LESSON 08

TOPIC: CHATTING IN TECH

AGENDA: YOU WILL LEARN

Vocabulary:
Chatting in Tech.

Grammar:
1st and 2nd Conditionals.

Pronunciation:
Words with “weird” pronunciation.

Writing:
Chat messages.

Speaking & Soft Skills:
Small talk and building rapport.

WARM-UP

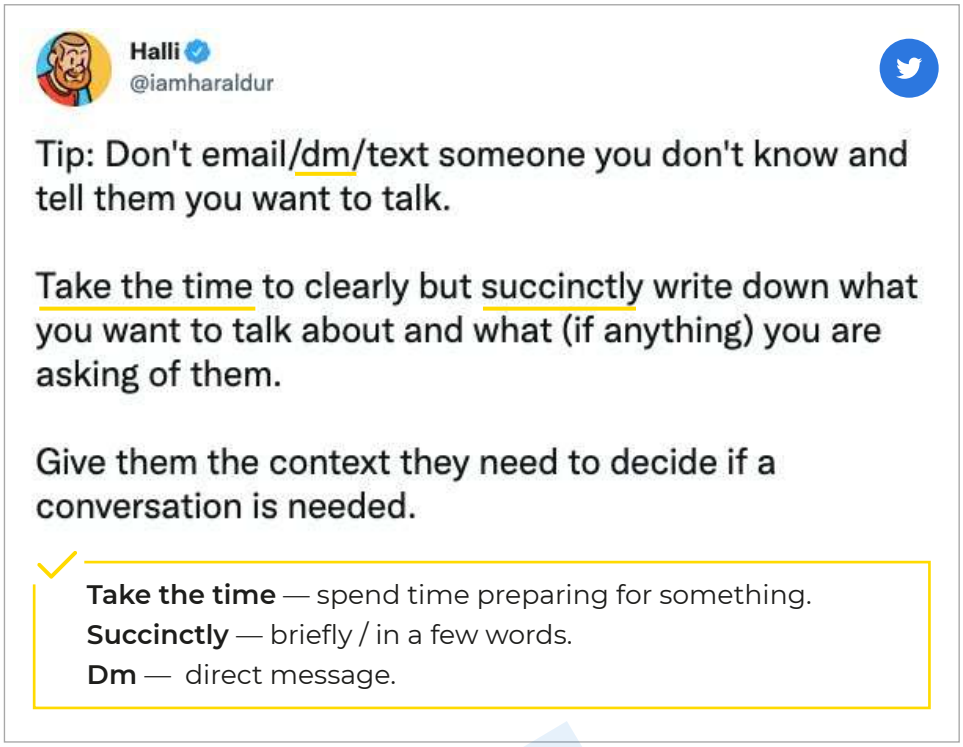
Answer the questions.

1. Look at the logos of 4 communication apps. Can you identify all of them? What can you say about each one? Which messaging apps do you use?
2. How is chat messaging different from emailing?

READING

EXERCISE 1A

Read the tweet. Does it align with your business communication ethic?



EXERCISE 1B

Read the text and mark the topics that are mentioned.

1. The peculiar characteristics of communication via chat as opposed to other forms of communication.
2. Differences between formal and informal chatting.
3. Better alternatives to phrases that may come off as rude or unfriendly.
4. Phrases that you should not use.

Whether you're using Slack, Skype or even just text messages, chatting is something we all do. Chat clients are essential tools in the modern tech professional's arsenal. Today we will go over some general rules and suggestions for writing chat messages and common mistakes you should avoid.

Chatting is a much less formal form of communication than, for example, email, so using casual tone and language is ok as long as it's friendly

For example, skipping subjects is a common practice:

> (I) Was trying to fix it yesterday but wasn't successful.
>
> (I've) Already informed the dev team though, they say they will get the platform up and running by this afternoon.

Because you cannot perceive tone over text, politeness becomes even more crucial when chatting. Be mindful of how your message sounds over text, without tone.

When problems arise, try to shift focus from the person to the problem instead of:

> "You forgot to update the link".
>
> Say: "The link needs to be updated / Looks like it's the wrong link".

For the purposes of business communication, you might want to use certain constructions that would help you sound more polite when making requests.

> I would appreciate it if you arranged for immediate payment.
>
> I would be grateful if you signed and returned the document by the end of the week.
>
> It would be more secure if you changed the password more frequently.
>
> Due to the complexity of the matter, it would be best if you asked a tax advisor to take a look at it.

Try not to use imperative tone in written business communication.

Instead of saying "Please don't (do this)", you can use the following phrases:

> Please refrain from merging PRs without approval.
>
> Please avoid running deployments until we give the all-clear.
>
> Please try not to cause customer escalations when you are on call.
>
> Please abstain from deploying on Friday evenings.

Listen to the recording of the text **(track 8.1)** and check your pronunciation.

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EXERCISE 1C

Complete the sentences with the highlighted phrases from the text.

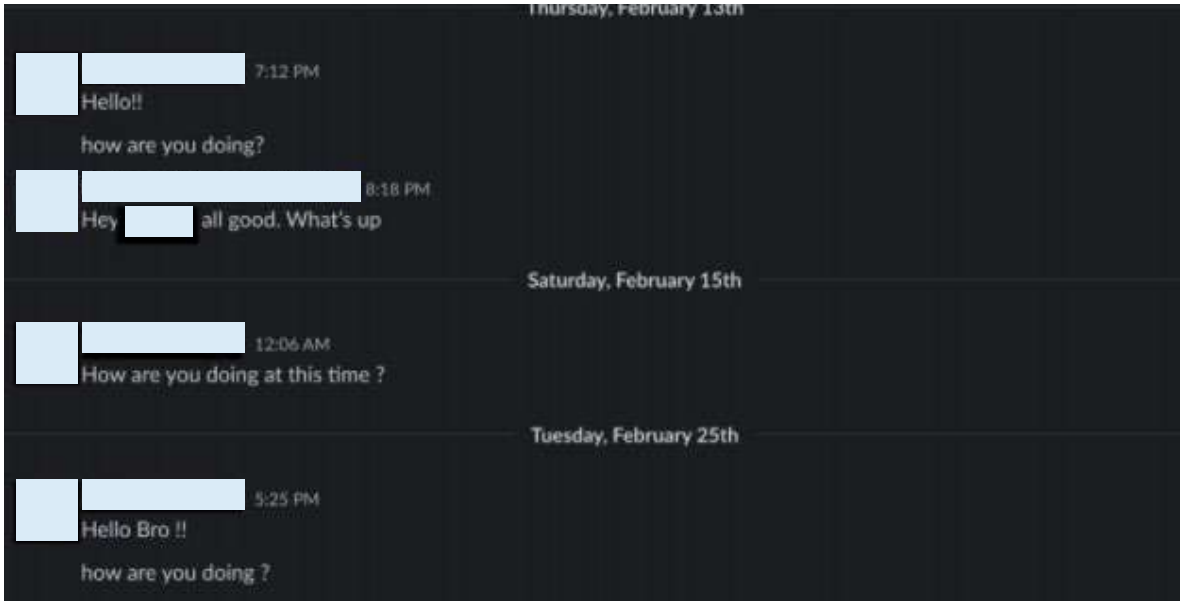
1. She has a very poor work-life balance. She has to stay _____ even during the weekends.
2. I work at a big company where communication is very formal. We never use any _____ phrases in our messages to other colleagues.
3. He told me about the problem as soon as it _____ .
4. Being professional depends on how you _____ professionalism.
5. We haven't started on that project yet. We're waiting for the customer to _____ .
6. He _____ from making any comments at the meeting yesterday.
7. These skills are absolutely _____ for any designer.
8. It took us a week to get the app _____ but at least it's finally working now!

EXERCISE 2A

Read more tips on chatting and and pay special attention to the highlighted expressions.

Let's talk about a few other big "don'ts" of work messaging.

Don't ask permission to ask a question — Just ask the question.



This is a pet peeve of every developer. If you have a question, and you already have an established working relationship with the recipient of the question, you don't really need to "ask permission" to ask the question — simply ask the question.

Refrain from using phrases that serve no actual purpose such as "How are you doing?", "How is it going?" etc.

For example:

> "Hi! Could you please tell me where I can find credentials for the staging cluster?"

This message is:

- polite
- to the point
- doesn't waste the other person's time

If you don't have an established relationship with the person you're writing to (i.e. you've never met them), a good rule of thumb is to quickly introduce yourself and then get on with the rest of your message.

> "Hi Nick, I'm Bob, I work with the platform team, and I was told that you could help me out with getting QA server access. I am currently working on ticket PLTF-3311: <link to ticket>. Would appreciate any assistance"

> "Hi John, I'm Steve, the new DevOps engineer on the platform team — do you happen to know how I can get a copy of the anonymized production database? Should I write a ticket for this? Appreciate the help!"

Thanks for letting me know. I'll reach out to the team to see who can help out with the issue

I hope you won't take this the wrong way but I have some concern that lack of **visibility** will cause this to become a game of telephone. I'll move this discussion to #backend and **pick it up** from there

Sure thing

It's just that sometimes the team can be ambivalent or even hostile to work that seems to appear **"out of the blue"** from remote devs. So by explaining why the situation matters you hope to get **buy-in** that we should move forward with **chasing** these issues **down**.

Make use of common rooms.

This will largely depend on your company policy, but generally speaking, you want to make sure everyone on your team is informed and up-to-date on what you're doing. Conducting most of your discussions in common chat rooms is a good way of eliminating miscommunication and confusion. Above is an example of how you can go about transferring a one-to-one discussion over to a common chat room.

Listen to the recording of the text **(track 8.2)** and check your pronunciation.

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EXERCISE 2B

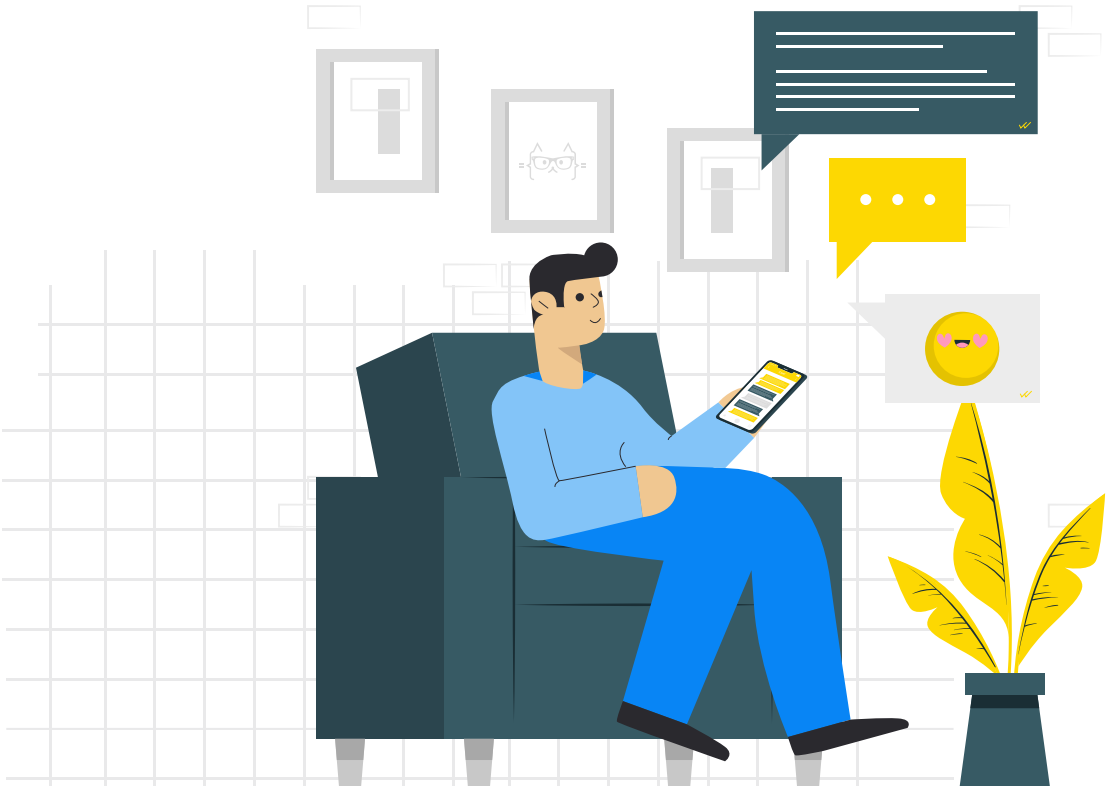
Match the highlighted words from the text to their definitions.

1. Pet peeve	a) remove
2. To the point	b) resume
3. Eliminate	c) something that annoys or angers you
4. Visibility	d) relevant to the subject that you are discussing
5. Pick (something) up	e) agreement with, or acceptance of, a policy or suggestion
6. Out of the blue	f) unexpectedly
7. Buy-in	g) to search for and find
8. Chase (something) down	h) ability to be easily seen or noticed

EXERCISE 3

Share your thoughts on the questions.

1. What is your biggest pet peeve when it comes to work communication?
2. Have you ever had to deal with issues that occurred due to miscommunication? What were they?



GRAMMAR

1st & 2nd Conditionals

EXERCISE 2A

Read the text. Can you see examples of the 1st and 2nd Conditionals?

Would you be where you are today if you didn't have higher education? And do you actually have it?

For years now, the software industry has been a field where no formal or informal education is necessary to succeed. If you want to be a professional, surely, you will learn the necessary skills, but does it matter where and with whose help? Does a person have more chances to become an expert if he has four years of accredited university behind? This is what I as an employer would really like to know. Most people tend to evaluate those with higher education as more desirable candidates, and I can also be biased. Probably, if I didn't have a degree, I would be more objective. I try my hardest to treat people fairly anyway.

When I am conducting an interview I am focused on understanding whether this person is more or less likely to succeed or make a mess that I will have to clean up. If I had a superpower, I would choose to be a mind-reader. I sometimes catch myself thinking: if only I was able to look inside their heads, I would know what they are capable of.

EXERCISE 2B

Look at the rules and observe the differences and similarities between the 1st and the 2nd Conditional Types.

Likely: there is a good chance that it will happen. **Future**	**Unlikely: there is little or no chance that it can happen.** **Future/Present**
1ST CONDITIONAL	**2ND CONDITIONAL**
If you want to be a professional, surely, you will learn the necessary skills.	If I had a superpower, I would choose to be a mind-reader.

- **Sometimes, it is possible to use both 1st or 2nd conditional with a slight difference in meaning:**
  - *If we bought a car, we would go on a road trip across the country. – Unlikely future.*
  - *If we buy a car, we will go on a road trip across the country – Possible future.*
- **2nd Conditionals is often used for polite suggestions and requests:**
  - *I would be grateful if you signed and returned the document by the end of the week.*
  - *It would be more secure if you changed the password more frequently.*

1st and 2nd Conditional structure

All conditional sentences consist of two parts (clauses): the conditional clause that shows a **condition** upon which the action can take place and the main clause that shows the **result.**

(Condition) + (Result)
If you let me take your car, I will be there in 10 minutes.

or (Result) + (Condition)
I would help you if I knew what to do.

Notice that the conditional clause normally starts with "if".

1ST CONDITIONAL	2ND CONDITIONAL
If + Present Simple → will + verb	**If + Past Simple → would + verb**
If we leave right now, we will catch his performance.	If we bought this car, we could go on a cross-country trip.
She will show you around if you need an office tour.	I would tell him about that if he were able to help.

📌 Words that denote conditions are never followed by Future Tenses. These include words like if, when and a few others.

SEE THE FULL LIST >>

- in Formal English we use 'were' instead of 'was' for all persons in the Second Conditional. In Informal English, this rule is rarely observed and "was" is used instead.
  - *If I were you, I would talk to your boss.*
- If we start the sentence with an "if" clause, we need to separate it with a comma. Sentences that start with a main clause don't need a comma before "if".

EXERCISE 2C

Put the verbs in the brackets in the correct form to complete the 2nd Conditional sentences.

1. If I **(be)** rich, I **(not/need)** to work so much.
2. If you **(work)** harder, you **(get)** a promotion.
3. He **(log into)** the system, if he **(have)** a password.
4. If helicopters **(not/cost)** so much, we **(buy)** one.
5. If I **(be)** you, I **(ask)** an expert about it.
6. He **(be)** a better manager, if he **(pay)** more attention to the ideas of others.
7. If we **(not/have)** the internet, communication (be) much more difficult.

EXERCISE 3

Complete the sentences using 1 or 2 conditional. Think about whether the condition is likely or unlikely.

1. If you **(learn)** the new language, you **(be able to)** work in the project. You have 2 months.
2. If I **(be)** a boss, I **(introduce)** flexible hours for everyone.
3. If I **(manage)** to meet the deadline, I (be) more responsible next time.
4. If I **(not like)** my colleagues, I **(not/work)** here.
5. If Sara **(be)** a little more organized, she **(be)** our team lead now.
6. I **(not/accept)** this job, if I **(be)** you. It sounds terribly boring.
7. If we **(get)** the approval by the end of the day, we **(be able to)** finish the update.
8. If this meeting **(last)** one more hour, I **(not/have)** time for lunch.

EXERCISE 4

Continue the sentences so that they are true for you.

If I took a year off work, _____ .

If my salary was twice as high as it is now, _____ .

If I could move to any country that I like, _____ .

If my native language was English, _____ .

Do the same with the sentences below:

_____ , I would be more productive.

_____ , my job would be more interesting.

_____ , my company would be more successful.

_____ , my office would be more comfortable.

PRONUNCIATION

Words with “weird” pronunciation

EXERCISE 1

Try pronouncing the following words. Listen to the recording (track 8.3) and check your pronunciation.

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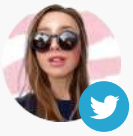
- Gauge
- Asterisk
- Automatic
- Cache
- Recipe
- Leisure
- Kubernetes
- Migration
- GIF
- Niche
- Apostrophe

SPEAKING & SOFT SKILLS

Small Talk and building rapport



ANNGLISH TIP
@anna_gandrabura

Business relationships in today's world are all about building rapport with people, be they co-workers, clients, prospective employers, investors etc.

You build rapport when you develop mutual trust, friendship and affinity with someone.

Building rapport can be incredibly beneficial to your career — it helps you to establish good interpersonal relationships, and this can open many doors for you.

EXERCISE 1A

Read the text. Can you comment on any of the provided tips or add your own?

One way to start building rapport is by using small talk.

The point of small talk is not to discuss any serious issues but to establish a connection with someone which will make your communication easier in the future.

Here are 5 small talk ideas which you can use with clients or colleagues.

1. PICK UP ON THEIR INTEREST

Try to deduce what a person is interested in just by being observant. Do they have a basketball poster on a wall behind them? Are they sitting in a gaming chair? You can them ask questions about that person's interests, for instance:

> Are you a basketball fan? Do you like other sports as well?
>
> Do you play a lot of video games? What's your favorite game?

2. ASK ABOUT THEM

Being generally curious about the person can also be a good way to build rapport with them. While you don't want to be too nosy or obnoxious, there are still plenty of "safe" questions you can ask such as:

> Have you ever had anything funny happen to you at work?
>
> Do you enjoy working in the office or do you prefer to work at home?
>
> Do you like reading books? Are you currently reading anything interesting?
>
> What would be an ideal present for you?
>
> If you could magically make one problem go away forever, what would it be?

3. SHARE SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF

Just talk about your day or your upcoming plans (make it short and sweet, you don't want anyone to be bored) and see if that takes you anywhere. It might turn out that you have something in common together.

4. PAY THEM A COMPLIMENT

Genuine compliments do wonders in terms of uplifting and inspiring the other person. If someone on your team has done a great job, let them know about it! If you can see that someone has put a lot of effort into something, give them a shoutout. They will appreciate it.

5. OFFER A PIECE OF ADVICE OR A RECOMMENDATION

Many people make a mistake of undervaluing how useful they can be to others. If there is a useful resource you love, a handy shortcut that saves you time, a great service you use, an awesome place you love visiting etc, share it with people! Don't assume those things are common knowledge.

If you would like more practice on soft skills, check out our English For IT Communication course.

GET 25% OFF >>

EXERCISE 1B

Consider the following 3 scenarios below and come up with an answer for each of them.

1. You are asked to share 3 interesting things about yourself at a meeting with a new client
2. Your team mate Sally has been very helpful in the last couple of weeks. Give her a shoutout in the team chat.
3. Someone asks you: "Do you have any podcasts / TV shows / books you could recommend? I'm looking for something interesting and thought-provoking."

WRITING & SOFT SKILLS

EXERCISE 1

Complete the sentences with frequently used phrases in business chatting.

up • through • into • to

1. I will look _____ the issue and get back _____ you as soon as I can.
2. I'll try to go _____ the project specification this evening and give you my feedback by tomorrow afternoon.
3. We have set _____ a meeting for Thursday at 6pm. Can you make it?

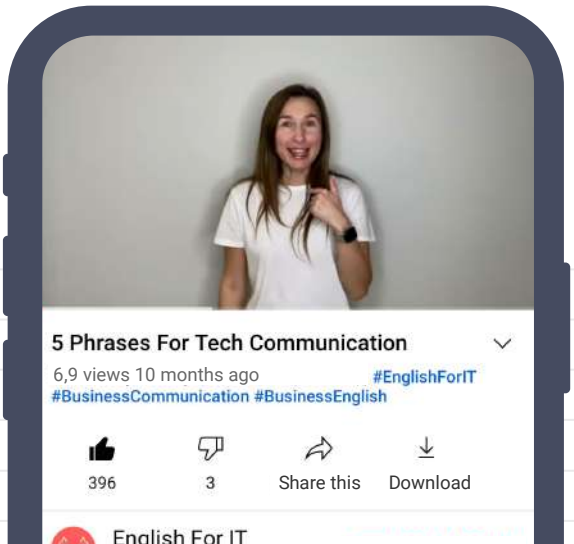
EXERCISE 2

Choose one scenario and write a chat message using the tips and phrases from the reading section.

1. You want to schedule a meeting to discuss migrating your production database.
2. A server is not responding, and you need help troubleshooting it (use made up details).
3. I made a mistake when setting up the firewall rules — inform me of this mistake.
4. You need somebody to cover your on-call rotation. Ask for help in a common channel.
5. You need to ask somebody for credentials to a production server. You have never met before.

Another thing that can help you build rapport is knowing idioms and fixed expressions. Watch this video on 5 common business expressions. Then, make up your own sentences with each of them.

LEARN 5 BUSINESS PHRASES >>



GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS

Dev — short for “developers”.

Production database — A database that contains the data used to drive your live, production site or app used by your customers.

PRs (pull requests) — a method of submitting contributions to an open development project.

Customer escalation — a scenario where a customer is not pleased with an employee interaction and wants someone at a higher level within the company to resolve the complaint.

(Chat) client — a program or computer that connects to and requests information from a server.

Kubernetes — a portable, extensible, open-source platform for managing containerized workloads and services, that facilitates both declarative configuration and automation.

If you want a little extra practice:

Reading

This article covers a range of topics and questions that are often used for small talk. Feel free to answer those questions yourself to get some speaking practice or use them to build rapport with other people.

VIEW GLOSSARY »

Fun stuff

Learning new words is most effective when you learn them in context! This website provides you with an ability to scrape Youtube’s video base for particular words or phrases.

YOUGLISH »