



By MICHELLE BAUMGARTNER

Success at Work: A Guide to English for Professionals

Learning English can feel like a full-time job.

You have to start out with basic training, spending many hours learning simple words.

You may even need to learn a whole new alphabet just so you can read and write all those new words.

Then, you have to learn to put those words together in phrases and sentences.

You also need to make sure you're saying the words correctly, so people can understand you.

And then, just when you think the job of learning English is done, you realize that there's **more** English to learn.

Because there's a special kind of English that you must use on the job: English for professionals.

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English for Professionals 101



The English language is used all over the world. But English for professionals can be a world of its own.

What is English for professionals?

Like most languages, English can be spoken in different ways.

Sometimes, it's casual, like when you're talking with your friends. You can use a lot of slang. You don't have to worry about grammar too much, as long

as your friends understand you.

When you're a professional in the workplace, you can't be too casual with the English language. You might need to address customers, or even your boss, more formally. To show them respect, you'll need to use polite language.

In addition to polite language, you might also need to learn special sets of words for your industry.

Every profession has its own special words. When you learn English at a professional level, you also have to learn the special English words that your profession uses, so you can speak clearly about the job with your coworkers.

If you were a lawyer learning English for your job, you'd need to learn words used in the courtroom. A doctor would need to learn English medical terms. A chef would need to learn English cooking terms. An airline pilot would need to learn aviation terms in English.

These are terms that you'd probably not learn in a regular English class. We'll talk about ways that you can learn the **jargon**, or special words, used within your trade or professional group.

Who should study English for professional purposes?

People in many different job fields use professional-level English:

- **Medicine:** Doctors, nurses, physician's assistants, physical therapists, pharmacists
- **Tourism and hospitality:** Chefs, restaurant staff, hotel staff, airport workers, flight crew, tour guides
- **Science and technology:** Engineers, chemists, web designers, computer programmers
- **Construction:** Contractors, builders, artisans
- **Law:** Lawyers, paralegals, court reporters, court interpreters

Even if you don't live in an English-speaking country, you might still need to know some professional English.

For instance, if you work in tourism or hospitality, you might need to speak English with travelers as part of your job.

Other professionals, like medical staff, engineers or computer programmers, might use English to work with colleagues (fellow professionals) in other countries.

What are the benefits of studying professional English?



Studying professional English can help your career in several ways—even if you already know some everyday English.

More available jobs.

These days, many companies do business around the world. Since [English is the international language of business](#), companies value workers who can speak professional English.

Even if you don't live in an English-speaking country, knowing professional English could help you find more job opportunities.

You could get hired more easily by English-speaking companies in your country, or by any company that wants to do business with English speakers.

Better-paying jobs.

Professional English opens up higher-paying jobs. Studies show that workers who are fluent in English [make much more money](#).

Level playing field.

You might come to an English-speaking country with a good education. You might even have a graduate degree.

Without professional English, though, your skills and education could be overlooked. You might lose jobs to people who are less qualified but more fluent in professional English.

Easier job training.

Knowing professional English can even help with on-the-job training.

This is true whether you're learning from a coworker or taking a job-related course in the classroom.

If your managers know that you can easily understand training, they'll probably ask you to learn more skills and perform more important work.

Promotions and pay raises.

Becoming fluent in professional English makes you more likely to get pay raises and promotions in your current job. There are a few reasons for this.

- **Many companies like to “promote from within.”** Experienced workers who become managers understand their employees’ jobs very well. They usually need less training than an “outside hire” (someone who has never worked with the company before).
- **Skilled English speakers can communicate well with their coworkers.** Fluent English speakers understand how to speak with company management in a professional manner. They can adapt (change) the way they speak in English so that it’s appropriate (right) for different people and situations.
- **Learning English at a professional level shows initiative.** It takes more effort than just learning “survival” English, or English at a very basic level. Your managers will know that you take your job seriously—and that you’re putting extra effort into it.

Clear communication is essential (needed) for management positions. So, people who speak English at a professional level will have a better chance of getting promotions and pay raises.

How Can You Study English for Professionals?



Learning English for professionals has many benefits. You know that it’s going to take time, though—and you’re already pretty busy.

How can you learn professional-level English in the time you have available?

Get a good foundation.

To build anything well, whether it’s a house or an education, you need a solid foundation (base).

If your English is shaky, and you don’t understand the basics well, simply memorizing more words will **not** make you more fluent.

If you’re just a beginner, start out with an English course that covers the basics. Once you start to get more fluent, find a course that’ll build on what you know.

Look for [English courses made for working adults](#). These will help you use your time well. As you progress from beginner to intermediate to advanced, you can focus on the English words and phrases that you'll need most in your job.

Take a standardized test.

A good way to show your mastery (firm grasp) of English is to take a standardized test.

There are a few major English tests available. Most of them will test your reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Just preparing for one of these tests can sharpen your professional English skills.

You're probably not going to spend the time and money to take more than one of these tests. So, which test should you take?

Three of the most popular standardized English tests are the IELTS, the TOEFL and the TOEIC. Each of these has different purposes:

- The **TOEIC, or Test of English for International Communication**, is mainly for people who will use English for international business. You might work at a company where the main language is **not** English, but you have a lot of English-speaking customers or clients. Or, you might use English as a common language with business partners around the world. Either way, the TOEIC might be the right test for you.
- The **TOEFL, or Test of English as a Foreign Language**, is more for people who plan to use American English in a school or business setting. Like the TOEIC, the TOEFL is made by the [Educational Testing Service \(ETS\)](#), an American group. Even though the TOEFL comes from the USA, there are more than 150 TOEFL testing centers around the world. There is also a “[test at home](#)” option.
- The **IELTS, or International English Language Testing System**, is a test administered (managed) by the British Council, the University of Cambridge in England and IDP Education in Australia. If you plan to use British English in a country like England, Scotland, Canada, Australia or New Zealand, think about taking the IELTS. The IELTS can also help you get your immigration visa in several of these [Commonwealth countries](#).

Getting certified in English by taking one of these tests can be very helpful to your career. You can list your certification on your résumé or job application. Hiring managers can see at a glance how well you know English—the “proof” will be right on your résumé.

A good standardized test score, along with your other job skills, could make

it more likely for you to get an interview.

Make professional English part of your everyday life.



Like any language, English can be spoken at many different levels. Professional English can be a bit more formal than the casual English you'd use while traveling, shopping or talking to friends. And, of course, each industry or professional field can have its own terminology (special words).

As a busy professional, you need to use your time wisely. Think of ways that you can [study professional English](#) while living your day-to-day life.

You can check out the business news on English-language websites, looking for stories related to your profession. You can join an organization for English-speaking professionals in your field. You can even learn and practice professional English by watching authentic videos with an interactive learning app like FluentU.



FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons.

With the FluentU app, you can watch curated videos related to your job. Hover over any unfamiliar word to pause the video, hear the word pronounced and get an instant definition.

The customized quizzes on FluentU will help you test how much you've learned. There are even flashcards on the FluentU app, so you can review your English vocabulary wherever you go.

[Start your free trial of FluentU today](#)—and learn English as it's used in the working world.

Take an industry-specific course.

Once you have a really solid foundation in the English language, you can go even deeper into on-the-job English.

Most professionals have to take training courses once in a while. They might learn a new skill or review the current “best practices” (right ways to do things) for their profession.

Since you're probably going to take job-related courses now and then, why not learn your new skills through English?

You'll get the latest information for doing your job well, plus you can improve your professional-level English at the same time.

Make professional connections.

“Networking,” or making business connections, is a tried-and-true way to do better in your career.

You can make these important connections with colleagues (other professionals in your field) as you practice your professional English. There are several ways that you can learn to use [English for professional purposes](#). One of them is to connect with other English-speaking professionals.

Attend industry conferences and networking events where the main language is English. Read English-language trade journals or industry blogs, then comment on the articles. Get into online discussions with other professionals.

What Types of Professional English Are There?

Just as there are many types of professionals, there are many different types of professional English.

The kind of professional English you study will depend on your career field.

Business English



Business English is also called “corporate English” because it’s used by corporations (large businesses).

If you had an office job in an industry like finance, insurance or banking, you’d need to use [corporate English](#) every day.

Like other kinds of professional English, business English is more formal than the casual English you might speak with friends and family. In business English, reading and writing skills are just as important as listening and speaking skills.

Business English should be clear and to the point. However, the words it uses are sometimes complex (not simple).

And there’s more to business English than just the words you use. The tone of your voice and your body language can be part of making your meaning

clear.

More and more people are working online these days. Let's say you're having a video conference with native English speakers or clients from different countries. How can you put people at ease? How can you make sure others understand you?

If you feel uncomfortable using business English in meetings and on phone calls, consider taking a specialized course, like this [“Master Communication Skills for Business Video Calls in English”](#) class that's available on Creativa.

Do you have trouble with English during business video calls?

What if you could speak fluent English in calls, and connect comfortably with your customers, colleagues, and managers?

Imagine... you could look forward to these calls instead of worrying about them.

What could this newfound confidence do for your career?

Did you know there's a course that can help you with that? It's called *Creativa*.

Don't miss this opportunity to improve your English and your career — *get started with Creativa today*.

Medical English



Healthcare workers, like physical therapists, nurses, home health aides and doctors, use two different types of medical English.

As a healthcare worker, you'd need to know [English medical vocabulary](#), such as basic words for body parts and common diseases, so you could speak easily with patients.

You'd also need to know complicated (difficult) words for talking to other medical professionals.

Lots of different resources can help you [learn medical English](#). You can get a healthy dose of medical English while taking a course, studying online lessons or listening to a healthcare podcast.

English for Tourism and Hospitality



Tourism and hospitality go hand-in-hand.

Tourism is all about getting people to come to your part of the world and have fun—and spend some money while they’re doing it.

Hospitality means making sure people have what they need while they’re guests in your country or town.

Hospitality can be thought of as part of the tourism industry.

When you learn [English for tourism and hospitality](#), you open up a world of career possibilities.

Tourism

If you’re learning [English for the tourism industry](#), [books](#) can be a useful resource.

Tourism textbooks can teach you about the industry itself. Guide books written for tourists can help you better serve tourists.

But don’t just read. Whether you’re a tour bus driver, a tour guide or a vendor near a popular tourist destination, test your skills with some [English for tourism exercises](#). These exercises target the terms that you’d use with tourists and hotel guests, helping you to understand each other better.

No matter what your job in the tourism industry is, English is an international language. You might need to use [English tourism vocabulary](#) to communicate with travelers from many different countries.

[Tourism English](#) can be used to help people with all kinds of services, like transportation, meals and lodging (places to stay), when they travel. Some travelers may even need medical or emergency services.

Travelers want entertainment—like concerts, activities and sports—and if you’re helping them find it, you’ll need to know [English for tourism](#).

Like any industry, tourism changes over time. [English for international tourism](#) covers a broad range of topics—including new trends like ecotourism, adventure travel and coworking spaces for digital nomads (people who work remotely from all over the world).

Hospitality

Once you have tourists in your area, they'll need places to stay and something to eat and drink. [English for hospitality](#) includes everything from English for hotels and campgrounds to restaurants and bars.

A number of different hospitality jobs [use English; the hotel industry](#), in particular, gives workers many opportunities to speak English with guests.

[English is especially important for hotel receptionists](#), who take care of guests from the time they arrive until they depart. This includes:

- Greeting guests
- Getting them rooms
- Giving them information about the local area
- Settling their bill when it's time to leave

[English for hotel management](#) is essential. A hotel manager takes care of serious issues for guests and makes sure that the hotel staff is working well together. Managers often use English for both of these duties.

To be successful, the [housekeeping staff needs some English vocabulary for work](#). These words make it easier to speak with guests and understand their requests. [English for housekeeping](#) also allows workers to carefully follow the hotel's guidelines for cleaning and safety. This way, guests can have a pleasant and comfortable stay.

Restaurants are another popular place to find hospitality jobs. Everyone from the bartender who mixes drinks for guests to restaurant staff like servers, cooks and managers will need to know the proper words for dealing with English-speaking customers or staff. This includes talking about food, making reservations and taking payment for services.

[English for bartenders](#) will include words for mixing drinks and pulling pints of beer. On the other hand, [English for restaurant staff](#) will focus more on taking orders, cooking food or dealing with diners' concerns.

If you have any of these hotel or restaurant jobs, you'll need to communicate clearly in English with some of your guests... and even with some of your coworkers.

Aviation English

Aviation English is a specific type of functional English—that is, English used for a particular purpose. It's not used to speak with tourists and other travelers, but it **is** used to keep them safe.

To some degree, **flight attendants** and other members of the cabin crew use aviation English when they're working with the flight crew in the cockpit. That said, [English for flight attendants](#) focuses mainly on helping passengers and keeping them safe during the flight.

The people who use [aviation English](#) the most are **pilots, co-pilots** and **air traffic controllers**.

For safety reasons, aviation English is a highly standardized form of English. Clear communication is essential to protect travelers and prevent tragic accidents.

Pilots and other members of the flight crew, as well as air traffic controllers, must prove how well they know aviation English by taking a special proficiency test.

English for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)



The fields of **science, technology, engineering** and **mathematics**—sometimes collectively (together) called “**STEM**” in English—use some very special words. Not even native English speakers will know or use a lot of these words in regular conversation unless they happen to work in highly technical jobs in one of these fields.

Many of the words used by chemists, physicists, engineers and mathematicians are highly complex. Some STEM words are just odd—especially the [computer English](#) words used by programmers and technicians. They might be words that you'd hear in regular conversation, like “zip,” “mouse” or “bug,” but they're used very differently.

If you're in a high-tech or science-based job, there are many ways you can learn [English for science and technology](#). For example, you can study [English for STEM](#) by watching different series of videos about STEM topics.

You can also practice [English for technology](#) while reading magazine articles about scientific discoveries, internet technology and all of the latest gadgets (devices). Several of these online magazines also have videos and podcasts.

English for construction workers



To get the job done safely and well, general contractors, construction workers and artisans, such as roofers, plumbers and electricians, need to communicate clearly.

[English for construction workers](#) includes specialized words to describe tools of the trade, as well as different types of skilled labor. English might be used as a common language on a construction site, where workers from many places need to understand each other. English might also be used to speak with the customers who order the work.

If you work in the construction business and can speak English well, using all of the right words to talk about the details of your job, you'll have a better chance of getting well-paying work.

Legal English

[English for professionals](#)

The court system uses language that can be difficult, even for native English speakers. A lot of the words used in the courtroom are based in Latin. [Legal English vocabulary](#) uses some common English words to mean very specific things, so these terms must be studied especially well to avoid confusion.

Lawyers, judges, court reporters and paralegals (specially trained researchers and law office assistants) all use legal English. Some business people use legal English when dealing with contracts.

No matter what kind of job you have, learning English for professionals has lots of advantages. It's hard work—but it can give a big boost to your career and really pay off.

Michelle Baumgartner is a language nerd who has formally studied seven languages and informally dabbled in a few others. In addition to geeking out over slender vowels, interrogative particles, and phonemes, Michelle is a content writer and education blogger. Find out more at [StellaWriting.com](#).

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