

SPEAK & WRITE

Preview

BETTER BUSINESS ENGLISH

ANDREW MILES

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SPEAK & WRITE BETTER BUSINESS ENGLISH

—A Preview by Andrew D. Miles—

This Preview

This booklet is a summary of *Speak & Write Better Business English*. It has four chapters and lists several tips for English students, such as when to use question tags, techniques to improve your listening, how to simplify your sentences, advice on gaining more vocabulary and a few more ideas.

The Full Book

The full book has sixteen chapters. You'll discover how to help people understand you better, how to learn faster by following your own style, how to give effective instructions, how to improve your pronunciation, and many other techniques to apply immediately. You can buy the full book at www.andymiles.com or at www.amazon.com

Other Books by the Author

Andrew has also written the *English / Spanish Business English Dictionary*; *400 Ways to Write It in Business English*; *400 Ways to Say It in Business English*; the *Spotty English & Spanish Stories* for small kids; and *My Days Away*, a novel where an Oxford teacher travels to discover a hidden world. You can read Andrew's books and contact him at www.andymiles.com

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Chapter 1

United Kingdom: Edinburgh to London

I was travelling from Edinburgh to London on the Caledonian Sleeper train. It left at night. Too poor to pay for a sleeping cabin, I had booked the cheapest seat, a place in a group of four. Not the best location, but if my companions were quiet, I would be able to rest and arrive in proper conditions for a job interview in London.

No luck. A man and a woman sat across from me. Around my age, in their early twenties. They were laughing and eating potato chips.

They chatted in French until the man spoke to me in English.

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

USE CAN, COULD, MAY OR MIGHT TO MAKE REQUESTS

“We are students. When we make a request in English, should we use *can*, *could*, *may* or *might*?”

The teacher in me woke up.

“It is possible to use them all, though *might* is the most polite and the least common.”

“And *can*?”

“**Can** is informal and direct. For example, when you want to borrow a pen from a classmate you say ‘Can you lend me your pen?’”

“Thanks.”

“**Could** is a bit more formal. Let’s say you’re telling a professor that you won’t finish a project on time: ‘Could I hand in the project on Wednesday instead of today please?’ Still direct but more polite.”

“What about *may* and *might*?”

“Imagine your boss comes to your house for dinner and the telephone rings. It’s your mother so you say ‘May I be excused for a minute? It’s my mother on the phone.’ **May** is very polite so use it in formal occasions.”

“Interesting.”

“**Might**. Your company’s general manager is at a meeting but you have to interrupt her. You knock on the door and say: ‘Might I interrupt you for a minute? Something urgent has come up.’ *Might* is uncommon and extremely respectful. Only for a few situations. In fact, I think I have never used it!”

“I see. *Can* with friends, *could* with people I don’t know too well, *may* when I want to be polite and *might* only in very formal situations.”

“Yes.”

“Thanks a lot. I’m Guy and this is Jeannette,” he introduced.

I replied with my name and said I was a teacher.

“We’ll call you Teacher—if you don’t mind.”

Another train passed. My answer was lost in the noise.

“I’ll remember it like this,” Jeannette said, “*Can* is for a beer with my sisters; *could* at a restaurant with workmates; *may* with my boss and *might* when I need a favour from a very important person.”

“That’s an effective way to remember,” Guy said.

SIMPLIFY YOUR CONDITIONALS

“Can I ask you another question? Do you know of any rule to make conditional sentences easier? They are very hard in English!”

“Sorry?”

“Conditional sentences. As in ‘If I win the lottery I had a lot of money.’”

“I will have,” I corrected.

“If I win the lottery I will have a lot of money,” Guy repeated.

I was about to reply that conditionals were more complicated in French but the man spoke again.

“Tomorrow we are sitting for a business English test and we’re afraid we’ll make mistakes.”

“There’s an answer to that. English has many conditional combinations but you could limit them to four.”

“Only four?”

“Imagine you are architects talking about a project. You can use conditionals to explain what’s **always true**, what’s **sure**, what’s **possible** and what’s **impossible**.”

“Always true, sure, possible and impossible.”

“First, use **present + present** when something is always true, as with scientific facts: ‘If you add two plus two you get four’, ‘If it’s frozen it is cold’ or ‘If the window is a triangle it has three sides.’”

“Right. All triangles have three sides!”

“Use **present + will** when a consequence is sure. The architects could say ‘If we extend the bedroom, we will spend more money.’”

“That’s clear. If they make a bigger room, it will be more expensive.”

“Thirdly, use **past + would** when something is possible but not one hundred per cent certain: ‘If we changed the design the building would look better.’”

“Can I give you an example? ‘If we made smaller windows the client wouldn’t be pleased,’” Guy said.

“Correct. You started with the past tense in ‘If we made’ and finished with would in ‘wouldn’t be pleased.’”

“And the other conditional? What about the impossible?”

“Use **past perfect + would** when something is impossible. For instance: ‘If we had started a month earlier the house would be ready now.’”

“It’s certainly impossible. We cannot go back in time!”

“If we had studied more we wouldn’t be afraid of the exam,” Jeannette added.

“You’re right, Jeannette. Your example is very good. You began with the past perfect tense in ‘If we had studied more’ and finished with would in ‘we wouldn’t be afraid of the exam.’ Perfect!”

We reached the city of York. Guy took a small notepad from his shirt pocket. He looked at his watch, wrote a few words and put it back.

IMPROVE YOUR VOCABULARY BY BUILDING WORDS

“Could I ask you something else? Is there an easy way for me to expand my vocabulary?”

“You can try **word building**.”

“What’s that?”

“If you know one word, for example *time*, you can build *timer*. If you know *react* you can build *reaction*. And if you know “*know*” you can make *knowledge*! You have doubled your vocabulary with little effort!”

“Interesting. I can transform *electric* into *electricity* or *electrician*.”

“When you learn a new word ask yourself ‘**Is there a verb for *sale*?**’ or ‘**What’s the adjective for *deliver*?**’ Your vocabulary will grow fast.”

“Thanks, Teacher.”

“Teach, teacher, teachable!” Jeanette said.

“Very good, Jeannette.”

“It’s like transformer toys. You can turn a truck into a robot but in the end it’s the same toy!”

“Yes, *teach*, *teacher* and *teachable* have different shapes but in the end they share the same meaning.”

We reached Euston Station in London. I hadn’t slept the whole night.

“Where’s your interview?” Guy asked.

“A school at Russell Square.”

“I’m sure you’ll get the job. If I pass the test, I’ll invite you to a drink.”

They went into the underground. I walked to Russell Square.

KEY POINTS

It's common to use *can* and *could* when we ask for something and less common to use *may* and *might*. *Can* is also the most informal. *Might* is so formal we almost never use it.

We can simplify our conditional sentences by applying only four language structures: (1) in cases where things are always true as in 'If it's Monday it is not Wednesday' we use the *present tense* for the first and the second part of the sentence. (2) When we want to describe a sure consequence we can resort to *present + will*, as in 'If it rains I'll bring an umbrella'. (3) If we are talking about possibilities that are not certain it's better to use *past + would* and say something like 'If Joan came to the party she would need to leave early.' (4) Lastly, *past perfect + would* describes impossible situations, such as 'If Napoleon had won at Waterloo everyone in Europe would speak French now.' History can't be changed!

Use word building to expand your vocabulary so spend time studying how to transform terms. Transform, transformer, transformable, transformation!

Chapter 2

United Kingdom: London to Gatwick Airport

I got the job and Guy passed his test. He invited me not only to a drink but also to a return trip on the Gatwick Express, which links London's Victoria Station with Gatwick Airport. We arrived early and took window seats. I mentioned that I had always liked trains. He answered that he had studied railway engineering.

FIND THE BEST ACADEMY

"I want to keep on learning English when I go back to France but there are many academies in my city and I don't know which one to choose."

"The right school can mean the difference between learning and wasting your money."

"Where should I start?"

"Visit the place. Classrooms should be **comfortable and clean**."

"That's easy to see."

"Then ask if **teachers have certificates**. Some schools hire native speakers who are not qualified."

"I know that. Speaking the language is not the same as teaching the language..."

"Try to **pay monthly** so you can leave if you are not satisfied."

"What about group size?"

"**Small classes** are always better. There is no exact rule as to when a class is too large but the bigger the group the less time to speak."

"You can't learn a language without speaking it."

"True."

"Do you think I should ask for a **trial lesson**?"

"Of course. Attend a class before you enrol. Most academies will accept and you'll be able to see whether you enjoy the lesson."

"What about other aspects?"

"A school is sometimes not only about classes. Find out if they have a **social programme** such as conversation groups, excursions, theatre in English or online classes."

"Theatre could be a good way to improve my pronunciation. Thanks, Teacher."

"You're welcome. The better the academy the faster you will learn, won't you?"

USE QUESTION TAGS TO CONVINCE LISTENERS

“Sorry, what did you say?”

“The better the academy the more you will learn, won’t you?”

“The ‘won’t you?’ What’s that?”

“A question tag. Short phrases we add at the end of sentences to transform them into questions, as in ‘this is a train, isn’t it?’”

“Are they common?”

“Very. We mainly use them to **confirm information**, to **keep conversation going** or to **get listeners to agree**.”

“This makes question tags useful. Can you give me some examples?”

“They help us confirm information when we are almost sure about something but still need to verify it. Examples could be ‘Tina works in production, doesn’t she?’ or ‘Peter can’t speak French, can he?’”

“Interesting. You are a teacher, aren’t you?”

“Well done! You got it right.”

“Thanks.”

“They’re also useful to keep conversation alive, as in ‘It won’t rain, will it?’ or ‘This beer tastes good, doesn’t it?’”

“I remember a Canadian saying ‘It’s a bit cold outside, isn’t it?’ It was snowing!”

“He was using question tags to keep conversation alive.”

“Now I understand. We were at a party and he didn’t know anyone except me.”

“We also use question tags when we want listeners to agree, as in ‘Hailey’s the right person for the job, isn’t she?’ or ‘Other suppliers can’t give you such good prices, can they?’”

“This would be useful for meetings.”

“Questions tags are helpful when you want to **convince listeners** and work much better than direct questions.”

“For example?”

“Our engine is the best in the market, isn’t it?”

“You’re right. It sounds more convincing than ‘Is our engine the best in the market?’”

“You’re asking the same but with question tags you give your opinion and invite listeners to say yes, especially because no effort is needed on their part. They don’t need to think about other engines. You’ve just told them yours is the best!”

“Can you explain how to build question tags?”

“**Add negative endings to affirmative sentences**, as in ‘She will arrive late, won’t she?’”

“That’s easy.”

“Or **positive endings to negative sentences**. ‘They can’t manage the problem, can they?’”

“That’s easy too.”

London houses and factories turned into open fields as our train marched south. Guy took out his notebook. He wrote short phrases at unpredictable intervals. I looked out the window.

MEMORISE KEYWORDS TO IMPROVE FLUENCY

“Something else. I’ll start work soon and will need English for my job. The problem is that sometimes I can’t find the words I want.”

“The solution is for you to memorise all common **expressions connected with your profession**. You’re a railway engineer, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am.”

“If you were an accountant you would need to talk about numbers. If you were a baker you’d have to talk about bread.”

“I’ll work at a train factory. I can chat with you but couldn’t describe a train. I’m afraid I’ll project the wrong image if I can’t find the right words. For example, what do you call the engine that pulls the train? It’s *locomotive* in French.”

“You’re lucky. It’s the same in English—locomotive!”

We sat silently for a few minutes until a lady wearing sunglasses looked our way. She reminded me of a student I had taught last summer.

“Let me tell you about Marta, an Italian architect. She could speak English well but at a meeting in New York she did not remember the technical words to describe a building. She felt bad because her prospective clients thought she didn’t know enough about her job.”

“Did she?”

“Yes! What she didn’t know were the *words* to describe her job.”

“I can understand her.”

“She was one of my students in Edinburgh. Had excellent grammar and good general vocabulary.”

“But that wasn’t enough...”

“Her studio lost the contract but Marta learnt a lesson—she memorised the more common words in architecture and can now reply to almost any question.”

“So, what’s your advice for me, Teacher?”

“Learn the three hundred **most common words** in railway engineering. Your fluency will benefit. Try two words a day. You’ll know everything you need in half a year.”

We reached the airport. We walked up the stairs, turned right into the hall but bought no beer. They were too expensive. We walked through the building, talked about visiting the cities on the departures panel and caught the express back to London.

KEY POINTS

Try to find the best academy, even if it means paying a little more or travelling a little further. Good academies tend to hire good teachers. Good teachers make lessons interesting and effective—which means you will not only enjoy classes but will also learn faster.

Question tags are made by transforming the last part of a sentence into a short question. In this way we can say ‘The machine will not start, will it?’ or ‘Peter would like a new car, wouldn’t he?’

There are many ways to memorise keywords but the main secret is to start with a proper list. Draw the list carefully either by reading material in your field or by translating it from your mother language. Remember that you can make mistakes with general English—but you can’t get your technical language wrong if you want listeners to trust you.

Chapter 3

Spain: Zaragoza to Canfranc

We kept in contact through Christmas cards for six years until I received a letter with a job offer. Guy was now working at a locomotive factory and had been transferred to Montcada i Reixac, near Barcelona in Spain. Would I be interested in becoming an in-house English teacher at his factory? I would not teach him directly but would yes work with other employees at the company.

We celebrated my incorporation with a train ride into the Pyrenees. Drove to the city of Zaragoza where—after buying sandwiches and coffee—we boarded *El Canfranero*. It would take us to an abandoned station at the border with France.



Canfranc train station

LEARN WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING PEOPLE SAY

"The other night I had dinner with an Australian customer. She sat across me at the table but I understood nothing she said. I had to ask my neighbour to translate, which was embarrassing. Do you know what could have happened?" Guy asked.

"I think you suffered what I call listeners block. Most often it happens because the speaker's accent and speed make listening very hard."

"She did speak fast. Also, I am used to British English so I find other accents difficult."

"You can learn how to handle listener's block if you pay special attention to a few things."

"What are they?"

"Let's start with accent. Find out where speakers come from and **watch videos** or **listen to audios** by people from those regions."

"She's from Canberra."

"Well, you can always visit Australia for a holiday!"

"I wish! I could start by watching documentaries."

"The next point is vocabulary. Think about the **expressions** people are likely to use and learn their pronunciation. For instance, you could have listened to something about railways in Australia before your meeting."

"You're right. I should have prepared myself better."

"The third aspect is place. Noisy locations make listening harder. Choose a **quiet spot** where you can be close to the speaker."

"Good idea. The restaurant was crowded and it was difficult to hear with all the noise. We'll go somewhere quieter next time."

"That should help. Also, **role play** situations to anticipate what people will say. This was a dinner meeting so you could have invited a foreign friend to a restaurant and practised."

"I should have practised with you, Teacher. But you're not Australian, are you?"

"I see you still remember question tags!"

"I do. You've given me ideas to prepare my meetings. However, what can I do when I'm already in front of the person?"

"Try to **sit near** them so you hear better; tell them that your English is not good so they speak more slowly or ask them to repeat things—but mainly lower your expectations."

"Sorry?"

"Lower your expectations. Concentrate on only part of the message. A good strategy is to **focus on easy words** and forget the rest."

"But I want to understand everything!"

“That’s not possible. You are a student and students don’t know everything. One day you will reach the advanced level and listener’s block will be forgotten. Think of that day!”

“It’s a long way off!”

“Imagine a game of tennis. If your opponents have the same level you can enjoy the game; but if they’re much better you run from here to there without ever catching the ball.”

“The problem is that I can’t choose my opponents, Teacher.”

“But you can learn how to play better.”

The train stopped by a lonely road. Yellow fields, olive trees. Far away, a military-looking building with antennas on its roof. We heard a noise under the wheels and our carriage moved side to side, as if someone was shaking it. Guy took paper and pen from his pocket. He looked at his watch. Wrote numbers and words. The shaking stopped; we gained speed and reached Huesca, a provincial capital. Seven passengers got off. Two climbed in. A castle on top of a hill. A large black and white sign with numbers near a town called Ayerbe. Bridges. Rivers. Tiny people scaling a mountain wall. Short tunnels. An artificial lake.

USE THESE EXPRESSIONS WHEN YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND SOMEONE

“You said I should ask people to repeat things. Can you suggest how to do that?”

“You can say ‘What do you mean?’, ‘Can you explain?’, ‘I don’t get the idea’, ‘Could you repeat?’ or ‘I don’t understand.’”

“Thanks.”

“By the way, one more point connected with listening. Don’t be afraid to **interrupt when you have a doubt**. People generally think that everything they say is understood perfectly so they never explain unless you ask them to.”

Olives gave way to pine trees. It wasn’t a fast train but we lost speed when we reached the city of Jaca. A group of Girl Scouts came in. They waved at us. We followed another river and climbed steadily.

USE VISUAL AIDS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

“Can you see the valleys below us?” said Guy. “They’re beautiful. I wish I had a camera.”

“Pictures are worth a thousand words.”

“That’s true.”

“Which reminds me of the importance of visual aids when speaking a foreign language. Some people **absorb visual information better** than spoken words.”

“Visual aids?”

“Pictures, drawings, graphs, charts, samples or videos.”

“Just like the photo I could have shown Jeannette if I had brought my camera.”

“It’s a good idea to bring **visual aids** to meetings and presentations. If listeners cannot understand your words, at least they will remember your examples.”

“I generally use graphs. They provide credibility.”

“And help to convince by showing instead of saying.”

“Any advice on how to prepare visual aids?”

“Yes. Graphs and charts should be **clear**: make fonts large and avoid pastel colours so words are easy to read; eliminate unnecessary pictures; avoid more than three columns; if it’s a small meeting provide printed sheets. Of course, you do not have to show everything you carry but it should be ready in case you need it.”

“So I should bring more than I’m planning to show?”

“Yes. Carry **as much information as possible**. When someone asks a question it’s fantastic to be able to say ‘I’m pleased that you’ve asked. Here I have a chart with last year’s sales figures’. It’ll show you have prepared your meeting well.”

“Anything else?”

“Make sure visual aids are **well produced**: the sound on videos must be excellent; product samples should be finished; charts printed on new and not on scrap paper; backgrounds should be plain; fonts consistent.”

“My graphs are always well produced. However, I sometimes doubt how many to use. I don’t want my listeners to be bored!”

“Restrict visual aids to **key moments** in your presentation because overuse will make your speech boring. People can only absorb some information.”

“Jeannette would pay attention to the first few pictures but if I showed her too many she would lose interest...”

“For instance, during the introduction to a speech use slides to show your main points. Later, a chart could support technical information. As you conclude, present a short video for your final argument.”

“Teachers have experience speaking in public, don’t you?”

“We do it every day.”

“Would you have any other advice for me?”

“**Stand-up** presentations work well with large groups; printed sheets are fine if **people have to write** something—but don’t distribute them early because everyone will read them and not listen to you. Samples are excellent

if you are going to show a **new product** but will take up time and slow you down. Also, audiences can get immersed in examining things, which means their attention will concentrate on the object and move away from you.”

“So I shouldn’t bring toy trains to my meetings?”

“Certainly not. Unless you’re selling trains, of course.”

“I am!”

“Two last things. Visual aids are also useful when **writing**; just keep them to about one per page. Finally, aids ought to be **relevant**—we do not really want to see your lovely Pyrenees pictures. They’re OK for your wife or friends but not for business meetings!”

“It’s a pity I forgot my camera.”

We opened our bags and ate the sandwiches we had brought from Zaragoza. There was no bar on the train. The girls looked at us and laughed. We were so near the trees that sometimes branches hit our window. A farmer and his tractor, birds circling above, an old water tank.

LEARN ABOUT GESTURES AND CULTURE TO IMPROVE YOUR LISTENING COMPREHENSION

“Another thing about listening, Teacher. I sometimes understand people’s words but don’t understand what they say. Is this possible?”

“Yes. You might be getting their gestures wrong or maybe there’s something connected to the speaker’s culture that you don’t know.”

“Gestures? Aren’t they international?”

“Most gestures are. Others, however, belong to more restricted circles and could cause confusion.”

“What can I do?”

“Ask your teacher for a lesson on **common gestures in English-speaking** countries and practise them in class.”

“You also mentioned culture.”

“Sometimes it’s not the words you don’t understand but the **cultural references**. I remember going to Chicago and people mentioning buildings by name instead of address. It was impossible for me to find them!”

“I wouldn’t know how to work on that. Culture is a very wide concept.”

“It is. Anyhow, **read guides or watch documentaries** on places you are about to visit. Also, **check the local news**. Many people talk about what’s happening in their town and that could help.”

“Good idea. In fact, something like this happened just before we met on the Edinburgh to London train. What I had read before helped me understand things better.”

“Really? I remember Jeannette and you coming into the carriage...”

“We had gone to the Edinburgh Jazz Festival. We made a point of checking the programme before we arrived and could recognise theatre and band names when people said them. It was helpful. Our English was bad but at least we understood everything we needed!”

“Not so bad. You passed your exams.”

“Yes. Thanks to simplified conditionals!”

We saw an abandoned cottage with a dog that barked at us. Our carriage was travelling so slowly the dog could have jumped in if the doors had opened. It began to snow. The vegetation cleared. An empty platform. Canfranc station. Enormous and in ruins. Guy had booked a hotel by a canal but immediately left to see if he was able to find a camera so he could get pictures for Jeannette. I stayed and watched TV. It was still snowing.

KEY POINTS

It's almost impossible to learn all the accents in English so if you know where someone comes from, study the vocabulary they might use and practise situations with your teacher. Sit near the speaker, look for easy words and don't worry if you can't understand everything. Sometimes a few phrases here and there are enough to have a general idea of what people say.

Pictures make everything clearer. Say whatever you want but try to show it too. People will remember your ideas better.

As for gestures and culture, here's a story. Gloria, a bank manager I taught some years ago was riding a plane for Nashville, the world's country music capital. Her right and left-side neighbours, two Americans, were chatting across her seat. They were discussing singers. Gloria would have liked to say something but couldn't understand enough so she closed her eyes until they changed subject to films. She immediately joined the conversation and ended up talking through most of the trip. Her culture helped her communicate all right when discussing movies but blocked her when they discussed country music. Therefore, learning about the place you are visiting is always a good idea.

Chapter 4

USA, San Francisco: Market & Powell St. to Ghirardelli Square

Nine months into my new job the division manager called me to his office. They had been contacted by the San Francisco city council to present a project for their cable cars. As by now I understood most of the technicalities involved in trains and carriages, could I accompany him and a team of engineers to California and help them with their presentations?

We landed in the afternoon. Everyone was tired. However, Guy and I walked to Market and Powell Street for a ride on the San Francisco cable cars, as he wanted first-hand experience before a meeting tomorrow. We were accompanied by an Austrian technician who had travelled beside Guy on the plane.

The Austrian turned towards me. We were on the tram already, climbing up a hill.

“These cars are pulled by a cable that runs under the streets. By the way, Teacher, can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”



Inside the San
Francisco Cable Car

INTRODUCE YOURSELF PROPERLY

“How should I introduce myself when talking to Americans? I know the words but I’m never sure of what to say.”

“Try with ‘Pleased to meet you.’ It’s the standard phrase.”

“Yes, I know that, but what else should I bear in mind?”

“The first rule in an introduction to foreigners is to **pronounce your name** slowly and clearly. If possible, repeat it so people understand it well. Austrian names can be difficult for English speakers.”

“Yes. I’m called Juergen and that’s hard. I always try to pause before and after I say it so listeners can ask if they don’t understand.”

“Right. If you have the time it’s also a good idea to **mention your position** and where you come from so people can easily place you.”

“Oh.”

“They might forget your name but could remember you as the technician from Vienna.”

“I’m actually from Salzburg. Can you give me some examples?”

“Of course. A company manager might say ‘I’m Henry Thompson. Henry. I run our Bristol factory’ or ‘I’m Henry Thompson, head of the Bristol factory. Please call me Henry’. Both would be fine.”

“Would this be all right? ‘I’m Juergen, a technician from the Salzburg office. Juergen’. Does it sound OK?”

“Perfect.”

“Another question. Should I shake hands?”

“In the English-speaking world, both men and women usually **shake hands** when they meet and when they leave—if the group is small.”

“And for bigger groups?”

“If groups are large we often look at the people who are introducing themselves and bow slightly on hearing their name. As we leave, we wave a general goodbye to everyone.”

“Sorry, what’s to bow?”

“To move your head down, as in a reverence.”

Guy spoke now.

“What if we have to introduce someone else, Teacher?”

“Imagine you’re introducing a university professor. You might say: ‘I’d like you to meet Professor Grant. She teaches math at Harvard’ or ‘This is Professor Alice Grant, a mathematician from Harvard’. Both would work.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes. Always **ask people** how they would like to be introduced. We don’t want to offend anyone by forgetting to mention they’re a doctor or mispronouncing their name.”

Juergen pointed towards Guy.

“This is Engineer Guy Durand, our suspension system specialist. He’s French but lives in Barcelona.”

“Well done!” Guy replied.

We saw a steep hill.

“Lombard Street. Some movies were filmed here.”

We reached Ghirardelli Square, where Guy spent time talking to the cable car conductor while Juergen and I walked to the seaside. Afterwards, Juergen invited us for hot chocolate at a converted factory.

USE ONE SENTENCE FOR ONE IDEA SO PEOPLE UNDERSTAND YOU EASILY

“I will have to explain complicated processes to our clients here in San Francisco. I have no problems with German but when I speak English listeners sometimes get lost.”

“Try to use short sentences with **one concept to every phrase**. People prefer simple phrases because they are easier to understand.”

“Yes, but simple sentences can only express simple ideas.”

“Of course. If you need to transmit complicated concepts divide the ideas into steps and **link them with connectors or markers**.”

“What are connectors and markers?”

“Words like but, because, first, so, before, after, then and others that link sentences.”

“Can you provide an example?”

“I’ll tell you a story. Once I asked a teacher to explain how to plan a lesson and she said ‘To plan a class properly you must know what you want, or your objective, to be able to decide what you need to teach to calculate the time before you write it down.’ It’s a bit confusing, isn’t it?”

“Not very clear.”

“I said so and she gave me a version I could understand easily: ‘First set your objective. Then decide what you’ll need and how long it will take. Finally, write the plan.’”

“One idea per sentence.”

“And sentences linked with connectors.”

It got dark so we took the cable car back to our hotel. This time Guy spoke.

“I followed your advice and studied more words related to my profession. Last week I learned *bogies*, which is the structure that holds the wheels of a carriage. I’ll use it tomorrow at a presentation. However, I’m worried about something else.”

“What is it?”

IMPROVE YOUR LISTENING BY IDENTIFYING IMPORTANT INFORMATION

“I still have problems understanding everything speakers say. I did what you suggested when we travelled to Canfranc and studied common American gestures—but what if I miss a sentence that’s important because I’m paying attention to what’s not important?”

“Here’s something you’ll find useful. Most speakers will pronounce important things differently, so if you pay attention to **phrases that are said louder, spoken more slowly, are mentioned after a pause or are accompanied by gestures** you should be able to comprehend the main part of what people say.”

“And if I want to understand everything?”

“We’ve talked about this before. You shouldn’t even try. You’ll get frustrated. Paying attention to everything will only give you a headache.”

“I do sometimes get headaches.”

“Imagine that you’re at a buffet breakfast. Do you eat all the food? Listening is the same. Get what you need and leave the rest on the table!”

“So I should concentrate on words that are spoken louder, come after a pause and are pronounced slowly...”

“Or accompanied by gestures such as head movement, raised hands, walking or pointing.”

We stayed in San Francisco for a week. Guy understood most of what the clients said, Juergen was able to explain his ideas and our team won the contract. I was paid a bonus. The first time in my life.

KEY POINTS

Introductions should be automatic so memorise the formula you feel most comfortable with. If your name is difficult, pronounce it slowly and repeat it. If you don’t understand the other person’s name ask them to repeat. Always add something about yourself so listeners can place you. At a party you could say ‘Hi, I’m John, Peter’s cousin’ and at a business meeting you could introduce yourself with ‘My name’s Aidan. I work at the New York office.’

Economy is a plus in English so keep your sentences as short as possible—especially when writing. Try to include only one idea in every sentence and use connectors when you have to transmit complex information.

Improve your listening by paying attention to keywords. They are generally said louder, more slowly, after pauses, or together with gestures.

Contents of this booklet

Chapter 1	3
Use can, could, may or might to make requests	3
Simplify your conditionals	4
Improve your vocabulary by building words	5
 Chapter 2	 7
Find the best academy.....	7
Use question tags to convince	8
Memorise key words to improve your fluency	9
 Chapter 3	 11
Learn what to do when you can't understand anything people say.....	11
Use these expressions when you don't understand someone	13
Use visual aids to improve communication	13
Learn about gestures and culture to improve your listening	15
 Chapter 4	 17
Introduce yourself properly	17
Use one sentence to one idea if you want people to understand you easily	19
Improve your listening by identifying important information.....	20

Contents of the full book

Chapter 5

Improve your pronunciation working on difficult sounds

Learn how to pronounce names

Make your writing concise, clear, complete and correct

Chapter 6

Learn how to differentiate similar sounds

Attack your weaknesses and learn better

Find the best teacher and learn faster

Chapter 7

Learn about words that are written differently but sound the same

Draw a learning map and study more effectively

Help people understand you better

Ask these questions to help people understand you better

Chapter 8

Put manner, place and time in the right order

Explain what should be explained

Check whether your teacher is teaching properly

Chapter 9

I remember what I hear

I remember what I understand

I remember what I do

I remember what I repeat

I remember what I learn with other people

I remember what I see

I remember what I write

Chapter 10

Write better emails with these rules

Study three hours a week

Use link words to improve your communication

Chapter 11

Learn about words that are written the same but sound differently

Provide examples so people remember

Give English time

Avoid large classes and don't give up if you can't see instant results

Remember that not everyone speaks with good grammar

Chapter 12

Learn words properly

Do not mix levels

Anticipate to improve your listening

Learn habitual situations

Learn how to interrupt

Chapter 13

Record yourself to improve your pronunciation and fluency

Help people understand your writing

Give effective orders

Chapter 14

Learn by taking notes

Use time effectively when you study English

Improve your listening by learning where words finish and start

Remember things by revising—though not immediately

Choose the right words and write better

Chapter 15

Keep up to date with neologisms

Memorise phone expressions

Keep sentences short and simple

Chapter 16

Kill those mistakes

Use the same type of language you hear

Conversation practice should reflect your needs

Explain ideas with analogies so people understand them better

Tell people when you change subject

Use quotes to generate trust

Avoid these words when speaking

This Preview

This booklet is a summary of *Speak & Write Better Business English*. It includes four chapters and several tips to help you speak better English: when to use question tags, techniques to improve your listening, how to simplify your conditional sentences and several more ideas.

The Full Book

The full book has sixteen chapters. You'll discover how to help people understand you well, how to learn faster by following your own style, how to give effective instructions, how to improve your pronunciation, and many other techniques to apply immediately. You can buy the full book at www.andymiles.com or at www.amazon.com.

Other books by the author



400 Ways to Write It in Business English is a guide with phrases for businesspeople who need to write emails, reports, descriptions, plans, proposals and other documents.

My Days Away is a novel where an Oxford teacher travels to follow love and discovers a hidden world.

English / Spanish Business English Dictionary is a glossary with more than 10,000 entries that include words from finance, law, economy, accountancy, management and other areas.

The *Spotty English & Spanish Stories* are bilingual tales for children up to eight years old, who can follow the adventures of Melanie and her little dog.

400 Ways to Say It in Business English includes expressions that businesspeople can use to apply in many situations, both at their company and in international meetings.