

The five Ps of participation

Level: Pre-intermediate upwards

Timing: Approx. 90 minutes

Material needed: One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan for pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 5/2011. It is written by Ken Taylor, an expert on business communication, who looks at the subject of participation in meetings and how to make meetings more effective. He provides hints and suggestions which have been divided into five easy-to-remember categories.

The tasks in the student worksheets will encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language and develop and practise skills that could be useful in business situations, especially when participating in meetings. The students are also required to think about how they sound when they give written advice and suggestions.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

Warmer

The warmer questions aim to introduce the topic of participation in meetings. They will help you find out which of the students regularly attend meetings and which format their meetings take. This knowledge will be useful for later tasks. If you have a large class, the task can be done by the students in small groups and then followed by class feedback.

Brainstorming

This is a short task in which students work in groups or as a class and share their spontaneous thoughts and ideas, possibly bringing in their experience, about what to consider when participating in meetings.

At this stage, the students should only scan the article very quickly to compare their suggestions with those of the author. They should wait until after they have attempted the Key words task before they read the article in detail.

Teaching and learning strategy: Brainstorming

We often read the instruction *brainstorm* in coursebooks or lesson plans, but do we actually know what *brainstorming* is and how it can be helpful for students?

Brainstorming is useful whether you have too few ideas or too many. It can help students who don't know how to organize their thoughts to find more focus and can give those who think they don't have any ideas a springboard or way into a task or topic. The most important thing to remember is not to evaluate the information that is offered during brainstorming. Just get the ideas written down and don't judge or organize them until the creative phase has wound down. This allows students to be spontaneous without having to worry about being too accurate.

Whether the students work in groups and make lists or mind maps which they can share with other students, or whether you write all the words that they call out onto the board, the main objective of brainstorming is to generate ideas (or here, vocabulary and phrases) which will aid the students in the following tasks.

Key words

Looking at these key words prior to reading will help the students understand the article. Finding them in context (i.e. within the article in a sentence) will help them to understand in which way the words are used. Note that the words are numbered in the order that they appear in the article.

Key:

1. waste;
2. agenda;
3. issues;
4. disorganized;
5. atmosphere;
6. doubts;
7. convincing;
8. alert;
9. slouch;
10. chair;
11. proactive;
12. dominate;
13. behave;
14. reflect

Imperatives

Students read about imperative sentences and find and underline as many as they can in the article, starting from paragraph 1 ('Be prepared') and not including the paragraph headings. This task can be made competitive by setting a time limit (e.g. two or three minutes depending on the students' level) and asking the students to work in teams. The team with the most correctly identified imperative sentences is the winner.

Key:

Positive: Go through the agenda carefully ...; Take some extra time to read the background papers ...; Prepare any short presentations and practise them.; Know exactly where the meeting will be held.; Organize your space ...; ... make small talk ...; Be punctual ...; Try to look at other people's comments

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in a positive way.; Be alert.; Sit up.; Concentrate on what other people are saying.; Make notes.; ... show that you are interested.; Try to be the kind of participant you would like others to be.; State your opinions clearly ...; Ask questions.; Be a good listener.; Set a good example ...

Negative: Don't be one of them!; Don't let your dislike of a colleague prevent you from seeing the sense of what they are saying.; Don't stare off into space ...; ... don't force the chair to drag (your opinions) out of you.; Don't be afraid to say that you haven't understood something.; Don't try to dominate the meeting by speaking all the time.

Participation checklist

Students make a ten-point checklist for themselves using what they consider to be the ten most important points from the previous task – if possible putting them in order of importance. This task will prepare them for the following writing task.

Writing

Individually or in pairs, the students write a polite email suggesting ways in which their colleagues can improve their participation in meetings, with the aim of making their (regular) meetings more effective. The students should 'send' their emails to other students. The recipients of the emails should then give the writers of the email feedback on how they felt when they read it. If they were not completely happy with it, they should suggest ways in which it could be improved, e.g. style, tone, spelling, grammar, etc. This task will not only practise English but also soft skills when passing on suggestions for improvements to colleagues.

Debate

Divide the students up into two teams – give each team one of the statements (which are loose quotations from the article) to read, discuss and defend. Each team must defend the statement they have been given regardless of whether it reflects their own personal opinion or not. Allow each team adequate time to discuss their statement and to make notes on how to convince the other team of the wisdom and truth of their statement. Hold a class debate in which each side should try to convince the other that their statement is correct. Afterwards, discuss which side won the debate and why. Make a note of good language used during the debate and give feedback on this.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

More on meetings

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business section on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: Making a start:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/making-a-start/>

Business tasks: Notes and messages:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-tasks/notes-and-messages/>

Business skills bank: Meetings:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-skills-bank/meetings/>

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participation ★★ noun [uncountable] /pɑ:(r)tɪsɪ'peɪʃ(ə)n/

the process of taking part in something

www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/participation

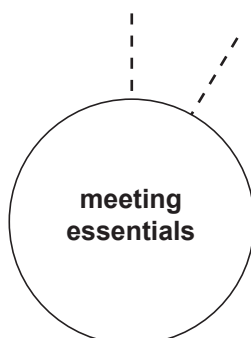
1 Warmer

Discuss the following questions:

- How often do you attend meetings?
- Which format do they usually take? E.g. face-to-face, Skype, telephone, video, etc.
- Where are they held?
- Which language are they held in?
- Do they follow a format or pattern?

2 Brainstorming

Brainstorm the most important things that you should know or do when you participate in a meeting and write them on the word wheel.



Compare your answers with those in the article.

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3 Key words

Match these key words from the article with their definitions and then find them in the article to read them in context.

disorganized doubts waste convincing atmosphere issues agenda

1. a situation in which time, money or energy is used without bringing any useful result

2. a list of things that people will discuss at a meeting _____
3. subjects or problems that need to be talked about _____
4. Someone who is _____ does not deal with things in a clear or sensible way.
5. the mood or feeling that exists in a place and affects the people who are there

6. feelings of not being certain about something _____
7. believable, certain or persuasive _____

slouch behave proactive reflect chair dominate alert

8. paying attention to what is happening and ready to react quickly if necessary

9. to sit with your shoulders bent forwards and your head low so that you look lazy

10. the person who is in charge of a meeting _____
11. taking action and making changes before they need to be made, rather than waiting until problems develop _____
12. to control something or try to be the most important person _____
13. act or to do things in a particular way _____
14. to show the existence or nature of something _____

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by Ken Taylor

There are certain points to consider in order to ensure that meetings are not a complete waste of time. Ken Taylor writes about the five most important points.

We spend a lot of our working lives sitting in meetings and we don't want to waste that time. How can we make sure our participation is effective? The only area over which you have 100 per cent control is your own behaviour. So, be an effective participant yourself and act as a good example to others. Here are the five Ps of good participation:

1 Be prepared

Good preparation is essential, especially if you are working in a foreign language. Here are some questions to think about:

- Are all the points on the agenda clear to you?
- Do you have to prepare and present information? Are there background papers you need to read?
- Who will be there?
- What are the potentially difficult areas of discussion?
- What is your opinion on the various issues?

Go through the agenda carefully to see whether you have the words and phrases you need to express your ideas. Take some extra time to read the background papers so that you understand them. Prepare any short presentations and practise them.

2 Be punctual

What do you think of people who arrive late to meetings? Don't be one of them! If you arrive late, you will seem disorganized and perhaps miss important information. Know exactly where the meeting will be held and get there early. Organize your space at the table in front of you so that you have everything you need. Take the chance to make small talk with other participants. Help create a good atmosphere before the meeting officially starts. Be punctual also in completing any work you promised to do at previous meetings.

3 Be positive

It's very easy to focus on the negative side of what is being said. Try to look at other people's comments in a positive way. Don't let your dislike of a colleague prevent you from seeing the sense of what they are saying. If you do have doubts, you should express them in a friendly and reasonable way. This will make what you say more convincing.

4 Be present

Of course, you need to be physically present. But you also need to be mentally present. Be alert. Sit up. Concentrate on what other people are saying. Make notes. Don't stare off into space, slouch in your chair or give the impression that you are impatiently waiting for the chance to speak. It's not enough simply to be interested in what's going on: you also need to show that you are interested. And if you make the effort, you will discover that meetings actually do become more interesting – and useful.

5 Be proactive

Try to be the kind of participant you would like others to be. State your opinions clearly and don't force the chair to drag them out of you. Ask questions. Don't be afraid to say that you haven't understood something. Be a good listener. The more proactive you are in the meeting, the more you will get out of it. But don't try to dominate the meeting by speaking all the time. Set a good example with your behaviour. This will influence the way your colleagues behave and your meetings will no longer be a waste of time. Also, the more professionally you behave in meetings, the more this will reflect positively on you as a business partner.



Image: Getty

KEN TAYLOR is the director of Taylor Consultancy Ltd., an international communication consultancy in London, and the author of *50 Ways to Improve Your Business English*.

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4 Language: Imperatives

An imperative sentence is one that gives advice or instructions, or that expresses a request or command. To make the imperative we use the infinitive of the verb without *to*. An imperative sentence does not require a subject; the pronoun *you* is implied.

Find and underline (at least) 15 positive and five negative imperative sentences in the article, e.g. *Go through the agenda* (positive) and *Don't be one of them* (negative).

5 Participation checklist

Make a checklist of ten points that will help you improve your participation in meetings.

A large yellow sticky note with a torn top edge and ten punch holes. It contains ten checkmarks on the left side, each followed by a horizontal dotted line for writing.

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6 Writing

Write a polite email to your colleagues suggesting ways in which they can improve how they participate in meetings, with the aim of making your monthly meetings more effective.

7 Debate

In teams, debate these two statements:

