

Handling Work Situations

SUGGESTING AND DISAGREEING

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OVERVIEW

In this unit, you will be attending a workshop which will give you the opportunity to fine-tune your English language skills.

You will work with the following functions:

- **making tactful suggestions**
- **making direct suggestions**
- **expressing tactful disagreement**
- **expressing direct disagreement**



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

There are many different ways of making suggestions and expressing disagreement in English. Some expressions are direct, and others are more tactful. In certain situations, it might be more appropriate to be tactful instead of direct; in those cases, you will need to use one of the tactful expressions for suggesting or disagreeing.

1. Complete the self-analysis chart below by placing a check mark beside any situations in which you would want to be particularly tactful.

SELF-ANALYSIS CHART	
SUGGESTING	
<input type="checkbox"/>	a) A new co-worker receives too many phone calls; this prevents you from concentrating.
<input type="checkbox"/>	b) A close colleague has been drinking at a party and now intends to drive home.
<input type="checkbox"/>	c) You would like your boss to schedule meetings earlier in the day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	d) You think it would be a good idea if you and your colleagues go out for lunch once a week.
<input type="checkbox"/>	e) A member of the public has asked you for information which you believe is available in another section.
DISAGREEING	
<input type="checkbox"/>	f) You disagree with your chief about how to handle a staff member whose work is unsatisfactory.
<input type="checkbox"/>	g) A close colleague has commented on the implications of changes to work plans; you think there are different implications.
<input type="checkbox"/>	h) Your supervisor, who is touchy, has expressed his opinion of the new director; you don't agree.
<input type="checkbox"/>	i) You do not share the views of a representative of another section regarding who should be responsible for what in a joint project.

2. Work with a partner. Discuss your responses to the chart.
3. Share your ideas with the rest of the class.

SUGGESTING

Read the section below. You will need the language later for your discussion.

Do You Remember...?

Do you remember these expressions for making suggestions?

SUGGESTING

OTHER EXPRESSIONS

Direct **I suggest* we**
We/You should
I say we/you should
I think we/you should } all go out for lunch.

Direct

Neutral **Let's** try one of the new restaurants.
What about
How about } trying a new restaurant?
What if we try a new restaurant?

Shouldn't we
Could you/we } make a reservation?

Neutral

Tactful **Maybe we/you could**
It might be a good idea to } put it off till
next week.

Tactful

SUGGESTING ALTERNATIVES

Neutral **It might make more sense** to bring lunch.
Bringing lunch { **might work better.**
might be a better idea.
Tactful **Why don't we/you** bring lunch **instead?**
Wouldn't it be better to bring lunch?

* I suggest... is used in formal situations.

1. Some English speakers may disagree on the precise ranking of these expressions. Discuss this point with the teacher and the class.
2. Do you know any other expressions for suggesting or suggesting alternatives? Add them to the list under the appropriate categories: direct, neutral, tactful.



Read this section. You can use this language later in your discussion.

Do You Remember...?

There are several ways to make suggestions less direct. You can

use a question: **What if* we leave/left } this until tomorrow?**
 What about* leaving }

use a negative question: **Why not leave this until tomorrow?**

use a modal verb: **We could leave this until tomorrow.**

use "maybe" + modal: **Maybe we could leave this until tomorrow.**

use a negative question + modal: **Wouldn't it be better to leave this until tomorrow?**

*N.B. Note the difference in the structures which follow **What if...** (present or past tense) and **What about...** (gerund).

(See also *Interface Canada* Inventory of Functions and Grammar, page 140.)

Practice Activity 1



Listen to the following conversations and answer the questions.

CONVERSATION 1

1. Circle the problem discussed in the conversation.

- a) computerization
- b) distractions in the office
- c) too many people in the office

2. What three suggestions are made?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

3. Listen to the conversation again. This time, listen for the expressions used to introduce the suggestions and note them in the space below. Then, decide whether the suggestions are direct, neutral or tactful. Finally, explain why these expressions were chosen:

Expressions	Dir./Neut./Tact.	Why chosen?



CONVERSATION 2

4. Why does Robert think John should not drive?

5. Use the space at the left to number the suggestions as you hear them.

____ Why not spend the night here? _____

____ I suggest you take a taxi. _____

____ I think you should call a cab... _____

____ Why don't you drive home with me? _____

____ It might be a good idea to play it safe. _____

6. In the blank on the right following each expression you numbered, indicate whether the expression is *direct*, *neutral* or *tactful*.

7. Listen to the conversation again. As you listen, try to decide the reason Robert made each of his suggestions with the degree of directness or tact which he used. Write your answer in the space below.

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Practice Activity 2

1. How would you word your suggestion in each of these situations?

- a) A colleague is moving into a new house. You think the office should arrange for supper to be delivered on the night of the move.

- b) A colleague whom you know quite well is having family problems and, as a result, is having trouble concentrating at work. Things have reached the point where you think counselling would be helpful.

- c) You don't know many of the people at a well-attended meeting. The director has asked people to suggest ways of saving money. You think the Christmas celebrations of the past should be replaced by something simpler.

- d) You are the supervisor of a section with very good morale. One of the staff is particularly friendly; in fact, this person often prevents everyone from working because of the hilarious stories he tells. Although the laughter contributes to team spirit, you believe too much time is being wasted.

2. Explain your choices to a partner or small group. Discuss the appropriateness of the expressions chosen by the group.

3. Take turns describing situations or problems of your own. Your classmates will suggest solutions.



Practice Activity 3: Suggestion Bee

You will be playing a game in which you have to give suggestions appropriate to the situation, the context and the people involved.

PROCEDURE

Divide into two teams. Your teacher will read a situation which requires suggestions. Members of Team 1 take turns calling out appropriate suggestions. If an inappropriate expression is chosen, the turn goes to members of Team 2 who can continue making suggestions for the situation. When no more suggestions are offered, the teacher will read out another situation for members of Team 2. Play continues as before.

SITUATIONS

- a) Your boss, who is very informal, wants to know how you would like to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the division.
- b) A new team member, whom you don't know very well, is worried because, this week, he has to pick up his children from daycare by five o'clock at the latest, but he is not supposed to leave work until 5:00 p.m.
- c) A team leader who doesn't like his ideas to be questioned wants to build morale by having everyone eat lunch together once a week at an expensive restaurant. He says he wants your input.
- d) A very useful but expensive training workshop will be given. Many people want to attend but there isn't enough money for everyone to be sent. You and your colleagues are discussing how to handle the situation.
- e) Everyone is behind in the work needed to complete a project on schedule. Your supervisor has called a meeting to discuss the situation.
- f) A project deadline is approaching and the work will not be ready on time. Part of the reason is that the supervisor was unrealistic in assigning the work. The supervisor has called a meeting to discuss the situation.
- g) Morale has been low. You and your colleagues are discussing what to do about it.
- h) Morale has been low. At a meeting for the whole staff, the Director has asked for suggestions.

- i) A new entranceway has been built at the front of your community centre. Despite assurances to the contrary, it is very slippery in winter. The renovation was very expensive. Now a meeting has been called to decide what to do. The person who was in charge of the renovation is present and is sensitive about the complaints that have been made.
- j) Situations made up by the teacher and/or class.

SCORING

Choose the way you want to score this game. Here are some possibilities:

- 1 point per appropriate suggestion.
- 2 points per suggestion: 1 for accuracy; 1 for appropriateness.
- Bonus points: for expressions that haven't been used before; or for imaginative or inventive suggestions.

Name a scorekeeper; the teacher is a possibility.



Suggestion Challenge

If you have time, try this variation of **Suggestion Bee**.

PREPARATION

Prepare cards such as these.

- i) I am your boss.
- ii) We are very informal in our division.
- iii) I want to know how you would like to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the division.

- i) I am a new team member.
- ii) I am rather nervous.
- iii) My problem is that this week my daughter has to be picked up from daycare by five o'clock. I'm not supposed to leave work until 5 p.m. I would appreciate suggestions from the rest of the team.

- i) I am your team leader.
- ii) I don't like people to challenge my ideas.
- iii) I want to build team morale by having everyone go out to an expensive restaurant for lunch once a week. I want input from the team.

Be sure each of your cards includes the following:

- i) who you are (boss, colleague, friend, etc.)
- ii) your personality or the formality, informality, or sensitivity of the situation
- iii) the problem or situation for which suggestions are needed

Try to challenge your classmates with imaginative situations from your work, personal or community life.

PROCEDURE

Place all cards face down on the table. Each student in turn picks a card and reads it aloud. The rest of the group must make suggestions appropriate to the situation, context, personalities, etc.

SCORING

Choose the way you want to score this game. Here are some possibilities:

- 1 point per appropriate suggestion.
- 2 points per suggestion: 1 for accuracy; 1 for appropriateness.
- Bonus points: for expressions that haven't been used before; or for imaginative or inventive suggestions.

Players can keep their own scores, based on the points awarded by the group.



DISAGREEING

Read the section below.

Do You Remember...?

You can use these expressions when you want to disagree.

DISAGREEING

OTHER EXPRESSIONS

Direct **I disagree.**

Direct

I don't agree with you.

Neutral **I'm not so sure** about that.

Neutral

I wouldn't say that.

I don't think that would happen.

I'm not sure I agree with you.

I don't know, I think it would be O.K.

I'm not sure that's the case.

Tactful **I see your point, but**

Tactful

I understand what you're saying but } I

don't think it's the best approach.

(See also *Interface Canada* Inventory of Functions and Grammar, pages 177-8.)

1. Do you know any other expressions for disagreeing? Add them to the list beside the appropriate category: direct, neutral, tactful.
2. Try translating expressions you use in French. Do they work in English?

Have You Tried...?

When you wish to be tactful, you can indicate understanding or uncertainty, before saying that you disagree.

Practice Activity 1

Read the conversation below. Indicate if the expressions of disagreement are appropriate or inappropriate. If the disagreement is inappropriate, suggest an alternative.

CONVERSATION 1

Scene: Boardroom; presentation to division about policy changes.

Director: ... And so, in the light of the overall funding cut, the only thing for us to do is to review all our project budgets and cut them all by twenty-five percent. Any comments?

New employee: I disagree. Can't you make some cuts at a higher level?

Appropriate _____ Inappropriate _____

Alternative: _____

CONVERSATION 2

Scene: Cafeteria; early December; a group — same office — is talking over lunch.

André: I think we should forget about all office parties this year and give the money to a needy family instead.

Bernice: I don't agree with you. Office parties are fun...and you get to know everyone better so it makes working together easier.

Marc: I see your point, Bernice, but there's a lot of poverty nowadays. Maybe we could at least adopt a family for Christmas.

Bernice: Appropriate _____ Inappropriate _____

Alternative: _____

Marc: Appropriate _____ Inappropriate _____

Alternative: _____

Discuss your answers with a partner or the class.

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Practice Activity 2

Consider this situation. A staff member continues to do unsatisfactory work, making your life very difficult. A suggestion has been made that no action be taken at this point because of problems in the personal life of the staff member. You disagree strongly. Write down how you would indicate your disagreement in each of these cases.

1. Your chief made the suggestion during a staff meeting.

2. Your colleague made the suggestion while you were having coffee together.

3. Your chief made the suggestion while chatting with you in your office.

Discuss your choices with the class.

Practice Activity 3

Work with a partner. Use different expressions of disagreement to discuss the following topics.

1. Follow this framework:

Speaker 1: Make a comment about any one of the topics below.

Speaker 2: Disagree and give a reason.

Speaker 1: Disagree with Speaker 2 and give a reason.

Take turns making the first comment and continue the discussion as long as you can.

- There should be a ban on junk food.
- Cars should be banned from downtown.
- Luxuries should be twice as highly taxed as necessities.
- Any extra government funds should be used for saving endangered species.
- You should never express emotion in the workplace.
- Success in life depends on who you know.
- There should be a \$125 000 limit on lottery winnings.
- The age of majority should be raised to 25.
- It should be mandatory for cars to run on electricity or on natural gas.
- High-voltage wires should be placed underground.
- We should abolish mandatory retirement.
- Salt should not be used on roads.
- There should be no more team expansions in sports.
- Every employer should provide on-site daycare.
- Bosses should be evaluated by their employees.
- Three weeks of paid sick leave is excessive.
- Topics of your own.

How many turns were you able to sustain for each topic?



2. Now use the same framework as for Part 1 of this activity for these situations. Fill in the details from your imagination.

- a) Speaker 1: president of community association
Speaker 2: new community member

Your community association has a surplus in its budget. Should it be spent and if so, on what?

- b) Speaker 1: donor
Speaker 2: board member

Your community association has been offered a substantial donation to be used for an art gallery. The board feels that other facilities such as a park, a swimming pool or an auditorium are needed more.

- c) Speaker 1: section chief
Speaker 2: new employee

The section chief feels that sweatshirts, jeans and running shoes present an unprofessional image to the public.

- d) Speaker 1: touchy colleague
Speaker 2: colleague

The touchy colleague feels that he is always ending up with more of the extra work than anyone else.

CONSOLIDATION ACTIVITY

Work with a partner. Choose one of the contexts described below, or invent a similar context of your own. Consider the following factors which might affect the language used:

- the nature of the setting (e.g. formal meeting, informal discussion, casual encounter in the elevator)
- the relationship between the speakers (e.g. formal [superior/subordinate], neutral [counterparts from different sections], friendly [close colleagues])
- the degree of tact required by the particular topic and speakers

Decide on a setting, a relationship and an appropriate degree of tact for the topic and context you have chosen. With your partner, create a conversation in which the speakers make suggestions, disagree, make alternative suggestions, give reasons, agree or disagree further. Use language appropriate to the situation.

CONTEXTS

1. Your photocopier keeps breaking down. The problem seems to be that people are not handling it correctly. One solution suggested is that all photocopying should be done by the only person who knows how to operate it properly — the secretary.
2. Until now, your community association has been run by volunteers. However, there is so much work that some volunteers are overloaded. They want the organization to hire an administrator. Others feel this is not a good idea.
3. In order to encourage people to reduce waste, your municipality has proposed a new program: households with only one bag or can of garbage per collection will receive vouchers for free use of the city's recreational facilities. People have been asked to react to the proposal.

Take turns presenting your conversations to the class. As you listen to each conversation, complete one of the evaluation boxes on the following pages.



CONVERSATION 1

SETTING	Formal <input type="checkbox"/>	Informal <input type="checkbox"/>	Casual <input type="checkbox"/>
RELATIONSHIP	Formal <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Friendly <input type="checkbox"/>
SUGGESTIONS	Direct <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Tactful <input type="checkbox"/>
DISAGREEMENT	Direct <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Tactful <input type="checkbox"/>
In general, was the language used appropriate to the setting, the topic and the relationship between the speakers? Yes ___ No ___			

CONVERSATION 2

SETTING	Formal <input type="checkbox"/>	Informal <input type="checkbox"/>	Casual <input type="checkbox"/>
RELATIONSHIP	Formal <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Friendly <input type="checkbox"/>
SUGGESTIONS	Direct <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Tactful <input type="checkbox"/>
DISAGREEMENT	Direct <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Tactful <input type="checkbox"/>
In general, was the language used appropriate to the setting, the topic and the relationship between the speakers? Yes ___ No ___			

CONVERSATION 3

SETTING	Formal <input type="checkbox"/>	Informal <input type="checkbox"/>	Casual <input type="checkbox"/>
RELATIONSHIP	Formal <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Friendly <input type="checkbox"/>
SUGGESTIONS	Direct <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Tactful <input type="checkbox"/>
DISAGREEMENT	Direct <input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <input type="checkbox"/>	Tactful <input type="checkbox"/>
In general, was the language used appropriate to the setting, the topic and the relationship between the speakers? Yes ___ No ___			

ANSWERS AND NOTES

SUGGESTING

Practice Activity 1

1. b)
2. a) Talk to Mark.
b) Mention it to the chief.
c) Bring it up at the next section meeting.
3. Why don't you...Could you...? Why not...? All are neutral; the speakers are all colleagues who seem at ease with each other; hence there seems to be no need for special diplomacy or strength in making suggestions.
4. John has had too much to drink.
5. a) Why don't you drive home with me?
b) It might be a good idea to play it safe.
c) I think you should call a cab....
6. a) Neutral
b) Tactful
c) Direct
7. Robert uses a neutral expression first, becomes more tactful when John refuses his first suggestion; finally Robert introduces his last suggestion with a direct expression in order to indicate how strongly he feels about the need for John not to drive.

DISAGREEING

Practice Activity 1

Conversation 1: Inappropriate (Since the employee is new, the disagreement should be more tactful.)

Alternative: I understand your point, but....

Conversation 2: Bernice: Appropriate (The conversation is among colleagues who seem to know each other and seem to have no particular tensions amongst them; thus, the disagreement can be direct without giving offence.)

Marc: Appropriate (Marc used a tactful expression of disagreement, perhaps in keeping with his personality.)



TAPESCRIPTS

Practice Activity 1

CONVERSATION 1

Art: I've had it up to here with Mark — you know there are three of us in the office.... Well, Mark's supervisor's always coming in and they get involved in all kinds of computer talk...and I'm trying to do my work...People should know better....

Beth: Why don't you talk to Mark about it?

Art: Oh, I've already done that.... It didn't have any effect.

Beth: Could you mention it to the chief?

Art: I don't want to go over his head now but....

Dave: Why not bring it up at the section meeting...you could present it as a soundproofing problem.

Mark: Hi, everyone. May I join you?

All: Oh,...hello, Mark...Sure...Hi....[etc.]

CONVERSATION 2

John: Great party, folks! Thanks for inviting me....See you on Monday!

Robert: Ah, John, why don't you drive home with me?

John: Robert, are you suggesting I'm drunk? I'm perfectly able to drive...hic!

Robert: It might be a good idea to play it safe.

John: Don't be ridiculous!

Robert: John, I think you should call a cab or let me take you.

John: Butt out, will you?...Bye, everybody.

Robert: John, wait...John...ah, John....[Fade out]