

Simulations: *Forbodies.com*

by Chris Barwood

Level: Intermediate and above

Age: Adults, young adults

Time needed: 60 minutes +

Grammar objective The language of meetings: expressing opinions, making suggestions, agreeing and disagreeing.

Section / Subject: Business English Skills

Summary: A lesson plan for a simulation of a business meeting

This simulation is very flexible. Numbers can be three to six for each group, with as many groups working simultaneously as is practical for your situation. If you need to reduce the amount of time for the meeting itself, you can simply reduce the number of topics to be discussed.

Purpose

Simulations develop a range of skills
Language: Speaking practice, specifically to practise the language of meetings:

- 1 Expressing opinions
- 2 Making suggestions
- 3 Agreeing and disagreeing

Business communication skills development:
participating in meetings, chairing meetings:

- 1 Setting an agenda
- 2 Summarizing
- 3 Facilitating communication

Anticipated problems

You need to keep tight control on the simulation and the learners' activities, paying close attention to timings and ensuring that learners are on task. This kind of activity works best with well motivated learners. Cultural differences can lead to difficulties and may need to be explained in advance.

Stage 1

Briefing (3 minutes)

Give learners an overview of the lesson so that they are aware of the purpose of the lesson and the nature of its stages. Outline these stages:

- 1 Pre-teaching of vocabulary and content
- 2 Task preparation
- 3 Simulation
- 4 Feedback

Stage 2

Pre-teaching (10 minutes)

Hand out the simulation description (Worksheet 1) to the learners, and give them a couple of minutes to find the items from the vocabulary sheet (Worksheet 2) in the text. Then divide them into groups of three to find the meaning of the words in dictionaries and from their context, using the vocabulary sheet if necessary, and with help from you on items that could be difficult. The vocabulary you need to work on will change with the language level and business knowledge of each class, but you can carry out this technique for any class. For more effective teamwork make sure each group divides the task by ensuring that each member looks up different words. (If necessary, divide words into groups 1, 2 and 3 for each member of each group.) Tell learners that each group will have to define/translate some of the words and put them in a sentence. When most of the groups have finished, have someone from each group feed their definition/translation and sentence back to the whole group. Correct or improve the responses when necessary.

Stage 3

Task preparation (7 minutes)

Put students into pairs/threes to check understanding of the simulation description together and come back to you with any difficulties they cannot resolve, which you can then explain to the whole class where necessary. Now put learners into the groups they will be in for the simulation. The optimum number is usually four, depending on how talkative your learners are. More than six in a group can mean that individual contributions get limited. Make a few final checks before you allow learners to start the simulation activity:

- 1 they need to decide very quickly on a chair;
- 2 the chair must decide on an agenda and manage the meeting, especially timing;
- 3 they need to discuss the issues and come to clear decisions;

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- 4 after a set time they will need to be able to feed their decisions back to the whole group and may need to do this in the form of a written report;
- 5 they should stay in the role of regional managers and not talk to each other as language learners.

Stage 4

Simulation (20 minutes)

Let the groups start by deciding the chair and agenda, then go into the meeting itself. They should only spend a maximum of about three minutes deciding on chair and agenda, so cut this short if they run over. After that it's important not to intervene in the learners' communication unless they really are not able to continue successfully with the task. But it is important that you monitor this stage of the lesson and get feedback from it relating to the language and business aims of the lesson, whether through video, audio or your own note taking. My personal preference is usually to listen unobtrusively and make paper notes of errors/good language usage and meeting skills. I focus largely on feedback that will be relevant for the whole group and keep it anonymous, but if the group is small enough individual feedback is highly prized. Bring this stage to an end either when the discussion has finished or you have to stop it in order to have enough time for feedback.

Stage 5

Task feedback (5 minutes)

Get feedback from each group on how the activity went for them. You need to find out:

- 1 what decisions they made (i.e. the result!)
- 2 how the meeting went (was it a successful process and were meeting skills used effectively?)

Stage 6

Language and Skills feedback (15 minutes)

Make sure that you have allowed enough time for feedback. If you chose to use video or audio recording for your monitoring, then you'll probably use it for feedback and there are too many ways to do this for me to go into much detail here, but you can see more in the article.

Language feedback

You may be able to do the feedback in a separate lesson from the simulation itself. The advantage of this is that you'll have time to organize from your notes or recordings exactly what feedback you want to give. I usually prefer to put examples of the most representative errors/good practice onto a slide or the whiteboard. A practical starting point is to brainstorm all your feedback onto one slide/whiteboard version and then get learners to identify which items are errors and which good language usage. Then give them the slide/whiteboard version showing them which are errors and which are correct, or simply mark them on the board as errors or good practice if you are teaching the simulation and feedback in one session. You can then move on to correcting errors with the whole class.

Skills feedback

Give learners the appropriate feedback on their skills, drawing attention to what you noticed whilst monitoring regarding the various chairing and meeting skills identified at the beginning of the lesson. The way you do this will of course depend on how much or little you have already worked with the group on meeting skills.

EXTENSION

Learners will have spent a lot of time speaking, so a written task for follow up is often appropriate, and if they know this is coming, it can help them to be more precise in the earlier stages. A report to the Board of the decisions made will be useful, particularly if you are also teaching report writing skills.

Simulations: *Forbodies.com*

Forbodies.com has a range of cosmetic and beauty products with stores in the UK, Holland and France, and a renowned website that has great sales success. It has a reputation for customer service and ethical products. The regional managers' representatives meeting needs to discuss the items below and reach decisions for action in 30 minutes. Decisions will then be passed on to the board.



FORBODIES.COM

Staff discounts

Currently all retail staff are permitted a discount of 8% on all in-house items, to a maximum of £150 per month. Total sales between stores and between individuals in each store vary greatly and a proposal has been made to link the amount of discount to performance, keeping 5% as the base line.

Training

Training for store managers is encouraged, but although a wide range of training opportunities exists, many managers do not take advantage of it. In particular managers need training in skills like leading teams, chairing meetings, delegation and decision making. How can you make sure your managers receive the training they need?

Saturday staff

It is company policy that at weekends for every member of Saturday staff (usually a person aged 16 or 17) there must be one member of full-time regular staff. Recently in the bigger stores more Saturday staff have been used and now some of the smaller stores want do the same.

United colours

A customer survey of our British shops has revealed that customers find the staff uniform too business like and would like a more relaxed look from the staff in the shops. Many staff feel that asking staff to wear simply the company colours of blue and green would be the most satisfactory solution.

Flexitime

Currently there is no flexitime in the stores: all staff work set hours. Although some staff would like to work flexitime, it has been felt until now that flexitime was not practical for Forbodies.com because of quite high staff turnover and the necessity of keeping the store effectively staffed at busy periods.

Vocabulary

Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3
FLEXITIME	ETHICAL	IN HOUSE
BASE LINE	COMPANY COLOURS	SET HOURS
STAFF TURNOVER	RENOWNED	REPUTATION
CUSTOMER SERVICE	DECISIONS FOR ACTION	THE BOARD
PERFORMANCE	TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF	TO CHAIR A MEETING
DELEGATION		