

What Makes Business English Special?

The Business English industry is huge. At any time there are thousands of people world wide learning BE, be it in schools, colleges, workplaces, private language schools or via the internet. People call themselves BE teachers, and publishers produce course books written especially for BE learners. What is it that makes BE different to other forms of ELT?

First of all, BE is needs based. Of course any teaching programme should be designed around the needs of the learners, but BE teachers tend to make this a high priority. Many learners are learning BE for a specific reason. They may be students at a school or university, preparing for a future job, or they may already be in the workplace, learning English in order to improve their current skills or because their company has new partners or customers. BE learners are normally learning English in order to do something with the language; they are not studying the language for its own sake.

BE focuses on the **language of business** the learners will need outside the classroom. Most business discourse is either related to a specific business task, or designed to help build relationships between people, or somewhere in between the two. Because of this, teaching programmes tend to deal with three types of language use: "everyday" language (similar to language outside the workplace), "general business" language, i.e. language which is clearly business related (e.g. lexis like: report, contract, market niche), and very context specific jargon (used by a specific industry or profession). Teachers will want to make their courses as efficient and effective as possible, and to do this they will juggle between these different types of language and focus on what is more relevant to their learners.

Finally, BE is linked to **business communication skills**. Users of BE often need to be able to do specific things with language, for example, give presentations, participate in meetings, give instructions and so on. BE teaching therefore often uses these communication skills as a context for the teaching. How better to prepare someone to give a presentation, than to practise giving presentations?

So a typical BE course will focus on the specific needs of the learners and deal with the relevant language and skills which will enable the learner to communicate effectively in the workplace. That is what makes BE special.