

## helping others to understand you

**Age:** Teenager / adult



**Level:** Upper-intermediate–Advanced

**Length:** 90 minutes (approx.)

**Language Focus:** key expressions and techniques for explaining ideas and helping others to understand you

**Skills:** speaking, reading

**Materials:** one copy of the worksheet per student; Task 4 involves some online research, which students could do using their smartphones or any device with an internet connection

**Aims:** to allow students to effectively use mediation techniques to get their ideas across; to provide students with useful language to explain ideas

### What are red words?

Ninety per cent of the time, speakers of English use just 7,500 words in speech and writing. These words appear in the Macmillan Dictionary in red and are graded with stars. One-star words are frequent, two-star words are more frequent and three-star words are the most frequent. 'Language for' lessons are based on red words and encourage students to improve their English through communicative tasks using collocation and commonly used phrases.

<https://www.macmillandictionary.com/learn/red-words.html>

- 1 Begin the lesson by showing the class some common internet terms which you think they will be able to explain (e.g. a *meme*). Put the students in pairs and ask them to explain each of the terms you give them. As you monitor, write up some of the language that students are using to explain, e.g. *It's like a cartoon, but ..., it's something which has become more common ..., Have you ever seen an image with ...?* Tell the class that in this

lesson, they'll study techniques and language which will help them explain their ideas clearly. This is a highly useful skill which will help them in many contexts, from job interviews to solving everyday problems.

- 2 For Task 1a, ask the students to stay in their pairs and give them the worksheets. Read aloud the introduction and give students a moment to describe the term *microphone*. Then provide feedback on the descriptions, e.g. *You use this to ..., You might find this in a ...,* etc. Next, ask them to decide who should be Student A and who should be Student B and give them the corresponding Taboo cards at the end of the worksheet. Ask the pairs to read the instructions for the task. Then allow them a few minutes to do the task in pairs. Once the game of Taboo has finished, ask the class if anybody felt that their partner was particularly good at explaining the terms. Have a brief discussion about what a good explanation involves.
- 3 Now refer students to Task 1b. Ask them to read the techniques used to explain terms and ask them to identify which technique/s they used in Task 1a. Write up any examples that the students provide.
- 4 Read aloud the definition of mediation from Task 1c. Then put students in pairs and ask them to brainstorm common situations in which people use mediation. Write up some of the students' suggestions on the board. Examples of situations include: teaching, students helping each other to understand, work meetings, negotiating, resolving arguments, reaching political agreements, legal contexts such as divorce proceedings, etc.

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- 5 Read aloud the instructions for Task 2a and set a time limit of a few minutes for students to decide which sentences are true and which are false. Allow them to work individually. Monitor the class as they do this, helping weaker students with difficult parts of the texts. Once the time is up, ask all students to compare their answers in pairs. Finally, if students find some questions difficult, look back at the corresponding parts of the texts for clarity.
- 6 Refer students to Task 2b and read the instructions aloud. As a class, try to find an example of a highlighted phrase for Technique 1. The best example is from the third situation, in which Hannah uses expressions like *First of all ...*, *Next ...*, and *As for ...*. Then allow students to find examples of highlighted phrases for techniques 2 to 5. Set a time limit of a few minutes for this. Once the time is up, elicit at least one example for each technique. As the teacher, you can see the answers on the Mediation Phrases page, but students shouldn't look at this page yet.
- 7 Now refer students to the Mediation Phrases page. Ask them to work individually to try and remember the 14 missing words without looking back at the situations. Monitor the class as they do this and help weaker students by reminding them of the phrases from Task 2b. Once they've written their suggested words, ask them to compare in pairs. Then, they should look again at the three texts from Task 2a to make sure their answers are correct. Finally, ask students to again work in pairs to discuss the meaning of all the highlighted phrases from the Mediation Phrases page. Elicit explanations for phrases which may have caused confusion. For example, to *unpack* means to explain something difficult by reducing it to simple stages or by using simpler language;
- As for ...* is used for introducing a subject that is related to what you have just been talking about; to *think of* can mean to *consider*.
- 8 Refer students to Task 3 and read the instruction aloud. Ask students to work individually as they correct the mistakes. Monitor the class as they do this and help weaker students by highlighting the problematic word in each sentence. After a few minutes, ask students to compare answers in pairs before finally checking the answers as a class.
- 9 For Task 4, put the students in new Student A/B pairs. Read the instructions aloud. Set a time limit for students to research their corresponding concepts online, using appropriate devices. If you wish, students could do this research phase collectively (e.g. several Student As could work together to research their concepts). Monitor the class as they research, helping them to understand the concepts if necessary. These are the basic definitions of each concept:
- Serendipity = The fact of finding pleasant or useful things by chance.
  - Blue sky thinking = Thinking that is not limited by the realities of the present and therefore generates new ideas.
  - The law of attraction = The belief that positive thoughts have a certain energy which then 'attracts' positive things to your life (and vice versa for negative thoughts).
  - Six degrees of separation = The belief that we are socially connected to all other people in the world by a maximum of six connections.
  - Playing devil's advocate = Pretending to disagree with someone in order to start a debate or interesting discussion.

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- The Peter Principle = The theory that, in hierarchical organisations, people rise to their level of incompetence. If they are competent at a certain level, they will keep getting promoted until they reach a level at which they are incompetent.
- 10** After students finish their research, they need to explain their researched concepts to their partners. Speakers should make sure they simplify the information and adapt their language for their partners. As students talk about each concept, partners should ask questions. Set a time limit (e.g. ten minutes) for the entire task. Monitor students and take notes as they speak. When the time is up, ask individual students to describe a concept which has just been explained to them, e.g. *Frank, can you tell us what Maria explained to you about 'blue sky thinking'?* Finally, give feedback.
- 11** Ask students to remain in the same pairs. Refer them to Task 5 and ask the students to discuss the questions for a few minutes. When the time is up, have a brief class discussion about the best techniques for explaining ideas, either from this lesson or from students' personal experience. Finally, provide feedback from the lesson.

### KEY:

#### 2. Text

Task a:

1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True; 6. True

Task b:

see Task 1c

Task c:

1. unpack; 2. in; 3. down; 4. all; 5. words;  
6. practical; 7. put; 8. make; 9. any; 10. for;  
11. refers; 12. for; 13. For; 14. Imagine

#### 3. Language in Use

1. ... I'm going to **break** it down for you.
2. What this means in practical **terms** is ...
3. To **put** it simply, ...
4. ... let's **unpack** them one by one.
5. Let's take **an everyday** example ...
6. Does that **make** sense? Or, ...
7. ... And as **for** money, it probably won't be ...
8. We used to think **of** video games only as ...
9. The letters UFO stand **for** *Unidentified Flying Object*.
10. ... too much to **take** in – I think my head might explode!