



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



WORKSHOP UNIT: FIND THE RIGHT WORD!

Explaining and Describing

Objective: By the end of this workshop unit you will be able to clearly explain and describe in detail, tactfully deal with sensitive topics, persuade, insist, counter-argue, refuse and concede.

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CREDITS

Development and Learning Technologies Directorate
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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDENT

APPROACH

1. Each unit contains materials for an average of five hours of class time. Of course, how long you spend on a unit will depend on your language level, the speed at which you learn, and how much of each unit you choose to do.
2. The emphasis in these units is on oral communication. Most of the activities are designed for pairs or small groups. These activities can be taped so that you can work on them on your own or discuss them with your teacher. A few activities require you to work alone in order to prepare for a subsequent group activity.
3. The teacher's guide for Level C, containing a model syllabus to help plan this level, gives a suggested order for using the units. Each unit is complete in itself; this means that, according to the needs and interests of the class, you can choose the units you need to work on, how much of a unit you want to do, and, if you wish, a different order in which to work on them than the one suggested.*
4. Within each unit, there are further opportunities to make choices. You can focus only on those functions you need, or you can choose which, if any, of the practice activities you want to do. You can also choose when to do the practices: e.g. beforehand in preparation for the unit; *en route* or as they come up in the unit; at the end after you have looked at the whole unit as a review; or at any other time the group wants.
5. Although all activities are complete in themselves, you are invited to contribute your own contexts, information, problems or topics. In this way you can make the units better reflect your own reality and get the most out of them.

OBJECTIVES

Each of the units in Phase 2 presents language for a combination of several objectives as listed below.

- Explaining
- Describing
- Supporting opinions
- Defending points of view
- Counselling
- Advising
- Handling hypothetical questions
- Handling complex work-related situations

The objectives are reviewed in two types of unit: **task** units and **workshop** units.

Phase 2 contains six task units and three workshop units.

*Note: In the teacher's guide for Level C, Phase 2 materials are suggested for use in Session 10, Week 1 and Week 2; Session 11, Week 1, Week 2 and Week 3 and Session 12, Week 1.

Task Units

Workshop Units

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1-The Stranger in Our Homes | 2-Get Your Message Across |
| 3-Safety First | 6-Find the Right Words! |
| 4-What Are You Afraid Of? | 9-How Should I Say This? |
| 5-To Your Health! | |
| 7-What's the Beef? | |
| 8-What Are the Alternatives? | |

Description of Units

Workshop and task units differ in their focus and in their organization.

WORKSHOP UNITS

These are units which focus on language. The language is presented in the context of workshops similar to ones you might attend to improve your communication skills. For example, you can find out what language to use in a variety of situations requiring diplomacy, such as challenging your boss, correcting a colleague at a meeting or persuading co-workers to change their minds.

How Are Workshop Units Organized?

These units are organized by language function, that is, by the purpose for which expressions are used, such as hedging, stalling, refusing, insisting,....

What Do Workshop Units Consist Of?

1. An **OVERVIEW**, framed in a box on the first page of each unit, presents the functions, grammar, vocabulary or strategies presented in that unit.
2. Some units have **BEFORE YOU BEGIN**, it contains questions which will help you focus on finding out what you already know and what you need to learn about the functions and the expressions in the unit.
3. The next sections each focus on a different language function. For each language function you are given lists of the words and expressions you need and activities to help you learn them.
4. Wherever you see **STUDY**, you will find a list of new expressions, vocabulary or grammar which you will need for the activities. Wherever you see **STRATEGIES**, you will find communication strategies which will help you to get your meaning across. **Finally,gives lists of expressions, vocabulary or grammar you may have already learned.**
5. Wherever you see **PRACTICE**, you will find a communication exercise which will practise the expressions, vocabulary, grammar or strategies you have encountered.

6. Each workshop ends with a **CONSOLIDATION ACTIVITY**. Consolidation activities are interactions or games which will allow you to integrate everything you have learned in the workshop.
7. At tab A is the **APPENDIX** which contains expressions for 34 functions, tense usage references and vocabulary.
8. Where required, answers are included and can be found in **ANSWERS** at tab B.

TASK UNITS

These are units which focus on a task requiring the use of language: solving problems, analyzing, making choices or decisions, or making recommendations. For example, you may be asked to choose a candidate for a special project, advise colleagues about work-related problems or recommend ways to reduce costs.

How Are the Task Units Organized?

These units are organized by sub-tasks, that is, by the steps involved in accomplishing the task, for example, preliminary discussions, informal meetings with one or two others, making a final decision, plan or recommendation.

Expressions, vocabulary, grammar or strategies used in accomplishing each of these sub-tasks are presented in sequence where they are needed.

Optional practice activities to help you master these expressions, vocabulary, grammar and strategies are presented at the end of each unit.

What Does a Task Unit Consist Of?

1. As in the Workshop units, the first page is an Overview of the functions, grammar, vocabulary or strategies presented in that unit.
2. The next sections each focus on a different step in the task. For example, when the task is choosing a candidate, the steps include discussing qualifications, preparing for the selection committee and making a decision.
3. As in the Workshop units, wherever you see the headings **STUDY** and **STRATEGIES**, you will find lists of the new expressions, vocabulary or grammar and strategies which you will need for the activities. **gives lists of expressions, vocabulary or grammar you may have already learned.**
4. Often, after these lists, you will see **PRACTICE**. This directs you to optional activities located at the end of the unit. These activities allow you to practise the expressions, vocabulary, grammar or strategies which have been presented. Since these activities are independent of the steps in the task, you may use or omit them, depending on your needs.
5. Where required, answers are included for each task unit in **ANSWERS** at tab B.

FIND THE RIGHT WORD!

Overview

In this unit you will be attending a workshop which will enable you to fine-tune your English language skills.

You will be working with the following functions:

- **Explaining in detail**
- **Describing in detail**
- **Giving bad news**
- **Dealing with sensitive topics**
- **Persuading**
- **Insisting**
- **Counter-arguing**
- **Refusing**
- **Conceding**

You will be working with the following strategies:

- **Making your explanations clear**
- **Making sure you understand**
- **Making sure you are understood**
- **Being tactful**
- **Being tentative**
- **Being distant**
- **Being empathetic**
- **Supporting your point**

Before You Begin

Step 1

Individual/Read

First, consider these three work situations and the questions that follow each of them.

1. You have to give a detailed explanation or description of a procedure, a policy, a plan, the work you are doing or work you have done.
 - If you have to do this task in your own language, is it difficult for you? If yes, what causes the difficulty? What strategies do you use to make sure your listener understands?
 - Now think about giving the same kind of detailed explanation or description in English. Do you have difficulties? If yes, why? (e.g. finding the right words, putting sentences together, etc.)
 - To make sure your listener understands you, can you use the same strategies in English as you do in your own language? Which ones? Are there any differences in the strategies you use in your own language and in English?
2. You have to deal with a sensitive situation (e.g. you can't concentrate on your work because the person who shares your office is always on the phone) or give people bad news (e.g. your office is moving to a different, less central location, etc.).
 - In such situations requiring tact, what strategies do you use in your own language?
 - If you have to handle the same situations in English, do you have difficulty? If yes, what causes the problems?
 - Are the strategies you use in your own language transferable to English? Do you use different strategies in English? Could you handle these situations more easily in English, if you knew additional strategies?
3. You have to persuade your boss, employees or co-workers to do something, such as allow you to take a training course, use a new procedure or sign a petition.
 - In your own language what techniques, specific words and expressions do you use to persuade people?
 - Are these techniques, equivalent words and expressions transferable to English?

Step 2

Class/Discuss

Discuss each of the preceding situations by answering the questions connected to it.

Explaining and Describing

At work, we often have to explain or describe a variety of tasks, plans, procedures or policies. You already know many strategies for explaining and describing.

STRATEGIES 1

EXPLAINING AND DESCRIBING

The strategies you have used for supporting opinions can also be used for explaining; that is, you can use examples, illustrations, details, facts, reasons, results and analogies. Consider the paragraph below from a presentation explaining why sales of brand name products have declined. The topic is stated in the first sentence. The rest of the paragraph explains the first statement by giving three reasons, an example, specific facts and the result.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Statement..... | "Shoppers are no longer as interested as they used to be in brand-name products. |
| Reason..... | Every product seems to be available in a multitude of variations and no product seems all that different. |
| Example..... | Just think of the number of cleaning products displayed on the supermarket shelves! |
| Reason..... | Not only is there a proliferation of known varieties, there is also an influx of new versions. |
| Facts..... | In Holland, there are 220 kinds of cigarettes; in the U.S. there are 200 brands of breakfast cereal; and in Argentina there are 1000 perfumes. |
| Reason..... | Add to all this variety, the fact that times are tough and money is scarce. |
| Result..... | With so many products to choose from, it is no wonder that the average shopper searches for a good price, not a good brand name." |

STRATEGIES 2

PARAPHRASING: HELPING YOUR LISTENERS UNDERSTAND

When you are explaining or describing, you have to make sure your message is communicated. When you are listening to an explanation or description, you have to make sure you are getting the message.

When you are **the speaker**, think about what you can do to **help your listeners understand** what you are saying. You may already know that using precise vocabulary, examples and concrete details are helpful tools. Paraphrasing, repeating key ideas by rewording them, is an additional strategy.

1. Imagine you are explaining how to make a presentation. You have discussed organizing the talk into separate sections. You could then paraphrase, using one of these expressions:

**In other words,
That is to say,**

**What I mean is,
What that means is,**

**What I was getting at is,
What it boils down to is,
Another way to say that
is,**

say what you are going to
say,
say it,
then say what you said.



What it boils down to is, ...

2. You already know some expressions to use when you are **the listener** and you want to **check your understanding by getting more information** (Appendix, page A-20). You can also give your interpretation of what you think the speaker said by paraphrasing, that is, by saying in your own words what you understood the speaker to mean. A listener in the situation above could paraphrase, using one of these expressions:

**In other words,
So,
Let me see if I understand what you're saying;
Let me see if I understand what you're getting at;**

say it three times.

Unless I'm mistaken, you're saying*
Do you mean by that
Does that mean
Is your point that
then you go into detail, and
Do I understand that you're saying that
Do I read you right in thinking that
Am I mistaken in assuming that

you have to say it briefly,
then you go into detail, and
then you tie it up at the end?

In the activities which follow, you can use the strategies you have just learned.

*With this opening expression you need rising intonation on "at the end" to create the question.

PRACTICE 1: EXTENDED LEAVE

Work with a partner. Take turns. First, one of you is an employee who is going on two-months leave and the other is the employee who will be the replacement. Switch roles.

Step 1

Pair/ Explain in detail

Procedure: First Turn

When you are the employee with leave:

Brief your replacement about what you do, what is to be done in your absence and how to do it best. (Specifics could include a description and update of present projects, use of equipment, people to be called on for decisions, help or information, routines, how to get along with various people in the division, and any other details and tricks of the trade to ensure that your work will get done effectively.) Use the strategies for **explaining/describing** (STRATEGIES 1, page 6-5) and **paraphrasing: helping your listeners understand** (STRATEGIES 2, page 6-6).

When you are finished, your replacement will tell you what he/she understands are the responsibilities and tasks involved in the job.

Based on what your replacement has recounted to you, do you feel confident leaving your work to this person?

Step 2

Pair/ Take notes

Procedure: Second Turn

When you are the replacement:

Take notes or in some way keep track of what you are told; use the strategies in the second part of STRATEGIES 2 on page 6-6 to **check your understanding** of what the job entails.

Step 3

Pair/Rephrase

Based on what you have been told, could you do the job? To be sure that you have understood correctly, describe what you think your responsibilities are and the tasks you have to do.



PRACTICE 2: INFOFAIR

In this activity you will be participating in an "InfoFair" both as a speaker and as a visitor.

Step 1

Individual/Write

On a sheet of paper, write down the work procedures, policies, plans, ideas,..., which you could explain. You may want to consider some of the examples below.

- Employment insurance (eligibility, duration, new rulings, request procedures,...)
- Training programs (availability, eligibility, prerequisites, costs,...)
- Campaign details (community charitable fund raisers, Canada Savings Bonds,...)
- Travel policy (authorization, advances, when/what claims can be made; taxis, parking, transportation, mileage, hotel, meals, incidentals, babysitting,...)
- Benefits (eligibility, remuneration, leave, severance, pension,...)
- Survival tips for when your office has only dividers and no door
- Working from a home office: type of personality, type of work, physical conditions,...
- Tips for winding down after work (change to comfortable clothes, listen to music, don't talk about work or home problems, take a bath or shower,...)
- If you aren't a morning person: how to be productive in the morning
- If you really have to bring your child to work (Should there be introductions? What happens if you have a meeting? What are the restrictions on location? What activities and incentives work?...)
- Meetings: Survival tips for participants and chairs (take notes, keep on topic, aim for resolution and closure,...)

Place your sheet of paper on your desk in such a way that your classmates can read it easily.

Step 2

Class/ Eavesdrop, prepare

Circulate around the class and find out what topics you can learn about during the InfoFair. Tell the speakers which of their topics you would like to find out about.

When your classmates have had a chance to indicate their interests, prepare the topics you will be explaining/describing. Remember to use the strategies for **explaining** from STRATEGIES 1 on page 6-5.

Step 3

Class/ Explain, check

Procedure

Divide the class in half. During Session 1, one half of the class will be speakers and the other half will be visitors. During Session 2, speakers will become visitors and visitors will become speakers.

After each visit, fill out the appropriate SELF-CHECK.

When you are a speaker:

- Explain your topic(s) as clearly as you can. Remember to use **paraphrasing** strategies from STRATEGIES 2 on page 6-6 to help your listener understand.

When you are a visitor:

- Visit each speaker who has some information on a topic you would like to know more about. As the topic is explained, check your understanding at least twice by paraphrasing what you understood. Use the expressions in STRATEGIES 2 on page 6-6.

VISITOR SELF-CHECK

| | Speaker 1 | Speaker 2 | Speaker 3 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>I understood the explanation:</i> | | | |
| completely | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| somewhat | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| <i>I was able to check my understanding by paraphrasing:</i> | | | |
| twice | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| more than twice | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

SPEAKER SELF-CHECK

| | Visitor 1 | Visitor 2 | Visitor 3 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>When I explained I used:</i> | | | |
| facts | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| details | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| examples | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| reasons | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| results | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| <i>I helped my listener by paraphrasing:</i> | | | |
| once | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| twice | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| more than twice | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| <i>Improvements I could make in my explanations:</i> | | | |
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 100%;"></div> | | | |

STRATEGIES 3

GIVING BAD NEWS

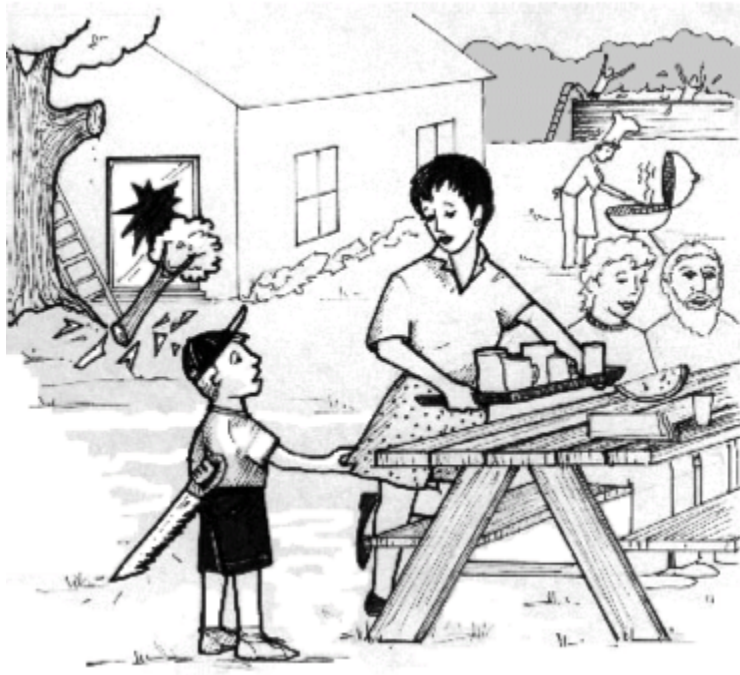
Sometimes you are faced with the unpleasant task of delivering bad news. You may want to use the strategies below to help cushion the blow.

1. These expressions introduce the idea that bad news is coming.

| Preambles | | | Bad News |
|---|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Could I speak to you privately? Can I talk to you alone? Can we speak in private? | Are you ready for some bad news today? Can you take some bad news today? I'm sorry I have/I've got to tell you this , but.... I'm sorry I have/I've got to tell you bad news , but.... I hate to tell you this , but.... I hate to do this to you , but.... | I'm afraid, Unfortunately, | your project has been cancelled. |
| | I'm afraid, Unfortunately, there's something I have to tell you. I have some bad news. You're not going to like this, but... I've got/I have to tell you bad news . I've got/I have to tell you something you won't want to hear . | The worst thing possible has happened. | Your project has been cancelled. |

You can try to soften the impact further by using several of the preambles together. For example, when giving the news of a budget cut to someone whose job extension will suffer as a result, you might use one of these combinations:

- "Could I speak to you privately?...I hate to tell you this but, unfortunately, the worst has come to pass. I'm afraid our budget has been cut so we won't be able to extend your contract."
- "Can I talk to you alone?...There's something I have to tell you. I'm afraid I have some bad news. Unfortunately, our budget has been cut, so your contract can't be extended."



Could I speak to you privately? I've got some bad news to tell you. I...

2. If you are not responsible, or do not want to take responsibility for the bad news, avoid personal pronouns (I, we, my, our). Use an impersonal subject (It, There) or a passive voice to introduce the bad news.

A memo just came with the news that the budget has been cut.
A memo just came saying that the budget has been cut.

It was felt that the only alternative was to cut the budget.
It seems as if the only alternative was to cut the budget.

3. You can try to explain your own position.

I'm awfully sorry but there is nothing else I can do.
I'm awfully sorry but there was nothing else I could do.

I have/had no alternative.
I have/had no choice in the matter.

I'm afraid I haven't been able to protect you.

I've tried to avoid this problem.
I've tried to avoid this situation.

I've been put in a terrible situation.

If I could arrange things differently, I certainly would.
If I could have arranged things differently, I certainly would have.

**I would have preferred if things had worked out differently.
I would have preferred for things to have worked out differently.**

I wish things had worked out differently.

4. You can indicate your understanding by using these expressions.

**I know what this means to you (and I'm very sorry).
I know how bad you feel (and I'm very sorry).
I know what a blow this is (and I'm very sorry).**


5. Often, you can soften the blow by pointing out any positive aspects or mitigating factors.

I owe you one.

I'll try to compensate for this in the future.

**It's only temporary.
It's only for a short time.**

At least you'll have your own computer/phone.
At least you'll have a room with a view.
At least you'll have time for your own interests.

 **Discuss the following with either a small group or the class.**

- **Are any of these strategies useable in your own language?**
- **Have you used any of these strategies in English?**
- **Which of these strategies do you think you will feel comfortable using in English?**



I'm so sorry. I really wish things had worked out differently.
Let's look at the positive side of things. At least you'll have a once-in-a-lifetime view.

PRACTICE 3: ACTIVITY DAY

Step 1

Individual/Read

Work alone. Consider the following situation and the alternatives used to handle it.

Situation

Everyone has been working very hard on the arrangements for Activity Day. There has been a great deal of enthusiasm and co-operation. The Chief has just learned that Activity Day has been cancelled.

The Chief's comments

- "A memo just came and it seems that Activity Day has been cancelled."
- "Unfortunately, I've got to tell you some bad news. I'm afraid they've cancelled Activity Day and nothing I said would change their minds."
- "I'm sorry but Activity Day is cancelled."

Under what circumstances would you use each of the comments above?

If you were the Chief, how would you deliver this piece of bad news?

Step 2

Pair, class /Discuss

Now work with a partner or the class. Discuss your views of the Chief's statements above. Then compare what each of you would say if you had to deliver this news.

PRACTICE 4: BAD NEWS

Step 1

Pair/ Read compose

Work with a partner. Decide what strategies and expressions you would use to break the bad news in each of these situations.

1. An employee has asked for two-week's leave during a very busy time. For this reason, you can't grant the request. This employee is very loyal; you wish you could have said yes.
2. You cannot give an employee the two-week's leave requested because the time period requested is very busy in your division. This employee always asks for extras.
3. Your team has done good work on a project. The work is almost complete, but now the focus of the project has been changed. As a result, most of the work will have to be redone.
4. You have to tell your staff that, because of budget problems, you have had to cut the amount of training that each can receive. You think training is very important and you fought to keep the promises made. You wonder if you should have tried harder.

5. You have to tell your staff that, because of budget problems, their training will be cut. You had no part in making what you feel was an unfortunate decision.
6. Your office, which is located downtown, will be relocated to a suburban location. It will take longer for everyone to commute. On the plus side, because there will be more space, everyone will have individual offices.
7. Because of reorganization, there will be more employees allocated to the space your staff now occupies. There will have to be at least two people in each office. You have to give this news to a nervous, volatile staff member who hates the distraction of others in his work space.
8. An employee asked to be assigned to a new project which will take three months to complete. From the experience, she would gain valuable skills beneficial both to herself and to your unit. The employee deserves this recognition but you cannot grant her request because your boss has indicated a strong preference for another individual.

Step 2

Class/Exchange

Write down *your* "giving bad news" situations. Exchange yours with two other students.

Step 3

Class/ Give bad news

With the class, discuss what you decided to say in each situation. Were there major differences? Were there differences in the amount of tact considered necessary? If yes, did the perception of the need for tact depend on the speaker's personality, age, gender or position?

VARIATION

Step 1

Group/Write

Working in groups, write the situations listed above, as well as similar situations of your own, on individual pieces of paper.

Step 2

Group/ Give bad news

Shuffle the papers and place them face down on the table.

In turn, pick up a piece of paper, read the bad news situation aloud and respond.

After your turn, place your piece of paper face down on the table, mixed with the other papers.

If you select a paper with a bad news situation that has already been read, you must respond to it, using expressions different from the ones used before.

Your group will award points for your response:

Accuracy – maximum 3 points

Appropriateness – maximum 3 points

Step 3

Class/Discuss

Discuss with your class.

- In your workplace, what topics would be considered sensitive to discuss with
 - your boss?
 - your colleagues?
 - your employees?
- Under what circumstances would you address these sensitive topics directly?
- Under what circumstances would you need to use tact/diplomacy?

Which of the following **strategies** do you use when you must deal with sensitive topics?

STRATEGIES 4

DEALING WITH SENSITIVE SUBJECTS

1. Be impersonal; don't blame or accuse. Instead of saying, "You've got the figures wrong again," try the following approaches.

An impersonal subject:

There seems to be a problem with these figures.

It seems as if there've been problems with the figures lately.

It would seem there've been problems with the figures lately.

The passive voice (as well as an impersonal subject):

It's been pointed out that some discrepancies have crept in.

It was felt that some discrepancies have crept in.



It was felt that broccoli was a poor choice of vegetable.

2. Prepare the listener.

I know this is a touchy subject, but there have been complaints* about your attitude.

You're not going to like this, but there have been complaints about your attitude.

3. Be tentative.

Use adverbs or modals to express possibility or probability.

Maybe/Perhaps you **could** make an effort to arrive at meetings on time.
You **probably shouldn't** lose your temper so quickly.

You **could/might** organize your time better.

Use expressions such as "I think" or "I wonder".

I think you should take more responsibility for your work.
I don't think you should make so many personal calls.

I wonder if you could** make your personal calls at lunch time.
I was wondering if you could make your personal calls at lunch time.

Use questions instead of statements:

Could you (possibly) do something about your personal calls?
Could/Can anything be done* about** your personal calls?

4. Instead of saying what "should be done" or what "should have been done," state your preference.

I would prefer you to co-operate more.
I would have preferred it if you'd completed the report earlier.

It would be better if you attended all the committee meetings.
It would have been better if you **had** attended all the committee meetings.
It would be/ have been better to attend all the committee meetings.

5. Make positive statements first, then qualify.

On the whole, things are all right; **however**, your lateness is a problem.
Generally speaking, things are all right; **however**, your lateness is a problem.

*Note the use of an impersonal subject "there."

**The use of a modal verb "could", rather than the more direct "should", makes the statement even more tentative.

***A modal verb, impersonal subject and passive voice are used within the question.

Your report was very good, **but** it was too long.
Your report was very good, **except for** the length.

You worked very well on the report. **However/Unfortunately**, there were some mistakes.

6. Say how you feel about the matter.

I'm sorry (to have to say this),

**I'm afraid to say this,
I don't like to complain,
I hate to mention this again,
I hate to bring this up,**

but I can't work when you are on the phone.

7. Show that you understand.

I'm not unaware of** the difficulties you face.
I'm aware of the difficulties you face.
I recognize that you have commitments.
I understand your predicament.
I know what you're up against.**



I know what you're up against.



Discuss with your class:

Which of the above would you use if you were the boss dealing with employees; an employee dealing with co-workers; an employee dealing with your boss?

****The double negative, "**not unaware**," makes the statement affirmative, it actually means "I am aware."

PRACTICE 5: SENSITIVE TOPICS

In this activity, you will be able to practice dealing with sensitive topics.

Step 1

Pair/Select

Choose, and work with, a partner. Consider the three situations in Group A below. Select two you would like to role-play. Roles are assigned to "you" and "partner."

Group A: An Employee Raises Sensitive Topics With a Boss

New Project: A problem arises over the personnel chosen to work on a new project.

Communications: An employee is concerned about lack of communication in the unit.

Morale: An employee responds to a request for suggestions about raising staff morale.

In the first of these role-plays, **you** will be the "Employee." Your **partner** will be the "Boss" or "Chief." Your role card is on page 6-24, **STUDENT 1 ROLE CARDS**. Your partner's card is on page 6-25, **STUDENT 2 ROLE CARDS**. As the boss, your partner begins the role-play.

In the other role-play, **you** be the "Boss" or "Chief." Your **partner** plays the "Employee." Your role card is on page 6-25, **STUDENT 2 ROLE CARDS**. Your partner's card is on page 6-24, **STUDENT 1 ROLE CARDS**. As the boss, you begin the conversation.

Step 2

Individual/Prepare

Now work alone. Find your role cards for the two situations you and your partner chose. Think about what you will say. The information on your cards can be the basis but you can use your imagination to create additional details. When you know what you want to say, consider the expressions and strategies you will use to get your message across.

Step 3

Pair/Role-play

Meet with your partner again and role-play both situations. To help you analyze your own performance, you may want to tape your role-plays.

Before you continue, consider how well you handled your part in the role-plays. What difficulties did you have? What improvements would you like to make?

Step 4

Pair/Prepare

For the next sets of situations, you can either work with the same partner or find a different one.

Consider the situations in Group B below and select the two you would like to role-play.

Group B: Sensitive Topics between Co-workers

New Project: A problem arises over the personnel chosen to work on a new project.

Job-sharing: Two employees run into some snags in their job-sharing.

Training Plan: A missing report causes delays.

Editing Woes: Two employees differ about the report one of them has written.

In the first role-play, you will be "Co-worker 1." Your partner is "Co-worker 2." Your role card is on page 6-24, **STUDENT 1 ROLE CARDS**. Your partner's card is on page 6-25.

In the other role-play, you will be "Co-worker 2." Your partner is "Co-worker 1." Your role card is on page 6-25, **STUDENT 2 ROLE CARDS**. Your partner's card is on page 6-24.

Step 5

Pair/Role-play

"Co-worker 2" begins each conversation. Proceed as you did before; that is, work alone and prepare your part in both role-plays, act out the situations with your partner, and then evaluate your performance and the improvements you need to make.

Step 6

Pair/prepare

Finally, consider the situations in Group C and select the two you would like to role-play.

Group C: A Boss Raises Sensitive Topics with an Employee

Home Work: There are different views about an employee's ability to work from home.

Talk, Talk, Talk!: A boss and employee discuss the fine line between being sociable and being disruptive.

Missed Meetings: A boss is unhappy with an employee who misses meetings.

Step 7

Pair/Role-play

In the first role-play, you will be the "Boss." Your partner is the "Employee." Your role card is on page 6-24, **STUDENT 1 ROLE CARDS**. Your partner's card is on page 6-25. As the "Boss," you begin the conversation.

In the other role-play, you will be the "Employee." Your partner is the "Boss." Your role card is on page 6-25, **STUDENT 2 ROLE CARDS**. Your partner's card is on page 6-24. Your partner, as the "Boss," begins the conversation. Proceed as you did before.

STUDENT 1 ROLE CARDS

GROUP A

Employee–Boss

New Project: Employee

You are excited because of an assignment to a new and interesting project. A team member whom you like has also been assigned. You don't want to make trouble but you are worried because personal concerns, from child care to loan payments, often prevent this person from concentrating. Since the project time frame is tight, you want to discuss your concerns with your boss.

Communications: Employee

You feel that there is a lack of communication in your unit and that the unit would function more effectively if there were regular meetings at which everyone was informed about what is going on.

Morale: Employee

The unit has been asked for suggestions about how to raise morale. You feel that the atmosphere would improve if the chief distributed work more fairly and then acknowledged work done well. You have made an appointment with the chief to discuss your ideas.

GROUP B

Co-worker–Co-worker

Job-sharing: Co-worker 1

You and a colleague have been job-sharing successfully. Until now, you have managed to co-ordinate your work by leaving each other detailed notes and by maintaining e-mail or telephone contact. Recently, you have had to chase after your colleague for information since the notes and messages left for you have been too brief. You have decided it is necessary to clear the air.

Training Plan: Co-worker 1

A member of the Computer Committee was to have given you a report on his division's computer training to use as a basis for your division's plan. You haven't received the report and your training plan deadline is approaching. This person has been late getting work to you before. You have called and left a message because you have to address the problem.

Editing Woes: Co-worker 1

Your colleague edited and proofread a report you wrote. You now have to meet and discuss the comments. You feel that your colleague has been too picky in some instances and, in others, has altogether missed the point you were making.

GROUP C

Boss–Employee

Home Work: Boss

An employee has asked to be part of an alternative work-arrangement pilot project which allows employees to perform some of their work from a home office. You feel this employee is not a good candidate for the pilot because too little self-discipline has been shown in the past. You have a meeting with the employee to discuss this request.

Talk, Talk, Talk!: Boss

People have complained that one of your employees, who is friendly and very sociable, prevents them from getting their work done. The employee often wants to talk to them or they hear the laughter and chatter while the employee talks to others. You have scheduled an informal chat.

Missed Meetings: Boss

One of your employees misses meetings and doesn't meet deadlines. You can no longer overlook this behaviour and have scheduled a meeting to discuss the matter.

STUDENT 2 ROLE CARDS

GROUP A

Employee–Boss

New Project:

Boss

Your division has a new project. If the results are good, your division will benefit. You have assigned to the project two people whom you think can work well together. One of these people has made an appointment to see you.

Communications:

Boss

You feel that it is unfair to expect your staff to meet their work deadlines while also attending frequent meetings which tend to be long. You keep people informed by speaking with individuals and telling them what you think they need to know about what is going on. One of your employees has asked to speak with you.

Morale:

Chief

You have asked your staff for suggestions about how to raise morale in the unit. As far as you are concerned, you are doing everything you can to keep everyone happy. An employee has asked to speak with you about some suggestions.

GROUP B

Co-worker–Co-worker

Job-sharing:

Co-worker 2

You and a colleague have been job-sharing. Until now, you have managed to co-ordinate your work by leaving each other detailed notes and by maintaining e-mail or telephone contact. Recently, your colleague has been calling you at home for details you think you have already left at the office. You feel it is necessary to clear the air.

Training Plan:

Co-worker 2

As a member of the Computer Committee, you were supposed to prepare a report on your division's computer training to be used as a basis for other computer training plans. You have been reluctant to write it because of the many flaws in both the plan and the proposed training. Now there is a message for you from the person waiting for your report.

Editing Woes:

Co-worker 2

You edited and proofread a report your colleague wrote. You now have to meet with your colleague and discuss the comments you made. You feel that in some places your colleague's thinking wasn't clear enough and in other places the writing was too sloppy.

GROUP C

Boss–Employee

Home Work:

Employee

You have a meeting with your boss to discuss the possibility of participating in an alternative work-arrangement pilot project. You would like to perform some of your work from a home office because of the flexibility you would then have to meet your family responsibilities.

Talk, Talk, Talk!:

Employee

You feel that you do your part in maintaining high morale in the division by chatting with everyone and keeping everyone up-to-date on what is going on. Your boss has asked to talk to you. You don't know what he wants to talk about.

Missed Meetings:

Employee

Your boss has scheduled a meeting with you. It is probably about a deadline you missed and a meeting you didn't attend. You feel you are given more work than others and, because of this, it is hard for you to meet deadlines. You try to avoid meetings as much as possible because they are mostly useless.

STRATEGIES 5

SUPPORTING YOUR OPINION

What strategies can you use either in English or in your own language to **support** the case you are trying to make? You may want to refresh your memory by checking the Expressions for Supporting an Opinion in the Appendix, pages [A-37](#) and [A-38](#).

STUDY 1

PERSUADING

Persuading can involve counter-arguing, insisting, bargaining, refusing or conceding. List the expressions you usually use when you are trying to **persuade** someone to consider your point of view, (for example, "Look at it from my perspective;....").

Compare your list with the expressions for Persuading in the Appendix, pages [A-30](#) and [A-31](#).

Here are some additional expressions you can use for **persuading**.

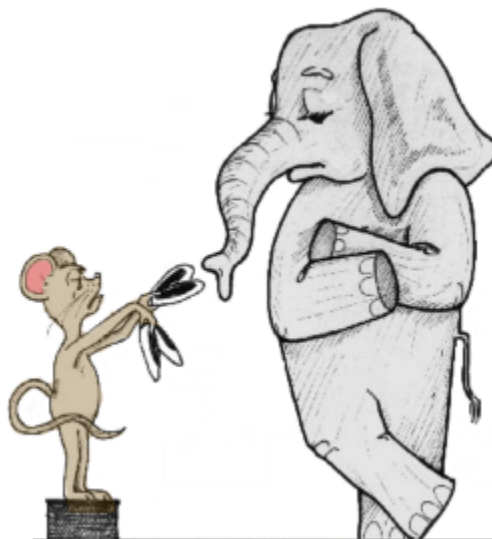
I urge you to

If you'd just

consider the matter from another /my perspective.

put yourself in my shoes./position.

look at it my/this way.



I urge you to put yourself in my shoes.

STUDY 2

INSISTING AND COUNTERING

Discuss with your class the expressions you use for **insisting** on your own position and those you use for **countering** a point made by the other side.

Compare the expressions you discussed with the expressions for Persuading, Insisting, Counter-arguing, notes and strategies in the Appendix pages [A-31](#) and [A-32](#).

After each side has done everything possible to persuade the other side, the process may continue by negotiating, that is bargaining, refusing or conceding.

STUDY 3

NEGOTIATING BARGAINING, REFUSING, CONCEDEDING

Do you know what expressions to use for **bargaining**, **refusing** or **conceding**? If not, check the Appendix on pages [A-10](#) (Bargaining), [A-33](#) (Refusing/Rejecting) and [A-13](#) (Conceding).

PRACTICE 6: A PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT

In this activity, you will be able to practise the process involved in persuading, counter-arguing, insisting, bargaining, refusing or conceding.

Step 1

Class/Choose

Work with your class. Consider the tasks listed in the three categories below. Decide which three tasks from each category you would like to work on. Where necessary, flesh out the situation with details relevant to your work situations. If you prefer, substitute tasks of your own.

| CATEGORIES | TASKS |
|---------------------------|--|
| Persuade your boss | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to allow you to take training you feel you need to let you work at home occasionally to change certain procedures (more/less frequent meetings) or practices (office gifts/lunches) to make a purchase (new software) to provide you with more personnel |
| Persuade your employee(s) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to use a new procedure to work different hours to be a United Way canvasser to co-ordinate a party (farewell/holiday/maternity) to represent your division on a committee |
| Persuade a co-worker | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to sign a petition not to go to the press/union with something not to go over boss's head to co-operate more with co-workers not to do certain things as they were done in the past |

Step 2

Groups/Prepare

On the board, first, list the nine tasks chosen by the class. Now, prepare arguments and counter-arguments for both sides of the tasks you chose. To do this, divide into groups of four or six. Then divide into two mini-groups; that is, groups of four divide into mini-groups of two; groups of six divide into mini-groups of three.

In your pairs or groups of three, brainstorm to develop a list of arguments and counter-arguments for both sides of each of the tasks the class selected. Take good notes so that you can refer to them when you are trying to persuade the other side.

Now you are ready to find out how persuasive you can be.

Step 3

Groups, Class /Persuade

There will be six rounds in the activity. You may want to tape record each round so that you can analyze your strengths and weaknesses in the process of persuading.

You will participate in this activity as part of the group of four or six you formed before. Your mini-group will try to persuade the other mini-group to do what you want.

Your teacher will call out a category from the list on the board, and one of the three tasks listed in that category; for example, your teacher might say, "The category is 'Persuade Your Boss' and the task is to persuade your boss to allow you to take training you feel you need."

One mini-group is the "Employee;" the other is the "Boss."

The activity proceeds as follows:

| Employee Group | Boss Group |
|--|--|
| Member 1: Give an argument for the training. → | Counter-argue. |
| Member 2: Either refute the argument presented by Boss Group Member 1 or present a new idea for your own side. → | Counter the argument or the new point and try to persuade Employee Group Member 2 to see the Boss Group's perspective. |
| Member 3: Can continue to counter-argue, add more points from the Employee Group's perspective or begin to bargain. (or Member 1 again in mini-groups of two.) → | Can continue by counter-arguing, adding new ideas or bargaining. (or Member 1 again in mini-groups of two.) |

The activity continues in this way:

The turn moves from mini-group to mini-group. Within each mini-group, turns rotate among group members until one side has persuaded or conceded to the other.

Step 4

Individual, group /Evaluate

Before you begin the next round, evaluate your performance.

Consider, when it was your turn:

- What strategies did you use to support your points?
- Which of the expressions for persuading did you use?
- Were you able to counter-argue and insist on your point of view?
- Which expressions for counter-arguing and insisting did you use?
- Were you able to persuade the other side?
- What improvements do you want to make in the next round?

Your teacher will now return to the list on the board and call out another of the tasks from the same category; for example, "Persuade your boss to let you work at home occasionally."

For this round, the mini-groups switch roles; that is, the mini-group which was the "Boss" will be the "Employee" and the mini-group which was the "Employee" will be the "Boss." The activity proceeds as before, with members from each group taking turns trying to convince the other side, until all three categories have been covered and all students have had turns trying to be persuasive in each role.

Remember to try to keep your arguments realistic and within the norms of your work situation.

Consolidation

A GOOD ARGUMENT

In this activity you and a partner will practise using expressions and strategies from the workshop.

Materials



A **tape recorder** for each pair

Index cards or blank sheets of paper (at least as many sheets or cards as there are pairs)

Step 1

Pair/Prepare

Preparation

Work with a partner. With your partner, read the role cards for SITUATIONS 1-4 below. Each situation involves a cluster of two or more of the functions you have studied in the workshop.

SITUATION 1

Function cluster: explaining, describing, persuading, refusing (= giving bad news)

Role 1

Your boss has asked you to try out several new database software packages to see whether they would be useful for the work you do. You like one program very much and think it would halve the time you spend on certain routine tasks. The package costs \$750. Describe the advantages: e.g. easy to learn, better record-keeping, compatible with other programs you already use, easily upgradable, good customer support, etc. Try to persuade your boss to purchase the package for your team.

Role 2

You have asked your employees to try out some new software packages. You have promised one group of employees that you will purchase the spreadsheet software they have recommended. That package costs \$300. Now another employee has recommended a \$750 database package. You can only afford to spend \$800 on new software in this fiscal period. Get all the information you need and inform the employee of your final decision.

SITUATION 2

Function cluster: dealing with sensitive topics, persuading, counter-arguing, refusing, conceding

Role 1

You are in charge of a prestigious but costly special project. You have just completed a long report on a complex and difficult topic. It is important for the continuation of your project that the report be well-received by your superiors. You feel you have done a good job. The language of the report is clear and simple, and the arguments are forcefully expressed.

A requirement in your unit has always been to get feedback from other colleagues before submitting written documents. Because of illness, vacations and other absences, the only person available to give you feedback is a junior colleague who has just joined the project. You have reluctantly asked this person to read your report before you hand it in. You are confident that there will be no problems.

Meet with your colleague to discuss the report.

Role 2

You have just been assigned to work on a prestigious, costly project. You have been asked to give some feedback on an important report prepared by the project leader. You know that the project leader takes great pride in writing well. You also know that the approval of the project leader is crucial to your continuing to work on the project.

In your view, the report is clearly written, but there are certain problems with biased and sexist language. You know from experience that management will be side-tracked by the problems with the language and will not address the ideas. You think that parts of the report should be rewritten.

Meet with your colleague to present your reactions.

SITUATION 3

Function cluster: persuading, counter-arguing, refusing

Role 1

You are one of two part-time workers in your unit. Until now, you have each worked two and a half days a week. Now your personal circumstances have changed and you would like to work either all mornings or all afternoons. Your boss is willing to change your hours, on condition that you reach an agreement with your part-time colleague. (You may add more personal information to justify your request.)

Meet with your colleague to discuss a new schedule.

Role 2

You are one of two part-time workers in your unit. Until now, you have each worked two and a half days a week. This arrangement suits your personal circumstances (your child care and transportation arrangements, etc.) very well. You are planning to go back to school on your free days.

Your part-time colleague has asked for a meeting to discuss changes to the hours you both work.

Meet with your colleague to discuss a new schedule.

SITUATION 4

Function cluster: insisting, refusing, counter-arguing, conceding

Role 1

You are the supervisor of several employees. You have been on a training course at which you have tried out new software designed to halve the time spent on some of the procedures your employees have to follow.

You have decided to install the software on your employees' computers. You were told by the course presenter that employees should be able to master the new procedures in three days of self-training.

Meet with a representative of your employees and persuade them to agree to the new software.

Role 2

You are an employee who has to perform several routine but complex tasks as part of your regular duties. These tasks are a vital part of the work of your unit. For these tasks, you use a software program which has been around for a long time. Although it is rather slow, it does the job well enough for your needs. An additional benefit is that you can use the program to speed up several other infrequent but time-consuming tasks.

Your boss wants you to use a much faster new program which is incompatible with the old one. You will have to manually transfer all the old data to the new program. A further problem is that you will lose the power to perform the other infrequent but time-consuming tasks on the computer.

You feel the boss has been unduly influenced by a slick presentation without understanding your needs and the advantages of the old system.

Meet with your boss and insist on being allowed to go on using the old system.

SITUATION 5

With your partner, think of at least one additional situation which uses a similar function cluster from the unit. Write out your situation(s) in the form of two role cards like those above. Write the roles on two separate index cards, or use a sheet of paper and cut it into two parts.

When you have finished your own role cards, photocopy the five or more sets of role cards above. Cut each set into two separate roles and clip them together.

Step 2

Pair/ Draw and decide

ROUND 1

Select

Place all the role card pairs face down in a pile.
In turn, with your partner, draw one set of role cards.
Decide who will take each role.

Step 3

Individual/Plan

Now work alone. Read your own role. Decide how you want to handle the situation and what you want to say. Try to incorporate as many functions and strategies from the workshop as possible so that you can have a sustained conversation. If you use a function or strategy more than once, try to use a different expression for that function or strategy each time. You may find it helpful to make notes of the expressions you want to use.

Step 4

Pair/Role-play



Meet with your partner. Turn on your **tape recorder** and role-play the situation. Listen to your own performance. Are you satisfied with:

- the length of the conversation,
- the functions and strategies you used,
- the variety of expressions you chose for each function and strategy,
- your degree of fluency and accuracy?

If you feel you could have done better, try again until you are satisfied.

Step 5

Pair/Check

With your partner, listen to your tape recording again but from a different perspective; this time use OUR CHECK LIST , and mark it in the following manner:

- Place a "X" in the row corresponding to each function and strategy you and your partner used in the situation you have just recorded.
- Indicate with an "O" each time each of you used a different expression for each function and strategy.

Step 6

Pair/Check

Now exchange your **tape** and role cards with another pair.

With your partner, read the role cards and listen to the tape you have received. Use CHECK LIST: OTHER PAIRS, on page 6-39, and mark it in the same way you did when you listened to your own tape; that is, place a "X" in the row for each function and strategy used by the speakers on the tape. Indicate with an "O" each time a different expression is used for each function and strategy. Listen to the tape as many times as necessary.

Compare

Return the tape, the role cards and the check list you have just completed to the other pair (CHECK LIST: OTHER PAIRS).

Look at the checklist which was returned to you (that is, the one the other pair completed based on the functions, strategies and expressions in the role-play you taped). Compare it to the checklist you completed when you listened to your recording of your own role-play (OUR CHECK LIST).

Were your listeners able to identify:

- all the functions you used,
- all the strategies you used,
- the correct number of expressions for each function,
- the correct number of expressions for each strategy?

Optional: SUBSEQUENT ROUNDS for extra practice

Find another partner and repeat the procedure you followed in Round 1. If you select a situation that one of you has already performed, either take the role you have not yet played or return the cards and select a different situation from the pile. Complete the rest of the steps as in Round 1.

OUR CHECK LIST

| FUNCTIONS/STRATEGIES USED | Situation 1 | Situation 2 | Situation 3 | Situation 4 | Situation 5 |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Functions | | | | | |
| Giving bad news | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Dealing with sensitive topics | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Persuading | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Insisting | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Counter-arguing | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Refusing | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Conceding | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Strategies | | | | | |
| Explaining using examples | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using illustrations | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using details | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using facts | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using reasons | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using results | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Paraphrasing to make sure you understand | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Paraphrasing to make sure you are understood | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Being tactful | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Being tentative | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Being distant | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Being empathetic | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Supporting your point | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

CHECK LIST: OTHER PAIRS

| FUNCTIONS/STRATEGIES USED | Pair 1 | Pair 2 | Pair 3 | Pair 4 | Pair 5 |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Functions | | | | | |
| Giving bad news | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Dealing with sensitive topics | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Persuading | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Insisting | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Counter-arguing | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Refusing | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Conceding | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Strategies | | | | | |
| Explaining using examples | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using illustrations | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using details | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using facts | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using reasons | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Explaining using results | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Paraphrasing to make sure you understand | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Paraphrasing to make sure you are understood | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Being tactful | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Being tentative | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Being distant | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Being empathetic | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Supporting your point | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |