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Participating in meetings

By the time I've thought, translated, and opened my mouth to speak, it's too late. The meeting has moved on.

— A non-native speaker talking about intervening

Aims

- How to intervene
- How to make your point
- How to interrupt and deal with interruptions
- How to adapt to different styles of participation
- How to express your opinion when speaking and writing
- How to agree and disagree in writing

A

Making your point in meetings

Quiz

How good are you at taking part in meetings? What do you think? Read the statements and choose your answers.

	Yes	No	Sometimes
1 It is hard to interrupt in a meeting when I want to speak.			
2 I find it easy to stop people interrupting me when I'm speaking.			
3 I find it easier to speak in English in meetings with other non-native speakers of English than with native speakers.			
4 It is hard to participate and make my point in meetings.			
5 It is difficult to summarize what I want to say.			
6 It is difficult to ask people to speak more slowly when I don't understand something.			
7 It is difficult to ask people to explain what they mean.			



Briefing

Many non-native speakers of English say they find it hard to make their points in meetings, especially when they are dealing with native speakers of English. So what can you do to be certain you can make the points you want to make in meetings?

How to make your points

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1 Prepare | Get the meeting agenda in advance and read it. Note the points you are interested in and think about what you might want to say. |
| 2 Tell the Chair in advance | Call or email the Chair of the meeting and make it clear that you would like to contribute on particular agenda points. |
| 3 Sit where the Chair can see you | If it is a face-to-face meeting, sit in the eye line of the Chair so you can catch his / her eye. If you are next to the Chair or hidden by a colleague, this can be difficult. Signal to the Chair when you want to make your point, either verbally or non-verbally. |
| 4 Make your points firmly | <p>Use these guidelines for your intervention:</p> <p>CLEAR Be as clear as you can. Explain what you will say and why you will say it.</p> <p>Pause before important words and phrases so people hear them clearly.</p> <p>POLITE Always be polite. Agree before disagreeing. Respect the other person's view.</p> <p>LIGHT Don't sound too serious. When we are nervous, we often sound too serious. Breathe out before you speak. It helps lower the voice.</p> <p>TIGHT A short, clear intervention is more effective than a long one. Say what you want to say, then stop.</p> <p>Remember these four words: CLEAR, POLITE, LIGHT, TIGHT.</p> |

Listening



1

Listen to two extracts from a meeting about the introduction of a single business management system within a large corporation. The Chair, Don and Silvia are present. Answer these questions.

- | | Extract |
|---|---|
| 1 In which extract does the Chair invite Don to intervene? | 1 ☐ 2 ☐ |
| 2 In which extract does Don stop an interruption? | 1 ☐ 2 ☐ |
| 3 In which extract does Silvia apologize? | 1 ☐ 2 ☐ |
| 4 In which extract does Don make a suggestion? | 1 ☐ 2 ☐ |
| 5 In which extract does Don say he has finished what he wants to say? | 1 ☐ 2 ☐ |



2

Listen again to the two extracts and complete these sentences.

Extract 1

- 1 The thing is how we manage this changeover.
- 2 Silvia, please can I just finish what I was to say?
- 3 Sorry, I didn't mean to be

Extract 2

- 4 John, could I in here?
- 5 I just to say something about technical support during the implementation phase.
- 6 Well, how if we reduced their normal responsibilities during this period?
- 7 That's I wanted to say.

Business practice



1

Listen and repeat these sentences.

Ask to intervene

Could I just come in here?
Could I just say something?

Make your point

I just wanted to say something about ...
My main point is ...

Stop an interruption

Just let me finish.
Hold on a moment. (*informal*)

Apologize for interrupting

Sorry.
Sorry, I didn't mean to be rude.

Get back to your point

As I was saying, ...

Make a suggestion

How about if we did this?
Why don't we do this?

Conclude your intervention

That's all I wanted to say.
That's what I think we should do.

2

Test yourself. Cover the sentences above and then complete these sentences.

- 1 Why we do this?
- 2 I was saying, we should do this first.
- 3 let me finish.



- 4 on a minute.
5, I didn't mean to be rude.
6 That's all I to say.



3

You are in a budget meeting and you want to make a point. Follow the instructions. Then listen to the model conversation.

You: Ask to intervene.

Chair: Yes, of course. What did you want to say?

You: Thank. Say you want to say something about budgeting for air travel.

Sarah: But we've already discussed that!

You: Stop Sarah's interruption and make your point – people can video-conference rather than have face-to-face meetings.

Chair: That's a good point.

You: Say your main point is air travel costs must come down.

Chair: I agree with you.

You: Say you have finished your intervention.

Business culture

In many cultures it is natural to give your opinion, agree, disagree and challenge other people's opinions, even the Chair. In many other cultures the opposite is true.

Think of your style. Put a tick in the box if you agree with the statements. Then think of another culture you deal with. Put a tick if you think they agree too.

Statement	I agree	The other culture agrees
1 I always agree with the boss in the meeting.		
2 I am happy to challenge the boss in the meeting.		
3 If I disagree, I say so.		
4 If I disagree, I keep silent.		
5 I interrupt to say I like something.		
6 I only interrupt if I think something is wrong.		
7 I like to give my opinion in a meeting.		
8 I prefer to listen to others and not say what I think.		

Now look at the differences and think. If you are in a meeting with the other culture, should you adapt? If so, what should you do?



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