

## Meaningless meetings: the best way to get nothing done

**Level:** Advanced (C1–C2)

**Time:** Approximately 90 minutes

**Business topics:** Productivity, meetings, corporate culture

**Business language:** Useful business vocabulary, phrases and expressions, language for participating in meetings

**Activities:** Discussing meeting policy, key words, understanding the text, business language, discussion, participating in a meeting

**Groups:** Whole class, pairs, small groups

**Overview:** This article discusses how several large companies are re-evaluating their meeting policies and drastically trying to free up more time for 'actual' work.

### 1. Warmer

- Ask students to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Elicit main ideas that arise from the discussion from the whole class.
- Ask students to skim the article and identify the main idea. Encourage them to do this before looking at the options and only choosing the best option after reading the whole text.

**Key:** 3

### 2. Key words

- Have students scan the article, find the key words individually and compare their answers in pairs. Elicit answers from the whole class.

**Key:**

- |                              |                                     |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>purge</i>              | 9. <i>bloat</i>                     |
| 2. <i>equate</i>             | 10. <i>epiphany</i>                 |
| 3. <i>bluff, bluffing</i>    | 11. <i>ingrained</i>                |
| 4. <i>cull</i>               | 12. <i>reappraise, reappraising</i> |
| 5. <i>stagger, staggered</i> | 13. <i>ruthlessness</i>             |
| 6. <i>veer</i>               | 14. <i>peer, peers</i>              |
| 7. <i>recurring</i>          |                                     |
| 8. <i>equivalent</i>         |                                     |

As an extension you can focus on pronunciation and ask students to identify similar long and short vowels. For example:

Short vowels:

bluff, cull

stagger

Long vowels:

purge, recurring

ruthlessness

Diphthongs:

Equate, reappraise, ingrained

bloat

veer, peer

### 3. Understanding the article

- Ask students to scan the article individually to complete this activity and then to compare their answers. Remind them that they don't need to read the whole article each time but that they should rather look over it very quickly to locate the information and then read carefully.

**Key:**

Paragraph	Main idea
1	Introduction: sets up the idea of companies try to be more efficient every year.
2	Shopify has cut meetings: banning them completely on one day, cancelling meetings of more than two people, limiting meetings of 50 or more people to 6 hours on one day.

3	<i>Amazon limits meeting attendees to the number of people who could share two pizzas, bans PowerPoint, and gives people time to read the agenda at the beginning of a meeting.</i>
4	<i>Workers can spend up to six and a half years in recurring meetings, many times without an agenda.</i>
5	<i>In the pandemic, people used Teams 153% more, and 42% of attendees do other things during meetings.</i>
6	<i>Employees on a four-day week trial have remained productive by cutting meetings and realised they sometimes invite people only to avoid hard feelings.</i>
7	<i>Meetings are not all bad: they can expose us to new ideas and allow us to learn from older peers.</i>

## 4. Business language – collocations

- a. Ask students to practise their scanning skills again to complete this activity. You could also set it up as a whole-class activity so students compete against each other to complete the 'reading race'.

**Key:**

- |              |           |
|--------------|-----------|
| 1. stir      | 5. impose |
| 2. fix       | 6. become |
| 3. veer      | 7. voice  |
| 4. undertake | 8. give   |

- b. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to paraphrase the sentences. This can be done as a speaking or writing activity. Answers given below are simply suggestions – more than one answer is possible.

**Key:**

1. They proposed a monthly meeting so all employees could voice their concerns.
2. The new design stirred a positive response.
3. We first undertook an inventory of the ways in which people wasted time.
4. The government imposed a lockdown.
5. You can become more productive if you stop multitasking.

6. Bill veered off agenda, as he tends to, and had to be interrupted.
7. There was a bug, but it was fixed promptly.
8. They wanted to recruit someone young to give a fresh perspective on what customers want.

## 5. Discussion

- a. Put students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions. Make note of good examples of vocabulary and language on the board, as well as incorrect usage that needs to be corrected. Ask the class to identify which is which and help you with corrections.

## 6. Wider business theme – participating in a meeting

- a. Students first discuss the questions in pairs and agree on the criteria that they would like to introduce. Ask them to make notes to use in the meeting.
- b. Go over useful language with the class and elicit any other phrases that might be useful for participating in a meeting. Regroup students so that they are in groups of six or eight and ask them to have their meetings. At the end, ask students to reflect on how productive their meeting was and how it could have gone better.