

# ***English for Teaching; Teaching for English***



(ETTE Project; Helping teachers help themselves)



## **50 of the Best Practices**

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Azerbaijan English Language Teachers' Association  
**AzerELTA**

*To celebrate the launch of the English for Teaching: Teaching for English (ETTE) project, here are 50 of the best articles, lesson ideas and questions from the British Council teaching and learning websites.*



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## ***Chapter One: Ten lesson tips and activities for secondary level***

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## **Secondary tips and activities 1: Getting teenagers to talk**

*By Clare Lavery, British Council*

Here are some tips and three discussion ideas, all aimed at getting teenagers to speak.

- Keep the conversation peer centred: plenty of pair or small group collaboration.
- Avoid asking discussion questions around the class: this puts them in the spotlight and causes potential embarrassment in front of friends. You also risk dominating the talk.
- Give them a concrete list of statements or opinions: help them to choose their own ideas. Don't expect them to have fully formed opinions on all things teenage!
- Keep to fairly short discussion activities (15 minutes): until you know what they like and they feel relaxed enough with you to talk freely.
- Feedback on errors after speaking should be general: try to avoid drawing attention to individual students' errors or they will be reluctant to speak next time.

### *Discussion activities*

Here are some stimulating discussion topics which have worked well with teenagers. The main features of these topics are that they

- a) draw on students' personal experience
- b) ask students to reflect on their own culture and attitudes
- c) give students a concrete decision to make with their peers.

### *Teenage time capsule*

Each group of students is going to bury a box in the ground for future generations to find. This box will contain 5 photos (or objects) which will tell young people in the future about life at the start of the third millennium in their country and/or school.

Students must choose their objects/photos together and each member of the group describes it to the rest of the class or another group. Explain why it is important and what it tells of life today.

### *Let the punishment fit the crime*

Prepare a short description on cards (or board) of all the possible punishments in a UK school e.g. writing lines, detention, exclusion and ask students in pairs or groups to add anymore that are used in their own country.

Then give each group a list of wrong doings (5 or 6) and ask them to order each act according to how bad they think it is e.g. swearing at a teacher, not completing homework for 3 weeks running, fighting in the corridor, smoking in the toilet. Now each group can also discuss which type of punishment might suit the crime!

This generates lots of discussion on what exactly constitutes unacceptable behavior but also what the students and their schools think is acceptable punishment.

*The 10 day trip*

A group of English teenagers are coming to stay in the country or region. They have only got 10 days to find out about your students' culture and see what is on offer.

Each group of students must plan an itinerary. It does not have to include all the tourist sights, they could go to a concert to hear local music or have a meal with a family or visit a school. Each must agree on the best introduction to their country and region, bearing in mind the age of the visitors.

Stress that students do not have to plan anything they would find boring.

These activity ideas originally appeared on the British Council Language Assistant website

(Adapted from [http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY/speaktry/teenagers\\_talk.shtml](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY/speaktry/teenagers_talk.shtml))

## Secondary tips and activities 2: Keeping teens interested

By Kevin Thomson, British Council, Barcelona

Many English teachers would probably agree that teenagers are the most difficult age group to teach. Sometimes our teenage students do not want to be in class in the first place and often their minds can be on other things when we are giving an English lesson. However, teen classes can also be fun and very rewarding for both the teacher and students. I believe that the materials that the teacher uses in the classroom are a crucial factor in deciding if a teens class is successful or not.

- A story from the classroom
- A lesson learnt
- Practical ideas
- Conclusion

### **A story from the classroom**

Some years ago in Barcelona I was trying to start a lesson with a class of fifteen year olds but two of the girls were having a noisy conversation in Catalan and it was proving very difficult to get the students' attention. Finally, I said to these two girls that if their conversation was really so interesting they should tell the rest of the students, in English, what they were talking about. One of the girls proceeded to tell the class about a girl at her school who was causing trouble by telling lies about people and generally being very destructive. The rest of the students listened with good attention then asked questions, made suggestions and the conversation developed for the next twenty minutes or so. Taking advantage of the unusually good attention being shown, I asked the students how they felt about the activities we did in class. We then had a really frank discussion.

- One thing that came across very clearly was that the students felt that a lot of the speaking activities we did were a waste of time. I explained the theory that students need to develop fluency by speaking in pairs or small groups and that during the present discussion some of the class hadn't spoken. "Yes, but look how much listening we've done today!", somebody said. After we had finished, one student came up to me and congratulated me on a brilliant lesson and several students asked me if we could do this kind of speaking activity again.

### **A lesson learnt**

Clearly, the students in my class in the anecdote above participated in the lesson much better than usual because they were very interested in what their classmates were saying. My previous attempts at getting the same students to speak and listen had been much less successful because they had not found the materials so stimulating. It seems obvious that lessons with teens will always be more interesting for the students if the teacher tries to find materials that the students can connect with instead of imposing materials that leave the students cold.

## Practical ideas

- **Whole class speaking activities**

If class size permits this, the teacher can help develop the students' fluency by organizing the class into a large circle. Rules should be clearly established that only one person is allowed to speak at a time and all communication must be in English. There are many possibilities as regards the subject to be discussed. One option is that students take turns asking any other student or the teacher a question. Another possibility is giving students the opportunity to suggest a list of topics that can be discussed as a whole class. The teacher can act as a chairperson and take notes of common errors then deal with these on the board after the discussion has finished. Students could try to correct sentences containing common errors.

- **Students' lives as a useful resource in the classroom**

Students can be given practice in forming questions by writing then asking questions to each other. It is usually a good idea for the teacher to give an example of an interesting question before the students start writing their questions.

- For example, a question such as **"Would you like to have children?"** is better than a question where the student probably already knows the answer (for example, **"Do you speak Russian?"**). After the teacher has helped the students to write their questions individually, the students can ask and answer the questions in small groups. This activity allows the students to decide what they are going to talk about instead of the teacher deciding.

- **Importance of personalization**

When we present new language to our teenage students, it is important to give them an opportunity to use this language to say something interesting about themselves.

- For example, if the teacher has just presented the second conditional, a way of practicing this structure would be to give the students a small piece of paper with sentence stems on them as follows:

***"If I won the lottery, I would.....", "If I could be somewhere else just now, I would be....." and "If I could meet somebody famous,....."***

The students complete the sentences then fold the piece of paper and give it to the teacher. In turn, students are given a piece of paper then they read

the sentences aloud. The students should then guess which of their classmates wrote the sentences.

- **Class surveys or learner diaries**

These can be used to allow students to express their opinions about classroom activities. These can be done periodically throughout the academic year with sentence stems to be completed such as:

***"The activities that have helped me learn so far this term have been.....", "The activities that I have not enjoyed so far this year have been.....", "I prefer speaking in small groups/the whole class...." etc.***

### **Conclusion**

It seems clear that it is important to provide lessons which keep our teenage students interested. If the students are not interested in the material we are using, it is probable that both students and teacher will end up bored and frustrated. While many of us may be obliged to use certain course books and other material that may not always stimulate our students, it is important to adapt this material or supplement it with activities that bring the students to life and encourage them to express themselves. If the teacher shows that she is interested in her students' opinions and is prepared to adapt her lessons after listening to these opinions, this can have a very positive effect on the atmosphere in the classroom.

(Adapted from [http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/teen\\_interested.shtml](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/teen_interested.shtml))

## Secondary tips and activities 3: Strategies for keeping your students attention

*By Clare Lavery*

Keeping students' attention and stopping them from getting distracted is a big challenge. Here are some reasons why students' attention may wander and ways to keep your classes on track.

- **Keep in control.** Anticipation is the best form of teacher defence so keep scanning the room, making eye contact with all students. You will catch those who are starting to fidget, look out of window or chat to their mates. Then you can react accordingly before the noise level has distracted everyone and created a situation.
- **Keep in tune with the class.** Don't just glide along with the best. If one student answers your questions this is not proof that all the others are following what is being discussed. Aim for responses from as wide a sample as possible. Don't just accept answers from the 3 or 4 class leaders or you will leave the rest behind.
- **Keep checking understanding.** Try not to use questions like "Do you understand?" or "Has everyone got that?" Students are notoriously wary of admitting they haven't understood, especially if their peers are feigning comprehension! Use further questions to see if they have understood the concepts.
- **Keep demonstrating.** Attention wanders when they don't know what to do and are too afraid to admit it. Keep your instructions to a minimum and demonstrate what to do rather than giving lengthy or detailed explanations. If nearly half of them are clearly unsure and starting to flounder or chat in their mother tongue, take action. Call on the pairs who are doing the task successfully to demonstrate their work as an example for others then try again.

### Changing the pace

Here are some tried and tested techniques for changing the pace of the lesson to keep students awake.

- **Chant.** Select a weekly chant which rouses students. Students stand or sit, clap along or snap their fingers and repeat the rap you have devised. This can be a quotation for higher levels or a sentence construction covered by lower levels. Make it short, snappy and fun.
- **Drill.** Use some quick fire questioning around the class and involve as many as possible. Then get the students to do the questions as well as supplying answers. Use visuals as prompts for this questioning.
- **Play a game.** Do a 10 minute revision game involving everyone pooling ideas, words or questions. Even a spelling game for beginners does the trick. Word association or memory games work well!
- **Give a dictation.** They do have to concentrate here! It might be just a short piece of text or a list of words. It could be some lines from a song in the charts.

(Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-teaching-tips-keeping-attention.htm>)

## Secondary tips and activities 4: Dealing with discipline *By Clare Lavery*

No matter how interesting and well prepared our lesson may be, it can be ruined by a confrontation with students. A bad atmosphere can result. Here are some strategies for ‘telling off’ students and still avoiding confrontations.

The way you reprimand will have an effect on classroom atmosphere so:

- **Anticipate misbehaviour.** Keep scanning the room during the lesson. Be aware of times when students may be distracted e.g. when you are writing on the board, helping individuals or when you are changing activity.
- **Use non-verbal signals first.** Delay the need to intervene by walking close to disruptive students, catching their eye or involving them in your questioning.

If the above avoidance strategies do not bring about good behaviour then intervene with care:

- **Keep calm.** Use a firm but calm tone, no matter how outrageously the student is behaving. Remember that they may wish to provoke your anger. Use your calm voice to maintain authority. If you lose it, you will lose respect.
- **Be fair.** You need to be absolutely clear in targeting the troublemaker(s). Some pupils may be reacting to others who are disturbing or distracting them.
- **Don’t get personal.** Make it clear that the behaviour is unacceptable, not the person. This helps avoid building up a negative relationship with a student.
- **Don’t compare.** Avoid making comparisons between students and classes as this is unfair. For example: My other classes don’t make as much noise/made more effort/enjoyed this.
- **Avoid empty threats.** Don’t threaten to do things which you will not be able to carry through. For example: The next person who talks will be sent to the Head. Avoid threatening punishments which you would not wish to implement!

When you need to reprimand it can be best if you:

- **Keep it private.** Before making it public, try speaking discreetly to the troublemaker. A quiet word is less embarrassing for the student and less disruptive to the others (if they are busy doing a task).
- **Avoid confrontation.** If the student seems tense, agitated or likely to explode it is best to postpone the reprimand until the end of the lesson.
- **Defuse confrontations.** Faced with a very angry situation and shouting, maintain a calm tone and recommend dealing with things at the end of the lesson. Never get involved in a shouting match.
- **Reprimand the troublemaker not the whole class.** Avoid blaming everyone for the bad behaviour of a few!

(Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-teaching-tips-discipline.htm>)

## Secondary tips and activities 5:

### Short projects to get them talking *By Clare Lavery*

There is nothing like a group project to get students talking and they work well as long as:

- The topic is centred on the learners' interests
- There is not any real need for extensive or time-consuming research
- Students can present their work orally to the rest of the class.

One particularly successful format is based on our love of lists. Students in small groups work towards compiling a top five.

Examples of top five topics are:

- Our top five favourite English records/music videos (including a final presentation with their number one song or video or lyrics).
- Our top five authors/books/poets (not just English speaking) – students can be encouraged to say why they like the author, give a description of the type of book or read an extract from a poem.
- Our top five adverts (magazine or TV) with a final round up showing the ads and describing why they are effective. This works well with students studying business.
- Our top five TV programmes (restrict to English/American ones if appropriate).
- Our top five designers/painters /paintings/buildings– including an oral description of, for example, one painting.
- Our top five discoveries/scientists/areas worthy of research – including discussion of the contributions made to the scientific field and to mankind.
- Our top five teenage fashions/teenage status symbols (e.g. mobile phone, moped).
- Our top five websites – for students who use the internet a lot. This can include a description of the site, its users and the reasons why it is so good.

A short project can be presented in one lesson, prepared and researched and completed in the next lesson.

The main advantages are:

- It gives students controlled opportunities to provide their own content in language lessons.
- It can be tailored to their school's curriculum or their own specialisation.
- The oral presentation of each group's findings can take as much time as is appropriate, depending on the enthusiasm and language level of the class.
- The final oral presentation stage gives excellent practice in extended speaking which is useful for higher levels. It can also be appropriate to the oral component of students' exams and gives them extra practice in talking about topics close to their hearts.
- Students often tell you about people and things related to their own culture which can be very informative and is a genuine information gap exercise. The project can be a good round up of a term or a school year.

(Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-teaching-tips-short-projects.htm>)

## **Secondary tips and activities 6: Improving discussion lessons**

*By Clare Lavery*

Have you ever felt you were asking all the questions about students' opinions? Do you find you are doing more talking in a discussion than your class? Here are some tips to:

- Shift the task focus from you talking to them (they have to talk to each other)
- Give them control of their own discussion
- Give them practice in formulating their opinions within a controlled framework.

Make a list of issues or topics which your students might find interesting. Think of seven or eight statements on each issue which represent typical and widely opposing comments on the topic.

For example:

- Topic: Are boys and girls the same?
  - Girls naturally want to play with dolls
  - Boys are usually better at Science subjects than girls.

### **Discussion envelopes**

- Photocopy each list of statements on different topics and put them in 3-4 envelopes.
- Divide the class into small groups. Tell them the title of each topic.
- Each group selects an envelope. They work through the topic in their group, taking turns to read aloud the statements found in the envelope and inviting comment and opinions.
- You can ask each group to record their reactions to the issues for feedback at the end of the session.

Re-use the envelopes in another lesson. Each group chooses a new topic and envelope.

### **Listen and react**

- Put students in small groups of 3 all facing each other.
- Act as conductor by reading aloud a statement on a list, one at a time.
- After each statement students have one minute to react in their group to what they have heard, disagree, agree, comment etc.
- Stop them talking after a minute (with gong, whistle, clap) and read the next statement on your list.
- Students hear you but must look at each other and tell each other what they think!

## Read and modify

- Give a list of statements on a set topic to each group in the class
- Students must work through the statements and modify them to reflect their views as a group. This involves discussion on how they will re word the sentence or add a further clause to justify their position.

For example:

- Topic: The school year
  - Statement: School holidays are too long
  - Students' modified sentence: We think school holidays are not long enough
- Use the feedback session at the end of the lesson to hear some of the “new” statements that each group has created.

(Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-teaching-tips-improvising-discussions.htm>)

## Secondary tips and activities 7: Reading aloud

*By Anthony Sloan, British Council, Warsaw*

These activities describe different ways you and your students can read text aloud in order to develop your students' feeling for the music of the language.

- Not only individual sounds, but the way words connect, intonation and rhythm are all important in coming across as an effective, natural-sounding speaker of English. It can be helpful for students to have practice in stretching speech, in playing with it, in exaggerating to help them overcome shyness. You can help in this regard by playing with the language yourself, by making fun of it, by putting on different accents, etc, and by encouraging your students to do the same.
- Having a small piece of text which students are familiar with gives them a secure footing from which to jump in different directions.

### Activities you can try

Begin with any text that you have already been looking at for some other purpose. Choose any of the following ways to play with it:

- Students read the text out in turns, each person reading just 2 words, or 1 word, at a time. The idea is to try to get the passage to flow smoothly and with proper intonation.
- One person reads aloud, and another acts as conductor. Arms up means loud, arms down means soft. Or arms left means slow, arms right means fast. Or, the conductor can conduct a choral reading of the passage.
- You mime an action from the text. Students respond with the corresponding sentence.
- Students sing the text to a well-known melody. They have to try to fit the words to the music.
- You write on the board or clap out the stress pattern of a phrase from the text. Students try to read out the appropriate phrase, or any phrase which fits. For example: Ba BA ba-da BA = 'a phrase from the text'.
- Students compete to see who can read a passage the fastest - without any mistakes.
- For comprehension, one student reads, another translates into the mother tongue.
- Students read according to an adverb, which other students can suggest, such as 'nervously', 'sadly', 'angrily' etc.

(Adapted from [http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/readtry/reading\\_aloud.shtml](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/readtry/reading_aloud.shtml))

## **Secondary tips and activities 8: Listening activities for songs**

*Katherine Bilborough, Teacher trainer, British Council, Spain*

Here are some tried and tested ideas I get my students to do when listening to a pop song. Activities need not require hours of preparation time and some of the best activities are spontaneous and simple. Below are a few suggestions. They are categorised into pre-listening, while listening and after listening activities.

### ***Pre-listening activities***

- Give students the title of the song and ask them to predict words and phrases that they expect to hear.
- Give students the words of a song with an "either/or" choice for certain words in each line. Students choose which word is more likely in each case and then listen and check if they were correct.
- Dictate a list of words which appear in the song - in a random order and add one extra word which doesn't appear. Students write the words then listen to the song, ticking off the words as they hear them. They should end up with one word.

### ***While listening activities***

- Students listen and delete extra words which they do not hear (you will need to prepare a song page with extra words)
- Students listen and fill gaps (open cloze or multiple choice)
- Students listen to a song, draw a picture to represent what they hear and then explain their pictures in small groups.

### ***After listening activities***

- Students listen to a song and make a note of 6 or 8 words that they hear. Then they use these words as the basic vocabulary for composing a poem in pairs. Although students are often reluctant to write poetry, if you tell them that their poem has to be "corny", they will enjoy the task.
- Students write another verse for the song in pairs or small groups.
- Students brainstorm all of the words that they have heard and then listen again and check to see how many are correct.

(Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/listentry/songs.shtml>)

## Secondary tips and activities 9: Round up activities *By Clare Lavery*

Many lessons at the end of a school year or course involve a summary of what has been covered. Revision activities are useful as they remind students of what they have done and reinforce a sense of learning.

The most effective revision:

- Uses an informal task-based approach
- Involves all students working together to pool their knowledge
- Includes an element of challenge
- Can be adapted up or down a level and/or used in mixed groups
- Is fun for even the most bored student

### Snakes and ladders revision

- Draw a blank snakes and ladders board.
- Complete some squares on the board with standard instructions like: make a sentence with the verb 'to remind' or 'move 2 spaces'
- Write challenges in all the other squares (depending on the language you have covered): Tell your partner something about your parents or ask your partner about his family.
- Photocopy the board and paste on cardboard (optional)
- Remember to ask students to bring dice and use coins as counters.
- Play in pairs or small groups.

### Language dice

You need some dice to play this game for small groups/pairs but it can be played with the whole class in 2 teams.

- Prepare question cards/sheets for each number on the dice.
- Divide the questions into categories (themes like hobbies, family or categories like grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), for example: if you throw a 6 you have to answer a grammar question, if you throw a 1 you get a vocabulary question.
- Students answer the questions based on the number they throw.

Use a points system for each correct answer. Limit throws. For example, to 3 throws each. Keep the game short and sweet. They can then swap partners to play again or the 2 class teams can play another round. Pairs and small groups will need question sheets with the answers on the back so they can play without you.

### Noughts and Crosses

This can be played with the whole class and then pairs or small groups can play alone.

- Draw a noughts and crosses grid on the board.
- Put a topic or category in each square of the grid. For example: geography/history/maths or themes from the units in their textbook: travel/entertainment.

- Prepare questions on each topic/category in the grid. This should involve language covered during the year e.g. new words, common errors (to be corrected by students) or restaurant language, geography, social English.
- Ask students to prepare questions using your models, if appropriate to their level.
- Play noughts and crosses in 2 teams. Teams take turns to choose a category square on the grid. They answer a question in that category. They can put a nought or cross in the square if their answer is correct.

(Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-teaching-tips-round-up.htm>)

## Secondary tips and activities 10: Games for language revision- and fun! *By Joanna Budden, British Council, Spain*

These games involve the learners sitting in a circle and working as a whole class. See the related think article - **Think** - *Methodology* - Circle games - for advice on how to manage these games and for more activity ideas.

- *Conditional chain game*  
This game is good to revise and practise structures in the first conditional.
  - The teacher begins with a sentence, for example "If I go out tonight, I'll go to the cinema."
  - The next person in the circle must use the end of the previous sentence to begin their own sentence. E.g. "If I go to the cinema, I'll watch The Last Samurai" The next person could say, "If I watch The Last Samurai, I'll see Tom Cruise" etc. etc.
- *Word Associations*  
A very simple game where students must think of words connected to the word that comes before.
  - For example, the teacher says, "Fish", the next person thinks of a word they associate with fish, such as "water", the next person could say "a glass" the next, "window" etc.
  - You can decide as a group if associations are valid. Ask the student to justify the connection.
  - To make it more competitive, set a thinking time limit and eliminate students.
  - When they are eliminated they can become judges.
- *Chinese whispers - telephone lines*  
A sentence is whispered around the circle. The last student to receive the message either says it aloud or writes it on the board. This can be a fun way to introduce a topic and activate schema at the beginning of a class. For example, for a class on food, whisper the question, "What did you have for lunch today?" Equally, at the end of a class it can be a nice way to revise structures or vocabulary from the lesson.
- *Concentration*
  - To begin with, students sit in a circle and do the hand actions of lap (both hands to lap), clap, left click, right click.
  - When they get the hang of it, add these words in time to the rhythm "Concentration, concentration, concentration now beginning, are you ready? If so, let's go!"
  - On the first finger click, you say your name, and on the second click you say the name of someone in the circle.
  - You have passed the turn to the person you nominated on your second finger click.

- Then they say their own name on the first click and the name of another student on the second.
- When they have got the idea, use lexical sets. For example, everyone says their favourite sport first then use these to play the game.
- For a competitive group, eliminate those students who make mistakes.
  
- *I went to the shops and I bought...*  
The classic memory game where each person adds a new item to the list in alphabetical order.
  - For example, student 1, "I went to the shops and I bought an apple" Student 2, "I went to the shops and I bought an apple and a bike". Student 3, "I went to the shops and I bought an apple, a bike and a coat".
  - This game can be adapted to different levels and lexical sets. I recently revised sports and the use of do/ play/ go by playing "I went to the sports centre....." The same game but using different vocabulary. For example, student 1 "I went to the sports centre and I did aerobics", "I went to the sports centre and I did aerobics and played basketball", "I went to the sports centre and I did aerobics, played basketball and went canoeing" etc.
  
- *Yes / No game*
  - Nominate one student to be in the hot seat, slightly apart from the rest of the circle.
  - The rest of the group must think of questions to ask the student in the hot seat.
  - They can ask anything they like, the only rule is that the student in the hot seat must answer the questions without using the words "yes" or "no".
  - Also ban "yeah", head nods and shakes! For example, a student asks, "Are you wearing jeans today?" The student in the hot seat could reply, "I am" or "you can see that they're jeans!"

(Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/othertry/circle.shtml>)



## ***Chapter Two:*** **10 Great Classroom basics**

### ***10 articles and ideas on ways of working in the classroom***

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## Basics 1: Classroom Layout

*Jo Budden, British Council, Spain*

The layout of your classroom can have a serious impact on the way you teach and the way your students learn. This article looks at some of the basic points that you can consider regarding the way you arrange your classroom.

- The importance of layout
- Some considerations
- Classroom layouts
- Conclusion

### **The importance of layout**

When you're planning your lessons do you ever think about the layout of the classroom? Sometimes it may be impossible and impractical to move the furniture around at all for many reasons including the fact that in some schools the tables are bolted to the floor! However, even if the furniture is immobile, remember that your students aren't, so you can think about how you want to group students and how you can use the space you have to your advantage. This may involve using spaces at the front, or down the side of the classrooms, letting students stand up or to sit on the tables to do certain activities.

### **Some considerations**

In an ideal world the classroom furniture would be light and mobile so you could come in and quickly rearrange it to your liking. Unfortunately, in the real world it is often heavy and the rooms themselves are too small to make too many changes. Having said that I do think it's worth thinking about the classroom layout and doing what you can to make it as appropriate as possible to your lesson. Here are some questions to consider:

- Can I see the faces of every single student and can they see me?
- Can everyone see the board (if you're planning on using it)?
- Can the students see one another?
- Can I move around the room so that I can monitor effectively?

For me, the first question is really important. I substitute a lot of classes, so I don't necessarily know all the students' names so it's vital to be able to see them all. Although it can seem like an extra effort and a waste of time I find that spending the first two minutes of a class moving the furniture so that I can see every single face is time well invested. You can usually get the students to help you and as long as you give the instructions in English it's all good language practice! Now, I'd like to look at a few typical classroom layouts.

### **Classroom layouts**

- **The horseshoe**  
Tables in a horseshoe or three sided square shape. This is great if you're doing board work and speaking activities. All the students will be able to see you, the board and each other

and you will have a lovely space in the middle of the horse shoe and around the outside to monitor. If you have a very large class you can get a similar effect by having one horseshoe inside another and using double rows.

- **Chairs in a circle**

Tables pushed to the walls and just the chairs in a circle. You can sit in the circle with your students. If they need to write at certain times of the lesson they can either go to work at the tables facing the walls around the outside or they can rest a folder on their knees and stay in the circle. The circle formation is great for many games, group discussions, welcoming your students at the beginning of the class, doing the register and really talking to your students.

- **Traditional rows**

Although many schools still use traditional rows, as you can pack in lots of people in a small space, there are very few advantages for a language teacher. If students are sitting in twos you have immediate pairs made for pair work but as you will probably want to change the pairs at some point this is only a limited advantage. If you can't get around behind the students to look at their work it can be really difficult to monitor. If you have to work in this layout think about the spaces at the front of the class and the aisles between the rows. For mingle tasks make use of these. Look for alternative spaces for certain group tasks, such as the corridors, playground or halls.

- **Nested tables in groups**

Nested tables are obviously great for small group work and project work. It can be difficult to start classes when students are already sitting on small tables as some students will have their backs to you. If possible have the students sit so they're side on to you and remember to move around the classroom when you need to give instructions or change activities. Surprise your class by popping up at different places around the class.

## Conclusion

I suggest you try as many classroom layouts as you can to see how you feel most comfortable. Experiment with the layout if possible. If you really can't change how your classrooms are set up, then do spend time thinking about how you can vary where your students sit and where you position yourself in the room too. The classroom dynamics can improve dramatically when you change the layout, it's a matter of experimenting and seeing what works best for you and your students and it's something that you may want to take into consideration at the lesson planning stage.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-tips-classroom-layout.htm>

## Basics 2: Large classes

### Large classes

Large classes are frightening! How can one person control 40-45 children? 'A sea of faces' but I think I will drown!

Large classes are fun. There are so many brains in the room. That means lots and lots of good ideas.

This teaching tip looks at how you can organise so many students at one time, teach them useful English, assess their progress - and stay sane!

There are key moments in lessons and courses that you need to concentrate on.

### Beginning lessons and courses

If your large class come noisily into the room and sit where they like, then you will have difficulty beginning the lesson clearly. Here are some tips:

1. In your very first lesson with the class make **a seating plan**. Then make sure they sit in the same seats next time. Have the children make name cards, collect them in and hand them out again at the beginning of the next lesson. This will help you to learn names much more quickly. On the seating plan make notes about any children who struggle or do well. Plan group work using the seating plan.
2. Get your room **organised at the beginning**. This is difficult if you are using someone else's room but it can still be done. Get the first students in the room to help you move tables and chairs as you want them. If you want children to move into groups in the middle of the lesson, it can help to do it table by table while everyone is doing a quiet writing or copying activity. This reduces the amount of furniture noise.
3. **Have something ready for the children** to do when they enter the room. In the go4english lesson plan 'on the farm' the teacher has stuck cards around the walls. You could have a puzzle on the board for them to look at, a list of words from last lesson, something on each desk that is a small revision game. Giving them the answer makes a good start to the lesson.
4. **Reward good behaviour** at the beginning of lessons. Give credit marks or points for a quick and quiet entry. You can time how long it takes to get settled and make it a game!
5. Have your **lesson plan outline on the board** for the children to see. They are more likely to listen for 5 minutes if they know they do not have to 'just listen' all lesson.

## Teaching language

In a large class it will take you some time to find out the ability and learning styles of all your students. So you must make sure that you think about using visual stimulation and letting the children use the language every lesson as well as making them listen and be quiet. See the go4english teaching tips on ‘mixed ability’ and ‘learning styles’ to give you some ideas.

In a big class children will stop concentrating as there are more distractions / noise and they feel very far away from the teacher when s/he is standing at the blackboard presenting. Do not ‘present’ and talk about language for more than 3 or 4 minutes. Cover one point and then let them do a mini exercise before you move on. In a large class you can use ‘concept check’ questions, just as you do with a smaller class but remember, they do not let you know what the whole class can do. To do that you need to be moving around the room.

Make board work very large and clear so that everyone can see at the back. When the children are copying from the board, walk round the room and check what people are doing. Give praise for good copying.

## Organising activities

Group work is essential for large classes. New teachers are sometimes frightened to do it as they think they will not control the class, but a good task can make everyone work well.

As soon as you can in your class you should try to set up **regular groups**. Regrouping 40 people every lesson can be very tiring. Most primary schools have regular groups that they work in, so that the teacher can say ‘Get into your groups’ or can set the class up at the beginning of the lesson. These groups can be in ability groups or mixed. They are easy to monitor as the teacher knows where and when most help will be needed.

**Varied groupings** are good too but in a large class these need to be chosen by the teacher to some extent or there will be chaos! One technique is to allow students to choose a partner and then put them with another pair so that everyone has a friend to work with. Plan group work very carefully as you will only want one complete reorganisation of the furniture in a lesson with so many people to move!!

## Controlling the class

From your first lesson you need a routine of how to allow the students to speak to you, how to allow the students to speak to each other and how to stop the whole class.

Speaking to you, students need to **put their hand up** to ask a question. Try not to let one student speak to you for very long in front of the whole class, as the others will stop listening. Long questions should be answered when students are working individually or in small groups. Do not answer questions in the middle of language presentation or instructions. Use a hand gesture to indicate that you will answer the question at the end of what you have to say.

Give clear (estimated) **time limits** for a group activity before you start and then give warnings ‘two more minutes’ during the activity. In this way, when you ask students to finish and listen to you, they will be ready to do so. Do not keep stopping group activities to talk to the whole class. **DO** stop a group activity briefly if the noise level is getting too

high and encourage the students to talk more quietly. Sometimes quiet background music helps students to keep their noise down so they can hear it. This can also work for individual work. Keep moving around and reminding students to use English.

Have a **signal** for stopping the class. Drama teachers, whose students are all talking and moving use a hand up gesture. As each student notices the teacher's gesture they put their hand up in the air also and stop talking. Other teachers use a whistle, or a tune on their CD player or rap on the white board. It is more effective if you also tell the students what to do: 'pencils down' 'close your books' 'look at the board'.

These routines need to be followed carefully.

### Ending and giving homework

At the end of the lesson everyone needs to know what they have been doing in this lesson and why, what the homework is and what they need for next lesson.

This will take **AT LEAST** five minutes with a large class but it does not have to be the very last 5 minutes. In large classes there will always be some people who pack up their stuff in the last 5 minutes when the teacher is trying to do an important review, because they feel the lesson is finished. If you wait until the bell rings **NO-ONE** will be listening!

Get the homework on the board earlier. Stop the lesson **BEFORE** the last 5 minutes and show the students their task for homework. Also write up what they need to bring for next lesson. Then let them go on with their work and you can go round and check that everyone has written this down.

Review time must be seen as important. Get selected students to come up and tick off on your board plan what they have done in the lesson. Give points and credits in this part of the lesson for good recall or participation, just as you would in the main body of the lesson. If the students are working in groups for the last part of the lesson, remember that you also have to put the furniture back! Don't end up doing it all yourself. That's a terrible way to end the day!

### Marking

How can you mark 45 books every week? Answer? Try not to! Plan a fixed number of formally assessed tasks during the term. For small activities such as sentence completion and grammar exercises, have students self-mark or have them exchange books and mark their friend's book according to a key on the board or OHP. Give short tests in class that you can mark together quickly.

When you do take in an assessed piece, make that a chance to review a section of the student's notebook and check they have done their other work well, putting comments on it. So that you do not have to return all 45 books before the next lesson, plan the next lesson to be done on paper or as a design project.

The better you know your large class, the better they will behave for you. Lead by example! Get yourself organised and the class will feel that they know what is happening. That way they will relax and enjoy English lessons! And if they are absorbed in what they are doing and feel secure, your life will be easier and a lot quieter. Then you can have fun. Good luck!

## **Basics 3: First classes Introducing yourself to classes**

by Clare Lavery

The first lesson and subsequent lessons will be crucial in establishing the atmosphere in your classes and your students' attitude towards you. Here are ten useful tips for helping you to get to know your students better and get off to a good start.

- Enlist the help of teachers: Will the teacher introduce you? Will you have your own slot of time to talk to the class? What would the teacher like you to do?
- Confirm guidelines with teachers: rules for rowdy behaviour, leaving the room to go to the bathroom, will the teacher deal with bad behaviour if you are both in the room together?
- Voice your worries, no matter how small.
- Keep in mind the old adage “first impressions count” and apply this to your first classes.
- Make your role clear you are a member of staff, not a member of the student body (no matter how close in age) so do not set out to be “mates” with them. Keep a friendly distance, keep personal details about boyfriends to yourself.
- Look professional: do not totally change your style but dress appropriately for the school culture, respect the staff dress code. Students need to perceive you as a teacher.
- Sound professional: be careful about your voice (clear and calm) and posture. Students need to feel you are in control or they will take control.
- Assert yourself: establish rules from the start and make them clear. No more than 5 will do. For example: do not start the lesson or explain activities if students are talking. Always expect silence before you speak. Have signals for getting attention (clapping hands twice) or for students to speak (putting up hands).
- Be organised: plan, plan and plan again ! If you will be alone with groups decide how you will introduce yourself and plan a task to get to know students. What will you write on the board? How long will the activity last ? What will you do if they get too noisy?
- Be positive: smile, even if you are feeling a nervous wreck. Concentrate on giving students positive attention with encouraging smiles and praise for answering questions.
- Show real interest: listen to their answers and react “That’s a good answer” “I like them too. Have you got their latest CD?” Keep your response as natural as possible.
- Make an effort to learn and use their names: Make name tags, cardboard name plates for desks or mark names on a seating plan of the room.
- Be patient: You may be the first native speaker they have ever met. Give them time to ask you questions and give them time to get used to your voice
- Have fun: try to relax and enjoy yourself. A sense of humour helps too!

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-teaching-tips-introducing.htm>

## Basics 4: Rules of the classroom; Establishing the ground rules

By Jo Budden

### Introduction

Good classroom management skills are essential to the smooth and efficient running of any classroom. But, no one is born knowing all the ‘tricks of the trade’ and most teachers learn the hard way, by their mistakes! Most of us (I hope!) can remember feeling completely out of their depth in a classroom situation at some point in their teaching careers. For example, in my first year of teaching, a particularly ‘lively’ group of ten and eleven year olds managed to lock me outside of the class; it was a very steep learning curve! I can still remember feeling my heart racing as the panic increased. At that point I was really thinking that maybe I wasn’t cut out to teach children after all. However, that was almost seven years ago and I’m pleased to say I’ve never had such a bad experience since. I have learned a lot from talking to and watching other teachers, trying new techniques and experimenting with lots of different ideas. One thing I’m now sure about, is that good classroom management depends a lot on how you establish the ground rules at the beginning of a course. Students need to know what you expect from them and what they can expect from you during the course. They need to know where the boundaries lie and what will happen if they step over the boundaries.

Even if you are in the middle of the course it is never too late to refresh students’ memories of the ground rules. It can also be worth spending five minutes establishing the ground rules when you get thrown in to substitute a class you have never taught before.

There are many different ways to go about establishing the ground rules of a classroom. Here are just a few simple ideas.

- **Happy face Vs Sad face**

Divide the board into two and put a smiley face and a sad face at the top of the two columns. (Use a tick and a cross if you think your students won’t appreciate the smileys!)

- Have your ideas clear of what you want to end up in the columns beforehand. You can adapt them according to the students’ contributions but you should know your own ground rules before going into the class.
- Give students examples of types of behaviour, and as a group decide which column to put them in. Depending on the level of the students you could explain the types of behaviour or use mime to get your message across. You could mime using a mobile phone for example. Ask the students, ‘is it ok to use your phones in the class?’ Establish that it’s not ok and write ‘using mobile phones in the class’ in the sad column.
- When you have done two or three as a class, divide the students into groups and get them to add as many things as they can to the columns. Then collate all the groups’ answers together on the board.

- **Ground rule posters**

You should then display these rules on a poster on the wall so you can refer to them later. Groups could be asked to make the posters. Talk with the class about what will happen if

these ground rules are broken. (See section ‘When rules are broken’)

- **Class contract**

Similar to the smiley chart idea above, a class contract is a negotiated document written by you and your students. It is more formal in that both parties (you and your students) sign the contract and keep it displayed. The contract outlines what you expect of the students and what they can expect from you.

For example:

The students of XYZ class will...	The teacher of XYZ class will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to speak as much English as possible.</li> <li>• Listen when the teacher is giving instructions.</li> <li>• Not have mobile phones on in the class.</li> <li>• Arrive on time to the class</li> <li>• Not throw things around the classroom.</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give homework on Thursdays and return it on Tuesdays.</li> <li>• Arrive on time to the class and finish the class on time.</li> <li>• Give students clear vocabulary lists on the board.</li> <li>• Give students a song / game etc. once a week/ month ...</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>
<p>Signed: (Students sign)</p>	<p>Signed: (Teacher signs)</p>

- Class contracts can be written with whole groups or with individual students. If you realise that you have one or two difficult students in the class you could write a contract with just those students. It’s a chance to talk to them about their behaviour and to set the limits of what’s acceptable in written form so that you can refer to it in the future. As a language assistant you probably won’t ever be in the position to have to draw up a class contract for an individual student alone. The class teacher will probably already have systems in place and it would always be worth talking to the class teacher first if you have individuals who are disrupting the class.
- **Praise the positive**  
If you do have a difficult group it’s really important to remember to praise good work and behaviour when (if!) it occurs, rather than always highlighting the negative. One way to do this with young learners is to have a star chart. Draw up a list of all the students’ names and at the end of each class, or periodically throughout the class, go through all the students and put stars (or a tick or a smiley face) on the chart by the names of students who have worked well. Some students like to give prizes to the students who get the most stars by the end of each term.

- **When rules are broken**

All schools have their own discipline procedures in place so find out as much as you can about the standard procedures. Then establish with your group exactly how you will react if the students do break the rules. You may decide to give each student three chances in each class. If a student breaks a rule their name goes up on the board. If their name gets on the board three times in one lesson further action will be taken. You should talk to your class teacher about this and find out what the further action could be. It may be they'll have to talk to the co-ordinator, or their parents get called; you should try to stay in line with the discipline procedures used throughout the school and make sure that the other teachers will support your decisions. It is useless to give a threat (e.g. phoning the parents) of any sort if you are not prepared or able to carry them out.

As I mentioned at the beginning, you will probably find that you will learn from your mistakes. Going into a class at the start of a new course and getting the balance right between being strict and being friendly and approachable is difficult. It also depends a lot of where you are teaching. Here in Spain where students can be very confident and often rather cheeky, the general motto is 'Don't smile until Christmas!' Obviously, not to be taken literally, but the idea is to start reasonably strict so as to get off on the right foot. It's always easier to lighten up when you and the students have a mutual respect than to start off too soft and then have to get stricter as the weeks go by!

**<http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-tips-ground-rules.htm>**

## Basics 5: Some Warmer ideas

### 1. Blockbuster

This warmer may vary according to the level of the group.

1. Prepare a list of words beginning with different letters of the alphabet. One possibility is to have 26, one for each letter.
2. Divide the class into teams of 4 or 5 students.
3. The first team to give a correct answer in each case wins a point.
  - The following are examples of questions at different levels:
    - i. *What 'a' is a kind of fruit?*
    - ii. *What 'a' is a vehicle that takes you to hospital?*
    - iii. *What 'a' is a joint that joins the leg and the foot?*

The game is simple and can be used to practice a particular word family or type of word such as animals, jobs, etc.

A variation would be to allow each team in turn to choose a different letter of the alphabet and then to give the question to this team only. This would be a slower, more reflective form of the game.

### 2. Hangman

This is one of the most traditional and oldest warmers. Decide on a word that is the topic of your lesson (e.g. school) and put spaces that match the word spelling. Students in groups decide on the letters. Draw a line for each wrong letter till you hang the man... To vary it a little, you can change the picture. Try playing Shark where you draw a man and then a shark little by little next to him with its jaws wide open.

### 3. Anagram

Draw a circle on the board and write letters to the topic word for your class inside the circle, but all jumbled up. For example: M A L I N A S. Ask students to write as many words as they can in two minutes using the letters in the circle. When they have finished, give them feedback and ask if anybody got a word using all the letters. Then tell them what word you had written on the board (note: in this example it is ANIMALS).

### 4. Secret word

Tell the students that you have a puzzle for them. You are thinking of a word, and you are going to give them clues one at a time for that word. When they think they know the word they should write it down. An example of clues for a topic-based lesson on school would be:

1. It is a place.



2. Almost everybody goes there when they are young.
3. Some people like it and others do not.
4. Teachers work there. (The school)

### **5. Word Class Dictation**

Write on the board ANIMAL, FOOD, and SPORT in three columns and ask students to copy it into their notebooks. Then dictate a series of words about these topics quickly. Students must write the words in the right column and spelling.

**(from [www.go4english.com](http://www.go4english.com))**

**[http://www.go4english.com/media\\_file/cms/2004-08-24/1094637782160.doc](http://www.go4english.com/media_file/cms/2004-08-24/1094637782160.doc)**

## Basics 6: Asking questions in class

No problem, you say. I am a teacher. I know how to ask questions. I ask them all the time. The last part is true. Teachers do ask a lot of questions. But you may not know how to ask them well in a way that involves all of your class. Have you ever thought about the **KIND** of questions you ask your students and who answers them?

### Types of teacher's questions

1. Asking students to remember something they know already/give a correct answer
2. Asking them to consider a problem or analyse something.
3. About behaviour and managing the classroom. What are you doing? Why are you late? (These questions are concerned with behaviour management and this will be discussed at another time.)

Let's look at type 1 and type 2 questions.

In **type 1** questions there is usually one right answer. Everyone in the classroom is expected to know the answer. This is often called a '**closed**' question.

Examples of this are:

What is the capital of France?  
What tense is this verb?  
(Holding three pens) How many pens do I have?  
(pointing to elephant) What's this?  
Is this a bus or a car?  
Can you spell 'really'?

**Type 2** questions do not always have a single or right answer. They make students think before they answer. There can be several alternatives. These questions are sometimes called '**open ended**' questions.

Examples of this are:

How can we answer the telephone?  
Can you tell me the names of any animals that eat fish?  
Why is this sentence in the past tense?  
What's the difference between these two sentences?

Both types of questions are useful in the classroom but a classroom that asks only Type 1 questions is not giving the students a chance to think for themselves.

Here are two scenarios:

Teacher with class of 20 pointing at three pictures of cats:

Small smaller smallest

Smaller is the comparative of small. It has -er on the end of the word, see?

The white cat is smaller than the black cat.

-est is the superlative of small. It has -est on the end of the word. The brown cat is the smallest.

Which cat is the smallest? Ahmed?

Ahmed: That one.

Is this cat smaller or bigger? Marina?

Marina: Smaller.

Here the teacher has told the students the information and then asked the question. They have not had to think for themselves. And only two of them have to answer.

What are the rest doing?

Now look at this:

Teacher with class of 20 pointing at three pictures of cats:

These cats are different. How are they different? Tell your partner how the cats are different. (Teacher waits for a minute.)

Class in pairs: colour, big, small, more small, black white etc

Teacher: OK everyone? Put up your hand if you could see a difference. (All hands should go up. If they do not, teacher waits). Chooses someone to answer.

Karim: Big and small, miss.

Teacher: Good. Can you make a sentence to compare them? Anyone?

Nour: This cat more small this cat.....

All the class had time to think. They all expected to answer the question. They have had time to see if they can do the task. The teacher knows what they know- that some of them can compare but that they need to learn how to do it grammatically. They are also trying- they are not so worried about giving a 100% correct answer. This is important for learning.

### Who answers the questions?

As well as the type of questions, it is important **how** students answer the questions. Most teachers know that you should not ask questions round the class and that you should not allow the same few students to answer each time. Think about these things also:

Give students time to think about an answer. Some students are slower than others, especially if you are speaking English in your classroom. Pause long enough for everyone to think. At first this seems strange but the students soon get used to it. Say things like 'Everyone who has an idea put up their hand.' And wait for almost all the students to put their hand up.

Give students something simple to discuss in pairs before you get them to answer in front of the whole class. (see above- *Tell your partner how the cats are different.*) They can make lists,



discuss a question, do an anagram and so on. Give only a minute or two but you will find that everyone is taking part.

One of a teacher's aims is to increase talking time. If you look back at the two scenes, you will see that the students in the second extract talk much more.

Try to ask questions that have 'something for everyone' to answer.

A question like: *What is the difference between a poem and a story?*

can have lots of levels of response. Some students will say only 'a story is longer'. Others will be able to talk about rhyme and rhythm. But all the answers can be accepted.

### **How can I improve?**

To improve the way you ask questions you need to research what sorts of questions you ask at the moment. What is your style?

Give this document to one of your colleagues to read and then ask them to observe your lesson, counting the types of questions you ask.

You can record your own lesson if you want.

Start the lesson with a question on the board for students to think about. This will help you to get used to the idea. Plan the questions before the lesson starts.

'Questioning' and 'higher order thinking' are 'hot' classroom issues at the moment.

It's fun to try something new!

[http://www.go4english.com/media\\_file/doc/2007-02-20/1171960246.doc](http://www.go4english.com/media_file/doc/2007-02-20/1171960246.doc)

## Basics 7: Checking Comprehension *By Clare Lavery*

Making sure that students understand what is happening in the lesson and that they have understood the language you have taught them can at times be very difficult. Just asking "Do you understand?" isn't really enough. You need to be sure.

### Tips for asking questions

Here are some tips for asking questions to check that students have understood you.

- **Don't ask 'Do you understand?'** They can easily answer 'yes' to avoid losing face.
- **Ask everyone.** Vary who you ask, don't just pick on the keenest or the best. You will never know if they all understand if you go for the safe bet!
- **Avoid repetition parrot fashion.** Questions which require little more than 'lifting' the answer from a text will not indicate if they understand the meaning.  
For example: John gets up at six except for weekends when he has a long lie in.  
Q "What time does John get up during the week?" "Does he have a long lie in at the weekend?"
- **Encourage interpretation.** Use questions which involve thinking about the meaning.  
"Does John always get up early?" "When does he stay in bed late?"
- **Personalise.** Use questions which involve the students personally in the topic. "Do you like having a lie in?" "Does John get up later than you?"
- **Encourage discussion on meaning.** Use questions with more than one possible answer to encourage discussion. "What time might he get up on Sundays?"

### Tips for promoting self checking

An important skill in communicating with others in a foreign language is the ability to clear up misunderstanding. You need to check if you have understood by yourself.

- Encourage students to ask for clarification. Build in a checking exercise to your activities. Encourage verbal checking, not just looking at each other's answers.
- They should not feel ashamed or embarrassed that they haven't understood.
- Discourage any mockery and encourage those who self-correct. Practise dialogues where 2 people mishear/misunderstand each other and clear up the misunderstanding verbally. Use these for intonation practice. A: Ok so that's sixty Euros B: No, it isn't sixty, it's seventy. A: seventy? B: Yes, that's right.

### Play clarification games

This is a game called 'What does that mean?'

- Make a list of sentences with one word in bold in each sentence. Give pairs or groups the sentences.
- Students take it in turns to ask what the word in bold means.
- Practice first with the whole class and encourage them to give further examples, synonyms or opposites.

For example. We aren't going to the beach as it's too **chilly** today. What does chilly mean? Oh, that's describing the weather. It is cold, not freezing but quite cold.

- Give out a reading text with words underlined which you wish to check. Students ask each other in pairs before checking with the whole class.

## Basics 8: Pair work; why do teachers use pair work?

### Asking children to work in pairs has many advantages:

- It's good for the children to speak to each other in English. This maximizes their talking time and minimizes the teacher's talking. The main aim is that the children can practice the language.
- It's good for the children to work with another child rather than alone. They can brainstorm more ideas and help each other. In fact, they focus more and the stronger child can help the weaker.
- It's good for the children to know that language is not an interaction between them and the teacher, it is between them and others: natives or non natives. The way they work together in pairs helps them not only to learn the language but to build up their rapport and independence.
- It allows you to step back and monitor the performance of individual children.
- It also allows children to personalize the lesson, by sharing their own experiences and opinions.
- Some children are shy and will never participate in whole class discussions. In pairs, children can feel safer and are more likely to take risks and experiment with the language.
- Introducing a pair work activity can give the lesson a change of pace.

### How to pair or group kids together

There are different ways of pairing or grouping children together. You can decide who you want to group together, and tell the individual children their partners. Or you can gesture with your hands to each child to work with the child next to them.

You can also group children randomly. This is a nice way to do it because the children work with different partners each time. Here are three ways of doing it:

- Ask children to line up in order of birthdays, height, etc. and then divide them up.
- Give each child a card with a word on it. Children find their partners by connection the words (e.g. black and white).
- Give each child a number. Children sit with someone who has the same number. For example, you have a group of 30 children and you want groups of 3. Go round the class giving each child a number 1 to 10. Then ask them to get into groups with children who have the same number. You should end up with 10 groups of 3 children.

**Tip:** You can do the same activity with letters of the alphabet or even vocabulary groups. This is a nice warm-up for the start of the class.

### **Six Problems with pairs and groups, and how to overcome them:**



#### **1. My children make too much noise when they all speak at the same time!**

Actually this is not a problem, as long as they are speaking English! It shows that they are involved in the activity. You might be concerned that your school Principle wouldn't like to hear all this noise coming from your classroom. So why not invite him or her, and other teachers, to come and watch the activity.

#### **2. Some of my children won't use English!**

To make sure they use English, tell them they will have to make a short oral report to the rest of the class when they finish. If they know they will have to report the results of the task to the other children, they will be encouraged to use English to complete the task.

#### **3. I can't control all the children while they are working in pairs!**

Make sure you give clear instructions (you can demonstrate the activity with a child in front of the whole class) and a time limit. With pair and group work you also have to be prepared to let go a little, to stand back and let the children get on with it. This might seem strange if you normally control the class at the front of the room.

#### **4. All the children finish at different times!**

Make sure you stick to your time limit. It's fine if some students don't finish the task (and it might encourage them to be quicker the next time!). If you have 2 or more pairs who finish very early, you could change the partners and ask them to repeat the task with their new partner.

#### **5. Some children are dominant and don't let their partner speak!**

If you have a real mixed ability group, you should decide who works together and not group them randomly. Try to put children together who have roughly the same language ability.

#### **6. They make lots of mistakes and I can't correct them all!**

This is not a problem if the aim of the activity is to develop fluency. Children will not communicate freely if they know they are going to be corrected every time they make a mistake. If they make a lot of mistakes with the language you are presenting in the lesson, you can note down their mistakes while you monitor and then make an exercise using these mistakes to wrap up the lesson.

[http://www.go4english.com/media\\_file/cms/2004-12-30/1104825497464.doc](http://www.go4english.com/media_file/cms/2004-12-30/1104825497464.doc)

## **Basics 9: Monitoring**

*By Jo Budden*

When your students are on-task and engaged in a speaking activity where are you and what are you doing? This may sound like an odd question as you could be doing a million different things. You may be thinking about what to do next, you may be cleaning the board and tidying up your desk, you may be looking out of the window counting the minutes until the end of the class.... or you may be monitoring your students.

Monitoring styles vary greatly according to teacher, from strolling wisely around the class to sitting on a chair with wheels whizzing around. There's no right or wrong way to monitor your students while they're doing speaking activities in class, but here are four simple tips to ensure efficient monitoring.

- **Take notes**

As you listen to your students make notes of the most important mistakes they make and think about how you are going to give feedback to the class. One way of doing this is to have a 'correction slot' in the class. For more information about correcting mistakes look at the Error Correction tip in the archive:

**<http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-tips-error-correction.htm>**

It's a good idea to make notes of good language you hear too and to give some positive feedback rather than focusing only on the mistakes.

- **Be mobile**

To monitor effectively you'll have to be able to move around the class and get in between the tables. Think about the classroom layout as you're planning the class and if the furniture is moveable, take the time to arrange it so you can monitor comfortably.

- **Be at your students' eye level**

If your students are sitting down to do the activity it's better for you to monitor by crouching down or sitting down too. If you're crouching down you don't have to be looking at your students, in fact it's often better if you're not. You can be looking away but listening and making notes. If this isn't your usual monitoring style students may find it a bit odd at first (especially if most of their teachers usually sit behind a desk to give a class) so explain to students what you're doing and why you're doing it. If you find crouching down uncomfortable try to put a chair near the students you are monitoring. If you're at their level it's much easier to tune in to hear individuals.

- **Be available but not intrusive**

As you're monitoring and making notes students may ask you questions and need you to feed in new vocabulary. Try to be available to help your students and let them know it's okay to ask you if they get really stuck. However, try not to intrude and over correct. This will be demotivating for your students. The odd on-the-spot correction may be justified, but if you over do it they may lose the will to carry on with the task.

**<http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-tips-monitoring.htm>**

## **Basics 10:**

### **Ways to encourage more use of English in class**

*By Clare Lavery*

Getting students to use English in the classroom is one of the biggest challenges of teaching. At first you might get frustrated when students speak their own language in class. Keep this checklist in mind and it may help.

- Always present yourself as an English speaker, right from the start.
- Don't be tempted to lapse into the students' language to explain, regain control or reply to a question. Patiently reply in English.
- Don't be tempted to slow down.
- You may feel put off when they call to each other in their mother tongue "What's she saying?" Use pictures, gesture, facial expression and rephrasing to get your message across.
- Lapsing into quick explanations in their language will undermine your role. Tuning-in will take time! Keep at it!

### **Activities to encourage English**

Here are more ways to create opportunities for simple communication in English lessons:

- Start each lesson by asking students about their week, weekend or previous evening. Talk about yours in a natural way: "Did anyone see that funny film on TV last night?"
- Ask students about their area or information you may need to know. Simple requests for help, such as: "Does anyone know if there is a bank open on Saturday here?" Ask for suggestions for places to visit. Even with beginners, opportunities can arise: ask for the time, the date, how to get to places nearby etc.
- Ask for explanations in English whenever students are able. This stretches students.
- Involve students in board work, asking them to spell aloud a word you are writing, inviting younger learners to complete a summary, write a question or correct a mistake on the board.
- Avoid asking "Do you understand?" Try to get more comments with questions to check understanding: "Why is there an 's' on this verb?" or "Can you pronounce this word?"
- Get students to refer to an English-English dictionary (take your own if necessary). Play games involving definitions (eg. Guessing a described object; animal, vegetable or mineral?; or What's my line? with job descriptions.) Do simple crosswords with clues.
- Play games where use of the mother tongue loses points for the team.
- Practise and encourage all common classroom requests: "Can I have another piece of paper?" or "May I go to the toilet, please?" - Students may not use English requests amongst themselves but insist they do with you.

Encouraging students can eventually pay-off. If they enjoy your lessons, their attitude to speaking English will improve over time.



<http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-teaching-tips-encouraging-english.htm>

## **Chapter Three:**

### **10 Great Activities with no resources**

***10 speaking, vocabulary and pronunciation activities that you can do with no resources- or just a board and chalk!***

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## Activities with no resources 1: One word story *By Jo Budden, British Council, Spain*

This activity is extremely simple. Each student adds a word to create a group story. Despite the simplicity it can be really challenging and I would only use it with higher levels.

### Preparation

Students should be in a circle (if this isn't possible make it clear they know who they are going to follow on from) .

### Procedure

- The teacher can begin by saying the first word and each student adds the next word, without repeating what has come beforehand.
- The stories can develop in any number of ways. Some groups may need the teacher to provide punctuation and decide that the sentence should end and a new one should begin. The great thing about this activity is that all students have to concentrate and listen carefully to their colleagues to be able to continue the story coherently.
- Good starting words are “Suddenly” or “Yesterday” to force the story into the past tense.

Example:

- \* Teacher – “Yesterday”
  - \* Student 1 – “I”
  - \* Student 2 – “saw”
  - \* Student 3 – “a”
  - \* Student 4 – “strange”
  - \* Student 5 – “man”
  - \* Student 6 – “who”
  - \* Student 7 – “was”
  - \* Student 8 – “wearing”
  - \* Student 9 – “a”
  - \* Student 10 – “yellow”
  - \* Student 11 – “hat”
  - \* Teacher – “Full stop, new sentence”
  - \* Student 12 – “He”
  - \* Student 13 – “was”
  - \* Etc. etc.
- It is great for highlighting word collocations and practising word order. It also highlights problems students may have with tenses or prepositions for you to focus on in future classes.

Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>

Activities with no resources 2:  
**True/false stories**  
*By Richard Frost, British Council, Turkey*

This speaking activity is very effective for practising the telling of stories and for learning fascinating things about the students in the class.

***Preparation***

You don't need any materials for this, just an invented story that you are ready to tell.

***Procedure***

- Tell the students an interesting story about yourself and describe in detail what happened. At the end of the story, give them an opportunity to ask you questions about the story. Finally, ask them to decide if they think the story is true or false. (This must be the first point at which you indicate it may not be true). Of course the story was untrue and now it's the students' turn to make up stories.
- Put the students into groups of two or three and tell them to prepare two stories for the class. Each student must have one story to tell, in a pair one story must be true and one must be false. In a group of three you can have one true and two false, or two true and one false. The important thing is that the false stories must be realistic and the true stories must be unusual.
- Make yourself available to help the students with language for the stories and make notes for problem areas to work on during the final feedback session. Also, give the students the opportunity to practise telling their stories to each other before they do them in front of the whole class. You may even let them make notes to use while telling the story, but try to avoid letting the write down the whole of the story.
- Ask each group in turn to come to the front and tell the rest of the class their stories. After each story is told, the class can ask some questions. When all in the group have told their stories, ask the students to decide which are true and which are false. Finally, reveal to the class the truth about the stories.
- When all the groups have finished their stories, conduct a feedback session and highlight the effective language that was used as well as the language that needs to be worked on.

***Variations***

It can be very intimidating and time-consuming talking in front of a large class so if you feel it is appropriate, it would be a good idea to match groups (e.g. three groups together) to tell each other their stories.

Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>

## Activities with no resources 3: Hot seat *By Callum Robertson*

This is a good activity for getting your students going in the morning. It is also excellent for revising vocabulary.

- First, split your class into different teams (two is best, but if you have a large class, any number could be used).
- Sit the students facing the board.
- Then take an empty chair - one for each team - and put it at the front of the class, facing the team members. These chairs are the 'hot seats'
- Then get one member from each team to come up and sit in that chair, so they are facing their team-mates and have their back to the board.
- As the teacher, have a list of vocabulary items that you want to use in this game.
- Take the first word from that list and write it clearly on the board.
- The aim of the game is for the students in the teams to describe that word, using synonyms, antonyms, definitions etc. to their team mate who is in the hot seat - that person can't see the word!
- The student in the hot seat listens to their team mates and tries to guess the word.
- The first hot seat student to say the word wins a point for their team.
- Then change the students over, with a new member of each team taking their place in their team's hot seat.
- Then write the next word...

This is a very lively activity and can be adapted to different class sizes. If you have many teams, perhaps some teams wait to play. Or if the team sizes are large, you can restrict how many team members do the describing. Have fun!

Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>



## **Activities with no resources 4:** **Broken telephone** *By Daphne Tan, Singapore*

This is a little game I have used to help students with their listening practice and it develops pronunciation awareness. The name of this game is 'broken telephone'.

- First the class is divided into a few groups, with about 10 in each group. I hand one person in the group a sentence, which he or she must then memorise and pass on to the next person, by whispering.
- The next person will pass the sentence down the line to the next and so on until it finally gets to the last person in the group. That person in the group will then have to stand up and say what the sentence is.

I find this exercise fun and a break from the normal learning routine. Teachers can construct sentences with words that may sound similar to others, like working (walking), lazy (lady), grass (glass) and so on. It's really funny hearing the sentence at the end because it is often a mad distortion of the original. The students often have a good time laughing at how ludicrous it all became in the end, and more importantly, realise the value of proper pronunciation.

**Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>**

## Activities with no resources 5: Adopt a word *By Sameena Rizavi, Pakistan*

At the start of the school year I ask my students to 'Adopt a word' and share it with the class.

### *Procedure*

- I give my students templates with headings:

Word	Meaning	Part of speech	Example of usage

- The students choose a word that they would like to adopt and do some research on it using the template above.
- Each student then gives a short presentation on his or her adopted word until all the class has had a chance.
- The words are then stuck to a large paper chart on the wall.
- This activity carries on the entire year with students sharing more and more words.
- In between we have quizzes about the new words. The students greatly enjoy contributing words, researching and presenting.
- 

Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>

## Activities with no resources 6:

### Family tree

*Daphne, China*

It's amazing how students can't stop telling their friends about themselves. I introduced my class of second language learners to the family tree and the different relationships between people in the family - in-laws, step-family, cousins, paternal and maternal sides etc. even terms like widow, widower and divorcee.

Then, I got them to draw their own family tree and share it with their friends, giving 10 minutes each to tell and ask about a particular member in their family, e.g. grandparents, aunts, cousins, siblings etc.

They could hardly stop talking! I'm glad to say that this is one lesson which saw students continuing their discussion even after the bell rang.

**Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>**

## **Activities with no resources 7: The silent sounds game**

*Liz Oldham*

This game is a good way to practice the vowel and diphthong sounds, and it is particularly enjoyed by young learners.

In 'Silent Sounds' you mouth a sound silently and the children guess the sound from the shape of your mouth. Use the game to contrast sounds that are often confused such as /ae/ and /e/ - found in words like 'mat' and 'met'.

Before you start, divide the board into two halves - left and right. On one side write the phonemic symbol for one of the two sounds - for example /ae/, or a word containing the sound - such as cat. On the other side of the board, write the other sound - so for example /e/ or the word 'bed'. Now mouth one of the two sounds, the children should watch your mouth closely and then identify the sound by shouting the correct sound, or - with a small class, by jumping left or right! You can then get the children to work in pairs and test each other in the same way

**Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>**

## Activities with no resources 8: Slap the board

### Slap the board - A vocabulary revision activity

*Psyche Kennett, Director of an English Language Teacher Training Programme in Vietnam.*

Slap the board is an energetic vocabulary activity - it can be used for revision, presentation and testing - which involves students running to and hitting the board.

You put the vocabulary items on the board in any order - sort of jumbled and sometimes a little bit higher than the tallest kid can reach, so that they'll have to jump.

Form groups. Give a mother tongue translation for one of the words on the board. The students have got to recognise the word which translates to that word. They then run to the board and slap the correct word. The first person in each group to slap the right word gets a point.

Alternatively, you can form teams and one person from the team runs to the board, as a representative. The first team to hit the correct word gets the point. The representative changes, ready for the next word..... This is a little calmer than if everyone is running to the board.

You can reverse the translation, by putting the mother tongue on the board. And of course, you could use definitions or opposites if you want to avoid using the mother tongue.

You can do it with pictures so you put the pictures on the board and call out the English word and the kids slap the picture.

The teacher doesn't have to call out the English, you can get other kids to call out so they're getting practice speaking too.

**Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>**

## Activities with no resources 9: Why didn't you come to the party? *Said Ali, Teacher, Uzbekistan*

This speaking activity for higher level beginners up to upper intermediate involves students working in pairs to make up excuses.

### *Procedure*

- Ask students if they've ever had parties. If they have, tell them to share experiences with the class. If they didn't explain to them what a party is.
- Tell students to remember the last party they had. Some guests were invited but some didn't come.
- Divide class into two parts. **A** students who attended the party and **B** students who didn't attend.
- Tell the **B** students who didn't attend party to prepare their excuses for when they are asked for them.
- Tell **A** students who attended the party to ask **B** questions to find the reasons of not attending.
- Tell them to give a range of excuses in different ways. Otherwise they repeat one excuse every time.
- Be careful to keep the students changing partners. The **A** students could also tell the **B** student about the party.

### **Notes**

- If you use this activity when you've just introduced a new structure that is appropriate here for example 'had to' or 'was/were', you will hopefully notice that students will use it without you having to prompt them.
- You can do some variations, such as excuses for not doing things on time or excuses for not keeping your word etc.

**Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>**



## **Activities with no resources 10: Snake-word**

*BY Bernard Ouedraog, Burkina Faso*

To check how rich my students' vocabulary is, I have them play the snake-word game.

Each row or team sends a representative to the blackboard. He/she chooses a coloured piece of chalk and they stand in a line. I write a letter and the first student must write a word beginning with that letter; the following student writes a word beginning with the last letter of the previous word:

For example: *D Data Amount Tomato On Narrow What.....*

They should write the words so that they make a snake...

*Datamountomatonarrowwhat....*

Time is limited, depending on the level of the class. After the time devoted has passed, and you haven't written a word, you pass your turn. If you pass your turn 3 times, you are replaced by another pupil in your row/team. Only two replacements are allowed. After that, the row/team is eliminated.

**Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/TRY>**

## **Chapter 4:**

# **10 Great Tips and activities for teaching young learners**

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## Primary tips and activities 1: Starting Primary

### Starting primary

*Gail Ellis, Head of the Young Learners Centre, British Council, Paris and Special Lecturer in the School of Education, University of Nottingham*

Teaching at primary level can cause many teachers, particularly those who have trained to teach adults, a variety of problems and generate a range of worries. Unfortunately, it is common for teachers to be asked by their institution to teach young learners even though they don't have specific training. Those first lessons with the class, which are quite probably in a different institution to your regular work, can seem daunting. In this article I provide some advice on how to deal with starting work with primary level students and I give ten top classroom management tips.

### Before you begin to teach

- *Find out who your pupils are*
  - Talk to the class teacher and find out if the children are complete beginners in English or have already learnt a little.
  - Are there any bilingual children in the class? If so, use them as your helpers.
  - Do any of the children speak another language?
  - You will find that the children will be highly motivated and excited about learning a foreign language. Your main aim, is to maintain this initial motivation and sustain their curiosity and interest so that they develop a real desire to learn the language, even if you don't feel they are learning very fast. You need to be realistic and so do the children about how much they can learn in the relatively short time you will spend with them.
  - It is quite normal for children to take some time before they actually start producing much language as they will need time to familiarise themselves with you - very probably the first native speaker of English they have ever met - and assimilate the language before they feel ready and confident enough to produce any.
  - Be patient and don't be afraid of repeating things again and again - children need and enjoy lots of opportunities to hear the language. Just remember to be natural.
- *Practicalities*
  - Get to know the class teacher and how they can help you.
  - How many pupils in your class?
  - What can you and can you not do in the classroom, for example, move furniture around?
  - Will the class teacher stay with you during the English lesson.
  - Find out about your school's etiquette?
  - How long are your lessons? 45 minutes, one hour?
  - Are you allowed to display children's work on the classroom walls?
  - Can you create an English corner?
  - What resources does the school have that you can use?

- How many photocopies are you allowed to make?
- Can you take the children into the playground?
- Can you use a computer?

### **Top ten classroom management tips for successful teaching**

- Plan what you are going to do in advance step by step and have clear aims so you and your pupils know exactly where you are going throughout a lesson. This is the only way you will be able to control up to 30 children in one class - and they will be the first to know if you haven't prepared and respond by becoming disruptive.
- Start your year by being firm and be consistent in your own actions and behaviour - children expect a disciplined, structured classroom environment and respond well to routines. Check with the class teacher what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and make it clear to the pupils that you expect the same behaviour.
- Learn your pupils' names and address them directly.
- Be mobile and walk round the class.
- Have a clear signal for stopping activities or when you want children to be quiet. Get silence and wait for their full attention before you start speaking and give clear instructions or demonstrations. Make sure children understand what they have to do.
- Never, underestimate children's abilities or intelligence. They may have very limited English but they still have the same interests and aspirations as any other child of their age. Keep them interested by providing stimulating content and meaningful activities.
- Always ensure that children have some English 'to take away' with them at the end of a lesson. Children will feel proud and have a sense of achievement if they leave the classroom being able to ask, for example, a new question in English, say something about themselves, or sing a song. This means (see the first point above) that your aims will be clear to the children.
- Avoid activities that over-excite - it is often difficult to return to a calm and controlled learning environment after a noisy game. Avoid activities that require a lot of movement as you will find that there is often very little space in a classroom for this type of activity. Also avoid activities that require a lot of cutting and pasting unless there is a clear linguistic outcome, as these can cut into valuable time, apart from creating a great deal of mess.
- Make positive comments about the children's work and efforts and let them see that you value their work.

- Have additional material prepared to cope with faster and slower pupils' needs and don't let activities go on too long.

Adapted from [http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/start\\_primary.shtml](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/start_primary.shtml)

## Primary tips and activities 2: Managing young learners

### Managing young learners

*Gail Ellis, Teaching Centre Manager, Paris and Janet Leclere, Teacher, Young Learners Centre, Paris*

Teaching young learners requires a knowledge of the developmental differences between children and teenagers and of the appropriate management skills. This article concerns the personal observations and experiences of a teacher who moved from teaching teenagers to teaching young learners. It includes ideas for classroom management and teaching strategies.

### Inside and outside the young learners classroom

The young learners market continues to grow amidst a decade of changing attitudes towards this sector of teaching. The teacher is now viewed as a highly-skilled professional who has the knowledge, skills, flexibility and sensitivities of a teacher both of children and of language, and one who is able to balance and combine the two successfully.

The term 'young learners' in the network covers a wide age range; 4-18 years of age, and most problems encountered by teachers are due to a lack of understanding of the developmental differences between children and teenagers, and of the appropriate classroom management skills to deal with these. Differences include conceptual and cognitive variations, variations in attention spans and motor skills such as drawing and cutting, as well as social and emotional differences. An understanding of these differences can help develop the flexibility that teachers of young learners require.

### New dimension

Janet Leclere joined the Paris Young Learners Centre last September, bringing with her valuable experience of teaching eight to ten-year-olds in French state primary schools. Her classes include a group of five-year-olds using Pebbles 1 (published by Longman); an age she had not taught before. 'Having been used to teaching older children, I found it difficult to accept that some children's attention would drift,' admitted Janet, who quickly realised that her classroom management skills needed to take on a new dimension to control and cater for the needs of these children.

As it was not possible to observe classes at the centre, Janet took charge of her own self-development and arranged this at a local nursery school. These are her

observations, which we hope will provide the starting point for further reflection and discussion in your own centres.

### **Classroom management and discipline**

- When children arrive, they put their coats on pegs, bags on the floor at their table places and then join you round the board. Only books and pencil cases on the tables. Avoid clutter - very young learner classrooms need to be very organised.
- Use two areas of the classroom. For presentation of new language, practice activities using individual children, storytelling and opening and closing of lesson, the teacher sits on a stool next to the board and half-faces the children. Children should sit on the floor at their teacher's feet, with a further row of children behind on chairs to form a closed circle. This avoids sitting on the floor and makes you feel more in charge.
- For activities, three or four children should sit at each table. Colour-code the tables. When children move from the board to the tables, get them to move group by group, not all at once. Children keep to the same places.
- Expect children to do what they are told, but be nice to them - even when you are feeling impatient.

### **Using the board**

- Present new language at the board. Use lots of flashcards. Involve all pupils - ask individuals to perform a small task: pointing to something, choosing a picture or sticking it on the board. Children like to be picked, so make it fair. Ask the whole class a question, get them to repeat or drill.
- Explain and demonstrate tasks you want children to do at the tables at the board. If using a worksheet, stick it on the board and demonstrate.

### **Routines and activities**

- Establish routines: always sit round the board to begin, play a game touching heads when taking the register, sing 'hello' to characters or sing a song they know. Everyone starts the lesson feeling confident and attentive.
- Surprise activities can help to settle a class if the children become too excited. Try a series of movements in sequence e.g. touch your head three times, then shoulders, then knees. Vary the count and see if they can follow.
- When changing activity, try using a rattle (e.g. rice in a box) rather than raising your voice to attract attention. This becomes a signal that children recognise. Start the activity, even if not all children are attentive. They will eventually join in with the others.

## Work

- Be aware of what sort of work children are doing at school. The teacher I observed worked on the skills of matching, comparing and classifying. These are all things we can develop and adapt.
- When children are working at tables let them finish as much as possible. Fast finishers can do another drawing, or colour in. As children finish, write on their worksheets to explain what they have drawn, stuck or classified etc. questioning them at the same time.

Adapted from [http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/manage\\_young.shtml](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/manage_young.shtml)

## Primary tips and activities 3: A question and answers about primary reading

### Primary reading

*Kyle Chung, Hong Kong*

What's the best way to get my primary pupils reading in English? When it comes to reading, they tend to lose their interest. Your suggestions are appreciated.

*Any advice or ideas for Kyle? What work on reading with younger students do you do? How do you keep their interest? **Contact us.***

### Your answers:

*Mei, China*

If they lose interest, it may be that the story is either boring or difficult for them to understand. Pupils can only concentrate on something for a limited amount of time. So, please do not expect them to act as adults. You've tried well.

*Viljami Nykanen. Finland*

For improving reading skills of my elementary level pupils I often try to make the reading more interesting by using the following ways:

1. In reading a chapter I group the students into two (or more) groups, and make sure each group is sitting in a full circle (pupils facing each other). Then I tell them that this will be a little reading competition (you can decide what kind of "prizes" to use, I normally give the winning group points or let them start the next exercise first). The point is to get every group to work together in reading the sentence (or the lines of a certain character in the chapter). They can invent their own ways if they want, i.e. reading together all of the sentence or just one person per word and finally everyone together etc.
2. If your pupils normally read out loud after a tape, try reversing the order (when they have heard the chapter once) so that the pupils read first and can then check their input.

When I used the first way my pupils were really enthusiastic, and it seemed to make them communicate a lot in between the sentences. Although some might argue against this kind of a competition, I think it really worked well with pupils whose input I normally had difficulties in receiving, because other pupils actually told them to stop joking around and participate in reading. In any case, hope this helps!!



*P. Vinayagam, India*

I teach English to my 8 year-old son. I am surprised to observe him nowadays reading aloud from comic books and other storybooks. I did not consciously develop the reading habit in him. I always read along with him. He listens to me first. I read slowly because English is a foreign language to me. After I have dropped the book and gone elsewhere, my son takes the same story and reads aloud. So, the point is that we may read aloud anything interesting with small children and then let them read the same. Don't give new items to read which they have not understood. Comic books are a better option because the characters appear before them speaking. The children are not conscious that they are reading. So reading is not a burden but becomes an interesting activity to the children.

**Adapted from [http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/talk/questions/primary\\_reading.shtml](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/talk/questions/primary_reading.shtml)**

## Primary tips and activities 4: A question and answers about storytelling for young learners

### Questions and answers Story telling for young learners

#### The Question:

##### Juan, Venezuela

Hi, I am an english teacher at a Primary school, specifically for 7 years olds. I have a group of 28 children and now I want to teach them through reading stories. Does anybody have any tips on how I can do this? Please help... thanks!

#### What is your opinion?

##### Jagan, India

Dear Juan,

It is really a thrilling thing to teach kids of that age with the help of stories. I think it helps to use some words from their mother tongue so that it is easier for them to understand the vocabulary. I would also advise you to give synonyms and antonyms. But make sure they don't become the victims of the mother tongue influence which is a common problem in countries like India where English is used as a second language.

Wishing you success

Jagan

##### U.D. Pradhan, India

After you select your material and you could consider simplification. It's also a good idea to make workable chunks of stories depending on the theme or plot. You should try parallel and extension activities to check the children's understanding/develop vocabulary.

##### Mónica Moretti, Argentina

Dear Juan,

I used to teach children when I took my first steps in teaching. It's so rewarding! Children are those open-minded little people who are always ready to do what you want them to do. As regards story telling in the classroom this is what worked for me; however, you have to bear in mind that groups differ constantly and what might work for one, might be a failure for others.

- I chose a reader, preferably one students were not so familiar with and a short one.  
I sat them in a semicircle (mind you I had 9 students in those days!).
- If there were unknown words or difficult expressions in the reader, I adapted them to already taught vocabulary.
- I started the reading section and every time a new character appeared in the story, I changed my voice and used a lot of mimicry so that students would immediately identify them in the story later on.

- Once I finished the reading, I told my students they were going to listen to it again, but this time they would join me in the story. In a matter of seconds their faces and bodies turned into whatever the character demanded them to be. You can't imagine how happy and excited they were!

I hope you achieve your goals and I wish you the best!  
Mónica

### **Sevda, Turkey**

Hi! You can choose a story according to the content that you want to teach. For example, teaching the present simple tense through the content "what do we do in the morning?" There are a lot of stories that will help you with their use of certain structures/vocabulary (such as the present tense)..  
Hope that helps you!

### **Soher Mostafa Ahmed, Egypt**

I think teaching reading through a story is nice, specially when using ICT. There are a lot of ways, for example, having a powerpoint presentation of the story using cartoons, animation and voices. This way is attractive to children as they like to watch it and interact with it. Another way is a web quest - and all children like the net. You simply provide them with questions concerned with the story and they search the web.

### **Moe Moe Kyaw, Japan**

If we want to teach stories to young children, we should be careful to choose the best for each individual group. For example, 'Snow White' and 'Cinderella' are the most famous tales in the world but are they the most appropriate? If we want to teach these tales, we should think about the students who live with stepfathers or stepmothers for example. There are many very good stories to choose from, and choosing the best one is the most important part of the process.

### **Md. Ziaul Karim, Bangladesh**

Pictures are a really important tool to motivate the students. Before presenting a story to the students, you can show them some pictures related to it. Then you can ask them questions for brainstorming, e.g. 'What type of story do you expect looking at these pictures?' You will find them thinking and speaking enthusiastically. When you present the story they will see whether their prior thought was right or wrong. You can also get them to draw pictures after reading the story.

Adapted from [http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/talk/questions/story\\_telling\\_y1.shtml](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/talk/questions/story_telling_y1.shtml)

## **Primary tips and activities 5: Storytelling in young learner classes** *Patricia Ielmini, Argentina*

According to David Vale and Anne Feunteun in 'Teaching children English: A training course for teachers of English to children', kids start developing their identity as readers and listeners from the age of three or four years old, because they start constructing their world of meaning and imagination when they are first exposed to different stories of life. It is vitally important that we, as teachers, support this development.

### **Constructive and creative comprehension**

Storytelling is a kind of reading which requires children to be active participants in the construction of meaning. Children get fully involved while listening to a story and they also feel joy and satisfaction. As language teachers, we are always tempted to regard the teaching of reading and listening only as a variety of comprehension activity but in doing so we sometimes discourage children from becoming "good" readers of English. Using storytelling in class, children develop a constructive and creative comprehension.

### **What constructive and creative comprehension implies**

When children listen to a story, in terms of comprehension response, they get involved in different types of mental processes. First, they create a mental picture of what they are listening to. Then, they can imagine what is going to happen next. Children also identify themselves with the characters and situations in the story relating them to their own experiences. Last but not least, children apply their own values to those found in the story. Therefore, each child's response will be unique because it will demonstrate individual interpretation, it will relate to the whole story and it can be also discussed and shared with others in the class.

### **Making it happen**

Choose a story or write one of your own. When you make the selection, think on the age level and proficiency level of your students. You may use a well-known fairy tale, a scary story or any suitable reader you find in your school-library.

This is what I did when I told my 5th grade students a "scary" story some time ago.

- Ask students to bring a flash-light and a cushion to the class.
- Have the students sit in a circle on the floor.
- Turn off the lights and ask students to switch on their torches and place them in front of them so they light up their faces.
- Tell them the story with much feeling. You may read it but it is better if you know it by heart, don't be afraid of using your own words.
- Use colourful pictures to help you. It is vital you properly use your voice, gestures, facial expressions, mimes, rhythm and speed to help the children understand the story as well as getting them more involved in it. (You may also use background music)
- When you finish, ask students some questions which stimulate a creative and constructive response. For example;

- How was the house on the moors different from your house?
- Could you describe the characters?
- What happened when ...?
- What do you think it happened...?
- Why do you think .....?
- What would you do if ...?
- Most important of all, take the children back as readers into the whole story without the need to focus mechanically on specific parts of the text.
- As a follow-up activity, you may ask students to change the ending which can be shared with other classes later or to role-play a dialogue between the characters of the story. You may also challenge your students to bring their own stories to tell the class in the target language .
- If you are going to retell another kind of story, you may dress up as one of the characters or you may also decorate the classroom with some of the story setting. Feel self-confident and try all what you think your kids will enjoy.

### **Conclusion**

I am fully convinced that storytelling from teacher to student or from student to student carries many benefits. Students can lose themselves in the characters, plots and situations, they lower their anxiety levels and at the same time, they increase their self-confidence and esteem. As they progress, the students can improve their abilities to comprehend and later produce the target language.

### **Further reading**

- 'Making it happen' by Patricia A. Richard. Longman
- 'Teaching children English: A training course for teachers of English to children' by David Vale with Anne Feunteun. Cambridge Teacher training and development
- 'The House on the Moors' by Paul Shipton. Heinemann New Wave Readers

Adapted from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/storytelling.shtml>

## **Primary tips and activities 6: Working in pairs and groups**

*By Jo Bertrand*

### **Introduction**

The tendency with primary learners is to treat the class as a whole group and underestimate their ability to work in pairs or in small groups. Even very young learners can become independent in their learning and guided early on they will be more likely to grow into autonomous and successful language learners.

### **The advantages of pair work and small group work**

- Gives learners more speaking time
- Changes the pace of the lesson
- Takes the spotlight off you and puts it onto the children
- Allows them to mix with everyone in the group
- Gives them a sense of achievement when reaching a team goal
- Teaches them how to lead and be led by someone other than the teacher
- It allows you to monitor, move around the class and really listen to the language they are producing.

### **Pit falls and how to avoid them**

- You could lose control of the class. Set up a signal before you start, like a visual time out with your hands, so that they know when to stop. Don't shout for them to stop as they will just shout louder!
- You are not able to listen to everyone at once and hear what they are saying – set up groups of three where A and B talk while C monitors. Then swap roles. They are producing language; you just want to make sure the language they are producing is English. Have a fun system of every mother tongue word you hear the monitor must stand up and then stay standing. The activity stops if all monitors are standing. This will make them aware of using English as much as possible and using their first language as little as possible.
- The classroom will get very noisy. This is OK, as long as they aren't shouting. Move them into different places in the room so that they can hear themselves speak.

### **How to set up pair and group work**

- Be sure to fully explain the procedure before splitting the class up.
- Always demonstrate either yourself or with the help of a volunteer exactly what they have to do.
- Ask them to tell you what they have to do before they do it (in their mother tongue if need be) to check their understanding.

- Have fill in activities ready for the quick finishers – but be sure that they have completed the task correctly first and haven't just finished early because they misunderstood what they had to do.
- Don't forget to have feedback time after pair work so that the children don't feel that they have been wasting time. It's important to share their work as a whole group although this doesn't have to be systematic.
- Set a clear time limit.
- Control who works with who so children aren't always being dominated or dominating others.

### Activities which lend themselves to pair work

- **Roll the ball**  
This can be used to practise any language that requires a question/answer pattern. They can roll the ball to each other and have to say the appropriate sentence as they roll the ball. E.g. "Hello" "Hello" "What's your name?" etc Remember the sentences they practise should be fairly short.
- **Information gap**  
Give each pair a picture. The pictures should be nearly the same with two or three elements missing from each picture. Without showing each other the pictures they should describe the missing objects. They will practise colour, prepositions of place, and adjectives such as big, small... Then they can compare their pictures
- **Telephone conversations**  
Sitting back to back they can practise telephone language or just simple exchanges that don't have to be connected to the telephone itself. Sitting back to back should arouse their interest and help train them with listening skills. It's a challenge, but a fun one!

### Activities which lend themselves to group work

- **Posters**  
Used to practise categorizing skills, reviewing colours and names of toys. The children can be in charge of finding pictures of toys and grouping in terms of colour or type of toy and displaying their work.
- **Cuisenaire rods**  
If you can find a set of these wooden, colour coded rods you'll find they come in handy for a whole host of activities. Give a random selection to the small groups. Together they must imagine a scene and build it to then describe to the class.
- **Weather dressing**  
Bring in a selection of items of clothing. You can ask the children to bring in one item each the week before but bring a few extra yourself to account for those who forget. Put the items in four piles around the room to make access easier and to avoid a scramble on one pile. The class should be in four groups – one for each season. They have a few minutes to collect a certain number of items that they could wear in that season. Everyone must have at least one item. But no-one in the group must have the same item as their other group members. The language they use can be describing to their group what they're wearing, using colours and

clothing vocabulary, and saying in what weather conditions they would wear the item. The other group members can say if they think it's appropriate for their season or not

Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-pair-group-work.htm>

## **Primary tips and activities 7: Teaching listening and speaking skills**

*by Jo Bertrand*

### **Introduction**

In this article you will find a few tips to get you started with teaching speaking and listening skills to young learners. The aims are:

- To think about what you say in class and to make your language more accessible to your young learners
- To think about how you can make listening fun and easy, not hard and boring

### **Age**

The tips below are for your classes with 5-7 year olds although you can use similar principles when teaching older primary age (8-12).

### **Listening - Instructions**

- Remember you are their model so always think about how you are going to introduce an activity before you go to class. Writing out instructions as part of your lesson plan will really help you to notice what language you are using with your young learners. You may find that your language is too complex for the beginner pupils.
- Imagine yourself as a beginner learning a new language and see if what you say is too difficult to follow. You may need to modify what you say. Instructions, if well thought out and accompanied always with demonstration, can be communicated purely in English.

### **Listening - Class management**

- Don't panic if you don't speak the children's first language. This won't prevent a bond forming between you and the children. If they know you as the person who only speaks English then they will always want to communicate with you as much as possible in English.
- Discipline can be easily understood by young children through your facial expressions and smiley/cross faces drawn on the board.
- Feedback can also be understood clearly when you use your face to help express whether or not you are pleased with the work they produce.

### **Listening - Using a song**

- Prepare the learners before they listen to anything.
- Show them pictures of characters from the song.
- If it's a song about teddy bears then bring in some teddy bears to show them. If the teddy bears sing sections of the song then use them as puppets and make them actually sing the song.
- Use actions as much as possible to accompany songs so that the children can participate. This will help build their confidence, increase their enjoyment and give them extra clues as to the meaning of the words they are listening to.
- They should predict, 'imagine', what they are going to hear. Again, sticking with the teddy bears, ask them if they think the teddy bear is happy or sad.
- When they are listening they should always have something to do. They need a reason for listening. You could allocate part of the song to a small cluster of children so they have to listen out for their part and sing along to that part only.
- Use the same song again and again. Listening is a difficult skill so building their confidence is vital at all stages of language learning. If they recognize the words they will be much more motivated. This is valid not only from a language point of view but also from a logical point of view. Listening to a song you know and like is always an enjoyable experience. Familiarity helps children feel secure.

### **Speaking - Songs and chants**

- Using songs and chants in class gives the children a chance to listen and reproduce the language they hear. They are working on the sounds, rhythm and intonation.
- Remember when you speak or sing keep it simple but very importantly, natural so that when they copy what you say they can have a chance of sounding natural.

### **Speaking - Whole class chorus drills**

- If you have a large class make sure the language they produce is not just confined to stilted whole class repetitions of sentences produced by you. If the class tries to speak at the same time they automatically slow down and the intonation and rhythm are lost. Whole class repetition does of course have its advantages as it allows weaker students to build confidence with speaking without being in the limelight. Do chorus drills as described above but limit them and always move on to letting individuals speak.

### **Speaking - Real language**

- As with listening, make sure they always have a valid reason for speaking. The more realistic the need for communication, the more effective an activity will be. In other words get them to ask their neighbour 'Do you prefer chocolate or strawberry ice-cream?' rather than saying; 'What's my favourite food?' This last question is just asking the children to guess rather than think. Avoid getting them to repeat sentences such as; 'What is my name?' or 'Is this a book?' Not only do you know it's a book, so the interaction isn't very interesting, unless the book is hidden in a bag and they are having to work out the contents, but also the

response is limited to a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Closed questions are ok to lead onto something more with low level learners but be aware of not using them too often.

### **Speaking - Further suggestions**

- Vary the types of speaking and listening activities you do. Keep them interested by introducing new approaches to speaking in class. This could mean talking to different people, talking to different numbers of people, speaking as a whole class, half a class or in small groups.
- For different levels in the same class you can ask them to listen for different things. Ask the weaker ones to tell you how many teddy bears there are in the song and the stronger ones to tell you what the teddy bears are doing in the song.
- To make one activity suit all levels ask them to practice saying between five and ten sentences. This way the quick finishers have more to do and the weaker pupils still feel they have achieved the task if they have practised only a few sentences

Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-teaching-listening-and-speaking.htm>

## Primary tips and activities 8: A game-change places

*By Jo Budden*

This is a great activity to get students moving about and practice some vocabulary or sentence structures.

### Procedure

- Start with students in a closed circle, with the teacher standing in the middle to begin the game. There should always be one less chair than participants.
- Depending on what you want to revise the teacher says, “Change places if .....(Example) you’re wearing trainers.” All students who are wearing trainers must stand up, and move to another chair and the teacher should sit on one of the recently vacated seats.
- The person left without a seat stays in the middle and gives the next command, “Change places if you .....(Example) have brown eyes” and so it goes on.
- Adapt for higher levels with commands such as, “Change places if ... you went to the cinema last weekend”, or “Change places if you ... would like to have less homework.”

Young learners can get very excited with this game so make it clear from the beginning that pushing other students out of chairs and similar behaviour is not going to be tolerated! Be careful to incorporate this activity in the class at an appropriate time. It is a definitely a ‘warmer’ as opposed to a ‘cooler’ and may be better at the end of a class.

**Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-change-places.htm>**

## **Primary tips and activities 9:**

### **A game: Listening Race**

*by Lucy Daniels*

This is a game I have been using with my students aged 10 and 11. It is to practise personal descriptions, and works on aural skills. The competitive element makes the children a lot more eager to join in and really listen.

- You need to prepare a selection of descriptions. Sentences can include whatever they have been learning: 'My name is..', 'I'm 10 years old', 'I've got one brother and two sisters', etc.
- Make two sets of all the descriptions you choose to use in the game and cut out the phrases separately. Don't forget to take a record of the sentences you have cut up!
- The aim of the game is for students to win points for their team by choosing the right sentence according to what the teacher reads out, then be the first to place it on a table at the front of the class. So, separate the children into two teams, and get them to form two lines at the back of the classroom. Put a set of the phrases on a table in front of each team - about halfway down the class - then read out the sentences and the children race to bring the correct phrase to the front. Whoever is first wins a point.
- If you like children could take it in turns to be the teacher and read out the descriptions.

Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-teacher-listening-race.htm>

## Primary tips and activities 10: Using songs with children

*By Jo Bertrand*

### Introduction

Children all over the world love listening to songs and most of them love singing too! Using songs to introduce language and revise vocabulary is a great way to help children remember. Having a rhyme, music and actions helps to quickly pick up the vocabulary and retain it.

### How to introduce songs

- The learners should hear it first a couple of times.  
If you are not confident with singing then you will need to find a recorded version. The down side of a recorded version is that you will be less connected to the song and the activity might feel less spontaneous. The upside is that you will have backing music and so the song might be more lively.
- Once they're heard the song a couple of times they can start to join in.  
If it is an action song they can watch you do the actions from the very first time and join in with them as soon as they feel ready.
- Sing and do the actions and emphasize the last words of each line.  
The children can fill in the blanks, with a little help from you if needed.

### Action songs

- **Heads, shoulders, knees and toes**  
This song is perfect for practising parts of the body. Children love singing it when you gradually take away the words but don't forget to sing a final, quick version with all the actions and words.
  - Head, shoulders knees and toes, knees and toes  
Head, shoulders knees and toes, knees and toes  
And eyes and ears and mouth and nose  
Head, shoulders knees and toes, knees and toes
- **If you're happy and know it**  
This is a great song that even the youngest learners can follow and join in with. They will very quickly want to do the actions. If you're happy and you know it clap your hands
  - If you're happy and you know it clap your hands  
If you're happy and you know really want to show it  
If you're happy and you know it clap your hands

If you're happy and you know it stamp your feet / touch your nose / wave your arms / stand up / sit down / say 'We are'...
- **Here we go round the mulberry bush**  
You can use a chair as a bush or a child but if you use a child then be sure to let them do all the actions and not just be a bush! The children can suggest other actions to do on a cold and frosty morning.

- Here we go round the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush.  
Here we go round the mulberry bush on a cold and frosty morning.

This is way we brush our hair, brush our hair, brush our hair.  
This is the way we brush our hair on a cold and frosty morning.  
This is way we brush our teeth / eat our food / put on our coat / say  
goodbye ...

- **The Farmer's in his den**

The children can stand and turn in a large circle for this song and have one person go into the centre of the circle each time a new character appears in the song. They can choose themselves the next child. Sing three times so that several children can have a turn at being a character.

- The Farmer's in his den, the farmer's in his den, E I addy O, the Farmer's in his den.  
The farmer wants a wife, the farmer wants a wife, E I addy O, the farmer wants a wife.  
The wife wants a child, the wife wants a child E I addy O, the wife wants a child.  
The child wants a nurse, the child wants a nurse E I addy O, the child wants a nurse.  
The nurse wants a dog, the nurse wants a dog E I addy O, the nurse wants a dog.  
We all pat the dog, we all pat the dog E I addy O, we all pat the dog.

### Classic songs that children love to sing

- **There was an old lady who swallowed a fly**

This is quite a long song. If you can use pictures to accompany the song the children will follow better. This is a song that needs to be acted to be brought to life so be ready to act out eating, the animals, and the exclamations.

- There was an old lady who swallowed a fly.  
I don't why she swallowed a fly,  
Perhaps she'll die.

There was an old lady who swallowed a spider  
That wriggled and wriggled and jiggled inside her.  
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly.  
I don't know why she swallowed the fly,  
Perhaps she'll die.

There was an old lady who swallowed a bird.  
How absurd to swallow a bird!  
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider, she swallowed the spider to catch the fly,  
I don't know why she swallowed the fly,  
Perhaps she'll die.

There was an old lady who swallowed :  
a dog – What a hog to swallow a dog! / a cow – I don't know how she  
swallowed a cow /a horse – She's dead of course

- **I can sing a rainbow**

Have colour flashcards stuck on the board. Practise the colours first making up a chant. Gradually cover up the colours until the children are chanting the colours with only white paper to look at.

- Red and yellow and pink and green, purple and orange and blue  
I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow too.  
Listen with your ears, see with your eyes and sing everything you see,  
You can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing along with me.  
Red and yellow and pink and green, purple and orange and blue  
I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow too.

- **The ABC song**

Have each child hold a flashcard with a letter. They first have to get themselves into the correct order and then hold their card up when they hear their letter in the song.

- A, B, C, D, E, F, G,  
H, I, J, K,  
L, M, N, O, P,  
Q, R, S,  
T, U, V,  
W, X, Y and Z

Now you know the A, B, C, you can sing along with me.

- **Twinkle, twinkle little star**

The children can make their own stars before singing this song. Give them three strips of pipe cleaners that they have to bend together in the middle to make a six-point star. This is a good way to practise instructions with them. You can hang them onto coat hangers and display like a mobile.

- Twinkle, twinkle little star  
How I wonder what you are  
Up above the world so high  
Like a diamond in the sky  
Twinkle, twinkle little star  
How I wonder what you are.

Adapted from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-using-songs.htm>



## Chapter 5: 10 Great Language points

*10 short, easy to follow explanations of popular grammar points*

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## Language point 1: There is/are; It is/they are

### What's the difference?

- ❖ We use **there is/are** to talk about something for the **first time** to say that it exists:
  - There's a new neighbour in flat number 6.
  - There's a really nice café next door to our apartment block.
  - There are 6 chairs around my dining room table.
- ❖ We use **it is/they are** to talk about **a particular thing**, place, fact, situation etc.
  - There's a really nice café next door to our apartment block. It's famous for its cream cakes.
  - There are 6 chairs around my dining room table. They are blue.

We use *it's/they are* here because now the café/chairs has/have been introduced **we know which particular one(s) we are talking about.**

### Special phrases with *it's*

We use **it's** to talk about

- time**
- distance**
- weather**

- What time **is it?** **It's** half past four.
- **It's** a long way from my school to where I live.
- **It's** hot today.

### Spoken English

Note that in **spoken English** we use contractions with **there is, they are** and **it is**.

**There is** becomes **there's**.

**It is** becomes **it's**.

**They are** becomes **they're**.

However **we do not shorten *there are***.

- **There's** a large kitchen in my apartment. ✓
- **There're** two bathrooms in my house. **X**
- **There are** two bathrooms in my house. ✓

Adapted from: [www.go4english.com](http://www.go4english.com)

## Language point 2: Much & Many

- Students often get confused about when to use some, any, much or many.
- Here are the rules for **when you can and can't use** each one:

	Uncountable	Countable	Positive sentences	Negative sentences	Questions
<b>Some</b>	√	√	√	X	<b>Not usually - for offers only.</b>
<b>Any</b>	√	√	X	√	√
<b>Much</b>	√	X	X	√	√
<b>Many</b>	√	√	√	√	√
<b>A lot of</b>	√	√	√	√	√
<b>A few</b>	X	√	√	X	√

NB. A **few** means three or four of something.

### **A tip!**

If you are talking about a large amount of something and you can't remember the rule, just use 'a lot of' as it can be used in all situations.

### **Modifiers**

In order to emphasise the amount of something you can use the following modifiers:

**So many**  
**So much**

I have **so many** chairs in my apartment.  
We have **so much** work to do today.

**Such a lot of**

Egypt has **such a lot of** furniture shops.

Only **so** can be used with indefinite determiners **much** (for uncountable nouns) and **many** (for countable nouns). We can use this pattern:

*so + determiner + noun*

- 'So many people had crowded on to the beach that there was no space left for my towel.'
- 'I'm sure there will be **so** much noise in the restaurant that I won't be able to hear what anybody is saying.'

**You cannot say: 'such many people', or 'such much noise'**

Alternatively, you can use this pattern:

*Such + a lot of + noun*

It has a similar meaning to so many/so much and can be used with all types of nouns.

### **Common mistakes**

1. So and such **cannot** be interchanged.

I have **such many** chairs. **X**

Egypt has **so a lot of** furniture shops. **X**

I have **so** many chairs. ✓

Egypt has **such** a lot of... ✓

2. **too much and so much**

**Another common mistake** is that students often say 'too much' in the wrong way. Too much actually means it is a **bad** thing.

For example:

I eat **too much** chocolate. (This means it is a **problem**. It's a **negative** thing.)

I eat **so much** chocolate. (**This means it's ok. I don't care** that I eat a lot of chocolate. I love it.)

**Adapted from [www.go4english.com](http://www.go4english.com))**

## Language point 3: Body parts: countable or uncountable?

For **most parts of the body** it is obvious whether it is singular or plural, countable or uncountable and the **patterns are regular**.

**For regular plurals add 's'**

one arm                      two arms

One eye                      two eyes

**However**, some body parts do not follow this pattern. Here are some **exceptions to the rule**:

### -Irregular countable nouns

Singular	Plural
Tooth	Teeth
Foot	Feet

-Also, **some body parts** are **uncountable**.

Uncountable nouns
Blood
Hair
Skin

Eg. I don't have a lot of **hair** ✓  
I don't have a lot of **hairs**×

**NB. Hair is a special case.** We can never say 'a blood' or 'a skin', but we can say 'a hair'. However this does not mean all the hair on your head, but just one single strand of hair.

Eg. Ouch! I have just pulled a hair out of my head. (not all your hair; just one thin strand!)

### Note on quantifiers

Remember that we use

**Much** with **negative uncountable nouns** and **questions** only



- I haven't got **much** hair.

We **do not use much** in a **positive statement, nor with countable nouns.**

**Many** with negative countable nouns and questions only

- I haven't got **many** teeth

We **do not use much** in a **positive statement, nor with uncountable nouns.**

**A lot of** can be used for **both negative and positive statements** and questions and with **both countable and uncountable nouns.**

### Useful advice

My advice is to use 'a lot of' if you find all this difficult to remember, and then you can't go wrong!

(from [www.go4english.com](http://www.go4english.com))

## Language point 4: Have got

### Meaning

#### When are 'have got' and 'have' the same?

- Possession  
I have a car and I have got a car
- Obligation  
I have to go now and I have got to go now

#### When is it not possible to use 'have got'?

- In the past  
I have got a car becomes I had a car
- Actions  
I have a shower ✓  
I have got a shower ✗

Have got is more common in informal or spoken English

### Form

Affirmative	Negative	Question
I have He/she/it has	I don't have He/she/it doesn't have	Do you have? Does he/she/it have?
I have got (I've got) He/she/it has got ('s got)	I haven't got He/she/it hasn't got	Have you got? Has he/she/it got?

Remember that in short answers we repeat the auxiliary:

Do you have? Yes, I do.  
Have you got? Yes, I have.

(from [www.go4english.com](http://www.go4english.com))

## Language point 5: Present perfect

The present perfect tense is a mixture between the past and the present as it is used to express an action that started at some point in the past and still has an effect on present.

### Form

The present perfect tense is formed with the present tense of **have + the past participle**.

- *I have worked hard.*
- *She has married Ahmed.*
- *He has gone to bed early.*
- *They have ordered a pizza.*

The **negative** is formed by adding **not** to **have** or **has**.

- *I have not worked hard.*
- *She has not married Ahmed.*
- *He has not gone to bed early.*
- *They have not ordered a pizza.*

The **question** is formed by inverting the auxiliary and the subject.

- *Have you worked hard?*
- *Has she married Ahmed?*
- *Has he gone to bed early?*
- *Have they ordered a pizza?*

### Use

The present perfect is used to express several situations.

To express:

#### **1. recent actions when the time is not mentioned**

- *She has read that book but she didn't like it.* (when she has read the book is not mentioned)

To express:

#### **2. recent actions that have results in the present**

- *Hamad has had a serious car accident.* (he is probably badly injured and may be in hospital now)

To express:

#### **3. actions occurring in an incomplete period**

- *Rania has already rung you five times this morning.* (this implies that we are still in the morning and Rania has rung at some indefinite time during this morning)

To express:

#### 4. habitual actions

- *I have never been late for work.* (it is my habit to not to be late for work)

To express:

#### 5. actions which last throughout an incomplete period, actions that start in the past and continue past the time of speaking in the present

- *They have been married for 25 years.* (they are still married)

### Time Expressions

Several time expressions are used with the present perfect tense. They usually come between the auxiliary and the past participle like:

just – already – ever – never

- *They have **just** announced their engagement.*
- *They have **already** gone back from their honeymoon.*
- *Has he **ever** fallen in love?*
- *She has **never** been to the UK.*

Some time expressions come at the end of the sentence, like:

since – for – recently – lately – yet

- *He hasn't played chess **since** he was a student.*
- *We haven't seen him **for** ages.*
- *They have moved house **recently**.*
- *She has got a new baby **lately**.*
- *Have you got a new job **yet**?*
- *He hasn't got a new job **yet**.*

(from [www.go4english.com](http://www.go4english.com))

## Language point 6: For and since

**For and since are both used with time expressions:**

for + period of time	since + point in time
two hours six months ten years a long time ages	nine o'clock December 1995 university I was a child

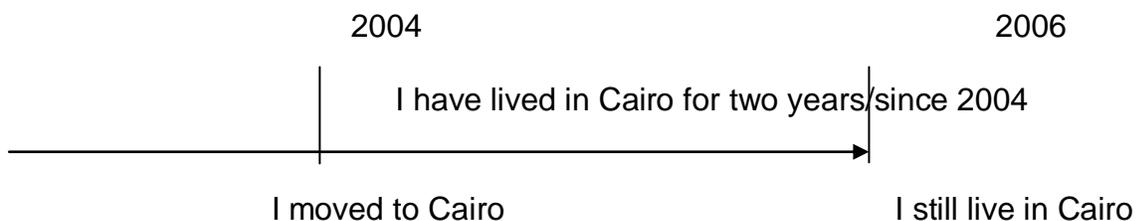
**For and since often have the same meaning:**

I have lived in Cairo for two years = I have lived in Cairo since 2004.

**For and Since with Tenses:**

For and since are usually used with the present perfect tense, because they refer to a time up to the present.

Look at this time line, which illustrates the sentences above.



**For** can be used with any tense:

I was at university for six years.  
 He's staying with me for two weeks.  
 She'll be in hospital for a month.

**(from [www.go4english.com](http://www.go4english.com))**

## Language point 7: Past simple

### Form

There are two types of verb - regular and irregular - and it is when using the **past simple** (as well as the past participle) that this is important. Regular verbs are formed by adding "-ed" to the end of the base verb, or simply "-d" if the base verb ends in the letter "e". (For two spelling exceptions, see below):

### Affirmative

- *I **played/lived***
- *You **played/lived***
- *He/she/it **played/lived***
- *We **played/lived***
- *They **played/lived***

### Negative

- *I **didn't play/live***
- *You **didn't play/live***
- *He/she/it **didn't play/live***
- *We **didn't play/live***
- *They **didn't play/live***

### Question

- ***Did you play/live?***
- ***Did he/she/it play/live?***
- ***Did they play/live?***

Irregular verbs are just that - irregular - and it is only possible to learn them by memorisation and practice. See the following web site for a list of irregular verbs:

<http://www.gsu.edu/~wwwesl/egw/verbs.htm>

## Spelling exceptions

See previous articles for verbs that double the consonant at the end and others that end in the letter y.

## Pronunciation

The "-ed" ending of regular verbs in the **past simple** can be pronounced in three different ways:

It is pronounced /**d**/ after vowels and voiced consonants:

- *Mowed**d***
- *Cried**d***
- *Agreed**d***
- *Bathed**d***
- *Robbed**d***
- *Loved**d***
- *Quizzed**d***
- *Judged**d***
- *Begged**d***
- *Teemed**d***
- *Cleaned**d***
- *Longed**d***
- *Wheeled**d***

It is pronounced /**t**/ after unvoiced consonants:

- *Stopped = /**t**/*
- *Laughed = /**t**/*
- *Hissed = /**t**/*
- *Washed = /**t**/*
- *Watched = /**t**/*
- *Talked = /**t**/*

It is pronounced /**id**/ after /d/ and /t/:

- **Needed**
- **Collected**

## Use

Basically, the **past simple** can be considered the "normal" tense to use when speaking about the past. In other words, you should use it unless you have a particular reason for using one of the other past tenses.

We use the **past simple** when we are referring to moments and periods of time that have already finished, especially if we actually mention the time. These moments and periods can be short actions that ended quickly, but also longer periods and also actions or events that were repeated:

- *I **fell** off a horse yesterday.*
- *I **lived** in Australia when I was younger.*
- *I **went** to the cinema every weekend when I was a teenager.*

(from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central>]

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-grammar-past-simple.htm>

## Language point 8: Used to

Form	Meaning
<p><b>Used To</b></p> <p>In affirmative sentences:</p> <p>subject pronoun + <b>used to</b> + infinitive</p> <p>In negatives and questions:</p> <p>subject pronoun + didn't + <b>use to</b> + infinitive            did + subject pronoun + <b>use to</b> + infinitive</p> <p>Note that the pronunciation of "used to" and "use to" is the same: /ju:stə/</p>	<p>A regular action or a state that happened or was true in the past but not the present.</p> <p>I used to smoke.</p> <p>This sentence means that I regularly smoked in the past, but I don't smoke now.</p> <p>I used to be a student.</p> <p>This sentence means that I was a student in the past, but I am no longer a student now.</p>
<p><b>Be Used To</b></p> <p>In affirmative sentences:</p> <p>Subject pronoun + am/is/are + used to + noun</p> <p>+ v-ing</p>	<p>Describes a state (not an action – use the verb "be").</p> <p>I am used to the traffic in Cairo.            I am used to driving in Cairo.</p> <p>This sentence means that in the past I had lots of problems dealing with this difficult situation, but that now it isn't a problem (I still don't like it, but I can deal with it).</p>
<p><b>Get Used To</b></p> <p>In affirmative sentences:</p> <p>Subject pronoun + get + used to + noun / v-ing</p> <p>Get used to is usually used in the continuous because it refers to a process</p>	<p>An action or state which describes a change.</p> <p>I'm getting used to single life.            I'm getting used to living alone.</p> <p>This sentence means that my attitude to living alone is changing; it was very negative but it is now becoming more positive.            However, I can't yet say I am used to living alone. I still have some problems with it.</p>

(from [www.go4english.com](http://www.go4english.com))  
**Language point 9:**  
**Question tags**

**Question tags** are the short questions that we put at the end of sentences, especially in spoken English.

- *You're coming, **aren't you?***
- *He's not serious, **is he?***

If the main part of the sentence is affirmative, then the **question tag** is negative:

- *It's warm, **isn't it?***
- *They went also, **didn't they?***

If the main part of the sentence is negative, then the **question tag** is affirmative:

- *She couldn't see it, **could she?***
- *We won't know till tomorrow, **will we?***

If the main part of the sentence contains an auxiliary verb (or the verb "to be", then this is used in the **question tag**:

- *They are away for a few days, **aren't they?***
- *You weren't available, **were you?***
- *She's Mexican, **isn't she?***
- *It wasn't his turn, **was it?***
- *You've got a cat, **haven't you?***
- *He's got a new house, **hasn't he?***
- *We can't go in there, **can we?***
- *They couldn't hear me, **could they?***

If the main part of the sentences does not contain an auxiliary verb, then we use the verb "to do" in the **question tag**:

- *She needs some help, **doesn't she?***
- *He loved his work, **didn't he?***
- *You come here often, **don't you?***

Depending on what we wish to say, the intonation of a **question tag** is different. If we are asking a real question (in other words, if we don't know the answer), then our voice



rises on the **question tag**:

- *That's spelt with two n's, **isn't it?***

On the other hand, if we are sure of the answer and are only asking for agreement, our voice falls on the question tag:

- *It's your turn next, **isn't it?***

More information about **question tags**:

<http://english-zone.com/grammar/1questions.html>

Exercises and quizzes about **question tags**:

<http://www.better-english.com/grammar/questiontags.htm>

<http://www.better-english.com/grammar/questiontags2.htm>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-grammar-other-areas-question-tags.htm>

## Language point 10: Articles

When do I use the articles **a** or **an**, **the** and **some** and when do I leave them out?

**no article**

**the**

**a/an**

**some, any or no article**

**No article:** **No article** is normally needed when we use uncountable and plural nouns to talk about things generally:

*A: What are your hobbies?*

*B: I like listening to music, playing tennis and collecting stamps.*

**The:** We use **the** when it is clear which thing or person we are talking about:

*We saw a tiger and an elephant at the zoo, but the tiger was my favourite. (the one I mentioned a second ago)*

**a/an:** We use **a** or **an** when we don't specify which things or people we are talking about:

*Should I use a pencil (not a particular one) or a pen (not a particular one) to fill in this form?*

**some, any or no article:** **Some** and **any** can be used with uncountable or plural nouns when we do not know (or say) how many /much:

*I can't understand why my bank balance is so low. I'm sure I paid some money into the account last week. (I can't remember how much)*

It sometimes makes no difference if we use **some** or **any** or **no article**:

*I've bought (some) tomatoes (some) apples and (some) cream but I couldn't find (any) peaches.*

However, because **some** and **any** usually suggest uncertain quantities, it would sound strange to say the following:

*She's really beautiful. She's got some long blond hair (=I'm not sure how much), a lovely smile and some beautiful teeth. (=I'm not sure how many)*

(from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central>)