

コース概要

このコースは日本人が英語を話す上で最も弱いとされるディスカッションスキルを養成するために作成された MANABI.st オリジナルのテキストです。

授業は1レッスン=1トピックで進みます。トピック毎に6-8つの質問が事前課題として記載されております。それぞれのトピックは社会人であれば誰もが体験又は一度は考えたことのあるものばかりですので準備の際、ご自分の体験を交えて分かりやすく説明できるようにしてください。

また、『質問される→答える』だけでは Discussion とは言えず、ただの Q&A セッションとなってしまいます。はじめは難しいと思いますが、出来る限り “What do you think?” と先生の意見も聞くようにし、さらにその答えについても突っ込んで聞ける『質問力』も磨いてください。

コース受講方法

1. 全 20 トピックがあり、どれも 1 ページにも満たない短いものです。以下が各トピックの概要です。
 - (1) Cell Phones & Teenagers (10 代の子供に携帯電話を持たすべきか?)
 - (2) Working Holiday (バカンス中に仕事?)
 - (3) Office Hours (残業は周りにとって迷惑?)
 - (4) A City Curfew (都市で未成年の門限を設定!?)
 - (5) Spanking (罰として子供を叩く?叩かない?)
 - (6) Pink or Blue (赤ちゃんの性別操作は可能?)
 - (7) Esperanto: The International Language (国際言語をご存知?)
 - (8) To Tell or Not to Tell (危険なダイエット薬品)
 - (9) A true news story -England's Manchester Evening News- (偽証罪!?)
 - (10) Food Fight (トレードマーク闘争)
 - (11) Fad Diets are Bad Diets (流行のダイエットは悪!?)
 - (12) Why do so Many People in Denmark Speak English? (英語がペラペラなデンマーク人)
 - (13) Slow Down and Enjoy the Sunshine (スローライフを Enjoy しましょう!)
 - (14) The Changing Face of America (移民の国アメリカ)
 - (15) Aging Parents (親の高齢化)
 - (16) Office Politics (嫌な上司)
 - (17) Sharing Personal Information at Work (プライバシー情報)
 - (18) Stress and the Working Life (仕事のストレス)
 - (19) Just Got Fired! (クビになった!)
 - (20) Thinking of a Career Change (起業するかしまいか)

2. まず『ログイン後』→『コースを探す』→一般会話>テキストの使用>【中級・上級】Improving Discussion Skills (MANABI.st オリジナル教材) よりご予約下さい。
3. 15 トピックの内最も話しやすいトピックを選び『先生への伝言』板を利用し先生に伝えてください。
4. 選択されたトピックをよく読み事前課題に対する答え (Beginner Level 及び Intermediate to Advanced Level) を準備してください。尚、Intermediate to Advanced Level の質問が難しすぎる場合は準備いただく必要はございません。その場合、事前に『先生への伝言』板を通じて先生にご連絡下さい。
5. レッソンは質問に沿って行われますが、脱線しても一向に構いません。質問を全てカバーできなくても気になさらないで下さい。本コースの目的はあくまで Discussion スキルを養成するためのもので、一つの質問で深い議論になる可能性ももちろんございます。1 トピックに1 レッスン以上利用されても構いません。ご自分のペースでレッスンを受講いただければ幸いです。
6. 既にやられたトピックを別の先生と Discussion されるのもお勧めします。その場合、『先生への伝言』を通じ、“I have already done this topic with a different teacher so I would like to have a free discussion using this topic”とお書き下さい。

お役立ち表現集

事前に準備をしていた質問以外に突然思っても見なかった質問をされる場合が多くあると思います。ここではなかなか考えがまとまらなくて困ったときに役に立つ表現を3つ解説します。

1. "Can you say that again?"
意味が分かっても時間稼ぎしたいときに使います。
2. "What do you mean by ****?"
質問の一部をはっきりさせたい場合やさらなる時間稼ぎをしたい時に使います。
3. "That's a tough one! I need to think a bit. In the mean time, can you tell me what you think first?"
全く質問に対し答えが浮かばなかったときの有効な切り替えし表現です。相手の答えに対しどんどん突っ込んで聞き、相手を攻めながら自分の考えをまとめていきます。

Topic #1: Cell Phones & Teenagers
-A Social Necessity or A Dangerous Combination?-

My name is Sue. I'm 15 years old, and I'm a junior high school student. Last night, I asked my parents if I could have my own cell phone, but they said "NO". They think I'm too young to have my own phone, and they're actually worried that if I do get one, I might somehow get myself into trouble. That's so stupid! I'm not a baby – I can take care of myself. I think the only reason they don't want me to have my own cell phone is because they won't be able to eavesdrop on my conversations anymore. My father says "I didn't have my own cell phone when I was a teenager and you don't need one either!". That's ridiculous. Times have changed since then and now everyone my age has a cell phone – except me.

I'm Peter, and I'm Sue's father. I know all her friends have their own cell phones - and I think it's ridiculous. I mean, why does a teenager need a cell phone? She sees all her friends at school everyday, and if they want to reach her at night or on weekends, they can call her at home. Besides, having her own cell phone might put her at risk. If she starts receiving calls on her own cell phone, my wife and I won't be able to monitor who she is talking to. It's a dangerous world out there and my daughter is naïve – what if she starts talking to the wrong kind of people? My wife and I won't be able to protect her if we don't know who she is talking to. She thinks she can take care of herself, but I'm not going to take any chances. When she turns 18, she can have as many cell phones as she wants, but in the meantime, the answer is "NO".

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. Do you agree with Sue or with her father? Why?
2. Do you think it's really necessary for teenagers to have cell phones?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a teenager having a cell phone?
4. If you had a teenager who wanted a cell phone, would you say "YES" or "NO"? Why?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

5. What are the social consequences of Sue being the only one of her friends not to have a cell phone?
6. Peter is worried that his daughter might be in danger if she has her own cell phone. Do you agree with him, or do you think he is over-reacting?

Topic #2: Working Holiday

My name is Liz. My husband and I are on holiday at a beautiful resort in Hawaii right now. Well, I'm on holiday anyway. You see, Rick brought both his cell phone and his laptop computer with him, and since we arrived here a few days ago, he keeps checking his voice-mail and email messages, and calling his office. As soon as we wake up in the morning, the first thing he does is turn on his computer, and then he checks his messages again two or three times before lunch. It's the same thing all afternoon... we can't even relax on the beach or go sightseeing without his phone ringing and him talking to his colleagues about their important business matters. I'm so annoyed! This was supposed to be a relaxing vacation, but Rick is working almost all the time. He's been so busy at the office this past year, and I was really looking forward to spending some time alone with him in Hawaii, but even on vacation, all he ever thinks about is work-work-work.

I'm Rick. I don't know why Liz is so upset with me. She really wanted to take a vacation together, and even though I'm very busy at work right now, I conceded. Yes, I'll admit: I have been checking my voice-mail and email, and calling the office several times a day. But, I have no choice. We're in the middle of a major project, and if anything goes wrong while I'm away, there will be serious consequences. I'm trying to spend as much time as I can with my wife while we're here in Hawaii, but she has to understand: I can't just walk away from my responsibilities at work. I'm an executive with my company, and my salary provides us with a comfortable lifestyle, including this trip to Hawaii. Unfortunately, my increased responsibilities also mean that sometimes, we have to make sacrifices.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. Do you think Liz has a good reason to be upset with Rick? Why?
2. When you go on holiday, do you take your cell phone or your laptop computer with you? Why or why not?
3. Do you check your home or office messages while you are away? Why or why not?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being able to check messages while you are on holiday?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

5. Why does Rick feel that Liz should be more understanding? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
6. Who do you think is being more selfish: Liz or Rick?
7. How do you suggest they resolve their disagreement?
8. Which would you prefer:
 - A) to have a high paying job with lots of responsibility, but not be able to take holidays without "staying connected" to your office via voice-mail and email everyday
 - B) to have a low paying job with limited responsibility, but be able to take holidays without having to worry about staying in touch with your office everydayExplain your answer.

Topic #3: Office Hours

Jeff and Alex work for a software development company. They are in the same department, and they are at the same level. Their regular office hours are Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Jeff comes in everyday at about 8:45am, and leaves at exactly 5pm. He works 40 hours/week.

Alex is late almost everyday – he usually arrives around 9:15am. But, he works until 7pm or 8pm, and sometimes also on weekends. Even though he comes in about 15 minutes late everyday, with all his overtime, he actually works 50 or 60 hours/week.

They both get paid for a 40-hour workweek.

Lately, Jeff has been getting annoyed at Alex for coming in late every day, so today he confronted him about it. Alex was surprised to hear that Jeff was upset, but he doesn't think it's a big problem – especially since he works many more hours every week than Jeff does.

Read the arguments below, and discuss your opinions on this hot topic.

Jeff

Our office opens at 9am, and I just don't understand why Alex can't make an effort to arrive on time. He thinks 15 minutes is no big deal, but it's inconvenient for me. We are working together on several big projects, so if I have a question or if I need something from him, I often have to delay my work until he gets here. I realize he works late every evening, but that doesn't make his consistent tardiness acceptable. I can't work late because I have to catch a train, so I can get home early enough to spend time with my children before they go to bed. It really bugs me that Alex is late everyday.

Alex

Sure, I usually come in 15 minutes late, but I work two or three hours later than Jeff does almost every night. If you actually compare our working hours, you'll see that I work 10 or 20 hours more than he does every week. I'm single, so I don't have to rush home to a family every night. When I'm working on something, I don't like to interrupt it and leave just because it's 5pm - I prefer to keep working until I feel tired. Because I work late, I sometime feel tired in the morning, so I sleep in and catch a later train, and I get to work around 9:15am. I don't see why this is such a big deal for Jeff.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. Do you agree with Jeff or Alex? Why?
2. If Alex continues to come to work late everyday, what should Jeff do?
3. What are your regular office hours? What time do you actually arrive at work everyday, and what time do you go home? Do you ever work overtime?
4. Do any of your co-workers come to work late everyday? If so, how do you and your other co-workers feel about this? What do you think should be done about it?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

5. If one person in your office works late everyday, does it make the people who leave on time look less dedicated to their jobs? If so, do you feel pressured to also work late, just for appearances? How do you feel about this?
6. What do your co-workers do that annoys you?
7. When a co-worker does something that bothers you, what do you do about it?

Topic #4: A City Curfew
-Will it really make a difference?-

Youth crime is a growing problem in Toronto. In recent months, there have been shootings almost every weekend. Most of these shootings have involved teenage members of rival gangs. This is a serious problem in Toronto, and city officials are wondering what they can do to prevent more violence. Toronto City Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti is proposing a bylaw that will impose an 11pm curfew on kids 15 years old or younger. This would mean that kids would have to be home by 11pm every night. The parents of kids who break curfew would face expensive fines, or even the possibility of losing custody of their children, because they would be judged as “irresponsible parents”.

Read the arguments below, and discuss your opinions on this controversial topic.

Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti

No child under the age of 15 should be out at night unsupervised. When kids get together at late at night, they get into trouble. I believe parents have to be more responsible for their children. An 11pm curfew would reduce youth crime, and it would keep kids safe. Parents who allow their kids to roam freely late at night are negligent. They should be fined, and if they continue to break the law, their children should be taken away from them.

Ryan Gallant – Age 14

I can't believe this guy is actually proposing an 11pm curfew on kids my age. He's crazy! Not all teenagers are bad. My friends and I like to get together on weekends, and we never get into trouble. Sometimes we hang out at the park, or we ride our bikes around our neighborhood. We never bother anybody. A curfew won't reduce crime in the city because gang members will just ignore it. Instead of imposing a curfew on kids like me, city officials should be arresting gang members who break the law.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. Do you agree with Councillor Mammoliti or Ryan? Why?
2. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of a curfew?
3. Is there a curfew in your city?
4. Do you think a curfew would help reduce youth crime in your city? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

5. Is youth crime a problem where you live?
6. What factors do you think contribute to youth crime in your area?
7. What could be done to reduce youth crime in your area?
8. What do you think of parents who let their kids roam freely late at night?

Topic #5: Spanking

-A Necessary Form of Discipline or Child Abuse?-

Jack and Elizabeth have a two-year old son named Tommy. Lately, Tommy has been misbehaving. Many people call this age the “terrible twos”, the age when toddlers are difficult to control. In the last few weeks, he’s been breaking things around the house, writing on the walls with his crayons, throwing his food and yelling “NO!” every time his parents ask him to do something. Jack and Elizabeth are worried that this behavior will get worse as he gets older. They both agree that something has to be done, but they disagree about how they should discipline their son. Jack feels that the best way to teach him what’s right and wrong is to spank him, but Elizabeth feels that hitting a child is abusive. She would prefer to use non-physical methods of discipline, such as scolding him when he misbehaves.

Read the arguments below, and discuss your opinions on this controversial topic.

Jack (Tommy’s Father)

Tommy’s behavior is unacceptable, and we have to do something about it now, before it gets worse. The best way to teach a two-year old child not to do something is to spank him when he does it. A young child does not understand verbal scolding – that is useless. Of course, I’m not suggesting we spank him hard enough to actually hurt or injure him. But, I think a light spanking will teach him that his behavior is unacceptable and deter him from repeating it. My parents spanked me when I was a child, and I turned out just fine.

Elizabeth (Tommy’s Mother)

I believe it’s wrong to spank a child. After all, how can we teach our son non-violent behavior if we spank him? If we spank our child, we are teaching him that it’s ok to hit other people. I think the best way to handle his bad behavior is to explain to him in very simple language why his behavior is unacceptable. If he continues to misbehave, we can punish him by sending him to his room, or by not letting him have his play time. This is the best way to teach him right from wrong.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. Do you agree with Jack or Elizabeth? Why?
2. Do you have children?
 - (1) If so, do you spank them? Why or why not?
 - (2) If you don’t have children now, but you plan to have children in the future, do you think you will spank them? Why or why not?
3. How did your parents punish you, when you were a small child?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

4. Do you consider spanking a form of child abuse? Explain your answer.
5. What’s the difference between spanking and child abuse?
6. What forms of discipline do you think work best for young children, and for older children?

Topic #6: Pink or Blue?

When Raquel announced that she was going to get pregnant, she told everyone that she was going to have a girl. Everyone laughed and said that she was setting herself up to have a boy.

Nine months later, Raquel gave birth, and it was a... girl. A year later, Raquel announced again that she was going to get pregnant again. This time, she told everyone that she was going to have a boy. Nine months later, voila! A boy.

Finally, Christine, a friend of Raquel's, confronted her. How could Raquel possibly know both times what sex the baby would be before she was even pregnant?

Well, it turns out that Raquel and her husband, Rick, hadn't left everything up to nature. They had spent close to \$10,000 to help determine the sex of their babies. Raquel had visited a clinic in the U.S. and undergone its new sperm sorting method, which produced the desired results.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Before reading this article, did you know that you could pay to help determine your baby's sex?
2. If you were Christine, would you have asked your friend how she knew what sex to expect?
3. Have you heard of other ways to predetermine your baby's sex?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

4. How far would you go to predetermine the sex of your child?
5. Would you consider sperm sorting? Why or why not?
6. Do you think that there are ethical issues related to this approach? What might they be?

Topic #7: Esperanto:
The International Language

“Plian bieron, mi petas.”

It’s not English, and it’s certainly not Japanese. So, what is it? It’s Esperanto, the international language, which was created back in 1887 so that people all over the world could communicate with each other. The person who created it was a doctor named L.L. Zamenhof. He went by the name “Dr. Esperanto.” That’s how the language got its name, which means “one who hopes.”

Approximately 75% of Esperanto's vocabulary comes from Latin and Romance languages (especially French), about 20% comes from Germanic languages (German and English), and the rest comes mainly from Slavic languages (Russian and Polish) and some Greek. One aspect that makes it easier to learn than other languages is that it is phonetic. So, every word is pronounced exactly as it is spelled. There are not any "silent" letters.

Today, approximately two million people around the world speak Esperanto. Anyone interested in learning the language can take correspondence courses or study from textbooks and CDs.

(In case you’re wondering about that first sentence, it means: “Another beer, please.”)

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Before reading this article, had you ever heard of Esperanto?
2. Would you consider studying Esperanto?
3. What languages do you speak other than Japanese? What languages would you like to speak?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

4. What do you think of the idea of an “International Language”?
5. Do you think it is an idea that could catch on? Why or why not?
6. Many people consider English the International Language. What do you think?

Topic #8: To Tell or Not to Tell

Kara and Mia are 16-year-old friends.

Ring...ring...ring...

Kara: Hello.

Mia: Hi, Kara. It's Mia. How's it going?

Kara: It's okay. I'm just really tired. I don't seem to have any energy anymore. Why do you always seem so peppy?

Mia: Do you want me to let you in on a little secret?

Kara: Of course! I won't tell.

Mia: Remember how they banned diet pills with Ephedra in them last year?

Kara: Of course I do. Everyone knows that.

Mia: Well, I found a site on the Internet where I can buy them. So, I have been ordering and taking them for the last couple of months. I have lots of energy, and I'm losing weight. If you want, I can get you some.

Kara: Hmm. I'm not sure about that. I remember hearing about a lot of scary side effects when they banned them.

Mia: Oh, don't worry about that. Only once in awhile do I notice that my hands tremble and my heart feels like it skips a beat.

Kara: Wow, that sounds kind of serious. Do your parents know you are taking it?

Mia: No way! I haven't told anyone except you.

(Mother's voice in the background)

Kara: My mom's calling me for dinner. I better go.

Mia: Okay. Well, let me know what you decide.

Kara: See you tomorrow at school.

Mia: Later.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Should Kara tell anyone about what her friend is doing?
2. Have you ever broken a promise?
3. Have you ever done anything you know isn't legal?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

4. When is it okay to break a promise?
5. Would you take a chance with your health if it meant that you would get the results you wanted?
6. Have you ever been in a situation in which you worried about a friend or family member's behavior?

Topic #9: A true news story, reported in England's Manchester Evening News:

A wealthy husband and wife were convicted recently in a Manchester, England, court of law for making up an elaborate story to avoid two speeding tickets that had been issued electronically. Installed cameras videotaped their car and clocked it above the speed limit two times. Stewart and Cathryn Bromley were fined the equivalent of about \$20,000, almost 200 times the cost of the original tickets.

The Bromleys had offered an alibi, explaining that the driver of their car was a Bulgarian friend. Cathryn even made up a postcard "from" the fictitious man "to" the Bromleys that incriminated him as the driver. Then, she actually traveled 1,400 miles from her home to Bulgaria to mail it with an authentic postmark.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Have you ever done something illegal while driving (run a red light, speed)?
2. Have you ever received a traffic ticket?
3. Did you ever lie to get out of trouble?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

4. Would you ever make up an elaborate story to avoid punishment?
5. Is it ever okay to lie or defraud someone?
6. Did the Bromleys get what they deserved?

Topic #10: Food Fight

Over the past few years, there have been a number of court cases regarding cheese. Yes, the subject is cheese. Not real estate, not murder, not robbery, but cheese. The argument focuses on who should be allowed to use certain words on the packaging of their products. For example: Should only cheese from a certain region in North Central Italy be labeled Parmigiano-Reggiano? Or, should anyone be able to call the cheese they produce by that name?

According to the courts, the answer is that only companies with cheese coming from certain regions can use the term. Just this year, a U.S. company was using the word “Parmigiano” on its packages of dehydrated cheese. It turns out that the cheese was not made in Parma, Italy, but rather on a farm in Wisconsin. So, the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano, Italy’s cheese watchdog group, took the company to court and won. The Wisconsin company is no longer allowed to use the terms Parmigiano, Reggiano, or Parmigiano Reggiano, or anything similar, on their packaging. Instead, they have to use the less appealing, more generic-sounding “Parmesan.”

It isn’t a new argument. A number of years ago, it was established that only sparkling wines from a certain region in France could be called Champagne. Could Kobe beef be far behind?

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Do you think any cheese company should be allowed to use the term Parmigiano?
2. Have you ever eaten Parmigiano cheese?
3. Did you know that there was a difference between Parmesan and Parmigiano?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

4. How about Kobe beef? Should only ranchers in the Kobe region of Japan be allowed to use the word “Kobe” in their advertisements?
5. Are there any other similar examples that might cause debates? (Chicago pizza, New York pizza, Balsamic vinegar) What about ones not related to food? (Cashmere sweaters, Shetland wool)
6. In general, do you think it is fair that regions can claim terms for their own?

Topic #11: Fad Diets are Bad Diets

Introduction:

Julie is a yo-yo dieter. Whenever she starts a new diet she loses weight. Unfortunately she can never stay on a diet for very long. She always goes back to her old habit of eating fried food and she gains weight.

Julie's story:

I've tried many popular fad diets. For example, first I tried the Grapefruit Diet. I had to eat a grapefruit before every meal and eat less fried food. It was worth it because I lost two kilograms during the first week! But I got tired of eating grapefruit all the time and stopped following the Grapefruit Diet. Before I knew it, I had gained four kilograms. Next I tried the Atkin's Diet, a low carbohydrate diet. At first I enjoyed eating lots of steak and not having to count calories. I lost five kilograms. But soon I wanted to eat bread, rice, pasta and donuts again. I stopped following the Atkin's Diet and gained six kilograms.

Finally, I got tired of trying fad diets. Two weeks ago I got some advice from a nutritionist. The nutritionist taught me how to eat a healthy diet. Now I eat fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meat and dairy products (such as milk, cheese and yogurt), and whole wheat bread and pasta. In addition, I started to exercise. I go swimming twice a week and play tennis once a week. So far, I have lost two kilograms! My goal is to lose ten kilograms. If I reach my goal and keep the weight off for six months I will treat myself to a new bathing suit and a new tennis racket!

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. What kind of fad diets has Julie tried?
2. Who taught Julie how to eat a healthy diet?
3. What kind of food does Julie eat now?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

4. What is a yo-yo dieter?
5. Have you ever tried a fad diet? What was the result?
6. Do you think that Julie will reach her goal and be able to reward herself with a new bathing suit and a new tennis racket? Why or why not?

Topic #12: Why do so Many People in Denmark Speak English?

My name is John and I live in Chicago. I like to travel and have visited many foreign countries such as Spain, Japan and Denmark. However, like most Americans, I cannot speak any foreign languages. I only speak English.

When I visited Spain, the receptionist at my hotel spoke a little bit of English, but the taxi drivers and waiters in the restaurants could not speak English. When I visited Japan, the lady selling bus tickets at Narita Airport and the receptionist at my hotel spoke English, but the taxi drivers, waiters and other people could not speak English. However, I soon discovered that many people in Japan can read English so when I had to take a taxi I usually wrote down where I wanted to go.

During my visit to Denmark, I was very surprised to find that nearly everyone could speak English – the receptionist at my hotel, taxi drivers, waiters, everyone! Of course they spoke Danish when they were talking to each other, but everyone spoke to me in English. I asked a taxi driver why so many people speak English in Denmark. The taxi driver was not sure, but he said that everyone in Denmark has to study English in school. Since Denmark is a small country with only six million people, Danish companies sell many of their products in foreign countries so English is very important for business. Also, many television shows from the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada are in English with Danish subtitles at the bottom, so people are used to hearing English on television.

I think that Denmark must have a very good program for teaching children English. I wish that the U.S. and other countries had better programs for teaching foreign languages.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. What foreign countries has John visited?
2. Who could speak English in Spain and Japan?
3. Who could speak English in Denmark?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

4. Why are people in Denmark bilingual?
5. Why do you think that many people in Japan can read English but cannot speak English?
6. What do you think is the best way to learn a foreign language?

Topic #13: Slow Down and Enjoy the Sunshine

Introduction:

A snowbird is a bird that typically lives in snowy regions. However, people who move from a cold place (such as New York or Michigan) to a warm place (such as Florida or Arizona) during the winter are also called snowbirds. These people are usually retired and more than 60 years old.

Tom's story:

My name is Tom. I live in Miami where the weather is almost always sunny and warm. My career is very important to me and I am the sales manager at the headquarters of a very large company. Since I am very busy at work I don't have much time to spend outdoors in Miami's warm climate. Also, since I have to work a lot I am always in a hurry. Sometimes I get annoyed at the many elderly retired people who spend the winter in Miami. They usually only stay here for a few months during the winter, and then they go back to their homes up north for the summer. We call these people snowbirds. Since they are retired they are not very busy – they drive slowly and always seem to be blocking the aisles in the grocery store.

Last weekend I finally had time to go for a bike ride. It was a very nice day and there were a lot of people on the bike trail. After riding for about 5 kilometers it started to rain. I was very sad and disappointed. I turned around and started to ride home as fast as I could. When I passed an elderly man who was riding slowly even though it was raining, he smiled and asked, "What's your hurry?" At first I thought to myself, doesn't he realize that it's raining? But as I continued to ride in the rain, I thought about the old man. He was smiling and seemed to enjoy the rain as much as he enjoyed the sunshine. I thought about my life and how I am always hurrying and I thought about the old man taking his time and enjoying the rain. Somehow, the snowbirds in Miami enjoy the sunshine even when it rains. Maybe I should slow down too.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. What is a snowbird?
2. Where does Tom work?
3. What did Tom do last weekend?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

4. Why do the snowbirds sometimes annoy Tom?
5. What does the following sentence mean: "Somehow, the snowbirds in Miami enjoy the sunshine even when it rains."
6. Do you think that Tom will relax and ride his bicycle more often?
7. Do you relax enough or are you always in a hurry? What do you do to relax?

Topic #14: The Changing Face of America

My name is Kathy and I live in Atlanta, Georgia. Lately I have noticed that when I call the bank or the telephone company I can choose whether I want to speak to someone in English or Spanish. In addition, many companies and the government now provide information in at least two languages: English and Spanish. I read in the newspaper that Hispanics are now the largest minority group in the United States and African-Americans are the second largest minority group. There are more than 40 million Hispanics in the U.S. and about half of them are from Mexico. Other Hispanics come from Latin American countries such as Cuba, Guatemala and Honduras.

My grandmother was born in Germany and she moved to the United States with her family when she was fifteen years old. She could not speak any English. Many immigrants moved to the U.S. from Germany, Sweden and other countries and they had to learn English as quickly as possible. I began to think about whether companies and the government should provide information to people in Spanish. Then I thought about my friend, Maria. Her mother was born in Mexico and she moved to the U.S. when she was forty years old. After living in the U.S. for ten years Maria's mother still does not speak English very well. But Maria is fluent in both English and Spanish. Maria plans to teach her children both English and Spanish. Maria is very proud to be an American, but she knows a lot about Mexico and enjoys celebrating Mexican cultural holidays.

I thought about my family. No one in my family speaks German and I do not know anything about the German culture. Maria is lucky to know a lot about two countries and two cultures, instead of just one.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. How many Hispanics live in the U.S.?
2. What countries do Hispanics come from?
3. Where is Kathy's grandmother from?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

4. Why did Kathy's grandmother learn English?
5. Do you think that it was difficult for Maria to learn both English and Spanish? Why or why not?
6. Do you think that companies in the U.S. should only provide information in English? Do you think that the U.S. government should provide information in Spanish and other languages?



Topic #15: Aging Parents

Introduction:

Cindy and Luke live in Houston, Texas. Cindy's mother, Elizabeth, lives in Austin, Texas, which is about 260 kilometers west of Houston. It takes about three and a half hours to drive from Houston to Austin. Elizabeth is seventy years old, so Cindy and Luke want her to move to Houston.

Cindy:

I am worried about my mother. Last year she fell and broke her arm. She has recovered, but I am concerned that she will have another accident or become ill. I would like her to move to Houston so that we can check on her more often. Our children would also benefit from seeing their grandmother more frequently. If she gets sick or hurts herself again I would like to be able to help her as much as possible. But it will be very difficult if she is in Austin. I work full-time, plus I have two active children. I think that it would be better for everyone if she moved to Houston.

Elizabeth:

I appreciate Cindy's concern, and although I would enjoy seeing her and my grandchildren more often, I am very happy living in Austin. I have lived here for many years and I have a lot of friends. I volunteer at the library once a week, I take walks in the beautiful parks and I sing in the church choir. Houston is a very big, unfamiliar city and it would be difficult for me to adjust to living there. Right now my health is fine, and my doctor thinks that as long as I am active I will remain healthy.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level:

1. Where does Elizabeth live?
2. How long does it take to drive from Houston to Austin?
3. Is Elizabeth healthy or is she ill?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels:

4. Why do Cindy and Luke want Elizabeth to move to Houston?
5. Why does Elizabeth want to stay in Austin?
6. Do you think that Elizabeth should move to Houston? Why or why not?
7. If Elizabeth moves to Houston in the future, do you think that she should live in her own apartment or with Cindy and Luke? Why?

Topic #16: Office Politics

Overview

Building and maintaining good relationships in the workplace take effort. A positive, professional relationship includes good communication skills and having a shared vision of what is important. However, this does not always happen in the workplace. How can we work toward improving our relationships? How can we manage difficult situations?

Frank says:

“I’ve just taken on the position of supervisor. My contract is a year in length. I like the job, but the people who work under my supervision just don’t work fast enough. They don’t understand the importance of being speedy. If the work is lacking somewhat in quality, I don’t mind. No one will notice anyway. It needs to be completed quickly and efficiently! These workers take too much time going over unimportant details. I’ve been in this business for over 20 years. I know what I’m talking about!”

Paulo says:

“Sherine, my supervisor, has taken maternity leave and won’t return to our office for a year. I have a new supervisor now. His name is Frank. He assigns projects without giving me enough time to complete them. When I ask for an extension on the deadline, he says, “You’re not working fast enough. Pick up the pace! Let’s move it.” I don’t think he understands how much work is truly involved in doing these projects. It’s important for me to do my work well. I don’t want the quality of my work to suffer just so I can meet his deadline. He doesn’t seem to care if the work is sloppy or not. I have tried to talk to him about this, but he doesn’t seem to be a good listener. I didn’t realize what a great supervisor Sherine was until she was gone. I can’t wait for her to come back!!”

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Describe Frank’s attitude toward work and his workers.
2. Who would you rather work for, Frank or Paulo? Why?
3. Would you be comfortable working for Frank? Why or why not?
4. What advice would you give to Frank? What advice would you give to Paulo?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

5. What are the signs of a good listener? How could Frank become a better listener?
6. How would you describe the personalities of Frank and Paulo?
7. What steps could Paulo take to help improve communication between himself and Frank?

Topic #17: Sharing Personal Information at Work

Overview

How much of our personal lives should we share at work? What information should we keep to ourselves? If you work full time, you spend an average of 35 to 45 hours a week or more with your co-workers. This means you spend more time with your colleagues than with your family. Isn't it natural to want to talk about issues not related to work? After all, we are social beings.

Sandra's Situation

Sandra has worked as a marketing and sales director for over ten years. She gets along with most of her colleagues and sometimes goes out for lunch with them. They share some details about their personal lives, but not all. Some of her colleagues attended her wedding a few years ago.

Sandra says:

"I'm pregnant! I found out last week. My husband and I are very happy. We have wanted to start a family for some time now. We have decided not to tell anyone until a little more time goes by. Of course, we will soon share the news with our family and friends. I have been thinking about when to tell my boss and my colleagues. I think I want to wait a few months. There is a new position within my company I am hoping to be promoted. I think I have a good chance because I have a reputation as a hard worker, but I am concerned that if my boss knows I'm pregnant, he won't promote me."

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Do you talk about your personal life at work? How much do you share with your colleagues?
2. How much of our personal lives should we share at work?
3. What happens when people share too much? Too little?
4. When should Sandra tell her boss and colleagues she is pregnant?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

5. Do you think Sandra's fear is unfounded?
6. What would you do in Sandra's situation?
7. If you were Sandra's boss and knew she was pregnant, would you promote her or not? Why or why not?

Topic #17: Stress and the Working Life

Davina has just been released from the hospital after having open-heart surgery. The doctors have told her she needs to learn to lead a less stressful life if she wants to recover. They recommend she switch from full time to part time work. Davina has agreed that she needs to make changes to her lifestyle and diet, but she loves her work! She has promised herself, her physicians, and her family that she will make an effort to change. She knows it won't be easy. She's always been a hard worker.

Davina's son, Jeff, is proud of his mother. She received her MBA and has been very successful in her career. Yet, Jeff wishes she would change her lifestyle radically. He is very worried about her. He thinks she should slow down. She should stop and smell the flowers! His mother is always on the go and rushing around trying to do everything. Now that she has had surgery, Jeff believes his mother should retire early and enjoy her remaining years. He is afraid she will have another heart attack if she doesn't stop working. He knows she has saved a lot of money and has a good pension plan. He would also be willing to help support her financially at any time in the future.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Do you think Davina will really change her life and work styles?
2. How would you describe Davina's personality?
3. What do you think of Jeff's point of view?
4. Should Davina take Jeff's advice? Why or why not?
5. How do you deal with stress? What do you do to relax?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

6. Name some things people can do to reduce stress while at work (at the office) and outside of work.
7. What changes would recommend to Davina if you were her doctor? Give specific examples.
8. Do you think society expects people to work too much? How many hours a week do you think people should work? At what age should people retire from working?

Topic #19: Just Got Fired!

Harold was called into his manager's office this morning. His manager Bill said, "I'm really sorry to tell you this Harold, but we are experiencing difficult financial times. Our company just doesn't have the money to keep all of our staff. There are many good employees here. You're one of them. We would really like to keep you on board, working for us, but we just can't afford it. We have to cut back. I'm terribly sorry Harold, but the company has to let you go."

Harold was shocked. He didn't know what to say or do. He said, "Of course, I understand." He felt numb. Then he packed up his belongings from his desk and left his office. Harold walked around downtown for the remainder of the day. How will he tell his family? What will he say? His new wife Judy will be upset. They married three months ago and are saving money for a house.

Two weeks have gone by since Harold has been fired. He still has not told anyone in his family or any of his friends that he lost his job. He feels embarrassed and ashamed. Harold is depressed. Everyday he gets up, eats breakfast, and leaves his apartment. Then, he pretends to go to work. Instead, he goes for a long walk in a city park, drinks coffee, and reads the newspaper. Harold knows he is living a lie. He has looked for other jobs, but they all seem to be low paying and uninteresting.

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Do you empathize with Harold? Why or why not?
2. What should Harold do?
3. What do you think Harold's wife Judy will say and do when she finds out Harold is not working?
4. Do you know anyone who has been in the same situation? What happened?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

5. What might help Harold overcome his feelings of embarrassment and shame?
6. Should employers be required to follow a certain kind of protocol when firing someone?
7. Have you ever had to fire someone? Have you ever had to give comfort to someone who was fired? If so, what did you say?

Topic #20: Thinking of a Career Change

Tom graduated from university 15 years ago. He is an accountant. Tom earns a good salary, has benefits (medical and dental), and has three weeks of paid vacation a year. He gets along with his colleagues and his supervisors. He likes his office and the fact that he has a great view of the city from his window. Overall, Tom is happy with his working environment, his work, and his career. Lately, however, he has been spending a lot of time thinking about starting a new career as a restaurant owner. He has always enjoyed cooking and fine cuisine, and the idea of opening a restaurant excites him! Of course, he enjoys his current position, but he is increasingly feeling unchallenged and bored at work. Tom is nervous about discussing his idea with his wife because he is afraid she will not understand.

Sue is Tom's wife. She takes care of their two young children at home. Their oldest daughter, Katy, is three. She will start school next year. The younger daughter, Emily, is two years old. Sue graduated from university with a degree in science and used to work in a research lab until she had their first child. She is happy in her role as a full time mother who stays home. In fact, she prefers this lifestyle to her former research work!

Discussion Questions – Beginner Level

1. Should Tom tell Sue that he is thinking about a career change? Why or why not?
2. If you were Sue, what would your response be to Tom's new idea?
3. Should Sue support and encourage Tom's career change? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever thought about changing careers? What happened? What was the outcome?

Discussion Questions – Intermediate to Advanced Levels

5. If you could give advice to Tom, what would you say? If you could give advice to Sue, what would you say?
6. How important is it for people to follow their dreams? How important is it to be practical? How can you find a good balance?
7. What do you think of the idea of Sue going back to work in order to financially support the family while Tom tries to open a restaurant business?