

Communicating in Business

A short course for Business English Students:
Cultural diversity and socializing, Using the telephone,
Presentations, Meetings and Negotiations

Teacher's Book

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Contents

Introduction	iv	Unit 8 The middle of the presentation	58
Module 1 Cultural diversity and socializing		Overview	58
Unit 1 Building a relationship	1	Holding the audience's attention	58
Overview	1	Structure (2) The main body	59
Cross-cultural understanding (1)	1	Listing information	59
Welcoming visitors	4	Linking ideas	60
Small talk: keeping the conversation going	6	Sequencing	62
Unit 2 Culture and entertainment	10	Unit 9 The end is near ... this is the end	65
Overview	10	Overview	65
Cross-cultural understanding (2)	10	Structure (3) The end	65
Inviting, and accepting or declining	11	Summarizing and concluding	66
Eating out	16	Questions and discussion	67
Module 2 Using the telephone		Module 4 Meetings	
Unit 3 Could I leave a message?	18	Unit 10 Making meetings effective	74
Overview	18	Overview	74
Preparing to make a telephone call	18	What makes a good meeting?	74
Receiving calls	19	Chairing a meeting	76
Taking and leaving messages	20	Establishing the purpose of a meeting	78
Asking for and giving repetition	23	Unit 11 Sorry to interrupt, but ...	83
The secretarial barrier	24	Overview	83
Unit 4 Good to hear from you again!	27	The structure of decision making	83
Overview	27	Stating and asking for opinion	84
Cross-cultural communication on the telephone (1)	27	Interrupting and handling interruptions	85
Setting up appointments	28	Unit 12 What do you mean by ... ?	91
Changing appointments	31	Overview	91
Ending a call	32	Asking for and giving clarification	91
Unit 5 Unfortunately there's a problem ...	36	Delaying decisions	93
Overview	36	Ending the meeting	94
Cross-cultural communication on the telephone (2)	36	Module 5 Negotiations	
Problem solving on the telephone	36	Unit 13 Know what you want	98
Complaints	38	Overview	98
Module 3 Presentations		Types of negotiation	98
Unit 6 Planning and getting started	43	Preparation for a negotiation	100
Overview	43	Making an opening statement	101
Presentation technique and preparation	43	Unit 14 Getting what you can	105
The audience	45	Overview	105
Structure (1) The introduction	46	Bargaining and making concessions	105
Unit 7 Image, impact and making an impression	50	Accepting and confirming	107
Overview	50	Summarizing and looking ahead	109
Using visual aids: general principles	50	Unit 15 Not getting what you don't want	112
Talking about the content of visual aids	51	Overview	112
Describing change	54	Types of negotiator	112
		Dealing with conflict	112
		Rejecting	115
		Ending the negotiation	117
		Optional case studies	119

1 Building a relationship

AIMS

- Cross-cultural understanding (1)
- Welcoming visitors
- Small talk: keeping the conversation going

Overview

This module looks at issues relating to working with professionals from other countries where cultural misunderstandings may cause embarrassment. It relates closely to the later module on Meetings. This unit focuses on developing personal relationships and mutual understanding between business partners. Unit 2 looks more directly at socializing within a business context, invitations, entertaining, and eating out.

The unit begins with an ice-breaker as a chance to develop small talk, before looking specifically at working with American and British people, together with suggestions on preparing for contacts with other countries. Knowledge and understanding is essential in order to get along well with one's partners from other countries. Socializing is instrumental in this: it is about building relationships.

The second section deals with welcoming visitors and helping them to feel at ease. This theme is used as a lead-in to small talk, which is developed in the final section of the unit and again in Unit 2. Small talk is looked at in terms of various topics and how to keep conversation going. There is a lot of scope for discussion of students' own ideas in the unit. The Transfer includes an option on a small research project. Think about the extent to which your students may travel to other countries or are likely to receive visitors. This is important. In the latter case, discuss which aspects of the students' own country, town or culture might be interesting or unusual for a visitor.

1:1 situation

Many of the activities which lend themselves to discussion and brainstorming will require more support from you. Encourage and elicit thoughts from the student and feed in your own ideas and those included here. There are two role plays where you will need to take a part, as well as two dialogues based on flow charts where you will need to take the right hand role in eventual practice. With more competent speakers, you may be able to add variations, thus increasing the need for spontaneity on the part of the student.

Time: 3 hours

1 Cross-cultural understanding (1)

- 1 Circulate among the groups, eliciting comments on the photograph. Different students will comment on different things, but draw out ideas on:
 - where it might be (which country/hotel/factory/office/etc.)
 - why they are there (for a meeting/seminar/new venture/chance/tourism, etc.)
 - what kind of relationships are represented (friends, new business partners, same company, etc.)
 - topics of conversation (business/non-business, hobbies, interests, small talk such as weather, travel plans, the hotel, colleagues, other countries, etc.)
 - what they *won't* be talking about ...

For five minutes, get groups of students to act out a typical situation as shown in the photograph. Join in yourself, exaggerating your speech patterns, encouraging a playful and humorous approach to the exercise.

Then discuss issues arising from the illustration:

- **Humor.** Ask to what extent humor enters into business relationships – or even jokes. In some countries, such as the United States, joking is often used to relieve tension. In others, such as Germany, that might be regarded as flippant or unprofessional. Sean O’Casey, the Irish playwright, said that the Irish turn a crisis into a joke and a joke into a crisis.
 - **Women in business.** In which cultures is this unlikely? Where are women having an increasingly prominent role in business? (The U.S., Italy, and the UK are examples, although less than 10% of company executives in the UK are women.) In some countries, despite legislation aimed at improving career opportunities for women, few reach the top (in Norway, for example, although the field of politics is an exception).
 - **Alcohol and business.** In cultures where alcohol is taboo, this is, of course, not an issue. However, while it is not unusual to have a glass of wine or a beer with lunch in Europe, it is very bad form to drink too much. In Italy, a nation of wine drinkers, it is very unusual to drink outside meal times, whereas in Sweden it is not unusual to have a beer with colleagues after work.
 - **Coffee.** In many countries, coffee and business seem inextricably linked. Coffee seems to be what cements relationships, everywhere from Saudi Arabia to Argentina, via North America and Norway.
 - **Tea.** In China and Japan, tea is more popular.
- 2 After ten minutes’ discussion of these issues to set the theme for the module, go on to the reading task. Ask students to read the text and quickly decide what is the main idea expressed in the text.

Answer: Everybody is different. Signals mean different things to people of different cultures.

- 3 If necessary, allow a second reading to find the answers.
- a) Eye contact is important. Not maintaining eye contact indicates someone who is unfriendly, insecure, untrustworthy, inattentive and impersonal. But it is considered rude to stare. Americans signal interest and comprehension by bobbing their heads or grunting.
 - b) Similar to Americans where eye contact is concerned. The English (sic)* pay strict attention to a speaker, listen carefully, and blink their eyes to let the speaker know he/she has been heard and understood.
 - c) Taught to direct their gaze at their teacher’s Adam’s apple or tie knot.
 - d) A gesture of respect.
 - e) If a person of a lower class stares at someone of a higher class.
 - f) Anger.

* *Note:* It is a small but significant point that the text, from an American source, speaks of *the polite Englishman*. Many foreigners refer to “the English” when perhaps it would be more correct to say “the British.” Discuss with students what the terms Britain, the UK, Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England refer to. In addition people from the U.S. are usually referred to as “Americans,” although the North American continent includes Canadians and Mexicans.

- 4 Introduce the question by asking why some sort of research is a good idea before doing business with people from different countries or cultures.
- a) Elicit / suggest that:
 - partnerships need to be built on trust and shared understanding
 - initial research can help one know more about potential partners and their country, so avoiding embarrassment.
- Think about possibly taboo subjects, such as:
- politics in countries where open political diversity is not tolerated, or where

democracy has a meaning different from your understanding of the term

- talking about family relationships
- alcohol and certain foods
- discussing business too early, etc.

Refer to the Skills Checklist. Fundamental things to consider include:

- some basic geographical knowledge
- some knowledge of political and economic conditions
- religion and specific customs
- public holidays
- attitudes and expectations regarding entertaining visitors
- business conventions.

 b) Introduce the recording. The speaker is an experienced negotiator, used to dealing with people from varied cultural backgrounds. He suggests seven areas that are important for someone planning to do business across a cultural frontier. Ask students to identify six of them.

Answer key

The following seven areas are mentioned:

- the actual political and economic situation
 - stability
 - trends
 - outlook
- infrastructure
 - telecommunications
 - transportation
- religion / language
- geography / history
- culture / customs
 - people
 - food / drink / socializing
- attitudes / families
- business customs / conventions

Option

As a further discussion point to develop, it might be interesting to ask students if they think this type of research is as important when one is planning to receive a visitor as it is when one

plans to go abroad. In many cases, similar research would be advisable in both instances.

Tapescript

INTERVIEWER: So if you are going on a business trip, or meeting someone from another country – perhaps a different culture – what do you need to think about?

PETER: Well, it's not so obvious. I always try to know something about the actual political and economic situation in the other country – the politics, the economics. I should always know something about that, about what's happening. Also if I'm going abroad, I find out a little about the infrastructure – I mean the telecommunications, the transportation, that sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER: And do you find out about the general background, basic information about the country?

PETER: The culture, yes. Certainly, the religion, the language – I might learn a few polite phrases – the geography, maybe a little history. And how people live, what kind of culture it is, how people socialize, food, drink, all that is very important.

INTERVIEWER: What about family life?

PETER: Yes, that too. How families live, if private life and business ever mix ... and also business customs and conventions. I don't want to be surprised by anything.

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End by saying the list is not closed – there are plenty of other things one could also mention.

Discussion

Facilitate a very brief discussion on the value of the points included in this section. Students may identify particularly useful considerations to think about. Refer again to the Skills Checklist.

Ask again why preparation for contact across culture is important. Points to bring out include:

- it is a question of courtesy that one should be interested in one's business partners and in their countries
- tact and consideration are important
- knowing something about your partners can save embarrassment
- one will not be expected to be an expert: most people will be tolerant, so long as goodwill and good manners are evident.

Time: 10 minutes

2 Welcoming visitors

Welcoming visitors involves making people feel relaxed and comfortable in a new environment. An essential part of this is small talk – or making conversation which is not directly concerned with reaching a business deal. The theme of small talk is developed in more detail later in the unit. Read the opening questions, making sure students understand the focus of this section. Elicit suggested answers:

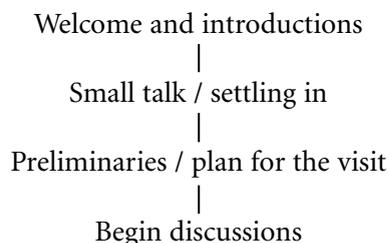
What happens when a visitor arrives with an appointment to visit a company?

- goes to reception
- introduces him/herself / states reason for visit (Who?)
- is taken to / met by the right person

What are the typical stages of the first meeting?

Suggest the first stage to the students: welcome and introductions. What might follow? Use the board or OHP to illustrate this structure.

Stages of a meeting



What conversations take place (in stage two above)?

- offer of refreshments
- questions about trip

- first visit / previous visits
- length of stay / hotel / etc.
- special interests / needs
- reference to previous contact / other small talk.

 1 Introduce the recording at Evco and play once. Elicit answers:

- a) The meeting is quite informal. They use first names, they interrupt each other a little and generally seem relaxed.
- b) They have never met: Luisa and Len have spoken on the phone a couple of times.
- c) Len wants to buy some fish to take home.

 2 Play the recording again. Given the situation, Luisa's interruption is probably acceptable, as is the immediate use of first names. On the other hand, Jack begins to talk about the program for the day quite quickly. Poor Len! This is a bit soon, surely! Let's hope they allow their visitor more time to relax with more small talk.

Option

Decide whether to spend more time on the language in this extract. Perhaps highlight language for: introductions / questions about the trip / taking of coat / offering refreshments / referring to program for the day, etc. Notice too how the small talk begins in discussing the weather and the fish. Ask students how the conversation could have developed – if Jack had not decided to get down to business.

Note: The participants in this conversation are lucky. Len asks about fish and the ice is broken. Sometimes getting the conversation going can be difficult. Point out that the module contains ideas for dealing with problems like this, beginning with the next section in this unit.

Tapescript

LEN: Hello, my name's Len Ewing. I've got an appointment ...

LUISA: Oh hello Len, I'm Luisa Caldos. We've spoken on the phone a couple of times. Nice to meet you.

LEN: It's nice to be here.
 LUISA: Oh – let me take your coat.
 LEN: Thanks.
 LUISA: Oh, here's Jack. Jack, this is Len, he's just arrived.
 JACK: Hello, Len. Nice to meet you ... and welcome to Evco.
 LEN: Thanks.
 JACK: Is this your first visit to the U.S.?
 LEN: No, I've been to Los Angeles two or three times but it's my first visit to Seattle.
 LUISA: Len, let me get you a drink.
 LEN: Yes, I'd like some tea, if possible, thanks.
 LUISA: Sure. With milk, or lemon?
 LEN: With lemon, please – and sugar.
 LUISA: Sure.
 JACK: Did you have a good trip?
 LEN: Absolutely no problems.
 JACK: That's good. You did fly didn't you – to Vancouver?
 LEN: Yes, that's right, then I drove down here.
 JACK: Oh that's good. Seattle can be a little wet at this time of the year ... you'll have to come back in the summer.
 LEN: Oh, I'd like that. I always like coming to the U.S. – and oh! A little problem! I need some fish. Can you advise me? I always take back some fish, some salmon.
 JACK: Oh, yes, King Salmon.
 LEN: And pickled herring too, in tomato sauce and the other one with onions and dill and pepper. Can you suggest a good place to get some?
 LUISA: Salmon? It's always wonderful ... the airport might be the best place. And the herring too.
 LEN: Okay, I'll have to get to the airport early. If I'm late, I might miss the plane. I can't go home without the fish!
 JACK: No! Certainly not. Well, we'll get you some for lunch anyway!
 LUISA: Okay, here's some tea.
 LEN: Oh, you're very kind.
 JACK: So, apart from fish, can I explain the program – I think we sent you an outline for the day – if you agree, we could start

with a video which explains some of our services and then we could have a look at a few reports on campaigns (*fade*)

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3 Explain that the focus here is on offering assistance and stating one's needs.

Start by asking the students to suggest ways to:

- offer assistance
- accept or decline such offers
- state one's needs.

 © Then introduce the situation.

Play the tape once. Check:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| a) to send a fax. | c) drink. |
| b) to send some flowers to his ex-wife. | d) newspaper. |
| | e) taxi. |

Tapescript

PETER: Yes, that's all right. I'm a little early – I can wait a few minutes.
 STEPHANIE: Well, can I get you a drink of something – some coffee or some tea perhaps?
 PETER: No, I'm fine thanks – but there is one thing – I'd like to send a fax – it's rather urgent.
 STEPHANIE: Yes, of course. Shall I show you to the machine or do you want me to take it?
 PETER: Oh yes, that would be better – and here's the number.
 STEPHANIE: Fine. Would you like a newspaper to read – or *Barron's*?
 PETER: No, it's okay – I can prepare some work while I'm waiting.
 STEPHANIE: Right, I'll get this off for you.
 PETER: Thanks. Oh – one other thing, I need to send some flowers to my ex-wife. Today is the fifth anniversary of our divorce. She didn't like all the traveling I did. I think some flowers from Australia would be rather appropriate, don't you?
 STEPHANIE: Er, perhaps! O.K., I'll get you a number for Interflora or something

like that. Maybe you have a special message you'd like to send with the flowers?

PETER: Yes, I'll think of one.

STEPHANIE: And this evening, will you need a cab to your hotel?

PETER: No, it's only five minutes. I'll walk.

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Language focus option

If you think it appropriate, ask students to identify the phrases in the dialogue which concern offering assistance and talking about one's needs.

Note: students are likely to know phrases like *I'd like ... / Could you get me ...* but are less likely to use introductory expressions like *There is one thing I need* or *I wonder if you could help me*.

Practice 1

Procedure

- Whole class performs the dialogue in pairs.
- Switch roles and repeat.
- You give cues where necessary, listening to parts from three or four pairs.
- Give group feedback, commenting on good language and problems.
- Select a couple of pairs to perform for the class.
- Finally, play the model version on the tape and discuss points arising.

Language focus option

Use the tape to focus on language of stating needs, offering assistance.

Tapescript

VISITOR: Hello, my name's Jim Linden from Amtel. I've got an appointment with Sandra Bates.

RECEPTIONIST: Oh, yes, Mr. Linden. Welcome to Datalink. Ms. Bates will be here in a few minutes. She's in a meeting that's just ending. Can I get you something to drink?

VISITOR: No thanks, I'm fine. Er, but I wonder if I could use a phone?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes, of course. And anything else ... if you need to send a fax or anything ...

VISITOR: No, it's okay, just the phone.

RECEPTIONIST: Right, well you can use this one.

VISITOR: Thanks. (*dials*) 'Allo, puis-je (*fade*) (a few minutes later)

VISITOR: (*fade in*) Au revoir. (*click*) Thank you very much.

RECEPTIONIST: Not at all. If there's anything else you need, please ask. Anything ...

VISITOR: Yes, I was wondering how far it is to the station?

RECEPTIONIST: It's about two miles – ten minutes by taxi. Should I get one?

VISITOR: Um, yes, thank you. That would be good. Can we say four o'clock?

RECEPTIONIST: Fine, I'll do that. Oh, I think Ms. Bates is free now. Shall I take you to her office?

VISITOR: Please. Thanks.

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Time: 15 minutes

3 Small talk: keeping the conversation going

Introduce the section. Remind students that small talk is always useful:

- at the beginning of a meeting, welcoming a visitor
- at other moments in a business relationship.

Elicit suggestions for:

- during breaks
- meals
- social occasions
- evenings
- moving from one place to another.

Ask what topics are useful for small talk. Remind students that conversation normally arises from the immediate physical environment: the weather, buildings and places, hotels, arrival and departure, meals, the time of day, entertainment, etc. or flows from the conversational context. Write on the board the topics students suggest. Suggest that some subjects are best avoided, but generally there

are many which can help to build personal as well as professional relationships.

In any conversation, the answers to questions and the comments that follow can provide a lead-in to the next comment – or even the next topic – in a conversation. Effective conversation requires that speakers recognize and pick up on these leads. Conversation proceeds on the basis of clues in previous sentences or in the immediate context. Additional points you may wish to mention:

- small talk helps develop good relationships and a good atmosphere
- small talk happens between casual acquaintances, people who meet in the course of their work, perhaps engaged in different fields, or staying in the same hotel or traveling on the same plane.

 1 Following this initial introduction, introduce the recording. Play the first version once. Elicit students' answers to the questions.

a) He doesn't respond to Randy's comment. It appears as if he doesn't care or isn't listening. Go through the explanation in the students' book. Make sure students understand the meaning of *supplementary question*. A supplementary question refers to the *same* topic.

 b) Elicit suggestions for a better version of the conversation. Then play the model answer on the recording.

Tapescript

First version

MANAGER: Is this your first visit here?

HEMP: No, in fact the first time I came was for a trade fair. We began our East Asian operations here at the 1997 Exhibition.

MANAGER: Shall we have a look around the plant before lunch?

Second version

MANAGER: Is this your first visit here?

HEMP: No, in fact the first time I came was for a trade fair. We began our East Asian operations here at the 1997 Exhibition.

MANAGER: Ah yes, I remember the exhibition well. So was it very successful for you?

HEMP: Well, we made a lot of useful contacts, including yourselves.

MANAGER: Of course ... now, shall we have a look around the plant before lunch?

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2 This exercise could be done as self-study or homework.

Answer key

- a) Well, I hope you like it.
- b) That's good.
- c) Oh, that's a shame. There's so much to see.
- d) Yes, I'd love to.
- e) That's very kind. Thank you.
- f) Oh dear, I'm sorry to hear that.
- g) What was the problem?
- h) Hmm. I hope you didn't feel too bad.

Time: 15 minutes

 3 Play each extract one by one.

- a) i = D, ii = B, iii = A, iv = C.
- b) Elicit a range of suggestions from the whole class, allowing some ideas to run for a few sentences, taking contributions from different class members. Occasionally go back to the recording again and repeat, allowing the conversation to take a different course. Here are suggestions for how the conversations might continue:
 - i) Further questioning on social and political affairs, relationships with neighboring states, next elections, economic conditions for businesses, foreign investment, etc.
 - ii) Observations on personal leisure preferences, love of or aversion to exercise / preference for watching rather than doing sports, etc.
 - iii) Further questioning on the vacation in the States, more detail, reference to one's own visit(s) to the States, opinions, other comments on vacations, preferred types, etc.

- iv) Questions about the family, ages of children, husband's work, etc.
Discussion of the impact of work on family life.
- c) Possible remarks to elicit or suggest include:
 - i) Depending on the acceptability of political conversation – a difficult area of conversation where some political systems are concerned – the discussion could easily lead to more information and comment on recent changes, future prospects, or refer to personalities involved.

Note: Politics is an interesting area: people can be baffled by the American people's criticism of politicians and even of the President, for example. Some leaders and some political systems, reviled elsewhere, may be revered by sections of their own people.

- ii) Different cultures have different perceptions of leisure: a drink with friends and associates in a bar can be anathema to some cultures where alcohol is taboo. Likewise, regular physical exercise is not everyone's idea. See also iii.
- iii) Leisure activities and vacations in particular may be totally different for different people.
- iv) Discussions on family, etc. may be unwelcome in some cultures. Americans or Europeans asking about aspects of family life might be unacceptable to Saudis, for example.

Tapescript

Extract i

WOMAN: So how are things going generally now, after the recent political changes?

MAN: Much better, I think generally people are more optimistic and the government should be all right now. There's a lot of popular support for government policies.

Extract ii

MAN: I like the thought of sports ... it's actually doing it I can't seem to manage.

I know I should, you know, keep in shape, eat less, go to a gym, use the hotel swimming pool ... but somehow I'd rather sit here at the bar and have a chat with whoever comes down. I spend all day working (*fade*)

Extract iii

MAN: So how do you usually spend your vacations? Do you stay at home or go abroad?

WOMAN: Oh, generally we travel. We were in the States last year, we went to California and to Arizona, we visited a few National Parks ...

Extract iv

WOMAN: Well of course, I like working. True, I travel a lot. That's not always so good, because it's difficult for the family. I've got children – they're four and six. My husband, he stays home and takes care of them (*fade*)

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Time: 15 minutes

Practice 2

Have students work in pairs to talk *non-stop* about the four pictures on page 7 of the Student's Book. Put a time limit on each one. Students should switch immediately to a different picture when you call time.

Fluency exercise option

Develop this exercise, perhaps as a warm-up or short fluency exercise at other stages of a lesson, using your own photographs from magazines, or photocopied images projected onto a wall using an overhead.

A variation on this is to use flashcards with various topics on them, such as:

travel	sports	politics / international politics
food	tourism in your country	art, theater, music

The various topics – or others suggested by the class – are written (or represented in pictures) on flash cards and distributed among the class. Have them stand up and circulate, discussing the topic on one of the cards with anyone in the room. When you call “change” they have to discuss the other student’s topic. When you shout “change partner” they have to talk to someone else, and so on. Leave two to three minutes between each call.

Time: 15 minutes

Language Checklist

Students should study the Language and Skills Checklist before practicing the role plays below. Tell them that the Language Checklists in the book are usually only a snapshot of all the available alternatives. Check pronunciation and comprehension of what is included. Use this same procedure throughout the book for both Checklists.

Skills Checklist

The Skills Checklist is about preparing for meetings with partners from other countries. It includes suggestions for developing effective cross-cultural understanding and builds on those aspects introduced in the first section of the unit.

Spend a few minutes discussing the recommendations and elicit students’ comments and any other suggestions.

Time: 10 minutes

Role plays

Encourage students to make notes from the Language Checklist if they need to. They should study their role cards for a minute or two, then act out the role play in pairs. The aim is to develop fluency and confidence in handling arrivals and engaging in small talk. You should try to note any problems you hear and refer to them in feedback.

If there is an odd number of students, you should take one of the roles.

Time: 15 minutes × 2

Role play option

An option is for you to play host or visitor and perform a role play with one or more students in front of the rest of the class. You can throw in added complications and difficulties that students would probably not include – where’s the restroom? (*toilet* in British English), some other difficulties – you need to cancel a hotel reservation, rent a car, buy a map, photocopy something, etc.

Transfer

This is an opportunity for students to put the ideas suggested in the Skills Checklist into practice with a specific country in mind. They could work individually, in pairs or in groups. Suggest they use a range of sources for finding out information:

- Published sources
 - books, guidebooks
 - travel information
- Official organizations
 - embassies
 - consulates
 - cultural centers
 - government offices and agencies
- Commercial offices
 - travel agents
 - marketing consultants
 - Import and Export offices and agencies
- People
 - colleagues who may know the place in question
 - nationals from the country concerned
 - students’ own knowledge.

Option

Develop the above into a mini-project for individual or group presentation at a later stage. This could be combined with Module 3 on Presentations.