

Business Lexicon of American and British English

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Abstract: There is a lot more to learning a second (or third or fourth!) language than just vocabulary and grammar because languages are used differently in different contexts. For example, everyone speaks to their boss differently than their grandparents. We all write differently for different contexts as well. A text message is certainly not going to be the same as a formal business report. Business English is the type of English used in business contexts, such as international trade, commerce, finance, insurance, banking, and many office settings. It entails expectations of clarity, particular vocabulary, and grammatical structures. Here's a quick review of some of the features of professional business communication.

Keywords: business writing, professional English, context, sophisticated vocabulary.

Clarity in business writing. When using English for business contexts, it is vitally important to be as clear as possible and leave nothing to interpretation. If you are unclear in your business writing or speaking, you often waste time and risk losing money. This is different from literature, for example, where a lot is left up to the interpretation of the reader. Learning to write well using professional English is a process. Instructional Solutions offers online Business English Writing courses for non-native speakers that can help you to achieve this type of writing. Short, direct vocabulary. Some types of English, like novels and law briefings, welcome long, sophisticated vocabulary. Business English is not like that. Good writing is direct and to the point. You should avoid:

- Clichés – sayings that have been used so many times they lose their power. Ex. One man's trash is another man's treasure.
- Proverbs – sayings with a moral. Ex. The early bird gets the worm.
- Idioms – culturally-based expressions. Ex. He hit a home run with that project!
- Phrasal verbs ("blow up") when you can use a one-word verb ("explode").
- Long verbs, such as "utilize," when shorter ones, such as "use" will work just as well.

Instead, good written communication is made of short, direct sentences that use the most impactful words for your purpose. In other words, say what you mean as simply as possible. Simple, yet effective, grammar. Save complex grammar for academic writing (though there are arguments that it doesn't belong there either!). Good English uses simple tenses (past, present, and future simple) as well as the present perfect. Words like "first" and "then" indicate the order of actions, instead of complicated grammatical structures. This ensures that the message is easy to absorb, saving time and money.

"But does he have the right tone?" You probably asked yourself this question, if not your colleagues or friends. And it is not easy. Business correspondence is a difficult task not only to

convey intention, but also to convey it in the right way. It is important to have the right professional tone. However, the methods to achieve this seem elusive. This passage will show you how the right tone can help you communicate more effectively. It will also provide you with actionable tactics and tools so you can write in the right tone. Merriam-Webster defines tone as the style or manner of writing. Tone conveys an attitude associated with content. Just as a speaker can change the meaning of words through intonation and non-verbal cues, writing can convey different meanings depending on how words are selected and combined.

What is a professional tone in business correspondence? Business letters must have the right tone to be effective. If the tone leaves the content unclear, confusing, or at worst offensive, the reader will not be able to properly internalize or respond to the text.

As businesses move more and more into the digital world, emails and instant messaging are replacing face-to-face meetings and phone calls. The rise of textual communication underlines the importance of correct knowledge and use of tone. The following concepts are explored in more depth in all online business writing courses. Determining the tone of a document. To use the correct tone in a document, you need to evaluate several determining factors. Here are some elements that define the tone of your letter. Audience. The audience is always the most important aspect of a business letter. The writer must have a clear idea of who will read the document in order to write it to his liking. The text should be adapted to their knowledge, needs and preferences. For example, a proposal written in a light-hearted, familiar tone might be appropriate for a regular customer from a country, but not suitable for another new international customer. Purpose of the document. The tone should be consistent with the purpose of the document. Each document is designed for a specific purpose, and the choice of language supports that purpose. The user manual is intended to be instructive and takes on a straightforward neutral tone. The sentence is designed to win business and uses compelling language to convince the reader. To apply the right tone, you need to have a clear understanding of the goal.

Middle. The tone depends on the format of the document. The email uses a different tone than the financial report or memo. The way a document is sent, prepared, or used changes the language used. In an era of short attention span and long Internet writing, words need to be phrased in a way that suits their environment. Brand personality. Finally, each company has its own style. Your brand can be trendy and fun, or serious and sustainable. The writing should be consistent with the overall quality, but be inferior to the factors mentioned above. For consistency, brand or marketing managers can provide a style guide to use when preparing business documents.

There are several general principles that apply to business writing. These standards will be modified based on four determining factors. However, every business writer can benefit from an understanding of these styles and the logic behind them. Each trait is combined with a linguistic tool with which you can achieve the tone you want. Confidence. Confidence attracts. Firms want to make deals with people who are confident in their business, product, and themselves. Tool: Use an active voice. Passive voice is harder for readers to understand and less convincing.

Example: Passive: Fast and efficient delivery is made by our trained drivers. Active: our trained chauffeurs make deliveries fast and efficient.

Tool: Avoid long sentences with the ", and". A comma followed by the word "and" is scored in readability studies as a request rather than confidence.

Example:

Insecure: Write with more confidence and learn to project a managerial tone and find any mistakes.
Confident: Write with more confidence. Learn to project an executive tone. Find all errors.

Sincerity

A business letter must be genuine in order to build a sense of trust. Since this can be difficult to convey in text alone, it can be backed up by evidence of past successes. **Tool:** use numbers. Numbers represent clear and specific statements that engage the reader. It's hard to argue about numbers so that readers get accurate information. The text reads as sincere.

Example: No numbers: we've helped many clients achieve their social media goals. With numbers: we have helped 55 clients reach over 22,000 new clients through social media.

Positivity

A positive tone attracts the reader. People are often motivated and attracted by a positive attitude. Positive result or benefits attract the reader.

Tool: Formulate your text in a positive way. Use encouraging and seductive phrases. Negative wording should be avoided.

Example:

Negative: Please accept the contract before Thursday midnight. Otherwise, we will be too busy to process your order and it may not be completed.

Positive: To guarantee delivery and high quality service, please accept the contract before Thursday midnight.

Good.

Business documents are read by a wide audience and should be inclusive. Speaking in a company and within a company requires the writer to show respect for the reader.

Tool: Remain neutral. In particular, avoid gender pronouns. The use of gender pronouns can show unintentional bias and be viewed as discriminatory by the audience. Use gender neutral terms to avoid these problems.

Example:

Gender: The chairman will be present to oversee the administration of the meeting.

Neutral: The chair will be present to oversee the administration of the meeting.

"They" as a neutral pronoun is becoming more and more popular. However, the best choice may be to simply give up gender in writing.

Accessible. Business text should be easy for the reader to understand. A common mistake is when a writer tries to sketch a text in a very sophisticated way. This choice of words makes the letter less accessible to the reader and therefore less successful in conveying the message. The goal is to convey content, not flaunt fancy vocabulary.

Tool: Keep it simple. A short sentence structure and simple words provide access to the document. Avoid using jargon. Simple doesn't mean condescending, but written in such a way that the audience can understand it as easily as possible.

Example:

Sophisticated: The offline engagement process ensures that all stakeholders can provide feedback on the retail expansion project.

Simple: There will be a public meeting with local residents to hear concerns about the zoning change application.

Content dependent tone

Convincing

Some documents, such as bids or tenders, require convincing language. This tone invites the reader to be convinced of the company's qualities. Decisions depend in part on how convincing the tone of the document is.

Tool: Use an imperative for recommendations. By using this form of the verb, you write directly and didactically. This leaves no room for questions. This leaves the reader with a clear idea of how you see the solution.

Example:

Present: We propose to continue the next phase of staff expansion.

Imperative: Move to the next phase of staff expansion

Tool: Avoid qualifiers. Introducing qualifiers weakens the presented argument. While the factors influencing success need to be pointed out, they should not detract from the main message. Consider including qualifiers in a separate statement or section if necessary.

Example:

Qualified: If at all possible, including financial monitoring is likely to improve quarterly results.

No qualifiers: enabling financial monitoring will improve quarterly results.

Negative messages

British English acing bad or confidential news is difficult. It's important to choose the right tone so that your message is clear but compassionate.

Avoid the tendency to hide or mitigate bad news by burying it. The information must be clear to the reader so that he does not feel confused or manipulated. Be sincere - the reader will appreciate it.

Tool: use the appropriate buffer. If bad news is expected or does not provoke an emotional reaction, include negative information at the top of the document. Include an explanation to clarify and communicate the final decision to the reader.

If the bad news is unexpected or likely to trigger an emotional reaction, use an indirect buffer. Keeping a buffer relevant to the topic will give the reader more time to react.

Example:

Disingenuous: Your experience is impressive and we enjoyed the conversation during the interview. However, we decided to hire another applicant for this position.

Sincerely: after a series of impressive interviews, we decided to hire another candidate for this position.

How to create tone in a letter?

The right tone in a business letter is very important. This is not a guessing game, but the result of thoughtful analysis and strategy writing. Incorporate this tactic into your copy and you'll find the right tone on the page.

Some business sayings are shared between Americans and Brits — but the differences say a lot about their respective cultures. American words like "trailblazer" and "pathfinder" show the frontier history of the U.S. and idealization of the entrepreneurial spirit. Although American English is stereotypically more clichéd, there are a number of business phrases becoming more prevalent in British English. The UK business world has developed their own businesses, including "360° thinking" and "thought-shower."

When it's claimed that Shakespeare coined 1,700 words, people think he's a genius. (He didn't, but that's another point.) When a poet says that a telephone squats, we applaud the imagery. But when the boss's boss says 'incentivize' or uses action as a verb, word lovers often become word haters.

Allan Massie, writing for the Telegraph, argued that most Americanisms are "lively, useful and agreeable," but the "American language we really should guard against is the management-speak promoted by business schools to baffle outsiders." Someone needs to tell Allan: you don't need Americans for management-speak.

The first evidence we have of incentivize (spelled incentivize, in fact) appeared in the UK Guardian newspaper in 1968. The first evidence of action to mean 'to take action on' was in 'The Times' (of London) in 1960. The only definite business Americanism in this paragraph is boss, from the Dutch baas, 'master.'

Still, there are good reasons to stereotype management-speak as American, and Massie was right to think of business schools. Americans invented the Master of Business Administration (MBA) in the early 1900s. In becoming an academic subject, business changed from something you do to something you talk about. A new jargon was born.

Business degrees were not easily exported to the UK. Even a gift worth nearly £2 million in today's money could not persuade Cambridge University to appoint a professor of business in the 1950s. The first British business degrees were awarded in the 1960s, but they only started to be popular in the 1980s and '90s. Even then the British viewed them with great suspicion.

The Americanisms of management-speak is not surprising if you consider some key deference in British and American values.

In the 1970s, psychologist Gordon Allport asked English and American insurance clerks to complete the sentence: "The qualities I admire most in a person are . . ." In many ways the two nationalities were the same—for instance, equal numbers valued a good sense of humor.

But a real difference emerged in the attitudes towards assertiveness.

Thirty-one percent of American responses said (in some way) that they valued the ability to exploit or exercise control over situations. This might be expressed with Americanisms like being a go-getter or having a can-do attitude. Only 7% of English respondents mentioned any such thing. On the flip side, 30% of the English respondents, but only 8% of the Americans, admired people who exercise self-restraint.

Management-speak are the language of go-getting — of grabbing opportunities and having impact, starting with the effect on the language.

People who advertise their go-getting aspirations by using management-speak can sound crass or self-important to those who prefer not to grab attention with new, action-packed words. And while management-speak is detested around the world, it's bound to be particularly unpopular in the land of stiff upper lips (an Americanism that the British have adopted with gusto). In modern American lore, cowboys are "good guys." Football teams are named after them, and cowboy characters or images are used to advertise blue jeans, fast food, and cigarettes (before cigarettes were demonized). The frontier may be lawless, but frontiers-people are hearty pioneers.

Not having a master has never been a bad thing for Americans, and so Americans have created a passel of positive words for people who battle the frontier, including trailblazer, ground British English aker, and pathfinder. Negative-tinged business expressions deride those who don't have that independent spirit, for example groupthink and drink the Kool-Aid (alluding to the 1978 mass suicide by the Peoples Temple cult).

In a sense, American willingness to create new words is a way of embodying that frontier spirit—though by the eightieth time you've heard a businesses, it sounds a lot less like independent, creative thinking.

Opaque metaphors and neologisms can make communication more difficult — but this is only part of the reason people complain about management-speak. The other reason is that the expressions get used to death. Metaphorical phrases like open the kimono ('disclose the inner workings of a company') or peel the onion ('look at the layers of a problem') become less evocative and more clichéd with use.

And, speaking of clichés: you'll never believe what happened next! British English has taken on management-speak with the enthusiasm of a convert. If we look at the top nineteen "buf-fling" business terms, as found by a UK YouGov poll, several are Americanisms that are now used more in Britain than in America. These include pro-active, thinking outside the box, and blue-sky thinking—the last of which occurs six times more often on British websites than on American ones. No wonder the British are sick of it.

The British aren't just adopting American business clichés, they're inventing their own. Six of the top nineteen annoying businesses are UK in origin: at the end of the day, at this moment in time, singing from the same hymn sheet, 360° thinking, flag it up, and thought shower. You might be scratching your head at that last one. Its presence in the "most annoying" list probably comes from people hearing about it on the news, not in real life.

'Thought shower had been briefly entertained (then widely mocked) as an alternative to the Americanism brainstorm — not so much because brainstorm was an Americanism, but because a borough council in Kent thought it might be offensive to people with epilepsy. (The National Society for Epilepsy called the coinage "political correctness gone a step too far."57)

American business culture has affected British culture, and British business culture has pushed management-speak in its own directions. Despite the distress about jargon, not everyone is convinced that the American cultural influence is a bad thing. UK Guardian columnist Jonathan Freed land suggests that importing American "can-do culture, partly fostered by the cult of business and enterprise" may rescue Britons from a "semi-feudal passivity" seen "in the habit of looking upward, waiting for those in charge to sort things out."Some business sayings are shared between Americans and Brits — but the differences say a lot about their respective cultures. Management-speak is the language of go-getting — of grabbing opportunities and having impact, starting with the effect on the language.

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