



# Better at business English

*Communications*

ANDY & ASTRID BAXTER



# Better at Business English

## Communications

Andy & Astrid Baxter



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# How should I use this book?

**Better at business English** is designed to help you express yourself effectively in today's business environment, in both spoken and written English. Step by step, you will learn the right words and sentences to use in a wide variety of business situations. All the most important topics are covered, such as e-mails and letters, applying for a job, making and receiving telephone calls, making presentations, chairing and taking part in meetings, as well as conducting negotiations and writing reports.

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## **Many examples**

The *Beter in...* series is unique in its very accessible approach, with a minimum of theory and a maximum of directly usable guidelines and examples. The many examples are clearly and systematically presented in easy-to-navigate tables. This makes it easier to learn how to use English correctly in a business context. More information about other titles in this series (e.g., *Beter in spelling*, *Beter in Nederlands*, *Beter in gesprekstechnieken*, *Beter in presenteren*, *Beter in argumenteren* and *Beter in rapporteren*) can be found on the AcademicX.nl portal.

## **Who is it for?**

*Better at business English* is written for students in the Netherlands in professional higher education (HBO). Thanks to its clear, compact layout, it is ideally suited for both classroom use and independent study. It is designed to be a practical tool, based on the actual needs of teachers and students.

## **Why?**

The way students in higher education learn today is different from how their predecessors learned. The *Beter in...* series recognises this. It provides short, understandable explanations, with examples taken from real business situations and online exercises with clear feedback available 24/7 at the AcademicX.nl portal.

## **Exercises in the book and online**

Test your knowledge per topic with short exercises. Each chapter ends with a clear, point-for-point summary and exercises. Extra exercises on each topic can be found on the AcademicX.nl portal.

We would like to thank Rosalind van Aalen-Grant (English teacher at the Avans School of International Studies, Breda) for giving us some useful ideas for the exercises, as well as the following HBO English teachers for suggesting improvements to the text to make it more suitable for HBO students: Shoba Dharap (Fontys Hogeschool, Eindhoven), Matthijs van Lente (Hogeschool Rotterdam) and Mara Sloomaker (Hogeschool Inholland, Alkmaar).

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# 1 Communicating in writing

Writing a clear message in English can be quite a challenge. In a business context, most written correspondence these days is done by email, but sometimes you may still need to write a formal letter. In this chapter you learn the basics of both. And when you apply for a job, you also need to know how you write a good application letter and cv in English. Finally, we'll briefly go into some aspects of social media in so far as they relate to the use of English.

## 1.1 What's in this chapter?

- 1.2 Email
- 1.3 Formal letters
- 1.4 Standard phrases
- 1.5 Job application letters
- 1.6 Curriculum vitae
- 1.7 Social media
- 1.8 Summary
- 1.9 Exercises

## 1.2 Email

Despite the relatively informal character of email, it is important your message is in correct English and easy to read. Make sure your emails are short and concise, and try to stick to one subject per email. Always clearly formulate the subject, and change the subject line when the subject changes.

To: jim.hobson@company.co.uk  
Subject: Two jobs for today

Dear Jim,

Am I correct in believing that Susan already finished the press release on Friday?

That leaves us with two jobs for today:

- (1) Invitation
- (2) FAQ

Please let me know if I've missed anything!

Best regards,  
Pam

### 1.2.1 Salutation

| The context   | What you write   |
|---|--|
| If you're writing to someone you know well, you can use his or her first name preceded by <i>Dear</i> . In a less formal context you can also use <i>Hello</i> . In short replies in a chain of messages, you can even leave out the salutation altogether. | Dear John<br>Dear Pam<br>Hello John<br>Hi John<br>Hello<br>Hi there      |
| If you know the recipient of your message, but you're still in a relatively formal relationship, you use <i>Mr</i> (for men) or <i>Ms</i> (for women) followed by the surname.  | Dear Mr Brown, Dear Ms Smith (uk)<br>Dear Mr. Brown, Dear Ms. Smith (us) |
| If the recipient holds a PhD and you're writing a formal message, it may be polite to use the title <i>Dr</i> instead of <i>Mr</i> or <i>Ms</i> .   | Dear Dr Smith (uk)<br>Dear Dr. Smith (us)                                |
| If you're writing to someone you don't know, you can use the most formal salutation.  | Dear Sir or Madam  |
| Whether you write a full stop (period) after the title depends on the variety of English you are using.   | Mr, Ms, Dr (uk)<br>Mr., Ms., Dr. (us)                                    |



Using the recipient's first name without *Dear* or *Hello* can come across as rather blunt.



In a business context, it is recommended that you use *Ms* rather than *Mrs* or *Miss* to address women. The use of *Mrs* for married women and *Miss* for unmarried women is considered rather old-fashioned these days.



Do not use *react* or *reaction* when you mean *reply*: *Thank you for your quick reply.*

### 1.2.2 Layout

Keep your messages as easy to read as possible by skipping a line between paragraphs:

Hello All,

Let me start by wishing you all a very happy New Year! I hope you had a relaxing holiday and that 2014 will be a great year for you.

A New Year also means a new newsletter, and we still have spaces left for articles in the January issue.

If there are any topics you'd like to see featured in an upcoming issue, just let us know.

Please send your proposals for stories to me and to Keith Johnson (Keith's email address is in cc above.)

As always, we try to fill issues on a first-come-first-served basis, so if you want to be sure to get your article published, email us as soon as you can.

Any questions? Feel free to drop me a line. I look forward to reading your material.

Kind regards,

Gillian Watson



Always check your emails for proper spelling and grammar before you click on the Send button. It's always a good idea to use the English spelling checker.



Do not use too many exclamation marks. One or two is fine, but don't overdo it.



Use capital letters properly, but don't use capitals only. It then looks as if you're shouting.

### 1.2.3 Contractions

Other than in formal letters, in email messages it's quite common to contract phrases such as *it is* and *I am*.

| Full form    | Contraction | Full form | Contraction   |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|---|
| it is/it has | it's        | I am      | I'm   |
| cannot       | can't       | you are   | you're (we're)                                      |
| they are     | they're     | he is     | he's (she's)  |
| do not       | don't       | I will    | I'll (you'll, he'll, she'll, it'll, we'll, they'll) |
| does not     | doesn't     | have not  | haven't   |
| is not       | isn't       | has not   | hasn't  |
| are not      | aren't      | I have    | I've (you've, we've)                                |
| will not     | won't       | he has    | he's (she's, it's)                                  |
| shall not    | shan't      |           |   |



Avoid informal contractions such as *gonna* (*going to*), *wanna* (*want to*), *ain't* (*isn't*), *gotta* (*got to*) and *'cos* (*because*). These are regarded as sub-standard in English.

### 1.2.4 Signing off

There are many different ways to sign off an email message in English. Below you find an overview of the ones that are used most. When you reply to a message, you can also choose to use the same sign-off as the one used in the message you received.

| Formal               | Polite            | Informal     |
|----------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Yours sincerely (UK) | Kind regards (UK) | Thanks       |
| Sincerely (US)       | Best regards (US) | Cheers       |
| Cordially (US)       | Yours (US)        | Take care    |
|                      | Best wishes       | All the best |
|                      | Thank you         | Best (US)    |
|                      | Many thanks       |              |
|                      | With thanks       |              |

You then simply add your name. In an informal context, just your first name will do. In a more formal context, use your first name and last name.



Do not sign off with your initials instead of your first name (e.g., A.L. Bakker). This comes across as rather formal and distant.

**1.2.5 Legal disclaimer**

Many companies add a *legal disclaimer* to their email signature. For example:

This message and any attachment are confidential and may be privileged or otherwise protected from disclosure. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender, delete this message and any attachment from your system and do not copy or disclose the contents to any other person. Although this e-mail is believed to be free of any virus or other defect that might affect any computer system in which it is received, it is the responsibility of the recipient to ensure that it is virus-free. [Name of company] accepts no responsibility for any loss or damage arising in any way from its use.

Unless otherwise agreed expressly in writing, this communication is to be treated as confidential and the information in it may not be used or disclosed except for the purposes for which it has been sent. If you have reason to believe that you are not the intended recipient of this communication, please contact the sender immediately.

**1.2.6 Useful phrases**

| What you want to do                    | What you write  |
|--|---|
| <b>Write a quick reply</b>             | <p>Thanks for your message. I'll get back to you as soon as possible.</p> <p>Thank you very much for your message. I'm afraid I don't have time to deal with it at the moment, but will get back to you as soon as possible.</p> <p>Thank you for your message. I will deal with the matter as soon as possible and get back to you with an answer.</p>   |
| <b>Ask for notification of receipt</b> | <p>I would be grateful if you would confirm that you have received this message.</p> <p>Would you please confirm receipt of this message?</p>   |
| <b>Send an out-of-office reply</b>     | <p>Thank you for your message. I shall be out of the office until ... Your message will not be forwarded. If you need an urgent response, please contact ...</p> <p>Thank you for your message. I'm travelling at the moment and will attend to your message as soon as I get back. If you need an urgent response, please call ...</p> <p>I will be out of the office from ... to ... and will not be checking my email. If your query cannot wait until my return, please contact my colleague, John Hudson, at ...</p> |

### 1.3 Formal letters

When it comes to formal letters, there are significant style differences between **us** and **uk** English, the two main varieties used in an international business context. Below, you see two examples of letters, one in **uk** style and one in **us** style. Just read them and see what the differences are all about. (See also AcademicX.nl: Differences between **uk** and **us** English.)

If the company you work for has English as their corporate language, they may well have decided to adopt **uk** or **us** English as their house style, in which case you should, of course, follow that. If no choice has been made, it makes sense for a Dutch company to use **uk** English, as that is more European than **us** English. Otherwise, you could choose the variety that is used by most of your customers. **uk** English is generally followed in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Singapore, India and Sri Lanka. Don't forget to use the correct spell-checker.

#### 1.3.1 Address

The main difference with Dutch letters is that the person you are writing to is always mentioned first in the address.

| <b>us English</b>    | <b>uk English</b>      |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| Mr. Thomas Jones     | Mr Thomas Jones        |
| Advertising Director | Communications Manager |
| Quick Copy, Inc.     | Glassworks Ltd         |
| 6599 State Street    | 65 Apple Court         |
| Portland, ME 04456   | London SW1 2EP         |

#### 1.3.2 Date

As you may have noticed, in English the place name is not written before the date.

The names of the months are always written with a capital letter.

In **uk** English, the normal order is day-month-year:

25 November 2015

In **us** English, the normal order is month-day-year, and a comma is put before the year:

November 25, 2015



POTTER & SONS  
66 Sandy Lane, Manchester MA7 2LJ  
Tel.: 0215-996183 info@potterandsons.co.uk  
www.potterandsons.co.uk

---

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Thomas Jones  
Communications Manager  
Glassworks Ltd  
65 Apple Court  
London SW1 2EP

4 April 2015

Dear Mr Jones

**British-style letters**

This is an example of a letter written in British style. It is a format that is commonly used in the UK. It is also in use in many other English-speaking countries.

Notice that all lines start at the left margin. This uses fewer key strokes than the American style and is therefore preferred in business as being more economical.

The date at the top of this letter has been written in British style. Neither the salutation *Dear Mr Jones* nor the complimentary close *Yours sincerely* is followed by any punctuation. This 'open' style of punctuation is now the norm in Britain. It also accounts for why there is no full stop after *Ltd* or *Mr* above, or after the initial *N* below.

Notice that the subject line is written below the salutation in bold. This is common practice in English letters, both in UK and US English.

The complimentary close is the one used in letters that contain the name of the recipient in the salutation.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

John Potter  
Managing Director

Enc (1)  
cc Ms N Gustafson

POTTER & SONS  
1256 Sherwood Avenue, Beachport, RI 12901  
Telephone: 215-996-4831 Fax: 215-996-3511  
info@pottersons.com  
www.pottersons.com

---

April 4, 2015

Mr. Thomas Jones  
Advertising Director  
Quick Copy, Inc.  
6599 State Street  
Portland, ME 04456

Dear Mr. Jones:

**American-style letters**

This is an example of a letter written in American style. It is a format that is commonly used in the USA. It is also in use (alongside the British style) in Canada.

Notice that the date and the complimentary close start at or slightly to the right of the center. All the paragraphs in the body of the letter, however, start at the left margin.

The date at the top of this letter has been written in American style, and the salutation *Dear Mr. Thomas* is followed by a colon (:), as is usual in formal letters in the United States. The complimentary close *Sincerely yours* used below is also one that is used by many Americans.

Finally, you have probably noticed that *Mr.* and *Inc.* are written with a full stop (or 'period' as the Americans call it). This style of punctuation also accounts for the comma after the complimentary close, and the period after *Ms* and the initial *N* below.

Sincerely yours,

John Potter  
President

1 Enclosure  
cc: Ms. N. Gustafson



*Better at business English* is designed to help you express yourself effectively in today's business environment, in both spoken and written English. Step by step, you will learn the right words and sentences to use in a wide variety of business situations. All the most important topics are covered, such as emails and letters, applying for a job, making and receiving telephone calls, making presentations, chairing and taking part in meetings, as well as conducting negotiations and writing reports.

### Correct business English

The *Beter in... / Better at...* series is unique in its highly accessible approach, with a minimum of theory and a maximum of directly usable guidelines and examples. All examples are clearly and systematically presented in easy-to-navigate tables. This book has been written directly in English by a native

speaker and a near-native speaker, both of whom have extensive experience in higher education and the business world. This means you can be sure that you are learning 'the real thing'.

### Practice

Each chapter ends with a clear, point-for-point summary and exercises. More exercises can be found on the AcademicX.nl portal.

### A really practical tool

*Better at business English* is written for students in the Netherlands in professional higher education (HBO). Thanks to its clear, compact layout, it is ideally suited for both classroom use and independent study. The combination of book and online portal make this product a really practical tool, based on the needs and wishes of teachers and students.



Andy and Astrid Baxter are the owners of Baxter Communications, based in Hilversum. The company provides language and consultancy services to many of the Netherlands' major multinationals, most of whom have adopted English as their corporate language. Andy and Astrid also wrote the widely praised *Handboek Zakelijk Engels*, which has been used for many years in Dutch higher education and business.

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