

# 16

# Career breaks

## Learning objectives in this unit

- Talking about taking a career break
- Presenting a personal case
- Talking about taking time off
- Choosing between *-ing* form and infinitive

## Case study

- Applying for a community placement

## Starting point

- 1 In your country, do young people have a gap year (a year off) between school and university?
- 2 How common is it for adults to have a career break? What do they use the time for?
- 3 What practical problems might a career break cause for both the employee and the employer?

## Working with words | Taking a career break

- 1 Read about three people who took career breaks. Which two people  
1 went to the same part of the world?  
2 are back working for the same company?  
3 give similar advice about taking a career break?  
4 spent time helping other people?  
5 have changed in similar ways?



### Freya, Advertising Manager

**Stage in career:** 'I'd worked in marketing for ten years and had just completed my Advanced Certificate. I resigned.'

**My career break:** 'I travelled around the world for 18 months and did voluntary work in Australia. My career break **revitalized** me – it has given me a new **perspective** on life and reordered my priorities; quality of life is more important to me now. I'm also more confident. If you're **hesitating** about taking a career break, the best **piece of advice** I'd give is to make sure you've got good relevant career experience before you leave – so it's easier to get back on the career ladder.'

**Effect on career:** 'The break acted as a catalyst for me to change career. I **put off** looking for a permanent job for a while, but now I've applied to join a government office.'



### Roberto, Business Analyst

**Stage in career:** 'I'd worked for the bank for 14 years, so they offered to keep a job open. I **postponed** my planned departure for a year to suit them.'

**My career break:** 'I spent a year travelling through south-east Asia and Australia, doing a series of scuba-diving courses. I also learnt to ride a motorbike and fly a helicopter. My **tip** for anyone considering a career break is: take it after you've worked for at least five years. That way you'll really **appreciate** the time off and have enough money to enjoy it. It's the best thing I've ever done.'

**Effect on career:** 'I came back with my batteries **recharged** and new enthusiasm; and now I'm doing a better version of my old job.'



### Jenny, Management Consultant

**Stage in career:** 'I was with my company for nine years and having a mid-career crisis. I intended to resign – they said they'd hold my job open.'

**My career break:** 'I was in Bangladesh, attached to a **voluntary organization** working with local communities to improve education and health care, and to develop new skills and earning potential. It broadened my **outlook** and I experienced a completely different pace of life. I'm now less materialistic, and I **feel grateful** for the things I have got. If you're **feeling uncertain** about a career break, just do it – life's too short.'

**Effect on career:** 'I went back to exactly the same job, but I now do four days a week, spending the fifth volunteering with a children's **charity**.'

**2** Work with a partner. Which career break would you most like to take and why?

**3** Put the words / phrases in **bold** in the text into pairs that have similar meanings.

*Example: revitalized / recharged*

**4** Complete these sentences, using some of the words / phrases in **bold** in the text.

- How would you enjoy working for a \_\_\_\_\_ like the Red Cross or Médecins Sans Frontières?
- Would you return from a career break feeling \_\_\_\_\_ and ready to get back to your old job or would you be uninterested in going back to work? Explain why.
- Have you got any unfulfilled ambitions that you have had to \_\_\_\_\_ for career reasons?
- Have you ever done anything that has given you a new \_\_\_\_\_ on life?
- Are you constantly seeking new things / opportunities or do you \_\_\_\_\_ the things that you have?
- What's the most useful \_\_\_\_\_ anyone has given you about dealing with boredom or stress at work?

**5** Work with a partner. Ask and answer the questions in **4**.

**6** **61**▶ Listen to an employer talking about the benefits of career breaks. Work with a partner and answer questions 1–5.

- Why did the company originally introduce flexiwork?
- Why was flexiwork particularly suited to this company?
- What are the current benefits of flexiwork?
- Why is flexiwork described as a win-win situation?
- Would the same arguments for flexiwork apply in your company? Why or why not?

**7** Choose the correct answer from the words in *italics*.

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1 A break might help me to head <i>off / round</i> in a new direction.                             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2 I would like the opportunity to develop some <i>light / soft</i> skills.                         | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3 I think I would return to work with <i>renewed / improved</i> enthusiasm.                        | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4 I would like to <i>broaden / enlarge</i> my horizons through travel.                             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5 My boss would see a break as an important part of my career <i>development / improvement</i> .   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6 Allowing career breaks will at some stage become our official company <i>policy / doctrine</i> . | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7 Allowing career breaks would help the <i>maintenance / retention</i> rate in my company.         | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**8** For each statement in **7**, look at the scoring system below, then circle one of the numbers 1–5. Compare and discuss your answers with a partner.

1 = agree very much    2 = agree    3 = unsure    4 = disagree    5 = disagree strongly

»» For more exercises, go to Practice file 16 on page 132.

**9** Think of a career break that might appeal to you and your employer. Give a short presentation of your idea, outlining

- the basic proposition
- what the benefits would be for you
- what the benefits would be for your company
- what financial arrangements you would propose.

# Business communication skills

## Context

Lena Johnson currently works for an IT company leading a team of technical writers. She has a diploma in photography and has decided to request a nine-month sabbatical to act as photographer for journalists making a documentary in the Antarctic.

## Presenting | Presenting a personal case



- 1 62▶ Read the *Context*. Listen to the meeting between Lena and her manager. Which of these benefits and arguments did she use for taking a sabbatical?

- I've been a loyal employee.
- I'll have to resign if I'm not allowed to take the sabbatical.
- I'll be more motivated after the trip.
- I'll gain experience I can bring to the company.
- It's a lifelong ambition of mine.
- I'm feeling burnt out!
- If you sponsor my trip, the company will gain advertising opportunities.
- My creativity is being suppressed in my present job.

- 2 62▶ Read phrases 1–9. Then listen again and underline the phrases that mean the same in audio script 62▶ on page 166.

- 1 It's something I've wanted to do for a long time.
- 2 The people I studied with have given me the desire to do this.
- 3 I'll never get this opportunity again in my life.
- 4 It's a situation where we'll both gain something.
- 5 I'd obtain skills that would be very useful for managing the team.
- 6 I know you'll have a lot of worries.
- 7 If I don't take up this opportunity, I'll regret it.
- 8 That's not very reasonable – I've always taken on extra work.
- 9 I'd be very grateful if you could talk to HR.

- 3 Put the phrases you underlined in 2 into these categories.

- a Stating what you want: \_\_\_\_\_
- b Explaining benefits: \_\_\_\_\_
- c Stating motivation: \_\_\_\_\_
- d Arguing persuasively: \_\_\_\_\_
- e Dealing with objections: \_\_\_\_\_

▶▶ For more exercises, go to Practice file 16 on page 132.

## Tip | valuable and invaluable

Make sure you are clear what you want to say when using *invaluable* and *valuable*.

*The experience was invaluable.*

(= something very useful)

*It was a valuable piece of equipment.* (= worth money)

An experience can also be *valuable*, meaning 'useful'; however, the meaning is not as strong as that of *invaluable*.

**4 Work with a partner. Read this information.**

You left your college course halfway through for personal reasons. You have performed extremely well in your job, especially since most of your colleagues are better qualified than you. You would now like to go back to college and complete your studies, but the only way to do this is to take a career break for a year.

- 1 Decide what type of job you have and what type of course you want to complete (use your own job if you like).
- 2 Discuss how you would present your case for a career break to your manager. Make sure you think of two phrases for
  - stating what you want
  - stating your motivation
  - explaining the benefits
  - arguing persuasively.
- 3 Think of two objections your boss might have and counter these with appropriate phrases.
- 4 Work with another pair. Talk them through your case and arguments.

**5 Choose one of these things that you would like to do (or an idea of your own) and prepare your case.**

- take paternity leave / extended maternity leave (assuming it isn't a legal option in your country)
- restructure your department
- introduce a new procedure in your office
- apply for a better position internally in your company
- take a temporary transfer abroad with your company

**6 Work with a partner. Take turns to present your case. When you are listening, object to some of the proposals you hear.**

 » Interactive Workbook » Email

**Key expressions**

**Stating what you want**

It's been a long-term goal of mine to ...  
 I intend to ...  
 I'd really appreciate it if ...

**Stating motivation**

I've been inspired by ...  
 I'd like to do this because ...  
 My motivation for this comes from ...

**Explaining benefits**


It's a win-win situation.  
 The experience I'd gain would be invaluable for ...  
 The plus points are ...

**Arguing persuasively**

It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.  
 This is a chance I can't (afford to) miss.  
 I'll never be satisfied unless I do it.

**Dealing with objections**

I understand your misgivings but ...  
 That's hardly fair. I've never refused to ...  
 But there are also (other) benefits for (you / the company).

 » Interactive Workbook  
 » Phrasebank

**Practically speaking** | Talking about taking time off

**1 63▶ Listen to three conversations. How did each speaker spend their time off?**

**2 Which of these phrases refer to the period of time taken off (T), the activity (A) or what the experience was like (E)?**

- 1 We visited my partner's family. \_\_\_\_
- 2 We just had a long weekend away. \_\_\_\_
- 3 It made a real change. \_\_\_\_
- 4 I didn't really enjoy it, but it needed doing. \_\_\_\_
- 5 It poured with rain the whole time! \_\_\_\_
- 6 I took the day off. \_\_\_\_
- 7 I caught up on some DIY jobs. \_\_\_\_
- 8 It was great for relaxing and switching off. \_\_\_\_
- 9 We managed to get away for the day. \_\_\_\_
- 10 We were on a three-day spa break. \_\_\_\_

**3 Work in groups of four. Think of three examples of recent time off (you can invent the information if you like). Have a different conversation about your time off with each member of the group. Refer to the Useful phrases on page 135.**

## Language at work | *-ing* form and infinitive

### 1 Read these extracts from audio 62▶.

- a You want to **take** an extended holiday.
- b And you'd like several months off to **accompany** her?
- c It's certainly worth **thinking** about.
- d It's not going to be easy to **persuade** them.
- e I'd enjoy **developing** my creative side ...
- f The experience I'd gain would be invaluable for **managing** the team.

#### In which extract is the infinitive being used

- 1 because of the verb that comes before it? \_\_\_\_
- 2 because of an adjective that comes before it? \_\_\_\_
- 3 to express purpose? \_\_\_\_

#### In which extract is the *-ing* form being used

- 4 because of the verb that comes before it? \_\_\_\_
- 5 because of a phrase that comes before it? \_\_\_\_
- 6 because of a preposition that comes before it? \_\_\_\_

### 2 Which of these common verbs and phrases are normally followed by the infinitive? Which are normally followed by the *-ing* form?

<i>like</i>	<i>there's no point ...</i>	<i>enjoy</i>	<i>want</i>
<i>would like</i>	<i>look forward to</i>	<i>fail</i>	<i>decide</i>
<i>refuse</i>	<i>seem</i>	<i>it's very difficult ...</i>	<i>miss</i>
<i>it's not worth ...</i>	<i>risk</i>	<i>manage</i>	<i>arrange</i>
<i>can't afford</i>	<i>finish</i>	<i>plan</i>	<i>it's easy ...</i>

» For more information and exercises, go to Practice file 16 on page 133.

### 3 You have been asked to complete a staff survey to find out how you feel about your company. Using your own ideas, complete these sentences, starting the rest of the sentence with a verb in the *-ing* form or infinitive.

#### STAFF SURVEY

Good points:	I enjoy ... I like ...
Neutral / bad points:	I don't mind ... I object to ...
Commitment:	I've never refused ... I've never failed ...
Difficulty of tasks:	I find it quite difficult ... I find it easy ...
Self-assessment:	I think I deserve ... I'm prepared ...
Ambitions:	One day I plan ... I also intend ...
Fears:	I'm worried about ... I'm concerned about ...
Hopes:	I would like ... I also want ...

### Tip | Changes in meaning

Some verbs can be followed by either the *-ing* form or the infinitive, but there is a change in meaning.

Use *like* + *-ing* to mean 'enjoy'.

*I like going to the cinema.*

Use *like* + infinitive to mean 'I think it's good for me'.

*I like to have a full check-up every two years.*

### 4 Work with a partner. Talk about your answers in 3.

### 5 Work with a partner. Student A and Student B, turn to File 47 on page 148 and follow the instructions.

## Applying for a community placement

### Background

#### Accenture – working in the community

Accenture is a global company which uses its expertise in consulting, technology and outsourcing to help its clients improve their performance. One section of the company, ADP (Accenture Development Partnerships), is involved with SPARK, a programme coordinated by VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) to help poor rural communities in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia manage their natural resources effectively. The ADP team worked with SPARK to: develop a strategy for managing the programme, deal with local ownership issues, improve its overall effectiveness, and implement its successful aspects in other regions. By the end of ADP's assignment, the team had met its challenges and a pilot programme had been started in Indonesia.

### Discussion

- 1 What experience do employees gain from working on programmes like SPARK?
- 2 How do companies benefit from employees working on such programmes?
- 3 **64** Listen to a consultant at Accenture who worked on the SPARK programme. Compare your ideas in 1 and 2.

### Task

A similar global company is working with a charity in Bangladesh. The aim is to provide community centres for both educational and cultural programmes. Phase 1 – building the community centres – has finished.

- 1 Read this extract about the project from the in-company magazine.

#### A Helping Hand – Phase 2

Now the community centres have been built, we are sending 40 volunteers to work alongside employees from the charity. The charity aims to provide courses on: English language for children, literacy and numeracy, computer skills, bookkeeping and basic accountancy. We are sending volunteers to teach and run the courses, as well as people to help coordinate the centres, work with back office administration and find resources.

If you are interested in a 6–12-month placement, please discuss this with your immediate superior and HR.

- 2 Work in groups of six. One volunteer is still required and you want to be chosen for the final place. Work with a partner and create an employee profile.
  - What skills / knowledge can you offer the project?
  - Why do you want to go?
  - Why should you be supported in your application?
- 3 Present your case (in pairs) to the rest of the group. While you listen to the presentations, make notes.
- 4 As a whole group, hold a short decision-making meeting. Decide who should be given the final place on the project and why.



## The Expert View

Career breaks offer many opportunities for personal growth, but many people are not aware of them. Developing a community of like-minded people can help individuals to define more clearly what they want to achieve or to become, and to be more aware of the opportunities that surround them. Once you've decided, it's important to stay focused on your development goals during your career break, and on your future reintegration into your company. Ask other people who have made these transitions about their strategic return to work. And ensure that you maintain contact with key decision-makers at your place of work.

Peter Fennah, Director of Career Development  
Cranfield School of Management



## Case study

## File 43 | Unit 10

Case study, Task, page 65

Student C

Favour	Name of person agreeing to favour
Help me organize 'office warming' party for new division – I'm not very interested in doing this.	
Give me two of your offices as we don't have enough space in our department.	
Give me the name of a good, reliable, financial controller.	

Favours you must refuse to do:

- Give contact names for mailing list.
- Contact IT company for internal network.
- Use / share your department's coffee machine.

## File 44 | Unit 13

Case study, Task, page 83

Student C

### Slashdot.org

**Founded:** 1997 **Users:** 5.5 m per month

**What is it?:** Technology news website and technical forum

**Who started it?:** Ernst Kohl / Luciana Francolini

**Approximate statistics / facts:**

- Hosts discussion forums for 'techies'
- Discussions run to 10,000 comments a day
- Pioneer of 'user-generated' site
- Developed from a personal blog – was bought by current owners for \$5 m in 1999
- Only 10 employees maintaining the site!
- Holding company was bought for \$900 m in 2006
- Based in California

## File 45 | Unit 14

Case study, Task, page 89

Student C

PCR employees took part in meetings and expected a round of discussion resulting in a decision. They questioned their Malaysian counterparts, asking for opinions and tried to draw conclusions from the answers. However, there were no direct answers to the questions. A result of this was that PCR became frustrated, thinking meetings were a waste of time. The Malaysian counterparts were frustrated because the decision-maker wasn't always consulted and PCR seemed to be expecting decisions to be made from any one of the participants.

## File 46 | Unit 2

Case study, Task, page 17

- Set up 'sideways' moves across to different departments / job areas and promotion. Organized internal transfers with subsidiaries abroad.
- Revised pay scales in alignment with industry standards.
- Introduced compensation package which included private health scheme.
- Brought in a 24-month leave period for new mothers – although legal requirement is 15 months.
- Promoted flexible working and home working.
- Introduced training budgets per head – encouraged training and personal development. New policy: each employee is entitled to four training courses a year – two must be attended, one of which is job-related.
- Arranged a monthly managers' breakfast. This took the form of an informal meeting where a big breakfast was provided. The idea was to promote discussion / small talk amongst managers in an informal setting.
- Made gift giving at Christmas standard throughout company – same given to everyone.
- Required departments to arrange a once-a-month Friday lunch to encourage socializing and teamwork.
- Management met department heads individually, twice a year, to review job and discuss concerns, wishes, etc. and most importantly, to give them feedback, thanks and praise.

**Results:**

As a result of these changes, voluntary staff turnover reduced to 3.3%; absenteeism reduced to 0.3%; 20–30% of staff accepted the offer of working some of their week from home.

## File 47 | Unit 16

Language at work, Exercise 5, page 100

Student A

You want to take a one-year career break but do not want to risk losing your job on your return. Answer your manager's questions (use your own situation or invent the details).

Student B

You are the HR Manager. An employee wishes to take a career break. Ask questions to find out:

- what they like about their current job
- if there is anything they dislike about the work
- what they are planning to do / where they would like to go
- how long they hope to go away for
- if they are planning to develop any new skills
- if they want to carry on working with the company when they get back / if they are expecting to get the same job back
- if they would be prepared to do a different job on their return
- if they will mind earning less than their colleagues.

When you have finished, change roles.

**Thomas** Well ... one success certainly was helping to produce the in-house magazine. I thought it was well produced with interesting content. I really enjoyed doing it, particularly interviewing colleagues from other countries for the staff profile column.

**Angelina** Yes, and I think you demonstrated great prioritizing skills, especially with the tight deadlines you had to meet.

**Thomas** How can I improve my chances of working more with international colleagues?

**Angelina** Well, you ought to sign up to one of our language courses. That'll put you in a better position for being selected when international projects come up. It's a pity we didn't think about this when you joined us. If you'd started a language course then, you'd be quite proficient now.

**Thomas** OK ... Can I identify that as a personal goal for the coming year?

**Angelina** Of course.

**Thomas** Erm ... What I didn't enjoy was when the magazine budget was cut ... we had to lose a couple of staff on the editorial team and I ended up doing most of the work myself.

**Angelina** Hmm ... You shouldn't have been expected to take on so much. I noticed your overtime hours were quite high at that time. Look, if this happens again, you need to let us know.

**Thomas** OK.

**Angelina** Are there any areas you feel you need to improve on?

**Thomas** Er, no ... not really.

**Angelina** Hmm, all right. One area I'd like to mention is training. You turned down an office management course we offered you. Why was that?

**Thomas** I didn't think I really needed it. Besides, we were short-staffed. If Katy hadn't left, I probably would have done the course.

**Angelina** Mmm ... You really should have done that course. I think it would have helped you deal with your workload better.

**Thomas** Yes ... If I'd known that at the time, I might have done it.

**Angelina** I think you certainly need to focus on gaining some more qualifications. Let's put this course on your list of goals for the coming year, too. Now ... were there any constraints that affected your performance?

**Thomas** Well, I mentioned that we're short-staffed and despite all this extra work, to be honest I've found it difficult to delegate. How should I do this?

**Angelina** You need to start by ...

... Good. So that brings us on to the office environment and resources. You've managed to create a very positive atmosphere in the new office. The move went very smoothly thanks to your team's organization.

**Thomas** Thanks.

**Angelina** On a less positive note ... You could have thought a bit more about the call centre rota. Feedback from that department has been poor.

**Thomas** I know. If we'd taken the old system to our new location, the rota would have been easier to organize ... but no one likes the new scheduling program. What's the best way to solve this, do you think?

**Angelina** I'll need to look into it. Let's arrange a meeting to discuss it next week.

**Thomas** Thanks. We could do with some training on the new program – there are some functions we don't really understand.

**Angelina** I'll check the budget.

**Thomas** If there's enough money, I'd also like another software program. I've already spoken to IT about it.

**Angelina** OK. Put your request in an email and I'll consider it.

**Thomas** Thank you. Oh ... and while we're talking about money, could we discuss ...?

## 60

1

A Hello. Peter Li?

B Yes, that's right.

A Nice to meet you. I'm Jacqueline, Florence Talbot's PA.

B Ah, I think we've spoken on the phone.

A That's right. Please take a seat. Can I get you something to drink? Coffee or tea?

B A cup of tea would be nice.

A Certainly. Florence is just taking a phone call. She'll be out in a few minutes.

2

A Hello, Andrea ... welcome to HGP Birgit. Let me take your coat.

B Thank you.

A You can leave your bag over there, if you like.

B Thanks.

A Did you have any trouble finding us?

B No, not at all, but the traffic was terrible.

A Yes, it's always like that on Fridays. I hope you managed to avoid the roadworks.

B Well, I went via the industrial zone ...

3

A Hello. You must be our new technical adviser?

B Yes, that's right. Tom Schofield.

A Nice to meet you. Michel is in a meeting at the moment, but he'll be right with you.

B OK, no problem.

A So you've driven over from England today?

B Yes, I had quite a good journey. You have good roads in France.

A What was the weather like when you left? It's been raining all day here.

B Oh, it was much worse than this!

A Really?! ... I can't imagine how it could possibly be ...

## Unit 16

### 61

**Interviewer** So you're quite happy with the idea of people in your organization taking a career break?

**Employer** Yes, although we prefer to use the term 'flexiwork', which is a better description.

**Interviewer** How did the idea come about? I mean, a lot of employers wouldn't like the idea of their staff disappearing for a year or so ...

**Employer** We introduced flexiwork at a time when our industry was having a bit of a downturn ... things were quiet ... it meant we could cut the wage bill but also retain staff for when the situation improved again.

**Interviewer** So it was basically just a cost-cutting measure?

**Employer** No, it was more of an experiment ... one that wouldn't be too expensive ... and it's been very successful ... in fact it's now official company policy.

**Interviewer** Do you think this is something that other companies will take up?

**Employer** I'm not sure – I think we're lucky because we specialize in consultancy. A lot of our work is project-based, and our consultants do three months here, six months there ... so it's quite easy for us to fit this kind of thing in.

**Interviewer** I think most people would see the advantages for the employee, but are there any other benefits for the company?

**Employer** Well, yes, apart from the cost savings that I mentioned before, it does a lot for our retention rate, so we don't get nearly so many resignations. If someone wants to broaden their horizons by having a long career break, they can have one, no problem. The other advantage is when we're recruiting, when we're looking for new talent. If we say we don't just allow career breaks, we actively encourage them – as part of your career development – that's very attractive to prospective employees.

**Interviewer** Presumably there are some people who go off for a few months and don't come back?

**Employer** For some people, yes, it acts as a catalyst for them to head off in a new direction ... but for most people, it gives them a chance to recharge their batteries and they return with renewed enthusiasm. From the point of view of motivation, it's great, it's a win-win situation. And in terms of personal development, people come back having learned something new – maybe a new language – or they've developed a soft skill like leadership or whatever ... but the bottom line is, those new skills are of value to the company as well.