

In the Office 

Correcting common English mistakes

This column will look at some of the pitfalls that Koreans tend to fall into when using English in the workplace. Let's speak English the right way!

OFFICE SETTING

Here is a list of some commonly misused words in an office setting.

1) Hand phone (X) → Cell phone or, more commonly, cell. Mobile phone (British English) (O)

What Koreans refer to as a "hand phone" is actually a "cell phone", or simply "cell", which is short for cellular phone. "Mobile phone" is a British expression.

» Can you call me on my cell?

2) Sign (X) → Signature (O)

Koreans use "sign" as a noun, but it only works when you use it as a verb. The noun form of this word is "signature".

» Sign here, please.
» I need your signature here, please.

3) Name card (X) → Business card (O)

Name cards are referred to as "business cards" in the English-speaking world.

» Here's my business card if you need to reach me.



4) Aircon (X) → Air conditioner (O)

Although the word "aircon" is a shortened version of air conditioner, native English speakers use the full word "air conditioner" or shorten it to "AC".

» Can you turn up the AC? It's so stuffy in here!

5) Consent (X) → (electrical) Outlet / Socket (O)

This is a very commonly misused word that we should correct. You plug into an "outlet" or a "socket", not a "consent".

» Is there an extra outlet that I can plug this into? I need to charge my phone.

STATIONERY ITEMS

These are some stationery items found on the desk that we refer to by the wrong name.



1) Hotchkiss (X) → Stapler (O)

A stapler is a stationery item that's in every office, but we refer to it by a wrong name.

» Can you pass me the stapler?

2) Sharp (X) → Mechanical pencil (O)

A "mechanical pencil" may be sharp because the lead you put in it is so thin, but it is not called a "sharp" in English.

» My mechanical pencil ran out of lead. Does anyone have some?

3) Notebook (X) → Laptop (O)

When native speakers hear the word "notebook", they will think of paper notebooks. They call them "laptops".

» Stupid laptop! It froze on me again!

4) Sign pen (X) → (felt tip) Marker pen (O)

What we refer to as a "sign pen" is called a "felt tip marker pen", or a "fine-liner pen", in correct English.

» Did you see my black felt tip marker pen? I had it on my desk just 10 minutes ago.

5) Magic (X) → Permanent marker (O)

The word "magic" is taken from the name of its manufacturer in Japan, and the actual marker itself is called a "permanent marker" in English. Colloquially, a permanent marker is also referred to as a "Sharpie" in North America, which is an American brand known for such markers.

» Can I borrow your permanent marker?

OFFICE FASHION

These are some expressions that we use day-to-day related to fashion that are not used by native speakers of English.



1) Y-shirts (X) → Dress shirt (O)

Although the long-sleeve shirt that's worn at the office is shaped like a Y, native English speakers don't call it "Y-shirts". This formal office attire is called a "dress shirt".

» I really like your dress shirt.

2) Running shirts (X) → Undershirt (O)

The article of underwear that we wear underneath a dress shirt is called an "undershirt" in proper English, not "running shirts".

» You should wear an undershirt under your dress shirt in the office.

3) One piece (X) → Dress (O)

When a native speaker hears the word "one piece", he/she will often think of a one-piece outfit such as a jumpsuit, in which the top and bottom parts are connected. To accurately convey our meaning, we should use the word "dress".

» I need a new dress for work. I'll go shopping this weekend.

4) Knit (X) → (knitted) Sweater / (knit) Sweater (O)

Of the different kinds of sweaters, what we call a "knit" is a "(knitted) sweater" or "(knit) sweater" in proper English. The word "knit" is a verb that refers to the act of knitting itself, not the sweater.

» Can we turn up the heating in the office? I'm wearing a thick (knitted) sweater, and I'm still cold.