Business Writing

Writing

Writing in a forerign language can be quite daunting, you have to worry about which words to use, how to make yourself understood clearly, and it's time consuming. However, with a little practice and close attention paid to how English speakers express themselves, you can quickly become a proficient and confident writer.

I read examples of student writing almost everyday, Monday to Friday, and I also watch them writing, too. Two main issues come out of this:

1. English Writing Structure: when I read students' work, it almost never follows the conventions of English writing structure closely or accurately enough
2. Dictionaries: students frequently referring to their dictionaries to check words

English Writing Structure

Problem

English writing structure is the set of conventions or rules which we follow when writing any text, whether a formal letter, a financial report, a proposal. It has to be done in pretty much exactly the same way each time. Problems occur when readers encounter written English doesn't follow these conventions; it causes a sense of disorientation in the reader, we find ourselves having to reread the text two or three times to figure out what the message is. I'm sure these types of conventions exist in all languages and cultures, but not necessarily the same conventions or rules, and here's the next problem, sometimes, when writing in a foreign language people still use the writing conventions from their own language. The effects on the reader are the same as I just mentioned, disorientation and confusion.

Solution

Keep in mind that whatever you're writing has a particular structure to it. If you've never formally learnt it for the language in which you're writing you might be relying on writing conventions taken from your own culture.

All good business emails should have at least four parts:

- **Subject Line.** The subject line is the first part of the email your reader sees. It can determine whether your reader opens the email straight away or saves it for later, and maybe even forgets to read it. Most people agree that subject lines should be short (six to ten words), and as specific as possible.
- **Salutation.** The salutation is how you greet the reader. It's important that you understand whether you are addressing a formal or informal audience.
- **Body Text.** The body text conveys the main message of the email. It should be written in paragraphs. If you have a list of points, use bulleted or numbered lists, (such as what you are reading now). The information should be prioritized, from most important or significant to least.
- **Sign off signature.** Your signature can be formal or informal, depending on your audience. A good email signature template helps your reader find all the information about you that they need.

  Most frequently used sign offs

Informal	Formal
Thanks Best cheers Regards Sincerely	Kind regards Yours sincerely Respectfully Many thanks Thank you very much

Take care Thanks a lot	

- Common mistake: *Thank you so much* does not have the same meaning as *Thank you very much*. These phrases are not synonymous. "Thank you *so* much" is used when someone has helped you personally, possibly having done you a favour that has significantly reduced any trouble or difficulties you had. The *"so"* makes it much more personal, whereas *"very"* is more neutral, and therefore probably more appropriate for most of your business communications.

↓

Paragraphs

Often, a more significant problem is that people may be familiar with the basic structure of an email but when it comes to the structure of the paragraphs in the message, we find a new set of problems.

Basic paragraphs should contain the following:

Unity. Unity in a paragraph begins with the *topic sentence*. Every paragraph has one single, controlling idea that is expressed in its topic sentence, which is typically the first sentence of the paragraph. A paragraph is unified around this main idea, with the supporting sentences providing detail. In order to write a good topic sentence, think about your theme and all the points you want to make.

 Coherence. This refers to the way you organize your supporting sentences. Whether you choose chronological order, order of importance, or another logical presentation of detail, a solid paragraph always has a definite organization. In a well-ordered paragraph, the reader follows along easily, aided by the pattern you've established. Coherence helps the reader understand what you want to say and avoids confusion.

Cohesion. Cohesion is the quality that makes your writing understandable. Ideas within a paragraph need to connect to each other and work together as a whole. One of the best ways to achieve cohesion is to use transition words. These words create bridges from one idea to the next. You can use transition words that show order (first, second, third), or logical development; (furthermore, in addition, in fact).

Style (formality)

Problem

The other problem is style. Depending on your culture or your company, your business environment may be slightly more or slightly less formal. The style you choose determines your email opening and closing. It can also determine the language you use and the tone of the email. An inappropriate style can lead to poor or confused business relationships. A company or employee that uses a more formal style with clients that are used to a more informal may lead the client to feel the company is somewhat cold and detached.

Solution

Here's a quick summary of some general rules about when to use a formal versus informal email style.

Use a *formal* email style:

- if it's required in your organization
- if the recipients aren't well known to you
- when sending an email to someone who is above you in authority such as your boss
- If the person you communicate with tends to use a more formal style themselves

Use an *informal* email style:

- if it's encouraged in your organization (your boss and others use an informal style)
- for a business colleague who is well-known to you and/or on friendly terms
- for personal emails that may contain both business and non-business topics
- If the person you communicate with tends to use a more informal style themselves

The choice between formal and informal style varies from country to country. If you're not sure whether you should use a formal email structure or an informal email structure, it's often safer to use a more formal style until you see how the recipient of your emails responds.

Use templates and examples

Finally, you can find plenty of examples of business writing on professional websites such as Indeed.com and Hubspot. Although these are all written in English, which means you need to be able to read English yourself, using English speaking websites means you can be fairly sure they are reliable examples of good writing practices.

Google it

Whatever the purpose of your email, whether it is a request for something from a colleague, an email related to sales, a good way to get examples is to Google it. For example, type in "writing follow up email" and Google search will give you plenty of examples of follow up emails which you can base your own writing on.

Dictionary

Although dictionaries are obviously essential when learning a language, they don't usually give you the context in which certain words are used, they simply give you the basic translation. This

frequently results in a slightly odd or inappropriate phrase. More seriously, it can sometimes result in an entirely wrong phrase which leaves the reader unable to understand what the writer wants to say.

Inefficiency

Using a dictionary while writing can also slow down the process of writing considerably. The time spent searching for words, the uncertainty felt while deciding whether or not to use certain phrases, can lead to a fairly inefficient use of time.

Solution

Study in advance:

A good place to start is by regularly studying the Business Vocabulary in Use series, in conjunction with your writing. Studying such books by themselves can be somewhat tiring, and rather difficult to effectively learn the language, but studying the vocabulary when you have in mind certain emails that you have to write, or certain meetings you have to attend will help retain the language far more effectively, as you have a much stronger purpose.

Mind maps

Create a mind map with certain business topics at the centre, then build up the mind map with useful phrases. Whenever you need to write an email, have your notebook full of different mind maps ready, and review the relevant sections before you start writing.

You'll find these activities save you considerable time and ensure that you use appropriate language, which is going to help impress your reader, rather than confuse them and diminish your reputation.

Reading

One of the most effective ways to improve your business English is to read as much as possible. However, there are a few tips which can really help increase the efficiency with which you learn the language and improve your ability to use it.

<u>Make it Relevant</u>

The most effective way to learn is to read subjects and topics that you are going to apply and use in your work. If you are a salesperson, read articles and books to improve your skills and knowledge of sales, if you want to improve your chances of getting a promotion in the future, you may want to show you have good management skills, so it would be a good idea to read books on management.

In particular, the ideas contained in these books are going to be slightly more Western in thinking, so it will give you a unique insight into the way in which western companies think about such issues differently to how your own culture might think of them.

Check out: <u>Forbes top 23 business books</u> for a nice range of books that you might find interesting.

<u>How to read business books</u>

I find that most business books have some interesting and relevant information for me, but that other areas of the book are more relevant to others. I guess it depends on your level of experience in the world of work. However, try reading just a chapter, not focusing on finishing the whole book. This can be somewhat daunting and may well lead you to give up too quickly. Read one chapter you think is relevant to your work situation and then go from there, reading more or two more chapters, until you have enough information. Business books very rarely need to be read in chronological order.

The BBC Business website is a good place to start, as the articles here are written for an international audience in mind, so they are not too difficult, but have a good range of suitable language. You can also try BC Tech, which has great articles related to tech issues and news.

Case studies
Problem solving is also an excellent way to engage your mind, and improve the way in which you effectively memorise the language you are learning. Business case studies are a very effective resource for this. Not only do you get English language practice, you also get increased exposure to real life business situations which are well known in the business word.

You can also get very professional case studies from Harvard Business School; you have to buy them, but they are not expensive, and are extremely well written, with engaging and relevant issues. You can access them here

Reading and studying case studies gives you an excellent opportunity to increase your vocabulary around the topic area, and provides you with excellent examples of how ideas regarding business problems are expressed.

Discussion
This might sound a bit geeky, but try getting together with one or two other colleagues to discuss the case studies and how you would solve any problems presented in them. This is hugely helpful when trying to remember the language and issues.