

Email essentials for intercultural business



Task A – introduction

Work in pairs or small groups to discuss your opinions. Do you agree with the following statements?

When writing emails in English it is good practice to...

1. *always use first names*
2. *write short, direct sentences*
3. *write impersonally (the company would like you to..., our team needs...)*
4. *simplify the vocabulary you use*
5. *use perfect grammar*
6. *check your spelling*
7. *avoid making your partner look bad*
8. *mirror the writing style of your partner*

Task B – your email communication in English

You are going to talk to your partner/group about the people you often have email contact with in English. Use the table below to make some notes. Write which nationalities you write to and how their email style is different to yours. Think about how (in)formal your business partners' English language is, their grammar, use of names, directness or anything more you have noticed.

Remember: This exercise isn't about who writes better English, just about differences!

Nationality	Differences in writing style
Ex: Americans	No 'Hello', always first name, short emails

When you are finished, compare your notes with other people in the class.

Task B – simplifying sentences

Look at the sentences below. Can make them shorter, but keep the same meaning? When you have finished, compare your ideas with another person.

1. The project is an important and essential step.
2. Our top product is an effective and flexible product today.
3. I will complete the project in a period of a week.
4. The new machine, made in Hong Kong, cost the company an arm and a leg.
5. Simone is the purchaser who purchases components on behalf of the company.
6. The student is developing a new component for the development department he works for.
7. The plant, which is located in China, is a new plant.
8. The meeting, which will be held in room 202c, will be a meeting to decide on the new suppliers we want to work with.

Task C - politeness in emails

Discuss the following questions in your pairs/groups:



- What does the picture tell us about intercultural communication?
- What are the risks to your business relationships of writing/receiving impolite emails?
- What are the risks to your business of writing/receiving impolite emails?
- How can you use language in emails to avoid conflict?

Task D - identifying politeness strategies

Read the email below. Elke is very busy. She has organised a meeting but Tony wants her to rearrange both the date and the location. He uses different politeness strategies to avoid conflict when communicating with her. Write the number 1-8 of the language examples in the email next to the correct strategy in the table. The first example has been done for you.

TO: e.brenner@akto.de
 FROM: t.willard@akto.co.uk
 RE: Purchasing meeting arrangements

Dear Elke

1. Thanks for your quick response. 2. I know what you mean – it’s a really stressful time of year!

3. I really like your idea of meeting at the exhibition centre – 4. it’ll save us both a lot of time.

5. I’m afraid I need to question the date proposed – 6. I tend to think we should have the meeting this month. 7. It was decided that the exhibition centre would be a better place to meet than the factory. 8. It would be great if you could send out a confirmation to all the participants.

Thanks a lot for your support.
 Tony

Politeness strategy	Language example (1-8)	Your example
Apologise	5 – <i>I’m afraid</i>	<i>I’m really sorry about this but...</i>
Be tentative		
Common ground		
Indirect requests		
Share opinions		
Show approval		
Thank someone		
Use of passive		

When you have finished, work in groups and brainstorm one more example from each category

Trainers' notes: Email essentials for intercultural business

Time: 90 minutes+

Level: high B1 if you pre-teach key vocabulary, otherwise low B2 and up

Skills: discussion, vocabulary, writing emails

Note: This lesson is aimed at learners of English who write to business partners from other countries. It is assumed that both parties are already fairly competent at email writing, in terms of grammar and range of standard expressions. This is not an introductory lesson to email writing. After this lesson, learners should have a better idea regarding politeness strategies and how to simplify language use so that they avoid conflict and misunderstandings when communicating via email.

Procedure:

Task A:

Learners should discuss the points and agree that, depending on the culture of their business partner, these opinions can be right or wrong. In cultures where face-saving is important, the use of one's surname, correct grammar and face-saving strategies is very important. Encourage the learners to conclude that one needs to analyse how their business partner communicates and use strategies which will avoid conflict and misunderstandings.

Task B:

Give learners plenty of support, as they will possibly never have thought about this question. If possible, ask learners in advance to bring examples of emails which they have received so that they can analyse them together in class.

Task C

Suggested answers, though other alternatives are of course possible

1. The project is essential.
2. Our top product is effective and flexible.
3. I will complete the project in a week.
4. The new machine from Hong Kong was expensive.
5. Simone purchases components.
6. The student is developing a new component for his department.
7. The China plant is new.
8. The new supplier meeting will be held in room 202c.

Task D:

Politeness strategy	Language example (1-8)	Your example
Apologise	5 – <i>I'm afraid</i>	<i>I'm really sorry about this but...</i>
Be tentative	6 – I tend to think	Perhaps... maybe...
Common ground	4 – It'll save us both...	Like you, I think... We can both...
Indirect requests	8 – It would be great if you could	Would it be possible...? I wonder if you could...
Share opinions	2 – I know what you mean	I hear you on that. I agree completely.
Show approval	3 – I really like your idea	That sounds great. I'm with you on that.
Thank someone	1. Thanks	Many thanks for... I appreciate...
Use of passive	7 – It was decided	(The project/order/meeting) was cancelled

Task E:

Make sure to give people plenty of support in brainstorming a situation. Make sure that the focus is on clear and polite communication rather than language accuracy.

Task F: Identify further areas learners would like to focus on regarding intercultural communication/email writing.