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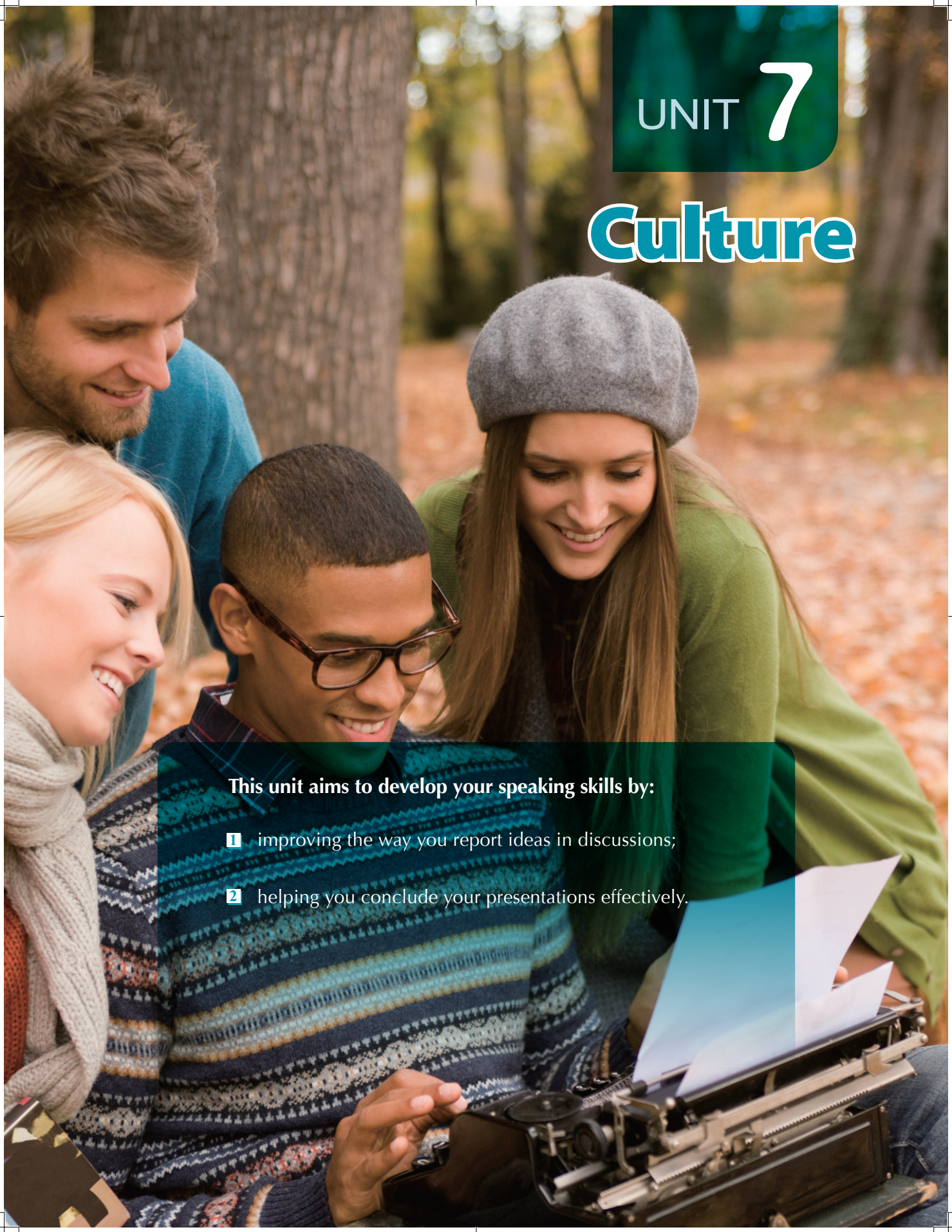

UNIT 7

Culture

This unit aims to develop your speaking skills by:

1. improving the way you report ideas in discussions;
2. helping you conclude your presentations effectively.

DISCUSSION SKILLS
Reporting

In seminar or tutorial discussion, you often have to talk not only about your own ideas, but also those of the authorities in your field that you have read in textbooks and journals or heard about in lectures. You have to take care to make it very clear to your listeners when you are expressing your own opinions, and when you are reporting ideas you have read or heard about.

Useful language

Reporting

sb. says…
According to sb.,…
sb. defines… as…
sb. describes… as…
sb. believes…
sb.'s theory is that…
sb. argues that…
sb. makes a strong case for…
sb. suggests that…

Note: Use just the surname (or personal name and surname) of the authority you are referring to—not titles such as Doctor or Professor.

Critical evaluation

Of course, you are expected to read and understand the key literature on the topic you are studying. But, as we pointed out in Unit 6, in the Western academic tradition it is not enough just to know the ideas: You are also expected to show that you can evaluate them critically. This means being able to form your own informed opinions about them.

The verb "claim" is very useful when you want to show that you do not necessarily accept the ideas you are reporting. When you say: *sb. claims that…*, your listeners will understand that you have doubts about the validity or truth of the idea.

To express your critical evaluation more directly, you can use the same expressions that you use to express opinions generally. (See also Useful language in Unit 1.)

I think sb. is right about…
sb. is quite right when he / she says…
I'm not sure I accept sb.'s point about…
I'm not sure I'm convinced by sb.'s argument that…
I don't agree with sb. about…
I can't accept sb.'s idea that…
sb. doesn't produce any evidence for his / her claim that…

You normally use the PRESENT SIMPLE tense when referring to people's ideas in discussion.
sb. says (not sb. said)...
But when you report research findings, use the PAST SIMPLE.
sb. found that…

Practice

Work in groups of three or four students. Spend a few minutes reading the following ideas and data. Think about how you could report the material. Do you have a critical evaluation of it? If so, think about how you could express that.

Take turns to practise reporting each item. Each student in the group should try to find a different way to report each one. If appropriate, let your listeners know your critical evaluation.

Tips : When you report ideas in discussion, you would not normally read out the exact words from your source material. It is more usual to summarise or paraphrase the ideas in your own words. Try not just to read out of the book—focus on getting the main idea across clearly.

1) "We have global markets but we do not have a global society. And we cannot build a global society without taking into account moral considerations." (George Soros)

2) Number of TV sets per 1000 people in East Asia
1985: 50
1995: 250
(World Bank)

3) "The relative risk of breast cancer increased by 7.1% for each additional 10g per day intake of alcohol, i.e. for each extra unit or drink of alcohol consumed on a daily basis… These results suggest that about 4% of the breast cancers in developed countries are attributable to alcohol… Smoking has little or no independent effect on the risk of developing breast cancer." (Cancer Research UK)

4) "There needs to be greater recognition that what is called Western science drew on a world heritage, on the basis of sharing ideas that made science what it is." (Amartya Sen)

5) "If we win the battle with nature, we'll end up on the losing side." (E.F. Schumacher)

6) "Cloning… will probably come to be accepted as a reproductive tool if it is carefully controlled." (Robert Edwards)

Discussion point 1 Coping with cultural differences

Preparation 1 (individual)

One of the predictable difficulties you can expect to encounter when you go to a different country to study or work is language. But difficulties may also result from cultural differences, which are often less obvious at first, and can be unexpected.

Read the definition of one of two terms: culture shock or culture bumps. Prepare to report the meaning of the term you have read about to another student.

TEXT 1A

Culture shock

Culture shock is a common experience for a person learning a second language in a second culture. Culture shock refers to phenomena ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological panic and crisis. Culture shock is associated with feelings of estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even

physical illness. The person undergoing culture shock views his new world out of resentment, and alternates between being angry at others for not understanding him, and being filled with self-pity.

(Abridged from) Brown, H. Douglas. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980: 28.

TEXT 1B

Culture bumps

Certain situations (e.g., arriving late for class) exist in all but a few cultures, and each culture develops particular responses that are labeled "polite" for these situations. For example, North American culture teaches university students who are late for class to enter quietly without knocking and sit down, while Chinese culture teaches university students to knock, offer an explanation, and wait for the teacher's permission to enter. A culture bump occurs when an individual has expectations of one behavior and gets something completely different. The unexpected behavior can be negative or neutral or positive. Unlike culture shock, which extends over an extended period of time, culture bumps are instantaneous, usually over within minutes or even seconds, though the effect may be long-lasting, and can occur any time one is in contact with members of a different culture.

(Abridged from) Archer, Carol M. "Culture bump and beyond." *Culture Bound*. Ed. J. Valdes. London: Cambridge University Press, 1986: 171.

Preparation 2 (pairs)

Work with a student who has read the other definition.

1 Take turns to explain to each other the meaning of the term you have read about. Don't read out the definition you have read, but explain the term using your own words. What is the difference between the two phenomena?

2 Tell your partner about any experiences you have had of or heard about:

   a) a culture bump. Was it negative, neutral or positive?
   b) culture shock. Did you overcome it? If so, how? How long did the process take?

Discussion

Now form a larger group of four to six students and do the following tasks.

1 Describe any experiences you (or your partner in the last activity) have had of or heard about culture shock or culture bumps.

2 Your group is asked to write a leaflet giving advice to foreign students coming to study at the institution you are studying at on how to avoid culture shock. What difficulties do you think a foreign student might have in adapting to life in this country? How could these be minimised? You must agree on five main points that should be included in the leaflet.

3 When you have decided on the advice you will offer, choose someone in your group to report your group's decision to the rest of the class.

Discussion point 2 Hofstede's dimensions

You are going to read part of a summary of an influential theory of cultural diversity, proposed by Geert Hofstede[1], a Dutch academic. Hofstede's work was originally intended to improve intercultural understanding in the business world (it was based on research into the IBM corporation), but it has also been applied in other fields.

Hofstede devised a framework for analysing national cultures based on four dimensions: "power distance", "individualism / collectivism", "masculinity / femininity" and "uncertainty avoidance".

Preparation (individual)

Your teacher will ask you to read a short explanation of one of Hofstede's dimensions. You will be asked to report what you have read to your group members who have not read your text. Read your summary carefully, using a dictionary if necessary, and plan how to explain the information to your group. You can make notes if you like, but don't write out a "script".

1 Hofstede, G. *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. London: Sage, 1980.

TEXT 2A

Power distance

Power distance is defined by Hofstede as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally".

In nations with a low power distance, such as the United Kingdom, inequalities among people will tend to be minimised, decentralisation of activities is more likely, subordinates will expect to be consulted by superiors, and privileges and status symbols are less evident. In high power-distance nations, conversely, inequalities among people are considered desirable, there is greater reliance by the less powerful on those who hold power, centralisation is more normal, and subordinates are likely to be separated from their bosses by wide differentials in salary, privileges, and status symbols.

TEXT 2B

Individualism / collectivism: behaviour towards the group

"Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty."

In some societies, people need to belong to a group and have a loyalty to the group. Children learn to say "we". This is true of countries such as Japan, India and China. In other societies, such as the United Kingdom, individualism is more important, and there is a lower emphasis on loyalty and protection. Children learn to say "I". In strong collectivist countries, there tend to be greater expectations of the employer's obligations towards the employee and his or her family.

TEXT 2C

Masculinity / femininity: behaviour according to gender

"Masculinity pertains to societies in which social gender roles are clearly distinct; femininity pertains to societies in which the social gender roles overlap."

In a masculine society (Hofstede gives the United Kingdom as an example), there is a division of labour in which the more assertive tasks are given to men. There is a stress on academic success, competition, and achievement in careers. In a feminine society such as France (according to Hofstede), there is a stress on relationships, compromise, life skills, and social performance.

The last 10 to 15 years have seen enormous changes—a "feminisation" process—in the behaviour of Western democracies. It has also been said that the emergence of developing countries is as much about feminisation as it is about dealing with harder business and economic realities.

TEXT 2D

Uncertainty avoidance: the need for structure

Uncertainty is "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations".

In some societies, there is a pronounced need for structure. This is because those societies tend to fear the unknown and to possess a high degree of uncertainty. Countries characterised by a low level of uncertainty (such as the United Kingdom) do not perceive something different to be dangerous, whereas, in strong uncertainty-avoidance societies, people will seek to reduce their exposure to the unknown and limit risk by imposing rules and systems to bring about order and coherence. The same thing can be seen in organisations. For example, where there is a need for rules and dependence there will tend to be a pyramidal organisational structure.

Business. London: Bloomsbury, 2002: 1004-5. (Quotations from Hofstede, G. *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 1991.)

Discussion

Your teacher will organise you into groups of three or four students who have each read about a different "dimension" of Hofstede's cultural framework.

1 Take turns to explain what you have read to the other students in your group. You must not just read out your text! Use your own words.

Tips: Remember that at this stage you are simply reporting what you have read, not giving your own views. Check that you have made yourself clear, and try to answer any questions you are asked.

2 Listen carefully to the other students' reports on their readings, and make notes on the key points. Ask for clarification of any points you haven't understood.

3 Discuss the following questions.

- Can you apply Hofstede's analysis to your own national culture? Try to rate it "high", "medium" or "low" on each of Hofstede's dimensions.
- If you have experience of another culture, how would you define it on the four dimensions?
- Do you think this kind of analysis could help people of different cultures understand each other better?
- Do you have any criticisms of this approach?
- One criticism that has been made of Hofstede's theory is that it seems to imply that cultures are fixed and unchanging. Do you think your national culture is changing? If so, can that change be described on Hofstede's dimensions? Which one(s)? Do you think that change is a good thing, or not? Explain your answer.

PRESENTATION SKILLS
Concluding your presentation

The importance of a firm clear conclusion

In Unit 6 we said that how you present your introduction is important because it makes a first impression. Similarly, the delivery of the conclusion is important because it leaves a final impression which can colour, retrospectively, the audience's view of your entire presentation. It leaves a bad general impression if you stop your presentation awkwardly, or rush through your final points because of lack of time, or, even worse, have to stop your presentation before you reach the conclusion. In fact the conclusion is so important that if you find you have mistimed your presentation and it is going to be too long, then you should omit your last main points or summarise them in a sentence, and go straight to the conclusion.

The conclusion is also important from a practical point of view, in that it offers the opportunity for a summary of your main message, so if the audience has not followed parts of your presentation this can be redeemed in the conclusion.

A conclusion should always be delivered firmly and strongly, usually at a slightly slower pace than the main body of the presentation. Keep the content brief and to the point, but don't rush the ending.

Signalling the conclusion

Start your conclusion with a language signal.

Signals for concluding

In conclusion / summary…
To conclude / sum up / summarise…
So…
Finally…

Signal the last sentence of the conclusion by your delivery. Catch the attention of the audience by lowering your voice slightly, slowing the pace, and using shorter phrasing and more emphasis. Then do not just stop, or mumble: *That's it* or *That's all I have to say* or *I've finished now*. Instead, pause briefly, smile at the audience, and say firmly: *Thank you*. If there is no chair, you might then want to say: *Are there any questions?*

If you are using an overhead projector, switch it off before you ask for questions. A PowerPoint presentation should be left running—with a final blank slide showing—in case you need to return quickly to a slide during question-time.

Content of the conclusion

Most conclusions consist of a summary of the main points of the presentation, perhaps highlighting any point that is particularly important. Most lectures and course seminar presentations end in this way.

If the presentation is of your own research, the conclusion may include some evaluation of your study. You can:

- relate the findings to your original hypothesis
- comment on the methods and how these affected the findings
- indicate the application of your findings, either in practical real life or to the development of theory
- make recommendations for further research

Analysis

You will hear the concluding part of a seminar presentation.

First listening

Listen and take notes. Do not worry about details, but answer the questions below.

Your teacher will play the recording section by section, stopping for the answer to each question. Discuss your answer with another student, then check with the teacher.

1 The speaker re-states the main research question, in general terms. What was the topic of the paper?

2 The speaker reminds the audience of the two sets of data that the researchers considered. What were they?

3 The speaker emphasises that three factors have to be taken into consideration when evaluating the supposed effects of the media. What are they?

4 The speaker indicates what the main finding seems to be so far. What was it?

Second listening

Listen again to the presentation.

1 Notice that the speaker says WE and not I. This is because she is representing a group of researchers.

2 As you listen, note the verbs and verb phrases that the speaker uses to report academic investigation. For example, she begins by saying "so in this paper we've *evaluated* a number of arguments".

Presentation practice

Preparation

Plan a talk (of about five to six minutes) on the influence of American English and North American culture in your own country.

1 Decide first what your main message will be. Then make an outline of your main points. (See Unit 1, Page 39 for suggestions on ways of organising the information in a presentation.) Make very short notes under each of the headings:
- Introduction
- Main point 1 (plus example or comment)
- Main point 2 (plus example or comment)
- Main point 3 (plus example or comment)
- Conclusion

2 Decide which language signals you will use to introduce all the sections of your talk.

3 Plan your conclusion in more detail. You should summarise the main points, and perhaps highlight the most important, or suggest a recommendation, or make a prediction. The conclusion should be brief—for a five- to six-minute talk a conclusion should be half a minute to one minute long.

Look at the verbs and verb phrases you noted in the Analysis section. Plan to use at least three or four of them.

4 Write out your last sentence, and practise speaking it slowly, firmly, with short phrasing, and emphasis. Remember to add the end signal *Thank you*.

Presentation

Now give your presentation to two other students. One listener should time your talk, and tell you when you have spoken for nearly five minutes. If you have not

started on your conclusion by then, you should move on to it immediately. The listeners should take notes of your main points while you are speaking and also note answers to the following questions.

1 Did the speaker use a language signal at the start of the conclusion?

2 Did the speaker summarise his / her main points clearly and briefly?

3 Did the speaker use a slightly lower voice, change of pace, and effective phrasing and emphasis in the final sentence?

4 Did the speaker remember to pause, look at the audience and smile, and say *Thank you* at the end?

Then exchange roles.

Evaluation

1 Compare your speaking notes with the ones the listeners took as you spoke. Did they understand all your main points? If not, discuss what you should do to make your meaning clearer.

2 Compare your notes on how you each concluded the talk. Did you forget to do anything?

3 Ask them if they thought your style was appropriate. Was there any part of your talk that was too informal?

SUMMARY

To conclude your presentation firmly and clearly, you have to remember:

- Even if you have to hurry some of your main points in the main body of the talk, don't hurry the conclusion.
- The conclusion should normally contain a summary of the main points in your presentation.
- It should be brief.
- Give the last sentence weight by speaking firmly, with a lower voice and slower pace, short phrases and clear emphasis.
- Conclude gracefully by saying *Thank you* to your audience.

SCENARIO
Project results

TASK

1. Work in groups of four with two students taking Role A and the other two Role B.
2. Analyse your task and discuss what you will say in this situation with the group member who takes the same role as you.
3. Role-play the following situation with a group member of the opposite role. You may refer to the discussion skills illustrated in this unit.

Role A ***Student***

You handed in a project for your course a couple of weeks ago. It was on a topic that you are interested in and you felt it would get quite a good mark.

The results were given out yesterday and your mark was much lower than you expected—a low Pass (54%). In their written comments, the two markers criticised your introduction as "rambling" and "messy". You are not quite sure what that means. Some of their other comments did not seem fair. In fact, before you gave in the project, you had shown a draft to one of the tutors, who said it was "OK".

You have also seen some of the projects written by other students and their work didn't seem better than yours, but they got higher marks. You have asked to speak to the Course Director to ask him / her to read the project and give a third opinion, to see whether he / she thinks the mark is fair.

What do you think is the best way to explain to the Course Director why you want him / her to read your project? Discuss what to say.

Role B *Course Director*

One of the international students in your department has made an appointment to see you, to discuss a recent project mark. He / She got a low Pass.

The two colleagues who marked his / her project thought that his / her project was very repetitive. One of them, in particular, felt that the introduction to the project was "rambling" (vague and unfocused) and the other described it as "messy" (poorly organised). Both the markers had the impression that the student did not know enough about the subject. They also commented on the low standard of his / her written English, which is much weaker than his / her ability to communicate in speech.

In your department, the normal procedure is that if the two markers give similar marks, and agree on a final mark, there is no reason for a third opinion. If they differ by 10% or more and can't agree on a final mark, they ask you as Course Director to assess the student's work and see which of the two marks you agree with more.

In this case, the two markers' individual marks were 50% and 61%. They discussed their comments and then agreed on a mark of 54%. So if the student wishes to make a formal objection to the project mark, you can either read the project yourself and give a third opinion, or you can ask the External Examiner to read the project and to advise you on a suitable mark. Now is the end of the academic year, just before the Examination Board meeting to discuss students' marks for all their assignments and exams.

Plan how best to explain the situation to the student. You want to be sympathetic but you are also extremely busy at this time of year.