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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

This issue is again very late out, but we are in fact getting back on our feet after all the computer problems. We are also very busy. Already the turnover this quarter is set to be the third highest we have ever experienced and it may well end up second only to the “tsunami” of the last quarter of last year. The increased workload obviously slows down our recovery, but is a welcome sign that our customer base is still expanding despite the difficulties we have been through.

Michael de Laine joins *English support*

Like Claire Clausen, who started working for *English support* last year, Michael de Laine works part-time as a freelance journalist for the *Copenhagen Post*. He has had a freelance contract with *English support* for some time, but will now be working part-time in our office as well.

Michael’s specialities are the worlds of business and of science. Amongst his other activities, he is the Chairman of the Danish Science Journalists Association (*Danske Videnskabsjournalister*). But in addition to his journalistic pursuits, he is also an excellent translator and proofreader.

Michael’s presence in the office will considerably strengthen our ability to serve our customers when Claire and I have teaching commitments, and his expertise will prove invaluable as our customer base, notably amongst researchers, continues to expand.

Our freelance network keeps growing! (Updated since No. 34!)

We now have some 150 freelance partners. They are all people with language expertise and many are specialists. Some 30% 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, and from Russian to Malay, so that between us we cover 29 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, engineering, architecture, computing, hunting and shooting, martial arts, business, 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!

Making opposites

A Chinese student of mine asked if there were any rules about opposites in English. A typical example might be that the opposite of *natural* is *unnatural*, while the opposite of *normal* is *abnormal*, and the opposite of *adequate* is *inadequate*, and the opposite of *polite* is *impolite*, and the opposite of *legal* is *illegal*, and the opposite of *agreeable* is *disagreeable*, and the opposite of *conformist* is *nonconformist*, and the opposite of a *theist* is an *atheist*, and the opposite of *careful* is *careless*, and so on. ☺

Well, at first sight it seems an impossible mess, but in fact there are some patterns from which we can create some (perhaps) useful guidelines.

Where there is a word ...

The first thing to note is that a lot of very common adjectives have completely different words as opposites: *rich* and *poor*, *right* and *wrong*, *clean* and *dirty*, *easy* and *difficult*, *fast* and *slow*, *alive* and *dead*, *wet* and *dry*, *tall* and *short*, *fat* and *thin*, *big* and *small*, etc., etc.

In these cases there is usually no opposite form to make, because we just use the other word. And in those few cases where an apparent opposite form exists, it often has a quite different meaning, e.g. *uneasy* (not feeling at ease), *unclean* (usually meaning *not clean* in some religious/ritual sense).

The prefix *un-* ...

This is the most usual way of making the opposite form of common adjectives: *unable*, *uncomfortable*, *unequal*, *unlike*, *unripe*, *unusual*, etc. The same applies to adverbs made from such adjectives: *uncomfortably*, *unequally*, *unlikely*, *unusually*, etc.

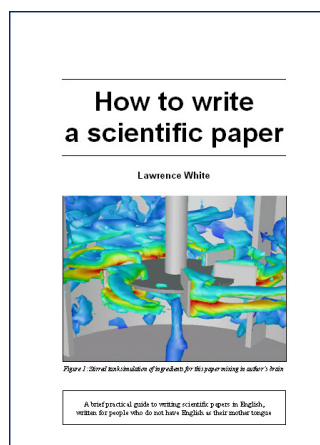
It is also used to make the opposite of quite a lot of verbs: *unbend*, *undo*, *undress*, *unfasten*,

unload, *unplug*, *untie*, *unveil*, etc. You will even find verbs like *to undeceive* and *unlearn*. And verbs made from *un-* + nouns: *unhorse*, *unseat*, *unthrone*, etc. All these verbs reverse a previous action (contrast: *uncover* with *discover*). Note that the verbs *unloose* and *unloosen* are exceptions and mean exactly the same as *loose* and *loosen*.

And, just occasionally, the meaning of a *noun* can be reversed, e.g. *unbelief*, an *untruth*.

The *un-* prefix comes from Old English (cf. the *u-* prefix common in Danish), but English has its roots in French/Latin as well as in the Germanic languages, so do not assume that the *un-* form is possible. Often it is not. But it is quite common, also with words originating in Latin: e.g. *unfortunate*, *unnatural* and *unnecessary*.

And when the past (or present) participle of a verb is used as an adjective, the opposite form (if there is one) is formed with *un-*: *undefined*, *uneducated*, *unemployed*, *uninterested* (and *uninteresting*), *unlit*, *unseen* (and *unseeing*), *unsurprised* (and *unsurprising*), *unwritten*, etc.



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

Making opposites (contd.)

The prefix *in-* (and variations) ...

This is the second most common prefix for forming opposites: *inaccurate*, *indefinite*, *informal*, *inhuman*, *inorganic*, *insane*, etc. Where the original word starts with *m*, *p* or *b*, *in-* becomes *im-* as in: *imbalance*, *immature*, *impossible*, *impure*, etc. Where the original word starts with *l*, *in-* becomes *il-* as in: *illegal*, *illiterate*, etc. And where the original word starts with *r*, *in-* becomes *ir-* as in: *irrational*, *irregular*, etc.

The problem is that the Latin prefix can also have another meaning, namely motion *towards* or *into*, so we have a lot of words in English that might look as though they are opposites, but which are not: *infect*, *inform*, *inset*, *imbibe*, *immigrant*, *impress*, etc. And the word *inflammable* means the same as *flammable*. No wonder that fire services all over the world recommend dropping its use entirely!

The words that form their opposites with *in-* usually have Latin roots (if that helps!), but as we have seen, some common words with Latin roots form their opposites with *un-*. This is also the case with many words from Latin that already start with *in-*, e.g. *unimaginative*, *uninformative*, *unintelligent*, etc.

And some opposites can be formed either way: *inadvisable* or *unadvisable*, *incurable* or *uncurable*, *inharmonious* or *unharmonious*, etc. There are also differences between British and US English: *insanitary* and *unarguable* are preferred in British English, while in US English both *inarguable* and *unarguable* are used and *unsanitary* is preferred.

The prefix *ab-* ...

This is another Latin prefix (meaning *from*). Its use in English is harder to define, but it often indicates deviation from some norm, as

in *abuse*, which may account for its use as an opposite in *abnormal*.

The prefix *dis-* ...

This prefix is often used for making opposites of words that already have another prefix of some kind: e.g. *disabuse*, *disembark*, *disinfect*, *disingenuous*, *disrepute*, etc., but it is also seen in opposites like *dishonest*, *dishonour*, *disuse*, and in verbs like *disarm*, *discover*, *displease*, *disprove*, which are what we might call active opposites.

The prefix *non-* ...

Non is simply the Latin word for *not*, so it is often used as a prefix to make an opposite where there is no obvious choice already in existence, e.g. an NGO is a *Non-Governmental Organisation*. It is common in modern words: *non-aggression*, *non-alcoholic*, *non-aligned*, etc.

In British English, these words are usually still hyphenated (as new combinations often are), but the trend is towards dropping the hyphens, as in the case of *nonconformist*.

US English makes less use of this convention in general, and most such words are written without hyphens.

The prefix *a-* ...

This is a Greek prefix for forming opposites. As such, it is only used in English for forming the opposite of words of Greek origin: *apolitical*, *asymmetric*, *atheism*, etc.

In some cases, the Greek prefix *a-* seems to be being replaced with *non-* (or even *un-*) with much the same meaning: e.g. *non-political*.

Something similar must have happened with the word *polite* when its opposite became *impolite*! ☺

And there's more!

The general term for opposites is a nice Greek-derived word, *antonym*. There are several different kinds. Above, we have mostly been concerned with what are called *gradable* or *complementary* antonyms. On page 4, we take a look at what are known as *relational* or *converse* antonyms, but I prefer to call them *reciprocals*.

Reciprocals

A Danish colleague suggested I take up this subject because he has noticed a lot of mistakes in this area. So here goes:

1. There are some pairs of verbs in English whose meanings are not exactly opposite but more *reciprocal*, like the words **push** and **pull** on the two sides of a door. We can draw the relationship between them like this:

PUSH → PULL

The words **push** and **pull** seldom cause foreigners much difficulty, because this pair of meanings exists in most other languages too. The grammar is also easy, because they both have only one object:

e.g. *You **push** this button and then you **pull** this rope.*

The words **imply** and **infer** work in exactly the same way:

e.g. *I did not mean to **imply** that she had lied, but you chose to **infer** it from what I said.*

IMPLY → INFER

2. However, the pattern of the following group of pairs is more complicated and some of the pairs do not exist in other languages:

The verbs on the left-hand side often have *two* objects:

e.g. *She gave **him a book**.*
*They lent **you some money**.*

In most cases, this sentence structure can be changed to:

*She gave **a book to him**.*
*They lent **some money to you**.*

GIVE → TAKE
SELL → BUY
LEND → BORROW
TEACH → LEARN

The verbs on the right-hand side have the following structure:

*He took (received) **the book from her**.*
*You borrowed **some money from them**.*

3. Finally there are verb pairs where the *place focused upon* (e.g. the position of the speaker, *or the person spoken to*, at the time spoken of) makes a difference:

GO → COME
TAKE → BRING

Here we use the verb on the right-hand side if the movement is *to the place* where *either* the speaker *or* the person spoken to *is, was* or *will be* at the time spoken of, and we use the verb on the left if the movement is *to any other place*:

e.g. *Can we **come** for dinner on Tuesday? We'll **bring** a bottle of wine.*
*We **went** there for dinner on Tuesday. We **took** a bottle of wine.*

Note that here both **take** and **bring** can take two objects (cf. point 2 above):

e.g. *I **went** to the hospital to see her. I **took her some flowers**.*

If you would like an exercise on using reciprocal verbs, get in touch!

More next month!

Best wishes

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www. **English support** .dk

Your natural language partner