

## WELCOME TO ENGLISH IN ACTION CONVERSATIONS

This volunteer kit was designed to prepare you for the experience of one-to-one English conversation practice with your student. The information included in the kit will answer many of your questions about the overall program, as well as the way the conversation sessions work. We welcome you and hope your involvement with EiA is as rewarding for you as it has been for the thousands of volunteers and students who have come together over the years.

Enclosed you will find:

1) An English in Action Conversations brochure describing the program. Also included is an EiA business card. You may want to give this to a friend or someone who might be a good EiA volunteer tutor. The best recruitment of new members for EiA is through current members.

2) Additional background information on EiA:

- Rave Reviews
- English in Action—Fact Sheet
- How It All Began

3) The Volunteer Information Packet which includes:

- What Is Expected of a Volunteer Tutor?
- Who Are your Students?
- Why Meet at a Unit?
- Aids to Help You as a Volunteer Tutor
- Dos and Don'ts for Tutors

4) *Tips on Tutoring English* for EiA volunteer tutors. This booklet contains a wealth of information, ideas and recommendations for effective, enjoyable conversations.

# English in Action Fact Sheet



English in Action Conversations, a program of the English-Speaking Union, provides one-to-one conversation practice by matching volunteer tutors with immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, asylees, students, visitors and people here on business. Conversation partners meet for one to two hours each week at one of our many times and locations in Manhattan.

EiA was founded in 1960, and in 1976 it became a program of The English-Speaking Union. The English in Action office is located in the ESU offices at 144 East 39<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10016.

People of all nationalities, occupations and visa status are accepted as students. Because EiA is a conversation program, applicants must have at least a basic knowledge of English. EiA does not accept beginning language students, nor does it teach the student how to read and write.

Volunteers must be native speakers of English and willing to commit themselves to the program for two hours each week on an ongoing basis. They must attend an orientation at the ESU office, where they are interviewed. Volunteers who are accepted into the program, are required to attend a training session before being placed. All volunteers and students must be 18 or older.

The EiA office is open Monday through Friday, from 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Check our website for orientation dates: [http://www.esuus.org/esu/programs/english\\_in\\_action/](http://www.esuus.org/esu/programs/english_in_action/)  
You may call us at any time for more information. Our phone number is 212-818-1200, extension 245 for volunteers and extension 226 for students.

The student registration fee is \$400.00, renewable annually. This fee helps to cover administrative expenses. There is no additional charge for the conversation sessions. The fee is non-refundable unless it is impossible for us to arrange a match.

There is usually a waiting period after registration before the student can begin. This delay occurs because a volunteer tutor who meets the needs of the student is not always available immediately.

EiA parties take place several times a year so that students and volunteers from other units have the opportunity to meet each other.

English in Action is funded through The English-Speaking Union of the United States, student registration fees and through contributions from volunteers, students, businesses and friends. All donations are tax-deductible and are received gratefully.



## Rave Reviews for English in Action Conversations

Our main trouble as non-English speaking people is that we are too afraid to use “our English” and what we need are people to whom we are not afraid to talk—who can correct our mistakes.

*A participant from Indonesia*

The service rendered by English in Action has, in many circumstances, made the difference between academic failure and success.

*Advisor to International Students,  
Long Island University*

We at IRC are grateful for your cooperation, from which so many have benefited.

*Resettlement Department,  
International Rescue Committee*

We feel that English in Action is a valuable program for international students in helping them to improve their everyday English.

*The American-Korean Foundation*

With this assistance, I also was helped in my adjustment to American life.

*A participant from Turkey*

To use English in a practical way is what I owe to you.

*A participant from Poland*

I liked EiA because I could talk.

*A participant from Syria*

It is very useful for those students like me who know English grammar but can't talk very well.

*An Italian medical student*

The English in Action program has revived my interest in this [field of teaching English] and I offer my thanks for pointing the way to a future and, I think, exciting career.

*A volunteer*

English in Action provides the transition from the cloistered classroom to the outside English-speaking world.

*Professor of English as a Second  
Language,  
American Language Institute,  
New York University*

For my part, few experiences have given me greater satisfaction....I was enormously enriched by what I learned of [my conversation partner's] culture.

*A volunteer*

A better command of a language enables people to appreciate the culture more profoundly. EiA enables us to feel at home among Americans.

*A participant from Japan*

At Teachers College we have very much appreciated the efforts of the English in Action program in offering our international students opportunities for informal conversations with interested Americans.

*Lecturer in English,  
Teachers College,  
Columbia University*

My volunteer made me feel confident. Talking with him, I was not afraid of making mistakes.

*A participant from Venezuela*

I think that the psychological help that an international student can get in this program during the adaptation period is the greatest value of it.

*A participant from Bolivia*

EiA is a gift for foreigners.

*A participant from Colombia*

If it were not that I have to earn a living, I would be much happier devoting my entire time to English in Action.

*A volunteer*

English in Action is, indeed, a lighthouse that gives light to students from different parts of the world in their quest for learning and improving their English.

*A participant from Russia*

It's a great organization, giving the opportunity to international students to learn English and get acquainted with American culture.

*A participant from Cuba*

I have learned more English at EiA than in any other place because I had more chances to practice and be corrected personally by the [volunteer].

*A Taiwanese government official*

Your kindness towards me permitted me to overcome my first natural uneasiness, derived from being in a completely new country.

*A participant from Italy*



## TIPS FROM TUTORS

The following tips were suggested by English in Action Conversations tutors, to help make the tutoring sessions meaningful and effective. Please feel free to contact us if you have additional tips you'd like to share.

- Begin by asking: "Tell me about yourself."
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Do more listening than talking.
- Be patient.
- Try to find your student's strengths and interests.
- Talk about things your student is passionate about.
- Be open and non-judgmental.
- Comparing cultures is a good way to learn and to teach.
- Help your student with pronunciation.
- Remember that it's a conversation, not a class.
- Focus on the present and the future, not on the past.
- Talk about daily experiences.
- Use current events as a discussion topic.
- Always bring paper and pencil to take notes.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help or suggestions.
- Remember that the Unit Director can be your mentor.
- Use the materials and resources in the Tutor Toolkit.

## WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A VOLUNTEER TUTOR?

Because it is the intent of English in Action to keep a conversation pair matched on the basis of interests for at least several months, *regular attendance is essential*. Even when tutors are paired with different or multiple students each session, the program depends on your regular and timely attendance. If you are unable to attend a session, notify your unit director in sufficient time for substitutions to be made. Make sure you have your unit director's contact information and keep it handy. There is no need to alert your students in the event of your absence. Please leave that to the unit director.

Think and work as a team member. Although you will mainly be working with your assigned students, we would like you to think of yourself as a team member in your unit. There are often unanticipated changes from week to week, so please be flexible about switching and/or sharing conversation partners.

Although this is a volunteer effort created in an informal manner and atmosphere, our purpose is not casual. We are here to help our students practice and improve their English conversation skills. We are eager to talk with you about any questions or difficulties you may have, as well as to share in your satisfaction and successes.

## WHO ARE YOUR STUDENTS?

All English in Action students are adults with their own life experience. They come from all walks of life, with a wide age range, and hail from over 200 different countries. Some are temporary visitors, while others are permanent residents or refugees. They have many different interests and concerns, and the majority of our students are multi-lingual and highly educated.

In addition to practicing the language without the fear of making mistakes, English in Action students are here to learn about life in this country and teach their conversation partners about their own languages, lands and customs. They may have different cultural expectations, so please be patient, especially regarding their timeliness and notions of courtesy and communication. Our goal is to facilitate mutual learning and understanding.

## THE UNIT IS THE FOUNDATION

One question that we would like to address at the beginning is "Would it be all right if my conversation partner and I met at home or elsewhere instead of at the unit?" Often this seems to be a perfectly reasonable thing to do. Perhaps you and your student work or live near each other, or you may feel it would be very convenient not to have to leave your home on cold or rainy days.

For your English in Action sessions, we must insist that you meet at your regular unit for the following reasons:

- **Unit sites provide a neutral setting.** Neither you nor your conversation partner need play the host or the guest, but rather can concentrate on learning. Because it is a neutral setting, the purpose is clearly a session for learning and the conversation practice can be more than just a chat.
- **Only by attending the unit can you stay in touch with the total program and feel a part of a larger effort.** Attending a unit gives the sense of belonging to a group of people all striving toward the same goal. For students, this is important because, although language learning is personal, it is encouraging to know that others are also going through the same process. For tutors, it provides the possibility of getting suggestions and assistance from other tutors and the unit director. For both partners, it is a chance to meet others with similar interests. Organizationally, the units are the places where information and support materials are distributed. By meeting outside of the unit, you are no longer a part of the total program.
- **The unit provides an opportunity to change conversation partners.** When you attend an English in Action unit, you have the opportunity to speak with many people. This is very important for students, as it allows them to hear different styles of speaking and experience different styles of tutoring. This is also a good opportunity for both tutors and students to meet people and make friends.
- **The unit gives you the opportunity to share your tutoring experience with your colleagues.** When you meet in a unit, you have the opportunity to share your thoughts and techniques with your fellow tutors, and in turn, you can learn from them. On occasion, if your student is absent, you may have the chance to sit in with another pair of conversation partners. This is an excellent time to learn new tutoring techniques from your colleagues and share your ideas. It also provides the student with a chance to observe native speakers in conversation.
- **Resources.** In addition to your tutor packet, each unit director will have the Marian Siegel Tutor Toolkit available during the tutoring sessions. The Toolkit includes reference books, conversation ideas and other tutoring materials. These materials are uniquely designed for the English in Action program.

## **AIDS TO HELP YOU AS A VOLUNTEER TUTOR**

### **Tutor Training Workshops**

English in Action offers Tutor Training Workshops every month, on a variety of topics, to help you to hone your tutoring skills. These workshops also provide a great opportunity for you to exchange ideas with your fellow tutors, and pick up new techniques and materials. We expect all tutors to take advantage of this resource by attending *at least two workshops per year*.

### **Directed Conversation**

*Direction will be determined by your student's language priorities.* Is your student a doctor, student, housewife, mechanic? How long has your student been in this country? How much schooling and English language training has your student had?

Is more facility in English needed to:

- complete a course of study?
- get a better job?
- feel comfortable in the new culture?
- accomplish the tasks of daily living?
- make an American friend?

As these questions are answered, you will be assessing your student's ability to use English and his or her reasons for wanting to improve their English language skills. This information will help you plan topics of discussion and activities for future meetings.

When you meet with your students for the first time, make sure that they understand that they are expected to arrive on time and attend English in Action regularly. Explain to your students that, if they are unable to attend a session, they should notify their unit director no later than the day before that session. End each session with a smiling reminder that you hope to see them the following week.

### **How to Help**

Remember that the first step to success is believing that your student can learn. The next step is believing that you can help.

- Your speaking style is a model for your student. Try to use natural speech during conversations. Speak at a normal rate. Don't exaggerate or distort pronunciation.
- Be encouraging. Praise your student. Remember that success leads to success.
- Use body language—eyes, face, hands—to underline and reinforce meaning. Build an awareness of the cultural differences in gestures.
- Bring pictures to stimulate conversation and to help students understand vocabulary.
- Correcting all the time can be discouraging. Let your student make some mistakes. Learning a language involves taking risks and making errors.
- While your student is speaking, jot down errors. Make corrections later. Don't interrupt your student's flow of speech.
- Provide models and additional examples of grammar patterns. Don't get bogged down in explanations of grammatical forms.
- Focus on listening and speaking skills.
- Encourage your student to be a creative, active learner.
- Occasionally ask your student to tell you what has been most helpful.
- Be patient. Give your student time to formulate thoughts. Moments of silence are an important part of your student's conversation.
- It's alright if you don't understand everything your student says, but remember to ask for clarification whenever you don't understand.
- Make the learning experience and the materials personal, dynamic and active.
- Be open, caring, supportive and flexible. Do what is best for your student at all times.

**Let your student do most of the speaking. Don't let your enthusiasm to tutor carry you away so that you do all the talking. We like the 80/20 rule: Let your student do 80 percent of the talking.**



## DOs AND DON'Ts FOR TUTORS

### DO

- Think about your tutoring sessions in advance.
- Determine and focus on the everyday language needs and personal interests of your conversation partner.
- Include a variety of activities in your sessions.
- Be “level-conscious” when explaining points of grammar or answering questions.
- Keep a paper and pencil handy at all times. Many students will recognize or learn a sound or word more easily if they see it on paper.
- Take notes on pronunciation and grammatical problems for future reference.
- If relevant, review what was covered in the previous session(s).
- Encourage students to read the newspaper and to bring articles of interest to their tutoring sessions.
- Encourage students to bring in phone messages, application forms, letters, memos and other “print” they may be having trouble with.
- Encourage students to keep a journal where they write down everything they hear, see or read which puzzles or surprises them. These entries can be related to language or culture, and can be discussed in your tutoring sessions.
- Think about a shared activity between sessions. For example, you and your partner might choose a mutually interesting movie or TV show. Discuss the program before and after watching it.

### DON'T

- Initiate or be drawn into too much “unfocused” conversation.
- Present too much material at one time.
- Attempt to work on all of a student’s problems at one time.
- Correct a student’s work for him/her. Guide the student to self-correction.
- Don’t overdo it. It’s easy to get carried away in your role as tutor.
- When in doubt, don’t hesitate to say, “I’ll check on it and get back to you.”



# Let's Talk!

*Volunteers helping newcomers speak English*

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## English in Action: How It All Began

*Marion Reith founded English in Action in 1960. Early in life, she developed a keen interest in different cultures and world peace. This interest was first sparked by a family trip that took her around the world in 1913 and 1914. Reith graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1918. Then she attended the Union Institute of Zurich in Switzerland. She became active in the field of Jungian psychology.*

*After founding EiA in 1960 and working for nearly twenty years as the program manager and later as a Unit Director, Reith retired in 1977 and moved back to California. After her retirement, she continued to tutor Japanese and Vietnamese students. She remained interested in EiA and kept in contact with the New York office until her death at the age of ninety-one on December 21, 1987.*

*Here is her description of the founding of English in Action:*

So often I am asked, "How did English in Action begin?" It began when I left my home in California for a visit to New York City in 1960. While there, I volunteered my services to my friend, Ruth Prukaple, Director of the Midtown International Center. Ruth had a call from one of the consulates, asking for help. They had a Thai student named Ladiwan who had come to get his Masters degree in Business Administration and was staying at the embassy. Ladiwan was getting very discouraged. He felt that he would never learn English and he wanted to go home. What could Ruth suggest? She suggested that he come and see me, which he did on January 26, 1960.

He knew only about fifty English words, but that wasn't enough to really speak English. We both jumped into trying to communicate with each other. We used our hands, our faces, and our gestures, and it was quite exciting. It was fun for him and fun for me, and he came to see me three times a week.

At our second meeting, a very distinguished looking gentleman from Argentina introduced himself and said, "I wish I, too, could talk with you for an hour." My answer was, "Why not?" He was here with his wife, who was doing library research, and he was studying advanced English. He told me that he hated to return to his country without ever having had an opportunity to discuss Latin American relations with a single North American. I then had two students, a beginner and someone advanced.

When one of the volunteers saw what a good time we were having, she said, "Please, get me a student. I would love to have time to really get acquainted with someone from another country."

Many new international students began to come for this one-on-one conversation practice program and volunteers signed up just as fast. When it was time for me to return home to California, I had fifty matched pairs.

I realized that I had inadvertently created an exciting English language program. I decided to stay in New York to help this program grow. It's gratifying to see how EiA has grown since its first birthday in 1960.

In 1976, EiA became part of the English-Speaking Union, where it has flourished.



*Let's Talk!* is a publication of English in Action Conversations, a program of the English-Speaking Union.

Karen Ruelle, Editor

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