

Lesson Plan: Communication Skills - Telling Stories

Try this sample lesson from *In Company 3.0* Pre-intermediate (B1) level, which looks at a way to develop communication skills through telling anecdotes or short personal stories. They are a useful way to build and maintain a conversation and foster good relationships with colleagues, which is a key soft skill in the world of business.

Level: Pre-intermediate / CEFR B1

Time: approx 45-60 minutes (or longer depending on how the activities are used)

How to use this lesson plan:

The lesson can be used for the whole class, who can work in pairs and small groups. Download and print out the provided Student's Book pages so each student has a copy, and use the related audio files.

Learning objectives

This unit is about telling anecdotes or short stories about events, in your own experience, which are often funny or interesting and which may provoke someone else to reply with a story about a similar experience. As such, they are a useful way of maintaining a conversation and fostering good relationships between people.

The unit starts with a recording of someone telling an anecdote about an incident that happened when he was a student. Students examine some of the language which is often used when telling stories and do some work on questions which they can use to encourage someone else to tell a story or give more details. They then work in pairs to tell anecdotes to each other.

Warm-up

Focus students' attention on the quotation from Sid Caesar at the top of the page. Ask them if they agree. Is it customary in their culture to respond to the telling of a story by telling one of your own? Do they enjoy listening to other people's stories or do they find it boring?

1 (Track 1.30) Focus students' attention on the definition of *anecdote* in the margin and ask them what they think are the key features of a good story or anecdote (for example, a good punchline, a dramatic event). List these on the board and leave them up until students have completed 1. Tell students that they are going to listen to an anecdote and that they should first read the conversation and see if they can predict what the missing words are. Allow them to compare their answers with a partner or in small groups before playing the recording for them to check. Point out that the person telling the story first asks whether he has ever told the story to his friend before. The friend replies that he doesn't think he has. Ask students if they would say that they hadn't heard the story before, even if they had, just to be polite. Refer back to the list of features of a good anecdote that you put on the board and ask the students to say which of these are reflected in the story they have just heard.

ANSWERS

a ride b was c hitchhiking d went e police
f stopped g important h suppose

Track 1.30 audioscript

A: Look at that car!

B: Yes, very nice. It's a Porsche 911.

A: Did I ever tell you about the time I had a ride in a Porsche?

B: No, I don't think so.

A: It was when I was a student. I was hitchhiking in Europe and a man in a Porsche stopped. He took me all the way across Austria. We went about 220 kilometres an hour all the way.

B: What about the police?

A: Well, they stopped us about four times, but this chap just showed some identity card and they waved us on.

B: Was he someone important, then?

A: I don't know, I didn't ask. I suppose he was some sort of high-ranking official. Anyway, it was the fastest I've ever been in a car.

2 (Track 1.31) Go through the example sentences with the class and point out that these two structures (*It was + adverb* and *Past Continuous*) are very common when people are telling stories. Their function is to set the scene and establish the background to a story. The structure *It was (when) ...* is immediately recognizable to native speakers of English as the beginning of a story, and they are likely to sit back and listen with enjoyment to what follows. Students make similar sentences using the prompts. Ensure that they realize that several alternatives are possible. Then play the recording for them to compare their answers. The material on the recording sets each sentence in a natural context and gives some idea of what the speaker is going to go on to say.

Track 1.31 audioscript

- a Yes, that was a long time ago. It was while I was living in Italy. I had this apartment in the centre of Milan ...
- b I can remember what happened. It was before I started working here. I was working on a temporary basis ...
- c No, it wasn't until much later. It was after I left university. I'd got my degree ...
- d Oh, yes, that reminds me. It was when I was working at ICL. I was in the marketing department ...
- e I had more time in those days. It was before I got married. In fact, I hadn't even met Mary ...
- f The timing was awful. It was just after my children were born. And there I was without ...
- g I'd just arrived in London. I was looking for a job. I bought the paper every day ...
- h Yes, I was still studying at the time. I was doing my Masters in the States. At the Harvard Business School, in fact ...
- i I was 19. I was studying at Cambridge. Things weren't going very well ...
- j No, it was with a different set-up. I was working for a small company north of here. One day the boss walked into ...
- k I was having a gap year after university. I was travelling through Asia. I'd just arrived in Ho Chi Minh City and ...
- l It happened last March. I was staying at the Continental Hotel in Prague. Lovely hotel, I recommend it.

3 (Track 1.32) Elicit a couple of *Have you ever ...?* and *Did you ever ...?* questions from the class. Point out that these are useful structures for encouraging other people to tell you about their experiences. Ask students to match the questions with the answers. With weaker classes, do one or two as examples with the whole class before asking them to work individually. Play the recording for students to check their answers. You may need to point out that, as with the previous recording, the answers are set in a natural context with the speakers giving extra details to supplement their answers.

ANSWERS

a 4 b 1 c 3 d 8 e 7 f 2 g 5 h 6

Track 1.32 audioscript

1

A: Did you ever hitchhike when you were a student?

B: Yes, but it was a long time ago, and I hated waiting in rain, so if I could, I took a train ...

2

A: Have you ever had a car accident?

B: No, I'm glad to say, but I nearly had one this morning! I pulled out and didn't see this motorbike. It was too close for comfort.

3

A: Have you ever been to Rome?

B: No, but I'd love to see the Coliseum one day. I once spent a few days in the north of Italy.

4

A: Have you ever lost any money on the stock exchange?

B: No and I've never made any either. I don't own any shares now.

5

A: Did you ever fail an exam at school?

B: Not at school, but I did at university. Actually I arrived late and they even didn't let me take it. It was a disaster.

6

A: Have you ever been camping?

B: Yes, lots of times. Actually we bought a camper van last year. We go somewhere most weekends.

7

A: Have you ever played a video game in 3D?

B: I didn't know you could. I've seen films with it though. I don't like having to wear those special glasses much.

8

A: Have you ever done anything illegal?

B: Not unless you count speeding and parking fines. Unless I've just forgotten something else!

4. The prompts here should enable students to come up with an anecdote to tell their partner, but you may need to give them plenty of time to prepare. This preparation could be done for homework. Focus attention on the *Useful language* box in the margin. As students tell their anecdotes, go around offering help and encouragement, and make a note of any interesting stories that could be repeated for the whole class. Encourage them to help each other by asking more questions, and praise any appropriate use of the phrases in the *Useful language* box.

1:1

Let your student choose whether they want to be Speaker A or Speaker B, and make sure that you can supply an anecdote for either role in order to give them practice in being an active listener: listening to a story and asking questions to encourage you to say more/ elicit more details.