

ROUND ROBIN



Is a **round robin** a) a fat bird, b) a jolly Christmas song or c) a Christmas letter? Read on to find out more ...

Background information

A **round robin** is a circular letter enclosed in a Christmas card and it gives details of the sender's year. The letter is not written especially for the recipient of the card, but copied for everyone and included with each of the sender's Christmas cards. The idea sounds fine, but often **round robins** appear boastful, merely listing a litany of the family's achievements. They also do not include any personal references to the person receiving the letter.

The kinds of things you might read in a **round robin** at Christmas include details of holidays; children's school achievements (exam results, theatre performances, prizes); promotions at work; house improvements; new cars and health issues (often with too much information ...!).

Originally, the term **round robin** was used to describe a document signed by several people, where it was not possible to tell who was the first person to sign and therefore the ringleader could not be identified. The expression comes from the French, meaning *ruban rond* (round ribbon).

Simon Hoggart of *The Guardian* newspaper takes great delight in these letters and asks readers to send in examples of the exquisite horror of the **round robin**. Read his summary here of last year's harvest:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2011/jan/14/simon-hoggarts-week-christmas-letters>

And read this honest **round robin** from a mother in Cheshire in England, who sent out a letter detailing her dismal and deeply unimpressive year:

<http://www.newsbiscuit.com/2008/12/03/mother-sends-out-honest-round-robin-with-family-christmas-cards-418/>

If you would like to introduce round robins to your students, then we have

- given you a suggestion for introducing the topic in class,
- provided you with an activity that can be used from A1 upwards.

You'll find all this in the following **Teacher's notes** and on the **Worksheet**.

Etiquette guides tell readers that **round robins** are best avoided and that it is preferable to send out a short, personalized letter instead. But what would Christmas be without at least one Christmas **round robin** boasting about Chloe and Jack's clarinet exams, the new BMW and the wonderful new conservatory?

Teacher's notes

Write on the board 'round robin' and ask students if they think it's a bird, a song or a letter. Explain what it is (a circular letter enclosed with a Christmas card) and that many people do not like receiving round robins. Tell your students that these letters are often rather boastful and only tell the news that reflects well on the writer.

For **A1** students use **Part A** of the Worksheet. (10 mins)

- Ask students to read the round robin and help them with any vocabulary, e.g. pass / fail an exam; win / lose a competition.
- Then ask them to choose the correct words.
- Check the answers together in class (see the correct version in the box on the next page).

For **A2 / B1** students use **Part B** of the Worksheet. (20+ mins)

- To start, read out the correct version of the round robin (see text in the box on the next page), stressing the boasts. While students are listening ask them to write down the topics of the letter. (holidays, the children, car, wedding anniversary, hotel for Christmas dinner)
- Ask students to write a round robin to their classmates. Make clear that this doesn't need to be a REAL letter about the student's own family. They should imagine a family and then answer the questions on their Worksheet about them. Encourage more confident students to answer as many questions as possible. Less confident students can just answer two or three.
- Allow ten minutes for students to write and while they are writing, monitor.
- When they have finished writing, collect the letters and 'deliver' each one to another student. Ask the recipient to read out the round robin they've received.
- Ask students which letter they think is 'worst' (i.e. the most boastful).

Hello friends around the world!

Where does the time go? Here is the year's news from the Clarksons.

We had a **fantastic** holiday in Egypt in the spring and in the summer we went for a **month** to America. We had a **marvellous** four weeks. We stayed in **luxurious** hotels.

In May, Thomas, who is now fourteen, **passed** his piano exams - he's a very **clever** boy. And our darling daughter Sophie **won** a dancing competition in September.

In October we bought a **new** car - it's the latest sports model. I love driving it, but it goes very **fast**. I must be careful! And in November Roger and I celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary and he **bought** me a diamond ring. It was **very expensive**.

It's nearly Christmas! I've booked a **table** at the Midland hotel for **Christmas** dinner - I'm not cooking another turkey again!

Please come and stay with us next year. We would **love** to see our friends again – if we are not on holiday!

How are you?

The (very busy) Clarkson family

Worksheet, Part A and Part B

See next page, please.

Worksheet, Part A

- Read this **round robin** and choose the correct words.

Hello friends around the world!

Where does the time go? Here is the year's news from the Clarksons.

We had a **fantastic / boring** holiday in Egypt in the spring and in the summer we went for a **month / day** to America. We had a **terrible / marvellous** four weeks. We stayed in **luxurious / economy** hotels.

In May, Thomas, who is now fourteen, **failed / passed** his piano exams - he's a very **clever / stupid** boy. And our darling daughter Sophie **won/ lost** a dancing competition in September.

In October we bought a **new / old** car - it's the latest sports model. I love driving it, but it goes very **fast / slowly**. I must be careful! And in November Roger and I celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary and he **sold / bought** me a diamond ring. It was **very cheap / very expensive**.

It's nearly Christmas! I've booked a **table / place** at the Midland hotel for **Christmas / Easter** dinner - I'm not cooking another turkey again!

Please come and stay with us next year. We would **hate / love** to see our friends again – if we are not on holiday!

How are you?

The (very busy) Clarkson family

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Worksheet, Part B

- Use the following questions to help you write a **round robin** letter. Start the letter with 'Hello friends!'.
 - **Holidays** – Where did you go? How many holidays did you have? What did you do on your holidays?
 - **Children** – What did they do this year? Did they win any competitions? Did they pass any exams? Did they star in a play at school?
 - **Cars** – Did you buy a new car? How much did it cost?
 - **Home** – Did you buy any new furniture? Did you get a new kitchen or bathroom?
 - **Celebrations** – Did you celebrate any special birthdays or anniversaries?
 - **Jobs** – Did you get a better job?