

## Odd jobs

by Walton Burns

**Age group:** Adults and young adults  
**Level:** Intermediate - Upper-intermediate  
**Time:** 30-45 minutes  
**Objective:** to practise asking questions and describing jobs  
**Key skills:** Speaking, listening  
**Materials:** Odd jobs cards

### Introduction

This lesson is based around a standard guessing game and is intended to expand students' vocabulary and awareness of work beyond the fairly standard jobs that most courses cover such as *doctor*, *lawyer*, *policeman*, *baker*, etc.

The odd jobs cards are central to the game, but you can also create your own to adapt the lesson to your students' culture.

### Before the lesson

Print out enough sets of cards for each pair or small group of students and cut them out.

### Procedure

1. Write the term *odd jobs* on the board and ask students what it means.
2. After a few students have answered, explain that it has two meanings. Firstly, *odd* means *unusual* or *strange*, so the term could mean *unusual job*. Secondly, we use the term *odd job* idiomatically to mean 'light work that needs to be done around the house', such as fixing a loose door handle, unplugging the toilet or gardening. An *odd jobs man* is like a fix-it man who can be employed to do such work, but often people do this work themselves.
3. Tell students that today you will be talking about the first meaning. Write *human signboard* on the board; or some other unusual job, if you prefer. Just make sure it's not one covered on the cards you will use later. Ask the students if they know what this is. If students don't know, explain that a human signboard is someone who wears a sign over their body, usually advertising a store or restaurant. You could have a picture of a human signboard on hand to help illustrate the meaning.
4. Now write the following five questions on the board:
  - *How do you get this job?*
  - *What kinds of people do it?*
  - *What qualifications do you need?*
  - *What are the good points?*
  - *What are the downsides?*

**Note:** for lower level students, you might want to put up easier questions, such as:

- *Where does this person work?*
- *What do they wear?*

- *Do they have to be strong?*
- *Do they get paid well?*
- *Do they have to have a good education?*
- *Do they work with other people?*
- *Do they work in a company or is it individual work?*

Ask students the questions one by one and let them discuss possible answers.

5. Ask students to name a few more odd jobs. When they have named five or six, pick a few and discuss the questions on the board with those jobs.

## Guessing game

6. Model the guessing game by taking one of the odd job cards, without showing it to students. Tell students that you have an odd job and they have to guess your job by asking you questions. If they seem stuck, direct their attention to the questions on the board.

If they ask a direct question such as *What do you do?*, which would give away the answer, be vague or pick the most unusual aspect of your job. For example, if they asked this question in relation to a human signboard, you could answer: *I stand on the street*. Encourage them to ask questions instead of just guessing jobs at random.

**Note:** To help lower-level students you could write the questions and answers on the board or have one student act as secretary. Then, if students guess a job that doesn't fit, remind them of the previous question. For example, if student A asks *Where do you work?* and you answer *In the circus*, then student B guesses *factory worker*, remind them that you said that you work in the circus. This helps them to keep focused and to use logic.

7. Once students guess correctly, put them in pairs or small groups and hand out a set of odd jobs cards to each group. Explain that they should take turns.

8. Student A picks a card (without showing it to the others) and the other student(s) ask questions, as in the example to the class, until they feel able to guess the odd job. The student who guesses the odd job correctly can keep the card. The game continues with student B (to student A's left). The student with the most cards at the end of the game is the winner.

Once most of the pairs / groups have finished the game, ask them to share some of the most interesting responses or funniest jobs with the whole class.

## Extension ideas

- Ask students if they have ever had unusual jobs and ask them to talk about what they did.
- Have students discuss categories of jobs. For example, ask them to name jobs that teenagers / old people; jobs that have anti-social hours (a schedule that makes it hard to have a social life); jobs that no longer exist, e.g. street lantern lighters.
- This lesson can lead into a discussion on money worries and why some people take unusual jobs.
- Conduct a blind interview. Students work in pairs with one student as a manager looking to hire someone and the other student as the interviewee. However, the student being interviewed doesn't know what job he / she has applied for. By asking questions like *What are the hours?*, *Is there a uniform?* and *What qualifications are you looking for?*, the interviewee must try to guess the job. You can allow the student playing the manager to think of the job or you can provide a list of potential jobs, such as those on the odd jobs cards.



**Odd jobs cards**

<b>cosmetics tester</b>	<b>magician</b>
<b>jingle writer (music on advertisements)</b>	<b>voice of train announcements</b>
<b>fruit picker</b>	<b>minister / priest / rabbi / imam</b>
<b>game show host</b>	<b>newspaper delivery person</b>
<b>gravedigger</b>	<b>ice cream taster</b>
<b>dog walker</b>	<b>stunt person in action movies</b>
<b>window washer</b>	<b>professional shopper</b>
<b>chef at a nursing home</b>	<b>children's party clown</b>
<b>people pusher (on subways in Japan)</b>	<b>acrobat in the circus</b>
<b>person who gives out advertisements on the street</b>	<b>travel writer</b>