

Business English conversation practice

Six workplace conversations to make your own

Original dialogues, separate role cards, comprehension questions and answers. Practise introductions, clarification, updates, deadlines, disagreement and client problems.

Intermediate workplace practice

For partners, classes and recorded solo practice.
Includes planning space and an answer key.

From model to independent conversation

- 1 Read the dialogue and answer its two comprehension questions. Check the answers at the end.
- 2 Read the dialogue aloud with a partner. Switch roles, then choose three phrases to keep in view.
- 3 Use the separate role cards. Each partner reads only their own card. Ask questions to discover the missing information.
- 4 Put the model away. Reach an agreement that meets both cards, then confirm who will do what and by when.
- 5 Repeat with one changed detail. Focus on a clearer question, a time expression or a phrase for a limitation.

SOLO PRACTICE

Read both cards and record alternating turns. You will already know both sets of information, so this version does not recreate a real information gap. Use it to practise explanations, questions and final summaries.

Check your final agreement

- Did I explain the relevant facts and limitations?
- Did I ask for information instead of guessing?
- Does the agreement satisfy both cards?
- Did we confirm the action, person, deadline and channel?

ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

All people and situations are fictional. The activities are intended for intermediate learning practice, not a formal CEFR assessment. Adapt names, formality and procedures to your workplace.

Introduce yourself and explain your work

Situation: Maya has joined a project team. Leo needs to know what she handles and how to contact her.

Maya: Hi, I'm Maya. I've just joined the operations team.

Leo: Nice to meet you. I'm Leo, from customer support. What will you be working on?

Maya: I'll be checking delivery schedules and following up on delayed orders. Who should I contact if a customer changes an address?

Leo: Send the details to our support inbox. One of us will update the order and confirm it with you.

Maya: Thanks. Is email best for an urgent change too?

Leo: For anything that needs action today, call the support desk first, then send the details by email.

Maya: Great. I'll call for urgent changes and use the inbox for routine updates.

Check your understanding

1. What two responsibilities does Maya describe?
2. What should she do when an address change needs action today?

PHRASES TO KEEP

I'll be working on ...; Who should I contact if ...?; Is email best for ... too?

Introduce yourself and explain your work

A: new colleague

You check supplier invoices and investigate missing information. You need to know who can approve an invoice and how to handle one that must be paid today.

B: finance colleague

The finance manager approves invoices. Routine requests go to the finance inbox. For a payment due today, A should call the manager first and then email the invoice. Your team cannot approve an invoice without the order number.

YOUR GOAL AND SECOND ATTEMPT

Finish by confirming the contact person, the routine channel and the urgent procedure. Change the task on a second attempt: A now handles staff travel bookings.

Planning notes: keywords, not a full script

Our final agreement: Who will do what, by when and through which channel?

Ask for clarification before starting

Situation: A manager asks for a short report. The colleague checks the scope before beginning.

Nora: Could you send me a summary of last month's customer calls by Thursday?

Adam: Sure. When you say a summary, do you mean the number of calls or the main issues customers raised?

Nora: Both, but keep it to one page. Include the three most common issues.

Adam: Should I include email enquiries as well?

Nora: No, just phone calls for this report.

Adam: And do you need it first thing on Thursday, or later in the day?

Nora: By two in the afternoon, please. I'll use it in a meeting at three.

Adam: Understood: one page, phone calls only, with the totals and three main issues, by Thursday at two.

Check your understanding

1. Which communication channel is excluded from the report?
2. What information must the one-page report contain, and when is it due?

PHRASES TO KEEP

When you say ..., do you mean ...?; Should I include ...?; Just to confirm ...

Ask for clarification before starting

A: manager

You need a one-page summary of this week's late deliveries by Friday at 11:00. Include the number of late deliveries and their main causes. Exclude cancelled orders. You initially ask only for "a delivery summary by Friday".

B: colleague

You can prepare the summary, but you need to check the period, the length, which orders to include and the exact deadline. Ask before agreeing to the task.

YOUR GOAL AND SECOND ATTEMPT

Finish with B summarising the agreed scope and deadline. Change the period or the excluded category on your next attempt.

Planning notes: keywords, not a full script

Our final agreement: Who will do what, by when and through which channel?

Give a progress update with a next step

Situation: Sam needs to know whether a product page can be ready on time.

Sam: How is the product page coming along?

Aisha: The text is finished, and I've checked the prices. I'm still waiting for two product photos.

Sam: Will that affect Friday's launch?

Aisha: It could. The photographer expects to send them tomorrow morning. If they arrive by noon, I can finish the page by four.

Sam: What if they're late?

Aisha: We could use the existing photos for the launch, then replace them next week. I'd need your approval for that.

Sam: That works. Let me know by noon tomorrow whether we need the backup plan.

Aisha: I will. I'll send you a status update at noon, and I'll finish the page by four if the new photos arrive in time.

Check your understanding

1. What work is complete, and what is still missing?
2. What backup plan does Sam approve?

PHRASES TO KEEP

I've finished ...; I'm still waiting for ...; If ..., I can ...; I'd need your approval for that.

Give a progress update with a next step

A: project colleague

You have finished the presentation slides, but the sales figures have not arrived. You can complete the charts within two hours of receiving them. If they are not available by 14:00 today, you can use last month's figures, clearly labelled, with approval.

B: manager

You need the presentation by 17:00 today. You can approve last month's figures as a temporary alternative, provided the slides clearly identify the period. Ask when you will receive an update and who will check the labels.

YOUR GOAL AND SECOND ATTEMPT

Agree on an update time, a backup plan and responsibility for checking the figures. On a second attempt, B needs the presentation at 15:00; renegotiate the plan.

Planning notes: keywords, not a full script

Our final agreement: Who will do what, by when and through which channel?

Negotiate a deadline without making a vague promise

Situation: A colleague requests a complete review earlier than it can realistically be done.

Ben: Can you review the whole proposal by tomorrow morning?

Elena: I can review the budget section by then, but I won't be able to check the full document before Thursday afternoon.

Ben: The client wants an update tomorrow. Could you send the main risks first?

Elena: Yes. I can send the budget comments and a short list of risks by ten tomorrow. The detailed review would follow by three on Thursday.

Ben: That would help. Will the first review include the delivery schedule?

Elena: Only the major dates. I won't have checked the supplier commitments at that stage.

Ben: Understood. I'll explain that the first update is preliminary.

Elena: Thanks. I'll send the preliminary comments tomorrow at ten and the full review Thursday at three.

Check your understanding

1. What will Elena provide tomorrow at ten?
2. What will remain unchecked in that preliminary update?

PHRASES TO KEEP

I can ... by then, but ...; Would it help if ...?; The detailed review would follow ...

Negotiate a deadline without making a vague promise

A: requester

You want a full training pack by Wednesday at 12:00 for a planning meeting. You can accept an outline for that meeting if it includes the topics, timing and materials needed. The final pack is needed by Friday at 16:00.

B: writer

You can provide an outline by Wednesday at 10:00 and a complete pack by Friday at 15:00. You cannot provide the finished exercises for Wednesday. Explain that limitation clearly.

YOUR GOAL AND SECOND ATTEMPT

Agree on two deliverables and two deadlines. Confirm what the first version will contain. Do not call it complete if some materials are still missing.

Planning notes: keywords, not a full script

Our final agreement: Who will do what, by when and through which channel?

Disagree politely and offer an alternative

Situation: Two colleagues are deciding how to train staff on a new booking system.

Olivia: I think we should send everyone a written guide and let them work through it.

Daniel: A guide would be useful. My concern is that some colleagues haven't used a booking system before.

Olivia: We don't have time for a long training session.

Daniel: Could we offer a twenty-minute demonstration and send the guide afterwards? We could record the demonstration for anyone who can't attend.

Olivia: That sounds manageable. What would you cover?

Daniel: Making a booking, changing it and checking the confirmation. The guide could cover less common problems.

Olivia: Let's do that. Can you prepare the demonstration for Monday?

Daniel: Yes. I'll prepare those three steps and send you the outline on Friday.

Check your understanding

1. Why does Daniel think the written guide alone may be insufficient?
2. What three actions will the demonstration cover?

PHRASES TO KEEP

My concern is ...; Could we ... instead?; That sounds manageable.

Disagree politely and offer an alternative

A: team lead

You suggest replacing the weekly team meeting with an email update to save time. You can keep a live meeting if it lasts no more than fifteen minutes.

B: colleague

You support written updates for routine news, but unresolved problems need discussion. Propose a short meeting for questions and decisions, with routine information sent beforehand.

YOUR GOAL AND SECOND ATTEMPT

Agree on what goes in the email, what the meeting covers and its maximum duration. For a second attempt, one colleague cannot attend live; decide how they can contribute.

Planning notes: keywords, not a full script

Our final agreement: Who will do what, by when and through which channel?

Handle a client problem and confirm the next action

Situation: A client reports an incomplete order. The account colleague investigates before promising a solution.

Client: We received six boxes this morning, but the order was for eight.

Ravi: I'm sorry two boxes are missing. Could you give me the order number and confirm which items arrived?

Client: The order is 4821. We have all the chairs, but only half the desk lamps.

Ravi: Thank you. I'll check the dispatch record with the warehouse. Do you need the remaining lamps for a particular date?

Client: Yes, we open the office on Friday.

Ravi: Understood. I'll call you by three today with an update. I need to confirm availability and transport before I can promise a delivery date.

Client: Please use my mobile number. I'm away from my desk this afternoon.

Ravi: Certainly. I'll call your mobile by three, even if I'm still waiting for the final delivery confirmation.

Check your understanding

1. Which items are incomplete, and when does the client need them?
2. What does Ravi promise, and what does he avoid promising?

PHRASES TO KEEP

Could you confirm ...?; I'll check ...; Before I can promise ..., I need to ...

Handle a client problem and confirm the next action

A: client

Your order is 7316. You received ten printer cartridges, but you ordered twelve. You need the remaining two by Tuesday. You are available by phone only before 14:00 today; after that, use email.

B: account colleague

You can contact the warehouse today, but you cannot yet confirm stock or delivery. Ask for the order details and the required date. Offer an update by 16:00, and check the best contact channel.

YOUR GOAL AND SECOND ATTEMPT

Finish by confirming the missing quantity, the required date, the update deadline and the channel. Distinguish the client's requested delivery date from a date you have actually confirmed.

Planning notes: keywords, not a full script

Our final agreement: Who will do what, by when and through which channel?

Answers and possible role-play agreements

Accept accurate paraphrases for comprehension. Role-play agreements may differ if they meet every condition on both cards.

CONVERSATION 1

1. Maya checks delivery schedules and follows up on delayed orders.
2. Call the support desk first, then email the details.

Role-play check: Name the finance manager, use the finance inbox for routine requests and call first for a payment due today. Include the order number.

CONVERSATION 2

1. Email enquiries are excluded.
2. Call totals and the three most common issues; Thursday at 14:00.

Role-play check: Confirm this week, one page, late deliveries only, number and causes, excluding cancellations; Friday at 11:00.

CONVERSATION 3

1. The text and price checks are complete; two photos are missing.
2. Use the existing photos for the launch, then replace them next week.

Role-play check: If figures arrive by 14:00, allow two hours for charts. Otherwise agree to clearly labelled last-month figures. Set the update time and who checks the labels.

Answers and possible role-play agreements

Accept accurate paraphrases for comprehension. Role-play agreements may differ if they meet every condition on both cards.

CONVERSATION 4

1. Budget comments and a short list of risks.
2. Supplier commitments have not been checked; only major delivery dates are included.

Role-play check: Outline by Wednesday at 10:00, including topics, timing and materials. Complete pack by Friday at 15:00. The outline does not include finished exercises.

CONVERSATION 5

1. Some colleagues have never used a booking system.
2. Making a booking, changing it and checking the confirmation.

Role-play check: Send routine information before the meeting. Use a meeting of no more than fifteen minutes for questions and decisions. Agree how an absent colleague can contribute.

CONVERSATION 6

1. Half the desk lamps are missing; the client needs them for Friday's opening.
2. An update by 15:00 today on the client's mobile. Ravi does not promise an unconfirmed delivery date.

Role-play check: Two cartridges are missing from order 7316; Tuesday is requested, not confirmed. Offer an update by 16:00 today by email because the client is unavailable by phone after 14:00.