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THE Language Key

Welcome Back!

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

Dear Readers

In today's fast-paced global business environment we are required to make well-reasoned decisions and communicate them clearly to a diverse audience. To do this in one's native language can be a challenge but to do this in English for non-native speakers brings extra pressures that can frustrate both the listener and communicator.

Beyond just having the basic vocabulary and grammar to convey the message, we need to understand what language to use, when to use it and how to deliver it. **Language Key's executive (1-on-1) coaching service** addresses these concerns with tailored programs focused on the needs of the individual and your organisation.

We take a very personalised approach to arranging our coaching programmes to ensure the content is tailored to the participant. First, we conduct a needs analysis, which involves speaking directly to the participant to get an understanding of their English abilities and also discuss areas of focus for the programmes. This is then followed up with a discussion with L&D/HR to determine any specific company objectives for the programme.

The next step is to develop a training plan and recommend a number of training hours to achieve the objectives. This training plan serves as a guide for both trainer and participant throughout the training sessions - it is not a strict structure, but indicates key skills and focus areas identified in the needs analysis. The participant and trainer may change the direction of the course as they see necessary as improvement progresses. For example, if the participant has a presentation to give, they may want to spend a few sessions on practicing and refining the presentation with the trainer. After all, the trainer is the participants' personal coach.

At the end of the training programme, the trainer writes a report for the participant explaining the course progress, areas of improvement, and also recommendations for further training or practice. This is an important tool to analyse improvement for both participant and company.

Rebecca Williams
Editor - The Language Key



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HK's Ageing Population Causes Concern

One in three people in Hong Kong is expected to be 65 years old or above by 2041, causing a reduction in economic growth in the city, the Hong Kong government has warned.

"It is a big concern for our population development," says Hong Kong University social sciences Professor Paul Yip, explaining that the economy will **take a hit** if the aging **trend** continues. "There will be more people but fewer people that are working, so fewer will be **contributing** to the economy of Hong Kong."

While some argue that government **forecasts** for 2041 don't **make allowances for migration** or those who will continue to work after the retirement age of 65, Hong Kong faces serious economic and social **challenges**.

For others, the problem is not so much a high population of elderly but Hong Kong's lack of children.

Financial pressure, **career-driven mentalities**, limited space and high property costs are seen as **drivers** of a **fertility rate** that is one of the lowest in the world, with an average 1.20 births per woman.

Social trends in Hong Kong also indicate that an increasing number of women are choosing not to get married. Those who do marry do so much later and have a very small **time window** to start families.

If Hong Kong does nothing about its aging problem it will have a median age of 56.3 years by 2040, according to the United Nations.

For some, the **spectre** of a city with a decreasing workforce and lack of **youthful dynamism** is a very real worry.

Key Vocabulary

- take a hit** – (phrase) be badly affected by a difficult situation or problem
- trend** – (noun) a general development or change in a situation
- contributing** – (verb) giving something in order to provide or achieve something together with other people
- forecasts** – (noun) reports saying what is likely to happen in the future
- make allowances for** – (phrase) accept that a particular fact will change a situation
- migration** – (noun) the movement of people to a country in order to find work, a better life, etc.
- challenges** – (noun) difficult things that test someone's ability or determination
- career-driven mentalities** – (phrase) people's thinking that they must build their career
- drivers** – (noun) things that force someone or something to do something or go somewhere
- fertility rate** – (phrase) the average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime
- time window** – (phrase) a period of time when it is possible to do or achieve something
- median** – (adj) relating to the middle number or amount in a series
- spectre** – (noun) the idea of something unpleasant that might happen in the future
- youthful dynamism** – (phrase) the energy and enthusiasm of young people, esp. young adults

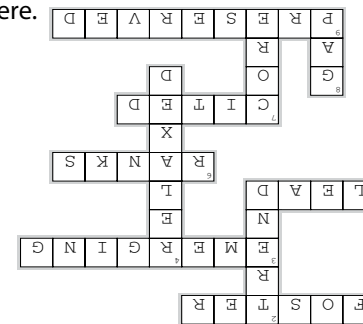
Complete the sentences below and right (including the crossword puzzle) using the highlighted vocabulary from the three articles. Remember to use the correct part of speech and verb tense in each case. You'll find the answers below.

1. An unhealthy lifestyle _____ his early death.
2. The government has agreed to finance a number of major road and rail _____ projects.
3. I'm using a _____ in my busy calendar to take a short trip to Boracay.
4. Facebook is one of the few companies with a truly _____ reach.
5. Toyota will _____ from the recall of 1.5 million cars with faulty air bags.
6. Juliette _____ from her colleagues because of her highly original ideas.
7. The company has _____ that it will make a profit of around \$350 million from the sale of its subsidiary.
8. The restaurant does good food but the choice is fairly _____.
9. Families _____ the earnings of wives far more than before.
10. The difference between the two teams has _____ over the past year.
11. Jeffrey's secretary _____ that she had copied a number of confidential documents without permission.
12. Finding a decision that pleases everyone is the _____ which now faces the committee.
13. You'll be causing an _____ if you park here.

ANSWERS:

1. contributed to
2. infrastructure
3. time window
4. global
5. take a hit
6. stands out
7. forecasted
8. restricted
9. rely on
10. narrowed
11. admitted
12. challenge
13. obstruction

SOLUTIONS

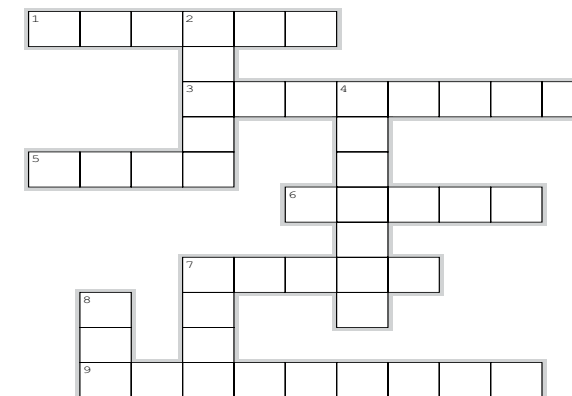


Across:

1. The company tries to _____ good relations between staff and management.
3. With the strong US dollar, _____ markets are receiving less investment.
5. Opinion polls suggest the government holds a slight _____ in the run up to the election.
6. Tiger Woods _____ second on the all-time list of golf major winners.
7. The head of sales _____ a number of reasons for the year-on-year 40% drop in revenue.
9. Many of the old buildings in the city have been _____.

Down:

2. The _____ in Hong Kong is for people to get married at a later age.
4. The company has a very _____ attitude towards dress at work.
7. The company's _____ business is micro-finance.
8. The _____ between the rich and the poor is widening in many developed countries.



Shenzhen is now more Competitive than Hong Kong!

For first time in 10 years, Hong Kong has lost its title as China's most competitive city, with Shenzhen taking the **lead** thanks to **innovation**.

Hong Kong's **reliance** on its financial industry rather than **fostering** small and **emerging** industries **contributed to** its fall in the Blue Book on Urban Competitiveness.

Hong Kong had held first place since 2005 when it was first put on the list, which **ranks** 294 cities in China and includes Taiwan.

A report on the survey **cited** Shenzhen's focus on innovation as the reason for its rise, and said Hong Kong relied too much on its **core** industries of finance, shipping, tourism and professional services. It said the city had failed to offer enough support for organizations working in innovation and technology and other small but emerging industries.

Dr Li Chao, a member of the research team that conducted the study, said Shenzhen was the most

innovative city in the country and its efforts in helping grow emerging industries made it **stand out**.

The report said Hong Kong continued to be in front in several **sub**-rankings such as those for knowledge-based economy, environment, and culture and information. But it said the **gap** was closing.

Economist Andrew Au said that Hong Kong maintained high positions in several global rankings of competitiveness, indicating the city remained competitive. But he **admitted** the **lead** had **narrowed**.



Key Vocabulary

- Innovation** – (noun) a new idea or method that is being tried for the first time, or the use of such ideas or methods
- reliance on** – (noun) condition of depending on something or someone
- fostering** – (verb) encouraging a particular feeling, situation, or idea to develop
- emerging** – (adj.) starting to exist or develop
- contributed to** – (phrasal verb) was one of the causes of an event or a situation
- ranks** – (verb) has a position in a list that shows things or people in order of importance
- cited** – (verb) mentioned something as proof for a theory or as a reason why something has happened
- core** – (adj.) describes the most important part of a system or principle
- stand out** – (phrasal verb) very easy to see or notice
- sub-** – (prefix) a smaller part of a larger whole
- gap** – (noun) a difference between two groups of people, two situations, etc.
- global** – (adj.) relating to the whole world
- admitted** – (verb) agreed that something bad is true
- lead** – (noun) a winning position during a race or other situation where people are competing
- narrowed** – (verb) reduced in size, amount, number, etc.

HK's Remaining Dai Pai Dongs Under Threat

Cheap Hong Kong's street restaurants, known as dai pai dongs, have served up favorite local dishes for decades. In the fairly recent past there were 100s of dai pai dongs all over the city but now there are only 24 remaining.

Offering the **rare** chance to eat outdoors, escaping the air-conditioning of the skyscrapers, the eateries are a **nostalgic** reminder of Hong Kong's past.

Dai pai dongs have become tourist attractions in themselves as well as being popular with both locals and **expatriates** working in Hong Kong. With no walls, cooks in the open, customers on plastic stools, plastic plates and bunches of chopsticks in tabletop jars, it's a **no-frills** formula that still brings in customers day and night.

When Hong Kong's population increased quickly after World War 2, concerns over street **obstructions** and **hygiene** grew. The government of the then British colony stopped issuing new licences for street restaurants and heavily **restricted** licence transfers.

Regarded as part of Hong Kong **cultural heritage**, the government is now facing calls for more to be done to **preserve** the last remaining dai



pai dongs. **Targeting** the restaurants around the central business district, services and **infrastructure** around the stalls were improved and in turn, the restaurant owners **upgraded** their restaurants. Additionally license transfers were **relaxed**.

However, the future of dai pai dongs in other areas of Hong Kong is not so bright.

Key Vocabulary

- rare** – (adj.) very unusual; not often found/seen
- nostalgic** – (adj.) (of something) causing you to remember the past with pleasure and sadness at the same time
- expatriates** – (noun) people who don't live in their own country
- no-frills** – (adj.) basic, without details or extras
- obstructions** – (noun) things that block the way or prevent passage through
- hygiene** – (noun) the practice of keeping yourself and your environment clean to maintain health and prevent disease
- restricted** – (adj.) limiting the number, size, or amount of something
- cultural heritage** – (phrase) the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation
- preserve** – (verb) keep something as it is, esp. in order to prevent it from decaying or to protect it from being damaged or destroyed
- Targeting** – (gerund) directing an action at a particular person or group
- infrastructure** – (noun) the basic structure of an organization or system which is necessary for its operation, esp. public water, energy, and systems for communication and transport
- upgraded** – (verb) improved the quality of something
- relaxed** – (verb) made less strict, formal



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ORIGINAL DOCUMENT

Let's now take a look at a letter from a bank to a customer who has requested a mortgage. In the letter, the bank rejects the customer's application but makes a counter-offer. It is willing to give the customer a loan but less than the amount requested.

Letters like this should follow a model structure where each paragraph has a specific function. The idea model structure for such a letter might be:

- Acknowledgement of Loan Application
- Action, Give Reasons, Reject Request
- Make Counter Offer
- Make Requests
- Positive Close

- Start a new paragraph here. The purpose of this paragraph is to politely reject the mortgage application, giving reasons. Details of the counter offer should be given in the next paragraph.
- The writer first says "regret" and then "approved." This type of language is confusing. It's best to say that the customer's original application was rejected, and in the next paragraph state the counter offer.
- GOOD: the writer has correctly used a standard phrase "I regret to inform you that..." a phrase commonly used to introduce bad news.
- Don't use negative words like "rejected" or "rejection." Instead use the negative "not" with the positive opposite of the word, e.g. "not successful." Always try to soften bad news.
- Introduce the counter offer with a standard phrase for giving positive news, e.g. We would be pleased to offer you..." There is no need to mention the phrase "counter offer" since it is clear what you are doing.
- Show a link between this paragraph (good news) and the previous paragraph (bad news) by starting your sentence with "however," or "despite this."

- Start a new paragraph here. The purpose of this paragraph is to state specific reasons for making the counter offer.
- Use a topic phrase to begin your sentence, e.g. We are making this counter offer because..."
- Never use the symbol "&" in place of "and" in official business correspondence.
- Write out numbers from 0 to 9. "2" becomes "two."

Just a brief scan of the letter below tells us that the writer has not followed such a structure. Read through the letter and compare the letter's structure with the model structure on the right. Also, make a note of any unclear terms, inappropriate words and examples of poor phrasing you find in the text. Then read through the rewritten letter and our comments at the bottom of the page.

- Subject headings should be brief.
- It's best to start the subject heading with a noun.
- A 'mortgage' is a type of loan, so the word 'loan' can be omitted.
- Capitalise all the main words in the subject heading.

- This sentence should be the first paragraph. A new paragraph should begin after it. It serves to acknowledge the customer's mortgage application.
- When thanking someone for something, use a standard phrase. "I would like to say thank you for..." is not a standard phrase. It's best to say "Thank you for..."
- When referring to a past communication, the date of the document received should be stated.
- "applying for a mortgage loan application" is a wordy phrase. Replace this with "mortgage application."

- If you begin a business letter with a person's name, you should end it with "Yours sincerely."
- If you begin a business letter with "Dear Sir," etc., you should end it with "Yours faithfully."

- "Should you have..." is out-of-date. Use "If you have ..."
- "Queries," "questions," "comments," etc is always plural when following "any."
- It's best to avoid a cliched phrase altogether and close with a positive comment related to the mortgage application or counter offer.

Dear Mr Lee

(1) Your application for a mortgage loan

(2) I would like to say thank you for your applying for the mortgage loan application. (3) After reviewing all of your income proof documents provided, I regret to inform you that your application was approved with counter offer from 70% of the valuation price to 55%. The approved loan is HK\$850,000. (4) The reason for this counter offer since your income is not steady. Your income is mostly based on commission & you cannot provide latest 2 years Tax Demand Note to verify your income.

(5) Should you have any query, please contact our hot-line.

(6) Yours

Roger Deng
LOANS OFFICER

Common Grammatical Errors in Writing

The email below contains 10 common grammatical errors. All ten errors are identified and explanations are provided. When you've read the explanations, read the 10 sentences below the email and try to find and correct the same 10 errors. You'll find the answers to the exercise bottom right of the page.



TO: Amy Ho, Departmental Manager
FROM: Tess Ng, Personnel Manager
SUBJECT: Trainee Placement Scheme

Hi Amy

As you requested, I have enclosed a copy of **scheduled programme**¹ for the Trainee Initiation Week. It will be held **between**² 23 March to 27 March.

Following³ your secretary's telephone call, I have set aside a session for you to speak to the participants. I **scheduled**⁴ this for Monday 23 March, starting at 10.00 a.m.

I am now completing the final **arrangement**⁵ for the week. Accordingly, I **will**⁶ be grateful if you **could be confirm**⁷ that the proposed time on Monday will be convenient for you.

In addition, I would **appreciate to receive**⁸ **some**⁹ comments you **should**¹⁰ have on the programme by Friday of this week, if possible.

Regards

Tess

1) Missing Article (a/an/the)

A singular, countable noun, such as **programme**, requires an article. When such a noun is used for the first time in a text, the indefinite article 'a' should be used. However, if the reader is already familiar with the noun and in this case the writer clearly is familiar with the **Trainee Initiation Week**, the definite article 'the' should be used – **the scheduled programme**....

2) Incorrect Preposition

Try to become familiar with the commonly used prepositions of time. For periods of time (with a start and a finish) you can use the two pairs of prepositions: **'between and'** and **'from to'**. Be careful not to mix up the two pairs – **from 23 March to 27 March**.... OR ... **between 23 March and 27 March**....

3) Unnecessary Preposition

The sequencing connective **'following'** is not followed by a preposition. It is followed either by a noun or pronoun. The writer may be confusing the phrase **'further to'** with **'following'**. **'Further to'** could replace **'following'** in this case – **Following your** OR, **Further to your**....

4) Incorrect Verb Tense (past simple vs. present perfect)

Use the past simple when you state the timing of a single past action. Although we know the session is scheduled for the 23 March, we do not know when the writer scheduled it for. When the timing of a single, past action is left unspecified, we should use the present perfect – **have scheduled**....

5) Incorrect Noun Ending (singular vs. plural)

We can assume here that more than one single arrangement was needed for the Initiation Week. The noun **'arrangement'** is generally used in the plural form in this context – **the final arrangements**....

6) Incorrect Modal Auxiliary Verb (will vs. would)

The modal auxiliary verb **'would'** is always used in the request structures: **'I would be grateful if ...'** and **'I would appreciate it if ...'** – **I would be grateful**....

7) Incorrect Structure (modal verb + main verb)

In active voice sentences, the correct structure should be: **[modal verb + verb infinitive without 'to']** – **could confirm**....

8) Incorrect Structure (verb + gerund/infinitive)

The verb **'appreciate'** is followed either by a clause introduced by **'that'** or by a gerund (not the infinitive) – **appreciate receiving**....

9) Incorrect Determiner (some vs. any)

In request sentences and negative sentences, use **'any'** instead of **'some'** with plural countable nouns. **'I would appreciate....'** is a polite request structure – **any comments**....

10) Incorrect Modal Verb

It is possible that the reader won't have any comments at all on the programme. To indicate possibility, the writer should have used the modal verb **'may'** – **you may have**....

- 1) Have you finished making the arrangement for Mr Takahashi's visit yet?
- 2) I would really appreciate to hear what he has to say on this subject.
- 3) Following to your email of 4 February, I am pleased to accept your quotation.
- 4) We are very sorry for any inconvenience which we must have caused you.
- 5) I will appreciate it if you could postpone the meeting until next week.
- 6) The resource centre will be open every weekday between 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- 7) I received your fax of 1 February requesting a bridging loan from us.
- 8) We don't have some places left on our Business English courses.
- 9) On 5 March, we will be holding charity event in aid of 'Save the Children Fund'.
- 10) We must recruiting some more experienced sales staff as soon as possible.

- 1) Have you finished making the **arrangements**⁵ for Mr Takahashi's visit yet?
2) I would really **appreciate hearing**⁸ what he has
3) **Following**⁷ your email of 4 February, I am ...
4) ... inconvenience which we **may**⁹ have caused you.
5) I **would**⁶ appreciate it if you could postpone the ...
6) ... every weekday between 5 p.m. **and**² 8 p.m.
7) I **have received**⁴ your fax of 1 February ...
8) We don't have **any**⁹ places left on our Business ...
9) On 5 March, we will be holding a charity event ...
10) We **must recruit**⁷ some more experienced sales ...

Check your Answers

The rewritten business letter is an improvement on the original because:

- It is correctly structured into paragraphs and each paragraph has a specific purpose.
- There is a logical order to the information. As a result, the letter is clearer and easier to read.
- The subject heading is clear and concise.
- The writer makes good use of standard phrases for key functions such as thanking, giving bad news, giving good news, etc
- It closes on a positive note with a specific reference to the counter offer.



REWRITTEN DOCUMENT

Dear Mr Lee

Mortgage Application

Thank you for your mortgage application of 4 September.

After reviewing your income from the documents you provided us, I regret to inform you that your mortgage application for 70% of the property valuation price was not successful.

Despite this, we would be pleased to offer you a mortgage of 55% of the valuation price. A mortgage of HK\$850,000 has been approved.

We are making this counter offer because your income is not stable, based mainly on commission and you have not provided us with the latest two years Tax Demand Note to verify your income.

I hope that this counter offer will meet your approval.

Yours sincerely

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Conversation Switching Techniques



Comment:

Although most of the conversation was small talk, Jill also managed to ask Michael to finish an important presentation and email her the details later that day. They actually focused on three topics during their brief chat. The first topic was focused on Michael, when Jill asked him about his holiday plans:

Jill: I wasn't sure if you'd be in to work today since you said you were going to be on vacation.

Then Michael enquired about something related to Jill, by asking:

Michael: Speaking of plays, how did your daughter's school presentation go?

Finally, Jill spoke a little about what was happening around her by mentioning a computer upgrade.

Let's take a look now at some of the language that Jill and Michael use as they switch between topics. Note that they begin with small talk, move on to a more serious work-related issue, and then switch back to small talk before ending the conversation. Jill begins the small talk by saying:

Jill: I wasn't sure if you'd be in to work today since you said you were going to be on vacation.

We see that Jill politely asks about Michael to begin the small talk. By saying "I wasn't sure if you'd be in today," Jill lets Michael know that she wants to start the conversation with small talk. She also shows that she has remembered what Michael told her about where he was going.

She also remembers that Michael likes theatre. When talking to co-workers, remembering their likes and dislikes and other small details about their lives helps in finding things to talk about.

Michael then asks about something related to Jill:

Michael: Speaking of plays, how did your daughter's school presentation go?

When he says this, Michael is switching topics from his vacation to Jill's daughter. Notice how he makes the switch: he uses the phrase "speaking of." This is a common way of switching topics during small talk when you want to move on to something that you have been reminded of based on what you were just talking about.

Jill then switches the topic to a more serious work-related issue. She says:

Jill: Anyway, I called because I wanted to check how the presentation for tomorrow is going. Is the slide show complete yet?

Phrases such as "Anyway, I called because..." or "Anyway, the reason I'm calling is..." are useful ways of letting your conversation partner know that you now want to talk about work. Finally, let's see when Jill switches back to small talk:

Jill: Would you? That would be really great. I'm having some new software installed on my system in a while, but I'll take a look at it ASAP and get back to you. These upgrades always seem to happen at the worst times!

Small talk may be used to fill silences or get to know someone you've just been introduced to. In this article, we're going to look at how to switch the topic of conversation when you want to move on from small talk to a business-related issue.

Why is it necessary to get into small talk at all if the point of your conversation is to talk about a work-related topic? Small talk is useful in creating a positive atmosphere, especially in telephone conversations where you can't see the other person directly. This is particularly useful if you have a favour to ask, or if you need to remind the other person that something is overdue.

The tone in such conversation is often more significant than the content of the dialogue. Remember to give the other person a turn to speak, and if you need to ask questions, don't get too inquisitive. Here, we will focus on how to switch from one topic to another during small talk. Since small talk is not restricted to a single topic, speakers often move rapidly from one subject to another while talking. It is useful to remember functional words and phrases that can indicate to your listener that you are changing the topic of conversation.

Situation 1:

Below is a conversation between Jill, a managing editor in an e-learning firm, and Michael, an associate in the company. As you read the dialogue, try to identify at least three topics that Jill and Michael talk about that are **not** related to business.

DIALOGUE 1

Michael: Good morning, Michael Hutchins.
Jill: Hi Mike, this is Jill Connor.
Michael: Hi Jill.
Jill: I wasn't sure if you'd be in to work today since you said you were going to be on vacation.
Michael: No, I'm going next week.
Jill: Edinburgh, right? I heard about this Shakespeare festival there this month. Maybe you can catch some of it.
Michael: Really? I must check that out. How did you know I was a theatre buff?
Jill: Are you kidding? You're always going to some play or other.
Michael: Speaking of plays, how did your daughter's school presentation go?
Jill: Very well actually. It even got a small review in the paper the next day.
Michael: Wow! Do congratulate her for me.
Jill: Thanks! Anyway, I called because I wanted to check how the presentation for tomorrow is going. Is the slide show complete yet?
Michael: Just about. I'm just tweaking it a little.
Jill: That's great! Do you think I could take a look at it sometime today?
Michael: Sure! I'm just going in for a meeting, but I can send it to you in a couple of hours.
Jill: Would you? That would be really great. I'm having some new software installed on my system in a while, but I'll take a look at it ASAP and get back to you. These upgrades always seem to happen at the worst times!
Michael: Tell me about it! And they usually take longer than they're supposed to.
Jill: So, I'll expect a mail from you later today.
Michael: You got it!
Jill: Thanks! Talk to you later.

Situation 2:

In the following dialogue, Rita and Peter are making small talk just after a business meeting. Here, the pattern of small talk may be slightly different from that in a telephone in the first dialogue, since the speakers are face-to-face. As you read the conversation, try to spot the words and phrases that the speakers use to move from one topic to another.

DIALOGUE 2

Rita: Well, that was a good meeting. Don't you like it when everyone gets involved in the discussion?
Peter: Definitely! It's much better than when a couple of people dominate the conversation. That's a lovely briefcase you're carrying—is it new?
Rita: Thanks! Yes, I just got it at Harrods last week. They're having a great sale.
Peter: Oh really? I should check it out!
Rita: I think it's on until next week. By the way, did you hear that Marita is moving to France?
Peter: Yes, in fact I was just talking to her about it. She said she was going to take some time off work and do an art course.
Rita: How lovely!
Peter: Oh, I've been meaning to ask you if you could send me a copy of your last presentation. There were some interesting points I missed and I wanted to go over it again sometime.
Rita: Why, thank you! Of course I can send it to you.
Peter: I was also very impressed with the creative designs you used the presentation. Do you mind if I take a closer look at your template?
Rita: Not at all! I'll email it to you when I get back to my desk.
Peter: Thanks a lot! I'm tired of using my old designs and could use some new ideas.
Rita: I know the feeling! Speaking of new ideas, don't you think we should ask for a change of décor in the office sometime? I'm getting tired of the orange and brown!
Peter: Absolutely! We should bring it up at the next HR meeting. Do you have any particular suggestions in mind?
Rita: Not really. Anything different would be a pleasant change!
Peter: Yes! Well, it was great chatting with you. I have to rush off now since I'm meeting a client for lunch.
Rita: Sure! See you soon!
Peter: See you. Bye!
Rita: Bye!



Comment:

When talking to someone face-to-face, there are clearly more options as far as speaking topics are concerned. Compliments on someone's hair, clothing or accessories are acceptable, but remember not to talk or ask about anything too personal unless you know the person well. Vacations, sport, current affairs and office events – even office gossip – are safe topics.

Rita signals to Peter that she wants to start by asking for his opinion. She says:

Rita: Well, that was a good meeting. Don't you like it when everyone gets involved in the discussion?

Note that framing your opinion as a question is a good way of involving the other person in the conversation.

Peter then changes the topic by complimenting Rita on her new briefcase. He says:

Peter: That's a lovely briefcase you're carrying—is it new?

Rita then uses the phrase "by the way" to indicate that she is switching to another topic. "By the way" is a handy phrase to use when you want to indicate that you are going to say something off-topic that is interesting but not of much importance. Rita says:

Rita: I think it's on until next week. By the way, did you hear that Marita is moving to France?

The conversation then shifts to a business-related topic when Peter asks Rita to send him a copy of her last presentation. He says:

Peter: Oh, I've been meaning to ask you if you could send me a copy of your last presentation. There were some interesting points I missed and I wanted to go over it again sometime.

Here, Peter indicates a switch in topic by saying "Oh, I've been meaning to..." This is good way of indicating a change of topic, both when you want to get down to business and also to switch to another general topic.

Rita then switches back to small talk, this time related to the office. She uses the phrase "speaking of":

Rita: I know the feeling! Speaking of new ideas, don't you think we should ask for

Finally, Peter indicates that he has to go and would like to end the conversation:

Peter: Yes! Well, it was great chatting with you. I have to rush off now since I'm meeting

Phrases such as "it was great talking to you" or "it was lovely chatting with you" signal that you want to end a conversation. It is usually polite to include a reason for ending the conversation, such as Peter does. Let's see that again:

Peter: Yes! Well, it was great chatting with you. I have to rush off now since I'm meeting a client for lunch.

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English Around the World



This month we spoke to Phueng Lui, a Thai national working in customer relations at a business hotel in Bangkok. Pheng is 28 and has been working for the same hotel since she graduated from university. This is what she had to say about her use of English.

"Since I work in the hospitality industry, I always meet people from different countries. English is the only language that I share with most of our guests. When I first started working here I was worried that I wouldn't be able to do my job properly because English isn't my mother tongue. But now after a few years I am a lot more confident.

I studied management at university here in Bangkok but I also took English in my final year which helped me to gain a better foundation in the language, particularly in grammar and writing. I didn't get much chance to practice speaking though, especially with native speakers, since our teachers were all Thai.

Often I find it difficult to understand other people's English accents. I find the accents from India and the Philippines especially difficult.

English courses are popular in Thailand with professionals who want to do better at their jobs. These courses are very different from the way that English is taught in school or even university since the focus is on using language relevant to work rather than on grammar and rules. When using English at work, I try not to think about grammar but I do think about whether what I'm saying sounds right or not.

My boss also helps us with our English by giving us language training classes. He's a native English speaker from London. He personally conducts the training and we role-play all the kinds of situations we face on a daily basis. This kind of training is really useful. For every situation we practice, we're given a list of useful language we can use."

Teacher: Tell me a sentence that starts with an "I".
 Student: I is the...
 Teacher: Stop! Never put 'is' after an "I". Always put 'am' after an "I".
 Student: OK. I am the ninth letter of the alphabet.



A man says to his friend, "Guess how many coins I have in my pocket." The friend says, "If I guess right, will you give me one of them?" The first guy says, "If you guess right, I'll give you both of them!"

The boss returned from lunch in a good mood and called the whole staff in to listen to a couple of jokes he had learnt. Everybody but one girl cried with laughter. "What's the matter?" said the boss. "Haven't you got a sense of humour?" "I don't have to laugh," she replied. "I'm leaving on Friday."

A girl and a boy are talking. The girl says, "You would be a good dancer except for two things." The boy asks, "What are those two things?" The girl answers, "Your feet."

A student is talking to his teacher. Student: Would you punish me for something I didn't do? Teacher: Of course not. Student: Good, because I haven't done my homework.

Business English Apps



Fluent U (iphone . android . free)
<http://www.fluentu.com/english/>

Fluent U turns videos into fun English learning lessons. The business category includes authentic videos covering six language levels. This is an excellent resource for learning!



Collins Business English: Listening (iphone . android . free)
<http://www.collins.co.uk/page/ELT+Apps>

Focusing specifically on building listening skills, this app features real people talking about their work and their lives in a variety of accents, with exercises and other learning materials.

In-Company English Club Promotion!!!

HK\$20,000 for 10 x 2-hour sessions / HK\$15,000 for 10 x 1.5-hour sessions. Promo price for up to 16 participants per class. Contact us by 31 July.

Designed to be an informal, fun and dynamic club that allows your staff to practice English in a relaxed and friendly environment, an English club helps encourage speaking and build confidence.

The format is flexible with input from you sought before and during the club. However, each session consists of a learning point or topic such as socialising, cultural awareness, colloquialisms and slang, hot topics in the news, telling narratives, impromptu speaking and media sessions to name but a few.

Sessions consist of group discussions, language games and activities, use of media, board games, role-plays and activities related to understanding colloquial expressions.

Key Objectives on an English Club

- Provide a fun and 'safe' environment for your staff to practice their English;
- Give your staff valuable feedback on their common errors and areas for improvement;
- Build your staff's proficiency in spoken English over the long term;
- Enhance your staff's confidence and interest in developing their English.



call
Lachlan Robertson
 2893 6124



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 What's the best way to write a date in English? I've seen a few different date formats. Which is the one to use?

A It is much clearer to your reader if you write the date out in full, including the day, month and year. If you are replying to a letter or email in the same month that the initial letter or email was written, it's not necessary to include the year.

Here are the three commonly accepted date formats: **15 November 20xx, November 15, 20xx or November 15th, 20xx.** The first of these is by far the most common format since it avoids the use of any punctuation.

Avoid **15/11/20xx** or **11/15/20xx** as these can be potentially confusing. In British English, the order is date, month, year. In American English, the order is month, date, year.

Q Could you explain the main difference in usage between "some" and "any"?

A First, **some** is used in positive sentences, while **any** is used in negative sentences. For example: **There are some new PCs on the market.** And: **They didn't have any new models.** **Any**, however, can be used in positive sentences when the meaning is negative. For example: **We have hardly any money left.** And: **There is seldom any reason to involve the Board in day-to-day business.**

Second, both **some** and **any** can be used in questions: **some** is often used when you expect a positive answer. Compare these two sentences: **Would you like some brochures?** (a positive response is expected). And: **Would you like any brochures?** (a negative

response is expected).

Finally, we use **any** in conditional sentences beginning with words and phrases such as **if, unless, and in case** as in these sentences: **If you need any help, please call me.** And: **Unless you have any objections, let's proceed with the plan.**

Q Could you tell me the meaning of the phrase "vice versa" and how it's used in context?

A This common phrase, **vice versa**, means that the reverse of what we have just said is also true. For example: **On this special day, husbands give their wives gifts and vice versa.** This means that husbands give their wives gifts and wives give their husbands gifts too. Here's another example: **Every year many people move from villages to cities but not vice versa.** This means that every year people move from the villages to the cities but people in the cities do not move to the villages.

Q I've been told not to use phrases like "as per your instruction/request," "as instructed/requested." What's wrong with them?

A Grammatically, there is nothing wrong with these phrases. These phrases were very common in the past, but these days they are regarded as being rather cold and official-sounding. They sound cold because they are impersonal. Modern writers tend to write in a more personal style and this means including personal references such as **you, he, she, your, and him.** So the best way to rewrite these phrases is to say: **As you instructed/requested, or According to your instruction/request.**

Spell Using The International Alphabet



When speaking on the phone in English, you may have difficulty with clearly communicating the spelling of your name, or understanding an important word spoken by the person you are calling. In these situations, it is a good idea to use the International Alphabet

So if your name is Zhane, you would say:

"My first name is Zhane. That's Z for Zulu; H for Hotel; A for Alpha; N for November; E for Echo - Zhane."

Keep the international alphabet with you when you make a phone call, or better still try to memorise it!

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| A for Alpha | N for November |
| B for Bravo | O for Oscar |
| C for Charlie | P for Papa |
| D for Delta | Q for Quebec |
| E for Echo | R for Romeo |
| F for Foxtrot | S for Sierra |
| G for Golf | T for Tango |
| H for Hotel | U for Uniform |
| I for India | V for Victor |
| J for Juliet | W for Whisky |
| K for Kilo | X for X-ray |
| L for Lima | Y for Yankee |
| M for Mike | Z for Zulu |

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