

TLP Five-Minute Read Over Coffee – Keeping cool in a virtual meeting

Over the last few years, I have done lots and lots of workshops with clients - struggling with virtual meetings in English. In particular when there are lots of people involved, native speakers using funny expressions, and some people talking too quickly.

➔ 5 Things to remember:

☑ 1) Perfection is nobody's friend. I live this principle when I speak French!

😊😊😊 If I speak French with positive intention (and an ability to laugh at my very particular English pronunciation) I find people are pretty accepting. The need to be perfect can block and stop 🚫 you from speaking.

☑ 2) Keep your dialogue open (most of the time). A tricky principle for French speakers. I talk a lot about the present perfect (the name of this piece of grammar really does not matter) because it is not instinctive for many of my clients.

💡 You have a conscious choice to be open in your style even when talking about things you have completed. This matters if you want to encourage feedback.

Example: I have spoken to the client, and they are frustrated with our progress. Any ideas are welcome on how we can respond to their concerns.

☑ 3) Ask questions with confidence and lightness.

Toby: We need to touch base with our client, as the ETA for delivery feels very up in the air. If we don't face the elephant in the room, I think it will be an uphill struggle!

Non-native speaker and colleague of Toby:

Thanks for this Toby, do you mind saying that again - I was not sure what you

meant, in particular with reference to the elephant!??

💡 There is a paradox in the perception that questions are seen as a sign of intellectual weakness, that you 'lose face' (look less credible) or slow down the pace of the meeting. I believe the opposite is true. Asking a question about the meaning of content or language is a sign of confidence and often helps others too shy to ask in unblocking understanding.

4) Make a little small talk.

You are waiting for a colleague to arrive in the Zoom meeting. Five people are looking into their screens a little uncomfortably - saying nothing. Be that person who gently facilitates some chit chat with the aim of putting people at ease.

Did you have a good weekend? How are things in the London office? Any plans for your summer holidays. Remember keep it light, not intrusive, and imagine you are playing ping-pong (you don't need to give a detailed description of your Sunday morning routine).

5) Less is more.

There is tendency for non-native speakers to over-compensate, speak too much or use very long and complex sentences.

💡 My Dad's favourite expression is 'less is more'. Short, simple sentences that get to the point. It sounds easy but actually it is a skill in itself. Note: Less is more does not mean direct!

So, stay open, light and positive in your next virtual meeting and power for the week as well!

