

180 ESL Conversation Starters and Questions (from Beginner to Pro)

Conversation Topics for Adults and Teens

Adults and teens usually know more about advanced topics than children (politics, religion, etc.) That being said, knowing more on these topics doesn't necessarily translate to being able to speak about these things easily so don't assume they can do everything. Be aware of your student's level and be prepared to reframe a question if they are struggling to understand.

Work

- Where do you work?
- Do you enjoy your job?
- Do you use English for your job?
- Tell me about your last job.
- What do you think is the most difficult job in the world?
- What do you think is the easiest job in the world?
- Where would you work if you could pick any job?
- Would you still work if you won the lottery?
- Do you think robots will replace all the jobs in the future?
- What kind of job should have the highest salary?

Music

- Do you listen to music?
- When did you start listening to music?
- Do you play a musical instrument?
- What do you think the future of music will be like?
- If you could meet any musician, who would it be?
- Why do people like music?
- If you could erase a musical genre, which would it be?
- Do you think musical success comes from working hard or luck?
- What was the first album you bought?
- Have you ever downloaded music illegally?

Holidays

- What is a holiday?
- Do you often go on holiday?
- Where did you last go on holiday?
- Where would you like to go on holiday next?

- Do you prefer relaxing or having an adventure on your holiday?
- Is it weird to go on holiday by yourself?
- What is the best food you've eaten while on holiday?
- Can you imagine what holidays 500 years ago were like?
- Would you like to go on holiday to space?
- What do you think the future of the holidays will be like?

Technology

- What is technology?
- What do you think of when you hear the word 'technology'?
- How has technology changed in the past?
- How has technology changed your life?
- Could you live without technology?

Conversation Topics for Kids

To engage a child in conversation, you have to enter their world. What is fun for them? What do they like to do? Using words/phrases like "wow", "That sounds tasty", "Awesome" can show you are listening to them and make things more fun which will get them saying more!

Pets

- Do you have a pet?
- What do you think pets do in the day?
- What do pets eat?
- Are cats better or dogs?
- What is the best name for a pet?
- Would you like a pet spider?
- Would you like to be an animal? Which one?
- Why do we have pets?
- Do you prefer cute or fun pets?
- What is the best present for a pet?

School

- Do you like school?
- What is your favorite subject?
- What is your least favorite subject?
- Who is your favorite teacher?
- Why do people have to go to school?
- Do you like homework?
- What would you do if you were the headteacher?
- How could schools be more fun?
- How long are the summer holidays?

- Can you learn and have fun at the same time?

Movies

- What is your favorite movie?
- Who is your favorite character?
- Who is your least favorite character?
- Do you like Disney movies?
- What was the last movie you saw at the cinema?
- How often do you watch movies?
- Do you wish you could live in a movie?
- Why do you watch movies?
- Do you prefer reading books or movies?
- Do you watch any movies in English?

Conversation Topics for Beginners

Keeping the topics simple for beginners is a must at the start. Talking about their hobbies and family can help, as these are areas they may have already experience in talking about. If a student is really struggling, then giving them phrases to use such as “I like ...” can help get the ball rolling.

Food

- What is your favorite food? Why do you like it?
- Do you like to cook? What dishes can you make?
- What foods are popular in your country?
- Do you prefer eating at home or at restaurants? Why?
- What is a typical breakfast in your home?
- Have you ever tried food from another country? Did you like it?
- Do you like spicy food? What spicy dishes have you tried?
- What foods do you dislike? Why don't you like them?
- What is a traditional holiday food in your culture?
- If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Hobbies

- What do you like to do?
- Do you do any sports?
- What types of movie do you like?
- Do you play video games?
- What do you usually do with friends?
- Is learning English a hobby or work?
- Do you have any unusual hobbies?
- Do you have enough time for your hobbies?
- What is a common hobby?
- What do you think is a boring hobby?

Family

- Do you live with your family?
- How many people are in your family?
- Are you close with your family?
- How often do you see your family?
- What do you do with your family when you see them?
- Is your family important to you?
- Which is more important, friends or family?
- Who is the weirdest person in your family?
- Are families less important nowadays than in the past?
- What would happen if we didn't have families?

Home

- Where do you live?
- What is there to do in your city?
- What is your place like?
- What is your neighbourhood like?
- Are there any parks near where you live?
- Have you ever lived elsewhere?
- How many rooms does your place have?
- If you moved, where would you like to live?
- Would you prefer to live in the city or country?
- Would you like to live abroad?

Weird and Funny Conversation Starters

Nobody wants to speak about the same mundane topics, especially if they're an advanced student. Being able to mix it up is a great attribute to have as a teacher. Not only will you have memorable lessons with these conversation starters, but it will really test the ability of the students to think about topics they aren't used to (instead of rolling off easy answers about familiar topics.)

Fails

- What's the most epic fail you've ever witnessed in person?
- Have you ever had a funny cooking fail? What happened, and how did it turn out?
- What's the most hilarious fashion fail you've ever seen or experienced?
- Have you ever had a technology fail at the worst possible moment? What was the situation, and how did you handle it?
- What's the funniest sports fail you've ever seen, either in person or online?
- Have you ever had a humorous translation fail when trying to communicate in a foreign language? What did you say, and what did you mean to say?
- What's the most amusing autocorrect fail you've ever experienced or seen?
- Have you ever had a funny fail while trying to impress someone you liked? What happened, and how did they react?

- What's the most comical pet fail you've ever witnessed or heard about?
- Have you ever had a hilarious DIY or home improvement fail? What went wrong, and how did you fix it?

Zombie Apocalypse Plan

- What is your zombie apocalypse plan?
- Who would you take with you?
- What would be your weapon of choice?
- What would you do if a friend got bitten by a zombie?
- What would you do if you got bitten by a zombie?
- What food would you take with you?
- Do you think governments should have a zombie apocalypse plan?
- Do you think everyone should have a zombie apocalypse plan?
- Is a zombie outbreak a likely scenario?
- Why do you think there are so many movies and TV series based on zombies?

Superpowers

- If you could have a superpower, what would it be?
- What do you think is the weirdest superpower in comic books?
- Are some superpowers too powerful?
- Would you like a superpower where you could turn things into gold by touching them?
- What is the weakest superpower in a comic book?
- Have we already seen every kind of superpower possible in a comic book?
- Are there some people in the real world that have superpowers? (doctors etc)
- Would you like a superpower where you could turn things into chocolate?
- Would it be better to be super strong or super smart?
- Would you like the power to travel through time?

Magic Lamp

- If you were granted 3 wishes, what would they be?
- Is wishing for more wishes cheating?
- Should there be any other rules for people granted wishes?
- Have you seen any movies with a magic lamp?
- Do you think there is a better object that could house a genie?
- Why are we interested in stories of people having wishes?
- Have any of your wishes come true in real life?
- Do you make a wish when you blow out the candles on a cake?
- Is it bad luck to tell someone what your wish is when blowing out the candles?
- What other ways do people make wishes?

Controversial Conversations Topics

These are topics that you need to be careful with and use your judgement based on the student's background. You need to wait until you know a student to find out what material is appropriate for them. That being said, If used correctly, then these can be really interesting and get the student thinking about "real issues".

Technology and Society

- Do you think social media has had a positive or negative impact on society? Why?
- Should governments have the right to monitor citizens' online activities for security purposes?
- Is technology making people less social or more connected?
- Do you believe that artificial intelligence will eventually take over many human jobs?
- Should parents limit their children's screen time and use of technology?
- Is online privacy a fundamental human right, or should people accept less privacy in the digital age?
- Do you think technology is making people smarter or more dependent on devices?
- Should schools incorporate more technology in the classroom, or focus on traditional teaching methods?
- Is the rise of fake news and misinformation on the internet a serious threat to democracy?
- Do the benefits of technological advancement outweigh the potential negative consequences for society?

Death Penalty

- What do you think about the death penalty?
- Do you know which countries still use the death penalty?
- Why do you think some countries use the death penalty?
- Do you know of any famous executions?
- Should the death penalty be outlawed?
- If we removed the death penalty then what punishment should replace it?
- What is the most humane form of execution?
- What would your "last meal" be?
- Does the fear of the death penalty reduce crime?
- How has execution changed over the years?

Abortion

- What is abortion?
- Should abortion be legal?
- Why do you think some people are "pro choice"?
- Why do you think some people are "pro life"?
- What do you think of abortion in cases where the baby was conceived due to rape?
- What do you think of abortion in cases where the Mother's life is in danger (due to being pregnant)?

- Should the father “get a say” in the matter of abortion?
- What advice would you give to a family member who was thinking of getting an abortion?
- Should people be allowed to protest against abortion?
- What do you think the future laws on abortion will be?

Corruption

- What is corruption?
- Is there corruption in your country?
- Why does corruption exist?
- Would you consider taking a bribe?
- Would you consider offering a bribe?
- Are some types of corruption better than others?
- Which countries have the most corruption?
- Which countries have the least corruption?
- Are there any stories of corruption that you can remember?
- Is it possible to get rid of corruption entirely?