

Pauline Naidoo and
Maryvonne Lumley Bolch

Office Practice

BOOK 3

Personal Assistants

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Preface

The Special English series introduces titles on a wide range of technical subjects that will be of interest to students of English as a second language. Each volume illustrates the special English of a particular trade or profession in both its spoken and written forms. It is not possible, of course, for books of this size to cover the subject matter exhaustively, so the authors have concentrated on those topics and activities that should have the widest appeal. The conversations which are the basis of each chapter or unit are deliberately written in the colloquial and idiomatic speech used by technicians and specialists as they go about their everyday activities.

It must be emphasised that these books are *not* primarily intended to teach the subject matter itself, although the technical content is accurate in every respect. Nor are they intended to teach the introductory stages of English. It is assumed that the reader is already familiar in his own language with the subject matter of the book, and has a good grounding in the basic grammatical patterns and vocabulary of English. He will use these books to improve his knowledge of English within the framework of a technical vocabulary that is of interest to him either privately or professionally.

The authors in this series each have their individual approach, but all the volumes are organised in the same general way. Typically, each book is based on a series of situational dialogues, followed by narrative passages for reading comprehension. Exercises give the student practice in handling some of the useful and more difficult patterns, as well as lexical items, that occur in each unit. Tape recordings of the dialogues and selected exercises may be used either in the language laboratory or for private study. Each volume is provided with a glossary of technical terms, with i.p.a. equivalents as used in the Daniel Jones *Pronouncing Dictionary*.

PETER STREVENS, *General Editor*

Introduction

This is the third book in our series on Office Practice. Following Clerical Duties Book 1 and Secretarial Duties Book 2, we come now to Book 3 for Personal Assistants. What is a Personal Assistant? There is no standard definition nor are the duties of a P.A. clearly defined. In our opinion a P.A. is a highly responsible employee who not only assists the Principal to carry out his duties but who can, if need be, stand in for him and implement decisions for him in his absence. She (or he) should not initiate company policy—that is a function of the senior executives—but she should be fully aware of it and be able to interpret it in the best interest of her Principal and his company.

Quite often the P.A. will have been promoted from the secretarial post and have excellent office skills. However the higher she climbs on the business ladder the less will she need her technical skills, and the more will she use her decision making, initiative, judgement and supervisory powers. In fact, many P.A.s will have their own secretaries.

Sometimes the P.A. is known as the Personal Secretary, Executive Secretary or the Private Secretary but the responsibilities are the same.

Because a P.A. may be found in any kind of office we have tried to present as many variations of the job as possible. To do this and yet maintain a continuity of theme, we have hit upon the happy idea of following a company on its move from the middle of a big metropolis—in this case London—to an area outside, thus concurring with the prevailing promptings of government, the environmentalists and the economic pressures. This format has also enabled us to introduce the most recent developments in today's office: flexitime, the computer, word processing machines, etc.

Meetings are an inescapable part of business life so we have included chapters on correct procedure, minutes, agendas, etc. Topical issues such as women's careers, trade union negotiations and office etiquette are also discussed, but readers are invited to write and comment on what else might have been included.

We wish to thank all the individuals, companies and organisations who have helped us in our research, invited us to observe their staff at work, made helpful suggestions and supplied us with valuable data. In particular we would like to thank Mandy Motyer for her work on the exercises following each chapter.

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Unit 1 To move or not to move (1)

Lumley Products Limited are a large firm with a Head Office in London and a factory in the Greater London area. They, like many other firms, are finding that the ever-increasing costs of operating a business in a capital city is forcing them to consider the possibility of moving to an area where accommodation, rates, etc., are lower. Philip Terry is one of the directors of the company, and Jennifer Podberry has been his personal assistant for several years. Here they are discussing the advantages and disadvantages of working out of London.

Mr Terry: As you know Jennifer, our *lease expires towards the end of next year.

Jennifer: I suppose we'll be negotiating its renewal?

Mr Terry: I don't think we will. The other directors seem to feel that this would be a good chance to make a clean break¹ and move right away from London.

Jennifer: Really, Philip, why's that?

Mr Terry: Well, partly because the rent here is going up phenomenally, but also because there's no room for future expansion and we've got to look ahead.

Jennifer: That's right really. Certainly the *rates and rent will be cheaper out of London; but isn't there a danger that we might have problems with staff?

Mr Terry: Well, it is more than likely that some of our present staff will want to stay here in London rather than move with us.

Jennifer: You can understand that. Deciding to move can't be easy. I mean, for some employees, their husbands' or

¹ a clean break: a total change

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wives' jobs would be affected; not to mention children's schooling.

Mr Terry: Yes, we are certainly going to be faced with finding some replacement staff; and then there's the job of helping to find accommodation for those who are prepared to move.

Jennifer: When you think about it, there are some advantages in moving out of London. You'd probably save hours a week in *commuting time, and just imagine how marvellous it would be to live in the country and walk to work down leafy country lanes.

Mr Terry: You're jumping the gun² a bit, Jen! We haven't definitely decided to move yet, let alone move the office into the middle of a field as you seem to be suggesting.

Jennifer: Will the people who are not moving be entitled to any sort of *compensation?

Mr Terry: Well, we'd certainly want to pay them some—but I'm quite sure that the matter will excite a fair amount of discussion between the directors and the union. Which reminds me, you'd better arrange a meeting with them so that we can give them early notification of our intentions.

Jennifer: Right, I'll arrange a meeting with the local secretary. Will some time next week be O.K.?

Mr Terry: Yes, I think so, but consult my diary to make sure.

Jennifer: Will we have to retain just a small office in London, do you think?

Mr Terry: That's one of the things we have to decide about because we're worried that we might have communication difficulties with our London suppliers and customers.

Jennifer: Yes, even though you can telephone them it always seems easier to iron out³ problems face-to-face.

Mr Terry: I agree. Now, the first and most important thing to decide is which area can offer us the space and facilities that we need.

Jennifer: Isn't this where *L.O.B. can help us? After all, that is what they specialise in, isn't it?

Mr Terry: It is. In fact I was going to ask you to get in touch

² jumping the gun: acting prematurely; going ahead too fast

³ to iron out: to smooth over; to ease

LOB: the office intelligence centre

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LOCATION OF OFFICES BUREAU

with them. Perhaps you'd like to make an appointment to go and see them this afternoon.

Jennifer: I'd love to—am I right in thinking that our three main concerns are where to move, what staff will be available and whether communications will be a problem?

Mr Terry: Yes, that seems to sum it up.

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EXERCISE 1 : Structural Practice

Notice this structure from the conversation:

I suppose we'll be negotiating its renewal?

Use this structure to respond to the following prompts:

Example: What will we be doing when our lease expires?

Prompt: *negotiate its renewal*

Response: I suppose we'll be negotiating its renewal.

1. What will we be doing when our lease expires?
negotiate its renewal
2. What will be the advantage of moving out of London?
save rent
3. How will we let the workers know?
consult the union
4. What about the people who decide not to move?
pay them compensation
5. What about communicating with London customers?
keep an office in London
6. Who will advise us where to move?
consult L.O.B.
7. What about our present staff?
arrange for them to move with us
8. What about housing for the staff who move?
consult an estate agent

EXERCISE 2

Statement: Our lease _____ towards the end of the month.

Prompt: *expire*

Response: Our lease *expires* toward the end of the month.

Now you do it:

1. Our lease _____ towards the end of the month.
2. Have you _____ to move with the firm?
expire
3. Will you be _____ in London?
decide

stay

4. Are the firm going to _____ you?
compensate
5. The lease can be _____ in September.
renew
6. The management and trade union will be _____ negotiations.
conduct
7. Have you _____ telephone communication difficult?
find
8. L.O.B. _____ in the relocation of offices.
specialise

EXERCISE 3 : Distinguishing between similar sentences

Note the difference in meaning between the pair of sentences below:

- (a) We haven't *definitely* decided to move yet.
- (b) We *definitely* haven't decided to move yet.

The first sentence indicates doubt as to whether a removal will take place. The second sentence emphasises the fact that a decision to move has not yet been taken.

Explain the difference in meaning in each of the sentences below:

1. (a) We haven't *definitely* decided to move yet.
(b) We *definitely* haven't decided to move yet.
2. (a) The secretary *didn't pretend* to know all of the advantages of moving
(b) The secretary *pretended not to* know all the advantages of moving.
3. (a) The trade union leader *promised not to* attend the meeting.
(b) The trade union leader *didn't promise to* attend the meeting.
4. (a) I remembered *telling him* that he was free to meet the L.O.B. representative.
(b) I remembered *to tell him* that he was free to meet the L.O.B. representative.

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5. (a) It *always seems* easier to telephone.
(b) It *seems* easier to *always* telephone.
6. (a) *He even* admitted there would be communication problems.
(b) *Even he* admitted there would be communication problems.
7. (a) Although I said I wanted to stay in London, he went on *asking me to* move.
(b) Although I said I wanted to stay in London, he went on *to ask me to* move.
8. (a) You won't have *much money to spend* on the move.
(b) You won't have *to spend much money* on the move.

COMPREHENSION

The high concentration of businesses in the centres of big cities has long been a problem in many countries. In most industrialised countries, governments have devised various schemes to encourage firms to move to less developed areas.

The Location of Offices Bureau, L.O.B. for short, is a Parliamentary Commission which has been operating, in Britain, since 1963. It aims at encouraging the movement of offices from London to suitable places in other parts of the country.

As can be seen from figs. 1 and 2, England, Scotland and Wales can be divided into various categories. Controlled areas are those areas around London and the South East, where the building of new offices is held strictly in check by the Town and Country Planning Act of 1971. A firm planning any wide-scale expansion would be unwise to select a Controlled Area in which to base its offices.

In contrast to this the intermediate, development and special development areas have no restrictions on building, and firms prepared to move to these areas are eligible for generous government grants, intended to encourage just such movement.

With the progressive improvement in motorway communications (see fig. 2) and the diminishing journey times on British Rail's 'Inter-City' trains few firms need worry too much about keeping in touch with business contacts in London.

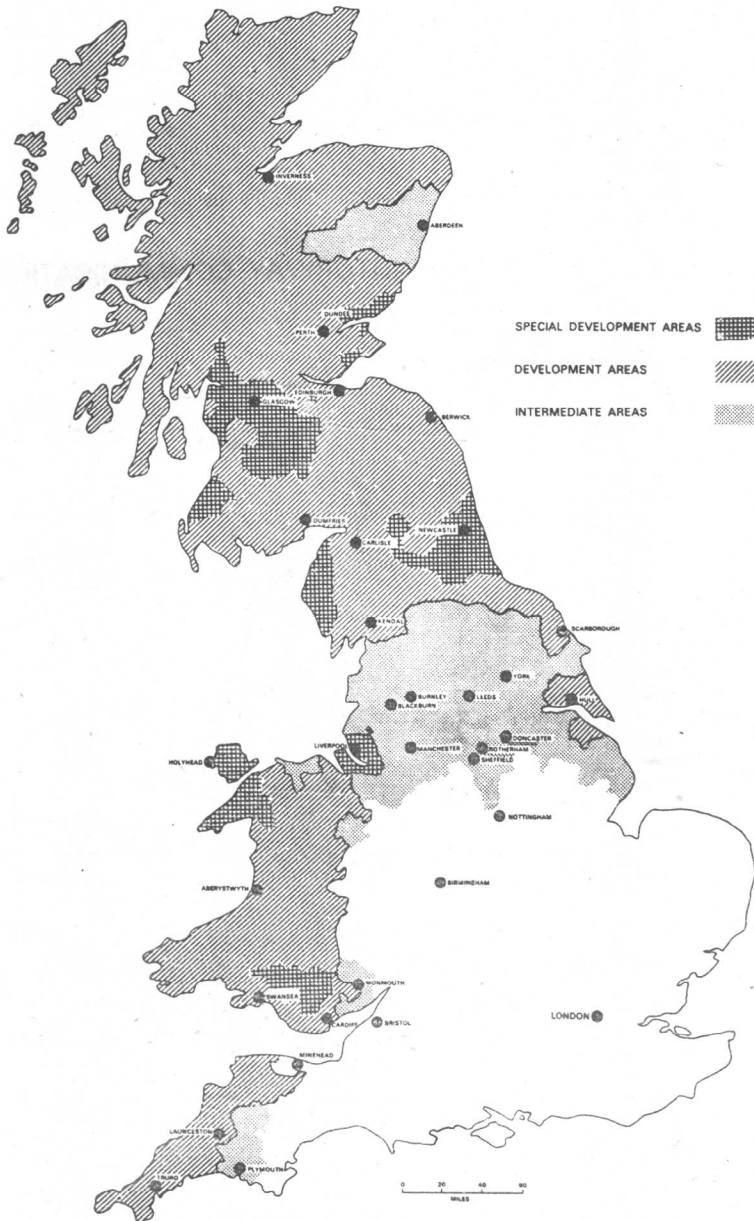


Fig. 1

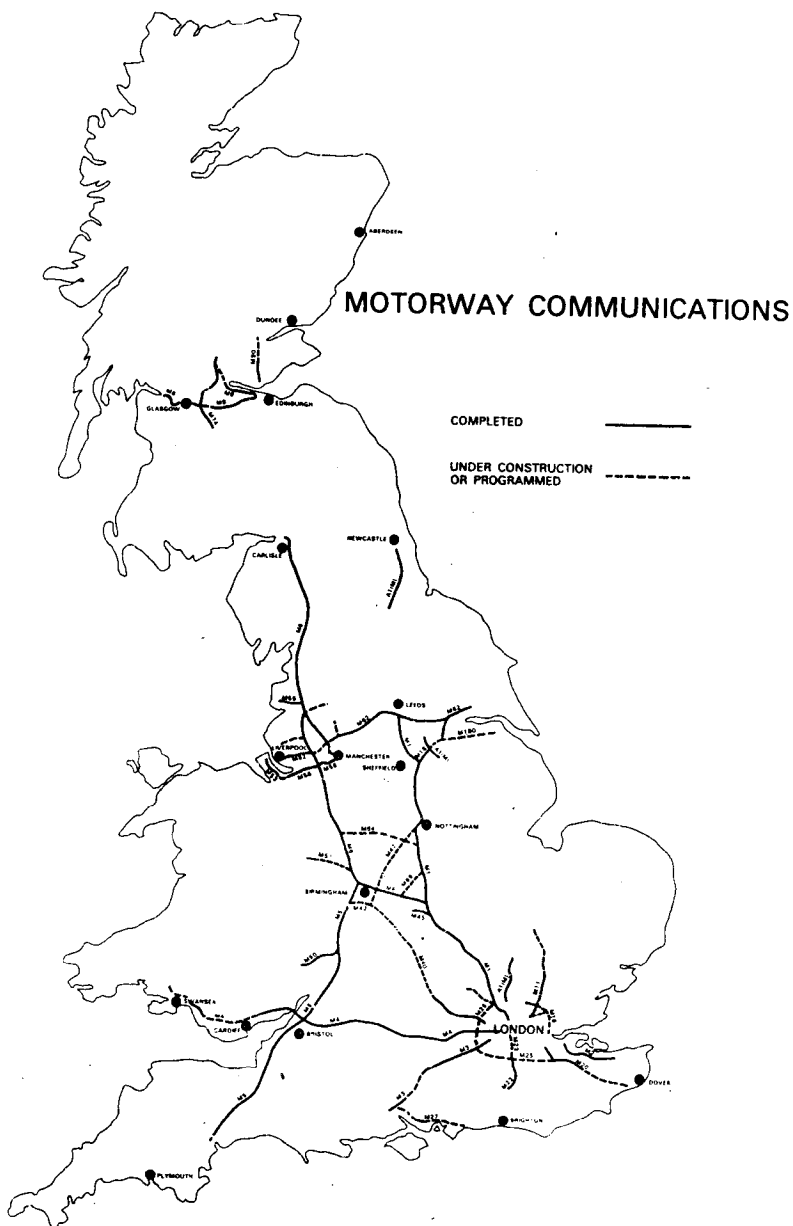


Fig. 2



Town Planners discussing a new housing development.

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EXERCISE 4 : Comprehension Questions

1. What is the main function of L.O.B.?
2. Why do you think the Town and Country Planning Act of 1971 encourages offices to move to other parts of the country?
3. What are the main advantages for any firm moving to an intermediate or special development area?
4. Why do you think many firms are loath to relocate their offices out of town?
5. Discuss some of the problems that the high concentration of business in inner city areas may cause.

EXERCISE 5

Use the following words in sentences of your own to show that you understand their meaning and use:

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. categories | 6. devised |
| 2. held in check | 7. schemes |
| 3. wide-scale | 8. diminishing |
| 4. progressive | 9. eligible |
| 5. concentration | 10. restrictions |

EXERCISE 6 : Secretarial

Assume that you are Jennifer Podberry and, using the information from this chapter, write a letter to the Trade Union suggesting two alternative dates for a meeting with Philip Terry.