

## Teaching Business English – an Introduction

This is the start of the Business English course sections. You will find a business section at the end of each of the 4 modules. The business sections are designed to give new or practising TEFL teachers some help with the following areas:

1. Some insights into the world of teaching Business English
2. A look at how we bring the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening into effective Business English classes
3. An overview of some of the main subjects we are asked to teach in the Business English classroom, such as English for telephoning, meetings and negotiation
4. Practical help for Classroom Management, with specific regard to 1-to-1 teaching
5. A view of some of the more 'up and coming areas', such as Information Technology and use of the Internet for Business English
6. Sample lesson activities, lesson ideas and practical tips on teaching 'Business English'.

Although this Business sections are made up of several components under separate headings, it is important to remember that these interact with each other. We have broken them down to make the ideas behind Business English teaching easier to understand.



While the demand for Business English lessons is increasing world-wide, Business English means different things to different people. We have tried to highlight some of the principal concepts behind Business English here, but there are several areas which we do not cover, simply because the subject is so wide. So our aim here is to introduce you to 'Business English' as a subject and to provide you with the confidence and a framework for teaching the generic business student.

In many countries, such as France, companies are required to reinvest some of their profits into training their staff. It is a huge, profitable area and even language schools with a focus on teaching teenagers will have business students enrolled on English courses. Similarly, in Germany company employees are often encouraged to take additional, part-funded 'study holidays' – and sometimes we have found that these students ask

for 'Business English'. Indeed, if a Portuguese business person is travelling to visit an Asian supplier, or if a Brazilian buyer is negotiating a deal with a Finnish salesman, almost certainly the language they will be communicating in is English.

So quite often the EFL teacher finds themselves thrown in at the deep end, with Business English lessons tagged on to their teaching timetable.

If you are a new teacher, certainly teaching English one-to-one to a 45-year-old Sales Director can be a daunting prospect. Almost certainly it is something that your initial TEFL/TESOL training course will not have gone into in any great depth. Comments from first-time business English teachers include:

*'Who is in control?'*

*'What is relevant to him?'*

*'He only wants 'conversation' so I don't feel like I'm teaching him anything.'*

New teachers feel out of their depth. It is rather incongruous that most teachers have no specialist training in an area that is likely to be the most financially lucrative for the school. If you seem to be in this category, then this course is definitely going to be of use to you. The writers of this course have all been in this situation and know how it feels.

## What is Business English?

Business English means different things to different people. At one end of the spectrum there is pure ESP, *teaching English for Special Purposes*. Such courses might be taught in-house, to lawyers, for example, who need 'Legal English' as a specialist area of the English language.

In addition to English teaching skills, quite often a high degree of specialist knowledge in this one particular niche field will be required. Unless you have a background in law, engineering or medicine etc., teaching ESP in its purest form will prove a difficult field to enter or succeed in.

At the other end of the scale, there are many individual professional people who require more general Business English. These people may need to know how to conduct themselves in English at meetings, in negotiations, on the telephone etc. or be able to perform a variety of social tasks when they are abroad on business. These are quite generalised business functions that can be taught across the board, with little regard to the business English student's actual profession. They will also need general English in order to perform their business functions adequately.

However, such students will still need some more specialist language input related to their career or industry. For example, if your student is a salesman for a firm that manufactures motorcycle crash helmets for sale overseas, he or she will need to know specific words relating to this field, such as visor, chin strap or shell. These words are unlikely to be of interest to other business people from different areas, but will be important to your student if he needs to use them with his customers.

Therefore it is easy to see that the lines between ESP, business and general English are often blurred and you may be teaching all three at some point under a 'business English' umbrella. In short 'Business English' means different things to different people. While we struggled to find any

one clear definition of what Business English is, there are some commonalities with general English.

For example, Business English students will need to be able to use grammar, English language functions and the basic skills just the same as the general English student. If they are meeting with other people and using English as the means of communication, they will need some 'social English' to discuss non-business matters (including topical events or news, small talk etc.) But on top of this, there will be extra key areas which your Business English students will require. For example:

- Some specialised English vocabulary - often work related
- Specific focus on certain skills (e.g. writing for emails, speaking on the telephone)
- Work related task learning (negotiations, meetings, presentations etc.)

You may well find that your Business English students are more directly motivated than their General English counterparts, and that they are very goal driven.

In this course we are going to look at some of the more general business English areas, rather than ESP. If ESP is an area of interest, you might like to take at the following website:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?sectionType=listsummary&catid=58015>



### **About Your Business Focus Course Book**

All Global English business courses come with a free course book. You can use this course book with pre-intermediate level students who are looking to improve their Business English. In certain sections of this course you will see the symbol (above, left), which indicates that the course book has useful material that can be used to support the particular theme covered. At the back of the course book there is a multimedia CD-ROM, which has 3 sections – a video phrasebank showing video clips of specific language in action, a 'Key Words' list that relates to each course book unit and an email phrasebank, which is full of excellent language for your students. Business Focus also has an interactive website which you and your students can use. You will find free teachers activities at the OUP Teacher's club at:

<http://www.oup.com/elt/catalogue/teachersites/businessfocus/?cc=gb>

You have to log in and register with OUP first, but it is free.

There are also further sections for your student at the Business Focus student site– go to <http://www.oup.com/elt/global/products/businessfocus/> for more details on various free activities.