WHAT'S INSIDE!

- Reading Comprehension
- Articles and Exercises
- Writing: Using Action Verbs
- Writing: Punctuation Check
- Speaking: Talking About Your Company
- Keeping a Conversation Going
- Simplified English Jokes
- English Around the World
- Questions to the Editor
We are at the half-way mark for the year, and what a year it has been so far! In addition to our business English programmes, our Cantonese, Mandarin, and soft skills programmes have been making an impressionable mark with clients. With workforces becoming more diverse, a need to be multi-lingual is becoming both more desired and more required. A large client of ours recognised that to have their English speaking managers be able to converse in Cantonese would be very beneficial. They contacted us at the beginning of 2016 and we have been coaching two of their senior managers in Cantonese and they are finding the training very rewarding.

As well as Cantonese, Mandarin training has also become popular. We conduct Mandarin training for a large financial institution. The participants on the course are from a wide range of countries; Britain, Australia, Spain and even Hong Kong! This is helping them communicate better with both their Mainland Chinese colleagues as well as their Mandarin speaking customers.

As far as soft skills are concerned, our training partner LCT has been working with us to deliver courses to a range of industries including finance, shipping/logistics, and retail. There courses have been targeting a unique blend of language and skills training, which often go hand in hand, to offer a training solution that caters for diverse needs.

Last but not least, our business English programmes are steaming ahead with many return clients and repeat courses. Our trainer-consultants are working hard with HR/L&D to customise programmes, design and deliver training, as well as adding their own personal touch to each programme they facilitate. Some highlights have been: a series of writing workshops with a government department that has now become a regular part of their staff training regime; customised frontline retail training for a number of popular brand retailers; multiple property management speaking and writing courses for some of Hong Kong’s leading groups.

Moving forward, we are currently working on some exciting online projects for English training that will compliment our range of training services. As the popularity of online training grows and people become increasingly ‘mobile’, we are aiming to provide online courses through a Learning Management System, similar to those used by universities which deliver online programmes. These programmes will offer flexibility for both participants and HR teams to monitor progress and improvement. Watch this space for more later in the year!
Domestic Helper Rights back in Spotlight

Hong Kong has the Longest Working Week in the World

Hong Kong has the longest working hours in the world, a comprehensive global UBS study reveals. Hong Kongers spend an average of 50.11 hours at their workplace each week, or 38 percent longer than the global average. The survey also looked at paid annual leave, which in Hong Kong is only 17.2 days a year, less than the 23-day average. Of the 71 cities analysed in the survey, Paris enjoys the shortest working week of 30.6 hours. To avoid people bringing work home, France is even considering making it illegal to send work emails in the evenings and on weekends. While Shanghai has the least paid leave - seven days a year - no mainland cities are in the top 10 cities for longest working hours. Under the mainland's labor laws, all employees should work no more than eight hours a day and no more than 44 hours a week on average. The UBS findings about Hong Kongers’ working hours came amid growing demand for standard working hours in the city. A three-month public consultation on standard working hours based on written contracts specifying working hours, rather than them being mandated in law, has begun.

Domestic Helper Rights back in Spotlight

Hong Kong has the Longest Working Week in the World

Hong Kong has the longest working hours in the world, a comprehensive global UBS study reveals. Hong Kong has the highest population density, efficient public transport system, general lack of space and high registration taxes on new cars should dissuade most people from buying cars.

The marketing team have conducted a _____ review of the needs of the target group.

sales of the product were almost $2m in the first quarter of 2016.

does it ______ on the label that this shouldn’t be taken by children under 8?

the desire for change has _____ since the election of the new president.

I believe we _____ the cost of a new corporate website.

Lack of agreement on which side pays has been the main ______.

The _____ of Hong Kong is very high but Manila is even higher.

We always strictly _____ to the government guidelines in this matter.

Johnny Depp and his wife are often ______ for these wrong reasons.

The company’s policy is to donate a small ______ of its annual profits to charity.

The very high cost of the apartment didn’t ______ Petter from purchasing it.

I tried to _____ Jane from investing in the scheme but she ignored my advice.

After a lengthy _____, the government legalised the sale of marihuana to the public for medical purposes.

We need to _____ our sales results more carefully.

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We need to _____ our sales results more carefully.
Using Action Verbs in Writing

**What are Action Verbs?**

Action verbs express achievements or things that people do in a concise, persuasive manner. Action verbs are direct and clear. They leave no doubt in your reader’s mind about what you are describing.

- I gave direction to a team.

- I directed a team.

You should use action verbs in your business documents because they make sentences and statements more concise. Look at the sentence above: gave direction to (13 words); directed (1 word). Since concise writing is easier for readers to understand, it is more reader-centered. Because reader-centered writing is generally more persuasive, action verbs are more convincing than non-action verbs.

Action verbs are particularly useful in documents such as job covering letters and resumes, where you need to describe your skills and accomplishments, i.e., what you have done and what you can do. Of course, action verbs should not be limited to such documents. They will give greater impact to any kind of business document.

**Example Sentences**

Action verbs may be contrasted with static verbs which refer to positions rather than actions. Static list should be replaced with action verbs whenever possible.

There are two aspects of action verbs that you should keep in mind while writing:

1. Action verbs are preferable to action nouns because they make sentences and statements more concise. Static verbs should be compared with action verbs.

2. Action verbs can be transitive and intransitive. Transitive action verbs tend to make your writing more informative.

First, let’s take a look at why actions expressed through verbs are more convincing than static verbs such as ‘give’, ‘do’, ‘make’, etc. It can make your sentences sound dull because they don’t inform.

Also, note that the sentences which contain action verbs are shorter than those which don’t. Using action verbs is therefore also an excellent way of making your sentences more concise and to the point.

Using transitive action verbs in the active voice can also make your writing more effective. Transitive verbs are verbs which have objects, and which therefore add information to your writing. Take a look at these pairs of sentences:

- Made a presentation on strategies for better negotiation

- Presented strategies for better negotiation

- Wrote documents that detailed the current developments in our R&D department.

- Documented the current developments in our R&D department.

- Made verifications of the sales statistics that come in every day.

- Verified the sales statistics that come in every day.

- Conducted negotiations which got us the best deals.

- Negotiated the best deals.

**Action Verbs in Context**

First of all, let’s take a look at how action verbs can make a job application cover letter more effective. Here is a poorly expressed paragraph from a cover letter that does make use of action verbs:

I am a very good negotiator and was instrumental in signing a large deal for my company last year. I also secured the last project that I did for my previous company. After I resigned from my previous post, I made a decision to make an improvement in my professional skills by doing a Masters degree.

As the above examples show, using action verbs like ‘managed’ and ‘created’ is more effective in outlining your achievements than their noun forms, such as ‘manager’ and ‘assistant’. ‘Was’, ‘am’ and other forms of ‘be’ as well as verbs such as ‘give’, ‘do’, ‘make’, etc, can make your sentences sound dull because they don’t inform.

**Here is the same paragraph with action verbs added.**

I negotiated a $75,000 deal for my company last year. Additionally, I achieved a sales target on my previous project that set a record. I then studied two years and honed my professional skills through a Masters degree in information management.

As we can see from the revised paragraph above, action verbs not only make your writing more direct, but also give you the opportunity to achieve results that can enrich your cover letter or other business document.

Action verbs can also be very useful in resumes since they can be used to quickly outline your key strengths and achievements. Let’s look at his job description from a resume:

- Made analyses of employee hiring needs.

- Was in charge of making graphics for upcoming projects.

- Managed a team of twenty people.

- Won best employee of the year award.

This section lists some impressive achievements, but the impact of the accomplishments may be lost because the list does not contain enough action verbs, and is also not parallel-structured.

Parallel structure refers to beginning each item on a bulleted or numbered list with the same part of speech. In a resume or list of accomplishments, it is best to begin each point on the list with an action verb. Here is the same list rewritten with action verbs:

- Analyzed employee hiring needs.

- Designed graphics for upcoming projects.

- Assessed training needs for advanced sales strategies.

- Managed a team of twenty people.

- Won best employee of the year award.

Here’s another example from a resume without action verbs:

- Employee Orientation.

- Summer 20xx

  - Vtech, Research Triangle Park, NC Human Resources Intern, Summer 20xx

  - Duties included administrative tasks in an office setting.

  - Responsible for distributing a survey to current employees.

  - The needs of recent hires were collected, documented, and analyzed.

  - I was involved in a variety of other activities, as needed.

Here the extract rewritten with action verbs:

- Vtech, Research Triangle Park, NC Human Resources Intern, Summer 20xx

  - Worked with a project team on the redesign of New Employee Orientation.

  - Created a survey to use with current employees.

  - Received an 80% response rate.

  - Interviewed 15 recent hires to gain insight into the needs of new employees.

  - Wrote and presented results to project team.

As we can clearly see, parallel-structured lists using action verbs highlights the person’s achievements much more clearly and directly than in a non-parallel list.

To conclude, remember that action verbs are always better than static verbs since they express direct actions, and also make your writing clear and concise, the primary aim of all business writing. Using action verbs will enhance your resume, cover letter and other business documents by involving your reader in your writing and drawing attention to your skills and accomplishments.
When giving a presentation, use the past, present and future verb tenses to describe all aspects of your company. Use the past simple passive to talk about when or where your company was established, and use the present simple passive to explain how your company is organised and where it is located.

When answering questions about your company, remember to actively listen to the questions and give both relevant and irrelevant answers. When asked closed questions, try to give more than just yes/no answers. Answer open questions as fully as possible.

On the right is a table showing which verb tenses are used to talk about different aspects of a company. Below is a table of the different question types.

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## DEVELOP YOUR SPEAKING SKILLS

### Verbs Tenses / Functions

- **Past Simple Tense / Past Accomplishments**
  - We won several awards for our products last year.
  - We were the first company to...
  - We introduced several unique designs during our first year.
  - We doubled our sales last year.
  - We opened five branches in the first six months of this year.

- **Past Simple Passive / Company History / Accomplishments**
  - The company was established in...
  - Our first office was opened in...
  - The firm was founded by Paul Jones in...
  - We were awarded several honours last year, including...
  - We were recognised as pioneers in the field of it.

- **Present Perfect Tense / Recent Actions / Accomplishments**
  - We have been the market leaders for the last five years.
  - The company has set up two new offices in the last year.
  - We have acquired two companies during the last two years.
  - We have signed partnership deals with many companies.

- **Present Simple Tense / Current Company Facts**
  - We are currently the market leaders.
  - We have a separate department for customer care.
  - The company provides quality services to customers.
  - We manufacture a range of quality products.
  - We employ over 5,000 staff.
  - We manage over 600 properties.

- **Present Simple Passive / Company Organisation**
  - The company is divided into seven departments. This division is headed by...
  - The department is managed by...
  - The department is organised into...
  - This team is led by...

- **Future Simple Tense / Plans / Expectations**
  - We will set up four new offices next year.
  - The company will launch several new products this year.
  - We will target new markets over the next five years.
  - We will form partnerships across Asia.
  - We will double our sales team in the coming months.

---

**Situation 1**

**The Car Boutique**

We outsource our human resources and personnel management requirements, and also hire leading market consultants as one of the pioneers in the car accessories market.

By the end of 2016, we will set up offices in New York and Tokyo. Our first office was established in Hong Kong, and is very well-known throughout Europe and Asia.

**Situation 2**

**Amy**

We have more than three hundred staff members across the world, and are looking to hire another fifty employees over the next decade, we’ve also set up offices in Berlin, Tokyo, Bangkok and Mumbai.

**Paul**

The training departments are all based in London, but the head office for the international design team is based in San Francisco.

**Amy**

The firm was founded by Paul Jones in 2003 in London and developed a local clientele. Our company is organised, you should also be able to describe your company’s organisation and structure.

When you meet clients at the workplace or talk to people at presentations, meetings and conferences, you may have to talk about your company. Apart from explaining how your company is organised, you should also be able to describe your company’s operations.

In this article, we will show you how to talk about your company, and how to answer questions about your company.

Two of the most important language points when talking about your company are the correct usage of verb tenses and the passive voice. You will need to use a variety of verb tenses to talk about the past, present and future of your company. You’ll also need to use the passive voice when talking about your company’s organisation and structure.

**Introduction**

Thank you for showing me around today, Amy. I’m very impressed with everything.

Thanks very much for showing me around today, Amy. I’m very impressed with everything.

Yes, I was wondering about your overseas branches, as you seem to have a lot of international clients.

I was wondering about your presence in China. I’d like to know more about your operations here. Perhaps you could explain more about your organisation.

Yes, we do have several overseas clients at the moment. The company was established in 2003 in London and developed a local clientele.

We have signed partnership deals with many companies.

Our first office was opened in...

Amy: Could you tell me a little more about your company?

Amy: Is your manufacturing department based in the UK?

Paul: We have a separate department for customer care.

Amy: Are you planning to release a new version soon?

Amy: Have you had much success in this market?

Paul: The company is divided into seven departments.

Amy: Is your manufacturing department based in the UK?

Paul: The company has set up two new offices in the last year.

Amy: Do you plan to open a branch here soon?

Paul: We will set up four new offices next year.

Amy: We are currently the market leaders.

Paul: The training departments are all based in London, but the head office for the international design team is based in San Francisco.

Amy: We have a separate department for customer care.

Paul: The company has set up two new offices in the last year.

Amy: The firm was founded by Paul Jones in 2003 in London and developed a local clientele.

Paul: We will target new markets over the next five years.

Amy: We are currently the market leaders.

Paul: We will open four new branches in the first six months of this year.

Amy: Our first office was opened in...

Paul: We have more than three hundred staff members across the world, and are looking to hire another fifty employees over the next decade, we’ve also set up offices in Berlin, Tokyo, Bangkok and Mumbai.

Amy: We have signed partnership deals with many companies.

Paul: We will set up four new offices next year.

Amy: The training departments are all based in London, but the head office for the international design team is based in San Francisco.

Paul: The company has set up two new offices in the last year.

Amy: We are currently the market leaders.

Paul: We will target new markets over the next five years.

Amy: We will form partnerships across Asia.

Paul: We will double our sales team in the coming months.

---

**Talking About your Company**

When giving a presentation, use the past, present and future verb tenses to describe all aspects of your company. Use the past simple passive to talk about when or where your company was established, and use the present simple passive to explain how your company is organised and where it is located.

When answering questions about your company, remember to actively listen to the questions and give both relevant and irrelevant answers. When asked closed questions, try to give more than just yes/no answers. Answer open questions as fully as possible.

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**Situation 2**

**Amy**

We have more than three hundred staff members across the world, and are looking to hire another fifty employees over the next year to keep up with the demand for our products.

I’ll be happy to answer any questions that you may have.”
My goal is to be able to go out to a pub with Westerners and feel comfortable. I think my English is pretty good but I do have problems, mostly because of the situations that we encounter. Nevertheless, I found the culture training very useful when I first joined the company all the graduate recruits were given an intensive real challenge to know what to say.

Bill had been out of work for a few months. After applying for over 100 vacancies and after receiving over 10 rejection letters, he decided that enough was enough. This is his reply to the most recent rejection letter he received:

---

Thank you for your letter of 14 October. After careful consideration, I regret to inform you that I am unable to accept your refusal to offer me employment at this time.

This year I have been particularly fortunate in receiving an unusually large number of rejection letters. With such a varied and promising field of candidates, it is impossible for me to accept all refusals. Despite Bambidge Ltd’s outstanding qualifications and previous experience in rejecting candidates, I find that your rejection does not meet with my needs at this time. Therefore, I will initiate employment with your firm immediately.

I look forward to working with you.

Best of luck in rejecting future candidates.

Yours faithfully

Bill Bridges

---

Q When writing business documents, could you confirm if I should put a capital letter after a colon?

A No, in most cases. Yes, when the text that follows is a full sentence and is longer than just a few words. For example: We cannot recruit any staff at the moment for one reason: our budget has been used up.

Q With the words “all” and “none”, should we use singular or plural verbs?

A Both of these words can be singular or plural. If you mean “all of them” or “none of them” use the plural verb. These two sentences are both grammatically correct: All of the stationery has been used up. (all of them) All of the visitors have left. (all of them)

Q In the following two sentences, the agreement between all, none and their verbs is incorrect. “None of the staff has been informed. And none of the rooms have been cleaned. To correct these sentences, the verbs should be made plural. None of the staff have been informed. And none of the rooms have been cleaned.

Q Could you explain the difference between the auxiliary verbs “shall” and “will”?

A Actually, there is no difference in meaning between the two words. “Shall” is the past tense used in an offer or an invitation and “will” shall be used in the future.

Q Could you explain the difference between an active verb and a passive verb?

---

In the past people used “I” in a document, subject heading. “Shall I refill your drink?” could still be used with “I” and “you” has since replaced “we” in an offer or a proposal. Shall I refill your drink? Could you explain how to write “Dear Ms Noonan” or “Dear Joan Noonan.” If it is not known, use the title “Ms” or omit the courtesy title altogether. You can write “Dear Ms Noonan” or “Dear Joan Noonan.” “Ms” is better if you don’t know her preference, and it’s business-related.

Q Could you explain the difference between the auxiliary verbs “shall” and “will”?

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To Whom It May Concern

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I look forward to working with you.

Best of luck in rejecting future candidates.

Yours faithfully

Bill Bridges

---

Q When writing a letter or an email, what form do I use to address a woman?

A When writing to a married woman, follow her preference for first and last names if you know it. She may prefer to be addressed by her husband’s last name, continue to use her original first name and middle initial (Mrs Joan L Noonan).

The form that uses her husband’s first name and middle initial as well (Mrs James W Noonan) is acceptable only for social purposes. It should never be used when addressing a business letter to a married woman in selecting “Mrs,” “Ms,” or “Miss,” always respect the woman’s preference. If it is not known, use the title “Ms” or omit the courtesy title altogether.

You can write “Dear Ms Noonan” or “Dear Joan Noonan.” “Ms” is better if you don’t know her preference, and it’s business-related.

---

Keeping a Conversation Going!

There are two main reasons why conversations end quickly. First, one person does all the talking, and second, the listener is not active.

We all should know that it takes two people to have a conversation, so make sure you give the other person an opportunity to speak.

One useful technique is through the use of open questions. Open questions force the listener to say more than just a few words. For example: What have you been doing this morning? Another good technique is to use phrases such as “How about you?” or “What about you?” to throw a question you’ve just answered back to the listener.

One more excellent and yet underused technique is to re-word or re-phrase what someone has just said to you. This positive technique shows that you are listening and are interested. Here are some examples:

A: The campaign has had a great impact.
B: Yes, it’s been very effective.

A: I was really surprised to hear that Larry had quit.
B: Yes, he tendered his resignation yesterday.

A: They manage to keep their prices low.
B: Yes, they’re very competitive, aren’t they?

A: He’s spent his entire career at American Express.
B: Yes, he’s the perfect example of the company man.

---

Questions and answers with Dr English

If you have any questions that you would like to have answered by Dr English then email us: edtor@languagekey.com

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