ESL LAB

Food Conversation Cards

Thirty food questions for adults, arranged like a meal: the shopping cart, the stove, the table, the check and the argument after. Every set comes with one talk rule that keeps answers going past three words. The numbers match the blog post on esllaboratory.com.

LEVEL	STUDENTS	GROUPING	TIME
A2 to C1	Adults and older teens	Pairs, groups, 1-to-1	10 to 15 minutes a set

What's inside, in the order of the blog post

1	**In the Cart**	Fridge and shopping questions, with quantity phrases	**Page 2**
2	**At the Stove**	Cooking questions, with verbs for the method	**Page 3**
3	**At the Table**	Describing food, with taste and texture words	**Page 4**
4	**The Check**	Restaurant questions, then a group verdict sheet	**Pages 5-6**
5	**The Argument**	Food debates, then a sheet to prepare the other side	**Pages 7-8**
	All 30 on screen	Every question and rule on one page, for online lessons	**Page 9**

How to play

Cut out the eight cards of one set. Put the green rule card face up in the middle and the six questions face down. One student takes a card and answers it. Their partner holds them to the rule on the green card, and then takes the next card. The white card is for a question of your own. The word strip under the cards gives the language the rule asks for, so keep it on the table.

For the teacher

> Model each rule once before the pairs start: answer a card yourself and let a student hold you to it. Students who never cook can answer set 2 about the person who cooks in their home. One-to-one, you and your student both answer every card. Online, share page 9 and work down the list.

The five rules

SET 1 · IN THE CART	SET 2 · AT THE STOVE	SET 3 · AT THE TABLE	SET 4 · THE CHECK	SET 5 · THE ARGUMENT
No general words	One step, out loud	No delicious, tasty or nice	One-sentence verdict	Argue the other side

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SET 1

In the Cart

A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min · questions 1 to 6

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 1 · THE RULE

No general words

Your partner stops you at *some*, *a few*, *stuff*, *things* and *a lot of*. Say which one, and how much.

A2-B1 · 1

What is in your fridge right now that you will definitely eat this week?

A2-B1 · 2

What has been in there untouched for over a month?

A2-B1 · 3

What goes in your cart every week without you deciding to put it there?

A2-B1 · 4

What did you buy once, use once, and never buy again?

A2-B1 · 5

Which shelf or cupboard is the messiest, and what is on it?

A2-B1 · 6

What would a guest figure out about you from your kitchen?

A2-B1 · YOUR QUESTION

INSTEAD OF SOME, SAY HOW MUCH

Containers	Pieces	How much is left
a carton of milk	a slice of cheese	It's nearly empty.
a jar of honey	a bunch of bananas	There's a tiny bit left.
two cans of beans	a handful of nuts	There's a whole one.
half a bag of rice	three spoonfuls of jam	It's past its date.

SET 2

At the Stove

A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min · questions 7 to 12

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 2 · THE RULE

One step, out loud

Before the next card, your partner must hear one step of the method. Not the dish, the step: *You put the oil in first.*

A2-B1 · 7

What do you cook when you are too tired to cook?

A2-B1 · 8

What is the last thing you cooked that went wrong?

A2-B1 · 9

What can you make without looking anything up?

A2-B1 · 10

Who taught you to cook, and what did they teach you first?

A2-B1 · 11

What have you eaten that you could not identify?

A2-B1 · 12

What would you cook for a guest you had just met?

A2-B1 · YOUR QUESTION

VERBS FOR THE METHOD

Before the heat	On the heat	Putting it in order
peel, chop, slice	boil, simmer	First, you...
grate, mix, stir	fry, roast, bake	Then you add...
season with salt	grill, heat up	Leave it for twenty minutes.
leave it overnight	until it turns brown	When it's ready, you...

SET 3

At the Table

B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min · questions 13 to 18

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 3 · THE RULE

No delicious, tasty or nice

After each answer your partner gives a verdict: *I want it* or *I don't*. Then they name the one word that decided it.

B1-B2 · 13

Describe the best thing you have eaten this month without naming the dish.

B1-B2 · 14

Describe a dish from where you grew up to a classmate who has never heard of it.

B1-B2 · 15

Describe a food you loved as a child and cannot face now.

B1-B2 · 16

Describe something that tastes far better than it looks.

B1-B2 · 17

What gets talked about at your table, and what is never mentioned?

B1-B2 · 18

Who do you most like eating with, and what is it about them?

B1-B2 · YOUR QUESTION

WORDS THAT DO THE WORK INSTEAD

Texture	Taste	The verdict
crunchy, crispy	sweet, sour, bitter	I want it, because of the word...
creamy, smooth	spicy, salty, smoky	I don't, because of the word...
chewy, sticky	rich, bland	It reminds me of...
soft, melting	a bit too sweet	It's served hot, with...

SET 4

The Check

B2-C1 · Groups of 3-4 · 15 min · questions 19 to 24

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 4 · THE RULE

One-sentence verdict

End every answer with a verdict in one sentence. The group votes, agree or disagree, before anybody comments.

B2-C1 · 19

What makes a restaurant worth its price?

B2-C1 · 20

When is a bad review deserved, and when is it just a bad evening?

B2-C1 · 21

Should tipping be expected, built into the check, or gone?

B2-C1 · 22

What should a kitchen do when a dish comes back?

B2-C1 · 23

Is an expensive restaurant selling food, or something else?

B2-C1 · 24

What would make you leave a restaurant before you had eaten?

B2-C1 · YOUR QUESTION

FRAMES FOR THE VERDICT AND THE VOTE

The verdict

My verdict: ...
It comes down to...
A restaurant is worth it when...
It's only fair if...

Voting yes

I'll vote for that.
I'm with you on that.
Agreed, as long as...

Voting no

I can't vote for that.
That's too strong for me.
Not if you mean...

SET 4 · WORKSHEET

The verdict sheet

B2-C1 · the vote for questions 19 to 24

Alone: write your own one-sentence verdict for each question on the cards. **In a group:** after each answer, write the verdict down, take the vote and count the hands before anybody comments.

CARD	THE VERDICT, IN ONE SENTENCE	THE VOTE
EXAMPLE	A restaurant is worth its price when you would go back with your own money.	Agree _____ Disagree _____
19		Agree _____ Disagree _____
20		Agree _____ Disagree _____
21		Agree _____ Disagree _____
22		Agree _____ Disagree _____
23		Agree _____ Disagree _____
24		Agree _____ Disagree _____

Now read the six verdicts together. Which two contradict each other? Cards _____ and _____

Rewrite one of them so that both verdicts can be true.

SET 5

The Argument

B2-C1 · Pairs · 15 min · questions 25 to 30

Cut out the eight cards. Rule card face up in the middle, questions face down. Keep the word strip on the table.

SET 5 · THE RULE

Argue the other side

Say which side is really yours. Then argue the side you do not hold. You get ninety seconds to prepare.

B2-C1 · 25

Is throwing food away a personal failure or a system failure?

B2-C1 · 26

Has delivery made us eat better, or only more often?

B2-C1 · 27

Can a dish belong to a country?

B2-C1 · 28

If a cake is built to look like a handbag, is it still food?

B2-C1 · 29

Should healthy food cost less than junk food?

B2-C1 · 30

Is cooking a skill everybody should have, or a hobby like any other?

B2-C1 · YOUR QUESTION

LANGUAGE FOR A SIDE YOU DON'T HOLD

Starting

For the record, I think...
But today I'm arguing that...
Let's say for a moment that...

Making the case

The strongest case for this is...
Look at it this way.
If that's true, then...

Before you reply

So your point is that...
I'd give you that...
Even so, ...

SET 5 · WORKSHEET

Prepare the other side

B2-C1 · ninety seconds for questions 25 to 30

Alone: pick three cards and fill in a box for each, arguing the side you do not hold. **In pairs:** take ninety seconds of silence to fill in one box, then argue. Before you reply to your partner, say their argument back in one sentence.

CARD _____	THE SIDE I REALLY HOLD: _____
THE SIDE I AM ARGUING TODAY	REASON 1
REASON 2	ONE POINT I WILL GIVE MY PARTNER

CARD _____	THE SIDE I REALLY HOLD: _____
THE SIDE I AM ARGUING TODAY	REASON 1
REASON 2	ONE POINT I WILL GIVE MY PARTNER

CARD _____	THE SIDE I REALLY HOLD: _____
THE SIDE I AM ARGUING TODAY	REASON 1
REASON 2	ONE POINT I WILL GIVE MY PARTNER

STARTING
For the record, I think...
But today I'm arguing that...

SAYING IT BACK
So your point is that...
If I understand you, ...

GIVING A POINT
I'd give you that...
Even so, ...

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ALL 30 · ON SCREEN

Food conversation questions

For online and one-to-one lessons. Share this page and work down one set at a time.

1. In the Cart A2-B1

Rule: No general words. Your partner stops you at some, a few, stuff, things and a lot of. Say which one, and how much.

1. What is in your fridge right now that you will definitely eat this week?
2. What has been in there untouched for over a month?
3. What goes in your cart every week without you deciding to put it there?
4. What did you buy once, use once, and never buy again?
5. Which shelf or cupboard is the messiest, and what is on it?
6. What would a guest figure out about you from your kitchen?

2. At the Stove A2-B1

Rule: One step, out loud. Before the next card, your partner must hear one step of the method. Not the dish, the step.

7. What do you cook when you are too tired to cook?
8. What is the last thing you cooked that went wrong?
9. What can you make without looking anything up?
10. Who taught you to cook, and what did they teach you first?
11. What have you eaten that you could not identify?
12. What would you cook for a guest you had just met?

3. At the Table B1-B2

Rule: No delicious, tasty or nice. After each answer your partner says I want it or I don't, and names the one word that decided it.

13. Describe the best thing you have eaten this month without naming the dish.
14. Describe a dish from where you grew up to a classmate who has never heard of it.
15. Describe a food you loved as a child and cannot face now.
16. Describe something that tastes far better than it looks.
17. What gets talked about at your table, and what is never mentioned?
18. Who do you most like eating with, and what is it about them?

4. The Check B2-C1

Rule: One-sentence verdict. End every answer with a verdict in one sentence. The group votes before anybody comments.

19. What makes a restaurant worth its price?
20. When is a bad review deserved, and when is it just a bad evening?
21. Should tipping be expected, built into the check, or gone?
22. What should a kitchen do when a dish comes back?
23. Is an expensive restaurant selling food, or something else?
24. What would make you leave a restaurant before you had eaten?

5. The Argument B2-C1

Rule: Argue the other side. Say which side is really yours, then argue the one you do not hold. Ninety seconds to prepare.

25. Is throwing food away a personal failure or a system failure?
26. Has delivery made us eat better, or only more often?
27. Can a dish belong to a country?
28. If a cake is built to look like a handbag, is it still food?
29. Should healthy food cost less than junk food?
30. Is cooking a skill everybody should have, or a hobby like any other?