

1.9

My mistake

Focus: Writing and listening.

Level: Intermediate +

Time: 40–50 minutes



Preparation: Make posters with the mistake quotations (below), printing one each on an A4 sheet of paper, of different colours if possible. Put them up around the classroom.

in class

1. At the beginning of the lesson, have students walk around the room to read the quotations and decide which one they like best.
2. In groups of 4 or 5, they share which quotations they chose and why. Encourage them to discuss anything of interest related to the quotations.
3. Tell the class a mistake story of yours (see example below).
4. Give students about 10 minutes to work individually and think of a time when they made a mistake and to write a short paragraph explaining what happened. Stress that they should feel comfortable telling others about it.
5. Reform groups: the group members tell each other their mistake stories. The group chooses the one they like best, and then they read it to the whole class.
6. Discuss with students the need to make mistakes in order to learn. While our goal is to speak the language we are learning fluently, for us to reach our goal we will have to use the language before we know it well, and it is normal to make mistakes.

Variation

For Step 5, collect the students' stories, and read each one out to the class. If you wish, you can make minor corrections as you read. Have the class try to guess who might have written the mistake story. After a moment, whether they guess correctly or not, say 'This is Gunter's (Alicia's ...) beautiful (or lovely, or ...) mistake.' Do this for each one, to reinforce the idea that it is all right to make mistakes.

Jane's mistake:

One day she went to class, and when she got there she noticed she had put on one black shoe and one brown one. But that isn't all. One shoe had a higher heel than the other one!

1.9 My mistake

<p>Mistakes are the portals of discovery.</p> <p>(James Joyce)</p>	<p>The only people, scientific or other, who never make mistakes are those who do nothing.</p> <p>(Thomas Henry Huxley)</p>
<p>Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes.</p> <p>(Mahatma Gandhi)</p>	<p>The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing.</p> <p>(John Powell.)</p>
<p>If I had my life to live over ... I'd dare to make more mistakes next time.</p> <p>(Nadine Stair)</p>	<p>A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.</p> <p>(George Bernard Shaw)</p>
<p>Mistakes, obviously, show us what needs improving. Without mistakes, how would we know what we had to work on?</p> <p>(Peter McWilliams)</p>	<p>The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one.</p> <p>(Elbert Hubbard)</p>
<p>Mistakes are a part of being human. Appreciate your mistakes for what they are: precious life lessons that can only be learned the hard way.</p> <p>(Al Franken)</p>	<p>A mistake is a gift to the class.</p> <p>(Caleb Gattegno)</p>

Note

For students to have a useful, positive attitude towards their errors, we need to have sensitive policies of error correction.

Acknowledgement

We learned about telling mistake stories from Tim Murphey's *Language Hungry! An Introduction to Language Learning, Fun and Self-Esteem*, 2006 (Helbling Languages).