

CHAPTER THREE

PERSONAL QUESTIONS



Because societies have different rules about asking personal questions, people from one culture may be shocked and uncomfortable by the questions they get from people from another culture.

IN THIS CHAPTER, STUDENTS WILL

- 1. EXAMINE THEIR OPINIONS ABOUT GETTING TO KNOW PEOPLE**
- 2. LEARN ABOUT THE KEY CONCEPTS IN THE CHAPTER—DEFENSIVENESS, *MORES*, *PERSONAL ISSUES*, *PRIVACY*, *SENSITIVITY*, *SHARING* AND *SMALL TALK*.**
- 3. READ THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON GETTING TO KNOW PEOPLE.**
- 4. REREAD THE DISCUSSION AND ANSWER READING TASKS.**
- 5. TAKE THE READING COMPREHENSION TEST.**
- 6. DISCUSS THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE WITH THE KEY CONCEPTS AND REAL-LIFE CULTURE CONFLICT.**
- 7. DO EXERCISES ON WORD MEANING AND LOGICAL OR DUMMY SUBJECTS.**
- 8. DO A CROSSWORD PUZZLE BASED ON THE WORDS IN THE CHAPTER.**

LET'S START WITH YOU.

Rate the following statements according to this scale.

- 5—strongly agree
- 4—agree
- 3—neither agree nor disagree
- 2—disagree
- 1—strongly disagree



1. _____ People in other parts of the world may have very different customs.
2. _____ In order to make friends with people of different countries, I need to be willing to treat them the way they wish to be treated.
3. _____ Foreigners living in Korea should always be willing to help Koreans practice their English.
4. _____ Spending time with someone is a good indication that you like him or her.
5. _____ Asking questions is a good way to get to know people.
6. _____ People get to know each other by giving information about themselves.
7. _____ Being polite often means being indirect.
8. _____ If someone tells me something about his or her life, I should say whether I think it's a good thing or a bad thing.
9. _____ In some situations, it's OK to lie or be rude to protect your privacy.
10. _____ People can always adjust to the customs of the country they're living in, even if they find it difficult.

LET'S LOOK AT KEY CONCEPTS.

When people are **defensive**, they are quick to protect themselves from criticism. (negative connotation)

My husband is very **defensive about** his mother. He gets irritable if I even mention her. (negative connotation)

Mores are the traditional customs and ways of behaving of a particular culture. (neutral)

When it comes to privacy issues, Western and Asian countries may have very different **social mores**. (neutral)

In North America, arriving unexpectedly at someone's house is a **violation of mores**. (negative)

If something is **personal**, it relates to a particular person rather than a group or organization. It may also relate to the individual's home life, rather than professional or political life. (neutral)

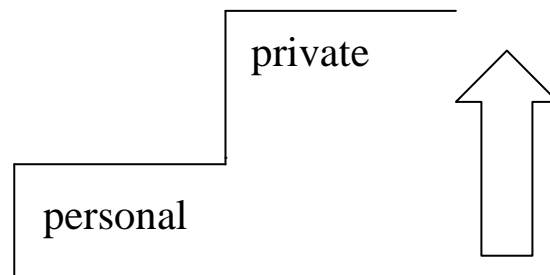
As predicted, the senator said he was retiring for **personal reasons**. (neutral)

Did you have to make such a **personal remark** about her hair color? (negative)

Please take all of your **personal belongings** with you when you leave the aircraft. (neutral)

She's not a beautiful woman, but she takes pride in her **personal appearance**. (neutral)

The secretaries would never open a letter marked "**personal**" or "**private.**"(neutral)



Having **privacy** means that you are able to be alone and to keep personal matters and relationships secret—if you want to. (neutral)

A citizen's **right to privacy** is protected by the U.S. Constitution. (positive connotation)

Please don't call newspaper reporters; this is a **private matter**. (neutral)

In general, Americans think parents should not listen in on their children's **private conversations** or open their mail. (neutral)

That's strictly **private property**; it has nothing to do with the government. (neutral)

If you are **sensitive**, you are kind and understanding toward other people (positive). Other meanings of the word are "delicate" (neutral); and "easily upset" or "reacting easily"—that is, too sensitive. (neutral or negative)

I like this school because the teachers are very **sensitive to the needs** of my children. (positive)

They are both very **sensitive parents**. (positive)

Learning to get along with people of other cultures often means developing **cultural sensitivity**. (neutral or positive connotation)

He's **too sensitive** about that scar on his cheek. I always avoid looking at it. (negative).

The dentist advised me to notice whether the tooth was particularly **sensitive** to hot and cold. (neutral connotation)

If people **share** something, it means they use it, do it, or experience it together. If one person **shares** something with someone else, it means she or he gave part of it to the other person or told the other person about it. (neutral or positive)

Early in life children are taught how to **share**. (positive)

I have my own bedroom, but I have to **share the bathroom** with my roommate. (neutral)

He's the man I want to **share my life** with. (positive)

We **share an interest** in sailing. (neutral)

OK, you guys, **share the joke**. (neutral)

She **shared with me** how difficult it was growing up in the Bronx, and I **shared with her** how much I hated boarding school. (positive)

Small talk is social conversation about unimportant things, often among people who don't know each other well. It is deliberately impersonal, and it avoids topics where people may disagree, like politics. (neutral)

It's part of a diplomat's job to go parties and stand around **making small talk**. (neutral, possibly negative)

In a business situation, you may have to **make small talk** for a while before you get down to business. (neutral, possibly negative)

LET'S TEST OURSELVES.

Without looking at the previous sections, complete the sentences by filling in the blanks. There may be more than one right answer.

1. Please don't make _____ remarks about his losing his hair. It's a very _____ topic with him.
2. The envelope was marked _____, but the secretary opened it anyway.
3. In North America, a visit to your doctor is always _____; your employer would never think of coming with you.
4. She's very nice, and she _____ with me how much she likes Korea.
5. I understand that we violated Korean social _____ by telling him we would have to charge him money for editing his paper, but we knew it would need several hours of work.
6. Individuals from both Korea and North America can get really _____ when they think you're criticizing their country.

LET'S JOIN THE ROUNDTABLE.

Reading task:

1. What key concept is connected with the fact that certain types of questions are acceptable in some cultures and not in others?

"You know," Bang-ho says, "Western customs can be really confusing."

"It's Western customs that are confusing?" jokes Anne. "Do you know how difficult it is to find out what's going on in Korea?"

"What do you mean specifically?" Tom wants to know. "Maybe we can help."

"It's difficult when you first meet people," Bang-ho explains. "I never know what to say. I know that I'm not supposed to ask personal questions, but I don't know what that means."

"Actually," Anne says, "last time we talked about how Korean and North American cultures can be the direct opposite of each other. I think this is an example of that. When Koreans are being polite, you ask questions of each other. It's a way of



showing interest in the other person. But in the West, we don't ask questions, we share information about ourselves. We think this means we are giving something of ourselves. When someone asks questions, it feels as if someone is trying to take something from us."

Tom nods at Bang-ho sympathetically. "This kind of thing is never easy."

Reading task:

2. Which of the key concepts is connected with meeting and getting to know someone? Explain.

Reading the situation

"Also," Anne adds, "Whether you can ask questions or not often depends on the situation. For example, if you meet someone in a coffee shop, it might be fine to ask where they're from or how long they've been in Korea. But when a teacher is trying to get a class started, it's an unwanted interruption."

Tom nods. "Or some poor, tired soul you see on the subway. If he's already taught eight hours that day, he probably doesn't want to give a free English lesson to a stranger. It can be very tiring."

Bang-ho agrees. "I've had a lot of good conversations with Westerners over beer in Itaewon. I just go to one of the places where people hang out and look around for someone who looks willing to talk."

"That's a very good idea," Tom says. "If you want to talk to people, try to catch people when they're in the mood, not when they're intent on going somewhere else."

Reading task:

3. What is the major function of small talk? Explain.

Small talk—giving your attention

"You know," Anne says, warming up to the topic, "we have some interesting rituals for getting to know each other. When we first meet, we may talk only about impersonal things—like the weather, which is the safest and most impersonal thing you can find to talk about. When it rains, it rains on everyone. Also, what we're doing is not exchanging information—you can look out the window and see what the weather's like. What we're doing is showing interest in the other person. I show interest in you by spending five or ten minutes with you. During that time, I make eye contact with you, I use a tone of voice that shows interest, I listen to what you have to say. I show you that I'm talking with you because I like you."

"Yes, of course," Bang-ho says.

Reading task:

4. Why might someone in a one-sided conversation become defensive? What might the person be reminded of?

Balance

Tom continues, "I think one thing that may cause conflict between Westerners and Koreans—or maybe between natives and travelers or foreigners in a lot of places—is the lack of balance in the conversation. It often seems as if the Westerner asks no questions or very few questions and the Korean asks a lot of questions."

“This one-sided conversation is like times when someone with a higher or more powerful position is asking all the questions—the boss interviewing a job candidate, an adult talking to a child or the police interrogating a crime suspect.”

“So the lack of balance, the one-sidedness in the conversation would probably make the Westerner very uncomfortable, and that discomfort can easily make the person very defensive.”

“Then the poor Korean, who assumes he’s having a friendly conversation with someone, suddenly discovers that person is angry, and he doesn’t know why,” Bang-ho says. “It’s very confusing.”

“Also,” Tom adds, “Some of the questions Koreans typically ask each other—like how old you are and whether you’re married—are questions Western adults don’t ask each other.”

Reading task:

5. What procedure do Westerners usually follow when getting to know each other? How does it work?

Rituals

“But as I was saying,” Anne says, “we have rituals which people can learn to make things easier, although at first they will probably not come naturally at all.”

“Like what?”

“Well, when I tell you something about myself—say, about my family—I am giving you something of myself, and I am also giving you permission to ask a question—one question—about my family at about the same degree of privacy. I answer it and then ask you a question. For example, I might tell you that I’m going to Seattle to my sister’s wedding. Maybe you ask what kind of wedding it’s going to be. I answer that my sister wanted a small church wedding, but that it’s getting larger because we have a lot of friends and relatives. Then I ask if you have any brothers or sisters. So it goes.”

“Of course, in some situations—like at work—you may not talk about family at all,” Tom adds. “In other places the women may talk about personal relationships while the men talk about sports.”

Reading task:

6. When are Westerners likely to be more direct and when more indirect than Koreans? Is this always true? Explain.

Asking indirectly

Anne tries to explain. “In the West, we don’t usually ask whether someone is married. If I’m talking to an interesting man my age and I think I may want to go out with him, I ask indirectly. I may find a way to ask something about his wife.”

“We Koreans often say that Westerners are very direct,” Bang-ho interjects. “But I know that’s often not true.”

“Right,” Tom agrees. “I might ask how much you’re thinking of paying me for an English editing job, but I won’t ask directly whether you’re married or how much you paid for your car. I’ll either find an indirect way of asking or I’ll explain why I need to know—maybe I’m interested in buying a car like yours—or both.”

Bang-ho looks thoughtful. “So let me get this straight. If you want to find out about me, you tell me about yourself. Then if I feel more relaxed, and I may respond by telling you about myself. Some direct personal questions are not OK. But they could be OK if there’s a balanced exchange of questions and answers by both people and if you have permission to ask. You get permission to ask when people tell you about themselves, not by asking if you can ask a personal question. Is that right?”

“Yeah. If you feel you need to ask for permission, it means the answer should probably be no.”

Reading task:

7. Why should a person be very careful about commenting on someone’s personal life?

Are all the answers “wrong”?

Anne gestures with her hands to show she’s going to talk about the big picture. “I think part of the problem is the people’s attitudes. Some Westerner might have become very defensive, thinking that people are always judging them or that people don’t like Westerners. Remember, if you’re not from a collectivist culture, you’re not used to people commenting about your personal life. It may also seem that all the possible answers you can give are wrong. Suppose you’re a Western woman in Seoul. Someone asks whether you’re married—a question people at home don’t ask you. If you say you are, then people want to know why you aren’t home with your husband where you belong. If you say you’ve never been married, they wonder what’s wrong with you that you weren’t able to find a husband. If you’re a widow, then they feel sorry for you. If you’re divorced, you’re an immoral woman. Having complete strangers pass judgment on your life can be very annoying.”

“Of course,” Tom interjects, “often people just ask questions in order to get to know someone better.”

“I understand that people may mean well,” Anne says, “and so do you. But so many Westerners—both younger people and older people—complain about being asked personal questions that I’m sure it gets in the way of communication.”

Reading task:

8. Why is it important to consider human psychology with issues like unwanted personal questions?

Psychological barriers

“You know,” Bang-ho says, “Koreans don’t ask questions just to collect information about people—although I guess sometimes it may seem that way. There’s also the question of where people fit in. Korean society is highly structured. You have to know how old someone is and where they are on the social scale in order to know how you should talk to them.”

“I know,” Tom interrupts, “and I think it’s great as long as both people are enjoying it. It can also be very efficient. I’ve seen people get to know each other very quickly that way.”

“I’m sorry,” Anne apologizes. “I didn’t mean to sound critical. The problem is that new social mores are often very difficult to get used to. My students like the expression ‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do,’ but they don’t understand this old European saying refers to little customs—things like using a fork or chopsticks. It doesn’t mean that the individual should conform to everything the group does.”

“But?”

“But, when you are dealing with cultural rules that you learn at a very early age, there is a very strong psychological barrier against changing them. I guess the real problem is that people often can’t cope with it very well. Let me draw a comparison. Suppose you are a Korean woman, the wife of a Korean businessman or diplomat. You live abroad. Like your Western counterparts, you often have important people over to dinner. You know you can’t tell your husband’s clients to take their shoes off before they come into your home, but every time someone walks on your new carpet with his shoes on, you feel that a stranger has intruded into your space. I think Westerners also feel their private lives have been invaded when strangers ask them personal questions. Frankly, sometimes I just lie. With taxi drivers, for example, I spin all kinds of stories about who I am and what I’m doing here—just to protect my privacy.”

Tom adds, “It’s almost always the same questions—but, wait—”

“Yes, just like we talk about the weather, always in the same way.”

“So what’s the difference?” Bang-ho asks.

“Well, maybe there isn’t any.” Anne says. “But some people seem to get very defensive.”

Tom continues, “Since Anne’s speaking in psychological terms, when someone starts firing questions at you, all of your previous experience becomes a part of your emotional response. Your response might not be appropriate, but you might not be able to help it. Sometimes people think someone is asking in a tone of voice that says, ‘Who the hell are you and what are you doing in my country!’ They might think people show very little interest in them as individuals. They just seem to be collecting information so later they can point and say, ‘That one’s an American, and that one’s a German, and that one’s a Russian.’”

“As individualists,” Anne adds, “people may hate being identified as a certain type of person—being stereotyped—because it can limit their personal freedom.”

Reading task:

9. What does the final section show us about Westerners, Koreans abroad and personal questions?

The other side

“What limits your personal freedom?” Sun-ok asks, as she stands with her tray near the table.

“Oh, we didn’t see you,” Tom says. “Let me pull up a chair for you.”

“What’s up?”

“We’re talking about being asked personal questions by strangers or people we don’t know very well.”

“Oh,” Sun-ok responds, “I hate that. One of my colleagues is always asking me when I’m going to get married. It’s not any of her business, of course, but I can’t tell her that. When I was in North America, no one ever asked me that kind of thing.”

“They might as a joke,” Anne remarks. “But that’s considered a private matter.”



Bang-ho eyes Sun-ok. “When you were in Canada and the U.S., did you get a lot of questions from people you didn’t know?”

Sun-ok nods. “Many, many people asked me where I was from.”

“How did that make you feel?”

“I hated it. It made me feel even more different. At that time, my English wasn’t very good, and I felt they were drawing attention to it and saying I looked funny and talked funny.”

“Well, yes,” Anne says with some embarrassment, “that’s what it means.”

“They often asked me how old I was.” She laughs. “In Korea I’m considered quite old for a single woman, but I gather that Americans thought I was much younger.”

Anne smiles at Sun-ok. “Westerners usually don’t ask people that. I would guess they might have thought you were very young to be so far from home. They might even have thought you were still in high school.”

“I think some people did,” Sun-ok admits. “I also got mistaken for a Japanese a lot, which I didn’t like very much, and I found it frustrating that people knew so little about Korea.”

“But you know,” Anne says, “when I was growing up in the South, there were a lot of international students at the college, and people were often very interested in them. I remember many social gatherings where they were the center of attention, but in a very positive way. We were interested in hearing their songs and their stories, and we thought their accents were charming.”

Sun-ok smiles. “You think my accent is charming?”

“Of course, dear,” Anne says. “Of course.”

LET’S TEST OURSELVES.

- Chapter Three shows you**
 - why Westerners may have a negative reaction to personal questions.
 - that Westerners are not as open and warm-hearted as Koreans.
 - that asking questions of Westerners is a good way to practice your English.
 - all of the above.
- You are a manager in the Korean division of a foreign company. One of the executives from the home office is in Seoul, and you are showing her around. When you introduce one of your assistant managers to her, he asks her how old she is. She blinks and steps back in surprise. You should**
 - wait to see how old she is.
 - immediately apologize for your subordinate’s behavior and explain that the question is OK in Korea.
 - take her to meet someone else.
 - explain politely that she looks very young for someone in a senior position.
- You have just accepted your first full-time job. Your very polite Western boyfriend congratulates you and then says, “I hope the salary is sufficient. I know times are hard.” In response you should**

- a. tell him how much money you'll be making.
 - b. thank him for his concern and assure him that the salary is fine.
 - c. say nothing.
 - d. hint that he has no right to ask for that information.
4. **It is early evening. Your new Western roommate is leaving the apartment. You ask where he or she is going. You get the response, "I'm just going out for a while." This means your roommate**
- a. is taking a short walk to get some air.
 - b. thinks it's none of your business.
 - c. is going to make a private phone call.
 - d. would appreciate some company.
5. **Your new roommate has just returned from shopping for new clothes. One item is a beautiful blue jacket. As he or she shows the clothes to you, you**
- a. say how nice they look, particularly the jacket.
 - b. ask where the shop is so you can buy a jacket just like this one.
 - c. ask how much the jacket cost.
 - d. ask if you can borrow the jacket sometime.
6. **You and your friend are on the subway. The Westerner standing next to you has his nose deep in a book. You want to talk to him. You should**
- a. begin a conversation by asking where he is from.
 - b. politely introduce yourself and ask if you can talk to him.
 - c. let him read.
 - d. begin talking with your friend in English, hoping to get his attention.
7. **When talking about the weather, Westerners show interest in the other person by**
- a. spending time with them.
 - b. making eye contact.
 - b. using the right tone of voice.
 - d. all of the above.
8. **Your new English teacher is very pretty. At the beginning of the first class, a student asks her if she's married. She laughs and says, "Why? Do you want to marry me?" This means**
- a. she thinks the guy is very good-looking.
 - b. it is only acceptable to ask when you need the information.
 - c. she is making small-talk.
 - d. she thinks the question is very funny.
9. **At the Pittsburgh airport bookstore, the Russian-born salesclerk is asked 40-50 times a day where is from. The message she gets every day is that**
- a. the American people want to be friendly with the Russian people.
 - b. people want to know why she speaks English with an accent.
 - c. people think the immigration laws should be stricter.
 - d. customers always ask salesclerks where they are from.

10. **You are talking to a Westerner in a coffee shop. You notice that your conversation partner has suddenly moved a little away from you and become a little defensive. You should**
- move your chair forward so you can maintain the same speaking distance.
 - stop and ask yourself if you have been asking too many questions.
 - offer to buy him or her another cup of coffee.
 - find someone else to talk to.
11. **The saying, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” means you should**
- follow the group in everything.
 - give up your individualism.
 - follow local customs, like not smoking at the dinner table.
 - all of the above.
12. **You work for a designer who owns the company. She has invited a Western colleague to come over for a visit and given you the use of the company car and driver so you can show her guest around. The driver is a new employee who is full of questions about the boss’s guest. You should**
- answer his questions because the guest won’t understand your conversation anyway—since it will all be in Korean.
 - tell the driver he’d better mind his own business.
 - tell the driver, “Since our guest doesn’t speak Korean, it would not be polite for us to speak Korean in front of her.” Then explain to the guest that you told him you’d be speaking English today.
 - tell the driver where to drive, ignore his questions and speak only to the guest.

LET’S TALK ABOUT IT.

1. What do you usually talk about when you meet another Korean for the first time? Do you ask questions? Do you sometimes feel the other person is asking too much?
2. Have you ever met a Westerner in a public place? What did you talk about? Would you try to start a conversation with another Korean in the same situation? Explain.
3. What impersonal topics would you include in “small talk”?
4. Do you think balance is important in a conversation? Is it important for both people to participate equally and enjoy talking to the other person? Explain.



5. What things would you like to ask a Westerner? How can you phrase your questions to ask about a general situation instead of a direct question about someone's personal life or experience?
6. Can you remember a time when someone asked questions or made remarks about your life which made you angry? Explain.
7. What do you do when someone asks you a personal question that you don't want to answer? Explain.

LET'S TALK ABOUT KEY CONCEPTS IN REAL LIFE.

1. An executive of a Western firm has just arrived at the Korean branch, where he will be the vice-president. One of the assistant managers spent the day showing him around. At the end of the day the general manager is outside the vice-president's office and hears him saying on the phone that the assistant manager asked him five times why he wasn't married. Quickly, he tells the secretary and a few other people to "cool it" because the vice-president is very angry. When the vice-president comes out of his office, the general manager apologizes for the behavior of his subordinate. The vice-president looks startled, then responds in a coldly polite way that shows he is very annoyed. Explain the thinking of both the vice-president and the general manager.
2. In the United States advice columns are very popular because they both reflect and influence cultural mores. What advice do you think an American columnist would give the following people?
 - a. A mother wants to know if she should ask her son and/or his wife when they plan to have children.
 - b. A man wants to know if he should ask the girl he plans to marry whether she is a virgin. (He is.)
 - c. A woman wants to know how to ask her best friend whether or not she colors her hair.
 - d. A woman wants to find out whether a good-looking man in her office is married.

LET'S LISTEN.

How not to make friends. (As they sit on the subway, the Korean is staring at the Westerner, who is trying to ignore her by reading a book.)

1. The first time the dialogue is played, do not look at your book. Just listen and try to pick up the main idea of the dialogue.
2. Before the dialogue is played a second time, read over these questions.
 - a. What was each person doing before the Korean spoke to the Westerner?
 - b. What was the Westerner's first response? What does it mean?
 - c. How interested is she in talking with the Korean? How do you know?
 - d. Is the conversation balanced or one-sided?

- e. When the Westerner says “pardon me” the second time, what does she really mean?
- f. Does the Korean make a value judgement about the Westerners’s life? What is it?
3. Listen to the dialogue a second time. Then discuss the answers to the questions with your partner.
4. Listen a third time. Be prepared to discuss the answers with the class.

A normal conversation. (As they sit on the subway, the two people make eye contact and smile.)

1. The first time the dialogue is played, do not look at your book. Just listen and try to pick up the main idea of the dialogue.
2. Before the dialogue is played a second time, read over these questions.
 - a. What was each person doing before the Korean spoke to the Westerner?
 - b. What did the Korean say to start the conversation? Why is this important?
 - c. How interested is the Westerner in talking? How do you know?
 - d. Is the conversation balanced or one-sided?
 - e. How is information transmitted?
 - f. How does each person give the other permission to ask a question?
 - g. Does the Korean make a value judgement about the Westerner’s life? What is it?
 - h. How does the Westerner know that the Korean doesn’t just want free English lessons?
 - i. How does the conversation end?
3. Listen to the dialogue a second time. Then discuss the answers to the questions with your partner.
4. Listen a third time. Be prepared to discuss the answers with the class.

LET’S ACT IT OUT.

Everyone in the class can stand up and hold on as if on a bus or a subway car, swaying back and forth. Each person turns to a partner to meet for the first time. Construct a dialogue which goes through each of the following steps. Do not rush through any of them.

1. Establish eye contact, nod and smile at each other. (If your partner does not do this, you should end the conversation.)
2. Say hello.
3. Begin talking about the subway. This is small talk, which should be as impersonal as possible. The purpose of your conversation is just to speak with each other.
4. Offer your partner some information about where you are going and/or coming from. Both of you should do this.
5. Ask your partner one question. This must be in direct response to something she or he has just said. After you get a response, offer another bit of information about yourself. Repeat Steps 4 and 5 several times.

6. After you and your partner have learned quite a few small things about each other, introduce yourself. Include information about where you are originally from, hoping this will cause your partner to mention where he or she is from originally.
7. If you want to know something about the place your partner is from, phrase it as a general question. For example, “I’ve always wanted to know about American universities. What is a typical day like for an American student?”

LET’S LOOK AT WORD MEANING.

What we can learn from this chapter:

- When words are synonyms, they have the same meaning. However, because a language doesn’t need a lot of words which mean the same thing, there are very few true synonyms. Most words which are called synonyms are actually partial synonyms. They may have the same meaning in some contexts, but are not used in others, or they have different connotations. Often what we need instead of a synonym is a good paraphrase of the idea, or a restatement of the idea using different words.

Exercise 1: Test your understanding of the key concepts from the chapter. With each item circle the letter in front of the closest synonym or paraphrase for the word in bold.

1. Alexis was taught how to **share** her toys with other children.
 - a. divide among people
 - a. each one does some
 - b. experience together
 - c. have in common
 - e. part
 - f. tell someone
 - g. use together
2. Can we talk somewhere **in private**?
 - a. belonging to one person
 - b. secret, not shared with others
 - c. alone
 - d. not part of the government
3. Don’t make jokes about her nose—she’s very **sensitive** about it.
 - a. delicate, tricky, problematic
 - b. reacting easily
 - c. easily upset
 - d. understanding, kind and helpful
4. He came from a poor family, and he’s very **defensive** about his background.
 - a. quick to protect against criticism
 - b. prevents opposition from scoring points
 - c. prepared to defend against attack

5. He never **shares** his problems with anyone.
 - a. divide among people
 - b. each one does some
 - c. experience together
 - d. have in common
 - e. part
 - f. tell someone
 - g. use together

6. He said he was leaving the company for **personal** reasons.
 - a. belonging to only one person, not a group
 - b. done by a particular person, not someone else
 - c. not business or professional
 - d. private

7. He's a very **sensitive** husband who usually listens to his wife and seldom interrupts her.
 - a. delicate, tricky, problematic
 - b. easily changed or damaged
 - c. easily upset
 - d. understanding, kind and helpful

8. I caught her looking through my **private** papers.
 - a. belonging to one person
 - b. secret
 - c. alone
 - d. not shared with others
 - e. not part of the government

9. I finally met a man I want to **share** my life with.
 - a. divide among people
 - b. each one does some
 - c. experience together
 - d. have in common
 - e. part
 - f. tell someone
 - g. use together

10. I'll give this matter my **personal** attention.
 - a. belonging to only one person, not a group
 - b. done by a particular person, not someone else
 - c. not business or professional
 - d. private

Exercise 2: With each item circle the letter in front of the closest synonym or paraphrase for the word in bold.

1. Marcus was told to **share** his cookies with the other children.
 - a. divide among people
 - b. each one does some
 - c. experience together
 - d. have in common
 - e. tell someone
 - f. use together

2. People **share** with animals a fear of loud noises.
 - a. divide among people
 - b. each one does some
 - c. experience together
 - d. have in common
 - e. tell someone
 - f. use together

3. The dentist asked me if that tooth was **sensitive** to heat or cold.
 - a. delicate, tricky, problematic
 - b. reacting easily
 - c. easily upset
 - d. understanding, kind and helpful

4. The enemy is sure to go **on the defensive** when they hear our numbers have doubled.
 - a. quick to protect against criticism
 - b. prevents opposition from scoring points
 - c. prepared to defend against attack

5. The opposition scored few points because we have a very good **defensive** team.
 - a. quick to protect against criticism
 - b. prevents opposition from scoring points
 - c. prepared to defend against attack

6. The letter was marked "**personal.**"
 - a. belonging to only one person, not a group
 - b. done by a particular person, not someone else
 - c. not business or professional
 - d. private

7. The money will have to come from the **private** sector.
 - a. belonging to one person
 - b. secret, not shared with others
 - c. alone
 - d. not part of the government

8. This is a very **sensitive** situation which has to be handled carefully.
 - a. delicate, tricky, problematic
 - b. reacting easily
 - c. easily upset
 - d. understanding, kind and helpful

9. This is just my **personal** opinion.
 - a. belonging to only one person, not a group
 - b. done by a particular person, not someone else
 - c. not business or professional
 - d. private

10. We each had a **share** in the decision-making.
- a. divide among people
 - b. each one does some
 - c. experience together
 - d. have in common
 - e. part
 - f. tell someone
 - g. use together
11. We need to discuss a **private** matter, so could you leave us alone for a while?
- a. belonging to one person
 - b. secret, not shared with others
 - c. alone
 - d. not part of the government
13. When we travel around Thailand, let's **share** the driving.
- a. divide among people
 - b. each one does some
 - c. experience together
 - d. have in common
 - e. part
 - f. tell someone
 - g. use together

LET'S LOOK AT LOGICAL AND DUMMY SUBJECTS.

What we can learn from this chapter:

When you first learned English, you were probably told that each sentence had to have a subject and that you couldn't omit it. Later, you may have noticed that, in fact, when native speakers are talking very casually, they often omit a sentence subject which was clear from the context.

A: Nice day, isn't it?

B: Yeah—can't talk, I'm afraid. Got to get downtown.

A: Going shopping?

B: Yeah, need some stuff for the house. You?

A: Have to pick up the kids.

In this chapter you learned that it can be important to avoid asking personal questions. It can be a fairly simple matter to make your questions impersonal while showing why you need to know.

How much did you pay for your car?

→ I'm thinking of buying a car something like this. Do you know how much a model like this usually runs (costs)?

In some situations, using "it" as the subject—like using a passive verb or a word like "person"—may be more polite because it's more indirect.

Example: I think I have the right to say no.

→ It's considered the right of the individual person to say no.

You may have been confused by sentences which have “it” as a grammatical subject. What does “it” mean here, for example?

It's difficult when you first meet people.
When someone asks questions, **it** feels intrusive.
It might be OK to ask.

Why and how English uses empty subjects

- In English we sometimes use dummy subjects—that is, subjects which do nothing but fill the grammatical space. For example, in the sentence, “It’s raining,” what is it that rains? In English we can’t say the sky is raining or the weather is raining. The logical subject might be “rain” or “raining,” but the grammatical subject refers to nothing at all. It merely fills the place of a subject. It is only a dummy.
- English also has a communication rule that the end of the sentence often contains the newest information, so sometimes a dummy subject occurs at the beginning of the sentence in order to put the new information at the end.

A: Why do you think she got angry when I asked her to bring me some coffee?

B: Well, she’s an engineer. It may be that she’s sensitive about being asked to serve coffee.

- Sometimes the logical subject is moved to the right—away from its normal position—for emphasis. In the sentence below, “it” is the grammatical subject, but “Western customs,” the logical subject, has been moved to the right of the “be” verb, in the complement position, with the noun complement modified by a relative clause.

Example: It’s **Western customs** that are confusing?

Sentence pattern: *It + be + noun/adjective complement*

- This structure is very common when the logical subject is an infinitive phrase. Leaving the infinitive phrase in the subject position is grammatical, but it sounds very stiff to native speakers.

Example: **To take the airport bus** is easy. → It’s easy **to take the airport bus**.

The subject/agent of the infinitive phrase can become the object of the preposition *for*.

Example: It’s easy **for me** to take the airport bus.

- A dummy subject in the same sentence pattern can also introduce an *-ing* phrase.

Example: It was nice **seeing you again**.

Exercise 1: Rewrite each of the sentences below, using the target sentence pattern:
It + be + noun/adjective complement. Remember to contract *it + is* to *it's* unless the sentence is a question.

1. My dream is to travel around the world.

2. Falling in love is so easy.

3. May I use the phone? [Use *okay*]

4. To ask personal questions of strangers is not acceptable in Western society.

5. If you arrived in Seoul about noon, that would be best.

6. To stand around making small talk is part of a diplomat's job.

7. *English* is hard to learn—not Korean.

8. Trying to communicate with people who don't speak the language can be very tiring.

9. Taking pictures in the park is fun.

10. From the top to the bottom is a long way.

- A dummy subject is common when the logical subject is an entire sentence. In that case, you may have this sentence pattern:

it + be + adjective + that/when/what/how/how many + sentence

Example: It's unlikely that the fabric will be strong enough.
It can be torture when the dentist is working on a sensitive tooth.
It's uncertain how many times she'll call tonight.

- This sentence pattern is also possible.

it + verb phrase + that/when/what/how/how many + sentence

Example: It amazes me that she ever gets anywhere on time.

Exercise 2: Rewrite the following in one of these patterns:

it + be + adjective + that/when/what/how/how many + sentence

it + verb phrase + that/when/what/how/how many + sentence

1. That I treat people the way they want to be treated is necessary if I want to make good friends.

2. Why she became defensive doesn't interest me.

3. What he said would be very hard to translate.

4. The phone's ringing in the middle of the night makes me very uneasy.

5. He seems to have shared too much information with another company.

Exercise 3: In the following items, form sentences using the elements in brackets. The verb phrase in brackets will become an infinitive with “to.” This is the logical subject.

Example: [share personal information with others]

It’s not always necessary _____

→ *It’s not always necessary to share personal information with others.*

If the agent of the action, or subject, is also given in brackets, put this in the sentence preceded by the word “for.”

Example:

[anyone/find an address in the West] It is easy _____

→ *It is easy for anyone to find an address in the West.*

1. [we/get the job done] It’s more important _____
than to save face.
2. [decide whether or not to share personal information] It’s considered the right of the individual person _____
3. [avoid being culturally insensitive] The more accurate information you have, the easier it is _____.
4. [respond as a Roman would] When you are dealing with something which can affect someone as strongly as a barrage of personal questions, it can be very difficult _____
5. [ask your neighbors what they do for a living, what the ages of their children are, where they go to school and all that] Among neighbors at a party, it might be okay _____

6. [ask where they’re from and how long they’ve been in Korea] If you meet someone in a coffee shop, it might be fine _____
7. [determine what is right or wrong] It’s up to the individual _____
8. [say no] In a Confucian society like Korea, relationship ties are so important that it may seem impossible _____

Exercise 4: What does the underlined *it* refer to in each of the following sentences? Rewrite the sentences without it.

1. **It**'s difficult when you first meet people.

2. When someone asks questions, **it** feels intrusive.

3. **It** often seems as if the Westerner asks no questions or very few questions and the Korean asks a lot of questions.

4. **It** sometimes seems like all the possible answers you can give are wrong.

5. **It** used to bother me when I had to be rude to protect my privacy.

6. If you meet someone in a coffee shop, it might be fine to ask where they're from or how long they've been in Korea. But when a teacher is trying to get a class started, **it**'s an unwanted interruption."

LET'S DO A CROSSWORD PUZZLE.

ACROSS

8 Talk between two or more people

10 Having this means you are allowed to do something

11 While someone is speaking, say or do something which causes them to stop

14 Polite man

17 Empty place; outside the earth

19 Instructions about what to do and what not to do

22 Moving straight ahead without changing direction; honest and open, saying what you mean

23 Underground railway

27 Social conversation about unimportant things (two words)

30 Someone you don't know

31 What happens when both sides have equal importance; remain steady and not fall over

32 Cause people to learn about something for the first time

DOWN

1 Air conditions, such as wind, rain, temperature

2 Kind and understanding; easily upset about something; problematic

3 Question people thoroughly in order to get information out of them, particularly when done by police

4 Traditional customs and rules of a culture

5 Something someone says that they know is untrue

6 Go into a place where you are not wanted; invade

7 Making you angry because you can't do anything about it

9 Subject you discuss or write about

12 Words and actions done in a fixed order, particularly as part of a church service or social custom

13 Ask for information

15 What happens when people look at each other at the same time (two words)

16 Games like football and basketball

18 Private; belong to an individual

20 Quick to protect themselves

21 Polite woman

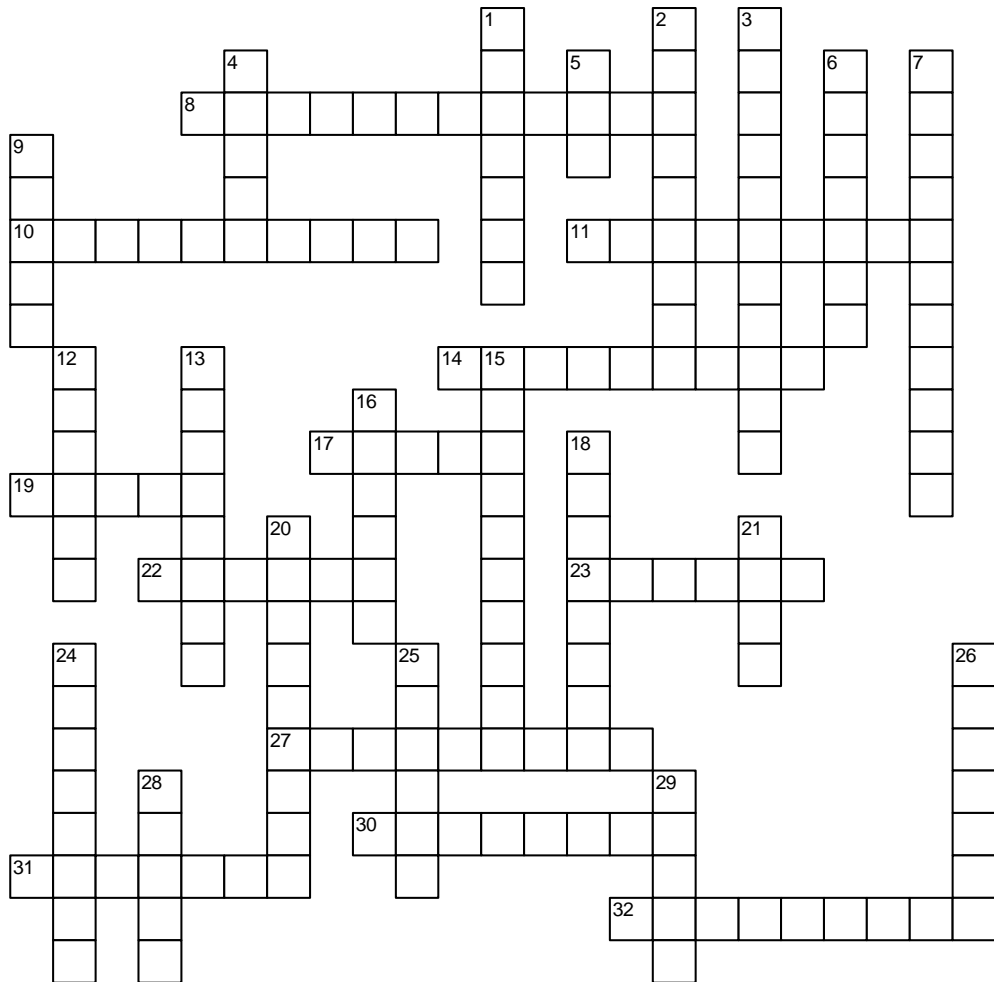
24 Limit set by a person; imaginary line that separates one area from another

25 Having good manners, acting in a socially correct way

26 Personal; not official; for the use of one person only

28 Use or experience together; divide; tell someone

29 Open and honest (maybe too much)



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