

## End and beginning

**Level:** Intermediate upwards

**Timing:** 90 minutes plus

**Material needed:** One copy of the worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

**Group size:** Any

### Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in Business Spotlight Issue 2/2010. The article deals with the problematic but essential Business English topic of losing a job. It also looks at vocabulary and expressions useful for discussing this topic, as well as the business skill of report writing.

The tasks in the student worksheets will encourage the students to not only learn and use new business vocabulary and related functional language but also to practise useful business skills such as report writing and reading for detail.

The teacher's notes aim to provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies, as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys, and extension tasks and lesson plans.

### Introduction

Losing a job is a dramatic event in anyone's career or life. The author of the article, Marley Obi, talks to people who have experienced this and who consequently discovered that becoming unemployed does not only mean the end of something but can also lead to new beginnings and opportunities.

### Warmer

Ask the students to read through the words from the article and, using their gut-feeling or initiative, decide whether the words are positive or negative (some, such as *work*, may be either or both, depending on the student's own personal work situation). Asking the students to work in pairs or groups of three will make this task more communicative as they will then have to negotiate with each other and justify their decisions. Although some of the words have clearly negative or positive rings to them, individual students' answers will vary depending on their personal experience as well as their knowledge of the vocabulary. Therefore, the key gives the answers according to how the words are used in the article.

### Key:

*Probable answers:*

*positive: work, elated, millions, relief, option, appreciated, buzz*  
*negative: work, redundancy, fired, right-sizing, anger, anxiety, blow, dismissed, knock*

### Business vocabulary

The students will find the words they need to complete the sentences in the word cloud. For some of the answers they will need more than one word. The paragraph numbers are given at the end of the sentences so that the students can either check their answers once they think they have the solutions or gain additional help in finding the answers by looking for the word(s) in the article.

For more information on word clouds, see this Business Spotlight lesson plan: <http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=60069&docid=157652> (Business Spotlight: The art doctor).

### Key:

- |                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. <i>made redundant</i>       | 8. <i>fired</i>                  |
| 2. <i>devastating</i>          | 9. <i>dismissed</i>              |
| 3. <i>temping work</i>         | 10. <i>contractor</i>            |
| 4. <i>voluntary</i>            | 11. <i>elation</i>               |
| 5. <i>bereavement</i>          | 12. <i>corporate fund-raiser</i> |
| 6. <i>anxiety</i>              | 13. <i>donation</i>              |
| 7. <i>emotionally damaging</i> | 14. <i>appreciated</i>           |

### Extension task

Give one of these sets of words to a pair of students and ask them to compare and contrast the words. They should present their findings to the class.

- made redundant / fired / dismissed
- temping work / voluntary work / contract work
- anger / anxiety / disbelief

### Comprehension

The students should first work alone and make a note of their answers. Then they should compare and discuss their notes with another student before finally writing a full answer to each of the four questions.

### Key:

*Suggested answers:*

1. *Relief, lack of self-confidence, panic (about her financial situation)*
2. *Temping work followed by voluntary work, during which time she will decide what she wants to do next.*
3. *It took her a long time (three years) to get over being dismissed and she didn't want to risk the same thing happening to her again.*

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4. As an opportunity to find out what he really wanted to do and also as a chance to spend time with his growing sons.

### Idiomatic expressions

The students should draw a line that connects one entry from each column to match the phrase, its meaning and the context in which it was used in the article.

phrase	meaning	topic in the article
take a knock	to be badly affected by something	self-confidence
a blow	an event that spoils your chances of success	being fired
take action against	to begin a (legal) activity against someone or something	a legal case against a company/employer
put someone's mind at rest	to stop someone feeling worried	the company was so impressed with her work that they offered her a full-time job
miss out on something	to lose the chance to do something	bringing up children
get a buzz from something	to get happiness or excitement from something	being appreciated

### Extension task

The students should write their own personalized example sentence for each of the expressions. This task can be done individually, in pairs or in small groups.

### Talking points

As redundancy could prove to be a sensitive topic, two very different questions are given as topics for further discussion. If the topic of redundancy seems to bring out too many emotions, it would be advisable to ask the students to discuss the second question only as this focuses on the positive aspects of having more time available.

### Writing a report

The students should write a report as stated in the task. The headings are given to provide structure.

### Teaching and learning strategy: Writing a report

Reports are concise and factual pieces of business writing. It is important to know who will read the report as this will affect the level of formality and the language used, e.g. is it going to be read by the board of directors or your co-workers in your own department?

Reports are usually split into four standard sections: Introduction, Main body, Conclusions, Recommendations. People who read reports usually know what to expect and where in the report to find what they need to know. If the writer deviates from the above division and order of the sections, readers may become irritated.

Each section should be given a heading (see task). The report itself may be given a title and appendices may be included where appropriate.

The writer's opinions are usually given in the Conclusions section. These opinions should be based on facts presented in the main body of the report.

Reports should be clear and precise, so it is useful to write in the following tenses:

- Use simple tenses (usually the present simple) to express facts.
- Use the imperative form (*Discuss the possibility ...*, *Give priority ...*, etc.) in the Recommendations section, as these apply to the company as a whole.

### Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

### More on losing jobs

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics, go to the following lesson plans in the Business tasks series on onestopenglish:

Business tasks: Getting and losing jobs:  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=156741>

Business tasks: Success and failure:  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59913&docid=156009>

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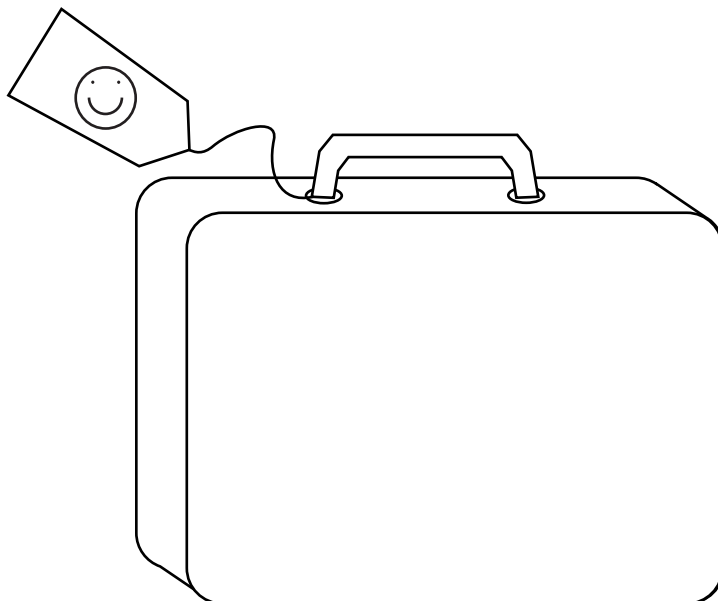
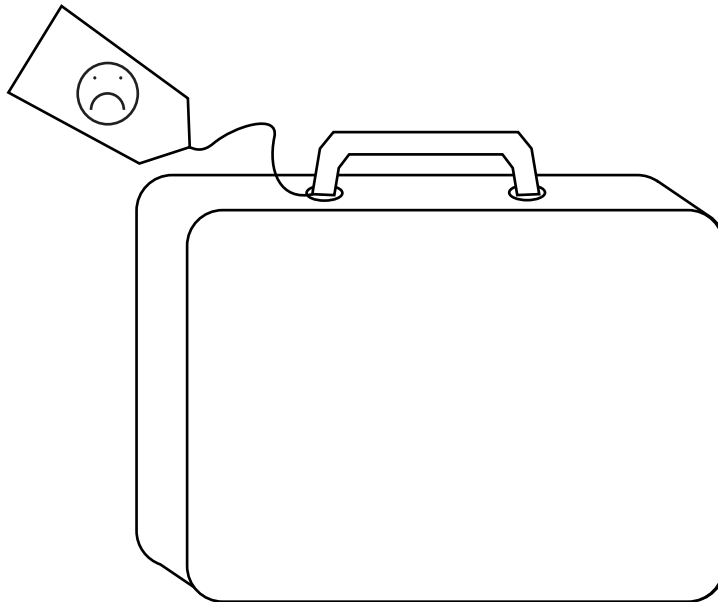
### Introduction

Losing a job is dramatic event in anyone's career or life. The author of the article, Marley Obi, talks to people who have experienced this and who consequently discovered that becoming unemployed does not only mean the end of something but can also lead to new beginnings and opportunities.

### 1 Warmer

Which of these words do you feel are positive and which are negative? Write them into the briefcases.

- |            |         |       |        |              |          |           |       |
|------------|---------|-------|--------|--------------|----------|-----------|-------|
| redundancy | work    | fired | elated | right-sizing | millions | relief    |       |
| anger      | anxiety | blow  | option | appreciated  | buzz     | dismissed | knock |



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### 2 Business vocabulary

Use the words in the word cloud to complete the sentences below.



1. John hasn't worked since he was \_\_\_\_\_ last autumn. (2 words, para 1)
2. The earthquakes had a \_\_\_\_\_ effect on Haiti. (para 3)
3. If you can't find a full-time position you could consider doing \_\_\_\_\_. (2 words, para 4)
4. At the weekends, Stephanie does \_\_\_\_\_ work for the Red Cross. (para 4)
5. Diane runs a group that helps people deal with \_\_\_\_\_. (para 5)
6. There was increasing \_\_\_\_\_ over the outcome of the talks. (para 5)
7. Witnessing a traumatic event in your childhood can be \_\_\_\_\_. (2 words, para 6)
8. Hilda was \_\_\_\_\_ for stealing the petty cash. (para 6)
9. Thomas claimed that he had been unfairly \_\_\_\_\_. (para 6)
10. We can't do the work by ourselves; we'll have to hire a building \_\_\_\_\_. (para 7)
11. The feeling of \_\_\_\_\_ that Mary experienced upon winning the gold medal was indescribable. (para 8)
12. The main job of a \_\_\_\_\_ is to find ways of getting money for a particular charity. (3 words, para 10)
13. Please make a \_\_\_\_\_ to UNICEF. (para 11)
14. When my boss tells me that I've done a good job, I feel \_\_\_\_\_. (para 11)



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by Marley Obi

1 When Victoria Harris lost her job in September 2008, her first reaction was relief. She had seen her firm lose several clients, and many of her colleagues had been made redundant. Her constant worrying about her job would now be over.

2 But the sense of relief quickly disappeared as the reality of her redundancy became clear. "You can't help but take it personally, even though you know it's nothing to do with you," says Harris, a former account director for Luchford APM, a British PR agency in London. "Your self-confidence takes a knock."

3 Cary Cooper, professor of organizational psychology and health at Lancaster University, in north-west England, comments that even the word "redundancy" is devastating. "I don't think any other country uses a word like the British word 'redundancy'. It's a horrific word, because it's saying you are redundant, not the job," Cooper points out. "The Americans avoid using negative terms – they say 'right-sizing', for example. I've even heard someone from America calling it 'iceing' (involuntary career event)."

4 Harris had been with the company for less than two years, so she didn't receive a redundancy payment. For weeks afterwards, she would wake up in the middle of the night in a panic about her finances. "I'm single and live alone, with a mortgage and no savings," she explains. "I didn't expect to find myself looking for temping work at the age of 32, when I've got years of PR experience but I've just had to take some receptionist work. It isn't ideal but at least it will pay the bills," she says. Harris has decided that, after being a temp for a while, she is going abroad to do voluntary work in a school in the townships of Cape Town in South Africa, while she decides what to do next.

5 Although there is no stigma connected to redundancy during a recession, losing your job can still often be traumatic. For many, there is a feeling of bereavement. They go through disbelief, anger, anxiety and depression."



6 If being made redundant is emotionally damaging, then being fired is an even bigger blow. Jo Dodds was working in the regional HR office of a big DIY retailer when she was suddenly dismissed in 2003. "I'd been having some problems with my boss and, one day, I was told they wanted me to leave," Dodds says. "I was asked to sign a compromise agreement, which means you basically give up your rights to take any action against the company. I was given four months' pay, tax-free, on the basis that I sign the agreement. After the meeting, I drove home immediately without speaking to anybody and I never went back again."

7 Although Dodds went on to better-paid jobs that she enjoyed, it took her three years to fully get over being fired. For a long time, she was reluctant to go back to permanent employment. The turning point came after a company she had been working for as a contractor was so impressed with her that they persuaded her to join them permanently. "That finally put my mind to rest that it wasn't me doing a bad job before," says Dodds, who now runs a local community magazine, as well as advising small businesses on how to market themselves online.

8 Following a job loss, people generally have two options. One is to try to get another job as soon as possible and the other is to use the opportunity to find out what they really want to do. Robert Clark, a former manager of North American reinsurance accounts for an international firm, decided he would take the second option. Clark was made redundant in May 2008, when his position in the company disappeared. After 23 years with the same company, he found himself jobless at the age of 45 and with a young family to support. But, unlike Dodds, his immediate reaction was elation.

9 "I hadn't been enjoying my job and, after the redundancy, I thought, 'This is fantastic! I don't have to go to work and I've got enough money to support myself.' I had a great five months off work," Clark says. "I managed to do many things I'd missed out on. I could take my two sons to school, go to sports days and be there when they came home. It really benefited my relationship with them."

10 When it was time to start looking for another job, Clark was determined to make a new start. He began volunteering for The Sick Children's Trust, which provides accommodation for families with children receiving hospital treatment for serious illness. Clark now works for the trust as a corporate fund-raiser.

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by Marley Obi

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“In my former job, I was dealing with millions of pounds every day but sometimes I felt that it didn’t matter a great deal at the end of the day,” he says. “Whereas here, if I get a £500 donation, that’s a big help. I put the same amount of effort into getting £500 here as I would have done getting £10 million in my old job, because I get a buzz from being appreciated.”

#### What the experts say

**Cary Cooper gives his advice for a successful return to work:**

**Think before you jump.** Before rushing off to get the same job in the same sector, ask yourself, “Is this sector shrinking? Will there be more people chasing fewer jobs?” If the answer is yes, maybe a different sector will have more options for you.

**Analyze yourself.** Ask the following questions, “What am I good at? What do I enjoy doing? What skills and competencies do I have? What did I do well in my last job? What didn’t I do so well?” Make a list and then decide how you are going to improve for the next job.

**Update your skills.** You may discover that the things you enjoy fit with a particular type of job but that you lack certain skills. So, look into any additional training you may need to update them.

**Make your job search effective.** Don’t waste time on countless jobsites: focus your search. Get an expert to look at your CV, rather than your mum or friends. And make sure you adapt your CV to every job.

**Show that you are interested.** After an interview, ask yourself if you were as good as you could have been. Then send a follow-up letter or email. This makes clear that you really want the job, and also gives you a chance to add extra information to the answers you gave at the interview.

**Keep active.** Being unemployed for a few weeks is OK. But being out of work for months looks negative to a recruiter. Unfortunately, many employers do not want to employ people who are unemployed. Voluntary work and internships can bridge that gap and help you to gain new skills.

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### 3 Comprehension

Use your own words to answer these questions about the people interviewed in the article.

1. What three emotional phases did Victoria Harris go through when she was made redundant?
2. Now that she has accepted her redundancy, what are her job plans?
3. Why was Jo Dodds reluctant to return to permanent employment after being dismissed?
4. How did Robert Clark view his redundancy?

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### 4 Idiomatic expressions

Match the idiomatic expressions in the article to the meanings and to the topic they are used to express. Scan the article to check your answers.

phrase	meaning	topic in the article
take a knock	to get happiness or excitement from something	a legal case against a company/employer
a blow	to lose the chance to do something	the company were so impressed with her work that they offered her a full-time job
take action against	to stop someone feeling worried	self-confidence
put someone's mind to rest	to be badly affected by something	being fired
miss out on something	to begin a (legal) activity against someone or something	being appreciated
get a buzz from something	an event that spoils your chances of success	bringing up children

### 5 Talking points

Choose one of these topics to discuss.

- Do you know anyone who has been made redundant? Did they see their redundancy as a new beginning or an end?
- If you were made redundant, how would you make good use of all the extra time you would have?

### 6 Writing a report

Write a 200-250-word report based on the article. The report will be read by employees – especially trainees – in the Human Resources department of a large company.

Keep the report factual and structured by using these headings:

- Introduction: What is redundancy?
- Main body: What redundancy means for different people. What the experts say.
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

