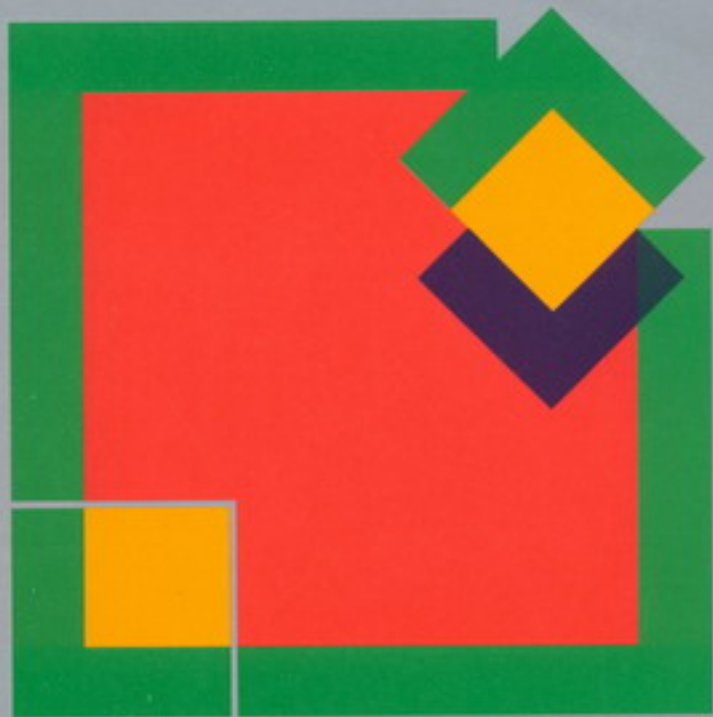


# Basic English Usage

Michael Swan



Oxford

## 313 'social' language

Every language has fixed expressions which are used on particular social occasions — for example, when people meet, leave each other, go on a journey, sit down to meals, and so on. English does not have very many expressions of this kind: here are some of the most important.

### 1 Introductions

Common ways of introducing strangers to each other are:

*John, do you know Helen?*

*Helen, this is my friend John.*

*Sally, I don't think you've met Elaine.*

*I don't think you two know each other, do you?*

*Can/May I introduce John Willis? (more formal)*

When people are introduced, they say *Hello* or *How do you do?* (more formal). Note that *How do you do?* is not a question, and there is no answer to it. (It does not mean the same as *How are you?*)

CELIA: *I don't think you two know each other, do you?*

*Alec Sinclair — Paul McGuire.*

ALEC: ]  
PAUL: ] **How do you do?**

People who are introduced often shake hands.

### 2 Greetings

*Hello. Hi. (very informal)*

More formal greetings:

*Good morning/afternoon/evening.*

When leaving people:

*Goodbye.*

*Bye. (informal)*

*Bye-bye. (often used to and by children)*

*See you. (informal)*

*Cheers. (informal)*

*Good morning/afternoon/evening/night. (formal)*

### 3 Asking about health etc

When we meet people, we often ask politely about their health or their general situation.

*How are you? How are things? (informal)*  
*How's it going? (informal)*

Answers:

*Very well, thank you. And you? Fine, thank you.*

Informal answers:

*Not too bad.*  
*OK.*  
*So-so.*  
*All right.*  
*(It) could be worse.*

### 4 Special greetings

Greetings for special occasions are:

*Happy birthday! OR Many happy returns!*  
*Happy New Year/Easter!*  
*Happy/Merry Christmas!*

### 5 Holidays

Before somebody starts a holiday, we may say:

*Have a good holiday.*

When the holiday is over, we may say:

*Did you have a good holiday?*

### 6 Journeys

We do not *always* wish people a good journey, but common expressions are:

*Have a good trip. Have a good journey.*  
*Safe journey home.*

After a journey (for example, when we meet people at the airport or station), we may say:

*Did you have a good journey/flight?*  
*Did you have a good trip?*

### 7 Meals

We do not have fixed expressions for the beginning and end of meals. At family meals, people may say something nice about the food during the meal (for example *This is very nice*) and after (for example *That was lovely: thank you very much*). Some religious people say 'grace' (a short prayer) before and after meals.

## 8 Visits and invitations

There are no fixed expressions which have to be used when you visit people.

Invitations often begin:

*Would you like to . . . ?*

Possible replies:

*Thank you very much. That would be very nice.*

*Sorry. I'm afraid I'm not free.*

It is normal to thank people for hospitality at the moment of leaving their houses.

*Thank you very much. That was a wonderful evening.*

## 9 Sleep

When somebody goes to bed, people often say *Sleep well*.

In the morning, we may ask *Did you sleep well?*

*Did you have a good night?* or *How did you sleep?*

## 10 Giving things

We do not have an expression which is always used when we give things. We sometimes say *Here you are*, especially when we want to make it clear that we are giving something.

*'Have you got a map of London?' 'I think so. Yes, **here you are.**'*

*'Thanks.'*

## 11 Asking for things

We normally ask for things by using yes/no questions.

***Could you lend me a pen?*** (NOT ~~*Please lend me a pen.*~~)

For details, see 286.

## 12 Thanks

Common ways of thanking people are:

*Thank you very much. Thank you.*

*Thanks. (informal) Thanks a lot. (informal)*

If we want to reply to thanks, we can say:

*Not at all. You're welcome.*

*That's (quite) all right. That's OK. (informal)*