

# Reporting on progress in English – Principles 1 to 6

Many of us continue to work remotely and it matters that we produce concise and effective progress updates. This article focuses on a set of best practice principles designed to inform the writing of effective progress updates in English. To find out more about our webinars on Reporting on progress and performance, please scroll down.

**There are a range of different scenarios in which you are expected to write a progress email. A cross section of examples are provided below.**

- You are working remotely and need to provide a regular update to your manager.
- You are emailing a senior manager a review of Q1 performance.
- You are sending an update in support of an important meeting.
- You are working for the Luxembourg office of a European company and regularly report into the corporate group.
- You are sending a regular ‘snapshot’ to your team on progress.

## **Principle 1. Be political but authentic!**

This sounds like a contradiction and does not mean ‘spinning’ or ‘fabricating’ information. Your guiding principle is not to give bad news in isolation! Imagine your team’s absence rate has increased over the previous month. You need to contextualize the information and highlight a proactive response to your manager.

**For example:** *While absence rates have been generally very good in 2020, we have experienced an increase in our team’s absence rate in*

*the last six weeks. We have organized a team meeting to explore the underlying reasons for this increase and how we can better support our staff going forward.*

## **Principle 2: Be nuanced in expressing contrasts.**

The key to getting this balance above is in effectively using linking words in how you report.

- **‘But/however’** - allows us to connect and contrast two “broadly” different ideas, often of a similar size. **‘Nevertheless’**, **‘though’** and **‘while’** can also be used to express contrast.
- **Example:** We have successfully achieved our deadline. However, we do have concerns about the quality of the prototype. (This is significant and questions the validity of the prototype).
- **‘Although’/‘even though’** - it expresses a concession/qualification but does not challenge the initial idea. **‘Although’** and **‘even though’** are followed by subject + verb. **‘Even though’** is stronger than **‘although’**.
- **Example:** We have successfully achieved our deadline despite some concerns about the quality of the prototype. (This does not question the overall validity of the prototype).
- **‘Despite’** and **‘in spite of’** are followed by a noun phrase/gerund. They perform the same function as **‘although’** and **‘even-though’**.

## **Principle 3. Keep your update open to the audience**

The present perfect simple is a great tool in keeping your update open. The **present perfect, have/has + past participle** allows you to connect a past action to now in a way that makes your update open and connected to your audience. It communicates some sort of relationship between the past and now. Importantly, even if the action is finished but there is a connection, consequence for now –

use the present perfect. For example, it communicates an openness to your manager because the tense is 'open' to possibilities in the present. The manager can change something if they like, give feedback or give their sign off.

### **Useful expressions using the present perfect simple:**

- I have finished the report and would welcome your feedback.
- I have nearly finished the report; can we review this tomorrow?
- I have redefined the project scope and would value your input.
- I have reviewed the initial project brief and have the following recommendations.
- I have reviewed the project costings and these are ready for your sign off

### **Principle 4. The dangers of overusing the past simple.**

You need to be aware of a key difference between the present perfect v the past simple (I have finished the feasibility study) v (I finished the feasibility study last week). The golden rule is use the present perfect to communicate the completion of project milestones (objectives/deadlines). The danger of overusing the past simple is that you give the impression of telling a closed story to your audience.

### **Consider the difference.**

**Closed using the past simple:** I finished the Q1 report on Wednesday. I spoke to Peter about the revised costings.

**Open using the present perfect:** I have finished the Q1 report and would welcome your feedback. I have spoken to Peter about the revised costings and we think that a sensible way forward would be to...

## **Principle 5. Communicating something is unfinished/a work in progress in a calm and measured way.**

The **present perfect continuous (have/has + verb + ing)** can be used to communicate to your manager, for example, that you are working on a project/activity (already started) and while it is unfinished, you have it under control. The present perfect continuous can be used to communicate to your manager that you are working on something - although you are not doing it right now. If you contrast this tense to the present continuous, it is a less urgent/immediate but calmer way of communicating an unfinished project. You need to judge the mood of your manager before choosing between these two tenses!

### **Useful expressions:**

- I have been working on the production report this week and it should be finished by Monday.
- I have been meeting suppliers and should have an initial recommendation by the end of the week.
- I have been developing new protocols for the SAP implementation and will have this ready in time for the monthly review.

## **Principle 6: How to highlight the energy, resource, time given to the project.**

The present perfect continuous can also be used to communicate a great deal of effort has been given to a project already. This tense highlights the time and energy already used in the activity if you feel this is not properly understood. Warning, it needs to be used carefully so you don't appear defensive to your manager.

### **Useful expressions:**

- We have been working every day on preparing the presentation.
  - I have been working on the sales figures all morning.
  - I have been analysing Q1 turnover and it remains a complex picture.
-