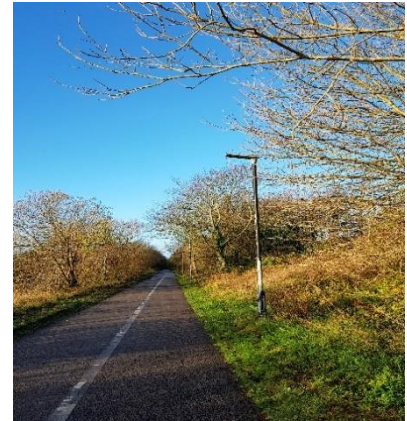


## Walking to work – stepping into the shrubbery

**One of the silver linings of 2020 was that I started walking to work, following the cycle-path along the river. Negotiating other people was a steep learning curve, though.**

Meeting another solo walker is not a problem; we just step to different sides of the path and keep walking. It's more tricky when I meet a peloton of cyclists, or a gaggle of teenagers strolling 5 abreast. I soon realized that to give people a wide berth, I have to be ready step into the shrubbery as we meet.



To accompany my side-stepping technique, I have also cultivated a range of facial expressions that I can deploy if the other people notice that I am avoiding them. These include 😞 'Yes - you are being inconsiderate' and 😊 'Sorry – it's nothing personal', depending on the situation.

Musing on my new skills brought home to me how my students, particularly neurodivergent adult learners, must feel when they join a class, especially after a break from studying. The social dynamics of the classroom are complex, and fluid. Some neurodivergent people find it challenging to form relationships, and to maintain them, because we humans can be somewhat unpredictable and inconsistent. Being faced with a whole new group of people can be daunting, and even a barrier to learning. Teachers can help, though, by:

- managing the 'getting to know you' process carefully,
- facilitating some simple activities that ease learners into their new relationships, and
- modelling the respectful social interaction that we would like to encourage.

It's often worth taking time to encourage the group to set their own clear ground rules for the classroom, too. Agreement about who should 'step into the shrubbery', and when, makes for a much more harmonious and collaborative learning environment.

If you would like to know more about neurodiversity and how it can impact on learning, there are still places on the online course: 'Understanding Neurodiversity'. More details from [Learn for Pleasure](#) or [ELT well](#).