

# TEACHING EFFECTIVE ORAL COMMUNICATION by Ingrid Freebairn

**Ingrid Freebairn** is a well-known and highly-respected author with years of experience in ELT. Together with Brian Abbs, Ingrid has written many of our most successful courses, including Sky, Snapshot, Blueprint, Flying Start, Discoveries and Strategies. As well as teaching, teacher-training and writing, Ingrid has also worked as an examiner for The University of Cambridge and an inspector of private language schools for the British Council. In the course of her work, she has travelled widely in Europe, the US and Latin America.

The whole point of learning English for most students is to be able to use it, to be able to speak it. If students are truly motivated, they will speak.

## Problems of motivating teenagers

- large classes
- mixed levels of ability
- difficult home background
- unsuccessful previous language learning experience
- onset of adolescence involving preoccupation with themselves, their friends, and lives outside classroom
- lack of self-confidence

## Why teenagers are reluctant to speak

- unmotivated
- shy and embarrassed
- frustrated – not enough language
- not interested in topic
- reluctant to make mistakes

## Principles of developing speaking skills:

1. Give a natural and lively model: listening and repeating is an essential stage.
2. Give plenty of controlled practice: less opportunity to make mistakes so it gives confidence.
3. Include simple functional exchanges and situations: motivating because students can identify with situations + easy to practise in pairs and fun to act out.
4. Give opportunities for personalisation: easier and more motivating to talk about oneself.
5. Make sure that topics for discussion are within their interest and experience.

If we spend enough time building up speaking skills, we can almost guarantee a positive outcome for every student, from the high achiever to the more reluctant member of the class.

## Speaking tips

- Get students used to speaking in class. Try and use English as much as possible e.g. for requests, instructions, giving praise, correcting etc.

- Allow time to prepare and rehearse. Initial pair or group work will help shy students.
- Make sure the students aren't going to struggle with new words or expressions.
- To stimulate everyday conversation, avoid Yes/No questions, e.g. Did you have a good weekend? Instead ask questions beginning with *What/Where/How/Why* etc. e.g. *What did you do at the weekend?*
- With more confident students, prompt with *Tell me what/why/how* you etc. or *Tell me about your (weekend)...* This allows students to say more than one sentence at a time.
- Don't correct in mid-flow. Go round and monitor conversations, making notes of any mistakes. Any common errors can be taken up with the whole class, without pointing a finger at any individual.
- If possible, record your students speaking now and again. Correction is much more effective when they can hear their own mistakes.
- Try not to let just one or two students dominate. Varying how you pair or group the students can sometimes help.
- Encourage and praise wherever possible. With weaker students, compliment on the content. *That's a good point, Carlos.*

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**MOTIVATING TEENAGE LEARNERS**

Keeping learners engaged and focused is one of the biggest challenges for teachers working with teenagers. The intrinsically motivated teenage learner is generally considered to be a rare species. Are we helpless in our efforts to engage learners and therefore achieve better learning outcomes?

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