

## F. An Approach to Building Phrase Banks <sup>1</sup>

A phrase is a short “chunk” or preformulated communicative whole that a learner can use in oral interaction. These phrases are best learned **by ear** (you introduce them orally, repeat them, have your learner repeat --until your learner can say them easily and comfortably).

You help learners build a “phrase bank” of appropriate communicative utterances that they can use for various interactions:

- Phrases for greeting people when arriving at work
- Phrases for leaving for the weekend
- Phrases for getting someone’s attention at a busy store
- Phrases for asking to talk to the boss about an issue
- Phrases for asking about a child’s progress in school
- Phrases for sharing information as part of small talk

### Steps for building Phrase banks:

1. Figure out the context (scenario) your learner typically encounters in everyday life
2. Set up a spontaneous interaction:
  - a. You are in my store. I am busy. You want to buy a new coffee maker. Get my attention and find out what different coffee-makers do.
  - b. You are a server at a restaurant. Greet customers and sit them. Let them know that the best table is already reserved.
  - c. You are at a parent-teacher conference. After greeting the teacher, find out how your child is doing
  - d. You are calling to make an appointment at the doctor’s. Tell me that you are really in pain.
3. Carry out the interaction with the learner. Exaggerate the role you are playing and make sure your learner proceeds with whatever interactive language they have. Remember -- you can communicate with less than perfect language.
4. Take note of what your learner can already do in the interaction and where they get stuck
5. Think about, and brainstorm with them, what it might be most useful for them to be able to say in this situation. Refer to the phrase bank below for ideas.
6. Choose 1 phrase to work on. Say it out loud in parts and have your learner repeat after you until they can say it on their own (do this all verbally without writing it down or having them read).
7. Try the role play again and this time have the learner use the phrase you just practiced. Do the role play several times until they can consistently use the phrase.
8. Choose another phrase and repeat steps 5 & 6.
9. As you add more phrases, try to choose role plays that will allow your learner to use/practice several of the phrases at once!

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<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to Tavia Teitler for this specific approach.

## IDEAS FOR USEFUL PHRASES

### Phrases for situations where other speaker is impatient or speaks too fast:

“Please be patient with me, I’m trying very hard to learn English.”

“Excuse me, could you please speak a little slower?”

“Excuse me, could you repeat please?”

### Phrases for parent teacher conferences:

“How is my student doing?”

“What does he/she need to work on?”

“How can I help my student?”

### Phrases for service jobs:

“Hello, how can I help you?”

“What can I get for you?”

“Will that be all?”

“Is this okay?”

Ask your learner: “What are things that people ask you at work?” Learners are usually able to answer this question and will help you get a better sense of what they need to be able to say.

### Housekeeping contexts:

“What would you like me to do today?”

“Is this okay?”

### Small talk contexts:

“You look nice today.”

“I like your shoes.”

“Great job yesterday.”

Ask your learner: “What are things that you would like to say to your co-workers to be friendly?”

### Getting acquainted (with questions):

“Do you live nearby?”

“Do you have a family?”

“Have you worked at \_\_\_\_\_ very long?”

“Do you drive to work?”



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