Start with a request

Work alone or in pairs. Bring a pen. Read this fictional example, then use pages 2-3 for a practice round. Page 4 is your personal takeaway. You may pass or write instead of speaking.

A fictional request

A manager asks for a polished customer briefing by Friday. The team can finish the core summary by Friday; adding charts would take until Monday. The customer needs the summary for a Friday decision. Only the account lead can approve a change to the deliverable. That approval has not been given.

1 / What is this really for?

Ask: Which information does the customer need for Friday's decision? Example reply: The core summary. This reveals the purpose; it does not approve dropping the charts.

2 / Who decides, and did they?

Ask: Can the account lead confirm a core summary on Friday and charts on Monday? Example reply: We still need to ask. Keep the decision open.

A proposed next step

Send the account lead the two delivery options and ask for confirmation before promising a change. A possible plan is not an approval.

In this example, what is still unconfirmed?

Ask before you promise

Pair round / 6 minutes: read for 1 minute, ask and write for 3, compare for 2. One person asks; the other answers only from the fictional facts on page 1, or says unknown. Solo? Write both parts.

Use the briefing example

Keep page 1 visible. Try your own wording for the two questions. Leave unknown answers open; do not invent approval.

Known facts / purpose, deadline and capacity

Question 1 / What is this really for?

Reply / what did you learn, or what is unknown?

Question 2 / Who decides, and did they?

Reply / who must confirm which decision?

Change one fact. Replay.

Pair round / 6 minutes: switch roles. Read for 1 minute, ask and write for 3, compare for 2. In this fictional replay, the customer now needs the charts for Friday's decision. Capacity and approval authority stay the same as page 1.

Hold the boundary

Do not assume overtime, extra staff or a later deadline. Ask about a trade-off or an authorized change. If no option is confirmed, record the open decision.

Question 1 / what needs clarifying now?

Question 2 / who can authorize a change?

What can still fit? What would have to change?

Proposed step / owner and confirmation needed

Compare / which changed fact changed your plan?

Take one question with you

Debrief / 3 minutes. Keep this sheet yourself. You may use a fictional example throughout. Leave real names and confidential details off the page; facilitators should not collect individual notes for appraisal.

From rehearsal to a conversation

Choose one routine request you could clarify. Describe roles, not people. A practice reply does not predict a colleague's answer or authorize a workplace decision.

One fact I will check before offering a plan

My purpose question / What is this really for?

My decision question / Who decides, and did they?

One small next step / who to ask and when

Afterward / what was confirmed, and what stays open?