

# HOW TO TEACH TEENAGERS

## LIKE A PRO

30 TOP SECRETS EVERY TEACHER OF TEENAGE LEARNERS SHOULD KNOW

TEENAGERS  
ARE

- too young to think like adults
- trying hard to escape childhood
- often unmotivated
- not exactly the most talkative age group
- a challenge for even the best of teachers

BUT THERE IS HOPE



✂ IT TAKES A SPECIAL PERSON TO WORK WITH TEENAGERS. A PERSON LIKE YOU.



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# The Toughest Class You Will Ever Teach: 9 Tips for Engaging Middle School Students

*Teaching little kids can be fun. They have energy and a fascination with the world that only comes from the innocence of childhood. Adult students, on the other hand, have a higher cognitive ability and can understand complex concepts even if their English language skills are at a beginning level.*

Nonetheless, **what does a teacher do when her students are too young to think like adults but are trying their hardest to escape childhood?**

This is the question that faces every middle school teacher. The awkward age that ranges from around 11 until 15 is a challenge for even the best of teachers, but there is hope. Here are some teacher-tested tips for the middle school teachers out there that will help you work with your students' strengths and minimize their struggles.

## HOW TO ENGAGE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

### 1 GET PHYSICAL

Kids at that difficult middle school age are often brimming with energy, even in inappropriate moments. To harness that energy in a constructive way, **try using physical games that include a language element.** The physical exertion will tame the middle schoolers' energy enough so they can sit and listen and the language tie in will ensure you don't feel like you are wasting valuable classroom time. Try games like *Simon Says*, which require your students to listen for directions before they move.

### 2 ENCOURAGE TALKING

Talking can be a high priority for kids in the middle school age group, especially for girls. Though second language students may not be as chatty as native speakers, kids will still benefit

from a chance to talk in class. **Make sure your lesson plans always include questions for discussion.** You may need to give specific questions for your students to cover rather than giving simple directions to simply discuss, but you will find that middle schoolers have opinions and they appreciate a chance to share them.

### 3 BE CREATIVE

Even though kids in the middle school age range are trying to mature out of their childhoods, being a kid is still a large portion of who they are, and **encouraging creative expression through artistic elements will add an element of fun to your classroom** they are sure to appreciate.

### 4 BE CONCRETE

Preteens experience a lot of brain development, but in middle school most students think in very concrete terms. They often cannot understand intangible concepts, so **the more concrete examples you give during your instruction, the more effective your teaching will be.** If you are trying to teach something abstract, try to explain it in as concrete terms as you can to help your students understand, and give lots of chances for students to put theoretical knowledge to practical use.

### 5 USE OBJECT LESSONS

**Object lessons can be an effective way to make an abstract lesson more concrete.** Think of ways you can teach a concept through an object lesson, and check online for successful object lessons other teachers have used.

### 6 BE FLEXIBLE

**Not every traditional or even successful lesson plan will work well with middle school students.** Be flexible and willing to change up even the lessons that have worked for

you in the past. Because your middle school students have different needs than children or adult students, you should always be willing to tailor your plans to meet those needs.

### 7 CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Everyone wants to feel as though he is successful at his work, and middle school students are no exception. **Celebrating the small victories and accomplishments of your students will help them feel motivated** and will inspire them to deepen their linguistic educations.

### 8 ENCOURAGE CURIOSITY

Middle school students are like children in that they are learning how the world works. **Encourage your students to satisfy their curiosity about language as they learn.** Allowing your students to ask any questions, and not berating them for it, will help your students get excited about learning. Then use this excitement to show them that they can be successful language learners.

### 9 GIVE AND TAKE RESPECT

**The more you give your students respect, the more likely they are to return the gesture.** Avoid talking down to middle school students, listen when you ask their opinions and talk to them like they deserve respect, and you will find your students are more responsive and engaged in class.

### EXPERIENCED TEACHERS KNOW THAT IT TAKES A SPECIAL PERSON TO WORK WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS.

By planning lessons to meet the needs of your middle school students and being flexible with your time and activities, you will be proud of what great students your middle schoolers have become.

# How to Teach the Millennial Generation (& Get Them off of Facebook)

The Millennial Generation, or Generation Y, is that generation born 1980-2000. They have never known a world without computers, so they are sometimes also called the “Net Generation” and “digital natives.” Speaking generally of the generation rather than of every individual within it, some of the positive aspects of its members are that they tend to be global in outlook and accepting of differences.

However, they are also used to *instant gratification*, *multitasking*, and can present some challenges to classroom instruction, such as *inattentiveness and overuse of technological devices*. Given that a major component of teaching is connecting with learners, what are some methods that teachers can use to connect with the millennial generation and keep their interest?

## HOW TO TEACH GENERATION Y

### 1 ALTER THE LECTURE FORMAT

The lecture does not have to be dispensed with completely, and sometimes it is a necessary, efficient, and even powerful method to relate information. But the lecture alone only reaches a select number of students. Instead of just lecturing, **make the lecture interactive**. Ask students questions or offer examples, and make use of Powerpoint, which students are accustomed to, to support the lecture in the class. It is easy to load slides and text into Powerpoint to create a lecture on the Holocaust, for example. Or give students an outline of the lecture for them to fill in to keep them involved. Finally, **make the lecture as short as possible**, just enough time to relate the necessary information before moving into a different mode of instruction. The lecture can be a powerful learning tool but should be used judiciously.

### 2 INCORPORATE VISUALS

Incorporating visuals will also aid a lecture. **Learners respond more to a**

**presentation if it is contextualized**. For example, when explaining verb tense, a handout graphically displaying the different tenses is helpful. Or a quick search on YouTube before class can yield some impressive results. For example, if the presentation is about urban decay and pollution, pictures of a major landfill can spark a discussion. Reproductions of famous paintings, such as those by Picasso, can also serve as a starting place for discussion and writing. Finally, having students bring in their own visuals to represent something the class has just read and explain the connection also works well.

### 3 INCORPORATE GROUP WORK

Group work can also be highly successful with Generation Y because they have worked in groups all of their lives. After a brief lecture on a topic such as global warming, move students into groups and have them discuss it and come up with causes and possible solutions. Every member of the group should have a role within that group, such as the researcher to review the text or writer to take notes. There should also be a leader to keep everyone on task.

It is also effective to **vary the group structure within a class period, going from whole class to small group to pair work instruction**.

### 4 TEACH BY DISCOVERY

Another alternative to the lecture format is to teach by discovery. Instead of telling students the information, have them **discover it themselves**.

If students have just read a short story, for example, have them work together to determine the major message or theme of the story, or present them with a dilemma, and have them come up with the solution. Or when introducing a new reading, present students with a series of vocabulary words related to the reading and have them determine what the words have in common and group them accordingly. This will have the additional affect of preparing students for the reading's topic

and vocabulary.

### 5 INCORPORATE TECHNOLOGY

—clips, IPODs, blogs, and video games.

**Students are used to technological devices, so incorporate them in class instruction**. This can be as simple as having students type, research, and illustrate their own papers as part of class. Or make use of YouTube's resources: for example, when teaching an article on the alleged “*Stupidity Epidemic*” in the U.S., include a clip from YouTube of Jay Leno's “*Jaywalking*,” in which he walks the street and asks passersby seemingly easy questions (and doesn't always get the correct answer): “*What color is the White House?*” When students are reading a novel, set up a class blog and have students blog about it so that it is an interactive rather than the more traditional and personal journal. If students are text-messaging each other all the time, make that a class assignment. Having students translate text messages into standard or formal English can raise awareness on register differences. Or design a lecture in podcast format, post it on a class website, and have students download and listen to it at home. Some instructors have also used simulations and videogames effectively in their classes. Other instructors have exploited the use of Digital Gaming, interactive games in which students work online, assume a role, and work toward some common goal. Other instructors use social networking sites where students can collaborate on projects. These sites are of particular help to more introverted individuals, who are more likely than extraverts to locate their authentic “selves” in cyberspace. **HOLDING THE ATTENTION OF GENERATION Y IS NOT EASY AS THEY ARE USED TO HAVING INFORMATION COME AT THEM FROM VARIOUS SOURCES.**

But with careful planning and being flexible, turning Generation Y from passive learners text messaging their friends in the back of the room into active learners is possible.



# The 10 Best Ways to Increase Teenage Student Motivation

*Ah, the joys of teaching! Young learners are so full of energy that most activities you propose are met with loads of enthusiasm. Adult learners are focused on meeting their language goals and have a wealth of skills and knowledge to contribute to the class.*

However, things are not as simple with teens. Most are very clever and insightful kids, but this is not exactly the most talkative age group. Have you ever faced a class full of blank stares where most of the replies you hear are “Yes”, “No”, or “It depends”? Have you ever felt frustrated by their lack of interest?

Here are some strategies that should get your teens a bit more motivated.

## HOW TO MOTIVATE ESL STUDENTS

### 1 USE AS MANY REFERENCES TO POP CULTURE AS YOU CAN

Consider your teens' interests. Imagine you want to discuss last week's events to practice the past simple tense. Will they be more interested in what President Obama did last week, or which outrageous outfit Lady Gaga wore to an awards show? If you're not willing to discuss Eminem's latest album, or any of the *Twilight* books or films, then you won't connect with your teen students.

### 2 GIVE THEM A LITTLE FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Little kids like to compete, and teens are no different. Whether they play sports or games on the Wii, they always try to out best each other. Why not introduce some friendly competition into the ESL classroom? Games are easy ways to do this, but you can also have them compete in any activity.

- Give them 60 seconds to write down as many words as they can related to a topic, like “clothes” or “foods”.

- Tell them that whoever finishes a written exercise first or has the most correct answers, gets to choose a video to watch or a song to listen to in class.

### 3 CATER TO THEIR SKILLS AND EXPLOIT THEIR TALENTS

Most teens are talented at one thing or another. Take your time to get to know them and discover what these talents are.

- Students who are artistically-inclined may draw pictures, sketches or cartoons of a story you read out loud to the class.
- Do you have a student who plays the guitar? Ask him or her to bring it to class and play a song while the class sings the lyrics in English.

### 4 USE PEN PALS TO MOTIVATE WRITING

If your students are not enthused about writing assignments, give them pen pals to write to. At ESL Teachers Board, or any other message board for ESL teachers, you can post a request for pen pals for your students, and find another teacher with whom you can trade email addresses. Writing to pen pals is a great introduction to what they may have to master later in life: business emails.

### 5 MAKE READING AGE APPROPRIATE

To get students excited about a reading assignment, make sure you choose material that will pique their interest. Naturally, books or stories about teens are sure to work, but you can also include celebrity biographies, anything sports-related, or any topic that may interest them, but is also up to their reading level.

### 6 PLAY SONGS TO IMPROVE LISTENING COMPREHENSION

If you play any of the audio that typically comes with course materials, your teens will most likely tune out and not hear a word. The best way to motivate them to listen is by playing songs. But you should also choose songs they like, or can relate to.

- A worksheet for *Photograph* by *Nickelback* can provide a great warm up exercise and a post-listening activity.
- Or, listen to *So Sick* by *Ne-Yo* and ask your students to complete the tasks set forth in the worksheet.

### 7 HAVE VIDEO LESSONS

Videos have great potential in the ESL class. Thanks to recent advances in technology, we no longer need to have a TV and DVD player in the classroom to teach a video lesson. A laptop will do for a small class, and a speedy Internet connection is great, but not entirely necessary, as you can have video files already downloaded to your computer. To keep teens focused on the task, choose short interviews, movie trailers, music videos, or how to videos on YouTube.

### 8 INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY INTO THE CLASSROOM

In the previous point, we mention how easy it is to show videos on a laptop, but you can integrate technology in so many other ways. **Most teens have excellent Web surfing skills, so why not assign them a WebQuest?**

A WebQuest is an online, inquiry-based activity where students are required to search for specific information within links provided by the teacher, and then produce a report or a PowerPoint presentation. Here are some great examples of WebQuests for teens: <http://www.nelliemuller.com/task2.htm>, but you can also design your own to suit your students' level.

## 9 PLAY GAMES

ESL games motivate any learner whether they are 5 or 50 years old. But with teens, it's important to choose games that will **challenge them, give them the right competitive feel, and help them effectively practice** an ESL item. A guessing game or any type of quiz show game should get them motivated.

- Try this Passive Voice Quiz Game (<http://busyteacher.org/1638-passives.html>), or design your own with similar categories.
- The 6 Clues Guessing Game (<http://busyteacher.org/1953-6-clues.html>) will have your students competing to see who guesses right with the least amount of clues.
- Need another example of a great game to practice grammar? Download the Wh- Questions Game at <http://busyteacher.org/2752-grammar-game-wh-questions.html>.

## 10 USE REALIA IN THE CLASSROOM

The use of real life objects is also a great way to motivate students of all ages. But it is particularly effective with teens who are already lacking in enthusiasm.

- **Giving directions:** Choose places that teens frequently visit like malls, concert venues, or sports stadiums. Use anything from real city maps to brochures of these locations to practice giving directions.
- **Tell me about yourself:** Instead of just telling the class about themselves, ask your teens to bring photos, as well as some of their favorite things, like books, CDs, a skateboard, or anything that represents them.

Make sure that at the beginning of the course you discuss what their learning goals are. They may not have thought of this earlier, but they may come to realize that they need English to surf the Internet, understand their favorite band's songs, or chat with foreign friends. And talking about the things that interest teens is a great way to

establish rapport.

**ONCE YOU CONNECT WITH THEM, YOU WON'T FIND ANY MORE BLANK STARES. YOU'LL SEE A ROOM FULL OF EAGER, SMILING FACES!**

# 7 Steps for Teaching the Intermediate ESL Student

*So you've been assigned an intermediate ESL this term after a number of terms teaching beginning ESL students. This should be a breeze!*

The students understand everything you say, can follow directions, and can carry on a conversation. After a week or so, however, you realize it is **NOT** a breeze. In fact, it's much more challenging than any class you've taught yet! A small contingent of students complains of being bored while other students say they can't understand any of the material. You seem to spend more time on lesson planning than ever before, with only student boredom and confusion to show as a result. **What's going on?** Well, the first problem is to paraphrase a scholar on the topic of assessment, *"there are many rooms in the house of 'intermediate.'"* Many different students with different levels of English skill can be legitimately called "intermediate": for example, those with strong conversational and life skills in English but almost no academic or literacy skills as well as those with strong reading and writing skills who have trouble carrying on a conversation. **This creates a problem for curriculum and instruction:** what exactly do you focus on and teach in such a class? How may these problems be addressed?

## HOW TO TEACH INTERMEDIATE LEARNERS

### 1 DIAGNOSTIC

Give a short diagnostic at the beginning of the term. For example, a small dictation followed by a reading with short answer questions is a versatile tool. This doesn't take a long time to administer, and it reveals some important information on each student's reading, writing, and listening skills. In addition, the instructor can get some information about the class, collectively: if it is trending toward the low or high end of intermediate, or if the class as a whole seems to have better reading and writing skills than listening. This information can inform future lesson planning.

### 2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Unlike beginning students, **students at this level can be asked what they need to work on and what their goals are**, both short and long term. If most of your students are job-oriented, for example, it might make more sense to work on conversational and pronunciation skills than on academic reading and writing. However, if more students have ambitions of obtaining a university degree, then additional emphasis can be placed on developing their academic vocabularies.

### 3 VARIETY OF MATERIALS

**Textbooks often cannot meet the varied needs of an intermediate class because of the range of abilities and interests**, and instructors may find themselves relying on supplementary materials such as newspaper and magazine articles and websites for teachers or chapters from select textbooks that allow duplication of class sets. If you notice a problem with present perfect tense, for example, you can just select a chapter from a grammar text to focus on that specific point rather than going through the whole text.

This variety of different materials increases the probability of reaching more students and holding student interest.

### 4 VARY INSTRUCTION

**Just as the materials should be varied, so should the instruction.** Instructors find themselves sometimes locked into a favorite mode of instruction, such as giving dictation, or playing vocabulary games, or student reading followed by class discussion. Using a variety of instruction rather than one type increases the probability of meeting all students' needs.

### 5 VARY GROUPINGS

And just as the materials and instruction should be varied in an intermediate class, **so should the grouping strategies.** Many ESL teachers have been trained in the value of group instruction, but not all students learn best this way. Some students learn best while working individually. The instruction should be varied from individual, to small group, to large group instruction throughout the course of a lesson.

### 6 FINE TUNE AS YOU GO

As the semester progresses, you may note common problems in paragraphing, for example or in stress and intonation. Give lessons in these areas as you note the problems. **Give frequent assessment**, both formal assessments of quizzes and tests to the more informal homework checks as well as just walking around and noting student interactions in English during discussion.

### 7 STUDENT FEEDBACK

Ask the students periodically how the class is going for them - they can give their feedback anonymously. Do several of these checks throughout the semester, starting several weeks in, perhaps after the first test. Ask students to write on a piece of paper the answer to the questions *"How is the class going for you?"* and *"Are there any changes you'd like to see?"* They then fold the paper and hand it in - no need to give a name. Most students just write things like *"It's great,"* or *"So far so good,"* but sometimes they have valuable feedback like *"I'd like more reading,"* or *"The teacher speaks too quickly"* — sometimes painful but important information! You'd better know about concerns near the beginning of class when they can be addressed than in the course evaluation at the end.

**THE TERM "INTERMEDIATE" ENCOMPASSES A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT STUDENTS: THOSE WHO HAVE JUST A LITTLE CONVERSATIONAL FLUENCY BUT STRONG READING SKILLS, OR THOSE WHO HAVE GOOD CONVERSATIONAL FLUENCY BUT POOR GRAMMAR AND WRITING SKILLS, THOSE WITH DEFINED VOCATIONAL GOALS, AND THOSE WHO WANT TO CONTINUE PURSUING A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION...**

Serving all of these different students with different skills and needs is not easy. In fact, the intermediate level may be the most difficult of the ESL levels to teach. However, by gathering information on the students and the class, varying materials and instruction, and gathering student feedback, the ESL teacher can meet student needs and set up a strong class.

# Is That Supposed to Be Funny? Using Humor in the Classroom and Avoiding the Pitfalls

*Recently my teen-aged daughter and I were watching TV, an old sitcom from the 1970s (one of the mixed blessings of cable networks is old TV programs.)*

In this story, the situation had the head of the household relegated to the spare bedroom due to a swarm of unexpected guests. In his fitful tossing and turning, he accidentally ripped off the mattress tag. He looked at it and then threw his arms to the sky, exclaiming, *“Come and get me!”* **I burst into laughter, while my daughter was merely puzzled, having no idea what the character meant or why it was funny.**

That’s because she is of a different culture than I — generational differences are really cultural differences in societies that undergo rapid change. My daughter did not grow up in the 1970’s, as I did, and when the show was set — when a generation of young people lived in fear of the police kicking down their doors at night over the mattress tags, which read something like: *Remove Under Penalty of Prosecution*. They still may read that, for all I know - I haven’t checked. I still have no idea who would be prosecuted and why — I have to think it was directed at dealers, not consumers. After I explained this all to my daughter, and at some length, she only looked slightly less confused and not at all amused. **This incident hit home for me how humor is so dependent on culture, on a shared context, and why jokes that have to be explained are probably not going to be funny.** Someone from that cultural context makes the connection immediately between the torn-off tag and *“Come and get me!”* and the humor is partly in making that immediate connection.

**ESL students don’t share the same cultural context as their instructor in most cases, making humor in the ESL class dicey.**

## ISSUES OF HUMOR IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

### CULTURALLY AND CONTEXT SPECIFIC

There is the old apology, *“You had to be there”* when a “funny” story falls flat.

Most of the humor of stand-up comedians is based on very specific cultural phenomenon. I watched a comedian once do a hilarious routine on the mundane task of trying to pay bills late at night when tired and either forgetting to put the check in the envelope or putting the address slip in backwards, and then having to rush to open the envelopes before the glue dried to correct the error. This is very culturally embedded and may not make much sense now to those used to paying bills online.

Again, someone I have to explain this to probably won’t find it funny. Much of the humor is recognizing oneself in the poor comedian’s plight.

### UNIVERSAL

**So is there any humor that is universal?** Yes, there is, or near-universal.

In one of my reading classes, the text had a reading about the lifework of movie actor/writer/director Woody Allen, who, not surprisingly, the students were not familiar with. So to give a sense of Allen and his work, I explained the synopsis of one of his short films, *“Oedipus Wrecks,”* which involves the middle-aged Allen character’s overprotective mother, through some magic, appearing in the sky over Manhattan to follow him around and tell him to wear his jacket and so forth. The students were able

to see the humor in this as overprotective mothers are a cultural universal.

## REASONS FOR INCLUDING HUMOR IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

So there appear to be numerous barriers to humor in the ESL classroom. Why include it at all?

### 1 LESSEN ANXIETY

Language learning, adjusting to a new culture, and returning to school can be tense matters. If the teacher can lighten the mood with humor, some of the tension dissipates, leaving students more ready to learn.

### 2 CLASSROOM BONDING

**When you laugh with someone, even a stranger, you bond with that person, if only momentarily.** You’ve shared a small but significant experience with him or her. This goes for students as well. A class that laughs together develops a feeling of goodwill toward each other and can work more productively together.

### 3 LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL LEARNING

**When you learn a society’s humor, how it conveys humor and what it finds funny, you’ve learned quite a lot about its culture.** Generally speaking, the sources of humor are also sources of anxiety, while the laughter is to dispel anxiety. For example, the classic butts of American humor — *mothers-in-law, bosses, coworkers, police officers, cars, fast food restaurants* — all reveal something about the anxieties of an urban, individualistic society.



Sometimes culture and language itself can be sources of humor. For example, a favorite short play I like to teach students is Kaufman and Hart's *"The Still Alarm."* It is written in one scene in a hotel room and has numerous roles for students. It is hilarious in its use of overly polite, inappropriate language, as in the hotel manager knocking and announcing something like, *"Pardon me for intruding, but the building is on fire."* It continues on like this, with the main characters calmly packing to leave, the firemen knocking for entrance, etc. Students are able to see the humor — it is possible to be too polite — and discuss more appropriate language for the situation, such as *"The building's on fire. Get out now!"*

## METHODS FOR INCLUDING HUMOR IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 INCLUDE HUMOR FROM THE BEGINNING

Use humor during such tasks as going over the syllabus with its myriad rules and policies, with such observations as *"Certainly you may miss class for family emergencies, but if your grandmother dies three times during the semester, I may begin to suspect something amiss."*

This gives a lighter approach to rule enforcement while not taking away the importance of the rule.

### 2 LIGHTEN THE MOOD

Use humor to lighten the mood. On test days, making a small joke can lighten what may be a heavy mood.

### 3 CALL ATTENTION TO HUMOR

Call attention to humor and discuss what makes it uniquely American and what seems more universal. Sometimes humor you thought was truly "American" turns out to be more universal and easily accessible.

### 4 SHARE A JOKE FROM THEIR CULTURES

Invite students to share a joke from

their cultures. Have them explain it and why it is funny within that culture. By the time we reach this step, student will have seen me go through the same steps. And if they can do this, explain a joke and its humor within a culture, they have advanced significantly linguistically and cognitively.

### 5 HUMOR IS A TOOL

**Humor is a tool for the class, not the class itself, nor should it be used as a weapon.**

Once my class was next to another that seemed to spend the majority of its sessions in gales of laughter. Although I'm glad they were enjoying themselves so much, I have to wonder how much they actually got done.

**Humor is a tool in the class, not the class content itself.** And needless to say (I hope), humor, especially sarcasm, should never be directed at students. Sarcasm can be hard to understand, even from someone within one's own culture, and "mean" humor becomes a barrier to, not a tool for, learning. Direct humor at inanimate objects or situations, not people.

### USING HUMOR IS NOT WITHOUT POTENTIAL PITFALLS.

However, if done appropriately, it yields many rewards in language and cultural learning as well as classroom bonding.

# Beyond Naptime: Incorporate Movies in the Classroom and Keep them Riveted

Once or twice a semester, teachers will sometimes get the idea of “Let’s watch a movie!”

Often the movie happens to be a personal favorite of the teacher. (I’m a big fan of “*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.”) Movie days can be a break from the regular curriculum, and valuable learning can take place as movies use contextualized language and teach culture.

**However, there is the danger of students nodding off or texting their friends rather than watching the movie. What are ways to prevent this?**

Sometimes the movie itself is a problem. It isn’t necessarily easy to choose a movie that is engaging, appropriate, and in some way instructive. Following is a brief list of films I’ve had success with. Needless to say, the instructor should always preview the film to make sure it will be appropriate for her individual class:

## FIVE ENGAGING FILMS FOR THE ESL CLASS

### 1 FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Classic musical of Tevye the milkman and his family in a Jewish village in turn of the twentieth century Russia. Students relate to Tevye’s struggles and dreams.

### 2 WEST SIDE STORY

Musical retelling of the *Romeo and Juliet* story set in Manhattan between two warring gangs, The Crips and The Jets. Much of the story is still relevant after sixty years, such as the theme of trying to survive in a hostile urban environment.

### 3 MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING

Romantic comedy between the Greek American Toulou and her WASP fiancée, Ian. Students respond readily to the cultural conflict between the two families.

### 4 INVENTION OF LYING

In this Jennifer Gardner comedy, her character, Anna, lives in a fictional world with the main character, Mark — a world where lying hasn’t been invented yet. Mark works as a screen writer where “actors” just read aloud real-life stories. After Mark invents lying, the real complications ensue. Good for ethical and cultural discussions about when it would be appropriate to lie and when not.

### 5 ERIN BROCKOVICH

Julia Roberts plays Erin Brockovich, in a real-life story of a single mother who discovered PGE dumping waste materials in a town’s water supply and fought them in a landmark case. Students find the character inspirational.

## TEN METHODS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH A MOVIE

### 1 SET THE MOVIE UP

Introduce the movie a day before hand, as you would a reading, discussing its *plot* and *characters* and relate it to the curriculum. For example, when showing “*Fiddler on the Roof*,” I’ve explained the major conflicts in the movie related to the characters’ being cultural minorities, which mirrors many of the students’ situations. I also give out the lyrics to “*If I Were a Rich Man*,” which models the unreal conditional.

### 2 LIST OF QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

To keep students attuned to the movie, give them a series of questions to focus them. The questions should focus on both global aspects of the movie: “*Where is the story set?*” and more detailed aspects of it: “*What is the name of the restaurant owned by Toulou’s family?*” to really make sure students are paying attention.

### 3 NEW VOCABULARY TO WATCH FOR

Give students a list of less frequent words used in the movie. See if they can write a definition using the context.

### 4 WRITE A SUMMARY

Summarizing is an important academic skill, and somehow students understand more about what to summarize with a movie — just the highlights — than they do with a written text, perhaps because they are used to orally summarizing movies and events for friends in a way they don’t with written text. **Have the students summarize as if for a friend who hasn’t seen the movie.**

### 5 BE THE REVIEWER

After summarizing, **discuss the difference between evaluating and summarizing**, two skills students tend to confuse. Summarizing is telling what happened, while evaluating is telling the reader your opinion of what happened. Reviewers evaluate, they don’t summarize. Discuss what to evaluate in a movie: *the acting, the sets, the script*, and so forth. Have students form “panels” and each individual within the panel give their evaluation in the form of stars (1 star=bad, 5 stars=excellent.) Have the reviewers defend their number to each other.



After giving their oral review, **have students write their reviews in paragraph form**, starting with a topic sentence that gives their overall evaluation of the movie and then details to support it.

## 6 DISCUSS THE MOST LIKED OR MOST HATED MOVIE CHARACTER

Students select one character each they liked most (or least) and explain why. This may be followed up also in written form. This is a good assignment for teaching paragraph structure for the descriptive paragraph.

For example, students start with a topic sentence that names the topic, or the character, and then comments on that topic with why the character is loved or hated, which is the controlling idea: e.g., “*Toula in ‘My Big Fat Greek Wedding’ is an independent woman.*” Following should be details that support that controlling idea: “*She has the courage to change her life, going against her family traditions.*”

## 7 WRITE A MONOLOGUE FOR A MOVIE CHARACTER

After the more analytical assignments, students can then engage in some creative ones, such as writing a monologue for one of the characters. Explain what a *monologue* is: a one-way extended conversation in which the character is either addressing the audience, himself or herself, or some unseen or silent character.

I like to give students the assignment to have a character explaining to someone “*Rule Number 1.*” If a character explains Rule 1: e.g., “*Rule number 1, man, you don’t go out with your best friend’s ex,*” this shows the character’s value system.

## 8 REWRITE THE DIALOGUE FOR A SCENE

Many beloved movies have dialogue we wish were different. Have students make the characters say what they’d like them to see.

## 9 REWRITE THE ENDING

What would happen to hero and heroine Tony and Maria if Tony didn’t die at the end of *West Side Story*?

Rewrite the ending and show us.

## 10 CHANGE THE SETTING: SET THE STORY IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES OR IN THE PAST

In many movies, the setting seems integral to the story — *Gone with the Wind*, for example, is hard to imagine set anywhere but the Civil War South. Other stories have more universal appeal. Have students experiment by resetting a *Sherlock Holmes* movie to contemporary United States for example.

## MOVIE DAYS AREN’T JUST AN EXCUSE FOR THE TEACHER TO PLAY A FAVORITE FILM, GRADE PAPERS, OR TAKE A BREAK.

The can be a powerful language learning tool if engaging before, during, and after activities are given.

# How to Avoid that Deer-in-the-Headlights-Stare: Start With Simple Instructions

**WE'VE ALL EXPERIENCED THE ALL-TOO-FAMILIAR BLANK STARE RIGHT AFTER GIVING WHAT YOU THOUGHT WERE AMAZINGLY CLEAR AND CONCISE DIRECTIONS.**

The blankness is then followed by whispers, confused looks and lots of questions. I've developed some targeted methods to dodge that deer-in-the-headlights stare, and to ensure that students will not confuse themselves or others during an activity.

Follow these steps, and you'll be an expert at giving simple instructions that truly payoff.

## TIPS TO SIMPLIFYING INSTRUCTIONS

### 1 USE SIMPLE LANGUAGE AND KEEP IT BRIEF

The number one key to giving simple instructions is to keep your language simplified at all times. Think ahead of time how you are going to explain it, and make the assumption that the activity is completely new to the entire class. Explain things with short sentences, easy words, and uncomplicated grammar. It takes some getting used to cutting out extra language and to say only what you need to say.

### 2 USE THE BOARD OR PROVIDE A VISUAL

Utilizing the board to get your point across can greatly take the pressure off your verbal instructions. If it is a game, you can show them how you are going to organize teams and keep score on the board. If they will be using the board to play the game, lay it out in front of them as you explain. Tic Tac Toe is a great example. As you explain, you can draw the diagram

and explain that one team is X and the other team is O. One person takes a turn and answers my question. If it is the X team's turn, one person answers correctly, then the team can put an X in one of the nine boxes. This would be quite difficult to explain only using language.

For more complex activities, a hand-out that they can refer to during the activity is a great tool. Showing it on the board or providing a handout with explicit step-by-step instructions will make your job a lot easier!

### 3 MODEL THE EXERCISE: GIVE EXAMPLES

Never begin a game or an activity without first going through a few examples! You can use your sharpest students as your helpers to go through your instructions and your expectations. Then model the game or activity. Show them exactly how it will go in the beginning, the middle and the end.

For games, you'll want to stress what the goal is and how to win the game. Be sure to include two to three concrete examples in your modeling.

### 4 REPEAT YOURSELF

It always helps to be repetitive so that you can be sure you didn't leave anything out. Go through the directions a second time especially if you can see that students aren't 100% sure about what they are supposed to do. You can also just repeat the model, using a different example..

### 5 DO COMPREHENSION CHECKS

Don't assume that all the students understand! Check to make sure and this will save you time and agony later. A few ways to do this is to question random students about the activity or game. For example, "John, how many

X's do I have to get in a row to win the game?" or "Jane, do I get to put an O in my square if I get the answer wrong?" It may seem simple, but checking to make sure comprehension is there may prevent you from having to interrupt the game to explain again.

Another tip is to focus some of the comprehension checks on students that chronically have problems following or understanding instructions. It is a pretty sure bet that if one of the weaker students is with you, the rest of the class is on the same page.

### 6 ANSWER QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Don't forget to answer their questions before they jump into the activity. This is especially important when they will be working in groups or pairs. Give the students a chance to look through any handouts and see if that sparks any additional questions.

**WHEN GIVING INSTRUCTIONS TO ANY ESL CLASS, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO BECOME AN EXPERT AT GIVING GOOD, CLEAR, CONCISE ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS.**

**YOUR STUDENTS WILL APPRECIATE IT AND IT WILL SAVE YOU A LOT OF GRIEF. DON'T FORGET TO USE HUMOR, BE AS ANIMATED AS POSSIBLE, AND REMEMBER, THERE ARE NO STUPID QUESTIONS!**



# The Gift of Gab: 10 Conversation Starters that Will Never Fail

**OFTENTIMES, STUDENTS ARE QUIET SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT BEEN PROPERLY PROMPTED TO SPEAK.**

Some may have the gift of gab in their native language, others are typically shy. Whatever the case may be, it is the ESL teacher's role to provide students with ample opportunities for speaking. Here are 10 conversation starters that will never fail you. Seriously. They work great as ice-breakers or time fillers, and may be used to practice a variety of verb tenses.

## TRY THESE 10 CONVERSATION STARTERS WITH YOUR NEXT CLASS

### 1 WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

The ideal conversation starter for a multicultural classroom, this simple question is great for groups of all levels and may be expanded to include more complex questions for higher levels. Start by asking a student where he/she is from, and then encourage the others to ask more specific questions about what you can do there, what the typical food is, what language they speak there, etc.

### 2 NAME 3 THINGS YOU HAVE IN YOUR HOME/ROOM

Students take turns naming things they have at home or in their bedroom. Encourage them to name things that may be unusual, perhaps a strange musical instrument or equipment for a sport not everyone plays. Students may also expand on their answers and explain why there is, for example, an antique typewriter in their home (it belonged to a grandparent). **Make it challenging** and tell each student that they can't repeat an item already mentioned by a previous student.

### 3 TELL US ABOUT THE LAST FILM YOU SAW AT THE MOVIES

Ask the student to name the film, and if possible give a short summary of the plot (without spoiling the ending!) Students then ask him/her questions about the film, like who's in it, how long it is, if it's a good film, if they liked/recommend it, etc. Expand to a discussion of the types of films they enjoy the most and their favorite movies.

### 4 WHICH 3 THINGS WOULD YOU TAKE TO A DESERTED ISLAND?

Students name three things they would take with them to a deserted island and why. You can make it more challenging by specifying that each of the three things have to be one animal, one technological device and one non-technological device. Say what they would do with each.

### 5 WHAT IS YOUR DREAM VACATION DESTINATION?

Students say where they would like to go, anywhere in the world and why. What would they do there? What sites/places would they see? Encourage students to ask questions, or ask students to supply information they may have about the destination. Has anyone else been there? Share!

### 6 TELL US ABOUT YOUR FIRST JOB

A good conversation starter for adult ESL learners, students talk about their first job. Where did they work? What did they do? What were their responsibilities? How long did they work there? Why did they leave this position? Students discuss if it's a common job, if there are lots of people who do this or if it's an unusual thing to do.

### 7 WHAT WAS THE LAST THING YOU BOUGHT?

Students talk about the last item they bought. Why did they buy it? Where? Was it a gift or for personal use? Expand to discuss where students usually go shopping. Do they ever buy things online? What would they buy and what wouldn't they buy online? Do they prefer large department stores or small

shops?

### 8 IF YOU HAD TO ELIMINATE ONE OF THESE THINGS FROM YOUR LIFE, WHICH WOULD IT BE? YOUR COMPUTER, YOUR CELL PHONE, OR YOUR TV?

Which would they choose and why? How would their lives be different without this particular item? Why did they choose to keep the other two? What are the advantages and disadvantages of keeping each item?

### 9 WHAT IS ONE THING YOU'VE NEVER DONE (AND YOU'D LIKE TO DO)?

Get the ball rolling by telling your students about something you've never done: *"I've never hiked to Machu Picchu, but I want to."* Students take turns talking about things they've never done before, but they'd like to do. They must start by saying, *"I've never..."* Find out if there is anyone who has already done that. *"Pablo says he's hiked to Machu Picchu. Tell us what that was like, Pablo."*

### 10 IF YOU HAD 3 WISHES TO MAKE, WHAT WOULD YOU WISH FOR?

This is the classic conversation starter for students who have been learning the unreal conditional. Ask each student to name their three wishes and say why they'd wish for that. How would their lives be different if these wishes came true? Here, you may also ask students to not repeat previous students' wishes.

THERE ARE LOTS OF OTHER GREAT CONVERSATION STARTERS. WHEN CHOOSING ONE, TRY TO MAKE IT SOMETHING THAT SPARKS INTEREST IN YOUR CLASS.

You may also tailor each question to your class. You may ask a group of teens who is, in their opinion, the greatest pop star today, but don't ask them who the greatest pop star of the 80s or 90s was!

# Using Clear and Precise Language: 10 Terrific Tips for ESL Teachers and Students

*Your students are learning complex grammatical structures. They are perfecting their pronunciation and learning how to listen better. Even their vocabularies are expanding, but something is missing.*

You hear them using the same words over and over, bland words that may get the message across but certainly don't make it interesting. You want to see them use precise language, pack more meaning in the same number of words. They want it too, even if they do not know it yet, and here are 10 terrific tips to get them to a place to achieve it.

## GIVE THEM THE TOOLS

### 1 THESAURUS RULES

Using a thesaurus is as simple as using a dictionary, and your students probably already own that skill. Show your students what a thesaurus contains, how it is different from a dictionary, and how to use it. Make sure they know they can look up the synonyms they find in the thesaurus in the dictionary to get a more precise understanding of their meaning. Then make several thesauruses available in your classroom for students to use during independent writing time.

### 2 EXPANDED VOCABULARY

If you teach ESL, you are going to be teaching vocabulary. But why not take your vocabulary lessons to the next level by **giving not only the required words, but a synonym and antonym for each?** Teaching **groups of words** rather than words in isolation will help your students develop a broader set of vocabulary and make more connections between the words

that they learn, and that means they will be able to remember and use more words more easily.

### 3 BANK ON IT

You might also work together as a class to develop general word banks. Note which general words your students tend to use repeatedly (*make, do, go, thing, easy, eat, etc.*) and put word bank posters on display in your classroom. Whenever anyone finds or uses a more precise word for any of the general words on the posters (a synonym), add it to the list. Your students will always have words at their fingertips to use in place of the boring words when they look at the posters around the room!

## GET THEM THINKING

### 4 JOURNALISTIC QUESTIONS

If your students do not know what details to share when they are speaking or writing, how can they express those ideas precisely? To help them through these hurdles, teach your students how to generate ideas using journalistic questions. Have partners ask each other questions that start with *who, what, where, why, when* and *how* to encourage details when telling a story. Make sure your students know they can make notes as they answer their partner's questions to use when they write later.

### 5 USE YOUR SENSES

Another way to help your students think in detail is using sensory perceptions in descriptions. You may want to start by giving your students a list of descriptive words that can be used in association with each sense. (Something along the lines of taste: *sweet, bitter, savory, appe-*

*tizing, bland, buttery, acidic, etc.*) Have your students imagine themselves in a place that they know. Ask them to note what it looks like, what it smells like, what they can hear and any other sensory details they can come up with. Encourage them to use words from your sensory word lists and be precise in what they describe.

### 6 SHED SOME LIGHT ON WRITING

For a teacher with a little creativity, there is no end to the use for highlighters. You can put them to the task of improving your students' expressive language with a little help from your class. The next time you pair your students for peer review of writing, give each person a highlighter and have him note any particularly interesting or descriptive words in his partner's piece. Then have students hand their papers back to the writer and look to see what their partner highlighted in their pieces.

## REWARD CREATIVITY

### 7 PUT YOUR CARDS ON THE TABLE

You can make several games geared toward expanding and enhancing your students' vocabularies. When you introduce synonyms and antonyms, use index cards to create a deck of matching pairs. Then use these cards for a memory style game or *go fish*.

### 8 PAYBACKS

Whenever a student discovers a specific or precise word, reward him! You may consider making a paper chain to hang around your classroom, adding one link at a time displaying an interesting word your students discover.



## 9 BID BYE-BYE TO BORING

**Play a game of banishing boring sentences!** Write a very generic sentence on the board (e.g. *The person went there.*) and challenge your students to rewrite the sentence in a creative way. Tell them that they cannot change the general meaning of the sentence, but they should get as creative as they can while still keeping the general meaning the same.

## 10 DEAL WITH IT

**For a real challenge, take a set of vocabulary index cards and have each student choose two cards without looking at them.** She must then write one sentence that uses both of the descriptive words. Each person scores 10 points every time he makes a logical sentence with his two descriptive words. See who has the most points after five rounds!

### WHEN STUDENTS LEARN AND USE CREATIVE AND SPECIFIC LANGUAGE, THEY WILL BE MORE MOTIVATED TO CONTINUE DOING JUST THAT.

Making vocabulary and language learning fun can mean all the difference between embracing boring words and ones that are breathtaking.

# 10 Fresh Roleplay Ideas for General English

**ROLE PLAYS ARE AN EXCELLENT WAY OF GETTING YOUR STUDENTS TO PRACTISE THEIR ENGLISH. THEY SIMULATE REAL LIFE SITUATIONS AND ALLOW THEM TO ACT OUT WHAT THEY WOULD DO IN A REAL SITUATION.**

There are two ways a role play can go: *scripted* and *non-scripted*. With a scripted role play, the teacher might use an example in a text book. This is a good idea for a warm up exercise, by getting everyone to split up into pairs and allow them to speak to their partner, taking on different roles. Non-scripted ones are when students are given a role each and must use whatever knowledge they have in order to speak with that partner. Below is a list of ideas for a general English class. This can be adapted to suit a situation.

## TRY THESE FRESH ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES WITH YOUR CLASS

### 1 TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

Speaking on the phone is different to a face-to-face conversation because one relies solely on language to communicate. Get the students who are practicing to **sit back to back** in order for this to work properly. There is a whole range of ideas which one can use to act this out. Examples include: *phoning to make a complaint, speaking to a friend or inquiring about a job position.*

### 2 GOING TO THE SHOP

A great one for younger learners as it will teach them the basics of interacting with people. Children generally rely on their parents to buy things for them, therefore this will boost their overall general confidence in buying. It can be as simple or as complex as one wishes, depending on the situation. Key phrases are often important here, such as *"I would like..." "How much are..." "Good morning..."* and so forth.

### 3 BOOKING A HOTEL

This will allow students to practise a specific type of language. Usually this will be formal language as it is a business conversation. This can also be done in the format of a telephone conversation, or it could be someone approaching a text. There is a wide range of opportunity here for the students to learn new forms of vocabulary.

### 4 SHARING OPINIONS

Choose a topic that everyone appears to be interested in. Get the students to pair up and give them a list of questions to follow. This will allow them to come up with their own phrases and use language in a much more practical way.

### 5 JOB INTERVIEW

Work is usually a good topic to begin with when teaching adults. Many are learning English in order to improve their career prospects. As a result, a **job interview role play is an excellent way to get the class learning that all important material.** Again, this can be *scripted* or *non-scripted*. A good idea would be to have the interviewer have a list of set questions, and the students can take it from there.

### 6 GETTING EVERYONE TO SPEAK

A traditional method is to ask the class to pair off. Of course, one cannot monitor every student particularly if the class is quite large. Therefore, it is important to make sure everyone is speaking and getting the most out of the language they know. If one has time, **have each individual group come up to the top of the class and speak in front of everyone else.** This will allow people to use their language more creatively.

### 7 ARGUMENT BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS

Again, this is a new opportunity for learning different types of vocabulary. This could be between two neighbours who are having an argument. *Perhaps one*

*plays music too loudly in the middle of the night* and is disturbing the rest of the apartment block. This can be as absurd or ridiculous as the students' want, as long as they are speaking and using the language correctly. Some of the situations thought up can be quite amusing.

### 8 BODY LANGUAGE

Body language is just as important as spoken language, so in their role plays try and let the students get into the role. Of course, one does not have to be an expert at acting but it is important for them to get a feel of the flow of the conversation. **Using body language effectively** will allow them to become a lot more in tune with the language they are using.

### 9 DEBATE

Debates are a brilliant way of encouraging language use. This is because they can become somewhat **heated**, and many new words can come up. It is important to choose a topic which might not be too controversial to some students. Remember to be sensitive to their age group and the general attitude of the particular country. Divide the class into two sides and give them each a side of an argument to defend.

### 10 HAVE FUN

When it comes to role plays, it is all about the creative use of language. The student must put what they know to the test. This doesn't mean they have to list off a boring dialogue. **Allow them to be as creative as they can.** Put them into challenging situations, and this will allow them to think of new ways of saying things.

**ROLE PLAYS CAN WORK AS A GREAT ICE BREAKER FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE CLASS.**

Always remember to be sensitive to any particular issues at the time, however, and be wary of the students' age. Usually, the likes of filing a complaint will not really be of interest to children. Once the students are having fun and speaking English, there are no limits to their own learning!

# How to Distribute Talking Time Between Students

SOME PEOPLE WILL FIND THAT THERE ARE STUDENTS WHO DO VERY LITTLE TALKING DURING THE CLASS. THIS CAN SOMETIMES BE A PAIN FOR THE TEACHERS AND IT IS USUALLY TEMPTING TO JUST GIVE UP ON THAT PARTICULAR STUDENT. OTHERS WILL MORE OR LESS DOMINATE THE CLASS. THERE ARE MANY CASES WHERE A STUDENT WILL JUST KEEP TALKING TO THE POINT OF OTHERS NOT REALLY BEING ABLE TO PUT A WORD IN EDGEWAYS.

Of course, it is important that every person in the class has a chance to talk, express their view and ultimately practise their use of the language. Teachers might think it is a lot easier for them if one student keeps talking, as it does make time go faster, but this can be detrimental to the learning of others. One needs to make sure that everyone is up to the same level. There is no telling how much the others have progressed or learned if there is one or two people who have all the talking time during the class.

Below are several methods whereby a teacher can insure that everybody has a chance to speak. Of course, some students will be a little bit more shy than others and this definitely plays a role in it.

## HOW TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE GETS A CHANCE TO TALK

### 1 ASKING AN OPINION

Find a controversial or interesting topic for students to read about. After the reading exercise is finished, allow them to discuss it by asking each student in turn. This is by far one of the easiest ways to make every student get a say in the topic at

hand.

Don't feel bad about cutting one short, and just remind them that there may not be a lot of time left and therefore everyone will need to get a word in. This is also a great way of getting the students who are a bit more shy to give their opinion and practice their skills. It is also a great way to get new vocabulary up on the board.

### 2 STORY STICK

This is another excellent way of making sure some of the talking is done *evenly* between students.

The concept of the story stick is that a group of people make up one story, each adding their own part to it. This could be done as a warm up exercise, or one to fill in the last few minutes of a particular class. It is usually best if the teacher comes up with the first sentence or part of the story.

Start with something simple such as "*Linda is a girl who likes to dream...*" and let it go from there. Allow each student to add a sentence to the story. Eventually, something will begin to shape. Get one of them to write it down and then pass it around. Allow each student to read out a paragraph from this.

Not only can the story stick be a great way of distributing talking time between the students, but it can also be a lot of fun. This is indeed a great exercise to practise on children. It will stimulate their own creative juices and you never know what they may come up with!

### 3 THE LEADER

Usually, in some classes, there will be one student who tends to dominate all conversation. This could discourage other students from joining in which can be detrimental. As a result, it will be important to make sure the more shy students have a chance to get their word in. Usually they may not feel that they are good enough to and

would rather that someone else speak for them.

One of the first things to do is, when the dominant student is talking, is to politely stop them and asking another student if they agree with his or her opinion. This will do well to stimulate conversation between the two students, allowing the less practised one to get a few words in. There are of course other ways in which this can be put to use.

If the more talkative student prefers to do a lot of the speaking, then form an activity such as a **debate** that the class has to do. Allow them to organize it, but have them ask for help and the opinions of others on their team. This way they will happily be able to keep talking, but others will also get a say in what is going on.

AS YOU CAN SEE, UTILIZING THE STRONG POINTS OF A CLASS CAN HAVE MANY GOOD RESULTS. THIS MEANS THAT ALL STUDENTS WILL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO PARTICIPATE, WITHOUT FEELING LIKE THEY ARE BEING PUT ON THE SPOT.

This is especially important when it comes to the idea of "the Leader". You may feel bad in telling them to stop talking after a certain point, so this is just a subtle way of letting them continue speaking, but also giving others a chance to do so as well. This way, no one's feelings are hurt and the appropriate goals are reached!



# What is the Communicative Style and How to Make it Work for You

## THE COMMUNICATIVE METHOD IS ALL ABOUT COMMUNICATION.

Communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. The teacher sets up situations that students are likely to encounter in real life. Unlike other methods of language teaching, which rely on repetition and drills, the Communicative Approach focuses more on spontaneous activities and practice, which provides varied outcomes depending on student reactions and responses.

The real-life simulations differ from day to day so that students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about significant topics. This method is focused upon students being able to communicate in a conscious way, taking into account real experiences. See how you can make the Communicative Style work for you.

## HOW TO MAKE THE COMMUNICATIVE METHOD WORK FOR YOU

### 1 UTILIZE CREATIVITY

Utilizing the Communicative Method comes more naturally than that of any rote system devised to keep students following the book at all times and memorizing all the material they can. This method is a way for both teacher and students to get the most out of the classroom experience. Utilize your own creativity to create activities and exercises that would otherwise have your students either moaning or snoring.

Put life into your lessons by remembering that each explanation or point needs to be followed by some kind of hands-on practice. Doing it this way pushes students to display compre-

hension of the point by participating. It also gives them the opportunity to work out the kinks naturally and they can begin to formulate their own questions. This method also should facilitate a safe learning environment where students are comfortable, aspire to speak and want to participate in activities that strengthen their abilities.

### 2 TESTS & DRILLS

You can still incorporate a small amount of drilling and testing. It is good to integrate quizzes and tests, but even those can be created communicatively. Base your tests on real-life situations and practical combinations of fill in the blank, multiple choice, true and false and essay. There are some topics, like irregular past tense verbs, that absolutely need to be drilled. You can create drills that are more like games. Play Tic Tac Toe or four in a row with verbs instead of having them just memorize words. They will need to memorize the verbs, but they also need practice using them in spoken and written English. Find ways to make drills fun and engaging and students will respond with increased involvement as well as more highly developed skills.

### 3 USE GAMES & INTERACTIVE PRACTICE

The Communicative Style gets the teacher out of the forefront and has the students doing the real nitty-gritty work. You explain the grammar. You guide the students in understanding and then you come up with the ideas of how they have fun practicing it. You moderate. The students should get plenty of floor time and should be the ones speaking most of the time.

There are lots of websites out there to give you ideas about games you can play, activities you can incorporate,

ways to break up lessons into activities. Think about simulating real life. Have the students do role plays that are guided but unscripted. Give them puzzles that take language and communication to work out. Incorporate competition and team oriented games as well as group and pair work.

Combine students in different ways and provide variety through activities. Try new things and don't be afraid to take some risks in generating original and entertaining ways to bring language to life.

## THE COMMUNICATIVE METHOD IS THE BEST WAY TO TEACH LANGUAGE.

YOU WILL FIND THAT IT OPENS UP A WHOLE NEW WORLD IN WHICH YOU HAVE A LOT MORE FREEDOM AND CREATIVITY. IT WILL BENEFIT YOUR STUDENTS BY GIVING THEM A SAFE VENUE IN WHICH TO EXPERIMENT AND LEARN MORE IN A SHORTER PERIOD OF TIME. I HAVE BOTH TAUGHT WITH IT AND STUDIED WITH IT, AND IT PROVIDES ABUNDANT RESULTS AND CONNECTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM THAT YOU JUST CANNOT ACHIEVE IN ANY OTHER WAY!

# 10 Conversational and Academic Phrases to Get Students Speaking and Writing in No Time

**WHEN STUDENTS USED TO ASK ME ABOUT HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE TO LEARN ENGLISH, I'D USUALLY MUMBLE SOMETHING ABOUT AN APPOINTMENT AND HURRY AWAY.**

I didn't want to tell them the cold facts: conventional wisdom, as well as research, suggests that it takes about 3 years for conversational proficiency and 5 years to learn a second language at a level to function in an academic setting. And while knowing these facts has kept me from investing in programs that claim a second language can be learned in two weeks, it has also somewhat discouraged me from pursuing further study in my own second languages, knowing the amount of time involved. And while I would certainly want to dissuade my students from investing in dubious language programs, I don't want to discourage them from studying a second language altogether. Most of all, I want them to experience some immediate success with English.

Small, immediate success helps students communicate in their second language and also motivates the learner to keep studying—necessary because language learning is a long, arduous task that requires persistence.

One way to help students with some immediate success in second language learning is through teaching some useful phrases.

So instead of the first lessons in English being taken up with learning the verb “to be,” students should learn some language that is used a lot in speaking or writing, that students need to understand, and that they can take out that day and use and actually simulate some fluency in doing so. Prefabricated phrases, or ready-made

phrases, like “How's it going?” help toward these ends. In fact, research suggests language is actually learned and stored in memory in these phrases.

## 10 MOST USEFUL ACADEMIC AND CONVERSATIONAL PHRASES

### 1 “ON THE OTHER HAND”

Signaling contrast, this phrase is often used in both writing and speaking. It has an intuitive appeal: most speakers can see the literal relationship of indicating a point (e.g., going out for Mexican food) “on one hand” and its contrast (e.g., going out for Chinese food) “on the other hand”—sometimes even holding up their own hands when enumerating the points.

Strangely, however, although they understand the phrase, even native speakers sometimes mess up the form: “on the other hands,” “on a other hand,” etc. If students learn the form as a “frozen” one—e.g., it never changes—then this will clear up some errors..

### 2 “BY THE WAY”

This is a useful phrase for raising a point that the speaker has just been reminded of: e.g., “By the way (speaking of summer), have you had the air conditioner serviced?” Students often mishear this: I've seen it written “by-derway,” which is what it sounds like, approximately. Therefore, teaching students the correct spelling and pronunciation gives them a useful tool in raising an important issue. It should however be noted that teaching stu-

dents the literal meaning of phrases is often counterproductive: the literal meaning of “by the way” is only peripherally connected to its actual use.

### 3 “AS I WAS SAYING”

This is another useful phrase for returning the conversation to an earlier point, often after having been interrupted: “As I was saying, it's getting late, and we should go.” Since the phrase often serves as a gentle reminder that you were speaking and had made a point, it is especially helpful to ESL students, who might frequently be interrupted due to their uncertainty with the language.

### 4 “AT ANY RATE”

This is a phrase often used to sum up a conversation and bring it to a close: “At any rate, I don't know why the instructor is not here, but I need to go now.”

### 5 “I WANT TO/I DON'T WANT TO”

These are among the most common phrases in the English language and serve as sentence stems: they can be followed by almost any base verb: “I don't want to go.” Learning how they are pronounced in rapid speech— “I wannuh” and “I don't wannuh”— and how they are used will expand students productive language.

### 6 “DO YOU KNOW IF—?”

This is another phrase that if learned the way a native speaker says it in rapid speech (“Duh yuh know if-?”) can expand students' fluency and productive speech because it can be followed with almost any short affirmative sentence: “Do you know if

class meets at 8 am?"

## 7 "WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO—?"

This useful phrase signals a request in a very polite way and can be followed by almost any verb phrase: "Would you be willing to give me a ride home?"

## 8 "WHAT DOES X MEAN?"

This is especially useful as classroom language. Almost any word can stand in for "X," and students can with this phrase expand their vocabulary.

## 9 "HOW DO YOU SAY X?"

Like item 8 above, this is also useful classroom language for expanding the speaker's vocabulary. Again, if learned as a native speaker would say it ("Howd'yuh say—"), it can also simulate fluency.

## 10 "FOR EXAMPLE"

This phrase is especially useful in writing and can be used to expand on a certain point: "San Francisco has many great tourist attractions. For example—!"

## METHODS FOR TEACHING PHRASES

There are numerous ways to teach the frequently used phrases of our language. One such method is simply to call attention to the phrases we use in speaking and writing: "Why did the actor in the TV show say 'at any rate'? Why does the author use 'on the other hand' here?" Part of language learning is to understand speakers and writers actually do use the language learned in the classroom: it is not just an academic exercise.

## 1 FILL IN THE BLANKS AND MATCHING

Both of these exercises are great for learning form and meaning:

Fill in the blank: on\_\_other hand

Match: on the other hand an opposite

point.

## 2 APPLY A LIST TO CONVERSATION OR WRITING

Hand out a list of phrases, give students a writing topic or speaking topic, and tell them to write or speak, working in three or five phrases from the list..

## LANGUAGE IS LEARNED MOSTLY IN PHRASES THAT ARE USED AGAIN AND AGAIN.

It is also probably stored in memory in phrases: when I think of my second languages, for example, what comes to mind are a few often-used phrases: "Ya ne znayu," in Russian ("I don't know"), "comment dit en francais—" ("How do you say in French—") and "Viyudaber Moishe" in biblical Hebrew ("And Moses said—"). Even today, if I throw out one of these phrases, I'll get compliments from native speakers on my strong second language skills. I've actually plateaued at a low intermediate level in those languages, but I've learned a few phrases very well. And if I go to a Russian or French speaking country, I can get around and could advance further with study. Learning often-used phrases in your second language has strong practical, academic, cognitive, and motivational value.



# Holler at Your Boy! Using Slang in the ESL Classroom

Slang in the classroom is not for every ESL teacher. Those whose students' future language usage will be limited to formal situations in which slang is not used may want to spend precious class hours on other topics. Most ESL students, however, will need to know at least some degree of slang if they plan to interact with native English speakers either socially or in the classroom. Besides, many ESL students find lessons on slang entertaining and enjoyable and give them a nice break from the standard textbook lessons, so most ESL teachers find lessons on slang a welcome addition to the curriculum. If you are looking to make slang a regular part of your lesson plans or are just looking for an occasional break from the standard curriculum, here are some ways you can use slang in your ESL classroom..

## 1 SLANGUAGE QUIZ

Start by giving groups of students two sets of index cards. On one set of cards, write an assortment of contemporary slang. On the other set, write more traditional synonyms or phrases for the slang expressions. (You can find a set of 20 common slang terms and their definitions here or compile your own collection from an online slang dictionary!) Using both sets of cards, groups try to match the correct slang term to its definition. Give students enough time to attempt their matches before giving them the correct answers. Afterward, ask your students why slang can make it difficult to understand English speakers in real life. When has slang posed the biggest problem for them and their English skills? Allow several students to share with the class. Why do they think English speakers enjoy using slang in their speech? Encourage your students to discuss how they feel about slang usage in their native languages.

## 2 WHAT IS SLANG?

After they have become familiar with the examples from the last activity, ask your students to attempt to define slang. Point out that slang may include specific vocabulary, phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions all of which are used in casual English conversation. Do your students think slang is a valuable form of speech? How might a person go about putting together a dictionary of

slang terms? Why might that be difficult? Point out to your students that dictionaries such as the Oxford English Dictionary make updates to their vocabulary compilations each year, and slang regularly makes its way into this official book. March 2012 was the most recent online update for the OED, and it now includes such slang terms as LARPing, scratchiti, soz (British slang), and boofy (Australian slang). Give your students some online time at oed.com to look up some of the slang words they already know, and challenge them to see if they know any slang terms that cannot be found in the dictionary..

## 3 BRINGING IT HOME

Your students now have a theoretical knowledge of slang, but what about practical experience? You have many options for the means of bringing slang into your classroom. When you do welcome slang, your students will learn more lifelike English than is sometimes found in the text books, and they will be better able to understand and communicate with native speakers.

### HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO BRING HOME THE SLANG:

- Find conversation partners for your students. If you teach in a school that also has native English speakers attending, you and another class may be able to mutually benefit one another simply by scheduling times to talk.
- When you cannot get native speakers into the classroom, bring your classroom to the native speakers. Reality television is more than just a source of entertainment for those who watch. Since the dialogue is not scripted like in other programs, your students will gain exposure to real life English as spoken by the typical American. Try showing your class popular programs that have a lot of interaction among contestant like Survivor, Celebrity Apprentice, Keeping Up with the Kardashians, or The Amazing Race (many of which offer full episodes online at no charge). Again, encourage your students to take notes as they listen.
- Public places are a great place for

your students to overhear conversations prime with slang. Send your students out to coffee shops, restaurants, shopping malls or other locations where people gather to talk. Challenge your students to sit down with a cup of coffee and listen for unusual English expressions as they write them down in their notebooks. Then bring your class back together to swap notes and define the expressions they gathered. Try using the Urban Dictionary or other online resource if you get stumped.

- Another resource for conversational English that keeps your students in the classroom is YouTube. This site offers a never ending selection of videos made by real people. You may have to do some digging to find the best videos for your students, but if you enjoy watching popular videos on your own time, just make note of the ones that would work best in your classroom and that showcase some unique slang expressions.

No matter where the words come from, ask your students to keep track of the slang expressions they learn, and encourage them to use the expressions themselves if they are comfortable doing so. Start a class collection of slang terms. Keep a set of index cards near a bulletin board. When a student learns a new slang term, he writes in on one side of the card and then writes the definition on the other side. Pin it up on the board and your students can check out the unusual words at their leisure.

### THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY REQUIRED CLASSROOM FAIR, SLANG IS ESSENTIAL FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS WHO HOPE TO INTERACT WITH THE PUBLIC IN CASUAL CONVERSATION.

For that reason, ESL teachers actually help their students become better English speakers when they include slang in the classroom. Though it may seem like a waste of time when the final exam is drawing ever nearer, your students will appreciate the exposure to and understanding of what real English speakers say! So take a chance, change it up and let your students add some flavor to their English lexicons with a lesson on slang.

# Little Things That Make Your Lesson a Success

When we think about teaching a new class, the first things that come to mind are all of the curricular aspects: the grammar, structures and vocabulary we'll cover throughout the course. Our teaching goals are most often aligned with these things we wish our students to master upon completion of the course. However, consider this: most teachers are able to teach the grammar... but how can you make a difference? What can you do to truly make your lesson a complete and utter success? These "little things" will work wonders: be sure to try them!

## REMEMBER THESE LITTLE THINGS

### 1 TEACHING IN CONTEXT AND WITH REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

We all have to use a course book, that's true. But the problem with course books is that they are filled with fictional characters students may have a hard time relating to. Why would they care about a fictional "Mr. Thompson" and how he did in his job interview? Or worse yet, why would they be interested in reading about a town that doesn't exist, when they can read about a real one, one they could possibly even visit some time?

Say you'd like to read about two cities and practice comparatives and superlatives. Use real maps and accurate information you can easily find on the Internet. Use your students' resumes to practice interview questions, not "Mr. Thompson's". With the huge royal wedding coming up, wouldn't your students love to know more about Prince William and Kate Middleton?

Whenever possible skip the fictional characters and use real people, real places - and don't forget to include some realia!

### 2 CATERING TO YOUR STUDENTS' NEEDS

Sometimes the course book sets out activities that are not really appropriate to the group you're teaching. This is frequently the case with teenagers, when

some of the material may be either too childish, or too adult. Don't be afraid to make some minor adjustments to make the material work for your students' needs.

This is also particularly useful to remember with students who have really specific needs, for example a group who wishes to improve their Business English writing skills. Imagine you've just covered a chapter where the topic was "Hotel English". Ask your students to write an email to inquire about a hotel's conference facilities for homework, and you'll have them practicing their email writing skills..

### 3 BOOSTING THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

Students are often self-conscious, insecure and feel frustrated with their efforts. Corrections are an essential part of the lesson, but don't forget to praise their efforts, as well, no matter how small their achievements may seem.

One great way to give them instant boosts of self-esteem is to end each lesson with a "What have you learned today?" This simple question is a great way for them to review the day's activities and see just how much they've accomplished. Even if their answer is "We learned the alphabet today", this is something they should be proud of..

### 4 TAKING ADVANTAGE OF LEARNING STYLES OR SPECIAL ABILITIES

How many times have you met students with amazing talent and unusual abilities? Whether it is incredible musical or artistic talent, exceptional writing or speaking skills, another wonderful way to make a lesson a huge success is by incorporating some of this talent.

Why play a CD when you have a student who can play the song on his guitar? If you have a group of very artistic youngsters, give them crafts to engage them in their learning.

### 5 USING THEIR LIKES AND PREFERENCES

Related to the above, but only slightly different, is to use their interests to increase motivation and participation.

If most of the class has read the Twilight books, use the characters to practice physical descriptions, talk about the weather in the small town of Forks, practice conditionals – would you become a vampire if you had the choice? Compare different types of supernatural beings, etc. Besides, just knowing who Bella and Edward are will definitely give you some street cred!

### 6 TEACHING CULTURE

Learning English as a second language is not all about the grammar, structures and vocabulary. It's also about why, how and where it's spoken. What is Thanksgiving and how did it originate? This is something that will surely interest your students. Compare the way things are done in different cultures. Students who are accustomed to having dinner at 8 p.m. might be surprised to find out that Americans usually dine at 6 p.m.

**IT WILL TAKE A LITTLE BIT MORE OF YOUR TIME TO PREPARE, AND YOU MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO GO WITH THE COURSE BOOK MATERIALS. BUT ANY EXTRA TIME SPENT WILL BE WELL WORTH IT ONCE YOU SEE YOUR STUDENTS FULLY ENGAGED IN THE LESSON AND PUTTING TO PRACTICE EVERYTHING THEY'VE LEARNED.**

**WE'RE NOT SAYING YOU SHOULD THROW THE COURSE BOOK OUT THE WINDOW! JUST MAKE THESE "LITTLE" ADJUSTMENTS HERE AND THERE AND YOU'LL SEE BIG DIFFERENCES!**

# 5 Most Creative Homework Assignments That Work

**MOST ESL TEACHERS AGREE THAT HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS ARE AN ABSOLUTE MUST IN AN ESL COURSE.**

But ESL students, on the other hand, may disagree. Adult learners will argue that they have busy schedules and a life outside the classroom, which translates into “no time for homework”. Young learners and teens may come to terms with the fact that they have to do homework, but do we want them to do it because they are compelled to do it... or do we want them to do it because they are excited to do it? Which would you prefer?

The only way to get young students excited about doing homework is through highly creative and thoroughly engaging homework assignments. And here are 5 examples:

## HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS THAT WORK

### 1 A WORD BOOK

A Word Book or Vocabulary Journal is a classic among teachers of young learners and teenagers who are not adept at using dictionaries. Here they have a chance to make their own. Help them design their very own Word Book from scratch, out of construction paper, cardboard, or any materials you have on hand. At the end of a reading task or activity, make a list of the words they have learned for the day. Their homework assignment is to enter each of the new words in their Word Book. The littlest ones simply copy the word and draw a picture of it, while older students can use the word in a sentence that illustrates its meaning. There is no need to copy “dictionary” definitions. They may also cut out pictures from magazines or newspapers and get as creative as they like. But one thing is certain: these will be words they won't easily forget!

### 2 DO MY RESEARCH!

This is an extremely engaging way to provide extended practice of any grammar point. Say you want your students to practice comparatives and superlatives. Tell them you need information on this year's Oscar nominations. Tell them to go to [Oscar.go.com](http://Oscar.go.com) and give them a list of questions they must answer:

- Which of the nominees for Best Picture is the longest film? Which is the shortest? The most popular? Earned the most money at the box office?
- Which film has the most nominations?
- Which in your opinion is the best film?
- Compare two of the actresses nominated for Best Actress. Who is older? Younger? Taller? Prettier?
- Etc.

You may assign any number of research tasks: ideal places for a family vacation ([LonelyPlanet.com](http://LonelyPlanet.com)), best restaurants in the city ([Zagat.com](http://Zagat.com)), or anything based on local information.

Just make sure you give them a website to go to, a set of questions to answer or a task to complete, and above all don't forget to plan the assignment with a grammar point or learning objective in mind.

### 3 IN THE NEWS

This is an ideal assignment for adult students. Most read the newspaper anyway, right? Or watch the evening news. Ask them to choose a news story that has piqued their interest, and have them:

- Write a report on the news story
- Write a dialogue in which a jour-

nalist interviews someone involved in the story.

- Answer a question like, “What could have gone differently?”, thus prompting them to use conditionals, for example (If the truck driver had not answered his cell phone, he would not have caused the accident.).

### 4 EMAIL WRITING

This is clearly one of the homework assignments that works best with higher level teenagers or young adults. Give them an email to read and ask them to write an appropriate reply. Or give them a situation that would require them to compose a message, like a complaint over a bad service experience.

### 5 WATCH IT!

Choose a TV series that is shown in English, either with or without subtitles (you may ask students to cover the subtitles). Choose a show that is suitable to your students' ages. Tell your students that their homework for that night will be to watch an episode of *Modern Family*, whether they usually watch the show or not. Give them a task to complete after viewing the episode: a synopsis of the episode, a character description, or a questionnaire (Do you usually watch this show? If not, would you start watching it? Why/why not?)

**ANOTHER GREAT WAY TO GET STUDENTS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN THEIR HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS IS TO ASK THEM TO COME UP WITH SOME IDEAS FOR CREATIVE ASSIGNMENTS ON THEIR OWN AND SHARE THEM WITH THE CLASS. THEY MAY SURPRISE YOU!**



# ESL Classroom: Designing Your Own Games

Almost everyone likes games. They are fun, energize the players and require their players to use imagination and brain power. What is there not to like when it comes to games? Games can provide an additional benefit to the ESL teacher – they can give your students practice using their English skills.

With this unit on making games, your students will walk through the process of creating and producing their original games as they use their English along the way.

## HOW TO DESIGN YOUR OWN GAMES

### 1 GAME RESEARCH

Before your students can create their original games, they will need to do some research on what kinds of board games people like and what is already available. If possible, take your students to a toy store and let them peruse the aisle that houses board games. Each person should write down the names of the games that are available for purchase. If there is not a toy store nearby, take your students to a large department store. Target, Wal-Mart and other department stores usually have a toy section and within that section a shelf or two of board games.

As your students are writing down the names of the games available for purchase, encourage each person to read the information that the box offers. They may be able to determine the overall concept of the game as well as the rules and objectives. The goal of the activity is to get a general sense of what each game is and how to play it.

### 2 AN ORIGINAL IDEA

Now that your students have some exposure to what games already exist, it is time for them to start using their own imagination.

First, each person should determine whether he wants to design a game of chance or a game of skill. Looking back on the list that each person made in step one, the games there can be classified into either games of chance or skill. A game of chance depends on your ability to roll well or choose good cards during play. These types of games include Chutes and Ladders and Candyland. Other games require skill or strategy from the players. This type of game includes Monopoly and Jenga. With skill games, the decisions that players make determine the outcome of the game.

Once your students have decided on a game of chance or a game of skill, they should start thinking of the overall concept of the game. Will players imagine themselves in a post apocalyptic world of zombies or will they role-play bunny rabbits making their den. This is where your student's personality will really come out in his game. Once the overall concept of the game is determined, your students should decide what the goal of the game will be. Will it be to kill all the zombies or create the most harmonic rabbit den? The final goal should fit with the overall story

### 3 HOW TO PLAY

Now that each person has his overall concept and final goal, it is time to decide how to get from point A to point B. Will players travel along a game board, rolling dice as they go? Will they have to answer questions and get clues to the mystery that they must solve? Have your class use the games that they listed in the first step as inspiration for their original game.

After deciding how progress will be made, your students should determine what rules the players must follow as they move throughout the game. Here is another place to gain inspiration from games that are already in production. In general, the

fewer rules a game has the easier it will be to play and, perhaps, the more appealing to its players. Have your students try to compose three to four rules that players should follow while playing their games.

### 4 MAKING IT HAPPEN

The final step is where creativity meets practicality. Your students must now produce the games they designed. First, each person should physically create his or her game. You will want to have as many resources available to your students as possible at this point. Some may need computers to produce cards for their game play. Others may need dice or props. Many will need large pieces of cardboard that can be made into game boards. Have each person determine what he needs to make his game and then do whatever it takes to make it happen. The second element for making the game happen is to write a set of instructions for players to follow when playing the game. If you have any games in your classroom or at home, let your students read the instructions that came with the game. These are often in a booklet or printed on the inside lid of the game box. You can also find directions for playing games online, and you can allow your students to read these instructions and use them as models as they write their own instructions.

Each person should type up his instructions once they are written and package them with the other elements that he created for his game. Now all that is left to do is play the game!

### 5 PLAY TIME

You may want to spread this activity out over several days to avoid burnout on the part of your students. Group your class into teams of four. Each team will then play a game created and produced by another member of the class. The creator should not be a participant in the game but should be an observer of the group as

they play. The group will need to follow the instructions that the creator wrote. The game creator should watch to see how well his classmates are able to play his game, how clear his instructions were and how much fun the group seems to be having. If the group gets stuck, he should step in and help. Once all the games have been played, each person should write an evaluation of his game. He should note how well his classmates were able to play and how much they seemed to enjoy the game as well as any modifications he thinks should be made.

**CREATING AND MANUFACTURING A GAME IS NO SIMPLE TASK, BUT IF TAKEN SYSTEMATICALLY IT IS SOMETHING THAT ANY OF YOUR STUDENTS CAN ACCOMPLISH.**

With reading, writing and speaking in the mix, your students will use many of their language skills over the course of this unit and will finish with an originally and (hopefully) entertaining game!

# 5 Reasons You Want Your Students to Evaluate YOU

THE IDEA OF YOUR STUDENTS WHO YOU HAVE BEEN GRADING ALL SEMESTER OR ALL YEAR GIVING THEIR FEEDBACK ON YOU AND YOUR TEACHING STYLE CAN BE INTIMIDATING TO SAY THE LEAST. WILL THEY RETALIATE FOR BAD GRADES? WHAT IF THEY DON'T LIKE ME AS MUCH AS I THINK THEY DO? WHAT IF THEY SAY SOMETHING THAT IS TOTALLY OFF THE MARK?

These are natural fears, and every teacher has them. If you have done student evaluations before, though, you have probably found that it is not as frightening a process as we teachers imagine it to be. Moreover, you have probably gotten constructive and helpful feedback from your students. So for those of you who are still on the fence about letting your students give YOU an evaluation, here are 5 reasons you might want to try it..

## 1 YOU KNOW WHAT THEY ARE GETTING AND WHAT THEY AREN'T

Though testing your students does give you a certain amount of feedback, you can get an even more holistic view of what your class is learning by asking open-ended questions on a student evaluation. By asking questions like what topics were a struggle for you? Or what areas do you still have trouble in, you will discover not only what they did or didn't learn the first time through, you will also learn what your students are retaining. When your students are not concerned with the results of a final exam or a unit test, you may get a different read on what they actually know. With that said, you will also know what they are not getting. By asking your students what they remember or what stood out to them, you will know what didn't. Those are likely the areas you will need to flesh out before teaching again either next semester or next year.

## 2 YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING RIGHT

Along with insight into how you need to improve your teaching, student evaluations will give you insight into the areas in which your teaching skills excel. You will know what lessons you have done are most memorable and have made the greatest impact on your students. Along with that, you will also learn the types of activities your students enjoy. Because your class make up will change from year to year, what your students prefer will also change with the classes. Still you will have a good general idea for where you are hitting the mark when it comes to your lessons. You will also learn if you are reaching all of the learning styles in your classroom. If you get positive feedback from only one group of students, you may realize you have been leaving another segment of your population out in classroom activities. You can use all of these insights when planning future classes to make them most effective and enjoyable for your students.

## 3 YOU CAN CORRECT PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY BECOME PROBLEMS

Because student evaluations tend to point out any issues you may have in your teaching style and classroom management, getting clued into them via a legitimate forum may keep students from complaining to your superiors. Through your student evaluations, you will become aware of issues like cultural bias and personality conflicts or lack of communication. All of these, if left unaddressed, can become overwhelming problems down the road. When your students clue you in to an issue in their evaluations, you can take measures to correct the situation before it becomes more than you can handle.

## 4 IT COMMUNICATES RESPECT TO YOUR STUDENTS

When your students see that you value their opinions and feedback, they will view it as a token of respect on your behalf. Everyone wants respect from the people they interact with every day, and by giving this respect to your students, it will motivate them to respond to you and each other with respect as well. This may eliminate discipline problems in the classroom or even put out fires before they happen. Your students will know that you value their opinions when you read their evaluations and make changes based on their feedback, and this is especially important if you have students who will return for an additional class.

## 5 OVERALL YOU BECOME A BETTER TEACHER

No person is perfect, and no teacher is perfect either. When you become aware of your strengths and weaknesses in your teaching style and classroom management, it will improve your overall performance as a teacher. You will have better relationships with your students, present better lessons, and have fewer problems. Though they are intimidating if you have never done them before, student evaluations offer nothing but benefits to the teacher who embraces this tool.

**EVEN IF YOUR SCHOOL DOES NOT REQUIRE STUDENT EVALUATIONS, YOU CAN WRITE AND DISTRIBUTE YOUR OWN AT THE END OF EACH SEMESTER.**

Just make sure your students know that you will not read their evaluations before you calculate their final grades, and hold to it. They will need that assurance if they are going to be honest with you.



# How to Deal with Eager Beavers: 5 Solutions to Common Problems

Independent, autonomous learners are a sight to behold. They show up for their first day of class armed with notebooks, pens, pencils and highlighters in an assortment of colors, as well as the iron will to learn.

They supply answers without being prompted. They complete all of their tasks and homework (and even ask for more!), and they dazzle you with a list of books they've read or movies they've watched in English.

But we all know that not all students are like that. There are some, by contrast, who must be told exactly what to do – all the time. What happens when we have autonomous and dependent learners in the same classroom? This poses a series of challenges:

## HOW TO DEAL WITH AUTONOMOUS & DEPENDENT LEARNERS: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS.

### 1 THE EAGER BEAVER READS AHEAD AND COMPLETES EXERCISES BEFORE CLASS

There are students who are so keen on learning that they'll come to class having read the coursebook and underlined all of the new words (which they have carefully looked up in the dictionary). Some even go as far as completing the exercises and answering the questions!

**SOLUTION:** While it's great for students to want to come to class prepared, they should understand that there are things you must do together – in class and as a group. Tell them that you understand that they mean well, and that it's great that they are so motivated! But if they want something to do at home, you can give them similar exercises or suggest other books/materials they can work with in their free time.

If they insist on "knowing" the answers before class, make sure they understand this gives them an unfair advantage over those who don't prepare.

### 2 THE EAGER BEAVER PROGRESSES FASTER

This is a very common problem to encounter. An autonomous learner is more naturally motivated, does extra work, pays closer attention and will soon enough leave their classmates behind. On the other hand, the dependent learner probably already feels insecure, and the feeling of lagging behind will only make them less motivated. In time, the gap will be even wider.

**SOLUTION:** The ideal situation would be to detect those students with a natural penchant for language learning and place them in a higher level. If this is not possible, give the fast learner extra work that is suitable to their level, but not specifically related to the class curriculum, perhaps something connected to a hobby they enjoy or books they may be interested in. The dependent learner on the other hand must be engaged and motivated by all means possible. You'll find great ways to motivate teens, for example, in this article.

### 3 THE EAGER BEAVER ENGAGES IN BAD STUDY HABITS

Some students use techniques/strategies that, while not altogether bad, are not precisely what you try to promote in class. A good example is when students read a text, underline each new word they come across, look it up in a bilingual dictionary and write down the translation for the word in their own native language. As most ESL teachers encourage students to think in English, bringing long lists of words they have already translated is counterproductive to this effort.

**SOLUTION:** Teach both autonomous and dependent learners different types of reading techniques and encourage them to use them at home. These techniques include scanning a text for answers, skimming to get the general idea, among others. Train them to focus on figuring out the meaning of the word from the context, but if they feel the need to look something up, encourage the use of an English dictionary.

### 4 THE EAGER BEAVER BRINGS UP TOPICS THAT ARE IRRELEVANT TO THE CLASS

Autonomous learners often ask questions about vocabulary or expressions they have come across in TV shows, movies or the Internet. This in itself poses a series of problems. Maybe not all students will be interested in the topic, TV show or subject matter – it may be highly specialized, scientific in nature, or quite simply, completely irrelevant to what you have been doing in class.

**SOLUTION:** Make sure students understand that you are willing to answer their questions and help them understand something, but there has to be a time and place for consultations that have nothing to do with class.

You may set aside a specific moment for these questions, either before or after class, or give them your email. But do not stray too far from your lesson plan to discuss an irrelevant topic, as it may only alienate unmotivated students further.

### 5 ALL OF THE ABOVE INVOLVES LOTS OF EXTRA WORK FOR THE ESL TEACHER

Finding extra material for either the eager beavers or dependent learners is an added burden to the ESL teachers who have enough on their plate. Most of us have our course planned with an established curriculum and do not anticipate these challenges.

**SOLUTION:** As in most cases, the best solution is to share the burden. Talk to other ESL teachers, particularly those who teach the same levels, and put together a list of recommended readings, extra-curricular study materials and books you may all suggest students buy for additional practice. This way, when you come across a student who wants or needs the extra work, all you have to do is consult your list and make the necessary recommendations..

# You Are NOT Your Students' BFF (Best Friend Forever): Balancing "Friendliness" and "Friendship"

**SOMETIMES THERE IS AN IMPULSE AMONG ESL INSTRUCTORS TO BEFRIEND THEIR STUDENTS.**

There are a number of reasons not to cross that line from teacher to friend. The first and foremost reason is you are quite simply not your student's friend.

As with parents who try to be their children's friend but quickly find that they can't be friends and remain effective parents—your BFF, after all, doesn't tell you what time to come home or to clean up your room—it's also very difficult to be your student's friend and maintain your teacher's role. After enjoying your student's hospitality at her home, for example, how do you then give her a "D" on the midterm, even if earned? If you've confided in your student your family problems, can you really face her in class, telling her which group to work in and what activities to do? Students do not usually engage in blackmail, of course, but matters do become complicated when the line between teacher and friend is blurred, so it's best not to blur the line. Of course, this is easier said than done, especially when students do make overtures of friendship. How can these politely be refused?

How can you still then maintain a "friendly" relationship without being "friends"? It's a delicate balance but it can be accomplished.

## 1 SET THE TONE

The teacher really sets the tone for the student-teacher relationship and the overall class. If the teacher is polite, friendly but businesslike, and remains focused on class work rather than personal lives, this goes a long way to establishing a tone. True, sometime a strong-willed student can undermine the tone set by the teacher, but that becomes very hard to do if the instructor has worked on the tone from the first day of class. The lone hostile student sitting in the corner and rolling his eyes or smirking is not so attractive to join if

the instructor's engaging and carefully planned activities are the alternative.

## 2 MAKE CLASS TIME FUN AND ENGAGING

If there is enough to do in class, enough meaningful activities and practice in and outside of class, students will be too focused on learning English to plan their next party with you. It's fine to have fun with your students, but it's best to confine that fun to the classroom and educational activities.

## 3 SET BOUNDARIES

Even with careful planning, there will still be students who test limits by attempting to bring in their own personal lives or ask the instructor about hers. The instructor can set boundaries by asking students to talk about their personal lives or share pictures with classmates after class rather than taking up class time passing them around. To questions about her own life that may seem too intimate, the instructor can respond with a smile, "I don't discuss my personal life in class," so that it is seen as a general policy, related to teacher, and not directed at a specific student. This can also be followed up with a small joke such as "I'm afraid it might put you to sleep."

## 4 BE STRAIGHTFORWARD

As with most interactions with others, straightforwardness is usually best as people are notoriously poor at picking up on subtle clues and hints. It's best that you are honest about the kind of relationship you want with your students: one of mutual respect and learning, for example—but inside the class.

## 5 BE PROFESSIONAL

Try to maintain a professional demeanor with students. This implies some distance, politeness, and a focus on the intellectual over the emotional side. This is really necessary in effective planning of lessons and grading of students. The

focus should be on acting as a teacher not as a buddy.

## 6 BE AVAILABLE — AS A TEACHER AND MENTOR, NOT AS A FRIEND

Finally, be there for your students on campus—in and outside of class. This means not only in teaching class but in advising which classes to take next term, writing letters of recommendation, assisting in understanding assignments, and discussing future professional and educational goals. If students see everything you can do for them as their teacher, they will forget about having you as a "friend." Friends and teachers help in very different ways and ultimately perform different roles.

**DOES ALL OF THIS MEAN THAT TEACHERS CAN'T HAVE ANY RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF CLASS AT ALL? NO, IT DOESN'T: TEACHERS CAN AND SHOULD GO ON CLASS OUTINGS, FOR EXAMPLE, WITH THEIR STUDENTS—BUT AS TEACHERS, AND THE OUTINGS SHOULD BE RELATED IN SOME WAY TO EDUCATION.**

It's all right for students to bring their personal issues to you to help with—how to resolve a problem with a roommate, for example, or how to balance a social life and school life. These are issues that teachers generally have experience in and can offer help with. But the relationship is really not mutual, and that is why teachers really can't be a student's "friend" because a student shared with me her concerns with her roommate does not mean I am free to share my marital issues with her. Just as a parental role really precludes that kind of "sharing," so does a teacher's, and just as parents might want to protect their children from the sometimes brutal adult life, so does a teacher want to preserve her classroom space from the ugly outside world. One way to do this is by preserving the teacher-student relationship.

# Testing 1-2 - Tips on How to Create Effective Tests

**MASTERING THE ART OF ASSEMBLING YOUR OWN LANGUAGE SKILLS TESTING WILL BE A VALUABLE ASSET THROUGHOUT YOUR TEACHING CAREER.**

There are lots of resources out there to help you and depending on where you are working, you can choose to do less formal testing and veer more toward assessment and evaluation of broad skills or hone in on more targeted areas. Test yourself out with these tips to creating effective tests, and with a little trial and error your design skills and question-writing abilities will ace the test.

## 1 READING & WRITING

The challenging thing about providing good solid tests for language learners is that you have several skill areas that you are assessing as well as topical knowledge and fluency within those areas. The two areas that you can assess with a written test are reading and writing skills. A written test can be an effective tool for assessing vocabulary usage, reading comprehension, writing skills, and also comprehension of tense and grammatical structures. There is a lot to consider when putting a written test together. You want it to be a cohesive review of what they have been practicing, you want it to be useful for discussion afterwards, and you want it to be as useful as it can possibly be without being too intimidating.

If you are expected to generate a formalized midterm and final exam test, or other testing to move students through levels, the focus should be on giving students a sense of accomplishment through test-taking. Test-taking is really important in a lot of institutions and countries, so take the fair approach and prepare students anytime you are doing any kind of formalized testing. Doing review sessions, giving them worksheets, and even providing very similar exercises as to what will be presented on the test are all useful ways to make sure students are ready for the test.

## 2 TEST QUESTIONS

You'll want to become well-

versed in the various types of questions to include on tests and be sure (for your own sake!) that you make the tests easy to grade. Including variety on any test is a beneficial for you and for the students. If you have to cover several chapters of material, divide the test into manageable chunks. A good starting point is to refresh yourself by going through the book and your lesson plans for ideas. Then pick out what you would like the main points of the test to be. You might have something like five to eight different sections on the test, depending on what you need to cover. Create sections that focus on vocabulary, reading comprehension, grammar, writing, and anything topical that needs to be tested. Once you have determined your sections, you can then decide what combination of question types you want in each section. You have a lot of choices here. Don't stick to only one or two. Challenge the students and provide ways in which they can express their knowledge. Typical tests can include any combination of the following:

**The ever-popular multiple choice questions, Fill-in-the-blank (good for grammar), Matching exercise (good for vocabulary), True and false, Written sections like answering questions or writing short essays, Reading Comprehension.**

Once you have determined the sections and the question types it is time to sit down and write your test questions (and answers). You can take questions from homework assignments, in-class work, or get some help from online sites. You could also develop totally new and fresh questions on your own. Choose topic areas that interest the students, are timely, and even provide some humor. One way to reach students is to use their names in a few of the questions or have a running joke throughout the test. Students enjoy locating these and you could even provide extra points if they catch on. The last factor to establish is the difficulty of your test questions. It is a delicate dance to get just the right combination of difficulty without being too simple, too difficult, or too confusing. You don't want to purposely trick the students

as many tests like to do with multiple choice questions. You want them to have to think things through and pay close attention to details. Always read through your tests several times and proofread them carefully. Make sure you don't have duplicate questions within the test, grammatical mistakes (embarrassing!) or any other error that might baffle students. Check your answer key and make sure you haven't created any obvious patterns, and last but not least, write a test that students will succeed at taking and will feel good for having experienced.

## 3 LISTENING & SPEAKING

Since there is no way to test speaking and listening portions on a written exam it will be necessary to do some kind of individualized assessment which can combine the two skills. Often a good option is to do an oral interview of sorts with different topics and questions that review what students have been practicing. Another way to test for these two skills is to test them separately. Doing a listening test that either the book provides or putting one together from online sources will give you an idea of where students are with listening skills. Other ways to test listening could be giving them a dictation, or asking oral questions that they have to answer in written or spoken form. For the speaking portion of a test, you could have students answer questions or give brief impromptu speeches. Students could be given a topic for which they have to speak about for 1 to 2 minutes and then you assess them on very clear guidelines. It is necessary to provide the students with the worksheet of what you will be assessing. If you are focusing on pronunciation and past tense verbs, they should be informed of the perimeters before the test.

**TESTING IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS AND ASSESSING STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IS VERY VALUABLE FOR TEACHERS.** Teachers should not shy away from providing brilliant, level-appropriate assessments that serve students in a larger capacity than just getting a high score on a test.



# Top 10 Ways to Assess Your Students

**PART OF TEACHING IS ASSESSMENT. COLLEGES OFFER ENTIRE COURSES ON WAYS TO ASSESS STUDENTS OF ENGLISH. IT IS EASY, HOWEVER, FOR TEACHERS TO GET STUCK IN A RUT OF ASSESSMENT.**

If you are looking for a new way to assess your students or just want a reminder of some oldies but goodies, read on for a look at ten of the most popular ways to assess ESL students.

## 1 ORAL INTERVIEW

Do a one on one interview with each of your students to get a good idea of their listening and speaking abilities. Schedule these types of interviews during class (perhaps take each student into the hall to have a private discussion while the rest of the class does seat work) or schedule with students individually. Asking questions that use grammatical structures and vocabulary that your class has studied will help you know exactly what each student has grasped. Do not penalize a student for not knowing content if he or she can compose grammatically and situationally correct statements or questions in response to your questions.

## 2 CLASS PRESENTATION

A presentation in class assesses a different aspect of spoken language. When you ask a student to speak in front of the class, he is able to prepare and practice what he wants to say. He can also research information on his topic. In this case, the grade you give your student should be based on both content and presentation.

## 3 ROLE PLAY

Another way to assess your students' speaking abilities is by having them perform role-plays in front of the class. By giving them a situation and roles to play, you can see how creatively your students are able to use language with one another. Be listening for content and grammar as with any oral assessment, but you can also be attuned to how your students are making creative use of their language to communicate with one another. Even if they show grammatical imperfection, are your students able to understand each other? Are they able to use the language skills they possess

to get their point across to their partner? These are important skills and ones you should foster in your students.

## 4 CLOZE EXAM

A cloze exam is an atypical way to test the understanding your students have of grammar. To write a cloze exam, write an original paragraph or take one that your students have used in their studies. Then replace every fifth or sixth word with a blank. Ask your students to fill in the blanks with words they think would be most logical and grammatical. You will see a variety of answers among your students, but as long as the answers are grammatically and logically correct, the student should receive full credit.

## 5 FILL IN THE BLANK

A fill in the blank test may seem similar to a cloze exam, but this type of test is used to test a specific grammatical structure or set of vocabulary. You can write individual sentences or an entire paragraph for your students, but it is probably best to provide a word bank in either case. You may choose to supply more words than will be necessary to fill in the blanks to make the test more challenging. This will force your students to choose the best answers rather than matching ten words with ten blanks.

## 6 WRITING SAMPLE

Having your students give you a writing sample is another good way to assess their proficiency with grammar. If you have them write something for homework, you run the risk that someone other than your student will do the writing. Often friends or native speakers will correct a nonnative speaker's writing with the intention of helping, but this will not give you an accurate picture of your student's writing. To avoid this, have your students do a periodic in class writing. Give them an adequate amount of time to write about a subject that you assign. You will then get an accurate look at their grammatical and writing proficiency. Follow up your assessment with some mini-lessons on common grammatical pitfalls that the class exhibited.

## 7 PORTFOLIO

To expand the material you base

your students' grades on, why not assign each person to assemble a portfolio. A portfolio is a collection of work samples that cover several aspects of the assignments your students have completed. This is an especially effective way to assess your students if you have the same class for reading, writing, listening, speaking and grammar. Ask each student to compile a collection of ten works for you to grade. You can include specific assignments on the list, but you can also give a category and ask your students to present their best work. Ask for a grammar homework assignment, a writing sample and a vocabulary exercise, for example. Your students can then choose the work that they are most proud of. They may feel more encouraged to be graded on their strengths rather than their weaknesses.

## 8 ONLINE QUIZ

You do not have to spend as much of your class time assessing your students as was often necessary in the past. With the extensive collection of online resources for ESL students, you can require your students to spend time at home or in a language lab period working on exercises and quizzes available online. Have your students print out their final scores or e-mail them to you. In so doing, your students will still get feedback on their work and knowledge, but you will not have to give up valuable class time for it to happen.

## 9 MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAM

Sometimes the classics are often the way to go when assessing your students. If you choose to give a multiple-choice exam, keep these pointers in mind when writing the questions. Make sure all the answers are grammatically correct. Your students should not be able to eliminate an answer based on grammar alone (unless, of course, that is what you are trying to test). Also, try to keep all the answer choices around the same length. If you choose to include the options "all of the above" or "none of the above", make sure they are options for additional questions. If you keep these tips in mind when you write your multiple-choice quiz, you will get better results from your students.

## 10 TRUE/FALSE QUIZ

The true/false quiz is also a classic that is used by most teachers. When you use this type of test, do not give trick questions that focus on minor details. Even more important, have your students correct the questions that they say are false. If they are making the corrections rather than just identifying the mistakes, you will make sure they are answering from what they know rather than making lucky guesses. You can assign one point to each answer and another point to each correction on the test.

**THERE ARE MANY OTHER WAYS YOU MAY FIND VALUABLE IN ASSESSING YOUR STUDENTS, AND THEY WILL EACH BE USEFUL IN THE CLASSROOM.**

**THE MORE VARIETY YOU USE IN ASSESSING YOUR STUDENTS, THE BETTER YOUR PICTURE WILL BE OF THEIR OVERALL LANGUAGE SKILLS.**

# Don't Do It: 10 Things Never to Do in the Classroom

**TEACHERS ARE THE HEAD OF A CLASSROOM, AND WITH THAT RESPONSIBILITY COMES A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF AUTHORITY. REMEMBER THAT ALL TEACHERS HAVE BAD DAYS AND MAKE MISTAKES.**

This list of 10 things never to do in the classroom is to help you avoid those missteps and get you back on track if you slip.

## 1 LOSE YOUR TEMPER

Losing your temper in any classroom can be disastrous. This especially applies in Asia where showing strong negative emotion is one of the worst things you can do. All teachers have bad days, get irritated with students, and struggle to maintain composure at one time or another. You really do not want to lose your temper so that you end up shouting, yelling, or crying. If you feel yourself getting angry it might be a good idea to step out of the room or remove yourself from the situation and count to one thousand

## 2 LOSE CONTROL

One thing you will never gain back if you lose it is control. Don't let the students in any class walk all over you, take control of your lesson, or get unruly in any way. Sometimes student might become overly-excited or obnoxiously loud during an activity, and you need to be able to bring them back down. Students need to respect you, and if you are too passive and don't have boundaries you are bound to lose control at some point. One great strategy that works with both kids and adults is to create a signal that when they see it, they know they are expected to do the same thing, and get quiet. Some popular options are: raising your hand, clapping if it isn't too noisy already, or waving. It is a domino effect when you reach a few students, the rest will follow and you will regain control.

## 3 GO CRAZY WITH HAND-OUTS

Too much paper is just not a good idea. Temper handouts with activities that

involve students and don't just keep them sitting idly by doing boring rote work and trying to weed through your ten-page grammar explanation. Use the board, interact with students and never rely on paper to do your job.

## 4 EAT LUNCH

You'd be surprised how many teachers bring their lunch into the classroom! This is just not appropriate with any level or any age. Drinking a morning cup of coffee or bringing in donuts or snacks for the group is one thing, but don't eat your afternoon meal while class is in session.

## 5 GET OVERLY INVOLVED

Depending on your circumstances, it can become pretty easy to become overly emotionally involved with your students. Because you are teaching a language, you may learn a lot about students during the class, and you may even need to extend some help to them outside of the classroom. Be careful to have boundaries for yourself and don't get too caught up in students' problems. Also be wary of creating personal relationships outside of the class. This can easily happen when teaching adults, just be sure it doesn't interfere with the classroom dynamic.

## 6 MAKE FUN OF STUDENTS

It may seem obvious that you shouldn't ever mock or make fun of students, but sometimes what seems to be a harmless joke or comment can wound a student's confidence and self-esteem. It is a great talent to be able to use humor in the classroom and also show students how to laugh at themselves. Just be careful that your jokes or sarcasm aren't aimed at particular students in a personally harmful way.

## 7 SIT DOWN

Sitting down through an entire class is just not appropriate. In Asia, for example, the teacher is expected to stand or walk around throughout the whole classroom period. Sitting down for too long delivers a message of laziness, unless you are injured or

ill. When in the classroom it is a time to interact, to circulate and to lead the students. You also don't want your students always sitting down and not moving around. Give them the opportunity to mingle around, stand at the board, or do group work away from their chairs.

## 8 BE LATE

Being late is a big problem in many countries and for many nationalities of students. It is very important to model the behavior you want from students. Being late very occasionally or sometimes coming in a few moments late is not a problem. It's when you are chronically late that you show the students it is acceptable for them to be late as well. Be as punctual as you possibly can, and when you are late be sure to apologize to students.

## 9 ONLY FOLLOW THE BOOK

Sometimes teachers fall into the trap of teaching everything directly from the textbook. This is not only boring and tedious: it is doing your students a disservice. Because they are learning a language, students need a lot of opportunities to practice and to experiment with their new skills. If you only focus on what the book dictates, the students will miss a lot. A textbook is a guide and can provide ideas about the order of topics and the structure to follow. Be sure that you are connecting your activities to the book, but not solely doing everything from that one source.

## 10 PLAY FAVORITES

All students in the class need to get your attention and your direction. It is okay to have your favorite students as long as you don't give them concessions that you don't provide to anyone else. It is only natural to hit it off with certain students, just be sure that you are fair to all the students in your class and give everyone adequate consideration and praise.

**We've probably all met teachers that have done at least one of the items on this list.** Look at your own style and be confident that you won't ever perform any of the ten things on this list.



# It's Personal! 7 Ways to Get Students to Open up and Share

ARE YOU MARRIED? DO YOU HAVE KIDS? WHERE DO YOU WORK? WHERE DO YOU LIVE? SOMETIMES, WE TRY TO GET PERSONAL INFORMATION FROM OUR STUDENTS, AND IT SOUNDS LIKE AN INTERROGATION.

Yet, this is information that is essential to our goals: we need to know as much as we can (without getting too personal) to tailor activities to their needs, to create rapport, or simply get to know them better. This is particularly challenging with beginners with limited vocabulary or who are very self-conscious about their English-speaking skills. Here are great ways to get your students to open up, without your having to give them the third degree.

## HOW TO GET YOUR STUDENTS TO OPEN UP AND SHARE

### 1 BE THE FIRST TO SHARE

How unfair is it to expect students to tell you all about themselves, without taking the time to reciprocate? If you want each of your students to tell the class a little bit about themselves, lead by example and go first. They'll be more willing to share after you've done it.

### 2 THE 'YES' GAME

One student stands in front of the class, and the rest ask him/her questions with the goal of obtaining a "Yes!" This is a game that can be played with any number of structures: Simple Present ("Do you...?"), Simple Past ("Did you...?"), Present Perfect ("Have you ever...?"), etc. When one student obtains 5 affirmative responses from their classmate, they win!

### 3 READING THAT LEADS TO SHARING

If you want students to share their views on a specific topic, it may be a little hard to get the discussion going by asking a question up front. Try reading a short piece on the subject first, followed by

some comprehension questions, and THEN ask students to weigh in with their opinions.

### 4 THAT'S RIDICULOUS!

If students are tense about sharing, particularly on the first day of class, break the ice with some comic relief: introduce yourself (using a very funny, made up name) and with a straight face, tell them you are 82 years old. Unless you have an extremely tense class (and thankfully, that is rarely the case) some of your students should understand that it's a joke. T

hen you confess to the ruse and tell them your real name/age, which is a perfect lead in to your asking them theirs. The same can be done for professions, hobbies, number of languages you speak, etc. Make a false, exaggerated statement, wait till they catch on, and once they're a bit more relaxed, they'll be more willing to share their personal info!

### 5 INTERVIEW YOUR CLASSMATE

This activity is also a fantastic ice-breaker. Divide students into pairs, and have them ask each other questions about their family, background, profession, where/how long they've studied English, etc. Once all the interviews have been completed, students report on what they've learned about their partner to the rest of the class.

### 6 SHOW OFF YOUR PROFILE

Another great way to share personal info indirectly is through a visual aid. Have each student bring a personal photo to class: this will be their profile pic. Give each student a piece of construction paper or poster board and ask them to create a profile. It doesn't have to be flashy or glitzy, perhaps something as simple as this:

PHOTO:

NAME:

AGE:

NATIONALITY:

LIKES:

DISLIKES:

FAVORITE FOOD:

ETC...

Put up the profiles where they will be visible to all, like the bulletin board. You also have the option to have each student create a profile for a classmate, thus forcing them to ask each other questions. Don't be afraid to try this with adult learners, too! Business English students may create their own resume in English, which you'll keep on file.

### 7 TIME TO SHARE

What happens when students are too eager to share? This is often the case with young learners who bring their newest toy to class or interrupt the lesson to show you their most recent addition to their collection of knee scars (and of course, go into a play by play account of how they fell off their bike). While it's great that they spontaneously wish to share these things, these outbursts disrupt the class, and often lead to more students jumping out of their seats to compare injuries or share their own experience. So, here's what you can do. Set aside a time to share, perhaps the first or last five minutes of class. Start the class by asking your students if they did anything interesting they'd like to share. On the other hand, when a student interrupts the lesson to share something, simply tell them you'll want to hear all about it, at the end of class.

### MAKE YOUR STUDENTS COMFORTABLE ABOUT SHARING AND KNOW WHEN TO DRAW THE LINE.

If someone is uncomfortable talking about a certain personal topic, respect that and never pry.

Create a fun, safe environment for your students to share information about themselves, and they will open up!

# Top 8 Tips on Teaching Absolute Beginners

When we talk about low-level students, we're not talking about teaching the students about the difference between present simple and past simple tenses. We are talking about a level 0 student who can barely string a single sentence together or has utter difficulties when answering the question 'How are you?' Teaching absolute beginners can be quite a tough task, especially for native speakers with little understanding of the L1 of the students. Nevertheless, with a little bit of help and the right guidance, a teacher can definitely make a strong improvement to the student providing them with the confidence they need to take them to the next level.

## 1 SMILING HELPS

Ah yes, number 1 on the list, a smile is something that can be understood on a universal level. When building a rapport with your absolute beginner, smiling will build trust and show him or her that you are there in a supportive capacity. Body language is also a useful tool when teaching English, as it is often said that about 70% of our communication is done through body language. Body language is great when trying to get answers from student, showing if the student is incorrect, or even if you want to elicit an answer from a student.

## 2 FIND AN ASSISTANT

When you're teaching a group of absolute beginners, it is more than likely that you will have one of the Ss in the class who would be a little bit above the others. You should use this student to your advantage and make them your class assistant. This class assistant can help communicate the task, vocabulary and other useful things that the other students may not yet have an understanding. By finding an assistant in the class, this makes things easier and creates a great atmosphere in the class where the students can help each other in the learning process.

## 3 USE REALIA, FLASHCARDS & OTHER VISUALS

Use what, I hear you ask? Realia is ESL jargon for anything that is 'real'. Realia is

great method when it comes to teaching vocabulary, as students can be able to simply put the vocabulary with a real life object. This can be done with practically anything, from the whiteboard marker in your hand, or even flowers from the garden. Another common form of realia is photos. Photos make a great to show the students an object or person that is real. One activity that works well with absolute beginners is learning about families. Both you and the students can take your family photos into the class and share them while describing the relative in the photo. Flashcards and other visuals, such as PowerPoint presentations are an ideal way to learning new vocabulary.

## 4 KNOW A FEW BASIC WORDS & PHRASES IN THE STUDENT'S LANGUAGE

While many language schools discourage any usage of the teacher using the L1 of the student, we find that using a few words and phrases here and there prove to be extremely helpful. This helps with getting your point across in the class, and teaching some of the simpler vocabulary. While many ESLers have been converted to the theory that students will learn by being constantly exposed to the language, they should think back to their own time at school when they were learning a different language. Surely if native English speaker with a level 0 in Japanese walked into a class where the teacher spoke only Japanese, then the level 0 English-speaker would probably have gained very little. Same rule applies for students learning English.

## 5 SPEAK... SLOWLY

This is one of the more obvious tips to make the list, but teachers should be reminded to speak slow. With vast number of coffee addicts who rely on their fix to get through six-straight hours of teaching, sometimes we can tend to get a little ahead of ourselves. Always keep this somewhere close to the forefront of your mind, or write it at the top of your lesson plan in big writing. This is a great way for remembering to keep the pace down throughout your class!

## 6 TEACH ALL FOUR SKILLS

For early learners of English, it is a good idea to give them a broad range of activities. This ensures that they can make an improvement in all areas. Learning a variety of skills will also help with other areas of English too. By practicing reading, the students will get a very good understanding of grammar and vocabulary, as they can see the words correctly used and in context. Listening is also a good way to learn new words while helping their speaking. By listening to a recording, students should try to copy the manner in which a native speaker says the words. This will help significantly later down the track in accent reduction.

## 7 REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT

It is important to repeat all commands in order to give them a chance to listen to the individual words. By repeating your commands, the students are more likely to understand what you are saying, as they may be able to understand specific words, and then contextually put the action and word together. For more advanced students at about a level 0-1, one ideal way of improving the student's vocab is to repeat the instruction using different words. If the student is unfamiliar with the vocabulary, they can generally use their brain to connect the dots while learning through the context.

## 8 CHILL, RELAX, BE CALM. DON'T STRESS!

Even though sometimes you may feel like you're not helping, or that the work you are doing is in vain, give it a few weeks. Things will begin to pan out nicely after a few weeks as you begin to find your feet and build a strong rapport with your students. They will also begin to understand your teaching methodology and begin to pick up on all visual clues, hand signals, body language, and everything else that you employ in helping them learn the target language. If you put in the time with them, they will always look back on you as being their first English teacher who really made the effort to help and assist them. Teaching absolute beginners can be a tough task, but with a little know-how and the right attitude, anyone can succeed.

# What You Need to Know if You Teach Absolute Beginners

**ALMOST WITHOUT EXCEPTION, WHEN I TELL PEOPLE THAT I TEACH ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE, THEY ASK, "OH, WHAT LANGUAGES DO YOU SPEAK?"**

Though I would like to answer with polylingual authority, the truth is I am only fluent in English. "Well, don't you need to speak their language before you can teach them English?" is the most common retort. The answer, as most ESL teachers have discovered, is NO. You do NOT have to speak a second language to teach English to those who know none whatsoever. Teaching English to absolute beginners, though, is not a simple task. Where does the teacher start when he or she has no common ground with the students waiting for instruction?.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TPR (TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE)

### 1 NATURAL LANGUAGE

Dr. James A. Asher developed an answer to that question with his second language learning method called **Total Physical Response**. He based this method on the idea that a person learning any language, particularly a first language, has a period of time in which he receives linguistic input without producing linguistic output. In other words, language learners take in information about a language before using that language for speech. In the early stages of TPR instruction, the teacher does the talking, and the students take it in. Later, after students have become comfortable and understand what they hear, do they speak the second language..

### 2 THE PHYSICAL CONNECTION

The key component of this language method, as one might guess from the title, is the physical response that the learners use while taking in the linguis-

tic information. Students who mindlessly listen to a teacher they cannot understand are more likely to fall asleep than become fluent, but when they make appropriate physical responses to the statements of their teacher, learning comes easily and quickly.

### 3 SUCCESS

It may be difficult to believe that students can have such a positive response to language instruction that needs no books and little preparation on the part of the teacher, but they do. I remember the first time I experienced the Total Physical Response technique from the other side of the desk. I was attending a lecture in graduate school when my teacher walked into the room on the first day and started speaking to the class in Hebrew. The class was confused initially: after all, we were there for a lecture on syllabus design. Our professor said several sentences to the class, pointing to herself (teacher) and pointing to us (students). She showed us the difference between two students in the front row (male and female form of the word), and wrote the corresponding words on the board. She sat down and stood up. Then she told us to do the same. Through that instruction and those movements, we learned the word for sit and the appropriate verb endings for first person singular, second person plural and second person singular. At each point, she wrote the vocabulary words and verb conjugations on the board. This exercise was the first ten minutes of class, and to my own astonishment, to this day I remember the Hebrew I learned in those few minutes, fifteen years later, though I have done no further study of the language!

### 4 IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH

I can personally attest to the success of Total Physical Response as a student and as a teacher, and I believe that any ESL teacher with a class of absolute beginners will find TPR the best method of language instruction. To use TPR in class, talk to your students. Use repetition. Write down words on the board. Above all, get your students moving. Start with imperative statements. Sit down. Stand up. Pick up your pencil.

Then, tell your students narratives. I am walking to the door. I am picking up my pencil. You are standing up. You are picking up your pencil. She is standing up. He is standing up. Be flexible when you teach with this method. Look for signs of comprehension in your students, and do not pressure them to produce language until they are ready to volunteer it. Keep reminding yourself that they are learning even if they are not producing English, and they will use that language to communicate when they are ready..

### 5 MANY BENEFITS

Many benefits come with instruction through TPR. Students feel less pressure to produce perfect language. You can use TPR with a mixed level class or with students with learning disabilities. TPR takes little preparation on your part. Kinesthetic learners, often the last that teachers think of when making lesson plans, are in their learning style glory! TPR is an effective language learning method for both children and adults, large and small classes. Most of all, your students will have fun moving around the classroom and engaging in their own learning process.

**TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE WILL FIND, IF THEY TEACH ANY LENGTH OF TIME, THAT THEIR STUDENTS COME WITH ALL LEVELS OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, AND SOMETIMES THOSE STUDENTS ALL SHOW UP FOR THE SAME CLASS.**

But when you are teaching a class of beginners or have beginners in your mixed level class, TPR may be the way to connect with all of your students. This method of instruction will have long term positive effects for your students. Not only that, their language learning process may be more in line with how languages are naturally acquired by first language speakers. All this will come together to make your students more engaged in class and give them longer lasting language knowledge. Whether you teach in the east or west, north or south, or have students from every corner of the globe, TPR is a way to bring them together and help them achieve a common goal!



# Whoops, I Did It Again: Talking About Mistakes

**MAKING MISTAKES IS NO FOREIGN IDEA TO ANYONE WHO EXAMINES HIS OR HER LIFE. WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES..**

Sometimes they come as a result of a well thought out plan that just does not work, and other times they are a result of impulsive actions. In either case, we are forced to face the consequences however unpleasant they might be. Though no one likes to admit his mistakes, it is sometimes necessary to do so if one wants to improve his life. Challenge your students to think about what it means to make mistakes, and they will learn about more than English as a second language..

## TALKING ABOUT MISTAKES

### 1 A BIG MISTAKE

*On January 4, 1990, a man in Providence, Rhode Island robbed an armored car. He took four bags of money, each weighing thirty pounds. He was not able to carry the bags because of their weight and was caught by authorities. It turns out that the bags contained pennies.*

Share this story with your students as a listening exercise. Then, ask your class to think about what mistakes the man made as you share the story again. Review any unfamiliar vocabulary with your students before going through the story the second time (armored car, authorities, etc.). Once students have listened a second time, put them in groups of three to make a comprehensive list of all the mistakes the thief made. The list should include such things as robbery, taking heavy bags, choosing bags that contained pennies, etc. Challenge your students to decide within their groups which mistake was the biggest one of all. Some may think it was attempting robbery in the first place. Still others will say his choice in what to steal was the biggest mistake. Once your students have had ample time to discuss the topic, work as a class to make a comprehensive list of the mistakes that the man made, and then take a vote on which mistake was the most significant. Ask for volunteers to role-play a conversation between the police and

the man as they interview him about his crime. Encourage creativity!

### 2 A PERSONAL MISTAKE

We all make mistakes. Sometimes, those mistakes are small, like stepping into a muddy puddle. Other times they are big, like choosing the wrong marriage partner. Give your students a few minutes to discuss with a partner one mistake they have made, big or small. They can be recent mistakes, like drinking too much at a party over the weekend, or significant ones that happened a long time ago. Encourage students to share as many details as they can or that they are comfortable with about the incident, and suggest that they take some notes as they write. With that discussion in mind, explain to your students that a narrative piece of writing is one that tells a story. The most important piece of a narrative is the series of events that make up the story, also known as the plot. A narrative should also be arranged according to time, that is chronologically. Give your students some class time to write the narrative that tells of their mistake, but challenge them to make one significant change in the story. Your students should write the piece again changing the mistake they made. They will end up with a story that tells of how they could have made a mistake but did not and the positive results that ensued. Doing this will give your students an opportunity to combine actual events with fictional events to create a narrative. Once the papers are done, let your students share their stories with their original partners, and encourage those partners to weigh in on how the story was changed. Could the writer have changed the story any other way? Does the story now have a happy ending?

### 3 MAKING AMENDS

With almost all mistakes, someone else is involved or suffers some of the consequences. Sometimes they are in partnership with us, and we make a bad decision that leads to the mistake. Perhaps we make an investment against our spouse's wishes and regret it. Maybe we make a bad decision in a video game and our partner loses his life. Is it possible that we complain about too much

homework and our teacher assigns twice as much to the entire class? At other times, the person affected by our mistake is someone that we have wronged. We blame someone else for something that they did not do. We cause physical harm to someone in a moment of anger. We betray a friend and then live to regret it. Get your class thinking about the ways that another person could be affected by a mistake that they might make, and invite your students to share their ideas. Take the discussion a step further and ask what they would do in a situation where they had made mistakes that affected another person. Would they ignore the mistake and act as though it never happened? Would they approach the person and apologize? Would they buy the person a gift with the silent message that they regret their actions? Each person who has made a mistake will take very different actions than another person might, but are there cultural expectations involved in that person's choice? Put your students in discussion groups to talk about what they would do and what most people from their home culture would do in certain circumstances of transgression. Give them some questions to discuss such as the following:

- Is it appropriate for a parent to apologize to his child?
- What should a husband do if he wrongs his wife?
- For someone in a professional setting, what is the best way to make up for a bad decision?
- What can a young person do when he has hurt his best friend?

After the groups have discussed the questions, ask volunteers to role-play those situations or any others that come up in the discussion. We all make mistakes, that is true, but not everyone addresses the consequences of those mistakes in the same way.

Your students will gain not only linguistic knowledge but interpersonal knowledge as well after talking about mistakes and what to do about them. **You can be sure, though, if you do these activities with your students, you will not regret it.**

# 8 Activities For Putting Phones to Positive Use in the ESL Classroom

**WHEN THE TYPICAL TEACHER SEES HER STUDENTS USING CELL PHONES IN CLASS, HER RESPONSE IS TO PUT IT AWAY, TAKE IT AWAY OR THROUGH SOME OTHER MEANS REMOVE THE PHONE FROM THE CLASSROOM.**

Today's phones, though, have many features your students can use to their advantage when learning English, and allowing them in the classroom may just help your students learn. Here are some activities you might want to try in class that will also convince you cell phones really can be put to positive use in class.

**TRY THESE 8 CELL PHONE ACTIVITIES IN YOUR CLASSROOM**

## 1 PASS THE PICTURE

Since most of today's cell phones include a camera feature, phones can be a terrific way to help your students learn new vocabulary. Set a precedent in your class that students can bring in cell phone pictures of objects they see outside the classroom, objects that they do not now possess English vocabulary to describe. Pass the picture around the class and see if anyone can give their fellow student an answer to his vocabulary conundrum, or give the answer yourself if no one else has a ready answer!

## 2 PICTURE SCAVENGER HUNT

On the flip side, you can give your students a set of words that corresponds with a unit you are studying in class and send them out on a picture scavenger hunt. This will work particularly well with very concrete sets of vocabulary, words that your students would use and see examples of on a daily basis. Send groups out with vocabulary lists and camera phones and see how many they can find before returning to class at the assigned time.

## 3 NO-SEE

For second language learners, visual clues are very important when it comes to communicating. Unfortunately, real life language situations do not always give ESL students ideal situations for communicating in English, for example, language exchanged over the phone. Cell phone conversations can give your students a chance to practice conversational skills without visual input to aid comprehension. Though they may be challenging, they will ultimately be beneficial to your students and their language studies.

## 4 VOICEMAIL CHALLENGE

Even more challenging to your students' listening skills is listening to a recorded message via voicemail. They will have the same challenges that come from lack of visual input, but they will additionally have the distortions that come from a digital recording. Be creative and send your students regular voice messages. Use a group message to your class to assign homework or give information that they will need for class the next day. The group message will save you from having to repeat the same message twenty times and your students will still reap the benefits that come with the voicemail challenge.

## 5 TEXT-A-SUMMARY

In reading class, cell phones can play a valuable part as well. The next time you want your students to write a summary of something they have read, have them text it to you or your website. Because many phones have a strict and very low limit on the number of characters one text can contain, it will force your students to be concise and avoid trivial and useless words in their summaries.

## 6 WRITING INSPIRATION

In writing, use cell phones as inspiration for writing assignments. Have students take pictures of people or scenes they see outside the classroom for inspiration when they write inside the classroom. They may want to take

pictures of interesting buildings, beautiful scenery or interesting people. For a real challenge, have students exchange phones and pictures and be inspired by their classmates' photos.

## 7 ACT'N'SNAP

Or have your students reenact a piece of literature they read in class in play format. As groups of students perform in front of the class, the rest of the students use their phones to take pictures. After everyone has performed and taken at least one picture, have your students use one of their pictures to write about what was happening in the selection at that point

## 8 RESEARCH ASSISTANT

If you ever find yourself frustrated because you do not have enough internet resources for your classroom, allowing your students to use their phones for internet access in class can alleviate that problem. Your students can then use the reference sources available online as well as do research right in class. Since they are using their phones, you will not need wifi or computers in your classroom.

**AS WE COMPLETE OUR TRANSITION INTO THE INFORMATION AGE, CLASSROOMS ARE BOUND TO FEEL THE EFFECTS, BUT TEACHERS CAN PUT THESE CHANGES TO POSITIVE USE ON A DAILY BASIS.**

By allowing and encouraging cell phones in the ESL classroom, you will have a unique bank of resources at your fingertips, and your students', ready to move them toward language fluency in English.

# Beyond Opinions: 3 Ways to Facilitate Stimulating Discussion

*One of the most beneficial ways to practice language naturally is through spontaneous discussion.*

At lower levels this is difficult to accomplish, but once students are at an intermediate level or above it is the perfect time to engage in some unadulterated discussion. Here are three ways to facilitate stimulating discussion.

## TRY THESE 3 GREAT WAYS TO FACILITATE STIMULATING DISCUSSION IN YOUR CLASSROOM

### 1 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Classes of all types and sizes can benefit greatly from discussions about culture, differences and opinions. If you have a class of primarily one culture chances are many cultural norms have already come up. You can delve deeper into the topic by providing information about how things are carried out in other cultures and doing comparisons. Students always have a lot to say about their cultural norms, food, ceremonies, etc. You could focus specifically on one element of culture, for example: weddings (a fun one), funerals (interesting), Buddhist Ceremonies (if applicable) or country holidays. Students can not only describe the topic, but discuss their favorite memories or parts, things they don't like, or whatever else comes up. The best thing about discussion is that it doesn't have to be structured, and it can lead to anywhere. Another way to bring in cultural differences is to create a cultures quiz which focuses on world cultural beliefs and differences. This is a great jumping off point for discussion, reflection, and heightened learning. If you have students from various countries, be sure to include each of their countries on the quiz, and possibly even some very little known facts.

### 2 SOCIAL ISSUES AND VALUES

Approaching social issues with an ESL class can be quite interesting and enlightening. The difference between the two is clear, but you will want to define it for students. Social issues deal with topics regarding the well-being of society and what students may believe is best for their community or society. Values back up our social stances and can be discussed in perhaps a more non-threatening way. There are a few things to keep in mind before you jump into a discussion regarding social issues and values. First, you'll want to consider very carefully bringing appropriate topics to the table. Be sensitive to religious and political beliefs that may hinder having a really open, honest and meaningful discussion. Also, be sure that all the students in the class are comfortable discussing the social issues and values that you choose. One last thing to think about is how to frame the discussion. When it comes to social issues where people have strong opinions and interaction may get heated, devise some ways that the discussion will not turn personal. Be sure to be clear with students that they are discussing a topic, not attacking one another for ideas or beliefs. Statements can be personalized from the speaker, but not aimed toward other students. The intention is that students go beyond their own opinions about the topic, and start looking at both sides of an issue. Providing a list of questions for them to use as a launch pad for discussion may be very helpful. You can approach topics that have recently been in the news, something that came up recently in the class, or devise a list of options and have students vote on what topic they would like to denote class time to discussing. Stay away from any issues overtly centered upon stereotypes, religious beliefs or anything that the students may not have much connection or interest in. **Some good starting points are topics such as:**

- Time is more important than money
- Teachers should be paid more
- Money can't buy happiness.
- I believe in the death penalty.

- Children should be seen not heard.
- Every family should recycle.

### 3 RESEARCH AND FACTS

An extension of the above discussion ideas could be to have students do some minimal research on a topic that the class has agreed upon. The option of having an informal debate that has students back up some of their thoughts and feelings with facts can be very beneficial. Depending on the level of the group, the debate can be as formal or as informal as you like. Considering a few key elements before throwing students into the ring is really important. First, if you want a more formal debate, it will require some class preparation time and lessons in advance. Students will need to have specific language at their fingertips as well as access to some ways to research their topic. Supplying students with a list of common phrases that could be utilized during an informal or formal debate is essential. You could spend some time defining the difference, and having little mini-debates to practice before the big one arrives. **Some key vocabulary to include could be:**

**INFORMAL:** In my opinion..., I think/feel that..., I'd say that..., The point is..., As I see it...**FORMAL:** I don't agree with you because..., Yes that is true but..., According to... what you said is not accurate..., Let me make my point..., My point is this...Debates are a great way for students to gain confidence and utilize several different language aspects. You may also want to consider having students argue for it and vice versa. It is challenging and forces them to rely more on their research than on their opinions..

### STUDENTS AT A HIGHER LEVEL REALLY APPRECIATE DISCUSSION, NO MATTER ITS FORM OR ITS PURPOSE.

It may take some time to get them comfortable sharing thoughts and opinions. Once you hit upon those issues that mean a lot to them, they will flourish and discussion time will become a regularly requested lesson.



# Top 10 Time Fillers For Your Classroom

*Try as you might, careful as you are with your planning, sometimes what you plan to cover in class does not work with the clock.*

When you are ready for the bell but the bell is not quite ready for you, try one of the following time fillers to keep your class busy until it is time to dismiss.

## TRY THESE TOP 10 TIME FILLERS WITH YOUR CLASS!

### 1 TWENTY QUESTIONS

Do you remember car trips as a child playing twenty questions in the back seat? You think of a person or object and your siblings have twenty opportunities to ask yes/no questions to determine what object you are thinking of. This is an easy and short activity for you to do with your ESL class when you have a few minutes to spare. The first time you play, your students will need specific direction as to the types of questions to ask. You should help them understand how to ask strategic questions to identify the object. The more practice you give your students with this activity, the better they will get at it, and before long they will be begging you to play!

### 2 Pictionary

No matter what you are currently studying in class, you most likely have a list of vocabulary your students need to learn. When that is the case, a few minutes at the end of class is a great opportunity for either of these two vocabulary revision activities. Have your current vocabulary list written on index cards that you can use at a moment's notice. Then, when you have a few minutes, have one student come up to the board and select one of the vocabulary words. Set a timer for between one and three minutes, depending on how difficult you want to make the activity, and allow him to draw pictures to try to get the class to guess the word.

His classmates can call out their guesses while he draws. He is not allowed to use any letters, numbers or symbols as he draws. If his classmates correctly guess the word, you can either give another person a turn or have him select a second word. As you study more vocabulary throughout the year, add those words to your collection. By the end of the year, you will have all your vocabulary words collected ready for a review.

### 3 CHARADES

The second vocabulary revision activity is similar. You can play a few rounds of charades with your students in a similar manner to the Pictionary activity. Use the same vocabulary cards, but this time have your student or students act out the vocabulary word rather than draw it. Either you can have one person act out the word for the entire class or have two people act out the word for one half of the class. As is traditional with charades, the actor cannot say anything. The first group to guess the word wins a point. If you like, keep a running score for the two teams for a month at a time and then award prizes at the end of the month.

Then you can switch up your teams and seating arrangement for the next month's competition.

### 4 WRITE A COMMUNAL STORY

With a few extra minutes, you can also have your class work together to write a communal story. Start with one sentence on the board. Have your students take turns coming up to the board and adding one sentence to the story. Each person will be able to use his or her creativity to further the story, and the whole class can make sure the grammar is correct with each addition. The more often you do this, the more creative your students will become in their additions. It will be fun for your class to see just how crazy they can get and still keep a logical plot.

### 5 WHY/BECAUSE

This silly little game has the potential for some laughs with your students. Give each person two index cards or two small scraps of paper. On one card, each person should write a question that begins with the word 'why'. Then on the second piece of paper, each person should answer his or her question starting with the word 'because'. Then collect all the why's in one pile and all the because's in another. Mix up each pile and then read one why card with one because card. The combinations can be very funny, and then after reading all the random match ups you can have your students match the correct answers with the correct questions.

### 6 WOULD YOU RATHER

This activity is a good one for getting to know your students better. Keep a list of questions for your students starting with "Would you rather..." For example, you may ask, "Would you rather be a leader or a follower? Would you rather eat ice cream or cake? Would you rather have a cat or a dog?" You can be straightforward with your questions or be creative and out of the box.

Ask your class a question and have your students move to one side of the room if they answer one way, the other side of the room if they answer the other way. Then ask random students on each side to explain why they chose the answer that they did. You can do as many or as few questions as you have time for. You may learn some interesting facts about your students and their preferences with this activity.

### 7 TELEPHONE

This old-fashioned game can get new life in the ESL classroom. Have your students arrange themselves in a circle around the room. Come up with a long sentence yourself or have one of your students do it (check to make sure it is grammatical) and whisper it in the ear of the first student in the circle. The listening student then has one opportunity to whisper it in the ear of the next student. The process continues around the circle until it reaches the

last person. That person then says the sentence aloud to the class. You should then tell the class what the original sentence was. Your class will be surprised at how much the sentence changed as it travelled around the circle. If you like, challenge your students to be as careful as they can when speaking and listening and see if the sentence can make it around the circle with minimal change

## 8 WHITE BOARD SLAM

This activity will increase your students' vocabulary as well as fill time at the end of class. Start by writing a word on the board that contains four letters. You can start with anything. Then, challenge your students to come up and change only one letter of the word to make a new word. If someone has an answer, have him come up and make the change. Then have another student come up and change the word again. See how many different combinations your students can come up with by changing one letter at a time with no word repeats.

Also, give them the opportunity to ask for a definition of any of the words that they may not know throughout the activity.

## 9 OPEN QUESTION SESSION

Sometimes just a simple opportunity to ask questions can benefit your class. If you have a few minutes, open the floor for your students to ask you questions. They can be about material you have covered in class, situations they have encountered that may be unfamiliar culturally, new vocabulary words, or any of many other possibilities. Likely, the question that one student asks will lead to another from a second student. Everyone will benefit from hearing the answers, and some students may even be able to answer questions of their fellow students. If so, let them share from their knowledge and experience.

If no one has the answer but you, share it with your class and be glad that the question opened the chance to share.

# 10 READ ALOUD COMPREHENSION

If you have a newspaper or magazine with short articles handy, you can also use this to fill a few minutes in your class. Read aloud a short passage and ask your students to relate back what they heard or answer comprehension questions. You can never give your students too many opportunities to practice their listening skills, so the next time you have a few minutes, read a paragraph or two from the paper and ask your student what the article is about, what they know about the situation from what they heard, what they think the rest of the article is about, and what else they would like to know from the rest of the article.

**HAVING SOME UNPLANNED TIME AT THE END OF CLASS IS NOT NECESSARILY A BAD THING FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**

**MAKE THE MOST OF THE MINUTES BY USING ONE OF THESE ENGAGING AND ENTERTAINING TIME FILLING TECHNIQUES. YOU WILL BE SURPRISED AT HOW QUICKLY THE TIME PASSES!**