

James Veitch: This is what happens when you reply to spam email

James Veitch is a British comedian and writer who has an unusual approach to dealing with unwanted spam emails that turn up in his inbox. Rather than think of them as junk and simply delete them, James has decided to answer the spammers and have some fun. In this edited TED Talk, James describes some of the spam email he has received and his hysterical correspondence with one email spammer that got a little out of hand. James doesn't think his approach is mean. He argues that if he is keeping the spammers busy talking to him, then they aren't taking money from innocent people.

James Veitch's idea worth spreading is that correspondence with email spammers can lead to surprising, bizarre, and often hilarious results.

Before You Watch

Activity 1

Activity aim: To identify the difference between spam and scam emails.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

Worksheet: Before You Watch 1

- Split students into pairs. Have them briefly jott down notes about the qualities unique to each type of email and common to both. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- After two minutes, call for volunteers to supply their suggestions. If students are hesitant, you may want to ask them some leading questions: *Do you know the sender of the email? Does it end up in your inbox? Should you answer the email?*
- Be advised that many spam emails can be of risqué nature and be prepared to steer the conversation away from that, as appropriate.

Answers

Answers will vary. Both are unsolicited. Spam emails tend to be advertisements, coupons, campaigns. Scam emails try to extract money or personal information from the recipient. Hopefully both end up in your spam folder.

Activity 2

Activity aim: To identify spam and scam emails.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 8 minutes

- Read the preview line of each email aloud and have students take notes on anything they notice individually.

- Take a class vote on which email is not spam or scam.
- Ask for two volunteers to comment on what they noticed in the emails. Are there any other telltale signs of spam or scam emails that the class can provide?

Answers

The last one is not scam or spam. Answers will vary on the others, but students may point to typos, references to money, an email from “dad” being in a spam folder, multiple names in the “from” field, one message being a forward, the improbability of a receipt of \$5.5M.

Activity 3

Activity aim: To identify the features of a scam email.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 6 minutes

Worksheet: Before You Watch 3

- Call on a student to read the email aloud to the class.
- Give students one minute to jot down their observations as individuals. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Bring students together in groups of four to share their ideas.
- Point to the different areas of the message where there are problems and call on individuals to identify them.

Answers

Answers will vary. The name in the email is does not match the email address; there are several spelling errors within the email; the content of the email and subject line do not match; you do not know the sender; the wrong name appears at the beginning of the email. Students may also comment on the strangely formal tone of the message.

Activity 4

Activity aim: To sort advice relating to scam and spam emails.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 3 minutes

Worksheet: Before You Watch 4

- Take advantage of this opportunity to quickly review some do’s and don’ts for responsible behavior online. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Call on students to assign each of the items into the correct category.

Answers

Don’t: open the attachments; click on the links and follow the instructions; assume the person sending the message knows you.

Do: create a spam folder and check it occasionally; protect your personal information, such as bank info, passwords, and birthdate; look for clues to tell you if the email can be trusted.

Extension

- Assign groups of four to list what can go wrong if you don't follow these rules.
- Ask volunteers to suggest more do's and don'ts (don't give out your password; do check the URL in any links you click; do pay attention to any spam/scam notification warnings you get from your school or work).
- Ask students for anecdotes about times they mistook a scam or spam email as legitimate.
- Extend the discussion to do's and don'ts of social media.

Watch

As students are guided to the correct answers through the in-app feedback, it is not necessary to review each question in the app. However, briefly reviewing any questions students have about individual items, or reviewing one or two of the activities would be appropriate. If class time is restricted, this option could be a way of checking comprehension and vocabulary in lieu of doing the in-class activities. Another suggestion to open the in-class discussion section would be to take a poll of students' answers to the first and last activities, which indicate their personal opinions and attitudes.

After You Watch

Comprehension: Activity 1

Activity aim: To check students' comprehension of the talk.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

Worksheet: Comprehension 1

- Check overall comprehension as quickly as possible, as students have already had a comprehension check in the app.
- Give students one minute to choose their answers, then ask for volunteers to give the correct answers. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Briefly clarify why any wrong answers are incorrect (For example, for item two, remind students that both Winnie and James send attachments; Winnie sends a letter with a "seal" to James, and James sends a chart to Solomon.).

Answers

1. c; 2. c; 3. b; 4. d; 5. d

Comprehension: Activity 2

Activity aim: To check students' comprehension of the talk.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 10 minutes

Worksheet: Comprehension 2

- Preview this activity by explaining to students that, even in content delivered by people who speak English well, it is common to encounter errors in both speech and text.
- Ask students if they noticed anything about the quality of the English in the emails James received. You may choose to project or hand out a portion of the transcript not covered in this activity to get the conversation going. For example: I AM WINNIE MANDELA, THE SECOND WIFE OF NELSON MANDELA THE FORMER SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT. (Students may comment that it is not normal to write an email all in capital letters.)
- Display the questions one at a time, giving students 10 seconds to read and note their answers for each one. Then, poll students for the correct answer on each item. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- As you go, ask a student who answers correctly for more detail on the error. Pause to review the rules related to any of the items as necessary.
- You may choose to pause for a teachable moment to address one of the common symptoms of language learning anxiety: fear of making a mistake. Point out that, although Solomon's emails in particular contain many errors, they are in fact perfectly comprehensible until James interrupts him to use the code. Likewise, students should

not allow the fear of not being completely accurate prevent them from expressing themselves, as accuracy is only one component of successful communication.

Answers

1. There is incorrect capitalization.
2. There is a subject/verb agreement error.
3. Both of the above
4. An article is missing.
5. The sentence is correct.
6. The word banker is missing an apostrophe.

Vocabulary: Activity 1

Activity aim: To solidify and practice understanding and usage of the target vocabulary.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

Worksheet: Vocabulary 1

- Draw students' attention to the *not* in the direction line to be sure they understand the task. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Quickly move through the items, asking for one student to read an item and options aloud, and then for a volunteer to answer. Repeat with new students.
- Clarify any mistakes they make as they go.
- Try to move through this comprehension check quickly to leave time for productive practice.

Answers

1. d; 2. b; 3. a; 4. d; 5. b; 6. a

Vocabulary: Activity 2

Activity aim: To ensure students understand the varying uses of *like*.

Class length: 90 minutes

Pacing: 15 minutes

- If you have not played this game before, take a moment to explain the rules and how to play.
- How to play: Divide into two teams: X's and O's. Take turns sending one person up to write an example of the word *like* using each of these meanings. The team has ten seconds to give feedback and correct errors. If the sentence is correct, the team gets the space. If the sentence is NOT correct, the opposing team has a chance to write a sentence, capture the space, and take the turn that follows as their own. The first team with three in a row wins.

Answers

Answers will vary.

Extension

- If the game goes quickly and students are enjoying it, this same game can be played again, provided students generate new examples.
- If you would like to collect written practice, request that ALL students write a sentence for each of the spaces ahead of playing the game live. This has the added benefit of ensuring that (1) students will eventually have drafts to refer to when it is their turn to write on the board, and that (2) all students practice actively even if one team wins quickly.

Vocabulary: Activity 3

Activity aim: To ensure students understand the varying uses of *get*.

Class length: 90 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

Worksheet: Vocabulary 3

- Remind students that many words in English have different meanings, depending on the context or the word they collocate with.
- *Get* is an extremely common word that is used in many contexts and with different meanings.
- Move through this activity quickly, calling on students to match a meaning with a sentence. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Ask students if they know these other meanings of *get*: *get away with* (escape from, evade); *get around to* (finally start doing something); *get around by* (travel by, in a smaller context, like a city—notice the difference with the previous example of only one word), *get along with* (be friendly with).

Answers

receive / A few years ago, I *got* one of those spam emails.

penetrate / And it managed to *get through* my spam filter.

become out of control / It was *getting a bit out of hand*.

obtain / *Get yourself* a pseudonymous (false name) email address.

move to action / And that was so much fun, right, that it *got me thinking*.

Grammar: Activity 1

Activity aim: To consolidate students' knowledge and understanding of continuous forms.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5 minutes

- Students at this level should be well versed in the formation of the basic perfect tenses. What they may need reinforcement with is when to use each, and what specific meanings they bring. Encourage them to apply the same rules of formation to other continuous tenses they may not have explicitly learned, such as the future perfect continuous.
- Give students two minutes to read the slide, perhaps asking for a volunteer to read aloud. Ask these questions to get them familiar with the different tenses: *Which tense should you use to describe an ongoing action...*
 - *that began in the past and continues into the present?* (present perfect continuous)
 - *in the future that started at a future point in the past?* (future perfect continuous)
 - *that is in progress right now?* (present continuous)
 - *that happened over extended time in the past?* (past perfect continuous)
 - *in the past, that was ongoing when another action occurred?* (past continuous)
 - *at a specific future moment in time?* (future perfect)

Grammar: Activity 2

Activity aim: To practice identifying continuous forms.

Class length: 90 minutes

Pacing: 3 minutes

- Ask for volunteers to point out the different examples, and briefly review the formation of each.
 - Present continuous = *am/is/are* + verb + *-ing*
 - Past continuous = *was/were* + verb + *-ing*
 - Past perfect continuous = *had been* + verb + *-ing*

Answers

Present continuous: *I'm expecting an email*; Past continuous: *It was getting a bit out of hand*

Past perfect continuous: *This had been going on for like, weeks.*

Grammar: Activity 3

Activity aim: To give students more practice working with continuous forms and recognizing how they are formed.

Class length: 90 minutes

Pacing: 15 minutes

- If you have not played this game before, take a moment to explain the rules and how to play.
- How to play: divide into two teams. Take turns letting a team member choose a category and amount (Ex: Past perfect continuous for 200!). Once they have chosen, reveal the prompt underneath. The student then has ten seconds to write a correct sentence according to the tense and prompt provided, and five seconds to accept feedback from their own team. If the sentence is correct, the team gets the points. If the sentence is NOT correct, the opposing teams both have a chance to write a sentence and divide the points (or one team can capture all, if only one sentence is correct).
- Some of the squares contain questions, so you may wish to review question formation in continuous tenses ahead of time. Draw their attention to the auxiliary verb and the placement of the present and past participles.

Present continuous	Are you going?
Past continuous	Were you going?
Future continuous	Will you be going?
Present perfect continuous	Have you been going?
Past perfect continuous	Had you been going?
Future perfect continuous	Will you have been going?

Answers

Answers will vary.

Extension

- If you would like to collect written practice, request that ALL students write a sentence for each of the spaces as they play game live. This has the added benefit of ensuring all students practice actively, even if one team wins quickly.

Grammar: Activity 4

Activity aim: To give students an additional opportunity to work with continuous forms.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5–8 minutes

Worksheet: Grammar 4

- Explain to students that each question has the same set of options.
- Allow students to read through the activity silently on their own, giving them about four minutes.
- Advise them to answer the ones they know first, and thereby eliminate answer choices for ones they may not. You may choose to use the worksheet for this task.
- Call on volunteers to read the items and answers aloud. Explain the notes on the individual answers as you go through them:

- 1a: This is a common use of a continuous tense that should be familiar students: describing an ongoing action as another action takes place.
- 2c: *Shall* is an auxiliary verb that means the same as *will* in the future tense. It is however, much less frequent and can also be used (1) to make suggestion (*shall we go?*) and (2) give commands (*You shall go!*). It can sound slightly more formal in register. For purposes of learning English, students need only recognize the word, as it is somewhat uncommon in modern speech (regionally dependent).
- 3d: The present participle and noun form (gerund) of a verb are identical, although they have different grammatical functions. If the *-ing* form acts as an object or does not have another verb associated with it, it is actually a noun.

Answers

1. a; 2. c; 3. d; 4. b

Grammar: Activity 5

Activity aim: To give students an opportunity to form questions using continuous forms.

Class length: 90 minutes

Pacing: 15 minutes

- Give students five minutes to prepare their questions.
- Circulate the room to check that they are correctly positioning the auxiliary verbs and to address any queries.
- Give students eight minutes to interview each other and record the answers.
- At the end, ask students to share anything interesting they learned about their peers.
- Correct any common errors as they arise.

Answers

Answers will vary. Students may construct questions as follows:

- Have you been studying another language?
- Are you going out after class?
- Do you enjoy spending time alone?
- Have you been traveling recently?
- Will you be taking a test soon?

Speaking: Activity

Activity aim: To ensure that students understand when and why intonation is used to show disbelief.

Class length: 90 minutes

Pacing: 3 minutes

- Briefly review how one can signal disbelief.

- Send students off in pairs to respond to the prompt.

Answers

Answers will vary. Students may answer as follows:

1. That's impossible!
2. Yeah, right!
3. Right, and I'm the Queen of England.
4. Do you live under a rock?
5. As if!
6. Are you serious?

Discussion: Activity 1

Activity aim: To prompt students to think about other types of online scams.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 3 minutes

- Assign students to read the text aloud, defining any words they have questions about as they go.

Discussion: Activity 2

Activity aim: To provide an opportunity for students to discuss the topic (why people get involved in online scams).

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: 5–8 minutes

- Point out that this second definition is a very recent definition that came from Nev Schulman's film, *Catfish*.
- His comparison to the catfish of the fishing industry makes the point that the existence of these catfish encourages us—the codfish—to keep ourselves stronger and more alert.
- Give students a few minutes to discuss, and then have them share answers as a class. Has anyone in the class ever had an experience with a catfish?

Answers

Answers will vary. Students may answer as follows:

You can get involved in a romance; you can have your personal information compromised; you can get bullied; you can waste time on something that is not really there.

Discussion: Activity 3

Activity aim: To provide further opportunities for students to discuss the topic (why people get involved in online scams).

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 8 minutes

- Continue the discussion by creating groups of four out of the existing pairs.
- Remind students that they can also include *don't* statements as part of their rules.
- Ask each group to share one rule and have everyone else who had the same rule raise their hands; have a volunteer record all rules on the board.
- Continues until all groups have spoken.
- At the end of the activity, ask if anyone can think of any more unique rules.

Answers

Answers will vary. Students may answer as follows:

Don't accept friend requests from people you have never met; keep your profile private; be thoughtful about your posts; be critical of the information you receive.

Discussion: Activity 4

Activity aim: To allow students to enter into a small group discussion about online scams.

Class length: 90 / 60 minutes

Pacing: 8 minutes

- Consider doing a "heat map" activity. Give each student three stickers (dots, post-its, etc.) and have them go up to the board and place one sticker on each of the three rules that they consider to be the most important (or all three on one, if they feel strongly).
- When everyone sits down, you will have a good visual reference of the opinions of the class.
- Take a few minutes as a class to review the results of the heat map and discuss the questions in the instructions.

Answers

Answers will vary.

Project

Activity aim: To allow students to assimilate what they learned in the talk and devise a short essay.

Class length: 90 / 60 / 30 minutes

Pacing: Outside class time

Worksheet: Project

- The North American Tree Octopus is an internet hoax generated to prove a point about how willing people are to believe anything they read online. Although the topic is evidently ludicrous, in one 2006 study, 100 percent of readers believed the content they were presented with.
- If you are concerned about your students not picking up on the hoax and becoming embarrassed in class, give them another couple of hints like: *Do Octopuses live in Trees?* *Do you think this is a hoax?*
- If not, James' Veitch's talk touches on the changing landscape for crime, truth, and personal responsibility in the internet age; let students go through the exercise of assessing the truth of what they find themselves.
- If interested, other similar topics for research may include Hercules the dog and the Onion Charging iPod.

Answers

Answers will vary.