

Teacher Notes

Successful speakers... take responsibility for the conversation

These teacher notes give you guidance on how you could manage the activities with your class. We encourage you to consider follow-up activities where students can reflect on their language production and to create checklists for them to consider their own performance. You may want to offer extra support on some activities, eg by doing an example with the whole class first and/or having an observation checklist for when they listen to each other. You may also prefer to present the activities in other ways.

Feedback

Remember to give students feedback on how they are performing throughout. You may choose to cover different aspects of speaking in single parts, eg activity 1 = pronunciation, activity 2 = fluency, activity 3 = accuracy etc, then give whole feedback on the final activity.

Successful speakers... take responsibility for the conversation

At Trinity College London, we have studied the scripts from hundreds of our speaking exams. We wanted to find out what makes some test takers more successful than others. One thing that test takers who perform better do is take a more active part in the conversation. They take responsibility for helping the conversation to carry on.

How can you take responsibility for a conversation?

- You can be a supportive listener
- You can ask questions
- You can comment on what the other speaker has just said
- You can make suggestions

Here are two examples taken from Trinity exams.

Trinity tip

Being responsible for a conversation does not mean that you have to speak all the time. For a conversation to flow, it is important to create opportunities for the other person to speak.

Activity 1

Read the conversations between a test taker <TT> and an examiner <E> aloud. Which test taker is taking responsibility for the conversation? [Test taker B...](#)

Corpus extract

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| <p>A</p> <p><E> Okay, erm...more and more people seem to be doing most of their shopping on the internet these days. I prefer seeing things in the shops.</p> <p><TT> [Silent]</p> <p><E> Because it's cheaper. Is it cheaper?</p> <p><TT> Erm...some things, yes. Er some things no. Erm, no it isn't cheaper. But, erm someone had to get it for you so, if you paid this person, it's the same price.</p> <p><E> Really?</p> <p><TT> So...</p> <p><E> Okay. Am I right to be worried?</p> <p><TT> Erm...</p> <p><E> Am I right to be worried about the internet?</p> <p><TT> Erm...</p> <p><E> Do you think that I'm correct?</p> <p><TT> Yes.</p> <p><E> Worrying.</p> | <p>B</p> <p><E> My friend's son is really good at sport. He's thinking of giving up full-time education and concentrating on that as a career.'</p> <p><TT> Okay.</p> <p><E> He's asked for my advice and I'm not sure what to tell him.</p> <p><TT> Erm...how old is the boy?</p> <p><E> He's eighteen.</p> <p><TT> Eighteen</p> <p><E> Hmm</p> <p><TT> And where is he living?</p> <p><E> He, he lives with his parents here in London.</p> <p><TT> Yeah, okay...and what has he studied so far?</p> <p><E> Well, he's eighteen so he's done his GCSEs and I think he's in the middle of A levels.</p> <p><TT> A levels, hmm, yeah...</p> <p><E> Yeah.</p> <p><TT> Hmm, I think if he's in the middle of A levels he should at least complete the A levels at the moment.</p> <p><E> Hmm, mmm...</p> <p><TT> Ermm...that would be really good.</p> |
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Trinity tip

While you are thinking of what to say, you can echo something that the other person has said.

- <A> He's eighteen
 Eighteen, mm...

This shows that you have been listening and are thinking about the conversation. To do this successfully, you should echo the main point, not just random words.

Trinity tip

To help someone continue speaking, you can ask simple questions to move the conversation along.

Activity 2

Read aloud. Tick the ones that show good echoing.

- a) 'I'm thinking of taking up mountain climbing.' 'Taking up...'
- b) 'I'm thinking of taking up mountain climbing.' 'Mountain climbing...'
- c) 'He's still only sixteen but he thinks he knows everything!' 'Sixteen...'
- d) 'He's still only sixteen but he thinks he knows everything!' 'He knows...'
- e) 'She's just got her degree and now she wants to do an MA.' 'An MA...'
- f) 'She's just got her degree and now she wants to do an MA.' 'She wants...'

Activity 3

Practise echoing what someone has just said. Use these prompts:

- a) I'm thinking of moving to Paris. **To Paris. / Moving to Paris.**
- b) She's only sixteen! **Sixteen! / Only sixteen!**
- c) You can find anything on the internet! **Anything! / Yes, anything.**
- d) He's really tall and he can never find clothes that fit him. **Really tall. / Ah...that fit him.**

Trinity tip

Another way in which you can take responsibility for the conversation is by making small comments as the other person is speaking.

For example: 'I see' 'Right' 'Yes' 'Yeah' 'Oh'

If you say 'Yes' and 'Yeah' when someone is speaking, this doesn't mean that you are necessarily agreeing with them. It means that you are encouraging them to continue speaking.

This conversation skill is called 'back-channelling'. It has different functions:

- ▶ You can show that you understand what someone is saying
- ▶ You can encourage the other person to continue speaking
- ▶ The tone of voice that you use when you back-channel can indicate your attitude or how you feel about what is being said.

Activity 4

Read aloud with a partner and add short comments. Suggestions for comment locations are highlighted with arrows.

My partner has suggested that we go on a trip. He wants to go somewhere really unusual, like the jungle in Borneo. But it will cost so much money and I'm not sure that I want to do something like that. I think I'd rather go to a nice hotel with a pool!

Activity 5

Choose from these topics:

- a) Someone you admire
- b) How to live a healthy life
- c) How to be a good friend

Give students some planning time to think about what they would like to say. Then ask them to work in pairs.

First, one of you tries to speak for a minute with no encouragement or comments from the other speaker. Then do the activity again, this time with one of you doing the main speaking and the other echoing, commenting and asking short questions.

Encourage the students to use a variety of discourse strategies; echoing, asking short questions, making suggestions and commenting briefly.