**LESSON PLAN: Compound adjectives and prepositional phrases in business essays and formal business writing**

*The lesson plan below comes from the ‘Building information: key grammar items’ section of my Udemy course, Teaching Grammar for Business Essays. Other topics in the course include cautious language, defining language, passives, relative clauses, verb clauses, cohesion, linkers, conditionals, cause and effect language, comparison language, and signposting.*

**Teacher’s Notes**

The ‘noun phrase’ – a group of words centred around a noun – is a key tool for ‘building information’ in formal writing. In this lesson plan, I’m going to focus on two features that increase the amount of information that students can convey in noun phrases: compound adjectives and prepositional phrases. (Earlier in my online course, I cover noun-noun pairs such as ‘business analysts’ and research findings.’)

**LESSON PLAN**

1. The concept of compound adjectives

2. Practising compound adjectives

3. The concept of prepositional phrases

4. Which preposition?

5. Revision of prepositional phrases

**1. The concept of compound adjectives**

You could introduce the topic of compound adjectives by getting students to suggest words to fill these gaps:

a highly**-\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_** document

urgently**-\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_** banking reforms

**\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_**-term investment

Guide them towards these answers:

a highly**-***sensitive/confidential* document

urgently**-***required/needed* banking reforms

*long/short*-term investment

Now show students *how* these adjectives convey information economically, normally by summarising relative clauses. Get the class to complete this list of examples:

banking reforms that are urgently needed 🡪 *urgently****-****needed banking reforms*

an outlet that sells fast food 🡪 ………………………

a sector that is growing rapidly 🡪 ……………………...

pay that is led by performance 🡪 ………………………

a restaurant chain that is oriented towards the family 🡪 ………………………………

Here are the answers:

an outlet that sells fast food 🡪 *a fast-food outlet*

a sector that is growing rapidly 🡪 *a rapidly-growing sector*

pay that is led by performance 🡪 *performance-led pay*

a restaurant chain that is oriented towards the family 🡪 *a family-oriented restaurant chain*

At this stage of the lesson, there are two things you may want to point out to your students. First, the grammatical flexibility of compound adjectives:

fast-food 🡪 adjective + noun

rapidly-growing 🡪 adverb + present participle

performance-led/family-oriented 🡪 noun + past participle

And secondly, the fact that although compound adjectives frequently come before nouns, where they are hyphenated, the same phrase may also occur on its own, when the hyphen is normally dropped:

…a highly-sensitive document. …a document that is highly sensitive.

**2. Practising compound adjectives**

Ask your students to have a go at this worksheet:

*A. Find an appropriate word to complete the compound adjectives in this short text:*

With simple problems, a ……………..-down communications channel may achieve the most rapid results. In more complex decision-…………….. processes, however, such as goal-…………….. activities, a ……………..-way dialogue between senior managers and their staff may be more effective.

*B. Match the words on the left with their partners on the right, and then use the compound adjectives you have made to complete the text below:*

above- term

self- average

time- supporting

long- consuming

‘Closed systems’ are, by their nature, ………………… units. Without the ………………… need to interact with other parts of the organization, such systems may, in the short term, produce ………………… returns. From a ………………… perspective, however, the lack of external input may mean that their goals no longer coincide with those of the wider organization.

Here are the answers:

A. With simple problems, a *top*-down communications channel may achieve the most rapid results. In more complex decision-*making* processes, however, such as goal-*setting* activities, a *two*-way dialogue between senior managers and their staff may be more effective.

B. *above-average, self-supporting, time-consuming, long-term*

‘Closed systems’ are, by their nature, *self-supporting* units. Without the *time-consuming* need to interact with other parts of the organization, such systems may, in the short term, produce *above-average* returns. From a *long-term* perspective, however, the lack of external input may mean that their goals no longer coincide with those of the wider organization.

Finally, as a brief research exercise, get your students to note down any useful compound adjectives they find over the next week or so in their reading, and bring them to your classroom – online or physical – with enough context so that they make sense.

**3. The concept of prepositional phrases**

Now let’s look at ways of helping students to add information to nouns through prepositional phrases. One way to start is to clarify the concept of the prepositional noun phrase. You can do this by showing students two sentences, and asking them if they can see a difference in the way the preposition is used:

It is not difficult to find untrustworthy traders **on** the internet.

The recent increase **in** online purchasing has had a number of effects.

Guide students towards the idea that in the first sentence the preposition ‘belongs’ to the words that follow it (‘the internet’), completing the expression ‘on the internet.’ But in the second sentence, the type we’re focusing on, the preposition is determined by the noun that comes before it (‘increase’):

It is not difficult to find untrustworthy traders [**on** **the internet**].

[**The recent increase** **in**] online purchasing has had a number of effects.

This second way is useful for conveying information, and a good alternative to a two-part, verb-based sentence, as you can see here …

The recent increase inonline purchasing has had a number of side-effects. *(using a noun phrase)*

Online purchasing has increased recently, and this has had a number of side-effects.

*(verb-based sentence)*

Now ask students to create their own prepositional noun phrase:

The internet has emerged as a medium of communication, and this has allowed companies to engage in a continuous conversation with their customers.

🡪 The emergence…

Here’s the answer:

*The emergence of the internet*as a medium of communication has allowed companies to engage in a continuous conversation with their customers.

It may be useful to point out to students that the nouns used after the preposition in these phrases may well be *verbal* nouns (the –ing form):

The recent increase in online **purchasing** …

*or:*

Managers have an essential role in **building** a sense of mission in their staff.

**4. Which preposition?**

It might be an idea first to check students’ prepositional knowledge. Show them a sentence like this and ask the class to complete the gaps:

The need ……… change within an organization may be a response ……… external pressure: an example of this would be the failure ……… existing systems to meet new consumer demand.

Here are the answers:

The need *for* change within an organization may be a response *to* external pressure: an example of this would be the failure *of* existing systems to meet new consumer demand.

If students get these prepositions right, that’s good. The bad news is that if you’re not sure, there’s no certain way of telling which preposition to use. ‘Of’ and ‘in’ are the most common. But generally students just have to learn them. *Except* that words in similar areas of meaning *tend* to be followed by the same preposition.

A simple activity can raise students’ awareness of this.

First, show the class words that generally take the same preposition, as you see below. (The word ‘generally’ is important because there will be exceptions/alternatives: ‘method’ for example, is sometimes used with ‘for.’) Ask students what that preposition is. (I’ve included the answers for you, as teacher, on the far right.)

1 example 2 method 3 analysis 4 shortage + *of*

5 increase + *in*

6 demand 7 reason + *for*

8 article *+ on*

9 answer 10 approach *+ to*

Then read out *at random* the similar words that you see in italics below and ask your students to try and give *you* the right number for their location in the table.

1 example 2 method 3 analysis 4 shortage *+of*

*type means, way examination, exploration lack*

5 increase *decrease, drop, fall, reduction, rise* *+in*

6 demand 7 reason *+for*

*need motivation, appetite*

8 article *assignment, book, essay, lecture, project, work* *+on*

9 answer 10 approach *+to*

*response introduction*

If you have time, you could get students to create one or two sentences using these nouns with a preposition.

**5. Revision of prepositional phrases**

Two exercises for your students.

**1. Complete the text with these nouns:** *reason, understanding, opposition, operation*

A(n) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of the communication process is essential to the efficient \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of an organization. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to innovative ways of working, for example, can result from the way in which the new idea is communicated: the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for change may be poorly explained by senior managers.

**2. Complete the sentences with the correct preposition.**

a) One response \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ a variation in demand is to hire seasonal workers.

b) An examination \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the data suggests that delays \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ production were caused by a shortage \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ skilled workers.

c) The market demand \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ new computer games is almost insatiable.

1.

A(n) *understanding* of the communication process is essential to the efficient *operation* of an organization. *Opposition* to innovative ways of working, for example, can result from the way in which the new idea is communicated: the *reason* for change may be poorly explained by senior managers.

2.

a) to b) of, in, of c) for

*END*

This plan has been adapted from my online course, Teaching Grammar for Business Essays:

<https://www.udemy.com/course/teaching-grammar-for-business-essays/?src=sac&kw=teaching+grammar+for+busi>