

Using OK in English

Part 2

Speaking activities for discourse markers
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The following teaching ideas are to help raise your students' awareness about OK and get them using it in class. This is the second part of a two-part series on the use of OK in English as a discourse marker. For more on how OK is used in English discourse and other class activities see the first part of this series.

1. OK or No Way

Aim: To practise using discourse markers to respond to suggestions

Skills work: Speaking

Write on the board the following.

OK.

No way.

Clarify the pronunciation and meaning of each of these expressions ("no way" is an informal and direct way of refusing a suggestion). Then explain that you are going to make several different suggestions to the class. They must respond with either *OK* or *no way*, depending on whether or not they want to accept the suggestion. Make a few suggestions, first to the class as a whole (who must respond chorally) then to individual students. When they get the idea, ask them to continue in pairs. They can further elaborate their conversations by giving reasons for accepting or refusing.

Sample suggestions:

Would you like more homework for tonight?

Would you like no more tests this year?

Would you like \$100?

Can you give me \$100?

Can I have your book?

Can I borrow your car?

Can I take a picture of you?

Note: You could combine this aspect of using *OK* with any lesson you do on the function of making suggestions, or teach different ways of making suggestions (*Would you like...*, *How about ...+ ing*, *Why don't we...*).

2. OK, but...Generalisation game

Aim: To practise disagreeing using discourse markers.

Skills work: Speaking

While OK is often used to accept a suggestion, curiously enough it also serves the purpose of refusing one. In this case, the *OK* is said to acknowledge the other person's contribution and is followed by a counter suggestion or contribution (often prefaced with a *but*).

Ask the students to work in pairs. Give each pair a copy of the card below and ask them to read the instructions. Explain that students must choose only one of the three words to begin the activity. They must then try to keep their conversation going for at least two minutes. When two minutes are up, ask students to swap roles and write up three new words for students to choose from.

Sample words you could use for this game:

*lawyers, famous football players, grandparents, doctors,
Americans, teenagers, people who work in public administration,
teachers, police officers*

The GENERALISING GAME - Instructions

Work with a partner for this activity. One of you is A, the other is B.
Your teacher is going to write three words on the board. Student A chooses one of them.

Student A must make a generalisation or comment about the word on the board.

Student B must disagree or present an exception to this rule.

Student A can disagree with Student B, or go onto the next word.

Useful language to make a generalisation:

Generally speaking...

Most of the time...

By and large...

Useful language to start disagreeing:

OK, but what about...

OK, but think of...

OK, but there are exceptions of course...

3. OK, where was I?

Aim: To practise using discourse markers to return to a topic in conversation

Skills work: Speaking

This is a variation on a favourite English Language Teaching activity. Prepare a story or joke in advance of the class. Make sure it is something you can remember well and that you can recite. Explain to the students that you are going to tell them the story, but that they must interrupt you and ask questions. Give an example to help them get started. When students interrupt, accept only to answer their question if it is formed correctly. When you have answered the question, come back to the point you left off by saying one of the following phrases:

OK, where were we? Oh yes...

OK, so...

OK, as I was saying...

(You can make your own of phrases that you would use under those circumstances).

Once you have (finally) finished your story, write the language you were focussing on (the phrases above) on the board and draw students' attention to them. Students can do the same activity in pairs.

4. OK, bye!

Aim: To practise using discourse markers to close a conversation.

Skills work: Speaking

For this activity, divide the class into As and Bs.. Give the As a couple of minutes to prepare an important story or series of instructions which they are going to tell B. While the As are preparing explain to the Bs that they are going to listen to A, but that they are desperately anxious to get away. B must try to stop A's conversation by occasionally interrupting with the words OK.

Put the students together in pairs, A and B. Ask A to begin their story while B tries to get away from the conversation. Circulate and check. You could get a strong pair to perform this in front of the class.

OK, anything else? A closing word

An overuse of the discourse marker OK might seem sloppy or informal to some speakers. The ultimate aim of many of these activities is to allow students to incorporate OK into their natural speech. Used correctly, a discourse marker such as OK can make one's English sound a lot smoother. It is also better than 1) going silent in the middle of a conversation or 2) using a discourse marker in your own language* when speaking English, especially if this is likely to be misunderstood by the other speaker.

* Examples would be "ese" in Latin American Spanish, "ben" in French.