

A Mixed Reception¹



It's a known fact that first impressions² count but visitors often receive a mixed reception when arriving at a company. George Sandford gives a rundown³ of some of the commonly encountered⁴ reception experiences.

Halt⁵! Who Goes There?

The reception desk is manned⁶ by a security guard who formerly worked as an engineer in a tank factory. Like a dutiful⁷ border guard⁸, he's convinced that you are a Russian spy and that it's his role to prevent you from gaining access⁹ to the building. Suspiciously, he eyes¹⁰ your ID and without talking or giving eye-contact, phones through¹¹ to the appropriate¹²

department. 'There's a Mr Sandford here, says he has an appointment with Mrs Pankowska. Note the use of the word, 'says,' highlighting¹³ the fact that the guest can't be trusted. However, much to his chagrin¹⁴ and disappointment, the meeting is confirmed and he reluctantly¹⁵ lets you through – but it doesn't mean that he trusts you and is sure that no good will come of¹⁶ your visit.

Can't You See I'm Busy?

It's a lady on reception this time, perhaps the sister of the tank engineer; she's cut of similar cloth¹⁷ and is far too busy to attend to¹⁸ you. At the moment, she's on the phone¹⁹ so she can't possibly acknowledge²⁰ your existence even although you're standing right in front of her. Finally the call ends but

there's something urgent²¹ to attend to on the computer. Impatiently, you announce²² yourself but only receive the curt²³ instruction, 'moment.' Eventually, when she does deal with you, it's monosyllabic²⁴ and limited to 'yes,' 'ID' and 'please wait.' As you wait, she throws scowling glances²⁵ in your direction for the inconvenience²⁶ that you've caused.

The Corridor Reception

No problem with the staff here, just the bijou²⁷ proportions of the reception area. To be honest, we are, or the company is, stretching a point²⁸ to call it a reception. The outside door leads directly into a lobby which was never designed as a reception area. There's barely room to swing a cat²⁹, let alone a small counter³⁰, a glass table and two metal framed chairs. With a chill³¹ January wind funnelling³² through the corridor every time somebody enters or leaves; it's not somewhere that you'd want to spend much time in.

The Post Room

A little bigger, just, and a variation on the small scale theme; we can't have reception staff sat around idly³³ twiddling their thumbs³⁴ so this reception doubles up as³⁵ the post room. There are large envelopes on top of the desk, packages behind it and boxes all around. There is a constant stream of deliveries³⁶ followed by company employees coming down to collect post and parcels³⁷. It's quite entertaining³⁸ really and helps to while away the waiting time³⁹.

Staff Canteen⁴⁰

Our next company reception has a vending machine⁴¹ so if you need to stock up on⁴² crisps, choccie⁴³ and pop⁴⁴, you've come to the right place but that's not all because here comes the sandwich guy! Suddenly, it's feeding time⁴⁵ at the zoo as the entire workforce⁴⁶ descend⁴⁷ to clamber over⁴⁸ each other in order to catch a glimpse of⁴⁹ the sarnies on offer. From your seated⁵⁰ position, the only ▶

¹² **appropriate** /ə'prəʊpriət/ | odpowiedni

¹³ **to highlight** /tə 'haɪlaɪt/ | podkreślać

¹⁴ **chagrin** /'ʃægrɪn/ | smutek

¹⁵ **reluctantly** /rɪ'lʌktəntli/ | niechętnie

¹⁶ **no good will come of it** /nəʊ gud wɪl kʌm əv ɪt/ | nic dobrego z tego nie wyjdzie

¹⁷ **cut of similar cloth** /kʌt əv 'sɪmələ kloθ/ | ulepiony z tej samej gliny

¹⁸ **to attend to something** /tə ə'tend tə 'sʌmθɪŋ/ | zając się czymś

¹⁹ **to be on the phone** /tə bi: ɒn ðə fəʊn/ | rozmawiać przez telefon

²⁰ **to acknowledge** /ə'kɒnɪdʒ/ | tu: zauważyć

²¹ **urgent** /'ɜ:dʒənt/ | pilny

²² **to announce** /tə ə'naʊns/ | ogłaszać, zapowiadać

²³ **curt** /kɜ:t/ | lakoniczny

²⁴ **monosyllabic** /mɒnəsɪ'læbɪk/ | jednosylabowy

²⁵ **a scowling glance** /ə skəʊlɪŋ glɑ:ns/ | spojrzzenie spode łba

²⁶ **inconvenience** /ɪnkən'vi:niəns/ | niedogodność

²⁷ **bijou** /'bi:ʒu:/ | klejnocik, perleńka

²⁸ **to stretch a point** /tə streɪtʃ ə pɔɪnt/ | naciągać, nagiąć argumenty

²⁹ **there's barely room to swing a cat** /ðeəz 'beəli ru:m tə swɪŋ ə kæt/ | nie ma miejsca, żeby się obrócić

³⁰ **counter** /'kaʊntə/ | lada

³¹ **chill** /tʃɪl/ | chłodny

³² **to funnel** /tə 'fʌnl/ | płynąć (przez wąskie przejście)

³³ **idly** /'aɪdli/ | leniwie

³⁴ **to twiddle one's thumbs** /tə 'twɪdl wʌnz θʌmz/ | zbijać baki

³⁵ **to double up as** /tə 'dʌbl ʌp əz/ | pełnić dodatkową funkcję

³⁶ **delivery** /dɪ'lɪvəri/ | dostawa

³⁷ **parcel** /'pɑ:sl/ | paczka

³⁸ **entertaining** /əntə'teɪnɪŋ/ | zabawny, rozrywkowy

³⁹ **to while away the time** /tə waɪ ə'weɪ ðə taɪm/ | zabijać czas

⁴⁰ **canteen** /kæn'ti:n/ | stołówka

⁴¹ **vending machine** /'vendɪŋ mə'ʃi:n/ | automat (np. z napojami, słodyczami)

⁴² **to stock up on something** /tə stɒk ʌp ɒn 'sʌmθɪŋ/ | robić zapasy

⁴³ **choccie** /'tʃɒki/ | czekoladka

⁴⁴ **pop** /pɒp/ | napój gazowany

⁴⁵ **feeding time** /fi:diŋ taɪm/ | pora karmienia

⁴⁶ **workforce** /'wɜ:kfɔ:s/ | personel

⁴⁷ **to descend** /tə dɪ'send/ | schodzić

⁴⁸ **to clamber over something** /tə 'klæmbə 'əʊvə 'sʌmθɪŋ/ | gramolić się

⁴⁹ **to catch a glimpse of something** /tə kætʃ ə glɪmpz əv 'sʌmθɪŋ/ | rzucić na coś okiem

⁵⁰ **seated** /si:td/ | siedzący

¹ **to receive a mixed reception** /tə rɪ'si:v ə mɪksəd rɪ'sepʃn/ | spotkać się z mieszanymi uczuciami

² **first impressions** /fɜ:st ɪm'preʃn/ | pierwsze wrażenie

³ **rundown** /rʌndaʊn/ | przegląd

⁴ **to encounter** /tə ɪn'kaʊntə/ | napotkać

⁵ **Halt!** /hɒlt/ | Stać!

⁶ **to man** /tə mæn/ | obsadzać (stanowisko)

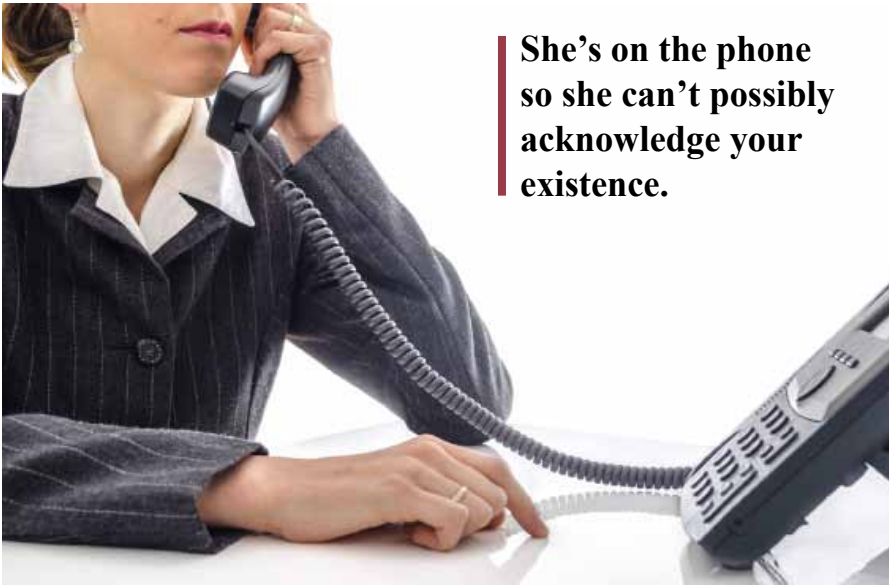
⁷ **dutiful** /'dju:tɪfl/ | sumienny

⁸ **border guard** /'bɔ:deɪ ɡɑ:d/ | członek straży granicznej

⁹ **to gain access to something** /tə ɡeɪn 'ækses tə 'sʌmθɪŋ/ | uzyskać dostęp do

¹⁰ **to eye something** /tə aɪ 'sʌmθɪŋ/ | przypatrywać się czemuś

¹¹ **to phone through** /tə fəʊn θru:/ | połączyć się telefonicznie



She's on the phone so she can't possibly acknowledge your existence.

thing that you can peruse⁵¹ is a sea of buttocks. 'Any egg mayo⁵² today?' 'Ooh, brie and olives, that sounds interesting.' Kasia, can you lend me ten zlotys?' All this talk of food makes you peckish⁵³ and you need something for lunch any way so you decide that if you can't beat them, you might as well join them⁵⁴. 'Cheese salad on wholemeal, please. None left? Only salami and gherkin⁵⁵? Not good for meetings; I think I'll pass⁵⁶ after all.'

Allow Extra Time for Check-in

Now we're in one of the city centre, prestige⁵⁷ office blocks that accommodate⁵⁸ many companies in one building. Unfortunately, we got caught in the morning rush

hour⁵⁹ and we are cutting it a bit fine⁶⁰ but there's still five minutes before our meeting kicks off⁶¹ but we can't just go straight up to it, first we have to go to a central control desk. Like a hotel reception desk at breakfast time, there's a long queue⁶² of people checking in and out to register and collect⁶³ and return security passes⁶⁴ that give you access to⁶⁵ the turnstiles⁶⁶ and lifts. With ten people in the queue and each transaction taking up to two minutes, it looks like we've blown it⁶⁷.

Pick Up Joint⁶⁸

For our meeting at this company, we're on time but there's still a crowd scene at reception but of a different kind⁷⁰. The receptionist is rather pretty, so much so

that the dilatory⁷¹ security guards sprawl on the counter trying to chat her up⁷². You struggle to make your presence known and get a disdainful⁷³ look from all around for having the cheek to⁷⁴ interrupt an important conversation. Once you've been processed⁷⁵, the courtship⁷⁶ continues; customers – what a pain!

Hide and Seek⁷⁷ Reception

Not all businesses are in the city centre and some prefer to take advantage of⁷⁸ lower rental prices⁷⁹ to be had out in the suburbs. Sometimes, these are in closed condominiums⁸⁰ with an intercom⁸¹ on the gate, far from the building itself. The first challenge is to find the entrance as the road on the address has no access⁸². You circumnavigate⁸³ the perimeter fence⁸⁴ and eventually⁸⁵ find the way in is on the opposite side on a completely different road. You press the number and the door lock is released but where now? The place is a labyrinth⁸⁶ of blocks and apartments numbered apparently, at random⁸⁷. Fifteen minutes later, and more by luck than judgement⁸⁸, you arrive at your destination⁸⁹ building. On entering the reception, you apologise for your lateness, explaining that you got lost. 'Oh don't worry,' comes the dismissive⁹⁰ reply, 'everybody does.'

Frigid⁹¹ Air

We've moved up market now to one of the posher⁹² corporates. A spacious⁹³

⁵¹ to peruse /tə pə'ru:z/ | przeglądać

⁵² mayo /'meɪəʊ/ | majonez

⁵³ peckish /'pekɪʃ/ | głodny

⁵⁴ if you can't beat them, join them /ɪf ju ka:nt bi:t ðəm dʒɔ:nt ðəm/ | jeśli nie możesz z nimi wygrać, przyłącz się do nich

⁵⁵ gherkin /'gɜ:kɪn/ | korniszon

⁵⁶ I think I'll pass /aɪ θɪŋk aɪl pa:s/ | chyba sobie odpuszczę

⁵⁷ prestige /pre'sti:ʒ/ | prestiżowy

⁵⁸ to accommodate /tə ə'kɒmədeɪt/ | zapewniać miejsce

⁵⁹ rush hour /rʌʃ 'aʊə/ | godziny szczytu

⁶⁰ to cut it a bit fine /tə kʌt ɪt ə bɪt faɪn/ | mieć mało czasu

⁶¹ to kick off /tə kɪk ɒf/ | rozpocząć się

⁶² queue /kju:/ | kolejka

⁶³ to collect /tə kə'lekt/ | odebrać

⁶⁴ pass /pa:s/ | przepustka

⁶⁵ to give somebody access to /tə gɪv 'sʌmbədi 'ækses tə/ | dać dostęp

⁶⁶ turnstile /'tɜ:nstɑɪl/ | bramka

⁶⁷ we've blown it /wi:v bləʊn ɪt/ | spapraliśmy sprawę

⁶⁸ to pick up /tə pɪk ʌp/ | podrywać

⁶⁹ joint /dʒɔɪnt/ | knajpa, lokal

⁷⁰ of a different kind /əv ə 'dɪfrənt kaɪnd/ | innego rodzaju

⁷¹ dilatory /'dɪlətəri/ | opieszaly

⁷² to chat somebody up /tə tʃæt 'sʌmbədi ʌp/ | zagadać do kogoś

⁷³ disdainful /'dis'deɪnfəl/ | pogardliwy

⁷⁴ to have the cheek to do something /tə hæv ðə tʃi:k tə du: 'sʌmθɪŋ/ | mieć czelność coś zrobić

⁷⁵ to process /tə 'preʊses/ | obrobić, przetworzyć

⁷⁶ courtship /'kɔ:tʃɪp/ | zaloty

⁷⁷ hide and seek /haɪd ən si:k/ | gra w chowanego

⁷⁸ to take advantage of /tə teɪk əd'vɑ:ntɪdʒ əv/ | wykorzystać

⁷⁹ rental prices /'rentl 'praɪsɪz/ | ceny wynajmu

⁸⁰ condominium /kɒndə'mɪniəm/ | osiedle

⁸¹ intercom /'ɪntəkɒm/ | domofon

⁸² access /'ækses/ | dostęp

⁸³ to circumnavigate /tə sɜ:kəm'hævɪgeɪt/ | okrążyć

⁸⁴ perimeter fence /pə'rɪmɪtə fens/ | ogrodzenie otaczające teren

⁸⁵ eventually /ɪ'ventʃuəli/ | w końcu

⁸⁶ labyrinth /'læbərɪnθ/ | labirynt

⁸⁷ at random /ət 'rændəm/ | przypadkowo

⁸⁸ judgement /'dʒʌdʒmənt/ | ocena sytuacji

⁸⁹ destination /destɪ'neɪʃn/ | docelowy

⁹⁰ dismissive /dɪs'mɪsɪv/ | lekceważący

⁹¹ frigid /'frɪdʒɪd/ | mroźny

⁹² posh /pɒʃ/ | elegancki, wytworny

⁹³ spacious /'speɪʃəs/ | przestronny

lounge⁹⁴ is decorated with expensive black leather and chrome⁹⁵ fittings⁹⁶, while display stands⁹⁷ show off⁹⁸ the company's out of your price bracket⁹⁹ products and services. The environment is as spotless¹⁰⁰ as a freshly sterilised operating theatre¹⁰¹ and staffed by three super-model receptionists wearing tasteful¹⁰² yet smouldering¹⁰³ black dresses, but don't expect a smile. They look vacantly¹⁰⁴ ahead with dead fish eyes and haughty¹⁰⁵ heads; superior beings¹⁰⁶, androids¹⁰⁷ perhaps. In fact, on reflection, the whole place is just a facsimile¹⁰⁸ of a reception, without the all important¹⁰⁹, human touch¹¹⁰.

The Bee's Knees¹¹¹

Finally, we reach the crème de la crème¹¹² and luxuriate in¹¹³ the eternity pool¹¹⁴ of receptions. Thick, wall to wall carpet covers an area large enough for a five-a-side¹¹⁵ football tournament while two large screens show the news in Polish and English. Courteous¹¹⁶ and attentive¹¹⁷ staff are able to greet you in any language from Icelandic to Swahili and Cantonese to Welsh. The only downside is that the large bucket seats¹¹⁸ pitched¹¹⁹ just 40cms from the ground, swallow you up like Venus Flytraps¹²⁰ and are virtually impossible to extricate yourself from¹²¹ while retaining¹²² any dignity – still, there worse places to get stuck in.

The Reception Conundrum

Joking aside, the worrying fact is that all of the examples given are absolutely true and some refer to major, well-known companies. The same organisations spend small fortunes on advertising campaigns¹²³ and PR but may fail to get their house in order closer to home¹²⁴.

Research suggests that one reason for this is that influential¹²⁵ company executives rarely need to check into¹²⁶ their own receptions and when they do go through them, may receive better than average¹²⁷ service, thus getting a falsely reassuring¹²⁸ impression¹²⁹. However, a more common explanation is that responsibility for the management of reception staff and service is often fobbed off on¹³⁰ a lower ranking¹³¹ administrator



The whole place is just a facsimile of a reception, without the all important, human touch.

who has little interest in or aptitude¹³² for the job. Ironically, organising a pleasant and welcoming reception, staffed by friendly, helpful and efficient¹³³ staff,

is not the hardest thing in the world to achieve – although sometimes you'd think it was. It's a conundrum¹³⁴, isn't it? ■

⁹⁴ lounge /laundz/ | poczekalnia

⁹⁵ chrome /krəʊm/ | chromowany

⁹⁶ fittings /'fi:tɪŋz/ | wyposażenie

⁹⁷ display stand /di'spleɪ stænd/ | miejsce wystawowe

⁹⁸ to show off /tə ʃəʊ ɒf/ | popisywać się

⁹⁹ price bracket /praɪs 'brækt/ | półka cenowa

¹⁰⁰ spotless /'spɒtləs/ | nieskazitelny

¹⁰¹ operating theatre /'ɒpəreɪtɪŋ 'θiətrə/ | sala operacyjna

¹⁰² tasteful /'tæstfəl/ | gustowny

¹⁰³ smouldering /'sməʊldərɪŋ/ | seksowny

¹⁰⁴ vacantly /'vækəntli/ | pusto, nieobecnie

¹⁰⁵ haughty /'hɔ:ti/ | wyniosły

¹⁰⁶ superior being /su:'piəriə bi:ɪŋ/ | istota wyższego rzędu

¹⁰⁷ android /'ændrɔɪd/ | android

¹⁰⁸ facsimile /'fæksɪməli/ | kopia, namiastka

¹⁰⁹ all important /ɔ:l ɪm'pɔ:tnt/ | najważniejszy

¹¹⁰ human touch /'hju:mən tʌtʃ/ | ciepły akcent

¹¹¹ the bee's knees /ðə bi:z ni:z/ | ósmy cud świata

¹¹² the crème de la crème /ðə krem də la: 'krem/ | elita, śmietanka

¹¹³ to luxuriate in something /tə lʌg'zʊəriət ɪn 'sʌmθɪŋ/ | rozkoszować się

¹¹⁴ eternity pool /'i:tə:nəti pu:l/ | luksusowy basen, którego brzegi oblewa woda

¹¹⁵ five-a-side /faɪv ə saɪd/ | piłka nożna w drużynach pięciosobowych

¹¹⁶ courteous /'kɜ:tiəs/ | uprzejmy

¹¹⁷ attentive /ə'tentɪv/ | uważny

¹¹⁸ bucket seat /'bʌkɪt si:t/ | fotel w kształcie muszli

¹¹⁹ to pitch /tə pɪtʃ/ | dostosować, ustawić

¹²⁰ Venus flytrap /'vi:nəs 'flaɪtræp/ | rosziczka

¹²¹ to extricate oneself from /tə 'ekstrɪkeɪt wʌn'self frəm/ | wydostać się z

¹²² to retain /tə ri'teɪn/ | zachować

¹²³ campaign /'kæm'peɪn/ | kampania

¹²⁴ closer to home /'kləʊsə tə həʊm/ | bardziej lokalny

¹²⁵ influential /ɪnflu'entʃl/ | wpływowo

¹²⁶ to check into /tə tʃek ɪntə/ | zameldować się w

¹²⁷ average /'ævərɪdʒ/ | przeciętny

¹²⁸ reassuring /ri:'ʃʊərɪŋ/ | uspokajający

¹²⁹ to get an impression /tə get ən ɪm'preʃn/ | odnieść wrażenie

¹³⁰ to fob something off on somebody /tə fɒb 'sʌmθɪŋ ɒf ɒn 'sʌmbədi/ | spychać coś na kogoś

¹³¹ lower ranking /ləʊə 'ræŋkɪŋ/ | niższej rangi

¹³² aptitude /'æptɪtju:d/ | zdolność

¹³³ efficient /ə'fɪjnt/ | efektywny

¹³⁴ conundrum /kə'nʌndrəm/ | dylemat