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**News & Tips**  
from

**English support**

NB: If you received this newsletter by e-mail, it is (hopefully) because you have expressed a wish to do so. If this is not the case, and/or you do not wish to receive it in future – *please let us know!*

No. 29 – March 2007

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Dear friends

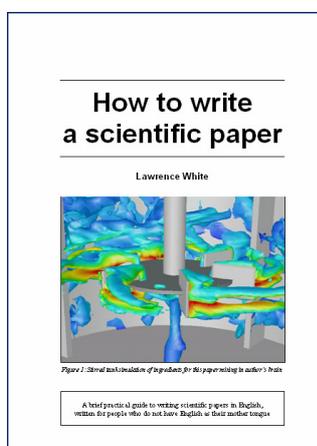
Just like last year at this time, I am happy to report that turnover for the first quarter this year is already well up on the previous quarter. Not only that but future orders look exceptionally good, and next quarter is set to break all records. The solid and steady growth predicted last year looks like continuing all this year too. We are still not talking about wealth and riches, of course, but a good secure income and a firm foundation of customer satisfaction on which to build.

## Help for universities

Most Danish academics read and understand English well, but many experience difficulties when it comes to writing up the results of their research for the English-language journals. So the Civil Engineering Department (BYG) at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) has entered into an agreement with *English support* which allows all their research staff to have their papers proofread and checked for language mistakes *before* they are sent to the journals.

English is also increasingly used in teaching. In the forefront of globalisation, universities have increasing numbers of foreign students and staff which means *everybody* has to communicate more and more in English – not only teaching staff, but also administrative and technical staff. To meet this challenge, the Human Resources Department at DTU has asked *English support* to run courses designed for teaching staff, for administrative staff, and for technical staff.

*English support* is also running courses in *How to write a scientific paper* at DTU, individual courses at other education/research institutions, and courses in scientific and academic writing for the Danish Association for Masters and PhDs (*Dansk Magisterforening*).



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## Booklet for science researchers

*“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.*

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD  
Danish Decommissioning

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**Published by *English support*. Order it now from your local bookshop or direct from [www.englishsupport.dk](http://www.englishsupport.dk)**

For an independent review (in Danish), see [Kommunikation og Sprog](#), under *Bog anmeldelser*.

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*Please turn over!*

Recently I have been doing some one-to-one teaching in pronunciation. On each occasion, my students have been Chinese researchers at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU). Their written English is on a par with their Danish colleagues, but they were experiencing difficulty in making themselves understood when presenting their ideas in the teaching situation or indeed in ordinary conversation, which can be very isolating. My task was to help them to articulate their English in a way closer to standard pronunciation. Foreign accents in a language not your own make communication difficult and Danes are simply unused to hearing English spoken with Chinese or Japanese linguistic interference. Here are some tips for others in the same situation.

## Word and sentence stress

Stress is very important in English, but since all the European languages use stressed and unstressed syllables, it is easy to underestimate the difficulty experienced by Chinese and Japanese speakers in dealing with this phenomenon. In their languages, and those of much of Asia and Africa, tone and pitch play a similar phonemic role. The fact that Chinese and Japanese are spoken more evenly and without stress tends to affect the English of native speakers of these languages. *Your native tongue trips you up!*

**Download a useful chart of phonetic symbols for English here:**

[www.englishsupport.dk/EN/phonemics.htm](http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/phonemics.htm)

## Vowels and vowel length

English has 12 different vowel sounds and 8 diphthongs. (Danish has even more vowels). But many other languages, including Chinese and Japanese make do with far fewer. This means that distinguishing between words like *cat* and *cut* can be a problem. And vowels can be long or short, e.g. *green* vs. *grin*. The long vowels in particular often change into (different) short vowels when unstressed, as in the sequence: *photograph* – *photography* – *photographic*, in which the stress is on the first, second and third syllable respectively [ˈfəʊtəɡrɑːf – fəˈtɒɡrɑːfə – fəʊtəˈɡræfɪk].

Chinese and Japanese speakers of English experience a lot of trouble with the many vowels, their different lengths, and the way they change according to where the stress is. And the fact that the *speed with which words are spoken* also varies in English (to fit a more or less regular beat on the stressed syllables in a sentence) increases their difficulties. In a sentence like “A **blackbird** is a **black bird**”, the stress falls on the three syllables in bold and the unstressed words in between are said rather quickly, while the last two words are said slowly. The effect is that the stress beat is regular.

*Many Chinese speakers have had really excellent teachers of English as far as grammar and spelling are concerned, but the majority of teachers in China do not pronounce English very well.*

## Consonants and consonant clusters

There are also problems with consonants. The endings of words are very important in English and a lot of words end in consonants or consonant clusters that are simply unknown in Chinese and Japanese. Words ending in /l/ and combinations (like *mill*, *walls*, *milk* and *walked*) need a lot of practice. Chinese speakers tend to simply leave them out.

### Did you know?

English support can offer **native-speaker** help with not only English, but also Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Rumanian, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Ukrainian.

# From the workshop...

## Get and have

Now here is a pair of verbs that often get mixed up. This is not surprising, because their meanings do overlap a little and the usage is rather complex.

First the overlap: *I had my trousers cleaned* = *I got my trousers cleaned*. The latter is colloquial and informal, but they both mean that I asked somebody else to clean them and they did so.

Similarly, the sentence, *John had Mary do some typing* = *John got Mary to do some typing*. The latter is more common nowadays, but again both mean that John asked Mary to do some typing for him and she did so.

The verb *to get* has many meanings and uses, usually involving a *change* of state, location or possession. E.g. it can mean *to become*, or *to reach*, or *to receive*:

*“He got angry”* – *“She got as far as the traffic lights”* – *“They got a lot of presents”*

However, it can also “strengthen” the verb *to have*. Instead of saying *“He has a gun”* (meaning he possesses a gun), we normally say *“He has got a gun”* or *“He’s got a gun”*. And instead of saying *“You have to do something about it”*, we often say *“You have got to do something about it”*.

But now comes the tricky bit. This usage is relatively new and it used to be only colloquial. And it can still only be used in the present tense. In the past tense, we must say: *“He had a gun”* and *“You had to do something about it”*. Likewise, in the future forms, we must say: *“He will have a gun”* and *“You will have to do something about it”*.

## Got and gotten

In British English, the past participle of *to get* is always *got*: *“He has got angry”* or *“He has got a gun”*. In US English there are two forms: *gotten* and *got*. The first is used in all the usual uses of the verb *to get*, while the latter is used in the special “strengthening” sense discussed in the previous two paragraphs.

So in US English, the two sentences above would be *“He has gotten angry”* and *“He has got a gun”*. In US English, *“He has gotten a gun”*, would mean *“He has received or got hold of a gun”*, not just that he *has* one.

## Get and be

There is another special use of the verb *to get* where it replaces the verb *to be*, with passive forms as in *“I’m getting married in the morning”*. Here the focus is on the change of state (matrimony) instead of the passive (being married by the priest), so using *get* has now become natural.

More than three hundred topics have been tackled so far in the pages of

# News & Tips

You can look them up on the website at: <http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/backindex.htm>, and back issues can also be downloaded at: <http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/backissues.htm>, where you can also download a whole year at a time (if you want to) by clicking on the year heading.

*Please turn over!*

## Plurals of abbreviations and subjunctives

*I very much enjoy reading your News & Tips. Your style reminds me of W.H. Ballin (author of Perfect Your English).*

*I noticed that in No. 2 you write CV's (and not CVs) and in no. 13 (your letter of 17 October 2005): If I was you, I'd stop pretending ...*

You are quite right about No.2: CV's should be CVs nowadays. This is a relatively recent shift in general practice with respect to plural abbreviations, though I confess to being a little out of date (say, 15 years) at the time. ☺

Someone else pointed out the "If I was you" in no.13, and you will find my comment on that in No.14, where I maintain the subjunctive is on its way out in informal writing.

And thanks for the compliment. W.H. Ballin. Oh my!

## Commas before *and* in lists

*When you make a list, like "apples, oranges, and bananas", do you put a comma in front of and?*

Well, it's not wrong to do so, and in US English it is quite usual. In British English, we always put a comma in if the things listed consist of several words, but not usually if they are single words, as in your example.

So most British English speakers would write "apples, oranges and bananas", while in a sentence like "I spent yesterday playing golf, drinking beer, and talking about the meaning of life", we will have a comma before "and" because there is a definite pause there. See *News & Tips* No.8.

## The ubiquitous *within*

*I'd like to suggest two other matters for you to address in a future number of News & Tips:*

- 1. Competency vs. competence (as in competence area)*
- 2. The Danish over-usage of within (e.g. you'll be responsible for all activities within change management)*

*One doesn't seem to find a job advert in English [in Denmark] without the word within being used 19 times!*

I wrote about the Danish overuse of "within" in *News & Tips* No.18, and I agree with the reader entirely. The words "competence" and "competency" got a mention in *News & Tips* No.1.

*Competency* is an abstraction from *competence*, and *competence* generally just means having sufficient skill or ability to do something. In English, describing someone as being *competent* is positive, but not strongly so, whereas the Danish cognate implies something more like being *well-qualified* or even *expert* in doing something. The English word *competence* is sometimes used in this more technical sense of *qualification*, but this is not its ordinary meaning.

More tips next month!

Best wishes

Lawrence White

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