Washing clothes

Language level: Intermediate (B1) +
Learner type: Teens; Adults
Time: 60 - 90 minutes
Activity: Listening; Writing
Topic: Housework; Listening & reading strategies
Language: Describing a process; Register (formal vs. informal)
Materials: Worksheet
Preparation, materials and equipment

For each student, make a copy of the Workshop on page 6.

Lesson plan

1. Write the following items on the board:

   • Different groups
   • Somewhere else
   • Lack of facilities
   • Complications
   • Mistake
   • Appropriate places

2. Tell students that these words and phrases have come from a scientific text. Ask students if they can guess what the text is about.

3. Tell students that you are going to read the text to them and they have to work out what it is about. Slowly read out the text on the Worksheet and finish with the question, "So how do you do yours?"

   Note that for the activity to work, it is vital that you do not reveal the topic or set the task at this stage.

4. Your students will probably stare at you blankly. Ask them if they would like to hear the text again. If so, read it a second time, again without telling them what it is about. Clarify any unknown language and write it on the board as you go along.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrange = organise</th>
<th>Sufficient = enough</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Due to = because of</td>
<td>Lack = absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherwise = if not</td>
<td>Pretty well set = more or less ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the short run = at the time</td>
<td>Arise = happen</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. Ask students for their answers. Alternatively, ask them to write down their answers without shouting them out. Read the text a third and even a fourth time if necessary. This is an exercise in intensive listening.
6. If students are still unable to identify the topic, play hangman with the following grid:

| The text is about _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ |

(Answer = washing clothes)

7. Ask students why the activity is so difficult. Tell them that there are at least three reasons and do your best to elicit and discuss them (see answers on the next page).

The task is difficult for the following reasons:

I **Lexis**: Words, expressions and lexis that are associated with washing clothes have been avoided. This makes it very difficult to infer information.

II **Register**: Listeners are told that the text comes from a scientific paper and the register of some of the language is formal (procedure, sufficient, lack of facilities, complications can arise). We probably wouldn’t expect such a text to be about the trivial topic of washing clothes. This is misleading.

III **No schema activation**: Students were not told beforehand what the text is about. This is a very unnatural way of doing things. Usually in life, we are given an initial framework within which we can place the information that follows. For example:
- In conversation, turns generally have a relevance to what was said before.
- Book covers and film posters give us clues about the genre and content of the products that they advertise.
- In newspapers, headlines, summary paragraphs and images guide us.
- We read synopses of talks and presentations before attending.
- Before a lecture, the lecturer may give us an outline of what he/she is going to speak about.
- Before handing over to a reporter, a TV/radio presenter will give us the basic who, what, where, when and why of a story.

8. Give out copies of the **Worksheet** and ask students to complete task 1.

9. Let students share and compare their ideas before going over the answers (see next page for answers).
Possible answers to task 1:

- **Different groups** (whites, colours, delicates)
- **Somewhere else** (a laundrette)
- **Facilities** (a washing machine, a drier)
- **Complications** (running colours, shrinking clothes)
- **Different groups** (underwear, shirts, T-shirts, etc.)
- **A mistake** (a red sock in the whites, temperature too high)
- **Appropriate places** (drawers, wardrobe)

10. Ask students to do the second task on the **Worksheet**. Make sure that students understand their task. They must:

- Rewrite the text in informal English so that it sounds more natural.
- Make specific reference to the items/ideas from step 9 (see above box.)

Note that you may have to give students some ideas to get them started. See example text on the next page for ideas.

11. Let students compare their texts and allow them to make any changes to what they have written.

12. Read out the informal version of the text below. Let students compare it with their own versions. Read it as many times as your students want.

*The procedure is actually quite simple. First you sort your laundry into different piles, for example, whites, colours and delicates. Of course, one pile might be enough. It depends on how much there is to do.*

*If you have to go to a laundrette because you don’t have a washing machine at home, then that is the next step. Don’t put all of your laundry in the same machine. In the short run, this might not seem important. But if you mix your loads, you could end up with pink shirts that are supposed to be white. Mistakes like these can be expensive.*

*When you have finished, sort your clean clothes into different piles again – underwear, T-shirts, socks, for example – and put them back in your wardrobe or drawers.*

*Eventually they’ll be used once more and the whole cycle will have to be repeated. However, that is a part of life.*
Variations

- Show students the following video about schema which makes use of the same text: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzbRpMIEHzM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzbRpMIEHzM) Give out copies of the Video transcription on pages 7 and 8. Discuss how language learners can use schema activation as a reading or listening skill.

Some standard possibilities:

- Make use of accompanying images to predict what a text is about.
- Make use of short headlines, titles, summaries, synopses, content pages, etc. to get an idea about what a larger text is about.
- Before listening and reading exams, read the questions first. This will give you an idea of what the text will be about.
- For reading and listening exams, you must know if the order of the questions corresponds with the order of the answers in the text. If so, this will provide you with a good framework for reading or listening.

- Brainstorm language related to washing clothes (laundry, washing machine, laundrette, whites and colours, detergent, conditioner, washing instructions, spin, hang, dry, iron, washing line, clothes pegs, etc.)
- Draw students’ attention back to the question: *So how do you do yours?* Ask them to write a detailed description of their relationship with laundry. If they claim not to do their own, they can still write about who does it, how often, details of the household system, reasons for avoiding it, etc.
- Ask students to prepare housework questionnaires for each other.
- Ask students to write about other household processes and procedures (washing up, making breakfast, cleaning the bathroom, etc). Encourage them to use scaffolding language from the washing clothes text.

| First ... | Of course, ... |
| If you have to ... because of ... | Otherwise ... |
| It is important (not) to ... | It is better to ... than ... |
| After the procedure is completed, ... | Eventually ... |

Reference

The text in this activity is taken from the following paper:

Worksheet

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into **different groups**. Of course, one pile may be sufficient, depending on how much there is to do.

If you have to go **somewhere else** due to lack of **facilities**, that is the next step. Otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things – that is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run, this might not seem important, but **complications** can easily arise. A **mistake** can be expensive as well.

After the procedure is completed, one arranges the materials into **different groups** again. Then they can be put into their **appropriate places**.

Eventually they’ll be used once more and the whole cycle will have to be repeated. However, that is a part of life. So how do you do yours?

**Tasks**

1. Look at the words and phrases **in bold**. Can you work out what they could refer to in the context of washing clothes?
   - **Different groups**
   - **Somewhere else**
   - **Facilities**
   - **Complications**
   - **A mistake**
   - **Different groups**
   - **Appropriate places**

2. Rewrite the text and make it sound natural. Make changes so that the register is that of informal spoken English. Decide which words, phrases and structures you are going to change, replace or omit.
Video transcription

The following is a transcription of a video which explains the thinking behind the washing clothes text. To see the clip on YouTube type Schema Medina into the search window.

Dr Medina:
Most of the factors that predict whether or not something that is being perceived will also be remembered operate in the first few seconds of learning. One of these factors involves something termed as schema and whether or not the new learning bumps into one.

Let me show you an example of a schema by having Dr Whitehead and myself read a paragraph to you – one actually taken from a famous research paper. Your job is to remember as many facts about the paragraph as you can.

Let me tell you in advance that you are going to fail miserably at this task unless I do something first. I can instantly improve your memory score from between 50 to 100% simply by adding seven little words before you hear Dr Whitehead and myself.

But I’m not going to do that. You will hear the paragraph first, then I will read you the words.
Dr Whitehead:
The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient, depending on how much there is to do.

Dr Medina:
If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities, that is the next step. Otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things – that is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many.

Dr Whitehead:
In the short run, this might not seem important, but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well.

Dr Medina:
After the procedure is completed, one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places.

Dr Whitehead:
Eventually they’ll be used once more and the whole cycle will have to be repeated. However, that is a part of life.

Dr Medina:
Did you get all that? No? Let us give you now the 7 magic little words: This paragraph is all about washing clothes. What that sentence provides for you is a mental framework: A way of organising thoughts around some aspect of the world. We call such frameworks ‘schemas’ and you have them about people, situations, objects ... This means something profound. Prior knowledge can disturbingly shape how you memorise and retain for long-term storage, future knowledge. If a schema is triggered near the moment of learning, that learning is more permanent.

Dr Whitehead:
Brain rules! *

* This is title of Dr Medina’s book (www.brainrules.com)