

**Conversation skills**  
by Vicki Craig-Ariyo

<b>Age:</b>	Teenagers / Adults
<b>Level:</b>	Upper intermediate
<b>Time:</b>	90 mins
<b>Objective:</b>	To make students more confident and skilled at taking part in spontaneous conversations; to practise strategies for taking part in a conversation, including openings and endings, clarification and turn-taking
<b>Key skills:</b>	Speaking
<b>Materials:</b>	One copy of the mingling activity per class; one copy of the conversation scenarios for every six (or seven) students; one copy of the worksheet per student; one copy of the lesson feedback sheet per student (optional)

**Preparation**

Cut up the mingling activity sheet. There is one set of three sentences, in case you have uneven student numbers. Add extra sentences if you have more than 13 students in your class.

Cut up the conversation scenarios.

**Procedure****Introduction**

1. Explain (or elicit from the students) that having a fluent conversation in another language is so difficult because there are a lot of language functions happening at the same time and a lot of skills involved (listening, speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary and so on). These different areas often overlap or even happen simultaneously.
2. It is important that students realize that, in this lesson, the main focus is on fluency and accuracy in the use of the target functional language, rather than overall accuracy. This transparency should pre-empt any feeling from the students that they are losing out when they are not corrected every time they make a mistake.
3. Introduce the class to the objectives of the lesson (graded to the comprehension abilities of your students):
  - By the end of the lesson, students will be more confident and skilled at taking part in spontaneous conversations.

- By the end of the lesson, students will have practised several strategies for taking part in a conversation, including openings and endings, clarification and turn-taking.

**Test**

4. Give each student in the class a slip of paper. Students must stand up, read out their slip to each other and find someone that has one with the same or a very similar meaning. Once students have found their partner, they should sit down together. Feedback at the end will ensure that everyone is partnered with the person they should be. If there are any mistakes, you can decide whether or not to move students again or just explain what the partnerships are, and why they are, wrong but leave students where they are.
5. Give each pair a conversation scenario. Each scenario asks the students to take part in a conversation. There are three different scenarios and each one focuses on one main conversation sub-skill. Instruct students that they have five minutes to discuss the scenario with their partner and have the conversation. Set the timer and begin.
6. The purpose of this stage is to see how well the learners can function in spontaneous conversation so there's not much point in giving them lots of time to prepare. Encourage them to work quickly. Monitor unobtrusively, noting any useful errors, difficulties or gaps in knowledge but don't interrupt the conversations.
7. Stop the students when the five minutes are up. Re-distribute the slips of paper and repeat. You could ask the students to do all three of the conversation tasks, if you feel they need to, they want to or you have the time.
8. Collect in the slips of paper. Ask the students how they felt about taking part in these conversations.
  - Were they easy or difficult? Why?
  - Did they have enough suitable expressions for these tasks?

If students claim it was easy or that they didn't have any problems, it might be a good idea to raise their awareness of the errors or gaps you noted down while

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monitoring (without actually providing any corrections yet). If they are aware that they need help, you could explain that this is the kind of language you are going to deal with in this lesson and that, by the end of the lesson, such conversations should be much easier for them.

Forgo any kind of error correction at this stage (as the main function of the activity is to test how much the students know) and wait until after the teaching stage, when the students should be more knowledgeable. It is, however, vitally important that you explain to your learners that errors will be dealt with later in the lesson so they know that they are not simply being ignored.

### Teach

#### Handout 3

##### Introduction

1. Explain to your students that you are now going to have a closer look at examples of language we can use for the three conversation functions looked at. Explain that this practice will help them to take part in conversations, like the ones they just practised, more effectively.

##### Activity 1

1. Instruct your students to listen carefully and write down the sentences you are going to say. Dictate the following sentences to the class:
  1. Can you explain that again, please? This time could you use words with fewer syllables!
  2. It's [pause] ... nice to see you, too. (*To be said in a tone that suggests it's not nice at all.*)
  3. Sorry but can I just ask you to stop for a second?
  4. It's great to run into you! What a surprise!
  5. Give me a chance to say my piece!
  6. I'm really sorry but I just didn't get that. Please say it again.
2. Once the students have had sufficient time to look over the sentences, ask them to compare their sentences with the person next to them. Give them a few minutes to discuss and encourage students to make any changes they want to.
3. Write up the correct versions of the sentences on the board for students to check. Encourage a

discussion about any differences between their own sentences and the correct versions. It's worth pointing out that, especially with number 2, it's not necessarily what you say but the way that you say it.

##### Activity 2

1. Ask the students to work together in pairs or groups of three to organize the sentences into three categories. Direct them to the objectives of the lesson to see what the three categories are (openings and endings, clarification, turn-taking). Give them a few minutes to discuss.

**Key:** category 1 – openings and endings; sentences 2 and 4; category 2 – clarification; sentences 1 and 6; category 3 – turn-taking; sentences 3 and 5

2. Encourage the students to check with each other to see if they can reach an agreement. Correct or discuss if necessary.

##### Activity 3

1. Instruct students to work with a new partner and discuss sentences 7 to 18, deciding which category they can each be added to. They are the sentences from the mingling activity at the beginning of the lesson. Give them time to discuss them and make their initial choices. Tell the students that you are going to look more closely at the meaning and use of these sentences shortly so, for now, they just have to think about their main function.

**Key:** category 1 – openings and endings; sentences 7, 11, 14, 15; category 2 – clarification; sentences 9, 10, 12, 13; category 3 – turn-taking; sentences 8, 16, 17, 18

2. Feed back as necessary.

##### Activity 4

1. Put the students into small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. Monitor for any 'useful' errors, as well as interesting discussion points that can be elaborated on for the benefit or interest of the other students after the activity has finished. Feed back as required.

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### Activity 5

1. Explain to the students that you have looked at lots of examples of language for conversation and that, now, you're going to have a closer look at how it's used and practise using it.
2. Divide the students in the class into three groups and give each group responsibility for one of the three categories. If there are more than 15 students in your class, you may have to have two groups covering the same category. Tell each group which category – openings and endings, clarification or turn-taking – is theirs and instruct them to work their way through the questions before presenting their answers to the rest of the class. Set a time limit so the students are clear about how quickly they have to work (around 20 to 30 minutes should be enough). Let them look online for examples of how the sentences might be used.
3. Monitor as the students complete the activity. Students should work together to answer all the questions.
4. Once students have come up with answers for the four questions, remind them that they are going to present their ideas to the other groups. Give them a further five to ten minutes to make sure their ideas are clear and to decide which student, or students, is going to present which part.
5. One group at a time will present their ideas. You should already have checked their answers during the monitoring stage so there shouldn't be any issues with accuracy of content. Tell the other two groups that they will also need to use these sentences shortly so they should take notes during the presentation and ask questions at the end. In addition, tell the groups that you are only focusing on the target language and you won't be correcting any other errors (although you can certainly note them for correction in a future lesson).
6. Encourage the other groups to ask questions at the end of each presentation. Feed back as necessary.

### Review activity 1

Ask students to close their books, cover any notes etc. and give you parallel expressions for the following:

- What do you think about that idea? (E.g. Does that make sense to you?)
- Would you elaborate on that? (E.g. Could you give us more details, please?)
- I didn't catch that. (E.g. Sorry, can you say that again? I'm not sure I understood correctly.)
- Hopefully we'll run in to each other again. (E.g. I'm looking forward to the next time we meet.)
- May I interrupt you for a second? (E.g. Do you mind if I butt in here?)

### Review activity 2

Nominate a couple of students at random to come up with a situation where they would use some of the sentences. Choose a couple of sentences from each category. Ask the last student you asked to select another sentence and a different classmate to ask. Continue until all of the students in the class have had the opportunity to answer.

### Test

1. Get students to work on the errors or gaps in knowledge from the first 'test' stage of the lesson. Ask students to identify what the errors, missing words or expressions or appropriacy issues are, then correct them.
2. Put the students back into the same pairs as during the first 'test' stage of the lesson and ask them to complete the conversation scenario part of the lesson again. Follow the same procedure as before – one task per pair, five mins each, then change tasks until each pair has done all three. Both you and the learners themselves, assuming the 'teach' stage of the lesson was effective, should note a significant improvement in their ability to carry out the tasks successfully.
3. After each pair has completed their third scenario, instruct the pairs to select one conversation to perform aloud to the rest of the class (they may wish to have a few more minutes of preparation time). Depending on the number of students in

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your class and the timing of previous activities, you may not have time to listen to each pair.

Either select a couple or ask for volunteers, then ask the remaining ones to perform their conversation as part of a review at the beginning of the next lesson.

### Lesson feedback (optional)

1. Ask the students to evaluate how confident they felt at taking part in a spontaneous conversation at the start of the lesson, compared to now. You could use a visual, such as the one in the lesson feedback handout, for them to express this easily and clearly. The feedback you receive will allow you to reflect on how successful the lesson was and how much future review of the target language may be necessary.

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## MINGLING ACTIVITY

It's really nice to meet you again.	I was hoping we'd have another chance to bump into each other.
Sorry, can you say that again? I'm not sure I understood correctly.	I didn't catch that.
What do you think about that idea?	Does that make sense to you?
I'm looking forward to the next time we meet.	Hopefully, we'll run into each other again.
Could you give some more details, please?	Would you elaborate on that?
May I interrupt you for a second?	Do you mind if I butt in here?
Sorry to cut you off but ...	

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## CONVERSATION SCENARIOS

**Scenario 1** You meet in the supermarket by chance. You haven't seen each other for a long time.

**Student A:** You are genuinely pleased to see Student B. Greet him/her appropriately.

**Student B:** You aren't so pleased to see Student A but, of course, you have to try and pretend you are. Greet him/her appropriately.

**Student A:** You are soon interrupted by your demanding children and have to end the conversation.

**Student B:** You are relieved to say goodbye.

**Scenario 2** Student A is an office worker and Student B is his/her manager. You are discussing an important project. (Decide what field you work in and what the project is.)

**Student A:** Ask for some details about the project.

**Student B:** Give Student A some details but don't answer his/her questions directly.

**Student A:** Ask for clarification.

**Student B:** Give some contradictory details.

**Student A:** Ask for clarification.

**Student B:** Give some unclear information.

**Student A:** Ask for clarification again or give up!

**Scenario 3** Student A is angry; very angry! You think that Student B has done something that has really annoyed you. (Decide what this is.)

**Student A:** Tell Student B why you are so angry. Keep talking and don't let him/her have a say.

**Student B:** You didn't do it! Listen to Student A's rant (if you don't listen, it'll only make him/her angrier) but try to find a good time to interrupt politely and explain your side of things.

**Student A:** Don't make it easy for Student B to interrupt. You need to get things off your chest!

**Student B:** Eventually, you manage to make your point and convince Student A that you didn't do whatever he/she thinks you did.

**Student A:** Apologize.

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### Language for conversations – openings and endings, clarification, and turn-taking

1 Write down the sentences your teacher says. Don't worry if you don't catch every word.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2 Discuss with another student how you could organize the sentences from activity 1 into three categories. Write the categories and the numbers of the sentences related to them below.

Category 1 – \_\_\_\_\_

Category 2 – \_\_\_\_\_

Category 3 – \_\_\_\_\_

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- 3** Have a look at the sentences below. Work together with one of your classmates and try to agree on which of the above categories you can add them to. Write the number of each sentence in one of the categories in activity 2.
7. It's really nice to see you again.
  8. What do you think about that idea?
  9. Would you elaborate on that?
  10. Sorry, can you say that again? I'm not sure I understood correctly.
  11. I'm looking forward to the next time we meet.
  12. Could you give us more details, please?
  13. I didn't catch that.
  14. I was hoping we'd have another chance to bump into each other.
  15. Hopefully, we'll run in to each other again.
  16. Does that make sense to you?
  17. Do you mind if I butt in here?
  18. May I interrupt you for a second?
- 4** In groups, discuss the following questions:
- Of the three functions that we focused on (openings and endings, clarification and turn-taking), which one is the easiest for you? And the most difficult?
  - Do you know of any other things you can say for any of these three functions? Take note of any useful language.
  - Are there any major differences in vocabulary or levels of formality, or any cultural differences, that make the way you would express these functions in your first language very different?
- 5** Your teacher will put you into a group. Your group will focus on one of the three categories you have been looking at – openings and endings, clarification or turn-taking. Work together to answer the following questions about the sentences in your category:
1. Which of the sentences would you use in formal and which in informal situations?
  2. Practice saying the sentences in different tones to give them different meanings.  
  
For example, *It's really nice to see you again!* said in a way that sounds genuinely friendly and positive, then said again with rolling eyes and gritted teeth.
  3. For each of the sentences, think of two contexts where you could use them, one with a positive or neutral tone and one with a more negative tone. Write them into the table below.  
  
For example, *It's really nice to see you again* (positive tone) – meeting a client who you have a good working relationship with. *It's really nice to see you again* (negative tone) – running into an old classmate who you didn't get on with when you were in school.



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4. For each of the sentences, think of two possible responses. One response should be positive in tone and one should be negative in tone or meaning.

For example, *It's really nice to see you again.* Responses – *It's nice to see you, too.* (positive)  
*I'm sorry but I can't talk. I'm in a hurry.* (negative)

	positive tone	negative tone
number 1		
<i>responses</i>		
number 2		
<i>responses</i>		
number 3		
<i>responses</i>		
number 4		
<i>responses</i>		
number 5		
<i>responses</i>		
number 6		
<i>responses</i>		

5. Your teacher will now ask you to present your ideas to the other groups. Decide who will present each part and make sure each of you are clear about the contents.

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## LESSON SHARE LESSON FEEDBACK

This is how I felt when taking part in spontaneous (unplanned) conversations in English at the start of the lesson.



This is how I felt when taking part in spontaneous (unplanned) conversations in English by the end of the lesson.



This is how I feel about taking part in spontaneous (unplanned) conversations in English in the future.

