



Introduction

Having had time to think about my native language while living in Japan has made me realise how difficult, irregular and dependent on context English can be. Like most languages, we use different words and phrases or even grammar in different situations. Writing a paper for a scientific journal has a different style from writing a technical specification in, say, an engineering company.

The language we use often changes again when writing a patent specification. Certainly as an engineer I always try to describe my products in as specific and clear a way as possible. When writing a patent, of course, one has to be careful not to accidentally introduce limitations which might limit patent scope, while (hopefully!) maintaining clarity. The most specialised language of all is used in the claims of a patent, where we have a hybrid of technical description and legal contract.

Unlike, say, the German language, there is no governing authority to define what is correct in English. For this reason, it is defined not by rules but by the usage of approximately 375 million people who speak English as a first language, and indeed many more who use English as a second language. For this reason, there are no rules that are 100% accurate in English. Probably the only rule is this: every rule has exceptions.

For the reasons mentioned above, the notes on this web site are intended to give you suggestions only for common usage in a technical context. The intention is to give you, the reader, a basic idea of how a native speaker of English interprets certain words or phrases. They are primarily intended for patent practitioners using English as a foreign language. Nothing, of course, can replace the skill of an experienced IP professional.

I hope you find these notes useful.

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This is the first of a series of notes on English for patent drafting that PDI wish to share with the IP community. The author is an engineer, and QA manager at PDI, but not a patent agent or attorney.

The author has a degree in Physics and Chemistry, and spent 16 years as a researcher and software engineer with (amongst others) GEC and Vodafone, working on diverse projects such as ocean sound propagation, geophysical analysis and telecommunications network management