

Reporting on progress in English – Principles 7 to 10

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. Last week we shared our first six principles - this article takes us from principle 7 to 10.

Principle 7 When you need to communicate urgency in your progress update.

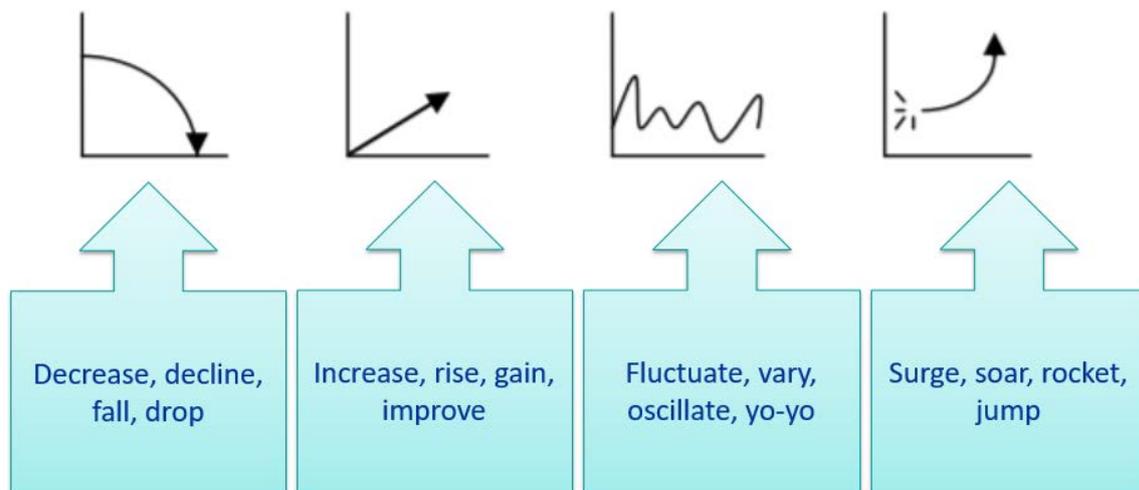
The present continuous: (am/is/are + main verb + ing). This tense can be used to communicate urgency. Your manager wants an update on your project and is anxious about slippage (falling behind). By using the present continuous you can communicate that you are treating this action very seriously and that you are 'on the case'! Don't forget that the present continuous is used to communicate what you are doing at that very moment. It can also be used to communicate what you are doing around now, this week, for example.

Useful expressions using the present continuous

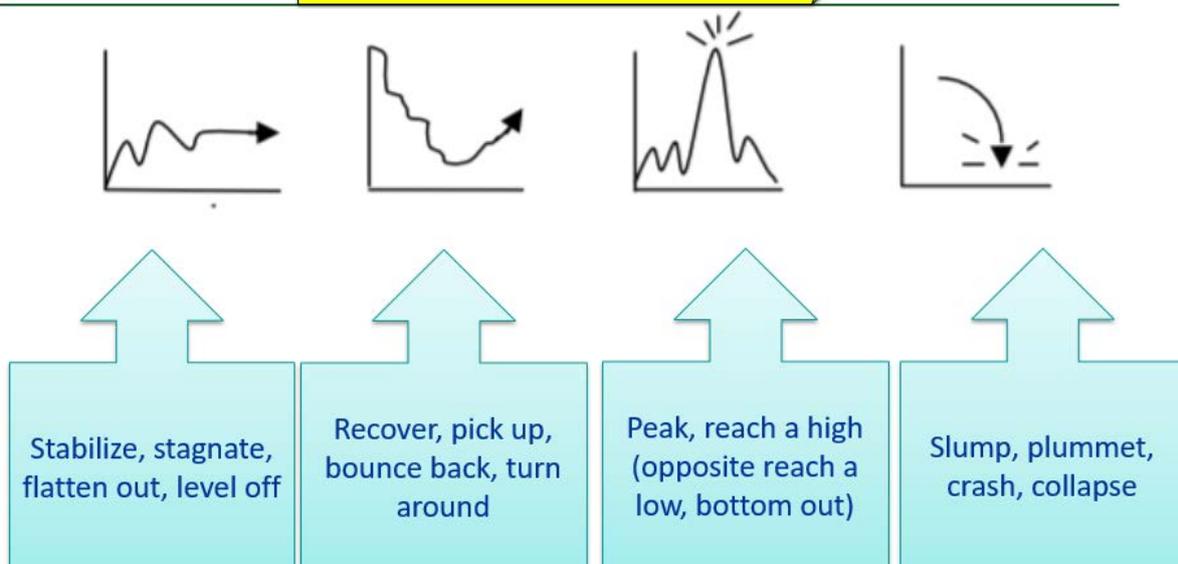
- I am working on this as a priority.
- I am focusing on completing the data analysis.
- We are reviewing the risk-log as a matter of urgency.
- We are rethinking how best to approach this, and I will get back to you at the end of the working day.

Principle 8 To widen your verbs of change.

We have noted a natural tendency for non-native speakers to communicate change, performance and progress using a limited range of verbs. There is a great range of verbs of change at your disposal. Using a broad range of verbs can add nuance to your progress update. Some examples are below;



Top tip: Different verbs of change convey a different level of formality. Rocket and yo-yo, for example, are better in a semi-formal communication.



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Principle 9 Giving further nuance to your progress emails.

When describing trends, you can use a range of terms, such as adverbs, that moderate the verb; **slightly, gradually, dramatically, significantly, substantially, etc...** This gives further nuance to how you communicate change over time. These types of adverbs can be used to downplay or highlight information in your progress review.

Example: Profits have **increased** dramatically.

Example: Sales have declined **slightly** over Q1.

You can also use these terms as adjectives that modify the noun form.

Example: There has been a **dramatic** increase in sales.

Principle 10 Making confident predictions.

Sometimes when reporting on progress you will not simply be reviewing the previous period. You will also be expected to make predictions about future performance. This needs to be done with care. It is a natural tendency to want to impress your manager by being over-confident (over-bullish) in your next steps, planning, or predictions about growth.

There are a number of different ways of making a prediction which are highlighted below.

10.1 'Going to' – evidence based prediction about future performance. This communicates a high level of confidence to your audience suggesting evidence/data has been reviewed prior to making an assertion about the future.

Example: Based on our analysis profits **are going** to stabilise in Q2 2020.

10.2 'Will' – instincts informing a prediction about future performance. 'Will' also communicates a high level of confidence to your audience. However, it is best used to refer to an instinctive insight for the future, your 'gut feel' rather than a calm analysis of available evidence.

Example: I have a feeling profits **will** rocket in 2020.

10.3 'Can', 'Could', 'May' allow you make a qualified prediction. There are many professional contexts in which it makes sense to be qualified and guarded. This could be because of uncertainty about future trends or simply the need to protect your own credibility.

Example: Profits **might** increase in **Q3**; however, this is very dependent on the easing of the current lock down measures.
