

Put a little



into
dialog
practice

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OK to copy.

Two problems:

Dialogs are really drills. And, like any drill, you have to be paying attention. If they do a bland, emotionless practice – it's not of much use.

Dialogs are "frozen speech". In real life, we need to be flexible.

This handout suggests ways to add life and flexibility to dialog practice. We've written it to go with the dialogs in the *English Firsthand* series but they can be used with nearly any conversation book. If you are using a different book, look in the English Firsthand contents page to find a dialog dealing with the language function, grammar point or topic you want.

Using the Drama Coach videos

There are 48 model dialogs (one for each of the 4 *English Firsthand* book), acted out and introduced by a "drama coach" named Adam. The drama coach introduces a voice or physical variation for each conversation. They are available free at

www.efcafe.com. You can download and save the videos. They are also included on the *English Firsthand Active Teach*. On the *Active Teach* version, you can turn on English subtitles to support understanding of the drama coach's suggestions. Click on the double triangle in the bottom, right corner.



Here are ways to use the videos.

- **Video as model.** The videos are shot with actors in front of a "green screen". The backgrounds are not supposed to look realistic. Rather, they add to the sense of "play." Have the students watch and practice the dialog.

- **Listen and repeat.** Play the dialog. Then play it again, stopping after each line. Students repeat.
- **Listen and DON't repeat.** Actually, the students do repeat, but they do a “mental step” first. Pronunciation has to begin in the mind. Stop after each line. Students repeat it silently (their mouths are moving but they don't make sounds). They get a mental target of the pronunciation. Then they say the line out loud and see how close to their mental target they are.
- **Nonsense syllables.** They repeat the lines, but instead of saying the words, they match the stress and timing of the line, using nonsense syllables such as “da.” So the words “NONsense SYLLables” would look/sound like “**DA**da **DA**ada”.
- **Shadow the video.** Shadowing means repeating what you hear – often trying to match the pronunciation. At a minimum, shadowing is useful in helping students hold the words in “working [short-term] memory” long enough to think about the meaning. For more on shadowing, see <http://tinyurl.com/shadowing-JW>
- **Shadow, but change the emotion.** Students repeat the line (or they watch the video, they practice the dialog with a partner). This time, they change their voices to show a range of emotions. Ideas: *You're happy. You're angry. You're tired. You are secretly in love with your partner. You are secretly in love with your partner's boy/girlfriend.*
- **Video plus “read and look up”.** Students work in pairs. They either shadow or just watch the video, then practice with a partner. Their books are open but every time they speak, they have to look away from the book. (This means the words have to at least enter working memory.). An easy way to do this is to have them stand up as they practice. They hold their book in one hand. They put it behind their back each time they speak. They can look back at it as many times as they need to, but when they speak they have to be looking at their partner's eyes.

Practice variations. These ideas can be used either after the videos or without the videos.

- **Voice/physical variation card.** Use the photocopyable ideas on the back of this handout.
- **Add a gesture.** Each time they speak, they have to do some kind of gesture.
- **Add a prop.** Get the students up and moving. Have them use anything available – cell phone, bags, book – to represent items in the dialog.
- **Do something else while you are speaking.** We often do actions unrelated to what we are talking about. Brainstorm actions with the student. Have them do those actions as they practice: Ideas: Drink a cup of coffee/tea. Go for a walk (around the room). Put on make-up/ come their hair, etc. Pick up a desk (both partners) and carry it somewhere.
- **3-minute conversation task.** The purpose of dialog practice is to move on to their own conversations. Follow-up a conversation with a “3-minute conversation”. It shouldn't be the same as what they said when they were practicing. They should change it to their own lives. 100% English.
- **Human CD player.** Instead of practicing in pairs, students practice in groups of three: 2 characters and the “human CD player”. Only the “human CD player” has his/her book



open. S/he reads the line. The other characters repeat the lines. The “CD player” can repeat lines as many times as necessary.

- **Dialog innervoice.** “Innervoice” is the voice we all have in our heads. Often it is different than what we are saying aloud with our “public voice.” Introduce a dialog one line at a time. Ask the students to suggest what the characters. For example, in *English Firsthand 1*, unit one, the dialog takes place at a party. The male character says, “Great music, isn’t it.” Students often suggest that his innervoice is thinking “Who’s she? She’s cute. Is she with anyone?” The female responds, “Yes it is. By the way, I’m (name).” Students suggest she’s thinking something like, “Who’s this? Do I want to have this conversation?” Etc.

Students think of the innervoice. Then they practice. They can do that with the video (pause after each line for them to say the innervoice lines), or in groups of four: two say the lines from the dialog, two say the innervoice lines. Then they change. For more ideas, see the *innervoice* section of www.HelgesenHandouts.weebly.com.

- **Off the wall practice** (This is for *Active Teach*, not the video). Project the dialog onto the screen or wall. Make it as big as possible. After practicing the dialog once or twice, they close their books. They continue practice, reading the lines from the projected dialog. Each time they speak, they make eye contact with their partner. This activity helps them move their heads up instead of looking down into the book. (Maybe people report that head position is better for memory).

- **on-line metronome (rhythm practice)** English is stress timed. Although it doesn’t match a musical beat perfectly, it is close. Adding a metronome to keep time turns any dialog into a chant, much like Carolyn Graham’s famous *Jazz Chants* (OUP). There is a free metronome you can download and save at <http://truefire.com/metronome>.

- **free-online drum machine.** Similar to using an on-line metronome, adding a rhythm helps students “feel” the rhythm of English. There are many on-line drum/rhythm machines. One that is easy to use (it had sample rhythms so you don’t have to program your own, is <http://www.onemotion.com/flash/drum-machine/> Many electronic keyboards also have a number of pre-set rhythms.



Dialogs that move you. We find it very useful to have partners stand and move around as they practice. It makes gesturing easier. Also, when students sit for just 20 minutes, blood drains from the brain and builds up in the feet and legs. Standing and moving for just one minute leads to a 15% increase of blood (and oxygen) in the brain. Here are some easy ways to encourage movement by having students

change partners. For all of these, have them practice the dialog with a few different partners, then have them change it to their own ideas, experiences, etc.

- **line up.** If your classroom has rows of chairs/desks, have students stand facing each other. After the finish the dialog, one person moves on partner toward the front of the room. A person at the front goes to the back of the line. They have the conversation with a few new partners. The same idea works with concentric circles.



Physical Variation Action Cards

for use with learner dialog practice

Drinking something. You are drinking a cup of coffee, tea or juice as you speak.

Gestures. Make a gesture every time you speak.

Mirrors. You are your partner's mirror. Every time you speak, make a gesture. Partner, make the same kind of gesture.

That's heavy. You are carrying something. Pick up a desk or something that is heavy while you speak.

On the phone. You and your partner are talking on the telephone. You can't see each other. Stand back-to-back as you practice.

Take a walk. You and your partner are taking a walk you talk. Stand up and walk around the room as you practice.

Read and look up. Stand up. Face your partner. Hold your book in one hand. You can look at the dialog any time. When every you speak, put your book behind your back. Make eye-contact with your partner.

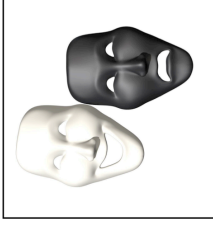
Play ball. You and your partner are playing catch with a ball while you talk. Make a ball out of old paper and toss it to your partner each time you speak.

Pass the book. Use only one book. Pass it to your partner after each time you speak. Partner, pass it back.

One step back. Each time you stay a line, step backward. You and your partner will be farther apart so you will speak louder.

Act it out. You and your partner are TV actors. The dialog is your drama. Act out the conversation. Use actions and emotion.

At the opera. You and your partner are opera singers. Sing the conversation as you act it out. It can be classical opera, a rock opera, hip-hop opera or any other type.



Voice variation action cards

for use with learner dialog practice

1A

You feel very **excited** today.
Make your voice show how you feel.

2A

You are very **outgoing** and **full of energy**.
Make your voice show how you feel.

3A

You are **not really paying attention**.
Ask: "Pardon?" "What?" "Huh?" etc.
Make your voice show how you feel.

4A

You are **full of energy**.
(You had 5 cups of coffee).
Make your voice show how you feel.

5A

You are a **nervous** person.
You worry a lot.
Make your voice show how you feel.

6A

You had a **big argument** with your boyfriend (girlfriend) last night. That has nothing to do with this conversation but you feel bad today.
Make your voice show how you feel.

1B

You feel very **bored** today.
Make your voice show how you feel.

2B

You are very **shy**.
Make your voice show how you feel.

3B

You are **very interested** what you and your partner are saying.
Make your voice show how you feel.

4B

You were up **very late** last night (3 a.m.)
You are very tired today.
Make your voice show how you feel.

5B

You are a **very confident** person.
You believe you can do anything.
Make your voice show how you feel.

6B

Today is a **wonderful day**.
You feel really happy
Make your voice show how you feel.