

**Objective** To improve your reading and listening skills.

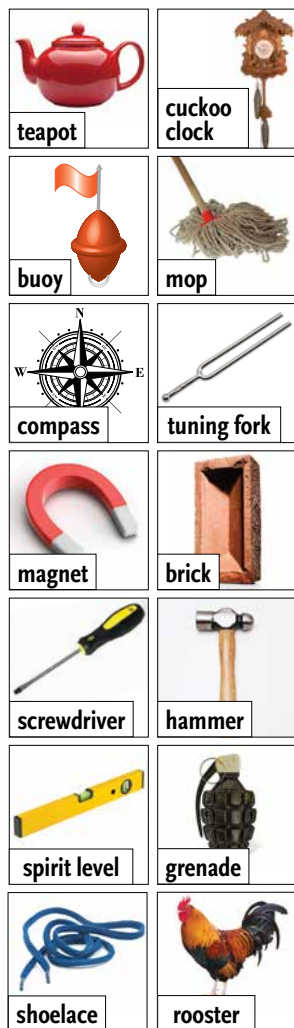
**Think about it** Have you ever played a joke on someone? What was it? What are the dangers associated with playing jokes on people?

**Exams** This reading and listening activity will help prepare you for English exams such as CAE, IELTS and TOEFL.

Answers on page 44

**Pre-reading**

You're going to read an article about tricks that are played on new employees. Look at the list of objects. What tricks can you think of involving these objects? Think of as many as you can.



**Reading I**

Read the article once to compare your ideas from the Pre-reading activity. Which joke is the funniest / cruelest / best / worst? Why?

**Reading II**

Read the article again. Then, explain what the following jokes involve.

1. The mail buoy =
2. Sea-bats =
3. The captain's crank =
4. A hammer for =
5. A long weight =



**HOW TO TRICK A NEW EMPLOYEE!**

In many professions, it's common practice to play a joke on a new employee. One variety of these practical jokes is known as a fool's errand. This involves sending an employee to look for something that doesn't exist – a "chocolate teapot", for example. Newbies are often too shy to question the request, or too young or inexperienced to realise it's a joke. Here are some more examples of fools' errands.

New cooks at restaurants are sometimes asked to go and find bacon stretchers, oven batteries, rooster eggs, or bird food for the cuckoo in the cuckoo clock.

In the navy, sailors are asked to stand at the bow of the ship to look out for the mail buoy that supposedly brings letters and parcels for people on board. Or, they're given a mop and told to find and kill a plague of "sea-bats", which have allegedly infested some portion of the ship.

Others will be told to go and fetch the "captain's crank", which can be used to wind up the compass. Or they're sent off in search of smoke benders, sonar grease (for when it sounds a bit squeaky), tuning forks for the foghorn, or rubber flags for rainy days.

Builders have great fun with their new apprentices, sending them off to find all sorts of non-existent things,

such as brass magnets, steep learning curves, electric bricks, and left-handed screwdrivers.

They may also be asked to look for tools made out of unlikely materials, such as glass hammers. Or they can be told to go and fetch a bucket of steam, a bubble for a spirit level, or a pot of tartan paint. A particular favourite is to tell them to find a "hammer for". And when they ask, "What's a hammer for?" the prankster will answer, "For banging nails in the wall, you fool!"

Another trick is to send the new employee to a hardware store to ask for a "long weight". Shopkeepers who are in on the trick will then go to the back of the shop, presumably looking for the "long weight", but really just relaxing or having a cup of tea. Eventually, the shopkeeper will come back and ask the customer whether the "wait" was long enough.

In the army, an inexperienced soldier may be asked to get an "ID-ten T" (ID-10T), which spells "idiot"; a Bravo Alpha Eleven Hundred November (BA-1100N), which spells "balloon"; or a Sierra Tango One (an ST-1), which spells "stone". New recruits are also sent on errands to find left-handed grenades, shoelace repair kits, grid squares and sparks for the fire.

What fun! ☆

**APRIL FOOL'S DAY**

April 1st is known as April Fool's Day in many English-speaking countries. It's a day to play jokes on people. There are also often fake stories in major newspapers. Previously, there have been articles on left-handed hamburgers and spaghetti trees, neither of which exist... of course!

**GLOSSARY**

- a practical joke** *n* a trick played on someone that's designed to make that person look stupid
- a fool's errand** *n* if you send someone on a "fool's errand", you tell them to go and find something that doesn't exist
- a newbie** *n* a person who is new at a company, etc.
- a stretcher** *n* something that makes an object longer – it "stretches" the object
- the navy** *n* the section of the armed forces that sails in ships and fights battles at sea
- the bow** *n* the front section of a ship
- a plague of** *exp* a "plague of" something bad (such as insects) is a large group of those things
- to infest** *vb* if an animal "infests" an area, there are large numbers of them in that area
- to wind up** *phr vb* if you "wind up" a device, you turn a key on it to make it work
- a bender** *n* a device that bends something (makes it change shape and become circular)
- sonar** *n* equipment on a ship that uses sound waves to calculate the depth of the sea or the position of something under the water
- grease** *n* a thick oily substance which is used to lubricate machinery (to make it work more effectively and move smoothly)
- squeaky** *adj* if something is "squeaky", it makes high-pitched noises
- a foghorn** *n* a piece of equipment on a ship that makes a very loud noise. It's used as a warning sound or to communicate with other ships
- brass** *n* a yellow-coloured metal made from copper (Cu) and zinc (Zn)
- steep** *adj* if something is "steep", it increases very quickly and at a large angle (80°, for example)
- a learning curve** *n* a process where people develop their skills by learning from their mistakes
- tartan** *adj* a type of cloth from Scotland with lines and colours
- a prankster** *n* a person who plays practical jokes on people
- you fool** *exp* you idiot
- a hardware store** *n* a shop that sells tools for the house / garden, etc.
- a weight** *n* an object with a specific weight (in kilos, etc.) that is used to measure other weights. It sounds like the word "wait"
- in on the trick** *exp* if someone is "in on the trick", they know about the joke
- a new recruit** *n* a person who has very recently joined the army, air force, navy, etc.
- a grid square** *n* the squares that divide up a map
- a spark** *n* a tiny piece of burning material that comes from a fire