

Creating stress-free speaking activities for low-level (adult) learners

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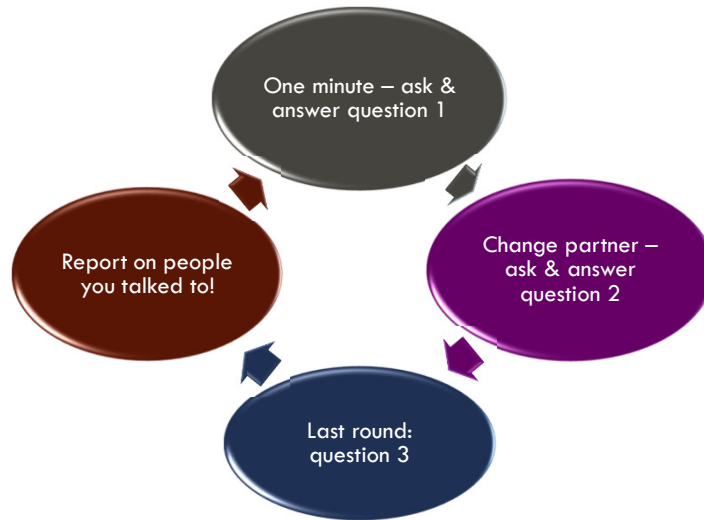
This workshop is based on my article for Business Issues 88 (Autumn 2014).

There is one activity by Andreas Grundtvig which I cannot include here, the Vocab Briefcase, but which I love working with and which is downloadable from the following link:

<http://www.cornelsen.de/cbb/reihe/r-3027/ra-7038/materialien>

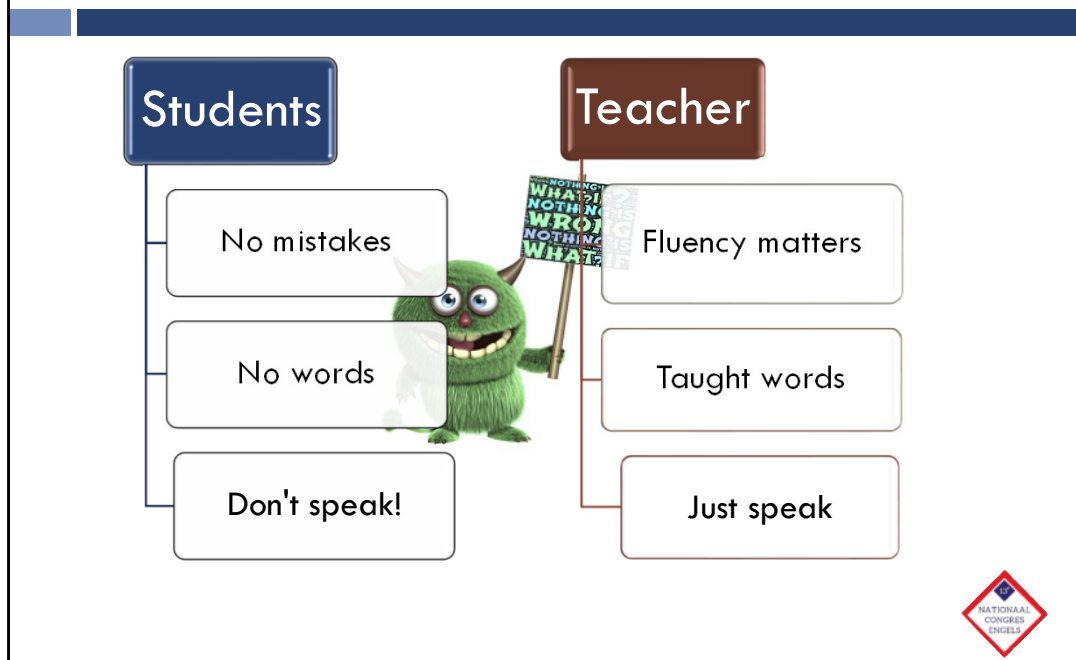
Teachers working with A1/A2 students may find the other activities also useful.

Warm up: Speed Dating



A useful warmer is speed dating or speed conversations, whatever you want to call it: students get cards with three questions, for example, small talk or about their job; they have to interview one person about one question and vice versa; they swap partners after each round. Rounds must be timed to one minute (or maybe two). We need to tie in this exercise, debriefing our students on what they have produced – use of present simple, transfer I do he or she does – that will be the focus of the lesson. This activity can also be used after work on a certain topic, e.g. holiday vocabulary.

Two perspectives



This is how they feel, and this is what I used to think. They are afraid of making mistakes, have little chance of practising English, have no confidence, no positive self-talk to build any confidence, and are often scarred by school experience. It took me a while to find out that speaking is a real challenge for them.

Plan for today

- Framework
- Activities:
 - Rules
 - Do them
 - Debriefing
 - Where can you use this? What level? What to observe (preparations, follow-up etc.)
- Wrap up
- Coffee somewhere in between

That is the structure of the workshop and you can use the worksheet provided.

Teaching environment

- Face-to-face?
- Telephone?
- Virtual classroom?
- Groups (how big)?
- One-on-one?
- In-company?
- School?
- University?



I teach a course of management assistants where we have different levels of English; they need to boost speaking confidence, and they have only this one day workshop.

Opportunities

Warmer activities

Pair and group work

Eliciting during lesson/questions

Classroom presentation/talk

Role play/simulations

There are different types of speaking activities and they can be used at different points in the lesson.

Preparing

- Minimum amount for teacher
- Good timing
- Pair and group work
- Heads up, heads down, heads together
- Clear input/briefing
- Check preparation time: groups, not individuals
- Repeat instructions, give clear assignments
- Prepare cards with different strategies



What to do and when? Good timing needed, pair and group work throughout the lessons; clear input/briefing, exposing/gathering of phrases (e.g. mind-mapping, hangman, guessing games, phrase brainstorming on flip chart/cards/pin board). Speaking activity in the beginning needs to prepare for activities in the end/later on. Don't keep them for the very end!

Clear instructions and assignment of roles. Best with prepared worksheets even for observers! Repeat instructions three times and check with individual groups when preparing whether they know what to do.

Prepare cards with different ways of responding (e.g. meetings: agree/disagree, and conference call/complaints bingo).

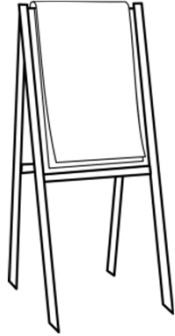
Warmers

- Help brain to tune in: should be no-brainers
- Must be relevant – to students, but also to session topic and later activities (pave the way)
- Can recycle last lesson, relate to familiar topics
- Need input and preparation
- Need debriefing: don't just stop the warmer



Reflect on the warmer used: what can you do with speed-dating?
Clear instructions? Timing? Debriefing? Relevant? What would be
the follow-up topic?

Eliciting vocab: hot seat

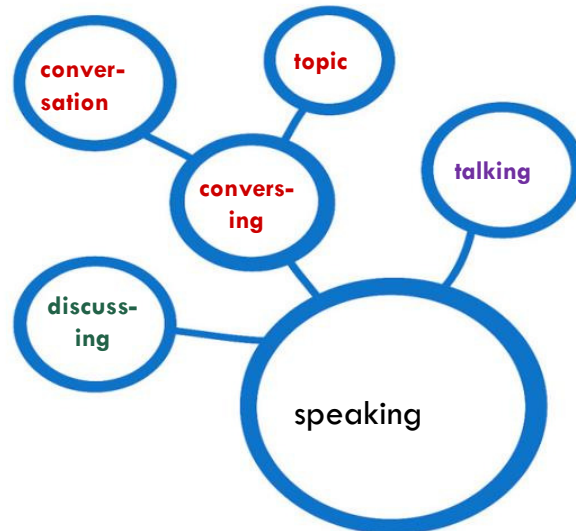


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Hot seat is a game played in two groups (make sure you have some reward like chocolate). Prepare two flip chart sheets on a wall, make sure there are enough marker pens. Write down words related to a topic of the last/present lesson (and to the speaking activity you want to do) on cards. Divide the students into two groups, maybe appoint one scribe per group. Each student gets one card (depending on group size, you can write between one and three words on the card) and checks that they know the words (it may be necessary for you to give them the word in their language). Explain the rules: each student describes one word from their card to their group. They are not allowed to show the cards, to mention any part of the word or to mime the word – the others guess the word and put it on their flip chart. Then it is the next student's turn until all words are used up. The team that finishes first wins. This game is very useful for students who always have a communication breakdown if they cannot find exactly the word they are looking for. When you transfer to the speaking activity to which the words are related, make sure students can see the words.

Eliciting vocab: mindmapping



Mindmapping also helps to build and structure vocabulary. The vocab briefcase mentioned earlier is one example. Students can do some brainstorming together, but if the group is larger, they may do that in small groups given one of the words to continue from. Mindmapping is good for establishing context, connecting words, creating word fields and collocations, visualising what you are going to say. Again ensure that the output remains visible during the speaking activity.

Pair and group work

- Help dissolving teaching front
- Give everyone opportunity to speak
- Less stress on learner (exposure)
- Need good group/team preparation
 - ▣ important how to pair/group people



If you divide students into groups to prepare their part of the speaking activity, get the respective groups to prepare together as they will help and complement each other. Remember that people can be shy or outgoing, think about that when you have pair work as, for example, two quiet people may never say anything, and need someone to draw them out and help them in the conversation. The roles should stop the outgoing speaker from dominating.

Consultants' circles



Intern

13/03/20

The consultants' circles is an activity that requires some preparation by the teacher. At A2/B1 topics need to be decided.

Students are divided into two groups. One half prepares some statements on the topic or a story related to a topic (highlight of the weekend, a problem at work). Students in the other group either get cards with response strategies (e.g. active listening, echoing, asking follow-up questions, paraphrasing, asking for clarification and so on) or prepare their own cards with the help of the teacher.

The students then make two circles. Those in the inside circle talk about their topic. Students outside respond. Students on the inside move after two or three minutes. Debriefing: check on the stories, but also on the different ways of responding (what worked best for whom).

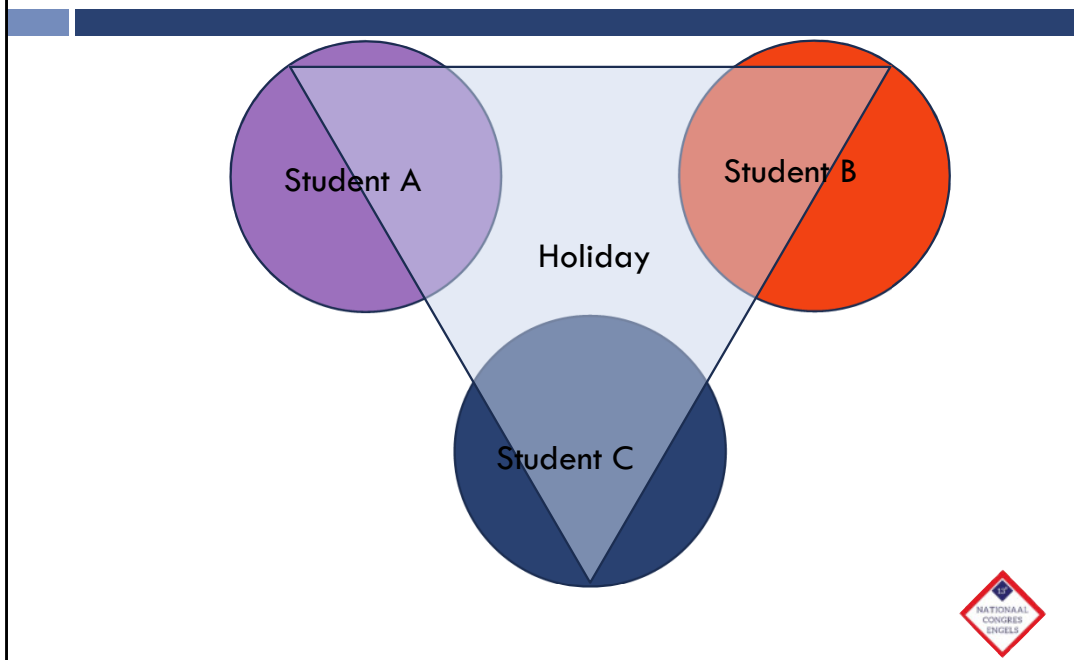
This activity is also useful at higher levels and in intercultural/communication courses where the outside circle gives advice to the inside circle (hence the name).

Three-minute stories



The teacher creates cards with nouns or adjectives on them referring to a past lesson, for example; each student draws three cards and has to tell a three-minute story. The stories can also be created in pairs. The other students must guess what the three words were (improves their listening and attention). This exercise is useful to boost spontaneity in students where they cannot prepare for ages what they are going to say but need to work with the words they have been given.

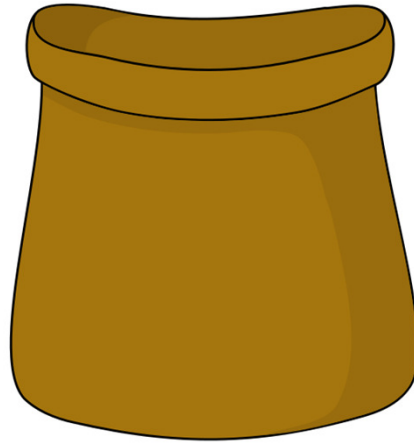
Triangle of common things



Students share their experience on one topic. They do that by talking, and they can take notes, or they can create a chart, maybe they put in pictures, and then compare what they have added to find out what they have in common. After that they present their chart to the other groups.

Actually, this is a kind of presentation training (but without saying so) and I often make them present the other team members' ideas (similar to speed dating). The preparation in the the group helps them to relax and rehearse, words missing can be provided by the teacher (or their smart phone dictionaries) and added to the chart.

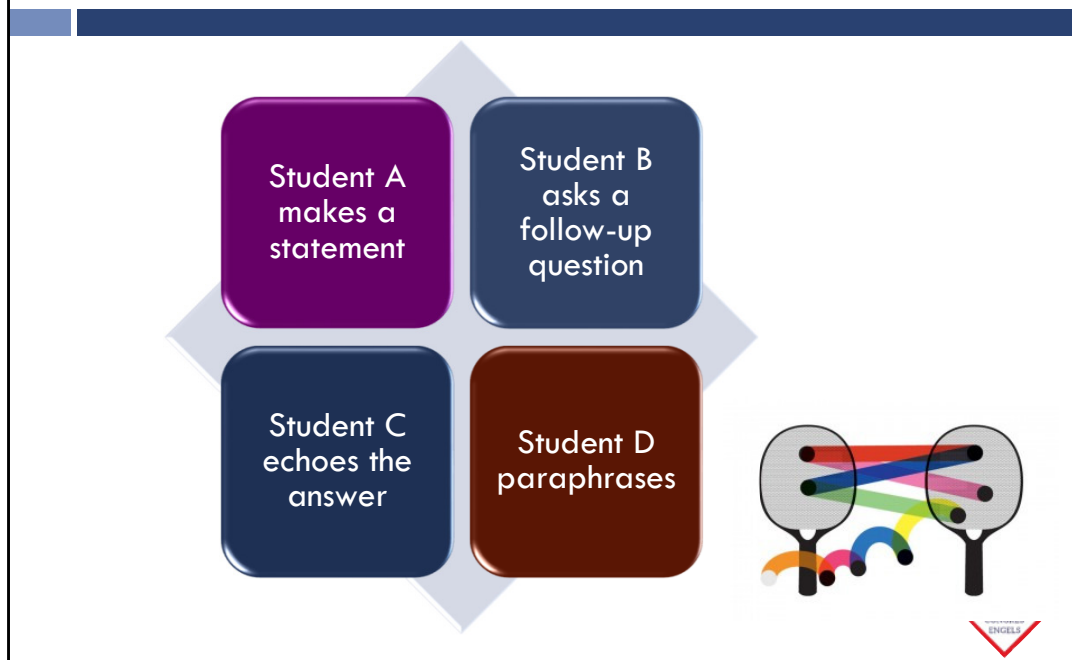
Wonder bag



Teacher collects objects from the students that go into the bag. Teacher and students prepare together language needed to describe objects (eliciting/recycling of past lessons: this is used for..., you can make...with this). This exercise is very useful for practising comparative and superlative forms of adjectives (this the best/biggest/greatest/most amazing). Prepare two charts: one with the adjectives, and one with sentence starters.

Each student pulls one object from the bag (has to check with the teacher that they know what it is called) and starts selling it to the others.

Ping-pong



Team up students in pairs of four.

Students get sets of cards which include a card with a statement related to the lesson topic; we need to save money on..., or we need to recruit more... and three cards with different respond strategies.

The first student gives their statement. The other students have to respond according to one of their strategy cards. The twist: if one strategy has been used in one round, the others need to use a different strategy. Then, once the student has used a particular strategy, they cannot use it again – so each has to make a statement and respond in three different ways; this is also very useful when you practise different forms of agreement and disagreement in a meeting/discussion. Students get a statement and cards with different ways of agreeing/disagreeing (mild to strong) and have to act that out. Tried that with a group of Koreans, Moroccans and Germans and low B1 level and it worked very well.

Help your students to fly high

info@tailored-trainings.de

QR code for
materials



Tibidabo, Barcelona



Please get in touch if you need more information or if you have tried out the exercises. I would love to hear your experience. Simply write to the e-mail address above. You can also find me on LinkedIn or Xing.