

Skills 360 – 9 Hacks for Improving your Business English (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. During a conversation, what do you say or do to show people you are listening?
2. Do you like it when people criticize you directly? Why or why not?
3. What do you think might be the effects of repeating an idea or words when you are speaking?

Vocabulary

To ramp up: to increase or enhance, especially in speed or progress; “We are going to have to ramp up production if we want to fill all these new orders.”

Traits: a quality or aspect of someone’s character or personality; “Confidence and an ability to connect with people are two very important traits of a good salesperson.”

To drone on: to talk in a boring way, especially for a long time; “Our meetings would be a lot better if the chairperson didn’t drone on about every minor issue for half an hour.”

To be tuned in: to be listening and understanding something; “If your listeners are looking at you and nodding or leaning forward in their chairs, then chances are they’re tuned in to what you’re saying.”

To throw in: to add casually, especially in speech or conversation; “In conversation with someone you’ve just met, trying throwing their name in occasionally; this makes people feel good.”

At a loss for words: not knowing what to say; “Good preparation means you won’t find yourself at a loss for words when the interviewer asks you a difficult question.”

Lousy: terrible or very bad; “Ted’s a great web designer but a really lousy writer, so could you help him out with the copy for the new site?”

To put someone on the defensive: to make someone react badly because they think they have been criticized or insulted; “Your comments on her work put her on the defensive, so it’s not surprising she doesn’t want to talk to you.”

To capture: to show or represent; “I really think the new ads capture the heart of our company: they’re funny, but moving, which is exactly how we want to be seen.”

To be wrapped up in: to be a part of something else; "Gina's disappointment with the meeting is wrapped up in her overall bad feelings about the project."

To have a special knack for something: to be especially or naturally good at doing something; "Brett, you should really work in marketing; you've got a special knack for expressing big ideas in just a few short words."

To pitch an idea: to try to convince or persuade people that an idea or proposal is good; "If you think you've got a good development idea, put together a 10-minute presentation and I'll give you time to pitch the idea at the next product meeting."

Trick: an effective way of doing something; "Listen Miranda, I can teach you a trick to reformatting your document that will take you 10 minutes instead of an hour."

Indirect language: we use "indirect language" when we communicate an idea without saying it directly; "Indirect language can be useful for criticizing, but be careful using it for request, because people might not realize you're asking them for something."

On the something side: a little bit something, where "something" is an adjective; "Well, I think the Thinkpads are good machines for our purposes, but they're a bit on the heavy side for a laptop."

To get someone's back up: to bother someone or make them angry; "A good manager can take feedback constructively rather than getting his back up when someone comments on his work."

To stick: to stay in memory or be difficult to forget; "During your presentation, you can help your main ideas stick in your listeners' minds by using shocking or colourful images."

Impactful: having a large effect; "We paid good money to get a famous motivational speaker as a conference keynote because we wanted something truly impactful to kick off the event."

Killer: very excellent or very difficult; "Tech enthusiasts will be happy to find some killer new gadgets at this year's Consumer Electronics Show."

On the fly: without preparation; "I need to prepare detailed notes for my talk, because unlike some more experienced speakers, I can't just speak for an hour on the fly."

Talking points: an important idea that supports what you are trying to explain; "Some people will hang up on you, but if you just stick to the talking points with every new call, you'll start to make some sales."

To go in blind: to go into a situation without knowing much about it or without preparation; "It's a bad idea to do into your interview blind; you need to learn about the position and the company in detail."

Surefire: certain to be effective or successful; "One of the most surefire ways of getting more done each day is to delegate tasks to other people."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look to give you more great tips for [ramping up](#) your business English skills.

You've probably heard that one of the [traits](#) of a great business leader is the ability to *communicate*. So, what does it mean to be a good communicator? What does a good communicator actually do? Well, there are a few things that every good communicator does. In our last lesson I covered a few of these special techniques, and today I want to add to that list.

When you think of being a good communicator, you probably think about speaking skills. But my first bit of advice is all about *listening*. Nobody likes it if you [drone on](#) and never give anyone else a chance to speak. You've got to learn to keep your mouth closed and your ears open. And you've got to listen *actively* to actually show people you're listening. That starts with smiling and nodding, which are simple habits that let the speaker know you're [tuned in](#).

But that's not all. You can [throw in](#) the occasional "yes," or "I see." Or you can echo what the other person is saying, like "a 30% increase? Impressive." If you do this, people know you're engaged. And that's especially important when you can't actually see the other person, like when you're talking on the phone or in a teleconference.

All right, so we've covered listening. Now I want to give you some speaking techniques. First off, have you ever found yourself [at a loss for words](#) when you have to criticize someone or their work? Because you know that it's not just what you say that is important, it's how you say it, right? If you just come out and say "your report was [lousy](#)," you're going to [put](#) the person [on the defensive](#). Instead, you need to be a bit more indirect. Try something like "well, I think there are some things you could work on." Better yet, combine the criticism with some praise, like this: "I think you [captured](#) the main ideas, but you might want to make the summary a little clearer." Wouldn't you rather hear feedback like that?

This kind of indirect criticism is [wrapped up](#) in something bigger that every great communicator [has a special knack for](#): being diplomatic. Diplomatic language is *careful* language. And I'm not just talking about criticizing or disagreeing. Careful language is also necessary when you make suggestions or [pitch an idea](#).

One of the [tricks](#) to being diplomatic is using words that soften what you're saying. We can do that with modal verbs, like "can" and "could" and "might." For example, think about the difference between "that is too expensive" and "that might be too expensive." Sure they have the same meaning, but one is softer. And a bit of [indirect language](#) will make it even more diplomatic, like "I'm wondering if that idea might be a bit [on the expensive side](#)." That's certainly not going to [get anyone's back up](#), is it?

Another way to soften a statement is to use words of possibility, such as "maybe" or "perhaps." Imagine you want to suggest buying new computers. You might say "we

need to buy new computers,” but that might sound too forceful. Instead, how about something like “perhaps we could buy some new computers?”

So, a diplomatic approach can make people more receptive. But you also want your ideas to **stick** in people’s memory, and a great way to do that is with repetition. You can try repeating an important word or idea so people don’t forget it. Or you can try repeating a certain structure or way of saying something. For example, think about a sentence like “we’ve got to get costs down and get our revenue up.” Using “get down” and “get up” in this way makes it more **impactful**, and more memorable.

So there we have it – some quick and easy ways to improve your business English... Oh wait, there’s one more **killer** technique that beats all the rest: preparation. If you have difficulty speaking **on the fly** or phrasing things the way you want them, then plan ahead. Find out who you’re going to be talking to, and adapt what you say for that audience. Make sure you know what **talking points** are so you can do well in that negotiation. Before that big interview, rehearse your answers. Whatever you do, **don’t go in blind**.

So there you have it: **surefire** ways to be a great communicator. Remember to be an active listener, careful with criticism, diplomatic, and use repetition. And finally, don’t forget there’s no substitute for good preparation.

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 can show active listening? [Select all that apply]
 - A "I see."
 - B Interrupting the speaker.
 - C Using indirect criticism.
 - D Nodding.
 - E Using words of possibility.
 - F Smiling.
 - G Echoing what the speaker says.

2. When is active listening especially important?
 - A When you want to persuade someone of your opinion.
 - B When someone tends to react poorly to criticism.
 - C During interviews.
 - D During telephone conversations.

3. Which of the following are NOT examples of indirect criticism? [choose 2]
 - A "Your presentation at yesterday's meeting was quite disappointing."
 - B "I think your lead-in was great, but the conclusion needs some work."
 - C "In my opinion, your presentation was far too long and packed with information."
 - D "I wonder if you could work on some of the transitions in your presentation?"

4. What types of words can help to make a statement more diplomatic? [Select all that apply]
 - A Words of possibility.
 - B Action verbs.
 - C Modals.
 - D Repeated words.
 - E Academic words.
 - F Indirect language.

5. What can repetition help you do?
 - A Make listeners remember what you say.
 - B Make people more receptive to criticism.
 - C Make people listen more actively.
 - D Speak more diplomatically.

6. What is the single most important way to improve your business English skills?
 - A Use indirect language.
 - B Listen more than you speak.
 - C Prepare.
 - D Organize your ideas.

Review Answers

1. Which of the following can show active listening? [choose all that apply]
A "I see."
D Nodding.
F Smiling.
G Echoing what the speaker says.
2. When is active listening especially important?
D During telephone conversations.
3. Which of the following are NOT examples of indirect criticism? [choose 2]
A Your presentation at yesterday's meeting was quite disappointing.
C In my opinion, your presentation was far too long and packed with information.
4. What types of words can help to make a statement more diplomatic? [choose all that apply]
A Words of possibility.
C Modals.
F Indirect language.
5. What can repetition help you do?
A Make listeners remember what you say.
6. What is the single most important way to improve your business English skills?
C Prepare.

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

Launch Quiz