

Tips for Volunteers and Speaking Clubs

English language clubs with volunteers are often some of the most successful and most popular Corner activities. They are effective, useful, and can be easy to run once you get them started. Here are some tips we have collected from some of our English Conversation Club volunteers for you to share with potential volunteers or with others who are already volunteering at your Corner!

General tips:

- Don't be afraid of silence! After asking a question in English, sometimes you will have to wait a little bit while someone gets the courage to speak, but the waiting can be better than just jumping in and trying to fill the silence. If the silence continues, rephrase the question.
- Sharing information and perspectives about the U.S. is great, but don't do too much talking – the goal is to get the guests to speak.
- Don't correct every mistake. Speaking and communication are more important than perfect grammar.

Activity and Presentation Tips:

- Some volunteers like opening up with a general discussion topic for warm up, and then move on to an activity.
- Holiday traditions make great topics for conversations and activities. Tea drinking, Christmas, national stereotypes and gender roles, Valentine's Day, Black History Month, St. Patrick's Day, and religious diversity, are some examples of successful topics.

Celebrate! Holidays in the U.S.A.

<http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/resources-et/celebrate.html>

- Singing songs is a great way to get participants involved.

Sing out Loud: Children's Songs & Traditional Songs

<http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/resforteach/pubcat/classtext/iskills/solcs.html>

<http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/resforteach/pubcat/classtext/iskills/solts.html>

- Pair and small group work is crucial – this gives more people the chance to speak. There is nothing wrong with starting an activity together, then splitting up a group, and going back and forth between different subgroups.
- After breaking up into pairs/small groups, come back to the big group and have someone from each pair/small group share some aspect of what was discussed in the small group with the big group.
- In a large group discussion, it's sometimes a good idea to shuffle index cards with the students' names written on them and pick these at random to call on participants. This way nobody feels "picked on by the teacher" but you get everyone to participate and prevent the extroverts from taking over.

More Specific Activities:

- Bring some pictures from a trip and pass them around for discussion. Ask your participants to talk about places they have been or would like to go.
- Guess the food: Give students a vocabulary list and an example of a recipe. Give pairs 10 minutes to write out their own recipe. Each pair presents their recipe without revealing the title. The other students listen and guess what the recipe is.

- Guilty: (http://esl.about.com/cs/teachingresources/a/bl_guilty.htm): Each pair makes an alibi and then is questioned individually (that is, the other person leaves the room) by the rest of the group. The pair with the most holes in their alibi is guilty of the crime. This takes about 20 minutes plus 5 minutes for each pair.
- Press Conference: (http://esl.about.com/od/conversationlessonplans/a/press_conf.htm): Groups of 3-5 come up with a product with a defect and the other groups ask them yes/no questions about the product and the defect until they figure out what it is. As an added twist, you can have the groups write and perform advertisements. If there is less time, you can have the groups just do the invention and skip the defect. Thinking up an invention typically takes about 30-40 minutes and each round of guessing (the invention and defect are separate rounds) takes about 5 minutes.
- Interview: A pair performs an interview of a famous figure from literature/television/history and the rest of the group tries to guess who it is. The winner goes next. This is a good time filler and can be fit into many different topics.

Organization and Encouraging Attendance

- Some volunteers pass around a piece of paper for people to write their names and phone numbers/e-mail addresses, and then send out announcements about a week before each meeting.
- Targeting potential participants directly is most effective, often more useful than indirect approaches like putting up fliers. Make announcements in relevant university departments, call teachers, ask teachers to announce activities in class, mention it to students, maintain email lists, text the students you're closer to, etc. People have to feel comfortable about going.
- Get students to come in groups. Some of the most loyal club-goers are sometimes entire sections of students. This works really nicely because they're excited to be there with their friends, so they're more likely to participate, and it makes the whole thing a lot less scary.
- Keep the enthusiasm up, but don't get discouraged if your crowd is reduced to a core. Sometimes initial meetings draw more people because of the club's novelty, but then attendance tapers off. The students who keep coming back are the ones who actually care, so this is not necessarily a bad thing. Try to keep things new and interesting, but know that fewer people doesn't have to mean less success.
- Show movies and do question and answer sessions afterwards. If the Corner has regularly scheduled movies, this could be a nice addition -- one American Corner chat club leader shows up randomly to movie showings at her local corner to do this when she has time, in addition to her English language club.

Other Resources:

- State Department Office of English Language Program's Materials for Teaching and Learning English: <http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/resources-et.html>
- American English: <http://americanenglish.state.gov>

Training for Volunteers: Shaping the Way We Teach English Webinars

- Using Online Materials for Teaching English: <https://statedept.connectsolutions.com/p2cpvao3yii>
- Warm-ups & Ice Breakers for All Ages: <https://statedept.connectsolutions.com/p17361851>
- Language Games for All Levels: <https://statedept.connectsolutions.com/p8im7vohsn4>



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