

ENGLISH FOR THE BUSINESS STUDENT

J. Stanley Jones

English for the Business Student

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>Preface</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Chapter 1 A MATTER OF WORDS	1
<p>I. Concise Writing; II. Choosing the Right Word, (1); Extract for Study No. 1: 'Money in the Bank'; III. Choosing the Right Word (2); Directness and Simplicity; The Long and the Short; Got, Lot, and Nice; IV. More about Discrimin- ation; V. Words that Cause Confusion; Extract for Study No. 2: 'Shalford's System'; VI. Spelling: Twelve Spelling Rules: Some Spelling Tests; Extract for Study No. 3: 'Our Servant, the Telephone.'</p>	
Chapter 2 THE SENTENCE AND ITS WORK	32
<p>I. What is a Sentence? II. Analysis of a Sentence; III. Phrases; IV. Kinds of Sentences; V. The Short and the Long; VI. Some Ways of Combining Sentences; Exercises in Combining Sentences; Extract for Study No. 4: 'Four Arms versus Eight.'</p>	
Chapter 3 WRITING CLEAR ENGLISH	47
<p>I. Clear Thinking; II. The Careless Use of Pronouns; III. The Unfortunate Phrase; IV. The Order of Words; V. The Importance of 'only'; Extract for Study No. 5: 'The Chinese Bus.'</p>	
Chapter 4 WRITING CORRECT ENGLISH	55
<p>I. What Grammar is; II. The Parts of Speech: Nouns, Plurals of Nouns, Adjectives, Adverbs, the Verb, Relative Pronouns, Prepositions, Usage of Prepositions: Extract for Study No. 6: 'The Shopkeeper.'</p>	

	PAGE
<i>Chapter 5</i> SOME SPECIAL POINTS OF GRAMMAR	66
I. Agreement of Subject and Verb; II. The Case of Pronouns; III. 'Due to' and 'owing to'; IV. 'Shall' and 'Will'; V. Past Tense and Past Participle; VI. The Participle and the Gerund; VII. The Unattached Participle; VIII. The Danger of Omitting Words; IX. 'Like' and 'As'; X. 'Less' and 'fewer'; XI. The Double Negative; XII. Exercises in Writing Correct English; Extract for Study No. 7: 'At home in 1977.'	
<i>Chapter 6</i> USING REFERENCE BOOKS	78
A List of Reference Books; Exercises in Using Reference Books; Extract for Study No. 8: 'The Department Store.'	
<i>Chapter 7</i> PUNCTUATION	82
Punctuation 1; Rules and Exercises; Punctuation 2; Rules and Exercises; Extract for Study No. 9: 'A Time Long Past'; Punctuation 3; Punctuating a Business Letter.	
<i>Chapter 8</i> DIRECT AND INDIRECT SPEECH ..	94
I. Converting Direct to Indirect Speech; II. Exercises; III. More Difficult Exercises.	
<i>Chapter 9</i> PARAGRAPHS AND PARAGRAPHING ..	101
Extract for Study No. 10: 'The Bank Manager'; I. The Structure of a Paragraph; Logical Order; II. Exercises in Writing Paragraphs; III. Paragraphing.	
<i>Chapter 10</i> BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE	115
I. The Three 'C's'; II. How a Business Letter is set out; III. Kinds of Business Letters—Letters of Enquiry; Quotations and Offers; IV. Orders; Execution of Orders; V. Complaints and Regrets; VI. Payment of Accounts; VII. Writing a Letter of Application; The Interview.	

Chapter 11 ORIGINAL COMPOSITION 148

I. The Subject Matter; II. The Order; III. Beginning and Ending; IV. The Style; V. In General; VI. Subjects for Composition.

Chapter 12 SIMILES AND METAPHORS 167

I. Similes; II. Metaphors; III. The Danger of Mixing Metaphors; IV. Proverbs; V. Exercises; Extract for Study No. 11: 'Miss Thompson at the Fishmongers.'

Chapter 13 MAKING A SUMMARY 174

I. Exercises in Condensing; II. Postcards; III. Telegrams; IV. The Three Stages; V. The Summary of a Paragraph; VI. Exercises in Summarizing; VII. Summarizing Longer Passages; Exercises.

Chapter 14 SUMMARY OF CORRESPONDENCE .. 191

I. Summary of a Letter; II. Summary of a Series of Letters.

Chapter 15 REPORTS, AGENDA AND MINUTES .. 202

I. Reports; II. Writing Reports; III. Reports based upon Statistics; IV. Preparing Agenda; V. The Minutes of Meetings.

Chapter One

A Matter of Words

'Words are, in fine, the only currency in which we can exchange thought.'

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

A FAMOUS professor has said that the chief distinction between Man and other living creatures is that Man is a 'communicating animal'. In other words, he has the ability to convey his thoughts and ideas to other men. The means of communication may be by word of mouth, telephone, telegraph, radio, letter, report, announcement, advertisement, lecture or even 'sky-writing'; but whatever method is used it entails the use of *words*.

In commercial and business communications we should aim to express our ideas in English which is direct, clear, pleasant and economical. To do this we need an adequate command over words. The more extensive our vocabulary the greater will be the fluency and clarity with which we can say what we mean.

There is no short way of acquiring this command over words. To enlarge our vocabulary and to develop a feeling for the 'right word' we need to:

1. Listen to good speakers.
2. Read wisely and widely.
3. Make constant use of a good dictionary.
4. Use every opportunity to practise the use of words.

Let us glance first at the problem of using words economically—that is, the problem of writing *concise* English.

I. CONCISE WRITING

*'Words are like leaves, and where they most abound
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.'*

In the busy world of industry and commerce a writer who

wastes words wastes time, and is as much an enemy of efficiency as a workman who slows up production in a factory.

In commercial documents and correspondence **Conciseness** (or brevity) and **Preciseness** (or exactness) of statement are particularly important, and more often than not these two qualities are found together. A writer who says something briefly usually says it clearly.

On the other hand, the writer who uses many words when few would do usually obscures the meaning and tries the patience and understanding of the reader by the woolliness of his style.

In aiming to achieve conciseness and precision the two chief faults against which we must guard are:

CIRCUMLOCUTION and REDUNDANCY

Circumlocution consists in saying things in a roundabout way. Thus—‘*In the event of rain supervening* the tea-party will be held in the marquee.’

This could be expressed—‘*If it rains* the tea-party will be held in the marquee.’

Redundancy is the use of superfluous words, and is of course a close relation to circumlocution. Frequently the unnecessary words merely repeat in another way something that has already been said:

‘Game birds abounded in great numbers in the preserves.’
As ‘abounded’ means ‘existed in great numbers’ it would be sufficient to say: ‘Game birds abounded in the preserves.’

EXERCISE ONE

Rewrite the following sentences more concisely:

1. The false charge against the defendant is not only baseless but is entirely without foundation.
2. The reason why the harvest was so poor was because the rainfall had been so light.
3. All the committee voted unanimously in favour of the motion.

4. As there will be no time for writing, all instructions will be given verbally, by word of mouth.
5. In recent years the number of fatal accidents, in which people have been killed, has increased.
6. If an insolvent company is unable to pay its debts it becomes bankrupt.
7. He was inspired by a desire to attain a high position in life.
8. The new government appealed for national support from the whole country for its firm and unyielding policy.
9. When a man has a shorter working day the time which he can devote to other pursuits becomes longer.
10. No faults could be found with the perfect condition of the grounds.

EXERCISE TWO

Rewrite the following sentences more concisely by substituting single words for the groups of words in italics. The initial letter of the single word is given in brackets. (You may change the order of words):

1. The Commonwealth government announced that it would grant a free passage to every *person who left this country with the intention of settling in the Dominion* (E).
2. The aeroplane was equipped with controls *so designed that either the instructor or the learner could control it* (D).
3. A police car *went before* the main procession (P).
4. We send a cheque in payment for *the amount of money spent by you on business journeys* (E).
5. The speaker wasted much time by dwelling upon topics *which had no bearing upon the subject* (I).
6. He was the manager of a shop *selling notepaper and other writing materials* (S).
7. Methods of *preserving food by storing it at low temperatures* have improved greatly in recent years (R).
8. The sale of certain goods on Sundays was *not according to law* (I).
9. In order to pay our way in the world it is necessary to increase *the amount of goods sent out of the country* (E).

10. We bought a house in one of the pleasant *outlying districts* of the city (S).

EXERCISE THREE

Express the meaning of each of the following phrases in a single word beginning with the letter given in brackets:

- happening each year (A)
- happening twice a year (B)
- happening once every two years (B)
- happening once every three years (T)
- a person eighty years old (O)
- a person a hundred years old (C)
- a celebration of an event that happened a hundred years ago (C)
- a celebration of an event that happened two hundred years ago (B)
- occurring at the same time (S)
- for the time being (T)

EXERCISE FOUR

Give a single word for each of the following descriptions of occupations (the initial letter is given in brackets):

- One who conducts a public sale in which articles are sold to the highest bidder (A)
- One who makes an official examination of accounts (A)
- One who writes shorthand (S)
- One who pays out money at a bank (C)
- One who collects postage stamps (P)
- One who carves in stone (S)
- A lawyer who has been called to the bar (B)
- One who sells cakes and sweets (C)
- One who writes plays (P)
- One who is qualified to conduct ships entering or leaving harbour (P)

EXERCISE FIVE

Supply the *one exact word* to express each of the following (the initial letter is given in brackets):

- Not capable of being heard (I)
- Not capable of being comprehended (I)
- Not capable of being explained (I)
- Not capable of being compared (I)
- Not capable of being accounted for (U)
- Not enough (I)
- Not capable of being burnt (I)
- Not capable of being eaten (I)
- Cannot be rubbed out (I)
- Without dignity (U)

II. CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORD (I)

WE HAVE already referred to the importance of a good vocabulary, or command over words. Only this will give us resources from which we can select the one exact word to suit the meaning we wish to express. No set of rules will enable us to choose from a number of words the *right* word. Reading, observation, the use of a dictionary, and much practice are necessary before we develop that intuitive feeling which tells us whether a word is right or wrong in its meaning and context.

Thus we might find it necessary to decide which of three words to use in the following sentence:

‘The company intend to DENY, or to CONTRADICT, or to DISPUTE the claim.’

These three words are closely connected in meaning, but only one is correct in the context.

We should say: ‘The company intend to DISPUTE the claim.’

The words CONTRADICT, DISPUTE, and DENY are examples of SYNONYMS, that is, words similar, or closely related, but rarely IDENTICAL in meaning. The English language is rich in synonyms, and before we can hope to speak

or write *precisely* we must be able to appreciate the fine shades of meaning which distinguish these words from one another. For example, synonyms for the word 'Postpone' are 'Delay' and 'Defer' but each has its particular usage and meaning which we can illustrate in such sentences as:

'The opening of the new shop has been *postponed* until April 1st.'

'The thunderstorm will *delay* the start of the tennis tournament.'

'The Judge said that he would *defer* passing sentence until he had considered the prisoner's record.'

EXERCISE ONE

Rewrite the following letter using from each group of synonyms given in brackets the word you regard as the most suitable for the context:

DEAR SIRs,

We are now able to (advise, inform) you that the (extension, enlargement) of our factory has been (finished, concluded, completed), and that next week we shall (commence, begin, start) the production of several entirely new ranges of children's foot-wear.

We have (installed, erected, set-up) in the new building the most (recent, up-to-date, modern) plant and have also (appointed, engaged, employed) some of the best designers and craftsmen available. We have been fortunate to secure delivery of (raw, crude, fresh) materials of the highest quality.

We shall be pleased to send you in a few days a copy of our (topical, current) catalogue. If you (desire, want, wish) we should be glad to send you samples of any of our products.

We are,

Yours faithfully,

L. D. HENSON AND COMPANY

EXERCISE TWO

Rewrite the following Chairman's address inserting from each group of words in brackets the word you regard as suitable:

The Chairman, who presided, said: Last year I (indicated, stated, pointed out) that (calculating, judging) by the number of (questions, enquiries) received the (demand, request, applications) for our new range of (articles, products, manufactures) seemed to be (growing, enlarging, increasing). My (prophecy, forecast) has proved to be correct, and not only during the year which I then (surveyed, reviewed) but during the first quarter of the (present, current) year both orders and (output, production) have (reached, achieved, attained) very satisfactory levels.

In view of the (notoriety, fame, reputation) which our products have (earned, attracted, deserved) and the (signs, symptoms) of a steadily growing demand, I have every (optimism, confidence) in the future of your Company, and I feel sure that this time next year we shall be able to submit to you another satisfactory report.

EXERCISE THREE

From the groups of words in brackets in the following sentences select the one word in each which you regard as correct:

1. One of the burglars was captured but his (*colleague, partner, accomplice*) escaped.
2. As there was but a short time left the last speaker was asked to (*abbreviate, compress, curtail*) his address.
3. When the second engine of the aircraft failed the pilot instructed the crew to prepare to (*desert, forsake, abandon*) the aeroplane.
4. As these articles are (*frail, flimsy, fragile*) we have sent them carefully packed in straw.
5. From the waters of the lake the travellers obtained (*an ample, a copious, an abundant*) supply of fresh fish.

6. The first Shopping Week in the town proved to be a very successful (*trial, test, experiment*)
7. The dresses in the store were (*imitations, duplicates, copies*) of the models shown in the London exhibition.
8. Some of the results show that the students have a real (*cleverness, talent, capability*) for designing wall-paper.
9. Owing to the lack of good roads it was difficult and expensive to (*carry, convey, transport*) heavy goods from one part of the country to another.
10. The most effective advertisements are simple and clear rather than (*ornate, decorative, elaborate*).
11. At the (*end, conclusion, termination*) of the meeting a vote of thanks will be proposed.
12. The first bicycles had a large wheel in front and a small wheel behind, but these machines are now (*old fashioned, obsolete, ancient*).

EXERCISE FOUR

Give at least one synonym for each of the following words:

NOUNS: occupation, trial, enquiry, reply, delay, home, error, difficulty, bill, statistics.

ADJECTIVES: early, incomplete, brief, conspicuous, clever, changeable, circular, adequate, accurate, flexible.

VERBS: need, assist, manufacture, accelerate, donate, counsel, consent, decrease, cancel.

EXERCISE FIVE

We have seen that SYNONYMS are words of similar meaning. ANTONYMS are words of OPPOSITE meaning. Here are some examples of antonyms:

labour and rest; simple and complicated; ancient and modern; edible and inedible; scarcity and abundance; order and disorder.

Write down at least one antonym for each of the following words:

NOUNS: import, caution, arrival, emigrant, profit, beauty, ease, danger, satisfaction.

ADJECTIVES: clear, permanent, fragile, indolent, cheap, modern, portable, guilty, spacious, transparent.

VERBS: hinder, succeed, increase, accept, include, reveal, expand, precede, divide, simplify.

EXERCISE SIX

Many antonyms are formed by the addition of a **PREFIX** to the original word, for example: fortunate, *un*fortunate; regular, *ir*regular; satisfaction, *diss*satisfaction; legible, *il*legible; familiar, *un*familiar; credible, *in*credible; possible, *im*possible.

By the addition of a prefix form an antonym to each of the following words:

correct	accurate	human
discreet	consistent	sincere
tolerable	tolerant	dependent
fortune	grammatical	similar
use	trust	sensitive
gratitude	equal	accessible
agree	honesty	advantage
relevant	polite	hygienic
eligible	legal	courtesy

EXERCISE SEVEN

Complete the following by adding for each word given in the first column a synonym in column 2 and an antonym in column 3:

WORD	SYNONYM	ANTONYM
employment (<i>example</i>)	work	unemployment
costly („)	expensive	cheap
diminish		
manage		