

Practical Approaches to Keep Students Talking in a Conversational English Class

GOAL: Orchestrate events in such a way that students become active, thoughtful participants in literate conversations

Select a reading (article, story) as a framework for interaction with the students. Teacher may read it aloud while students listen, or students may read paragraph by paragraph. Ask provocative questions that bring the students' own experience to bear on the topic. Examples: Why do you think...? What if...? How do you feel about...? What is your opinion of...?

“Say Something” – (Round Robin technique) Ask a student to select a word or a phrase related to the discussion. Teacher begins by saying something about the word—asks a question, makes a comment, elaborates a point. Then students comment or question. Continue until the word or phrase is thoroughly explored. Continue with another word selected by another student.

Panel Discussion – Select three to four persons to sit at front of room as a panel. Teacher presents a statement or issue. Each person expresses his/her opinion. Use several panels so more students can be involved. Allow the class to interact with the panel.

Debate – Teacher presents a controversial topic. Students volunteer to form two teams to debate the pros and cons.

Line to Line – Students form two lines facing each other. Teacher suggests a topic and each two students facing each other discuss the topic for one minute. Then one line rotates so that each person has a new partner. Teacher suggests another topic. Continue with new topics until the entire line has rotated.

Repeat the Story – Select one student to leave the room. Teacher reads aloud a short story. The student who left the room returns and the class tells the story from memory to the student. All students should participate. Then the student must retell the whole story.

Walk-Around Discussions – Prepare a handout with questions and a space for two responses. Students walk around and ask each question to two classmates. They make notes and afterwards report their answers to the class. Questions can be about anything-- seeking advice, consequences for actions, etc.

Reaching Consensus – Prepare a handout with list of statements that may or may not be valid. Divide the class into groups. Each individual must indicate whether he/she agrees or disagrees. Then, if one person disagrees, the group should change the wording so that the statement is acceptable to all members of the group. They may not “agree to disagree.” Report orally.

Interviews/ Self-directed Interviews –Make sure students know the necessary question and answer structures. To avoid embarrassment because a student doesn't want to reveal thoughts and feelings in a certain area, each student could specify three to five topics he/she would like to be asked about.

Guest Speaker –A guest speaker can add spice and variety to your class. Students benefit from hearing a different voice. Be sure speaker knows it is a discussion class and will present material in an interactive way.