

This section presents two stand-alone language learning activities related to the theme of cars. Each activity is designed for students at the proficiency level indicated.

Walking Cars

Level: Beginner

Time required: 5 minutes (or more)

Goals: To provide learners with common vocabulary describing the movement of vehicles; to practice listening skills; to energize and refresh learners

Materials: chalk and blackboard, or whiteboard and markers

Background: The controlled movements students practice can enhance classroom management. Repetition of commands, reinforced by physical movement, makes remembering the vocabulary easy and fun.

Preparation:

1. Write “Walking Cars” on the board. Ask learners what they think “Walking Cars” might mean.
2. Tell them that in this activity, they will be the Walking Cars. But they will be walking in place.
3. Demonstrate walking in place: lift your feet and swing your arms as if you are walking—but without moving forward.
4. Write the following Action Commands on the board and demonstrate the movements:

go straight – walk in place at a medium pace

slow down – walk in place in slow motion

speed up – walk in place very fast

stop – hold your exact position, even in the middle of a stride

5. Practice these four Action Commands with the class.

Procedures:

1. Have learners stand up—beside their desks, in the aisles, in the front or back of the classroom—wherever there is room.
2. Give commands to the class. For example, if you say “Go straight,” the class will walk in place at medium speed. If you say “Speed up,” the class will walk in place faster.
3. Students will follow whatever instructions you give. When you say “Stop,” all students should freeze.
4. Gradually add more Action Commands—on the same day or the next time you play:

turn left – turn counterclockwise 90 degrees and continue walking in place

turn right – turn clockwise 90 degrees and continue walking in place

make a U-turn – turn around 180 degrees and continue walking in place

honk your horn – make a beep sound

Variations

1. Allow a student to give the commands. After students have played several times, they will be able to call out the commands themselves. Not only can this make the activity more fun for students, but it also gives them speaking practice and allows you to pay more attention to their pronunciation and comprehension.
2. Do the activity with students in smaller groups. Divide the class into groups of five or six. Allow

Classroom Activities

students to take turns being the one to call out the Action Commands. This will add speaking practice and student autonomy to the task.

3. You can turn Walking Cars into a game. However, you will need open space because students will actually walk forward instead of walking in place. It's possible to play in a classroom if you have enough room, but think of playing outside, too (e.g., on a playground or sports field).

Students form a line to start, as in a race, so that they are roughly equidistant from you. You should stand a reasonable distance from them, facing them.

Students move forward, or back, or to the right or left, according to the Action Commands you give.

When you “catch” a student—for turning the wrong way or for moving after a “Stop” command, for example—that student must go back to the starting line. Other students continue to advance, and those who reach you (or a predetermined goal, such as a fence or a tree) are winners.

Extension

You can advance the language of the activity by adding Action Commands or mixing in syn-

onyms. This activity can provide challenging listening practice if you continue to add commands, such as those listed below.

Additional Action Commands

park – sit down in your seats

pull out – get out of your seats

back up – walk backwards (can be used if you play Walking Cars as a game)

floor it – walk very fast (can be used if you play Walking Cars as a game)

Synonyms for Action Commands

turn left = take a left; hang a left

turn right = take a right; hang a right

go straight = drive; go straight ahead; continue; keep going

speed up = accelerate; step on it

slow down = reduce speed

stop = hit the brakes; red light

honk your horn = beep your horn; honk

Checklist Talking

Level: Intermediate and Advanced

Time required: 15–30 minutes (or less)

Goals: To reinforce vocabulary related to transportation and travel; to allow students to practice speaking English freely; to allow students choice in speaking

Materials: a list of 20 questions (written on the board or photocopied)

Preparation: Prepare a list of 20 questions related to a particular topic (in this case, cars and transportation—see page 52). The questions should be designed to generate discussion.

Procedures:

1. Explain to students the philosophy behind Checklist Talking. The primary purpose is for speaking practice, and students will have a lot of freedom. For the activity to succeed as it should, it is essential that students understand the following guidelines:

- Students talk in pairs or small groups.
- They may choose any question, in any order, from the list to ask to their group mates. When a question has been discussed, they can check it off.
- They need not answer all questions. If it turns out that a group discusses only one of the questions, that's fine.
- They can add their own questions.
- They can drift off topic.
- Ideas and opinions matter; grammar does not. The teacher will not interrupt or correct mistakes (although the teacher may contribute to group discussions).

2. Write the questions on the board or pass out photocopies. Writing questions on the board has the advantage of allowing you to customize them to fit your needs and the interests of your students; it also allows you to add questions or changes suggested by students.

3. Allow time for reflection by giving students a few quiet minutes just to look over the questions. They will benefit from this time to process the language and reflect on their own ideas.

4. Divide the class into pairs or small groups.

5. Before your students take part in the activity for the first time, do a demonstration for the whole class. It's important for the class to observe the process and to witness the degree of independence they will have in talking. Have one or two student volunteers form a group with you. You can start by asking any question on the checklist. Let the student volunteers respond. Don't be afraid to digress. For instance, in discussing cars, you might be reminded of a vacation you had. At this point, you are no longer specifically answering any question in the Checklist, and that's fine! This is how true conversations shift and stay alive. If the discussion slows, someone can ask or respond to another question on the Checklist, and the conversation begins again.

Note: It's probably best to introduce a time limit (of, for example, five minutes) to the group discussion. Timing has several positive results: (a) students know the task won't be long and dull: "Hey, it's only five minutes"; (b) students think less about speaking correctly and more about expressing ideas; (c) most groups will not have time to get to all the questions. That means you have kept every group busy, on task, for the allotted time, and no group will be surprising you with a premature cry of "We're finished!"

6. Once students understand how Checklist Talking works, they're ready to begin. Make sure all students have access to a Checklist or can see the questions on the board; then ring a bell or announce that talking time is beginning.

7. Circulate around the room. You might contribute to the conversation, but don't interrupt or correct students.

8. Bring the activity to a close as soon as one group becomes silent. But if the conversation is

Classroom Activities

lively, feel free to let the activity continue—even beyond your announced time limit.

9. Afterward, you may ask the group for any particularly interesting ideas they heard. Students can share these with the whole class.

Extensions

1. Mix up the pairs or groups and do Checklist Talking a second time. Students will be familiar with the process, as well as with the subject and the questions. They will enjoy expanding or improving upon what they have already said with their new partners.

2. Once students understand the procedure, you can use Checklist Talking for any subject from your syllabus or textbook. Brainstorm 10 to 20

questions with students. Write them on the board. (You might want to let students brainstorm questions in groups before sharing them with the class for use in the activity.) Again, the idea of choice is very important. Students do not need to answer all the questions, do not have to answer in order, and are allowed to drift off topic.

3. You can use this Checklist, or a similar one, as a source of writing topics. Students may choose to write (a paragraph, a narrative, an argument, etc.) about one of the questions.

KEVIN MCCAUGHEY became a Regional English Language Officer in 2012. He has taught writing in the United States, and among the places he has trained English teachers are Yemen, Kamchatka, and Madagascar. He encourages the use of movement and innovative formations in the classroom.

Checklist Talking: Cars and Transportation

- Would you like to own a car? What kind? What color?
- What are some advantages of owning a car?
- What are some disadvantages of owning a car?
- How often do you ride in a car? Where do you go?
- When was the last time you took a taxi?
- How often do you ride the bus? Where do you go?
- How often do you ride the train? Where do you go?
- What kind of expenses do you have after you buy a car?
- What is the longest trip you've ever taken in a car?
- There are a billion cars in the world today. What do you think of that?
- What's the longest bus trip you have ever taken?
- In your region, is it more pleasant to travel by car or train or bus?
- Is your town pedestrian* friendly? In other words, is it easy and safe to walk places?
- What are the advantages of riding a bike instead of driving a car?
- What are the disadvantages of riding a bike in a town or city?
- When was the last time you rode a bike? Where did you go?
- For you, what's the most convenient form of public transportation?
- How much time do you spend each day walking to school or work?
- Why do you think cars are so popular?
- How will cars be different in the future?

*pedestrian – a person who walks