

GAME-BASED LEARNING

Say Something Interesting

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Levels	<i>All</i>
Aims	<i>Develop ability to engage in more interesting and effective small talk (phatic communication)</i>
Class Time	<i>10–15 minutes</i>
Preparation Time	<i>None</i>
Resources	<i>Tokens (e.g., poker chips, bottle caps, small pieces of colored paper)</i>

Small talk, a kind of phatic communication, is a necessary communication skill for forming interpersonal relationships (Thornbury, 2006). Many teachers and textbooks cover basic advice, like asking questions and being a good listener; however, having something interesting to say is also an important part of small talk (Fine, 2005). One way to make small talk interesting is to include extra information. For example, if asked, “Where are you from?” the answer, “Tokyo,” is fine, but not very interesting. A more interesting answer would be, “Tokyo, but to tell the truth, I don’t like it very much.” Another example is in answer to the question, “How long have you lived in San Francisco?” a factual answer of six years is not as interesting as, “Six years, and they’ve been the most exciting of my life.” The more interesting the answer, the easier it is for the questioner to respond to it and for the conversation to continue (Garner, 1997).

PROCEDURE

1. Write several typical small talk questions on the board. These can be easy things like, “Where are you from?” or “What do you do?” or “How long have you lived here?” Give the students a few minutes to think about how they would answer the questions and specifically about how they can make their answers more interesting by including extra information.
2. Model giving factual answers versus more interesting answers with extra information. Discuss with the students which kind of response makes it easier for the conversation to continue.
3. Give the students a few tokens. Have the students stand up and move around and ask and answer the small talk questions. As each student answers, their partner should evaluate the level of interest they have in the answer and give their interlocutor one or more of their tokens.
4. The activity is over when the students have either given away all of their tokens or they have spoken to every student. The student with the most tokens at the end is the winner.

CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. Some students may realize that one way to win the game is to not give away any of their tokens, so you may want to give each student a unique color or number the tokens so that you can easily differentiate between the tokens that the students started with and the tokens they received.
2. Many students may feel obligated to give their speaking partner a token whether they found their response to the question interesting or not, and everyone will end the game with the same number of tokens. To avoid this, encourage the students to give more than one token for responses that they found interesting. Also, you as the teacher can participate but only give tokens for truly interesting responses.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Fine, D. (2005). *The fine art of small talk: How to start a conversation, keep it going, build networking skills—and leave a positive impression!* New York, NY: Hyperion.
- Garner, A. (1997). *Con conversationally speaking: Tested new ways to increase your personal and social effectiveness.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Thornbury, S. (2006). *An A–Z of ELT.* Oxford, England: Macmillan Education.