

Compensatory Strategy Role-Play Card Pack & Assessment Rubric

GranTeach EKT Series – Speaking Module

1. Teacher Guide

This pack is designed to help your learners practise compensatory strategies in speaking, especially circumlocution, approximation, and word coinage. The goal is not to “avoid mistakes”, but to keep the conversation alive when there is a lexical gap.

You can use these cards in general speaking classes, exam preparation courses, or as warm-up tasks before more demanding role-plays. The activities work best from A2 to B2 levels.

The key message for learners is: when you do not know or remember a word, you do not stop. You explain, you use a similar word, or you creatively build a word that your partner can still understand.

Suggested procedure for a 15–20 minute activity:

1. Briefly remind learners what compensatory strategies are (explain, use a similar word, or creatively build a word). Keep the explanation simple and show one or two examples.
2. Put learners in pairs or small groups and give each pair one or two role-play cards.
3. Tell them which words they are not allowed to use (the “banned words”) and set a clear time limit for the conversation.
4. Monitor and take quick notes on useful examples of circumlocution, approximation, and word coinage.
5. After the role-play, run a short feedback stage: highlight good attempts, reformulate where necessary, and ask the class how else they could express the same idea.
6. If possible, repeat the same scenario with a different partner or a different card so that learners can immediately apply the feedback.

Timing & grouping suggestions:

- A2–B1: 3–4 minute role-plays in pairs, with clear prompts and strong support.
- B1–B2: 5–7 minute role-plays, possibly in triads (speaker, listener, observer). The observer can tick a simple checklist for compensatory strategies.

Feedback tips:

- Start by valuing the strategy, not only the correct word. First show that the learner kept the conversation alive.
- Then provide or elicit the target word or a more natural expression.
- Encourage peers to share alternative ways of expressing the same idea.
- Record short samples (with learners' permission) and revisit them later as awareness-raising material.

2. Role-Play Cards – A2–B1

Each card below describes a situation for a short role-play. The “banned words” are not allowed. Learners must use compensatory strategies to keep the conversation going.

Card A2–1: At the Supermarket

Goal: Ask for help to find an item in a big supermarket.

Roles: Student A: customer, Student B: shop assistant.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “rice”, “pasta”, “shelf”.

Task: Explain what you want to buy, describe where you saw it before, and ask for directions.

Card A2–2: Looking for a Classroom

Goal: Find the right classroom in a new language school.

Roles: Student A: new student, Student B: receptionist.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “classroom”, “floor”, “stairs”.

Task: Explain which class you have, what time it starts, and ask how to get there.

Card A2–3: At the Pharmacy

Goal: Ask for medicine for a common health problem.

Roles: Student A: customer, Student B: pharmacist.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “headache”, “stomach”, “medicine”.

Task: Describe how you feel, when it started, and ask for something to help you.

Card B1–1: Lost in the City

Goal: Ask for directions when you are lost in a new city.

Roles: Student A: tourist, Student B: local person.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “map”, “street”, “corner”.

Task: Explain where you want to go, what you can see around you, and check you understand the directions.

Card B1–2: Returning a Product

Goal: Return a product that does not work properly.

Roles: Student A: customer, Student B: shop assistant/manager.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “receipt”, “refund”, “broken”.

Task: Explain the problem, say when you bought it, and ask for a solution.

Card B1–3: Planning a Weekend Trip

Goal: Plan a short trip with a friend and agree on the main details.

Roles: Student A and B: friends.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “hotel”, “train”, “cheap”.

Task: Discuss where to stay, how to travel, and how to save money.

3. Role-Play Cards – B1–B2

These cards are slightly more complex and can be used for longer, task-based role-plays. Learners are encouraged to use circumlocution, approximation, and word coinage where necessary.

Card B1–B2–1: Technical Problem in an Online Meeting

Goal: Explain a technical problem during an important online meeting and suggest a solution.

Roles: Student A: presenter, Student B: colleague or client.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “connection”, “screen”, “microphone”.

Task: Describe what is going wrong, how it affects the meeting, and what you suggest doing next.

Card B1–B2–2: Missing Luggage at the Airport

Goal: Report missing luggage and negotiate what the airport staff should do.

Roles: Student A: passenger, Student B: airport staff.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “luggage”, “bag”, “tag”.

Task: Describe your item, explain when you last saw it, and ask for clear next steps.

Card B1–B2–3: Product Idea in a Team Meeting

Goal: Present a new product idea to your team using simple language.

Roles: Student A: team member, Student B: team leader.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “product”, “customer”, “market”.

Task: Explain what the idea is, who it is for, and why it could be successful.

Card B1–B2–4: Dealing with a Complaint

Goal: Handle a customer complaint professionally and keep the conversation calm.

Roles: Student A: unhappy customer, Student B: support agent.

Banned words: You cannot use the words: “angry”, “problem”, “fault”.

Task: Explain the situation, show empathy, and offer realistic options.

4. 60-Second Mini-Rubric – Managing Lexical Gaps

Use this rubric for quick, impression-based assessment during or immediately after a role-play. Focus on how the learner manages lexical gaps, not on every single error.

Level A2

Can-do descriptor: Can sometimes keep the conversation going using very simple explanations or gestures when a word is missing.

Notes: Often needs support or extra time.

Level B1

Can-do descriptor: Can usually keep the conversation going by explaining the idea in other words or using a similar word.

Notes: Sometimes hesitates, but does not completely stop.

Level B1+

Can-do descriptor: Can often combine circumlocution and approximation to make themselves understood even with several lexical gaps.

Notes: Shows clear effort to stay in the conversation.

Level B2

Can-do descriptor: Can systematically choose effective strategies (explanation, similar word, creative word) to avoid breakdowns in communication.

Notes: May even help their partner by reformulating ideas.

Tip: quickly tick the level that best describes the learner's performance and add one short comment about what they did well and what they can try next time.