

# General IT Dialogue Lab

Realistic workplace dialogues, role-play cards, and debrief prompts for advanced ESL learners in IT teams

**Audience: instructors, coaches, peer practice groups, technical English cohorts, and IT teams**

Focus: high-level professional English for general IT teams, including service management, networks, identity, cloud, endpoints, security operations, change control, observability, and realistic workplace dialogue.

Designed for advanced ESL learners who already work in IT or IT-adjacent roles and need field-specific fluency rather than basic technical vocabulary.

Teaching stance: general IT is not one job. Learners need enough shared language to move across help desk, infrastructure, security, cloud, platform, vendor, and business conversations without losing precision or credibility.

## How to Run the Dialogue Lab

---

1. Use groups of three: IT speaker, counterpart, observer.
2. Read the model dialogue once. Then replay it using the same situation but different facts from the learner's work.
3. The observer listens for terminology accuracy, triage questions, evidence, risk language, audience awareness, and decision clarity.
4. After each role-play, replay the hardest 30 seconds with a more precise sentence.

### **Facilitator guardrail**

Do not let learners hide behind vague technical nouns. Ask them to name the user impact, the evidence, the likely owner, the next action, and the confidence level.

## 1. Service Desk Escalation: 'VPN Is Broken'

### Setting

A remote employee reports that the VPN connects, but the finance system will not load.

Speaker	Line
User	The VPN is broken again. I cannot get to finance.
Service desk	I understand the impact. Can I confirm one detail: does the VPN show connected, or does the connection fail completely?
User	It says connected.
ESL learner	Then we should avoid calling this a VPN outage yet. It may be DNS, routing, firewall, or the finance app itself. Are other internal sites loading?
User	The intranet loads, but finance times out.
ESL learner	Thank you. I will update the ticket as 'VPN connected; finance app unreachable over VPN for one user.' I am checking whether this is user-specific or app-wide before escalating.

### Language notes

- Good triage narrows the scope before assigning blame.
- The learner validates the user's frustration while changing the technical description.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 2. P1 Incident Bridge: DNS or Application Outage?

### Setting

Multiple users cannot reach a customer portal after a DNS change.

Speaker	Line
Incident commander	We need a clear status. Is the portal down?
Network engineer	The application servers are healthy. DNS queries are returning the old address for some users.
ESL learner	So the service is partially unavailable because name resolution is inconsistent after the change. The immediate mitigation is to roll back the DNS record and lower the TTL if possible.
App owner	Can we say the application is not the cause?
ESL learner	We can say current evidence points to DNS propagation, not application health. We should avoid final root-cause language until we review the change timeline and resolver logs.

### Language notes

- Separate service impact from component health.
- Use 'current evidence points to...' when the root cause is not fully confirmed.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

### 3. Access Review: Urgent Admin Permission

#### Setting

A senior manager asks for admin rights to fix a reporting dashboard before a board meeting.

Speaker	Line
Manager	Just give me admin access for today. I know what I am doing.
IT lead	We want to help with the deadline, but permanent admin rights are not the right control.
ESL learner	We can offer a time-limited privileged session with approval, logging, and a clear task scope. After the task, access will be removed automatically.
Manager	That sounds slow.
ESL learner	It is faster than a normal access change, but it still protects the company and your account. I can start the exception workflow now and stay with you until the dashboard is fixed.

#### Language notes

- Least privilege can be framed as protection, not obstruction.
- Offer a controlled path rather than only saying no.

#### Role-play variation

#### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 4. Patch Window Negotiation

### Setting

Security wants to patch a critical vulnerability; operations worries about downtime during month-end close.

Speaker	Line
Security	This CVE is being actively exploited. We need the patch tonight.
Operations	Tonight is month-end close. If the ERP system is down, finance cannot finish.
ESL learner	We have two risks: exploitation if we wait, and business disruption if the patch fails. Can we test the patch in staging now, apply compensating controls tonight, and schedule production for the first safe window?
Security	What controls?
ESL learner	Restrict exposure, increase monitoring, block known indicators, and require rollback approval before any production change. If exploitation evidence appears, we move to emergency change.

### Language notes

- High-level IT English often balances two real risks instead of pretending one side is irrational.
- Compensating controls reduce risk when the ideal fix is delayed.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 5. Cloud Cost Spike

### Setting

Finance notices a 38 percent increase in monthly cloud spend.

Speaker	Line
Finance	Why did cloud cost jump? Did IT approve this?
Cloud engineer	Most of the increase is compute in the analytics environment and log retention in production.
ESL learner	The immediate issue is spend, but the operational issue is ownership. Several resources have no cost-center tags, so we cannot assign accountability confidently.
Finance	Can you cut it today?
ESL learner	We can stop idle non-production instances today, reduce excessive log retention where policy allows, and bring a tagging enforcement plan by Friday. I would not delete storage until owners confirm retention requirements.

### Language notes

- Cost conversations need evidence, ownership, and guardrails.
- Do not promise savings by deleting resources without retention review.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 6. Kubernetes Incident: Crashing Pods

### Setting

A containerized internal tool fails after a deployment.

Speaker	Line
Developer	The deployment is broken. The pods keep restarting.
Platform engineer	The readiness probe is failing, and the logs show missing environment variables.
ESL learner	Then the cluster is doing what it should: it is not sending traffic to unhealthy pods. The likely cause is release configuration, not Kubernetes itself.
Developer	Should we roll back?
ESL learner	Yes, unless there is a faster config fix with lower risk. My recommendation is rollback now, restore service, then compare the deployment manifest with the previous version.

### Language notes

- The learner distinguishes platform behavior from application configuration.
- Incident language should prioritize restoration, then investigation.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 7. Phishing and Possible Account Compromise

### Setting

A user clicked a suspicious link and entered credentials.

Speaker	Line
User	I think I made a mistake. I entered my password on a weird page.
Service desk	Thank you for reporting quickly. Please do not change anything else yet.
ESL learner	We will reset your password, revoke active sessions, check sign-in logs, and confirm whether MFA prompts were accepted. Can you forward the email as an attachment to security?
User	Am I in trouble?
ESL learner	The priority is containment and evidence. Reporting quickly helps us protect your account and other users.

### Language notes

- Good security communication reduces shame so users report faster.
- Containment steps should be specific but not overly alarming.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 8. Backup Restore Test: RPO Mismatch

### Setting

A restore test shows that the system can recover, but with more data loss than expected.

Speaker	Line
Business owner	The restore worked, so are we good?
Database admin	The restore completed, but the latest usable backup is six hours old.
ESL learner	That means the RTO may be acceptable, but the RPO is not. We can restore service in time, but we may lose more data than the business agreed to.
Business owner	I did not understand that difference.
ESL learner	RTO is how long recovery takes. RPO is how much data loss is acceptable. We need either more frequent backups, replication, or a formal acceptance of the higher data-loss risk.

### Language notes

- RTO and RPO are often misunderstood; define them in business language.
- A successful restore can still fail the business requirement.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 9. Change Advisory: Firewall Rule Request

### Setting

A project team wants a broad firewall opening before a launch.

Speaker	Line
Project lead	We need to open the firewall to the vendor range today, or the launch slips.
Security architect	The requested range is too broad.
ESL learner	Can we narrow by source, destination, port, protocol, and time window? If the vendor cannot provide that, we should treat this as a high-risk exception with monitoring and an expiration date.
Project lead	What is the business impact of waiting?
ESL learner	Launch delay is one impact. The other impact is exposing internal services more widely than necessary. The decision should name both risks and the owner who accepts the exception.

### Language notes

- A change review is not only a technical approval; it records risk ownership.
- Use precise constraint language: source, destination, port, protocol, duration.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 10. Post-Incident Review: Blame vs Learning

### Setting

A failed manual change caused an outage. The team is reviewing what happened.

Speaker	Line
Manager	Who made the change?
Engineer	I did, but I followed the old runbook.
ESL learner	The action matters, but the improvement question is broader. Why did the runbook allow a manual step without peer review, validation, or rollback verification?
Manager	So what should the action items be?
ESL learner	Update the runbook, add automated validation, require peer review for that command, and create an alert that detects the bad state within two minutes.

### Language notes

- Root-cause language should include process and detection gaps.
- Action items need owners, due dates, and verification, not just good intentions.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 11. Vendor Escalation: SaaS Degradation

### Setting

A critical SaaS vendor reports a regional degradation affecting SSO logins.

Speaker	Line
Business stakeholder	Why can't IT fix this?
Vendor manager	The issue is in the vendor's region. We do not control their identity gateway.
ESL learner	Our role is mitigation and communication. We are checking alternate login paths, monitoring the vendor status page, and collecting affected-user counts so we can escalate with evidence.
Stakeholder	When will it be fixed?
ESL learner	The vendor has not provided an ETA. I will give the next update in 30 minutes, or sooner if the status changes.

### Language notes

- When a vendor owns the fix, IT can still own communication, impact tracking, and mitigations.
- Avoid inventing ETAs under pressure.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?

## 12. Executive Update: Risk, Impact, and Decision

### Setting

A CIO asks for a short update during a major email outage.

Speaker	Line
CIO	Give me the short version.
ESL learner	Email delivery is delayed for about 40 percent of users in North America. External mail is queued, not lost. The likely dependency is the spam-filtering service. We have opened a vendor P1 and are testing a bypass for critical mailboxes.
CIO	What decision do you need?
ESL learner	Approval to enable the bypass for legal and customer support if delay exceeds one hour. The risk is reduced filtering during the bypass window, so security will monitor inbound volume and suspicious attachments.

### Language notes

- Executive updates should include impact, confidence, mitigation, risk, and requested decision.
- A short update can still be technically precise.

### Role-play variation

### Observer checklist

- Did the learner name the issue precisely instead of repeating a vague symptom?
- Did the learner ask for scope, evidence, timeline, impact, and recent changes?
- Did the learner use risk language without panic or overconfidence?
- Did the learner make a clear recommendation, owner, or next step?