

Learning, Teaching
and Student Engagement

English Skills

Formal and Informal English for Speaking

This module covers concepts such as

- Understanding the different levels of informality in speech
- Understanding when to use formal or informal English
- Practising some new words and expressions
- Knowing where to find out more

www.jcu.edu.au/students/learning-centre



The**Learning**Centre
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Spoken English at university can be formal, informal or somewhere in between.

Informal English is common in spoken English at university. In lectures and tutorials, there will be a certain level of formality, but some lecturers will use colloquialisms frequently. Let your lecturers know if you are finding it hard to understand them because of this. Very informal, local language, combined with speaking very quickly, can cause problems for students.

For everyday interactions with students and staff, you need to develop your social English. The best way to do this is to listen to locals whose first language is English and ask questions. Practise some of the informal language you hear, but be careful not to use swear words or offensive language by mistake. A lot of Aussie humour involves word play or requires some understanding of the cultural context. Your language and cultural background will affect how much time it takes you to understand local humour.

Polite language

It can be helpful to use polite language in informal contexts (please, thank you, excuse me, would you mind?, may I add something? I'm afraid I disagree with that because...).

Intonation also indicates the level of politeness. Try asking the question below, with different levels of intonation. Rising intonation is more polite.

"What's the time, please?"

Informal language:

- Abbreviations (Aussie, barbie)
- Contractions (uni, lab)
- Acronyms (JCU)
- Vocabulary choice (got, chook)
- Phrasal verbs (go up)
- Idioms (to run around like a headless chook)
- Metaphors (a mountain of work)
- Clichés (a nice person)
- Everyday phrases (How are you going? Not bad)

Slang: very informal contemporary language (sweet as, hot)

Swear words & offensive words (avoid these!)

Informal Everyday Phrases and Slang

How are you going? How's it going?

How are things? How have you been?

Not bad / Good thanks – how about you?

I've been flat out!

What have you been up to? What's up? Sup?

Not much / Dunno / Heaps of stuff

Learning informal Australian English independently

WEBSITES

Australia Network – Learning English

<http://australianetwork.com/learningenglish/>

AusEphrase

<http://www.e-phrase.com.au/>

AusEphrase Training Video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mu68NbGVhkM>

National Museum Australia: Australian English

http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/nation/australian_english

National Museum Australia: Aussie English for the Beginner

http://www.nma.gov.au/play_aussie_english/guide/ebook.html

Aussie English from the sticks

<http://aus-eng.blogspot.com.au/>

FACEBOOK GROUPS

Australia Plus Learn English is a free service for anyone learning English and is produced by the ABC, Australia's national public broadcaster.

<https://www.facebook.com/AustraliaPlusLearnEnglish>

YOUTUBE CLIPS

Please note: some of these clips include a small amount of swearing or offensive language

An American in Melbourne

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNLV3tcFm4A>

Introduction to slang with outback scenery

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsBm2lIFeKM>

Aus E-Phrase

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Nq-IUHnmU>

Adam Hills - Aussie comedian

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpBYnL5fAXE>

Summary (to sum up!)

- Spoken English at JCU can be both informal and formal
- Polite language is helpful for both formal and informal spoken and written communication
- To learn Aussie English, explore some websites but, best of all, **ask an Aussie!**