

Lesson Plan: I Can Explain...

by [Sarah Sahr](#)

How many times have you asked students to talk about a certain topic in class and then... nothing, complete silence? Occasionally, students simply don't know how to begin a conversation. Sentence starters are usually good, but that requires a bit of reading. For a truly authentic speaking activity, we really need students to focus on what they are going to say (and, as with all speaking activities, there is always a little bit of listening).

I also like to allow students to have a little bit of support when trying to speak extemporaneously. In this activity, I allow students to have a "cheat sheet" to help them voyage their way through a conversation (and the cheat sheet presents an opportunity for a little bit of writing, the other production skill). In allowing students to build their own scaffold, this lesson plan lets students practice authentic conversation with a little bit of support. In the end, this lesson plan will ask students to listen, write, and speak; three out of four skills... not bad!

Consequently, this will be a great opportunity for students to practice how to ask clarifying questions. See the Conversation step in this lesson plan for more details.

Disclaimer: You'll need enough computers for each student to have his or her own. You'll also need access to YouTube.

Materials: Computers with Internet access; YouTube; photos of complex dished food like apple pie, palak paneer, lasagna, etc.
Audience: Secondary students and adults, all proficiency levels.
Objective: Students will be able to <ul style="list-style-type: none">• construct "how to" notes based on a YouTube video,• paraphrase the steps needed to make a favorite food, and• ask clarifying questions to their partner regarding the steps needed to make the favorite food.
Outcome: Students will talk about how to make their favorite food.
Duration: 60 minutes

Lesson Preparation

Talk with the overseer of the computer lab in your institution. Make sure there are enough working computers for your class and that each computer has headphones. Also check that there isn't a firewall blocking YouTube.

Introduction

Pass some photos around the room of complex dishes to make. Use food items that take a great deal of time to prepare: apple pie, palak paneer, lasagna, ceviche, injera, bulgogi, pho, etc. Ask students if they would be able to explain to a classmate, how do you make these items?

Field Trip! Let students know they are about to learn. Gather your things... we are walking down the hall... to the computer lab.

Building a Scaffold

Please only allow 20 minutes for this part of the activity. Sometimes, students get “stuck” on YouTube and can’t leave. No cat videos, please.

Students should choose a food they would like to watch being made. By simply searching on YouTube for any food item, thousands of videos come up. “Apple Pie”: 289,000 hits, “Palak Paneer”: 11,000 hits, “Bolgogi”: 18,700 hits. For the sake of time, the video they choose to watch should be no more than 5 minutes.

While students watch their videos, with head phones on, they should write down key points on how to make the dish. Students will be able to use these notes when talking with their partner.

Practice

After the 20 minutes have been used viewing the videos, students should practice how they are going to present the dish to their partner. One of the greatest ways to do this is to have student stand up, facing a wall. In using hands to cup ears and speaking very softly into the wall, students can hear their voice and make adjustments to inflection, tone, cadence, and the like. Sequencing is key to this conversation. Make sure students practice going through their key points in order. And, lastly, consider wall space; it might be best to have students utilize the hallway, if possible, for this practice. Allow for 10 minutes of practice.

Conversation

Return everyone to the classroom. Have students pair up as they enter. Take a very quick moment to review some question starters on clarification. For example:

- What do you mean?
- I don’t think I understand what you are saying.
- Why would you do that?
- So you have to blanch the tomatoes... what’s *blanch*?
- How many minutes do you bake the bread?
- Could you repeat that?

I’d also ask students to predict what questions they might be asked based on their explanations. Write some of these question starters on the board.

Remind the students that they have a cheat sheet to help them. Let them know it’s important to cover all points they wrote down on the paper. (It must be important if they wrote it down.) Remember sequencing! Let them talk for as long as possible.

Closure

If time allows, students can talk about the experience of having these kinds of self-built scaffolded conversations. Make sure this closer activity isn’t about the food, but more about the conversation prep and execution. What could have been different?

You can find past TESOL Connection lesson plans and activities in the [TESOL Connections archives](#), or you can visit the [TESOL Resource Center](#). From there, search Keywords “TESOL Connections,” and you will find about 20 resources with my name on it (Sahr, Sarah).

Sarah Sahr works at TESOL and is currently pursuing her doctorate in education administration and policy at the George Washington University. Her professional career has taken her all over the world, most notably as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ethiopia and as a traveling school teacher/administrator with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus. Sarah is also a certified ashtanga yoga instructor and has managed an eco-lodge in Chugchilan, Ecuador.