

Speed Networking

By [Sarah Sahr](#)

So often, our beginner students just need enough language to get through day-to-day activities. Several of their English exchanges are quick 5–8 sentence conversations that fluent speakers take for granted. This activity allows for several one-on-one conversations on several day-to-day topics in a short amount of time.

Materials: Timer with a loud bell, (if needed) envelope with topics cards
Audience: Adult English language learners; beginner to low-intermediate
Objectives: Students will be able to build on communication competence through several short role-play conversations.

Introduction:

Let students know that you will be reviewing several short conversations that you have been practicing over the course of their program, i.e. introductions, ordering food, asking “how much?”, etc. Give students a moment to think of some other short conversations they might have in their day-to-day lives. If they are having trouble, give some examples:

- Making phone calls
- Visiting the doctor
- Giving excuses for being late
- Greetings
- Describing your family
- Telling personal information
- Asking for directions
- Hiring a taxi
- Visiting the post office
- The weather
- Apologies
- Helping a friend

Writing the topics on the board as they are mentioned might spur other conversation topics.

Once you get a good group of topics on the board, go through the ones you think might be challenging and ask for simple sentences or questions that might help the conversation move forward. For example, “giving excuses for being late”:

Questions: *Why are you late? Where have you been? What happened?*

Statements: *I missed the bus. My watch stopped. The meeting ran long.*

Information:

Students will be divided into two groups of equal number. If there isn't an equal number, the instructor should participate. Move all the desks and chairs out of the way and create a big open space in the middle of your classroom. Let half the students create a circle facing outward. Have each student in the other half stand opposite a person in the circle. You now have an inner circle and an outer circle.

Let students know that you will be choosing a topic, at random, from the board to have pairs talk about. You will also have a timer. Depending on the topic, the conversation could last 60

seconds to 3 minutes. For example, if you choose “introductions” that might take about 60 seconds. However, if you choose “telling personal information” it would be nice to give the students more time to talk about themselves.

Now it’s time for... Speed Networking!

Let the role-play begin! Make sure you give detailed instructions on what students should talk about. If you are asking them to talk about “visiting the post office,” let them know which person is the customer and which is the clerk. Let them know that the customer is going to mail a package to his or her home country. Give students time to think before they start talking. The instruction might go something like this:

[in a booming voice] *VISITING THE POST OFFICE!*

You are at the post office. The person in the inner circle is trying to mail a package to his or her home country. The person in the outer circle is the clerk. If you are the clerk, think about what questions you will ask? [wait 20 seconds]. If you are in the inner circle, you are the customer. Think about the statements you might say. [Wait 20 seconds.] Who will take the money? [Wait 20 seconds.]

People in the outer circle, what are you doing? [Wait for the answer.]

People in the inner circle, what are you doing? [Wait for the answer.]

Are you ready? Quickly decide who’s going to talk first.

You have 2 minutes. [Set the timer.] Ready...set...go!

When the timer goes off, congratulate students on a job well done, but try not to linger. Once this conversation is over, have the outer circle move one person to the right, choose a new topic, and repeat! The goal is to work on spontaneous speech...if you spend too much time thinking about what just happened, students might lose momentum for the next conversation.

Go through as many conversations as you can. If you are participating, make sure to listen for mistakes or items you’d like to address at the end of class. If you are not participating, assist only if absolutely necessary. Let the students do the work.

Reflection:

Once you feel students have had their fill of conversations, reassemble the classroom and have students take their seats. Hand out a quick conversation chart asking which conversations were easiest, and which were challenging, or discuss this aloud. Now you have a list of items your class should work on!

Suggested adaptations:

If you would like to include reading and writing in the activity, have students write the speaking topics on small slips of paper and put them in an envelope. When students have a new partner, they pull a slip out of the envelope, read it, and role-play that topic. This could also save time at the end of class when students have to reflect of the conversations they just had... they could

write “easy” or “challenging” on the slips of paper and put them back in the envelope for you to collect.

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