

## What *not* to say to someone who stammers

### Topic

Stammering/stuttering and how best to respond when someone stammers.

### Learning outcomes

- Give examples of how (not) to respond when someone stammers
- Practise reading for specific information
- Use a range of structures for expressing preference and/or annoyance: would prefer, would sooner, would rather, wish

### Age/level

Aged 13-17 and Adults B1+/B2 (especially useful for FCE)

### Time

65 minutes

### Materials

Appendix 1 – Cut up into 3 texts. Enough copies for 1 text per student  
Presentation – This could replace Worksheet 2  
Worksheet 1 – Reading  
Worksheet 2 – Grammar activities

### Introduction

This lesson was devised to mark International Stammering/Stuttering Awareness Day on 22 October. However, the lesson could be used at any time of year.

The lesson begins with students reading a short text with some key points about stammering. They then go on to read a first-person account by a person who stammers, about how he would prefer people to respond when he does so. After some discussion about the topic, the lesson goes on to focus on some different grammatical structures to express preference and sometimes annoyance: would rather/sooner, would prefer, wish. There is some practice using sentence transformation (as found in FCE) and then some more personalised practice.

**Notes:** Be sensitive about using this plan if you have a learner who stammers.

'Stammering' is the word used in the UK, and 'stuttering' means the same thing but is more commonly used in the USA and Australia.)

## Procedure

<b>1. Lead-in (10 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give out the Discussion text (<b>Appendix 1</b>) or display <b>slide 2</b>. Ask students to read the text</li> <li>• Students then discuss in pairs what, if anything, surprises them. They may, for example, be surprised that it is genetic or that it is relatively common.</li> <li>• Ask learners to discuss the follow up questions in pairs:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Do you ever stammer or know anyone that stammers?</li> <li>— How do you think you should respond when someone stammers?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> Because this can be a sensitive subject, it is probably better not to make this into a whole-class discussion. Students can then decide whether to say to their partner that they have a stammer themselves or have a family member who does, etc.</p>
<b>2. Reading (10 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Either give out worksheet 1 or display <b>slide 3</b>.</li> <li>• Ask learners to look at the photograph of Joe. Ask them what they think he is like (friendly? confident? Intelligent?)</li> <li>• Ask learners to read the text on Worksheet 1 and compare what Jo says to their discussion.</li> <li>• With their partner learners then answer the questions</li> </ul> <p><b>Suggested answers</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. People assuming he's stupid or nervous; people giving him advice as though they are an expert; people finishing his sentences; people asking why he stammers</li> <li>2. He wants people to focus on what he's saying, rather than how he's saying it</li> <li>3. People may feel embarrassed, or want to help the person, or may be unsympathetic. The more people talk openly about stammering and how to respond, the easier it will be for people who stammer, as they will feel more accepted.</li> </ol>
<b>3. Grammar focus (15 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask students to find and complete the different ways of expressing preference, Task 2 on the worksheet or display <b>slide 4</b>. These are underlined in the reading text.</li> </ul>

- Once they have done this, ask them what grammatical differences they notice in the structures. Briefly elicit a few examples.
- Make sure students understand the difference between bare infinitive (go) and full infinitive (to go). Students then complete the grammar rules (**Task 2**) using the words in the box (they use some words more than once). This task is also on **slide 5** and **slide 6**.

**Answers:**

1 prefer 2 rather 3 prefer 4 prefer 5 rather 6 rather/sooner 7 sooner /rather  
 8 rather/sooner 9 sooner/rather 10 rather/sooner 11 rather (not sooner) 12 wish  
 13 wish

- Ask students to identify which form expresses some annoyance.

**Answer**

wish - depending on intonation, the other forms could be used this way as well, but 'wish' always has a feeling of annoyance.

**4. Grammar practice 1 (15 minutes)**

- Either display **slide 7** or ask learners to look at Task 3 on their worksheet.
- Elicit the first two answers as a whole class to check students understand how to complete the exercise, using the word in capitals.
- Then ask them to complete the rest of the sentences individually. Let students check and compare their answers in pairs, before checking as a class. The answers are on **slide 8** and noted below.

**Note:** these structures are commonly tested in the FCE exam, so initially working alone could be good exam practice. If learners are taking the exam soon, you could set a strict time limit for doing this exercise to replicate exam conditions.

**Answers:**

- 1 I'd rather you didn't shout.
- 2 I'd sooner he didn't buy me presents all the time.
- 3 Lucy would prefer to go to the cinema rather than (go to) the theatre.
- 4 I wish you wouldn't whistle all the time.
- 5 I'd prefer to eat Chinese food tonight.
- 6 They wish you wouldn't use your mobile at the dinner table.
- 7 I'd rather not go out tonight.

<b>Grammar practice 2 (15 minutes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask learners to work in pairs to do Task 4 (<b>slide 9</b>), making a list of 5-10 things another people sometimes do that they find annoying.</li> <li>• Monitor and support with language. Write any useful vocabulary on the board.</li> </ul> <p><b>Tip:</b> You can adapt the list size according to how much time you have left. Or you could assign the follow up activity for homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elicit a few examples from pairs. Write them on the board.</li> <li>• As a whole class elicit two ways the ideas can be written using: prefer, rather, sooner, wish.</li> </ul> <p><b>E.g.</b> I'd rather you didn't interrupt me when I'm speaking/ I'd prefer you not to interrupt me when I'm speaking.</p> <p>The example sentences are on <b>slide 10</b>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask pairs to write up all their ideas into sentences (2 ways for each sentence)</li> <li>• Nominate pairs to share 2 of their sentences. Ask the rest of the class the confirm if the grammar is correct</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> Peer correction can be useful. Encouraging this as a whole class in an informal way means you can correct any unnecessary negativity and model giving constructive feedback. This can be used as a learner training strategy before moving onto individual peer correction in future lessons.</p>
<b>Useful links</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grammar reference: <a href="https://theenglishlanguagecoach.com/2021/04/07/expressing-preferences/">https://theenglishlanguagecoach.com/2021/04/07/expressing-preferences/</a></li> <li>• Online grammar exercise: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/3xr5wvww">https://tinyurl.com/3xr5wvww</a></li> </ul>

**Contributed by**

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## APPENDIX 1 – Discussion text (3 copies)

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### What *not* to say to someone who stammers

#### Task 1: Read the short text below about stammering. Does anything surprise you?

Stammering (sometimes referred to as ‘stuttering’) means that when you speak you get stuck on certain words or sounds, or that you repeat sounds. It usually starts in early childhood, but some people grow out of it. There is no one reason why people stammer, but recent research suggests that it is genetic. Around one person in every hundred stammers.

- Do you ever stammer or know anyone that stammers?
  - How do you think you should respond when someone stammers?
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