

THE

Business English Training

# Language Key

## WHAT'S INSIDE

- ⇒ Starting emails well, common errors and key phrases
- ⇒ When to use the passive voice in writing
- ⇒ Signposting business presentations
- ⇒ Presentation survival English
- ⇒ Welcoming business visitors
- ⇒ Business English tips
- ⇒ Dr English Q&A
- ⇒ Puzzles and fun



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# THE Language Key

## Welcome Back!

to enhancing your business English and communication skills.....

Dear Readers

Welcome to the first issue of The Language Key, a business English training publication for Hong Kong learners of English.

Published quarterly, The Language Key includes short articles and features on various aspects of business English. The aim of the magazine is to encourage learners to develop and improve their English for the workplace.

The Language Key is free for Hong Kong companies. As free copies are limited, however, we would advise co-ordinators to place the copies in areas where as many staff as possible can access them such as in reception areas and training departments. If you're interested in receiving extra copies for your company, please call us.

The Language Key magazine was first published in Hong Kong between 1994 and 2005. 120+ monthly issues were published during this period. When internet access became widely available, the magazine evolved into the global online training platform, Workplace English Training E-Platform (WETE). WETE continues to offer in-depth interactive training in all areas of business English and is available by individual and company subscription.

Well-known in the Hong Kong training community since 1994, Language Key provides in-house, generic and tailored business English and communication skills courses to local and international companies.

If you have any comments on The Language Key, we'd be pleased to hear from you. In the meantime, enjoy the magazine!

Rebecca Williams  
Editor – The Language Key



Reading

4-5



Writing

6-7



Speaking

8-9



Features

10-11

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THE Business English Training  
Language Key

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## Hong Kong Marks Bruce Lee's Death

Bruce Lee **starred** in just five movies and only three of them were **released** before his early death in Hong Kong at the age of 32. But people are still **fascinated** with his life.

Hong Kong **marked** the 40th **anniversary** of Lee's death by opening a five-year **exhibition** at the Heritage Museum **celebrating** the **achievements** of the city's biggest star.

Among the 600 items on display at the exhibition are the famous yellow track suit Bruce Lee wore in the film Game of Death, his poetry written in English, and family photos.

Lee was born in America but his family moved back to Hong Kong when he was only a few months old. He became a child actor who **excelled** in the Wing Chun style of kung fu and Latin dance. But he wasn't very **academic**, so he was sent back to the US after he turned 18.

During university, Lee taught Chinese martial arts. He married one of his students, Linda. The young family moved to California where Lee **eventually** got a part in a TV series, the Green Hornet.

After **limited** success and **disappointment** as an Asian man fighting for roles in Hollywood, Lee decided to return to Hong Kong where he made his **popular** and **enduring** movies, including Enter the Dragon.

### Key Vocabulary

- starred** (verb) if someone stars in a film they are the main person in it.
- released** (verb) made a movie available for people to buy or see.
- fascinated** (adj.) very interested.
- marked** (verb) If you mark an occasion, like a birthday or death, you do something to celebrate it.
- anniversary** (noun) a date on which you remember or celebrate something that happened on that date one or more years ago.
- exhibition** (noun) when objects such as paintings are shown to the public.
- celebrating** (gerund) doing something special to mark an occasion.
- achievements** (noun) good things you succeed in doing, esp. by working hard.
- excelled** (verb) was very good at something.
- academic** (adj.) clever and good at studying.
- eventually** (adverb) in the end.
- limited** (adj.) small in amount.
- disappointment** (noun) the feeling of being unhappy because something did not happen.
- popular** (adj.) liked by many people.
- enduring** (adj.) existing for a long time.

In less than a **decade**, many well-known shopping areas in Hong Kong have been **transformed** to **cater to** the free-spending tourists from mainland China.

Gone are many of the fruit sellers, tea houses and noodle vendors that give the city its **unique** character. They have been **squeezed out** by rents that are twice as high as New York and four times higher than London.

And the city is beginning to ask whether the loss of these small businesses will change the character of Hong Kong's streets and **discourage entrepreneurship** in

## High Shop Rents Squeezing Business



the city's main shopping areas.

High rents combined with short leases discourage young people from starting up their own businesses.

A two or three-year lease is normal, compared to five to ten-year leases in the UK.

A 60% rent rise after a short lease is **common** these days, forcing old **tenants** to **abandon** their businesses, often to be replaced by **luxury** shops selling designer brands.

**Greedy** landlords charging ever increasing rents are unlikely to change in the short term and smaller, **independent** businesses will continue to be forced out.

### Key Vocabulary

- decade** (noun) a period of ten years.
- transformed** (verb) changed completely.
- cater to** (phrasal verb) give someone exactly what they want.
- unique** (adj.) different from everywhere else.
- squeezed out** (phrasal verb) forced to move out because of external factors thing.
- discourage** (verb) make someone less confident or

- enthusiastic about something.
- entrepreneurship** (noun) the act of starting a new business, especially one involving risks.
- common** (adj.) quite normal and widespread.

- tenants** (noun) people who rent property from landlords.
- abandon** (verb) leave; move out.
- luxury** (adj.) describes an expensive shop selling high-end products.

- greedy** (adj.) describes a person wanting more money than is needed.
- independent** (adj.) describes a shop owned by an individual rather than a big chain.



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# Key Vocabulary Test

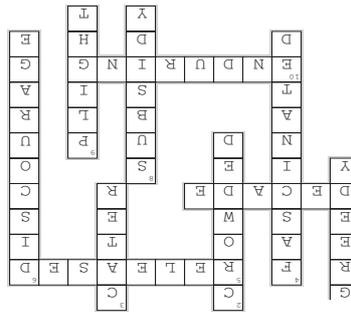
Complete the sentences below and right (including the crossword) using the highlighted vocabulary from the three articles. Remember to use the correct part of speech and verb tense. You'll find the answers below.

- It's very \_\_\_\_\_ for Hong Kong people to work 10-hour days.
- When writing a CV, it's good to mention your most important \_\_\_\_\_.
- My salary is \_\_\_\_\_ compared to the salary of the managing director.
- According to the contract, our photocopier will be serviced at 2-month \_\_\_\_\_.
- We have a \_\_\_\_\_ product not currently available anywhere else in the world.
- We don't own our office; we are just \_\_\_\_\_.
- Since the CEO, Jim Stewart, arrived two years ago he has completely \_\_\_\_\_ the fortunes of the company.
- The project has lost a lot of money so we have decided to \_\_\_\_\_ it.
- Our most \_\_\_\_\_ products target the teenage market.
- If the office rent goes up much further, it will be \_\_\_\_\_ to us.
- Paul owns more than 20 businesses. He's a real \_\_\_\_\_.
- Would you describe Prada as being a \_\_\_\_\_ brand?

## ANSWERS:

- Common
- achievements
- tiny
- intervals
- unIQUE
- tenants
- transformed
- abandon
- popular
- unaffordable
- entrepreneur

## SOLUTIONS

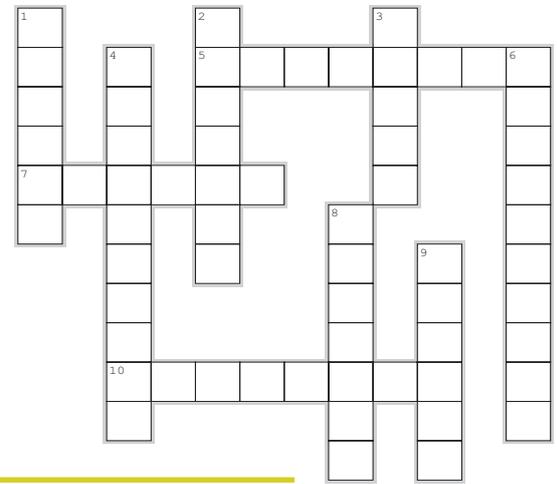


## Across

- Apple's new iPhone will be \_\_\_\_\_ today.
- The band was very successful for a \_\_\_\_\_ before splitting up.
- I have many \_\_\_\_\_ memories of the time I spent working in Tokyo.

## Down

- He's asked for a salary rise even though he's the highest paid employee. He's \_\_\_\_\_.
- By ten o'clock the bar was really \_\_\_\_\_.
- The hotel \_\_\_\_\_ to tourists on a small budget.
- I was \_\_\_\_\_ to hear about Joe's new project.
- High rent and property prices don't \_\_\_\_\_ mainland Chinese from coming to Hong Kong.
- Overseas companies receive a government \_\_\_\_\_ to set up business there.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ of the refugees from Syria is very sad to see.



# Subdivided Flats: Hotter Inside than Out

Tenants of Hong Kong's **tiny, subdivided** flats are being forced outside because even the hot summer weather is cooler than their homes.

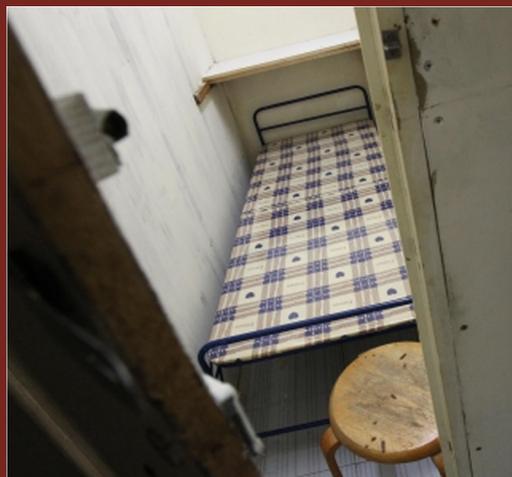
A **green group** measured the temperature at three-minute **intervals** in five subdivided flats over the period during the summer.

It found that the **temperatures** indoors at the hottest time of the day were up to five degrees Celsius higher than temperatures outside. This is not really surprising when kitchen, toilet and bed spaces are **crammed** together in a **crowded** flat with poor **ventilation**.

One 9.2 square metre subdivided flat in Kwun Tong recorded a temperature of 37.5 degrees Celsius on July 30.

Subdivided tenants often cannot escape the summer heat by staying indoors. Even for those who have an air-conditioner, the electricity bill can be **unaffordable**. The government **subsidy** for electricity use cannot help much, as the money often goes to the owner of the flat rather than tenants. The use of electric fans and air-conditioning in a small unit can also **overload** the power supply and therefore be dangerous.

Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying said the **plight** of those living in subdivided flats in Hong Kong sometimes kept him **awake** at night.



## Key Vocabulary

- tiny** (adj.) very small.
- subdivided** (noun) divided into smaller parts.
- green group** (noun phrase) an organisation whose main aim is the protection of the environment.
- temperature** (noun) how hot or cold something is.
- intervals** (noun) periods of time between two actions.
- crammed** (verb) forced into a small space.
- crowded** (adj.) very full of people.
- ventilation** (noun) the ability to let air come into and go out of a room or building.
- unaffordable** (adj.) too expensive for people to be able to buy or pay for.
- subsidy** (noun) money given as part of the cost of something.
- overload** (verb) put too much electricity through an electrical system.
- plight** (noun) an unpleasant condition, especially a serious, sad, or difficult one.
- awake** (adj.) if someone is awake, they are not sleeping.



## Starting Emails Well – Clear Referencing

The aim of the opening paragraph in a business email is generally to:

- make reference to previous correspondence or communication
- say how you found the recipient's name/address
- say why you are writing to the recipient.

The opening paragraph is very important. A good opening should make clear the purpose of your email.

On the right are three short business emails showing the use of key phrases for referencing in different situations. Focus on the expressions in bold. You'll find a number of key phrases for starting email below.

Dear Ms Tam

**Following our conversation on the phone this morning**, I would like to ask whether you could offer us a further discount if we ordered over 10,000 units from you each month.

I look forward to hearing your reply.

Regards

Dear Ms Jiang

**Thank you for your fax of 22 September** enquiring about our services.

Further to this, I have attached our latest brochure and price list.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me.

Regards

Dear Mr Berger

**Regarding the questions** you raise about the draft contract in your fax of 1 July, I think it best if I meet you to clarify everything.

Are you free on Thursday afternoon around 2 pm?

I hope to see you then.

Regards

### Common Errors

#### Writing an Incomplete Sentence

The two sentences below are incomplete:

- ✗ Further to your email of 3 June concerning the trustees of the P F Smith 20xx Settlement.
- ✗ Regarding your claim for attendance allowance.

Each statement needs to be continued and completed, inserting a comma instead of a full stop. For example:

- ✓ Further to your letter of 3 June concerning the trustees of the P F Smith 20xx Settlement, I am pleased to enclose the form you requested.

Alternatively, you could insert a main verb at the start to complete the sentence:

- ✓ I refer to your claim for attendance allowance.

#### Repeating the Subject Heading

Email benefit from a good heading, as it introduces the topic and saves having to write a long first sentence to cover the same ground.

Don't keep referring to the heading with such phrases as 'with reference to the above-mentioned equipment', 'regarding the above-numbered agreement', 'the above matter' and 'in connection with the aforementioned'.

For example, instead of writing:

- ✗ Re: Flat 1806, Block N, South Horizons

Dear Ms Chang

I refer to your enquiry yesterday in relation to the above-mentioned property and enclose details as requested....

Write:

- ✓ Re: Flat 1806, Block N, South Horizons

Dear Ms Chang

I refer to your enquiry yesterday and enclose details of the property as requested.

#### Key Phrases

**Reference to Your Own Previous Correspondence**  
I refer to my email to you on 14 June concerning.....  
We/I recently wrote to you about ...  
On 5 May, I emailed you about.....

**Reference to Previous Verbal Communication**  
I refer to the conversation we had on Tuesday about.....  
Following our phone conversation this morning, I.....  
Further to our meeting last week, I.....

**Reference by Thanking**  
Thank you for your email requesting...  
Thank you for your fax enquiring about....  
Thank you for meeting me on Monday.

**Saying Why You're Writing**  
I am writing with reference to your enquiry of 6 November.  
I am writing in connection with your email of 1 May enquiring/requesting....

#### Replying to Someone's Request

As you requested, I am enclosing a brochure about our company.  
As promised, I have attached...  
Regarding your request for information on....., I.....

#### Making Reference to Questions

In response to the questions in your email, I am writing with further information.  
In answer to your question about....., I.....

#### Making Reference to Something your Reader Knows

As we discussed, I am going to propose a merger of the sales and marketing departments.  
As previously agreed, the construction can proceed on 1 November.

#### Making Reference to Something You've Seen

I refer to your advertisement for the position of.....in.....on.....  
Further to your advertisement in..... on 1 February, I.....  
I would like to apply for the position of... advertised in..... on.....

# Let's Rewrite!

## Good vs Bad Documents

Below is a business letter. It is badly written because it lacks good organisation and structure. It also uses over-complex sentence structures and uncommon language. Read our comments on the letter and then the rewritten letter.

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### Original Letter

Dear Mr Leung

**Re: C/A No. 82-388473-00**

Referring to your letter of 8 July 20xx.

We wish to advise that the captioned subject account was automatically closed on 4 July 20xx due to deduction of inactive account service charges, relevant statement is enclosed for your retention.

In accordance with your request, we hereby furnish you with a schedule of charge of our Bank for your perusal. If you intend to process, kindly let us have your written instruction for our proceeding.

Looking forward to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely

### Feedback

- The first and last paragraphs include incomplete sentences. Add a subject and verb to the start of each sentence or add a full clause to the end.
- Use of out-of-date language: *wish to advise; captioned; in accordance with; hereby; furnish; perusal; kindly*. Use language in common usage.
- Paragraph 2 includes a run-on sentence – two sentences joined by a comma. Use two sentences separated by a full stop.
- Paragraphs 2 and 3 each contain two separate points. Divide each paragraph into two separate paragraphs.
- Sentence constructions are too complex. Simple sentence structures are clearer and easier to read. Using simple sentence structures will also help you to avoid making unnecessary grammatical errors.
- The letter includes a number of common grammatical errors. Become familiar with the errors you often make and learn how to correct them.

### Rewrite

Dear Mr Leung

**Re: C/A No. 82-388473-00**

We refer to your letter of 8 July 20xx. We would like to inform you that the above account was automatically closed on 4 July 20xx due to the deduction of inactive account service charges.

We have enclosed the relevant statement for your reference.

As you requested, we have also enclosed a list of our charges.

Please let us know in writing if you would like to make a transaction.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

## Grammar Tips: When to Use the Passive Voice

Generally we'd advise business writers to use the active voice. The active voice is clearer, more direct and more personal. However, there are times when the passive voice is preferred.

### 1. When you don't know who performed the action.

- ✓ Some documents **were removed** from the cabinet.
- ✗ Someone **removed** the documents from the cabinet.

### 2. When it doesn't matter who performs the action.

- ✓ It **has been decided** that pay rises won't be given.
- ✗ Jerry Lau **decided** that pay rises won't be given.

### 3. When we want to avoid blaming someone.

- ✓ The architectural plans **were lost**.
- ✗ Andy **lost** the architectural plans.

### 4. When we want to soften an instruction or command.

- ✓ The procedures **should be revised**.
- ✗ Revise the procedures / You should revise the procedures.

### 5. When we want to add variety to sentence structures.

- ✓ After we **contacted** the supplier and **placed** your order with them, we **arranged** for the order to be shipped on 10 July. We then **gathered** the related documents from the supplier and shipping company. These **were sent** to you by courier this morning.



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## Signposting Presentations

### Key Phrases

#### Introducing the Subject

I'd like to start by...  
 Let's begin by...  
 First of all, I'll...  
 Starting with...  
 I'll begin by...  
 Finishing One Subject...  
 Well, I've told you about...

#### Starting Another Subject

Now we'll move on to...  
 Let me turn now to...  
 Next...  
 Turning to...  
 I'd like now to discuss...  
 Let's look now at...

#### Analysing a Point

Where does that lead us?  
 Let's consider this in more detail...  
 What does this mean for ABC?  
 Translated into real terms...

#### Giving an Example

For example,...  
 A good example of this is...  
 As an illustration,...  
 To give you an example,...  
 To illustrate this point...

#### Dealing with Questions

We'll be examining this point in more detail later...  
 I'd like to deal with this question later, if I may...  
 I'll come back to this question later in my talk...  
 Perhaps you'd like to raise this point at the end...

#### Summarising and Concluding

In conclusion,...  
 Right, let's sum up, shall we?  
 Let's summarise briefly what we've looked at...  
 If I can just sum up the main points...

#### Ordering / Sequencing

Firstly...secondly...thirdly...lastly...  
 First of all...then...after that...finally...  
 To start with...later...to finish up...

How does your audience know the aim of your presentation? How do they know where you are at any time during your presentation? What point you will be covering next? Or how long it will take? They know because you tell them. You have to give them the signposts. It's important to draw a roadmap for the audience.

During your introduction, you should tell your audience what the structure of your presentation will be. You might say something like this:

**"I'll start by** describing the current position in Europe. **Then I'll move on** to some of the achievements we've made in Asia. **After that** I'll consider the opportunities we see for further expansion in Africa. **Lastly**, I'll quickly recap **before** concluding with some recommendations."



A member of the audience can now visualize your presentation like this:

<b>Introduction:</b>	• Welcome • Explanation of structure
<b>Body:</b>	• Europe • Asia • Africa
<b>Conclusion:</b>	• Summing up • Recommendations

He will keep this image in his head during the presentation. He may even write it down. And throughout your presentation, you will put up signposts telling him which point you have reached and where you are going now.

When you finish Europe and want to start Asia, you might say:

"That's all I have to say about Europe. Let's turn now to Asia."

When you have finished Africa and want to sum up, you might say:

"Well, we've looked at the three continents Europe, Asia and Africa. I'd like to sum up now."

And when you finish summing up and want to give your recommendations, you might say:

"What does all this mean for us? Well, firstly I recommend..."

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# Presentations: Survival English

## What to say in tricky situations!



- **If you get your facts wrong.**  
I am sorry. What I meant to say was this. / Sorry. What I meant is this.
- **If you have been going too fast and your audience is having trouble keeping up with you.**  
Let me just recap on that.  
I want to recap briefly on what I have been saying.
- **If you have forgotten to make a point.**  
Sorry, I should just mention one other thing.  
If I can just go back to the last point, there's something else I forgot to mention.
- **If you have been too complicated and want to simplify what you said.**  
So, basically, what I am saying is this.  
So, basically, the point I am trying to get across is this.
- **If you realize that what you are saying makes no sense.**  
Sorry, maybe I didn't make that clear. Let me rephrase that to make it quite clear.
- **If you cannot remember the term in English.**  
Sorry, what is the word I am looking for?  
Sorry, my mind has gone blank. How do you say 'escargot' in English?
- **If you are short of time.**  
So just to give you the main points.  
As we are short of time, this is just a quick summary of the main points.



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## Welcoming Visitors

Knowing how to welcome business visitors is an important business speaking skill. This is often the first impression that a visitor will have of a company so you need to make a good impression. Treat visitors in a friendly and relaxed manner, and make sure they are comfortable if they have to wait around. Take an interest in who they are and what they've been doing.

Let's look at a typical situation. Dan Roberts is an important client from England. He has an appointment to see Tina Chan, the sales manager, at 11:30. He arrives 20 minutes early so as to be in good time for the meeting. Tina Chan's secretary greets him and makes him feel welcome. It is important for the secretary to make sure Dan is made to feel welcome and is comfortable while he is waiting for the meeting.

- Secretary :** Hello. May I help you?  
**Dan Roberts :** Yes, I have an appointment to see Tina Chan at 11:30. I'm a bit early actually.  
**Secretary :** I'll just call Tina to see if she can meet you now..... I'm afraid she's got someone in there with her at the moment. She said she'd be free in 10 minutes.  
**Dan Roberts :** That's fine.  
**Secretary :** Would you like to take a seat while you wait?  
**Dan Roberts :** Yes, thanks.  
**Secretary :** Can I get you something to drink?  
**Dan Roberts :** Yes, please. Could I have a coffee, please?  
**Secretary :** Certainly. How do you like it?  
**Dan Roberts :** Milk with two sugars, please.  
**Secretary :** Right, I'll get that for you now. (pause)  
**Secretary :** Here you are. Careful! The cup's a bit hot.  
**Dan Roberts :** Thank you.  
**Secretary :** Have you just arrived in Hong Kong?  
**Dan Roberts :** No, I arrived a couple of days ago, actually.  
**Secretary :** How do you find it?  
**Dan Roberts :** I like it. I even like the crowds.  
**Secretary :** Oh, please excuse me. I have a call to answer.  
**Dan Roberts :** No problem.



When a visitor comes to your office, the first thing to do is to make them feel comfortable by offering them a seat and a drink, especially if they will need to wait some time before an appointment. If you're a secretary or receptionist, ask a few general questions to relax your visitor.

If you have an appointment with your visitor, make sure you greet them sincerely and tell them that you have been expecting them. Use small talk to break the ice before you talk business.

### Key Phrases

**Here are some common questions for welcoming visitors:**

- How are you enjoying Tokyo so far?
- How was your flight?
- How is your hotel?
- Is this your first trip to Kuala Lumpur?
- Did you have trouble finding the office?
- Did you just arrive in Singapore today?
- Did you come by taxi?

**You can ask more specific questions:**

- Where are you staying while you're in Tokyo?
- Which hotel are you staying at?
- How far is your hotel from here?
- How long will you be staying in Taipei?

**Or more immediate questions can be asked:**

- Can I get you something to drink?
- Can I get you a cold drink?
- Would you like some tea or coffee?
- Can I get you a magazine or something to read while you wait?
- Can I take your coat?
- Can I take your umbrella?

**And you need to ensure your guest feels comfortable if they have to wait:**

- Why don't you have a seat and I will call Mr Jacks for you.
- Would you like to take a seat?
- Please take a seat.
- Mr Rogers will be here shortly. Please make yourself comfortable while you wait.



## Business English Apps

### Business English Skills

■ iPhone | Android | Free



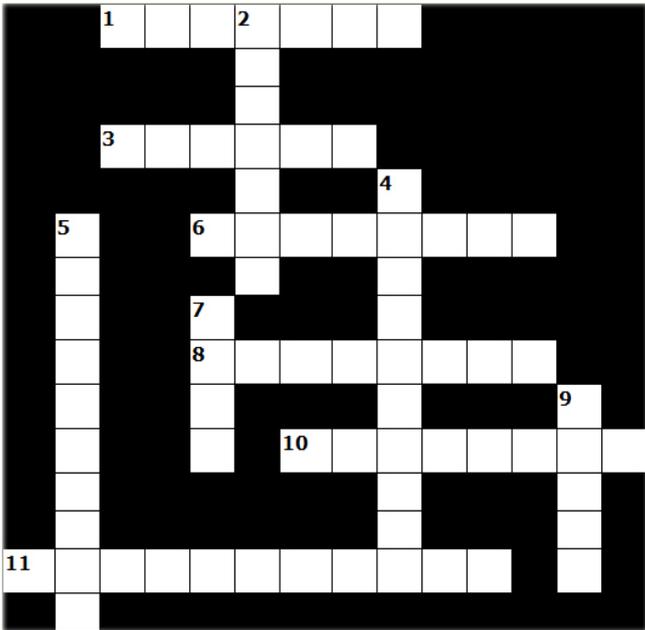
Business English app which focuses on business skills such as telephone, meetings and presentations. Includes on-going story supplemented by lessons, quizzes, vocabulary and speaking practice sections.

### Business English Free

■ iPhone | Android | Free



This app includes a series of quizzes on different aspects of business English. It focuses on vocabulary and grammar. The exercises are level-based from beginner to advanced. You will need to pay for the premium version.



**ACROSS**  
 1. payroll  
 2. revenue  
 3. assets  
 4. commission  
 5. investment  
 6. turnover  
 7. bonus  
 8. earnings  
 9. cashflow  
 10. instalments  
 11. instalments

**DOWN**  
 1. revenue  
 2. commission  
 3. investment  
 4. bonus  
 5. earnings  
 6. turnover  
 7. cashflow  
 8. instalments  
 9. instalments  
 10. instalments  
 11. instalments

Little Johnny watched, fascinated, as his mother gently rubbed cold cream on her face. "Why are you rubbing cold cream on your face, Mumy?" he asked.

"To make myself beautiful," said his mother.

A few minutes later, she began removing the cream with a tissue.

"What's the matter?" asked Little Johnny. "Giving up?"

"Darling," said the man to his new bride,

"now that we are married, do you think you will be able to live on my small income?"

"Of course, dearest, no trouble," she said. "But what will you live on?"

A dog walks into a job centre, goes up to the woman at the desk and says, "Good afternoon, miss. I'm looking for work."

The woman looks up, amazed, and says, "Good heavens, a talking dog! Er... well, let's try the circus in town. I'll give them a ring."

The dog says, "The circus? What on earth would the circus do with a computer programmer?"



## Business English Crossword

Solve the "money and finance" crossword by completing the gaps in the sentences below. You'll find the solution below the crossword.

### Across

- McDermot Software is growing fast, adding another 100 employees to its \_\_\_\_\_ over the last year.
- A company's \_\_\_\_\_ can consist of cash, investments, buildings, machinery, specialist knowledge or copyright mater such as music.
- Last year we made a profit of US\$390,000 on a \_\_\_\_\_ of US\$1.7 million.
- Average \_\_\_\_\_ for skilled workers are rising.
- Small traders often have short-term \_\_\_\_\_ problems.
- We agreed to pay for the car by monthly \_\_\_\_\_.

### Down

- Taxes provide most of the government's \_\_\_\_\_.
- She gets a 15% \_\_\_\_\_ on every machine she sells.
- Stocks are regarded as a good long-term \_\_\_\_\_.
- The company has had a very good year making record profits. All employees should get a nice big \_\_\_\_\_.

Speaking 1: Expressing Opinions > Listening Practice Exercise 1

Click on the audio icons. Then decide in each case below which would be the best response. Continue to the next exercise when you've finished.

1 LISTEN!  
 a. Is that what you believe?  
 b. Is that the truth?  
 c. Do you think so? Thanks.

2 LISTEN!  
 a. Actually, I disagree. I think it's good value.  
 b. I'm thinking...  
 c. I might pe...

3 LISTEN!  
 a. I don't rec...  
 b. I agree. It have alrea...  
 c. Perhaps I...

4 LISTEN!  
 a. I'm disagre...  
 b. I completely agree with you. It's like pouring money down the drain.

**Marking**  
 You scored 30% in this exercise.  
 Correct = 3  
 Wrong = 2  
 Missed = 5

Buttons: Try again, See the answers, Forward

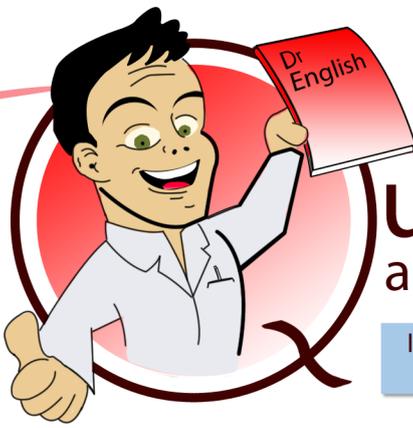
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# Questions answers and tips with Dr English

If you have any questions that you would like to have answered by Dr English then email us:  
[editor@languagekey.com](mailto:editor@languagekey.com)

**Q** Could you tell me whether I should spell numbers or write them as numerals in a sentence?

**A** Most style manuals agree with this simple rule: Spell all one-digit numbers (one to nine), and use numerals for any number having two or more digits (10+).

There are some exceptions, but they're logical and simple. Use numerals for all numbers in dates and street addresses, and for numbering consecutive items (such as paragraph numbers), no matter how high or low.

Also, use numerals for all numbers in a sentence if it contains both kinds (209 applicants for 5 jobs). The idea here is to be consistent within any sentence, to avoid confusing readers.

**Q** When you talk about the workplace, what prepositions do you use with the verb 'work'? For example: "Do you work for/to Mr Huang?"

**A** **Work with** is used with a colleague's name: **I work with Patricia Leung.** **Work under** is used with a boss's name: **I work under Stephanie Henderson.** **Work for** is used with a company: **I work for HSBC Asset Management.** **Work in** is used to generalise about the place you work: **I work in a Bank.** **Work at** is used to talk about the specific, well-known establishment where you work: **I work at Hong Kong University.**

**Q** Is it acceptable to use the word "per" in business writing or is it considered a little out-of-date?

**A** The word **per** is out-of-date, although it is still often used in phrases such as, **as per your request/instruction/order** or **as per contract / as per our telephone conversation**, etc. In modern English, and particularly when you write business documents, it is better to use a more personal phrase for example: **as you requested / instructed / ordered**, or if it is not possible to personalise the phrase then **according to the contract / following our telephone conversation**, would probably be the best alternatives.

**Q** Could you explain how we should use the semi-colon in business writing?

**A** Use a semi-colon to separate two independent clauses that are closely related. Do this to indicate that you don't want the reader to stop with the thought.

An independent clause is one that can stand alone as a complete sentence. It has a subject, a verb and a complete idea. For example: **MyFlex is our best client; half of our business comes from them.**

Also, when items in a series are complex, long, or contain commas, it is best to separate the items with a semi-colon rather than a comma. For example: **We elected the following: Mary, president; Richard, secretary; and Paul, treasurer.**



**P**roper etiquette is important in business greetings. Make sure to use polite language such as "please" and "thank you.". Appropriate titles and gestures should also be used. Shaking hands is common in most English-speaking countries. It is also important to smile.

Here are a number of useful phrases for when you greet someone in a business situation:

#### Introduce yourself with your name and title:

May I introduce myself. I'm Roger Cook. I'm in charge of client accounts. Here's my card.  
Hello Mr Williams. I'm Amy Lui, client relationship manager. Let me give you my card.

#### Shake hands, greet and express happiness to meet the other person:

How do you do?  
I'm pleased to meet you.  
Pleased to meet you too.

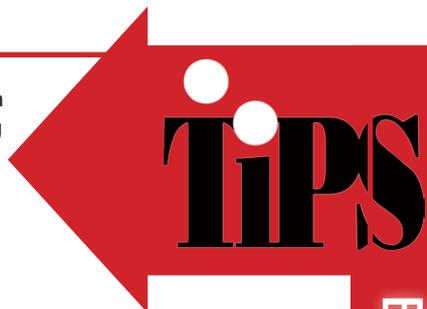
#### Other useful phrases:

If you are late for a meeting or appointment:  
Sorry to keep you waiting.  
I'm sorry for being late.  
Did you get my message to say I'd be a few minutes late?

- »» Use polite language
- »» Shake hands
- »» Smile

#### Introducing colleagues:

This is Jeremy Benting, my associate.  
I'd like to introduce Janice Long, my personal assistant.  
I'd like you to meet Paul Wheeler, our training coordinator.  
May I introduce Jason Isaacs, head of sales.



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