

Chapter Nine

Problem-solving listening activities

These activities are transactional because they provide ways for students to comprehend content to solve problems through their use of both bottom-up and top-down processes. For example, one of such activities is students are detectives listening to a recorded report about a murder, and as they listen, they complete a grid on the alibis of the suspects. Based on what they hear, their task is to narrow down the suspects to select the murderer.

Q/ How do EFL/ESL teachers use media to teach listening?

There are many ways in which EFL/ESL teachers can make use of media in our listening classes. Radio, for example, offers songs, advertisements, talk shows, and drama. Television, offers quiz shows, comedies, reality shows, soaps, cartoons, educational programs, news, and commercials.

Q/ What are the techniques that used in processing authentic video materials?

- 1- Silent viewing: Students view video material without sound to consider what is going on and guess what speakers are doing and saying.
- 2- Soundtrack only: Students hear the soundtrack without the picture and speculate on what speakers look like, the setting, and the location.
- 3- Beginning only: Students view the beginning of a sequence, then predict what will happen next.
- 4- Ending only: Students view the ending and consider what happened earlier.
- 5- Split viewing (One): Some students view the material without sound. Others listen without viewing. Groups come together to create a fuller understanding of context and content.
- 6- Split viewing (Two): Half the class sits with back to screen. Half can see the screen. Both can hear. Pairs then build a fuller understanding of context and content.

Q1/What Does It Mean to Converse in a Second Language?

Conversing in a second language means knowing how to maintain interaction and focus on meaning; use conversational grammar; introduce, develop and change topics; take turns; apply conversational routines; and adapt style to match the setting/context.

A. Maintaining Interaction and Meaning

Conversations have both transactional and interactional purposes. When speaking and when the purpose is transactional, the focus is primarily on the meaning of the message. Is your message getting to the listener? For example, imagine explaining how to find your home to a new friend or describing your aches and pains to a doctor. When the speaking purpose is interactional, the focus is on maintaining social relations-greeting, complimenting, and chatting with friends.

B. Using Conversational Grammar

To truly communicate, you must also be able to use conversational grammar, which is different from standard grammar because it is based on how people actually talk. It features small chunks, mostly clauses and single words, as opposed to complete sentences. (This is true for both interactional and transactional turns.)

C. Introducing, Developing, and Changing Topics

Carrying on a conversation also requires speakers to introduce, develop, and change topics. This aspect of conversational management can be complex, the selection and development of a topic done through a process of negotiation. This includes opening a conversation with a formulaic expression such as What's up? To get past this initial greeting and before going onto another topic, other conversational cues or "formulas" are needed; for example, you may ask the person (or guess from the context) if he or she is busy or free to talk, how much time he or she has, and what topic should be talked about. In our own language it is natural to select topics to talk about with people we know and people we don't know. But in another language, it is not easy to know how to do this-that is, what is safe to talk about and what isn't.

D. Taking Turns

To take part in a conversation also means to take turns, and there are both short and long turns. A short turn includes just one or two utterances, such as in the What's up? conversation. A long turn takes place when it is necessary for a speaker to explain or justify something, to provide an anecdote, or to tell a story. Many EFL/ESL students have difficulty taking long turns in a conversation because to do so requires them to take on responsibility for generating a sequence of utterances that gives the listener a good understanding of what they are saying, something that is not always easy to do in a first language, much less a second. Some students have trouble taking both long and short turns, which could be a result of previous language-learning experiences, but possibly also because they lack the strategies in English for taking a turn, such as using interjections like Mmhmm to signal a request to speak, and quickly adding something to what a speaker just said. In conversations with multiple participants, EFL/ESL students might wait for a pause in order to contribute; if they are talking to Americans, that pause may not come, which makes knowing how to interrupt another useful strategy.

E. Carrying Out Conversational Routines

Conversing also means participating in conversational routines, many of which require a sequence of short turns. These routines are used regularly in our daily interactions—for example, paying for a newspaper, greeting a friend in the street, leaving a party, apologizing to a teacher, complimenting a friend, and offering something to a guest. Although all these interactions aren't scripted to a person, there are consistent patterns and rules

F. Adapting Style

Conversing also includes the selection of conversational style to match the formality of the situation. Jack Richards provides a good example of how native speakers of English adapt their style when asking someone the time. From informal to formal, language is adapted in social settings in the following ways: Got the time? What's the time? Do you have the time? Would you know what time it is? Could I trouble you for the time? EFL/ESL students have trouble adapting style, sometimes being too formal in an informal setting, in part as a result of applying the style rules from their first language. For example, in the

United States some Asian students will use last names in situations that call for first name use, such as Mr. Brown, rather than John. Furthermore, ESL students who are not accustomed to calling older people or those with a higher status by their first names v 'n avoid addressing them by any name.

Q2/ How Do EFL/ESL Teachers Teach Conversation to Beginners?

With beginners, especially those students at the survival level, teachers usually limit the scope of the conversations so that these conversations are manageable and the students are successful. One way teachers do this is to control the kinds of questions they ask, using yes-no, either-or, and identity questions.

Teachers also limit the scope of a conversation through the use of what

Littlewoods calls “quasi-communication” activities, the objective of which is for students to practice using English with reasonable fluency, but without having to be overly concerned with communicating meaning effectively. E.g. of another quasi-communicative activity is dialogue practice.

Q3/ What Kinds of Activities Do EFL/ESL Conversation Teachers Use with Post Beginners?

a) Dialogue Writing, Skits, Role Plays, and Improvisations

One activity many students like because they can consider their own interactive needs is to write their own dialogues. When students act out their dialogues, they become skits, the idea being for students to practice and then perform in front of the class. Role-play activities are similar to skits in that students are expected to act. However, unlike skits, students are not provided with lines but are given a situation and roles to play. It's important to note that while some students are natural performers (actors), others are not and are uncomfortable with these types of activities. Video drama is similar to role play. However, each role play is videotaped so students can reflect on their use of language. This can lead to improvisation

B. Buzz Groups

This activity got its name because students sound like a group of busy bees while working on a task. To create a buzz group, the teacher selects a topic that will likely interest students and have some purpose; it's useful to try authentic tasks such as planning an actual trip to a museum.

C. Games and Related Activities

EFL/ESL teachers use games in the conversation class. A variety of games exist to teach grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation; there are picture, psychology, memory, guessing card and board games.

D. Computer-Mediated Communications

There are many ways to engage students in conversation through the use of computers. One of the first things some people think of is e-mail. While e-mail provides opportunities for students to communicate, it only partly creates conversation. This can include using abbreviated speech-like grammar, a question-response-react style, and content appropriate to informal and formal conversations.

Q4/ How Do EFL/ESL Teach Pronunciation?

Teaching Pronunciation: Creative Activities

One activity makes use of minimal pairs (two words pronounced exactly the same except for one difference-e.g., lice and rice, lap and lab). The teacher selects pairs that are problematic for students and lists them on the board. For

Example, students from Spain might benefit from grappling with these minimal

Pairs:

List A:

Seat eat

List B:

Sit it

Each sheep

Itch ship

The teacher begins by calling out a word and then students tell the teacher whether it is from list A or B. Once the students understand the rules, they take turns selecting and pronouncing words, while classmates and the teacher tell the speaker the correct answer.

This activity is most useful in homogenous classroom settings where the students speak the same first language.

Another activity uses a kazoo to focus on patterns of intonation. With a kazoo, the teacher can avoid words and grammar and focus only on intonation patterns. A number of intonation patterns can be taught-for instance, patterns for declarative sentences, yes-no questions, and tag questions.

To prepare the Pronunciation Computer activity, the teacher needs to collect samples of students' English during classroom activities. The teacher writes these samples (words, phrases, sentences) on the board and numbers each item. The students, who are sitting in a semicircle facing the board, are then told to study the list of language items and to raise their hands if they would like to practice an item.