

Let's be honest about the current wave of lay-offs

Level: Advanced (C1–C2)

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Overview: This article discusses the current culture and how people are being fired during the increasing wave of lay-offs.

Business topic: Redundancy, work culture, corporate culture

Business language: Words and phrases for lay-offs

Activities: Key words, understanding the text, business language, discussion, writing a formal business email

Groups: Whole class, pairs, small groups, one-to-one

3. Key words

- a. Have students work individually to match the key words to the definitions by referring to the section number given in brackets. Have students compare their answers in pairs. Elicit answers from the whole class.

Key:

1. *chief executive*
2. *badge*
3. *dismal*
4. *laid bare*
5. *unavoidable*
6. *grapevine*
7. *retrenchment*
8. *sharp-elbowed*
9. *be dispensed with*
10. *cowardice*
11. *blot*

4. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to read the statements and then find the relevant parts of the article in order to determine if the statements are True or False. Encourage students to not only correct the false statements but also be ready to explain what supports the true statements. Have them share their answers in pairs or small groups before eliciting answers from the whole class.

Key:

1. *True*
2. *False (It was this year.)*
3. *True*
4. *True*
5. *True*
6. *False (It was done over the phone, but the CEO offered him help in finding new opportunities.)*
7. *True*
8. *False (She got a phone call.)*
9. *True*
10. *True*

1. Warmer

- a. Ask students to discuss the questions in small groups. Monitor and write any useful vocabulary on the board. Elicit the main ideas that arise from the discussion from the whole class.

2. Reading for gist

- a. Have students skim the article and choose the main idea. Then ask students to scan for phrases that support their answer.

Key:

2

5. Business language – formal and informal phrases

- a. You could set up this activity as a Total Physical Response (TPR) activity. Put the table on the board or the walls of the classroom and have students physically add the words to the table. This could be done as a competition or as a group activity. If you are teaching online, you could set up virtual boards to do the same.

Key:

Formal	Neutral	Informal
<i>be dispensed with</i>	<i>lay-off</i>	<i>be axed</i>
<i>be dismissed</i>	<i>be laid off</i>	<i>fire</i>
<i>make redundant</i>	<i>lose your job</i>	<i>sacking</i>
<i>terminate</i>	<i>job cuts</i>	<i>your time's up</i> <i>the chop</i>

- b. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to complete the task. In some instances, more than one answer is possible but encourage students to examine the context given in the sentences.

Key:

- made redundant (also acceptable: laid off, terminated)*
- job cuts*
- lose their jobs (also acceptable: be laid off, be made redundant, terminated)*
- dismissed (also acceptable: fired, sacked – depends on tone)*
- laid off (also acceptable: made redundant)*
- sacked (also acceptable: fired, dismissed)*
- be dispensed with (also acceptable: be made redundant)*
- be axed (also acceptable: be made redundant, be laid off – tone varies)*
- your time's up (informal; also acceptable: you're fired, you're out – not from original list)*
- the chop (also acceptable: axed – informal)*
- fired (also acceptable: dismissed, sacked)*
- be dispensed with (also acceptable: be terminated)*

- c. Have students write sentences using the words and phrases from the table. Review their examples as a class and discuss the level of formality of each sentence.

6. Discussion

- a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

7. Wider business theme - writing a formal email about lay-offs

- a. Explain that students are going to write a formal email to the managers at a company they're the CEOs of. They need to inform the managers about a round of lay-offs the company is preparing. Briefly discuss what format such an email should have (formal, neutral or informal), and what it should contain.

- Ask students to work in pairs or small groups. Ask them first to read the text and fill in the notes.

Key:

- setting*
- script*
- small talk*
- final pay / severance*
- question*
- support*

Once students have completed this task, hold a quick class discussion. Ask students if they agree with these tips and if they would like to add anything to them.

- Ask students to work individually and draft their emails. When they are done, you can ask them to work in pairs, exchange their emails and give each other feedback.