

Lesson 30: Interrupting & Getting Back on Track

Knowing how to interrupt is an important skill in social English. The way you phrase your interruption will make a big difference in how it is received – so in today's lesson, you'll learn various phrases for interrupting politely.

Natalie and Rachel are participating in a meeting about how to increase sales during the holiday season. There are several other people in the meeting, but Natalie and Rachel have some strong opinions about the best way to proceed. Listen to their conversation to learn various phrases for interrupting.

Natalie: Regarding our holiday discounts, I suggest offering 20% off our newest products during the month of December, and -

Rachel: Excuse me - could I interrupt you for a moment?

Natalie: Let me just finish my thought - um, as I was saying, 20% off our newest items and 30% off the rest of our products. Then we can place advertisements in -

Rachel: Sorry - could I just say something before you go on? I'm not so sure discounts are a good strategy. It might get more sales, but our profit margins will be tiny. There's no point getting more customers if -

Natalie: Could I jump in there? Rachel, you might not know this since you're new to the company, but we actually did the discounts last year and it was very successful. Sales went up by 400%, so I think we should stick with a proven strategy that -

Rachel: Wait a minute - you keep talking about sales, but have you factored in all the costs of advertising the holiday promotions? I want to know what the final profit was, because otherwise -

Natalie: Well - could I add something here? The initial profits were not that high, but it's still beneficial because a lot of the new customers who bought items on sale will then return and make additional purchases at full price, so it ends up -

Rachel: Sorry, let me just ask - do you have evidence that customers actually do that? Or are you only speculating? Just because everyone else offers big Christmas discounts doesn't mean that we need to -

Natalie: Hold on - the fact that everyone else offers discounts means that we should do it too, because shoppers have come to expect holiday sales. If we don't, we'll miss out on a big opportunity because people will just buy from some other store. So it's not just about the numbers, it's also about keeping a good image in the eyes of the public and -

Rachel: Okay - I just want to say that maybe we should try other ways of attracting customers during the holiday season, not just discounts, which is what everyone does. If we do something a little different, we'll stand out, and people will tell their friends about -

Natalie: May I have a word? I really don't think it's a good idea to try experimental stuff at the moment; almost half of our annual revenue comes from the Christmas season, so if we try something that doesn't work, it'll be a big problem financially. We shouldn't risk -

Rachel: Could I say something here? It's *exactly* this type of thing that keeps the company from growing. If we never try anything new, how can we possibly -

Natalie: I'm sorry to interrupt, Rachel, but we seem to be getting off the point. We can discuss the overall strategy for growth at another time. Now, where were we? To get back to what I was saying...

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

In this dialogue, neither Natalie nor Rachel seem to be able to let each other finish their sentences! Of course, this is an exaggerated example to show various forms of interrupting - in real life, it would not be polite to interrupt so frequently. However, if you do need to interrupt someone else, here are some phrases you can use.

It's common to start with "excuse me" or "sorry" to make the interruption more polite. Then you can follow with a phrase like "could I say..." or "I just want to say..." Here are some examples:

- "Excuse me – could I say something here?"
- "Excuse me – could I interrupt you for a moment?"
- "May I have a word?"
- "Sorry to interrupt, but I have something to say on this point."

- “Sorry - can I jump in here?”
- “Sorry, but I just wanna say that...”
- “Before you go on, let me just say that...”
- “Before we move on to the next point, I'd like to say that...”
- “If I can just come/jump in here...”

The word "just" in some of these phrases functions as a way to minimize the interruption and emphasize the fact that you are only going to make a small intrusion.

Instead of using the verb "say," you can also use **ask, suggest, point out, add, mention**, or other verbs that describe more specifically the comment you are going to make.

There are a few interrupting phrases that are a little less polite and more direct. These should only be used with people you know well; they are a little too informal for a professional setting:

- “Hold on.”
- “Wait a minute.”

Finally, we have some phrases for interrupting impolitely. These phrases can be used during an argument:

- “What are you talking about?”
- “But I already said...”
- “Listen to me.”

If someone tries to interrupt you, but you do not want to permit the interruption, you can use one of these phrases:

- “Let me finish.”
- “Hear me out.”
This is an informal phrase meaning that you want the person to listen to everything you are going to say
- “Just a minute, I haven't finished yet.”
- “One second, let me just finish my thought.”

At the end of the conversation, Natalie uses some phrases for bringing the meeting back to the original topic of discussion. Here are some phrases for getting back on track:

- **“Now, where were we? / where was I?”**
- **“To get back to what I was saying... / As I was saying...”**

If the other person is talking about something that is not related to the current topic, you can say:

- **“I'm not sure that's very relevant to the topic at hand.”**
- **“We seem to be getting off the point.”**

Finally, to delay the discussion of a certain point until later, use these phrases:

- **“We'll be talking about that later. / I'll come to that point later.”**
Use these phrases when you will discuss the issue later in the same meeting
- **“We can talk about that another time. / Can we leave (or save) that discussion for another time?”**
Use these phrases when you want to delay the discussion of the issue until a different day in the future

All of these phrases are useful for making interruptions during a meeting or discussion - but there are other situations in which it might be necessary to interrupt someone. Here are some phrases for...

Interrupting two other people talking (when you only need to talk to one of them):

- **“Excuse me - can I talk to you for a second?”**
- **“Sorry to interrupt, but can I ask you a quick question?”**

Interrupting someone who is busy with an activity, like reading or working:

- **“Hi - sorry to bother you, but...”**
You can use this phrase with people you don't know, for example, if you need to ask for some information.
- **“I need to talk to you for a minute - is this a good time?”**
This phrase is good for using with your co-workers, to ask about their availability at the moment.

Interrupting someone who is talking to you, when you need to leave:

- **“Sorry to cut you off, but I've actually gotta run.”**
- **“(Name), I'd love to hear about it a little later, but right now I gotta go.”**

This phrase is good for saying to someone who is in the middle of telling you a long story, or a long description of something.

“Gotta” is an informal way to say “need to...” It’s very common in spoken English.

You’ve finished Lesson 30! Now take the quiz to practice the phrases from this lesson.

Quiz – Lesson 30

1) Excuse me - _____ I say something here?

- A. do
- B. could
- C. will

2) May I _____ a word?

- A. get
- B. have
- C. take

3) Before you _____, let me just say that...

- A. get in
- B. go on
- C. take over

4) Sorry - can I just _____ in here?

- A. pop
- B. drop
- C. jump

5) Just a minute, I haven't _____ yet.

- A. completed
- B. done
- C. finished

6) One second - _____ me out

- A. hear
- B. let
- C. listen

7) Now, _____ were we?

- A. how
- B. when
- C. where

8) We seem to be getting off the _____.

- A. area
- B. point
- C. thought

9) Can we _____ that discussion for another time?

- A. leave
- B. make
- C. wait

10) Can I ask you a _____ question?

- A. fast
- B. quick
- C. short

11) Hi - sorry to _____ you, but could you tell me what time it is?

- A. annoy
- B. bother
- C. distract

12) Sorry to _____, but I've gotta run to my piano lesson.

- A. cut you off
- B. get you away
- C. take you out

Lesson 30 Quiz – Answers

1.B 2.B 3.B 4.C 5.C 6.A 7.C 8.B 9.A 10.B 11.B 12.A