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Email Tune-up 02: Asking for comments



www.businessenglishpod.com

Original Email

Subject: Please review this document

Dear Emily,

I should be glad if you review the attached document. Please can you let me know if you have any inputs, comments and concerns? I look forward to hearing from you.

If I don't receive your feedback by 5:00pm next Wednesday, I will deem that you are OK with the content of the attached document.

Thank you very much for your attention!

Yours sincerely,

Dora

Revised Email

Subject: Document for review

Dear Emily,

I should be glad if you could review the attached document. Can you please let me know if you have any comments?

I would like to receive your feedback by 5:00pm next Wednesday, so that I can make any changes you feel are necessary.

Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Sandra

Transcript

All right, we already know a little bit about the background of this short email.

This is an internal company memo. *Sandra* is contacting her colleague *Emily* to ask her to read and review a document, which she has *attached* to the email as a separate file.

Sandra wants the language to sound *friendly*, but she also wants to keep the language direct and professional.

Let's first look at issues of **mechanics**: formatting, punctuation and grammar.

I think the formatting of this email needs a couple of changes.

In the first paragraph we have a phrase, *I look forward to hearing from you*, which normally appears in the *conclusion* of a business letter. So I'm going to cut this out and move it down to the end of the third paragraph and make it the last sentence of the email. So we now have: *Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to hearing from you*, which is a very good way to close an email.

We also need to make a few corrections to the *grammar* of this first paragraph. Sandra begins by writing *I should be glad if you review the attached document*. Now we need to add a modal verb to this main verb, which is *review*, to make it clear that this is a *polite request* to Emily.

When we add *could*, the phrase becomes *if you could review the attached document*, which is the verb form we use in English for indirect requests.

Looking at the second sentence, we see *Please can you let me know*. Here we need to begin with the modal verb, since this is a question, so let's say *Can you please let me know*.

Notice also that Sandra asks if Emily has any *inputs, comments, and concerns* about this document. These are three words that basically mean the same thing. So to make her language more concise, I think we should take out the words *inputs and concerns* and just say *Can you please let me know if you have any comments*.

Now in the second paragraph I only see one problem with mechanics. It's a spelling error, or more likely a typing error. *Yu* should be *y o u*.

Finally, in the third paragraph, I don't think Sandra needs to use an exclamation point at the end of the word *attention*. That creates a very informal style, which is *not* something you'd usually want in a business email. So let's take the exclamation point out and make it a full stop.

Style

Now. Let's go back up to the top and look at the *style* of this email, beginning with the subject line.

I can see one problem right here at the start. Sandra begins by saying *Please review this document*. But we don't know what kind of document she's referring to. Is it a report? Is it a memo to other staff members? We really have no idea. But, unfortunately, we can't fix that, because the information is missing from the email.

Let's move on to the first paragraph, where we see the same problem. Sandra doesn't tell us what kind of document she's talking about. Apart from that, though, this paragraph seems to be okay.

I think we'll need to make some changes to the second paragraph, though, to make it more formal and less wordy.

Sandra writes: *I will deem that you are OK with the content of the attached document*. Now, a word like *OK* is very informal, and it's not a word that you probably want to use in a business communication. So let's change this *OK* to *satisfied*.

We also don't need to use so many words in this sentence. Instead of saying *I will deem that you are OK with the content of the attached document*, let's just say *that you are satisfied with the document*.

Sandra has already explained that the document is *attached* to the email, so she doesn't need to repeat the word *attached* in the second paragraph.

Tone

Let's go through one more time, starting at the top, and look at the *tone* of this email. Is it written in a way that's both *polite* and *effective*?

Right now the subject line is much too direct. Sandra is already making a request to Emily in the body of the email, and we don't need to repeat this request in the subject line. To make it less direct and more polite, we can change the subject line to something like *Document for review*.

I think the tone of the first paragraph doesn't have any major problems. However, if we look at the second paragraph, there are certainly some changes we should make. Look at how Sandra begins this sentence: *If I don't receive your feedback by 5:00 next Wednesday*. And she finishes the sentence by saying *I will deem that you are satisfied with the document*.

By using a negative verb here – *If I don't receive* – she creates a negative feel for the entire sentence. The emphasis is on what's going to happen if Emily *doesn't* do what Sandra asks.

Let's first change the beginning phrase to eliminate the negative verb. Instead of talking about what Emily *shouldn't* do, let's talk about how she can help Sandra to improve this document. We can change this to something like *I would like to receive your feedback by 5pm next Wednesday*. By expressing herself this way, Sandra emphasizes what Emily *should* do to help Sandra do her job.

And in the second half of the sentence, instead of telling Emily what will happen if she doesn't comment on the document, Sandra can explain why Emily's help is useful. She can say something like *so that I can make any changes you feel are necessary*.

Now look at what we've done to the two halves of this sentence. The first phrase, *I would like to receive your feedback by 5pm next Wednesday*, uses a modal verb, *would*, to make an indirect request to Emily. And the second phrase, *so that I can make any changes you feel are necessary*, explains why she's making the request and how Emily can help her do her job.

Okay, the third paragraph looks pretty good, since we've already made some changes. Let's take a look at the closing salutation. *Yours sincerely* is very formal, and it's not something you'd normally use in a letter to a colleague. Let's change it to something more friendly and concise, like *Regards*.

All right, I think we've made all the changes we need to this email. It now reads more professionally, more clearly, and more courteously as well.

Learning Point – Asking for comments or a review

Here are a few phrases you can use to ask colleagues for suggestions, or feedback, on a document you've prepared.

If you want to make sure that other members of your team are informed about the work you've been doing, you can use sentences like these to express interest in their opinions:

- *I'd be grateful for any comments or suggestions you might have.*
- *I'd like to get some feedback on the report before we send it out.*
- *Please let me know if you'd like to propose any changes.*

If you want to make a stronger request for feedback, making it clear that you expect a response from your readers, you can use sentences like these:

- *Please take a look and let me know what you think of this draft.*
- *I'd like to receive detailed feedback on this version of the document.*
- *I'd appreciate it if each of you can take a few minutes to review and comment on the report.*

Writing Task 02 ([Click here to view/download the video](#))

Before we finish off today, here's the writing task for this episode:

Write an email to a group of colleagues, announcing that you have completed a business document for your company and that you would like them to read and review it before you submit it to your supervisor. Be sure to include the following points:

- The type of document you are sending
- A way to find the document (for example, as a file attached to your email)
- The type of comments you are asking for
- A deadline for submitting comments

NB: You can invent details such as the name of the company or product if you want, but it is not necessary to complete the task

We'll post an example answer to this writing task in a couple of days, so be sure to check the website at www.businessenglishpod.com to see how you did.

Example Answer

Subject: Draft of quarterly sales report

Dear Colleagues,

I've just completed a draft version of our department's sales report for the most recent quarter, which you will find attached as a Word document.

I've been asked to submit the final version of this report to our head office no later than 9:00am on Friday, and I'd very much like to hear your feedback on the draft before I send it out. If you have any comments or suggestions, I'll need to receive them by 3:00pm Thursday so I can refer to them when I prepare the final version on Thursday afternoon.

I look forward to hearing from all of you.

Thanks and best regards,

Simon

Writing Task 02 – Answer Transcript

Okay, here's a possible answer that we've put together for this writing task. Let's start with the subject line: "Safety Test Review Meeting".

Okay, here's one possible answer you could have given.

For the subject line, you can write something like: *Draft of Quarterly Sales Report*

And we can begin with an introduction like: *Dear Colleagues, I've just completed a draft version of our department's sales report for the most recent quarter. The report is attached as a Word document.*

And then a new paragraph: *I've been asked to submit the final version of this report to our head office no later than 9am on Friday and I'd very much like to hear your feedback on the draft before I send it out.*

New paragraph: *If you'd like to make any comments or suggestions, please submit them by 3pm Thursday so that I can refer to them when I prepare the final version.*

And then a closing paragraph: I look forward to hearing from you.

And then a closing salutation: *Regards, Simon.*

All right, let's look at what we've done here.

We have a very specific subject line, *Draft of Quarterly Sales Report*, which tells the reader *what* the email is about. It identifies the document that's going to be discussed.

The first paragraph explains *why* the email is being written: *I've just completed a draft version of our department's sales report...* and he specifies that this report is attached to the email, so that the readers know where to look for it.

The second paragraph explains *what* Simon wants his readers to do. Simon writes that he needs to submit the final version of the report soon, and that his readers can help him improve it by giving him some feedback first.

The third paragraph specifies *when* Simon wants his readers to take action. It's phrased in a positive way, as an invitation to submit comments and suggestions, but it also contains a clear deadline for action – 3pm on Thursday – and it gives an explanation for why Simon is making the request: *so that I can refer to them when I prepare the final version.*

The final paragraph is a closing statement – *I look forward to hearing from you* – that also politely reminds Simon's readers that he's making a request, and that he expects them to take action in response to the email.

So this is one possible response to the task we gave in the last episode.