

Lesson 34: Talking About Information

Today we'll begin the final section of the Everyday English Speaking Course – it's called **functional English**, and it focuses on practical phrases that you can use in a variety of situations and contexts.

We'll start this section by learning how to talk about **information**. First, let's look at some details about the word "information" itself. "Information" is an **uncountable noun** in English. This means we always say **information**, *never* "informations."

If you want to talk about specific points, you can use the expression "pieces of information," for example: "His report presented five essential pieces of information."

Other essential expressions regarding information are:

- **Always say "some information"**
(not "an information")
- **Always say "too much / not much information"**
(not "too many / not many informations")
- **Always say "little information"**
(not "small/few information")

You can use the expressions "a lot of" or "lots of" with information. And something that contains a great abundance of information can be described as "**a wealth of information**" – for example, "This book is a wealth of information about the history of China."

Information can be **accurate, correct, or precise**... the opposite being information that is **false, incorrect, wrong, or inaccurate**.

Information can be **relevant, useful, or valuable** – this means it's related to or important to the topic of interest – or it can be the opposite: **unrelated, irrelevant, or useless**.

New information can be called **fresh** or **up-to-date** information – and the most recent information is often called **the latest information**. On the other hand, information that is not current is called **out-of-date**.

Okay, let's listen to some conversations!

Conversation #1 – Accurate and Inaccurate Information

Andrea, Frank, and Isabel are staff members at an English school. The school's profits have been going down lately, and they are having a meeting to talk about it.

Andrea: Could anyone tell me how many new students signed up last semester?

Frank: I'd say about a hundred and fifty.

Isabel: Yes, that's right. We had ninety new beginner students, forty at the intermediate level, and about fifteen new students in the advanced class.

Andrea: Okay, so we have tons of new students... but then why is the school losing money?

Isabel: The problem isn't getting new students, it's keeping the students we have. About 75% of last semester's beginners didn't continue the course.

Frank: You've hit the nail on the head. So that means we're constantly spending money on advertising, but we're not getting students that stay at the school for the long-term.

Isabel: I'm afraid he's right.

Andrea: Then I'd like to know why the students are leaving.

Frank: Well, I talked to a few of them and they said they weren't satisfied with our teaching methodology – so that's probably the reason most of them don't continue past the first semester.

Isabel: Sorry, Frank, but I think you're mistaken. There might be a few people who are unsatisfied with the methods, but on the end-of-course evaluations the students rated our teachers and classes very highly. I suspect people are just forgetting to register, and then the deadline passes and it's too late.

Andrea: That's spot on – I've noticed that we always have lots of last-minute registrations. How many e-mails do we send students to remind them that classes will be starting?

Frank: Ummm... three or four, I think.

Isabel: That's actually not correct – I checked the records, and this semester we only sent one reminder e-mail. I think we need to change that right away, because we're missing a big opportunity to keep our students – even the ones who are happy with our classes.

Andrea: Absolutely. Can you two work together to make sure we follow up with the students well in advance of the registration deadline? I'm hoping we can improve our enrollment a lot next semester.

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

Andrea opens the meeting with one of the “asking for information” phrases you learned in a previous lesson – but let's review:

- **“Could you tell me...? / Could anyone tell me...?”**
- **“I'd like to know...”**
- **“Do you know...? / Does anyone know...?”**

You can use the phrases with “anyone” when asking for information from a group of people, and you're not sure which person has the answer.

Some of the information in the dialogue is correct, and some of it is incorrect. Here are some phrases for confirming information and saying that it's correct:

- **“That's right. / That's correct.”**
- **“You hit the nail on the head. / That's spot on.”**
These are two idiomatic phrases meaning someone is exactly right.
- **“I'm afraid he's/she's/you're right.”**
The expression “I'm afraid...” is used to acknowledge correct information that is bad news

How about saying that some information is *incorrect*? There are various ways to do this – some are more polite, and others are more confrontational:

- **“I'm afraid that's not quite right.”**
- **“That's actually not correct.”**
- **“I think you're mistaken.”**
- **“I don't think you're right about that.”**

- **“Actually, the data/evidence shows...”**

This is a way of calling attention back to the facts, without directly saying the other person is wrong.

- **“No, you've got it wrong. / No, that's all wrong.”**

These are very direct and rather insensitive; they can make the other person feel bad

- **“What are you talking about?” / “You don't know what you're talking about.”**

These phrases are rather confrontational and may start an argument – especially the second one!

Conversation #2 – Generalizations

Patricia and Jay are two managers at different companies. They're having a conversation about their employees. Listen to their dialogue to learn ways to generalize and talk about exceptions.

Patricia: I'm so glad I hired a couple of recent graduates from university – they've been a big asset to the company.

Jay: Really? My experience has been the opposite. I have a number of young people in my department, and on the whole they don't perform very well.

Patricia: What do you mean?

Jay: Generally speaking, they don't do what they're told. And they tend to want to be in charge – even though they have no experience! Not to mention the fact that they're on their cell phones about ninety percent of the time.

Patricia: Well, the trick with motivating young employees is usually to show them the overall vision of the project or company. You're right – by and large, they don't like to receive orders. So I always take the time to explain how their contribution matters in the long run – and in most cases they get a lot more excited about their work.

Jay: Hmm, I'll have to try that. Does it also help them stay at the company longer? What normally happens with our recent graduates is that they get bored and leave within a year. The only exception is David, who's been with us for the past four years.

Patricia: I think that more often than not, young people quit their jobs not because of the job itself, but because *they* don't quite know what exactly they want to do yet.

Jay: Not me – I've known what I wanted to do since I was 12.

Patricia: Well, there's an exception to every rule!

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

Most English learners overuse the phrase "in general..." to make generalizations. Here are some alternative phrases you can use:

- **"Ninety percent of the time..." / "Nine times out of ten..."**
- **"What normally happens is..."**
- **"Generally speaking..."**
- **"On the whole..."**
- **"By and large..."**
- **"In most cases..."**
- **"More often than not..." / "They tend to..." / "They have a tendency to..."**
These last three phrases are milder generalizations – something that is true more like 60% of the time, not 90%.

Now, to talk about a special case – something or someone that does not follow the general rule – we can use the word **except** or **exception**:

- **"The only exception is..." / "That's an exception."**
- **"Everyone went to the party *except* Tom."**
(Tom did NOT go to the party)

You've finished Lesson 34! Today's speaking task is to leave a message and tell me:

- Three or four general truths about your country or culture
- Two things that other people believe about your country, which are incorrect

Click here to leave a message: <http://www.speakpipe.com/espressoenglish>