
Unit 5 – Teaching Grammar in Business English

Unit Objective

To develop your competences in teaching and training grammar in the Business English classroom.

Type of Unit

Self-directed.

Learning Hours

2 hours.

Supplementary Materials for Unit

None.

Unit 5 – Teaching Grammar in Business English

Pre-Unit Task

Complete this pre-unit task in full before you move on to the next section. Spend as much or as little time as you need on this. There are no right or wrong answers. You can research ideas if you wish but there is no requirement to do this. You **do not** need to submit your answers to your tutor.

What Business English contexts might these be used in?

- Present simple
- Past simple
- Present perfect
- Present perfect continuous
- Narrative tenses (past simple, past perfect, past continuous, past perfect continuous)
- Future forms
- Passive
- Conditionals
- Modals
- Comparatives and superlatives
- Questions and question forms

Unit 5 – Teaching Grammar in Business English

Notes

Present Simple:

The present simple in Business English is used to talk about:

- Routines: “Every day, we submit the report before 16.00.”
- Facts: “The company employs 15,000 people.”
- Working roles: “I work in the bond issue department; I report to”
- Feelings and thoughts: “I do not consider this to be a fair offer.”

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising the present simple are:

- Writing job descriptions
- Describing “typical” working days
- Creating company fact sheets

Past Simple:

The past simple is used to talk about:

- Past jobs (including in CV writing): “For four years, I managed the department.”
- Events or actions in the past: “She attended the meeting in my place.”
- Consecutive events: “The company was acquired in 2018. The new owner changed the name the following year.”

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising the past simple are:

- Writing CVs
- Report on chronologies of past events

Present Perfect:

The present perfect is used for:

- Experiences: “I have visited the country before for conferences and events.”
- Things up to now: “I have worked here for ten years.”

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising the present perfect are:

- Controlled discussions about experiences
- Answering questions in an interview
- Certain introductory tasks (such as “Find Someone Who ...”)

Present Perfect Continuous:

The present perfect continuous is used to talk about:

- Financial trends (such as share price movements) up to now: “The price has been increasing steadily up to now.”

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising the present perfect continuous are:

- Sourcing and describing financial data (see also “Narrative Tenses” below)

Narrative Tenses:

The narrative tenses are the past simple, past perfect, past continuous, past perfect continuous. These are commonly used in Business English when:

- Making a report: “We had prepared the proposal when we heard that the client had changed their requirements from the original brief.”
- Telling a story: “I had been sitting on the plane for two hours when the captain told us the plane was having technical problems and the airline has cancelled the flight.”
- Reporting on or describing financial data: “The price has been rising for three months but when the news hit, the price plummeted.”

These might all be found in presentations.

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising narrative tenses are:

- Presentations (of various sorts)
- Writing reports
- Sourcing and describing financial data (see also “Present Perfect Continuous” above)

Future Forms:

Any future forms can be used for:

- Forecasts and projections: “According to the analysis, the value of the currency will continue to drop.”
- Predictions: “It will be a mistake to give them the contract.”
- Plans: “We will send the proposal this week and will try to meet with them next week.”

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising future forms are:

- Controlled discussions about future issues in business, commodities prices or nation economies
- Controlled discussions or presentations on future career plans

Passive:

The passive is commonly needed in Business English. This includes:

- Removing the subject when the agent is unknown: “The money was stolen.”
- Giving credit using “by”: “The book was written by Jack Welch.”
- In signs and notices: “Hard hats must be worn at all times.”
- When describing industrial processes: “The aluminium is pressed in huge coils before it is shipped. At the plant, the metal is cut to size before it is fed into the press. Any waste metal is collected and recycled at each stage of production.”
- Making things more objective and “academic”: “It is felt that the offer is too low” (not “I feel the offer is too low”).

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising the passive are:

- Writing reports on projects
- Presenting processes
- Academic writing on business

Conditionals:

Conditionals will frequently be found in:

- Negotiations: “If you order 50,000 units, we can give you a discount on this first order.”
- Contracts: “The offer is made on condition of satisfactory references.”
- Meetings and discussions: “We can finance this if we make cuts elsewhere.”

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising conditionals are:

- Negotiation roleplays and simulations (the bargaining phase)
- Meeting roleplays and simulations
- Writing contracts
- Any controlled discussions

Modals:

Modal verbs can be used when:

- Hedging (speaking cautiously to avoid the suggestion of certainty): “The price might hit \$1,800 per ounce before the month end” (rather than “will hit” as “will” implies certainty).
- Setting rules and conditions: “You must report any spillages immediately.”
- Giving advice: “You should accept the offer.”
- Making statements less direct: “This could be a problem.”

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising modal verbs are:

- Making predictions
- Setting rules and guidelines for the workplace (health and safety, etiquette and so on)
- Giving advice and mentoring

Comparatives and Superlatives:

Comparatives and superlatives are often used when:

- Talking about products and competitors: “Their products are more expensive but are better quality than many competitors. Currently, we are the cheapest on the market.”

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising comparatives and superlatives are:

- Benchmarking studies (studies comparing your own organisation or products to a competitor in order to drive improvements)

Questions and Question Forms:

Questions forms (and also asking the right questions in the right tone) are essential for:

- Conversations: “What do you do?”
- Coaching (non-directive developmental question and answer conversations): “What do you think you can do about this?”
- Monitoring: “What are you planning for us?”
- Socialising: “How long have you worked there?”
- Making spoken or written enquiries: “What is the timescale for delivery for orders of this size?”

Some suggested tasks for practising or contextualising question forms are:

- Introduction and group dynamic tasks
- Social events or networking roleplays or simulations
- Co-coaching practices
- Writing enquiry e-mails
- Asking questions in a presentation
- Interviewing roleplays or simulations

Unit 5 – Teaching Grammar in Business English

Tasks

Spend as much time on these tasks as you wish and write as much or as little as you like. You should submit your answers to your tutor:

1. Find a business-related text that utilises the narrative tenses. Explain how you could use this text in a grammar-focused lesson.
2. Find an image, text or video that could be used to teach one or more uses of the passive. Explain how you would use it in a lesson.
3. Find some data (financial or otherwise) that could be used to teach present perfect continuous or past perfect continuous. Explain what the figures are and how you could use them in a lesson.
4. Think of three phrases that might be needed in a meeting or negotiation that use conditionals.
5. Choose two or more products, which might be competitors, and explain how they could be used to teach comparatives and superlatives.