HOW TO INCREASE STUDENT TALKING TIME EXPONENTIALLY, TURN THEM ON TO DISCUSSION, AND MUCH MORE!

SPEAKING SPECIALIST

27 TOP SECRETS EVERY SPEAKING TEACHER SHOULD KNOW AND USE

TAKE YOUR SPEAKING LESSONS TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL



THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS WHY STUDENTS ARE QUIET.

ONE OF THEM IS YOU

Lots of ESL teachers complain that students don't talk enough. They're too quiet. They just sit there and don't say anything.

WHAT IS A TEACHER TO DO WHEN HER CLASS JUST ISN'T IN THE MOOD TO SPEAK?

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I Can't Wait to Talk about It! Turning Your Students on to Discussion

You have a class of talkers: they sit in small groups and will chat about anything and frequently about nothing, their speech filled with "like" and "you know," devoid of any apparent meaning. But give them a legitimate course-related topic to discuss, such as the national election, and they clam up. When asked why, they claim either they don't want to talk about it or they don't know what to say — and they probably are telling the truth in that, not just avoiding the task. So how do you address this, your class who has nothing to say or a way to say it? Begin by examining the two claims:

1 STUDENTS DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT

Why would students not want to talk about the assigned topic when they spend all day, it seems, talking to their peers anyway? It may simply be because it is an assigned topic, and as such it takes away student motivation to begin with. Or the topic itself might be too difficult, too boring, or too abstract for the students to address. All these factors can and should be addressed in designing discussion topics.

2 STUDENTS DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY

Another problem is students don't know what to say on the topic. The reasons for this may be that the students don't understand the topic, don't have the knowledge base to discuss the topic even if they understand it, or don't have the language to discuss the topic — perhaps a little of all three. For example, I generally understand the idea of stem cell research, enough to hold a position on it, but I really lack the knowledge or vocabulary base to get into an extended conversation on the topic without some prior preparation. It is the same for most of our students.

METHODS TO ADDRESS THE RELUCTANT DISCUSSION PARTICIPANT

1 "SELLING" STUDENTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPRESSING ONESELF

Besides the students who are just unsure of their ability to discuss ideas — and these include native speakers of English — are those students who just don't see the value of it: they view talk and discussion as a waste of time or somehow "uncool." Therefore teachers should demonstrate the value of being articulate — that if you present your ideas in just the right way, you can open doors: convince others to fund your business, marry you, be your friend, allow you into a prestigious college, and so forth. It's really the articulate people who are actually "cool" and get rewards, not the silent and superficially "cool."

2 STUDENT GENERATED TOPICS

One way to really raise student enthusiasm for discussion is to allow students to generate their own topics, with some parameters. So if your recent class reading has been on the topic of the ethics of scientific research, for example, let students design their own discussion questions on the topic: for example, the ethics of spending resources on space exploration when there are so many immediate problems to address on this planet might be a question that comes up. Teachers may offer guidance in design of the questions, but generally students are happy to design their own.

3 STUDENT GENERATED GROUPS

One main reason that students don't want to work in groups is that they get "stuck" working with people they don't like or get along with. True, a good argument here is that part of adult life is learning to work with people we don't particularly like. However, student enthusiasm for discussion is raised by occasionally allowing students some input into choosing their groups — once a week, for example. And if they're trained to choose groups quickly and respectfully, then a lot of the difficulty in the logistics of groups is reduced. Finally a lot of the poor dynamics that can sometimes develop with groups is eliminated because students have chosen the peers they want to work with.

4 TOOLS FOR DISCUSSION:

Advancing an Opinion, Listening to Others, Politely Disagreeing

Another reason students don't like discussion is they don't have the tools for it: they don't know how to advance an opinion, for example, so they never really get a chance to speak, or they experience rudeness such as other students not listening or disagreeing in a belligerent manner. If students are taught in advance some of the skills of active listening, how to politely break into a conversation and give an opinion as well as how to disagree with another's viewpoint and still remain courteous, then a lot of the anxiety of group discussion is removed.

5 PREPARATION FOR ACADEMIC DISCUSSION

Once students have some mastery in discussing the topics they have generated, it's time to move on to academic discussion, a little different in the topics are not student generated, at least at the beginning, and they are not on everyday topics, such as how to manage a busy schedule and get enough sleep, but rather about academic topics such as capital punishment, stem cell research, gun control, and the like. These topics require a certain knowledge base as well as specific vocabulary. Therefore some preparation is needed beforehand, such as lecture and reading, before students will be able to discuss the topic. As their knowledge of the topic grows and they develop an opinion on it, students become more enthused about discussing it.

As the semester progresses, students become more aware of other issues to discuss and will suggest these topics to their groups.

MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO HAVE A REASONABLY INTELLIGENT DISCUSSION, ESPECIALLY IN OUR ERA OF "LIKE" AND "YOU KNOW," CAN BE DIFFICULT.

However, through strategies such as student – generated topics and groups and teaching students the tools of academic discussion, teachers can turn our "cool" silent types into articulate speakers.

7 Techniques to Increase Student Talking Time - Exponentially!

LOTS OF ESL TEACHERS COMPLAIN THAT STUDENTS DON'T TALK ENOUGH. THEY'RE TOO QUIET. THEY JUST SIT THERE AND DON'T SAY ANYTHING.

There are several reasons why students are quiet, but guess what? One of them is you! Don't take this the wrong way. You do a splendid job. But the more you speak, the less they speak. And you don't want your students to come to class simply to listen to you, right?

TRY THESE 7 TECHNIQUES TO INCREASE STUDENT TALKING TIME

1 GIVE THEM TIME TO ANSWER

Is it realistic to expect every student to reply promptly and accurately? Of course not. Some students may be able to fire off a rapid response, but this is not always the case. Some students need time to understand and process what you've said/asked. Then, they need time to come up with the right response. So if you want to speak less and get them to speak more, you'll have to give them those precious seconds they need. If it's hard for you to wait, count. Five seconds. Or more if you can. It may be hard at first for you and the other students to take those few seconds of silence, but it'll be worth it.

2 DON'T ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS YOURSELF

Have you ever stopped to think that when one student asks you a question, another student may know the answer? Try this technique:

S1: Why is this answer wrong?
T: Mmmm... (looks around the classroom or even directly at another student)
S2: Because "beautiful" is a long adjective and so the comparative is "more beautiful".

And isn't it beautiful when your students can help each other, and you don't have to say a single word?

3 USE PAIR OR GROUPWORK

Quite often we act out role plays with another student. But if you get students into pairs for the role plays and simply walk around to assist, you will speak less, and they will speak more. The same goes for groupwork, whether you have them do a writing task, like write a story together, or a speaking task, like a discussion.

4 HAVE THEM READ / EXPLAIN INSTRUCTIONS

If the instructions are in the coursebook or the worksheet, why must you read them out loud and explain them to the class? If they are pretty straightforward, have a student read them to the class and another explain/rephrase if someone hasn't understood. This is also a great way to keep eager beavers happy: they get to explain something that is very clear to them, and those who need a little extra help still get the assistance they need.

5 ASK OPEN-ENDED INSTEAD OF YES/NO QUESTIONS

If you ask students yes/no questions, that's basically what you'll get – a yes or a no (and the occasional "maybe"). The more questions you ask with where, why, how often, when, etc. the more they'll have to speak. But just don't stop at one question:

T: What kind of music do you listen to?
S1: I listen to rock music.
T: Why?
S1: Because I like it.
T: Where do you listen to it?
S1: I listen to it everywhere: at home, on the bus, on my way to school...
T: (asks S2) How about you, Tommy?

And Tommy should have a pretty good idea of what he can say about his music preferences.

6 SAY ONLY WHAT IS NECESSARY

Don't echo back what students say. Don't blabber on and on about your weekend. Don't fill the silence with useless chatter. Of course, you can have relaxed conversations with students, but save those for either the very beginning or the end of class, or what's even better, the break. During class time, try to focus your efforts on getting them to speak.

7 DON'T TELL, ELICIT

When we tell students the answer, they passively receive it. They ask, "What's this?", and you say, "It's a stapler". It's too easy for everyone, including you. If students don't remember a word, for example, try to elicit it from them and feel free to give them clues.

S1: What's this?
T: Oh! You mean this device we use to staple papers together? What's this called?
S1: It's a stapler.

Much too often we tell: Remember when we talked about the different types of weather? We have cloudy, sunny, etc. Don't tell them what they are if you've already seen it in class! Get them to say it!

ACHIEVING THE RIGHT BALANCE

A special mention must be made regarding how much a student is expected to speak. I subscribe to the theory that in the case of beginners, the ratio of TTT vs. STT should be 50-50, and this percentage should progressively change till you achieve a 30% TTT vs. 70% STT. In very advanced learners, it could even reach a 10-90. You need to figure out what works for each class, but in most cases you should not be talking more than your students. The one, simple way to get students to speak more is for us to resist the urge to speak. Why don't teachers shut up? Sometimes it's because we feel uncomfortable in the silence. Sometimes it's because we quite simply like to talk, and we enjoy the chatter. But leave the chatter for the teacher's room. This is something I still struggle with, as I tend to get too chatty. Can you talk less in class?

ESL Checklist: 9 Items for Effective Free-speaking Activities

Speaking is an essential skill in learning English as a second language – most students agree that this is what they struggle with the most. Still, many of us focus most of our efforts on drilling and repetition of phrases and dialogues.

While it's a great start for beginners, at some point students need to have speaking activities that will allow them to improve their communication skills, which takes a lot more than a repetition of phrases. Free-speaking activities are perfect for this. Here are the main points to consider when using free-speaking activities in your ESL class.

WHAT FREE SPEAKING IS AND WHAT IT'S NOT

A good free-speaking activity is not synonymous to free conversation time. This is not the time to speak about whatever they want, with no given goal or objective. Free speaking means that students have the chance to use the language resources they deem to be necessary and/or useful to achieve the task.

There are 3 essential Ps in language teaching: presentation (introduction of topic/new vocabulary/language item), practice (drilling and repetition) and performance. Free speaking corresponds to performance. It's the chance they have to put everything they've learned to good use.

ESL CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE FREE-SPEAKING ACTIVITIES:

1 DOES IT HAVE A CLEAR LEARNING GOAL?

Why are you using this free-speaking task? Are you giving your class a chance to practice vocabulary they've just learned? Review grammar, phrases or expressions? Free-speaking activities can't just be a time to speak freely, there has to be some connection to something students have been presented and practiced recently. Say you recently taught them expressions for agreeing/disagreeing. Give them a chance to use them!

2 IS THERE A CLEAR OBJECTIVE?

Students won't know if they have successfully achieved the learning goal if they don't know what the task objective is. Do they have to reach an agreement? Find a solution to a problem? Brainstorm ideas? Here are some examples of speaking tasks with clear objectives:

- Students must reach an agreement on where to have a friend's surprise party.
- One student tells the class about his/her eating habits and lifestyle. The rest of the class has to provide ideas for a healthier lifestyle.
- Students discuss ways to protect the environment and come up with a list of 10 ideas they can start implementing today.

3 IS IT FUN / INTERESTING / APPROPRIATE?

It goes without saying that the success of the activity hinges on how engaged your students are. And activities that are not fun or interesting will fail to engage them. Try tailoring each activity to your student's interests and level. For a group of Business English learners, change the surprise birthday party scenario mentioned above: have the class reach an agreement on where to host a conference/meeting,

4 IS IT COMPETITIVE?

Young students and teens, in particular, thrive in healthy competition. Is there a way of breaking the class into teams, so they can compete to provide the best/most ideas/results? See which group comes up with the most ideas to protect the environment.

5 IS IT CHALLENGING?

Speaking tasks that are too easy will be over in 5 minutes. Good speaking tasks last at least 10-15 minutes – remember you want to give your students a chance to speak. Have you introduced and obstacle or complication they must overcome? Here are some complications for the surprise birthday party scenario:

- Give them a limited budget
- Tell them that because it's winter, they can't have the party outdoors
- They only have three days left to plan and buy everything!

6 WILL THERE BE SOMETHING TO REPORT IN THE END?

Good free-speaking tasks give students something they can summarize/report to the rest of the class. Will they be able to provide an action plan for the surprise birthday party? A list of tasks and who's responsible for each?

7 IS IT STRUCTURED?

What is the procedure your students should follow? Is it clear? A structured activity gives students who are not so confident a backbone to support them. For the birthday party scenario, give students the items they must decide on:

- Venue
- Food
- Music
- Date and time
- Number of Guests, Etc.

8 CAN IT BE REPEATED?

When they are done, and you give them your feedback, can they re-enact it? Reenactments gives them a chance to fine tune things that were not so accurate so that they can improve their previous performance. Did they forget to decide on a date and time? No one's taking care of the music? Re-enact the discussion and try not to forget these points.

9 IS THERE ENOUGH ROOM TO SHOW THEIR CREATIVITY?

Even structured free-speaking tasks need to give students enough wiggle room to make adjustments as they go, and find creative solutions to problems. If there's no money for the DJ, one of your students may volunteer to be the DJ for the night.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO IS CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE STUDENTS SPEAK FREELY - NOT A FREE- FOR-ALL. GIVE THEM THE RIGHT INDICATIONS, AND THEY WILL DO JUST THAT.

Opening Gambits: 5 Conversational Openers for the Shy Student

IN LEARNING ENGLISH, ADULT ESL STUDENTS OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES CAUGHT IN A "CATCH-22."

A Catch-22 involves two contradictory outcomes, such as the one made famous in the novel by the same name: to get out of serving in the military, a soldier had to demonstrate he was insane, but if he wanted out of the military, he couldn't be insane. There is a similar "Catch 22" for English Learners: to learn English, students need more practice speaking English, but to practice English with native speakers, they almost need to know English already. It is often noted that children learn second languages faster than adults, and while this may be true, a major reason may be that children simply have more opportunity to practice, in the form of play groups, where other children tend to welcome them with varying degrees of willingness. Adults, however, tend to find it much harder to approach a group of strangers and join in their conversation, which is hard in a first language, much less a second.

How then can the adult ESL student join these adult "play groups" (conversation groups) to gain needed practice in the second language? A way to do this is through the opening gambit.

An opening gambit serves several functions: it serves as a greeting, shows desire to join the group in conversation, and establishes a possible topic for conversation. An opening gambit may be as simple as "Hi, I'm Michelle. How are you this evening? Do you make it out here often?"

There are a number of other opening gambits of varying degrees of sophistication.

5 OPENING GAMBITS

1 THE TRAFFIC/WEATHER IS GOOD/POOR TONIGHT.

Traffic and weather are perennial topics with for opening gambits because they are neutral — few can take exception to me remarking on the heavy rain as it can't be argued, and is no one's fault. In addition, these rather flat topics can lead into more interesting terrain — a comment on the weather or traffic in Sacramento, for example, almost invites a comparison to weather and traffic in other cities the speakers have lived in, and they can in this way learn something about each other.

2 HOW OFTEN DO YOU COME HERE?

This can be a good opening gambit because it can lead to both a discussion of the immediate surroundings — for example, a bookstore -- as well as the addressee's habits, such as reading habits. This can furthered be developed into comparisons of the two speakers' reading habits, bookstores in general, and the conversion of traditional books to electronic material.

3 HOW DO YOU KNOW JOHN?

This is a good opening at a party, for example, when the speaker might ask the addressee how he or she knows the host. This then can lead to a discussion of the speakers' mutual connections to the host through work, or school, or recreational activities, and they may then find shared interests.

4 HOW LONG HAVE YOU BELONGED TO---?

This is an especially good opening gambit at a meeting for a professional, civic, or recreational organization, such as through a church or club. This gambit can lead into a discussion of the speakers' histories with the organization as well as their reasons for being involved in it.

5 WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT---?

This is another good opening for the immediate context: for example, if the speakers are at a professional or civic meeting at which there is a presentation, one of the speakers might ask the other what she thinks of the presenter. This can lead into further, more in-depth conversation about the speakers' philosophies and beliefs related to the organization: for example, if I am at a professional meeting of other teachers of English, and the presenter comes from a grammar-translation background — that is, teaching English with a heavy focus on translating to the students' first language and analyzing the grammar — I might express my skepticism to someone who asks my thoughts on the presenter. This can lead to an interesting discussion on teaching methods and their history and effectiveness.

4 METHODS TO TEACH OPENING GAMBITS

1 EXPLICIT TEACHING

To teach opening gambits, as with almost anything, some explicit instruction is required at the beginning through definition and example in context so that students get a firm idea of what the concept means. The teacher can begin by asking students if they would just walk up to a group of strangers at a party and begin talking. Most will probably answer "no." The teacher can then introduce a more effective strategy: joining a group, listening quietly for a time, then when the opportunity presents, entering the conversation by making a comment. This is the "opening gambit."

2 MODEL

Once students understand what the gambit is, it's time to show its correct use. One way to do this is by modeling: write some of the common opening gambits on the board then call on a more advanced student choose and use one of the gambits, to which you respond appropriately. This of course can be reversed, with the instructor giving the gambit to the student. Finally, a short clip from a romantic comedy, for example, showing characters in a party scene can demonstrate use of the opening gambit — sometimes their inappropriate use, as well--which can be discussed.

3 GUIDED CONVERSATIONS

Once students understand opening gambits and have seen them in action, they are ready for some guided conversations, with dialogues prepared by the teacher — or just the gambit, on an index card, to which students have to come up with responses. This step may also be skipped if students are prepared enough to move to the less structured and more independent roleplay.

4 ROLEPLAY

In the roleplay, the teacher may just give out the general directions, the context and roles, and let the students go from there. For example: Get into groups of five. Four members are the conversation group. One member wants to join with a conversational gambit. Talk for 5 minutes then rotate roles. Everyone has to take the turn of the joiner with the gambit. In this strategy, because it is unstructured, students experience what it is like in a real situation where they will have to overcome discomfort to join a conversational group and there is no real script to guide them.

NO DOUBT, JOINING NATIVE SPEAKERS OF A LANGUAGE IN CONVERSATION IS DIFFICULT FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER AS IT IS EVEN FOR THE NATIVE SPEAKER, ESPECIALLY IF THE OTHER SPEAKERS IN THE GROUP ARE STRANGERS.

However, we all find ourselves in situations having to converse with people we don't know, and careful use of the opening gambit makes this less stressful and may even lead to some long-term friendships beyond the immediate situation.

How to Teach Conversational English: 9 Best Practices

When other teachers, even other ESL teachers, hear I'm teaching an ESL conversation class, they often say it sounds "relaxing," or "fun" or "easy." Most teachers will smile at this, of course, recognizing that any teaching, while it may be fun, is almost never "relaxing" or "easy."

And while the conversation class may certainly be less rigorous than, for example, an advanced writing class, it has its own set of problems. In a writing class, I know what the students need, and the title "Advanced ESL Composition" alone suggests the curriculum: course readings and several student essays on related topics over the course of the semester, in drafts increasing polished and focused on structure, grammar, and punctuation. A conversation class, however, is less defined. What exactly is a conversation class? What is the curriculum? Sometimes there's not even a course text available. Despite this initial lack of clarity, however, there are general principles of best practice that a conversation class can be built around.

9 BASIC PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING CONVERSATION CLASSES

1 FOCUS ON COMMUNICATION AND FLUENCY, NOT CORRECTNESS

I'm always surprised when in the first days of class students turned to me or ask their classmates if they are holding the conversation "correctly," if it is "right." Rarely even in our native languages do we concern ourselves if the conversation is proceeding "correctly": the point is if our meaning is coming through. This is what should be emphasized to students: it's not a matter of "right" but whether or not your classmates understand you and can respond to you!

2 LAY THE GROUNDWORK

Before entering in academic conversations, students have to agree on some basic "rules for engagement": listening to each other courteously, listening actively by clarifying meaning and asking for examples, advancing one's own opinions clearly and politely while considering the audience, etc. Most students will really know these rules already from their first languages — there are probably some cultural universals in politeness — and can usually help in brainstorming five or so rules to be displayed prominently in the class. More than five will likely be too many to focus on and be useful.

3 STUDENT DIRECTED: STUDENT CHOICE OF TOPICS

There are few things more uncomfortable than being in a conversation on a topic you either intensely dislike or have nothing to say on. Most native speakers will excuse themselves from such conversations as soon as possible. Teachers should be wary of assigning controversial topics such as the legality of abortion or same sex marriage without gauging the climate of the class and having an idea of how receptive students will be to such topics. Some classes are perfectly capable of holding a mature conversation on these topics, others not depending on their language and cross-cultural and interpersonal skills. Teachers should ask themselves the following: Are my students capable of listening to their peers on the topic without erupting in anger? Can they advance their own opinions without undue embarrassment? One way around this concern is allowing students to come up with their own topics to use over the course of the term. Have them work in groups, write agreed-upon topics on index cards, and collect them. They do not have to be "academic" topics like the validity of global warming but almost anything students are interested in and can discuss for an extended time, such as favorite music. One class session or part of one in brainstorming topics will likely yield enough topics for the term, and the instructor can just draw an index card to use during discussion time.

4 SMALL GROUP / PAIR WORK

Conversation occurs in small, not large groups. Having students work in small groups or pairs is usually more productive for a number of reasons: students are less self-conscious if they are "performing" in front of a small group rather than large, and they have more chance to speak in a smaller group. In addition, conversations generally occur in smaller groups, as any party or meeting will demonstrate — people gather in small groups to talk when given the opportunity. Setting aside regular time for students to get into groups for discussion will help them develop their conversation skills.

5 ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO ROTATE PARTNERS

Some teachers assign conversational partners or groups for the term, and this has advantages, such as students get to know each other better this way, and they can quickly get into their groups when asked to, easing transitions. However, there also are advantages to occasionally rotating partners or groups, perhaps every few weeks. In this way, students get to know more of their peers and get exposed to more ideas while still having the structure provided by having a stable group for a period of time.

6 TEACH STUDENTS STRATEGIES

Too often conversations even between native speakers fall flat because the participants don't know conversation strategies. In addition, there is a difference between an everyday conversation and an academic conversation. Many if not all of our students can carry on an everyday

conversation without much difficulty: “What would you like for dinner?” “I dunno. Pizza? Chicken? What do you want?” Much of our day-to-day “conversation” goes on in exchanges like this and requires few strategies. But to have a real “conversation” on the topic of food choices, for example, the conversational partners will have to know different strategies for introducing the topic, drawing each other out, asking for opinions, advancing their own, using examples, and so forth.

7 TEACH VOCABULARY

It seems elementary, but it is often forgotten that students may not be participating because they simply don’t have the vocabulary to enter a specific conversation. Introducing some key phrases and words related to the topic will help this. For example, on the topic of different types of vacations today, students should learn words like “condo,” “time share,” “hotel,” “motel,” “extended stay,” “business class,” and “coach.”

8 TEACH BOTH FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONVERSATION SKILLS

There are specific strategies for entering, extending, and ending conversations both formally and informally. For example, with “Hey, Diana! How was your vacation to Hawaii?” I am signaling to Diana that I’d like to open an informal and probably brief conversation on the topic of her vacation that might extend a little into my vacation and vacations in general. However, with “What do you think about how we vacation today? Hasn’t it changed quite a bit from even ten years ago?” I am signaling a different kind of conversation — more in-depth and analytical as the conversation participants consider different types of vacations, and more academic. Knowing these strategies for different types of conversations will help students avoid confusion and even annoyance and gain experience in different types of conversations.

9 GRADE AND ASSESS

Grade on degree of participation and understanding of conversation. Assess informally.

Because the focus of instruction, and of conversation itself, is on communicating meaning rather than on correctness, students should be assessed mostly informally. The instructor can walk around the class, sit in on conversations, and get an idea this way on the degree of participation of each student. Students can also be asked to hold a conversation in front of the teacher or class and be assessed by a rubric on the degree of responding to and advancing topics, on use of strategies and vocabulary, and so forth. Finally, more formal quizzes and tests can also be given in the form of listening to taped conversations and answering questions about topic, vocabulary, responses, strategies, and so on.

TEACHING CONVERSATION CAN SEEM CHALLENGING BECAUSE AT FIRST BLUSH IT SEEMS AS IF THERE ARE FEW PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE THE INSTRUCTOR.

However, keeping in mind such strategies as preteaching vocabulary, establishing small groups, and teaching conversational strategies, there is plenty to teach and do in the conversation class!

Hello, How are You: Conversational Routines Students Need to Know

It probably occurs at some point to most native speakers while going through a typical conversational routine: "Hello! How are you? How's the family?" and so on that there is little originality in language use.

Except for a few big events — fires, illness, accidents — our everyday language seems to exist in set routines. There are some concerns with this, of course — boredom, superficiality, calling up the wrong phrase on occasion: e.g., "you, too" instead of "thank you." However, there are even a larger number of advantages, especially for nonnative speakers: for example, lessened chance in making a mistake in grammar, vocabulary, or register because it is a set routine. In addition, going through the routine automatically frees up processing space in the brain so that the speaker can plan out the real "meat" of conversation after the routine — making a sale, asking for a date, etc. This is true even for native speakers of the language. Knowing these conversational routines is therefore a cultural expectation: e.g., a speaker who bids an ESL student to "Have a nice day" in farewell would probably feel slighted if the student did not respond in kind. Therefore it is important to teach students these routines.

WHAT CONVERSATIONAL ROUTINES DO YOUR STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW?

1 ROUTINES FOR GREETING

These routines for greeting may be used as an opener to a more important conversation, or they may be used simply as greetings, to acknowledge the other person as he or she passes. Emphasis should be made on their function—that despite the wording, they are usually just greetings, not inquiries in the other speaker's health and well-being.

A: Hi! How are you?
B: Not bad. And you?

A: How's it going?
B: Can't complain. And yourself?

A: And how are you today?
B: Very well, thank you.

2 ROUTINES FOR GRATITUDE

Although one of the dialogues models the use of "you're welcome," it should be noted that Americans say this very little: it seems to have been replaced with "no problem."

A: Wow! Thanks so much. I really appreciate it.
B: No problem.

A: I just want you to know how much this means to me.
B: It's my pleasure.

A: Thanks! This is great.
B: You're very welcome.

3 ROUTINES FOR COMPLAINT

Complaining is done rather frequently in American culture, something that comes with being a consumer culture. There are therefore a number of ways to complain, from the cold and controlled to the flaming and hostile, depending on the situation. We of course would want our students to focus more on the controlled side, which actually is more likely to get results, along with being as specific as possible about the problem and what should be done about it.

A: I find this work on my car unacceptable. I'm still experiencing the same problem.
B: I'm sorry. I'll have the technician look at it right away.

A: We've been waiting for our server for twenty minutes. Could you tell me how much longer it will be?
B: I'll check on that right away, sir.

A: Excuse me. Would you mind turning down your music? It's very loud, and I can hear it all the way down the street.
B: I'm sorry. I'll get my son to lower it right away.

4 ROUTINES FOR APOLOGY

There are also numerous routines for apology, mostly to loved ones and friends, but also sometimes to relative strangers: the former tending to be more sincere and the latter more routine. Most apologies include an acknowledgement of the offense given and offer an explanation as to why. Except for the most serious offense, the person apologized to usually accepts it. "No problem" is often used to accept an apology as well as in response to "thank you."

A: I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting this long! Traffic was terrible.
B: No problem. I thought it was probably something like that.

A: I'm so sorry! Are you all right?
B: No problem. The train's very crowded today.

A: Rob, I'm really sorry about this, but I'm going to be a little late on the report. I've had the flu the past couple of days.
B: Okay. Just get it in asap.

5 ROUTINES FOR FAREWELL

Finally, we have routines for farewell, which often don't contain the word "good bye" these days but use other expressions. Included often are reasons why the speaker must leave.

A: I should let you go. I have to get dinner started.
B: Well, it's been nice talking to you. See you soon.

A: Well, I've got to go now. I have to meet my wife at the dinner.
B: Okay. Have a great weekend!

A: Well, it's been great catching up, but I have just a pile of work...
B: Yeah, me too. Let's plan to get together for lunch sometime.

HOW TO TEACH ROUTINES

1 MATCHING

Because these routines are more or less set (e.g., the appropriate response to “How are you?” is some variation of “fine”), have students match the routine opening sentence with the correct response. This will prepare them for coming up with the correct responses in actual speech situations.

2 FILL IN THE BLANK

Blank out part of a written dialogue: e.g., A: Hi! ____ are you? B: Not ___. And you? This will further help students process the routines and learn them to the level of automaticity.

3 MAKE THE CORRECTION

Give out “butchered” dialogues, with errors in grammar or usage: e.g. “How’s are you?” “Bad! And you?” Correct and discuss the errors.

4 WRITE DIALOGUES

Have students get into pairs or groups. Have them choose the basic situation and the characters or assign them. The students then work together to create one or two conversational routines.

5 PRACTICE DIALOGUES

After writing their dialogues, students can practice and perform them in front of the class, or trade class routines with another group and perform theirs.

6 FIELDTRIPS

Go to Starbucks or another cafe. Stores, restaurants, and other public places where people engage in conversation, like a park, are also possibilities. Have students note which conversational routines people engage in. Discuss them back in class.

SO THERE ARE MANY ROUTINES IN ENGLISH FOR A VARIETY OF SITUATIONS AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTICE.

The routines can be for a wide range of places -- the similarity between them is the function: to greet, to say farewell, and so on. Knowing the function of the different routines will help students develop speaking skills appropriate to the situation with a level of fluency.

4 Practical Tips for Encouraging a Quiet Class to Speak

Have you ever asked a question of your ESL class only to be rewarded with unwavering stares and the sound of crickets in the background? I know I have, and for teachers it can be very frustrating when students just don't respond.

Of course there are times when no one knows the answer to a question you or I pose, but other times students understand the question, know the answer, can produce the answer and still stay silent. What is a teacher to do when her class just isn't in the mood to speak? Here are some tips you can use today to get your quiet class speaking up.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE A QUIET CLASS TO SPEAK

1 LAY DOWN THE RULES

Sometimes students have different expectations for class participation than you do. In some cultures it is inappropriate for students to speak up in class, even in language classes. To combat this cultural clash, take a few moments to explain the rules for speaking in class to your students. Give your students a short paragraph that explains your expectations for their participation. Your paragraph should state that in English speaking countries and English classes, students should speak during class. Answering the teacher's questions is good, and it's also good to interrupt with questions they have during lessons. Make sure your students know that talking in class shows they are interested and paying attention and it is not a sign of disrespect. Once you give your class the paragraph with the rules, put your students in groups to read the paragraph, talk about any difficult words and share their own experiences and expectations about talking in class. Come together as a class and talk about any surprises students may have found in their group discussion.

2 BE PERSONAL

When you have reluctant speakers in your class, throwing a question out to the group as a whole may get you nothing more than blank stares. No one may feel the need or the confidence to speak up. But by looking at or addressing specific students or groups of students when you ask your questions, they are more likely to give you an answer. This isn't to say you should put your class members on the spot. Pressuring individuals to answer when they are not ready will only increase their stress and make them even more quiet. When you ask questions, though, make eye contact and wait for a student to speak before moving on to another person and making eye contact with them. Taking just one minute to stop talking and wait for an answer can make a big difference in how often and how willingly your students respond to questions!

3 KEEP IT SPECIFIC

"Do you understand?" How many times have I caught myself using this question in class? And even though my intention in asking is to make sure my class is tracking with me, this type of general comprehension check often does less than nothing toward helping students. This is true for two big reasons. First, if your students do not understand what you are saying, it may be just as wrong to assume they understand your question checking their comprehension. Secondly, students who do not understand are not always willing to admit their confusion in front of the entire class. Shyness or shame can keep their mouths closed even when speaking up would be a help to them. Combat this reluctance by being more intentional in your comprehension checks. Rather than asking general comprehension questions, help your class by asking specific questions about the material you have covered. With specific questions come specific answers, and these answers will give you a better read on how much your students really understand.

4 CREATE FEEDBACK

Positive reinforcement is one of the most effective means for encouraging your students to speak in class. When students offer answers to your questions, show them that you value and appreciate their participation. Praise your students when they speak and let them know that the best students participate in class. If you can, make class participation part of their grades, and make sure they know it counts. Give your students periodic updates on how their participation meets your expectations, and always be positive in your attempts to get your students to speak in class.

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN FRONT OF A QUIET ESL CLASS, JUST REMEMBER THIS. YOU JOB IS TO TEACH THEM LANGUAGE, BUT IT IS ALSO TO TEACH THEM CULTURE, AND THAT INCLUDES SPEAKING UP IN CLASS.

Make a point of teaching your students how to participate in English class successfully. Be patient with your quiet students, but don't settle for a quiet class for long. If you encourage your students, give specific opportunities for them to respond and let them know it's more than okay to talk, you will see these same students start to open up and speak up in class more each day.

10 New and Improved Uses of Questionnaires in Your ESL Class

WHAT IS THE SINGLE BEST WAY TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT SOMEONE'S HABITS, PREFERENCES OR EXPERIENCE?

Why, a questionnaire, of course! That's why we complete questionnaires when we go to a new doctor, apply for a job or participate in a market survey. Sometimes we even do them for fun or to find out something about ourselves – they're quite popular in women's magazines.

Because it is one of the best ways to obtain and share information, we also use them in our ESL class. However, there is a downside to using questionnaires: students are often limited to reading questions from a list or providing an answer from a multiple choice, which is not a very productive use of class time. So, here are 10 new and improved ways to use questionnaires and quizzes in your ESL class, strategies that will get your students to read less and practice more.

USING QUESTIONNAIRES OR QUIZZES IN CLASS

Questionnaires or quizzes are great for helping students break the ice the first day of class or obtain information about classmates regarding specific topics, like favorite food, eating habits, sports and hobbies. They help students practice "interview" situations, where one student asks the questions and the other answers them.

10 NEW AND IMPROVED WAYS TO USE QUESTIONNAIRES

1 USE PROMPTS

Instead of printing out questionnaires with complete questions, which students would simply read out, include just the prompts. Students will have to use them to come up with complete questions themselves. Prompts should look like this:

- Favorite food?
- Favorite sport?
- Free time?
- Musical instruments?

Make sure they provide just the right level of challenge, but are not too hard to figure out.

2 GIVE CATEGORIES

To take it up a notch, give them categories instead of prompts. List things like "Hobbies", "Sports", "Food", "Movies" and have students come up with different types of questions on their own.

3 MAKE PREDICTIONS

This puts a fun spin on the whole questionnaire activity. Have students write the questions they will ask their partner based on the prompts/categories above AND predict what they will say. Then they proceed with the interview and compare their predictions to the answers they get. They may be in for a surprise!

4 REPORT BACK

A great way to maximize speaking time is to have each student complete a questionnaire for his/her partner and then summarize for the class what they have found out about this person: "Carla likes to play sports in her free time and is a huge baseball fan. She ..." The great thing about this type of activity is that you can use any tense or instruct them to use verbs for reporting.

5 MYSTERY TOPIC

A great way to get your students to put their deductive skills to the test! Give each pair of students a questionnaire with no title. Students work together to figure out what kind of questionnaire it is and what type of context you might find it in. For example, if the questionnaire asks a series of questions about eating habits (what students eat and drink and how often they do it) students will probably guess that this type of questionnaire might be used by a doctor, dietician or nutritionist.

6 GUESS WHO?

Students complete the questionnaire for themselves but leave out their names. You can then pass them around or put them up on a wall, and see if they can guess whose questionnaire each one is.

7 NOT TRUE!

Instruct your students to complete their questionnaires, but they must lie three times. Partners try to sniff out the lies. Another option is to have students lie as their partner asks the questions – he or she has to guess which statement is not true.

8 CRAZY QUESTIONS!

Have students compete to come up with the craziest questionnaire ever. In it, they should include questions that are virtually impossible to answer (How many times do you blink a day? How many times have you been sick since the day you were born? What was the first song you ever heard on the radio?) The goal here is not to answer these crazy questions – most of them are impossible to answer – but to encourage creativity while they use correct grammar and structure at the same time.

9 CELEBRITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Ask each student to answer the questions as a famous person or celebrity would. This is a great time to make use of some of your celebrity photos. Partners read the answers and try to guess which celebrity their classmate was pretending to be.

10 LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

It is quite common for magazine questionnaires to come with an answer key that assigns points for each type of answer. Then, based on the number of points, you fall into a particular category. Here's an example of an online quiz that tells you how environmentally friendly you are: www.gotoquiz.com/how_environmentally_friendly_are_you. And here's a printable version from the British Council - www.britishcouncil.org/kids-print-green-quiz.pdf, a quiz called How Green Are You? This type of quiz is a great lead in to a discussion about what we can do to conserve the planet's resources.

CREATE YOUR OWN, USE THOSE AVAILABLE ONLINE, OR PRINT SOME FROM BUSYTEACHER.ORG!

But be sure to include quizzes and questionnaires in your class every now and then. They're fun and may even shed some light on issues your students could be concerned about, like their health and the environment.

6 Methods to Help Students Improve Conversational Vocabulary

Many ESL students, particularly international students who are new to the U.S. but may have studied English for years in their home countries, come to college having some academic vocabulary, ability to read their texts, follow lectures, and participate in class discussion with some degree of ease, but they lack conversational English ability to use outside of class.

I noticed this in particular recently when, in greeting a student as he was leaving the student union and carrying a plate of junk food, he explained he did not often eat French fries, as he was now. I responded, "I'm glad to hear that: they're not good for you." He looked puzzled. "Good for me?" I assured him I did not mean him, personally: "you" often means "everyone" in everyday conversational English. This international student was a top student in class but struggled with simple conversations because of his lack of practice with native speakers of English. Many ESL students, both those who have lived in the U. S. as well as international students, share this dilemma, probably because it is more comfortable to read an English text than to try to participate in an actual conversation. However, even ESL students who are not planning to live in an English-speaking country would benefit from learning the vocabulary and structures of conversational English in order to carry on the casual conversations which occur even in academic and business settings. So what vocabulary and grammar should we teach, and how do we teach it to help students with their conversational English?

TERMS AND STRUCTURES OF CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH

1 CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH, AND CONVERSATION IN GENERAL, IS PERSONAL RATHER THAN IMPERSONAL.

Therefore, terms related to the speakers' immediate situations and lives are emphasized. Personal pronouns such as "I" and "you," for example, are prominent in conversational English while they are not in academic English. In fact, many college instructors go so far as to tell students not to use "I" in a formal paper. While I would not go to this extreme, it does demonstrate the personal/impersonal dichotomy between conversational and academic English.

2 CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH IS IMMEDIATE AND CONTEXT-DEPENDENT:

Therefore, terms related to the immediate context are emphasized. For example, it's typical to begin a conversation with a comment on the weather, or what one of the speakers is wearing, or what one of the speakers is doing — all related to the immediate situation and therefore "natural" for opening a conversation.

3 BREVITY.

Everyday conversations are generally relatively brief. As in the example shown earlier between me and my student outside the student union, a quick discussion about the student's lunch choice is fine: a more extended discourse on the nature of the American and Japanese diets would be inappropriate because most everyday conversations occur when the speakers are on the midst of some other activity, such as getting lunch between classes, and there is limited time for an in-depth conversation.

4 ROUTINES.

Related to brevity, conversational English is based on routines. For example, in running into a friend at the student union, there is a set of unspoken expectations about the conversational "routine" for this situation: "Hey! How's it going?" "Fine. Getting your lunch? How's it look today?" "Not so bad, but stay away from the fish. What class do you have next?" "Physics. Sorry, got to go!" Because these speakers are probably in a hurry in passing between classes, there is a specific "routine" that requires little time and thought – a greeting, some comment on the immediate situation, and a farewell. Deviation from the routine may result in confusion or annoyance.

SIX METHODS FOR TEACHING CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH

1 RAISE AWARENESS.

Students may be unaware of the difference between academic and conversational English. I like to give a few examples drawn from life or literature. A good one I just noted in a novel showed an older family member advising a younger about his affair with a married woman: "Be discrete." When the younger one asks what that means, his elder translates into conversational English "Don't get caught." English is full of examples like these: most utterances have both conversational and more formal or academic forms, such as the multiple ways to say "shut up": "Quiet, please," "You have the right to remain silent," and "Your silence is appreciated." Briefly discussing these differences demonstrates to students the differences between the academic and conversational.

2 MODEL.

Students from non-English speaking countries, while they may have studied English for years in classrooms, may have had very little real exposure to English in actual conversational use. Providing them models of this through short TV or YouTube clips showing speakers engaged in everyday English use will begin to close this gap.

Point out the routines the speakers go through: how they greet each other, how they develop the conversation, and then close it.

3 REAL WORLD USE:

Many students, particularly ESL students, are very reluctant to venture out into the world beyond the university. Because they are going to need to do this eventually, students should be encouraged in this direction. Send them out to shopping centers, bookstores, or coffeehouses to note how people engage in conversations in an actual real life setting. Have them come back to class ready to discuss new vocabulary or phrases they learned.

4 HAVE STUDENTS PRACTICE WITH EACH OTHER.

Once students have learned some of the language and structures of conversational English, have them practice with each other in pairs. Hold a class party in which students have to speak to multiple people or groups, just as in a real party.

5 PRACTICE IN REAL WORLD SETTINGS.

In this exercise, all students will have to sign up for one real-world setting, such as a party or a meeting, in which they will have to engage in conversational English. Have them bring back a short report on what happened to share with their classmates. This also provides some accountability for actually doing the exercise.

6 ASSESS STUDENTS.

Assessment does not have to mean a traditional pencil-and-paper test, which would make little sense for assessing conversational English and does not match the way students have been taught, in any case. Some alternate ways to assess are walking around the class while students are talking and noting how much time is spent in English or another language. Then the class can be brought back together so the instructor can discuss common concerns she noted. Students may also hold conversations before the rest of the class or with the instructor as part of assessment. A rubric should be used to note vocabulary and phrases used.

CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH IS OFTEN NOT SEEN AS IMPORTANT AS THE ACADEMIC, PERHAPS RIGHTLY SO AS IT IS THE ACADEMIC STUDENTS MOST IMMEDIATELY NEED TO SUCCEED AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL.

Nevertheless, conversational English is an important part of any student's experience in an English-speaking country and is therefore important to be taught.

Project Pronunciation: Perfecting Speaking Skills in Every Lesson

PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE SHOULD BE A NATURAL PART OF EVERY ESL LESSON.

Speaking correctly is such a huge part of learning English, varied and interesting pronunciation practice should include communication, correction, and lots of organic speaking opportunities.

PROJECT PRONUNCIATION: PERFECTING SPEAKING SKILLS IN EVERY LESSON

1 CORRECT, CORRECT, CORRECT

One of the most important aspects of any ESL classroom is creating a safe environment for learning where students are also corrected when they misspeak or make mistakes. This is especially important when approaching pronunciation because if students are allowed to make mistakes over and over again, they will develop bad habits that are difficult to break. In order to make corrections meaningful, students should repeat the correction on the spot immediately after the teacher corrects them. Students look to the teacher for consistent pronunciation correction because it establishes a level of trust: you are not going to allow them to speak incorrectly. So it is key for teachers to be able to correct with confidence and without stopping the flow of games or conversations. A good guideline for correcting pronunciation is to wait until you hear a student misspeak at least twice before jumping in to adjust the mistake. You have to seize the right moment to correct. Don't miss the opportunity to pass, but if you do miss your moment, be sure to snag the next chance. In addition, if you hear multiple students making the same mistake, it is time to not only correct, but to stop what you are doing to provide a short explanation of the correction.

2 READ IT ALOUD

It can sometimes be challenging to create stimulating reading activities that provide an equal amount of practice for all students. In order to practice pronunciation as well as vocabulary, stress and intonation students should spend some amount of class time reading aloud. This doesn't have to be as dry as it sounds. Make games out of it. One option is to divide the class in half, and have a short reading or conversation in front of all students. Each half of the class will take turns reading a sentence as a group. The groups will alternate quickly. To make it more fun have students stand as a group as they read their sentence uniformly. This game should move fast from group to group, and students should be encouraged to speak clearly, loudly, and enthusiastically. You can also throw in additional elements like asking students to read with a particular emotion or characteristic like sadly or egotistically!

Other ways to incorporate reading aloud is to build in rounds practice. Rounds practice is simply when students go around the room and individually practicing Q and A, specific grammar structures, or conversation topics. Students are generally given a structure to follow, but must create their own question, answer, or opinion. This encourages students to pay attention and to be present in class because they know that they will be expected to speak in each and every class. Incorporating rounds practice takes the pressure off speaking aloud because the expectation is the same for everyone, and it yields a range of different examples. It also gets students interacting with one another. The teacher will help if students get stuck, and students will also begin helping one another when they run into problems with grammar, pronunciation or understanding.

3 DICTIONARY GAMES

There are several ways to make using a dictionary fun and inspiring. Some of the best ways to do this are to create games that utilize a dictionary so that students not only practice pronunciation of new words, they also begin learning how to build vocabulary and remember new words.

To introduce dictionary work, make a team game out of quickly looking up words. You can do this by putting students into small groups and providing each group with an English dictionary. Then choose a word at random, say it to the students, and have them race to find it in their dictionaries. The first group to find the word reads out the definition and practices natural pronunciation as they go. To reward the winning group allow them to choose the next word to search. Before playing this game be sure that you have introduced how to locate words in a dictionary, and how to utilize the elements of the entries such as the pronunciation guide, the parts of speech, and the definitions. A variation on this game could be to write out a list of words on the board that the students must look up. That way they have to work out the pronunciation as well as locate the definition. To make this even more challenging, misspell some of the words, and have students make the corrections together.

One last idea to utilize dictionary work is to create an English Dictionary Word of the Day Wall. This works great for all levels, and you can have students contribute to it by writing down new words on color coded cards by part of speech. They can then write out the pronunciation and the meaning of the word before it gets posted on the wall. These dictionary tasks and games get students comfortable using dictionaries and empowers them to take control of their learning and pronunciation.

EACH AND EVERY ESL CLASS SHOULD INCORPORATE PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE WITH A VARIETY OF SPEAKING EXERCISES.

Students will increase their retention of grammar and vocabulary when they gain confidence about pronunciation.

What Your Students Need to Know About Body Language

WHILE WORDS MAY BE OUR MAIN FOCUS AS ESL TEACHERS, FOR THE STUDENT WHO TRULY WISHES TO COMMUNICATE WITH EASE, WE HAVE TO GO DEEPER. BODY LANGUAGE AND NONVERBAL CLUES ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT IN COMMUNICATION.

Some researchers claim that 60-90% of our communication comes from paralinguistic, that is beyond the words we say, clues. Body language includes posture, gestures, facial expressions and body language, and like so many other things, does not necessarily translate from one culture to another. Though linguistic fluency is probably your number one priority in your ESL class as it should be, you and your students will find it worthwhile taking a moment or two to talk about body language.

HERE'S WHAT YOUR STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BODY LANGUAGE

1 EYE CONTACT

Depending on the home cultures of your ESL students, they may have a very different understanding of eye contact than do native speakers of English. In some cultures, it is impolite to make eye contact with a superior. This gesture is seen as threatening, challenging or rude. Americans, however, interpret a lack of eye contact not as a sign on humility and respect, but as a sign of guilt, the inability to trust the speaker, or lack of intelligence. Encourage your students to make eye contact as they are speaking. Help them understand that eye contact when listening shows you are paying attention and care about what the other person has to say. Some students may struggle with making eye contact as they speak, but encourage them to try and praise any small accomplishments they make.

2 PERSONAL SPACE

Picture this conversation. An American teacher is speaking one on one with an international student. The teacher takes a step backwards. The student steps forward. The teacher takes another step back. The student takes another step forward. They continue, unknowingly, until they move from one side of the room to the other. This is a very real and common occurrence, and it is also an issue of personal space. Each culture has a distinct and subconscious distance that they prefer to keep between them and the people around them. For Americans, that distance is approximately two feet. Members of other cultures prefer different amounts. When ESL students are accustomed to a smaller amount of personal space than the native English speakers with which they interact, their listeners are likely to become uncomfortable quickly, even if they cannot say what it is that is making them uncomfortable. Making your students aware of what personal space is and how much distance English speakers like to keep between them and their conversations will make your students better received than they might be if they were close speakers. If personal space is an issue with your students, have them practice keeping appropriate personal space by having students mingle and make polite conversations with one another while you walk around the room and check their personal space.

3 MIRRORING

Mirroring is more than just checking your hair and lipstick on your way out of the house. Mirroring is a key way of communicating agreement or understanding during a conversation. Often without knowing it, speakers mirror the body language of the person with whom they are speaking. They lean back -- we lean back. They furrow their brow -- we furrow our brow. They smile -- we smile. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, we mimic the body language that we see. Mirroring body language can put a speaker at ease and show someone that you are on the same page emotionally. For students learning English as a second language, mirroring in conversation is important. Many people will wrongly assume a nonnative speaker cannot understand even the simplest of conversations. Students who learn to mirror their conversation partners, though, may earn themselves more credit in a conversation with a native speaker. This technique is particularly useful during professional conversations, such as job interviews, where the speaker is trying to make a strong first impression.

MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, YOUR STUDENTS SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT BODY LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT.

It can aid communication, set the mood for a conversation or help accomplish discourse goals. Being aware of their own body language as well as that of their listener can make all the difference in an important conversation. Talking about body language across cultures may be unusual, but it will ultimately help your students become better English communicators.

7 Great Go To Activities for Conversation Class

TRY THESE GREAT GO TO ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR NEXT CONVERSATION CLASS

1 TAG TEAM ROLE PLAY

The classic role play is one of the best activities for your conversation students. For a twist, have two students work as a team in one conversation. If one person gets stuck for ideas or just doesn't know what to say, he tags his partner in to take over the dialogue.

2 ROLE PLAY CHANGE UP

Have two students start a role play. After they have been talking for a few minutes, freeze the conversation, and have new students take their places. They should jump in as if they were one of the original players. Change players as many times in one conversation as you like.

3 PROBLEM SOLVED

Divide your class into two groups, and have each group choose one designated speaker for a role play. In the role play, present a problem to the speakers and challenge them to come to a mutual agreement. Make sure each team has a slightly different ideal outcome for the role play. Speakers can consult with their groups throughout the role play.

4 DIALOGUE

Give students time to think about what they want to say before they go in front of the class to say it. Have pairs of students write a dialogue (you might want to tie it into your current vocabulary unit) and then perform it for the class.

5 CREATIVE IMPROVISATION

Write your current vocabulary words on index cards, and have students pull two or three cards. Then, have two students improvise a dialogue, each racing to use his words in an appropriate context first. The first one to use all of his words wins.

6 MYSTERY PARTNER

Have one person role play the host of a party. Each guest (four or five other students) has a secret identity that the host must discover through conversations with them. Once the host correctly identifies each guest, the guest can sit down. Repeat the activity until everyone in class has had a chance to play either the party guest or host.

7 INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a great way for your students to practice their conversation skills. Start by having students interview their classmates, but move on to other students in the school as well as native speakers they run into on a daily basis.

7 More Go To Activities for Conversation Class

TRY THESE 7 MORE GO TO ACTIVITIES FOR CONVERSATION CLASS

1 TAKE A SURVEY

Short surveys give your students a chance to practice their English skills with different types of speakers. Have students write their own surveys with between five and ten questions and then approach other students at school or people walking on the street close to your location.

2 CLICHÉ CONVERSATIONS

Have your students take a cliché conversation from one of their text books (e.g. Hello, how are you? Fine, thank you, and you?) and rewrite it using more creative and original language. Looking for new ways to say familiar sentiments will challenge your students use of vocabulary and dialogue structure. Then, have each pair perform their dialogue in front of the class.

3 A PLEASANT CONTROVERSY

Controversial topics make great conversation starters among ESL students. Give students a topic on which they are likely to have strong feelings and listen to the quality of their English as they talk. The more emotional a person is when he talks, the more authentic level of language fluency will emerge. Listen for accents, grammar issues and other mistakes students might mask at other times.

4 THE NEXT CONTROVERSIAL STEP

Take your controversy conversation to the next level by holding a classroom debate. Divide your class into three teams, the pro side of the debate, the con side of the debate, and the judges who will determine the winning team. Each group should plan either their case or how they will judge the presenters. They then give their arguments or judgments at the appropriate times.

5 WOULD YOU RATHER?

Asking students a simple question is often enough to get them sharing thoughts and opinions. Ask students a question starting with 'Would you rather'. For example, 'Would you rather have a cat or a dog? Would you rather live a long life alone or a short life with loved ones? Would you rather have just peanut butter or just jelly?' Then, pair each student with someone of the opposite opinion and see what conversation emerges.

6 A PIECE OF THE PAST

Students will have plenty to talk about when they are sharing stories from their past. Ask students to share with a partner experiences that elicited a specific emotion: something that made you angry, sad, scared, or happy, for example.

7 ICE BREAKER BLOCKS

Write a unique ice breaker on each block of a tumbling block game (such as Jenga). While playing the game, students must answer the question on each block they pull before placing it at the top of the stack and moving to the next player.

7 New Go To Activities for Conversation Class

TRY THESE 7 NEW GO TO ACTIVITIES FOR CONVERSATION CLASS

1 A PICTURE'S WORTH

Give each student or pairs of students an unusual photograph (try worth1000.com for some unique ideas), and ask each person or pair to create a story to go along with the picture. After students have planned their stories, have them share their pictures and their stories with another student or pair of students in class.

2 CONVERSATION REDO

For intermediate and advanced students, have them identify a conversation in their past that was unsuccessful, perhaps when they were first learning to speak English. Give them a chance to redo that conversation by looking back, identifying their mistakes, determining how to avoid them the second time through, and then role play the conversation with a classmate.

3 TEACHER FOR A DAY

Let your students share their ideas on how to make class more interesting and engaging. Have pairs of students discuss an ideal day in your ESL class and then propose their ideas to you.

4 GET TO KNOW BINGO

For students just getting to know each other, play a unique version of Bingo. Brainstorm a list of exciting or interesting experiences students might have had, and have students write these experiences in the spaces on a blank Bingo board. On your signal, students mingle searching for someone who has done each of the activities on his Bingo board. The first person with five initialed affirmatives in a row shouts Bingo!

5 MAKING PLANS

Students will get lots of talking in when they make plans for an activity tied your current vocabulary unit. Have students plan a fieldtrip to a sports game, an elaborate holiday meal, details for room and board at a family reunion, or some other task that will use the vocabulary they are in the process of learning.

6 COMMUNAL STORY

Have students sit in a circle. One person starts a story with 'Once upon a time'. Each person adds two or three sentences to the story, keeping consistent with what his classmates have already said. Continue around the circle until the last student finishes with 'And they lived happily ever after'.

7 PROBLEM SOLVED

Asking for advice is something that everyone needs to do from time to time, and ESL students are no exception. Have your students ask each other for advice for any of several types of problems: relationship problems, educational problems, or business problems, for example.

7 Best Games for Your Next Conversation Class

TRY THESE 7 BEST GAMES FOR YOUR NEXT CONVERSATION CLASS

1 ICE BREAKER JENGA

Using a tumbling block game such as Jenga, create your own ice-breaker game. Write one simple icebreaker question on each block. When a student pulls the block from the stack on his turn, he must answer the question before placing the block at the top of the stack.

2 GET TO KNOW YOU BINGO

With your class brainstorm several characteristics a person might have (for example, fly in an airplane, have a younger sister, etc.). Students fill in their own empty bingo boards with these characteristics. Students then mingle asking their classmates if they have one of those characteristics. (Students may ask only one question before they must switch partners.) If the student's answer is 'yes', that student initials his classmate's board. The first student with five initials in a row shouts, 'BINGO!' and wins the game.

3 MYSTERY PARTY GUEST

Assign each of about five students a secret identity. One at a time, these students enter a party where another student is playing host. The host must determine the identity of each guest by having party type conversations with each person.

4 20 QUESTIONS

One student chooses an object. The rest of the class takes turns asking yes/no questions to determine what the object is. After 20 questions, if the class has not guessed the object the student who chose the object wins.

5 CREATE A GAME

Get students talking to each other by making up their own board game. Start a collection of assorted board game pieces, then challenge groups of 3-4 students to make up their own game using them. They must also explain the game to the rest of the class.

6 APPLES TO APPLES

In this game, students play cards that they think relate to one another. The judge in each round of play lays down a card, and the other players must choose the card they think are related to the first one. The judge chooses the card that is most appropriate and then must explain his reasoning behind the choice.

7 CHOOSE YOUR VICTIM

Choose a specific grammar point to practice and arrange your students in a circle. The first person asks a question using the grammatical structure and then tosses a ball to another student, who answers the question. If he answers correctly, he asks a question to another student and tosses the ball. If he answers incorrectly, he must return the ball and sit down. The last student standing wins.

7 More Great Games for the ESL Classroom

TRY THESE 7 MORE GREAT GAMES FOR YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1 JEOPARDY

Put the answers up on the board (tape a sheet of paper over each one until you are ready to reveal it) and get your students to give you the questions. This game is great for reviewing content material or for practicing question formation in the different tenses.

2 MODIFIED BANANAGRAMS

Starting with 11 tiles from a Bananagrams game, have pairs of students work to use all their tiles in one crossword style grid. Have students add one tile at a time, arranging and rearranging the letters and words as necessary to incorporate the new tile. Continue until all the tiles are used. The team that uses the most letters in their grid wins.

3 SCRABBLE SLAM

Using a deck of lettered cards, students make words consisting of four letters. Use the game to expose your students to new vocabulary or help them learn predictable spelling patters in English.

4 UNSCRAMBLED EGGS

To practice spelling relay race style, fill 12 plastic eggs with the letters your students will need to spell each of 12 vocabulary words (use game tiles or small slips of paper). Students race to the eggs, choose one, spell the correct word and race back to tag the next person. The first team to correctly unscramble all 12 eggs wins.

5 SPELLING PONG

Write letters on the bottoms of several plastic cups. Students take turns bouncing a ping-pong ball into the cups and collecting the letter on the bottom of the cup. They can then use the letters they collect to spell a word. Play continues until every student is able to spell a word with at least three letters using the ones he or she collected from the cups.

6 SPELLING B

With no preparation, you can test your students spelling knowledge. Introduce new vocabulary and teach your students standard spelling patterns with this elimination game. Give two teams of students one word at a time to spell (use a mixture of familiar and unfamiliar words). A mistake causes the player to sit down. The last student standing is the winner.

7 SIMON SAYS

Students practice their listening and vocabulary skills when you give directions in this classic children's game. Start most commands with Simon says and then see if your students can follow your directions. If you do not start with 'Simon says' students should not follow the command. Anyone who does must sit down. The last student standing is the winner.

7 Easy Icebreakers You Can Do With Post-It Notes

TRY THESE 7 EASY ICEBREAKERS YOU CAN DO WITH POST-IT NOTES

1 HIDDEN TREASURE

Write several icebreaker questions on the sticky side of post-it notes and stick them to the board. Have each student take turns choosing one sticky note and answering the question on the back. He can then choose another student in the class to answer the same question.

2 TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

Give each student three post-it notes. On two notes, she writes something true about herself. On the third, she writes something false about herself. Students share in groups of four to five and try to guess which statement is each player's lie.

3 QUESTION MIXER

Write the name of one well known person on a sticky note, and write enough so everyone in class has one. Stick a note to each persons back. Students ask classmates one yes/no question at a time until they have figured out who is on their back.

4 WHERE ARE YOU FROM

For a class of internationals, give each person a post-it note flag to place on their home country on your classroom world map. After everyone has placed their post-it, students try to guess whose note is whose.

5 GET TO KNOW YOU

Have each person write five facts about himself or herself on a post-it note, and then put the notes on the board. Make sure you write one, too. Then, choose one post-it and read it aloud. Try to guess which student wrote it. When you get the right student, that person takes a turn with the remaining notes. Continue until all the notes are gone.

6 A MATCHED SET

Have your students write five fun facts about themselves and turn the paper in to you. Then, write each fact on a post-it along with a matching one with that students name. When your students are not in the room, put the post-its all around your classroom. Students must then race to match the names with the correct facts (they cannot match their own name). The person with the most matches at the end of the game wins.

7 ALL-STAR CLASS

Once your students are beginning to get to know each other, have each person draw a self portrait and display them on a bulletin board in class. Each person writes a positive adjective describing each of his classmates on a star shaped sticky note and sticks it to the self portrait. Do this activity in one day or over a period of time, and then let students take their portraits home.

7 Simple Learning Centers You Can Do With Post-It Notes

TRY THESE 7 SIMPLE LEARNING CENTERS YOU CAN DO WITH POST-IT NOTES

1 PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES

Visuals are great for ESL students, and post-it notes can be just what your students need when it comes to prefixes and suffixes. Starting with a base word written on a post-it, have students add prefixes and suffixes to the word, each written on its own post-it. Or reverse the process and have them break down a longer word. Want a real challenge? Try breaking down the longest word in the English language: antidisestablishmentarianism!

2 STUDENT NEWS

Post a laminated piece of poster board in a corner of your room. Label it The News Nook and explain to your students that they can write a short note about something in their lives. If a student has a piece of news to share, give him or her a post-it and ask the student write the news there. Tell students to include their name at the end when they write a note. Encourage the rest of the class to read the notes, and make sure you read them, too. At the end of the week, return the notes to your students and start fresh on Monday.

3 CONTENT REVIEW

Give your students a self review by writing a question on one post-it and the answer on another. In a folder, stick the answer and then the question on top of it. Students can review the content information by reading the question and self-checking with the answer underneath it.

4 ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Write a series of words on post-it notes. (You may want to use current vocabulary words.) Students put the words in alphabetical order on a flip chart. When finished, students can check the answers on the next page of the chart and then re-scramble the words for the next student.

5 AND THE ANSWER IS

Tap into your students creativity with the answer of the day center. Simply write an answer on a post-it note and put it at the center each day. Your students then use their creativity and question writing skills to write the questions it might answer.

6 BECOMING EXPERTS

Challenge your students to become an expert on a new vocabulary term. Write several words on post-it notes and display them in a learning center. Each person chooses one, writes his name on the note, and researches that word until he feels he is an expert. Then, he explains that word to the rest of the class when you review the vocabulary set.

7 SENTENCE EXPLOSION

Take a famous quote and write each word on a separate post-it. Then display the words in your learning center. Students must either group the words by part of speech or arrange them in logical order to reassemble the quotation.

How to Use Fieldtrips for Effective Speaking Lessons

It's time to talk, for your students that is. That's because they are in your speaking class. You pride yourself on making class exiting and engaging. You want your students to talk more than you do, and you see them improving their English speaking abilities every day. Sometimes, though, it's just time to get out of the classroom. Other teachers get frustrated, feeling they cannot take their speaking class outside the classroom walls, but you know better. You know that field trips can be one of the greatest assets to your speaking curriculum. And even if you don't quite know how to make the most of field trips for your speaking class yet, you will when you use the following ideas.

4 REASONS TO USE FIELDTRIPS FOR SPEAKING LESSONS

1 FIELD TRIPS ARE REAL

The speaking that your students do on a field trip is real. Not to say that speaking in the classroom isn't, but sometimes fabricated classroom exercises can come off a little artificial. When your students speak during a field trip, they are in real contexts talking to real people. The type of language they use has a clear purpose – communicating with the people around them. Not only that, the places where they are having the conversations are more real. Your students may encounter background noise or other challenges that they have not experienced in the classroom. This will be challenging as they listen and as they speak, but when they do their language skills are sure to improve.

To use the reality of field trips to your advantage, don't try and make things easier for your students. Challenge them to communicate even though their surroundings may be less than ideal. Encourage them to raise their voices when necessary or use the language they do know in creative ways. Show them how to ask questions appropriately, both in the words that they use and the body language that comes along with them.

2 FIELD TRIPS PROVIDE CONNECTIONS

Getting your students out into a non-classrom context gives them a chance to make different and tangible connections with the material you are teaching. If your speaking class is anything like mine have been, you teach along thematic units. When your field trip ties into those themes, your students can make concrete connections with language that might otherwise be intangible. They can see, feel, smell and fully experience the context, and that experience will help their language knowledge really stick.

When you can, tie in your field trips thematically. Getting tours or a sporting location, office facility or restaurant would tie into units on sports, business and food. Teach your students the vocabulary beforehand, but point out the tie-ins when you are on your field trip. If possible, give your students a chance to touch objects, move around the environment and experience their surroundings with every sense they possess. Your students will remember the meaning of "sour" better when they bite into a lemon wedge, and because they shouted into an empty theater from the stage, they will remember the meaning of "echo". The more your students experience the context, the better they will retain the knowledge about it.

3 FIELD TRIPS PROVIDE VARIETY

You can do so many different speaking activities with your students when you guide them out of the classroom and into the world. Doing interviews is an easy one. When your students are getting a tour of an unusual place or meeting interesting people at those places, require your students to ask questions. If possible, arrange one on one interviews and help your students prepare before the trip. Before you take your trip, have students discuss their expectations and make predictions about the trip and what they will learn. After the trip, have students discuss their predictions and whether they were wrong or right. Have them talk about the things they learned and make a list of things they would still like to know. You may even want to have your students do follow up interviews to get that additional information or to do research on a related topic. Your students will continue to make connections between the information they already know and the new language they are learning when they are using language for practical purposes with clear goals.

4 FIELD TRIPS ARE INTERESTING

Field trips have one more important quality to offer your ESL students: excitement. If your students have travelled overseas to study English, a field trip can be an exciting way to see into the world around them. It can be a lesson in culture or a reminder of home. In either case, field trips will engage and interest your students, and happy students are better learners. Most students are excited to talk about what they have learned and what they experienced on their fiddle trips. And that enthusiasm can be just what you need to maintain or increase momentum in your class. Use the memories your students make during the field trip to spark discussions on interesting topics. Bring culture into your discussions, and let your students talk about the challenges they faced when they were out in the real world.

WHETHER YOU ARE AN EXPERIENCED ESL TEACHER OR ARE NEW ON THE JOB, YOU SEE THE BENEFITS OF FIELD TRIPS FOR STUDENTS IN YOUR SPEAKING CLASS. IN FACT, THE MORE YOU USE FIELD TRIPS TO ENCOURAGE REAL, AUTHENTIC AND MEMORABLE LANGUAGE USE, THE MORE YOU WILL WANT TO INCLUDE THEM IN YOUR LESSON PLANS. AND WHEN YOU DO, EVERYONE WILL EXPERIENCE THE BENEFITS.

So Many Ways to Say I'm Sorry: Teaching Apologies

EVERYBODY MAKES MISTAKES. IT'S A FACT OF LIFE, AND WE ALL HAVE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO EXPRESS OUR REGRET FROM TIME TO TIME.
So how do you teach your ESL students how to apologize in English? After all, not every culture has the same expectations when it comes to apologies. In U.S. culture, a good apology contains 6 parts.

Here is the anatomy of a good apology that you can present to your ESL students when they are learning to say I'm sorry.

THE ANATOMY OF A GOOD APOLOGY

1 A REQUEST FOR THEIR ATTENTION

Before apologizing, the offender needs to ask the offended for their attention. Depending on who the offended person is, the request may be casual, informal or formal. A person might start with a phrase like 'excuse me, can we talk about something', or 'I wanted to talk to you about what happened yesterday'.

2 AN ADMISSION OF WHAT HAPPENED

The next step in apologizing is to state what happened without making excuses. The speaker might say something like 'I know I hurt your feelings', 'I caused a problem', or 'I forgot to do something'. The speaker should be honest and respectful of the other person.

3 A SINCERE ADMISSION

The third piece of an apology is a sincere admission that you did something wrong. The apologizer can say something like 'I messed up', 'I made a mistake', or 'I should not have done that'. The more specific the speaker can be, the better received the apology will be.

4 THE APOLOGY

Step four is the actual apology. These words are what makes an apology an apology. The speaker should say 'I'm sorry' or 'I apologize'. Speakers should be careful to say 'I'm sorry I ...' rather than 'I'm sorry you ...' or 'I'm sorry if ...' The two latter phrases are likely to cause more offence or increase anger in the already offended.

5 SOME HUMOR (OPTIONAL)

Depending on how close the apologizer is to the offended person, he might choose to include humor to lighten the mood. This can help diffuse a tense atmosphere or melt the anger of the offended person. Particularly helpful is self deprecating humor, something that pokes fun at the person who offended.

6 TIME TO FORGIVE

Finally, the offended person should have time to forgive the offender. Depending on how serious the situation is, this may take seconds or days or even longer. Someone offering a good apology gives the other person time to resolve his or her feelings and seek reunification. It is key to avoid putting pressure on the offended party.

NOW THAT YOUR STUDENTS KNOW WHAT THEY SHOULD INCLUDE IN A GOOD APOLOGY, GIVE THEM A CHANCE TO PRACTICE.
Role plays are great for this type of language practice. Start by brainstorming with your class different situations that would demand an apology like the ones below. These situations should range from the minor inconveniences, honest mistakes and serious offences.

Then brainstorm a list of phrases your students might use when making apologies in each of these situations. Once students have a plan and the vocabulary for their apology, have pairs of students choose a situation and role play an apology to one another. Make sure each student plays the role of the offender and the offended. If you like, have students come to the front of the class and perform their apologies for the class. This can be a fun activity for particularly dramatic students, and you can encourage entertainment and humor.

MINOR INCONVENIENCES
Stepping on someone's foot
Arriving late for class
Receiving the wrong food at a restaurant

HONEST MISTAKES
Forgetting to do something
Offending another person
Damaging something accidently

SERIOUS OFFENSES
Cheating on a spouse
Stealing something
Intentionally hurting someone

I Hate to Bother You But: 5 Activities to Practice Polite Requests

Do your students know the following expression? 'It's easier to attract bees with honey than with vinegar.'
Write this proverb on the board and talk about what they think it means, then tell them the real meaning. Do your students have similar phrases in their native languages? Give your students a chance to share their thoughts. Then move into the topic of making polite requests. Polite requests are useful for setting people at ease and still getting the assistance you need. Different cultures make polite requests using different tools, and English is no exception. Here are the basics of making polite requests in English and some in class activities you can use for practice.

TRY THESE 5 FAST ACTIVITIES TO PRACTICE POLITE REQUESTS

The most common way of making a polite request is using the modals 'could' and 'would'. Could you do me a favor? Would you pass the salt? These are simple grammatical structures for polite requests. Show your students how these words make a potentially offensive command (Come here!) into a polite request. (Could you come here?) Let your students practice these constructions with the activities explained below.

1 A STEP FURTHER

Once your students are comfortable with the simple could/would request constructions, introduce other means of making a polite request. You should include the following phrases. You may want to focus on using these phrases in one or more of your in class request activities.

Please...
I'd like...
Do you mind...
May I...
Shall we...

2 FAVORS CONTEST

With your students, make a list of 10 to 20 items in the room. If possible, write the items on small slips of paper and put them in a hat: you will then use them for this fun and competitive game. Divide your class into two teams. For each round of the game, have one student from each team come to the front of the room. One person draws an object from the hat. The two students then take turns making requests related to that object and using that object in the sentence. For example, if the object is pencil, students may ask questions like the following: Could I borrow a pencil? Would you mind lending me a pencil? Could you hand me that pencil? Etc. When a student can no longer think of a request associated with the object, the round is over and the other team scores a point. Once you have gone through all the items on the list, the team with the most points scores. This is not only a great way of practicing polite requests: it is also a fun way of reviewing vocabulary.

3 LOCATION FAVORS

Have your students practice using polite requests with this inverted 20-questions style game. Each person thinks of a location. It can be anything from the ordinary (like a library) to the extraordinary (like the inside of a volcano). The student who selected the place asks polite requests of her classmates, but these requests should be those she might ask if she were in the mystery location. The student gives one request at a time while the rest of the class tries to guess where her secret location is. The student who guesses correctly gets to play next. If the student leader gives 20 requests and the class is still unable to guess the location, that student wins the round. Continue until everyone in the class has had a turn to hint about their mystery location.

4 CAREER HELP

Have pairs of students work together to brainstorm a list of as many occupations as they can. Once they have completed their list, have the two students write a dialogue which includes as many requests as possible. Each dialogue should feature one of the careers they listed in their brainstorming session and should use a variety of methods for making polite requests.

5 POLITE TRANSFORMATION

Have each student make a list of 10 commands. You may want to review how to express commands in English by dropping "you" in a sentence. Then, have students exchange papers and rewrite the commands using polite expressions. After students have rewritten the commands as polite requests, have a class discussion about the advantages to making a polite request rather than a command. You may want to circle your discussion back to the proverb you discussed at the beginning of the class period.

"Huh? What Did You Say?" Teaching Students to Ask for Clarification

One day I was preparing my students to go out and survey university students on campus. We were reviewing tips for speaking with native speakers.
Me: "What do you say if someone says something you don't understand?"
Students: "I'm sorry. Can you say that again?"
Me: "Good. Now what do you say if you still don't understand them?"
Students (in unison): "You say 'Thank you. Have a nice day' and run away."

I had to laugh. We've all been there. When you have to ask someone to repeat something more than once, it's easier just to run away or smile and nod and hope they didn't ask anything that requires a real response. Non-native speaking students encounter this problem frequently in their daily life and need to be equipped with the necessary tools to avoid a breakdown should they run into problems. Here are some tips to consider when teaching students how to ask for clarification

HOW TO TEACH STUDENTS TO ASK FOR CLARIFICATION

1 TEACH THE CULTURAL NORM

There isn't just one way to let someone know that you didn't understand. The culturally appropriate response may vary based on geographical location, formality of the situation, and type of relationship between the speakers. For example, when talking with close friends, it's appropriate to say, "Huh?" If you're in the southern U.S., the best response is "Ma'am?" or "Sir?" Explain to your students the importance of register and teach a variety of ways to indicate confusion such as the following:

I'm sorry. Could you repeat that please?
I'm sorry I didn't hear you. Could you please say that again slowly?
You said... ?
Did you say X or Y?
Pardon?
Excuse me?
What was that?
Say that again please?
I'm sorry, I don't understand what _____ means.

Be sure to tell them that certain common expression can have other meanings. For example, if students responded with "What did you say?" the listener might be confused and think that the student was offended rather than confused. This is also a good time to bring up intonation.

2 IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED - WRITE IT DOWN!

Asking someone to repeat themselves once is normal. Twice can be a bit daunting because you may end up having to ask a third time. If students are feeling nervous and really unsure of what the speaker said after the first time, tell students to ask the person to write it down. Tell students to keep a small notebook and pen with them at all times. If the person writes it down, not only will they be able to better understand, they will have a running list of complicated words and phrases that they can then bring back to class for further review.

3 SPEAK HOW YOU WANT TO BE SPOKEN TO

If someone at a restaurant or a store is speaking too quickly for students, instruct students to speak louder and more slowly themselves. Often we emulate the people we are talking to, so if your students speak louder and slower, the person they are interacting with may as well. This will prevent the need for asking for clarification and hopefully avoid any embarrassing situations.

4 DON'T PANIC!

The easiest thing to do is get frustrated and give up, but the only way to improve is to continue to try. Instruct students not to panic if they encounter a complicated listening situation. If they panic, they won't be able to concentrate on what the speaker is saying, and their listening comprehension will only worsen. Remind students that listening takes practice and inevitably they will encounter a situation where they can't understand someone. If you keep enforcing the idea that this is normal, they will feel less anxious when encountering these situations in real life.

HOW TO PRACTICE IN THE CLASSROOM

1 CREATE ROLE PLAYS

Design situations and role plays where one student misunderstands the other. After teaching the various ways to ask for clarification, have students practice several of these phrases in role plays. Suggested role plays:

Customer service representative on the phone
Fast food worker and customer
Business meeting negotiations
Teacher and student regarding missed homework assignment
Doctor's receptionist scheduling an appointment for a patient
Bank teller and someone wanting to open a new account

2 USE CELL PHONES

Have students practice the above role plays on their phones in different rooms. Phone conversations can be the most difficult (for native speakers too!) because there are no body language cues, and students must rely just on their listening comprehension. Since students love their cell phones so much, have some students leave the room and then call each other.

3 MISSING INFORMATION SCENARIOS

Using various role plays, give students key information for the role plays. Students need to practice filling in missing information, like phone numbers or addresses and must ask clarifying questions to get the information.

4 PRACTICE WITH NEW VOCABULARY WORDS

Sometimes listening confusion happens because of poor listening skills, but

sometimes it's because of a limited vocabulary. To practice asking about specific vocabulary related misunderstandings, do role plays with complex or new vocabulary. Give each student a list of new vocabulary words along with the definitions. If you have very advanced students, you could also use nonsense words. During the role plays, have students use these new vocabulary words in their lines, thus prompting the other student to ask for the definition of that word.

5 SHARE LEARNING STORIES

Language learning is full of mishaps and misunderstandings, and while they may be embarrassing at the time, they often make for great stories later! Encourage your students to share with each other some funny instances of not understanding to help them feel more comfortable with the idea that they won't always understand everything.

6 TEACH WRITING MISCOMMUNICATION

Misunderstandings aren't limited to spoken interaction. Plenty of e-mails and letters can result in miscommunication as well, even more so due to the lack of intonation. Have some time to practice writing clarification questions in e-mails as well. Explain that writing is generally more formal, so they should use the more formal forms of asking for clarification.

7 TEACH REAL LISTENING

Too often, the listening dialogues presented in books don't reflect what's actually spoken. For example, a dialogue in a fast food restaurant as shown in a book might look like this:

Cashier: Hello. Welcome to Fast Food Heaven. What would you like to order?
Customer: I would like a number 5 please.
Cashier: Would you like fries or a salad with that?
Customer: I would like fries please.
Cashier: What would you like to drink?
Customer: A coke.
Cashier: Great. So that's a number 5 with fries and a coke. Your total is $6.95. Are you paying with cash or credit card?
Customer: Cash. Here you go.
Cashier: Thank you. Your order can be picked up at the end of the counter. Have a great day.

When in reality, most fast food conversations go like this:

Cashier: Hi.
Customer: Can I have a number 5 please?
Cashier: Fries or salad?
Customer: Fries.
Cashier: Drink?
Customer: A coke.
Cashier: $6.95.
Customer: Ok.
Cashier: Pick it up over there.

Prepare your students with real dialogue practice so they won't be overly flustered or confused when cashiers don't speak how they thought they would. The more prepared they can be, the better they will be able to comprehend.

NOT UNDERSTANDING SOMEONE WHEN THEY SPEAK IS A PART OF DAILY LIFE FOR ALL OF US.

To help with the lack of cultural understanding and language difficulties, we need to arm our students with back-up plans by teaching them phrases and expectations for listening in the real world.

Achieving Natural Language at the Intermediate Level

ONCE STUDENTS EVOLVE INTO INTERMEDIATE LEVEL SPEAKERS, THEY ARE READY FOR A LOT MORE NATURAL LANGUAGE PRACTICE.

It might seem daunting to veer students away from the safety of scripted or very predictable language, but revving students up about utilizing natural language isn't as hard as it seems.

HOW TO ACHIEVE NATURAL LANGUAGE AT THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

1 SMALL TALK OPENERS

When students begin to speak with some amount of fluency and have mastered some really tough grammar topics, they are definitely ready to learn the art form of small talk. Providing small talk amongst students at the beginning and end of every class can be a very organic way to get them speaking naturally. Step back from goal-setting with students for these warmers or wrap-ups and simply begin some small talk casually and conversationally. It is common for people to talk about their weekend plans or experiences, ask how someone is feeling that has been ill, or ask for a restaurant reference. You can have goals in the back of your mind for your small talk exercises, but don't control the conversation -- let if flow.

Using small talk openers can also teach new expressions in a natural way and students can choose to write them down, use them outside of class, or utilize them in-class. You may also want to have conversations about small talk. Define what it is, ask them to point out times in the class when they have experienced small talk, and ask them if they use it in the real world. Brainstorm small talk openers with students, and then sprinkle those in to your warmers and wrap-ups. There are a lot of options for also creating lessons around situational small talk if you would like students to delve more deeply into it, or in challenging them to come up with new ways to utilize small talk.

Some great openers to consider introducing or bringing up are:

How's it going today, class?
What's happening this weekend?
Did you know there is ... (a concert in the park.)..this ... (Saturday)?
Is this seat taken?
Do you mind if I ask you where you got that....(blouse, purse, etc)?
This weather is crazy. Is it always this hot in the summer?

There are so many variables as to how you can phrase small talk, and what you might come across to introduce. Students should learn how to politely answer unexpected questions, ask for clarification if they don't really understand, and employ strategies to continue a conversation that begins this way. Let your students take the lead on small talk, and make it a usual occurrence in the classroom.

2 OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Have you noticed that intermediate level students love to ask questions? They are curious, want to find out personal details, and enjoy showing off their language skills. Use this to your advantage and do varied exercises with open-ended questions. So often students are accustomed to asking yes or no questions which really doesn't jump-start any kind of thought-provoking conversation. One example that you could bring in to illustrate what you mean is to role play a teenager talking to his or her parent. This can be fun to do whether you have a class of adults or teens. It will drive the point home that you will only get substantial information if you use open-ended questions. It also displays how in conversation, we need to really listen to the other person, ask follow-up questions, and show interest in what the other person is saying. For the teen to parent role play, simply ask for two volunteers. One student will be the parent, who really wants to connect with their teen. That student asks a lot of closed questions. Student Two is the bored and annoyed teenager who just wants to evade the questions, give non-answers, or the shortest answers possible.

Here's an example of what your volunteers might say:

Parent: "How was school today?"
Teen: "Fine."
Parent: "Did you enjoy gym class?"
Teen: "No." (eye roll)
Parent: "Are you hungry?"
Teen: "A little."

This could go on for a little while until you tell them to stop. Ask the class for their observations. Discuss what the parent did wrong, and the missed opportunities to get more information or to engage their teenager. After a good discussion, have students do another role play with this scenario and see how it changes when open-ended questions are used. You could first brainstorm with the class things the parent could have said differently, and get them thinking about how to phrase open-ended questions.

A few examples could be:

What did you do today/at school/?
Why didn't you enjoy...?
What was the best/worst part of your day?
I'm sorry you didn't have fun in gym class. What was so horrible about it?

After the introduction of open-ended questions, make a point to have students practice this with one another as often as possible. Point out missed opportunities, or ask them how they could get more information when they forget to use this method.

3 TASK-CENTERED SPEAKING

Task-centered speaking gives students the freedom to craft language that is all their own, while still carrying out a task or accomplishing an outcome. Get into the habit of formu-

lating activities that allow students to use language in this way as often as you can manage it. Outcome-based speaking works really well for mingling activities, small group discussions, and games. Define the outcome clearly for the students either as a group or individually, and give students reminders throughout the activity. If you are giving individual outcomes to students, it can be entertaining to keep those private until the end of the activity. Challenge students to discern what all the tasks were. Don't forget to address the tasks during the wrap-up of activities. You could also sometimes have students formulate tasks for themselves or one another. Examples of task-driven work might be challenging, creative, simple or adventurous.

Include things like:

Speak only in the third person for this whole exercise.
Use tag questions as much as possible
Get information using conditionals
Speak quietly/loudly/angrily/romantically (fun to assign each student a different adverb)

ACHIEVING NATURAL LANGUAGE WITHIN PERIMETERS IS CHALLENGING, BUT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BORING.

Excite students by implementing these strategies to produce natural language and see them take off in all kinds of interesting directions.

3 Determined Discussion Strategies for Intermediate Students

INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS HAVE A LOT OF SKILLS TO LEARN AND DEVELOP. One key ingredient to their success is receiving constructive discussion opportunities. Employ these 3 determined discussion strategies to get your students talking up a storm.

TRY THESE 3 DETERMINED DISCUSSION STRATEGIES

1 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

A wonderful jumping off discussion topic is similarities and differences. It will be stimulating for student to examine characteristics, traits, facts, and descriptive language all in one activity. The point of discussing similarities and differences is to compare and contrast very different or even very similar objects, people, or emotions . First brainstorm a list of thirty to forty elements with your students. These could include famous people, animals, places, weather, food items, or anything else that your students can think of. Some examples could be: *Julia Roberts, ice cream, zebra, sunshine, love, rainbow, coffee, Africa, etc.*

Once you have a comprehensive list, write them out on separate cards. Have one student draw two cards. The class must then come up with as many similarities and differences that they can for the two things called out. If you want to add a competitive element, split students into teams. The last element of this discussion exercise is to inform the students that each item on their lists can be challenged by the other team. Students will have to defend their statements, provide examples, and apply reasoning as to why their comparisons makes sense. This is a high-energy activity that allows students to devise creative and unusual statements.

2 DIFFICULT SITUATIONS AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

A wonderful activity that evokes active listening and careful speaking is the topic of difficult situations and problem-solving. These activities bring to the center stage useful topics like question-creation, modals, and conditionals. When students have been in a class together for awhile, they develop very supportive relationships. Approaching difficult situations not only facilitates hearty conversation, but it also helps strengthen those classmate relations and addresses sensitive material. As the teacher, you can be the judge of whether to present the situations based on classroom dynamics or hypothetical examples.

A natural way to introduce problem-solving is to present the class with a problem. If you are in another country, maybe it is a question or problem you have with a cultural difference. It could be a tough decision that you need to make, or some kind of moral dilemma. Choose what you think your group will respond to, but no matter what, make it personal and real. Present your dilemma in a conversational tone, and then ask the students for their thoughts and suggestions. This example should display to students that they need to ask questions to gain background information, and that they should try to view the issue from your perspective. One last point to make is that there are no easy answers. Once you have done your introduction, you can ask students to describe a difficult situation they have dealt with in the past or one they might be experiencing at the moment.

Before you ask them to get personal, you could do a speaking exercise to warm them up called 'what would you do if'. List out possible scenarios like:

What would you do if...
You saw your best friend steal something?
You really like your brother's girlfriend?
You found $300 in the bathroom at the mall?

With this exercise you can also have students add in hypothetical background information. Ask students to create sample scenarios based on the questions. For example 'you saw your best friend steal'. What did he/she steal? Was it something he/she really needed, but could not afford? Where did he/she steal it from? If you do this exercise first, it may naturally evolve into the students sharing their own similar experiences.

3 FINISH THIS SENTENCE

'Finish this sentence' can be a quick discussion activity or you can employ strategies to make it more complex. However you decide to incorporate it, it will give your students the opportunity to express themselves, question one another, and explain why they answered the way that they did. You can do a list of these or spread them out throughout a period of time. Come up with a list of sentences that the students must complete, so that you have it ready to go whenever you decide to jump into it. This is one of those activities that could become a standard part of your class where you put one on the board and have a short discussion. Some examples are:

My/Teacher's best quality is...
Our class is....
Our country is...
This year is....
This class is important because...
The most important thing in life is...

Students go around the room and profess their answers to the questions. No two students can have identical answers, so if it has already been said, students need to formulate a different answer. For each answer provided, students in the class should ask as many questions to one student that they can think of in one minute. For example if I say, "My best quality is my honesty," students would then fire questions at me, such as: Why do you think honesty is your best quality? Can you give an example of this? Do you think your spouse/mother/brother would agree? Why is honesty a good quality? And so it goes until time runs out, and then the next student answers questions regarding his or her answer.

One other way to perform this activity is for students to fill in the blank individually, but as a class they must decide on only one answer that everyone agrees is the best possible answer. This promotes honest discussion, and the students must work together to formulate their best answer as a group.

DISCUSSION FOR INTERMEDIATE LEVEL STUDENTS SHOULD ENCOMPASS NATURAL LANGUAGE, PRACTICE OF KNOWN STRUCTURES, AND A SAFE ENVIRONMENT. Take these three discussion options and adapt them to your particular group for the best, chattiest results!

3 Spectacular Speaking Activities for Advanced Learners

Teaching advanced learners is incredibly fun and rewarding, but sometimes it can feel like they have mastered everything you could possibly teach them. When it comes to communicating, there is always more they can learn to reach the highest fluency level possible. Try these 3 spectacular speaking activities and watch their skills evolve to a new height.

TRY THESE 3 SPECTACULAR SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

1 OPEN DISCUSSION

Open discussion is essential for advanced students to create and experience natural language. The guidelines for open discussion might vary from group to group, but the main elements should remain: each lesson students are exposed to a certain amount of conversation time that is not mediated, where correction does not take place, and where topics are allowed to ramble on according to the whim of the class. Students should lead these open discussions, and in facilitating true open discussion, you want to have some goals and outcomes that the students are aiming for, but do not exactly map out how they are going to get there. These outcomes can be quite generalized, structured around topics and could change for each discussion. You can get ideas from observing students during class time and examining what they need to practice, where there are questions, and what the group on a whole is interested in. An outcome could be as simple and general as, “in this discussion, see how many idioms you can work into the conversation without forcing it.” Another example outcome could be, “Try not to talk about yourself. Learn about others while speaking during this discussion.” Involve students in the outcomes as they have wonderful ideas as well. Sometimes as teachers, it is difficult to let go of the grammar reigns and allow students to speak without a particular structure or usage in mind. This is particularly what advanced students need and crave. This is not to say that open discussion is a free-for-all in which classroom rules and etiquette do not apply. On the contrary, open discussion is a vehicle for students to communicate with one another within appropriate guidelines while learning a lot about applying usage in practical application.

2 MATCHMAKING

Discussion exercises that focus on relationships can open up a whole new realm of possibilities for advanced level English speakers. There are a number of ways to bring in the topic of relationships and/or dating in advanced classes. One way to have students explore these topics is to do some version of a matchmaking exercise. Matchmaking exercises work well because students will use a lot of varied language concepts while not taking themselves or the activity too seriously. This is also a topic everyone is interested in, whether they admit it or not, and you can pick and choose which elements students are expected to focus on. Matchmaking activities encompass topics like characteristics, dating challenges, preferences, past experiences, and future expectations. One possibility is to ask the students to create a dating profile or synopsis for another student in the class. This could be accomplished in an interview format where students first come up with a list of questions to be answered and then determine the answers in pairs. This way, they are answering the questions as if they are another student, so it is less intimidating and becomes a lighthearted way to express what they know about each other. When the students have completed their profiles they can present them to the class, and the class then guesses who they pretended to be. You could also approach matchmaking as a role play where students are given specific characteristics, like handsome, successful and egotistical. Another student might have the characteristics angry, beautiful, and lonely. As they are mingling they ask and answer questions as a person with their characteristics would answer. They are then expected to find a good match for themselves. The results are often hilarious, creative, and unexpected.

3 SPOKEN WORD

There are a lot of opportunities where you could creatively have students perform some type of spoken word in front of the class. These exercises tend to work best when they are spontaneous so students don’t have time to be nervous, and preparation is also limited. Spoken word leads to a lot of natural language and each student gets a chance to be in the spotlight for a very short time. One way to facilitate spoken word is to utilize those magnetic poetry kits that were so popular a few years ago. If you don’t have any of these in stock, they are very useful tools in all levels of ESL classes. There are several themes now and each kit supplies you with 500 or so words on little magnetic pieces that can be put up on the board or handed out in random to students. If you don’t have any of these, make some cards with random words and include every part of speech. Don’t tailor the cards to specific vocabulary or themes, just create them indiscriminately and hand them out just as randomly. The wonderful thing about the magnetic poetry pieces is students are able to look at hundreds of words to compose a short, eloquent piece of poetry, create one or two lines to speak about, or have other students choose a few words they must include in their spoken work. The spoken work could have a specific aim like, try to be funny, use sarcasm, or rant about a pet peeve. It could also just be left to the words. Students could create something on the spot, share it with their classmates and then expound on it for one or two minutes.

REACHING NEW LANGUAGE HEIGHTS FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS IS EXCITING TO WATCH AND TO FACILITATE. Utilizing these 3 spectacular speaking activities will give your students new ways to speak to one another and increase communication skills.

Frankly My Dear: Opening Up Viewpoints for Advanced Learners

Advanced language learners need to be able to provide opinions and describe the reasoning for their viewpoints. It is a wonderful way to develop vocabulary, utilize complex grammatical structures, and engage in interesting dialogues. Open up viewpoints for your advanced learners and learn a lot about them while they improve very important skills.

HOW TO TEACH STUDENTS TO OPEN UP VIEWPOINTS

1 PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE

Teaching students how to use persuasive language appropriately can give them the outlet they need to discuss opinions, world issues, and controversial topics. When presenting persuasive topics you don't have to focus solely on persuasion. It can be productive simply to have students defining their opinions and organizing thoughts while also building confidence. The outcome you want is for them to feel strongly about something and to have the language to communicate it. You don't want students to become argumentative or overly-opinionated during the learning process.

Once you have devised goals with the students, a perfect starting point is ranking exercises. You can come up with any number of topics and ask students to rank their opinion on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to ten (strongly agree). Here you may choose to introduce other language sometimes seen on surveys. These can be things like: indifferent, somewhat disagree/agree, or not applicable. For your ranking exercise present a range of topics. They could be hot-button issues, culturally-relevant topics, or familiar, non-intimidating subjects. Here are some examples:

If you work hard, you will be successful.
I can get a higher paying job if I speak good English.
Foreigners should pay more at restaurants.
Women should earn the same wages as men.
Technology has made life better in most ways.

Once all students have ranked the statements, they can begin discussing their opinions in a variety of ways. You could do one big group discussion or put them in small groups or pairs. Before you send them off to start discussion, review or brainstorm some key phrases used when presenting opinions persuasively. Some examples are:

In my opinion....
I don't think...is right/positive, because....
My feeling is that....
I don't see how....
I feel very strongly that....
Frankly, I think that... is wrong/incorrect

These phrases are used to introduce where their opinion lies. Making those statements is the easy part. They must then back up their statements with thoughtful arguments that are heartfelt and to the point. Allow them to practice uninterrupted and observe what happens. Then bring them back together as a group and debrief what their discussions entailed, how many items they discussed, and how they felt they did expressing themselves.

2 POLITELY DISAGREEING

It is important to stress that expressing viewpoints has a time and a place, and students need to also respect the opinions of other people. When starting out, students may get anxious to express their opinions, so be sure to set guidelines for discussion and speaking activities. You may want to address how to interrupt, politely disagree, and how to focus on opinions not personal attacks. Disagreeing politely is an art form, and it creates opportunities for students to use humor, craft meaningful arguments, and challenge each other to defend opinions. It is important to approach the topic of disagreement within an environment of respect. When done correctly, students learn to defend themselves and their beliefs even when it might be difficult or contrary to the popular way of thinking.

One way to practice disagreeing with one another is to create debates where students must argue points on both sides of their beliefs. When they have to defend something they are against, it will show them that there are two sides to every argument and that both sides have good points.

3 CURRENT TALK TOPICS

To keep viewpoints in the forefront of lessons continuously, you can institute a daily talk topic. Arrange it however you would like, but ideally a set amount of time each lesson focuses on open discussion of one particular topic. You could also weave the topic into other parts of the lesson if it is appropriate. You can assign a topic of the day at the beginning of class, tell them what it is at the end of the lesson for the following class, or assign the duty to one student per day. Whichever way you choose, be sure that the topic will promote healthy, stimulating dialogue to get everyone interacting. If you want to incorporate reading or writing with your daily talk topic, you could choose a short article to be the jumping off point for discussion and vocabulary. This can work well if the students need some direction initially. A short reading can spark a lot of conversation and really get conversations progressing. You may also want to have students write about the topic before or after the discussion to organize thoughts, expound more on their viewpoints, or to summarize. Daily talk topics should relate to the students' daily lives. Topics would be very different if you are teaching an advanced high school class versus an advanced class of older learners. Make the topics applicable to them so that they have some stake in the conversations. This will motivate learners not only to speak, but to listen to their classmates.

EXAMINING VIEWPOINTS FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS CAN LEAD TO A WHOLE NEW PHASE OF EXPRESSION. Opening up viewpoints in the right format and environment is definitely the way to help students progress and develop.

3 Strategies for Interpreting Slang for Advanced Learners

Advanced learners are always anxious to study and master idiomatic and street-wise language. Using slang is one primary way for students to test the waters of fluency and begin communicating in expressions as native speakers do. Apply these 3 strategies to help students interpret the cumbersome world of slang.

TRY THESE 3 STRATEGIES FOR INTERPRETING SLANG

1 WHAT THEY HEAR

It's very useful for students to hear slang terminology in natural speech at a regular speed. To do this, speak to students using a number of expressions without defining the new language concepts. Present slang in context using stories and examples and do your best not to slow down your speech. Always speak to them in a conversational tone utilizing a number of slang words and phrases. Students should listen to see how many expressions they can pick out of your story, and how accurately they can piece them together. Chances are when you first start presenting slang this way, they will miss several words or phrases entirely or record them incorrectly. This is normal and once they see how many they missed or misheard, they will be that much more interested in doing better the next time. Don't let missing expressions hinder their confidence, especially if you have littered your story with phrases they have never heard before.

Give students time to compare their answers in small groups or pairs. Students can spend time discussing what they heard and the possible meanings. After they have determined what they heard, they can then begin to pick apart the expressions, and attempt their own examples of how to use each slang expression. This is a lot to accomplish, so you may want to split it into two parts so students aren't overwhelmed. You could also go over the answers as a group and then have them reconvene into their groups to determine their individual examples for new phrases.

2 COMPREHENSION CHECKS

Comprehension checks are vital as students are learning how to practically apply the slang they are learning. Doing comprehension checks ensures that students not only understand the expression, but also have a good idea of how and when to use it. There are a lot of ways to reinforce the new vocabulary and highlight practical use. Quizzes assembled in various ways can be used so that students can gage their own progress, and the quizzes don't have to be overly-serious or stress-inducing. Think about ways to create and go through quizzes that will be memorable and entertaining. One way to do this is to have students take a short quiz independently and then assemble them into groups for the correction and explanation of the quiz. Provide twists to correction, like handing out poker chips or fake money to have each team bet on how successful they believe their answer is before the answer is provided. For multiple choice quizzes, try forming two teams and do a race to the right answer. In this instance, one team must be the first to respond to the question by buzzer or hands, and then before they provide the correct answer, they must first dispel each answer that is incorrect.

Using new slang situationally is a wonderful comprehension check as well as a way to review lots of new vocabulary. A good stand alone activity is to provide them with situations and have students role play or create short conversations on the spot. You could use cards with various situations and hand them out to small groups or pairs. Then ask students to conversationally insert the slang they have learned where appropriate. Your situations could be things like:

Meeting someone new at a party
Running into a friend or teacher at the park
Complaining about an exam to a friend
Ordering food at a restaurant
Asking for help with directions

Students will enjoy using the new words and phrases, and may begin correcting one another, incorporating slang into daily use, or asking for more and more and more.

3 USE TV AND MOVIES

Where can you find a lot of natural language usage that also exposes students to other accents, faster language, and unlimited slang? Movies and TV are a wonderful resource for any teacher tackling slang, and with the addition of the internet everything you might be looking for is right at your fingertips. Look for TV shows that are popular with students to engage them, challenge their listening, and provide memorable clips with humor. Sitcoms are perfect for one-on-one slang usage, and you can create whole lessons around one or two clips. Using movies may take a little more prep time, but if you happen to have a class that loves to watch movies, it's a great way to have them listen for new language and have ready-made situational examples to refer to. Animated films are a good choice, or dramas that have a lot of dialogue and not much action. Stay away from raunchy comedies, complex thrillers, and action movies with little speaking. Some great movie options are: When Harry Met Sally, Sleepless in Seattle, Runaway Bride, and Father of the Bride.

Movies and TV provide a great resource to display natural language, and also to focus on relationships, conversations in general, and conflicts. Students will pick out a lot of interesting language, not just slang and they will enjoy being able to sit back and watch language in action. Be sure to always have goal-driven lead-in and wrap-up exercises, possible fill-in-the-blanks, and discussion topics that weave in the slang and situations that were approached. Experiment with what works best, and you might just find your advanced students asking to view an entire movie or episode.

STUDENTS WILL FIRST BE EXPOSED TO SLANG THROUGH YOUR EYES AND YOUR EXPLANATIONS.

Give them the tools to decipher slang for themselves by employing these strategies that are sure to get them slinging slang in no time.