



ÉCOLE DE LA FONCTION
PUBLIQUE DU CANADA
CANADA SCHOOL
OF PUBLIC SERVICE



EXPLAINING and DESCRIBING 1

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CREDITS

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CHALLENGING INFORMATION

PRE 1

POSSIBLE CHALLENGE EXPRESSIONS – WORKSHEET

A large empty rectangular box for writing, with a vertical scrollbar on the right side.

CHALLENGE EXPRESSIONS – REVISED LIST

STUDY 1

CHALLENGING INFORMATION FROM OTHERS

Expressions	Strategies
Is that right? Can we really get that much?	<i>Use a question</i> to be diplomatic.
Isn't that \$2 500?	<i>Use a negative question</i> , but remember that you are also implying that you believe you have the correct information.
That's not correct/ the amount, is it?	<i>Use a question tag</i> to soften the challenge.
I'm sorry, but as far as I know, that's not right/ the figure. I'm sorry, but I don't think that's what it is.	<i>Use an introductory expression</i> to soften the challenge.
Actually/ In fact, that's not (quite/exactly) what I was told.	<i>Use an introductory adverb</i> to distance the challenge.
I'm sorry, but in fact that's not quite correct, is it?	<i>Use several</i> of the above <i>strategies</i> together to be most diplomatic.
I thought it was \$2 500... My information is that it's \$2 500.	<i>Take responsibility</i> for possibly being wrong.

Add some of the expressions you know to the appropriate section of the list above.

PRACTICE 1

Scenario

Your boss has just said: "Don't worry about the cost repairs. We can get the \$5 000 from the special fund...." You are almost 100 percent sure that the amount is only \$2 500. You do not want to say so directly.

A. Come up with three acceptable challenges. Write your answers below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Your teacher will give you instructions.

PRACTICE 2

The Challenge Ring I

Practise giving and challenging information. Use as many different challenge expressions as possible.

Instructions:

1. S1 gives information (Note: the info can be about anything).
2. S2 challenges the information.
3. S2 gives information.
4. S3 challenges.
5. S3 gives, etc.
6. Keep going around until S1 finally challenges information.

PRE 2

Your teacher will present the scenario.

STUDY 2a

APOLOGIZING AND CORRECTING

If challenged, and a mistake was made, apologize and simply give the correct information:

Excuse me. That should have been sixteen weeks, not six weeks....
I'm sorry. That should have been sixteen weeks, not six weeks....
Sorry. That should have been sixteen weeks, not six weeks....

OR

Apologize, take responsibility for the error, and give the correct information:

Excuse me. (I made a mistake.)	What I meant (to say) was sixteen weeks....
I'm sorry. (I made a mistake.)	What I should have said was sixteen weeks....
Sorry. (I made a mistake.)	What I (really) meant was sixteen weeks....

STUDY 2b

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

(Excuse me but,) I'm afraid your information isn't correct.

If my memory serves me correctly, the director said six weeks.

Does anyone have a copy of the document?

No/Sorry/Sorry but, I've got the (correct/actual) information right here.

No, I remember distinctly that the finance officer said six weeks.

CORRECTING YOURSELF

PRACTICE 3

Role play the challenges from Practice 1 on page 6. S1s challenge S2s' information, S2s apologize and give correct information, or support your original information. Then switch roles. S2s challenge while S1s apologize and correct, or support.

PRACTICE 4

The Challenge Ring II

A. Write a challenge scenario.

B. Present your scenario to the person to your right.

C. Ss to the right challenge the information. The author of the challenge either apologizes and gives the correct information or supports the original position.

PRACTICE 5

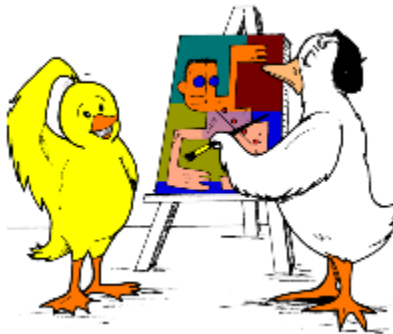
Divide into S1 and S2 groups. S1s use Information List A on page 10; S2s use Information List B on page 11.

Take turns with a partner presenting the information in your lists. If the information on a topic is different from your partner's, challenge your partner using an expression appropriate to your respective roles. Feel free to respond to a challenge in any way you wish; invent an explanation for the difference, or apologize and correct the information.

Listen carefully to the expressions your partner uses to challenge you. If you feel that the challenge is not sufficiently diplomatic for the context or for their role, make a note and discuss it at the end of the activity.

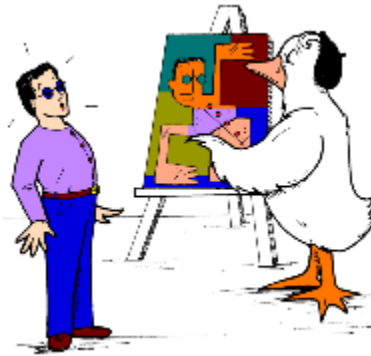
INFORMATION LIST A

1. You are the supervisor. Your Director told you early in the morning in the hall that she has cancelled the meeting scheduled for this afternoon and rescheduled it for Monday at 9.30 a.m. You are speaking to a new employee.
2. You have heard that the restaurant selected for a team lunch is no longer in business. You are speaking to a close colleague.
3. You are working on a special project in your department. You have been told by a colleague that the project will be cancelled in a month. You are speaking to the project co-ordinator.
4. You are a new employee. Your section chief told you when you started that you would probably be assigned to a new project. You are speaking to a supervisor whom you hardly know.
5. You are a member of a community committee on land use in your area. At a public meeting you have reported the committee's proposal that commercial zoning should be limited to 25 percent in your area. You are speaking to a member of the public in front of about 200 people.



INFORMATION LIST B

1. You are a new employee. You received an e-mail memo from the Director's office at ten o'clock informing you that the meeting scheduled for this afternoon has been cancelled and postponed indefinitely. You are speaking to your supervisor.
2. You have heard that the restaurant selected for a team lunch which had been closed has now reopened, under new management. You are speaking to a close colleague.
3. You are a project co-ordinator speaking to one of your researchers on a special project. You have been told by your Director that the special project is so well thought of that it will be expanded and given a new mandate and definition.
4. You are a supervisor responsible for winding down a discontinued project. Your section chief has told you that a new employee you hardly know will be assigned to help you. You are speaking to the new employee.
5. You are a member of the public, attending a public meeting of about 200 people to discuss land use in your area. Your community committee on land use has distributed a flyer containing a proposal to limit commercial zoning to 45 percent. You are speaking to a member of the community committee.



CHALLENGING THE SPEAKER

PRE 3

Your teacher will present the scenario.

If you want to challenge your colleague more directly, what expressions and strategies could you use?

CHALLENGING THE SPEAKER – WORKSHEET

Expressions	Strategies
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STUDY 3

CHALLENGING THE SPEAKER

	Expressions	Strategies
DIRECT	Really? Are you sure?	If the relationship allows, you can boldly question the speaker.
	Do/Did you mean double that amount? Did you say double that amount?	You can repeat the "mistake" and give the speaker the chance to correct it.
	Don't/Didn't you mean half that amount?	You can use a negative question, implying that you believe your information is correct.
	Didn't you say \$2 500?	You can feed the correct information to the speaker by suggesting that the speaker has inadvertently changed what was originally said.
TACTFUL	I think, in fact, you mean \$2 500. I'm sorry, but did/don't you actually mean half that amount?	You can also use distancers or introductory expressions when challenging a speaker.

Compare, discuss and add suggested expressions to appropriate parts of the list.

PRACTICE 6

1. Work with a partner. Read the scenarios below and decide which expressions you would use to challenge the speaker in each scenario.

- a. You are on the board of your local community association. At a public meeting, a speaker says:

"I'm pleased to see that this projected budget will allow four people to attend the regional conference..."

The figures you have seen only allow two people to attend the conference.

What would *you* say if the speaker were:

- i. a representative of a local business who has been very generous in the past?

- ii. a fellow board member who is also a friend?

- iii. the President of the Board?

- iv. a new board member you haven't previously met?

- b. You are at a work group meeting. A speaker says:

"The new deadlines we agreed on are April 30, July 28 and November 30..."

You thought your team had agreed to deadlines of May 30, August 28 and December 30.

What would you say if the speaker were:

- i. a new, junior team member?

- ii. your supervisor, who you think doesn't like you?

- iii. the head of your division?

- iv. a close colleague?

2. Briefly discuss your choices and the reasons for them with your partner then with the class.
3. Your teacher will give you instructions.

CORRECTING A SPEAKER**PRE 4**

Match the expressions with the strategies by writing the expression number in the appropriate strategy box.

Expressions	Strategies
1. Only people living over 15 miles away can park free.	__ This expression uses the question form for diplomacy. Intonation plays an important role in how this expression is interpreted.
2. No (way)! It says here we have to pay. The heck we do! /Bull! Everyone has to pay. You're wrong. Jean told me we had to pay. You're mistaken. We've always had to pay before. You can't be right. I bet we have to pay.	__ The question form makes this group of expressions less blunt than those above. Remember that negative questions and question tags with falling intonation imply that you expect the listener to agree with you.
3. That doesn't sound/seem right (to me). I'm not sure that's/you're right...	__ These expressions could give offence, unless you are on <i>very familiar</i> terms with the speaker. As a rule, using " You " is rather blunt since the focus is on the speaker rather than on the error.
4. Is that right?	__ This expression is rather formal.
5. As far as I know / Surely / As a matter of fact / Actually, it's only free for people who live 15 miles or more away.	__ Sound/seem and " I'm not sure " are more diplomatic because they are more tentative. The questioner is suggesting that he/she is not necessarily right.
6. (Surely) it isn't for everybody, is it? It's only for people who live far away, isn't it? Didn't you say it was only for people who live far away?	__ This correction avoids mentioning the error; it uses introductory expressions or adverbs to tactfully introduce the correct information. However, it could still seem somewhat blunt to some people.
7. I'd like to suggest correcting just one thing; it depends on where you live...	__ A bold statement of the correct information is very blunt and will probably give offence.

CORRECTING A SPEAKER

If you know that a statement made by a speaker is incorrect, and if you have the correct information, you may wish to correct the speaker, particularly if the information is important.

STUDY 4

Here are some expressions and strategies to choose from when you wish to correct a speaker. For example, suppose a fellow employee comes into your office with the following news: "Have you heard? We're all going to be able to park free at the new building!" Depending on your relationship with the speaker, you could say:

Expressions	Strategies
Only people living over 15 miles away can park free.	A bold statement of the correct information is very blunt and could possibly give offence.
No (way)! It says here we have to pay. The heck we do! /Bull! Everyone has to pay.	These expressions could give offence, unless you are on very familiar terms with the speaker.
You're wrong. Jean told me we had to pay. You're mistaken. We've always had to pay before. You can't be right. I bet we have to pay.	As a rule, using " You " is rather blunt since the focus is on the speaker rather than on the error.
That doesn't sound/seem right (to me). I'm not sure that's/you're right...	Sound/seem and " I'm not sure " are more diplomatic because they are more tentative. The questioner is suggesting that he/she is not necessarily right.
Is that right?	This expression uses the question form for diplomacy.
As far as I know / Surely / As a matter of fact / Actually, it's only free for people who live 15 miles or more away.	This correction avoids mentioning the error; it uses introductory expressions to tactfully give the correct information.
(Surely) it isn't / it's not for everybody, is it? It's only for people who live far away, isn't it? Didn't you say it was only for people who live far away?	The question form makes this group of expressions less blunt than those above. Remember that negative questions and question tags with falling intonation imply that you expect the listener to agree with you.
I'd like to suggest correcting just one thing; it depends on where you live...	This expression is rather formal.

PRACTICE 7

1. Work with a partner. Read each of the situations below, and write down as many expressions as possible for each situation.

- a. You are talking to your Director, whom you know well, about a new project.

Director: "The first phase of the project will begin in June."

You think: The first phase of the project will begin in September.

What could you say? _____

- b. You are talking to your newest trainee about the new project.

Trainee: "I'm glad the new project starts in June – that way I'll get to work on it before I move on in September."

You think: The new project begins in September.

What could you say? _____

- c. You and your close colleague are discussing a change in policy regarding overtime.

Your colleague: "We're all going to have to work a certain amount of overtime next year."

You think: The new policy says that overtime will have to be substantially reduced next year.

What could you say? _____

- d. You are at a large meeting with your supervisor.

Your supervisor: "During the last trimester, our section handled 38 percent more requests than in previous quarters."

You think: We handled 38 percent fewer requests last trimester.

What could you say? _____

- e. Your friends are planning a trip to Platano Beach.

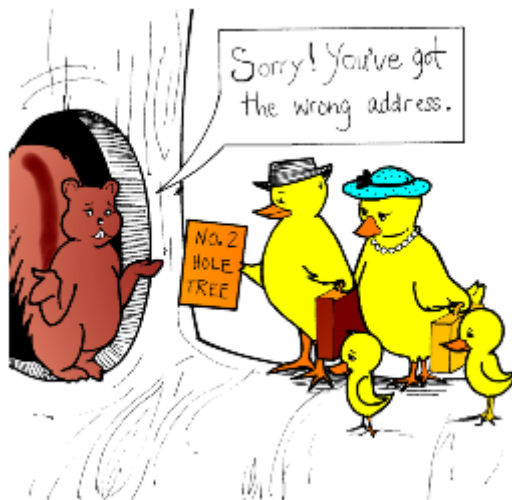
One of your friends: "According to a survey on tourist safety, Platano Beach came out as one of the top-five safe places to visit."

You think: I read that survey in the newspaper. I'm almost certain Platano Beach came out as one of the least safe places.

What could you say? _____

2. Discuss your choices with the class.

3. Now find another partner and take turns role playing each situation, using some of the expressions you chose.



CONSOLIDATION ACTIVITY

In this activity you will form part of a committee responsible for the planning of a conference arranged by your organization, with participation from local industry, the media and the municipality.

Up to now, the work has been undertaken by subcommittees. Information on the arrangements to date has not yet been distributed to everyone. Some people have been informed orally about some of the arrangements; others have received phone messages containing additional information.

A meeting has been called to discuss the possibility of adding an additional event to those already envisaged for the conference: a banquet, sponsored in part by the local Tourist Board.

The proposed banquet will add about \$500 to the cost of the conference. The banquet has been provisionally scheduled for May 15, from 6:00 - 8:30 p.m. The proposed location is the Banquet Room at the Crest Motel, which is available on May 15.

You know that some of the information you now possess may be incomplete, inaccurate or out of date. You have arranged to meet with members of some of the other subcommittees.

PREPARATION

Your teacher will give you instructions and role cards.

PROCEDURE

Phase 1

Meet with your group and share your information in order to establish the following facts:

1. the accuracy of the information you possess in each category (budget, costs, date, etc.) on your role card. Make any necessary corrections.
2. any information missing from your role card. Add it to your role card.

As you discuss the information on your cards, you will find that not everyone has the same information. Use expressions which are appropriate for the role relationships. Question, challenge and correct the other group members until you find items of information held by **two or more** people. When two people have the same information you can feel confident that these items are correct.

Phase 2

Once you feel confident that you all know which information is correct, decide, on the basis of the information you possess, whether or not you can add the proposed banquet to the program. Your teacher has a Suggested KEY.