

LESSON 8: POLITENESS AND DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

AGE: Adult

LEVEL: Upper Intermediate

TIME: 90 minutes

LANGUAGE FOCUS: questions and politeness

SKILLS: listening; speaking

MATERIALS: students' questions from Compass 5 & 6; role play cards (one card per student); one copy of the worksheet per student

OVERVIEW: to improve and trial questions; to role-play potential awkward situations and consider possible solutions

STUDENTS WILL:

- Trial and improve three cultural questions chosen at the end of lesson 6.
- Consider ways of being polite and make their questions more polite.
- Explore how to deal with the situations that may arise when conducting interviews in public.

PREPARATION:

- for this class, students will need to bring the questions they chose at the end of lesson 6. You may wish to print out a copy of the original cultural questions they looked at in lesson 5, activity 2, as a backup in case they forget.
- photocopy and cut up the role-play cards so you have enough for the whole class



TEACHING TIP: Draw students' attention to how the formality of the question increases with the length of it. Explain that in English, the more indirect a question, the more polite it is, and generally the more indirect a question, the longer it is.

ACTIVITY 2

Students consider what level of formality to use in different situations

Put students in groups and give them time to discuss questions 1–4. Encourage students to share information about showing politeness in their language/culture by expressing interest in how this compares with other students' language/culture. Are there any similarities? What are the differences? (In a mono-cultural group, do they all agree on what is polite and impolite? Are there regional variations?)

Key:

1. b
2. a; depends on family culture
3. c, d
4. students' own answers

Focus students' attention on the Speaking Tip. It is about introducing interview questions with a general statement. The general statement is related to the topic of the question that follows. This helps the interviewee by contextualizing the question.

ACTIVITY 3

Students decide how to introduce their main questions

Put students in pairs and ask them to review three cultural interview questions they prepared at the end of Compass 6. If they have forgotten to bring them, you could show them the original questions from lesson 5, activity 2, and ask them to choose three. While they review and modify their questions with statements and polite language, monitor each pair and offer correction and help.

WARMER

Students discuss personal experiences of interviews and rude behaviour

Put students in pairs or groups to discuss the questions. Do some quick whole class feedback.

LANGUAGE FOCUS: QUESTIONS AND POLITENESS

ACTIVITY 1

Students order the questions from least to most formal

Ask students to rank questions a–d, then let them compare their answers in pairs or small groups. Encourage them to discuss any disagreements and explain their ranking.

Key:

- a. 4
- b. 1
- c. 3
- d. 2

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TEACHING TIP: Don't focus only on grammatical form. Notice also if the students sound impolite – are their questions too direct? (Make sure to note down key errors to revisit after the language focus on formality.) Are they using appropriate lexis and correct collocations? Encourage the interviewers to use the discourse markers studied in Compass 5 such as 'yes, I see', 'that's interesting' and 'mmhmm' to show their partner that they are following their answer.

When they have finished, ask students to work with a new partner and ask the new, clearer questions. This is good practice for them. Explain that you will monitor and there will be feedback at the end. After this initial trial, do the feedback using what you have noted down while monitoring. Elicit corrections.

TEACHING TIP: Don't focus only on errors. Also tell the students what they did well. This could be related to using good intonation and asking the questions clearly, etc. Mix up good language and errors during the feedback session, meaning students have to concentrate more carefully to decide whether there is an error and, if so, what it is. Positive feedback will help them know what they are doing well, rather than only what they are doing incorrectly.

SPEAKING SKILLS: DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT SITUATION

ACTIVITY 1

Students brainstorm potential problems they could have while interviewing people

Put students in groups to generate ideas of problems that might arise when they do the interviewing homework.

ACTIVITY 2

Students build a toolkit of communication strategies to use if they have any of these problems

Ask students to read through the problems in the table in activity 2. Ask students to discuss in groups if they have had these problems before. If so, what did they do? If not, what would they do? Elicit some answers to discuss as a whole class. Next focus students' attention on the list of solutions provided. Individually, they should write each solution next to the correct problem in the table. Then let them check their answers in pairs before doing whole-class feedback.

TEACHING TIP: Draw students' attention to the word 'interviewee'. Ask them what it means (a person who is being interviewed). Can they think of any other examples of words with the suffix -ee? (E.g. employee – a person who is employed by someone else.) Do they know the names for the people doing the interviewing and employing? (Interviewer, employer.) What patterns can they notice? (The suffix -ee is for a person who is having an action done to them, while -er is for the person doing the action.) Do they notice the change in stressed syllable between each pair of words? Drill the pronunciation. Integrating elements of language and pronunciation focus into activities like this is a good way to help build up students' knowledge of English.

Key:

Problem	Solution
You think you understand what your interviewee said, but you aren't sure.	Say, 'You mean ...' and repeat what you think the interviewee said, using different words.
You don't understand what your interviewee is saying because he/she is talking too fast.	Say, 'I'm sorry, I don't understand. Could you say that a bit slower, please?'
Your interviewee uses a word that you haven't heard before.	Ignore the word you aren't sure about and try to understand the sentence around it. If you still can't understand, say, 'Could you please explain that again?'
Your interviewee tells a story instead of answering your question.	Listen and see if what your interviewee is describing relates to the topic of your question. If you are unsure, say 'That's interesting. Thank you' and ask a yes/no question to check your understanding.
Your interviewee says he/she doesn't understand your question.	Say, 'I was wondering' + repeat your question, in different words if possible.

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Problem	Solution
Your interviewee seems angry with you.	Say, 'I'm sorry to have disturbed you. Thank you for your time. Goodbye.'
You don't think your interviewee has answered your question.	Say, 'I was wondering' + repeat your question, in different words if possible.
Your interviewee stares at you and doesn't answer.	Say, 'I'm sorry – perhaps you haven't understood my question. What I would like to know is' + repeat your question.

Ask students to add problems and possible solutions of their own to the table. There is space for two, but if they think of more, they can write these down separately. When they have finished, put students in new groups and ask them to share their problems/solutions. Go round each group to check that the solutions are appropriate to the problems.

ACTIVITY 3

Students compare their English toolkit with what they would do in their own language

Discussing this question should help students become more aware of what is and isn't transferable between their language and English. Give them time to discuss in their groups, then give each group an opportunity to share what they have discussed with the whole class.



TEACHING TIP: Encourage student response. For example, when a group explains that some of them would do this, while others would do that, ask the other students in the class if they would do either of those things or not, and why. This gives students the opportunity to share about their own culture, learn about other cultures, and make comparisons. This should help them become more culturally aware, which is important in the development of intercultural competence.

SPEAKING SKILLS: PROBLEM SITUATION ROLE-PLAY

ACTIVITY 1

Students role-play different interview situations

Give each student a role card. Tell them to keep their role cards secret. Then divide the students into two groups: A

and B. Tell group A that they will ask their questions, and tell group B to follow the role on their given card. Ask students to stand up, walk around and pretend they are on the streets in the town centre. Group A should use polite language to stop another student and ask their interview questions. You could remind them of the phrases they learned in the previous lesson (see below). Group B should follow their role-play cards when they are being stopped and questioned.

Language for stopping other people (from Compass Lesson 7 Activity 6):

- Excuse me, I wonder if you would be able to answer a few questions for me. It's for a school project. It shouldn't take long.
- Excuse me, my name is Maria and I'm a student at _____. Could you please answer a few questions for my school project? Hopefully it will be quick.

When the pairs have finished, ask them to swap so Group B ask the questions and Group A follow their role-play card.



TEACHING TIP: Demonstrate the activity first, using one of the role cards as an example and a volunteer student. Go through the instructions on the card you have chosen and elicit from students how they would carry these out. This way, students are better prepared to carry out the activity successfully.

Monitor while they do this and make a note of any errors, including inappropriate or incorrect strategies. When students have finished, go through the language errors that you have collected.

ACTIVITY 2

Students reflect on the conversations they had in Activity 1

Ask students to look at questions a–c and make notes about the problems they had, the strategies they used and how effective those strategies were. Then, ask students to share their reflections. When they have finished, ask each group to report a brief discussion summary to the rest of the class. After each group reports, discuss the strategies used – could any other strategies have been used? Would they have been better? Why/why not?

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SPEAKING SKILLS: INTERVIEW REHEARSAL

ACTIVITY 1

Students retriial their interview questions

Ask students to interview a student from another class or a teacher in the school if possible. If this is not possible, they should find a new partner in their class. This is to rehearse the questions for their homework interview. Remind students to think about how polite they should be with each person interviewed. Elicit factors that influence this, e.g. how well they know the student, the student's age.

ACTIVITY 2

Students evaluate the interviews they have done in this lesson

Put students in pairs to discuss the questions in activity 2, thinking about and reflecting on the interviews they have done. The questions should help them consider a) content, b) use of general statements and c) expression of politeness. Round off the discussion with a whole class feedback session, allowing students to share their answers with the whole class.

CHECKLIST

Conclude the lesson by drawing students' attention to the checklist. Students should tick the items they feel confident about. If they do not feel confident enough to tick the item, they should make a note of why. After students have had time to do this, let them share their answers in groups.

HOMEWORK

Students should interview at least four people using their interview questions. Remind students that they will need to bring their transcripts of the interviews, or notes, to the next class.

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YOU ARE LATE TO PICK YOUR CHILDREN UP FROM SCHOOL SO YOU ARE IN A HURRY. YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO ANSWER STUDENT A'S QUESTIONS. YOU WANT TO GET AWAY AS SOON AS YOU CAN.

ONE OF STUDENT A'S QUESTIONS REMINDS YOU OF SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU TWO YEARS AGO. REMEMBERING THIS DISTRACTS YOU FROM THE QUESTION. TELL A STORY ABOUT THIS EXPERIENCE.

YOU FIND STUDENT A HARD TO UNDERSTAND SO YOU HAVE TO KEEP ASKING THEM TO REPEAT THEIR QUESTIONS USING DIFFERENT WORDS. IF STUDENT A USES DIFFERENT WORDS, YOU ARE HAPPY TO ANSWER. OTHERWISE, YOU BECOME ANNOYED AND DO NOT ANSWER ANY MORE QUESTIONS.

YOU CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING TO SAY IN RESPONSE TO STUDENT A'S QUESTIONS SO YOU GIVE REALLY SHORT ANSWERS. YOU SHOULD ONLY GIVE LONGER ANSWERS IF STUDENT A ASKS EXTRA QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU.

YOU ARE LATE FOR A MEETING SO YOU ARE IN A HURRY. YOU TRY TO SPEAK VERY QUICKLY SO THAT YOU CAN FINISH SOONER. HOWEVER, YOU ARE A NICE PERSON, SO IF STUDENT A ASKS YOU POLITELY TO SPEAK MORE SLOWLY, YOU DO SO. BUT THEN YOU GET FASTER AGAIN!

YOU WILL ONLY SPEAK TO STUDENT A IF THEY ARE VERY POLITE. THEY MUST ASK YOU IF YOU WOULD ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE INTERVIEW. IF STUDENT A DOES NOT ASK YOU POLITELY, YOU SHOULD RESPOND RUDELY AND WALK AWAY.

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WARMER

Have you ever been interviewed or interviewed someone else before? If so, how was it? Did you enjoy it? Describe it to a partner/group. If not, try to imagine what it would be like.

Think about a time that someone was rude to you or you were rude to someone else. What happened? What did you say? How did the other person respond? How did you feel? Tell your partner/group.

LANGUAGE FOCUS: QUESTIONS AND POLITENESS

ACTIVITY 1

Rank the following questions from least formal (1) to most formal (4).

- a. I was wondering if you could tell me how important religion is in your family.
- b. How important is religion in your family?
- c. Could you tell me how important religion is in your family?
- d. Can you tell me how important religion is in your family?

ACTIVITY 2

Discuss the following questions in a group.

1. Which question(s) from activity 1 would you use with your friends?

2. Which question(s) would you use with your parents' friends?
3. Which question(s) would you use with another student in the school that you haven't talked to before?
4. How do you show politeness when asking questions in your language?

SPEAKING TIP

When we ask people interview questions, we often introduce the question with a general statement about the topic.

E.g. *'Religion is very important to some people but less important to others. Can you tell me how important religion is in your family?'*

Do you do this in your language?

ACTIVITY 3

Look at the three cultural questions you chose at the end of lesson 6. Which questions need to be introduced with a general statement? Which questions could be more polite?

Work in pairs and rewrite your questions below so they are more polite and are introduced using statements.



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SPEAKING SKILLS: DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT SITUATION

ACTIVITY 1

You are going to interview people outside school for your homework. What problems might you have when you do this? Discuss them in groups.

ACTIVITY 2

Look at the table below. Have you ever had any of these problems when asking people questions? What did you do?



Problem	Solution
You think you understand what your interviewee said, but you aren't sure.	
You don't understand what your interviewee is saying because he/she is talking too fast.	
Your interviewee uses a word that you haven't heard before.	
Your interviewee tells a story instead of answering your question.	
Your interviewee says he/she doesn't understand your question.	
Your interviewee seems angry with you.	
You don't think your interviewee has answered your question.	
Your interviewee stares at you and doesn't answer.	

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SPEAKING SKILLS: INTERVIEW REHEARSAL

ACTIVITY 1

Find some students from a different class and interview them. Introduce each question with a general statement if necessary.



ACTIVITY 2

Think about the interviews you have done so far today and discuss the following questions in pairs.

- What are the most interesting things you found out?
- Did you introduce your questions before asking them?
- Did you use different question forms depending on how well you knew the student you were interviewing?

CHECKLIST

I can:

- listen to an interview and identify key information.
- understand the relationship between question forms and degree of formality.
- write effective questions to ask people during interviews.
- use appropriate communication strategies to solve problems that might arise during my interviews.

HOMEWORK

Ask at least four people from outside school your interview questions. Record your interviews and transcribe them. When you have finished, make a note of any interesting answers. Bring your notes to the next class. If you cannot record an interview, make notes about the interviewee's answers. What did they say? What did you find interesting? Do this as soon as you finish the interview so that you can remember their responses. Bring your notes to class.

Remember: Do your homework – you will need it for the next lesson!