

# Introduction. *New ways in teaching business English*

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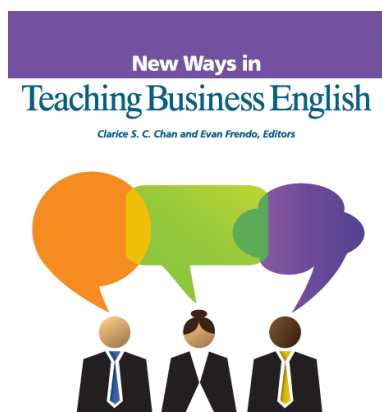


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The book *New Ways in Teaching Business English* was a finalist for the British Council's 2015 ELTons Award for Innovation in Teacher Resources.



### Keywords

Business English; ESP; TESOL; teacher resources; business English tasks and activities; understanding stakeholders; spoken business communication; written business communication; authentic materials; authentic language; intercultural communication; learner autonomy

## INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1990s business English was already being described by St John and Johnson (1996) as “the fastest growing area of ESP [English for specific purposes]” (p.1). The field has continued to flourish, as evidenced by the great number of newly published materials on business English and a growing body of research into the nature of this field. One challenge for business English practitioners from such growth is that it has become increasingly difficult to keep up to date with all the new materials and insights from research. The purpose of this volume is to enable practitioners not only to put into practice teaching ideas from colleagues in various teaching contexts all over the world, but also to raise their awareness of the current trends and issues in the field and ways of taking these into account, as appropriate, in their own teaching.

Business English means different things to different people. Many teaching professionals see it as a subset of ESP, with its own approaches and methodologies, but others may have a different perspective. For example, learners may see business English as simply a term used to describe the lingua franca that they need to operate effectively in a globalized workplace. Training managers in corporations may have a financial outlook: business English is the language that adds value, the language that affects the bottom line. Even among teachers there are different opinions. Some see business English as primarily about teaching the language used by business people in their day-to-day work, whereas others may include business content, business communication skills, and intercultural communication competence as well. Similarly, teachers working with immigrants in an ESL context may have quite a different view of business English from teachers working in an EFL context.

Despite the difficulty of defining business English in a precise way, three different teaching and learning contexts do seem to stand out. The first is the tertiary education context, in which most learners are pre-experience; that is, they have not yet spent time in the posteducation world. The second is what might be called adult education. The primary difference between tertiary and adult education is that the business English course in adult education is not part of an academic program; such a course is typically offered in a language school. Learners in these situations may be pre-experience or in-work and may be paying for the course themselves. The third context is corporate training, which focuses primarily on in-house needs and tends to deal with very specific contexts and topics. By definition, the learners in this context are in-work, although not necessarily job-experienced. In some corporate contexts such training may be informal and takes place in the workplace rather than in a classroom.

It is important to remember that these contexts are not necessarily as clear-cut as this description might suggest. There is often overlap or variation, and indeed some teachers (and learners) will experience all three contexts, perhaps even

simultaneously. It is not hard to see why Bargiela-Chiappini and Zhang (2013) describe how “the notion of “Business English” has been adopted in local contexts to reflect often very different circumstances” (p. 193).

This volume is not only a celebration of the variety of contexts in business English, but also a celebration of many of the innovations and trends that have been appearing in the field. These include activities informed by research, activities which focus on language and/or communication skills, activities which emphasize the learner’s own responsibility for learning, and activities which make use of technology and the Internet. One particularly noticeable characteristic is that while contributors come from different countries and contexts, all activities can be adapted to suit local situations.

The activities have been grouped into six categories:

- Part I: Understanding Stakeholders
- Part II: Spoken Business Communication
- Part III: Written Business Communication
- Part IV: Working With Authentic Materials and Language
- Part V: Intercultural Perspectives
- Part VI: Promoting Learner Autonomy

In using the book, readers will realize that many activities, with their multiple aims and suggested options, may fit equally well into another category. Readers will probably find that some activities in the book are not totally unfamiliar—this reflects the nature of our profession, which often spreads ideas by word of mouth as well as through books, magazine articles, blog posts, newsletters, and conference proceedings, and which often prefers incremental innovation to dramatic change. Yet we believe that many readers will find in this collection new topics to include in their teaching, new activities for teaching familiar topics or new methods and tools to implement activities. One caveat, however, is that activities involving the use of technology or some websites may in time appear old and outdated. In such cases we have tried to ensure that those activities will continue to offer something even if a recommended website no longer exists or a particular piece of software has been superseded.

Finally, we would both like to say a big thank-you to all the contributors, without whom this book could never have existed. They have all freely donated their ideas and their time to make this collection possible. We would also like to make a special mention to all those who have given us useful suggestions and feedback, in particular, Chris Bowie, Joseph V. Dias, and Adele Fenstermacher. It is our hope that, through the variety of activities and options provided by the contributors, readers will find themselves having a wider repertoire of teaching strategies

and being more aware of the key trends in the field. Most important, we hope that this book will inspire readers to think of more new ways of teaching business English and make their teaching both more effective and rewarding.

## REFERENCES

- Bargiela-Chiappini, F., & Zhang, Z. (2013). Business English. In B. Paltridge & S. Starfield (Eds.), *The handbook of English for specific purposes* (pp. 193–211). Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons.
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