The Negotiation Language Toolkit

Anchor, probe, concede, push back, and close — in confident professional English.

Negotiation in English isn't about aggressive language — it's about precise language. Each phase has its own phrases. Use the wrong one (too soft when anchoring, too hard when probing) and you lose leverage. These are the patterns that consistently work in real deals.

01 · ANCHORING (THE FIRST NUMBER YOU PUT ON THE TABLE)

Whoever names the first number sets the frame. Don't apologize for your number — state it confidently.

- **Our standard rate for this scope is $X.**
  'Standard' implies you're not making it up for them. Strongest opener.
- **Based on what you've described, we'd be looking at around $X.**
  Anchors a range while sounding consultative.
- **For a project of this size, we typically come in at $X.**
  'Typically' makes the number feel like a market reality, not a quote.
- **I want to be upfront about pricing — this comes in at $X.**
  Direct, transparent opener. Lowers the awkwardness of price talk.
- **Before we go further, let me share the investment range.**
  'Investment' (not 'cost' or 'price') reframes the conversation around value.

02 · PROBING THE OTHER SIDE

The deal is in the questions. Ask before you propose.

- **What does success look like for you on this?**
  Surfaces their real goal. Their answer often reveals what they'll pay for.
- **Help me understand the budget you're working with.**
  Direct ask. 'Help me understand' makes it feel collaborative, not interrogative.
- **What's the most important piece of this for you?**
  Reveals their priority — which tells you what to protect and what to trade.
- **What's prompted you to look at this now?**
  Reveals urgency. Urgent buyers pay more.
- **Who else is involved in the decision?**
  Critical question. You need to know if you're talking to the actual buyer.
- **What would it take for this to be a clear yes for you?**
  Forces them to name their conditions upfront — saves rounds of negotiation.

03 · PUSHING BACK ON THE PRICE

Use these on either side of the table — buyer or seller.

- **That's higher than what we had in mind.**
  Owns the gap without committing to a counter.

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- **I'd need to see real movement on the number to make this work.**
  Direct ask for a price change without naming a target.
- **We're not going to get there at that rate. Where can you flex?**
  'Where can you flex' invites them to suggest concessions.
- **If price is the issue, let's talk about scope.**
  Reframes the conversation: same money, less work — instead of less money, same work.
- **Walk me through how you arrived at that number.**
  Polite version of 'justify it.' Often makes them lower the number themselves.
- **That's not going to work on our end. What are we missing?**
  Soft no + open question. Invites a creative counter-offer.

04 · MAKING CONCESSIONS (GIVE TO GET)

Never concede without getting something back. Always pair the give with the ask.

- **I can do $X — but only if we sign by Friday.**
  Trades a price drop for a faster close. Classic 'if-then' move.
- **I'm willing to come down on price if we extend the contract to two years.**
  Trades short-term margin for long-term certainty.
- **We could include the onboarding at no extra cost — would that get us closer?**
  Adds value instead of cutting price. Protects margin.
- **If I throw in X, can you commit to Y today?**
  Direct trade structure. Forces a commitment, not a delay.
- **I can flex on the timeline if you can flex on the deliverables.**
  Universal trade structure. Use when both sides need movement.

05 · REFRAMING WHEN STUCK

When the conversation hits a wall, change the frame.

- **Let's zoom out for a second — what's the goal here for both of us?**
  Resets the conversation around shared interest.
- **We're getting tangled on price. Can we talk about value first?**
  Moves from numbers to outcomes. Often unsticks a stalled deal.
- **What if we approached this completely differently?**
  Invites a creative restructure. Use when standard moves aren't working.
- **Set the price aside for a moment — is everything else acceptable?**
  Isolates the real blocker. Often only one term is the problem.
- **I think we're closer than it feels. Let me suggest a path forward.**
  Reasserts that a deal is possible. Stops escalation.

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06 · CLOSING THE DEAL

I think we have a deal. Let me put it in writing.
Locks the agreement before either side has second thoughts.

If I send the contract over today, can you sign by end of week?
Forces a timeline on the close. Reveals whether they're really ready.

Just to confirm what we've agreed: …
Always restate the terms verbally before ending the call. Prevents 'I thought you meant…' later.

I'll send the paperwork by tomorrow morning. Anything else you need from me to make this easy?
Confident close + offers to remove friction.

Sounds like we have alignment. I'll get the next steps over to you.
Soft, professional close. Common in B2B sales.

Let's get it done.
Direct, decisive close. Use when you've earned the right to be assertive.

07 · WALKING AWAY (THE MOST POWERFUL PHRASE IN ANY NEGOTIATION)

I don't think this is the right fit for us — but I appreciate the conversation.
Walks away cleanly. Often brings the other side back with a better offer.

If we can't get to $X, I think we should pause and revisit later.
Signals you're prepared to walk without fully closing the door.

Let me think it over and come back to you tomorrow.
The polite delay. Gives you space and signals you're not desperate.

I think we're too far apart on this one.
Honest assessment. Often unlocks a final concession.

THE ONE RULE THAT BEATS EVERY SCRIPT

Whoever talks less wins more. After you ask a probing question or state your price, stop talking. Silence is uncomfortable — and the other side will usually fill it with information you can use. If you only remember one thing from this sheet, remember to shut up after the ask.