

**Lesson Objective:** Sometimes you need to interrupt another person who is speaking. In this lesson, you will learn some useful expressions for interrupting politely. You will also practice your intonation.

## Example Conversations

### 1. Interrupting (due to time constraints) two people

Read the dialogue, and practice with a partner.

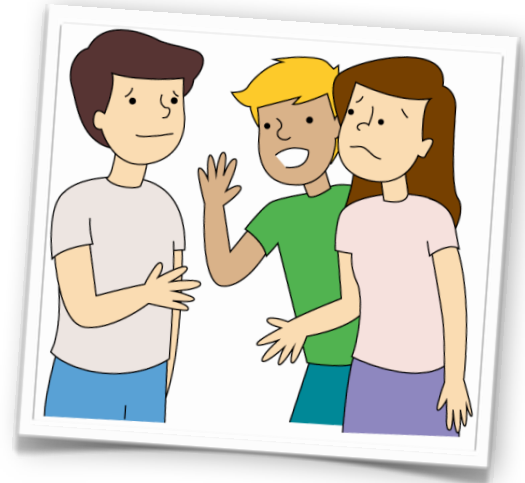
*In a rush...*

**A:** Amy, there you are! I have to tell you about the dance. You'll never believe...

**B:** I'm afraid I can't talk right now.

**A:** I just have to tell you one...

**B:** I'd love to chat, but I have to catch my bus.



### 2. Interrupting

(to find information) three people

Form a group of three and practice this conversation. Think about body gestures and voice tone.

*At the bus stop...*

**A:** Where do you want to have dinner tomorrow?

**B:** I don't know, how about...

**C:** **Sorry for interrupting.** Does this bus go to the shopping mall?

**B:** Yes.

**A:** So, should we have fast food?

**C:** **Sorry to bother you again.**

**B:** No problem. How can we help you?

**C:** What's the bus fare for students?

### 3. Interrupting

(to add or correct information) three people

Practice interrupting a speaker. Notice that some speakers interrupt politely. Which speaker is impolite?

*In a meeting...*

**A:** Of course, there are many other ways to recycle...

**B:** May I say something here?

**A:** Be my guest.

**B:** I think reducing our waste is far more important than recycling.

**A:** Okay. Well, tomorrow, we'll be...

**C:** **Hold on!** Tomorrow? Shouldn't we be talking about reducing before recycling? I mean...

**A:** **If I may continue,** we must stick to the agenda.

## 4. Polite or Impolite?

Are the following expressions polite or impolite? Listen to your teacher read these examples. Then practice saying them out loud. Which words are **stressed**? Notice your teacher's intonation.

- ① May I come in here? \_\_\_\_\_
- ② Wait a minute! \_\_\_\_\_
- ③ It's my turn to speak. \_\_\_\_\_
- ④ I'm sorry to interrupt, but... \_\_\_\_\_
- ⑤ Sorry to cut you off, but we're out of time. \_\_\_\_\_
- ⑥ If you don't mind, I'd just like to mention something. \_\_\_\_\_
- ⑦ Are you finished yet? \_\_\_\_\_
- ⑧ If I may... \_\_\_\_\_
- ⑨ Sorry, could I just mention that... \_\_\_\_\_
- ⑩ May I have a word? \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Interrupting Politely – A Checklist

Read the following list and discuss it with a partner. Which items are the most important?

- ① \_\_\_\_\_ eye contact. ✓
- ② \_\_\_\_\_ for a break in the conversation. ✓
- ③ \_\_\_\_\_ a good reason for interrupting. ✓
- ④ \_\_\_\_\_ respectful language (sorry, please, may I). ✓
- ⑤ \_\_\_\_\_ about “interrupting” in different cultures. ✓

Choose the right verb and complete the checklist.

Learn  
Wait  
Use  
Have  
Make

## 6. What could be more important than this?

Work with your class to think of reasons people have for interrupting each other. Think about reasons why children, parents, employees, tourists, and students interrupt each other. Which reasons are acceptable? Which are examples of things that can wait?

## 7. Group Speaking Activity – STOP INTERRUPTING

Imagine your classroom is a party. Socialize with all of the guests. Your teacher will tap on one student’s shoulder. This person will play the role of the “interrupter”. The interrupter will **cut in on** many different conversations. After a few minutes, one student should tell the “interrupter” to “Stop interrupting!” The teacher will then choose another student to be the “interrupter”. Practice using polite and impolite expressions from page 2.

## 8. Discuss this famous proverb:

“The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it.”  
~ Chinese Proverb

## Answer Key

### Description:

Student review language and useful expressions for interrupting. They practice interrupting politely and work on intonation when using these expressions.

**Tags:** functional English, useful expressions, low-intermediate, intermediate, interrupting, interruptions

### Exercise 1–3

Read out loud in small groups. The first conversation can be practiced in pairs. The next two conversations can be practiced in threes. You can put your students in groups of 3 or 4 for this activity and have them take turns listening and reading. Encourage them to stand up and practice body gestures, too.

3) Speaker C is impolite.

### Exercise 4

1. May I **come in** here? *polite*
2. **Wait** a minute! *impolite*
3. It's **my** turn to speak. *impolite*
4. I'm **sorry** to interrupt, but... *polite*
5. **Sorry** to cut you off, but we're **out** of time. *polite*
6. If you **don't** mind, I'd **just** like to mention something. *polite*
7. Are you **finished** yet? *impolite*
8. If I **may**... *polite*
9. **Sorry**, could I **just** mention that... *polite*
10. May I have a word? *polite*

In addition to identifying the words and syllables that are stressed, help your students notice and practice the rising and falling intonation in these examples.

### Exercise 5

*Make* eye contact. ✓

*Wait* for a break in the conversation. ✓

*Have* a good reason for interrupting. ✓

*Use* respectful language (sorry, please, may I). ✓

*Learn* about “interrupting” in different cultures. ✓

(Do you have a multicultural classroom? Discuss this final item with your students to learn about what is acceptable in different cultures.)

### Exercise 6

Work together to make a list of reasons why people interrupt. Which types of interruptions are acceptable?

### Exercise 7

Have students practice using the expressions from page 2. If possible, try to give each student a turn being the “interrupter”. If you have a large group, designate more than one interrupter at a time.

### Exercise 8

Discuss this famous proverb. You could also use this opportunity to discuss types of interruptions that aren't verbal. If you don't have time to discuss the proverb, consider using it as a journal topic. For more information on using journals with your English learners, check out our blog post: [Using Journals With English Learners](#)

**Spelling Note:** This lesson shows the American spelling of the word *Practice*. Most 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 text and see if they know the alternate spelling.