

# Introduction

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This book consists of activities to get learners of English speaking. That's it really.

Each activity allows learners the opportunity to speak and express their opinions on a wide range of issues. Preceding the activities, there are two pages of Useful Phrases for the learners. These are only a few of the possible phrases, and you should feel free to add your own.

The book is based on the principles of communicative language teaching and, to a large extent, the principles of the natural approach. First and foremost is the idea that learners need speaking practice and need time and space to be able to express themselves in the new language if they are to make progress.

I often tell my learners that learning a new language is like playing a musical instrument. Let's take the piano as an example; you can listen to piano music, you can read books about the piano and books of music theory, and all this will help you understand the piano and piano music. However, if you don't actually put your fingers on the keyboard and try to do it, if you don't actually *play* the piano, you will not be able to play it. You can only really learn to play by doing it.

Furthermore, even when you can play, you still need to practice regularly to keep and improve your proficiency.

## User Friendly Cards and Questionnaires

Most of these activities are very simple to prepare and execute. Some activities require you to make **cards** from a master (but once made they can be reused again and again, especially if you laminate them), and the other activities consist of putting your learners into pairs or groups and handing out a **questionnaire**. If you feel it is necessary, you can pre-teach some vocabulary; with this in mind, potentially difficult words are provided in the teacher's notes. **Lesson-by-lesson teacher's notes start on page 67 at the back of the book.**

These activities work with learners from intermediate to advanced proficiency level.

## The Teacher's Role

I have assumed throughout that these activities will be used with a class, and have indicated that the learners should be put into small groups of three to six. If the activity is a card game,

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you just need a set of cards for each group. If it is a questionnaire, give out a questionnaire to each student or to each group.

However, these activities can also be used by pairs, or even in a one-to-one, tutorial situation, in which you work with a single learner and give your opinions.

When working with groups, your role is to circulate, giving help and support as necessary. There are great opportunities for vocabulary input when these activities are going on.

However, and this is important, I would strongly advise against correcting any grammar mistakes during the activities. Let your learners try to express themselves. Interrupting their discussions with corrections can be very counter-productive. I have taught many learners who are afraid of making mistakes. Usually, because they are so used to being constantly corrected, it is difficult to make them talk. To be blunt, if students are afraid to talk, they quite simply never will learn. To return to the musical instrument analogy: people make a lot of mistakes when they are learning to play an instrument, but no one should get upset about those mistakes. It is all part of the learning process. Learners should be allowed to learn from their mistakes without feeling bad about them. Mistakes are friends. They show the learners where they need to go next.

Furthermore, it is a rare person indeed who is perfect in a second language, so why should your learners be perfect? During these activities, it is much better if you just make a note of any mistakes and deal with them at a later time, without even pointing out who made the mistake. These are free-speaking activities, so allow your learners to be free! Give them time and space to express themselves, and don't pester them with corrections while they are trying to do so.

This book is not meant to be worked through like a textbook. This is a stand-alone, photocopyable resource book to be turned to whenever you feel your learners need some speaking practice. Most activities work well on their own, but many can also be either warm-ups or follow-ups for listenings or readings that you are working with. It is also not always necessary to do the whole activity. With some activities it is possible to do some of the questions and return to the activity at a later time.

Not all activities work with all groups. I have included a "things to look out for" section in the teacher's notes with some guidelines to help on this point.

That's all, really. Have fun observing and listening to your learners speak!

*Phil Keegan*