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Teaching Students to Speak Spontaneously through Group Talk

Catherine participated in an online UK seminar about Group Talk in 2025 with Greg Horton and Wendy Adeniji and introduced the idea at the Focus on Junior Secondary Day in March 2026.

Greg Horton pioneered this strategy at his school in the UK and it remains an effective method to promote spontaneous communication. Given that fear of speaking is a demotivating factor for choosing German in the elective years, this proven strategy is worth trying in our classrooms.

In a nutshell

Teachers teach the language structures the students will use including how to ask questions and some authentic conversational fillers. Students participate in activities and language games to familiarise themselves with and practise using the structures.

From early on in Year 7, students are invited to regularly discuss something (e.g. at the start of a lesson) in small table groups which involves giving opinions. There is a set time, a short time when they begin and it lengthens as they become more confident users of the language structures and with more language structures to use over time.

The students have the support of chat mats with vocabulary to help express themselves, to ask questions, to react to an opinion, to agree and disagree. It takes time to build confidence in students and they improve with practice. The support is gradually removed. The language level increases from year to year with new language structures.

Students stay in the same group for each discussion. It can be a friendship group as they need to feel comfortable to offer opinions. They experiment

with using language in an authentic communicative situation.

The teacher is not part of a group, and the discussions are not formally assessed. However, the teacher can informally assess the progress of students when moving around listening in to the discussions. They can hear how well the students can express themselves, the mistakes that are made, what language gaps there are etc. The teacher can determine what follow-up teaching needs to occur based on their observations.

Getting Started

Introduce the concept of a Group Talk. Spend a whole lesson on the phrases they need, practising them, and then run a practice Group Talk at the end. It is awkward and a bit stilted at the start but over time the students become more familiar with the language and task. Then, depending on the class, incrementally increase the number and length of Group Talks held. The more time you invest early on, the more confident they will feel. Eventually, remove the support materials.

Strategies to Support Group Talks

Use activities and fun games to practise phonics and intonation when introducing the language structures.

Bob Up Game

- Play with 2 or 3 teams, each student with a number.
- The teacher says the number, those students bob up.
- The teacher says a word/phrase in English, the first to repeat in English and then say it in German get a point for their team. (Important to say both to make the connection.)

EPI games would also be good here e.g. sentence stealer.

Students will need to know some adjectives which young people would use (boring, funny, awesome, stupid). Eventually introduce simple intensifiers (e.g. It is very/quite/a bit ...).

Teach how to give reasons for opinions whenever the teacher thinks the students are ready to do it, increasing more complex structures each year. It is important to continue using support mats/cue cards.

Create support mats to language structures to give opinions (e.g. Level 1 – Well I think ..., I find ...) agreeing (e.g. Yes, me too..., I agree), disagreeing (e.g. No, not me...), expressions of surprise (e.g. You're joking!) and disinterest (e.g. I don't care) in increasing difficulty from year to year. Don't rush the progression. Allow lots of time (a year) for the students to develop fluency with the structures at each level/stage.

Support mats have full sentences with the translations. As the students develop confidence and phrases become known, gradually reduce the support i.e. provide a cue mat with only the first letter of each word and translation.

Other ideas are to provide language structures on cue cards which they play/spend when they use them. And/or provide a bingo board with higher-level phrases and every time they use one, they cross it off their card.

Keep resources to use again: laminated picture cards, cue cards, support mats.

Starting Group Talks

Create groups of 3 or 4 and start with e.g. 1 minute and eventually increase to 3 minutes, then 10 minutes at higher levels. Put a timer on the board.

Start with once a fortnight and then more often until it is an automatic classroom routine for students to practise speaking.

If some are reluctant participants, they could use puppets to conduct a Group Talk until they are more confident with using the language.

Discussion Topics

Choose a topic your students want to talk about, something of interest to them, something that prompts opinions, something relevant to their age and interests. Providing an image is a good idea as there is something concrete upon which to focus the discussion. Choose topics/pictures which are age appropriate. It could be of a famous person, a band, different foods, YouTubers, a film, TV show, sport team, something in the news — something to have an opinion about which leads to comparison and better still, to elicit preferences.

Every class is different with different likes and dislikes, different musical tastes. Ask the students what they want to talk about. You may need to provide vocabulary on a PPT slide which you think they may not know and which might stop the conversation of a topic.

Benefits of Group Talks

Students enjoy being able to talk about things of interest to their lives. This lets them do that.

When practised routinely, Group Talks build confidence and fluency over time as well as strategically building language skills required for senior years and real-world interactions.

A Recorded Seminar

Watch a video on YouTube from 2023 with Greg Horton and Wendy Adeniji talking about Group Talks.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rm5TfMKLTbQ&t=5s>

GREG HORTON'S GROUP TALK PROGRESSION CHART

	Learning intentions/ outcomes	Key structures and vocabulary
Stage 1		
Introducing and responding to simple opinions	introduce simple opinions	Ich denke, es/das ist (gut).
	elicit simple opinions	Und du? Magst du ...? Wie findest du ...? Was denkst du?
	express simple (dis)agreement	Ja, das stimmt. Nein, das stimmt nicht. Ich auch (nicht).
	use some basic colloquialisms	Du spinnst! Du bist doof! Das ist echt geil.
Stage 2		
Taking part in a short discussion	say what they like or dislike doing	Ich (spiele) gern/nicht gern (Tennis).
	use a range of transferable opinion adjectives with qualifiers	Es ist ein bisschen/ziemlich/sehr (spannend).
	formulate basic questions	(Spielst) du gern (Tennis)? Wie oft (gehst) du (ins Kino)?
	use more varied opinion 'openers'	Ich glaube, ... Ich meine, ... Meiner Meinung nach ...
	express more varied ways of (dis)agreement	Du hast recht. Das stimmt doch nicht! Doch! Du redest Unsinn!
	use hesitation and time-gaining phrases	Also, ... Moment mal! Lass mich mal denken.
	give simple reasons for their opinions	Ich mag (...), weil es (interessant) ist.
Stage 3		
Exchanging reasons and preferences	new ways to ask for an opinion elicit reasons	Was hältst du von ...? Warum (hörst) du gern (Rap)?
Talking across time frames	express simple preferences	Ich denke, (Deutsch) ist besser als (Mathe). Ich (esse) lieber (Käse) als (Wurst).
	elicit preferences	Was findest du besser? (Deutsch) oder (Mathe)? Was isst du lieber? (Käse) oder (Wurst)?
	exchange and comment on future plans	Ich will (heute Abend ins Kino gehen). Ja, gute Idee! Nein, ich will nicht, weil ...
Stage 4		
Developing a line of thought	give a developed response to a stimulus	A response in German sustained through the use of connectives, sequencing devices and time-gaining phrases.
Sharing points of view	listen to extended talk, then respond to key points raised	Du hast gesagt (Tennis ist toll), aber ich denke (es ist sehr langweilig).
Balancing an argument	give a balanced view of an issue	Auf der einen Seite/Einerseits (ist meine Schule modern) aber auf der anderen Seite/Andererseits (sind die Lehrer:innen zu streng). Meiner Meinung nach (ist es sehr schön hier), obwohl (das Wetter oft schlecht ist).

Sample Group Talk Support Mats from Wendy Adeniji

Stage 1 for Year 7
Stage 2 for Year 8
Stage 3 for Year 9

Stage 4 for Year 10 (not provided)
Stage 5 for Year 11 (not provided)

Speak Easi Group Talk Stage 1 German

Giving an opinion

Also, ich denke ...
Well, I think ...

Ich finde ...
I find ...

Agreeing

Das stimmt.
That's correct.

Das denk' ich auch.
I think so too.

Disagreeing

Das stimmt nicht.
That's not true.

Rejecting

Du spinnst! *You're crazy!*
Halt die Klappe! *Keep your mouth*

Surprise

Was? *What?*

Disinterest

Egal. *Doesn't matter.*

Finding out an opinion

Was denkst du?
What do you think?

Wie findest du?
What do you think of... ?

Speak Easi Group Talk Stage 1 German

Giving an opinion

A , I d ...
Well, I think ...

I f ...
I find ...

Agreeing

D s .
That's correct.

D d ' i a.
I think so too.

Disagreeing

D s n .
That's not true.

Rejecting

D s ! *You're crazy!*
H d K ! *Keep your mouth shut!*

Surprise

W ? *What?*

Disinterest

E . *Doesn't matter.*

Finding out an opinion

W d d ?
What do you think?

W f d?
What do you think of... ?

Speak Easi Group Talk Stage 2 German

Say what you like or dislike doing

Ich (spiele) gern (Tennis).
I like playing tennis.

Ich (spiele) nicht gern (Tennis).
I don't like playing tennis.

Use a range of opinion adjectives with qualifiers

Es ist ein bisschen / ziemlich / sehr (spannend).
It's a bit/quite/very exciting.

Use more varied opinion openers

Ich glaube
I believe

Ich meine
I think / mean

Meiner Meinung nach
My opinion of

Express more varied ways of (dis)agreement

Du hast recht.
You're right.

Das stimmt doch nicht!
That's not right!

Doch!
Yes sure!

Attention-grabbing and time-gaining phrases

Hör mal!
Listen!

Pass auf!
Watch out!

Also, ...
So ...

Moment mal!
Wait a moment!

Formulate basic questions

(Spielst) du gern (Tennis)?
Do you like playing tennis?

Wie oft (gehst) du (ins Kino)?
How often do you go to the cinema?

Speak Easi Group Talk Stage 3 German

Give reasons for opinions and elicit reasons

Ich mag (Deutsch), weil es
(interessant) ist.
I like German because it's interesting.

Warum (hörst) du gern (Stormzy)?
Why do you like Stormzy?

Express preferences and make comparisons

Ich denke (Deutsch) ist besser
als (Mathe).
I think that German is better than maths.

Ich (esse) lieber (Käse) als
Wurst.
I prefer cheese to sausages.

Elicit preferences

Was findest du besser:
(Deutsch) oder (Mathe)?
What do you prefer, German or maths?

Was (isst) du lieber:
(Käse) oder (Wurst)?
What do you prefer, cheese or sausage?

Exchange and comment future plans and past actions/events

Ich will (heute Abend
ins Kino gehen).
I'm going to the cinema tonight.

Ja, gute Idee!
Yes, good idea!

Nein, ich will
nicht, weil ...
No, I don't want to because...

Use sequencing devices to explain opinions

Erstens denke ich
Firstly I think

zweitens
secondly

Und schliesslich
And finally

Express degrees of (un)certainty

Ich bin (nicht) sicher, (ob) ...
I'm not sure, if ...

Keine Ahnung!
No idea!