

Conversation fillers

Grade: GESE Grade 5+ (CEFR B1 and above)

Exam task focus:

- ▶ To respond appropriately to interaction
- ▶ To initiate and maintain conversation
- ▶ To show understanding of other speakers

Materials needed:

- ▶ Conversation fillers handout



During a conversation, we often use words, phrases or sounds to show that we are actively listening or to give ourselves thinking time before we respond to a question. Findings from the Trinity Lancaster Corpus have shown that those candidates who used techniques to manage hesitation when speaking and demonstrated that they were actively listening to the examiner through the use of verbal cues, were more successful than those who didn't.

Procedure

1. Tell the students they are going to do an activity where they will use conversation fillers. Ask them if they know what a conversation filler is and why we use them.
2. Then, in pairs or small groups, get students to brainstorm:
 - ▶ Words/phrases that can be used to demonstrate they are listening to their interlocutor.
 - ▶ Words / phrases that can fill in silent gaps while speaking.(If this concept is new to them, you may want to begin this activity by providing examples taken from an audio or video dialogue and getting them to write down any fillers they notice.)
3. Feedback their ideas as a class and write their contributions on the whiteboard. Add any other ideas that they haven't included (see ideas in the conversation filler cards) and provide examples where necessary.
4. Divide the class into pairs and give a copy of the 'While listening' cards to Student A and a copy of the 'While speaking' cards to Student B. (Alternatively, you can display these on the whiteboard for the class to refer to.)
5. Ask Students B to describe, to their partner, an event that happened to them. While Student A is listening, (s)he will respond, using the prompt cards, and asking additional questions to get more information.
6. While Students B are talking, they should also try to include fillers to avoid awkward silences.
7. After about 2–3 minutes, ask students to swap cards, and repeat the process so that each student has the opportunity to talk about a personal event.
8. Class feedback – Ask students if there are any prompts they used more than others and how they might be able to include those that haven't been used.

While listening:

Really?	Right	Sure
How awful!	Oh no!	You're joking
What a pity!	Have you? / Did you? / Are you? etc	Mmm / Uh-huh
Fantastic!	That's great!	Wow!

While speaking:

Well	So	Let me think...
I mean	I guess / think	You know
What I want to say is...	The point I want to make is...	Anyway...
Well, what I mean is...	Back to our topic ...	As I was saying...
The basic idea is...	Hold on ...	Like