



## Lesson 16: Networking and Effective Communication

This lesson is about encouraging students to develop their networking and interpersonal skills. The aim is to help students develop confidence in speaking with others and initiating conversations.

**Level:** Pre-intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level B2 and above)

**Time:** 60-90 minutes

**How to use this lesson:**

This lesson can be done in class but if you are short of time, parts of the lesson can be done at home as a written exercise. Try to allow time in class for students to discuss the different exercises. This will give them useful practice with asking and answering questions, as well as an opportunity to use the lesson vocabulary.

### Procedure:

#### Optional warmer or icebreaker – 10 minutes

##### Marooned

Get students into groups of 4 – 6.

1. Explain the situation: you are marooned on an island. What five (you can use a different number, such as seven, depending on the size of each team and their language level) items would you have brought with you if you knew there was a chance that you might be stranded. Have students brainstorm items and make a list (set a time limit).
2. Next, explain that they are only allowed to keep five items *per team*, not per person. For higher level students add a condition, e.g. items that will fit into a bag; that you'd find in your home/car; etc. Have them write their items on a board/flip chart and discuss and defend their choices with the whole group. The aim is to come up with a class agreement on the most essential 5 items.

This activity helps students to learn about other's values and problem solving styles and promotes teamwork.

#### Lead-in – 20 minutes

1. Brainstorm with the group what interpersonal skills and behaviour are needed for networking (whether on or offline, encourage them to think about both).

The list may include body language, listening (empathy), speaking (clarity and tone of voice), use of questioning, building rapport, understanding, tuning in to emotional or non-verbal cues and sharing information. Discuss each one and get students to think about the implications for both on and offline networking (you could get them to do this in groups). Use this opportunity to clarify or add any new vocabulary.

2. Give out the handout or reveal on a separate flipchart the following key attributes of great networkers:

Great networkers...

- ▶ present themselves with self-assurance
- ▶ are ready to seize opportunities
- ▶ are effective in give-and-take
- ▶ understand emotional and non-verbal cues
- ▶ relate well to others and create good relationships
- ▶ encourage and practice open communication
- ▶ stay receptive



## Lesson 16: Networking and Effective Communication

### Exercise 1 – 30 minutes

The first exercise focuses on demonstrating just how many resources are available even within a small group of people and the second on how to present oneself in the most effective way during a networking opportunity. This is not about traditional networking i.e. “working a room” and instead really focuses on harnessing personal strengths and expertise which are already present. Students may know plenty about social networking but this is about face-to-face communication.

### Teaching tip:

Encourage students to bring some really vexing problems to the table. It is always a surprise to find solutions right there in the room. This exercise very dramatically demonstrates the power of networking and of being willing to ask for help. If you are in touch with students before the session you could ask them to give you some problems in advance.

1. For each student in the class (or in pairs for lower ability students), create a specific problem and write it at the top of a sheet of paper. The problems should be varied, difficult, and require detailed resources. For example: “You want to get a scholarship to study economics at a prestigious British or American university.” “You need to fix the transmission on a 1992 Subaru Legacy and don’t have much money.” “Your dissertation relies on a document written in Mongolian.”
2. Have the class mingle and, by talking with other students/pairs collect as many suggestions for resources as they can to solve their problem. The resources should be actual resources in the classroom. Does someone have a friend who speaks Mongolian? Does someone know a good inexpensive auto mechanic? Does anyone know the process for getting into a good UK or US university?
3. When students feel they have found plenty of good ideas and resources, they should set their paper down on your desk, go back out into the group, and help others solve the other problems. This should continue until all the problems are on your desk or the time limit has been reached.

### Discussion

- ▶ Quickly look over the problems and decide which problems were best solved.
- ▶ Which problems still lack satisfactory solutions and why?
- ▶ For those still lacking a satisfactory solution, are there any good resources in the room that were not discovered by students during their discussion? Ask the class or share your ideas.
- ▶ For each problem, what is the best next step?

Ask the students how they felt about “networking” during this activity. Was this easier than meeting new people and having to make general chit-chat? If so, why?

### Exercise 2 – 10 minutes

These exercises are based on comedy improvisational tools: improvisational theatre is theatre performed without rehearsed or scripted lines. The actors make everything up on the spot. The skills that allow the improvisational actor to do this successfully are the same skills that make *any* individual successful in situations that are challenging, unfamiliar and unexpected. In other words, they are critical life skills.

What’s more, they don’t represent a mysterious talent that you are either born with or not, they are *learnable skills*. Anyone can acquire, improve them and refine them.

**Activity:** Students mingle in a large group, taking on different character. Help students to imagine they are at a cocktail party. You could even have a little music in the background to set the scene.

1. Have all the students mingle freely about the room talking to anyone they would like to as if they were at a party. After about thirty seconds you yell “Freeze!” and all of the students freeze like statues. You then yell out a character personality (e.g., “happy”, “tired”, “angry”, “rich”), and then “continue”. All the students then continue to mingle at the party but must express the personality as strongly as possible. After about 20 seconds of each, you change the character. Students should never *speak* the personality/character aloud (e.g. “I’m hungry!”) but should express the endowment (e.g. “I could really use a cheeseburger right now. Do you have one?”).
2. During the game, give the students some feedback about how successfully they are portraying the endowment. Are they smiling and laughing when they should be “angry”?



## Lesson 16: Networking and Effective Communication

### Teaching/training tips:

This game is meant to help students use their bodies to become different characters. For some students this will come very naturally, whereas others will find it difficult. The idea is that to successfully get other people interested in our dreams and goals, we need to find a character that will make a positive impression and that character may change depending on whom we are talking to.

### Review:

Discussion points for application: get students to come up with examples where they might use these skills. With the character endowments, get them to think about where being “enthusiastic” or “committed” would help them in their networking skills. What would *that* look like in that situation? You could also discuss how networks are developed, what sources they can use, why it’s important and what opportunities exist for them.

### A special note for the teacher:

Improvisation instruction requires a teacher who is energetic, attentive, and involved. Follow the tips below and your improvisational teaching experience will be a great one!

- 1. Use *unconditional positive regard* towards the participants.**  
It is hard to release the tremendous creative energy of improvisation if participants don’t feel like they are in an environment where they will be safe from feeling ridiculous. To this end, the instructor must never be critical of creative decisions made by the participants unless they are inappropriate.
- 2. Let them know that “failure” is okay.**  
Not only should failures not be criticised, they should be celebrated! Participants should be praised for their courage and effort regardless of the result.
- 3. Be the first into the breach.**  
Participants aren’t going to feel comfortable acting silly or making strong character choices if the instructor doesn’t. You must strive to be the silliest, loudest, most ridiculous person in the room. Model the level of energy, commitment, and enthusiasm that you want to see.
- 4. Take small steps.**  
Improvisation games range from very simple warm-up exercises to full-blown games that are physically and mentally strenuous. To arrive at the latter, you must take your participants slowly through the former. By taking small steps, your participants will feel increasingly confident and empowered and you will be amazed at their improvisation abilities!
- 5. Explain and demonstrate clearly.**  
When describing an activity, it’s best to *show* participants how to do it (when possible). This will help to make the instructions absolutely clear.
- 6. Fix mistakes quickly.**  
If it is obvious that someone didn’t understand any of the rules of the games, fix it quickly! Don’t wait until everyone else makes the same mistake.



## Lesson 16: Networking and Effective Communication

---

### Great networkers...

- ▶ present themselves with self-assurance
- ▶ are ready to seize opportunities
- ▶ are effective in give-and-take
- ▶ understand emotional and non-verbal cues
- ▶ relate well to others and create good relationships
- ▶ encourage and practice open communication
- ▶ stay receptive

Specific problem	Possible solutions