

A large, vibrant red abstract graphic consisting of several overlapping, curved, flame-like or petal-like shapes. It is positioned behind the text, with one large shape behind 'LET'S' and another behind 'ABOUT IT'.

MYRNA KNEPLER

**“LET’S
TALK
ABOUT
IT”**

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

MYRNA KNEPLER

Northeastern Illinois University

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To Henry, who supported and helped.

*To daughters, friends, and colleagues whose names
appear scattered throughout the text.*

Illustrations by Susan Stillman

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TO THE STUDENT

The purpose of this book is to help you to talk about your ideas and opinions in English.

All of you know quite a lot of English by now. You probably can carry on short conversations with English speakers, but perhaps it is still difficult for you to talk about the more complicated thoughts and ideas that come easily to your mind in your own language.

This book will give you practice in carrying on adult conversations and discussions in English. In addition, it will help you to review some of the grammar points that often cause difficulties for students of the language.

Many of the exercises ask you to express your own ideas and opinions. Because different people have different ideas, there will always be more than one answer to each question. Each answer you give, however, must be in a correct grammatical form. If you need help with the grammar, the teacher will refer you to one of the special grammar exercises in Section Three.

TO THE TEACHER

This book is designed to help students learn to carry on extended conversations in English—the kinds of conversations that take place among adults in the college classroom, or among co-workers discussing a job to be done, or among friends, once pleasantries have been exchanged.

The book is written with the intermediate student of English in mind. That is to say, it is for the student who has already been taught most of the common grammatical patterns of English and can produce many of them with some degree of accuracy. This student also commands a sufficient vocabulary to perform the tasks of everyday life and carry on short social conversations in English.

But “survival English” is not enough for many students. If the students are adults and used to discussing adult ideas in their own language, they may be frustrated by their inability to do so in English. They may either feel forced to talk what they consider “baby talk” in English or to remain silent just when they feel the need to speak.

Most students find it easier to speak if there is some framework for conversation. In this book that framework is provided by the short text that begins each lesson. This text, in the form of a story, presents either a series of events in someone's life for comment and speculation (Section One) or a problem to be solved (Section Two). It is hoped that some of the texts are lively enough to make students smile occasionally. Each chapter in Section One focuses on one or more grammatical structures that frequently cause difficulties for intermediate-level students. In both sections the conversation exercises first center on the students' reactions to the events or problems in the stories and then lead to opportunities for students to talk about their own ideas and experiences.

All the exercises in Sections One and Two are aimed at getting students to actively create their own utterances, using their own understanding and imagination. There is never any one correct answer; there are always many. The exercises in Section One lead students toward framing their answers in the form of particular structural patterns; in Section Two there are no such constraints.

The final section consists of sixteen mini-grammars, one for each lesson in Section One. Each mini-grammar contains a short explanation of the corresponding lesson, as well as exercises to reinforce learning.

The book can be used in several ways. It can be the main text in a conversation class, perhaps supplemented by listening comprehension and pronunciation exercises. Alternatively, it can be used as a grammar review in a course emphasizing communicative competence.

Most of the exercises can be used in a number of different ways. Students may work individually, reporting their answers to the class; they may work with a partner, or in small groups. The emphasis is on oral work, but many of the exercises can also be written out for further practice. Some exercises can even be developed into composition topics if such activity is consistent with the goals of the class. More detailed suggestions to the teacher follow.

Suggestions for using Section One

Section One emphasizes the use of appropriate grammatical structures in a conversational context. Each lesson contains:

1. A listing of structure skills needed to do the conversation exercises in that lesson.
2. A short text in the form of a story.
3. Conversation exercises based on the situation or problem in the story. Each exercise demands mastery of a particular grammatical structure, but leaves students free to develop their own answers as long as they are appropriate to the situation.
4. Conversation exercises based on the students' own experiences.
5. Vocabulary expansion exercises (in most lessons).

There are several ways in which the lessons in Section One may be used, depending on the teacher's style and the ability level of the students. Since most of the conversation exercises are based on the story that begins each lesson, students should understand it completely. It is probably best to read the story aloud at least once, with the students following it in their books. Definitions of difficult words can be elicited from the class and written on the blackboard. Some factual questions about the text should be asked, and one or more students can be asked to summarize it.

In low-intermediate classes, the teacher may wish to do some of the appropriate grammar review exercises from the corresponding mini-grammar (in Section Three) with the class before beginning the conversation exercises. Some teachers may also wish to assign grammar exercises to be done at home before the class meetings.

In working with more advanced students, the teacher may move directly into the conversation exercises. The mini-grammars can then be used independently by students when they need help with a particular structure, and by the teacher if the majority of the class shows weakness on a particular grammar point.

Most of the conversation exercises can be done either by having individual students report their answers to the class or by assigning partners and giving each pair a few minutes to develop answers together. A few of the exercises call for role plays, which can be rehearsed with a partner and then performed in front of the class.

Even though the focus of the book is on oral communication, the teacher may want to assign some conversation exercises as written classwork or homework from time to time in order to check student progress.

Suggestion for using Section Two

The lessons in Section Two are constructed somewhat differently from those in Section One. In Section Two students are not asked to respond to a particular grammatical form, although they will probably call upon forms learned in earlier lessons.

Each text in Section Two describes a problem, the solution of which is the basis for class discussion. The problem is in narrative form because students seem to be able to respond more easily to such stories than to abstract discussion topics; instead of asking students to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of moving to a new place, a lesson asks the student to decide whether a particular family, as described in the story, should pull up stakes.

Except for very small classes, most of the lessons in Section Two are probably taught most successfully if the students are divided into small groups to work out the answers to the problems together. Many students find it easier to speak in such small groups, and such conversations are closer to experience outside the classroom. Three to five students per group seems to work best. Each group should have a chairperson in charge of reporting the group's decision to the class. In the first class sessions the teacher should be responsible for setting up the groups and selecting chairpersons from among the most verbally skillful students. Later the responsibility of arranging groups and selecting chairpersons can be shared with the class, although every member should have a chance to lead a group.

Teachers will find many ways of working with these materials. A detailed plan for teaching the first lesson in Section Two, "Moving to Another City," is provided only as a guide.

Teaching "Moving to Another City"

FIRST DAY

1. *Warm-up:* "Many of you have moved here recently. It's difficult to move, isn't it? Were there some problems?"

2. Write *difficult vocabulary* on the board. Definitions can be elicited either before or after the first reading of the text.
3. Read story aloud at least once, while students look at their copies. Ask factual questions about details of the story. Ask one or more of the students to summarize the main points. Do not attempt to use the story as a listening comprehension exercise only; students need to have the text in front of them to be aware of all the details they must consider.
4. Set the problem: "What do the Thompsons have to decide? Do different members of the family want different things?"
5. Ask students to read over the problem at home.

SECOND DAY

6. Divide the class into groups of three to five students. Select a chairperson for each group to report to the class.
7. Explain that each group has two tasks: (1) to decide the best solution to the problem, (2) to give several good reasons for their decision. There is no right answer. If members of a group disagree (and you hope they will), each person should try to convince the rest of the group. Emphasize that while the chairperson of each group will make the report, everyone in the group must contribute to the solution.
8. Groups begin their discussion. Tell them they must be ready to report their decision and reasons in 10 minutes. Setting a time limit for the discussion is important. During the group discussion:
 - (a) Circulate rapidly to see that each group understands its task and is beginning.
 - (b) Visit each group to see that the members of the group are working toward a common solution. If agreement comes too quickly, be prepared to play devil's advocate.
 - (c) Visit each group one more time to check to see that the group can give reasons for its decision.
9. The chairperson of each group reports to the class. Then the floor is open for class discussion and comments. It is sometimes good to run a little short of time. (I like to have my students still arguing as they leave the classroom).

THIRD DAY

10. Do "Questions for Discussion" as follow-up.

Suggestions for using Section Three

The sixteen mini-grammars of Section Three are keyed to the sixteen lessons in Section One. Each contains a short explanation of the grammar needed to complete the lesson, and exercises to reinforce the learning of that grammar. Unlike the exercises in Section One, which focus on communication, the exercises in the mini-grammars focus on the learning of the appropriate grammatical structure. They can generally be expected to be easier than the exercises in Section One.

In more advanced classes the teacher will probably want to begin with the lessons of Section One and use the mini-grammars only when needed. Teachers working with low-intermediate level students, however, may wish to teach all or part of a mini-grammar before beginning the corresponding lesson in Section One.

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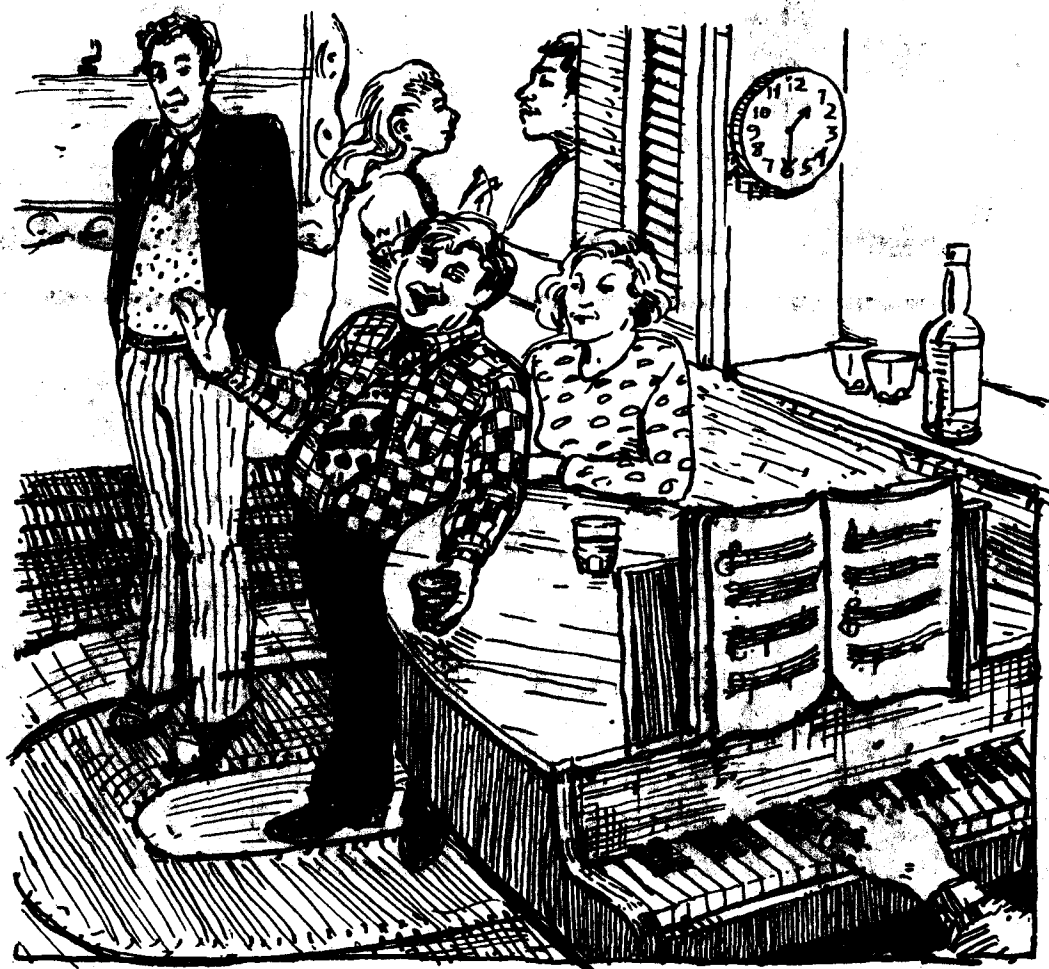
SITUATIONS
FOR
DISCUSSION

LESSON

1

STRUCTURE SKILLS

Forming negative sentences



Opposites Attract

Steve and Jeff are good friends although they are completely different from each other. Steve is very short and rather fat. He likes to wear bright-colored casual clothes. Last week he bought a flashy red plaid shirt and a loud print tie. He also bought an expensive pair of shiny leather shoes. Every week Steve spends his paycheck before he gets another one.

Steve enjoys being with people. He's extremely cheerful all the time and likes to tell jokes. People laugh at his jokes, but he laughs even harder. His laugh is very loud.

Steve loves to go to parties. He eats and drinks a lot and is always surrounded by people. He likes to dance and to listen to loud music. At every party he sings all his favorite songs at the top of his voice and dances with all the girls in the room. He's the last one to leave any party. Steve is a typical extrovert.

EXERCISES

1. Jeff is Steve's best friend. He is completely different from Steve in looks, personality, and habits. Describe Jeff, keeping all your sentences affirmative but using words with meanings that are opposite in meaning to some of the words in the story (antonyms). You may use your imagination to add additional details to your story.

EXAMPLE: Jeff is very tall and rather thin. . . .

/He is a typical introvert.

2. Describe Jeff again, this time using negative sentences whenever possible.

EXAMPLE: Jeff is not short and not fat.

He doesn't like to wear bright-colored clothes.

3. How many untrue statements can you make? One student deliberately makes an untrue statement. The next student must immediately change it to a true statement by changing affirmative to negative or negative to affirmative.

EXAMPLES: The earth is flat. (first student)

The earth isn't flat. (second student)

This room doesn't have a door. (first student)

This room has a door. (second student)

4. After many years of working in a snack shop, Mr. Miller and his wife were able to open a small restaurant of their own a few years ago. Although their business has been fairly successful, both of them have had to work ten to twelve hour days, six days a week. Mr. Miller buys all the food and even does some of the cooking. He is always concerned that his customers are satisfied and likes to visit their tables and chat with them. After everyone else has gone home Mr. Miller plans the next day's menus. Many evenings the Millers don't leave the restaurant until after midnight.

Last summer, the Millers took their first vacation in years. During those three weeks they lived in a completely different way than usual. Tell at least ten things the Millers didn't do on their vacation.

EXAMPLE: They didn't get up at 6:00. Instead, they slept until ten.

5. All last semester, My Hanh worked part-time as a cashier in the neighborhood drugstore and took a full load of courses at the junior college downtown. She was always rushing from place to place. This summer she will still be working but she won't be going to school for three months. It will seem like a vacation to her. What are some things My Hanh won't do this summer?

EXAMPLE: She won't buy her lunch from a vending machine. She will have time to prepare herself a good meal.

6. Do you think it is really possible for people who are as different from one another as Steve and Jeff to be good friends? Do you have any friends whose personality and habits are very different from your own? How are they different from yours?

7. Do you think husbands and wives should have similar personalities and interests? Do you know of a successful marriage in which the husband and wife are very different?

Vocabulary: Antonyms

Antonyms are words with opposite or nearly opposite meanings such as:

loud soft casual formal extrovert introvert

The antonyms for many English words can be formed by adding prefixes such as: *un-*, *in-*, *im-*.

pleasant	unpleasant
patient	impatient
credible	incredible

Supply the antonyms for the following words. Then use each word in a sentence. If you are not certain which prefix to use, check your dictionary.

worthy	conspicuous	credible
comfortable	sensitive	equal
lucky	predictable	fit
possible	known	separable