B2-C1 English Worksheet

Fear of Embarrassment: Why Are We Afraid of Looking Silly?

24 November 2026 | The Guardian, 23 November 2026

Article

At 21, university student Jayni Makwana realised that fear of looking ridiculous was beginning to hold back her willingness to try new things. Highly self-conscious and critical of her own mistakes, she was reluctant to attempt anything that invited scrutiny. She had abandoned writing poetry and stopped practising the violin because she feared she might make a fool of herself. Even conversations with friends became exhausting as she tried to fit in and avoid saying the wrong thing. Her perfectionism was turning ordinary pleasures into potential embarrassments.

A collection of childhood photographs encouraged her to look back on a more carefree period. As a child, she had worn unusual clothes, made music with relatives and persisted when learning to cycle was difficult. Remembering that attitude helped her step outside her comfort zone while studying in Copenhagen. Cycling through busy streets initially seemed daunting, and she almost decided to give up. Instead, she started on quieter roads and gradually ventured further. She chose not to put off exploring the city simply because she feared making mistakes.

That shift also changed how she spent time with friends. Familiar songs helped her let go of her inhibitions; she could dance without worrying about other people's reactions. More broadly, fear of judgement can make it difficult to speak up, even among friends. Her experience suggests that people need not take up new hobbies to regain confidence; finding joy in familiar activities can be enough. Constant self-criticism can unnecessarily limit opportunities for enjoyment and connection. The story invites a broader question: when public mistakes can be filmed and shared, do we prioritise appearing impressive over participating fully in life?

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

No.	Statement	T / F
1	Jayni became so concerned about judgement that she withdrew from activities she liked.	
2	She felt entirely comfortable making mistakes in front of university friends.	
3	Cycling through Copenhagen was effortless from her first attempt.	
4	Memories of childhood encouraged her to reconsider her perfectionism.	
5	She rebuilt confidence by attempting manageable journeys before harder ones.	
6	The article suggests excessive self-criticism can reduce rewarding experiences.	
7	Remembering childhood music made her less willing to dance with other people.	
8	The article suggests that avoiding embarrassing situations is the best way to become more confident.	

Fear of Embarrassment: Why Are We Afraid of Looking Silly?

Phrase Match

Match each phrase (1-10) to its correct definition (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. hold back	A. stop trying to do something
2. make a fool of herself	B. express an opinion openly
3. fit in	C. reflect on something from the past
4. look back on	D. prevent someone from making progress or acting freely
5. step outside her comfort zone	E. begin a new activity or hobby
6. give up	F. stop holding on to a feeling or concern
7. put off	G. behave in a way that might make her look foolish
8. let go of	H. delay doing something until later
9. speak up	I. attempt something unfamiliar or challenging
10. take up	J. feel accepted as part of a group

Synonym Match

Match each word (1-10) to its correct synonym (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. self-conscious	A. disapproving
2. critical	B. intimidating
3. reluctant	C. needlessly
4. scrutiny	D. hesitant
5. abandoned	E. untroubled
6. carefree	F. examination
7. daunting	G. favour
8. gradually	H. quit
9. unnecessarily	I. progressively
10. prioritise	J. inhibited

Use the New Language

Choose 5 words or phrases from the worksheet and write your own sentences.

No.	Your sentence
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Fear of Embarrassment: Why Are We Afraid of Looking Silly?

Discussion Questions

Student A	Student B
1. Have you ever performed in a play, concert or musical?	1. Does the risk of being filmed change how freely people behave in public?
2. What was the most nerve-racking speech or presentation you have given?	2. Why might adulthood make people more reluctant to experiment or look foolish?
3. Have you ever done karaoke despite feeling self-conscious?	3. Should schools require public performances, or respect students who find them daunting?
4. When did you last step outside your comfort zone for fun?	4. How much does fear of judgement hold back creativity in the workplace?
5. Have you avoided an activity because you might make a fool of yourself?	5. Are some cultures more accepting of public embarrassment than others? Why?
6. How would you feel if an awkward moment of yours appeared online?	6. Can the pressure to appear confident prevent genuine friendships?
7. Has someone ever helped you laugh off an embarrassing mistake?	7. Where should we draw the line between harmless teasing and public humiliation?
8. What did you enjoy as a child that you would like to take up again?	8. Would society benefit if people were more willing to let go of perfectionism?

Answer Key

True/False	1=T, 2=F, 3=F, 4=T, 5=T, 6=T, 7=F, 8=F
Phrase Match	1=D, 2=G, 3=J, 4=C, 5=I, 6=A, 7=H, 8=F, 9=B, 10=E
Synonym Match	1=J, 2=A, 3=D, 4=F, 5=H, 6=E, 7=B, 8=I, 9=C, 10=G

Example Sentences With the Phrases

No.	Example sentence
1	Fear of criticism can hold back talented students.
2	She worried she might make a fool of herself during the audition.
3	New colleagues sometimes change their behaviour to fit in.
4	I like to look back on my school performances with affection.
5	Moving abroad encouraged her to step outside her comfort zone.
6	He refused to give up after forgetting his lines on stage.
7	Do not put off learning a skill just because you may struggle initially.
8	She found it easier to let go of her fear after a supportive rehearsal.
9	Good meetings encourage quieter employees to speak up.
10	You do not need to take up acting to become more confident.