

# 39

No-Prep/Low-Prep ESL

# SPEAKING ACTIVITIES



For  
Teenagers  
and Adults



**JACKIE BOLEN**

39 No-Prep/Low-Prep  
ESL Speaking Activities:  
For Teenagers and Adults

Jackie Bolen

Jason Ryan (Editor)

From: [\*My Life! Teaching in a Korean University\*](#) and [\*ESL Speaking.org\*](#)

Author of: [\*How to Get a University Job in South Korea\*](#) and  
[\*The Wealthy English Teacher\*](#)

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Jackie Bolen: [wealthyenglishteacher@gmail.com](mailto:wealthyenglishteacher@gmail.com)

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## **About the Author, Jackie Bolen**

### **From the Paddies to the Bright Lights**

I've been teaching English in South Korea for a decade to every level and type of student and I've taught everyone from kindergarten kids to adults. Most of my time has been centered around teaching at two universities: five years at a science and engineering school out in the rice paddies of Chungcheongnam-Do, and also at a major university in Busan where I now teach high level classes for students majoring in English. In my spare time, you can usually find me outside surfing, biking, hiking or on the hunt for the most delicious kimchi I can find.

### **Speaking Classes: I Love You!**

Although I've taught all kinds of classes related to English and these days find myself teaching a lot of academic writing, some of my favorite ones are of course those focused on speaking including conversation, English interviews, public speaking and presentations, academic

speaking test preparation as well as current events and social issues. I particularly like teaching conversation to beginners because it's very rewarding to see them make huge improvements and for their confidence to grow from class to class.

In case you were wondering what my academic qualifications are, I hold an MA in Psychology. During my time in Korea I've successfully completed both the Cambridge CELTA and DELTA certification programs. With the combination of almost ten years teaching ESL/EFL learners of all ages and levels, and the more formal teaching qualifications I've obtained, I have a solid foundation to offer teaching advice. I truly hope that you find this book useful and would love it if you sent me an email with any questions or feedback that you might have—I'll always take the time to personally respond ([wealthyenglishteacher@gmail.com](mailto:wealthyenglishteacher@gmail.com)).

### **More Fabulous Stuff to Check Out**

If you find this book useful, please leave a review over on Amazon and don't forget to check out my other books at the same time:

[\*The Wealthy English Teacher\*](#) is a book in which you can learn all about finances for ESL teachers. You could also check out these related websites: [\*Freedom Through Passive Income\*](#) and [\*The Wealthy English Teacher's Website\*](#).

If you're interested in getting the most awesome job in South Korea which is working at a university—please check out [\*How to Get a University Job in South Korea\*](#). You can find more details at the book's website: [\*University Job Korea\*](#) and also check out my [videos about getting a university job in Korea](#) on *YouTube*.

# Jackie Bolen around the Internet

[ESL Speaking](#)

[My Life! Teaching in a Korean University](#)

[Google Plus](#)

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If you can't get enough ESL games, activities and other useful stuff for the classroom in this book, you can get even more goodness [delivered straight to your inbox](#) every week. I promise to respect your privacy—your name and email address will never be shared with anyone for any reason.

## Who This Book is For

This book will be helpful for a wide range of people. Perhaps you're an experienced teacher, but are stuck in a rut when it comes to lesson planning and you feel like your teenage or adult students are not engaged in your classes. Or, maybe you're a very busy teacher with an extremely heavy teaching load and don't have a lot of time to plan your lessons. Maybe you have closely followed a textbook for all your classes up to this point, but you now have a class with no book and are trying to figure out what to do. You might also be an inexperienced teacher and you've only been teaching for a few weeks or maybe you've never set foot in an ESL classroom before. This book is for you!

Perhaps you've been searching the Internet, trying to find some new ideas for ESL speaking games and activities, but are tired of wading through haystacks of useless and poor search returns to find the needle that you can actually use in your class. This book is perfect for you too. My aim is that this will be an *extremely practical* resource to help make your

speaking or conversation classes interesting and fun, as well as making your lesson planning quick and easy. I've written the book that I wish I had ten years ago when I first started teaching, and also one with content that I have been using all the years since then. Everything you see in this book has been tried in real-world classrooms and proven to work for myself as a teacher, and more importantly for improving the speaking skills of my English language learners.

This book will also be helpful for you if you find yourself thrown into a situation where you're given a new speaking class at the very last minute and there's nothing provided in the way of materials. This situation is all too common when working at a place like a cram school. The majority of the activities in this book truly are no-prep or low-prep and require almost nothing in the way of materials. The best place to start in those frantic few minutes before your class starts is my list of "[Last Minute, No Prep Time or Materials Required](#) activities."

I hope this book is a resource that you'll refer back to again and again as you plan your ESL lessons and that it will make

your teaching life easier.



# Top 10 Tips for Teaching ESL Speaking

## Student-Centered vs. Teacher-Centered

When many ESL teachers first start off their time in the classroom, they talk a lot (this is known as a teacher-centered classroom) and way more than they actually should. If you want your students to get better at speaking in English, they need to be speaking in English for most of the class, ideally at least 90% of it (this is known as a student-centered classroom) if they are at intermediate to high levels of proficiency. The best way to make this happen is to put students in pairs or groups of 3, set up an activity or give them a set of conversation questions and let them get to it. Monitor for errors and offer assistance if required, but don't interfere. If you have lower level students, the teacher-talk time will need to be increased from 10% to 30% or more but you should still try to reduce this percentage as much as possible (keep reading for my [tips on teaching very low level speaking classes](#)).

A related note to add about making your classes more student-centered is the need for students to have “processing time. ” When you teach them new vocabulary or a grammar concept that they're seeing for only the first or second time, they'll need time to organize and understand that material before they're expected to actively use it. It can be helpful to use some very controlled spoken or written exercises before doing more open-ended activities or games. You'll find that most textbooks are designed in this way—the grammar point or vocabulary is introduced through a reading or listening, students “notice” the language, the teacher “presents” the language (or students do a guided discovery instead), there's a controlled practice with a written exercise, and finally students “produce” the language in a freer activity, either written or spoken.

## Teach your Students How to Ask Questions

Conversation is a two-way street and in order to be good at it our students need to know how to ask questions.

Conversation is not simply asking and answering something like:

A: "How was your weekend?"

B: "It was good."

A better conversation would look like:

A: "How was your weekend?"

B: "It was good, I saw a movie."

A: "Really? **What** movie?"

Or,

A: "How was your weekend?"

B: "It was a bit boring, I just stayed home. **How** about you?"

A: "Oh, mine was fun, I went to \_\_\_\_\_."

I remind my students of the key question words: who/what/when/why/where/how and tell them that they can almost always use at least a couple of them to ask a follow-up question to their conversation partner. Also, teach your students question forms; it's maybe not as obvious as you think since questions are formed in a variety of grammatical ways in other languages and your students may not know how to make them. For example, even my very advanced level students in Korea still make mistakes with the negative past question forms ("Why didn't you went to work yesterday?" Or, "Why don't you go to work yesterday?"). If you know a little bit about the first language of your students, it can be quite useful in understanding the errors that they're making.

Statements in English often follow the pattern of Subject-Verb-Object (He speaks Italian). There is no auxiliary verb in this statement, so the helping verb “do” is used in the question form (Does he speak Italian?).

If there is an auxiliary verb in the statement, it is inverted with the subject when it is made into a question. For example:

He can speak English. ---> Can he speak English?

These are only the most basic of examples and it can be far more complicated; even high level students are easily confused about how to make the question forms so reviewing them periodically will be useful in helping our students learn how to engage in conversations.

Additionally, an important speaking sub-skill that is useful but which our students often aren't that confident in is initiating a conversation. We can teach them a few strategies, appropriate topics, and useful phrases to help them with this. You will have to use your discretion to know what kinds of questions are appropriate in your particular situation because it can vary so much from country to country. An activity that

works particularly well for this is [Partner Conversation Starters](#).

## Students Need to Listen

It's tempting, even in our first language to not listen to our conversation partner, but instead think of the next witty or wise thing to say in our heads. This does not lead to good conversations. Instead, truly listen to what your partner is saying and then respond to that. I make sure to talk to my students about this because it's even more tempting to do this in a second or third language where you are struggling to put words together into coherent sentences. There are a few tips I tell my students to help them out.

The first and last words in the question are key if it is a “W/H” question. For example, “Where do you go to school?” If you hear *where*, then you know that your answer needs to be a place of some sort and if you hear school, the answer should be quite obvious. “Do you go to” is necessary for forming a grammatically correct question but it's not that important for the listener to be able to answer appropriately. If a student catches the key words, it's possible for them to make a reasonable guess at the correct answer. This tip is also especially useful for something like the TOIEC listening test,

where many of the possible answers can be eliminated simply by knowing what the first word in the question is.

I also teach my students phrases that they can use if they didn't understand the question and missed the key words. For example, they could say something like, "Sorry, could you please repeat the question?" or, "I didn't understand, could you say it again slowly?" I tell them that it's not a terrible thing to ask someone to repeat something and that it's always better than giving a completely random answer that's unrelated to the question.



## **It Doesn't Always need to be Fun**

When you're new to teaching, there is the temptation to always be a constant entertainer. I call these people edutainers. However, edutainer mode is hard to keep up, week after week, month after month, and year after year. While it's good to have a laugh and a joke once in a while, learning English is not easy so it is okay to have more serious kinds of speaking activities that do not involve a game of some sort.

For example, partner conversation activities are extremely valuable because that means that every single student in your class is either listening or talking in a very active way for the duration of that activity. It also gives students a chance to get feedback from a partner similar to their own level, which is helpful because they are able to see if what they are saying is comprehensible, or not. Students will appreciate your classes if their English speaking skills are improving, even if you are not the most entertaining teacher so don't be afraid to do some more serious things.

## Make a Plan

Many ESL teachers have a very heavy teaching schedule of up to 30 hours/week (or more!), so there often isn't much time or energy to make lesson plans for classes. However, it can be quite challenging to have *consistently* great classes if you don't spend at least a few minutes thinking about the class and jotting down a few ideas about what you're going to do. Even if you have only 5-10 minutes, here are a few things you could think about:

1. How will you introduce the target language? A reading passage? A listening exercise? A story? A worksheet?
2. What will you write on the board?
3. What controlled practice activity will you do? What page in your book? Another resource? Is it student-centered? Could you have students do it with speaking, instead of writing (if it's a conversation class)? How will you provide feedback?
4. What freer practice activity will you do? Is it student-centered? Are students speaking a lot? How will you provide

feedback?

5. What will you do if you have some extra time left at the end of class?

6. Do you need any supplementary materials?

7. Follow-up or review in the next class?

Even spending five minutes jotting down the answer to these seven questions on a blank piece of paper before class will prove extremely useful in reducing your overall stress levels with regards to teaching as well as being beneficial for your students. It will even save you more time if you make a lesson plan template and then print off a stack of them to last you a month or two. Students also feel reassured that they are in capable hands if you have at least a few things written down on a piece of paper because they know you've spent time thinking about the class and that you have a plan for them to follow.

Remember that students see the greatest improvements when they're challenged to do new things, so in this case it would be using new grammar constructions or vocabulary

when speaking. If you plan carefully, you can ensure that your students are being pushed to do this, instead of just relying on their regular “go to repertoire” of things they've probably been using for years. Challenging our students could also involve pushing them to use their previous knowledge in a new activity or context and of course, this book is an excellent place to start if you need a few new ideas for speaking activities!

### **Provide a Demonstration of the Language and Game/Activity**

A normal way that people learn a language is by first “seeing” and then “doing.” You can demonstrate the target language to your students in various ways such as using a video clip from a movie, song, podcast, or the MP3 listening files and reading exercises that are in your textbook. Of course, you, the teacher, can also provide an example for your students but it's good for them to hear different genders, accents, and levels of English speakers so be sure to change it up from time to time. Keep in mind that there are many English speakers in the world who speak English as their second,

third or fourth language so be sure to use some of these examples as well.

Another situation in which you'll want to provide a demonstration for your students is when you set up an activity or game. Especially if your students are beginners, it will be extremely difficult for them to understand instructions without seeing a demonstration of them as well. I've found that even with my advanced classes, it is helpful to provide a demonstration because if I don't, my students often end up doing something that I don't want them to be doing. And of course, it's totally my fault!

## **Change Partners**

A common thing that happens in ESL classes is that students sit with the same partner every single day. This is not useful for a number of reasons, the main one being fossilization, where errors get entrenched. One way that our students know they are making a mistake is if their partner is unable to understand them. If a student goes with the same partner each time, that partner will get to know their mistakes and be able to understand them, even if nobody else can which isn't useful. Another reason that you need to change it up is that students are usually more motivated to speak in the target language (English!) if they aren't with their BFF. Finally, it simply gets boring to talk to the same person over and over again so changing it up periodically will increase motivation in your classes.

## **Give Feedback**

If you hear some errors while students are speaking, it can be helpful to give feedback to them. Think back to your own experiences of learning a language, sport skill or musical instrument. Part of learning is just practicing on your own, but I'm sure there were cases when you got some extremely valuable feedback about an error you were making which accelerated your improvement significantly. Our students want us to give them feedback on the errors that they are making and in my own informal surveys that is what students think my most important role should be.

There are two schools of thought about this: error correction can happen during the activity, or at the end. My general rule is that if you are focusing on accuracy, it is helpful to correct during an activity, especially for the controlled practice activities. If you are focusing on fluency, correct at the end and don't interrupt.

Don't forget that it's not helpful to correct everything unless you have very advanced level students. Doing so will

overwhelm your students and destroy their confidence. I will usually correct the following types of errors:

1. Those that impede understanding and communication in a significant way but only if it's something that my students are at a level to understand. For example, maybe a high beginner student doesn't know how to form questions and is asking, "dinner-eat?" It would be helpful to stop and at least write the correct form on the board for the student to copy, "What will \_\_\_\_\_ tonight?"

2. Those that involve the target language of that lesson.

3. Those that involve something we recently studied together in the past month or two.

4. Those that students at their level should have down cold. For example, a high intermediate level student should not be making any mistakes using the simple past.



## **Use the Whiteboard for Key Words and Phrases**

Just because you showed your students some vocabulary or a new grammar concept once or twice doesn't mean that they're going to remember it or be able to recall it when necessary. A way that we can help them is by writing the key vocabulary words or phrases that you are studying that day on one side of the whiteboard and leave them up there for the entire class for students to refer to if necessary. This is especially important for beginners because they often don't have the scaffolding in place in their brains to connect new material to, as our more advanced level students would. Gradually, as students become more proficient at using those particular words or grammatical constructs, we can stop putting them on the board and challenge students to recall them on their own.

## **Change it Up**

Just because you did a speaking game or activity that worked well one class doesn't mean that you should keep using it again and again. This will become boring really quickly for your students. Variety is key to keeping our students interested and engaged in the class and it's always good to challenge our students with new things so they can improve their skills. There are 39 speaking games and activities in this book—make use of them!

# **Top 5 Tips for Teaching Low Level Speaking Classes**

I really get how difficult it can be to teach “conversation” classes to very low level students who can barely say their name or what they ate for dinner last night—we've all been there. Then there are the expectations of the parents, our bosses, and the students themselves that we are supposed to perform a miracle of sorts and turn these very low level students into fluent English speakers who are comfortable conversing in English over the course of a single semester. To make matters worse, we often only see our students for two or three hours a week, if that and in a class or ten or more. It's very unrealistic but unfortunately, it's the situation that we often find ourselves in. Here are a few tips for you.

## **Don't Hope for Miracles**

Just because your boss, the students and the parents unrealistically expect miracles from you, doesn't mean that you need to as well. Be gentle with yourself and of course sincerely try to help your students improve their English speaking skills, but in the end it is up to the students to either take what you give them and run with it, or not. If not, there isn't much you can do besides continue to do your best to inspire and motivate. Certainly don't lose any sleep over it. I've had plenty of students in South Korean universities, who, despite having had studied English for ten years or more couldn't even tell me their name or what city they were from. I knew that simply getting that student to be able to tell me these things by the end of the semester would be a big improvement and that the goal of having an actual conversation was just too far beyond their capabilities that it would have been futile to even try.

When you're teaching beginners in speaking classes, celebrate the little improvements that you see and focus on those things. For example, the student who struggled with

pronouncing a word correctly finally got it. Cherish the moment when a student says something besides, “I’m fine, thank you, and you?” in response to your, “How are you today?” Or the student who had been struggling in a previous lesson but then is able to answer your review question at the beginning of the next class. Enjoy the feeling when one of the very shy students talks to you in the few minutes before class starts. There are plenty of little things in the stages before a “real conversation” that you can celebrate.

## **Focus on Other Skills First**

One of the theories of language learning is that a solid foundation in the more passive skills (listening and reading) comes before the more active production skills (writing and speaking). It's how we learn language as a child; first we listen and then eventually we speak. As we get older, we first learn to read and then we write. Therefore if your students are extremely low level, it can sometimes be unrealistic to focus extensively on speaking if they don't have a solid grasp of reading or listening skills. Even though the class is a “conversation” class, you can slip in some work on these other skills each class and this will really help your students get ready to speak later. In fact, most of the textbooks in use today introduce the target grammar or vocabulary through a reading or listening exercise. Since it's a “conversation” class, it can be tempting to skip over this and get straight to the speaking part of the lesson, but keep in mind that these things are actually quite useful for our lower level students for building a solid foundation.

All four skills are intricately connected and can be hard to separate but you don't really need to do this. The best classes are often those that delicately balance these four skills and so even in “conversation” or “speaking” classes, don't be afraid to include some of the other three skills as well, although your class should be heavier on the speaking if that is what the students and administration at your school expect of you. Don't forget to think beyond your class and see language learning as a holistic process that happens over years and decades.

In addition, you could also focus on some functional speaking skills, which in some ways are easier to teach and learn than just general speaking because they are so specific and the language is often quite controlled with a very limited range of variations. For example, you could work on giving advice with beginners by teaching them how to use *maybe you could/should* (very polite), *should/shouldn't* (more polite) and *you'd better/you'd better not* (less polite). The level of politeness would depend on the context you've chosen to introduce the language.

Another function that you could easily teach to beginners is apologizing. Something like, "I'm (really) sorry, I \_\_\_\_\_" is very useful and doesn't require complicated grammar or vocabulary.

Finally, agreeing and disagreeing are also useful and they don't involve complicated grammar. Things like: really, me too, I think so too, ummm how about \_\_\_\_\_?, etc. are within the grasp of most beginners.



## **Focus on Vocabulary**

One of the main reasons that students cannot converse freely is that they lack the vocabulary to be able to do so. In my experience, this is a far bigger problem for absolute beginners than lack of grammatical knowledge. Think about your own experiences in learning a language—I'm sure you knew what you wanted to say and perhaps even knew the grammar construction that you needed to use but probably just couldn't access that elusive, but necessary word. If you spend some time each class teaching even a few new words to your students, it will be time well spent. However, be careful not to overwhelm students with too many because then they won't actually remember anything! I find that the ideal amount is 5 new words per class, which is an amount that anyone can remember quite easily and it's also often possible to maintain these until the next class. Of course, you should review words periodically as well so that they remain in the student's working memory and are more readily accessible to them when needed.

## **Student-Centered Teaching: Is it Possible?**

Student-centered teaching should be the ideal that we all strive for in every single class we teach and it really is possible with even a high-beginner class. However, with very low level students it can be extremely difficult to do this and by necessity, you may have to have a more teacher-centered approach. If this is the case, do not worry too much about it, but always be thinking in the back of your mind how you could make each activity more focused on the students and less on you. If there's an activity that is mostly you talking, consider whether or not that's the best activity and think about if there's another one you could replace it with.

Remember, it's the students who should be working hard in your classes and not you.

I remember when I did the CELTA course (the 120 hour long ESL teaching certification program from Cambridge University) and how one of my tutors challenged me to make lessons that were more student-centered. I had thought that my lessons were this way already, but I now see that it wasn't true. He challenged me to consider every single thing

I did in class where I was at the front of the classroom speaking and whether or not it could be done in a way that had the students either discovering the language for themselves through guided discovery, or using the language in a meaningful way with a partner or small group. I challenge you to do the same thing that my tutor did for me. Carefully consider every single time you're at the front of the class talking and how you can reduce this talking time and increase the amount of time your students are active and engaged. Sure, it's a harder for them but they'll almost always appreciate it when they see gains in their language skills, which student-centered teaching will bring.

## **Build Confidence**

If your students are high school students or adults and have been studying English for years but are still extremely low level, it's highly likely that they have little to no confidence in their English abilities. Remember to meet students where they're at and don't praise only the top students in the class, but also praise the lower levels ones too for any small improvement that they make. Even a simple thing like having a positive attitude towards English that day in class or participating sincerely in a game or activity can be praised. Remember that even a small comment can go a long way towards building confidence and increasing motivation.

## **Best Activities for a Specific Situation**

This section is designed to be used as a quick reference guide when you're short of time and looking for an activity for a specific class that you're teaching. In my experience, these activities have worked particularly well with the recommend type of language learner.

## **Private 1-1 Classes with Adults**

[2 Truths and a Lie](#)

[120-90-60 Fluency Activity](#)

[The “Expert” conversation activity](#)

[Dictagloss](#)

## **Private 1-1 Classes with Teenagers**

[Draw a Picture, but Someone Else is Talking](#)

[20 Questions](#)

[Making Videos](#)

## **Classes: Teenagers**

[Steal the Eraser](#)

[ESL Speaking Bingo](#)

[Small Group Board Games](#)

[Making Videos](#)



## **Classes: University Students**

[Quiz Show Review Game](#)

[Typhoon](#)

[Survey Activities](#)

[Running Dictation](#)

## **Classes: Adults**

[20 Questions](#)

[120-90-60 Fluency Activity](#)

[Find Something in Common](#)

[Just a Minute](#)

## **Classes: Total Beginners**

[Steal the Eraser](#)

[Typhoon](#)

[Rock-Scissor-Paper](#)

[Partner Role-Plays](#)

## **Classes: Really Smart, Advanced Level Students**

[2 Truths and a Lie](#)

[20 Questions](#)

[Problem and Advice](#)

## **Icebreakers**

My Name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I like \_\_\_\_\_

Toilet Paper Icebreaker

The "Expert" Conversation Activity

2 Truths and a Lie

Just a Minute

# **The Last Minute Class: No Prep Time or Materials**

## **Required Lessons**

[Partner Role-Plays](#)

[Partner Conversation Starters](#)

[20 Questions](#)

[The Expert Conversation Activity](#)

[Never Have I Ever](#)

[Who do you Want at your Party?](#)

[Just a Minute](#)

# **Games and Activities for All Levels**

## **Vocabulary Flip Chart**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 20 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Flip-chart or flashcards

The captain sits in a chair at the front of the class facing her team. The teacher stands behind the captain with vocabulary words on a flip-chart or a stack of flashcards. If you use flashcards, make sure they are big enough for everyone to be able to see them, even at the back of the class. The team has to give hints in English (no gestures) to the captain until she can guess the word. At that point, the team moves on to the next word. Each round is three minutes and you can play 3-4 rounds with different captains. I give each group one pass per round in case there is a word that the captain really doesn't know.

## **Teaching Tips:**

One of the ways that students gain fluency is by employing communication strategies such as substitution, which means that when a student can't remember the specific vocabulary word that they want to use, they're able to substitute another word, or phrase to get their meaning across. This game is very useful for practicing substitution skills in a fun way.

Make sure you emphasize that this game requires speaking only English. It is simply too easy for students to say the word in their first language, the captain says it in English and then it's not a useful speaking activity. I warn students at the beginning of the game that if I hear a word in their first language, that round will immediately finish, even if they are only 5 seconds into it.

One of the cons of this game is that the other team is sitting idly waiting while the other team is playing. A way to alleviate this problem is by keeping the rounds very short so that waiting time is reduced. You can also mention that any word that a team has "passed" on could come back into play so it's good to pay attention. Furthermore, elicit the other team's



help to watch for any infractions such as gesturing, miming, or not speaking in English.

**Procedure:**

1. Prepare a large flip-chart of flashcards with your target vocabulary. I often use an old notebook.
2. Put the students into teams of 4-8. They choose their captain for the first round.
3. The first team sends their captain to the front of the class who sits in a chair facing their team, while the teacher stands behind them with the flashcards. Give the team 3 minutes to describe as many words as possible, using only English to the captain who must guess them. The teacher keeps track of how many correct words the team got.
4. Continue to play until all teams have played an equal number of rounds, with different captains for each round.
5. The team with the most points at the end of all the rounds is the winner.

## Small Group Board Games

Skills: Reading/speaking

Time: 25-40 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Board game sheet and marker for each student (a coin or eraser)

Board Games often come in the “teacher’s resource book” that goes along with your textbook and if this is the case, you're in luck because no prep will be required but you'll have a solid activity that your students will probably love and it has the added bonus of being extremely student-centered. However, don't worry if there isn't a pre-made game in the textbook because it's easier than you might think to make your own. It will only take 5-10 minutes once you get a bit of experience doing it.

Use questions based on the grammar and/or vocabulary that you've been studying during the previous classes. Have some fun squares, such as, “Switch positions with the person

on your right” or, “Go back 5 spaces.” The style I typically use is a question of some kind where the student has to speak one or two sentences in response to it. The other students in the group listen for incorrect answers, in which case the student has to move back the number that they “rolled. ” You can use dice (which gets loud), two coins (2 heads = 5, 1 head + 1 tail = 3, 2 tails = 1), or a number sheet where students close their eyes and move their pen to choose a number.

Here are 2 board games that I use in my classes for “always” + “continuous” verbs and the simple past so you can get an idea of how easy it really is to make your own.

[Always + Continuous Verb board game](#)

[Simple Past Board Game](#)

### **Teaching Tips:**

Board games have their own lexical set and it may be the first time many of your students have ever played a board game in English so it's useful to do some pre-teaching.

Before you play, you can teach them some key phrases and

encourage them to speak only English (it's your turn, go ahead, your roll, pass the dice, let's ask the teacher, etc.).

Dice are my least favorite way to “roll” because they fall off the desk, roll around the room and they can also be very loud. Using coins or a paper sheet with a pen is much more controlled.

If students disagree about whether an answer is correct or incorrect, you can make a joke and tell them not to fight but just to ask you to be the referee. You should think carefully about your game though and make most of the questions easy enough that there are obvious correct answers. If not, your class time will be very stressful if you have a big class and many groups demanding your attention at the same time.

Before I give the winner of each group a little prize, I'll often make them answer one or two final questions, which I usually take from the game board. It's a good way to review correct vocabulary and/or grammar use with the class in case any group has been off-base but you didn't catch it. A key component of learning language is hearing it and using it

again, and again, and again. Help your students do this in class by doing quick reviews together at the end of activities.

**Procedure:**

1. Hand out the “game boards” as well as dice or coins to groups of 3-5 students. Have each student provide their own token—it can be an eraser, a key or a small piece of paper.
2. The students can do rock-scissor-paper to see who goes first. The first student uses the dice or coins to find the number of spaces they will move ahead. That student answers the question and if correct, they stay on that space but if incorrect, they move back the number of spaces that they rolled.
3. The next student rolls the dice and answers a question and so on.
4. The game continues until one student reaches the final square on the game.

## **Just a Minute**

Skills: Speaking

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Whiteboard, timer

This is a very simple activity that you can use as a fast warm-up at the beginning of class in order to get your students talking. Write a bunch of general categories on the board such as jobs, hobbies, dreams, movies, food, etc. Put the students into groups of 4 and they can number themselves 1-2-3-4. Then, ask one of the students to throw a paper airplane at the board and whatever word it gets closest to is the topic for the first student. All the number ones must talk about that topic for one minute without stopping and if they stop or have a long pause, they've lost the challenge. You can adjust the time limit to be higher or lower depending on the level of students (beginner = 30 seconds, advanced = 2 minutes). Erase the first speaking round word from the board

and continue the activity with the remaining three students except that they have different topics. It's helpful if the teacher does an example speech first with a topic that the students choose.

### **Teaching Tip:**

For higher level students, you can require that their teammates listen carefully and each of them has to ask the speaker an *interesting* follow-up question or two.

### **Procedure:**

1. The teacher writes topics on the whiteboard (teacher-supplied, or elicited from students).
2. Put students into groups of 4. They number themselves 1-2-3-4.
3. The teacher does an example speech with a topic that students choose.
4. One student throws a paper airplane at the whiteboard. The topic closest to where it hits is the first one.

5. Student one has to talk about that topic for a minute without stopping. The goal is to have minimal pauses and to never stop talking. (Optional: the other three students each ask a follow-up question). 6. Erase the first speaking round word. Another student throws the paper airplane and finds another topic. The number two students talk for a minute. Continue with the third and fourth rounds' students.



## Quiz Show Review Game

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 30-45 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: PowerPoint chart, or white board and questions

This is a "Jeopardy" style quiz game, which is useful for teenagers all the way up to adults. It works especially well as a review game before a test. Although most teachers spend a lot of time making this game by using PowerPoint, it really isn't necessary and you can simply write up the grid on the whiteboard before class starts in less than a minute. It should only take you 5-10 minutes to prepare the questions if you're very familiar with the material so it really is a low-prep game.

Make up categories based on whatever you have been studying. For example: "vocab, can/can't, movies, body, etc." Think of questions that range from easy (\$100) to difficult (\$500). Put the students in groups of 3-4 and they have to

pick their category and question. The students can pick whatever they want, but the key is that if they get it correct, they get the points. If wrong, they get minus that number. I put in a few +/- \$500/\$1000 and choose your own wager (up to \$1000) to make it more interesting and give the lower level teams a chance to catch up.

There are a few different ways that you can get students to answer questions such as being the first entire team to put their hands up, or hit a buzzer but that can get pretty chaotic. Instead, I do this activity in a more controlled fashion with each team choosing questions in order, one at a time.

One very fun category that I like to include is “random,” where I ask any sort of question that we didn't specifically talk about in class. It's more like a general knowledge or trivia category. If you're looking for trivia that's appropriate for ESL students, the questions I use in my own classes are from [ESL Publications](#). They're very high quality and will truly make your life easier because there isn't much on the Internet in the way of decent questions for adults who don't

speaking English as their first language. Trust me, I've looked for it and couldn't really find it before this book.

You could also include a category called, "All about \_\_\_\_\_" where you ask the students questions about yourself. Only include those things that you've mentioned in class before and observant students will be able to answer.

### **Teachings Tips:**

Something I do to make it more interesting for the other teams who are not answering the question is tell the students that some of the questions from the game are actual questions on the exam that they're usually doing the next week. I don't think I've ever had so many students paying such close attention to anything before! And of course, put in a few of the game questions on the test to reward those who were listening closely.

If you want to make this game more student-centered and also practice writing and questions forms, you can get the students to make the questions. Put the students into groups of 3-4 and give them the general categories. Then, for each

category, they have to submit one easy, one medium and one difficult question. Compile their questions and play the game in the next class you have together. A team might be lucky and get their own question, but it shouldn't happen too often.

### **Procedure:**

1. Make a list of review questions. This depends on the number of categories but 25 works well (5x5).
2. Make sure each team gets asked an equal number of questions.
3. Put students into teams of 3-6 and do rock-scissor-paper to see who goes first.
4. The first team chooses a category and a price. Ask them that question. If correct, they get the points and you can eliminate that question from your board. If incorrect, they lose those points and that question remains in play so that another team can answer it.

5. The next team chooses a question. Follow the same procedure as above.

6. Continue the game until most or all of the questions are gone and all the teams have had a chance to answer an equal number of questions.

## Partner Conversation Starters

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 10 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

Students often struggle with how to start a conversation and this is an activity you can use to help them. It's particularly useful for beginners but it's also possible for advanced level students if you give the students a particular context relevant to them such as “at the water cooler” (business small talk) or “at the drink table” (party small-talk).

The way it works is that you write the beginning of a conversation on the PowerPoint or whiteboard. For example,

A: “How was your weekend?”

B: “It was \_\_\_\_\_. I \_\_\_\_\_.”

Or,

A: "What did you do last night?"

B: "I \_\_\_\_\_."

Or,

A: "Anything interesting happening with you lately?"

B: "Not really, I've just been \_\_\_\_\_."

Put the student into pairs and they have to engage in a short conversation for about a minute using the starter. If you have adults, you can ring a bell after one minute is up and then they have to quickly find someone else that they haven't talked to yet and start the conversation again. If you have teenagers, it can get a little chaotic to do it that way so I recommend forming two opposing lines. One line stays stationary while the other line moves one person down the line for each round.

### **Teaching Tips:**

An important sub-skill that our students need to be proficient at is initiating a conversation. However, it can sometimes be a bit of a difficult thing even for English native speakers so

it's really useful to provide our students with opportunities to practice it and also to give them a few set phrases they can keep in their English “tool-kits. ” It can be useful to do this activity at regular intervals (every month perhaps) and use different starters each time.

**Procedure:**

1. Think of a conversation starter. Put it on the PowerPoint or whiteboard.
  2. Have students find a partner, either in a line or by themselves.
  3. Students have a one minute conversation using the starter.
  4. Ring a bell and students have to find a new partner, either by mingling or moving one space down the line to face a new partner.
  5. Students have another short one minute conversation.
- Repeat as many times as desired.



# Typhoon

Skills: Listening/speaking

Time: 30 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: White board and questions

This is a fun review game that any age group of students will love that requires a little preparation but no materials. Every single time I play it, my students always want to play again and talk about it for the rest of the semester. Draw a grid on the board, marking one row with numbers and one with letters. 5x5 works well for a 30 minute game. Put in two or three of each of the special letters (T/H/V), secretly on your master paper, but not the board. On the board will just be a blank grid.

T = typhoon: lose all your points

H = hurricane: pick 1 team for minus 5 points

V = vacation: get 5 points for free

E = easy question: 1 point

M = medium question: 3 points

D = difficult question: 5 points

Fill in the rest of your grid with these easy, medium and difficult questions. Then depending on how big your class is, make 4-5 teams. They pick a square, (B-6 for example), then you write the letter in the box and ask them the question or reveal the “special square” that corresponds to it. Have a list of easy/medium/hard questions prepared beforehand. If they get the question correct, give them the points and if not, erase the letter in the box and another team can pick that square if they want and get the same question. Here is the [grid and questions](#) that I prepared for one of my university classes in Korea.

**Teaching Tips:**

If one team is running away with certain victory, you can adjust it on the fly by switching some squares around but don't be obvious about it. For example, if the team who is in the lead gets a vacation or hurricane, you can easily switch it with an easy question. Then later in the game, hopefully one of the last place teams will get the vacation or hurricane instead (remember a hurricane is where that team can choose another team to lose points, therefore reducing the gap).

If you want to make it more fun, you can be kind of dramatic when writing the letter up in the grid on the board. For example, just do the single line-stroke to start off T, H, E, etc. and students will be anxious to know what it is (because the horizontal strokes of each letter are missing). I also often say things, "Oooooohhhh, bad weather is coming. " Or, "Hmmm . . . the sky is getting very dark."

Make sure that all the students get a chance to participate by saying that once a student on a certain team has answered a question, they can't answer again until all the other team members have. However, their teammates can help them by

giving some hints if necessary so that the lower level students won't feel embarrassed or like they're letting down their teams.

### **Procedure:**

1. Prepare review questions beforehand, as well as a “grid” with the appropriate letters marked on it (T, H, V, E, M, D).
2. Write the corresponding grid on the whiteboard, but be sure not to reveal the letters. It should just be blank at this point.
3. Put the students into 4-5 teams. They can rock-scissor-paper to decide who goes first. The first team chooses a square and then you reveal which letter it contains. If a special square, perform that action and if a question, ask the appropriate level of question. If the answer is correct, they get the points and that square is finished. If incorrect, nothing happens and that square remains in the game.
4. The next team chooses a square, performs the action, and so on it goes with the next team.

5. Keep track of the total points and continue the game until all squares are revealed.

## Making Videos

Skills: Speaking

Time required: 1-5 hours

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Smartphone and/or computer

For my conversation classes, I rarely give the students written homework. It doesn't really make sense and it seems far better to me that my students have to practice speaking. Plus, at least in Korea, everybody loves using their Smartphone so this gives my students another excuse to do this.

I base the homework on whatever we're studying. For example, in one of my higher level classes we were talking about good and bad manners, so I had my students choose a specific situation (going to someone's home, at a coffee shop, eating out, etc.) and explain what things you should and shouldn't do. For lower level students, I've done things like telling students to introduce themselves and then giving

a few topics that they have to cover such as family, hobbies and hopes for the future.

It's really easy for the students to upload the videos on *YouTube* and then send you the link so you can watch and evaluate them. To make it even more fun for the students, I tell them that they can make the video with someone else if they wish. If it's a person in the same class, the requirements are usually slightly higher (for example, five minutes instead of three). But, they could also do it with anybody outside the class. I've had students get their families, little brothers or sisters, girlfriends or boyfriends, international students they know in their dormitory, and even random people on the street to help them. It's usually really funny and interesting and it's homework that I truly don't mind grading.

You could show the videos in class if you want, but I often don't since there are always lots of students who are really shy (in Korea). However, if students know that other students will be watching their videos, motivation is higher and the videos tend to be better quality. Another thing you can do is to have students watch the other videos and comment on

them as part of their homework but be careful with this and make sure to provide specific rules for what kinds of comments are allowed if you teach teenagers because they can sometimes be less than kind.

Here are a few examples of videos my advanced level students have done recently for homework:

[Video #1](#)

[Video #2](#)

[Video #3](#)

[Video #4](#)

[Video #5](#)

### **Teaching Tips:**

Getting your students to make videos is a particularly effective way to work on functional language or language sub-skills. Some things you could focus on for solo videos include: giving an opinion, offering advice, using more or less formal language depending on the situation, marking the



main points of a discourse through emphasis, and verbal cues or transition statements. If there are two or more people, you can focus on the things previously mentioned but could also consider making a request, apologizing, agreeing, disagreeing, asking for an opinion, turn-taking skills, initiating, etc. What you choose to focus on depends on the topic you choose and whether the student is alone or with a partner. For example, in solo speech it can be really useful to focus on something like grammatical accuracy, pronunciation or intonation. However, in a pair your students could work on offering advice, or transition statements.

Even if you're not stellar at using technology, chances are that your students mostly are, especially if they are teenagers or university students so don't let this hinder you. I've found that even the mature students in my classes could figure it out, usually by asking their own teenagers or students (many of them are teachers themselves). Of course, you should put up your own video on *YouTube* first so you at least have a basic idea of the process. If students are having particular problems, I recommend instructing them to Google

it in their own language because the question has surely been answered already.

I never give additional points or take away points for things like poor sound or lighting quality as long as I can see and hear them. I instead focus on English use, since it's an English class and not a video making or editing one. That said, if a student uses their creative powers and goes above and beyond what the other students have done, I'll usually give them a bonus point or two and even ask them if I could show their video in class to the other students.

Some students worry about privacy issues so I always mention that I'll grade the videos very quickly (within a day) and as soon as they get an email from me with my comment, they can delete the video. Another option is to have students send you the video itself by email or upload it to a shared *Google Drive* or *DropBox* account.

### **Procedure:**

1. Decide on the criteria for the video: alone/partner/group, length, topic, etc. Here are three examples of video

homework assignments I've given to my advanced conversation students:

[Introduce Yourself Video](#)

[Good and Bad Manners in Korea](#)

[Rules and Regulations in Korea](#)

2. Explain the criteria very clearly to your students and either have them work on it in class or for homework.

3. Students can upload the video to *YouTube* and then send the link to the teacher.

4. There are three options for watching the videos:

A. The teacher watches them and writes comments for the students.

B. You watch them in class, with an optional Q&A time.

C. Students watch each other's videos outside of class and leave a comment. I do not recommend this option for teenagers due to the bullying factor. However, it works quite well with university students and adults.

## **Describing Something Guessing Game**

Skills: Speaking/listening/reading

Time required: 5-10 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Handout or PowerPoint with approximately 20 pictures

This is a simple warm-up activity that you can use to generate some interest in a topic for intermediate or advanced students or it can also be used as a quick review of the last lesson's contents. For beginners, it's best to play after you've taught them the necessary language to make the sentences instead of as a warm-up at the beginning of class.

Make up a handout or PowerPoint with pictures of around 20 famous people. Give some hints, such as, "He's American," "He's a sport player," and, "He plays golf." By this time the students will have guessed Tiger Woods. You then cross Tiger Woods off their list or delete it from the PowerPoint.

Turn it over to the students and they will take turns describing the people to each other.

You can play in pairs, small groups or with the whole class. This activity works for almost any topic (animals/food/clothes, etc.) and is good for teenagers or adults. Here is a Korea-centric PowerPoint version of this game that I used in my own classes a couple of years ago:

[Famous People Guessing Game.](#)

### **Teaching Tips:**

A sub-skill that you could focus on using this activity is hedging, which is when we are not sure about something and use language to indicate that. For example, “Maybe it's \_\_\_\_\_,” “It might be \_\_\_\_\_,” “Is it \_\_\_\_\_?,” “It could be \_\_\_\_\_.”

I emphasize that students should speak in full sentences when they are giving hints to their partners. Simply saying things like, “Man, American, golf” is really not useful for helping students improve their English skills beyond the most basic beginners and even then it's questionable. It's useful to

put some example sentences on the board such as “She/He has \_\_\_\_\_ (hair/eyes).” “She/He is from \_\_\_\_\_.” “She/He is a \_\_\_\_\_ (job).”

As a general rule, the more that you can get your students speaking in full sentences, the better off they'll be in terms of language learning. It's far easier to let your students just say one or two words, but they're not actually pushing themselves to incorporate grammar constructions into their speech in a meaningful way. But, of course don't forget that spoken discourse has much shorter sentences than more formal written work, so don't push students to use more complicated grammatical constructions when doing a simple speaking activity like this.

You can put in a few fun pictures to make it more interesting. For example, I'll always include a picture of myself in a situation where it might not look like me because I had a different hairstyle or was wearing glasses. Or, I'll put in a picture of my twin sister (I really do have a twin)! You can also add a picture of a student in the class or another teacher at your school that the students would know.

## **Procedure:**

1. Prepare pictures of famous people on a handout or in a PowerPoint. PowerPoint is easier and better, but check how it will look on the big screen first before using it in class. Sometimes low-quality pictures can look terrible when made bigger. Also, be careful if you print out the pictures because you'll often need a really high quality printer in order to make the pictures easily recognizable.
2. Do one example with the students so they get an idea of how to play.
3. Put the students into partners or small groups. The first student chooses someone secretly and describes him/her to his/her partner, who must guess the person, using hedging if they are unsure about the answer. You can also allow your students to ask some "W/H" questions to their partner if they wish.
4. The students switch roles and continue until the time is up. In order to avoid frustration, I usually make a limit for each

picture of two minutes because there might be one that the guesser really just doesn't know.



## Partner Role-Plays

Skills: Writing/speaking

Time Required: 20-40 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

Give the students a conversation starter to get them going. For example, if you're talking about *feelings* in class that day, you can use:

A: Hey \_\_\_\_\_, how are you doing?

B: I'm great, how are you?

A: I'm \_\_\_\_\_ (sad, embarrassed, angry, bored, etc.).

\*\*\*Anything besides, "I'm fine, thank you, and you?" is good.

\*\*\*\*

B: Oh? What's wrong?

A: \_\_\_\_\_.

B: \_\_\_\_\_.

Another context that I often use this activity with is *illness or injury*. For example:

A: Hey \_\_\_\_\_, you don't look (sound) so good! What's wrong?

B: Oh yeah, I'm not good. I \_\_\_\_\_.

A: Really? \_\_\_\_\_.

B: \_\_\_\_\_.

A: \_\_\_\_\_.

One final context that I use this with is *excuses*. For example:

A: Hey \_\_\_\_\_, you're \_\_\_\_\_ minutes late!

B: I'm really sorry. I've been/I had to \_\_\_\_\_.

A: Hmmm . . . \_\_\_\_\_.

Give the students about ten minutes to write the conversation with their partner. You can adjust the number of lines and how detailed of a starter you give to suit the ability level of your students. For lower level students, it can be helpful to have a word bank on the board relevant to the context so that the writing portion of this activity doesn't get too long (you could also provide them with a detailed, fill in the blank script). Then, the students memorize their conversation (no papers when speaking!), and do a role-play it in front of their classmates if you have a small class of less than ten.

Remember that you should try to maximize the amount of time students are talking. If you have a larger class, there are a few different ways to handle this. You could get pairs to come up to your desk and show you their conversation while the other students are working on something else, you could use it as a speaking test of some kind, each pair could join with one or two other groups and perform for them, or finally you could have students make a video of themselves and send you the link or put it up on *YouTube*.

I really like this activity because it's perfect for lower level students who want to practice “conversation” but don't quite have the skills to do this on their own and it's also a good way to force your advanced students to use some new grammar or vocabulary that you're studying.

### **Teaching Tips:**

Having your students make conversations is very useful for practicing functional language and speaking sub-skills. I usually choose one or two functions to mention when I'm giving the instructions for the activity and provide a bit of coaching and language input surrounding that, depending on the level—beginners will need more help.

The functions in particular that fit well with partner conversations include agreeing, disagreeing, apologizing, and asking advice. The sub-skills that you can emphasize are things like turn-taking, initiating a conversation, speaking for an appropriate length of time, stress and intonation, responding (really?), and cohesive devices, particularly noun pronoun reference: A: I saw a movie last night. B: Which one did you see? A: I saw Ironman. It was good.

This truly is one of the most useful things you can do in your conversation classes, especially for beginner or intermediate students so make sure you try it out at least once or twice over the course of a semester. It gives your students a chance to have a real conversation which will build a lot of confidence but they won't have the pressure of coming up with something to say on the spot. That said, it's gets boring if you do this every class; I generally do it about once a month for a class that meets twice a week over the course of a semester.

**Procedure:**

1. Prepare a conversation starter based on what you are studying.
2. (Optional) Pre-teach some language that students could use, if you haven't done that already in your lesson.
3. Write the conversation starter on the whiteboard, PowerPoint, or on a handout.
4. Have students complete the conversation in pairs. Then, they must prepare to speak by memorizing and adding in

stress and intonation. You could give some individual help to each pair to assist them in knowing what to stress and how to do it.

5. Have students stand up and “perform” their conversation if you have a small class. In larger classes, there are a few other options (see above).

6. Reward teams for interesting conversations, good acting (no reading), and correct grammar/vocabulary that you were studying that day.

## Survey Activities

Skills: Speaking/listening/writing/reading

Time Required: 15-30 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials: Survey handout

Give the students a sheet of paper with some questions and they need to find one of their classmates who fit each slot. My general rule is that one question equals around two minutes for intermediate to advanced students so 10 questions would equal a 20 minute activity; it's one minute per question for beginners because they will not be as good at asking follow-up questions. The kinds of questions you could put on your paper include things like: "Do you travel sometimes?" or, "Are you a university student?" Then, if their partner answers yes (encourage students to answer in full sentences!), they write down their partner's name and ask them one (beginner) or two (intermediate to advanced) more questions to elicit some extra information. They can only ask

each classmate one question. If their partner's answer is no, they should choose another question to ask them.

Prep the activity well before you turn students loose by saying what you're looking for: only speaking English, everybody standing up, talking to everybody in mostly full sentences, writing the answers in English. Get a student to ask you one of the questions first and then ask a student one of the questions so your students have two models of what they need to do. Here is a survey that I would use on the first day of class:

### Get to Know Each Other Survey

| Name | Do you _____? Are you _____? | Extra Information (W |
|------|------------------------------|----------------------|
|      |                              |                      |
|      | from outside this city       |                      |
|      | in third year                |                      |
|      | play sports                  |                      |
|      | live alone                   |                      |
|      | eat pizza a lot              |                      |



|  |                                   |  |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|
|  | an only child                     |  |
|  | play sports                       |  |
|  | have a part time job              |  |
|  | have a boyfriend or girlfriend    |  |
|  | like horror movies                |  |
|  | in second year                    |  |
|  | take the subway to school         |  |
|  | think English is the best subject |  |
|  | enjoying this class               |  |
|  | love your school                  |  |
|  | like studying English             |  |
|  |                                   |  |

Some more surveys that I've used include:

[Around the House Survey](#)—a good example of a more open-

ended survey where the students have to make their own questions; this survey is perfect for higher level students.

[Celebrations Survey](#)

[Have you Ever Survey](#)

### **Teaching Tips:**

Along with [partner conversation starters](#), this is my other favorite ESL speaking activity that I regularly use in class (at least once a month). It's perfect for beginner to advanced students and it's one of the most student-centered activities that I know of.

Surveys are an excellent way for students to practice some important speaking sub-skills, especially responding appropriately based on what their partner tells them. For example, if they are surprised they could respond with, "Really?" If in agreement, they could say, "Yeah, me too. " If in strong disagreement, they could say something like, "Wow! Why do you think that?" You could even put three categories on the board for "Agree," "Disagree" and "Surprise" and elicit a few ideas from the students about

appropriate things they could say in response to a statement.

Another important speaking sub-skill is turn taking. I emphasize to my students that there are times when in-depth and lengthy discourses are necessary (a presentation) but doing a survey activity like this mimics small talk. In small talk, the keys are to listen well, ask some interesting questions and follow-up questions, give short, concise answers and not to ramble. I will sometimes give my students an example of a rambling answer and they usually find it really funny, but I hope that they get the point too!

### **Procedure:**

1. Prepare the survey, based on whatever you are studying.
2. Hand out surveys and write up one or two of the question on the board, making it look the same as the handout. Do two example questions with students, one with you asking a student a question and vice-versa for the second one.
3. Students stand up and talk to one classmate asking them one question (any order is okay). If the answer is "yes," they write in the name and ask a follow-up question. They can

write one or two words in the appropriate slot based on the answer their partner gave them.

4. If the answer is no, they must ask another question from the survey until they get a “yes. ”

5. The pair splits up and each student finds a new partner to talk to.

6. The activity continues until the allotted time is finished.

## Speaking Bingo

Skills: Speaking/listening/writing

Time: 20-30 minutes

Level: High-Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Blank "Bingo" grids, or blank paper

This is a very fun activity that teenagers as well as university students seem to love. Have a list of about 30 vocabulary words that you've been studying. If you use less, the game will be over very quickly. Give the students a pre-made Bingo Grid, or have them draw a 5x5 grid. Then the students fill in the grid randomly from the list of words on the board or PowerPoint. Then, choose someone to go first (rocks-scissor-paper, draw numbers out of a hat, according to the attendance sheet, etc.). The first student describes a word, but doesn't actually say the word. The next person describes another word and on it goes, just like a regular Bingo game, but the students are speaking the whole time. You can do variations, such as "1 line," "2 lines," "X-Bingo" and

“Blackout.” This variation works best in smaller classes of ten or less.

In bigger classes, you can describe the words but it becomes solely a listening and writing exercise instead of a speaking one. Another way to do it would be to put students in small groups of 4-6 to play together; there are two benefits—there's more student talking time and it becomes more of a strategic game because each student can keep an eye on their opponent's boards.

### **Teaching Tips:**

One important strategy to increase fluency that our students need to practice is producing synonyms of a word they don't know, or if can't remember the exact one that they want. This Bingo game is an excellent way to focus on this.

This game requires absolutely no prep-time if you are given a class at the last minute and need something to fill the time. Simply ask the students what they've been studying the past few days or weeks and if they say, “animals,” then ask them to tell you all the animals they know and write them on the

board and that will form the list they have to choose from as they prepare their boards.

Ask the students to use a highlighter or just an “x” over the words instead of scribbling it out entirely with their pens. This way, you are able to check their answers in case of a Bingo.

### **Procedure:**

1. Prepare blank Bingo grid photocopies beforehand (or students can draw their own on paper), as well as a list of vocab words (PowerPoint works well).
2. Students fill in the Bingo grid with their chosen words.
3. The first student chooses a word and describes it, using hints but not the word itself. You can choose the order of who describes words any number of ways: drawing numbers, seating arrangement, alphabetical order, etc.
4. All students cross off that word if they have it on their Bingo grid. The next student describes a word and so on.
5. The first student to get one line is the winner. The next winner is two lines, then “X,” and then “blackout. ” My rule is

that you can't win more than one round.



## What Am I?

Skills: Speaking/listening/reading

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Tape or pins and vocabulary words on paper

This is a classic party game that is an excellent way for beginner students to practice asking simple questions. I often use it as a warm-up in the next class if in the previous one we studied about question forms. For more advanced students, you can choose much harder vocabulary words instead of simple ones like you would for beginners. A good topic for advanced students (or a party you are hosting) is famous people.

Write a bunch of animals, jobs, hobbies or whatever vocabulary you want on slips of paper. Then tape or pin one to each student's back so that they can't see what it is. They have to go around to their classmates asking yes/no

questions to find out what they are. For example, “Do I have four legs?” After each question, they can make a guess and the other student will answer “yes” or “no.” They can only ask each student one question, so they will talk to almost everyone in the class by the end of the activity.

### **Teaching Tips:**

Be sure to pick vocabulary that you are sure everyone is familiar with. This game really isn't fun for the student who is unlucky enough to get “armadillo. ”

Also, emphasize to students that this game is just for fun and the purpose is to enjoy themselves while practicing some questions in English. While they can just look at their own paper or get someone to tell them the word, it's not useful and it won't feel good to figure out the word through cheating.

### **Procedure:**

1. The teacher prepares slips of paper with the target vocabulary.
2. The teacher pins or tapes one slip to each student's back.

3. Students walk around the class asking one classmate one yes/no question. The classmate answers the question and after each question, they can have one guess as to what the secret thing is.

4. If incorrect, they talk to another classmate and follow the same procedure. If correct, they take a rest, or get another paper from the teacher depending on time. A student can only ask one question to each student in the class—they cannot speak to the same student twice.

## **Draw a Picture, but Someone Else is Talking**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Blank paper

This is a fun way to practice body parts or descriptive words (big, small, long, etc.) and I guarantee that everyone will be laughing throughout this activity. The students sit back to back and one person is the “talker” while the other one is the “drawer. ” The person talking describes something that they’re looking at to their partner (a face, a body, a city, a monster) and that person draws what they hear. The results are usually hilarious and fun to show to the rest of the class!

### **Teaching Tips:**

Some useful functional language that you can practice with this activity is asking for clarification. You can pre-teach some language surrounding the topic, such as:

How \_\_\_\_\_ (long, tall, etc.)?

What do you mean?

I didn't understand, could you say it again?

What did you say? I couldn't hear you.

This activity can get quite loud so it's best to ask students to spread out in the classroom, if possible.

If you teach absolute beginners this is also a great activity, but you might have to do it in a more teacher-centered way. For example, the students could describe a picture to you that you draw on the board, or you could describe something to them and they all draw their own versions of it.

**Procedure:**

1. Two students sit back to back but close enough to talk to each other.
2. Give student A a picture of some kind, based on whatever you are studying. I usually put something up on the

PowerPoint and have the drawer sit with their back towards the screen.

3. Student A describes the picture to student B who must draw it, without looking at the original picture. Student B can ask some questions to student A to clarify if necessary.

4. Compare the original picture with the drawing and laugh a lot!

## **Charades with Speaking**

Skills: Speaking

Time: 20-30 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: White board

You can use this activity to review whatever you're studying. For example, verbs work especially well. Write out some phrases or words that can be easily acted out on small pieces of paper and put them in an envelope.

Divide the class up into two teams. The first team sends one person, the captain up to the front and they have to act out and describe in English as many things as they can in two minutes. Alternatively, you can have each team member rotate through the captain role during a single 3-4 minute round. The first person describes the first word and after their team guesses it, they go to the back of the line and the next person is up. Then the next team goes. You can do as many rounds as you want with different captains.

## **Teaching Tips:**

To add even more fun, if there is a team that is behind by a lot you can have a double and then a triple bonus round to give them some hope that they can catch up and maybe even win.

## **Procedure:**

1. Prepare some words or phrases beforehand, based on whatever you're studying.
2. Divide the class into two and each team can choose their first captain.
3. Team A sends their captain to the front who randomly chooses a paper and then must describe and act it out to their team who can guess what it is.
4. When the team guesses correctly, the captain takes another word and the game continues. Alternatively, you can have the students rotate the captain role amongst themselves during the course of a single round. In this case,



make the round a bit longer—maybe four minutes instead of two.

5. Each round is 2-4 minutes and each team tries to get as many words as possible.

6. The next team goes, using different words.

7. You can play as many rounds as you wish, but make sure you have different captains for each one so everyone gets a chance to describe the words.

## 20 Questions

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 20 minutes

Level: High-Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

This is a “20 questions” style game based on whatever you’re studying such as animals or jobs that is particularly effective for working on yes/no question forms and also logical thinking. If you have higher level students, this works well as a warm-up or icebreaker activity. You can leave it open and allow the students to choose any person, place or thing.

The teacher starts the game by thinking of a secret thing and the students can ask the teacher yes/no questions. Keep track of how many questions are asked and incorrect answers count as a guess too. Students can then play the game in small groups or in pairs, which will significantly increase the student talking time.

## **Teaching Tips:**

It is especially important to do a demonstration of this game because in my experience, it isn't played in many parts of the world. You can also coach students a little bit on what good and bad questions types are, such as a guess right at the start of the game is a terrible and too specific type of question but a general question which eliminates a lot of possible answers is a good one (animals: Does it have 4 legs?, or jobs: Do I need to go to university to get it?).

This game is easily adaptable to make it much easier or much more difficult. To make it very difficult, just say that the secret word has to be a noun. If you want to make it less difficult, specify either a person, place or thing. Finally, the easiest version is to choose a more specific category such as animals or jobs. If you choose the easiest version, you might want to reduce the number of questions from 20 down to 10. For absolute beginners, it's useful to write some example questions on the board for them to refer to throughout the activity.

This is another one of those absolutely nothing required in the way of preparation or materials games which can be played with a variety of levels and class sizes (from 1-40). Keep it in your bag of tricks to pull out in case of emergency.

**Procedure:**

1. The teacher chooses a secret thing for the example. Students ask a yes/no question. The teacher answers the question and puts one tick (checkmark) on the board.
2. Students ask more questions and the game continues until the students either guess the secret thing or they reach 20 questions/guesses. If you have a small class, it's easy to monitor the activity to ensure that each student gets to ask a question. If you have a larger class, you can make a rule that once a student has asked one question, they cannot ask another one until five more questions have been asked. If the students guess the secret thing, they win. If they reach 20 questions without guessing, the teacher is the winner.
3. Each guess also counts as one question, in order to prevent random guessing.

4. Students can play the game in partners or small groups of 3-5. Whoever guesses the correct answer gets to choose the next secret thing.

## **Running Dictation**

Skills: Writing/listening/speaking/reading

Time: 15 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: The “dictation” + some way to attach it to the walls or board.

This is one of my favorite activities which covers reading, writing, listening and speaking. There are a wide variety of English styles you can choose: poems, song lyrics, a short story, famous quotes—the list is almost limitless. For example, you might make up a story or conversation a few sentences long (less than ten). Put each sentence on a strip of paper and you can also put another strip of paper on top to prevent cheating. Put these around the classroom in various locations.

The students will be in teams of two. One person is the reader and one is the writer. The reader gets up and reads a bit of the passage and comes and tells it to the writer. They

go back to remember more of it and so on and so on. At the end, the students have to put the song or conversation in order. If you have beginner students, make sure it's obvious enough what the correct order should be. Intermediate and advanced students can handle something with a bit of ambiguity. When they're done, I'll check their writing and if there aren't many mistakes plus the order is correct, that team is the winner. How many mistakes you allow depends on the level of your students.

Tell your students before the activity starts that standing at the strip of paper and then yelling to their partner instead of walking over to them is not allowed or they will be disqualified.

Here are 2 examples of running dictations I've used in the past:

[Around the house](#)—Intermediate Level

[Introduce Yourself](#)—Beginner Level

**Teaching Tips:**

Make sure you let your students know what cheating is (yelling, the “reader/speaker” touching the pen, using their phone camera) and if that happens their team will automatically be disqualified.

Make sure you move beyond simply dictating the sentences down onto the paper into dealing with meaning as well. You can do this by requiring students to put the conversation, song or poem in the correct order. They can simply write “1, 2, 3, 4” beside each sentence instead of re-writing them. Make sure whatever you choose has some sort of logical order to it. Alternatively, if you choose something that doesn't really have an order, you could skip this step.

**Procedure:**

1. Prepare a simple story or conversation and put each sentence on a strip of paper.
2. Put the papers around the classroom on the wall, equally spaced out.
3. Divide the students into pairs: one writer and one reader.



4. The reader stands up, walks to the station and reads a paper, then goes back to the writer and tells what they read to the writer, who must write it. The reader can go back to a single paper as many times as required.

5. This procedure of reading, speaking, listening, and writing continues until the team has all the sentences down on their paper.

6. The two students put the story or conversation in the correct order.

7. The teacher can check for accuracy and meaning and decide if it's acceptable, or not.

## **Toilet Paper Icebreaker**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 5-10 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Toilet paper

This is an icebreaker activity for the first day of class so that you can help the students get to know each other in a fun way. Bring in a roll of toilet paper, and depending on the size of your class, tell the students they can take a certain number of pieces (4-7 works well). You can also play this game with a bag of wrapped candies (wrapped for sanitary reasons) and as the student completes each speaking task, they can eat the candy. In fact, maybe all your classes would like this option better but it depends on your budget! Don't give them any other information. Once everyone has their papers, explain that they have to tell the class one thing about themselves for each square of paper they have. For each sentence, they "throw-away" one square until they're

done. If you have an extremely large class, you can put the students in groups of 5-6 for this activity instead of playing all together as you would for a smaller class.

### **Teaching Tips:**

Students are always so curious about why they have a choice for how many they chose. Be mysterious and don't give away the secret until everyone has chosen.

### **Procedure:**

1. Divide the students into groups of 5-6 (larger classes), or play together for a smaller class.
2. Students choose the number of pieces of toilet paper that they want depending on your minimum and maximum criteria.
3. Tell the students that for each square they took, they must say one interesting thing about themselves.
4. The first student says one thing about themselves and discards that square into the pile in the middle (or eats the candy!). The other students could make a response of some

sort such as “Me too,” or “Really?”, or “I can't believe it!” The second student says one thing and discards a square.

Continue in a circle until all squares are used up.

5. An optional, but fun variation for higher level students is that they can have a chance to ask a follow-up question after each statement, but only one and the fastest person gets to do it. For each follow-up question, they can discard a square into the pile.

## **My Name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I like \_\_\_\_\_**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 10 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

A way that you can get your students to remember names (and you too!) is to do this simple activity. Go around the class, and have students say, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I like \_\_\_\_\_." The next student repeats the previous ones (His name is \_\_\_\_\_ and he likes \_\_\_\_\_.) and adds their own. It goes on until it finally gets to you and you can impress the students with your memorization abilities! It works best for small classes of twelve or less. If you have more than twelve students, you can divide the students up into groups of around that number and they can play together.

**Teaching Tip:**

Adapt this to your level of students. For absolute beginners, it might be enough to simply say their own name and then, "His/Her name is \_\_\_\_\_. " For more advanced students you could use something like name and what they did last night, or what they ate for lunch for past tense grammar. To challenge them even more you could do something with the future tense, such as next weekend or next vacation.

**Procedure:**

1. The first student can say the first sentence. "My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I like \_\_\_\_\_."

2. The second student must repeat the first student's sentence and then add their own.

3. And so on it goes, until the last student (or teacher) has a turn.

## **My World**

Skills: Writing/reading/speaking/listening

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Beginner to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

This is an excellent icebreaker activity that you can do on the first day of class to introduce yourself and then have the students get to know one or two of their classmates. You start by drawing a big circle on the whiteboard with the title, "My World. " Inside the circle there are various words, pictures or numbers that have some meaning to you. For example, inside my circle there might be 1979, blue, 37, a picture of two cats, and a mountain. The students would then have to make some guesses about why these things are special to me. The correct answers are: my birth year, favorite color, number of countries I've been to, my pets, and hiking which is my favorite hobby.

**Teaching Tips:**

This is a good activity to practice some functional language dealing with correct or incorrect guesses. Teach your students how to say things like, “You're close,” “Almost,” “You got it,” “That's right,” “Really? No!”

Remember that the goal of our classes should be to make them more student-centered than teacher-centered, so try to minimize the amount of time that it takes for students to guess what's in your circle. Most of them are quite easy with only one or two more difficult ones. Then, if required, give your students some hints so they are able to get the harder ones. To increase student talking time, it's always better to have students playing this activity with each other instead of only with you.

For beginners, this activity might be a bit of challenge. You could write down these question forms to help them out:

Is this your \_\_\_\_\_ (hobby, birth year, age, favorite color)?

Do you have \*/a/an \_\_\_\_\_ (cat, three family members, etc.)?

Have you \_\_\_\_\_ (visited, gone to, tried, etc.)?



## **Procedure:**

1. Draw a big circle on the board and write “My World” at the top. Put in some words, pictures or numbers inside the circle that have some meaning to you.
2. Have students guess what each thing means. Give hints if necessary.
3. Students prepare their own “world. ”
4. Students can play with a partner or in small groups of 3-4.

# **Games and Activities for Higher Level Students**

## **The “Expert” Conversation Activity**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time Required: 20-30 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

Students write down five things that they're an expert in. Once they've written their lists, they circle the three that they think will be most interesting to other students in the class. Next, divide the students up into pairs and give them about 5-6 minutes to ask some questions to their partner about things they are experts in. Keep changing partners for as long as you want the activity to last, but more than 3-4 times gets kind of boring.

**Teaching Tips:**

This is a particularly useful activity for practicing many of the speaking sub-skills such as initiating a conversation, turn-taking, and appropriate length of responses. You can pre-teach some of these things before you begin the activity. For example, show your students how to initiate a conversation by saying something like, “I see you're interested in \_\_\_\_\_. What/where/why/when/who/how \_\_\_\_\_?”

Or you could teach your students about appropriate length of responses by doing one bad example and then one good example. Continue with the bad example by rambling on and on until the students are feeling a little bit uncomfortable and they'll see clearly what you mean.

If possible, try to get students to talk to someone that they don't know. This is particularly helpful for the students who don't know anybody else in the class, or don't have a friend. Having a five minute conversation with someone makes you feel like you actually know them and these students won't be so alone in future classes. I do this by asking students to choose partners to go with whose names they don't know.

**Procedure:**

1. Talk about what “expert” means with your students. Tell them five things that you're an expert in.
2. Students make a list of 5 items.
3. Students choose the three things that they think will be most interesting to the others in the class. Tell students to do the same with their own lists.
4. Students find a partner and talk together for 5-6 minutes about the chosen topics. Starting the conversation, turn-taking and changing topics is up to them.
5. Students switch partners and continue.

## **2 Truths and a Lie**

Skills: Writing/listening/speaking

Time: 20-30 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

Play in groups of 4-6 in a bigger class, or everyone together in a small class. My general rule is that if you allow minimal or no follow-up questions, it takes around 3-4 minutes per student. However, if you allow 2-3 minutes of questions, it takes about 6-7 minutes per student. It's a good activity to use "always, usually, sometimes, never" or "can, can't" and "I've." Students write three sentences, one of which is false. They read their sentences and the other students guess the false one. Higher level classes can ask three questions, or question the person for a pre-determined amount of time (2-3 minutes) to determine the false one. A correct guess gets one point. Each student gets a turn to play.

**Teaching Tips:**

This is a useful activity for practicing the speaking sub-skills of initiating a conversation and responding to something in a questioning way. For example, students will have to say something like, “So you can make/play/do \_\_\_\_\_? I kind of don't believe you! Tell me \_\_\_\_\_” if you allow question time.

You can do this as a single activity in one class, or you can also do it over a series of days. For example, I taught at a winter camp where I had the same group of students for 10 days in a row. My class had 20 students, so as a warm-up for each day, 2 students had to go in the “hot-seat” (one at a time) and we got to ask the students questions about their 2 truths and 1 lie for three minutes. I appointed a “captain” to keep track of the points throughout the two weeks. The two winners got a \$5 *Starbucks* gift certificate, which was a small way to add some *friendly* competition to the class.

You can also give points to the student in the hot-seat for anyone who doesn't figure out the correct answer. But, either do this or the other way I mentioned above. If you do both, it gets complicated and confusing very quickly!

Emphasize that students must pick things that are “big picture” ideas. The terrible examples I give are things like birthdays, hospital they were born in, name of sister, etc. There is simply no way to verify this information through asking any sort of interesting questions. Better categories are things like hobbies, travel, part-time jobs, skills and abilities. I have students write down their statements and try to catch any of the bad ones before the game starts.

**Procedure:**

1. Write three sentences on the board about yourself: two are true and one is not.
2. Explain to students that they are to do the same for themselves.
3. Do your demonstration with one group. Read your sentences and those students can ask three questions (or have two minutes, etc.) to ask questions.
4. Each student in the group must choose for themselves which sentence is false. Reveal the answer and whoever guessed correctly gets a point.

5. The students play the game in small groups, making sure that each person gets a chance to share their three statements. You can help move the activity along by acting as a time-keeper by giving each student's turn a specific time limit.



## **Problem and Advice**

Skills: Reading/writing/speaking

Time: 30-40 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

This is an excellent activity for studying should/shouldn't and better/better not. Write down a problem such as a high school student studying for the University Entrance Exam who is exhausted and can't sleep at night. Have the students prepare some advice for that person in groups of 2-4. When everyone is ready, have the groups share their answers with the class. The most helpful and clear advice gets a prize of some kind; you can either choose the winner or have the class vote on it.

### **Teaching Tips:**

This also makes an excellent homework activity if you get the students to make a video talking about their advice for a

certain problem. To make it even more fun, I'll often make my own video of the problem and put it up on *YouTube* for them to watch, either in class or at home. I usually ham it up a bit and add some drama and may perhaps even have a friend make a guest appearance. Students love seeing their teacher on *YouTube*!

Giving some advice or an opinion in a polite way is an important functional skill that students need to learn and this activity is particularly helpful for that. It's worthwhile to spend some time talking about how to make your advice more, or less, polite depending on the circumstance.

**Procedure:**

1. Think of a problem of some kind, depending on the topic being studied and the level of the students.
2. Ask students to give some advice to that person. Give them time to prepare their presentation in small groups.
3. Each team does a short presentation in front of the class sharing the advice that they came up with. You choose the best, or have the class vote on it.

## **The Secret Person**

Skills: Writing/speaking/listening

Time: 20-30 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

This is the perfect activity for using “be” statements in the past tense. Have students think of two dead people and write down when he was born/where he was from, why he was famous, how he died, and one or two more interesting things. Then, put the students into small groups of 4-5 to play together. The first student gives the student to the right of them the first hint and they get one guess. If correct that student gets a point and goes next, starting with the person on their right. If incorrect, the first student gives the next hint to the next person to the right and they get a guess. This pattern continues until the correct answer is guessed.

**Teaching Tips:**

You can play this game with the whole class, but it's better in small groups because it's far more student-centered. Of course, you should do a demonstration first with the whole class before you let them play together.

Many students pick the same two or three people, depending on the country where you are teaching. I avoid this situation by using those people as my examples. I'll say something like, "You need to pick two dead people, for example, Michael Jackson and Kim Jong Il. " In Korea, a couple more people you could ban are Lee Sun Shin and King Sejong!

### **Procedure:**

1. Do a demonstration for the students first. Think of a dead person. Give some hints, such as when he was born, where he was from, why he was famous, etc.
2. Have the students guess who the person is after each hint.
3. Put students into small groups and have them choose two dead people and write some hints about him/her. Giving around 5-6 hints is best. Be sure to start with the hardest ones and get to the easiest ones at the end.

4. The students do rock-scissor-paper and the winner goes first. She gives the person to her right the most difficult hint and then that person gets one guess. If correct, he gets a point and the game continues with his secret person. He starts with the person on his right. If incorrect, she gives the next student to the right in the circle the next hint and they get one guess. It continues until the correct guess is given.

### **An Interesting Story and Questions**

Skills: Writing/reading/speaking/listening

Time: 15-30 minutes

Level: Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

Have students write something interesting. Some examples you can use are: most embarrassing moment, scariest thing you've ever done, your dream for the future, etc. Base it on whatever you are studying in class. Then, distribute the stories to other people in the class. They have to go around the class, finding the person whose story they have by

asking questions. Once they find that person, they have to ask three interesting questions about the story.

### **Teaching Tips:**

Emphasize to students that they are to practice asking good *full-sentence* questions. For example, “USA?” is not a good question, while, “Did you study abroad in the USA?” is much better. Also emphasize that students should think of interesting follow-up questions that expand upon their knowledge about that situation. This involves reading carefully so they can avoid asking about things that are already mentioned. You can give your students a couple of minutes before the activity starts to write down a few questions based on the paper they received to help facilitate this.

This activity provides an excellent opportunity for your students to work on reported speech. This is something that high level students are often surprisingly weak at. If you have a small class (less than 10), students can report what they learned about their partner to everyone. If larger, students can tell their seating partner what they learned. For example,

students might say something like, “I talked to Min-Ji. She told me that she got in a car accident last year. She said that it was really scary, but thankfully nobody got injured seriously. ”

**Procedure:**

1. Have students write an interesting story based on a certain topic. Adjust for length and difficulty depending on your students.
2. Collect stories and redistribute them—one per student, making sure a student does not get their own story.
3. Students go around the class asking people if they have their story. For example, “Did you get in a car accident when you were little?”
4. When they find the person, they must ask them three interesting follow-up questions about it.
5. Do the optional variation of having students tell other people what they learned in order to practice using reported speech.

## Do you like to \_\_\_\_\_?

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 15 minutes

Level: Intermediate

Materials Required: Strips of paper (or students can make their own)

This activity is quite similar to the previous one but it's better for intermediate students while the previous one is better for advanced students. This is due to the complexity of the task—it is easier to write down five statements than it is to write a paragraph telling a story. The previous activity requires some detailed follow-up questions, while this one can be done without it.

Give each student five strips of paper. On each piece of paper they write something interesting about themselves. Then, collect them, mix them up and distribute them back to your students (three per student). At this point, everyone stands up and goes around the class asking questions to try



to find the owner for each paper that they have. If someone is done early, you can give them another paper from the reserve pile that you have.

For example,

"Did you go to \_\_\_\_\_ middle school?"

"Do you have a twin brother?"

"Do you love to play soccer?"

### **Teaching Tip:**

Students need to write down *interesting and unique* things about themselves. For example, "I go to XYZ university" is something that every other student in the class will say yes to so it is not a good thing to use.

### **Procedure:**

1. Give students five strips of paper (or they provide their own).
2. Students write down one interesting thing about themselves on each paper.

3. Collect papers and redistribute (three per student).
4. Students stand up and go around the class, asking their classmates, “Do you have a twin brother?” “Can you play the piano really well?” based on what is on their papers.
5. If it's a match, they get one point and that paper is “finished. ” Optionally, you can require higher level students to ask 1-3 follow-up questions before they get a point.
6. If a student finds all their matches, they can get one or two more papers from your reserve pile.

## **Find Something in Common**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 10-20 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials: Nothing

This activity is an excellent way for everyone to get to know each other. The students stand up with a piece of paper and pencil in their hand. They have to talk to everyone in the class to try to find something in common (they are both from Seoul or they both know how to play the piano). Once they find this thing in common, they write it down along with the person's name. Keep going until most of the students have talked to everyone.

### **Teaching Tips:**

This is a great activity for students to practice the sub-skill of initiating a conversation, which is something that many of them find quite difficult. You could coach your students

before the activity starts and give them a few phrases or conversation starters to keep in their head if they get stuck. However, since this game is mostly for higher level students, I wouldn't write them on the board because students will be referring back to them throughout the activity when they are actually capable of remembering a few phrases in their head and can recall them easily.

Many students struggle with speaking because it happens in real time. Unlike in writing, where we can first plan and then produce later, planning and production overlap and often happen at the same time. If our students focus too much on planning, fluency can suffer. If they focus too much on production, accuracy can suffer. In this activity, fluency is far more important than accuracy because the students are having short, small-talk type conversations. I tell my students not too worry too much about choosing the perfect vocabulary word, or exact grammar constructions, but instead just focus on communicating quickly, in a way that is “good enough. ”

Tell your students that while it is okay to have short conversations about the thing they have in common, the goal of the activity is to try to talk to most of the people in the class so they need to keep moving and talking to new people. I recommend to my students that they try to spend only 1-2 minutes talking with each person.

**Procedure:**

1. Students stand up with a pencil and paper in their hands.
2. They talk to another student and try to find something in common by asking some questions. Some kinds of questions that work really are things like, "Have you ever \_\_\_\_\_ (lived abroad)?", "Are you \_\_\_\_\_ (an only child)?" or, "Do you \_\_\_\_\_ (have a brother)?"
3. Once they find something in common, they write that down, along with the person's name.
4. Then, they find a new partner and continue until they've talked to everybody in the class or the time is up.

## **120-90-60 Fluency Activity**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 15 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

If you want to help your students speak more quickly and fluently, this is the perfect ESL speaking activity for you. Give your students a topic that they know a lot about. For example: good or bad points about their school, university, or hometown. I often give half the students one topic and the other half another just to make it a bit more interesting to listen to. Give your students 3-5 minutes to prepare, depending on their level. But, emphasize that they should just write one or two words for each point, and not full sentences because it is actually a speaking activity and not a writing one. Then, with a partner, the first student has to give their speech and talk continuously for two minutes, while their partner listens. I use an online stopwatch so that the

students can see the clock countdown. Then, I give the students another two minutes and they switch roles.

After that, the students have to find a new partner and the activity repeats, except they have to include ALL the same information as before, just in 90 seconds. Then, switch again, with 60 more seconds. One way that you can help your students make the transition to less time is by giving them 30 seconds between rounds to think about how to say something more concisely, go over in their head the part of their speech where they had to slow down for some reason or to think about where they could use conjunctions.

You could give an example of something like this: "I like watching The Simpsons. It's funny. It's interesting. My mother, father, brother and I watch while we're eating dinner almost every night of the week" --->"I like watching The Simpsons because it's funny and interesting. I watch with my family almost every night while eating dinner. "

For lower level students, you can adjust the times to make them shorter and easier because talking for two minutes can be quite difficult.

Emphasize that students must include all of the key information even though they have less time to say it. Speak more quickly or more concisely!

### **Teaching Tips:**

It can be really difficult to find good speaking activities that are focused on fluency instead of accuracy, but this is an excellent one and I try to use it a couple of times per semester.

Emphasize to your students that they must include all the same information they included the first time, so they'll either have to say things more concisely or speak faster. Present it as a difficult, but attainable challenge that they can achieve. At the end of the second and third rounds, ask your students how much they were able to include as a percentage. If they did well, tell them to pat themselves on the back for achieving something that wasn't easy. A small motivational moment in your class!

Something that you can remind your students of is that spoken speech is more informal than written discourse,



particularly in the areas of sentence length and connectors. When we write, things like “however,” “although,” and “moreover” are common but in spoken speech we mostly just use simple connectors like “and,” “but,” and “or. ” Also, in spoken discourse the length of an utterance is much shorter and we don't need to use complicated grammatical constructions.

**Procedure:**

1. Give students a topic and some time to prepare their “speech. ”
2. Students give their speech to a partner, talking for two minutes without stopping. Switch roles and the second student gives their speech.
3. Students find a new partner and give their speech again, this time in 90 seconds. Switch roles.
4. Students find a new partner and give their speech again, but in 60 seconds. Switch roles.

## **Travel-Weather-Seasons Task-Based Activity**

Skills: Speaking/listening/writing

Time: 30-40 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

Almost every ESL textbook has a unit on travel, weather or seasons. Here is an excellent task-based activity that you can do with your students, which will fit into any of these units really well.

Put the students into groups of 4-6. The students are a tour company and the customers are my parents who are coming from Canada to Busan (or your city) for a visit. I will show them a picture of my parents and explain about the kinds of things they like and don't like (example: they like walking around, and sightseeing as well as watching sports, but they hate seafood and strenuous exercise). Then, the students have to plan a 1-3 day tour (depending on the time for the

activity/level of students) of Busan (or your city) for my parents.

I usually give them around 20-30 minutes for the task, and at the end they have to share their ideas with the class. It's a good idea to think about how many students/group there are, and give a minimum number of itinerary things they should plan and how much speaking time per person is expected. I pick the top groups based upon the following:

1. I think my parents would love the itinerary.
2. They just speak, and don't read from a paper.
3. Their presentation was informative and convincing.

This could also be adapted into a more comprehensive task, such as making a brochure or promotional video or something like that.

### **Teaching Tips:**

Task-based activities such as this one are an excellent way to promote autonomous learning, which is when students figure out the language for themselves. They also promote

team-work, which is a valuable life-skill. You can foster these two things by telling your students to see if anyone on the team knows a certain word or grammatical construction first before asking the teacher, and you can also assign some team roles such as leader, note-taker, time-keeper and so on.

I also like task-based activities because they are more of a deep-end approach to speaking where we plunge learners into a task and see how well they cope. This is in contrast to the walk before you run approach where the language is broken down into separate sub-skills. While most textbooks follow this latter method, both are quite useful and we should strive to use a mix of both in our classes.

The sky is the limit for an activity like this and it can be a 25 minute activity or an entire semester. Some ways to make this into a more comprehensive activity would be to have students make brochures or a short *YouTube* video advertising their tour where they have to go to the actual locations. Or, they could write an article to submit for publication to an English language newspaper, magazine or

website in your city although that would become more of a writing activity than a speaking one.

This is a particularly good activity if you teach adults who are studying something like hotel, restaurant, tourism or airline services (or they're already working in those fields). You can focus even more on the vocabulary and grammar necessary for this project (and by extension—their jobs too) if this is the case. Even if your students are not studying these things, you can still help them by pre-teaching some vocabulary from lexical groups that they might not be so familiar with in the area of tourism.

Related to this is the idea of appropriateness of register. By this I mean using the appropriate kind of language for the situation. For example, we speak very differently to our sister or brother than we do to a young child or to the CEO of our company. In this case, you can help your students understand what kind of language would be most appropriate for this activity, which is a formal presentation about a kind of informal topic.

**Procedure:**

1. Choose a task such as preparing a tour for your parents in the city you live in.
2. Discuss expectations including the length of preparation time, length of speech, how many student will speak, what questions to answer, etc.
3. Give students time to prepare and assist if necessary.
4. Listen to their speeches together as a class. Give some feedback to each group and/or ask follow-up questions, or have the students ask follow-up questions.

## Relative Clause Speaking Activity

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 15-25 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Who/what papers (one per group)

Interesting and fun activities or games using relative clauses are not that easy to come by (I've looked!) but this is a good one. I think you'll find your students really enjoy it and that they're able to use the target grammar quite easily and naturally.

Make a list of things or people, cut them up into little pieces and put them in an envelope (here's my very [Korea-centric who/what list](#)). Put the students in groups of four and the first person has to choose a paper at random and keep it secret. Then, they give hints about it, preferably using relative clauses or reduced relative clauses.

For example, if they chose Barack Obama, they could say things like:

This is a man who's from the USA.

I'm sure he's someone everyone knows.

He has a lot of power which he uses to influence the whole world.

The other three people on the team get to guess who it is and whoever guesses it correctly keeps the paper, gets one point and then is the next person who chooses a random paper and gives hints. In order to avoid endless incorrect guesses, I make a rule that if you make an incorrect guess, you are "out" of that round unless all the other people also have incorrect guesses, in which case it starts over and everyone has one more chance.

### **Teaching Tips:**

I recommend using a somewhat country specific list for wherever you are teaching. I've found that many of my students lack the general knowledge that I think they should



have. Maybe it's a culture thing, or maybe it's the age gap but whatever the case, choose many famous people from wherever you're living.

You could challenge your higher level students to use different kinds of relative clauses throughout the game, such as “who,” “that,” and reduced relative clauses.

Here are some of the worksheets that I use with relative clauses in my adult classes:

[Relative Clause Friend and Family Member Questions](#)

[Relative Clause Self-Study Worksheet](#)

**Procedure:**

1. Prepare a list or pictures of famous people or things.
2. Put students in small groups.
3. The first student must secretly choose one person or thing and give hints, preferably using relative clauses.
4. The rest of the group can guess, but if a student makes an incorrect guess, that person is “out” until the next round

unless everyone is also incorrect and then everyone gets another chance.

5. The person who guesses correctly gets one point and a chance to pick the next person or thing.

6. The person with the most points at the end of the allotted time is the winner.

## **Never Have I Ever**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 10-20 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

This is a classic party game that you can play in your ESL speaking classes as well. The way it works is that students think of a few things that they haven't done but that they think others in the class have. For example, maybe someone hasn't been to Japan or China but most of the people in the class probably have. Or, perhaps someone has never tried Indian or Vietnamese food. If you have higher level classes, no thinking time is really necessary, but with intermediate students, you might have to give them a few minutes of time before you start the activity so that they can prepare. You could also elicit a few possible categories such as food, travel, hobbies, free time, etc. if you feel this activity will challenge your students too much when open-ended.

The first student starts with one of their statements, saying, “Never have I ever \_\_\_\_\_.” The other students listen and if they have done it, they get a point. I usually get students to keep track of points themselves by writing a tick on their paper or in their notebook. If you have a small class, you can appoint a captain to do this on the board. You go around the room until everyone has said at least one statement (for big classes) or a couple of them (smaller classes) and then tally up the final points. Whoever has the most points is the “winner” and the person who has had the most interesting life so far! If you have a large class, it's best to divide students up until groups of 7-10.

### **Teaching Tips:**

This game is quite difficult to explain, even to people who speak English as their first language so doing a demonstration with multiple examples is vital.

### **Procedure:**

1. Give students time to prepare 2-3 statements; the amount of time depends on the level of your students. They need to

think of things that they've never done, but which they think their classmates have.

2. The first student says one of their statements. If someone else has done it, they put up their hand to signify this and they get one point. I usually have students keep track of the points themselves or appoint a captain to do this.

3. The next person can say their statement and you follow the same procedure, until everyone has said at least one statement. You can also continue until you've done two or three rounds, depending on your class size.

4. The person with the most points has had the most interesting life.

## Telling a Story, ESL Speaking Style

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 20 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

In almost all general, four skills ESL textbooks such as [\*Smart Choice\*](#) or [\*World Link\*](#), there are pages with discussion starters that involve telling a story of some kind, often in the unit related to the past tense. A big problem with telling stories in class is that most students will not do a very good job of it if they are given no time to prepare. An activity that could potentially be very useful for generating some interesting conversation and discussion can be over in only a couple of minutes.

A better way is to give the students 2-5 minutes (depending on the level) of preparation time before they have to tell their story. I emphasize to the students that it is a speaking activity and not a writing one, so while they can jot down a few

words, they cannot write full sentences. Also, remind your students to make use of transition signals to give some structure to their stories such as first, second, next, after that, or finally.

Once the time is up, you have a few options. If you have a small class, you can listen to everyone's stories. Or, put the students in groups of 3-4 in a larger class. Each person in turn tells their story and every listener will have to ask them one question. Emphasize that everyone is to listen carefully to the story and think of one *interesting* question to ask the student and not just to think about their own story. You can review the "5Ws/H" questions for lower level students, if required (who, what, when, why, where and how) and also give some examples of good and bad questions.

### **Teaching Tips:**

A very common way that we tell stories is to use the past continuous first and then the simple past. For example, "I was walking to school, when I tripped over a rock." Students often don't know this, at least in Korea so it's extremely helpful to give a quick review of it and some examples before

starting this activity. A timeline is the perfect way to explain the idea that something was happening in the past when another thing, also in the past, interrupted that action.

A cohesive device that you could focus on during this activity is noun-pronoun reference. A normal way that we tell a story is to mention a person first as a noun and then later as a pronoun. For example, "I was walking to school when I saw a man breaking into a car. He smashed the window and ran away." If your students are higher level they probably do this quite naturally, but it's worth reminding intermediate level students.

### **Procedure:**

1. Assign a topic about which students must prepare a short story (not by writing, just by thinking).
2. Put students in groups and the first student tells their story.
3. Other students listen and each thinks of one interesting question to ask.



4. The other students in turn ask the storyteller their question and listen to the answer. The group can ask follow-up questions if they wish.

5. Continue until all students have shared their story and have been asked some questions.

## **Dictagloss**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: A short story

This is a simple activity for higher level students that helps them practice their listening and memory skills, as well as substituting vocabulary words if the original word is no longer accessible to them. You can find a short, interesting story of some kind or make up one yourself. I've used various things from children's stories to a story about something I did on the weekend. Just about anything can work.

Tell the story 1-3 times, depending on the student level and of course you can also vary your speaking speed to make this activity easier or harder. Once you are done telling the story, students will have to go in groups of 2-3 to retell the story. Emphasize that they won't be able to recreate the exact story that you told, but that they should try their best to

keep the meaning the same. Each team can pair up with another team to compare. Then, tell the original story again so students can see how they did.

This activity works well as a writing activity too.

### **Teaching Tips:**

It's very helpful for students to compare answers with a partner before they have to say anything in front of the class so be sure to put them in partners or groups of three to work together on this activity. It's useful for the weaker students to have a stronger student getting them up to speed. It also gives students confidence that they're on the right track and they're less nervous to share their answers with the class.

If you use something "scandalous," it will make the activity a lot more fun! Of course, it should still be appropriate so just picture your boss observing your class to decide if you should use it or not.

### **Procedure:**

1. Prepare a short story which you'll read to your students.

2. Put students in groups of two or three and read the story to them.
3. Students try to remember the details of the story and compare with their group. I usually only allow them to do this by speaking.
4. Read the story again and students attempt to recreate the story more closely, again by speaking.
5. Read the story again (depending on level and difficulty of story) and students again attempt to recreate it, even more closely.
6. Elicit a couple teams to tell their story to the class (in a small class). Or, put two teams together and they tell their stories to each other (in a larger class).
7. Read the story one final time for students to compare their own.

## Who do you Want at your Party?

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 5-15 minutes

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Nothing

This is an excellent speaking warm-up activity for higher levels. Put the students in groups of 4. Have them pick four famous people, dead or alive that they'd like to invite to a party they are having. Then, they have to say the reason why they're inviting them. I do an example like this:

**Person:** Michael Jackson

**Reason:** He has a cool house with lots of toys and he can play some dance music for us.

Give your students a few minutes, depending on the level. Then, rotate the students around into new groups of four so that each group has students who were not together in their original groups to share their answers together (they can

choose the top 1 or 2 answers to share). Or, you could tell students to find a partner and they have one minute to share answers. Then, find a new partner and another minute and so on.

### **Teaching Tips:**

Students will often pick the same people and it's kind of boring. Ban some of the most common ones in your country.

### **Procedure:**

1. Put students in groups of 4.
2. Each group picks four famous dead people that they'd like to have at their party.
3. They must also think about and explain why they'd like to invite him or her.
4. Students find a new partner or new group of 4 and share 1-2 of the answers from the previous group. If a new group of 4, I give students about 6 minutes. If a pair, 2 minutes is good. Students can switch and share answers again for as long as you want the activity to last.

## **Poster Project Group Presentation**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 5-10 hours preparation, 1 hour presentation time  
(depending on class size)

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Materials Required: Large poster paper

If you want to do some task-based learning in your class, this is an excellent one to do. Put your students in groups of 2-4 and assign a topic or theme. If you're studying about food, you could tell your students to choose a popular food in their country. If your class is about current events or social issues, each group could choose one of those.

Then, students will have to make a poster with some pictures and a minimal amount of text. Emphasize the minimal text because if you don't, many of the posters will be filled with large amount of tiny writing that is impossible to read. It's a good idea to draw a model poster on the white board and

draw big pictures with examples of writing size and content. You can point these things out as you give instructions.

Once the poster is complete (give class time, or for homework), the group will make a presentation about the topic. I emphasize that each group member must talk for an equal amount of time and that they must memorize their presentation and cannot read from a paper. Finally, I ask them to prepare a few quiz questions (3-5) for their classmates to test and see if they were listening! You can also include some Q & A time if your class is outgoing and they won't be too shy to do this.

### **Teaching Tips:**

This is an excellent activity to use if you want to focus on stress and intonation with your students. You can show them how to use these things to emphasize the key points, signal a transition or signal what is old and what is new information.

You could also consider introducing some markers that are present in more formal kinds of spoken discourse such as this one. For example, there are standard ways to introduce



a topic (Today, I'm going to talk about \_\_\_\_\_), develop an idea (I'll talk about three main points related to this), transition into another idea (Now that you've heard about A, I'd like to talk about B), or conclude a presentation (Remember the most important points are \_\_\_\_\_.)

While not a lot of preparation is required for this since your students are doing most of the work, you need to be really clear in your head about what your expectations are and you also need to convey this really clearly to your students. If you don't, you're likely to be disappointed in the results, but it will be your fault and not the students. It can be helpful to prepare a list of "Top 10 Do's and Don'ts" on a handout or on a class website or *Facebook* group.

It is extremely important to get students to memorize their speeches and to ensure this, you can allocate a large amount of points (20-30%) to it if the assignment is graded. If you don't, the presentation will likely be terrible and will often consist of simply reading from a PowerPoint or a piece of paper. I do however tell my students to bring their script up to the front with them and they can look one time per person

without any penalty in case they truly forget what they need to say.

**Procedure:**

1. Put students into groups and assign a topic.
2. Give explicit instructions about what is required of them regarding the poster and the presentation.
3. Have students prepare the poster and the presentation, either in class or for homework.
4. Students do their presentation in front of the class.
5. The students ask their classmates some quiz questions based on what they talked about.
6. Question and answer time (optional).

# **Games and Activities for Lower Level Students**

## **Rock-Scissor-Paper**

Skills: Reading/speaking/listening

Time: 20 minutes

Level: Beginner to Intermediate

Materials Required: Question and answer papers (5 per student)

This is an excellent review activity to do before a test for lower level classes where there are well-defined, closed type questions and answers. On separate papers, make matching questions and answers. Give each student five random papers with a mix of both questions and answers. They have to walk around the class to find their “match. ” Once they do, they can rock-scissor-paper and the winner takes both papers and those papers are “out. ” In order to increase student talking time, my rule is that students cannot read

each other's papers but must find the matching papers only through speaking. If I see students reading, I enforce a penalty of some kind, where I usually take away one of their matches. The students with the most points (matches) after a certain period of time are the winners.

Here's an example of the questions that I used in one of my beginner adult classes:

### [Rock-Scissor-Paper Questions](#)

#### **Teaching Tip:**

Try to design questions that have unambiguous questions and answers. I mean that each question should have one very specific answer and not be possible for other papers. Make sure you do a demonstration with a couple examples before you start so your students understand the game. I'll usually set aside a couple of matches for my demo and arrange it so that two good students get one part, while I keep the corresponding one. Then I "find" the matches.

#### **Procedure:**

1. Prepare matching question and answer papers using unambiguous questions and answers. Cut them out into single strips of paper (questions and answers are separate).
2. Give each student five random papers, in a mix of questions and answers.
3. Students walk around the class, finding their “match. ” They can do this only by speaking and not by reading each other's papers.
4. Once they find a match, they do rock-scissor-paper.
5. The winner keeps both papers and that set is finished.
6. The winner is the student with the most sets after the allotted time. If there are more than two or three students who are the “winners,” you can reduce this by having a final rock-scissor-paper showdown.
7. Check carefully at the end of the game to ensure that papers are indeed matches. It can be a good teachable moment to explain why a potential match is incorrect if a mistake is made.

## **Tic-Tac-Toe**

Skills: Listening/speaking

Time: 15 minutes

Level: Beginner to Intermediate

Materials Required: Whiteboard

This is a review game for students to play in small groups. I usually make groups of four and then within the group, there are two opposing teams. Have students make a regular tic-tac-toe board in their notebook or on some scrap paper. Put up a list of review questions in a PowerPoint, or give students a handout. The teams take turns answering the questions and if correct, they get to mark a square on the grid with X or O and the first to get three in a row is the winner. The teacher can act as the referee in case of uncertainty about an answer.

**Teaching Tip:**

This game isn't fun if your opponent doesn't know how to answer any questions or has never played tic-tac-toe before so in order to prevent this, I put students in teams of two, trying to match a higher level student with a lower level one. Hopefully, at least one of the students will be able to answer questions and has some sort of tic-tac-toe skill. If you know that many students will have a difficult time answering the questions, you can put some answer prompts up on the whiteboard or PowerPoint.

**Procedure:**

1. Put students in groups of four, two teams of two.
2. Students can make a normal tic-tac-toe board on a piece of paper.
3. Put review questions in a PowerPoint, or give students a handout with them.
4. One person from each team does rock-scissor-paper to determine who will go first.

5. The first team has to answer the first question and if correct, gets to mark the board with either an X or O. The other team answers the next question and gets to mark one spot on the board if correct.

6. The first team to get three X's or O's in a row is the winner.

7. You can play numerous games and even have the “winners” move up and the “losers” move down like in King's court until you have one final team that is the “King. ”



## **Steal the Eraser**

Skills: Listening/speaking

Time: 10-15 minutes

Level: Beginner to Intermediate

Materials Required: 2 chairs, a table or desk, eraser

Divide the students into two teams. Have two desks at the front of the class, facing each other with an eraser in the middle of the two desks. One student from each team comes and sits in the hot seat. Rotate through the class so that all the students get a chance to play at least once. You then ask a question of some sort, which you should prepare beforehand (one round = one question/2 students. Two rounds = one question/student. Include a few extras for a “bonus” round). The first person that grabs the eraser can try to answer the question. A helpful rule is that the student can take the eraser whenever they want, but the teacher stops talking as soon as the eraser is touched. The student then has ten seconds to answer as you count down on your

fingers. If correct, they get one point. If not, the other player gets a chance to answer the question after you repeat the full question one more time.

To make it even more exciting or if one team is behind by a lot of points, have a "Bonus Round," where the teams pick their best three players and each question is worth three points.

Here's an example list of very simple questions that I use for this game.

### [Steal the Eraser Game Questions](#)

#### **Teaching Tips:**

Emphasize that the first student to touch the eraser must take it in order to prevent any chaos. I also require students to keep their fingers on the edge of their desks when I begin the question. It's really important to stop talking the instant one student touches the eraser. If not, students will just grab the eraser and wait for you to finish the question, which is really unfair. It's best to use questions that have very well-defined answers so you don't have to make any judgement

calls because half the class will be unhappy with you no matter what decision you make.

**Procedure:**

1. Prepare two desks facing each at the front of the class, with an eraser in the middle.
2. Divide students into two teams.
3. Each team sends up one person to the front and they sit at the desks. I don't let students choose the person for each round but simply make them go in the order that they are sitting.
4. The teacher asks a question (prepare the list beforehand), but stops speaking once the eraser is touched. Alternatively, you can have each team appoint a captain who takes turns reading the prepared list of questions in order to increase student talking time.
5. The first player to touch the eraser must answer the question within ten seconds. Count down the time on your fingers.

6. If correct, he/she gets one point and the next two people come up to the front for another question.

7. If incorrect, the teacher reads the question (in full) one more time and the opposing player gets a chance to answer the question within ten seconds.

8. If correct, they get one point. If incorrect, both players sit down and the next pair comes up. You can share the correct answer with the class before saying a new question.

9. Continue until all students have had a chance to play at least once.

## **Daily Schedule Speaking Activity**

Skills: Speaking/listening/writing

Time: 10-20 minutes

Level: Beginner to Low-intermediate

Materials Required: Nothing

It seems that in most beginner ESL textbooks there is a unit on daily schedules, such as, "What time do you get up?" or, "What do you do in the afternoon?" A fun activity that you can do is to have students interview their partners. You can pre-select questions for lower level classes or let the students choose their own questions for higher levels. Make sure you specify a minimum number of questions if you let the students choose their own (beginners = 6-8, intermediate = 10+). Have the students jot down a few notes as they go. Then, they have to close their notebooks, and in a group of four, they have to explain their partner's daily schedule to the other pair in their group. The other group can ask a question or two to the person whose schedule was talked about. You

can put some example questions on the board to help your beginner students with this.

### **Teaching Tips:**

This is an excellent activity to turn a boring topic into something that's moderately interesting. Being able to talk about daily schedules is quite an important thing for our learners to be able to do, so ignore the temptation to just skip this section when you come to it in your textbook.

I usually give students a set amount of time to interview their partner such as 3 minutes x 2 = 6 minutes. So each person has to ask questions for three entire minutes and then answer questions for the same amount of time. I emphasize that if the three minutes is not up, they can think of another 1-2 questions to ask. After the first three minutes, I'll say, "Stop, change" so that students don't have to keep track of the time themselves (they probably won't).

While reported speech is kind of a higher level concept, you can introduce it briefly in this activity and provide some concrete examples for students to follow. This happens when

two teams join together and are reporting what they learned about their partner to the other pair. For example, “Jen said that she \_\_\_\_\_,” or “Tim told me that he \_\_\_\_\_.”

For beginner level students, you will need to be very explicit about the kinds of questions and answers they could use and make sure they have access to examples of them, either in the textbook or on the whiteboard.

**Procedure:**

1. Assign the task to the students, specifying if they must ask questions that you've prepared for them, or if they make their own and how many questions. If students write their own questions, it usually takes about two minutes/question for beginners and one minute/question for intermediate level students.
2. Put students in pairs and they can interview their partner about their daily schedule, taking brief notes.
3. Students switch interviewer/interviewee roles.

4. Put each pair with another pair to do the reported speech task.

5. Student A introduces student B to the other pair. The other pair has a chance to ask some follow-up questions.

6. Continue until all four students' daily schedules have been introduced.



## **Show and Tell**

Skills: Speaking/listening

Time: 1-2 minutes per student (no questions). 4-6 minutes per student (with questions)

Level: High beginner to Intermediate

Materials Required: Nothing

This is a classic activity from way back in elementary school but it can work well in your ESL classes too. Tell students a few days before the “show and tell” class that they need to bring an object from home that is meaningful to them. If it's something really big (a piano) or something that doesn't transport easily (a cat), then they can email you a picture to put up on the screen instead. Students give a short presentation, talking about the item and why it's meaningful to them. The audience can ask a few follow-up questions. In order to make the question time go more smoothly with shy classes, you can put students into teams of 4-6 and each team has to ask one question. You could also award points

or a reward to the 3 or 4 students who ask the most thoughtful questions.

### **Teaching Tips:**

This activity is an excellent way to get your students doing presentations in a low pressure way. If they have something familiar to hold on to, they'll feel less nervous than standing in front of the class with nothing. In addition, everybody likes talking about themselves!

Instead of doing this activity in a single class, you could do it over the course of a semester with one or two students going at the beginning or end of class; you can assign specific days to each student.

### **Procedure:**

1. Tell students to bring a meaningful object from home, or send a picture if bringing the object isn't practical.
2. Students introduce the object in a short presentation of 1-2 minutes, depending on the level.

3. The other students listen and can ask some follow-up questions.

## **Can and Should Speaking Activity**

Skills: Speaking/listening/writing

Time: 10-20 minutes

Level: Beginner to Low-intermediate

Materials Required: Nothing

There is often a unit in beginner ESL textbooks with "can/can't" for possibility/impossibility and "should/shouldn't" for advice. Here is my fabulously fun way to introduce it, such that even the lowest of the low, quietest of the quiet classes will participate. Tell your students that you want to go on vacation somewhere in \_\_\_\_\_ (whatever country you teach in) and need their advice. First, do an example with the whole class and then have students work in pairs using the same script (see below). There are lots of different scenarios you can use to expand the activity.

**Teaching Tip:**

You can use this activity for a variety of contexts. If you have adult students, you could use something more interesting like, “How can I find a boyfriend?” or “What should I do to be more handsome/beautiful?” If you wish to add a degree of difficulty for intermediate level students, you can have them explain WHY: “You can go to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_,” or, “You can't go to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Procedure:**

1. Do an example with the class. You can use this script:

**A. Where should I go on vacation this summer (winter)?**

B. You can go to \_\_\_\_\_.

Elicit some answers. Students in Korea choose the same places all the time and I usually select Jeju Island, for reasons you'll see later.

**A. Should I go in summer?** B. Yes, you should. No you shouldn't. Etc.

**A. So what can I do there?** B. You can \_\_\_\_\_.

**A. How can I get there? Can I go by airplane? Can I swim?** B. Hahaha! Crazy teacher. No, you can't.

2. Write the questions and answer sentence-starters on the board.

3. Put students in groups of two. Student A asks questions and student B gives answers (advice) to their partner using these questions.

4. Students switch roles and do it again.

5. You can introduce a new scenario such as a businessman or businesswoman visiting from abroad, or a university student from another part of your country coming to visit your city. One student can pretend to be this person while the other one can give some advice about where to go and what they can do.

6. An optional variation of this is to have students prepare their own scenario (or you assign a different one to each group) and a conversation that they will act out in front of the class using can/should for giving advice.

## Did You Like the Book?

If you found lots of useful ESL speaking activities and games, please head on over to Amazon and leave a review. It really helps this book rank more highly so that other teachers like you can find this resource. If you have any questions, or I can help you in any way, please email me at: [wealthyenglishteacher@gmail.com](mailto:wealthyenglishteacher@gmail.com). The things I'm most knowledgeable about are: teaching in Korea, working at Korean universities, personal finance for expats, and of course teaching ESL/EFL.

Don't forget to [join my mailing list](#) for more ESL activities and games for all skill levels and ages, not just speaking. In addition, I have sample lesson plans, website and book recommendations and more.

Finally, check out my personal lesson plans below if you need even more ideas for your conversation classes, or wonder how I go about designing my own.

## **Conversation Class Lesson Plans**

These are lessons that I would use for 1-3 hour classes with very high level, motivated students, ranging from 1-1 to 30 or more students. If you have a larger class, you'll have to break it into smaller groups of 3-6 for discussion purposes.

Remember, the goal is to make your classes as student-centered as possible so you want to make sure that your students are doing most of the talking instead of you.

For higher level classes, I also use authentic material instead of things from ESL textbooks because it helps train my students for real-life and it's more interesting to choose from things currently in the news for me and the students. While authentic material can be a bit challenging, you can help your students by pre-teaching any difficult, but important vocabulary. You can also partly rewrite authentic material to make it easier by making it shorter, removing difficult grammatical constructions or substituting vocabulary words that you think your students won't know (an example of this is



the article below: [\*Aging to Challenge South Korea's Economic Transformation.\*](#))

I don't recommend using these lessons without adaptation because they might not be suitable for your students (they are mostly Korea based), but you can see the basic format of a lesson for higher level students. For more up to date lesson plans that I use in my own classes, go to my blog, [\*My Life! Teaching in a Korean University\*](#) and look in the sidebar for “lesson plans. ”

Also be sure to scroll down below these higher-level lessons for [\*More Conversation Class Lesson Plans\*](#) as well as [\*pronunciation practice\*](#); these are suitable for a wider range of student levels.

## **Agricultural Subsidies**

<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20131028000778>

### **1. Warm-up**

- A. Do you think a lot about where your food comes from?
- B. Would you buy organic food or locally grown food, even if it were 50% more expensive?
- C. Would you ever buy cheap imported rice instead of Korean rice?
- D. How has the agricultural industry changed in Korea in the past 50 years?

### **2. Vocabulary**

- A. plummet (verb)
- B. commodity (noun)
- C. indigenous (adjective)
- D. mitigate (verb)

### **3. Questions from Reading**

A. What are the differences in the agricultural industry in Korea between 1970 and 2010?

B. Does Korea have high or low subsidy levels compared to other countries?

C. In the long-term, do agricultural subsidies help or hurt farmers?

D. What does Chung Hoe-Sang think about this situation?

E. Why do some people argue that the agricultural industry should not be treated like other industries?

F. What are the 2 middle paths?

### **4. Discussion questions**

A. Do you think that the agricultural industry should be treated like other industries by being made to compete in the free market, without subsidies? Why or why not?

B. Is there a cultural or historical reason (or another kind of reason) why subsidies for farmers are so high in Korea?

C. Why are there so few young farmers in Korea? How could attitudes towards farming as a job change?

D. Which of the middle paths is a better option do you think?

E. Is it necessary for Korea to be rice self-sufficient?

**5. Choose one option. Prepare a 3 minute persuasive speech. We will ask you some follow-up questions based on what you said.**

In your opinion, what is the best option?

A. No subsidies for farmers in Korea. They should have to compete in the free market.

B. Create high border taxes on imported food, resulting in higher consumer prices for Koreans.

C. Lower border taxes and give money directly to farmers, lowering consumer prices for Koreans.

D. Provide farmers with property tax breaks and low income taxes.

E. Some other option . . .

## **6. Let's work on speaking more quickly.**

Take your 3 minute speech and you now have only 2 minutes, but you must include all the same information. Next, you have only 1 minute. Can you include all the same information but in a much shorter amount of time? Challenge yourself!

## **Aging to Challenge South Korea's Economic Transformation**

<http://www.cnbc.com/id/101150318>

South Korea has one of Asia's fastest-growing economies, but one looming roadblock threatens its path to becoming an international powerhouse: a rapidly aging population. According to a report by the Korea Statistical Office, the number of people aged 65 and above has surpassed 6 million for the first time, accounting for 11.7% of the population. What's more, the ratio of senior citizens to working age people – currently 1 to 6 – is projected to shift to 1 to 1.5 by 2050. “The aging population is one of the most fundamental, structural shifts happening in Korea and affecting the growth prospects for the country,” said Wonsik Choi, Senior Partner at McKinsey & Company in Seoul.” Just to give you an example, the working age population in Korea will peak at 37 million in 2016 and will diminish thereafter. ”

Korea's fertility rate stands at just 1.24, among the lowest in the world. And while Korea currently bears the third-youngest

population globally, the OECD estimates that it will have the second oldest population by 2050, right after Japan. The demographic shift in population structure is expected to be an economic headache for Seoul, which will likely see a slowdown in the growth of its labor force.

But some economists argue that Korea faces a transitional period, stating that the country is benefiting from a demographic "sweet spot," which will result in a sizable build-up of net financial wealth. The age structure of the population strongly suggests that over the next five years Korea will benefit from a demographic sweet spot – one in which the working age population (the 15-64 age cohort) expands, while at the same time falling fertility rates lower child dependency, but before old age dependency starts to rise significantly.

The aging population is positive for savings, that's why Korea has a current account surplus," explained Young Sun Kwon, Senior Economist at Nomura International in Hong Kong. Kwon notes that the elderly population's tendency to save

more boosts capital investment growth as household savings are the main source of funds for investment.

"The ability to seize this window of opportunity is not automatic, and Korea's demographic sweet spot will only last until 2016, after which the country will face headwinds from an aging society as the old-age dependency rate starts to rise sharply and significantly," the Nomura report said. "If Korea fails to capitalize on the released resources and fails to harness this demographic sweet spot effectively, it faces the prospect of having to deal with renewed pressures from a much weaker position. Korea's population growth rate is set to start falling below zero in 2018," it added. Kwon emphasizes that while an aging population is good for savings, it may not necessarily be good for domestic demand. For economic growth, a younger population is better, he says. For now, the secret to sustaining Korea's growth potential could just lie in increasing its labor participation. The Bank of Korea's Kim agrees to that, " Unless we make our population young, we're likely to lose economic dividend, which has contributed to Korea's growth in the past. We should find more opportunities for women



and the elderly to remain in the labor market to participate in the market further."

Still, with household debt levels among the highest in Asia as the young spend more than they can afford to, even the growth drive from a younger population would not be without risks.

## **Korea's Aging Population**

### **1. Warm-up**

A. An aging population is often considered to be a negative thing. Are there any positives that you know of?

B. Do Koreans in general think of this issue as a big problem?

C. Has the government taken any steps to reduce this problem?

D. Are there other countries that you know of which are facing similar problems?

### **2. Read the article and think about the questions**

A. What are the negative things about Korea's aging population? Are there other things not mentioned by the article?

B. What are the positive things? Are there other things not mentioned by the article?

C. What is the current ratio of senior citizens to working age people? What is the projection for 2050?

D. When will the working age population in Korea peak? Is there a demographic reason for this that you know of?

E. Do you think that increasing the labor force participation will be helpful?

### **3. Let's have a debate**

Side A: An aging population is ***not*** really a big problem for Korea and the government should take no steps to reduce this problem.

Side B: An aging population is a really big problem for Korea and the government should take immediate action to reduce this problem.

Round 1: With your teammate, give a 3-4 minute introduction speech. You have 10 minutes to prepare

Round 2: Question/Answer period (5 minutes/team)

Round 3: Closing arguments (2-3 minutes/team)

#### **4. Speech time**

A. What are some possible solutions to this problem? Let's think of 5-6.

B. Choose one and prepare a 2 minute speech about why this is the best solution.

#### **5. Let's Work on Speaking Quickly**

You must give your speech one more time, including all the same information but you only have 90 seconds to talk. You must either speak more quickly or more concisely.

# People Use Technology More, Sleep Less

[Breaking News English article](#)

## 1. Warm-up

- A. What kind of technology do you use most often?
- B. Are you addicted to any forms of technology? Which one?
- C. Can you remember what life was like before smartphones? How was it different from now?
- D. Do you think technology is mostly helpful or harmful?
- E. Should there be a limit for children using things like smartphones or tablets?

## 2. Read the article and think about these questions

- A. Are you surprised that a 6 year old has a good understanding of technology?
- B. Do you use technology more or less than the U. K. average? Do you sleep more or less than their average?

- C. Do you prefer online or face to face communication?
- D. Does increasing technology use mean we are becoming anti-social?
- E. Do you think smartphones are helpful or harmful for university students?
- F. How much TV per day is too much? What are some of the negative effects of watching too much TV?
- G. Do you think Korean children only understand technology when they are 14 or 15, or is it much earlier? Are you better at using technology than your parents?

### **3. Debate**

In pairs, prepare either Side A (Technology plays too large of a role in our lives these days) or Side B (Technology is very useful in our lives and we should make use of it as much as possible). The teacher will tell you which side you are. You have 8 minutes to prepare your ideas and then give about a 2 minute speech.

Join with a group from the other side and both teams share their short speeches. Then, you will have about 10 minutes for a Q & A, where you can ask some difficult questions and also defend your opinion.

# More Conversation Class Lesson Plans

## Renewable Energy

This is a lesson for university students or adults that are intermediate level or higher. [This Renewable Energy PPT](#) was for a 3-hour class, but it could easily be adapted to a class from 90 minutes to 4 hours.



## **If I Had a Million Dollars**

I've used this simple lesson many times for lots of different ages and levels with great success. It's the perfect activity for when you're studying about conditionals or talking about values.

[If I Had a Million Dollars Worksheet](#)

## **Lost in Translation**

In many ESL textbooks, there is a chapter about culture shock and one of my favorite things to do is watch the movie “Lost in Translation” and have a discussion about it. Here's the worksheet that I use.

[Lost in Translation Worksheet](#)

## **Film English**

If you're looking for some solid lesson plans for your teenage or adult students, I highly recommend this site. I use it all the time and appreciate the interesting videos, thoughtful discussion questions and well-organized lesson plans ([www.film-english.com](http://www.film-english.com)). Most of the stuff is perfect for a class of 1-2 hours in length and intermediate level students or higher.

## [ESL Writing](#)

Don't let the name deceive you, this site has plenty of ESL speaking lesson plans as well. I particularly like the listening stuff, which are actually speaking lessons in disguise. He chooses some excellent short films and has some interesting discussion questions to go along with them.

# Speaking Class Pronunciation Practice

## 1. Past tense verbs: t/d/id

/d/ Example: smelled. Previous letter = voiced/vibration of vocal cords.

/t/ Example: walked. Previous letter = voiceless/no vibration of vocal cords.

/id/ Examples: visited/decided. Previous letter = /t/ or /d/.

<http://www.elementalenglish.com/past-tense-verb-pronunciation-t-d-id/>

### Practice:

A. I walked down the street and watched my friend's dog who smelled something.

B. Last year, I visited China. I tried some interesting food and visited some cool places.

## 2. Plurals: s/z/iz

/s/ Example: cats- voiceless/no vibration

/z/ Example: dogs- voiced/vibration

/iz/ Example: watches, bridges, judges, slices, blazes, horses

<http://www.elementalenglish.com/3-sounds-of-the-plural-s-in-english/>

### **Practice:**

A. I went to a farm and saw horses, pigs, cows, chickens and snakes.

B. You need many things for schools: pens, pencils, books and new glasses.

### **3. /Th/ sound**

<http://www.vitaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/th-sound-Handout.pdf>

### **4. Memory Game: Find the Matching Sounds**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cvj->

[SdYKyf5hAkCX71bvj65fyI4wzvfG16rY9vDKO4Y/edit?  
usp=sharing](https://www.googleapis.com/auth/identitytoolkit?usp=sharing)