

5 MANAGING AND PARTICIPATING IN A FACE TO FACE MEETING

5.1 Exploiting the few minutes before the meeting begins

Use the time while other participants are arriving to practice your English and settle your nerves (see 3.4).

5.2 Announcing the start of the meeting

If you are the chairperson, typical ways to signal that you want the meeting to start is to say one of the following in a loud voice:

OK, I think everyone is here.

Right, shall we get things moving?

Let's begin / get going / get started, shall we?

Perhaps we'd better get started / get down to business.

If you are not the chairperson and know that someone else is due to arrive you can say:

Vladimir should be here in a few minutes.

My manager has just texted me to say she will be here at 10.15. She apologizes for the delay.

I thought David was supposed to be coming.

5.3 Introducing the attendees

When not all the attendees know each other, it is quite common for each person to briefly introduce themselves in response to a prompt from the chairperson:

Would you like to say a few words about yourselves?

You may wish to say: 1) your name, 2) your position, 3) why you are attending

Hello, I am Bui Than Liem.

I am the sales manager at Viet Merchandising

I am here in order to ...

If you are the chairperson you might decide to introduce a new person to a group of people who already know each other:

First of all I'd like to introduce you to Ugo who is going to be working in our group. Ugo, would you like to say a few words about yourself?

5.4 Referring to the agenda, outlining objectives, talking about breaks

Although participants should already know why they are at the meeting, they may need reminding:

I've called this meeting first to ... secondly to ...

The main objective of our meeting is ...

If you are the chairperson and you have not distributed the agenda prior to the meeting, you can hand out the agenda and say:

I've prepared an outline / a rough agenda.

As you will / can see, there are five issues I'd like to discuss.

Could you look through it please.

Could you add any points you'd like to discuss.

Also, feel free to suggest any items that you think we do not need to discuss.

Alternatively, if the agenda was distributed in advance:

Have you all got a copy of the agenda?

Now let's look at the agenda in detail.

Do you have any comments you'd like to make on it?

If you are a participant, in response to the chairperson's request for comments, you can say:

No, everything seems fine.

Well actually, I was wondering why we need to discuss ...

Yes, I would like to suggest that we also discuss ...

If we have time, could we also go through ...

5.5 Announcing the time schedule and breaks

For potentially long meetings, it helps to inform participants of any breaks:

We have a lot to cover, so I suggest we have a break at 10.30 and then for lunch at around 12.30? Does that sound alright?

I have planned a break at 11.00 and arranged a buffet lunch for one o'clock. Then if it is OK with you, we can be back at the table for two o'clock.

I think we should aim to finish by four thirty at the latest.

You can also suggest the time that each item should take:

I think we can allocate 15 min to each of the first two items. Then two or three minutes to the other items.

We should take about 30 min for the first point, and around ten minutes for each of the others.

When the time comes for a break you can say:

Well, it's already 11.00, time for a break.

Perhaps before we move on to the next item we should take a break.

5.6 Opening the discussion

If you are the chairperson, you can suggest who should open the discussion:

Would you like to open the discussion.....?

Perhaps you'd like to explain/tell us/give us....?

Alternatively, you can say:

OK, let's begin with item 1. Does anyone have any ideas on ...?

5.7 Bringing other people into the discussion

Once the discussion is going, you can suggest that other people join in:

Could I just bring Melanie in here, she's made a study of ...

Kaspar, would you like to tell us about ...

Sergei, I think you have been investigating ...

Some research has shown that silent participants often have a lot to contribute, as they may be silent simply because they disagree with what is being decided. To encourage such people to participate:

We haven't heard from you yet, Pierre. I would really appreciate hearing your views.

Eriko, would you like to add anything?

5.8 Moving on to the next item in the agenda

If you are the chairperson and feel that an item in the agenda has been sufficiently covered, you can say:

I think that covers the second item. We can move on to the next item.

Let's move on to the second point now.

Shall we continue then?

If you are not the chairperson, but feel that a topic has been exhausted:

Would it be alright if we move on to the next point and then come back to this later?

I think we're losing sight of what we are trying to do so can we move on to ...?

I think it might be a good idea to move on to the next point.

5.9 Interrupting and handling interruptions

Due to your English level, you may not feel sufficiently confident to interrupt someone else while they are speaking. The secret is to use a combination of body language (moving forward in your chair and perhaps raising your hand slightly) and to say 'sorry' followed by one of the following:

Could I just say something / interrupt?

Do you mind if I just say something?

I'd just like to ask Luigi a question.

If someone interrupts you and you are OK about this you can say:

Please go ahead.

That's fine, I've said everything I wanted to.

If you wish to continue speaking:

Sorry, if I could just finish what I'm saying ...

Can I just finish what I was saying? It will only take me a minute.

If there is an external interruption (e.g. the phone goes, someone comes into the room, there is a loud noise), to return to what you were saying:

Going back to what I was saying / I said before ...

OK, where was I? / What was I going to say?

OK, what we were saying? Oh, yes, I was saying that ...

5.10 Eliciting opinions from silent attendees

A key role of the chairperson is to encourage all attendees to express their opinion so that all points of view can be taken into account and a consensus achieved. If you simply say:

Do you all agree on that?

Does anyone have any comments?

What's the general view about that?

you risk that the quieter attendees (or those whose English is poorer than the other attendees) will say nothing even if they might have something useful to contribute. Instead, it is best to ask them by name:

Katsumi, would you like to comment here?

But even the above question may not be effective because Katsumi could simply answer 'no'. So it is best to ask more direct questions.

Katsumi, what do you think would be the advantages of ...?

Shigeko, how would your department react if we took this decision?

By asking questions that require a specific answer, you ensure that attendees become much more involved in the decision-making process.

5.11 Expressing opinions

You can express your opinion or make suggestions in two main ways, by:

1) focusing on your own personal viewpoint (using *I*, *me*, *my*)

It seems to me that ...

As I see it

My inclination would be to ...

2) making it sound like a joint opinion (using *we* or no pronoun). This is a more diplomatic approach and leaves the decision more open.

From a financial point of view, it would make more sense if we ...

Why don't we ..?

What about ...?

It might be a good idea to ...

Even if you use *I*, you can still make the opinion sound less strong and more tentative:

I wonder if we could ...

I (would) recommend/suggest that we should ...

When a meeting involves people you have not met before, it generally pays to adopt a soft approach. So if you disagree with someone, it is best to avoid direct statements such as *I completely disagree* or *I can't accept that*. Instead, you can use more indirect expressions:

I'm sorry, but I have reservations about ...

Actually, I'm not sure that that is necessarily the best approach.

Also it helps if you show that you have listened to what they have said and appreciate its importance from their point of view.

I appreciate your point of view but ...

I accept the need for x, however ...

I can see why you would wish to do this, nevertheless ...

I totally understand what you're saying but ...

5.12 Making mini summaries

Whatever your level of English, it is worth checking both for yourself and on behalf of your colleagues, that you have understood what has been discussed and agreed so far. So, after each key point has been discussed, you can say:

Can I just check that I have understood what has been decided?

Could someone just summarize for me what has been agreed so far?

5.13 Taking votes in formal meetings

If you are the chairperson of a formal meeting in which a vote is required, typical phrases that are used include:

Can we take a vote on that proposal?

All those in favor. OK. All those against. Right, thank you.

So that motion has been accepted / rejected by five votes to two.

5.14 Summarizing and winding up the meeting

Typical phrases that a chairperson will say in order to wind up (conclude) a meeting are:

In conclusion ...

To sum up ...

So, if you'd like me to summarise what we've ...

So just to summarize what we've been saying ...

If the meeting is informal, and no one has offered to make a summary, you can consider offering to make a summary yourself in order to check that you have understood everything. This will avoid having to clarify misunderstandings at a later date.

Can I just summarize what we have decided, to check that I have understood everything correctly.

So if I have understood correctly, we have decided to ...

Other more informal phrases that you might hear at the conclusion of a meeting and which indicate that the speaker thinks that the meeting can be terminated, are:

I think we've covered everything so let's finish here.

I think we can stop here.

Shall we call it a day?

Shall we wind things up?

5.15 Informing attendees of the next steps

The meeting process does not end with the termination of the physical meeting. There are always some follow up tasks. The chairperson will usually indicate what he / she plans to do next with regard to:

- when the minutes of the meeting will be ready and how they will be circulated
- when and where the next scheduled meeting will take place
- what tasks, if any, attendees are expected to carry out

If the chairperson does not inform you of such details, you can ask:

(When) will you be emailing us the minutes of the meeting?

Are there any more meetings scheduled for this project?

Is there anything I / we should be doing to implement the decisions made at this meeting?

Do you want us to / Would you like us to prepare anything for ...?

5.16 Thanking and saying goodbye

When the meeting has been declared closed, typically the chairperson will thank everyone for their participation and make some enthusiastic comment about the outcome of the meeting:

Well, thank you all for coming. I am sorry we went over time, but I am sure you will agree that we have achieved a lot today. I hope you all have a safe trip home, and I look forward to seeing you again in the near future.