English support
Business House (PO Box 618)
Jernbanegade 23 B
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News & Tips from English support

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No. 27 – January 2007

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Happy New Year to all our readers!

Dear friends

True to tradition, this issue will set out our vision for 2007. However, looking back over previous January issues, it is clear that the vision for 2005 was only really fulfilled in 2006 and that the vision for 2006 was only partly fulfilled. We do have a large and expanding network of freelance partners, all of whom have signed our agreement on collaboration and confidentiality, which protects our customers. Several of these partners are based abroad. But there is a long way to go.

Vision for 2007

Our network of native-speaker freelance partners is now truly extensive. It covers not only proofreading and translation into English and Danish, but also Chinese, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Norwegian, Rumanian, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Ukrainian. We will continue to expand this network.

However, our network far exceeds our current customer base. This is, of course, better than the other way round, but the difference is wasteful. This year we have delivered translations in Chinese, Danish, German, Norwegian, Russian and Swedish, but we have not yet, for instance, attracted custom for our excellent Hungarian or Spanish colleagues.

So the aim this year is to get our *Language support* website up and running on full blast and make sure that our marketing gets the message out to all those who may have need of our services.

Another prominent feature of 2007 is that teaching will constitute a sizeable chunk of our activity, probably as much as 25%. Amongst other things, *English support* will be delivering courses to the Danish Association for Masters and PhDs (*Dansk Magisterforening*), as well as running the following courses for Human Resources at the Technical University of Denmark:

English for Teaching Staff – 10 sessions
English for Administrative Staff – 10 sessions
English for Technical Staff – 5 sessions
How to Write a Scientific Paper – one-day introduction course
How to Write a Scientific Paper – a 6-session course; participants work on their own papers
Improve your English Pronunciation – a 7-session course for foreign staff.

We will be happy to discuss running similar courses in other education/research institutions, as well as tailor-made, in-house courses for private companies. We also have plans to expand our teaching activities in other directions. So just ask! ☺

Translators, secretaries, teachers … **English support Hotline** *… helps you get it right!*

You ring or write and we drop everything to concentrate on your problem for the time it takes.
Register now (FREE) – per minute charge: 10 kr. – invoicing once a quarter (minimum 120 kr.)

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

If you received this newsletter in the post, you will need to subscribe if you want it again. See web site for how.

More pronunciation problems

Last month we looked at some pronunciation problems that can lead to grammar mistakes. Another is the *-ed* ending in the past of regular verbs. In most cases, this is pronounced **/d/** or **/t/** depending on whether the preceding sound is voiced or unvoiced. Thus in *"organised"*, the ending is pronounced **/d/** [ˈ**ɔːgənaɪzd**], while in *"worked"*, the ending is pronounced **/t/** [**wɜːkt**].

But if the basic form of the verb ends in either a **/d/** or a **/t/** sound, the *-ed* ending must be pronounced **/ɪd/** as in *"loaded"* [ˈ**ləʊdɪd**] or *"looted"* [ˈ**luːtɪd**].

Many non-native speakers are not consistent in pronouncing this **/ɪd/** where it is needed when they speak, which leads to grammatical mistakes in their written English. Here are some examples recently seen:

"I am educate in engineering" (from a CV)
"It would be appreciate if you could" (from a business letter).

Download a useful chart of phonetic symbols for English here:

www.englishsupport.dk/EN/phonemics.htm

Probably and properly

Here are two words often confused, both in pronunciation and in writing. This is an example from a recent job advertisement in Denmark:

"You properly have a degree or acquired knowledge in engineering".

So you could say that pronouncing these words *properly* would *probably* help! ☺ Here it is a matter of distinguishing clearly between the voiced consonants [**b**] in the middle of *"probably"* [ˈ**prɒbəblɪ**] and the unvoiced consonant [**p**] in the middle of *"properly"* [ˈ**prɒpəlɪ**].

Corporation and co-operation

These two words are also often mixed up, probably due to a failure to distinguish them properly in pronunciation. The commonest mistake is to use *"corporation"* where *"co-operation"* is meant:

e.g. *"In close corporation with our partners"*

But I have also seen: *"This company is a large co-operation"*.

Note that *"co-operation"* can also be written *"cooperation"*, but is still a 5-syllable word.

Teachers!

– Do you sometimes have to go through complex equations for your international students?

Speaking maths is an ***English support*** leaflet that can help you find the right expressions!

Available FREE on request – just e-mail: info@englishsupport.dk

Far and distant

These two words have essentially the same meaning, but are used differently. The usual adjective is *"distant"*, while *"far"* is used predicatively, e.g. *"the distant mountains"* and *"Is it far?"* The reverse it not used, so we do not speak of *"far objects like buildings"*, nor do we ask *"Is it distant to the railway station?"*

This is because, in modern English, *"far"* is really an adverb, and when we say *"Is it far?"* we mean *"Is it far to go?"* The adverb *"distantly"*, however, is only used in a metaphorical sense:

e.g. *"He gazed at her distantly"* – which means that his thoughts were not on her.

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From the workshop...

Some or any

This is a tricky area of English for many foreigners. We use *a* or *an* with singular countables, but we use *some* or *any* with uncountables [see *News & Tips* no.4] and plural countables:

e.g. *"**an** apple"* (singular countable)
*"**some** or **any** water"* (uncountable)
*"**some** or **any** apples"* (plural countable)

Would you like some tea?

Oh dear, I haven't got any!

Some: We use *some* where the meaning focuses on the *positive presence* of an amount of an *uncountable* or a number of a *countable*:

e.g. *"I have **some** water"*
*"I have **some** apples"*

When used with an *uncountable*, *some* is an indeterminate but fairly small amount, and it means less than *a lot of*:

e.g. *"I have **no** water"* < *"I have **some** water"* < *"I have **a lot of** water"*

When used with *countables*, it is an indeterminate number, but it means more than *one* or *a couple of*, and less than *lots of*:

e.g. *"I have **a couple of** apples"* < *"I have **some** apples"* < *"I have **lots of** apples"*

Any: We use *any* where the meaning focuses on *the very existence (or not) of an uncountable or a countable*. Here *any* means more than *no* or *none*, but is otherwise quite indefinite:

e.g. *"I haven't got **any** water"* (Not even a little bit)
*"Have you got **any** apples?"* (The answer is *Yes*, if you have even *one*).

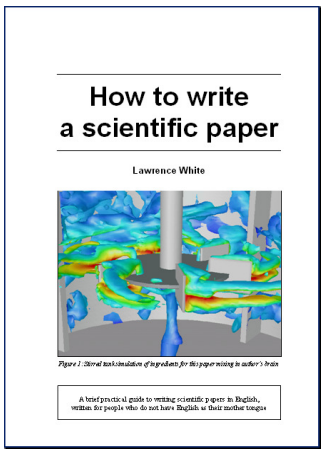
Any can also be used to mean *just one* (out of a *class* of things). When a conjuror says: *"Pick a card, **any** card"*, he means: *"Take **one** card and I don't care which one it is"*.

Note: These differences in meaning between *some* and *any* apply also to *someone* and *anyone*, *something* and *anything*, *somewhere* and *anywhere*, and so on. Here is a typical mistake:

"I'll check it through tonight and let you know if something needs changing".

This is wrong, because the word *"something"* is being used to focus on the very existence or not of even just *one* thing that needs changing, so the sentence should be:

"I'll check it through tonight and let you know if anything needs changing".


How to write
a scientific paper

Lawrence White

A brief practical guide to writing scientific papers in English, written for people who do not have English as their mother tongue

Booklet for science researchers

"How to write a scientific paper", is an excellent guide – even for the experienced author of scientific articles and reports. It is easy to read and gives good advice about the structure of such papers, the writing process, and a number of the many linguistic traps that authors who do not have English as their mother tongue tend to fall into.

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD
Danish Decommissioning

Published by *English support*. Order it now from your local bookshop or direct from *www.englishsupport.dk*

Please turn over!

Questions & Answers

If you received this newsletter in the post, you will need to subscribe if you want it again. See web site for how.

Which, who and that

I've been told that to use "that" as in "the house that Jack built" isn't correct and one must use "which". Can you comment on this in a future newsletter? Sometimes I use both in the same sentence to avoid repeating "which" but am not sure if I am making a "mistake".

The people who have told you that *"that"* should not be used in phrases like *"the house that Jack built"* simply don't know what they're talking about. But you do have to distinguish between two kinds of relative clauses: *identifying* and *parenthetical*. [See also *News & Tips* Nos. 8 and 11]. There are three "rules" to remember:

Rule no. 1: You cannot use "that" in *parenthetical* relative clauses, i.e. relative clauses that give *extra* information (as it were, in parentheses). These clauses have a comma before and after:

e.g. *"Please contact my secretary, **who** can be reached by e-mail."*
*"Please read this manual, **which** will tell you how to do it."*

Rule no. 2: In *identifying* relative clauses (as in *"the house that Jack built"*), i.e. relative clauses that *identify* the person or thing they refer to, you can always use "that", and there is no comma before or after the relative clause:

e.g. *"The secretary **that** (or **who**) answered the phone said…"*
*"The table **that** (or **which**) we normally use has gone."*

Rule no. 3: You cannot use "which" (though you can use "who") in identifying relative clauses that follow superlatives or any of the following words: *all, few, little, much, none, only, way* and *any(thing), every(thing), no(thing)* or *some(thing)*. In these cases you must use "that":

e.g. *"It's the **best** film **that**'s ever been made about madness"*
*"Is this **all that** is left?"* [Contrast: *"Are these **all** (the people) **who** are left?"*]
*"I hope the **little** (**that**) I've been able to do has been of some use"*
*"The **only** thing **that** matters is to find our way home"*
*"I went home the same **way** (**that**) I came"*
*"Have you got **anything that** belongs to me?"*

They for he or she

I regularly translate international adoption files and the child to be adopted may usually be of either gender. Sometimes I end up with a sentence like "Elena (the applicants' biological daughter) is looking forward to the arrival of her little brother or sister. She wants to share all her toys with him or her and teach him or her all that she knows". To avoid the "him or her" (also "his or her") is it correct to put "them"? Also, is it correct to use "themself" to refer to the child instead of "himself or herself"?

The word *"themself"* is definitely *not* correct, but using *"they"* for *"he or she"*, *"them"* for *"him or her"*, *"their"* for *"his or her"* and *"themselves"* for *"himself or herself"* is now in general use in the spoken word. It is also more and more acceptable in (particularly more informal) writing, but where possible this usage should probably be avoided in very formal texts. In your example for instance, you could have used a phrase like *"the new baby"* or *"her new playmate"*.

More next month!

Best wishes

Lawrence White
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No. 28 – February 2007

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Dear friends

Two years ago, the *English support* website went (a little bit) multilingual with pages in Danish and Hungarian (see *News & Tips* No.4). Within a year, we also had French and German pages and were able to offer native-speaker support in Russian, Serbo-Croat, Spanish and Swedish (see *News & Tips* No.15). Today, we can offer many more, though our website is still only in five languages – a situation we intend to rectify as soon as humanly possible.

Did you know?

English support can offer **native-speaker** help with not only *English*, but also *Chinese*, *Czech*, *Danish*, *Dutch*, *Finnish*, *French*, *German*, *Hungarian*, *Icelandic*, *Italian*, *Japanese*, *Norwegian*, *Polish*, *Portuguese*, *Rumanian*, *Russian*, *Serbo-Croat*, *Spanish*, *Swedish*, *Turkish* and *Ukrainian*.

Translators!

Do you translate into a language not your own? You are very well-educated and qualified as a translator, yet know perfectly well that your "feel" for the language cannot match that of a native speaker. There is no shame in that. *No one speaks (or writes) a foreign language like a native!*

So what can you do? Well, *English support* exists to help you (and a lot of other people)! Many of you already send translations to us. We can ensure that your translation looks as though it was written by a native-speaker – because it will be thoroughly checked by a native speaker, who will also give you suggestions for improvements. The final text will then sound "right" to the native-speaker audience it is aimed at – instead of sounding "foreign".

Of course, this service costs money, though not as much as you might think! And the better your work, the less it costs. On the other hand, if your work does need quite a few changes, you might consider *whether you would really have wanted to send it to your customer in that condition?*

Whichever way you look at it, you can only gain by using a professional native-speaker service like ours. Your customers will be glad, and you will get more of them. You may have to charge them a little more, but most will willingly pay a little more to get a better final result.

After all, they would look pretty silly down the pub boasting that they had got the *cheapest* translation in town! The thing that really matters with a translation is whether it is any *good*.

And that's where we come in – for English, but also many other languages.

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From the workshop...

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Last month, I was out teaching economists. The focus was on how to write papers that would be published – including, of course, getting the grammar right. A number of language problems came to the surface. Here is a little selection that will hopefully be of general interest.

Economic and economical

Most dictionaries treat these two as variants, but the most common usage in modern English is to use *economic* as the adjective from *economics*, while *economical* is used to mean *using the minimum required*, *thrifty*, *frugal*, etc. So my students last month wrote *economic* texts, but not necessarily *economical* texts. ☺

Statistics

This is a singular (uncountable) noun, exactly like many other words that end in *–ics*: economics, politics, physics, athletics, gymnastics, aerobics, etc. But unlike all these, *statistics* can also be the plural of a singular countable form, *statistic*. Another word with the same feature is *lyrics*.

Now there is obviously a connection (and even overlap) in meaning between the plural countable noun *statistics* and the uncountable noun *statistics*, but there is also a clear difference. If a statistician says, "*Statistics **are** fun*", he or she is thinking of the individual (countable) statistics, while if he or she says, "*Statistics **is** fun*", the focus is on the fascination of the subject as a whole.

So in English, you can have one statistic, or two statistics, but you cannot have one politic.

Countables and uncountables

This brings us naturally to the way English has a *lot* of words that can be used as both countables and uncountables. The nearest countable to *politics* is *policy*. We can say: "*All governments have **a policy** on immigration, and some have several **policies** in conflict with each other*". But the word *policy* can also be used as an uncountable: "*Making **policy** is a most important task*".

This is a very common feature of English. Words like "analysis", "technology", "expense", "tax", "income", "profit", and many others can be used both as uncountables and as countables. We use the uncountable form when we refer to the word in a general sense:

> *"He called for better empirical **analysis** of the link between openness and growth"*
> *"The **cost** of living is rising sharply in these countries"*.

Whereas when we focus on individual examples, we use these nouns as countables:

> *"We needed to make a lot of different **analyses** before we could see the pattern"*
> *"**Costs** like housing, food, travel and clothing are rising sharply in these countries"*.

Data is, data are

The contrasting usages of "*data is*" and "*data are*" (see also *News & Tips* No.13) illustrate the same point. The everyday "*data is*" uses *data* in a general, uncountable sense, like *information*.

Content and contents

These two are really another example of the same thing, except that there is no singular form for *contents*, so it is probably best thought of as a plural uncountable, like *clothes* and *the police*. But the difference between *content* and *contents* is the difference between the general abstraction on the one hand and individual (countable) items on the other. So "*the content of a book*" refers to its general theme or subject or idea, whereas the "*Contents*" refers to the list of individual chapters.

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From the workshop...

Adverbs

Another area that causes a lot of problems in academic papers (and elsewhere) is how adverbs are used. While adjectives modify nouns, adverbs must be used to modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs:

e.g. *"Share prices rose **quickly**"* (adverb modifying a verb)
*"**Economically** sound"* (adverb modifying an adjective)
*"Share prices rose **extraordinarily** quickly"* (adverb modifying an adverb)

People forget to use an adverbial form when modifying an adjective (or another adverb), and write things like *"**environmental** friendly"* (which is incorrect), instead of *"**environmentally** friendly"*.

Hyphens

Economic papers, like many other academic texts, contain a lot of words that need hyphenating. Often this is just a matter of looking the word up in the dictionary. A word like "*proactive*", for instance, is not hyphenated, whereas "*pro-American*" is. Dictionaries can vary, and US English uses less hyphenation than British English, but the best advice is to look the word up. If a word with a prefix is not listed without a hyphen, you almost certainly need one.

Compound words

However, when it is not a case of a prefix plus a word, there are some clear rules:

1. *Adjectives* that are made up of more than one word should be hyphenated:
   e.g. *A **five-pound** note, **large-scale** production, **long-term** policy, **market-driven** sales*
2. *Nouns* made partly from verbs should also be hyphenated:
   e.g. *Go to **check-in**, **decision-making**, **trade-off**, **willingness-to-pay**, **insider-trading***

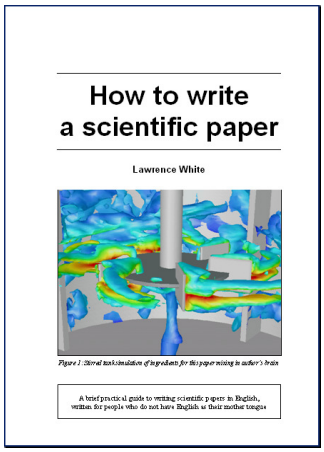
Compound concepts (noun + noun)

Since English very often uses nouns as adjectives, it is *not* necessary to hyphenate when a concept consists of noun + noun:

e.g. *a **market economy**, **farm animals**, **property prices**, **capital costs**, **tax relief***

But when such compound concepts are themselves used as adjectives, they become compound adjectives (rule 1 above) and a hyphen is necessary:

e.g. ***market-economy** prices, **farm-animal** feed, **property-price** war,* etc.



Booklet for science researchers

"How to write a scientific paper", is an excellent guide – even for the experienced author of scientific articles and reports. It is easy to read and gives good advice about the structure of such papers, the writing process, and a number of the many linguistic traps that authors who do not have English as their mother tongue tend to fall into.

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD
Danish Decommissioning

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Questions & Answers

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A question on that little word "the" …

I find it really difficult to work out when to use "the" in English and when to leave it out. Can you tell me what the rules are?

The little word *"the"* is known as "the *definite* article". In English, we use it when we refer to a particular (or definite) thing, as opposed to the thing in general. Here is the basic contrast:

The life of Brian	***Life is wonderful***

In the first, the reference is to a particular or definite life: *Brian*'s life. In the second, the reference is to life in general – not any particular life, but all life. Most European languages would also use the definite article in the second case, but English is different on this point.

So economists might say, *"Economics is interesting"*. On the other hand, if their interest is more specific, they might say, *"The economics of environmental protection is interesting"*.

Here are some particular cases of this general rule which should throw further light on the subject:

1. We use "the" when we are talking about something or someone in particular and we expect our conversation partner to know which one(s) or who we mean:
   e.g. *I bought a radio and a CD-play, but **the** CD-player didn't work*
   *Please close **the** door.*
2. We use "the" in front of singular things of which there is only one:
   e.g. ***the** earth, **the** sky, **the** sun, **the** universe, etc.*
3. Similarly, we use "the" in front of superlatives, because there is only one:
   e.g. ***the** best book that's ever been written about madness*
   ***the** most beautiful woman in the world.*
4. We also use "the" with countable nouns in the *singular* if we make a *general* statement about all things of a particular type:
   e.g. ***The** telephone makes the world a smaller place.*
   Contrast: *Telephones make the world a smaller place* [no "the"].
5. Similarly, we use "the" with some adjectives to refer to all people of a particular type:
   e.g. ***the** rich, **the** old, **the** unemployed, **the** hungry, etc.*
   Contrast: *rich people, old people, unemployed people, hungry people* [no "the"].

Teachers!

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No. 29 – March 2007

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Dear friends

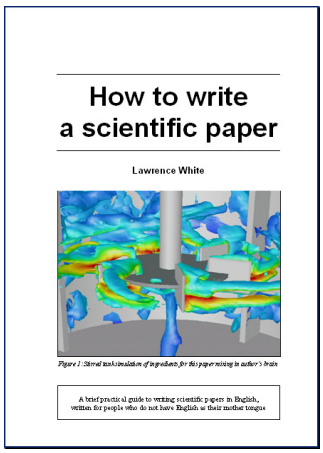
Just like last year at this time, I am happy to report that turnover for the first quarter this year is already well up on the previous quarter. Not only that but future orders look exceptionally good, and next quarter is set to break all records. The solid and steady growth predicted last year looks like continuing all this year too. We are still not talking about wealth and riches, of course, but a good secure income and a firm foundation of customer satisfaction on which to build.

Help for universities

Most Danish academics read and understand English well, but many experience difficulties when it comes to writing up the results of their research for the English-language journals. So the Civil Engineering Department (BYG) at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) has entered into an agreement with *English support* which allows all their research staff to have their papers proofread and checked for language mistakes *before* they are sent to the journals.

English is also increasingly used in teaching. In the forefront of globalisation, universities have increasing numbers of foreign students and staff which means *everybody* has to communicate more and more in English – not only teaching staff, but also administrative and technical staff. To meet this challenge, the Human Resources Department at DTU has asked *English support* to run courses designed for teaching staff, for administrative staff, and for technical staff.

English support is also running courses in *How to write a scientific paper* at DTU, individual courses at other education/research institutions, and courses in scientific and academic writing for the Danish Association for Masters and PhDs (*Dansk Magisterforening*).



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For an independent review (in Danish), see *Kommunikation og Sprog*, under *Boganmeldelser*.

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

If you received this newsletter in the post, you will need to subscribe if you want it again. See web site for how.

Recently I have been doing some one-to-one teaching in pronunciation. On each occasion, my students have been Chinese researchers at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU). Their written English is on a par with their Danish colleagues, but they were experiencing difficulty in making themselves understood when presenting their ideas in the teaching situation or indeed in ordinary conversation, which can be very isolating. My task was to help them to articulate their English in a way closer to standard pronunciation. Foreign accents in a language not your own make communication difficult and Danes are simply unused to hearing English spoken with Chinese or Japanese linguistic interference. Here are some tips for others in the same situation.

Word and sentence stress

Stress is very important in English, but since all the European languages use stressed and unstressed syllables, it is easy to underestimate the difficulty experienced by Chinese and Japanese speakers in dealing with this phenomenon. In their languages, and those of much of Asia and Africa, tone and pitch play a similar phonemic role. The fact that Chinese and Japanese are spoken more evenly and without stress tends to affect the English of native speakers of these languages. *Your native tongue trips you up!*

Download a useful chart of phonetic symbols for English here:

www.englishsupport.dk/EN/phonemics.htm

Vowels and vowel length

English has 12 different vowel sounds and 8 diphthongs. (Danish has even more vowels). But many other languages, including Chinese and Japanese make do with far fewer. This means that distinguishing between words like *cat* and *cut* can be a problem. And vowels can be long or short, e.g. *green* vs. *grin*. The long vowels in particular often change into (different) short vowels when unstressed, as in the sequence: *photograph – photography – photographic*, in which the stress is on the first, second and third syllable respectively [**ˈfəʊtəɡrɑːf – fəˈtɒɡrɑːfə – fəʊtəˈɡræfɪk**].

Chinese and Japanese speakers of English experience a lot of trouble with the many vowels, their different lengths, and the way they change according to where the stress is. And the fact that the *speed with which words are spoken* also varies in English (to fit a more or less regular beat on the stressed syllables in a sentence) increases their difficulties. In a sentence like "*A **black**bird is a **black bird***", the stress falls on the three syllables in bold and the unstressed words in between are said rather quickly, while the last two words are said slowly. The effect is that the stress beat is regular.

Many Chinese speakers have had really excellent teachers of English as far as grammar and spelling are concerned, but the majority of teachers in China do not pronounce *English very well.*

Consonants and consonant clusters

There are also problems with consonants. The endings of words are very important in English and a lot of words end in consonants or consonant clusters that are simply unknown in Chinese and Japanese. Words ending in **/l/** and combinations (like *mill*, *walls*, *milk* and *walked*) need a lot of practice. Chinese speakers tend to simply leave them out.

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From the workshop...

Get and have

Now here is a pair of verbs that often get mixed up. This is not surprising, because their meanings do overlap a little and the usage is rather complex.

First the overlap: *I had my trousers cleaned = I got my trousers cleaned*. The latter is colloquial and informal, but they both mean that I asked somebody else to clean them and they did so.

Similarly, the sentence, *John had Mary do some typing = John got Mary to do some typing*. The latter is more common nowadays, but again both mean that John asked Mary to do some typing for him and she did so.

The verb *to get* has many meanings and uses, usually involving a *change* of state, location or possession. E.g. it can mean *to become*, or *to reach*, or *to receive*:

"*He got angry*" – "*She got as far as the traffic lights*" – "*They got a lot of presents*"

However, it can also "strengthen" the verb *to have*. Instead of saying "*He has a gun*" (meaning he possesses a gun), we normally say "*He has **got** a gun*" or "*He's **got** a gun*". And instead of saying "*You have to do something about it*", we often say "*You have **got** to do something about it*".

But now comes the tricky bit. This usage is relatively new and it used to be only colloquial. And it can still only be used in the present tense. In the past tense, we must say: "*He **had** a gun*" and "*You **had** to do something about it*". Likewise, in the future forms, we must say: "*He **will have** a gun*" and "*You **will have** to do something about it*".

Got and gotten

In British English, the past participle of *to get* is always *got*: "*He has got angry*" or "*He has got a gun*". In US English there are two forms: *gotten* and *got*. The first is used in all the usual uses of the verb *to get*, while the latter is used in the special "strengthening" sense discussed in the previous two paragraphs.

So in US English, the two sentences above would be "*He has gotten angry*" and "*He has got a gun*". In US English, "*He has gotten a gun*", would mean "*He has received or got hold of a gun*", not just that he *has* one.

Get and be

There is another special use of the verb *to get* where it replaces the verb *to be*, with passive forms as in "*I'm getting married in the morning*". Here the focus is on the change of state (matrimony) instead of the passive (being married by the priest), so using *get* has now become natural.

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Please turn over!

Questions & Answers

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Plurals of abbreviations and subjunctives

I very much enjoy reading your News & Tips. Your style reminds me of W.H. Ballin (author of Perfect Your English).

I noticed that in No. 2 you write CV's (and not CVs) and in no. 13 (your letter of 17 October 2005): If I was you, I'd stop pretending ...

You are quite right about No.2: *CV's* should be *CVs* nowadays. This is a relatively recent shift in general practice with respect to plural abbreviations, though I confess to being a little out of date (say, 15 years) at the time. ☺

Someone else pointed out the "*If I was you*" in no.13, and you will find my comment on that in No.14, where I maintain the subjunctive is on its way out in informal writing.

And thanks for the compliment. W.H. Ballin. Oh my!

Commas before *and* in lists

When you make a list, like "apples, oranges, and bananas", do you put a comma in front of and?

Well, it's not wrong to do so, and in US English it is quite usual. In British English, we always put a comma in if the things listed consist of several words, but not usually if they are single words, as in your example.

So most British English speakers would write "*apples, oranges and bananas*", while in a sentence like "*I spent yesterday playing golf, drinking beer, and talking about the meaning of life*", we will have a comma before "*and*" because there is a definite pause there. See *News & Tips* No.8.

The ubiquitous *within*

I'd like to suggest two other matters for you to address in a future number of News & Tips:

1. *Competency vs. competence (as in competence area)*
2. *The Danish over-usage of within (e.g. you'll be responsible for all activities within change management)*

One doesn't seem to find a job advert in English [in Denmark] without the word within being used 19 times!

I wrote about the Danish overuse of "*within*" in *News & Tips* No.18, and I agree with the reader entirely. The words "*competence*" and "*competency*" got a mention in *News & Tips* No.1.

Competency is an abstraction from *competence*, and *competence* generally just means having sufficient skill or ability to do something. In English, describing someone as being *competent* is positive, but not strongly so, whereas the Danish cognate implies something more like being *well-qualified* or even *expert* in doing something. The English word *competence* is sometimes used in this more technical sense of *qualification*, but this is not its ordinary meaning.

More tips next month!

Best wishes

Lawrence White
LW@englishsupport.dk

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News & Tips from English support

No. 30 – April 2007

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Dear friends

Nowadays, when I come with just a two-pager, I almost feel I have to have a good excuse. Well, that's certainly not a problem this month! The work just keeps pouring in and the days can't get any longer. So, you may hear some new voices on the phone when you ring in, because I'm also going to be out of the office teaching quite a bit in April and May. This all means there's a lot to be done and little time to do it. But next month's issue will definitely be four pages. ☺

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Our network is still growing!

Although the workload is expanding fast, so is the *English support* network of native-speaker collaborating partners. This means that there has been no problem finding people with the skills to tackle the work, and we are hardly ever forced to say *No* to a customer.

But we do say *No* occasionally. People promoting religion, nationalism, racism, sexism or trying to sell dubious or non-existent products are always politely declined and advised to stop doing so. Otherwise the range is enormous, from business letters to PhD theses, from company brochures to company accounts, from websites to whole books, from job advertisements to CVs.

A lot of the work is academic, but again variety is the spice of life: we have tackled papers on ethics, films, logistics, medicine, architecture, solar energy, bioethanol production, steel corrosion in concrete, facilities management, the environmental impact of the Øresund Bridge, water management, airport maintenance in Greenland, laboratory safety, forest preservation, amino acid uptake in plants, the environmentally friendly maintenance of golf courses, and much more.

But as we continue to expand, we will need still more native speakers of English (and other languages). So if *you* know people who might be able to help, please ask them to get in touch!

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Please note this date in your diary …

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See you there!

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

If you received this newsletter in the post, you will need to subscribe if you want it again. See web site for how.

Diverge and divert

These two verbs have very little overlap in meaning, yet are often confused. This is probably due to the similarity in pronunciation apart from the last consonant. Speakers of languages in which the final consonants are often not fully pronounced seem particularly prone to the confusion.

To *divert* is to *turn something in another direction*. Sometimes the meaning is literal as in "*diverting the flow of traffic*", which means changing its direction, but often the meaning is metaphorical, as in *"diverting attention"*, which means to distract someone. By extension there is also a now slightly old-fashioned usage meaning to *entertain* or *amuse* as in *"diverting someone"*. Note that all these meanings are transitive (you divert *something* or *someone*, even in sentences where this object is not actually mentioned) and they can all be contained in the noun *diversion*.

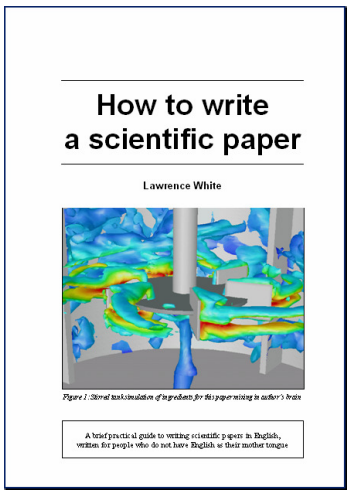
To *diverge* is to *go in another direction from something else*. Here the meaning is intransitive (the verb has no object). It can be literal, as *"the flow of traffic diverged into two streams"*, but again it is often metaphorical, as in "behaviour that diverges from the norm", which means it is *different*, *at variance*, even *deviant*, but without the negative connotations of the latter.

The time being

A favourite expression in Scandinavian English is *"for the time being"*. Sometimes the wrong preposition is used, and people write things like *"at the time being"* and *"in the time being"*. The meaning usually intended is best captured by the very common expression *"at the moment"*.

"At the moment" often indicates the temporary (time-limited) nature of an action, as in *"the sun is shining a lot at the moment"*. Here the speaker is suggesting that it is just a temporary state of affairs, not the usual situation. Note how *"at the moment"* does not necessarily include the meaning of *"at this moment"* or *"right now"*, although the focus is on a temporary period of time *around about now*.

"For the time being", however, is rather different. It always does include *right now* (and maybe some time before now, too), but its focus is on a temporary period of time *stretching into the future*. E.g. *"A leaf has fallen on the line somewhere near Odense, so all InterCity train services between Copenhagen and Århus have been suspended for the time being"* – i.e. until the problem has been fixed in what is hopefully the relatively near future.



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The last years

This is another favourite. Whenever the *"last years"* may be, they will presumably conclude with the "last days" and finally "the End", which some people always seem to think is "nigh" (an old-fashioned word for *near*).

What people normally mean is *"recent years"*. Note that if you specify the number of years, etc. there is no problem. So while you can say *"over the last three years"*, you must say *"in recent years"* if you want to avoid sounding weirdly eschatological (speaking of "the End").

More next month!

Best wishes
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News & Tips from English support

No. 31 – May 2007

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Dear friends

What an amazing month! This newsletter has been delayed due to the sheer pressure of work. We are only half way through the second quarter, and already the turnover from work done and work ordered for this quarter is up more than 41% on last quarter's record figure. More and more people are discovering *English support* (also for other languages). And almost every day we get new readers for this newsletter, which is also very encouraging.

It's a funny old world, isn't it!

At this time last year, I wrote an **open letter** to *Dansk Translatørforbund* (which translates its name as the *Danish Association of State-Authorised Translators and Interpreters*), suggesting they change this English version of their name, so that it doesn't sound as if the notorious *Stasi* is still alive and well and living in Copenhagen! DT had started renewing its website, but had not yet got to the English pages, so I thought it might be a good time to make the change. In June I also asked for the right of reply to leading DT member Dee Shields' scurrilous attack on *English support* in DT's magazine (MDT*nyt*) for daring to hold views at variance with her own on this matter.

There was a brief exchange of views with Mette Aarslew, DT's leader at the time (see *News & Tips* nos.19–21), but, since then, nothing – no change, no apology, no retraction, and no right of reply.

As one reader complained at the time:

I am "fed up" with hearing about Dansk Translatørforbund. Most "normal" Danes know that there is no such word as "state-authorised"! It is, and will always be, a "danglish" word ...

The really odd thing, though, is that *the DT web site is still waiting for the English translation*. It seems that, while native-speaker Dee Shields could find time to write an 11,000-word attack on my person and my company (based on zero knowledge of either), in the last 12 months she has not had time to translate the less than 3000 words on her own organisation's website into English.

I guess it's a matter of priorities. But it makes you think, doesn't it! ☺

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From the workshop...

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Re: Business letters

I thought we might take a brief look at business letters this week. There are a lot of useful phrases and hints on layout and style in the *English support* sheet, *How to write a business letter*, which you can download from the website at http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/teaching.htm. But my attention has recently been drawn to a number of other points that are worth making.

The first is that little word *"Re"*. Most English-speakers consider using *"Re"* a little stiff and rather old-fashioned, but Microsoft has given it a new lease of life in the subject headings in e-mails. Actually, you do not need to put anything at all in front of subject headings in letters.

But it seems that whole generations of bilingual secretaries and other highly qualified office staff in Denmark have been taught (*inter alia* at the Copenhagen Business School, no less!) that *"re"* is short for *"regarding"*. It is not. *"Re"* is a Latin word meaning *"In the matter of"*.

The misinformation has led to an awful lot of people writing letter subject headings starting with *"Regarding"* or that other favourite, *"Concerning"*, either of which is definitely not normal here.

In fact, even in the text of the letter, these two can sound odd. As noted in *News & Tips* No. 20, using them a lot, when you could just as well have written "*about*", sounds foreign. And where you might want to use them to introduce a new topic, there is another rather more common English expression: *with regard to*.

Hereby, herewith, hereafter, etc.

A great many non-native speakers use these words a lot in business letters and e-mails. Partly this is a reflection of the fact that in most languages the difference between the written word and the spoken word is much greater than in English. That is why I always recommend that you translate what you would *write* in your own language into what you might *say* to someone in your own language, before translating it into English. In fact, this rule applies just as much to scientific papers and other formal reports as it does to business letters.

Like that other favourite, *"To whom it may concern"* (see *News & Tips* No. 3), words like *hereby*, *herewith* and *hereafter* should really only be used in that most formal of formal styles beloved of the legal profession – or at least some parts of it! Not to mention the fact that *hereafter* is also a noun for where you may or may not go after you are *dead* – so using it can lead to some really strange-looking sentences. An example might be: *"In the hereafter, you will find a description of the cottage"*. In this sentence, using *"In the following …"* would avoid unnecessary confusion!

You and you and You

One last point on business letters: it is surprising how often I see "you" written with a capital letter in business letters in the middle of a sentence. This is a carry-over from the German *De* (also found in some other languages including Danish), which is a formal/polite way of addressing someone. It does not exist in English. The word "you" is only ever written with a capital letter at the start of a sentence and (sometimes) in headings or titles of books, etc.

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From the workshop...

Scientific writing

I have been doing quite a bit of teaching on how to write scientific papers recently, and I also proofread a lot of scientific texts in the course of my work. It seems to me that there are two things which could make a real improvement to the English in a great many scientific papers: using the right tense and not using the passive forms of the verb so much.

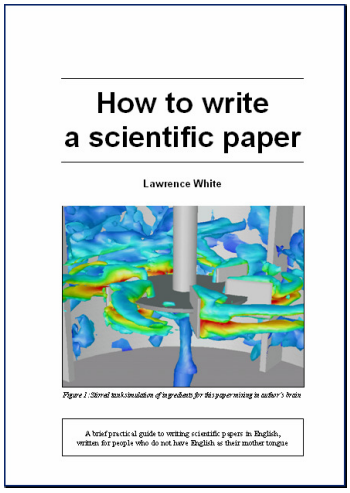
Passive forms

It is not really surprising that Danish writers of English tend to use the passive forms of the verb too much. This is because the passive forms are used a lot in written Danish. But written English prefers active forms, and uses passive forms little more than in spoken English.

When it comes to scientific writing, there appears to be even more pressure to use passive forms. A great many PhD students and other researchers seem to have been told that they *must on no account* use "I" or "we" in a scientific paper, *because that would suggest a lack of objectivity*.

Now the idea that scientific objectivity might be rooted in grammar is so silly that you only have to put it into words to see how daft it is.

Scientific objectivity is based on the *repeatability* of your work, and using a lot of passive forms when describing your work can only have a *negative* impact on the ability of others to understand, repeat and check it. The fact is that passive forms make your language more complex, less clear, and more difficult to understand.



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The tense of the verb

The other thing that can make it difficult to work out *who did what when* is the habit of using the wrong tense. One example is the use of the present perfect when talking about the past. The rule in English is that you should use the *past tense* to talk about the *past*. In a scientific paper, this means that you should use the past tense to talk about what you did and the results you got. If you write *"An experiment has been carried out to demonstrate X"*, you risk your readers thinking that this information is about what other people have done, not what you did.

The (simple) present tense should be used for general-fact (timeless) statements. For instance, you use the present tense for talking about what your paper's diagrams, graphs, tables, etc. *show*, and you can also use it for what is stated in published work: *"X says that …"*. Descriptions of equipment or materials or software used are also general-fact statements. But when talking about what you specifically *did* with them, or *found out*, you should use the past tense.

The present perfect (see also *News & Tips* No. 17) is best thought of as a present tense. Its focus is on explaining the present. In a scientific paper, it might be used to say something like, *"So far as we are aware, no experiments using this technique have been done before"*, or *"Until now, it has always been thought …"*.

---

*"**How to write a scientific paper** is an excellent guide – even for the experienced author of scientific articles and reports. It is easy to read and gives good advice about the structure of such papers, the writing process, and a number of the many linguistic traps that authors who do not have English as their mother tongue tend to fall into."*

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD
Danish Decommissioning

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Questions & Answers

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Technical words and phases

I have a customer who often has a need for technical words and expressions in English that you can't find in the dictionaries on the Internet.

*What do **you** do when you need technical words and expressions in English? Do you look in an English technical dictionary? And is it good enough and up-to-date?*

This is a really excellent question and I am sure there are lots of good answers.

My own approach is based on the fact that "technical English" is not one kind of English. People working even in adjacent fields sometimes find it difficult to understand each other's usage. This means that there are limits to the usefulness of all but the most specialised technical dictionaries.

But for Danish readers, there is one resource which deserves to be more widely known and used, and that is Gyldendal's Danish-English Industrial Dictionary (*Industriordbog*), which is not just concerned with heavy industry, as the name might seem to imply, but many different kinds of processes associated with production.

If I can't find what I am looking for there, I usually start looking on the Internet – not specifically in the dictionaries, though of course you may get useful hints there, but by doing searches for the Danish words or phrases in a similar context, where there is an English version too.

Or if I am proofreading a text in English, I might see if the same word or expression is used elsewhere in a similar way in a similar context.

Used carefully and sensibly, the Internet is a fantastic tool for people working with language.

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News & Tips from English support

No. 32 – June 2007

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Dear friends

Well, it had to happen. For the first time in our 3½-year history we have had to turn away work because of sheer lack of capacity! Normally, the rather extensive *English support* network of freelancers is more than enough to tackle any job, but since the last issue, turnover from work done and work ordered for this quarter has risen from 41% to more than 90% up on last quarter's record! So with the summer holidays coming up, we need more resources.

How you can help …

English support has a mission: that of providing language services *second to none*. [We don't mind at all if others are just as good, but we draw the line at anyone providing *better* proofreading, translation or teaching than we do.☺] So naturally we do not like turning away work.

This means we need **more** freelance assistance – *especially from native speakers of English*. There is increasing demand for other languages too, but what is most difficult is finding enough people with the time and ability to make really good translations into English.

English support needs YOU!

This month we had to turn down a long, semi-technical job with short deadlines, because it was simply not possible to assemble a large enough team of people for that particular job. Of course, this is partly due to the holiday season, but even so, this is a situation we do not like to be in.

So if YOU know anyone (who knows anyone, etc.) who is a native speaker of English, has a good command of Danish (and/or other languages), and would like to have some freelance translation work, *please ask them to get in touch!* They can write to me at LW@englishsupport.dk. Thanks!

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Erratum

There was a very silly mistake in last month's issue, and I didn't spot it until it was too late.

As a reader at *Novo Nordisk* put it:
You seem to have mixed up 'De' and 'Sie'. ;-)

Yes, under the heading **You and you and You**, I attributed the common tendency to write "you" with a capital letter in the middle of a sentence to a carry-over from the German *De*. I hope all my German friends will forgive me! I meant, of course, the German ***Sie***, of which *De* is the *Danish* equivalent.

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

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Politics and policies

Politics and *policy* have a common root in the Greek work *polis*. So, for that matter, does the word *police*. But in modern English they all are quite separate.

Politics is one of a group of uncountables ending in *–ics*. Other examples are *aerobics*, *athletics*, *economics*, *logistics*, *mathematics*, *physics*, etc. There are all singular. So are *ethics* and *statistics* when considered as subjects. But they are also plural forms for *ethic* and *statistic* [cf. *No. 28*].

No such complexities accompany the word *policies*. It is simply the plural form for the countable noun, *policy*. Like many other countables in English, *policy* can also be used as an uncountable. It is possible to talk about *the formation of policy* and, of course, *foreign policy*, without implying that the parties or countries concerned have only *one* policy.

So when do we say *politics* and when do we say *policy*? Well, *politics* is the general art of state or government power (including local government). It is true that word is also used (ironically) in other connections, e.g. *office politics*, but this is exceptional. *Policy*, on the other hand, can be used in almost any connection (e.g. *honesty is the best policy*, *he had a policy of never borrowing from his friends*) as well as in politics (e.g. *the new party has a policy on taxation*).

Economics and financial matters

The noun *economics* refers to the subject in general and the *economy* almost always refers to the *national* or *international economy* – the stuff of *politics*! Companies and individuals do not have *economies* – they have *financial situations*. But the plural word, *economies*, is also used for *cuts* and *savings* – e.g. *economies of scale* – and in this sense it can be used in any context.

Economical and economic [cf. *No. 28*]

The adjective *economical* is usually connected with this latter sense of the word *economies*. So being *economical* means being *thrifty* or *careful with consumption*, while being *economical with the truth* means keeping some of it back! If we are talking about *economics*, or the *economy* in the other meaning of the word, the adjective is *economic* – e.g. *economic laws* or *economic policy*.

Perform: a question of overuse

Do you *perform* measurements, analyses, or experiments? This verb gets used heavily in a lot of scientific and other technical writing. In normal (everyday) English, the word *perform* is more commonly used as an *intransitive* verb (no object) as in *"The actors (or the car) performed well"*, though a transitive form is also possible as in *"The actors performed **the play** well"* or in the expression *"to perform **a service**"*.

So here are some useful alternatives: *make measurements*, *carry out analyses*, and *do experiments*.

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From the workshop...

Participate and participation

Here some other words that get overused – especially in the field of education. People *participate* in meetings and courses and conferences, where they are known as *participants*, and later they write up the results of their *participation*. And there is nothing wrong with it, except that English has a lot of other expressions that are more down-to-earth and which we tend to use more often.

First of all, there is the phrasal verb *to take part in*. Substituting this for *to participate* in most cases will immediately help. The 3000 or so phrasal verbs in English are a much under-used resource and learning to use them would vastly improve the quality of a lot of non-native-speaker English. And *those taking part* is much more natural English than *the participants*.

But you can also *go to* meetings, *go on* courses, and *attend* or *speak at* conferences.

Price and prize

There is no **/z/** sound in Danish, so there is a strong tendency for Danes to pronounce both these words with an **/s/** sound. This leads to confusion between them on countless websites, resulting in strange things like offers of prizes as low as 10 kr!

Made and maid

Pronunciation is not the problem here. These two are pronounced exactly the same. But despite the fact that "Made in China" and "Made in France", etc. can be seen printed or stamped on large numbers of the products we buy, many non-native speakers still have problems with the irregular verb *to make*. And the spelling checker, of course, finds no fault with "Maid in France".

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Ashamed and shameful

These two words are often confused, although the difference in meaning is sharp and clear. The word *ashamed* is used to describe *how a person might feel*, while *shameful* is used to describe *acts that a person ought to feel ashamed of*. Like beauty, both these concepts exist in the eye of the beholder, so a person may not be *ashamed* of acts other people consider *shameful*, or vice versa.

Information and knowledge

Information and *knowledge* are not the same thing. There is a lot of *information* available on the Internet and in books, but not one scrap of *knowledge*. That is because knowledge is information that a living being (whether human, animal or extraterrestrial) has acquired and made their own.

Both words are *uncountable* in English, so you cannot have *informations* or *knowledges*. To get round this problem, you can speak of *pieces of information* and *pieces of knowledge*.

Both words can be followed by the word *about*, and each can be followed by another preposition linking to what they are *about* – you can have *information* ***on*** a topic and you can have *knowledge* ***of*** a topic. I stress this, because the **Danish Ministry of Education** seems to be very fond of the somewhat unusual combination, *knowledge* ***on***, and uses it all the time – whenever they want to define the *information* students are supposed to acquire as *knowledge* by the end of a course.

This practice should *not* be imitated! The Ministry has clearly received incorrect information on this point – perhaps from someone lacking native-speaker knowledge of English. ☺

Please turn over!

Questions & Answers

If you received this newsletter in the post, you will need to subscribe if you want it again. See web site for how.

Put on your Marigolds and get stuck in!

I am subtitling some short clips of film. In one of them, we see an interviewer enter a house and say, "Not wanting to be seen in your marigolds" to a lady coming out of another room.

I get the feeling that the lady was surprised by the visit (and the cameras!) and therefore wanted to freshen herself up or something before going on camera. But I can't find anything that confirms my suspicion. So does the above sentence have some special meaning? Or was the lady just working in her flowerbed when the interviewer and the cameras arrived?

The sentence most likely means the lady had been doing some cleaning or washing up. *Marigolds* are indeed flowers, but they are also a well-known make of protective gloves (from heavy industrial and chemical resistant to household cleaning), which she really did not want to be seen in on camera.

Gyldendal's Industrial Dictionary

You mentioned 'Industriordbogen' last month.

It is available on the Internet at www.ordbogen.com, but you need to subscribe if you want to look up more than two words a day.

Thank you very much! I've had a link to www.ordbogen.com on my *Useful links* page for years, but I was not aware it was based on Gyldendal's *Industriordbog*. So there may be a lot of other people who do not know it as good source for specifically *technical* English. ☺

Before or after?

I have a lot of trouble deciding when an adjective should come before and when after the noun it applies to. Should I write, "the investigated concrete" or "the concrete investigated"?

This problem is not about the position of adjectives in English. Adjectives, like other modifiers, normally come before the word they modify. But English also uses past (and present) participles to replace whole clauses. Here the meaning is, *"the concrete (which was) investigated"*, which is why the word *investigated* should come after the word *concrete*. The word *investigated* in this sentence is not an adjective, but plays the role of a (shortened) relative clause. Contrast the common use of the past participle, *reinforced*, as an adjective in, *"the reinforced concrete"*.

More next month!

Best wishes
Lawrence White
LW@englishsupport.dk

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Your natural language partner

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News & Tips from English support

No. 33 – July 2007

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Dear friends

Impact on the world – that is the significance of last quarter's amazing **83% increase in turnover** compared with the first quarter's record figure. At one point it looked as if the increase would be more than 90%, but some of the work ordered did not arrive in time to be included. Increased turnover is not the only measure of impact. Last month also saw a dramatic 55% increase in the number of daily visits to the *English support* website, and an unusually large number of enquiries.

An ever-growing circle of satisfied customers

Of course, the impact is still small. Just a drop in the ocean. And turnover is not the same as profit. I am still as poor as a church mouse. But if security is an ever-growing circle of satisfied customers, then *English support* has a secure existence in front of it. This means we can focus on the real aim of the company, which is not *just* to survive or provide a source of income in my old age, but to make an actual difference in the quality of English written by non-native speakers.

Why is that important? Well, English is the language of international commerce and science (not to mention films, pop music, etc.), and if your English is full of mistakes, it makes you look incompetent, even foolish. At worst, it can make you completely incomprehensible.

One of my very first customers was a Danish software producer aiming at the US market. He knew that his potential customers would judge him at least partly by the quality of his English. And poor English could also make his highly technical message difficult to grasp. He still has his material checked by *English support* – like many others.

And in the case of scientific papers, poor quality English can lead to your message not getting out at all! It is quite a common reason for papers being rejected by English-language science journals.

Export means English …

In the globalised world that everybody is talking about, English is the modern *lingua franca*. Any organisation that wants to reach out beyond the borders of the country it happens to be in has to have a website in English. Yet the plain fact is that, even in Denmark, where a lot of people are quite good at English, far too many websites have large numbers of language mistakes on them – from small companies bidding you "wellcome" at their websites, to great institutions of learning offering "international educations". A lot of money has often been spent on the medium, but all too little on the message.

English support needs YOU!

There is certainly no shortage of work to be done!

So if YOU are a native speaker of English, have a good command of Danish (or other languages), and would like some freelance translation or proofreading work in your native tongue, *please get in touch*. You can write to me at: LW@englishsupport.dk. Thanks!

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

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Little and small

These two adjectives mean much the same, yet not quite. For instance, *a little boy* is also *a small boy*, but somehow "little" is smaller than "small" and is more often used when exaggerating or speaking derisively about someone or something, whereas "small" is more usually used in a literal and straightforward sense.

This means that non-native speakers should think twice before using the word "little" where "small" would also fit.

But "small" is seldom used with uncountables. Apparent exceptions, like *small change* and *small talk*, are examples of combinations in which a new noun is created. In these cases, the word *small* is not so much an adjective as a constituent part of the two-word concept. So for uncountables, we normally use *little* or *a little*.

Little and a little

These two work much the same way with uncountables as *few* and *a few* work with countables. If I say, *"She gave me **little** information"*, the focus is negative: **not much** information was given. Whereas if I say, *"She gave **a little** information"*, the focus is more positive: she gave me **some** information.

Note that *little* and *a little* can also be used as adverbs, with a parallel difference of meaning. So we can speak of the economy slowing down *a little* (to some extent) or *little* (to hardly any extent) and you might be *a little* confused by this difference or (I might hope) *little* confused by it. ☺

Few and a few

The same difference exists between *few* and *a few* (except that they can only be used as adjectives and only with countables).

Again the focus of *few* is negative. If I say, *"He has **few** friends"*, I mean he does not have many, whereas if I say, *"He has **a few** friends"*, I focus on the fact that he has some friends. The latter is clearly more positive.

More and less / fewer

Since *few* is used with countables, we use *fewer* as the opposite of *more* with countables. For example, the opposite of *more rain* is *less rain*, but the opposite of *more cars* is *fewer cars*.

While this usage is admittedly under challenge, as more and more English people say things like "*less cars*", the recommendation must be that non-native speakers use the more correct *"fewer cars"*, especially in writing. Alternatively, of course, one can say *"**not as many** cars"*.

More than four hundred topics have been tackled so far in the pages of

News & Tips

You can look them up on the website at: http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/backindex.htm, and back issues can also be downloaded at: http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/backissues.htm, where you can also download a whole year at a time (if you wish) by clicking on the year heading.

From the workshop...

Hardly

The first thing to be clear about with *hardly* is that it is no longer the adverbial form of *hard*, for which English often finds another expression, like *with difficulty* or *with a great deal of effort*. In some senses, however, *hard* itself can be the adverbial form of the adjective, e.g. *hard work* is when *you work hard*. This is also the case in *hard-earned*, *hard-hitting*, *hard-won*, etc.

The word *hardly* started life as meaning *with difficulty*, but in modern English has come to mean *only just* or *almost not*. If I say, *"I hardly knew him"*, it means that I knew him so little that you could almost say I didn't know him. Similarly, *"They were hardly alive"*, means they were only just alive or almost dead.

But, sometimes, *hardly* implies *not at all* – as in, *"That can hardly justify your actions"*. This usage started life as irony, but is now quite common.

This means that when an English speaker reads a sentence like *"Even today's fastest computers can hardly carry out a full-folding simulation of a moderately sized protein"*, we become unsure whether the author means they **can** (only just) or **cannot** (at all) do the job.

So a good rule is that where you mean *not*, you should write *not*, and where you mean *only just*, you should write *only just*. Use *hardly* with care! And the same applies to *scarcely* and *barely*.

Scarcely and barely

These words started life as the adverbial forms of *scarce* and *bare*, but in modern English have come to mean exactly the same as *hardly*. The word *scarcely* even has the same ambiguity in the same places, but *barely* always means *only just* or *almost not*.

All three words have a strong negative sense, and although the negative sense is not absolute, it is no longer correct English to combine them with a negative. So we don't say, *"He can't hardly walk"*, but, *"He can hardly walk"*.

When *barely*, *hardly* and *scarcely* are used at the beginning of a sentence, the subject and verb are inverted, as in *"Scarcely **had I** arrived when I was asked to chair the meeting"*.

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The wonderful world of language

I came across a nice (Swedish) word the other day that exactly expresses what I do: *Språkvask*. It means *language revision* or literally *language cleaning*. It is short, sharp and to the point, so next time somebody asks me what I do, I'll probably just say, "Språkvask!", and see what happens. ☺

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See you there!

Please turn over!

Questions & Answers

(Edited)

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Order and sequence

I changed the word *order* to *sequence* in a text on a piece of software, but my customer argued the case for using these two words differently in technical texts:

> *While "sequence" just refers to the position of one thing following another, the word "order" means that the sequence follows some sort of criterion or "key". So the data in a table have a sequence, but not necessarily an order, unless they have been sorted in some way.*
>
> *Unicode, for instance, uses the words like this when discussing the order of combined sequences of letters in various alphabets, see http://unicode.org/faq/normalization.html and search for "order".*

The distinction is useful and makes sense. Indeed, even in ordinary everyday English we might speak of an *ordered sequence*, but never of a *sequenced order*. And when we speak of *genome sequencing*, for instance, we use sequencing in the limited sense suggested by my customer.

However, it should be noted that outside of the technical world of computing, the two words are usually used in almost exactly the same way – and with both meanings. See for instance the explanation of genome sequencing given by the Human Genome Project Information website at http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/faq/seqfacts.shtml, which uses the word *order* with the same limited meaning with which it uses the word *sequence*.

Did you know?

English support can offer **native-speaker** help with not only *English*, but also *Chinese*, *Czech*, *Danish*, *Dutch*, *Finnish*, *French*, *German*, *Hungarian*, *Icelandic*, *Italian*, *Japanese*, *Norwegian*, *Polish*, *Portuguese*, *Rumanian*, *Russian*, *Serbo-Croat*, *Spanish*, *Swedish*, *Turkish* and *Ukrainian*.

Science papers in Russian or Czech

English support is pleased to announce a capacity for translation of scientific papers into Russian and Czech. We now have two freelance partners who are well-qualified for this kind of work in their respective languages, which means we are now able to offer to translate papers written in English or Danish so they are ready for publication in Russian or Czech scientific journals.

This capacity will be extended to other languages as opportunity allows and customers request the service.

Language festival in Copenhagen

In addition to Kommunikation og Sprog's Forum on 26 September (see page 3), another language event is taking place earlier in the same month. The Copenhagen Language Festival 2007 will be held on 15 September at Det Grønlandske Hus, Løvstræde 6, 1007 Copenhagen, and the theme this year will be: *"Native languages in a globalised world"*.

For more information, contact festival organiser, Betty Chatterjee on tel. 38 89 10 13 or by e-mail at chatterjeebetty@hotmail.com. If you can read Danish, you can also look at the Copenhagen Esperanto Club's website at http://www.esperanto.dk/sprogfestivalen/lingvofestivalo.html.

More next month!

Best wishes
Lawrence White
LW@englishsupport.dk

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News & Tips from English support

No. 34 – August 2007

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Dear friends

Well, I came back from holiday in England and there was this mountain of work! So this month's issue has been delayed more than ever. Sorry about that. I'll try not to let it happen again – until the next time, of course. ☺ On the other hand, I do try to learn from my mistakes, so this month I have taken on extra help in the office, albeit still on a part-time basis. Hopefully this will mean that the next issue will come out somewhere near the beginning of the month …

Claire Clausen joins English support

Best known in her former roles as radio journalist and press and PR officer for the British Embassy in Copenhagen, Claire's voice is so familiar that I immediately recognised it when she rang asking about freelance translation work.

Claire has a way with words, and I needed help, so we soon convinced each other what a good idea it would be for her to take a part-time job in the office as well. Among her other pursuits, she's an amateur actress, so she was very convincing!

I have quite a heavy load of teaching lined up this autumn, so Claire will be taking care of a lot of the day-to-day running of the office as well as doing translation and proofreading work herself. And if anyone needs a voice-over – who could be better?

The freelance network keeps growing!

We now have some 120 freelance partners. They are all people with language expertise and many of them are specialists. Some 25% are English speakers resident in Denmark, while others live elsewhere. We also have a large number of Danish partners, who translate into Danish. And more than 35% of our freelance partners have other languages as their mother tongue, from Japanese to Portuguese, so that between us we cover 22 languages – with more to come.

In all these languages, we can fulfil all your business needs, from business letters and brochures to complete websites. As long as we think they are ethically defensible. ☺

And in several languages, we can also manage technical and scientific writing. We like challenges. And we have specialists in many fields: medicine and pharmaceuticals, computing, hunting and shooting, martial arts, accounting and law. And we are always looking for more.

Would you like to join us?

So if YOU have a good command of both your own and at least one other language, and would like some freelance work in your native tongue, whether translation or proofreading, *please get in touch*. You can write to me at: LW@englishsupport.dk. Thanks!

English support needs YOU!

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

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Daily and everyday

There is considerable overlap in meaning between these two words, but they are not entirely interchangeable. The word *daily* is used to refer to something that happens quite literally every weekday, as in *daily routines*, *daily newspapers*, etc. The word *everyday* (contrast *every day*) usually has the broader meaning of *ordinary* or *common*, as in *everyday life* or *everyday clothes*.

Principle and principal

These two words are often confused by native speakers, yet there is general agreement on a clear distinction between them.

The word *principle* is an abstract noun, meaning *a general rule* or *standard* of some kind, or *the basic characteristic* of something: e.g. "*it was against his principles*", or "*the principles of flight*".

The word *principal* is fundamentally an adjective, meaning *first* or *main*: e.g. "*the principal character in a play*". But it can also be used as a noun, meaning roughly the *first* or *main person* or *thing*. So the headmaster in a school is sometimes called "*the Principal*", key agents in a law case may be referred to as the "*principals*", and in finance, the "*principal*" is the capital sum as opposed to any interest or other earnings that might accrue to it.

Dependant and dependent

Native-speakers are a lot less unanimous on these two, but there are two clear patterns in usage, which non-native speakers would be well-advised to follow. In general, British English uses *dependant* as a noun and *dependent* as an adjective, while American English tends to use *dependent* in both cases.

Note that the noun takes the preposition *of*, while the adjective takes the preposition *on*. So in British English, if you are the *dependant of* someone, it means you are *dependent on* them for financial support.

That depends!

The verb *to depend on* has a wider range of meaning. It can mean *to rely on* (and not just for financial support, but also *to trust* a source of information), and it can also have a passive sense of *to be influenced* or *determined by* something, as in "*What do you want to do this evening? – Well, that depends (on you)!*"

Dependent and depending

The prepositional expression "depending on" reflects this latter verbal meaning, so we might say "*Let's go by car, cycle or walk, depending on the weather*", but would **not** say "*dependent on the weather*" here. Note that *on* (or *upon*) is the only preposition that can follow the verb *depend*.

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See you there!

From the workshop...

Talking about the future (Part I)

Some languages don't really have a future, and English is one of them. By that, of course, I don't mean they won't be around for long – I expect English will go on being used for quite some time – but that English has no real future tense. Instead, we use special constructions in the present tense. But they are rather peculiar and tricky for non-native speakers. Worse still, the grammar books don't usually do a very good job of clarifying them. So here's my version!

1. Already decided

When we are talking about something in the future which has already been decided by someone (not necessarily the speaker), we normally use the *present continuous* form: e.g. "*What **are you doing** tomorrow? – **I am flying** to Tokyo*".

Note that the decision to go had *already been made before* the speaker started speaking.

The *present continuous* is made up of the verb *to be* + the *ING*-form. Another, more formal way of expressing this kind of future is the verb *to be* + the infinitive: e.g. "*The Queen **is to visit** New York tomorrow*". [This is the form shortened by headline writers to: "*Queen **to visit** New York*"].

Most grammar books seem to think these forms are about the *near* future, but this is not so; they are about things which have already been decided before the speaker started speaking: e.g. "*NASA **is sending** a manned mission to Mars at some time in the next two or three decades*".

2. Intention and what is likely

When we are talking about something in the future which we *intend* or which we *consider likely* to happen, we use *to be going to*: e.g. "*I **am going to** sell my car*" or "*It **is going to** rain*".

Note that the intention/belief about what is likely existed *before* the speaker started speaking.

3. Pure future

When we are just talking about the future (i.e. without focus on things already decided, intended or thought likely), we use *will*: e.g. "***I will** be late home tonight*" or "*Do you think **we will** catch the train?*"

Note that it is also possible, but not very common nowadays, to use ***shall*** instead of ***will*** in these sentences when the subject is in the 1st person. The danger is, of course, that you may sound as though you have just stepped out of a time machine from the first half of the last century. ☺ In modern English, *shall* is normally only used to ask for advice or offer to do something, as in, "***Shall I** answer the phone?*" or "*What **shall we** have to eat?*" and these are not future forms at all.

Important: There can be a certain amount of overlap in meaning between these three forms, but they are well worth keeping conceptually separate for the many occasions when only one will do.

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Please turn over!

Questions & Answers

(Edited)

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Another fine mess …

Thank you for sending me the Newsletter; I read it with interest every time!

In News and Tips No. 33, I think there is a mistake. You write that the word "språkvask" is Swedish. I think it must be Norwegian …

How nicely put! Yes, I have no idea how I came to write that it was "Swedish", but you are quite right: the wonderful word "språkvask" is, of course, Norwegian.

A "bridge" too far …

I have spotted what might have been an unintentional slip on your part, i.e. the hyphen in "We now have two freelance partners who are well-qualified" (should be "well qualified"). I recently had to explain this to an author of Basque mother tongue and to do this I quoted from the entry for "well" (1st sense) on www.askoxford.com:

*— USAGE When **well** is used with a past participle, such as 'built', and the resulting compound precedes the noun, it is advisable to use a hyphen, as in a tall, well-built man; usually a hyphen is not used when the compound stands alone, as in her remarks were well intentioned.*

You are quite right, it was a slip. I explain the basic rule in No.28 – see point 1 under **Compound words**: "*Adjectives that are made up of more than one word should be hyphenated*". This applies to past participles used as adjectives, too: e.g. ***market-driven***, ***well-spoken***, and so on.

In the sentence where I went wrong, the past participle is not an adjective, but part of a passive form (*to be qualified*), in which case the word "well" here is playing the normal role of an adverb and no hyphen should be present. As you say, it should have been "well qualified".

This explanation differs from that of the very useful www.askoxford.com, but it has the merit of helping us get other cases right, too. For instance, if a man has a *well-paid job*, he is *well paid* (no hyphen). This is clearly a passive form. But a *well-read* man is a man who is *well-read* (hyphen). This is not a passive form, but an adjective – even though it does not "precede the noun".

The same applies to *well-spoken*, meaning a person *speaks* well. Less clear, perhaps, is *market-driven* in "*Production is market-driven*". Here the word is a substitute for "*driven by the market*", which is passive in meaning, but *market* is a noun, so the combination must be hyphenated.

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More next month!

Best wishes
Lawrence White
LW@englishsupport.dk

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Copenhagen Language Festival 2007: "*Native languages in a globalised world*"
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No. 35 – September 2007

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Dear friends

This month sees two quite different language events all our readers may be interested in. The first is the ***Copenhagen Language Festival*** organised by the Copenhagen Esperanto Association and Kalaallit Illuutaat at the Greenland House on Saturday, 15th September, and the second is the ***Communication and Language Forum 2007*** organised by the Union of Communication and Language Professionals, at Copenhagen Business School on Wednesday, 26th September.

A Festival of Languages!

The theme of this 2nd Copenhagen Language Festival is: *Mother tongues in a globalised world*. It will be a festival celebrating the abundance of different languages in the world and how this is a *resource* not a problem.

Languages are the main bearers of human culture and when a language disappears, we all lose access to a part of our common culture. And your mother tongue is also an important part of your personal identity.

At the festival you can hear native speakers of a great many languages, take a crash course in some of them, and learn surprising facts about all of them. There will also be music and song as well as a lot of talks you can go to on various languages and cultures.

11 AM – 5 PM, Saturday, 15th September, Det Grønlandske Hus, Løvstræde 6, Copenhagen

The Communication and Language Profession gets together!

The Communication and Language Forum 2007 is for professionals engaged in the field. In its own way, it too is a celebration, but the focus is on communication and language in business and politics and society at large.

This year's general theme will be: *The importance of communication for the competitiveness of companies in a globalised world*, with speakers from Copenhagen University, Carlsberg, Aarhus School of Business, Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen Zoo, Denmark's Radio, one of Denmark's new Regions, and a consultancy in web communication.

The range of subjects is also impressive: from how good communication impacts on company's bottom line, stimulates innovation, and helps meet marketing targets, to the tremendous challenges of multilingual communication and how our social networks are going seriously on-line.

Information and booking at: www.kommunikationogsprog.dk/Forum.

8.30 AM – 4.30 PM, Wednesday, 26th September, "Ovnhallen", Porcelænshaven, CBS

***English support** will have a stand at both events and we look forward to seeing you there!*

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

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Ignore and neglect

The verb *ignore* is connected with the noun *ignorance* and the adjective *ignorant*, but the verb implies a kind of *wilful* "ignorance" or *choosing* to be "ignorant" of something, e.g. choosing not to notice someone at a party: "*She came to his party, but he* ***ignored*** *her all evening*". Similarly we might say of a (poor) scientist, "*He* ***ignored*** *the results that did not fit his theory*".

Someone else might think these actions deplorable. In which case they might say, "*He* ***neglected*** *her all evening*", or, "*He* ***neglected*** *to take into account the results that did not fit his theory*."

Note that the verb *neglect* implies moral failure in some way. So while you *can* neglect a person, an animal, or even a house and garden, the fundamental idea is always that (in the speaker's view) there is something you *ought* to have done, but did not. And the noun, *neglect*, contains the same idea – "*His children showed signs of* ***neglect***".

The verb *ignore*, on the other hand, always applies to a noun or a pronoun – a person, a thing or a fact – and it does not necessarily contain a moral dimension. So the typical situation is that we ignore *facts* and neglect *to do* things. ☺

Choices and decisions

You *make* choices: e.g. "*He was forced to* ***make*** *a choice between his mistress and his wife*". You can also *make* decisions. But when a *group* of people decide something, we normally say they *take* a decision. The implication here is of some kind of consensus or even a vote. Note how in English, people who get to decide things *on their own* are called *decision-****makers***.

You can also *come to* or *reach* a decision, but none of these options is available with choices …

Contrary to and in contrast with/to

Something can be *contrasted* with something else in many ways, but one thing is only *contrary to* another thing if it is logically incompatible with it. So an action might be *contrary to* the law, or a statement might be *contrary* to popular belief. In both cases, acceptance of the one excludes the other.

But we would say the red door was *in contrast to* the blue of the door frame. The contrast might be thought to show poor taste, but there is no logical conflict involved.

So the phrase, "*on the contrary*" is used to introduce a statement strongly incompatible with a previously mentioned idea, e.g. "*She did not help;* ***on the contrary****, she did everything she could to wreck the project*". The latter statement is incompatible with the idea of her *helping*.

But then we might go on to say, "*Her behaviour was* ***in contrast to*** *that of other club members, who helped a lot*". There is no logical incompatibility in different people doing different things.

More than four hundred topics have been tackled so far in the pages of

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From the workshop...

Talking about the future (Part II)

Last month, we looked at the three basic ways of talking about the future in English (see *News & Tips* No.34). This time we take a look at a few more sophisticated aspects.

A. The future continuous

Two of the future constructions that we looked at last month have continuous versions too. They can both be used to talk about actions which will be in the process of taking place at a particular point of time in the future, e.g. "*At this time tomorrow,* ***I'll be lying*** *on a beach in Tunisia*" or "*At this time tomorrow,* ***I'm going to be lying*** *on a beach in Tunisia*". They can also both be used for actions which will take place within a limited time period in the future, e.g. "*I* ***will be teaching*** *all day tomorrow*".

There is no sense of intention or likelihood in the continuous form after *to be going to*, but it does express strong emotion of one kind or another, so "*I* ***am going to be teaching*** *all day tomorrow*" might, for example, express enthusiasm (*I bet you're all jealous!*) or despair (*Why me!*).

The continuous form after *will* can also express mere *expectations* about the future, e.g. "*We'll all be going down the pub later on*" and "*I'll be seeing you!*", or even about the present, e.g. "*Mary will be watching television*" (meaning *right now*).

B. The future in the past

All the various ways of talking about future are based on constructions in the present tense. So in English, they can all be moved into the past tense, with *would* instead of *will*, *was* instead of *am* or *is*, and *were* instead of *are*, e.g. "*I* ***would be teaching*** *all day (the next day)*" and "*I* ***was flying*** *to Tokyo next month*".

At first sight, the idea of the future in the past sounds bizarre, but it is actually quite logical. It is a future that belongs to the past – either in the sense that it is no longer going to happen or that it already has. The various meanings of the future forms in the past are the same as in the present.

So if a historian writes, "*Caesar* ***would cross*** *the Rubicon the next day"*, he means that that was the future at that time. And if I say "*I* ***was flying to*** *Tokyo next month*", it means that a decision about the future had been made, but has now been changed, so that I am no longer going.

C. The simple timeless

There is one fly in the ointment of all this beautiful consistency, and that is what we might call the *simple timeless*. This is where the *simple present* (or *past*) of the verb is used in subordinate clauses in a sentence in which the main clause uses a future form, e.g. "*I will tell you as soon as I* ***know***" or "*The first person who* ***opens*** *that door will get a shock*".

In these cases, the subordinate clause is just as much about the future as the main clause, yet the timeless simple form of the verb is used in the subordinate clauses. And this rule applies even in sentences in which the future is not explicit in the main clause, e.g. "*When he* ***comes****, tell him I'm not in!*" or "*I have brought an umbrella in case it* ***rains***".

But like all good rules, there is also a clear exception. ☺ The rule does not apply to subordinate clauses about the future when the clause itself is the *object* of a verb. In these cases, we must have one of the future forms, just as we would in a main clause, e.g. "*I think* ***it is going to rain***" or "*We'll write and let you know* ***when we are coming***".

Note that the *simple timeless* is what we also use in main clauses that state general facts – i.e. that are not about the future, present or past, but are timeless in character, e.g. "*The sun always* ***rises*** *in the East*", "*I* ***live*** *in Denmark*", "***Do you like*** *ice cream?*" and "*The shop* ***opens*** *at 9.30*".

Please turn over!

Questions & Answers

(Edited)

If you did not receive this newsletter by e-mail, you will need to subscribe if you want it again. It's FREE. Get on the mailing list via the website!

How does it work?

In recent issues, we have been inviting people who have a good command of both their own and at least one other language, and who would like some freelance work in their native tongue, *to get in touch*. We are always looking for people who might be able to help.

Here are some of the questions we received:

How does the payment system work? What do you take for sending jobs to me?

Well, I don't take a commission or anything, if that's what you mean. On the contrary, I pay you for doing the work. First I send you a text and ask for a quote. You look at the text and tell me how much you want and when you can deliver. I go back to the customer and give a price and say when I can deliver – adding on time and money for my part. Nothing goes to the customer that I haven't checked through. If the customer agrees to the price and delivery time, we get the job.

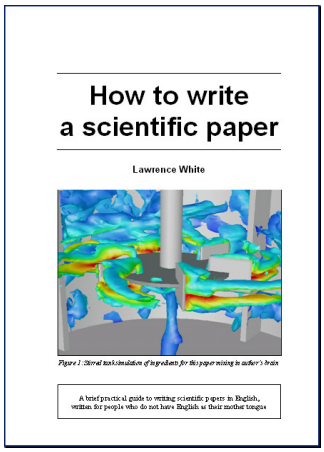
Do you pay extra at weekends or for rush jobs?

Well, no – I agree every job individually. My price to the customer also varies according a wide range of factors, including time and difficulty, so I expect your price may do the same.

What is the usual time frame given for the translation of, let us say, a twenty-page academic paper? I realize the author will have a deadline, but what time frame would you consider reasonable for such a task?

There is no "usual time frame". You decide yourself how long you need for a job. After all, you may well have other things to do! But customers often want things by yesterday at the latest, so it pays to be as realistic as you can. ☺

*All these questions assumed that I would be passing on work. But the agreement I ask people to sign is completely mutual. If **you** have too much work, become ill, or go on holiday, you can send work to **us** and keep your customer, too.*



And here are some answers for science researchers!

"How to write a scientific paper", is an excellent guide – even for the experienced author of scientific articles and reports. It is easy to read and gives good advice about the structure of such papers, the writing process, and a number of the many linguistic traps that authors who do not have English as their mother tongue tend to fall into.

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD
Danish Decommissioning

Published by *English support*. Order it now from your local bookshop or direct from *www.englishsupport.dk*

For an independent review (in Danish), see *Kommunikation og Sprog*, under *Boganmeldelser*.

More next month!

Best wishes
Lawrence White
LW@englishsupport.dk

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News & Tips from English support

No. 36 – October 2007

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Dear friends

At the last minute, I was regrettably unable to attend the ***Copenhagen Language Festival*** (see last issue) held on 15th September due to pressure of work, though I understand it was a success. I did manage to get to the ***Communication and Language Forum 2007*** on 26th September, where the *English support* stand was well attended. Just over 250 people, including exhibitors, came to the Forum, and we probably got to speak to at least half of them.

The importance of communication

The Communication and Language Forum 2007, organised by the Union of Communication and Language Professionals, had as its main theme this year, *the importance of communication for the competitiveness of companies in a globalised world*. Last year the theme was *globalisation and inter-cultural communication*.

But communication has *always* been important – and not just in the context of globalisation. In fact, *forget the wheel*, by far the most important invention human beings have ever made is *speech*. Before speech, all communication was limited essentially to what can be conveyed through body language. Naturally, the noises that we could make with our mouths and throats contributed to this communication (as they do with other mammals), but nothing complex, nothing requiring extensive collaboration, and no abstract ideas could be uttered, formulated, or even thought.

The DNA record shows that around 50,000 years ago the descendants of a group of *homo sapiens sapiens* in one part of eastern Africa began to spread out over the whole world. The fossil record shows no physical change, no change in what some people like to call the "hardware" of our bodies and brains, but something dramatic must have happened in our "software" – our culture.

The development of language as we know it, the prerequisite for everything we now think of as human, is the most likely enabling event for the expansion, which fairly quickly led to the presence of *homo sapiens sapiens* almost everywhere and the extinction of the only other form of *homo* left, the very successful *homo sapiens neanderthalensis*, which had dominated much of western Eurasia for at least 100,000 years with what the archaeological record shows was an almost static culture.

So it seems a little odd that we have to spend so much time convincing our fellow human beings that communication and language are important, also in business; that it can affect your bottom line, stimulate innovation, and help meet marketing targets; that poor language can eliminate all the costly gains of flashy graphics and fancy layout on your website; or that clear communication is the very bedrock upon which the objectivity of science is built.

But people take language for granted. *We, communicators, must become better at communicating the importance of communication!* ☺

You will find a brief report on the Forum at http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/komsprog2007.htm. And I owe a special *Thank you!* to Eileen and Claire, who helped man the stand on the day.

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

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Adapt and adopt

These two verbs have quite separate meanings, but are very often confused by even well-educated non-native speakers of English. Here is an example from a paper I read recently:

> "*In April 2005, EC maximum levels for benzo[a]pyrene were adapted for e.g. bivalve molluscs intended for human consumption (10 µg kg^{-1} wet weight)*".

The fundamental meaning of the verb *to adapt* is to *change*, *modify* or *adjust* something to fit new circumstances or purposes. This meaning is clearly not present in the above sentence.

The verb *to adopt* means to *accept* or *take over* (a child, an idea, a plan, a proposal, etc.) *as one's own*. This is what the author of the above sentence meant to say:

> "*In April 2005, EC maximum levels for benzo[a]pyrene were adopted for e.g. bivalve molluscs intended for human consumption (10 µg kg^{-1} wet weight)*".

There had been a proposal to set maximum levels for the presence of this mutagenic and highly carcinogenic hydrocarbon in bivalve molluscs intended for human consumption. The European Commission agreed with this proposal and set the maximum levels – i.e. *adopted* them.

On the other hand bivalve molluscs might be described as *adapted* for living in certain conditions – i.e. their evolutionary history is one of *change to fit* the conditions they now live in.

Insulate and isolate

Confusion between these two verbs is mostly due to their overlap in meaning and the fact that many languages (including Danish) use the same word for both. Both words come from the same Latin root (*insulatus*, meaning *made into an island*), one directly, the other via Italian.

But there is a clear conceptual difference between an *isolated* house and an *insulated* house. The first is far from other houses, while the second does not lose heat in winter. So an *isolated* house might also be *insulated*. ☺

The fundamental idea in the verb to *isolate* is that of *placing apart*. A person with a contagious disease may be *isolated* – separated from others who might catch the disease. The cause of the disease might also be *isolated* – separated from other possible causes.

The fundamental idea in the verb *insulate* is that of *preventing the transmission* of electricity, heat or sound to or from something by surrounding it with a non-conducting material. So I might wear *insulating* clothing in Arctic conditions to keep the warmth in, or a recording studio might be well *insulated* to keep the surrounding noises out.

In the field of electricity, we might speak of *isolated* circuits (*kept apart*) and describe the plastic or rubber on wires keeping them apart as *insulation*.

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From the classroom...

Light rail

I am currently teaching a class of university lecturers in the field of transport. Last month, we had some discussion about the generic concept *light rail* and how it is used in English.

The term *light rail* was devised in 1972 by the Urban Mass Transit Association in the USA. It corresponded broadly to the German *Stadtbahn* concept; the word *light* was used to indicate light loads. In British English, the term *light railway* had long been used in a similar way.

But there is a grammatical difference which those who make use of these terms should note. A *light railway* is clearly a noun concept, while *light rail* (in the sense intended) is always used as an adjective. As Wikipedia expresses it: "*The Docklands Light Railway (DLR) is a* ***light rail*** *system serving the redeveloped Docklands area of East London*".

So while you can go to any town in the UK and ask if they have a *light railway*, you will only get puzzled looks if you ask if they have a *light rail*. And the same is true in the US. A light rail is a rail that is light, and a rail can be a horizontal bar of wood, a curtain rail, a fence – or, of course, one of those things used in parallel pairs to make railway track. But it is definitely *not* a railway or railroad system. So you have to use *light rail* as an adjective with a noun: a *light rail system*, a *light rail network*, *light rail transportation*, *light rail technology*, and so on.

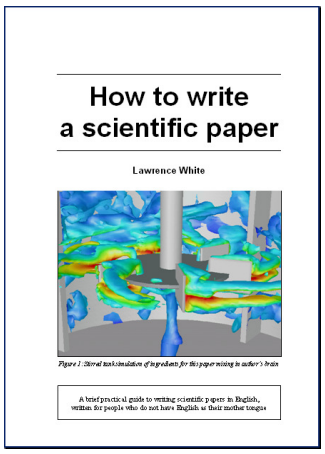
The only exception I have seen to this rule (in texts written by native speakers) is the use of *light rail* as an uncountable noun in the clear context of talking about light rail systems. Here is an example from Wikipedia: "*Britain began replacing its run-down local railways with* ***light rail*** *in the 1980s, starting with Tyneside and followed by the Docklands Light Railway in London*".

Plurals of abbreviations

Abbreviated nouns (e.g. *vol.* for *volume*, *dept.* for *department*, *tbsp.* for *tablespoonful*, etc.) have a full stop to mark the abbreviation. These do not have plural forms (though note that the plural of *p.* for *page* is *pp.*), and neither do units of measurement: *km*, *cc*, *rpm*, etc.

But a lot of modern abbreviations and acronyms are made with capital letters or numbers. The usual way of making the plural form of these is to simply add a small "s". So *non-governmental organisations* are *NGOs*, *chief executive officers* are *CEOs*, *compact discs* are *CDs*, the *Twenties* were the *1920s*, and if a *carbon nanotube* is a *CNT*, then *carbon nanotubes* are *CNTs*.

Fifty years ago, it was usual to use an apostrophe here, but today the apostrophe is normally only used with abbreviations to indicate possession, e.g. *NATO's combined strength*, *1920s' music*, the *CEO's salary*, *a CNT's properties*, and so on. [See also *News & Tips* no. 29].



Booklet for science researchers!

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Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD
Danish Decommissioning, Risø

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Questions & Answers

(Edited)

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Switching from passive to active voice in scientific papers

In my booklet, *How to write a scientific paper*, I argue that passive forms should not be used just to exclude the author(s) from the picture. Real scientific objectivity is based on the *repeatability* of the work, observations or experiments – not on what I call "*first-person phobia*".

Far too many scientific papers are difficult to read and understand because of the style and language they are written in. This affects the repeatability of the work described *and its scientific value*. Using the active voice more often increases the likelihood that your reader will be able to follow the text and see who did what when and where. See also *News & Tips* no. 31.

Here is a customer who understands that, but is still not quite sure how to use the first person:

> *Dear Lawrence*
>
> *You proofread a scientific paper for us some months ago. You suggested using the active voice with "we" instead of the passive voice to make clear the difference between "what we did" and "what others do or what has been described in the literature". For example, writing "we propose the following reaction mechanism", instead of "the following reaction mechanism is proposed".*
>
> *I found this very useful and think that it is also very helpful for the reader.*
>
> *At present, I am writing my PhD thesis and realize that it would also be convenient to use the active voice there to make that difference between our work and the literature.*
>
> *I have talked to my professor about it and he said that it should not be a problem with regard to the regulations for a PhD thesis. But, being only one author – how would that be with regard to semantics? I really would not want to say "I", because what I am describing is the result of our work together.*
>
> *It would be very helpful to hear your opinion about that. Many thanks in advance.*
>
> *AK*

I think the answer is that you use "I", when referring to yourself, and "we", when referring to the group – whose existence you obviously acknowledge in *Acknowledgements* and introduce in your *Introduction*.

This allows you both to avoid taking sole credit for the work of the group, and yet to state your own conclusions without making everybody else in the group take joint responsibility for them. In other words, you make the natural distinction between *I* and *we* that you made in your e-mail:

We did this and we got these results.
I think their significance is the following.

I hope that helps!

> *Dear Lawrence*
>
> *Many thanks – I think that is a good solution.*
>
> *AK*

More next month!

Best wishes
Lawrence White
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News & Tips from English support

No. 37 – November 2007

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Dear friends

Some of you were probably wondering whatever happened to the November issue! Well, here it is at last, late but still (just!) in November. The work has just been pouring in and this month it has been almost a tsunami. Turnover is more than double the previous record (in May this year) for a single month. So it has been a little difficult to find time for reflection, or even sleep, never mind writing the newsletter!

No flash in the pan

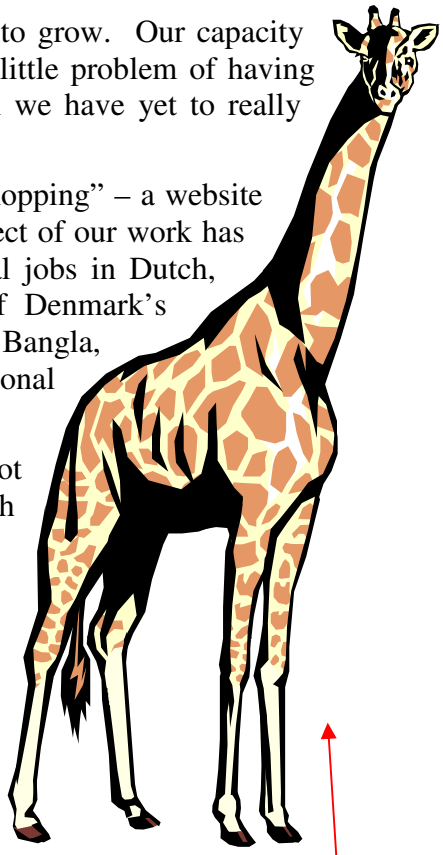
This month's figures are quite extraordinary, but the long-term trend is also very encouraging. Already we can see that turnover in 2007 will be more than double that of the previous year for the second year running. This means that our customer base is expanding rapidly – but also steadily.

Our network of collaborating freelance partners also continues to grow. Our capacity still outstrips demand by quite a wide margin, but there is the little problem of having time to organise an effective distribution of work – a problem we have yet to really tackle.

And we are also getting more customers who want "one-stop shopping" – a website or a leaflet translated into several different languages. This aspect of our work has not yet been widely publicised, but we have completed several jobs in Dutch, English, German, Norwegian and Swedish (the languages of Denmark's closest neighbours), and we are currently engaged in one for Bangla, Chinese, English, Hindi, Nepali, Polish and Urdu for an educational institution with a lot of foreign students.

The amount of teaching this year has also been extraordinary, not least related to *How to write scientific paper*, with three full length courses and four one-day presentations for new PhD students.

So we've been a bit busy, all in all!



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Wednesday 5th December, from 3–5 PM

Come and network with a range of companies and enjoy two Danish Christmas specialities: *æbleskiver* and *glögg*.

A chance to "meet the giraffe" and the other inhabitants of the Business House menagerie!

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

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Practice and practise

The first thing to note about these two is that there is a difference between British and American English here. In American English, the only correct spelling is *practice*.

But in British English, the noun is *practice* and the verb is *practise*. This is the same pattern as is found with *advice* and *advise*, *device* and *devise*, and *licence* and *license*. So, in British English, if you *practise* your English, you get *practice* in English.

Licence and license

Like *practice* and *practise*, these two words are pronounced in exactly the same way. American English uses the –se form for both noun and verb, while British English distinguishes between the noun, *licence*, and the verb *license*. So, in British English, a *licensed* driver is a driver who has a *licence*.

Advice and advise

Here the pronunciation is different. The word *advice* ends with an **/s/** sound, while *advise* ends with a **/z/** sound. The same applies to *device* and *devise*. American English is exactly the same as British English on this point, both in terms of spelling and pronunciation.

Unfortunately, a great many Danes find it difficult to (remember to) make the **/z/** sound, which Danish does not have, and this leads them to fail to distinguish clearly between the noun and the verb. As noted in *News & Tips* no. 32, the same pronunciation problem also leads to confusion between *price* and *prize*, which are two quite different words in English.

So if I might give a bit of *advice*, please *practise* making a difference between *advice* and *advise*, *device* and *devise*, and especially *price* and *prize*! **/zzz/** ☺

Satisfying and satisfactory

At first sight, these two words might seem to have the same meaning, but this is not so. The word *satisfying* implies full or complete satisfaction of a desire or wish, while *satisfactory* implies merely that something was adequate – but perhaps only just. So there is a big difference between describing a meal as *satisfactory* and describing it as *satisfying*. The latter would be a compliment while the former would be almost insulting.

On the other hand, the word *satisfying* can only be used in relation to the fulfilment of some kind of personal desire or need. No matter how pleased a teacher may be with student's homework, he or she will probably not write *"Satisfying"* against it!! *"Excellent"* would be considered more appropriate. *"Satisfactory"* would mean the work was OK, adequate – an average effort.

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From the workshop...

Needs, need, needn't

The verb to *need* has two main usages and several different meanings. The two main usages are as a normal verb and (but this is now less common) as a (quasi-)modal verb.

Modal verbs like *can*, *will*, *must*, etc. do not take an –s in the third person singular present tense and most of them are followed by the infinitive without *to* in front (the exception is *ought*). So we say he *can speak* English, he *will speak* English, he *must speak* English, and he *ought to speak* English.

And we do not use *do not* to make the negative form of a modal verb: we simply add the word *not*: he *cannot speak* English, he *will not speak* English, he *ought not to speak* English, etc. Nor do we use *do* to form questions: *Can he speak* English? *Ought he to speak* English?

So on those rare occasions in modern English (only in questions and strongly negative statements) when *need* plays the role of a modal verb, it follows the same rules: *"Need he speak* English at the meeting?" "No, he *need not speak* English – they all understand Hungarian."

But this usage is now unusual and non-native speakers *need not* worry about it, because it is now much more common to use *need* as a normal verb and say, "Non-native speakers *do not need to* worry about it". So you may see it and even hear it, but you *do not need to* (or *need not*) use the modal form.

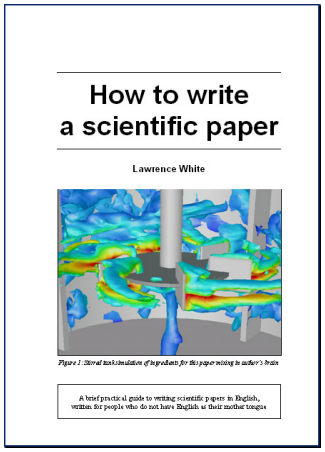
The verb *to need* as a normal verb

The fundamental idea with the verb to *need* is to express the necessity of something. So it can be a strong expression of a desire for something (*I **need a beer**!*), but it can also be more literal (*She **needs a bike** to get to school*). It can also be applied to a verb (*You do not **need to speak** English*).

And the subject does not have to be an agent (a person or animal). I could also say *"My garden **needs a lot of work**"*. Note that the implication is that the *speaker* thinks the garden needs a lot of work, so there is an agent involved; gardens, as such, do not have needs. But exactly the same grammatical structure is used. In the same spirit, we can also say *"My lawn **needs to grow**"*, and when it has grown, *"My lawn **needs to be mowed**"*.

Finally, this passive infinitive (*"**to be mowed**"*) can be replaced with the ING-form or gerund with absolutely no change in meaning: *"My lawn **needs mowing**"*.

Need I say more? ☺



Do you need to write scientific papers?

"How to write a scientific paper", is an excellent guide – even for the experienced author of scientific articles and reports. It is easy to read and gives good advice about the structure of such papers, the writing process, and a number of the many linguistic traps that authors who do not have English as their mother tongue tend to fall into.

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD
Danish Decommissioning, Risø

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Please turn over!

Questions & Answers

(Edited)

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On writing scientific papers

Dear Lawrence

You recommend a structure for scientific papers with sections for Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion, but my supervisor thinks Results and Discussion should be one section. Do you have a solution?

I suppose the first thing to make very clear is that the IMRAD structure (with the four sections *Introduction*, *Methods*, *Results* and *Discussion*) has been in widespread use in scientific papers for decades. But the main point is not the section headings themselves but the *content* they represent:

Introduction – WHY you did the work you are reporting: the background to your research
Methods – HOW you did the work: a detailed account of materials, techniques, equipment, etc.
Results – WHAT you found out: the empirical data presented so they can be understood
Discussion – What it all MEANS, in the light of your starting point, current theory/practice, etc.

I would argue that this basic content structure is a requirement for any good scientific paper, whatever the actual headings used (and journals, as well as supervisors, differ on these). The real danger in having a *"Results and Discussion"* section, is that all too often it becomes just a *Results* section, with no discussion of the significance of the work.

So my advice is to make sure that your *"Results and Discussion"* section contains *both* parts, one after the other, and that your final paragraph (or *Conclusion*) is a summary of the *Discussion* part, so that it hangs together with your *Introduction*.

On being a student

Dear Lawrence

How do you translate the Danish word "student" into English?

This question touches on one of those few, but large, cultural differences between Denmark (and much of the continent of Europe) and the UK (and most of the English-speaking world).

In English, if we say someone is an engineer, for instance, we usually mean he or she *works* (or recently had a job) as an engineer, whereas the same expression in Danish usually means he or she *has qualified* as an engineer. Of course, many jobs require academic qualifications in the English-speaking world just as much as anywhere else, so there *is* overlap, but the main focus is different.

When someone is described as a *student* in Danish, the focus is on the level of education attained: the person has passed the exams necessary for going on to university-level education. In English, the focus on what the person does, so a student is someone who *studies*. If the person is under 16, we tend to use the word *pupil*, but otherwise *anyone* taking a course of study can be described as a student. On the courses I run at DTU, for instance, some of my students are university professors.

So we clearly cannot translate the Danish word *student* with the English *student*, and there is no single word for it in English. Going from English into Danish, the best is usually *studerende*.

More next month!

Best wishes
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News & Tips from English support

NB: If you received this newsletter by e-mail, it is (hopefully) because you have expressed a wish to do so. If this is not the case, and/or you do not wish to receive it in future – *please let us know!*

No. 38 – December 2007

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Dear friends

A large and growing number of customers, translators, proofreaders, secretaries, teachers, students, researchers and others are now reading this newsletter. It is your support that has been decisive in making this year a fantastic success. We may not be rich, but we *are* happy in our work!

Will Danish ("state-authorised") translators unite in one organisation?

The two organisations of *statsautorisede translatører* ["state-authorised" translators] in Denmark are talking about merging. The negotiations have been going on for some time and may well take a lot more time, because there has been a long history of conflict between them, but both parties seem to be taking the talks seriously.

Such a merger may or may not be a good thing, but one thing is clear from where I am sitting and that is that the new organisation, if it comes, will have to take a position on the utterly scandalous article on *English support* that appeared in MDT*nyt*, *Dansk Translatørforbund*'s official magazine, in 2005 [still on public view at www.onlineart.dk/mdtnyt03-05.pdf].

We are talking about an 11,000-word article, in which Dee Shields had "a long rant" (her choice of words) entirely at my expense. This thoroughly scurrilous, vituperative, and totally undocumented attack on my company, my person, my abilities, etc. was the *main feature*, making up 63% of the entire magazine!

A question of credibility

Should the new, merged organisation not repudiate this article as the disgusting verbal diarrhoea it truly is, then we would have to assume that it had decided to incorporate this particularly unpleasant bit of the history of *one* of the organisations into the *joint* history of the new organisation. Such a decision would, I fear, be very expensive in terms of credibility.

So I very much hope that this issue will become a part of the negotiations – something that needs to be cleared up. And while they are about it, I suggest they also drop the use of "state-authorised" in the English names of their organisations. Its retention, long after its total unsuitability has been so fully explained, is *already* very expensive in terms of the credibility of both organisations.

For the full discussion on this issue, download the newsletters listed under "state-authorised" in the index at http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/backindex.htm. Key points are summarised in No. 21.

Translators, secretaries, teachers … **English support Hotline** *… helps you get it right!*

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From the workshop...

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Working in, on and with

Do you work *with* medicine? Well, no one can say that is incorrect English, but it is worth noting that we normally use *"work with"* when talking about (collaboration with) people or animals, so you might *work with* John Smith or *with* horses or dogs.

When we are talking about a field of work, the more usual expression would be *"work in"*, as in the question *"Do you work in medicine?"* – NOTE: **not** *"within* medicine*"* (see Nos.18 and 29).

But the preposition *with* can also mean *"using"*. If I actually handle medicines in my work, I might say *"I work with medicines"*. So while the Managing Director of ICI can be said to *work in chemicals*, he almost certainly does not *work with chemicals*: he has laboratory assistants for that.

When we are talking about specific projects or tasks, we usually use *"work on"*. So I may know someone *in* research and development who is working *on* (the project of) a new breed of pea.

A series of

The word *series* is much over-used in translations from Danish into English. This is mostly due to a common Danish expression (*en række af*), which is often translated as "*a series of*". This is not usually appropriate, because a *series* is a group or succession of related things arranged in order, like a set of TV programmes, books, articles, pictures or films. The Danish expression, however, usually has a looser meaning corresponding to the English expression "*a number of*".

Between and among

The confusion that arises here is due to the fact that the word *between* is used in more ways than the word *among*. When we are talking about *location*, both words can be used. For instance, you may put your plate *between* your knife and your fork (two things) and you may picnic *among* the trees (more than two things).

But when we speak of *differences*, *choices*, or *interactions*, the correct word is *between* – no matter how many things are involved. For instance, we may speak of the differences *between* six products, the choice *between* three options, competition *between* 15 companies, and trade *between* large numbers of nations.

The word *among* may still be seen occasionally in the last two cases, but is a little old-fashioned and is best avoided by non-native speakers. More common is *divide among*, but here too modern English favours *divide between* even when what follows is more than two: *"The inheritance was divided between the three children equally"*.

So the *safe* rule is: If you are talking about *location*, use *between* for two things and *among* for more than two, but otherwise, when choosing between *among* and *between*, choose *between*! ☺

More than 450 topics have been tackled so far in the pages of

News & Tips

You can look them up on the website at: http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/backindex.htm, and back issues can also be downloaded at: http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/backissues.htm, where you can also download a whole year at a time (if you wish) by clicking on the year heading.

Xmas gift ideas

All I want for Christmas …

Since I am currently undergoing extensive open-mouth surgery, I feel rather like the boy in the song – all I want for Christmas is my two (three, four) front teeth! But I thought you might like some other ideas to think about – at least until the moment finally arrives and you open the packet with the usual pair of socks, scarf, or lumpy jersey that you will never, ever wear… – *Oh, thank you very much! – That's just what I've always …*

Back-up you don't have to think about

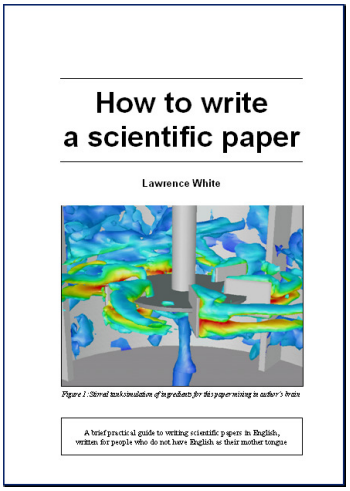
One thing everybody who uses a computer has to worry about is what happens if (when) the thing stops working. You know, one day the screen is just black and you can't recover your hard disk. So you need to take back-ups, right? But do you? And if you do, how often? And is it enough?

The scope for sleepless nights is enormous, especially if you are self-employed and all your data is on one machine. So take back-ups! And the neat way to do it is over the Internet.

There are several such systems. I use one called *Carbonite*. It starts automatically and works quietly and continuously in the background, backing up your changed data, which is encrypted before it leaves your machine and is therefore safe in more than one way. And, no, the system does not slow down your computer or your internet connection. Nor does it cost the earth …

You can try it out here! If you use this link to download a free 15-day trial subscription, you get an extra free month of service when you buy:
http://www.carbonite.com/raf/signup.aspx?RAFUserUID=213288&a=0

And the perfect Xmas gift for the rocket scientist in your life!



Abstract

English is the main language for international science publication, but not the native language of the majority of scientists. Writing well in a foreign language can be difficult. Some good existing material on how to write scientific papers was therefore blended with empirical data from English teaching pre-stored in the brain of a professional linguist and educator. This mixture was fermented at temperatures in the range of 35–40°C over a period of 28 days, after which essentials were extracted. The result is a practical manual for people who wish to publish in English but are not native-speakers. Conclusion: *Read on!*

Keywords

Writing – English – Science – Journal – Articles

"How to write a scientific paper", is an excellent guide – even for the experienced author of scientific articles and reports. It is easy to read and gives good advice about the structure of such papers, the writing process, and a number of the many linguistic traps that authors who do not have English as their mother tongue tend to fall into.

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD
Danish Decommissioning

Order it now from *English support* at *www.englishsupport.dk*

HAPPY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE!

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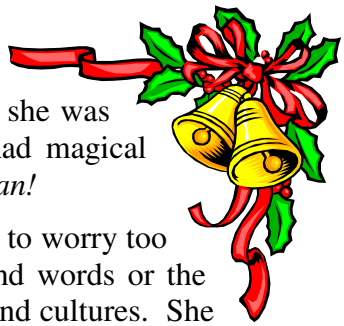
Please turn over!

The princess who wasn't

(A fairy tale for Christmas)

Any resemblance between a character in this story and any real person is purely intentional – but she'd probably better keep a low profile anyway! ☺



ONCE UPON A TIME, in a faraway country (let's call it Cloud-Cuckoo Land), there lived a princess. Well, *she* knew she was a princess, at any rate. Everybody *else* thought she worked as a translator. But she knew she was something really special. She was not only a princess, but she also had magical powers. *She could make any word mean exactly what she wanted it to mean!*

Now, this gave her a tremendous advantage in her work. She didn't need to worry too much about all those difficult things like the *meanings* that cluster round words or the *associations* and *connotations* that words might have in other languages and cultures. She could just concentrate on the *words*, which made it all so much easier.

For instance, she could take a job title like *Adjunkt* in Danish, and she knew at once that *Adjunct* would sound just fine in English. If she sprinkled her translation with a little of her special *SAT*-powder, no one would ever notice. At least they wouldn't *say* they noticed. You see *SAT*-powder has the effect of shutting people up. People tend to think that if something has *SAT*-powder sprinkled over it, then it *must* be OK.

And the truth is that *SAT*-powder usually really *does* mean that a translation is OK. This is because the people who have it have spent a long time studying how to translate words from one language into another and usually have a pretty good idea what they are talking about. Otherwise they don't get given the powder in the first place.

But our princess used it to cut corners. The Danish *Revisor* was easily translated with *Revisor* and *Folkeskolelærer* became *People's school learner*. The new English usages just flowed off her pen! *Administrating Directors*, *School Inspectors*, *Vice Inspectors*, and, of course, the *State's Minister*. It was dead easy!

Everything was just so wonderful, but you know how it is – there is always *someone* who goes and spoils it all, isn't there! *Someone* started claiming that these translations were all very well, but no one would understand them in England.

"Where?" she asked.

England. You know, where they speak English.

"Well, what does *that* matter?" she said, "This is how we say things in Cloud-Cuckoo Land, and that's that!"

But it wasn't, because more and more people started noticing that although there was plenty of *SAT*-powder sprinkled all over these translations, they still didn't sound quite right somehow.

So the princess decided to hire Saatchi and Saatchi to convince people she was right. With enough money it ought to be possible to change the so-called connotations and associations and usages and all that rubbish so they conformed to her ideal world where words meant just exactly whatever she wanted them to mean.

But Saatchi and Saatchi said no, they wouldn't take it on, because they only liked to do things which were actually possible.

And that's when the princess discovered she wasn't a princess after all and that she didn't really have any magic powers at all, but was "merely" a translator.

"Ah well", she thought, "never mind! – I've got a good imagination, so I can always take up writing fiction instead!" And she lived happily ever after, writing fiction in Cloud-Cuckoo Land.

THE END

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