

English language training

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Abstract: This article examines written and spoken English, analyzes some contractions used in business letters, sporting language and demonstrates that in English pronunciation there are more exceptions than rules.

Keywords: formal style, understand, pronunciation, exception, must, modal verbs, language.

Style in written English: Written English is still a good deal more formal than spoken English. Contractions freely used in speech, such as I'll, they'd, shan't and won't, as well as extravagant idiom and slang, are only written when the tone is intended to be conversational, as in a letter to a friend, for instance. Business letters are kept brief and clear; jargon and elaborate phrases of the "I remain your most obedient servant" kind are not considered good English. Official, and especially legal, documents, however, still tend to use the longest words and most tortuous sentences. Writers offering advice - gardening and cookery experts, for instance - instruct us in the imperative, and anybody selling anything may praise his own wares, providing he doesn't contravene the Trades Descriptions Act (the law forbidding false claims).

Test yourself

Bearing these idiosyncrasies of style in mind, can you identify the following extracts? There are two letters, one to a friend and one to a newspaper; an advertisement; a report from the sports pages of a magazine; a parking ticket (issued for the illegal parking of a car); and advice from a cookery writer.

First make the pastry by lightly rubbing the fats into the flour with your fingertips and lifting the mixture up high to let the air in. Then gently mix to a dough with cold water. Roll into a ball, place it in a polythene bag and leave it in the refrigerator for an hour.

This is just to let you know that all being well we'll be dropping in to see you on Saturday. I hope this is O.K., but if you have other plans let us know. John sends his love and so do the children. They are growing so fast you won't know them.

The most magnificent flats in London for quality, value-and the view. Each superb flat has an exquisite view of the Thames that has to be seen to be appreciated, 2-4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms and private terrace.

Amenities include garaging, saunas, indoor pool, resident porter, lifts and landscaped gardens. You talk about dogs transmitting disease to human beings. Fair enough. But may I mention that human beings transmit radioactivity and pollution, among other unpleasant things, to their fellow human beings-and probably to dogs too.

If before the end of 21 days from the date of this notice the sum of £2 (being the fixed penalty for the offence) is paid to the Chief Clerk, Marylebone Magistrates' Court, the Police will not take proceedings for the offence and any liability to conviction of the offence will be discharged. The British women's athletics team have suffered three withdrawals through injury which could diminish their chances of qualifying for the final of the European Cup in their semi-final at Sofia next Sunday.

Hints on pronunciation

These verses demonstrate what every student knows-that in English pronunciation there are more exceptions than rules!

I take it you already know

Of tough and bough and cough and dough.

Others may stumble but not you

On hiccough, thorough, lough and through.

Well done!

And now you wish, perhaps.

To learn of less familiar traps?

Beware of heard, a dreadful word.

That looks like beard and sounds like bird.

And dead; it's said like bed, not bead

For goodness' sake don't call it "deed";

Watch out for meat and great and threat (They rhyme with suite and straight and debt).

A moth is not a moth in mother

Nor both in bother, broth in brother,

And here is not a match for there

Nor dear and fear for bear and bare;

And then there's dose and rose and lose- Just look them up-and goose and choose.

And cork and work and card and ward

And font and front and word and sword

And do and go and thwart and cart-

Come, come,

I've hardly made a start!

A dreadful language!

Man alive.

We have to start it when we're five.

Must you use "must"? "

"I must have more English lessons", is a cry often heard among students of the language. "I must study harder because I must take my examination next June." Must, in short, becomes a very overworked word. They would understand a native speaker who said, "I ought to have more lessons because I have to take my examination next June", but they find it difficult to judge for themselves the distinctions between must, should, have to and ought.

First, consider MUST. It carries an idea of immediacy and urgency which is part of its appeal to the often frustrated learner. Basically it has two meanings. The first is that of necessity. "You must hurry up if you don't want to be late for the concert." "She must make up her mind quickly."

The second meaning is of there being no alternative. "He must be here. I saw him come in only a minute ago." "I can't find my diary. I must have left it on my desk in the office." Note also that must may be employed to press an invitation. "You must come to have dinner with us soon." "Tell Jane she must come with us when we visit Oxford." Must has one form only, but a future tense is made by coupling it with a future word or phrase. "I must buy a new evening dress next week. The Langs have invited us to their party." Otherwise the missing tenses are supplied by HAVE TO.

"When we lived on a farm we had to get up at five in the morning." "He'll have to work harder if he wants to pass his examinations." In the present tense there is a clear distinction between the use of must and have to. "I must see the Prime Minister immediately-it's a matter of urgency", suggests a necessity that has suddenly arisen. "I have to check in at the airport by 14.00 hours", suggests a necessity that you have been aware of for some time.

Like must, OUGHT also has one form and its missing tenses are supplied by have to. But its meaning is clearly different-that of obligation. "You ought to write to your mother more often", means that you have a duty to write to your mother more often. It can be used with a past infinitive to form a past tense: "I ought to have realised what was happening"; in indirect speech : "He said that you ought to speak to her more politely"; and with a future word to express the future: "If they want to spend their summer holiday in the USSR, they ought to book soon".

SHOULD is very close to ought but not so strong. It suggests not so much a duty, but a wiser course of action. "You really should wear a hat if you are going out in the sun." "You should see his garden-it is a perfect picture/" Frequently it is followed by the old subjunctive: "I should get plenty of fresh air, if I were you."

In the second person, the choice between MUST, HAVE TO, OUGHT and SHOULD will depend to some extent on the relationship between the speaker and the

person he is speaking to. To tell someone they **MUST** do something is to command them to do it, and **HAVE TO** similarly puts the speaker in a superior position. The use of **OUGHT** suggests strong advice. **SHOULD** has an altogether milder suggestion.

Sporting language Yorkshireman and sportswriter Michael Parkinson recalls in idiomatic north country style a larger-than-life character from his youth. Some knowledge of the game of football, also known as soccer (to distinguish it from rugby football), will be a help to readers whatever their nationality.

The piece was originally published in *The Sunday Times*. Funny how the trapdoor of my memory is sprung by incidents of the moment. Only the other day I was minding my own business taking a stroll when I happened on a game of soccer. Two local teams were hard at it boring the pants off the three spectators and each other when there occurred something that reached into the back pocket of my mind.

One of the teams gained a free kick just outside the penalty area and it was taken by a player built like a butcher's dog and wearing the demeanour of the village hangman. He raced 30 yards and toe-ended the ball, heavy as a suet pudding, at the wall of defenders. The velocity of the shot was sufficient to cause the wall to break and scatter all except for one player who not only remained at his post but flung himself headlong at the missile.

This would always prove too much for the penalty taker who, instead of keeping cool and placing the ball, would feel challenged to knock Muscle's head from his shoulders. Many tried but none succeeded. The inevitable result of aiming at a spot just between Muscle's eyes was that the ball ended up 50 yards behind the penalty taker.

Off the field he made a handsome living heading anything for money. For instance whenever the fair came to the village we'd all turn up at the coconut shy to win one for Muscle. Armed with our coconut he'd throw it high in the air and then head it. This act inevitably drew a large crowd and very soon we'd be going round the punters laying odds that Muscle could head the coconut three times running and more than that break it.

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