

# "TALKING ABOUT ANYTHING"

## Step-by-Step Instructions for Creative, Motivating Oral Language Skills Activities

For use with or without *Speaking Card Deck*:  
54 Picture Topic Cards from A to Z

**S**peaking Card Deck: 54 Picture-Topic Cards from A to Z contains 54 subject cards, on topics people like talking about in social conversation. The cards also include pictures to stimulate creative thinking about each subject. For non-native speakers of English and developmental students, there are reproducible vocabulary lists (words and phrases related to the topics) at the end of this *Activity & Idea Book*.

The 54 *Cards*, along with any others you want to add to the deck, can be used for the speaking activities and games described in this book. They also mirror and complement the concepts of *Part Three*—entitled “Talking About Anything”—of *Speaking: Oral Language Skills for Real-Life Communication*, by Authors & Editors + Work/Life English. Following is a list of the 54 topics included in the *Speaking Card Deck: 54 Picture-Topic Cards*.

- |               |               |                     |                |
|---------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1. AIR TRAVEL | 15. GRADES    | 29. MOTHERS         | 42. SCIENCE    |
| 2. AGING      | 16. HAIR      | 30. NATURE          | 43. THE SEA    |
| 3. BABIES     | 17. HALLOWEEN | 31. NEIGHBORS       | 44. SHOES      |
| 4. CATS       | 18. HANDS     | 32. NEWS            | 45. SLEEP      |
| 5. CHOCOLATE  | 19. HATS      | 33. THE OUTDOORS    | 46. SMOKING    |
| 6. CHRISTMAS  | 20. INSECTS   | 34. PAPERWORK       | 47. SNOW       |
| 7. COOKING    | 21. JOBS      | 35. PEACE & QUIET   | 48. SPORTS     |
| 8. DATING     | 22. JUNK      | 36. PRICES          | 49. THE SUN    |
| 9. DOGS       | 23. KIDS      | 37. PUBLIC SPEAKING | 50. TELEVISION |
| 10. DRIVING   | 24. LOVE      | 38. RAIN            | 51. TIME       |
| 11. FASHION   | 25. MACHINES  | 39. READING         | 52. TRAVEL     |
| 12. FEELINGS  | 26. MEAT      | 40. RELIGION        | 53. WEATHER    |
| 13. FAST FOOD | 27. MEN       | 41. SCHOOL          | 54. YOUTH      |

“Talking About Anything” for Use with or without

*Speaking Card Deck: 54 Picture Cards from A to Z*

# "TALKING ABOUT ANYTHING"

Step-by-Step Instructions for Creative, Motivating  
Oral Language Skills Activities

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

"TALKING ABOUT ANYTHING" 5-6

### CREATIVE THINKING GAMES & ACTIVITIES pages 7-10

|                                |      |
|--------------------------------|------|
| 1 ASSOCIATION LINES OR CIRCLES | 7    |
| 2 CREATIVE SENTENCES           | 8    |
| 3 CREATIVE STORY LINES         | 8-9  |
| 4 CATEGORIES                   | 9-10 |
| 5 CUE WORDS                    | 10   |

### "TALKING ABOUT ANYTHING"— EFFECTIVE SPEAKING & LISTENING pages 11-21

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| 6 CREATING "ORAL ESSAYS"                | 11-13 |
| 7 PRESENTING "ORAL ESSAYS"              | 14-15 |
| 8 COMPREHENDING "ORAL ESSAYS"           | 15-17 |
| 9 THE COMPLAINT BRAINSTORMING GAME      | 18-19 |
| 10 PAIRED SPEECHES: WHINING VS. VALUING | 20-21 |

### SUPPLEMENTARY LISTS 22-40

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| VOCABULARY LISTS<br>for 54 Picture-Topic Cards from A to Z | 22-35 |
| SUPPLEMENTARY LIST OF<br><i>Speaking</i> TOPICS            | 36-38 |

a creative *Activity & Idea Book* for *Speaking:*

# "TALKING ABOUT ANYTHING"

**M**ost of us like to share our thoughts about life—often over coffee or a restaurant meal. Sometimes a topic or someone else’s comment reminds us of an interesting idea we heard somewhere—perhaps from an acquaintance, in the media, or online. Or we remember something we once read in a newspaper, magazine, or book that gave us “food for thought,” and we want to mention it. Other times, it’s just fun to *philosophize*—to catch our thoughts as they pop into our heads and let our imaginations go as we think out loud. Or we can just talk for the sake of talking.

And then there’s *complaining*. It may or may not be pleasant to vent feelings or to tell everything we dislike about someone or something. Even so, it’s often a relief from accumulated anger or stress. And it’s all right to gripe or whine just for fun—if others join in. Telling everything that has bothered us about a situation—or that might possibly irritate or annoy us in the future—can produce an amusing or even hilarious speech or conversation.

Here are some ways to learn to talk about almost anything—and to do it in interesting, entertaining, or productive ways.

**R** *Relax, and take in any thoughts that occur to you.* It’s unproductive to “tune out” what’s around you or to avoid considering ideas just because they seem “weird” or unusual at the moment—or, worse yet, because we’ve never heard or read them anywhere. We all need to daydream at times—to respect our own creativity. Sometimes, it’s best to give the imagination free reign so we can think and talk about—*whatever*.

**R** *Grab onto the most interesting thoughts before they disappear.* Our best ideas often occur to us while resting, so how can we stay ready to capture them? Perhaps by keeping paper and pencil next to the bed or the couch—or even the bathtub. To catch hold of “mind pictures,” we might draw or write on a napkin, type words into an electronic notebook, speak into a recorder, use a “memo” app, or call our own voice mail to leave a message. Not every idea will seem equally valuable later on, of course. On the other hand, if we grab interesting thoughts as soon as they pop into our heads, they can keep developing in the subconscious.



**"Talking About Anything" for Use with or without**

***Speaking Card Deck: 54 Picture Cards from A to Z***

**5**

✎ *Be aware of what is going on, and learn about new things.* Experience and knowledge of various subjects are necessary for creative thinking, so we should take in—consciously—what we see, hear, and read. Because this information stays in our subconscious, it may come to the surface just when we need it to be creative.

✎ *Unless it can be taken as hurtful or insulting, allow ourselves to say anything that comes to mind.* Especially when we are relaxing or enjoying recreational activities with family or friends, we should be able to “just talk” about anything that pops into our heads—and then sit back and enjoy their reactions. Working or playing together—even just playing with words and ideas—can make the creative process easier, more fun, and more effective.

In addition to following the above suggestions, how can you learn to talk spontaneously about “Just About Anything” in interesting ways? How can you *practice* becoming compelling or fascinating conversationalists? Especially if adapted creatively to your own educational purposes, the communicative activities suggested in this *Activity & Idea Book* are appropriate for:

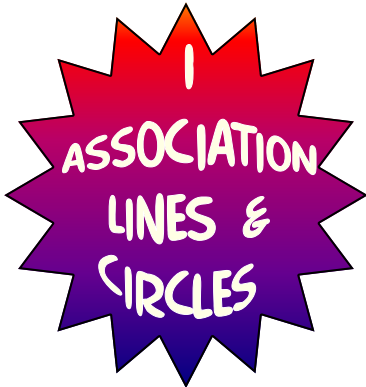
- ◆ formal (credit or non-credit) high school, adult, or college speech courses, including courses in intermediate or advanced ESL
- ◆ informal conversation groups or oral communication classes for native or non-native speakers of English
- ◆ other courses and educational situations in which learners are developing their creative thinking and organizational skills
- ◆ speakers’ meetings run by groups devoted to improving their members’ communication skills
- ◆ social gatherings and parties at which there are games—especially communication and word games.

All the ideas in this *Activity & Idea* make use of the *Topic-Picture Cards* in the *Speaking Deck: 54 Topic Cards from A to Z*. The ideas can be used, however, with *any* word cards you or others create. You can write words or phrases on index cards, or print them out on colored card stock to cut apart into appropriate card sizes. If you like, you can add drawings, clip art, or even pictures cut out of old books or magazines. Or for many of the ideas, you can work without any **Topic Cards** at all—just using lists of possible subjects to talk about.

# "TALKING ABOUT ANYTHING"

## TOPICS FROM A TO Z CREATIVE THINKING GAMES & ACTIVITIES

**B**efore beginning interactive oral activities and mini-speeches on the subjects of the *Speaking Card Deck: 54 Topic Cards from A to Z*, you can use the cards as aids for creative thinking. Here are some suggested "card games" or activities to stimulate the imagination or trigger ideas.



**W**orking alone or with others, with a full deck of 54 Cards or fewer, participants arrange their topics in order of *meaning associations*. They begin by placing any card face up on a desk or table. Next to it, they place a Card naming a subject that can be associated with the first card in some way. The third Card in the line must have some association with the second, the fourth with the third, and so on.

If several groups are playing this game at the same time, they can compete. When time is called, the group with the longest line of Cards (connected by associations they can explain) is the winning team.

For a more challenging game, players can try placing Cards in a circle—so that the *last* topic meets and is associated with the *first*. But to succeed in this game, they must be able to *justify* how each topic reminds them of or can be associated with both the preceding and the following topics.



### EXAMPLES OF ASSOCIATIONS:

If you like cooking, be sure to have chocolate around because many dishes can be made with it—especially at Christmas time. Of course, dogs like chocolate too but you should never give it to them because . . .

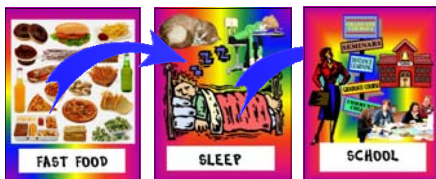
"Talking About Anything" for Use with or without

*Speaking Card Deck: 54 Picture Cards from A to Z* 7

## 2 CREATIVE SENTENCES

**W**orking alone or with others, participants pick three **Topic Cards** from the back—that is, without looking at the pictures and words. They turn the **Cards** over. As fast as possible, they create a reasonable or plausible sentence that includes all *three* of the words.

Example:  
When fast food makes me want to sleep, I think about the exciting games we play at school.



For more challenge, players can compete in creating sentences with the words or phrases from four, five, or even more **Topic Cards**.

## 3 CREATIVE STORY LINES

**T**wo or more players can participate in this speaking skills card game—with a full or partial deck of *Speaking Topic Cards*.

The deck is shuffled. Four cards are dealt out to each player. Participants hold them fan-shaped in their hands. The remainder of the deck is placed face down in the middle of the playing surface (desk or table).

The player to the dealer's right begins the game by taking any card from his/her hand and telling the *beginning* of a story about that topic. The next player places any **Card** from his/her hand face up on the first **Card** and continues the story in a sentence or two—by working the topic of *that Card* into the story line. Play passes to the next person in the same way.

If any player cannot think of a way to incorporate one of the **Topic Cards** in his/her hand into the developing narrative, that person picks one **Card** from the top of the face-down deck. If that topic doesn't produce any creative thinking either, that player may pick another. Still no ideas?

Then that person must pass. The winner of the game is the first person to get rid of all of his or her **Cards**. Hopefully, he/she will end the story in an imaginative or colorful but logical or “believable” way.



# 3 CREATIVE STORY LINES

Continued

For a faster, less competitive version of the same game, players can be allowed to put **Cards** on the face-up deck and continue the story *in any order* rather than in turn—as soon as they think of logical or creative ways to work in new topics.

This cooperative game version ends when all the cards have been incorporated into the *story line* (the plot)—or when all players are stumped as to how to include the remaining **Topic Cards**.

Now this cat really loved chocolate—more than meat, milk, or even sleep.

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful but very spoiled cat.

The family the cat lived with liked the outdoors, so they decided to go camping. They took all their chocolate with them. All of a sudden, . . .

For review, each group of players turns the face-down deck face up again. From the **Topics** as they appear one by one, they try to recall and reconstruct the plot of their story—perhaps improving on their *story line*.

As language-learning follow-up to the oral game, groups of players can reconstruct their story *in writing*—perhaps to hand in. Or as a team, they can retell or summarize their story for the whole class.

# 4 CATEGORIES

The *Speaking Topics Cards* are shuffled; the top face-up **Card** is shown to the group. Its **Picture-Topic** is the “Category” for the first round. Participants work individually, in pairs, or in teams. Within a time limit (perhaps 3 to 5 minutes), they list as many words naming items of that classification as they can. (If it doesn’t name a “collection of things,” they list *associated words* instead.)



EXAMPLES OF “FAST FOOD ITEMS”: hamburgers, french fries, tacos, burritos, fried chicken, hot dogs, . . .

“Talking About Anything” for Use with or without

*Speaking Card Deck: 54 Picture Cards from A to Z*

4

## CATEGORIES

Continued



To score their lists, individuals or teams in turn tell one of the items they wrote down. Everyone or each group that listed the *same* thing crosses it off, as do those that first said it. Continue until all items have been mentioned once.

The winner of the game is the person or team with the most items that *no one else* has listed. He/She/They may choose the next “*Category*.”

EXAMPLES OF KINDS OF COOKING (ACTIVITIES):  
frying, braising, boiling, broiling, steaming, roasting, grilling, barbecuing, baking, mixing, stirring . . .

EXAMPLES OF KINDS OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES: hiking, walking, running, jogging, camping, swimming, diving, rowing, sailing, boating, fishing, sunbathing, . . .

5

## CUE WORDS

As in the TV Game Show “Password,” partners play this game in pairs. One gets a stack of 10 **Topic Cards**. With a deck of 54 **Cards**, up to 5 partnerships can play at the same time. Others can observe each twosome.

The person of each pair with the **Topic Cards** keeps the words and pictures hidden from his/her partner. At the word “Go,” the time is noted or a “Start” button is activated. The first player gives his/her partner verbal “cues” designed to elicit the name of the **Topic** on the first **Card**. Whoever is giving the cue words may not tell or spell the answer, of course. He/she just keeps saying “cue words” until the other person guesses the topic correctly—or until a designated time (like 90 seconds) has passed. In either case, the first player moves on to the next **Topic Card** and repeats the process.

The object of the game is to get through the stack of **Topic Cards** in as little time as possible, preferably with 10 correct guesses. After each round, partners get a different stack of cards and change roles.

The winner of the game is the duo that that has given cues for and guessed the most words.

## EXAMPLES:

Player 1: Nap. ➡

Player 2: Pillow?

Player 2: No. Tired. ➡

Player 2: Bed?

Player 1: Sorry. Bed. ➡

Player 2: I know. Sleep!

Player 1: Right! For the next topic, the cue is. . .







# “TALKING ABOUT ANYTHING” VOCABULARY LISTS

**D**o you or your students need help in thinking of ideas for “Creative Thinking Games,” “Oral Essays,” “Complaint Vs. Praising Speeches,” or other “Talking About Anything” language activities based on the 54 topics of the *Speaking Picture-Topic Cards Deck*? Perhaps the following vocabulary lists will help stimulate imagination.

Following are 54 short vocabulary lists—one for each topic, divided into “neutral” words and phrases, “positive” vocabulary, and items that often have a negative connotation. (Remember that *word connotation* can depend on the context and attitude of the speaker.) Participants may refer to these lists when they’re playing games, preparing to speak, and/or listening to others hold forth on these subjects. The lists may be duplicated and distributed, enlarged and projected onto a screen, or used in other creatively helpful ways. Of course, participants must learn to use words correctly and appropriately in context and will need to add many items (words and phrases) of their own to their speech.

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>1. AIR TRAVEL—<br/>VOCABULARY</p>  <p><b>AIR TRAVEL</b></p>   | <p>“Neutral” Words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reservations, tickets</li> <li>• flight attendants, pilots, co-pilots</li> <li>• luggage, baggage, suitcases, garment bags, overhead compartments</li> <li>• passengers</li> <li>• seats, seatbelts</li> <li>• windows, lights, air</li> </ul> | <p>2. AGING—<br/>VOCABULARY</p>  <p><b>AGING</b></p>   | <p>“Neutral” Words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• senior citizens; mature, wise</li> <li>• retirement, social security, pensions</li> <li>• becoming parents, grandparents, grown (grand)children, family, relatives; take care of, protect</li> </ul> |
| <p>“Positive” Words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• first class, room</li> <li>• comfort, service</li> <li>• fast, quick, on time, convenient</li> <li>• fun, entertaining</li> <li>• technology, new, exciting</li> </ul> | <p>“Negative” Words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• coach, crowded, cramped, overfull, uncomfortable</li> <li>• lines, long waits</li> <li>• unreliability, delays, flight cancellations</li> <li>• nervous, rude</li> </ul>  | <p>“Positive” Words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family gatherings, special events, holidays, anniversary celebrations, honor</li> <li>• free time, hobbies, recreation, interests</li> <li>• relaxation, fun</li> <li>• wisdom, experience</li> </ul> | <p>“Negative” Words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• getting old, becoming useless</li> <li>• losing strength, flexibility, brain cells</li> <li>• sickness, illness, diseases, loss of functions, eyesight, hearing, movement</li> </ul>                |

**3. BABIES—  
VOCABULARY**



**BABIES**

**“Neutral” Words**

- maternity clothes, birth, hospital, motherhood
- baby furniture, cribs, high chairs, play pens, gate, safety devices
- baby food, diapers, toys, playthings

**“Positive” Words**

- miracles, marvel
- cute, funny, loveable, adorable, cuddly
- young, innocent
- curious, smart, bright, amazing
- fun, entertaining
- hope for the future

**“Negative” Words**

- demanding, needy
- hungry, thirsty, wet
- feedings; worn out, sleepless, fatigued, exhausted, tired
- cry, howl, bawl
- noisy, annoying
- have your hands full

**4. CATS—  
VOCABULARY**



**CATS**

**“Neutral” Words**

- animals, house pets
- feed cat food, table scraps, milk
- veterinarian, health, grooming
- vaccinations, shots
- spay, neuter
- take care of, watch, observe; fur, paws

**“Positive” Words**

- kittens, tiny, sweet, adorable, loving
- furry, cuddly, purr
- pet, stroke; clean
- beautiful, graceful
- playful, funny, cute
- independent, smart
- easy to care for

**“Negative” Words**

- housebreaking, kitty litter, odor
- roam, territory
- hiss, screech
- cat fights
- chase mice, hunt birds; fleas, ticks
- claws, scratch

**5. CHOCOLATE—  
VOCABULARY**



**CHOCOLATE**

**“Neutral” Words**

- food, candy, bars, chocolates, dessert
- cookies, cake, pudding, hot chocolate (cocoa)
- unsweetened, milk chocolate, semi-sweet, bitter
- cook, bake, melt
- save, freeze, store

**“Positive” Words**

- delicious, enjoyable, sweet, satisfying
- dark, rich, creamy, nourishing, aromatic
- treat, delicacy
- eat, drink, enjoy, savor, lick, sip
- gifts, Valentine’s Day, affection, true love, passion, devotion

**“Negative” Words**

- junk food, sweets, empty calories
- fattening, fatty, sugary, sickening
- stomachache, upset, indigestion, gas, headache; obesity
- addition, caffeine
- messy, sticky, tough stains, smudges

**6. CHRISTMAS—  
VOCABULARY**



**CHRISTMAS**

**“Neutral” Words**

- winter holiday, December 25
- preparations, family, parties
- Christmas tree, evergreen, pine, spruce, needles
- ornaments, lights, candles, mistletoe, poinsettias

**“Positive” Words**

- happy, exciting, warm, friendly
- peace, good will
- decorations, beautiful, pretty
- delicious feasts
- cookies, treats, desserts
- presents, gifts, Santa Claus

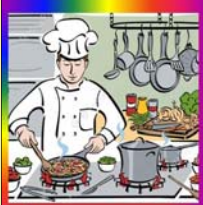
**“Negative” Words**

- overwork, stress, nerves, tension
- expectations, disappointment, depression, loneliness
- expensive, credit, bills, overspend, materialistic
- fattening, unhealthy

**“Talking About Anything” for Use with or without**

***Speaking Card Deck: 54 Picture Cards from A to Z* 23**

**7. COOKING—  
VOCABULARY**



**COOKING**

**“Neutral” Words**

- buy groceries, food, ingredients, cuisine
- prepare meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner, supper
- boil, simmer, sauté, brown, fry, bake, roast, broil; serve
- add, mix, stir, blend

**“Positive” Words**

- shop, plan meals
- nourish, feed, take care of family
- enjoyable, creative
- table settings
- attractive, good, delicious, tasty
- enjoy, savor
- satisfying

**“Negative” Words**

- housework, chores
- tedious, back-breaking, time-consuming, difficult
- mistakes, burned, overcooked, dry
- tasteless, bland
- clean-up, pots and pans, dishwashing

**8. DATING—  
VOCABULARY**



**DATING**

**“Neutral” Words**

- flirt, get attention
- meet someone, get to know someone
- converse, talk
- ask someone out, invite, accept
- make a date, go out to eat, see a movie
- pay, go dutch

**“Positive” Words**

- someone special, “Mr./Ms. Right,” “the One,” perfect mate, great guy, wonderful woman, the right match
- court, woo, fall in love; get engaged, set a date, commit

**“Negative” Words**

- shy, fearful; rejection
- arrogant, vain; ugly, creepy; obnoxious, dumb; “stuck-up,” flaky, crazy, nasty, undesirable
- pursue, chase, stalk, bother, hurt
- lonely, desperate

**9. DOGS—  
VOCABULARY**



**DOGS**

**“Neutral” Words**

- pick, choose, select, buy, purchase, find
- pet shop, animal shelter, litter
- feed, groom, train, exercise, take care of, care for, bathe
- veterinarian, shots, health
- doghouse, dog food, supplements

**“Positive” Words**

- puppies, cute, cuddly, tiny, sweet
- faithful, loyal, adoring, protective
- pet, guard dog, member of the family
- purebred, show dog, prizes

**“Negative” Words**

- expensive, costly
- housebreak, messy, dirty, smelly, sick, old, decrepit, feeble
- dogfights, growl, bark, howl, bite
- chase, get lost, traffic, danger
- fleas, rabies, illness

**10. DRIVING—  
VOCABULARY**



**DRIVING**

**“Neutral” Words**

- learner’s permit, driver’s license
- practice, follow the rules of the road
- drive a car, a truck, a taxi, a motorcycle
- the right of way, turn, park, speed up, slow down
- seat belts, air bags

**“Positive” Words**

- convenient, fast transportation
- speed, freedom, safety, comfort, luxury, technology
- exciting, fun, joyful, exhilarating, great
- trips, outings, explore, educational

**“Negative” Words**

- haggle, sticker price, negotiate, high pressure sales
- maintenance, repairs, expense
- insurance rates, premiums
- accidents, crashes
- vandalism, theft

# "TALKING ABOUT ANYTHING"

## More TOPICS FROM A TO Z

### SUPPLEMENTARY LIST

**A**re the topics suggested by the *Speaking Card Deck*—54 **Picture Topic Cards from A to Z**—insufficient for your language teaching or learning purposes? Do you want to add cards to the deck or create your own topic card decks? Do you prefer to dispense with *Topic Cards* and conduct “Talking About Anything” activities from lists of possible topics instead? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then the following *Supplementary List of Speaking Topics*, arranged in alphabetical order, should be of interest. Feel free to duplicate it for learners, if it’s helpful, or make use of it in other productive ways.

|                   |                |                     |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| ✂ ACADEMICS       | ✂ BEAUTY       | ✂ CAMPING           |
| ✂ ACCIDENTS       | ✂ THE BIBLE    | ✂ THE CAMPUS        |
| ✂ ACTING          | ✂ BICYCLES     | ✂ CARS              |
| ✂ ADDICTION       | ✂ BIRDS        | ✂ CAVES             |
| ✂ ADULTERY        | ✂ BLOOD        | ✂ CHILDREN          |
| ✂ ADVERTISING     | ✂ BOOKS        | ✂ CHOLESTEROL       |
| ✂ ALIENS          | ✂ BOSSES       | ✂ CHURCHES          |
| ✂ AMERICAN LIFE   | ✂ BOYS         | ✂ THE CIRCUS        |
| ✂ AMUSEMENT PARKS | ✂ BREAD        | ✂ CITIES, BIG       |
| ✂ ANGER           | ✂ BREAKFAST    | ✂ CITIZENSHIP       |
| ✂ ANNIVERSARIES   | ✂ BRIDES       | ✂ CLASSES (COURSES) |
| ✂ ARGUMENTS       | ✂ BRIDGES      | ✂ CLOCKS            |
| ✂ ASSIGNMENTS     | ✂ BROTHERS     | ✂ CLOTHING          |
| ✂ ATHLETES        | ✂ BUDGETING    | ✂ CLUTTER           |
| ✂ ASTRONOMY       | ✂ BUSES        | ✂ COFFEE            |
| ✂ BANKS           | ✂ BURGLARS     | ✂ COLD WEATHER      |
| ✂ BANKRUPTCY      | ✂ BUSINESS     | ✂ COLORS            |
| ✂ BARS            | ✂ CABS (TAXIS) | ✂ COMIC STRIPS      |
| ✂ BATHROOMS       | ✂ CAFETERIAS   | ✂ COMMAS            |