



B1-B2 • Business English

Failure Stories in Business

1. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

1. What's a failure that taught you something big?
2. Do companies share failures openly?
3. How do you design experiments that can fail safely?
4. What's the difference between blame and accountability?
5. How do you run a good postmortem?

2. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Match the words with their meanings:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. hypothesis | a. a testable idea about cause and effect |
| ___ 2. pilot | b. backup plan if the first fails |
| ___ 3. kill criteria | c. a small test before a full launch |
| ___ 4. root cause | d. revert to a previous state |
| ___ 5. blameless | e. useful insight gained from experience |
| ___ 6. fallback | f. something accepted as true without proof |
| ___ 7. scope | g. not assigning personal blame |
| ___ 8. assumption | h. the underlying reason for a problem |
| ___ 9. rollback | i. predefined signs to stop a project |
| ___ 10. lesson learned | j. the defined limits of a project |

3. READING

Fail Smaller, Learn Faster

Failure isn't a badge of honor; it's tuition. Smart teams run small pilots with clear kill criteria, so the cost of being wrong is affordable. Postmortems hunt root causes and lessons learned, not people to blame.

The goal isn't to fail more—it's to fail smaller and learn faster. Write down assumptions, design fallbacks, and decide how you'll rollback before you launch. If you pay the tuition, collect the education.

Write hypotheses before the work, choose success metrics that can disconfirm the idea, and timebox the pilot. Afterward, separate proximate from root causes and decide what you will do differently next time. Publish short 'lessons learned' so the organization stores memory outside people. The aim is not fearless failure—it's safer learning.

4. COMPREHENSION

1. Why is failure compared to tuition?
2. What do kill criteria do?
3. Why should postmortems be blameless?
4. How do fallbacks and rollbacks help?
5. What is the real goal regarding failure?

5. VOCABULARY REVIEW

Fill in the blanks with words from the vocabulary list:

1. Start with a testable ____.
2. Launch a small ____ before national rollout.
3. Define ____ so you know when to stop.
4. Find the ____, not just the symptom.
5. Keep the review ____.
6. Prepare a ____ in case plan A fails.
7. Clarify the project ____.
8. List each _____. What could be wrong?
9. Have a quick ____ plan ready.
10. Write the ____ so the whole org can learn.

6. WORD FORMATION

One cell is blank in each row. Complete the missing form.

Verb	Noun	Adjective
___	failure	fallible
learn	___	learned
assume	assumption	___
___	plan	planned
decide	___	decisive

7. COLLOCATIONS

Match the words that go together:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. blameless | a. analysis |
| 2. pilot | b. program |
| 3. root-cause | c. matrix |
| 4. risk | d. postmortem |
| 5. kill-switch | e. criteria |

8. ERROR CORRECTION

Find and correct the mistakes:

1. We doesn't write assumptions before tests.
2. There is many blame and few lessons.
3. If we would set kill criteria, we stop sooner.
4. The team were rolling back too late.
5. He don't prepare any fallback plan.

9. GRAMMAR REVIEW

Complete the sentences:

1. If you ____ (define) kill criteria, exits are easier.
2. Only after the outage ____ (end) did we find the root cause.
3. Had they ____ (pilot) first, losses would be smaller.
4. If assumptions ____ (be) wrong, adjust the scope.
5. She felt relieved because the rollback ____ (work).

10. PASSIVE VOICE TRANSFORMATIONS

Change to passive voice:

1. Leaders shared the lessons widely.
2. They will run a blameless postmortem.
3. We wrote down the assumptions.

11. DISCUSSION

1. How do you make failure cheaper?
2. What makes a good postmortem?
3. When should you stop a project?

4. How can leaders reward learning?

12. CRITICAL THINKING

Tell a failure story (real or imagined) in 150-200 words, focusing on the hypothesis, kill criteria, and what you learned.

Answer Key

Vocabulary Preview: 1-a, 2-c, 3-i, 4-h, 5-g, 6-b, 7-j, 8-f, 9-d, 10-e

Vocabulary Review: 2. hypothesis; 3. pilot; 4. kill criteria; 5. root cause; 6. blameless; 7. fallback; 8. scope; 9. assumption; 10. rollback; 11. lesson learned

Word Formation: fail/failure/fallible; learn/learning/learned; assume/assumption/assumed; plan/plan/planned; decide/decision/decisive

Collocations: 1-d, 2-b, 3-a, 4-c, 5-e

Error Correction: We don't write assumptions before tests. | There is a lot of blame and few lessons. | If we had set kill criteria, we would have stopped sooner. | The team was rolling back too late. | He doesn't prepare any fallback plan.

Grammar Review: 2. define; 3. ended; 4. piloted; 5. are; 6. worked

Passive Voice: 1. The lessons were shared widely.; 2. A blameless postmortem will be run.; 3. The assumptions were written down.