



**Teaching  
Nomad**

**40-Hour  
Teaching ESL Online  
Course**



# **Chapter 4:** **conversational classes**



### Types of Students

With conversational classes, you are going to have a wide variety of students.



You may have older students who do not have much language facility, young students who are almost fluent, and anything in between. You're also more likely to get students from all parts of the world, not just one particular country.

Some students may want to talk about specific topics, like business or another field. Their primary use for English is to establish business deals and interact with partners. If that is the case, it would be best for you to have background knowledge on the topic.

Naturally, you can expect to see a few differences between students in different age groups. On the next few pages, we'll discuss the attitudes and goals of three age groups: children, adults, and adolescents.

### Children



#### **Attitude**

Children often take these classes because their parents have told them to. They may take some warming up to really start to interact with you.

You can help this by being silly and talking about easy topics at first. Speak slowly and wait patiently for a response. It can be tempting to fill in words for them if they don't say anything, but you have to ascertain whether it's because they're shy or because they don't understand the question. If they don't understand, explain or ask a different one. If they're just hesitant to talk, ask them the same one again.

Children are more likely to see you in a typical teacher's role and are unlikely to have any questions about your methods. They will rely on you to lead them through a conversation unless they are very talkative.

#### **Goals**

A conversational class is not a child's main source of English learning. They may have several other English classes that teach grammar and vocabulary. In a conversational class, children want to improve their overall fluency and practice using grammar they've learned in school. It makes it easier to speak naturally and may also teach them extra vocabulary words.

### Adults



#### **Attitude**

Adults are generally more serious than children about their English language development. Their relationship with you will lean towards the nature of a peer-to-peer relationship, rather a teacher-student one. It is important to establish rapport, as they might be initially self-conscious and need to become comfortable with making mistakes in front of you.

Adults are more likely to question you about reasonings behind grammar or teaching methods. They've had a lot of life experience with learning in and out of classrooms and come with expectations of how the class is going to go. Be prepared to give reasons for grammar points and where vocabulary will be useful.

#### **Goals**

Adults sign up for classes because they have a specific goal in mind. They might want to talk about business or improve their English to boost their resume. They typically already have a foundation in English, and want to use it in practical situations, such as when talking to an international client. With an adult learner, content should be geared towards whatever use they have for English, rather than general grammar practice.

[In this video](#), you can see an online teacher and an adult student have a first lesson together. Right away, the teacher asks questions to find out who the student is, where he is from, and why he is taking the course: he is an acupuncturist from Japan who wants to improve his English skills for work. Based on this information, the teacher makes the lesson more difficult and geared towards teaching words commonly used when interacting with English-speaking clients.

### Adolescents



#### **Attitude**

Adolescents are at an age where their approach to English will vary. You may have reluctant students whose parents have signed them up or self-motivated students who have asked for more practice. Adolescents have likely had years of English schooling, depending on what country they're from and are therefore less likely to be too reticent. They will still see you in as more of a teacher than a peer and rely on you as a guide for the class.

The changes that take place during puberty set adolescents apart. They are at an age where they are starting to become independent and seeing how they fit into the world. They will start questioning their parents' decisions, and if they have been unwillingly signed up for an English class, they will be the most difficult to get to open up and participate.

You will have to be patient and wait them out. Try to ask about their interests and goals while speaking to them as adults. Be prepared to give good reasons as to why they should take an English class with you. At this stage in life, they need more motivation than "my parents told me to" in order to become engaged with the subject.

#### **Goals**

Again, adolescents are going to be a cross between children and adults. There will be students who are simply improving their fluency and students who have a specific goal in mind. Some might be practicing for a speech and want feedback, some may be studying for an important exam with an English proficiency component, or they may be preparing for some sort of competition. In the first lesson, figure out your student's motivation and appeal to that as you work with them.

### Preparing Topics

For many classes, your conversation may flow freely. If you are an excellent conversationalist, you might be able to do this for any class you have. However, **having prepared topics** makes it easy to get a conversation started and for your student to have something to talk about.

If you make or choose topics, send them to your student so they know what to expect. Let your student know, *“In our next session, we will be talking about travel. Think about where you would like to visit and be ready to speak about the reasons you want to visit there for next class.”*

#### Goal-Oriented

When preparing topics, the first thing to think about is what you want to accomplish during the conversation.

Do you want your student to practice using the present progressive tense? Using specific vocabulary? Presenting marketing ideas?

Within this framework, you can talk about a multitude of topics, but keep in mind what learning objectives the student should work on.

#### Individualized

After figuring out what points to work on, add in your students' interests. You can create a story in present, past, or future tense about anything they'd like to speak about. If the class is to practice for a specific scenario, you should be able to act as a partner.

For example, you should have enough knowledge to pretend to be a businessperson or a judge. In conversational classes, you will often have new students, so try to gather information about them at the beginning of or before class if possible.

As you work and gain experience, you might develop a consistent client list, and then you can really get to know your students

### Feedback

The main benefit from online conversational classes is that students can get immediate **feedback** from someone who knows what to look out for.



During the conversation, you should make note of grammar and pronunciation mistakes. You can write them down to go over later and/or correct them immediately. If correcting right away, the student should repeat the correction back to you. If a student makes a large number of mistakes, correct them the first few times but let them continue to speak and simply put it into your feedback. Overcorrecting can interrupt their thought process, which is detrimental to fluency.

Additionally, make note of new vocabulary and expressions you might introduce. By writing down notes on mistakes and future topics, you can give feedback that your students can use as a visual reminder of what they should practice.

Finally, your feedback should be focused and specific. If there are too many points to remember, it becomes too difficult for your students to practice. Pick three or four language points they can really improve on. Pull examples from your conversations and provide reasons for corrections.

- An example note might be, *“You said ‘I like dog,’ but the correct form is ‘I like dogs’ because you are talking about an animal in general. You like many dogs, not just one.”*

In addition to making corrections, add positive feedback on concepts that you notice the students do well with, especially if you can see improvement. A good way for delivering criticism is with the sandwich method; that is, put your criticism between two pieces of praise.

## Chapter 4: Conversational Classes



### Cultural Differences

With online conversational classes, you might teach students from cultures that are vastly different from your own. Unlike a traditional classroom, where your pool of students will likely be from one country, conversational classes let you talk with people from all over the world.



You have to keep in mind that depending on where each of your students are from, they might react differently to a male or a female teacher, or they might not feel comfortable talking about certain topics. They might also have opinions with which you don't agree.

On the other hand, you can learn so much about another culture by talking to your students. Teaching online can be an incredibly enriching experience from the comfort of your home if you're able to make the most of what's available.