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UNEX Cultivating Oral Expression



Title: Punctuation matters

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Title:

Keywords: *to be used after in search function on the website* **#speaking, #oral expression #punctuation**

Duration: *5-20 minutes, the teacher decides how much time needs to be devoted to the task, depending on students' skills and length of the text to be used.*

Description:

The idea of the task is to focus students' attention on punctuation marks in texts and how they affect the delivery of a text and sometimes its meaning. The task aims at making them realize why punctuation matters: because it can radically alter the meaning of a text, because it helps readers to understand what writers are trying to say and, because it helps writers to be clear in what they are trying to communicate.

Objectives:

1. focus on punctuation marks
2. practice delivery skills using appropriate punctuation, intonation, pauses
3. practice speaking skills
4. encourage using punctuation marks in their own texts

Activity(ies) (Stages):

- **Warm-up**

Let students discuss differences in meaning between pairs of sentences with the same words but different punctuation marks, help when necessary using appropriate intonation, encouraging students to read the sentences out loud.

Example sentences:

Let's eat Grandma! Let's eat, Grandma!

Twenty five-dollar bills. Twenty-five dollar bills.
I want to thank my parents, Tiffany and God. I want to thank my parents, Tiffany, and God.
Most of the time, travellers worry about their luggage. Most of the time travellers worry about their luggage.
That's all. I've finished! That's all I've finished!

- **Core activities**

Students are given a set of sentences written without punctuation marks. The teacher reads the same sentences (with punctuation marks) with the intonation, pauses and appropriate rhythm. Students' task is to add punctuation marks so that the meaning of their sentences matches the one they've heard their teacher read. Then students compare their versions in pairs or small groups and after receiving feedback from the teacher (eg. by displaying the correct punctuation on board) they practice reading the sentences paying attention to the punctuation marks that have been added in the previous stage of the task.

Alternative approach: If students already are conscious of the importance of punctuation they may be given a set of sentences where they add punctuation on their own. Then, they read the same sentences in pairs paying attention to intonation, pausing as punctuation marks indicate, comparing at the same time whether they added punctuation marks in the same places or not, and how it affected the meaning they communicated.

- Feedback from the students – have a short discussion on their perception of the task; whether they found it useful.

Tips for trainers

Make sure the sentences you've chosen for the task will not be too difficult for the students' level; in the 'alternative approach' task- the best idea is to choose such examples which are open for interpretation- where punctuation actually changes the meaning of the sentence.

List of resources, materials etc.



Handouts for students with sentences where they will have to add punctuation marks.

Pens/ pencils.

Board, projector for displaying correct punctuation in the sentences read by the teacher.

Evaluation/Feedback

Have the students found the task useful?

Have they been able to complete the task?

Have they become more aware of the importance of punctuation?

Have they adapted their intonation to the punctuation marks used in the task?