



THE Language Key

Business English Training

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- ⇒ BULATS testing and preparation
- ⇒ Internal benchmarking
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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,

Good language and communication/soft skills are becoming increasingly important to companies worldwide. As businesses expand, economies integrate, and people move around the world to work, we are seeing a greater demand for a range of business language and skill needs.

The Language Key is pleased to announce three new areas of training services: corporate Mandarin training, executive 1:1 training in other languages (Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, French, German and Spanish), and soft skills training. The new training services aim to directly address Hong Kong's language, communication and soft skills-based training needs.

Our corporate Mandarin training programs are designed in a very similar way to our corporate English training programs based on the participants' level, job type and workplace Mandarin learning needs. Programs include: tailored in-house courses, 1:1 executive coaching, small group training and workshops. Our Mandarin trainers are qualified and have several years corporate training experience in Hong Kong.

With soft skills, we have established a partnership with London Corporate Training (LCT), a well-established and respected British training institute with over 20 years' experience conducting skills-based programs for companies in the UK. The Language Key will offer in-house LCT programs in Hong Kong using LCT trainers. Companies will have the option of sending staff to LCT's London training centre when there is a need for individual training or training a small number of employees.

If you are interested in finding out more about our new training services, please visit our website or call our Director of Training, Lachlan Robertson, on 2893 6124.

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Editor – The Language Key



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Measures to Boost Working Population

The Hong Kong government is increasing its efforts to attract overseas **talent**, including **professionals** from mainland China, as the city's working population is expected to **shrink** in 2018.

In an interview with Xinhua, Director of Immigration Chan Kwok-ki said the government will **relax** visa rules for foreign and mainland professionals working in Hong Kong. Under the government scheme professionals will be allowed to stay for two years upon arrival in the SAR instead of one year.

Professionals **attracted** to the city through these two schemes who earn a taxable yearly salary of over HK\$2 million will be **eligible** for six-year visas, Chan said.

The government **rolled out** a new scheme in May **appealing** to the overseas-born children of Hong Kong **permanent residents** to come back to the SAR. Applicants need not be employed before they come to Hong Kong and can bring their **spouse** and unmarried children to live in the city.

Chan said about 10,000 non-local students who study in Hong Kong higher education institutions stay in the city after their studies every year, most of them from China. The government hopes these non-local students can "**put down roots**" in Hong Kong, Chan said.

He said these **measures** were designed to maintain the city's workforce **amid** low birthrates, longer **life expectancy** and an aging population. The Labour and Welfare Department said last year it expected the city's working population to start decreasing from 2018 onward and shrink to 3.5 million by 2038 from the current 3.8 million.

Key Vocabulary

- talent** - (noun) having a natural ability or skill to do something
professionals - (noun) people with jobs needing special skills or education
shrink - (verb) get smaller in size, amount, number, etc.
relax - (verb) make rules, laws, requirements, etc. less severe
attracted - (verb) made people come to a place or do a particular thing by being interesting, enjoyable, etc.
eligible - (adj.) able to do something because you are in the right situation
rolled out - (phrasal verb) made a new product, service, or system available for the first time
appealing to - (verb) attracting or interesting someone because of certain qualities
permanent residents - (phrase) people allowed to live indefinitely within a country of which they are not citizens; refers to a visa status
spouse - (noun) your husband or wife
put down roots - (idiom) begin to have a settled life in a particular place
measures - (noun) a number of actions taken to achieve a particular purpose
amid - (prep.) while something else is happening
life expectancy - (phrase) the average period that a person may expect to live

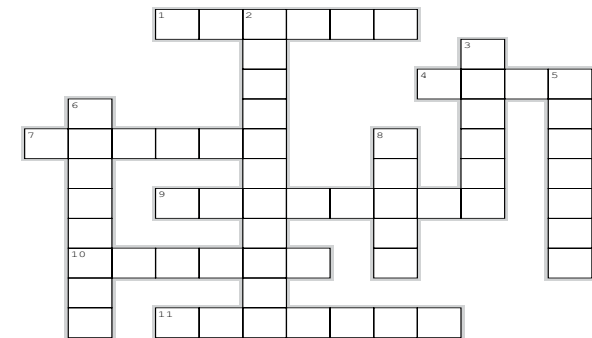
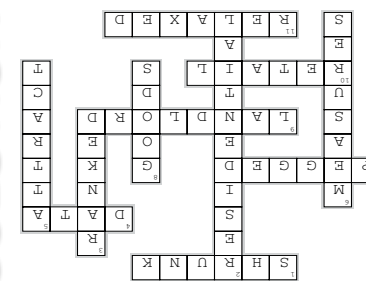
Complete the sentences below and right (including the crossword puzzle) using the highlighted vocabulary from the three articles. Remember to use the correct part of speech and verb tense in each case. You'll find the answers below.

- Only people over 18 are _____ to vote.
- We signed a three-year _____ when we moved into the house.
- Mr Ewing and Mr Campbell gave HK\$30,000 and HK\$11,000 _____.
- Business is starting to _____ since interest rates fell to a record low.
- I'm pleased that John finally got married and is _____.
- The company plans to _____ the scheme across Singapore this year.
- I thought I'd _____ the leisure facilities while I'm here at the hotel.
- _____ rice prices have had a significant impact on poor families.
- The _____ of foreigners living in the Philippines is considerably higher than that of the locals.
- Most modern pop music doesn't _____ to me at all.
- The current inflation rate is roughly _____ government expectations.
- The _____ temperature in this highland resort is eight degrees lower than in the lowlands.
- For many people, this type of medical procedure remains _____.
- What is the average _____ for people in Cambodia?

ANSWERS:

- eligible
- lease
- respectively
- pick up
- putting down roots
- roll out
- take advantage of
- Sky-rocketing
- purchasing power
- appeal
- in line with
- average
- unaffordable
- life expectancy

SOLUTION



Hong Kong Luxury Retailers Fight Unaffordable Rents

Landlords in Hong Kong, the world's most expensive city for **retail** rents, are facing pressure from **luxury retailers** to lower rents.

Luxury retailers such as Prada and Kering SA, owner of Gucci, have **flocked** to Hong Kong to **take advantage of** mainland Chinese **appetite** for luxury **goods** over the last five years. Rents have gone up dramatically during that period. Now, as China's economy slows and fewer mainland tourists visit Hong Kong causing a decline in sales, rents are becoming **unaffordable** for many retailers.

Rents are high in Hong Kong, and the currency—**pegged** to the dollar—has risen along with the **greenback**, making goods there more costly. At the same time, the euro has declined in value making Paris and other European cities less expensive.

Kering said it has started **negotiating** with landlords and could close some of its shops if negotiations with landlords don't **work out**.

Prada has talked to landlords without any acceptable results, a spokeswoman said. Prada said it won't **expand** or close



stores in Hong Kong, for now, but if sales don't **pick up**, it could consider not renewing some **leases** when they end.

Rents in Hong Kong's shops are the world's highest, beating those in New York. Retail rents in the first quarter in Hong Kong were \$4,334 a square foot, above New York's \$3,617.

Landlords may have to reduce rents if the option is leaving shops empty. Rents for street shops in key business districts could fall 10% to 15% in 2015, according to brokerage Knight Frank.

Key Vocabulary

- Landlords** - (noun) companies and people who you rent property from
retail - (adj.) describes the activity of selling products to the public in shops and on the internet
luxury retailers - (phrase) shops that sell high value, high class items such as bags, clothes and watches
flocked - (verb) moved or came together in large numbers
take advantage of - (phrase) use the good things in a situation
appetite - (noun) the feeling of wanting something very much
goods - (noun) items made to be sold

- unaffordable** - (adj.) too expensive for people to be able to buy or pay for
pegged - (verb) fixed the cost of borrowing money or the value of a country's money at a particular level
greenback - (noun) the US dollar
negotiating - (gerund) trying to make or change an agreement by discussion

- work out** - (phrasal verb) happened or developed in a particular way
expand - (verb) increase in size
pick up - (phrasal verb) If a business or social situation picks up, it improves
leases - (noun) contracts in which you pay money in order to use a building for a period of time

Hong Kong is World's Hardest Working City!

Hong Kong is the world's hardest working city, at 50 hours a week according to a new report.

The UBS Prices and Earnings 2015 report included **data** from 71 cities around the world, where Hong Kong was **ranked** 6th on the list of the world's most expensive cities to live in, a 10-place place **jump** from three years ago.

Sky-rocketing property prices were the main **driver** for high living costs, with Hong Kong having the second highest **residential** rent in the world, second only to New York City.

The top three most expensive cities to live in were New York City, Zurich and Geneva, when rent is included in living costs. Within Asia, Hong Kong is followed by Tokyo, Seoul, and Taipei **respectively**.

The study said a furnished two-room apartment in Hong Kong costs around HK\$35,000 to rent per month, and a similar apartment in New York costs HK\$1,600 more. While the difference in rents between the two cities is only HK\$1,600, the **disparity** in people's **income** is **huge**.

When it comes to **purchasing power**, an employee in Hong Kong can buy an iPhone 6 by working 52 hours, while New Yorkers only need 24



hours of work to get one.

No surprises in the ranking of working hours though, as Hong Kong **emerged** as the hardest working place on Earth, with employees putting in an **average** of 2,600 working hours a year, or 1,000 more hours a year than Parisians, while receiving just 17 days of holidays in a year.

On a weekly basis, Hong Kongers average over 50 hours per week, or four more hours of work daily when compared to employees in Paris, where staff works 35 hours per week **in line with** government **regulations**.

Key Vocabulary

- data** (noun) information or facts about something
ranked (verb) had a position in a list that shows things or people in order of importance, value, etc.
jump (noun) increase, rise
Sky-rocketing (adj.) describes something that rises in number, value, amount, price, etc. very quickly
driver (noun) something that pushes another thing so that it increases in amount, number, price, etc.
residential (adj.) describes a place where people live (not work)
respectively (adv.) in the same order as the people or things you have just talked about
disparity (noun) difference, usually relating to the money people earn or their position
income (noun) money that you earn by working, investing, or producing goods
huge (adj.) very large
purchasing power (phrase) a person's ability to buy goods
average (noun) an average amount is calculated by adding some amounts together and then dividing by the number of amounts
in line with (idiom) according to; in accordance with
regulations (noun) official rules that control how something is done

The first question we need to ask ourselves is what do we mean by tone. Tone refers to the emotional context of your email, the level of formality and informality you adopt in communicating and your attitude towards your topic. Tone lets your readers know that you are communicating specifically with them and not with just anyone.

Create Reader-Based Messages

Whenever possible, maintain a personal touch and emphasise 'you' over 'me' in your emails. Instead of writing to your workers:

I want to emphasise the importance of following safety procedures.

Why not say:

Your safety is important to this company. Please follow all safety procedures carefully so as to avoid accidents.

We create the 'you' attitude by highlighting the reader's benefits and concentrating on the reader's needs instead of your own. In other words, we have to be more 'reader-centred' and put ourselves in the reader's position. However, we cannot create the 'you' attitude by simply using 'you' instead of 'we' or 'I' all the time.

Compare these two examples:

Inappropriate tone

Since we have to update our training records, please fill in the attached form and return it to us by 31 May 20xx.

Appropriate tone

We would like to update our training records so that we can arrange appropriate training programmes for your career development. Would you please complete the attached form and return it to us by 31 May 20xx.

We believe that we can get the response we want more easily by adopting the 'you' attitude.

Emphasise the Positive

In general, you want to keep your tone positive and to avoid negativity. Even when writing to tell someone they've done something wrong, or to point out a problem, your tone should be firm but even-handed. Remember your purpose is to change behaviour or to find a solution, not to cause offence or put another person down. Instead of writing this to your subordinate:

You failed to send your expense claim form before the deadline, so you will not be compensated until the end of November.

You could write:

As we did not receive your expense claim form before 31 September, we are afraid that we cannot compensate you until the end of November.

Your reader will feel much more comfortable dealing with the second, more positive approach, where the emphasis

Appropriate Tone for Internal Email



blame has clearly been removed from the reader and directed towards the writer. To get a clearer idea of this, compare the two examples that follow:

Inappropriate tone

It is quite obvious that somebody in your department cannot read. This is the second time this month I've had to return the overtime records because the client job numbers were not filled in.

Give the job to someone else this time, okay? Or, at least tell them the facts – no overtime records, no overtime pay.

Appropriate tone

I am returning your overtime records because the client job numbers were not filled in. This oversight has occurred twice in one month.

Please let your staff know that unless we have complete records, we cannot issue overtime cheques.

I would appreciate your help in clearing up this problem.

If you find yourself in a negative mood when you sit down to write, try to change your attitude. Or, write a negative email but don't send it. Making someone else feel bad may make you feel good, but think how it would feel to be on the receiving end of it. Short-term satisfaction is a poor exchange for creating long-term problems for yourself.

Keep Your Tone Natural

With the exception of highly technical messages, emails are informal communications. Yet many writers feel that when they put their thoughts on paper, they must change their language into something more official sounding as in this example:

Inappropriate tone

Herewith are the files for the Technoview audit.

Please make an estimate of your requirements for the length of time you will need these files. Note this time on the enclosed slip and return the slip to me at your earliest convenience.

The writer obviously believes that a more official tone is likely to ensure that the reader will comply. However, it is more likely to ensure the reader's confusion.

The writer only needs to say:



Appropriate tone

Here are the files for the Technoview audit.

Please let me know how long you will need them. Write your time estimate on the attached slip and return the slip to me.

Over-official language prevents clear communication. Hear yourself telling the reader what you want him or her to know before you write it. Read your message aloud. Try and attain a clear, straightforward style that lets your true "voice" come through.

Avoid Mixed Tone Messages

Make sure that your tone is appropriate for your reader's position. You would use a more formal tone with superiors and a more relaxed, information tone with colleagues and subordinates. An email to someone above you in the company should not be too familiar or assume too much about your relationship. In general, avoid using mixed tones, as in this example:

Inappropriate tone

To: Ruby Leung, Head of Department
From: William Tang, Administration Manager
Subject: Hiring Part-Time Clerical Help

Because of the recent loss of two full-time employees, I've found myself shorthanded – and you know how hectic that can be!

Last time this happened we didn't catch up for 3 weeks!

So, I would like approval to hire two temporary clerical workers for the month of March. We're always busiest then – it must be the spring weather.

Please let me know as soon as possible if we can take on the extra help. By the way, I love your new hairstyle.

The mixed tone and inappropriate personal comments of this email are not likely to impress your reader. Mr Tang should have focused on his request and saved the personal comments for conversation.

Appropriate tone

To: Ruby Leung, Head of Department
From: William Tang, Administration Manager
Subject: Hiring Part-Time Clerical Help

Two clerical workers in our department resigned last week, leaving us shorthanded for the workload in March.

I would like your approval to hire two temporary clerical workers to cover that month.

Because you will be on a business trip next week, I would be willing to make all arrangements to hire and train the part-time workers.

Please let me know as soon as possible if we can take on the extra help.

The revised email not only states a problem and what decision is needed but lets the Department Head know what the manager is willing to do to help. The tone is businesslike without being too familiar or too official.

Summary

When writing email, consider the following points:

- Focus on what you can do for your reader
- Adopt a 'reader-centred' approach
- Use positive language throughout
- Adopt a more natural, conversational tone
- Maintain the same tone throughout

Use Precise, Active Verbs in your Documents

- Strengthen word choice at the word and sentence level by adding precise verbs.
- Avoid non-specific verbs and the overuse of is, are, was, were, I or we.
- Always look for verbs that are masked as nouns. Convert the noun back to a verb by using its root and rewrite the sentence.

✗ John Wong will contact you at 11.30 p.m.
✓ John Wong will send you an email at 11.30 p.m.
✓ John Wong will visit you at 11.30 p.m.

✗ We must consider this problem.
✓ We must resolve this problem.

✗ The report is a summary of previous research on drinking.
✓ The report summarises research on drinking.

✗ The copy editor made an improvement to the draft.
✓ The copy editor improved the draft.

✗ John Leung is responsible for the distribution of the daily marketing report.
✓ John Leung distributes the daily marketing report.

✗ Improvement of the invoicing system will be performed by Jane Ng.
✓ Jane Ng will improve the invoicing system.

✗ Candidate interviewing and employment is done by the HR.
✓ HR interviews and employs all candidates.

✗ All credit card approval is done by Kerry Tam.
✓ Kerry Tam approves credit cards.

TIPS

Writing Advice



Functional Language for Querying and Clarifying

Now it's rather unlikely that anyone would have to query so many things in such a short meeting like this one. We're just using this as an example to show you how to use key functional language for querying information.

If you study the dialogue on page 8, you'll see there's more to it than simply querying what someone has said. You'll also need to know how to clarify, confirm, correct, and ask for repetition. You can see of full list of functional language in the box also on page 8



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Querying and Clarifying Information

When you attend a business meeting, you may not always agree with everything someone says. You may think that someone has got their facts wrong. Or you may simply be confused or feel misled by what someone says. If you are in such situations, it is very important for you to 'query' or 'clarify'. You need to check that the information given is correct or that you understand correctly what has been said.

One way of politely querying something is simply to repeat the part you think is wrong and ask a question such as:

13 million? Wasn't it 30 million?

If you are unclear about something, you need clarification and might say something like:

I don't quite follow you. What exactly do you mean?

Situation

The dialogue on the left is between two managers discussing the previous month's sales figures. Make a note of the phrases used by the two speakers to query and clarify what has been said.

Querying Information 13 million?

Isn't it 30 million?
Don't you mean 2002?
Shouldn't it be 5000 units?
Sorry, I meant 30 million.
No, I mean 2001.

Clarifying Information

Let me spell out...
Have I made that clear?
Do you see what I'm getting at?
Let me put this another way...

Requesting Information

Please could you...?
I'd like you to...
Would you mind...?
I wonder if you could...

Asking for Repetition

I'm afraid I didn't understand that.
Could you repeat what you just said?
I didn't catch that.
Could you repeat that, please?
I missed that. Could you say it again, please?
Could you run that by me one more time?

Asking for Clarification

I don't quite follow you.
What exactly do you mean?
I'm not sure what you are getting at.
I don't see what you mean.

Asking for Verification

You did say next week, didn't you?
Do you mean that...?
Is it true that...?

Correcting Information

Sorry, I think you misunderstood what I said.
Sorry, that's not quite right.
I don't think you understand what I'm saying.
That's not quite what I had in mind.
That's not what I meant.

DIALOGUE

- JEN:** OK, so, just to give you a summary of the sales figures for last month.
SARA: Last month? Don't you mean this month?
JEN: No, I mean last month. This month's figures aren't ready yet, are they?
SARA: Oh, no, of course not. Sorry.
JEN: So, overall, sales last month are up again – by 2.6%, in fact, which is pretty good.
SARA: Er, 2.6%? Shouldn't that be 6.2%?
JEN: Yeah, up by 6.2%. Didn't I say that?
SARA: No, you said 2.6.
JEN: Oh, ... right. Well, you know what I mean. So, anyway, the thing is, we're getting the best results in Thailand and Malaysia – 30,000 units.
SARA: 30,000? That doesn't sound right to me. 13,000, surely?
JEN: No, the figures are here – Thailand and Malaysia: 30,000 units.
SARA: Thailand and Malaysia. Are you sure? That can't be right. Sales have never been good in those two countries.
JEN: That's just the point. Sales are usually terrible there, but they were excellent in June.
SARA: June? Isn't it July we're talking about?
JEN: July! Yes, of course, July! If you'd just let me finish! What I want to know is if we could sell the product in June, ...
SARA: July.
JEN: ... in July, then why can't we sell it there every month?
SARA: Good point. Have you spoken to John about it?
JEN: John? You mean Jim.
SARA: Jim, yes. Whoever's in charge of South East Asia these days.
JEN: Jim Munroe. I couldn't. He's had to fly to Australia. His mother's ill apparently.
SARA: There must be some mistake.
JEN: Hm?
SARA: Well, I saw Jim this morning as I was coming in – on his way to play golf, by the look of it.
JEN: What? Are you sure? Wait till I see him!
SARA: One last thing... I heard we'd been getting quite a bit of interest from Indonesia?
JEN: Yes, we've had some interest but no firm orders yet.
SARA: No firm orders? I was told a company in Jakarta had ordered 5,000 units.
JEN: They have accepted a quotation for 5,000 units on condition that we provide free delivery.
SARA: We can't accept that – we never deliver for free.
JEN: Never deliver for free? Didn't we provide free delivery for that recent order from Malaysia?
SARA: Yes, but what I meant was we never deliver for free unless there are special circumstances. In the Malaysian case they placed a very large order.



This month we spoke to Choi Hyunjae who comes from South Korea. Hyunjae works for an electronics company as a Marketing Executive. He is based in Seoul.

We spoke to him in Hong Kong while he was on a short business trip. We couldn't help notice that although his spoken English was grammatically quite accurate, it was extremely formal and full of old-fashioned words and expressions. He was speaking in a way that would be more appropriate for writing. We pointed this out to him and this is what he had to say in reply.

'Yes, I am not surprised that you mention this. In Korea, we only know one form of English - written English. There are very few native speakers of English and even fewer native speakers who are qualified to teach English. We also have very little access to English language programmes on the radio and television. As a result we have almost no chance to practice.'

For a short time I took private lessons from the wife of an American soldier based in South Korea. She sounded as if she was speaking another language - not English. There are so many phrases, idioms and colloquial expressions which I am not aware of. One thing I learned from this experience, however, is that the only way to improve and to gain in confidence is to speak and that is what I am trying to do.

I am lucky in that my company provides free training to its staff. I've enrolled on a number of these programs and I find them very useful, especially the ones focusing on communication skills in English.'

A salesman paid a visit to one of his business customers. Nobody was in the office except a big dog emptying wastebaskets.

The salesman stared at the animal, wondering if his imagination could be playing tricks on him.

The dog looked up and said, "Don't be surprised. This is just part of my job."

"Incredible!" exclaimed the man. "I can't believe it! Does your boss know what a prize he has in you? An animal that can talk!"

"No, no," pleaded the dog. "Please don't tell him! If that man finds out I can talk, he'll make me answer the phone as well!"

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 man inserted an ad in the classifieds: "Wife wanted."

The next day he received a hundred emails. They all said the same thing: "You can have mine."



Business English Apps



Business English Strategy and Sales (iphone . android . free)

<http://www.talkingbusinessenglish.com/>

Learn useful English vocabulary for growing your business, developing ad strategies, and increasing consumer demand. The app includes realistic scenarios, exercises, games and audio.



Speak and Learn Business English (iphone . HK\$50)

<http://www.phone-english.net/portfolio/business-english-iphone-app/>

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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 would just like to know if the word "staff" is singular or plural?

A **Staff**, a collective noun like **committee** and **team**, denotes a group of people. Whether it takes a singular or plural verb depends upon whether **staff** refers to the group as a unit or to its members as individuals. [The staff is meeting to review the new rules. The staff are specialists, recruited from all over the world.]

Q Why should writers proofread their documents when they can use computer spelling and grammar checkers?

A Spelling and grammar checkers alert writers to many errors, but some errors still slip through. For example, a typographical error may produce a new word that is grammatically correct in its context, but that changes a sentence's meaning. For example, in the sentences that follow, can you spot the error that slipped by the computer spelling and grammar checker?

The Post Office has changed its operating hours to better serve the community. The window will not be open from 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 6:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m., Saturday.

Did you spot the **not** that should be **now**? In these same sentences, the writer should also double-check the numbers to make sure that the times are accurate. Transposed numbers are a common error that slips through spelling and grammar checkers.

Q When talking about the workplace, what prepositions do you use with 'work'? For example: Do you work for/to Mr Ho?

Work with is used with a colleague's name: **I work with Mary Chan.** **Work under** is used with a boss's name: **I work under Donald Lam.** **Work for** is used with a company: **I work for HSBC.** **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 I was told that the phrases "in connection with", "in respect of", and "in regard to" are all out-of-date. Is this correct?

A Yes. All these phrases are rather old fashioned and unnecessarily lengthy. Replace them with either **about**, **regarding** or **concerning**. For example: **I am writing to you about your claim.**

Q What words are used in English for the figure "0" in mathematics?

A In British English you usually use the word **nought**. For example: **Statistics show that nought point four per cent (0.4) of the population is affected by the disease.**

You can also use the word **nothing**. For example: **Seven minus three, minus four leaves nothing.**

The word **zero** is often used in American English in the above situations. **Zero** is also used in British English when referring to the temperature. For example: **It can get very cold here in winter. Temperatures often drop to below zero.**

When giving telephone numbers in Britain, people say **0**, pronounced like the word **owe**.

Phrases for Leaving Telephone Messages

Projecting a professional image over the phone is important for building a good working relationship with colleagues, clients or customers. Below are a number of useful language structures for leaving a message over the telephone.

Asking for someone

Can/Could/May I speak to...?
I'd like to speak to...
Could you put me through to...?
Could I have extension 211, please?
May I speak to someone in the Accounts Department, please?

Asking when someone is back

When do you expect him back?
Do you know when he'll be back in the office?
What time will she be back?

Asking to leave a message

May/Can/Could I leave a message?
Could you take a message, please?

Explaining the reason for calling

I'm calling about...

The reason I'm calling is to + infinitive
It's about + noun phrase/gerund
I'm just returning Mr Smith's call.

Leaving a message containing information only

Could you tell her that...?

Leaving a message requesting action

Could you ask him to...?

Other useful expressions

I would appreciate it if you could inform him as soon as possible. It's rather urgent. I'll be out the rest of the day. Could you ask him to call me tomorrow?
Actually, is there anyone else I can speak to regarding this matter?

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