



ESL360 • UNIT 1 • LESSON 1.1

Dead Ends & Open Doors

Starting conversations with ease...

Unit 1, Part A — “Hi, Goodbye, and Everything In Between”

Conversations with Strangers

What's it like for you to start a conversation with someone new?

What We'll Cover Today

-  Techniques & Phrases to make starting conversations easier
-  Grammar for introducing yourself accurately
-  Simple responses for smoother, more natural conversations

Dead-Ends

A dead-end introduction is over before it begins. It is a question with one simple answer.

When you say "Hi, I'm Lori. What's your name?" — that's it.

The other person now knows your name. There's nothing else there.

They say their name back, and now you're both standing there with nothing left to say, because the exchange already did its whole job.

It wasn't rude or wrong. It was just complete, and complete is the opposite of what keeps a conversation moving.

Ask yourself this?

If I say this, does the other person have something easy to ask me next?

If the honest answer is **no**, it's a **dead end**.

Make things easier on yourself by learning how open doors to better introductions.

Tip for Avoiding Dead Ends:

If it can be answered with "yes," "no," or one word, it's not a door opener, it's a coin flip, a dead end.

A true door opener uses a question word—what, how, where, why—so a one-word answer isn't grammatically possible.

Dead Ends—Questions with One-Word Answers

Noticing something in the moment...but there's room for improvement

- I love your [scarf/bag/etc.] — Is it new?
- Do you like this space?
- Have you smelled this perfume before?

Opening through something shared, But then hitting a brick wall...

- Did you like [the event/the talk/the class]?
- Was [X] your favorite part?
- Do you recommend the fish or the chicken?

Dead end ways of asking about their connection to the place or event

- Do you know [host's name]?
- Are you from around here?
- Have you enjoyed the [event] so far?

A softer alternative to "what's your name" . . . but still a dead end

- I don't think we've met — I'm Lori. Are you new here?
- We haven't met yet — I'm Lori. Do you know anyone here?

Door Openers—Using Question Words

Noticing something in the moment

- I love your [scarf/bag/etc.] — where did you get it?
- What do you think of this space?
- What brought you here today?

Opening through something shared

- What did you think of [the event/the talk/the class]?
- What's been your favorite part of [X] so far?
- What do you recommend trying?
- How's [X] going for you so far?

A softer alternative to "what's your name"

- I don't think we've met — I'm Lori. What brings you here today?
- We haven't met yet — I'm Lori. How do you know everyone here?

Asking about their connection to the place or event

- How do you know [host's name]?
- Where are you from originally?
- What do you usually do here?
- What have you enjoyed most about [event] so far?

Joining someone*

- Mind if I sit here?
- Is this seat taken?
- Would it be okay if I joined you?

* Yes, these are yes/no questions, but they're still "door openers" because they're not really asking for information. They're asking permission.

#2 Giving them something real to respond to

1

Interests

What fascinates you &
how do you spend your time

2

Abilities

What you're good at:
skills, talents, strengths.

3

Aspirations

What you want to learn,
do, or see someday.

4

Character & Habits

The traits &
tendencies that make you, you.

Interests & Abilities—Sentence Frames

INTERESTS

“I’ve always been fascinated by...” ...*astronomy.*

“I spend a lot of my free time...” ...*gardening.*

“I spend a lot of my weekend...” ...*reading.*

“What most people don’t know about me is...” ...*I used to compete in chess tournaments.*

ABILITIES

“I’m pretty good at...” ...*fixing things.*

“I have a talent for...” ...*remembering birthdays.*

“One thing I’ve gotten really good at is...” ...*baking bread from scratch.*

“I’ve always had a knack for...” ...*languages.*

Aspirations & Character—Sentence Frames

ASPIRATIONS

“I’ve always wanted to learn...” *...how to play the piano.*

“I’ve always wanted to go...” *...to the Redwood Forest.*

“...is on my bucket list.” *Seeing the Panama Canal is on my bucket list.*

CHARACTER & HABITS

“I tend to...” *...be quiet when I first meet people.*

“I often...” *...go on a walk in the morning.*

“I’m the kind of person who...” *...always has a project going.*

Your Turn: Build Your List

Please get out a piece of paper and write down 8 interesting things about yourself

- 2 Interests “I’ve always been fascinated by...” “What most people don’t know about me is...”
- 2 Abilities “I’m pretty good at...” “I’ve always had a knack for...”
- 2 Aspirations “I’ve always wanted to learn...” “I’ve always wanted to go...” “...is on my bucket list.”
- 2 Character & Habits “I tend to...” “I often...” “I’m the kind of person who...”

Don’t worry about grammar yet — just get your ideas down.

Which Is More Interesting?

Read each pair. Which one helps you know the person better?

1

I like music.

I love classical music, especially Mozart.

2

I like gardening.

I grow roses and herbs in my backyard.

3

I want to travel.

Seeing the Panama Canal is on my bucket list.

The Power of Specificity

SPECIFIC DETAILS MAKE FOR BETTER INTRODUCTIONS

I like animals.



I raise monarch butterflies.

Which sentence gives you more to respond to?

Choose Two. Make Them Specific. Share.

Your Task:

- Choose two things about yourself from the list above & work with your team to make them more specific.

Sort the Statements

As a group, sort these statements into two piles based on what they have in common.

I read mysteries.

I grow roses.

I speak three languages.

I'm reading a mystery set in Ireland.

I'm growing tomatoes for the first time.

I'm learning Italian.

I'm planning a trip to Turkey.

I read a lot.

I make my own bread.

I speak Portuguese.

I love old movies.

I'm training for a 5K next month.

What's the Rule?

Here's the correct grouping. Talk with your group: what do the statements in each group have in common?

A GROUP A

I read mysteries.

I grow roses.

I speak three languages.

I read a lot.

I make my own bread.

I speak Portuguese.

I love old movies.

B GROUP B

I'm reading a mystery set in Ireland.

I'm growing tomatoes for the first time.

I'm learning Italian.

I'm planning a trip to Turkey.

I'm training for a 5K next month.

Generally True vs. Happening Now

SIMPLE PRESENT

Habits, preferences, routines, and things generally true about you.

“I read mysteries. I grow roses.”

PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

An activity or situation in progress around the present period.

“I’m reading a mystery set in Ireland. I’m learning Italian.”

Why this matters: this is one of the most useful — and trickiest — contrasts in English self-description. Getting it right is what lets you say clearly what’s always true about you, and what’s just true today.

Recipe for Making Present Progressive

subject + **am / is / are** + verb**-ing**

MOST VERBS

Add -ing.

read → reading

SILENT -E

Drop the e, add -ing.

make → making

VOWEL + CONSONANT

Double the final consonant.

stop → stopping

TWO-SYLLABLE VERBS

Double only if the last syllable is stressed.

preFER → preferring, OPen → opening

-IE ENDINGS

Change ie to y, add -ing.

lie → lying

Remember Recipe B from Book Club—When forming questions: Auxiliary verb “be” + subject + verb-ing?
Here it is again, but in statement form: subject + auxiliary verb “be” + verb-ing.

The next step...

Simple Response Phrases for Smoother Conversations

Reacting — showing you're actually listening

- Oh really?
- No way!
- Wow, I didn't know that.
- That's amazing.
- Seriously?
- I had no idea.
- Huh, I never thought about that.
- That's so interesting.
- That's cool.
- Are you kidding me? (to show surprise or admiration)

Relating — connecting your own experience

- Me too!
- I've always wanted to try that.
- That reminds me of something similar.
- I know exactly what you mean.
- I feel the same way.
- I've never done that, but I'd love to.
- That's funny — I do something like that too.

Buying a second to think — without an awkward silence

- That's a good question... let me think.
- Hmm, how do I put this...
- Actually, now that I think about it...
- That's interesting, actually...
- Well, let me think about that for a second...

Shifting to a new idea smoothly

- Speaking of which...
- That reminds me...
- On a similar note...
- Actually, that makes me think of...
- Along those same lines...
- Which reminds me...
- You know, that reminds me of...
- Now that you mention it...
- Funny you should mention that... ← very natural, connects to something you were already thinking about

Conversation Partner Practice

1

Partner #1

1. Ask a question with a question word.



2

Partner #2

2. Reply using a response phrase & share one specific, interesting detail about yourself



3

Partner #1

3. Reply using a response phrase & share a specific, interesting detail about yourself.

Remember: practice confident, warm intonation when you speak — not just correct grammar.

Before We Close...

- 1 How do you avoid a dead-end introduction?
- 2 How do **specific** details & **simple response** phrases help keep conversations moving?
- 3 What's **one thing** you learned today that **you will practice** this week?

Up Next:

Unit 1, Lesson 1.2

Tell Me More...

More practice keeping a conversation going through genuine curiosity; asking thoughtful questions & building follow-up questions from what the other person has already said.