



Language for newbies – what to ask when you start a job, and how

Spilling coffee on a new laptop or breaking the photocopier on your first day in a new job might be your idea of work hell. If you're starting a new job remotely, it might only be the technology you crash, but you're still keen to make a good first impression. Never fear – most of these situations can be mitigated by using the right language to excuse or explain yourself, and awkward situations can be prevented by asking the right questions. After all, new recruits (often known as 'newbies') are usually granted a honeymoon period. It's wise to use it well.

by Garry Britton

Learn quickly and ask questions at onboarding

Learn quickly and ask questions at onboarding Hopefully, your new company will have organised a well-designed onboarding process (also sometimes known as an induction). It may be a day, it may be a week – but however comprehensive, you'll probably still have questions:

- Who do I go to for questions about leave arrangements? Is that my boss or HR?
- What's the company's social media/ BYOD policy? ('Bring your own device' is when you use your own electronic equipment for work).
- Can you explain a little more about the structure of the organisation? Maybe you have an organogram to help me see where I fit in?
- I'd like to know more about the annual appraisal system and how that relates to bonuses.

Notice that the last point isn't actually a question, but it's an enthusiastic way of eliciting information.

Pick up the lingo

'Lingo' is just a colloquial form for 'language'. The point is, it's an abbreviation that not everyone may know.

All companies have their own jargon and short forms to baffle you with, so the best time to ask about them is while you're still seen as new and won't be expected to know.

Leave it too many months and it might be embarrassing to ask!

- What exactly is a VTA?
Oh, a virtual teleworking assistant, I see!
- Did you say 'beebee' or 'baby'? Oh OK – BB for British brand!

„Hi!“



Find out about the culture

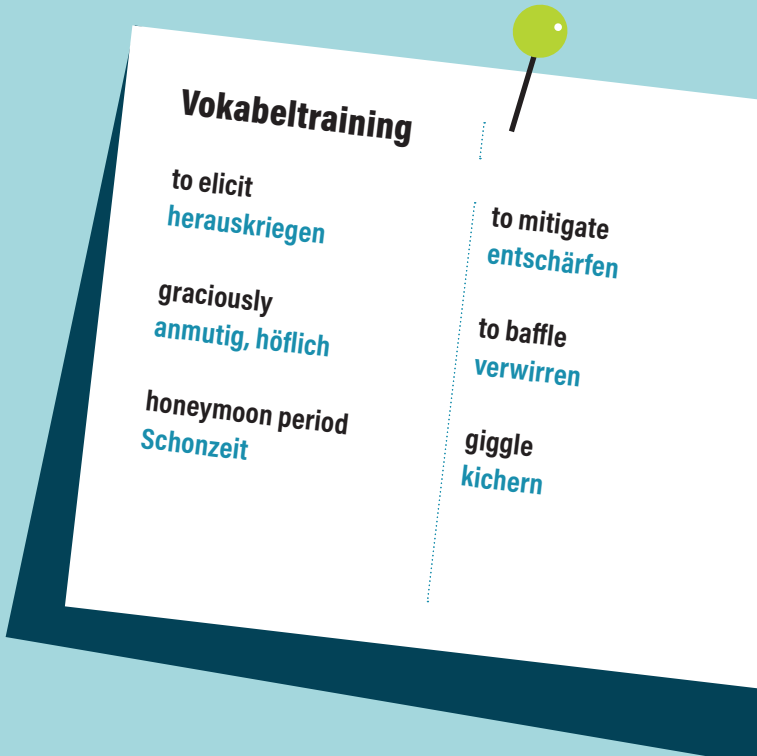
Company culture may be hard to define, but can be very strong. I remember once working in a new online translation team where one member insisted on telling us that she 'came from a culture where people spoke out and took responsibility for their views'. This wasn't very well appreciated in the new team. You might ask about points of etiquette, or more ordinary matters:

- Is it acceptable to email a director or should we always go through line managers?
- How long do people normally spend on lunch? Is it OK to pop out?

Enquire about the expected communication style

A point related to culture is how people normally communicate. Your new boss may not want to talk to you in the same ways, with the same frequency, as your last boss. Other managers may have their own communication styles, and so may the company itself. You could ask:

- Do you prefer emails and messages, or should I just pick up the phone or use Teams?
- Is it generally done to drop in on managers unannounced? Is there an open-door policy?
- Would I normally be expected to reply to emails at weekends?



Be ready to excuse yourself when things go wrong

Back to the accidents we started with. Even if you don't break anything, you usually can't help making a mistake of some kind. Names are a particular source of error when you're new:

- 'I'm so sorry, I referred to you as Peter Smith, but I've just realised you're Smythe' (y pronounced like my).
- 'Kelly, please forgive me for calling you Shelly. With all these new names today I'm getting confused.'

Apologise graciously and people will usually laugh in a sympathetic way. Remember that English-speaking workplaces can be very informal, and some people love nothing more than a giggle!

