

Learning to say no

Level: Intermediate (B1–B2)

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Overview: This article describes the experiences of four academics who collectively say no to a hundred professional requests.

Business topics: Saying no, communication, career decisions

Business language: Useful business vocabulary and phrases, phrases used for rejections

Activities: Key words, understanding the text, business language, discussion, saying no at work

Groups: Whole class, one-to-one, small groups

1. Warmer

- a. With a partner, students answer the questions which lead into the article. After they have talked with a partner for a couple of minutes, get students to share their thoughts and ideas with the rest of the group.

2. Reading for gist

- a. Ask students to skim the article and choose the best option. Have them compare their ideas in pairs before checking with the whole class.

Key:
3

3. Key words

- a. Ask students to work in pairs to complete the task. Elicit anything else they know about each word. Have students scan the article to find the words used in context.

Key:

1. *systematic*
2. *hone*
3. *decline, declining*
4. *proposal*
5. *rejection*
6. *invariably*
7. *routinely*
8. *substantial*
9. *cap*
10. *disarray*
11. *instructive*
12. *non-promotable*

4. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to read the questions and find the answers in the text. Encourage them to identify key words in each question and to scan the text quickly to find the answer.

Key:

1. *b. work-related*
2. *a. review*
3. *b. firm rejection*
4. *a. prior commitments*
5. *a. did*
6. *a. was no real reason*
7. *a. even more*
8. *a. capping*
9. *b. women*

5. Business language – verb + noun collocations

- a. Note, the target language in the task is in the order that it appears in the article, but the phrases have been modified and simplified. Ask students to complete this task in pairs or small groups.

Key:

1. *make*
2. *hone*
3. *decline*
4. *draw up*
5. *adopt*
6. *cap*
7. *take on*

- b. Students use the target language in the sentences so that they can understand their meanings and see how they can be used.

Key:

1. *decline / turn down your invitation / request*
2. *strategies / rules, adopt*
3. *tasks, take on*
4. *draw up a spreadsheet*
5. *cap the number of*
6. *made, commitment*

6. Discussion

- a. Put students in 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.

7. Wider business theme – saying no at work

Task 1

Four situations have been provided but encourage students to add a personalised situation from their own work context.

Allow students to read the situations and reflect individually before doing the speaking activity. Remind students to look at the useful language and make notes for each situation to prepare for the role-play.

Then ask students to take turns making the requests and responding to them. Monitor while students are participating in the role-play and write down any recurring errors or good use of language.

Provide feedback to the whole class, and if time allows, put students into new pairs for one or two more situations, so they can practise with the language input from the feedback session.

Task 2

Allow students to work individually or in pairs. Then regroup students and ask them to peer edit their writing using the checklist below. Encourage them to help each other with corrections. Have them first focus on the tone and content of the email before dealing with grammar and vocabulary.

Peer editing checklist:

- Does the email feel positive? Does it have a neutral tone?
- Is it a firm no? Is it clear if it is a 'no for now' or a 'definite no'?
- Is it unnecessarily apologetic or does it offer too much information?
- Does it offer an alternative solution if appropriate?