

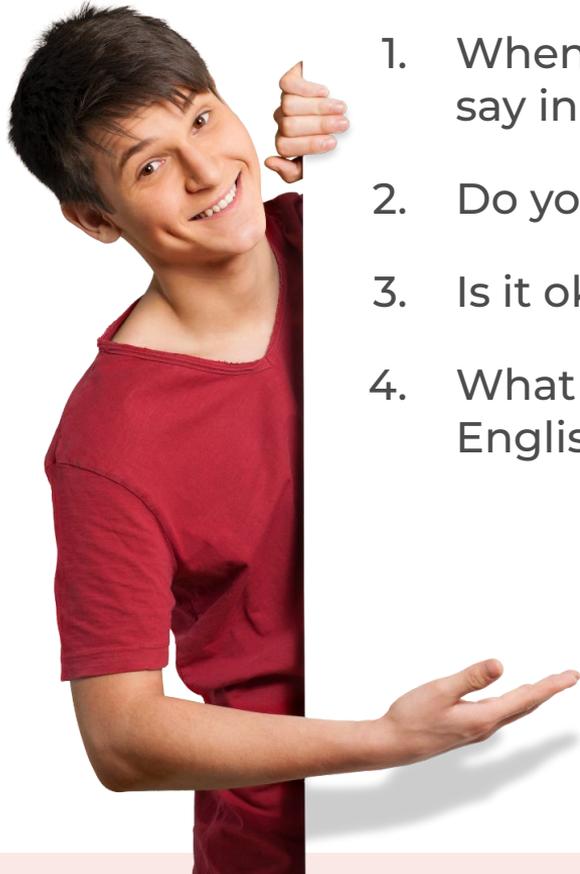
B1 —

Explaining something when
you're not 100% sure



Focus: Filler words for hesitation, softening, and
thinking time

Warm-up questions



1. When you don't know the exact answer, what do you usually say in your language?
2. Do you ever hesitate in English? Why?
3. Is it okay to be unsure in a conversation? Why / why not?
4. What situations make you feel uncertain when speaking English?

Useful filler words for uncertainty

Filler word / phrase	Meaning	Example
Um / Uh	A small hesitation sound.	<i>Um... I think it's on the second floor.</i>
Well...	Softens your answer.	<i>Well... I'm not totally sure, but I think so.</i>
Let me think...	You need a moment to think.	<i>Let me think... maybe around 6 p.m.</i>
I guess...	You aren't 100% sure.	<i>I guess he'll arrive later.</i>
I suppose...	A polite way to show uncertainty.	<i>I suppose it could work.</i>
Probably...	A guess based on limited information.	<i>He's probably at home.</i>
Actually...	Used before clarifying or correcting yourself.	<i>Actually... I might be wrong.</i>
To be honest...	You are speaking honestly.	<i>To be honest... I don't really know.</i>
In a way...	Something is partly true.	<i>In a way... you're right.</i>
What I mean is...	Helps you explain more clearly.	<i>What I mean is... the instructions aren't clear.</i>

Guided examples

Example 1

- A. Do you know how this coffee machine works?
- B. *Let me think... Well... I guess you just press this button?*

Example 2

- A. Is the meeting at 3 or 4?
- B. *Um... I'm not totally sure. To be honest, I think it's at 4.*

Example 3

- A. Why didn't Anna join us?
- B. *Actually... I suppose she was busy. In a way, she hinted at that yesterday.*



Grammar and function guide

This is not grammar-heavy; it's functional language.

Why we use filler words:

- To buy thinking time
- To make uncertainty sound *natural*
- To soften answers (especially in English-speaking cultures)
- To avoid sounding too direct or abrupt
- To maintain fluency even when unsure

Be careful:

- Using *too many fillers* can sound unconfident
- Using *none* can make you sound robotic or overly direct

Goal: Balanced and intentional use.



“The Forgot-My-Password Incident”

Tom works in a small office in Cape Town. One Monday morning, his colleague Maya asks him to help her log into the new system. Tom thinks he remembers how it works, but he isn't 100% sure. “Tom, do you know how to reset the password?” Maya asks.

Tom hesitates. “Um... well... let me think,” he says. He clicks around the page slowly. “I guess you go to ‘Settings’ first, but... actually... I’m not completely sure.”

Maya laughs. “It’s okay! I don’t understand these things either.” Tom scrolls again. “To be honest, the new system is confusing. What I mean is... the old one was much simpler.”

Maya points at a small grey button. “Is that it?” Tom squints. “Probably... in a way... that could be the right link.”

Maya clicks the button and a message pops up: Password reset email sent. Tom smiles. “Well... I guess we figured it out... somehow.” Maya replies, “Teamwork! Even when we’re not sure.”

Reading comprehension questions

General Understanding

1. Who needed help with the new system?
2. Why was Tom unsure?
3. How did they finally reset the password?

Filler Word Recognition

Find examples of these in the text:

- A thinking-time filler
- A softener
- A correction/clarifying filler
- An uncertainty phrase

Open-ended

1. Do you also use filler words in your language?
2. How do you usually react when someone asks you something you're unsure about?

Controlled practice (gap-fill activity)

Fill the gaps using:

“well,” “um,” “let me think,” “I guess,” “actually,” “probably,” “to be honest”

1. _____... I'm not sure this is the right address.
2. _____... is it on the left or right?
3. _____... I think he'll call us later.
4. It's confusing. _____... I need a moment.
5. _____... I thought the meeting was today, but I might be wrong.
6. He's _____ going to be late again.
7. _____... this isn't my area of expertise.





HearSay Learn audio activities

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- Click the shareable link on the slide, or
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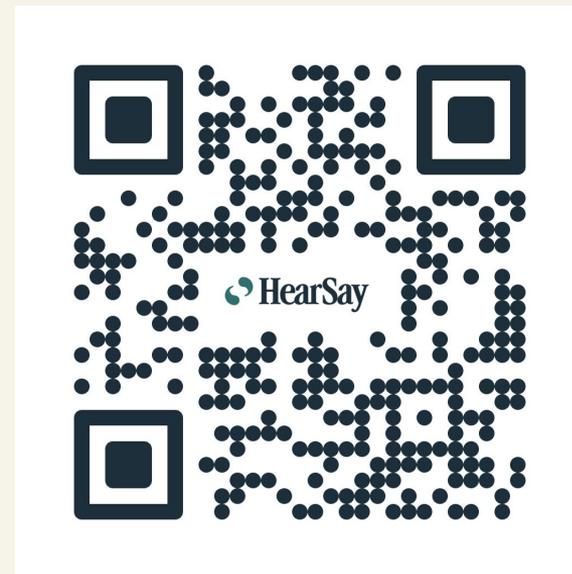
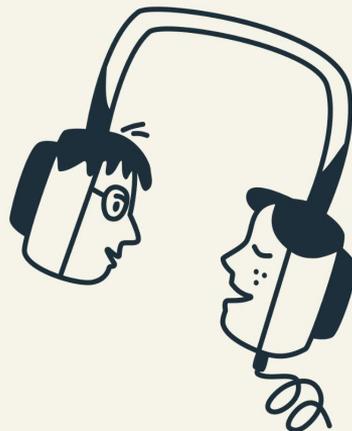
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“Flat decision day”



[Click here to listen to the conversation between Chloe and Liam](#) (or scan the QR code, above)

*** **British accent**



Comprehension questions



1. Why is Chloe feeling stressed?
2. What does Liam say is a “massive commitment”?
3. Why does Chloe suggest they could wait another month?
4. What mistake does Liam admit to making last week?
5. What solution does Liam suggest at the end of the dialogue?
6. How does Chloe think they should approach the decision?



Gap-fill activity

Fill in the missing filler words/phrases from the dialogue:

Options: “well,” “to be honest,” “I guess,” “actually,” “probably,” “um,” “let me think,” “in a way,” “what I mean is,” “I suppose”

1. _____ I don't know. _____ it's a massive commitment.
2. _____ we could wait another month if you're still unsure.
3. _____ I _____ should've looked at fewer places last week.
4. _____... _____, moving now makes sense, but I'm still not totally settled.
5. _____ we don't have to rush; _____ we need a plan that feels right.
6. _____ we could call the agent and ask for another viewing.



Multiple-choice questions (MCQs)

- 1. Why does Liam say he should've looked at fewer places?**

 - a. He didn't like any of them.
 - b. Looking at too many confused the decision.
 - c. The agent asked him to choose quickly.
 - d. Chloe wanted him to choose alone.

- 2. Which filler phrase does Liam use to show he needs thinking time?**

 - a. "Actually..."
 - b. "I guess..."
 - c. "Um... let me think."
 - d. "In a way..."

- 3. What does Chloe suggest they do instead of rushing?**

 - a. Move to a different flat entirely
 - b. Take a holiday
 - c. Make a plan that works for both of them
 - d. Call the landlord immediately

- 4. What does Liam propose they do to be more certain?**

 - a. Sign the papers today
 - b. Watch a video tour of the flat
 - c. Ask for another viewing
 - d. Find a different agent

Dialogue practice — student role-play

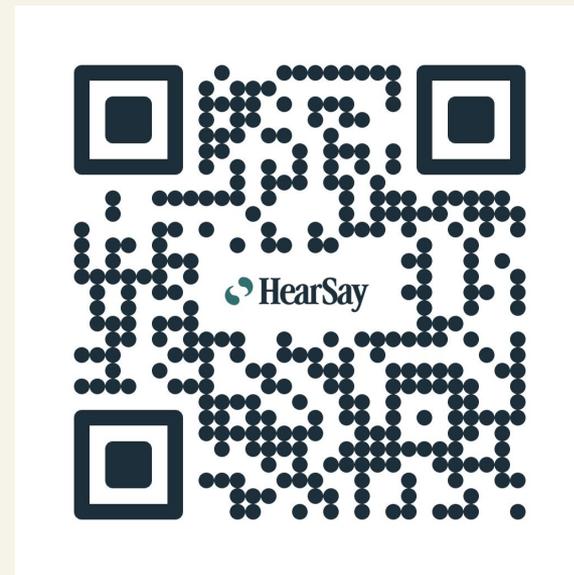
Prompt: You must explain something you're not fully sure about. Use at least five filler words.

Scenario Options:

1. A friend asks you how to use a new app.
2. Your boss asks if the project deadline changed.
3. A tourist asks for directions to the museum.
4. A colleague asks why the internet is slow.



“Flat decision day”



[Click here to listen to the conversation between Sarah and Leo](#) (or scan the QR code, above)

*** *American accent*



True or false task

Based on the Sarah & Leo climate-change dialogue

1. ___ It is unusually warm for April in New York City.
2. ___ Leo thinks climate change is not affecting NYC.
3. ___ Sarah is worried that the subways might flood later in the summer.
4. ___ Leo asks what experts expect to happen in the next ten years.
5. ___ Sarah is certain about the exact predictions for the next decade.
6. ___ Sarah says experts believe storms might get stronger.
7. ___ Leo feels the city is making quick and effective changes.
8. ___ Sarah mentions that some neighborhoods may need higher sidewalks or raised buildings.



Comprehension questions

1. Why is Sarah surprised about the temperature?
2. What does Leo say about the heat in NYC?
3. What is Sarah worried about for the summer?
4. What question does Leo ask Sarah about the next ten years?
5. According to Sarah, what do experts say about storms?
6. What does Leo think about the city's response to climate change?
7. What examples of changes does Sarah mention from her professor?



Gap-fill activity — filler word + vocabulary



Use the words below to complete the dialogue lines: “uh,” “let me think,” “in a way,” “to be honest,” “actually,” “I suppose,” “well,” “probably,” “I guess”

1. Sarah: “Wow, it’s seventy degrees today. That’s crazy early.”
2. Leo: “Yeah, it _____ is. _____, I _____ we’re used to the heat now.”
3. Sarah: “Um, yeah. We need better sea walls. _____, I worry about the subways flooding later.”
4. Leo: “I guess so. What do they _____ expect to happen in the next ten years?”
5. Sarah: “_____... _____. _____, experts say storms will get stronger, but I’m not totally sure.”
6. Leo: “Yeah, _____, I feel like the city talks about it a lot but nothing changes.”
7. Sarah: “_____, my professor said some areas might need raised sidewalks.”
8. Leo: “_____, we should learn more, but it’s overwhelming.”

Speaking task — real-world use

“Tell me how to cook your favourite meal.”

Prompt: Use some filler words of uncertainty throughout your speech.



Reflection



1. Which fillers feel natural to you?
2. Which ones feel uncomfortable?
3. Do you use fillers differently in your mother tongue?



Thank you for your support.

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