News & Tips

from

English support

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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!

BusinessHouse.dk

holds

OPEN HOUSE

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!

From the workshop...

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.

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.

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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.
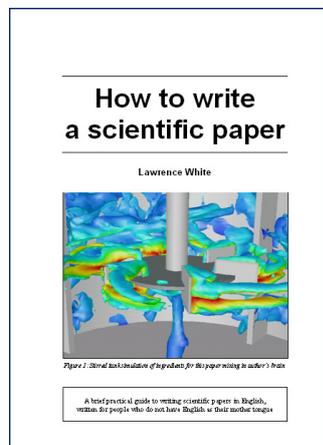
The verb *to need* as a normal verb

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? ☺

How to write a scientific paper

Lawrence White

Figure 1: Stirred tank simulation of ingredients for this paper writing in author's brain

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

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

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

Questions & Answers
(Edited)

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
Lawrence White
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