Language for ...

weather

Age: Adult

Level: Upper intermediate

Time: 45–60 minutes

Language focus: weather forecasts and descriptions

Skills: listening, speaking

Materials: audio + worksheet exercises, internet access preferable

Aims: provide students with language to understand mainstream weather forecasts and describe weather conditions

What are red words?

Ninety per cent of the time, speakers of English use just 7,500 words in speech and writing. These words appear in the Macmillan Dictionary in red, and are graded with stars. One-star words are frequent, two-star words are more frequent, and three-star words are the most frequent. 'Language for' lessons are based on red words and encourage students to improve their English through communicative tasks using collocation and commonly used phrases.

1 As preparation for the lesson, ask students to watch or listen to one or two UK weather forecasts (short videos available online at e.g. www.bbc.co.uk/weather/ or www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/forecast) note down any words or phrases they hear repeatedly (e.g. *chilly, showers, sunny spells, weather front, brighter skies, clear (v + adj)*), and check their meanings in the Macmillan Dictionary.

Teaching Tip: if students have computer access, they could be invited to note their findings in a word cloud platform (e.g. https://answergarden.ch/), which could be displayed and informally looked at as the class begins.

2 Make a copy of the worksheet for each student.

3 The warmer looks at a range of adjectives commonly used when describing weather. They can be broadly categorised into 'hot', 'cold' and 'wind'. Ask students to work in pairs and complete the first part of the activity as quickly as possible. Identify the fastest finishers – did they get everything correct? Check the answers as a class, pointing out that *cool, icy* and *bitter* can be used in the context of 'wind' as well as 'cold'. Can students identify the adjectives which describe pleasant weather?

Teaching Tip: Tell students that they can learn more about the specific meanings of these adjectives (and many others) at the thesaurus panels at 'hot', 'cold' and 'wind' in the Macmillan Dictionary, i.e.

www.macmillandictionary.com/thesaurus-category/british/general-words-for-warm-and-hot

http://www.macmillandictionary.com/thesaurus-category/british/cold

www.macmillandictionary.com/thesaurus-category/british/words-used-to-describe-cold-weather

www.macmillandictionary.com/thesaurus-category/british/words-used-to-describe-windy-weather

More information on 'hot' can also be found one the Macmillan Dictionary blog:

www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/language-tip-of-the-week-hot.

The subtle differences between synonyms like these may be useful for students to know – e.g. *sweltering* is hot in an uncomfortable way, *roasting* often refers to the temperature inside rather than outside, *balmy* is warm and pleasant.

As an extension activity or homework, ask students to order the adjectives in increasing intensity, e.g.: *cool – chilly – freezing – bitter; breezy – windy – blustery; mild – balmy – warm – scorching,* etc.

Language for ...

weather

4   Tell students that they're now going to listen to a typical UK weather forecast. Ask them to read the sentences in exercise 2a in preparation. Play the audio. Give students time to complete exercise 2a and then replay the audio so that they can check their answers. Check the answers as a class.

5   Before completing exercise 2b, explain that you're going to play the audio again and that students will need to listen out for two words (just one in question 5) to complete each of the sentences. Ask them to read the sentences and briefly think about what the words might be. Play the audio, pausing if necessary. Once students have completed the exercise, check the answers as a class, showing how the questions highlight typical phrases which crop up in weather forecasts, i.e. *cold/warm front, blustery winds, remain settled* (also *unsettled*), *isolated/scattered showers, sunny spells*. Explain that these phrases don't, however, tend to be used when people talk about the weather informally, and that later exercises will look at some typical language for this.

6   Exercise 3a highlights some typical words and phrases people use when describing weather. Ask students to carefully read the sentences and first complete any answers they immediately know so that they can be eliminated. Check the answers as a class. Explain that phrases such as these are far more likely to be used by native speakers of English than some of the more basic weather vocabulary they are already familiar with, e.g.: *It was clouding over...* rather than *It was becoming cloudy.... It poured down* rather than *It rained a lot; I hope it brightens up.* rather than *I hope the sun shines.*

7   Exercise 3b focuses on some common noun collocations occurring in weather descriptions and forecasts. You may want to explain that *spell* in this context means 'period of weather'. Ask students to complete the exercise in pairs, reminding them that they should identify the option which does not occur with the noun on the right. Tell them to think back to what they heard in the audio, which may help with some of the questions. Check the answers as a class.

8   Exercise 3c simulates a typical conversation on the theme of weather. Remind students that to correctly complete it they'll need to alter the form of some of the words in the box (n.b.: for gap 4, they'll need to recognise that *cloud* should be used as a verb). If necessary, tell them that looking back at earlier exercises, e.g. Exercise 3a, will help them with some of the answers. Check answers. You may wish to explain that describing the weather as *mixed* (Amy's last turn) is a common way of saying it changed a lot over a period of time.

> 💡 **Teaching Tip:** Ask students to look back at the conversation and underline the occurrences of the word *it*. Explain that when talking about the weather informally, native speakers very often use 'It ...' rather than saying/repeating 'The weather...'.

9   Divide students into pairs for Exercise 4. Tell them to look at the pictures, note down a few ideas and then take it in turns to informally tell their partner about what the weather was like, e.g.: on holiday / on a particular day / when they left home this morning, etc. Remind students to look at the conversation in Exercise 3c and the words/phrases in earlier exercise material to help them, as well as the useful phrases box.

weather

10 As a wind-up discussion, ask students what they think of weather forecasts. Do they regularly listen to or watch them? Do they think the information they provide is reliable? Are they more reliable today than they were in the past? If so, why?

Answer key:

1 hot: balmy, boiling, mild, scorching, sweltering, warm
cold: bitter, chilly, crisp, cool, freezing, icy
wind: bitter, blustery, breezy, cool, icy, windy
describing pleasant weather:
balmy, crisp, mild, warm

2a 1. T 2. F 3. F 4. T
5. T 6. T 7. F

2b 1. cold, temperatures
2. heavy, winds
3. showers, downpours
4. clear, skies
5. settled
6. cloud, rain
7. sunny, showers

3a 1. c 2. f 3. g 4. b
5. a 6. d 7. e

3b 1. weak
2. strong
3. sprinkled
4. shiny
5. heavy
6. drizzle
7. frying
8. light

3c 1. poured
2. brightened
3. warm
4. clouded
5. chilly
6. blustery (or windy)
7. clear
8. rain

4 students' own answers

Audio transcript

You might notice a different feel to the weather today. Curtesy of a cold front which came in overnight, temperatures have dropped in most areas and it's going to be quite a chilly day, especially in the north. Low pressure in charge means we're likely to have some heavy bursts of rain across parts of the west this morning and some rather blustery winds, though these will ease by early afternoon and showers will fade. Over in the east, there's a better chance of seeing some sunshine, though always the risk of isolated showers, especially on the coast which could see some heavier downpours. But if you've got outdoor plans then it's not all bad; by late afternoon the rain starts to clear away and we should see brighter skies right across the country. This evening then, generally a dry night, turning warmer as we head into tomorrow.

The rest of the working week remains settled; highs of around 18 or 19 Celsius and largely dry, especially in the south. Don't pack your umbrella away just yet though, as it all goes downhill at the weekend with cloud increasing and a band of more persistent rain heading in from the west on Friday evening. After a wet start, Saturday looks likely to be the better day of the two, with sunny spells and scattered showers on Sunday. And that's the forecast.
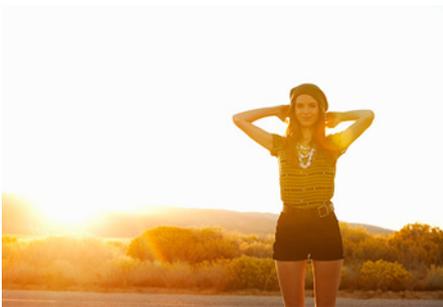
Language for ...

weather

1 Warmer

Put these weather adjectives with the correct image.

balmy	bitter	blustery	boiling	breezy	chilly	crisp	cool
chilly	cool	freezing	icy	mild	scorching	sweltering	
warm	windy						

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Which four adjectives from the box above usually describe pleasant weather?

2 Audio

a ▶ **Listen to the weather forecast and decide if the following sentences are true (T) or false (F).**

1 Today is going to be colder than yesterday. _____

2 The west will be wet all day. _____

3 It'll be dry on the east coast. _____

4 It's likely to be sunnier this evening. _____

5 Tomorrow will be warmer than today. _____

6 It'll rain again before the weekend. _____

7 Sunday will be a dry day. _____

weather

b ▶ **Listen again and complete the sentences with the correct words.**

1   Courtesy of a _____ front which came in overnight, _____ have dropped in most areas.

2   We're likely to have some _____ bursts of rain and some rather blustery _____ .

3   There's always the risk of isolated _____ , especially on the coast which could see

     some heavier _____ .

4   By late afternoon the rain starts to _____ away and we should see brighter _____ .

5   The rest of the working week remains _____ .

6   It all goes downhill at the weekend, with _____ increasing and a

     band of more persistent _____ heading in from the west.

7   _____ spells and scattered _____ on Sunday.

3   Language in use

a   **Read the sentences describing weather. Look at the words in bold and match them with their meanings a–g.**

1   I hope it **brightens up** today – we're planning to have a barbecue.

2   Suddenly the fog **lifted** and she had a fantastic view.

3   There's no way we can go walking, it's absolutely **pouring down**!

4   I think we should head back – it looks like the weather's starting to **close in**.

5   The sun was shining but there was a cool **breeze** off the sea.

6   It was glorious when we set off for the beach but by the time we arrived it had **clouded over**.

7   It wasn't raining heavily, just a bit of **drizzle**.

a   a light wind

b   to change suddenly and become unpleasant

c   to become sunnier

d   to become darker because clouds are forming in the sky

e   very light rain

f   to disappear

g   to rain very hard

Language for ...

one **stop** english

MACMILLAN
DICTIONARY
www.macmillandictionary.com

Worksheet

weather

b Circle the option which does <u>not</u> combine with the noun to make a common phrase for describing weather.

1	*light / gentle / weak*	breeze
2	*strong / heavy / torrential*	downpour
3	*scattered / isolated / sprinkled*	showers
4	*sunny / shiny / dry*	spells
5	*strong / blustery / heavy*	winds
6	*mist / fog / drizzle*	patches
7	*scorching / frying / sweltering*	heat
8	*light / bright / clear*	skies

c Complete the conversation with the correct form of the words in the box. There is one word you don't need.

---

blustery   brighten   chilly   clear   cloud   pour   rain   warm   wind

---

Cat: Hi Amy. How was the camping trip?

Amy: The first night was awful. It absolutely (1)_____ down and everything in the tent got soaked.

Cat: Oh no, so what did you do, go to a hotel?

Amy: We were thinking about it, but when we woke the next morning it had (2)_____ up. We went down to the beach and it was actually quite (3)_____and sunny.

Cat: Did you go in the sea?

Amy: Oh no, it didn't last long – after a couple of hours it (4) _____ over again. It was quite (5)_____, so we went back to the tent to make a cup of tea. But it was so (6)_____ that the stove kept blowing out. In the end we gave up and drove to a cafe!

Cat: What about the rest of the week?

Amy: The weather was pretty mixed, (7)_____ skies one day and then heavy (8)_____ the next.

Cat: Oh boy. Sounds like a typical summer in Scotland!

Language for ...

one stop english

MACMILLAN
DICTIONARY
www.macmillandictionary.com

Worksheet

weather

4   Communicate

Practise having a short conversation describing what the weather was like at a particular period of time. Look at the pictures below or use your own ideas. Try to use some of the weather words and phrases from the exercises above.

It was absolutely boiling/freezing in ...

We only had a few showers/bit of drizzle.

It was chilly in the evenings.

It was a really blustery day.

It never really poured down.

Then it brightened up in the evening.

It snowed while I was ...

It had clouded over by lunchtime.

Red Words

breeze **	clear ***	cloud ***	forecast**	pour ***	rain ***	shower **	spell **
warm ***	wind ***						

5   Discuss

- Do you listen to/watch a weather forecast every day?
- If so, does it ever change what you wear/do, etc?
- Do you think weather forecasts provide reliable information?