

CONVERSATION

3-2-1 Icebreaking

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Levels	<i>All</i>
Aims	<i>Develop fluency</i> <i>Help students get to know each other at the beginning of a course</i>
Class Time	<i>30–60 minutes</i>
Preparation Time	<i>10 minutes (first time only)</i>
Resources	<i>Timer</i> <i>1 card per student (see Appendix)</i>



This activity is based on the 4/3/2 technique (Arevart & Nation, 1991; Nation & Newton, 2009), which helps to foster speaking fluency. In a 4/3/2 activity, a student talks about a familiar topic with three different students, giving the same speech within a gradually reduced time. The speaker talks with the first student for 4 minutes, with the second student for 3 minutes, and with the third student for 2 minutes. Delivering the speech with the same content in reduced amounts of time enables students to improve their speaking fluency.

Icebreaking is a useful activity at the beginning of a course. It helps students get to know each other so that a friendly and cooperative environment can be created. This activity focuses on students introducing themselves to their peers. Note that the time for this activity has been adapted to 3/2/1 because a 4-minute talk about oneself may be too long.

PROCEDURE

1. Prepare the cards (Appendix).
2. Explain the purpose of the activity to the students.
3. Give students 1 minute to plan a speech about themselves, with the option of writing it down. Suggest some information that can be included, such as nationality, hobbies, and reasons to study English.
4. Give each student one card. Tell them to find one partner holding the card with the same color as theirs. In pairs, one student talks about him- or herself for 3 minutes while the other listens and tries to remember that information. The speaker can look at their notes but should not read the notes aloud. The listener may take notes when listening.
5. When 3 minutes have passed, ask the students to change roles.

6. When another 3 minutes have passed, ask the students to change partners by finding a student holding a card with the same shape as theirs. In this round, each student talks for 2 minutes.
7. When both 2-minute rounds have passed, ask the students to change partners again by finding a student holding the card with the same letter. In this round, each student talks for 1 minute.
8. Ask the students to return to their desks for a class discussion. Each student speaks to the whole class and introduces one student they met. Other students who also talked to the same person can add any information that is missing.

CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. Some students may cut down the information in their speech to deal with the time reduction. Teachers should remind students to avoid this so that they can develop their speaking fluency. They should repeat the same ideas within a shorter period of time.
2. This activity can be used with other topics.
3. Depending on the levels of the students and the topics, the allotted time for each turn can be longer or shorter.
4. Shrinking-time condition (4/3/2 or 3/2/1) focuses solely on pushing fluency. To develop students' complexity and accuracy rather than fluency, a constant-time condition (3/3/3 or 2/2/2) may be more suitable (Thai & Boers, 2016).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Arehart, S., & Nation, P. (1991). Fluency improvement in a second language. *RELC Journal*, 22, 84–94.
- Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Thai, C., & Boers, F. (2016). Repeating a monologue under increasing time pressure: Effects on fluency, complexity, and accuracy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50, 369–393.