ESL LAB

Clothes Conversation Cards

Thirty questions that move outward, from what your students are wearing right now to who pays for cheap clothes. Each set has its own page: five question tags to cut out, a blank tag for your own question, and the worksheet for that set's talk rule. 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 Room** Not a Top: Say the Exact Word	A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min	**Page 2**
2	**In the Wardrobe** Where Is It Now?	A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min	**Page 3**
3	**On the Street** Claim or Verdict?	B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min	**Page 4**
4	**In the Office** Say It Out Loud	B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min	**Page 5**
5	**In the Past** One Sentence We'd All Sign	B2-C1 · Groups of 3 or 4 · 15 min	**Page 6**
6	**On the Label** Cost per Wear	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 tags, put them face down and work through them in order.

The rule makes the conversation. The green band at the top of each page is the talk rule. Describing a sweater is a vocabulary exercise; guessing why your partner chose it is a conversation. The worksheet under the tags is where the rule happens.

One-to-one or alone. You and your student both answer every card. A student working alone answers in writing and follows the *Alone* line on each worksheet. Answers to the practice exercises on pages 3, 4 and 5 are upside down under each exercise.

For the teacher

Keep it about clothes, not bodies. Students describe outfits, colors and choices. No student's size, shape or looks are up for comment, and set 3 is about claims on what a person decided, never on how they look.

Money is uneven in most groups. Sets 2 and 6 touch on what students own and paid. Nothing needs an expensive answer, a rough or invented price is fine, and any student can answer about a friend instead. Answer the first card of each set yourself: the class copies your tone.

SET 1 · QUESTIONS 1 TO 5

In the Room

A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min
Activity: Not a Top: Say the Exact Word

Guess why. After each answer your partner guesses why you chose it. You say *Yes, that's it* or *No, actually …* Use the exact word for every item, never *top* or *shoes*.

1 · SET 1 · IN THE ROOM What are you wearing right now, item by item?	2 · SET 1 · IN THE ROOM Which of those did you choose this morning, and which did you just put on?	3 · SET 1 · IN THE ROOM What is the oldest thing you have on?
4 · SET 1 · IN THE ROOM What would you change about today's outfit if you could?	5 · SET 1 · IN THE ROOM What do you wear when you want a day to go well?	+ · SET 1 · YOUR QUESTION

Not a Top: Say the Exact Word

Cross out the general word, use the exact one. Answer card 1 with this map: say *I'm wearing a …* for every item, with one detail. Then fill in the table. Your partner writes a guess in the last column before you say why. **Alone:** fill in the table and write your own reason in the last column.

~~a top~~	~~pants~~	~~shoes~~	~~a jacket~~	Add a detail
a T-shirt	jeans, chinos	sneakers	a coat, a raincoat	striped, plain
a shirt, a blouse	sweatpants	boots	a puffer jacket	long-sleeved
a sweater, a hoodie	leggings	loafers	a blazer	loose, tight
a turtleneck	a skirt, a dress	sandals	a denim jacket	ripped, faded
a cardigan, a fleece	shorts	heels	a vest	with the sleeves rolled up

MY OUTFIT TODAY

THE EXACT WORD AND ONE DETAIL	CHOSE IT OR JUST PUT IT ON?	PARTNER'S GUESS: WHY THIS ONE?
a dark green turtleneck, a bit too warm EXAMPLE	☑ Chose it ☐ Just put it on	"You have a meeting." No, actually, it was the only clean one!
	☐ Chose it ☐ Just put it on	
	☐ Chose it ☐ Just put it on	
	☐ Chose it ☐ Just put it on	

DESCRIBING	GUESSING WHY	ANSWERING
I'm wearing a …	I think you chose it because …	Yes, that's it.
It's a … with …	Is it because …?	Close, but …
I've had it for … years.	My guess is …	No, actually, …

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SET 2 · QUESTIONS 6 TO 10

In the Wardrobe

A2-B1 · Pairs · 10 min
Activity: Where Is It Now?

Follow the item. Before you move to the next card, ask your partner two things: *Where is it now?* and *Why haven't you gotten rid of it?*

SET 2 · IN THE WARDROBE
6 What have you owned for years and never worn?

SET 2 · IN THE WARDROBE
7 What do you wear until it falls apart?

SET 2 · IN THE WARDROBE
8 What did you buy because another person had it?

SET 2 · IN THE WARDROBE
9 What is in your closet that no longer fits the life you have?

SET 2 · IN THE WARDROBE
10 What would you never throw away?

SET 2 · YOUR QUESTION
+

Where Is It Now?

One row for every card. Write the item, then ask the two follow-up questions and note the answers. The last column is the story: one sentence in the past simple. **Alone:** do it for five things in your own closet.

CARD	THE ITEM	WHERE IS IT NOW?	WHY IS IT STILL THERE?	THE STORY, IN ONE SENTENCE
Ex.	a yellow raincoat	at the back of my closet	It was a present from my sister.	I bought it for a trip to Scotland, and it didn't rain once.
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS
Where is it now?
Why haven't you gotten rid of it?
When did you last wear it?
Where did you get it?

PAST SIMPLE YOU NEED
buy, bought · wear, wore
give, gave · keep, kept
throw, threw · find, found
get, got · put, put

CHECK: WRITE THE PAST SIMPLE
a) I _____ (buy) it in 2019 and never _____ (wear) it.
b) My mom _____ (give) it to me for my birthday.
c) I _____ (keep) it because it _____ (fit) perfectly.
d) I almost _____ (throw) it away last spring.

Answers: a) bought, wore b) gave c) kept, fit d) threw

SET 3 · QUESTIONS 11 TO 15

On the Street

B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min
Activity: Claim or Verdict?

Make a claim about the person, not the clothes. After each answer your partner says what the outfit tells them about the person. You rule the claim fair or unfair.

○ 11	SET 3 · ON THE STREET Describe an outfit you saw this week and still remember.	○ 12	SET 3 · ON THE STREET Describe what a colleague or classmate wore the last time you saw them.	○ 13	SET 3 · ON THE STREET Describe what people in your city tend to wear.
○ 14	SET 3 · ON THE STREET Describe what you would put on to be taken seriously.	○ 15	SET 3 · ON THE STREET Describe an outfit that told you something true about the person in it.	○ +	SET 3 · YOUR QUESTION _____ _____ _____

Claim or Verdict?

First, practice the difference. Write **C** if the sentence is a claim about the person, **V** if it is a verdict on the clothes. Only claims count in this game.

a) She plans her week on Sunday night. ☐
b) That coat is too long for her. ☐
c) He was in a hurry this morning. ☐
d) Those shoes don't go with the suit. ☐
e) He doesn't want people to notice him. ☐
f) The colors are lovely. ☐
g) She cares more about comfort than about what people think. ☐
h) It's a really nice jacket. ☐

Answers: a) C b) V c) C d) V e) C f) V g) C h) V

NOW PLAY: DETAIL FIRST, THEN THE CLAIM

CARD	ONE EXACT DETAIL YOU HEARD	YOUR CLAIM ABOUT THE PERSON	FAIR OR UNFAIR?
Ex.	a black coat with the collar up, and very worn sneakers	He walks everywhere and doesn't care about the rain.	☑ Fair ☐ Unfair
11			☐ Fair ☐ Unfair
12			☐ Fair ☐ Unfair
13			☐ Fair ☐ Unfair
14			☐ Fair ☐ Unfair
15			☐ Fair ☐ Unfair

MAKING A CLAIM	RULING	NOT A CLAIM
I'd say she ...	That's fair, actually.	Nice jacket!
My guess is that he ...	That's a bit unfair.	It suits her.
That tells me she ...	Close, but ...	The colors are lovely.

SET 4 · QUESTIONS 16 TO 20

In the Office

B1-B2 · Pairs · 10 min
Activity: Say It Out Loud

Say every rule the way a colleague would. Not *The dress code is smart casual*, but *I wouldn't come in wearing those.*

○ 16 SET 4 · IN THE OFFICE What are the unwritten clothing rules where you work or study?	○ 17 SET 4 · IN THE OFFICE Who would be spoken to for breaking them, and who would not?	○ 18 SET 4 · IN THE OFFICE What do you wear at work that you would never choose outside it?
○ 19 SET 4 · IN THE OFFICE Should a company be allowed to tell staff what to wear?	○ 20 SET 4 · IN THE OFFICE What has changed about work clothes in the last ten years?	○ + SET 4 · YOUR QUESTION _____

Say It Out Loud

First, practice. Each line is written like a company policy. Write what a colleague would actually say instead: short, and a little informal.

Smart casual attire is required.	**"I wouldn't come in wearing those."**
a) Employees must maintain a professional appearance at all times.	_____
b) Open-toed footwear is not permitted in the office.	_____
c) Clothing with visible logos or slogans should be avoided.	_____
d) Business formal attire is expected for client meetings.	_____

Possible answers: a) "Don't come in looking like you just got out of bed." b) "No flip-flops, even in July." c) "Nobody here wears a T-shirt with words on it." d) "If a client's coming in, wear the suit."

NOW YOUR OWN: THE UNWRITTEN RULES WHERE YOU WORK OR STUDY

THE RULE, SAID OUT LOUD	WHO WOULD BE SPOKEN TO?	WHO WOULD GET AWAY WITH IT?
"Nobody wears shorts here, even in summer."	a new intern	the boss, on a Friday

SAYING THE RULE	WHO GETS AWAY WITH IT	YOUR OPINION
You'd never see anybody in ...	Nobody says anything if ...	Honestly, I think it's fair.
You'd get a look if you ...	Nobody minds when ...	It makes no sense to me.
It's fine unless ...	She can, because ...	It's an old rule.

SET 5 · QUESTIONS 21 TO 25

In the Past

B2-C1 · Groups of 3 or 4 · 15 min
Activity: One Sentence We'd All Sign

Agree on one sentence. After each card the group writes one sentence every member would sign. If you can't agree, write what the disagreement is about instead.

○ 21 SET 5 · IN THE PAST What did people once wear that we now find alarming?	○ 22 SET 5 · IN THE PAST How far would a reasonable person go to look the way they want?	○ 23 SET 5 · IN THE PAST Who decides what counts as well dressed, and how did they get the job?
○ 24 SET 5 · IN THE PAST Is anything worn today going to look absurd in fifty years?	○ 25 SET 5 · IN THE PAST Does a country still have a way of dressing, or has that gone?	○ + SET 5 · YOUR QUESTION _____

One Sentence We'd All Sign

BANNED ~~It depends on the situation.~~

One row per card. Write a sentence every member of the group would sign, then all of you initial it. If you can't agree, cross out the initials and write what the disagreement is really about. **Alone:** write your sentence, then the strongest objection a classmate could make.

CARD	OUR SENTENCE, OR WHAT WE DISAGREE ABOUT	SIGNED
Ex.	Most people today would not risk their health for a look, but they would risk their comfort.	**C.R. · D.M. · S.L.**
21		____ ____ ____ ____
22		____ ____ ____ ____
23		____ ____ ____ ____
24		____ ____ ____ ____
25		____ ____ ____ ____

Read your five sentences together. Do any two of them contradict each other?

PROPOSING	NARROWING IT	NAMING THE DISAGREEMENT
How about: ...?	Only if we add ...	We agree on ..., but not on ...
Can we all live with ...?	Let's change always to usually.	The real question is ...
What if we say ...?	That's too strong for me.	It comes down to ...

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SET 6 · QUESTIONS 26 TO 30

On the Label

B2-C1 · Groups of 3 or 4 · 15 min
Activity: Cost per Wear

Put a number on it. Every opinion needs a number: a price, how many times you wore it, how many years it lasted. *Cheap clothes are bad* is a slogan. *I paid $8 and wore it twice* is an argument.

26 · SET 6 · ON THE LABEL Would you rather own ten cheap T-shirts or two expensive ones? Why?	27 · SET 6 · ON THE LABEL Have you ever bought something knowing it would fall apart soon?	28 · SET 6 · ON THE LABEL What is the most you have paid for one piece of clothing, and was it worth it?
29 · SET 6 · ON THE LABEL Is buying secondhand a way to save money, a way to help the planet, or just a style?	30 · SET 6 · ON THE LABEL Who should pay the hidden cost of cheap clothes: brands or shoppers?	+ · SET 6 · YOUR QUESTION _____ _____ _____

Cost per Wear

PRICE **$90** ÷ TIMES WORN **150**

= $0.60 a wear. Sneakers worn three times a week for a year. A $60 party dress worn once costs $60 a wear.

Before card 26, each person adds three items: one you wear all the time, one you almost never wear, and one you regret. Guess the number of wears if you don't know. A rough price is fine. Then use the numbers in your answers to cards 26 to 30. **Alone:** fill in all six rows.

ITEM	PRICE	TIMES WORN	COST PER WEAR	BUY IT AGAIN?
a winter coat EXAMPLE	$200	about 400	$0.50	☑ Yes ☐ No
				☐ Yes ☐ No
				☐ Yes ☐ No
				☐ Yes ☐ No
				☐ Yes ☐ No
				☐ Yes ☐ No
				☐ Yes ☐ No

Look at the cheapest cost per wear in your group. Was it a cheap item?

NUMBERS
I wear it about … times a week.
It lasted … years.
That works out at … a wear.

JUDGING IT
It paid for itself.
It wasn't worth it at that price.
It was a bargain, until …

CARD 30
The brand should …, because …
The shopper can't …
It's on both of them.

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