

Speaking activities

On these pages you will find ideas for classroom activities which involve speaking

1) Staged role-play

Jeff Fowler, Teacher, Trainer, British Council Naples

This is a series of engaging role-plays based on the concept of the gap year / a round the world trip. The activities motivate the students to persuade and argue in a light-hearted manner. There are a series of five small role-plays and this activity works best with intermediate students.

Preparation

Download and make copies of the role-play cards. You'll need one set for each group of three students. You might like to pre-teach some structures for expressing and asking for opinions.

Procedure

- Elicit or explain the concept of a gap year (between university and school) and ask students what they'd like to do if they had a free year.
- Elicit travelling and hang up a large map of the world.
- Tell the students they have a round the world air ticket valid for a year and they are going to go on an imaginary tour around the world with two friends.
- Put the students into groups of three.
- Hang world map on the board (or a globe) and ask each group to discuss where they'd like to go.
- Get the students in their groups to think about any problems that might occur with such a trip. For example; language, arguments over accommodation, where to go etc.
- Tell the students they are now in the country they chose and they have to act out their roles as described in the cue cards.
- Give your students a minute to read their cue cards and then take them in. The students then carry out role-play 1. Listen and make notes of any vocabulary or pronunciation problems.
- Do plenary feedback with each group to see if they stayed in an expensive or cheap hotel etc.
- Do the other role-plays with quick feedback from each group and a little work on any language problems they have had each time.

2) Story in a bag

Maria Spelleri, Manatee Community College, Florida, USA

This oral story creating and relating activity works best with intermediate level and above learners. (I don't recall the origins of this activity. I picked it up from some book or workshop at least ten years ago!)

Preparation

Before class, the teacher fills paper bags with 5-6 random objects. You'll need one bag per group of four students. To make this activity interesting, the objects should be diverse and unrelated to each other. Go for a combination of the unusual and the mundane.

- An example of a diverse content bag from my class is:
 - a postcard from Singapore
 - a can-opener
 - a candle
 - a surgical mask
 - a theatre playbill (program)a teddy bear.

Procedure

- At a signal, each group of students opens its bag, removes its objects and invents an oral story incorporating all the objects found in the bag. The stories become very complex and creative in order to make each object a step in the plot.

Here's an example based on the bag items described above.

"One morning Shelley received a postcard from her old college friend, Louise. The card was from Singapore, and in it, Louise had invited Shelley to come for a visit. Shelley flew to Singapore and met Louise. The first night she was there, they went to a play at a local theatre. It was a murder mystery and the ladies were feeling a bit nervous walking back to Louise's home after the show. When they got home Louise tried to turn on the light, but there was no electricity. She lit a candle andetc."

- It's important that the story be oral and **not** written and then read. This allows spontaneous changes, and for group members to jump in and correct each other or add details in the final telling.
- When the groups have finished, each group shares its story with the whole class. Each student in the group should tell one part and hold up the related object when it is mentioned in the story.
- Some group members may tell two parts, or tell one part that uses two objects- it doesn't matter. Most of the talking is done in the creation of the story within the group.

Watch out for those clever souls who would say "Shelley packed her suitcase for Singapore. In it she put a candle, a can opener, a teddy bear...etc."

Variation

- The teacher makes up a crime that has been committed, for example; '*Professor Whatsit found dead under a picnic table, Lady Wigglebiggle's diamonds stolen from her bedroom drawer*'.
- The groups are then told that the items in their bags are clues to the crime collected by a detective. The

story that the groups come up with then are the details of the crime. Here is an example.

"The teddy bear had been ripped open, to reveal a hiding place. It was now empty. The detective realised it was the place where Professor Whatsit kept the key to his secret laboratory. Buy how had the killer made it past the guard dogs? The can opener left on the kitchen counter was analysed and found to contain traces of dog food. Clearly, the killer fed the dogs, maybe even drugged them to keep them calm etc."

3) True / False stories

Richard Frost, British Council, Turkey

This speaking activity is very effective for practising the telling of stories and for learning fascinating things about the students in the class.

Preparation

You don't need any materials for this, just an invented story that you are ready to tell.

Procedure

- Tell the students an interesting story about yourself and describe in detail what happened. At the end of the story, give them an opportunity to ask you questions about the story. Finally, ask them to decide if they think the story is true or false. (This must be the first point at which you indicate it may not be true). Of course the story was untrue and now it's the students' turn to make up stories.
- Put the students into groups of two or three and tell them to prepare two stories for the class. Each student must have one story to tell, in a pair one story must be true and one must be false. In a group of three you can have one true and two false, or two true and one false. The important thing is that the false stories must be realistic and the true stories must be unusual.
- Make yourself available to help the students with language for the stories and make notes for problem areas to work on during the final feedback session. Also, give the students the opportunity to practise telling their stories to each other before they do them in front of the whole class. You may even let them make notes to use while telling the story, but try to avoid letting them write down the whole of the story.
- Ask each group in turn to come to the front and tell the rest of the class their stories. After each story is told, the class can ask some questions. When all in the group have told their stories, ask the students to decide which are true and which are false. Finally, reveal to the class the truth about the stories.
- When all the groups have finished their stories, conduct a feedback session and highlight the effective language that was used as well as the language that needs to be worked on.

Variations

It can be very intimidating and time-consuming talking in front of a large class so if you feel it is appropriate, it would be a good idea to match groups (e.g. three groups together) to tell each other their stories.

4) Why didn't you come to the party?

Said Ali, Teacher, Uzbekistan

This speaking activity for higher level beginners up to upper intermediate involves students working in pairs to make up excuses.

Procedure

- Ask students if they've ever had parties. If they have, tell them to share experiences with the class. If they didn't explain to them what a party is.
- Tell students to remember the last party they had. Some guests were invited but some didn't come.
- Divide class into two parts. **A** students who attended the party and **B** students who didn't attend.
- Tell the **B** students who didn't attend party to prepare their excuses for when they are asked for them.
- Tell **A** students who attended the party to ask **B** questions to find the reasons of not attending.
- Tell them to give a range of excuses in different ways. Otherwise they repeat one excuse every time.
- Be careful to keep the students changing partners. The **A** students could also tell the **B** student about the party.

Notes

- If you use this activity when you've just introduced a new structure that is appropriate here for example 'had to' or 'was/were', you will hopefully notice that students will use it without you having to prompt them.
- You can do some variations, such as excuses for not doing things on time or excuses for not keeping your word etc.

5) Dating game

Richard Frost, British Council, Turkey

This is a great activity for getting students talking. I have used it successfully with many different levels and age groups and have found that it is very effective at motivating teenagers to talk. It is particularly useful for practising describing appearance, character and interests.

Preparation

You will need a selection of flashcards of people, a mixture of ages and types.

Procedure

- Put a picture of a person on the board and ask the students to tell you his/her name, age and job. Write whatever they tell you on the board. (Note: at first they may be a bit confused and think that they should know the person, they will soon get the idea).
 - Then ask them to describe him/her physically (again write what they tell you on the board). Repeat this procedure for his/her character and hobbies. You should end up with a paragraph profile of the person.
 - Read the description of the person and elicit from the students that he/she is not happy because they are single and would like to meet a man/woman.
 - Then follow the same procedure above to elicit a description of the person that they would like to meet. At the end of all this you should have two descriptions.
 - Tell the students that you see these kinds of descriptions in lonely hearts pages in magazines and newspapers. (You could even bring some in to show them)
- Give the students a picture each and tell them not to show it to anyone. You may have to stress this, as it is a temptation to show the pictures to friends in the class. The students then have to write a description of the person in the picture and the person they would like to meet. Point out that they can use the model on the board as a guide. Monitor and feed in language as they need it.
- Tell the students to leave their pictures face down on the table and to mingle. The aim is for them to try and find a partner for the person in their picture. At lower levels they can take the description with them as they mingle. They need to talk to everybody and not just settle for the first person who comes along asking questions to ensure they find the right person. It is also a good idea to play some romantic music in the background as they are mingling (Marvin Gaye or Stevie Wonder).
- After you have given them enough time to find partners, stop the activity (if they are being very choosy give them a time limit and tell them they must compromise and find a partner). Conduct a feedback session and ask the students to tell the class about their invented character and the partner that they have found. The class can then see the pictures for the first time and decide if they think it will be a successful relationship.

Follow up ideas

- Students can write the story of the relationship or can write letters to the new partners.

Variations

- You can change the context and replace the pictures of the people with pictures of houses/flats and ask the students to be either estate agents or buyers looking for a place to live. Again they can write descriptions of places they want to sell (of varying standards) and places they would like to buy, mingle and try to find their dream homes.

6) Getting teenagers talking

Catherine Sheehy Skeffington, British Council, Barcelona

Here are five useful ways that I have used to try to encourage my teenage learners to use more English in class.

- **Bribery**

The oldest trick in the book - and not one to be over-used. The idea is simple, take in small prizes to give to students whenever they have spoken enough English. What is 'enough' depends on you and the class - one word may be all you want from a particularly quiet student.

Possible prizes could be:

- Small fruits can be surprisingly popular (but messy)
- Sweets and biscuits are a favourite (but bad for teeth)
- Pencils and rubbers can work (but are expensive)
- Points, awarded to the class as a whole, with which they can 'win' watching 10 minutes of video, listening to an English song or playing a game of their choice.

- **Hangman**

This is another way of using points to bribe the students to speak English. One hangman can be used to refer to a particular offender, a group or the class as a whole. This way round the class is promised a treat for the end of the class (e.g. video, song or game) but they can lose lives by offending - i.e. not speaking English when you require them to.

- Each time they offend, one life is lost - indicated by a limb being added to the hangman.
- If the hangman is completed, they have lost all their lives and forfeited their treat.
- Use this technique thoughtfully - bear in mind the consequences of the hangman always or never dying (it may be seen either as an impossible task or an empty threat).

- **Time Out**

This time the bargaining material is minutes. At the beginning of the class, tell the students you'll give them five minutes to speak in their own language at some point in the class. However, if they use up the minutes before the designated time, they lose them for good.

- How far you want to extend this is up to you - if it's relevant they can lose minutes for the following class, but this can be demotivating.
- Another way to use this technique is to give them potential minutes, which they make real by speaking English.
- Remember to mark these on the board to avoid disputes and remind them of their progress (five circles that become happy faces, for example).

- **The UnTrophy**

This is a trophy that is awarded to a person who is speaking the wrong language. The student to receive it can then pass it on to the next person they hear speaking the wrong language. The person holding it at the end of class has a forfeit - extra homework, staying late or simply being the last to leave. The trophy can be a real or virtual object:

- If virtual, the teacher needs to keep track of where it is & indicate this on the board.
- If real, the students can write their own forfeits & stick them onto the trophy.

- **The last word**

Once again, this involves the students having some control over the penalty for not speaking English.

- 15 minutes before the end of class, they brainstorm topics that are hard to speak about in English. The topics are written on slips of paper or on the board.
- The students vote for the person who spoke the least English - or this is decided by the teacher or some other method.
- The offender chooses a topic, by choosing one of the slips of paper or throwing a ball at the board. He/she then has to speak about that topic for a certain amount of time (30 seconds or 1 minute) - silence can be penalised by doubling the amount of time they have to speak or with some other forfeit.
- Obviously this needs to be used sensitively, taking into account the reasons why a student has spoken very little English in the class.

7) The crime scene

Nik Peachey, teacher, trainer, materials writer, British Council

This is an activity that I've used with students of all levels to practice their ability to describe people and events and to produce questions. It's also good for getting students to really listen to each other and to take notes or just for some fun.

- **Preparation**
 - The activity is based around a short video clip of a crime. Any crime scene will do. The video doesn't even have to be in English as you can do it with the sound off.
- **Procedure**
 - You should split the class into two groups and tell one half that they are going to be the police and they are going to interview the witness to a crime. Their task is to work together with the other police and prepare questions that they will ask the witness.
 - Tell the other half of the class that they are going to witness a crime. You'll need to have the classroom set up so that only the 'witnesses' can see the TV screen. If you trust your students enough you could actually send 'the police' out of the class or to another classroom, to work on their questions while the witnesses watch the crime.
 - When the crime scene video clip has been played, put the students into pairs so that each of the police is with a witness. The police should then interview the witness and get as much information as possible about the crime.
 - Make sure that the police take notes as they listen. If you have artistic students you could also get them to work together on a picture of the criminal or a diagram of the crime scene reconstruction.
 - To add an element of motivation you could also give a prize to the most accurate notes.

If you have a video that is in English you can play it with the sound on and, for higher levels, even extend the focus to reported speech: 'He told everyone to put up their hands.'

Technology free crime scene

- **Preparation**
 - If you don't have access to a video / TV you can do a 'low-tech' version of this activity by cutting pictures out of a magazine. Be sure to cut out enough for half the class to each have a picture and have a few extras to spare.
- **Procedure**
 - Put the students into pairs, one policeman and one witness, and have the witness from each pair come to the front of the class.
 - Give each one a picture of a person to look at. Tell them that the person in the picture is a criminal. They shouldn't let anyone else see the picture.
 - Once they've had a couple of minutes to look at the picture, take all the pictures back and then send the witnesses back to their seats.
 - Their partner, the policemen, then has to ask questions and make notes so that they build up some idea of what the person in the picture looks like.
 - Once they have their description, put all the pictures on the floor at the front of the class and get the policemen to come to the front of the class and see if they can find the picture that the witness described.
 - You should make sure that the witnesses remain silent until all the policemen have 'arrested' the picture of their choice.
 - You can then try this again reversing the roles this time. This gives the students a chance to learn from any mistakes they may have made the first time round.

You can make the activity more difficult by selecting pictures of people who look more similar (same age / sex etc.) or easier by having a greater range of people.

This activity can also be a very useful lead into discussions or vocabulary work on crime or description.

8) Chain story telling activity

Arizio Moreira, Hamilton, New Zealand

In this speaking activity the students tell personal stories which are prompted by pictures. The activity is performed as a mingle.

- Cut up cards of different objects, activities, animals, etc. selected randomly.
- Place the cards scattered on the floor in the middle of the classroom.
- Tell the students to pick up a card from the floor which they think makes them remember one of the following:
 - (a) a memorable event in their lives
 - (b) a positive or negative past or recent experience or
 - (c) a story about a friend/family member/acquaintance/etc that they would like to share with others.
- Tell the students that they must find another in the class and tell them what the picture makes them remember and listen to the other person's story too.
- Each students must tell their story for about one to two minutes only.
- Students then must exchange pictures and find another student to talk to.
- Emphasise that they must ask the name of the person they were talking to before they move on to talk to another one.
- Students must then talk to another student and tell him/her the story of the person they last talked to.
- Students swap pictures again and move on to talk to someone reporting the story they've just listened to.
- Round the activity off by asking individual students to report to the class the interesting things they've

learned about other people in class.

9) Task based speaking

Richard Frost, British Council, Turkey

This is a speaking lesson on the theme of planning a night out that uses a listening exercise to provide language input.

- **Preparation and materials**
You will need to record two people planning a night out on the town
- **Pre-task (15-20min)**
Aim: To introduce the topic of nights out and to give the class exposure to language related to it. To highlight words and phrases.
 - Show sts pictures of a night out in a restaurant / bar and ask them where they go to have a good night out.
 - Brainstorm words/phrases onto the board related to the topic; people / verbs / feelings etc.
 - Introduce the listening of two people planning a night out. Write up different alternatives on the board to give them a reason for listening e.g. (a) restaurant / bar (b) meet at the train station / in the square. Play it a few times, first time to select from the alternatives, second time to note down some language.
 - Tell them that they are going to plan a class night out and give them a few minutes to think it over.
- **Task (10min)**
 - Students do the task in twos and plan the night. Match them with another pair to discuss their ideas and any similarities and differences.
- **Planning (10min)**
 - Each pair rehearses presenting their night out. Teacher walks around, helps them if they need it and notes down any language points to be highlighted later.
- **Report (15 min)**
 - Class listen to the plans, their task is to choose one of them. They can ask questions after the presentation.
 - Teacher gives feedback on the content and quickly reviews what was suggested. Students vote and choose one of the nights out.
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- **Language Focus (20min)**
 - Write on the board five good phrases used by the students during the task and five incorrect phrases/sentences from the task without the word that caused the problem. Students discuss the meaning and how to complete the sentences.
 - Hand out the tapescript from the listening and ask the students to underline the useful words and phrases.
 - Highlight any language you wish to draw attention to e.g. language for making suggestions, collocations etc.
 - Students write down any other language they wish to remember.

Note: You can go on the planned night out with your students. This can make it even more motivating for them.

10) Family tree

Daphne, China

It's amazing how students can't stop telling their friends about themselves. I introduced my class of second language learners to the family tree and the different relationships between people in the family - in-laws, step-family, cousins, paternal and maternal sides etc. even terms like widow, widower and divorcee.

Then, I got them to draw their own family tree and share it with their friends, giving 10 minutes each to tell and ask about a particular member in their family, e.g. grandparents, aunts, cousins, siblings etc.

They could hardly stop talking! I'm glad to say that this is one lesson which saw students continuing their discussion even after the bell rang.

11) Getting the whole class talking

Clare Lavery, British Council

The following activities are designed to get everyone talking. They can be used with all levels because the language required to communicate is determined by the students. Remember to set up and demonstrate these activities carefully before letting the class go ahead.

Jigsaw puzzle challenge

- Take 3-4 large pictures/photos and stick them on card. Pictures can come from Sunday supplements, travel brochures, calendars, magazine adverts etc. Pictures specific to students' interests will motivate them e.g. film stills, cartoons, news stories, famous paintings, famous people.
- Draw puzzle shapes on the back of each picture (4-5 shapes) and cut out the picture pieces.
- Give each student in the class a jigsaw piece. They must not show their piece to anyone.
- Students then mingle and question each other about what is on their puzzle piece to try and find people with pieces of the same jigsaw.
- The object of the game is to find all pieces and put together the jigsaw. The first complete picture puzzle wins.

Something in common or 'give me five'

- Explain that we can all find something in common with those around us. The object of this game is to discover as many things you have in common with fellow students. You can limit this to 5 things in common.
- Brainstorm examples with the whole class, noting suggestions, e.g.
 - We both have long-haired cats
 - they both went to see Robbie Williams in concert
 - We all like Harry Potter
 - We both have a younger sister called Georgia
 - Our favourite colour is green
 - Our families go to the same supermarket, church, club, holiday place
 - We both believe in love at first sight, ghosts, god.
- Give students a time limit to mingle and find out as many things they have in common. The one who finds the most is the winner.
- Alternatively ask them to find five things and the first person to shout 'five' is the winner.

Create a biography

- Take a biography of a famous person and write each detail on strips of paper.
- Keep the identity secret so they have to guess, if appropriate.
- Draw a table on the board for students to copy and make notes e.g. place of birth, early years, famous for..
- Give out the strips (split the class in two if large and give out 2 sets)
- Students mingle and ask each other questions until they have as many details as possible about the person.
- Take away the strips and put students in pairs or small groups to use their table of notes to write the biography.

12) Improving discussion lessons

Clare Lavery, British Council

Have you ever felt you were asking all the questions about students' opinions? Do you find you are doing more talking in a discussion than your class? Here are some tips to

- shift the task focus from you talking to them (they have to talk to each other)
- give them control of their own discussion
- give them practice in formulating their opinions within a controlled framework.

Discussion envelopes

- Make a list of issues or topics which your students might find interesting. Think of seven or eight statements on each issue which represent typical and widely opposing comments on the topic. For example:
 - Topic: Are boys and girls the same?
 - Girls naturally want to play with dolls
 - Boys are usually better at Science subjects than girls.
- Photocopy each list of statements on different topics and put them in 3-4 envelopes.
- Divide the class into small groups. Tell them the title of each topic.
- Each group selects an envelope. They work through the topic in their group, taking turns to read aloud the statements found in the envelope and inviting comment and opinions.
- You can ask each group to record their reactions to the issues for feedback at the end of the session.
- Re-use the envelopes in another lesson. Each group chooses a new topic and envelope.

Listen and react

- Put students in small groups of 3 all facing each other.
- Act as conductor by reading aloud a statement on a list, one at a time.
- After each statement students have one minute to react in their group to what they have heard, disagree, agree, comment etc.
- Stop them talking after a minute (with gong, whistle, clap) and read the next statement on your list.
- Students hear you but must look at each other and tell each other what they think!

Read and modify

- Give a list of statements on a set topic to each group in the class
- Students must work through the statements and modify them to reflect their views as a group. This involves discussion on how they will re word the sentence or add a further clause to justify their position. For example:
 - Topic: The school year
 - Statement: School holidays are too long
 - Students' modified sentence: We think school holidays are not long enough
- Use the feedback session at the end of the lesson to hear some of the "new" statements that each group has created.

13) Getting teenagers to talk

Clare Lavery, British Council

Here are some tips and three discussion ideas, all aimed at getting teenagers to speak.

- Keep the conversation peer centred: plenty of pair or small group collaboration.
- Avoid asking discussion questions around the class: this puts them in the spotlight and causes potential embarrassment in front of friends. You also risk dominating the talk.
- Give them a concrete list of statements or opinions: help them to choose their own ideas. Don't expect them to have fully formed opinions on all things teenage!
- Keep to fairly short discussion activities (15 minutes): until you know what they like and they feel relaxed enough with you to talk freely.
- Feedback on errors after speaking should be general: try to avoid drawing attention to individual students' errors or they will be reluctant to speak next time.

Discussion activities

Here are some stimulating discussion topics which have worked well with teenagers. The main features of these topics are that they

- a) draw on students' personal experience
- b) ask students to reflect on their own culture and attitudes
- c) give students a concrete decision to make with their peers.

Teenage time capsule

Each group of students is going to bury a box in the ground for future generations to find. This box will contain 5 photos (or objects) which will tell young people in the future about life at the start of the third millennium in their country and/or school.

Students must choose their objects/photos together and each member of the group describes it to the rest of the class or another group. Explain why it is important and what it tells of life today.

Let the punishment fit the crime

Prepare a short description on cards (or board) of all the possible punishments in a UK school e.g. writing lines, detention, exclusion and ask students in pairs or groups to add anymore that are used in their own country.

Then give each group a list of wrong doings (5 or 6) and ask them to order each act according to how bad they think it is e.g. swearing at a teacher, not completing homework for 3 weeks running, fighting in the corridor, smoking in the toilet. Now each group can also discuss which type of punishment might suit the crime!

This generates lots of discussion on what exactly constitutes unacceptable behaviour but also what the students and their schools think is acceptable punishment.

The 10 day trip

A group of English teenagers are coming to stay in the country or region. They have only got 10 days to find out about your students' culture and see what is on offer.

Each group of students must plan an itinerary. It does not have to include all the tourist sights, they could go to a concert to hear local music or have a meal with a family or visit a school. Each must agree on the best introduction to their country and region, bearing in mind the age of the visitors.

Stress that students do not have to plan anything they would find boring.

14) Improvisations

Clare Lavery, British Council

- *How do improvisations work?*
 - Role play involves giving students role cards, instructions and time to prepare. Improvisations are more spontaneous. The teacher does not give details or language phrases to use.
 - Improvisations work best if students are given roles and situations and asked to react immediately.
 - Improvisations can be introduced very briefly with a 'warm up'.
 - Improvisations encourage students to
 - use whatever language they have available to:communicate;
 - develop "thinking on your feet" skills and gain confidence in coping with the unexpected;
 - get practice in instigating communication from nothing;
 - focus on getting the message across rather than on repeating dialogues parrot fashion;
 - use their imagination;
 - imagine themselves using the language in real life situations;
 - be creative with language.

- *Classroom management*
 - In a whole class, put students in a circle with an inner circle of students facing them.
 - After each spontaneous dialogue/situation students sitting in the outer circle move one place to find a new partner.
 - Then call out new roles or situations and say "action".
 - Keep to a non-judgemental director role and do not intervene to correct language or discuss content.
 - Hold feedback at the end. Allow students to feel free during the improvisation phase.
- *Ways to introduce improvisations*
 - Use a song (just listened to, covered recently in class or very familiar to students). For example: She's leaving home – The Beatles. Give pairs roles (the girl, the mother/father, the boyfriend) and give situations to try out (the night before she left, the parents talking on finding her leaving note, the boyfriend asking her to run away, the telephone call home after a week away).
 - Use a picture and photos of people speaking to each other: vary scenes and pass the pictures around. Focus on a theme, such as all pictures of people in different parts of an airport or social situations. Assign roles so students form a 'tableau' if there are a variety of interactions going on in the photo/picture.
 - Use a cartoon with no written dialogue. Students are the different characters and mimic the behaviour and imagine the conversation taking place.
 - Use a video with sound off. Select scenes from a favourite show or film e.g. Friends Students are assigned roles and act out what they think is taking place.
 - Use a piece of realia: a real object to spark conversation e.g.. A train timetable, a bit of English currency and a list of exchange rates, a hat or outfit, a musical instrument, a mobile phone, a menu (students must incorporate these object as part of their invented dialogue).
 - Use a prop (good with younger learners): a pair of finger puppets, a mask to wear or anything that makes them assume a new personality.

15) Find the murderer

Jacqueline Francois, France

Speaking and listening activity

Level: Intermediate or advanced

Target language: Past continuous

- 1. Write on board: *Mrs. McDonald was found dead in her house on Tuesday at eight in the morning, you have to find who killed her and why*
- 2. Explain to students they are going to prepare a play and perform it (split them in 2 or 3 groups) while one group performs the other watches them. The audience has to guess who the murderer is. (Here you have 2 options, depending on the level, although it works well with pre-intermediate students too)
- 3. Preparation: give students enough time to prepare this and help them at this stage, if necessary, especially using the past continuous e.g. - what were you doing yesterday at 7 o'clock etc. (don't give them any help during the performance)
 - Option (a) Tell the students they are free to invent a story why she is dead, and how, they can choose their own personalities and alibis, and decide who will be the inspector as he or she has to prepare a few questions to ask the suspects. They work in groups and they decide who the murderer is amongst themselves. If you have a class of say, 8 or 10, divide them in two groups so that they don't know what the other group is planning. This is important when they are going to perform, as the other group who's watching them has to guess who the murderer is just before the end. They can also ask additional questions and clarification to the performers.
 - (b) or you can give them a few suggestions saying she was very rich, or famous, or whatever comes to your mind. Write on board a few relatives or friends e.g. her niece, her brother-in-law, her sister, husband, neighbour etc. Write on board some useful questions e.g. "what were you doing at where were you staying? etc. They prepare the play, but still let them decide who's who.

- 4. When they are ready, the students perform while the other group or groups watch and listen carefully to decide who the murderer is.
- 5. Just before the end of the play the performing group stops and ask their audience who they think the murderer is, inviting them to ask any additional questions or for clarification. (At the end I always start clapping for the others to do the same and thank them for their performance)
- 6. If the audience guesses right, give them points or a round of applause.
- 7. Change performers and repeat from point 3.
- 8. Of course, teachers can use their own imagination or better still get the learners to invent the characters and alibis.

My personal comment: I always ask for feedback, up to now they have always really enjoyed it. I'm always amazed at their imagination, I think the best one was when one group had decided it was suicide! Enjoy and good luck!

16) Bingo mingle

Leonardo de Waal, Colombia

In the event you have students who are stressed out or just plain bored by the dull approach to teaching grammar, there's a game you can play that will lure students into a communication approach to what is being taught. I used this for teaching Present Perfect tense. It is just like bingo, but involves the students mingling and asking questions.

- In a 4 or 5 by 5 grid write statements like 'Has never been to Colombia', or 'Has been to the cinema twice this month' in each cell and so on until your grid is filled.
- You might want to have different Bingo cards to create more variety.
- Students will then mingle as a whole class and ask each other questions to try to fill the grid up.
- Standard Bingo rules apply about winning the game. (Creating a row or column etc. with answered questions)

You can of course adapt this for many different language points. It a a good way to introduce a game element in to the typical mingle or 'find someone who' activities. Good luck!

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17) Short projects to get them talking - Lists

Clare Lavery, Teacher trainer and materials writer, British Council

There's nothing like a group project to get students talking and they work well if:

- the topic is centred on the learners' interests;
- there is not any real need for extensive or time-consuming research;
- students can present their work orally to the rest of the class.

One particularly successful format is based on our love of lists. Students in small groups work towards compiling a top five. Examples of top five topics are...

- Our top five favourite English records/music videos (including a final presentation with their number one song or video or lyrics).
- Our top five authors/books/poets (not just English speaking) – students can be encouraged to say why they like the author, give a description of the type of book or read an extract from a poem.
- Our top five adverts (magazine or TV) with a final round up showing the ads and describing why they are effective. This works well with students studying business.
- Our top five TV programmes (restrict to English/American ones if appropriate).
- Our top five designers/painters /paintings/buildings– including an oral description of, for example, one painting.

- Our top five discoveries/scientists/areas worthy of research – including discussion of the contributions made to the scientific field and to mankind.
- Our top five teenage fashions/teenage status symbols (e.g. mobile phone, moped).
- Our top five websites – for students who use the Internet a lot. This can include a description of the site, its users and the reasons why it is so good.

A short project can be presented in one lesson, prepared and researched and completed in the next lesson.

The main advantages are

- It gives students controlled opportunities to provide their own content in language lessons.
- It can be tailored to their school's curriculum or their own specialisations.
- The oral presentation of each group's findings can take as much time as is appropriate, depending on the enthusiasm and language level of the class.
- The final oral presentation stage gives excellent practice in extended speaking which is useful for higher levels. It can also be appropriate to the oral component of students' exams and gives them extra practice in talking about topics close to their hearts.

Students often tell you about people and things related to their own culture which can be very informative and is a genuine information gap exercise. The project can be a good round up of a term or a school year.

18) Superlative questions

Gareth Rees, Teacher and materials writer, London Metropolitan University

This activity practises the superlatives in questions, and generates a great deal of student speaking. It is a highly personalised activity, asking the students to talk about their own experiences and opinions.

- Prepare individual questions on slips of paper. The questions should all use the superlative form. For example,
 - What's the most interesting country you have been to?
 - What subject are/were you worst at at school?
 - What is the tallest building you have been in?
 - Who is the strangest person you have met?
 - What is the greatest problem in the world today?
- You can design the questions so that they suit your class well.
- Give each student two or three questions
- Put the students in pairs.
- They interview each other - encourage them to talk extensively in response to the questions
- After five to ten minutes (depending upon the amount of conversation), call out 'STOP'
- Now, swap the partners round
- The students interview their new partner.
- After a while, stop and swap
- Depending on the size and energy of the class, keep stopping and swapping.
- Once you think you have stopped and swapped enough, ask the students to return to their original seats.
- To round off, they should tell their neighbour about some of the answers they received.

Recently, I did this activity with a class of 16 intermediate adult students. They swapped partners five times, and in total the activity lasted one hour - one hour of nearly non-stop student talking time.

I think the activity worked because although the students asked the same questions to each partner, they of course heard differing answers because the questions were so personalised. The variety in the question topics also generated interest. Every time you went to a new partner, you had no idea what you would be asked. So, all you need to do is think of enough questions for the students!

19) Summer destinations

Clare Lavery, Teacher trainer and materials writer, British Council

These are activities that encourage students to talk about their plans for the Summer

Practise descriptions of places using photos from travel brochures. Give each group a selection of 5-6 places. Ask them to take turns in describing the place in their picture: the climate, the location, the activities you can do there. Make sure you have a good contrast in climates/urban and rural/developed or very deserted places. Then either:

- a. Ask each group to select their favourite destination from the pictures you have given them. Go round the class and ask them to say why they would like to visit the place in the picture.
- b. Or ask them to use their pictures to pick a holiday for a honeymoon couple, a group of teenagers and a retired couple. Each group presents their choice to the class explaining why they have chosen this holiday, why it is suitable.

Focus on plans for the Summer (not just a holiday) and use them to preview the language needed to talk about plans. Ask students to note down key words while you are speaking: This July I'm planning to work in my Uncle's shop and I'm going to do some reading for my university course next year. I would like to play a bit of tennis and spend some time with my friends. Ask students to do the same exercise in pairs. The note taking will help them listen carefully. Go round the class asking students to tell you about their partner's plans.

Use a holiday song to introduce the topic e.g. Cliff Richard's Summer holiday or Madonna's Holiday.

20) Interview the Experts

Ken Wilson

Three students sit in a line at the front of the class. They are the experts, but they don't know what they are experts about. The rest of the class choose the area of expertise - e.g. cooking, car maintenance, trees. Ignore students who shout out 'sex' or 'kissing' or other unworkable topics.

The other students then ask the experts questions and the experts answer them. Each expert uses only one word at a time.

Example:

They are experts about fashion.

Question: What colour will be fashionable next year.,

Expert 1: I

Expert 2: think

Expert 3: that

Expert 1: blue

Expert 2: will

Expert 3: not (Expert 3 trying to hi-jack the answer - this is good!)

Expert 1: be

Expert: 2: unfashionable (Expert 2 trying to hi-jack the answer back)

A very simple and effective speaking activity which the rest of the class enjoys listening to. An important consideration.

21) Erase the dialogue

Sadie, UK

If you have students that aren't very confident or happy about speaking this is a good idea that always works for me. Make up a dialogue of say about six or eight lines, say, for example, a dialogue on making arrangements. So the dialogue would go something like this -

A 'What are you doing this evening?

B 'Nothing much, why?'

A 'Would you like to come and drink a cup of tea with me in the cafe?'

B 'Yes, I'd love to. What time?'

A 'Hmm, shall we say 6 o'clock?'

B 'That'll be great. See you then

A 'OK. See you later. Goodbye'

B 'See you later'

This is relatively simple English but the aim is to make it as lively and realistic and as natural as possible. So, the first thing I would do is to write this dialogue on the blackboard and then I would drill it. I get the whole class to repeat each line after me a number of times until they sound very natural. Then once we've been through this dialogue a few times I would begin to erase a few of the words from each line. For example, in the first line - 'What are you doing this evening?' - I would perhaps erase the words 'are' and 'doing' to focus on the grammar point. Then we would go through the dialogue again, this time with the class trying to remember the complete lines without me prompting them and then we would drill it again without those words. Then I will erase some more words, so this time the first line might be 'What ..', Of course they're not allowed to write anything down during this - they're not allowed to cheat and it becomes a bit of a game. Finally, you end up with more and more of it being rubbed off until you have the dialogue with just perhaps one or two words in each line as prompts. Then all the students try to say it all together and it's become fun and they're now concentrating on remembering and they're losing their inhibitions about speaking. The final practice could be done in pairs and the students should then write the dialogue down. You can use any dialogue you want, for any situation. It could also be the beginning of a conversation, which the students practise in this way, and then have to continue from their imagination.

22) Fun discussion of controversial topics - the 'Tap-In Debate'

Paul Southan, New Zealand

The 'Tap-In Debate' is a fun way for students to discuss controversial topics. It is excellent for speaking and listening practice.

Basically, you need a controversial topic to start. Once you have established a controversial topic, divide your students into two groups; those who agree with the statement and those who disagree. They now prepare their arguments. Once you have done this, arrange your chairs so that there are two hot seats facing each other and then place chairs behind each of the two hot seats (enough for all of your students).

The idea is that two students start the topic of conversation, trying to defend their group's point of view. Once started, you then tap any two students on their shoulders during the conversation (Always one who is in a hot seat and one who isn't) Once they have been tapped on the shoulder they **MUST** stop the conversation and two new students must resume it exactly where the other two left it, even if this is in mid sentence (they change places with the person in the hot seat). They must make it coherent and follow the previous opinions and statements! They must continue the sentence of the previous speaker exactly where the previous student in the hot seat left it!

I like this activity especially because it involves all the students and they can't afford to sleep on the back seats because they know they will wreck the lesson if they do!

One other point: pre-teach some useful vocabulary they can use prior to doing it. For example, the vocabulary associated with the topic or which people use in debates e.g. I disagree, I think you are right, In my opinion, to be honest etc.

23) Motivating speaking activities

Sheryl Carvalho, Portugal

The students must be motivated to speak, or need to speak in order to complete the activity. For the last couple of years, I've specialised in teaching children aged 6-10 (mainly at beginner level), but I don't see why some of these basic principles can't be applied to learners of any age. At this age, the learners aren't motivated by new language, they're motivated by an activity. It can be very difficult to get them to speak if they really don't see the point. You can approach this by focussing on the following.

1. The function of the language and use an authentic or near authentic task (e.g. get them to sit back-to-back to practise speaking on the telephone).
2. A motivating task, which uses the language you want them to practise (e.g. students write questions on small squares of paper using the target language, then form the papers into a board game to be played using dice and counters.)

Here are some possible examples, which apply to one or a combination of the above.

A popular, well-known type of activity is the information gap. In this type of the activity, one group has half of the information required to complete the task and the other group has the other half (or pairs of students). The two groups need to exchange information to complete the task. Possible examples of tasks are:

- Making an arrangement: each group has a diary, with appointments already filled in. They need to exchange information in order to agree when they can meet.
- Giving/receiving directions: 2 sets of maps, each with information missing. 2 sets of directions for these missing places. The students again need to exchange information in order to complete their maps.
- Crosswords: each group has some of the answers. They need to make up appropriate questions and then exchange, or ask appropriate questions. Hopefully, the students will be more concerned about completing the crossword, rather than worrying about speaking.
- For a listening text, in which the students would normally listen to a tape in order to fill in the gaps. Why not give each group half of the answers? They are then given the opportunity to exchange information. They can listen to the tape afterwards as a final check.

Here are some examples of other activities I use with my younger learners.

- Secretly put an object in a paper bag (or hide it behind me, or write the word, or draw a picture). I then get the students to guess what's in the bag, by asking an appropriate question. The student who guesses correctly takes over from me. Do this a couple of times, and then let the students take over. Group vs group, or in pairs.
- Find your partner. Information is written on slips of paper, which can be matched in some way. Each student receives a paper, then the class mingle and exchange information in order to find their partner. E.g., for a group of 10 students, to practise colours. Colour in 5 slips of paper and write the words for these colours on the other slips. Students ask each other "What colour have you got?" in order to find their partner. (The point of this activity from the students perspective is finding their partner, not necessarily the practice of the language.)
- The following example may be appropriate for more advanced students. I call this activity 'Find someone who'. Each student writes the end of the sentence on their own piece of paper. The students then mingle and hopefully conversations are started. (The students can also use questions for this activity e.g. When was the last time you....?)

I hope that the suggestions and examples given are useful and practical for your situation, or inspire you to invent others.

24) Third conditional guessing game

Nancy Osmand

This is a simple game for spoken practice of the third conditional.

Ask a student, a volunteer hopefully, to leave the room. While that person is out of the room you and the rest of the class decide on something very unusual that could have happened while they were out of the room. A good example is two students get married, the OHP explodes, basically whatever the students can suggest.

Then, the person who has left the room comes back in and asks each student in turn only one question and the full question is 'What would you have done if this had happened?'

And each student in turn answers in a full sentence for example, 'If this had happened, I would have bought some flowers'

Now, they mustn't mention the names of anyone involved because at the end the student who is guessing has to work out what happened to whom and, if they can't, you can go round again with new answers.

[As this is for speaking practice, the students should use the contracted form for the conditional grammar - 'If this'd happened, I'd 've bought some flowers.']

25) Preposition basketball

Elvin, Italy

This is a lively activity to practise prepositions of place: "Let's play basketball!"

Choose a spot in the classroom (a corner, the teacher's desk...) and place there several different objects (pens, rubbers, books etc) at random and a small box or a bag that represents the basket. Decide with your students how many points you will score if they send the ball (you can make a very simple ball with a piece of paper) into the basket (you could give 3 or 5 points, depending on how difficult it is).

What is fun is that each student, even if he doesn't succeed in throwing the ball into the basket, will score one point for every correct description of the final location of the ball that he/she can say: "The ball is behind the red pen", "It is under the teacher's desk", etc. In such a way, it often happens that a student scores more points when the ball doesn't go into the basket, depending on the student's ability to use the correct prepositions.

You can choose if you prefer to divide the class into teams or make an individual competition. Students have a lot of fun in practising this activity that is suitable for children and teenagers as well.

26) Running Dictation

Nancy

This is a lively activity that practises, speaking, listening, writing, walking and remembering!

Choose a short passage or dialogue and make several copies. Put the copies up around the walls of the classroom (or even the school building).

Put the students in pairs or small groups. The aim is for one of the students in each pair to walk (or run!) to read the passage on the wall. They remember some of the passage and walk (or run!) back to their partner. They quietly dictate what they remembered to their partner, who writes it down. They then swap roles. Over several turns they will build the whole passage. This means they really do have to run back and forth because students will only remember three or four words at a time.

The winning pair is the team that finishes first - although you need to check for mistakes. If there are mistakes, they must keep walking to check!

A good idea is to teach them punctuation vocabulary beforehand if you want them to use the correct punctuation in English. It's a good way to check spelling and fabulous for pronunciation - and great memory training!

Some feedback from a teacher who tried this activity

Elaine, Perth Australia

I used this running dictation idea of yours with my lovely class of ESL adult beginners of all ages and nationalities. It worked a treat! The whole room was humming and the mission was accomplished with a deal of fun. It revealed quite a lot about the students, the generous souls, the class cheats and the people who'd really prefer to work alone, but for the greater good they co-operated with others of differing literacy levels. The main problem was stopping the slower pairs after 40 minutes! Thanks so much for the inspiration.

27) Simple picture activity

Richard Kearney, Germany

- Divide the class into pairs
- Give one learner a simple picture
- Ask his or her partner to try and find out with questions what's on their picture

28) ARM exercises – speaking activity to wake up a sleepy class

Gillie Cunningham, Teacher/Teacher Trainer

This is a great way to start a lesson with a free speaking activity.

I call it 'ARM exercises' which is simply short for Accept, Reject or Modify statements.

Choose a controversial statement. For example:-

- 'Women are the best drivers'
- 'Mobile phones should be banned from public spaces'
- 'Homework should be optional'
- 'Burgers are better than pizzas'

Either dictate or write the statement on the board. Students decide if they accept, reject or modify this statement, according to their personal opinion. When they have made their decision, you would then say 'OK go round the room and try to find somebody who has the opposite opinion to you' or 'OK go round the room and find someone who has a similar opinion'. Alternatively, they could mingle in the class to find the range of opinions, like a small survey – how many students accepted, rejected, or modified the statement.

This activity can really stimulate discussion and the focus is very much on the students rather than the teacher. To round off the activity, finish with a short whole class feedback stage.

29) Doctors and patients – speaking activity

Gillie Cunningham, Teacher/Teacher Trainer

This lesson can take anything from half an hour to an hour and a half.

Divide your class in half, half are doctors, half are patients.

Put the patients in an area of the class which becomes the waiting room. The patients should either come up with their own symptoms, or you can give them a few ideas - the one who wakes up in the morning feeling sick, the one who can't sleep or the one who's putting on a lot of weight or the one who's losing weight - you can have any kind of ailment you want and the idea is that every patient should visit every doctor and get advice from that doctor.

Be careful to set a time limit for each consultation with the doctors. Once the patients have visited each doctor – they may want to make notes of the advice given – they return to the waiting area and decide who was the best doctor, and perhaps who was the craziest! Meanwhile, the doctors all get together, because they are at a medical conference, and they have to compare the advice they'd given – and perhaps decide who was the craziest patient!

This activity can be used for both vocabulary and structures - you can use it for reported speech 'he said ... he told me...', you can use it for practising modals like 'should' or 'must', or for practising verb patterns such as 'he suggested I should ...' or 'he insisted on my doing ..', 'he told me to do ..'

It's usually a great fun lesson, students love it because there's lots of speaking and listening practice and they can use their imaginations and senses of humour.

30) Nursery rhyme role-play - advanced speaking activity

Bruce Neill, Florida, USA

Pick any children's nursery rhyme, dictate it to the class (comprehension) and ask them to read it back (reading, pronunciation, spelling). Then help with the weird words that they had to guess at. (perception of similar sounds and referral to their data base of known words and sounds) Finally help with comprehension, if necessary.

The exciting part comes next. Ask students, in turn, to role play the characters and interact with each other.

Example:

Little Miss Muffet, sat on a tuffet,

Eating her curds and whey.

Along came a spider,

Sat down beside her,

And chased Miss Muffet away.

You may think that only two roles are available. But, the mini theatre can develop in an infinite number of ways.

Miss Muffet and the friendly spider/deadly spider. The absent mother. The psychologist treating the trauma. The farmer who had tried to spray the field and exterminate the spiders. Green Peace, the press, etc.

Try Jack and Jill, Humpty Dumpty, Hey Diddle Diddle, etc. Great fun, lots of laughs, and very educational!