

---

## Activities for self-directed language learners

### Introduction

Language learning activities are things to do in real communication situations in the community to try out what you have been practicing in structured sessions. These activities help you focus on one communication situation or area of vocabulary and culture at a time. These are just suggestions. Make up more activities of your own, once you get the idea!

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use activities for self-directed language learners:

- The Eating Out activity  
**See:** The Eating Out activity
- The Join in the Work activity  
**See:** The Join in the Work activity
- The Public Transport activity  
**See:** The Public Transport activity
- The Reading the Signs activity  
**See:** The Reading the Signs activity
- The Shopping Trip activity  
**See:** The Shopping Trip activity
- The Social Visiting activity  
**See:** The Social Visiting activity
- The Telephone Procedures activity  
**See:** The Telephone Procedures activity
- The Telling Jokes activity  
**See:** The Telling Jokes activity
- The Town Map activity

- **See:** The Town Map activity
- The Town Survey activity
- **See:** The Town Survey activity

### See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, extemporaneous communication

---

## The Eating Out activity

### Introduction

With the Eating Out activity, you go to a local restaurant with a group and share a meal together. This technique works well for a class and teacher to do together, or for a group of language learners and their tutor or language associate (LA).

### Objectives

- To learn new vocabulary
- To learn the appropriate cultural behavior for eating out
- To have an informal time together with the teacher (or LA) and other students, getting better acquainted on a personal level. These kinds of relationships are often very important to non-westerners.

### Guidelines

- Take a native speaker with you who is comfortable in the cultural setting. You need someone to learn from by observation and instruction.

### Steps

*Before your outing*

1. Discuss vocabulary and phrases which will likely be used at the restaurant.

*Before your outing*

2. Talk about cultural necessities such as tipping, getting the attention of the waitress, and paying.
3. Set up the time and date of the outing.

*During your outing*

4. Go to the restaurant and enjoy yourself. Use the vocabulary phrases necessary to order your meal.

Also spend time in informal conversation with other members of the group.

*After your outing*

5. Discuss any difficulties you had at the restaurant or observations you made about the outing.

Enhance your learning by choosing further activities:

- Write a description of the experience and give your impressions
- Compare appropriate restaurant behavior in your home country with what you have learned is appropriate in this situation.
- Make a do's and don'ts list for eating out in this situation.

### **See also**

- Keywords: activities for language learning, restaurants, vocabulary

---

## **The Join in the Work activity**

### **Introduction**

With the Join in the Work activity, you find out what types of things are going on in the village (town) on a particular day and choose one activity where you can become involved.

### **Objectives**

- To observe work patterns and other cultural information
- To get to know individuals better
- To learn new vocabulary
- To increase your ease of speaking conversationally

### **Guidelines**

- Use this activity as a learning tool, even in the early stages of language learning (predominately to observe and to be involved with individuals). Use it later to continue improving your speaking abilities in a relaxed setting.

- Choose a variety of activities to join in—not merely ones you find exhilarating, but ones which allow you to become involved with people in their setting. You may find that the language and culture learning you get during this activity is vastly different from what you get in the formal "language session" time. This may be the time they let you get an insider's view because you are willing to be involved with their daily schedule, rather than just following your own agenda prearranged during formal language time.
- Carry a small notebook, if possible, to jot down notes while you attend an activity. Otherwise, do your best to make mental notes and then write them down as soon as possible.
- Observe working relationships between participants, including their verbal and nonverbal interaction. You may be able to learn about social hierarchies within these parameters.
- Ask questions about what is going on if you do not understand. However, do not turn this into a language session. If the participants seem unwilling to answer your questions, save them for a language session and simply observe during this activity. Do not press them for answers or you may alienate yourself, or at least make yourself less welcome in the future. Observe the way knowledge is passed from one individual to another (such as from older man to younger). Watch how they train those who do not yet know how to do the work and try to place yourself in that learner's position.

### **See also**

- Keywords: activities for language learning, culture learning

---

## **The Public Transport activity**

### **Introduction**

With the Public Transport activity, you explore the local public transportation system, learning about routes, stops, stations, fares, and other pertinent information.

### **Objectives**

- To learn which vehicles you need to locate for your transportation needs
- To know what the fares are and how the routes run (nonstop or otherwise)
- To confidently use the public transportation system

### **Guidelines**

- Obtain a map of the bus routes, if available, or obtain a map of the town and surrounding areas.
- Learn key terms before you begin this activity such as *token* , *transfer*, *express*, *route*, and *destination*.
- Undertake only part of the transportation system at a time. Eventually cover all of it, or all of the parts you will most likely need.
- Take a notebook and pen to write down comments on the information you learn, your reactions to the mode of transportation, and other interesting things.

## Steps

1. Go to the central transportation station and locate the bus (or other form of transportation you are investigating) that will take you to your destination.
2. Find out the cost of the trip, and the approximate duration. You may choose to explore alternative routes to the same destination, or to explore alternative modes of transportation (taxi cab, motorcycle, etc.).
3. Choose one mode of transportation and go on the trip.
4. Take notes about your trip, how many stops you made, how crowded it was, the duration of the trip, etc.
5. When you reach your destination, find out how and when you can get back to the central station.
6. When you arrive back at the central station, you may choose to try another destination and route or wait until another outing.
7. At some point, you may want to talk about your discoveries with the language associate (LA) or another native speaker. Ask about anything you do not understand concerning the transport system.

## See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, public transportation

---

## The Reading the Signs activity

### Introduction

With the Reading the Signs activity, you walk down a street (such as the main street in the business district) and write down the messages that appear on signs. Then you discuss

them with the language associate (LA) to understand their content and intent.

## Objectives

- To use written messages which are available as an aid in getting around
- To become familiar with abbreviations and shortened speech

## Steps

*Before your session*

1. Go to a street that has many signs and write down their content.

*During your session*

2. Go over the list of signs with the LA and get clarification for any messages you do not understand.
3. Categorize the signs according to common categories:
  - Advertisements
  - Traffic and safety notices
  - Regulations
  - Announcements
  - Information
  - Slogans
  - Place names
  - Miscellaneous

## Variations

A further exercise you can do with the Reading the Signs activity is to analyze the grammar of the signs. You might ask such questions as, "What kinds of words are left out?" "What verb forms are used?" Try rewriting the signs into complete sentences. For example, change "No crossing zone" to "You must not cross the street in this place." You might also try to create some signs of your own, incorporating the common principles used in local advertising. If the country has a highway system, you might spend one session studying highway signs, which vary greatly from those found on a city street. Other possibilities for specialized signs include graffiti, bumper stickers, gravestones, and T-shirt slogans.

## See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, reading proficiency
- 

## The Shopping Trip activity

### Introduction

With the Shopping Trip activity, you go shopping for the week's groceries without actually purchasing them, but by listing them in a notebook.

### Objectives

- To become familiar with the local supermarket (or open air market)
- To learn new vocabulary items of food names
- To gain confidence in being able to make a trip to purchase items by yourself

### Guidelines

- Take a language associate (LA) or someone who knows their way around better than you do, on your first trip. You can go by yourself if you are a brave soul, but you should know enough of the language to take care of yourself.
- Make up a list of the items to be "purchased."
- Learn vocabulary items that will be helpful, such as, "a bottle of", "a kilo of", "a can of."
- Make it a comparative trip if there are several supermarkets in town.
- Buy some items, if necessary, on the trip. You may find that you cannot gather (accurate) information without buying something if you go to an open air market. If bargaining is a part of the purchase scenario and you are not actually going to purchase anything, the price you are told initially would not be the actual purchase price. See the Role-Play technique for suggestions on how to prepare for a trip to the market.

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Shopping Trip activity:

*Before your trip*

1. Prepare your list and set a time for your trip.

*During your trip*

2. Go to the store and begin walking the aisles, looking for the items you want to "purchase." Notice the overall organization of the store.
3. As you write down prices, you may want to compare brand names, size versus price amounts (is it more economical to buy the large one or not), and other considerations.
4. Ask your companion about things you do not understand.

Write down new vocabulary items and other things of interest.

5. Go to another store (if available) and do more comparison shopping.

*After your trip*

6. Tally your "purchases" to find your total cost.

Write down your overall impression of each store and decide where you want to shop.

### **See also**

- Keywords: activities for language learning, buying and selling, culture learning

---

## **The Social Visiting activity**

### **Introduction**

With the Social Visiting activity, you take advantage of opportunities to engage in conversations while at social activities, such as visiting in a home, attending a club meeting or a sporting event.

### **Objectives**

- To expand your vocabulary
- To increase your listening comprehension
- To increase your ease of speaking conversationally

### **Guidelines**

- Use this activity as a learning tool to gain greater conversational skills. It can be used even in the early stages of language learning (predominately for listening skills), but is especially useful as your speaking ability increases.
- Find a person or a setting that is comfortable for you. This may not be a problem for extroverts, but many introverts need a relatively nonthreatening environment before



they are willing to utter a syllable.

- Do not turn a visit into a formal setting by making an appointment. Rather, "drop by" and see what is happening. Sit around the kitchen table, the fire, the front room, under a tree, or wherever a group is gathering.
- Try to stretch your limits by speaking more than you really feel comfortable doing, and little by little you will gain confidence.
- Listen for clues which differentiate social visiting from more formal settings of speech usage, such as church, official speeches, or teaching situations--whether public school, language school, or formal language sessions with a language associate (LA).
- Pick up verbal and nonverbal cues and incorporate them into your own social visits. Once you have tested them to make certain they are valid and nonoffensive, make them a part of your social visiting skills.
- Take any questions concerning what happens during these social visits to a LA. Do not pull out your data notebook and turn the social setting into a language session or the parameters will be changed. If you are afraid you will forget something you want to ask about later, try to make a mental note. Even if you forget initially, if the question comes up enough times, you will eventually understand it or remember to ask the LA later.

### **See also**

- Keywords: activities for language learning, culture learning, interactional skills, social visiting, vocabulary

---

## **The Telephone Procedures activity**

### **Introduction**

With the Telephone Procedures activity, you practice using the telephone to learn the appropriate etiquette and skills required for local use.

### **Objectives**

- To learn appropriate vocabulary for using a telephone
- To practice using the phone book, dealing with operators, dialing local and long distance numbers
- To learn how to communicate without using facial expressions and gestures

## Guidelines

- Practice the same task several times with different people to build confidence.

## Steps

### *Before your practice*

1. Make a list of questions you want to ask each of the parties you call.
2. Use the telephone book to make a list of the businesses and persons you want to call and their phone numbers.

### *During your session*

3. Call the first number on your list and explain that you are seeking information. Proceed with all your questions, then end the call.
4. Write down the information you received and how you felt about the phone call.
5. Continue making phone calls until you have exhausted your list or until you feel confident in your ability to use the phone.

## Prerequisites

Here are some prerequisites for doing the Telephone Procedures activity:

You need to learn vocabulary items associated with the telephone before you actually try to carry on conversations. Some of these vocabulary items are dial, receiver, call, dial tone, busy signal, operator, information, collect, direct dialing, and extension.

You also need to learn phone etiquette, such as proper greetings and introductions.

## Variations

Here are some variations of the Telephone Procedures activity:

You can call the operator to find out how to make a collect call or how to charge a call to a third party.

You can practice hearing how people respond when answering a wrong number call. Try calling a business and asking for information they cannot possibly know, or call a private number and ask for a person you know will not be there.

You can call information hot line type numbers or other information numbers: time and temperature, movie theaters, dial-a-joke, 800 numbers, or want ads.

You may also need to learn how to use a radio telephone. You should learn the location of the operation station and how to book a call on the radio telephone.

## See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, numbers, telephones, vocabulary
- 

## The Telling Jokes activity

### Introduction

With the Telling Jokes activity, you practice telling jokes to native speakers after you have practiced them with a language associate (LA).

### Objectives

- To learn the proper intonation and stress needed to carry a joke
- To provide cultural insight into what is considered funny

### Guidelines

- Listen to jokes told by native speakers and analyze them for
  - common themes,
  - frequently used words and phrases, and
  - types of jokes: puns, tall tales, or riddles.

There may even be books of jokes available in the language. These may be helpful, even if you do not actually tell the jokes because the language may be closer to actual spoken language.

- Notice the circles in which jokes are told, also where they are not told, and who tells jokes.
- Do not try to translate jokes from your native language as the humor may be completely different. Something that is acceptable joke material in your culture may be taboo in the local culture. Or something hilariously funny in your culture may be of no humorous value locally.
- If you find it difficult to tell a joke, you could focus instead on learning how to listen to jokes and how to respond appropriately to jokes.

### Steps

*During your session*

1. Tell the LA you want to learn how to successfully tell a joke.  
Ask if there are certain guidelines you should know when telling a joke.
2. Ask the LA to tell you a joke. Notice the verbal and nonverbal cues.
3. Tell your joke to the LA.  
Have the LA tell you how to improve your joke telling.
4. Practice until you are comfortable telling your joke.

*After your session*

5. Practice telling your joke to several native speakers or groups of native speakers.  
Keep telling your joke until you get a good laugh.  
If you bomb, ask the listeners how you can make the joke funnier.

### **See also**

- Keywords: activities for language learning, culture learning, intonation

---

## **The Town Map activity**

### **Introduction**

With the Town Map activity, you make a map of a nearby area of town and then you go out and fill in the map with general information, such as street names, store names, landmarks, buildings, parks, and other notable sites.

### **Objectives**

- To become familiar with at least one section of town
- To get out into the local environment and to interact with people even if only briefly (possibly set up a network of friends for conversation practice)

### **Guidelines**

- Select a manageable section of town or divide the area you want to map out into more than one outing.
- Make it an enjoyable outing. Take time to explore interesting sites, have a croissant and cappuccino (or whatever the local tasty treat is). Take time to have fun doing this activity.

## Steps

1. Prepare a map of a nearby area of town.
2. Go out to the area and label all the sites found there. Note places you might want to explore in detail at a later time. Include landmarks that people use in giving directions (mango trees, statues, hills, etc.).

### Variation

Another activity you might do in conjunction with the Town Map is to find out information about the sites on the map which require you to speak with native speakers. For instance, find out the business hours of the stores or the planned social activities at the park (sporting events, etc.).

### See also

- The Town Survey activity
- Keywords: activities for language learning

---

## The Town Survey activity

### Introduction

With the Town Survey activity, you work alone or with another person (as part of a larger overall group) to learn details about one part of town. Once you have collected the information, compile all the findings into a mini-guidebook.

### Objectives

- To learn about a large segment of the community quickly by sharing your findings with other students and learning from their investigations
- To provide an opportunity to speak the local language in a real situation

### Guidelines

- Use this activity after you feel comfortable asking questions (and can understand some of the answers).
- Prepare a list of questions beforehand about the specific place you will go to and learn about.

## Steps

*Before your outing*

1. Decide where you will do your survey and prepare a list of questions. Refresh your mind on appropriate ways to start and end a conversation.

*During your outing*

2. Go to the designated place and find an official person or worker there who is willing to give you information.

*During your outing*

3. Ask your questions and write down answers if appropriate. Otherwise do it after you have left the survey site.

*After your outing*

4. Meet with other survey members and share what you learned. Include in the discussion any difficulties or interesting insights from the experience.
5. Write up your findings and compile all the information for a mini-guidebook.

**See also**

- Keywords: activities for language learning, interactional skills