



PHOENICIA UNIVERSITY

Business English

Tips, Tricks, and Phrases for Sounding Professional

Vocabulary, email etiquette, meeting language, and applied practice

1 What Is Business English?

Business English is the variety of English used to communicate clearly, politely, and effectively at work — in emails, meetings, calls, and presentations alike.

It is not just vocabulary.

- Sounding professional depends as much on tone and structure as on the individual words you choose.

It spans every format.

- Emails, meetings, phone calls, presentations, and small talk each have their own conventions.

It is a learnable skill.

- Professional register is built through practiced phrases and habits, not innate talent.

1.5 Billion+

people worldwide use English for work-related communication — more than any other language

Strong Business English is increasingly treated as a core employability skill, not merely a soft skill.

2

The Three Pillars of Professional Communication

Communication trainers often group professional English around three pillars that must work together — not one traded off against the others.

Clarity

Saying exactly what you mean in plain, direct language that leaves no room for misreading.

Tone

Choosing words and phrasing that stay polite, confident, and appropriate to the relationship.

Structure

Organizing a message — greeting, purpose, detail, action — so the reader knows what to do.

A message only reads as professional when clarity, tone, and structure are all in place at once.



3

Upgrading Your Register: Casual to Professional

Greeting

Casual: “Hey, quick one for you.”

Professional: “Hello, I have a quick question for you.”

Request

Casual: “Can u send that over?”

Professional: “Could you send that over when you get a chance?”

Disagreement

Casual: “That is just wrong.”

Professional: “I see it a little differently — could we look at this again?”

Apology

Casual: “My bad, missed that.”

Professional: “Apologies for the oversight — I will correct it right away.”

Follow-up

Casual: “Any update??”

Professional: “I wanted to follow up — do you have an update on this?”

Closing

Casual: “Thx, bye.”

Professional: “Thank you for your time. Best regards.”

Small register shifts — not longer sentences — are usually what makes a message sound professional.



4 Why It Matters Now

Professional communication skill is no longer optional — it now sits at the center of how employers and clients judge competence.

70%

of employers worldwide say communication is the single most important skill in a job candidate

\$1.2T

lost annually by U.S. companies to miscommunication and unclear collaboration

25%

productivity gain organizations typically see after improving internal communication

19 hrs

the average hours employees spend each week on written communication alone

This matters for two reasons at once: hiring managers filter for it, and hybrid and remote work put more weight on writing than ever.



5 Essential Phrase Categories

Emails & Written Requests

Openers, polite requests, and professional sign-offs for everyday correspondence.

Meetings & Discussions

Phrases for stating opinions, agreeing, disagreeing, and steering the conversation.

Small Talk & Networking

Light, culturally safe openers for building rapport before business begins.

Negotiations

Language for proposing, conceding, and closing without sounding weak or aggressive.

Presentations

Signposting phrases that guide an audience through structure and transitions.

Phone & Video Calls

Clarifying, confirming, and repeating phrases suited to lower-bandwidth channels.

6 Case Study: Email Makeover

The rewrite model: the same request, reworded from casual drafting into professional structure.

- Before: “hey can u send the report today thx”
- After: “Hi Maya, could you send me the report by end of day? Thank you.”
- What changed: a greeting, a complete sentence, a specific deadline, and a closing — no new information added.

Model takeaway: professional tone comes from structure and completeness, not from longer or more complex vocabulary.

24 hrs

the outside window most workplace etiquette guides recommend for replying to a work email

1 Ask

clear emails limit themselves to one main request, so the needed action is obvious

0

text-speak abbreviations (“u”, “thx”, “asap”) that belong in a professional email



Case Study: Meeting Phrases

The real-time model: set phrases let you participate confidently without needing perfect grammar under pressure.

- Opening a point: “I would like to add something here” or “Building on that point...”
- Disagreeing politely: “I see it a little differently — could we consider...” instead of “No, that is wrong.”
- Buying thinking time: “That is a good question — let me think about that for a moment,” instead of silence.

Model takeaway: meeting phrases work like scaffolding — they let you sound composed even while you are still forming the idea.

3 Sec

a pause that feels natural before responding — much shorter than it feels in the moment

1 Phrase

“Could you say that another way?” quietly resolves most cross-cultural mix-ups in a meeting

Golden Rule

disagree with the idea, not the person: “I see it differently” beats “that is wrong”



8 Business English Across Contexts

The same message can need very different phrasing depending on the channel and the audience.

Written & Formal

Emails to senior management or clients — full sentences, no abbreviations, a clear subject line.

Written & Informal

Team chat messages — short and direct is fine, but keep the tone respectful.

Spoken & Formal

Client calls and presentations — complete sentences, signposting phrases, careful pacing.

Spoken & Informal

Small talk before a meeting starts — contractions and casual vocabulary are expected.

9 The Overly-Casual Problem

Sounding unprofessional is not about big words — it is about tone, structure, or formatting that clashes with the reader's expectations.

Signs of professional writing:

- A clear, specific subject line
- One request per message, stated early
- A greeting and a sign-off, even in short notes

70%

of employers rank communication skills as the single most important hiring criterion

\$1.2T

lost annually by U.S. companies to miscommunication and unclear collaboration

Employers are responding: many companies now include a short writing sample as part of their hiring process.



10

Common Barriers to Professional English

Confidence Gap

Fear of sounding wrong stops many strong speakers from using the phrases they already know.

Limited Phrase Bank

Knowing grammar rules is not the same as knowing the set phrases native speakers use automatically.

Overcorrection

Trying too hard to sound formal can produce stiff writing — “Please be advised” instead of “Please note.”

Cultural Differences

Directness, small talk, and how disagreement is expressed vary widely between business cultures.

Overgeneralization

Learning one fixed phrase for every situation can sound robotic when the context actually calls for variety.

Channel Mismatch

Using the same register for a text message, an email, and a formal report rarely fits all three well.

11 Clarifications: Common Misconceptions

Misconception	Reality
<i>“Sounding professional means using big, formal words.”</i>	Clear, simple words used correctly are more professional than complex ones used incorrectly.
<i>“Perfect grammar is what makes you sound professional.”</i>	Tone and structure shape a reader’s impression more than the occasional grammar slip.
<i>“Business English is only for emails.”</i>	It covers meetings, calls, presentations, small talk, and even chat messages.
<i>“Native speakers never need to think about this.”</i>	Native speakers follow the same conventions — they have just practiced them longer.

12 Class Exercise

Exercise 1: Email Makeover

- Take a casual message you have actually sent or received and rewrite it in professional register.
- Add a greeting, a clear subject line, and a polite sign-off.
- Underline the one specific action or request in your rewritten version.

Exercise 2: Meeting Phrase Roleplay

- In pairs, roleplay a short meeting disagreement using only polite phrases from Slide 8.
- Swap roles and repeat using phrases for agreeing and building on an idea.
- Discuss: which phrases felt natural, and which felt stiff or memorized?

Debrief: could your Exercise 1 rewrite work as a text message too? Why or why not?





Key Takeaways

- Professional English is about clarity, tone, and structure working together — not longer sentences or bigger words.
- Small register shifts, not vocabulary overhauls, are usually what separates casual writing from professional writing.
- Different channels need different registers — what works in a team chat rarely works in a client email.
- Confidence grows from a phrase bank: the same handful of openers, disagreements, and closings covers most situations.