

Peer Greeting and Peer Talk

Peer Greeting

This activity, in its simplest version, is used 10th and 9th Rank classes; it increases in complexity in the 8th Rank and beyond. The first thing that students do upon entering the room (after Enterquest, if the class has begun doing that activity, and before sitting down) is to greet every other student in the class. Or, to save time in large classes, students may be set a number of other kids to greet, e.g., three or four.

At all times, to ensure that students understand the words they are using, check for comprehension by eliciting Japanese translations of the most recently taught phrases. This can be done quickly before the activity commences.

STEP 1. Greeting only (*Attainable within the 9th Rank for all classes*)

Student A: Hello, (*B's name*).
Student B: Hello, (*A's name*).

- Students make eye contact and smile as they speak.
- If the teacher elects to have students shake hands, the handshake should follow this protocol:
 1. Fully engaged hands – no finger-holding.
 2. Firm (but not strength-testing) grips.
 3. Two or three non-exaggerated shakes (no hand-holding), then disengage.
 4. Greet while shaking hands, or before. Kids should not silently shake hands before commencing greeting.
- Once this works smoothly, other greetings are introduced: 'Hi' and usually 'good afternoon.' The rule is that student B must respond using a different greeting than student A. Example:

Student A: Hi, (*B's name*).
Student B: Good afternoon, (*A's name*).

- In this and in subsequent steps, teachers should restrain the impulse of some to rush through the greeting without putting any feeling into it. Teach them to slow it down, insert appropriate pauses, and intone the words meaningfully.

STEP 2. “How are you?” (*Attainable within the 8th Rank for all classes*)

Example:

Student A: Hello, (*B’s name*).

Student B: Hi, (*A’s name*).

Student A: How are you?

Student B: I’m fine. And you?

Student A: I’m fine too.

- When this works well, teachers may introduce variations on the question: “How are you today?” or “How are you doing?” To wean kids from habitual use of question forms taught earlier, require that all use the new version until it has been well practiced. After that, allow them to use whichever version they like. (But insist on hearing a variety.)

STEP 3. Other answers (*Attainable within the 8th Rank for all classes*)

There are two reasons to teach answers other than “I’m fine”: to introduce expressive variety into students’ speech, and for the sake of honesty—they may not always be “fine.”

Age-appropriate possibilities include: I’m okay / all right / pretty good / not bad / great / cold / hungry / hot / sleepy / tired, etc. Other possibilities will arise when students have some particular answer they want to use that day. Teach this on the spot, and then make a note to review it in subsequent lessons.

- You may find it expedient to ban “I’m fine” as an answer until the other answers you’ve taught have been sufficiently practiced. Later, re-allow it.
- Later in class, use “How are you?” as a Quick Response question, and don’t award points to any kid who blurts “I’m fine” but, earlier that day, gave a different answer during Peer Greeting. This, also, builds student awareness of the importance of answering honestly.

STEP 4. Third-person reporting (*Attainable within the 8th Rank for most classes, adjusting English required so as not to take more than a minute. May be delayed until 7th Rank.*)

Asking students to recall their peers’ answers has two benefits: it gives them practice using the third person, and it encourages them to actually *listen* when greeting one another, rather than slip through the activity inattentively.

This may be done either before or after students have sat down.

Example 1:

Teacher: Who spoke with Haruka? *(In large classes, some kids will not have spoken with certain others.)*

Some students: I did.

Teacher: How is she today?

Those students: She's pretty good.

Haruka: That's right.

Example 2:

Teacher: Yuki, who did you speak with?

Yuki: Haruka and Teppei.

Teacher: How are they?

Yuki: Haruka is pretty good, but Teppei is tired.

Teacher and all other students: That's too bad.

- Except for the first time or two, not every student need recall a peer's answer, nor need every student's info be recalled—to do so will take too long in large classes. Random spot checks will suffice, so long as teachers are careful not to pass over a given child too many weeks in a row.
- This step may also yield useful practice answering “Are you...?” questions. Example:

Teacher: Tomoki, how is Mariko?

Tomoki: She's hungry.

Teacher: Oh, are you hungry, Mariko?

Mariko: Yes, I am.

Teacher: And you, Tomoki? Are you hungry?

Tomoki: No, I'm not.

STEP 5. Using the Teacher's Assistant *(Attainable within the 8th Rank for some classes, if upper-level/mature. May be delayed to 7th Rank.)*

The TA may be charged with determining how many times to pair up during the activity that day. Example:

TA: Greet four people today.

- Whether and when to use this option depends on the maturity level of the class. It boosts esteem of the TA role but may backfire if the TA chooses numbers that are too low (not enough practice greeting) or too high (TA will not have total class time parameters in mind). It may be best to give the TA an option, e.g. either 3 or 4.

When students enter the 5th Rank, they begin to do the Peer Talk activity, of which Peer Greeting is always the first part. In this way, Peer Greeting lasts through the higher ranks, and can be modified for increased challenges and learning opportunities.

Peer Talk

In Peer Talk, as in Peer Greeting, all students, before sitting at the class table, greet one another in pairs. They then ask a question (or, at most, two) of one another. This question is announced by the teacher and is the same from week to week until students have had enough practice with it to be smooth. Use the procedure to teach new phrases (page 68), to introduce new Peer Talk questions and teach them how to say their own truthful answers in English.



The Peer Talk questions for the 5th and 4th Ranks are printed on the Peer Talk record sheets.

A Peer Talk exchange consists of:

1. Greeting (*as in Peer Greetings*)
2. The question (*student A to B*)
3. Student B's answer
4. A counter-question (*student B to A*)
5. Student A's answer

If the class is doing two Peer Talk questions that day, and student A has initiated the first, B will initiate the second.

At the end of the exchange, the pair will quickly disengage and each will seek a new partner. The activity continues until each student has finished the exchange with every other, or (in large classes), until having paired with a pre-determined number of partners, say three or four.

Example Peer Talk exchanges

A: "What's your favorite TV program?"

B: "I like the news best. What's yours?" (Or, "What's your favorite?")

A: "Mine's Chibi Maruko Chan."

A: "Do you have any pets?"

B: "Yes, I have a rhinoceros beetle. Do you have any pets?"

A: "Yes, I have seven guppies and a rhinoceros beetle, too."

A: "Do you have any pets?"

B: "No, I don't. Do you?"

A: "No, I don't, either."

Preparation

Follow the procedure in Teaching New Phrases (in this manual) for all components of Peer Talk: the question, possible answers, and the various return questions. Model common, anticipated answers and solicit individual ones, quickly assisting with the latter. Finally, kids should repeat the whole English sequence (without translation or a model from the teacher).

For at least two weeks, prepare the class for the new phrase as above but don't actually set them loose for pair work. Keep track of group progress in the preparatory activity in your class records. Only when the class is solidly prepared should we begin the stand-up-and-go activity. Failure to lay proper groundwork will have some kids speaking with incorrect or incomplete understanding, not to mention going slower, getting stuck and committing many more errors during paired exchanges. Without such solid foundations, only your best students will ever become smooth.

Additional Notes

- Any early finishers should be kept profitably engaged while waiting for their peers to wrap up. They may review a set of flashcards (as in Team Challenge Lite) or otherwise be assigned something worthwhile to do.
- You should not, at the beginning, pair with an odd-kid-out in an odd-numbered class, because your attention will be required in managing students at large. The unpaired child will just have to wait until another pair is ready to change partners. Later, when the activity is running smoothly, it is a good idea to pair with any child who, for the moment, is alone.

- Do not time Peer Talk with a stopwatch. Doing so tends to result in speed-distorted faux-communication.
- Students should be taught that Peer Talk counter-questions may vary depending on the preceding answer given.

Example 1:

A: Do you have any pets?

B: No, I don't. Do you?

Example 2:

A: Do you have any pets?

B: Yes, we have a female Siberian Husky named Killer. Do you have any pets?

In example 2, had B said only, “Do you?” as a counter-question, her implied meaning would have been, “Do you (also) have a Siberian Husky?”

- When teaching potential answers, students may at first give answers in Japanese for the teacher to translate. We want to encourage this, as our goals are to teach as many possible answers as may be relevant, and to allow our kids to honestly say whatever is on their minds (for more specific and interesting communication, should it be forthcoming). Teachers whose Japanese comprehension is lacking, if translation assistance is not close at hand, should make notes of students' desired answers and come ready the next week with equivalent English. To get meaningful communicative answers, you will need to question students to draw out information that they will then routinely include when offering personal information or responding to questions during Enterquest, Speak 'n Sit, Peer Talk, etc.; for example, color, sex, breed and name of a pet dog.
- The TA (and the Ex-TA in large classes) may circulate during Peer Talk in the role of the teacher, correcting errors and providing hints. Pairs will raise their hands when stuck to summon the TA. (And the TA, in turn, will raise his or her hand for the teacher's help if also stuck.) We might do this from the third week or so of pair-practicing a Peer Talk question, but it need not be done every week. Only doing it once in a while allows us to unobtrusively skip it during a week with a weak TA.

- As described above for Peer Greeting, after Peer Talk, the teacher may ask some kids (but not all, especially in a big class), “Who did you talk with?” and “What did she say?” This gives kids practice with the third person and will encourage careful listening and real communication during the Peer Talk exchanges.