

HOW TO TEACH SPEAKING

Outside the context of any classroom, all children who are repeatedly exposed to language, in normal circumstances will learn it unconsciously. Most adults can learn a language without studying it. Though they may have more trouble with pronunciation and grammar than younger learners, they may still be able to communicate fluently. Children and adults who learn language successfully outside a classroom context seem to share certain similarities. First of all, they are usually exposed to language which they more or less understand even if, sometimes, they can't produce the same language spontaneously themselves. Secondly, they are motivated to learn the language in order to be able to communicate. And communication is mainly an oral business. And finally they have opportunities to use the language they are learning, thus checking their own progress and abilities.

All these features of natural language acquisition can be difficult to replicate in the classroom, but there are elements which are no doubt worth imitating. Obviously enough within the classroom environment students don't get the same kind of exposure as those who are "picking up" the language. But we should try to work on motivation, language exposure, maximised talking time and we should offer chances to use the language.

This module will deal with communicative (or conversational) skills, that is those skills a speaker must possess when he or she wants to communicate something orally.

Communicative (conversational) skills

When we think about speaking, we mean when the students use any and all the language at their command to perform some kind of oral task. The important thing is that there should be a task to complete and that the students should want to complete it.

The reasons why it is a good idea to give students speaking tasks which provoke them to use all and any language at their command are mainly three:

- 1) **Rehearsal:** when students have free discussions or conversations inside the classroom they have a chance to rehearse having discussions or conversations outside the classroom. Simply enough, when they meet a new friend from abroad the first conversation will be about introducing oneself, one's own family etc. Having them take part in a role-play at the lost property office allows them to rehearse such a real-life event in the safety of the classroom. It is a way for students to "get the feel" of what communicating in the foreign language really feels like.
- 2) **Feedback:** engagement in a speaking task which demands for the use of all and any language at the students' command provides feedback for both teacher and students.
- 3) **Engagement:** completing a speaking task can be really motivating and give real satisfaction. Many speaking tasks (role-play, discussions, debate, problem-solving etc.) are intrinsically enjoyable in themselves and if planned carefully (by the teacher) and completed successfully (by the students) contribute to increasing their self-esteem.

What is conversation?

Teachers often tend to assume that conversation in the language classroom involves nothing more than putting into practice the grammar and vocabulary skills taught elsewhere in the course. But if we want to teach conversation well, we need to know something about what native speakers do when they have conversations. We have chosen to deal with conversation here, because conversation is what normally occurs in everyday life, in the contacts students will have with foreign friends or foreign people in general. With the term "conversation" we refer to a spoken interaction between two or more people who don't follow a fixed schedule.

The purposes of conversation include the exchange of information, the creation and maintenance of social relationships, the negotiation of status and social roles as well as deciding on joint actions.

The basic unit of a conversation is an **exchange**. An exchange consists of two moves (an initiating move and a response):

- A. Would you like a cup of coffee?
- B. Yes, please.

We can give a function to each move. In the case above we have *offering* (A) and *accepting* (B). To do so we need to take account of factors such as who the speakers are and where and when the conversation occurs.

An exchange or a series of exchanges are not necessarily the same thing as a conversation:

- A. Excuse me?
- B. Yes?
- A. How do I get to the railway station from here?
- B. Go straight on, then take the first turning on the right. The railway station is at the end of the street.

- *Can you think of other examples of this kind?*

The one above is not a conversation because the two speakers want to finish their business as quickly as possible; on the other hand, conversation is open-ended and has the potential to develop in any way. It is possible that the example above could contain a conversation if B enquired about A's nationality and A told him the reason why he wanted to reach the station. The potential is always there in real life. Unfortunately, many students never have the confidence or opportunity to go beyond simple exchanges like the one above, so one of the main aims when teaching speaking skills is to propose exercises and activities which allow students to develop the ability to initiate and sustain conversation.

Conversation is such a natural part of our lives that many people are not conscious of what happens within it. However, conversation follows certain rules which can be described. During a conversation:

- usually one person speaks at a time;
- the speakers change;
- the length of any contribution varies;
- there are techniques for allowing the other party or parties to speak;
- neither the content nor the amount of what we say is specified in advance.

The two moves in an exchange are related to each other when the second utterance can be identified as related to the first. These are called **adjacency pairs**. Some examples are:

A. Hello!

B. Hi! (greeting-greeting)

A. Are you OK?

B. Yes.

In some cases we can predict the second part of a pair from the first as in the first example. In other cases there might be a variety of options.

- *Let's take a complaint. What are the different parts which might follow a complaint?*
- *Here are some adjacency pairs where the second part is missing. Can you complete them?*
- **What nationality are you?**
-
- **Would you like something to drink?**
-
- **Remember to record the film on Channel 5 for me this evening.**
-
- **My head aches.**
-

We need to think about ways of developing appropriate second parts to adjacency pairs from the start. For example many drills require students to reply to yes/no questions with "yes" or "no" plus a repetition of the auxiliary. We therefore get exchanges like this one:

- A. Has Sandra arrived?
- B. No, she hasn't.

What students do not often get are opportunities to practise other options, such as:

- A. Has Sandra arrived?
- B. There has been an accident on the motorway. She has just called to say she's stuck up.

Another reason why students usually appear flat and unresponsive in conversation is the tendency to encourage them to produce isolated sentences containing a target structure, e.g. *If I won the lottery I'd travel around the world.*

We all should keep in mind that a minimal answer does nothing to drive the conversation forward.

Many students have great difficulty in getting into a conversation, in knowing when to give up their turn to others, and in bringing a conversation to a close. In order for conversation to work smoothly, all participants have to be alert to signals that a speaker is about to finish his or her turn and be able to come in with a contribution which fits the direction in which the conversation is moving. We need to train students to sense when someone is about to finish. Falling intonation is often a signal for this.

Besides, students often lose their turn because they hesitate in order to find the right word. Teaching them expressions like *Wait, there's more* or *That's not all* as well as fillers or hesitation devices such as *Erm...*, *Well...*, etc will help them to keep going.

As regards topics, we must keep in mind that different cultures talk about different things in their everyday lives. Native speakers are very aware of what they should and should not talk about with specific categories of people in their own language. That is why both teachers and students need to develop a sense of taboo subjects if they are to avoid offence.

- *Can you think of any taboo subject for English people?*

Simplification in informal speech

- *Have you ever met a person who pronounces the individual sounds and words of English beautifully but who still sounds very foreign? What's the reason, in your opinion?*

In English the sound quality of a word, particularly the vowels and certain consonants, changes depending on whether the word is said in isolation or as a part of a continuous stream of words. Some of this is a result of simplification of informal speech owing to the fact that

English is a stress-timed language. This means that between two stressed syllables there is the same interval of time.

Let's take two sentences:

1. I caught a bus.
2. It's a bus I caught.

- *Do they contain the same number of words or syllables?*
- *What do they have in common?*

The two sentences are the same length when spoken because they contain the same number of stressed syllables (two each). This means that the unstressed syllables have to be squeezed in. The vowels belonging to unstressed syllables very often become the **weak vowel** represented by the symbol [ə]. The weak vowel or "schwa" is the most common sound in spoken English.

Another peculiarity of spoken English is **elision**, that is the "missing out" of a consonant or vowel or even both.

If you give each part of a word the same value (as it normally happens in Italian), this can have a wearying effect on the native speaker listener. This was particularly true with Trinity Exams last year. Students who were very accurate and whose vocabulary was rich but who spoke, I would say, flatly, got lower marks than students who were far less accurate but were able to reproduce the stress-timed pattern typical of the English language. This shows that it is worth pointing out weak forms from the start for recognition and production.

Planning communicative activities

Many students repeatedly say that their main purpose in learning English is to be able to speak. Nevertheless, most of them don't talk readily in class and the "discussion lessons" in which the teacher does most of the talking are still too prevalent.

- *Pause and consider: when you were a student, did you take part in any lesson which dealt with discussing a specific issue? Did you talk a lot? Who talked the most?*
- *As a teacher, have you ever favoured discussion in class (obviously using L2)? Were your lessons successful or were you not satisfied with them? In either case which were the issues you discussed?*

If you find that lessons where discussion took place were not successful as the teacher did most of the talking, consider if the students were prepared for the discussion or fluency activity. **Preparation** is a vital ingredient for success. Students need to be orientated to the

topic. You just can't enter the classroom and say: *Today we are going to talk about ethnic cleansing through the centuries* (the issue may be relevant to a fifth-year class, though).

- *Empathise with your students: if you were one of them, how would you feel? Why would you rather sit quietly in the back row hoping your teacher takes no notice of you than engage in a passionate attack against ethnic cleansing?*

Some simple techniques which can be used to prepare students for a particular topic are the following:

- the use of audio/visual aids to arouse interest;
- a general orientation to the topic: a short text, questionnaire, a video extract. (This pre-speaking task must never be too long but it is recommended);
- exercises focussing on key words needed for a task.

Students may need to be orientated to the task. The general rule is to formulate tasks in terms students can understand and make sure that the **instructions** are clear.

- *Record yourself while you are giving instructions for a speaking activity. Listen. Were the instructions clear? How would you modify them?*

One possible paradigm for instruction-giving is as follows:

- Think through instructions from the point of view of the student.
- Include only the essential information in simple, clear language.
- Insist on silence and make sure you can be seen. Make eye-contact.
- Use demonstration and gestures where possible to go with your explanation.
- Make sure the students have understood what to do. Do this by asking for a demonstration or for an answer to a question which proves understanding. A yes/no answer to a question like *Do you understand? Are you with me?* is not particularly revealing.

Gower and Walters¹ state that "the way you give instructions indicates the way you exercise control and your attitude to the group... Generally students (...) would not appreciate you trying to be more polite. It would be time-wasting and slow things down and would involve you in more complicated language than they can readily understand".

- *What is your view?*

What has been said so far as regards instructions concerns all the other skills we are going to deal with in the following modules.

Last but not least is the **choice of the topic** to discuss. Students are sometimes not motivated to talk because they lack involvement in the topic. However, even where students admit interest, they may be unwilling to talk about it in English because they lack the linguistic resources. It is a good idea to talk about things which are within the students' experience or which they think they might influence their future lives or attitudes. I am thinking of the terrorist attacks to the U.S. last year: the students were motivated and involved to speak about what had happened because they felt it was something that was linked to their hopes and fears for the future.

One idea to help students go is finding the topic to discuss but instead of discussing it under a general perspective, you could try setting a specific related problem. Let's take, for example, the new war the American President would willingly wage against Iraq. You could divide the class into two groups, one in favour of a military response to overthrow Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, the other more careful and prone to turn to diplomacy and intelligence instead. Give them some articles with different viewpoints and the results of the poll conducted among Americans and tell them they must decide (and agree) on how to cope with this crucial issue: going to war or relying on intelligence and diplomacy?

When dealing with speaking activities, it is important to ensure that the students develop a sense that they are **making progress**. Often students do not realise just how much more confident and fluent they are becoming. One reason may be that they may rarely get the opportunity to take a leading role in conversation; it is well worth trying, then, to programme activities and pair work in which brilliant students have to sustain a conversation with those at lower level, in order to give them the experience of being the driving force in a conversation. This is particularly important in view of the consolidation of self-esteem, which we must never forget when dealing with teenagers.

Getting students to compare their current efforts with recordings made in the earliest stages of the course is another way of boosting confidence.

In many cases students will have external objectives such as the oral examinations run by organisations such as Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate and Trinity College. It is therefore useful to show the extent to which students are making progress towards their examination objective by including an element of exam practice in the programme. This is a possible approach to how this can be set up:

- make your students fully aware of what a satisfactory performance in the examination involves. For example, show them a film of a Trinity exam interview, commenting on the mastery of language but also on fluency and on the examiner's gestures and fillers;
- an identification of areas which are critical for a good performance in the exam might then be followed by controlled practice of exam-type tasks;

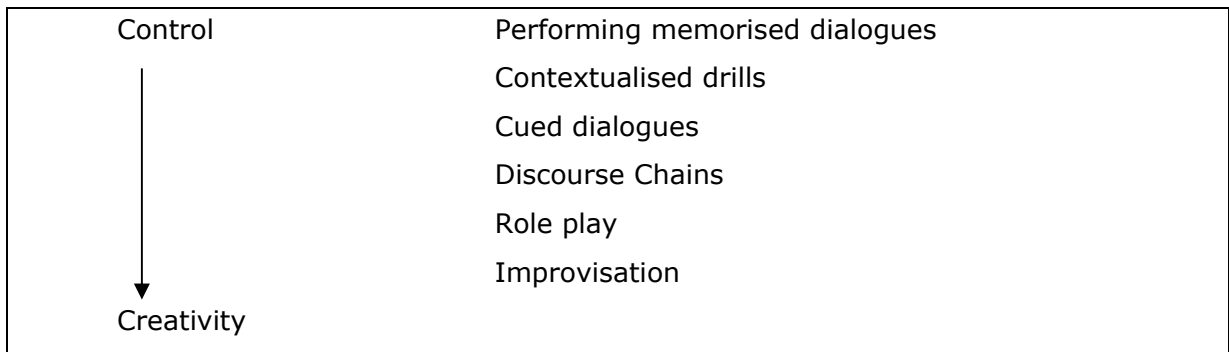
¹ Gower R., Walters S. *Teaching Practice Handbook*, Heinemann, 1988.

- you should also give your students practice in exam conditions. Feedback from these tasks is particularly valuable in that it fosters self-evaluation and improvement.

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Towards communicative competence

According to William Littlewood² there is a continuum of classroom activities to promote communicative competence:



Step 1: Controlled activities

Although conversational competence can only come from fluency activities or natural language interaction outside the classroom, there is an argument for the use of controlled activities which help students develop confidence as well as the ability to participate in and maintain simple conversations.

- *Remember your first English lessons. What kind of student were you? Were you always ready to raise your hand to be invited to speak in the foreign language or did you hope the teacher didn't see you?*

Many students have to overcome a psychological barrier before they are prepared to speak in the foreign language. Some students feel uneasy when they have to speak in the classroom situation because there is always an audience, others contribute in the sheltered environment of the classroom but are at a loss when they have to use the language outside. A few prefer not to speak at all and are then denied opportunities for practice.

Within the classroom a major source of threat against speaking is the individual's perception of himself/herself and the other students. Threat reduction is possible by building up personal security through the use of **getting-to-know-you activities** which promote trust as well as **articulation activities**³ which give the opportunity to use English sounds in a safe environment.

² William Littlewood, *Communicative Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Getting-to-know-you activities

They are meant to build a positive atmosphere of trust within a group.

CHAIN NAMES	
LEVEL	Any level (including beginners) (from A1)
TIME	5-10 minutes
AIM	Introducing students to each other
PREPARATION	None
PROCEDURE	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ask the students to sit in a semi-circle and nominate one student to introduce himself/herself.2. The person next to him/her must then repeat his/her name, and then introduce himself/herself.3. Ask your students to repeat this procedure around the semi-circle, each one repeating the name of the person before them and then saying their own name. For example:<ol style="list-style-type: none">A. I'm Roberto.B. Roberto, I'm Paola.C. Roberto, Paola., I'm Francesco.D. Roberto, Paola, Francesco, I'm Giulia.More advanced students might tackle the following:<ol style="list-style-type: none">A. I'm Francesco. I'm from Mestre.B. He's Francesco. He's from Mestre. I'm Bianca, and I'm from Marcon.C. He's Francesco. He's from Mestre. She's Bianca. She's from Marcon. I'm Piero, and I'm from Mirano.
REMARKS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Twelve represents a maximum number for this activity. (Split the class into two semi-circles if the students are more.)2. You should always take a turn to show you are learning too.

³ The names for the different kinds of activities within communicative competence and the examples are taken from Rob Nolasco, Lois Arthur, *Conversation*, Oxford University Press, 1987, which has offered plenty of ideas for the writing of this module.

GUESS WHO	
LEVEL	Elementary to intermediate (A2 to B2)
TIME	15-20 minutes
AIM	Students are given statements of personal information about other students and they have to ask questions in order to establish the person's identity.
PREPARATION	Have available enough small pieces of paper for the whole class.
PROCEDURE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give each of your students a piece of paper and ask them to write four facts about themselves. These can be anything they choose, e.g. <i>I was born in February, I own a bicycle, I like Limp Bizkit</i> etc. as long as the statement is true. 2. Tell the students to fold their pieces of paper and pass them anonymously to the front of the class. 3. Collect them together and then redistribute them so that each student has personal information about another student. 4. Once the students have had a chance to look at the personal information, tell them that they will have to find out whose information they have by turning the statements into questions, and then asking other students those questions. You can exercise control over the activity in a variety of ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - by deciding on the form of the question which is allowable, such as <i>Who was born in February?</i>; - by deciding whether to nominate students to speak or to allow them free choice; - by deciding whether or not to allow students to move about. 5. Once you have decided on the rules for the

	activity you can set it in motion. The activity ends when everybody has found out whose personal information they have.
REMARKS	If the initial statements were collected in the previous lesson, or copied out two or three times, you could distribute more than one set of information to each student. This would be needed to make a mingling activity more successful.

- *Focus on the "Guess who?" activity. What kind of practical problems may arise? How would you cope with them?*

Articulation activities

When students come to speak in a foreign language they often find themselves inhibited by the prospects of having to make what to them are strange and even comic sounds. One way to tackle this problem is to give students the opportunity to experiment with sounds.

LISTEN AND RECORD	
LEVEL	Elementary and above (from A2)
TIME	15-20 minutes
AIM	For students: making a recording after listening carefully to a taped model.
PREPARATION	Select a natural model for students to imitate.
PROCEDURE	Ask the students to listen to the tape and to repeat any of the utterances they have heard, until they are ready to be recorded. The activity is self-directed, but you should be available for consultation. The finished product can be a subject of feedback and evaluation.
REMARKS	The activity is self-regulatory. This is important if students are not to be threatened by having to repeat something they feel uncertain about. This activity also fosters the notion of rehearsing what we are about to say, something many people do in their own language, anyway.

Dialogue building

The use of cues or prompts to build up dialogues is a commonly-used technique. The cues or prompts determine the content of what is said, and dialogue building activities can range from being highly controlled to very free. Dialogue building is not a substitute for fluency work, but used sparingly it allows the possibility of giving weaker students a chance to say something.

- *Go through a course-book and find an activity of this kind. Send it to our forum saying whether it is a highly controlled one or a free one. Use a ranking scale where 1 stands for highly controlled, 5 very free.*

Gambits

In the early stages of conversational development students can be taught to take the part of the person who responds to what somebody else has said, by producing an appropriate response or "gambit".

Here's a list of what we might teach:

1. Language to indicate the speaker's agreement with what has been said:

- *Yes, it is.*
- *Yes, that's right.*
- *Of course, it is.*
- *Quite, absolutely true.*
- *Yes, I do / Yes, he was / Yes, they were....*

2. Language which indicates polite disagreement:

- *Well, not really.*
- *Not quite, no.*
- *Perhaps not quite as bad/good/difficult as that.*
- *Em, I don't know.*

3. Language to indicate possible doubt:

- *I'm not quite sure.*
- *Really?*
- *Is that right?*
- *Is that so?*
- *Are you sure?*

4. Language to provide positive and negative feedback:

- *Great!*
- *That's nice.*
- *Very nice indeed (good, clear, pretty)...*
- *Really nice.*
- *Sounds lovely! (informal)*
- *Not very nice.*
- *No at all nice/clear ...*
- *Very nasty indeed (disagreeable, bad, noisy) ...*
- *Sounds awful. (informal)*

5. Language to encourage confirmation and more information:

- *Is that right?*
- *Really?*
- *No kidding?* (informal)
- *You're not!*

One way of getting students used to the function of short responses is to build them into drills. Although such practice is semi-mechanical students enjoy the challenge of getting the stress and intonation of the short response right. The important thing is not to use drills too extensively.

Step 2: Awareness activities

Students need to become aware of what native speakers do in conversation if they are themselves to achieve communicative competence in the target language. The focus of the awareness activities will be then on promoting the following issues:

- the ability to "sound" English by drawing attention to critical elements which can be usefully imitated (weak forms);
- development of the ability to interpret what is being said;
- a feeling for what is appropriate in conversation;
- awareness of strategies used to further conversation;
- awareness of the target culture.

Awareness activities can be used from the earliest stages of learning.

Observation tasks

They are used to encourage students to become sensitive to particular features of conversation. Observation should always be directed through the use of task sheets and these can be used to focus on:

- audio recordings of people talking;
- video recordings of people talking;
- conversations as they occur in real time.

The simplest observation tasks require the observer to mark the presence or absence of a particular feature.

ENCOURAGING NOISES	
LEVEL	Elementary and above (from A2)
TIME	15-20 minutes
AIM	Making students sensitive to expressions which encourage the other speaker to continue.
PREPARATION	Select an audio or video tape that contains examples of this type of expression. Hand out

	the task sheet below to the students.
TASK SHEET	
Listen to the extract of people talking. Make a tick (✓) next to each of the expressions in the list whenever you hear one of the speakers using it.	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Really?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Does He?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Is that right?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>That's nice.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>How interesting.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Uh huh.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Is it?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Yes.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I see.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Mmmm.</i>
PROCEDURE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce the task so that the students get some idea of what they are looking for. 2. Give out a copy of the task sheet to each student. 3. Play the tape two or three times before focussing on the specific expressions in context.

Sensitivity to the sound system

- *How often do you notice, focus on and/or correct the following in what your students say?*
 - *Phonetic confusion (**pin** vs. **bin**)*
 - *Problems with consonant clusters (**str** or **nch**)*
 - *Interference from the written form (*half*)*
 - *Failure to use the weak form*
 - *Incorrect word stress*
 - *Incorrect intonation*

If students are to make themselves easily comprehensible, there is a need to work on their pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation from the start.

Remember that lengthy but infrequent attention to stress and intonation is less effective than short tasks that are built into the overall teaching programme and often as introductory "warming up" activities, end of lesson relaxers, or simply as and when the need arises in response to errors.

Cross-cultural awareness

If we accept the fact that language is embedded in culture, then some elements of cross-cultural training are inevitable and the inclusion of some cross-cultural work in the teaching of communicative skills would seem to offer the following advantages:

- cross-cultural issue can generate discussion in their own right;

- knowledge of why people in the English culture behave in certain ways should make native speakers easier to interpret;
- a sensitivity to the ways social norms operate in other languages should make the learning of certain areas of language (such as *politeness formulae*) easier;
- If students become aware of issues such as social taboos, they are less likely to cause offence by breaking them. Besides, they would begin to fall into the category of foreigner that native speakers find easy to talk to.

CULTURE SHOCK!

LEVEL

Pre-intermediate and above (from A2/B1)

TIME

25-30 minutes

AIM

For students: discussing the problems people encounter when they have to live in a new country for a period of time.

PREPARATION

Make photocopies of the task sheet below.

PROCEDURE

1. Introduce the topic and give out a task sheet to each student.
2. Divide the students into small groups after they have had the chance to complete the task individually.
3. Chair a feedback session to see what generalisations emerge. Remain as neutral as possible throughout.
4. If students have not had experience of living in a foreign country, you can ask them to imagine how strangers might feel.

REMARKS

If students going to an English-speaking country to study English realise that settling-in problems occur anywhere, learning should be promoted.

TASK SHEET

Here are some difficulties people encounter when living in a new country. Please indicate with a tick (✓) how important each one has been or would be for you.

	Of very great importance	Of great importance	Of some importance	Of no importance
1. Differences in the weather				
2. Being away from the family				
3. Differences in the food				

4. Differences in the way people make friends				
5. Transportation problems				
6. Getting used to new ways of learning				
7. Adjusting to new ways of doing things, e.g. shopping				
8. Difficulties in communicating one's own ideas				
9. Different living conditions				
10. Different social customs				
11. Getting newspapers and magazines from home				
12. Meeting people from the same country				
13 Knowing what to do in everyday situations				
14. Other (please specify)				

Step 3: Fluency activities

The communicative needs of the average foreign student fall within a limited range of purposes, the most important of which are:

- the maintenance and development of social relationships;
- information exchange;
- co-operative problem-solving in English;
- expressing ideas and opinions.

If students are to achieve communicative competence the practice tasks they are given must:

- provide the experience of using English in real time (in real life the interlocutor does not wait for the right or appropriate answer);
- offer them the chance to express their own feelings and points of view;
- provide the opportunity of using the language for a specific purpose.

It is also important that the tasks are culturally appropriate and perceived as relevant by the students.

The successful introduction of fluency activities to a class which has not encountered them before usually requires an element of learner training. This is because the students may perceive that the burden is placed on them as it is the students who initiate and determine what they want to say (even if within a set of guidelines) and feedback can be delayed as the teacher keeps a low profile throughout the activity to allow the students to express themselves freely. Then it is important, especially with adolescent learners, that learner training covers the *why* and the *how* of what the students are being asked to do. The teacher can simply point out the ways in which fluency activities help to promote the objective of oral competence by forcing the learners to use the English they have in their heads. The *how* refers to the fact that students may not know what is expected of them during the activity. It is a good idea, then, that they perceive elements in common with what they have been used to doing, for example the way of giving instructions for an activity.

In class students very often revert to using L1 in the execution of fluency activities if they are not under scrutiny by the teacher. Some of the reasons for this problem include:

- social unease at using a foreign language with their peers;
- perceiving the task as being difficult to complete in any language;
- becoming affectively involved, that is perceiving a genuine need to use the easiest way of communicating about the solution to the task.

- *How would you cope with this problem?*

First you must give a reason for using English in the completion of a task, not simply telling them to do it in English, but making it purposeful. Then at an early stage tasks must be short and relatively easy. The activity should never appear stressful to the students. You should praise the students who make the effort to use English and make clear that for this particular type of exercise errors are not so important.

Sharing

A great deal of motivating language practice can be generated by asking students to talk about themselves, to share their private store of experience with one another, providing they have a framework in which to do so. The framework, especially in the early stages, should limit the exchanges to quite simple factual information. Such exchanges constitute a natural information gap activity in which all students are able to participate.

The activity that follows is a very simple one aimed at introducing students to fluency activities.

I HATED MATHS - DID YOU?	
LEVEL	Elementary and above (from A1)
TIME	25-30 minutes
AIM	Introducing students to fluency activities
PREPARATION	Prepare a task sheet along the following lines, and make photocopies.

TASK SHEET

Look at this list of subjects we study in school:

English

Geography

Physical Education

Chemistry

Italian literature

Mathematics

Physics

History

Art

Work individually for five minutes. Choose one of the subjects you particularly like and list three reasons for liking it. Choose one of the subjects you particularly dislike and list three reasons for disliking it.

Now go round the class and find out if anyone likes or dislikes the same subjects as you. Find out the reasons people gave for liking or disliking a subject and make a list under the headings below:

Reasons for liking a subject

Reasons for disliking a subject

PROCEDURE

1. Warm your students up for the task by getting them to list the subjects they did in school. This will check that they know the name of the subjects in English.
2. Give each student a task sheet and explain that they have a maximum of 15 minutes to go round the class. When they have finished, run a feedback session for the whole class and ask questions such as:
 - Who likes/dislikes the same subjects?
 - What are the most common reasons for liking/disliking particular subjects?
3. Get the students to expand and comment on the reasons given.

Ranking activities

In ranking activities students are required to put the items from a given list into an order of importance or preference. This rearranging phase is usually followed by a period of discussion when students explain or defend their choice. One of the best known of these activities is "Castaway" in which students have to choose the most essential items to survive on a desert island for three months. A standard procedure for ranking activities is as follows:

1. Familiarise the students with the task through oral presentation. Arouse their interest and go through key words.
2. The students work individually and write down their solutions. Set a time limit.
3. The lists are compared and discussed in small groups.

EUREKA!																					
LEVEL	Pre-intermediate and above (from A2)																				
TIME	30-35 minutes																				
AIM	Promoting discussion about inventions																				
PREPARATION	<p>Put the following list of inventions in random order on a handout or OHT. Do not include the dates.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>Gunpowder</td><td style="text-align: right;">1000</td></tr> <tr><td>Atomic bomb</td><td style="text-align: right;">1945</td></tr> <tr><td>Wheel</td><td style="text-align: right;">3000 BC</td></tr> <tr><td>Screw</td><td style="text-align: right;">200 BC</td></tr> <tr><td>Paper</td><td style="text-align: right;">105</td></tr> <tr><td>Printing</td><td style="text-align: right;">1440</td></tr> <tr><td>Microscope</td><td style="text-align: right;">1608</td></tr> <tr><td>Telephone</td><td style="text-align: right;">1876</td></tr> <tr><td>Motor car</td><td style="text-align: right;">1885</td></tr> <tr><td>Aeroplane</td><td style="text-align: right;">1903</td></tr> </table>	Gunpowder	1000	Atomic bomb	1945	Wheel	3000 BC	Screw	200 BC	Paper	105	Printing	1440	Microscope	1608	Telephone	1876	Motor car	1885	Aeroplane	1903
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PROCEDURE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask the students to work in pairs to decide on the approximate date for each of the inventions. When they have done this, ask them to put the inventions in the order of their appearance, with the earliest invention first. Allow them to check the answers with you. 2. Now ask each pair to choose from the list three inventions that have had the most positive effect on civilisation, as well as the three that had the most negative effect. They should discuss their choice with another pair and agree on a joint list. 3. Finally, chair a feedback session in which each group presents its list. See if the class can come to a consensus. 																				
REMARKS	Students are likely to have different interpretations of the words "positive" and "negative". This is worth exploiting, so allow them to settle the argument themselves.																				

Role plays

Role plays can range from highly controlled activities - in which all the content is supplied to student - to full-scale simulations in which participants determine what they will say on the basis of background information and the role they are given.

Feedback

Evaluation of the success or failure of conversational performance is not an easy job. In conversation a variety of factors, including the speaker's accent, control of grammar and vocabulary, as well as overall fluency, all contribute to any impression of the performance.

The objective of feedback is to give students the information they need to improve on their performance. Areas for feedback in activities aiming at the development of communicative skills include:

- grammar;

- appropriacy of vocabulary and expressions;
- fluency;
- pronunciation;
- non-linguistic factors affecting communication.

Feedback needs to be staged and selective if it is to avoid demoralising the students. To achieve this teachers need to decide on the areas of communicative performance most relevant to their students. Once the decision is made, it is a question of focussing on the chosen areas in turn until the students reach the required performance level. To assist this process, teachers need to be continually aware of student performance and progress. One way of doing this might be to keep a record card for each student similar to the one below:

Name	Date	Nature of task (short talk etc.)	Grammatical correctness	Appropriacy of vocabulary	Fluency and pronunciation	Overall performance

Another way might be to use a tape recorder during speaking activities. This way it gets easier for the teacher to identify areas of weakness which can form the basis of subsequent lessons focussing on accuracy, the presentation of new language, etc. Other advantages of using tape recordings of students at work include:

- the opportunity for students to hear again their own performance;
- the opportunity to look objectively at how students develop over a period of time.

It is important for teachers **to correct mistakes** made during speaking activities in a different way from the mistakes made during a study exercise. When students are repeating sentences trying to get their pronunciation right, then the teacher will often correct (appropriately) every time there is a problem. But if students are involved in a passionate discussion about whether smoking should be banned anywhere, the effect of constant interruption from the teacher will destroy the conversational flow, thus mining the purpose of the speaking activity.

It is a good idea to watch and listen while speaking activities are taking place, noting down things that seemed to go well and times when students couldn't make themselves understood or made important mistakes. At the end of the speaking activity the teacher can write the mistakes on the board or on an OHT asking students to correct them. As with any kind of correction, it is important not to single students out for particular criticism.

M03: HOW TO TEACH SPEAKING

TASK 1

Describe a group of students and then say what topics for speaking activities they might be interested in. How would you try and find out which those topics are?

TASK 2

Write the two moves of an exchange and then try to identify the potential it contains to develop into a conversation.