

Skyteach

Best speaking activities one-on-one

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by Yuliia Belonog

Foreword

There are lots of activities for group lessons such as games, roleplays. But if a teacher works one-on-one online or in a real classroom mode the choice is not so various and a bit limited.

Individual classes are very popular with adults who are very busy to commute to class or want more personalized attitude. In addition, what is the most frequent learning goal? Of course, speaking. Adults want to be able to talk. We all know that is impossible without other skills and subskills such as listening, reading, grammar and vocabulary. So in this resource book you can find some speaking tasks which are suitable for any level and almost any topic. You know your students better and can adaptate these activities to make them more effective and interesting.

The advantage of these tasks is that they allow to activate target grammar and vocabulary in an engaging way. We suggest using them after some controlled practice or as revision activities.

Contents

1. Do you know someone who	4
2. Two truths, one lie	5
3. Guess my answer	6
4. Celebrity interviews	7
5. Memory test	8
6. Wheel of fortune	9
7. Voice -over	10
8. Use the words	11-12
9. Assosiations	13
10. A reason why	14
11. Yes, but	15
12. Quotes	16
13. Webprojects	17
14. What the connection	18
15. Find similiarities between us	19

Do you know anyone who....?

Level: elementary and higher.

Preparation: points for discussion.

Focus: any grammar or vocabulary topic.

We are all familiar with a classic communicative speaking task “Find someone who...”. It’s a great activity if you work with a group. Students have to mingle and ask the questions to fill in the table.

Example,

Find someone who...

Activity	Name	More details
Likes heavy metal	Alice	ACDC
Has been to a rock concert	Peter	The Scorpions, last March
Will go to a music festival this year	Mary	She is going to attend Eurovision

How to adapt it to one-on-one teaching? Instead of “Find someone who...” use

Do you know anyone who... Give more details

likes heavy metal

has been to a rock concert

will go to a music festival this year

Sample answer: My husband has been to a rock concert. ‘Muse’ performed in Berlin. He went there two years ago and he liked it very much.

Sometimes you don’t need to make any alterations to the task from the book. This activity can help you to practice any grammar topic like Present Simple, Present Perfect, Past Simple, Present Continuous, Be going to, would like etc. And it can be used with any vocabulary topic as well.

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Two truths, one lie

Level: elementary and higher

Preparation: no preparation

Focus: any grammar or vocabulary topic.



If you ask your student to make sentences with new words, this task will be not communicative. Do we make sentences in order just to make them in everyday life? No, we make sentences to use them in conversations. Instead of this rather boring task, ask your student to make three sentences, two of which will be truth and one lie. Of course, it is necessary to use key grammar structure.

Photo by Oli Dale

For example,

I have never written an article.

My family has been to Paris.

I have won in a dancing competition.

The student reads out the sentences and the teacher needs to guess which one is a lie. For higher levels the teacher can ask more questions to identify it. You can also read your sentences to the student and let him or her guess. As you see, the student still practices “Present Perfect” but he/she talks about his/her experience and is more engaged because it is a kind of a game and is more entertaining.

Guess my answer

Level: pre-intermediate and higher.

Preparation: sentences with target grammar.

Focus: any grammar topic

This type of tasks is common in the coursebooks.

Complete the sentences with your ideas:

1. If I were a millionaire, I would....
2. If I have to live abroad, I would
3. If I had been born a girl (a boy), I would....

This task is effective because it helps to practice new grammar structure in speaking. But there's another option how to vary it.

A teacher is a person who is very interesting for students and they want to know more about him/her. So let your student predict your answers.

Sample answer:

I think if you were a millionaire, you would buy a boat



Photo by Hai Phung

If your student guesses 100%, give him/her 2 points. If partially - 1 point and zero if he/she fails to guess. The teacher can do the same about the student.

This task involves a competitive element and makes it fun.

Celebrity interviews

Level: upper-intermediate and higher.

Preparation: a recorded interview with a celebrity.

Focus: Questions, indirect questions, indirect statements, indirect commands and requests.

It is easy to report other people's speech if you work in group. For one-on-one teaching, you can use recorded interviews.

Find a video interview with a celebrity which your student likes. Let him/her watch it at the lesson or as a homework.

The easiest variant that even suitable for intermediate is to watch the interview and make a list of 5-8 more questions which he would like to ask. Then you can role-play the interview. Your student can be his/her favourite celebrity and you can interview him/her with a new set of questions.



For higher levels, the task will be to watch an interview and:

- To report the questions
- To report the answers
- To report the questions and the answers to somebody who hasn't watched this interview.

As a follow-up activity a student can express the attitude to what he/she has heard: if the student agrees/disagrees or which information was surprising etc.

Photo by Hai Phung

Memory test

Level: elementary and higher.

Preparation: a picture which gives an opportunity to use target grammar and vocabulary.

Focus: Grammar: Present Perfect, Present Continuous, There is/are, There was/were, Prepositions of place and movement, Be going to, Some/any.

Vocabulary: rooms and furniture, clothes, appearance, actions, food etc.

Find a picture which contains target vocabulary or/and gives a chance to utilize target grammar structures.

Show a picture to your student and ask to look at it very attentively to memorize the details. Time limit can be 20-40 seconds depending on the picture.

For example,



Photo by Jessica Ruscello

After that remove the picture and ask your student to describe it giving as many details as possible, using grammar (there is/are, there was/were + a/some/any) and vocabulary (food items).

If a learner doesn't have a very good memory or for lower levels, you can ask some guiding questions.

Wheel of fortune

Level: elementary and higher.

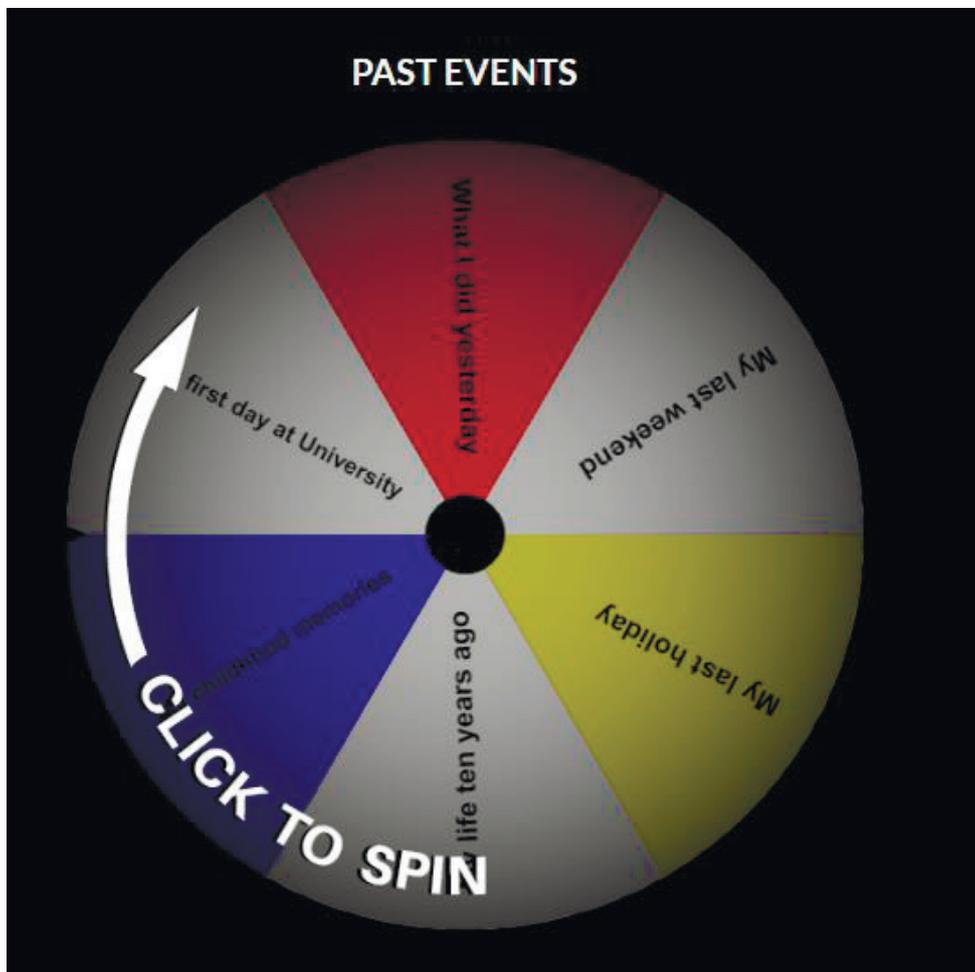
Preparation: a wheel with completed categories.

Focus: Grammar: Past Simple, Present Perfect, Conditionals, Used to, Be going to.

Vocabulary: any topic.

This activity is similar to “Talk for a minute”. But you can bring an element of fun to your lessons by letting a spinning wheel decide which topic to use.

[Modify a wheel](#) according to the target language. It is also suitable for revision activities. For example, [this](#) one.



Spin the wheel and it will choose a topic for your student. The student needs to talk non - stop for 1-3 minutes depending on the level.

Voice-over

Level: intermediate and higher.

Preparation: a picture which gives an opportunity to use target grammar.

Focus: any grammar or vocabulary topic.

As it has been mentioned before, making sentences with new grammar structures or vocabulary isn't engaging. Add a real-life context to make it fun. Find a picture with people speaking and doing other activities. For example, this one.



Give your student some time to prepare a dialogue between people. Usage of target grammar or vocabulary is obligatory (you can provide a list of expressions). Make some necessary error corrections and roleplay the dialogue using your student's script.

Photo by Jessica Ruscello

You can label the pictures with names. As an alternative, choose a video extract and play it in a silent mode. Let your student make a dialogue.

Use the words

Level: pre-intermediate and higher

Preparation: a list of words.

Focus: any vocabulary topic.

Sometimes after vocabulary input and practice students continue to use not the target lexis but words that they already know. But our aim is to activate new vocabulary. Give a learner any speaking topic preferably related to the topic of the lesson. But draw your student's attention to the list of words that he/she has to use.

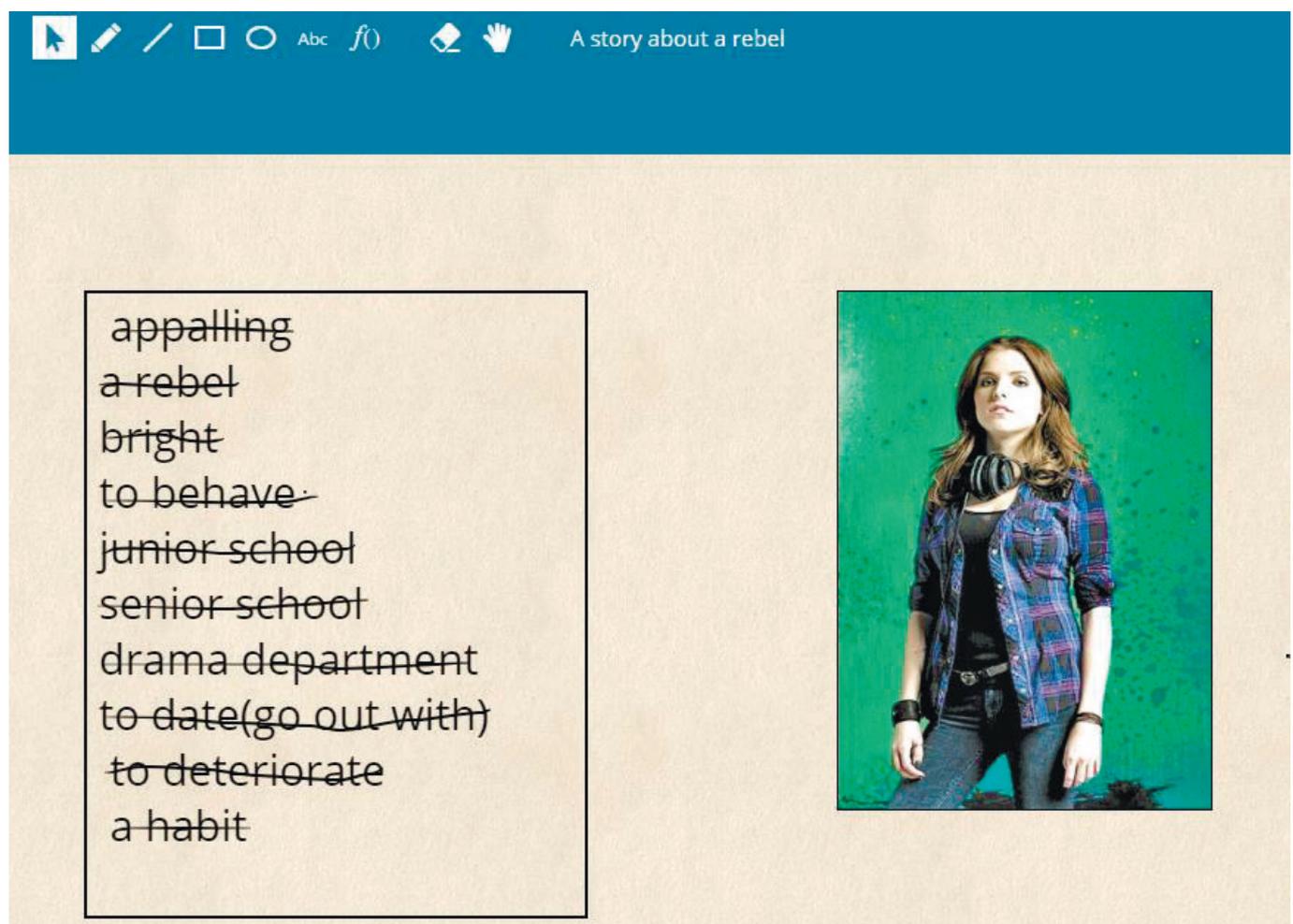
As the student uses each word, cross it out in the chatbox or whiteboard.

For example,

(intermediate level)

Look at the picture and make a story about this teenager using the words on the left.

Your task is to use all the words.



The screenshot shows a digital whiteboard interface. At the top, there is a blue header bar with various icons (a mouse cursor, a pencil, an eraser, a square, a circle, 'Abc', 'f()', a diamond, and a hand) and the text 'A story about a rebel'. Below the header, the main area is a light beige background. On the left, there is a black-bordered box containing a list of words, some of which are crossed out with a horizontal line: 'appalling', '~~a rebel~~', 'bright', '~~to behave~~', 'junior school', 'senior school', 'drama department', '~~to date (go out with)~~', '~~to deteriorate~~', and 'a habit'. On the right side of the whiteboard, there is a photograph of a young woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue and red plaid shirt over a black top and dark jeans, with headphones around her neck. The background of the photo is a textured green.

To add some variety in your classroom, you can use [Word clouds](#) to create the list for speaking.

For example,

(pre-intermediate level, NEF 3d edition).



There is a big selection of shapes, fonts and colours. It is visually attractive and can bring some novelty to a learning process.

Associations

Level: upper-intermediate and higher.

Preparation: a list of words.

Focus: adjectives.

The higher the level, the more complicated adjectives students have to learn especially at higher upper-intermediate and advanced levels. This activity let you organize speaking practice and help learners memorise the words.

For example,

Look at the list of adjectives and say what associations you have with them.

Insatiable

Tremendous

Meticulous

Taciturn

Zealous

Sample answer:



I have an association with 'insatiable': something juicy. When summer comes and first fruit turn ripe, I have an insatiable appetite for them. I imagine I am at the seaside eating juicy peaches.

Photo by Pete Bellis

A reason why

Level: intermediate and higher.

Preparation: a list of sentences with the result of actions.

Focus: Past Perfect Continuous, Past Perfect, Present Perfect Continuous, Present Perfect.

This activity has an aim to practice Perfect tenses in imaginary situations. The student should read the sentences with results and think of the actions with caused them.

For example, the Past Perfect Continuous:



I saw you yesterday...

1. You were sleeping on the bench.
2. Your clothes were covered in mud.
3. Your eyes were red.

Photo by Dan Gold

Sample answers:

1. I had been walking 15 km and then I was so tired that I sat on the bench and fell asleep.
2. I had been helping my granny in the garden.
3. My husband and I had been arguing.

For the Present Perfect Continuous make the sentences in the present.

It is possible to adapt this activity for lower levels to practice Past Simple and be going to. For example,

1. You (have) packed your suitcase
2. You (have) bought a new dress
3. You (have) cooked a meal for four people.

Sample answers:

1. *I'm going to travel.*
2. *I'm going to go to the party.*
3. *My friends are going to visit me.*

Yes, but....

Level: pre-intermediate and higher.

Preparation: a list of sentences with target language or without it.

Focus: Past Perfect Continuous, Past Perfect, Present Perfect Continuous, Present Perfect.

This activity helps to practice both grammar and vocabulary in authentic way. It teaches learners to disagree politely and provide arguments. Prepare some statements preferably with your key lexical or grammar structures. No matter if the student agrees or disagrees, he needs to say: "Yes, but..." and make his/her argument that it opposite to the idea expressed in the sentence.

For example,

Passive voice and Clothes and shopping (pre-intermediate)



1. Low-quality goods are produced in China.
2. The best clothes are designed in Paris.
3. Clothes which are made of synthetic materials are bad for us.

Photo by Igor Ovsyannykov

Sample answers:

1. *Yes, but almost all famous brands have their factories in China. If goods are produced in Europe, they are more expensive.*
2. *Yes, but famous designers work in other cities like Milan and Barcelona.*
3. *Yes, but clothes made of natural fabrics are usually not very cheap.*

This activity was inspired by a book "700 Classroom activities" by Seymour, Popova.

Quotes

Level: pre-intermediate and higher.

Preparation: a list of quotes with the target language or without it.

Focus: any grammar or vocabulary topic.

Find famous quotes on a certain vocabulary topic or some which contain target grammar structures. If the quotations have key grammar that will help your student to see it in the context and refresh the structures in their memory. The learner reads the statements and express his/her ideas.

For example,

Second and Third Conditional sentences.

Read these famous quotes. Which one do you agree with? Why? Give some personal examples.



Photo by Filios Sazeides

1. I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would made myself remembered. (J. Keats)
2. Most people would succeed in small things if they were not troubled with great ambitions. (H. Longfellow)
3. If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter the whole history of the world would have been different. (B. Pascal)

Webprojects

Level: elementary and higher.

Preparation: a task and a weblink .

Focus: any vocabulary topic.

Authentic tasks can raise learners' motivation immensely. They need to see how to apply the key language to real-life situations.

For example, your topic is food and cooking.



Photo by Toa Heftiba

Give your student a website with recipes and ask to choose one which he/she likes and tell you about the ingredients and why he/she wants to cook it.

<https://www.hellofresh.com/recipes/>

The principle which works for for low levels is “Grade the task, not the language”. Make the task really simple. Students don't have to understand all information on this website. He can search for the specific information that he needs. The most important is to provide real-life context for learning and encourage speaking.

Other variants:

Find a flat to rent (Houses and flats)

Choose a summer destination (Travelling)

Choose a book to read (Literature)

Choose a present to your friend (Online shopping) etc.

What's the connection?

Level: elementary and higher.

Preparation: a list of words.

Focus: almost any tense.

The teacher provides a list of 5-7 words. The student needs to ask the questions to guess the connection between these words and the teacher. There should be a hint. It is possible to limit to 2-3 questions.

For example, (used to)

Things from my childhood

A tiger

Apples

Tanya

2 years old

Chess

Flowers



S: Did you use to eat apples?

T: No, I didn't.

S: Did you use to hate apples?

T: Yes, I did.

Photo by Vanessa Serpas

Find similarities between us

Level: elementary -intermediate.

Preparation: a list of statements.

Focus: any grammar or vocabulary topic.

Prepare 3-7 statements. Tell your student that you will ask and answer questions to find what things are similar between you.

For example, (food)

Things that you had_____ yesterday.

For breakfast

For lunch

For dinner



S: What did you have for breakfast?

T: I had some eggs and a ham sandwich.

What about you?

S: I had some cereal.

T: What did you have for lunch?....

T: What things are similar?

S: We both had...

Photo by Vanessa Serpas

Thank you for reading this e-book!

I hope you can find many inspirational ideas for your lessons. I wish you to be creative and motivated teachers!

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