



Five College Center for World Languages

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[Home](#) > [Five College Center for World Languages Conversation Partner Training Tutorial](#) > Section 2: Activities

Section 2: Activities

Section 2: Conversation Session Activities

2A: Types of Activities

2A: What Activities are Used in a Conversation Session?

Format of a Conversation Session

You will want to prepare ahead of time what activities you are going to use and when you are going to use them during the conversation session. You may have only one or two language learners in the session. Therefore prepare activities that you can use with one person and can adapt them to use with two or more. Dialogues and role-play are particularly useful in creating authentic conversations as well as vocabulary games and activities.

Warm-up Activities

Plan to have one or two activities that can be used at the beginning of the session. It may take some time for the language learner to adjust to speaking in the target language. Make sure these activities are not too challenging and are in keeping with the material the student is covering in his/her syllabus. Warm-up activities may include asking how someone is doing, a small vocabulary game, and maybe practicing different types of greetings (informal, formal). A vocabulary game can be as simple as bringing in a set of pictures that correspond to the vocabulary words and asking the student to tell you the correct vocabulary word for each picture.

Role-play and Dialogue Activities

Role-play and dialogue activities can include activities such as the examples below. In a conversation session with only one student the conversation partner will need to participate in the activity, whereas, in a situation with two or more students, the conversation partner can divide the students into pairs and work with one student if there is an odd number.

- You play the seller and the student is the customer. Role-play a scenario in which different customers come to you to buy different items that you have brought in.

- Role-play a dinner party situation in which everyone must introduce her/himself to the host (the conversation partner) and explain where s/he is from, what s/he does, and how happy s/he is to meet the host.
- Ask simple questions as a warm-up activity. These questions should require short and easy answers. Questions may include “Do you study at Smith?” “Where do you study?” “What is your major?” “Where are you from?”
- Using the present tense, ask the student to describe his/her daily routine.
- Practice numbers! Bring in pictures of different objects that show multiples of the specific objects. For example, a picture of five houses. Then, ask the student how many houses are in the picture.

Some activities may need additional props such as pictures from a magazine or the internet, a copy of a country’s map etc. Some number games or vocabulary activities are more effective with visual images. These materials are helpful and reinforce a language learner’s use of the target language. Use what you think will work in helping encourage conversation and speaking.

Be sure when you are reenacting a dialogue or role-play with a student that both you and the student are standing up, greeting each other, and using appropriate body language and gestures to recreate a more authentic context. Act out the dialogues rather than remain seated. Try to establish real conversations.

Identity Cards

Identity cards refer to a set of index cards (or sheets of paper) that have information related to different “identities” on the card. These cards are useful in letting language learners practice speaking to different people in different contexts. It builds upon their ability to address people of all ages and social stations. Here is an example of what may be included on an identity card. Keep in mind that, the more the student learns in the language, the more information you can start to add to identity cards.

Sample identity card for a complete beginner:

Name: Rose Thompson
 Age: 45
 Occupation: teacher

Sample of an identity card for a beginner with more grammar experience:

Name: Rose Thompson
 Age: 45
 Occupation: teacher
 Favorite opera: La Traviata
 Hobbies: singing, running, and cooking.

In the second example some more attributes about Ms. Thompson were added because the student is now able to utilize this information correctly in a conversation.

2B: Menu of Activities

2B: A Menu of Speaking Activities

Speaking Activities for Conversation Partners

Here you will find a variety of different speaking activities you may use during your conversation sessions. They are divided according to different communicative skills.

Each activity can be used with one person or with more than one person. For those activities that are dialogues, the conversation partner will need to act out the role-play and dialogue with the other person in the session. When doing so, make sure that the roles in the dialogue are switched so that the student has the opportunity to practice both roles. This is to ensure that the person in the conversation session learning the language has the opportunity to practice a variety of different identities as well as both formal and informal registers.

Group 1

Student Skills Group 1: Basic greetings, alphabet, pronouncing words

1. Role play a situation in which two people meet for the first time and introduce themselves using the basic greetings. They are expected to greet each other using simple vocabulary associated with basic greetings. These include "hello" "my name is" "how are you?" "I am fine" "what is your name" and "goodbye." If the book does not offer the expressions/vocabulary for "my name is" and "what is your name" you may write these on the board and ask students to repeat your pronunciation of them.
2. Role play a situation in which a professor and student meet for the first time. In this greet each other using simple vocabulary associated with basic greetings within a formal context.
3. Bring in pictures of different famous people you may have found on the internet or in the magazine. Include famous people with whom one would use formal address such as a president or famous writer. Also choose images of people who would be considered a student's peers such as teenage pop stars or images of young children. Ask student(s) to address each image deciding whether to use a formal or informal address. This is used to practice formal vs. informal context.
4. Create a set of imaginary identities using flashcards. On each flashcard simply write the name of the person along with their profession or age. Ask student(s) to role-play using their identities and greet each other for the first time. Student(s) will need to decide whether to use informal or formal language.
5. Bring in a set of flashcards containing the letters of the alphabet. Practice the pronunciation of each letter with the group. After you have practiced the alphabet together, show one letter at a

time and ask for its pronunciation.

6. Create a list of vocabulary words that reflect the different sounds the student(s) has/have studied. You can choose words that may be illustrated by a picture, for example a picture of an apple to emphasize the pronunciation of the word "apple." You can use these pictures by first showing the student(s) the picture and writing out the word on the blackboard. Ask for the pronunciation of the word after you have pronounced it. Follow-up this activity with a quick drill in which you show each image and ask for the word in order to practice pronunciation.
7. Bring in very simple and basic advertisements in your language. Ask for a simple pronunciation of the letter combinations and words seen. It is not important that the student(s) understand what is being read, but rather it is important that they are able to handle the pronunciation of different sounds. It also lets the student(s) see what an advertisement or basic ad looks like in the target language.
8. Reenact a dinner party in which you each take turn playing the host and each person needs to address the host and introduce him/herself. This activity can be done with two people who need to role-play different identities simultaneously.

Group 2

Student Skills Group 2: Numbers 1-9, 10-20, colors, days of the week, months of the year

1. Choose an object in the room. Ask for the number of objects in the room to be counted. For example you may choose a pencil and there are three pencils in the classroom.
2. Role-play a scenario in which two students meet for the first time. They introduce themselves using the basic greetings they have already studied and exchange phone numbers. Each student must write down the phone number s/he hears and then repeat it back to their role-playing partner to verify it is correct.
3. Role-play a scenario in which a student runs into a friend's parent and asks for his/her friend's cell phone number from the parent. This requires the use of both the formal and informal depending on which role is being recited. Be sure that each person role-playing has the opportunity to switch his/her role.
4. Bring in dried beans or an object that easily comes in multiples. Place the maximum number student(s) have learned of the object (for example if they studied 1-20 then place 20) on a table. Ask how many there are. After they answer, start to take away a 2-4 at a time and continue to ask how many there are until there is only 1 left. You can also use to practice simple arithmetic with numbers.
5. Bring in a series of pictures of the different seasons. Be sure one can easily recognize which season is which. Ask which months belong to each season.

6. Bring in a series of sports and activities done in all four of the different seasons. For example images of people skiing in the winter or at the beach in the summer. Ask in which month can

one do these activities. Which season?

7. Role-play two students meeting for the first time. They introduce themselves using basic greetings and ask for the following information: (1) telephone numbers and (2) addresses.
8. Create a sample page of a planner (agenda book/calendar) for the current week. Place the month, the year, and the numbers but not the days of the week. Point to each slot and ask for the correct day of the week. If dates have been studied, then you can also ask for the full date for each day.
9. As a group, ask for the names of the different colors seen in the room.
10. Bring in different colored images, such as those in a magazine, and ask for the names of the colors seen in the images.
11. Conversation starter question: What is your favorite color? This can be a question you ask towards the beginning of a conversation as a warm-up to the next activity.

Group 3

Student Skills Group 3: The verb “to be,” present tense, present progressive, adjectives, possessive pronouns, family members

1. Role-play: Two college roommates meet for the first time in their dorm room. They greet each other, exchange phone numbers, email addresses, and discuss what classes they are taking each day of the week.
 2. Reenact a conversation between a university student and his/her advisor. The advisor will ask the student which classes s/he is taking and on which days + any extra activities/organizations s/he is participating in. This allows for practice of formal and informal registers.
 3. Role-play a phone conversation between two friends. One friend is studying abroad and the other friend is still at home. The friend at home is interested to know about what the other friend is doing in the new country. What is his/her class schedule like, where does s/he go everyday? What does s/he eat everyday? etc.
 4. Role-play a phone conversation between two students discussing what they are doing in that current moment.
 5. Using identity cards role-play a conversation between guests at a dinner party. Each person will be asked to introduce him/herself, what s/he does for a living, where s/he is from, how many language s/he speaks what are his/her hobbies etc.
 6. Discuss family trees and describe the different family members of the tree using different descriptive adjectives.
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7. Ask for each person in the session to describe him/herself using descriptive adjectives.
8. Bring the family tree of a famous family in popular culture and ask for the familial relationships between the members of the family. You can choose a famous family in American popular culture or a famous family in the target language's popular culture. Be sure to create the family tree so that the different relationships are easily understood.
9. Ask how each person normally celebrates his/her birthday (this requires use of the present tense).
10. Ask each person to describe one of his/her good friends. What is his/her name? What does s/he look like? What is his/her personality like? What does s/he study?
11. An interview between two people:
 - a. Where are you from?
 - b. What languages do you speak?
 - c. What are you studying?
 - d. Where do you attend school?

If you have more than one participant in the session, ask for each participant to present the person s/he interviewed.

12. Role-play a conversation between two students deciding on where to go for lunch, when to meet and where they will meet.
13. Bring in pictures of different celebrities and ask for them to be described using descriptive adjectives.

Group 4

Student Skills Group 4: Transportation, doctor visits, grocery shopping, shopping, ordering food/restaurants, hotels, housing

1. Bring in a series of pictures of different modes of transportation such as a picture of a train, airplane, bicycle etc. Ask for the name of each object that is in the picture. Afterwards, ask which mode of transportation one uses to get to different places. For example, to get to India do you take a bus or a plane? Etc.
 2. Role-play a phone conversation between an airline representative and a student purchasing his/her airline ticket to his study abroad destination.
 3. Role-play a dialogue between a ticket cashier and a someone looking to purchase a train ticket at the train station. The person should explain where s/he wants to go, ask how much it will cost, and how long is the trip.
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4. Role-play the following scenario if you have more than 1 person: two students are studying abroad together and have decided to rent a car to travel around. They call the car rental company and inquire about the car rental specifics: how much does it cost per day, where are they not allowed to drive to? Etc. Be sure each student has the opportunity to play the part of the car rental company's representative.
5. Role-play the following situation: While studying abroad a student decides to take a taxi to visit a friend who visits a bit outside of the city. Role-play the conversation between the taxi driver and student.
6. Role-play a typical conversation one encounters going through customs in the target language's country/countries.
7. Role-play a conversation between a study-abroad student and a university student in the host country. The university student is selling his/her bicycle and the study abroad student is interested in buying it.
8. Bring in either the actual objects or photographs of different produce such as fruits vegetables etc. Things one would normally find at an outdoor grocer or in a grocery shop. Role-play a conversation between a seller and a buyer. If bargaining is done in the target language's country than incorporate it into the conversation.
9. Bring in photographs of different foods and items typically found for sale at open markets. Have one person act as the seller while the other acts as the buyer. Be sure they have the chance to switch roles.
10. Role-play the following situation: two students are preparing a birthday dinner for a common friend. They talk about what they want to make and create a list of items they need to buy at the grocery store.
11. Role-play a situation in which a foreign exchange student walks into a grocery store but is unable to find the following items: toothpaste, soap, shampoo, laundry detergent, and band aids. S/he asks one of the workers at the store for help.
12. Act out the following: a study abroad student has just arrived in the country of his/her destination but his/her luggage cannot be found! Role-play a conversation between the student and his/her study abroad director explaining the situation.
13. Act out a situation in which a foreign exchange student has fallen ill. S/he has had a stomach ache for three days accompanied by a headache. S/he goes to the doctor and describes his/her symptoms to the doctor.
14. Role-play a conversation between a hotel guest and a hotel receptionist. The guest complains about the following problems:
 - a. The lights in the room don't work.
 - b. There is no hot water.
 - c. The air conditioning does not work
 - d. The phone does not work.

Be sure students switch roles and if possible partners.

15. Role-play a phone conversation between a hotel receptionist and a guest making a hotel reservation.
16. Bring in a newspaper listing of apartments for rent in the target language. Read the listing and then role-play a conversation between a prospective renter and the owner based on what has been read in the listing.
17. Bring in a sample of a menu in the target language. Using the menu, role-play a restaurant outing. One person can play the part of the waiter/waitress while the other(s) will act as the diners.

Group 5

Student Skills Group 5: Simple past tense, habitual past tense, future tense, vocabulary associated with vacation, education, and work

1. Ask each person to describe what s/he did last summer.
 2. Create a set of identity cards and hand them out. Role-play a dinner party where everyone is trying to get to know everyone else. Each person talks about his/her job, where they went for vacation last year, and when their next vacation will be. This can be done with just 2 people or with more.
 3. Create a set of new horoscopes for each person in the room using the future tense or create a new horoscope for each sign.
 4. Ask the students individually to share how they imagine their life in 10 years using the future tense.
 5. Role-play the following scenario: a study abroad student meets with his/her advisor at the university s/he is studying at abroad. The advisor asks the student to bring him/her up to date with the student's current educational history for example:
 - a. What does s/he study?
 - b. What other languages does s/he study?
 - c. What other subjects has s/he taken?
 - d. How many courses did s/he take last semester
 6. Bring in an example of a job classifieds that list different employment opportunities. Read through the different employment opportunities and discuss which jobs interest the student(s) and why.
 7. Reenact a job interview between a recent college graduate and a prospective employer. The student(s) may choose the type of work field.
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8. Ask each person to describe his/her daily routine last semester using the habitual tense.
9. Role-play the following scenario: A student recently comes back from a study abroad experience and tells his/her grandparent all about what s/he did during the study abroad.
10. Bring in pictures of different destination areas from the target culture's country/countries. Ask for an itinerary to be planned for one of the destinations and using the future tense, share what they will do once they arrive there.
11. Ask each person to describe his/her dream job. What kind of tasks does this job require? What does someone with this job do everyday?
12. Create a story: create your own character for a story and have each person add sentences to the story.

2C: Examples & Assignment

2C: Video Examples and Section 2 Written Assignment

Section 2 Written Assignment

First watch the video examples below. Even though you may not understand the language involved, you can still observe the way the conversation partner and students interact.

Think about these questions, write down your notes, be prepared to talk about them in group discussion. If you are doing this training individually, you will need to prepare written answers to each question and e-mail your written work to the FCCSWL office before scheduling your individual conference.

1. Study the examples of speaking activities and watch the sample videos. Get a sense of the wide range of speaking activities that can be used in a conversation session. What makes each of the videos a good example of a speaking session activity?
2. Carefully look over the very first unit in the textbook used for your language. Make a list of the types of vocabulary and language usage your students learn in the first lesson. Go through the Menu of Speaking Activities and choose three activities that could be used with students studying the first unit. Describe how you would introduce each of these three activities in the conversation session. In other words, how would you give the students instructions for the activity? How will you communicate what you want them to do?
3. Chose any unit in the second half of the textbook used for your language. Go through the menu of speaking activities and select at least three activities that are appropriate for practicing what is covered in that unit. Describe which three activities you have chosen, why you chose those activities, and how you will adapt the generic instructions to make an activity that is representative of your language and culture.

Video Examples

Offering Cake

Questions and Answers

Turkish Bingo

Instructions for a Role Play

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