Adult ESL Shopping Conversation Practice

Practice the real conversations behind a shopping trip: explain what you need, ask a useful follow-up, compare two options, and confirm what happens next. These 24 original cards include shopper and staff goals, polite language support, and fictional store details for classroom use.

Host guide / Letter / 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 fictional product cards, store map, or blank comparison grid.

- Paper and pens for noting the item, option chosen, and next step.

How to run it

1. Select two to four cards and assign the shopper and staff roles. Let learners choose a neutral scenario if they do not want to discuss personal purchases.

2. Give each partner different information. For example, the shopper has a need or constraint while the staff member has an invented stock note or policy card.

3. Pre-teach a small set of useful phrases, then model one polite question and one confirmation sentence.

4. Allow one minute for each learner to read their own role. They may write key words but should not script every line.

5. Run the role-play for three to five minutes. The shopper should make a decision or agree on a next step.

6. Swap roles or change one product detail, such as size, color, or availability, and repeat the conversation.

7. Review the task outcome and one phrase that helped clarify information. Focus feedback on being understood, asking follow-up questions, and polite register.

Useful shopping phrases

Keep this language bank visible during the first round. Learners can borrow one phrase and replace the key noun or detail. Invite them to notice how a short reason can make a request easier to understand.

- Finding an item: “I’m looking for ___.” “Could you tell me where I can find ___?”

- Asking about options: “Do you have this in another size or color?” “What is the difference between these two?”

- Checking details: “Could you show me how this works?” “Is this the item listed on my note?”

- Service requests: “I’d like to exchange this, if possible.” “Could you explain the store’s practice for this fictional situation?”

- Clarifying: “Let me check that I understood.” “So the blue one is available today, but the gray one is not?”

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Make the information gap useful

A good pair task gives each person a reason to speak. The staff member should not reveal every detail immediately; the shopper should ask questions tied to a goal. For example, one role may say a lamp needs to fit on a narrow desk, while the other role has two fictional models with different measurements.

For a simpler round, read the prompt aloud and provide sentence starters. For a more open round, hide the language bank, add a follow-up question, or let learners create a new but clearly fictional store detail. These prompts are not consumer guidance and do not state what a real shop must do.

- Use a blank comparison grid: item, useful feature, question asked, choice, next step.

- Ask observers to listen for a polite opening, a follow-up question, and a confirmation.

Keep the practice respectful

Shopping can involve money, body size, or personal circumstances. Keep examples fictional, do not require learners to share budgets or real purchase problems, and allow anyone to pass on a prompt. Avoid turning a role-play into advice about legal returns, warranties, payment, or credit.

- Replace personal details with a character card.

- Use neutral feedback: “The request was clear” or “A follow-up question helped,” rather than judging the purchase.

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CARDS / Adult ESL Shopping Conversation Practice

N_ESL_SHOPPING-001 / find product

Shopper A needs a notebook with blank pages and a firm cover. Staff B has two fictional notebooks: one has blank pages and one has lined pages. Ask where they are, compare the cover, and choose one.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-002 / compare products

Shopper A wants a small desk lamp that fits a narrow table. Staff B has fictional product cards showing two widths and two colors. Ask for the measurements, compare the options, and explain which one fits the stated space.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-003 / sizes and stock

Shopper A found a jacket in the wrong size. Staff B has a fictional stock list with one larger size in another color and no more of the original color. Ask about the options and choose what to do next.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-004 / sizes and stock

Shopper A wants to try on shoes but cannot find the matching size. Staff B checks a fictional stock card. Ask whether another size is available today or whether the store can suggest a different option.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-005 / service problem

Shopper A bought a desk organizer that arrived with one piece missing. Staff B is at a fictional customer-service counter. Describe the missing part, show an invented receipt number, and ask what options are available under the role card policy.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-006 / exchange

Shopper A received the wrong color in a made-up online order. Staff B has a fictional exchange policy with two possible next steps. Explain the problem, ask what information is needed, and repeat the agreed plan.

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CARDS / Adult ESL Shopping Conversation Practice

N_ESL_SHOPPING-007 / compare products

Shopper A is choosing between two fictional travel mugs. Product card one is lighter; product card two holds more. Staff B can explain both notes. Ask about the difference and choose according to a stated priority.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-008 / find product

Shopper A has a list of three items for a home office. Staff B works in a fictional shop and knows the aisle locations. Ask for directions to each item, then summarize the route in order.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-009 / clarify product details

Shopper A sees a price label beside an item but is unsure which product it describes. Staff B checks an invented shelf note. Explain what you see, ask for clarification, and confirm the displayed practice price before deciding.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-010 / recommendation

Shopper A wants to buy a gift for a colleague who likes drawing. Staff B has three fictional gift cards with different uses. Ask what each one is for and recommend one without asking for private information.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-011 / clarify product details

Shopper A is looking for a phone charger but does not know which connector matches a fictional device card. Staff B can read the device note. Ask what information is needed and repeat the compatible label exactly as written.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-012 / product demo

Shopper A wants to know whether a small kitchen appliance can be demonstrated. Staff B has a fictional store note saying one display model is available at a counter. Ask where to go and what the demonstration will show.

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N_ESL_SHOPPING-013 / store service

Shopper A is buying a present but wants it wrapped in a simple way. Staff B has an invented list of two wrapping options and one unavailable option. Ask about the choices and confirm the selected option.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-014 / exchange

Shopper A wants to exchange a shirt because the color is different from the fictional order note. Staff B checks the note and has two colors in stock. Explain the mismatch and agree on one next step.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-015 / compare products

Shopper A is comparing two backpacks using a fictional product card. One has more pockets; the other is lighter. Ask about the feature that matters most to your character and explain the final choice.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-016 / order collection

Shopper A wants to collect an order from a fictional pickup desk but cannot find the collection point. Staff B gives directions from the front entrance using three landmarks. Ask for repetition if needed and confirm the route.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-017 / service problem

Shopper A received a box with the wrong item inside. Staff B is a customer-service representative with a fictional order record. State the item ordered and item received, then ask how to document the difference.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-018 / compare products

Shopper A is choosing a chair for a small reading corner. Staff B has fictional cards with seat width and color. Ask which option fits the character’s stated space and summarize the choice.

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N_ESL_SHOPPING-019 / product information

Shopper A wants to ask about the care instructions for a wool scarf. Staff B has a made-up label card with simple washing symbols described in words. Ask the staff member to explain the written directions; do not invent care instructions.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-020 / clarify product details

Shopper A found a useful item but cannot tell whether it is sold as a single item or a pair. Staff B checks a fictional package note. Ask for the quantity and confirm the package description before choosing.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-021 / market stall

Shopper A is at a craft fair and likes a handmade bowl. Staff B made it and can describe its size, color, and intended use. Ask two questions and decide whether the item suits a fictional gift idea.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-022 / compare products

Shopper A needs a storage box that fits on a shelf 30 centimeters wide. Staff B has fictional boxes measuring 25, 30, and 35 centimeters. Ask which options fit the stated limit and repeat the selected measurement.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-023 / exchange

Shopper A is returning a fictional gift but does not want to explain the personal reason. Staff B has a made-up store policy card with two options. Ask what information is needed and choose a next step without disclosing private details.

N_ESL_SHOPPING-024 / availability

Shopper A cannot find a particular notebook style. Staff B says it is not in stock today but offers two fictional alternatives. Ask what is similar and different, then decide whether to choose an alternative or come back later.

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Hosting questions

Are these shopping role-plays about real store rules?

No. Any stock, price, or policy detail is fictional practice material. Learners should check with an actual retailer for real terms.

How can a beginner use the cards?

Choose one task, provide the phrase bank, and let learners prepare key nouns before speaking. They can repeat the task with new details.

Do learners need to memorize a dialogue?

No. The cards give a goal and information gap. Learners choose their own wording and ask follow-up questions.

Can a third learner join a pair?

Yes. The third person can observe for clear requests and confirmations, then take a role in the next round.

Do these cards give consumer or legal advice?

No. They are language practice only and do not describe real return rights, warranty coverage, payment methods, or store policies.

References

British Council TeachingEnglish shopping activity uses shopper/shop-owner information gaps, role cards, preparation time, and review of useful phrases; this JSON has original scenarios and wording.

https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-resources/teaching-secondary/activities/intermediate-b1/shopping-role-play

British Council TeachingEnglish adult-oriented shop-service role-play describes customer/staff roles, polite requests, role swapping, and a fictional return situation; used for instructional design, not copied dialogue.

https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-resources/teaching-adults/activities/pre-intermediate-a2/shop-service-role-play

Voice of America Learning English teacher resource models a marketplace role-play with different information for shoppers and shopkeepers; referenced for the information-gap format only.

https://learningenglish.voanews.com/amp/lets-teach-english-unit5-role-plays-and-group-projects/4023316.html

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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