

# Conversation Continuation Support Tools for Beginner-Level Learners

by SHINYA KOGA

Facilitating sustained conversations is a key challenge in elementary-level English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. Teachers often face difficulties in helping students develop conversational skills, particularly the ability to maintain dialogue and respond appropriately. In Japan, the curriculum guidelines of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology highlight “Small Talk” as a representative activity for fostering interactive speaking skills, spanning from elementary to high school education. The activity involves short conversations where students practice using previously introduced language, helping them develop communicative competence.

This article introduces Conversation Continuation Support Tools, a set of instructional materials designed to promote fluency, interaction, and confidence in conversation-based activities. The structured approach ensures that even young learners with limited English proficiency can actively participate and engage in meaningful conversations, providing them with opportunities to use language in a supportive and achievable manner. Additionally, these tools offer EFL teachers a practical framework to guide their students’ development while reducing the burden of planning complex activities. By enabling consistent, incremental progress, the materials help create a classroom environment where students and teachers can feel confident and motivated.

## ADAPTABILITY

This technique is flexible and can be adapted to various teaching contexts, as these examples show:

- The tools can be customized to suit different topics, age groups, and proficiency levels.
- In classrooms without digital devices, teachers can distribute printed versions of the tools or write them on the board or a poster.
- Teachers with limited preparation time can also involve students in creating the materials, such as having them brainstorm questions for the Collection of Questions, explained below.

## OVERVIEW OF THE TECHNIQUE

The Conversation Continuation Support Tools consist of seven materials, designed to address different aspects of conversation skills:

### 1. Input Enhancement Slides

These slides use teacher talk and visual aids to introduce key phrases and expressions that students can use in conversations. The teacher models the language, helping students understand its usage in context.



Figure 1. An example of an Input Enhancement Slide

To make the content comprehensible, slides can include simple visuals, substitute phrases, and questions. Combining illustrations with the text helps students understand meanings and encourages speaking. Teachers prepare new slides based on the target language for each lesson but can also adapt or reuse existing ones. Preparing slides for one lesson (see Figure 1 for an example) typically takes less than 15 minutes.

- **How to Use in Class**

### ***Teacher Talk and Modeling***

The teacher displays a slide and interacts with students by modeling target expressions.

### ***Example Teacher Talk***

*(Pointing to the slide)* “Look at this picture. This is Osaka. In Osaka, you can visit Osaka Castle.”

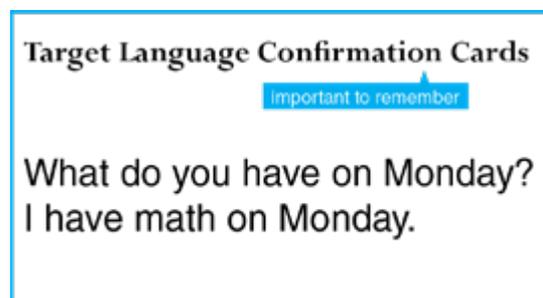
*(Writes on the board: “You can visit \_\_\_\_.” and prompts students to fill in the blank.)*

“You can see many buildings.” *(Have students repeat, if needed.)*

“You can eat takoyaki. Now, try saying it: ‘You can eat takoyaki.’”

### ***Guided Practice with Variations***

The teacher encourages students to personalize the structure: “What can you do in your city?”



**Figure 2. An example of a Target Language Confirmation Card**

A student might respond, “I can visit a museum,” using the modeled sentence pattern.

The teacher provides additional support: “Great! Now, ask your partner what they can do in their city.”

### ***Student Application***

Students practice in pairs using sentence prompts and visuals. They take turns asking and answering, reinforcing conversation skills with scaffolded guidance.

The slides partially display teacher input to support student comprehension. Pairing the sentence “You can visit Osaka Castle” with an illustration helps students construct their own sentences, such as, “I can visit Osaka Castle.”

## **2. Target Language Confirmation Cards**

These cards highlight the target language used during conversations, presenting questions and responses in a clear, visual format. Students can refer to these cards before and during conversations to confirm their understanding (Figure 2).

*Example:* A card might display, “What class do you have on Monday?” with a suggested response, “I have math on Monday.”

## **3. Language Integration Insertion Cards**

These cards allow students to practice sentence construction by modifying or inserting new words into specific language structures. This helps students expand their vocabulary while reinforcing grammatical accuracy.

*Example:* Students might replace placeholders in a sentence like “I have \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_,” inserting their desired subjects and days to create sentences such as, “I have math on Monday.” (Figure 3)

## 4. Conversation Model Cards

These cards provide examples of complete conversations, illustrating the flow of dialogue and appropriate turn-taking. They serve as scaffolding for students as they practice conversations. In place of cards, teachers may also display this information on a poster or on the board to reduce the number of cards students need to manage.

*Example:* A card might display the following:

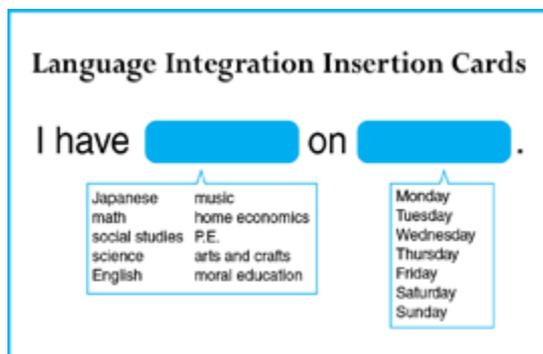
- A: What's your name?
- B: My name is Tom. What's your name?
- A: My name is Lisa. Nice to meet you!

## 5. Collection of Questions

This is a bank of frequently used questions that students can choose from during conversations. It encourages them to think on their feet and sustain dialogue by asking follow-up questions.

These questions can be reused across multiple sessions, allowing students to gradually build a repertoire of conversational strategies. Teachers may also choose to display them on a poster for easy reference.

*Example:* Questions like “What subject do you like?” and “Where do you want to go?” can be included.



**Figure 3.** An example of a Language Integration Insertion Card

## 6. Collection of Reactions

This tool provides students with natural ways to react to their partner's statements, such as showing interest, agreeing, or asking for more information. It includes both verbal and nonverbal cues to make conversations engaging.

Similar to the question bank, these reaction prompts can be used over multiple sessions. Teachers can decide whether to provide them for each session or display them for ongoing reference.

*Example:* Students might respond with, “That’s interesting!” or “Wow! Tell me more!”

## 7. Self-Assessment Sheets

After each conversation practice session, students evaluate their performance using a simple five-point scale. They reflect on aspects like continuation, questioning, responding, and reaction. This fosters self-awareness and goal-setting (see Figure 4 for an example of a Self-Assessment Sheet). For beginner-level students, this reflection can be conducted in their first language to facilitate deeper self-assessment and understanding.

*Example:* A student rates themselves 3 out of 5 for asking questions and sets a goal to use two new questions in the next session.

## PREPARATION AND USAGE

- Materials needed: Slides, cards, and handouts (digital or printed) can be used. The tools used in this activity have distinct purposes.
- Teacher preparation: Teachers prepare materials in advance, but students may copy content from a model.
- Number of cards: Each student uses one set of cards per session.
- Card organization: Cards are clearly labeled and can be color-coded for

Level	Continuation	Questioning	Responding	Reaction
5	2 minutes without pauses, with good rhythm	7 or more questions (considering the topic)	Responds to all questions immediately in sentences	4 good reactions
4	1 minute and 30 seconds without pauses, with good rhythm	5 or more questions (considering the topic)	Responds to all questions in sentences	3 good reactions
3	60 seconds without pauses, with good rhythm	3 or more questions (considering the topic)	Responds to all questions immediately with single words	2 good reactions
2	40 seconds without pauses, with good rhythm	3 or more questions	Responds to all questions with some delay, using single words	1 good reaction
1	20 seconds without pauses, with good rhythm	Able to ask a question	Responds to half of the questions in sentences or single words	Able to nod in response
Comment	What was achieved? What was not achieved? Reason? Plan for next step.			
? Express				Date

**Figure 4. An example of a Self-Assessment Sheet**

- easy identification. Some cards may be combined into a handout to reduce paper use.
- Teacher guidance: Teachers provide explicit instructions on when and how to use each tool, ensuring students apply them effectively.
  - Input Enhancement Slides are visual aids projected onto a screen for the entire class to view. They are used by teachers to introduce the target language.
  - In contrast, cards (e.g., Target Language Confirmation Cards and Language Integration Insertion Cards) are tools stored on tablets for individual reference, allowing students to work at their own pace. They can also be referred to during conversation. In classrooms without individual e-learning devices, these cards can be printed and distributed as physical copies for students to use.
  - Additionally, Self-Assessment Sheets are paper-based worksheets that students use after conversation practice to reflect on their learning.
- These tools are designed to complement each other, supporting students' learning through their distinct roles.
- The Conversation Continuation Support Tools are also designed to be used flexibly, according to the objectives of the lesson and the students' learning progress. In some lessons, all tools may be employed, while in others, only selected tools are used as needed. For example:
- **Input Enhancement Slides** introduce the target language at the beginning of the lesson, providing students with the necessary input.
  - **Target Language Confirmation Cards** are used to deepen students' understanding

of the target language. They achieve this by providing structured prompts or examples that help students verify their use of the target language in context, reinforcing comprehension and accuracy.

- **Language Integration Insertion Cards** allow students to construct sentences that reflect their preferences and experiences, providing opportunities to practice the target language.
- **Conversation Model Cards, Collection of Questions, and Collection of Reactions** are referred to during pair-based conversation practice, accessible via tablets. In classrooms without access to tablets, these resources can be provided as printed handouts or displayed on posters for students to refer to during practice.
- **Self-Assessment Sheets** are used after conversation practice to facilitate reflection and goal setting.

The primary objective of these activities is to encourage students to sustain conversations naturally while incorporating the target language for the day. The first step introduces specific target-language expressions aligned with the lesson objectives. These expressions are practiced in context through tools such as the Language Integration Insertion Cards, enabling students to personalize their use of the target language by discussing topics of their choice. Topics remain flexible and open-ended, allowing students to explore various interests or ideas.

## IMPLEMENTATION

This technique is designed for warm-up activities at the start of each English lesson. It was implemented in a Japanese elementary school for fifth- and sixth-graders, with a focus on making conversations engaging and achievable. Below is the typical flow of a Small Talk session using the tools:

### 1. Input Facilitation (3 minutes)

The teacher uses Input Enhancement Slides to model key phrases and expressions. The teacher might say, “My name is Mr. Koga. What’s your name?” while showing the appropriate slide.

### 2. Target Language Review (1 minute)

Students practice reading the Target Language Confirmation Cards aloud to reinforce understanding of the day’s expressions.

### 3. Language Integration Practice (2 minutes)

Using Language Integration Insertion Cards, students practice replacing placeholders with their own words. They might complete “I like \_\_\_\_\_” by filling in *baseball*. The teacher first provides a model, and then each student says their completed sentence aloud.

### 4. Conversation Practice (2 minutes)

Students pair up and use the Target Language Confirmation Cards, Language Integration Insertion Cards, Conversation Model Cards, Collection of Questions, and Collection of Reactions stored on their tablets or distributed as handouts. They engage in free-form conversations while referring to the tools as needed.

Occasionally, students may switch partners and interact with multiple classmates. Such activities provide opportunities to encounter diverse responses and expressions, allowing students to repeatedly practice the target structures. This helps enhance their flexibility and confidence in using the target language.

### 5. Self-Evaluation (3 minutes)

After the conversations, students complete the Self-Assessment Sheets to reflect on their performance and set goals for improvement.

## 6. Class Sharing (5 minutes)

Students share challenging phrases or expressions with the class. The teacher provides feedback and models correct usage, if necessary.

### **EXAMPLE ACTIVITY: "SELF-INTRODUCTION"**

**Objectives:** To practice introducing oneself and asking follow-up questions

**Materials:** Input Enhancement Slides, Target Language Confirmation Cards, Language Integration Insertion Cards, Collection of Questions, Self-Assessment Sheets

#### **Steps:**

1. The teacher introduces expressions using Input Enhancement Slides—for example, “What’s your name?” and “How do you spell it?”
2. Students practice using Target Language Confirmation Cards to reinforce these expressions. They also use Language Integration Insertion Cards to insert their own preferred words into the target language structures.

3. In pairs, students engage in a conversation, referencing the Collection of Questions to ask follow-up questions.
4. After the conversation, students reflect on their performance in their L1, noting what went well and setting goals for the next activity on the Self-Assessment Sheet.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Conversation Continuation Support Tools provide a practical framework for developing conversational skills in elementary EFL classrooms. By combining structured resources with engaging activities, this approach helps students build confidence and fluency while making conversations enjoyable. Teachers worldwide can adapt these tools to fit their unique classroom needs, empowering students to become more-effective communicators.

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