

## Skills 360 – 9 Hacks for Improving your Business English (Part 1)

### Discussion Questions

1. What do you usually say to someone if you don't understand what they are saying?
2. What special words do you usually use when explaining the steps in a sequence or process?
3. How important do you think it is to be polite and courteous in business discussions?

### Vocabulary

**Hack:** a tip or trick to doing something efficiently or in a new way; "There are several websites dedicated to cool IKEA hacks that show you how to combine IDEA items in new ways."

**To be founded on:** to be based on; "A manager's decisions should be founded on the best information available at the time."

**Not rocket science:** relatively easy, or not as difficult as people think; "Can I make a PDF from your Word document? Of course Dave, it's not rocket science you know. I can show you how."

**To take something to the next level:** to improve or develop something even more; "With expansion into European markets, we'll have millions of new potential customers and can take our revenue to the next level."

**Obscure:** not well-known, or difficult to understand; "You might think it's fun to drive an expensive and obscure model of car, but what are you going to do when it breaks down and you need parts?"

**To be within your grasp:** if something is "within your grasp," then you are capable of obtaining or achieving it; "With the Fireball 3000 microphone connected to your computer, studio quality recording capabilities are within your grasp."

**Sophisticated:** advanced or complex; "The New York Time Stock Exchange couldn't function as it does without all of the sophisticated computer programs facilitating thousands of transactions per minute."

**On a human level:** related to human relationships or concerning people and their emotions, rather than ideas or things; "Gerald is a good technical manager and really knows the field, but he's not the best at relating to staff on a human level."

**Concise:** expressed simply and briefly; "You've only got about 10 minutes to present to the executive team, so make sure you are really concise."

**To-the-point:** direct and relevant; "If you want an honest opinion about your design, ask Vera. Her feedback is always to-the-point, but still constructive."

**Engaged:** attentive, involved in something, or actively participating; "We thought it would be fun not just to have a great Christmas party, but to get all the staff engaged in actually planning it."

**A two-way street:** a situation involving two people or groups working together or giving and taking equally; "You have to understand that these negotiations are a two-way street, and that you need to give something up if you want management to give you something."

**To scratch your head:** if a person "scratches his head," he is showing he is confused by something; "Several people appeared to be scratching their heads when I explained the key ratios, so I went over it again, but more slowly."

**To raise your eyebrows:** to move your eyebrows upward, to show surprise or disbelief; "Jack, if you propose another round of budget cuts, leadership is going to raise their eyebrows and tell you it's impossible."

**To pose a question:** to ask a question; "The presenter started off by posing a really tough question to the audience; for the rest of his presentation, he answered that question."

**Latter:** if you mention two things, then you can refer to the first as the "former" and the second as the "latter;" "We need to hire a new programmer and a certified energy manager; the former should be easy, because there are so many programmers out there, but the latter might be tough."

**To give it another shot:** to try again; "I didn't pass the Certified General Accountants exam last spring, so I'm going to give it another shot this fall."

**"You can bet:"** it is certain that; "Once one gas station lowers its prices, you can bet the others on the same street will do the same."

**To dress something up:** to decorate or make something more formal; "Listen Ron, stop dressing up your criticism and just tell me directly what you didn't like about my presentation."

**Logic:** the way that ideas are connected or the quality of ideas being reasonable; "If the government is saying that household debt is too high, I don't see the logic in cutting interest rates further."

**Sequence:** an order of things; "Well, it looks like you completed all the steps in starting up the machine, but not in the write sequence."

**To get fancy:** to use complex instead of simple solutions or words; "It's fine if the introduction to the proposal is worded nicely, but don't get too fancy when it comes to explaining our solution. Just make it simple and clear."

**To see where someone is going:** to understand how someone's ideas are connected; "First you talked about controlling spending, but now you're talking about new investments. I don't see where you're going with all this."

**Random:** made or done without method or reason; "We conduct random drug tests on all athletes, but if there's cause for concern, we'll select specific athletes for testing."

**Courteous:** polite and respectful; "Even if you disagree strongly with your colleagues in a meeting, you should remain courteous and voice your disagreement nicely."

**After all:** all things considered, because of course; "I'm sure Wendy will be able to close the deal. After all, she's won the annual sales award three years in a row."

**Modals:** a kind of helping verb that shows possibility, obligation, permission, or ability; "When making a request, the modal "could" is slightly more polite than the modal "can.""

**To be a ticket to something:** a sure way of achieving something; "Many self-made entrepreneurs will tell you that it's hard work, not luck, that is the real ticket to success."

**Courtesy:** polite and respectful behaviour; "North Americans doing business in Asia must understand how important basic courtesy is in relationship-building."

**Over the top:** extreme, too much, or exaggerated; "Todd, I think your solution to this little crisis is too over the top. We can't really cut 200 staff to ensure a dividend for the shareholders next quarter."

**To run through:** to summarize or explain something briefly; "Okay ladies and gentlemen, to finish up today I'd like to run through some of the important decisions we've just made."

**Train of thought:** a line of thinking or series of connected ideas; "Okay, now, where were we. That was a great question, but I seem to have lost my train of thought. So... oh right, now I remember."

## Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want look at some quick and easy **hacks** you can use to improve your business English.

Business is all about relationships, and relationships are **founded on** good communication. And while English may seem like a difficult language, being a great communicator and connecting with people **isn't rocket science**. You can learn just a few techniques that will **take** your business English skills **to the next level**. And I'm not talking about learning a thousand new words or some **obscure** rules of grammar. The tips I want to give you are fully **within your grasp** right now.

Let's start with a real easy one: keep it simple. Use the language you know, and that your listeners know, to communicate your message in simple terms. Do you really think a **sophisticated** vocabulary is going to impress people? Or help you negotiate a good price from a supplier? Probably not. And it won't help you connect with people **on a human level**. Listen to any great political speech or watch any great presentation online, and you'll notice that the speaker keeps things simple.

Simple also means short, or **concise**. Why use 50 words when you can use 15? Everyone appreciates language that is clear and **to-the-point**. So keep it simple, and you'll keep people **engaged**.

But what happens when *other* people *don't* keep it simple? Communication is a **two-way street**, and sometimes you find yourself **scratching your head** at what someone else is saying. So what you really need to do is to clarify. And remember to be specific about what it is you don't understand. If a supplier tells you a part is "temporarily unavailable," which isn't very clear, don't just **raise your eyebrows** and say "pardon?" Instead, say something like "what exactly do you mean when you say this part is *temporarily unavailable*?" That will encourage the speaker to be more specific.

Another way to clarify is to check back and confirm. That sounds something like "So, you think we shouldn't build a new website, right?" Or maybe it means saying "You're saying John is the best applicant, am I correct?" Checking back and confirming is a great way to clarify because it **poses** a yes-no **question**. The person can either say "yes, that's what I mean," or "no, that's not what I mean." And if it's the **latter**, the person can then **give it another shot**. And **you can bet** they'll be extra clear so you don't have to ask again.

So, we've talked about being simple and clarifying. Now here's another crucial technique for communicating clearly: connect your ideas. Your ideas *are*, in fact, connected, right? So make that clear to your listeners. You can use simple linking words, like *and*, *so*, and *but*. Or you can **dress it up** a bit with some more formal expressions. For example, you might say: "Product A is the cheapest. *However*, cost is not the only consideration. We also need to think about quality. For this reason, I think we should go with Product B." Can you hear how important those words

“however” and “also” and “for this reason” are? These linking words help show the connection between your ideas. And they help listeners see your [logic](#).

Connecting your ideas can also mean showing a [sequence](#). And once again, you don’t have to [get fancy](#). Basic words like “first,” “second,” “next,” and “lastly” can help people [see where you’re going](#). But if you *don’t* connect your ideas, they will sound like a [random](#) collection of thoughts. And you yourself might have to answer some of those clarifying questions I just mentioned.

Now there’s one more business English hack I want to give you today: remember to be polite and [courteous](#). [After all](#), you’re trying to connect with people and make a good impression, right? There’s an old saying that goes like this: “people buy from people they like.” So be friendly and polite.

And being polite begins with those little words we call [modals](#), like “could,” “might,” and “would.” Whether you’re making a suggestion, giving feedback, or asking permission, modals are your [ticket to courtesy](#). And remember that questions are always better than commands. So we don’t say “give me a pen.” Instead, use a modal and a question and say: “could I have a pen?” You don’t have to go [over the top](#), but with a simple, polite, and courteous approach, you’ll do great.

So, let’s [run through](#) these four tips once again. First of all, I suggested keeping it simple to keep people engaged. Next, I advised you to ask questions to clarify when you don’t understand. Then I talked about the importance of connecting your ideas so listeners can understand your [train of thought](#). And finally, I suggested making sure you’re friendly and polite. These are all great ways to communicate better and connect with people. But is that *all* there is to it? No, actually, I’ve got a few more great techniques for you in our next episode. So be sure to tune in!

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.

So long. And see you again soon.

## Review

1. Which of the following describes language that “keeps it simple?” [choose 2]
  - A Sophisticated
  - B Concise
  - C To-the-point
  - D Courteous
  
2. Which of the following are good examples of clarifying techniques?
  - A “I’m sorry, but I’m not sure I understand.”
  - B “So, you’re saying that the ads aren’t effective, is that right?”
  - C “Would you mind explaining a bit more?”
  - D “What do you mean when you say participation is imperative?”
  
3. Why is checking back and confirming a good clarification technique?
  - A It is polite.
  - B It doesn’t make people feel uncomfortable.
  - C It is easy to understand.
  - D It poses a yes/no question.
  
4. In the following sentence, what are the linking words? [choose all that apply]  
*We saw profits increase, but we shouldn’t be too excited yet. We still have underperforming divisions. Therefore we need to continue our focus on improving work systems. Otherwise, we’ll lose what we’ve just gained.*
  - A But
  - B Yet
  - C Have
  - D Therefore
  - E Continue
  - F Improving
  - G Otherwise
  - H Gained
  
5. Which of the following are given as keys to speaking with courtesy? [choose 2]
  - A Saying “please.”
  - B Asking questions.
  - C Using the correct intonation.
  - D Using modal verbs.
  
6. What is NOT recommended as a good way to improve your business English skills?
  - A Learning lots of new vocabulary.
  - B Speaking concisely.
  - C Connecting your ideas.
  - D Asking question when you don’t understand.

## Review Answers

1. Which of the following describes language that “keeps it simple?” [choose 2]

**B Concise**

**C To-the-point**

2. Which of the following are good examples of clarifying techniques? [choose 2]

**B “So, you’re saying that the ads aren’t effective, is that right?”**

**D “What do you mean when you say participation is imperative?”**

3. Why is checking back and confirming a good clarification technique?

**D It poses a yes/no question.**

4. In the following sentence, what are the linking words? [choose all that apply]

We saw profits increase, but we shouldn’t be too excited yet. We still have underperforming divisions. Therefore we need to continue our focus on improving work systems. Otherwise, we’ll lose what we’ve just gained.

**A But**

**D Therefore**

**G Otherwise**

5. Which of the following are given as keys to speaking with courtesy? [choose 2]

**B Asking questions.**

**D Using modal verbs.**

6. What is NOT recommended as a good way to improve your business English skills?

**A Learning lots of new vocabulary.**

## Online Practice

Click the “Launch” button to open the **online practice**:

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