

ESL Speaking and Conversation Overview

When learning to speak in another language, how would you feel if you couldn't speak without constantly being corrected? Would you be more or less likely to try to speak? Likewise, how would you feel if you were never corrected and the listener just nodded his or her head? Would you feel like you were improving and that you were speaking well? There is a way to have a happy medium.

There are different types of conversation in an ESL lesson.

a. Conversation for Communication: or "Open/Free Conversation"

This can happen during the "Warm-Up" phase of the lesson or spontaneously as what you're doing sparks conversation. Don't worry if you get a little bit off-track for a while because this is a way you're building friendship.

If you are having a natural conversation where you're getting to know each other, don't correct. Focus on communications, that is, whether or not you can *understand* what the student means. Choose one thing that interfered with understanding and point it out *after you talk*. This way, your friend will feel free to talk with you and will not freeze with worry about saying every word correctly.

b. Guided Conversations: Drills, Exercises, Extension Activities, etc.

These conversations will come from activities you are doing in an ESL book. Focus on correcting the things that come from the goal of the lesson. It may be a grammar point or new vocabulary. It's also good to bring up past lesson goals if you hear that your student is forgetting what was already learned. Focus on correcting the grammar already learned, rather than on everything the student is saying. The goal is for the student to use the pattern successfully many, many times. Change up the pattern.

Ex. Using the Present Continuous (Progressive) from an ESL book

FYI Present Continuous is used to describe activities "in the moment"

Structure: am/is/are + verb-ing I am sitting. He is watching TV.

Correcting: Student says, "He am sitting at the table." You say, "He am?"

Give the student time to figure out the correction and then repeat it again correctly.

c. Dialogues

These are specific conversations with all the grammar and vocabulary included. Be sure to do variations so the student can use these dialogues in real life. Also give the student an assignment to try this in a situation specific to him or her. To extend, rewrite the dialogue to that specific situation.