

Can't you be more positive? - Teacher's notes

Aim: This is primarily a fluency-based lesson to develop students' phrase-building skills with language chunks based on the keyword 'can't'. Secondly, it expands knowledge of the use of 'can't' in sentences with a positive meaning. It works equally well with groups and individuals. Adapted one-to-one procedure and a follow-up activity are described after the group procedure.

Level: Intermediate+

Time: 60 mins

Procedure:

Question 1

Ask students to discuss question 1 on the worksheet in pairs for two minutes. After two minutes, ask students to give third person feedback about their partner to the whole class.

Question 2

Ask students to work alone for two minutes using a separate sheet of paper to write their sentences.

Question 3

When students have finished, ask them to compare their answers with a partner. Check their findings in open discussion. Write some of the more interesting or surprising sentences from question 2 on the board. Most of the sentences will probably have a negative meaning – especially at the intermediate level, but be prepared for surprises!

NB: If students do produce sentences with a positive meaning, don't highlight these too much, as even the stronger students will still get a lot from the phrase-building stage.

Question 4

Ask the students to discuss their ideas about question 4 in pairs (one or two minutes per sentence). No feedback is necessary as the next exercise will confirm meaning.

Question 5

Give students up to three minutes to match. Check their answers with the whole class. At this stage, you might want to point out that in **4.2** 'can't' can quickly revert to its nasty, negative nature. Present an example such as: 'I can't believe what a geek our teacher is.'

(Key: 4.1=b; 2=a; 3=d; 4=c)

With stronger students, note other possible structures for:

1. **4.2:** I can't believe **how beautiful it is** = how + inverted adjective clause
2. **4.3:** I can't tell you **what a pleasure it's been / what a great time I've had** = what + inverted (adjective +) noun clause

Question 6

Dialogue writing

Prompt students and foster ideas for production by first eliciting the functions of each 'chunk' and some situations when we would use them. Write up functions and one or two example situations:

- 4.1 = Expressing anticipation/excitement about a future plan (going on vacation, moving to a new place, starting a new job, etc.)
- 4.2 = Expressing surprise/astonishment (seeing a new place or thing: city / someone's house or car, meeting a new person, etc.)
- 4.3 = Expressing emotional reaction / extreme sincerity (describing a recent experience / trip, etc.)
- 4.4 = Expressing gratitude/appreciation (someone has done you a favour / given you a gift / invited you somewhere, etc.)

For 2 – 5 students:

Give student pairs time to write, checking form with them individually. You may wish to have them perform their dialogues (or perform another pair's!)

For 6 or more students:

Have students work in pairs. Give them time to write, checking form with them individually. After they've finished, have the pairs write their dialogues neatly on a separate sheet of paper, providing gaps after their 'can't expressions. Pairs then swap dialogues and try to complete their new dialogue in an appropriate way. They can then perform it while the original authors confirm/reject (or simply give an opinion about) the new version.

Optional pairs/group discussion:

Develop questions about/with the expressions for students to discuss, e.g.

- Is there anything you can't wait to do? What is it?
- Is there anyone you can't thank enough for something? Who is it? What is it for?

(You'll probably get a lot more production from students by posing the questions in the past tense with 'could'.) Monitor discretely, noting any errors (and good language) for post-review and feedback.

For one-to-one lessons:

1. Engage student in direct, informal discussion.
2. Follow procedure as it is.
3. Have student reflect on their own sentences.
4. Ensure the student considers the meaning and explains directly to teacher. Don't give any feedback at this stage!

5. Student checks and compares their own ideas. Discuss student's reaction to their findings.
6. This stage is optional for one-to-one, although some students may appreciate the chance to consolidate or even expand on their speaking with writing practice.

Follow-up activity:

This lesson can be followed up well with the Optimists and pessimists activity 71 from *Keep Talking* (Klippel – CUP) where students work in two teams: optimists and pessimists. The teacher should prepare topic cards for students to base discussion on (see below).

- 1 A student from team 1 starts by making a positive statement, e.g. "Playing sports is good for you."
- 2 A student from team 2 must respond with a negative statement, e.g. "Yeah, but if you play sports, you might have an accident and injure yourself, which is bad for you."
- 3 A different student from team 2 then takes a new topic card, makes a pessimistic statement about it and a student from team 1 must respond with an optimistic statement.

For added motivation, you may wish to award points, i.e. 1 point for every counter statement produced by each team, and 1 point given to other team when the opposing team cannot produce a counter statement!

Topic card ideas:

- 1 Sports
- 2 Television/Films
- 3 Video games
- 4 The Environment
- 5 The Internet
- 6 Weather
- 7 Food

Can't you be more positive? – Worksheet

- 1 Are you a pessimist or an optimist? What do other people say about you? Do they agree with you?
- 2 Finish this sentence as many ways as possible: *I can't...*
- 3 Compare your sentences with a partner. Do most of your sentences have a negative meaning? Do any of them have a positive meaning?
- 4 Read the statements below. Explain in your own words what the underlined parts mean.
 1. I can't wait to go on vacation.
 2. I can't believe what a beautiful place it is.
 3. I can't tell you how much fun we had.
 4. I can't thank you enough for your help.
- 5 Match the 'can't' expressions above with their meanings below:
 - a It's surprising/extraordinary.
 - b I'm very excited about it.
 - c Thank you very, very, very much!
 - d Words are not enough to express the idea.
- 6 Write a two-person dialogue and use at least one of the 'can't' expressions. Finish the expression(s) with your own ideas.