

# Business Class

WEEK 8 - HOW TO SOUND MORE  
PROFESSIONAL?

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# Class Objectives

## EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES

### ★ Objectives:

- Our aim is to encourage you to expand and modify your vocabulary and not telling you that your language is too simple or not enough.
- By the end of this lesson today, you'll know how sound like a professional.



# Lesson for Today

## BRIEF INTRODUCTION

- You can use general English to feel comfortable when speaking in any situation, including business ones. However, as we learn every day, improving your English with more formal phrases or is part of your growth.
- Sometimes very small change or replacement of the most common word with the one that is more formal or official or business related, can have meaningful impact on how you sound. And most of all, how you are perceived by others.



# How business English is different from General English?

General English is used in day to day conversations, with casual words and tone, basic vocabulary and in most cases basic grammar. Business English is more formal, it has professional context and specific purpose.

Of course general English can be used in business situations and this is totally fine. Sometimes however we want to use higher level words, which are not that difficult once we know them.

There are for sure jobs and companies, where without technical language your work would be impossible, however in majority, being professional in business language, means much more than just fancy words.

Sometimes, to sound more professional takes only a bit of rephrasing when speaking or writing email. Here are few other tips which can help you with your professional language



# Remove “I don’t know” from your dictionary?

Frankly speaking it depends ;-)

I can imagine the situation that the employee throws simple "I don't know!" showing the lack of interest in a subject and at the same time passing the message - "I don't care. That's not my problem."

However, it tells us more about the attitude not his knowledge.

Assuming you really have no data about something I believe it is ok to admit that. Of course adding below phrases may be really useful.

- I'll find out and get back to you
- I'll check this in the files/reports/guides etc
- I want to give you 100% answer thus I need to check the documentation
- Let me verify this first and I will get back to you with an answer ASAP



# Remove “I don’t know” from your dictionary?

If you would like to use other expressions to say that you do not know something you can use:

## WHEN YOU SHOULD KNOW THE ANSWER - IT'S YOUR AREA.

You're in the accounting department and your team is still working out the financial projections for the next year. You've got a meeting about this today and you know you're not ready to every question on this topic.

- I'm not sure, but I'll find out and let you know.
- I'll find out.
- I'll look into it and get back to you with what I find.
- That's a good question and I want to get you the right information. Let me get back to you by end-of-day.

So your answer might sound like:

That's an excellent question. My team and I are finalizing the projections on that and I'll have your answer by the end of the day.



# Remove “I don’t know” from your dictionary?

## WHEN IT’S NOT YOUR AREA OF EXPERTISE BUT SOMEONE WANTS TO KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS...

Here are 3 ways to answer a question when you’re not the expert:

- I’m not sure I’m the best person to answer that but...
- Here’s what I know and here’s what I don’t know...
- Based on my understanding, I believe that...

## WHAT TO SAY WHEN IT’S BETTER TO HELP SOMEONE FIND THE ANSWER...

Instead of saying ‘I don’t know’ try one of these:

- Great question. Let’s look into that.
- Let’s see if we can get some more information on that.

## WHEN YOU NEED MORE INFORMATION TO GIVE THE RIGHT ANSWER

Here’s two great options:

- Before I answer, could you share a few more details about what you need/what you’re looking for?
- Before I answer your question, could you clarify your question?



# Remove “I don’t know” from your dictionary?

## CASUAL OPTIONS (TO YOUR FRIEND RATHER)

Your friend lost her keys — again!  
She always does this and, of course, you have no idea where her keys are.

- I don’t have the foggiest idea.
- I haven’t a clue.
- Who knows?
- Don’t ask me.
- Your guess is as good as mine.

# What if you don't understand?

## INSTEAD OF SAYING "I DON'T GET" YOU CAN USE:

- Am I correct in understanding that...?
- Just wanted to make sure that by saying XYZ you mean....





# Let's apologize! Or not?

## HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU UTTERED THE WORDS, "I'M SORRY" WHEN YOU HAVEN'T ACTUALLY OFFENDED SOMEONE OR MADE AN ERROR?

It's a common phenomenon, especially in the workplace. While you may think your reflexive apology shows deference, respect or accommodation, it's actually may make you appear less confident in your own professional abilities.

## FIND A WAY TO SAY 'THANK YOU'

Instead of: "I'm so sorry I'm late in getting this to you."

Try: "Thank you for patience as I finalize this project; I'm excited to hear your thoughts once I've submitted it to you on X date."

## APOLOGIZE FOR 'BOTHERING' PEOPLE?

Instead of: "I'm sorry to interrupt ..."

Try: "Let me say/ask this..." OR "Great points, I would like to add ..."

Instead of: "Sorry, do you have a minute?"

Try: "Excuse/Pardon me..."

Instead of: "I'm sorry to bother you."

Try: "I know how busy you are, but I'd love your feedback on something. Is now a good time?"



# Let's apologize! Or not?

## APOLOGIZE WITH OTHER EXPRESSIONS

Instead of: "I'm so sorry I wasn't prepared for that presentation."

Try: "That didn't go the direction I'd planned. Here's how I'll fix it."

Or: "That didn't go as well as planned, but I got this. Let me go to work."

## PRACTICE EMPATHY

Some people use "I'm sorry" to show sympathy. Instead, practice empathy by reflecting what the other person might be feeling. For example, if someone shares a difficult story or experience, you might say, "That sounds like it was really hard for you."

## EXPRESS SELF-AWARENESS

Consider a more emotionally intelligent approach. Ask yourself, who is it that needs to say sorry all the time -- the solution minded you, or the insecure you? Instead of saying sorry, say, "Thanks for pointing that out, what else is worth knowing here?"

## WHAT IF YOU DISAGREE?

Having a difference in viewpoints isn't something either party should feel the need to apologize for. Period.

Instead of: "I'm sorry, but I disagree."

Try: "That's an interesting perspective. Here's how I was thinking of it."

Instead of: "I'm sorry, but I don't agree."

Try: "Let's look at this from another angle."



# Yes! No! Maybe?



## WAIT! THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SAY YES?

### YES! OF COURSE THERE IS!

#### HERE ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON IN PROFESSIONAL AREA:

- Yes, of course. I will get it to you this afternoon.
- I'd be glad/happy to make the reservations for you.
- Absolutely. I will finish it this afternoon.
- Certainly – I will call him now.

## UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE HAVE TO SAY NO. NO I CAN'T CHANGE THE DATE OF THE MEETING.

- I would love to/like to but our company has a holiday party that night.
- I'm afraid that I'm not available on Tuesday.
- No, (I'm sorry to say that) we aren't able to change the time of the meeting.
- I wish I could but I'm unable to make that kind of compromise.
- We appreciate the offer, however, this is not a good time for us.
- I'm afraid I can't meet you today. How about tomorrow?

## YOU CAN'T OR DON'T WANT TO COMMIT TO SOMETHING?

- Perhaps I can make it. Let me check my calendar.
- Perhaps it will work. Let me think it over.
- I'm not sure whether I can but I'll check my calendar and let you know.

# Kind = professional?

## INDEED! LET'S GET SOME POLITENESS TO OUR LANGUAGE.

- Be more diplomatic in English
- Switch from direct, assertive language to indirect, formal language
- Be more flexible in English so you can say what you want, how you want

## WOULD, COULD, MIGHT, MAY.. MODAL VERBS!

It seems so simple, but using a modal can change a direct, aggressive question into a polite request. They soften your requests, questions, and commands, which means you won't sound rude or too direct.

- Order me a coffee, please. → Would you get me a coffee, please?
- Please leave. I have to take this phone call. → Could you step out of the room for a moment? I have to take this phone call.
- Send me those documents before the end of the day. → Could you send me those documents by the end of the day?
- I need to borrow your pen for a moment. → May I borrow your pen for a moment?

# Kind = professional?

## IN ENGLISH, THE PRESENT SIMPLE TENSE CAN SOUND DIRECT, MAYBE TOO DIRECT SO...

Change the present tense to the past tense or a continuous (-ing) tense. Your meaning is still in the present, but you change the verb to add softness, to be less direct.

TIP: We do this with verbs such as hope, feel, think, want, wonder.

- Do you have time to meet tomorrow to discuss this?  
→ I wondered if you had time to meet tomorrow.  
→ I was wondering if you had time to meet tomorrow.  
→ I'm wondering if you have time to meet tomorrow.
- What is your name? → What did you say your name was?
- I'd like to finish this meeting by 4:00 p.m. → I was hoping to finish this meeting by 4:00 p.m.
- Can I ask a question about the agenda? → I wanted to ask a question about the agenda.
- I think you need help with the deadline. → I thought you might like some help with the deadline.

# Kind = professional?

## SOFTEN YOUR LANGUAGE

We often use expressions such as:

a bit, around, kind of, -ish, a few, quite, slightly, a little

We use these expressions – or qualifiers – to provide less direct information, for example with times or quantities.

- I'd like you to spend around 4 hours to get this project completed. If you can't complete it by then, let's talk so we can make necessary changes.
- Why don't you come to my office at 2:00-ish (= around 2:00) for a quick meeting.
- That's not quite what I had in mind. What if we made a few changes?
- That estimate is a bit high, don't you think?

## CAN'T YOU? YES, YOU CAN!

In more professional situations, we sometimes have to tell someone that we can't do something. To say "I can't" can be negative and it could sound like a failure. Instead, you can use the words "not able to" or "unable to" to soften the language.

- I'm not able to complete this project by 4:00 p.m. but I should have it finished tomorrow morning.
- I'm unable to meet you tomorrow. I'm sorry.

# The company jargon

The business world is full of jargon – special words and expressions that are hard for those outside the business world to understand. For those learning English with a view to working in the English-speaking business world, getting to know some of this jargon is vital to understanding your work colleagues and superiors.

So let's take a look at some of the most common words and phrases that you're sure to come across in the business world, but unlikely to come across anywhere else. Whether you choose to use these words and phrases yourself is up to you, but they will at least help you to understand what your colleagues are talking about.

There is no other way to learn it, than to actually start working and learning the jargon on daily basis. Listen to your colleagues and learn from them. Or find the blogs and other literature from your field, to read and learn from.

## OUR TIP:

Jargon is however mostly to be used at the office or with your coworkers. It is better to avoid it with external customers. Unless they know the area.



# It's not only about the language

## STONE OF YOUR VOICE

Speaking too soft may look like you are in doubt of what you want to say and speaking too loud when excited may look like you are angry. Make sure you adjust the tone of voice to the situation.

## VOICE MODULATION

Remember to emphasize by your voice the most important parts of the sentence and this will cause your message to be clearly understand and remembered.

## VOLUME OF YOUR VOICE

Adjust the volume to the room you are in – for example when in big conference room you may need to speak louder than being the office. But don't be too loud so people don't think you are shouting at them.

## BREATHING AND PHRASING

Breathing is something we tend to forget when nervous or too excited. If you rush too much, you make your speech difficult to comprehend.

## YOUR BODY

When speaking sit straight, hold your head high, open your chest, take deep breaths in and out. When standing, make sure you stand confidently, with same body weight on both legs. All of this helps the voice projection and maximizes it, without a need to shout.





# It's not only about the language

## BEING PREPARED

Of course we need to say it at least once during each Business Class :-) Professional look goes hand in hand with confidence and you can gain the latter by knowing what you're talking about. Before talking with another person spend some time thinking about the matter, try challenging your approach and look at the subject from different perspectives.

## BEING TIRED

How much confidence and energy do you have in the morning when you only had four hours of sleep last night? Being exhausted and professional is hard enough in your native language, not to mention foreign one.

## ENGAGEMENT

Sounding more professional is not only about showing you know the right vocabulary. It is also about showing the control you have over your voice, showing your authority and engaging people so they actually listen to what you want to tell them.

## PRACTICE

Exercise at home with your voice – force yourself to speak louder or slower, repeating same sentences with different tone, modulation. Learn how to breath in a controlled way, so by breathing correctly you can reduce stress when needed.



# Summary of Today's Class

## RECAP 1

There's nothing bad about General English, although professional language brings additional value.

## RECAP 2

There are popular phrases that make you sound professional even in difficult situations.

## RECAP 3

Kindness is professional.

## RECAP 4

Mind your breathing, voice and body language. Above all - prepare yourself :-)



# Thank You

**FOR JOINING OUR COURSE!**

Please have a look at the further recommendations below.



# What else can you do?

## IN ORDER TO BECOME CONFIDENT AS A PRO

### **You can use Grammarly**

If you would like to analyze and improve your writing skills, you can download for your PC application called Grammarly. When you write, emails for example, this app analyzes your sentences and in real time provide hints on better words to use or grammar mistakes you made. Use it for some time, its basic level is free of charge. This is also great way to learn new vocabulary.

Find out more on Grammarly here: [www.grammarly.com](http://www.grammarly.com)

### **Search YouTube for videos on phrases used for Business English**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idCkU-0G8wE>



### **Read Business English magazine online**

<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/business-english/business-magazine>

### **Listen to Podcasts for Professionals**

<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/business-english/podcasts-for-professionals>

# What else can you do?

IN ORDER TO BECOME CONFIDENT AS A PRO

## **TED**

is always a good idea: <https://www.ted.com/>



## **Audiobooks in English and much more!**

You can download and use free mobile apps for learning new English Vocabulary. You can watch and mimic actors from your favorite movie series – choose one related to business ;-)

**Achieving a high level of fluency and confidence in business English takes more than just listening, watching videos or reading. It's a process, where each day of using new specific vocabulary and phrases makes you more and more advanced and fluent. Hope you feel motivated to become a pro!**

# Sources

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