

INNER CIRCLE JULY

#7 / 2022

This month

New Topics & Talking Points:
The Easiest Way to Increase Your
Speaking Time

innovative LANGUAGE.COM

NEW TOPICS & TALKING POINTS: THE EASIEST WAY TO INCREASE YOUR SPEAKING TIME

- 1. Ceilings You'll Hit When Speaking in Your Target Language & How to Break Through Them**
- 2. How to Apply This Learning Tactic**

Welcome back to the Inner Circle.

Last time, you learned how to ramp up your language progress for the second half of the year.

I also set a goal for eight minutes of Hindi, and even though I didn't have much time, I managed to hit it.

With speaking, it seems like it can get exponentially harder with every minute. Two minutes is easy, but by eight minutes, you might feel like you're running out of things to say. You hit a ceiling.

So let's talk about how to break through!



CEILINGS YOU'LL HIT WHEN SPEAKING IN YOUR TARGET LANGUAGE & HOW TO BREAK THROUGH THEM

The most obvious issue in a conversation is running out of things to say.

Another “ceiling” you can hit is.... that you get good at some conversations, namely the ones you have a lot. For example, you can introduce yourself, or talk about why you’re learning the language, because you tend to have those conversations a lot. But, that’s all you’ll be able to talk about. And it’s a common issue with beginners and even intermediate learners.

It’s like being a one-trick pony with language.

So, if you don’t branch out, your language ability can easily go downhill.

And it happened to me too.

When I was a Japanese beginner, I focused a lot on something I was familiar with — baseball. So, I knew a lot about baseball, the terms and the players in Japanese. And when I started to speak with someone, when we changed the topic to baseball, I could talk all about it... well, to the extent that a beginner could. But, when they switched the topic... It was like hearing a completely foreign language for the first time. I was lost.

On one side, it felt great. I was able to talk about something really well.

On the flip side, it felt awful because that was all I could do. I could speak fluently about one topic, but froze at another.

So, what’s one to do?

If you want to be able to speak more and extend your speaking time, there are two options.

1. You can learn to talk about new topics, or as we call them, talking points.
2. You can also learn to speak in more depth about what you already know.

The second one comes more slowly as you get better with the language. It's just a matter of learning and getting "used to" more words and grammar rules. So, if you're actively learning a language, you're always working on the second one.

But the short-term, easier thing to do is to learn to talk about new topics.

That's how I hit my goal this time.

To give you a bit of background, I noticed that with every language I've learned, there'd be a point where my teacher and I were having the same conversations

every time. That's when you know you've hit a ceiling. It's unavoidable for language learners because you can't learn everything at once, but it's frustrating.

For example, in Hindi, my teacher and I talk about the weekend and the weekend routine. For me, that means talking about what my kids have been doing. Which is interesting the first time. But, by the 10th week or so, not so much.. It feels good to be able to understand everything and reply in Hindi on that one topic, but at the same time I know I'm not really improving.

So this is where our team's 1-minute conversation cheat sheets come in.

It's not really cheating, but it is a good way to prepare new topics and save time.

The image shows five 'One Minute Conversation' cheat sheets for English learners. Each sheet is designed for a one-minute conversation and includes a title, a conversation script, and a list of vocabulary words with checkboxes.

- Can Talk About the Weather:**
 - What's the weather like?
 - It's sunny.
 - Vocab File 1: sunny, warm, hot, nice.
- Can Talk About Well-Being:**
 - How are you?
 - I'm fine.
 - Vocab File 2: fine, great, doing very well, terrible.
- Ask About What Someone Likes:**
 - Do you like cats?
 - Yes, I do.
 - Vocab File 1: cats, dogs, winter, summer.
- Can Talk About Where Someone Lives:**
 - Where do you live?
 - I live in Shanghai.
 - Vocab File 1: Shanghai, Paris, Dubai, New York.
- Can Talk About Your Weekend:**
 - What did you do over the weekend?
 - I cleaned my apartment.
 - Vocab File 1: cleaned my apartment, watched Netflix, went shopping, slept the whole day.
 - Vocab File 2: practiced guitar, went to the gym, studied English, played tennis.
 - Vocab File 3: ate out, played video games, went to the movies, went hiking.

The last sheet also includes a 'NOTES' section and a list of additional activities: 'I cleaned my apartment', 'I watched Netflix', 'I went shopping', 'I slept the whole day', 'I practiced guitar', 'I went to the gym', 'I studied English', 'I played tennis', 'I ate out', 'I played video games', 'I went to the movies', and 'I went hiking'.

With these cheat sheets, you get a quick sample dialog of just two or three lines, and you get words that you can plug into the lines to create your own answers.

For example, my Hindi teacher and I talked about the weekend, so I used the weekend cheat sheet. The sheet has phrases for weekend activities like, "I cleaned" or "I went out to eat." I used the very same line on my teacher and asked her what she did over the weekend. You can use it to talk about your weekend and ask about theirs and double the speaking time.

There's also a cheat sheet on the places you've been to, which naturally came up after talking about the weekend. The cheat sheet talks about countries you've visited, but you could add in your own words to say, "I've been to the coffee shop," and you could ask your teacher the same thing. The grammar is the same.

These sheets can add up to a minute of conversation time if it's back and forth. But it also depends on you. If a topic is new to you and you only have the cheat sheet, you'll get a minute at most. If you know more

words and grammar rules to build off the cheat sheet with, you can talk as much as you want.

The cheat sheets just point you in a direction and help you get started with a new topic, and they let you speak a bit more.

They're like a primer for a new topic, which is what I needed to reach this goal.

But I mentioned another way to increase your speaking time: learn to talk more in-depth about what you already know.

This is the one that gives you real, meaningful progress, and it's something I'm actively working on with the HindiPod101 lessons and in-person lessons. That progress takes time, which I didn't really have this month. It's easier to use lines off of a cheat sheet. It's harder to get used to new words and grammar rules and use them freely in conversations. That's the part that takes time.



HOW TO APPLY THIS LEARNING TACTIC

Aside from running out of things to say...

One other common issue or ceiling you'll hit is — only being able to speak about topics you often talk about and struggling if a new topic comes your way.

As we said, you can extend your speaking time by 1) learning to talk about new topics, or 2) adding more depth to topics you already know.

"Learning to talk about new topics" is the easiest of the two.

And it doesn't take much time.

So, that's where our 1-minute conversation cheat sheets come in. These cheat sheets serve as a primer for new topics and conversations. You'll get brief dialogues for topics like the weather, the weekend, and your health.

You'll find the links to these 1-minute cheat sheets on the Inner Circle page.

To do:

- Download the 1-minute cheat sheets.

The second way you can build up your list of talking points is... to simply write out topics you like, like your hobbies, sports, or music.

Then search for lessons based around these topics inside the Lesson Library. You'll learn conversations that you can use in real life with native speakers.

To do:

- Come up with a list of topics you like.
- Search the Lesson Library for lessons based on the topic.

You can also check out our Can-Do lessons in the Lesson Library. These cover specific topics like introducing yourself, talking about yourself, talking about your family, and more. Unlike the cheat sheets, you'll get to hear the native pronunciation, learn how to talk about these topics more in-depth, and practice speaking.

The goal is to expose yourself to new talking points and topics so that you can use them in real life.

And so that you're not a one-trick pony in your target language.

NOW FOR MY NEXT GOAL.

I'll aim for.... 8 minutes again. I'll be traveling, so I'll try and maintain that as I revisit another language I learned in the past — Hebrew.

What about you? Let us know what your measurable monthly goal is.

Email us at
inner.circle@innovativelanguage.com,
and stay tuned for the next Inner Circle.