



HOW TO GET YOUR CHATTERS TALKING!

Although there are many aims of The Chatty Corner, it is safe to say that the main one is to encourage the chatters to talk. Here are some tips to help you achieve this aim. You might find it a bit overwhelming to try to take all these ideas on board so it may help to try one for a few weeks and then revisit this guidance. There are many more ways to get your chatters to talk and I'm sure you are already using them. Please feel free to share your ideas with other volunteers. We all need a bit of inspiration!

Many of our chatters are around intermediate level so we will think about them first.

INTERMEDIATE

- On your first meeting, take the opportunity of getting to know your group. Make sure you don't ask all the questions. Even if the group know each other, it's good practice for them to ask questions about each other. You can model the question and then they should ask each other going round the table. Be ready to correct some of their mistakes and pronunciation but you can play this by ear.
Start with all the usual questions such as name, where do you live, are you married, where do you come from etc.
Be careful to make your questions sound natural; you can model and practise "have you got...?" For example "Have you got any children/brothers/sisters?" Then make sure they reply with "Yes I have/No I haven't". You can extend this and encourage them to use their imagination, for example "Have you got a car/bicycle/any hobbies etc.
- If you know the group and they all know each other you can still model questions and then ask each other. You might want to practise the past tense so you could ask "What did you have for dinner yesterday?" You can then ask "Who cooked it/cleared the table/did the washing up?" You will be surprised at how difficult they will find questions and you can gently correct them sometimes.
- If you find you've run out of ideas then use the resources on the back shelf. I know many of you already use the picture dictionaries and these are a good place to start. There are various ways you can use them but here are one or two ideas:

Ask them to look for an object, let's say a ladder. Then ask one of them "have you got a ladder?" Encourage "yes I have/no I haven't". Ask each other going round the table. Then ask "what do you use a ladder for?" You may need to help them to formulate the answer or you can give them a list of ideas.



You can ask the chatters to ask the first question; they could say “where’s the vacuum cleaner?” or “what’s that?”

The photo dictionary which is aimed at adults has pages of sports/hobbies/jobs etc. These can be used to promote discussions.

- A final word on intermediate chatters; you will find that they can talk but are not necessarily accurate so it’s really helpful for you to model the English they should be using but then they must practise it. Listening is useful for them but speaking is usually a harder skill to perfect and they will only do so by practising.

ADVANCED

- These chatters can be just as much of a challenge as they will need to be stretched a bit more than the intermediate learners. They usually come to us because they know they need to practise speaking and listening.
- If your group is new to you, then ask and answer questions to get to know them first. Make sure everyone joins in. If they know each other they can still ask you. You could also ask one of them about the other one; this can be quite fun. For example you can ask what his/her wife’s/husband’s name is, what his/her hobbies are, what his/her job is/was etc.
- If you are confident, you can discuss a particular topic but make sure you don’t do all the talking. If you’re discussing a news event, you could give a summary then ask one of them to repeat the story. You could also encourage them to ask questions.
- There are several resources for advanced learners on the shelf at the back. Please ask if you want more information about them.

BEGINNERS

- This is the most challenging chatter or group of chatters especially if you don’t have any TEFL qualifications. You will almost definitely need resources and you may want to consider encouraging your chatters to write too.



- It's often easier if you have a group who speak the same language as they will explain things to each other in their native tongue. However, if this isn't the case and you aren't making yourself understood, just laugh about it and try to move on!
- The picture dictionaries will be useful here. You may need to give them the words first so you can point and say "this is a broom" for example. They can repeat the sentence. After three or four, go back and say "what's this?" and encourage "it's a broom". If you have a group, they can ask each other round the table. You may be able to tell them "you use a broom to sweep the floor" or ask "have you got a broom?" You could go onto "Who sweeps the floor in your house?" There are many questions you can ask for most items and you can come back to each item two or three times for practise.
- Use the playing cards to practise numbers. Make sure they can count from one to 20 first. If not, help them to write the numbers down and practise counting in order for a while. If/when they are a bit more confident, shuffle the cards and turn them over one at a time to practise numbers one to ten randomly. Then put a 10 down and turn a card over next to it, explaining that they have to add the two together so that you practise 11 to 20. You can do this fast once they are confident. If they are confident up to a hundred, turn the playing cards over and they have to add up the numbers.

Numbers are usually easy if they are slow. If you have a group who are confident with numbers, ask them to write down their phone numbers and give them to you (check they're happy with this – they can make up a number if necessary). Then read their numbers as fast as you can the first time – they won't be able to write it down unless they are amazing. Then read it a bit slower and finally very slowly.

SUMMARY

Please don't think that this list of ideas is either prescriptive or exhaustive. Most of you will already have your own excellent ideas and you don't have to use any of the methods described above. Please also remember to use the resources at the back of the Chatty Corner. There are so many ways we can get our chatters chatting!

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