

32 ESL Activities for Adults: Business & Professional English Practice

Thirty-two speaking tasks built around what adult professional learners actually have to do in English at work: pitch, negotiate, present, push back, and defend a position under questions. Grouped by task type, graded by CEFR level.

Pitching & Persuasion

1. The Cold Pitch

A2–B1 · 3 min. Pitch an everyday product to a skeptical "client" (a classmate) in under a minute, no notes, no prep beyond the object itself.

2. The Twist Pitch

B1–B2 · 4 min. Same pitch format, but a catch is revealed mid-pitch (it's only sold in one country, it needs batteries no store stocks) — the student has to adapt the pitch live rather than restart it.

3. Shark Tank Q&A

B2–C1 · 5–6 min. After a full pitch, the "investors" (the rest of the class) get 90 seconds of genuinely unscripted follow-up questions the presenter didn't prepare for.

4. The Elevator Pitch

A2–B1 · 1 min. A strict 60-second version of any pitch above — forces the speaker to identify and keep only the single strongest claim.

5. Sell the Downgrade

B1–B2 · 3–4 min. Student has to pitch a deliberately worse version of a product convincingly (a phone with no camera, a car missing a wheel) — tests persuasive language under a genuinely weak hand.

6. Two Products, One Budget

B2–C1 · 5 min. Two students pitch competing products to the same "client," who has to choose one and explain the decision out loud in full sentences.

7. The Rebuttal Pitch

B2–C1 · 4 min. After hearing a competitor's pitch, a second student has 60 seconds to argue why their own product is still the better buy.

8. Silent Objection Round

B1–B2 · 4 min. The "client" may only raise short objections (price, need, trust) rather than full sentences — the seller has to respond to each one in turn without a script.

Negotiation & Objection Handling

9. The Deadline Negotiation

B1–B2 · 5 min. Two students negotiate a project deadline extension — one wants more time, one refuses — and must reach a spoken agreement, not just state positions.

10. Budget Defense

B2–C1 · 5–6 min. A student defends a specific budget figure to a "manager" pushing for cuts, using structured argument (reason, evidence, concession) rather than flat refusal.

11. The Counter-Offer Chain

B1–C1 · 6 min. Two sides trade increasingly specific counter-offers on a workplace scenario (remote-work days, scope, timeline) until one side concedes or time runs out.

12. Escalation Handling

B2–C1 · 4–5 min. One student plays a frustrated client escalating a complaint; the other must de-escalate using formal, non-defensive language rather than apologizing repeatedly without substance.

13. The Compromise Round

B1–B2 · 5 min. Two opposing positions on a workplace scenario must land on a spoken compromise that neither side fully wanted, stated explicitly at the end.

14. Silent Pushback

B2–C1 · 5 min. One student states a position; the other may only respond with short pushback phrases ("That assumes—," "What about—") — forces the first speaker to keep defending and refining the claim.

15. The Vendor Cross-Check

B2–C1 · 5–6 min. A "vendor" claims a service meets every requirement; the "buyer" cross-examines with pointed, specific follow-up questions rather than accepting the claim at face value.

16. Two Teams, One Contract

B1–C1 · 8–10 min. A full team-format negotiation over a fictional supply contract, scored live by the rest of the class as each side makes its case.

Meetings & Formal Presentations

17. The Stand-Up Update

A2–B1 · 2 min. A 2-minute status update built from keyword prompts only (what's done, what's blocked, what's next) — no full script allowed.

18. Quarterly Numbers, No Slides

B1–B2 · 3–4 min. Present three made-up figures (revenue, headcount, a delay) as a short spoken update — framed honestly, not spun, even when one number is bad news.

19. The Document Brief

B1–B2 · 4 min. Given a short report to skim for five minutes, the student summarizes it aloud to the class in under two — tests extracting the point, not reading it back.

20. Bad News, Formally

B2 · 3 min. Deliver a piece of unwelcome news (a delay, a budget cut) in formal register, without softening it into vague, uncommitted language.

21. The One-Slide Pitch

A2–B1 · 2–3 min. Present a single idea using only three keyword prompts as scaffolding — no full notes, no written script.

22. Meeting Recap

B1–B2 · 3 min. Given three bullet points from an imaginary meeting, the student summarizes it in coherent spoken paragraphs to someone who "missed it."

23. The Interruption Drill

B2 · 4 min. The presenter must field two unscheduled interruptions mid-presentation and return smoothly to the original thread afterward.

24. Formal Feedback, Face to Face

B2–C1 · 3–4 min. Deliver constructive but genuinely critical feedback on a piece of fictional work directly to a "colleague," staying in professional register throughout.

Structured Argument & Formal Register

25. The Project Post-Mortem

B2–C1 · 6–8 min. Two "team members" argue opposite explanations for why a fictional project missed its deadline, formal register required from both sides throughout.

26. Case for the Budget

B2–C1 · 5–6 min. Full structured-argument format — opening position, evidence, rebuttal — defending a spending decision to a deliberately skeptical panel.

27. Cross-Examine the Report

C1–C2 · 6–7 min. One student presents a fictional business report; the rest of the class cross-examines it courtroom-style, testing every claim in turn.

28. The Ethics Case

B2–C1 · 8–10 min. A workplace ethical dilemma (a conflict of interest, a decision to flag or stay quiet) argued in full formal-trial format — two sides, a verdict.

29. Position Paper, Live

C1–C2 · 6 min. Student defends a written position (given in advance to prepare, never to read from) entirely through live spoken cross-examination, no notes during the round itself.

30. The Formal Complaint

B2 · 4–5 min. Student voices a workplace grievance to "HR" entirely in professional, non-emotional register — informal language or venting isn't allowed.

31. Panel Review

C1–C2 · 8–10 min. A student presents a business case to a three-person panel, each of whom asks one genuinely pointed follow-up question in turn.

32. The Verdict Round

B2–C1 · 6 min. After any activity above, the rest of the class votes and each has to justify the verdict aloud in one structured sentence.