

HOW TO TEACH EVERYDAY ENGLISH

LIKE A PRO

WHAT EVERY TEACHER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TEACHING EVERYDAY ENGLISH

HOW TO TEACH

GREETINGS

CONVERSATIONAL
ROUTINES

APOLOGIES

POLITE REQUESTS

SMALL TALK

DISCOURSE MARKERS

CONNECTORS

SMALL TALK

AGREEING
AND DISAGREEING

THE ABILITY TO HOLD

A CONVERSATION
IS A VITAL
PART OF
THE HUMAN
EXPERIENCE

CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH

IS PERSONAL RATHER THAN IMPERSONAL,
IT IS IMMEDIATE AND
CONTEXT-DEPENDENT

🔧 HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR STUDENTS DEVELOP EVERYDAY ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

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English is All Around You! How to Bring Everyday English into Class

THOSE OF US WHO TEACH ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE HAVE AN ADVANTAGE OVER OTHER LANGUAGE TEACHERS: OUR WORLD HAS BECOME SO GLOBALIZED THAT FOR MANY YEARS NOW WE HAVE BEEN SEEKING ONE LANGUAGE AS COMMON GROUND – AND THIS LANGUAGE IS ENGLISH.

In the fields of international business and technology, English is the language that most people are expected to handle. From technological gadgets to famous name brands, catch phrases to song lyrics, English has permeated every society in the world today to such extent that most of the world's population will probably come across words or names in English on a daily basis. So let's use this everyday English to our advantage!

WHAT IS AN ANGLICISM?

An anglicism, simply put, is an English word borrowed by another language. It is more common in some areas or industries as is the case with business (marketing, cash, holding) and entertainment (reality show, thriller, backstage), for example. Each language has its own particular anglicisms, and the words often change from country to country, even if they speak the same language. This is often the case with Spanish-speaking countries – some may use the English word “bacon”, for example, while others prefer the equivalent in Spanish (panceta or tocino). For the purposes of this article, I can't provide a complete list of anglicisms, but I can mention some of the most common throughout the world.

ANGLICISMS OR ENGLISH WORDS STUDENTS ARE LIKELY TO COME ACROSS:

- Computer/modern tech jargon: Most students are familiar with words like “mouse”, “click”, “app” or “tweet”. Most of these words have equivalents in other languages, but people are increasingly using the words in English.
- Brand names: There are countless

brand names that are used to describe the product itself, words like “Scotch tape”, “Word”, “Messenger” or “Walkman”.

- Names of places, towns, streets, football clubs, etc.: Banks often include the word “bank” in their name (Citibank), shopping centers often include the word “shopping”.
- Miscellaneous: Music words like “rock n'roll”, “jazz” or “blues”, foods like “hot dog”, “ketchup”, “sandwich” or “cheesecake”, verbs like “play”, “check in” or “check out”. And the lists go on and on...

Be sure to research and use the words in English that are most often used in the country where you teach. Also beware of pseudo-anglicisms. This is when an English word is borrowed but used differently from its original meaning. For example, in some Latin American countries the word “fashion” is used as an adjective to mean “stylish” or “cool”: You are so “fashion”. But fashion is not an adjective in English! It is very important to make this distinction with your students and show them how some words in English have been deformed or their meaning changed.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1 SNAP A SHOT!

Ask students to go around town and find signs, posters, billboards, etc. with words in English. Ask them to take a photo of the sign with their cell phone or camera. With younger students or those who don't have phones, ask them to find at least one example and copy it on a piece of paper. They must also make a note of where they saw this: was it an ad or a store window?

In class, students share their photos or drawings. Students must look closely at the examples and determine:

- If it is indeed a word in English or a similar equivalent in their native language (classes and “clases” in Spanish).
- If the word in English is used cor-

rectly: Say a store sells “bodies”. Does “body” in this context mean the same thing in English-speaking countries? (In some countries a “body” is a women's undergarment). What if it's “body splash”?

- If it's an entire phrase in English - does it make sense?

2 IDENTIFY THE SCENE

A great variation to the activity above is for you to present snapshots of signs/posters that have words in English in them. Ask students to guess where the photo was taken. Ask them to describe the context.

3 BRAINSTORM

Ask students to brainstorm words in English they may come across on a daily basis. Turn it into a game by giving them a category and seeing which team comes up with more. For example, call out “musical bands”: each team may come up with names like Pet Shop Boys, The Doors or Green Day. The only rule is that the name has to have words in English. If both teams write down the same item, each team gets 5 points, but if there is an item that only one of the teams came up with, then that team gets 20 points.

4 SEARCH FOR IT IN PRINT!

Similar to the first activity, in this case, students must find words in English in newspapers or magazines in their native language. Once they are done searching, students come together and discuss why a particular English word was used and not the equivalent in their native language.

5 WHO SAID THAT?

Sometimes entire phrases in English become so popular, they are used all over the world and are easily recognized. These are usually movie quotes or parts of song lyrics. This is English content that often surrounds students on a daily basis, which at some point they learn to recognize. Pick some very popular phrases and

ask students to identify who said it or where it is originally from. Here are some good options for movie quotes:

"Show me the money!" – Jerry McGuire

"Houston, we have a problem." – Apollo 13

"Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." – The Wizard of Oz

"Go ahead, make my day." – Sudden Impact

"May the Force be with you." – Star Wars

"E.T. phone home" – E.T.

"I'll be back." – Terminator

"I see dead people." – The Sixth Sense

"My precious." – The Lord of the Rings trilogy

"I'm the king of the world!" – Titanic

Choose movie quotes that are more appropriate to your students' ages (young students may not be familiar with Clint Eastwood or The Wizard of Oz).

STUDENTS MAY BE AMAZED AT HOW MUCH ENGLISH THEY ACTUALLY USE ON A DAILY BASIS. SOME SEE IT, BUT ARE NOT ENTIRELY SURE WHAT IT MEANS.

There are fun ways to make use of the English they know, but may not be aware that they already know.

How to Teach Conversational English: 9 Best Practices

When other teachers, even other ESL teachers, hear I'm teaching an ESL conversation class, they often say it sounds "relaxing," or "fun" or "easy." Most teachers will smile at this, of course, recognizing that any teaching, while it may be fun, is almost never "relaxing" or "easy."

And while the conversation class may certainly be less rigorous than, for example, an advanced writing class, it has its own set of problems. In a writing class, I know what the students need, and the title "Advanced ESL Composition" alone suggests the curriculum: course readings and several student essays on related topics over the course of the semester, in drafts increasing polished and focused on structure, grammar, and punctuation. A conversation class, however, is less defined. What exactly is a conversation class? What is the curriculum? Sometimes there's not even a course text available. Despite this initial lack of clarity, however, there are general principles of best practice that a conversation class can be built around.

9 BASIC PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING CONVERSATION CLASSES

1 FOCUS ON COMMUNICATION AND FLUENCY, NOT CORRECTNESS

I'm always surprised when in the first days of class students turned to me or ask their classmates if they are holding the conversation "correctly," if it is "right." Rarely even in our native languages do we concern ourselves if the conversation is proceeding "correctly": the point is if our meaning is coming through. This is what should be emphasized to students: it's not a matter of "right" but whether or not your classmates understand you and can respond to you!

2 LAY THE GROUNDWORK

Before entering in academic conversations, students have to agree on some basic "rules for engagement": listening to each other courteously, listening actively by clarifying meaning and asking for examples, advancing one's own opinions clearly and politely while considering the audience, etc. Most students will really know these rules already from their first languages — there are probably some cultural universals in politeness — and can usually help in brainstorming five or so rules to be displayed prominently in the class. More than five will likely be too many to focus on and be useful.

3 STUDENT DIRECTED: STUDENT CHOICE OF TOPICS

There are few things more uncomfortable than being in a conversation on a topic you either intensely dislike or have nothing to say on. Most native speakers will excuse themselves from such conversations as soon as possible. Teachers should be wary of assigning controversial topics such as the legality of abortion or same sex marriage without gauging the climate of the class and having an idea of how receptive students will be to such topics. Some classes are perfectly capable of holding a mature conversation on these topics, others not depending on their language and cross-cultural and interpersonal skills. Teachers should ask themselves the following: Are my students capable of listening to their peers on the topic without erupting in anger? Can they advance their own opinions without undue embarrassment? One way around this concern is allowing students to come up with their own topics to use over the course of the term. Have them work in groups, write agreed-upon topics on index cards, and collect them. They do not have to be "academic" topics like the validity of global warming but almost anything students are interested in and can discuss for an extended time, such as favorite music. One class session or part of one in brainstorming topics will likely

yield enough topics for the term, and the instructor can just draw an index card to use during discussion time.

4 SMALL GROUP / PAIR WORK

Conversation occurs in small, not large groups. Having students work in small groups or pairs is usually more productive for a number of reasons: students are less self-conscious if they are "performing" in front of a small group rather than large, and they have more chance to speak in a smaller group. In addition, conversations generally occur in smaller groups, as any party or meeting will demonstrate — people gather in small groups to talk when given the opportunity. Setting aside regular time for students to get into groups for discussion will help them develop their conversation skills.

5 ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO ROTATE PARTNERS

Some teachers assign conversational partners or groups for the term, and this has advantages, such as students get to know each other better this way, and they can quickly get into their groups when asked to, easing transitions. However, there also are advantages to occasionally rotating partners or groups, perhaps every few weeks. In this way, students get to know more of their peers and get exposed to more ideas while still having the structure provided by having a stable group for a period of time.

6 TEACH STUDENTS STRATEGIES

Too often conversations even between native speakers fall flat because the participants don't know conversation strategies. In addition, there is a difference between an everyday conversation and an academic conversation. Many if not all of our students can carry on an everyday conversation without much difficulty: "What would you like for dinner?" "I

dunno. Pizza? Chicken? What do you want?” Much of our day-to-day “conversation” goes on in exchanges like this and requires few strategies. But to have a real “conversation” on the topic of food choices, for example, the conversational partners will have to know different strategies for introducing the topic, drawing each other out, asking for opinions, advancing their own, using examples, and so forth.

7 TEACH VOCABULARY

It seems elementary, but it is often forgotten that students may not be participating because they simply don't have the vocabulary to enter a specific conversation. Introducing some key phrases and words related to the topic will help this. For example, on the topic of different types of vacations today, students should learn words like “condo,” “time share,” “hotel,” “motel,” “extended stay,” “business class,” and “coach.”

8 TEACH BOTH FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONVERSATION SKILLS

There are specific strategies for entering, extending, and ending conversations both formally and informally. For example, with “Hey, Diana! How was your vacation to Hawaii?” I am signaling to Diana that I'd like to open an informal and probably brief conversation on the topic of her vacation that might extend a little into my vacation and vacations in general. However, with “What do you think about how we vacation today? Hasn't it changed quite a bit from even ten years ago?” I am signaling a different kind of conversation—more in-depth and analytical as the conversation participants consider different types of vacations, and more academic. Knowing these strategies for different types of conversations will help students avoid confusion and even annoyance and gain experience in different types of conversations.

9 GRADE ON DEGREE OF PARTICIPATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF CONVERSATION. ASSESS INFORMALLY.

Because the focus of instruction, and of conversation itself, is on communicating meaning rather than on correctness, students should be assessed

mostly informally. The instructor can walk around the class, sit in on conversations, and get an idea this way on the degree of participation of each student. Students can also be asked to hold a conversation in front of the teacher or class and be assessed by a rubric on the degree of responding to and advancing topics, on use of strategies and vocabulary, and so forth. Finally, more formal quizzes and tests can also be given in the form of listening to taped conversations and answering questions about topic, vocabulary, responses, strategies, and so on.

TEACHING CONVERSATION CAN SEEM CHALLENGING BECAUSE AT FIRST BLUSH IT SEEMS AS IF THERE ARE FEW PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE THE INSTRUCTOR.

However, keeping in mind such strategies as preteaching vocabulary, establishing small groups, and teaching conversational strategies, there is plenty to teach and do in the conversation class!

6 Methods to Help Students Improve Vocabulary and Structures

Many ESL students, particularly international students who are new to the U.S. but may have studied English for years in their home countries, come to college having some academic vocabulary, ability to read their texts, follow lectures, and participate in class discussion with some degree of ease, but they lack conversational English ability to use outside of class.

I noticed this in particular recently when, in greeting a student as he was leaving the student union and carrying a plate of junk food, he explained he did not often eat French fries, as he was now. I responded, "I'm glad to hear that: they're not good for you." He looked puzzled. "Good for me?" I assured him I did not mean him, personally -- "you" often means "everyone" in everyday conversational English. This international student was a top student in class but struggled with simple conversations because of his lack of practice with native speakers of English. Many ESL students, both those who have lived in the U. S. as well as international students, share this dilemma, probably because it is more comfortable to read an English text than to try to participate in an actual conversation. However, even ESL students who are not planning to live in an English-speaking country would benefit from learning the vocabulary and structures of conversational English in order to carry on the casual conversations which occur even in academic and business settings. So what vocabulary and grammar should we teach, and how do we teach it to help students with their conversational English?

TERMS AND STRUCTURES OF CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH

1 CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH, AND CONVERSATION IN GENERAL, IS PERSONAL RATHER THAN IMPERSONAL.

Therefore, terms related to the speakers' immediate situations and lives are emphasized. Personal pronouns such as "I" and "you," for example, are prominent in conversational English while they are not in academic English. In fact, many college instructors go so far as to tell students not to use "I" in a formal paper. While I would not go to this extreme, it does demonstrate the personal/impersonal dichotomy between conversational and academic English.

2 CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH IS IMMEDIATE AND CONTEXT-DEPENDENT:

Therefore, terms related to the immediate context are emphasized. For example, it's typical to begin a conversation with a comment on the weather, or what one of the speakers is wearing, or what one of the speakers is doing — all related to the immediate situation and therefore "natural" for opening a conversation.

3 BREVITY.

Everyday conversations are generally relatively brief. As in the example shown earlier between me and my student outside the student union, a quick discussion about the student's lunch choice is fine, while a more extended discourse on the nature of the American and Japanese diets would be inappropriate because most everyday conversations occur when the speakers are on the midst of some other activity, such as getting lunch between classes, and there is limited time for an in-depth conversation.

4 ROUTINES.

Related to brevity, conversational English is based on routines. For example, in running into a friend at the student union, there is a set of unspoken expectations about the conversational "routine" for this situation: "Hey! How's it going?" "Fine. Getting your lunch? How's it look today?" "Not so bad, but stay away from the fish.

What class do you have next?" "Physics. Sorry, got to go!" Because these speakers are probably in a hurry in passing between classes, there is a specific "routine" that requires little time and thought — a greeting, some comment on the immediate situation, and a farewell. Deviation from the routine may result in confusion or annoyance.

SIX METHODS FOR TEACHING CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH

1 RAISE AWARENESS.

Students may be unaware of the difference between academic and conversational English. I like to give a few examples drawn from life or literature. A good one I just noted in a novel showed an older family member advising a younger about his affair with a married woman: "Be discrete." When the younger one asks what that means, his elder translates into conversational English "Don't get caught." English is full of examples like these: most utterances have both conversational and more formal or academic forms, such as the multiple ways to say "shut up": "Quiet, please," "You have the right to remain silent," and "Your silence is appreciated." Briefly discussing these differences demonstrates to students the differences between the academic and conversational.

2 MODEL.

Students from non-English speaking countries, while they may have studied English for years in classrooms, may have had very little real exposure to English in actual conversational use. Providing them models of this through short TV or YouTube clips showing speakers engaged in everyday English use will begin to close this gap.

Point out the routines the speakers go through: how they greet each other, how they develop the conversation, and then close it.

3 REAL WORLD USE:

Many students, particularly ESL students, are very reluctant to venture out into the world beyond the university. Because they are going to need to do this eventually, students should be encouraged in this direction. Send them out to shopping centers, bookstores, or coffeehouses to note how people engage in conversations in an actual real life setting. Have them come back to class ready to discuss new vocabulary or phrases they learned.

4 HAVE STUDENTS PRACTICE WITH EACH OTHER.

Once students have learned some of the language and structures of conversational English, have them practice with each other in pairs. Hold a class party in which students have to speak to multiple people or groups, just as in a real party.

5 PRACTICE IN REAL WORLD SETTINGS.

In this exercise, all students will have to sign up for one real-world setting, such as a party or a meeting, in which they will have to engage in conversational English. Have them bring back a short report on what happened to share with their classmates. This also provides some accountability for actually doing the exercise.

6 ASSESS STUDENTS.

Assessment does not have to mean a traditional pencil-and-paper test, which would make little sense for assessing conversational English and does not match the way students have been taught, in any case. Some alternate ways to assess are walking around the class while students are talking and noting how much time is spent in English or another language. Then the class can be brought back together so the instructor can discuss common concerns she noted. Students may also hold conversations before the rest of the class or with the instructor as part of assessment. A rubric should be used to note vocabulary and phrases used.

CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH IS OFTEN NOT SEEN AS IMPORTANT AS THE ACADEMIC, PERHAPS RIGHTLY SO AS IT IS THE ACADEMIC STUDENTS MOST IMMEDIATELY NEED TO SUCCEED AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL.

Nevertheless, conversational English is an important part of any student's experience in an English-speaking country and is therefore important to be taught.

Conversational Routines

Your Students Need to Know

IT PROBABLY OCCURS AT SOME POINT TO MOST NATIVE SPEAKERS WHILE GOING THROUGH A TYPICAL CONVERSATIONAL ROUTINE: “HELLO! HOW ARE YOU? HOW’S THE FAMILY?” AND SO ON THAT THERE IS LITTLE ORIGINALITY IN LANGUAGE USE.

Except for a few big events — fires, illness, accidents — our everyday language seems to exist in set routines. There are some concerns with this, of course — boredom, superficiality, calling up the wrong phrase on occasion: e.g., “you, too” instead of “thank you.” However, there are even a larger number of advantages, especially for nonnative speakers: for example, lessened chance in making a mistake in grammar, vocabulary, or register because it is a set routine. In addition, going through the routine automatically frees up processing space in the brain so that the speaker can plan out the real “meat” of conversation after the routine — making a sale, asking for a date, etc. This is true even for native speakers of the language. Knowing these conversational routines is therefore a cultural expectation: e.g., a speaker who bids an ESL student to “Have a nice day” in farewell would probably feel slighted if the student did not respond in kind. Therefore it is important to teach students these routines.

WHAT CONVERSATIONAL ROUTINES DO YOUR STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW?

1 ROUTINES FOR GREETING

These routines for greeting may be used as an opener to a more important conversation, or they may be used simply as greetings, to acknowledge the other person as he or she passes. Emphasis should be made on their function—that despite the wording, they are usually just greetings, not inquiries in the other speaker’s health and well-being.

A: Hi! How are you?
B: Not bad. And you?

A: How’s it going?
B: Can’t complain. And yourself?

A: And how are you today?
B: Very well, thank you.

2 ROUTINES FOR GRATITUDE

Although one of the dialogues models the use of “you’re welcome,” it should be noted that Americans say this very little: it seems to have been replaced with “no problem.”

A: Wow! Thanks so much. I really appreciate it.
B: No problem.

A: I just want you to know how much this means to me.
B: It’s my pleasure.

A: Thanks! This is great.
B: You’re very welcome.

3 ROUTINES FOR COMPLAINT

Complaining is done rather frequently in American culture, something that comes with being a consumer culture. There are therefore a number of ways to complain, from the cold and controlled to the flaming and hostile, depending on the situation. We of course would want our students to focus more on the controlled side, which actually is more likely to get results, along with being as specific as possible about the problem and what should be done about it.

A: I find this work on my car unacceptable. I’m still experiencing the same problem.
B: I’m sorry. I’ll have the technician look at it right away.

A: We’ve been waiting for our server for twenty minutes. Could you tell me how much longer it will be?
B: I’ll check on that right away, sir.

A: Excuse me. Would you mind turning down your music? It’s very loud, and I can hear it all the way down the street.
B: I’m sorry. I’ll get my son to lower it right away.

4 ROUTINES FOR APOLOGY

There are also numerous routines for apology, mostly to loved ones and friends, but also sometimes to relative strangers: the former tending to be more sincere and the latter more routine. Most apologies include an acknowledgement of the offense given and offer an explanation as to why. Except for the most serious offense, the person apologized to usually accepts it.

“No problem” is often used to accept an apology as well as in response to “thank you.”

A: I’m so sorry to have kept you waiting this long! Traffic was terrible.
B: No problem. I thought it was probably something like that.

A: I’m so sorry! Are you all right?
B: No problem. The train’s very crowded today.

A: Rob, I’m really sorry about this, but I’m going to be a little late on the report. I’ve had the flu the past couple of days.
B: Okay. Just get it in asap.

5 ROUTINES FOR FAREWELL

Finally, we have routines for farewell, which often don’t contain the word “good bye” these days but use other expressions. Included often are reasons why the speaker must leave.

A: I should let you go. I have to get dinner started.
B: Well, it’s been nice talking to you. See you soon.

A: Well, I’ve got to go now. I have to meet my wife at the dinner.
B: Okay. Have a great weekend!

A: Well, it's been great catching up, but I have just a pile of work...

B: Yeah, me too. Let's plan to get together for lunch sometime.

HOW TO TEACH ROUTINES

1 MATCHING

Because these routines are more or less set (e.g., the appropriate response to "How are you?" is some variation of "fine"), have students match the routine opening sentence with the correct response. This will prepare them for coming up with the correct responses in actual speech situations.

2 FILL IN THE BLANK

Blank out part of a written dialogue: e.g., A: Hi! ____ are you? B: Not _____. And you? This will further help students process the routines and learn them to the level of automaticity.

3 MAKE THE CORRECTION

Give out "butchered" dialogues, with errors in grammar or usage: e.g. "How's are you?" "Bad! And you?" Correct and discuss the errors.

4 WRITE DIALOGUES

Have students get into pairs or groups. Have them choose the basic situation and the characters or assign them. The students then work together to create one or two conversational routines.

5 PRACTICE DIALOGUES

After writing their dialogues, students can practice and perform them in front of the class, or trade class routines with another group and perform theirs.

6 FIELDTRIPS

Go to Starbucks or another cafe. Stores, restaurants, and other public places where people engage in conversation, like a park, are also possibilities. Have students note which conversational routines people engage in. Discuss them back in class.

SITUATIONS AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTICE.

The routines can be for a wide range of places -- the similarity between them is the function: to greet, to say farewell, and so on. Knowing the function of the different routines will help students develop speaking skills appropriate to the situation with a level of fluency.

SO THERE ARE MANY ROUTINES IN ENGLISH FOR A VARIETY OF

Opening Gambits: 5 Conversational Openers for the Shy Student

IN LEARNING ENGLISH, ADULT ESL STUDENTS OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES CAUGHT IN A "CATCH-22."

A Catch-22 involves two contradictory outcomes, such as the one made famous in the novel by the same name: to get out of serving in the military, a soldier had to demonstrate he was insane, but if he wanted out of the military, he couldn't be insane. There is a similar "Catch 22" for English Learners: to learn English, students need more practice speaking English, but to practice English with native speakers, they almost need to know English already. It is often noted that children learn second languages faster than adults, and while this may be true, a major reason may be that children simply have more opportunity to practice, in the form of play groups, where other children tend to welcome them with varying degrees of willingness. Adults, however, tend to find it much harder to approach a group of strangers and join in their conversation, which is hard in a first language, much less a second.

How then can the adult ESL student join these adult "play groups" (conversation groups) to gain needed practice in the second language? A way to do this is through the opening gambit.

An opening gambit serves several functions: it serves as a greeting, shows desire to join the group in conversation, and establishes a possible topic for conversation. An opening gambit may be as simple as "Hi, I'm Michelle. How are you this evening? Do you make it out here often?"

There are a number of other opening gambits of varying degrees of sophistication.

5 OPENING GAMBITS

1 THE TRAFFIC/WEATHER IS GOOD/POOR TONIGHT.

Traffic and weather are perennial topics with for opening gambits because they are neutral — few can take exception to me remarking on the heavy rain

as it can't be argued, and is no one's fault. In addition, these rather flat topics can lead into more interesting terrain — a comment on the weather or traffic in Sacramento, for example, almost invites a comparison to weather and traffic in other cities the speakers have lived in, and they can in this way learn something about each other.

2 HOW OFTEN DO YOU COME HERE?

This can be a good opening gambit because it can lead to both a discussion of the immediate surroundings — for example, a bookstore -- as well as the addressee's habits, such as reading habits. This can furthered be developed into comparisons of the two speakers' reading habits, bookstores in general, and the conversion of traditional books to electronic material.

3 HOW DO YOU KNOW JOHN?

This is a good opening at a party, for example, when the speaker might ask the addressee how he or she knows the host. This then can lead to a discussion of the speakers' mutual connections to the host through work, or school, or recreational activities, and they may then find shared interests.

4 HOW LONG HAVE YOU BELONGED TO---?

This is an especially good opening gambit at a meeting for a professional, civic, or recreational organization, such as through a church or club. This gambit can lead into a discussion of the speakers' histories with the organization as well as their reasons for being involved in it.

5 WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT---

This is another good opening for the immediate context: for example, if the speakers are at a professional or civic meeting at which there is a presentation, one of the speakers might ask the other what she thinks of the presenter.

This can lead into further, more in-depth conversation about the speakers' philosophies and beliefs related to the organization: for example, if I am at a professional meeting of other teachers of English, and the presenter comes from a grammar-translation background — that is, teaching English with a heavy focus on translating to the students' first language and analyzing the grammar — I might express my skepticism to someone who asks my thoughts on the presenter. This can lead to an interesting discussion on teaching methods and their history and effectiveness.

4 METHODS TO TEACH OPENING GAMBITS

1 EXPLICIT TEACHING

To teach opening gambits, as with almost anything, some explicit instruction is required at the beginning through definition and example in context so that students get a firm idea of what the concept means. The teacher can begin by asking students if they would just walk up to a group of strangers at a party and begin talking. Most will probably answer "no." The teacher can then introduce a more effective strategy: joining a group, listening quietly for a time, then when the opportunity presents, entering the conversation by making a comment. This is the "opening gambit."

2 MODEL

Once students understand what the gambit is, it's time to show its correct use. One way to do this is by modeling: write some of the common opening gambits on the board then call on a more advanced student choose and use one of the gambits, to which you respond appropriately. This of course can be reversed, with the instructor giving the gambit to the student. Finally, a short clip from a romantic comedy, for example, showing characters in a party scene can demonstrate use of the opening gambit — sometimes their inappropriate use, as well -- which can be discussed.

3 GUIDED CONVERSATIONS

Once students understand opening gambits and have seen them in action, they are ready for some guided conversations, with dialogues prepared by the teacher — or just the gambit, on an index card, to which students have to come up with responses. This step may also be skipped if students are prepared enough to move to the less structured and more independent roleplay.

4 ROLEPLAY

In the roleplay, the teacher may just give out the general directions, the context and roles, and let the students go from there. For example: Get into groups of five. Four members are the conversation group. One member wants to join with a conversational gambit. Talk for 5 minutes then rotate roles. Everyone has to take the turn of the joiner with the gambit. In this strategy, because it is unstructured, students experience what it is like in a real situation where they will have to overcome discomfort to join a conversational group and there is no real script to guide them.

NO DOUBT, JOINING NATIVE SPEAKERS OF A LANGUAGE IN CONVERSATION IS DIFFICULT FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER AS IT IS EVEN FOR THE NATIVE SPEAKER, ESPECIALLY IF THE OTHER SPEAKERS IN THE GROUP ARE STRANGERS.

However, we all find ourselves in situations having to converse with people we don't know, and careful use of the opening gambit makes this less stressful and may even lead to some long-term friendships beyond the immediate situation.

Hello, Hello: New Ways to Teach Old Greetings

YOU SEE YOUR STUDENTS IN THE MORNING, AND YOU NATURALLY GREET THEM, "GOOD MORNING. HOW ARE YOU?" HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU HEARD THAT SAME OLD RESPONSE, "FINE, THANK YOU. AND YOU?" HOWEVER, HOW MANY NATIVE SPEAKERS DO YOU KNOW THAT RESPOND THAT WAY?

Why not challenge your students to veer off the traditional dialogue path and into authentic conversation. Here are some suggestions on how to do just that.

HOW TO TEACH GREETINGS IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1 GIVE OTHER OPTIONS

Brainstorming is a great class level activity. The energy in the room is often palpable, and students feed off the ideas and energy of their classmates. Start your lessons on greetings by brainstorming a list of possible responses to the traditional, "How are you?" Students will likely offer the traditional responses very quickly, but push past those to responses that are more unusual. Fine. Go away. Terrible, how are you? What do you want? Why do you ask? Do you really want to know? These and many other non-standard responses are things that native speakers say every day. Keep a running list posted in your classroom, and allow your students to add other responses as they think of them or as they do a little research with the following activities.

Variety comes not only in responses, but also in the initiation of the conversation. Expand your classroom display to show both. Simply designate one area of the display for initiations and another for responses. As your students brainstorm and do research to expand each list, they will naturally find phrases to add to the other.

2 DO A LITTLE RESEARCH

Make discovering alternate greetings an ongoing event for your students. If they are listening for the greetings that people use every day, they will certainly expand their dialogue options. Movies are a great resource for ESL students. There are plenty of scenes when one character meets another. You can take several clips from one movie like *You've Got Mail*, or take one scene from each of several movies. Also, encourage your students to share dialogue from favorite movies whether they play the scenes for your class or simply relay the dialogue. You can also find film resources on youtube videos and television shows or interviews.

E-mail and text messaging are another way for your students to find authentic greetings from native speakers. Though both e-mail and texting are written forms, the language used in them is more reflective of spoken English. By challenging your students to examine samples of these forms, they will get reading practice while doing research for speaking thus addressing two language aspects at the same time. If you can, supply your class with some e-mails and text messages for them to examine or ask them to bring in some of their own.

3 A BLACK TIE EVENT

Though informal speech is what speakers use in most situations, it is not universally appropriate. There are times, like in a job interview or a business meeting, that using formal speech is the correct choice. This is a simple way to make sure your students have the opportunity to practice their formal as well as informal speech while in class. Grab a few old neckties and hang them up near the door of your classroom. If students want to be spoken to formally on a given day, they take a tie as they enter the room and wear it during class. Any other student who speaks with the tie-wearer should address him or her

with formal speech. Now all of your students will have to determine which greetings are appropriate for casual settings and which are appropriate for formal settings. You can also take some class time to address that question and list several circumstances what situations fall into each category.

IT IS EASY FOR TRADITIONAL DIALOGUES TO SOUND ARTIFICIAL AND STAGNANT, BUT MOST OF THE TIME THEY ARE THE FIRST CHOICE FOR OUR STUDENTS. ENCOURAGE YOUR STUDENTS TO GO BEYOND THESE TRADITIONAL DIALOGUES AND USE MORE FREQUENTLY HEARD PHRASES.

If they do, they are more likely to sound like fluent speakers of English and not uncomfortable students of the language.

Simple Solutions for Teaching So Do I, Neither Do I, I Do and I Don't

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE THAT NO ONE ELSE DOES? WHAT WOULD A PERSON HAVE TO SAY FOR YOU TO DISAGREE?

Whatever the reason, agreeing and disagreeing with another person is something that every language learner should be able to do. English has four simple statements that language learners can easily put to use when agreeing and disagreeing: so do I, neither do I, I don't and I do.

AGREEING AND DISAGREEING IN ENGLISH

1 AGREEMENT

Two phrases are used to agree with a speaker in English: so do I and neither do I. The former is used to agree with a positive statement. The latter is used to agree with a negative statement.

I have a dog. So do I.

I don't have a cat. Neither do I.

2 DISAGREEMENT

Like with agreement, English speakers use two basic phrases to disagree with another person's statement: I don't and I do. The former is used to disagree with a positive statement. The latter is used to disagree with a negative statement.

I have a cat. I don't.

I don't have a dog. I do.

HOW TO TEACH SO DO I, NEITHER DO I, I DO AND I DON'T

Here are some simple games you can play with your ESL students to practice agreeing and disagreeing.

1 WHAT DO YOU LIKE

Brainstorm a list of foods with your class. They should range from the simple to the exotic. Then make up a

set of cards for your students with one food on each or have your students make their own cards. You should have enough sets for every four or five students in your class. To play this agreement and disagreement game, divide your class into groups and have each group put their cards face down in the middle of the group. One person draws a card and makes a positive or negative statement about that food. For example, "I like pistachios" or "I don't like grapes". The person sitting to the right of that person must make a statement either agreeing or disagreeing with the speaker. If that person makes a correct and grammatical statement, she gets the card. She then pulls a new card and makes a statement for the person to her right. If she makes an incorrect statement, the card goes back into the center of the circle before she picks a new card and makes a statement for the person on her right. Play continues until all the cards are claimed. The person with the most cards at the end of the game wins.

2 A ROLL OF THE DICE

Give your students a list of topics for debate. You should include simple topics as well as ones that are more controversial. If you like, use this list (<http://www.englishclub.com/speaking/agreeing-disagreeing-topics.htm>). Then divide your students into pairs and give each pair a standard die. For each round of play, one person makes a statement about one of the topics. Her partner then rolls the die. If he rolls an odd number, he must disagree with his partner. If he rolls an even number, he must agree with her. Encourage your students to spend a few minutes discussing each topic. Students should feel free to be creative during their discussions since they may or may not be arguing their actual position on a given subject.

3 DO YOU AGREE?

Play this simple game with your class to practice agreeing and disagreeing. Provide students with several cards that have the phrases used to agree or disagree: so do I, neither do I, I don't,

I do. You may want to provide three of each to each pair of students. Have students shuffle cards and divide between them, each student keeping their hand private. Each student then takes a turn making a statement. Her partner must either agree or disagree starting with the phrase on one of his cards and then completing the sentence. If a student does not have the correct phrase on his card for a truthful answer, he must pass. The next student then makes a statement. Students should try to compose their statements so that their partner will not be able to use her cards. However, all statements and responses must be true. The first student to play of all her cards wins.

4 EXPANDING YOUR VOCABULARY

Once your students have mastered the simple phrases for agreement and disagreement, take their language learning to the next level. You can find an extensive list of agreement and disagreement phrases here: <http://www.usingenglish.com/files/pdf/agreeing-and-disagreeing-language-review.pdf>. Have students read the items on the list and decide how strong the agreement or disagreement is in each phrase. Have students discuss which phrases would be most appropriate for agreeing or disagreeing with an employer, a friend, a spouse or a parent. Which would they be most likely to use? Are there any they would never use?

IF YOU ARE LUCKY, THE STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS DON'T DISAGREE VERY OFTEN. THESE GAMES, THOUGH, WILL GIVE THEM A CHANCE TO PRACTICE BOTH AGREEING AND DISAGREEING WITH THEIR CLASSMATES IN A SAFE SETTING.

Some students may need extra encouragement when it comes time to disagree since it may be rude in their native cultures. Students who will use English in a business or academic setting, however, would do well to practice this type of discussion in their ESL programs before having those types of conversations in the real world.

"Huh? What Did You Say?" Teach Students to Ask for Clarification

One day I was preparing my students to go out and survey university students on campus. We were reviewing tips for speaking with native speakers.

Me: "What do you say if someone says something you don't understand?"

Students: "I'm sorry. Can you say that again?"

Me: "Good. Now what do you say if you still don't understand them?"

Students (in unison): "You say 'Thank you. Have a nice day' and run away."

I had to laugh. We've all been there. When you have to ask someone to repeat something more than once, it's easier just to run away or smile and nod and hope they didn't ask anything that requires a real response. Non-native speaking students encounter this problem frequently in their daily life and need to be equipped with the necessary tools to avoid a breakdown should they run into problems.

Here are some tips to consider when teaching students how to ask for clarification

HOW TO TEACH STUDENTS TO ASK FOR CLARIFICATION

1 TEACH THE CULTURAL NORM

There isn't just one way to let someone know that you didn't understand. The culturally appropriate response may vary based on geographical location, formality of the situation, and type of relationship between the speakers. For example, when talking with close friends, it's appropriate to say, "Huh?" If you're in the southern U.S., the best response is "Ma'am?" or "Sir?"

Explain to your students the importance of register and teach a variety of ways to indicate confusion such as the following:

I'm sorry. Could you repeat that please?

I'm sorry I didn't hear you. Could

you please say that again slowly?

You said... ?

Did you say X or Y?

Pardon?

Excuse me?

What was that?

Say that again please?

I'm sorry, I don't understand what _____ means.

Be sure to tell them that certain common expression can have other meanings. For example, if students responded with "What did you say?" the listener might be confused and think that the student was offended rather than confused. This is also a good time to bring up intonation.

2 IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED - WRITE IT DOWN!

Asking someone to repeat themselves once is normal. Twice can be a bit daunting because you may end up having to ask a third time. If students are feeling nervous and really unsure of what the speaker said after the first time, tell students to ask the person to write it down. Tell students to keep a small notebook and pen with them at all times. If the person writes it down, not only will they be able to better understand, they will have a running list of complicated words and phrases that they can then bring back to class for further review.

3 SPEAK HOW YOU WANT TO BE SPOKEN TO

If someone at a restaurant or a store is speaking too quickly for students, instruct students to speak louder and more slowly themselves. Often we emulate the people we are talking to, so if your students speak louder and slower, the person they are interacting with may as well. This will prevent the need for asking for clarification and hopefully avoid any embarrassing situations.

4 DON'T PANIC!

The easiest thing to do is get frustrated and give up, but the only way to improve is to continue to try. Instruct students not to panic if they encounter a complicated listening situation. If they panic, they won't be able to concentrate on what the speaker is saying, and their listening comprehension will only worsen. Remind students that listening takes practice and inevitably they will encounter a situation where they can't understand someone. If you keep enforcing the idea that this is normal, they will feel less anxious when encountering these situations in real life.

HOW TO PRACTICE IN THE CLASSROOM

1 CREATE ROLE PLAYS

Design situations and role plays where one student misunderstands the other. After teaching the various ways to ask for clarification, have students practice several of these phrases in role plays.

Suggested role plays:

Customer service representative on the phone

Fast food worker and customer

Business meeting negotiations

Teacher and student regarding

missed homework assignment

Doctor's receptionist scheduling an appointment for a patient

Bank teller and someone wanting to open a new account

2 USE CELL PHONES

Have students practice the above role plays on their phones in different rooms. Phone conversations can be the most difficult (for native speakers too!) because there are no body language cues, and students must rely just on their listening comprehension. Since students love their cell phones so much, have some students leave the room and then call

each other.

3 MISSING INFORMATION SCENARIOS

Using various role plays, give students key information for the role plays. Students need to practice filling in missing information, like phone numbers or addresses and must ask clarifying questions to get the information.

4 PRACTICE WITH NEW VOCABULARY WORDS

Sometimes listening confusion happens because of poor listening skills, but sometimes it's because of a limited vocabulary. To practice asking about specific vocabulary related misunderstandings, do role plays with complex or new vocabulary. Give each student a list of new vocabulary words along with the definitions. If you have very advanced students, you could also use nonsense words. During the role plays, have students use these new vocabulary words in their lines, thus prompting the other student to ask for the definition of that word.

5 SHARE LEARNING STORIES

Language learning is full of mishaps and misunderstandings, and while they may be embarrassing at the time, they often make for great stories later! Encourage your students to share with each other some funny instances of not understanding to help them feel more comfortable with the idea that they won't always understand everything.

6 TEACH WRITING MISCOMMUNICATION

Misunderstandings aren't limited to spoken interaction. Plenty of e-mails and letters can result in miscommunication as well, even more so due to the lack of intonation. Have some time to practice writing clarification questions in e-mails as well. Explain that writing is generally more formal, so they should use the more formal forms of asking for clarification.

7 TEACH REAL LISTENING

Too often, the listening dialogues presented in books don't reflect what's actually spoken.

For example, a dialogue in a fast food

restaurant as shown in a book might look like this:

Cashier: Hello. Welcome to Fast Food Heaven. What would you like to order?

Customer: I would like a number 5 please.

Cashier: Would you like fries or a salad with that?

Customer: I would like fries please.

Cashier: What would you like to drink?

Customer: A coke.

Cashier: Great. So that's a number 5 with fries and a coke. Your total is \$6.95. Are you paying with cash or credit card?

Customer: Cash. Here you go.

Cashier: Thank you. Your order can be picked up at the end of the counter. Have a great day.

When in reality, most fast food conversations go like this:

Cashier: Hi.

Customer: Can I have a number 5 please?

Cashier: Fries or salad?

Customer: Fries.

Cashier: Drink?

Customer: A coke.

Cashier: \$6.95.

Customer: Ok.

Cashier: Pick it up over there.

Prepare your students with real dialogue practice so they won't be overly flustered or confused when cashiers don't speak how they thought they would. The more prepared they can be, the better they will be able to comprehend.

NOT UNDERSTANDING SOMEONE WHEN THEY SPEAK IS A PART OF DAILY LIFE FOR ALL OF US.

To help with the lack of cultural understanding and language difficulties, we need to arm our students with backup plans by teaching them phrases and expectations for listening in the real world.

So Many Ways to Say I'm Sorry: Teaching Apologies

EVERYBODY MAKES MISTAKES. IT'S A FACT OF LIFE, AND WE ALL HAVE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO EXPRESS OUR REGRET FROM TIME TO TIME.

So how do you teach your ESL students how to apologize in English? After all, not every culture has the same expectations when it comes to apologies. In U.S. culture, a good apology contains 6 parts.

Here is the anatomy of a good apology that you can present to your ESL students when they are learning to say I'm sorry.

THE ANATOMY OF A GOOD APOLOGY

1 A REQUEST FOR THEIR ATTENTION

Before apologizing, the offender needs to ask the offended for their attention. Depending on who the offended person is, the request may be casual, informal or formal. A person might start with a phrase like 'excuse me, can we talk about something', or 'I wanted to talk to you about what happened yesterday'.

2 AN ADMISSION OF WHAT HAPPEN

The next step in apologizing is to state what happened without making excuses. The speaker might say something like 'I know I hurt your feelings', 'I caused a problem', or 'I forgot to do something'. The speaker should be honest and respectful of the other person.

3 A SINCERE ADMISSION

The third piece of an apology is a sincere admission that you did something wrong. The apologizer can say something like 'I messed up', 'I made a mistake', or 'I should not have done that'. The more specific the speaker can be, the better received the apology will be.

4 THE APOLOGY

Step four is the actual apology. These words are what makes an apology an apology. The speaker should say 'I'm sorry' or 'I apologize'. Speakers should be careful to say 'I'm sorry I...' rather than 'I'm sorry you...' or 'I'm sorry if...' The two latter phrases are likely to cause more offence or increase anger in the already offended.

5 SOME HUMOR (OPTIONAL)

Depending on how close the apologizer is to the offended person, he might choose to include humor to lighten the mood. This can help diffuse a tense atmosphere or melt the anger of the offended person. Particularly helpful is self deprecating humor, something that pokes fun at the person who offended.

6 TIME TO FORGIVE

Finally, the offended person should have time to forgive the offender. Depending on how serious the situation is, this may take seconds or days or even longer. Someone offering a good apology gives the other person time to resolve his or her feelings and seek reunification. It is key to avoid putting pressure on the offended party.

NOW THAT YOUR STUDENTS KNOW WHAT THEY SHOULD INCLUDE IN A GOOD APOLOGY, GIVE THEM A CHANCE TO PRACTICE.

Role plays are great for this type of language practice. Start by brainstorming with your class different situations that would demand an apology like the ones below. These situations should range from the minor inconveniences, honest mistakes and serious offences.

Then brainstorm a list of phrases your students might use when making apologies in each of these situations. Once students have a plan and the vocabulary for their apology, have

pairs of students choose a situation and role play an apology to one another. Make sure each student plays the role of the offender and the offended. If you like, have students come to the front of the class and perform their apologies for the class. This can be a fun activity for particularly dramatic students, and you can encourage entertainment and humor.

MINOR INCONVENIENCES

Stepping on someone's foot

Arriving late for class

Receiving the wrong food at a restaurant

HONEST MISTAKES

Forgetting to do something

Offending another person

Damaging something accidentally

SERIOUS OFFENSES

Cheating on a spouse

Stealing something

Intentionally hurting someone

Non, Nyet, NO: Teaching ESL Students the Fine Art of Saying “No”

IT'S BEEN A DIFFICULT YEAR, REplete WITH DEMANDING STUDENTS.

Let's see: there was the one who wanted to make up the whole term in a week and then the student who did nothing right all semester and then expected me to change her grade after she turned in a last paper, after I had submitted grades, also done incorrectly. They were both so surprised at hearing “no” from me — no, they couldn't make up the term, no I wouldn't change the grade — that they went to the dean, who also had issues with “no,” apparently, and initially supported the students.

It can be hard to say “no.” Indeed, in a number of cultures — including English-speaking — saying “no” is inappropriate, and a series of evasive tactics have evolved: different polite ways of saying “no” (in American English, “I'll think about it”... “Let me get back to you,” and “We'll see” — my mother's personal favorite) . Many individuals also find it difficult to say “no” — it is easier, for one thing, to say “yes”: less conflict, for example, and generally people feel more kindly toward you, in the short term at least. In addition, in American culture in recent years, many people seem to have a hard time hearing “no” as they are so used to getting agreement on all requests, no matter how unreasonable. We are a consumer culture, after all, and the customer is always right. For example, late last year New York City was hit by a hurricane, Hurricane Sandy, which devastated large portions of the city. However, it was days after before the participants of the New York Marathon, scheduled right after the hurricane, really understood that the marathon wasn't going to happen that year because city officials were so evasive in what should have been obvious — New York, which still had debris cluttering major streets, was simply not in any position to be hosting a marathon in less than a week after this devastating event. And then some marathoners reacted with outrage, feeling betrayed, perhaps to an extent understandably, that so much time had elapsed before informing them, after

they had already travelled to the city and booked hotel rooms. So actually saying “no” at the appropriate time is a necessary skill for the well-being of everyone involved. And because so many unreasonable requests are thrust on us these days, students have to learn to say “no” in a culturally appropriate way.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING STEPS TO SAYING “NO”

1 IDENTIFY WHEN TO SAY “NO”

Part of the problem with saying “no” is even knowing when to say “no.” Is it okay to say “no” to someone asking to borrow your book? Babysit her child? Borrow money? It's up the individual, mostly, to decide. Part of this is training students to recognize their personal limits — what is and isn't okay with them. Many students may have limited understanding of what personal rights and boundaries are, so some discussion of this, what are reasonable requests, is a starting point.

2 SAY “NO”

It seems elementary, but many people don't really see this as an option—we are so conditioned to saying “yes.” Here some direct instruction in various ways of saying “no” might be in order. In many cultures, there is either no word at all for “no” or a number of preferred ways of saying it. In American English, for example, instead of “no” many people say “I'll think about it,” “Let me get back to you on that,” or “I'm afraid that won't be possible.” These carry much the same meaning as “no” without the bluntness. Teaching students these different variants of “no” will help them socially and professionally.

3 OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE

Often rather than a simple, flat “no,” something more is required, if a continued relationship with the requesting party is desired. Here is where sug-

gesting alternatives can come in: Not comfortable with lending your car? Offer a ride instead. Can't babysit tonight? Offer your list of reliable babysitters. Discussion of these alternatives to offer can tie into the conversation on when to say “no,” as students discuss what their boundaries are, what they are and are not willing to do, and what they can offer instead.

START TEACHING SAYING “NO”

1 TEACH THE LANGUAGE TO USE

We rarely just say “no” in American culture. Introduce students to some of the common phrases used for “no”: “I'll have to think about it,” “We might look into that at a later date,” and so forth. Also identifying who to use each form of “no” with is important. Have students match a phrase with the appropriate person: “I can't believe you'd ask that!” could sometimes be appropriate with my brother, for example, while “I regret that won't be possible, sir,” is more so to my boss.

2 “BROKEN RECORD”

Some people, unfortunately, just don't understand that “no” means “no” and will continue to badger. Here is where teaching “the broken record technique” comes in. (“Broken record” is a misnomer for repeating the same phrase over and over, like a scratched — not broken — record. A broken record of course will not play at all, but this is the American idiom for repeating something over and over.) Teach students to just keep repeating variations of no — “I'm afraid not”... “I'm really sorry, I can't do that” -- and so forth until the requesting party finally understands. This is also an opportunity to practice the language learned in step one.

3 ROLE-PLAY

Have students work in groups and come up with requests, reasonable or ridiculous: “Can I borrow your pen?”

to “Could you please walk my cat every day while I’m on vacation?” Then have students break into pairs and practice requesting and responding with agreement or refusal. This will prepare students for what to say in different situations when they are asked something they are not willing to do, and it also gives them the chance to practice the language of requests and responses.

4 PUT IT IN AN EMAIL

Often it is best to deal with unreasonable requests by email, if possible. This buys you time, gives you a chance to compose your thoughts, and put together a polite but firm refusal — all very difficult in a face-to-face situation in your first, much less second, language. Therefore, asking a person to please email her request is an option because, once it is in writing, she may herself see how ridiculous it sounds and think again about sending the email. And if she doesn’t, this will buy the time necessary to consider and craft a thoughtful response. Finally, if the request is actually granted, it is in writing, and can be referred to as necessary (“As you can see below, we agreed to make 200, not 400, sandwiches for the charity event.”)

SO IS IT EASY TO SAY “NO”? IT PROBABLY WILL NEVER BE SO, IN ANY LANGUAGE. BUT BY IDENTIFYING REASONABLE VERSUS UNREASONABLE REQUESTS, LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF “NO,” AND ROLE-PLAYING DIFFERENT SITUATIONS, ORALLY AND IN WRITING, STUDENTS CAN LEARN APPROPRIATE WAYS TO SAY “NO.”

Teaching ESL the Fine Art of Establishing Personal Boundaries

I've always admired those people with a strong set of personal boundaries — you know the type, the ones that others almost never make ridiculous requests of, never take advantage of, and generally show respect for.

Because there was no real common factor in such people, such as gender, body size, pitch of voice, and so forth, I thought for a long time that their boundaries were somewhat magical, innate to them and communicated mysteriously to others. On the contrary, however, there are definite strategies for establishing and communicating personal boundaries that can be learned. For ESL students, especially if they come from a place where personal freedoms are limited, “boundaries” may seem a foreign concept. However, it may be more universal than cultural in that everyone has a sense of how they would like to be treated, which is really what a boundary is — how we would, and would not, like to be treated. Students, and ESL students, may in particular have trouble with boundaries, not really recognizing knowing how to establish and communicate them, but there are ways to teach establishing healthy boundaries.

Most people may have thought of boundaries, or the concept of it, without really naming it — as when I was younger I was able to recognize the people that effortlessly communicated boundaries, but I really didn't have a definition or a firm grasp on the essential qualities of the concept. Therefore it's necessary to define it and discuss it.

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES is a matter of the following steps:

1 DECIDE ON PERSONAL BOUNDARIES.

How do you want others to treat you?
Are you okay with others interrupting

you when you're working, for example, or does this bother you? Before you communicate your boundaries to others, you have to decide what they are yourself — otherwise, you may find yourself always upset with the roommate you actually like, but who's always popping into your room while you're studying, without really knowing why.

2 RESPECT OTHER'S NEEDS.

It may be just the case that the roommate who's always coming into your room is just thoughtless — she doesn't consider you might be studying when she comes in really needing to talk about the party Friday night. But it may also be that she does have certain items she really needs to discuss with you, like the rent payment, but never has a chance because you are always either at school, at work, or studying. The first step to getting your needs met is to recognize other's, so if you set aside regular time to talk to your roommate, she may have less need to interrupt you while studying.

3 COMMUNICATE THE BOUNDARY.

Suppose you do make an effort to regularly talk with your roommate, and she still interrupts you while you're studying. This might indicate a boundaries issue, and requires some clear communication: “I'm sorry... this is my study time, so I can't talk. I can talk to you later at dinner, as we've discussed before.” If the interrupting has been going on for a long time, this might need to be repeated several times before the roommate understands that you're serious.

USE THE IDEAS BELOW TO TEACH PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

1 MAKE THE ABSTRACT CONCRETE.

“Boundary” is a hard idea to grasp,

even for native speakers of English, perhaps because it is such an abstract concept and varies from person to person. Therefore, make the abstract more concrete through analogy and example. “Boundary” is roughly synonymous with “border,” a concept that most students are already familiar with. One option is to show a map of the United States and discuss the borders or boundaries between a few of the states — where the boundary between California and Nevada lies, for example. (This is incidentally a way to also teach the geography of the United States, something many Americans have trouble with.) Discuss what this boundary means: a change in laws, for example, as gambling and prostitution have both historically been legal in Nevada but not in California. This shows the literal meaning of “boundary,” a demarcation between separate entities. Also give the example of physical boundaries. Most people will have a sense of their physical boundaries, if not their emotional ones, even if they've never thought about them consciously. For example, I've worked with a volunteer student who sits at the front of the room and reads while I move closer and closer to her until I'm almost right on top of her while looking over her shoulder. Usually the class will start laughing as I move closer, and after the demonstration I'll discuss why: because I had violated the student's boundaries in a visible way. I also ask the student at what point she became uncomfortable — and volunteers always do become uncomfortable sooner or later during this exercise. Although they may vary culturally, boundaries exist across cultures, and physical boundaries are the most obvious.

2 EXTEND THE DISCUSSION ON BOUNDARIES.

Once the meaning of “boundary” is clear, it's time to extend the discussion, further solidifying the concept while students also explore their understanding of their own personal boundaries. One option is to pass

out a list of requests or expectations that others might impose from being available to babysit to moving into your home. Students should discuss and rank what they would be willing to do and under what circumstances — e.g., a “1” means I would not consider it a boundaries violation if a roommate helped herself to the food in our common refrigerator under almost any circumstances while “10” means I would consider it an extreme violation of boundaries for a roommate’s friend to camp out on our sofa, except in a really dire situation. Discussions like these demonstrate in detail what boundaries are and how they apply.

ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES IS A HARD TASK FOR ALMOST ANYONE IN ANY CULTURE. IT IS, HOWEVER, FOR PERSONAL COMFORT, OR EVEN SAFETY, NECESSARY. SOME INVESTMENT OF CLASS TIME IN HELPING STUDENTS DEFINE, IDENTIFY, AND ESTABLISH PERSONAL BOUNDARIES IS THEREFORE TIME WELL-SPENT IN HELPING THEM NAVIGATE THEIR NEW COUNTRY.

3 CASE STUDIES AND EXAMPLES

Showing different “case studies” and examples, drawn from life, perhaps, of boundaries violations as well as defending boundaries will solidify the concept in students’ minds while also showing them ways of addressing issues related to boundaries. A common situation, especially to poor or young people, is moving into a new place that has an “extra” room and how this often brings on requests to stay in that room (especially if the residence is located in a desirable area, such as near a beach). Discussing what “Janice” should do about the avalanche of requests to “visit” her—some from family, some from people she barely knows — again develops understanding of boundaries, as most of us have, or should have, boundaries related to whom we live with.

4 ROLE PLAY.

Role play is also a powerful instructional tool in addressing the concept of boundaries. For example, have students work in pairs on simple scenarios that have been written on index cards, such as demand for money, invasive questions, and so on, one student making the request or demand while the other student establishes the boundary: “I’m afraid I can’t lend that amount,” “I’d rather not answer that,” and so forth. Not having a scripted scene but rather just as the general situation given forces students to think on their feet, which is what really is demanded in everyday conversation.

What Your Students Need to Know About Body Language

WHILE WORDS MAY BE OUR MAIN FOCUS AS ESL TEACHERS, FOR THE STUDENT WHO TRULY WISHES TO COMMUNICATE WITH EASE, WE HAVE TO GO DEEPER. BODY LANGUAGE AND NONVERBAL CLUES ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT IN COMMUNICATION.

Some researchers claim that 60-90% of our communication comes from paralinguistic, that is beyond the words we say, clues. Body language includes posture, gestures, facial expressions and body language, and like so many other things, does not necessarily translate from one culture to another. Though linguistic fluency is probably your number one priority in your ESL class as it should be, you and your students will find it worthwhile taking a moment or two to talk about body language.

HERE'S WHAT YOUR STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BODY LANGUAGE

1 EYE CONTACT

Depending on the home cultures of your ESL students, they may have a very different understanding of eye contact than do native speakers of English. In some cultures, it is impolite to make eye contact with a superior. This gesture is seen as threatening, challenging or rude. Americans, however, interpret a lack of eye contact not as a sign on humility and respect, but as a sign of guilt, the inability to trust the speaker, or lack of intelligence. Encourage your students to make eye contact as they are speaking. Help them understand that eye contact when listening shows you are paying attention and care about what the other person has to say. Some students may struggle with making eye contact as they speak, but encourage them to try and praise any small accomplishments they make.

2 PERSONAL SPACE

Picture this conversation. An

American teacher is speaking one on one with an international student. The teacher takes a step backwards. The student steps forward. The teacher takes another step back. The student takes another step forward. They continue, unknowingly, until they move from one side of the room to the other. This is a very real and common occurrence, and it is also an issue of personal space. Each culture has a distinct and subconscious distance that they prefer to keep between them and the people around them. For Americans, that distance is approximately two feet. Members of other cultures prefer different amounts. When ESL students are accustomed to a smaller amount of personal space than the native English speakers with which they interact, their listeners are likely to become uncomfortable quickly, even if they cannot say what it is that is making them uncomfortable. Making your students aware of what personal space is and how much distance English speakers like to keep between them and their conversations will make your students better received than they might be if they were close speakers. If personal space is an issue with your students, have them practice keeping appropriate personal space by having students mingle and make polite conversations with one another while you walk around the room and check their personal space.

3 MIRRORING

Mirroring is more than just checking your hair and lipstick on your way out of the house. Mirroring is a key way of communicating agreement or understanding during a conversation. Often without knowing it, speakers mirror the body language of the person with whom they are speaking. They lean back -- we lean back. They furrow their brow -- we furrow our brow. They smile -- we smile. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, we mimic the body language that we see. Mirroring body language can put a speaker at ease and show someone that you are on

the same page emotionally. For students learning English as a second language, mirroring in conversation is important. Many people will wrongly assume a nonnative speaker cannot understand even the simplest of conversations. Students who learn to mirror their conversation partners, though, may earn themselves more credit in a conversation with a native speaker. This technique is particularly useful during professional conversations, such as job interviews, where the speaker is trying to make a strong first impression.

MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, YOUR STUDENTS SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT BODY LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT.

It can aid communication, set the mood for a conversation or help accomplish discourse goals. Being aware of their own body language as well as that of their listener can make all the difference in an important conversation. Talking about body language across cultures may be unusual, but it will ultimately help your students become better English communicators.

How to Teach Your ESL Students about Figurative Language

SAY WHAT YOU MEAN AND MEAN WHAT YOU SAY.

It's something I heard often from my grandfather, and generally it's a good policy, I think. But the English language can sometimes be uncooperative, at least in the minds of nonnative speakers. Even when an English speaker is saying what she means, she might not mean exactly what the audience hears. Figurative language takes the blame. Figurative language is creative language: it is using words in a nonliteral sense to get one's meaning across. It's meaning what you say but not saying what you mean. English has five basic types of figurative language: similes, metaphors, personification, idioms and hyperbole. Each is a distinct technique to make language richer and to paint more vivid pictures in the minds of the reader or listener. For ESL students, understanding and recognizing figurative language is essential to achieve fluency. Here are the main types of figurative language used in English and activities you can do with your students to practice them.

GET AMAZING RESULTS WHILE TEACHING ALL TYPES OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

1 SIMILE

A simile makes a comparison between two items using the words like or as. The comparison makes a description more vivid or striking or easier to picture. A simile says to the listener that two things are similar. The key to recognizing a simile is identifying the word as or like in the comparison.

The man was like a prowling lion.
The man was as hungry as a bear.

If you know what a hungry bear might be like, you can imagine what the man feels or how he is acting. This comparison paints a picture in the listener's mind.

2 HOW TO TEACH SIMILES

Give your students a chance to get out of the classroom and do some nature observation. Go on a short walk as a class or give your students a set amount of time to walk around your school grounds. Tell them to note any outstanding features of the landscape – tall trees, green grass, etc. After your walk, return to the classroom and have students write ten phrases using adjectives that describe a natural element that they saw. Once their sentences are complete, remind your students that similes compare two items to paint a picture for the reader or listener. Show your students how to take a descriptive phrase using an adjective and turn it into a simile. Starting with the phrase “a tall tree” have students volunteer other items that are tall: a skyscraper, a giant, etc. Then use one of those objects to transform the descriptive phrase into a simile: the tree was as tall as a skyscraper. Have each student rewrite five of his descriptive phrases as similes in this way. Then ask students to share what they have written with the class.

3 METAPHOR

Metaphors also make a comparison between two items, but they do not use as or like in the comparison. In a metaphor, one item is said to be something, that two items are equal, but this equality is not to be taken literally. Sometimes the comparison in a metaphor is clearly articulated. Other times, the comparison is implied.

The man was a hungry bear, a prowling lion looking for prey.
She jumped into a circus of activity once school started.

4 HOW TO TEACH METAPHORS

Give your students some examples of metaphors and discuss together what they mean. Make sure your students understand how two items are being compared without using the words like or as. Then challenge your stu-

dents to create their own metaphors. One popular way to use metaphors is in describing people. Have students work in pairs to list fifteen personality traits. Then, have the pair choose eight of those to use as inspiration for their own metaphors. Have students start by choosing a personality trait, for example, loud. Then have students make a list of a few items that are loud – a thunderstorm, a party, an elephant, etc. Students should then use one of those items as inspiration to write a sentence containing a metaphor.

His voice was thunder, rattling the windows and the doors of the classroom.

Give students a chance to share their favorite metaphors with the rest of the class. If your class is creative, give them a chance to illustrate their metaphors in a humorous way and display them in your classroom.

5 PERSONIFICATION

Personification is not used to describe people. Instead, personification is used to describe an animal or an object. In personification, an inhuman item is given human characteristics. Weather can be described with human characteristics, for examples. Likewise, animals are good subjects of personification.

The trees moaned in the wind.
Their arms reached for someone they had lost.

6 HOW TO TEACH PERSONIFICATION

Poetry is a great resource for personification. Because every word in a poem is carefully chosen, personification can pack a descriptive punch in just a few words. I like to use a jigsaw style activity when I teach personification to my students. I divide my class into three groups and give each group copies of one of the following poems: April Rain Song, The Sun, and The Sky is Low. I have groups work together to first define any unfamiliar vocabulary and then to find and highlight any

human attributes used to describe the weather in their poem. I then break students into groups of three making sure each person has studied a different poem. Students share their poems with their new groups and point out the any personification in the poem. I ask these same groups to then talk about how the personification each poet used helps create an overall feel to the poem. Finally, I challenge students to write their own poem about the weather using personification. If you are teaching younger students, give your class a chance to illustrate their poems and then post them on a bulletin board titled "Whatever the Weather".

7 IDIOMS

Idioms are language specific phrases that mean something other than their literal meaning. ESL students need lots of opportunities to practice idioms since ultimately learning idioms means memorizing them. Some common examples of idioms are

Drinks are on the house.
He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

Though you can coach students to understand some idioms based on their parts (the house is another word for the business, silver spoons are something the wealthy might have but not the average person) the best way for students to learn idioms is through practice.

8 HOW TO TEACH IDIOMS

With a little effort, you can find many idiom exercises for ESL students. One of my favorites is to give students a list of English idioms and have them guess at the meanings. I break my students into groups of three or four and give them a list of about twenty idioms. I ask the groups to discuss each idiom and guess what it might mean. They will know some of them already, but many of the idioms will be unfamiliar. After 15-20 minutes of discussion, I give my students a list in random order of what the idioms on their sheets mean. I challenge my groups to match the meanings to the correct idioms. This exercise is a challenge for ESL students, but it is also fun. I like to watch students' faces as they puzzle out what these crazy English phrases really mean. I wrap up the activity by going through the

idioms and giving students the correct meanings and encouraging students to share some of their favorite idioms from their native languages. If you like, you can do this exercise multiple times giving students a different list of idioms for each discussion.

9 HYPERBOLE

A hyperbole is an exaggeration, a description taken to the extreme and not meant to be taken literally, instead intended to paint a picture for the listener.

This backpack weighs a ton.
I haven't been to this restaurant in forever.

Your students should be able to recognize hyperbole by the extreme exaggeration. Often, the literal meaning of hyperboles are physically impossible.

10 HOW TO TEACH HYPERBOLE

Give your students some examples of popular hyperboles. You can find a list here (<http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-hyperboles.html>) or compile your own. Have students discuss in pairs what each of these phrases means. Then challenge your students to write a skit in which one character only speaks in hyperboles. The skit should be two people discussing a problem that might be common among your students: too much homework, asking a girl out on a date, or trying to understand American culture, for example. Have students perform their skits for the class. After each skit, as the audience to give examples of hyperbole that were used in the skit.

UNDERSTANDING THE LITERAL MEANING OF ENGLISH IS NOT ENOUGH WHEN FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE COMES INTO PLAY. MAKE SURE YOUR STUDENTS ARE PREPARED TO TACKLE THIS NEW LEVEL OF LANGUAGE BY REVIEWING AND PRACTICING THESE FIVE TYPES OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN ENGLISH.

I Hate to Bother You: 5 Fast Activities to Practice Polite Requests

DO YOUR STUDENTS KNOW THE FOLLOWING EXPRESSION? 'IT'S EASIER TO ATTRACT BEES WITH HONEY THAN WITH VINEGAR.'

Write this proverb on the board and talk about what they think it means, then tell them the real meaning. Do your students have similar phrases in their native languages? Give your students a chance to share their thoughts. Then move into the topic of making polite requests. Polite requests are useful for setting people at ease and still getting the assistance you need. Different cultures make polite requests using different tools, and English is no exception. Here are the basics of making polite requests in English and some in class activities you can use for practice.

TRY THESE 5 FAST ACTIVITIES TO PRACTICE POLITE REQUESTS

The most common way of making a polite request is using the modals 'could' and 'would'. Could you do me a favor? Would you pass the salt? These are simple grammatical structures for polite requests. Show your students how these words make a potentially offensive command (Come here!) into a polite request. (Could you come here?) Let your students practice these constructions with the activities explained below.

1 A STEP FURTHER

Once your students are comfortable with the simple could/would request constructions, introduce other means of making a polite request. You should include the following phrases. You may want to focus on using these phrases in one or more of your in class request activities.

Please...
I'd like...
Do you mind...
May I...
Shall we...

2 FAVORS CONTEST

With your students, make a list of 10 to 20 items in the room. If possible, write the items on small slips of paper and put them in a hat -- you will then use them for this fun and competitive game. Divide your class into two teams. For each round of the game, have one student from each team come to the front of the room. One person draws an object from the hat. The two students then take turns making requests related to that object and using that object in the sentence. For example, if the object is pencil, students may ask questions like the following: Could I borrow a pencil? Would you mind lending me a pencil? Could you hand me that pencil? Etc. When a student can no longer think of a request associated with the object, the round is over and the other team scores a point. Once you have gone through all the items on the list, the team with the most points scores. This is not only a great way of practicing polite requests -- it is also a fun way of reviewing vocabulary.

3 LOCATION FAVORS

Have your students practice using polite requests with this inverted 20-questions style game. Each person thinks of a location. It can be anything from the ordinary (like a library) to the extraordinary (like the inside of a volcano). The student who selected the place asks polite requests of her classmates, but these requests should be those she might ask if she were in the mystery location. The student gives one request at a time while the rest of the class tries to guess where her secret location is. The student who guesses correctly gets to play next. If the student leader gives 20 requests and the class is still unable to guess the location, that student wins the round. Continue until everyone in the class has had a turn to hint about their mystery location.

4 CAREER HELP

Have pairs of students work together to brainstorm a list of as many

occupations as they can. Once they have completed their list, have the two students write a dialogue which includes as many requests as possible. Each dialogue should feature one of the careers they listed in their brainstorming session and should use a variety of methods for making polite requests.

5 POLITE TRANSFORMATION

Have each student make a list of 10 commands. You may want to review how to express commands in English by dropping "you" in a sentence. Then, have students exchange papers and rewrite the commands using polite expressions. After students have rewritten the commands as polite requests, have a class discussion about the advantages to making a polite request rather than a command. You may want to circle your discussion back to the proverb you discussed at the beginning of the class period.

Hedges, Euphemisms, Apologies: Language for Politeness

Not a lot of our language is direct, I realized recently after an exchange at a restaurant.

"So have you had a chance to look over the menu?" the waitress asked at the beginning of the meal. "What do you want?" would be, of course, far too blunt, and "Have you had a chance to look at the menu?" does indeed function the same way. Similarly, the waitress said "I'll just put the check here on the table for whenever you're ready" at the end of the meal -- she would never say, "You need to pay now." In fact, a lot of our language is made up of similar language for politeness.

LANGUAGE FOR POLITENESS

1 THE HEDGE

The Hedge "I'd really like to come to the party on Saturday, but I'm not sure if I can," means "I probably won't be there." The speaker needs to respond to this invitation but doesn't want to give a direct "yes" or "no" and instead hedges, or approaches the invitation indirectly, to avoid offending the host or committing himself to coming when he can't.

2 EUPHEMISM

Euphemism is the "pretty language" we use to cover up a sensitive matter: "a little heavy," for "fat," for example, and "mature" for "old." Because euphemisms are very indirect and an attempt to in some way evade the truth, they can be confusing for even native speakers. The instructor should go over some of the sensitive or "taboo" topics of American culture--death, aging, weight--and some of the common euphemisms for them. Usually, the more sensitive the topic, the more euphemisms it will have: think of how many alternate ways we have to say "to die": "passed away," "bought the farm," "kicked the bucket," "went to heaven," and so on.

3 THE APOLOGY OR PSEUDO-APOLOGY

The Apology or Pseudo-apology: "I'm sorry I'm late. Traffic is miserable," or similar apology with an excuse is necessary for such minor transgressions as lateness. In contrast, a "pseudo-apology" is often used as an expression of sympathy: "I'm sorry to hear about your father's death." This is obviously not actually an apology but an expression of sympathy, and mistaking its function can lead to some rather comical exchanges: e.g., "It's okay, it's not your fault."

4 REQUESTS

All languages have some way, and usually many ways, of asking for help: all of us do this, of various people, and over different things, sometimes just in the course of a day. So there are many ways to ask for help. Generally speaking, the closer the relationship and/or the smaller the request, the less formal and polite the language. As the favor grows bigger and/or the relationship more distant, the more polite the language. For example, I might say to my brother, "Hey, lend me a quarter for the parking meter, please?" but to a board of directors of a foundation, I would say, "I sincerely request that you seriously consider funding this worthy program..." Switching the two registers, or levels of formality and politeness, would be completely inappropriate.

5 TERMS OF ADDRESS:

"Sir," "Ma'am," and "Miss": When is it polite to use these, if at all?

"Sir" is used with adult males, "Ma'am" is used for an adult females, "miss" usually for a teenager or young adult.

These are used when the addressee's name is not known: e.g., "Sir, would you have the time?" They are also used for customers and clients: e.g., "What can I get for you, Ma'am?"

Some interesting notes on terms of address: "Lady" in American culture is not polite when used as a means of address -- rather it is a dishonoring, as in "Lady, move your car." "Boy" as a term of address for male service people, especially African American ones, has long fallen out of use in the United States, seen rightly as racist. However, "girl" is still heard to refer to, not address, female service people, such as waiters, no matter the age of the person: e.g., "I already gave my order to the girl," when "the girl" might be sixty years old.

METHODS TO TEACH THE LANGUAGE OF POLITENESS

1 TEACH THE TERM

Explain the entire concept of politeness and how different cultures have different ways to show politeness. Ask for examples in U.S. culture: "excuse me" being a common one that people use when they really mean "move." Ask for similar examples from students' own cultures.

2 RAISE AWARENESS

Show a clip from a TV or part of an article and ask students for examples of polite language: "What term does the writer use for 'older person?'" and "What words does the actor use for his friend's grandmother death?" In this way, students begin to understand that people do use the language of politeness frequently.

3 CORRECTION

Show a TV clip or read a news article in which there is some violation of polite language. Work with students to identify the offending parts and see if they can correct them: e.g., "The actor keeps calling his friend 'fat,' -- what can he say that is more polite?"

4 SITUATIONAL APPROPRIATENESS

Discuss situations where polite language is really necessary: when addressing a client or customer, in a professional or business setting, in a ceremonial or religious situation, meeting someone for the first time, and so on. Also discuss places when it would not be appropriate, such as in an emergency situation like a fire or in casual gatherings with friends or family.

5 ROLE PLAY

After students have had a chance to work with the language of politeness, have them work on role-play. Put students in groups and pass out index cards with the basic situation on it: “Your friend asks about your grandmother, who had been sick. Your grandmother actually died last week. What should you say?” or “Your coworker asks you to have lunch with him. You’re too busy. What do you say?”

BECAUSE THE WHOLE POINT OF THE LANGUAGE OF POLITENESS IS OFTEN TO COVER UP AN UGLY REALITY, SUCH AS DEATH OR THE NEED FOR MONEY, UNDERSTANDING IT CAN BE DIFFICULT, EVEN TO NATIVE SPEAKERS.

However, understanding how to use these various language functions of hedges, euphemisms, and apologies is necessary to navigate successfully in English.

ESL Etiquette: Teaching Students to Speak with Politeness

NO MATTER WHERE YOU TEACH ESL, CULTURE WILL ALWAYS FIND ITS WAY INTO YOUR CLASSROOM. IT'S TO BE EXPECTED.

So many things vary from one country to another and one people group to another, and what it means to be polite in any given culture is no exception. Every culture has certain expectations when it comes to how and when to speak, and being polite in difficult, frustrating, depressing or emotional situations can be a challenge for your students as it is to native English speakers. To familiarize your students with what it means to be polite in the U.S., try this lesson plan on teaching students to speak with politeness.

THE SITUATION

Start your lesson on politeness by posing a tough question to your students. How would they confront a teacher who they thought was being unfair in their grading? How would they tell a friend that his girlfriend was cheating on him? How would they tell a parent that they were quitting school? Any of these questions or others like them will get your students thinking about how to talk to someone about something uncomfortable. After your students think about the situation and perhaps discuss it with a partner, challenge them to come up with advice for someone else who might be facing the tough situation.

WHAT'S IT TO YOU?

One of the best ways for your students to understand each other as well as their host culture is to talk about the importance of politeness in their home cultures. Put your students into groups of four or five, preferably students from various cultures, and then have them discuss the following questions.

Is it important in your culture to be polite?

When should you be polite?

What happens if you are not polite?

What instructions would you give

someone about being polite in your home culture?

When students discuss these questions, they are bound to hit on some interesting topics. It is important to show politeness to your elders? Your superiors? People with power or money? Different cultures will have different values, and values dictate what type of behavior is expected. All these cultural values will come out in your students' discussions.

Now that your students have discussed situations in which they should show politeness in their home cultures, have your class work together to create master list. On your list, include as many situations as you and your students can conceive in which it is important to show politeness.

HOW TO BE POLITE

Once you have a list of situations your students think require politeness, walk them through these rules for polite conversation in the U.S.

1 THINK ABOUT YOUR ATTITUDE

Impolite speech starts with a negative attitude toward a situation or a person. The first step in acting politely is noticing when that bad attitude is rising up within you.

2 LISTEN TO AND LOOK AT YOUR CONVERSATION PARTNER

A person can learn a lot about how someone else feels by looking at their facial expressions and listening to their words and tone of voice. Help your students understand what these signals mean in the U.S. If their listener's face is tense, their eyebrows are drawn together, or their lips are pressed together tightly, that person is upset. Other body language can indicate boredom, confusion and disbelief.

3 KEEP YOUR VOICE CALM

Using a loud voice or forceful speech is considered impolite among English speakers in the U.S., and using an inappropriate voice volume may make a situation worse rather than better. Help your students understand the proper volume and tone of voice at which to speak.

4 WATCH BODY LANGUAGE

While it is okay to speak with your hands in the U.S., using forceful gestures, pointing and hitting are all considered aggressive behavior in a conversation. Help your students understand just how much is too much when it comes to using their bodies while they speak. This is also a good time to address personal space. Americans generally leave about two feet between themselves and the person with whom they are speaking, and they do this without even realizing. Standing too close to a person or too far from them may send the wrong message in a conversation.

5 AVOID NEGATIVE RESPONSES

Answering someone with sarcasm, insults, or a lack of seriousness is another way to send the wrong message to someone with whom you are speaking. Though these responses are sometimes acceptable in specific situations, your students would do better to follow this rule: if in doubt, leave them out. Insulting a conversation partner may do so much damage that the person is unwilling to continue any conversation. Tell your ESL students that avoiding these responses is the safest strategy.

6 RESPOND THOUGHTFULLY

Native speakers sometimes struggle with this polite conversation guideline as much as nonnative speakers do. Our grandmothers told us to think before we speak for a reason. Reacting and responding are

not the same thing in a conversation, and sometimes saying the first thing that comes to mind can be very detrimental (see guideline #5). Taking a moment to think about what you want to say, making sure it is appropriate and kind, can make the difference between a relationship deepening and relationship destroying conversation.

Once you have discussed these guidelines with your students, have them think back to the difficult situation they discussed at the beginning of the lesson. Did their advice follow these guidelines? If so, great! If not, you may want to have your students come up with some different advice.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

This summary activity will encourage creativity and humor in your students. Have groups of four or five work together to write a skit about a situation in which a person can be impolite. Your students should choose a situation from the master list you compiled as a class. Each group will write and perform two skits about this situation. In the first skit, they will show how NOT to act in their situation. In this version, they should not follow the polite speech guidelines. They should also write a second skit about the same situation. In this skit, students should show how to speak politely following the six polite conversation guidelines. Each group should perform both skits for their class, and the viewers are sure to have as much fun as the performers when they watch their classmates being intentionally rude in a conversation. Not only that, but acting in and watching skits will help your students remember what it means to speak politely in the U.S.

So How about those Giants?

Teaching the Fine Art of Small Talk

"So how is everyone?" Paul asked. "Fine," I responded. "Shana's on a school trip this week." "Oh, yes, school trips. My sons usually have four a year. Kelly and I chaperone..."

This recent conversation was not between me and a close friend, as you might be surmising but rather between me and my accountant. We rarely communicate besides on the phone and even then only several times a year. This necessitates the use of small talk, that discussion on relatively unimportant matters that not many people do well. "Small talk" is actually complex in its rules and practice and is something of an art form — a lost one, much like the art of conversation itself.

Why do we need small talk at all? Small talk is for those occasions when spending time with someone we don't know well — a stranger at a party, a classmate outside an office — but we need to talk to the other person because ignoring him or her would be rude.

However, because he or she is a stranger or relatively so, we want to avoid potentially sensitive topics. Small talk is so widely practiced that being able to successfully conduct a conversation in small talk is necessary for social success, including that of our ESL students.

TOPICS TO AVOID FOR SMALL TALK

1 RELIGION

The United States is a diverse nation, including in religion—so much so that it is written in our Constitution that state business is separate from religious because of the potential for conflict if one majority religious group gained control within the government. Likewise, religion is a topic avoided in most public settings especially with relative strangers because of the potential for conflict at worst or discomfort at least.

2 POLITICS

Politics is another volatile topic, like religion, for similar reasons — people

tend to have deeply-felt or strong opinions on these topics and the potential for conflict is great if two people disagree. There are, of course, some minor topics on which most people can agree — like presidential candidate's bad haircut or poor control of the English language, despite being a native speaker. Other than these light topics, politics should be avoided in small talk.

3 SEX AND OTHER PERSONAL INFORMATION

"TMI" is an idiom in current use in the U.S., an acronym for "too much information." One goal of small talk is to avoid making the listener uncomfortable. Some topics, like the sex life or health of the speaker, are too personal for small talk.

ACCEPTABLE TOPICS FOR SMALL TALK

So there are a lot of topics that are not suitable for small talk, mostly because of their sensitivity. So what is some suitable material?

1 THE WEATHER

A conversation on the weather sounds boring, right? Not really — I just had an online conversation in which the participants spent a few minutes discussing the weather conditions in our different parts of the world — from the pouring rain in New Zealand to the dangerously hot and dry California. And since everyone experiences weather and nobody has control of it, everyone could contribute to the topic, say something interesting, and not get angry at someone else — the Californians could hardly blame the New Zealanders for having more water.

2 SPORTS

Sports are, like weather, a relatively "safe" or neutral topic, particularly if the conversation participants are from the same locale — in all likelihood they support the same team and can spend a few moments congratulating or commiserating with each other on their team's progress, or lack thereof. Even people who support competing teams rarely become hostile in their opposing interests, and competitive remarks tend to remain good-natured. ESL students frequently can contribute to these conversations with their stronger knowledge of sports like soccer, as it's called in the U.S., and football elsewhere.

3 CURRENT, NON CONTROVERSIAL EVENTS

There are those current events which are virtually free of controversy: most will agree on the humanity of the billionaire giving away another million to charity or the horror of a mass shooting. Part of the reason people discuss these topics publicly is that we are momentarily bonded with each other in agreeing upon the event.

THE PRACTICE OF SMALL TALK

1 TEST THE WATERS

People begin "So how about those Giants?" to find out if the other party is interested and can contribute to the conversation. Small talk is a dialogue, not a monologue.

2 ENGAGE IN THE TOPIC

Even though you may be discussing the weather, engage in it enough to keep the other party interested. Add your personal experience and "take" on the topic. Almost any topic can be interesting if the parties engage. And almost any topic is boring if they don't.

3 KNOW WHEN TO BREAK IT OFF

There will come a point when you've said all that you can say about the weather, the other party seems bored, or that time demands you move on to the main point of your call or visit.

4 TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Sometimes instead of breaking off the small talk, the parties involved find they have enough common interests to move beyond the small talk phase and into more serious discussion. That is fine and one of the points of small talk, to find out if there is enough common interest to move beyond small talk.

5 SHOW YOUR PERSONALITY

Even if it is only in a small way, the person you have engaged with for this short period of time should be left feeling as if they have spoken with an actual person with something real to say, even if it's only about the weather. Someone I was speaking to recently in a social situation, for example, told me the weather and terrain of my city, Sacramento, California, reminded her in some ways of her native Pakistan. That's an original observation I won't forget soon, and I'll remember that conversation and person who said that.

SO DOES SMALL TALK HAVE TO BE BLAND? ABSOLUTELY NOT.

Despite its negative reputation as boring and repetitive ("Hot enough for ya?"), small talk does not have to be bland. It is an art form, and at its best puts others at ease, leaves them with an interesting insight, and paves the way to a deeper relationship — or at least the next stage of this particular interaction.

Summer's Top Activity to Take Outside: Small Talk

THE SKY IS BLUE. THE WHITE CLOUDS FLOAT PAST HIGH OVERHEAD. THE BIRDS CHIRP ENTICINGLY CALLING, "COME OUTSIDE. COME OUTSIDE." THE TEACHER IN YOU SAYS TO BE RESPONSIBLE, BUT THE FOREVER STUDENT INSIDE WANTS TO GIVE IN TO YOUR STUDENTS' CRIES TO TAKE CLASS OUTSIDE.

The good news is this: you can enjoy the beautiful weather summer has to offer while still teaching your class useful and important English skills.

TEACHING SMALL TALK: TAKE IT OUTSIDE

1 INTRODUCING SMALL TALK

One of the easiest activities to take outside is conversation. It's easy enough to simply take your class outside to do conversation activities you have already planned for your current unit, but why not use an out of classroom experience to give your students a more authentic experience with native speakers? Small talk is the perfect opportunity for your students to practice their English in a non-threatening and low commitment setting with native speakers.

Before setting your students loose among the public, explain to them the concept of small talk. Small talk is chatter between people that do not know each other who are either trying to get to know each other or trying to keep up polite conversation. In English, there are some acceptable topics for small talk. One of the most common is the weather. You can teach your students colloquial phrases like "Is it hot enough for you?" and "April showers bring May flowers." You can also use the opportunity to review weather vocabulary or introduce it if you are teaching beginning students. Going out into the public and making small talk is an opportunity to show your students that weather vocabulary is not just something to mark off a checklist but a thing that it is useful in

day-to-day living.

Professional sports may be another subject area you want to explore when giving your students tools for small talk. "How about them Yankees?" or similar phrases can be useful for international students who are trying to carry on a conversation with native speakers. Different times of the year will be appropriate for different sports. With summer approaching, baseball is a hit. Depending on how much class time you invest in this subject, you may even want to take your students to a game (minor league games are great and inexpensive).

2 WARN YOUR STUDENTS

Make sure your students understand that there are many topics not suitable for small talk. They should know that it is inappropriate to discuss politics with strangers as well as topics of finance and appearance. These subjects will not always be taboo in a student's native culture, so it is always best to give some direction as to what not to say.

3 PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Now is your opportunity to give your students some practice before actually hitting the streets. You can pre-generate a list of possible scenarios your students may find themselves in where small talk could be required. These places may include standing in line at a restaurant, at a sporting event, or when waiting to purchase something. Keep it simple. There is no real need to create scenarios with great detail because your students will be acting as strangers to one another and have no more complex a goal than making simple conversation. Pair students together and let the whole class practice at once, then take some of your bravest volunteers to act out the scenario in front of the class. Other students can give feedback on what they did well and where they need to work for improvement.

4 MAKE THE MOST OF WHERE YOU ARE

Finally, take your students out into the public to practice their newly acquired small talk skills. Your specific location will determine what places you can bring your students. Some potential places might be a coffee shop, a grocery store or a cafeteria. A local park or public area, a ticket booth, a beach or a shop are also possibilities. A public library or courthouse may also be places you could take your students. Your best opportunities will come in places where there are a number of people waiting for something with nothing else to do at the time.

Let your students know that the setting may also open up new topics for small talk including the food at a particular restaurant, a movie you may be in line to purchase tickets for or a sporting event. All these are suitable topics when they relate to the setting the small talk is happening in. It would not really be appropriate to discuss food at a particular restaurant while waiting in line for a movie ticket, though.

THE NEXT TIME THE BIRDS BECKON AND THE SUN ENTICES - REMEMBER THIS: AS ESL TEACHERS, WE DO NOT HAVE TO FEEL GUILTY ABOUT TAKING OUR CLASSES OUTSIDE.

The good summer weather can provide the perfect opportunity to work on small talk, an area of conversation that is often neglected. The more opportunities you give your students to have authentic conversation with native speakers, the more progress they will make and the easier their transition will be to full immersion in English. So go outside, meet some people, and try to make the most of the good weather ahead.

As I Was Saying: How and Why to Teach Discourse Markers

DISCOURSE MARKERS ARE THOSE PARTS OF THE LANGUAGE THAT CONNECT ONE PIECE OF DISCOURSE, OR EXTENDED SPEECH/WRITING TO ANOTHER, SUCH AS AN INTRODUCTORY PHRASE OR ONE THAT RAISES A NEW POINT OR COUNTERPOINT.

These markers are important in connecting parts of the discourse as well as contributing to fluency. In addition, they guide the listener or reader in the direction of the discourse. For example, they signal the speaker's or writer's desire to open or close a conversation. They exist in both written as well as conversational language, and there are both formal and informal markers.

Students need to know discourse markers because they are important clues in the change of direction in a lecture, a conversation, or essay. For example, it can be nearly impossible to enter or exit a conversation in American English without some discourse marker like "I just want to say..." or "Anyway..." (In my particular dialect of California English, the stress is on the second syllable in the latter, and there is a long pause following, indicating the speaker's desire to draw the conversation to a close or to move on to the next topic.) It is also important to learn which markers are more appropriate to writing or speaking. More than once I've had a student turn in a paper with the conversational marker "Last time I checked" (as in "Last time I checked, we have free speech in this country"), when the more appropriate marker would be "In my experience..." or "To my knowledge..." in a formal paper. Knowing discourse markers is important to fluency and appropriateness.

Let's begin by identifying some common discourse markers and their functions.

COMMON DISCOURSE MARKERS IN SPEECH

1 As I was Saying... (to bring the conversation back to a former point)

2 Anyway... (to move on to another point or to close a conversation)

3 Here's the thing/The thing is... (to raise an important issue)

4 I'm glad you brought that up because... (to add onto a point just raised)

5 At the end of the day... (to conclude an argument)

COMMON DISCOURSE MARKERS IN WRITING

1 On the other hand... (to move to an opposing viewpoint)

2 In the case of... (to introduce an example)

3 In addition to... (to raise a new point or example)

4 From another perspective... (to introduce an opposing or different viewpoint)

5 In the final analysis... (to conclude)

TEN WAYS TO TEACH DISCOURSE MARKERS

1 Raise awareness. Call attention to discourse markers while reading or listening to conversations or lectures. Once students start paying attention, they'll be surprised how often these are used in both formal and informal situations. Just as an example, in the TV series, "Monk," popular in the first decade of this millennium, the title character Adrian Monk, a former police detective with a series of mental health concerns like Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, has the verbal tic of using the marker, "Here's the thing," usually when introducing one of his obsessions to an unsympathetic audience. Playing a clip from a TV series like this to your class can get them to notice discourse markers in speech.

2 Have students look for discourse markers in readings. Call attention to how a writer opens a piece, moves on to another point, introduces a counterpoint, and concludes. Discuss how effective the writer is in the use of discourse markers and what might be more effective.

3 Have students match discourse markers to their meanings. After students have had some practice recognizing markers in both spoken and written discourse, have them match cards with the discourse marker on one card and its definition/function on other. In this way, students are clarifying and making explicit what they have implicitly learned through exposure.

4 Delete markers from extended prose. Have students make substitutions. The next step would be to take a couple of paragraphs of written dis-

course, delete the markers, and see how well students fill in the deletions. Have them compare their answers with each other and then go over the paragraphs with a class as a whole. It can be surprising how many “right” answers students will come up with for each item: often more than one marker will work well in the same situation.

5

Jumbled words: have students create discourse markers out of a stack of word cards. Have them practice the markers they came up with in a couple of sentences.

6

Give out a list. Ask students to practice using the discourse markers on the list in conversation and writing. Challenge them to include at least three discourse markers in their next journal or other writing assignment.

7

Write some dialogue. Have students write a conversation between two friends in the cafeteria, or a husband and wife at dinner, and so forth. Give students the basic situation and perhaps topic of conversation (week-end plans, finals, etc.), and have them write the conversation. Tell them to include at least three conversational markers.

8

Perform the dialogue. Once their dialogues have been written and checked by the teacher, have volunteers perform. Have the class comment on the use of markers and how realistic they seemed: too formal or informal, for example.

9

Assign writing with markers. When giving their next essay assignment, have students include three markers per paragraph/10 markers per paper, or whatever number is right for you.

10

Have students edit each other's work. Sometime when my writing appears in print, I'll notice prob-

lems with it I didn't see before, especially if I didn't have someone else look it over. Even experienced writers need a second pair of “eyes” on their work because we are not objective about our own work and tend to see what we think we wrote rather than what we actually wrote. Before turning in their papers, students should trade papers with a peer and edit each other's work, specifically focusing on markers. Have students circle areas of concern in peers' papers and discuss at the end. The role of a peer editor is not to correct work but to be a second pair of “eyes.”

DISCOURSE MARKERS COMPRISE A LITTLE-DISCUSSED BUT IMPORTANT AREA OF LANGUAGE.

It is through discourse markers that we move and signal the direction of the conversation or writing. Knowing their correct use will help students function well in English.

Excuse Me (Please Move): Teaching Pragmatics in Conversation

TRADITIONALLY, ESL INSTRUCTION HAS FOCUSED ON TEACHING THE GRAMMAR OF THE LANGUAGE, WITH A LOT OF CONCENTRATION ON THE VERB TENSE SYSTEM.

Recently more attention has been given to vocabulary, often divided into categories like “colors” or “animals.” Less attention has been given to pragmatics, or the social use of language, using language in a way appropriate to the context and to get things done. For example, “Excuse me” in contemporary American English has taken on a function of getting someone who is blocking the way to move. More obscure but still necessary to know are familiar phrases and their contemporary usages, such as “May I help you?” which sometimes is not an offer of help at all but rather a request to be left alone (when said in a flat tone, while the speaker is obviously busy and is not a service person whose job is in fact to help the addressee).

LANGUAGE TO TEACH

First in teaching pragmatics is deciding what to teach. Some obvious areas of instruction are language appropriate for greetings, opening and closing a conversation, and farewells. There are of course many other language functions (getting people to move, be quiet, go away, etc.), but this is a start.

GREETINGS

How are you?

It's remarkable, long after the witty observation that the definition of a person with poor social skills is one who, when asked “How are you?” actually tells you, people still do this. The joke highlights the pragmatic function of “How are you” as a greeting, not a real inquiry into one's health (unless coming from one's doctor). And the appropriate answer (unless to one's doctor) is “fine.” Teaching students this function is important because of the wide-spread use of the greeting.

OPENING AND CLOSING A

CONVERSATION

1 OPENINGS

Do you have a moment?

Can we talk?

With phrases such as these, the speaker establishes a need to impose on the listener's time to talk.

2 CLOSINGS

I won't keep you/I'll let you go.

I know you must be busy.

Wow, I didn't realize how late it's gotten.

All of these phrases are important to recognize for what they are: the speaker's desire to end the conversation and move on. Missing this cue — and sometimes even native speakers will — can result in annoyance in the speaker.

3 FAREWELLS

It's remarkable, but native English speakers rarely end a conversation with “goodbye.” Rather, they'll often use one of the following:

I'll let you go.

I won't keep you.

I'm sorry, but I've got a bunch work to do and have to go.

HOW TO TEACH PRAGMATICS

Once some language has been decided upon for instruction, an actual method of instruction should be settled on.

1 AWARENESS RAISING

First, students do need to be made consciously aware of pragmatics — the fact that native speakers violate its rules demonstrates that it is not easily or consciously learned. Awareness of this issue can be achieved by first directly introducing the topic and naming it as pragmatics, the way people use language out in the “real world” as opposed to in books. Most students are aware of this dichotomy: my daughter, who is studying Spanish as a second

language, a useful language to know in our home state of California, has nevertheless questioned the value of Spanish class because of the way the language is taught: “When am I ever going to have to say ‘what color is your oven’ in Spanish?” she asked, and she is right in that this is language, although highlighting colors and appliances, of limited use. Student motivation to learn can be increased by introducing pragmatics as the study of useful, “real life” language and by discussing typical examples and why they are used: What does the receptionist say to you in the doctor's office when the doctor is running late? Often it is “to make yourself comfortable,” and she says that because “sit down and be quiet,” which is what she wants you to do, is too direct and rude (at least for the setting, a doctor's office).

2 AUTHENTIC EXAMPLES

Discussing authentic examples like the one above is one method of teaching pragmatics. Another is to actually see examples in action, perhaps from well chosen clips of TV shows. Often the dialogue is very realistic, depending on the program, and there is the added advantage of hearing correct intonation. The instructor can choose a clip from a favorite program and play about 5 minutes of it, asking students to note the language used for greetings, for introducing a topic and closing it, for farewells. Ask about why the characters made those particular language choices: Why “What's up, Dog?” rather than “How are you?” Play the clip again as necessary.

3 “HOMEWORK” ASSIGNMENTS

Give students a brief homework assignment for extended practice. Have them go to Starbucks or the student union or a similar public place and just observe the language use going on. Note the way people greet each other, take leave of each other, and so forth. Write the examples down if they are hard to remember (students might want to be

discrete about that, as people can become nervous if they think they are being in some way recorded or documented.) Bring the examples back to class for discussion.

4 IMPROVISATION

After students have learned some social language, it's time to practice a specific with a kind of exercise drawn from the world of dramatic arts helps here — that of improvisation, when actors are given a general sense of their character and the situation and must from there develop the dialogue and plot impromptu. The same can be done in ESL class: “Elena, you're the boss, and Jakob, you're the worker, and you need to go into her office to ask her a question about your work. What is a polite way to do that?” This is, after all, how language use happens in real life — I'm in a specific situation like needing my boss's signature on some papers, which means interrupting him, and I have to think of the most appropriate language for the situation. After they've rehearsed their sketches, student volunteers may perform for the class.

IN CONCLUSION, PRAGMATICS IS A LESS-EXPLORED BUT IMPORTANT PART OF LANGUAGE LEARNING.

It is as fully important as studying the grammar and vocabulary of a language because it demonstrates how language is actually used in specific situations and the appropriate way to use it to accomplish specific tasks.

7 Conversation Based Idiom Activities for ESL Students

TRY THESE 7 CONVERSATION BASED IDIOM ACTIVITIES WITH YOUR ESL STUDENTS

1 IDIOM INTRODUCTION

To introduce the topic of idioms to your students, lead a class discussion about the way people talk. Explain that idioms are phrases that have a meaning different from their literal meaning. Ask students to volunteer any such phrases they have heard. Then give them a few examples to cement the understanding of idioms in their minds. Have groups of students work together to list as many idioms as they can think of.

2 IDIOM RESEARCH

Give groups of three students a set of four or five idioms to research. For each idiom, they should find a definition (available online), give an example of the idiom in context and explain its origin (if possible). The group should then use this set of idioms in a dialogue they write together. Once all groups have finished, have each group share its dialogue with the rest of the class.

3 LITERATURE'S IDIOMS

Choose a reading selection for your students that is sprinkled with idioms. If you are not already working with such a text, try 'My Momma Likes to Say' or 'Even More Parts' or other similar idiom based picture books. Then, have groups of three or four students read the texts and locate any idioms within it. The groups should then discuss those idioms and try to determine their meanings based on the context. Have each group work with one book each day until every group has dissected each literature selection.

4 MIXED UP IDIOMS

Write some original sentences

that use unusual or interesting idioms. Transfer the sentence to index cards one word per card. Give pairs of students one set of cards and see if they can unscramble the sentences and guess the meaning of the idiom in that sentence. Have pairs of students write their own sentences on index cards, also including idioms, and exchange with a partner. Students then try to unscramble those sentences as well.

5 PHOTO FINISHES

Give groups of four to five students an unfamiliar idiom along with two pictures. One picture should be the literal representation of the idiom. (Do an image search at google.com to find these.) The second picture should be the nonliteral meaning of the idiom. The groups should look at these pictures and work together to interpret the meaning of the idiom. Once they have figured it out and checked their answer with you, have them share their interpretation (and pictures) with the class.

6 IDIOMATIC CULTURE

Give your student a list of common U.S. English idioms and challenge groups of about three students to make conclusions about U.S. culture based on the idioms. Then, give those same groups a list of British idioms and ask them to do the same.

7 IDIOM INTERVIEWS

Have students interview each other on the topic of idioms. Students should ask for information on what idioms have given their fellow students trouble in English and why they think learning idioms is or isn't important. Then, ask each person in your class to do a second interview, this time with a native English speaker. These interview questions should elicit the native speaker's opinion on learning idioms. Is it important for ESL students? What advice would the native speaker give an ESL student who is trying to learn idioms? What idioms do they think are

the most important for ESL students to learn?

Holler at Your Boy! Using Slang in the ESL Classroom

Slang in the classroom is not for every ESL teacher. Those whose students' future language usage will be limited to formal situations in which slang is not used may want to spend precious class hours on other topics. Most ESL students, however, will need to know at least some degree of slang if they plan to interact with native English speakers either socially or in the classroom.

Besides, many ESL students find lessons on slang entertaining and enjoyable and give them a nice break from the standard textbook lessons, so most ESL teachers find lessons on slang a welcome addition to the curriculum. If you are looking to make slang a regular part of your lesson plans or are just looking for an occasional break from the standard curriculum, here are some ways you can use slang in your ESL classroom.

HOW TO TEACH SLANG IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1 LANGUAGE QUIZ

Start by giving groups of students two sets of index cards. On one set of cards, write an assortment of contemporary slang. On the other set, write more traditional synonyms or phrases for the slang expressions. (You can find a set of 20 common slang terms and their definitions here (<http://myenglishpages.com/blog/standard-slang-lesson-plan-3/>) or compile your own collection from an online slang dictionary!) Using both sets of cards, groups should try to match the correct slang term to its definition. Give students enough time to attempt their matches before giving them the correct answers. Afterward, ask your students why slang can make it difficult to understand English speakers in real life. When has slang posed the biggest problem for them and their English skills? Allow several students to share with the class. Why do they think English speakers enjoy using slang in their speech? You may

also want to encourage your students to discuss how they feel about slang usage in their native languages.

2 WHAT IS SLANG?

After they have become familiar with the examples from the last activity, ask your students to attempt to define slang. Point out that slang may include specific vocabulary, phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions all of which are used in casual English conversation. Do your students think slang is a valuable form of speech? How might a person go about putting together a dictionary of slang terms? Why might that be difficult? Point out to your students that dictionaries such as the Oxford English Dictionary make updates to their vocabulary compilations each year, and slang regularly makes its way into this official book. March 2012 was the most recent online update for the OED, and it now includes such slang terms as LARPing, scratchiti, soz (British slang), and boofy (Australian slang). Give your students some online time at oed.com to look up some of the slang words they already know, and challenge them to see if they know any slang terms that cannot be found in the dictionary.

3 BRINGING IT HOME

Your students now have a theoretical knowledge of slang, but what about practical experience? You have many options for the means of bringing slang into your classroom. When you do welcome slang, your students will learn more lifelike English than is sometimes found in the text books, and they will be better able to understand and communicate with native speakers.

Here are some ways to bring home the slang.

- Find conversation partners for your students. If you teach in a school that also has native English speakers attending, you and another class may be able to mutually benefit one another sim-

ply by scheduling times to talk. Classes studying international business, public relations, language instruction or anthropology may all be eager to talk with the internationals in your classroom. Seek out the teachers of these classes, and when they and their classes come to speak with your students, have your students take note of any unfamiliar vocabulary that they use.

- When you cannot get native speakers into the classroom, bring your classroom to the native speakers. Reality television is more than just a source of entertainment for those who watch. Since the dialogue is not scripted like in other programs, your students will gain exposure to real life English as spoken by the typical American. Try showing your class popular programs that have a lot of interaction among contestant like Survivor, Celebrity Apprentice, Keeping Up with the Kardashians, or The Amazing Race (many of which offer full episodes online at no charge). Again, encourage your students to take notes as they listen.
- Public places are a great place for your students to overhear conversations prime with slang. Send your students out to coffee shops, restaurants, shopping malls or other locations where people gather to talk. Challenge your students to sit down with a cup of coffee and listen for unusual English expressions as they write them down in their notebooks. Then bring your class back together to swap notes and define the expressions they gathered. Try using the Urban Dictionary or other online resource if you get stumped.
- Another resource for conversational English that keeps your students in the classroom is YouTube. This site offers a never end-

ing selection of videos made by real people. You may have to do some digging to find the best videos for your students, but if you enjoy watching popular videos on your own time, just make note of the ones that would work best in your classroom and that showcase some unique slang expressions.

- No matter where the words come from, make sure your students are keeping track of the slang expressions they learn, and encourage them to use the expressions themselves if they are comfortable doing so. You may also want to start a class collection of slang terms. Try keeping a set of index cards near a bulletin board. When a student learns a new slang term, he writes in on one side of the card and then writes the definition on the other side. Pin it up on the board and your students can check out the unusual words at their leisure.

**THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY
REQUIRED CLASSROOM FAIR,
SLANG IS ESSENTIAL FOR ENGLISH
SPEAKERS WHO HOPE TO INTER-
ACT WITH THE PUBLIC IN CASUAL
CONVERSATION.**

For that reason, ESL teachers actually help their students become better English speakers when they include slang in the classroom. Though it may seem like a waste of time when the final exam is drawing ever nearer, your students will appreciate the exposure to and understanding of what real English speakers say! So take a chance, change it up and let your students add some flavor to their English lexicons with a lesson on slang.

Are You Sure about That? Teaching Certainty and Uncertainty

Language can be very subtle.

English is peppered with nuances that communicate respect, disbelief, sincerity and certainty (among other things). For students of English, it is easy for these subtleties to get lost in translation, but understanding those words and phrases is sometimes key to understanding what a person is trying to communicate. The subtleties surrounding certainty, for example, can determine how a speaker should respond or what actions she should take. In fact, a whole category of adverbs in English is dedicated to expressing certainty. That's why ESL teachers should make a point of teaching the art of certainty to their students. Though beginning students may not be ready to talk about adverbs of certainty, your intermediate and advanced students should be comfortable recognizing and using these adverbs. Here are some activities you can use with your ESL students when the time is surely right.

CONSIDER USING THESE ACTIVITIES TO PRACTICE CERTAINTY AND UNCERTAINTY

1 CERTAIN OR UNCERTAIN

Give your students a list of adverbs of certainty. Include some that express uncertainty and some that express certainty. Then have students work in pairs to divide the list into two categories - words that express certainty and those that express uncertainty. Students should use their previous knowledge and a dictionary, if necessary, to determine which group each word fits into. You may want to include the following words in your list.

Absolutely	Positively
Actually	Possibly
Allegedly	Presumably
Apparently	Probably
Certainly	Purportedly
Clearly	Reportedly
Definitely	Seemingly
Doubtfully	Supposedly

Evidently	Surely
Hopefully	Theoretically
Hypothetically	Undeniably
Invariably	Undoubtedly
Obviously	Unmistakably
Perhaps	Unquestionably

If your students can add to the lists once these words are sorted, encourage them to do so.

2 ADVERB OF CERTAINTY PLACEMENT

Adverbs of certainty appear before the main verb in a sentence but after the auxiliary verb.

He is absolutely coming tomorrow.

She allegedly stole the diamond necklace.

They can also appear at the beginning of a sentence.

Obviously Anna is in love with the king.

Hypothetically, students start at level one and progress through level six.

After reviewing placement of adjectives of certainty with your class, have pairs of students work together to write five statements that they are sure of. Each statement should use one of the adverbs of certainty. Then, have each pair write five statements they are not sure of, also using an adverb of certainty in each sentence. Tell students to make sure some sentences place the adverb of certainty before the main verb and others place it at the beginning of the sentence.

3 SURELY YOU KNOW...

Surely is an adverb of certainty that serves a specific purpose when it comes at the beginning of a sentence. A speaker who uses surely in this way believes that his statement is true but is looking for confirmation. Consider the following sentences.

Surely you know we have a test tomorrow.

Surely you have told your family about your fiancé.

Though phrased as a statement, each

sentence is in fact a request for information from the listener. You can give your students a chance to practice this structure with this fun lying game. Each student should write three statements about herself – two that are true and one that is a lie. Either in groups or with the whole class, have each person read her statements. The other students should then determine which statement they think is a lie. To check if they are correct in their choice, they should give a “surely” statement expressing disbelief at what they think is the lie. For example, a student might say the following.

I swam with sharks.

I climbed Mt. Everest.

I shot a bear.

Her classmates would then reply with one of the following statements.

Surely you didn't swim with sharks.

Surely you didn't climb Mt. Everest.

Surely you didn't shoot a bear.

If the speaker is wrong in his guess, the first person should give a statement of certainty in reply.

I absolutely swam with sharks.

If the class guess is correct, the speaker should admit the lie and chose the next person to read his statements. Make sure each person has a chance to share her statements and try to fool her classmates before ending the activity.

4 ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?

To give your students some more practice using adverbs of certainty, brainstorm a list of silly statements (either with your students or before class). You might include statements such as the following.

The sky is purple.

Hippos make great pets.

Spaghetti is the best topping on a pizza.

Winter is a great time to visit the beach.

Learning English is quick and easy.

Have students work with a partner and the list of statements. On his turn, the student should choose a statement and use an adverb of certainty to indicate he is certain his statement is true.

Spaghetti is definitely the best topping for pizza.

His partner then asks, "Are you sure about that?" The first student should then rephrase his statement in the negative form also using an adverb of uncertainty.

Spaghetti is apparently not the best topping for pizza.

Then students switch roles and choose another statement following the same pattern as above.

5 WRITING ABOUT THE FUTURE

In writing, have students make predictions about their futures. Students should write two paragraphs about what their future will be or might be like. The first paragraph should be about his near future – the next semester or the next year. Your students will probably be somewhat certain of the events in this time period. The second paragraph should be about his life far in the future. He might want to think about his life five or ten years in the future. These are events he will probably be less certain about. When writing, each person should include some things he is sure about and some things he is unsure about in each paragraph about his future. Encourage students to use as many adverbs of certainty as possible in their paragraphs. If you teach children, you may also want to have students draw pictures to illustrate their futures and post them on a bulletin board in your classroom.

WHEN YOU ARE CERTAIN YOUR STUDENTS ARE READY TO PRACTICE ADVERBS OF CERTAINTY, THESE ACTIVITIES WILL GET THEM STARTED IN THE PROCESS. HAVE FUN AND IN THE PROCESS YOUR STUDENTS WILL DEFINITELY ADVANCE IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Get It Together: 4 Types of Connecting Language in English

MAKING CONNECTIONS.

It's a good idea in the work place, but it's absolutely essential when you are in the classroom. In math class, a simple plus sign is all that's needed, but in the language classroom, things are a little more complicated. Connections in English can happen between independent sentences. Words such as also, in addition and plus will link an idea in one sentence to an idea in another sentence. But connections can happen within a sentence as well. For these types of connections, English speakers generally use one of four types of connecting language.

HOW WE CONNECT IDEAS IN ENGLISH

1 COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

The first type of connecting language in English are coordinate conjunctions. These familiar words include and, but, or and nor. These little words connect words, groups of words, sentences or groups of sentences. For coordinating conjunctions, the words or sentences are on the same level, that is, they are of equal value.

And is an inclusive connector – it creates a positive connection between two ideas, people or things. *I play tennis, and I study physics.*

But, on the other hand, shows contrast between ideas, people or things. *I play tennis, but I do not study physics.*

Or communicates a choice between two elements. *Do you play tennis, or do you study physics?*

Nor shows negative inclusion, that is, neither is true. *I don't play tennis, nor do I study physics.*

2 CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

Correlative conjunctions are pairs of words that show relationships between subjects and objects in a sentence. They include both ... and, not only ... but also, either ... or, and neither ... nor. Like coordinate conjunctions, correlative conjunctions connect ideas that are of equal value.

Both ... and shows a similarity or connection between ideas. *Both Jake and Mary play tennis for exercise.*

Not only ... but also shows that a subject has two distinct qualities. *Not only does Jake play tennis, but he also studies physics.*

Either ... or communicates a choice between two elements. *Either Mary can play tennis or she can study physics. She doesn't have time for both.*

Neither ... nor shows a negative similarity or connection between ideas. *Neither Mary nor Jake plays tennis on Sundays.*

3 SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

Subordinating conjunctions connect two ideas that are not of equal footing. One idea is subordinate to the other. When a dependent clause is connected to an independent clause with a subordinating conjunction, the result is a complex sentence. English has over thirty common subordinate conjunctions. Some of the most familiar are if, because, since, so that, and when. Subordinating conjunctions can be divided into eight basic categories.

- Place: She plays tennis wherever she travels.
- Time: She feels tired after she plays tennis.
- Manner: She dresses however she wants.
- Cause/Reason: She does this because she doesn't care about

style.

- Purpose: She practices so she can get better.
- Result: She plays so that she will stay healthy.
- Condition: She practices even if it is raining.
- Substantive: Who can know whether she is right?

4 RELATIVE PRONOUNS

Relative pronouns also connect a dependent clause to an independent clause, resulting in a complex sentence. When relative pronouns are used, the dependent clause gives more information about something or someone in the independent clause. Relative pronouns include who, whose, where, when, which and that.

Who relates information about a person. *Jake is someone who likes to exercise.*

Whose shows a possessive relationship. *Jake is an athlete whose body shows his efforts.*

Where indicates a place. *The park is where the tennis courts are.*

When indicates a time. *After work is when he likes to play.*

Which is used for things. That is used for both people and things. *Tennis is a sport which (that) will keep you healthy.*

AS YOU CAN SEE, MAKING CONNECTIONS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CAN BE COMPLICATED AND CONFUSING FOR ESL STUDENTS. IF YOUR STUDENTS CAN MASTER THESE FOUR TYPES OF CONNECTING LANGUAGE, HOWEVER, THEY WILL BE SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATORS.

Achieving Natural Language at the Intermediate Level

ONCE STUDENTS EVOLVE INTO INTERMEDIATE LEVEL SPEAKERS, THEY ARE READY FOR A LOT MORE NATURAL LANGUAGE PRACTICE.

It might seem daunting to veer students away from the safety of scripted or very predictable language, but revving students up about utilizing natural language isn't as hard as it seems.

HOW TO ACHIEVE NATURAL LANGUAGE AT THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

1 SMALL TALK OPENERS

When students begin to speak with some amount of fluency and have mastered some really tough grammar topics, they are definitely ready to learn the art form of small talk. Providing small talk amongst students at the beginning and end of every class can be a very organic way to get them speaking naturally. Step back from goal-setting with students for these warmers or wrap-ups and simply begin some small talk casually and conversationally. It is common for people to talk about their weekend plans or experiences, ask how someone is feeling that has been ill, or ask for a restaurant reference. You can have goals in the back of your mind for your small talk exercises, but don't control the conversation: let it flow.

Using small talk openers can also teach new expressions in a natural way and students can choose to write them down, use them outside of class, or utilize them in-class. You may also want to have conversations about small talk. Define what it is, ask them to point out times in the class when they have experienced small talk, and ask them if they use it in the real world. Brainstorm small talk openers with students, and then sprinkle those in to your warmers and wrap-ups. There are a lot of options for also creating lessons around situational small talk if you would like students to delve more deeply into it, or in challenging them to come up with

new ways to utilize small talk.

Some great openers to consider introducing or bringing up are:

How's it going today, class?
What's happening this weekend?
Did you know there is ... (a concert in the park.)...this (Saturday)?
Is this seat taken?
Do you mind if I ask you where you got that.... (blouse, purse, etc)?
This weather is crazy. Is it always this hot in the summer?

There are so many variables as to how you can phrase small talk, and what you might come across to introduce. Students should learn how to politely answer unexpected questions, ask for clarification if they don't really understand, and employ strategies to continue a conversation that begins this way. Let your students take the lead on small talk, and make it a usual occurrence in the classroom.

2 OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Have you noticed that intermediate level students love to ask questions? They are curious, want to find out personal details, and enjoy showing off their language skills. Use this to your advantage and do varied exercises with open-ended questions. So often students are accustomed to asking yes or no questions which really doesn't jump-start any kind of thought-provoking conversation. One example that you could bring in to illustrate what you mean is to role play a teenager talking to his or her parent. This can be fun to do whether you have a class of adults or teens. It will drive the point home that you will only get substantial information if you use open-ended questions. It also displays how in conversation, we need to really listen to the other person, ask follow-up questions, and show interest in what the other person is saying. For the teen to parent role play, simply ask for two volunteers. One student will be the parent, who really wants to connect with their teen. That student asks a lot of closed questions. Stu-

dent Two is the bored and annoyed teenager who just wants to evade the questions, give non-answers, or the shortest answers possible.

Here's an example of what your volunteers might say:

Parent: "How was school today?"
Teen: "Fine."
Parent: "Did you enjoy gym class?"
Teen: "No." (eye roll)
Parent: "Are you hungry?"
Teen: "A little."

This could go on for a little while until you tell them to stop. Ask the class for their observations. Discuss what the parent did wrong, and the missed opportunities to get more information or to engage their teenager. After a good discussion, have students do another role play with this scenario and see how it changes when open-ended questions are used. You could first brainstorm with the class things the parent could have said differently, and get them thinking about how to phrase open-ended questions.

A few examples could be:

What did you do today/at school/?
Why didn't you enjoy...?
What was the best/worst part of your day?
I'm sorry you didn't have fun in gym class. What was so horrible about it?

After the introduction of open-ended questions, make a point to have students practice this with one another as often as possible. Point out missed opportunities, or ask them how they could get more information when they forget to use this method.

3 TASK-CENTERED SPEAKING

Task-centered speaking gives students the freedom to craft language that is all their own, while still carrying out a task or accomplishing an outcome. Get into the habit of formulating activities that allow students to use lan-

guage in this way as often as you can manage it. Outcome-based speaking works really well for mingling activities, small group discussions, and games. Define the outcome clearly for the students either as a group or individually, and give students reminders throughout the activity. If you are giving individual outcomes to students, it can be entertaining to keep those private until the end of the activity. Challenge students to discern what all the tasks were. Don't forget to address the tasks during the wrap-up of activities. You could also sometimes have students formulate tasks for themselves or one another. Examples of task-driven work might be challenging, creative, simple or adventurous.

Include things like:

Speak only in the third person for this whole exercise.

Use tag questions as much as possible

Get information using conditionals

Speak quietly/loudly/angrily/romantically (fun to assign each student a different adverb)

ACHIEVING NATURAL LANGUAGE WITHIN PERIMETERS IS CHALLENGING, BUT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BORING.

Excite students by implementing these strategies to produce natural language and see them take off in all kinds of interesting directions.

Get Your Students to Stop Translating and Start Thinking in English

"How do you say, 'Que tengas un buen fin de semana' in English?" How many times have your students asked you to translate something from or into their native language?

How often do you have students who translate things in their heads before answering you? By contrast, how often do you have students who provide a natural-sounding reply, spontaneously and automatically, without even blinking an eye? Chances are most of your students still translate in their heads – at least some of the time. Our goal as teachers is to guide students towards increasingly thinking in English and drop the crutch of translation. But we all know this is precisely one of the hardest things to achieve. So how do we do that? How can we effectively get our ESL students to think in English?

WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT FOR ESL STUDENTS TO STOP TRANSLATING AND START THINKING IN ENGLISH

1. Consider their main goal. They want to learn to speak English, not become translators. There's no point in them speaking their native language in their heads while they're trying to learn another.
2. It's counterproductive. The constant comparison of one language to another hinders naturally flowing speech. Experienced interpreters are real pros at this, but your students are not.
3. Some things are simply too hard to translate. This creates a situation where the student is desperately trying to remember how to say the one word they have in their minds in English, while they should be trying to recall a recent lesson instead.

Now, that we've established the importance of getting students to think in English for the duration of the class, let's see ways to help them achieve this elusive state.

HOW TO GET YOUR STUDENTS TO STOP TRANSLATING AND START THINKING IN ENGLISH

1 USE AN ENGLISH-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

If you teach ESL by only speaking English in class, then you often supply definitions or explanations of words in English. Ask students to use Eng-Eng dictionaries, and it will contribute to your efforts.

2 MIME FEELINGS AND ACTIONS

When you teach feelings like "sad", "happy", "scared", etc. it's a lot simpler to translate them. But it's so much more fun to act them out – for you and your class! The same goes for actions like opening closing things, walking, running, etc.

3 TEACH LANGUAGE IN CONTEXT

A student writes a word on the board, points to it and asks what it means. Most of the time we have no idea where they got it, which leads us to ask questions about the context. After all, there are plenty of words that have different meanings in different contexts. This is precisely why language must be taught in context. For example, would you teach the Past Simple by presenting a list of verbs and their past forms? What if there are verbs they don't understand? Your best course of action is to introduce the context first. Tell students what you do every day, and then tell them what you did yesterday. This eliminates any need for translation.

4 INTRODUCE SET PHRASES AS SET PHRASES

Has a student ever asked you to translate the meaning of "You're welcome"? In most languages a literal translation is ridiculous, but providing a similar phrase in the students' native language is not necessary, either. When students ask for translation simply say a set phrase is a set phrase. Make sure they understand it's a reply to "Thank you". They will probably figure out the equivalent in their language, but with some expressions an equivalent is hard to come by – think of proverbs or idiomatic expressions. The goal is for them to understand the mean-

ing of the phrase and when it's used.

5 USE VISUAL AIDS

Like miming, visual aids such as flashcards, illustrations, posters and even video are great ways to avoid translation.

6 USE OPPOSITES OR SYNONYMS

Use words they already know to lead in questions: Are you happy to see your friend? You're glad to see him. Check out these other great ways to teach vocabulary. No translation needed at all!

7 TEACH LANGUAGE IN GROUPS

The need for translation will be eliminated if you teach words in groups that make sense, for example, "eat" and "drink" with a list of food items.

8 PRETEND YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

If students try to say things in their own language, simply say you don't understand. Try to lead them to say what they want to say in English. This is by far my favorite strategy. If a student speaks to me in Spanish, I love to say, "Yo no hablar español" with a thick English accent (besides being absolutely fluent in Spanish, I'm also a good actress). Because it's funny, it predisposes students better than a reprimand!

THERE IS STILL MUCH DEBATE AS TO WHETHER AN ESL CLASS SHOULD BE ENGLISH ONLY OR INCLUDE SOME ELEMENTS OF THE NATIVE LANGUAGE.

I have personally had excellent results speaking only English in my classrooms. There have been very few occasions in which I had to explain something to a student in Spanish, but those were very special cases or students with some type of learning difficulty. When I teach Japanese students, I can't use their native language at all. I can't speak a single word in Japanese, but that doesn't impact the lesson negatively, in fact, it is very helpful, as students are not tempted to use their native tongue.