

English Corner



Dr Mable Chan is a lecturer of the Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She was awarded the *Faculty Award for Outstanding Teaching* in the 2005/2006 academic year. With her vast experience teaching academic and business English for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, she is going to introduce in this column interesting and fascinating knowledge about business English.

I. Features of Business English (Avoid Nominalization)

In business communication, we need to avoid nominalization, which is also a means to achieve conciseness. Nominalization is “a noun phrase that has a systematic correspondence with a clausal predication which includes a head noun morphologically related to a corresponding verb” (Quirk et al 1985: 1288). It replaces personal nouns and verbs. It acts like passive verbs with no subjects. The following examples illustrate what nominalization is and how to avoid it.

Nominalization	Noun → main verb
1. I made a determination.	I determined...
2. I made an application.	I applied...
3. I will make an announcement.	I will announce...
4. I will provide appropriate information to clients regarding...	I will inform clients about...
5. I will have no stock ownership of the company.	I will not own the company's stock.
6. There is the possibility of prior approval of these documents.	The boss might approve these documents in advance.
7. The customer was in violation of the regulations.	The customer has violated the regulations.
8. The brochure provides an illustration of the course.	The brochure illustrates the course.
9. Prior to the completion of...	Before you complete...
10. Consideration of this issue should cover...	Please consider...



II. Features of Business English (Rule 3: Be positive)

Positive sentences are easier to understand than negative sentences. The following table illustrates this point:

A.

Negative compound phrase	Single word
1. not able	unable
2. not accept	decline/reject
3. does not have	lacks
4. not many	few
5. not often	rarely
6. not the same	different

B. The following sentences could be rewritten in a positive way.

1. If you don't submit necessary documents, we won't be able to proceed with your application.

Positive: Please submit necessary documents for us to proceed with your application.

2. The contract shall not be valid unless countersigned by our authorized representative.

Positive: The contract becomes valid when countersigned by our authorized representative.

III. Features of Business English (Rule 4: Be polite)

In business writing, the tone is very important. You should try to be as polite as possible and the tone should be positive (instead of neutral or negative). Look at the following examples:

1. It is none of our business if you do not check whether the products are satisfactory on delivery.

Polite version: Customers are expected to check that goods are satisfactory on delivery.

2. We do not have time to send our representative to your company. She is busy dealing with larger accounts than yours.

Polite Version: We are happy to send our representative to your company as soon as her heavy schedule allows.

Adapted from Bilow, G (2004). *Business Writing for Hong Kong*. 3rd Edition. Hong Kong: Longman.



Quiz:

Rewrite the following sentences to make them more concise.

1. The following summary is intended mainly to highlight important information included in the brochure.

2. I am afraid I am not in a position to approve your request unless you inform me of the reason why you need such information.

Key:

1. This summary highlights important information from the brochure.
2. I cannot approve your request unless you let me know why you need such information.

References:

Bilbow, G. (2004). *Business Writing for Hong Kong*. 3rd Edition. Hong Kong: Longman

Quirk, Randolph, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, and J. Svartvik. (1985). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London: Longman