

Alien negotiations

by Magnus Coney

Age group: Teenagers / adults

Level: Intermediate - Upper-intermediate

Objective: to practise using the first conditional to reach an agreement

Key skills: Speaking

Materials: One copy of the worksheet for each student; one pair of astronaut / alien role-play cards for each pair of students; picture of Yuri Gagarin in spacesuit

Before the lesson

Find a picture of Yuri Gagarin in his spacesuit. There are four pairs of role-play cards, so you may need more than one copy of the picture. If possible, mount the astronaut and alien role-play cards on different coloured card to easily distinguish between them.

Procedure

1. Show the picture of Yuri Gagarin to the class. Ask the students if they know who it is and if they know / can guess how long ago he first went into space (in April 1961, over 50 years ago).
2. Ask students what they think his friends and family said to him before he left. If an example of the first conditional does not come up, write *If you come back safely ...* on the board and ask students to complete the sentence. Write examples on board and correct, if necessary.
3. Elicit that this form is the first conditional and is formed with *If* + present simple + *will*. Explain that it is used to express the idea that if the first condition is met (now or in the future), the main clause will happen after. To check understanding, ask if (at that time) Gagarin coming back safely is possible, impossible or certain. The students should answer that it is possible / likely that he comes back safely. Don't forget to drill the pronunciation of both *I'll* and *won't*.
4. Hand out the 'Astronaut sentence prompts' worksheet and ask students to individually complete the sentence prompts as if they were astronauts going into space. Circulate and check that students are using the correct form. When they have finished, put them in pairs and ask them to see how many sentences they have completed in the same way as their partner. To do this, get students to ask each other about their sentences using the form *What will you do if ...?* to practise first conditional questions.
5. Ask students for some examples for the final prompt (*If I meet an alien ...*). Tell the class that in many older sci-fi films, when aliens met humans for the first time, they often said 'Take me to your leader'. What will the astronauts say to an alien if they meet one? Elicit that humans and aliens might be able to help each other.
6. Tell the students that they are going to be playing the parts of astronauts and aliens. Explain that they will work in pairs and that both parties will want something from the other. What kind of language will they need to do this? Elicit or explain that the first conditional can be used to promise, persuade, warn and threaten, all of which might be necessary in the upcoming 'negotiations'. Give examples such as *Massimo, if you do your homework, I'll buy you a cake!* or *If you don't bring an umbrella to London, you'll get wet!*.
7. Tell the students you are going to hand out role-play cards describing who they are, what they have, what they want and other relevant information. One of them will be an astronaut, one will be an alien. They will

either be on the alien's home planet or a planet that is foreign to both. Elicit that negotiations often begin with small talk, so they should ask each other about their adventures so far. When they begin their negotiations, they should try and use the first conditional where necessary. As a form of peer assessment, students could keep a tally of the number of times their partner uses it. Remind students that *will* is normally contracted to *'ll* in speaking.

8. Hand out the role-play cards and tell students to take a minute to look at them and decide on some things they might do / say (you may want to do an example yourself with one of the stronger students). They can start negotiating when both partners are ready.

9. After about five minutes, collect the cards in and redistribute them so half the class are aliens and half astronauts. Have some way of showing whether a student is an astronaut or an alien, perhaps with coloured role-play cards. Tell them they are at a small intergalactic service station in the outer reaches of the universe and they have to find someone who can help them. Tell them they can go back to a previous student to renegotiate / withdraw their offer if they receive a better one. Give them ten minutes to complete the activity.

10. During the activity, monitor and note down examples of errors and good language to discuss after the activity. Finally, students can describe their negotiations and any agreements reached to the rest of the class.

Additional ideas and extension activities

- Focus on indirect speech and being diplomatic. Say that the aliens are very direct while humans are much more indirect. Students practise speaking as both 'species' and change their language accordingly.
- For lower-level classes, ask pairs to write a dialogue based on their role-play cards that they can practise and then perform to the class. This activity gives them more time to think about the form, so when they come to do it orally they are more confident.
- For an outgoing Business English class, this lesson could be used to teach negotiation expressions rather than the first conditional.
- Brainstorm or pre-teach space vocabulary that students can use during the small talk at the beginning of their negotiations. This could be done during the warmer, either by giving the class a time limit to come up with as many space words as possible or by brainstorming as a class and collecting the words on the board.
- Role-play interviews between Yuri Gagarin and a journalist before his flight. This could be another opportunity to practise the first conditional.
- Elicit or brainstorm some simple negotiation expressions that students can use during the activity, such as *How about ...?*, *What if I ...?* and *You must be joking!*.
- At step 9, get the 'aliens' to sit in a circle facing outwards, and the 'astronauts' to sit in a circle around them facing inwards. The outer circle moves around one space every two minutes, so every astronaut talks to every alien.
- With large classes, you could divide students into groups of eight and do step 9 within their groups in different parts of the classroom.

Astronaut sentence prompts

- If I get bored on the spaceship, _____

- If I'm allowed to bring something from home, _____

- If I discover a new planet, _____

- If I feel homesick, _____

- If I don't get on with the other astronauts, _____

- If I see a comet, _____

- If I walk on the Moon, _____

- If I meet an alien, _____



Astronaut / alien role-play cards

Student A1

You are ... an astronaut travelling alone through space.
You have ... a spaceship (which is unique and worth billions of pounds).
You need ... energy for your spaceship to get back to Earth.
But ... you are also very lonely.

Student B1

You are ... an alien travelling alone through space.
You have ... a very old spaceship that breaks down a lot but is powered by an unlimited energy source.
You need ... a way to get home.
But ... you are very adventurous and want to learn more about the humans.

Student A2

You are ... an astronaut travelling alone through space.
You have ... a spaceship, lots of food and a joke book (a present from your only child).
You need ... to learn how strong the alien race is, because there are too many humans on Earth and they need a new planet to live on.
But ... you are very emotional and miss your family. If anything reminds you of them, you get very upset.

Student B2

You are ... an alien security guard on your home planet.
You have ... a flying bicycle (that only flies in the atmosphere) and an intergalactic mobile phone.
You want ... to learn about human feelings and emotions (you have never experienced them).
But ... you are very insecure and want the astronaut to think that you and your people are important and powerful.

Student A3

You are ... an astronaut travelling alone through space.
You have ... a spaceship and lots of beer and chocolate.
You need ... to discover new energy sources for Earth.
But ... you are drunk and high on sugar.

Student B3

You are ... an alien travelling through space with your family.
You have ... a husband / wife who is an intergalactic expert on nuclear fusion (the most powerful form of energy known but humans cannot control it).
You want ... to learn how to have fun. This discovery would make you the richest person on your planet.
But ... you are having problems with your husband / wife and are only staying together because of the children.

Student A4

You are ... an astronaut travelling through space with your family.
You have ... some photos of your family and lots of children's toys.
You need ... food for your family because you have eaten almost everything.
But ... the alien is very beautiful and you start to fall in love.

Student B4

You are ... an alien scientist.
You have ... a time machine and a replicator, which can create and recycle objects including food.
You need ... a human to do experiments on.
But ... you think humans are very ugly, so you can't look at them.