

# Detective or Good Communicator?

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Picture the following: a man is standing in a line. When he gets to the front of the line, a woman smiles, greets the man and asks him several questions. The man points to a sign on the wall behind the woman. The woman nods her head.

Where is the man? It is difficult to say for certain, but we can probably assume that the man is in some sort of store or bank or perhaps even a government office. Now, let's imagine that we hear the woman say, "And is that for here or to go?" at the end of the conversation.

Now it becomes clear that the man is in a fast food restaurant. We did not need to hear the whole conversation or see the complete setting to know this. Like a good detective, all we needed were a few clues to solve the mystery.

As we process information, we naturally make assumptions and fill in the blanks of our understanding based on clues. Not only do we connect the dots to make sense of what we hear and see, we also try to predict what might come next.

This is a very important skill as it allows us to navigate uncertainty and make educated guesses. Sometimes our assumptions turn out to be wrong; but more often than not, they are correct.

Now let's imagine that you are the person in the line. You are, however, in a foreign country and you do not speak the language very well. Once you arrive at the head of the line, you know that you will be asked several questions. How do you prepare?

First, you will do your best to imagine what you will say in advance so there will not be any surprises. Secondly, you will try to predict the kinds of things you might be asked. If you

have time, you might even look up a few words in your dictionary before entering the shop.

Whatever your method, you will most certainly prepare yourself and try to predict what type of language you will hear. And as you interact with the cashier, you will use this information as well as your deduction skills to successfully complete the transaction.

Teachers of foreign languages know only too well the importance of prediction and deduction skills for their students. And, as with all abilities, practice makes perfect. Luckily there are many types of interesting activities that allow students to practice their detective skills.

In my classes, I try to give students time to think about a topic and activate their vocabulary before we explore it in depth. Before listening exercises, I tell the students the topic of the text and have them brainstorm words related to it. I also have the students read the questions and imagine answers.

During reading and writing activities, I sometimes give students only the first half of the dialogue from the text. Students must imagine the ending. For an easier challenge, I create a fill-in-the-blank exercise using the text. Before reading, the students must predict what the missing words are.

There are many techniques and activities that can be used to help our students develop their language detective skills. The main thing is to make students aware that they don't have to understand every word, but instead can make educated guesses and predictions.

And the final piece of advice for our students: trust your instincts and don't be afraid to take a chance. All the best language detectives do!