

# **Speaking Naturally**

**Communication Skills in  
American English**

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*Mary Newton Bruder*

**Peking University Press**

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Bruce Tillitt  
Mary Newton Bruder

# To the teacher

Recent trends in ESL/EFL curriculum design and pedagogy have stressed the importance of teaching communicative strategies and the functional use of language. *Speaking Naturally* is designed to do just that: teach students how to perform certain language functions in English by presenting the social rules for language use.

Because native speakers acquire these rules as part of growing up, they do not need to make conscious reference to them as adults. Second language learners, however, need information about sociolinguistic rules that may differ from those in their own culture. We have found in the writing and testing of the materials that there is often disagreement about rules, depending on one's native region, sex, age, and so on. If you disagree with any of the sociolinguistic rules presented in the text or feel that they need modification, point this out to your students and discuss the differences.

## Differences between informal and formal speech

In all languages the forms people use when speaking formally are different from those used informally. In English we tend to use formal speech with strangers and people of higher status, and informal speech with family, friends, and colleagues. Of course, language does not always fall into such neat categories as "formal" and "informal." The level of formality speakers choose depends upon their relationship, the setting, the topic being discussed, and many other factors. Students should be aware of the differences in speaking styles and the reasons for selecting the most appropriate style in a given situation.

Formal and informal speech are differentiated in this book in two basic ways: by style and by content. Informal speech is characterized stylistically by omissions, elisions, reductions, and, sometimes, a faster speaking rate. Formal speech is characterized by embedding (building information into sentences, also characteristic of written language) and a tendency toward more complete sentences as opposed to fragments. Consider, for instance, these examples of informal and formal language:

### *Informal*

Sorry, gotta go.

Wanna beer?

He's a pain in the neck.

### *Formal*

I'm afraid I've got to be going now.

Could I offer you a beer?

He has not been easy to deal with.

## To the teacher

Formal and informal speech can also be differentiated on the basis of content. There are certain phrases appropriate in informal situations that are inappropriate in formal situations, such as "Got any change?" (which would not usually be asked of a stranger, for example).

Thus students need to know not only *how* to perform language functions but the cultural rules that determine *when* these functions are appropriate. Even classes at advanced levels may not have a great awareness of the different rules for speaking. In such a case you could ask questions concerning customs in the students' countries and discuss how these customs differ from those in North America, for example: When do you thank people? Is it acceptable to stop by someone's house without calling first? How would you get a waiter's attention in a restaurant?

As a warm-up activity, early in the semester, you might give the class a "quiz" like the following:

Which of the following are polite, rude, or neutral remarks?

You look thin.

You look like you've gained some weight.

How much does your apartment cost?

Can you lend me \$5 until next week?

Do your parents fight a lot? (To a classmate.)

What a beautiful baby you have.

How much did your shoes cost?

Do you have any children? Why not?

What religion are you? (At a cocktail party.)

What grade did you get on your test? (To a fellow classmate.)

That color doesn't look good on you!


## Introducing the unit

Each unit opens with one or two paragraphs that set the students' expectations for what is in each lesson. We recommend asking students to read this introduction silently before they listen to the dialogues. You could accompany this with a brief (5-minute) discussion of the topic in relation to the students' cultures.

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# 1 DIALOGUES AND DISCUSSION

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The dialogues are recorded on the Cassette (indicated by the symbol ). The students should listen to the recorded dialogues as they read along in the book. A discussion that focuses the students' attention on the teaching point (or recycles previous teaching points) follows each dialogue. A question about level of formality is presented each time, since this is the key to the language differences. The students should be asked to give evidence from the dialogues to support their answers.

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## 2 READING


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Students might read Section 2 in each unit for homework; you could review it briefly in the next class, answering questions and pointing out areas that diverge from the students' native cultures. If you do not know the students' cultures, it is often fun and instructive to be an amateur anthropologist and find out a few things about them. You could then spend some time discussing the differences between North American customs and those of other cultures.

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## 3 PHRASES

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The phrases are recorded on the Cassette (indicated by the symbol ). Students should listen to the phrases on the tape as they read them in the book. You may want to have students repeat the phrases out loud. Point out grammar and pronunciation differences for different formality levels.

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## 4 SMALL GROUP PRACTICE

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The students work in pairs or small groups according to the directions for each exercise. If possible, group students with others from different language backgrounds to encourage them to use only English. Change the grouping frequently so that all the students get to know each other. No names have been used to designate the speakers, so the teacher can assign roles in the role plays and other exercises according to the class membership.

The groups practice simultaneously – the noise level gets pretty high at times – and then groups are selected to perform for the entire class. It would be boring for all the groups to perform each exercise, so you should avoid repeating the same exercise. However, there should be frequent “in front of class” performances with plenty of feedback from both you and students.

Feedback should be delayed until the end of the performance; the students should not be interrupted in mid-stream or they lose the thread of the conversation. Corrections should center on things that may interfere with communication, such as severe pronunciation problems or violations of the communicative competence rules. Feedback should also include comments on the appropriateness of language to the role. It is also a good idea to try to get the performers to correct their own errors if possible, with questions such as “Do you think a professor would really say \_\_\_\_\_?”.

*To the teacher*

### **A. Using what you've learned**

For classes of lower proficiency, these exercises can be assigned as homework before the performance in class. The students still need to practice in class, however.

### **B. Cued dialogues**

These exercises allow the students to apply what they have learned without conducting a complete conversation from start to finish. The language functions are specified and the turns numbered, so that following the steps will create a fairly natural conversational exchange. A feedback discussion should follow.


### **C. Mini-roleplays**

With these, the students have the most freedom to use what they have learned. Some expressions are suggested, but feel free to suggest others. The roleplays should be fairly short (3–5 minutes) and should be followed by a feedback discussion.

# To the student

*Speaking Naturally* gives useful information about the kind of language that is appropriate in different situations. For example, how and when do you thank people? How do you invite your boss or professor to dinner? How do you invite a friend? What is the most polite way to interrupt? You already know the language and social rules for your own culture. How do they differ in America?

Throughout the units you will be asked to analyze the formality of the relationships between different people in the situations presented. We hope that when you finish you will be more comfortable using English in a variety of situations.

To help you listen for the differences, the dialogues at the beginning of each unit, and the phrases in Section 3 of each unit, are recorded on the Cassette (indicated by the symbol ).

As you know, North America is made up of many different groups of people. Customs vary somewhat according to region and ethnic background, but generally the language is the same. If you have doubts about what to say in a particular situation, feel free to ask someone. Most Americans enjoy talking about their language.

# 1 Openings and closings

Opening a conversation and bringing a conversation to an end are essential parts of our everyday language. You already know how to say hello and good-bye, but in this lesson you will study in more detail how Americans perform these functions. You might notice some similarities, as well as some differences, if you compare American conversation openings and closings with those in your native culture.

In the dialogues that follow, listen carefully to what the speakers say to greet each other and what they say to indicate that the conversation is over. Notice especially how many interchanges it takes to end a conversation.

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## 1 DIALOGUES

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### Dialogue A

Mike: Say, Grace, how you doing?\*

Grace: Mike! Hey, how are you?

Mike: Not bad. Where you going?\*

Grace: Over to Jerry's. How about you?

5 Mike: Oh, I just got off work. Boy, I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!

Grace: Where are you working now?

Mike: J & L Steel. It's a real pain. But I guess I shouldn't complain. Lots of guys are out of work these days.

10 Grace: Yeah, that's the truth. Well, I better let you go get some supper.\*

Mike: Yeah. It was great seeing you again. Maybe we could get together sometime.

Grace: Sounds good.\* I'll give you a call.

15 Mike: OK. Great. Well, I'll be seeing you.

Grace: OK, Mike. Enjoy your meal.

Mike: Thanks. Bye.

Grace: Bye.

*get off work*: finish working for the day

*out of work*: unemployed

\*Usage note: **How (are) you doing?**, **Where (are) you going?**, **I (had) better**, **(It) sounds good** are all examples of informal speech in which words are dropped.

## Unit 1

### Discussion

1. What do the two speakers call each other?
2. How do they greet each other? (What phrases do they use?)
3. What does Mike mean in line 8 when he says, "It's a real pain"?
4. How many exchanges does it take Mike and Grace to end their conversation?
5. How do Mike and Grace say good-bye? (What phrases do they use?)
6. Is this a formal conversation? How do you know?

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### Dialogue B

(The telephone rings.)

Dean Schubert: Hello. This is Virginia Schubert.

Fred Marshall: Hello, Dean Schubert. My name is Fred Marshall.  
I'm a reporter from the *Times*.

Dean Schubert: Yes?

5 Fred Marshall: I heard about a strange animal at your house. Could  
I come and talk to you about it?

Dean Schubert: Yes, it certainly would make an amusing story! Can  
you come this afternoon at three o'clock?

10 Fred Marshall: Yes, that would be fine. Thank you very much. I'll  
see you then.

Dean Schubert: You're welcome. Good-bye.

### Discussion

1. Why does Fred Marshall telephone Dean Schubert?
2. What words do they use to greet each other?
3. Why does Fred thank her?
4. What is the relationship of the speakers?
5. Is this dialogue more formal or less formal than Dialogue A?

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### Dialogue C

Jack: Oh, my gosh, that's Susie Johnson!

Mike: What?

Jack: Over by the bananas. Come on, let's go say hello. (*They go  
over to Susie.*) Hey, Susie!

5 Susie: What? . . . Jack?!

Jack: Hey, how are you? Gee, we haven't seen each other in . . . it  
must be close to three years!

Susie: Well, how have you been?

Jack: OK.

10 Susie: Still working at Lamstons?

Jack: Let's not go into that. Oh, Susie, this is Mike, one of my buddies at work.

Susie: Hi, Mike.

Mike: Hi, how are you?

15 Jack: Gee, we ought to go somewhere to talk. How about Peter's Pub?

Susie: Sounds good. Just give me a minute to pick up a few things for dinner tonight.

Jack: OK. See you at the check-out stand.

*oh my gosh*: an expression that shows surprise

*gee*: an expression that shows surprise (see Unit 6)

*buddy*: good friend

*check-out stand*: cashier; where you pay for what you buy

### Discussion

1. How many people are there? Where are the speakers? What are they doing when this dialogue begins?
2. How does Jack say hello?
3. Identify the ages and relationships of the speakers.
4. What can you say about the level of formality here? Why is it appropriate?



## 2 GREETINGS, PRECLOSINGS, AND CLOSINGS

### Greetings

Greetings in all languages have the same purpose: to establish contact with another person, to recognize his or her existence, and to show friendliness. The formulas for greeting are very specific and usually do not carry any literal meaning. People say "Good morning" even if it is a miserable day and may reply to "How are you?" with "Fine, thanks," even if they aren't feeling well.

The greeting is always returned, often in the same form but with different stress.

A: How *are* you?

B: Fine, thanks. How are *you*?

or

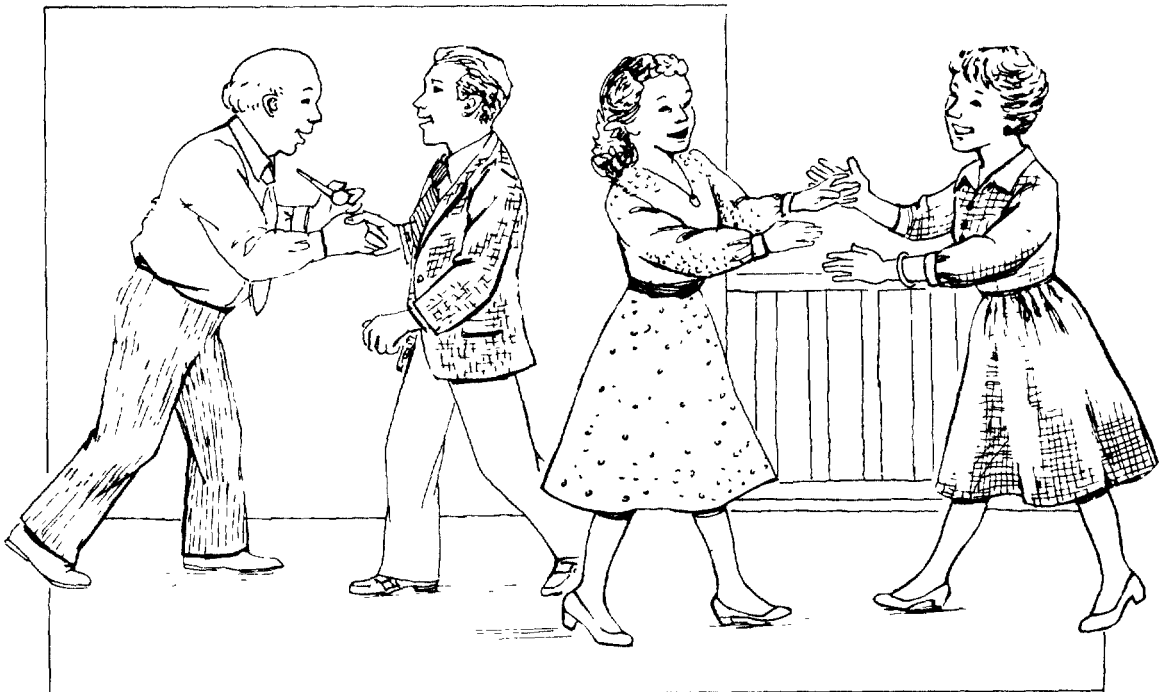
A: How are you?

B: Fine, thanks, and you?

A: Fine. (Thanks.)

People who are together every day greet one another the first time they meet each day. They do not shake hands.

When people have not seen each other for a long time, the greeting is often enthusiastic and is usually accompanied by shaking hands among men, hugging among both men and women, and sometimes a kiss on the cheek among women.



### *Preclosings and closings*

Usually people do not suddenly quit talking, say good-bye, and leave each other abruptly; ending a conversation normally takes some time. This involves two kinds of interactions: preclosings and closings.

*Preclosings* are phrases that signal the end of a conversation; *closings* are phrases that explicitly end the conversation.

There are some people with whom it is difficult to end a conversation. The problem is that they usually ignore the signals that end the conversation. With close friends this does not usually cause any severe difficulties; but with people we do not know well or with people in superior positions, it is considered rude to ignore preclosings. If someone ignores your first preclosing, you can use a stronger one (see Phrases section).

In formal situations, the superior (in age, status, etc.) usually signals the end of a conversation. On the telephone, the caller usually precloses. In informal situations, either speaker may preclose. Preclosings often include thanking a person for something (Unit 4) or making an excuse or apology (Unit 5).

Closings, like greetings, are commonly used exchanges with no literal meaning. People who are together every day say good-bye at the end of the day or week (and wish each other a nice weekend).

When leaving a party, guests always find the host or hostess to say thank you and good-bye. People who are leaving each other permanently or for a long time shake hands or embrace, depending on the relationship. If you are in an unfamiliar situation and wonder what to do, watch other people or ask.

### *Discussion*

What gestures can you use for greeting someone in your country? Do you shake hands? If so, what are the rules for handshakes? How do you end a conversation in your country? Do you have certain expressions to show that you are ready for a conversation to end?

### 3 PHRASES

*Directions:* Listen to the following phrases on the tape as you read along here. Then practice saying them. The phrases near the top of the list are generally more formal than the ones near the bottom.

	GREETINGS	RESPONSES
<p>More formal</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Less formal</p>	Good morning.	Good morning.
	Good afternoon.	Good afternoon.
	Good evening.	Good evening.
	How nice to see you!	Yes, it's been quite a while.
	What a pleasant surprise!	
	Hello, Robert.	Hello, Kathryn.
	How are you?	Fine, thanks. And you?
	Hi, Bob.	Hi, Kathy.
	How've you been?	Pretty good.
	What's happening?	Not much.
	What's new?	Nothing.
	How are you doing?	OK.
	How you doing?	Not bad.
	Long time, no see.	Yeah!

	PRECLOSINGS	RESPONSES
<p>More formal</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Less formal</p>	Well, I'm afraid I have to be going. (I've got to get up early tomorrow.)	Thank you for coming.
	It's been a pleasure.	Yes, I've enjoyed it.
	Thank you for the advice.	My pleasure.
	I really must go now. (stronger)	
	It was nice to see you. (Note past tense.)	It was good to see you.
	Well, it's getting late.	Maybe we can talk again.
	I know you're busy	
	Nice to see you again.	Nice to see you.
	Thanks for coming.	It was fun.
	Maybe we could get together sometime.	Sounds good.
	Great seeing you.	Same here.
	I've really got to go.	OK. See you.
	Got to go now.	See you again.

	CLOSINGS	RESPONSES
<p>More formal</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Less formal</p>	Until the next time. .	Good-bye.
	Good night, Bill.	Good night, Jean.
	Good-bye, Harry.	Good-bye, Lisa.
	Have a nice (weekend).	You, too.
	Talk to you later.	Bye. Take it easy.
	See you later.	So long. Take care.

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## 4 SMALL GROUP PRACTICE

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### A. Using what you've learned

*Directions:* For each situation that follows, read the cues given, then discuss the relationship among the speakers and the level of formality. Using this information, complete the dialogues orally with phrases from Section 3 or with any other appropriate response. Example:

A: It was nice seeing you again.

B: *Yes, let's do it again*

A: Bye.

B: *Bye.*

#### *Situation 1*

A: Hi, Jack. How are you?

B:

A: Not bad. What's up?

B:

#### *Situation 2*

X:

Y: Good morning, Dr. Anthony.

X:

Y:

#### *Situation 3*

A: Well, that's very interesting but I'm afraid I must \_\_\_\_\_.

B: All right. I'll be talking to you again later, maybe?

A:

B:

#### *Situation 4*

A: \_\_\_\_\_ and that's just the way it happened.

B: Oh, I almost forgot. I'm supposed to meet \_\_\_\_\_.

A:

B:

A:

## Unit 1

### B. Cued dialogues

*Directions:* After looking at each situation carefully, discuss with your partner(s) the relationship among the speakers and the appropriate level of formality. Then practice, using any words or expressions appropriate to express the functions given. Your teacher will ask you to perform the dialogue for the class.

#### Situation 1 (Example)

A and B are old friends. They see each other again after four years. A has an important meeting and can't talk long. (You can use your real names or made-up names for practicing these situations.)

- | A   | B   |
|---|---|
| 1. greets B, expresses surprise<br><i>Hi, Betty! Haven't seen you in ages!</i>                                  | 1. returns greeting and gestures<br><i>Oh, hi! It <u>has</u> been a long while!</i>   |
| 2. asks about B's family<br><i>How's your family?</i>   | 2. answers questions, asks about A's job<br><i>John's fine and the kids are doing well in school. I hear you're working for a lawyer.</i> |
| 3. replies to B's question, precloses<br><i>Yes, I really like it a lot. In fact, I have to go to work now.</i> | 3. replies to preclosing, gives closing<br><i>It was great seeing you<br/>Bye!</i>  |
| 4. replies to closing<br><i>Bye!</i>  |   |