

# ETpedia™

Business English

500 ideas  
for Business  
English teachers

John Hughes and Robert McLarty

Series editor: John Hughes

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ENGLISH  
TEACHING  
*professional*

# ETpedia

## 500 ideas for Business English teachers

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Published by:

Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd  
Rayford House  
School Road  
Hove BN3 5HX  
UK  
Tel: 01273 434 943  
Fax: 01273 227 308

First published 2016

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**ISBN:** 978-1-911028-20-8

**PDF ebook ISBN:** 978-1-911028-27-7

**Epub ISBN:** 978-1-911028-28-4

**Kindle ISBN:** 978-1-911028-29-1

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**Cover design:** Emma Dawe, Pavilion Publishing and Media

**Page layout and typesetting:** Tony Pitt, Pavilion Publishing and Media

**Printing:** CMP Digital Print Solutions

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# Introduction

# 10 reasons for using this resource

## 1. Everything in one place

Business English teachers can find supplementary resources, teaching ideas, activities and tips in many different places. If you work at a language school, the shelves of your teachers' room might have many different publications, resource books and folders full of materials created by your colleagues. If you are a teacher who travels to different companies to teach English, then perhaps you rely more on websites offering lesson plans and worksheets. The amount of materials for teachers these days can be overwhelming and also time-consuming to search through. The aim of this resource book is to bring together a collection of ideas, tips, tools and techniques in one place for faster reference.

## 2. Clearly organised

This resource contains 50 units covering everything from preparing and planning your Business English course, activities for different business topics and a range of ideas for developing business communication skills. Each unit always has 10 points. Why 10? Well, if you're new to teaching Business English, reading our 10 tips on carrying out needs analysis will mean you can plan your course. Having 10 activities for practising the language of sales will help most teachers prepare a lesson on the topic. And knowing the 10 criteria that make an effective presentation will allow you to give detailed feedback.

## 3. New to Business English teaching

If you are teaching Business English for the first time ever, then this resource will provide you with all the basics to help you effectively plan a course and teach students who are in work or students who are planning future careers in business.

## 4. Experienced teachers

Perhaps you have been teaching Business English in companies or in universities or colleges for some time. Hopefully you'll find some ideas in this book that are familiar or which remind you of activities you haven't used for a while, and it'll also give you some fresh ideas to give your lessons a boost.

## 5. Supplementing your coursebook

If you are following a coursebook or a set of materials for a defined syllabus, then this resource can support that content with ways to lead into topics, expand the range of activity types, and suggest how to adapt the material to match learners' needs and interests.

## 6. Studying for a Business English qualification

Perhaps you are taking a formal qualification in teaching Business English such as the Certificate in International Business English Training (Cert IBET) or the LCCI First Certificate for Teachers of Business English. Or perhaps you are focusing on developing your business English skills as part of an MA qualification or the DELTA or Diploma in TESOL. For any teacher involved in this kind of ongoing professional development, this resource is an excellent reference with the lists of 10 acting as useful study tools.

## 7. Teacher trainers

If you are a teacher trainer or someone who needs to deliver staff training in the area of Business English, then use the checklists of ideas that this resource offers as a means to preparing your sessions.

## 8. Course planners and materials writers

Business English ETpedia includes information on needs analysis, planning and lists of business topics and skills with suggested exercise types. This means that course planners and writers will find it helpful in the development of course programmes.

## 9. Additional materials

As well as the resources offered in this resource, you will also find additional photocopiable worksheets in the Appendix. These worksheets relate to units in the resource and offer instant classroom activities.

## 10. More time

The one thing most teachers need is more time; more time to plan, more time to search for resources, more time to reflect on their teaching, and more time to develop their skills and knowledge for the Business English classroom. We hope that by offering you this collection of accessible ideas, you'll have more time to spend on developing your teaching in the way you would like.

*"ETpedia saves hours of planning time and opens opportunities for variation, adaptation and even creating my own materials inspired by the ideas it offers."*

**Ayat Al-Tawel, teacher of Business English, Egypt**

# 10 ways to use this resource

This book has been written for different teachers at different stages of their Business English teaching career. It can be read and used in different ways according to your level of experience, need or interest.

## 1. Cover to cover

You could start at the beginning and read to the end. If you are finding out about teaching Business English for the first time, then the book will work as an introductory text to the subject.

## 2. Read a section

The contents page will direct you to different sections. In each section you will find units containing 10 ideas, tips, activities, questions or thoughts on a particular aspect of teaching. Some of the sections might not be immediately relevant to your context so you can leave these for later (when you might need them) and some sections will help you with immediate interests, concerns or questions.

## 3. Teacher's block

Just as writers sometimes have days when they can't write (a condition commonly referred to as 'writer's block'), there are days when teachers search desperately for ideas to help them come up with a lesson, but can't think of anything. We can call this 'teacher's block', and we hope this book will offer you some help with it. Open the book at any page and see if the 10 ideas on that page give you a new idea.

## 4. Teaching a new area of business

One reason that teachers enjoy Business English is that they are constantly coming into contact with students from different business backgrounds who need different types of English. This book suggests ways to learn about the new area of business and how to approach teaching the English needed.

## 5. Write in the book

Maybe you've tried one of the activities in the book or found an idea you liked. Make notes in the margin about why it worked or how you adapted it, so you can refer to it again later.

## 6. Helping colleagues

If you work with other teachers, then you've probably experienced a situation where a colleague is desperately searching for something to help improve their lesson. Perhaps you can help them out by suggesting they manage a lesson on meeting skills by using some of the ideas in Unit 31 on page 90. Or if they'd like to make more use of authentic materials, then show them the tips in Unit 47 on page 130.

## 7. Last-minute lessons

Most teachers have experienced the day when a colleague is off sick and they have been asked to teach a class at very short notice. You probably won't have much time to prepare, but you'll find enough ideas in Section 'Activities for business topics' (see page 39) to help you teach a complete and useful lesson.



## 8. More practice

Many students require extra practice on specific areas of English. For example, they might ask you for more speaking practice in your lesson (see Unit 24 on page 69) or perhaps you have noticed that a class needs more time to work on business writing (see Unit 41 on page 114).

## 9. Develop yourself

If you're at the stage of your teaching career where you feel you are ready for more of a challenge, you'll find some ideas in Unit 50 on page 137.

## 10. Write your own 10

Teaching is always evolving, developing and changing. More ideas can be added so why not visit the [www.myetpedia.com](http://www.myetpedia.com). You can read blog posts from other teachers suggesting their own set of 10 ideas and you are invited to suggest your own 10 (see p173).

*"I frequently use the ideas in ETpedia as a kind of checklist when preparing."*

**Mario Lecluyze, teacher trainer, Belgium**

# 10 facts about the authors

## John Hughes ...

- ▶ taught his first Business English class in Poland in 1993. He then worked as a Business English teacher at language schools, in universities, and for companies including Gucci, Deloitte and Fiat.
- ▶ has managed Business English departments in Poland and Italy, carrying out language audits and needs analyses, course design and assessment.
- ▶ has trained many teachers from all over the world to work in the field of Business English, including training courses leading to the LCCI First Certificate in Teaching Business English qualification.
- ▶ has been the author or co-author on many Business English course books, including *Business Result*, *Successful Presentations*, *Successful Meetings* (Oxford University Press), *Success with BEC Vantage* (Summertown/Cengage Learning), and *Telephone English* (Macmillan).
- ▶ regularly gives talks and presentations on different English Language Teaching topics at international teacher's conferences and in online webinars. He also writes for journals including *English Teaching Professional* and *Modern English Teacher*.

## Robert McLarty ...

- ▶ taught his first Business English class at International House, Hastings, in 1979. Since then he has worked as a Business English teacher in Paris and Oxford.
- ▶ has run Business English schools in Paris, Hastings and Oxford, designing courses, recruiting and training teachers and developing new products.
- ▶ has co-authored Business English books including *Business Basics*, *Quick Work* and *Business Focus* (Oxford University Press).
- ▶ has conceptualised and published a wide range of Business English coursebooks including *Business Result*, *Skills for Business Studies*, *Business one:one*, *Successful Presentations* and *Successful Meetings* (Oxford University Press).
- ▶ regularly gives talks on Business English, writes materials and articles, edits *Modern English Teacher* and is Principal Tutor at the Oxford Teachers' Academy.

## Thanks and acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank everyone involved in the development of *Business English ETpedia*. In particular Cathy Rogers and the team at Pavilion Publishing including Fiona Richmond, Lyra-Marie Burton and Mike Benge. We'd also like to thank all the Business English teachers and trainers who gave feedback on our ideas and who shared their own.



# What is Business English?

This section begins by defining what Business English is and looking at its position in relation to English language teaching in general. Anyone new to teaching Business English will find this section a useful introduction, and more experienced teachers will find it helpful as a summary of the key areas that go to make up Business English.

The first few units explain what Business English is and why students choose to take this kind of course in contrast to a more general English course. Unit 4 also addresses some of the typical concerns that teachers have who are new to Business English. So if you are the kind of teacher who never imagined you'd be teaching 'business', then this unit should allay any fears you might have.

Units 5 to 7 focus much more on some of the typical contexts in which Business English is taught. For example, you might be teaching one-to-one or in small groups. Often these kinds of lessons take place on company premises and away from the typical language school setting. On the other hand, there is a growing demand for Business English to be taught at college or university level to young adult students. In this context, classes can be large and your students won't have much personal experience of the world of work or business to draw upon.

If you are totally new to teaching Business English, then it's probably worth reading the whole of this section from beginning to end in order to give yourself a thorough introduction. For teachers with more experience of Business English, then you'll want to dip in to those units which provide you with additional ideas and support.

# 10 aspects of Business English

Most people picking up this book will be familiar with the terms ELT (English Language Teaching), TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). They all refer, in very broad terms, to the world of teaching English to people who need the language for a whole variety of reasons.

However, one of the main reasons why many adult students learn English is because they want to get a job, build their career, or extend their professional skills. So many language teachers often find that they are teaching a type of English that is linked directly to the world of work and business; what is often referred to as *Business English* or *English for work*. Interestingly, when you ask different teachers to give you a single definition of what Business English is, you'll find a wide variety of views and comments. Here is a selection of definitions based on 10 different viewpoints which, when read together, provide a very useful introduction.

## 1. English for your job or the workplace

In Business English you are teaching students who don't necessarily need a general course in which they try to move up a level; instead they want English that will help them to do their current job or their future job more effectively. Some of these students won't be involved in private business necessarily. They might work in the public sector or for a charity, for example. But the term 'Business English' is often used generally to refer to anyone trying to work effectively using English, whether that means by reading legal documents, writing commercial terms, handling phone-calls and emails or dealing with international clients.

## 2. Time-effective English

Many business people are very busy and don't want to spend time studying every area of English. Business English is often concerned with the English that students need now and how they can learn it in the most time-effective (and cost-effective) way.

## 3. Business topics

Some students will need key vocabulary to talk about specific areas of business. For example, someone working in Human Resources might need specific vocabulary to talk about what it is they do or to carry out aspects of their role such as recruitment. Similarly, if you are teaching pre-work students in a university setting, you might teach English within the context of different subjects ranging from marketing to logistics, to environmental ethics. You won't necessarily teach the actual subject, but you will sometimes use texts about these topics.

## 4. Communication skills

Unlike general English, Business English includes helping students to communicate in certain ways that are common to business. These communication skills include giving presentations, participating in meetings, socialising and networking and writing business correspondence. Many business people take special training in communication skills in their own language so your job might be to provide the English they'll need. However, sometimes Business English teachers also need to give help with aspects of communication such as effective body language and using visual aids.

## 5. Communicative competence

In Business English we are usually more interested in whether a student can communicate effectively to complete a task rather than how much grammar or vocabulary they know. For example, a student with a lower level of English can sometimes be a more engaging presenter or a more effective negotiator than a student with advanced English. In other words, they use the English they have to its greatest effect along with the other personal skills they possess.

## 6. Training more than teaching

Some Business English teachers prefer to call themselves 'trainers'. It might be that the term 'trainer' sounds more professional in the business world, but it also reflects the fact that in Business English we often focus on helping the students to be better at what they do with the English they already have. (Note that throughout this book we use 'teacher' and 'trainer' interchangeably.)

## 7. Businesslike as well as about business

Given that many of your students will be professional people working in company environments, the term Business English often implies a certain expectation that the teacher will be equally professional and businesslike. This influences every aspect of the job, from how you present yourself to the appearance and quality of the teaching materials you use.

## 8. Client and colleague English

Business English is also about the type of people that your students will need to communicate with. Typically, we think of business people talking to clients and customers who are interested in buying and selling. But in today's international world, your students will also need English to communicate with their colleagues and counterparts in other countries.

## 9. Specific and general English

Sometimes you'll meet a teacher working with business students and they'll say, 'We don't really do business English; my students want general English.' What they often mean is that their students aren't interested in reading and discussing texts about, for example, the stockmarket. Instead they want to talk about everyday topics. The point is that Business English can include being able to discuss general subjects when making conversation with colleagues and clients. After all, a large part of doing business is about relationship-building and social English.

## 10. English for travel

Many Business English students will take your course because they travel and use English in different parts of the world. They might need English to check in, to order food, or to take a taxi. It's all part of the content and approach that forms what we call Business English.

# 10 reasons why students choose Business English

There is a wide range of reasons for people studying Business English. Why they have chosen this course, or had it chosen for them quite often, will have a huge impact on how you plan and deliver the courses.

## 1. Aspirations

Many teenagers and young adult students soon realise that English is vital if they plan on having a career in skilled industries. In some countries, when students go to colleges to study technical courses, English lessons might be included as part of their programme.

## 2. International businesses

With so many businesses relying on international trade, employees often find that they have to be able to use some English as a medium of communication with colleagues and clients in a variety of countries. Note that these won't just be with people from countries where English is the first language, but also from countries where English is commonly used as a lingua franca.

## 3. Promotion

Anyone who is keen to get promoted will often need to develop more skills or to improve existing skills. Being able to communicate effectively in English is often one of those skills and may be necessary for anyone trying to move up the career ladder.

## 4. Changing jobs

As with getting promoted, some of your students might be on your course with the aim of gaining a level of English that will help them apply for jobs with other companies.

## 5. A reward for good performance

Some companies offer the incentive of training as a reward for good work or even for loyalty.

## 6. A specific job to do

One of the best teaching situations is when the participant needs training to fulfil a specific role. The needs will be clear, motivation will be high and all stakeholders will be pushing for a successful outcome.

## 7. Documentation in English

As globalisation continues, more and more employees find themselves surrounded by reporting and administrative systems in English. The spread of IT has been a real driver of growth for the English language and a lot of back-office employees are finding themselves having to deal with data in English. They might not ever need to speak English, but they still need to improve their reading, writing and vocabulary.

## 8. The company language

We often think that English is used only in business for external communications with people overseas, but for many companies English is also the internal company language. For example, a company in Italy could be taken over by a multinational with branches and divisions all over the world – in this situation, the new 'parent' company might insist that all internal communication, especially documentation, is now carried out in English.

## 9. University studies

Students at university often study subjects such as business or finance which require a good level of English. This might be because lectures are given in English and the fact that so much of the academic literature for these kinds of course will also be in English.

## 10. Lots of other reasons or none at all

You will also find that a large number of students simply take the course because it is there. The company offers it and staff members accept it without necessarily having a real and tangible need. A careful balance of English for work, travel and socialising is often necessary in these cases.

*“Choosing Business English (instead of general English) ensures the language focus is relevant and that the topics and tasks prepare professional people for the specific situations they will encounter in their working lives, while making the most of their limited time.”*

**Hannah Murphy, Principal, OIE Oxford, UK**

# 10 things that can make Business English different from general English

Although around 90% of the words you will be teaching are the same in both general and Business English courses, there are some major differences which you will need to bear in mind. They will affect the way you manage the course and the way your teaching is perceived by the participants. Here are 10 ways in which Business English courses are often different from general courses.

## 1. Course length

Courses for companies and professional individuals tend to be shorter in Business English. They have to fit in around busy work schedules and sometimes students may only be with you for a few months. For this reason, your aims and objectives will often be based on the immediate or short-term needs.

## 2. Needs analysis and course planning

You may have a coursebook or programme to follow, but it's always important to find out the needs of your students and reflect those needs in your planning (see Unit 9 on p26). Let your students play a key role in the planning and content of the course.

## 3. Defining the students

In general English we often define students in terms of level and then put them into classes accordingly. When teaching in businesses, level is important but we also define students in other ways. For example, are they already in work and therefore have lots of experience? Or are they pre-work, so that you might have to teach them about business concepts as well? We can also define and group them according to their job profile; so even though a group of engineers may have different general English levels, it might make sense to put them in the same class in order to work with their specialist area of English.

## 4. Tangible results

On a Business English course the students are often sponsored by their company. Like any investment, the company expects a quantifiable return which means that the students have to be noticeably better at a work-related aspect of English after the course. Ideally, students should leave the class feeling that what they have just learnt can be instantly used in their workplace. The company itself may also expect to see clearly-defined results being achieved in a cost-effective way.

## 5. Working with experts

A lot of the expertise in a lesson comes from your students. In other words, they know what their job is about and will probably need to teach you about it. Your job is to provide them with the English to be able to talk about it and carry it out.

## 6. The role of the teacher

In Business English, the words used to describe the role of the teacher often differ from those used to describe teaching in a school situation with general English courses. Sometimes you might be referred to as a 'trainer', a 'coach', a 'language consultant' or even as a 'service provider' delivering English to your client-student. These roles reflect the styles and approaches to teaching English that can emerge in the Business English context.



## 7. Location

Typically, English teachers are used to working in a classroom in a school, but teaching in the Business English context often requires a different setting. You might have access to a well-equipped training room or sometimes you might have to work with the student at his or her desk. You could find yourself teaching students on a factory floor or perhaps delivering a one-to-one lesson over the phone or via skype. Flexibility is a key skill for any Business English teacher.

## 8. The stakeholders

Unlike in a general English class where there is usually one main stakeholder – the student – or perhaps also the parents of a younger student, in business the other stakeholders in the course might include people such as the head of training, the student's boss, or even the owner or managing director of the company. So the teacher will often need to balance the needs and interests of a number of different stakeholders.

## 9. Teacher professionalism

Of course teachers should have a professional attitude to their job in any situation, but in a business context you may need to follow certain dress codes or adhere to strict rules when on the company premises. In other words you need to aim to fit into the business culture of the company you are working with.

## 10. Developing yourself

One key reason why many teachers prefer Business English to general English is that you start to learn so much about different areas of business. Many of your students are such experts in their field (see 5) that they share their knowledge with you. So in return for teaching them English, you can learn about a whole range of topics.

*“I prefer teaching Business English to general English as I can help my learners focus on developing their careers and improving workplace performance. An improvement in their general English ability is a natural by-product.”*

**Mike Hogan, Director of Teacher Training, York Associates, UK**

Teachers who start out teaching general English are often worried about switching to Business English. It should be no more worrying than taking on any new type of course, such as an exam preparation course or a complete beginners' class. Many people assume because they have little experience of the business world that this will in some way be found out. In fact, teaching Business English is an extraordinary opportunity to learn about a whole range of different professions simply by being an interested and active listener. You may recognise some of the thoughts in this list.

### 1. 'I don't know anything about business.'

Above all you are a teacher of English and it is the language in which you are an expert. Your classes and individual students come to you to improve their performance in English and expect your help. They will not expect you to be an expert in all the different professional areas they come from. They are also very keen to discuss things other than their work occasionally.

### 2. 'How can I teach concepts and vocabulary I don't understand?'

Your main objective is to teach English and as you gain experience in different work-related courses you will start to understand more and more about business, certainly enough to start asking questions which will activate language from your students. If you come across a term or a concept you don't understand, it is perfectly natural and useful to ask the class to try and explain it in English.

### 3. 'My class know much more than I do.'

This is undoubtedly true about many things, but not English and how to teach it. Use what the class know to teach them what they do not know. In other words, take advantage of their professional knowledge to improve their English by using role plays, presentations and case-studies which require them to transfer their knowledge into English.

### 4. 'They are all older than me.'

This is a regular comment among newer teachers, but be assured that at a certain time it will no longer be true! In the meantime make sure you act in a mature, professional way and no-one will judge you on your age as long as you do your job well.

### 5. 'They don't always do the homework and sometimes don't attend class.'

Inevitably working people are going to be too busy to attend their language classes if they have other priorities at work. Always let them know what they have missed and give them access to any worksheets you have handed out or online links you would like to them to study. With a class which has regular absentees, make sure that your lessons are self-contained and do not rely on attendance over a period of time. Try and plan homework which can be done quickly and anywhere, e.g. a short exercise, an email or a quick listening exercise.

### 6. 'Will I have to dress very smartly?'

You will have to dress in a professional, neat way because you are representing your school often on the client's premises. It also helps to convey a sense of 'I know what I am doing'.

## 7. 'I like teaching general English and there isn't much in Business English.'

In fact there is a lot of what you might call 'general English' in Business English. Your students still need to learn grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). So all the skills you have developed in teaching English elsewhere, including to young learners and teenagers, still apply.

## 8. 'I like being in charge and sticking to the plan.'

In Business English classes you always have to be prepared to abandon the plan and go with a topic the group needs to work on. This typically happens when there is a professional need to look at a particular topic, a visitor is coming or someone has a presentation to prepare, or the industry is in the news and the class want to discuss it in English. Your role at this point is to facilitate and monitor the language used. Keep the planned lesson for another day.

## 9. 'The course is very short.'

Some Business English classes can be as short as 10 to 15 hours. It is important that you maximise the teaching time to really make a difference. Choose one or two clear objectives and work on them. Improving speaking or writing skills can easily be addressed in a short course with noticeable improvements if the lessons are carefully tailored to the participants' needs. It might be that you have to leave out some of your favourite lesson types such as grammar or reading because they are not really time-effective.

## 10. 'Business English is boring.'

This is the most incorrect assumption or concern of all. Business is fascinating because it isn't just about how to buy or sell, or make money. Every business and every organisation is different, so it's rare to find any student who doesn't have an interesting job. The trick is to find out what is relevant to the student, and then work on relevant scenarios and language. Asking question after question allows you to build up your understanding of the job while stretching your students' ability to discuss it in English.

*"Before my first Business English class, I feared that the level of intellect of my students would be way beyond me and any discussions would go right over my head. It turned out they were normal people who enjoyed a good laugh or game to balance out the serious stuff just as much as any other class."*

**Angie Conti, Academic Manager, Malta**

# 10 typical Business English teaching contexts

When a teacher tells you they teach Business English classes you might imagine something very different to the context they actually teach in. Depending on the country, the client and the premises, any number of the following might be the 'training' room. Wherever you are doing the teaching it will be up to you to take advantage of the circumstances to make the lessons as effective as possible.

## 1. In a meeting room

Some Business English classes take place on the company premises, often in a meeting room around a large table. This makes students feel at home, but makes it less easy for the teacher to rearrange furniture to suit activities. On the other hand, such rooms often have good technology such as internal phones, internet connections and data projectors which can be used to great effect.

## 2. In the student's own office

This is especially true for one-to-one lessons. Note that the dynamics of the student sitting on one side of a big desk and you on the other can sometimes make the lesson too formal, so try to sit together at a table in the office. On a positive note, working in the student's office can give you a real insight into their working lives and help you plan and teach accordingly.

## 3. On the factory floor

If you are teaching students whose job is in a factory, then you might need to run your lessons literally 'on the job'. This might mean you are putting up with external noise or interruptions but you can turn this kind of situation to your advantage by making the lessons very hands-on. For example, students can explain how the factory works and you can start to introduce the language they need to make their explanations more effective.

## 4. On the telephone

Given that speaking in English over the phone is something that challenges many students, teaching over the phone is a great opportunity to develop the students' confidence and ability to speak and listen in English. Note that you can also use teleconference equipment to teach groups of students.

## 5. Via skype or facetime

Online video conference technology such as Skype or Facetime provides a useful medium for one-to-one and small group teaching, allowing 24/7 teaching in a very flexible way. The lessons can be recorded and reviewed by those present as well as those who were unable to attend.

## 6. At home

Intensive courses for a weekend, a week or more with the teacher acting both as host and teacher are increasingly common and accredited in the UK by the British Council. The advantage to the learner is that they are in a relaxed, totally immersed environment learning in both formal lessons and informal social settings.

## 7. At a language school with mixed nationalities

Multilingual classes in English-speaking countries offer a wide range of Business English classes with the added benefit that there is a genuine need to communicate in the target language and a genuine information gap as students swap ideas and share experiences.

## 8. In a company training room

Some large companies with a real interest in lifelong learning have great facilities for training. Business English courses in this context often take place in purpose-built rooms with great equipment.

## 9. At university

As more and more students in higher education realise that they will probably need English to get a decent job, universities are offering Business English. These courses often cover not only the language of business but some of the concepts as well.

## 10. In fact, anywhere!

Teaching Business English and English for work can take place virtually anywhere. The two authors of this book have also taught English to people who needed it for their job inside a helicopter, in a home appliances showroom, at a conference centre, on a train to Warsaw, in a travel agent, underneath the chassis of a car, on a building site, in a chauffeured car, in the nightwear department of a Paris store, in a restaurant, and many more places.

*"I taught a Finn on the beach once. He needed English for video conferencing and made his colleagues jealous by calling from the beach."*

**Sue Annan, Training and Business English Co-ordinator, St Brelade's College, Jersey**

# 10 tips for teaching one-to-one and small groups

Business English lessons are often with one student or small groups. However, many teacher-training courses do not deal with the dynamics of small group or individual teaching even though most teachers will probably have an opportunity to teach them quite early in their career. There are some real advantages to working with small groups as you can use activities which simply would not work in a large class.

## 1. Use their expertise

The smaller the group, the easier it is to fit the programme to the learners' needs. The lexical and functional areas your students would like you to cover might be very specialised. Use your students' knowledge, their documents and their scenarios to inform the course content. For the learner, whether they are a chemist, a pilot or a legal assistant, the language will automatically be more memorable and easier to retain because they have felt a genuine need to use it.

## 2. Be proactive right from the start

In a large group, it is understandable that a number of students are less talkative and appear less interested than others. In a small group, however, each student has a real opportunity not only to contribute actively, but also to influence the shape of the lessons and the direction of the course. From the start, encourage students to ask questions and offer opinions, not only about the subject of the lesson but also about other areas they would like to explore.

## 3. Conversations have to be two-way

One of the easiest traps to fall into is the one way conversation where everything is initiated by the teacher. Practise turn-taking by setting up five minute sessions where only the class can initiate the conversation and have them score points for interest and change of subject rather than just grammatical accuracy. The more your learners can transfer their normal adult L1 conversation skills into English, the better they will communicate.

## 4. Vary your correction technique

You will come across a wide array of Business English learners with very different attitudes to correction. Some will expect constant correction, others want the correction but appear to ignore it and continue to make the same mistakes, while others like errors noted down so as not to interrupt the communicative flow. Peer correction should be developed, but do be aware of the hierarchical issues in your class, particularly if they are all from the same company. Some learners are loathe to be corrected by anyone other than the teacher.

## 5. Seating arrangements

For small groups and one-to-one classes, seating arrangements can be very important. For groups, make sure you take into account the personalities and any hierarchy issues. Ensure the layout allows for communication, but also permits you to stand up and present if necessary. In one-to-one classes you may prefer to work from sheets of A2 or A3 or with a tablet or laptop rather than standing up at a whiteboard.

## 6. Record regularly

Easy access to recording technology (such as voice recording on a phone) makes it a realistic and useful tool for smaller groups. Get students into the habit of recording themselves and listening to their voice. The technique allows them to see the importance of pronunciation and to highlight where they can realistically improve. Recordings also act as a great point of comparison at the start and end of a course and are a very useful homework activity for those who are too busy to do more traditional exercises.

## 7. Changing the pace

Teaching one-to-one and small groups for long classes can be highly intensive. It's possible that your student or students have requested personal classes in order to get the maximum amount of time speaking and listening to you. However, you will still need to vary the pace of the lesson and to take breaks from just talking. Include moments where the pace and style of the lesson changes. Don't be afraid to have students do a quick exercise on their own or show a short video clip to break up the lesson. Your students will also probably welcome the opportunity for a short break from talking.

## 8. Experiment with your teaching approach

With older classes, your learners might not have been language students for quite a while. This means that the way they react to pedagogic materials might not necessarily be in quite the way you expect. Some students could find role playing difficult, others won't enjoy controlled practice, and perhaps a few students won't like a discovery approach for learning language – they'll want you to tell them the grammar rule, for example. Be prepared to experiment with what works and what doesn't.

## 9. Change the location

To inject variety into a lesson with one student or a small group, suggest having a lesson somewhere else. Take them out of the usual classroom and go for a walk round the building or agree to meet at a café, perhaps, or – for lessons that normally take place on company premises – suggest your students come to your normal language school for the day. A change of environment can really stimulate learning.

## 10. Give responsibility

Introduce the idea of role reversal by asking a learner to teach the rest of the class (or you). Being able to illustrate, explain, describe or demonstrate a skill or a topic in English is a highly motivating activity which takes the focus away from the teacher and creates genuine learner-centredness. Giving all students the chance to do this at least once in the course will prove very popular and effective.

# 10 differences between in-work and pre-work Business English

We can categorise Business English students in two general ways. In-work students (sometimes referred to as in-service) are already working. Pre-work (or pre-service) are those that are still studying. This essential difference can affect your lessons in the following ways.

## 1. Experience

The in-work (IW) learner has a career and a complete understanding of their position. They understand, therefore, precisely what they need or potentially will need to do in English. The pre-work (PW) learner lacks this experience and brings less professional knowledge to the course. Both require Business English, but the content of the course will be quite different.

## 2. The theory behind the job

The IW learner is unlikely to need to learn business theory whereas the PW student will still have gaps in this part of their knowledge. Business theories (e.g. approaches to management, types of company structure) are a good context for learning vocabulary for the PW learner while the IW learners will be keener to acquire the language needed to communicate in very practical situations such as writing emails, attending meetings or chatting to colleagues all in English.

## 3. Learning experience

Many IW learners may not have been in a formal learning situation for a while and will lack the study skills of the PW learner who will be used to taking notes, doing research, managing projects with fellow students and submitting written work. Traditional forms of homework might not always be that appealing to the IW learner so it is best to ask them to do homework tasks which fit into their normal professional practices such as writing an email or preparing some PowerPoint slides.

## 4. Flexibility

With a PW course, students will be expected to attend lessons at certain times and reports may be produced to indicate attendance. This also might be true for the IW course, but the reality is that IW students will tend to be absent and late more often because of outside work pressures. As a result, you might need to build in lots more in-class recycling and revision activities for the IW learners who cannot attend on a regular or punctual basis.

## 5. Curriculum

IW learners will have a much clearer idea of the situational language and vocabulary as well as the specific skills they need to work on. If they do not have to negotiate in their first language, then it is unlikely they will need to learn to do it in English. The same will be the case for all the communication skills, email, telephone, meetings etc. As a result, planning a targeted curriculum is much easier for IW learners. For PW students, the curriculum is normally defined for them before the course because the way they will actually be using English is still an unknown.



## 6. Tests and exams

Quite often PW learners are in an environment where they will have to take a test or exam at the end of the academic year, so you will need to teach towards that. For IW learners you will probably use testing less because the real test is whether they can carry out their current job in English. Nevertheless, some companies may expect their employees to be tested regularly and results may need to be given to a manager. If this is the case, then clarify the format of these tests early and prepare students for them.

## 7. Short term and long term view

Because a PW course is often delivered in a higher education institution, your students are usually studying full-time so there is time for homework, revision, project work and so on. There is also time to take a longer view and build up their general English level at the same time, so there is room for grammar and everyday vocabulary and expressions. With IW classes, where the course length can be much shorter, the main aim will be to improve their ability to work in English; this means that in theory every lesson needs a 'takeaway' – something that they can use in their job after the lesson.

## 8. Motivation

IW learners who have asked for the course in order to perform better professionally have a strong intrinsic motivation to succeed. They might also have been put forward by their manager, giving them a sound extrinsic motivation as well. On the other hand, some IW learners are on the course just because it is on offer, in which case their motivation might not be as clear. PW classes, as on a general English course, will be made up of students who are highly motivated and those who are less motivated and less keen to contribute.

## 9. Attitude to the teacher

With PW learners you will often be asked to teach both business concepts and the language of business. There is a lot of knowledge to transfer and you – as the teacher – are in charge of that transfer. You will also probably be involved in the testing and the assessment at the end of the session. Your role is clearly defined and the majority of students will understand it and behave normally just like in most of their classes. With IW learners the role is less traditional; you are there to help them work more effectively. Quite how you do this will depend on the make-up of the group, their attitude towards English, the relationship you build with them and the usefulness of the lessons you give. Don't worry if you sometimes come across resentment towards learning English. This is understandable among learners of a certain age who never expected they'd have to try and learn a new language at their stage in life.

## 10. Out of class pressures

With IW learners we sometimes forget that they are trying to learn English on top of everything else in their already busy lives. Not only do the participants have to come before or after work, or sometimes instead of lunch, they then have to go back to their job and families and fit in homework, revision and any other preparation the course requires. On the other hand, PW learners might be studying other subjects at their school or college so bear in mind the rest of their workload.

# 10 characteristics of teaching in-company

One of the main differences about teaching Business English is that you will often be asked to teach in-work students on the company's premises. For new teachers this can be a little strange at first and requires a bit more planning than just going to school to teach your classes. Here are 10 points to bear in mind.

## 1. The logistics

Travelling to a company means planning how you are going to get there and how much time you'll need. You'll need the phone number of a contact person at the company in case you are delayed by traffic or you need to call in sick. And once you are at the company, subsequent lessons might take place in different locations so check you have enough time to get from one lesson to another.

## 2. Rules and regulations

One of the first things to understand as a Business English teacher is that when you are on the company premises you have to follow their rules and regulations. Identity cards, security checks and health and safety issues might become a regular part of your working day.

## 3. No colleagues

Unlike working in a language school or some other institution, you are quite likely to be the only English teacher on site. This means you have no one to get ideas from, no staffroom to relax in between lessons and no colleagues to interact with. A number of teachers find this quite difficult at first.

## 4. The face of the school

Because you are probably the only teacher on site, you are also automatically the face of the school. This means that as well as teaching you have to develop your client relation skills and look the part. Employees who don't follow the courses will know who you are and if your course goes well there is always the chance of an increase in business the following term.

## 5. Local knowledge

The longer you work in a company, the more you will understand how it works, what times of the year are busy, who the main customers are, how competitive the market is and so on. This insider knowledge will help you to develop more meaningful and useful lessons. Actively find out as much as you can about the company; don't be afraid to ask questions. Become an expert in what the company does.

## 6. Authentic location

Teaching in-company allows you to teach them the English they need in the place they need it. The authenticity of the situation is important and you can access samples, documents and sales literature, which will all be of use to you.

## 7. Luggage

One of the drawbacks of being on site is that you often have to carry everything with you. You might be in the same teaching room each time you go there, but there might not be a place to store things. Having to take all the materials for the day along with any equipment will always require some planning.

## 8. Shared background

With in-company teaching one of the advantages is that all the learners share the same background. This means there are common themes and topics which can be addressed, specific vocabulary areas which everyone needs and company events which can be included in the teaching programme. One of the benefits of an in-company teaching programme is that it helps different departments learn about each other through the medium of English.

## 9. Cover

It is highly unlikely you will be replaced if you are sick for a day on an in-company course. What usually happens is that the class is cancelled and you will have to try and make up the lesson at a later date.

## 10. Part of the furniture

When you have been teaching at a particular company for a number of years you might well become a sort of unofficial English adviser. Your old and new students will know you and that you are a safe pair of hands to turn to for tasks like checking a translation or informally helping someone with their presentation preparation.

*“Giving lessons in a company (instead of in a school) provides a constant source of new teaching ideas because you experience at first hand students’ everyday working reality.”*

**David Grant, author and trainer, Nantes, France**





# Preparation and planning

One feature of Business English that distinguishes it from many other course types is that a great deal of emphasis is put on the use of a needs analysis stage to find out what students want and need from their course. The first units in this section deal with what a needs analysis is and why you might use one, especially on courses with students who already use English in their job.

This section also gives you tips on how to broaden your search for information about the students' language needs so that you get the full picture. From this research you will want to start planning a course. Sometimes you'll find a published course book which serves your needs, and on other courses you will want to tailor the materials and course aims to specific needs. So there's a unit giving advice on how to plan your course accordingly.

# 10 tips on carrying out a needs analysis

Carrying out a language needs analysis is a key difference between Business English and following a fixed curriculum on a general English course. The aim is to find out what your students need to gain from the course and then design the course towards those needs. So if you are working with a student who needs English to give presentations on the subject of data management, then you should try to help them become effective at doing this. Of course, teaching to the student's needs is relatively straight-forward in a one-to-one class. But when you have a group of students with different needs, you have to find ways to balance any difference in interests.

## 1. The student's level

When you first meet a student you need to establish his or her level of English. This could be done using a placement test, but you also want to meet the student face-to-face if possible. That's because a Business English student might score low (or possibly high) on a placement test which measures their general English level, but when it comes to performing their job in English, the student might be more or less effective than their general level suggests.

## 2. What? Who? How?

Many needs analysis questionnaires often include a list of extensive questions and tick boxes. Students can either fill these in on their own or you can use them as the basis of an interview. It's useful to remember that at the core of any needs analysis are three key questions:

- ▶ What do you communicate about in your work? (the business specialisms and topics)
- ▶ Who do you communicate with? (colleagues, clients, nationalities, job titles)
- ▶ How do you communicate? (by phone, via Skype, face-to-face in meetings, by email)

Any other questions that are asked in a needs analysis will probably relate to these three central questions.

## 3. Too much information

While it's important to find out lots about the student or students, there's a danger that we ask our students for too much information. The result is that we have so many needs and directions to follow that we don't know where to start. Also, our student's expectations might be set too high, believing that you will be able to address all the needs in an unrealistic length of time. So at the first meeting, if your students has lots of requests, try to prioritise them. If they need to give an important presentation in three weeks' time, then that's a good starting point. If they request report writing because they think they might have to do this sometime in the future, it can be dealt with later.

## 4. Balancing the needs of a group

You might have a group of students who all need the same kind of English; perhaps they all work in the same department or in the same field of business. If so, you can probably balance their needs and requirements. But many more classes include students from different departments or companies who all want to improve their English, but also have individual needs. In this case, it's important to make everyone's needs 'public' so every student is aware of the needs of their colleagues. Sometimes you might even want to say in class that a certain language area will be more useful for some students than others.

## 5. Pie-chart completion

A good way of collating needs in a group and to show the group how varied the needs are is to ask them to complete a simple pie-chart. They all draw a large circle and slice it up into the different areas they want to cover on the course. You can give them a choice comprising Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Meetings, Telephoning, Writing, Socialising, Presentations and Specific language. The percentages they choose for the different areas will be reflected in their pie-charts. You can then collate these wishes into a group pie-chart reflecting the contents of the course as asked for by the participants.

## 6. First lesson presentations

To get a snapshot of the level and needs of the group you can ask them to do a short presentation at the first lesson. Ask them to talk about their job, who they work with, what they do in English and what they would like to achieve on the course. Give them time to think about what they are going to say. You could also put them in pairs and have them present to each other before asking them to present to the whole class. It's a useful way for the students to get to know each other and it provides you with plenty of information for course planning as well as finding out what areas of English will need the most work.

## 7. Ongoing needs analysis

No matter how careful and thorough your needs analysis is, there will be areas to work on which nobody will have mentioned or noticed. As the course develops, always be aware that needs might change or new ones emerge. Take time during a course to ask students if their needs are being met; this could take the form of an informal conversation at the end of a lesson or you could ask them to complete a short feedback form.

## 8. Feedback

We often mention feedback in this book because it is such a key element to good Business English teaching. A simple question after a lesson is to ask what happened during it – 'What did we do today?' The class needs to be aware not only of what happened, but also why it happened, in other words to understand the approach and pedagogy as well as simply describing the content. They need to evaluate the usefulness of activities and of their own contribution. They need to learn what they need you for, but also how much they need to help themselves.

## 9. Email Q and A

Before and during the course, a regular flow of information can happen via email or a class Facebook page. This allows you to communicate with the class and them with you. This is of use at the needs analysis stage but also as the course is rolled out. Questions can be asked and answers given or suggestions made by all participants.

## 10. Ways and means

One other useful way of adding value to the needs analysis is to ask participants to consider not only what they want to achieve, but how they are going to do it. If they want to increase their active vocabulary they will need to add something like 'by learning 20 new words a week'. If they want to increase their confidence in English on the telephone they can add 'by initiating at least one call a week in English'. These individual contracts will help them stay motivated and ultimately improve more quickly.