

## UNIT IX



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# Unit IX Conversation Survival Guide

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## Introduction

Fluency gives self-confidence and its lack undermines you.

The intention of this chapter is not to replace conversation guides; on the contrary, we encourage you, according to your level, to use them.

Without including translations, it would have been foolish to write a conversation guide. Why, then, have we written this chapter? The aim of the chapter is to provide a “survival guide”, a basic tool, to be reviewed by upper-intermediate speakers who actually are perfectly able to understand all the usual exchanges but can have some difficulty in finding natural ways to express themselves in certain unusual scenarios. For instance, we are strolling with a colleague who wants us to accompany him to a jeweler’s to buy a bracelet for his wife. Bear in mind that, even in your own language, fluency is virtually impossible in all situations. I have only been upset and disappointed (in English) three times. At a laundry, at an airport, and, on a third occasion, at a restaurant. I considered myself relatively fluent in English by that time but, under pressure, thoughts come to mind much faster than words and your level of fluency can be overwhelmed as a consequence of the adrenaline levels of your blood. Accept this piece of advice: unless you are bilingual you cannot afford to get into arguments in a language other than your own.

Many upper-intermediate speakers do not take a conversation guide when traveling abroad. They think their level is well above those who need a guide to construct basic sentences and are ashamed of being seen reading one (I myself went through this stage). I was (and they are) utterly wrong in not taking a guide because, for upper-intermediate speakers, a conversation guide has different and very important uses (as my level increased, I realized that my use of these guides changed; I did not need to read the translations, except for a few words, and I just looked for natural ways of saying things).

In my opinion, even being bilingual, conversation guides are extremely helpful whenever you are in an unfamiliar environment such as, for example, a florist. How many names of flowers do you know in your own language? Probably less than a dozen. Think that every conversation scenario has its own jargon and a conversation guide can give you the hints that an