

# Improving Your Writing and Speaking



Noordhoff Uitgevers

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Hans Veenkamp**

**First edition**



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# Introduction

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*Improving Your Writing and Speaking* has been developed to improve professional language skills in English. The book offers realistic examples and case studies that stimulate students to learn new words and structures in a communicative context. They improve their communicative skills in English by being engaged in authentic tasks in which they learn to apply the language tools that are offered in the modules. The book can be used as a logical next step after **Engels in de Beroepspraktijk**, which is also published by Noordhoff Uitgevers, but can also be used without that preparation by all students of intermediate-advanced level.

The modules in the book, four on speaking skills and two on writing skills, all follow the same structure. After an introductory text, a model is provided that will serve as an example of the skills that are being trained. After the model has been analysed and discussed, the students practise the new knowledge and skills in authentic business contexts. Each module is concluded by a case study in which students can apply what they have learnt.

The website [www.improvingyourwritingandspeaking.noordhoff.nl](http://www.improvingyourwritingandspeaking.noordhoff.nl) offers additional materials and suggested answers to questions in the book.

We thank Simone Groeneveld, English methodology teacher Engels at Radboud University, teacher trainer, coordinator of internationalisation at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, for her valuable comments and suggestions.

# Overview

Module	Theme	Grammar
Module A: Face to face	1.1 Meeting a potential customer 2.1 Closing a business deal 3.1 The final meeting	Phrasal verbs Can and Could Adverbs and Adjectives
Module B: Telephoning	1.1 Asking for information on the phone 2.1 Making arrangements on the phone 3.1 Solving a problem on the phone	Question tags Demonstrative pronouns Reflexive pronouns
Module C: Meetings and Discussions	1.1 Opening the meeting 2.1 The main items on the agenda 3.1 Closing the meeting	Some and Any Gerund or 'to-infinitive' Will or 'be going to'
Module D: Presentations	1.1 First part of the presentation: introduction 2.1 Second part of the presentation: the body 3.1 Third part of the presentation: conclusion	Adverbs and Adjectives Active or Passive Comparative and Superlative
Module E: Correspondence	1.1 Email 2.1 Email with request 3.1 Letter of application	Much or Many Possessive form: 's or of Plural nouns
Module F: Report writing	1.1 Business report: sample introduction 2.1 Paragraph writing 3.1 Recommendations	Active or Passive Prepositions Should/could/ought to/ need to



A FACE TO FACE CONVERSATION  
HAS TO DEVELOP NATURALLY

# Module A:

## Face to Face



### CEFR FOCUS:

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| <b>B2</b> | Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction, and sustained relationships with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party. |
| <b>B2</b> | Can use a variety of strategies to achieve comprehension, including listening for main points; checking comprehension by using contextual clues.   |
| <b>B2</b> | Can sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker.                     |
| <b>B2</b> | Can initiate, maintain and end discourse appropriately with effective turn taking.   |

### Introduction

In today's digital age people rely heavily on the use of emails, text messages, and social media. Although these means of communication have revolutionised doing business, it is important to balance these online interactions with face-to-face communication as the latter can boost efficiency. Instead of spending an entire day emailing back and forth, having a face-to-face meeting can clarify things in one go. The personal touch of face-to-face communication is key to those dealing with outside clients and stakeholders. Moreover, a sense of community comes with the ability to interact and socialise. This sets the foundation for trust, and ultimately creates a better working relationship.

## 1.1 Model 1: Meeting a potential client



- Voice: Ann Montague, a self-employed business consultant, has set up a meeting with Fred Sumner, a potential client. He is very interested in Ann's business contacts in Eastern Europe. They meet for the first time in a hotel lobby.
- Ann Montague: Hello, you must be Fred. Hi, I'm Ann Montague. Pleased to meet you.
- Fred Sumner: Fred Sumner. Pleased to meet you.
- Ann Montague: Right – so here we are then. Traffic's been mad this morning! It took me about an hour to get to this hotel.
- Fred Sumner: I know. My taxi ended up in one of the worst traffic jams I have ever seen – I thought I would stay in that cab all day!
- Ann Montague: Well, I'm glad you made it. And I'm also glad we could have this meeting. I **was looking into** your portfolio last night and I must say I'm impressed by what you have achieved so far. So what can I do for you?
- Fred Sumner: Well, as you may have read my company exports car accessories to the automotive industry. In the last ten years we have been quite active in Germany and France. We do notice, though, that markets over there are increasingly becoming saturated. So we feel it's time to focus on new markets in Eastern Europe. That's why I contacted you so we could perhaps **make use of** your experience in these countries.
- Ann Montague: Let me first say that I appreciate your interest in my field of work. You're right – I do have a lot of experience in assisting companies that want to do business in Eastern Europe. The network I have is quite extensive, actually.
- Fred Sumner: So in which countries in Eastern Europe have you been most active, then?
- Ann Montague: Well, I have many business contacts in Poland and Hungary. Recently I have acquired some valuable contacts in Lithuania as well. Have you thought about what countries you would like to focus on?
- Fred Sumner: I have, yes. You just mentioned Poland. As a matter of fact my biggest German client has its office in Dresden and he does a lot of business with Poland. I feel there must be some opportunities for me in that country.
- Ann Montague: Right. If I understand you correctly you would first like to focus on Poland? I would be glad to be of assistance. Have you got any thoughts on how I could be of help to you?
- Fred Sumner: I do. I think you can possibly **fill me in on** Polish business ethics, and specific rules and regulations I need to take into account. It would be great if I could **meet up with** some interesting partners from your own business network in Poland.
- Ann Montague: I'll tell you what – what if I just **draw up** a list for you with some interesting business partners in Poland? I could also do a bit of research on which areas you should target for your specific product. Would that be helpful, Fred?
- Fred Sumner: Oh, it certainly would, Ann. You do understand, though, that I have also contacted other consultants that may be able to help me enter the Eastern European market.

- Ann Montague: No problem. That's perfectly understandable. Then again, if you are happy with my work I do hope that we will be able to do business. I can guarantee you that my network in Poland and indeed Eastern Europe is quite vast.
- Fred Sumner: That's exactly why I contacted you. Would it be feasible for you to compile that list of potential business partners before, say, end of next week?
- Ann Montague: Certainly. I will start working on it as soon as I'm home – which will be sometime tonight with this traffic I'm afraid!
- Fred Sumner: Haha, wonderful, Ann. Well, I must say this talk has been really helpful. Thank you very much.
- Ann Montague: You're welcome. It's great meeting people who have the audacity to broaden their horizon! I'll send you the list Wednesday next week at the latest. If you do have any questions before then, just let me know, ok?
- Fred Sumner: Thank you, I will indeed.
- Ann Montague: We'll be in touch. It's been a pleasure meeting you.
- Fred Sumner: Thank you, it's been a pleasure for me, too.

**GRAMMAR TIP: PHRASAL VERBS**

- I think we should **look into** this a bit more.
- My colleague will **see you off** at the airport.

Information about the grammar tips can be found in Grammar Focus section 1 at the end of the book.

**QUESTIONS**

- 1 What phrase does Ann use to move from 'ice-breaking' to 'getting down to business'?
- 2 What other phrase could Ann use when she says: 'I was looking into your portfolio last night...'?
- 3 At some point Ann calls Fred by his first name. Explain why that is a good move at that point. What kind of effect does this have on Fred?
- 4 Fred mentions business ethics as a possible challenge when doing business in Poland. Describe what he probably means by that.
- 5 Ann and Fred specifically chose to have a real face-to-face meeting rather than a telephone call or a video conference. What are the main advantages of a face-to-face business meeting like this?

**1.2 Focus points**

During a face-to-face meeting you can distinguish four phases:

**Greeting and introducing**

- This is the first phase of the meeting. You exchange your names and you briefly inform about your counterpart's well-being. The actual phrases that you can use may vary, though. If you already know your speaking partner you can use less formal phrases than when you are meeting someone for the first time.

### Ice-breaking and socialising

- During this part of the meeting both counterparts talk e.g. about the weather, or any other mundane topics that may come up. The aim in this phase of the meeting is to create a pleasant atmosphere, rather than getting straight to the point. It also serves as a way to get to know each other a bit more.

### Stating your point

- After the initial stages of a face-to-face meeting it is time to get down to business. In this phase you make clear why you have the meeting and, more importantly, try to accomplish your previously set objectives. This phase is the most crucial one of a face-to-face meeting.

### Ending

- Obviously, you cannot just bluntly end the meeting. As you have spent time introducing, socialising and discussing, it is wise to properly end the meeting. It is wise to summarise the main points that have been discussed and to conclude the meeting as a whole.

### Greeting and introducing

#### Formal

Good morning/afternoon.  
 Good morning, I hope you are well.  
 I am fine, thank you very much.  
 My name is John Ferguson. I am Head of Sales.  
 Can I introduce you to Carol Lewis?  
 Pleased to meet you.

#### Informal

Hello, nice to see you again.  
 Hello, how are you?  
 Not too bad, thanks.  
 Hi, I'm John. Head of sales.  
 This is Carol.  
 Good to see you.

### Ice-breaking and socialising

#### Formal

It's wonderfully sunny outside, isn't it?  
 I hope you had a good journey.  
 How would you like your coffee?  
 I appreciate your invitation.  
 How long have you worked here if I may ask?

#### Informal

It's so sunny outside and we're stuck here!  
 Did you have any problems getting here?  
 Do you want milk or sugar in your coffee?  
 I'm happy we could meet up.  
 So, have you been working here long then?

### Stating your point

#### Formal

Let's address the first topic.  
 The reason why I contacted you is...  
 I hope we can do business together.  
 My main concern is...  
 My field of interest is...  
 So if I understand you correctly,...

#### Informal

Let's crack on, shall we?  
 What I'd like to hear from you is...  
 It would be great to team up with you.  
 I'm a bit worried about...  
 I'm involved in...  
 Let me just check here...

**Ending****Formal**

I believe we have discussed the main points.

Let me summarise the topics we have discussed.

I hope everything is clear.

It's been a pleasure meeting you.

Thank you and goodbye.

**Informal**

That's about it, I think.

In a nutshell, we've talked about...

Just fire away if you have any questions.

Well, it was great meeting you.

Thanks. We'll be in touch.

A

**1.3 Task 1: preparing a follow-up meeting**

- 1 Work individually. You are Ann Montague, a business consultant. You have just met Fred Sumner, a potential client from Liverpool. He has asked you to compile a list of potential business partners who work in the automotive industry in Poland. Use the internet to look for them and then list them below according to the example given:

Name	Location	Specialty
CarAcces.group	Sosnowiec	Leading distributor and producer of professional chemicals and car care products in Poland

- 2 Work in groups of 3 or 4. Compare your findings and compile a shortlist of the 10 most interesting business partners for Fred Sumner.
- 3 Work in groups of 3 or 4. With your group you prepare the follow-up meeting with Fred. Brainstorm about subjects such as cooperation in terms of technological development, human resources, etc. Try to figure out what Fred really needs in doing business with these potential Polish companies. Draw up a list of subjects you want to discuss.

Follow these steps:

- Describe the topic.
- Give a brief description.
- Indicate whether this topic is *critical* (i.e. something you want to accomplish during the meeting) or *optional* (i.e. something that may be useful but that is not key for the success of the meeting). For an example see below:

Topic	Description	critical	optional
Shortlist of partners	The shortlist of potential business partners is accepted by the client.	x	
Rules and regulations	The overview of specific Polish rules and regulations is approved of by the client.		x

## 2.1 Model 2: Closing a business deal



- Ann Montague: Hello, Fred, good to see you again.
- Fred Sumner: Hi, Ann. Likewise. How have you been?
- Ann Montague: Not bad at all, actually. Last week has been very busy. What about you?
- Fred Sumner: I had quite a busy week as well. I talked to some more people that may be able to help me expand to Eastern Europe.
- Ann Montague: Right ...
- Fred Sumner: But I'm happy that we **can** have this second meeting. I was impressed by the list you sent me. It contained many interesting partners – on paper, that is.
- Ann Montague: Well, of course, you need to contact these businesses individually, but I'm happy that you appreciate my work.
- Fred Sumner: I certainly do, Ann. And that's why I have decided to do business with you. I believe you have the knowledge and the contacts I need to become successful in Poland.
- Ann Montague: That is great news. I would be more than happy to consult you. What are you thinking of in terms of duration and scope?
- Fred Sumner: Do you mean for how long I would be hiring you?
- Ann Montague: Yes. And what specifically you would like me to do for you and what you **can** do yourself.
- Fred Sumner: That's a good question. I think based on your list of potential business partners I **could** first decide which businesses to contact first.
- Ann Montague: I **could** contact these selected businesses for you if you want to ...?
- Fred Sumner: Right. That might be helpful ...
- Ann Montague: ... especially because not all Polish partners speak English fluently. I speak Polish and my experience is that it is easier to get in touch with them when you speak their language. Having said that, I do believe that just contacting them is not enough. We'll have to analyse the automotive market first and target specific regions within Poland.
- Fred Sumner: Let's do that. I think you're right. Preparation is key. Ann, **can** I ask you to draw up a detailed overview of your services for this project? Once I have that I **can** check whether it will match my expectations.
- Ann Montague: No problem, I will make sure you receive my detailed offer including my fee.
- Fred Sumner: Yes, about your fee, erm, **could** you specify per activity what you will charge? That would be very insightful.
- Ann Montague: I will indeed. By the end of next week you will have received my full offer.
- Fred Sumner: Perfect. **Can** we meet in, say, two weeks, to discuss your offer and finalise things?
- Ann Montague: Of course. I will make time for that. By the way, have you ever eaten Polish food?
- Fred Sumner: Haha, no, I haven't. Why?
- Ann Montague: There's a first time for everything – I suggest we'll have our next meeting in a local Polish restaurant. I **can** guarantee you that the food is wonderful!

Fred Sumner: Good idea. I'm looking forward to it.

Ann Montague: Me too. We'll be in touch!

**GRAMMAR TIP: CAN AND COULD**

- **Could** you help me, please?
- You **can't** enter that zone as only staff is allowed.

Information about the grammar tips can be found in Grammar Focus section 2 at the end of the book.

**QUESTIONS**

- 1 Ann says 'Right...' in the first stage of the meeting. Why does she use that word at that point?
- 2 The word 'right' has many meanings, especially when used as an adverb. Give five meanings of the word 'right'.
- 3 Give a definition of the word 'scope' and write a sentence that illustrates the correct meaning.
- 4 At some point Fred is somewhat hesitant when Ann comes up with a proposal. What arguments does she use to win Fred over?
- 5 One of the advantages of a face-to-face meeting is that each partner can take turns, i.e. take initiative in the conversation. Write down in which sentences taking initiative becomes apparent.

## 2.2 Focus points

**Closing the deal: persuading, rebutting and finalising**

The difference between a face-to-face meeting with a friend or family member and a face-to-face encounter with a business partner is quite significant. Most business related face-to-face meetings serve a specific purpose; there is a business goal to be achieved. This goal may be doing business, agreeing on a deal or simply to assess whether the other person may be of professional interest to you. Apart from the different phases (as seen in 1.2) three ways of influencing your face-to-face partner can be distinguished: persuading (to win someone over using sound arguments), rebutting (opposing your speaking partner's view) and finalising (rounding off a face-to-face meeting). Depending on your relationship with your business counterpart, these goals can be met in a direct and indirect way:

**Persuading**

**Indirect**

I may have something that could be interesting.  
 How would you feel about... ?  
 I would be very happy to research that for you.  
 Would you be interested in any other projects?  
 If you agree, we could start working together.

**Direct**

Listen to this: ...  
 What if I...  
 Let me just research that for you.  
 This project is also interesting for you.  
 If you say yes, we're in business.

**Rebutting****Indirect**

I can't say that I share your view.  
 I can't help feeling that ...  
 My views are somewhat different,  
 though.  
 Isn't it true that ...

**Direct**

I disagree with you.  
 Something tells me...  
 I have a different view.  
 Surely ...

**Finalising****Indirect**

Can we agree to do business?  
 I think that would be all for now.  
 In summary/Summarising ...

**Direct**

Shall we close the deal?  
 Let's stop here.  
 In a nutshell ...

**2.3 Task 2: Preparing the final meeting**

- 1 Work individually. Make a list of tasks/activities that Ann can perform for Fred. Be critical: do not include activities Fred can do regardless of Ann's expertise. The list of tasks that Ann can do should be rather specific, e.g. contacting the embassy, drawing up draft contracts, etc.
- 2 Work in groups of 3. One of you plays Ann, the other is Fred and one student plays a potentially interesting Polish business partner, Aleksy Nowak. He runs a chain of exclusive car rental offices. The objective of the meeting is that both Fred and the Polish business partner are interested in doing business in the future.

The meeting is split up in three phases:

- First phase: getting to know each other + introduce businesses
- Second phase: investigate business opportunities
- Third phase: summarise main points of discussion and end the meeting

- 3 After having done this role-play every group member reflects on the effectiveness of his or her contribution. Write down the main pitfalls and successes.

**3.1 Model 3: The final meeting**

- Voice: In this meeting Ann Montague and Fred Sumner meet once again to finalise their business cooperation. As promised, the meeting takes place in a Polish restaurant. Both are in a good mood, although they do have some issues that need to be addressed.
- Ann Montague: Good to see you again, Fred. How's life?  
 Fred Sumner: Not too bad, thanks. What about you?  
 Ann Montague: I'm fine. Shall we start straight away? I hope you have looked into my offer.  
 Fred Sumner: I have. Let me first say you've put a lot of effort into it. You have been very meticulous in listing all the things you could do for me ... There's hardly anything left for me to do!  
 Ann Montague: I beg your pardon?

- Fred Sumner: Don't take this the wrong way, but there are some things I could **easily** do myself, like drawing up spreadsheets or contacting my liaison partner in Dresden.
- Ann Montague: I see. It's just that I wanted to paint a **complete** picture. **Obviously**, all the activities I listed are negotiable. Would it be better if we left some things out?
- Fred Sumner: I think it would. What if I contact my Dresden partner myself first? That will save me some costs, although I think your fee is perfectly acceptable.
- Ann Montague: No problem at all. It's good that we have this meeting now so that we can express our expectations towards each other. I'm happy you accept my fee -
- Fred Sumner: Erm ... About the fee. As I said, your fee per activity is acceptable. My only worry is that some activities have not been limited time-wise.
- Ann Montague: Could you elaborate on that?
- Fred Sumner: Well, for example if it took you more than a month to contact all **potential** Polish business partners, that would be rather costly as I will pay you per month. I just want that to be limited to one month.
- Ann Montague: That's fine, Fred. I can perfectly understand your point. I will change it in the new offer I'll send you.
- Fred Sumner: Thank you very much. I am very much looking forward to our collaboration!
- Ann Montague: Me too. That's settled then. So let's focus on more important matters: food. Have you taken a look at the menu yet?
- Fred Sumner: No, not yet. But I can't wait to have a small taste of Poland! Haha.

#### GRAMMAR TIP: ADVERBS AND ADJECTIVES

- I **fully** agree with you.
- We haven't discussed this item in **full** detail.

Information about the grammar tips can be found in Grammar Focus section 3 at the end of the book.

#### QUESTIONS

- 1 Compare this final meeting with the first face-to-face meeting. As you must have noticed, the tone of voice, the 'atmosphere' is quite different in this final meeting. What has clearly changed in terms of degree of formality, the use of the phases, etc.?
- 2 At one point Ann says 'Could you elaborate on that?'. What other phrases could she have used?
- 3 Fred is a bit critical about the list of activities Ann has drawn up. Why?
- 4 What does the phrase 'That's settled then' mean?
- 5 Who is 'in charge' during this meeting? Why?

## 3.2 Focus points

### Avoiding ambiguity in communication

Especially in a face-to-face meeting it is vital to have a clear picture of what your partner means. Ambiguity (unclear meaning or intention) should be avoided as it can make meetings very inefficient. Wondering – or guessing! – what the other person actually means is counterproductive and generally slows down a meeting. In order to avoid ambiguity the participants in face-to-face meetings should:

- Avoid double negatives, i.e. avoid phrases like: *It's **not impossible**; I'm **not dissatisfied*** etc.
- Avoid unclear or vague language, i.e. avoid phrases like: *The conditions to clarify this have not yet been met* etc.
- Avoid direct personal attacks, i.e. avoid phrases like: *You don't know how it works* etc.
- Avoid excessive use of the passive voice, i.e. avoid phrases like *This matter should be looked into a bit more*, etc.

### Avoid double negatives

#### avoid:

This proposal is not inapt.  
You can't dislike this idea.  
It is never impossible to achieve things.  
  
This has not proven to be impossible.

#### use instead:

This proposal is useful.  
You'll probably like this idea.  
Things can be achieved/You can achieve things.  
  
This has proven to be possible.

### Avoid unclear or vague language

#### avoid:

I feel there is some room for improvement.  
My proposal may be of some interest to you.  
The particularities of the contract are diffuse.

#### use instead:

We can change the conditions for the better.  
I have an interesting proposal.  
  
The contract is a bit unclear.

### Avoid personal attacks

#### avoid:

Why don't you understand what I'm saying?  
Your decision was bad.  
  
You have let me down.  
You have lied about the business deal.

#### use instead:

I hope I'm making myself clear.  
  
You may need to reassess your decision.  
I expected more support from you.  
You should have been more accurate about the business deal.

### Avoid excessive use of the passive voice

#### avoid:

These decisions will have to be reassessed.  
Time and effort are needed to seal the deal.  
Has it been taken care of?  
The confirmation email has been sent.

#### use instead:

We should reconsider some decisions.  
I will have to put some time and effort into the deal.  
Have you taken care of it?  
I have sent the confirmation email.

## 4.1 Model Case

### 1 Situation

You work as a regional manager for *KidZ-ToyZ*, a chain of toy stores in the United Kingdom. Some of your shops in your region haven't been doing very well as profit margins have decreased dramatically. You decide to set up a face-to-face meeting with Warner Johnson, who supervises 5 local stores in the North-West of England. The topic on the agenda is clear: why are the stores showing such bad figures? And what can be done to reverse this trend?

### 2 Background material

In the table below you can see that net loss (netto-verlies) of KidZ-ToyZ North-West England increased in April and May 2015. Both the fall in sales numbers and the growing expenses are rather worrying:

<i>in thousands</i>	April 2015	May 2015
Net sales.....	£ 2,636	£ 2,008
Cost of sales.....	£ 1,656	£ 1,663
<b>Selling, general &amp; administrative expenses* .....</b>	<b>£ 897</b>	<b>£ 898</b>
<i>*personnel costs, advertising, rent, maintenance etc.</i>		
Operating earnings.....	£ 7	£ 5
Interest expense.....	£ 128	£ 134
Interest income.....	£ 2	£ 1
<b>Net loss KidZ-ToyZ N-W</b>		
England.....	£ 584	£ 681

### 3 Procedure

- 1 Work individually. Write down in 75-150 words on what questions you would like an answer from Warner, e.g. 'Why have the administrative expenses increased?' or 'What items have you sold more in April and why?'
- 2 Work together with a classmate. Discuss the options you have to intervene. Use the background material above: what costs can be cut? Especially consider 'Selling, general & administrative expenses.'
- 3 Now have the face-to-face meeting. One of you plays the regional manager and the other is Warner Johnson.
  - Use the vocabulary in Focus Points of this module and the vocabulary in Useful Phrases at the end of this book.
  - After practising the meeting, present it to the class. Your fellow students will decide which student is the most convincing.