This section presents a stand-alone language-learning activity emphasizing speaking. Specifically, students will participate in role plays to describe occupations and job-related duties.

Role-Play Party: Talking about Jobs

LEVEL: Upper Beginner or Low Intermediate

TIME REQUIRED: 45–60 minutes

GOALS: To ask and answer small-talk questions about jobs; to practice using language related to greetings, introductions, and taking leave

MATERIALS: Chalk and blackboard, or markers and whiteboard; paper and pencils or pens; role-play character cards and graphic organizers (see Preparation section for details); timing device; overhead or digital projector (optional)

OVERVIEW: Students will role-play being at a party with assigned character names and job titles. Several role-play parties occur in the classroom at the same time. Party "guests" must introduce themselves and ask one another about their jobs; they are encouraged to have fun and be dramatic. Students can refer to supporting language information on the board, if needed, but they do not follow a script. When the parties end, students use a graphic organizer to write down details they remember about the other guests and their jobs, then discuss and compare the information they collected. Scaffolding options for lower-level students and students who might not be familiar with small-talk functions are provided at the end of the activity.

PREPARATION:

1. Before class, use small pieces of card stock or paper to prepare character cards.

    - During the role play, students will work in groups of 6. Each student in a group will need a unique character card. For example, in a class of 42 students working in groups of 6, you would need to prepare 7 sets of 6 character cards; the different roles in each set can be the same from group to group. (Forming groups of 4 or 8 students is also acceptable; however, with groups of 8, students will have to remember more information in the final phase of the activity.)

    - Each character card should contain a job title along with a male and a female character name; students will pick the name that matches their gender.

    - The jobs you include on the character cards are limited only by your imagination, your teaching context, and the students' proficiency. Examples are:
        doctor   police officer
        hotel clerk   pilot
        teacher   politician

Police officer

© John Roman Images/Shutterstock.com

lawyer singer
engineer shopkeeper
astronaut hairdresser/barber
tour guide flight attendant
travel agent zookeeper

If you like, you can customize the jobs to make them specific to your local environment:

> English teacher at [the name of your school], clerk at [the name of a local hotel], and so on.

Name: _____ (male) / _____ (female)

Job: _____

Blank character card

Name: *Frank* (male) / *Francine* (female)

Job: *firefighter*

Sample character card

2. Make and copy three-column graphic organizers that students can use to record details about other guests after the party ends. (If you prefer, students can draw their own organizers during the activity.) The first column provides space for each student's real name, the second column for the character's name, and the third column for details about the character's job.

Graphic Organizer: Party Guest Information

Student name	Character name	Job title and details
(Example) *Carlo*	*Frank*	*Firefighter — wears yellow uniform, likes to help people, works in a fire station*

3. To save time during the activity, consider writing the job-description questions on the board in advance and covering them with a large piece of paper (see Procedures, Step 4). Or, if you have an overhead or digital projector, you could prepare the text in advance and display it as needed during the activity. If you use the Scaffolding steps outlined at the end of the activity, you might also prepare in advance the Small-Talk Function Chart and the dialogue between Frank and Paul.

PROCEDURES:

1. Tell students they are going to pretend to attend a party, and each student will play the role of a party guest. Explain that people at this party don't know each other, and therefore guests must introduce themselves to one another. Also, tell students that each person must learn about the other party guests' jobs by asking them at least two questions about their work. Let students know that they must try to remember as many details as possible about each guest they meet.

2. Explain that before the party starts, students will receive information about their character and job, and that they will have time to think about their character and information related to the job.

3. Put students into groups of 6. Ask a student volunteer to pass out the sets of character cards, giving one set facedown to each group. In each group, students should pass the stack of cards around, taking one card without looking at it.

4. When all students have a card, ask them to look at it without showing it to anyone else. Explain that students should choose the name on the card that matches their gender and that when the party starts, they will pretend they have the occupation written on the card. Tell students they will prepare to play their character's role at the party by thinking about answers to the questions displayed on the board:

- What is your job? What type of work do you do?

- What do you do at work?

- What do you wear to work?

- Where do you work? (Describe the building or location.)

- What kinds of people and other things do you see at work?

- Is your work dangerous? … boring? … fun? … difficult? … interesting?

- What do you like about your job? What do you dislike?

- Did you go to a special school or training course for your job?

5. Model the character preparation process by doing a "think-aloud" about an example character not used in the student cards. Use level-appropriate examples, make notes on the board during the process, and elicit information from students when possible. For instance, after you look at your example card, your think-aloud might go something like this:

> "My name is Frank, and I'm a firefighter. Hmm … what do I do at work? I fight fires. I put water on fires … . What else? [*Ask students*.]
>
> "Ah, yes, I help people. What clothes do I wear? I wear a uniform. [*Ask students what color the uniform is*.]
>
> "Yes, a bright yellow uniform … and a special hat … . What is it called? [*Ask students*.]
>
> "That's right; a helmet. Where do I work? Hmm … a building for firefighters … what is that place called again? [*Ask students*.]
>
> "Oh, right, a fire station … . What does my character's voice sound like? Hmm … maybe a deep voice like this [*demonstrate a deep voice*] … Hi, my name is Frank. Nice to meet you. …"

(*Note*: If you are female, you can replace "Frank" with "Francine" and adjust the character information, if necessary, as you perform the think-aloud.)

6. Give students a few minutes to consider the character description questions. Tell students they can make notes during this preparation stage, but they can't use the notes during the party. Remind them they can be dramatic and "get into character" during the party by adopting a different voice or by walking or standing in a way that matches their character. You might ask questions like these: "How does your character talk? How does your character walk? What gestures does your character make?"

7. Ask student volunteers to pass out the character graphic organizers. (If students are making the graphic organizers, guide them through the process.) Explain that after the party ends, students will use the graphic organizers to record what they remember about each character they met. Remind students they will not make or use notes during the parties. Model filling out the organizer by using details from your demonstration character, Frank or Francine.

8. Before starting the parties, give students a minute or two to review the notes they made about their characters. Remind students to:

- Meet all the other party guests and ask them at least two questions about their jobs

- Try to remember as many details as they can about each character

- Have fun while playing their character

9. Establish "party locations" for each group in different areas of the classroom, and set a time limit for how long the parties should last (approximately ten minutes, depending on the group size). Ask students to leave their notes and graphic organizers at their desks, and then ask students to get up and go to their designated areas.

10. Start the parties. Walk around, monitor student performances, and provide support, when requested, by referring students to language examples on the board. You might want to make notes about language or communication issues you observe for use in a whole-class feedback session at the end of the activity.

11. When three minutes are left in the parties, give students a verbal warning such as, "Only three minutes left. Try to meet all of the party guests."

12. When time is up, end the parties and ask students to return to their seats. Ask students to use their graphic organizers to write down all the information they can remember about the other party guests. Tell them it is okay if they can't remember everything; they should just do their best.

13. After a few minutes, direct groups to work together to discuss each character at the party. Ask someone in each group to volunteer to be the discussion leader. For each student, the discussion leader will ask the group members to supply the character's name and all the details they can remember about the character's job. Tell students to add any missing details to their charts during the discussions.

14. If you want, after the group discussions, conduct a whole-class review of the role plays. Ask all the students who played each character to stand up or raise their hands, and then ask students from a few groups to share details about the character and his or her job. You might ask questions like these:

- Would everyone who played Mark or Maria the shopkeeper please stand up?

- What did you all learn about Mark or Maria's job?

- How did this character act during the party?

Because students in different groups may have provided different character details or acted differently, students can

Firefighter

© Flashon Studio/Shutterstock.com

compare and contrast information from other groups with information about their own group's character.

15. In addition to the role-play character discussion, to close out the activity, you can review with the class any small-talk, grammatical, or vocabulary-related issues you noted while observing the students' improvised conversations.

VARIATIONS

More drama!

If you want to make the role-play parties more dramatic and character-driven, add a "character mood" or "character description" note to each character card during the preparation phase (Step 1 under Preparation). For example, a character card might say:

Name: *Frank* (male) / *Francine* (female)

Job: *Firefighter*

Character description: *grumpy* [or *shy*, *sad*, *very happy*, *tired*, *nervous*, etc.]

The additional information encourages students to use vocabulary knowledge about moods and personalities while planning and developing their character's voice and behavior. Include a fourth column called "Character personality" on the graphic organizer so students can note their observations about each party guest's behavior and mood during the party.

Notes support

Some students might find it too challenging to have unscripted conversations and then remember the details from the conversations they have had with several party guests. If this is the case in your class, allow students to take the graphic organizers to the party and make brief notes after each conversation. Students can revise their notes, adding any details they remember after the party, prior to the group discussions. Be sure to extend the time allotted for the party conversations if you choose this variation.

SCAFFOLDING

Small talk

If your students have practiced "small talk" in English, you might be able to skip these

Small–Talk Function Chart

Introductions/Greetings — Starting the Conversation	Acknowledgement Statements — Keeping the Conversation Going	Taking Leave — Ending the Conversation
• Hi, my name is _____. • I'm _____. • Nice to meet you, _____. / Nice to meet you, too. • Hi, _____, how are you? • Isn't this a great party? • Are you having a good time?	• I see. / Oh, I see. • That's interesting. / How interesting! • Oh, really? • That's great. • That sounds fun / exciting / difficult, etc.	• It was nice talking to you. / I enjoyed talking to you. • It was nice to meet you. • I'll see you later. / See you later. • Have a good time. / Have a good time at the party, _____. • Enjoy the party! • Bye. / Good-bye.

Note: This chart does not cover all small-talk functions; a limited number of examples are provided here for upper-beginner/lower-intermediate learners.

scaffolding steps or to review them quickly. If your students are unfamiliar with small talk, take time to explain that short conversations people have at parties or in other settings are examples of small talk. Ask students to give you examples of other times or places small talk can occur (waiting for a bus, waiting in line at a store, etc.).

Tell students that small talk often has three parts: starting a conversation, keeping the conversation going, and ending the conversation. On the board, display the Small-Talk Function Chart. Ask students to identify examples of the different functions in a sample dialogue (you might want to use the dialogue between Frank and Paul, below), underline examples they identify in the dialogue on the board, and emphasize that the pieces of information in the chart can be combined during a short conversation. Ask students to provide additional examples to the chart under each functional category. You can keep the Small-Talk Function Chart on the board for the students' reference, if needed, during the role-play parties.

Sample conversation

If necessary, prepare students to participate in brief small-talk conversations at a party by modeling an example conversation. Display the conversation on the board and model it with the help of a student volunteer or by playing both parts yourself using different voices, body language, and/or positions for the two characters:

Frank: Hello. My name is Frank.

Paul: Nice to meet you, Frank. I'm Paul.

Hotel clerks

© Dmitry Kalinovsky/Shutterstock.com
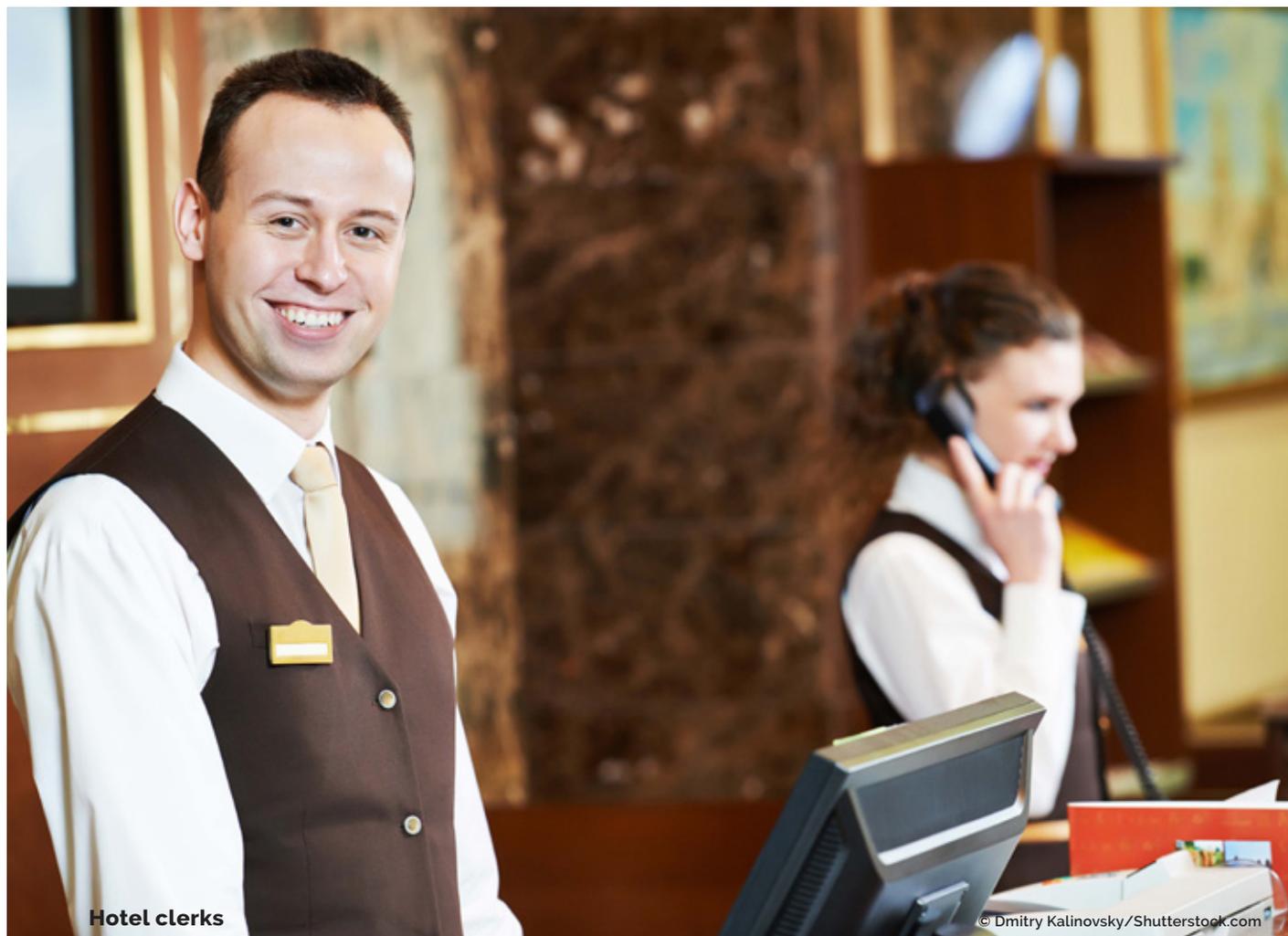
Frank: Nice to meet you, too. Paul, what do you do?

Paul: I work in a restaurant. I'm a server.

Frank: Oh, I see. What do you like about your job?

Paul: I meet many new people.

Frank: What do you dislike about your job, Paul?

Paul: I stand up all day, so I get tired. Frank, what is your job?

Frank: I'm a firefighter.

Paul: That sounds exciting. What do you wear to work?

Frank: I wear a yellow uniform and a helmet.

Paul: I see. Is your work dangerous?

Frank: Yes, but I like to help people.

Paul: That's great! Have a good time at the party, Frank.

Frank: You, too, Paul.

(Move on to chat with other party guests.)

This activity was written by **Heather Benucci**, an EFL teacher, teacher trainer, and materials development specialist. She has led virtual professional development programs for EFL teachers in over 100 countries and has worked face-to-face with teachers and students in Russia, Korea, England, and the United States.

Astronaut

© Triff/Shutterstock.com