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Appendix: English for Everyone

Using English diplomatically and politely

English

Pardon?

Please.

Go ahead.

Here you go.

You're welcome.

Not at all.

German

Bitte?

Bitte.

Bitte.

Bitte.

Bitte.

Bitte.

<https://www.facebook.com/german.consulate.new.york>

(last accessed on 30 April 2015).

Effective Communication

Asking for Clarification

How to overcome difficulties with comprehension

Reading

Communication experts have recommended for decades that we users of the *lingua franca* English adapt the engineering principle “**Keep It Simple Stupid**” (KISS). For communication between native and non-native speakers as well as between non-native and non-native speakers, this means we must understand what we are talking about so that we can explain it using ordinary words in shorter sentences.

KISS is not “dumbing down”, that is, making the content simpler for those supposedly less intelligent than we are. It is rather explaining concepts in words and a sentence structure that others will be able to grasp more easily. And why not? If even Warren Buffett is concerned about using “Plain English/Language”,¹ we can certainly allow ourselves to simplify for the sake of good communication.

Buffett, one of the richest people in the world, tailors his communication to his sisters:

¹ USA: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/> (last accessed 17 February 2015).

UK: <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/> (last accessed 17 February 2015).

“I pretend that I'm talking to my sisters....: Though highly intelligent, they are not experts in accounting or finance. They will understand plain English, but jargon may puzzle them. My goal is simply to give them the information I would wish them to supply me if our positions were reversed. To succeed, I don't need to be Shakespeare; I must, though, have a sincere desire to inform....”²

Whether we are explaining the German university system in German to non-German speakers or the German pension system in English to newly-called professors -- native or non-native speakers of English – *Bandwurmsätze*,³ jargon, passive sentences are, as far as possible, passé. We are encouraged to use sentences no longer than 25 words, to avoid overly complex-compound sentence structures, to address our audience directly, to be aware of potential challenges they may have. And it is highly recommended that we slow down our rate of speech, no matter whether we are speaking to native or non-native speakers of whatever language.

Of course, native speakers tend not to slow down when speaking with us. The following exercises should help you cope with this common communication challenge.

² <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/whyPL/testimonials/buffet.cfm>
(last accessed 17 February 2015).

³ Sometimes translated as “boa constrictor sentences”.

Exercises

1. Decide whether the speaker of the following sentences softened the potentially negative content of the message and created a more diplomatic version. Check the appropriate box. The first example has been done for you.

p.v. – polite version b.v. – blunt version

- | | p.v. | b.v. |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| a. I haven't finished the report. | | x |
| b. To be honest, this will be very difficult. | | |
| c. I want more time to think about the questions. | | |
| d. I'm afraid I haven't handed in my course work yet. | | |
| e. With all due respect, I don't agree with what you just said. | | |
| f. I want more time to finish my course work. | | |
| g. Hand me the telephone now. | | |
| h. I can't give you an extension. | | |

- i. Would you mind handing me your form?
- j. It would be nice to have more time to take a closer look at this matter.
- k. Could you call me back later?
- l. I'm afraid I can't answer all your questions.
- m. I'm terribly sorry, but I'm not the right person to speak to.
- n. Come back during our office hours.

([key](#), p. 26)

2. Can you rephrase the following sentences so that they sound more polite?

- a. I don't know.
- b. You must ask at your faculty.
- c. We can't help you.
- d. Send me your CV.
- e. I want to know the planned starting date of your research project.
- f. I haven't found a solution.
- g. Sign the form and ask the project manager for approval.

([key](#), p. 26)

3. How can you say politely that you did not understand the other person? Put the provided words and phrases into the correct order and make sentences. There may be more than one possible answer.

- a. my – a bit – I'm – English – afraid – rusty – is
- b. your – afraid – I'm – don't – understand – I – point
- c. you – just – I'm – don't – sorry – what – I – understand – said
- d. a bit – confused – I'm /do you mind – again – it – explaining
- e. my English – I'm sorry – yours – as good as – isn't /for me – please – write – down – could – you – that /then – maybe – help – can – I – you
- f. would you mind – what – said – you – clarifying /follow – I don't – I'm afraid
- g. that – word – you – for – another – could – use

([key](#), p. 27)

Did you know that experts in intercultural/international business communication have been suggesting for decades that we avoid using idioms?

On the one hand, this seems too bad: idioms can show how we have mastered a language, and they can be fun to use. On the other hand, they do not “travel well” (an idiom that means something cannot be understood [linguistically/culturally] or appreciated elsewhere), and translations of idioms are frequently more puzzling than the original.

Considering that US Americans, Canadians, Australians, British have different idioms, we can see some sense in a recommendation not to use idioms in international communication. There are, after all, thousands of English-language idioms, and how likely is it that an idiom we learned in British-English will be understood by someone who has learned American-English, either as a native or a non-native speaker.

Take the American idiom “to be out in/of left field”. Native speakers might be able to guess this means something is odd. Those who have learned British English will probably not be able to guess – although some Germans, Koreans, Japanese will know the idiom because of their baseball experience.

Since our aim in using English is to communicate necessary information and not to show off how good our English is or how intelligent we are, we should use idioms rarely.

4. Using idioms

- a. to me - I'm afraid - as clear as - that is - mud
- b. thank you - now - for explaining - as clear as day - it is
- c. all Greek - I'm afraid - it's - to me
- d. head or tail - I can't - what - of you are saying - I'm sorry - make
- e. a clue - have - I do not

([key](#), p. 27)

5. Asking for and giving directions. Correct the mistakes in the following sentences.

- a. How do I come to the cafeteria?
- b. The easiest way is to bow right after the main entrance.
- c. It's just around the edge.
- d. Drive with the lift to the third floor.
- e. The best way is to turn right after you pass the secretary's bureau.
- f. Where is the most narrow post office?
- g. Follow me. I'll sign you the way.
- h. It's a bit wide away.
- i. You will pass the Decan's office.
- j. Can you say me where the computer lab is?
- k. It's about ten minutes with the bus.
- l. It's across of the Faculty of Science.
- m. I cannot found the Foreigners' Registration Office.

n. Are you from round here?

o. It's a very hectic road.

p. If you pass the little bridge you've gone too wide.

q. Be aware that there gives no parking.

r. You will watch a big information counter in the back of the hall.

s. I'm excuse I don't know my way around here.

t. Would a plane be helpful?

([key](#), p. 27)

6A. Put the following phrases commonly used in emails into the correct column, either formal/neutral or informal.

formal/neutral	informal

- a. I will contact you again shortly.
- b. best wishes
- c. See you soon.
- d. Just give me a call if you have more questions.
- e. Bye for now.
- f. Hi David!
- g. Here is the document you wanted.
- h. I am delighted to tell you that ...
- i. Sorry I haven't written for ages.
- j. Do not hesitate to contact me again if you require any more information.
- k. Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms Hohman, ([key](#), p. 28)

B. Match the informal phrases with their corresponding neutral/formal forms.

formal/neutral

a. Your name was given to me by ...

b. I am writing with regard to ...

c. Please let me know your requirements.

d. I regret to inform you that ...

e. Thank you very much for your email received on 16th of October.

f. Re ...

g. However, ...

informal

1. What do you need?

2. I'm sorry to tell you that ...

3. Thanks for the email of 16 Oct.

4. I got your name from ...

5. With reference to ...

6. I'm writing about ...

7. But ...

([key](#), p. 29)

C. Match the beginnings of the sentences with their corresponding endings.

a. Please get back to me

1. your help in this.

b. I would appreciate

2. to hearing from you soon.

c. I look forward

3. I am attaching the minutes of our last meeting.

d. As agreed,

4. you could not open the attachment.

e. Please complete the attached forms

5. after 3pm on Monday.

f. I am sorry

6. and send them back to me by next Friday.

g. I am out of the office

7. if there is anything else I can do for you.

([key](#), p. 29)

D. Please rewrite the following excerpts from emails. The phrases *in italics* are too informal.

- a. *Thanks for the email of 1 Nov where you wanted to know more about our Bachelor's programmes. But you haven't told me your interests, which makes it very difficult for me to answer your question. Please check our webpage for more information first. Let me know if you'd like me to help you. Bye for now.*
- b. *Sorry, I can't make it next week. I'll be on holidays. Could you come around the week after on Monday?*
- c. *Hi Prof Hodgkinson! Re your email from today- please contact Mrs Miller at the Department for Travel Expenses. I'm sure she is more than happy to answer your questions. See you.*

([key](#), p. 29)

E. Read the emails and choose the most appropriate word to fill in the gaps.

a. Dear Mr. Thorton,

Thank you for your (1.) *interest – concern – matter* in our Master programmes in the area of Law and Business.

(2.) *Watching – Due to – To regard* the fact that nearly all of the programmes offered are taught mainly in German, I would recommend you (3.) *contact – consult – support* the information about “Law and International Business Studies” (M.Sc. in English) (4.) *on – in – with* www.unixyz.de. There you will find all of the application and admission requirements. Please (5.) *appreciate – note – mark* that the application deadline is June 15, 2016. I (6.) *would like – must – will* to emphasise that we only can accept officially certified copies of degree certificates. If certificates are issued in a language other than English or German, please enclose a translation made by an certified translator.

With (7.) *friendly – merry – best* regards,
Marie Mayer

- b. (1.) *Dearest – Good day – Dear Hannah,*

With reference to your email I would like to give you the (2.) *further – following – next* information.

To complete your enrolment we (3.) *will need – have needed – needing* your health insurance when you start your study here at the latest.

(4.) *Addition – Adding – In addition* you will need your tenancy agreement. Please go to the Resident's Registration Office (5.) *as soon as – so fast as – so quick than* possible to show your visa and tenancy agreement and register there. I am afraid I (6.) *am not – can – cannot* make an online appointment in advance on your behalf. Please go there directly.

I hope I (7.) *be – have been – can* of assistance.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch (8.) *if – case – for* you have any other questions.

Kind (9.) *greetings – hellos – regards,*
M. Schmidt

([key](#), p. 30)

F. There is one mistake in each sentence. Please correct it.

- a. Please find attachment the report.
- b. Here is a copy of Mr Johnson's letter- what you think?
- c. Enclosed are the questionnaires – please sign them and return them me by 15 December.
- d. Our office is located close the main entrance of the University.
- e. This is just confirm your visit to our Department on 5 May.
- f. We be very pleased if you could attend our Examination Board meeting next Tuesday.
- g. Give my best regards to family.

([key](#), p. 30)

Did you know there is a website called EnglishForEveryone.org? No? I didn't either. When we needed a title for our appendix: my choice was "English for Every(wo)man".

It turns out, though, that EnglishForEveryone.org is a good site to begin searching for more online learning aids. This site has "Printable English Worksheets" for everything from tenses to (American!) pronunciation, concentrating not only on language learning aids but also on "saving paper at the printer/copier".

And the title "English for Everyone" seems to have caught on. Google it, and you will find many sites — including some from *youtube*⁴--with innumerable written and oral exercises. These are truly *lingua franca* exercises, concentrating on basic vocabulary and grammar: little of the jargon needed for your more professional communication will be used in these. For those wanting to refresh their English, these sites are a good place to begin.

7A. On the telephone: Put the following phrases into the correct column.

⁴ E4E, for instance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvngN-7qLw0> (last accessed 1 January 2016).

beginning a call	leaving/taking a message	connecting	finishing a call

- a. Please hold.
- b. I'll put you through to Mr Meyer.
- c. May I ask who's calling?
- d. I'm sorry, Mrs Löwe is not available at the moment.
Would you like to leave a message for her?
- e. Could you ask him to call me back?
- f. This is Hannes Smith speaking.
- g. Can I leave/take a message?
- h. Speak to you soon.
- i. Thanks for calling.
- j. May/Could I speak with Dr Paul?

([key](#), p. 31)

B. In a telephone conversation, it can sometimes be difficult to understand the other speaker. Fill in the missing letters to complete the words.

- a. Sorry, I'm hav___ a little tr___le hearing. Could you s___w down a little?
- b. There's a lot of bac___ound noise – I can bar___ hear you.
- c. Sorry, I didn't quite c___h that. Could you rep___t it, please?
- d. Could you s___ak a little loud___?
- e. I'm af___d I don't have an answer right now. Could you send me an email ___tead and I'll get back to you as so___ as possible?
- f. Could I call you back in a f___ minutes? I'll ask one of my coll___ues.
- g. Would you mind repea_____ that for me?
- h. Could you s___ that ag___n?

([key](#), p. 31)

8. Sometimes you may face situations in which you do not know an answer or you are not the right person to speak to. What expressions could you use? Correct one mistake in each of these sentences.

- a. On the telephone: Please hold the phone. I'll put you connected to Mrs Gambler. She know more about that than I do.
- b. Have you a few minutes? I think one of my colleagues might have more informations.
- c. Please follow to reception and ask there.
- d. I afraid I'm not the right person to ask.
- e. Why don't you go to the main University building and ask one in the central administration?
- f. It is sorry, but you have to go and see someone from the Personnel Office. Do you want me to making an appointment for you?
- g. I could call Prof Durham on your behalf and check when he is available now.
- h. I'm not responsible that for. Maybe is it a good idea if you go to Mrs Schneider. She is the person in care.

([key](#), p. 32)

Did you know that administrative titles not only differ from German HEI⁵ to German HEI but are also translated many different ways?

Considering some of the German stereotypes – overly exact, bureaucratic, efficient... -- we could have hoped that the top administrative positions at a German university might be the same and might be translated similarly? Our aha experience/moment:⁶ not really. The top elected official might be Rektor (sic), Rektor_in, Präsident_in -- yes, fairly similar -- but the varied translations -- president, vice-chancellor, principal⁷ -- can be puzzling.

If it were only that: in the 2nd edition of his *Wörterbuch des Hochschulwesens*, Garrett Quinlivan pointed out that some terms are rather “clumsily ‘translated.’”⁸ Other terms, though, are “clearly mistranslations...”: “Kanzler als ‘vice-chancellor,’”⁹ for example.

Oops.

⁵ EU abbreviation for Higher Education Institution; HE is used in other countries for higher education.

⁶ The Oxford English Dictionary traces this term back to the 1920s.

⁷ Yes, referring to the head of a college or university.

⁸ Author’s interpretation. The original can be found on p. 6 (Raabe, 2009).

⁹ Ibid.

And now we also have Dirk Siepmann's *Wörterbuch Hochschule*¹⁰. He points out that some terms "have no direct equivalent in English".¹¹

To put it mildly, your linguistic challenges are not all that easy to meet. Consider, for instance, the following organigrams:

Präsident -P-			
Vizepräsidentin -VP1-	Vizepräsidentin -VP2-	Vizepräsidentin -VP3-	Kanzler -K-

President - P			
Vice President1 -VP1-	Vice President2 -VP2-	Vice President3 -VP3-	Kanzler ¹² (sic) -K-

Vice-Chancellor			
Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Chief Operating Officer ¹³

Provost			
Associate Provost	Associate Provost	Associate Provost	Vice Chancellor for Finance ¹⁴

¹⁰ "Forschung, Lehre und Management" (Deutsch-Englisch/Englisch-Deutsch) 2015.

¹¹ Op cit., p. 17.

¹² The first two diagrams are from a German university. Elsewhere in this university, Vizepräsidentin is translated as "Registrar".

¹³ An Australian university.

¹⁴ An American university.

These reflect an emphasis on the administration of the academic—and ignore too many examples of alternative terminology: one German university, for example, translates Rektor as rector but Prorektor as vice-president. Other English-language terms for Rektor include principal (yes, this is also used for colleges and universities) and master. And Kanzler might be chancellor, chief financial officer, head of administration, provost, vp/director of finance and xx....

If you think this is fun, please, continue the list—there are many other possibilities out there. A good starting point is [IATE](#); other very good sources are Dirk Siepmann's and Garrett Quinlivan's dictionaries, the DAAD dictionary and various university translation guides. A problem remains: if you are more familiar with American English, you will have problems with the British and vice versa.

So, what to do if you are preparing a trip abroad for your top administrator? The simplest is:

1. List the administrator's name with the English translation of his/her position chosen by your university.
2. Follow this with a description of the main responsibilities or the responsibilities for which your administrator is visiting another university.

“Prof. Dr. N.N., provost of the University of XX, is responsible for all academic areas at our university.”

And enjoy hunting down all of those other possible terms for university administrators!

Key

1.

[blunt = b; polite = p]

- | | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| a. -- b | b. -- p | c. -- b | d. -- p | e. -- p |
| f. -- b | g. -- b | h. -- b | i. -- p | j. -- p |
| k. -- p | l. -- p | m. -- | n. -- p | |

2.

- a. I'm sorry to say that I am unable to answer your question/query.
- b. To find that out you should really ask the people concerned at your faculty. Do you need help finding out who they are?
- c. I'm afraid I cannot be of further assistance, aside from pointing you in the right direction.
- d. Please send me your current CV.
- e. Please let us know the planned starting date of your research project.
- f. I'm afraid I have not found a solution; however, I am still working on it/have referred it to someone more qualified/knowledgeable in that regard.
- g. Please sign this form and ask the project manager for approval.

3.

- a. I'm afraid my English is a bit rusty.
- b. I'm afraid I don't understand your point.
- c. I'm sorry, I don't understand what you just said.
- d. I'm a bit confused. Do you mind explaining it again?
- e. I'm sorry, my English isn't as good as yours. Could you please write that down for me? Maybe I can help you then.
- f. Would you mind clarifying what you said? I'm afraid I don't follow.
- g. Could you use another word for that?

4.

- a. I'm afraid that it's as clear as mud to me.
- b. Now it is as clear as day; thank you for explaining.
- c. It's all Greek to me, I'm afraid.
- d. I'm sorry, I can't make head or tail of what you are saying.
- e. I do not have a clue.

5.

- a. How do I get to the cafeteria?
- b. The easiest way is to turn right after the main entrance.
- c. It's just around the corner.
- d. Take the lift to the third floor.

- e. The best way is to turn right after you pass the secretary's office.
- f. Where is the closest post office?
- g. Follow me. I'll show you the way.
- h. It's a bit far away.
- i. You will pass the Dean's office.
- j. Can you tell me where the computer lab is?
- k. It's about ten minutes by bus.
- l. It's across from the Faculty of Science.
- m. I cannot find the Foreigners' Registration Office.
- n. Are you from around here?
- o. It's a very busy road.
- p. If you pass the little bridge, you've gone too far.
- q. Be aware that there is no parking.
- r. You will see a big information counter in the back of the hall.
- s. I'm sorry, I don't know my way around here.
- t. Would a map be helpful?

6A.

formal/neutral: a – b – h – j – k

informal: c – d – e – f – g – i

6B.

a -- 4

b -- 6

c -- 1

d -- 2

e -- 3

f -- 5

g -- 7

6C.

a -- 7

b -- 1

c -- 2

d -- 3

e -- 6

f -- 4

g -- 5

6D.

- a. Thank you very much – 1st of November – asked for more information regarding – However, – have not told – Please do let me know if I can be of further assistance. – Kind regards,
- b. Unfortunately, I will have to reschedule our appointment for next week. I will be away from my desk. Are you free the week after on Monday?
- c. Dear Prof Hodgkinson, – Regarding your email from today – I am sure/convinced – I look forward to meeting you soon. Yours sincerely,

6E.

a.

- | | | | |
|-------------|---------------|------------|-------|
| 1. interest | 2. Due to | 3. consult | 4. on |
| 5. note | 6. would like | 7. best | |

b.

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. Dear | 2. following | 3. will need |
| 4. In addition | 5. as soon as | 6. cannot |
| 7. have been | 8. if | 9. regards |

6F.

- a. attached
- b. what do you
- c. return them to me
- d. close to
- e. to confirm
- f. would be
- g. your family

7A.

beginning a call: c – f – j

leaving/taking a message: d – e – g

connecting: a – b

finishing a call: h – i

7B.

- a. Sorry, I'm having a little trouble hearing. Could you slow down a little?
- b. There's a lot of background noise – I can barely hear you.
- c. Sorry, I didn't quite catch that. Could you repeat it, please?
- d. Could you speak a little louder?
- e. I'm afraid I don't have an answer right now. Could you send me an email instead and I'll get back to you as soon as possible?
- f. Could I call you back in a few minutes? I'll ask one of my colleagues.
- g. Would you mind repeating that for me?
- h. Could you say that again?

8.

- a. ~~phone~~ – line/~~connected~~ – through/~~know~~ – knows
- b. ~~Have you~~ – Do you have/~~informations~~ – information
- c. ~~follow~~ – go
- d. ~~I afraid~~ – I'm afraid
- e. ~~one~~ – someone
- f. ~~It is sorry~~ – I'm sorry/~~making~~ – make
- g. ~~when~~ – if
- h. ~~that for~~ – for that/~~is it~~ – it's/~~care~~ – charge

Glossary English – German

A

admission	Zulassung
agree, to	einwilligen; zustimmen
application	Bewerbung
apply, to	anmelden; beantragen; bewerben
appointment	Termin
appreciate, to	schätzen; dankbar sein
approval	Einverständnis; Genehmigung
approve (to), to	genehmigen; einverstanden sein (mit etwas)
attach, to	beifügen; anhängen
attachment	Anlage; Anhang
attend, to	teilnehmen
attendance	Anwesenheit
available	verfügbar; frei; erreichbar

B

background noise	Hintergrundgeräusch(e)
behalf (of the employer), on	Auftrag (im)
bow, to	biegen

C

cafeteria	Mensa; Cafeteria
call back, to	zurückrufen
certified copy	Kopie, beglaubigte
certified translator	Übersetzer_in, beeidigte_r
clarify, to	klären; erläutern
colleague	Kolleg_in
complete, to; fill in/out, to	ausfüllen
confirm, to	bestätigen; bescheinigen
confirmation	Bestätigung; Bescheinigung
course work; term/seminar paper	Haus-/Semesterarbeit
CV (curriculum vitae)	Lebenslauf

D

deadline	Frist
Dean	Dekan_in
Dean's Office	Dekanat
delighted, to be	erfreut sein
department	Abteilung/Fach/Dezernat

E

emphasise, to (BE); emphasize, to (AE)	betonen; hervorheben
enclose, to	beifügen
enrolment (BE); enrollment (AE)	Immatrikulation
extend, to	verlängern
extension	Verlängerung

F

faculty	Fakultät; Fachbereich; Lehrkörper
financing studies; student aid	Studienfinanzierung

Foreigner's/Alien (Registration) Office; International Registration Authority	Ausländeramt; Ausländerbehörde
form; document	Formular; Antrag

H

hall of residence; student hall; dormitory	Studierendenwohnheim
hand, to	reichen
health insurance	Krankenversicherung
hesitate, to	zögern

I

in advance	vorher; im Voraus
in charge (of), to be	zuständig sein

L M O

leave a message, to	Nachricht hinterlassen
main entrance	Haupteingang
office hour(s)	Sprechstunde

P Q

Personnel Office; H(uman)R(esources) Department	Personalabteilung
put through, to	durchstellen
questionnaire	Fragebogen

R

receive, to	erhalten
(Local Residents'/Citizens') Registration Office; Office of Vital Statistics	Einwohnermeldeamt/Bürgeramt
regret, to	bedauern
report	Bericht; Gutachten
require, to	benötigen
requirement	Anforderung; Voraussetzung
research fellowship	Forschungsstipendium
research project	Forschungsprojekt
residence permit	Aufenthaltserlaubnis
responsible	verantwortlich

rusty	engerostet
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S

scholarship announcement/advertisement; call for applications	Stipendienausschreibung
scholarship/fellowship approval notification; letter of confirmation	Stipendienbescheid
semester contribution/fee	Semesterbeitrag
sign, to	unterschreiben
solution	Lösung

T U

tenancy/rental agreement	Mietvertrag
travel expenses	Reisekosten
university management/ executive/ leadership; university management, executive board, university directorate	Universitätsleitung

V W

Vice-Chancellor; President; Provost; Rector; Principal	Rektor_in; Präsident_in
Vice-President; Head of Administration; Chancellor; Registrar; Chief Financial Officer; Director Administration and Finance; Vice President of Finance and Human Resources	Kanzler_in
with reference to	bezugnehmend (auf)
with regard(s) to	betreffend