

# BELF research and materials for the corporate language training market

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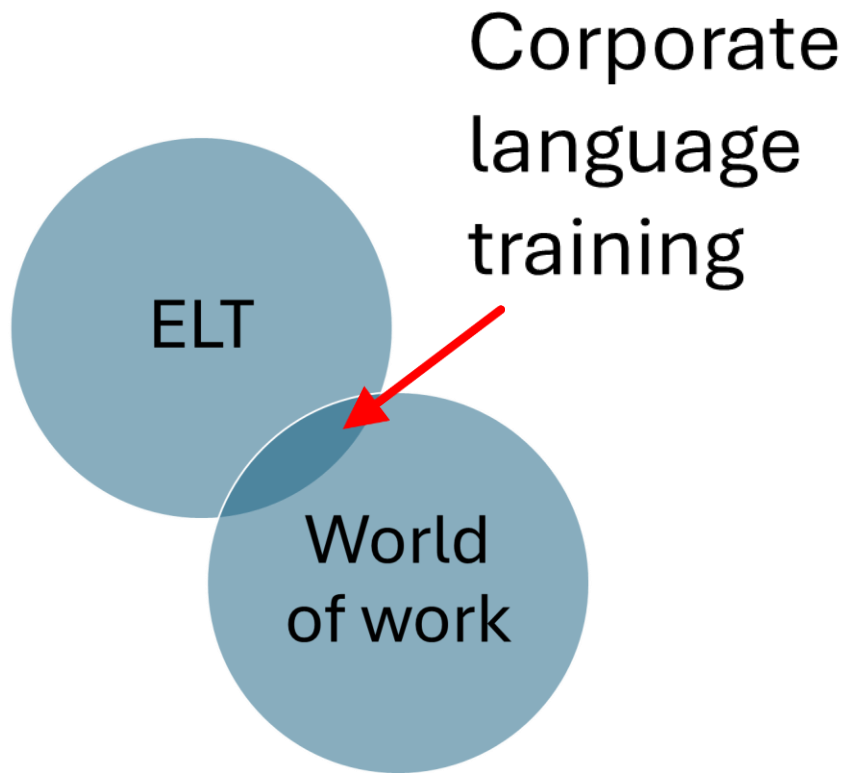
Evan Frendo  
[www.e4b.de](http://www.e4b.de)  
5 June 2025



**MaWSIG**  
Materials Writing Special Interest Group



# Today's Goals



**Deconstructing BELF:** Explore the meaning of English as a business lingua franca (BELF) and its impact on the broader ELT industry, particularly Business English and ESP.



**Corporate Language Training:** Offer a glimpse into the world of corporate language training and the opportunities it presents for materials writers. Five case studies.



# Deconstructing BELF

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Research and implications





Let's start by  
looking at some  
authentic  
business  
interactions







Software development team meeting in Southern Germany. All the Germans speak good English (C1-C2). Today they have a project update from one of their Indian developers, who has flown in from Bangalore. He is a “native speaker” of English.



Too fast. Too technical. I  
didn't understand what he  
was talking about.



# An email about travel arrangements

Hi Lin

Just to let you know the visa came through today  
- all successful. See you in Wuhan :-)

Bernd





# Response

Good news

I have booked my train tickets back and forth. I will meet you Wuhan G train Station. I will arrive the station at 20:00 around earlier than you. You will arrive Wuhan Station at 20:40 around.



# Another example

Hi Lehmann

How have you been? Have you got my last email? I haven't heard from for some time. I would like to meet you on the skype to talk about the invitation letter and something for this year team training. We have booked your flight ticket couple of months ago. Hope you reply me after you get this email.

Looking forward to your sound.

Nigel Chan



# Another example

you

Hi Lehmann

surname instead of first  
name

How have you been? Have you got my last email? I haven't heard from for some time. I would like to meet you on the skype to talk about the invitation letter and something for this year team training. We have booked your flight ticket couple of months ago. Hope you reply me after you get this email.

Call to action

Looking forward to your sound.

Nigel Chan

Looking forward to hearing from you



# Response from Hans Lehmann

Hi Nigel

Good to hear from you - yes very happy to skype. At the moment I am on my way to Japan - I will check my schedule for next week and get back to you.

BR

Hans



# Response from Nigel Chan

Good!

You are the way to Japan. For business or relax. last week I planned to visit Japan on this National Day. It is denied by my wife. . Hope you have a ggod time there!

Nigel Chan



# The only issue ...

Good news

I have booked my train tickets back and forth. I will meet you Wuhan G train Station. I will arrive the station at 20:00 around earlier than you. You will arrive Wuhan Station at 20:40 around.



# Examples of non-standard English

- I used the *before* reference (previous)
- I ask for a quick glance for this paragraph
- Ok I note it. We will think later on.
- Any idea where is?
- Can I get back to you later? I need more thoughts for that.
- I would like listen comments from experts here.



# What is BELF research?

- Investigates use of English in international business contexts
- Highlights communication strategies used to “get the job done”
  - Accommodation
  - Translanguaging / multilingualism
  - Non-verbal communication
  - Negotiation of meaning / co-construction of meaning
  - Pragmatic strategies
  - Politeness / appropriateness

# Business English and BELF

“A distinction must be made between the traditional conception of business English (BE) and BELF: whereas BE refers to the language required to function in the workplace, BELF underscores that this English usage is not a static, codified body of knowledge. Rather, BELF is constantly evolving and negotiated in real time between interactants in different contexts.”

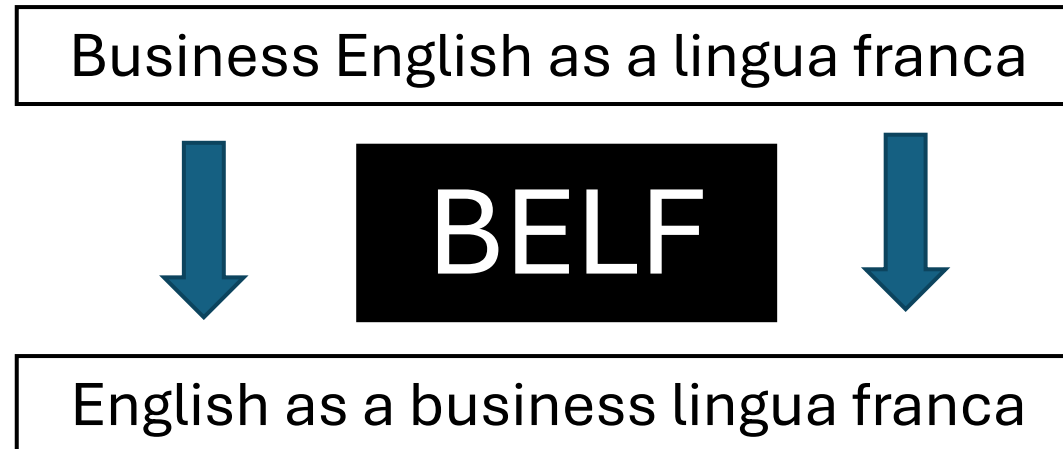
Peltonen, L., & Hu, G. (2025). Addressing linguacultural competencies in business English pedagogy. *ELT Journal*, ccaf017.

# What is BELF?

“BELF is perceived as an enabling resource to get the work done. Since it is highly context-bound and situation-specific, it is a moving target defying detailed linguistic description.” (p. 129)

Kankaanranta, A., Louhiala-Salminen, L. & Karhunen, P. (2015). English in multinational companies: implications for teaching “English” at an international business school. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 4(1), 125–148.

# BELF is evolving



Revisiting BELF and  
where are we now  
(Virginia López Grisolia)

31 August 2025

“we want to emphasize the domain of use rather than the type of English”

Kankaanranta, A., & Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2013). “What language does global business speak?” The concept and development of BELF. *Ibérica*, 26, 17-34.





# The “B” in BELF

- Domain of use – international business community / business context / business culture
- Overall goal – getting the job done – goal-oriented interactions / task oriented. Rapport building is part of this.
- Business knowledge and expertise – knowledge of business practices, specialized lexis, genre conventions, hard skills





“What does this mean for the teaching of workplace talk?”

“How can we prepare learners if nothing is fixed or patterned or identifiable? How can an ESP practitioner make use of findings that suggest there is no single right way to do anything, or that the same people will do things differently on different days, in different meetings, in different organizations?” (p. 293)

Marra, M. (2025). English in the workplace. In S. Starfield, & C.A. Hafner (Eds.), *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 284-304). Wiley.

# Workplace learning

“Learning ... seems to happen most effectively in business “communities of practice” rather than in traditional English training”

Ehrenreich, S. (2010). English as a lingua franca in a German multinational corporation: meeting the challenge. *Journal of Business Communication*, 47(4), 408-443.

“I illustrated how heavily their learning was sourced from their own experience of using English at work, rather than from a systematic study of English.”

Takino, M. (2019). Becoming BELF users: the learning process of business users of English and its conceptualization. *Journal of English as a lingua franca*, 8(2), 235–267.




# Workplace learning


“Hamad, who worked in process engineering, attributed his strengths in English to his time in the reservoir field in the United States and Norway, where he learned to communicate in what he called “the company way.”” (pp. 503-504)

Hodges, A., & Seawright, L. (2023). Transnational technical communication: English as a business lingua franca in engineering workplaces. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 86(4), 498–513.

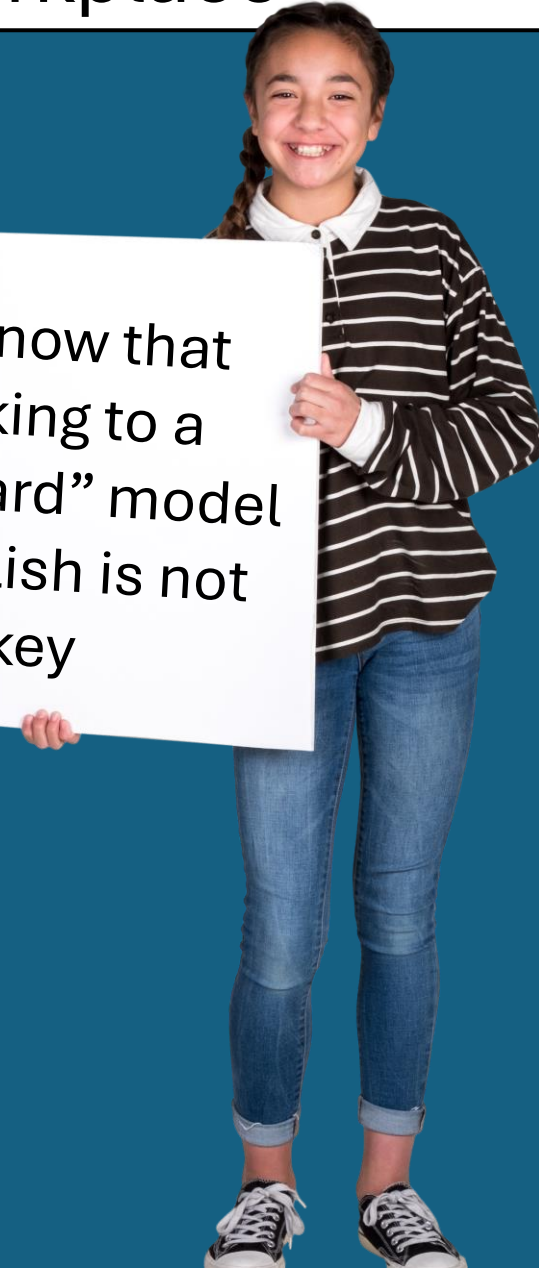
# We know a lot about how English is used in the international workplace



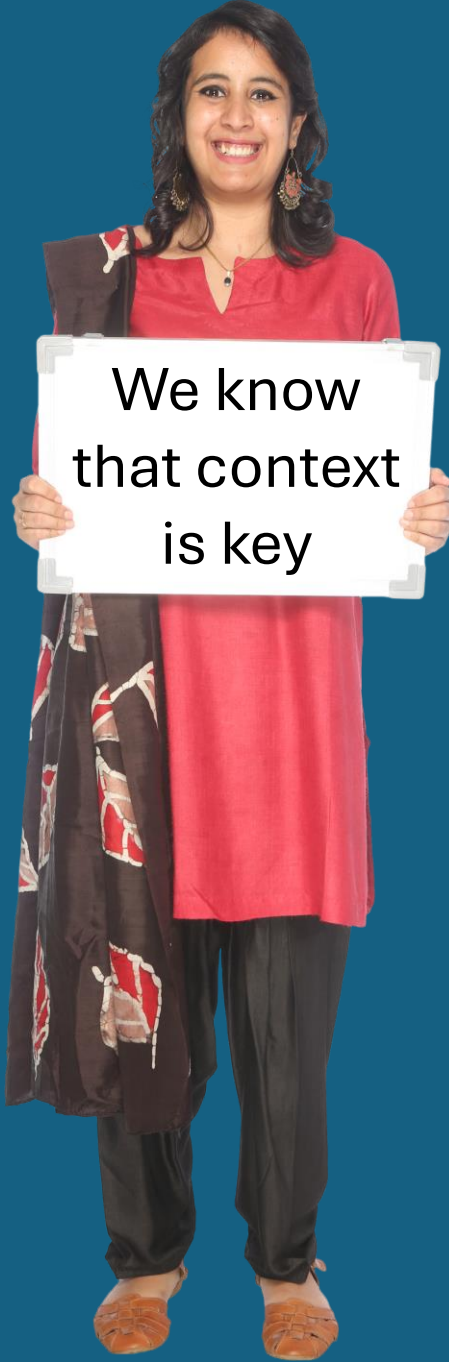
We know that communication strategies are key



We know that mutual intelligibility is key

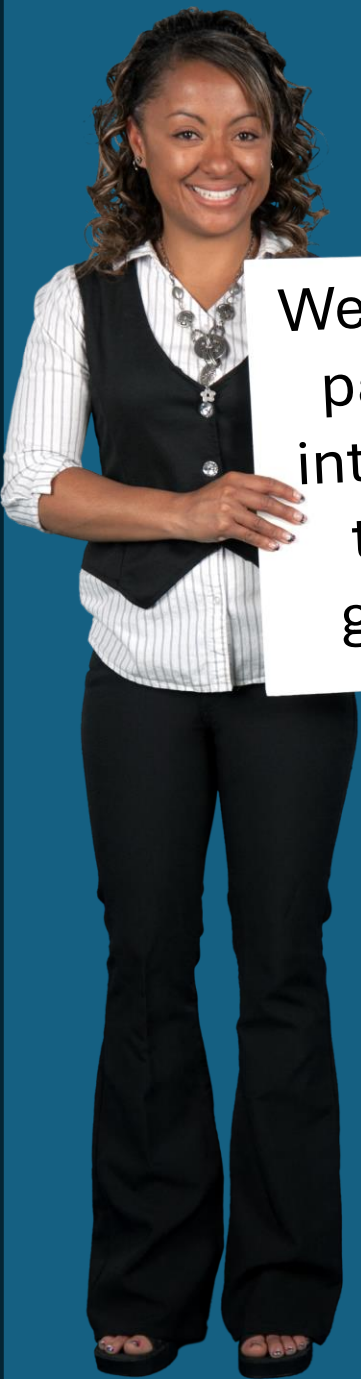


We know that sticking to a “standard” model of English is not key

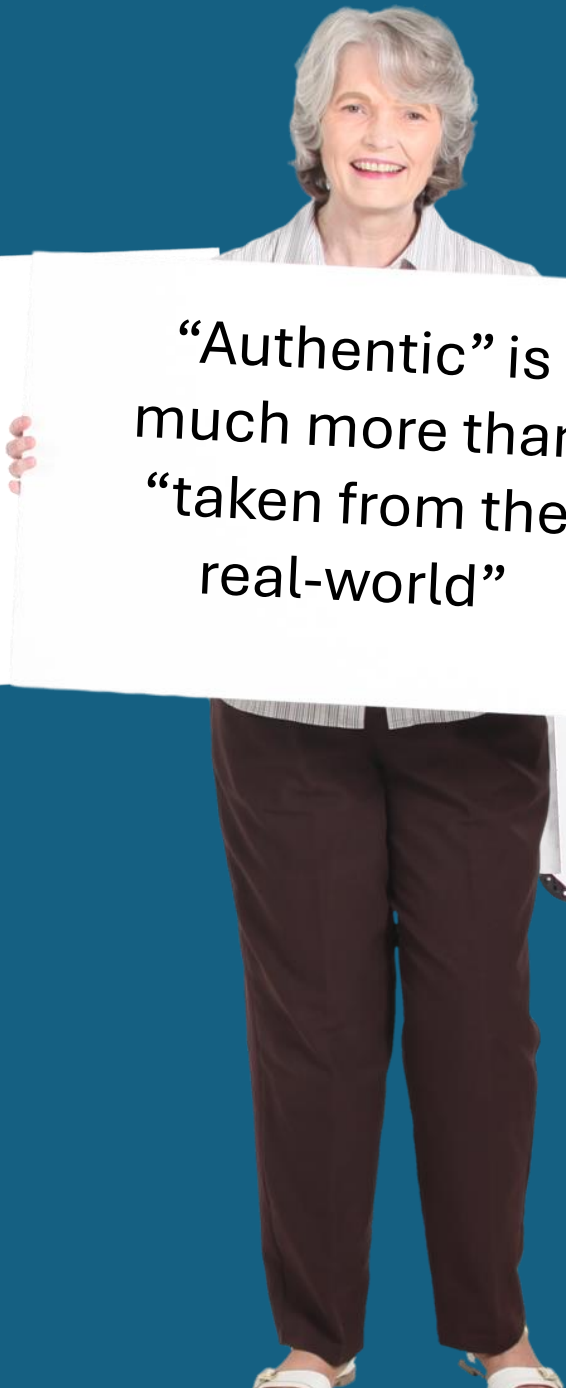


We know that context is key

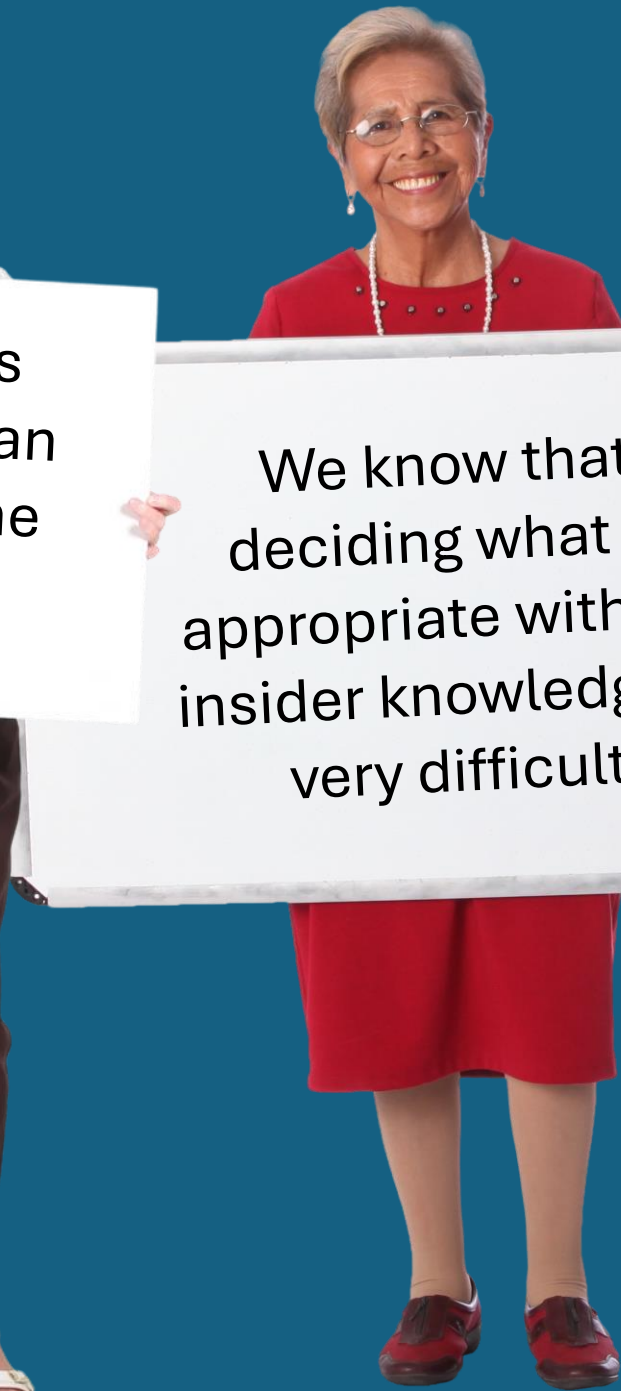




We know that  
passing an  
international  
test is no  
guarantee



“Authentic” is  
much more than  
“taken from the  
real-world”



We know that  
deciding what is  
appropriate without  
insider knowledge is  
very difficult



Linguacultural  
competence is  
critical

# BELF research and teaching materials

“Despite the large body of work that now exists that has revealed much about how English is used as a second or additional language by users across the globe in business and professional communication, it is still the case that very few of these findings have as yet been incorporated into teaching materials.” (p. 507)

Nickerson, C. (2025). English for Specific Purposes and English as a Lingua Franca. In S. Starfield, & C.A. Hafner (Eds.), *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 505-524). Wiley.



# Corporate language training

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Five case studies





[illegible][illegible]

# Translation

 **RWS**
 **Linguistic Systems, Inc.**  
**LIONBRIDGE**
 **insync training**  
 **ITOS World**  
improving digital learning solutions  
 **welocalize**  
 **Idea translations**  
 **ingenuiti**  
REALITY ENTER  
 **ulatus**  
localize to a solution  
 **TRANSPERFECT**  
**propio**
 **ERIKSEN TRANSLATIONS**

RosettaStone

Enterprise

+Babbel  
FOR BUSINESS

duolingo

Pearson

ELT E.L.T. The English Language Trainers GmbH  
Sprachschule für Akademiker & Wirtschaft

/learnship/

goFLUENT

SPEACH  
Powered by AI

GlobalExam

TalktoCanada.com

POWERED BY efable

CLT Commercial Language Training

KERN TRAINING

learnlight

edflex

voxy

Berlitz

TALAERA

Busuu

Language Teams

Alison

TALK Corporate Language Training

EN GEN

MANGO

The Spanish Group

Eton Institute

The image displays a large collection of logos for various companies and organizations, categorized into two main sections:

- Learning Management Systems (LMS, LCMS, LXP):** This section includes logos for companies like WorkAMP, FrontCore, Blackboard, Canvas LMS, FutureLearn, and many others, all focused on educational technology.
- Simulation, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality:** This section includes logos for companies like Oculus, HTC Vive, Microsoft HoloLens, and various VR content creators and platforms, all focused on immersive technologies.

The collage displays a wide array of EdTech companies. The 'Management & Evaluation' section includes logos like TSG, Questionmark, and Blackboard. The 'Translation' section features LINGR, RWS, and TransPerfect. The 'IT & Technical Training' section lists companies such as Blackboard, Coursera, and FutureLearn. The 'Language Training' section, highlighted by a red arrow, includes Babel, Duolingo, and Rosetta Stone. The logos are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with some overlapping, creating a dense visual representation of the EdTech market.

The diagram is a large grid of logos, organized into five main sections, each representing a different business function or industry sector. The logos are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with each logo representing a specific company or organization. The sections are: Enablement, Compliance (Health & Safety), Workforce Development, Customer Service, and Certifications & Continuing Education. Each section contains a dense collection of logos, with some logos being larger and more prominent than others. The logos are color-coded and feature various designs, including text, icons, and abstract shapes. The overall layout is clean and professional, with a clear focus on the diversity of the network.

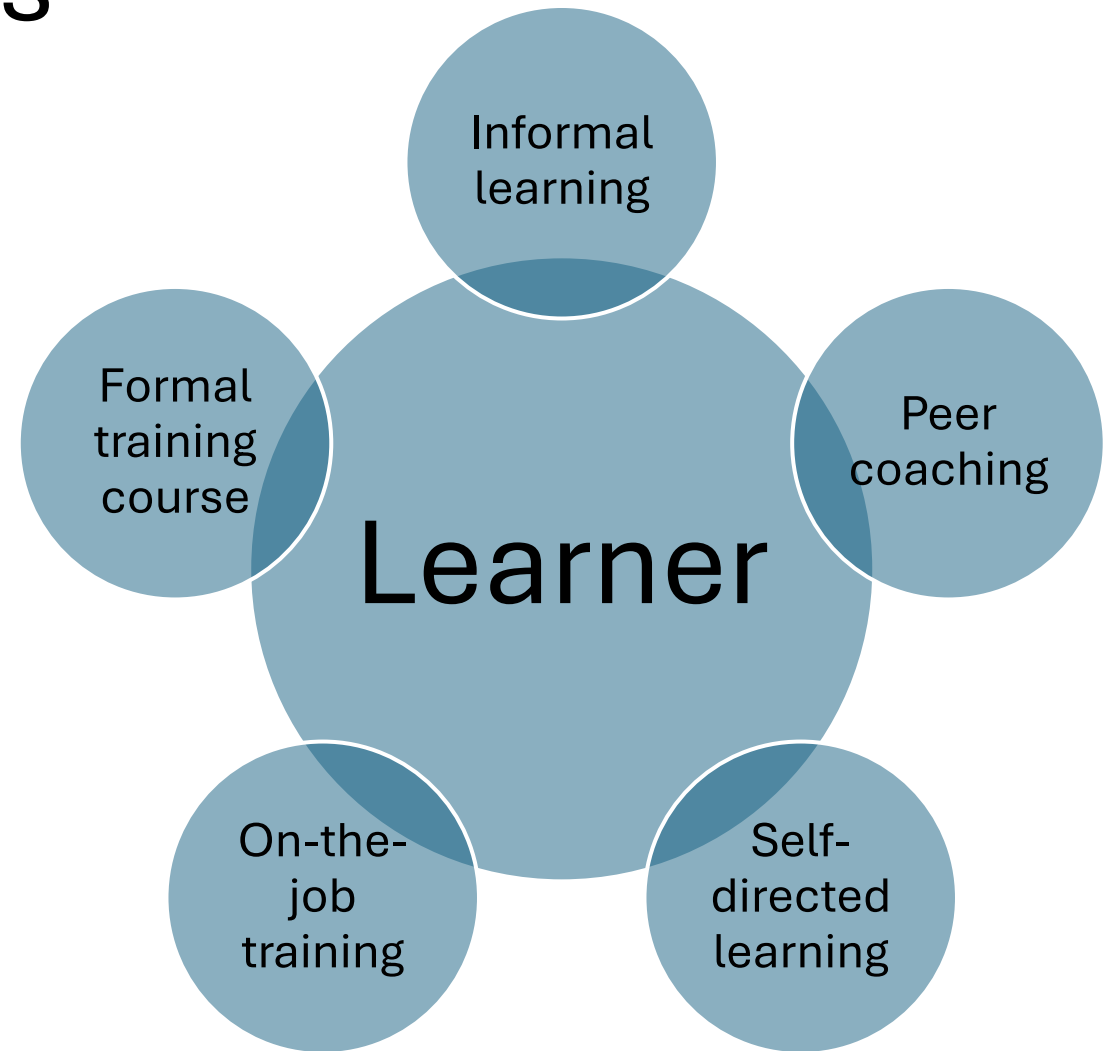


# Learning clusters – surround learners with meaningful learning assets

“Instead of designing one training program per capability gap, L&D needs to shift to designing multiple assets and connecting learners with the learning assets they need.”

(p. 35)

Owens, L.M.D., & Kadakia, C. (2020). *Designing for modern learning: Beyond ADDIE and SAM*. Association for Talent Development.



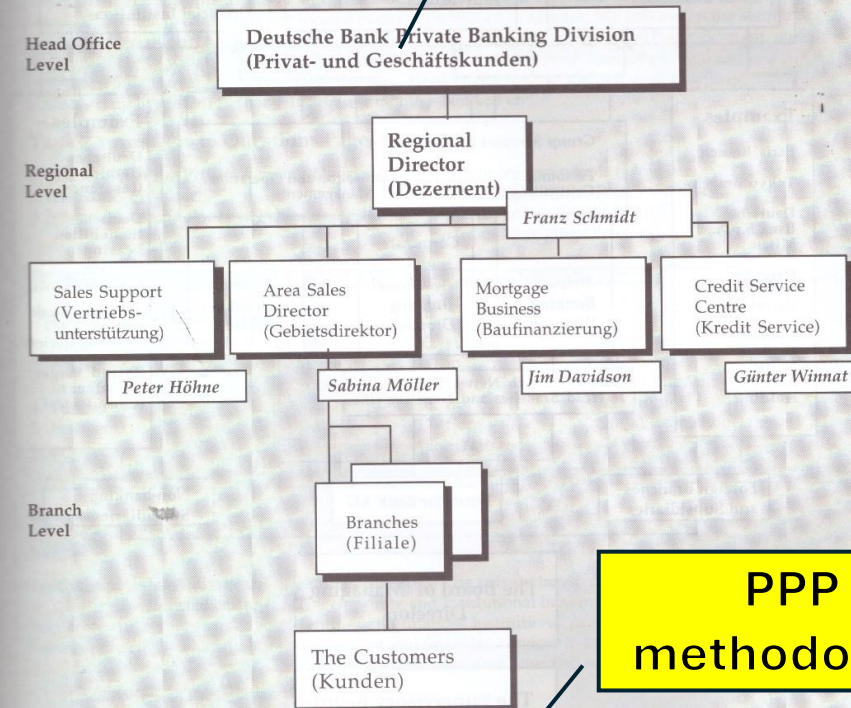


## Contents

Unit Number and Title	Communication Targets	Language Areas	Page
<b>Unit 1</b> Introducing Yourself and Describing Your Job	Introducing yourself Describing your job	The simple present The present continuous	1
<b>Unit 2</b> Describing Deutsche Bank The Structure of Your Division	Describing the structure of a department or division Describing the overall structure of Deutsche Bank	Prepositions Key vocabulary for organigrams and company structure	9
<b>Unit 3</b> Describing the History of Deutsche Bank	Describing the history of Deutsche Bank Describing your career	The simple past	17
<b>Unit 4</b> Receiving a Visitor to Deutsche Bank	Meeting visitors		23
<b>Unit 5</b> Entertaining a Visitor	Entering a restaurant		29
<b>Unit 6</b> Developing the Relationship	Responding to questions Fluency practice	Requests Permission Suggestions	35
<b>Unit 7</b> Meeting the Customer	Asking questions about the individual and the company	Vocabulary of the company and the individual	43
<b>Unit 8</b> Making Contact by Telephone	Basic structure of a telephone call Basic conversation Getting through	Basic telephone vocabulary Basic formulae	49
<b>Unit 9</b> Describing Deutsche Bank	Bringing the picture up to date	The present perfect	55
<b>Unit 10</b> Describing Products and Services	Describing products and services to a customer	Comparing Comparing products	63

The Bank  
Language Self StudyTraditional  
grammar  
syllabusCompany  
specific  
contentCompany  
logoUnit 2 - Describing your Division and  
your Department in Deutsche BankKey lexis  
translated  
into German

Look at the organigram below.

PPP  
methodology

Listen to Tape 2.1 again.



Now draw an organigram of your own branch or department in Deutsche Bank and practise describing it using the prepositions, words and grammar you have learned so far.





# Case study 1 – writing for a language school

- Language school wanted more context-specific materials for one of its clients
- Teachers only spend a few hours per week with the learners – not really enough to know the context
- Teachers lack expertise / time to develop materials themselves



A person wearing a white lab coat is seated at a desk, writing on a document with a silver pen. The background is blurred, showing other people in a professional setting.

# Working with company documentation

**1 Read the document.**

**2 Underline the following terms. What do they mean?**

- Factory Acceptance Test
- Site Acceptance Test
- Commissioning
- Final Acceptance

**3 What happens at each event? Work with a partner and make a list.**



# Task-based learning – role-plays

Work with a partner. One of you works for XXX, and the other is a client.

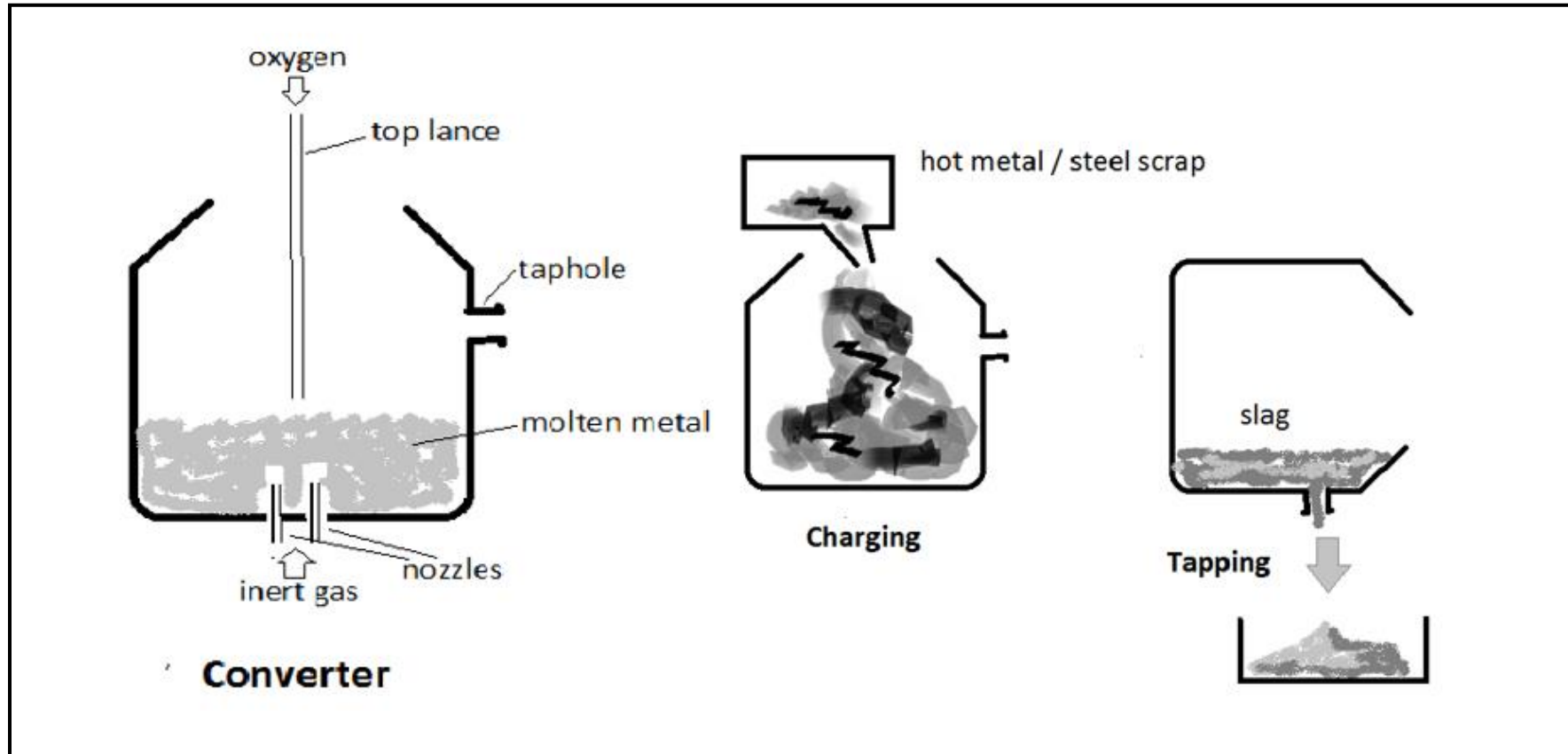
Client

Ask about the difference  
between support visits  
and service review  
meetings.

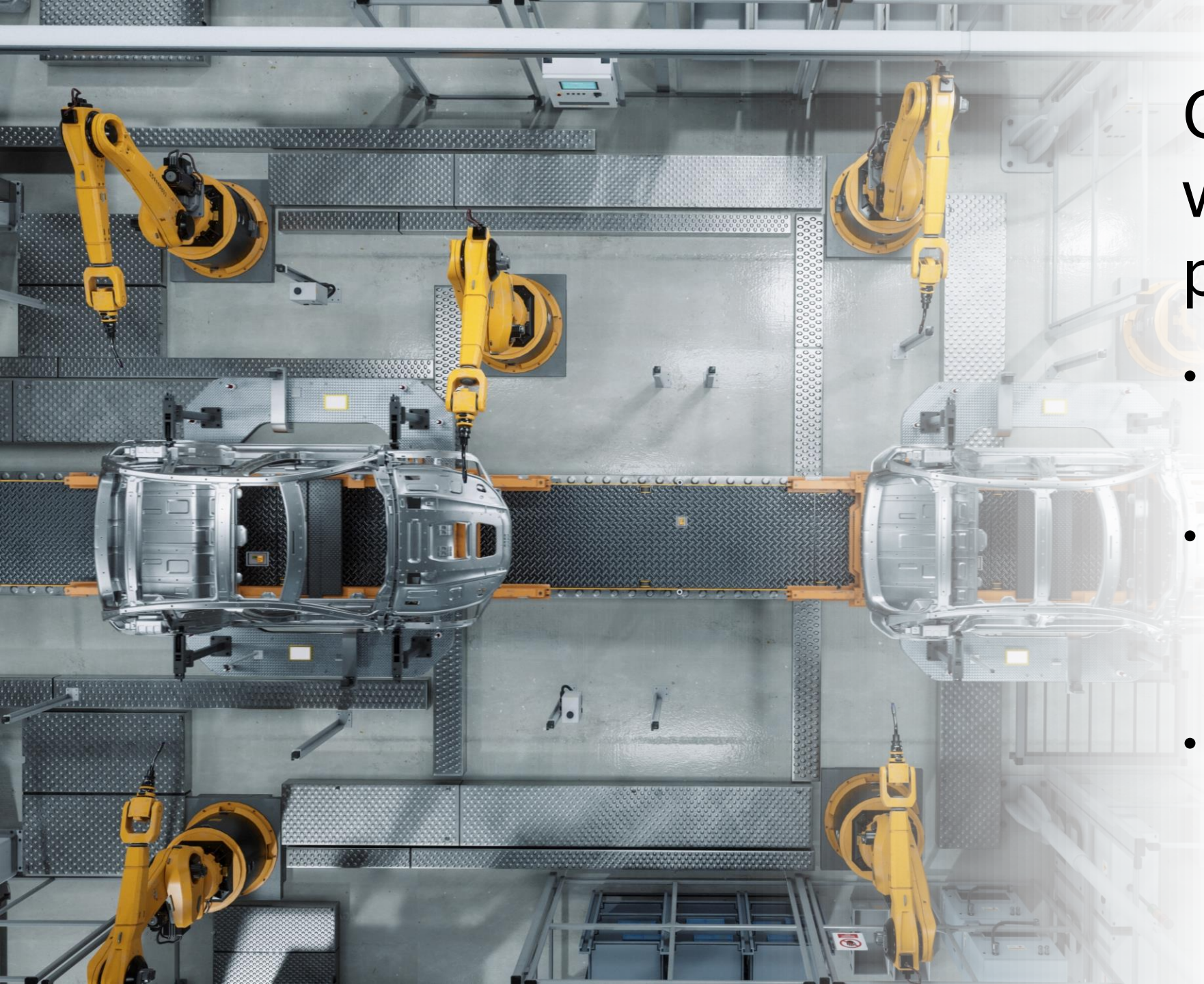
XXX employee

Answer the client's  
questions.

# Focus on specific needs



Materials developed for software developers working on a steel plant project.



## Case study 2 – writing for a publisher

- Publisher approached by corporate client (automotive industry)
- Decision to produce supplementary material (worksheets) using publisher templates
- Desktop research – writers had no direct access to the client



# Analyse lexis

N.B. Thinking about lexical items in terms of proficiency levels does not make sense

1	RECYCLING
2	#
3	PLASTICS
4	WASTE
5	AUTOMOTIVE
6	MATERIALS
7	PLASTIC
8	VEHICLE
9	RECYCLED
10	VEHICLES
11	AUTOMOBILE
12	MATERIAL
13	PET
14	SHREDDER
15	ENVIRONMENTAL
16	ELV
17	SCRAP
18	AUTO
19	RECOVERY
20	ELVS

21	WWW
22	INDUSTRY
23	CONTAINERS
25	DISMANTLING
26	PARTS
27	NON
28	FERROUS
29	DIRECTIVE
30	HTTP
31	BOTTLES
32	HAZARDOUS
33	S
34	FACILITY
35	REUSE
36	PACKAGING
37	METALS
38	ALUMINUM
39	STEEL
40	PVC

41	LANDFILL
42	COLLECTION
43	GLASS
44	DISPOSAL
46	SORTING
47	RECYCLABILITY
48	EU
49	PRODUCTS
50	COMPONENTS
51	EPA
52	MANUFACTURERS
53	WEIGHT
54	TECHNOLOGIES
55	METAL
56	RECYCLE
57	SEPARATION
58	REMANUFACTURING
59	DISMANTLERS
60	AUTOMOBILES









# Worksheets

Technical English 4

Automotive Unit 11

4 How would you describe these wheel alignments? Label the diagrams.

5 Here is a post from a website, but there are five mistakes. Find and correct them.




Photo: C. Martin

Tyre wear can be caused by many things, including incorrect air pressure in the tyre, improper wheel balance, and suspension misalignment. If your tyres are worn on the inside it is probably due to incorrect tyre pressure. If your tyres are worn in the centre you need to check your wheel balance. If your tyres show signs of scalloping, (also known as edge wear), the reason is probably over inflation of the tyres. And if your tyre is feathering you probably have zero to e. In all cases you should see an expert who will be able to give you professional advice.

6 Many of the words in the article can also be used in non-automotive contexts. Choose suitable words to complete these sentences. (You may have to change the form of the word).

- I love seafood, but I'm not sure if you can eat \_\_\_\_\_ raw, or if you have to cook them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ refers to an ancient Chinese therapy which uses heated glasses to create suction on the skin.
- Our new \_\_\_\_\_ mattress is extremely comfortable.
- I normally put a \_\_\_\_\_ of vanilla ice cream on my Appleton del.
- My jeans have a \_\_\_\_\_ on the left knee.
- This supermarket is so big. Give me a moment and I'll get my \_\_\_\_\_.
- In the vineyard we no longer \_\_\_\_\_ grapes to make the wine.

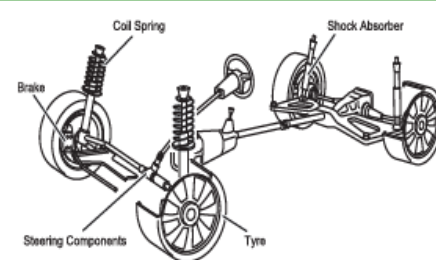
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Technical English 3

Automotive Unit 1

1 Read this article about suspension systems. What sort of suspension would you expect a racing car to have?



The suspension system connects a vehicle to its wheels, and is designed to provide steering stability as well as a comfortable ride. To do this it must have the ability to deform elastically, in other words, to change shape when a force is applied, and then return to its original shape when the force is removed.

The suspension has to be able to deal with three main tasks. It must be able to absorb road shock and provide a comfortable ride, it must be able to keep the tyres in contact with the ground so that the vehicle handles correctly, (steering, braking, and acceleration), and it must be able to minimize roll as the vehicle goes round corners. To do this it has a system of shock absorbers, springs and tyres which can deal with the shocks, it has a steering system which allows the driver to control the vehicle, and it has a frame which provides a load carrying structure.




One of the key issues is getting the stiffness of the system right. A nice soft suspension will provide a comfortable ride and the wheels will stay firmly on the ground; however the vehicle is likely to dive during braking, squat during acceleration, and roll during cornering. Too stiff, on the other hand, and the vehicle will have much better handling characteristics; it will roll less, and it will maintain a specific ride height. It will also be much less comfortable; typically cars with a stiff suspension will bounce and jump about as they come into contact with irregularities in the road. Racing cars normally have stiff suspension.




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Technical English 3

Automotive Unit 4

Look at the illustrations of different jobs in the automotive industry. Match the illustration with a job summary below.

At the moment I am working on a project to improve the aerodynamics of a new model, so I spend most of my time in the wind tunnel, testing new model parts and assemblies. I am also involved in the day-to-day maintenance of the wind tunnel facility, including all the tools and instruments we need to collect our data.

My background is in engineering and design. I spend most of my time working on drawings for different parts for our cars, but I am also involved in the design and testing of prototypes. I need to collaborate with a lot of people in my job, so I have a lot of meetings where we discuss ideas, make sketches, and solve problems.

I work in a lab. My job involves preparing and testing samples of paint, and then recording all the results in a database. I am also responsible for buying all the supplies the lab needs. My background is in chemistry, and I am also very familiar with standard laboratory equipment and procedures.


My job is multidisciplinary and is a combination of different engineering fields, including systems engineering, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, control engineering, and computer science. At the moment I am spending a lot of my time using CAD software to design a new sensor system for one of our assembly lines.

I work in the paint shop. I started as an apprentice, but nowadays I am in charge of the whole department. My team is responsible for mixing paint to the required colour, painting the surfaces as required, inspecting the finished work and repairing any defects. I am also involved in advising on the purchasing and setting up of any new equipment we need.

My job involves building rapport with customers, advising on trade-ins, and working out which model might best suit a potential buyer. I need to be very knowledgeable about all the latest models, their characteristics, features, technical specifications, but I also need to keep up to date with our competitors.

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# Case study 3 – writing for a company training department

- Multinational – 200k+ employees around the world. Different products / services.
- Large pool of in-house trainers / external trainers
- Materials – published coursebooks, supplemented by bespoke in-house materials



# White-labelling

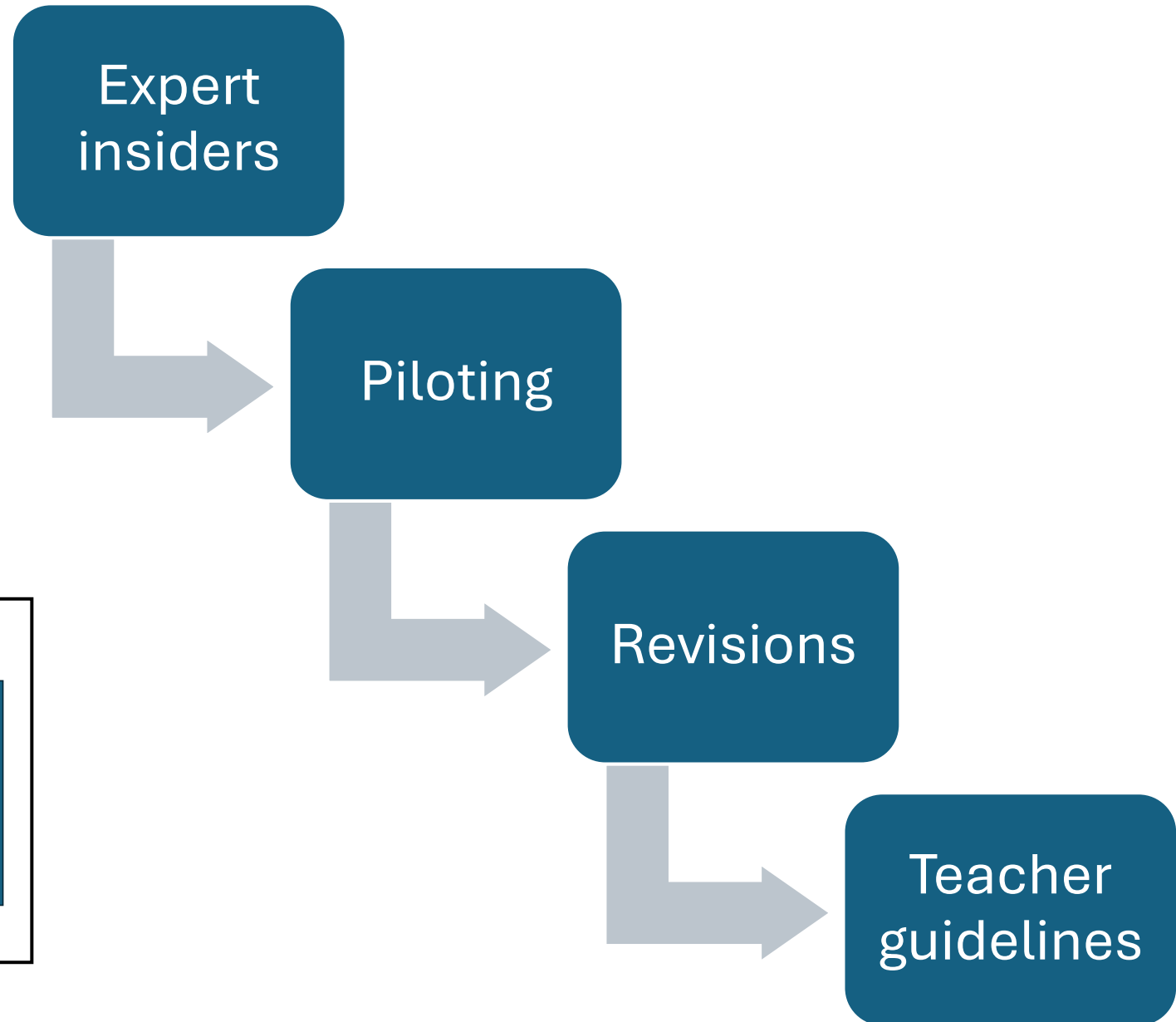
A

You are a potential [insert department name] customer. You are interested in hearing about [insert product / service] because you might buy it in the future. However, your present [insert product / service] works reasonably well, and you think you can last at least [insert number] more years before making a decision. Fill in the framework below and then be prepared to discuss your needs with an [insert product / service] representative.

B

You represent [insert department name]. You are about to meet a potential customer who may be interested in buying [insert product / service] sometime in the future. Fill in the framework below, and then be prepared to persuade the potential customer that he should invest in [insert product / service] sooner rather than later.

# Final checks



## White-labelling

A

You are a potential [insert department name] customer. You are interested in hearing about [insert product / service] because you might buy it in the future. However, your present [insert product / service] works reasonably well, and you think you can last at least [insert number] more years before making a decision. Fill in the framework below and then be prepared to discuss your needs with an [insert product / service] representative.

B

You represent [insert department name]. You are about to meet a potential customer who may be interested in buying [insert product / service] sometime in the future. Fill in the framework below, and then be prepared to persuade the potential customer that he should invest in [insert product / service] sooner rather than later.





## Case study 4 – writing for an e- learning company

- Sales training for retail client
- Bespoke, not white-label
- Internal sales associates – staff of 47 boutiques, approx. 250 people
- External sales associates working at retailers and in external boutiques – staff of 900 POS, approx. 5,000 people
- Priority is to develop connection to the brand and knowledge for ALL sales associates. (NOT ELT!).





# Client's objectives

- Leverage sales
- Rank 1st in sales staff's minds and light the fire of passion in them
- Make them understand what XXX stands for in a contemporary and lively way
- Keep salesforce attached to the brand even when they change job from one retailer to another
- Become a reference on product knowledge with the tools provided
- KPIs to analyze the training effort of a partner



# Prototyping

## Pre-test

2-minute test /  
needs analysis

100% passing - user  
can skip modules  
and go directly to  
assessment

## Module 1

10-15 min. learning  
module

Input: video, audio,  
images, text

Practice:  
interactions,  
comprehension  
exercises

Productive skills  
task to link to  
community

## Module 2

10-15 min. learning  
module

Input: video, audio,  
images, text

Practice:  
interactions,  
comprehension  
exercises

Productive skills  
task to link to  
community

## Module 3

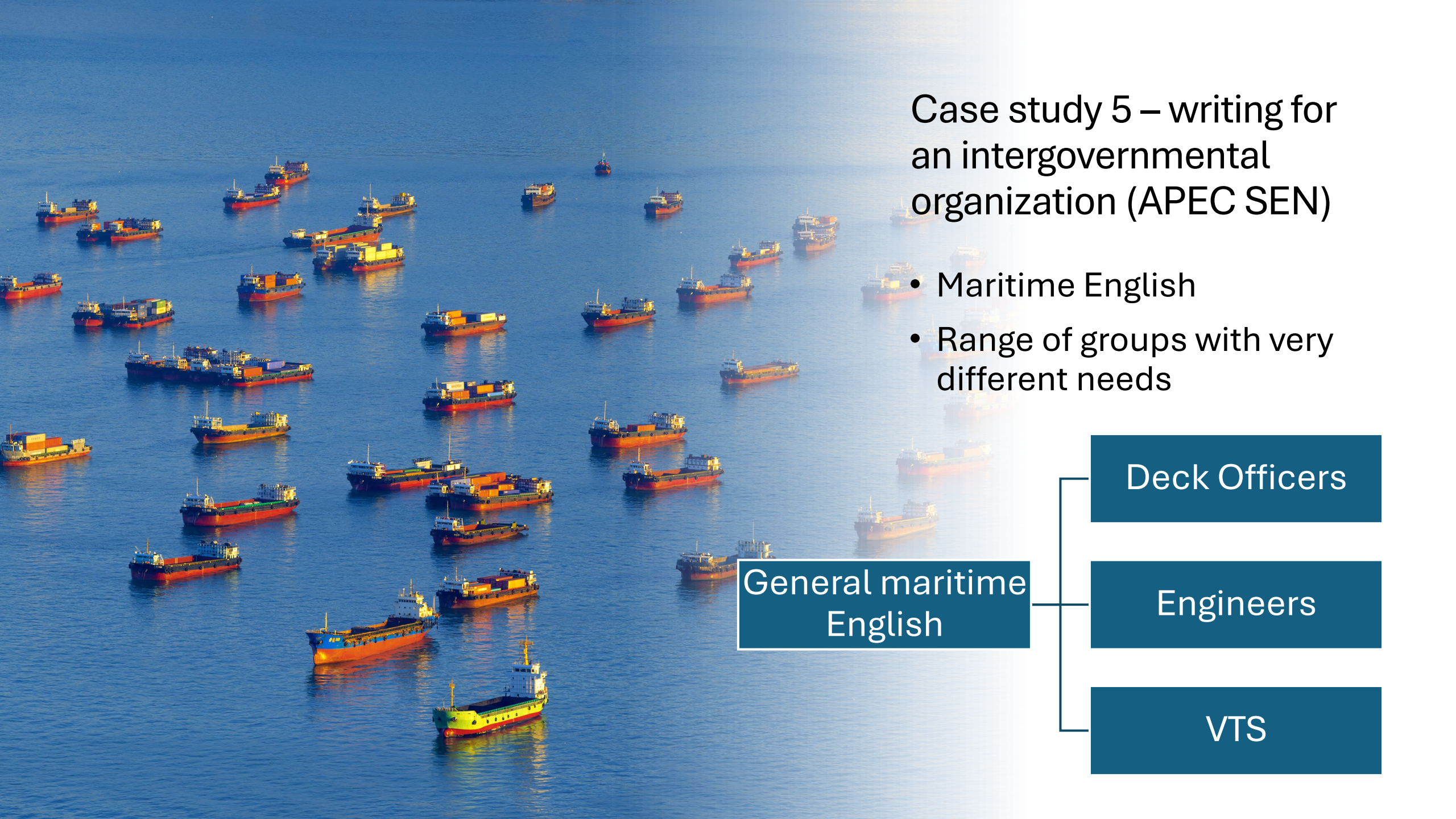
10-15 min. learning  
module

Input: video, audio,  
images, text

Practice:  
interactions,  
comprehension  
exercises

Productive skills  
task to link to  
community



An aerial photograph of a large number of cargo ships, primarily red and white, scattered across a vast blue ocean. The ships are seen from a high angle, showing their hulls and some cargo containers. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is a lighter blue, suggesting a clear day.

## Case study 5 – writing for an intergovernmental organization (APEC SEN)

- Maritime English
- Range of groups with very different needs

General maritime  
English

Deck Officers

Engineers

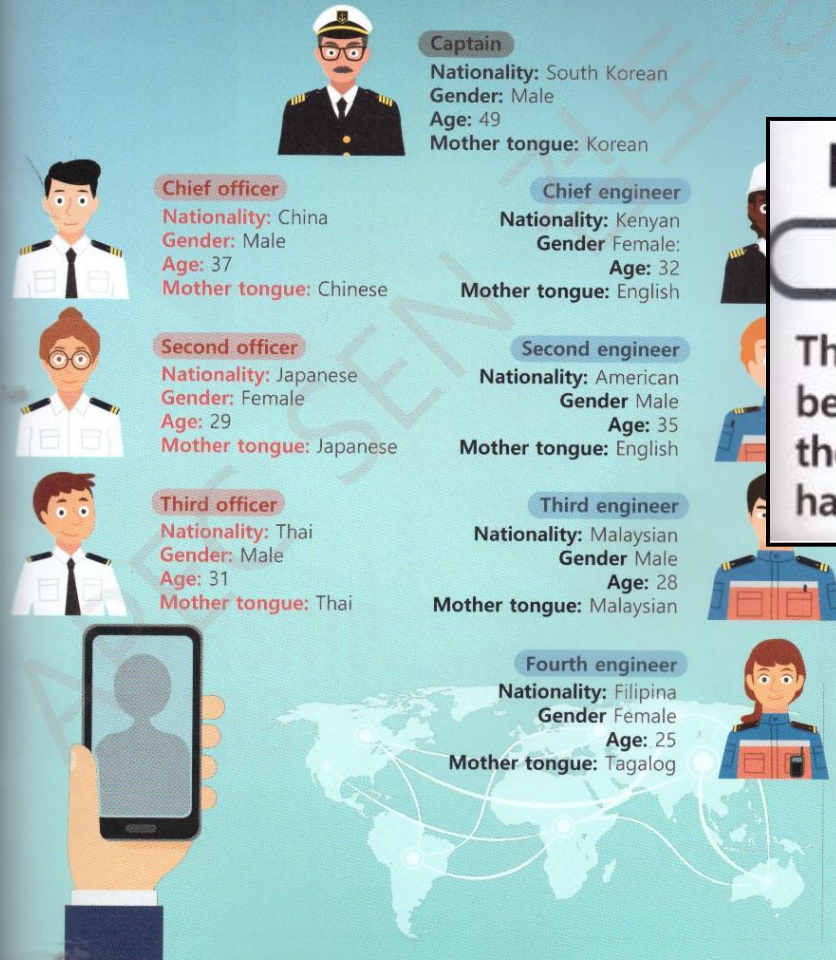
VTS



## Review: Harmonized Communication

### Activity

The following table sets out the ranks on a ship. It shows some of the differences between ranks, nationalities, genders, generation gaps, and languages. Discuss the strategies they need for a harmonious life onboard by using all things you have learned in this chapter.



**Captain**  
Nationality: South Korean  
Gender: Male  
Age: 49  
Mother tongue: Korean

**Chief officer**  
Nationality: China  
Gender: Male  
Age: 37  
Mother tongue: Chinese

**Chief engineer**  
Nationality: Kenyan  
Gender: Female  
Age: 32  
Mother tongue: English

**Second officer**  
Nationality: Japanese  
Gender: Female  
Age: 29  
Mother tongue: Japanese

**Second engineer**  
Nationality: American  
Gender: Male  
Age: 35  
Mother tongue: English

**Third officer**  
Nationality: Thai  
Gender: Male  
Age: 31  
Mother tongue: Thai

**Third engineer**  
Nationality: Malaysian  
Gender: Male  
Age: 28  
Mother tongue: Malaysian

**Fourth engineer**  
Nationality: Filipina  
Gender: Female  
Age: 25  
Mother tongue: Tagalog

## Review: Harmonized Communication

### Activity

The following table sets out the ranks on a ship. It shows some of the differences between ranks, nationalities, genders, generation gaps, and languages. Discuss the strategies they need for a harmonious life onboard by using all things you have learned in this chapter.

# General Maritime English – intercultural communication

Logbook  
entry

Transcript of  
radio  
conversation

Focus on key  
expressions

## Written and Spoken Communication at the Time of Accident

### In logbook

Increased speed to overtake KM BEGONIA.

Collided with port side of KM BEGONIA while overtaking.

### On bridge



#### VHF conversation between KM LILY and KM BEGONIA



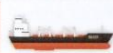
Motor tanker KM BEGONIA. This is bulk carrier KM LILY.  
Come in, please.

This is KM BEGONIA. Go ahead.



Captain. What is your intention?

Hey! That's what I want to say to you.  
You are too close to me now. What are you doing?



Um... I am late for the arrival schedule.  
I have a plan to overtake on your starboard. Are you okay with this?

No. I have a fishing vessel on my port side.  
I cannot make a safe distance on my starboard. Do you understand?



Hmm... Do you want me to overtake your port?

It can also be dangerous because of the limited space between us.  
There is no safe clearance.  
It would be better to reduce your speed.



I think it is no problem to overtake on your port side.  
I would like to increase my speed to overtake you. It might be okay.

The two vessels collided five minutes after the conversation

### Key expressions

- go ahead
- the arrival schedule
- What is your intention?
- too close
- the limited space

- overtake
- safe distance
- limited space
- make a safe distance
- no safe clearance

- safe clearance
- reduce speed
- increase speed

## Analysis of Accident

1 What happened?

Write your answer here

2 Which vessel wanted to overtake?

Write your answer here

3 Was the other vessel happy with the decision to overtake?

Write your answer here

4 What reasons did BEGONIA give?

Write your answer here

5 Did LILY understand BEGONIA's message?

Write your answer here

6 What was the best action each of them should have taken in the situation?



7 Now, summarize the accident in the following report.

01 Overview of accident

Write your answer here

02 Possible causes of accident

Write your answer here

03 What should be done to prevent the accident?

Write your answer here

Focus on job  
skills

Deck Officers





# Features of corporate training materials

- Wide range of client types – each project is unique
- Close collaboration with expert insiders / stakeholders
- Based on analysis of the client's workplace discourse and client's business objectives / learning needs
- Rarely available outside the company / organization

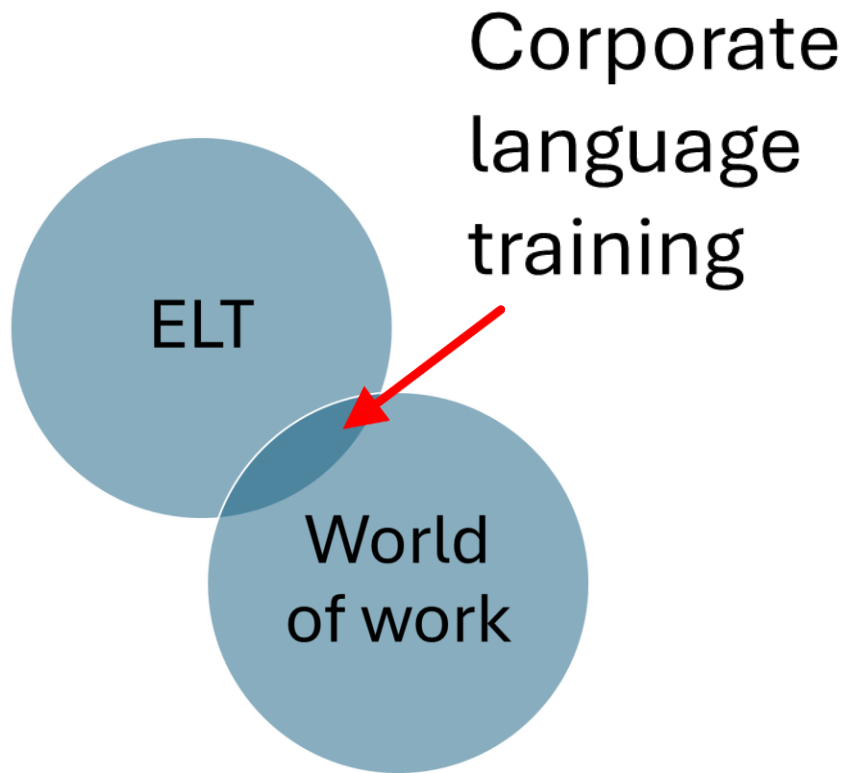
# But what about AI?

## Yes, for sure, but ...

- Insufficient training data
  - rarely includes specific corporate content (e.g. spoken discourse from a CoP)
- Sycophancy – aligning with the user's perspective
- Hallucination – incorrect output presented as fact
- Bias – e.g. training data, algorithms, prompts



# Today's Goals



We know a lot about BELF. We don't know much about how people become BELF users in the workplace.

**Deconstructing BELF:** Explore the meaning of English as a business lingua franca (BELF) and its impact on the broader ELT industry, particularly Business English and ESP.



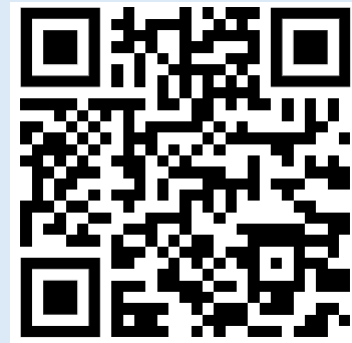
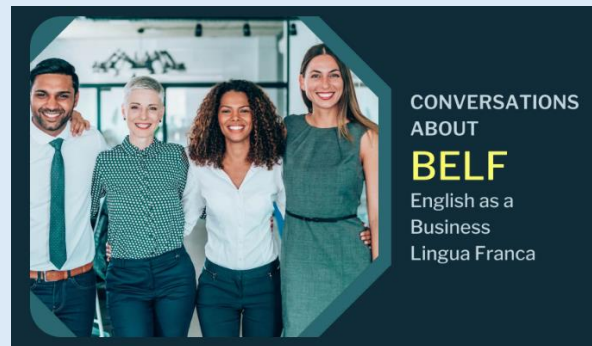
**Corporate Language Training:** Offer a glimpse into the world of corporate language training and the opportunities it presents for materials writers. Five case studies.

Plenty of potential outside the “ELT bubble”.



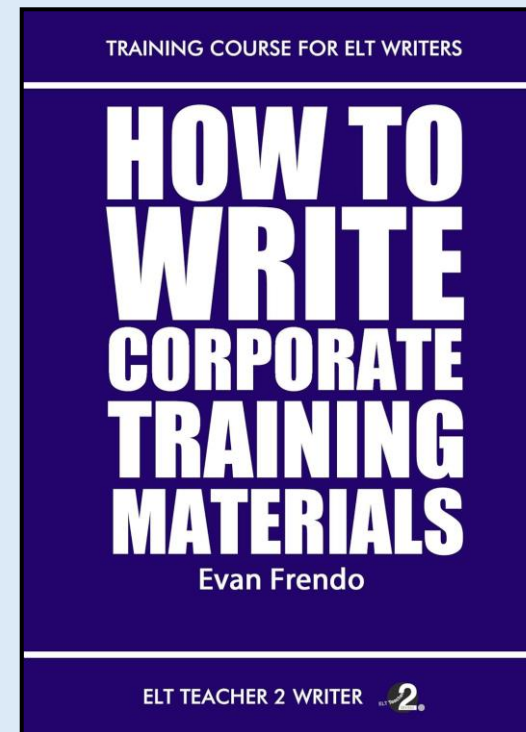
# Further reading

## English as a business lingua franca



<https://communicationlights.de/resources/>

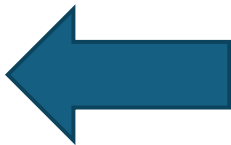
## Corporate language training





# BELF research and materials for the corporate language training market

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5 June 2025



Download the slides here



**MaWSIG**  
Materials Writing Special Interest Group