



Session 6 (Ch. 19–25) — Fall 2026 ESL360 Book Club



READING SCHEDULE

Session #	Date	Chapters
1	9/3/2026	Letter + Ch. 1–2
2	9/10/2026	Ch. 3–5
3	9/17/2026	Ch. 6–7
4	9/24/2026	Ch. 8–11
5	10/1/2026	Ch. 12–18
6	10/8/2026	Ch. 19–25
7	10/15/2026	Ch. 26–28
8	10/22/2026	Ch. 29–32
9	10/29/2026	Ch. 33–36
10	11/5/2026	Ch. 37–40
11	11/12/2026	Ch. 41–44
12	11/19/2026	Ch. 45–47
13	12/3/2026	Ch. 48–51
14	12/10/2026	Ch. 52–56

SESSION 6: VOCABULARY

The expressions below come from Chapters 19–25. Notice how each expression works in its original context and how you could use it in other situations.



break the news to someone Fixed expression / conversational expression

If you break the news to someone, you tell them important news, especially when you expect the news to surprise, disappoint, or upset them.

Usage: *Often used when telling someone for difficult or unexpected news: break the news to someone; break the bad news; break the news gently.*

Context: “The next time Margot and I video-chat, I break the news to her.”



weigh in on something Phrasal verb / idiomatic expression

If you weigh in on something, you give your opinion about a subject, discussion, or decision.

Usage: *Common in casual, professional, and public discussion: weigh in; weigh in on something; ask someone to weigh in.*

Context: “Okay, work on his profile and send me the login info so I can weigh in on everything.”



hold off Phrasal verb

If you hold off, you wait before doing something because you think it may be better to act later.

Usage: *Often used for a deliberate temporary delay: hold off; hold off on something; hold off until...*

Context: “Why don’t we hold off until we see how this thing with Ms. Rothschild plays out?”



play out Phrasal verb

If a situation plays out, it develops over time until you can see what happens or how it ends.

Usage: *Common pattern: see how it plays out / wait and see how things play out.*

Context: “Why don’t we hold off until we see how this thing with Ms. Rothschild plays out?”



hold something against someone

Idiomatic expression

If you hold something against someone, you continue to judge or treat that person negatively because of something they did or because of something about them.

Usage: *Common pattern: hold it against someone / hold something against someone.*

Context: “You shouldn’t hold that against her,” I say.



take it out on someone

Idiom / conversational expression

If you take it out on someone, you treat that person badly because you are angry or upset about something else.

Usage: *The person is usually not the real cause of the anger or frustration.*

Context: “Well, don’t take it out on me.”



out of spite

Fixed expression

If you do something out of spite, you do it deliberately because you want to annoy, hurt, or upset someone.

Usage: *Out of introduces a motive: out of spite, out of kindness, out of curiosity, out of fear.*

Context: “You know you did it out of spite.”



a late bloomer

Idiom / metaphor

If someone is a late bloomer, they develop a skill, interest, ability, confidence, or other part of life later than many other people do.

Usage: *It can refer to education, careers, relationships, confidence, talents, or physical development. It does not necessarily imply failure.*

Context: “I guess you could call me a late bloomer, but that implies that we’re all on some predetermined blooming schedule...”



take the lead

Fixed expression / idiomatic expression

If you take the lead, you become the person who starts, organizes, directs, or takes primary responsibility for an activity.

Usage: *Take the lead on something is especially common in professional English.*

Context: "...though I let Kitty take the lead on it and merely sign my name under hers."



a bit much

Informal expression

If you say something is a bit much, you mean it is more extreme, excessive, demanding, expensive, emotional, or elaborate than you think is appropriate.

Usage: *A bit softens the criticism. The exact meaning depends on context.*

Context: "I was going to make a much more extravagant card, big and beaded and lacy, but Kitty said it would be a bit much."



cut it close

Idiom / informal expression

If you cut it close, you leave yourself only a very small amount of time or other margin before a limit or deadline.

Usage: *Especially common with time: We made the flight, but we cut it close.*

Context: "He always cuts it close, so I figure I'm fine being just five minutes early."



get something in your head

Idiomatic expression / conversational expression

If you get something in your head, you begin thinking or believing something and become focused on that idea, sometimes without a particularly strong reason.

Usage: *Common patterns: get it in your head that... / get an idea in your head.*

Context: "The night before Valentine's Day, I get it in my head that my card for Peter isn't enough and cherry turnovers would be a fantastic idea..."

SESSION 6: GRAMMAR IN USE

Softening What You Say

In conversational English, speakers often soften statements to show how certain, direct, or strongly committed they want to sound. Softening does not simply mean “being polite.” It can change the meaning of the message or how strongly the speaker presents it.

Compare:

- “That’s too much.”
- “I think that’s too much.”
- “I think that might be a bit much.”

Different softeners do different jobs

Language	What it usually does	Example
I think...	presents something as your opinion	“I think we need more time.”
I guess...	often presents a conclusion you are arriving at; it can also show reluctance or soften your stance	“Oh, I guess we actually have seven chapters this week, not six.”
probably	says something is likely	“She probably forgot.”
maybe / perhaps	introduces a possibility	“Perhaps she’s busy.”
might / might not	presents something as possible	“She might be busy.”
I’m not sure, but...	explicitly signals uncertainty	“I’m not sure, but I think we’re early.”
a little / a bit	reduces the force of an evaluation	“That’s a bit expensive.”
kind of	makes a description, feeling, or opinion less exact or less strong	“I’m kind of disappointed.”

*These are not exact degrees of certainty.
Context and tone also affect how certain or tentative a speaker sounds.*

Where do softening words go?

Probably – natural, common word order

- **After be:** “She is probably busy.”
- **After the first auxiliary in a positive sentence:** “She has probably forgotten.” / “They will probably arrive late.”
- **Before a negative auxiliary:** “She probably didn’t check her email.” / “They probably won’t arrive on time.”
- **Before a simple main verb:** “She probably forgot.”
- **Note:** “Probably she didn’t check her email” is also possible, but it is less common. For now, use the patterns above.

Maybe / Perhaps — a useful default

- **Put them at the beginning:** “Maybe she didn’t see it.” / “Perhaps she didn’t see it.”
- “She perhaps didn’t check her email” is possible, but it is less common in everyday English. For now, use “Perhaps she didn’t check her email.”

I think / I guess / I’m not sure

- **These naturally begin statements:**
 - ▶ “I think it’s too expensive.”
 - ▶ “I guess she’s busy.”
 - ▶ “I’m not sure, but we might need more time.”

A little / a bit

- **Keep them close to what they soften:**
 - ▶ “It’s a little expensive.” (NOT “It’s expensive a little.”)
 - ▶ “That’s a bit much.”
 - ▶ “He sounded a little annoyed.” (NOT “He sounded annoyed a little.”)

Kind of

- Put “kind of” close to the word or idea it softens: “It’s kind of expensive.” / “I kind of like it.” / “I kind of want to go.”

“Kind of” is especially useful when a feeling, description, or opinion is not completely strong or exact. In casual speech, it often sounds like “kinda,” but write “kind of.”

A closer look at I guess...

“I think” and “I guess” are not exact synonyms.

- “I think” usually presents your belief, opinion, or judgment.
- “I guess” often presents a conclusion you are arriving at rather than a straightforward assertion. Depending on the context and tone, it can also show uncertainty, a new realization, reluctance, or a softer stance.
- “I think we have six chapters this week.” → This is what I believe.
- “I thought we had six chapters. Then I checked again: Oh, I guess we actually have seven.” → I have just realized or concluded this from new information.

I guess is also common for a tentative conclusion:

- There’s no answer. “I guess they’re closed.” → This is the conclusion I’m arriving at, but I do not know for certain.

And “I guess so” often shows hesitant or reluctant acceptance:

- “We should probably leave now.” — “I guess so.” → I accept that, although I may not be enthusiastic.

IMPORTANT: “I guess” is not simply a less-certain version of “I think.”

Combining softeners

You can combine softeners when they do different jobs.

Language	What it softens
I think...	your stance: this is my judgment
might	your certainty: this is possible, not certain
a little / a bit	the strength of the evaluation
kind of	strength or precision: the description is less absolute

Example: "I think that might be a little too expensive."

Another example: "I guess that might be a bit too much."

More softening is not always better

- "I think that might be a little expensive." ✓
 - ▶ "I think" = shows this is your opinion, not a fact
 - ▶ "might" = shows you are not completely certain
 - ▶ "a little" = makes the negative description ("expensive") less strong
- "I guess that might be a bit too much." ✓
 - ▶ "I guess" = shows that this is the conclusion you are coming to
 - ▶ "might" = shows you are not completely certain
 - ▶ "a bit" = makes the criticism less strong
- "I'm not sure, but that might be too expensive." ✓
 - ▶ "I'm not sure, but..." tells us about the speaker's confidence in what they are about to say.
 - ▶ "might" presents the statement itself as a possibility.
- "Maybe I guess it might perhaps be a little expensive." ✗ **Whoa! Way too much softening. :)**
- "She might probably be busy." △ — **Usually avoid combining might and probably this way.**
- "Maybe she probably forgot." △ — **Usually avoid combining might and probably this way.**

*Combine expressions when they contribute different meanings.
Don't pile up several expressions that are doing essentially the same job.*

When should you soften?

Soften when the softer language matches what you actually mean or helps you manage the conversation.

- Show genuine uncertainty: "She might be busy."
- Present an opinion as an opinion: "I think this is the better option."
- Make criticism less strong: "That's a bit unfair."
- Show mixed or incomplete feelings: "I kind of like it."
- Disagree without making the conversation unnecessarily confrontational: "I see your point, but I think..."
- Make a boundary courteous while keeping it clear: "I'd rather not discuss that."

When should you NOT soften? (△ = grammatical, but not recommended here.)

Good communication does not mean softening everything. Sometimes clarity and confidence are more important.

State a fact clearly — *You know the appointment time:*

✓ “Your appointment is at 2:00.”

△ “I think your appointment is probably at 2:00.”

Unnecessary softening can make you sound unsure about something you actually know.

Make a clear request — *You need the report by Friday:*

✓ “Could you send me the report by Friday?”

△ “I was kind of wondering if maybe you could possibly send me the report by Friday.”

Too much softening can make a request harder to understand.

Keep an important boundary clear — *You do not want to discuss something personal:*

✓ “I’d rather not discuss that.”

△ “I guess I’d kind of rather not talk about that.”

You can soften the tone without making the boundary sound negotiable.

Give important instructions or safety information — *The instruction needs to be clear:*

✓ “Don’t take this medication with alcohol.”

△ “You might want to avoid alcohol when taking this medicine.”

Do not soften when uncertainty could change or confuse the message.

Choose language that matches what you know, what you mean, and the situation.

- If you are uncertain, show uncertainty.
- If you are expressing an opinion, you may want to show that it is your opinion.
- If you know something, say it clearly.
- If a boundary needs to be firm, keep the boundary clear.

SESSION 6: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GRAMMAR IN CONVERSATION

As you discuss, try softening your stance, certainty, or evaluation when that matches what you mean. You do not need to soften every statement.

1. Children Parenting Adults

Margot has strong feelings about the possibility of her father dating Ms. Rothschild, even though it is his relationship and she is living far from home. *When an adult child disagrees with a parent's choice, what role should the child have? What is the difference between having an opinion, giving advice, and trying to influence the decision?*

Language to use:

- "I think..."
- "I guess it might depend on..."
- "I can understand that, but..."
- "That's probably true, but..."
- "Although I understand that point, I see it differently."

2. "A Bit Much": How Strong Should You Say It?

Kitty thinks Lara Jean's elaborate Valentine's card would be "a bit much." *Why might she say a bit much instead of simply saying too much? When is it useful to soften a negative opinion, and when might being more direct be better?*

Language to notice. *Something to think about: Do these sentences sound equally certain? Do they communicate exactly the same attitude?*

- "That's too much."
- "I think that's too much."
- "I guess that's a little too much."
- "That might be a bit much."
- "I think that might be a bit much."
- "I'm not sure, but I think that might be a bit much."

3. Questions, Answers, and Privacy

Stormy asks Lara Jean questions because she wants personal information. Lara Jean realizes what Stormy is trying to find out and redirects the conversation. *Does asking someone a question mean that person has to answer it? How can you protect your privacy without sounding unnecessarily rude or defensive?*

Softening a boundary changes how you state the boundary. It does not have to weaken the boundary itself.

Decline:

- "I'd rather not get into that."
- "I'd prefer to keep that private."
- "I'm not really comfortable talking about that."

Give limited information:

- "I can tell you ____, but I'd rather not discuss ____."

Redirect:

- "Anyway, what about...?"
- "Actually, I wanted to ask you about..."

BOOK → LIFE → PRACTICE

In the Book: Kitty says Lara Jean's more elaborate Valentine would be "a bit much." Lara Jean also says "I guess" when she reluctantly accepts Kitty's point about using the craft supplies. In these chapters, characters often choose language that shows how strongly they want to state an opinion, judgment, or boundary.

Discuss: What can happen when your words sound more certain, more critical, or more direct than you intend? Can a statement become so *soft* that the listener no longer knows what you really mean?

Put It Into Practice: Work with a partner. Do **PART A** of situation first, then continue with **PART B**. For each situation, decide how strongly you want to speak. Give a response that matches your real communicative goal — certain, tentative, politely doubtful, or firm but softened.

Possible language: I think... • I guess... • probably • maybe / perhaps • might / might not • I'm not sure, but... • a little / a bit • I'd rather... • I'd prefer...

4. **PART A:** Your group wants to spend much more than planned on an event. You have concerns, but you are open to hearing the reasons.

PART B: Your partner pushes back or asks for more: "I know it costs more, but we only get one chance to do this well. It's worth it." You still have concerns, but you are open to a compromise.

Language to model: • "I can see why it matters to you, but I think that might be a bit much for our budget." • "That's probably true, but I'd like to see the numbers first." • "I'm not sure, but I think we could get a similar result for less." • "Could we find a middle option?"

5. **PART A:** A coworker offers an explanation for a problem. You think the explanation is possible, but you do not have enough evidence to be confident.

PART B: Your partner says: "I'm sure that's what happened. It's the only explanation that makes sense." You still do not have enough evidence to be confident.

Language to model: • "That's possible, but I'm not sure we have enough information yet." • "Perhaps you're right. Could we check the records first?" • "I think it's probably part of the problem, but there might be another explanation." • "I'm not sure, but I'd rather confirm it before we decide."

6. **PART A:** A friend asks a personal question you do not want to answer. Set a clear boundary without sounding hostile.

PART B: Your partner does not accept your answer and asks again: "Oh, come on, just tell me!" Keep your boundary clear without sounding hostile.

Language to model: • "I understand you're curious, but I'd rather not get into it." • "I'm not going to talk about that. Can we talk about something else?" • "I'm not comfortable discussing that, but I'm happy to talk about ____."

7. **PART A:** Someone suggests waiting before making a decision. You reluctantly agree that waiting may be sensible.

PART B: You agreed to wait. Your partner says: "Great, so you're fine with waiting until next month?" You accept, but you are not enthusiastic, and you want a clear point to decide.

Language to model: • "I guess so, but could we agree on a date to decide?" • "I guess we could hold off, but I'd like to check back in a couple of weeks." • "I'm okay with waiting, but I'm a little worried we might lose the chance." • "Let's see how it plays out, but let's set a deadline."

SESSION 6: PRACTICE QUESTIONS

GRAMMAR & COMMUNICATION

Bold expressions may come from this or an earlier Book Club session. Try to retrieve their meanings from memory and context.

Section A – What Does the Speaker Mean?

1. **You are enjoying a party, but your friends are ready to leave. One says, “We should probably go now.” You reply, “I guess so.” What does “I guess so” most likely communicate here?**
 - a. You strongly agree and are eager to leave.
 - b. You accept the suggestion, but you sound somewhat reluctant.
 - c. You are asking whether it is time to leave.
 - d. You are certain that everyone must leave.
2. **Which sentence presents something as likely, but not certain?**
 - a. She is definitely at home.
 - b. Perhaps she is at home.
 - c. She is probably at home.
 - d. d. She might be at home.
3. **Which sentence most clearly presents an explanation as only one possibility?**
 - a. Perhaps he missed the train.
 - b. He definitely missed the train.
 - c. He probably missed the train.
 - d. He missed the train.
4. **Which sentence softens the strength of a negative evaluation rather than the speaker’s certainty?**
 - a. I guess the price is high.
 - b. The price might be high.
 - c. Perhaps the price is high.
 - d. The price is a bit high.

Section B – Put the Softener in a Natural Position

Choose the sentence that uses the softening word or phrase in the most natural default position for everyday English.

5. **Which sentence follows the correct word order taught above for the word “probably”?**
 - a. Probably she didn’t check her email.
 - b. She didn’t probably check her email.
 - c. She probably didn’t check her email.
 - d. She didn’t check probably her email.
6. **Which sentence follows the default position pattern taught above for “perhaps”?**
 - a. She perhaps didn’t see the message.
 - b. Perhaps she didn’t see the message.
 - c. She didn’t perhaps see the message.
 - d. She didn’t see perhaps the message.

7. Which sentence follows the default position pattern taught above for “probably” with be?
- a. She probably is busy today.
 - b. Probably she busy is today.
 - c. She busy probably is today.
 - d. She is probably busy today.
8. Which sentence follows the default position pattern taught above for “probably” with an auxiliary?
- a. They have probably forgotten the appointment.
 - b. They probably have forgotten the appointment.
 - c. They have forgotten probably the appointment.
 - d. Probably they forgotten have the appointment.

Section C – Combine Softening Naturally

9. You think a plan may cost too much, but you are not strongly opposed to it. Which response expresses a tentative opinion without piling up unnecessary softeners?
- a. That plan is too expensive.
 - b. Maybe I guess that plan might perhaps be expensive.
 - c. I think that plan might be a little too expensive.
 - d. That plan definitely cannot work.
10. You see that Maria’s office is dark and her car is gone. Which sentence most naturally presents “she went home” as a conclusion you are arriving at, while leaving it as a possibility?
- a. I guess Maria might have gone home.
 - b. I guess Maria probably might have gone home.
 - c. Maybe I guess Maria is probably gone home.
 - d. Maria definitely might have gone home.
11. You think the decorations may be more elaborate than necessary. Which sentence naturally softens both your certainty and the evaluation?
- a. The decorations are too much.
 - b. Perhaps the decorations definitely are too much.
 - c. The decorations probably might be much.
 - d. I think the decorations might be a bit much.
12. You believe waiting is probably sensible, although you are not enthusiastic about it. Which response most naturally expresses hesitant acceptance?
- a. I absolutely want to wait.
 - b. I guess we could just **wait and see**.
 - c. Maybe I guess perhaps we should wait.
 - d. We definitely must wait.

Section D — Session 6 Vocabulary: Use the Expression in a New Context

Choose from the expressions below. Each expression is used once. Change pronouns or verb forms when necessary.

cut it close • a late bloomer • take it out on someone • play out • a bit much • break the news to someone • get something in your head • out of spite • hold off • take the lead • hold something against someone • weigh in on something

13. We don't have enough information yet. Let's _____ on making a decision until the test results come back.
14. Everyone had offered an opinion except Mei, so the chair asked her to _____ before the committee voted.
15. I know you're frustrated about work, but please don't _____ your family.
16. Daniel made a mistake during his first week, but his manager didn't _____ him later.
17. I hate to _____ her, but the position has already been filled.
18. We reached the airport only a few minutes before boarding ended. We really _____.
19. Nobody knows whether the two companies will reach an agreement. We'll have to see how the negotiations _____.
20. Sofia discovered painting when she was nearly fifty and jokes that she is _____.
21. Once my father _____ that he wanted to learn Italian, he practiced every day.
22. No one wanted to organize the neighborhood event, so Rosa offered to _____.
23. Sending twenty follow-up emails in two days seems _____.
24. After their argument, Leo deliberately excluded his coworker from the invitation _____.

Section E — Recycled Grammar & Vocabulary

25. **Your friend says, "Nadia didn't invite me because she's angry with me." You know there could be several explanations. Which response avoids claiming more than you know?**
 - a. She definitely isn't angry with you.
 - b. She might not have invited you for a completely different reason.
 - c. Nadia forgot to invite you.
 - d. She is trying to get a rise out of you.
26. **You are speaking to a receptionist you do not know. Which sentence correctly uses an indirect question?**
 - a. Could you tell me what time does the office close?
 - b. Do you know what time is the office closing?
 - c. Could you tell me what time the office closes?
 - d. Could you tell me what time does close the office?
27. **A restaurant made a mistake, but the server apologized and fixed it immediately. You want to acknowledge the mistake before giving a contrasting view. Which response does that correctly?**
 - a. Even though they made a mistake, I think we can put it behind us.
 - b. Even though they made a mistake, but I think we can put it behind us.
 - c. Because they made a mistake, I think we can put it behind us.
 - d. They made a mistake, so although we can put it behind us.

28. You are exhausted after volunteering for several events. A friend suggests that you organize another event next week. Which response gives softened advice to wait before agreeing?
- a. You must stop volunteering.
 - b. You should never help them again.
 - c. You need to get it together.
 - d. You might want to hold off before agreeing to anything else.

Section F — Change the Strength

Rewrite each statement so that it matches the communicative goal. More than one natural answer may be possible.

29. The plan is too expensive. You believe this, but you want to present it as your opinion rather than as an absolute fact.

30. The plan is too expensive. You have some concern about the price, but you are not strongly opposed. Use more than one softener naturally.

31. She forgot the meeting. You think this is likely, but you do not know for certain.

32. That question is too personal. You want to set a clear boundary without sounding hostile.

SESSION 6: PRACTICE QUESTIONS – ANSWERS

GRAMMAR – WITH ANSWERS

Section A – What Does the Speaker Mean?

1. b – You accept the suggestion, but you sound somewhat reluctant.
2. c – She is probably at home.
3. a – Perhaps he missed the train.
4. d – The price is a bit high.

Section B – Natural Position

5. c – She probably didn't check her email.
6. b – Perhaps she didn't see the message.
7. d – She is probably busy today.
8. a – They have probably forgotten the appointment.

Section C – Combine Softening Naturally

9. c – I think that plan might be a little too expensive.
10. a – I guess Maria might have gone home.
11. d – I think the decorations might be a bit much.
12. b – I guess we could just wait and see.

Section D – Session 6 Vocabulary

13. hold off
14. weigh in
15. take it out on
16. hold it against
17. break the news to
18. cut it close
19. play out
20. a late bloomer
21. got it in his head
22. take the lead
23. a bit much
24. out of spite

Section E – Recycled Grammar & Vocabulary

25. b – She might not have invited you for a completely different reason.
26. c – Could you tell me what time the office closes?
27. a – Even though they made a mistake, I think we can put it behind us.
28. d – You might want to wait a few days before agreeing to anything else.

Section F – Sample Answers

29. I think the plan is too expensive.
30. I think the plan might be a little too expensive.
31. She probably forgot the meeting.
32. I'd rather not answer that. / I'd prefer to keep that private.