

Interrupting

Let's Learn

In this lesson, you will learn how to interrupt politely for different reasons. You will also learn how to respond to interruptions.

Let's begin by looking at these word parts and word forms. Do you know any other words with "inter" or "rupt"?

Words / Parts	Form	Example / Meaning
interruption	noun	Sorry for the interruption.
interrupt	verb	Don't interrupt again.
interrupted	passive	I was rudely interrupted.
inter-	prefix	between, during, among
-rupt-	root	to break

Warm-Up

BRAINSTORM

What are some reasons for interrupting a speaker?

- to say that you have to leave
- to correct someone
- to share an opinion

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Dialogues

Read the dialogues, and practice with a partner.

Dialogue 1

AT THE BUS STOP

- A: Sorry to interrupt.
Does this bus go to the shopping mall?
- B: *[Leaves another conversation]* Yes, it does.
- A: Thanks.
- B: No problem.
- A: *[A moment later]* Sorry to bother you again. Do you have the time?
- B: It's five after four.
- A: Thanks a lot.

Dialogue 3

IN THE CLASSROOM

- A: Okay, let's move on to the assignment.
There are two—
- B: Excuse me.
- A: Yes?
- B: Did you say that the test was going to cover Units 2 and 13, or 2 and 30?
- A: Units 2 and 13.
- B: Thanks. And it's this Monday, right?
- A: No. Next Monday.
- B: Thanks. Sorry for the interruption.
- A: No problem. Now, where were we?

Dialogue 2

IN A RUSH

- A: Hey! Long time no see.
- B: Hi there.
- A: So, how was the—
- B: I'm so sorry. I'd love to chat, but I'm late for work!
- A: No worries. We'll talk soon!
I want to hear all about the concert.
- B: Sounds good! Bye.

Dialogue 4

IN A MEETING

- A: There are many other things we can recycle around here. For example—
- B: Sorry. May I add something here?
- A: Sure, go ahead.
- B: Rather than just recycling, we also need to focus on reducing. I mean—
- C: I'm so sorry. I have to run to an appointment.
- A: Okay. And yes, we can get back to this tomorrow around—
- B: Sorry, but before Erin goes, I wanted to mention that we should all start bringing in reusable water bottles.

Useful Expressions

There are many different reasons for interrupting. Sometimes we interrupt a speaker, and other times we interrupt an action. Listen and repeat these expressions with your teacher.

A. Interrupting Politely

Interruptions are sometimes necessary. In English, it is polite to apologize before you interrupt someone.

Reason for Interrupting	Examples
to signal that you have to go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm so sorry. I have to go. • I hate to interrupt, but... • Sorry to interrupt, but... • I'd love to stay and chat, but... • I wish I could hear more, but...
to ask for clarity or repetition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excuse me, but could you say that again? • Sorry to cut in, but did you say/mean...? • Sorry. Before you continue... • Pardon me, but just to clarify...
to add a thought or share an opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorry, but I'd also like to add... • Sorry. May I say something? • May I have a word? • Sorry. Could I just mention that... • Sorry, if I might add something...
to get someone's attention or information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excuse me. Do you have a...? • Pardon me. Are you using this...? • I'm sorry to interrupt, but... • Sorry to bug you. Do you know... • Sorry to bother you again...
to refocus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorry, but we're going to run out of time. • Sorry, but we need to get back on track. • Sorry, but we've kind of gone off-topic.

Note:

In some situations, such as in a classroom or during a presentation, it is polite to raise your hand to interrupt.

Useful Expressions cont.

B. Interrupting Abruptly

Interrupting without a polite expression is very common in informal spoken English. Sometimes people just talk over a speaker. Other times, they signal that they are coming in.

Reason for Interrupting	Examples
to disagree or argue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold on. • Stop right there. • That's not true. • That's a lie. • That's not what happened.
to show dismay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Come on. • You've got to be kidding. • I can't believe you said that. • What are you talking about?
to gain or regain the floor*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's my turn. • You've said enough. • Are you finished yet?

***Note:**

When you *have the floor*, you are the person speaking. When you *give someone the floor*, you stop speaking and give another person the chance to speak.

C. Responding to an Interruption

It is usually polite to allow an interruption. In some cases, the speaker has a good reason to reject an interruption.

Allowing an Interruption

- What can I do for you?
- What do you want to add?
- What is it?
- Go ahead.
- Sure.
- Be my guest.
- By all means.
- Sorry. I've been talking your ear off.

Rejecting an Interruption

- Let me finish.
- Just hear me out.
- You can talk when I'm done.
- I'm almost finished here.
- Just wait until we're done here, please.
- I just need to say one more thing before I give you the floor.

Taking Turns

Read the information about interrupting, and answer the questions.

A. Timing

There are good and bad times to interrupt. The best time to interrupt is when the speaker's point is coming to a close. The worst time is when a speaker is just beginning a thought or is saying something very interesting or important.

Listen for a short pause or a dropped voice before you start talking.

Note:

Sometimes turn-taking is done through body language, such as a nod or a wave of the hand. This means "Go ahead."

B. Biting Your Tongue

You might have a strong urge to interrupt if:

- you have something important to say
- the speaker is talking for too long
- the speaker says something you disagree with
- you are worried that you are going to forget what you want to say
- you have a related story or example
- you already know what the other person is going to say
- you think you can say something faster or better than the speaker

If possible, bite your tongue (resist the urge to interrupt) and wait for a pause or finished thought before you speak.

C. Getting Back On Track

An interruption can make you forget what you were saying. Here are some ways to get back to the topic or conversation:

- Where were we?
- What were we talking about?
- What was I saying?
- You were saying...
- Anyway...
- As I was saying...

D. Comprehension

Now answer the questions to confirm your understanding.

1. When is a good time to interrupt a speaker?
2. When is a bad time to interrupt a speaker?
3. What does the term "bite your tongue" mean?
4. Identify three or more situations when you should try to bite your tongue instead of interrupting a speaker.
5. Why would someone use the question "Where were we?"

Listening Practice

A. Choose the Correct Response

Listen to the recording.

Circle the best response to each question or statement.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. a) How can I help you?
b) We'll talk later.
c) You've said enough.</p> <p>2. a) Sure. Be my guest.
b) Now, where were we?
c) Good point.</p> <p>3. a) Can I cut in here?
b) That was a long time.
c) Go ahead.</p> <p>4. a) No problem. Call me later.
b) Around 3:45.
c) Before you continue.</p> <p>5. a) By all means.
b) That's correct.
c) If I could just add a note.</p> | <p>6. a) True. Where were we?
b) It's on the list.
c) Stop right there!</p> <p>7. a) Where's the flyswatter?
b) I'm very sorry.
c) Anytime. What is it?</p> <p>8. a) Let's get back on track.
b) It's my turn to speak.
c) I'll save the rest for tomorrow.</p> <p>9. a) What is it?
b) I suggest we stop here.
c) I can help you.</p> <p>10. a) Don't worry about it.
b) It should be here in five minutes.
c) It goes downtown.</p> |
|---|---|

B. Choose the Correct Timing

Three students will go into the hall. Your teacher will assign three roles to these students. Student A will give instructions about something. Student B will interrupt Student A politely at appropriate times. Student C will interrupt Student A abruptly at inappropriate times. Student A will try to get back on track after the interruptions.

When it's your turn to interrupt:

Try to use expressions you learned on pages 3–4.

When it's your turn to be in the audience:

Answer the following questions:

1. What instructions was Speaker A trying to give?
2. Which student interrupted politely?
Which student interrupted abruptly/rudely?
3. What reason(s) did Student B and Student C have for interrupting?

Review

Task 1

WORDS & EXPRESSIONS

Write an example sentence or question for each of the following types of interruptions:

#	Reason	Type	Sentence or Question
1	to ask for clarification	polite	
2	to ask for time-sensitive information	polite	
3	to add information	polite	
4	to disagree	abrupt	
5	to show dismay	abrupt	

Review cont.

Task 2

COMPLETE THE DIALOGUE

Now complete the dialogue and perform it for your teacher with a partner.

A: Moving on. You all have the camping list, so let's have a look.

B: May I add _____ before we move on?
1.

A: Of course. Go _____ .
2.

B: Your GPS may not find the campground, so bring a map.

A: Thanks for mentioning that.

B: Sorry, one more thing.

A: _____ ?
3.

B: If anyone needs a ride, I have two extra seats.

A: Excellent. Now, where _____ ?
4.

Task 3

INTERRUPTIONS

Work in a group of three. Write a short dialogue between three people that takes place at a bus stop. Include the three roles below. Perform your skit for your class or teacher. Switch roles and perform it again so that Speaker A gets a chance to practice interrupting.

Speaker A	describes an event he/she attended
Speaker B	interrupts twice politely for different reasons (e.g., to ask for clarification and to suddenly leave)
Speaker C	does not know Speaker A or B, but interrupts twice politely (e.g., to get information)

Audience Questions

Your classmates will have to answer the following:

1. What event is Speaker A describing?
2. What reasons does Speaker B have for interrupting?
3. What reasons does Speaker C have for interrupting?
4. How does Speaker A respond to the interruptions?
5. Are the interruptions timed appropriately?

Speaking Assessment Tool

Student / Group: _____

Date	Level	Assessed By	Role-Play Scenario	Skills
			Interrupting (politely)	Speaking, Listening

Criteria	Achieved 	Achieved With Help 	Needs Improvement 
uses polite language for interrupting			
interrupts for a variety of reasons			
responds appropriately to an interruption			
uses appropriate timing for interrupting			

Notes




Learner Reflection

INTERRUPTING

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

Name: _____

Date: _____

Can I...	Yes (very well) 	Yes (with help) 	Not yet 
identify many different reasons to interrupt?			
interrupt politely?			
respond to an interruption?			
get back on track after an interruption?			
interrupt at an appropriate time?			

My Notes