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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!*

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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.

*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!*

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**

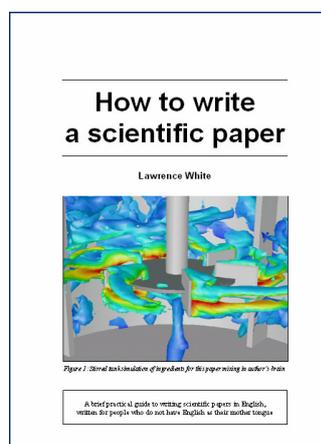
## Compound concepts (noun + noun)

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

Published by *English support*. Order it now from your local bookshop or direct from [www.englishsupport.dk](http://www.englishsupport.dk)

Please turn over!

## 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!

– 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](mailto:info@englishsupport.dk)

More tips next month!

Best wishes

Lawrence White

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