

## Things that often happen

by Adrian Doff

**Level:** Intermediate and above

**Time:** 20 minutes

**Aim:** – To use common expressions for talking about frequent events and tendencies.  
– To talk about routines at work.

**There are three ways of using this worksheet:**

- Give the worksheet to students to work through independently, and then in the next lesson go through the exercises and deal with any points that arise.
- Use the worksheet for an active classroom lesson. The notes below give ideas for doing this.
- Do not give the worksheet out in class but use it as the basis for your own lesson, getting ideas and phrases from the students and presenting language on the board (use the notes below to help you). Then give out the worksheet at the end, and ask students to do the exercises for homework.

### Warm-up

Give out the worksheet.

**Warm-up: Establishing the concept**

Read the three texts at the top of the worksheet. Discuss what kind of company they might be written by.

Answers:

- A a company (or shop) that sells appliances (e.g. cookers)
- B a journalist, or a public relations (PR) company
- C a company (factory) producing food containers (e.g. for the catering industry)

Point out that all the texts are about things that often or generally happen. If you like, gloss the phrases *tend to* (= they are usually more interested ...) and *has a tendency to* (= this often happens).

### Worksheet

**Language focus**

1. **Present simple tense:** Read through the examples. If necessary, give simple examples of your own to show the meaning of any unfamiliar adverbs or phrases, e.g.

- My brother lives in the USA. I see him maybe once in two or three years – I *hardly ever* see him.
- I don't *normally* smoke, but I *occasionally* have a cigarette after meals.

Ask students a few questions, and get them to use suitable adverbs in their replies, e.g.:

- When you start work? When do you finish work?
- Do you ever work at home?
- When do you have meetings? What about parties? Do you see your colleagues outside the office?
- Do you ever have problems with computers or other equipment?

2. **will:** Read through Text A the top of the worksheet again. Point out that *will* doesn't refer to the future here, but to things that happen regularly (so you can expect it to happen).

Read the examples under 'will', and establish what they are about:

- about people buying an expensive carpet (e.g. a Persian carpet)
- about passengers who have to stay overnight because their flight is delayed.

Ask students if they have ever bought a carpet or missed a flight, and what happened.

3. **tend to:** Read through Text B the top of the worksheet again, and focus on the verb *tend to*. This means that they are *often* or *usually* interested in personalities. Read the examples under 'tend to'.

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To practise this, ask students to tell you about:

- their office (e.g. Does it tend to get hot or cold? Does it tend to be noisy?)
- people's buying habits (e.g. What kind of cars do older/younger people (men/women) tend to buy in their country?)

4. **have a tendency to:** Read through Text C the top of the worksheet again, and focus on the phrase *has a tendency to*. Point out that this also means 'it often happens' or 'it will probably happen', but we often use it for negative characteristics. Read the examples under 'have a tendency to'.

To practice this, ask students to think about:

- someone in their family
- something they own (e.g. a car)

Ask them to give you a sentence using *has a tendency to*...

### Practice

#### 1. Talk or write:

Students write sentences. Then ask them to read out what they have written.

**Alternative:** Give students a few moments to think about their work and the people they work with, and possibly make a few notes. Then ask them in turn to tell the others about them.

**Larger classes:** Do this as pairwork, then ask a few students what they found out from their partner.

#### 2. Exercise:

Do the exercise together round the class; or let students do it alone or in pairs, then go through it together.

Possible answers:

- He tends to get very bad-tempered; he has a tendency to get very bad-tempered
- will normally give a refund; will usually give a refund
- tend to be cyclical; they normally/generally rise in the spring
- We sometimes get complaints; it very rarely happens; it hardly ever happens
- has a tendency to develop problems; occasionally develops problems

**Other language areas you could explore:**

#### 1. Other adverbs and phrases expressing frequency

- *regularly, frequently, as a rule, almost invariably, almost always*
- *every day/week/Monday; every four days, every three years; once/twice a week, three times a year*
- *from time to time, now and then, at times, every so often*
- *seldom, rarely, infrequently, on rare occasions*

#### 2. Expressions with 'likely'

- *We're likely to make a profit next year (= it will probably happen)*
- *You're likely to get a refund*

#### 3. Adjectives with 'tendency'

- *It has an unfortunate tendency to break down*
- *She has an annoying/alarming tendency to lose her temper*

#### 4. be inclined to

- *She's inclined to talk too much when she's with new customers*
- *He's inclined to take decisions without discussing them first*

#### 5. Expressions with 'habit'

- *He's in the habit of (has a habit of) not answering the phone (= he usually doesn't answer it)*

#### 6. The use 'will', 'keep + -ing' and 'is always + -ing' to express irritation

- *He will tap his fingers on the desk when he's thinking – it's very annoying.*
- *He keeps sending me emails (= more than necessary)*
- *She's always asking for extra money.*

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**A**

'Customers **will often** look on the Internet to compare makes and prices of cookers, but then they **will** come to us for advice.'

**B**

'National newspapers **generally want** stories about economics or finance, but local papers **tend to** be more interested in people and personalities.'

**C**

'Ordinary plastic **has a tendency to** go soft at high temperatures, so we use a special plastic called Thermax for all our food containers.'

**Present simple tense**

To talk about things that often or sometimes happen, we use the *Present simple* tense:

*They usually **have** a meeting at the beginning of every month.*

*She normally **contacts** me by email, but we sometimes **talk** on the phone.*

**Adverbs with the present simple tense:**



often  
usually  
normally  
generally

sometimes  
occasionally  
(= not often)

hardly ever  
(very) rarely

*I normally work until 6.00. (= most days)*  
*I occasionally finish work at midday. (= a few times a month)*  
*I hardly ever work in the evening. (= almost never)*

**will**

We can also use *will* to talk about things that happen *regularly* (= we can expect this to happen):

*Customers **will usually** visit the shop two or three times before they actually buy a carpet. (= this is normal)*

*If the flight is delayed till the next morning, the airline **will normally** pay for a hotel. (= you can expect this)*

**tend to**

We can use the verb *tend to* to express the idea 'it often happens':

*Our office has huge windows, so it **tends to** get very hot in the summer.*

*People **tend to** keep to the same brand unless they have a strong reason to change.*

**have a tendency to**

This is often used to describe *negative* characteristics of people or things:

*He's a careful worker, but he **has a tendency to** spend too long over unimportant details. (= he usually does this)*

*The computer **has a tendency to** crash if it tries to download a large file. (= this often happens)*

**Talk or write**



Think about the normal routines of your work and the people you work with. Think about:

- daily routine (who does what and when)
- colleagues at work
- customers and clients
- your own job

Use expressions from this worksheet to talk or write about them.

**Exercise**

1. Think of a different way to express each sentence, using words and phrases from the worksheet.

- a) He often gets very bad-tempered when he's under stress at work.
- b) The shop normally gives a refund as long as the customer has a receipt.
- c) The share prices of companies like IKEA are often cyclical: they usually rise in the spring.
- d) We occasionally get complaints about our service, but it doesn't happen at all often.
- e) The 2005 model sometimes develops problems after the first 20,000 kilometres.