



---

# **COMPELLING AMERICAN CONVERSATION-TEACHER’S GUIDE**

---

**WITH COMMENTARY, SUPPLEMENTAL EXERCISES, and  
REPRODUCIBLE SPEAKING ACTIVITIES**

**Mark Treston  
Robert Glenn**

**Editors  
Eric H. Roth  
Toni Aberson**



CHIMAYO PRESS  
[2015]

## Introduction

How do you we get our intermediate English language learners to speak more in our classes? How can we help prepare American residents by choice develop the conversational skills to become future American citizens? What quotations and proverbs help explain diverse American perspectives and attitudes on some common conversation topics?

These questions inspired *Compelling American Conversations: Questions and Quotations for Intermediate American English Language Learners*. Since 2012, the versatile speaking skills textbook has found its way into several English as a Second Language and English language development classrooms. The book also gained some fans, including two experienced ESL teachers, Mark Treston and Robert Glynn, in Los Angeles.

We met and discussed the many different ways, and many different teaching environments, that the English teachers use the book. Mark and Robert created this reproducible English teacher’s guide out of those wide-ranging, long conversations. This book provides teaching notes, brief comments, and supplemental exercises for *Compelling American Conversations* based on ESL classroom experiences and reflections. The author’s skill, expertise, and passion for teaching English can be discerned in their many practical classroom tips. Even though I co-authored the original book, I also learned from this insightful teaching suggestions. Perhaps you will too.

Following the suggestion of many adult education and community college instructors, this *Reproducible Teacher’s Guide* allows teachers to make classroom copies of pages from the original book. This practical feature should improve access of many budget-conscious, English language learners, English teachers, and language schools to the content of *Compelling American Conversations*. Copying textbook pages remains an essential, if controversial, activity for many dedicated educators working today.

Like many other experienced English teachers, I often browse through teaching guides for ESL & ELT textbooks. Therefore, this particular Reproducible Teacher’s Guide has been written so the materials can be read – and perhaps enjoyed - both individually or consumed in a scaffold manner. The two dynamic teachers and authors have shared their perspectives in a more candid, less diplomatic manner than many more traditional textbook publishers. The result is an informative, street smart guide to deploying *Compelling American Conversations* in your English classroom.

Take a look, use what you find valuable, and share with students. It’s time for you and your English students to create some new compelling American conversations.

Sincerely,

Eric H. Roth  
Co-author of *Compelling American Conversations*  
July 1, 2014

## Chapter One - Opening Moves

### Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to engage in an introductory conversation
- Students will be able to ask for help, clarify what was being discussed and offer basic information about themselves
- Students will be able to use write basic sentences using present and past tenses
- Students will be able to enunciate their words more carefully
- Students will be able to understand basic quotations and proverbs and use them in conversations
- Students will be able to share their ideas and ask questions
- Students will be able to search and share information from different media outlets

### p. 1 - Meeting Each Other -

This popular icebreaker activity gets students talking on the first day of class. Pair students by random numbers, initials, lineup or whichever pairing technique works best for your class.

Keep the conversation going: Encourage the students to continue their conversations with their own questions. This conversational activity will also help you perform a needs assessment on your students in the first few days of the class by observing their proficiency in making spontaneous conversation.

### Pronunciation Connection:

Give examples of words in English that are commonly pronounced with different accents, even by native speakers: Tomato, a, the, etc. Also, remind students to be clear about differentiating verbs, nouns, gerunds and adjectives with similar words such as drive, driver, driving and driven. This clarification prevents unnecessary confusion in conversation. These distinctions are classically expressed as learning to "say what you mean, and mean what you say."

**Grammar Connection:** It would help students to note that quotation marks (" ") in writing differentiate what we are saying from what someone else is saying. Quotations remain crucial not only for writing skills but also for reading and even listening. This might be an opportune time to delve into the use of quotations and paraphrasing for more advanced students.

### P. 3 Expanding Vocabulary:

Review definitions with students, with oral reading and/or repetition. This can be done teacher to student(s), or between students, depending upon context and student

proficiency.

- For practice and comprehension checks, ask students to clarify the vocabulary: What is the difference between agree and argue?
- What is the difference between conversation and talking, or simply asking questions and making requests? (I.e. how much does this cost?)
- Explain and explore the role of conversation in English speaking culture, in such venues as the pub, the bar, the coffee house, the "water cooler" at the workplace, in a park or out in nature, at an auditorium, or on the street etc.

Also, emphasize the extra-social importance of conversation: getting along with co-workers at your job, or being able to speak clearly at an interview. Explain how in mainstream American culture, people who are not conversational at all can make others uncomfortable and even nervous. As noted below, other cultures can have very different attitudes towards moments of silence in conversations.

### **Conversation Idioms:**

**Water Cooler Conversation** - Workers in offices and other worksites congregate and gossip when getting glasses of water at the water cooler, or cups of coffee in commons or kitchen. "Water cooler conversation" usually consists of talking about what was on TV programs, movies, sports, general chat, "small talk," (**explain idiom, see below**) and office gossip.

**Small talk** - make conversation about the weather, sports, family and other prosaic, everyday topics, usually to start a conversation, socialize with and get to know strangers, or acknowledge respect for and awareness of co-workers, relatives, and other people. NOTE: You can explain that Americans tend to feel uncomfortable and awkward with moments of silence. This feeling differs from some other cultures and language groups, such as Japan, where silent stretches in conversation are prized as moments of harmony. This difference is good to keep in mind, as sometimes people from other countries can perceive Americans as talking continuously, whether or not they have anything to say.

**Chit Chat** - Innocent small talk. It can become disruptive and distracting when it occurs during class.

**Chat him/her/me/you/us up** - Talk to an attractive person with the intention of getting to know him or her better and possibly getting a date. (Although this expression is from Britain, it is "catching on" (**explain idiom**) in the United States.

**Back talk** - A heated response, often to a parent or other authority figure, usually without listening or considering what the other person has to say.

**Talk past each other** - Arguing couples, co-workers and others who state their opinions without listening to what the other person has to say.

**Sound Practice Minimal Pairs:**

Ear, year fear, gear, near, beer, deer, jeer, peer, tear. Also compare them to sounds distinguishing the vowels such as:

| <b>Long e sound</b> | <b>Short e sound</b> | <b>Long I sound</b> |
|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Hear                | Hair                 | Hire                |
| Beer                | Bear                 | Buyer               |
| Deer/Dear           | Dare                 | Dire                |
| Peer                | Pair                 | Spire               |

Ask students in groups or pairs to come up with similar words and sounds to emphasize the dramatic changes pronunciation makes in the meaning of words and sentences.

**Caution:** Use your judgment as a teacher as to which idioms and expressions are appropriate for your particular school, class and student population.

Pillow talk - intimate conversation between couples in bed together.

Barroom Conversation - People in bars, under the influence of alcohol, express opinions that are emotional, sometimes loud, and not based on any facts or real information. This expression often goes with the idioms "You don't know what you're talking about" and "It was the liquor (beer, etc.) talking."

**p. 3 - Expanding Vocabulary:**

State opinions and ask the students if they agree or disagree.

- I think American cars are better than Japanese or German cars. Do you agree or disagree?
- Alternate activity: Write one or several opinion statements on the board and have students decide if they agree or disagree, and explain why, in pairs or groups.
- Present these statements for consideration: Money is the most important thing in life. Do you agree or disagree?
- Love is more important than money in life. Do you agree or disagree? You can do one or more of these statements, individually or in combination, to elicit the thoughts and expressions of your students.

This is an opportunity to discuss fact versus opinion. For example, I think American cars are better than Japanese or German cars versus American car companies posted record profits for the months of July and August or Highway safety tests list American car companies at the top of their ratings (of course, followed by more specific sources). Here are some other questions you can use for this activity:

- How many people have children?
- Do you encourage your children?
- How do you encourage your children?
- How do we encourage each other in class?
- How do I encourage the students as a teacher?
- How do teammates encourage each other in a sport?
- Do you feel encouraged today? Why or why not?
- What things require courage to do? (This is an opportunity to discuss courage, encourage and discourage).

**p. 5 - Paraphrasing Proverbs:** - Discuss the meanings of the various proverbs, and how these reveal differences among cultures. You can also note that some different proverbs carry the same meaning. Discuss different phrasing, such as "Chance favors the prepared mind" and "The smallest journey begins with a single step." It is also worth exploring American ideas about opinions. Because of our constitutionally-guaranteed idea of free speech, Americans have the expression, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion." This common expression has produced some amusing variations, such as "Everyone's entitled to my opinion."

You can lead students to compare and contrast the subtle differences in quotations:

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

"Live each day as if it is your last, for one day you will be right."

"Time was invented so everything wouldn't happen at once."

"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."- Mainstream

"All I know is that I know nothing." – Socrates

"Knowledge (wisdom) begins with realizing (understanding) what you *don't* know."

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks." "You're never too old to learn."

"If opportunity knocks, make sure you get up and answer the door."

"If someone opens a door for you in Hollywood, walk through it." - Cheech Marin, comedian/actor

"Talk is cheap" and "Silence is golden." Mainstream

"Money talks, baloney (nonsense) walks."

"The 'haves' and the 'have-nots' might more accurately be characterized as the 'do's' and the 'do-nots' - Thomas Sowell, economist

"You are your own worst enemy." "People cause their own problems." - Mainstream

### **Expansion Activity:**

**Make a proverb!** Choose the ideas expressed in the proverbs and quotations, and invent your own variations! If you have a good memory and want to build group rapport, you can later include their original proverbs and sayings through your subsequent classes. If you feel really adventurous, you can promise your students to propagate their proverbs through your subsequent classes.

It will help students to explain and explore the definitions and concepts of literal, metaphoric, figurative, figure of speech and expression. Students might otherwise be baffled by expressions that they might be trying to translate and interpret literally.

Many expressions use imagery to make their point and convey their idea. For example, "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." Should such people also avoid sleeping during daylight hours? However, this expression does not refer literally to people who live in houses that are constructed entirely from glass. Rather, it advises us to consider our own vulnerabilities and shortcomings before we criticize or attack other people.

Give examples of literal and figurative expressions, and have the students differentiate each one. "Whenever you point a finger, you have four other fingers pointing back at you." Ask your students what they think this expression means. Is this saying a literal or figurative expression? You can actually suggest to your students that they point their index fingers, and have them decide if their other fingers are indeed pointing back at them or not.

Be sure to give the students credit for the proverbs they invent. Here are some examples of a proverb invented in and for the class led by Robert Glynn English class in Los Angeles:

- "The Great Wall of China started with a single brick."
- "The Eiffel Tower in Paris started with an idea."

### **Search and Share p. 8**

Almost everybody knows the concept of body language. However, students are unfamiliar with the phrase "body language." You might consider explaining the concept of "body language" for students who might not be familiar with it. You can test your own aptitude for non-verbal expression by acting out various adjectives for the students and let them guess which feeling you are trying to convey.

Once students have done this, you can explain how this is "body language." You can have students repeat this fun exercise throughout the class. This exercise a great

opportunity to discuss body language in other cultures. This has always been a conversation starter and everyone can share their experiences despite conversational skills. In fact, you could mime different body languages (as long as they are acceptable of course) as an activity and elicit students to respond. If the class is diverse, have students go around the room and interview fellow students for body language that is used in their country/culture.

A variation on this activity is to have students watch television news in English for 5-10 minutes, then report back to the class on what the main news story was and what it said. This alternative allows students to practice listening to native English speakers outside the classroom environment, discussing subjects and events that are at least somewhat familiar.

### **On your own- p. 9**

This section is practice for the students in observing non-verbal communication (body language) and how this observation enhances and reinforces verbal communication in English. Where you and your students can practice this depends on where you are teaching, a big city with hordes of commuters riding the subway every day, or a small town with groups of people congregating in the town square, or anywhere in between.

### **Academic Vocabulary Expansion: Prefix/Suffix Study**

Prefixes alluding to “Not”

Non, Mis, un, a, non

It might be a great opportunity to discuss the evolution of the English language and some of the interesting surprises of where words come from. Words such as “uncommon” and “inaudible” were first used in Shakespeare’s plays and have been used ever since. Shakespeare basically combined the prefixes “un” and “in” to words to simply mean “not.” This could lead to discussions about how language is constantly changing and that even the new age of technology relies heavily on prefixes, suffixes, roots and stems (internet, microchip). This is also a great conversation starter for the use of technology or words that are universally used across different languages.

Here are just a sampling and feel free to give examples in sentences.

Non:

Nonnative speaker – One who does not speak the native language.

Nonconformist- One Who does not conform to the existing system.

Nonviolent- One who does not believe in using violence as a method

Mis:

Misunderstanding, miscommunication, misinterpret, misconstrue, misinform, misuse.

Un:

Uncompromising, unconditional, unsuspecting, unbelievable.

A:

Amoral, asexual, atheist, apolitical, apathy.

### Phrasal Verbs

Two verbs that are commonly used at phrasal verbs are “take” and “make.” One could use several lessons just going over the intricacies of the use of these two verbs in an English conversation. Do not forget to mention that phrasal verbs such as make up and take out have several meanings and therefore are even more confusing for students. This is the reason why students must remember to listen and read for context as opposed to individual words. This will also assist them in getting better scores exams such as TOEFL and IELTS.

Take out, after, over, apart, in, up, back

Make up, out, of, over, though

This is a good opportunity to show how phrasal verbs can be separated.

Example: George took his girlfriend out for dinner in Little Italy to celebrate her birthday. Did you make it through exam week intact?

**Take Out** – To remove something from somewhere.

*Johnny, could you take out the trash on your way out please?*

*Take out the reference in your essay about Joey, he might not appreciate it.*

**Take After** – To look or act like someone else

*Wow, David really takes after his father. He looks and acts like him.*

**Take Over** – To conquer or take control of something.

*Do you want me to take over? You look tired.*

**Take Apart** – To dismantle or reduce something or someone’s action or statement

*Did you see the debate yesterday between the two candidates? The Senator took his opponent apart.*

*I won’t know what’s wrong with your car until I take the motor apart.*

**Take In** – To observe with detail and for enjoyment

*We took in the view when we climbed the mountain*

**Take Up** – To begin to do something or accept an offer

*Did you hear about Eric, I heard he took up scriptwriting and stopped writing novels.*

*I think I’ll take you up on that offer to go to Hawaii. I really need a break.*

**Take Back** – To regret and apologize for something said or done

“Take it back! I never cheated in soccer. You were the one who always cries foul.”

**Make Up** has several meanings from make up a test or make up an appointment to make up a story. It’s extremely confusing for students and therefore very useful to teach.

**Make Up** – To reschedule or do something again

*Mark, you need to make up the test you missed if you want to pass my class.*

**Make Up** – To reconnect or get back together (another great phrasal verb) after splitting up or breaking up (two more great phrasal verbs).

*Is Danny on the dating scene again or did he make up with his girlfriend?*

**Make Up** – To tell a lie or a false story

*James, you have to stop making up stories. Nobody will believe you anymore*

**Make Up** – Direct phrase meaning to decide

*Can you make up your mind already, I’m starving! Just choose something already.*

**Make Out** – To have intimate relationships with someone such as kissing.

*I saw Jenny and Ted making out at the restaurant last night. I didn’t know they were a couple.*

**Make of** – To figure something out or to try and distinguish something.

*What do you make of this painting? It’s truly odd.*

**Make Over** – To have a complete change in life or physical look

*Laurie had a complete makeover while on vacation in the Bahamas*

**Make Through** – To survive something or to complete something

*Doctors said he’s gonna make it through. He was shot in the chest, but it didn’t hit any vital organs.*