

# HOW TO TEACH SPEAKING

## LIKE A PRO

40 TOP SECRETS EVERY SPEAKING TEACHER SHOULD KNOW

THERE'S  
NOTHING  
QUITE LIKE  
A GREAT  
SPEAKING  
CLASS

IT ALL  
BOILS DOWN  
TO ONE THING:

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT  
WHERE STUDENTS CAN EXPRESS  
THEMSELVES FREELY, WITH NO PRESSURE

🔧 BEING AN EFFECTIVE SPEAKING TEACHER REQUIRES MORE THAN JUST TALK

# CONTENTS PAGE 1

## HOW TO TEACH SPEAKING

- |       |  |  |  |
|-------|--|--|--|
| 4     | <b>BREAK THE ICE:</b> How To Break The Ice: 5 Creative Ways To Get Your Class Talking              | Outside: Small Talk  | a Softer Approach to Speaking Class  |
| 5     | <b>TIPS &amp; TRICKS:</b> 7 Sure-fire Tips To Get Your Students Speaking So Easily                 | 16-17 <b>GENERAL:</b> Conversational Phrases to Get Students Speaking & Writing in No Time | 31 <b>DRAMA &amp; PLAYS:</b> 10 Methods to Incorporate Drama in the ESL Classroom                              |
| 7     | <b>TIPS &amp; TRICKS:</b> How to Get Everyone Speaking in a Multilevel Class                       | 18-19 <b>GENERAL:</b> Talking About Countries Of The World: Top 10 Conversation Ideas      | 32 <b>DRAMA &amp; PLAYS:</b> Do Be So Dramatic: Ideas for Integrating Plays into the ESL Classroom             |
| 7     | <b>TIPS &amp; TRICKS:</b> How to Evaluate Speaking   | 20 <b>GENERAL:</b> Dream Big: How To Teach Talking About Dreams, Plans and Strategies      | 33 <b>ROLE PLAYS:</b> Top 10 Role Plays For Your Speaking Class  |
| 8     | <b>TIPS &amp; TRICKS:</b> 7 Ways to Turn the Boring Coursebook into Engaging Speaking Tasks        | 21-22 <b>GENERAL:</b> Facts, Opinions & Theories. How to Talk About Them to Students       | 34 <b>ROLE PLAYS:</b> A Landlord and a Tenant Walk Into a Classroom... Role Plays to Improve Speaking Skills   |
| 9     | <b>TIPS &amp; TRICKS:</b> Communicative Ideas for Puzzles in the ESL Classroom                     | 23 <b>GENERAL:</b> Talking About Our Heroes  | 35 <b>ROLE PLAYS:</b> How to Teach English Using Role-Plays, and When (Not) to Use Them                        |
| 10    | <b>TIPS &amp; TRICKS:</b> What is Communicative Style and How to Make it Work for You              | 24 <b>GENERAL:</b> Ready, Set, Go: Talking About Travel in the ESL Classroom               | 36 <b>DISCUSSIONS &amp; DEBATES:</b> 8 Simple Tips to Encourage Student Participation During Group Discussions |
| 11    | <b>INTERVIEWS &amp; SURVEYS:</b> Can We Talk? Conducting and Using Interviews in the ESL Classroom | 25 <b>GENERAL:</b> Hello, Hello: New Ways to Teach Old Greetings                           | 37 <b>DISCUSSIONS &amp; DEBATES:</b> 10 Keys To Promoting Class Discussion                                     |
| 12    | <b>INTERVIEWS &amp; SURVEYS:</b> Go Ahead, Ask: How to Use Surveys to Teach English                | 26 <b>GENERAL:</b> Hedges, Euphemisms, Apologies, Requests. Language for Politeness        | 38 <b>DISCUSSIONS &amp; DEBATES:</b> How to Lead Discussions: No Need to Speak Like Obama                      |
| 13-14 | <b>SMALL TALK:</b> So How about those Giants? Teaching the Fine Art of Small Talk                  | 27-28 <b>GENERAL:</b> yes, Yes, YES - How to Teach Sentence Stress                         | 39 <b>DISCUSSIONS &amp; DEBATES:</b> Essential Tips for Conducting a Class Debate                              |
| 15    | <b>SMALL TALK:</b> Summer's Top Activity to Take   | 29 <b>DRAMA &amp; PLAYS:</b> Inspire Creativity and Impromptu Speaking with ESL Games      |  |
|       |  | 30 <b>DRAMA &amp; PLAYS:</b> Quiet Conversations: Taking                                   |  |

# CONTENTS PAGE 2

## HOW TO TEACH SPEAKING

- 40 **DISCUSSIONS & DEBATES:** Learning through Arguing: The Keys to Successful Classroom Debates
  
- 41 **DISCUSSIONS & DEBATES:** Highly Effective Discussion Based Activities on School
  
- 42 **DISCUSSIONS & DEBATES:** Get Your Students Talking with a Mock Trial
  
- 43 **DISCUSSIONS & DEBATES:** Holding a Class Election
  
- 44 **CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS:** 33 Controversial Topics And How To Teach Them
  
- 45 **CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS:** Should We be Talking about This? Addressing the Topic of Racial Identity in the U.S.
  
- 46 **CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS:** Two Sides to the Cigarette: The Smoking Debate in Your ESL Classroom
  
- 47-48 **CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS:** From “Shooting an Elephant” to the Occupy Movement: Academic Discussions on the Use of Force
  
- 49 **CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS:** In the Eye of the Beholder: What Will Your Students Say about the Media’s Message



# How To Break The Ice: 5 Creative Ways To Get Your Class Talking

## ICEBREAKERS ARE IMPORTANT WHEN YOU ARE TRYING TO GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS.

They are even more important if your students do not know one another well either. Depending on how your school organizes its classes, you may use these types of activities primarily at the beginning of the school year. You can also adapt icebreakers into activities to use when starting new topics. It is sometimes easier for students to share their ideas if they know the rest of the class will have to share theirs too.

Here are some fun icebreakers you can do with almost any class.

## TRY THESE ICE-BREAKERS:

### 1 LEARN THE NAMES

In order to learn students' names, you can conduct an activity where students take turns saying their name. You can make this more challenging by having students say the name of the last student to speak or even the names of all the students who have already said their name before saying their own name. To make it more interesting and to learn a little more about your class, ask students to include something specific such as their favorite cereal, color, sport, or movie. By the end of the activity you should try your best to say every student's name.

If students are learning the names of their classmates for the first time, conduct some other name activities for practice. For one activity, have students stand in a circle, on a student's turn he should say a word or sentence related to whatever prompt or topic you choose, and then call out the name of a classmate to go next.

### 2 FIND SOMEONE WHO...

If students know one another's names, get them talking about some other topics by having them play "Find Someone Who ~" where students ask and answer questions based on pic-

tures or phrases to find someone for each question who can answer "Yes." The model question for this activity could be "Do you like ~." or "Do you have ~." After five to ten minutes, depending on the number of questions students have to ask, have everyone sit down and call on students to read some of the answers, for example "Ben likes soccer." this way the class can learn more about individual students. Try to encourage students to give sentences about people who have not yet been mentioned. This gives everyone the opportunity to share something.

### 3 TALK AND REMEMBER

Another activity gets students talking with the people seated around them. Have students talk to the person to their right about hobbies for instance. After a minute or two have students turn to the person to their left and talk about another topic. You could also do this as a mingling exercise where students have a limited amount of time to exchange information before moving on to the next person and conversation topic. Be sure to ask some students things they learned about their peers at the end of the activity so that they try their best to remember the conversations they had.

### 4 WHAT'S IMPORTANT

If your class is quite small you may also consider having students think about the three things they would take with them to a deserted island and then share why they chose one or all of those things. This is an excellent way of getting to hear about what is important to your students and how they are able to organize their thoughts.

If your class is larger, you can conduct the same activity in groups which is good for getting students talking with one another but will exclude you for most of the activity. Another similar group activity is to have students write down the first word that pops into their head when they hear you say a certain color. Students can then discuss why they chose certain words in their

groups or just have the student with the most unusual choice explain his choice. After a few minutes give them another color to think about and discuss. Groups should present the class with a brief summary of their discussions towards the end of the lesson.

### 5 THREE ADJECTIVES THAT DESCRIBE YOU

For introductions, you could also have students choose three adjectives to describe themselves. Perhaps at the end of the year have students fill in adjectives for all their classmates, nothing mean spirited, and give students a summary of what their classmates said about them in the last lesson. This should give students some positive reinforcement and point out their personality strengths. It may be interesting to compare these with the adjectives students chose to describe themselves too.

## ICEBREAKERS ARE EXCELLENT BECAUSE THEY GIVE STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THINGS ABOUT THEMSELVES AND LEARN ABOUT THEIR PEERS.

These activities often get students moving or thinking creatively. They can be lots of fun and dissolve any tension or nervousness there might be in your classroom. It is important that students be able to interact with one another easily because learning English is all about communication. Students will need to be comfortable sharing ideas with the class and talking with other students in groups or in pairs on a regular basis.

# 7 Sure-fire Tips To Get Your Students Speaking So Easily

**WHEN IT COMES TO SPEAKING, CONFIDENCE IS THE KEY, PASSWORD, LOGIN AND BIOMETRIC SECURITY THAT STUDENTS NEED IN ORDER TO SUCCEED AT SPEAKING WITH EASE.**

Once a student builds the confidence to speak, their abilities begin to improve at breakneck pace. Students who lack confidence are the ones who stumble and resort to their L1, and develop a fear of making mistakes that manifests itself if not ironed out quickly.

As a teacher, you cannot magically click a button and provide the students with the confidence to speak, but you can be there to encourage them to build their confidence by trying a few new little tricks, or even something as simple as nodding your head and smiling a little bit more.

No matter what lengths are taken, the foundations of succinct, accurate and fluent speech are through a high level of confidence. This article will take a look at some of the methods to help students speak by opening the door to some of the untapped confidence that lies within. Here's a few of the best that we could think of.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 FORGET THE ERRORS; JUST BE HAPPY THAT THEY'RE SPEAKING

Yeah! See how well they're speaking? Yes it may not be accurate or fluent, but hell, sure enough they are using English! Sure, they may be speaking in purely the present simple, but hey, keep sitting back smiling and nodding, and you will do wonders with helping the student cross the first hurdle of building their confidence with speaking.

### 2 GIVE THEM EASY TOPICS THAT THEY KNOW A LOT ABOUT... THEM!

We all love to do it, recalling an amus-

ing story about our lives in our home country, telling a tall tale about teaching a government minister or even the introduction class where we get the students to ask us questions. The most familiar topic anyone can talk about is oneself. We do it, they can too.

### 3 PROVIDE THE CUES, GIVE THEM THE IDEAS

One of the things that I like to do is draw a diagram that outlines me. In the middle of the board is a little stick figure of me, leading out to all of the influences in my life. The best way to describe it is like a mind-map, but I prefer to call this a "life map". The life map allows students to see influences, likes, dislikes in their life and then give them the necessary cues to speak about themselves.

### 4 IF THE CUES FAIL, GIVE 'EM THE OUTLINE

If the visual cues fail, give the students a virtual template to work off. The teacher can simply write the language and the structures on the whiteboard for the students to fill in with the appropriate words.

### 5 TAKE THEM FOR A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE, OUTSIDE THEIR COMFORT ZONE

If the potential is there or the student's skill is just lying underneath the surface, one of the ways I like to deal with that is to push the students a little bit harder and chip away at what's underneath the service. I love pushing students to the best of their abilities, and if there is a mere inkling of the confidence, I will be there to prod and poke it as much as I can. I love to give little challenges to my students such as talking for 30 seconds or a minute non-stop on a topic. This seemingly difficult activity will make life so much easier when it comes to speaking about the simple things.

### 6 LISTEN TO THE REAL DEAL

Sure enough, students who have been away from the English language for a while, only need to listen to a dialogue before they begin to grab their confidence by the horns and take it for a ride. A good dialogue that clearly outlines the language can be used as a starting point, while providing students with a chance to "mimic" the accent and the style. The more "brave" students will quickly take to the task and instantly pick up on some of the key vocabulary, while adding their own personality into replicating the dialogue.

### 7 SMILE, BE PATIENT, AND SMILE AGAIN!

No matter how many different activities that you try with your student, nothing beats a smile when it comes to unlocking the confidence. A smile provides the students with positive reassurance to keep at it and give them a positive outlook on what they can perceive as being the impossible task of speaking a foreign language.

**IF YOU FOLLOW THESE STEPS, WE'RE SURE THAT YOU WILL SUCCEED IN PROVIDING YOUR STUDENTS WITH THE KEY TO UNLOCKING THEIR INNER CONFIDENCE, WHICH IS ONE OF THE MAJOR FACTORS IN SPEAKING ENGLISH WITH CONFIDENCE.**

# How to Get Everyone Speaking in a Multilevel Class

## HOW TO GET EVERYONE SPEAKING IN A MULTILEVEL CLASS IS A QUESTION THAT PLAGUES ESL TEACHERS.

You can try role plays, and that works to some degree, but shy students and those with less fluency won't participate at the level teachers would like. Group discussions can be hit or miss. One solution for the multilevel class is the Strategic Interaction Method. This method combines group discussion with role play and class discussion to encourage stress free participation from students at all levels.

## HOW TO GET EVERYONE INVOLVED

### 1 THE SCENARIO

Strategic Interaction begins with a scenario. This scenario is a real life situation in which your students will be required to use language to solve a problem. Though a group of students will receive each scenario's information, only one person will perform the assigned role during the performance stage. Each group's information about the scenario is different. They do have shared information about the situation, but each group also receives information specific to the role assigned to that group, that is the personal agenda of the role that group will be fulfilling. This situation and conflicting agendas will create tension between the roles and a conflict which needs to be resolved.

### 2 REHEARSAL

Students are given time in group discussion to determine the strategies they will use in the performance stage. Though only one student will actually be performing the interaction, all students can participate in the rehearsal phase and give advice to the performer. By discussing strategies in groups, students who are not confident enough to perform a role play in front of the class can participate in a less intimidating environment offering valuable input to the group and learning from others the language needed to accomplish their goal.

### 3 PERFORMANCE

One student from each group will participate in the performance stage. Remember that at this point neither group knows the agenda of the other, and each participant has his own agenda to accomplish. Students must use language in strategic ways to try and achieve their goals. The goal of the different roles will be at odds with each other, so students must decide if and when to compromise on their goals. At any point during the interaction, the person playing the role can pause the interaction and consult with his or her group for advice and input. This gives strategic interaction an advantage over the simple role play. Students playing the roles are freed from the need to know all the answers and students at all fluency levels can participate in giving advice.

### 4 DEBRIEFING

After the performance, conduct a debriefing. Debriefing is the only part of the activity that happens with the entire class. In the debriefing stage, the teacher should lead a discussion about the interaction. You can encourage students to offer opinions about successful communication strategies or unsuccessful ones, and provide an opportunity for students to ask questions about any part of the interaction. In addition, during debriefing students can share alternative resolutions to the situations and share how they could have been achieved. Students find the freedom to express their personal opinions in this stage even though they may not have been able to perform the role play.

### 5 POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

In any scenario you use, each role should have an agenda in conflict with the agenda of the other role. Here are two possible scenarios you can use with your students.

Scenario One: This scenario between two friends puts the participants in a tense situation, each reticent to tell the other the full truth of what has happened.

Role A: You borrowed your friend's car to pick your significant other from the airport. Because you parked the car illegally, it was towed. You do not have money to get the car back from the towing agency. You are about to meet with the friend who lent you the car.

Role B: Although you know your friend can be irresponsible at times, his/her significant other was flying into town and you were unavailable to pick that person up. Instead you loaned your car to your friend. Thankfully, your friend did not have any accidents. Because you have some unpaid parking tickets, the police would impound your car if anything had happened. You do not have money to get your car back if something like that happens. You are about to meet your friend and get your car back.

Scenario Two: In this situation, each of the participants has pressure to achieve an outcome in opposition to the other participant.

Role A: You are a teacher who has gotten much criticism for giving too many students A's. You are on a program this semester to only give A's to the top five students in your class. If you fail to be more restrictive in giving high grades, you may lose your job.

Role B: You are a senior in college and have achieved a 4.0 up until this semester. Every other semester when you have failed to get an A, your professor has allowed you to do makeup work or retake tests to improve your grade to an A. You are about to graduate and do not want your perfect record spoiled. You are about to meet with the only teacher who did not give you an A this semester. Try and get him/her to change your grade.

**AS YOU CAN SEE, STRATEGIC INTERACTION IS ONE OF THE EASIEST WAYS TO GET EVERYONE IN YOUR MULTILEVEL CLASS SPEAKING.**

By taking away pressure and embarrassment and giving students the support of their group, you can get everyone in your class speaking today.



# How to Evaluate Speaking

You are in a small classroom at your local language school or university. It is almost the end of the semester, and your speaking class has been fun all year. They have learned vocabulary, done role plays and strategic interaction, and practiced speaking to one another and to you. The big question now is how do you evaluate their progress? You either speak or you don't, right? It's either good or it isn't. The good news is this: you can give objective grades in a speaking class.

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN EVALUATE SPEAKING

### 1 CREATE A RUBRIC

Most teachers will be familiar with the concept of grading with a rubric, a table with different criteria and a grading scale. If you have never created a rubric before, it's really quite easy. Simply choose the criteria on which you will grade students and list them along the left side of the page. Then create an even number of columns along the top of the page. Four is the easiest to start with if this is your first rubric. These columns will represent potential skill levels of your students. For each criterion, define what level of the ability a student at each of the four levels would exhibit. For example, the most straightforward way to label the boxes on the rubric would be, "Meets expectations high, meets expectations low, slightly underperforms, does not meet expectations." The more rubrics you make, the more detailed you can be in your descriptions. Then, as you evaluate each student, determine at which level he or she is performing. Take the average level among the criteria and you have an objective grade with suggestions for areas in which your student can improve.

### 2 PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation is a basic quality of language learning. Though most second language learners will never have the pronunciation of a native speaker, poor pronunciation can obscure communication and prevent an ESL student from making his meaning known. When evaluating the pronunciation of your students, listen for clearly articulated words, appropriate pronunciations of unusual spellings, and assimilation and contractions in suitable places. Also listen for intonation. Are students using the correct inflection for the types of sentences

they are saying? Do they know that the inflection of a question is different from that of a statement?

### 3 VOCABULARY

After noting your students' pronunciation levels, move to vocabulary. Vocabulary comprehension and vocabulary production are always two separate banks of words in the mind of a speaker, native as well as second language. You should encourage your students to have a large production vocabulary and an even larger recognition vocabulary. For this reason it is helpful to evaluate your students on the level of vocabulary they are able to produce. Are they using the specific vocabulary you have instructed them in this semester? Are they using vocabulary appropriate to the contexts in which they are speaking? Listen for the level of vocabulary your students are able to produce without prompting and then decide how well they are performing in this area.

### 4 ACCURACY

Grammar has always been and forever will be an important issue in foreign language study. Writing sentences correctly on a test, though, is not the same as accurate spoken grammar. As your students speak, listen for the grammatical structures and tools you have taught them. Are they able to use multiple tenses? Do they have agreement? Is word order correct in the sentence?

### 5 COMMUNICATION

A student may struggle with grammar and pronunciation, but how creative is she when communicating with the language she knows? Assessing communication in your students means looking at their creative use of the language they do know to make their points understood. A student with a low level of vocabulary and grammar may have excellent communication skills if she is able to make you understand her, whereas an advanced student who is tied to manufactured dialogues may not be able to be expressive with language and would therefore have low communication skills. Don't let a lack of language skill keep your students from expressing themselves. The more creative they can be with language and the more unique ways they can express themselves, the better their overall communication skills will be.

### 6 INTERACTION

Being able to say what you mean with a foreign language is one thing, being able to interact with others is another. Ask your students questions. Observe how they speak to one another. Are they able to understand and answer questions? Can they answer you when you ask them questions? Do they give appropriate responses in a conversation? All these are elements of interaction and are necessary for clear and effective communication in English. A student with effective interaction skills will be able to answer questions and follow along with a conversation happening around him. Great oratory skills will not get anyone very far if he or she cannot listen to other people and respond appropriately.

### 7 FLUENCY

Fluency may be the easiest quality to judge in your students' speaking. How comfortable are they when they speak? How easily do the words come out? Are there great pauses and gaps in the student's speaking? If there are then your student is struggling with fluency. Fluency does not improve at the same rate as other language skills. You can have excellent grammar and still fail to be fluent. You want your students to be at ease when they speak to you or other English speakers. Fluency is a judgment of this ease of communication and is an important criterion when evaluating speaking.

**THESE CRITERIA, PRONUNCIATION, VOCABULARY, ACCURACY, COMMUNICATION, INTERACTION AND FLUENCY ARE ALL MARKERS OF A STUDENT'S OVERALL SPEAKING ABILITIES.**

Students may excel in one and struggle in another, and not necessarily the ones you might think. Help your student understand these qualities of effective speakers. Let your students know that you will be listening for these qualities when you evaluate their progress and encourage them to improve their English in these areas. Also, listen to them both when they talk to you and when they talk with other students. Finally, remember that a true evaluation will take into consideration more than just the oral interview on the final exam. Listen to your students throughout the semester. Note how they improve in these areas. Encourage them as speakers and learners, and you are sure to reap the benefits, too.

# 7 Ways to Turn the Boring Coursebook into Engaging Speaking Tasks

Most ESL teachers need a coursebook to follow. It gives us a structure. It gives students a structure.

But it does not give us fun, engaging speaking tasks. At least, most coursebooks don't, which is unfortunate since most students sign up for ESL classes to learn to speak English. However, because we are resourceful teachers, we can always supply the engaging speaking tasks that coursebooks seem to be missing.

Here are some great ways to turn that boring coursebook around:

## 7 THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH THE COURSEBOOK

### 1 YOU GOT THE JOB!

Most ESL coursebooks include a unit on jobs or professions. Activities usually involve describing what each profession does or involves. To make these tasks a little more engaging, have your class conduct job interviews instead. Divide students into pairs, one student is the interviewer and the other is the interviewee. Go around the class and give each pair a different profession or job to interview for.

### 2 SHOPPING INFORMATION GAP

An information gap exercise is a great way to engage students in speaking tasks. In this Shopping Information Gap, students are divided into pairs, and each is supplied with a worksheet with some information missing from it. Students ask each other questions to find the missing pieces. Use this worksheet, or try this one for Personal Information, but you may create your own information gap exercise on any coursebook topic.

### 3 FIND SOMEONE WHO...

This is another classic activity, one that is quite popular among ESL teachers. Students are given a worksheet, like this Winter Vacation Find Someone Who,

and their task is to ask the questions that are modeled in the worksheet, or come up with the right questions to find out who among their classmates has done something in particular. A great way to practice present perfect questions with "ever". Try using a famous fictional character, like James Bond and ask your students to find someone who "has driven a sports car", "been to India", "used a spy gadget", etc.

### 4 MEET MY FRIEND!

This is the ideal speaking task for beginners. In the worksheet, you'll find cards with personal information on one side, and blanks to be filled in on the other. Students are divided into pairs, and they interview each other. They must supply the information given on their card, and take notes on their partner's. Then, each must report what they have found out about their new friend.

### 5 ROCK N' ROLE PLAY

Role plays are another classic speaking activity. And most coursebooks include role plays. But not all students enjoy them or take advantage of their opportunity to speak. The problem is not acting out the role play but how well the roles have been set up. To ensure successful role plays, you must go beyond the typical, "Student A is the client, student B is the customer". When preparing role play cards or instructions include a lot of details and complications.

For example, divide students into groups and tell them they play in a Rock n' Roll band. Give each of them a different weekly schedule of activities. They must check their schedules and set up at least two practice sessions for the week. The more filled up their schedules are the harder it will be for them to schedule their rehearsals.

### 6 TABOO

This popular board game can be adapted to suit any vocabulary. Some course materials even come with their own Taboo cards. But it's not too hard to make your own. Each card should

have a word to be described, as well as a few others words that can't be used in the description. For example, if the word is "cow", the other words that can't be used might be "milk", "dairy", or "udder". Award one point for each word guessed correctly, and the team with the most points wins.

### 7 LET'S DEBATE!

Class debates are amazing opportunities for extended speaking practice. As in the role plays, the effectiveness of the debates lies in how successful you are at engaging students. Some great topics for debate are:

- Pros and cons (of social media, email, the Internet, etc.)
- Solutions to a problem (global warming, energy crisis, etc.)
- Planning meetings (city planners deciding which problems need to be addressed, for example, and encourage students to use modals to say what should, could, or must be done)

### FEEL LIKE THROWING THE BORING COURSEBOOK OUT THE WINDOW? NO NEED TO!

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em, right? Instead of working against it, work with it. Take what you need from it and create your own engaging speaking tasks. Or try any of these ideas and you will not only get your students to speak, you may have a hard time getting them to stop!



# Communicative Ideas for Puzzles in the ESL Classroom

Does it seem strange that an activity that is as visually based as a puzzle can be used for communicative activities in the ESL classroom?

With some preparation, you can use puzzles for a series of activities in your classroom that require your students to talk with one another and practice speaking and listening in a real context with tangible results. Read on to find out just how puzzles can make for a highly effective speaking class lesson.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 HOW TO MAKE THE PUZZLES

Have you ever played one of those games that requires you to move square tiles around a grid to form a picture? Though some people may have a knack for this type of puzzle, even when all of the puzzle pieces are square, most people will struggle to complete the puzzle. You can challenge your students to a puzzle completion race which requires them to communicate in real time for a real purpose. Your groups should be three or four students large, and you will need one puzzle for each group. To create your own puzzle, first think about how large a scale you want to attain for your game.

To go big, you can purchase some inexpensive posters at a local store, getting one copy of one poster for each group which will be working on the puzzle. If you can, mount each poster to poster board or cardboard so your students will have an easier time of manipulating the pieces. The easiest way to do this is with spray adhesive. You can also have the poster laminated to give it some substance. Then cut the poster into equal sized rectangles. Around 20 squares is an ideal number, but 16 or 32 pieces may be easier for division purposes. Then put all of the pieces for each puzzle in their own zip top bag so each group has theirs ready for the race.

For a smaller scale puzzle, print a picture from the internet or a photo you have taken of your students. Again, adhere it to cardboard or have it laminated and

cut it into rectangular pieces. Finally, put each set of pieces in its own bag and you will be ready to play.

### 2 HAVE STUDENTS MAKE THE PUZZLES

If you do not want to prepare the puzzle pieces yourself, you can also have your students transform the posters into puzzles. Each poster will still need to be mounted or laminated, preferably before class, and then you can have groups of students cut each poster into pieces. Your students will need to follow two specifications as they cut the posters: they should end up with twenty pieces and each piece should have only straight edges. They may end up with some rectangular pieces, but more likely your groups will have a variety of triangular pieces for the other groups to work with. Make sure, in this case, that each group has a different picture to transform into a puzzle than it will have to put back together.

### 3 READY, SET, GO!

When the time for the race is at hand, give your groups enough room to work (you may want to let them work on the floor) and let the contest begin. Encourage students to talk with each other as they solve the puzzle. You may want to review the imperative form with your class before putting the puzzle together so they will be familiar with how to give instructions to one another. Award points to the first team to finish. If you like, plan a survival tournament and award points to second and third place as well.

### 4 GIVING DIRECTION

You can take this puzzle to an even greater challenge level by having students work in pairs to complete the puzzle. The challenge does not come from limiting the number of players to two, the challenge comes with the blindfold that one person will wear. The person who wears the blindfold is the only one who is allowed to touch the puzzle pieces. The person without the blindfold gives instructions to the one moving the pieces. Because this activity is so challenging, you may want to keep the number of puzzle pieces to a minimum, no more

than eight. Again, award points to the team who finishes first, second and third.

### 5 A PERSONAL TOUCH

Younger students may enjoy seeing their own illustrations become puzzles. You have at least two options if you want to make your students' pictures into puzzles. One option is to have your students draw on a precut puzzle. You can purchase inexpensive blank puzzles at your local craft store. Give one completed puzzle to each student and ask him or her to draw a picture on the puzzle pieces. (Note: markers will probably work better for this than crayons or pencils since there is often a glossy finish on the premade puzzles.) Each person can then separate his or her puzzle into its pieces and put them into a zip top bag. You can then use these puzzles for any of the other activities.

A second option for making students' drawings into puzzles is to scan pictures that they have drawn into a computer, and then laminate and cut them into pieces. If you opt for this method, you may not want to tell your students what their drawings are for. Make the pictures into puzzles before class and then use them for the group activities. As your students work to put the puzzles together, they will realize that the puzzles are their own pictures. You can do a follow-up activity by asking your students to share how they felt when they realized that the puzzle was their own picture. Were they excited? Were they embarrassed? Did it make it easier to complete the puzzle? You can have your students write their reactions as a freewriting or a journal entry.

### ALMOST ANYTHING CAN BE USED IN AN ESL CLASSROOM TO ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION AND COMMUNICATION, AND PUZZLES ARE A GOOD EXAMPLE.

These visually based activities, when used strategically, can encourage your students to communicate in real ways with their classmates, using their language skills to strategize and evaluate. Whether you prepare the puzzles ahead of time or have your students do it during class, they will enjoy putting the pieces together in a race against their classmates!

# What is the Communicative Style and How to Make it Work for You

## THE COMMUNICATIVE METHOD IS ALL ABOUT COMMUNICATION.

Communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. The teacher sets up situations that students are likely to encounter in real life.

Unlike other methods of language teaching, which rely on repetition and drills, the Communicative Approach focuses more on spontaneous activities and practice, which provides varied outcomes depending on student reactions and responses. The real-life simulations differ from day to day so that students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about significant topics.

This method is focused upon students being able to communicate in a conscious way, taking into account real experiences. See how you can make the Communicative Style work for you.

## HOW TO MAKE THE COMMUNICATIVE METHOD WORK FOR YOU

### 1 UTILIZE CREATIVITY

Utilizing the Communicative Method comes more naturally than that of any rote system devised to keep students following the book at all times and memorizing all the material they can. This method is a way for both teacher and students to get the most out of the classroom experience. Utilize your own creativity to create activities and exercises that would otherwise have your students either moaning or snoring. Put life into your lessons by remembering that each explanation or point needs to be followed by some kind of hands-on practice. Doing it this way pushes students to display comprehension of the point

by participating. It also gives them the opportunity to work out the kinks naturally and they can begin to formulate their own questions. This method also should facilitate a safe learning environment where students are comfortable, aspire to speak and want to participate in activities that strengthen their abilities.

### 2 TESTS AND DRILLS

You can still incorporate a small amount of drilling and testing. It is good to integrate quizzes and tests, but even those can be created communicatively. Base your tests on real-life situations and practical combinations of fill in the blank, multiple choice, true and false and essay. There are some topics, like irregular past tense verbs, that absolutely need to be drilled. You can create drills that are more like games. Play Tic Tac Toe or four in a row with verbs instead of having them just memorize words. They will need to memorize the verbs, but they also need practice using them in spoken and written English. Find ways to make drills fun and engaging and students will respond with increased involvement as well as more highly developed skills.

### 3 USE GAMES AND INTERACTIVE PRACTICE

The Communicative Style gets the teacher out of the forefront and has the students doing the real nitty-gritty work. You explain the grammar. You guide the students in understanding and then you come up with the ideas of how they have fun practicing it. You moderate. The students should get plenty of floor time and should be the ones speaking most of the time. There are lots of websites out there to give you ideas about games you can play, activities you can incorporate, ways to break up lessons into activities. Think about simulating real life. Have the

students do role plays that are guided but unscripted. Give them puzzles that take language and communication to work out. Incorporate competition and team oriented games as well as group and pair work. Combine students in different ways and provide variety through activities. Try new things and don't be afraid to take some risks in generating original and entertaining ways to bring language to life.

## THE COMMUNICATIVE METHOD IS THE BEST WAY TO TEACH LANGUAGE.

You will find that it opens up a whole new world in which you have a lot more freedom and creativity. It will benefit your students by giving them a safe venue in which to experiment and learn more in a shorter period of time. I have both taught with it and studied with it, and it provides abundant results and connections in the classroom that you just cannot achieve in any other way!

# Can We Talk? Conducting and Using Interviews in the ESL Classroom

*Where were you born? What did you like as a child?*

These and other questions can get the conversation started for a successful interview, but an interview is about more than just the questions you ask. Planning and organization are the tools that enable an interviewer to get the most benefit from his limited time with his interviewee. Your students can achieve success as interviewers and get language practice in the process.

## HOW TO USE INTERVIEWS IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 GOOD FORM

Interviews appear in many different formats. Some forms may be more familiar to your students than others. For example, they may have seen someone interviewed on the daily news, but have they seen a celebrity interviewed on a talk show? How about interviews on sports shows? Have your students read a printed interview in a magazine? Start your lesson on interviewing by discussing with your students the many people who are interviewed. Where might those interviews appear? When your students see an interview, do they prefer a video interview or a written one? Give your students some examples of interviews from a magazine and through video clips. What types of questions do the interviewers ask?

Before you go very far with your interview unit, take a few minutes to do a grammar and vocabulary review. Make sure your students know how to ask questions, are familiar with the vocabulary words interviewer, interviewee and response, and phrases like grant an interview and conduct an interview and the difference between them. It is also beneficial to spend a few minutes clarifying for your students the difference between an interview and a conversation.

When a person grants an interview, the interviewer must show his appreciation through his conduct and manners throughout the interview. Ask your students what might constitute good interview manners. You can look for answers like not taking too much of the interviewee's time, being organized, shaking hands at the beginning and saying thank

you at the end, listening carefully and taking notes when appropriate, and sending a thank-you note.

### 2 GET READY

Before asking your students to conduct an interview, they will need to prepare so that the interview is successful. Have them think about what type of information they want to get from the interviews. They will be using this information more extensively later, but upfront they should consider their purpose in gathering the information. Are they going to be writing a piece about the people whom they are interviewing? Are they doing research about a particular topic, and are they interviewing experts who can give them useful information about that topic? Knowing the purpose of an interview will help your students select the best questions to ask and help them direct the conversation once they get started. Good resources for interviews might be parents, classmates, students in another grade, teachers or school employees. As your students prepare their interview questions, have them write at the top of their papers the reason for the interview so it is always at the forefront of their minds and so it will make sure your students' questions are useful and to the point.

### 3 WRITE IT OUT

Start formal interview preparation with your students by brainstorming some questions. The first step in the brainstorming process is to write the purpose of the interview at the top of the paper. You don't want them to get too far off the topic and waste their limited time. Then have your students start listing questions. Encourage them not to worry about which questions are good and which aren't good or the order in which they list the questions. Once each student has a list of about twice as many questions as they will need, have them go back through and eliminate the ones that are not as good. Now it is the time to organize the questions.

- Start with informational questions which will be easiest to answer. These types of questions help get background information and break the ice.

- Then move on to understanding questions, that is, questions that help you understand what the person does and why. The answers to these type of questions will be more personal than answers to the information questions but not as personal as answers to the last type of question, opinion questions.

- The most personal questions are the opinion questions, the ones where you ask how a person feels about a particular thing. They may evoke emotional answers that make the interviewee mad or sad, so save these questions for last.

### 4 THE TIME HAS COME

Now the time has finally come to conduct the interview. You may want to give your students an example either through a video or by conducting an interview with someone in front of the class. You can demonstrate with an interview with one of your students or another teacher. If your students will be interviewing each other, give them class time to conduct their interviews. If they will be interviewing outside of class time, you may want to permit them a practice run on one of their classmates. Remind students that they should take notes throughout the interview and always keep their final purpose in mind. After your students have completed their interviews spend a little class discussion time to talk about the experience.

After the debriefing period, it is now time to put the information your students acquired in their interviews to their final purpose. Your students may be writing a report or doing an oral presentation.

If the former, you may want to clear a bulletin board for them to display their interview notes alongside their final papers. If the latter, permit your class to ask of each presenter any questions they have about the interviewee or the information from the interview.

**INTERVIEWS CAN BE A GREAT RESOURCE FOR WRITING, SPEAKING AND LISTENING PRACTICE IN THE ESL CLASSROOM. IF YOU ASK, THE BENEFITS YOUR STUDENTS RECEIVE FROM CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW WILL COME.**



# Go Ahead, Ask: How to Use Surveys to Teach English

Are you tired of creating artificial reasons for your students' conversation practice? Are you looking for a means for your students to talk to native speakers in an authentic setting? Surveys may just provide the solution to your dilemma.

They provide authentic setting and topic for conversation with native speakers and can be tailored to the level of your students' language abilities. Besides, not only are they a fun activity to do, they may give your students something to talk about in the process.

## HOW TO USE SURVEYS IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 REVIEW QUESTION FORMAT

Before sending your students out to talk to strangers, take some time to review proper question format. For most students, this will be a grammar review, but if you have students with very limited English, it can be instructive. First, review the different question words with your students, and review when to use each one. Use who for questions about people. Where for places. What for things. When for times. Why for reasons. How for process questions. Encourage your students to use a variety of question words when they write their survey. You can also review commonly used question phrases like, "How do you feel about...?" and "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?" and "How would you rate the following?" Help your students understand that these types of questions are often used on surveys, but are not appropriate for casual conversations, so they should be careful under which circumstances they use them.

### 2 GET IN SOME PRACTICE

Your students will benefit from some personal experience taking surveys, too. Though not exactly what they will be writing, magazine quizzes are easy and accessible, and they are fun for students. You can find quizzes in magazines from good housekeeping to highlights. Copy a few surveys your students will enjoy to use in class or challenge your students to bring in a quiz

they found in a magazine on their own. Then take some time to answer the quizzes and discuss results in groups.

You can use practice survey taking to your advantage, too. Every teacher can improve his or her craft. Use the occasion of teaching about surveys to write one of your own. Give your students a self-written survey about your class. Ask about the amount of group work, homework and whether they connect with your teaching style. The feedback will be invaluable, and you will not get any surprise bad news at the end of the semester from their official evaluations!

### 3 KEEP IT SIMPLE

Today everyone is busy, and it is very unlikely that a person on the street has time to fill out a ten-minute survey. The best surveys are simple, straightforward and have easily answerable questions. When your students are designing their surveys, encourage them to write straightforward questions with a scale option for answers. The most common scale will be

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Strongly disagree.

Survey takers will be more willing to help if questions are as easy to answer, and limiting their effort to circling a number on a page is a great way to do this.

### 4 WRITE IT OUT

Now that you have covered question grammar, explained what surveys are for and given your students some experience taking surveys, it is time for them to write their own. Every good survey will contain some questions on demographics. For most surveys, age brackets and a choice of gender will be enough, but do not be afraid to suggest other areas for survey if they relate to the subject of your student's survey.

Then have each student determine the subject area he wants to research. He should think about the type of data he wants from the takers' answers. Will he ask about international drivers' licens-

es? The quality and variety of food in the cafeteria? The desire of students at his school to do studies overseas? Encourage your students to research something in which they are interested and can learn useful information about.

Your students should also include a section near the end of the survey for open comments. A good survey will always give the participant an opportunity to speak his opinion about anything related to the survey. This section may also provide quotations that your students may want to cite in a final paper or presentation.

### 5 GET UP AND GO

Finally, with all your preparation done, it is time to go and hit the pavement. Your location will be the biggest deciding factor in the best place to find willing survey participants. If you are in an urban setting, you may be able to catch pedestrians as they move off to work or school. A college campus is an opportune location as there are usually plenty of people outside. Another possibility may be a beach or other tourist attraction. Be watchful for policies on solicitation. If none of these places will work for you, you might want to try a coffee shop, grocery store or mall.

When approaching a potential survey taker, students should have a scripted explanation that they are doing a school project and could the person spare just a couple of minutes to complete the survey. Have survey ready on a clipboard and a working pen. Once the person completes the survey thank him or her for their time. The goal here is to make it as easy and quick for the survey taker to participate as possible.

**THE SURVEY EXPERIENCE FROM CONCEPTION TO COMPLETION IS RIPE WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ESL STUDENTS TO IMPROVE THEIR LANGUAGE SKILLS. WHAT YOU DO WITH THE DATA IS UP TO YOU.**

It often makes a great reference for a persuasive essay or speech. No matter what you do, it will be a beneficial and informative experience for everyone involved and one your students are sure to remember.

# So How about those Giants?

## Teaching the Fine Art of Small Talk

*"So how is everyone?" Paul asked. "Fine," I responded. "Shana's on a school trip this week." "Oh, yes, school trips. My sons usually have four a year. Kelly and I chaperone..."*

This recent conversation was not between me and a close friend, as you might be surmising but rather between me and my accountant. We rarely communicate besides on the phone and even then only several times a year. This necessitates the use of small talk, that discussion on relatively unimportant matters that not many people do well. "Small talk" is actually complex in its rules and practice and is something of an art form — a lost one, much like the art of conversation itself.

Why do we need small talk at all? Small talk is for those occasions when spending time with someone we don't know well — a stranger at a party, a classmate outside an office — but we need to talk to the other person because ignoring him or her would be rude.

However, because he or she is a stranger or relatively so, we want to avoid potentially sensitive topics. Small talk is so widely practiced that being able to successfully conduct a conversation in small talk is necessary for social success, including that of our ESL students.

### TOPICS TO AVOID FOR SMALL TALK

#### 1 RELIGION

The United States is a diverse nation, including in religion—so much so that it is written in our Constitution that state business is separate from religious because of the potential for conflict if one majority religious group gained control within the government. Likewise, religion is a topic avoided in most public settings especially with relative strangers because of the potential for conflict at worst or discomfort at least.

#### 2 POLITICS

Politics is another volatile topic, like religion, for similar reasons—people tend to have deeply-felt or strong opinions on these topics and the potential for conflict is great if two people disagree. There are, of course, some minor topics on which most people can agree—like presidential candidate's bad haircut or poor control of the English language, despite being a native speaker. Other than these light topics, politics should be avoided in small talk.

#### 3 SEX AND OTHER PERSONAL INFORMATION

"TMI" is an idiom in current use in the U.S., an acronym for "too much information." One goal of small talk is to avoid making the listener uncomfortable. Some topics, like the sex life or health of the speaker, are too personal for small talk.

### ACCEPTABLE TOPICS FOR SMALL TALK

So there are a lot of topics that are not suitable for small talk, mostly because of their sensitivity. So what is some suitable material?

#### 1 THE WEATHER

A conversation on the weather sounds boring, right? Not really—I just had an online conversation in which the participants spent a few minutes discussing the weather conditions in our different parts of the world—from the pouring rain in New Zealand to the dangerously hot and dry California. And since everyone experiences weather and nobody has control of it, everyone could contribute to the topic, say something interesting, and not get angry at someone else—the Californians could hardly blame the New Zealanders for having more water.

#### 2 SPORTS

Sports are, like weather, a relatively "safe" or neutral topic, particularly if the conversation participants are from the same locale—in all likelihood they

support the same team and can spend a few moments congratulating or commiserating with each other on their team's progress, or lack thereof. Even people who support competing teams rarely become hostile in their opposing interests, and competitive remarks tend to remain good-natured. ESL students frequently can contribute to these conversations with their stronger knowledge of sports like soccer, as it's called in the U.S., and football elsewhere.

#### 3 CURRENT, NON CONTROVERSIAL EVENTS

There are those current events which are virtually free of controversy: most will agree on the humanity of the billionaire giving away another million to charity or the horror of a mass shooting. Part of the reason people discuss these topics publicly is that we are momentarily bonded with each other in agreeing upon the event.

### THE PRACTICE OF SMALL TALK

#### 1 TEST THE WATERS

People begin "So how about those Giants?" to find out if the other party is interested and can contribute to the conversation. Small talk is a dialogue, not a monologue.

#### 2 ENGAGE IN THE TOPIC

Even though you may be discussing the weather, engage in it enough to keep the other party interested. Add your personal experience and "take" on the topic. Almost any topic can be interesting if the parties engage. And almost any topic is boring if they don't.

#### 3 KNOW WHEN TO BREAK IT OFF

There will come a point when you've said all that you can say about the weather, the other party seems bored, or that time demands you move on to the main point of your call or visit.

## 4 TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Sometimes instead of breaking off the small talk, the parties involved find they have enough common interests to move beyond the small talk phase and into more serious discussion. That is fine and one of the points of small talk, to find out if there is enough common interest to move beyond small talk.

## 5 SHOW YOUR PERSONALITY

Even if it is only in a small way, the person you have engaged with for this short period of time should be left feeling as if they have spoken with an actual person with something real to say, even if it's only about the weather. Someone I was speaking to recently in a social situation, for example, told me the weather and terrain of my city, Sacramento, California, reminded her in some ways of her native Pakistan. That's an original observation I won't forget soon, and I'll remember that conversation and person who said that.

### SO DOES SMALL TALK HAVE TO BE BLAND? ABSOLUTELY NOT.

Despite its negative reputation as boring and repetitive ("Hot enough for ya?"), small talk does not have to be bland. It is an art form, and at its best puts others at ease, leaves them with an interesting insight, and paves the way to a deeper relationship — or at least the next stage of this particular interaction.



# Summer's Top Activity to Take Outside: Small Talk

The sky is blue. The white clouds float past high overhead. The birds chirp enticingly calling, "Come outside. Come outside." The teacher in you says to be responsible, but the forever student inside wants to give in to your students' cries to take class outside.

The good news is this: you can enjoy the beautiful weather summer has to offer while still teaching your class useful and important English skills.

## TEACHING SMALL TALK: HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 INTRODUCING SMALL TALK

One of the easiest activities to take outside is conversation. It's easy enough to simply take your class outside to do conversation activities you have already planned for your current unit, but why not use an out of classroom experience to give your students a more authentic experience with native speakers? Small talk is the perfect opportunity for your students to practice their English in a nonthreatening and low commitment setting with native speakers.

Before setting your students loose among the public, explain to them the concept of small talk. Small talk is chatter between people that do not know each other who are either trying to get to know each other or trying to keep up polite conversation. In English, there are some acceptable topics for small talk. One of the most common is the weather. You can teach your students colloquial phrases like "Is it hot enough for you?" and "April showers bring May flowers." You can also use the opportunity to review weather vocabulary or introduce it if you are teaching beginning students. Going out into the public and making small talk is an opportunity to show your students that weather vocabulary is not just something to mark off a checklist but a thing that it is useful in day-to-day living.

Professional sports may be another subject area you want to explore when giving your students tools for small talk. "How about them Yankees?" or similar phrases can be useful for international students who are trying to carry on a conversation with native speakers. Different times of the year will be appropriate for different sports. With summer approaching, baseball is a hit. Depending on how much class time you invest in this subject, you may even want to take your students to a game (minor league games are great and inexpensive).

### 2 WARN YOUR STUDENTS

Make sure your students understand that there are many topics not suitable for small talk. They should know that it is inappropriate to discuss politics with strangers as well as topics of finance and appearance. These subjects will not always be taboo in a student's native culture, so it is always best to give some direction as to what not to say.

### 3 PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Now is your opportunity to give your students some practice before actually hitting the streets. You can pre-generate a list of possible scenarios your students may find themselves in where small talk could be required. These places may include standing in line at a restaurant, at a sporting event, or when waiting to purchase something. Keep it simple. There is no real need to create scenarios with great detail because your students will be acting as strangers to one another and have no more complex a goal than making simple conversation. Pair students together and let the whole class practice at once, then take some of your bravest volunteers to act out the scenario in front of the class. Other students can give feedback on what they did well and where they need to work for improvement.

### 4 MAKE THE MOST OF WHERE YOU ARE

Finally, take your students out into the public to practice their newly acquired small talk skills. Your specific location will determine what places you can bring your students. Some potential places might be a coffee shop, a grocery store or a cafeteria. A local park or public area, a ticket booth, a beach or a shop are also possibilities. A public library or courthouse may also be places you could take your students. Your best opportunities will come in places where there are a number of people waiting for something with nothing else to do at the time.

Let your students know that the setting may also open up new topics for small talk including the food at a particular restaurant, a movie you may be in line to purchase tickets for or a sporting event. All these are suitable topics when they relate to the setting the small talk is happening in. It would not really be appropriate to discuss food at a particular restaurant while waiting in line for a movie ticket, though.

**THE NEXT TIME THE BIRDS BECKON AND THE SUN ENTICES - REMEMBER THIS: AS ESL TEACHERS, WE DO NOT HAVE TO FEEL GUILTY ABOUT TAKING OUR CLASSES OUTSIDE.**

The good summer weather can provide the perfect opportunity to work on small talk, an area of conversation that is often neglected. The more opportunities you give your students to have authentic conversation with native speakers, the more progress they will make and the easier their transition will be to full immersion in English. So go outside, meet some people, and try to make the most of the good weather ahead.

# Conversational Phrases to Get Students Speaking in No Time

**YOU'VE PROBABLY EXPERIENCED IT, IF YOU'VE STUDIED A SECOND LANGUAGE: SITTING IN RUSSIAN CLASS, FOR EXAMPLE, FOR WEEKS, PERHAPS MONTHS, AND THEN MEETING AN ACTUAL RUSSIAN-SPEAKING PERSON AND REALIZING YOU CAN'T SAY ANYTHING TO HER.**

This is one of the largest complaints of traditional language instruction, and in all fairness, there are a number of culprits: the small amount of time devoted to language learning being one. But another concern is the means of instruction and the curriculum. If students spend large amounts of time conjugating verbs, they won't be able to string two words together for a conversation. Even if they focus on vocabulary, but learn words in lists, students still won't be able to string two words together. But if second language students learn language as a set of useful, everyday phrases — How are you? I'm fine. It's really hot today — they can begin to string two words together. Students are in language class for a limited amount of time, often as little as three hours a week, and this time should be spent on language they can use.

Most of language is formulaic, research has shown — even native speakers, in the pressure of online production, often fall back on formulas: e.g., “Have a nice day,” and “You, too!”

## PHRASES FOR CONVERSATION

The following phrases have been found to be among the most common in English, in *The Grammar of Written and Spoken English*, by Biber and his colleagues (1999).

### SENTENCE STARTERS:

These phrases are useful in that they can be used to start a sentence or even an entire conversation. The student, having memorized the first part, need only fill in the second part. As a student of Russian, for example,

I made ample usage of the phrase “Ya doomayo shto —” (“I think that —”), thereby signaling to the other participants in the conversation that I had a point to make and allowing me time to put that thought together. Many of the following phrases can be used in a similar manner. And they all can be used again and again, on a number of topics, explaining their commonality in the language:

**To demonstrate a lack of understanding or lack of agreement on a topic:**

I don't think—  
I don't know—

**For storytelling or recounting a conversation:**

I went to the—  
And I said—

**For commands or requests:**

Have a look at—  
Can I have a—

### COMPLETE SENTENCE RESPONSES

In response to a point made by another speaker, keeping the listener involved in the conversation

That's a good idea.  
I don't like it.

## ACADEMIC PHRASES

Even a significant portion of academic prose is comprised of “ready-made” formulaic expressions — readers of this genre expect a certain kind of language, and in using it, the writer demonstrates his membership in this community. Teaching students this language therefore helps them enter the academic writing community. Below are some of the formulaic phrases used in academic writing and their functions.

## INTRODUCTIONS

With the following, the writer introduces a topic or an example.

In the case of—  
The nature of the—

## CAUSE/EFFECT

As a result of —

## ADDITION

In addition to the—

## COMPARISON

With the following phrase, the author compares an example or point with one previously mentioned.

In the same way—

## COMPARISON

At the same time-- (This seems like a phrase to show comparison, but it is most often used for contrast: “I really like dogs, at the same time, I like cats as well...”)

## ENUMERATING POINTS

In the first place—

## METHODS FOR TEACHING

### 1 CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

Students must first be aware of the formulas that exist in everyday language and how to respond: the way many Americans today respond to “Thank you,” for example, is not “You're welcome” but rather “No problem.” This kind of actual, “real-world” language use is often not taught in textbooks because it tends to be highly specialized to time and place: in certain regions or by specific age groups. For example, once in when getting my laptop repaired, the customer service representative helping me responded “No problem” to my “Thank you” and

then quickly retracted it with “I don’t mean to suggest there was a problem....” When I assured him I understood what he meant by “no problem,” he went on to tell about a previous customer who was annoyed with his use of “no problem,” thinking he was suggesting that there was indeed one in serving her. Even native speakers, apparently, can misunderstand idiomatic, formulaic phrases, and should keep in mind their actual usage rather than the literal meaning.

Besides conversation, students can study their course readings for use of academic phrases. Opening any academic text to a random page is likely to reveal several academic phrases. Call students’ attention to them: “What words does the author use to introduce the topic?” “How does the author use the phrase ‘in other words’ here?” This will demonstrate the many kinds of phrases and ways they are used in academic writing.

into a conversation or essay.

### THE PREVALENCE OF FORMULAIC PHRASES IN CONVERSATION AND WRITING SUGGESTS HOW KEY THESE PHRASES ARE TO FLUENCY: IT MAY BE CLOSE TO IMPOSSIBLE TO BE FLUENT WITHOUT THESE SHORT CHUNKS OF MEMORIZED LANGUAGE.

Learning these phrases, however does not come “naturally” — even native speakers sometimes joke about calling up the wrong formulaic phrases in conversation, such as “You, too” to a waiter’s “Have a good meal.” So while they exist on the automatic level, phrases do need to be consciously learned. Engaging in consciousness-raising and practice provides the processing that students need to learn these phrases to become more fluent in their second language.

## 2 MATCHING

The next step, after exposing students to a variety of conversational and academic phrases, is having students match phrases to their meaning or function: e.g., “No problem”=“You’re welcome.” This provides additional processing with the phrases.

## 3 SENTENCE COMPLETION

Most phrases comprise an incomplete sentence or thought: they are just the stem or beginning of a thought or sentence. Take advantage of this structure by having students complete sentences: e.g., “I want to—” or “Do you know—” in conversation, perhaps with index cards that have been passed out with the key phrase written on it.

In writing, students can complete sentences that begin with the more academic “In the case of—” or “On the other hand—”

## 4 PRACTICE

Students can extend the activities above, perhaps structuring an entire conversation or essay around the key phrases.

The instructor may also give out a handout of the key phrases and have students work as many as possible



# Talking About Countries Of The World: Top 10 Conversation Ideas

Our world is constantly changing and with that comes lots of new and old countries each with their own language, people and customs. Exploring these in your ESL class can lead to some interesting and in depth conversation.

## TRY THESE TOP 10 CONVERSATION IDEAS TO TALK ABOUT COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD

### 1 WARM UP GAMES

Write down as many countries as you can in one or two minutes. Whoever writes the most wins. Compare lists and combine them to come up with one class list.

Using the list of countries you created in the activity above, ask students to list one thing they know about each of these countries, perhaps something that it's famous for, such as film stars, music groups or its cuisine. Make it a race- first one to get 10, 20 or 30.

Name a country to match each letter of the alphabet A to Z – ask each student as you go around the room. If a student can't name a country they drop out of the game. The last person left in the game wins. You could include cities too.

Name the country. Give out sticky notes or small sheets of paper. Ask students to list things that are particular to a certain country - one on each sheet of paper. For example, gum trees, maple leaf, tulips, chocolate, wine. Collect all the cards. Mix them up and divide between your students. Working in pairs, students hold up a card and ask their partner to name the country that the characteristic belongs to. They can talk about this country. What else do they know about it? Have they been there? Does this characteristic only exist in this country or do other countries have this too or something similar? For example: Koalas can only be found in Australia. Australia is famous for its surf but so is Indonesia.

### 2 PRESENTATIONS

Ask each student to write up a presentation about their own country or any country that interests them. Suggest they use power point if they have a computer or they could make their own paper version of a power point presentation if they don't. Work with your students to develop a list of topics that they could include in their presentation: cuisine, weather, population, animals, famous people.

Give your students a week or so to research and develop their presentation. You could also allow some time for them to work in class, however, it is a good homework exercise.

Suggest that they keep it short. No more than 5 minutes. Then over a number of sessions each student presents their country to the class. Encourage questions at the end of each presentation and of course a round of applause!

Tips:

- Have no more than three students present in one class as it's hard to listen for too long and the other students can become restless. If you do spread them out over a few sessions, students are interested and really look forward to their colleagues' presentation. They also become very supportive of their colleagues because they know it's not that easy to do.
- Try to limit the number of corrections you make during your students' presentation. Just be mindful that this can disrupt their concentration and make them even more nervous. Just let the presentation flow but do note the errors and follow up with individuals later. Students do like the one on one time with you and they value your feedback.

### 3 TRADITIONAL DRESS

Talk about the countries that have

traditional dress such as the kilt in Scotland. Talk about the countries that have different standards of dress. What do people wear in different countries? How does the climate dictate what people wear? What other things influence what people wear in different countries?

### 4 PLAN A TRIP AROUND THE WORLD

Students can work in pairs to plan a trip around the world. Where would they like to go? Why? What would they most like to see in each country? Collect some travel brochures or just print off some maps of the world to prompt discussion. Or why not ask students to visit their nearest travel agent to get some brochures of the countries they would like to visit. The experience of asking for brochures would be great practice for them. Talk about the countries they have already been to. Which have they enjoyed the most and why?

### 5 FOOD FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

Talk about different cuisines, the way people eat, meal times, and cooking methods. How do these things similar or different from country to country? Go out to a restaurant together – perhaps a cuisine that they have not tried.

### 6 AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 SECONDS

What is happening in other countries right now? Ask one student to name a country and then choose a student to talk about that country in 80 seconds. Ask another student to play timekeeper. Feel free to adjust the time that students speak depending on their skill levels. This works well as a whole class activity. It can be quite fun and challenging as students try to keep to the timeframe.

### 7 FLAGS

Hand out coloured pencils and ask students to work in pairs to draw all the different flags that they know. Talk

about which flag belongs to which country in pairs or small groups. How are the flags different? How are they similar? What colours are they? Describe them to each other.

## 8 THE OLYMPICS

Where will the Olympics be held in 2012? Where have they been held before and when? Which countries are known for being good at which sports? Which sports do you follow? Is your country particularly good in any sport? Will athletes from your country be attending the Olympics? Have you ever been to the Olympics? Do you watch the Olympics on TV? Name some famous Olympic athletes? What are they famous for? Which country do they come from?

## 9 COUNTRIES DISCUSSION

Have a discussion about English speaking countries. How are they different from other countries and from each other? Name some famous people from these countries. Discuss the different meanings of some words and pronunciation. Come up with a list of as many as you can. For example, in parts of Australia flip flops are called thongs and trousers are called pants. Where as in England the words pants and thongs refer to underwear.

## 10 SOUVENIRS

A discussion about souvenirs can be a funny one! What are souvenirs all about? Why do people buy them? Do they really represent the country where you buy them or are souvenirs the same in every country just with a different name stuck on? What sorts of things do you buy when you visit other countries?

### WATCH OUT FOR PRONUNCIATION AND GRAMMAR WHEN HAVING CONVERSATION CLASSES ABOUT COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD.

Write the common mistakes up on the board or on large sheets of paper so that students can refer to them. And have fun!

# How To Teach Talking About Dreams, Plans and Strategies

If someone asked you, “What kinds of dreams do you have?” how would you respond? Would you talk about dreams you have while you are sleeping? Would you talk about daydreams you have when you take a short mental vacation? Would you talk about your dreams for the future?

Dreams are something that a person encounters every day. Whether you are dreaming big or running from a nightmare, these activities will give your students opportunities to talk about their dreams and further their English skills in the process.

## HOW TO TEACH TALKING ABOUT DREAMS, PLANS AND STRATEGIES

### 1 LET'S TALK

Introduce your students to the idea of dreams by showing a clip from *The Wizard of Oz*, a movie that they have probably already seen. A good scene is the end of the movie when Dorothy wakes up from her dream after the tornado. If your students are younger, you may also want to share the book *Ben's Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg. Then ask them what it means to dream. Can they think of any other examples from books, movies or television where the characters wake up to find that everything has been a dream? Encourage your students to share their ideas.

Then ask your students what types of dreams they have had. They will most likely share dreams they have had when sleeping. Most dreams that students will remember will be ones that have touched on strong emotions. They may be dreams that were funny, frightening, silly, weird, sad or fanciful. Divide your class into small groups and allow them to share their dreams with one another. This is a good time for you to get a candid measure of their English skills. When people become emotional, their speech will revert to its most natural state. If you

can listen to all of your students during this activity, you will know what English issues with which they struggle. After the discussion, give each group a chance to share one or two stories they found most interesting. You can ask that another person in the group retell a classmate's dream.

Now introduce the concept of a dream being something you hope to achieve in the future, and teach your students the phrase dream big. Share one of your dreams whether it is to travel or make a special purchase. Then have your class reform into their groups and share this type of dream with one another. Before you do, though, you may need to review the structures “I hope to...” and “I would like to...” Also, encourage your students to start their explanations with some day, one day, or in the future.

### 2 PLAN AHEAD

At this point, your students may have a good idea for a dream they would like to write about. If they have decided on one dream for the future that they would like to write about, give them an opportunity to compile some details about the dream by using a cluster map. In a cluster map, your students should put the topic of their dreams in the center of a page and put a circle around them. From that center circle, students should draw spokes that reach out to other circles. These other circles will hold the details about the dreams. You may want to have your students draw six spokes and write along each spoke one of the question words: who, what, where, when, why and how. They should then answer these questions about the dream they have for the future. By getting these ideas down on paper before writing the essay, your students will not be floundering for ideas in the middle of the writing process. It will also be easier for them to organize the essay before they write. Now give your students time to write out their dreams or assign it for homework. You may also want to design a

bulletin board where you can display what your students have written. Encourage your students to read about one another's dreams and talk to their classmates about them.

### 3 STRATEGIZE

After your students write about their dreams, let them strategize how to achieve those dreams with this activity. Write the phrase five-year plan on the white board. Ask your students if any of them know what a five-year plan is. If no one can explain a five-year plan, ask a volunteer to explain what a plan is. Then have them guess at what a five-year plan would be. Help them understand that a plan is more definite than a dream so the verb tense to use when writing a five-year plan is the simple future. In one year, I will... In three years, I will... Have your students think about their dreams and create a five-year strategy for achieving their dreams. If they cannot achieve the dream in five years, allow them to create a ten-year plan. If time permits, allow each student to share his five-year plan in front of the class and allow the class to ask questions and offer advice. Remind the presenter to use simple future for definite plans or to use may or might when talking about possible actions in the future.

**THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE CAN BE BENEFICIAL FOR ALMOST ANYONE NO MATTER WHAT HIS OR HER AGE. GIVE YOUR STUDENTS THE CHANCE TO DO THIS BY DISCUSSING THEIR DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE AND PLANNING A WAY TO ACHIEVE THEM.**

It will help your class to get to know each other better and may also give your students some useful plans for achieving their dreams.



# Facts, Opinions, and Theories: How to Talk about Them to Students

With students - undergraduate and graduate level alike - there is a basic confusion of what is a fact, what is an opinion, when they should be used.

A young student approached me recently, for example, surprised she could include in discussion her own opinion of a character in the story and that opinion could differ from mine, the instructor's. Also common is to take cultural values—"Capitalism is the best economic system"—as factual, a given, that does not need to be defended. Then words like "theory," "law," "subjective" and "objective" further muddy things at higher levels. Misconceptions surrounding these terms are rampant. Part of concern is that the terms themselves exist in some way on a continuum: for example, if enough evidence exists to support my opinion, and enough people agree with me, does it actually begin to somehow enter the realm of fact? It is actually not a given, not factual, that capitalism is the best system, wouldn't most reasonable people agree, however, that war is a negative and should be a last resort in terms of relations between two countries? Would that enter the realm of "fact"?

## DEFINITIONS OF THESE TERMS

### 1 FACT

A fact is something verifiable and not arguable: University of the Pacific is in Stockton, California. I can pull out a map and show you, and it is very difficult to argue the point with me without seeming a little crazy.

### 2 OPINION

An opinion is arguable. University of the Pacific is a beautiful campus. I can show you pictures of the campus and support my opinion by describing the lawns, the trees, gardens, and the buildings, however you can still disagree with me, claiming, for example, that brick buildings in your opinion are ugly, and not seem crazy.

### 3 THEORY

A theory, in the scientific sense, is a best description of the facts, of why something is. The theory of evolution uses the fossil record and DNA analysis to describe how life developed. This is different from the everyday use of the word: "I have a theory about why my husband is always late," meaning I have a guess or supposition about his behavior not built on evidence.

### 4 LAW

A law is a theory that has been proven numerous times, such as the law of gravity. Long after the fall of an apple gave Newton the inspiration for his theory of gravity, apples continue to fall down from trees. They don't defy the law and fall up. If they did, the law would have to be revisited.

### 5 OBJECTIVE

True objectivity is without bias, without perspective, reporting events as they occur. We think of a camera's view as objective, taking in a room, for example, exactly as it appears.

### 6 SUBJECTIVE

Something that is subjective is from a particular perspective and bias. All human reporters are subjective—even a camera, in the hands of a human photographer, becomes subjective—recording a room, a church at a wedding, in a certain way and, through the use of light, for example, making the room more beautiful than it might seem in other circumstances.

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT FACT AND OPINION

### 1 OPINIONS ARE BAD; FACTS ARE GOOD

An old TV program featured a detective who, on interviewing witnesses on a case, would insist, "Just the facts, Ma'am" when the witness began rambling on

with her perceptions. Actually, detectives don't go around crime scenes gathering "facts" from the public—the reason they would talk to the public would be mostly because they are interested in people's opinions of the crime. Why would the police go to the neighbor and ask about the victim's comings and goings to just to learn that the victim left home at 8:30 am every day and came back at 5:30 pm without fail? Why wouldn't they want to hear the neighbor's opinion on the victim's comings and goings—that the neighbor thought the victim was crashing bore, for example? Whether or not this is "true," it does reveal something about both the victim and neighbor - it's valuable information. Facts police can usually gather themselves.

### 2 ALL OPINIONS ARE EQUAL

My mother recently didn't want to hear her doctor's opinion on her case—it was just an opinion. I tried to explain to her that the opinion of her doctor pertaining to her health was qualitatively different from mine, for example, or her granddaughter's, or even her son-in-law's, who is a doctor but not in the correct specialty in this case. I don't know how much I got through to her.

Similarly, students, especially at lower levels, think that they shouldn't include their opinion—it's just an opinion, and of no worth. On the contrary, that's what your reader generally wants to hear—your thesis is your opinion—supported, of course. Even when I as your teacher tell you "Describe the University of Pacific," I am really asking for your opinion. I don't want to hear "University of the Pacific is in Stockton, California and is a small private campus with several thousand students." I know all of that or can easily learn it from the university website. I want to hear your opinion of it. Facts in this case make for dull writing because the writer can't develop the ideas: I can do nothing with "University of the Pacific is in Stockton." So what? "University of the Pacific is an excellent small, liberal arts school" is something that can be developed, and here is where facts are important—as the details, not the main ideas. Give the student population details as support for

the quality of the school, not as main ideas of themselves.

### 3 WRITING SHOULD BE BASED ON "FACTS"

Most writing actually is opinion. You would probably not want to read an essay that recounted "just the facts" of the life of Abraham Lincoln, for example. It is the writer's particular take and perspective on his life and how he managed his marriage, the country, and the war that is interesting.

### 4 A HUMAN WRITER CAN BE OBJECTIVE

Some people pride themselves on somehow doing this, being "objective." This isn't possible. The facts that I was born female, American, and in the latter part of the 20th century inform how I view the world and how I write. The best I can do is acknowledging my perspective and biases and try for balance and objectivity.

### 5 BIAS IS BAD

The very term "bias" has an ugly sound to many Americans, conjuring up images from the pre Civil-Rights era, perhaps, where "bias" was something that intruded in the lives of many Americans in a negative way. "Bias" actually just means a predisposition for or against something, again, we all hold it, based on past experiences. My own bias in terms of housing, for example, is of single-family units in suburban neighborhoods. That is what I grew up with, that's what I picture when someone says "house."

## HOW TO TEACH FACT/OPINION CONTINUUM

### 1

Teach the definitions of different terms. Use examples. In this way students can begin differentiate their use of the terms.

### 2

In reading, ask students to point out facts and opinions. Which seem to be verifiable facts in the reading? What points can be argued?

### 3

When reading, ask students to

evaluate a writer's viewpoint. What seems to be his perspective? What are her biases?

### 4

When reading, ask students to evaluate the quality of opinions and how well they are supported.

### 5

When writing, get students in the habit of being critical of their own biases. Are they taking too many things as given? Do they need to support their ideas more?

**TEACHING THE ART OF EVALUATING FACTS AND OPINIONS AND APPLYING THEM APPROPRIATELY ISN'T EASY, BUT IF TEACHERS GET INTO THE HABIT OF HELPING STUDENTS EXAMINE THEIR READING IN THESE TERMS, AND TO APPLY THEM TO THEIR OWN WRITING, THEY WILL BECOME CRITICAL THINKERS AND WRITERS.**

# Talking About Our Heroes

Every child has a hero. For some, it may be a sports figure or a celebrity. For other children, their heroes are people who have made great advances in the world like Jesus or Einstein. Most children name one of their relatives, a parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle, as their heroes. Regardless of who the hero is, we look up to our heroes as examples and role models, and we seek to live our lives in similar ways to them.

These activities will get your students speaking and writing English while talking about the important people in their lives, their heroes.

## HOW TO TALK ABOUT HEROES IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 WHAT IS A HERO?

What makes a person a hero? Is it something he has done? Is it a quality she possesses? Start by explaining to your student what the word hero means, and then brainstorm the qualities that a hero might or should have. They may be characteristics such as bravery, fearlessness, strength, intelligence or boldness among many others. Allow your students to share what they value in the people they look up to. After talking about the qualities of heroes, give your students some examples of heroes by reading selections from *The Children's Book of Heroes* by William J. Bennett. Do these people exemplify the qualities your students said a hero possesses? How do they meet those descriptions? How are they different? Break your students into groups and assign one hero to each group. Then have that group discuss how that person either does or does not meet the class' criteria for a hero. If you are teaching adults, you may prefer to read portions of newspaper articles that talk about local people who have done heroic acts in the community rather than selections from the children's book.

### 2 WHO IS A HERO?

After examining the heroes in groups, encourage your students to share with one another who their heroes are. In their groups, they should

tell their classmates who their heroes are and what qualities those people possess that make them heroic as well as the heroic actions they have performed. These people can be living or dead, people that your students know personally or people they have never met.

You can create a display of heroes in your classroom that you can add to throughout the year. Start with examples from the books or people in your community. Post a picture of that person as well as a description of him or her and what he or she has done for the community or the world. You can include well-known heroes like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi as well as local heroes. Also, encourage your students to contribute to the wall with heroes from their home cultures.

Now your students will write about their heroes. For younger children or beginning students, you may assign two to three sentences for each of the following questions. For older children and advanced students, you may want them to write a paragraph answering each of the following questions. In either case, tell your students to give the following information about their heroes in their writing.

1. Who are they?  
Give some information about the person and his or her personal life and history.
2. What did they do?  
Explain the acts that classify that person as a hero.
3. How do they measure up as a hero?  
Point out what qualities that person has that match those characteristics of a hero your class brainstormed earlier.
4. Why is he or she your hero?  
Explain why you admire that person's actions or character.
5. What would you say to your hero?  
If you could meet that person, what would you say to him or her and why?

Once your students have written their pieces, display them on the wall of he-

ros. Make sure that each person has a picture of his or her hero to display with the writing assignment.

After your wall of heroes has grown a little and your students have had time to read the information about its members, break your class into small groups to talk about the heroes. In those groups, ask students to decide how they would classify the heroes. The classification could be based on past and present, by country or by accomplishment. Let your students decide, and challenge them to think of as many classifications as they can.

### 3 ARE YOU A HERO?

To round out your unit on heroes, put your students in groups and have them discuss heroic actions that each of them has performed in the past. Their examples could be walking an older person across the street or doing yard work out of kindness, or they could be as dramatic as saving someone's life. Only your students will know. Then, if you desire, have your students write about their own heroic act. You may or may not want to add them to your wall of heroes or make a special section on the wall to display their own stories.

**WE ALL LIKE TO HAVE SOMEONE IN LIFE TO ADMIRE. THIS UNIT ON HEROES WILL GIVE YOUR CLASS PRACTICE WITH LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING AND WRITING AS THEY LEARN ABOUT HISTORICAL FIGURES AND SHARE ABOUT HEROES IN THEIR OWN LIVES. YOU CAN CARRY THE THEME THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR OR JUST FOCUS ON IT FOR A FEW DAYS.**

In either case, your students will be encouraged to be thankful for the influential people in their lives and to live more heroic lives themselves.



# Ready, Set, Go: Talking About Travel in the ESL Classroom

Have your students ever ridden a bicycle? Have they ridden in a hot air balloon? Have they ever taken a trip on the back of a mule or donkey? People all over the world use these means of travel on a regular basis, but sometimes one type of travel is obviously more appropriate than another. Thinking about unique types of travel like these, your students will have fun as well as get their creativity flowing as they come up with their own new means of travel! So strap on your seatbelts and get ready for an adventure that is sure to take you places, but who knows just where that might be.

## TEACHING A UNIT ON TRAVELLING? TRY THESE CHALLENGING ESL ACTIVITIES

### 1 BICYCLE

Most people have probably ridden a bicycle at some point in their lives, but how far is too far for a ride? Dr. and Mrs. H. Darwin Mellrath spend three and a half years between 1895 and 1898 bicycling around the world (riding ships across the oceans, of course). With this in mind, challenge your students' map reading skills (and non-pros reading abilities) by having groups plan a bicycle trip across the country or across the continent. Each group of four students should plan the best bicycle trip across the country using a map to plan the route keeping in mind the terrain and the weather. After each group has planned its trip, have students choose some resting points along the route from which to "send" post cards to the folks back home. You can display a large map on a classroom wall and post the post cards near the places from which they would have been "sent." This exercise is a good opportunity to review with your class how to write and address a post card. The content, length and style are all different from that of a personal letter. You should then review with your students how to address a post card and what type of postage to use. Follow up the activity by having your stu-

dents write real post cards to someone in their family or to a friend and then post and mail them.

### 2 HOT AIR BALLOON

If your class includes a literature element, you may want to consider reading the 1947 Newberry Winner for an excellent contribution to children's literature, *The Twenty-One Balloons* by William Pene DuBois. Because of its target reading level, it may be more comfortable for your students to read than an adult oriented book at a higher reading level. In this book, DuBois writes about many inventions linked with the hot air balloon. Some are fictional, but many are historical. Your students will enjoy reading about a chariot pulled by hot air balloons, a hot air balloon RV and many other creative uses of hot air and fabric. After reading the book or portions of it, challenge your students to come up with their own hot air balloon invention. They may dream of a hot air parking garage or a balloon powered skate park. Whatever their imaginations come up with, ask the members of your class to write descriptions of their inventions. Each description should include the purpose of the invention, its uses or advantages, and who would most benefit from the invention. Then have your students illustrate their descriptions and post their work on a bulletin board titled "Up Up and Away."

If desired, you can follow this activity up with a mock investors' meeting. Give each person in the class a certificate for 1000 balloon dollars to invest in one of the inventions of a classmate. Each student should present his invention to the class stressing why it is the best option in which to invest. After all of the presentations, each person should commit his balloon dollars to one of the projects. If you like, divide your class into three teams and assign one of the top three inventions to each team. Have the group work together to plan how to make the project and what it would really cost to produce. You may also want to encourage each

group to think of a marketing strategy to introduce the invention to the world.

### 3 MULE RIDES

For visitors to Grand Canyon National Park, riding a mule down into the cavern can be a once in a lifetime experience. Ask your students if anyone has ever taken a mule ride. If so, ask that person to share about his or her experience. Then show your class some pictures of the Gran Canyon. In groups, have your students predict what it might be like to take a mule ride into the canyon. What might they need to bring? What might be prohibited? After some discussion time, have your students do some information gathering about mule trips into the canyon. You should encourage each group to look at the general information that the park provides about its mule trips, the FAQ, the do's and don'ts and the rider qualifications. Give each group some time to revise their lists of what to bring and not bring. After reading and discussing the possible trips, have each person choose whether he would prefer a day trip or an overnight trip into the canyon on mule. Then each person should write a mock letter to the park administrator to reserve the trip he has chosen. Each person should include contact information, travel plans and a request for reservation.

**PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES ARE TRAVEL OF THE EVERYDAY SORT, BUT WHO CAN SAY THAT THEY HAVE TRAVELLED BY MULE, HOT AIR BALLOON OR BICYCLES OVER LONG DISTANCES? THOUGH YOUR STUDENTS MAY NEVER GET AN OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL BY THESE MEANS IN REAL LIFE, THEY CAN IMAGINE WHAT THIS TYPE OF UNUSUAL TRAVEL WOULD BE LIKE, AND YOU NEVER KNOW.**

Perhaps this imaginary travel will inspire your students to take an extreme trip in the months or years to come. Either way, their imaginations will get a spectacular ride as their English skills get a work out. Bon voyage and happy travels!

# Hello, Hello: New Ways to Teach Old Greetings

You see your students in the morning, and you naturally greet them, “Good morning. How are you?” How many times have you heard that same old response, “Fine, thank you. And you?” However, how many native speakers do you know that respond that way?

Why not challenge your students to veer off the traditional dialogue path and into authentic conversation. Here are some suggestions on how to do just that.

## HOW TO TEACH GREETINGS IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 GIVE OTHER OPTIONS

Brainstorming is a great class level activity. The energy in the room is often palpable, and students feed off the ideas and energy of their classmates. Start your lessons on greetings by brainstorming a list of possible responses to the traditional, “How are you?” Students will likely offer the traditional responses very quickly, but push past those to responses that are more unusual. Fine. Go away. Terrible, how are you? What do you want? Why do you ask? Do you really want to know? These and many other non-standard responses are things that native speakers say every day. Keep a running list posted in your classroom, and allow your students to add other responses as they think of them or as they do a little research with the following activities.

Variety comes not only in responses, but also in the initiation of the conversation. Expand your classroom display to show both. Simply designate one area of the display for initiations and another for responses. As your students brainstorm and do research to expand each list, they will naturally find phrases to add to the other.

### 2 DO A LITTLE RESEARCH

Make discovering alternate greetings an ongoing event for your

students. If they are listening for the greetings that people use every day, they will certainly expand their dialogue options. Movies are a great resource for ESL students. There are plenty of scenes when one character meets another. You can take several clips from one movie like *You've Got Mail*, or take one scene from each of several movies. Also, encourage your students to share dialogue from favorite movies whether they play the scenes for your class or simply relay the dialogue. You can also find film resources on youtube videos and television shows or interviews.

E-mail and text messaging are another way for your students to find authentic greetings from native speakers. Though both e-mail and texting are written forms, the language used in them is more reflective of spoken English. By challenging your students to examine samples of these forms, they will get reading practice while doing research for speaking thus addressing two language aspects at the same time. If you can, supply your class with some e-mails and text messages for them to examine or ask them to bring in some of their own.

### 3 A BLACK TIE EVENT

Though informal speech is what speakers use in most situations, it is not universally appropriate. There are times, like in a job interview or a business meeting, that using formal speech is the correct choice. This is a simple way to make sure your students have the opportunity to practice their formal as well as informal speech while in class. Grab a few old neckties and hang them up near the door of your classroom. If students want to be spoken to formally on a given day, they take a tie as they enter the room and wear it during class. Any other student who speaks with the tie-wearer should address him or her with formal speech. Now all of your students will have to determine which greetings are appropriate for casual settings and which are appropriate

for formal settings. You can also take some class time to address that question and list several circumstances what situations fall into each category.

IT IS EASY FOR TRADITIONAL DIALOGUES TO SOUND ARTIFICIAL AND STAGNANT, BUT MOST OF THE TIME THEY ARE THE FIRST CHOICE FOR OUR STUDENTS. ENCOURAGE YOUR STUDENTS TO GO BEYOND THESE TRADITIONAL DIALOGUES AND USE MORE FREQUENTLY HEARD PHRASES.

If they do, they are more likely to sound like fluent speakers of English and not uncomfortable students of the language.

# Hedges, Euphemisms, Apologies, Requests: Language for Politeness

Not a lot of our language is direct, I realized recently after an exchange at a restaurant. “So have you had a chance to look over the menu?” the waitress asked at the beginning of the meal. “What do you want?” would be, of course, far too blunt, and “Have you had a chance to look at the menu?” does indeed function the same way. Similarly, the waitress said “I’ll just put the check here on the table for whenever you’re ready” at the end of the meal - she would never say, “You need to pay now.” In fact, a lot of our language is made up of similar language for politeness.

## LANGUAGE FOR POLITENESS

### 1 THE HEDGE

The Hedge “I’d really like to come to the party on Saturday, but I’m not sure if I can,” means “I probably won’t be there.” The speaker needs to respond to this invitation but doesn’t want to give a direct “yes” or “no” and instead hedges.

### 2 EUPHEMISM

Euphemism is the “pretty language” we use to cover up a sensitive matter: “a little heavy,” for “fat,” for example, and “mature” for “old.” Because euphemisms are very indirect and an attempt to in some way evade the truth, they can be confusing for even native speakers. The instructor should go over some of the sensitive or “taboo” topics of American culture--death, aging, weight—and some of the common euphemisms for them.

### 3 THE APOLOGY OR PSEUDO-APOLOGY

The Apology or Pseudo-apology: “I’m sorry I’m late. Traffic is miserable,” or similar apology with an excuse is necessary for such minor transgressions as lateness. In contrast, a “pseudo-apology” is often used as an expression of sympathy: “I’m sorry to hear about your father’s death.” This is obviously not actually an apology but an expression of sympathy, and mistaking its function can lead to some rather comical exchanges: e.g., “It’s okay, it’s not your fault.”

### 4 REQUESTS

All languages have some way, and usually many ways, of asking for help: all of us do this, of various people, and over different things, sometimes just in the course of a day. Generally speaking, the closer the relationship and/or the smaller the request, the less formal and polite the language. As the favor grows bigger and/or the relationship more distant, the more polite the language. For example, I might say to my brother, “Hey, lend me a quarter for the parking meter, please?” but to a board of directors of a foundation, I would say, “I sincerely request that you seriously consider funding this worthy program...”

### 5 TERMS OF ADDRESS:

“Sir,” “Ma’am,” and “Miss”: When is it polite to use these, if at all?

“Sir” is used with adult males, “Ma’am” is used for an adult female, “miss” usually for a teenager or young adult. These are used when the addressee’s name is not known: e.g., “Sir, would you have the time?” They are also used for customers and clients: e.g., “What can I get for you, Ma’am?”

Some interesting notes on terms of address: “Lady” in American culture is not polite when used as a means of address: rather it is a dishonoric, as in “Lady, move your car.” “Boy” as a term of address for male service people, especially African American ones, has long fallen out of use in the United States, seen rightly as racist. However, “girl” is still heard to refer to, not address, female service people, such as waiters, no matter the age of the person: e.g., “I already gave my order to the girl,” when “the girl” might be sixty years old.

## METHODS TO TEACH THE LANGUAGE OF POLITENESS

### 1 TEACH THE TERM

Explain the entire concept of politeness and how different cultures have different ways to show politeness. Ask for examples in U.S. culture: “excuse me” being a common one that people use when they really mean “move.” Ask for

similar examples from students’ own cultures.

### 2 RAISE AWARENESS

Show a clip from a TV or part of an article and ask students for examples of polite language: “What term does the writer use for ‘older person?’” and “What words does the actor use for his friend’s grandmother death?” In this way, students begin to understand that people do use the language of politeness frequently.

### 3 CORRECTION

Show a TV clip or read a news article in which there is some violation of polite language. Work with students to identify the offending parts and see if they can correct them: e.g., “The actor keeps calling his friend ‘fat,’ - what can he say that is more polite?”

### 4 SITUATIONAL APPROPRIATENESS

Discuss situations where polite language is really necessary: when addressing a client or customer, in a professional or business setting, in a ceremonial or religious situation, meeting someone for the first time, and so on. Also discuss places when it would not be appropriate, such as in an emergency situation like a fire or in casual gatherings with friends or family.

### 5 ROLE PLAY

After students have had a chance to work with the language of politeness, have them work on role-play. Put students in groups and pass out index cards with the basic situation on it: “Your friend asks about your grandmother, who had been sick. Your grandmother actually died last week. What should you say?”

**BECAUSE THE WHOLE POINT OF THE LANGUAGE OF POLITENESS IS OFTEN TO COVER UP AN UGLY REALITY, SUCH AS DEATH OR THE NEED FOR MONEY, UNDERSTANDING IT CAN BE DIFFICULT, EVEN TO NATIVE SPEAKERS.** However, understanding how to use these various language functions of hedges, euphemisms, and apologies is necessary to navigate successfully in English.



# yes Yes YES! How to Teach Sentence Stress

“Stress” is part of the rhythm of a language, the pattern of stressed or emphasized syllables and unstressed syllables of which English sentences are made up. Appropriate sentence stress is important for native-like or even comprehensible speech: if the stress pattern is incorrect, then listener comprehension will suffer.

Many ESL students lack an understanding of English sentence stress, however, often giving each syllable equal length, resulting in monotonous and difficult to understand speech.

## WHAT ARE METHODS TO TEACH NATIVE-LIKE SENTENCE STRESS?

### 1 START BY DISCUSSING STRESS

Read a sentence aloud from the textbook without stressing content or main idea words. Ask students if they think it sounds right. They will probably say no. Then read the same sentence with the correct stress pattern. Ask them what they think now. This will raise their consciousness about stress.

### 2 INTRODUCE SYLLABLES

Stress in English interacts with syllables: that is, syllables alternate between stressed and unstressed within a sentence. Select a sentence from a dialogue in your textbook and model “beating out” the syllables on the desk. Have students do the same. Have them count the syllables in the sentence.

### 3 ELABORATE ON STRESS

Explain the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables. Explain the stressed syllables are louder and longer. Stressed syllables tend to occur in content words such as nouns and verbs, structure words such as articles and prepositions are usually unstressed.

### 4 PROVIDE EXAMPLES

Model stressed and unstressed syllables by selecting a sentence from your book and writing it on the board, marking the stressed syllables with a dash or a dot. Then read the sentence aloud, emphasizing the stressed syllables. Have students practice with you.

### 5 DEFINE SCHWA

Explain that most unstressed syllables in English are reduced and pronounced as a “schwa.” Teach the schwa sound (the “uh” sound as is the second syllable of “station”). Modeling the expressions “Uh-huh” (for “yes”) and “huh-uh” (for “no”) is a humorous way to teach this sound. The American English greeting “How are you doing?” for example is really pronounced /how’r yuh doin’/ --the structure words “are” and “you” get reduced to schwa.

### 6 PRACTICE SENTENCE STRESS

Practice the sample sentences on the board again, emphasizing the stress pattern, making the stressed syllables louder and longer and reducing the unstressed syllables. Ask students about the content and structure words and which are stressed and unstressed.

### 7 MARK

Have students on their own pull sentences from the same dialogue in their books and mark the stress patterns.

### 8 COMPARE

Students can then compare their markings with a partner.

### 9 PRACTICE IN PAIRS

Practice the dialogue in pairs, focusing on the stress patterns.

## MORE ADVANCED ACTIVITIES

### 1

Teach specialized use of stress and how meaning can shift based on the stress pattern and what the speaker wants to emphasize. “I love my sister,” “I love my sister,” “I love my sister” and “I love my sister” all carry different meanings.

### 2

Give out a dialogue with the content words deleted. Have students listen to a recording of the dialogue for the content words and fill them in. They can then practice the dialogues in pairs.

### 3

An alternative to this, for more advanced students, is to have them predict the content words that belong in the blank spaces. Have them fill in the dialogues, check them against the tape, and then students can practice.

### 4

Play “telegrams”: explain a telegram was something like a precursor to a text message—a message in which all the structure words or were deleted: “Mom sick. Come home.” Give out a page of “telegrams.” Have students add the structure words and practice reading with appropriate sentence stress.

### 5

The above activities can also be done with popular songs. Play the song and hand out the lyrics, with content words or structure words deleted. Have students listen to the song and fill in the words.

### 6

Poetry is also a great way to practice sentence stress as poetry

is actually based on regular stress, or meter, patterns. Teach students a simple poem, such as Frost's "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening." Have them practice reciting it. They may try writing their own similar poems after, imitating Frost's style and stress/meter patterns.

## 7

Humor is often based on the stress pattern, or "delivery" as comedians call it. Tell a well-known joke and show how the humor is affected by the way the speaker uses stress by delivering it first with the correct stress and then without.

## 8

Give out index cards with content words students are currently learning written on them. Have students line the cards up into "sentences," adding structure words as necessary, and mark the correct stress pattern then practice saying the sentences.

## 9

Do a "drawing" activity by handing out a dialogue and having students "map" the stress of each sentence in the dialogue over the sentence, with high peaks representing stressed syllables and dips unstressed.

## 10

Have students bring in idioms that they've heard or want to learn about and go over the stress patterns.

### **FREQUENTLY REVISIT THE PRINCIPLES OF SENTENCE STRESS, TAKING TIME REGULARLY TO MODEL THE STRESS PATTERNS OF SENTENCES SELECTED FROM DIALOGUES.**

Add to students' existing knowledge base by teaching stress related to different types of sentences, such as information ("Wh-") questions and "yes/no" questions.

Participating in a variety of related activities will result in a higher likelihood that students will internalize the principles of sentence stress in English.

# Inspire Creativity and Impromptu Speaking with ESL Games

**GETTING ORIGINAL RESPONSES FROM STUDENTS CAN BE DIFFICULT WHEN YOU'RE TEACHING ESL, BUT SPEAKING UNSCRIPTED ENGLISH IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS FOR STUDENTS TO PRACTICE ON A REGULAR BASIS.**

The act of putting together words in logical order with correct structure and grammar is a combination of art and skill that can only be learned through experience. Creativity is a significant part of speaking and many students feel lost when they're expected to give pre-scripted responses to questions in the classroom.

To get around mundane "computer printout" speaking from your students, try some of the following games that encourage students to indulge their creativity in speaking activities.

## 1 SUPERLATIVE Q&A TOSS

This game will require students to use a short pre-scripted phrase in their responses, but creativity will still be encouraged. It's a great way to get students used to the idea of coming up with their own sentences without overwhelming them. To prepare, make a set of index cards with superlative questions written on them and secure the stack with a rubber band. For example, one card might say "What is the most exotic place you have been in your life?" and another might say "Who do you think is the best movie star?" For these examples, students' answers would include the phrases "The most exotic place I have ever been is..." and "I think the best movie star is..." with original responses to fill in the gaps.

To play this game, have everyone sit in a circle and pull an index card out of the stack. Toss the stack to one of your students and read the question aloud, asking the student to provide a response. Once the student answers your question, have him or her pull out a new card and toss the stack to

another student. The first student then reads the new question and the student holding the stack answers. Keep going around the circle until you run out of cards.

## 2 VOCABULARY CHAIN STORY

In this game, students will be required to use a little more originality. Pass around index cards with one vocabulary word on each card, have students form a circle, and explain that you're going to tell a story. Keeping one card for yourself, start the story with one sentence that contains your vocabulary word. You can either go around the circle or toss a bean bag to determine who goes next, but have each student add a sentence to the story that contains his or her vocabulary word.

When all the cards have been used, you can have students try to identify all of the vocabulary words in the story (no peeking at the index cards). This is a great way to review vocabulary words and encourage creative speaking.

## 3 EAVESDROPPING IDENTITY CRISIS

For this game, divide your students into pairs and a group of three if necessary. Write up some index cards for your paired students that describe relationships (use examples of two-person relationships for most cards, but try to come up with a few that include three communicators). For example, you might write "Doctor and Patient," "Teacher and Student," or "Grandmother, Mother, and Daughter." Bring in two fake cell phones and have students take turns having a conversation while the class "eavesdrops" and tries to guess the identity of each speaker.

This game requires "expert" creativity, so make sure that your students are comfortable with impromptu speaking before you try this one. To make it less intimidating, allow students to remain seated at their desks while they have

their "conversations."

It's a fun game if you can get maximum participation from your students, so you might try to prepare them for "Eavesdropping Identity Crisis" by playing the other games first.



# Quiet Conversations: Taking a Softer Approach to Speaking Class

**ASKING YOUR ESL CLASS TO BE QUIET ALMOST SEEMS COUNTERINTUITIVE. AFTER ALL, ISN'T THE GOAL OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS TO SPEAK THE TARGET LANGUAGE?**

You can achieve this goal of fluent speech even when you are doing quiet themed activities. Take a look at the following possibilities to get inspired to get quiet.

## QUIET CONVERSATIONS. HOW TO TAKE A SOFTER APPROACH TO SPEAKING CLASS

### 1 WHISPERING

If you have ever studied phonology, you may know that the sounds that make up spoken words are not the same sounds used in whispered words. While spoken English uses a complete set of voiced and voiceless consonants (b versus p, g versus k, etc.) whispered English uses only voiceless consonants (p instead of b, k instead of g). When a native speaker whispers, the pronunciation of words is very different.

Give your students some practice deciphering whispered English with a little class activity. Introduce the following conversational pattern. In a conversation between two people, the first person asks, "Can I tell you a secret?" with normal pronunciation. The second responds, "Yes." Then the first person whispers a secret to his listener. For example, he might say, "I forgot to brush my teeth this morning." The listener should then check his understanding of what his partner said. "Did you say you forgot to brush your teeth this morning?" If that person heard right, the first person should say, "Shhh, yes." If the listener did not hear the secret correctly, the first person should whisper, "No, I said..." and then repeat the secret. The two students should continue until the listener has correctly heard and repeated the whispered secret. Then the two speakers change roles and play again. Students will likely find this activity very challenging, but for a true fluency in

English, speech of this type should be addressed.

### 2 QUIET MUSIC

There have been many studies on the effect of classical music on the brain. The conclusion is consistent that people are more creative when they listen to classical music. Give your students a chance to respond to music with either a writing or a discussion activity. To practice your students' writing, dim the lights in the room but do not turn them off completely and then put on some classical music. You can choose whatever style you want, or give your students some variety by playing several selections during the class period. Ask your students to write while they listen to the music. They may write a fictional story as they listen, they may write about experiences they have had in the past, or they may write about how they feel at the moment. The most important thing is that your students write.

Encourage them to be creative and get in touch with how the music makes them feel. If you would rather practice speaking, play short selections of the music and then break your class into groups. Each group should discuss how the music made them feel and why each person thinks they felt that way. Then students can discuss if they liked the particular selection or what type of music they would rather listen to. Repeat with as many musical selections as you have time for in class.

### 3 QUIET AS A MOUSE

A quiet unit can be a good time to make sure your students understand what a simile is. A simile is a phrase that compares two objects using the word like or as. One example might be, "He is as quiet as a mouse." Challenge your students to think creatively as your class makes a list of similes.

Start by brainstorming a list of adjectives. Then, in groups, have your students use those adjectives to make similes. She is as loud as a train. He is as busy as a beaver. After the groups

have finished, give them a chance to share their creativity with the class. Did any two groups come up with the same similes? Are there any consistencies across cultures?

### 4 NOT AS QUIET AS YOU THINK

Our lives are very noisy. At any given time, we are bombarded by so many sounds that we do not even notice them most of the time. Challenge your students' powers of observation by taking some time out of typical class activities to listen quietly. For example, as I write this I can hear the fan on my computer, the washing machine in my basement, and my roommate breathing as well as the air blowing through the vents in the back of the room. Normally, we do not notice the sounds around us all the time, but by focusing for just a few minutes we can hear a completely new world. If you can take your students to an unusual place, a courtyard, a park, some nearby woods or a stream, do so and then take some time to listen to the natural sounds around you. If you cannot leave the school, your students will still benefit from this activity in the classroom. After spending a given amount of time listening, have your students share what they heard either through discussion or in writing. This might also be a good time to teach the word onomatopoeia – a word that is structured to sound like the noise it represents. Examples that you can give might include bang, bark, meow and crash.

**JUST BECAUSE YOUR CLASS IS BEING QUIET DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE NOT LEARNING AND PRACTICING ENGLISH. THESE ACTIVITIES MAY DECREASE THE VOLUME OF YOUR TYPICAL CLASS PERIOD BUT THEY WILL ALSO INCREASE YOUR STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH.**

Through whispering, listening and simply taking time to let creativity flow, your students will benefit from this quiet class time.

# 10 Methods to Incorporate Drama in the ESL Classroom

## WHAT DOES DRAMA HAVE TO DO WITH ESL? A LOT.

Drama is about dialogue, about language, and interacting with others in specific “scenes” with appropriate language—all activities we as teachers try to get our students to engage in.

## REASONS FOR INCORPORATING DRAMA IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

Drama can be a valuable teaching tool. It gets students up and moving around and interacting with each other. It’s particularly appealing to kinesthetic learners but can be used successfully for all learners. It also contextualizes language, making real and three-dimensional that which is on the printed page.

Students will improve the speaking and listening skills in performing scenes and also their writing skills through such activities as dialogue writing. Drama also teaches the “pragmatics” of language, how we appropriately use language to get something done, like make a request. Finally, drama promotes class bonding: in drama classes, there is usually a great deal of comradery.

## METHODS FOR INCORPORATING DRAMA IN THE ESL CLASS

### 1 ACT OUT THE DIALOGUE

One of the easiest ways to incorporate drama in the classroom is to have students act out the dialogue from their textbooks. Simply pair them up, have them choose roles, then work together to act out the dialogue, figuring out for themselves the “blocking,” or stage movements. This is effective for a beginning activity of incorporating drama in the classroom.

### 2 PERFORM READER’S THEATER

Another good beginning exercise is to do Reader’s Theater. Hand out cop-

ies of a short or one-act play, have students choose roles, and then read the play from their seats without acting it out. However, do encourage them to read dramatically, modeling as necessary.

### 3 ACT OUT THE STORY

If students are reading a short story such as “The Chaser,” about the man who buys a “love potion” for his unrequited love, have students act out the story or part of the story, working in groups and assigning roles and determining the blocking. This is particularly effective with “short-shorts”: brief, one-scene stories with limited characters.

### 4 WRITE THE DIALOGUE FOR A SCENE

Watch a brief clip of a movie without the sound on. Have students write the dialogue for it and act it out.

## MORE ADVANCED ACTIVITIES

Once students have had some experience with the basics of character, dialogue, and stage movement, they can move on to some more advanced dramatics, involving more of students’ own creativity and critical thinking skills.

### 1 ACT OUT AND PUT WORDS TO AN EMOTION

Give students an emotion, such as “anger” or “fear”. Have students, either singly or in groups, first act out that emotion then put words to the emotion.

### 2 GIVE “VOICE” TO AN INANIMATE OBJECT

What would a stapler say if it could talk? Or an apple? Have students write monologues with inanimate objects as the character. A monologue is a short scene with just one character talking, either addressing the audience, God, or himself or herself. Hamlet’s “To Be or Not to Be” soliloquy might also be

termed a monologue, for example.

After writing them, students can read the monologues aloud.

### 3 CREATE A CHARACTER

Have students develop a character, writing a one-page profile on the character’s background, appearance, personality, etc. Have them introduce the character to the class, explaining what interests them about their character.

### 4 WRITE A MONOLOGUE

Using the character they’ve already developed, have students write a monologue for that character then perform it.

### 5 MIME AND DUBBING

Have students act out short scenes without dialogue. The rest of the class then supplies the dialogue, developing the “script.”

### 6 IMPROVISE

Put students in groups of two or three, and assign the characters and the situation to the groups, perhaps using 3x5 index cards. Give a time limit of two to three minutes per scene. Students go from there, extemporaneously creating the dialogue and movement themselves.

**DRAMA IS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL THAT CAN BE USED TO PROMOTE INTERACTION AND LANGUAGE SKILLS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM AS WELL AS CREATE A CLASS BONDING EXPERIENCE.**

With careful planning, use of drama can enhance your English classroom curriculum.

# Ideas for Integrating Plays into the ESL Classroom

Most ESL classes do not spend a lot of time reading and discussing contemporary drama. Just because drama is not common in the ESL classroom, though, does not mean there is not value in that genre of literature. Plays can be integrated into the ESL curriculum and classroom, and they can serve your students well as both reading and speaking resources for all areas of language learning. Read on to see how you can integrate plays into your ESL curriculum.

## HOW TO INTEGRATE PLAYS INTO YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 DIALOGUE IN MANY FORMS

Plays are written in a unique format – the speaker is listed before each line which is written just as the person is supposed to say it. Because of this unique writing style, plays are a great resource when you are teaching your class about quoted and reported speech. The lines listed on the page represent the actual words of the characters. Choose a scene to read aloud with your class, and assign roles to your students before reading through the dialogue. It does not have to be too long of a selection. After your class has read the scene, review the difference between quoted speech and reported speech. When writing quotations, the words that a person said are written in the same tense and agreement, but the punctuation must follow a special pattern. Reported speech, on the other hand, does not use a special punctuation pattern but does change the verb tense and its agreement at times. Have your students practice using both forms by taking the lines from the play and writing them first as quoted speech and then as reported speech before reviewing it together. To follow up this activity, have your students write their own dialogue in one of three forms: quoted speech, reported speech or play format. Give the students who would like a chance to share their dia-

logue an opportunity to do so in front of the class.

### 2 SPEAK ON

Since plays are written to be read, they are a ready resource the next time you are looking for a class dialogue for pronunciation activities. By assigning parts and having your class read aloud, you can work on general pronunciation and intonation patterns with your students. Not only that, you can also challenge your students to act out the dialogue from the play as they read. This will add to their listening and reading comprehension and give you a chance to evaluate the pronunciation of individual students in isolation of their spoken grammar.

After your class has read a play, ask a volunteer to lead this question and answer activity. Have a volunteer pretend to be one of the characters in the play (you can either assign the character or let the volunteer choose it himself). Then give your class an opportunity to ask questions of the volunteer to try to identify who he is. They should be allowed to ask yes or no questions but not open ended questions. If the class is able to guess the character with ten or fewer questions, they win. If they are not, the volunteer wins. Repeat with as many characters as you like, and use a different volunteer each round.

### 3 WRITE ON

A scene that your class reads aloud can also serve as a unique story starter for writing class. After reading a scene, challenge your students to write a continuation of what happens with the characters. They should include details about the setting and characters in their piece as they write in pros form.

Another writing activity that you can use with a play your class has read is letter writing. Challenge each of your students to put himself or herself into the position of one of the characters in the play. What does that character

think and feel? Have your students imagine themselves as that character at the pivotal point of the play, and in character ask your students to write a personal letter to another character in the play. Your students should keep in mind what is happening in the play at that point and the perspective of the character.

You can also challenge your students to write their own short skits and present them for the rest of the class. If your class has watched a movie at any point in the year, use the deleted scenes from that movie as a starting point for this speaking activity. Using the deleted scenes as a model, have your students work in groups to write their own additional scene that was “cut” from the play and then have them perform it for the class.

### 4 LISTEN ON

If you are able to get a copy of a performance of a play your class has read, watching it as a class will be a unique experience for your students. Since a play is written to be watched rather than read, your class will likely increase their comprehension by viewing actors speaking the lines they have only seen on paper up until that point. After watching the play, ask your students to comment on the stage directions, costumes and props used in the performance and how they compare to what the playwright wrote. Was it what they imagined as they were reading? If your students were the directors, what would they have done differently? What would they have done the same?

**DRAMA IS A UNIQUE GENRE AMONG LITERATURE, BUT IT IS PROFITABLE FOR YOUR ESL STUDENTS TO BE EXPOSED TO THIS TYPE OF WRITING.**

By including plays in your ESL curriculum, your students will have a more rounded literature experience and still gain valuable language skills through its study.



# Top 10 Role Plays For Your Speaking Class

Role plays can often be a fun and entertaining way of getting the class to practice their English. There are literally hundreds of possible ideas available, and what is listed below is only a few of them.

Language of course is meant to be spoken. It originally evolved as the spoken word, and in historical terms writing is more or less a new invention. As a result, speaking classes are probably one of the most essential parts of teaching a language. Understanding and learning the grammar is all well and good, but if the students don't get practice, then how will they be able to use the language effectively? By putting them in different scenarios, students' minds will pick up faster and be able to work properly. Taking a look on the Internet, one can find a whole range of pre-written role plays that can be adapted for the class, or used in their original format. This is usually up to the teacher. Often, when beginning a new language, it is possible for one to practice simple phrases with a role play. Another interesting challenge would be to have the students design their own one. Often this can help bring out their creative side, and allow with the production part of speaking.

## TRY THESE TOP 10 ROLE PLAYS WITH YOUR NEXT SPEAKING CLASS!

### 1 TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

Telephone conversations are good because, unlike ordinary face to face conversations, they require people to listen solely to the words. Normally, you would have the students sit back-to-back and pretend they actually are on the phone. Appropriate telephone manner is then taught during this, such as always saying "hello" when answering the phone (this is particularly important when it comes to business, always answer with "hello").

### 2 GOING TO THE SHOP

For this role play, you can teach the basic vocabulary. If students are planning on going abroad soon, then this will allow them to practice dealing with the general public. This role play will also make great use of certain grammatical structures, for example, the difference between: "I would like those" and "I would like that". Even if your class is sufficiently advanced, this can be helpful for fine tuning specific grammatical errors.

### 3 DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT

A doctor's appointment will get the students used to particular medical terminology. As you can see, each role play serves a specific purpose when practicing speaking. It allows the student to become more familiar with certain terms.

### 4 IMMIGRATION OFFICE

Another important one, especially if the students are planning on emigrating any time soon. They will need to know certain vocabulary, and doing a role play of this nature is definitely going to boost their confidence.

### 5 LOOKING FOR ACCOMMODATION

Finding accommodation in another country is tricky. Using this type of role play, one student can act as the estate agent and the other can be the prospective buyer or tenant. It might also be a good time to let them jot down some very common terms used when it comes to dealing with getting accommodation such as land lord, lease, etc.

### 6 BOOKING A HOTEL ROOM

For student going on holiday, this will also be helpful. Again, it can be tied in with telephone manner. Try practicing this both as face to face and on the telephone!

### 7 JOB INTERVIEW

This is going to be of particular

interest to business students. Job interviews will generally require a lot of business phraseology in order for the interviewee to appear professional to the employer. Even when not learning a language, practicing a job interview can relieve a lot of the stress that comes along with looking for work.

### 8 CASUAL TALK

Integration is another important point when it comes to moving to a new country. Helping the students learn common phrases and even slang in English is going to be just as vital as teaching them "proper" words. Whilst they will have all the knowledge, getting used to various slang words is something which needs to be worked on. A fun class would be to show the differences in accents in English speaking nations from around the world!

### 9 TALKING ABOUT A HOLIDAY

Using a specific topic or theme, depending on what vocabulary one wants to teach on a specific day, can be very fruitful. The students can pretend to be a travel agent and a customer, or simply two friends.

### 10 DEBATE

Whilst not necessarily a role play, a debate is always a good way to begin a class. Students will get used to the different modes of argument and sometimes the debates themselves can become quite heated. It will, overall, make for a very interesting class.

**ROLE PLAYS, ULTIMATELY, ARE MORE FRUITFUL WHEN THE STUDENTS MAKE THEM UP THEMSELVES.** Of course this is usually done with guidance from the teacher, in order to weed out any grammar mistakes. It is important to use a variety with your students if teaching general English. There are many more resources out there on the web, so you will never be short of great ideas!



# Role Plays to Improve Speaking Skills

**IT'S IMPORTANT TO PRACTICE SPEAKING IN THE APPROPRIATE CONTEXT. HOWEVER, THE CLASSROOM IS A CONTRIVED SITUATION THAT DOESN'T ALWAYS AFFORD THE OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS TO PRACTICE NATURAL SPEAKING.**

A way to bring a wide variety of social contexts to your class is through a role play, which is one of the most adaptable activities for the speaking classroom. This activity is practical, entertaining, and gets students to produce authentic English.

## HOW TO USE ROLE PLAYS TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS

### 1 BE PRACTICAL

Students will be more motivated and eager to participate if you present them with a realistic situation that they might encounter in their daily lives. For example, asking students to role play about a tenant that has a problem with an apartment manager will be more practical than a student speaking with an alien. Using realistic situations gets students to practice essential vocabulary and phrases in such a way that they will be better able to retain what they learn.

### 2 IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

Role plays are an opportunity for students to produce natural, semi-spontaneous speech. When setting up a role play, you should give enough information about the situation to evoke the vocabulary you are targeting, but it should leave enough to the imagination to allow the students to construct their speech on the spot. Students will get more from the exercise if they can correctly use the appropriate vocabulary on their own. Encourage students to make notes while they are planning, but not to write a script. If you want students to read from scripts, try an activity like reader's theatre. In a role play, students should work on building their fluency by using unplanned speech.

### 3 PRE-TEACH VOCABULARY AND CONVERSATIONAL

## PHRASES

Using role play scenarios based on themes you've taught in class is a good way to enforce the vocabulary you've been teaching. Discuss the scenarios before you do the role plays, and teach the necessary phrases and vocabulary. However, it's essential to teach realistic vocabulary.

For example, many times we teach our students this dialogue when in a coffee shop:

*A: Hello, welcome to Coffee Place.*

*What can I get for you today?*

*B: I would like a tall coffee.*

*A: Would you like any cream or sugar with that?*

*B: Yes, please. I would like two sugars and a little cream.*

*A: Your total is \$5.50.*

*B: Here you go.*

*A: Thank you so much. Have a nice day.*

*B: Thanks, you too.*

In reality, most coffee ordering experiences go something like this:

*A: Hi.*

*B: A tall coffee please.*

*A: Cream or sugar?*

*B: Two sugars please.*

*A: \$5.50*

*B: Thanks.*

If we teach our students that every customer service experience they have will use formal speech, they may end up confused and frustrated. It's important to teach our students polite speech, but we must also teach them realistic encounters as well. Decide what your objectives are before doing the role playing activity: is it to teach polite, fully grammatical structures or to give them a realistic world encounter? You may need to approach the activity differently depending on which of the two objectives you have.

### 5 MIX UP ACTIVITIES

One of the best parts about role plays is that they are adaptable. If you do normal role plays frequently in the classroom, students may become bored and less motivated to try their best. By

changing the activity slightly, you can break the tired routine in the classroom.

For example, a modification you could make would be to give each pair or group a 'mystery phrase' or sentence written on a note card, and instruct them to build a role play where this word or phrase might occur naturally. While the students are performing their role play, have the remaining students try to guess what their 'mystery phrase' was. Another variation is doing each role play twice, but having the students switch roles for the second time.

For advanced students you can have students in the audience call out words or situations for the role players to use or switch to immediately, similar to an improv routine, and award points for the team that can produce the most successful dialogue.

### 6 RECORD AND REFLECT

Role plays are great in class. However, students often don't get feedback on their speech production to determine if their accuracy or pronunciation was correct. Try to make notes while each student is speaking to give them some constructive feedback on their role play after it is completed. Try to avoid correction and feedback while students are speaking so as not to disrupt their fluency.

An alternative to this would be to record the students while they are speaking, and then send the file to the student to have them reflect on their production. Did they use the key vocabulary correctly? Did they speak clearly? Producing the speech in a role play is one part of the learning experience, but reflection and feedback are equally essential for students to improve.

**ROLE PLAYS ARE GREAT FOR GETTING STUDENTS OUT OF THEIR SEAT, COLLABORATING WITH OTHER STUDENTS TO USE APPROPRIATE VOCABULARY, AND SPEAKING IMPROMPTU ENGLISH.**

It is a wonderful low-prep activity to boost your students' confidence and speaking skills.

# How to Teach English Using Role-Plays

Role-plays give students the opportunity to demonstrate how to use English in real life situations and make them focus more on communication than on grammar. Role-play activities can be a lot of fun however a class full of shy students may be reluctant to participate so it is important to know your students.

## HOW TO PROCEED

1

Regardless of what type of role-play you intend to do, it is imperative that students feel comfortable with the necessary structures and vocabulary.

This makes role-plays ideal for the final lesson on a particular topic. If students perform well, move on to the next chapter and if students struggle, address any mistakes in the following lesson. The feedback given in any role-play lesson should be primarily positive and focus on pronunciation, acting, and creativity. Role-plays are about encouraging your students and building their self confidence.

2

Mini-role plays can be done in any lesson as a practice activity.

Rather than just practice the model dialogue in pairs or groups, encourage students to be creative and use props to better reflect a real life situation. Students should have some space to move about the classroom and be given extra time to practice. If the model dialogue is four to six sentences total, a practice activity in pairs may take five minutes with only two or three demonstrations while a mini-role play of the same length may take ten to fifteen minutes to prepare with about ten minutes for performances. This activity can even be done in the same lesson as the introduction and drilling of a new topic if your students have a good understanding of the new material.

3

Role-plays can also take an entire lesson especially if students are put in groups instead of in pairs.

A lesson such as this would be ideal after several lessons on the same topic. A directions themed role play might be best in groups of three or four where each student must say a minimum of three or four lines. Structuring the activity in this way will give your students some easy guidelines to follow. You can prepare your students by explaining the activity at the end of a class, placing them in their groups, and asking them to think about what they would like to do. Suggest that they bring in any props they would like to use and try to provide some if possible. In the next class, quickly review the target material before splitting the class into groups and dedicate half of the time to practice with the remaining half being for performances. If your students are really eager to perform, ensure that every group gets an opportunity to present their role-play to the class even if it means performing during the next lesson as well. If students are reluctant, then have only the groups that volunteer present.

4

Role-plays can be used as end of term projects for intermediate and advanced students.

At this stage in their studies, they have sufficient knowledge to draw upon to enact real life situations and can get really creative. It is important to decide how you plan to grade your students so that you can explain it to them before they get started. If the project is worth one hundred points, you can break it into sections such as creativity, pronunciation, acting, attitude/enthusiasm, script, etc and assign a point value to each section. Four sections are probably enough. Perhaps each group of students can be assigned a different chapter of your textbook or a different theme.

This project would take many lessons. There would be one class where you introduce the project, split the class into groups, and let students brainstorm followed by classes for script development, practice sessions, and final performances. A good method of checking the progress of each group is to have script submissions once or twice before the final performance. The first submission can be to correct grammar and the second submission should be the final script. This will ensure that students can take chances and push their abilities, prevent them from practicing incorrect material, and verify that they are making progress on the project.

**ROLE-PLAYS CAN BE IMMENSELY TIME CONSUMING AND REQUIRE SOME REAL PLANNING AND STRUCTURE BUT ARE GENERALLY EASY TO CONDUCT ONCE STARTED. STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLE WITH ENGLISH EXAMS MAY FINALLY GET THEIR OPPORTUNITY TO SHINE WHILE STUDENTS WHO GENERALLY PERFORM WELL ON EXAMS WILL BE CHALLENGED TO PROVE THEIR ABILITIES IN ANOTHER WAY. ROLE-PLAYS ARE LESS STRESSFUL THAN PREPARING FOR EXAMS AND ENJOYABLE FOR BOTH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS.**

# 8 Tips to Encourage Student Participation During Discussions

## GETTING ESL STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE DURING GROUP DISCUSSIONS CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS AN ENGLISH TEACHER HAS TO DO.

For some students, nothing will give them the push they need to share in a group. For most others, though, small changes in your leadership style and your expectations can be just what they need to open up and contribute to the conversation.

## HOW TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT PARTICIPATION

**1** Sometimes during discussions, students may not understand what type of answer you are looking for. A simple way to encourage these students to speak is by giving a model answer. Answer your own question and show your students what type of answer they should give you. This gives them a grammatical structure on which to base their own ideas and removes some of the intimidation that they might otherwise feel.

**2** Make sure you are not falling victim to a common mistake among teachers, especially inexperienced ones. Do not be afraid of silence. The next time you lead a class discussion and no one seems to have an answer to the question, time yourself and wait a full sixty seconds before breaking the silence. Sometimes an uncomfortable silence will be just what a hesitant student needs to speak up. For other students, that small amount of time can be enough for them to gather their thoughts and formulate what they would like to say before they open their mouths.

**3** Be careful what and how much you are correcting. If you are correcting pronunciation and grammar and content all at the same time, it is not surprising that your students may feel too intimidated to open up! Focus your correc-

tions on one issue so your students feel as though they can speak without being overwhelmed with their mistakes. Also, encourage your students that their opinions are welcome even if they are not in agreement with yours or their fellow students'.

**4** Don't put students on the spot. Calling on a student who is not ready to speak will only increase his or her anxiety and will often cause that person to retreat even further into his or her shell. By refraining from putting pressure on unready students, you take away that fear factor. Though this alone may not get a quiet student talking, it will help create an atmosphere conducive to speaking.

**5** Make sure your students know they have freedom to fail during group discussions. This does not mean that you want your students to underperform. What it does mean is that you are not going to criticize your students for making a mistake. When students know that there is freedom to be imperfect, the intimidation level of group discussion will decrease and that in turn will free your not so perfect students to speak.

**6** Let your students work together. Sometimes intimidation and a fear of speaking in front of one's peers is enough to shut down students who are unsure of their speaking abilities. For those who might be more willing to talk when only one person is listening, designate one speaker for each group to share with the class and ask the remaining students to share with the designated speaker. Because you eliminate the fear of sharing in front of the entire class, your students may be more willing to participate in their discussion group.

**7** Think about how you are grouping your students together during discussions. If you have some students who

are more talkative than others and who also have a tendency to dominate a discussion, put them in a group together. Put all of your quietest students in a group of their own as well. By doing this, you force your more quiet students to engage in the discussion as no one else will be steering it for them.

**8** Something as simple as where your students are sitting in a group can contribute to how much they share during discussions as well. If you are leading, make sure your most talkative students are sitting directly to your left and right if you are in a circle. Likewise, seat your quietest student directly in front of you. If you are not leading the discussion, designate a facilitator for each group and arrange your students' seats in the same manner. The amount of eye contact that each person receives from you or the facilitator can have an influence on how much that person speaks during the discussion.

**THESE IDEAS ARE NOT GOING TO SOLVE EVERY STUDENT'S HESITANCY TO SHARE IN GROUPS, BUT THEY WILL GET YOU STARTED MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION IF YOU HAVE STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLE TO PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSIONS.**

The first step toward open discussion is to give your students the model they need and the time to formulate their own ideas for sharing. Then by creating an atmosphere that encourages discussion and not perfection, your students will be less intimidated to share in class. Finally, by strategically grouping and seating your students in their groups, you will create a physical environment in which your students will be willing to share. I hope these tips will help improve participation in your class discussions and encourage your students feel more comfortable when they do speak in class. Ultimately, each person's participation comes down to him or her, and you cannot force an unwilling student to participate in class. Do what you can to make your class more open to discussion and then challenge your students to step up to the plate and use the language they are trying so hard to acquire!



# 10 Keys To Promoting Class Discussion

There are many benefits to the student-centered class discussion although it's sometimes a challenge to develop. There are a number of potential pitfalls, including students talking off-topic, not talking at all, or one or two students dominating the discussion.

However, when it can be developed, benefits of class discussion include increased engagement with the course content, classmates, increased use of critical thinking skills, and practice in students' second language.

A few methods have been found helpful for increasing student participation in class. Addressed first are some of the basics of setting up a class discussion and then following are more advanced methods.

## KEYS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION: THE BASICS

### 1 PREPARATION

Give students time to develop their ideas before discussion. Perhaps have them do a quick write on the topic first to gather their thoughts, this is particularly effective with more introverted students, who, it has been found, usually need more time to reflect before speaking.

### 2 NOT ALONE

Put students in pairs or small groups. Research has shown that when working in small groups of peers, students feel safer and more motivated to explore content than when speaking in front of the whole class.

### 3 PROVIDE A STEPPING STONE

Provide a list of interesting discussion topics or methods to develop them. We all know that good discussion topics are the ones moving toward universal in focus (rather than dwelling on the specifics of the text), arguable, perceptive, and significant.

### 4 SET THE RULES

Teach students the rules of class discussion, such as making eye contact, listening actively, and disagreeing respectfully. Some teachers might expect students to just "know" the rules. However, these standards need to be actively communicated and modeled.

### 5 ASSIGN ROLES OR TASKS

Give students a definite task, or topic, of conversation so that focus is provided to the group. Each student should also have a role within the discussion group, such as taking notes or referring to the reading as necessary, again to keep everyone focused and make sure that the group is not "carried" by a few hard-working students while others slack off.

### 6 TICK-TOCK

Give students a time limit. This is a final element to keep students focused on the discussion rather than drifting off.

### 7 WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM

Students should receive credit for participating. You will notice how some quiet students become more and more engaged when given some course credit to do so.

## BEYOND THE BASICS

Once students have mastered the basics of holding a discussion, more advanced skills can be taught.

### 8 OPINIONS, OPINIONS, OPINIONS

Research suggests that students should be taught different levels of questioning for discussion, moving beyond the literal to more inferential interpretation of a text. For example, "What city does the narrator live in?" is a literal question, focused on the surface features of the text, more inferential is, "Why do you think the narrator moved there?" If this is not stated directly in the text, students will have to reflect on the text and the

narrator's character to arrive at an answer.

### 9 RUBRICS HELP

Develop a grading rubric that describes different levels of participation and the corresponding grade, for example:

A: Actively Engaged Discussion Partner

- \* often asks inferential questions

- \* listens actively

- \* volunteers answers and feedback

B: Engaged Discussion Partner

- \* asks inferential questions

- \* sometimes listens actively

- \* sometimes volunteers complex answers and feedback

C: Passive Discussion Partner

- \* rarely asks questions, and if so, literal ones

- \* does not listen actively

- \* rarely volunteers answers or feedback.

### 10 FREEDOM

Give your students more opportunities for practice and feedback. Students will not learn this skills overnight, of course, so they should be given regular chances to practice, perhaps as much a class session, if only for fifteen minutes. Regular, short periods of practice are more effective than long bouts. For more efficient set-up, students could have a standing list of topics posted and regular groups.

By implementing some basic principles and careful planning, and then moving beyond the basics to a more advanced level, the "dreaded discussion" can be improved and make a substantial contribution to the class and students' education.



# How to Lead Discussions:

## No Need to Speak Like Obama

For intermediate and advanced learners it is important to dedicate time to discussing topics so that students have practice organizing their thoughts and expressing their views. Lessons focused on debating, giving advice, and reading articles are some examples of when discussion activities could be conducted.

### DEBATING

There are a lot of phrases and vocabulary words that go along with debating but introducing only a couple new things each time you have this kind of lesson will allow students to focus mostly on the lesson topic while still building their vocabulary. Phrases such as “I see your point however...” and “I agree/disagree with you but/ because...” would be appropriate. To lead a debate, divide students into two groups with each one representing one side of the argument. You can give them a passage to read about the topic and some facts or perhaps give one side facts to support its argument while giving a different set of facts to the other. While students are working in groups, it is important to ensure that each student has the opportunity to practice speaking. Give students some time to review the material and organize their thoughts before conducting the activity. Students should decide who presents the initial argument for their group and then take turns presenting their case and responding to the other group’s points.

You may decide to judge the groups based on how they present material and the strength of their arguments or simply conduct the activity for fun. Once students have exhausted the topic, it may be appropriate to have groups switch sides so that students get to argue both sides of the same discussion or have another debate on an entirely new topic if there is enough time.

### GIVING ADVICE

To start this lesson, you could ask each student to write down a problem he has and submit it anonymously at the beginning of class. This way, the advice given during the lesson is sure to relate to issues that the students are dealing with and thus gives it much more relevance than any sort of problems you may think of to use for this activity.

To start, simply draw a problem out of a hat, box or jar for instance and read it aloud to the class as if it were your problem. Ask students to take turns giving you advice about the problem. After a piece of advice has been offered you can open it up for discussion by saying “Do you think that’s a good idea?” and perhaps having students raise their hands if they agree with the advice. Then ask why students agree and why other students disagree with the advice. Call on a student who disagrees to give another piece of advice and repeat this again or move on to another problem. This gives students examples of real life situations where they may need to give advice as well as lots of speaking practice.

### READING ARTICLES

Articles relating to current events, new technology, fashion, travel, or any hobby may be appropriate reading material for your class. It is important to choose a topic which will appeal to your students. You can use the article to practice pronunciation and introduce vocabulary but also to lead into a discussion. An article about soccer might lead to questions such as “Do you like soccer? Who is your favorite player? Did you watch the World Cup?” and then move on to more complex questions such as “Do you think soccer is getting more or less popular? Why?” Students can be asked lots of questions based on their responses and you can encourage other students to ask questions as well.

Discussions are often challenging to lead in larger classes because there is a lot of time where students are not speaking so you may want to have students work in groups to discuss and then present material on a specific theme. Each group could be given a different theme and then students would have more time to express their individual opinions. With smaller classes discussions are much easier to conduct but you may have to prepare more questions for these lessons because students may move through the material more quickly. With both class sizes discussions are an important part of learning English because students need to be able to produce their own material based on their thoughts and opinions as opposed to simply regurgitating information and memorizing grammatical structures.

**DISCUSSION CLASSES ARE AN EXCELLENT METHOD OF ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND GIVE STUDENTS LOTS OF SPEAKING PRACTICE.**

# Essential Tips for Conducting a Class Debate

Your students have better things to debate than whether Justin Bieber is better than Taylor Lautner. By introducing structured, formal debate to your ESL classroom, your students will benefit with listening, speaking and critical thinking skills.

They might learn a thing or two about the issue as well. Here are some simple tips to making it happen.

## HOW TO CONDUCT A CLASS DEBATE

### 1 INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

All debates start with a topic, or resolution. Often, this resolution is a proposed course of action that one team will argue for and another will argue against. Choose a topic to which your students can relate and perhaps one with practical application. You can make the topic less serious (the cafeteria should include more international dishes on the daily menu) or more serious (the U.S. government should reform its visa application process). In any case, be sure that your students understand the issue and any specialized vocabulary that goes with it.

### 2 ASSIGN THE AFFIRMATIVE AND THE NEGATIVE

There are two sides to any debate. Naturally, one will argue for and another against the resolution. With ESL students, it is best to group your students into teams to research and argue the issue rather than expecting one student to do all the work. This way one student does not have all the pressure to perform, and the other members of the group can help with comprehension and strategy. Ideally, break your class into four groups (you will want at least three students in each group) and assign two groups to each of two resolutions. Then assign one of each pair of student groups to the affirmative. This group will argue for the issues being presented. The other two groups will be the negative and will argue against the resolutions.

During the debate, the other groups will serve as the judges and decide which side presented a stronger case voting for the winners of the debate at its conclusion.

### 3 GIVE TIME FOR RESEARCH

Your students will need time to research the issue. Not only that, they will also need additional instruction on the specific vocabulary that may be involved. Make sure all of your students understand any specialized vocabulary so the efficacy of their arguments does not depend on simple comprehension. Encourage each group to form a strategy as to who will do most of the talking during the debate though remind them that all of them are expected to participate in the research and strategy of the debate. Then, during the preparation time in anticipation of the rebuttal, your students should discuss with their teams the points the opposition made and decide how to refute them.

### 4 KEEP TRACK OF TIME

If you are unfamiliar with formal debate, the speakers follow a set order. The following is the most basic of debate structure.

First, the affirmative group receives two minutes to present their case to the audience.

The negative group then receives two minutes to present their case.

After both sides have a chance to speak, both teams receive two minutes to prepare a rebuttal and summary. The order of speech is reversed now and the negative side presents their rebuttal and summary for the first two minutes.

The last to speak is the affirmative team who then presents their rebuttal and summary for two minutes. The debate is now concluded.

There are other structures that you can follow for debate, and they may be useful once your class is familiar with the process and strategy of debate, but if this is the first time your students are formally debating, keeping things simple is best.

### 5 MAKE A JUDGMENT

Usually in debate, the winner is the one who has presented the strongest case. For ESL classes, the overall purpose of speaking is more important than the specific outcome of the debate. Still, your students will probably want to know who won. To determine the winner, have the audience vote on which team they thought made the most convincing argument. With this, weigh your own opinion as to who communicated clearly and refuted the opponent's arguments best. This combination will identify your winners.

Your grading process, on the other hand, does not have to name a winner and a loser. As long as your students were able to communicate clearly, use good grammar, and have good pronunciation, the debate was a success, and their grades should reflect that success.

**THOUGH DEBATES ARE OFTEN FORMAL AND STRUCTURED, DO NOT LET THEM INTIMIDATE YOU. CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES ARE ALWAYS A GREAT RESOURCE FOR ESL STUDENTS' SPEAKING PRACTICE, AND DISCUSSING THE ISSUES IN A FORMAL MANNER IS JUST AS VALUABLE AS INFORMAL CLASS DISCUSSIONS.**

The next time your curriculum brings up a controversial issue, why not use it as an occasion for a class debate and give your students a new and structured experience of spoken English!

# The Keys to Successful Classroom Debates

**REGARDLESS OF STUDENT BACKGROUND OR PROFICIENCY LEVEL, NEARLY ALL STUDENTS LOVE A GOOD FIGHT — WITH WORDS THAT IS.**

Nothing gets students more motivated to speak English than by having the opportunity to debate with their peers. Holding a classroom debate is a magnificent way for students to practice spontaneous speech, however, in many classes debates fall flat. Below are a few tips to make sure that your next debate will effectively engage all students in the class and enhance their language skills.

## HOWTO: SUCCESSFUL CLASSROOM DEBATES

### 1 STUDENT-SELECTED TOPICS

Debates will be much more successful and interesting for everyone involved if the participants are interested and passionate about their controversial topic. As a whole class, brainstorm potential debate topics that are suitable for the class, and try to narrow it down to a list of six or seven topics.

Have students rank their top five preferences and indicate their position (Pro or Con). Collect the students' preferences, and try to match students according to their top five choices. More often than not, it will work out to give each student one of their top picks and still have enough students on each side.

### 2 LESS IS MORE

One of the biggest flaws in formal debates with an entire class is that the dominant personalities take center stage and monopolize the speaking time. Having shorter debates with fewer participants (ideally four: two Pro and two Con) allows all students to get more speaking time.

### 3 BUILD THE ANTICIPATION

You should introduce the debate topic with enough time in advance to motivate your students to be excited about the debate. Play some games in the classes leading up to the debate, and allow the competing teams to play against each other to build rivalry.

Give students a few days to work together to conduct research and an outline. Ensure that students meet together as groups and are organized when it is their turn to debate (who's speaking first, second, third, etc.).

### 4 EQUIP THEM WITH ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY

Debates are great ways to get students to include useful pragmatic language for disagreeing with others, expressing their opinions, and negotiate turn-taking roles for who gets to speak next. Useful transition words to teach include: In my opinion... I understand... however... With all due respect... May I interrupt? and Please let me finish. These phrases should be taught and practiced in class activities before the debate, such as in role plays.

### 5 HAVE STRUCTURE, BUT NOT TOO MUCH STRUCTURE

Introduce the format of the debate to students in advance so they can be organized. This can be modified based on your classroom dynamics, but a simple format that works well goes like this : 1) Pro Team introduction and reasons. 2) Con Team introduction and reasons. 3) open debate. 4) audience questions. 5) Pro Team conclusion. 6) Con Team conclusion.

Typically, the purpose of debates is to encourage spontaneous, reasoned speech. Too much structure encourages students to read from a script, but too little structure could result in a screaming match. During the open

debate time, have a ball or an object that can be passed from speaker to speaker, and only the person holding the object may speak at that time.

### 6 GETTING EVERYONE INVOLVED

While two teams are debating, what do you do with the remaining students in the audience? To keep these students active and engaged, involve them in the evaluation process. Create a rubric ahead of time that students can fill out as they listen to the debate. Have the audience rate the speakers, critique their ideas, and decide on the winner. Asking each student to write down one question based on the debater's comments will also help to keep them feeling included in this class exercise.

### 7 MUM'S THE WORD

As a teacher, your facilitator role should be minimal. If you have set up the debate format properly, the students should be able to monitor one another and carry out the debate. This allows students to practice how to handle interruptions and turn taking negotiations. Only intervene when absolutely necessary. The more autonomous the students can be, the more they will learn from this exercise.

**WHEN DONE PROPERLY, DEBATES FOSTER A GREAT CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT BY ENCOURAGING TEAMWORK AND FRIENDLY COMPETITION.**

Debates help reach multiple classroom objectives: they not only practice speaking and listening skills, but also motivate students, develop their argumentation strategies, and encourage learner autonomy. After the arguing is finished, everyone has improved their English!



# Highly Effective Discussion Based Activities on School

Though young people may groan whenever they hear the word school, teachers love it.

We would not be teachers if we did not love teaching and learning, and school is the place where that happens, but sometimes our understanding of what school is differs from that of our students. When you want to challenge your students' understanding of what school is and what it could be, try one of these discussion-based activities on school.

## TRY THESE DYNAMIC DISCUSSION BASED ACTIVITIES ON SCHOOL & EDUCATION

### 1 SHOULD SCHOOL BE COMPULSORY?

In 1647, Massachusetts passed the first law which made attending school compulsory. What do your students think about mandatory school attendance? Is it a good idea to make young people attend school? Break your class into small groups to discuss the topic and make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of school being compulsory. Then have the groups discuss what they would do if they were not in school. Have each group write a one-week schedule of the activities they would do if they did not have to attend school. Then give your students a chance to turn the tables and suggest an activity that would be compulsory for adults.

### 2 SHOULD SCHOOLS BE SINGLE GENDER?

Another controversial issue in the world of education is whether or not boys and girls should have separate schools. There is some evidence to suggest that girls perform better in all girl schools, the same does not seem to be true of boys in all boy schools. Divide your class into two groups – boys in one group and girls

in another. Have each group discuss what it might be like to be in a school with only students of the same gender. What would be the same? What would be different? Would they like it or dislike it? Why? Have each person take some time to freewrite on the topic of single gender schools.

### 3 SHOULD SCHOOLS HAVE UNIFORMS?

Ask your students to talk with a partner what they do to get ready for school in the morning. Working together, have the pairs make lists of what most people do to get ready for school and how long those activities take. What difference would it make in the morning routine if your students had to wear a uniform to school? Would they get ready faster? Would it take longer to get ready? Would they want to wear a uniform to school? Have your students do some reading on the pros and cons of school uniforms before dividing the class into two teams. Assign one team in favor of school uniforms and the other team against school uniforms. Then organize a debate between the teams. Each team should choose one representative to speak, and the other members of the team should help that person prepare her statements and defend herself during the debate.

To run the debate, start with the pro side, and give the speaker five minutes to present her case. Then give the other side five minutes to present his case. After both opening statements, set three minutes for the teams to discuss what they will say in response to the opposing side. This time the con side goes first and gets three minutes for a rebuttal. After that, the pro side gets three minutes for her rebuttal. You may want to have several pairs of students debate the issue.

After the debate, ask your students to comment on the arguments of both sides and cast their votes for a winner.

### 4 SHOULD SCHOOLS BAN JUNK FOOD?

Healthy eating is a major issue facing educators today. Should schools allow junk food to be sold and consumed under their roofs? Should students be given the freedom to decide what and how much they will eat? Have your students brainstorm a list of all the possible foods a student might eat or purchase at school, and then ask your students to divide that list into “healthy” foods and “junk” foods. Which list is bigger? Which list is more appealing? What qualities can identify any given food as junk food? Have groups of three students make a list of what qualities might classify a particular food as junk food. Then have the groups propose 5 foods to remove from the school menu and 5 new foods to introduce to the school menu. Once each group has made its decisions, have them present the changes in front of the class.

After each group has taken a turn, ask the members of the class to vote for one of the food plans to determine whose strategy might be most successful.

**SCHOOL, THOUGH MOST YOUNG PEOPLE GO TO IT EVERY DAY, IS NOT THE SAME FOR EVERY PERSON. THERE ARE CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS THAT EVERY SCHOOL MUST DISCUSS AND THEN TAKE A SIDE ON.**

With these activities, your students will gain a better understanding of what school is and what it could be, and they may even walk away with a greater appreciation for the school they have.



# Get Your Students Talking With a Mock Trial

**TRUE, NOT MANY OF YOUR STUDENTS WILL HAVE TO STAND UP IN COURT AND DEFEND THEMSELVES OR PROSECUTE ANOTHER IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, THOUGH A FEW MAY, BUT THAT IS NO REASON TO DISMISS HAVING A MOCK TRIAL IN YOUR CLASSROOM.**

A mock trial has more to offer your students than familiarity with court procedures. Playing roles in a mock trial requires your students to speak clearly, logically and with conviction. They will need and develop confidence in their speaking abilities as they play formal roles in a mock court setting. So even if you and your students are not pre-law, give a mock trial a chance in your ESL classroom and you may find that your students' language abilities flourish, case closed!

## HOW TO HOLD A MOCK TRIAL IN YOUR CLASSROOM

### 1 GIVE A BRIEFING

Because your students may not be familiar with U.S. legal proceedings, start by showing them this short video on the Supreme Court from pbs.org. It gives a general idea of the purpose of the Supreme Court, and PBS has also supplied a transcript and comprehension questions that you may choose to use with your students. Point out that the courts in the U.S. are not designed to create the law but to apply the laws that already exist. You should also give your students a chance to ask any questions they may have about the U.S. legal system.

### 2 ASSIGN ROLES

Tell your students that they are going to hold a mock trial in the classroom. You may need to explain what this term means. Once you do, you can assign roles to your students. Start by asking your students what roles they think people might play in court proceedings. If your students would benefit from seeing a trial in progress, you may want to show clips from *A Few Good Men*, *12 Angry Men*, or even old

episodes of *Night Court*. Your students may not know the correct terminology for each position, but they should be able to get a feel for what each person is doing. You also have the option of having your class read a scripted trial in class, though this may be a greater time investment than you want to take. Review the specific roles that various people play in the trial and give their official titles. Give accurate vocabulary (defendant, prosecutor, judge, attorney, witness) for the different roles as well as an explanation of what each person does during the trial. Have students choose roles or assign them as you see fit, but make sure each person will have a speaking part in the trial.

### 3 REVIEW THE STEPS

Now that your students understand the roles and know which they will be playing, review with them the steps in the trial.

1. The Prosecutor's Statement
2. The Defendant's Statement
3. The Prosecutor Calls Witnesses (and defendants have an opportunity to cross-examine)
4. The Defense Calls Witnesses (and prosecution has an opportunity to cross examine)
5. The Prosecutor's Closing Statement
6. The Defendant's Closing Statement
7. Deliberation of the Jury
8. The Verdict

As you review each of these steps, point out who does the majority of the speaking for each.

### 4 PREPARE AND PLAY OUT

Before the actual mock trial, give your students time to prepare. The prosecution and defense will be doing the most work at this point. They will want to interview witnesses and prepare their opening and closing statements. They may even do some legal research, but that is completely optional. Keeping the topic of the trial lighthearted will keep the element of fun in an otherwise seri-

ous situation. You may want to try Goldilocks vs. the Three Bears or The Three Little Pigs vs. The Big Bad Wolf. If your students are more suited to a serious topic, choose something more realistic, or tie the topic into material you are already working with in class. You may decide to use a situation your students have read about in a piece of literature, the newspaper or a controversial issue you discussed in class.

When the day of the trial arrives, act as director or even as judge as the students play their parts. After everyone has spoken, have the jury deliberate privately. They will get the most speaking practice during this deliberation, so make sure they have enough time and that they discuss all of the important elements of the trial and review all the evidence. The judge closes the trial by announcing the verdict.

### 5 EXTEND

After the great accomplishment your students have made, celebrate with a court themed movie and a classroom party, but your court ties do not have to end there. You can extend the activity further in ways that will continue to challenge and develop your students' language skills. Many courthouses are open to the public, and your ESL class may enjoy a field trip to see an actual trial in process. Another option is to invite a law professional to come to your class and give a presentation. Allow your students enough time to ask about actual court proceedings and share their own experiences in the mock trial as well.

**IF YOU DECIDE TO GIVE YOUR ESL STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN A MOCK TRIAL, YOU WILL SEE THE CONFIDENCE THAT DEVELOPS FROM PUBLIC SPEAKING AND LOGICAL ARGUMENT.** They will have experience in presenting as well as interviewing and deliberating, all valuable language skills. A mock trial may not be the best fit for every ESL class, but those that take the chance will find that it was a meaningful and memorable experience for your students!

# Holding A Class Election

Sometimes during the course of a semester, I spend a couple of days in my ESL class holding a “class election,” in which students nominate candidates, campaign for, and finally vote for a class president to represent them to the administration.

Some students are outwardly skeptical of the process, particularly when they learn that the process is largely a symbolic, academic one: that the “class president” has no official role in the class or school. So why hold a class election at all? There are a number of good outcomes. Instructors can teach the following in the course of a mock election:

## WHY YOU SHOULD HOLD A CLASS ELECTION

### 1 DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

We should teach the system that the students will shortly, if they don’t already, participate in. It has been shown naturalized Americans vote at higher rates than native-born ones, perhaps valuing the right to vote more. They should then be informed about the system and its benefits and flaws.

### 2 ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

Campaigning and holding an election seem to call upon a lot of academic grammar, such as the conditional: “If you vote for me, I will clean the parking area.” The passive voice is also used: “The parking area will be cleaned.”

### 3 PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE

Students are called upon to develop their sense of audience and use persuasion as they campaign. How can they get other students to vote for them or their candidate? What can they say to get elected? This involves audience awareness: what do the voters want? A clean parking lot? More parking spaces? More desks? How can they convey to their audience, other students, that they can get the job done and meet voter expectations? Identifying a campaign slogan, or short catchy phrase, e.g., “Arturo: the Go-To Man” develops both audience awareness and language use.

### 4 IN TURN, STUDENTS DEVELOP THE ABILITY

## TO EVALUATE PERSUASION

Do a candidate’s promises and claims seem legitimate? Depending on the climate of the class, students may be permitted to engage in a mock “smear” campaign against the other candidate: “Don’t vote for Tatyana. She was caught stealing public money.” Students then have to evaluate how legitimate these claims seem. Which candidate seems the most reliable?

### 5 SPEAKING SKILLS

Students can be encouraged to give short speeches in which they discuss their promises to voters. This might even develop into a basic debate with another candidate in which student’s take opposing sides on an issue, such as the need for childcare on campus or allowing a smoking area. The art of courteously disagreeing with someone, largely lost in contemporary American culture, can be introduced to students and the language of disagreeing while remaining respectful taught. The audience, the other students, can watch and evaluate the debate, deciding on who won and why.

### 6 QUESTIONING AND INTERVIEWING SKILLS

Students can be allowed, at the end of the debate, to question the candidates on the issue debated. They may also, at other times in the campaign, be allowed to interview the candidates as they decide on whom to vote for. Interviewing, and deciding the right questions to ask, requires both critical thinking and language skill, especially if the instructor has set a limit on the number of questions that may be asked. Perhaps there will be a session where everyone may ask each candidate only one question, which will be written anonymously on a slip of paper and collected, and only a set number of these will be asked, based on relevance. This forces the students to think of the most pertinent questions they can.

### 7 WRITING SKILLS

Writing skills develop as students create campaign posters with their slogans. They can also create short biographies or curriculum vitae/resumes that can be made up, of course, for the candidate—but the skill of writing a bi-

ography or CV transfers to real situations that require one. Students may also write letters with their future hopes to the candidates. A number of genres are employed in launching an effective campaign.

### 8 COMPUTER SKILLS

Computer skills are also developed in the campaign as students create posters with their or their candidate’s picture, resumes that may be in brochure form, and emails to their “voters,” their classmates, about the campaign and its progress.

### 9 SETTING LIMITS

It is, of course, important that the campaign not take over the whole class. The first step is setting a time limit on the campaign: it might be a couple of days or a week or two, depending on your class. The campaign may only go on for a day or two and focus on the use of the conditional for making promises. Or it may extend into a longer time and incorporate more of the exercises discussed. However, setting a time limit gets students to budget their time effectively while practicing their English skills. In addition, there is a concern, particularly with a “campaign” that has gone on for some time, for students to take it a little too seriously, and some discourtesy might spring up among students. Usually all that is needed is reminding students of the importance of remaining respectful of each other, an important part of the democratic process and the ability of dissenting parties to coexist.

### 10 WRAPPING UP

Election Day is here! Have students cast their votes on slips of paper, count them up, and announce the winner. Assure the students we are all “winners” in the peaceful election of our leader and celebrate with a small potluck as desired!

**HOLDING A CLASS ELECTION TEACHES STUDENTS LANGUAGE, CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS, AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. IT CAN BE AS BIG OR SMALL AS THE INSTRUCTOR WISHES TO MAKE IT.** But by focusing on this process, rather than the results (who “wins” and “loses”), the best of democracy—egalitarianism, respect, and persuasion—is taught.

# 33 Controversial Topics

## And How To Teach Them

Controversial topics make many teachers want to run away from the curriculum screaming, but for ESL teachers they offer an unequalled opportunity to foster discussion in the classroom. Though you may feel queasy at the idea of teaching some topics, use the following strategies to make it a teaching triumph rather than a classroom catastrophe.

### HOW TO TEACH CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS

#### 1 INTRODUCING THE TOPIC

Before giving students any materials supporting one side or the other about a controversial topic, ask them what they already know about it. If you are teaching adults, you may be surprised at the experience your students may already have with a given issue. Also, letting students volunteer information may give you a heads up that they could have deep personal connections to the topic.

#### 2 PRESENT BOTH SIDES OF THE ISSUE

Though you almost certainly agree with either one side of a controversial issue or the other, leading a unit on a touchy subject requires the teacher to be the moderator. As such, it is your responsibility to present both sides of the issue no matter where your opinions lie. You can present both sides by giving students two separate selections, each supporting the opposite opinion, or by presenting material that covers both points of view in one piece. Either way, make sure your students understand the issue, the problems connected with it and any unfamiliar vocabulary they may encounter.

#### 3 FACILITATE DISCUSSION

After presenting both sides of the issue and making sure students understand the controversy, give small groups of students an opportunity to discuss the arguments each side presents. They will be sure to offer their own opinions, perhaps vehemently, and you should not pressure them with discussion as an entire class. As students talk about the issue, they will be able to help each other further understand the arguments posed

by each side. Just be sure that all groups are allowing free expression from everyone. You may have to step in if one or two students are being bullied by opposing opinions.

#### 4 EXPRESS YOUR OPINION

After introducing both sides of the issue and allowing students to discuss their opinions, you can express your own opinion on the subject. Waiting until this point to uncover your own view point gives your students the freedom to express themselves honestly without fear of repercussion. Students can be intimidated to support a point of view in conflict with their teacher's.

#### 5 PRESENT A CASE STUDY

Case studies are always a great opportunity to foster discussion. A good case study will not have a clear cut or straightforward course to a happy ending. Not only will struggling with the situation encourage discussion, it will provide a more lifelike and realistic use for language. Life itself is not cut and dry, and if your students will be using language in real world situations they will have to express themselves in difficult circumstances.

#### 6 FACILITATE (MORE) DISCUSSION

Now that students have heard both sides of the issue, discussed the topic with their peers, learned where you stand on the issue and looked at a real life case study, it is time to discuss the issue again. Go back to the discussion questions you provided at the beginning of the unit and allow students to express any changes in their opinions or share things that they have learned. The goal in teaching a controversial subject is not to sway students to one opinion or the other, but they may change the way they feel after further discussion. They may also strengthen the beliefs they had at the beginning of the unit, but hopefully they can express themselves more clearly and give strong support for their beliefs.

**WHEN HANDLED CORRECTLY, CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS CAN BE A GOLD MINE OF CONVERSATION IN THE ESL**

#### CLASSROOM.

Though it is sometimes necessary to create discussion over supplied curriculum topics, using controversial issues in the classroom allows a natural and emotional pathway to conversation. If you are sensitive to your students' opinions and aware of their feelings, tough to tackle topics just might provide the best lessons all year.

#### EXAMPLE CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS:

Using animals in medical research helps people

Gay marriages are wrong

Women will never be equal to men in the workplace

You can't have a happy family life and a successful career at the same time

Marriage is outdated

The death penalty is acceptable in some cases

Foreigners shouldn't be allowed to vote

Celebrities earn too much money

Military service should be obligatory

War is never an option for solving international disputes

Torture can be acceptable in some cases

Curfews keep teens out of trouble

We are becoming too dependent on computers

Smoking should be banned worldwide

Single-sex schools are evil

Homework is harmful

A woman's place is in the home

Committing suicide should be made legal

A man should have a wife for the family and a mistress for pleasure

Soft drugs should be legalized.

Those who can - do, those who can't - teach

You will be happier if you stay unmarried

Software piracy is not really a crime

We do not really need religion

Your race affects your intelligence

Euthanasia should be legal

Obesity is a disease

Video games contribute to youth violence

Drinking age should be lowered

Steroids should be accepted in sports

Cloning has a lot of benefits

Prenuptial agreements make families stronger

Corporal punishment should be allowed in schools.



# Addressing the Topic of Racial Identity in the U.S.

It doesn't take long for the issue of race to come up in the American classroom, especially the ESL classroom.

Delve very far into U.S. history, and you come up against segregation, slavery, the treatment of Native Americans, and the "evacuation" of Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II. The current public dialogue is dominated by issues of immigration, affirmative action, and our first nonwhite President. And delving very far into these topics will take you inevitably such questions as "Who are Native Americans? Who are Japanese Americans and African Americans?" The answers to these questions are muddy, as the issue itself is. Just as an example, I shared an office with a colleague for most of a year before I realized he was African American, and that was only after he mentioned having gone to Howard University, a historically black college. This kind of experience is not unique—first because race is a cultural, not biological, designation, and someone seen as "black" in the U.S. wouldn't necessarily be in another country. The other reason is because we don't talk about it—I would never, and most Americans would never, raise the issue of my colleague's race, of course, unless he himself brought it up. In many areas of American discourse race is a taboo topic. So why talk about it at all?

## REASONS TO DISCUSS RACE

1

Practical reasons. Students have to fill out forms. Many official forms ask students to note their race. It's not uncommon for me to have a student tell me she really doesn't know which "box to check," or which category to put herself in, on these forms. She should know, even if it is to check "other" because none of the categories quite describe her.

2

It is part of our history: our only civil war was in part fought over race. Anyone addressing U.S. history who does not mention race relations has not dealt honestly with the topic.

3

It is a part of our literature: from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to more recent works such as *The Help*, about white women and their relationships with their African American maids in the Pre-Civil Rights South, race permeates American literature.

4

Bias. Often students hold biases that are based on misinformation, such as beliefs about minorities and their supposed criminal tendencies. Just discussing the topic can sometimes clear things up for the student.

5

"Taboo" Topic. The topic is "taboo," but does that mean it's never addressed? One class I taught turned into a discussion about what to do when people make ethnic jokes in your presence because that had recently happened to a student. Race is part of the public dialogue, although officially it isn't, and students should have some idea of how to respond to it.

## LEADING THE DISCUSSION ABOUT RACE AND RACIAL IDENTITY

1

Use yourself as an example if possible. I have opened the discussion by offering myself as an example, so students are not put on the spot. I have asked students what race they see me as: most quite readily respond "white," and I reply that is indeed the box I check, how most of the society sees me. Had I lived about fifty years ago, however, this would not be true because I am Jewish, and Jews in both Europe and the U.S., throughout most of their history were seen as "not white" but some other race. This has also been true of Italian and Irish people at various times—people seen today for the most part as indisputably "white." This raises the issue that race is cultural, not genetic, and is based on how society sees one and how one self-identifies. Students often enter the dialogue about their own racial identities.

2

Use examples of prominent people. President Obama is also a good example of the notion of race as not fixed but more a matter of public and personal identity. Obama identifies as black, he has publicly said, and that is how most Americans see him. However, because he is actually biracial, in some cultures such as Brazil that recognize biracial as a category, he would be seen more in that category.

3

Show a film on the topic. Many films address the issue of race. One I've had success with showing parts from is *The Human Stain*, about the relationship between an elderly college professor and a cleaning woman. It is based on a novel by Philip Roth about Coleman Silk, the professor, who most of his adult life has been successfully "passing" as white and Jewish, while actually he was born into an African American family and brought up as such. The film raises the issue of how permeable race really is: "passing" must have been a relatively common phenomenon, given there was a special term for it. It also raises questions about why someone would choose to "pass": Silk had to give up his heritage and deny his family in order to pull this deception off. Why would someone feel compelled to do that? What does it say about our society? Silk made this choice about fifty years ago, but do people still make similar decisions today: do people still "pass," perhaps in less drastic ways?

4

Case Studies. Although it's taboo, the topic of race still comes up frequently in the U.S.—perhaps precisely because it's taboo, it probably isn't far from many people's thoughts and leaks out into their words. Discuss, through case studies: for example, two men in a coffee shop sitting next to Mary begin making jokes about people of her heritage. Should she say something? Walk out? Do nothing?

Although it is officially a taboo topic, race comes up rather frequently in the U.S.: it is, after all, a large part of our culture and our heritage. Students should learn to discuss it in a courteous manner.



# The Smoking Debate in Your ESL Classroom

If you teach elementary school children, smoking may not be an issue you need to address very often in your classroom. However, if you are teaching adults from around the world you may find that the issue of whether smoking is good or bad filters its way into your classroom on a daily basis.

Different cultures around the world have very different opinions of smoking, and your students will often reflect that cultural bias. Like any controversial topic, though, the issue of smoking is useful material for getting your students speaking and expressing their opinions in the classroom. Try some of the following activities with your students the next time the issue of smoking drifts into your classroom.

## HOW TO: THE SMOKING DEBATE IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 PROS AND CONS

You can introduce the topic of smoking to your students by taking an informal survey: a simple raise of hands can tell you how many of your students are in favor of smoking and how many are opposed to the habit. Once each person has expressed which side of the debate he or she falls on, divide the class into two groups based on their opinion. Ask the anti smokers to work as a group to list all the reasons a person should not smoke. Ask the pro smokers to work together as well listing all the benefits of smoking. Challenge your students to make their lists as extensive as possible.

Once your students are thinking about the topic, give them some ideas of the bans that have been imposed on smokers in the United States. You can either gather some interesting facts from Wikipedia yourself or give your students some time to read about them on their own. How does each group feel about the bans that affect smokers? How do they affect nonsmokers? Do they think the laws are fair? Do they think any of the laws should be changed to be either less strict or more strict? How do they think these laws have affected most people's opinions about smoking?

### 2 PERSUASIVE THOUGHT

One of the most important aspects of persuasive speech or writing is the refutation. In the refutation, the person argues against what the opponent has argued for. Still working in your pro and con groups, give each group a copy of the arguments the other group listed for their position. Using that list, challenge both groups to come up with a refutation for each argument that the first group listed. Then, have them decide which three arguments are the strongest and write out the refutation.

If you like, this is a natural place to have your students write a persuasive essay or give a persuasive speech. Either way, students should start with an introduction, give the reasons for their side of the debate, refute the opponent's opinions and finish with a conclusion.

### 3 THE MEDIA

Smoking tends to be portrayed in the media in a certain manner. Often, it appears sophisticated or cool, and can be very attractive to younger children or teens. Over the course of a week, challenge your students to find as many examples of smoking in the media as they can. They may bring in magazine pictures, list movie clips or commercials, quote celebrities or print pictures from the internet. As your students bring their examples in, post them on a bulletin board in your classroom titled "Smoking Hot?" The pictures, written descriptions and quotations will become a kind of gallery for your students to look at. After your students have brought several items in and the gallery wall is looking full, ask your students to take some time to look at what is posted. Then have them write an emotional reaction to what they see. How do these pictures make them feel? Do they affect the beliefs they already hold? It is important that your students understand they will not be judged on their opinion or which side of the great smoking debate they come down on. You will be reading their pieces for grammar and style as well as logical organization.

### 4 HANDS ON DEMONSTRATION

You can use a hands on demonstration to show your students the effects of smoking. If your students are older, you can have pairs of students perform the experiment themselves by giving them the instructions and the necessary materials. If your students are younger, you should perform the demonstration for them. In any case, this activity should be done outside. For each demonstration you will need one or two cotton balls, a cigarette, some clay and a plastic bottle. Have one or more students put a cotton ball inside the plastic bottle. Then cover the opening of the bottle with clay to create a plug. This bottle will represent the inside of the body and show some of the effects of smoking on the lungs. Next, poke a pencil or other object through the clay until you can see it in the bottle and insert the filter end of the cigarette in the hole. Make sure there is a tight seal as this is the mouth. Light the cigarette and squeeze the bottle about a dozen times to simulate puffing on the cigarette. Then put the cigarette out and remove the clay plug.

Once you have performed the demonstration or your students have finished the experiment on their own, ask them some questions about it. In your discussion, ask your students what happened to the cotton balls, how they look and why these were the results. Also, ask how this experiment demonstrates the effects of smoking on the body. Have each person follow the experiment by writing a summary of what they saw and what the results of the experiment were. Also, ask your students to include a personal reflection in their piece about their opinion of smoking. Do they hold the same belief they had at the beginning of the unit? Why or why not?

**SMOKING IS A CONTROVERSIAL TOPIC, AND IT CAN PLAY DIRECTLY INTO THE DYNAMICS OF AN ESL CLASS BECAUSE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES OF OPINION WHEN IT COMES TO THE HABIT.** These activities will get your students talking and writing about the subject of smoking and perhaps influence how they view the habit.

# Academic Discussions on the Use of Force

This year saw uprisings around the world, from my own local “Occupy Sacramento” movement to the overthrow of the president of Egypt.

Indeed, “The Anonymous Protester” was Time Magazine’s Person of the Year. I mentioned to my husband, a veteran of the 1960’s protests, that there seemed to be parallels between the Occupy Movement, which began as a protest against Wall Street and quickly spread around the world, and the civil disobedience so prevalent in the 1960s, he snorted and said that the 1960’s protests had a point. While it may be that the 1960’s protests were more focused on specific social ills such as segregation, it seems to me both protest movements, of the ‘60s and today, have a discontent directed at authority—authority gone awry. It’s probably not coincidental that the young adult generation involved in the current protest movement—the generation in our classrooms, in other words—would be mostly children of the 1960’s protesters.

So how does all of this relate to our classrooms? It’s very relevant—in terms of discussing issues of human rights, of use of force, about appropriate and non-appropriate rebellion against authority.

This was all driven home one afternoon last fall, when I was in my ESL reading class, discussing the scheduled reading, George Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant,” his classic essay on the misuse of power. In this essay, Orwell was serving as a British Empire police officer in Burma and was forced into killing an elephant—when he didn’t want to, when he was the “white man with the gun,” the person supposedly in power, and when the elephant was harming no one at the moment—all to avoid loss of face in front of the Burmese. Coincidentally, we were reading this essay the day after a now-infamous event at nearby University of California, when in a videotape that went viral, campus police pepper-sprayed a group of student

protesters who were passively sitting on the quad.

The protest movement has material on the use of force and of democracy ripe for discussion, reading, and writing.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

These are discussion points that will probably come up on the use of force and can be modified according to the teacher’s reading and situation.

**1** Who was “right”? Is there always a “right” and “wrong” party in events like this? Who will probably end up taking the blame, and should he or she take the blame?

**2** Does context matter in the problem? Does past behavior, the surroundings, what the victim “might” do or has done count? Does it matter, for example, that the elephant had already killed someone? Did it matter in the pepper-spray incident that the Thanksgiving weekend was approaching, it was cold out, services would be closed, and therefore the campus administration not without reason wanted the protesters to dismantle their camp, and they refused?

**3** What alternatives were there? What should or could the aggressor have done instead? The victim? Should the protesters at UC simply have moved when asked? What could the police have done before spraying them? What more could Orwell have done before resorting to using a gun?

**4** Are there any absolute wrongs in the matter of use of force? Should people always obey police, for example, whether or not they agree with

them?

**5** What do incidents like the event at UC say about democracy? Is it merely an anomaly, or is does this event show our democracy is in peril in some way?

## METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

**1** Opening the dialogue. What do you think about the events at UC last week? Sometimes students have an “I-don’t-want-to-talk-about-this-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-the-class” attitude. Often this attitude is based on a fear of “getting in trouble” in some way. Be patient and persistent, make the connection to the reading explicit, briefly, if necessary. Allow different students to speak, and show the fear is baseless.

**2** Often students have already formed a set opinion on the reading or event: “The Occupiers should have moved when the police told them to. They’re just irritating and have nothing better to do.” Gently questioning and pushing against these assumptions: “Were the participants in the Boston Tea Party ‘irritating’ to anyone? Perhaps that is their tactic? And does irritation give the police license in the level of force used?” can further stimulate discussion.

**3** Break students into groups. Once the discussion has started, the teacher can break the class into smaller groups of three or so, each group getting its own set of pre-typed questions on the topic. Within the group, students can assign roles such as leader, to keep discussion going; recorder, to take notes to be collected for participation points, spokesperson,

to share with the class when called on, and so forth. This gives students a task to accomplish and each student a role. Discussion like this can easily take up a class period. If the teacher has not prepared questions because of the timeliness of the current event, just a single question on the board is often enough: "What could the police have done differently?" Ask the students to come to consensus in their groups.

to get passionate about. And who wants to discuss or write about something they are not passionate about?

## 4

Wrap up, debrief. Call the class back together as a whole. Go over main points that were discussed in each group as time allows. Collect notes from each group as desired for participation points.

## 5

Writing topics. Once students have discussed the topic, they can now write about it. I see writing in this case as an extension of the discussion begun in class. Students already may have settled on a topic from discussion they really are passionate about: another benefit to discussing these kinds of topics is the joy of seeing the formerly apathetic student suddenly enthused. In this case, if the discussion topic is an appropriate writing topic, I'll let the student write to that.

## 6

Guidelines for writing topics: the topics should be specific enough to generate interest but also broad enough for critical thinking. For example: What are your ideas about the use of force? When is it appropriate? When not? Support with your own experiences and ideas drawn from the reading and discussion in an essay response. The essay should be of 500 words with a thesis and supporting paragraphs. Giving students specific guidelines like this allows them to develop their own ideas yet in academic format.

**STUDENTS ARE RESISTANT SOMETIMES TO BEGINNING A DISCUSSION ON A TOPIC THAT HAS BEEN CONTROVERSIAL, BUT WITH GUIDANCE CAN BEGIN DEVELOPING THEIR READING AND WRITING SKILLS.**

Controversy, after all, is what we tend



# What Will Your Students Say about the Media's Message

Not many people enjoy controversies or the tension that comes along with them, but controversies can be the ESL teacher's best friend for a very significant reason. They get students talking. When you introduce your students to an issue that brings out their emotions, they will be motivated to speak. Not only that, but because they are invested in their own opinions, your students will have more natural language production. For anyone who gets emotional when he speaks, his natural accent, grammar and vocabulary come out stronger and are easier to observe. When your students are talking this way, you, their teacher, can get a good read on how much English they have really acquired. Following is a unit that examines how the media communicates a message about beauty that is sure to get your students talking.

## WHAT WILL YOUR STUDENTS SAY ABOUT THE MEDIA'S MESSAGE

### 1 TODAY'S ISSUE

The media has an enormous amount of influence on young people today, and those who look can find plenty of hot topics to discuss in the classroom. One of the issues that may not come to mind as quickly as others is the idea of what it means to be beautiful. Young people are inundated with images that speak to physical beauty – through television, advertisements and celebrity culture. This constant message plays into each of our self images. However, most of the time we accept the message the media supplies and fail to question the truth of that message. Getting your students to think about what defines beauty will have benefits on multiple levels. They will get talking about a personal and important topic, they will gain perspective on the message the media is sending their way, and they may end up having a better body image when they take a critical look at the media and themselves.

### 2 MAGAZINE SEARCH

Give your students some time to look through magazines and online for advertisements that speak to or of personal beauty. They may point out men and women, young people and old being

portrayed as beautiful or not beautiful. Challenge your students to also notice phrases and words the advertisers use to communicate the idea of beauty. Let small groups of students work together to compile a list of what they find, and challenge each group to write their own definition of beauty as it is represented in the media images.

### 3 IS IT TRUE?

Is the way magazines portray beauty an accurate representation of true beauty? For women? For men? Answers may fall anywhere on a wide spectrum, but encourage your students to share their own opinions with their small discussion groups. If you like, have each person write a reaction which answers the same questions. Make sure your students know as they discuss that disagreements are bound to come out. The key is continuing to be respectful to the others in the group, listening, offering contrary opinions in a normal tone of voice, and agreeing to disagree when necessary. Then take the discussion a step further by asking your students how much of this message ties into the financial benefits for product designers and advertisers. Should it? How can everyday people take measures to improve the media's message as well as their own reception of that message?

### 4 BEAUTY IN A WORD

In English, some adjectives describing beauty are traditionally reserved for solely men or solely women. Fewer may be used to describe both genders. Such words include attractive or cute. Men specific adjectives include handsome and dapper. Women have their own, too, including pretty and voluptuous. Challenge your class to see how many words used to describe beauty they can list. Start with one general list and then challenge pairs or groups of students to determine which are reserved primarily for describing men, which for women and which can be used for either. Allow your students to use a thesaurus and offer some suggestions of your own. Once everyone has classified the adjectives, take some time to share your classification with the class and see if everyone agrees.

### 5 GETTING PERSONAL

Depending on the ages and personalities of your students, you may or may not want to break your class into two groups, male and female. (This is particularly beneficial for adolescents, but younger children may do best to skip this activity.) Once you have your male and female groups and a moderator of the same gender for each, ask your students if they ever feel unhappy with the way their bodies look. Allow any willing student to share, and make sure individuals do not feel pressured to share if they are not comfortable doing so. For those who do share, ask if they can explain why they feel the way that they do. Challenge your students to think about how their self assessments could lead to negative behavior.

### 6 DOING THINGS WRITE

Your students may be feeling a lot of different emotions at this point in the discussion on beauty. Some may feel an improvement in their self esteem. Some may feel frustrated at how the media has such an influence in their lives. Give your students a chance to send the right message by creating their own advertisement which communicates a healthy body message. Ask each student to choose an ad you used in the first activity and create an original advertisement for the same product or service. Because not everyone will have advanced artistic abilities, allow your students to formulate their advertisement as a collage or original piece of art work, tracing and stick figures accepted. When the ads are finished, post them on a bulletin board next to the original advertisement. Extend the activity and ask your students to choose a pair of advertisements and write a compare/contrast composition about them.

### WHEN IT COMES TO BEAUTY, YOUR STUDENTS MAY HAVE MORE TO SAY THAN EVEN THEY KNOW.

Open up the channels of communication in your classroom and get your students talking about this issue on which they might not agree. As long as everyone is using the language they know to express their ideas, everyone in your class will have one.