



“Just a Minute”

Focus: Adapting Speech

Overview

By playing a classroom version of the British television game show *Just a Minute*, students develop flexibility with language, proficiency with self-expression, and appreciation for the nuances of English.

Standards

- **9-10.SL.6.** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Objectives

- To learn to play with English and enjoy its nuances
- To sharpen listening skills
- To increase mental acuity
- To develop an understanding of synonyms

Materials

- Computer and Internet connection
 - Sound system
 - List of authors, novels, characters, literary terms studied in the year, quarter, or unit copied onto index cards that can be randomly drawn for topics
 - Stop watches
 - Access to online recordings of the BBC program [Just a Minute](#)
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Activity 1

Lecture

The BBC television program [Just a Minute](#) is essentially a combination of game show and improvisational comedy, one that challenges participants to speak extemporaneously for sixty



seconds on a pre-chosen topic. The catch? One must speak without “repetition, hesitation, or deviation.” Those who violate those rules are subject to a challenge by a panel of judges.

A fuller explanation of these rules adapted from Wikipedia is given below:

Rules of *Just a Minute*

- **"Repetition"** means the repetition of any word or phrase, although challenges based upon very common words such as "and" are generally rejected except in extreme cases. Words contained in the given subject are exempt unless repeated many times in quick succession. Skillful players use (sometimes obscure) synonyms in order to avoid repeating themselves. The term "BBC" can be successfully challenged for repetition of "B".
- **"Hesitation"** is watched very strictly: a momentary pause before resumption of the subject can give rise to a successful challenge, as can tripping over one's words. Even pausing during audience laughter or applause (known as "riding a laugh") is usually not permitted.
- **"Deviation"** means deviating from the subject, but has also been interpreted as "deviating from the English language as we know it," "deviation from grammar as we understand it," deviating from the truth and sometimes even logic, although often leaps into the surreal are allowed.
- **Challenges:** A panelist scores a point for making a correct challenge against whoever is speaking, while the speaker gets a point if the challenge is deemed incorrect. However, if a witty interjection amuses the audience, even though it is not a correct challenge, both the challenger and speaker may gain a point at the chairman's discretion. A player who makes a correct challenge takes over the subject for the remainder of the minute, or until he or she is correctly challenged. The person speaking when the 60 seconds expires also scores a point. An extra point is awarded when a panelist speaks for the entire minute without being challenged.

Source: [Wikipedia](#)



Explain the game and its three essential rules (no repetition, hesitation, or deviation) to the students. The following example of a successful player's delivery of a speech on "How to Win an Argument" should be distributed to the students:

Example: How to Win an Argument

"Well, it varies according to the person that you are arguing with. Should it be a child that you are having a contretemps with, the ideal is deviation tactics? For instance, Lola Lupin, who I mentioned before, won't eat her dinner. So what I do is say, "Yes, it is rotten food, let us sing a song," making sure that that particular chanson has a few vowels in it that require her to open her mouth, during which I pop the spoon in and I have won the argument. However, if it is an argument with a person that knows their subject what I do is nod sagely and smile superciliously, let them ramble on, and at the end I say, "I'm sorry, I think you're completely wrong," turn on my heels, and leave."

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

Small Groups

In small groups, students should study the example above to analyze see how the player has obeyed all three rules. What strategies did she use to avoid repetition? What strategy did she use to avoid deviation? What strategy did she use to avoid hesitation?

Activity 2**Listening**

Students should listen to an episode of [Just a Minute](#). Suggest that students listen intently, pay close attention to the interruption, and remember the way in which the chairman gives out points.

Discuss with students how this activity will help them accomplish the following goals:

- To draw on their content knowledge of English
- To use their understanding of synonyms
- To develop ability to listen carefully

**Activity 3****Practicing**

Students should break into groups of five. In groups, students should brainstorm a list of reasonable topics they can give to the students chosen to be the “Just a Minute” speakers. The topics should reflect those authors, works of literature, or concepts studied in the most recent unit, the quarter, the semester, or the year. Then, students should split those topics into those they deem *easy* and those they deem *difficult*.

Group Practice

Assign each group one topic from easy and one from difficult. They must complete at least one round of *Just a Minute*. If they have time, switch to a different chairperson and complete another round. Ideally, students should be able to complete five rounds in thirty minutes.

Whole-Class Match

As an alternative activity, the teacher may wish to pit the winners against each other. Each group will select its strongest players for one whole-class match. The audience (the rest of the students) can select topics and/or act as a chair.

Closure

Note that the topics included in the game can address prior and current topics discussed in class as well as other subjects (history, science, film, popular culture, practical skills). As a review game prior to a final exam, this activity might be both fun and helpful.

Specific Resources

- [Just a Minute](#)

General for ELA:

- [BBC](#)
- [Revolting People](#)
- [Old Harry's Game](#)



- [Arts & Letters Daily](#)