ESL LAB

Daily Routine Conversation Cards

Thirty questions that follow one habit through its life, from the routine you never notice to the one you would defend. Each set has its own page: five cut-out cards with answer starters, and the worksheet for its activity. 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	**The One You Don't Notice** Rebuild My Day	A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min	**Page 2**
2	**The One You Started in January** Guess the Streak	A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min	**Page 3**
3	**The One That Didn't Last** Two Versions	B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min	**Page 4**
4	**The One You Keep Meaning to Start** Shrink It	B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min	**Page 5**
5	**The One You Recommend to Other People** Advice vs Practice	B2-C1 · Pairs · 15 min	**Page 6**
6	**The One You Would Defend** Who Pays?	B2-C1 · Groups of 3 or 4 · 15 min	**Page 7**

How to use the cards

Print only the set you need. Every page stands alone. Cut out the five cards, put them face down and work through them in order: the questions build on each other.

The starters are a ladder, not a script. At A2 and B1, students use the starter at the bottom of each card. Stronger students fold it under and answer without it.

The worksheet is the activity. The box under the cards is what turns five answers into real practice: a retell, a guess, two versions, a smaller habit, advice you don't follow, a cost with a name on it.

One-to-one or alone. You and your student both answer every card. A student working alone answers in writing and does the left column of the worksheet. The answers to the grammar checks on pages 2 to 4 are upside down at the bottom.

For the teacher

> Sets 2 and 3 ask about habits students gave up, and some of those are personal. Let any student answer about a friend, or skip a card without saying why. Model the first answer of each set on a habit of your own: the class copies your tone.

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SET 1 · QUESTIONS 1 TO 5

The One You Don't Notice

A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min
Activity: Rebuild My Day

Listen, don't write. Your partner answers all five cards. Then you retell their day in order, from memory, and fill in the timeline. Your partner corrects only what is wrong.

SET 1 · QUESTION 1

What do you do every morning in the same order without thinking about it?

START *First I ..., then I ..., and I always ...*

SET 1 · QUESTION 2

What time did you wake up today, and what was the first thing you did?

START *I woke up at ..., and the first thing I did was ...*

SET 1 · QUESTION 3

Which part of your day never changes, whatever else happens?

START *Whatever happens, I always ...*

SET 1 · QUESTION 4

What is the last thing you do before you go to sleep?

START *The last thing I do is ...*

SET 1 · QUESTION 5

What would throw your whole day off if it happened differently?

START *If I didn't ..., my whole day would ...*

SET 1 · YOUR QUESTION

Rebuild My Day

After the five answers: write your partner's day here from memory, in order, with clock times. Not *around lunchtime* but *at twenty past one*. Then your partner checks each line. **Alone:** write your own day and check it tomorrow.

TIME	WHAT THEY DO	PARTNER'S CHECK
6:45 EXAMPLE	She wakes up and always checks the weather before she gets up.	6:30, not 6:45!

WHERE THE ADVERB GOES

Before the main verb: *I usually walk to work.*

After be: *I'm always late on Mondays.*

Phrases go at the end: *I call my mom twice a week.*

PUT THE WORD IN THE RIGHT PLACE

a) I check my phone before breakfast. **(always)**

b) My bus is late on Mondays. **(usually)**

c) We eat dinner before nine. **(hardly ever)**

d) I go for a run in the morning. **(often)**

Answers: a) I always check … b) My bus is usually late … c) We hardly ever eat … d) I often go …

SET 2 · QUESTIONS 6 TO 10

The One You Started in January

A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min
Activity: Guess the Streak

Guess first. Before your partner answers card 7, guess out loud how long their habit lasted. Circle your guess on the line, then hear the real answer.

SET 2 · QUESTION 6

What is the most recent habit you tried to start?

START *The last habit I tried to start was ...*

SET 2 · QUESTION 7

How long did you keep it going?

START *I kept it going for ..., and then ...*

SET 2 · QUESTION 8

What made you start it in the first place?

START *I started because ...*

SET 2 · QUESTION 9

Who knew you were doing it?

START *Only ... knew about it, because ...*

SET 2 · QUESTION 10

What would have made it easier?

START *It would have been easier if ...*

SET 2 · YOUR QUESTION

Guess the Streak

Play three rounds with three partners. Guess the streak on the line, then write the real answer. An exact guess scores 2, one step away scores 1. Ask card 9 too: did anybody know about the habit?

A day	A week	Two weeks	A month	Three months	Still going

PARTNER AND HABIT	MY GUESS / REAL ANSWER	ANYBODY KNEW?	STILL DOING IT?	POINTS
Lucas: German on an app EXAMPLE	Two weeks / a month	No	No	1
		☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Look at the habits that lasted. What do they have in common?

FINISHED, OR UP TO NOW?

Finished time: past simple. *I started running in January. I stopped after two weeks.*

Up to now: present perfect. *I've tried to start running three times. I've kept it going since May.*

CHOOSE THE RIGHT FORM

a) I (tried / have tried) yoga last spring.

b) I (started / have started) Spanish three times, and I'm still on lesson one.

c) How long (did you keep / have you kept) it going before you stopped?

d) I (did / have done) push-ups every morning since September.

Answers: a) tried b) have started c) did you keep d) have done

SET 3 · QUESTIONS 11 TO 15

The One That Didn't Last

B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min
Activity: Two Versions

Say it twice. Give your partner's reason for stopping back to them in two versions: the excuse and the fair reason. Your partner says which one is true.

SET 3 · QUESTION 11

What did you do every day a year ago that you have quietly dropped?

START *A year ago I used to … every day, but …*

SET 3 · QUESTION 12

What did you tell yourself when you stopped?

START *I told myself that …*

SET 3 · QUESTION 13

What did you actually gain by stopping?

START *I got back …*

SET 3 · QUESTION 14

Would you start again? What would have to be true?

START *I'd start again if …*

SET 3 · QUESTION 15

Which of your current habits won't survive the next year?

START *I don't think I'll still be … next year, because …*

SET 3 · YOUR QUESTION

Two Versions

Write your partner's dropped habit, then their reason twice. The excuse is the version they would give on a bad day, hard on themselves but not cruel. The fair reason is the version a good friend would give. They tick the true one. **Alone:** do it for a habit of your own.

THE HABIT THEY DROPPED	THE EXCUSE	THE FAIR REASON	TRUE ONE
She used to run before work every day. EXAMPLE	You just stopped making time for it when winter came.	Your new job started at 7:30, so the run had to go.	F
			☐ E ☐ F
			☐ E ☐ F
			☐ E ☐ F

EXCUSE
You just stopped …
You told yourself …, but really …

FAIR REASON
It made sense to stop, because …
You had a good reason: …

CHOOSING
The first one, if I'm honest.
Somewhere in between.

USED TO OR WOULD?

used to + verb: past habits **and** states. *I used to run every morning. I used to have a gym membership.*

would + verb: past habits only. *Every Saturday I would run to the river.* Not: *I would have a gym membership.*

IS WOULD POSSIBLE TOO? YES OR NO

a) I used to live near a park.

b) Every evening I used to write three lines in a diary.

c) I used to be much fitter.

d) On Sundays we used to cook for the whole week.

Answers: a) no b) yes c) no d) yes

SET 4 · QUESTIONS 16 TO 20

The One You Keep Meaning to Start

B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min
Activity: Shrink It

Shrink it until it's a yes. Your partner names a habit they keep putting off. You suggest a smaller version. If they wouldn't really do it, shrink it again.

SET 4 · QUESTION 16

What have you been meaning to start for more than a year?

START *I've been meaning to ... for ...*

SET 4 · QUESTION 17

What is the real reason it hasn't happened?

START *To be honest, the real reason is ...*

SET 4 · QUESTION 18

What would the smallest possible version of it look like?

START *The smallest version would be ...*

SET 4 · QUESTION 19

What in your week would have to move to make room for it?

START *I'd have to give up ... on ...*

SET 4 · QUESTION 20

Who would notice if you did it?

START *... would notice, because ...*

SET 4 · YOUR QUESTION

Shrink It

Rung 1 is the habit your partner keeps meaning to start. It has to be something a person could watch you doing: not *be healthier*, not *be more organized*. Each rung is smaller. Stop at the first yes. **Alone:** build your own ladder.

EXAMPLE LADDER

1. Go to the gym four times a week. ☐ Yes ☑ Still too big
2. Go to the gym on Mondays. ☐ Yes ☑ Still too big
3. Do a 15-minute workout at home on Mondays. ☐ Yes ☑ Still too big
4. Do ten squats while the kettle boils. ☑ Yes ☐ Still too big
5. No rung 5: rung 4 was a yes.

YOUR PARTNER'S LADDER

1. ☐ Yes ☐ Still too big
2. ☐ Yes ☐ Still too big
3. ☐ Yes ☐ Still too big
4. ☐ Yes ☐ Still too big
5. ☐ Yes ☐ Still too big

SHRINKING

What if you only ...?
How about just ... once a week?
Could you do it in five minutes?

ANSWERING

Still too big. I'd never ...
Hmm, maybe. If ...
That I could actually do.

BEEN MEANING TO

I've been meaning to ... for ages.
I keep meaning to ..., but ...

SET 5 · QUESTIONS 21 TO 25

The One You Recommend to Other People

B2-C1 · Pairs · 15 min
Activity: Advice vs Practice

Two answers to every card. First give the advice in full sentences. Then say honestly whether you follow it yourself.

SET 5 · QUESTION 21

What would you tell a student who can't concentrate for ten minutes?

START *If I were you, I'd ...*

SET 5 · QUESTION 22

What would you say to a friend who is exhausted and won't slow down?

START *I'd tell them to ..., but ...*

SET 5 · QUESTION 23

What is the best advice about habits you have ever been given?

START *The best advice I've had was ...*

SET 5 · QUESTION 24

What do you tell other people to do that you don't do yourself?

START *I always tell people to ..., but I ...*

SET 5 · QUESTION 25

Why do you think that gap exists?

START *I suppose it's because ...*

SET 5 · YOUR QUESTION

Advice vs Practice

Cards 21 to 24: write the advice you gave in one full sentence, then tick how often you follow it. **Card 25:** look at your ticks and explain the gap. **In pairs:** your partner asks *And do you?* after every piece of advice.

CARD	WHAT I'D TELL YOU	DO I DO IT?
Ex.	If I were you, I'd put your phone in another room for twenty minutes.	☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☑ Never
21		☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never
22		☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never
23		☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never
24		☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

Card 25: why the gap?

GIVING ADVICE
If I were you, I'd ...
You might want to ...
It's worth ...-ing.

ADMITTING IT
I try to, but ...
Not as often as I should.
Let's say I'm working on it.

EXPLAINING THE GAP
It's easier said than done.
It's easier to see in other people.
Do as I say, not as I do.

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SET 6 · QUESTIONS 26 TO 30

The One You Would Defend

B2-C1 · Groups of 3 or 4 · 15 min
Activity: Who Pays?

Name a cost and the person who pays it. A real person with a job and a schedule, not "society". Then the group decides: is it worth paying?

SET 6 · QUESTION 26

What does a tightly organized life cost the person living it?

START *It costs them ..., because ...*

SET 6 · QUESTION 27

Is a morning routine a real advantage, or a story successful people tell afterward?

START *I'd say it's more of ..., because ...*

SET 6 · QUESTION 28

Should an employer have any interest in how you spend your evenings?

START *An employer should only care if ...*

SET 6 · QUESTION 29

When does tracking a habit stop helping and become the point of it?

START *It stops helping when ...*

SET 6 · QUESTION 30

Is being busy a choice, a status symbol, or neither?

START *For most people I know, it's ...*

SET 6 · YOUR QUESTION

Who Pays?

One receipt per group. For every card, write one cost and the person who pays it, with a name and a job. Then vote: is it worth paying? At the end, choose the one cost your group would sign up to.

RECEIPT · THE ONE YOU WOULD DEFEND

CARD	THE COST	WHO PAYS IT	WORTH IT?
Ex.	No room for last-minute plans with friends.	Carmen, a nurse on early shifts	☑ Yes ☐ No
26			☐ Yes ☐ No
27			☐ Yes ☐ No
28			☐ Yes ☐ No
29			☐ Yes ☐ No
30			☐ Yes ☐ No

We would pay for card number _____

Signed _____

NAMING A COST
The price is ...
What you lose is ...
It eats into ...

NAMING THE PAYER
The person who pays is ...
Think of a ... with two kids.
It's her, not the company.

DECIDING
It's worth it if ...
Only up to a point.
Not at that price.