

A

Word combinations with 'meeting'

arrange set up fix	} a meeting	organize a meeting
bring forward		make a meeting earlier than originally decided
put back put off postpone		make a meeting later than originally planned
call off cancel		decide not to have a meeting
run chair		be in charge of a meeting
attend		go to a meeting
miss		not go to a meeting

Note

You can say 'bring forward a meeting' or 'bring a meeting forward'. But you can only say 'bring it forward', not 'bring forward it'. The rule is the same for **put back** and **call off**.

B

Types of meeting

- **chat** – informal discussion – with colleagues at the coffee machine
- **brainstorming** among colleagues where as many ideas are produced as possible, but are then evaluated later
- **project meeting / team meeting** of employees involved in a particular activity
- **department meeting / departmental meeting**
- **meeting with suppliers** – for example, to negotiate prices for an order
- **meeting with a customer** – for example, to discuss a contract
- **board meeting** – an official, formal meeting of a company's directors
- **AGM: annual general meeting** (BrE) / **annual meeting** (AmE) – where shareholders discuss the company's annual report
- **EGM: extraordinary general meeting** – a shareholders' meeting to discuss an important issue such as a proposed merger

C

How was the meeting?

Some colleagues are discussing a meeting they have just come out of.

Anil: I thought it was very **productive**.

Juliet: Well, I thought it was a **waste of time**. I heard nothing I didn't already know.

Barbara: Well, I agree with Anil. I felt we had some very **useful discussions**. We certainly **covered a lot of ground**. We got through an incredible number of things.

Juliet: As usual John was **rambling** and kept **wandering off the point**. He just uses meetings as a chance to **show off**.

Anil: But to be fair, the chair really **kept things moving** – she encouraged people to **stick to the point** by keeping things brief.

Exercises

- 55.1** Replace the underlined expressions with appropriate forms of the verbs in A opposite. In some cases, more than one verb is possible.

Eurotunnel owns and operates the tunnel under the English Channel. A meeting for shareholders had been **(1) organized** for 12 July. The company is experiencing financial problems and some shareholders wanted **(2) the meeting to take place before then**, but in the end the meeting was **(3) delayed**. The Paris commercial law court agreed that the meeting should be **(4) moved** to 27 July to allow time for financial rescue plans to be finalized. Eurotunnel's chairman **(5) managed** the meeting very efficiently, and the new financial plans were agreed. Only very few shareholders **(6) did not go to it**.

- 55.2** Look at B opposite. At which type of meeting would you be most likely to hear each of these things?

1 I'm pleased to announce another good year for shareholders of this company.

2 I know this sounds crazy, but how about giving away 100,000 free samples?

3 Things in the sales department are getting out of control. We should all start making a real effort.

4 So, you think you can offer 10,000 a month at a unit cost of £4.90?

5 Have you heard? Suzanne is being fired. Her sales figures aren't good enough, apparently.

6 That's a deal, then. Looking forward to working with you. I'm sure you won't be disappointed.

7 Amazingly, we're ahead of schedule on this job.

8 I recommend to shareholders that you accept BP's offer for our company.

9 As you know, BP wants to buy this company. As chief financial offer, what do you think of their offer, Saleem?



- 55.3** A management consultant is talking about meetings, using expressions from C opposite. Put what she says into the correct order.

- a point and rambling. And then there are those who want to show
- b moving. If they do this, it's amazing how much ground you can cover.
- c Of course, everyone wants meetings to be productive and achieve results. But from personal experience, we know that a lot of them are a waste of
- d off – to show how important and clever they are. The chair should keep things
- e the point. We've all seen those annoying people who keep wandering off the
- f time, and nothing is achieved. In order for discussion to be useful, people should stick to

Over to you

What sort of meetings do you go to in your school or organization? Are they useful?

A

The role of the chair: before the meeting

A **chairman**, **chairwoman** or **chair** has to be a **good organizer**. What they do before the meeting is as important as the meeting itself. They should ensure that the **agenda** – the list of things to be discussed – is complete by asking those involved what should be on it and then **circulating** – distributing – the agenda to those involved. They should check the **venue**, making sure the room will be free and without interruptions until the end of the meeting.

Note

Don't say **agenda** when you mean **diary**.



B

The role of the chair: running the meeting

The **chairperson** should be a **good timekeeper**. They should start the meeting on time. Don't wait for **latecomers**.

They should appoint a **minute-taker**, someone who makes sure that opinions and **action points** – where participants agree to do something, find something out, etc. – are noted.

The chair should make sure that each participant has the chance to **make their point**.

Disagreements should be dealt with **tactfully** – without annoying people – making sure that each side feels their point of view has been noted. Avoid **digressions** where people **get off the point**.

They should make sure each point on the agenda is **allocated** the time it deserves, perhaps indicating this on the agenda. Even if the current item has not been completely covered or **resolved** – decided – make sure that discussion **moves on to the next point**.

They should ensure that the meeting **finishes on time**, or early.

Let's make a start.

Would you mind taking the minutes, Adam?

I think you wanted to say something about this, Brigitte.

Let's talk about this calmly.

I think we've covered this item.

We can return to this issue at the next meeting.

Let's move on to the next item.

OK. Time's up. Thanks for coming.

C

Follow-up

After some meetings, it's necessary for the minutes from the previous meeting to be circulated, especially if there are **action points** that particular people are responsible for.

At the next meeting, the chair should ask for the minutes to be read out and make sure that all agree that it is an **accurate record** of what happened, and see if there are any **matters arising** – any points from the last meeting that need to be discussed that are not on the agenda of the current meeting. And they should check what progress has been made on the action points of the previous meeting.

Exercises

- 56.1** This article relates to points in A and B opposite. Read the article and say if the statements below are true or false.

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO CHAIR A MEETING!

I've been asked to chair a meeting about the Christmas office party, but I'm incredibly nervous as I've never chaired one before. Is there a secret for success?

You may never have chaired a meeting, but as you've probably been to lots, you'll have seen it done well and badly. Think about the things that please and annoy you, and build on them. Well-run meetings stick to the point, get things decided and finish on time. Make sure everyone has the agenda well in advance, and that you know enough about the participants and issues to be discussed. Arrange for the room to be cool rather than warm; people will be less likely to go to sleep. See yourself as a referee whose job it is to ensure fair play through careful watching and listening. It's up to you to encourage the timid, control the talkative, involve the bored, calm down the argumentative and be kind to the minute-taker you have appointed. Getting that individual on your side is essential if you want the record to reflect your desired outcomes. It's normal to suggest what should be left out from the minutes and how any difficult bits should be phrased. Keep things moving by not letting discussions wander off the subject or get over-long. Get decisions made and recorded, even if it's only to postpone matters until the next meeting. If someone is being difficult, defuse things by offering to continue the discussion personally at a more appropriate time. If the meeting is likely to be more than a couple of hours long, try to include a break at the mid-point; it acts as a marker and stops people getting restless. Aim to leave everyone feeling they have had a chance to say what they wanted to say, and gain lasting and well-deserved popularity by finishing early.

In planning a successful meeting, you should:

- 1 think about meetings you have been to in the past.
- 2 hand out the agenda at the meeting.
- 3 know something about the participants and the things they will be talking about.
- 4 treat every participant in the same way.
- 5 be nice to the person making a record of the meeting.
- 6 allow people to talk for as long as they want.
- 7 never talk to participants about particular issues after the meeting is over.

- 56.2** Complete the statements below (1–7) containing expressions from A, B and C opposite with appropriate forms of the verbs that come in front of them.

- 1 Someone who records what is said _____ the minutes.
- 2 The chair _____ the person in 1 above as the minute-taker.
- 3 If you _____ the agenda, you send it out before the meeting.
- 4 The chair should _____ the right amount of time for each point.
- 5 When one point has been covered, the meeting should _____ to the next point.
- 6 If you want to save time, _____ digressions.
- 7 Everyone should _____ that the minutes are an accurate record of what happened at the last meeting.

Over to you

- Are you good at – or would you be good at – chairing meetings? Why? / Why not?
- What do you find annoying in meetings?

A

Opening the meeting

Creative Advertising is a US-owned advertising agency with offices in Soho in London. Its chief executive, Carla Eagleton, is opening a meeting with four of the people who work for the company.



OK, let's get started.

As you know, I've called this meeting to discuss the situation in the design department. Until now, the feeling has been that designers are creative types and need the freedom to work as they wish. But things are getting out of control.

You can also say:

- Let's begin, shall we?
- Shall we make a start?
- Let's make a start.
- It's time to get started.
- Let's get down to business.

You can also say:

- I've arranged this meeting to ...
- I've organized this meeting to ...
- The purpose of this meeting is to ...
- The main objective of this meeting is to ...

B

Asking for and expressing opinions

Would you like to open the discussion, Piers?

I believe the design department needs a certain amount of freedom, but there are limits. They come in at 10.30 when all other employees have already been at work for two hours. This leads to tensions between design people and other employees.

You can also say:

- Would you like to kick off?
- Would you like to get the ball rolling?

You can also say:

- Personally, I think ...
- My standpoint is that ...

What about you, Maria?

As I see it, I can't run the design department as if it was the accounts department.

- How about you, Maria?
- What do you think, Maria?

- The way I see it ...

In my opinion, they're going much too far. I can't bear to think of the costs involved.

Of course, we are creative, and need to be given the freedom to work how we like.

- It looks/seems to me as if ...
- It's clear to me that ...

- Obviously, ...

Note

The expression **kick off** comes from football. **Get the ball rolling** does not come from any particular sport.

You use **Of course** and **Obviously** to introduce an idea, but also to show that you think other people will know it or agree with it already. Be careful how you use these expressions, as they can sound rude.

Exercises

57.1 Complete the expressions from A and B opposite grouped together below.

1

How
..... about you?
.....

2

I've
..... this meeting to ...
.....

3

Let's
....., ?
.....
.....

4

The (main)
..... of this meeting is to ...
.....

5

It
..... to me as if ...
.....

57.2 Match the two parts of the expressions from the continuation of the discussion in B opposite.

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 1 The way | <input type="checkbox"/> | a I think that the prizes we win help us to attract and keep the |
| 2 Personally, | <input type="checkbox"/> | best designers. |
| 3 It looks to me | <input type="checkbox"/> | b as if the design people think of themselves as living on another planet. |
| 4 It's clear to | <input type="checkbox"/> | c I see it, you should be looking at what we produce, not at the time of day |
| 5 In my | <input type="checkbox"/> | we produce it. |
| | | d opinion, we have to think of the needs of each department. |
| | | e me that they set a very bad example to the other departments. |

Over to you

- How free are people to express their feelings in your organization?
- Are people at all levels encouraged to say what they think?
- Are new employees asked for their opinions?

A Agreeing

Carla's meeting (see previous unit) continues.

The phrases in bold can be used when agreeing with people.

You may be right there. The budget figures are not looking good. But on the other hand we mustn't forget the other benefits for the company.



You can also say:

- a **I couldn't agree more.** We got our latest recruits after we won the Advertising Industry Award for best advertisement last year.
- b **Precisely.** Creativity comes to some of our people in the middle of the night.
- c **Exactly.** It's the creative people who bring in all the money.
- d **Absolutely.** It's the output that counts.



You're perfectly right. We are the people who are the driving force behind the company.

You can also say:

- e **That's true, I suppose.** But we must think of the company as a whole.
- f **I suppose so.** But other employees mustn't be forgotten.

B Disagreeing

That's not really how I see it. Designers and accounts people are all company employees.



You can also say:

- g **I don't really agree.** The prizes that the designers get are important, but people would come to work for us anyway.
- h **I can't go along with you there.** I think we need to see people at their desks actually working.
- i **I think you're mistaken.** If the designers get to work late, they should be disciplined.
- j **I'm afraid I can't agree with you there.** We all depend on each other for the company to make money.
- k **I'm sorry, but that's out of the question.** All employees should keep to normal working hours.



I think you're wrong. The design department's costs are justified because of our high-quality work. The costs of the other departments are not justified.

You can also say:

- l **Of course not.** The latest figures I've seen show that the project is within budget.
- m **That's absurd.** You can't expect us to leave at 10 in the evening and be back at 8 in the morning.
- n **That's ridiculous.** Each department has very specific needs.

Note

Be careful with **That's absurd**, **That's ridiculous** and **Of course not**. These expressions are very strong and can be offensive.

Exercises

58.1 Put the expressions in A and B opposite into the following groups:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 mild agreement | 3 strong agreement |
| 2 mild disagreement | 4 strong disagreement |

58.2 The expressions below follow on immediately from those in A opposite. Match the continuations (1–6) with the expressions (a–f).

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1 We don't care about the hours that each person in our department works. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Besides that, the prizes help us to attract and keep the best designers. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Not only do we have these very high costs, but it also sets a very bad example to the other departments and they start going over budget too. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 We're all in this together. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 Without us, there would be no profits. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 You should be looking at what we produce, not at the time of day we produce it. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

58.3 Two advertising managers, Georgina and Henry, are exchanging opinions. Use expressions from B opposite (g–n) containing the word in brackets to complete what Henry says. Then match what Georgina says with Henry's replies.

Georgina	Henry
1 The agency should move its offices out of Soho to the suburbs somewhere.	..... (absurd). We would lose employees to our competitors if we cut salaries.
2 Times are difficult and everyone should take a 10 per cent pay cut.	..... (along). The agency is at its most creative now.
3 The real problem is the number of unproductive people in the agency.	..... (ridiculous). We need to stay in the creative heart of London.
4 When they travel on business, everyone should stay at the same low-cost hotels in order to cut costs.	..... (afraid). People need to get away from their offices sometimes.
5 One reason for our high costs is employees who go out for coffee in the local bars twice a day.	..... (really). Other advertising agencies are doing well, despite the economy.
6 If the agency's less profitable than it was, it's because economic conditions are terrible.	..... (course). Everyone in the agency works hard.
7 If we could get back to the creativity we had when the agency was founded, all our problems would be solved.	..... (course). Everyone in the agency works hard.
	..... (question). Some of the accommodation is really bad.

Over to you

- Is it acceptable for people to disagree openly with each other in your company/country?
- Do you prefer to avoid arguments?

A

Interrupting, referring back, checking understanding, avoiding confrontation

Here are some other expressions used in meetings for different purposes.

To interrupt someone politely:

- **If I can just stop you for a moment.**
- **Can I (just) come in here?**
- **Sorry to interrupt you, but ...**

To refer back to what was said earlier:

- **To go back to what you were saying earlier ...**
- **As we were saying earlier ...**
- **To go back to what I was just saying ...**

To check that you understand what someone has said:

- **Are you saying that ... ?**
- **Are you suggesting that ... ?**
- **If I understand (you) correctly, ...**
- **If I follow you, ...**

To avoid direct **confrontation** – disagreement:

- **I take your point ...**
- **I understand what you're saying ...**
- **I see/know what you mean, but ...**
- **I hear where you're coming from on this, but ...**

B

Agreement, consensus or compromise?

An **agreement** is when people **agree about** or **on** something.

A **compromise** is an agreement where each side accepts less than it wanted – they each have to **compromise**.

A **consensus** is a situation where most people agree about something.

If people **have a disagreement about** something, they **disagree about** it.

Note

All the nouns above can be countable and uncountable.

You can **come to**, **reach** or **find agreement** or **an agreement** (with someone). The same verbs can be used with **compromise** and **consensus**.

If you disagree (with someone), you have a **disagreement** (with them).



C

Concluding

- **We've covered a lot of ground.**
- **It's been a very interesting discussion.**
- **We're running out of time.**
- **To go over what's been said ...**
- **To sum up ...**
- **We're going to have to agree to disagree.**
- **Unless anyone has anything else to add ...**
- **We're going to have to stop there.**
- **I think that's it.**
- **Thank you all for coming.**

Exercises

- 59.1** Use complete expressions from A opposite to complete the dialogue, based on the prompts in brackets. The first one has been done for you.
- A: We really will have to increase productivity.
 B: (coming), but there are limits to how much we can ask of each individual employee. After all, if you look back at the records for ...
I hear where you're coming from on this, but ...
 A: (stop), you have to admit things were different then. That was in the late 1990s.
 B: (understand), but that's not so long ago. The pressures were the same.
 C: (go back), there are limits as to what we can ask from the creatives. They ...
 A: (interrupt), but I hate that word 'creative'. A lot of them have created nothing except chaos since they arrived in the company.
 C: (suggest) that the creative department has people who shouldn't be there?

- 59.2** Use the information in B opposite to complete the table below.

Countable noun	Uncountable noun also?	Verb	Expression
agreement			..... / ..... / ..... (.....) agreement
disagreement			..... disagreement
compromise			..... / ..... / ..... (.....) compromise
consensus			..... / ..... / ..... (.....) consensus

- 59.3** Look at C opposite and put the extracts from this newspaper report into the correct order.

- a out of time and we're going to have to stop there. I'll let you know the committee's decision about the solution to this problem by the end of the month.
- b There were strong differences of opinion at last night's meeting to discuss banning cars from the centre of Cambridge. The chair, Ms Yolanda Johns of the town council's transport committee, organized the meeting well. At the end of the meeting she said, 'We've covered
- c They said it would improve the quality of life. It was not possible to come to
- d a lot of ground and I've listened to both sides of the argument. To sum up the arguments, there were those who thought that banning cars would damage shops and businesses in the town.' Others disagreed.
- e a compromise or consensus. There was total disagreement. After four hours of heated discussion, Ms Johns said, 'It's been a very interesting discussion but we're running

Over to you

In your organization, are decisions based on compromise and consensus – or are they imposed from above? Give an example.