

Lesson Plan – Talking about advertising

This lesson was created for Intermediate level students but could be adapted for other levels. It is a two hour lesson but depending on the students could vary.

The individual stages of the lesson can be varied or even omitted, but have been designed to move the class from short activities in which they build and explore their ideas on a topic, to longer activities allowing free expression of these ideas. Although I encourage its use, I don't compel students to reproduce language learned in the early part of the class because I am firmly of the opinion that free and open expression is the best way to improve fluency.

Vocabulary lead in

- I draw a circle in the middle of the board and write some words around it, for example, revenue, profit, market research, publicity, prime time, full page, classified, flyer and ask the class to guess the theme, i.e. the missing word in the middle. Invariably, intermediate students get the answer quickly enough, so we focus on the words, and add more, to get everybody fully on topic.
- Then I give them some sentences (see Appendix) and ask them to try to deduce the meaning of the bold words from the context. This can be challenging but feel free to amend the document and introduce easier lexis.
- We feed back as a whole group and I give any guidance necessary.

Advertising doesn't pay

- I give the class (or project onto the screen, wall etc.) a short anecdote about a man who refuses to advertise and ask them to discuss its message, in pairs.
- Consider, a man wakes up in the morning after sleeping on an advertised bed in advertised pyjamas. He will bathe in an advertised bath, wash with advertised soap, shave with an advertised razor, have a breakfast of advertised juice, cereal and toast which was toasted in an advertised toaster, put on advertised clothes and look at the time on his advertised watch.
- He will drive to work in an advertised car, sit at an advertised computer, drink his favourite advertised drink and write with his advertised pen. Yet this man hesitates to advertise, saying that advertising does not pay. Finally, when it is too late and his unadvertised business goes broke, he will then advertise it for sale.
- Generally, the response is that advertising is very important for companies, and that without it business is not possible. And although I'm not known for my sympathy for the marketing men and women of this world, I am generally pleased to get this from my students, as it sets the agenda for a successful conversation.

What advertised products do you have?

- I ask students in pairs to think, and speak honestly about all the things they have in their house that have been advertised. Perhaps they could say what they have, how it was advertised, and who bought it. Many find at this stage that they don't have 'anything to say', but a little prompting does tend to remind them, even something as mundane as washing powder can give us something to talk about.

- It could be as few as two or as many as ten minutes until students run out of things to say but I don't try to stretch things out, this is just a short introduction to a long lesson and there is plenty more to talk about. But I am interested to know what's been said, so for this reason, and to lead the group to the next stage, we have a brief chat as a group to summarise.
- My questions are carefully chosen to lead into the next topic. I may ask who bought the item, or more importantly, where you / they saw it advertised. I write these on the board. This sets us up nicely for stage 3.

How to advertise

- In small groups, perhaps fours, students think of as many ways as they can in a minute to advertise. There are scores of possible answers but usually we come up with about 12. This is easily enough, because the same groups will then focus briefly on each method and discuss its effectiveness. What is each method used to advertise? Could it be used to advertise something else, for example, would you pay for a slot on prime time TV to advertise for a flatmate? (Somebody always says yes to this, just for fun of course).
- We finish this stage by writing the main means of advertising on the board with a short list of benefits, in note form. I share this task with the class, many students love writing on the board.
- Then I give students a short list of situations (see Appendix) and ask them in their groups to devise a strategy for advertising in each. Basically, I ask them to decide what would be the best way to advertise in each case and why. As you can see, there are a range of situations and an enthusiastic class will, encouraged by you, enjoy discussing a range of options and implications for each.
- Depending on time, I split the groups up and ask individuals to share their ideas, subsequently feeding back to their original groups with a view to revising their answers. Generally there is no change of position, generally they have agreed the most reasonable course of action.

Is this good advertising?

- I put the students back in pairs and explain that I am going to give them some ads for two minutes per ad. I give them the first one each and quickly write some questions on the board. I generally use advertising from magazines or the internet, and am sure to select a range of styles, including one or two quite cryptic choices. After a couple of minutes, change pictures and pass them around the circle (or along the row etc).

1. What can you see in this ad? (Try to avoid students answering Question 2 at this stage)
2. What is the ad for?
3. How do you know?
4. Is it easy to tell?
5. Is the ad effective?
6. How?
7. Does it make you want to buy this product or service?

- To summarise this I take the pictures back and ask them to tell me their answers briefly, focusing on their answers for Question 2. Often it can come as quite a surprise. What they thought was an ad for a holiday in Spain turns out to be an ad for toothpaste. A great source of classroom amusement.

Ethics - Debate

- Now as a group we discuss some of the approaches to advertising from the examples in **Is this good advertising?** I ask pairs to think of five disadvantages, or negative aspects of advertising and to be ready to report these back to the group, often at this stage, we don't have a lot of spare time, and the final activity will require preparation in order to be truly effective.
- When I hear the students' verdicts I often find they miss the point, which is fine of course, not least as at this stage of the lesson they generally express their views very eloquently. Suggestions like advertising is annoying are valid opinions, but to prepare the class for our final debate, I need to steer the class towards the 'morals' of advertising by asking such questions as, is advertising always factually correct? Do people receive the right information about products? Does advertising put pressure on individuals in any way?
- Then I divide the class into As and Bs. I tell them that the advertising executives are making big profits while ordinary people are struggling. I explain that parents with small children are put under pressure to pay though the nose (I don't say that bit) for toys their children demand. And I ask them what they have to say about it. The first person to offer an answer, however tentatively, gets to choose their group's role, advertisers or parents.
- Then I hand out the debate roles (see Appendix) to the As and the Bs, who in ten minutes work together to prepare their arguments. I monitor and give ideas where necessary.
- After ten minutes I bring the class together and arrange them either into fours (two As and two Bs), or into two facing groups. I prefer the latter, but for a class with more than 10 students it can deprive the quieter ones of their chance to speak.
- And this stage orchestrates itself. I have never needed to intervene or take control, and as I save the corrections for after, it can be allowed to flow until it runs out of energy. Any input you choose to make will depend entirely on your class and your teaching style.

Conclusion and Corrections

- I often use corrections as a way of concluding a topic and lesson, simply by combining some errors with further questions about the point being made. For example, a student may say:
- You should to consider poor families
- I wouldn't name the student specifically (they usually know who they are anyway), but instead of asking students to correct the mistake, I quietly change it on the board and then ask the class, for example, why should they consider poor families?
- And this usually rounds things off nicely.

Note about correction

- Some of you may apply correction regularly to students and I know there are arguments in favour of this. I also correct quite directly at times, but in a conversation lesson I avoid it in most cases, certainly during the later stages.
- I explained this to a group of students once who were curious to know why. So as well as explaining the difference between fluency and accuracy, I spoke briefly about their responsibility to correct themselves.

- To this end, I wrote a few mistakes on the board the group had made, and asked them to correct them, which they all did instantly.
- In the light of this, I asked them why they needed me to correct mistakes when they knew the error themselves.
- If Intermediate students need a teacher to stop them and point out to them that **should to go** is incorrect they are in the wrong class. And if we are going to stop students to teach them elementary grammar each time they slip up, we'll only slow their progress even more.
- Students need to learn to listen to themselves and correct themselves. That is something most will never do in a teacher dependent classroom.

Suggestions for Follow on Activities

- Students review a range of 'slogans' (see Appendix) and write convincing sales pitches for something, which they attempt to sell to the class. I usually give out a range of choices, including Ferrari, Lemon tree, local football team season ticket, weekend for two in the city you happen to be in, apartment in central London etc. They should be encouraged to be creative, what's wrong with saying that Maradona plays for the local football team?
- Students read ads in a newspaper or magazine and design alternatives.
- Students advertise the school.
- Students think and talk about how advertising has changed over 50 years, and how it will look in the future.
- Students write and perform a TV ad for something, preferably something funny like a trip to the moon. You can film this and other classes can come and see it.

Appendix

Vocabulary Sentences

In pairs, discuss the meaning of the words in **bold**. Try to understand from the context if you are not sure:

The company had a new product to sell so it decided to **run an ad** to get some business

Many adverts are only effective because they **persuade** people that they need products or services when in reality they don't

Sometimes advertising is **deceptive**, you can't believe a word they tell you

Many people **try to keep up with the Jones'**, so they are often very keen for people to see them buying the latest things

Some of the claims made in TV adverts are **implausible**, I'll never know how people **fall for them**

"This new product of ours, it's good, but if we don't **plug it** on TV we won't sell it."

The company had just enough money in their budget to buy a **slot** on prime time TV, but only for ten seconds

Advertising Situations

<p>You want to sell a new type of mobile phone. You have decided to advertise on TV. Decide when you want your ad to be broadcast so it can be seen by the maximum number of appropriate people.</p>	<p>You have just opened a new local flower shop. You don't have a big budget so you need to think carefully about how and where to advertise. You need to decide how and where to advertise.</p>
<p>You want a new flatmate. You must decide how to advertise so it will be seen by the type of person you want to live with.</p>	<p>You have invented a new kind of cooker, and you want to market this. You have plenty of money so you can use different media to advertise. Decide which two serve you best and why.</p>
<p>You want to sell your house but not using an estate agent. It is only a small house so the buyer will probably come from the local area. How will you advertise?</p>	<p>You want to advertise your company. It is not a new company but you lost money last month and you want new customers. You make plastic bottles for fizzy drinks. Decide who the customers are, and how to attract them.</p>

You are the manager of an advertising agency and recently you have been responsible for advertising children's toys. Your company took the decision to advertise a range of popular toys on TV during the period before a popular national holiday.

NOTE – you do not work for the toy company, you are in advertising and the toy company is using you for publicity.

But some parents are angry with you. They say you have deliberately exploited their easily-led children with such persuasive advertising that they have demanded toys that the parents cannot afford.

Prepare your case. Here are some of the things you might say:

- You do not force anybody to buy the products
- If the advertising is so bad, why let children watch TV at these times?
- You believe that your products are educational and necessary for the children's intellectual development
- You deny that your ads are over-persuasive

Now think of some more things you can say:

You are the parent of two young children, 7 and 6 years old. You are a devoted parent who would move mountains to make your children happy, but you have a limited budget, and to be honest, the recent advertising campaign to sell children's toys has caused you problems. Because the ads are so persuasive, your children are demanding toys you cannot afford.

So you go to see the manager of the agency to argue the case of parents everywhere.

Here are some things you can say:

- You think it is scandalous that so much pressure is put on innocent children to be in with the crowd
- You think that it is unfair that so much money is being made when parents such as you are struggling
- You think the adverts should be later in the evening so adults can decide what to buy without pressure from the children
- You want the manager to understand that children do not realise that their parents have limited funds

Now think of some more things you can say:

Advertising Slogans

Can we interest you in a ... ?

All the smart money is going on ...

This is a very popular item.

Perhaps you would like to consider ...

Keeps you feeling and looking young

How could you be without a ... ?

You're never too old / young for a ...

An eye-pleasing item

Enjoy the amazing beauty of ...

Make an impression with ...

Blends beauty with performance

You can't lose with a ...

Sure to attract admiring looks

You'll display yours with pride

A practical choice