

Announcement

English final exam will be on January 9 or 16th, 2018

Meetings in English

Whether you are holding a meeting or attending a meeting, it is important that you understand key English phrases and expressions related to meetings. A successful meeting has no surprises. With proper preparation and careful organization, a meeting can run smoothly. The most typical complaint about meetings is that they run *too long*. Meetings that run longer than necessary can be very costly to a company or business.

As the famous business expression says: Time is money! So:

- setting goals and time limits,
- keeping to the agenda, and
- knowing how to refocus,

are key components of an effective meeting.

This may sound simple in your own native language, but it is a little trickier when you or the participants do not speak fluent English.

Following are tips from English Club, the world's premier free website for learners and teachers of English. These pages will help you hold or attend a meeting with success.

Scenario

The following pages will be based on the meeting of a fictional company called Paris Tours.

The owner of the small tour company is Pierre.

He has ten employees, including four supervisors, Kana and Thomas (guides), Nolan (driver), and Jane (receptionist).

These four supervisors will be called to a meeting to discuss the upcoming tourist season.

Follow through the pages to watch how Pierre prepares for and holds the meeting, and how his staff (=personnel) participate.

Vocabulary

Word	Meaning	Example Sentence
absent	not present	The vice president is absent due to unforeseen circumstances.
accomplish	succeed in doing	We have a lot to accomplish today, so let's begin.
address	deal with; speak on	I hope we do not have to address this matter again in the future.
adjourn	close a meeting	If there are no further comments, we will adjourn the meeting here.

agenda	list of objectives to cover in a meeting	Please forward the agenda to anyone who is speaking at the meeting.
AGM	Annual (yearly) General Meeting	We always vote for a new chairperson at the AGM.
allocate	assign roles/tasks to certain people	I forgot to allocate someone to bring refreshments.
AOB	Any Other Business (Unspecified item on agenda) item on agenda	The last item on the agenda is AOB.
apologies	announcing people who are absent; apologies for absence	Everyone is present today, so we can skip the apologies.
ballot	a type of vote, usually in writing and usually secret	Please fold your ballot in half before you place it in the box.
board of directors	group of elected members of an organization/company who meet to make decisions	The board of directors meets once a month to discuss the budget.
boardroom	a large meeting room often has one long table and many chairs	The boardroom is reserved for a manager's meeting, so we'll have to meet in the lounge.
brainstorm	thinking to gather ideas	Let's take a few minutes and brainstorm some ways that we can cut costs.
casting vote	deciding vote (usually by the chairman) when the votes are otherwise equal	The role of treasurer was decided based on the chairman's casting vote.
chairperson/chair	the person who leads or presides at a meeting	As chair, it is my pleasure to introduce to you, Mr. John Davis.
clarification/verification	explanation/proof that something is true/understood	Before we address this matter, I'll need some clarification as to who was involved.
closing remarks	last thoughts spoken in a meeting (<i>i.e.</i> reminders, thanks) you	I just have a few closing remarks and then you will all be free to go.
collaborate	work together as a pair/group	The board fell apart because the members had difficulty collaborating.
commence	begin	We will commence as soon as the last person signs the attendance sheet.
comment	express one's opinions or thoughts	If you have a comment, please raise your hand rather than speak out.
conference	formal meeting for discussion, esp. a regular one held by an organization	Before the conference there will be a private meeting for board members only.
conference call	telephone meeting between three or more people in different locations	Please make sure I have no interruptions while I'm on the conference call.
confidential	private; not to be shared	Any financial information shared during this meeting should be kept confidential.
consensus	general agreement	If we cannot come to a consensus by the end of the meeting we will put it to a vote.

deadline	due date for completion	The deadline for buying tickets to the conference is May 25th.
designate	assign	If no one volunteers to take the minutes I will be forced to designate someone.
formality	a procedure (often unnecessary) that has to be followed due to a rule	Everyone knows who is going to be the next vice president, so this vote is really just a formality.
grievance	complaint	The first item on the agenda relates to a grievance reported by the interns.
guest speaker	person who joins the group in order to share information or deliver a speech	I am delighted to welcome our guest speaker Sandy, who is going to be offering some sales pitch tips.
implement	make something happen; follow through	It's not a question of whether or not we're going to use this idea, it's whether or not we know how to implement it.
mandatory	required	It is mandatory that all supervisors attend Friday's meeting.
minutes	a written record of everything said at a meeting	Before we begin with today's meeting, let's quickly review the minutes from last month.
motion	a suggestion put to a vote	The motion to extend store hours has been passed.
objectives	goals to accomplish	I'm pleased that we were able to cover all of the objectives today within the designated time.
opening remarks	chairperson or leader's first words at a meeting (i.e. welcome, introductions)	As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we have to clear this room before the end of the hour.
overhead projector	machine with a special light that project a document onto a screen or wall so that all can see	I'm going to put a pie chart on the overhead projector so that everyone can visualize how our profits have declined.
participant	person who attends and joins in on an event	Can I have a show of hands of all of those who were participants in last year's conference?
proxy vote	a vote cast by one person for or in place of another	There must have been one proxy vote because I count twelve ballots but only eleven attendees.
punctual	on time (not late)	Firstly, I want to thank you all for being punctual despite this early meeting.
recommend	suggest	I recommend that you sit closer to the front if you have trouble hearing.
show of hands	raised hands to express an opinion in a vote	From the show of hands it appears that everyone is in favor of taking a short break.
<u>strategy</u>	plan to make something work	We need to come up with a strategy that will allow us to have meetings less frequently.
<u>unanimous</u>	in complete agreement; united in opinion	The vote was unanimous to cut work hours on Fridays.
<u>vote</u>	to express (the expression of) an opinion in a group by voice or hand etc.	We need to vote for a new vice chairperson now that Jerry is retiring.
<u>wrap up</u>	finish	Let's wrap up here so that we can get back to

Preparing for a Meeting

Calling a Meeting

There are a number of ways that you may call or be called to a meeting. Some meetings are announced by e-mail, and others are posted on bulletin boards. If a meeting is announced at the end of another meeting, it is important to issue a *reminder*. A reminder can also come in the form of an e-mail or notice. Verbal announcements or reminders should always be backed up by documented ones. The date, location, time, length, and purpose of the meeting should be included. It is also important to indicate exactly who is expected to attend, and who is not. If you are planning on allocating someone to take on a certain role, make personal contact with that person to inform them of his or her duty.

Sample E-mail

To: jane@paristours.com
cc: kana@paristours.com; thomas@paristours.com; nolan@paristours.com
From: pierre@paristours.com
Subject: Meeting

Hi Everyone,

We will be having a meeting next Friday from 2:00 PM-4:00 PM in Room 3. All supervisors are expected to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the upcoming tourist season. As you probably have heard, this could be our busiest season to date. There are already twenty bus tours booked from Japan, and fifteen walking tours booked from North America. We are also expecting Korean and Australian tours in late summer. Please make arrangements to have other staff members cover your duties during the meeting.

Thank you,
Pierre

Sample Notice:

MEETING
LOCATION: Room 3
DATE: Friday, May 5th
TIME: 2:00 PM-4:00 P.M.
FOR: Supervisors only
SUBJECT: Tourist Season
ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY

Writing an Agenda (=ordre du jour)

In order to keep the meeting on task and within the set amount of time, it is important to have an agenda.

The agenda should indicate the order of items and an estimated amount of time for each item.

If more than one person is going to speak during the meeting, the agenda should indicate whose turn it is to "have the floor" (=avoir la parole).

In some cases, it may be useful to forward (=envoyer) the agenda to attendees (=participants) before the meeting. People will be more likely to participate in a meeting, by asking questions or offering feedback, if they know what is going to be covered.

Sample Agenda

- 1 Welcome, Introduction: Pierre and Stella (5 minutes)
- 2 Minutes from previous meeting: Jane (10 minutes)
- 3 Japan Tours: Pierre (15 minutes)
- 4 N.A. Tours: Pierre (15 minutes)
- 5 Korean Tours: Pierre (15 minutes)
- 6 Australian Tours: Pierre (if time allows 10 minutes)
- 7 Feedback from last year: Everyone (15 minutes)
- 8 Vote on staff picnic: Everyone (15 minutes)
- 9 Questions/Closing remarks/Reminders: Everyone (5 minutes)

Allocating roles

The person in charge of calling and holding a meeting may decide to allocate certain roles to other staff members. Someone may be called upon to take the minutes, someone may be asked to do roll call, and someone may be asked to speak on a certain subject. This should be done either in person, or in an e-mail.

Sample Personal Request

Pierre: Hi Jane, did you get the e-mail about next week's meeting?

Jane: Yes, I'll be there.

Pierre: Great. I'd like to put you in charge of reviewing the minutes from last meeting for us.

Jane: Sure, I can do that. I think there is a copy of the minutes in my file.

Pierre: Thanks, you'll have ten minutes to remind us of what we discussed last meeting. This will be good for Stella to hear. Stella will be our new private tours coordinator.

Sample E-mail:

To: jane@paristours.com

From: pierre@paristours.com

Subject: Minutes

Hi Jane,

I just wanted to make sure that you would be available to review last month's minutes and present them at Friday's meeting. We have a new staff member joining us, so I'd like to give her a chance to see where things have been going since the last meeting.

If you have any concerns about this, let me know.

Thanks,
Pierre

Opening a Meeting

Small Talk (=papotage, banalités)

Whether you are holding the meeting or attending the meeting it is polite to make small talk while you wait for the meeting to start. You should discuss things unrelated to the meeting, such as weather, family, or weekend plans.

Sample Dialogue:

Pierre: Hi Thomas. How are you?

Thomas: Great thanks, and you?

Pierre: Well, I'm good now that the warm weather has finally arrived.

Thomas: I know what you mean. I thought winter was never going to end.

Pierre: Have you dusted off your golf clubs yet?

Thomas: Funny you should ask. I'm heading out with my brother-in-law for the first round of the year on Saturday.

More conversation Starters (small talk bonus)

Talking about the weather

Beautiful day, isn't it?

Can you believe all of this rain we've been having?

It looks like it's going to snow.

It sure would be nice to be in Hawaii right about now.

I hear they're calling for thunderstorms all weekend.

We couldn't ask for a nicer day, could we?

How about this weather?

Did you order this sunshine?

Talking about current events

Did you catch the news today?

Did you hear about that fire on Fourth St?
What do you think about this transit strike?
I read in the paper today that the Sears Mall is closing.
I heard on the radio today that they are finally going to start building the new bridge.
How about those Reds? Do you think they're going to win tonight?

At the office

Looking forward to the weekend?
Have you worked here long?
I can't believe how busy/quiet we are today, can you?
Has it been a long week?
You look like you could use a cup of coffee.
What do you think of the new computers?

At a social event

So, how do you know Justin?
Have you tried the cabbage rolls that Sandy made?
Are you enjoying yourself?
It looks like you could use another drink.
Pretty nice place, huh?
I love your dress. Can I ask where you got it?

Out for a walk

How old is your baby?
What's your puppy's name?
The tulips are sure beautiful at this time of year, aren't they.
How do you like the new park?
Nice day to be outside, isn't it?

Waiting somewhere

I didn't think it would be so busy today.
You look like you've got your hands full (with children or goods).
The bus must be running late today.
It looks like we are going to be here a while, huh?
I'll have to remember not to come here on Mondays.
How long have you been waiting?

Welcome

Once everyone has arrived, the chairperson, or whoever is in charge of the meeting should formally welcome everyone to the meeting and thank the attendees for coming.

Well, since everyone is here, we should get started.
Hello, everyone. Thank you for coming today.
I think we'll begin now. First I'd like to welcome you all.
Thank you all for coming at such short notice.

I really appreciate you all for attending today.
We have a lot to cover today, so we really should begin.

Sample Welcome:

Pierre:

I think we'll begin now.

First I'd like to welcome you all and thank everyone for coming, especially at such short notice.

I know you are all very busy and it's difficult to take time away from your daily tasks for meetings.

Introductions

If anyone at the meeting is new to the group, or if there is a guest speaker, this is the time when introductions should be made. The person in charge of the meeting can introduce the new person, or ask the person to introduce him or herself.

I'd like to take a moment to introduce our new tour coordinator.

I know most of you, but there are a few unfamiliar faces.

Stella, would you like to stand up and introduce yourself?

Hi everyone. I'm Judy Strauss. I'll be acting as Amanda's assistant while Nancy is away on maternity leave.

Roll Call(=appel)/Apologies(=excuses)

If the meeting is a small group, it is probably unnecessary to take attendance out loud. The person who is taking the minutes will know everyone personally and can indicate who is present and who is absent. In a larger meeting, it may be necessary to send around an attendance sheet or call out names. If an important figure is absent, it may be necessary for the chairperson to apologize for his or her absence and offer a brief explanation for it.

It looks like everyone is here today.

If you notice anyone missing, please let Tefy know so that he can make a note of it.

Unfortunately, Naina cannot join us today. He has been called away on business
Mirana will be standing in to take the minutes today, as Lala is home with the flu.

Objectives

Some people who hold meetings prefer to pass around copies of the agenda, and others will post a large copy on a wall, or use an overhead projector. No matter which format is used, attendees should be able to follow the agenda as the meeting progresses. Before beginning the first main item on the agenda, the speaker should provide a brief verbal outline the objectives.

Sample Introduction to the Agenda:

Pierre: As you can all see here on the agenda we will be mainly talking about the upcoming tourist season.

First we'll discuss the groups that will be coming in from Japan.

After that we'll discuss the North American Tours, followed by the Korean tours.

If time allows we will also discuss the Australian tours which are booked for early September.

Next, I'm going to request some feedback from all of you concerning last year's tours and where you think we can improve.

And finally, we'll be voting on where and when to have this year's staff picnic.

Following the Agenda

Taking the Minutes

Anyone, including you, may be assigned to take the minutes at a meeting. Often someone who is not participating in the meeting will be called upon to be the minute-taker.

Before a meeting the minute-taker should review the following:

- The minutes from previous meeting
- All of the names of the attendees (if possible)
- The items on the agenda

It also helps to create an outline before going to the meeting. An outline should include the following:

- A title for the meeting
- The location of the meeting
- A blank spot to write the time the meeting started and ended
- The name of the chairperson
- A list of attendees that can be checked off (or a blank list for attendees to sign)
- A blank spot for any attendees who arrive late or leave early

Sample Minutes Outline

Supervisor's Meeting

Friday, May 5

Room 3

Start: _____ Finish: _____

Chair: Pierre

Attendees:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Late to arrive: _____

Early to depart: _____

The minute-taker can use a pen and paper or a computer and does not need to include every word that is spoken. It is necessary to include important points and any votes and results. Indicating who said what is also necessary, which is why the minute-taker should make sure to know the names of the attendees. If you cannot remember someone's name, take a brief note of their seating position and find out their name after the meeting. A minute-taker should type out the minutes immediately after the meeting so that nothing is forgotten.

Watching the Time

One of the most difficult things about holding an effective meeting is staying within the time limits. A good agenda will outline how long each item should take. A good chairperson will do his or her best to stay within the limits. Here are some expressions that can be used to keep the meeting flowing at the appropriate pace.

I think we've spent enough time on this topic.
We're running short on time, so let's move on.
We're running behind schedule, so we'll have to skip the next item.
We only have fifteen minutes remaining and there's a lot left to cover.
If we don't move on, we'll run right into lunch.
We've spent too long on this issue, so we'll leave it for now.
We'll have to come back to this at a later time.
We could spend all day discussing this, but we have to get to the next item.

Regaining Focus

It is easy to get off topic when you get a number of people in the same room. It is the chairperson's responsibility to keep the discussion focused. Here are some expressions to keep the meeting centered on the items as they appear on the agenda.

Let's stick to the task at hand, shall we?
I think we're steering off topic a bit with this.
I'm afraid we've strayed from the matter at hand.
You can discuss this among yourselves at another time.
We've lost sight of the point here.
This matter is not on today's agenda.
Let's save this for another meeting.
Getting back to item number 5...
Now where were we? Oh yes, let's vote.

Voting

When issues cannot be resolved or decisions cannot be easily made, they are often put to a vote. Most votes occur during meetings. Votes can be open, where people raise their hands in favor or in opposition of the issue. In an open vote, the results are evident immediately. Other votes, such as who should be elected to take on a certain role, are private or closed. During private votes, attendees fill out ballots and

place them in a box to be counted. The results may not be counted until after the meeting. Here are some specific expressions used during open voting:

All in favor?

Those who agree raise their hands or say "Aye".

All opposed?

Motion to hire more tour guides, moved by Thomas.

Suggestions or ideas that are put to a vote are called **motions**.

When a person makes a suggestion, the term to use both during the meeting and in the minutes is ***moved***.

Motion to hire more tour guides seconded by Nolan.

When another person agrees with the motion, it is **seconded**.

When a motion is voted and agreed upon it is **carried**. When it is voted and disagreed upon it is failed.

Most often votes are put to a majority. If there is a tie vote, the chairperson will often cast the deciding vote.

Sample Voting Session

Pierre: Okay, now that we've covered most of the business, it's time to vote on the staff picnic. Jane and I have come up with two different ideas. I'll give Jane the floor now, and she'll outline these two options. After that we'll vote. I don't think there is any reason to have a private vote, so I'll just ask to see a show of hands. Jane, would you do the honors?

Jane: Thanks Pierre. Okay, so, as you all probably assumed, we are going to wait until most of the tours have passed through before we have the staff picnic. That way most of you should be able to attend. So we've chosen the last Sunday of September. I hope that works out for all of you. Now, the first option is to have a BBQ at Mariposa Beach. We would do this on the last Sunday of September. The second option is to have a potluck dinner/pool party in Pierre's backyard. The only problem with this is if it rains, there isn't much in the way of shelter there. I don't think Pierre and his wife will want all of us dashing inside in a thunderstorm.

Pierre: Well, if we had to we could probably squeeze everyone in the basement. Anyhow, those are the options, so let's put it to a vote. All in favor of option number one? Raise your hands please...okay, one vote. And, all in favor of option number two? That's four. Okay, so it looks like a pool party at my house.

Jane: Great. I'll put up a sign up sheet and everyone can write down what they plan to bring.

Comments and Feedback

During the meeting, participants will comment, provide feedback, or ask questions. Here are some ways to do so politely:

If I could just come in here...

I'm afraid I'd have to disagree about that.

Could I just say one thing?

I'm really glad you brought that up, Kana.

I couldn't agree with you more. (I agree)

Jane, could you please speak up. We can't hear you at the back.

If I could have the floor (chance to speak) for a moment...
We don't seem to be getting anywhere with this.
Perhaps we should come back to this at another time?

Closing a Meeting

Wrapping Up

There are different reasons why a meeting comes to an end. Time may run out, or all of the items in the agenda may be checked off. Some meetings will end earlier than expected and others will run late. The odd time, a meeting may be cut short due to an unexpected problem or circumstance. Here are a variety of ways to adjourn a meeting:

It looks like we've run out of time, so I guess we'll finish here.
I think we've covered everything on the list.
I guess that will be all for today.
Well, look at that...we've finished ahead of schedule for once.
If no one has anything else to add, then I think we'll wrap this up.
I'm afraid we're going to have to cut this meeting short. I've just been informed of a problem that needs my immediate attention.

Reminders

There is almost always one last thing to say, even after the closing remarks. A chairperson might close the meeting and then make a last-minute reminder. Instructions for tidying up the room may also be mentioned.

Oh, before you leave, please make sure to sign the attendance sheet.
I almost forgot to mention that we're planning a staff banquet next month.
Don't forget to put your ballot in the box on your way out.
If I didn't already say this, please remember to introduce yourself to the new trainees.
Could I have your attention again? I neglected to mention that anyone who wants to take home some of this leftover food is welcome to.
If you could all return your chair to Room 7 that would be appreciated.
Please take all of your papers with you and throw out any garbage on your way out.

Thank You's and Congratulations

The end of the meeting is also the time to thank anyone who has not been thanked at the beginning of the meeting, or anyone who deserves a second thank you. Congratulations or Good-luck can also be offered here to someone who has experienced something new, such as receiving a promotion, getting married, or having a baby.

Before I let you go let's all give a big thank you (everyone claps) to Thomas for baking these delicious cookies.

Again, I want to thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here today.

Most of you probably already know this, but Nolan's wife just gave birth to a baby boy.

As you leave today, don't forget to wish Stella luck on the weekend. The next time you see her she will be happily married.

Follow Up

In the closing remarks, the chairperson, or participants may want to discuss the date and time for the next meeting, when the minutes will be available, or when a decision should be made by. This is also the time to give contact information, such as how to send a question by e-mail or who to call regarding a certain issue.

We'll meet again on the first of next month.

Next time we meet I'll be sure to have those contacts for you.

If anyone has any questions about anything we discussed today, feel free to send me an e-mail.

The minutes from today's meeting will be posted as of tomorrow afternoon.

I'll send out a group e-mail with the voting results.

More Useful English Phrases for Participating in a Business Meeting

From About.com English as a Second Language By K. Beare

Opening the Meeting

Good morning/afternoon, everyone.

If we are all here, let's:

- get started.
- start the meeting.
- start.

Welcoming and Introducing Participants

Please join me in welcoming (name of participant)

We're pleased to welcome (name of participant)

It's a pleasure to welcome (name of participant)

I'd like to introduce (name of participant)

I don't think you've met (name of participant)

Stating the Principal Objectives of a Meeting

We're here today to...

Our aim is to...

I've called this meeting in order to...

By the end of this meeting, I'd like to have...

Giving Apologies for Someone Who is Absent

I'm afraid... (name of participant) can't be with us today. She is in...

I have received apologies for the absence of (name of participant), who is in (place).

Reading the Minutes (Notes) of the Last Meeting

First let's go over the report from the last meeting, which was held on (date)

Here are the minutes from our last meeting, which was on (date)

Dealing with Recent Developments

Jack, can you tell us how the XYZ project is progressing?

Jack, how is the XYZ project coming along?

John, have you completed the report on the new accounting package?

Has everyone received a copy of the Tate Foundation report on current marketing trends?

Moving Forward

So, if there is nothing else we need to discuss, let's move on to today's agenda.

Shall we get down to business?

Is there any other business?

If there are no further developments, I'd like to move on to today's topic.

Introducing the Agenda

Have you all received a copy of the agenda?

There are three items on the agenda. First,

Shall we take the points in this order?
If you don't mind, I'd like to ... go in order (OR)
Skip item 1 and move on to item 3
I suggest we take item 2 last.

Allocating Roles (secretary, participants)

(Name of participant) has agreed to take the minutes.
(Name of participant) has kindly agreed to give us a report on this matter.
(Name of participant) will lead point 1, (name of participant) point 2, and (name of participant) point 3.
(Name of participant), would you mind taking notes today?

Agreeing on the Ground Rules for the Meeting (contributions, timing, decision-making, etc.)

We will hear a short report on each point first, followed by a discussion round the table.
I suggest we go round the table first.
The meeting is due to finish at...
We'll have to keep each item to ten minutes. Otherwise we'll never get through.
We may need to vote on item 5, if we can't get a unanimous decision.

Introducing the First Item on the Agenda

So, let's start with
Shall we start with...
So, the first item on the agenda is
Pete, would you like to kick off?
Martin, would you like to introduce this item?

Closing an Item

I think that covers the first item.
Shall we leave that item?
If nobody has anything else to add,

Next Item

Let's move onto the next item
The next item on the agenda is
Now we come to the question of.

Giving Control to the Next Participant

I'd like to hand over to Mark, who is going to lead the next point.
Right, Dorothy, over to you.

Summarizing

Before we close, let me just summarize the main points.
To sum up,...
In brief,
Shall I go over the main points?

Finishing Up

Right, it looks as though we've covered the main items

Is there Any Other Business?

Suggesting and Agreeing on Time, Date and Place for the Next Meeting

Can we fix the next meeting, please?

So, the next meeting will be on... (day), the . . . (date) of.. . (month) at...

What about the following Wednesday? How is that?

So, see you all then.

Thanking Participants for Attending

I'd like to thank Marianne and Jeremy for coming over from London.

Thank you all for attending.

Thanks for your participation.

Closing the Meeting

The meeting is closed.

I declare the meeting closed.

How to hold a great meeting

From FORBES 03/20/2007

Ask most people to describe meetings at work, and the adjectives they might use include “boring,” “long” and “worthless.”

“Hardly anyone does them well, and nobody thinks about how to improve them.” *Jennifer Goodrich*

But becoming a meeting master isn’t the equivalent of searching for the fountain of youth.

Just remember a few guidelines:

- Provide attendees with an agenda that includes the mission of the meeting at the top
- Stick to a time limit
- Have a decision-making process in place so the items discussed get accomplished.

The most important rule:

Cancel the meeting if you can’t think of an actual problem to solve or decision that needs to be made.

Perhaps the most reviled workplace get-together is the weekly staff meeting. *Glenn Parker*

- They tend to be longer than necessary, unstructured and boring.
- More often than not, they are completely useless.
- The phrase we hear over and over again is, ‘It was a waste of time’.
- People feel there was no purpose other than, ‘It is Tuesday morning, it is 9 a.m. and so it is time for the regular staff meeting.’

This is precisely the fate that some employee suffers weekly. The boss breaks a number of meeting rules.

Example:

First, around 25 people attend, of which about half are the attorneys (the bosses); the rest are the support staff (accountants, office administrators, etc.), who all don’t need to be there.

Second, there’s no agenda or specific purpose. Instead, the facilitator asks everyone what they’ve done throughout the week. The lawyers dominate the meeting, competing about who worked harder. Finally, the meeting tends to go over its allotted time.

It’s a common problem that some people in a meeting don’t really need to be there.

One solution: If some people only need an update, don’t force them to attend a long meeting—send an e-mail update instead.

No matter who attends, always distribute a written agenda so attendees know what to focus on and what information or materials to bring.

Implement rules in order to finish on time or before time:

- If participants aren’t given an agenda before the meeting, they are not required to attend.
- Prior to the meeting, e-mail all participants a project update spreadsheet. That way, the discussion remains focused on new issues rather than an endless string of updates.

Another common problem: Getting off track. There are two ways to deal with this issue.

- Use a miniature hour glass like the ones that come in board games. When the sand runs out, the speaker’s time is up.
- Speakers can be instructed to hold a specific object—say a mug or a ball—when talking. Only the person holding the object is allowed to talk.

If the meeting leader—or another staffer—tends to go off topic or share personal anecdotes, don’t deal with it in the meeting. Instead, have someone approach the person post-meeting and say: “*Everybody*

enjoys the anecdotes about the industry, but I'm sure you realize people are very busy. We're all on deadline. It would be helpful if we can complete the agenda on time."

Another option: *"We enjoy those stories, but we'd rather hear them after work over a drink."*

Speaking of drinks, don't be afraid of serving snacks or non-alcoholic beverages during a meeting. Some managers worry it'll distract participants, but you need not worry. People who eat together feel more comfortable around each other.

Try "all chocolate" meetings in the afternoon. If you're a health-conscious office, make healthy snacks the theme of the food. Many companies are global, so it's not unusual to have many ethnicities represented. That can make for a great opportunity to try out different cuisines.

Start and end meetings at odd times. Meaning, instead of calling for a meeting at 2:30 starts it at 2:34. "It gets people's attention," he says. "It's another way of adding fun and spirit."

Five tips on how to hold a great meeting

Meetings can be long, boring wastes of time. But they don't have to be.

Here are some tips for making the most of a meeting.

Decision Makers

Invite the right people to a meeting. There must be someone with the authority to make a decision in attendance.

Agenda

Make sure there is an agenda and that everyone in attendance gets a copy of it prior to the meeting. That way, they know how to prepare. An agenda also helps participants stay on point.

Time Limit

Most meetings are so long because they're not effectively run. Set a time limit and stick to it. Jennifer Goodrich, president of Benchmark Leadership Training, ensures that she sticks to the schedule by limiting everyone to two minutes of speaking time.

Decision Process

If the meeting is called to decide something, make sure there's a decision-making process in place. Will it be majority rules? Or does everyone in attendance have to agree?

Follow Up

At the meeting, set deadlines for what you want to accomplish and make sure there is a follow-up process. That way, great ideas translate into action.