

A biography of Kilian Jornet

Read a biography of mountain runner Kilian Jornet, who climbed Everest in a day, to practise and improve your reading skills.



When you picture mountain climbers scaling Mount Everest, what probably comes to mind are teams of climbers with Sherpa guides leading them to the summit, equipped with oxygen masks, supplies and tents. And in most cases you'd be right, as 97 per cent of climbers use oxygen to ascend to Everest's summit at 8,850 metres above sea level. The thin air at high altitudes makes most people breathless at 3,500 metres, and the vast majority of climbers use oxygen past 7,000 metres. A typical climbing group will have 8–15 people in it, with an almost equal number of guides, and they'll spend weeks to get to the top after reaching Base Camp.

But ultra-distance and mountain runner Kilian Jornet Burgada ascended the mountain in May 2017 alone, without an oxygen mask or fixed ropes for climbing.

Oh, and he did it in 26 hours.

With food poisoning.

And then, five days later, he did it again, this time in only 17 hours.

Born in 1987, Kilian has been training for Everest his whole life. And that really does mean his whole life, as he grew up 2,000 metres above sea level in the Pyrenees in the ski resort of Lles de Cerdanya in Catalonia, north-eastern Spain. While other children his age were learning to walk, Kilian was on skis. At one and a half years old he did a five-hour hike with his mother, entirely under his own steam. He left his peers even further behind when he climbed his first mountain and competed in his first cross-country ski race at age three. By age seven, he had scaled a 4,000er and, at ten, he did a 42-day crossing of the Pyrenees.

He was 13 when he says he started to take it 'seriously' and trained with the Ski Mountaineering Technical Centre (CTEMC) in Catalonia, entering competitions and working with a coach. At 18, he took over his own ski-mountaineering and trail-running training, with a schedule that only allows a couple of weeks of rest a year. He does as many as 1,140 hours of endurance training a year, plus strength training and technical workouts as well as specific training in the week before a race. For his record-breaking ascent and descent of the Matterhorn, he prepared by climbing the mountain ten times until he knew every detail of it, even including where the sun would be shining at every part of the day.

Sleeping only seven hours a night, Kilian Jornet seems almost superhuman. His resting heartbeat is extremely low at 33 beats per minute, compared with the average man's 60 per minute or an athlete's 40 per minute. He breathes more efficiently than average people too, taking in more oxygen per breath, and he has a much faster recovery time after exercise as his body quickly breaks down lactic acid – the acid in muscles that causes pain after exercise.

All this is thanks to his childhood in the mountains and to genetics, but it is his mental strength that sets him apart. He often sets himself challenges to see how long he can endure difficult conditions in order to truly understand what his body and mind can cope with. For example, he almost gave himself kidney failure after only drinking 3.5 litres of water on a 100km run in temperatures of around 40°C.

It would take a book to list all the races and awards he's won and the mountains he's climbed. And even here, Kilian's achievements exceed the average person as, somehow, he finds time to record his career on his blog and has written three books, *Run or Die*, *The Invisible Border* and *Summits of My Life*.

Reading C1: A biography of Kilian Jornet – 1

Write the correct numbers to complete the sentences.

1. It's normal to find it hard to breathe at metres above sea level.
2. Kilian reached the summit of Everest in hours on his second attempt.
3. He was years old when he walked a long way without being carried.
4. At the age of , he saw mountaineering as more than a hobby.
5. At age , he became his own trainer.
6. At bpm, Kilian's pulse rate is much slower than even very fit people.

Reading C1: A biography of Kilian Jornet – 2

Choose the best answer.

The majority of climbers on Everest ...

- need oxygen to finish their ascent.
- are accompanied.
- make slow progress to the top.
- (all of the above)

Kilian Jornet is unlike most Everest climbers because ...

- he is a professional climber.
- he ascended faster.
- he found the climb difficult.
- (all of the above)

In his training now, Kilian ...

- demand a lot of himself.
- takes a lot of rest periods.
- uses a coach.
- (none of the above)

Kilian partly owes his incredible fitness to ...

- the way he makes extra time for sleep.
- his ability to recover from injury.
- where he grew up.
- (all of the above)

His training includes ...

- psychological preparation.
- making sure he drinks enough water.
- trying to reduce his recovery time.
- (none of the above)

Kilian's books are ...

a long list of races and awards.
discouraging to average people.
best for an expert audience.
another example of his impressive accomplishments.

Discussion

What physical challenges would you like to train for?

A threat to bananas

Read a text about a fungus threatening bananas to practise and improve your reading skills.



In the 1950s, Central American commercial banana growers were facing the death of their most lucrative product, the Gros Michel banana, known as Big Mike. And now it's happening again to Big Mike's successor – the Cavendish.

With its easily transported, thick-skinned and sweet-tasting fruit, the Gros Michel banana plant dominated the plantations of Central America. United Fruit, the main grower and exporter in South America at the time, mass-produced its bananas in the most efficient way possible: it cloned shoots from the stems of plants instead of growing plants from seeds, and cultivated them in densely packed fields.

Unfortunately, these conditions are also perfect for the spread of the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. cubense*, which attacks the plant's roots and prevents it from transporting water to the stem and leaves. The TR-1 strain of the fungus was resistant to crop sprays and travelled around on boots or the tyres of trucks, slowly infecting plantations across the region. In an attempt to escape the fungus, farmers abandoned infected fields, flooded them and then replanted crops somewhere else, often cutting down rainforest to do so.

Their efforts failed. So, instead, they searched for a variety of banana that the fungus didn't affect. They found the Cavendish, as it was called, in the greenhouse of a British duke. It wasn't as well suited to shipping as the Gros Michel, but its bananas tasted good enough to keep consumers happy. Most importantly, TR-1 didn't seem to affect it. In a few years, United Fruit had saved itself from bankruptcy by filling its plantations with thousands of the new plants, copying the same monoculture growing conditions Gros Michel had thrived in.

While the operation was a huge success for the Latin American industry, the Cavendish banana itself is far from safe. In 2014, South East Asia, another major banana producer, exported four million tons of Cavendish bananas. But, in 2015, its exports had dropped by 46 per cent thanks to a combination of another strain of the fungus, TR-4, and bad weather.

Growing practices in South East Asia haven't helped matters. Growers can't always afford the expensive lab-based methods to clone plants from shoots without spreading the disease. Also, they often aren't strict enough about cleaning farm equipment and quarantining infected fields. As a result, the fungus has spread to Australia, the Middle East and Mozambique – and Latin America, heavily dependent on its monoculture Cavendish crops, could easily be next.

Racing against the inevitable, scientists are working on solving the problem by genetically modifying the Cavendish with genes from TR-4-resistant banana species. Researchers at the Queensland University of Technology have successfully grown two kinds of modified plant which have remained resistant for three years so far. But some experts think this is just a sophisticated version of the same temporary solution the original Cavendish provided. If the new bananas are planted in the same monocultures as the Cavendish and the Gros Michel before it, the risk is that another strain of the disease may rise up to threaten the modified plants too.

Reading C1: A threat to bananas – 1

Choose the best answer.

Mass-produced bananas are ...

grown from seeds because it's efficient.

cloned because it's a fast and cheap way to grow them.
sweeter than other bananas.
exported to Central America.

The spread of the TR-1 strain was ...

caused by lack of water.
speeded up by the flooding of banana fields.
slowed down by crop spraying.
helped by the movement of people and vehicles.

Which sentence is NOT true?

The Cavendish replaced the Gros Michel.
The Cavendish bananas were easier to transport than the Gros Michel.
The Cavendish was resistant to the fungus.
The Cavendish stopped United Fruit from losing more money.

South East Asia's Cavendish exports fell in 2015 because ...

a new strain of the fungus has developed.
farmers can't afford new farming technology.
they had to quarantine their fruit.
they depended too much on other countries.

Genetically modifying bananas may ...

mean farmers can grow the Gros Michel again.
cause farmers to repeat the mistakes of the past.
encourage farmers to try new growing methods.
only be a short-term solution.

How would you describe the writer's opinion about the future of the Cavendish?

Optimistic
Pessimistic
Cautious
Uninterested

Discussion

What do you think of the solution to genetically modify the Cavendish banana?

Cultural behaviour in business

Read a blog post about doing business in different cultures to practise and improve your reading skills.



Much of today's business is conducted across international borders, and while the majority of the global business community might share the use of English as a common language, the nuances and expectations of business communication might differ greatly from culture to culture. A lack of understanding of the cultural norms and practices of our business acquaintances can result in unfair judgements, misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication. Here are three basic areas of differences in the business etiquette around the world that could help stand you in good stead when you next find yourself working with someone from a different culture.

Addressing someone

When discussing this topic in a training course, a German trainee and a British trainee got into a hot debate about whether it was appropriate for someone with a doctorate to use the corresponding title on their business card. The British trainee maintained that anyone who wasn't a medical doctor expecting to be addressed as 'Dr' was disgustingly pompous and full of themselves. The German trainee, however, argued that the hard work and years of education put into earning that PhD should give them full rights to expect to be addressed as 'Dr'.

This stark difference in opinion over something that could be conceived as minor and thus easily overlooked goes to show that we often attach meaning to even the most mundane practices. When things that we are used to are done differently, it could spark the strongest reactions in us. While many Continental Europeans and Latin Americans prefer to be addressed with a title, for example Mr or Ms and their surname when meeting someone in a business context for the first time, Americans, and increasingly the British, now tend to prefer using their first names. The best thing to do is to listen and observe how your conversation partner addresses you and, if you are still unsure, do not be afraid to ask them how they would like to be addressed.

Smiling

A famous Russian proverb states that 'a smile without reason is a sign of idiocy' and a so-called 'smile of respect' is seen as insincere and often regarded with suspicion in Russia. Yet in countries like the United States, Australia and Britain, smiling is often interpreted as a sign of openness, friendship and respect, and is frequently used to break the ice.

In a piece of research done on smiles across cultures, the researchers found that smiling individuals were considered more intelligent than non-smiling people in countries such as Germany, Switzerland, China and Malaysia. However, in countries like Russia, Japan, South Korea and Iran, pictures of smiling faces were rated as less intelligent than the non-smiling ones. Meanwhile, in countries like India, Argentina and the Maldives, smiling was associated with dishonesty.

Eye contact

An American or British person might be looking their client in the eye to show that they are paying full attention to what is being said, but if that client is from Japan or Korea, they might find the direct eye contact awkward or even disrespectful. In parts of South America and Africa, prolonged eye contact could also be seen as challenging authority. In the Middle East, eye contact across genders is considered inappropriate, although eye contact within a gender could signify honesty and truthfulness.

Having an increased awareness of the possible differences in expectations and behaviour can help us avoid cases of miscommunication, but it is vital that we also remember that cultural stereotypes can be detrimental to building good business relationships. Although national cultures could play a part in shaping the way we behave and think, we are also largely influenced by the region we come from, the communities we associate with, our age and gender, our corporate culture and our individual experiences of the world. The knowledge of the potential differences should therefore be something we keep at the back of our minds, rather

than something that we use to pigeonhole the individuals of an entire nation.

Reading C1: Cultural behaviour in business – 1

Choose the correct answer.

The British trainee felt that the people who want to be addressed as 'Dr' must be ...

- hard-working.
- conceited and self-important.
- doing a medical degree.
- from Germany.

If you are not sure how to address someone, you should ...

- use the title you see on their business card.
- make your decision based on cultural stereotypes about their country.
- address them the way you'd like to be addressed.
- ask them what they would like you to call them.

There might be a misunderstanding if an American smiles at a Russian business associate because the Russian might think that the American is ...

- being fake.
- challenging their authority.
- trying to break the ice.
- disrespectful.

The Japanese, South Koreans and Iranians might interpret a smiling face as being ...

- friendlier.
- less open.
- not as intelligent.
- dishonest.

Americans and British people sometimes use eye contact to show that they ...

- like the speaker.
- are really listening to what is being said.
- are honest and truthful.
- are attending to every need of the speaker.

The last paragraph warns the reader not to ...

- engage in international business.
- let national cultures shape the way we behave and think.
- let miscommunication damage our business relationships.
- overgeneralise using our knowledge of cultural stereotypes.

Discussion

What practices have you encountered that seemed strange or even inappropriate to you?

Four book summaries

Read a series of short book summaries to practise and improve your reading skills.



Four positive books about the world

***Factfulness* – Hans Rosling with Ola Rosling and Anna Rosling Rönnlund**

In *Factfulness*, Professor Hans Rosling, along with two collaborators, asks simple questions about the world. Questions like 'How many girls finish school?' and 'What percentage of the world's population is poor?' It turns out the majority of us get the answers to these questions completely wrong. Why does this happen? *Factfulness* sets out to explain why, showing that there are several instincts humans have that distort our perspective.

For example, most people divide the world into US and THEM. In addition, we often believe that things are getting worse. And we are consuming large amounts of media that use a sales model based on making us afraid.

But according to the authors, the world isn't as bad as we think. Yes, there are real concerns. But we should adopt a mindset of factfulness – only carrying opinions that are supported by strong facts. This book is not concerned with the underlying reasons for poverty or progress, or what should be done about these issues. It focuses on our instinctive biases, offering practical advice to help us see the good as well as the bad in the world.

***Enlightenment Now* – Steven Pinker**

Are things getting worse every day? Is progress an impossible goal? In *Enlightenment Now*, Steven Pinker looks at the big picture of human progress and finds good news. We are living longer, healthier, freer and happier lives.

Pinker asks us to stop paying so much attention to negative headlines and news that declares the end of the world. Instead, he shows us some carefully selected data. In 75 surprising graphs, we see that safety, peace, knowledge and health are getting better all over the world. When the evidence does not support his argument, however, he dismisses it. Economic inequality, he claims, is not really a problem, because it is not actually that important for human well-being. One cannot help wondering how many people actually living in poverty would agree.

The real problem, Pinker argues, is that the Enlightenment values of reason and science are under attack. When commentators and demagogues appeal to people's tribalism, fatalism and distrust, then we are in danger of causing irreparable damage to important institutions like democracy and world co-operation.

***The Rational Optimist* – Matt Ridley**

For more than two hundred years the pessimists have been winning the public debate. They tell us that things are getting worse. But in fact, life is getting better. Income, food availability and lifespan are rising; disease, violence and child mortality are falling. These trends are happening all around the world. Africa is slowly coming out of poverty, just as Asia did before. The internet, mobile phones and worldwide trade are making the lives of millions of people much better.

Best-selling author Matt Ridley doesn't only explain how things are getting better; he gives us reasons why as well. He shows us how human culture evolves in a positive direction thanks to the exchange of ideas and specialisation. This bold book looks at the entirety of human history – from the Stone Age to the 21st century – and changes the notion that it's all going downhill. The glass really is half-full.

***The Great Surge* – Steven Radelet**

The majority of people believe that developing countries are in a terrible situation: suffering from incredible poverty, governed by dictators and with little hope for any meaningful change. But,

surprisingly, this is far from the truth. The reality is that a great transformation is occurring. Over the past 20 years, more than 700 million people have increased their income and come out of poverty. Additionally, six million fewer children die every year from disease, millions more girls are in school and millions of people have access to clean water.

This is happening across developing countries around the world. The end of the Cold War, the development of new technologies and brave new leadership have helped to improve the lives of hundreds of millions of people in poor countries.

The Great Surge describes how all of this is happening and, more importantly, it shows us how we can accelerate the process.

Reading C1: Four book summaries

Choose the correct answer.

Which book talks about how we can continue to make things even better?

Factfulness
Enlightenment Now
The Rational Optimist
The Great Surge

Which book covers a long period of human history?

Factfulness
Enlightenment Now
The Rational Optimist
The Great Surge

Which book claims that human intuition negatively affects the way people think about the world?

Factfulness
Enlightenment Now
The Rational Optimist
The Great Surge

Which book says that current establishments are under threat from politics?

Factfulness
Enlightenment Now
The Rational Optimist
The Great Surge

Which book explains that we tend to mentally divide humans into two clear groups?

Factfulness
Enlightenment Now
The Rational Optimist
The Great Surge

Which book claims that trade has helped make life better around the world?

Factfulness
Enlightenment Now
The Rational Optimist

The Great Surge

Which book makes the claim that unfair distribution of wealth does not affect happiness as much as people think?

Factfulness

Enlightenment Now

The Rational Optimist

The Great Surge

Which book focuses primarily on developing countries?

Factfulness

Enlightenment Now

The Rational Optimist

The Great Surge

Discussion

Would you like to read any of these books?

Giving and receiving positive feedback

Read a magazine article about giving feedback at work to practise and improve your reading skills.



Your manager stops you and says she needs to have a word about your performance in the recent project. You worry about it all weekend, wondering what you might have done wrong. When you step into her office on Monday morning she begins by praising you for the good work you've done on the project, and you wonder if this is

the obligatory praise that starts off the typical 'feedback sandwich'. You know how the feedback sandwich goes: say something nice, say what you really want to say, say something nice again.

In an attempt to inject some positivity into their feedback, many managers rely on sandwiching negative feedback between two positive comments. However, when feedback becomes such a routine, employees can start to perceive positive feedback as simply a form of sugarcoating the negatives, thus diminishing its value. Instead, positive feedback should not simply be seen as something to cushion the negative, but should be delivered so as to reinforce and encourage good performance. Below are three tips to help you make positive feedback count.

1. Don't always follow positive feedback with negative feedback

When positive and negative feedback always appear to go hand in hand, the positives can become devalued and ignored. Ensure there are times when positive feedback is given for its own sake and resist the temptation to offer constructive criticism.

2. Cultivate a 'growth mindset'

Psychologist and 'growth mindset' proponent Carol Dweck spoke of the plasticity of the brain and our ability to develop skills and talents that we might not have been good at to start with. Many of us tend to focus our praise on the end result and seemingly innate talents, e.g. 'You really have an eye for details' or 'You have a real talent for organising events'. However, research suggests that by focusing on the process of how things are done – praising effort, experimentation and problem-solving strategies – we can encourage the development of new skills and the continued honing of talents.

3. Create a culture of offering positive feedback

Make giving positive feedback part of your team/department/company culture. Don't just wait for special moments like appraisals to give feedback. Offer informal positive feedback when making small talk or when walking down a corridor. Feedback doesn't have to only come from the higher ranks either. Encourage peer feedback among team members and colleagues and actively ask them for positive comments on each other's performances on tasks.

It might take time to counter the effects of an environment where there is a cynical view of positive feedback, but in the long run, by embracing positive feedback, you can not only enhance working performance but also enrich the quality of life in the workplace.

Reading C1: Giving and receiving positive feedback – 1

Choose the correct answers.

What does the 'feedback sandwich' involve?

- Giving positive feedback by accompanying it with negative feedback
- Giving negative feedback by accompanying it with positive feedback
- Creating a feedback culture in an organisation
- Devaluing positive feedback

The writer believes that the 'feedback sandwich' ...

- can encourage good performance.
- makes negative feedback more painful.
- makes employees fearful of feedback.
- is too predictable to be effective.

The 'growth mindset' idea is that ...

- we can become good at things that we might initially not seem to have a talent for.
- we should focus on honing the talents that we are born with.
- the end result is more important than the process.
- we must not tell people that they are good at certain things.

How can we create a culture of positive feedback?

- By offering feedback only during informal occasions such as when walking down a corridor
- By making sure that only positive and not negative feedback is given
- By asking your employees to offer positive feedback to their colleagues
- By not conducting appraisals for employees

A cynical view of positive feedback ...

- is irreversible.
- can make the quality of working life richer.
- can be healthy.
- can be changed gradually.

What might be a good title for this article?

- The power of a growth mindset
- The power of positive feedback
- The power of positive thinking
- The power of the feedback sandwich

Discussion

What are your tips for giving motivating feedback?

Horror film clichés

Read an article about horror film clichés to practise and improve your reading skills.



Five horror film clichés

Since almost the beginning of cinema, we have had scary films. Of all the genres that exist, horror is perhaps one of the most conventional. Many horror films rely on specific plot devices, also called tropes, to make their audience frightened. When a trope is used too much, it can become a cliché. But when used well, it can really make us jump out of our skin. Here are some of the most used, and perhaps abused, clichés in horror films.

1

No matter what kind of house it is, the basement is a scary place in horror films. That's usually where something is hiding or where the evil psychopath has hidden their tools. Basements are always dark and often damp. You can only reach them by a narrow staircase. And basements are always creepy, even when there isn't anything down there.

2

In older horror films, when protagonists were in desperation, it was difficult or impossible for them to call for help or call the police. Mobile phones have made that situation a bit less believable now.

What's the solution to maintain suspense? No phone coverage! If you're a hero in a horror film, it's almost certain that at a key moment, just when you absolutely need to call for help, you will not have any coverage at all. Or your phone battery will die just as you are making the call. Or both.

3

Horror films love uninhabited places. This could be an abandoned hospital, a scary empty house or a ghost town. There's something about lonely, empty places. What was it like when people lived there? Why did they leave? Maybe it's also that they are so quiet, which can be very scary too. Of course, abandoned places are also handy for horror film directors in that it's more believable that you will have no phone coverage there either (see above).

4

The hero has been driving for hours. It's night-time and it's beginning to rain. Suddenly he sees a person on the side of the road. Maybe the company will keep him awake? In horror films, giving *anybody* a ride is asking for trouble. The hero always does it, and it always ends badly.

5

This horror film cliché was especially popular with horror films of the late 20th century. It starts with a group of teenagers all enjoying themselves, and it ends with everyone dead except one girl. At the beginning the girl is usually innocent, shy and not particularly strong. By the end, she has become the toughest and most resourceful person in the world. The last girl almost always wins in the end.

Reading C1: Horror film clichés – 2

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the word in CAPITALS.

1. It's asking for trouble – it will end . BAD
2. Horror is a very genre. CONVENTION
3. The main character's phone battery always dies or they have no mobile
when they need to call for help. COVER
4. The last surviving character always turns out to be the most person in the
world. RESOURCE

5. There was no one there! The town is almost completely . INHABIT
6. His voice was full of . DESPERATE
7. The last surviving girl always turns into the person in the world. TOUGH
8. The story was too to be true. BELIEVE

Discussion

Do you like horror films? Can you think of any more horror film clichés?

How humans evolved language

Read an academic text about how humans evolved language to practise and improve your reading skills.



A

Thanks to the field of linguistics we know much about the development of the 5,000 plus languages in existence today. We can describe their grammar and pronunciation and see how their spoken and written forms have changed over time. For example, we understand the origins of the Indo-European group of languages, which includes Norwegian, Hindi and English, and can trace them

back to tribes in eastern Europe in about 3000 BC.

So, we have mapped out a great deal of the history of language, but there are still areas we know little about. Experts are beginning to look to the field of evolutionary biology to find out how the human species developed to be able to use language. So far, there are far more questions and half-theories than answers.

B

We know that human language is far more complex than that of even our nearest and most intelligent relatives like chimpanzees. We can express complex thoughts, convey subtle emotions and communicate about abstract concepts such as past and future. And we do this following a set of structural rules, known as grammar. Do only humans use an innate system of rules to govern the order of words? Perhaps not, as some research may suggest dolphins share this capability because they are able to recognise when these rules are broken.

C

If we want to know where our capability for complex language came from, we need to look at how our brains are different from other animals. This relates to more than just brain size; it is important what other things our brains can do and when and why they evolved that way. And for this there are very few physical clues; artefacts left by our ancestors don't tell us what speech they were capable of making. One thing we can see in the remains of early humans, however, is the development of the mouth, throat and tongue. By about 100,000 years ago, humans had evolved the ability to create complex sounds. Before that, evolutionary biologists can only guess whether or not early humans communicated using more basic sounds.

D

Another question is, what is it about human brains that allowed language to evolve in a way that it did not in other primates? At some point, our brains became able to make our mouths produce vowel and consonant sounds, and we developed the capacity to invent words to name things around us. These were the basic ingredients for complex language. The next change would have been to put those words into sentences, similar to the 'protolanguage' children use when they first learn to speak. No one knows if the next step – adding grammar to signal past, present and future, for example, or plurals and relative clauses – required a further development in the human brain or was simply a response to our increasingly civilised way of living together.

Between 100,000 and 50,000 years ago, though, we start to see the

evidence of early human civilisation, through cave paintings for example; no one knows the connection between this and language. Brains didn't suddenly get bigger, yet humans did become more complex and more intelligent. Was it using language that caused their brains to develop? Or did their more complex brains start producing language?

E

More questions lie in looking at the influence of genetics on brain and language development. Are there genes that mutated and gave us language ability? Researchers have found a gene mutation that occurred between 200,000 and 100,000 years ago, which seems to have a connection with speaking and how our brains control our mouths and face. Monkeys have a similar gene, but it did not undergo this mutation. It's too early to say how much influence genes have on language, but one day the answers might be found in our DNA.

Reading C1: How humans evolved language – 2

Are the sentences true or false?

1. Experts fully understand how the Hindi language developed.

True

False

2. The grammar of dolphin language follows the same rules as human language.

True

False

3. Brain size is not the only factor in determining language capability.

True

False

4. The language of very young children has something in common with the way our prehistoric ancestors may have spoken.

True

False

5. When people started using complex language, their brains got bigger.

True

False

6. The role of genetics in language capacity is not yet clear.

True

False

Discussion

Do you think monkeys and dolphins have complex language like humans do?

Life on Mars

Read an article about life on Mars to practise and improve your reading skills.



A new study published in the journal *Science* shows definitive evidence of organic matter on the surface of Mars. The data was collected by NASA's nuclear-powered rover Curiosity. It confirms earlier findings that the Red Planet once contained carbon-based

compounds. These compounds – also called organic molecules – are essential ingredients for life as scientists understand it.

The organic molecules were found in Mars's Gale Crater, a large area that may have been a watery lake over three billion years ago. The rover encountered traces of the molecule in rocks extracted from the area. The rocks also contain sulfur, which scientists speculate helped preserve the organics even when the rocks were exposed to the harsh radiation on the surface of the planet.

Scientists are quick to state that the presence of these organic molecules is not sufficient evidence for ancient life on Mars, as the molecules could have been formed by non-living processes. But it's still one of the most astonishing discoveries, which could lead to future revelations. Especially when one considers the other startling find that Curiosity uncovered around five years ago.

The rover analyses the air around it periodically, and in 2014 it found the air contained another of the most basic organic molecules and a key ingredient of natural gas: methane. One of the characteristics of methane is that it only survives a few hundred years. This means that something, somewhere on Mars, is replenishing the supply. According to NASA, Mars emits thousands of tons of methane at a time. The level of methane rises and falls at seasonal intervals in the year, almost as if the planet is breathing it.

NASA suspects the methane comes from deep under the surface of the planet. The variations in temperature on the surface of Mars cause the molecule to flow upwards at higher or lower levels. For example, in the Martian winter the gas could get trapped in underground icy crystals. These crystals, called clathrates, melt in the summer and release the gas. However, the source of the methane is still a complete mystery.

The world of astrobiology considers both of these studies as historical milestones. According to this information, Mars is not a dead planet. On the contrary, it is quite active and may be changing and becoming more habitable.

Of course, this means further research is necessary. Scientists say they need to send new equipment to Mars, equipment that can measure the air and soil with more precision. There are already missions underway. The European Space Agency's ExoMars ship lands in 2020 and will be able to drill into the ground on Mars to analyse what it finds. Additionally, NASA is sending another Mars Rover in the same year to collect samples of Martian soil and return them to Earth.

The possibility of life on Mars has fascinated humans for generations. It has been the subject of endless science-fiction novels and films.

Are we alone in the universe or have there been other life forms within our Solar System? If the current missions to the Red Planet continue, it looks as if we may discover the answer very soon.

Reading C1: Life on Mars – 1

Choose the correct answer.

The study in the journal 'Science' was written by NASA scientists.

- True
- False
- Not given

This is not the first study to suggest that life existed on Mars in the past.

- True
- False
- Not given

A scientific vehicle found very small elements of an organic molecule within water extracted from the planet.

- True
- False
- Not given

It is believed that this conclusively proves that there was once life on the planet.

- True
- False
- Not given

Methane is a natural molecule that is a sign of life.

- True
- False
- Not given

All organic molecules have a limited lifespan.

- True
- False
- Not given

Mars can be said to have a winter and a summer.

- True
- False
- Not given

There are at least two more scientific expeditions heading to Mars.

- True
- False
- Not given

Discussion

Do you think people will live on Mars?

Managing a problem

Read an email managing the problems faced by a member of an international team.



From: Jo Backhouse
To: Karl Anderson
Date: 17 October
Subject: Support for Judy

Dear Karl,

I received a call from Judy a couple of days ago to discuss some of the issues that she was having and I thought I'd give you a heads-up on what was said, seeing that you are Judy's project team leader.

Judy really enjoys working with you and the team and finds the project very interesting, but I think she's feeling a bit lost and struggling to see the big picture. It seems that she's been given a fair amount of autonomy to carry out the tasks that you've given her, and of course this level of delegation is not uncommon in your branch. But I believe in her Tokyo office, she is used to a bit more managerial direction and guidance and so is finding this international project quite daunting.

When I asked her about meeting her deadlines, she mentioned that due to the recent changes to the project timeline, her goalposts have been moved, and she doesn't seem to really understand why this has happened. Bearing in mind that she's also facing simultaneous

deadlines from her department in Tokyo, we can presume that she might be feeling a bit stretched.

Looking ahead, I was wondering if we could make it easier for Judy by offering her more direction when setting her tasks, at least until she learns the ropes and gets used to working unsupervised. I think she'd also appreciate you giving her a clearer idea on how her role in the team fits into the overview of things. Do you think you could maybe outline the group and individual targets at your next team meeting and that way, everyone not only gets a reminder of the end goal, but each team member, including Judy, might have a more holistic view of the whole project?

I was also thinking it might help to touch base with her every so often to make sure that she's up to date with any changes to the overall plan of attack. In the meantime, I'll write to her manager in the Tokyo office and see how aware they are of the deadlines you've given her, and if they could in some way review her responsibilities and co-ordinate her tasks so that she doesn't constantly feel pulled in both directions.

Judy is an extremely conscientious worker and is eager to contribute positively to the team. Personally, I think she is someone with high potential and will be an asset to our international projects if properly mentored. I'm keen to know your thoughts on the matter and am open to any suggestions on how we could better support Judy so that she has a more smooth-sailing experience on the team.

Best regards,

Jo Backhouse

Head of Department
International Projects

Reading C1: Managing a problem – 1

Choose the best answer.

Why is Jo writing to Karl?

- To suggest that his management style is not suitable for the current members of his team
- To let him know about the issues his team member is facing and help him manage them
- To tell him how to solve his problems
- To ask him to take it easy on Judy and not give her too much work

What is Judy not used to?

- Being told what to do
- Collaborating with people internationally
- Being left to do things on her own
- Delegating work to other people

Why is Judy confused by the changing targets?

She feels as if she needs to understand the reasons for the changes.

She has simultaneous deadlines from the Tokyo office.
She doesn't want to know the bigger picture, just her part.
She doesn't like meeting deadlines.

Who might benefit from having a better overview of the project and a better understanding of how the individual tasks fit together to achieve the group target?

Only Judy
Judy and the Tokyo office
Judy and Karl
Judy and the rest of Karl's team

What does Jo think of Judy?

Judy works well independently but isn't a good team player.
Judy is lazy and prefers managers to tell her exactly what to do.
Judy is very hard-working and capable and will go far in the company.
Judy is very enthusiastic but not very experienced.

Which of these does Jo do in her email?

Mix positives in with the negatives
Focus on the solutions
Use language to show that she's expressing her own opinion or a possibility and not hard facts
All of the above

Discussion

How do you deal with problems at work? Have you ever had to write an email similar to this one?

Political manifestos

Read four political manifestos to practise and improve your reading skills.



A – Rufus Loredó

Westwend is a changing town. People come to Westwend to build a better and more prosperous future for themselves and their family.

As your representative I pledge to:

- fight to improve public schooling for our children
- work to ensure that Westwend is connected more effectively: both its transport and digital connections
- listen to each and every citizen's problems and help them overcome them.

Westwend needs someone who represents all of our communities and not only the wealthy, who puts people before politics and who keeps their promises.

Let me be that person.

B – Lona Williams

My goal is to restore full services at our local hospital and create free parking for visitors. I pledge to provide better care for the elderly and the most vulnerable in our town.

I will create jobs in Westwend by reducing taxes and red tape. Together we will help families overcome the high cost of living by tackling job insecurity and extending free childcare for working parents.

I will fight for our services and to keep our streets safe.

I will support our rural communities and local businesses.

My priority is people. My priority is you.

C – Jamar Repaci

My first goal is to press for a minimum wage of £10 by next year, and ban zero-hours contracts, which contribute greatly to job insecurity. I will join the fight to scrap highly prohibitive university tuition fees. A good education and a good job should be available to all the citizens of Westwend.

Our planet is in a moment of crisis, and Westwend can play its part. I am committed to investment in renewable energy and will provide tax credits to small businesses that engage in green practices. I will also fight to protect the wildlands around Westwend.

I will fight for fairness in government. I will work to protect our planet.

D – Cliff Slater

I pledge to be a full-time, unsponsored representative for the communities of Westwend. I will give you straight answers to your questions, without using jargon or meaningless statistics. I will maintain a full-time office and hold regular open-door sessions with the people of Westwend.

I promise to promote Westwend as a beacon for business and tourism. I will seek to reduce the unnecessary restrictions government places on people and companies. I will campaign for a more simple and transparent tax system for all.

The time of empty promises is over. Let's bring change to our town. Change for the better.

Which manifesto talks about higher education?

- A
- B
- C
- D

Which manifesto talks about transportation?

- A
- B
- C
- D

Which manifesto talks about healthcare?

- A
- B
- C
- D

Which manifestos talk about better communication with citizens?

- A and B
- A and D
- B and C
- C and D

Which manifestos talk about deregulation?

- A and C
- B and C
- B and D
- C and D

Which manifestos talk about better conditions for workers?

- A and B
- A and C
- B and C
- B and D

Discussion

What would you put in a manifesto for your town?

Sustainable supermarkets

Read an article about how some supermarkets have become more environmentally friendly to practise and improve your reading skills.



Many of the major supermarket chains have come under fire with accusations of various unethical acts over the past decade. They've wasted tonnes of food, they've underpaid their suppliers and they've contributed to excessive plastic waste in their packaging, which has had its impact on our environment.

But supermarkets and grocers are starting to sit up and take notice. In response to growing consumer backlash against the huge amounts of plastic waste generated by plastic packaging, some of the largest UK supermarkets have signed up to a pact promising to transform packaging and cut plastic wastage. In a pledge to reuse, recycle or compost all plastic wastage by 2025, supermarkets are now beginning to take some responsibility for the part they play in contributing to the damage to our environment, with one major supermarket announcing their plan to eliminate all plastic packaging in their own-brand products by 2023.

In response to criticisms over food waste, some supermarkets are donating some of their food surplus. However, charities estimate that they are only accessing two per cent of supermarkets' total food surplus, so this hardly seems to be solving the problem. Some say that supermarkets are simply not doing enough. Most supermarkets operate under a veil of secrecy when asked for exact figures of food wastage, and without more transparency it is hard to come up with a

systematic approach to avoiding waste and to redistributing surplus food.

Some smaller companies are now taking matters into their own hands and offering consumers a greener, more environmentally friendly option. Shops like Berlin's Original Unverpakt and London's Bulk Market are plastic-free shops that have opened in recent years, encouraging customers to use their own containers or compostable bags. Online grocer Farmdrop eliminates the need for large warehouses and the risk of huge food surplus by delivering fresh produce from local farmers to its customers on a daily basis via electric cars, offering farmers the lion's share of the retail price.

There is no doubt that we still have a long way to go in reducing food waste and plastic waste. But perhaps the major supermarkets might take inspiration from these smaller grocers and gradually move towards a more sustainable future for us all.

Reading C1: Sustainable supermarkets – 1

Are the sentences true or false?

1. More and more people want supermarkets to reduce the amount of plastic waste they produce.

True

False

2. By 2025, many of the major supermarkets will have stopped using plastic in their in-house products.

True

False

3. Supermarkets are still denying that plastic packaging can cause damage to our environment.

True

False

4. Supermarkets are not telling people how much food they are actually wasting.

True

False

5. There is a grocer in Berlin that doesn't allow customers to use their own containers.

True

False

6. Farmdrop doesn't store large amounts of food and so doesn't produce unnecessary waste.

True

False

7. Farmers supplying food to Farmdrop get a small fraction of the price that customers pay.

True

False

8. The author believes that small shops like Bulk Market and Farmdrop will eventually take over the major supermarkets.

True

False

Discussion

What other environmentally friendly measures should supermarkets and other shops take?

The state of the world

Read an article about the state of the world to practise and improve your reading skills.



If your view of the world comes from watching the news and reading newspapers, you could be forgiven for lying awake at night worrying about the future. Apparently, rising violence and population rates mean humans are both killing each other in ever larger numbers and being born at rates the world's resources can't sustain. To make matters worse, all the wealth is concentrated on a handful of people in the world's richest countries. People in low-income countries live in poverty while the West gets richer. Depressing, isn't it?

But do the statistics support our negative world view or is the world actually improving?

Let's take global population first. It's around 7 billion now, in line with figures predicted by the UN in 1958. By the year 2100, the same experts predict it will be around 11 billion. But did you know that 11 billion is probably as high as that number will get? The rate of increase will slow down in the second half of this century thanks to falling birth rates today.

Falling birth rates? Yes, that's right.

In the last two centuries, improvements in technology and health meant fewer children died young, fuelling rapid population growth. These large families produced even more children who survived into adulthood and had their own children. But with the wider availability

of contraception in the 1960s, the global average number of babies per woman has declined from six babies per woman to as low as two.

The biggest factor in child mortality is poverty. And while it's still true that only 20 per cent of the world takes about 74 per cent of the world's income, 60 per cent of the world now falls into a middle-income group, with 11.6 per cent – the smallest amount of people in history – still living in conditions of extreme poverty. If the majority of the world's people have money, international aid could realistically achieve the UN target of eradicating poverty by 2030. As poverty goes down, life expectancy goes up, birth rates go down because parents can expect their existing children to survive, and the global population stabilises.

As for news stories that make us think the world is an increasingly violent place, there is cause for some optimism too. Between the end of World War II and 1990, there were 30 wars that killed more than 100,000 people. Today there are still civil wars, but countries are mostly co-existing more peacefully than in the past. However, terrorism has shot up in the last few years and, since World War II, wars have killed many more civilians than soldiers. Even for civilians, though, the statistics are not all bad. Although deaths are nine times more likely to be a result of violent crime than political conflict, the global murder rate fell slightly, from 8 per 100,000 people in 2000 to about 5.3 in 2015.

Of course, none of this means the world is perfect, and whether you personally are affected by war and poverty is often down to the lottery of where you're born. Also, we still face huge problems of our own making, particularly environmental ones like global warming, and wealth and natural resources need to be distributed more fairly. But not all the news is bad news, whatever the TV and newspapers might say.

Reading C1: The state of the world – 2

Choose the best answer.

What does the word 'apparently' in the first paragraph tell us about the rise in violence we see in the news?

- The rise is obviously true.
- The rise seems true but evidence might show it isn't.
- The rise seems false but evidence might show it's true.

Which statement about population levels is correct?

- About two hundred years ago, the child mortality rate dropped significantly.
- The rate is growing steadily now.
- The rate will start to drop in the year 2100.

Which factor does NOT cause the birth rate to fall?

- Improvements in healthcare
- The availability of contraception
- Poverty

One of the UN's targets for 2030 is to ...

end poverty.

increase life expectancy.

make population levels stable.

People are more likely to be killed ...

by soldiers.

by politicians.

by criminals.

There is reason to be optimistic because ...

you might win the lottery.

there are some positives despite what the newspapers report.

we're making progress with environmental problems.

Discussion

How optimistic are you about the world?

A music review

Learn how to write an album review.



Want a job as a music journalist? Here's your chance. We're looking for a new lead reviewer for Hot! Magazine but we're not interviewing for the job. Instead, write a review of your favourite album ever. We want to know why you love it and why you think everyone should listen to it. Convince us and you've got the job!

I'm certainly not alone with my choice of favourite album. In fact, Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the USA* has sold 30 million copies worldwide since its release in 1984. Nearly 30 years later, in 2013, Springsteen performed the complete album in concert to the delight of some of his many die-hard fans.

A fast-paced, foot-tapping rock album, *Born in the USA*'s lyrics nevertheless carry emotional weight. Behind the catchy rock melodies that drive these powerhouse classics are stories of the dark side of the American dream. Many tracks deal with the struggles of hard-working ordinary people and the bitterness and anger they feel as life doesn't bring them riches or glory. The song *Glory Days*, for example, is about people in a small town looking back at when they were young and had the world at their feet while *Downbound Train* tells the story of a young man whose life is ruined when he loses his job. It's not hard to imagine that the artist is channelling real people he knew and the life he might have had if he hadn't become a star. The album will leave you in no doubt of the unique and extraordinary talent of the Boss.

Unlike many other best-selling album artists, Springsteen is still releasing chart-topping, stadium-filling new music and remains at the top of his game in his late 60s. It doesn't surprise me at all. This is a man who tells us our most fundamental stories about

ourselves and, when you listen to *Born in the USA*, those stories are as relevant today as they ever were.

Tips

1. The first paragraph should be a general introduction to what you're reviewing. Include the title, artist, and an interesting fact about its success or how it was made.
2. The main body of the review needs detailed observations. Use specific vocabulary (e.g. *lyrics*, *fast-paced*, *catchy melodies*) to comment on particular songs and parts of the music.
3. It is also important to give context. Link the music to the artist's life, or what inspired them, and the political or social context of the album.
4. Try to make the review interesting and relevant to the reader. You can relate the artist's work to real-life experience (yours or that of people in general).
5. Use compound adjectives (e.g. *fast-paced*, *foot-tapping*, *best-selling*) to make your writing highly descriptive.
6. Finish off with a summary of why this album/concert, etc. is important.

Discussion

What's your favourite album of all time?

A proposal for a digital newspaper

Learn how to write a proposal.



There are plans to stop production of your university newspaper. You feel that the newspaper should be saved. You decide to write a proposal to the university suggesting a digital version of the paper.

A proposal for a digital version of the university newspaper

Introduction

This proposal intends to outline how a digital version of the university newspaper, *The Scallion*, could function and aims to show that an online paper is viable for the future of the newspaper. It draws on the views of 3,000 students surveyed in May.

Background

The Scallion is printed weekly and distributed free in faculty buildings, with a readership of approximately 10,000 students. It is written and produced entirely by students. The survey shows that the newspaper is highly valued by university students and staff for entertainment, cultural enrichment and work experience.

Current problems

The cost of printing newspapers is significant. Furthermore, some students do not have easy access to the paper, since the only way to obtain a copy is to physically go to university. An additional environmental issue is that a large number of copies end up as litter on campus.

Proposed solution

It is proposed that the newspaper could shift to an online format. An overwhelming majority (95 per cent) of survey respondents were 'keen' or 'very keen' on this.

The key benefits would be:

- **Lower costs.** Electronic publication is much cheaper than printing, and the website would require minimal maintenance. Although there are considerable initial costs of developing a website, these would be offset over time.
- **Improved accessibility.** Students unable to collect a copy and those with visual impairments would be able to read the paper online.
- **Eco-friendliness.** A website would reduce paper usage and produce no litter.
- **Digital media experience.** For student journalists, gaining experience in running a web-based news site would be invaluable for any job which involves digital communication.

Drawbacks

One issue is information management. The site would have to comply with data protection and privacy laws. Advice should be sought from the IT department.

Another drawback may be personal preference. Twenty-five per cent of survey respondents liked having a physical paper to flick through in a café. However, as this is a minority view, I would suggest that the benefits of the online paper outweigh the inconvenience on this issue.

Conclusion

The results of the consultation suggest that moving the paper online is the best option given that it would reduce costs, be more environmentally-friendly and reach a larger audience. A change to a digital format is therefore recommended to maintain the benefits of the newspaper while addressing its current difficulties.

Tips

1. Start by reading the question carefully. Brainstorm all your thoughts about the proposal first. Then choose your best ideas and plan your paragraphs.
2. Use subheadings to make the structure clear. Start by stating the aim of the proposal (*Introduction*) and giving information about the context (*Background*).
3. Next, move on to the *Current problems* and your *Proposed solution*. You can also mention the *Drawbacks* and how to address them before you finish (*Conclusion*).

4. You should use an impersonal, formal tone for your proposal. Passive verb forms (e.g. *It is proposed that ...* , *Advice should be sought ...*) are a useful way to avoid *I think* or *You should*.
5. The final section should include an overall recommendation based on your previous points.

Discussion

Do you prefer to read a newspaper online or on paper?

A report on a research study

Learn how to write a report on a research study for your company.



Report on staff engagement at Girox Foods

Introduction

At Girox Foods, we are experiencing an annual employee turnover of about 12 per cent. Although this might not seem high at first glance, the industry standard is seven per cent. The principal objective of this report is to investigate the causes of employee engagement within the firm and, based on those, offer recommendations to improve the employees' experience of the workplace and increase employee retention.

Research methods

This study was conducted with over 500 employees of Girox Foods between March and August 2018, with the aim of understanding their experience and expectations of the workplace. The study covered the 80 branches of Girox Foods located in 20 European

countries. In addition to the 500 questionnaires filled out by Girox employees, 120 also participated in ten separate focus groups where participants took part in discussions about their levels of engagement in Girox and their hopes for the future.

Key research findings

- The top reason for employee disengagement given by 35 per cent of those surveyed is the lack of challenging work, followed by having too many working hours (34 per cent).
- 43 per cent of those surveyed said that the top reason for employees quitting their jobs was a lack of recognition, while 31 per cent stated that it was due to bad management.
- There was no correlation between salaries and level of employee engagement.
- 47 per cent stated that their levels of engagement would improve if they felt more ownership of their work. 45 per cent wanted more flexibility both in terms of working hours and locations. 42 per cent were keen to see the company investing more in their career development.
- 59 per cent felt that their commitment to the company would improve if they were given training opportunities to improve their business skills. 64 per cent rated social and cross-cultural intelligence as the most important skill needed in the workplace.
- 41 per cent of respondents felt that there should be increased transparency in company communications, as this would lead to increased trust and more informed decision making.

Recommendations

On the basis of these findings, we recommend that Girox Foods adopt a more people-oriented management style. As part of this, we should explore ways of offering more flexible working hours to our employees and consider how we can enable employees to work from their chosen locations. Managers need to consider a variety of ways to challenge our staff and provide more positive reinforcement and recognition of the work they do. Increased investment in professional development, especially in the area of social and intercultural communication, could also contribute to creating a positive environment for employees to produce their best work.

Tips

1. Organise your report in sections and give each section a heading.
2. The wording of the headings may differ. For example, you could title the third section *Findings* or *Main findings*. However, the structure of all reports is generally the same:
 - a description of the background situation and purpose of the report
 - details of how the study was conducted
 - the main findings
 - recommendations based on those findings.

3. State practical details such as where the research was conducted, how many people participated and which methods were used (questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, etc.).
4. Use bullet points where appropriate to present points clearly.
5. Provide statistics or evidence to back up your claims.
6. Use an impersonal style of writing in order to sound objective. Using the passive voice helps to do this. Avoid using the pronoun *I* (but *we* is sometimes used).
7. Support your recommendations by explaining the benefits they would bring. Alternatively, warn what may happen if the recommendations are not implemented.

Discussion

What motivates you and keeps you engaged at work? What would push you to start looking for a different job?

A response to a complaint

Learn how to write a response to a complaint.



To: pierre_houches@me.com
From: Customer Service Team – TC Insurance
Subject: Your recent policy renewal

Dear Mr Houches,

Thank you for your recent renewal of your insurance policy with Top Car Insurance.

It has been brought to our attention that at the end of your renewal call you registered a complaint and stated that you were dissatisfied with the service you had received.

We value your custom and I assure you that we take all customer feedback seriously. On behalf of the company I would like to apologise for the length of time it took for you to receive your final quote for this renewal. I am also sorry for the inconvenience caused when the discounts you received were not automatically applied.

We have taken your suggestions on board and will review our renewals process for existing customers. We understand your point that the process should not take as long for existing customers as for new customers buying a new policy.

In appreciation of the many years you have been a customer of Top Car Insurance we are happy to refund you the difference in price between your new and your previous premium, i.e. £73.20. I have also made a note on your account to ensure that your next renewals process will run more smoothly for you.

We value your feedback and will use it to improve our service.

We trust that you will find this a satisfactory response to your complaint and that this correspondence will bring this matter to a close. However, should you wish to discuss this matter further, please let us know how best to contact you.

With kind regards,

Rowena Harrod

Customer Service Team

Tips

1. Use a formal register.
2. Choose vocabulary that is more objective and reduces negative emotions where possible, e.g. *dissatisfied* rather than *unhappy/upset*, *inconvenience* rather than *trouble/problem*.
3. Acknowledge the complaint and show you understand the problem. Focus on the facts and avoid making excuses or placing blame on individual people.
4. Apologise and explain what steps will be taken to ensure it doesn't happen again.
5. Emphasise the positive relationship with the customer:
We value your custom ... / feedback ...
In appreciation of the many years you have been a customer ...
We are happy to ...
We trust that you will ...
6. Offer some kind of solution or compensation if appropriate.

Discussion

Do you have any tips for dealing with customer complaints?

An email explaining an incident

Learn how to write an email to explain an incident to your manager.



To: steve@red-ribbon.com
From: sanjit@red-ribbon.com
Subject: Process issues in the team

Dear Steve,

Since you requested in our recent line management meeting for me to inform you of any issues, I'm writing to tell you about a recent incident. Last week, after experiencing some difficulties with the order processing system, tensions arose in the team and a confrontation occurred between two team members.

I've outlined what led to this incident below:

1. There was a system update that we weren't expecting last week. The update slightly changed the interface menu. Everything is still there but people have said it's not easy to find some of the menu items they're looking for.
2. There seems to have been a period of time after the update that new entries weren't being saved. This led to some work being lost. We worked overtime to catch up on everything and all orders have been processed. But as a consequence there was a general feeling of pressure and tiredness in the team.

As a result of these challenging circumstances there was some tension, leading to a disagreement between Johann and Maria. Johann lost his temper and made some inappropriate remarks to Maria.

I met with them both in order to reflect on and resolve the conflict. Johann has apologised for his behaviour and he realises that Maria could have chosen to start disciplinary proceedings. They have worked together on a plan to improve communication and therefore alleviate tensions within the team.

I've also asked our colleagues in the IT department to run a training session for us all on how to best use the system in light of the recent software upgrades.

There's no specific action for you to take, but I felt it important that you're kept in the loop.

I'll keep you posted.

Regards,

Sanjit

Tips

1. Write clearly and get straight to the issue.
2. Soften the impact of bad news by using words like *issue*, *challenge* and *difficulty* rather than *problem*. Using *seems to be* rather than *is* also has the same effect.
3. Use positive words with a negation, e.g. *not easy*, rather than negative-sounding words, e.g. *difficult*.
4. Focus on the issue rather than people involved by using passive forms, e.g. ... *new entries weren't being saved*.
5. Focus on solutions rather than problems.
6. State clearly what action, if any, is necessary.

Discussion

Do you ever have to write emails like this at work? Do you find it difficult to give bad news?

An email request

Learn how to write a formal email to make a request.



Dear Ms Leitman,

I am writing to request your help following a change in my circumstances.

As you know, I am enrolled on the Basic Spanish course at your college, which starts in September. However, due to unforeseen family events, I have had to leave the country for a while to assist my parents in Hong Kong.

At present it is not clear when I will be able to return and unfortunately I will not be able to start the course as planned.

I would like to request a refund for the course fees already paid. I apologise for the short notice and for any inconvenience caused. In the event that a refund is not possible, I would be grateful if you could postpone my enrolment until my return.

Thank you in advance for your help and I hope to be able to update you on the situation soon.

Yours sincerely,

Honor Singh

Tips

1. Organise the letter clearly into:

- The reason for writing
 - The nature of the problem
 - The outcome you'd like
 - An apology for the inconvenience
2. Don't go into too much personal detail when explaining the problem, as this is a formal situation with a person you don't know well.
 3. To make polite requests use the phrase *I would be grateful if you could ...*
 4. Using nouns instead of verbs can make your writing sound more formal. (For example, instead of *My circumstances have changed*, say *There has been a change in my circumstances.*)
 5. Sign off *Yours sincerely*, if you know the person's name and *Yours faithfully*, if you don't.

Discussion

When was the last time you had to cancel something because of an unforeseen situation?

An email to a friend

Learn how to write an email to a friend.



Hi Rebecca,

How ARE you?! It's been ages!! I thought I'd drop you a line seeing as I'm stuck in the airport with nothing to do but make use of the free Wi-Fi.

Not that writing to you isn't top of my list of things to do, of course ;) but I've been totally snowed under at work, plus all the family stuff that's been going on ... Anyway, I'm just about to go on a much-needed holiday so I really can't complain!

Anyhoo ... what have you been up to? I saw Carol a couple of months ago – don't know if you heard what happened with her job but it made me feel grateful I only slightly hate mine – and she was saying your book is going to be published?! GREAT news!!! Send me a link and I'll definitely buy it and leave a five-star review :)

As for me, same old, same old re: job. Maggie and I broke up a while ago, as you know, but we're getting on much better now and it's working out far better for the kids. No-one new on the horizon but I'm off to Canada travelling for a month (if this plane ever leaves!) so who knows?!

Actually, I'll be flying over your house in a few hours. I'll wave! Let's make a plan to see each other when I get back, OK?

Hope life's treating you well!

Lots of love,

Sarah

Tips

1. It's common to start with a reason for writing and refer to how long it's been since you saw or wrote to each other.
2. Use phrasal verbs (e.g. *going on*, *been up to*) and informal expressions (e.g. *drop you a line*, *same old*, *same old*) to give it a friendly, informal tone.
3. Use emoticons or multiple exclamation marks (!!!) or question marks (???) to add extra excitement and feeling. You can also use capital letters for emphasis (*How ARE you? GREAT news!!*).
4. Before signing off you can finish with closing phrases like *Hope all's well!* / *Looking forward to seeing you!* / *Best of luck with ... !*
5. Sign off with *Lots of love* for close friends or family or *Take care* if you are not so close.

Discussion

How do you keep in touch with friends?

An essay about women in science

Learn how to write an essay that suggests reasons for and solutions to a problem.



In most universities there are more male students than female students on science courses. What is the reason for this? What could be done to balance out the numbers?

In higher education, science subjects are typically dominated by male students. This negatively impacts the world of work, as fewer females then go into the science, technology and engineering sectors. This essay will explore the reasons for the lack of gender diversity in science and suggest ways to create equal opportunities in this area.

The most likely reason for the imbalance is that society reinforces the idea that boys and girls have different interests and abilities. We see this from a very early age when little boys are given cars and Lego while girls get dolls. The former are encouraged to build things whereas the latter learn to care for others. Later on, we are told that girls are better at languages or boys have better spatial awareness. In fact, there is no evidence that biological differences between the sexes make one gender more talented than another at a particular subject. It is society, not nature, that tells us girls should favour arts and humanities and leave maths and physics to the boys.

Coupled with this is the lack of positive female role models youngsters see doing science-related jobs. Cartoons and stories often show the crazy scientist, genius inventor, or adventurous astronaut as a man. Furthermore, there is an unfortunate perception that scientists are geeky, have poor social skills or that their work is lonely and detached from the rest of the world. These are false stereotypes portrayed by the media, but they may mean that girls do not identify with scientists, and see science as an unappealing career path. If girls saw more positive female role models in science it would give them more confidence and a greater sense of belonging in those subjects.

Given these points, it is important to tackle this issue right from a child's early education. By the time young women are at university, it may already be too late to disprove the view that science is 'not for them'. Hence, for very young children gender-neutral play needs to be encouraged. As children get older, both the education system

and the media must raise awareness of female achievements in the field of science, as well as exposing them to a more diverse set of characters in books and films. We need to find ways to show young girls that science is fun, interesting, and, most importantly, theirs too.

Tips

1. Read the question carefully. If the question asks you to discuss the reasons for a problem and suggest solutions, make sure you do both.
2. In your introduction, restate the question in your own words and say what your essay will do. *This essay will outline the reasons for ... and offer solutions to the problem.*
3. Plan the paragraphs of your essay before you write. Start each paragraph with a topic sentence that summarises the main idea of the paragraph.
4. Develop your position fully by extending your ideas and using examples to support your arguments. Use linking expressions like *Coupled with*, *Furthermore*, *In fact* and *Given these points* to show what is coming next.
5. Try to use a wide range of vocabulary. Use natural-sounding collocations like *equal opportunities* and *role model*. Avoid repetition by using synonyms or words with similar meanings: *girls*, *young women*, *females*; *children*, *youngsters*. You can also use *the former* and *the latter* to refer to things you have just mentioned.
6. Build the conclusion from the ideas in the essay rather than introducing new ones.

Discussion

Which subjects have more female students and which have more male students in your country?

An opinion essay

Learn how to write an opinion essay.



Some people think that some types of criminals should not go to prison. Instead they should do unpaid work in the community. To what extent do you agree?

Owing to the great variety of crimes that can be punishable by prison, some people argue that not all criminals are the same and it would therefore be more appropriate to give certain criminals community service instead. I agree that in some cases, prison may not be the best solution and community service would probably have more benefits.

One justification given for prisons is to keep society safe by removing criminals from the outside world. So the first thing to consider is if someone who has broken the law is a danger to other people. In the case of violent crime, there is an argument to keep the perpetrator away from society. However, burglary or possession of drugs, for example, does not involve violence against other people so the criminal does not present a direct danger to anyone in the community. Keeping these types of criminals in prison is expensive for the taxpayer and does not appear to be an effective punishment as they often commit the same crime again when they come out of prison.

Personally, I also believe punishments should reform people so they do not reoffend. A further reason not to put these people in prison is that they may mix with more dangerous and violent criminals, potentially committing a worse crime when they are released. By keeping them in the community, helping others, they not only learn new skills, but they could also develop more empathy and care towards others. If this occurs, society can only benefit.

Critics of this more rehabilitative approach to crime believe that justice should be harsh in order to deter people from committing similar crimes and that community service could be less likely to have that effect. However, there is very little evidence to suggest that long prison sentences deter criminals.

In conclusion, putting criminals who are not a danger to society in prison is expensive and, in my opinion, ineffective, both as a deterrent and as a form of rehabilitation. Community service for non-violent crimes benefits both society and the offender. That said, it would be useful to have more data to work out whether community service or prison is more likely to stop someone reoffending. I strongly believe that decisions on how best to deal with criminals should be based on evidence of what actually works.

Tips

1. Introduce your essay by restating the question in your own words.
2. If the essay asks you *to what extent do you agree?*, make your opinion clear throughout. You can either agree, partially agree or disagree with the statement, explaining and justifying your opinion.
3. The structure should be:
 - Introduction
 - The first reason why you agree/disagree
 - The second reason why you agree/disagree
 - The third reason why you agree/disagree (if you have one)
 - Conclusion
4. Use phrases to organise and link your ideas, e.g. *Owing to ...* , *One justification for ...* , *The first thing to consider is ...* , *A further reason ...* , *In conclusion ...* .
5. If you do not have solid evidence for your ideas, use modal verbs such as *might*, *may* or *could* (e.g. *they could develop more empathy and care*) or other tentative phrases (e.g. *it does not appear to be an effective punishment*).
6. Conclude by restating your opinion and summarising your two or three main arguments.

Discussion

Do you agree that community service is better than prison for some crimes?

Conference bios

Learn how to write a short biography for a conference programme.



Julie Wong

Julie Wong is a leading researcher in the field of Robotics and AI. She has been published extensively as author and co-author of over 50 papers in highly regarded, peer-reviewed journals. She frequently speaks at international conferences and was awarded the prestigious Royal Academy Simone Fielding fellowship in 2012. Julie lives with her family in a smart home she designed herself.

Terrie Sharp

Best-selling author Terrie Sharp knows how to tell a good story or two, having twice won the Olive Crime Writer Award. Born on the housing estate with the highest crime rate in Glasgow, she learned to keep quiet, stay out of trouble and how to open car doors with a knife. Luckily, she only used her knowledge to write her novels and she's not so quiet these days, appearing on popular daytime shows like Police Today and at writing conferences throughout the UK.

Ahmed Modine

Ahmed Modine started his first business at age 14 and retired at 32. Along the way he went bankrupt twice and lost his house and car once. What he learned about starting again from scratch became the number one most popular online course on U-Learn.com: *From up to down to up again – How to succeed when everything sucks*. What he doesn't know about turning an idea into a profitable business isn't worth knowing.

Tips

1. Bios are often written in the third person, especially for conferences, events and books. Social media bios can be less formal and in the first person.
2. Use your full name in the first sentence and refer to an accomplishment to help people remember who you are. (*Julie Wong is a leading researcher ... / Best-selling author Terrie Sharp ... / Ahmed Modine started his first business at age 14 ...*)
3. Keep it short and interesting so people get all the key information before they stop reading.
4. If the bio is for an event like a conference, only include the details that are relevant to this particular audience. For a general bio, for example on your website, you can provide links for readers to find out more.
5. One or two personal details (e.g. *Julie lives with her family in a smart home she designed herself ... / She learned how to open car doors with a knife. / ... he lost his house and car once*) help create interest and a connection with the reader.

Discussion

When was the last time you had to write a short bio?

Describing a table

Learn how to summarise information in a table and write a report on the main features.



The table below gives information about some of the world's most studied languages. Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Language	Number of people learning the language	Number of native speakers	Number of countries where the language is spoken
English	1.5 billion	527 million	101
French	82 million	118 million	51
Chinese	30 million	1.39 billion	33
Spanish	14.5 million	389 million	31
Italian	8 million	67 million	29
Japanese	3 million	123 million	25

The table illustrates some interesting facts about some of the world's most popular languages to learn. It allows comparisons between the number of people who study a language versus those who speak it as a mother tongue, and shows how many countries have speakers of each of the languages.

The prominence of English is striking. 1.5 billion people are learning English compared to only 82 million studying the second most popular language to learn, French. English is spoken in 101 countries, roughly twice as many as French and three times more than Chinese. English is the only language with more learners than native speakers.

In terms of native speakers, Chinese is the most spoken language, more than double English with 1.39 billion. It is the third most popular language to learn with 30 million learners. Spanish has over five times more native speakers than Italian, but proportionally fewer learners at 14.5 million for Spanish and 8 million for Italian. As for Japanese, it is the least studied language of those given with 3 million learners.

Overall, more people are learning English than the other languages combined and English is spoken in the highest number of countries. However, Chinese has by far the greatest number of native speakers. There seems to be little correlation between how many native speakers there are of a language and the number of learners, but there is a stronger link between the number of learners and how many countries have speakers.

Please note: *This page was designed for writing practice only. Information and statistics in the table may not be accurate.*

Tips

1. Start by saying what information is shown. If you are writing in an exam, try to avoid repeating the same wording as the question, e.g. *The table illustrates some interesting facts about some of the world's most popular languages to learn.*
2. In the second paragraph give an overview of the most important features of the information.
3. Be selective and choose the key observations and trends. You don't have to write about every single detail.
4. Divide your observations into paragraphs about different aspects of the data. A concluding paragraph is not always necessary.
5. Don't use your own general knowledge to give reasons for the data or to add more information than is shown. The question only requires you to summarise and report the data in the table.
6. Use a variety of structures for:
 - making comparisons, e.g. *slightly more than, by far the highest, as ... as, compared to, double the number of, correlation between*
 - approximating, e.g. *nearly, roughly, almost*
 - stating what you are referring to, e.g. *in terms of ... , as for ... , of those given.*

Discussion

Which language apart from English would you like to learn?

The changing workplace

Learn how to write about changes in the business workplace.



What skills will the workforce of the future need?

As technological innovations continue to change the workplace, we are seeing more industries entrust their operations to new gadgets, software and programs that can transform the workplace. One such technology that has the potential to revolutionise workplaces in the coming years is RPA (Robotic Process Automation). With more industries starting to embrace RPA software, RPA robots would be able to handle mundane, repetitive tasks like some of the clerical work normally dealt with by administrative staff, thereby lowering running costs and increasing productivity.

There is a common concern that companies employing technology like RPA are only interested in increasing their profit margins through cost reduction, and that this trend would eventually leave most of the workforce jobless. However, while it is true that the menial tasks of administrative and clerical jobs are likely to be taken over by automation, the demands on the average office worker will evolve to include more creative work, managerial duties and communication with clients and suppliers.

With this shift in focus, the skills required of future workers are also bound to change. Moving away from basic data entry skills, the worker of the future will be expected to have transferable problem-solving and critical thinking skills that will enable them to tackle any difficult situation and work independently to find solutions.

The ability to adapt and be agile would also be essential in a world that is likely to become increasingly volatile, uncertain and complex. Having such flexibility, coupled with the desire to keep learning and the initiative to step forward, the successful worker of the future is one who will be able to use their skills to seek out opportunities, make improvements and take on new challenges wherever they'll be working.

By equipping our future generation of workers with such business skills, we can ensure that when automation fully takes over, our workers will have the survival skills to become better employees and leaders of the future.

Tips

1. It is helpful to start with a more general statement before narrowing it down to talking about a specific example, e.g. *technological advancements will continue to change the workplace* → *one such technology is RPA*.
2. Use clauses to show if a change is going to happen:
 - over a period of time, e.g. *As technological innovations continue to change the workplace, ...* / *With more industries starting to embrace RPA software, ...*
 - at some point in the future, e.g. *when automation fully takes over, ...*
3. Connect new paragraphs to what was previously written in order to achieve better cohesion, e.g. *With this shift in focus, ...* / *The ability to adapt and be agile would also be essential ...* / *By equipping our future generation of workers with such business skills, ...*
4. When talking about future trends, use a variety of phrases to show the different levels of probability of things happening, e.g. *to be likely to, to have the potential to, to be expected to, to be bound to*.
5. Conclude with a summary of the main points of your article.

Discussion

How do you think the workplace of the future might change? What business skills do you think will be necessary for the worker of the future to be successful?