



Expressing yourself: ways of saying 'I don't know'

Overview: In this lesson, learners develop their awareness and understanding of expressions meaning 'I don't know' and practise using these expressions.

Total time for activities: 45 minutes

Level: upper intermediate to advanced

EXPRESSING
YOURSELF

Teacher's Notes

1. Before class, cut up the Student's Copy so that you have three individual worksheets for each learner.

2. Write the following on the board:

- 1 idea
- 2 du_ _ _
- 3 clue
- 4 should
- 5 search
- 6 anyone's
- 7 mine
- 8 ask
- 9 who
- 10 faintest

3. Ask learners, working individually or in pairs, to expand these prompts into expressions meaning 'I don't know'. Elicit answers and write the complete expressions on the board.

Answers

- 1 *I've no idea. / I've got no idea. / I have no idea.*
- 2 *Dunno.*
- 3 *I haven't a clue. / I haven't got a clue.*
- 4 *How should I know?*
- 5 *Search me.*
- 6 *It's anyone's guess. / It's anybody's guess.*
- 7 *Your guess is as good as mine.*
- 8 *Don't ask me.*
- 9 *Who knows?*
- 10 *I haven't the faintest idea. / I haven't got the faintest idea.*

4. Ask learners to work in pairs. They should say the expressions and try to decide where the main stresses are. Get them to write down the expressions and underline the stressed words. Tell them that there are either one or two stressed words in each expression.

5. Elicit answers and confirm or provide the answers by underlining the stressed syllables on the board.

Answers

- 1 *I've no idea. / I've got no idea. / I have no idea.*
- 2 *Dunno.*
- 3 *I haven't a clue. / I haven't got a clue.*
- 4 *How should I know?*
- 5 *Search me.*
- 6 *It's anyone's guess. / It's anybody's guess.*
- 7 *Your guess is as good as mine.*
- 8 *Don't ask me.*
- 9 *Who knows?*
- 10 *I haven't the faintest idea. / I haven't got the faintest idea.*



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6. Drill the expressions chorally and/or individually, depending on the size of your class. Learners should pay particular attention to stressing the correct syllables.
7. Conceal the list of expressions on the board. Distribute **Worksheet A** or display it on the board. Learners work on the task in pairs.
8. Elicit and confirm answers. Correct stress as necessary.

Answers

- 1 *I have no idea. / I've got no idea. / I haven't a clue. / I haven't got a clue.*
- 2 *Search me.*
- 3 correct
- 4 *I haven't the faintest idea. / I've no idea. / I've got no idea. / I have no idea.*
- 5 correct
- 6 *It's anyone's guess. / It's anybody's guess.*
- 7 *Your guess is as good as mine.*
- 8 correct

9. Show the list of expressions on the board again. Ask the class these questions:

a. Which of the expressions is used especially in informal conversation?

Answer: *Dunno.*

b. Which expression is particularly useful for expressing annoyance at being asked an unreasonable question?

Answer: *How should I know?*

c. Which expression is particularly useful for saying 'I don't know the answer any better than you'?

Answer: *Your guess is as good as mine.*

d. Which expressions are particularly useful for saying 'Nobody knows, probably'?

Answer: *It's anyone's guess. / It's anybody's guess. / Who knows?*

e. What can be added to some of these expressions to make them sound more polite and cooperative?

Answer: *I'm sorry / I'm afraid*

Explain that 'I'm sorry' and 'I'm afraid' are used especially with expressions 1, 3 and 10. 'I'm sorry' can be added at the beginning of the expressions. 'I'm afraid' can be added at the beginning or end. Write these examples on the board:

I'm sorry, I've no idea.

I'm afraid I've no idea.

I've no idea, I'm afraid.

Draw learners' attention to the commas:

'I'm afraid I've no idea' is spoken as a single continuous phrase.

'I'm sorry, I've no idea' is spoken as two phrases.

'I've no idea, I'm afraid' is spoken as two phrases, and the voice should go up or remain level, but not go down, on 'I'm afraid'.

10. Distribute **Worksheet B**. Allow a few moments for learners to read through it, and then ask them the following questions:

Which of the expressions do you use already?

Which ones were new for you today?

Which ones had you heard before, but not used?

Which ones do you like? Why?

Which ones don't you like? Why?

11. Ask learners, working individually, to quickly write 10 *Wh*-questions to ask their classmates. These should be a roughly fifty-fifty mixture of questions that are easy to answer quickly and without a great deal of thought, and questions that are clearly impossible to answer.



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12. Ask learners to find a partner and take turns to ask and answer the questions they have written; in answering questions they cannot answer, they should use as many different 'I don't know' expressions as possible, using Worksheet B as a prompt if necessary.
13. Ask learners to put their copies of Worksheet B away, and distribute **Worksheet C**. They should now find a new partner and repeat the activity, using Worksheet C to as a prompt to help them use as many 'I don't know' expressions as possible. They can repeat the activity with different partners as many times as seems useful. They can improvise new questions as they do so.

Follow-up

- ▶ In subsequent lessons, and in pre-lesson and post-lesson chat, find opportunities to ask learners questions which they won't be able to answer.
- ▶ In subsequent lessons involving question-and-answer activities, interviews, questionnaires etc, ask learners to include one or two questions that will be impossible to answer.



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Worksheet A

Some of these ways of saying 'I don't know' contain mistakes. Find the mistakes and correct them.

1. I haven't got an idea.
2. Don't search me.
3. How should I know?
4. I haven't a faint clue.
5. I've no idea.
6. It's everyone's guess.
7. Your idea is as good as mine.
8. Who knows?



Worksheet B

Ways of saying 'I don't know':

1. I've no idea. / I've got no idea. / I have no idea.
2. Dunno.
3. I haven't a clue. / I haven't got a clue.
4. How should I know?
5. Search me.
6. It's anyone's guess. / It's anybody's guess.
7. Your guess is as good as mine.
8. Don't ask me.
9. Who knows?
10. I haven't the faintest idea. / I haven't got the faintest idea.



Worksheet C

Prompts for 'I don't know' expressions:

idea	got
mine	ask
clue	dunno
don't	faintest
afraid	me
good	sorry
who	anyone
search	should
your	guess