

## Pollution – slow poison?

### SPEAKING SKILLS IN FOCUS (S1 AND S3)

In this section you will learn to:

- ✓ express your ideas clearly using the correct verb tenses
- ✓ respond clearly, accurately and effectively to others in conversation
- ✓ communicate your ideas clearly and confidently in a more formal talk.

### GETTING STARTED

- 1 Think about the following questions in pairs. Make notes on any interesting ideas.
  - What are the sources of air, sea, water and land pollution around you?
  - What issues or problems does pollution cause in your daily life?
  - Who or what is responsible for this pollution?
  - Who can do something about it? What should be done about it?
  - What can you do about it? What are your rights against pollution?
- 2 Now quickly note your thoughts on pollution in your city or region. Don't worry about whether all the details are correct or not. If you have questions, note those down as well.

### EXPLORING THE SKILLS

The sentences below are in the simple present tense (e.g. *leads, creates*) or the present continuous tense (e.g. *is shrinking, are becoming*). This is because they are referring to facts that are considered current or true over a long period of time.

- a) The burning of fossil fuels *leads to* serious air pollution and also creates more greenhouse gases in our environment. (simple present tense)
- b) The water table is *shrinking* in many parts of the world. (present continuous tense)
- c) Our freshwater sources *are becoming* too polluted for fish and other organisms to survive. (present continuous tense)

- 3 In your pairs, tell each other three facts that you have recently learnt in Science or Geography. Write down each other's facts. What tenses are you using?
- 4 Tell each other three facts about what is happening in the room where you are at this moment. Write down each other's facts. What tenses are you using?



## DEVELOPING THE SKILLS

When you are discussing a topic with a partner or in a group, you need to listen and then respond clearly, accurately and appropriately, even if the situation is quite informal.

- 6 Read these extracts about air pollution. If there are any words you do not know, discuss them with your partner and see if you can work them out from the rest of the sentence. Only use a dictionary as a last resort. Make a note of any new words.

### The air we breathe

Air pollution is a severe problem – one that we ignore at the risk of our health and our economy.

Lung cancer is now the most common cancer in the industrialised world, and heart disease is the second-biggest cause of death in some places. **Smog** hangs heavy over cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, where children grow up with asthma and other **respiratory illnesses**. Every year, cities lose billions of dollars due to health costs and lost productivity.

These problems all go back to air pollution, whose consequences are long-term, sometimes **fatal** and almost always borne by the public.

Much of the time, air pollution is invisible, but its effects are not. Millions of people in Asia are breathing dirty air – with terrible health consequences, from respiratory disease to strokes, lung cancer, and heart disease.

Economies in Asia have grown rapidly, but often at the price of its people's health and wellbeing.

From [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org)

### A silent killer

Air pollution is a world-wide problem. Carbon monoxide is a colourless, odourless, poisonous gas produced by the incomplete burning of carbon in fuels, mainly by cars and trucks and also by forest fires and the burning of agricultural waste. In the USA, about 77% of the pollutant comes from transportation sources. In cities, as much as 95% of all CO emissions may come from automobile **exhaust**.

From 'Carbon Monoxide' from *Environmental Science in the 21st Century* – an online textbook by Robert Stewart

#### GLOSSARY

- smog** a type of air pollution caused when water (fog) in the atmosphere combines with smoke and chemical fumes to form a brownish haze, which irritates the eyes and lungs
- respiratory illnesses** illnesses of diseases which affect the air passages of the body
- fatal** causing death
- exhaust** waste gases, including carbon monoxide, which are expelled from a carbon-fuelled engine or machine when it is in use

7 In groups of two or three, talk together about air pollution in your part of the world. You can talk about your home countries, or the country where you live now if it is not the same.

- What causes the pollution?
- What is being done about it?
- Are there health consequences for people in your city or region?

### GOING FURTHER

Now you will work together to give a talk in a more formal situation. You can feel confident that you have plenty of ideas and will know which tenses to use. You have gained a clear understanding of various types of pollution and the problems that air pollution in particular can cause.

#### TOP TIP

In order to give a speech that flows well and naturally, you need to spend some time planning together and making sure that your sections link well to each other. Also, be clear about your facts and key words, and decide together what they mean.

8 In your group, prepare a six-minute talk about air pollution. Include:

- the dangers it poses to our health and wellbeing
- what could be done about it.

Your audience will be your classmates and teacher. Make sure each of you speaks for about two minutes.

- Try to ensure that your talk flows naturally and that each person's speech connects to the other's.
- You could use connective clauses like:

*As Sarah pointed out when she introduced air pollution, the health hazards are often hidden...*

or

*If we know that carbon dioxide is released by burning fossil fuels, then we need to consider what this means for our lungs...*