

English Corner



Dr. Mable Chan is a lecturer at the Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She was awarded the *Faculty Award for Outstanding Teaching* in the 2005/2006 academic year and has vast experience teaching academic and business English to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. In this column she advocates using simple and concise English for business writing.

I. What is Business English?

Business English is English that fulfills work-related needs. There are both spoken needs and written needs in the workplace; these include phone conversations, presentations, meetings, negotiations, interviews, and email communication, letters, reports, persuasive communication (e.g. sales letters, leaflets, proposals and advertisements) and visual communication.

The purpose of business communication is to convey messages in a clear, concise and courteous way. In this issue and the next few issues, I will illustrate the features of business English with examples. There will be a short quiz at the end to check your understanding. Are you ready?

II. Rule 1: Be Simple

- a. The business world has changed greatly in the past century or two; the following old-fashioned/outdated expressions or business jargon should no longer be used.

Business Jargon	Simple English
Esteemed Sir	Dear Sir/Madam
enclosed herewith	I enclose
at your earliest convenience	as soon as possible

Business Jargon	Simple English
in the event that	if
due to the fact that	as/because/since
it has come to our attention that	we note that
we are in receipt of	we have received

- b. In business communication, use familiar words which have simpler synonyms to convey clear messages. Don't, however, give up a precise word to convey exactly what you mean. Look at the following examples:

Unfamiliar words	Familiar synonyms
stipulate (e.g. regulations/laws stipulate that...)	require
terminate	stop
monitor	check
utilize	use
encompass	include

III. Rule 2: Be Concise

Conciseness means using the least number of words to express the most meaning. Reduce redundant words as in the following examples:

1. The universities will **merge together** soon.

The universities will **merge** soon.

Remark: Delete *together*.

2. **Past experience** is invaluable.

Experience is invaluable.

Remark: Delete *past*.

3. Please **sign your name** here.

Please **sign** here.

Remark: Delete *your name*.

4. I **am of the belief that** he is suitable.

I **believe** that he is suitable.

Remark: Use the single word *believe*.



Quiz:

Rewrite the following sentences to make them simple and concise (answers as below).

1. Kindly advise us at your earliest convenience if you are interested in our products.
2. I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to join our company.

Key:

1. Please let us know as soon as possible if you are interested in our products.
2. I would like to invite you/I invite you to join our company.

References:

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

Guffey, M.E. (2004). *Essentials of business communication*. 6th Edition. Mason, Ohio: South-Western College Pub.