

There's been a slip up!

Making Mistakes is like Falling Over

A Metaphor Lesson by Lindsay Clandfield

This is a vocabulary and idiom lesson for intermediate and upper-intermediate students. The aim is to highlight the metaphorical meanings of several phrases related to making mistakes. The emphasis is on meaning, with an activity to incorporate these expressions into use.

STAGE ONE

Write the word MISTAKES on the board. Elicit other words and situations that students think of when they think of mistakes. Write these up on the board. Allow some discussion about individual words or situations at this point.

STAGE TWO

Tell the class that they are going to role play several different situations in which people make mistakes. Divide the class into pairs. Assign each pair a role card. Give them a couple of minutes to think about what they are going to say. Don't let this go on too long because the speaking activity should be as natural and unscripted as possible. Tell them they must incorporate the phrase on their card into the roleplay. Circulate and help different pairs with their expressions.

STAGE THREE

Give the handout to the students. Tell them that as they listen to the roleplays, they should listen out especially for the phrases on the worksheet. They have to circle the correct word to make the phrase. Tell them to do this first with their own expression on the role card. Then have the pairs perform the roleplays for the class. Check back the answers.

ANSWERS:

a) I think I tripped up on the first question. b) The actor stumbled over her lines! c) But you didn't take a single wrong step! d) You could fall flat on your face! e) When I asked him/her, he/she fumbled for what to say! f) Is this a clumsy attempt at saying sorry? g) It was a slip of my tongue. I'm sorry!

STAGE FOUR

Draw students' attention to the metaphor box. Ask them if any of the expressions exist in their own language. Does the same metaphor for mistakes exist as well?

STAGE FIVE

Think of 3. This is a quick speaking activity to get students using and personalising the new expressions. Divide the class into groups of 5 maximum. Copy and cut up each of the sentences and give each group a set of sentences. Each person in the group must take a sentence at random and answer the question. They must do this in a minute. You could also do this directly from the worksheet, with students taking turns challenging each other to answer one of the questions.

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1. Role Play

The teacher will give you a card with a situation to perform in front of the others. Prepare your roleplay briefly with a partner. Then act out your situation. Use the expression on the card in your roleplay.

2. What's the Right Word?

Listen to the roleplays, then choose the right word to complete the expressions below about making mistakes.

- a. **I think I tripped (up / down) on the first question.**
- b. **The actor stumbled (up / over) her lines!**
- c. **But you didn't (take / do) a single wrong step!**
- d. **You could fall (fat / flat) on your face!**
- e. **When I asked him/her, he/she fumbled (for/in) what to say!**
- f. **Is this a clumsy attempt (to / at) saying sorry?**
- g. **It was a slip of (the / my) tongue. I'm sorry!**

Can you think of a different context for each of these expressions? Make a list with a partner. Then compare your alternative contexts to another pair's.

2. Metaphor Box.

In English, making a mistake is like falling over, or like being clumsy and dropping things.

Are there any similar expressions in your language about making mistakes? Does this metaphor exist in your language?

3. THINK of 3 – Challenge!

Answer the following questions. You only have one minute for each one.

- Think of three times when you might fumble for something to say.
- Think of three times when you thought you might flat on your face.
- Think of three times when you put your foot in your mouth!
- Think of three slip-ups that frequently happen where you work or study.

ROLE CARDS

<p style="text-align: center;">ROLE CARD</p> <p>You are both students talking about your final exam, which you have just finished.</p> <p>I think I tripped up on the first question.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ROLE CARD</p> <p>You are both talking about a play you saw, which was terrible in your opinion. You are very disappointed.</p> <p>The actor stumbled over her/his lines! I think he/she was drunk!</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">ROLE CARD</p> <p>A. You just finished a presentation, but you feel awful about it. B. You are encouraging A, you think their presentation was great.</p> <p>But you didn't take a single wrong step!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ROLE CARD</p> <p>A: You want to ask someone (not B) out on a date, but you are nervous. B: You are A's friend, you think it is a bad idea.</p> <p>You could fall flat on your face!</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">ROLE CARD</p> <p>A. You think your boyfriend/ girlfriend is cheating on you with someone else. You want advice. B. You are A's friend. Give advice.</p> <p>When I asked him/her, he/she fumbled for what to say!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ROLE CARD</p> <p>A. You are B's boss. You are angry with A because they lost an important client. B. You forgot to call an important client and now you feel terrible.</p> <p>Is this a clumsy attempt at saying sorry?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">ROLE CARD</p> <p>A. You are B's mother. By accident you called B's girlfriend by another name. B. Your girlfriend is furious at you because your mother called her a different name.</p> <p>It was a slip of the tongue. I'm sorry!</p>	