

English support  
Business House (PO Box 618)  
Jernbanegade 23 B  
DK-4000 Roskilde

**News & Tips**  
from

**English support**

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Dear friends

Well, what a year it's been! It started on full throttle and has been pretty well that way all year. We are coming up to the end of the third year of *English support's* existence. The third year is often make-or-break year for newly-started businesses. It's the year you run out of money if you can't find enough customers. I am happy to report that it looks very much as if we might survive. Thanks to you, our customers, colleagues and friends!

## A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL!

Christmas is a funny thing. Its origins have nothing whatsoever to do with Christianity. First there was the Roman *Saturnalia*, starting on 17<sup>th</sup> December (when little Saturn was born) and ending on 25<sup>th</sup> December, the birthday (believe it or not) of *Sol Invicta*, the "Unconquered Sun".



And a special greeting to all those who, for whatever reason, have to work over the Christmas period!

Sol Invicta was a minor Roman god, who became very important when a new religion called Mithraism became popular. These people worshipped a Persian god called *Mithra*, who in Rome was identified with Sol Invicta. So 25<sup>th</sup> December became Mithra's birthday too.

The period between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> December was one long festival of eating, drinking, singing, giving gifts, party games and generally having a good time in every conceivable way.

In more northern parts, among the various Germanic tribes, there was a similar festival to brighten up the long dark winter. It was known as *Yule* – a word still used in English (along with *Yuletide*) for the Christmas period.

No one knows when Jesus was born (never mind Sol Invicta, Mithra or little Saturn), not even the year. But when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, the Church wanted to ease Mithra/Sol Invicta out of the way, so they picked 25<sup>th</sup> December – and then tried very hard to stop the traditional debauchery up to and on that date. And they did not believe in celebrating birthdays. The day was just marked with a special service called *Christ's mass* or *Christmas*.

But they never succeeded in *completely* suppressing the old traditions. Have a nice Christmas!

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*Please turn over!*

## Number of and Amount of

These two are often mixed up, and not only by non-native speakers, it must be said. You can only use *number of* with plural countable nouns, and *amount of* should only be used with uncountables:

e.g.: a large **amount of** money (uncountable), a large **number of** coins (plural countable).

A common mistake is to write something like “a substantial **amount of sculptures was stolen**”, which should be either “a substantial **number of sculptures were stolen**” or “a substantial **amount of sculpture [uncountable] was stolen**”.

Both these expressions can be written as plurals: “large **amounts of money**” and “large **numbers of coins**”. Note that both of these are followed by plural verbs.

## Adjectives followed by infinitives or gerunds

Last month we took a good long look at the gerund and the infinitive after various verbs. Quite a few adjectives can also be followed by infinitives and/or by a preposition plus a gerund, e.g.:

Adjectives	Examples with infinitive	Examples with preposition + gerund
afraid	<i>afraid to go</i>	<i>afraid of going, afraid about going</i>
difficult	<i>difficult to do</i>	<b>X</b>
fond	<b>X</b>	<i>fond of doing</i>
good	<i>good to do</i>	<i>good for doing, good at doing</i>
interested	<i>interested to hear</i>	<i>interested in hearing</i>
sorry	<i>sorry to say</i>	<i>sorry about saying</i>
sure	<i>sure to win</i>	<i>sure of winning</i>
welcome	<i>welcome to come</i>	<b>X</b>



Note that the meaning almost always changes. For instance, “*She was sure to win*”, describes the situation as other people saw it, whereas “*She was sure of winning*”, just describes how *she* felt.

## Relations and relationships

In ordinary everyday English, a *relation* is a member of your family (also known as a *relative*), and your *relationships* are your close friendships of the romantic and/or sexual kind.

But the plural word, *relations*, is also used in other contexts, e.g. *industrial relations*, *foreign relations*, *diplomatic relations*, *international relations*, *sexual relations*, etc. The common feature here is that *relations* in this sense always have to do with contacts between people or groups of people (e.g. nations) and their behaviour.

Note that we do not use the singular form, *relation*, in this sense. Instead, we use *relationship*. So we might speak of “*the relationship between India and Pakistan*” or of “*relations between India and Pakistan*”, but not of “*the relation between India and Pakistan*”.

The only exception is the prepositional phrase “*in relation to*”, which can be used in any context.

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# From the workshop...

## Problems with pronunciation

There are some words that seem to cause a lot of trouble and curiously enough “pronunciation” is one of them. A lot of people, including some native speakers, pronounce it “pronounce-iation”, and not surprisingly, this can lead to spelling problems.

Now, English is difficult enough to spell in the first place, without making additional problems for yourself by mispronouncing it! ☺

Some students of mine (all teachers) demonstrated the powerful effect of mispronunciation on spelling and grammar recently. They had a written exercise in which the phrase “several months” occurred. Despite the fact that the only thing they had to do with this particular phrase was copy it across into another document, nearly all of them wrote “*several month*”.

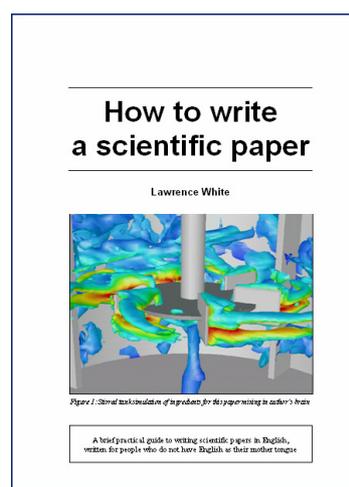
Many non-native speakers find it difficult to say the “th” sounds in English, and especially where followed by an “s”, so they simply drop the “s”. But how you speak is how you write. So they often end up writing it too! The moral is: *Practise your pronunciation* (see next page)!

## Extend and Extent

Another very common pronunciation problem that leads to spelling problems is the difference English makes between voiced and unvoiced consonants, e.g. the voiced “d” in the verb “extend” and the unvoiced “t” in the noun “extent”.

In many languages, the difference between voiced and unvoiced consonants (e.g. the pairs “d”/“t”, “b”/“p”, and “g”/“k”) is small or non-existent at the end of a word and makes no difference in meaning. But in English, “send” and “sent” are not the same, a “cab” is not a “cap”, and a “bag” is not a “back”. Make the difference clear in your pronunciation and you won’t mix up the spelling of words like “extend” and “extent”.

## The perfect Xmas gift for the researcher in your life!



### Abstract

English is the main language for international science publication, but not the native language of the majority of scientists. Writing well in a foreign language can be difficult. Some good existing material on how to write scientific papers was therefore blended with empirical data from English teaching pre-stored in the brain of a professional linguist and educator. This mixture was fermented at temperatures in the range of 35–40°C over a period of 28 days, after which essentials were extracted. The result is a practical manual for people who wish to publish in English but are not native-speakers. Conclusion: *Read on!*

### Keywords

Writing – English – Science – Journal – Articles

*“How to write a scientific paper”, is an excellent guide – even for the experienced author of scientific articles and reports. It is easy to read and gives good advice about the structure of such papers, the writing process, and a number of the many linguistic traps that authors who do not have English as their mother tongue tend to fall into.*

Order it now from *English support* at [www.englishsupport.dk](http://www.englishsupport.dk)

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD  
Danish Decommissioning

*Please turn over!*

# Tongue-twisters...

If you received this newsletter in the post, you will need to subscribe if you want it again. See web site for how.

## Cheers!

It has been known for some people to get a little “merry” at Christmas. In fact, you might even know someone who knows someone who does. ☺

They say that drink loosens the tongue, so here are a few sentences that should get easier to say as you work your way through your next Christmas “lunch”!

1. Charming children fetched chairs from the porch.
2. Charles cheerfully chose to play chess in Chile.
3. The giant was obliged to wear a huge pair of pyjamas.
4. Nigel and Jack played bridge with the surgeon and the juggler.
5. He thought both theories of thermodynamics were worthless.
6. Smith’s last thoughts six months ago were about this theatre.
7. Their mother and father gathered the clothes together.
8. My brother loathes this thundery weather.
9. Sally smiled and kissed Sam sensually on the lips.
10. He glimpsed at the text whilst sipping a glass of cider.
11. There was a vase with a dismal design of flowers.
12. Zealous boys poisoned the prisoners.
13. Russian ships were fishing off the Finnish shore.
14. She showed her galoshes to an ambitious Welshman.
15. Occasionally he had the pleasure of a vision of the treasure.
16. He had no illusions about the closure decision.
17. William walked warily forward to a warm welcome.
18. We watched as the waves washed the cliffs away.
19. Will he behave well during the voyage?
20. Have we invited the veterans from Worthing?



## More readers

There are quite a few new readers this month. Welcome! I hope you will enjoy receiving *News & Tips* every month.

And if *you* know someone who might like to receive *News & Tips*, why not send them an e-mail suggesting they subscribe? It doesn’t cost anything and what’s more it’s free. But we only send it to people who ask for it, so they will have to push one of those red buttons marked **Newsletter** at: <http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/news.htm>.

Best wishes

Lawrence White

[LW@englishsupport.dk](mailto:LW@englishsupport.dk)

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