

Managing longer talks

Many learners struggle to produce longer stretches of speech like stories, anecdotes and presentations. We can help learners develop their competence and confidence in giving longer talks by doing two things: (1) helping learners prepare their talks in a thorough and systematic way; (2) increasing the number of opportunities they have to deliver their talks. In this Teaching Tip, we look at some simple, practical techniques for helping learners in each of these two areas.

Helping learners prepare for their talks

Imagine that you'd like each learner in your class to produce a longer talk of two or three minutes about a memorable journey from their life.

- Start by providing the class with a **model**, i.e. demonstrate what you want them to do. Tell them a story about a memorable journey from your life. It's a good idea to prepare this in advance by making some notes on what you want to say, but avoid writing your story out in full and then simply reading it aloud, as your aim is to produce a natural-sounding story. (Alternatively, you could use a recording from a coursebook or make your own recording).
- You can **engage learners' interest** further by giving them a couple of minutes after your talk to work in pairs and come up with one or two questions they want to ask you about your story, e.g. points they didn't quite understand or extra details they'd like to find out. Then elicit and answer the learners' questions in class.
- **Activate vocabulary** which you think might be useful for the task. A simple technique here is to 'brainstorm': give learners a topic area, elicit the vocabulary they know and write it up on the board. For a story about memorable journeys, for example, it might be useful to brainstorm words and expressions connected with reasons for travelling (*to visit an old friend, to do some sightseeing, to close a business deal, ...*), travel-related verbs (*set out, arrive, stop off, stay over, break down, ...*), and positive and negative emotions (*excited, stressed, furious, full of anticipation, ...*). Remember that the aim here is to prompt learners to share what they already know rather than teach lots of new items.
- Give learners **time to plan** their talks, working alone and thinking of ideas (What they're going to say?) and language (How they're going to say it?). They can make notes if they find this helpful. Before learners start preparing, check that they understand exactly what they have to do. Ask them: What do you have to talk about? Roughly how long should your talk be? How long do you have to prepare? Should you write out their talks in full? The answer to the last question is: No, just write short notes if anything.
- You can help learners during this preparation stage by providing them with **guiding questions or headings** to structure their thoughts. For example, you could write these questions on the board:

When and where? Reason for journey?
What happened?
How did you feel?
How do you feel now?

Ask learners to work through them as they plan.

Note: You could have these questions up on the board earlier, during your model, and refer to them as you tell your story.)

- Alternatively, you can provide learners with a structured **note-taking sheet**:

Introduction (when, where, why, ...)	
Main events 1. 2. 3. 4. ...	Feelings
Conclusion (feelings now)	

- As learners plan, provide **language support** by encouraging them to ask you about any words or expressions they need. You could also bring a few bilingual dictionaries to class so that learners can look up items for themselves.

Increasing opportunities for speaking

Once learners have prepared, put them into pairs to listen to one another's talks. You can then use one or more of these techniques to give the learners yet more speaking practice:

- Put the learners into new pairs and ask them to tell their stories again. They will find that, on second telling, their talks are noticeably more fluent and coherent. See also the Teaching Tip on **Progressive pair and group work**.
- Put the learners into new pairs and ask them to tell their new partners about the stories they heard from their previous partners.
- Leaving learners in the same pairs, ask them to tell their stories again. This time, however, as they listen to one another, they need to ask as many questions as they can to find out extra details. The more detailed the questions are, the more fun this can be!

It's a good idea to demonstrate this activity in class by asking a stronger learner to tell you the opening few sentences of their story and then interrupting with lots of questions:

- S:** Well, this was about five years ago. I was driving to –
T: Driving? What kind of car?
S: Oh. It was my old Toyota. So, I was driving –
T: What colour was it?
S: Blue.
T: OK. Carry on.
S: I was driving work one morning, and next to the road I saw a –
T: What was the weather like?
S: It was ...