

# Let's Talk!

Help the conversation flow in your A2 and B1 level classes!

At the A2 and B1 levels, your students aren't beginners anymore, so you want them to start speaking more freely, but they're not yet ready to have the more open discussions you can do with higher level groups. So, how can you support and encourage your A2 and B1 students to speak about their own experiences, feelings and opinions?

Whether you want to include more discussions in a general English class, or you are teaching a conversation course, let's deal with some common concerns – and get everyone talking!

## Topics

At the A2 and B1 levels, we need to keep the topics familiar and relatable. My tip: Choose discussion topics which flow naturally from the topics in your coursebook and use familiar vocabulary.

Example: For the topic of holidays

- What's the best month to go on holiday?
- Is it better to have one long holiday or two short ones?
- Are adult-only hotels a good idea?

## Vocabulary

We shouldn't expect an A2 or B1 level class to launch into a discussion without warming up.

My tip: Open discussions are best at the end of a lesson, but if you're doing it at the start, use a warm-up phase to remember key vocabulary for the topic. Put the words on the board (or on the screen) where everyone can see them during the activity. Online teaching tip: As an alternative to asking students to put their hands up and suggest a word in a brain-

storming session, use the chat function and ask students to post a word for others to see. Or use an online tool such as Mentimeter to present the students' suggestions as a word cloud.

## Thoughts and opinions

Allow students time to gather their thoughts before they speak.

My tip: Surveys and questionnaires are useful here. This allows students not only time to form an opinion, but it also gives them time to think about the vocabulary they will need to use.

## Putting it all together

At the A2 and B1 levels, it's not easy for a learner to form their opinion, remember the key vocabulary and form a full sentence all at the same time.

My tip: Instead of using questions to start the discussion, try using sentence starters to put students on the right track. Example:

Avoid: Why do you prefer beach holidays?

Offer: I prefer beach holidays because ...

## Big groups, little groups

Many students are anxious about speaking in front of a large group.

My tip: Pairs and small groups are the obvious solutions here. Start in pairs and then report back to the class in a plenary session.

Online teaching tip: Use the breakout room function to form pairs or small groups. Some less confident students may want to turn their cameras off, but I would discourage this as it's difficult for other students to talk to a blank screen.

### 3a Household skills

#### Household hero?

Are you a hero of household organisation, the queen of clean – or a 'don't care' diva of dirt and disorganisation?

Give yourself a star rating for each of these household jobs!

Doing the washing (not throwing everything in at 60 degrees)	☆☆☆☆
Ironing clothes (including underwear? and bedsheet?)	☆☆☆☆
Cooking (not just your one 'signature dish')	☆☆☆☆
Loading the dishwasher (the correct way – not like your partner?)	☆☆☆☆
Cleaning (not just sweeping the dirt under the carpet!)	☆☆☆☆
Doing simple household repairs (e.g. replacing a tap without flooding the bathroom)	☆☆☆☆
Decorating and furnishing the home (e.g. painting and wallpapering a room without swearing)	☆☆☆☆
Making a household budget (and keeping to it)	☆☆☆☆
Doing the paperwork (e.g. paying bills on time, dealing with home insurance)	☆☆☆☆

A questionnaire from *Let's Talk Now B1*, page 22

### 4c What about you?

Choose one of the conversation starters below, or choose a holiday photo on your phone. Tell a partner about it and he / she will react with a phrase from the What to say box in exercise 4a.

- The first holiday I can remember was ...
- I didn't enjoy my holiday in ...
- The most exotic holiday I've ever been on was ...
- We had a very relaxing holiday in ...
- We wanted a different kind of holiday, so ...

Words to use

amazing experience  
beautiful scenery  
comfortable Bed & Breakfast  
delicious food  
impressive buildings  
marvellous hotel  
picturesque village  
spectacular view

awful weather  
bad service  
dirty rooms  
expensive meals  
noisy restaurant  
overcrowded beaches  
tiring journey  
unfriendly people

Sentence starters from *Let's Talk Now A2*, page 28

## Mistakes

If students are brave enough to express an opinion in front of the group, they deserve encouragement, not criticism. Keep your focus on confidence building and fluency, rather than accuracy.



### Zur Autorin

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#### 4b Your tips

These are the top five wasted foods.  
Do you have any tips for  
how to use their leftovers?



#### Words to use

mix  
put  
leave  
fry  
bake  
thicken  
serve  
grate  
grill  
freeze

50 *fifty*

A conflict-free discussion from *Let's Talk Now B1*, page 50

My tip: If you think one student is so unclear that the others may not understand their point, you can use the echo technique of correction.  
Student: I like holiday train is cheap.  
You: Oh, you like going on holiday by train because it's cheaper. That's a good point.

#### Listening

In the whole-group phase of a discussion, it's easy for students who are only listening to switch off, which is discouraging for the speaker.

My tip: Keep the listeners on their toes by asking questions. Students at this level benefit from repetition and reinforcement, so don't be afraid to ask a question like, "Can you tell us what X said, to check that we all understand?" Or have the listeners ask the speaker a follow-up question, such as, "Can you ask X a question that starts with *Where?*"

Online teaching tip: Encourage students to use their reaction buttons to applaud, give a thumbs up or laugh.

#### Avoiding conflict

Less confident students can be anxious about class discussions because, when handled badly, they can lead to disagreement or conflict.  
My tip: Discussions don't have to be *for and against*, or about *right and wrong*. They can be simply sharing personal preferences, where there are no right or wrong answers. Discussions can also be collaborative, sharing ideas and problem solving.

Examples: There can be no wrong answers when you're describing your perfect day or offering an idea for using up leftover food. These ideas not only lend to peaceful discussion, but also allow the class to bond over similar opinions or even learn new recipes! Some more conflict-free discussion topics:

- What is the best day of the week?
- What skill would you like to learn?
- Your most important possession
- What makes a good friend? (And are you one?)
- Plan a weekend in your city for a visitor from the US.
- Plan a weekend or holiday for your teacher.

#### The end

Discussions can tend to fizzle out, so it's good to set a time limit and to round things off with feedback on the discussion.

My tip: Round off the discussions by asking for feedback, such as having students vote for the most interesting experience or the funniest story.

That's more positive than asking who spoke the best.

Online teaching tip: You can use an online survey tool before and after the discussion, to see if opinions about the discussion topic have changed.

***"Discussions don't have to be for and against, or about right and wrong. They can be simply sharing personal preferences, where there are no right or wrong answers."***

#### 'Think, Pair, Share'

'Think, Pair, Share' is a handy motto for conversation lessons.

Think: Give students time and simple support materials to think about what they want to say.

Pair: Form pairs or small groups for preliminary conversations.

Share: Come together as a whole group to share thoughts.



#### MEHR ENTDECKEN

Let's Talk Now A2 und B1  
ISBN 978-3-12-605555-0  
ISBN 978-3-12-605556-7  
[www.klett-sprachen.de/lets-talk-now](http://www.klett-sprachen.de/lets-talk-now)