

Business English alibi game

Past Perfect and Past Continuous practice

Notes for teachers

Summary

Students make up their last working day using the cards provided and then aim to answer all questions about it from a police officer to prove their innocence. Unlike the usual version of the Alibi Game, this version can be played in small classes or even one-to-one with the teacher.

Preparation

Make one copy of the “rules of the game” sheet for each student or each group (or use it to explain the rules yourself).

Cut up one copy of the “my work day playing cards” sheet per student, and maybe copy one un-cut-up copy per student for reference.

Stages

As a warmer, you could have students tell each other 10 things they did in their last working day in random order. Their partner must then work out the order using the minimum number of questions.

Grammar presentation of Past Perfect and Past Continuous can be done here or after any other stage.

Give out the rules of the game and/ or explain it and give out the playing cards.

Let them play the game in groups of two or three, telling slower groups when they need to switch roles. Monitor for use of the Past Perfect and Past Continuous.

As they explain the differences between the stories and the slips of paper (as described on the “rules of the game” sheet), monitor for language difficulties and go through some examples at the end of the class.

Declare who is guilty.

The end.

Rules of the game

Yesterday at 2:35 pm a laptop with very important data on it was stolen from a manager's desk. The police are questioning all the people who work in that office to try to find who is guilty of this crime.

Your teacher will give you a list of things you did that day. Using your imagination, first of all decide which thing you were doing at 2:35 pm and put that in the middle of the table next to the "2:35 pm" card. Then arrange the other things in the order you imagine you did them. You can put two pieces of paper side by side if you were doing them at the same time, or put a slip of paper vertically if it took a long time and you did many other things before you finished it. Use at least half of the cards. Any you don't use can be left face down on the table.

Try to remember everything you did and in which order, including things happening at the same time, because the police will question you on every detail.

Leaving your slips of paper on the table, swap chairs with your partner so you can see each other's cards. With a textbook or similar, block your partner's view of their slips of paper and question them on everything they did, e.g.

- "What were you doing while you were drinking coffee?"
- "When the meeting started, had you already finished emailing?"

Make sure that you use past tenses for all questions and answers.

After you have finished questioning each other, tell the whole class any differences between the slips of paper and your partner's story, e.g. "Jose said he had drunk his coffee before the meeting, but actually he was drinking his coffee during the meeting". The person in the whole class with the most differences is guilty.

My Work Day cards to cut up

2:35 pm yesterday
Board meeting starts
Board meeting ends
You arrive at the board meeting
Emailing foreign subsidiary
Filing
Telephoning suppliers
Writing memo(s)
Proofreading a report
Interviewing job applicant(s)
Give PowerPoint presentation
Give clients a tour of the company
Arrive at work
Your boss arrives at work
Drinking coffee
Signing for deliveries
Lunch break
Leave work
Listen to your mobile messages
A cigarette break
Complaining
Apologising
Tidy up
Get a text (mobile vibrating in your pocket)
Read your text(s)
Dismiss someone
9 o'clock in the morning yesterday
5 o'clock in the afternoon yesterday
Chatting with colleagues
Someone leaves a note on your computer screen