

One-minute speeches

This is a fun, competitive activity which you can use with all levels except beginner level. It works as a warmer or to fill spare class time with valuable spoken fluency practice. You'll need to provide slips of paper, but the speaking topics themselves are entirely learner generated.

Topics

- 1 Put learners into pairs of roughly equal speaking ability. Give each pair twelve slips of paper and ask them to write a different topic (a word or short expression) on each slip. You can leave the choice of topic completely open, so that learners can choose things which are as random or obscure as they like, for example:

cars elephants insurance socks doing the washing-up

Alternatively, give learners a general area (perhaps the subject of a recent unit from their coursebook) and ask them to think of topics within that area. For example, for the area of SPORT they might come up with:

tennis Manchester United the Olympics golf balls Usain Bolt

Another possibility, particularly suited to higher levels, is to ask learners to come up with topics (nouns) which all start with the same letter of the alphabet, for example:

soccer scissors sand Sweden strikes

- 2 Collect in all the slips of paper, shuffle them, then give twelve back to each pair so that they now have a mix of their own topics and those thought up by other members of the class.

They should put the slips in a pile, face down, between them.

- 3 In pairs, ask learners to take turns to pick up a slip and talk about the topic for one minute while their partner times them.

If they manage keep talking for a whole minute without repeating themselves or hesitating (within reason), they keep the slip. If not, they give it to their partner. The aim of the activity is to collect as many of the twelve slips as possible.

You can of course vary the length of time for which the learners have to speak, according to the level of your class.

It doesn't matter how silly or random the learners' speeches are – as long as there's at least a loose link to the topic, and they keep talking! It's a good idea to demonstrate this yourself by asking learners to give you a topic and then improvising a light-hearted one-minute speech while they time you.

- 4 When learners have used up all the topics (this should take about 15 minutes), quickly establish who the winners in each pair were.
- 5 To round off the activity, put learners into new pairs and ask them to tell their new partners which of their previous partner's speeches they found the most interesting or entertaining, and why. Finally, ask one or two learners the same question in open class.