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## HOW TO TEACH BUSINESS ENGLISH THROUGH A NEWSPAPER

### INTRODUCTION

This essay aims to provide the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teacher with an overview of the newspaper as a perfect for teaching Business English. It is hoped that the student will master Business English by learning to read the business section of a newspaper written in English.

It is this section of a newspaper that contains information that affects people's economic lives. For example, people with money to invest can find quick information and advice that will help them earn money on investments in stocks, bonds, or real estate. Also, everyone can get information about employment trends and developing career areas.

### FOCUSING ON STUDENT'S READING HABITS

Depending upon reading habits, students become interested in the newspaper and its different sections. Topics of business articles will be described in general, including a series of articles by Alan Friedman, called "Looking for Work in Europe," published in March, 1994 in the *International Herald Tribune (IHT)*. This topic is of interest because it concerns students of business and language.

The exercises proposed to work with each article follow a similar structure, dealing with reading skills, vocabulary skills, structure of the text, grammar and talking, and writing skills. There are certainly other ways of using the newspaper as a valuable tool in teaching Business English.

Historically, it can be seen that the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century greatly favored the expansion of business and financial

*Global Business Languages (1998)*

activities. Improvements in communication have had an impact on trade development and consequently the improvement of Business English. Today, newspapers have become one of the most widely circulated media for spreading information, with much pertinent material found in business and advertising sections.

The role of language is highlighted. It should match the target audience, so that the language used in a message intended for specialists is a valuable linguistic element among the rest of the components of a total message.

We must take into account the specific vocabulary that the target audience should master. This specialized knowledge is restrictive, and for this reason is more critical when assessing the subject offered. The wide range of anglicisms can also be noted when dealing with business subjects, and are very relevant, although these English words or expressions generally have Spanish equivalents.

The power of the newspaper, especially on Business English messages, as well as that of communication media and advertisements, are very useful for ESP teachers. They ease their task, and lead them to successful research. Teachers must recognize the possibilities of using newspapers from a double perspective: the study of applied linguistics and also translation matters.

For the most part students are not businessmen who are familiar with the newspaper. The first step is to familiarize them with the newspaper. It is an excellent idea to emphasize that daily newspapers offer them a whole world to explore, and that this material also provides new ways for the teaching of foreign languages.

#### AN OVERVIEW OF THE NEWSPAPER

It is very important to take into account that newspapers use a number of devices (a sort of deictics) in order to help their readers find the information they want quickly, including:

- Boxes that list articles found elsewhere
- An index
- Page titles
- Headlines

Most newspapers include various sections, each pertaining to either news, business, sports, or advertising, which allows readers to find par-

ticular items directly related to the economy. Sometimes newspapers have special sections, for example, an entertainment—arts and leisure section—on the weekend. Usually the articles begin with a dateline, or the name of the place where the article was written.

*Exercise:* The Set-Up of a Newspaper

- a) Look at a recent issue of a newspaper (in our case the *IHT*) and circle some examples of the devices that help readers find information.
- b) List the order of the sections.
- c) Locate the items below, indicating the section and page where each can be found:
  1. the weather
  2. the score of a sports event
  3. a story about a recent election
  4. a dateline from a European country
  5. information about a cultural event
  6. information about the stock market
  7. a letter to the editor
  8. the funnies
  9. an editorial opinion
  10. classified advertisements

#### THE STUDENT'S NEWSPAPER READING HABITS

We must consider that in a newspaper there are many different types of articles. News articles report current news and political events, while articles expressing opinions and taking positions on current issues are on the editorial pages. In order to review the student's newspaper reading habits, students are asked to write down their thoughts or discuss them with a partner on the following:

1. Do you follow the same pattern each time you read the newspaper? For example, do you always look at the back pages first?
2. What kind of articles do you usually read: "hard" news stories? Sports stories? Editorials? Comics? Advertising? Why?
3. How familiar are you with various sections of the newspaper? Can you find what you are looking for quickly?

4. In the articles that you read completely what motivates you to do so? Your interest in the subject? A catchy headline? The length?
5. What are some reasons why you do not read the entire newspaper from front to back? Lack of time? Lack of interest? Lack of familiarity with the topics? Unfamiliar vocabulary?
6. Do you find the business section hard to understand? Do you read it often, regularly, or seldom?
7. Do you read a newspaper in your native language differently from the way you read an English-language paper? What are the differences?
8. Do you think your newspaper reading habits will be the same in six months? In a year? Would you like to change your reading habits? Why, or why not?

#### AN ANALYSIS OF HEADLINES

Headlines are designed to catch the eye and interest of readers as they look through a newspaper. They typically summarize the main idea of an article in a few words, help to predict the subject of an article, and its viewpoint. Headlines pose special problems in reading. Often, they leave out short function words, or contain idioms, as well as puns, because the headline writers are seeking to be clever and attract reader interest.

##### *Exercises*

1. Look through a newspaper and pick out five headlines. Predict the subject of each article from the headline and read the article to find its subject. Finally, check to see if your predictions were accurate.
2. Write different headlines for the same five articles.

#### TOPICS OF BUSINESS ARTICLES

A variety of articles can be found in the business section, including:

- Articles reporting the financial situation of companies, whether they are running at a profit or a loss.
- Articles reporting new products and technology developed or being developed by companies, and how these might affect the business.

- Information on whether currencies, such as the dollar, are going to go up or down in value.
- Articles about political policies and elections are affecting business.

All these articles help the reader analyze current business conditions. The following exercises can be used with any business article. In the first one, students analyze the structure and the contents. The purpose of the second is working with business vocabulary, so that students become familiar with it. The third involves students in the discussion of topics related to the article and real-life problems. There is an extra exercise that deals with the stock market, helping students read and understand that section of the newspaper.

1. Analyzing a business article.

- a. What is the headline? How does it help you predict the content and viewpoint of the article?
- b. What is the purpose of the article (i.e., to report conditions of a company, a new product, trends in the stock market, expert's opinion on economic conditions)?
- c. What is the main idea of the article?
- d. Does the article make a prediction about the future? If so, what is the prediction?
- e. Does the article give the reader any advice? If so, what is it?

2. The language of business.

Business uses its own special vocabulary. To understand business articles, you need to know terms such as recession, bonds, stocks, futures, bull market. Read two or three business articles. Write down at least five sentences that include words you do not know, and underline them. Discuss the terms in class and see if you can define them, using context and then a dictionary.

3. How's business?

Students are asked to scan the business section of newspapers for several weeks, looking for information about general business conditions in the country. As they read, they need to look for answers to the following questions. They should be prepared to discuss their conclusions with the class.

- a. Is it difficult to find a job right now? Why? In what fields are employment opportunities best?
- b. For the person with capital to invest, where is a good place to put it now, according to the experts?
- c. What economic problems does your country face at this time?
- d. Is the economic outlook optimistic or pessimistic?

#### 4. Reading stock prices.

Daily newspapers run long lists of the stock and bond prices of companies on the major exchanges. Investors who own any of these stocks or bonds can follow the fluctuating prices in the daily paper, and so can students interested in business.

In class, students practice reading the newspaper listing of stock prices. They note that some newspapers provide a key to help read the information. They then choose the stock of a well-known company on one of the major exchanges, “purchase” 100 shares, and follow the closing price for any four days within a two-week period. At the end of the two weeks, they “sell” the stock. During the period that they “own” the stock, they fill in the following information:

Name of the stock purchased \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of purchase \_\_\_\_\_ Price per share \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_ Closing price \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_ Closing price \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_ Closing price \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_ Closing price \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_ Closing price \_\_\_\_\_

Students try to determine reasons why the price went up or down.

#### LOOKING FOR WORK IN EUROPE

The *International Herald Tribune* on March 10, 1994 published a series of three articles by Alan Friedman, entitled “Looking for Work in Europe.” Employment is a very interesting and useful subject to discuss. This series provides an example on how to work with business articles in class. Some preliminary exercises are suggested that relate to the whole series, then a pattern of exercises is established with sample questions

that will vary with each article. The section “Getting the Message” focuses on making sure that students understand the article. It emphasizes reading skills and critical thinking in several different ways. The “Vocabulary” section deals with the business vocabulary that appears in the article: business terms, idioms, expressions. It builds vocabulary acquisition strategies. There are different kinds of exercises too. Students examine the structure of the articles (paragraphs, main ideas, the point of view of the writer, etc.) along with grammar in the “Structure and Grammar” section. After the article is well understood and analyzed, the students are encouraged to participate by means of written and oral discussion in the “Talking and Writing” section.

The following exercises are used with all three articles.

#### PREVIEWING THE ARTICLES

- a. It is very useful that the teacher, considering the level and ages of the students in the class, provide background information to stimulate interest and recall prior knowledge of the subject.
- b. Before reading the articles, students discuss the following questions:
  - Is unemployment currently a problem in your country?
  - Do you think it is getting better or worse?
  - What careers are considered the best to guarantee you a job? Has it changed lately?
- c. As students read, they look for answers to the following questions:
  - What is the European Community “White Book,” or White Paper?”
  - What does “entitlement culture” mean? Do you think that the term could be applied to Spain? Why is it a problem?
  - Why is the work force in Europe less mobile than in the United States?

The following exercises are used in conjunction with “In Europe’s Jobs Crisis, Growth Is No Answer,” by Alan Friedman. The same pattern of exercises may be used for the other two newspaper articles in the series, although, of course, the questions will vary, and even the kinds of questions asked in each section.

## GETTING THE MESSAGE

After reading the article, students indicate if each statement is True (T) or False (F):

- \_\_\_ By next year, the European jobless numbers are expected to decrease.
- \_\_\_ The drive to restore industrial competitiveness is hostile to unemployment.
- \_\_\_ The non-wage labor costs in Europe are higher than those in the United States.
- \_\_\_ Some companies are considering moving to lower-wage production countries.
- \_\_\_ What Europe needs is a wider social net, in order to create more jobs.

## VOCABULARY

Students write a sentence with each of the following words and idioms, using a dictionary if necessary:

- |                              |                     |
|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Technological edge           | Pie-in-the-sky      |
| To slash regulatory red tape | Nonwage labor costs |
| Hamstrung                    | Deregulation        |

## GRAMMAR

In many sentences in this article the word “that” introduces a noun clause that is the object of the verb. Students reread the article paying special attention to them and complete the following sentences with ideas from the article:

- Mr. O’Sullivan fears that . . .
- The graph in the article shows that . . .
- In the G-7, everyone agrees that . . .

## TALKING AND WRITING

In the article, a number of people give their opinions on the subject of work. Students discuss the sentences quoted below and write supporting or opposing statements to one of them:

“I have seen no evidence that achieving more competitiveness will solve unemployment. If we are honest with ourselves, the drive to restore industrial competitiveness is hostile to employment” (Mr. O’Sullivan, participant in the making of the White Paper).

“There is a feeling that we are in a high-wage environment and it should stay that way. People don’t want a wage staircase” (Horst Siebert, President of the Kiel Institute of World Economics).

#### CONCLUSION

This work is specifically aimed at educators teaching ESP, business English, and technical-scientific terminology. It emphasizes the great validity and topicality of terms drawn from newspapers. It is hoped that students will be encouraged to obtain a good command in techno-scientific English by using some of the methods outlined in this article.

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