



Skills 360 – Top 10 Business English Skills (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. Are you comfortable making informal conversation with people you don't know well?
2. What do good listeners do that poor listeners don't do?
3. Are you able to reject people's ideas carefully, without making them feel badly?

Vocabulary

Guru: someone who is respected in a certain field and who people look to for advice; "As a business guru and life coach, Tony Robbins makes millions through seminars and self-help books."

Worth one's weight in salt: valuable; "I'm happy that Glen has proven so quickly that he's worth his weight in salt as a salesman."

Small talk: casual conversation about simple topics; "Okay everyone, can we just skip the small talk and get straight to the negotiation?"

To set a mood: to make the right atmosphere or feeling in a place or situation; "Many tech companies try to set a casual and fun mood in their offices to attract young talent."

To stick to something: to continue to use one thing; "If it's too much to take care of all the social media, why don't you just stick to Twitter and let Lana do Instagram?"

To break the ice: to say or do something to make people feel comfortable in a social situation; "Good trainers know how to break the ice at the start of a session and help people to get to know each other."

Perspective: a way of thinking about something; "Hank's worked his whole life in Iowa, so his perspective isn't so broad. We need someone with some international experience."

To pitch: to try to sell something or persuade someone to support an idea; "I think your idea is great, and I could help arrange a meeting where you could pitch it to some investors."

To go about something: to deal with a situation in a certain way; "If you go about this partnership too aggressively, I'm worried that the other company will get scared."

To assess: to carefully consider or evaluate; "I've assessed our finances carefully and decided that we can't afford to expand at this time."

Accordingly: in a way that is appropriate for the situation just mentioned; "You need to understand the rules around travel expenses and plan your trip accordingly."

With guns blazing: with a lot of energy or determination; "Jenny is usually pretty quiet, but she came into that tough negotiation with guns blazing!"

To shoot yourself in the foot: to say or do something that causes you problems; "I think I shot myself in the foot in the interview when I said I planned to move to Europe in a couple years."

Substantive: important or serious; "HR has looked into your complaint and decided that its not substantive enough for them to do a full investigation."

Engaged: interested and involved; "Since we lost a few big clients, the staff just don't seem as engaged or excited to be here any more."

Follow-up question: a question about something that has just been said; "Do you mind if I just ask a couple follow-up questions about your experience in Argentina?"

Discerning: showing good judgment; "Joe really isn't a very discerning manager. Everyone he has hired has turned out to be lazy or useless."

Sincere: true and honest; "I like working here, because my boss shows sincere concern for my happiness."

Active listener: a person who concentrates fully on what someone is saying and responds to show he or she understands; "An active listener usually smiles and asks questions about what someone says."

Yes-man: someone who always agrees with people who have more power, just to be liked; "Your boss will respect you more Tony if you stop being such a yes-man and actually tell him what you think."

Nuanced: sensitive to small or subtle differences or meanings; "Effective cross-cultural communication requires a very nuanced understanding of body language."

Uncertainty: a situation where things are unclear or not known; "With so much uncertainty in the economy, people seem really hesitant to invest in real estate."

To waffle: to avoid making a clear decision or taking a clear position; "Stop waffling Quin and just take the job in Moscow. I'm sure you'll be happy there."

Intention: a plan in your mind to do something; "Boris says he wants to cooperate on this project, but I can't help feeling his real intentions are not so good."

Branding: the use of design and advertising to make people recognize a company or product; "Our new branding package explains exactly how our logo should be used and which fonts to use in our communications."

To postpone: to decide to do something at a later time; "If only three people can make it to the meeting, why don't we postpone it until another day?"

Decisive: able to make clear decisions; "I wish Ryan was more decisive. It feels like he has to think about every little thing for weeks."

To get results: to make good things happen or succeed; "We're not just looking for a nice person with good ideas; we need a person who can actually get results."

Action points: specific things to be done, especially developed through discussion or a meeting; "Okay, I'll send out the meeting notes tomorrow and highlight all the action points with people's names beside them."

To delegate: to give a piece of work or responsibility to someone else; "Why are you doing data entry? You need to delegate that kind of work to your employees."

Recap: to describe briefly what has been said or done; "Now, before I take any questions, let me just recap the main ideas of my presentation."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at some of the business English skills everyone needs in order to be successful.

As any [guru worth his weight in salt](#) will tell you, business is all about relationships. That means connecting with new people, and maintaining good relations with people in your existing network. And one of the ways we do this is through [small talk](#).

We call it small talk because it's not about big important business topics. It's about things like the weekend, the weather, sports, or family. You hear it every time someone walks into the office and says "Oh hey Dave, how's it going?" Or at a conference when someone says "So, where are you from?"

Making small talk in English allows us to connect with people, find out more about them, and [set a mood](#). This kind of conversation involves a back and forth of simple comments, questions, and answers. You need to show interest in the other person, but also reveal a bit about yourself. And it's important to [stick to](#) topics that are common to both people.

Once you've [broken the ice](#) with small talk, *then* you can move on to bigger topics. And that's where you bring in the skill of expressing opinions in English. Exactly how you do that depends on the situation. If you're in a meeting and want to add your [perspective](#), you might just introduce it with an expression like "the way I see things" or "as far as I'm concerned."

But if you're making a suggestion or [pitching](#) an idea, there are a couple of ways to [go about it](#). You might do it carefully with words like "perhaps" or "maybe" or "we could." Or, if you want to state something more confidently, you can use stronger words like "have to" or "should." The important thing here is that you [assess](#) the situation and adapt your language [accordingly](#). If you're new to a team or the most junior person in the room and you come out [with guns blazing](#), telling everyone what *must* happen, you'll be [shooting yourself in the foot](#).

After all, conversation isn't just about speaking; it's also about *listening*, and that leads me to asking questions. I don't just mean "yes or no" questions. I mean [substantive](#) questions that show that you're listening and [engaged](#). This could include [follow-up questions](#) during small talk, which helps you connect with people.

Beyond small talk, this also includes [discerning](#) and [sincere](#) questions about people's ideas. This is a big part of being an [active listener](#), which means listening to *understand*, not just listening to *respond*.

Of course, being a good listener doesn't mean being a [yes-man](#). Participating in a meeting or negotiations in English requires the ability to *reject* ideas. And that's not as simple as saying "no" or "I disagree." Most situations require a more [nuanced](#) or careful approach.

If you don't like someone's idea, you might soften your comment by expressing [uncertainty](#). For example, you might say "I'm not sure that's the best way to do this." Or "I wonder if that might be too expensive." You can also use the "yes but" approach, such as "I see what you're saying, but I'm not sure we can do that."

But be careful with this kind of softening language. If you're in a position to say no or reject something, be clear about it. You can still be diplomatic without [waffling](#). To do that, you can comment on the positive aspects of the idea, or the [intention](#) behind them, before saying "no." For example, you could say "I agree that would help our [branding](#), but we just can't afford it right now." Or "I appreciate your concerns for the timeline, but we have to [postpone](#) this."

Rejecting ideas effectively is one aspect of being [decisive](#) and [getting results](#). And that brings me to one last skill I want to mention today: getting people to take action. You've probably been in an English meeting where there was a lot of great discussion, but no real [action points](#).

So you need to learn how to [delegate](#) effectively. I don't just mean giving orders. "Jenny, take care of the report" sounds like an order. But effective delegation at the end of a meeting sounds more like "Jenny, I'd like you to take care of the report." Or maybe "Jenny, I think you're the best person to handle the report."

Alright, so we've looked at five essential business English skills. Let's do a quick [recap](#): you need to know how to make small talk, express opinions, and ask good questions. At the same time, you need to be able to reject ideas and get action from people.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the [BusinessEnglishPod.com](#) website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

Happy learning. And see you again soon.

Review

1. Which of the following are aspects of making small talk? [Select all that apply]
 - A Discussing weather or sports
 - B Talking about major business news
 - C Simple comments, questions, and answers
 - D Detailed explanations of ideas
 - E Showing interest
 - F Carefully rejecting ideas
 - G Delegating responsibility

2. Which of the following words will help you express your opinions or make suggestions *carefully*? [Choose 2]
 - A Have to
 - B Perhaps
 - C Should
 - D Maybe

3. Being an active listener means listening to _____, not just to _____.
 - A Accept / reject
 - B Reply / discuss
 - C Understand / respond
 - D Interrupt / hear

4. Expressions like "I'm not sure" and "I wonder" help you reject someone's ideas by showing...
 - A ... decisiveness.
 - B ... uncertainty.
 - C ... understanding.
 - D ... control.

5. Which of the following is a good way to reject someone's idea diplomatically?
 - A First comment on the positive aspects of the idea.
 - B Ask the person to explain their ideas while you listen actively.
 - C Tell the person you don't have time to discuss the idea.
 - D Use short, clear statements.

6. Which of the following demonstrate effective delegation? [Choose 2]
 - A "Maddy, you need to create the budget."
 - B "You're going to create the budget, aren't you Maddy?"
 - C "Maddy, I think you're the best person to create the budget."
 - D "I'd like you to create the budget please Maddy."

Review Answers

1. Which of the following are aspects of making small talk? [choose all that apply]
A Discussing weather or sports
C Simple comments, questions, and answers
E Showing interest
2. Which of the following words will help you expression your opinions or make suggestions carefully? [choose 2]
B Perhaps
D Maybe
3. Being an active listener means listening to _____, not just to _____.
C Understand / respond
4. Expressions like "I'm not sure" and "I wonder" help you reject someone's ideas by showing...
B ... uncertainty.
5. Which of the following is a good way to reject someone's idea diplomatically?
A First comment on the positive aspects of the idea.
6. Which of the following demonstrate effective delegation? [choose 2]
C "Maddy, I think you're the best person to create the budget."
D "I'd like you to create the budget please Maddy."