

Five-Minute Activities for Business English

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Contents

Introduction	I
Needs analysis	3
1 Business topics: jobs and careers	
1.1 <i>Job skills</i>	4
1.2 <i>What's your job?</i>	5
1.3 <i>Perks and drags</i>	5
1.4 <i>My job and me</i>	6
1.5 <i>Dream job</i>	6
1.6 <i>What would your boss say?</i>	7
1.7 <i>Interview experience</i>	7
1.8 <i>Interview questions</i>	8
1.9 <i>Career stages</i>	9
1.10 <i>What's your background?</i>	9
1.11 <i>Career plans</i>	10

See also *Mini-presentations* 55 / *'Wh' questions* 68 / *Things in common* 68 / *Time management* 69 / *Current project* 71 / *Fact or fiction?* 72 / *I'll never forget* 72 / *Brainstorming collocations* 90 / *Devowelled words* 92 / *Lexical dominoes* 92 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Dictionary search* 95 / *If it was up to me . . .* 104

2 Business topics: the company	
2.1 <i>Describing your company</i>	11
2.2 <i>Organigrams</i>	11
2.3 <i>Logos</i>	12
2.4 <i>SWOT analysis</i>	12
2.5 <i>Company plans</i>	14

See also *IT and me* 30 / *E-commerce* 31 / *Mini-presentations* 55 / *'Wh' questions* 68 / *Things in common* 68 / *Brainstorming collocations* 90 / *Devowelled words* 92 / *Lexical dominoes* 92 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Dictionary search* 95 / *Expanding sentences* 100 / *In my office* 103

3 Business topics: products and services	
3.1 <i>Product profiles</i>	15
3.2 <i>USP</i>	16
3.3 <i>Business documents</i>	16
3.4 <i>Complaints</i>	17

See also *Describing your company* 11 / *SWOT analysis* 12 / *Is it ethical?* 20 / *E-commerce* 31 / *Mini-presentations* 55 / *Persuasion* 56 / *Quick email responses* 74 / *Brainstorming collocations* 90 / *Devowelled words* 92 / *Lexical dominoes* 92 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Dictionary search* 95

4 Business topics: management and marketing	
4.1 <i>Management tips</i>	19
4.2 <i>Demotivation</i>	19
4.3 <i>Is it ethical?</i>	20
4.4 <i>Brand associations</i>	20
4.5 <i>Magazine pictures</i>	21
4.6 <i>What makes a good sales consultant?</i>	21
4.7 <i>An entrepreneur I admire</i>	22

See also *Describing your company* 11 / *SWOT analysis* 12 / *Time management* 69 / *Brainstorming collocations* 90 / *Lexical dominoes* 92 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Dictionary search* 95

5 Business topics: money and finance	
5.1 <i>Saying figures</i>	23
5.2 <i>Describing trends</i>	23
5.3 <i>Pelmanism</i>	25
5.4 <i>Spending, wasting, saving</i>	26
5.5 <i>Budgets</i>	27
5.6 <i>Financial statements</i>	27
5.7 <i>Investment portfolio</i>	28
5.8 <i>Tracking shares</i>	29

See also *SWOT analysis* 12 / *Dictating news headlines* 80 / *Figures in the news* 86 / *Brainstorming collocations* 90 / *Devowelled words* 92 / *Lexical dominoes* 92 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Dictionary search* 95

6 Business topics: information technology	
6.1 <i>IT and me</i>	30
6.2 <i>What's your favourite website?</i>	31
6.3 <i>E-commerce</i>	31
6.4 <i>Internet news</i>	31
6.5 <i>Internet translation tools</i>	32
6.6 <i>Researching your own culture</i>	33

See also *SWOT analysis* 12 / *Tracking shares* 29

7 Business topics: cultural awareness	
7.1 <i>Cultural controversy</i>	35
7.2 <i>Iceberg or onion?</i>	35
7.3 <i>Flight to Rubovia</i>	37
7.4 <i>Dos and Don'ts</i>	38

See also *Researching your own culture* 33 / *Diplomatic language* 50 / *Firm or flexible?* 54 / *First few minutes* 62 / *What do you say when . . . ?* 65 / *Menus* 66 / *My goldfish just died* 70 / *English loan words* 97 / *Business metaphors* 98

8 Business communication skills: telephoning	
8.1 <i>Taking a message</i>	40
8.2 <i>Arranging a meeting</i>	41
8.3 <i>Hotel reservation</i>	42
8.4 <i>Swapping email addresses and phone numbers</i>	43
8.5 <i>Is that N for November?</i>	44
8.6 <i>Noisy telephone conversations</i>	45

See also *Complaints* 17 / *Effective performance* 61 / *First few minutes* 62 / *Follow-up email* 74 / *Stop the tape and continue* 82 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Correct yourself* 104 / *Revise key phrases* 105 / *Role play changes* 109

9 Business communication skills: meetings and negotiations	
9.1 <i>Opening the meeting</i>	46
9.2 <i>Discussion flowchart</i>	47
9.3 <i>The clarification game</i>	48
9.4 <i>Disagreeing</i>	49

9.5	<i>Diplomatic language</i>	50
9.6	<i>Problems, problems</i>	51
9.7	<i>Crisis!</i>	52
9.8	<i>Setting the agenda</i>	52
9.9	<i>Negotiation areas</i>	53
9.10	<i>Firm or flexible?</i>	54

See also *SWOT analysis* 12 / *Budgets* 27 / *Effective performance* 61 / *First few minutes* 62 / *Follow-up email* 74 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Correct yourself* 104 / *Revise key phrases* 105 / *Role play changes* 109

10	Business communication skills: presentations	
10.1	<i>Mini-presentations</i>	55
10.2	<i>Persuasion</i>	56
10.3	<i>Presentation structure</i>	56
10.4	<i>Signposts</i>	57
10.5	<i>To read or not to read, that is the question</i>	59
10.6	<i>The best presentation I ever heard</i>	61
10.7	<i>Effective performance</i>	61

See also *My job and me* 6 / *What's your background?* 9 / *Describing your company* 11 / *Organigrams* 11 / *The clarification game* 48 / *Phonological chunking* 87 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Correct yourself* 104 / *Revise key phrases* 105

11	Business communication skills: social English	
11.1	<i>First few minutes</i>	62
11.2	<i>Follow-up questions</i>	63
11.3	<i>Standard exchanges</i>	64
11.4	<i>What do you say when ... ?</i>	65
11.5	<i>Menus</i>	66
11.6	<i>It's a good story, isn't it?</i>	67

See also *What's your job?* 5 / *Perks and drags* 5 / *What's your background?* 9 / *Effective performance* 61 / *'Wh' questions* 68 / *Things in common* 68 / *I'll never forget* 72 / *Follow-up email* 74 / *Passing notes* 78 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Correct yourself* 104 / *Revise key phrases* 105 / *Role play changes* 109

12	Language work: speaking	
12.1	<i>'Wh' questions</i>	68
12.2	<i>Things in common</i>	68
12.3	<i>Days of the week</i>	69
12.4	<i>Time management</i>	69
12.5	<i>My goldfish just died</i>	70
12.6	<i>Current project</i>	71
12.7	<i>Fact or fiction?</i>	72
12.8	<i>I'll never forget</i>	72

See also Most activities for *Business topics* and *Business communication skills* / *Response to a text* 84 / *Hot seat* 94 / *Correct yourself* 104 / *Role play changes* 109

13	Language work: writing	
13.1	<i>Email tips</i>	73
13.2	<i>Follow-up email</i>	74
13.3	<i>Quick email responses</i>	74
13.4	<i>Chain letter</i>	75
13.5	<i>Writing emails</i>	75
13.6	<i>Reformulate a letter to an email</i>	76
13.7	<i>Email abbreviations</i>	77
13.8	<i>Passing notes</i>	78
13.9	<i>The purpose of this report</i>	79

See also *Career plans* 10 / *Describing your company* 11 / *Company plans* 14 / *Product profiles* 15 / *An entrepreneur I admire* 22 / *Spending, wasting, saving* 26 / *Opening the meeting* 46 / *'Wh' questions* 68 / *Putting back the grammar* 99 / *Expanding sentences* 100 / *Five-minute dictogloss* 101 / *In my office* 103 / *If it was up to me ...* 104 / *Correct yourself* 104

14	Language work: listening	
14.1	<i>Dictating news headlines</i>	80
14.2	<i>Jumbled sentences</i>	80
14.3	<i>Stop the tape and continue</i>	82
14.4	<i>Incorrect summaries</i>	82
14.5	<i>Listen and count</i>	83

See also *Activities for telephoning / It's a good story, isn't it?* 67 / *Response to a text* 84 / *Questioning the text* 85 / *Figures in the news* 86 / *Phonological chunking* 87 / *Five-minute dictogloss* 101

15 Language work: reading

15.1	<i>Response to a text</i>	84
15.2	<i>Questioning the text</i>	85
15.3	<i>More than single words</i>	85
15.4	<i>Figures in the news</i>	86
15.5	<i>Class-generated text summary</i>	86

See also *Tracking shares* 29 / *Internet news* 31 / *Researching your own culture* 34 / *Follow-up email* 74 / *Incorrect summaries* 82 / *What does that stand for?* 94 / *Business metaphors* 98 / *Putting back the grammar* 99

16 Language work: pronunciation

16.1	<i>Phonological chunking</i>	87
16.2	<i>Stress patterns</i>	88
16.3	<i>Problem sounds</i>	89

See also *Saying figures* 23 / *To read or not to read, that is the question* 59 / *Dictating news headlines* 80 / *Listen and count* 83

17 Language work: vocabulary

17.1	<i>What's the difference?</i>	90
17.2	<i>Brainstorming collocations</i>	90
17.3	<i>Devowelled words</i>	92
17.4	<i>Lexical dominoes</i>	92
17.5	<i>What does that stand for?</i>	94
17.6	<i>Hot seat</i>	94
17.7	<i>Dictionary search</i>	95
17.8	<i>Categorising vocabulary</i>	96
17.9	<i>English loan words</i>	97
17.10	<i>Business metaphors</i>	98
17.11	<i>Responding to a lesson</i>	98

See also *Job skills* 4 / *Business documents* 16 / *Describing trends* 23 / *Pelmanism* 25 / *Financial statements* 27 / *Internet translation tools* 32 / *The clarification game* 48 / *Disagreeing* 49 / *Problems, problems* 51 / *Signposts* 57 / *Standard exchanges* 64 / *What do you say when . . . ?* 65 / *Menus* 66 / *Listen and count* 83 / *More than single words* 85 / *Stress patterns* 88 / *DIY gapfill* 106 / *Cover it up (two columns)* 107 / *Cover it up (gapfill)* 108 / *Noticing language in a tapescript* 109

18 Language work: grammar

18.1	<i>Putting back the grammar</i>	99
18.2	<i>Expanding sentences</i>	100
18.3	<i>Five-minute dictogloss</i>	101
18.4	<i>English → L1 → English</i>	102
18.5	<i>France/French</i>	102
18.6	<i>In my office</i>	103
18.7	<i>If it was up to me . . .</i>	104
18.8	<i>Correct yourself</i>	104

See also *What's your job?* 5 / *Dream job* 6 / *Career plans* 10 / *Company plans* 14 / *Describing trends* 23 / *Diplomatic language* 50 / *Follow-up questions* 63 / *'Wh' questions* 68 / *DIY gapfill* 106

19 Exploiting coursebooks

19.1	<i>Revise key phrases</i>	105
19.2	<i>DIY gapfill</i>	106
19.3	<i>Cover it up (two columns)</i>	107
19.4	<i>Cover it up (gapfill)</i>	108
19.5	<i>Noticing language in a tapescript</i>	109
19.6	<i>Role play changes</i>	109

See also *Activities for listening and reading / Standard exchanges* 64 / *Reformulate a letter to an email* 76 / *The purpose of this report* 79 / *Phonological chunking* 87 / *Categorising vocabulary* 96 / *Putting back the grammar* 99 / *English → L1 → English* 102

1 Business topics: jobs and careers

1.1 Job skills

Focus Introducing vocabulary for skills and abilities
Level Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Write on the board one job name, e.g. *sales manager, accountant, IT systems manager, Chief Executive Officer, journalist*, or choose one that several members of the group have or know about.
- 2 Brainstorm and write on the board the skills and abilities that you need to do this job. Some typical ideas for a variety of jobs are given in Box 2, but follow whatever the students suggest.

Box 2 Examples of skills and abilities

being good with figures/people/technical issues
being a good administrator
being good at organising your time
having a good understanding of the market
liking challenges
working well in a team
being a good communicator

Follow-up

- Choose another job to generate more ideas.
- Students write down the skills and abilities they need to do their own job. Afterwards the teacher can collect them in and then read them out in random order. Other students have to guess whose job is being described.

4 Business topics: management and marketing

4.1 Management tips

Focus Introducing the topic of management
Level Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Ask students to write down two tips that they would give to a new manager in their company.
- 2 Invite students to come to the board and write up their tips. (If you divide the board into two sections with a vertical line, then two students can be writing at the same time.)
- 3 Students explain their ideas to the class.

Follow-up

Number the tips on the board. Tell students that they are now going to vote for the four tips that they like best, but they cannot vote for their own. Students first write their four numbers on a piece of paper, then vote in open class for each suggestion by raising hands. Write the totals on the board by each tip, then discuss with the group why the winning tip(s) won.

4.2 Demotivation

Focus Discussing the topic of motivation
Level Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Ask the students to write down three things that are guaranteed to demotivate an employee in their company.
- 2 Divide the students into pairs or threes. They compare their ideas and decide on the 'best' one.
- 3 The groups share their ideas with the rest of the class.

Follow-up

This activity could introduce a more conventional discussion on motivation at work.

6 Business topics: information technology

6.1 IT and me

Focus	Discussing information technology
Level	Intermediate – Advanced
Preparation	Write on the board the words <i>IT and me</i> and then one of the sentence beginnings in Box 19. Alternatively, photocopy and distribute Box 19.

Box 19 Sentence beginnings for discussing IT

IT and me

What I find most exciting about IT at the moment is . . .
 The single greatest change in our IT system over the last few years has been . . .
 The biggest change in our IT system over the next few years is probably going to be . . .
 The biggest disaster we ever had with our IT system was when . . .
 If I could upgrade one piece of software tomorrow, it would be . . .
 If I could upgrade one piece of hardware tomorrow, it would be . . .
 The one thing that would really improve mobile communications in our company is . . .
 The company's website is really important because . . .
 We could really improve our company website by (+-ing) . . .
 In order to integrate IT more closely with our other business activities, the best idea would be to . . .

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Procedure

- 1 Ask students to write down the sentence beginning on the board (or choose one from the photocopy) and then complete it in their own way.
- 2 Say that you want a volunteer to tell the group something about the IT system in their company. Ask them to read out their completed sentence, then the rest of the group (and you) can ask questions.

Follow-up

- Invite more volunteers to do the same.
- Repeat for other sentence beginnings on other days.

8.6 Noisy telephone conversations

Focus	Checking, repeating and summarising information over the phone
Level	Elementary – Intermediate

Procedure

- 1 Tell students they are going to practise a telephone conversation under difficult conditions. Divide them into pairs, and then ask all the A students to stand with their backs against one wall, and all the B students to stand with their backs against the opposite wall. Make sure that they know who their partner is.
- 2 Explain the activity: student A is going to call student B to arrange to meet one evening the following week. They will need to discuss the day, time, place, and what they want to do. All the pairs will be talking at the same time, so they will need to check carefully what the other person said and confirm the details at the end. (You can introduce an element of fun by asking the students to use real or imaginary mobile phones and hold them up as if they were really calling.)
- 3 Remind the students how to begin: student B picks up the phone and says *Hello, X speaking*. Go over to the A students' wall, look at the B students, and start the activity by making the sound of a phone.
- 4 Give the students a minute at the end of the process to get together quietly and check they understood each other!

Follow-up

You will almost certainly need to look at expressions for checking understanding, e.g. *Sorry, did you say . . . ?*

12.7 Fact or fiction?

Focus	Getting to know you: question formation
Level	Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Write up on the board three statements about your own professional life: one true, one half-true, and one false.
- 2 Students ask you a few questions about each statement. You give short replies (inventing information where the original was half-true or false).
- 3 Students work together in pairs or groups to decide which is true, which is half-true and which is false. Then they check with you.

Follow-up

Students write similar sentences about themselves, read them out, and are asked questions by the others, as above. The others pick out the fact from the fiction.

Variation

This also works well with general statements about any aspect of your job, particularly as a Day One 'getting to know you' exercise.

12.8 I'll never forget

Focus	Discussing work experiences
Level	Intermediate – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Write up on the board:
 . . . , and I'll never forget that experience.
- 2 Ask a volunteer to tell the group in a few sentences about something that happened to them at work, finishing with the words on the board. If there is time, there can be a question or two.

Follow-up

Invite more volunteers to do the same.

15.2 Questioning the text

Focus	Introducing a short text by asking questions
Level	Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Before a reading or listening activity, tell students the topic of the text. If it has a headline or title, write it on the board.
- 2 Ask students what questions they hope the text will answer. Take a minute to brainstorm the questions and write them on the board.
- 3 Students read or listen to the text to check which questions are and aren't answered.

Variation

Ask students what words they think will come up in the text. Brainstorm and write them on the board, then check with the text, as above.

15.3 More than single words

Focus	Dealing with vocabulary in a text
Level	Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Following a reading task, ask the students to choose five key words from the text, which you write on the board.
- 2 Refer to the first occurrence of the words, and ask the students to 'look left and right of the word' and shout out the collocations for you to write up.
- 3 Continue for other occurrences of the same words, and their collocations.

Follow-up

Students summarise the text using the collocations on the board.