



**Title of Report:** Business Communication in Hong Kong

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### **1. Identify and describe the training program.**

Business Communication is a core course for students majoring in business at the University of Hong Kong. The course runs for twelve weeks (i.e., one semester), with two hours of class time per week. Each year about fifteen to sixteen such courses are offered to around three hundred students from the School of Business of the University of Hong Kong. Most of the teachers who have taught the course possess teaching qualifications and postgraduate qualifications (e.g., MAs or PhDs in Applied Linguistics).

### **2. Describe the target audience for the training programs.**

The participants in the Business Communication course are first-year students taking different programs for the degree of Bachelor of Business Administration. Most of them do not have full-time work experience. They are largely local Hong Kong students, but there are some Mainland Chinese students and international students from other countries.

### **3. Describe the needs assessment procedures utilized to develop the program.**

As the course coordinator at the time, I developed a revised version of the course. As an ESP researcher who advocates that pedagogy should be informed by research (see Chan, 2009a), I consulted the relevant literature to get an idea of the needs of business students. In the light of the research which shows the importance of business meeting skills in the workplace (e.g., Crosling & Ward, 2002), I explored the possibility of including a new component on business meetings. Therefore, I conducted an in-house needs analysis, which involved a questionnaire given to the business students at the university, as well as discussions with representatives of the School of Business.

### **4. Explain the English language training program's over-arching goals and specific objectives.**

The course prepares students to communicate effectively both in their university coursework and in anticipation of future work situations which will entail the use of English. In the course, students are required to work on a project involving the investigation of business activity in Hong Kong by interviewing a business executive. At the end of the project, the

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students are required to produce a written report and give a group presentation based on the data they collected. Through a series of role-play tasks, the course also provides opportunities for students to practice business meeting skills. The identification and understanding of idiomatic language is also emphasized, both in informal business situations and in more formal written and spoken genres.

At the end of the course, students are expected to be able to do the following:

- investigate and report on real business activities;
- demonstrate competence in oral presentations;
- produce concise and accurate written reports in an appropriate format and style;
- participate in business meetings and business-related discussions confidently; and
- appreciate the role of idiomatic language in business communication.

**5. Describe the teaching methods and training procedures used in the program.**

The course emphasizes experiential learning and reflection. It includes project work as well as task-based language learning. Learner autonomy is also promoted through self-study and peer teaching.

The business investigative project involves instruction and practice in the following activities:

- drafting business correspondence and making telephone calls to target companies;
- interviewing a business executive;
- giving oral presentations with appropriate visual aids; and
- report writing, with guidance and feedback from the teacher.

The business meeting component includes in-class simulations of business meetings and post-meeting reflections. This component also entails out-of-class self-study of business meeting skills.

The idiomatic English component consists of an introduction to idiomatic language. Practice opportunities include peer teaching of idioms.

**6. Describe the teaching materials used in the program.**

Both in-house materials and published materials (e.g., videos and role-plays from photocopiable resource books) are used on the course. For the idiomatic language peer teaching, students produce handouts for their classmates.

**7. Explain the content of the English language training program.**



**A. What written and spoken genres are covered in the training program?**

Attention to written genres focuses on business correspondence and business reports. For spoken genres, primary attention is given to telephone interactions, participation in business meetings, and giving oral presentations.

**B. What communicative functions are covered in the training program?**

Applied linguistics research has shown that the approach to teaching communicative functions through lists of functions and exponents is undesirable in that such lists do not sensitize students to the contextual factors which influence language choice (Chan, 2009b; Koester, 2002; Williams, 1988). Therefore, the course does not adopt this approach. Instead, students are given role-plays or real-world tasks (e.g., calling up a target company) to practice communicative functions in context.

**C. What speech events are covered in the training program?**

The course covers two main speech events. Business meetings are addressed through role-plays. Oral presentations specifically involve reporting on the findings of the project to the class.

**8. Explain the delivery mechanisms employed by the program.**

This course involves face-to-face teaching with about twenty students per class. The students also engage in the self-study of business meeting skills. In addition, there are small-group tutorials on report writing, where the teacher provides feedback on the learners' report drafts.

**9. Explain the assessment procedures used in the program.**

For the investigative business project, the assessed outcomes include a group written report and a group presentation. The assessment criteria cover language, content and organization. For the business simulations, students submit a reflective assignment on the business meeting role-plays conducted during the course. Students are assessed on their ability to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and to propose sensible actions to improve future performance in similar situations.

**10. Explain the program evaluation mechanisms used.**

Course evaluation questionnaires are administered to the students at the end of each term. We also solicit feedback from the School of Business.



**11. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this English training program.**

In the field of English for specific purposes (ESP), one recurrent issue has been that ESP teachers often do not have the requisite subject matter knowledge to teach a particular course (e.g., a teacher of legal English may not have studied law). Some teachers have described their feelings of insecurity when teaching business communication to business students while they themselves have neither studied business subjects nor worked in the business world.

As a researcher who advocates that teachers should keep abreast of research, I have proposed that teachers can learn about language use in business situations from published research (Chan, 2009b). However, ESP researchers can also help by finding more ways to introduce their findings to ESP teachers (Chan, 2009a).

**12. Describe the successes of the program and explain how they are documented.**

The high scores for course effectiveness and teacher effectiveness on the course evaluation questionnaires are indications of the success of the course.

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