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***Professional English Writing for  
Engineers and Utility Specialists***

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**Y305**

# ***Research Centre for Professional Communication in English***

<http://www.engl.polyu.edu.hk/RCPCE/>

- Established in Jan 2006
- **Mission:** To pursue **applied research** and **consultancy** so as to deepen our understanding of professional communication in English and better serve the communication needs of professional communities.

# ***‘Professional expertise’: Three components (Bhatia 2004: 146)***



# *Objectives of seminar*

To introduce and demonstrate a number of practical **corpus-based** writing strategies that **Engineers and Utility Specialists** will be able to apply when planning and writing **different text-types in English** in the professional world.

- ✿ Choosing the right words
- ✿ Finding the right preposition
- ✿ Writing less: ellipsis, substitution and reference
- ✿ Headlines and titles
- ✿ Rhetorical functions and structuring

# *Choosing the right words*

How can you determine which words are appropriate:

- **powerful coffee** or **strong coffee**?
- **powerful engine** or **strong engine**?
  
- ✿ Do we ask a native speaker of English?
  
- ✿ Using **corpora**, **corpora access software**, and **corpus-based dictionaries and grammars** to inform professional written communication.

# *knowledge on ... or knowledge of ...?*

- As professionals, we often encounter queries such as:
  - ✿ Should I write **knowledge on ...** or **knowledge of ...**?
- What do we do to find out?
- Let's check a corpus-based dictionary, e.g. *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary Online*  
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=44130&dict=CALD>

# *Check a corpus*

- What is a corpus?
- ‘a corpus is a collection of naturally-occurring language text, chosen to characterize a state or variety of a language’ (Sinclair 1991: 171):
  - ✿ Reference corpora
  - ✿ Specialised corpora

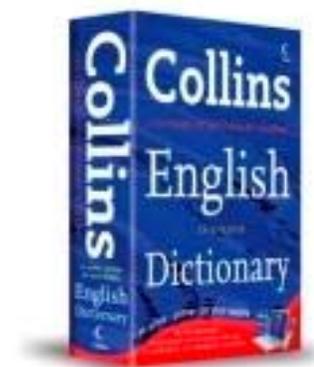
## *Reference corpora with built-in software programs*

The world's two largest corpora are in the United Kingdom:

**British National Corpus (BNC)** (100 m words)

<http://sara.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/lookup.html>

**The Bank of English** (524 m words, continues to grow): a collection of modern English language held on computer for analysis of words, meanings, grammar and usage



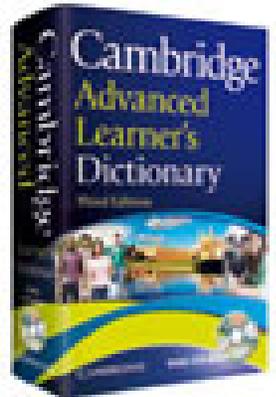
# *Language of the British National Corpus\**

Token	Cumulative Relative Frequency
<b>the, of, and, a, in, to, it, is, was, to</b>	<b>21.28%</b>
<b>i, for, you, he, be, with, on, that, by, at</b>	<b>6.66%</b>
<b>are, not, this, but, 's, they, his, from, had, she</b>	<b>4.35%</b>
<b>which, or, we, an, n't, 's, were, that, been, have</b>	<b>3.25%</b>
<b>their, has, would, what, will, there, if, can, all, her</b>	<b>2.42%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b><u>37.96%</u></b>

Nearly **40%** of British English is made up of just **50 words** and **20.23%** is made up of only **6 words**.

# ***CUP: Corpus-based publications***

- Cambridge University Press Corpus-based books (Chart 2)
  - ✿ Adult, Secondary, Exams, Professional English, etc.
  
- Cambridge University Press Corpus-based books (Chart 2):
  - ✿ Grammar, Vocabulary, Dictionaries, Pronunciation, Methodology and Linguistics



# Cambridge International Corpus

- Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE)  
Recordings of spoken English across the UK **5 million words**
- Cambridge and Nottingham Spoken Business English (CANBEC)  
Unique recordings of business language in commercial companies  
**1 million words**
- Cambridge Cornell Corpus of Spoken North American English  
Recordings of spoken English across North America **0.5 million words**
- Cambridge Corpus of Business English  
Business reports and documents from the UK and US **60 million words**
- Cambridge Corpus of Legal English  
Law related books and articles from the UK and US **20 million words**
- Cambridge Corpus of Financial English  
Books and articles relating to economics And finance from the UK and US  
**55 million words**
- Cambridge Corpus of Academic English  
Text from Academic books and journals from the UK and US  
**25 million words**
- Cambridge Learner Corpus  
Exam scripts written by students taking Cambridge ESOL exams  
**30 million words**

## *A specialised corpus in PolyU*

- Hong Kong Financial Services Corpus (HKFSC) (6.7 million words), Research Centre for Professional Communication (RCPCE), Department of English:  
<http://langbank.engl.polyu.edu.hk/HKFSC/>
- a built-in software program: *ConcGram*
- What does the HKFSC show us about the use of ‘knowledge on ...’ or ‘knowledge of ...’?

# *Corpus-based inquiries*

**Not sure what word or words to say or write?**

- Consult a corpus and study the **frequencies** and **contexts of use** of the words or words.
- A corpus can be more reliable than relying on one's intuition or the intuition of somebody else, e.g.
  - ❁ **staff member** or **member of staff**?
  - ❁ **sales volume** or **volume of sales**?

## *sales volume or volume of sales?*

- These are not cases of right versus wrong. However, the frequencies of their occurrence in the BNC might help you to decide. There are more than **4 times more** instances of **member of staff** than **staff member**. Whereas **sales volume** has **twice as many** instances as **volume of sales**.
- In these cases **Yahoo! search results** confirm the **higher frequency** of **sales volume**, but not **member of staff**; **staff member** is **much more frequent**.

## *Patterns of word association and meaning*

- Words **do not** create meaning in isolation. “You shall know a word by the company it keeps” (Firth, 1957).
- Meaning is created by the **co-selection of words**.
- **Forms of co-selection:**
  - ✿ **collocation**
  - ✿ **colligation**
  - ✿ **semantic preference**
  - ✿ **semantic prosody**

# *Collocation*

The **collocates** of a word are words which frequently **co-occur** in the vicinity of that word, e.g.

- **cause** co-occurs with **problem(s), damage, death(s), disease, concern, cancer, pain, trouble**
- **seeking** co-occurs with **asylum, help, advice, support, information**
- **applause** co-occurs with **loud, thunderous, rapturous, spontaneous, polite, warm, enthusiastic**

(Stubbs 2001)

# *Colligation*

- A word has a colligate when a particular **word class** co-occurs in the vicinity of the word.
- e.g. the word **cases** often co-occurs with a quantifier: *some, many, most, more, both, several*, etc.

# *Semantic preference*

The relation between an individual word and semantically-related words, e.g.

- The word **heated** is associated with the following **semantic set**: **debate, discussion, argument(s), exchange(s)**
- The word **agent** is associated with the following **semantic set**: **estate, travel, secret, literary**
- The word **large** is associated with words that express quantities and sizes, e.g. **large number(s), scale, part, amounts, quantities, areas** (Stubbs 2001)

# *Semantic prosody*

- Semantic prosody expresses the '**function**' of the lexical item.
- Sinclair (1991) gives the example of the phrasal verb **set in** which is typically co-selected with the following: **rot, decay, malaise, despair, ill-will, decadence, impoverishment, infection, prejudice, rigor mortis, bitterness, boredom**, etc.
- Thus the co-selection of the subjects found with this phrasal verb have created a semantic prosody of '**unpleasantness**'.

## *Semantic prosody*

- As a result, any subject of this phrasal verb is impacted by this semantic prosody, and so if the subject does not conform to this semantic prosody, it will be perceived as '**marked**', e.g. **happiness set in, love set in, interest set in** are marked.

## *committed to and commit*

- Search for the pattern of use and meaning of **committed to** and **commit** in the Hong Kong Financial Services Corpus (HKFSC)  
<http://langbank.engl.polyu.edu.hk/HKFSC/>

# Sample concordance lines of **committed to** (HKFSC)

- 1 groups control occur but the Group has initiated and is committed to a plan to sell the assets. The investment in unconsolid
- 2 nance Manual. Corporate Communication The Company is committed to a policy of open and regular communication and fair di
- 3 PORATE RESPONSIBILITY Being a listed company, HKEx is committed to achieving the best corporate governance practices, and
- 4 ere held. In respect of corporate governance, HKEx is committed to adopting the best practices and meeting the highest sta
- 5 ated by local universities. Environment PCCW is committed to best environmental practice in all its commercial acti
- 6 sustain long-term business growth, the Group has been committed to building a highly dedicated and competent team to work
- 7 y time during the year. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE HKEx is committed to building and maintaining high standards of corporate go
- 8 ccountability to all stakeholders. It is, in addition, committed to continuously improving these practices and inculcating
- 9 le corporation on the FTSE4Good Global Index, PCCW is committed to contributing to the community, which is reflected by t
- 10 le corporation on the FTSE4Good Global Index, PCCW is committed to contributing to the community in which it conducts bus

# *Sample concordance lines of **commit** in a general English language corpus*

the employer has committed or proposes to commit a crime, fraud or misdeed. Whilst  
a criminal offence: if he incites anyone to commit a criminal offence, whether or not I  
offence: if he incites a client or anyone else to commit a criminal offence; or if he helps  
oration and every officer of it who is in default commit an offence and each is liable on  
e management will be brought to court if they commit any criminal or civil breaches of the law.  
y threats, promises or otherwise, a person to commit any such contravention; directly or  
mistakes of technical mismanagement, they commit what is called cosmetic mismanagement, i.  
vent wrongdoing by harsh penalty, those who commit wrongdoing are not ashamed, but

## *What is the problem with **commit** in HKFSC?*

- 1 developments. The Board will continue to commit itself to achieving a high quality of corporate govern
- 2 individuals development. Employees are encouraged to commit to continuous improvement by initiating their own lear
- 3 ef Executive Officer, WWF Hong Kong (left) Would CLP commit to increased investment in renewable energy generation

# ***committed to and commit***

- From concordances, a lot can be learned about the patterns of language use.
  - ✿ **commit** tends to co-occur with words related to ‘**crimes and/or behaviour that is socially disapproved of**’, e.g. corrupt act, corruption offence, crime, criminal offence, breach of the law, breach of trust, contravention, offence of deception, mismanagement, wrongdoing, etc.
  - ✿ **committed to** is associated with **preferred activities**, e.g. high standard of ethics, transparency, fairness, best corporate governance, addressing problems, assisting, high standard of business conduct, best practice, etc.
- This results in **commit** and **committed to** having different semantic prosodies.

# *Semantic prosody: another example*

Look at the following newspaper extract and see if you can identify an instance of usage which is **marked** because it seems to contravene the semantic prosody conventionally associated with it.

Extract from an editorial in The Standard dated 19.12.03

***It is clear that Hong Kong's economy is on the path to recovery and we can look forward to considerably better prospects next year.***

***This good news is compounded by recent surveys of business conditions. A survey conducted by Grant Thornton showed that business confidence had soared in Hong Kong compared with last year and businesses were optimistic with respect to the economy and positive on turnover, profits and business expansion.***

- 703 The adviser's stress may be further compounded by the feeling that the regulations are unfair.
- 174 High-cost oversupply has been compounded by extremely low demand.
- 537 These shortcomings are clearly compounded by the difficulty of creating new titles.
- 937 The Chinese population, for many of whom existing poverty was compounded by the effects of war, were treated with the utmost contempt and ruthlessness.
- 473 The service remains in a pit of despair compounded by underfunding and the closure of specialist resources such as Peper Harrow.
- 128 This group's inferior class position is linked to their families' origins as immigrants, and is compounded by poor incomes and racism.
- 155 The drying up of remittance flows was compounded by the rising cost of oil imports, and the loss of earnings stemming from the trade embargo on Iraq and Kuwait.
- 39 Disapproval of the government was compounded by its lack of clarity over plans to rebuild the mosque.
- 126 Uncertainty and scientific dispute is compounded by the fact that radioactive contamination is different from many other types of pollution.

(examples from British National Corpus)

# *Semantic prosody*

Study these sentences. Do any of them seem to be **marked** in their choice of wording?

1. I'm excited by the thought of my impending wedding.
2. The director said he was greatly saddened by the impending closure of his company's factory.
3. She was happily preparing for her daughter-in-law's impending birthday.
4. The lawyer refused to comment on his client's impending corruption trial.

- 162 According to one report, people could hardly wait for the attack to start, and everybody wanted to be present at Britain's **impending defeat**.
- 524 Towards the end, Horthy tried to extricate the country from the **impending shambles**, but the Germans occupied it in March 1944 and, in any case, the Allies were no longer sympathetic.
- 350 The news of his **impending death** had badly ruffled his composure.
- 285 And GPU's lawyers made great play of a document, written by Babcock staff before the TMI accident, that suggested new procedures to recognise the signs of **impending accidents** before they happen.
- 759 Some insects, for example, emit a pheromone as an alarm signal, warning other members of the same species of **impending danger**.
- 709 About three-quarters of the way down the train Jack began to feel very frightened for the overpowering sense of **impending evil** became even stronger.
- 528 Achieving fusion as an energy source is a dream today made more urgent by the fear of **impending environmental disaster**.
- 758 PGL is not, in itself, an illness and is not thought to be a sign of **impending illness**.
- 789 Had the German attack been mounted on 12 February, as planned, the French, caught as it were in transit --; for though now aware of the **impending peril** they were only beginning to bring up reinforcements --; must have been overcome in a total and horrible manner.
- 102 The rest of the world may be doom-mongering about the mainframe and its **impending extinction**, but not Walker International, the Aylesbury-based subsidiary of San Francisco-based IBM mainframe accounting software company Walker Interactive Systems Inc.
- 123 Moreover, in the absence of any evidence of **impending upheaval**, individual peasants were wary of risking involvement in seditious talk.
- 043 After the exhilaration of the Anniversary came the grim reality of **impending war**: discussions took place with the Borough Surveyor and a Major Foster on Air Raid Precautions.
- 146 Towering head and shoulders above the Customs officer, who stood aside to let him pass, the man strode in, his face as dark and threatening as an **impending storm**.

**(examples from British National Corpus)**

# *impending*

Here is a dictionary definition of **impending**.

**impending**

adj

An **impending** event is one that is going to happen soon.

(Collins COBUILD Dictionary, 2006)

# *impending*

**impending** Show phonetics

adjective [before noun]

describes an event, usually something **unpleasant or unwanted**, **that is going to happen soon**:

*impending disaster/doom*

*Lineker announced his impending retirement from international football before the 1992 European Championships.*

(Cambridge Dictionaries online, accessed 26 August 2008)

## ***Semantic prosody: regime***

- Sinclair (2003) gives the example of a journalist from S.E. Asia who wrote an article in his newspaper which described the Government of the country as a **regime**.
- The Government took him to court on charges of libel – they argued that for a government to be called a ‘**regime**’ is insulting. His defence was that **regime** was not inherently insulting. The journalist was convicted.
- **Do you agree that if you call a government a **regime**, you are likely to intend an insult to it?**

# *regime*

creasingly critical of the **autocratic regime** in North Korea, indicating if not a  
es as ' an exceptionally **unpopular regime** Iran's international behaviour will f  
erals under the former **Communist regime** have been arrested and accused of  
n merely numerical terms, **Stalin's regime** actually killed more millions than -  
of Enver Hoxha, the most **Stalinist regime** in Europe. But they did demand I  
condemned the Nigerian **military regime** for sentencing Ken Saro-Wiwa the  
nd was partly funded by the **Hitler regime** but as a scientist he claimed to be  
e. [p] In Chile, General **Pinochet's regime** introduced a mandatory savings  
any of his colleagues in the **Vichy regime** had taken the precaution of burning  
t be contemplated by a **totalitarian regime**, just as the Nazis tried to breed an  
pitalist democracies with the **Nazi regime** was among the more provocative  
gime has been declared an **outlaw regime** in effect. And when the people of  
e his conversations with the **Iraqi regime**. Ekeus just decided to choose and  
ccession of a new **authoritarian regime**. Er and er finally there's one that I

(examples from Bank of English)

## *The dynamics of lexical meaning*

‘The Hong Kong Polytechnic University has groomed more than 200,000 young talents in its 65 years as a leading provider of higher education.’

Is there an instance of language use in this sentence which you think is **marked**?

- 023 You can buy most **grooming** items in compact travel sizes --; look at the Braun and Philips ranges of shavers, hairdryers and hair stylers.
- 013 '**Grooming** up my successor?';
- 110 Far from being `dirty' and `unsavoury'; it spends as much time **grooming** its fur as any fastidious cat.
- 274 He has been **grooming** his son Kim Jong-il for the succession, but the latter does not enjoy his father's authority and a power struggle could already be under way.
- 830 Some dogs obviously require more **grooming** than others, and a variety of tools are available for this purpose, ranging from combs and brushes to scissors and clippers.
- 986 In 16 per cent of weddings, both bride and **groom** have been married before.
- 238 When they reached the stables a **groom** took the horses and Rain and Ayling entered the house by a back way.
- 691 To keep a horse clean you need to **groom** it.
- 109 Intersolv bought the rights to the application six months ago, since when it has **groomed** and re-packaged the product for its worldwide launch as Maintenance Workbench.
- 568 Ferguson accompanied the European Ryder Cup team as Colin Montgomery's personal guru to Kiawah Island last year and has **groomed** many leading amateurs, several of whom who have made their mark on the European professional circuit.

**(examples from BNC)**

[www.netsafe.org.nz/offenders/offenders\\_default.aspx](http://www.netsafe.org.nz/offenders/offenders_default.aspx) - 25k - Cached - Similar pages  
The Internet Safety Group:: [Sex Offenders & Grooming](#) > What is ...what is [online and offline grooming](#)? How do you know if someone is trying to [groom a child online](#)?  
Internet Safety Group 2006 ...

[www.netsafe.org.nz/offenders/what\\_is\\_grooming.aspx](http://www.netsafe.org.nz/offenders/what_is_grooming.aspx) - 26k - Cached - Similar pages  
[ More results from [www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz) ]  
Inhope - The Association of Internet Hotline Providers. [Paedophiles use the rooms to groom children](#) for abuse by pretending to be law so that grooming children for abuse on the Internet becomes a new offence. ...

[www.inhope.org/en/problem/grooming.html](http://www.inhope.org/en/problem/grooming.html) - 21k - Cached - Similar pages  
BBC NEWS | Scotland | [Law change on internet 'grooming'](#) Paedophiles caught using the internet to "[groom](#)" children in Scotland could ... [Paedophiles convicted of internet grooming](#) in England and Wales face up to ...

[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/3490717.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/3490717.stm) - 39k - Cached - Similar pages  
BBC NEWS | UK | Scotland | MSPs pass [internet 'grooming' law](#) It is now an offence to '[groom](#)' youngsters over the internet. A bill to clamp down on [paedophiles grooming children on the internet](#) has been passed by MSPs ...

[news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/scotland/4604909.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/4604909.stm) - 37k - Cached - Similar pages  
The Scottish Parliament: Justice 1 Committee News Release: The Executive's Bill aims to create [a new offence of sexual grooming of a child](#) ... [The threat from paedophiles who use the internet to groom](#) vulnerable ...

[www.scottish.parliament.uk/nmCentre/news/news-comm-05/cj105-002.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/nmCentre/news/news-comm-05/cj105-002.htm) - 18k - Cached - Similar pages  
[Man charged with online grooming'](#) - Breaking - Technology - smh ...Under the legislation, [online grooming](#) is defined as [exploiting the anonymity](#) .. [The man faces five charges of using the internet to groom/procure a child](#). "We've had cases where it's taken two years before [a child predator meets a kid](#) and has [groomed](#) them successfully."

(examples generated by Google)

# ***Finding the right prepositions (worksheet p.1)***

1. Interactive online courses were organised to raise participants' awareness \_\_\_\_\_ the importance of ethnics.
2. To enhance the members' knowledge \_\_\_\_\_ the latest requirements.
3. The Director expressed concern \_\_\_\_\_ the Department's arrangements.
4. A comparison \_\_\_\_\_ the similarities \_\_\_\_\_ different ordinances.
5. Companies should set up proper procedures \_\_\_\_\_ dealing with the declarations.
6. The head office has employed an accounting firm to conduct quarterly audits \_\_\_\_\_ the subsidiaries.
7. With escalating public concern \_\_\_\_\_ corporate governance in recent years,  
directors are expected to promote an ethical culture.
8. There were nine teams each composed of three staff members with the highest  
score \_\_\_\_\_ the web quiz.
9. It is the contractor who decides \_\_\_\_\_ what situation a covering works  
order is  
allowed.
10. Placing advertisements \_\_\_\_\_ TV and in the print media.

# ***Writing less: ellipsis, substitution and reference***

## **Ellipsis**

Three main kinds of ellipsis in English: nominal, verbal and clausal.

(i) **nominal** - the omission of a noun headword

*Russia's Interior Ministry said about 60 rebels had been killed and another 15 wounded while the Russian side had four dead and 14 wounded.*

## *Verbal ellipsis*

(ii) **verbal** – omission of main or auxiliary verb

*a: Will anyone be waiting?*

*b: Jim will, I should think.*

*a: Has she remarried?*

*b: No, but she will one day, I'm sure.*

# *Clausal ellipsis*

(iii) **clausal** - individual clause elements, e.g. subject-pronoun, or longer clause components are omitted.

- *She said she would go to visit her mother as soon as she could go to visit her mother and she has visited her mother.*
- *don't know, doesn't matter, sorry, etc.*

# Clausal ellipsis

- *She said she would go to visit her mother as soon as she could (go to visit her mother) and she has (visited her mother).*
- *(We) don't know (when he's arriving).*
- *(It really) doesn't matter (what you did).*
- *(I'm) sorry (to call so late, but I need a favour.)*

# Substitution

Use of words such as 'so' or 'do' to substitute for prior parts of the text.

- *The study asked participants if they benefited from the workshop. Almost 80% responded that they benefited from the workshop.*
- *A: It would be nice if the rain stopped soon.*
- *B: I hope the storm would stop.*

## ***Reference***

Use of definite article and proforms, for example, to refer backwards, forwards or outside the text.

*Mr Putin said that the operation had become necessary after the Chechen rebels shot two of their hostages. The Chechens denied this.*

# Reference

## Russian President Vladimir Putin

*Mr Putin said that the operation had become necessary after the Chechen rebels shot two of **their** hostages. The Chechens denied **this**.*

→ *shot two of **Mr Putan's** hostages.*

→ *The Chechens denied **shooting two of their** hostages.*

## Reference

- *When he addressed his New Year wishes to the Canadian people, Federal Prime Minister Stephen Harper hoped they would ...*
- *The Government will revise its estimates as a result.* (South China Morning Post)

## Reference

- When *he* addressed *his* New Year wishes to the Canadian people, Federal Prime Minister Stephen Harper hoped *they* would ...
  - When *Federal Prime Minister Stephen Harper* addressed *Federal Prime Minister Stephen Harper's* New Year wishes to the Canadian people, Federal Prime Minister Stephen Harper hoped *the Canadian people* would ...
- The Government will revise *its* estimates as a result.
  - The Government will revise *the Government's* estimates as a result.

- ✓ **Choosing the right words**
- ✓ **Finding the right preposition**
- ✓ **Writing less: ellipsis, substitution and reference**
- ✿ **Headlines and titles**
- ✿ **Rhetorical functions and structuring**

# *Headlines and Titles*

**Dunkin'**

**Donuts**

America runs on Dunkin'

**CRISPIER. CRUNCHIER. TASTIER.**

**NEW OVEN-TOASTED HASH BROWNS**

# *Headlines and Titles*

**Dunkin'**

**Donuts**

America runs on Dunkin'

(6 words, alliteration, same first and last word,  
metaphor: Dunkin' supplies 'power' to America)

**CRISPIER. CRUNCHIER. TASTIER.**

(3 words, alliteration, 3 comparative adjectives, full stops)

**NEW OVEN-TOASTED HASH BROWNS**

(4/5 words in one unit, with two adjectives and a plural noun)

# *Headlines and Titles*

What are some of the key considerations when writing headlines and titles?

- Capture the important points of the content.
- Keep it as short as possible - 4-6 words - to be 'punchy'.  
[leave out determiners, prepositions, conjunctions, etc.]
- Use 'strong' verbs.
- Think about the sound of the words: use alliteration, rhyming etc.
- Pose a question.
- Use a new word (neologism).
- Use humour.
- Use a quote.

## ***Discussion (worksheet p.2)***

1. Shanghai shares stay shaky
2. Delay and deception
3. 'Dozens die' in China train crash
4. What are currynomics?
5. McCain: 'Obama Out of Touch'

# ***Rhetorical structure and functioning***

## **Choice of rhetorical strategy**

What are the implications of choosing **deductive** (main idea before details) versus **inductive** (details before main idea) strategies?

(worksheet p.3)

# *Coherence*

Two of the central concerns in any description of coherent discourse structure and organisation in professional and business contexts are:

- Language use should be appropriate for the communicative purpose, audience and context of situation.
- Communication should be simple, clear and direct.

**Are these concerns always compatible?**

## *Compare two e-mails*

Dear (first name)

Give my boss the report which you are helping him to prepare by tomorrow morning.

Regards,  
X (first name)

(19 words)

Dear (first name)

How are you doing? Don't forget to send me the photos that we took yesterday.

By the way, you may know that my boss is going to an important meeting this Friday morning and I understand that you are helping him in preparing a report. You may already realise that the report is essential for the meeting. Grateful if you could finish it by tomorrow morning.

Give me a ring if you need any help. Thanks.

Regards,

X (first name)

**(81 words)**

# *Pragmatic politeness*

- Politeness consists of strategies employed by participants in spoken discourse to best achieve their communicative goals in a particular context.
- **Maintenance of Face:** a "person tends to conduct himself during an encounter so as to maintain both his own face and the face of the other participants" (Goffman 1967: 11).
- **Negative and Positive Face:** Brown and Levinson (1987) identify face-work as a crucial influence on the ways in which messages are constructed and it consists of two related elements.

# *Face*

**Positive face** is an individual's "desire to be liked, approved of, respected and appreciated by others".

**Negative face** is an individual's "desire not to be impeded or put upon, to have the freedom to act as one chooses".

# ***Face-threatening act (FTA)***

- Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that many communicative acts threaten negative and/or positive face.
- Insults, expressions of disapproval' for example, on threaten the hearer's or reader's positive face.
- Order and requests, for example, threaten the hearer's or reader's negative face.
- A speaker's or hearer's own positive face is threatened if, for example, she/he admits to some inadequacy.
- A speaker's or hearer's own negative face is threatened if, for example, she/he is forced into offering assistance.

# *Linguistic politeness strategies*

Speakers estimate the risk of face loss based on the relative power relationship and social distance between the speaker and hearer and the size of the imposition.

**Power + Distance + Imposition** = degree of face-threat  
to be compensated  
by appropriate  
linguistic strategy  
(Brown and Levinson 1987)

## ***Five super-strategies*** (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65)

- 1 the speaker can do the FTA '**on record**' **baldly**, without any redressive action of any kind
- 2 the speaker can do the FTA '**on record**', but with redressive action in the form of **positive politeness**
- 3 the speaker can do the FTA '**on record**', but with redressive action in the form of **negative politeness**
- 4 the speaker can do the FTA '**off record**', in other words **indirectly**
- 5 the speaker **does not do the FTA** because the risk of face loss may be considered to be so great

## *Realisations of ...*

<b>positive politeness</b>	<b>negative politeness</b>
Notice/attend to hearer's wants	Be conventionally indirect
Exaggerate interest/approval	Question/hedge
Intensify interest	Be pessimistic
Use in-group identity markers	Minimize imposition
Seek agreement	Give deference
Avoid disagreement	Apologize
Presuppose/assert common ground	Impersonalize
Joke	State the imposition as a general rule
Assert knowledge of hearer's wants	Nominalize
Offer, promise	Go on record as incurring debt
Be optimistic	
Give (ask for) reasons	
Assume/assert reciprocity	
Include speaker and hearer in the activity	
Give gifts to hearer (goods, sympathy etc.)	
	(Brown and Levinson, 1987: 102 & 131)

# *Realizations of off record strategies*

## **A. Invite conversational implicatures**

- Give hints
- Give association clues
- Presuppose
- Understate
- Overstate
- Use tautologies
- Use contradictions
- Be ironic
- Use metaphors
- Use rhetorical questions

## **B. Be vague or ambiguous: Violate the Manner Maxim**

- Be ambiguous
- Be vague
- Over-generalize
- Displace H
- Be incomplete, use ellipsis

# *Pragmatic politeness*

Study the two e-mails, and analyse the use of pragmatic politeness in each.

(worksheet p.4)

# *Analysis of pragmatic politeness*

Dear (first name)

**Give** (an imperative verb to give an order) my boss  
the report which you are helping him to prepare by  
tomorrow morning.

Regards,  
X (first name)

**Overall strategy 1 – bald on record with no  
redressive language**

Dear (first name)

How are you doing? (*notice/attend to hearer's wants, +ve*) Don't forget to send me the photos that we took yesterday (*assert common ground, +ve*).

By the way (*minimise imposition, -ve*), you may (*hedge, -ve*) know that my boss is going to an important meeting this Friday morning and I understand (*hedge, -ve*) that you are helping him in preparing a report (*assert common ground, +ve*). You may (*hedge, -ve*) already realise that the report is essential for the meeting (*assert common ground +ve*). Grateful (*go on record as incurring debt, -ve*) if (*hedge, -ve*) you could (*hedge, -ve*) finish it by tomorrow morning (*conventionally indirect, -ve*).

Give me a ring if you need any help (*offer, +ve*). Thanks. (*go on record as incurring debt, -ve*).

Regards,

X (first name)

**Overall strategy 3 – on record with mostly negative forms of politeness.**

# *Conclusion*

Described and demonstrated a number of practical **corpus-based** writing strategies that **you** can apply when planning and writing **different text-types in English** in the professional world.

- ✿ Choosing the right words
- ✿ Finding the right preposition
- ✿ Writing less: ellipsis, substitution and reference
- ✿ Headlines and titles
- ✿ Rhetorical functions and structuring

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