

TLP Five-Minute Read Over Coffee – How to communicate next steps with precision

💡 How to communicate next steps with precision and clarity.

➡ You need to send clear next steps/actions after a meeting. How can you do this clearly and efficiently in business English? Please find two cool techniques to use depending on the formality/context, and one reflection point about setting deadlines.

➡ Both techniques adhere to the principle that meaningful actions highlight the 'who, what, when'. What is the action, who owns it and when does it need to be delivered by?

1. More formal style:

Example: A new Business English Newsletter will be developed by 25th November 2022. (TH)

- The future passive voice is used here.
- You start with the object and then use the 'will be' + verb in the past participle (third column).
- The 'by' is used to define the delivery date/deadline.
- The initials of the subject (TH) = Toby Higson is put in brackets at the end.

Strengths of this style: This is a professional, efficient and output-focused way of communicating next steps.

Limitations: In some contexts, this style might feel too cold and clinical.

2. More relaxed style:

Example: Toby will develop/is going to develop a new Business English newsletter by 25 November 2022.

Strengths: A warmer and more personal style.

Limitations: This style might feel too familiar in certain contexts. This style also takes some emphasis away from the output (the newsletter) which might or might not feel appropriate.

💡 Reflection point: I have had some really interesting discussions with clients about how transparent you should be in setting a deadline for an action/next step. I personally think a next step that is not timebound can feel very vague.

However, there might be valid business reasons why you cannot commit to a specific time. For example, you face uncertainty with your supply chain. In this situation you have three options, which all need to be used with care.

- Avoid a time reference and use an expression such as 'as a priority, as a next step, as a matter of urgency, as soon as possible...'
- Give a date reference but transparently soften it, by 'mid-November', 'in between 6 to 8 weeks.'
- Soften the introductory verb... 'we expect it to arrive by.../it should arrive by...'

I hope this is helpful in your writing of next steps and actions!

Have a good day.

Best wishes

Toby
