

Interrupting and disagreeing politely by Simon Mumford

Age: Young adult – adult

Level: Intermediate+

Objective: To learn to interrupt and disagree politely

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Worksheet and two large pictures: one showing an older person, and the other a younger person.

Preparation

Make one copy of the worksheet per student. Prepare two large pictures: one showing an older person, and the other a younger person.

Procedure

1. Ask students if they have disagreements, e.g. with friends, family, teachers. Point out that a discussion is not the same as having an argument. People can disagree in a polite and friendly way. Sometimes it is necessary to interrupt to get your point over and this should also be done tactfully.

2. Focus attention on the worksheet dialogue. Ask two students to read it aloud. Explain that the speakers sound rather rude, because they interrupt each other without warning.

3. Draw attention to the boxes on the worksheet. Explain that interruptions are often preceded by a 'softener' that prepares the other speaker for the interruption, e.g. *Excuse me; Erm, well; Just a moment*, or a non-verbal signal, e.g. a cough. Point out that when disagreeing, it is polite to acknowledge what the other person has said, using phrases such as, *Yes, but ...; I know, but ...; I see what you mean, but ...*.

4. Put students in pairs and ask them to read the dialogue again, this time including the phrases on the worksheet. This is how it could sound:

A: *I think that 17 is too young to drive—*

B: *Excuse me, that may be true for some people, but many 17-year-olds are very responsible. A few are careless, but most of them—*

A: *Erm, well, yes, I know, but what about the minority? They should not be allowed to drive. They are very dangerous, and they might kill—*

B: *Just a moment. I see what you mean, but I don't think that it's right to punish everyone because of a few people. Those that break the law will be caught and punished. That is what the law is for and—*

A: *I know, but can I just say that the law does not always work? Some people don't get caught. And the law is not strong enough. People pay a small fine then—*

B: *If I could just come in here. The solution is to make the law stronger.*

5. Show the pictures to the class: picture A is an older person, and picture B is a younger person. Put students in pairs, giving one in each pair the role of A, and the other B. Tell the students that they will have a discussion about the legal driving age, similar to the dialogue, but they are free to introduce their own arguments. When you hold up picture A, A students speak, and when you hold up B, B students speak. Because this means interrupting their partners, students should use the interruption and/or acknowledging phrases before starting their turn. Change the picture you hold up at regular intervals.

6. After a few minutes, ask students to change roles and/or partners and continue for a few more minutes. This activity would also work with other topics, according to your students' interests.

Worksheet

Interrupting and disagreeing politely

Dialogue

A: *I think that 17 is too young to drive—*

B: *Many 17-year-olds are very responsible. A few are careless, but most of them—*

A: *But what about the minority? They should not be allowed to drive. They are very dangerous, and they might kill—*

B: *I don't think that it's right to punish everyone because of a few people. Those that break the law will be caught and punished. That is what the law is for and—*

A: *The law doesn't always work. Some people don't get caught. And the law is not strong enough. People pay a small fine then—*

B: *The solution is to make the law stronger.*

Softeners

Excuse me, ...

Erm, well, ...

(cough) ...

Just a moment/minute ...

If I could just come in here ...

Can I just say that ...?

Acknowledging arguments

Yes, but ...

I know, but ...

Yes, that may be true, but ...

I see what you mean, but ...

Yes, but on the other hand ...