

Return address:

Colleagues and students
Department of the Built Environment



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Our reference
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Your reference

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Environment

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Subject: English

Dear Colleagues and Students,

Increasingly we are receiving complaints about the way we teach in English at our faculty and how we present ourselves as an international program through our curriculum.

The problem has three sides to it.

1. The **habits** and practices we have developed to cope with the fact that we are a Dutch university teaching/doing research and administering our faculty in English
2. The **level** of the English used in our teaching and tutoring, research and administration
3. The **international** orientation of our international educational and research program

This needs to be explained at leisure. If you do not need the explanation but simply want to read what is required then please read what is written in [blue](#).


1. We would like to remind all students and all staff that some of the habits we have acquired to cope with being Dutch in an English Speaking University in The Netherlands although innocently motivated, have an exclusionary effect that, though inadvertent, is insidious and destructive. Students and staff burdened with these habits feel excluded, wrong-footed and placed at a disadvantage and that is just about the worst thing possible for a healthy institution. So please read the following list of **Do's and Don'ts** and hold it up to yourself as a mirror. We are striving to be an inclusive faculty and this means that we have to do our best to not burden our international students and staff with an unnecessary and quite inappropriate guilt when their presence forces the conversation to change from Dutch into English, especially when that conversation (as during tutoring sessions or committee meetings) should have been in English in the first place.
 - a. [Do not start your class or meeting with the remark: "are there any international students or can we speak in Dutch?" or with phrases of similar ilk and intent. Assume the class or meeting needs to start in English.](#)
 - b. [When in a meeting \(or teams meeting\) and there is a break, please continue in the language you were holding that meeting, which for clarity's sake should, strictly speaking, always be in English.](#)

- c. Do not tell international students or colleagues to use google translate to translate the words you yourself fail to know in English, or texts that are not in English. That is your own responsibility and should be part of the preparation for your course or project or management task.
- d. Students: make an effort to be inclusive to all your fellow students. Make sure that the diversity of our student population is fairly represented in all your associations and committees. Be open and welcoming and woke. Make sure you are not yourself guilty of the language-games outlined above. And take the initiative to mingle outside of your own language group of linguistic comfort zone. We see archipelagos forming of all sorts of linguistic sub-cultures. This is not a good development, let's not just believe that it is good to work together, let's actually do it.

ON CAMPUS = ENGLISH SWITCHED ON

2. We should be justly proud of the advances we have made over the past seven odd years since the switch-over to English. The change is nothing short of miraculous. But we are not there yet. There are new members of staff from various countries as well as some old members of staff that (continue to) find it hard to express themselves and communicate with reasonable fluency in English. There are even some that simply do not want to or are not aware of how piecemeal and impoverished their English is. The point is that whether we and any one of us wanted the change from Dutch to English, or whether any of us thinks it is a good or bad idea, is quite irrelevant. We have each of us committed ourselves to teaching at this English Speaking University and so we have to deal with the consequences of that choice. **This means, quite simply, that all staff and all students have a personal responsibility to improve their fluency generally and more specifically to acquire the correct technical vocabulary relevant to the Built Environment in general and their specialization in particular.** It is the responsibility of the university to facilitate this development by offering courses where possible. (Should you be interested in receiving help with your English then please follow this link [Training Index \(tue.nl\)](#)). However it is our own responsibility to take them and, where such courses are impracticable, to acquire the skills through self-study. We would ask all those in a position of leadership[and therefore tasked with conducting yearly reviews with individual members of staff to pay attention to this point.
3. Our courses, our research and the way we conduct our administration need to be tailored to international stakeholders and interests. Therefore, in your education and where relevant in your research tutoring use cases examples and problems from The Netherlands only when those cases, examples and problems have a clear international or generic dimension or relevance. And make that dimension or relevance explicit in your teaching and tutoring. In your management and administration tasks familiarize yourself with the proper forms of communication and administration in English.

Kind regards,



Prof.ir. Theo Salet
Dean of the Department of the Built Environment