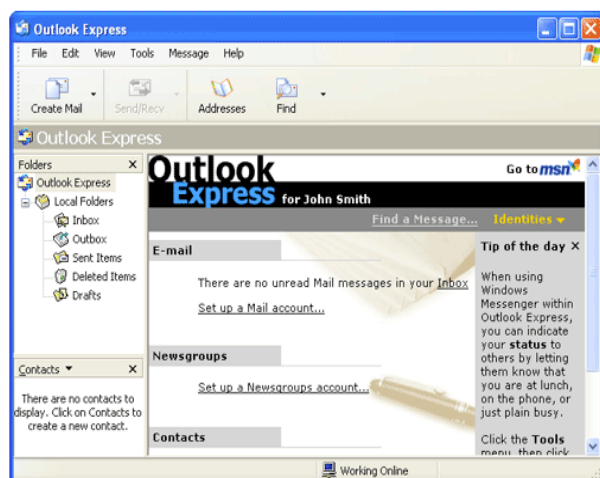


## BEP 38 - Describing a Procedure

Welcome back to businessenglishpod.com. Today's episode focuses on describing a procedure.

In our jobs, we often have to tell people about procedures and processes—how to do something. This can be more formal—for example giving government visitors a demonstration of a production line—or informal—for example showing a colleague how to use the photocopier.



Today's dialogue is a common situation where describing a procedure is useful—giving someone help. It takes place at Elektra, a fashion design company. You'll hear Sandy, an accountant, call Felipe, who works in the IT department. Sandy is having a problem with her computer and Felipe describes to her the procedure for fixing it.

In today's dialogue, in addition to studying how to describe a procedure, you'll also learn a lot of useful computer vocabulary.

Now, just before we listen to the dialog, we're going to try something new. We wanted to build a little more interactivity into the podcast, so from now on we're going to feature some listening comprehension questions before you listen to the dialog. As long as you're not driving to work, make a quick note of the questions so you can review them later. We'll publish the answers on the website – [www.businessenglishpod.com](http://www.businessenglishpod.com) – in a couple of days, [so be sure to check in.]

### Vocabulary:

**icon** -- A picture on your computer screen that represents a program or document.

**to go into a menu** – At the top of a window, a menu is one of the lists of tools, such as "file," "edit," "view," "insert," and so on. "To go into a menu" means to click on it so that it drops down and all its options become visible.

**pop server** – POP is an acronym for "post office protocol" and server is a type of computer. In simple terms, a pop server is a mail drop service, like a postbox where your email program goes to pick up its mail.

**smtp** – An acronym for "Simple Mail Transfer Protocol." This is a language computers use to electronically transfer emails.

**self-explanatory** – An adjective describing something so easy that it explains itself.

**Dialog:**

Felipe: IT Help Desk, this is Felipe, how can I help you?

Sandy: Felipe, it's Sandy.

Felipe: Not again! (exaggerated)

Sandy: What? (laughing)

Felipe: Just kidding. What can I do for you Sandy?

Sandy: Well, I can't get my email to work. I think I accidentally deleted something.

Felipe: No worries. We'll get you ship shape in no time.

Sandy: Great! When can you make it over?

Felipe: Actually, I think I can walk you through this on the telephone. First you go into the "Tools" menu in Outlook and click on "Accounts."

Sandy: Sorry, Felipe, one step at a time, okay? I don't see my email anywhere.

Felipe: No worries. Is Outlook open? You should make sure you've double clicked on the letter icon on your desktop to open outlook.

Sandy: Oh. Silly me. Now I've got it open.

Felipe: Now you click on "Tools" at the top of the page. A drop down menu should appear. Do you see it?

Sandy: Yes.

Felipe: Okay, now you click on "accounts."

Sandy: Okay, got it.

Felipe: Great. In the list, do you see your Electra account?

Sandy: No. That's what I deleted, huh?

Felipe: Yes, I think so. But no problem. I'll help you reinstall it.

Sandy: Great.

Felipe: Click "add," then three options will appear. Mouse over and click on "mail." Now a window should appear where you put in your name.

Sandy: Uh huh. Got that. Now, click "next" right?

Felipe: Right. Now this one is pretty self-explanatory. Just put in your full email address.

Sandy: All right. And click next. Uh oh. This looks complicated.

Felipe: No worries. It's easy. In the top box—the one that says pop server—you just write "pop.elektra.com." And in the other box type in "smtp.elektra.com."

Sandy: That was easy.

Felipe: Now, in the next window you just put in your password, click okay, and you're done!

Sandy: Uh huh. Go it.

Felipe: Try checking your email.

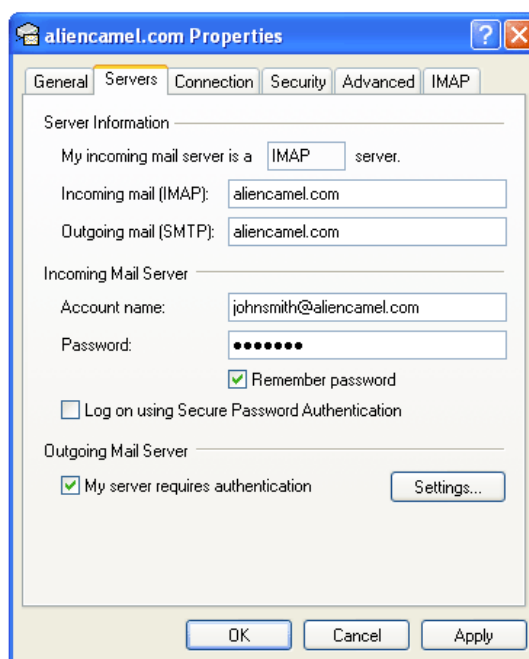
Sandy: It works! Oh, and I got one from you. How sweet!

Felipe: Is there anything else I can help you with?

Sandy: Well there might be one more thing. Uhm, you don't think you might have time to go out for dinner tomorrow night, do you?

Felipe: You mean just me and you? Like on a date?

Sandy: Of course like on a date, you idiot. Don't be a fool Felipe!



### Listening Comprehension Questions:

- 1) Do Felipe and Sandy already know each other?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What is the problem with Sandy's computer?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Is Sandy good with computers?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4) What else does Sandy want from Felipe, besides help with her computer?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Debrief:

It sounds like Sandy might just be using her computer as an excuse to talk to Felipe. What do you think?

Before we go through the dialogue in detail, let's discuss a few common ways that procedures are explained.

Explaining a procedure is not complicated. Usually, the simple present tense ("You do") is used. As you know, simple present is for things that are true in general—facts—for example, "the earth goes around the sun." Since a procedure is the way something is generally done, the simple present tense is well suited for describing one.

What pronoun do you use? That is, do you say "We do" or "you do" or "one does"? Though it's possible to use the impersonal third person "one," this sounds rather formal. So, as in many languages, in English we just normally use "you," which can mean "you, the specific person to whom I am explaining this procedure," but can also take on the more general, indefinite meaning of "one" or "someone in general." Occasionally, you also hear the first person plural pronoun we, which is used in the inclusive sense—we the team. Listen to an example of a procedure described the most common way, simple present with "you."

First you clean the fish. Then you cut up some garlic and onions. Then you heat some oil in the frying pan—peanut oil is best for this recipe. Next, you fry the garlic and onions briefly in the oil—about 15 seconds—then you add the fish...

Getting hungry?

Sometimes you will also hear other verbs used for describing a procedure. For example, you will often encounter the construction "you should," especially when the procedure is not set in stone, that is, when it's not totally fixed. This usually takes the form of a mixture between giving advice and telling someone how to do something. This use of "you should" is common in training. For an example, listen to this advice on cold calling someone, that is, calling a potential customer without any previous contact.

Before you contact a potential customer, you should always find out as much as you can about them. Then, when they pick up the phone, you should try to get the customer talking about themselves right away. Afterwards, you should lead them gradually towards the sale.

For formal processes, the passive voice may be used to emphasize the thing or action rather than the person who performs the action. This is more common in writing, but you might also hear it in speech, perhaps in the description of a production line to a visitor.

First the fabric is cut here. Then the shirt is assembled over here. Afterwards the buttons are sewn on. Finally it is ironed, pressed and packaged.

Another construction used to describe some kinds of procedure is “we will.” In this case, “we” is inclusive—it includes the listener and the speaker—“we, the team.” “Will” is used in the sense of describing the habits of people, for example, “Before going to bed at night we will always turn off the lights.” If the procedure you are describing involves a strong element of habit, “we will” may be appropriate; but the simple present and you is always correct, so you are safe with that.

Finally, if it’s an informal situation or if a high level person, a boss, is talking to a lower level person, you may hear command forms being used. For example:

First turn on the machine. Then put coffee in it here, and add water. Add one scoop of coffee for every cup of water. That’s right. Now just wait, and the coffee will be done in minutes.

Notice that all the examples we’ve covered have one thing in common: The strong use of sequencing words such as first, second, third, fourth, then, afterwards, next, now, finally. Frequent use of sequencing words will make your procedure explanation clearer. By the way, it’s totally unnecessary to put “ly” on the end of first, second and so on. The famous American writer E.B. White said that dressing up number words by putting “ly” on them was like putting a hat on a horse: The horse doesn’t need it and it looks silly.

Now, let’s go through the dialogue to see how Felipe explains to Sandy the procedure for fixing her email account. On the way, we will also look closely at some of the idioms and computer vocabulary they use.

How does Sandy describe the problem with her computer?

Sandy: Well, I can’t get my email to work. I think I accidentally deleted something.

Felipe: No worries. We’ll get you ship shape in no time.

Felipe’s reply, “We’ll get you ship shape in no time” is an idiom. To be “ship shape” or “sea shape” describes a ship that is seaworthy, that is, one that is running well and in good condition. “In no time” means very quickly. So the whole sentence means, “Don’t worry, we’ll get your computer running well very soon.”

What else could have Felipe said to tell Sandy that he is going to fix the problem?

- No worries, we’ll get your computer working in no time.
- Let me have a look. Don’t worry. I can help you with that.
- All right, Sandy, just bear with me and we’ll get the problem fixed right away.

When Sandy hears that Felipe can fix her problem, she asks him when he can make it over—that is when he can come over in person, physically, to her desk. What does Felipe say?

Felipe: Actually, I think I can walk you through this on the telephone. First you go into the “Tools” menu in Outlook and click on “Accounts.”

“To walk someone through something” is an idiom that means to explain something to someone. So when Felipe says that he can walk Sandy through the procedure on the telephone, he means that he can tell her how to solve the problem without meeting with her in person.

Which method does Felipe use to explain the procedure? Simple present? Should? Passive voice? Command? Will? Mostly he uses the simple present tense and “you,” as in the example we just heard: “First you go into the ‘Tools’ menu in Outlook and click on ‘Accounts.’”

At other points, however he uses “you should.”

Sandy: Sorry, Felipe, one step at a time, okay? I don’t see my email anywhere.

Felipe: No worries. Is Outlook open? You should make sure you’ve double clicked on the letter icon on your desktop to open outlook.

What does this mean? To click means to press the mouse button. Double click is to press it twice rapidly in succession to open a document or a program (program means a piece of software). What’s an icon? That’s the picture that represents a program or document on your computer screen. For example, a letter icon represents the Outlook mail program.

When Felipe tells Sandy that she should make sure she’s opened her email program, he’s not strictly speaking describing part of the procedure; instead, it’s something extra that Sandy might have missed.

So far we’ve heard Felipe use “you” with the simple present and use “you should” to describe his procedure to Sandy. Does he use any other ways? Well, he doesn’t use the passive voice, does he? Why not? Since this is just a friendly discussion among colleagues, the passive voice would sound overly formal, cold and stiff. How about “We will”? That would be strange too. Reconfiguring the computer is not a matter of habit—what people generally do—it’s a matter of definite procedure. There’s a clear process to follow. Felipe does, however, use the last method we discussed for describing procedures, namely the command form.

Felipe: Click “add,” then three options will appear. Mouse over and click on “mail.” Now a window should appear where you put in your name.

Sandy: Uh huh. Got that. Now, click “next” right?

Felipe: Right. Now this one is pretty self-explanatory. Just put in your full email address.

Because Sandy and Felipe know each other and perhaps also because they’ve already warmed up—they’ve been talking for a while already—it sounds personal and friendly for Felipe to use a direct command form for these simple kind of small things, such as “mouse over and click on mail.” By the way, what does that mean? Well, “mouse over” means to move your mouse over. And “mail” is the name of a button. So this literally means “move your mouse over and click on the mail button.”

Felipe also uses a good vocabulary word here—"self-explanatory." That means something that is so easy to understand that it almost explains itself.

Note that Felipe checks to make sure Sandy has understood. He says "Are you with me?" What else could he say?

- OK, so is that clear?
- Does that make sense?
- Do you know what I mean?
- So far so good?

Now we're just about finished with our discussion of explaining procedures today. But before we finish, let's look back briefly at the very professional phrase Felipe uses after he has finished up helping Sandy. He says, "Is there anything else I can help you with?" What else could he say?

- Is there anything else I can do for you?
- Is that all?
- Do you have any other questions?
- So there it is. Any questions?

Well, that about covers this episode.. You've learned several common ways to describe a procedure, and you've reviewed some idioms and computer vocabulary.

Take care and see you soon! Here at BusinessEnglishPod.com, we'll be back in no time with new ways to keep your English ship shape. Goodbye!

### Language Review Questions

Fill in the missing parts in the following short dialogues with language from the box.

Not really. Can you go through that again?

Can you walk me through this?

Is there anything else I can do for you?

No worries, we'll get you ship shape in no time.

1. **A:** I think there's something wrong with my computer.

2. **A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. **A:** Does that make sense?

4. **A:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. **B:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. **B:** Yes, I'd be happy to. First ...

3. **B:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. **B:** Not, that's great, thanks. You've been very helpful.

## **Useful Language:**

### **Describing a procedure using the simple present with “you”:**

First you clean the fish. Then you cut up some garlic and onions. Then you heat some oil in the frying pan—peanut oil is best for this recipe. Next, you fry the garlic and onions briefly in the oil—about 15 seconds—then you add the fish...

### **Using ‘should’ to describe a procedure that is not fixed:**

Before you contact a potential customer, you should always find out as much as you can about them. Then, when they pick up the phone, you should try to get the customer talking about themselves right away. Afterwards, you should lead them gradually towards the sale.

**For formal processes, the passive voice may be used to emphasize the action rather than the person who performs it.**

First the fabric is cut here. Then the shirt is assembled over here. Afterwards the buttons are sewn on. Finally it is ironed, pressed and packaged.

### **Describing a procedure using the command form:**

First turn on the machine. Then put coffee in it here, and add water. Add one scoop of coffee for every cup of water. That’s right. Now just wait, and the coffee will be done in minutes.

### **To let someone know you can help:**

- No worries, we’ll get your computer working in no time.
- Let me have a look. Don’t worry. I can help you with that.
- All right, Sandy, just bear with me and we’ll get the problem fixed right away.

### **Checking that someone is following your instructions:**

- OK, so is that clear?
- Does that make sense?
- Do you know what I mean?
- So far so good?

### **Checking to see if there is anything else you can do to help:**

- Is there anything else I can do for you?
- Is that all?
- Do you have any other questions?
- So there it is. Any questions?



## Answers

### Listening Comprehension:

- 1) Yes. When Felipe hears that it's Sandy on the phone, he jokingly says "Not again!"
- 2) She has accidentally deleted her email account in Microsoft Outlook, so she can't receive email.
- 3) No. She herself admits that she's not good with computers. Fortunately, Felipe's directions are good. But, on the other hand, she could have just been using the computer problem as an excuse to talk to Felipe.
- 4) Sandy appears to be romantically interested in Felipe, doesn't she? She asks him out on a date.

### Language Review:

- 1) No worries, we'll get you ship shape in no time.
- 2) Can you walk me through this?
- 3) Not really. Can you go through that again?
- 4) Is there anything else I can do for you?

### Tip:

This website has a very nice, step-by-step guide to setting up a new email account in Outlook: <http://aliencamel.com/receive/setup/outlookexpress>