



B1-B2 • Business English

Decision-Making Under Stress

1. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

1. How does stress change your decisions?
2. Do you decide faster or slower under pressure?
3. What helps you stay calm when stakes are high?
4. Have you ever made a great decision in a crisis?
5. Should leaders show emotions when deciding?

2. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Match the words with their meanings:

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. fight-or-flight | a. how information is presented or worded |
| ___ 2. tunnel vision | b. narrow focus that ignores peripheral info |
| ___ 3. cognitive load | c. after-action review to learn from outcomes |
| ___ 4. heuristic | d. imagining failure in advance to spot risks |
| ___ 5. bias | e. belief that your judgment is more accurate than it is |
| ___ 6. triage | f. automatic stress response preparing action |
| ___ 7. framing | g. mental shortcut for quick decisions |
| ___ 8. overconfidence | h. sorting by urgency and impact |
| ___ 9. postmortem | i. systematic deviation from objective judgment |
| ___ 10. pre-mortem | j. mental effort required at a given time |

3. READING

Staying Smart When the Pressure's On

Stress shrinks our attention. We get tunnel vision, grab the first heuristic, and feel strangely confident. That's useful when the house is on fire, but risky in complex problems. Cognitive

load rises, working memory falls, and we miss weak signals that matter.

Strong decision systems beat strong moods: triage what truly can't wait, set a simple frame for options, and run a quick pre-mortem to expose failure points before you commit.

Afterward, a brief postmortem captures what worked and what to change. You can't delete stress, but you can design choices that stay smart when the heart rate spikes.

Practical safeguards help: write decisions in a one-page brief, list three options with pros/cons, and pre-commit to the conditions that would trigger a reversal. Use a 'red team'—one person tasked with arguing against the favored plan. Even two minutes of paced breathing can lower arousal enough to widen attention. When the tempo is high, simplicity wins: fewer variables, shorter feedback loops, clearer ownership.

4. COMPREHENSION

1. Why can heuristics be risky under stress?
2. What is the purpose of triage in decisions?
3. How does a pre-mortem help?
4. What is the difference between a pre-mortem and a postmortem?
5. Why do the authors say systems beat moods?

5. VOCABULARY REVIEW

Fill in the blanks with words from the vocabulary list:

1. Under pressure, people often rely on a quick _____ to decide.
2. High _____ makes it hard to hold details in mind.
3. _____ can cause us to ignore useful side information.
4. Leaders should do _____ to sort tasks by urgency.
5. A decision's _____ changes how options feel to us.
6. Doing a _____ can reveal risks before they happen.
7. A short _____ captures lessons after the event.
8. _____ makes us feel more accurate than we are.
9. In danger, the _____ response prepares the body to act.
10. Hidden _____ can skew our judgment without noticing.

6. WORD FORMATION

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

Verb	Noun	Adjective
_____	decision	decisive
lead	_____	leading

stress	stress	_____
_____	analysis	analytical
respond	_____	responsive

7. COLLOCATIONS

Match the words that go together:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. risk | a. framing |
| 2. option | b. assessment |
| 3. decision | c. task |
| 4. time-critical | d. path |
| 5. stress | e. response |

8. ERROR CORRECTION

Find and correct the mistakes:

1. She make decisions faster when she are under pressure.
2. We didn't did a pre-mortem before the launch.
3. Bias are always obvious to experienced managers.
4. If the alarms would stop, we can think clearer.
5. There is too many variables to consider quickly.

9. GRAMMAR REVIEW

Complete the sentences:

1. If the team _____ (run) a pre-mortem, they might avoid the error.
2. Only when the noise _____ (drop) did he notice the key data.
3. Had she _____ (practice) triage, the priority would have been clear.
4. If you _____ (frame) the options differently, the choice might change.
5. They couldn't focus because their cognitive load _____ (be) too high.

10. PASSIVE VOICE TRANSFORMATIONS

Change to passive voice:

1. Leaders make high-stakes decisions daily.
2. Stress distorts our attention.
3. The team will conduct a postmortem tomorrow.

11. DISCUSSION

1. What habits help you decide well under pressure?
2. When is speed more important than accuracy?
3. How can teams reduce tunnel vision in a crisis?
4. What would a good pre-mortem look like for your work?

12. CRITICAL THINKING

Describe a stressful work decision. In 150-200 words, explain the context, options, risks, and why your final choice made sense (or didn't).

Answer Key

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

Vocabulary Review: 2. heuristic; 3. cognitive load; 4. tunnel vision; 5. triage; 6. framing; 7. pre-mortem; 8. postmortem; 9. overconfidence; 10. fight-or-flight; 11. bias

Word Formation: decide/decision/decisive; lead/leadership/leading; stress/stress/stressful; analyze/analysis/analytical; respond/response/responsive

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

Error Correction: She makes decisions faster when she is under pressure. | We didn't do a pre-mortem before the launch. | Biases are not always obvious to experienced managers. | If the alarms stopped, we could think more clearly. | There are too many variables to consider quickly.

Grammar Review: 2. run; 3. dropped; 4. practiced; 5. frame; 6. was

Passive Voice: 1. High-stakes decisions are made daily.; 2. Our attention is distorted by stress.; 3. A postmortem will be conducted tomorrow.