Communicative language teaching thrives on meaningful, purpose-driven practice. One of the simplest and most powerful exercises you can use is creating themed lists. Lists focus your attention on vocabulary you actually need, help you personalise learning, and turn passive words into usable language for everyday tasks.

Why themed lists work for communicative language teaching

Themed lists are ideal for beginners and busy learners. When you make a list around a real activity, like shopping or planning a meal, you immediately give vocabulary a function. That function creates context, which helps words stick. Instead of memorising isolated terms, you learn language that directly supports what you want to do in the target language.

Examples of useful lists

- **Shopping list** — bread, milk, cheese, apples (or pain, lait, fromage, pommes in French)
- **Things in my house** — sofa, lamp, blanket
- **Things I like** — hobbies, foods, places
- **Daily routine** — wake up, make coffee, check email
- **Errands and tasks** — post office, pharmacy, bank

How to create lists that actually improve fluency

Follow a simple process to turn a list into active knowledge.

1. **Pick a task** — choose something you want to do in the language. This aligns with communicative language teaching because the language is serving a purpose.
2. **Start small** — 8 to 12 items is enough for a short practice session.
3. **Add phrases** — write one sentence using each item. For a shopping list item like cheese write I need some cheese or Je voudrais du fromage.
4. **Personalise** — change examples to match your life. The more personal, the more memorable.
5. **Repeat in short bursts** — review the list daily for a few minutes rather than

one long session.

Turn lists into communicative practice

To make lists even more effective, convert them into short dialogues or prompts. Play the role of shopper and shop assistant. Ask questions, give reasons, and combine items into sentences. This moves vocabulary from recognition to production, which is the core aim of communicative language teaching.

Quick routine to try

- Day 1: Create a 10-item themed list
- Day 2: Add one sentence per item and read aloud
- Day 3: Use the list in a short self-dialogue or voice note
- Ongoing: Rotate themes weekly and review past lists

Themed lists are low-cost, flexible, and surprisingly effective. Make them part of your daily habit and you will see vocabulary that matters begin to come to life.

These are low-prep and high-interest for classes, too. Create a list and let students explore. Some examples:

List target language items and have them explore target language outlets. For example, furnish my house (IKEA), “buy” this grocery list, “pack” for a trip and list activities to organise into trip itineraries.

These are great for grammar, too. Learners can check things that are true for them (i.e. things you have done to practice the present perfect).

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