Adult ESL Conversation Questions and Activities

Give adult English learners a reason to keep the conversation going. These 24 original discussion tasks ask partners to explain a preference, compare ideas, share a low-pressure example, or make a small group decision—with language frames for asking follow-up questions and clarifying meaning.

Host guide / Letter / Adult ESL/EFL pairs or small groups; suitable for teacher-led classes and informal practice / 20–45 minutes; choose 4–8 cards for one session

Read the guide privately first if this activity has hidden answers. Print single-sided at Actual size / 100%. Cut only sheets marked CARDS. Keep answer keys with the host.

What you need

- Printed or screen-displayed prompt cards.

- Optional board or paper for sentence frames and follow-up questions.

- Timer for turn changes, if useful.

How to run it

1. Choose four to eight cards and preview any words learners may need. Let the group skip a prompt that feels too personal or unfamiliar.

2. Put learners in pairs. For each card, Partner A speaks first for up to one minute while Partner B listens for one detail to ask about.

3. Partner B asks a follow-up question and then gives their own view or example. Switch who begins on the next card.

4. Use the language bank as a support menu. Learners may point to a frame, change one word, and continue in their own voice.

5. After two or three cards, invite pairs to join another pair and share one idea they found interesting, not a judgment about a person.

6. Close by asking learners which question helped the conversation continue and which phrase helped them clarify or disagree politely.

A simple conversation routine

A topic becomes a conversation when each turn responds to the last one. Use this three-part routine: give a short answer, add a reason or example, then ask a related question. The listener should react to the answer before moving to a new topic.

For quieter groups, let learners write three key words before speaking and keep turns short. For a more confident group, ask the listener to paraphrase one point before offering a different view. Avoid correcting every sentence while someone is speaking; collect a few useful language notes and review them after the round.

- Open: “For me, ___ is useful because ___.”

- Follow up: “What do you like about it?” “Could you give an example?”

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- Clarify: “When you say ___, do you mean ___?”

- Agree or differ: “I see your point. I would add ___.” “I have a different experience.”

- Invite another turn: “What about you?” “Has that changed over time?”

Choose support that fits the room

These cards do not assign an official proficiency level. A teacher can make a task shorter, provide two answer choices, or offer a sentence frame; a group can also ask for a longer explanation or compare two viewpoints. Keep supports optional so they help learners participate without making the conversation sound scripted.

- More support: underline the action word, offer a short phrase bank, and allow notes.

- More stretch: ask for a counterexample, a consequence, or a comparison with a different situation.

- Pair format: take turns asking and answering. Small-group format: give each speaker a different role, such as summarizer or follow-up questioner.

Make personal sharing optional

Adults bring varied experiences, responsibilities, and comfort levels to a class. A card can be answered with a real example, an imagined example, or a general opinion. Learners should not need to disclose finances, family details, health information, immigration history, or workplace conflict to complete a speaking activity.

- Say: “You can answer generally or invent a character.”

- Allow learners to pass and choose another card.

- Praise a clear reason or thoughtful follow-up rather than a particular opinion.

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CARDS / Adult ESL Conversation Questions and Activities

N_ESL_ADULT-001 / daily routines

Describe one small routine that makes a busy day easier. Give one example of when you use it, then ask your partner whether they have a similar routine or a different one.

N_ESL_ADULT-002 / hobbies

Choose a hobby you already enjoy or would like to try. Explain what a beginner would need for a first session, then ask your partner what makes learning a new hobby enjoyable.

N_ESL_ADULT-003 / learning

Talk about a skill you learned outside a formal class. Describe the first step you took and one thing that helped. Your partner asks one follow-up question about the process.

N_ESL_ADULT-004 / technology

Name a kind of digital tool that helps with an everyday task, without naming a brand if you prefer. Explain what problem it solves and one situation where a person might choose another method.

N_ESL_ADULT-005 / technology

Discuss notifications on phones or computers. Which kinds are useful, and which do you prefer to silence? Give a reason and ask your partner how they decide what to check first.

N_ESL_ADULT-006 / music

Choose music for one activity—reading, exercising, relaxing, or traveling. Explain what qualities fit the activity, then ask your partner to choose a different activity and music mood.

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CARDS / Adult ESL Conversation Questions and Activities

N_ESL_ADULT-007 / music

Describe a song, performance, or musical style that you enjoy without quoting lyrics. Explain what you notice about its sound and ask your partner what they listen for.

N_ESL_ADULT-008 / holidays and time off

Some people prefer to plan a holiday or day off in detail; others decide as they go. Compare the two approaches and agree on one situation where each could work well.

N_ESL_ADULT-009 / community and traditions

Describe a celebration, seasonal event, or personal tradition you are comfortable sharing. You may also invent one. Explain one step in the event and ask what makes a gathering welcoming.

N_ESL_ADULT-010 / planning

Imagine you and a partner have one free afternoon in a fictional town. Choose two activities from a list the teacher provides, explain the order, and agree on a meeting point.

N_ESL_ADULT-011 / places

Talk about a public place where it is easy to concentrate or relax, such as a library, park, or community room. Describe one feature and ask your partner what they would add.

N_ESL_ADULT-012 / design

Choose one everyday object that is well designed. Explain what makes it easy to use, then ask your partner to describe a different object and compare the design choices.

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CARDS / Adult ESL Conversation Questions and Activities

N_ESL_ADULT-013 / recommendations

Discuss a book, podcast, article, or show you would recommend to an adult friend. Give a spoiler-free description and ask what kinds of stories or information your partner enjoys.

N_ESL_ADULT-014 / problem solving

Think of a time you solved a small practical problem, or invent a character who did. Explain the steps in order and ask your partner which step was most important.

N_ESL_ADULT-015 / group decisions

A group is choosing between a quiet indoor activity and an outdoor activity for a weekend gathering. Explain which details the group should ask about before choosing, then reach a decision together.

N_ESL_ADULT-016 / communication

Discuss what makes instructions easy to follow. Describe one helpful feature—such as numbered steps, a picture, or an example—and ask your partner to suggest another.

N_ESL_ADULT-017 / organization

Choose one way people organize notes, reminders, or appointments. Explain why it suits a particular person, then compare it with another method your partner describes.

N_ESL_ADULT-018 / community

Imagine a community center is planning a short evening event for adults. Suggest a theme, one activity, and one way to help newcomers join the conversation. Ask your partner to improve the plan.

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CARDS / Adult ESL Conversation Questions and Activities

N_ESL_ADULT-019 / technology

Talk about a change in technology or daily life that you have noticed, or use an imaginary example. Describe one task that became easier and one new question people might have.

N_ESL_ADULT-020 / future plans

Choose a goal you might work toward in the next few months, or invent a goal for a character. Name a first step and a possible obstacle; your partner asks how you might respond.

N_ESL_ADULT-021 / decision making

Discuss how people decide what to do first when several tasks need attention. Compare two fictional strategies and explain which one might suit a person who prefers a clear plan.

N_ESL_ADULT-022 / social conversation

Describe a kind of conversation that helps people get to know one another without asking private questions. Give two sample questions and invite your partner to add one.

N_ESL_ADULT-023 / learning

Imagine a small group wants to learn something together for one month. Choose a topic, decide how often to meet, and suggest one simple way to share what each person learned.

N_ESL_ADULT-024 / preferences

Compare two ways to spend a quiet evening: doing one activity alone or joining a small group. Explain one advantage of each and ask your partner which detail would influence their choice.

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Hosting questions

Are these adult ESL questions a test?

No. They are open conversation tasks for practice. They do not assign a score, diagnose proficiency, or predict exam results.

Can learners skip a question?

Yes. They may answer generally, invent an example, or choose another card. Personal disclosure is not required.

How many cards should a class use at once?

Four to eight cards can support a short session. Choose fewer when learners need more planning time or longer turns.

How are these different from the food, travel, shopping, and workplace pages?

This hub focuses on broad adult discussion and conversation habits. Companion pages focus on practical role-play tasks such as ordering, asking directions, shopping, and workplace exchanges.

Can the prompts work for informal language exchange?

Yes, but F32 is the dedicated page for adult language-exchange partners. This set is arranged for teacher-led classes as well as small groups.

References

British Council TeachingEnglish guidance discusses adult learners, relevant discussion contexts, low-pressure monitoring, and decision-making tasks; used to shape facilitation notes, not copied prompts.

https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-resources/teaching-secondary/activities/intermediate-b1/getting-adults-and-children-talk

British Council TeachingEnglish describes learner-generated questions, pair/group discussion, and follow-up questions as a practice format; all question cards here are newly written.

https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-resources/teaching-primary/activities/level-2/games-question-practice

British Council TeachingEnglish guidance on using learners' ideas and open evaluative questions; referenced for facilitation design only.

https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/understanding-learners/your-learners-resource

Original AI-assisted resource with AI editorial review. Independent human playtesting and physical printing have not been completed. Answer, listen, or pass.

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