

Activity: Compliments in American English (multiple days)

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This is a multi-day activity designed for adult English language learners, but it can be adapted for other languages. Learners should understand the concepts of [distance](#), solidarity, [power](#), and [imposition](#) to study giving or receiving compliments. They assume the role of Compliment Reporter to collect compliments and then come back together to collaborate, report to the class, and discuss generalizations. It is best to introduce the activity at the end of a class session where there will be a gap of at least a few days before the next class occurs, such as the last class before the weekend.

LEARNING OUTCOMES. Learners will be able to:

Knowledge:

- Formulate compliments in English using familiarity with English vocabulary, grammar, and structures. Examples:
 - I like your ____! (I/we + like/love + Noun or Noun Phrase)
 - Your ____ are ____! (Noun or Noun Phrase + Verb “to be” + Adjective)
 - That’s a _____ (“That’s a” or “What a” + Adjective + Noun or Noun Phrase)

Analysis:

- Assess how close their relationship is with someone (distance/solidarity) and use that information to choose an expected or typical compliment from all the compliments they know.
- Assess the relative power speakers have and use that information to choose an expected or typical compliment from all the compliments they know.
- Assess whether they are imposing on someone and to what degrees, and use that information to choose an expected or typical compliment from all the compliments they know.
- Vary their choice of typical/expected compliment as needed, based on their estimations of power/closeness/imposition.

Subjectivity:

- Make conscious choices about which compliment types and structures they personally want to use in a given context, based on their identity or other factors. Learners can explain why they made those choices.

Awareness:

- Evaluate how those listening to their compliment received it and understand the impact language has on others.
- Identify miscommunications and repair if they need to/want to.

MODE(S): Interpersonal, Interpretive, Presentational

MATERIALS: [Activity Slides](#), [Graphic Organizer and Oral Presentation Rubric Handouts](#)

DAY 1 PROCEDURE — Instructions for Going Out into the Field (10 minutes):

1. Learners go out into the field (meaning, the general environment/landscape of the place where they live) and assume the role of Compliment Reporter.
2. Over the next few days they write down at least 3 compliments they hear or read in English. This could be something they encounter in their own homes, while they’re among friends, something they read on social media or hear on television, or something they overhear while shopping, for example.
3. As soon as possible after learners hear the compliment, they must write down (or make a voice memo/recording) of all details of what they heard, to the best of their ability, using the [graphic organizer](#).

- a. If learners hear a compliment and can't get to their organizer quickly, they should jot down details on their phone or speak them into a voice memo – whatever they need to do so they remember important details of the compliment. [Teachers, you may need to explain “eavesdropping” to your learners – make sure they don't get themselves into trouble!]
4. Like traditional news reporters, learners should try to describe the who / what / when / where / why and how:
 - a. Document a description of WHO said the compliment, plus tell WHAT the compliment was, documenting any language they heard that came directly before or after (including any reactions to the compliment! Tell learners that studying how compliments are received is an important part of the activity).
 - b. Document WHEN they heard the compliment (day of week, time of day), and tell WHERE they heard it (e.g., at the bank? On an episode of the T.V. show Friends?).
 - c. Tell WHY they think the compliment was given, and record any details of HOW the compliment was given (if spoken, was it with sarcastic tone? If spoken or written, was there use of slang, emphasis connectors, or anything else that seemed important? What about pauses or nonverbal cues such as gestures or eye rolls?)
5. Compliment Field Reporters should pay special attention to degrees of power, distance, and imposition involved. On their graphic organizers, they should note answers to the following questions:
 - a. Could you tell whether the person extending the compliment seemed to be in a more, or less, powerful social position, than the person receiving the compliment? (If applicable; some compliments may not be directed at a specific individual).
 - b. If applicable, could you tell whether the giver and receiver of the compliment seem like they have a close relationship?
 - c. If applicable, could you tell whether the giver of the compliment seemed like they were imposing on the receiver of the compliment? (e.g., catcalls on the street may impose upon the receiver – remember, not all compliments are welcome!)

DAY 2 PROCEDURE – Collaborative Compliment Reporting (90 mins. for class of 12):

1. (Slide 1) Paired Warm-Up: **Think/Pair/Share** (10 mins). Tell learners:
 - a. Think about what you already know about complimenting in American English.
 - b. Turn to a partner. Compare and contrast American English compliments with complimenting in other languages and cultures you are familiar with.
 - c. Share your thoughts with the class.
2. (Slide 2) **Collaborative Compliment Reporting:** Put learners in groups of 3-4.
3. Learners look at their field notes on their graphic organizers together and compare:
 - a. What were the compliments you heard?
 - b. Who spoke them?
 - c. Did the interlocutors seem to be in equal or disparate power relationships? How can you tell? Did speakers seem to be close? Provide rationale.
 - d. Was imposition high or low, if discernible? How did you determine that?
 - e. What were the reactions to compliments you observed?
 - f. Did any of the compliments seem to “go wrong” – i.e. the receiver was not happy about the compliment?
4. The groups look for common themes or generalizations they can make about typical or expected compliments in the target language, based on their collective field notes.

5. (Slide 3) Pass out the [oral presentation rubric](#). Learners take 20 minutes to compile this information into an informal oral report shared with the whole class.
6. Groups of students give a presentation of 5-10 minutes.
 - a. Those listening to the presentation take notes to document key takeaways.
7. Learners comment on generalizations/reports of other groups. Do they agree/disagree with other groups' findings? Why or why not?
8. Learners comment on whether they would/would not like to use specific compliments or compliment structures they and/or their peers have heard in the field.
9. (Slide 4) **Exit Ticket:** As learners file out the door they must tell the teacher:
 - a. One thing you learned from another group's presentation.
 - b. One compliment you heard today that you will use + tell who you might use it with in your own life + explain why. What do you expect the other person's reaction might be? Why?

Note: While this activity is geared toward learners immersed in a second language environment, learners in a foreign language environment could do an adapted version of this activity, where they immerse themselves in target language media (e.g., view web sites, browse social media, watch TV or YouTube in the language) in order to gather compliment field notes. In such cases, the teacher may choose to curate a list of potential media sources for learners, depending on learner needs and abilities.