

Adult ESL Food and Dining Conversation Practice

Practice the English you need to make a reservation, order a meal, ask a clear menu question, or solve a small food-service mix-up. These 24 original role-play cards give adult learners a practical goal, partner roles, and language support without turning the activity into an exam.

Host guide / A4 / Adult English learners in pairs or groups of three; teacher or facilitator optional / 25–45 minutes, depending on the number of cards and role swaps

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 role-play cards.
- Optional blank menu, reservation sheet, or grocery list for learners to annotate.
- Paper and pens for noting useful phrases and one follow-up question.

How to run it

1. Choose two to four cards that match the group's current vocabulary and comfort level. Let learners pass on any scenario they do not want to discuss.
2. Assign roles and give each learner a private information point, such as a time, menu detail, preference, or missing item.
3. Pre-teach only the words needed for the chosen task. Model one polite question and one way to ask for repetition.
4. Give pairs two minutes to plan. Encourage key words and sentence starters, not a fully written dialogue.
5. Run the first role-play for three to five minutes. The listener checks whether the task was completed, not whether every sentence was perfect.
6. Swap roles or change one detail, such as the reservation time or available menu item, and repeat the conversation.
7. Close with a short reflection: Which phrase helped? What information was still missing? What would you ask next time?

Useful language for food conversations

Keep the phrase bank visible during a first round. Learners can select a phrase, adapt one word, and then make the next turn in their own language. Encourage a clear request plus a reason when that helps the partner respond.

- Ordering: "Could I have the ____, please?" "I'd like to order ____." "Could we see the menu, please?"
- Asking: "Could you tell me what comes with it?" "Does this dish include ____?" "What would you recommend if I prefer ____?"
- Preferences: "I don't eat ____." "I'd prefer something without ____." "Could I have ____ instead?"
- Clarifying: "Sorry, could you repeat that more slowly?" "Did you say ____ or ____?" "Let me check that I understood."

- Resolving a mix-up: "I ordered ____, but I received ____." "Could you help me check the order?"

Make the cards work at different levels

For an early-speaking group, let learners point to menu items and use the sentence starters. For a more confident group, hide the phrase bank after one practice round and add a follow-up question or a constraint. These are flexible classroom supports, not formal level labels or exam practice.

- Simplify: underline the key noun and give each role one short goal.
- Extend: ask learners to paraphrase the partner's request before responding.
- Make it printable: cut out the card, fold the role details inward, and let each partner read only their own role.

Facilitator note

Use fictional menus and details when the task touches on allergies or dietary needs. Learners are practicing how to ask and clarify; they are not being asked to make health decisions. For real dining decisions, direct people to the restaurant or another appropriate source. Avoid requiring learners to disclose personal medical, religious, or financial information.

- Offer a neutral alternative such as "a food you prefer not to eat."
- Praise clear turn-taking, repair questions, and successful information exchange—not accent imitation.

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<p>N_ESL_FOOD-001 / cafe order</p> <p>At a café, Customer A has ten minutes before a meeting and wants a drink and a simple breakfast. Customer B takes the order. Ask what is available, choose two items, and repeat the order to confirm it.</p>	<p>N_ESL_FOOD-002 / reservation</p> <p>Customer A wants to reserve a table for three at 6:30 p.m. Customer B answers the phone and has a fictional booking sheet. Confirm the day, time, party size, and name before ending the call.</p>
<p>N_ESL_FOOD-003 / menu questions</p> <p>Customer A is choosing between two dishes on a fictional menu and wants to know what comes with each. Customer B explains the menu. Ask one follow-up question and make a final choice.</p>	<p>N_ESL_FOOD-004 / dietary preference</p> <p>Customer A prefers a meal without one named ingredient. Customer B is a server with a short ingredient list. Ask whether the dish includes it and request another option if needed; do not guess when the information is unclear.</p>
<p>N_ESL_FOOD-005 / substitution</p> <p>Customer A would like a side dish changed. Customer B checks the fictional menu and explains two possible substitutions. Agree on one option and repeat the full order.</p>	<p>N_ESL_FOOD-006 / service repair</p> <p>Customer A receives a different drink from the one ordered. Customer B is the server. Explain the mix-up politely, confirm what was ordered, and decide together what happens next.</p>

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<p>N_ESL_FOOD-007 / takeout</p> <p>Customer A is calling to place a takeout order for two people. Customer B writes the order. Include one main dish for each person, one shared side, a pickup time, and a name for the order.</p>	<p>N_ESL_FOOD-008 / change reservation</p> <p>Customer A needs to move a dinner reservation from 7:00 to 7:30. Customer B checks a fictional schedule with one available time and one full time. Ask about the options and confirm the new booking.</p>
<p>N_ESL_FOOD-009 / food market</p> <p>Customer A is shopping for ingredients for a simple picnic and has a list of six items. Customer B works at the market. Ask where three items are and request a suggestion for one replacement item.</p>	<p>N_ESL_FOOD-010 / food market</p> <p>Customer A is buying fruit for a shared meal but is unsure which item is ripe enough to serve today. Customer B is the produce seller. Ask two descriptive questions and choose an item without relying on a real safety claim.</p>
<p>N_ESL_FOOD-011 / takeout</p> <p>Customer A wants to order lunch to take away and needs to know how long it will take. Customer B gives a fictional wait estimate and asks about utensils. Confirm the order and pickup details.</p>	<p>N_ESL_FOOD-012 / reservation</p> <p>Customer A arrives at a restaurant with a reservation, but the name is misspelled on the fictional list. Customer B checks the list. Spell the name, give the booking time, and agree on the next step.</p>

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<p>N_ESL_FOOD-013 / shared meal</p> <p>Customer A is planning a potluck with three colleagues and wants each person to bring a different type of dish. Customer B helps organize the list. Suggest a dish, ask what others are bringing, and avoid duplicate choices.</p>	<p>N_ESL_FOOD-014 / invitation</p> <p>Customer A is inviting a colleague to lunch. Customer B has a busy calendar and a preference for a quiet place. Find a day and time, ask about food preferences, and agree on a plan.</p>
<p>N_ESL_FOOD-015 / service repair</p> <p>Customer A ordered a soup and a sandwich, but the receipt lists only one item. Customer B is at the counter. Explain what seems missing, show the fictional order note, and ask the staff member to check.</p>	<p>N_ESL_FOOD-016 / menu questions</p> <p>Customer A is choosing a dish to share with a group and wants to know whether it is mild or spicy. Customer B describes two menu options. Ask for a plain-language comparison and choose one.</p>
<p>N_ESL_FOOD-017 / hotel breakfast</p> <p>Customer A is staying at a hotel and wants to know when breakfast is served and where it is located. Customer B works at the front desk. Ask for both details and repeat them back.</p>	<p>N_ESL_FOOD-018 / group order</p> <p>Customer A is organizing lunch for a small meeting and has a fictional menu with three choices. Customer B helps collect orders. Ask each person for a choice and summarize the final count clearly.</p>

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N_ESL_FOOD-019 / recommendation

Customer A is looking for a café where two friends can talk comfortably. Customer B knows three fictional cafés with different noise levels and seating. Ask about the options and recommend one to the group.

N_ESL_FOOD-020 / food conversation

Customer A wants to learn how to make a dish that a friend brought to a meal. Customer B explains a fictional three-step recipe. Ask about the order of steps and write a short summary in your own words.

N_ESL_FOOD-021 / reservation

Customer A calls a restaurant to ask whether a table is available for four at 5:45. Customer B has a fictional booking sheet. If that time is full, offer a nearby alternative and confirm the choice.

N_ESL_FOOD-022 / custom order

Customer A is ordering a sandwich and wants to choose bread, filling, and one topping. Customer B takes the order. Ask the customer to repeat the final combination before confirming it.

N_ESL_FOOD-023 / shared meal

Customer A is coordinating a shared dinner with a vegetarian guest and a guest who avoids a different ingredient. Customer B helps plan the menu. Ask what each person would like and choose dishes that need no assumptions.

N_ESL_FOOD-024 / paying and clarifying

Customer A wants to ask for the bill and check that two shared items are included. Customer B is the server. Request the bill, identify the fictional item list, and confirm the total shown on the practice receipt.

Hosting questions

How many learners can use these food conversation cards?

They are written for pairs, but a third learner can observe, note useful phrases, and then take one role in the next round.

Are the prompts suitable for beginners?

Many can be simplified with a phrase bank, pictured menu, and shorter turns. Teachers can choose a small set instead of using all 24 at once.

Do the cards give allergy or nutrition advice?

No. They help learners practice how to ask and clarify. Use a real restaurant or qualified source for actual ingredient and food-safety questions.

Should learners memorize a model dialogue?

No. Use the phrase bank as support, then let partners choose their words and respond to new details.

Can I change the prices, foods, and names?

Yes. The details are fictional prompts. Replace them with locally familiar examples while keeping the speaking goal clear.

References

British Council TeachingEnglish example of restaurant ordering with a menu, customer/server roles, pre-taught phrases, role switching, and repeated turns; used for activity design only.

<https://africa.teachingenglish.org.uk/classroom/activities/three-speaking-activities>

British Council TeachingEnglish role-play guidance describes preparing needed vocabulary and phrases, modeling a task, pairing learners, swapping roles, and monitoring; our scenarios and cards are original.

<https://africa.teachingenglish.org.uk/classroom/activities/role-play-2>

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