

Do you sometimes feel that your students speak English well enough, but you are not sure of their ability to communicate effectively with native speakers? This lesson will help you to understand skills and strategies associated with oral communication that can be useful for your students. It will give you ideas on how to highlight these aspects of oral interaction with your students.

Task 1 – Jenny’s exam students

Jenny: I’ve got two students who are going to be doing an important speaking test next month. We did a practice test today. The students’ grammar is fairly correct, they have good vocabulary and their pronunciation is clear enough. The problem is I still sometimes have problems following what they’re trying to say. For example, at one stage in the practice test I suddenly noticed that they had changed the topic of the conversation without me realising it! I feel there’s something I should be teaching them, but I am not quite sure what that is.



Have you got any ideas of how you can help Jenny?

Jot down your advice on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 

Task 1 Feedback

Jenny could help her students communicate more clearly by getting them to focus on some core speaking skills and strategies. The following tasks will help you understand what these are.

Key Skill

The teaching of speaking involves more than just providing students with speaking fluency practice. Teachers need to focus on skills and strategies that will help students negotiate meaning and communicate effectively with other people.

Task 2 – Identifying skills and strategies



1 to 6 below are speaking skills and strategies. a – f are definitions of these strategies, and i to vi are examples. Match the speaking skills and strategies with the definitions and examples.

Speaking skills and strategies	Definitions	Examples
1. Turn taking		
2. Repair		
3. Seeking clarification		
4. Feedback		
5. Boundary or transition marking		
6. Paralinguistic devices		

Definitions

- a. Asking the person you are speaking to explain something they have said
- b. Using things like body language, gesture and eye contact to send a message to the person you are speaking to
- c. Signalling that you have finished speaking or knowing when and how to get into a conversation
- d. Indicating that you have finished talking about a topic and perhaps also showing that you are about to introduce a new topic into the conversation.
- e. Correcting yourself when you speak, or rephrasing something when you feel the person you are talking to hasn't understood.
- f. Using small words or sounds to indicate to the speaker that you are listening to what they are saying.

Examples

- i. A: I suppose I was feeling depressed ... no, what I really mean is ... I was feeling sad.
- ii. A: What was that you said about using the washing machine?
B: Oh – you can use it whenever you like.
A: Oh so I don't need to book a time.
B: No.
- iii. A: Ok ... now let's move on to ...
- iv. After making her point, Ann sat back in the chair and looked at her colleagues to see if anyone would disagree with her.
- v. A: ... and the weather was fantastic
B: Great
A: It didn't rain once
- vi. A: .. and I think that's all we can say about it.
B: OK, but I think another point worth considering is ...

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

These micro skills do not necessarily generate spoken language, but they do ease spoken communication between two speakers. Many of these micro skills are realised in very different ways in different languages and cultures. For example, many native speakers of English find there are cultures where people stand too close to them during a conversation, or they may find that the person they speak to is not giving them enough feedback. For this reason, it is important to focus on these skills. They can avoid misunderstandings and break downs in communication.

Task 3 – Spoken genre and speaking skills and strategies



Letters a to e below are different spoken genre. Decide which 2 of the following 5 speaking skills and strategies are most likely to be used in each spoken genre. You need to think about both the speaker and the listener.

NB. Paralinguistic devices are not included here because they are likely to be used with all the genres.

Speaking skills and strategies	
1. Turn taking	2. Repair
3. Seeking clarification	4. Feedback
5. Boundary or transition marking	

Spoken genre	Speaking skills and strategies	
a. Telling a story to a friend.	i.	ii.
b. Giving instructions of how to download pictures from a digital camera to a computer.	i.	ii.
c. A business meeting.	i.	ii.
d. Social chatting with friends.	i.	ii.
e. Explaining a medical problem to a doctor.	i.	ii.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Many of these micro skills are more typically found in some spoken genre as opposed to others. When preparing speaking lessons, it is a good idea to ask yourself if there are any typical micro skills associated with that genre then aim to highlight these during the lesson.

Task 4 – Teaching ideas for speaking skills and strategies



Numbers 1 to 5 describe different tasks that can help develop students' awareness of speaking skills and strategies. Letters a to e describe activities that can be included with these tasks. Match the tasks to activities.

Tasks	Activities
1. Students analyse a transcript of some authentic native speaker interaction.	
2. Students watch an authentic video or DVD of native speakers performing specific spoken genre.	
3. Students perform a speaking task in small groups. One of the students takes the role of observer.	
4. The teacher films students performing a specific spoken genre.	
5. The teacher gives students invented words or phrases to use in a conversation.	

Activities

- a. The filmed item is played back to students who evaluate their ability to use speaking strategies and communicate clearly.
- b. The excerpt is played without sound and the teacher asks students to focus on the body language and eye contact that native speakers use.
- c. The students try to drop the word or expression into the conversation thereby forcing the other student to seek clarification.
- d. The teacher asks students to find and underline specific words or expressions that are used as speaking strategies.
- e. The observer is asked to focus on two or three speaking strategies and evaluate the group's effectiveness. After the activity the observer gives feedback to the group on these strategies.

Thinking about your teaching ...

Many published teaching materials see speaking either as freer practice of language or as spoken fluency. Study the course book or materials you are currently using and see if there is any explicit focus on speaking skills and strategies. If there is, could you add any more? If there are not, can you think how you can add a focus on skills and strategies to a fluency activity. Try to create a speaking skills and strategies mini-syllabus that matches other speaking activities in your teaching programme.

Write up your mini-syllabus in your *Teaching log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

After doing a lesson that focus on speaking skills and strategies, ask your students to evaluate it. Give them some questions to talk about (for example, what was useful in this lesson? What was easy / difficult for you? What do you think you need more practice in?). You can ask the questions in an open class situation or students can talk about them in small groups and give you feedback on their discussion.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 27 - 31 of *How to Teach Speaking* by Scott Thornbury (Pearson 2005), there is further reading on speaking skills and communication strategies.

On pages 163 - 169 of *Learning Teaching* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on speaking skills and genre.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to this topic:

- **Unit 3 e) Speaking fluency:** *Discusses how different kinds of speaking activities can help get your students talking.*
- **Unit 5 g) Using drama activities:** *Discusses how adding an element of drama to activities may help motivate students to speak in English.*

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Turning taking | c. and vi. |
| 2. Repair | e. and i. |
| 3. Seeking clarification | a. and ii. |
| 4. Feedback | f. and v. |
| 5. Boundary or transition marking | d. and iii. |
| 6. Paralinguistic devices | b. and iv. |

Task 3 – Feedback

a. Telling a story to a friend.

- i. Boundary or transition marking ii. Feedback

Comment: The speaker will signal transitions from one stage in the story to the next. The listener will give feedback to indicate that he or she is listening.

b. Giving instructions of how to download pictures from a digital camera to a computer.

- i. Repair ii. Seeking clarification

Comment: The speaker is likely to rephrase more complex instructions if he or she feels the listener has not understood (perhaps because they do something wrong). The listener may also ask for certain points to be clarified.

c. A business meeting.

- i. Turn taking ii. Seeking clarification

Comment: All speakers will need to be aware when other participants in a meeting have finished speaking, or they may want to interrupt. Different ideas will be put forward at the meeting by individual speakers and other participants may want more detail or further explanation of those ideas.

d. Social chatting with friends.

- i. Turn taking ii. Boundary or transition marking

Comment: All participants in the conversation will need to be aware of when they can enter the conversation. Social chatting can often cover a large range of topics, so transitions will need to be clearly signalled.

e. Explaining a medical problem to a doctor.

- i. Repair ii. Seeking clarification

Comment: The patient may need to rephrase what they say to the doctor to make sure he or she understands the symptoms. The doctor is likely to ask for more information about the symptoms from the patient.

Task 4 – Feedback

1. d.
2. b.
3. e.
4. a.
5. c.