



ESL Podcast 316 – Business Emails and Abbreviations

GLOSSARY

re: – regarding; related to; on the subject of

* Did you read Fern’s memo re: the change in the vacation policy?

headway – progress; advancement; the process of moving a task or project forward

* Even though Jimmie has a private teacher, he hasn’t made much headway in learning French.

settled – planned; arranged; organized; decided

* The company has settled on a list of 200 guests to invite for the conference.

e.g. – *exempli gratia* (Latin); for example; for instance

* Bernard is excited about the benefits of the new position (e.g., better pay, a longer vacation, and a new office).

venue – place; the location where something will happen

* Have you considered the Grand Hotel as a venue for the company’s New Year’s party?

agenda – a list of things that will be discussed in a meeting, for how long, and in what order

* According to this agenda, we’re going to talk about that issue for only an hour.

i.e. – *id est* (Latin); that is; in other words

* Everyone was angry at Jack (i.e., no one thought he was a good manager).

free rein – freedom to do what one wants; liberty; ability to make the decisions

* Rachelle was given free rein on the project, as long as it didn’t cost more than \$15,000 in total.

as (one) sees fit – as one wants; as one likes; with whatever details one chooses

* Kelly likes to spend money as she sees fit and never hesitates to buy expensive things.

to hammer out – to decide or determine the final details of something

* Most of the work is finished, and now, they’re just hammering out the final report.



ESL Podcast 316 – Business Emails and Abbreviations

etc. – *et cetera* (Latin); used to show that other things could be placed in a list; used to show that the list is not complete

* At the park, people were playing baseball, volleyball, Frisbee, soccer, etc.

et al. – *et alii* (Latin); and others; used at the end of a list of people to show that other people's names could be included in the list; used to show that a list of names is not complete

* This book was written by five authors, but I only see Hall et al. listed here.

remaining – things that still need to be done or addressed; things that haven't been finished yet

* The only remaining thing we need to do to buy that house is to sign the papers.

in line with (one's) thinking – in agreement; with the same opinion

* Sammy isn't in line with his boss's thinking, but he has to do what she says anyway.

ASAP – as soon as possible; as soon as one can

* Please let me know ASAP whether you'll be able to finish the report by Friday.

P.S. – post script; used to add another message at the end of a letter or email, below one's name

* I can't wait to see you at the show tonight.

Love,

Janice

P.S. Don't forget to bring your umbrella!

to wrap up – to finish; to complete; to end

* Cynthia is trying to wrap up the project so that she can go on vacation.



ESL Podcast 316 – Business Emails and Abbreviations

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Luis write that they need to hammer out the details?
 - a) Because he's writing about a carpentry project.
 - b) Because they need to finish planning the meeting.
 - c) Because "hammering out" is a way to say "writing down."

 2. Who should be invited to the meeting?
 - a) Only Adam, Lin, Toshi, and Cecelia.
 - b) Adam, Lin, Toshi, or Ceclia, but not all four.
 - c) Adam, Lin, Toshi, Ceclia, and some other people.
-

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

settled

The word "settled," in this podcast, means planned, arranged, or decided: "Have you settled on a name for your baby?" When talking about arguments, the verb "to settle" means to stop fighting and come to an agreement: "After five years, the two men finally settled their disagreement." The verb "to settle" also means to move to a new place, build a home, and begin living there: "Many people who were looking for gold settled in Oregon in the 1800s." The word "settlement" refers to a group of homes in an area where few people live: "Are there very many settlements in northern Alaska?" A "settlement" is also an arrangement where one person pays someone to not go to court: "Ori received a \$1 million settlement for agreeing not to sue the tobacco company."

to wrap up

In this podcast, the phrase "to wrap up" means to finish or complete something: "How long did it take you to wrap up the interview?" The informal phrase "that's a wrap" is used at the end of meetings or projects to show that something is finished: "If no one has any other comments, then that's a wrap and we can all go home." The verb "to wrap" means to put something around someone or something else: "Zelma was cold on the bus, so she wrapped a blanket around her legs." The phrase "to wrap up" can also mean to put paper around something that one has bought, or to decorate a gift with colored paper: "How would you like me to wrap up your purchase, sir?" Or, "Mary wrapped up all the gifts in green paper with red ribbons."



ESL Podcast 316 – Business Emails and Abbreviations

CULTURE NOTE

In American business “correspondence” (written communication), there are many common “salutations” (greeting) and “abbreviations” (small groups of letters that represent other words or phrases). It’s important to use the correct salutations and abbreviations in formal business writing.

If you are friends with the reader, you might use his or her first name: “Dear Jennifer.” If you know the person’s name, but don’t know him or her (or at least not very well), use the last name: “Dear Mr. Drake.” If you are writing to a woman and do not know whether she is married (Mrs.) or single (Miss), it is best to use “Ms.,” which can refer to either a married or single woman.

Sometimes we don’t know who will read the letter we’re writing. In that situation, some people like to start their letters with “To whom it may concern.” Other people prefer “Dear Sir or Madam.” Both of these are very formal salutations. Occasionally businesses will use “Dear friend” or “Dear client,” but these aren’t as professional as the other “options” (choices).

In formal business correspondence, the salutation should be followed by a “colon” (two dots, one on top of the other; “:”). In informal business correspondence, the salutation can be followed by a “comma” (a short, curved line normally used to separate words; “,”).

At the end of the letter, below the writer’s “signature” (hand-written name), abbreviations may provide additional information about the letter. For example, “cc:” means “carbon copy” and is used to show that a copy of the same letter was sent to another person. For example, “cc: Bill Warren” means that a copy was sent to Bill Warren. Another abbreviation, “encl” means “enclosure” and “indicates” (shows) that other pieces of paper, like receipts or proposals, have been placed in the same envelope.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – c



ESL Podcast 316 – Business Emails and Abbreviations

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 316: Business Emails and Abbreviations.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 316. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful city of Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com, and download a Learning Guide for this episode. Our Learning Guides are 8 to 10 page PDF guides that will give you a complete transcript of everything we say on this podcast. You will also receive all of the most important vocabulary words, with definitions and new sample sentences. We also have additional explanations of vocabulary that we don't talk about on the podcast, comprehension questions, and a cultural note.

This episode is called, "Business Emails and Abbreviations." Let's get started.

[start of example]

Dear Sam,

I am writing to follow up on our phone conversation re: the upcoming meeting. We've made good headway in our planning, having settled many of the arrangements, e.g., the date, time, and venue. However, we still need to decide on the agenda, i.e., who will speak, in what order, and for what length of time. Fortunately, we have free rein to set up the meeting as we see fit, so it's just a matter of hammering out the details before we can invite the participants, book the meeting room, etc.

I suggest that we call a second meeting and invite some of the people who will be involved in the meeting: Adam, Lin, Toshi, Cecelia, et al. With everyone there, we should be able to come to a decision about the remaining issues. If this is in line with your thinking, I'll send out an email ASAP.

Let me know what you think.

Luis

P.S. We also need to start planning the annual meeting, but we can wait until this one is wrapped up before we start on that.



ESL Podcast 316 – Business Emails and Abbreviations

[end of example]

This episode discusses an email and some of the abbreviations that we use in an email or a letter. “Abbreviations” are letters that “stand for,” or take the place of, words. We use abbreviations to save time in our writing. Some abbreviations we also use even when we talk to each other, but for the most part, abbreviations are used in writing.

In this email, we begin with Luis saying to Sam, “Dear Sam, I am writing to follow up on (or to continue the action on) our (planned) phone conversation re: the upcoming meeting.” “Re” with a colon after it – a “colon” is when you have one period on top of another period, what looks like a period (“:”) – “re:” means regarding, related to, or on the subject of. When it is in the middle of a letter, it is normally not capitalized. You will usually see “re:” in a letter or a memo at the top of the letter or memo, or right before the actual text of the letter or memo; there it is capitalized (Re:).

So, Luis says, “I am writing to follow up on our phone conversation” regarding “the upcoming meeting. We’ve made good headway in our planning.” To “make headway” (headway – one word) means to make progress, to advance. To “make headway” is the process of moving a project forward; doing the next thing that has to be done.

Luis says, “We’ve made good headway in our planning having settled many of the arrangements.” “Settled” here means having planned, having arranged, or simply having decided. So they’ve “settled,” or decided on, “many of the arrangements, e.g.”; “e.g.” stands for the Latin expression “*exempli gratia*,” or “grazia,” this means “for example,” or “for instance” – “e.g.”

So, Luis says we’ve settled on “many of the arrangements,” for example, “the date, time, and venue.” A “venue” (venue) is the place or location where some event or some activity, some meeting will take place. “However,” Luis says, “we still need to decide on the agenda.” Your “agenda” (agenda) is a list of things that you will be discussing in a meeting, usually the order in which you’ll be discussing these topics. “However, we still need to decide on the agenda, i.e.”; “i.e.” stands for, again, a Latin expression, “*id est*,” and it means “in other words,” or “that is.” So, Luis is saying, “we still need to decide on the agenda,” that is, “who will speak, in what order, and for what length of time.” “I.e.” is similar to “e.g.” When you use “e.g.,” you’re giving an example of something; when you’re using “i.e.,” you’re giving an additional definition, if you will, of that word. So, Luis is explaining that when he says “agenda,” he means the order of the speakers and the length of time they will be speaking. When he talks about the



ESL Podcast 316 – Business Emails and Abbreviations

arrangements, he uses “e.g.” because he’s giving an example of some of the arrangements they have settled on – they have already decided on.

Luis continues, “Fortunately, we have free rein to set up the meeting as we see fit.” “Free rein” (rein – two words) means freedom to do what you want, the ability to make decisions on your own. Someone may say to you, “You have free rein on this project, do whatever you want.” That means you can make all of your own decisions. “My wife has free rein for deciding what kind of furniture we’re going to buy” – it’s her decision.

Luis says that “we have free rein to set up the meeting as we see fit.” The expression “as we see fit,” or “as you see fit,” means as we want; as we like; we can do whatever we want. It’s very similar to “free rein.” Luis says, “it’s just a matter of hammering out the details.” “It’s just a matter of” means the only thing we have to do is hammer out the details. The phrasal verb to “hammer out” means to decide or determine the final details of something, usually an agreement, or in this case, a meeting. “We need to hammer out the details” – we need to figure out all of the little things that need to be done.

Luis says they need to hammer “out the details before we can invite the participants” – the people coming to the meeting – before we can “book” the room, or reserve “the meeting room, etc.” At the end, he says, “etc.” “Etc.” is another Latin abbreviation for the words “et cetera.” “*Et cetera*” is abbreviated “etc.,” and it means that we are saying the list that we are giving is not complete, that there are other things that we could add to this list of things. In this case, Luis is saying that the details include inviting the participants, booking the room, and other things. But he doesn’t want to list every single thing, so to let Sam know that there are other things in addition, he uses the abbreviation “etc.”

Luis suggests that they “call a second meeting and invite some of the people who will be involved in the (main) meeting.” And then he lists some names, “Adam, Lin, Toshi, Cecelia, et al.” “Et al.,” spelled E-T A-L. (two different words – “et” and then space “al.”), is, again, a Latin expression which means “and others.” The Latin expression is “*et alii*.” We use “etc.” (etc.) when we are talking about things in a list, we use “et al.” when we are talking about people. So, instead of giving all the names of the people, Luis says, “Adam, Lin, Toshi, Cecelia, et al.,” meaning there are other people on the list. English, as you can see, uses a lot of Latin words – abbreviations for Latin words – in its writing.

Luis says, “With everyone there (with everyone at the meeting), we should be able to come to a decision about the remaining issues.” The “remaining issues” are the things that haven’t been finished yet. “If this is in line with your thinking,



ESL Podcast 316 – Business Emails and Abbreviations

I'll send out an email ASAP." The expression "to be in line (line) with someone's thinking" means that you are in agreement; you have the same opinion. The abbreviation "ASAP" stands for "as soon as possible" – as soon as you can. Sometimes people will say "a sap," but mostly we say "ASAP." These letters are usually capitalized, without periods in between them. Notice for the other abbreviations, the Latin abbreviations especially, we tend to use periods, but for "ASAP," there are usually no periods and all the letters are capitalized.

Finally, Luis says, "P.S." (P.S.). This is an abbreviation for "post script." It's used at the end of a letter or the end of the message to add some additional information. It is always put underneath the name of the person, so you have a letter or an email, on the bottom you put your name, then you want to say something else, you can say "P.S." If you write an email to your wife, you may tell her "I will be home tonight at 5:00," and then you put your name, and below your name you put "P.S. I love you." Isn't that nice!

Luis says, "P.S. We also need to start planning the annual meeting, but we can wait until this one is wrapped up before we start on that." To "wrap (wrap) up something" is a phrasal, or two-word verb, meaning to finish; to complete; to end. To "wrap up" also has some additional definitions; take a look at our Learning Guide for some more explanations about that.

Now let's listen to the story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of example]

Dear Sam,

I am writing to follow up on our phone conversation re: the upcoming meeting. We've made good headway in our planning, having settled many of the arrangements, e.g., the date, time, and venue. However, we still need to decide on the agenda, i.e., who will speak, in what order, and for what length of time. Fortunately, we have free rein to set up the meeting as we see fit, so it's just a matter of hammering out the details before we can invite the participants, book the meeting room, etc.

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ESL Podcast 316 – Business Emails and Abbreviations

Luis

P.S. We also need to start planning the annual meeting, but we can wait until this one is wrapped up before we start on that.

[end of example]

The script for this episode was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

Well, we will “wrap up” this episode of ESL Podcast. Thank you for listening. From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. We’ll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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