Mastering Workplace English: A Book Review of 'English for Business Communication' by Mable Chan

Reviewed by

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INTRODUCTION

Although business English books have been extensively published during the last two decades (Bhatia & Bremner, 2012; Emmerson, 2010; Sweeney, 2003; Talbot, 2009), this book, "English for Business Communication" by Mable Chan (2020), is a comprehensive textbook designed for business professionals learning business English or workplace communication. This encompasses both verbal and written forms of English

while integrating the latest research in business communication. The book centers on contemporary business communication realities, encompassing English usage in social media and the notion of communicative competence. It thoroughly examines email communication, informal English, and English for social interaction. Moreover, the book delves into persuasive messaging and offers an accompanying e-resources website with genuine workplace genres and pertinent research studies.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1: This chapter focuses on the dynamics of communication within the workplace, encompassing both written and spoken aspects. It sheds light on the transformative effects of social media tools and technology on communication culture. The chapter provides an overview of recent developments in written and spoken workplace communication, outlining the themes covered in subsequent chapters of the book. One of the main topics discussed is the prominence of email as the primary written communication method in the workplace. The chapter underscores its significance and ease of use in modern business interactions. Furthermore, it delves into the increasing relevance of oral communication in specific fields like engineering, banking, and healthcare. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to impart a comprehensive understanding of the principles that govern effective workplace communication, emphasizing their critical role in different professional contexts. Effective communication in the workplace is valued and can help in career advancement. The chapter emphasizes the need for business English to be concise and simple, following the concept of plain language. This approach saves time, effort, and money, and is widely recognized and appreciated in various sectors and professions. The chapter also highlights the differences between spoken and written communication and explains the significance of adapting messages to different formats. In other words, this chapter aims to equip the reader with the knowledge and skills necessary for successful communication in the workplace. The chapter concludes with post-reading activities.

Chapter 2: This chapter emphasizes the importance of understanding not only the language accuracy but also the appropriateness of using and responding to language in different contexts. The chapter covers distinct differences in business English and provides practical advice for effective workplace communication. It advises using simple and common words, avoiding the passive voice when the active voice is suitable, and eliminating unnecessary words. The chapter also highlights the importance of discourse competence for producing and comprehending different types of oral and written texts. Additionally, it explores strategies for overcoming communication problems such as rephrasing, gestures, and clarification requests. The chapter concludes by discussing the purpose and nature of business English and offers insights into business reports, presentations, informal English, socialization, meetings and negotiations, interviews, and appraisal interviews. It presents research findings and provides practical tips for success in each area.

Chapter 3: In the chapter "Email and Emerging Social Media," the book discusses the significance of email as a communication tool in the workplace and highlights its various communicative purposes, such as general communication, sharing information, customer service, and personal business. It also briefly mentions the emergence of social media platforms in the workplace. The chapter provides insights into the features and format of email, emphasizing its flexibility and efficiency. Also, it aims to equip readers with knowledge and skills for effective communication in the digital age. From this chapter, readers should understand the importance of effective workplace communication and the principles that govern it. They should learn the significance of using concise and simple language, as demonstrated by the plain English campaign. By applying these principles, readers can become valued and advance in their careers. The chapter also highlights various aspects of business communication, such as presentations, informal English, small talk, negotiations, and interviews, providing practical tips and insights for success in these areas

Chapter 4: In the chapter on conveying negative and goodwill messages, readers are provided with valuable insights on effectively delivering bad news or negative messages in the workplace while maintaining goodwill. The chapter covers various aspects such as the challenges faced by managers, principles and strategies for de-emphasizing negative messages, occasions that require negative or goodwill messages, channels to use for conveying negative messages, and guidance on preparing effective negative and goodwill messages. It also emphasizes the importance of establishing and nurturing goodwill in business communication. This chapter equips readers with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the delicate task of conveying negative messages while fostering positive relationships in a professional setting.

Chapter 5: In this chapter, readers are introduced to essential communication strategies aimed at influencing, engaging, and empowering others. It provides a comprehensive overview of various persuasive tasks that individuals may encounter in their workplace or daily life, ranging from persuading subordinates, colleagues, or customers to even addressing the public or peers. The chapter delves into persuasive techniques employed by professionals and celebrities across different sectors. A key focus of the chapter is on the significance of language features, encompassing both content words and grammatical words, in attaining successful persuasion. Understanding the power of language and its nuances is crucial in effectively influencing others. Moreover, the chapter delves into the necessary skills for achieving persuasive communication, which includes grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. These skills collectively contribute to mastering effective communication and strategic persuasion in various professional scenarios. In other words, this chapter provides valuable insights into the strategies and techniques essential for successful persuasion in professional situations, emphasizing the role of language and diverse competencies in achieving persuasive communication.

Chapter 6: The chapter covers the effective use of persuasion in enquiry and invitation messages. It explains the purpose and structure of these messages and provides examples and strategies for persuasive communication. For enquiry messages, the chapter focuses on the importance of requesting actions and presents research on the main moves in these messages. It also discusses workplace requests and responses to requests. Regarding invitation messages, the chapter emphasizes the use of persuasion through directing and politeness behavior to commit the reader to future action. It also highlights cultural differences in persuasive appeals. Overall, the chapter provides valuable insights into using persuasion in both enquiry and invitation messages to enhance workplace communication.

Chapter 7: In this chapter, the focus is on formal analytical business reports and proposals. Business reports are organized and objective presentations of facts needed to make decisions and solve problems, while proposals seek permission to undertake further studies or investigations. The chapter begins by discussing the reasons for the increase in report writing, such as business expansion, globalization, and government requirements. It then explores the structure of business reports, comparing the commonly depicted structure in textbooks with authentic business reports. The essential sections of a business report include the introduction, methodology, findings/discussion, conclusions, and recommendations. The chapter also covers the purpose of each section and provides examples. It concludes by discussing the methodology section, the importance of data interpretation in the findings/discussion section, and the purpose of the conclusions and recommendations sections. Overall, the chapter provides guidance on writing formal business reports and proposals, highlighting the key differences between the two and emphasizing the skills required for effective communication in the workplace.

Chapter 8: The chapter on making oral presentations provides valuable guidance on delivering effective speeches. It highlights the importance of a strong closing, summarizing the main points in three key messages, and presenting information concisely. The chapter

also emphasizes the need to plan the presentation carefully by understanding the purpose and audience, managing time effectively, and creating visually appealing slides. It advises against overwhelming the audience with excessive information and suggests ending with a positive note and assigning a task to engage the listeners. Also, the chapter aims to enhance presentation skills by providing practical strategies for engaging the audience and conveying messages effectively.

Chapter 9: This chapter offers readers practical and effective techniques for engaging in small talk with colleagues in the workplace. It integrates valuable research findings specifically geared towards second language learners of English for business communication. Moreover, the chapter delves into the significance of informal English and English used for socialization, aspects that are often overlooked in conventional business communication courses or textbooks. The chapter also provides insights into conducting engaging conversations in professional settings. It emphasizes the importance of understanding social judgment and using this knowledge to foster meaningful interactions. The ultimate aim of the chapter is to equip readers with the necessary skills and confidence to effectively socialize and participate in small talk, thereby enhancing their interpersonal communication in the workplace. Therefore, readers will be better prepared to engage in successful and meaningful conversations with their colleagues.

Chapter 10: This chapter discusses the importance of meetings in the workplace and their various purposes, such as problem-solving, decision-making, and consensus-building. It highlights that meetings are the most dominant form of spoken communication and explores different types of meetings, including information meetings and decision-making meetings. The chapter also delves into the challenges and difficulties associated with meetings, such as understanding different accents and interrupting effectively. Furthermore, the chapter emphasizes the significance of negotiation skills in effective workplace communication. It provides guidance on how to be an effective leader or participant in a meeting, prepare well, and take effective minutes. It also introduces the

concept of negotiation, defining it and outlining the keys to success in negotiations. In other words, the chapter equips readers with the necessary knowledge and skills to engage in successful business meetings and negotiations.

Chapter 11: This chapter explores two main types of interviews commonly found in the workplace. Employment interviews are personally interactive processes where individuals ask questions to determine the qualifications of a person for employment decisions. On the other hand, appraisal interviews provide the basis for decisions regarding promotions, salary raises, and set developmental goals and performance targets. The chapter also discusses the importance of effective questioning skills and interview structure for interviewers. It also highlights the critical preparation and assessment criteria for interviewees. By reading this chapter, readers will be able to understand what makes interviews effective and how to be a successful interviewer. Furthermore, the book covers communication skills, critical listening models, and provides examples of interactions between appraisers and appraisees, where the appraiser helps the appraisee understand their weaknesses in a certain area and develop career goals. It provides valuable insights and guidance on employment and appraisal interviews for both interviewers and interviewees.

AUTHOR'S ARGUMENTATION

Some potential academic arguments about the book are as follow:

1. Practical and relevant content: One argument could be that the book provides practical and relevant content for students and professionals in the field of business communication. It covers both written and spoken English, incorporating current trends such as social media and email communication. This can be seen as valuable for individuals seeking to enhance their English language skills in a business context.

2. Research-based approach: Another argument could focus on the book's research-based approach. By incorporating up-to-date research in business communication, the book

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ensures that learners are exposed to the latest theories and practices in the field. This can be seen as a strength, as it provides learners with a solid foundation and helps them stay current in an evolving business environment.

3. Comprehensive coverage: The book's comprehensive coverage of various aspects of business communication could be seen as advantageous. From analyzing persuasive messages to exploring informal English and socialization, the book addresses a wide range of topics relevant to effective workplace communication. This comprehensive approach can be beneficial for learners looking to develop a well-rounded skill set.

4. Application of theory: Additionally, an argument could be made about the book's emphasis on applying theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios. By providing examples and explaining findings, the book helps learners understand how to apply these theories in practical situations. This approach can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the learning experience.

5. Persuasive techniques: Lastly, an argument could be made about the book's incorporation of persuasive techniques. In discussing Aristotle's three modes of persuasion or Professor Robert Cialdini's six weapons of influence, the book assists learners in developing persuasive communication skills. This can be valuable for professionals who need to persuade others and make compelling proposals in a business setting.

CONCLUSION

By reading the book ,readers can expect to gain a comprehensive understanding of effective communication in a business or workplace setting. They will learn both spoken and written English skills specific to business communication, including email writing, social media usage, conveying negative and goodwill messages, persuasive messaging, formal business reports/proposals, making oral presentations, and socialization skills. The book provides practical strategies, tips, and analysis of various workplace communication scenarios, allowing readers to improve their English communication skills and succeed in their

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professional endeavors. Additionally, the book offers post-reading activities and questions for reflection to further enhance learning and engagement with the material.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest reported by the author(s)

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Piangchan Moffatt is an experienced educator from Thailand. She has a background in teaching English and has been involved in various educational contexts, including vocational colleges and universities. With a passion for engaging students in autonomous, collaborative, and authentic learning, Moffatt has implemented innovative teaching methods in her classes.

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