

## Using Corpora to Teach the Differences Between *Reservation* and *Appointment*

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### Abstract

Learning English vocabulary can be a challenge for ESL and EFL learners, especially when they are synonymous words. This paper analyzes two English nouns *reservation* and *appointment*, concentrating on their collocations. The corpus used in this paper is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Based on the findings, I created a set of materials for one corpus-informed lesson to help ESL/EFL learners discover the usage of the two words in context and improve their language skills.

### Introduction

Using corpora can help language learners understand and use the target language effectively. In this paper, I will analyze two English nouns, *reservation* and *appointment*, because they are quite similar and therefore can be confusing for many Japanese students. This is because these two words, *reservation* and *appointment*, are the same word in Japanese (“yoyaku”) and from my own experiences as a second language learner, I can understand that it is very difficult for English learners to understand the differences between these words and use them in real-life situations. Thus, I would like to analyze how English speakers use the two words, and how corpora can help students learn them. Based on the analysis, I will suggest materials to help students to understand the usage of these two words. My analysis will focus on:

- Frequencies of *reservation* and *appointment*
- Collocations of *reservation* and *appointment*
- Contexts of use for *reservation* and *appointment*.

### Analysis

#### Corpora

The corpus used for analysis was the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). COCA is a free online corpus created by Mark Davies at Brigham Young University in Utah. The corpus is composed of more than 1 billion words from 220,225 texts, including 20 million words from each of the years 1990 through 2017. This corpus offers eight different genres:



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spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic journals, web, blog, and TV/ Movies. It provides useful information about the frequency of words, phrases, and grammatical constructions across the genres. For example, users can see if the words are more formal such as in academic articles, very informal such as in TV and movie subtitles, or somewhere in between such as magazines and newspapers.

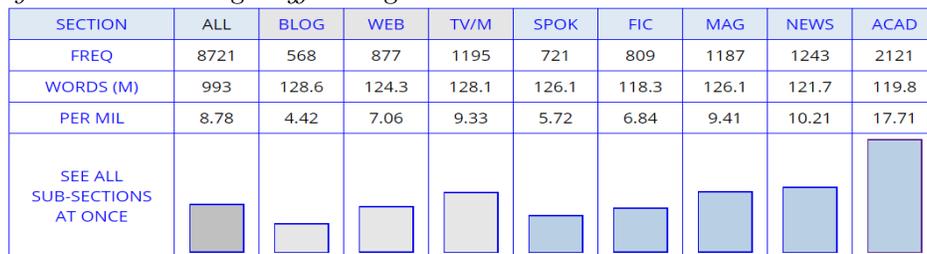
**Findings**

***Frequencies of Reservation and Appointment in COCA***

As shown in Figure 1, *reservation* is frequently used in the academic genre with a frequency of about 17.71 words per million (WPM) whereas it is less used in other registers such as in the spoken (about 6 WPM) and blog (about 4 WPM). The reason why it is used a lot in the academic genre is that *reservation* has many meanings such as agreed meeting, hesitation, lack of full willingness (e.g., I have no reservation in recommending her to you), and Native American land.

Figure 1

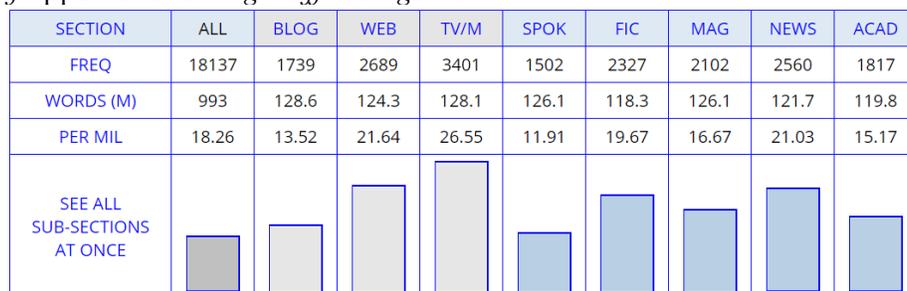
*The frequency of reservation in eight different registers*



In contrast, *appointment* occurs most often in the TV/Movies genre with a frequency of about 26.55 words per million (WPM). It occurs more frequently than *reservation* (about 9 WPM) in the TV/Movies genre. In addition, *appointment* is also commonly used in the other registers of newspapers (about 21 WPM) and web pages (about 22 WPM). This is because like *reservation*, *appointment* also has more than one meaning such as agreed meeting and service, assignment of someone to a position (e.g., we’re very happy about his appointment as a minister). Moreover, the word *appointment* occurs in the web genre (about 22 WPM) than *reservation* (about 7 WPM) (Figure 2).

Figure 2

*The frequency of appointment in eight different registers*



Overall, these two nouns *reservation* and *appointment* are most frequently used in the register of TV/Movies and Academic. This means that these two words are used in TV and movie subtitles or in spoken transcripts and journals. However, overall, the noun *appointment* is more frequently used in all registers than the noun *reservation*. It is very important for learners of English to know how these nouns are actually used in different registers so that they can use the appropriate form in context.

**Collocations of Appointment and Reservation**

For this analysis, the collocates of the two words are compared to see how they differ in usage, using Key Word in Context (KWIC) concordances in COCA. To do so, nouns and prepositions are closely studied.

Collocations of *reservation* with other nouns.

The first collocate search is “reservation” (POS noun. ALL, Collocates: POS noun. ALL 1L, 0R). The KWIC results (Figure 3) show that *reservation* is frequently used with other nouns such as *hotel*, *dinner*, and *airline* (The results show that “Navajo” and “Ridge” are frequently used with the word *reservation*, however, since these words are a different meaning, they are not included as frequency words). Examples are the following:

- 1 I have a 9:00 dinner reservation. (COCA)
- 2 Hey, it looks like we're going to work late. So do you want me to call Steven and cancel your dinner reservation? (COCA)
- 3 Did you confirm the hotel reservation? (COCA)
- 4 We missed our flight. That afternoon, we extended our hotel reservation and returned to Assi Ghat. (COCA)
- 5 Though I haven't yet figured out how to make an airline reservation via Twitter, the Starwood social media team has made hotel reservations for me. (COCA)
- 6 I think Mrs. Dunston should make an airline reservation. (COCA)

Figure 3

Collocations of reservation with nouns

1	<input type="checkbox"/>	NAVAJO	137	
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	RIDGE	95	
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	DINNER	77	
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	HOTEL	58	
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	RIVER	52	
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	ROCK	29	
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	AIRLINE	27	
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	EARTH	22	
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	COMPUTER	22	
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	MESCALERO	20	

From this result, therefore, the noun reservation is used to keep something, such as a room in a hotel, a table at a restaurant, a seat on an airplane.

Collocations of *appointment* with other nouns.

The second collocate search is “appointment” (POS noun. ALL, Collocates: POS noun. ALL 1L, 0R). The KWIC results (Figure 4) show that *appointment* is most frequently used with other nouns

such as *dentist*, *doctor*, and *hair* (“recess” is not included as a frequency word because *appointment* has a different meaning in that collocation). Here are some examples:

- 1 “Sarah had a dentist appointment this morning, and Dave had an early meeting, so I had to take her.” (COCA)
- 2 Well, do you remember anything else? I have a dentist appointment tomorrow. (COCA)
- 3 I told you I would make a doctor appointment, and I promised to take walk breaks. (COCA)
- 4 I missed my hair appointment. (COCA)
- 5 I’m late for a hair appointment. (COCA)

Thus, from these results, the noun *appointment* is used with someone, such as a doctor, a dentist, a lawyer, a consultant.

Figure 4  
*Collocations of appointment with nouns*

1	<input type="checkbox"/>	RECESS	108	
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	DENTIST	98	
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	HAIR	91	
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	LIFETIME	85	
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	COURT	64	
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	DOCTOR	48	
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	STANDING	29	
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	CABINET	25	
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	FACULTY	21	
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	SENATE	21	

Collocations of *reservation* and *appointment* with prepositions.

The third collocates search is “reservation” and “appointment” (POS noun. ALL, Collocates: POS prep. ALL 0L, 1R). The results are in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

Figure 5  
*Collocations of reservation with prepositions*

1	<input type="checkbox"/>	IN	508	
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	FOR	322	
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	AT	221	
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	OF	94	
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	TO	81	
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	ON	78	
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	WITH	64	
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	NEAR	43	
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	ABOUT	39	
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	UNDER	26	

Figure 6  
Collocations of appointment with prepositions

1	<input type="checkbox"/>	OF	1867	
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	WITH	1619	
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	FOR	677	
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	TO	541	
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	AT	503	
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	IN	392	
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	ON	144	
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	AS	140	
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	BY	129	
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	FROM	42	

Overall, the result shows that both words *reservation* and *appointment* are used with the same prepositions, such as *at* and *for*. Here are some examples:

- 1 I have a reservation at Versailles at 7:00. (COCA)
- 2 I had an appointment at 17:30. (COCA)
- 3 I was calling to confirm Bonnie's dinner reservation for tonight. (COCA)
- 4 I really wanted to get a reservation for my husband Jim's birthday. (COCA)
- 5 We went to New York City for a medical appointment for my husband, on Wednesday. (COCA)
- 6 I also made a dinner reservation for two at my favorite restaurant. (COCA)
- 7 How do I get a reservation for a campsite? (COCA)
- 8 Making your appointment for an interview is the first step in the visa application process. (COCA)
- 9 Call a DMV CDL office and make an appointment for a driving test. (COCA)

From these results, the preposition *at* is used with both words to refer to a place or specific time such as *at 12:30 pm*. The other preposition *for* is used with them to indicate time or duration (e.g. *for tomorrow*), people (e.g. *for my friend*), the number of people (e.g. *for two*) or the objects, aim or purpose (e.g. *for a campsite*). However, as shown in Figure 5, the preposition *in* is most frequently used with *reservation* and KWIC shows that it is used in different ways. For example, they are (1) a prepositional adverb such as *in advance*, (2) a proposition of time which is used for nonspecific times during a day, a month, a season, or a year such as *in winter*, and (3) a proposition of a place which is used for the names of land-areas (towns, countries, and states) such as *in South Dakota*. Here are some examples:

- 1 You can make a dinner reservation in advance for Monday from 6 p.m. to 9:45 p.m. (COCA)
- 2 If someone makes your entire reservation in winter, you could be more often than not stress about amount practicable. (COCA)
- 3 We had a reservation in Brooklyn and now we are at Bellevue. (COCA)

In contrast, Figure 6 shows that *appointment* is frequently used with the preposition *with*, which it is much less used with *reservation*, and it is used with a person such as *with Dr. Siegel* or *with my friend*. Here are some examples:

- 1 If you have a broken tooth, don't hesitate to schedule an appointment with Dr. Siegel.
- 2 I had my last appointment with my therapist on Monday.
- 3 I've got an appointment with my accountant this morning.

From these results, therefore, when teachers teach the usage of these two words, they can tell students to also pay attention to the prepositions such as *with* in the sentences. I realized again how important these findings are. This is because, from my own experience as a language learner, I remember that my teacher always told me that I should also always pay attention to the prepositions because sometimes I can find the answers from the preposition. Through this analysis activity, students can know and understand how the target words are used in context.

### **Teaching Materials**

Description of the target students' proficiency level and main lesson goal:

*Time:* 60 minutes

*The target students' proficiency level:* high intermediate ESL students

*Materials:* Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and student worksheet

*Main lesson goal:* Students will learn/understand the differences between two nouns *reservation* and *appointment* and the usage of them. The materials will enable students to discover the usage of these words in context and to improve their language skills.

appointment  
reservation

**Activity 1: Investigation of Frequency, Genre, Register**

Directions: Form groups of three. Use COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and follow the steps below to learn more about the use of words.

Part 1

Search for the word *reservation* (reservation\_nn\*) and then answer the following questions:

Q1. What is the entire frequency of the searched word in this corpus?

Q2. Which register has the highest use of *reservation*?

Part 2

Search for the word *appointment* (appointment\_nn\*) and then answer the following questions:

Q1. What is the entire frequency of the searched word in this corpus?

Q2. Which register has the highest use of *appointment*?

Part 3

Review the answers you have collected from researching the words, which noun is more frequent?

## Activity 2: Investigation of Collocations with Nouns and Prepositions

### Part 1: Investigation of Collocations with Nouns

Directions: Use COCA and do a COLLOCATES search for

- a *reservation* (COLLOCATES “reservation” POS noun. ALL, Collocates: POS noun. ALL. 1L, 0R)
- b *appointment* (COLLOCATES “appointment” POS noun. ALL, Collocates: POS noun. ALL. 1L, 0R)

Q1. What are the common collocations of *reservation* and *appointment*?

Q2. See examples below extracted from COCA. How are other words used with *reservation* and *appointment*?

Examples extracted from COCA:

#### ***Reservation***

- 1 I have a dinner reservation.
- 2 Hey, it looks like we're going to work late. So do you want me to call Steven and cancel your dinner reservation?
- 3 Did you confirm the hotel reservation?
- 4 We missed our flight. That afternoon, we extended our hotel reservation and returned to Assi Ghat.
- 5 Though I haven't yet figured out how to make an airline reservation via Twitter, the Starwood social media team has made hotel reservations for me.
- 6 I think Mrs. Dunston should make an airline reservation.

#### ***Appointment***

- 1 “Sarah had a dentist appointment this morning, and Dave had an early meeting, so I had to take her.”
- 2 Well, do you remember anything else? I have a dentist appointment tomorrow.
- 3 I told you I would make a doctor appointment, and I promised to take walk breaks.
- 4 I missed my hair appointment.
- 5 I'm late for a hair appointment.

Part 2: Investigation of Collocations with Prepositions

Directions: Use COCA and do a COLLOCATES search for

- a *reservation* (COLLOCATES “reservation” POS noun. ALL, Collocates: POS prep. ALL. 0L, 1R)
- b *appointment* (COLLOCATES “appointment” POS noun. ALL, Collocates: POS prep. ALL. 0L, 1R)

Q1. What are the common collocations of the words *reservation* and *appointment*?

Q2. See examples below extracted from COCA. How are the words used with *reservation* and *appointment*?

Examples extracted from COCA:

**Reservation**

- 1 I have a reservation at Versailles at 7:00.
- 2 I was calling to confirm Bonnie's dinner reservation for tonight.
- 3 I really wanted to get a reservation for my husband Jim's birthday.
- 4 I also made a dinner reservation for two at my favorite restaurant.
- 5 How do I get a reservation for a campsite?
- 6 You can make a dinner reservation in advance for Monday from 6 p.m. to 9:45 p.m.
- 7 Good evening. I have a reservation in the name of Humbert. I called last night. Twin-bedded room and two people.
- 8 I got us a reservation in this new tapas place. Would you wanna join?

**Appointment**

- 1 I had an appointment at 17:30.
- 2 We went to New York City for a medical appointment for my husband, on Wednesday.
- 3 Making your appointment for an interview is the first step in the visa application process.
- 4 Call a DMV CDL office and make an appointment for a driving test.
- 5 If you have a broken tooth, don't hesitate to schedule an appointment with Dr. Siegel.
- 6 I had my last appointment with my therapist on Monday.
- 7 I've got an appointment with my accountant this morning.

**Activity 3: Practice**

**Practice 1**

Choose *reservation* or *appointment* to fill in the blanks.

1. I had a dentist \_\_\_\_\_ yesterday.
2. I have a doctor's \_\_\_\_\_ tomorrow morning at nine o'clock.
3. We have to extend our hotel \_\_\_\_\_ by tomorrow.
4. Receptionist: Hello, May I help you?  
Patient: Hello. I want to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ with Dr. Morimoto.
5. Ticket seller: Ticket section, good morning.  
Caller: Hello. I would like to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ for tonight, please.

Ticket seller: What time, Sir?

6. Receptionist: Good morning, Hair Design.

Ayumi: Can I make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ with John, please?

7. Adam: Hi, I would like to see the doctor, please.

Receptionist: Do you have a/an \_\_\_\_\_?

Adam: No.

Receptionist: When would you like to have a/an \_\_\_\_\_?

8. Emily: Good afternoon. This is "Tasty", Emily speaking.

Kate: Hi, I want to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ for dinner tonight.

Emily: Ok, about what time and how many people for the table?

9. Receptionist: Hello, this is Ayumi. Can I help you?

Keiko: Yes, I need to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ with Mr. Brown.

Receptionist: I can do that for you. What day is good for you?

10. Restaurant: Ayumi's Grill. Can I help you?

Riko: Yes. Could I make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ for tomorrow evening?

Restaurant: Just one moment please. For what time?

**Activity 3: Practice 2**

Choose *reservation* or *appointment* to fill in the blanks.

1. Receptionist: Doctor's office. Jane speaking. How can I help you?  
Caller: I need to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ with Dr. Harris.
2. John: Hi, is this Dr. Smith's clinic?  
Receptionist: Hi, yes this is the right place. How may I help you?  
John: I want to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ with Dr. Smith for some time during the day.
3. Restaurant: Morimoto Restaurant.  
Customer: Hi, I would like to make a dinner \_\_\_\_\_ for two people.  
Restaurant: Of course, what evening will you be joining us on?
4. Receptionist: Good morning. Morimoto Hotel. May I help you?  
Mrs. Miwa: Good morning. I would like to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ for myself and my friend. Could you please tell the cost of a single room per night?
5. Hotel: Good morning. Welcome to the Plumeria Hotel. Riko speaking. Can I help you?  
Ayumi: Hi, good morning. I would like to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ for the third weekend in September. Do you have any vacancies?
6. I made a/an \_\_\_\_\_ with my dentist for Tuesday.
7. Receptionist: Hello. What can I help you with?  
Mr. morimoto: I need to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ for a haircut.
8. I have to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ for a driving test.

**Activity 4: Speaking activity**

Seeing the Doctor: The conversation below is jumbled up. Work in pairs, arrange this conversation between Ayumi and the receptionist. Fill in the blank with “appointment” or “reservation.”

- Receptionist: How will you pay?
- Receptionist: Hello. Morimoto Medical Offices. May I help you?
- Receptionist: What kind of problem are you having?
- Receptionist: Ok, please come in this afternoon at 1:30.
- Ayumi: Yes, I can be there at 1:30.
- Receptionist: Oh, I see. When can you see the doctor?
- Ayumi: Thank you. Good bye.
- Ayumi: No, I've seen Doctor Morimoto before.
- Ayumi: This afternoon about 2 o'clock.
- Receptionist: Are you a new patient?
- Ayumi: Hello, I'd like to make a/an \_\_\_\_\_ to see Doctor Morimoto.
- Ayumi: I have had a very bad headache for three days.
- Receptionist: Ok. What is your name?
- Ayumi: My name is Ayumi. A-Y-U-M-I.
- Receptionist: Ok. I can get you in to see Doctor Morimoto at 1:30. Is that time good for you?
- Ayumi: I will pay with cash.

**Homework:** Write an email to a hotel to arrange for your stay

You are planning to travel to Japan and you are looking for a hotel.

You are going to write an email to a hotel manager of Sakura Hotel to book a room. His name is Mr. Miwa. In your email, you should:

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Include all relevant information:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 your contact information,</li><li>2 date and time of arrival and departure,</li><li>3 number of days of your stay,</li><li>4 type of room and any special needs or requests such as a smoking or nonsmoking</li></ol></li></ol> |
|---|

room.

2. Use the word “appointment” or “reservation” appropriately.
3. Start your email with "Dear Mr. Miwa”

### References

- Davies, Mark. (2008-). The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): One billion words, 1990-2019. Available online at <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>.
- Friginal, E. (2018). *Corpus linguistics for English teachers: New tools, online resources, and classroom activities*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Timmis, I. (2015). *Corpus linguistics for ELT: Research and practice*. London: Routledge.

## Appendix Answer keys

### Activity 1: Investigation of Frequency, Genre, Register

Part 1: Q1. What is the entire frequency of the searched word in this corpus? **Answer:**

SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
FREQ	8721	568	877	1195	721	809	1187	1243	2121

Q2. Which register has the highest use of *reservation*? **Answer:** Academic

Part 2:

Q1. What is the entire frequency of the searched word in this corpus? **Answer:**

SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
FREQ	18136	1739	2689	3401	1502	2327	2101	2560	1817

Q2. Which register has the highest use of *reservation*? **Answer:** TV and Movies

Part 3: Review the answers you have collected from researching the words, which noun is more frequent? **Answer:** *appointment*

### Activity 2: Investigation of Collocations with Nouns

Part 1: Investigation of Collocations with Nouns

Q1. What are the common collocations of the words *reservation* and *appointment*? **Answer:**

*Reservation* → dinner, hotel, airline

*Appointment* → dentist, hair doctor

Q2. See examples below extracted from COCA. How are the other words used with *reservation* and *appointment*? **Answer:**

*Reservation* is used to keep something, such as a room in a hotel, a table at a restaurant, a seat on an airplane.

*Appointment* is most frequently used with other nouns such as *dentist*, *doctor*, and *hair*.

Part 2: Investigation of Collocations with prepositions

Q1. What are the common collocations of the words *reservation* and *appointment*? **Answer:**

*Reservation* → in, for, at, of, to

*Appointment* → of, with, for, to, at

Q2. See examples below extracted from COCA. How are the words used with *reservation* and *appointment*? **Answer:** Overall, both words *reservation* and *appointment* are used with the prepositions such as *at* and *for*. For example, *at* is used to refer to a place or specific time such as *at 12:30 pm* and *for* is used to indicate time or duration (e.g. *for tomorrow*), people (e.g. *for my friend*), the number of people (e.g. *for two*) or the objects, aim or purpose (e.g. *for a campsite*). However, *appointment* is frequently used with the preposition *with* such as *with Dr. Siegel* or *with my friend* and *reservation* is frequently used with *in* such as *reservation in advance*, *reservation with winter*, or *reservation with Brooklyn*.

### Activity 3: Practice 1

Choose *reservation* or *appointment* to fill in the blanks.

1. appointment
2. appointment
3. reservation
4. appointment
5. reservation
6. appointment
7. appointment
8. reservation
9. appointment
10. reservation

**Activity 3: Practice2**

Choose *reservation* or *appointment* to fill in the blanks.

1. appointment
2. appointment
3. reservation
4. reservation
5. reservation
6. appointment
7. appointment
8. appointment

**Activity 4: Practice (Speaking activity)**

Receptionist: Hello. Morimoto Medical Offices. May I help you?

Ayumi: Hello, I'd like to make an appointment to see Doctor Morimoto.

Receptionist: Ok. What is your name?

Ayumi: My name is Ayumi. A-Y-U-M-I.

Receptionist: Are you a new patient?

Ayumi: No, I've seen Doctor Morimoto before.

Receptionist: What kind of problem are you having?

Ayumi: I have had a very bad headache for three days.

Receptionist: Oh, I see. When can you see the doctor?

Ayumi: This afternoon about 2 o'clock.

Receptionist: Ok. I can get you in to see Doctor Morimoto at 1:30. Is that time good for you?

Ayumi: Yes, I can be there at 1:30.

Receptionist: How will you pay?

Ayumi: I will pay with cash.

Ayumi: Ok, please come in this afternoon at 1:30.

Receptionist: Thank you. Good bye.

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**About the author:**

Ayumi Morimoto holds a master's degree in TESOL from Hawaii Pacific University. Her academic and teaching interests are activity-based instruction and student motivation in second language classrooms.