BEST GRADES

with Erica

Business English for students & teachers

STUDY GUIDE

SEQUENCING
why it is really important
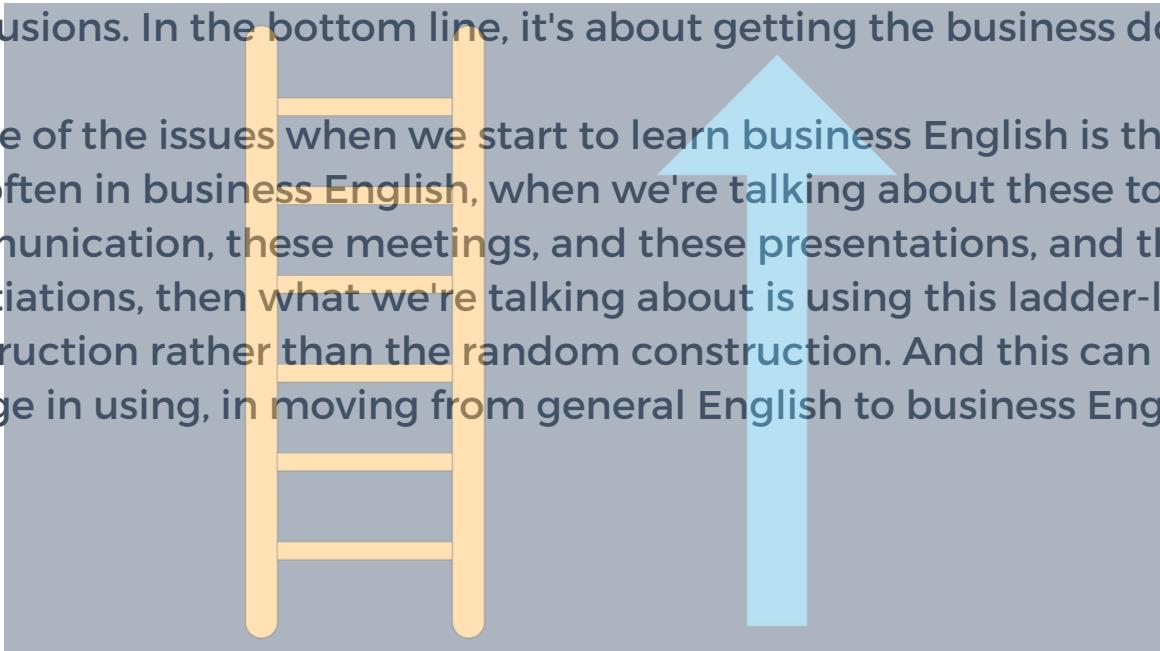# & how to use it

SUBSCRIBE 🔔

1

Well, last night I went out to a restaurant with some friends of mine, and if I was to draw a diagram of the communication that we had, I would say that it would look something like this. Now if I look at this, it's very **random**, it's **illogical** in some ways, and it's certainly **unstructured**. So when we began to talk, we began to talk about a point here, and then we went across here, and then we went to another point here, and then we jumped back to here, and then we came here, and it really didn't matter. Because the **aim** of this kind of social conversation is really about maintaining and building relationships that we have.

Now if I compare this to business communication, the diagram would look very different. So for example, last week I went to a business meeting, and if I was to draw a diagram of this communication, it would look something like this. Now this is a **ladder**, and a ladder is about going **step by step by step**. It's very **linear**, and it's quite **structured**, and it's quite **logical** in many ways. You go from the first step to the second step to the third step. And this is the way business communication works, and the business communication, it wouldn't matter if it's a presentation, or a meeting, a negotiation, or writing, even when you're writing an email, or a formal report. Because business communication has a **different kind of aim**. It's about setting an action plan. It's about making decisions. It's about reaching conclusions. In the bottom line, it's about getting the business done.

So one of the issues when we start to learn business English is that very often in business English, when we're talking about these tools of communication, these meetings, and these presentations, and these negotiations, then what we're talking about is using this ladder-like construction rather than the random construction. And this can be a change in using, in moving from general English to business English.

2

Now, the really good news about this is, in some ways it's very simple. And the technique that we're using is called **sequencing**. And sequencing is all about putting you**r ideas into a flow**. It's about arranging your ideas in a structure and putting them into some logical progression of the ideas, so that it's **coherent**, and it's **concise**, and it's **effective**.

Now. the good, as I say, the good news about sequencing is that there's **certain language that we use in order to indicate our sequencing**, and to make the sequencing clear, either to our readers or to our listeners. Now this is not difficult, and these phrases you can learn, and you can pick them up, and maybe you know many of them already.

The **skill of sequencing**, though, or maybe the art of sequencing, though, is this ability to organise your ideas and put them into some kind of logical progression. And this is really where the skill of sequencing comes in. It's much more than just learning a few phrases. And like anything else in life, the more that you practise it and the more that you do it, you'll find the easier it gets. And, if you develop your skills of sequencing, first of all, this will improve your business English. It will improve your communication, not only in the business world, but also in the academic world because you'll be able to put your ideas across **coherently**, **logically**, and **relevantly** to your audiences. You'll be much more effective and much more concise in your communication. And as a result, this will improve your overall performance. You'll find that when you do exams, that you'll begin to get better grades because of this structure that you've put into information and your ability to express your structure. And also, when you get out into the business world, you'll find that you're giving a much better impression to your colleagues and to your bosses.

So, what we're going to do in this video is look at sequencing. And first of all, we're going to look at what sequencing is, how structure works. Then we're going to look at expressing this structure. And then we'll go on to, well, structuring the information.

3

The big question you have is probably, well, **how do I structure information?** So let's get started.

So, if we come back to our diagram of the ladder and the idea of **linear communication,** well, let's have a look at this ladder and see the different parts of the ladder when it comes to business communication.

So, in any kind of communication, and again, this doesn't matter whether it's a presentation or a report or a meeting, there'll be some kind of **introduction**. And in the introduction, we often set the stage. We often give an overview of what people can expect. And as soon as I do this, people begin to structure the oncoming communication in their heads. And again, this is helping with your communication. Then there's a **main body** to the communication. And then we have to structure our content within the main body. And then at the end, very often, especially if it's a longer communication, there is some kind of **summary** of all the ideas that we've had in the communication and then there's some kind of **conclusion**. This could be recommendations. It could be an action plan. It could be some kind of conclusion. It could be making the decision.

So, when it comes to dividing up the main body, then the main body has this natural **progression**. So there'll be different ideas or different agenda points. So item 1, item 2, and item 3. So, let's look at the language to do with this. So, what we need in order to express this progression and make the progression clear to somebody, whether they're listening to us or whether they're reading or writing, what we need is some kind of **transition**. Now transitions, they occur in different forms.

They can be **verbally**. So in a presentation, I would say something like, **moving on to my next point** now. **That's all I wanted to say about point** 3. **And now I'd like to tell you about point** 4. Or they could be **in writing**. And in writing, they can, especially if it's formal reports, they can be more formal. So instead of saying **next**, maybe we write down **subsequently**. And we've got things like following and furthermore, and so on and so on. And also, we should also think that transitions, they're also **visual**. And, I can communicate my transitions in a visual way. There are a couple of ideas that I've got about this. So one would be, for example, in a presentation, some people, for example, will clearly number the different points of their presentation on their presentation slides or their visual information. Or they'll actually number the slides. Or they use different headings on their slides in different ways in order to indicate their structure. If we think about writing, if we think about a report, then, well, first of all, when we're writing, first of all, structure is given. If I look at the page, I can see the paragraphs, I can see the writing and

4

I can see white space. This is giving me some kind of structure. If I'm writing a report, then I might have **sections**, and then **subsections**, and then **bullet points**. This is some kind of visual transition.

So, let's have a look at some of these **verbal transitions**. And again, as I say, you may know many of these. And I would encourage you, when you're practising your business communication, whether that's in writing or in speaking, to try and build up the transitions and to **use variety** in the transitions that you use. So, let's have a look at these.

So, at the beginning, I've got things like **first**, **firstly**. **The first point is**, **initially**. That is something I might use more in writing. **The initial topic**, **let's start with**, **let's begin with.**

And, then, the second point has a kind of parallel. So, I've got things like **second**, **secondly**. In a report, I can just simply number things. **Next**, **the next point is, moving on now to, let's shift our focus to.**

And, again, another parallel with the third point, **third**, **thirdly**. I mentioned before, **next**, another word is **subsequently**, in formal English. Then **the next step, the next action, following this, after, afterwards, additionally, in addition.**

And, then, coming to the end of our communication, I've got little transitions like **finally, lastly.** To summarise: **in summary, to sum up, to recap,** and to give conclusionsL **in conclusion, to conclude**.

In structuring my information, if I move along to the left-hand side, I might want to say things or give information at the same time. So, I've got transitions like: **at the same time, simultaneously, meanwhile**. And, if I want to contrast information, then there are transitions like: **on the other hand, on the contrary, in contrast**.

These are the first steps of sequencing. It's thinking about using a ladder kind of structure, using introduction, main body, points one, two, three, and then conclusion and recommendations.

5

Linguistically, as I said, these transitions are not too difficult, and you may know already many of the phrases.

I think the difficulty and the **skill in sequencing** comes much more in **structuring this information**. So let's have a look at, and I want to give you some ideas of how to structure information.

So let's look at, first of all, the concept of the **progression of ideas**. And, there are some things that we talk about in life and in business English, they have a natural progression of ideas. So, let's have a look at some examples of this. So, the first thing would be when you're talking about any kind of **process**. A process has a sequence. So, for example, here in my first example:

There are 4 key steps in our quality control process. We are going to examine: 1. inspection, 2. analysis, 3. testing and 4. reporting.

Feedback is integral. First, We gather input, second we analyse it, third make adjustments and then finally repeat the cycle.

Instructions. Firstly, open the box. Secondly, remove the contents. Thirdly, check the contents.

The discussion will evolve from the general concepts to the specific case studies. (making a point in a meeting or discussion)

To achieve our marketing objectives, sequential steps are followed. The initial step is research, subsequently there is strategy development, followed by execution and finally evaluation. (writing - e.g. report)

Let me give an overview of the presentation. We'll start with the background information, followed by the key findings and then finish with my recommendations.

So, here we're talking about natural progressions and natural processes that invite you, in some ways, to come up with these sequences. So let's have a look at some other structures that we can also use that have some kind of, again, natural progression, natural sequence of ideas or of thinking.

6

timeline

First, let's discuss the project's initial planning phase. Next, we'll move on to the execution phase. Finally, we'll cover the results and lessons learned.

In the timeline, you can see that the project started in January, followed by a testing phase in March and the final product launch in June.

I would like to tell you about our company: firstly I'll talk about the foundation, then I'll go on to outline our current growth and lastly I'll look to the future. (past - present - future)

To understand the evolution of technology, we'll explore key inventions in chronological order.

importance - priority

I'll outline our objectives in order of priority. Firstly our top priority is safety, then I'll go on to customer satisfaction and lastly I'll deal with cost efficiency.

When considering new features for this product, we need to rank them in order of importance to users.

In this section of the report, the necessary action is outlined, starting with the most urgent action and finishing with the least urgent.

What do we need to do? First and most importantly, we need to inform the customers. Then, we must recall the product as soon as possible and finally, we should examine our production processes.

contrast - comparison

Now, let's compare the advantages and disadvantages of the three software solutions. First, we'll discuss Solution A, followed by an analysis of Solution B and then move on Solution C.

My first point is to outline the drawbacks, then I'll move onto the benefits before finishing with the recommendations.

Contrasting the performance of our products in different regions is essential. We'll begin with Europe, next we'll look at North America and finally examine Asia.

Let's explore two scenarios. First, we'll consider the best-case scenario and then we'll examine the worst-case scenario.

hierarchy

Firstly I'll talk about the executive board, next the department managers and then the individual teams.

This report is organised with sections, sub-sections and bullet points.

Let's use this meeting to discuss the needs of our employees using Maslow's hierarchy of needs, going step by step from the bottom to the top.

I'll run through the **roadmap** of the project. Our starting point was the initial planning phase, then we moved through development and successfully reached our **destination** - the final implementation stage.

It's been and will continue to be **a voyage of discovery**. We successfully **navigated** the calm waters in Europe, then had some problems in the more turbulent waters in America and are looking forward to **exploring new territories** in Asia. Let me expand …

The customer **journey** is a sequence of interactions as s/he goes from awareness to purchase to loyalty. This report will consider each point of this journey.

So, this was sequencing. And **sequencing is a really useful business skill**. It will really help you both in your academic life and your business life. Sequencing is all about changing those random circles to some kind of linear ladder-like structure in your communication. It's about achieving a logical and coherent flow to your information that expresses clearly and effectively what you want to express and helps your readers and your listeners to understand your information.

Sequencing has different aspects. One aspect is all about this ability and this skill to organize your information. As I said before, the more you do it, the easier it will become. If you can structure very quickly in a meeting situation your arguments into three clear points, for example, this will really help people to understand your content. And, if you're using English as a foreign language, everybody will be able to understand your language much better. In addition, you'll create a much better impression. Some people in meetings will go on and on and on and repeat themselves, and you don't really understand the point of the communication. So, when you use sequencing, you should really begin to, as I say, develop this skill.

And, there are different things that you need to think about …

9

And, one is the **means of communication** itself. There will be a difference, for example, between meetings and presentation. Negotiations have an accepted structure to them. Or, whether you're writing an email or a report, for example.

And, connected to this, you should also think about **tone** in business. Sometimes, you'll need a quite formal tone. So, if I'm writing a very formal business report, for example, or I'm giving a presentation to new customers. Or, sometimes, I need a much more informal tone. So, if I'm writing email to business partners that I've known for many years, or I'm giving a presentation to colleagues, for example.

Then, connected to this again, I need to think about the **audience** and whether the audience are readers or whether they're listeners, I have to think about their needs and expectations and I have to think about what those needs and expectations are and that different audiences will need different approaches.

And again, coming again to another connected point, then I need to think about what is **the objective**? What's the objective? What's the aim? What are the goals? What do I want to achieve with my communication? And make sure that anything that I put into my content is moving towards that aim or objective. This again will really make my communication much more effective. It will be clear. It will be concise. It will be straightforward.

It will be **relevant**. If I'm relevant, then I will keep people engaged, and I will keep people moving towards what it is I want to achieve with my communication. Irrelevant information, going off the point or putting in stuff that's not relevant, will lead my audiences to not be engaged, and it will lead to them being confused in many ways.

So, that's all I wanted to say about sequencing.

10 **Practise sequencing. Use sequencing in every step of your Business English course.** This can only improve your Business English skills.