

BBC Learning English
Talk about English
Live webcast – Good, plain English
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About this script

Please note that this is not a word for word transcript of the programme as broadcast. In the recording process changes may have been made which will not be reflected here.

Jackie: Hello, this is Talk About English, coming to you live from Bush House in London. I'm Jackie Dalton.

Callum: And I'm Callum Robertson. In the programme today we continue our focus on news and the media.

Jackie: And find out what makes good, plain English.

Trevor: In advance of the meeting there will be a pre-planning plenary session with all committee members to combine together reflections on the suggested proposal

Jackie: And what makes English that isn't quite so good.

Callum: Also, blogging...

Jackie: And how one London blogger gained international fame

Callum: Our guests today are Anna McKane - experienced journalist, trainer and author of a new book on news writing. Welcome Anna. Can you tell us a little more about yourself?

Anna: (responds)

Jackie: And we're also joined by an English learner, Stefan Roemermann. Thank you for joining us. Tell us about yourself.

Stefan: (responds)

Jackie: The focus of this programme is how to write and speak in good clear English. This is part of our wider look at news and the media – a theme we've had over the last couple of weeks. I think there's a good reason why we're linking the topics of news and good, plain English: Anna, good news writing can really teach all of us something about how to use language in our everyday lives, can't it?

Anna: (responds)

Jackie: Anna, throughout the programme, you're going to be giving us tips on what makes good English. And this might be especially useful for those of you who want to enter our competition to win an mp3 player by sending us your eyewitness report – details of how to enter are on our website. The deadline is Monday 18th of September. But let's start with Anna's first bit of advice on good English.

Anna: (use plain everyday English).

Jackie: Well let's set a challenge for Stefan, our English learner here in the studio. We're going to give you some words and you've got to come up with simple, everyday versions. Here are the words:

in advance of – before

assist – help

approximately – about

in order to – to

commence – start

utilise – use

request – ask

residence - home

Jackie: We hear or see examples of unnecessarily complicated language use quite often – I hear the first one almost everyday. Listen to these phrases and try to spot what's wrong with them.

Phrases

Please allow passengers off the train first before boarding

Please enter your PIN number

A free gift

An aromatic aroma

A new innovation

If you don't get better you'll never improve

A bouquet of flowers

All: (discuss)

Phrases

A brief moment
To combine together
A complete monopoly
He was completely destroyed
A difficult dilemma
A new bride

All: (discuss)

Jackie: Coming up, we'll hear about your dream jobs.

Callum: But first, let's have one more tip from Anna on how to write good, plain English. We've had "Don't use too many words," we've had "Use simple everyday words." What else would you recommend?

Anna: (Use 'listen to me words' – go easy on the adjectives, use verbs etc.)

Jackie: Now you've got quite a good exercise that students can do to help them improve their English and we're going to get Stefan, our English learner here in the studio to do the exercise. You can do it too if you're listening at home.

Anna: (Exercise - 'The person ran down the road towards the building' exercise...how to be more precise, more arresting)

Callum: And if you're doing this at home, why not send us your sentences and we'll see what we come up with. The address is talkaboutenglish@bbc.co.uk

Jackie: Coming up later on, precision in using English.

Callum: But first, last week we heard from Mark, a foreign correspondent – someone who reports from a different country on what's happening there. Mark is a very experienced foreign correspondent who has travelled to many different parts of the world. This week, we're going to hear from someone who is just starting out as a foreign correspondent.

Jackie: Jonny is 24, he's trained as a journalist and he's got a fantastic first job. He's off to Madagascar in two days to work as a reporter out there. I spoke to him earlier and asked him to explain what he'd be doing. As you listen, try to answer this question: what is a stringer?

Jonny

Callum: So as Jonny explained to us, a stringer is someone who is placed in a country and looks out for news stories there and reports on them. But they're usually not directly employed by the news organisation – they're paid for each story that gets printed or broadcast, but they don't get a constant fixed salary.

Jackie: Jonny used the expression 'keeping an ear to the ground' – what does that mean?

Callum: (explains - to make sure you always know what's happening)

Jackie: Next I asked Jonny why he wanted to be a stringer? What reasons does he give?

Jonny

Callum: Jonny wants to be a stringer for lots of reasons, including 'to open people's eyes' - to make them aware of what's going on in different parts of the world and to challenge himself.

Jackie: Next I asked Jonny what skills he thought were needed to do his job. He'll mention several, but there's one skill he's a bit worried about – he's not sure if he is very good at it. Which one is he concerned about?

Jonny

Jackie: Well Jonny was a bit worried about organisational skills - he said he's never been that good at being organised. What other skills did he mention?

Callum: He said you've got to be good at motivating yourself, which means to make yourself do things without someone having to tell you do to them. He said there would be no-one breathing down his neck.

Jackie: Yes, that's a nice phrase - what does "to have someone breathing down your neck" mean?

Callum: (explains - to constantly watch them and tell them what they should be doing)

Callum: Jonny said you have to be good at talking to people. Anna, do you agree that's an important part of being a good journalist – building up relationships?

Anna: (responds)

Jackie: Next I asked Jonny if other foreign correspondents had given him any advice about his new job. What advice has he been given about his career?

Jonny

Jackie: Anna, Jonny's advice to listeners entering our eye witness report competition. "Tell it how it is, keep it simple." Good advice?

Anna: (responds)

Jackie: Let's go back to hear a last word from Jonny.

Jonny

END OF PART ONE

Jackie: You're listening to talk about English with Jackie Dalton, Callum Robertson and our two guests today: Anna McKane – journalist, author and trainer and Stefan Roemermann a blossoming journalist from Germany and English learner.

Callum: We've just heard from Jonny who's just about to go off on his dream job. And this week on our website we've been asking you what your dream job would be. We've asked actors to voice a couple of the messages that you've sent in, and the messages we've chosen all relate to news to fit in with our news theme.

Jackie: The first one is from My Nguyen in Vietnam. What does she want to do?

My Nguyen

I am a journalist in Vietnam and correspondent is also my dream job. I have visited many places in my country, but I have not gone abroad yet. I always dream of visiting other countries, meeting foreign people and learn about their culture, their languages. When I was a child, I wanted to be a tour guide when I grew up. But now, I'd love to be a reporter. I think everyone has their own dream job, but just a few people can make their dream come true.

Jackie: Well, that's one listener who, like Jonny, wants to travel the world as a reporter. What about Shawn from China, what does he want to do?

Shawn

I would say only a few people in this world are doing what they want to do at work, and most of us are just doing our jobs that do not suit our interests. For me, my dream job is to be an **anchorman** on our national television, broadcasting English news to viewers around the country and the rest of the world

Jackie: Shawn wants to be an 'anchorman'. What's that?

Callum: (explains – someone who introduces news and reads news reports - include term news anchor)

Jackie: Finally let's hear a message from Radek in Poland. Why did he change his mind about what he wanted to do?

Radek

As long as I can remember I always wanted to be a war photographer. When I was a young boy I watched a lot of documentary movies about professional photographers all around the world. It simply fired my imagination, but later I realized that it's almost impossible for me, to be a war photographer because of the danger. Therefore, 4 years ago I started taking photos in my country, about ordinary people and their lives. I know now that I don't need shots of tragedies to take a good photo. I want to be a "simple" photo journalist.

Callum: Radek always wanted to be a war photographer but then he realised it was too dangerous. So instead, he takes pictures of people in his own country.

Jackie: And what he says about wanting to be a simple photo journalist is really interesting – news doesn't just have to be 'big stories'.

All: (discuss)

Jackie: Let's have a reminder of some of the vocabulary that's come up so far.

Recap

to keep an ear to the ground - to make sure you always know what's happening – "I try to keep my ear to the ground so I don't miss any big news stories."

motivating yourself - to be able to do things without needing to be told to – "I'm hopeless at motivating myself, I work much better if I have a boss telling me what to do."

to breathe down someone's neck - to constantly watch them and tell them what they should be doing – "My boss is always breathing down my neck, I wish he'd just let me get on with my work!"

a news anchor - someone who introduces news and reads news reports – "And our news anchor this evening is Mike Malone."

Jackie: In an earlier webcast, we talked about how journalism is changing and part of that related to the idea of citizen journalism – Callum, could you remind us what that is?

Callum: (explains- news created by ordinary members of the public)

Jackie: An area of citizen journalism that's recently become very popular is blogging. What's blogging? Let's have a reminder from language expert professor David Crystal

Crystal

In 2001, I wrote a book called, *Language and the Internet*, and I didn't mention the word 'blog'. Well, this year, I have a second edition out. In it goes, that's how fast the internet moves.

Those who blog, bloggers, carry out the activity of blogging, setting up a blog site, with a unique web address in order to do so. It's an abbreviation of 'web log'; a phrase that was first used in 1997, both as a noun and as a verb, a web log.

It's essentially a content management system, a way of getting content on to a webpage; it's a genre, a bit like diary writing, or bulletin posting. I mean, people add their posts or diary entries, with some regularity, if you're a blogger you do it daily at least, often several times a day.

So at one extreme there's the personal diary, kept by an individual who wants to tell the whole world about his or her activities, or interests and opinions and so on. And

then at the other extreme, there's the corporate blog, maintained by an institution, such as a radio station or a music store.

Well, there are even more coinages about to come, it seems to me. The totality of all blog sites in the world is known as the blogosphere. And if you have a blog and it goes on for too long, be careful, because somebody might describe you as having blogarrhoea!

Jackie: We're going to hear from a London blogger, who calls herself Annie Mole. Like most bloggers, she blogs as a hobby – something she does in her spare time for pleasure.

Callum: Annie blogs about one thing in particular and that's the London underground or the tube. She writes about what it's like travelling on the tube, any news about the underground and so on.

Jackie: Traffic to her blog suddenly increased in July last year. Callum, could you explain that word 'traffic' in this context.

Callum: (explains - the quantity of people visiting a website)

Jackie: Well traffic to Annie's website suddenly went up just over a year ago. Why was that? Listen to find out.

Annie

Callum: Well traffic to Annie's site went up because of the London bombing. It went from about a thousand a day to nineteen thousand.

Jackie: We're going to hear more from Annie. This time, try to answer this question: Why does she think people like to turn to bloggers as a source of news?

Annie

Jackie: Annie said people like to follow blogs because you're hearing from a real person – they're giving their own reactions and "have no axe to grind?" Callum what does that mean?

Callum: (explains)

Jackie: As the day went on Annie started getting messages and calls – where does she say they were coming from?

Annie

Callum: Annie says hundreds of people from America started sending her messages, and even the New York Times picked up on her blog, as well as newspapers in Australia.

Jackie: Well you can read some of Annie's blog by following the link on the right side of our webcast page. Meanwhile, time for a recap of some the new vocabulary that's come up

Recap

Citizen journalism - news created by ordinary members of the public –

"Citizen journalism is becoming more popular now that people can record video pictures with their phones."

A blog - a diary on the internet –

"A lot of my friends have blogs, it's a great way to find out more about their lives."

Internet traffic - the quantity of people visiting a website –

"Traffic to my blog has gone down, it must be getting boring!"

END OF PART TWO

Jackie: You're listening to talk about English with Jackie Dalton, Callum Robertson and our guests today: Anna McKane – journalist, author and trainer and Stefan Roemermann, an English learner from Germany.

Jackie: We've been talking about blogging and hearing from the London Underground blogger, Annie Mole. Here at BBC Learning English, we have our very own blog.

Callum: (explain teacher/student blog)

Jackie: On the phone from Slovakia we've got Anita...

(talk to Anita)

Jackie: Stefan we set you an exercise earlier on where you had to come up with new words for a sentence we gave you. How are you getting on?

Stefan: (responds)

Callum: The sentence we gave you was 'The person ran down the road towards the building,' What have you come up with?

Stefan: (responds)

Jackie: One part of using language which is very important for most journalists is choosing words which are accurate and neutral. Callum, could you explain what that means?

Callum: (being fair)

Jackie: We're going to hear now from Fouad Razek, formerly Head of News and Current Affairs for the BBC's Arabic service. He's very much aware of the importance of choosing your words carefully as a journalist so that you explain things as objectively as possible. He's about to give us an example of a recent difficulty with language that came up. Have a listen

Fouad

Jackie: (summarise: martyr – pleases Palestinians, terrorist - pleases Israel use 'suicide attacks' as a more neutral phrase) Anna, is choosing the right language difficult for journalists?

Anna: (responds)

Jackie: Stefan, you had a question for us?

Stefan: What does 'watershed' mean?

Callum: (Explains 'watershed' – a time in the evening after which television programmes which are not considered suitable for children can be broadcast)

Jackie: That's all we've got time for. Next week: the media, Poland – our country of the month - and the results of our competition to win an mp3 player. You've got until Monday 18th September to enter – details of how to do that are on our website. Thanks to our guests, Anna and Stefan and do join us again for more Talk About English. Goodbye!

All: Goodbye!