

Adult ESL Workplace Conversation Practice

Practice workplace English through short, low-stakes conversations: give a project update, ask what a colleague means, make a meeting suggestion, or agree on a next step. These 24 original role-play cards include phrase support and fictional workplace details, without promising hiring or job-performance results.

Host guide / A4 / Adult English learners in pairs or small groups; teacher, facilitator, or workplace trainer optional / 25–50 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 role-play cards.
- Optional fictional project board, meeting agenda, or task list.
- Paper and pens for notes and agreed next steps.

How to run it

1. Select four to eight cards and tell learners that all work situations are fictional practice scenarios. Allow learners to pass or use an imaginary role.
2. Assign roles and distribute different information, such as a draft deadline, a meeting goal, or a question the other person needs to ask.
3. Review the phrase bank and model one concise update plus one polite clarification question.
4. Give partners one minute to prepare key words. Encourage notes rather than a complete script.
5. Run the conversation for three to five minutes. Ask partners to finish with a clear summary or next step.
6. Swap roles or change one fictional constraint and repeat. An observer can note one effective clarification and one useful phrase.
7. Debrief the communication task, not the learner's real employment history or personal performance.

Useful workplace language

These frames help learners enter a conversation, make a request, or confirm what they heard. They are options rather than fixed scripts; adapt directness and formality to the fictional role.

- Updates: "I've completed ____, and I'm working on ____." "The next step is ____."
- Clarification: "Could you clarify what you mean by ____?" "When you say 'soon,' what time frame should I use for this practice task?"
- Requests: "Would you be able to ____?" "Could we agree on which task comes first?"
- Polite disagreement: "I see the reason for that option. My concern is ____." "Could we compare it with ____?"
- Confirmation: "Let me summarize what we agreed." "I'll take ____, and you'll follow up on ____."

Keep role-play realistic without real workplace risk

Use generic teams and invented projects. Avoid asking learners to disclose salaries, immigration status, performance reviews, conflict with a real manager, or confidential information. For a beginner group, give role cards with short facts; for a more confident group, add an unexpected question or require a concise recap.

A debrief can focus on whether the request was clear, whether each person had a chance to speak, and whether the final action was specific. It should not be presented as an assessment of professional competence or a guarantee of workplace success.

- Support: offer a sentence frame and let learners prepare vocabulary.
- Extend: ask partners to paraphrase the other person's concern before responding.
- Optional observer task: record the agreed action, owner, and fictional deadline.

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<p>N_ESL_WORK-001 / status update</p> <p>Colleague A gives a two-minute update on a fictional project with one completed task and one open question. Colleague B listens, asks about the open question, and repeats the next action in one sentence.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-002 / clarification</p> <p>Colleague A has received an unclear request to “finish it soon.” Colleague B assigned the task. Ask what “soon” means in this fictional schedule, confirm the priority, and agree on a specific practice deadline.</p>
<p>N_ESL_WORK-003 / meeting planning</p> <p>Two coworkers are planning a short meeting. A wants to cover three topics; B has only fifteen minutes. Compare priorities, choose one topic to handle first, and decide what can be shared later.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-004 / priorities</p> <p>Colleague A cannot complete two fictional tasks by the same practice deadline. Colleague B is the project lead. Explain the conflict, ask which task should come first, and summarize the revised plan without making claims about real policy.</p>
<p>N_ESL_WORK-005 / suggestions</p> <p>Colleague A has an idea for simplifying a fictional team checklist. Colleague B asks what problem it solves. Present the idea, give one example, and invite a question or concern.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-006 / polite disagreement</p> <p>Colleague A disagrees with a proposed meeting format. Colleague B supports the proposal. State one concern politely, ask what the group needs from the meeting, and agree on a way to compare options.</p>

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<p>N_ESL_WORK-007 / team roles</p> <p>Colleague A is new to a fictional project and needs to know who handles two tasks. Colleague B has a simple team list. Ask who owns each task and repeat the names and responsibilities.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-008 / clarification</p> <p>Colleague A has not understood an acronym used during a meeting. Colleague B used it and can explain it in plain language. Ask what it means and provide a short example to check understanding.</p>
<p>N_ESL_WORK-009 / asking for help</p> <p>Colleague A needs help with a fictional spreadsheet task but has already tried two steps. Colleague B is a teammate. Explain what you tried, ask one focused question, and agree on a next step.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-010 / recap</p> <p>Colleague A will be away from a fictional project discussion and needs a short recap afterward. Colleague B attended the meeting. Ask what decisions were made, what remains open, and who will follow up.</p>
<p>N_ESL_WORK-011 / requests</p> <p>Colleague A has completed a draft early. Colleague B needs to review it but is working on another task. Ask whether a short review is possible and agree on a realistic fictional time.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-012 / facilitation</p> <p>Colleague A is facilitating a meeting where one person has spoken for a long time. Colleague B has not yet shared an idea. Invite B to contribute and then summarize both viewpoints neutrally.</p>

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<p>N_ESL_WORK-013 / feedback</p> <p>Colleague A wants to give feedback on a fictional presentation slide. Colleague B created it. Mention one detail that is clear and ask whether a chart label can be revised for easier reading.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-014 / receiving feedback</p> <p>Colleague A receives feedback that a fictional report is difficult to follow. Colleague B is the reviewer. Ask which section needs clarification and repeat the specific change you will make.</p>
<p>N_ESL_WORK-015 / handoff</p> <p>Colleague A is coordinating a team handoff. Colleague B has a task list with one finished item and two pending items. Ask for status, confirm the owner of each pending task, and recap the handoff.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-016 / scheduling</p> <p>Colleague A needs to reschedule a fictional check-in because of a calendar conflict. Colleague B has two available times. Explain the conflict without oversharing, ask which time works, and confirm the new slot.</p>
<p>N_ESL_WORK-017 / problem solving</p> <p>Colleague A notices that two team members have different versions of a practice document. Colleague B manages the fictional shared folder. Explain the mismatch and ask how the team should identify the current version.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-018 / inclusion</p> <p>Colleague A wants to invite a new teammate into a conversation before the group makes a decision. Colleague B is leading the discussion. Ask for a pause, explain what perspective may be missing, and agree how to include it.</p>

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<p>N_ESL_WORK-019 / status update</p> <p>Colleague A must explain a small delay in a fictional project. Colleague B needs to know what changes. Give a brief update, name the task affected, and suggest one new practice checkpoint.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-020 / clarification</p> <p>Colleague A is asked to lead a task but needs to understand what a successful result looks like. Colleague B made the request. Ask for two concrete requirements and summarize them back.</p>
<p>N_ESL_WORK-021 / presentation</p> <p>Colleague A is preparing a short team presentation and wants feedback on the order of three sections. Colleague B is the audience. Listen, suggest one improvement, and ask a question about the main point.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-022 / decision making</p> <p>Colleague A and B have different ideas about which fictional feature to build first. Each has one reason on a role card. Share the reasons, ask one question about the other option, and choose a temporary priority.</p>
<p>N_ESL_WORK-023 / onboarding</p> <p>Colleague A is starting a new role in a fictional organization and needs to know how to request equipment or access. Colleague B explains the team's invented onboarding steps. Ask for the first contact and repeat the sequence.</p>	<p>N_ESL_WORK-024 / meeting close</p> <p>Colleague A is ending a project conversation. Colleague B has the agreed notes. Summarize the decision, name who will do each next step, and ask whether anything remains unclear.</p>

Hosting questions

Are these cards employment or HR advice?

No. They are English practice activities with fictional workplace details. They do not explain employment rights, company policy, or HR procedures.

Can learners use their own workplace examples?

They may, but they are not required to. Fictional roles are available for anyone who prefers not to discuss a real job.

Do the activities prepare learners for job interviews?

They are general communication practice, not an interview course and not a promise of hiring outcomes.

Can these prompts work for mixed-confidence groups?

Yes. Use the phrase bank and short role notes for support, or add a follow-up question and a summary task for a more open round.

How many cards fit one class?

Four to eight is a practical starting set for a short session. Use fewer if learners need more time to plan and repeat each conversation.

References

British Council meeting lesson plan includes structured meeting role-play and turn-taking; cited only for activity design, not copied meeting tasks.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Meetings%202%20Getting%20involved%20in%20meetings%20Lesson%20Plan.pdf>

British Council TeachingEnglish describes a role-play cycle with adult English learners, including reflection and a differentiated language focus; referenced for repeat-and-reflect activity design only.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/knowning-subject/strategic-repetition-accelerated-speaking-fluency>

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