

THE Business English Training Language Key

WHAT'S INSIDE!

- The Importance of Reading
- Reading Comprehension Articles
- Writing: Clear Instructions
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- English Around the World
- Questions to the Editor

THE Business English Training Language Key

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YEARS

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WHY SELECT US?

- 1 The Language Key Ltd has been delivering successful language training programs for 100s of Hong Kong companies since 1994.
- 2 We use experienced business English trainers who have a understanding of the language learning needs of Hong Kong professionals.
- 3 We provide online learning support for all courses and workshops, and free continuous learning through our online training platform.

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THE Language Key

Welcome Back!

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

Dear Readers

The importance of reading is often overlooked by English language learners. However, if you want to improve your vocabulary and use of language in both speaking and writing then the more you read the faster this will happen.

Inputs (listening and reading) drive outputs (speaking and writing). With language, familiarity fixes words and phrases in your mind. Reading is a very accessible and relaxing way to boost your language skills and learn about other things as well. Here are a few tips.

Try to read at the right level. Read something that you can (more or less) understand. If you need to stop every three words to look in a dictionary, it is not interesting for you and you will soon be discouraged. Slightly challenge yourself when you read.

Make a note of new vocabulary. If there are four or five new words on a page, write them in your vocabulary book. But you don't have to write them while you read. Instead, try to guess their meaning as you read; mark them with a pen; then come back when you have finished reading to check in a dictionary and add them to your vocabulary book.

Try to read regularly. For example, read for a short time once a day. Fifteen minutes every day is better than two hours every Sunday. Fix a time to read and keep to it. For example, you could read for fifteen minutes when you go to bed, or when you get up, or at lunchtime.

Be organised. Have everything ready:

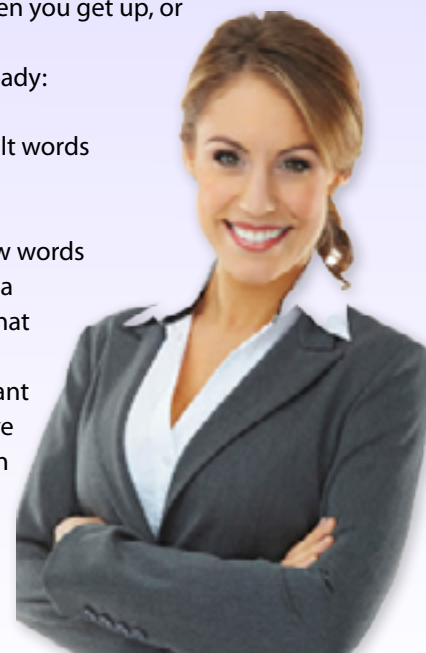
- something to read
- a marker to highlight difficult words
- a dictionary
- your vocabulary book
- a pen to write down the new words

Read what interests YOU. Choose a magazine or book about a subject that you like.

On a final note, if you seriously want to improve your English, learn to love reading in English. It is a little-known fact that the best readers often get the best grades, jobs and opportunities!

Rebecca Williams

Editor – The Language Key



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Rooftop Slums Highlight HK's Wealth Gap

According to the latest government figures, there are 3,962 rooftop **dwellers** in 1,556 households in Hong Kong.

Mostly found in old **urban** areas in Kowloon, the houses are **crammed** together so tightly they form their own above-ground streetscapes, complete with gardens, playgrounds and places of **worship**.

The rooftop **slums** in Hong Kong **highlight** one of the most **bewildering** facets of Asia's self-described "world city," which has the most expensive property prices in the world.

Constructed on top of buildings since the 1950s and 60s without government approval, these **makeshift** communities **clutter** the rooftops of old working-class neighborhoods. Metal sheets cover concrete-walled **shacks**. And they've provided **vital** accommodation for low-income people such as migrants from mainland China and Southeast Asia for more than 50 years.

Although the dwellings are illegal, on **the grey market** they unofficially **change hands** for up to HK\$40,000. Contrast that with Hong Kong's legal market where the average selling price for an apartment is HK\$13.25 million.

Property prices and rental prices have almost doubled since 2009, pricing a good percentage of the population out of the property market. With many workers still earning well under HK\$10,000 a month, even renting an apartment has become **unaffordable**. An estimated 400,000 households now live under **the poverty line**, which is set at HK\$14,300 for a house of four.

With property prices continuing to rise, and an ever widening gap between the incomes of the rich and the poor, what kind of future can these rooftop dwellers look forward to?

Key Vocabulary

dwellers – (noun) people who live in properties
urban – (adj.) of or in a town or city

crammed – (verb) forced something into a small space or filled an area tightly with people
worship – (noun) religious ceremony and prayer

slums – (noun) very poor crowded areas of cities
highlight – (verb) attract attention to or emphasise something important

bewildering – (adj.) confusing; difficult to understand
makeshift – (adj.) temporary and of low quality

clutter – (verb) including many objects/ things in a state of disorder
shacks – (noun) simple, small buildings

vital – (adj.) necessary or extremely important to someone or something
the grey market – (phrase) the unofficial but not illegal system of selling something

change hands – (phrase) go from one owner to another
unaffordable – (adj.) too expensive for people to buy or pay for

the poverty line – (phrase) the official level of income that is needed to achieve a basic living standard

Choose a Clever, Younger Wife for a Happy Marriage!

The secret to a happy marriage is choosing a wife who is more intelligent and at least five years younger than you, say UK **experts**.

These **pairings** are more likely to **last** longer, especially if neither has been **divorced** in the past, according to the Bath University team.

The findings **predict** a happy future for pop star Beyonce Knowles, 34, and rapper husband Jay-Z, 45.

The **researchers** studied interviews of more than 1,500 **couples** who were married or in a **serious relationship**.

Five years later, they followed up 1,000 of the couples to see which had lasted. They found that if the wife was five or more years older than her husband, they were more than three times as likely to divorce than if they were the same age.

If the **age gap** is **reversed**, and the man is five or more years older than the woman, a happy marriage is more likely.

If the woman has a better education than the man -

Beyonce has her high school diploma, unlike husband Jay-Z - and the chances of a longer lasting marriage improve further.

Dr Emmanuel Fragniere and **colleagues** do say that men and women choose **partners** "on the basis of love, **physical attraction**, **common interests**, etc."

But they say that using factors such as age, education and **cultural origin**, may help reduce divorce.



Key Vocabulary

experts (noun) people with a lot of skill/ knowledge in/about something

pairings (noun) the joining together of two people of a certain type, age, etc.

last (verb) continue to happen or exist
divorced (verb) If a married couple divorces, they stop being married

predict (verb) say what you think will happen in the future

researchers (noun) people who study a subject in detail in order to discover new information about it

serious relationship (phrase) a sexual or romantic friendship

couples (noun) two people married or

having a romantic relationship
age gap (phrase) the difference in age between two people

reversed (verb) changed the order of things so that it becomes the opposite
colleagues (noun) people you work with

partners (noun) a partner is someone that you are married to or having a

sexual relationship with
physical attraction (phrase) liking someone's appearance

common interests (phrase) interests shared by two or more people
cultural origin (phrase) the culture a person was born into and raised in

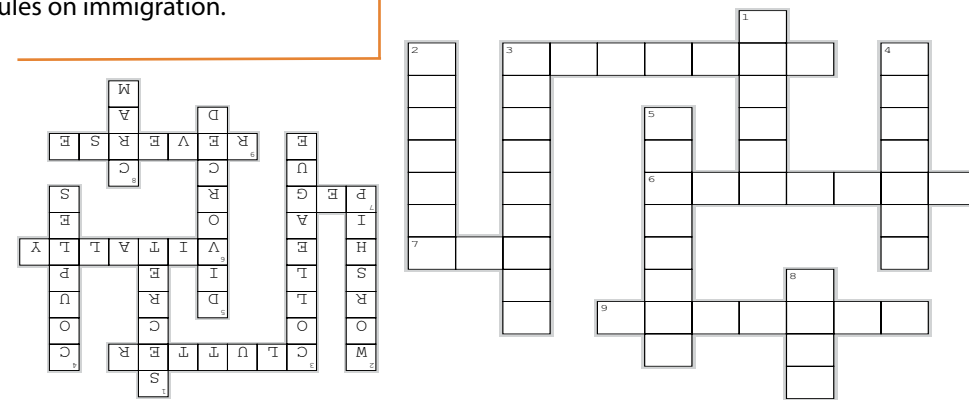
Complete the sentences below and right (including the crossword puzzle) using the highlighted vocabulary from the three articles. Remember to use the correct part of speech and verb tense in each case. You'll find the answers below.

- He grew up in the _____ of Rio de Janeiro.
- Now that Jean's got a job, she's financially _____.
- The store sells designer clothes and shoes sourced from _____.
- Jane has no _____ to Bill. I'm surprised she married him.
- In 1991 almost 36 million Americans were living below _____.
- The growth of the company has been _____ by a lack of investment.
- South Korean groups have had a major _____ on Asian pop music over the last few years.
- I'm surprised Mary and David broke up; I thought they were in a _____.
- Who could have _____ that she would win the election?
- The Italian restaurant on Jaffe Road isn't as good since it _____ last year.
- He is the government's foreign-policy _____ for South America.
- The town's economy depends on the summer _____ of tourists.
- The report _____ the need for stricter rules on immigration.
- Where are you _____ to for your vacation this summer?

ANSWERS:

1. slums
2. independent
3. the grey market
4. physical attraction
5. the poverty line
6. limited
7. impact
8. serious relationship
9. predicted
10. changed hands
11. expert
12. influx
13. highlights/highlighted
14. heading

SOLUTION



HK's Unwelcoming Attitude to Mainlanders

Hong Kong's **unwelcoming attitude** is one reason why it is becoming a less **attractive destination** for mainland tourists as they **head** to Japan, France, South Korea and Britain instead.

While Hong Kong, Thailand and Macau were the three most **popular** destinations for mainlanders over the past three years, a report **predicts** that they will **embrace** new favorites in northern Asia and western Europe.

With a weaker yen, the number of mainlanders going to Japan was expected to increase from 1.3 million in 2013 to 8.9 million in 2020. France would see a 500 per cent rise, while South Korea, the US and Italy can expect arrivals to triple.

The future growth would be **limited** by a lack of hotel rooms in Hong Kong and an unwelcoming attitude over the **influx** of tourists, says the report. The strengthening US dollar - which the Hong Kong dollar is **pegged to** - against the yuan also makes it a more expensive destination.

Nearly four out of 10 of the 400 mainland travellers questioned said the Occupy protests had had an **impact** on whether they would travel to Hong Kong and this could affect numbers during



the Lunar New Year holiday.

Mainland visitors to the city rose by 16 per cent to 47.2 million last year, according to **preliminary** figures from the Tourism Board. Travel under the individual visit scheme - which allows residents of 49 mainland cities to travel **independently** to Hong Kong - increased by 7.6 per cent.

Key Vocabulary

unwelcoming – (adj.) not making a visitor feel happy, comfortable, or wanted
attitude – (noun) how you think or feel about something and how this makes you behave

attractive – (adj.) causing interest or pleasure
destination – (noun) the place where someone is going

head – (verb) go in a particular direction
popular – (adj.) liked, enjoyed, or admired by many people or by most people in a particular group

predicts – (verb) says that an event or action will happen in the future
embrace – (verb) accept something with great interest or enthusiasm

limited – (verb) kept within a particular size, range, time, or group
influx – (noun) the arrival of a large number of people or things

pegged – (verb) fixed the amount or value of something in relation to something else
impact – (noun) the strong effect or influence that something has on a situation or person

preliminary – (adj.) coming before a more important action or event, esp. introducing or preparing for it
independently – (adv.) not influenced or controlled by other people but free to make your own decisions



At some time in your working life, you may have to write some instructions in English. Whether it's explaining how to use the new codes for a photocopier or writing detailed instructions for the new customer database you've created, "how-to" documents are a part of workplace life.

As we all know from experience, though, clear, easy- to-follow instructions are often hard to find. That's mainly because it's difficult to step outside what we know and explain a procedure so that someone else can follow it.

In this issue we'll be looking at some language considerations when writing instructions in English. We won't go into the technical details of how to write instructions as you can get this sort of information from a reference book on technical writing.

HOW TO OPERATE THE CANON XL20 PHOTOCOPIER

1

The Canon XL20 photocopier, located in the Reprographics Department on the second floor, may be used by any employee making work-related copies. If everyone follows these instructions and uses the machine carefully, we can reduce service costs and also experience less downtime.

Loading Paper

- 1. Remove Paper Tray 1 by firmly pulling it backwards.
- 2. Select about 250 sheets of A4 paper and align the edges of the sheets.
- 3. Insert the paper into the tray.
Place the paper edges under the retaining clips.
- 4. Return the paper tray to its drawer.

Making Copies

- 1. Press the power switch to the "On" position.
Wait for the flashing "Ready" indicator to stop flashing.
- 2. Place the original face down on the copy board glass.
Centre it.
- 3. Set the number of copies desired by pressing the plus or minus button.
- 4. Press the "Start" button.

**Caution*
If you see a red warning light flashing at any time, do not try to fix the problem. Report the problem immediately to Ms Rebecca Hui of the Reprographics Department.

HIRING A PERSONNEL OFFICER FOR THE PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

2

Once the job description has been written or updated, a decision regarding classification must be made. The Personnel Officer will review the job's scope and depth of responsibilities to make a determination about classification. If the job has not changed, the review will be minimal and confirm the current classification.

To prepare for this review, you should:

- Detail job changes (if updating an existing position) in terms of complexity, autonomy, impact and/or scope
- Identify external and/or internal organisational factors that influence the request
- Include your recommendation of the appropriate classification (if known)
- Explain any other information that may help to clarify the job duties

The Personnel Officer will analyse the job description, talking with you about the job as needed. When the classification decision has been made, the hiring process can continue.

ASSEMBLING SYSTEM AND STARTING OPERATIONS

3

First, you should check to see that you have all of the components listed on the form. **After that**, you need to separate out components marked with a 'Q' and those marked with an 'X'. **Then**, slot each of the components into the main case so that the number and letter on each component corresponds to the number and letter above each of the slots in the main case.

Before switching on the system, ensure that all the components are firmly in their slots. **Once you have switched the system on**, you should be able to see a green light to indicate that the system is functioning correctly.

Finally, press the button marked 'Start' to begin the operation.

Introduction
Sample Texts

We will be reviewing the following topics:

- Using appropriate vocabulary
- Adopting an appropriate writing style
- Describing sequences of steps
- Using appropriate layout and organisation

SAMPLE INSTRUCTIONS

On the left you'll see three different sample sets of instructions. You'll notice that all three sets have been written using different layout styles. The layout style will, of course, depend on the complexity and the nature of the instructions.

Complex instructions require a formal layout style with headings, sub-headings, indented text, etc. Less complex instructions can be written as a sequence of paragraphs. If you use the paragraph format, each paragraph should focus on a single point or topic.

The most readable sets of instructions are generally numbered or bulleted lists. Normally, items are numbered when a sequence of steps is being described. Items are bulleted when no special sequence is necessary. For example, a list of steps for assembling a bicycle would be numbered, while a list of safety tips for cyclists might be bulleted. In the samples on the left, the instructions for operating the photocopier are numbered, while the instructions for hiring a Personnel Officer are bulleted since, in that case, the order of the steps is not important.

In the third sample, the writer has decided not to use numbered or bulleted lists. It is simply a matter of choice. However, if you are describing a sequence of events, it is important that the sequence is made clear. To achieve this without using a numbered list, you'll need to have knowledge of sequencing connectives and their associated grammatical structures.

USING APPROPRIATE VOCABULARY

In adapting to your readership, be sure to use words that are familiar to as many of your readers as possible. If your readership is a general one, avoid jargon. Prefer short words, such as **end** rather than **terminate**, **use** rather than **utilise**. Here are a few more:

| INSTEAD OF | USE |
|------------|--------|
| additional | extra |
| commence | start |
| forward | send |
| purchase | buy |
| assistance | help |
| frequently | often |
| anticipate | expect |
| sufficient | enough |

Select precise verbs that clearly indicate the required action, such as **adjust, bend, grasp, inspect, measure, pull, rotate, release, and replace**. For example, instead of saying:

Turn on the computer

you could be more precise by saying:

Press the power switch to the "On" position. It is located on the rear of the CPU and looks like a light switch.

Also be sure that you use strong verbs. Instead of saying:

Make an adjustment to the timer

say

Adjust the timer.

DESCRIBING SEQUENCES OF STEPS

When giving certain instructions, it is important to indicate clearly the time relationship between each of the steps. Tell people what they need to do in the order they need to do it, e.g. Instead of Cut the blue wire after you cut the red wire, write After you cut the red wire, cut the blue wire.

Sequence markers are words or phrases which show the relationship between time (see the bold text in the third sample instructions). We put these words or phrases at or near the beginning of a sentence or clause. They connect the following information with the earlier information. Here are some common sequence markers:

| SEQUENCE MARKERS | | | |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| First | first of all | the first step | at the first stage |
| Second | secondly | the second step | at the second stage |
| Third | thirdly | the third step | at the third stage |
| Then | after that | the next step | at the next stage |
| Finally | next | the final step | at the final stage |

Good business writers will also vary the language and grammatical structures that they use to help their writing sound more interesting. On the right, we list a number of grammatical structures which can also be used to indicate time sequences.

ADOPTING AN APPROPRIATE WRITING STYLE

People reading instructions aren't particularly interested in creativity or variety. Once you develop a pattern for presenting information, follow that pattern throughout the document. This advice is particularly important if you're writing a longer piece such as a manual or online help system; users very quickly get into habits - expecting information to appear a certain way on the page, follow a particular sequence, rely on specific conventions, and so on. Use that pattern to help them work more effectively.

Use short sentences. If necessary, break up long sentences. The most readable sentences contain 17 or fewer words.

- **Give one step at a time.** For example, don't write Cut the cord and remove half an inch of insulation from the wire. **Instead, write** Cut the cord. Remove half an inch of insulation from the wire.
- **Keep the articles a, an, and the.** For example, Press the arrow button to view the selections is easier to read and understand than Press arrow button to view selections.
- **Place any necessary explanation after the step.** For example, Hold your keys as you approach your vehicle. Experts say you are most vulnerable when you are getting into or out of your vehicle. Explanations need not be written as commands.
- **Begin each step with an active verb in the command form.** For example, write Start the motor rather than You should start the motor. Write Raise the access lid instead of The operator should raise the access lid.
- **Be concise, but don't write in note form.** Change Pass card through punch area for debris to Pass a card through the punch area to clear away any debris.

After giving each step, put on a separate line anything that happens after that step. For example:

- 1. Press 9.
You'll hear a dial tone.
- 2. Dial your number
- 1. Push the red button.
The VDU display will light up.
- 2. Push the green button.

before + verb....ing (gerund)

Make sure the machine is plugged into the 240V socket of the transformer **before switching** it on.

after + verb....ing (gerund)

After entering this area, a voice message will alert you to the following five choices:

after/before + clause

Press the device firmly into slot C **before you replace the case**.

once/before/after/when/as soon as + have + past participle

When you have completed the task, email it to Joe Chu at jchu@gmail.com



Telephone Skills

Handling Telephone Enquiries and Requests

DIALOGUE 1

- Anna:** Good morning, Camera City. This is Anna. How may I help you?
Daniel: Hello, this is Daniel Wang calling from Image Studios. I'd like to enquire about ordering twenty handy cams, please.
Anna: Certainly. Do you have a particular model in mind?
Daniel: Yes, I'm interested in the Sony HDR-TG1.
Anna: The Sony HDR-TG1 – just a minute. Yes, this model costs US\$998, and we can offer you a discount of seven per cent for bulk purchases.
Daniel: Could you send me a quote, please?
Anna: Certainly. Would you prefer to receive the quote by email, fax or post?
Daniel: Fax, please. The number is 310-789-3450.
Anna: Could you repeat the number, please?
Daniel: Sure. That's 310-789-3450.
Anna: 310-789-3450. And that's Daniel Wang, from Image Studios. Is that correct?
Daniel: That's right.
Anna: I'll fax you the quotation for twenty units within the next fifteen minutes, Mr Wang. Is there anything else I can help you with?
Daniel: Yes, could you also tell me when you'd be able to deliver if we place an order today?
Anna: Certainly. May I call you back with this information?
Daniel: Sure.
Anna: Thank you. Could I have your phone number, please?
Daniel: The phone number is the same as the fax, and my extension is 106.
Anna: Extension 106. Thank you, Mr Wang. I'll fax you the quote right away, and call you in about thirty minutes with the estimated delivery date.
Daniel: Thanks.
Anna: You're most welcome, and have a nice day.



DIALOGUE 1

- Tony:** Good afternoon, this is Tony Leung. May I help you?
Susan: This is Susan Ng. I'm calling because I'd like to change my rental plan.
Tony: I'd be happy to help you with that, Ms Cheung. Could you please give me your customer account number?
Susan: Just a minute... yes, that's 48499381.
Tony: 48499381. Thank you. What plan would you like to change to, Ms Cheung?
Susan: Well, I'd like the plan with unlimited local calls, and I would also like to activate my voicemail.
Tony: I'm afraid I can't activate your voicemail since this is the Billing Department. I'd be happy to give you the number of the Voice Services Department.
Susan: Can't you ask them to do it for me?
Tony: Unfortunately, you need to confirm your request for voice mail activation in person. Would you like the number of the department?
Susan: Yes, thanks.
Tony: Please call 310-777-7000.
Susan: Got it, thanks.
Tony: Also, I'm very sorry, but I just checked your records – we're unable to place a request to change your rental plan, since you requested an annual package. What does that mean?
Tony: Well, your current package expires in June 2009, after which we will be happy to change your scheme if required.
Susan: Oh, okay.
Tony: If you like, I can call you back in four weeks and confirm your request to change your rental plan.
Susan: Yes, could you please do that?
Tony: Certainly. Your alternative contact number is 310-3354-8756, is that correct?
Susan: Yes, that's right.
Tony: Thank you, Ms Cheung. I'm sorry I couldn't be of more assistance today, and I look forward to assisting you next month.



To respond properly to enquiries, you should be able to answer the caller's questions and give them the information they are looking for. To handle requests, you should be able to tell the caller what you will do to fulfil their request, and when you will do it.

To handle enquiries or deal with requests in a polite and efficient manner, it's a good idea to become familiar with some common functional expressions. See the list of key phrases on the right.

Dialogue 1

Anna is a Sales Executive at a showroom which sells cameras. Read the transcript and see how she handles a telephone call from Daniel, a caller who has an enquiry and a request.

Anna handles the call efficiently using polite and friendly language. Key points:

- having correct pricing and discount knowledge without referring to a list, etc.;
- offering a number of methods to send the customer the information he needs;
- repeating back and confirming the customer details such as is name and number; and
- offering further help.

Dialogue 2

Sometimes, you may not be able to help a caller with a request. In this case, you should apologise for not being able to help, and tell the caller how they can get the information they want. In this dialogue Tony, a network executive at a telecoms company, speaks to Susan who has a request concerning the service she receives from the company.

In this dialogue, we see that Tony is unable to help Susan with both her requests. Note the polite language Tony uses:

- I'd be happy to help you with that.
- Could you please give me your customer account number?
- Which plan would you like to change? (NOT Which plan do you want to change?)
- Would you like the number of? (NOT Do you want the number of....?)
- I'd be happy to give you.....

When she can't help the customer personally, she apologises and declines the requests politely:

- I'm afraid I can't activate your voicemail.
- Unfortunately, You need to confirm your request.....
- I'm very sorry we're unable to place a request.....

Key Phrases

Asking for Someone's Name/Number

Could I have your name, please?
 Would you mind telling me your name?
 What's your number, please?
 Could you please give me your number?

Checking Someone's Name/Number

Is your last name spelled W-O-N-G?
 That was Kevin Wong, right?
 I'm sorry, was that 4566 or 4556?
 So that's 2747 4782.
 Sorry, did you say Duncan or Durkan?

Asking someone to repeat information

Could you say that again, please?
 Can I have that number again, please?
 Could you confirm the number again, please?
 Would you mind repeating that, please?
 Could you repeat your number again, please?

Asking if you can call back

Could I call you back this afternoon?
 May I call you back tomorrow morning with this information?
 Can I get back to you on this as soon as possible?
 Can I call you back in a few minutes?

Replying to Requests (Positively)

I'd be happy to.
 I'd be glad to do that.
 That's no problem.
 Certainly.
 I'll do that right away.

Replying to Requests (Negatively)

Sorry, I can't help you. You could try...
 I'm sorry, we don't handle that, try...
 You'll have to try...
 I'm afraid we....
 Unfortunately.....

Making Suggestions / Giving Advice

Can I give you the number of that department?
 You need to call....
 You could call....
 Why don't you speak to....
 I think the best thing to do is...
 Perhaps you should.....

Language Considerations

DECLINING REQUESTS POLITELY

When you tell a caller that you are unable to help them or grant their request, you need to do this as politely as possible. Don't just say 'No' or 'I don't know.' In addition, if you can't personally help, you should try to give the caller some useful advice and suggestions.

So instead of saying:

I can't help you with this.

You would say:

I'm afraid I can't help you with this.

And follow it with some practical advice. By giving the caller some practical advice, it lets them know that as a customer or potential customer, you are interested in them.

You can use words and phrases like 'I'm sorry', 'I'm afraid' and 'unfortunately' to apologise for not being able to help the caller. To give advice and suggestions, begin your sentence with phrases like 'Shall I give you', 'You could try' and 'You may want to' and 'Would you like to'.

Here are more examples of declined requests, followed by practice advice or suggestions:

I'm very sorry, but I can't help you with that. You could try calling the helpdesk again and asking them for the right department.
 Unfortunately, we don't handle that. Please call the travel desk for help with that.
 I'm afraid I can't do that. Please contact the sales department for further assistance.
 I'm sorry, but we don't handle those requests. The design department may be able to help you with your request.

OFFERING HELP

You can help a caller by offering to do something such as sending them a brochure or an email with the information they have requested. Here also, you can use question phrases such as 'would you like me to', 'would you like', 'shall I' and 'may I'. Here are some examples of how you can do this:

Would you like me to send you a brochure with this information?
 Shall I send you an email with those details?
 May I email you this information?
 Would you like to receive a hard copy of this by post?
 I'll contact the supplier to see if they can deliver at an earlier date, if you like.

You can also offer to do something through a statement rather than a question. In that case, you can use helpful phrases like 'I can', 'If I may', and 'I'd be happy to'. Here are some sentences that use such phrases to offer to do something for a customer:

I'd be glad to send a representative to give you a demonstration.
 If I may, I'd like to send my associate over with the paperwork.
 I'd be happy to send you a brochure with the product descriptions.
 I'd be happy to send you more details by email.
 If you don't mind, I'll just check with my supervisor if this is possible or not.
 I'd be pleased to assist you personally with the software set up.

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Features

English Around the World



We spoke to Jane Ho who is a resident of Singapore. Cecilia works as a Public Relations Officer for a large multinational company which she would prefer us not to name. When we met Cecilia she was with some of her fellow Singaporeans. We were surprised at how naturally she could switch between her native language, Mandarin, and English. We asked her how she managed to attain such fluency.

"Well, that's the benefit of being educated in an English-medium school. Overall there is a very high standard of English in Singapore. When the country obtained independence from the British, it was decided that English would be kept as the first language. Although Chinese is still widely spoken in the homes and by the older generations, English is certainly the preferred language of the younger generation. Practically all business is conducted in English and it is therefore essential to have a good command of both spoken and written English if you are to land a good job."

Personally, I believe it has a lot to do with the standard of the teachers and the way in which English is taught. Teachers in Singapore speak excellent English and can easily teach their subjects without having to constantly revert back to Chinese. This total immersion in the language from primary, through secondary to high school is the main reason why standards are so high."

The boss was complaining in our staff meeting the other day that he wasn't getting any respect. Later that morning he went out to get a small sign that read, "I'm the Boss." He then attached it to his office door.

Later that day when he returned from lunch, he found that someone had stuck a note on the sign that said, "Your wife called, she wants her sign back!"

A teenage girl had been talking on the phone for about half an hour, and then she hung up.



"Wow!" said her father "That was short. You usually talk for two hours. What happened?"

"Wrong number," replied the girl.

A man goes to the doctor and says, "Doctor, wherever I touch, it hurts."

The doctor asks, "What do you mean?"

The man says, "When I touch my shoulder, it really hurts. If I touch my knee - OUCH! When I touch my forehead, it really, really hurts."

The doctor says, "I know what's wrong with you - you've broken your finger!"

Three mice were being chased by a cat. The mice got stuck in a corner when one of them turned around and barked, "Ruff! Ruff! Ruff!" The surprised cat ran away scared.

Later when the mice told their mother what happened, she smiled and said, "You see, it pays to be bilingual!"

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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

Q I'm always confused about whether to use "that", "which" or "who". Can you give me a brief explanation?

A OK, here are some basic rules to show you the difference in usage between these relative pronouns.

Use **who** (or **whom**) to refer to people or animals with given names. For example: **The request was sent to the company president, who immediately approved it.**

Use **which** to refer to places, things, or events. For example: **The annual statistical report, which was distributed yesterday, shows an increase in enrollment.**

Use **whose** to refer to both animate and inanimate objects. For example: **The supervisor whose promotion was denied filed a grievance.** And: **The book whose ISBN number is 141 200xx is out of print.**

Use **that** to introduce restrictive information and to refer to groups of people, places, things, and events. For example: **The two companies that adopted the plan showed profit increases.**

Q Can you tell me if it still acceptable to use the phrase 'due to the fact that'?

A While the phrase **due to the fact that** is grammatically correct, it should not be used as it's too wordy and rather out-of-date. Why use such a long phrase, when it can easily be substituted by **because, since, or as**?

Make sure that you don't use 'due to' in its place. 'Due to the fact

that' must be followed by a full clause, whereas '**due to**' needs to be followed by a noun or noun phrase. For example: **Due to the poor weather, the event has been canceled.**

Q Should we include punctuation after the salutation and complimentary close in business letters?

A It all depends on which letter layout style you are using. If you're using a full blocked style, no punctuation is required after the salutation in British English; a colon is usually used in American English. If you're using a semi-blocked style or full open style, a comma is used in both British and American English.

After the complimentary close, no punctuation is used with full blocked styles in both British and American English. For all other styles, a comma is needed after the close in both varieties of English.

Q I'd like to know in which situations we should use a semi-colon punctuation mark?

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: **Red is my favourite colour; half my wardrobe is red.**

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.**

Greeting a Visitor at Your Office

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.

Introductions

Quite often you may need to keep your visitor waiting a few minutes especially if they arrive early. Some useful phrases:

May/Can I introduce myself. I'm.....
Hello, Mr/Ms Kong. I'm.....
Sorry to keep you waiting.
I hope you haven't been waiting long.

Making Excuses

Sometimes, you may be required to explain the absence of your boss or colleague to a visitor. There may be various reasons for this, but it is important to explain clearly and state an approximate time that they will be available.

I'm sorry, Mr Ng is on the phone right now.
Mr Brown is just finishing off a meeting.
He'll be with you in about five minutes.
He'll be with you shortly.



You should always direct your visitor/guest using clear instructions. After the initial greeting and/or explanation of a delay with your colleague/boss, you should then direct your visitor to the location of the meeting etc. You may find these phrases useful:

This way, please.
Please follow me to the conference room.
If you would like to follow me, I'll take you to.....
We've booked a conference room on the sixth floor, so we need to take the lift.

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