

Should **surtout** be translated?

Surtout is a word that conveys a very precise meaning. It would be logical to assume it should be translated into English every time you see it. But have a look at the examples below and ask yourself whether it makes sense to include the notion of “especially” or “overall” in English.

Example #1

Elle vous secondera dans la sélection de l'un de nos forfaits spécialement conçus pour l'occasion et, **surtout**, vous conseillera judicieusement dans l'organisation de votre grande fête.

Draft translation

She will help you select one of our specially designed packages and, more than that, provide great advice on organizing your special event.

Comments

Is it more important to provide organizational advice than to pick the best available package?

Example #2

Contactez-nous dès maintenant pour réserver et, **surtout**, pour offrir l'Art de vivre du Château XYZ!

Draft translation

Contact us today to make your reservation and, especially, to enjoy the Art of Good Living at Château XYZ!

Comments

Is giving the gift of a getaway at this hotel more important than booking a room? Some people may say the two go hand in hand!

Example #3

Les gens mangent régulièrement à l'extérieur du foyer et les aliments offerts au restaurant sont souvent plus gras et **surtout**, servis en plus grosses portions.

Draft translation

People regularly eat outside the home, and restaurant food is often higher in fat and, above all, served in larger portions

Comments

Logically, restaurants could serve heaping piles of lettuce without that being a problem. So why are bigger servings more a problem than fatty food?

Example #4

Cet échange et partage de l'information met en évidence l'importance de pouvoir disposer de statistiques claires, cohérentes et **surtout** comparables.

Draft translation

This opportunity to discuss and share information highlights how important it is that the statistics are clear, consistent, and above all comparable.

Comments

So would it be okay to have figures you can compare, but that are unclear or inconsistent?

Example #5

Les volumes de transaction sont énormes et les marges bénéficiaires relativement faibles. Il importe que les transactions s'opèrent rapidement et **surtout** efficacement.

Draft translation

Transaction volumes are huge and profit margins are relatively small, so transactions must be quick and above all efficient.

Comments

How could the transactions be efficient if they weren't quick?

Example #6

C'est à partir d'une excellente communication entre nous que nous pouvons comprendre parfaitement vos besoins et, **surtout**, répondre précisément à vos demandes.

Draft translation

With free and open communication between us, we are able to understand your needs perfectly and, above all, precisely meet each one.

Comments

Why is meeting needs more important than understanding them? And isn't the syntax in this sentence needlessly complicated? How about this: With free and open communication between us, we are able to understand and meet your needs perfectly.

Example #7

En fait, le Québec possède des avantages stratégiques indéniables, dont un environnement d'affaires compétitif, un leadership dans la recherche et l'innovation, une main-d'œuvre compétente et, **surtout**, une économie résolument tournée vers l'exportation.

Draft translation

Quebec has undeniable strategic advantages, including a competitive business environment, leadership in research and innovation, a skilled workforce, and especially, a strongly export-oriented economy.

Comments

There is no compelling reason to believe that the last point is the most important.

Example #8

J'ai réalisé que les plus belles richesses humaines sont à notre portée car les êtres humains ont fondamentalement le respect et admiration pour la vie et **surtout**, la volonté d'un monde meilleur.

Draft translation

I realized that the greatest human treasures are within our reach because human beings have a fundamental respect and admiration for life, and especially the desire for a better world.

Comments

Take out the word "especially" and ask yourself whether the sentence is weaker, stronger, or different in meaning.

Example #9

Dans l'encadré bleu en haut de la page, choisissez dans les menus déroulants l'établissement de formation le plus près de vous. Vous obtiendrez alors des informations très pratiques : prochaine date du début des cours, nombre de places disponibles, date limite pour l'admission et **surtout** l'horaire des cours.

Draft translation

Select the closest school to your home from the dropdown menu in the blue box at the top of the page. This will display very practical information: next course start date, number of spots available, enrollment deadline, and especially the class schedule.

Comment

How can the class schedule be more important than all the other items?

Takeaway

What should this tell us? Although **surtout** usually means "especially/particularly/above all/more than that," it sometimes means nothing at all. It could be a writer's tic or a poorly chosen word, or a space holder or a word to signal that the writer has reached the end of a list. If you follow your instincts and ask yourself what the true meaning of the word is in your context, you will probably never go wrong.