Asking for Clarification

Warm-Up

*Clarify* is a verb. It means “to make clear.” You need to speak and understand language clearly in order to communicate. If you don’t understand someone, you need to ask for clarification. *Clarification* is a noun.

In the paragraph above, what parts of speech are the words *clear* and *clearly*?

Dialogues

Read the dialogues, and practice with a partner.

**A. Asking for Clarification**

**Dialogue 1**

A: *Excuse me. Could you repeat that, please?*
B: No problem. I said that the next bus comes in 15 minutes.

**Dialogue 2**

A: *I'm not sure I follow. Could you give me an example?*
B: Sure. Let me think of one.

**Dialogue 3**

A: *Did you say the meeting is on Friday?*
B: No, I said the meeting is today. We're meeting to discuss Friday's schedule.

**B. Using Tag Questions to Ask for Clarification**

**Dialogue 1**

A: You said three cups of sugar, *right*?
B: No, I said two cups of sugar.

**Dialogue 2**

A: You understand the rules, *don't you*?
B: Yes, I understand them clearly.

**Dialogue 3**

A: You are Joey's wife, *aren't you*?
B: No, I am Allan's wife. Lisa is Joey's wife.
A: Oh, I'm sorry! You and Lisa look similar. Thanks for clarifying.

**C. Offering Clarification**

**Dialogue 1**

A: *What I mean is, come over anytime.*
B: Oh, okay. Thanks for clarifying.

**Dialogue 2**

A: *Let me explain that differently.*
B: Thanks. I'm really confused.

**Dialogue 3**

A: *Let me clarify. This trip is just for the senior students.*
B: Oh, I misunderstood. I thought it was for all of the students.
Asking for Clarification

A. Useful Expressions for Interrupting

Never pretend to understand something that you don’t understand. Use a polite expression to interrupt and ask for clarification if you don’t hear or understand something properly.

1. Pardon me?
2. I beg your pardon?
3. Excuse me. Could you repeat that, please?
4. Could you say that again?
5. I’m sorry, I didn’t hear you properly.
6. I’m sorry, I missed that.
7. I’m sorry, I didn’t catch that.
8. I don’t understand what you mean. / What does ______ mean?
9. Could you give an example? / Could you explain more about ______?
10. Did you say ______? (repeat what you think a person said)

B. Speaking Practice

Now work with a partner. First, work together to come up with questions for the responses below (orally). Then practice asking and answering the questions together. The person who asks the question will ask for clarification after hearing the response. The respondent will repeat the answer (more slowly). Finally, switch roles.

Responses:

- 459-9901
- 450 Water Street
- Melissa
- April 14
- It’s on page 45.
- There is no parking available here. You will have to park on the street.
- In aisle seven.

Example:

A: What’s your phone number?
B: 459-9901.
A: I’m sorry, I didn’t catch that.
B: (more slowly) 459-9901.

Let Me Be Clear

Play a game of broken telephone in small groups. One person starts a message and whispers it to another person. Did the message make it all the way to the end of the line? Now play again. This time, if you don’t hear correctly, ask the whisperer for clarification:

Example:

A: (whispering) I like cute puppies, such as poodles.
B: (out loud) I’m sorry, I didn’t hear you.
A: (whispering) I said I like cute puppies, such as poodles.

Informal Clarification

BETWEEN FRIENDS

Close friends and family members aren’t always polite. You may hear them asking for clarification in a very informal way.

- What?
- Say again?
- Huh?
- Wha’d you say? (What did you say?)
Vocabulary Review

A. Choose the Best Response

Listen to the recording. Circle the best response for each question.

1. a) Let me clarify.  
   b) No, I don’t get it.  
   c) Yes, that’s right.

4. a) Yes, you got it now.  
   b) Let me explain.  
   c) I’m sorry, I don’t understand.

2. a) Allow me to rephrase that.  
   b) Thanks. I’m really confused.  
   c) Yes, it’s a good one.

5. a) Follow me.  
   b) Sorry, I’ll give you an example.  
   c) Yes, that’s how I got here.

3. a) You’re coming, aren’t you?  
   b) Understand?  
   c) That’s right.

6. a) No, I said for 14.  
   b) That’s okay.  
   c) Oh, I misunderstood.

B. Word Forms

The word “clarify” is a verb. The word “clarification” is a noun. The word “clear” is an adjective. Which word is needed in each blank?

1. Are we all __________ on what we need to do?  
2. Let me __________. You can use a dictionary.
3. Please ask for __________ if you don’t understand.
4. I need you to __________ the instructions.
5. The voice message was not __________.  
   Can you tell us your address again?

A Fun Idiom

ON THE SAME PAGE  
to have the same information  
and a shared understanding  
of something

• I just want to make sure we’re all on the same page.
• Are we on the same page?
• I don’t think we’re on the same page.
Review

Task 1

Work with a partner. Read a dialogue between two hockey coaches and some parents. Identify the following:

1. the date of the event
2. the location of the event
3. clothing requirements
4. transportation details
5. the cost of the event
6. one special rule
7. one important reminder

A TEAM MEETING

Coach #1: Hi, parents. We have a few announcements about the upcoming hockey tournament. As you know, the tournament is on the second weekend in March in Brampton, Ontario.

Interrupting Parent #1: Pardon me, where is it?

Coach #2: Brampton. Next, all players must have their Home and Away jerseys.

Interrupting Parent #2: Sorry, I missed that.

Coach #1: Bring your child’s Home and Away jerseys to the tournament.

Coach #2: Next, each child must bring his own skates, helmet, padding, and hockey stick. We will not have extras.

Interrupting Parent #1: Could you repeat that, please?

Coach #2: Bring your child’s jerseys, skates, helmet, padding, and hockey stick.

Coach #1: We are taking a bus. The bus is leaving on Saturday at 9:00 am from Market Square.

Interrupting Parent #2: Sorry, did you say Markham?

Coach #1: I said Market Square. Am I forgetting anything?

Coach #2: No siblings are allowed on the bus.

Interrupting Parent #1: I’m sorry, what does that mean?

Coach #2: No brothers or sisters. Players and parents only.

Coach #1: Oh, and all players must bring a deposit of $50 to Monday’s practice.

Interrupting Parent #2: Pardon me? Did you say $15?

Coach #1: $50. Five-oh. And don’t forget to sign and submit the permission form.

Coach #2: Are there any questions?
Review cont.

Task 2

Now imagine that you and your partner are the coaches or leaders of a team or club. You are going to hold a parent meeting to talk about an upcoming event. Prepare the following information for your meeting in short form.

- the date of the event
- the location of the event
- clothing/equipment requirements
- transportation details
- the cost of the event
- one special rule
- one important reminder
Review cont.

Task 3

It’s time to hold your parent meeting. Go to the front of the room with your partner and hold your meeting. The parents (classmates) will practice interrupting you politely to ask for clarification. They may also ask you additional questions.

Remember to talk about:
- the date of the event
- the location of the event
- clothing/equipment requirements
- transportation details
- the cost of the event
- one special rule
- one important reminder

Did You Remember?

PROMPTS FOR INTERRUPTING

1. Pardon me?
2. I beg your pardon?
3. Excuse me. Could you repeat that, please?
4. Could you say that again?
5. I’m sorry, I didn’t hear you properly.
6. I’m sorry, I missed that.
7. I’m sorry, I didn’t catch that.
8. I don’t understand what you mean. / What does _____ mean?
9. Could you give an example? / Could you explain more about _____?
10. Did you say _____? (repeat what you think a person said)
# Speaking Assessment Tool

**Student / Group:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Assessed By</th>
<th>Role-Play Scenario</th>
<th>Skills</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asking for Clarity</td>
<td>Speaking, Listening</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
<th>Achieved With Help</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interrupts politely</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asks for clarification using tag questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provides a reason for the lack of comprehension or understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speaks clearly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**
**Learner Reflection**

**ASKING FOR CLARIFICATION**

Add check marks (✔) to show what you've learned in this lesson.

| Name: _____________________________ | Date: ____________________________ |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can I...</th>
<th>Yes (very well)</th>
<th>Yes (with help)</th>
<th>Not yet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ask for clarification?</td>
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<td><img src="emoji" alt="Smiley" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Question Mark" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use tag questions when asking for clarification?</td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Smiley" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Smiley" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Question Mark" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>offer clarification?</td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Smiley" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Smiley" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Question Mark" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interrupt politely when I don’t understand or don’t hear properly?</td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Smiley" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Smiley" /></td>
<td><img src="emoji" alt="Question Mark" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask for clarification in a very informal situation?</td>
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<td><img src="emoji" alt="Smiley" /></td>
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**My Notes**


Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

Students review language and useful expressions for clarifying and asking for clarification. They play a modified game of broken telephone and practice interrupting for clarification. An optional three-part review/assessment task is included at the end of the lesson.

LEVEL: Int
TIME: 1–2 hours
TAGS: functional English, useful expressions, clarifying, asking for clarification, interrupting, tag questions

Warm-Up

Discuss why being able to clarify and ask for clarification is so important. What happens if you don’t know how to (or if you’re too shy to) ask for clarification? Remind students that clear is an adjective and clearly is an adverb.

Dialogues

Have students practice the dialogues in pairs. If you have not introduced tag questions, you may need a supplementary lesson. Check out our editor’s tips on teaching tag questions: http://blog.esllibrary.com/2012/11/29/tag-questions-are-fun-to-teach-arent-they/

There is also additional practice in our Functional English lesson, Reporting a Missing Item: https://esllibrary.com/courses/92/lessons/2106

Let Me Be Clear

Put students in groups. (If you have a small class, play all together). Play a regular game of broken telephone. Then play the revised game where students ask each other for clarification.

(continued on the next page...)

Asking for Clarification

A. USEFUL EXPRESSIONS FOR INTERRUPTING

Read the useful expressions out loud, and have your students repeat them. Check for proper intonation.

Explain that people who are in a close relationship will use informal language to ask for clarification. Make sure your students understand that these expressions can be considered rude or abrupt if the relationship is not informal and close.
**Answer Key cont.**

**Vocabulary Review**

Explain the idiom in the box ("on the same page") and use it as often as you can in class. Explain how teachers might use this expression literally and figuratively.

**A. CHOOSE THE BEST RESPONSE**

1. a  
2. b  
3. c  
4. b  
5. b  
6. a  

**Transcript:**

1. I'm sorry, but I don't get it.
2. I'll give you an example.
3. You said the party starts at 9:00, right?
4. I'm confused.
5. I'm not sure I follow.
6. You said a table for four, right?

**B. WORD FORMS**

1. clear  
2. clarify  
3. clarification  
4. clarify  
5. clear  
6. clarify

**Review (Assessment Tasks)**

The following three tasks can be used for assessment purposes and/or review practice.

**TASK 1**

Have four volunteers read the dialogue out loud for the class. Put students in pairs. Have them read the dialogue again to identify the information. Take up the answers together:

1. second weekend in March  
2. Brampton, Ontario  
3. Home and Away jerseys, skate, helmet, padding, stick  
4. a bus that is leaving on Saturday at 9:00 am from Market Square  
5. $50  
6. no siblings on the bus  
7. sign permission form and bring to Monday’s practice

**TASK 2**

Give pairs time to come up with an idea for a parent meeting and plan the details of their meeting in short form. Discourage students from writing out full sentences.

**TASK 3**

If you want to use this task for summative assessment, hand out the ready-made Speaking Assessment Tool (page 7), or personalize your own from a template in Shared Criteria for Success: https://esllibrary.com/resources/2352

Give each pair the opportunity to come to the front of the class to hold a parent meeting. The other students will be the parents. Encourage the other students to interrupt politely throughout the meeting. You can decide whether or not to allow other students to have the interruption prompts on page 6 available or not.

For this task, you will be assessing the students who are acting as parents asking for clarification (rather than the coaches/leaders).

**Learner Reflection**

When you are finished with this lesson, have your students reflect on their learning by filling in the chart.

**SPELLING NOTE:**

This lesson shows the American spelling of the word *Practice*. Other English-speaking countries spell it this way: *Practise* (when used as a verb; *Practice* when used as a noun). Make it a challenge for your students to find this word in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spelling.

**ABOUT THE EMOJI:**

The emoji (and their derivatives) used in this lesson are from Twemoji, an open-source project by Twitter. They are licensed under CC-BY 4.0. https://github.com/twitter/twemoji

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