

English in the World

One language. Many voices. Real business.

Module 1 · Foundations of Business Communication

Topic 1 · Exploring the global role of English in business, multicultural communication and corporate settings



Level B1-B2 · Online class · 90 minutes

Vocabulary · business-press reading · Use of English · case studies · reflection · homework

Державний університет «Житомирська політехніка»

Teaching material · 2026

Online lesson at a glance

Designed for Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams. No paid platform is required.

Time	Stage	Online format	Purpose
0-7	Your English World	Chat waterfall + pair talk	Activate experience and get everyone speaking early.
7-15	Communication ranking	Poll/reactions + breakout rooms	Contrast accuracy and effectiveness.
15-27	Vocabulary warm-up	Shared screen + chat	Pre-teach core terms.
27-32	Pre-reading prediction	Poll	Create a reason to read.
32-47	Business-press reading	Silent reading / shared PDF	Read for gist and detail.
47-57	Reading tasks	Breakout rooms	Check comprehension and discuss ideas.
57-70	Use of English	Individual + pair check	Practise form in a business context.
70-81	Cross-cultural case	Breakout rooms	Analyse misunderstanding and repair communication.
81-87	English varieties	Chat challenge	Build awareness of international English.
87-90	Personal goal	Private chat / shared board	Set a concrete course goal.

Learning outcomes

- Explain why English functions as a global business language.
- Use key vocabulary for international communication.
- Identify risks in multicultural communication.
- Choose clearer language for international teams.
- Set a personal Business English goal.

Before class

- Enable chat and breakout rooms.
- Prepare a simple poll with six communication skills.
- Share this PDF in advance or screen-share it.
- Optional: create one shared Google Doc for group answers.

Online technique - chat waterfall: ask students to type an answer but not press Enter. Count down 3-2-1, then everyone sends at the same time. This prevents stronger students from shaping everyone else's answers.

1. Your English world

CHAT WATERFALL In 60 seconds, list as many situations as possible where you already use or see English.

work study travel social media technology gaming news shopping business entertainment

Tomorrow you join an international team. Your manager is German, a colleague is Polish, a client is Japanese and the IT specialist is Brazilian. None of them is a native English speaker.

Discuss in pairs

- What language will the team probably use?
- Does everybody need perfect English?
- What matters more: perfect grammar or clear understanding?
- Who “owns” English today?

Quick poll

- Rank from 1 (most important) to 6:
- perfect grammar
- large vocabulary
- clear pronunciation
- confidence
- cultural awareness
- ability to explain things simply

2. Vocabulary warm-up

Match 1-10 with A-J. Type your answers in the chat, for example: 1C, 2A...

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. lingua franca | A. people who work for a company |
| 2. workforce | B. communication between people from different cultures |
| 3. headquarters | C. a common language between people with different first languages |
| 4. global trade | D. the main office of an organisation |
| 5. corporate language | E. international buying and selling |
| 6. cross-cultural communication | F. accepted expectations in a culture |
| 7. cultural norms | G. a language officially used inside a company |
| 8. communication breakdown | H. ability to speak smoothly and easily |
| 9. fluency | I. a failure to understand each other |
| 10. adapt | J. change to suit a situation |

Teacher: after checking, ask each breakout room to create one business sentence using any two expressions from the list.

Key vocabulary · English-Ukrainian

English	Українською	Business example
lingua franca	мова-посередник	English acts as a lingua franca in many international teams.
workforce	персонал; робоча сила	The company has a multilingual workforce.
headquarters (HQ)	штаб-квартира; головний офіс	The headquarters are in Tokyo.
global trade	світова торгівля	English is widely used in global trade.
corporate language	корпоративна мова	English is the company's corporate language.
cross-cultural communication	міжкультурна комунікація	Managers need cross-cultural communication skills.
cultural norms	культурні норми	Cultural norms influence meetings and negotiations.
communication breakdown	збій / порушення комунікації	Unclear deadlines can cause a communication breakdown.
fluency	вільність мовлення	Fluency helps, but clarity is also essential.
accuracy	мовна точність	Accuracy matters in contracts and formal documents.
clarity	ясність; чіткість	Clarity is more important than complex vocabulary.

Key vocabulary · English-Ukrainian / continued

English	Українською	Business example
adapt	адаптувати(ся)	Good communicators adapt their style to the audience.
misunderstanding	непорозуміння	Confirm details to avoid misunderstanding.
direct / indirect	прямий / непрямий	Different cultures may prefer direct or indirect feedback.
tone	тон спілкування	Tone can change how a message is understood.
idiom	ідіома; сталий вислів	Too many idioms can confuse international colleagues.
stakeholder	зацікавлена сторона	We need to update all project stakeholders.
supplier	постачальник	The supplier asked for a clearer delivery schedule.
negotiate	вести переговори	They negotiate with clients across several markets.
build rapport	налагоджувати контакт / взаєморозуміння	Small talk can help build rapport before a meeting.
check understanding	перевіряти розуміння	Strong communicators check understanding instead of assuming.
common ground	спільна основа; точки дотику	The teams found common ground during negotiations.

Micro-task: Choose five expressions that you think will be most useful in your future career. In a breakout room, explain your choices.

The language nobody owns

English has become part of the infrastructure of global business. But a shared language does not automatically produce shared meaning.

BEFORE YOU READ Which idea do you expect the article to support?

- A Everyone in international business should speak perfect English.
- B Native speakers have a permanent advantage.
- C English connects business, but effective communication requires more than accuracy.
- D Companies should stop using local languages.

Walk into an international meeting in Warsaw, Tokyo or Dubai and there is a good chance that the conversation will take place in English. What is less certain is whether anyone in the room will actually be British, American or Australian.

English has become the lingua franca of much of global business. It connects managers, engineers, customers and suppliers who may have completely different first languages. In multinational companies, English is often less a “foreign language” than part of the infrastructure of getting work done.

Some companies have made that idea explicit. Japanese technology group Rakuten began its “Englishnization” programme in 2010 and designated English as its official corporate language in 2012. The company says a common language helped staff share information across borders, recruit internationally and support a more diverse workforce. Airbus, one of Europe’s largest aerospace groups, also identifies English as its official business language, while noting that individual roles may require local languages.

Yet choosing one language does not automatically remove communication problems. A meeting may include colleagues from Finland, Brazil, Japan and Italy. Everyone may speak English well, but they may still disagree, interrupt, give feedback or respond to silence in different ways.

One manager might say, “I don’t think this proposal will work.” Another may prefer, “Perhaps we could consider another option.” The basic message is similar, but the social meaning can feel very different. In some professional cultures, directness signals efficiency. In others, the same directness can sound unnecessarily confrontational.

This is why international business communication requires more than fluency. Speakers need to listen carefully, check understanding and adapt their language. Silence might mean disagreement, respect, uncertainty or simply that someone needs time to think. Even “yes” can sometimes mean “I understand”, not “I agree”.

Original B1-B2 teaching text written in a business-press style. Company facts are based on official Rakuten and Airbus sources; see Sources at the end of the pack.

The language nobody owns / continued

Native English speakers have to adapt too. Everyday expressions such as “let’s touch base”, “it’s a ballpark figure” or “we need to hit the ground running” may sound natural in London or New York but create unnecessary work for colleagues elsewhere.

A technically correct message can therefore be commercially ineffective. “Can you circle back ASAP?” may be obvious to one employee and confusing to another. “Can you send me an update by 3 pm today?” leaves much less room for interpretation.

For international teams, simpler English can sometimes be better English. That does not mean reducing every conversation to basic vocabulary. It means choosing language according to purpose and audience: precise deadlines, clear responsibilities, fewer unexplained idioms and more confirmation when the stakes are high.

Culture also affects the business around the language. Attitudes to hierarchy can shape who speaks first. Expectations about time influence deadlines and punctuality. Approaches to disagreement affect meetings and negotiations. Relationship-building may be considered essential before business begins in one context and unnecessary in another.

The risk is to turn these patterns into stereotypes. National culture is only one influence on a person. Industry, age, profession, company culture and individual personality matter too. Effective communicators therefore replace assumptions with curiosity: “How does this team prefer to work?” is usually a better question than “How do people from this country behave?”

That shift changes what “good English” means in business. The successful international professional does not necessarily sound British or American. They can explain an idea clearly, notice when meaning has been lost, repair misunderstandings and build trust with people whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds may differ from their own.

English may provide the common platform. Making communication work is still a human skill.

BIG IDEA: Effective Business English = language + clarity + cultural awareness + the ability to adapt.

3. Read for gist and detail

A. Choose the best summary

- 1. International companies should replace local languages with English.
- 2. English is widely used in global business, but language ability alone does not guarantee successful communication.
- 3. Native speakers communicate more effectively than other professionals.
- 4. Cultural differences make international teamwork impossible.

B. True or false?

- 1. Rakuten made English its official corporate language.
- 2. A shared language removes cultural misunderstandings.
- 3. Native speakers may need to simplify idioms.
- 4. The text says national culture explains every individual’s behaviour.
- 5. Clearer deadlines can reduce misunderstanding.

4. Think like a business communicator

In breakout rooms, choose the clearer sentence for an international team. Explain why. Is the other sentence always “wrong”?

Option A	Option B
We need to get all our ducks in a row before we move the needle.	We need to organise everything before we make changes.
Can you circle back on this ASAP?	Can you send me an update by 3 pm today?
Your proposal is wrong.	I have some concerns about this proposal. Can we look at another option?
Maybe we could possibly think about finishing it sometime next week.	Could we finish it by Wednesday?
Discuss • Is simpler English less professional? • What is the difference between being direct and being rude? • When can idioms be useful? When can they become a problem? • What should you do when you are not sure you understood?	Useful repair phrases • Just to make sure I understood correctly... • When you say __, do you mean...? • Could you clarify what you mean by...? • So, are we agreeing that...? • Let me rephrase that. • Can I check one detail?

5. Vocabulary in context

Complete the sentences with: **adapt** • **breakdown** • **corporate** • **fluency** • **norms** • **stakeholders** • **clarity** • **rapport**

1. Good pronunciation helps, but _____ is not the only goal of international communication.
2. We need to update all project _____ before Friday.
3. A common _____ language can make cross-border communication easier.
4. Different cultural _____ may influence how people give feedback.
5. A serious communication _____ delayed the project by two weeks.
6. Good managers _____ their style to the team and situation.
7. Precise deadlines improve _____ and reduce unnecessary follow-up.
8. Small talk can help build _____ before a difficult negotiation.

Reading follow-up

6. Use of English

Part A • Word formation

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in capitals.

1. Clear communication is essential in a culturally _____ workplace. **DIVERSE**
2. The manager asked for _____ because the deadline was unclear. **CLARIFY**
3. International teams benefit from cultural _____ and curiosity. **AWARE**
4. Small misunderstandings can become serious if they are not handled _____. **EFFECT**
5. The company introduced English to improve communication across its global _____. **OPERATE**
6. Good communicators are usually flexible and _____. **ADAPT**
7. The email sounded too direct, although the sender had no _____ to be rude. **INTEND**
8. Language training can increase employees' _____ when speaking in meetings. **CONFIDENT**

Part B • Open cloze

Write one word in each gap.

English is used (1) _____ as a working language in thousands of international organisations. However, sharing a language does not mean that people always communicate (2) _____ the same way. A phrase that sounds polite to one person may sound too indirect (3) _____ another. This is why professionals need to pay attention not only (4) _____ grammar and vocabulary, but also to context.

When a message is important, it is useful to check (5) _____ the other person has understood it as intended. Instead (6) _____ assuming that "yes" always means agreement, a manager can ask a more specific question. International communication becomes easier when people are willing to adapt (7) _____ each other and focus (8) _____ clarity.

Part C • Key word transformations

Complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first. Use 2-5 words including the word given.

1. "Could you explain what you mean?" she asked. **CLARIFY**
She asked him _____ what he meant.
2. It is not necessary to use complex vocabulary to sound professional. **HAVE**
You _____ complex vocabulary to sound professional.
3. The team did not understand the deadline, so the project was delayed. **BECAUSE**
The project was delayed _____ the deadline.
4. I recommend confirming the decision in writing. **IDEA**
It is _____ the decision in writing.
5. People from different teams may communicate differently. **WAY**
People from different teams may communicate _____.
6. The manager changed her communication style for the new team. **ADAPTED**
The manager _____ the new team.

7. Cross-cultural case: “Yes, but did he agree?”

Read the situation. In breakout rooms, analyse the communication rather than judging the people.

Anna, project manager: Can your team finish the report by Friday?

Kenji, team lead: Friday may be a little difficult, but we will try.

Anna: Great. Friday it is.

On Friday the report is not ready. Anna is surprised and frustrated. Kenji is surprised that Anna expected the report.

Analyse

- What went wrong?
- Did either person necessarily lie?
- What did “we will try” mean to Anna?
- What might it have meant to Kenji?
- Which assumptions caused the problem?

Repair

- Rewrite Anna’s question so it is easier to answer precisely.
- Rewrite Kenji’s answer so the risk is explicit.
- Add one confirmation question.
- Agree on a clear final deadline.

Communication principle: Check, don’t assume.

8. Real company challenge

Rakuten introduced English as its official corporate language during its global expansion. Airbus also uses English as its official business language.

Imagine: A Ukrainian company is expanding into Germany, Poland, Spain and Japan. The CEO proposes: “From next year, English will become our common corporate language.”

3 benefits

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 risks

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 actions

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

60-SECOND PITCH Present your team’s recommendation to the CEO.

9. One English or many Englishes?

English varies across regions. In international business, the goal is usually not to imitate one variety, but to be **consistent, clear and understandable**.

British English	American English	Meaning
holiday	vacation	time away from work
mobile phone	cell phone	portable phone
CV	résumé	job application document
postcode	zip code	postal code
flat	apartment	home in a larger building
organisation	organization	spelling difference
programme	program	spelling difference in many contexts

Online chat challenge: assign half the class “British” and half “American”. Say a word from one column; students type the equivalent as fast as possible.

10. Personal Business English profile

Rate your confidence from 1 (not confident yet) to 5 (very confident).

Speaking in a meeting 1 2 3 4 5	Writing a professional email 1 2 3 4 5
Giving a presentation 1 2 3 4 5	Understanding different accents 1 2 3 4 5
Making small talk 1 2 3 4 5	Disagreeing politely 1 2 3 4 5
Negotiating 1 2 3 4 5	Explaining a problem clearly 1 2 3 4 5

My course goal: By the end of this course, I want to be able to _____

Make it measurable. Example: “I want to give a three-minute business presentation without switching to Ukrainian.”

HOMEWORK - Business English in the Wild

Find one real example of English used in international business: a company website, LinkedIn post, job vacancy, product page, business email or corporate announcement. Bring a screenshot or link and answer: Who is communicating? Who is the audience? Why is English being used? Is the language formal or informal? Which three useful business expressions can you find?

Answer key

Vocabulary warm-up

1C, 2A, 3D, 4E, 5G, 6B, 7F, 8I, 9H, 10J.

Reading

Prediction / best main idea: C. Best summary: 2. True/False: 1 T; 2 F; 3 T; 4 F; 5 T.

Vocabulary in context

1 fluency; 2 stakeholders; 3 corporate; 4 norms; 5 breakdown; 6 adapt; 7 clarity; 8 rapport.

Use of English • Part A

1 diverse; 2 clarification; 3 awareness; 4 effectively; 5 operations; 6 adaptable; 7 intention; 8 confidence.

Use of English • Part B

1 as; 2 in; 3 to; 4 to; 5 whether/if; 6 of; 7 to; 8 on.

Use of English • Part C

1 to clarify; 2 do not have to use; 3 because the team misunderstood; 4 a good idea to confirm; 5 in a different way; 6 adapted her communication style to.

Case study - possible repair

Anna: Would Friday be a realistic deadline for your team?

Kenji: Probably not. We could try, but Monday would be a safer commitment.

Anna: So, are we agreeing on Monday at 12:00?

Kenji: Yes, Monday at 12:00 is realistic.

Accept other answers that make the risk, responsibility and deadline explicit. Avoid presenting national communication patterns as fixed stereotypes.

Sources & teaching notes

The reading passage in this pack is an original teaching text, written for B1-B2 learners in the style of concise business journalism. It is not an excerpt from the Financial Times or any other publication.

Rakuten Group: official corporate pages describe the “Englishnization” programme and the adoption of English as the company’s official corporate language in 2012.

global.rakuten.com/corp/careers/culture/
global.rakuten.com/corp/sustainability/diversity/
global.rakuten.com/corp/about/history.html

Airbus: its careers FAQ states that English is the official business language, while some roles may require additional local languages.

airbus.com/en/careers/faqs

British Council LearnEnglish: materials on cultural behaviour in business emphasise that a shared language does not remove differences in communication expectations and business etiquette.

learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/free-resources/reading/c1/cultural-behaviour-business

Pedagogical note

When discussing cultural differences, focus on communication preferences and context, not fixed national stereotypes. Encourage students to ask, clarify and observe instead of assuming that every person from a country communicates in the same way.

Design note

This lesson pack uses orange, green, yellow and dark neutral tones associated with the visual identity of Zhytomyr Polytechnic. The university’s official website links to its institutional brandbook and describes an official colour logo.

Core message for Lesson 1: Business English is not about sounding “native”. It is about making meaning clear, adapting to people and context, and getting work done together.