**How to Organize Speaking Clubs**

English language clubs are often some of the most successful and most popular formats for cross-cultural exchange. They are effective, useful, and can be easy to run once you get them started.  Here are some tips we have collected from volunteers who have organized and run English Conversation Club.

**General tips:**

* Don't be afraid of silence!  After asking a question in English, sometimes you will have to wait a little bit while someone gets the courage to speak, but the waiting can be better than just jumping in and trying to fill the silence. If the silence continues, rephrase the question.
* Sharing information and perspectives about the U.S. is great, but don't do too much talking – the goal is to get the guests to speak.
* Don't correct every mistake.  Speaking and communication are more important than perfect grammar.

**Activity and Presentation Tips:**

* Consider creating a calendar for the club so that participants know of your topic in advance and can prepare. Consider providing the participants with a few websites, video clips or light readings so that they can warm up in advance. Work in manageable numbers; consider a series of 4 – 6 conversations. Toward the end of the series, provide a calendar with a new series of 4 – 6 events.
* Some volunteers like beginning with a general discussion topic for warm up, and then move on to an activity. Be sure to keep it under 10-15 minutes maximum. Consider whether you will accept questions during your presentation or after and let the audience know. The larger the audience, the less you may want to accept questions during the presentation phase.
* Pick lively, engaging topics that you can speak about from a personal angle. Include personal anecdotes so that the topic moves from the abstract to the concrete. If possible, use humor.
* Holiday traditions make great topics for conversations and activities.  Besides the well-known holidays of Christmas, New Years, Easter and Thanksgiving, try Groundhog Day, MLK Day, Arbor Day, Mardi Gras, Washington’s Birthday, Earth Day, Women’s Equality Day, and Black Friday
* Consider co-presenting with some of your more active participants. Increasing their speaking time will help them as well as possibly create a program that will continue even after you leave.
* Pair and small group work is crucial – this gives more people the chance to speak.  There is nothing wrong with starting an activity together, then splitting up a group, and going back and forth between different subgroups.
* After breaking up into pairs/small groups, come back to the big group and have someone from each pair/small group share some aspect of what was discussed in the small group with the big group.
* In a large group discussion, it's sometimes a good idea to shuffle index cards with the students' names written on them and pick these at random to call on participants.  This way nobody feels "picked on by the teacher" but you get everyone to participate and prevent the extroverts from taking over.
* Singing songs is a great way to get participants involved.

 **More Specific Activities:**

* Bring some pictures from a trip and pass them around for discussion.  Ask your participants to talk about places they have been or would like to go.
* Another possibility is to bring objects that you can pass around. Well-chosen objects can help bring to life any topic.
* Guess the food: Give students a vocabulary list and an example of a recipe. Give pairs 10 minutes to write out their own recipe. Each pair presents their recipe without revealing the title. The other students listen and guess what the recipe is.
* Guilty: (<http://esl.about.com/cs/teachingresources/a/bl_guilty.htm>): Each pair makes an alibi and then is questioned individually (that is, the other person leaves the room) by the rest of the group. The pair with the most holes in their alibi is guilty of the crime. This takes about 20 minutes plus 5 minutes for each pair.
* Press Conference: (<http://esl.about.com/od/conversationlessonplans/a/press_conf.htm>): Groups of 3-5 come up with a product with a defect and the other groups ask them yes/no questions about the product and the defect until they figure out what it is.  As an added twist, you can have the groups write and perform advertisements if. If there is less time, you can have the groups just do the invention and skip the defect. Thinking up an invention typically takes about 30-40 minutes and each round of guessing (the invention and defect are separate rounds) takes about 5 minutes.
* Interview: A pair performs an interview of a famous figure from literature/television/history and the rest of the group tries to guess who it is. The winner goes next. This is a good time filler and can be fit into many different topics.

**Organization and Encouraging Attendance**

* Some volunteers pass around a piece of paper for people to write their names and phone numbers/e-mail addresses, and then send out announcements about a week before each meeting.
* Targeting people directly is most effective, often more useful that indirect approaches like putting up fliers.  Make announcements, call teachers, ask teachers to announce activities in class, mention it to students, maintain email list, text the students you're closer to, etc. People have to feel comfortable about going.
* Consider having a club specifically for English teachers. After all, they will “multiply” the topic and pass on new language better than anyone else.
* Get students to come in groups. Some of the most loyal club-goers are sometimes entire sections of students. This works really nicely because they're excited to be there with their friends, so they're more likely to participate, and it makes the whole thing a lot less scary.
* Keep the enthusiasm up, but don't get discouraged if your crowd is reduced to a core. Sometimes initial meetings draw more people because of the club's novelty, but then attendance tapers off.  The students who keep coming back are the ones who actually care, so this is not necessarily a bad thing. Try to keep things new and interesting, but know that fewer people doesn't have to mean less success.
* Show videos, short documentaries and movie clips and do question and answer sessions afterwards.  If the Corner has regularly scheduled movies, this could be a nice addition -- one ETA shows up randomly to movie showings at her local corner to do this when she has time, in addition to her English language club.
* Consider spicing up the conversation with youtube clips, podcasts, and other multi-media sources.

*Use Americanenglish.state.gov for more support*