



## CHAPTER 1

# Day One

CEFR B1–B2 • Startup Culture • Austin, Texas

Jargon: runway • burn rate • MVP • deck • seed round • pivot • scale • disrupt • traction • unicorn

Grammar: Modals for possibility and certainty — will, might, could, may, should

Culture: Flat hierarchies and first-name culture in American startups

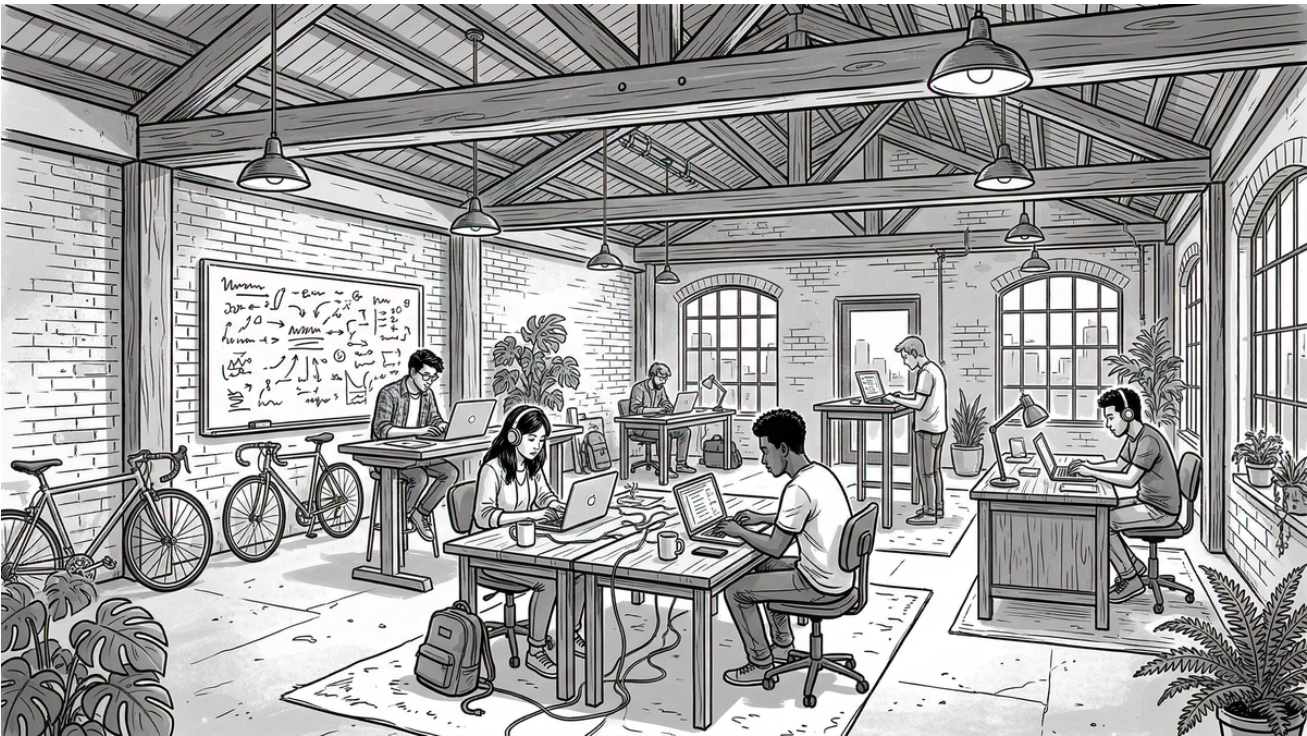
## PART 1 — The Story

# Day One

The Uber dropped Zara Okafor in front of a building that looked like it had given up being a warehouse and hadn't quite decided what to become next. A hand-painted sign above the roll-up door read StackRight in blue spray paint, and beneath it someone had added in smaller letters: "We're disrupting everything. Don't worry about it."

She had her laptop bag on one shoulder and a cold brew in her hand. It was 8:47 a.m. and already eighty-two degrees in Austin.

Inside, the space was enormous and mostly empty in the way that expensive emptiness looks in tech company photos — exposed brick, high ceilings, mismatched furniture arranged to look accidentally cool. Seven or eight people were scattered around, most of them in their mid-to-late twenties, most of them staring at screens. Nobody looked up.



The StackRight workspace: a converted warehouse in East Austin.

"Zara?" A young man with curly red hair and a UT hoodie materialized from behind a standing desk. "I'm Lena's assistant. Well — I'm the only assistant, so technically I'm the assistant. I'm Marco." He shook her hand. "We're super pumped to have you. Lena's on a call with the investors in Singapore but she'll be out in, I don't know, twenty minutes? Maybe

forty? Come sit."

Marco gave her a tour that lasted six minutes and covered: the kitchen (one espresso machine, one rule – don't break it), the conference room ("We call it The Fishbowl – everyone can see in, the glass doesn't actually reduce sound at all, great design choice"), the standing desks, and a whiteboard the length of one wall covered in calculations and what appeared to be motivational phrases written in red marker.

One phrase was circled twice:



The whiteboard Zara notices on her first morning.

"What does that mean?" Zara asked, pointing.

Marco glanced at it. "Our runway. That's how long we can operate before we run out of cash – assuming our current burn rate. Lena thinks we'll get to the next round before that happens, but it keeps everyone, you know." He made a focused, slightly terrified expression.

"Motivated," Zara offered.

"Exactly."



Lena Vasquez, StackRight's founder, exits the Fishbowl.

A woman burst through the glass door of the Fishbowl like someone who moved through spaces faster than spaces expected. Lena Vasquez was thirty-one, Stanford MBA, former product manager at a Series B logistics company in San Francisco that had failed spectacularly and made her locally famous for it. She was wearing a blazer over a t-shirt that read "Ship It."

"Zara." She shook hands once, firmly. "Good. You're here. Here's where we are: we have eleven weeks before we present to the lead investor in our seed round. Right now our deck is what I would describe as honest, which is another way of saying not compelling. I need you on this. I'll walk you through the MVP this afternoon. Have you used Figma before?"

"I've used Canva—"

"Close enough." Lena was already moving. "We have \$420,000 left in the bank. Our burn rate is roughly \$68,000 a month. That gives us just over six months. The seed round closes, or we pivot hard. I'm going with door number one." She turned and looked at Zara with the focused attention of someone who had learned to assess people very quickly. "I read your writing samples. You're clear. You explain things well. That's actually what this company

needs right now — someone who can take what we've built and make it make sense to people who write checks."

Zara looked around the open floor — at the whiteboards, the mismatched chairs, the six engineers who still hadn't looked up — and thought: I have no idea how to do this. I'm going to figure out how to do this.

"When do we start?" she asked.

Lena smiled. "We started the minute you walked in."

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That afternoon, Lena called the whole team over — all eight of them — to run through what she called "the pitch in its current state." She stood at the whiteboard, no slides, no notes.

"Watch this," Marco whispered to Zara. "She does this to feel it."

Lena took a breath and began.

#### Lena's Model Pitch

*"Every year, small businesses in the U.S. lose an estimated \$37 billion because their teams can't communicate project status in real time. The tools that exist were built for enterprise — they're too expensive, too complex, and too slow to scale down.*

*StackRight is a lightweight project communication platform built specifically for teams of two to twenty. We've built the MVP, we've run a pilot with six businesses here in Austin, and we're seeing strong traction — a 78% weekly active user rate in month one.*

*We're raising \$600,000 in our seed round to extend our runway, hire two engineers, and begin our go-to-market push in three cities. If this works the way our pilot suggests it will, we believe StackRight could scale to 50,000 users within eighteen months."*

Nobody spoke for a moment. Then one of the engineers started clapping, and the others joined in.

Zara had been taking notes. She looked down at her page. She had written: runway. seed round. MVP. traction. scale. Every word Lena had used — she'd heard them all that morning. Now she understood why they mattered.

### Comprehension Check

1. What is Zara's first impression of the StackRight office?
2. What does Marco explain about the whiteboard message?
3. Why does Lena say the current deck is "honest" but "not compelling"?
4. What does Lena's pitch tell you about StackRight's product and situation?
5. Why do you think Zara writes down the five jargon words at the end?

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## PART 2 — Jargon Focus

### The Language of Startups: 10 Essential Terms

The words below are the basic vocabulary of startup life. You encountered most of them in today's story. Each term has a specific meaning in the startup world — sometimes quite different from everyday English.

#### 1. runway

noun

How long a company can continue operating before running out of money.

"18 months of runway left. Act accordingly."

Note: Think of an airplane runway — it has a fixed length. When it ends, you either take off (raise more funding) or stop.

#### 2. burn rate

noun

How much money a company spends each month to operate.

"Our burn rate is roughly \$68,000 a month."

Note: Register note: Used openly inside a company. In a formal investor presentation, you might say 'monthly operating expenditure' — same idea, more formal.

#### 3. MVP

noun — Minimum Viable Product

The simplest version of a product that can be shown or sold to early users.

"I'll walk you through the MVP this afternoon."

Note: Not 'Most Valuable Player.' The logic: build the minimum version first, learn from real users, then improve it.

#### 4. deck

noun

A pitch deck — a slide presentation used to present your company to investors.

"Our deck is what I would describe as honest, which is another way of saying not compelling."

Note: Deck is always informal. In a formal written document you might say 'investor presentation,' but in conversation, everyone says deck.

## 5. seed round

noun

The first significant round of external funding a startup raises.

"We have eleven weeks before we present to the lead investor in our seed round."

Note: Funding stages typically go: pre-seed → seed → Series A → Series B → IPO. Seed is early — the company is still proving itself.

## 6. pivot

verb / noun

To significantly change your product, strategy, or target market in response to what isn't working.

"The seed round closes, or we pivot hard."

Note: Originally a basketball term. A pivot keeps one foot planted (your team, your tech) while changing direction entirely.

## 7. scale / scaling

verb

To grow a company rapidly — expanding to many more customers without proportionally increasing costs.

"We believe StackRight could scale to 50,000 users within eighteen months."

Note: Scaling is the goal. A business that needs 10× the staff for 10× the customers does not scale well.

## 8. disrupt / disruption

verb / noun

To radically change an industry by introducing a new product or model that replaces existing ones.

"We're disrupting everything. Don't worry about it."

Note: Heavily overused in startup culture. Used seriously by founders; used ironically by many observers. The sign outside StackRight is both a joke and sincere.

## 9. traction

noun

Evidence that your product is working — users signing up, revenue growing, engagement increasing.

"We're seeing strong traction — a 78% weekly active user rate in month one."

Note: Investors love this word. It means: real proof, not just a good idea.

## 10. unicorn

noun

A privately held startup valued at \$1 billion or more.

"Every founder dreams of building a unicorn."

Note: The term was coined in 2013 to signal rarity. Today there are hundreds of unicorns globally, which some argue changes the word's meaning.

### Usage Task A — Vocabulary in Context

Word Bank:

burn rate, deck, MVP, pivot, runway, scale, seed round, traction, unicorn, disrupt

Match each sentence to the correct term from the word bank. Write the term in the blank.

1. "We've got about nine months before we need another investment — after that, we're done." → \_\_\_\_\_
2. "We changed our whole strategy after realizing small businesses weren't interested." → \_\_\_\_\_
3. "We only built the basic version first — just enough to test whether people want it." → \_\_\_\_\_
4. "We're spending about \$55,000 every month just to keep operating." → \_\_\_\_\_
5. "Our investor presentation needs to be completely redesigned." → \_\_\_\_\_
6. "We're seeing real users coming back every week — that's the proof we needed." → \_\_\_\_\_
7. "If this model works for 500 customers, it should work for 500,000." → \_\_\_\_\_
8. "They completely changed how people think about hotel bookings — nobody saw it coming." → \_\_\_\_\_

### Usage Task B — Paragraph Gap Fill

Word Bank:

burn rate, deck, MVP, pivot, runway, seed round, scale, traction, unicorn

Fill in the blanks in both paragraphs using words from the word bank. Each word is used once.

Paragraph 1 — A founder's blog post:

My name is Jordan Cole, and six months ago I co-founded a company that tracks food waste in restaurant kitchens. We built our \_\_\_\_\_ (1) in eight weeks — just the core feature, nothing fancy — and started testing it with three local restaurants in Denver. The feedback was good, but our \_\_\_\_\_ (2) was already under twelve months, and our \_\_\_\_\_ (3) was climbing fast: \$41,000 a month and rising. We knew we had to move quickly. After our early results showed real \_\_\_\_\_ (4) — restaurants were actually changing their ordering habits — we decided to take the next step and raise a \_\_\_\_\_ (5) to bring on two engineers and push the product further.

Paragraph 2 — An email to an investor:

Subject: StackRight Update — Q3 Hi Elena, Quick update before our call Thursday. We've had to make some hard decisions this quarter. After our first product didn't get enough adoption, we decided to \_\_\_\_\_ (6) — we're now focused exclusively on the logistics sector rather than general small business. The new \_\_\_\_\_ (7) we've been showing investors has been getting a much stronger reaction. We genuinely believe this product has the potential to \_\_\_\_\_ (8) nationally within two years. If things continue at this rate, some people in the space are even saying we have a shot at becoming a \_\_\_\_\_ (9) — though we're trying to stay focused on the fundamentals for now. Best, Lena

Usage Task C — Register Practice

The same idea, different contexts. Rewrite each sentence for the context shown.

1. Original (casual standup): "Our burn rate is killing us."

Rewrite (investor meeting): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Original (investor meeting): "We are experiencing promising early-stage traction."

Rewrite (casual standup): \_\_\_\_\_

3. Original (casual): "We need to pivot."

Rewrite (written investor memo): \_\_\_\_\_

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## PART 3 — Pronunciation Focus

### 10 Key Phrases: Stress, Sound & Usage

In startup conversations, these phrases appear constantly. Knowing how to pronounce them clearly and naturally makes a strong first impression. Stressed syllables are shown in **BOLD CAPITALS**. IPA notation is included where a sound is particularly tricky for non-native speakers.

#### 1. runway

**RUN-way** /ˈrʌn.weɪ/

Two equal syllables, but the first carries the stress. The vowel in RUN is /ʌ/ — like the 'u' in 'cup,' not 'moon.' Don't say 'ROON-way.'

*Culture: Cultural: Said quickly and casually in standups — 'How's the runway?' not 'How is the runway looking currently?'*

#### 2. burn rate

**BURN rate** /ˈbɜːrn reɪt/

Treat it as a compound noun: primary stress on BURN, lighter stress on 'rate.' The 'ur' sound in BURN is /ɜːr/ — same vowel as 'word' or 'first.'

*Culture: Cultural: Founders say this matter-of-factly, not anxiously. Showing alarm about burn rate in a pitch signals weakness.*

#### 3. MVP (em-vee-PEE)

**em - vee - PEE** /,em viː ˈpiː/

Always pronounced as three letters: M-V-P. Never say 'Minimum Viable Product' in conversation — use the abbreviation. Stress falls on the final letter: em-vee-PEE.

*Culture: Cultural: 'Ship the MVP' is a startup mantra. It signals pragmatism over perfectionism — a cultural value.*

#### 4. seed round

**SEED round** /ˈsiːd raʊnd/

SEED carries the main stress. The 'ee' in SEED is a long /iː/ sound. Round is unstressed. Don't over-stress 'round.'

*Culture: Cultural: 'Seed' (like a seed planted in the ground) is a deliberate metaphor — early investment that hopefully grows.*

## 5. pitch (the pitch / to pitch)

### PITCH /pɪtʃ/

Short vowel /ɪ/ — like 'bit' or 'sit.' Not /i:/ (as in 'beach'). The final /tʃ/ is clear and sharp.

*Culture: Cultural: 'To pitch' is a verb and a noun. 'She pitched the investors.' / 'The pitch went well.' Both are common.*

## 6. traction

### TRAC-tion /'træk.ʃən/

Stress on TRAC. The 'a' is /æ/ — like 'trap' or 'cat.' The ending '-tion' is reduced: /ʃən/, not 'shee-on.'

*Culture: Cultural: Saying 'we're getting traction' in a pitch is a positive signal. Quantify it when possible: 'We're seeing traction – 40% week-over-week growth.'*

## 7. pivot

### PI-vot /'pɪv.ət/

Stress firmly on PI. The second syllable is completely reduced to a schwa: /'pɪv.ət/. Don't stress the second syllable.

*Culture: Cultural: 'Pivot' has become a badge of resilience in startup culture. Famous pivots – Slack, Instagram, YouTube – are celebrated.*

## 8. scale / to scale

### SCALE /skeɪl/

One syllable. The vowel is a diphthong: /eɪ/ — like 'fail' or 'mail.' 'This doesn't scale' = a complete, common sentence in startup English.

*Culture: Cultural: 'Does it scale?' is one of the most frequently asked investor questions. It means: can this grow without proportionally growing costs?*

## 9. disrupt / disruption

### dis-RUPT /dɪs'rʌpt/ | dis-RUP-tion /dɪs'rʌp.ʃən/

In the verb 'disrupt,' stress is on the SECOND syllable: dis-RUPT. In the noun 'disruption,' stress stays on the second syllable: dis-RUP-tion.

*Culture: Cultural: 'Disruptive' is used so often it has lost much of its force. Experienced investors may roll their eyes. Avoid overusing it.*

## 10. unicorn

U-ni-corn /'ju:.nɪ.kɔ:rn/

Three syllables. Stress on U. The first vowel is /ju:/ — like 'you.' The final syllable '-corn' has an /ɔ:r/ sound — like 'corn' or 'born.'

*Culture: Cultural: Calling your own company a 'future unicorn' in a pitch is risky — it can sound arrogant. Better to let investors use the word.*

### Pronunciation Practice Task

Read Lena's model pitch aloud from Part 1 (page 4). Focus on the five jargon words that appear in the pitch: runway, seed round, MVP, traction, scale.

Then say each of the 10 phrases to a partner. Your partner marks whether your stress pattern sounds natural. Switch roles and compare. Which sounds gave you the most difficulty?

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## PART 4 – Grammar Focus

### Modals for Possibility: could, might, may, will

#### Noticing Task

Read these sentences from the story. Pay attention to the words in bold.

1. "Lena's on a call — she **will** be out in twenty minutes? Maybe forty?"
2. "I'm going with door number one."
3. "The seed round closes, or we **pivot** hard."

Which sentence expresses certainty? Which expresses possibility? Which shows the speaker is not completely sure?

What do you notice?

When someone is certain about the future:	<b>will + base verb</b>	"She <b>will</b> be there."
When someone is not certain — estimating:	<b>might / may / could + base verb</b>	"She <b>might</b> be out in twenty minutes."
When making a decision right now:	<b>going to or simple present</b>	"I'm <b>going</b> with door one."

#### The Certainty Scale

Expression	Certainty Level	Example
<b>will definitely</b>	Very high (almost certain)	"We <b>will</b> close this round."
<b>will</b>	High confidence	"This <b>will</b> work."
<b>should</b>	Expected / likely	"We <b>should</b> hit that target."
<b>may</b>	Neutral possibility	"This <b>may</b> take longer than expected."
<b>might</b>	Lower possibility	"We <b>might</b> need to pivot."
<b>could</b>	Open possibility	"This <b>could</b> be a problem."

## Controlled Practice

Choose the correct modal for each context. Sometimes more than one answer is possible — be ready to explain your choice.

1. Lena states this as a financial fact: "We \_\_\_\_\_ (will / might) run out of money in six months if we don't close this round."
2. A developer is unsure about a deadline: "The feature \_\_\_\_\_ (will / could) be ready by Friday — I'm not 100% sure yet."
3. Zara is reassuring Lena after a strong meeting: "That \_\_\_\_\_ (might / will) really help our chances with the lead investor."
4. Marco is speculating about an investor's reaction: "She \_\_\_\_\_ (might / will) ask about our burn rate — I've heard she always does."

### Communicative Task: The Uncertainty Game

In startup pitches, speakers must balance confidence with honesty. Too certain = you look naive. Too uncertain = you sound weak.

With a partner, take turns making pitch statements. Your partner decides whether the statement sounds appropriately confident.

"We will have 10,000 users by June." → Too bold? Or good confidence?

"This could potentially maybe be useful to some customers..." → Too weak?

Write three pitch sentences of your own — one with will, one with might, one with could.

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## PART 5 – Listening

### The Office Tour: Marco Explains Everything

#### Before You Listen

1. What do you think a new employee's first day in a startup looks like? What might be different from a traditional company?
2. Marco is going to give Zara an informal orientation. What topics do you think he'll cover?

You will hear Marco give Zara an informal orientation on her first afternoon at StackRight. He speaks quickly and casually — this is real office speech, not a formal presentation. Listen carefully for the startup vocabulary from Part 2.

#### Listening Task 1 – First Listen: Main Ideas

Listen once. Circle the topics Marco covers.

- A. How the company makes money
- B. The current runway situation
- C. Why the last product failed
- D. What the MVP does
- E. Startup funding stages
- F. The office culture and rules
- G. What happened to the previous employee in Zara's role
- H. How the team feels about the upcoming investor meeting

#### Listening Task 2 – Second Listen: Detail Questions

Listen again. Answer in full sentences.

1. According to Marco, how many months of runway does StackRight currently have?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the monthly burn rate Marco mentions?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What does Marco say about the previous person who had Zara's job?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What startup does Marco use as an example of a successful pivot?  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What does Marco say about Lena that he wouldn't say in front of her?

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### Listening Task 3 – Language Focus

Listen a third time to the section where Marco talks about the investor meeting. Write down three sentences Marco uses that include a modal verb (will, might, could, may, should). For each sentence, say whether Marco sounds certain or uncertain.

Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_ Certainty level: \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_ Certainty level: \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_ Certainty level: \_\_\_\_\_

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## PART 6 – Cultural Lens

### "Everyone's on a First-Name Basis Here"

Walk into most American startup offices and you'll notice something immediately: nobody has a visible title. The CEO might be sitting at a folding table next to the newest intern. The engineering lead might be wearing sandals and eating cereal at 2 p.m. People interrupt each other – and apologize for it – but then do it again. And everyone, without exception, goes by their first name.

This is not an accident. American startup culture deliberately flattens hierarchy – or at least performs flatness. The idea is that the best ideas should come from anyone, that rank shouldn't filter communication, and that speed requires everyone to speak directly. Lena doesn't introduce herself as 'Ms. Vasquez.' She doesn't wait for Zara to prove herself through six months of formal apprenticeship. She hands her a real problem on the first day.

There's genuine value in this approach. People feel heard. Decisions can happen fast. Creative people flourish when they don't have to ask permission for every idea.

But there are also tensions that the culture rarely admits to. Flat hierarchies still have power – it's just less visible. Someone decides who gets promoted, who gets equity, whose 'idea' gets credited. The informal first-name culture can mask real inequalities, especially for people who come from cultures where directness reads as aggression or where formality signals respect.

For non-American employees and new graduates alike, decoding the unwritten rules of this culture takes time. Zara will spend much of this book doing exactly that.

#### Discussion Questions

1. In your own culture or work experience, how is hierarchy usually communicated? (Titles? Forms of address? Office location?)
2. What are the advantages of a flat hierarchy in a fast-moving company? What are the risks?
3. Lena hands Zara a real, high-stakes problem on her first day. How would you feel in Zara's position? Is this typical in workplaces you know?
4. The text says flat hierarchies 'perform flatness' — meaning the equality is partly an image. Do you agree? Can you think of examples?

## PART 7 – Skills Task

### The Daily Standup: Introducing Yourself to the Team

**Context**  
It is Zara's first daily standup. Lena asks everyone to introduce themselves briefly and say one thing they're working on and one thing they're uncertain about. Zara has never participated in a standup before. She has 90 seconds.

#### Your Task

Write Zara's standup introduction. It should include:

- A brief self-introduction (who she is, what her role is)
- One thing she's going to focus on this week (use: will / going to)
- One thing she's not sure about yet (use: might / could / may)
- One genuine question for the team

Target length: 120–150 words

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**Extension – Speaking**  
Deliver your version of Zara's standup to a partner or small group. Time yourself — stay under 90 seconds. Partners give feedback: Did she sound confident? Was the uncertain part too weak or appropriately honest?

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## PART 8 – Reflection & Self-Assessment

### Can I...?

Explain what runway and burn rate mean in a startup context

Use will, might, could, and may to show different levels of certainty

Describe one difference between American startup hierarchy and hierarchy in another culture I know

Pronounce runway, MVP, traction, and pivot with correct stress

Write a short professional self-introduction using the grammar from this chapter

Reflection prompt (optional writing extension): Think about the first day of a job, a class, or a new situation you've experienced. What did you understand immediately — and what took you time to figure out? Write 80–100 words.

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## TEACHER'S NOTES — Chapter 1: Day One

### Answer Keys

#### Comprehension Check (Part 1):

1. Enormous, mostly empty, exposed brick — impressive but slightly chaotic. No one looked up.
2. It shows how long the company can operate before running out of money, based on their burn rate.
3. It tells the true financial story but doesn't tell it in a way that makes investors want to invest.
4. It's a project communication tool for small teams; they've built an MVP and shown early traction with Austin businesses.
5. Because those five words are the language of the world she's now part of — she's beginning to understand the vocabulary.

#### Task A (sentence matching):

1. runway 2. pivot 3. MVP 4. burn rate 5. deck 6. traction 7. scale 8. disrupt

#### Task B (paragraph gap fill):

Paragraph 1: (1) MVP (2) runway (3) burn rate (4) traction (5) seed round

Paragraph 2: (6) pivot (7) deck (8) scale (9) unicorn

#### Task C (register practice — sample answers):

1. "Our monthly expenditure is placing significant pressure on our remaining capital."
2. "People are actually starting to use it." / "We're getting real users coming back."
3. "We are considering a strategic shift in our core product direction."

#### Grammar Controlled Practice:

1. will (Lena states this as a financial fact, not a guess)
2. could (the developer expresses genuine uncertainty)
3. will (reassurance — encourages confident framing); might also acceptable if context reads cautiously
4. might (speculation about someone else's behavior)

### Listening Answers

#### Task 1 (main ideas — topics Marco covers):

B, D, F, G, H (Note: Marco does not cover A, C, or E)

#### Task 2 (detail answers):

1. Approximately six months (based on \$68,000/month burn rate).
2. \$68,000 per month.
3. He left after three weeks — the pressure was too much and he didn't understand the product.

4. He mentions Instagram, which pivoted from a location check-in app to a photo-sharing platform.
5. He says Lena is "actually really good at this" — meaning the pitch — though she rarely shows it externally.

**Task 3 (modal sentences — examples from the script):**

"This could be the round that changes everything." — uncertain (optimistic hope)

"She will definitely ask about the burn rate." — certain

"We might have to extend the timeline if the demo doesn't land." — lower possibility

## Listening Script — 'The Office Tour'

Approximate length: 2 minutes 10 seconds at natural pace. Record with one voice (Marco) — casual, quick, slightly breathless. Recommend slight Austin accent if possible, or neutral American. Pause briefly between the three sections.

### SECTION 1 — The Office

"Okay, so — welcome, officially. I know Lena gave you the thirty-second version, so let me give you the real version.

This place is organized chaos, and I mean that as a compliment. We don't have HR, we don't really have job descriptions, and the espresso machine is basically the entire wellness program.

The important stuff: there are eight of us. Six engineers, me — I handle everything that isn't engineering — and now you. You're the first non-technical hire since Lena herself. That's either exciting or terrifying, depending on how you look at it.

The last person in your role lasted three weeks. Not because Lena is hard to work for — she's actually great — but because he didn't understand the product. Like, at all. He kept calling it a 'project management tool,' and that's not what we are. We're a communication layer. There's a difference. Lena will explain it better than I can.

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### SECTION 2 — The Numbers

So here's the real situation. We have about six months of runway left. Our burn rate is \$68,000 a month, which sounds like a lot, but honestly, for a team this size in Austin, it's pretty lean. San Francisco teams burn twice that.

The seed round — that's the \$600,000 we're trying to raise — that's what extends the runway and lets us hire two more engineers. We've got an MVP that works. We've got six businesses who've been using it for a month and actually keep coming back, which is the traction part. Seventy-eight percent weekly active users. That number is really good, by the way. Lena doesn't brag about it enough.

The investor meeting is in eleven weeks. If that goes well, we're set for the next twelve months and we start to scale. If it doesn't — and I'm not saying it won't, but if it doesn't — we pivot. Lena already has a pivot plan. She's got three of them, actually. She's that kind of person.

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### SECTION 3 — The Culture

Last thing — and this is important. There's no hierarchy here. I mean there is — Lena is the boss, obviously — but she doesn't act like it. She'll sit next to you, she'll ask what you think, she'll actually change her mind if you make a good argument. I've seen it happen.

Call her Lena. Not 'Ms. Vasquez,' not 'Lena, ma'am' — just Lena. Same for everyone. It might feel weird at first, especially if you're used to a more formal environment, but you'll get used to it.

The investor meeting — you're going to be in the room. Lena wants you in the room. This could be the meeting that changes everything for us. Or it might not land perfectly the first time, and we adjust. Either way, you should be there.

Any questions? No? Great. Coffee's in the kitchen. Don't touch the espresso machine until Marco shows you how. That's me. I'll show you after lunch."

## Timing Guide

Section	Suggested Time
Part 1 — Story (silent read + comprehension check)	15–20 min
Part 2 — Jargon Focus (Tasks A, B, C)	25–30 min
Part 3 — Pronunciation Focus	15 min
Part 4 — Grammar Focus (noticing + practice)	25 min
Part 5 — Listening (3 tasks)	25–30 min
Part 6 — Cultural Lens + discussion	15–20 min
Part 7 — Skills Task (writing + optional speaking)	20–25 min
Part 8 — Self-assessment	5 min
Total	~145–165 min

Recommended across three 55-minute sessions or two extended 80-minute blocks.

## Teaching Notes

Story section: Before students read, write '18 months of runway left. Act accordingly.' on the board. Ask: 'What do you think this means?' Let students speculate — then read to find out. After the reading, ask students to re-read Lena's model pitch and identify which jargon words from Part 2 appear in it. This creates a bridge between the story and the vocabulary section.

Task B (paragraph gap fill): The two-paragraph format tests recognition across genres. Paragraph 1 (blog post) is informal-reflective; Paragraph 2 (email) is professional-urgent. Alert students that the register shifts between paragraphs. After completing the fill, ask: 'Which paragraph sounds more formal? Which words signal that?'

Task C (register): This is the most important exercise in the chapter. Monitor for students who paraphrase only the nouns but not the register. The shift from 'our burn rate is killing us' to investor-appropriate language requires thinking about audience and relationship, not just vocabulary.

Pronunciation: Play the listening recording before the pronunciation section if possible — students can hear the stress patterns modeled by Marco. Then use the pronunciation boxes as a reference rather than a new input.

Listening: Task 1 is intentionally slightly tricky — topics C and E are not covered, but students may expect them. Use this as a discussion point: what did Marco choose NOT to explain, and why? Task 3 (modal sentences) should be done after the Grammar Focus section if time allows.

Cultural Lens: For a multicultural class, the discussion questions work very well. For a monolingual class, ask students to research one famous startup (Airbnb, Slack, Stripe) and find examples of how that company talks about its culture publicly — does it match what this note describes?

Skills Task: If doing the speaking extension, record students (phone is fine). Playing back even 20 seconds of their own delivery is highly effective for noticing uncertainty markers (um, hedging overuse, trailing off).

## Differentiation

B1 support: Provide sentence starters for the standup task: 'Hi, I'm..., I'll be focusing on..., I'm not sure yet whether..., My question for the team is...'

B2 extension: Ask students to write a second version of Zara's standup where she sounds overconfident. Compare the two versions. Which sounds more trustworthy and why?

Pronunciation support: For students with particular difficulty, have them record themselves saying each term and compare to a dictionary audio model before the partner practice.