

In groups, learners prepare to talk about (and mime) what people in various different jobs do in their working lives. They are interviewed by other groups who have to guess what the occupation is.

What's my line? was a TV show which ran in the USA from 1950–1967 (and in the UK until 1996). This adaptation works well in language classrooms.

- 1 Tell learners to imagine that they have a particular job – anything from being an astronaut or a costume-designer, to an ice-skater, a nurse or a train driver. Later, others will interview them to try and guess what their occupation is.
- 2 Put learners in groups of equal numbers to choose an occupation – as many groups as is feasible, depending on the size of the class. They must then discuss what people in that occupation do: exactly what processes they use, what they do when they start their working day and what routines are typical. The group lists all these things.
- 3 Learners in the group now try and describe these things without being absolutely clear about what they mean! For example, if they wear a nurse's uniform they can say 'special clothes' instead. If they use a stethoscope the learners can say, 'I always carry a special piece of equipment with me,' etc. They also dream up some mime activities (see also 40 and the rest of Section E) they could do to represent the occupation.
- 4 When the groups have finished their preparation, a learner from each group goes to another group. They do their mimes to the group they have gone to. The group they are miming to discuss for a maximum of 45 seconds what they think the occupation is before making a decision and writing it down. The visiting learner does not say if they are correct.
- 5 Groups now interview the visiting learner for a maximum of two minutes. They cannot ask, 'What is your occupation?' or 'Do you

drive trains?’ but they can ask less direct questions such as ‘Why do you do your job?’ or ‘How many hours a day do you work?’ ‘What time do you start work?’ The visiting learner must answer truthfully (whilst using their imagination) but try not to give the game away.

- 6 At the end of two minutes the group votes on what they think the occupation is. The visiting learner now says if they are correct. The group gets five points if they choose the correct occupation and an extra five points if that is the same as their vote after the mime.
- 7 Visiting learners now go back to their original groups. A different learner from each group goes to visit a new group (different from the one their original group visited) and the procedure is repeated – and again the points are recorded (see stage 6 above). Repeat the procedure until all the learners have been a visitor to a group.
- 8 During all the previous stages, monitor the groups, help out with procedural matters if things get stuck, and keep a record of particular language problems. When the activity is finished, find out which group scored the most points, bring successful language you have heard to everyone’s attention and discuss any language problems that can be solved there and then or need to be worked on later.

Why it works for me

Its initial discussion phase, the voting and the questioning give the whole activity real communicative purpose. It is fun, there is (some) movement, there is a lot of enjoyable repetition, etc.

Alternatives

Visiting learners can pretend to be a famous person. They can visit a doctor with an imaginary – ridiculous – ailment (i.e., she thinks she’s a giraffe!) or go to a job interview (he thinks he’s a secret agent).

Online/virtual variations

This is an ideal game for online teaching. Depending on the size of the group, the ‘visitor’ can prepare alone (though this loses part of the activity’s function) and/or we can use breakout rooms, just as in a face-to-face classroom.