

AGONY COLUMN

Objective: Getting students to write a letter of reply to someone's problem using mixed tenses and in particular, modal verbs and 2nd / 3rd conditional phrases.

Materials: Use the problem sheet provided (or invent/add your own)

Procedure

1. Warm up: have a short discussion with the students to ask them who they normally turn to for advice, if they often find themselves giving advice etc. Ask them what they consider their best way of solving problems.
2. Give the students the "problem page". Ask students if they ever read the Agony columns in magazines and what they think of them.
3. Ask students to read through the various problems (giving vocabulary help when needed) and choose one problem. The students have to write a reply to the problem.

Teacher's guidelines: some useful vocabulary to point students in the right direction and to make their letters more varied.

Giving advice and making suggestions

I think you should...

why don't you...

If I were you... I'd

It might be an idea to ...

You had better...

In my opinion

You should/shouldn't

I wouldn't advise you to...

You have to...

You must/mustn't

You don't have to...

If you ask me ...

Workshop – Agony Column

I am house-hunting at the moment, which is very difficult as I work full-time. I use the telephone in the office quite a lot to make appointments with estate agents, lawyers etc. Is this wrong? Will I find myself in hot water over this? Would it be better to ask my boss for permission? What if my boss refuses to give me permission? How will I ever organise the move? Maybe I should carry on in secret and hope that I'm not caught out. I need some advice because I need to find a house but I don't want to and can't afford to lose my job!

Louise, 34

Help! I think my friend is going crazy. She's acting very strangely at the moment. She no longer wants to go out with me, in fact she no longer wants to go out with any of her friends. The only time she goes out is to meet up with her "special" workgroup. I have no idea what she does at this workgroup nor do I have any idea who these people are. I think that this "special group" is a cult! If I'm right, what can I do to help?

Angela, 18

My girlfriend of 3½ years has decided to dump me because in her opinion I am too “safe”. What does that mean? I’m a nice, reliable, considerate guy – that’s why she chose me in the first place. So what’s the problem? She says she wants someone more “exciting”. What does that mean? What are women looking for? – a dangerous guy, a guy who treats them badly. Are all women the same?

James, 30

I need some advice. I’m 58 years old and 2 years ago, my dear, lovely wife died suddenly and since then, I’ve been feeling so lonely and so lost. My children are grown up now and live far away with families of their own and I don’t want to intrude. I don’t have any “real” friends now – some moved away, some died and some were more friends of my late wife. How can I get myself out of this depression? Am I not too old to be starting my life over?

Raymond, 58

Sarah and I have been together for 2 years. We have a good relationship or should I say we “had” a good relationship. Everything was going well until I was offered a job in Milan for a year. Sarah took the news very badly. I tried to explain to her that it would be a temporary thing but she wouldn’t listen. This job will give me so much experience and I am prepared to have a long distance relationship as I love Sarah. However, Sarah has given me an ultimatum – her or Milan. What should I do?

Sam, 27

I have just found a new job and I’m so glad. My present job had become unbearable as I have a terrible boss. She’s rude, unkind, unfair and creates a terrible office environment. Before I leave (in 2 weeks’ time) I would like to speak up about her bad behaviour and tell her exactly how I (and others) feel. I think she needs to be told exactly what type of person she is. What will happen if I do so? Will my boss just think I’m being bitter and spiteful? Would it be better to say nothing at all?

Tracey, 28