

Rehearse in L1, perform in English

During extended speaking tasks – for example, topical discussions or role-plays – learners face the twin challenges of coming up with ideas and using English to express those ideas. This can have a negative effect on learners in two ways. First, learners may have to put so much mental effort into creating ideas that the accuracy and fluency of their English is less than perfect. Second they may be so focused on getting their English right that they only attempt to express simple ideas rather than ‘stretching’ themselves.

Rehearsing in L1 is a procedure for overcoming these problems by separating out the ‘ideas-generation’ and ‘use of English’ parts of a speaking activity.

How does it work?

- 1 You want your learners to practise speaking by discussing some statements in your coursebook about a controversial topic. For example:

- 2  3.45 Listen to the first part of Lewis and Amelia’s conversation. Who likes boxing? Who doesn’t?

- 3 a Which of these opinions do you think are Lewis’s (L)? Which do you think are Amelia’s (A)?

- 1 Boxing is dangerous.
- 2 Other sports are more dangerous.
- 3 In boxing, the goal is to hurt other people.
- 4 People are naturally aggressive.
- 5 Boxers are great athletes.
- 6 People can choose to box or not.
- 7 Children under sixteen shouldn’t box.
- 8 If you ban boxing, it will become more dangerous.
- 9 Boxers could do other sports because they’re good athletes.

- b  3.46 Listen to the rest of the conversation and check your ideas.

- 4 Do you agree with the opinions? Talk in groups.



Lewis and Amelia from the USA are watching a boxing match at home.

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Put the learners in pairs and ask them to discuss the questions in their first language (L1) rather than in English. (If you’re teaching a multilingual group, make sure you have pairs of learners with the same L1.) This stage gives learners the chance to engage with the topic, generate ideas and form opinions without having to worry about their English.

- 2 Then put learners into new pairs. Tell them to discuss the questions again, this time in English. The fact that the learners have already rehearsed in their L1 will mean that:
 - they already know what they want to say, and can focus on how to say it in English.
 - they're motivated to use English, rather than simply saying the same things again in L1.
 - they challenge themselves to express complex ideas from the rehearsal stage without 'simplifying them'.
- 3 While learners are speaking in English, monitor closely and make notes for a follow-up stage in which give language feedback on good models, error correction and gaps in your learners' language.

When can I use it?

You can use this technique with many kinds of extended speaking tasks: discussions, debates, role-plays, negotiations, stories, anecdotes, etc.

As with any extended speaking task, it's a good idea to follow it up with a language feedback stage. Because the L1 rehearsal technique encourages learners to challenge themselves rather than play safe with their English, it will help give you a clear picture of language areas where learners make errors or have a language gap. Have a look at the Teaching Tip on **Giving language feedback**.