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English Revisited:

Tips, Tidbits & Tutorials

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Glossary

 resolution: a promise/
 decision to do sth.

 diligent: hard-working
 the wherewithal: money
 needed, financial means
 urge s.o. to do sth.:
 strongly encourage s.o.
 to do sth.

 stick to your guns
 (colloquial): do not give
 up

 persevere: to hang on,
 do not give up

dread: fear

intricacies: details

Editorial

The new year is well underway and I hope that many of our readers have been able to stick to their New Year's resolutions.

If we had been more diligent last year, we would not be facing the same issues again this year. If only we had the wherewithal, we could hire a coach to urge us to follow through with our plans. There is no time like the present, though, so if you stick to your guns and persevere, you will be able to achieve your goals this year.

Our careful readers no doubt spotted in the last paragraph one of our main topics in this

issue of our newsletter, namely if-clauses. While dreaded by many, they actually follow a simple pattern.

Last issue we dealt with the intricacies of commas and in this issue we will take a closer look at dots. Sounds like an odd point? Read on to find out what's in a dot.

Lastly, in this issue we will also provide more tips on writing a persuasive cover letter in English.

John Nixon



Comments

Listening Feature: Listen to the first of several conversations with the Amish on p. 4.

Upcoming Issues :

- if-clauses (Part Two)
- academic writing
- a look inside the US presidential elections

Do you have any ideas for future issues? Please contact us.



Subscription

Currently on Offer

If you are interested in any of the following, please **contact us**.

- **Workshops from February to June:**
Accent Reduction and Voice Training: February 10, 17 and 24 (9:30 to 13:00)
Expert English for Academic Staff: February 23 and 24 (8:30 to 16:30)
Academic Writing in English: February 26, March 4 and 11 (8:30 to 11:45)
Conference English / Academic Presentations: March 8 and 9 (8:30 to 16:30)
Speaking English on the Job: April 22 (8:30 to 11:45)
Accent Reduction and Voice Training: May 3, 10 (9:30 - 13), May 25 (13:30 to 17:00)
Academic Writing in English: May 27, June 3 and 10 (8:30 to 11:45)
Academic Vocabulary Expansion: June 23 (8:30 to 11:45)
- **Editing Service and Coaching:** Do you have a paper, abstract or other document that needs to be looked over by a native English speaker before it is published? Or are you preparing to deliver a lecture or presentation and would like to get some feedback from a native speaker. If so, we can help.

Grammar

If-Clauses: Conditional Sentences

Many learners of English despair when they hear the term “if-clauses” and many teachers wonder why that is when if-clauses are really straight forward and simple – once one has grasped their basic structure, that is. To demystify if-clauses, let us begin by pointing out that there are only four types. Though there are admittedly confusing variations, the standard if-clauses follow the same pattern:

If we do one thing,	another thing happens .	→ zero conditional
If-clause <i>Present Tense</i>	main clause <i>Present Tense</i>	→ general truth
<i>If you don't get enough sleep, you can't concentrate well the next day.</i>		

If we do one thing,	another thing will happen	→ 1 st conditional
If-clause <i>Simple Present</i> ,	main clause <i>Will-Future</i>	→ probable
<i>If you play your cards well, you will get a pay raise next year.</i>		

If we did one thing,	another thing would happen .	→ 2 nd conditional
If-clause <i>Simple Past</i> ,	main clause <i>would+infinitive</i>	→ hypothetical
<i>If she published more in English, she would reach a wider audience.</i>		

If we had done one thing,	another thing would have happened .	→ 3 rd conditional
If-clause <i>Past Perfect</i> ,	main clause <i>would have+past participle</i>	→ unreal; related to the past
<i>If we had saved more when we were younger, we would have had a bigger down payment for our house.</i>		

That is basically all there is to if-clauses. The questions derived from our four types of conditionals are accordingly:

What happens if I do this or that?	→ zero conditional
What will happen if I do this or that?	→ 1 st conditional
What would happen if I did this or that?	→ 2 nd conditional
What would have happened if I had done this or that?	→ 3 rd conditional

There are a few things you should note when using if-clauses:

1. There is always a comma after an if-clause, but never before it.

If you run for office, you will have to make many speeches. (comma)
You will have to make many speeches if you run for office. (no comma)

2. There is no comma directly after if, as it is considered to be a strong discourse marker.

If, you run for office, you (incorrect)

3. Generally speaking, the word “would” is not used after “if”. This is a common mistake for German speakers.

Wenn Sie mehr unterrichten würden, würden Sie weniger veröffentlichen.
If you taught more, you would publish less. (Not “if you would teach more,...”)

Nota bene: This is not, however, the case with polite requests.

Here it is common to use “would” to attenuate your request.

If you would be so kind as to send me the file by tonight, I would appreciate it.
I would be grateful if you could answer me as soon as possible.

According to Michael Swan in his *Practical English Usage*, in spoken, colloquial American English, you might hear *would* in both clauses.

Where would we hide if a tornado would hit again?

4. The 2nd and 3rd conditionals may also be used for recommendations.

such as (II) “If I were you, I would do this.”
 and (III) “If I had been you, I would have done this”.

5. The past simple in the 2nd conditional is often replaced with “was/were to”.

If you were to run a few more tests, you would probably get the desired results.

This is not used, however, for state verbs.

If you were to like hiking, you would enjoy the Dolomites. (incorrect)
If you liked hiking, you would enjoy the Dolomites. (correct)

For the advanced learners among our subscribers, we will continue with **mixed conditionals** and **alternative ways of expressing condition without using “if”** in our next issue.



Intercultural Communication

What's in a Dot? Differences in Notation and Symbols

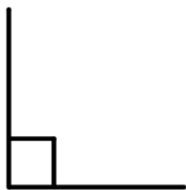
As we saw in our article on commas in the last issue of our newsletter, there are a number of differences between German and English when it comes to punctuation. A comma used on eBay instead of a dot or decimal could break the bank. Our readers might protest that English-speakers are the odd men out since most continental European languages are in agreement with German on this matter. Why is it then that calculators sold and used in Germany do not have any commas? Rather weird, don't you think? (I can see some of our readers reaching over for their calculators to double check this.)

Mathematics

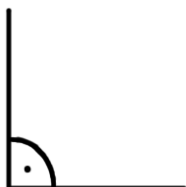
Differences in notation and symbols can be found in many other areas as well. Mathematics is rife with variances. In addition to the use of decimals for commas and of commas to separate thousands in English, we also find the use of three dots arranged in a triangle in mathematical notation (\therefore). These three dots stand for *therefore* and are used when making a conclusion at the end of a mathematical proof, typically in a syllogism. An example of its use is as follows:

$x > y$ (*x is greater than y*)
 $y > z$ (*y is greater than z*)
 $\therefore x > z$ (*therefore x is greater than z*)

German, by the way, uses a double arrow (\Rightarrow) to represent *therefore*.



English notation



German notation

Another instance of misplaced dots involves the notation used to represent right angles.

In the English-speaking world, a right angle is represented using a box, whereas in German a dot is used inside of a curve linking the two lines forming the right angle.

Dates

By no means are the varying conventions governing the use of dots confined to math. In fact, the dots used in German to separate the day, month and year in a date are replaced with slashes in English. Hence, the date Germany's national holiday was first celebrated is written as 03/10/1990 in British English and not as 03.10.1990. For American English, see the box on the sidebar.

Ordinal Numbers

In German, a dot is used after a number to indicate an ordinal number, for example 2. Seite. This is, however, not the case in English. Ordinal numbers are written using an abbreviated superscript, for example 2nd page.

Currency

Yet other variations include the position of currency symbols, the way some numbers are written and quotation marks. Although when we read a price out loud in English the currency is said at the end, the currency symbol, e.g. \$ or €, is always placed out front.

\$700 instead of 700\$

Handwritten Numbers

Some handwritten numbers also vary. For instance, a one in English consists of simply one vertical stroke and is missing the first slanted stroke in a German one. Compare 1 and 1. This can be very confusing for an English-speaker who might misinterpret a German handwritten one, with its slanted stroke extending all the way to bottom, as an upside down v. Similarly, a seven in English consists of two strokes instead of three.

Compare 7 and 7

In the UK and Ireland, many people also use the crossbar in the middle. In North America this is far less common.

Quotation Marks

Lastly, both sets of quotation marks in English are superscripts, that is, they are placed at the top of the line. Furthermore, they are also directed inwards.

Compare "...” (English) with „...“ (German).

Be sure to keep these differences in notation in mind when preparing your next PowerPoint presentation in English.

Writing the Date in English

American English:
October 3, 2016

short forms
Oct. 3rd, 2016
or
10/3/16

British English:
3 October 2016

short forms
3rd Oct. 2016
or
3/10/16

Glossary

break the bank:
bankrupt someone

be the odd man out:
be the exception

weird:
odd, strange
(more in the US)

rife with:
full of

syllogism:
logischer Schluss

is/are as follows:
ist/sind wie folgt

right angle:
an angle of 90°

by no means:
notice that the verb and subject are reversed after this expression

confined to:
limited to

hence:
therefore

John Nixon

Vocabulary

Useful Language for Cover Letters

In our 2nd newsletter from 2015, we took a look at general tips and cultural differences for cover letters. Now, we will go a bit deeper into this topic by considering some useful language for improving your writing.

The cover letter is your first opportunity to demonstrate to your potential employer what separates you from the rest of the applicants. Be careful not to be too formulaic, which could bore the reader and imply a lack of imagination. For instance, you should not begin with *To Whom It May Concern*. Instead, find out the name of who will be reading your application and address it to him or her. Although Americans tend to use first names more often than Germans, you should remain formal, i.e., use *Dear Mr. Y* for men and *Dear Ms. X* for women. Do not write *Mrs.* unless you are certain that she is married. If you cannot find a name, one solution would be to leave out the salutation and only include a subject heading or to write *Dear Hiring Professional* or *Dear Search Committee*, depending on the type of job you are applying for.

Do you know what *perspicacious* and *adscitious* mean? No? Well, the reader will likely not know them either. Leave those multisyllabic wonders for complex literature. The language in your cover letter should be clear, concise, and understandable. Louise Kursmark, who has written numerous books on the application process, suggests that you use the *show readability statistics* option under the spell-check preferences for Microsoft Word. This feature estimates the grade level of your writing. Kursmark recommends a fifth or sixth-grade writing level.

One challenge of preparing an effective cover letter is to come across as confident but not arrogant. One way to do this is to use persuasive action verbs to show the reader that you are assertive. Words such as *coordinated*, *developed*, *supervised*, *drafted*, *formulated*, *approved*, *organized*, and *implemented* denote a take-charge personality. Avoid weak phrases like *I believe* or *I feel* and replace them with *I am confident* or *I am convinced*. However, you should use such phrases sparingly.

Lastly, your cover letter should get straight to the point. Including information about your hobbies, though it might shed light on your personality, should be left out since it is not directly related to the position. Experts all agree that the cover letter should not be longer than a page and around two to four paragraphs in length.

For further practice, [click here](#) for activities related to the language used in cover letters.

Two Nations Divided by One Language

The term cover letter is used in North America to signify the letter that one attaches to one's résumé outlining in more detail the work you have completed, the skills you have acquired and the qualifications you have earned. In Britain, the term covering letter is used instead.

As for CV, which stands for curriculum vitae, but which is usually abbreviated, it is predominately used in Britain, while the term résumé is more common in North America. Nevertheless, CV is also used in academic contexts in North America.

Dr. Joseph Michaels

Listen to an interview with two Amish men in Indiana and Michigan speaking Pennsylvania Dutch, a dialect of German. Note the similarities with southern German dialects. Dutch here is a variation of the word *Deutsch* and does not refer to the Netherlands.



Audio

Dr. Joseph Michaels

Glossary

formulaic:
containing a common collection of words

address:
speak or write to someone specifically

come across as:
to give s.o. an impression of yourself

assertive:
exhibiting a strong and forceful personality (but not aggressive)

denote:
indicate, be a sign of

use sparingly:
use little of something

shed light on:
reveal, help to explain

acquire skills:
gain skills

abbreviated:
shortened

predominately (or predominately):
mostly