

# Daily “Warm-up Dialogs” for All

*JoAnn Elizabeth Siebert, Tokyo International University of America*

As the years pass, I change my classroom routines to suit the times, the students, and my own interests. However, one routine that has persisted is the use of what I call “warm-up dialogs” at the beginning of almost every class period. All ages and levels benefit from warm-ups that incorporate vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, and previous or upcoming concepts. I include topics and useful phrases from the students’ lives. Warm-up dialogs work well in intensive language classes, sheltered classes, and language classes that support content classes.

Warm-up dialogs are short, generally 8-12 lines, and are read by a pair of students. Figure 1 is an example from a grammar class in which students are practicing contractions soon after their arrival in the United States.

## Preparation and class time

Writing the dialogs takes 10 to 30 minutes, but I now have dozens I recycle and revise. I mark syllable and word stress with upper case letters. I have recorded some dialogs using free Dartmouth Recorder software and linked them to my course websites. The class time devoted to the dialogs ranges from 10 to 30 minutes.

## Implementation

The dialog is on the students’ desks as they come into class. Many start to look at it immediately. When class starts I say the lines, explaining new grammar, vocabulary, or concepts. With the dialog in Figure 1, I

would teach, for example, how to pronounce the names of the dormitories. We then say the lines together. I explain and emphasize all aspects of pronunciation.

Next, I make pairs by giving students, for instance, a vocabulary word or a geographic name, making sure there are two students with the same word. They stand and say their words until the corresponding partners are found. The students then remain standing and say the dialog, switching parts if appropriate and doing it a second time. If more practice is needed, students switch to a new partner and start over. I walk around, listen, and help.

Alternatively, I may first dictate all or part of the dialog or do a cloze exercise before giving students the full script. In pronunciation classes, I may write all or part of the dialog on the board in the International Phonetic Alphabet and have students figure it out, alone or in pairs, before I give them a script.

Finally, halfway the way through the course, I ask the students to suggest social and academic situations they would like me to use when I write the warm-ups. From that point on, I often incorporate their ideas.

A: **GOOD MORning. HOW’S it GOing toDAY?**  
B: [B answers A’s question and then says his/her own line] ... **HOW’S your DAY so FAR?**  
A: [answers] ...By the **WAY, WHAT’S the NAME of your DORM?**  
B: [answers] ... **WHERE’S YOUR ROOM LOcated?**  
A: [in \_\_[dorm]\_\_ ... **WHO’S your ROOMmate, and is he/she NICE?**  
B: [answers] ... **WHAT’S YOUR ROOMmate’s NAME, and WHAT do you KNOW about him/her?**  
A: [answers] ... Well, en**JOY the REST of the DAY.**  
B: **SAME to YOU. SEE you LAtter.**

*Figure 1. Sample warm-up dialog*

## A rewarding routine

The warm-ups use colloquial language and real-life situations but still include course material. The students are active from the first minute of class. My students never seem to tire of the warm-ups and always rate them highly on end-of-semester evaluations. Lastly, I especially enjoy these first minutes of class when the students are standing, smiling, and doing the warm-up they expect every day.

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# Report Writing for Lower Level ESL Students

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In the elementary grades, every one of us made reports on various topics such as “The Pyramids” or “Volcanoes.” We would find information – usually from one source – to complete an assignment. As we proceeded to higher grades and high school we learned to find information from various sources and to avoid using exact words, expressions, phrases, and sentence structure. We learned the proper way to paraphrase and quote informational material to protect sources and make writing uniquely our own, not only in expressing facts and ideas, but also in relating an opinion or thesis about a topic.

In early grades we learned the basics by using exact language from text. I devised a student-centered exercise to work on this basic skill by writing a class report from several sources. My students were second-third level (high-beginner) Clark College ESL students in their 20s and 30s from Russian, Spanish, and Asian backgrounds. The class had previously taken a field trip to the public library and become familiar with the types of material available and how and where to locate information (see Library Worksheet in Appendix A).

First, I took out five simplified biographies of Martin Luther King Jr. from the library. One biography came from the Internet via a relative of one of the students. Next, I made a set of questions about Dr. King’s personal information, education, family, work, activity, and beliefs (see Table 1 below). I gave one biography and a set of questions to each of six groups of students and asked each to write the title of the book, author, library call number, whether illustrated, number of pages, and pages where answers to the questions were found.

Following that, in cooperative learning fashion, we shared the answers on one worksheet that had the sixteen questions. (See answers to the questions in Table 2 below.) To examine relationships between ideas, I asked each group to cut out the sentence answers, decide how best to organize them into a report or story, and paste them together. I then typed the final form into a paragraph and listed the “references” in alphabetical order at the bottom of the page. The result was the final paragraph in Table 3. Finally, the class read the resulting draft. They understood the information they had collected,