

# ADVANCED ESL TIPS & TRICKS EVERY TEACHER SHOULD KNOW

## YOU, THE SUPER TEACHER

HOW-TO GUIDES, LESSON IDEAS, PRINT AND GO ACTIVITIES, AND MORE



IT'S NOT ABOUT  
MORE EXPERIENCE.  
IT'S ABOUT HAVING  
MORE INFORMATION

 YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO BE THE NEXT SUPER TEACHER, SO START READING

# CONTENTS

- 3-4 **MUST READ:** 4 Simple Retention Tricks That Will Help Your Students Remember 90% Of What You Teach In Class
- 5-6 **MUST READ:** Lesson Planning for Beginners: 5 Tactics for Excellent Preparation (or 'How I learned to stop panicking and love my plan')
- 7-8 **MUST READ:** Getting Hijacked – 5 Tactics for Going With The Flow When Plans Change
- 9-10 **MUST READ:** Filling Time, Not Killing Time: 10 Great Games for the Last Minutes of an ESL Class
- 11-13 **MUST READ:** The Calm, Consummate Professional: 10 Life-Hacks for Any Teacher
- 14 **MUST READ:** 7 Easy Ways to Inject Humor into Your ESL Classroom
- 15-16 **MUST READ:** The Bridge: How To Generate Noisy But Light-hearted Debate With Any Levels And Class Sizes Using An ESL Classic You Are Probably Already Familiar With
- 17-18 **MUST READ:** The Balloon Debate: An Integrated ESL Classic in 6 Easy Steps
- 19-20 **AUTHORITY:** Respect My Authority – 9 Concepts for Firm but Fair ESL Classroom Discipline
- 21-22 **TRUST AND RESPECT:** To be in Good Standing: 6 Ways to Gain Trust and Respect From Your ESL Students
- 23-24 **OPEN LESSONS:** How To Plan An Open Lesson: 7 Easy Steps
- 25-26 **PERSONAL INFORMATION:** Personal Information In The Classroom: How 'Open' And Direct Communication Should Be
- 27-28 **L1 OR NOT?:** Mixing it Up: 7 Ways to Ensure Against L1 Enclaves Among ESL Students
- 29-30 **L1 OR NOT?:** Don't Close the Door on L1: 4 Ways Your Students' First Language Can Help Them Learn English
- 31 **ALL SKILLS:** Cover All Four Skills With This Simple, 4-Step Activity Your Students Will Love
- 32-33 **ALL SKILLS:** Crime and Punishment: 5 Integrated Exercises for ESL Students
- 34-35 **AMBIGUITY:** What Do You Want Us to Do, Exactly? Tolerance of Ambiguity and Lack Thereof in Students
- 36-37 **TELEVISION:** Should You Have Television in Class? 6 Reasons You Should Turn on the TV (and How to Make It Productive for Your Students)
- 38 **SMARTPHONES:** Don't Throw That Smart Phone out the Window! 7 Spiffy Ways to Use Technology to HELP ESL Students Learn
- 39-40 **DIVERSITY:** My Country, Right or Wrong: Five Ways of Understanding Nationalism in the ESL Classroom
- 41 **DIVERSITY:** A Rainbow of Cultures – 7 Steps to Organizing an International Day
- 42-43 **ADULT LEARNERS:** 9 Reasons Why Games with Adult Learners are a Must
- 44-45 **ADULT LEARNERS:** 7 Proven Ways to Teach the ABC to Adults
- 46-47 **INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS:** Teaching ESL in an Individual Tutoring Setting: Keeping the Student Awake and Involved
- 48-49 **INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS:** Teaching One-on-One: A Teacher's Dream of Individualizing and Building Curriculum
- 50-51 **INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS:** When They Just Want to Pass: 12 Dos and Don'ts for the One-on-One ESL Tutor
- 52-53 **ONLINE LEARNERS:** How Do I Even Do That? Principles of Teaching ESL Online
- 54-55 **ONLINE LEARNERS:** Teaching ESL Online: Pros and Cons
- 56 **ONLINE LEARNERS:** Engaging Virtual Lessons: 5 Great Techniques that Will Change Your Online Lessons
- 57-58 **ONLINE LEARNERS:** Teaching on Skype®: Essential Guide of Dos and Don'ts
- 59 **ONLINE LEARNERS:** Teaching Remotely: Use These 7 Tips for Teaching by Skype and You Can't Go Wrong
- 60-61 **CLASSROOM CRIME SCENE:** Language Cops in the Classroom? How to Set up a Classroom Crime Scene and 8 Language Activities You Can Do with It
- 62-63 **ERROR CORRECTION:** Being Wrong Is The Best Thing That Can Happen: 8 Methods for Compassionate Error Correction
- 64-65 **FLUENCY:** 'Just a Minute': 5 Steps to Making Fluency Fun

# 4 Simple Retention Tricks That Will Help Your Students Remember

## IMAGINE A PYRAMID.

At the bottom are all the students who kind of get it, who remember some information from class. At the top of the pyramid are those few students who seem to retain almost everything that they learn in class. And at the bottom and at the top, along with their students, are the teachers who have these students in class. Some are less effective and some more effective, as their students' performance shows. Every teacher falls on the pyramid somewhere, even you. But before you settle in and get comfortable at any of the lower levels, see how easy it is to get to the top and be a teacher whose students achieve amazing results in their English classes.

## HELP YOUR STUDENTS BECOME AMAZINGLY SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS

### 1 THE BASICS

Students retain twenty percent of what they hear. It's not very impressive. And for English as a second language learners, the percentage is even lower. The language barrier factors in at nearly every level, and a student's listening comprehension skills and knowledge of vocabulary will, generally, negatively affect how much of what he hears he is able to retain.

The good news is it's simple to move students up from this meager twenty percent retention. Getting students involved in the learning process, things you probably do every day in your ESL class, will increase how much they retain.

One way to improve students' listening comprehension is to give them as many different opportunities to practice as possible. This includes bringing multimedia into your classroom – tape recordings and podcasts for example. Show them videos of people giving speeches, and bring guest speakers into your classroom. Even inviting another teacher to come and talk to your students will help them improve their listening compre-

hension since different people speak with different vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. The good news is that all these things work to improve listening comprehension. The bad news is that even students with the best listening comprehension will only retain around twenty percent of what they hear. But we're not to the top of the pyramid yet.

### 2 MOVING UP THE LADDER

Take a step up. "Oh, I'll just read it in the book." Books may contain a great amount of information whether you are studying English or entomology, but that doesn't mean they are the best source for learning. According to research in education, students generally remember about thirty percent of what they see. This includes reading books, looking at graphics, and any other process that involves only the eyes and the brain. A lot of ESL students prefer reading information to attending class. Perhaps it is because they can take their time and look up words that are unfamiliar to them. They think that working at their own pace, even if it's only through visual means, will help them learn English better. Even with this extra attention to learning, however, most of them will not retain all the information on the page, only about thirty percent.

It's important for teachers to remember this. Sometimes the best option for your class seems to be independent work, something reading based. And those kinds of activities are not bad. But it does matter how and when you use them. These independent reading based activities are best as review of information rather than a means of presenting new information. When students read information they already know, it will increase retention. When they read new material as their only means of learning it, their retention is less than ideal.

### 3 A COMMON HOLDING PATTERN

Very few ESL teachers either present a lesson orally or have students read about it in a text or from a worksheet.

Most teachers, no matter what the subject, have figured out that doing both – presenting information orally and visually – gives their students more success when it comes to retaining information. Research supports this conclusion, and they move up to the next level of the pyramid. If student see and hear the same information, they will retain approximately fifty percent of that information. That's why we teachers write on the board while we are teaching students. It gives a double punch of input. That double input almost doubles how much students remember of what they have read and heard. Here on the level of hearing and seeing, most students become comfortable, and teachers can, too. But it's so easy to keep going up, why stop there.

### 4 A LITTLE CHANGE MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE

Yes, remembering fifty percent of what we present in class is probably a pretty good result, but with just a little change, we can help our students become even more successful. Just taking one other small step in a lesson will increase student comprehension to a stunning seventy percent. Let your students talk. That's the big factor – speaking. Traditional classroom teachers may balk at the idea, but as ESL teachers, part of our job is to get students speaking English. As a result, talking in class is always a good thing. Well, most of the time it is. And research shows that students generally retain about seventy percent of what they hear, see, and say in class. That means all those small group discussions are great not only for pronunciation work, but also for helping students remember information in grammar class, vocabulary class, and writing class. I'm not espousing chanting verb conjugations as a way to improve student comprehension, but think about adding simple activities such as these to your class: give students a jigsaw in reading class so each person must orally communicate his information to his group. Have students interview each other while using a new grammar construction. Play a game of cards to teach

vocabulary (memory, go fish, etc.) and have students read the matches they make before setting their cards aside. Let students read instructions and answers aloud when they are completing a worksheet, even if it's only with one or two other students. These simple things will make a difference in how much your students learn and how well they learn it.

## 5 REACHING THE TOP

Who would complain if their students remembered seventy percent of what they taught in class? But you don't have to stop there. Your students can achieve approximately ninety percent retention with just one more step in the teaching/learning process: doing. Doing can mean a lot of different things, and there are probably as many interpretations of that word as there are teachers in the world. I like to think of doing in terms of kinesthetic learners – students who need to get their hands involved when they are learning. Though they may do okay with listening, reading, and even speaking, if they can handle and move objects, build things, draw things, have objects in their control that relate to the lesson, they soar. Because only a small number of students in your class are probably kinesthetic learners, it might seem like you are misusing your all too short class time to include hands on activities in every lesson, but you aren't. Even aural and visual learners will benefit from kinesthetic activities in class.

### **WHEN YOU BOIL IT ALL DOWN, ONLY OUR STUDENTS CAN ENSURE THEIR OWN SUCCESS IN LEARNING ENGLISH.**

But by including aural, visual, speaking, and doing activities into our lesson plans, we can make a difference in how well and how easily our students learn. And when we do, we can be assured we have given them the best chance they have to succeed.



# Lesson Planning for Beginners:

## 5 Tactics for Excellent Preparation

**DID YOU EVER HAVE A TEACHER WHO WAS A BIT SCATTY OR HARE-BRAINED, WHO NEVER SEEMED TO KNOW WHAT WAS COMING NEXT? SOMEONE WHO WAS WELL-MEANING, AND PROBABLY VERY SMART, BUT WHOSE CLASSES SEEMED TO JUMP HAPHAZARDLY FROM ONE TOPIC TO ANOTHER?**

They may have been a thoroughly nice person, but I suspect learning with them was frustrating. If a teacher isn't organized and truly ready to teach, their students pick up on it straight away: long pauses and head-scratching slow down the pace of the class and undermine the students' confidence in the learning process. The good news is that some simple techniques will ensure you seldom, if ever, find yourself at a loss in front of your class. Done thoroughly and in advance, good lesson planning will have your classes running like clockwork.

### MAKE SURE YOU TRY THESE 5 LESSON PLANNING TACTICS

#### 1 THINK ABOUT TIME.

*"I've got forty minutes of material for my class, but how am I going to fill the last ten?"*

You've heard this before, and so have I, and frankly, I find it to be a troubling sign.

Time is a gift. It is an opportunity to positively affect the lives and learning of our students. Our role is not to this time, but to make excellent use of it – the best possible use, in fact – in the service of the day's learning aims. Consider how much time you'll have, and use this as your starting point for the next set of decisions.

#### 2 DECIDE YOUR LEARNING AIMS

*"By the end of the class, what are my students going to be able to do?"*

Consider this literally. You'll begin at 8:00, and by 8:50, the students will have gained at least one new skill.

What will this be? Here are some examples:

- Learning to more clearly and accurately pronounce a tricky sound (s/z, f/p, p/b, etc)
- Learning to use a new grammatical structure (a tense, a conditional form, a modal verb, etc)
- Learning to use a new lexical group (rooms of the house, the continents of the world, animals)
- Improving reading or listening skills (greater comprehension, quicker reading for gist or detail)
- Working on self-correction for writing and speaking (solving problems before they emerge)
- Learning to avoid an L1 problem (those brought up by Chinglish, Konglish, Japlish, etc)

How will you know when this skill has been mastered? Consider a simple assessment system, so that success becomes obvious and measurable. Here are some good indicators:

- The student no longer needs correction, or if they do, this role has passed from the teacher to their classmates, who provide reminders as needed.
- The student spontaneously uses the new word in their own sentences.
- The tricky sound may now be clearer or, at least, awareness has been raised, which is equally valuable.
- The student can express more of what they want to say, relies less on trying to translate or reaching for a dictionary, and is more confident.

#### 3 CONSIDER STRUCTURE, TEACHER TALKING TIME AND DIRECTION

Most new teachers – and quite a lot of old hands, too – talk too much in the classroom. It's natural and understandable, but we could all do better with this. Removing the teacher from the center of the learning process is a cor-

nerstone of Communicative Methodology, and it has many positive results. The less you speak, the more your students will gain confidence and fill that vacuum. I would describe learning how to shut up as the most valuable lesson of my first years as a teacher. One way to focus on this is assign to each step of the class a 'direction': is the flow generally from teacher to student (T-S), or in a dialogue (T-S-T), or in pair work (S-S)?

A classic ESL lesson structure would be:

1. Review (5 mins, T-S-T)
2. Presentation (3-5 mins, T-S plus check questions)
3. Controlled Practice (10 mins, S-S plus feedback)
4. Free Practice (10+ mins, S-S plus feedback)
5. Consolidation / Homework setting / Practice through games (5-10 mins, mixed)

Who, in each section, should be doing most of the speaking? I suggest that in all but 'Presentation' the students should take the lion's share of the talking time by answering review questions, working in pairs, offering opinions, etc.

Assign activities to each step. Review work could be a quick quiz, a puzzle or competition, a worksheet done in teams, or simply firing questions at your students to check the understanding of past material. Presentation is a critical step, and I recommend that you pare down your talking time to the absolute minimum while still articulating the essential material. Consider your audience: would you more enjoy a ten-minute lecture on modal verbs, or five funny modal verb examples followed by being invited to contribute your own? Practice this step in front of a mirror or camera: time how long it took to effectively explain a grammar point, for example, and the next time, try to reduce the time by 20%, and then 50%. Two good examples are far more valuable than five minutes of laborious

explanation.

Controlled practice is generally based in textbook questions, but I urge you to complete this stage quickly, as it checks only the basic understanding of the material and doesn't require the production of it. This happens in the free practice stage, where the students make individual use of the material without many hints from the teacher or textbook. This, in turn, leads to true fluency as the student now has the skills to spontaneously use the language.

## 4 GATHER YOUR RESOURCES

As your gain experience, you'll amass a box full of useful bits and pieces. I found that using something as simple as colored chalk helped grab my students' attention, but real objects, puppets, flash cards and card games, dice, colored paper, stop watches and sticks of glue will all find a home in your box of tricks at some stage. I try, in each class, to teach a word in a way my students may never have seen before: this engages the students and makes the experience, and therefore the word, more memorable.

What facts might you need at hand? If you're teaching the continents of the world, for instance, invite your students to guess the highest and lowest recorded temperatures, or the longest rivers, or highest mountains on each continent. Facts are impressive, as well as useful, and they evince solid preparation which engenders respect.

## 5 SET USEFUL HOMEWORK

Thankfully, the days of uselessly writing or completing gap-fill exercises are largely gone. Homework is another form of practice, mostly done quietly and alone. Make it as useful as possible, so that each question is a genuine check of the students' understanding and ability to individually use the material. Ask for vocabulary practice in a variety of full sentences, all of the students' own making. Set grammar homework in paragraph style, obliging multiple uses of the same structure for different circumstances. Multiple choice, as educators are slowly coming to find, is almost entirely a waste of time. Ask for production and comprehension, not simply make-work tasks which require little

use of brainpower. Invite the students to ask themselves this: "I really get it? Can I do this independently now?" If they genuinely reach this stage, invite them to stop and do something else. I tell my students to practice what they need to, until they can decide that they're comfortable with the material.

## A SOLID LESSON PLAN SOLVES THE MAJORITY OF LIKELY CLASSROOM PROBLEMS.

I keep all of mine in folders, organized by levels and subjects, to avoid unnecessary repetition of preparatory work. Even after 15 years in the classroom, I still find a plan indispensable, and encourage you to make a habit of writing comprehensive plans which meet your teaching needs, for your students benefit and your own, too.

# Getting Hijacked – 5 Tactics for Going With The Flow

**IF YOU WORK ABROAD, THE CHANCES ARE YOU'LL BE INVITED TO LOCAL SCHOOLS, CELEBRATIONS AND OTHER SPECIAL EVENTS.**

You might be asked to give prizes at an English competition, to give a model lesson at a high school, to open a shiny, new building or even help launch a local TV station. These can be great opportunities to meet people and see otherwise inaccessible areas of the country -- they also require us to be wary of being utilized or exploited for someone else's benefit. Some challenging experiences while working in rural China taught me how to react in these situations so that I retained both important relationships and my own dignity. Well, most of the time...

**TRY THESE 5 TACTICS WHEN PLANS CHANGE**

## 1 BE AWARE

It may seem a dreadfully cynical place to start, but ask yourself who it is that is inviting you, and why they are doing so. If they're a friend, or a trusted teaching colleague, then you might be able to rely on them not to put you in an embarrassing situation. By this I mean those impromptu classes for the 150 middle school students who just happened to be crowded into the school's lecture theater when you arrived to 'meet the principal for lunch'. Or the radio station crew who are there to interview you, in their own language, with no notice or preparation. Ask as many questions about the event as you want to: after all, you're doing your friend a favor.

If a complete stranger has invited you to attend an event – and this will often be through a 'middle-man' intermediary who you already know – then accept from the outset that you may have very little control over what happens. Which leads us to...

## 2 EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

All of my worst hijackings came out of the clear blue sky. I finished the planned model lesson and then it was announced that, as a musician, I would now perform a song for the class. You might love doing this, but not me! An agreed photo opportunity became, upon the unexpected arrival of a minivan, a surprise visit to the local factory, or a new arch celebrating a historic victory, or the preserved home of a noted poet. These can be terrific occasions -- I'll never forget my spontaneous visit to the famed Mao Tai rice wine distillery in Guizhou province. Some can be excruciating, as when a 45-minute model lesson turned into leading soccer training for a hundred eight year-olds, followed by a gigantic second lunch and then a non-negotiable, private English lesson for the Party chairman's daughter. A VSO colleague put it well: "Imagine the strangest thing that might happen, and then double it".

I've always felt that learning to laugh at the unplanned weirdness is the best reaction. In any event, you'll have a good story to tell later.

## 3 PREPARE TO BE FLEXIBLE WITH THE TRUTH

Honesty is a great virtue, but let's just accept it: white lies elegantly solve problems. Lavish group dining was an essential part of my visits to schools and towns in China, but begging off a massive banquet because of 'stomach trouble' is perfectly fine. Explaining that you can't drink due to 'doctor's advice' will also generally be taken seriously. Claiming to be a vegetarian for religious purposes, especially when you're presented with a meat you can't even name, is a neat evasion which won't truly offend anyone. The reverse – tucking into the plate of cow's larynxes or jellied pig's blood and exclaiming its deliciousness, or downing a dozen glasses of the local brew – will quickly make you plenty of friends, but don't break your own

rules, or compromise your health, just to please others.

Time is another factor. Try to build agreed-upon parameters from the outset, so that the day doesn't become an open-ended affair. Expecting a phone call from home is a good reason, while tiredness is an elegant way to side-step events in the later evening, or if nothing else comes to mind, it often helped to simply explain that I had 'an arrangement', and had to get home in time. Even the most ardently exploitative host will relent if you glance at your watch every few moments. If you've had a great time, be sure to say so. If you haven't, choose something you didn't mind so much, and praise it unequivocally. For me, the best way to make friends was to thank people for their thoughtfulness in helping me understand my new environment.

## 4 BE PREPARED

It's easier to wriggle free of odious expectations if your hosts are instantly fond of you. Arrive armed with a little local knowledge, if at all possible. For our visits to rural schools in China, I tried to find mention of the place in Chinese history – a stop on the Long March in the 1930s, for example – or a famous artist who was born there. These events and people can act as great icebreakers, a little like a tourist arriving here in Boston and showing an enthusiasm for Ted Williams ('Did you know he flew combat missions in Korea with John Glenn?') or an interest in old warships like the USS Constitution.

If there's a chance you'll be dragged into a lecture hall full of expectant teenagers, have a couple of activity ideas in your back pocket. For massive groups, consider drilling some pronunciation, setting up a simple pairwork activity to build and perform a conversation, or try a team game. One of my favorites, best for groups of 6-12, is to write the word ORCHESTRA on the board and begin a

competition whereby the teams must make words from only those letters (e.g. 'tea', 'chest' and 'star' would be OK, but 'chord' needs a missing 'D' and 'heroes' needs a second 'E'). Our record was 99 words: see if they can beat that!

Another way to react is by arranging an impromptu 'English Corner'. Stick topics on the wall in the four corners of the classroom, and invite the students to rotate around, discussing each one with new people. The topic page could include suggested questions or points to consider. For example, if the topic is 'Home and Family' (a perennial favorite in China), the questions could include:

- How many brothers and sisters do you have? (elementary)
- Is it better to be the oldest or the youngest sibling? (intermediate)
- Do you think people will still get married in the 22nd Century? (advanced)

## 5 GRAB SOME LINGO

Finally, in my experience, nothing broke the ice like speaking a few words of the local language. The fifty words of Chinese I had during my first weeks there opened all manner of doors. Showing an enthusiasm for the language, and trying to say the very simplest things (particularly on TV or radio) was uniquely nerve-wracking, but boosted my nascent reputation and broke down an important barrier: suddenly, I wasn't quite so alien and my presence in a very remote region became more comprehensible. It might ultimately be something of a joke at your expense, but I can't recommend it enough.

Sensitivity and anticipation serve us well when invited to a special event. Some will be strange and even unpleasant – the speech-giving contest where every student loudly denounced the US and UK was 'peak weird' for me – but others will be elevating, informative events which add meaningfully to your time abroad.



# Filling Time, Not Killing Time: 10 Great Games for the Last Minutes

**IF I COULD GIVE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO EVERY NEW TEACHER, IT WOULD BE THIS: HAVE IN YOUR BACK POCKET A FEW EXERCISES WHICH ARE VERY LIGHT AND FUN, WHICH DON'T TAKE MUCH TIME, WHICH WORK WITH ANY LEVEL OF CLASS, AND WHICH PRACTICE OR REVIEW USEFUL MATERIAL.**

When planning a class, we can never tell how long the assigned material will take: it's one of the classic unknowns of our profession, but it needn't worry you. Having some 'fillers' to hand is a great way to round out the class while still practicing useful language and giving your student a much-deserved treat.

Two words of warning, though: 1) Treats should be earned, not given automatically, 2) Always be careful to ensure that the activity, whatever it is, isn't simply intended to run down the clock. Instead, focus on a relevant and useful language point, or a skill which needs practice. I'm a firm believer in keeping the students engaged and on-topic right until the bell rings: they will respect you more, and get more out of the class. It also gives the forty or fifty minutes of class time a certain 'sanctity', as one of my colleagues put it, dividing this time very clearly from 'non-class' time.

## TYPES OF ACTIVITY

I'm going to refer to these exercises as 'activities', which have an educational objective, as opposed to 'games', which need not. Feel free to be inventive and take into account the opinions of your students, but some basic categories are:

- Memory Games, which tend to focus on the recall of a string of nouns, the details of a story or an important sequence of events.
- Fluency Games, which emphasize spontaneous production of rapid but unprepared speech.
- Mysteries and Guessing Games, in the style of 'Twenty Questions', which practice question formation

and problem-solving abilities.

- Vocabulary Games, which rely on the students' vocab knowledge, and the ability to apply what they know to unfamiliar words.
- Word and Dictionary Games, which practice important dictionary skills and introduce fun, new words in a less formal context.
- Quizzes, which can test general knowledge or specific language points in a competitive framework, and can be very different from those used for assessments or exams.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

These are all classic ESL activities which are set up, carried out and finished inside ten minutes. All are ripe for expansion, but work well in a very short variant for those last few moments of your class.

1. Twenty Questions never fails: the students ask closed questions, preferably in a variety of forms, to discover the animal, country, famous person (etc) you're thinking of, but the only possible answers are 'yes' and 'no'. Some variants include 'maybe', 'not exactly' and the like, to deal with the gray areas which sometimes crop up.
2. My favorite variant of Twenty Questions has become known as The Phone Box Mystery. A man is found dead in a phone box, and the students must ask (up to twenty) questions to discover how he died. They normally ask about his injuries, background and hobbies, what he was doing right before he entered the phone box, and so on, but again the answers must be either 'yes' or 'no'. The classic ending is to have the students discover that the man was fishing all day, caught a spectacularly large fish and called a friend to boast about it. While animatedly gesticulating in the phone box to describe its enormous size, he accidentally punched through the glass walls

and cut his wrists open. It's a little macabre, I'll grant you, but it keeps the students guessing!

3. Hangman has a place at almost every level. Adapt the classic game to include or exclude different kinds of help, e.g. providing one or two letters at the outset, revealing the Part of Speech or the number of syllables in the word, providing a clue as to the lexical group the word belongs to (tools, illnesses, modes of transport, etc), describing the word's origin, or letting the students know how recently you taught them the word.
4. Just a Minute, the fluency game, is a great stand-by. The student must speak, as the classic rules say, "Without hesitation, deviation or repetition" for sixty seconds on a subject of your choosing, or that of the opposing team.
5. I Went To Market is a memory game composed by the whole class. The first student claims, "I went to market and bought a pair of ice skates". The second adds their own purchase: "I went to market and bought a pair of ice skates and a pet lizard." This is a terrific game, not only for memory, but for practicing measure words (a pint of milk, a kilo of rice, a bottle of wine) and articles (a, an, the).
6. Kim's Game is another memory challenge. Arrange a dozen or more everyday objects on your desk and invite the teams to spend only one minute memorizing them. Then, sit the students down and, without their seeing, remove one or two objects, invite them back and ask which are missing. I play a variant which requires the students to name every object they can see, to practice vocabulary.
7. ORCHESTRA, as I call it, couldn't be simpler. I write the word on the board, checking understanding and the number of repeated letters. I then invite the students, in teams of no more than four, to write down all the words they can make from those same letters. For instance,

the repeated 'r' gives 'roar', but 'stretch' requires a missing second 't'. I tell my students that the record is ninety-nine words, and see if they can beat it. Typically, they find 50-60 words in ten minutes.

8. Dictionary Treasure Hunt invites the students to find very specific words in their dictionaries, either individually or in teams, against the clock. Examples of a category would include:

- A five (or six) syllable word which they can explain to the class

- A word with more than three (or more) meanings

- A word from medicine, astronomy, chemistry, etc.

- A foreign word or expression which has been imported verbatim (Schadenfreude, coup de grace, wigwam, igloo).

- A word based on a brand name

9. Quick Jeopardy is a short variant of the TV classic. For the fastest running of this game, I prepare all the questions in advance, make sure they're easy enough that we'll get quick answers, and hand over to the next team immediately the previous team has answered.

10. Finish My Story is a sentence-building game which is best played either by proceeding around a circle, or by throwing a ball or bean-bag to the next person. Begin with a sentence fragment (e.g. "Yesterday I...") and invite the students to add just one more word each. The sentence may take a curious turn or become hugely long, and is often pretty funny by the end.

**FILLING TIME, RATHER THAN KILLING TIME, PROVIDES VERY USEFUL EXTRA PRACTICE AND ENGENDERS RESPECT FOR THE TEACHER, AS THE STUDENTS BECOME AWARE THAT YOU'RE USING, AND CERTAINLY NOT WASTING THEIR TIME.**

I recommend these treats after successful classes, and hope that you find them useful.

# The Calm, Consummate Professional: 10 Life-Hacks

## WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOMEONE'S 'WORK', THEIR 'JOB' AND THEIR 'PROFESSION'? IF YOU TEACH, WHICH OF THESE WORDS DESCRIBES YOUR TEACHING?

Until about thirty years ago, teachers were regarded, alongside medics and lawyers, as a professionals, worthy of admiration and respect. More recently, for a host of reasons, this perception has broken down: teachers have a 'job' and do a range of 'work', but something important has been lost both from the day-to-day nature of teaching, and how the profession is perceived by the public. To assign blame is largely futile, but I have some suggestions for ensuring that we approach our work with true professionalism by addressing a couple of issues, introducing one or two new elements, and following some ancient but valuable advice. Here are my 'Life-Hacks' for a happy, successful, professional teacher.

## 10 LIFE-HACKS ANY TEACHER COULD USE

### 1 LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

It's so basic but so difficult. Keeping well rested and in a positive state of mind relies on controlling the levels of stress and anxiety in your life. A huge boost to your problem-solving capacity, and your general well-being, is to fix a time by which you're heading towards bed. The implications of working while poorly rested are all too familiar to many of us: irritability and short-temperedness, difficulty paying attention, lethargy and negativity. My habit is to stand and move around throughout my classes, and feeling light on my feet helps keep me active, responsive and mobile.

As well as getting sufficient sleep, we must ensure it is good quality sleep. Take a break from your devices in the half hour or so before bedtime: this has been shown to aid falling asleep, whereas bright screens are linked to wakefulness and insomnia. Try not to

snack late in the evenings. If you're a smoker, you don't need me to tell you what to do. And, even if you're doing all of these good things, consider one more addition to your evening routine:

### 2 MEDITATE

Slowly but surely, Western society is adopting this ancient, simple method of refocusing our energies and allowing distraction and worry to ebb away. Whether in the morning, at lunchtime, after work, or in the evening, ten minutes (or more, if possible) of quiet sitting provides benefits which scientists are still scrabbling to quantify. People who regularly meditate tend to become angry less often, to forgive more readily, to laugh more easily, to shrug off the unchangeable rather than become stressed by attacking it, and have fuller, more rewarding social and family lives.

For teachers, meditation can bring that equanimity – the willingness to accept the rough and the smooth – which serves us well when dealing with problem students or colleagues. I've found myself less distractible and funnier since I began meditating regularly -- its impact is highly individual but its effects are uniformly positive.

There are a lot of web and other resources on meditation, but here's the basic procedure:

1. Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Sit on a couple of cushions, or whatever works for your body, and cross your legs so that you are stable and won't need to shuffle around.
2. Breathe slowly in and out. Focus exclusively on each breath, the passage of air in and out of your nose, the feel of each breath as it fills your chest, the nuanced sensations which we ignore but which are rooted in a rather beautiful symmetrical simplicity. Notice everything but don't react to it. Ignore the small discomforts: they will likely pass in a moment.
3. Thoughts will occur. Let them go, again and again, observing them dis-

appear from view like a passing cloud. Don't become attached to any thought at all – not the fact that you forgot to load the dishwasher, or that Girls is starting in half an hour, or that you've got a horrendous cable bill which you can't afford. Let it all go.

4. Stay there for as long as you feel you can, then slowly get up and continue what you were doing. Bring the awareness of your breath and your body into everyday life. The rewards from this simple routine will surprise you: best of all, it's entirely free of charge.

### 3 GET REGULAR EXERCISE.

Make sure your heart gets a workout at least three times a week. This could be almost anything from a swim or a game of tennis or basketball, through to a jog on a treadmill or at the park, a brisk walk with your dog, a few push-ups and sit-ups at home, or an exercise class. Working out pours healthful chemicals into our brains, just the kind every professional needs to think and teach at their best. You'll also look and feel good, boosting your confidence and sense of self-worth.

### 4 IF YOU DON'T WRITE IT DOWN, IT NEVER HAPPENED

This maxim reminds us to make plenty of notes throughout our working day. Tricky questions from students, ideas for a new activity, a reminder to check the meaning or etymology of an unusual word, a note to call a colleague or arrange a meeting, all go straight into my notebook, where I also keep my lesson plans. You might use a device instead -- I'm just a little old-school.

### 5 PROPER PLANNING PREVENTS POOR PEDAGOGY

Even if they're very vague or flexible, every class you teach should have a set of objectives. This doesn't turn the class into a dry, impersonal 'product'

which you then 'deliver' to your students. It simply organizes your intentions so that the people who are giving their time and money to learn from you will never find themselves short-changed. Consider for each semester, perhaps also for each class, the overall learning aims your students have. What do they most need? What mistakes are you hearing? What elements of their skills set need to be boosted?

This is often done through testing, but I'm coming to believe that a more subjective approach, in parallel with routine quizzes and tests, can be of benefit. After all, exams rarely reveal the true nature of a student's mindset and skills: tests can be a dreadfully blunt instrument, forcing certain types of answers while failing to accommodate those with different learning styles, methods of self-expression, personal interests, etc. As a teacher, you spend hundreds of hours with these students and are better placed than any examiner to judge their relative aptitudes and weaknesses.

All of this subjective and test-based data flows directly into your lesson planning. Say, for example, that your students aced the multiple-choice section on conditional forms. Does this mean they can use all four of them fluently? Find out by building a spoken exercise into your plan: true fluency isn't expressed as a choice between three or four answers, but as the spontaneous, individual, accurate production of language.

Planning keeps us from forgetting what should come next, organizes the class time into sections which reflect our learning aims, and gives the teacher a sure-footed confidence as they progress through the class, exactly as though they were driving with a GPS rather than navigating from memory.

## 6 IT'S GREAT TO CREATE

There are many fantastic textbooks out there, and plenty of terrible ones too, but what's certain is that no one ever wrote a textbook specifically with your class in mind.

On arriving in China back in 2000 and flipping through the 1960s grammar-based horror show which was the available ESL textbook, I resolved to

gather more and better resources on my own. With limited Internet availability but plenty of help from other foreign teachers and my local colleagues, I brought together exercises which were more fun, far more relevant to my students, and allowed us to practice using the communicative methodology I was brought in to espouse to these trainee teachers. Gradually, I added my own material to this growing folder: short reading comprehension exercises about more recent world affairs, crosswords and word-searches, error correction exercises (which were normally pretty hilarious), debates and speaking activities, creative writing prompts, -- you name it, I tried to come up with it.

Unleashing my creative side was a terrific experience, and wherever possible, I urge you to gather and create your own material with your own students in mind. This lets you accommodate their interests rather than relying on a textbook to do so: I firmly believe the teacher is best placed to select the most interesting topic areas and (certainly for more experienced teachers) to judge the learning needs of their students.

## 7 PROFESSIONALS DON'T PLAY FAVORITES

I'll put this simply and directly: There Are No Bad Students. You're within your rights to dismiss this as rose-tinted or naive, but I believe labeling a class or a person as 'bad' is myopic, deceptive and unfair. What you've found is that the student doesn't respond well, or can't stay focused, or is with classmates who distract them. I refuse to believe that the student is a hopeless case (certain very serious, clinically diagnosed behavioral disorders notwithstanding) and would insist that we need to muster our patience and professionalism, keep a cool head, and do whatever we can to help.

At the other end of the scale, it's important never to appear to have 'favorite' students. I cringe whenever a colleague uses this word, as though it implies that we can rank our students from 'good' to 'bad', or even worse, from 'smart' to 'dumb'. They are all the same. They have different attitudes and backgrounds, different aptitudes and preferences, but every single one is capable of excelling in their own

way. Not every student of yours, or mine, will become a Nobel Laureate or a billionaire mogul, but it's a wonderful, refreshing, energizing thought that they might.

## 8 DON'T GET MAD. BREATHE IN AND OUT.

You've spent hours preparing a really fun consolidation exercise for your students. But when the time comes, they're unruly and chatty, don't take your classroom instructions seriously, and little comes of it. You could get mad and blame the students, or you could not. You could yell at them, or not. For some teachers, rule by fear is a favorite model, but I reject this out of hand.

In many of the world's cultures, shouting is a sign of failure. Losing your temper means simultaneously losing their respect. Nothing turns people off like a red-faced tirade, even if, from a certain point of view, they've deserved it. Disappointment and displeasure can be shown through your body language, through small, targeted sanctions, and through a brief pep talk far better than through yelling and castigating. I don't think I worked any harder for those teachers who lost their temper -- quite the reverse, in fact.

We are models for our students, a curious mix of guide, instructor and part-time parent. I would prefer to present a calm, imperturbable face which shows my students that I'm in control, whatever might be happening. And if they're not interested, that's simply their loss: come exam time, or more importantly at a later stage in life when these skills become suddenly and centrally important, they will regret not having paid attention. I'm not the kind of teacher who will berate students for not doing what I've asked -- I'll do my best to earn their respect, so that they pay attention and follow orders because I'm respectfully requesting that they do. Yelling might be a short-cut, but I feel sure that, at least for most students, it destroys their respect for the teacher. If you feel your control slipping, simply stop and take three deep breaths.

## 9 ASSESS YOURSELF

The students file out and you're left alone in a quiet classroom. This is a great moment for a little analysis.



How did the class go? Did we meet our aims? How was the classroom environment? Did everyone have a chance to speak?

Going through a quick, routine assessment of your class will teach you valuable lessons which feed directly into the next lesson plan. What material did you lack? Was there enough time for everything, or did the pace of the class go slack at any point? Were you able to answer all the questions you received?

The results could be a couple of simple notes: Use left side of white board for vocab and don't clean it... Keep Antonio busy so he doesn't bother Luca... Ask maintenance to turn down the air-conditioning... Bring a red marker for error corrections on the board... Find good examples of past modals, etc.

## 10 LISTEN TO WISDOM

Even if you've been teaching your whole life, you can still learn from your colleagues and other professionals. Not all of their advice will be relevant, and you may disagree with it, but that's part of the valuable dialogue which spreads ideas and helps us interrogate the methodologies, assessment systems and teaching styles we're all constantly trying to improve. Don't be afraid to ask questions of those with more, or as much, or even less experience than you: newer teachers were more recently trained, and may bring valuable new ideas to the table. Older teachers often have good ideas on classroom management and discipline, while younger colleagues can be great sources of exercises, articles or games.

At the same time, be prepared to offer your own opinions and give guidance, especially to the less experienced members of the staff room. This free exchange of pedagogical thought, often skipped over until special staff training days, should enlighten everyone and offer an open channel for resolving problems and finding better ways to teach and study.

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I believe that the best teachers follow a lifestyle dedicated to the competent practice of their craft: this is one reason why fitness, rest and meditation are my first three recommendations.

IF WE'RE IN A POSITIVE STATE OF MIND, FREE FROM CLUTTERING WORRIES, AND WE'RE CONSCIENTIOUSLY PREPARED AND READY TO USE THE LATEST METHODS, OUR GUIDANCE WILL BE MORE VALUABLE, OUR PROFESSIONAL LIVES WILL BE VITAL AND REWARDING, AND OUR STUDENTS' CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE WILL BE BOTH FRUITFUL AND ENJOYABLE.

# 7 Easy Ways to Inject Humor into Your ESL Classroom

*"I hear students roaring with laughter in other ESL classrooms as I walk down the hall. I'd love to make my students laugh like that, but I'm not good at making jokes or clowning around. Any tips for effective ways to add humor to my ESL classroom?"*

Our role as ESL teachers is to help our students gain the language and tools they need to communicate better in English. True, we're not entertainers: it's not our responsibility to "put on a show" and make them happy. But it's also true that humor helps students relax. Laughter is indeed the best medicine, and rather than creating a distraction it creates an environment that is conducive to learning. An ESL classroom full of happy, smiling faces is a gift that I would bestow on any ESL teacher if I could. But I can't. What I can do is suggest some ways to inject a good dose of humor into your class. And here's how!

## 7 EASY WAYS TO INJECT HUMOR INTO YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 FUNNY FACES

You don't have to be a professional actor to make a funny face. Once you get past the "OMG, I look ridiculous phase" you'll see it's quite easy and highly effective when it comes to not only conveying feelings, like sad, happy, worried, etc., but also giving feedback. For example, when students make a mistake while speaking, instead of interrupting and correcting, I often simply make a funny face (like exaggerated shock for big mistakes like using the wrong verb tense), which helps them see their mistake but takes the edge off the "correction".

### 2 COMICAL CARTOONS

Cartoons or comic strips are superb sources of humor for intermediate to advanced students. They help make a "serious" topic less cut and dried, and more interesting and friendly. Consider this cartoon, for example, a classic from the Far Side cartoon series by Gary

Larson:

<http://bit.ly/1zfwUQf>

As the cartoon indicates the expression to go bad has two different meanings. Because they often include a play on words, cartoons are a great way to learn new vocabulary and the nuances of the English language. If your students have never heard the expression "Curiosity killed the cat", this would be a great way to teach it!: <http://on.fb.me/1vgR5qw>

### 3 PRICELESS PUNS

Wordplay can provide tons of laughs, as long as students get the joke. Puns rely on the use of words that have different meanings, or that are written differently but sound the same (as in homophones). There are plenty of sites where you can find puns that are appropriate for the ESL classroom, like this very funny list:

<http://www.funenglishgames.com/fun-stuff/funnypuns.html>

But never underestimate the effect a spontaneous pun may have on your class!

### 4 JOLLY JOKES

Jokes have a similar effect in your classroom, but unlike puns (which can be unintentional and spontaneous) jokes must be learned and prepared beforehand. A joke that is told like a little story is great way to either introduce a topic or close the lesson.

### 5 ABSURD ACCESSORIES

I love introducing the element of randomness in my ESL classroom. Suddenly bringing out things your students are not expecting can make for very funny moments. About to teach the Future Perfect? Bring out a "crystal ball", and you'll get some laughs. There are any number of props you can use in class, and if a clown nose is a little too much for you, maybe you'll feel more comfortable with a hat or tiara?

### 6 SILLY SLAPSTICK

I learned to use slapstick in the classroom by accident. Literally, by accident. As a person who is terribly

clumsy by nature, I discovered early on, I was prone to embarrassing myself in the classroom by tripping, falling down the stairs, or spilling an assortment of liquids on myself or my books. At first, I was mortified, of course, but then I decided to make an embarrassing situation into an opportunity for comedy. So every time I spilled something, I made exaggerated moves to clean it up. Every time I fell, I would bounce back up and start jumping around saying, "I'm ok. Honestly! See no broken bones! But you might want to check the chair. I think it broke a leg" – pun intended! And instead of being concerned or worried, students would laugh. The terrible accident became slapstick comedy. It's called laughing at yourself, and I highly recommend it.

### 7 INTREPID IMPERSONATIONS

I never ever not even once in my life dreamed of becoming an actress. But the more I taught ESL, the more these strange little voices started popping out of my mouth. It began with very young learners when I tried different voices for different characters. But then I became bold enough (some might say crazy enough) to do different accents with adult learners. Try faking a British (or American) accent. Impersonate a famous celebrity. Students get a kick out of it every time. If you don't feel you can, start small, like doing voices for a story.

No, you don't have to be a stand up comedian. No one's expecting you to. You don't have to be off-the-wall wacky or go full-on clown for your class.

**SIMPLY ADD THE LEVEL OF HUMOR YOU'RE COMFORTABLE WITH. SOMETIMES, A SIMPLE LIGHT-HEARTED REMARK WILL DO THE TRICK, ENOUGH TO GET YOU AN EAR-SPLITTING GRIN FROM A STUDENT. BUT I GUARANTEE YOU, THAT'S ALL IT TAKES AND THAT'S HOW IT BEGINS. THE MORE SMILES YOU GET FROM YOUR STUDENTS, THE MORE YOU'LL WANT!**

# Generate Noisy But Light-hearted Debate With Any Levels & Class Sizes

## ESL CLASSES ARE OFTEN AT THEIR MOST TALKATIVE WHEN FACED WITH A MORAL DILEMMA.

Whether the class is monolingual or multi-national, exercises which pose ethical quandaries tend to give accessible opportunities to shy students, bring out cultural viewpoints and personal opinions, cement classroom relationships and help build a rapport, and offer an engaging context for language production. A real favorite of mine – and of many other ESL teachers – has been the exercise I've called 'The Bridge' -- you may have come across it. It is readily adaptable for different levels and class sizes, and never fails to generate noisy but light-hearted debate.

## FOLLOW THESE 7 SIMPLE STEPS FOR 'THE BRIDGE' EXERCISE:

### 1 SETTING UP

The initial narrative is perhaps best delivered as a listening exercise. I draw a simple map on the board, of a village consisting of small mud huts, through the middle of which flows a river which can be crossed only by a bridge in the center of the village. Adding some palm trees, weather or other village features all helps create the atmosphere. Students might brainstorm the kind of things one might find in a village in the developing world – a well, a store, a road, some small businesses etc – and then the teacher tells the story which will give rise to our dilemma. Students should either take notes or just listen carefully.

### 2 THE STORY

A young couple live on the west bank of the river. The Husband (our first character) is working away from home, as there are few jobs in the village. The Woman (our second character) is a caring wife, but like anyone, she becomes lonely and depressed while her husband is away. Besides, even when he's around, he doesn't seem as interested in her as he used to be. Paint the picture of a decent, moral person who is subject to needs and desires, not a heartless gold-

digger or a callous cheater.

So, one night she travels across the bridge to spend some time with a man she recently met: let's call him The Lover (our third character). They develop a relationship about which the woman feels guilty, but she is more fulfilled and finds herself smiling more often, just through being considered attractive by someone. This carries on for a few weeks, without the husband's knowledge. (You might add that there is a relaxed cultural attitude to relationships outside of marriage -- conversely, there might be strict social conventions against this.)

Very early one morning, The Woman wakes up in The Lover's house to the sound of gunfire and explosions. A brutal civil war has begun and the village is suddenly host to hundreds of soldiers, some of whom have been tasked with closing the bridge. The woman panics: her husband is due home soon, and if she is missing, he will become suspicious. She races to the bridge but finds it blocked by armed men, one of whom is The Soldier (our fourth character) who refuse to let her across.

She wonders if bribery might work. The Woman asks The Lover for some money to bribe the soldiers, but he refuses, inviting her to leave her husband permanently and move in with him. (We're not sure how serious this offer is, but certainly The Lover is being short-sighted and selfish). The Woman refuses, insisting that her marriage still means a great deal to her. Instead, she visits an old school friend in another part of the village. She explains what has happened, but The Friend (our fifth character) is disappointed that she has cheated, and refuses to help her with bribery money.

She returns to the bridge, desperate to get across, and upon being refused again, she dashes across, taking her life in her hands. As per his orders, The Soldier raises his rifle and shoots her. The Woman falls dead on the bridge.

### 3 INITIAL DISCUSSION

*Who is responsible for the death of The Woman?*

A pair discussion works best here. Ask the students to rank the five characters by level of responsibility (#1 is the most responsible and #5 is the least). This will take time, and is the first opportunity to bring out the language of persuasion and compromise:

*Isn't it true that The Husband is blameless in all of this?*

*Wouldn't you agree that The Soldier was just doing his job?*

*You have to admit that The Friend was extremely unhelpful at a dangerous moment.*

### 4 COMPARING OPINIONS

Open up the debate to compare each pair's list. Are there significant differences? Why has this happened? Investigate with some quick questions, establishing general and individual opinions.

### 5 A LITTLE MORE DETAIL

At this stage, if you'd like to complicate the students' decision-making process, include extra information:

- The woman has never done anything like this before -- she is a religious woman and feels intense regret and self-loathing about what she has done. She still loves her husband very much.
- The Husband has a girlfriend of his own – this is one of the reasons he chose to work away from the village.
- The Lover has had many affairs with married ladies, has seen the problems this can cause, and simply doesn't care. He's in it for the fun -- the rest is The Woman's problem.
- The Friend was engaged to The Woman a few years ago, but she chose The Husband instead. He is jealous and resentful, having only just recovered from a broken heart.
- The Soldier has been celebrating the easy victory and is extremely drunk.

## 6 SECOND DISCUSSION

These extra details will require further debate, and the pair's lists will probably change. What differences are there between the first list and the second?

## 7 POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS

The beauty of 'The Bridge' is its flexibility. Possible extension exercises are many and varied, and could include:

- A court case in which each student is assigned a character role. They must prepare to defend themselves under cross-examination, and to incriminate the others so that, in the final analysis, their character is judged to bear less responsibility.
- The Diary of the Woman/Husband/Soldier etc. Students write journal entries for the days before, during and after this crisis, from the point of view of one of the characters.
- Police Report. A description of events from the point of view of the authorities.
- Talk Show interview. Each character is interviewed to get their view on what happened. The audience might then vote for who they believe is the most responsible.
- Drama. Students write scripts for short scenes from the story – The Woman's argument with The Friend, or The Husband's reaction on arriving home, for example.
- Op-Ed Pieces. Students write opinion articles in defense of one or more characters, or accusing one of being the most responsible.
- What If? Practice conditional forms by wondering how the story might have ended differently if The Husband had returned a day early, or The Friend had given The Woman some money, or The Soldier had not been drunk, etc.

## A DDITIONAL CHARACTERS

For larger groups, consider adding:

- The Colonel. As The Soldier's boss, this officer is responsible for closing the bridge. He might be green and inexperienced, or

might have poorly communicated his orders, or could be a slow-witted megalomaniac, as you prefer.

- The Boatman. An alternative to crossing the bridge. This character is usually greedy and unhelpful, demanding unreasonable payment for ferrying The Woman across.
- The Sister. Observing all of this, and perhaps getting involved, is The Woman's sister. She interferes in the story in whichever way most equalizes the levels of responsibility of the characters.

### I HAVE ENJOYED THIS EXERCISE ON SO MANY OCCASIONS, AND WITH CLASSES OF ALMOST EVERY LEVEL.

I hope that it proves as successful in your classroom.



# The Balloon Debate: An Integrated ESL Classic in 6 Easy Steps

At the end of a tough week of grammar or test preparation, it's nice to allow a class to let off some steam while still practicing a good range of language skills. My favorite way to reward them is with a game such as *The Bridge* [see my article] or by playing *Jeopardy* [ditto]. Another option is a classic moral dilemma, adapted for the ESL classroom: *The Balloon Debate*.

## 6 EASY STEPS FOR THE ESL CLASSIC

### 1 SETUP (LISTENING OR READING)

I wrote a one-page introduction for my class to read together -- you could do the same, or it could be a short listening exercise. The text might read:

*The attention of the world's media is focused today on five teams of celebrities who are competing in a round-the-world balloon race. They will begin in Boston and fly east over the Atlantic. The race intends to raise millions of dollars for worthy charities, and will feature 'Big Brother'-type fixed-camera TV and Internet coverage, which expected to bring in hundreds of thousands of viewers.*

At this point, check the important vocabulary (balloon, competition, celebrity, charity, coverage) and establish why the race is taking place. Elicit some examples of charities and how they help people. Ask about conditions on a hot air balloon, and perhaps about the physics of what keeps them in the air.

Then, introduce the passengers. There is a single pilot, as well as five celebrities. I would recommend against using real celebrities, as pre-existing opinions will unhelpfully color the debate. Feel free to be inventive with the details, but I recommend a mix of ages, genders, skills, titles and special details. Here are three examples:

- Dr. Stephen Fairfax (aged 76) is a pioneering surgeon and inventor of the artificial heart valve. He still

teaches at a prestigious university and has mentored several of the world's leading surgeons.

- Angelica Lombardi (aged 34) is an Oscar-winning Italian actress and supermodel. She has used her considerable fame to raise money for charities, and was recently referred to in the British press as 'The Italian Diana'. She has adopted two children with her partner.
- Professor Jim Myers (aged 51) is a 'once in a generation mind', according to Stephen Hawking. His work on cosmology and quantum physics has revolutionized our understanding of the universe. He writes prolifically and appears on cable TV regularly to debunk bad science and encourage young people to enter the profession. He has three grown children.

The students should, from the outset, form a picture of these individuals and begin to establish their views on each person's value to society. Perhaps elicit opinions on which of the five professions is the most worthwhile: include sports and the arts, though they will generally be pushed lower down the list by business people, scientists and medics. What do these opinions tell us? Are there any strong views either way?

### 2 THE EMERGENCY

Describe the situation to your students, either as a reading or listening task:

The balloon sets off successfully from Boston and makes its way slowly across the Atlantic. After a few hours of good progress, the pilot suddenly begins to look worried. The balloon's supply of fuel seems to be leaking and, when the pilot investigates the tank, discovers that it cannot be stopped. He calculates that they will be unable to make landfall, and cannot turn back because of unfavorable winds. The only way any of them can survive is if the balloon sheds as much weight as possible. The passengers throw out everything they can find, but the difference is minimal. The

pilot makes it clear to a panicking group that the true problem is the weight of the people...

### 3 INITIAL ORDERING

Invite the students to consider the order in which the five passengers should be thrown out of the balloon. What criteria will they use? Should the oldest person go first, irrespective of his health and status? Or perhaps the youngest? Should it be the person seen as least valuable to society, even if they have children?

Inform your students that the pilot cannot be thrown out, as no-one else can safely land the balloon, and that (for the purposes of the exercise) all five passengers have the same weight. Scientists can neither repair nor pilot the balloon, and no rescue is available, as it is night time and a panicked passenger has already thrown the GSP transponder overboard.

Compare the students' lists. Do any themes emerge? Why?

### 4 ROLE-PLAY SETUP

Each student will now represent one of the characters. They can be assigned randomly, or through a system of your choosing -- larger classes will end up with two or three of each character, which is fine.

To prepare for the debate, the students should consider two aspects:

1. I should not be thrown out of the balloon, because...
2. The others should be thrown out before me, because...

Give them a few minutes to make some notes, guarding against writing full sentences which they will simply read during the debate: the aim is fluent and spontaneous language production. If necessary, review the language of agreement and disagreement, comparison (I'm more vital to the economy than you are...), persuasion and criticism.

## 5 THE DEBATE

The students have ten minutes (approx.) to persuade each other of their importance. Their objective is to push their way to the bottom of the list, so that they're less likely to be thrown out. Monitor this (usually very noisy and boisterous) activity, throwing in ideas to complicate or simplify the debate, as necessary. Each student should spend time with an example of every other character, so they will have at least four conversations.

## 6 VOTING

Once the dust has settled, invite the students to compose their individual list, at the top of which is the person will be thrown out first. Tally these votes on the board, giving one point for the person in most peril, and five for the safest person. The character with the least points is then thrown out, followed by the second, etc.

Ask your students how this list came to be. What criteria did they use? Are they surprised by the results? What do they tell us about society, and how we view particular professions? What would have made the choice more difficult? Make notes on this last question, and consider adapting the debate to make it more difficult to choose between the five characters: I've spent years fine-tuning my own, and it's different every time.

**THE BALLOON DEBATE IS A LONG-STANDING ESL CLASSIC WHICH STILL HAS MANY MILES IN ITS TANK. I HOPE IT HELPS TO CREATE SOME MEMORABLY NOISY AND CONTENTIOUS CLASSES.**

# Respect My Authority – 9 Concepts for Firm but Fair Discipline

## THE CHINESE HAVE A SAYING:

*If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.*

Without control of our emotions, it is said, we are apt to behave in ways which harm our relationships with those around us and cause unnecessary stress. As teachers, we have all faced frustrating situations, perhaps to the point of raising our voices or lashing out with punitive measures. Over my years in the classroom, I've found that sanctions and penalties can be counter-productive, and might actually result in the weakening of a teacher's authority. Instead, I've come to believe in 'prevention rather than cure', putting in place systems of discipline which reward good focus, raise students' awareness of their own behavior and its impact on others, and undermine tendencies which lead to poor discipline before they can take a firm hold.

## WHAT IS DISCIPLINE, AND WHEN DO WE NEED IT?

I'll say it right from the start: Discipline IS NOT punishment. I recognize that we use the verb in just that way (as in, "Do you discipline your children?") but I want to very clearly separate these two ideas.

For me, discipline is the provision of a structure which guides our students towards best practice. Its sole aim is to bring good order to the classroom environment. It is not about power or control, and it certainly isn't about making the learning experience more difficult or painful. In fact, the reverse is true: a well-disciplined class is bright and cheerful, progresses through consent and mutual respect, not through fear or the imposition of arbitrary rules, and has (tacitly or explicitly) agreed a simple code of conduct which benefits everyone.

We have all struggled with a class which becomes dominated by one or more 'difficult' personalities. Often,

these students are simply bored and need a greater challenge. Increasingly, there may be psychological or behavioral issues which are beyond both the remit of a typical classroom teacher and the scope of this article. Most ESL classes are populated by young learners and teenagers, groups which can often pose disciplinary challenges. In my experience, discipline becomes important in the following areas, among others:

- Students using their first language (L1)
- Students becoming distracted
- Students failing to complete homework
- Students complaining about the work
- Students forgetting to bring their books, or a pen
- Students breaking the rules on the use of cellphones
- Students falling asleep in class
- Students moving off-topic and/or not using the target language
- Students flirting in class
- Students bullying their classmates
- Racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination

What can we do in such situations? Is it possible to be firm and authoritative without alienating or upsetting our students?

I believe so. The root of our authority can be the quick building of a rapport with the students, during our first few days or weeks of the class. This engenders mutual respect, opens channels of communications and, at least in my experience, eliminates most disciplinary problems before they can start. Think back to high school: were you on your best behavior for the teacher you couldn't stand, or for the teacher whose insights changed your life? Which professor did you most respect? What were their characteristics? Did they yell or dish out unpleasant punishments? Or did they, perhaps, win you over with candor, good

humor, honesty and inclusiveness?

## BUILDING AUTHORITY

There can be little authority without respect, and as we all know, respect is earned, not given automatically. I'd like to offer some suggestions on how to raise the likelihood that your students will quickly respect and admire you as a teacher and grant you the right to preside over the classroom. Your authority is then wielded with the students' permission, rather than as a result of a prolonged wrestling for control.

### 1 EARN IT

It's worth repeating. Especially with young learners, there is no guarantee whatsoever that, simply because you're the one holding the chalk, you'll have their respect. Give the students multiple reasons to take you seriously and to listen to what you have to say. Many of these are mentioned below.

### 2 PREPARE

Students have a sixth sense for those awkward, unpleasant moments in which their teacher has become uncertain of their footing. We've all felt it, and it sucks! The trick here is not to over-extend yourself: if you're not sure, ask for a moment (or the evening) to gather your thoughts, or compose a good example. There's nothing wrong with this kind of reaction: "You know, that's a great question, and I want to make sure I give you the best answer I can. Let's talk about it tomorrow – remind me, OK?" Make a note of the question and come back to it when there has been sufficient preparation time.

In the same way, I've found that students respond extremely well to the tactical deployment of a neat fact. Have a store of these at your disposal and build it up as your career progresses. You'd be amazed how much young people don't know (yet)

and how impressed they will be if you demonstrate a solid general knowledge.

### 3 PRAISE THEM, BUT ONLY LIKE YOU SHOULD

Everyone loves being praised or thanked. Keep the really big reactions (a massive thumbs up and a beaming smile) for those special moments, so that the students are given parameters which are logical and consistent. Many ESL students, especially shy Asian learners, absolutely love the celebratory high-five I give when they successfully make their way through a nasty tongue-twister ('Larry was surprised when the supplies arrived' is a real favorite!) or correctly navigate some complex grammar (like conjugating the future perfect).

### 4 USE YOUR BODY

Your posture speaks volumes. Slouching, leaning against something, putting your feet on the desk, or any of the other symbols of disinterest are very strong signals to your students that you just don't care. Of course you do, so stand up straight, keep eye contact, make generous, clear gestures and keep moving.

### 5 YOU'RE TOP DOG

The social mix of a classroom resembles that of a group of animals: there are leaders and followers, decision-makers who are active, and shy individuals who are more passive. Expect and anticipate this phenomenon, identifying who is likely to be dominant, and then deliberately control their space. This needn't even be detectable. You're aiming to remove the preconditions by which an Alpha-type student might question or undermine your authority. Sure, they're funny... but not that funny. They're knowledgeable and skilled... but they don't know everything.

Without necessarily articulating it, bear in mind that you are the boss. The teacher has the education, the life experience, the professional skills, the thousands of hours in the classroom, and the long history of tackling issues just like these -- no student has these things, certainly not a teenager. Whatever your students do, and however they respond to you, remember that there's only one person who

should have authority, and that's you.

### 6 KEEP THE WORK / FUN BALANCE

It's very tempting to 'buy off' an unruly class with a game, a movie or a field trip. Deploy these priceless gems carefully: don't be afraid to make the students work for their fun. Be firm: if you haven't heard the production you're looking for, don't reward the class until you have. If they're still ignoring the final 's' on third-person conjugations, hold back the praise and prizes until they show you that it's in place.

### 7 I'M NOT ANGRY, I'M DISAPPOINTED

Remember when your parents used to say this? It hurt more than the anger! Raising your voice and losing your temper -- this is an opinion, but one which is very carefully considered -- are a failure. They are the worst reaction to poor discipline, and could damage the rapport which is essential to creating and maintaining your authority.

### 8 WORK WITH ME

When describing my current course load, I tend to say that I 'work with' a certain class, rather than I 'teach' them. This may seem inconsequential, but consider the dynamic implied by the two: one speaks of a unidirectional flow of information and opinion, while the other connotes a mutuality of contribution and effort. Take a moment to ponder which side of this line your teaching style is on.

### 9 STOP HITTING YOURSELF

I recently became convinced that the entirety of my class had plagiarized their term papers. This was a terrible moment. How could they try to deceive me like this? I thought we had a good thing going, and then they pull something so cheap, so beneath them! Ultimately, I learned that they had comprehensively misunderstood the conventions of citation and bibliography -- it was less plagiarism than a lack of experience. However, I was obliged to tell the students that they had broken the rules. Rather than lecture them on the virtues of honesty and academic rigor, I made a plea: Don't make me be a hardass. My

school had a very strict integrity code, which I said I would enforce if they compelled me to. This took the teacher out of the equation: instead, they were battling an immovable school policy, rather than a generally flexible, friendly instructor -- their troubles became self-inflicted, and suddenly had nothing to do with me. This avoided unnecessary accusations and unpleasantness.

### DISHING IT OUT

If you do need to sanction your students, I recommend a measured, compassionate approach which might include some of the following:

- Make the student dance or sing a song
- Paint the student's nose with your whiteboard marker
- Set additional homework
- Bring forward a deadline
- Threaten to reduce the student's grade
- Threaten to mark the student absent for that class, though they attended
- Make the student produce some language as their punishment: my favorites are asking them to answer questions in the conditional or modal forms, e.g. "What would have happened if you had not been late today?" or "How might your week have been different if you hadn't copied your homework from Wikipedia?"

However you choose to sanction your students, I believe it should be relatively light and a truly memorable experience.

Humiliation (singing, dancing, doing an impression or an animal noise) works well in this regard: the student will never forget that red-faced moment when they had to crow like a rooster right in front of that gorgeous classmate they'd been trying to impress. There should be no malice in these sanctions, merely the uniquely unforgettable packaging of a behavioral reminder.

**I HOPE YOUR CLASSES ARE SMOOTH, WITHOUT UNDUE STRESS, AND THAT THESE TIPS HELP YOU KEEP YOUR COOL AND CREATE A USEFUL AND PRODUCTIVE ATMOSPHERE OF MUTUAL RESPECT!**



# To be in Good Standing: 6 Ways to Gain Trust and Respect

In my experience, the best language practice happens when students respect the learning process itself. Having faith in the models and examples, the methods of practice, and the different exercises, produces useful attentiveness and enthusiasm, two key elements in the achieving of our learning aims. No matter which kind of skill is to be acquired, students must necessarily want to participate in the process. Gaining their trust and respect helps to create a truly successful learning environment and, though often difficult, doing so is easier than you might think.

## GAIN TRUST AND RESPECT WITH THESE 6 TIPS

### 1 BE PREPARED, AND BE OBVIOUS ABOUT IT

No-one likes to have their time wasted. If the students see that you have a solid plan for the class – in a binder on your desk, or perhaps simply noted on the board – they will gain the sense of a journey which is taken together, from the introduction of the material, through checking and controlled practice, to free practice and fluency. This is only one of many reasons why you should plan every class you teach, even if this can be boiled down to a handful of sentence fragments in a notebook.

Preparation also helps give the class a flow, with one section leading logically into the next: this enhances the sense of a 'journey' and helps hold students' attention. There is nothing worse, for a tiring student, than being made to feel as though the class has lost its moorings and is aimlessly drifting.

Another part of your pre-class checklist could be the gathering of all necessary resources. Consider pictures, objects, examples and quotations, web links, and of course your own plan, in a notebook or binder. Bring more than you might need: experience will guide you here.

### 2 EXPLAIN YOUR AIMS

"Good morning, guys! It's eight o'clock. By quarter past nine, you'll be able to describe all kinds of tropical weather, and how it can cause natural disasters. Now, who can tell me the last time it rained in our city?" I began most of my classes with a quick description of what the students can expect to be able to do by its close, either spoken or written on the board. At the end, we check our progress against these aims: incomplete work is given as homework, or finished during the next class.

This clarity is mirrored in my classroom instructions. I have the habit of rehearsing these, so that I can find the most efficient method of communicating what I need. Imagine that you want the class to divide into four roughly equal groups, and then practice the language and gestures for doing so. Keep strong eye contact and be prepared to repeat yourself. Random milling about can badly slow the pace of the class, so be sure that everyone is moving in the right direction as quickly as possible.

### 3 THINK AHEAD

If you found yourself learning about tropical weather in a second language, what issues might you encounter? Perhaps the difference between a hurricane and a typhoon, or why some storms have male names and some female. Exceptional language teaching goes far beyond meaning and pronunciation: anticipating your students' questions gives you a special edge, and can make it appear (even when it might not be true!) that you're very thoroughly versed in the topic. Have to hand an example of a major storm within your students' lifetimes, or a few pictures to show how a hurricane works.

### 4 BE FIRM BUT FAIR

New teachers often over-react to disciplinary issues, believing that

a stern, initial response will engender respect over the longer term. More experienced teachers know that it can be better to hold back until the measures will be most effective. A raised eyebrow – my favorite method for showing that unimpressed – can be far more effective than a three-minute harangue. Move on from there to using some exasperated body language, as if you're confused as to why some students would continue to chatter when the others are ready. Extra work, or requiring the student to sing, dance or otherwise slightly embarrass themselves, would come next, but the quickest way to lose respect, especially in Asia, is to shout. In all cases, at pains to point out that I take no pleasure from punishing my students, and that dishing out extra homework or reporting someone to my superior is always done reluctantly, as if being made to do so, despite my own preference for harmony and co-operation.

### 5 BE FUNNY, BUT NOT A JOKE

The first time Luca forgot his homework, I let him know this wasn't good, but gave him an extra day. The second time, I made a joke about how he'd forget his head if it wasn't permanently attached, and gave him a 12-hour extension. The third time, my tone was a lot more serious: I told him my patience had run out, and gave him only two extra hours. When the homework failed to arrive, I gave him an F. The alternative would be to risk the students taking advantage of my generally relaxed and understanding nature. Luca knew where the boundaries were, as they were defined on each occasion. I didn't let my joking response become an excuse to treat my deadlines with disrespect, and the other students, immediately aware that an F was on the cards, focused well and completed their work on time. Be funny, and make light of problems when and where you can, but know your own limits and gain a sense for when the students might be trying to take you for a ride.

## 6 RULE BY CONSENT, NEVER BY FORCE

Teaching is, in important ways, a form of government. We all need a little structure and discipline, but rather than a heavy-handed, dictatorial style, I've found a discursive, participatory democracy the most effective method of classroom governance. This works best with more mature students, but I think it has a place at every level. You could engage the students to find out how much other homework they have, and agree on a reasonable weekly or nightly workload for your own course. You could elicit areas of the language which particularly interest them, or the kinds of games they enjoy, working these into your course plan as a way to show your class that you're listening, and that you regard them as unique individuals. Remember, the aim is for us to effectively practice language, not simply for the students to 'do as the teacher says'. If you ever find yourself enjoying the power trip of bellowing at a class full of scared kids, consider switching to another profession, perhaps the armed forces.

**WE RESPECT PEOPLE WHO EXHIBIT CALM, WELL-ORGANIZED COMPETENCE. HAVING A GOOD PLAN, ACHIEVABLE AND CLEARLY-EXPRESSED AIMS, AN EVEN HAND, AND A SENSE OF HUMOR, WILL GO A LONG WAY TO HELPING CREATE AN ENJOYABLE AND EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR STUDENTS.**

# How To Plan An Open Lesson: 7 Easy Steps

## HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED WHY OPEN LESSONS ARE NECESSARY?

As we all know, teachers definitely have a lot of stuff to juggle. Considering most of us hold regular meetings with parents to keep them well informed, why would inviting them to participate in an actual lesson even be needed? Well, there is an answer to this question, one that you as a teacher should definitely keep in mind. Consider this: your classroom is a world of details, sometimes too many to handle, but you can make things much easier in your classroom by using parents as partners. Remember that there are things that parents don't know or can't imagine on their own. By giving them the chance to participate and see things first hand, you would be giving them valuable insight as to how their kids are working and how they, as parents, can be useful to you. Take a look at some of the benefits of holding open lessons.

- Parents can be very powerful allies in any child's education. Keeping parents informed and inviting them to become part of the educational process can significantly influence their child's progress. Teachers who take advantage of "parent power" can significantly improve teaching effectiveness.
- Parents have an amazing opportunity to see first hand how you work and how you connect with the kids.
- Parents can get to know you and their child's academic program. They can see how kids work and what is challenging for them.

There are different types of open lessons and they even have different names such as open house, back-to-school night and meet-the-teacher night.

Most of them occur sometime in the beginning of the school year or at the start of the course. All of them provide

parents with an "inside look" into the daily activities and occurrences of your classroom. It's a wonderful opportunity for you to share the classroom experience with them. However, it is important to keep in mind that being ready for such an event is extremely important. After all, you want to show parents that you are an organized teacher who is on top of things, not that you are simply winging it. Here are some tips and ideas that can help you make this annual event successful and full of purpose.

## HOW TO GET PARENTS INVOLVED WITH OPEN LESSONS

### 1 SEND OUT PERSONAL INVITATIONS

Parents need to be well informed of when the open lesson will take place ahead of time. Remember they might need to make changes in their busy personal schedules in order to be able to attend. You can have your students make the invitations themselves using art materials. Your students can then take them home or, another option is to mail to the invitations. All invitations should include the following information: name and address of the school, date and time of the event, your room number, your name, and a brief outline of the schedule and activities for that evening.

### 2 PLAN YOUR PRESENTATION

What you will be saying to parents should be meticulously planned beforehand. Parents will want to know about the kids and the curriculum but they also want to know a little about you. Share something about yourself (where you grew up, your education, your family, your educational philosophy). Make sure to mention what goals you have set for the year. Your presentation should be no longer than 10 to 11 minutes tops, after all, parents are there to see how kids work.

You can provide more details in your parent-teacher conferences later on.

### 3 TIDY AND CLEAN

Your image, as well as the classroom's reflects on you as the teacher of that course. Where you are concerned, dress professionally and be well groomed. As they say, first impressions are often lasting impressions. A jacket and tie or at least a dress shirt and tie along with pressed slacks are considered very appropriate for men. Pantsuit, blouse and skirt, or a dress are a great choice for women. Where the classroom is concerned, make sure it is clean and tidy. Also, prepare everything you will need for that lesson and keep it handy. You can hang a "Welcome" sign outside the door, with your name and the room number on it. Prepare a sign-in sheet for parents and leave a list with the activities and any other useful information for parents to take as they come in, as well. Decorate your classroom and bulletin boards, and make sure you have enough chairs for everyone

### 4 SAMPLES

Set out textbooks, and be sure each child's desk has a folder with samples of the student's work. Additional student work (be sure to have samples from all students) can be posted on bulletin boards. Photographs of students and activities can also be posted there. Put up lots of colorful posters and charts with some of the content kids have seen. Make sure the classroom is vibrant and full of the kids' work.

### 5 WELCOMING YOUR GUESTS

It is ideal to stand at the door and to greet each and every parent with a handshake and a smile. Be pleasant and courteous, and if there is someone you haven't met, make sure to introduce yourself. It is also a good idea to have parents use name tags

with their name and the names of their kids.

## 6 YOUR PRESENTATION

Your presentation should be brief since it is only meant to provide some information about yourself and to cover what children have worked on so far and what they will work on in the future. Afterward, make sure to invite parents to stay to work on the activity you have planned for that evening with the kids and also look at their child's work.

## 7 ACTIVITIES

Make sure to give a lot of thought to what activities will be done that lesson. This is not a good time to teach anything new. After all, parents want to see what their kids are able to do in English. Choose activities your students are good at and familiar with. Also, fun activities you know the students like and do well will keep them motivated. Circulate around the room, smile, and make positive comments about the students and what they are doing.

### **OPEN LESSONS ARE A GREAT TIME FOR TEACHERS, PARENTS AND KIDS TO BE PART OF THE SAME EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE.**

Remember, it is not the time for personal conferences. Those should be set up a different day. Make the experience enjoyable and don't forget to have fun.



# Personal Information: How 'Open' & Direct Communication Should Be

**A GREAT DEAL OF VALUE HAS BEEN PLACED ON "OPENNESS" IN COMMUNICATION IN U.S. CULTURE OVER THE PAST YEARS, PERHAPS IN RESPONSE TO POLITICAL SCANDALS OF SEVERAL LEADERS HIDING CRITICAL INFORMATION.**

"Openness" may also be in a backlash to traditional U.S. manners which tend to emphasize reserve. The cultural change in revealing one's innermost secrets, which in the past would have been kept secret, can also be seen in popular culture, where celebrities as well as the lesser known readily reveal such information as abuse, addiction disorder, and mental health concerns. There is also the proliferation of "reality" TV, in which people invite cameras into their homes to film their family dysfunction for the public's entertainment. Some of this change has actually been positive — individuals shouldn't have to hide their heritage or sexual orientation, for example.

However, there should also be boundaries in this openness -- an opinion a number of people apparently share, as seen in the popular use of the acronym "TMI" or "too much information" (about one's personal life).

In addition, opinions on what is appropriate public information about oneself vary across cultures and generations. Therefore, in the classroom, especially the multicultural classroom, care should be taken on how much students should be expected to reveal about themselves even in a culture with an increasing expectation of self-revelation.

**FORESEE PROBLEMS WITH EXPECTED STUDENT SELF-DISCLOSURE**

## 1 DISCOMFORT

Take into account cultural and personal boundaries. Many students are uncomfortable revealing so much about themselves. That boundary should be respected. When I was a new graduate student twenty years ago, just on the cusp of this movement of self-revelation,

I had an instructor who twice pulled me into her office to complain about "distance" in my writing. I was already writing professionally at that time and was surprised by a serious complaint about my work. However, willing to correct any deficiencies, I asked her to please point out instances of what she was talking about. She didn't but just reiterated the complaint. Because "distance" and objectivity is usually a value in academic writing and higher education in general, her concerns continued to elude me. I've since concluded that she was annoyed that I refused to participate into the kind of therapy session her class regularly devolved into — students and instructor sitting in a circle, and sooner rather than later abandoning discussion of the curriculum and moving into their personal lives. I was simply uncomfortable with this. Because instructors have an obligation to teach the students who come to their class and not pick and choose their culture or personality type, boundaries should be respected.

## 2 LOSS OF PROFESSIONAL DISTANCE

Another concern with self-revelation in the classroom is the loss of professional distance. If students are too self-revelatory, there is a breach of the boundary that exists between students and teachers that is there for a reason: students and teachers are in actuality not peers even with pretenses that they are. When there is an imbalance in power — instructors hold power over students in their grades and possibly entire academic future — the relationship is not equal. Therefore, some distance must be maintained. Students and teachers are really are not friends free to share everything without fear of repercussions.

## 3 INTRODUCTION OF BIAS IN GRADING

Another related concern of the loss of professional distance when self-revelation goes too far is the introduction of bias into the grading process. Professor "Turner" did not like me because I didn't participate in her group therapy nor did I

treat the class journal as a personal diary. My grade reflected her frustration with this reserve. In a contrasting situation, a number of years later, when I was myself a college professor, I allowed a student to confide in me personal details related to an emotionally abusive relationship that were affecting her class grade. Later, when that grade was not up to her usual standards, she was angry because she had opened herself to me. It can be difficult to turn students away, or seem to, because teachers are usually compassionate individuals. However, to preserve the objectivity of the grading system, students with personal problems should be referred to professionals trained in addressing them.

## 4 CREATION OF A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

A final and prime reason to avoid too much openness in the classroom is the potential creation of a hostile environment. The incident with Professor Turner and her group therapy sessions would not have occurred today because if not I then another student would have taken the situation to the dean regarding the creation of a hostile environment — that is, a learning situation that is so oppressive or anxiety-producing to individuals that learning becomes impossible. The students' comfort level and safety in the learning process takes precedence over the individual instructor's preferred teaching style.

**CONSIDER SELF-DISCLOSURE: ASSIGNMENTS AND STRATEGIES TO BE WARY ABOUT**

## 1 JOURNALS

A journal in an academic sense is not a personal diary. Because students often confuse the two — most have had experience with a diary but not a class journal — care must be taken to distinguish the two. The personal diary many students have kept reveals their reflections on their personal lives: indeed, the diary is often seen as so private that it is

hidden away even from family members. An academic journal, on the other hand, is meant as reflections on course material and drawing connections between it and other material students have read and in turn to their professional and academic — not personal — lives. An academic journal, in addition, is intended for an audience, unlike the secrets of a diary. Make the distinction between the two clear and what is expected in an academic journal.

## 2 PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Many instructors start the semester assignment with a writing topic that will demand in response a personal narrative, an account of something important that happened to the student — in itself fine and a traditional way to start a writing class. Most of us have some experience telling stories about our own or other's lives. The potential problem lies in the specific topics assigned: topics related to experiences of trauma and disagreements with family and friends, for example, invite the kind of intimacy that should be avoided to preserve professional distance and student comfort levels. More appropriate topics might relate to students' introduction into the academic community, such as experiences related to coming to college and how it contrasts with high school. Assignments like these not only preserve comfort levels and objectivity but also lead to student reflections on the academic community they are entering.

## 3 SPECIFIC TEACHING STRATEGIES THAT INVITE UNPROFESSIONAL INTIMACY

A much-touted, perhaps too much so, strategy in recent years has been moving from the traditional classroom design of rows of desks where students sit facing the instructor, who stands in the front of the room and lectures. Replacing this is the circle of desks facing each other, the instructor joining as just another member of this group. There are several problems here, however. The first is it seems facile to claim the simple change in a seating arrangement has so many advantages: breaking down barriers, fostering classroom interaction, creating equality and so forth. In addition, even if these claims prove true, it is not a given that the changes are posi-

tive. As noted, the barriers are there for a reason, and since the student-teacher relationship is not equal to begin with, pretenses that it is are troubling.

### THERE ARE ADVANTAGES IN THE MOVEMENT TOWARD MORE SELF-DISCLOSURE IN THE CLASSROOM.

If implemented well and without undue pressure, it can foster learning in allowing students to feel safe in being who they are and free to share ideas related to the class curriculum without fear of criticism. There are pitfalls, however, in crossing boundaries and creating a nonprofessional and even hostile environment. Therefore, a curriculum that invites student self-disclosure should be approached with care.

# 7 Ways to Ensure Against L1 Enclaves Among Students

**THE JOURNEY FROM BEGINNER TO PROFICIENCY IS A LONG ONE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS FELT THAT, ONCE STUDENTS BEGIN TO MAKE FRIENDS FROM COUNTRIES OTHER THAN THEIR OWN, THEY'RE MAKING A GIANT STRIDE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.**

This isn't just good for the classroom's social environment, and it isn't just a huge boost to the students' own confidence and the quality of their experience when studying abroad. It's actually a very positive sign for their language acquisition as well, showing us that they've gained sufficient English to break through the inevitable barriers of language and background, and meaningfully engage with students from any other part of the world.

However, arranging for this monumental moment to occur isn't at all simple. Students often arrive with pre-installed views on their own nation and its relationship with the world, and on the ethnic groups and religions they're set to encounter along the way. These range from the tolerant and accepting, through to the downright xenophobic and exclusive. As teachers, we need to be sensitive to these viewpoints and help encourage the new friendships and new understandings to which the ESL environment is so very conducive.

One of the biggest threats to a cohesive, contended group of students is enclavism, i.e. the tendency for L1 groups to form up, and then harden and become exclusive, thereby blocking potentially valuable cross-cultural relationships. Here are some ways to deal with this common and divisive issue:

## 1 YOU'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE

I've written [\[LINK\]](#) on how to ensure that our students use as little as possible of their own language (referred to as L1). One of the first steps in doing this is to remind the students that they are not, in fact, in their home en-

vironment, even if they're surrounded by other L1 speakers. Ways of doing this tend to be funny -- "Look out of the window: Where are we, again?" This worked particularly well at my school in Boston which had a giant US flag on its front lawn! Alternatively, have the students figure out exactly how many miles they are from their home towns: the results might surprise them, though we hope not to make them any more homesick!

## 2 WE'RE ALL THE SAME

Early on in the semester, perhaps in the first week, run a couple of 'Getting to Know You' exercises which are simple interviews. Brainstorm good questions with the students, e.g. Which sports team do you support? Do you have a favorite place to go out in your home town? Are your parents nervous that you're traveling so far from home?

What keeps coming out of exercises like these is that we all have the same worries, and desires, and that we're fundamentally alike. Our superficial differences simply don't matter. This realization is a huge step toward building friendships and leaving behind the comforts of the L1 enclave.

## 3 GOOD ADMINISTRATION

School administrators who genuinely care about this issue will go out of their way to ensure that your classes are ethnically mixed. Sometimes this isn't possible, or the school isn't committed to this particular cause. As much as possible, request that none of your classes are monolingual, and that as few of your students as possible are in home stay accommodation with others from their language group. Even Portuguese and Spanish students can find themselves 'cheating', rather than using English.

While trying not to single out any particular group, it's often the case that Chinese students suffer the most from 'enclavism' and its attendant problems. With little experience of

foreigners from back home, a traditionally rather closed-off mentality to the outside world, and often a low level of language (and therefore social) skills, young Chinese learners need guidance and sometimes a firm hand to ensure they don't lapse into pervasive use of L1. More than most other nationalities, there is the danger that they will settle into a comfortable enclave of Chinese speakers, fail to practice their English, and achieve few of their learning aims.

Be aware, though, of a seemingly common sight in mixed-ethnicity ESL classrooms: a group of students arguing volubly and fluently, all except the two Chinese kids who sit in total silence. Monitor and help out as much as possible: get the others to back peddle until the whole group knows what's going on. Remember, in their situation, we'd all be terrified, too.

## 4 CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Make a point of mixing nationalities in group activities, and consider designing a seating chart to avoid L1 pairs (i.e. students from Chile and Spain shouldn't sit together). This won't always be possible, but even imposing such an arrangement reminds the students that they're here to speak L2 and to engage cross-culturally. Bear in mind L1 groupings when assigning research or group presentation tasks, in just the same way that we consider relative skills levels.

## 5 BUILD BRIDGES

I taught a class of ten students a few years ago, and on our first day, we tried to find every one of our classmates' countries on a map. There was general confusion and a lack of success. I try to begin semesters with plenty of introductory, bridge-building activities such as interviews, games of 'Find Someone Who', quick presentations on the students' home towns, research tasks to discover more on classmates' countries, etc. But step

one should be 'Where in the world do you come from?' and a good session of map-reading. You'll receive some startled reactions. My favorite was, "Impossible! Iceland has no people!"

## 6 TELL STORIES

I try to see L1 issues coming. On day one of a semester, I'll compare three (semi-fictional) learners: Student A has no foreign friends and hangs out in his L1 group, Student B has a handful of foreign friends and goes out once a week for noodles with the Japanese kids, Student C makes friends with anyone he can, uses social networking to keep in touch, and is unafraid of his mistakes. "Go ahead, guys, guess which one got the best results on his tests!"

Alongside this trick, I tell personal stories about what happened when I visited a country with friends (we stuck together and didn't learn any L2 beyond 'train station' and 'beer') and when I traveled alone (I learned plenty of local language, because I had to, and had a much richer experience). I find that students generally take these anecdotes seriously, and have been known to embellish them for effect. Try doing the same: the advice feels so much more genuine and considered if it comes from personal experience.

## 7 OTHER METHODS

You might also:

- Set essays or research tasks on the importance of integration, multi-culturalism, and the civil rights movement
- Teach basic social phrases in almost every class, reiterating them often, so that students are better armed with the language needed to make friends
- Organize mixers or other multi-ethnic events outside of class
- Award those who have lots of non-L1 Facebook friends, or who bring in photos of themselves in a restaurant with students from other countries, etc.
- Set up a system of embarrassing forfeits for those who speak L1 in the classroom: I paint the tip of

the student's nose with the white-board marker, but I'm sure you'll find your own way to do this!

### L1-ENCLAVES DIVIDE CLASSES AS WELL AS NATIONALITIES AND LANGUAGE GROUPS, AND THERE'S NO REAL NEED FOR THEM TO DOMINATE YOUR CLASS DYNAMIC.

Firm, continuous pressure results in better habits without requiring a draconian form of discipline: gentle reminders work better than a slapped wrist. For some students, the greatest lesson of their studies overseas might be that we are united by far more than we're divided, and that the rest of the world isn't quite so scary after all.



# 4 Ways Your Students' L1 Can Help Them Learn English

## DON'T SHUSH YOUR STUDENTS! BELIEVE IT OR NOT, L1 USE MIGHT BE HELPING THEM LEARN ENGLISH

Are your ESL students speaking Spanish (or Korean or Thai) in class? Let them, and see why it's beneficial to you, too. You don't have to ban your students' first language to help them learn English. Here are four reasons why.

## FOUR REASONS TO ENCOURAGE L1 USE IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

When I first tell people that I am an English as a second language teacher, inevitably, they ask, "Oh, what languages do you speak?" I have taught students from all over the world, speakers of over a dozen different languages, and I can honestly say that I am only fluent in English. How is that possible, they wonder. The fact of the matter is, there is no way that as an ESL teacher in the United States that I can speak every first language of every one of my ESL students. The good news is, I don't have to. I am a firm believer that immersion in a second language is a perfectly wonderful way to learn any second language.

But even though I don't speak my students' languages, that doesn't mean that I can't draw on the strengths they exhibit in their first language to help teach them English. Using your students' first languages to help them learn English isn't hard, and you may find that you are already doing some of these things that make it possible. Read on to find out.

### 1 ALLOW FIRST LANGUAGES IN THE CLASSROOM

It may seem perfectly straightforward and logical. By disallowing first language use in the classroom, students will speak more English. The problem with that statement is that it is wrong. When students are prohibited from speaking their native tongue in the classroom, especially during

free time, they may feel squelched no matter what language they are trying to speak. Your students may become timid and afraid to say anything, even in English. To avoid this, let students speak in their first language during free time, for clarifying instructions, or when they are trying to put their ideas together. It is unrealistic to expect speakers of the same first language to limit their interactions to English only. Don't fight against this human instinct. Allow the use of L1 where it helps students increase their performance in English and don't take it as a personal offense when they speak a language you don't understand in class. It's not personal -- it's natural.

### 2 GROUP STUDENTS BY FIRST LANGUAGE

Grouping students who speak different first languages together has many advantages in addition to forcing them to use English to communicate. But there are also advantages to grouping students with the same first language together, too. This can be especially helpful in a class with mixed levels. Pairing a student with someone from his own home country, a speaker of his own first language, helps both you and your lower level student. Your student will likely be less stressed when he knows a group member or partner understands anything he wants to say, and low stress is essential for getting your student ready to receive the information you are presenting to him or her.

If you are teaching in English, you will probably be giving directions to your students. Lower level students might not understand what you are explaining even though upper level students might, and having students grouped with like first languages gives those lower level students a resource for understanding your directions so they can fully participate in the activity.

Putting your students with their fellow L1 speakers also gives the lower level student a clue in to mistakes or

misunderstandings that can happen specific to that language since his L1 partner can point out the obstacles he has already overcome.

Finally, when cultural issues come into play, issues that could cause conflict and misunderstanding for your students, their classmates who have already worked through those difficulties will be able to help their classmates when they are paired with a fellow speaker of their first language.

### 3 ENCOURAGE SHARING OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Culture permeates our deepest of areas of who we are – our thoughts, opinions, and decision making. Encouraging your students to share their cultures is a great way of getting students to understand and appreciate their differences. And whether we like it or not, language is a big part of culture. So when you ask students to share about their food, past times, entertainment, and others areas of their home cultures, make a point of allowing some of their language to filter in as well. When you allow and even encourage first language sharing during times of cultural exchange, you show that you respect and value the places where your students come from, and you don't think that English and American culture are superior to their own cultures. That in turn will make your students more receptive to learning English. They will appreciate the cultures that speak English as well as the language itself and will understand that it is more than just a tool for advancing in their educations, business, or other personal goals.

### 4 ENCOURAGE RESPONSES IN FIRST LANGUAGES

If you have your students keep a journal, think about allowing first language writing in that context. When I have students journal, my goal is to get them writing. It is not to elicit perfect grammar, spelling, and handwriting. I want students to feel free to express

themselves. Later I have them use that writing as inspiration for more formal assignments. There is no reason that ESL students should feel they cannot use their first language in a journaling assignment. In fact, writing in their first language may actually help them solidify the English you taught them in class. This is particularly true if you are teaching content in addition to language instruction. Processing the information you presented in English in class in their first language in a journal assignment will help your students internalize information and vocabulary, and it may also help them get some great ideas on paper that they might not be able to get out in English words and grammar.

**FOR SOME TEACHERS, BANNING FIRST LANGUAGE USE IN THE ESL CLASSROOM MAY SEEM LIKE A GOOD IDEA, BUT YOU CAN ACTUALLY USE YOUR STUDENTS' FIRST LANGUAGES TO IMPROVE THEIR ENGLISH ACQUISITION.**

It's simple, unobtrusive, and shows you value their culture and language as you want them to value yours.

# Cover All Four Skills With This Simple, 4-Step Activity

**A TEACHER'S WORK IS NEVER DONE, AND THE MORE WE CAN MULTITASK WITH OUR CLASS ACTIVITIES, THE BETTER OFF BOTH WE AND OUR STUDENTS WILL BE.**

This simple activity is perfect for the teacher who wants to cover several areas of language instruction in just one activity. In short, students choose one of their interests and create a book about it using pictures and vocabulary. It works for younger students as well as adults, and you might even have classroom resources for future use when you are done. Here's how to create this engaging and educational experience with your students.

**COVER ALL LANGUAGE SKILLS IN AN ENJOYABLE WAY**

## 1 PICTURE THIS

The activity starts with students looking through magazines for pictures that interest them. I hope you have a collection of classroom magazines on hand for your students to use in various activities. They are great for learning vocabulary, creating collages, and using for writing prompts, among many other activities. In this activity, students will look for pictures that appeal to them that they will later assemble into a book. It helps if you have magazines that cover topics of interest to your students. If you're not sure that you do, invite students to bring in magazines that they like, even if those magazines are not in English. They will only be taking the pictures from the magazine and not the words. Make sure you warn them, however, that they will be cutting pictures from their magazine, so they should not bring something that they do not want to cut up. Students can work individually or in groups to choose their pictures. Have students choose between five and eight pictures that interest them and paste each one on to a separate piece of paper. Eventually they will compile these pages into a book.

## 2 IDENTIFY IMPORTANT VOCABULARY

Once your students have chosen their pictures and pasted them onto their book pages, it's time to talk about what is in the pictures. If individual students chose their pictures, it's best if you can talk with each person individually as well. If you had groups work together, you can have groups discuss the pictures among themselves as you move from group to group giving input. During the discussion, students should point out any important objects or elements in the pictures. You or their classmates will supply the correct vocabulary for these items, and you may want students to make a list on a separate piece of paper of these important vocabulary words.

## 3 WRITE IT OUT

This step is when the book really comes together. You will have to be involved in writing each book because it's important that the spelling and grammar be without error in these class made books. Thus, this is a good step to do while your class is doing other, independent work. You will not, however, come up with the text that will be written. That is your students' job. Sitting with each individual or group, have your student tell you what text should go on each page. It is up to your students whether they want to write a fictional piece or an informational piece (or even a combination of the two). Reading picture books similar to the one they are creating is a good way to prepare them for this activity. When it is time to write, students should have their list of vocabulary handy when they give you the sentence(s) for each page. You then write down what your students said correcting the grammar as you write (no need to point out to your students their grammatical mistakes at this point) and using correct spelling. Once all the pages have text on them that relates to the picture on that page, your students can assemble the book. Staples are a great go to,

but you can use any binding option that works for you and your budget including three ring notebooks or a spiral binding.

## 4 READ AND READ AGAIN

Once your books are bound, your students have a reading reference that will interest them and be at their reading level. Because they chose the pictures for the book, they will be interested in the subject and, most likely, have a fair amount of previous knowledge about it. Because they gave you the sentences to write down, they will understand the grammar of what they are reading (even if you made corrections for them). Because the book is based on pictures, they will have a good picture reference for the vocabulary they learned in the book writing process. All these things combine to make an interesting and level appropriate book for your students to read. If you like, set aside a place in your classroom for these student-made books so their classmates can read them during their free time. If the exercise is particularly successful with your students, think about also setting aside space for a book making learning center. Students can choose pictures and assemble their books on their own and then come to you for help with vocabulary and the text for each page.

Not every class activity has to be complicated. In this straightforward activity, students choose pictures that appeal to them and then take the steps to transform those pictures into the text of a book – a book that interests them and that they and their classmates can read independently. It's fun and covers discussion, vocabulary, writing, and reading in one simple and fun activity.

# Crime and Punishment: 5 Integrated Exercises for ESL Students

## I'VE ALWAYS FOUND THAT ESL STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE MORE IN CLASS WHEN WE'RE DISCUSSING ISSUES WHICH APPLY TO EVERYONE.

Debates on the environment, education and taxation tend to work well, and I've always found success discussing crime: everyone has opinions about it, many of us have experienced it first hand, and it's relatively easy to get a good discussion going, perhaps one which usefully divides the class and provokes extended argument (in a good way!)

There are different approaches, depending on the level of the students and how well you know them.

## TRY THESE 5 WAYS TO TEACH AND TALK ABOUT CRIME

### 1 VOCABULARY TIME

Crime vocab is surprisingly easy to teach because all of the relevant concepts are already familiar to your students. Brainstorm the crimes they already know and then elicit more. Crimes which may not already be in the students' lexicon include:

- Financial crimes: fraud, embezzlement, corruption, tax evasion, running a pyramid or Ponzi scheme
- Arson, criminal damage, vandalism, graffiti
- The different forms of criminal violence: battery, vehicular manslaughter, homicide, grievous bodily harm (UK), assault with a deadly weapon (US)
- The different forms of theft: larceny, burglary, home invasion, pickpocketing, confidence tricks, scams, phishing, identity fraud
- Car crimes: Driving Under the Influence, Driving Without Insurance etc

Once the board is full of crime vocab, turn to types of punishment or sanction. Consider:

- Jail (US), gaol (UK, old-fash-

ioned), prison, incarceration

- Sentences, parole, capital punishment, time off for good behavior, suspended sentence, concurrent / consecutive terms, solitary confinement ('the hole'), mitigating circumstances
- Community service, fines, suspended license, restraining order.

### 2 INTERVIEW TIME

Which of these crimes have your students experienced personally, or through a friend? Are there any famous cases from their home countries? Can they think of someone who was on the run, or who received an especially severe sentence? Which of these crimes should result in the greatest and least penalties?

### 3 RESEARCH TIME

Assign each student, pair or group the name of a famous criminal, or a specific crime which they will research and present on. Possibilities include:

- Bonny and Clyde
- Bernie Madoff
- Charles Manson and family
- The Boston Marathon bombing
- The Lindberg Baby abduction
- Al Capone

They could also research crime statistics from your city or country, or their own, forming enough data to compare the crime rates back home and see which are the safest (and least safe!) cities. Local newspapers normally cover crime in some detail, and will be a good source for recent events. Has the crime rate been falling or rising? Why might this be?

### 4 SCENARIO TIME

My favorite way to discuss crime is with a handful of fictional but realistic examples. These never fail to provoke debate, and I learn a lot about my students from the answers they give. Feel free to invent your own (po-

tentially nuanced and complex) case, but a good starter could be this sorry tale:

*Barbara Peters had been worried about her husband Arthur for several months. He was staying later than usual at the office, and was showing less and less interest in his wife. One evening, while Albert was in the shower, Barbara checked his phone and found numerous romantic texts from a woman named Lydia -- they were clearly having a relationship. Barbara dropped the phone, dashed to the bedroom closet, loaded Albert's gun, threw open the bathroom door and shot him six times. Albert was pronounced dead in hospital. Barbara called the police herself, admitted the murder, and made no attempt to plead her innocence.*

This can be delivered as a listening or reading task. Ask some check questions: how did Barbara find out about the affair? How many times did she shoot Albert? Then give your students time to discuss the appropriate punishment for Barbara. Should her emotional state and Albert's infidelity be regarded as mitigating circumstances, and result in a lesser penalty? Could Barbara have been mentally unstable, and need psychiatric care, rather than prison?

Here's another scenario which generally produces lengthy and heartfelt discussion:

*Patrick Mills has been in and out of work for the past two years. He finds it difficult to follow instructions and seems to resent his management wherever he works. In debt, and short on his rent, Patrick decided to help some friends who were arranging a small shipment of cocaine from [name your own real or fictional city] to London. Inexperienced and poorly prepared, Patrick was apprehended at the airport even before boarding the plane. Local law carries extremely strict penalties for drug trafficking, although the Home Office could re-*



quest that Patrick serve any prison time in a UK jail.

Should Patrick's past difficulties be taken into account, or is he just a 'bad apple' who should be off the streets? Should we treat drug traffickers more or less severely than murderers like Barbara? Where should Patrick serve his sentence? I tend to use Ghana as Patrick's departure country, and remind my students that Patrick might not survive in a local prison.

## YOU'LL BE SURPRISED AT THE DEPTH, BREADTH AND STRENGTH OF YOUR STUDENTS' OPINIONS ON THESE POINTS.

Crime is a great topic for eliciting lots of vocabulary, engaging the students in thinking and discussing realistic cases, and learning about their own cultural and personal values.

## 5 DEBATE TIME

There are many aspects of the criminal justice system which are ripe for debate. Consider these discussion topics:

- Is it reasonable to call a person 'a criminal', as though it were their career, or even their genetic predisposition?
- Is a criminal sick, evil, or just unlucky?
- How do you feel about California's controversial 'Three Strikes' rule?
- Should 'Life mean life' during sentencing? (i.e. should the prisoner ever be eligible for parole?)
- Is the purpose of prison to punish, to deter, to rehabilitate, or simply to house those who cannot integrate into society?
- Is the death penalty ever an appropriate response? When? How should it be administered? (Be aware that some nations, Saudi Arabia and China in particular, have a strong history of imposing capital punishment, and that voicing concerns about this policy might be seen as criticizing their governments.)
- Is solitary confinement a violation of the prisoner's human rights?
- Should the family of the victim be consulted about sentencing the accused?
- Should habeus corpus (the right to a fair trial) be suspended in some cases? When? Does terrorism fall into this category? (Tread carefully here, but it's a terrifically charged topic.)

# Tolerance of Ambiguity and Lack Thereof in Students

## I HATE TO SOUND LIKE AN OLD, IRASCIBLE PROFESSOR, BUT I'M FINDING AN INCREASING GENERATION GAP BETWEEN COLLEGE STUDENTS TODAY AND THOSE OF MY GENERATION.

Most notable today is the tendency of students to treat a college education as a commodity which they've purchased, and the quality of which — and the individual student's grade — is solely in the responsibility of the instructor. Related to this “consumer” attitude is an intolerance of ambiguity, the demand to be told exactly what to do, in order to protect the precious grade, the student's “investment.” This has resulted in a number of trends: for example, the expectation to provide increasingly detailed “rubrics” for each project which explain in excruciating detail its expectations and their relationship to the students' overall grades.

In a personal experience, a few years ago I had a student in a graduate-level education course who claimed to “not understand” what to do in the design of a “webquest.” A webquest asks the student to visit a number of related websites, recording information from each, in order to investigate a problem. In other words, it is a research project incorporating online data. The problem was not that the student didn't understand and admitted it: most students then had not yet had experience with such a project. Indeed, because I had anticipated some confusion, I gave out a list of detailed instructions on how to complete the project. Because the student still expressed confusion, I then provided a model that I created of a webquest investigating my own question on the effects of writing portfolios. This again issued the response the student didn't know what to do, with the strong implication it was my fault for “not explaining well.” I then obliged by asking for the student's topic and completing the first step for her. Not surprisingly, there was still feedback that the assignment was “confusing” and an implied demand that the proj-

ect be eliminated -- which the student stated explicitly was to protect her grade.

It is my position, however, that some ambiguity is part of an education, indeed may be the essential component. Development of critical thinking skills naturally involves learning new material that it is initially confusing, demanding one's active engagement in the learning process in order to plan one's original work that is not modeled completely on someone else's. Students should approach the class expecting some ambiguity and lack of immediate understanding, and the teacher should guide students toward this acceptance.

## DISCOVER STEPS TO GETTING STUDENTS TO ACCEPT AMBIGUITY

### 1 START THE TERM WITH CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS BUT MOVE AWAY FROM THIS GRADUALLY

Starting with clear instructions of the material but eventually turning control over the learning process to the students is a traditional teaching method called “scaffolding.” That is, the instructor provides temporary support as students progress in competence. In the webquest, the clear instructions, examples, and instructor completion of part of the assignment are all temporary “scaffolding” that teachers should be expected to provide, especially over unfamiliar material. The operative word, however, is “temporary.” Students are expected to actively engage in this learning process from the start so that they can gain enough understanding of the material to eventually progress independently. The problem is when the student “shuts down” and turns over all control to the instructor. The teacher should actively discourage this response. Explaining “too much” can create a passive learner who has not grappled

with the material enough to truly understand it. Therefore, when students begin to show some understanding, the teacher should stop helping so much.

### 2 EMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR COMPLETING ONE'S OWN ORIGINAL WORK

Along with the increasing demand of detailed instructions is the expectation for “examples”: students expect examples of almost all assignments, from essays to research projects to journal responses. Again, while a valued teaching method, excessive use of “examples” is problematic. For one, it's not always necessary, especially with familiar assignments. While the instructor shouldn't assume that all students have seen a webquest, it's not at all unreasonable to expect they all know what a paragraph looks like. Scrambling up so many models is also an additional burden on the instructor, as not all student work is exemplary, and a model created by the teacher is often artificial. By nature teachers are not at the students' level of development, and examples created by teachers on assignments can look forced. In a related concern is the potential for plagiarism. If the model is too close to the project students are expected to complete, the probability of students just copying the model increases. Teachers should therefore not yield to demands for examples in all cases. In addition, there is a need to explain what plagiarism is and the seriousness of the offense.

### 3 TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO COME UP WITH THEIR OWN TOPICS AND DO THEIR OWN RESEARCH

A main problem behind the demand to be told what to say and how to say it is students' mistaken belief they have nothing original and of value to say. This notion is usually incorrect: almost everyone has some original interest and something of value to say about it. Therefore, wide latitude in the

choice of topics for projects should be allowed. I've had students who have researched such "nonacademic" topics as the process of recruiting professional football players and controversial topics such as whether a college education really delivers on its investment. Allowing this choice not only decreases the possibility of plagiarism, but student engagement is also increased. Students are more engaged with a project they care about and therefore work harder, learn more, and produce better work.

## **4 DISCUSS THE VERY NATURE OF COLLEGE EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTOR**

At some point in the process, often early on, the students begin to ask why: why is the instructor not telling us exactly what to do, how to do it, what her expectations are: why isn't she doing her job? It is now time to discuss the nature of a college education. By telling students exactly what to do, the teacher is actually doing a large part of the student's job, which is to grapple with the material, maybe get frustrated, feel confused, and deal with ambiguity in general. This is all part of the learning process. In dealing with these problems, students begin to develop critical thinking skills required in figuring out, for example, what they want to research and how to go about finding the answers to their questions. To take over the process completely is to rob students of this experience which is the very education they've paid me for (which they often remind of).

**AS FOR WHAT I EXPECT? THE ANSWER TO THAT IS OFTEN I HONESTLY DON'T KNOW. THE FINAL PRODUCTS THAT STUDENTS PRODUCE IS ULTIMATELY IN THEIR CONTROL.**

And often I'm pleasantly surprised.

# Should You Have Television in Class? 6 Reasons to Turn on the TV

## TELEVISION GETS A BAD RAP IN A LOT OF EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS THESE DAYS.

It's a brain drain, intellectual rot, a waste of time, and the source of all corruption in young people today, some say. But for ESL students, television isn't the enemy. In fact, television can have several uses in the ESL classroom. Besides giving students a break from the everyday, television can aid in teaching English in a multitude of ways. Here are some reasons you might want to leave the TV on in your English class.

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN USE TV EFFICIENTLY IN YOUR ENGLISH CLASSROOM

### 1 EXPOSURE TO REAL LANGUAGE

That title might be a bit of an overstatement. Actors don't speak as messily or as roughly as the average Joe, but they probably get closer to it than you do. ESL teachers, without realizing it, modify their speech. We speak slower, articulate more, and use more simplistic vocabulary. When you let your ESL students watch television as part of your instruction plan, they get exposure to a more natural language in aspects such as pronunciation, speed of speech, vocabulary choice, and use of dialect.

### 2 GETTING A LEG UP ON VOCABULARY

If you have been teaching ESL for a while, you might notice something in your own speech – you know how to avoid using slang. For me, my shift away from slang happened without me even thinking about it. When students didn't understand something I said (using a more colloquial term) I just said it again with a different vocabulary choice. Eventually, the second vocabulary choice became the first choice, and slang slipped out of my classroom language use. This shift is natural. We want our students to understand us, but avoiding the use of nonstandard English actually hurts your students in the long run. When you

use television in your classroom, your students will be exposed to many non-standard English vocabulary choices including slang, colloquialisms, and less common vocabulary. All of these are good for your students to learn, particularly for intermediate and advanced students. To give your students this kind of vocabulary exposure, watch a favorite television show and ask them to note any words they heard that they did not recognize, or give them the words beforehand and see if they can guess the meaning from their context. Then make a point of using those words in class and awarding extra credit to students who use them as well.

### 3 INCREASED READING COMPREHENSION

Did you know that letting your students watch the movie before they read the novel isn't a bad idea in the ESL classroom? It may seem counterintuitive. After all, don't we want students to understand what they read as they read it? Won't reading unfamiliar material show us just how much they are able to understand as they read? No necessarily. When ESL students read material in English about an unfamiliar topic, they are facing two different levels of comprehension. First of all, they are facing the challenges associated with a second language. They must understand grammar and vocabulary in the target language. But when a reading selections contains unfamiliar factual (or fictional) material as well, ESL students face an additional comprehension hurdle – the factual material. It is possible to understand the language aspect of what a person is reading but not understand the content, or vice versa. When you give your students the factual information through a movie or other video, they can focus on the language aspect of comprehension because they already have an understanding of the factual information. To give your students this comprehension edge, you can show them a movie version of a novel you will read, a documentary on a subject they will read about, or any other video that will cover factual material that they will read. Have students take notes on what they watch

and review unfamiliar vocabulary. When students have completed their reading assignment, have them watch the same program again and see how much better they understand what they are watching.

### 4 RESEARCH WITHOUT READING

If you are teaching a conversation, speaking, vocabulary, or listening class, reading might not be a key goal on your syllabus. Still, you might want your students to learn about new subject areas. While most teacher's first resource would probably be a book or an article on a new topic, you do have other choices. There are plenty of video resources (documentaries, informational television shows, etc.) that are good sources for research for ESL students. When you choose to show your class one of these programs, they will still learn the content that you are targeting, but watching a video as opposed to reading research will challenge a very different set of language skills. Try showing your class an episode of How Stuff Works, How it Works, or another program from the Discovery Channel or the Science Channel. Then ask students to summarize what they watched and see if they can summarize the process with two or three other students.

### 5 LISTENING COMPREHENSION PLUS

Listening comprehension can be a challenge for ESL students, particularly when their listening material is a recording on a cassette or CD. Most of the time in real language situations, English speakers have more clues than a simple recording provides. They also get visual clues – facial expressions, body language, and even a visual on pronunciation as well as the greater context of the conversation. Using television resources in class gives your students a listening comprehension advantage over simple recordings, and this type of listening is more like real life anyway. If you want to use television in class for listening comprehension, try using a clip from the nightly news. The stories are generally short, they often have more than one speaker, and on site re-



ports give great visual clues for comprehension. You might be surprised at how well your students understand what they see and hear.

## 6 CLUE IN ON CULTURE

Culture is always coming up in the ESL classroom. Just because a person is fluent in English does not mean that English speaking cultures make sense to them. There is more to a people group than the words they use. Television is a great way to bring up some cultural issues for your students. If you watch sitcoms, you will often find a relatively realistic portrayal of cultural trends, trends that may be shocking or difficult for your students to understand. Showing a clip in class is a good way to get the discussion started when you want to address a cultural issue with your students. These issues might include appropriate workplace behavior, the culture of dating, family relationships, or popular entertainment. When you use this type of material with your ESL students, talk about what they saw in the video, how it made them feel or what it made them think, their cultural values and practices on the same subject, and how the two compare. That way your students will have exposure to English speaking culture but will also have a chance to talk about their own cultural values and hopefully see that different is okay.

**WHILE SOME ADULTS MAKE A POINT OF KEEPING THEIR CHILDREN FROM TELEVISION, ESL TEACHERS MAY DO THEIR STUDENTS A DISSERVICE BY JUMPING ON THAT BANDWAGON. TELEVISION CAN BE USED IN MANY WAYS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM, FOR COMPREHENSION, INFORMATION, AND EXPOSURE TO NEW VOCABULARY. ALL OF THESE ARE VALUABLE TO STUDENTS WHO ARE STRIVING TOWARD ENGLISH FLUENCY. SO FLIP ON THE SWITCH, PUT YOUR FEET UP, AND SEE HOW USEFUL TELEVISION CAN BE IN THE CLASSROOM.**

# 7 Spiffy Ways to Use Technology to HELP ESL Students Learn

## HAVE YOU EVER FOUND YOURSELF FRUSTRATED BY STUDENTS WHO JUST WON'T STAY OFF THEIR PHONES IN CLASS?

Well maybe instead of getting frustrated you should put them to work. We live in an age of technology, and instead of fighting our students to keep it out of the classroom, we can do a lot more good by pointing technology in a positive direction. There are lots of ways technology can help ESL students learn. Here are just a few ways to use technology in your classroom to help your students further their language learning.

## TURN PHONES INTO YOUR BEST FRIENDS

### 1 A DICTIONARY IN YOUR POCKET

Whether you are teaching advanced students or beginning beginners, they might have a great picture dictionary right at their fingertips (or in their pants pocket). Any smart phone can be used as a makeshift picture dictionary with no special apps needed. A simple image search on an unfamiliar vocabulary word will, in most cases, produce enough pictures of any word so that your students can infer its meaning. If you like, encourage students to make their own hard copy picture dictionary for your next vocabulary unit by printing out those images and collecting them in a blank notebook or on sheets of paper. If you want, you can even do the image search yourself and use the pictures you come up with when you introduce the new words to your students.

### 2 MULTIMEDIA CONTENT

If you are teaching content areas, you may find that your students struggle to understand lecture alone. You can bring technology into your classroom as a means to helping your students understand and absorb general information when language is a barrier. Do a video search on your topic and play excerpts for your students. Not only will these excerpts be a different way to present the same information to your students,

you can also use them as listening comprehension activities, and what student doesn't like watching videos in class?

### 3 READY, SET,...ACTION

Almost every cell phone or tablet has an option for recording videos. While this can add up to great fun the next time you have your students write their own skits, you can use this tool to help improve their pronunciation on a regular basis, too. Many ESL students do not always realize what their pronunciation is actually like. We hear our own voices in our head the way we want them to sound, no matter if we are native speakers or second language learners. The next time you do a pronunciation activity, go around the room and video your students speaking using their phones or tablets. After they are finished, have them go back and watch the video listening closely to their pronunciation. They may be surprised to hear what they are really saying, and the camera might pick up any unusual body language as well. Students can then use that information to improve their spoken English. If you don't have time to record all of your students, have them record themselves with the reverse camera option on their cell phones. You can also have pairs of students work together to record and then analyze their pronunciation videos.

### 4 CONVERSATION PARTNERS ACROSS THE SEA

If you teach ESL overseas, it might be difficult finding conversation partners for your students. That's not the case, however, when you use Skype or facetime to connect with English speakers around the globe. If you are looking for conversation partners for your students and don't have anyone local who is willing to come into the classroom, tap into your connections back home. Find a teacher who is willing to take a few minutes out of class each week to talk over the internet. With a partner over the ocean, students can share what they are learning, talk about their activities outside of the classroom, or work together on projects. Both classes will benefit from the experience academically and personally.

### 5 INDEPENDENT LEARNING CENTERS

Independent learning centers are great for ESL students, but they often take time to prepare. Take a shortcut by putting a tablet preloaded with level appropriate apps in a learning center in your classroom. You can find apps on just about every topic in English – vocabulary development, reading comprehension, pronunciation -- you name it. Even if you don't have a technology device hanging around, you can still make a center work. Print off a list of free apps that your students can download and use in that center on their smart phones or other devices. That way they can not only learn independently in class but will also have the apps available when they go home.

### 6 YOU'RE MY INSPIRATION

When you are looking for topics for your students to write or speak about, have them find their own inspiration on Instagram. With a simple cell phone your students can have access to pictures from all over the world – exciting places and interesting people are just waiting to inspire your students. Have students work with a partner to talk about a picture. They can review verb tenses, practice using vocabulary, or describe the people and places they see. If a picture is worth a thousand words, your students will never lack for topics to talk and write about.

### 7 RESOURCES FOR BUSY TEACHERS

Don't forget one of the easiest ways to help your students learn through technology – Busy Teacher! We have thousands of printables, lesson plans, and worksheets that are easy to find with a simple search. For many of them, all you need to do is print and walk into your classroom. One thing a teacher never has enough of is time, and Busy Teacher is here to help you make class planning a breeze and to share the great ideas other teachers have used and found effective.

# My Country, Right or Wrong: 5 Ways to Understand Nationalism

Teaching English abroad is a profession which frequently pits the teacher against local idiosyncracies and frustrations. Our reactions to these peculiarities - matters of dress or speech, food and table manners, or time-keeping - can go a long way to defining the tone of our stay. One factor which we invariably encounter, both when abroad or working with foreign students in the west, is the passionate expression of nationalistic beliefs. Every nation and ethnic group has its moments of patriotic fervor, brought to the surface by an anniversary, or a confrontation with a long-standing regional rival, or merely by a seemingly innocent comment. Handling these tricky moments is a challenge, and I'd like to present some methods both for taking the sting out of such awkward situations, and for ensuring that the teacher does nothing to worsen the situation.

## UNDERSTAND NATIONALISM IN THESE 5 STEPS

### 1 IT'S REAL. DON'T DISMISS IT.

Without getting too far into philosophy, it's worth remembering that 'truth', as it pertains to our relationship with our home countries, is impossible to define. Very quickly, we find that our connections to the spirit and culture of our homelands are personally forged and unique. It makes no more sense to lambast such an opinion than to criticize which soccer team a student supports, or whether they prefer McDonalds or Burger King. What matters is that patriotic beliefs, however they may seem to others, are both honestly held and established after much reflection -- parental or educational influences very often play their part, and here it's important to consider that criticizing the belief might be seen as undermining those deeply respected origins. Whether or not you agree, the belief is real for the student.

### 2 EVERYONE DOES IT.

During the Monday morning flag-raising ceremony at the Chinese college where I worked, I was upset by what I saw as the deliberate fostering of an unthinking nationalism. Singing the national anthem and saluting the flag smacked of brainwashing: it felt like an attempt to get under the skin of naive, young people and to capture their lifelong allegiance. Then I took a moment to reflect, and took a broader, more informed view: every country in the world does something similar. An American upset by such a ceremony need only remind themselves of those thousands of recitations of the 'Pledge of Allegiance' at high school, a Briton need look no further than the singing of 'God Save the Queen' at sporting events or during the unconfined flag-waving fervor of the Last Night of the Proms. From Albania to Zambia, nationalism and patriotism are inculcated for a huge range of reasons -- some are matters of genuine national pride, others darker and more cynical -- making this practice one of the oldest and most enduring in human culture. Singling out one nation for marking its uniqueness is to ignore the global and ancient nature of this trend.

### 3 YOU MAY NOT UNDERSTAND WHERE IT COMES FROM.

We may find it nearly impossible to empathize with those for whom a 14th century battle is a critical historical fulcrum. It is easy to wave away the dispute over possession of a tiny Pacific island, but for those brought up within the debate, there might literally be nothing quite so important in the world. Deep history has a habit of wending itself into the threads of contemporary culture almost as if the events were those not of the last millennium, but of last year. Even if the details of the event are highly spurious -- or the event itself may never have occurred -- it is worth treating your students with the same seriousness and respect they have shown in their view

of history. To refute an assertion that one of your students' ancient countrymen invented the concept of latitude, or algebra, or the earliest rocket, would be exactly as though someone from the other side of the world dismissed Thomas Jefferson and Winston Churchill as plagiarists and frauds -- you'd be offended, and justifiably so. A failure to tread carefully, especially when rightly leading the student to the true facts of the matter, can badly mar your relationship with the class.

### 4 DARK FORCES ARE NOT ALWAYS TO BLAME

It is easy to regard nationalism and cynical manipulation as close cousins, but this need not always be true. Many patriotic beliefs are rooted in a very genuine affection for the landscape, arts and language of one's home. I confess to wishing Britain every success in world affairs, but I have no enthusiasm whatsoever for empire-building or military dominance -- I have a respect for tolerance and fair play, and a love for the English countryside, its pubs in particular. Furthermore, the expression of one's patriotism need not embody a parallel desire for one's own nation to rule the world, although this is something we will infrequently find. Much more often, there are far less sinister motives: 'I think we do this really well, and the world might benefit from emulating us'. In the case of my native Britain, I might laud the legal and parliamentary systems, but wouldn't think of attempting to impose traditional British food on the world.

It is also worth remembering that nationalism, for all its flaws, acts as a vital glue which can provide much-needed national unity: modern China would not exist without it, and the economic miracle which has lifted billions out of poverty would have been still-born without the enduring togetherness provided by four generations of enthusiastic patriotism.

## 5 BEWARE OF PUSHING YOUR OWN AGENDA.

“I’ll show these people their true place in the world. There’s no way I’m going to spend a whole year here and just let them carry on thinking as they always have. They need to be taken down a peg or two.”

If ever you find yourself echoing sentiments like these, please stop and think. As an ESL instructor, your task is not to burst the balloon of your students’ patriotism, or to ‘correct’ their view of themselves, but to provide an environment where language skills acquisition is both inevitable and good fun. Among younger teachers in particular, there is often the temptation to ‘put things right’ with regard to nationalistic beliefs and to those views of history which collide badly with what we are taught in the west. Dangerously nationalistic tendencies, more often than not, melt away once the student reaches university and reads more widely. It can be a tough transition to have cold water poured on the fire of one’s nationalistic fervor -- to do so is absolutely not our role. Besides, implicit in the argument which begins, “Your country isn’t so great, because...” is its almost inevitable complement: “My own country actually is so great, because...” There are few quicker ways to destroy your relationship with a class, and I urge you to take care when reacting to these deeply-felt and delicate issues.

### **I WOULD CLAIM - AND I DO HOPE THAT YOU AGREE – THAT IT IS THE PUREST NONSENSE TO APPLY A ‘GOOD-BETTER-BEST’ PARADIGM TO NATION STATES.**

All are unique, and their differences should be celebrated, not compared on some unfair scale which, in any event, cannot hope to avoid bias. What does it truly mean, I’ve often wondered, to claim primacy through an event in which we did not participate? Can I seriously claim that Britons are superior to Frenchmen because of how the Battle of Trafalgar concluded? Of course not. Many students are, however, informed by just such a view of history, and it is our job to gently guide them to a fuller understanding both of the facts, and of the strong, deep bonds which connect the nation states of the world.



# A Rainbow of Cultures – 7 Steps to Organizing an International Day

## IT'S A WONDERFUL THING TO CELEBRATE THE DIVERSITY OF OUR ESL CLASSES.

Often, our students are abroad for the first time, and have the experience of meeting people from continents and countries they might know little about. A way to enjoyably bridge these gaps is to organize an International Day which highlights the culture of each nation or ethnic group, enabling students to see past the differences and appreciate the similarities, and the colors, of each culture.

## ORGANIZE AN UNFORGETTABLE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR STUDENTS

### 1 START EARLY

This will be a significant undertaking, so give yourself plenty of time – perhaps several months – to bring together ideas, distribute advice and instructions, and form your working groups. A good way to begin organizing is to consider how many rooms or locations you'll need (one or two countries per room, for example) and how you're going to allocate sufficient resources. Decide on a budget and how much you expect each country to contribute towards its own display.

### 2 PREPARE SOME GUIDANCE

International Day will work best if your nation-teams work to a prepared plan. This short document should encourage the students to consider their own culture, and to tease out aspects which they believe the rest of the world needs to know more about, and/or would enjoy. Consider some or all of these:

- An exhibit on the country's language(s) and ethnic group(s)
- A display of dance or music (the Turkish belly-dancing displays never fail to draw a crowd!)
- Examples of local food and drink
- Maps, globes and other graphics showing the location and appearance of the country
- A display about an important person from that country

- A display detailing an important historical event
- Information on an important national achievement – putting a man in space, hosting a major sporting event, achieving a significant world record, etc.

### 3 HELP WITH ORGANIZATION

As part of setting up International Day, encourage the national groups to form a committee whose members have specific, realizable objectives. These might include sourcing and cooking food, arranging for embassies to send cultural material, engaging a musician or dancer, and organizing art works and displays. Encourage the teams to hold regular meetings with minutes and action points – this is good practice for the 'real world', in itself – and to hold each other accountable, in the spirit of working together as a team and trying not to let each other down. This is such a nice opportunity to show off some culture, and if well organized, it can be a truly memorable and enjoyable day.

### 4 CONSIDER YOUR VISITORS

How many students do you expect to be there? How will the students progress around the different displays? Should they follow a certain path or direction, e.g. clockwise? How can you predict and avoid traffic jams, or occasions when crowding will make things difficult to see or interact with? Play out the day on paper, and anticipate issues before they arise.

### 5 MAKE IT INTERACTIVE

Many museums hand out quizzes or treasure hunts, and your International Day might benefit from something similar. Questions could be based on the displays and performances, and could include:

- Finding the meaning of a particular word in a foreign language
- Naming a type of dance, or food, or artwork
- Finding out about a historical figure
- Finding the country's location, neighbors, major rivers, etc.

Consider adding a guest book to each room, for visitors to write their thoughts. Encourage the students to consider interactive elements to their displays: this could include teaching visitors how to do origami, or dance the waltz, or use chopsticks, or sing a national anthem.

One other idea is to give nation-teams a 'special mission' specific to them. I sent the Saudi team in search of a recipe for kimchi, and 'Team Holland' on a mission to learn, and show me, how to mime like a French street artist. These missions could be rewarded with bonus points, or could just be for fun.

### 6 BE POSITIVE

Our policy has been that there is no testing on International Day: the students are working on this purely to highlight their culture, and to enjoy themselves, so it would not be a good time for an exam! Praise your students as much as you like, leaving aside errors or problems, and focusing on their achievements in bringing to others the individuality of their background.

### 7 PRIZES!

The only judging we permit is the giving of prizes. Students and/or teachers could vote on this at the end of the day. Prize categories could include:

- Best overall room
- Best performance
- Best food
- Most interesting display
- Best effort / diligence / the 'Extra Mile' award
- Most Interactive Team

**PLANNING AND CARRYING OUT AN INTERNATIONAL DAY CAN BE A LOT OF WORK, BUT WITH A SOLID TEAM, GOOD MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING, AND ENTHUSIASM, IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE A DAY YOUR STUDENTS WILL NOT FORGET, AS WELL AS A PRICELESS OPPORTUNITY TO BREAK DOWN SOME CULTURAL BARRIERS.**

We've found that, especially when it comes to food, such barriers can be remarkably easy to overcome, leading to lasting friendships and a more open, tolerant world-view.

# 9 Reasons Why Games with Adult Learners are a Must

## WHO SAID GAMES WERE JUST FOR KIDS?

And whoever told you that your adult learners feel games were childish and patronizing is misinformed. It is true that adult learners are more motivated to learn English whatever the reason. It could be they need English for immigration purposes, employment or further education, but it doesn't mean that their time in an English language learning environment should be staid, boring and only following the paths of more traditional methods of teaching. Yes, it is also true that adult learners have more inhibitions than younger learners, often having the fear of making fools out themselves in front of their peers, however, if the trainer finds adult appropriate games that are not 'silly' and have some relevance to their learning then you'll see after a little warming up, your adult learners will literally transform.

Using games is a great way to either teach a point or supplement your lesson plan. Short quick games can also be used with adult learners to 'warm them up' after a long day at the office or carrying out their household duties – in short games are often welcomed by adult learners as they want to relax a little and make the transition from their outside lives to the English language classroom. There are a plethora of benefits when it comes to using games in the English language classroom with adults. They include better mutual group dynamics, reinforced learning, encouraging whole class participation, motivating learners, encouraging active speaking and not to mention games are a whole heap of fun, regardless of your age. One of the most frequent objections an adult learner has with regards to playing such games in their English language class is that they're not doing the serious study they should be. The most important thing to bear in mind with adult learners is that everything needs a purpose, including games – activities without purpose will be viewed as a waste of time. Here are a number of reasons why games can help stimu-

late and encourage learning amongst ESL adult learners.

## 9 REASONS YOU SHOULD USE GAMES WITH YOUR ADULT LEARNERS

### 1 GAMES WARM UP ADULT LEARNERS

Adult learners are very different from younger learners when it comes to learning. It is often the case that adults have been out of school for a long time and are no longer used to studying. Adults also have a lot more on their plates than younger learners and have to juggle a number of different things from housework, to jobs, to family, to finances and it's difficult to find equilibrium between everything. Making the switch from their hectic life to the English language classroom can be daunting at times, unlike younger learners who are accustomed to studying. It's not necessary to spend a lot of time on warm-ups and it depends on how long your actual session is. A one hour lesson wouldn't warrant a 15 minute warm-up, but an hour and half one would.

### 2 GAMES CREATE BETTER CLASS DYNAMICS

When adults join an English language class, they rarely do it for the sheer fun of it, they have a purpose. Each learner will come from a variety of backgrounds with different professions and reasons for wanting to either learn or improve their English language skills. Like any situation where adults are placed together there is going to be uncertainty and wariness when it comes to the other participants in the class – in short, adult learners are not as flexible and as resilient as children and they don't necessarily bond instantaneously. Getting to know you games in the first weeks of the lessons is a great way to break the ice. Additionally, it's also a fantastic way for you to gauge

their levels of English, which in turn will help you to tailor lessons to their needs for their future coursework so they can get the most out of their language learning experience. Games at the beginning of a course will not only help you break barriers and make adult learners feel more at ease, they will also help you set a precedent that games are perfectly acceptable in the English learning environment if they serve a purpose.

### 3 GAMES AID MEMORIZATION

Most adult learners are accustomed to traditional methods of translating vocabulary from their L1 to their L2. However, it has been proven repeatedly, the older a language learner is, the more difficult it is to recall vocabulary. Games are a fun way of practicing, picturing and recalling vocabulary and phrases and it's done with less effort than sitting over a list of covered words trying to remember their translation. Adult learners, although hesitant at first, will soon welcome such games to promote their learning as results can be seen quicker. Adult learners will quickly realize that incorporating fun elements into a lesson will aid memory. If people are taking pleasure in what they're learning, there is a better chance that they will acquire new vocabulary quicker.

### 4 GAMES PROVIDE SATISFACTION AND MOTIVATION

Adults like any other learner need to know they're making progress. They have more extrinsic reasons for learning English, therefore there is more motivation. When adults can clearly see their progress when answering questions correctly under game circumstances they feel that they're moving forward towards their goal and if they're team is losing in a game, then they'll be even more motivated to learn next time – there's never anything wrong with a bit of healthy and fun competition in the ESL classroom.

## 5 GAMES ADD VARIETY

While many traditionalists will argue that adult learners prefer routine lessons and set exercises there is reason to believe otherwise. Predictable lessons become boring and if adult learners cannot see their progress other than in tests they will soon become unmotivated. Different approaches need to be taken in a language classroom to learn correctly and when the same point is revised in a different way there is greater chance of it sticking.

## 6 GAMES ALLOW FOR FREER PRACTICE

Language lessons usually move from controlled exercises to freer exercise. There is definitely a limit as to how many times certain grammatical points and sentence clauses can be repeated. Using games in the ESL classroom will allow for a freer more uncontrolled practice where the learners are able to revise what they have previously done and work towards fluency rather than accuracy.

## 7 GAMES WORK THE BRAIN

In any classroom situation your brain is worked a lot. Learning vocabulary and grammar rules requires a lot of memory and it overworks the logic part of the brain. This part of the brain is used a lot by adult learners in their day to day lives – at work, at home with the kids and so on which can prove extremely tiring for adults who have more responsibilities than just attending a language course. Incorporating games will help work different parts of the brain, easing up on the logical part and therefore reducing stress and fatigue. Incorporating relevant games that use other areas of the brain with skills such as drawing, acting, hand-eye coordination and music will not only take pressure off the adult learners it will be easier to learn English more completely.

## 8 GAMES ENERGIZE

Adult ESL sessions are generally longer than children's lessons typically ranging from 1.5 to 2 hours due to the heavy schedule of the learner outside of the ESL learning environment. It's difficult for adult learners to frequent lessons more due to other commitments therefore sessions are

longer, especially as they have the capacity to focus more than a child. This is not to say that adults do not begin to fade during a lesson, however. Using energizers with adult students can work in the same way as warmers and it's a fun way to break up the monotony of a class. At the end of the day learning a new language is hard, and it's even harder when you're an adult learner. It requires effort and concentration at all times and these must be maintained throughout the length of the lesson which is why short games that last 5 minutes are a good idea to help adult participants sustain interest and energy.

## 9 GAMES ENCOURAGE INTERACTION

It has already been mentioned, however, it's worth mentioning again that adult learners are often more reluctant to communicate and interact with other class members. In some cases, where there's mixed abilities or learners from different nationalities therefore there is more disinclination to engage due to a fear of not being good enough or perhaps the fear of losing face. Games with adults break down these barriers and if chosen and executed wisely, they make the perfect tool to encourage interaction and communication. When adult learners are having fun, they often forget about their hang-ups and communicate without even realizing.

**THERE IS A COMMON MISCONCEPTION AMONGST ADULT LEARNERS THAT LEARNING ENGLISH SHOULD BE SERIOUS AND IF THERE IS HILARITY AND FUN INVOLVED THEN THEY'RE NOT LEARNING.**

Adult learners can benefit a great deal from games and they should not be reserved just for children in the ESL classroom. It is up to the educators to instill the message and to show adults that it is indeed possible to learn English and have fun at the same time. Although they will surely hold their reservations at first, in the end they'll thank you for it!



# 7 Proven Ways to Teach the ABC to Adults

**WHEN IT COMES TO TEACHING ADULT ESL BEGINNERS TEACHERS CAN OFTEN DRAW A BLANK, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE MORE INEXPERIENCED.**

There are many preconceptions that teaching mature learners English is far easier than teaching younger children. There is the idea in place that adults have more motivation to learn whereas young children are more likely to be there because their parents have sent them. Others would argue that because adults are of a mature age it's easier to teach and control the class whereas young children can often be unruly and over zealous. Perhaps this is all true but what about the content? What about teaching the basics?

When we start learning a language, other than the basic greetings, one of the first things we learn is the alphabet. We learn the order of the letters, phonetic sounds of the letters and various words associated to them. Teaching the alphabet is easy to young learners due numerous fun games, songs, pictures and flashcards that can be implemented in the language classroom with the most common one being the ABC song. These methods do not bode well with adults and even though knowing the alphabet is essential in a language, such teaching techniques are deemed inappropriate and juvenile. To many teachers this may be obvious but to others not so much. Teachers often make the mistake of using the same techniques and approaches teaching both adults and younger learners which in turn could lead to detrimental learning. If you take a glance at any lower elementary course book it is clear that there are specific activities that need to be covered. If adult participants feel like they're being treated like children they'll quickly retract thus making the learning process more complicated. When teaching adult learners it's absolutely essential to take the material and modify it so it doesn't appear to be too simplistic and condescending. So, what are some effective ways to

help your ESL adult learners acquire basic knowledge in an age-appropriate way?

## CONSIDER SOME GREAT METHODS TO HELP YOUR ADULT STUDENTS LEARN THE BASICS

### 1 DOING DIAGNOSTICS

The greatest challenge with teaching adult ESL learners in a classroom environment is that you'll have learners of all different levels. You'll have those who are true beginners and those who are false beginners therefore it is necessary to carry out diagnostic tests to determine their actual English literacy level.

Adult learners like to be tested. It's a method that suits them and it appears to be more formal and as adults, they like structure. Additionally, because they're investing both their time and money into learning English they want organization and they want to see results.

Testing their English literacy level could simply be done by having the participants of the class fill out a short form with biographical information. Participants can fill out simple realistic forms which will require them to state their name, address, age, telephone number and so on. Tutors will need to demonstrate this on the board and afterwards they'll be given an idea of what the class knows and doesn't know.

Realistic diagnostic tests to determine their level will motivate adult learners. Filling in forms is a part of everyday adult life and they'll see this as a useful task.

### 2 PRE-TESTING ABC KNOWLEDGE

It's also a good idea to see which letters your learners already know. Instead of using flashcards use some-

thing more adult like to show the class particular letters. Using a projector with a PowerPoint presentation will make adult learners feel more comfortable. After all, this type of technology is commonplace in the workplace and it will make the learning and testing process more realistic.

Randomly project letters onto the screen and have your learners say them to determine their preexisting knowledge.

### 3 WRITING SHEETS TO RECOGNIZE LETTERS

Passing out different sheets with single letters to your adult learners will help them with autonomous learning. With sheets directly in front of them, as opposed to the group chanting you would do with younger learners, you will help the adult participants have more control over their own learning.

As you pass out each paper be sure to repeat the letter as you hand them out. After repeating each letter, continue to repeat the phonetic sound. Don't force your adult learners to chant and repeat after you as most adult learners have more inhibitions than younger learners. Let them repeat at their own free will. After they get used to the new methods they'll then begin to respond and you'll see them mouthing the sounds after you until they become more comfortable in their new learning environment.

### 4 INTRODUCE FLASHCARDS

After the teacher has allowed the learners to mouth and see the words themselves and they feel more comfortable in their knowledge the use of the traditional flashcards can be implemented. Adult learners generally need to feel safer in their environment before they will participate vocally in class especially if this is the first time learning a language.

Without speaking, hold up plain, non-decorated alphabet cards randomly



and prompt the adults to name them through your body language and your smile. After a few rounds of uncertain guessing they'll begin to become more confident and willing to participate which will be evident in their louder more certain voices.

## 5 ALPHABET ASSOCIATION

When associating words with letters to improve alphabet knowledge care also needs to be taken with adult learners. With children this method is easy as there are number of great words and simple words that are relevant to children for example B is for ball, baby, Batman and so on. Adjusting your materials and modifying your lesson content to suit the needs of your adult learners is necessary. It makes the learning more meaningful and in turn they'll be more motivated to learn.

Again PowerPoint presentations can be useful in this scenario. Have a letter projected on the board and with each click show pictures and the word corresponding to the letter in focus.

In order to do this, you need to look at the demographics of the class and have a clear understanding of their purpose for learning English. If it's for business purposes, an example of this could be C is for computer, cartridge, calculator, camera and so on. As your learners grow more confident with saying and pronouncing the words you can just project the picture. Ask them for the phonetic sound of the word and then have them say the word. This will need to be modeled a few times and they'll quickly pick it up.

This particular way of helping your adult learners associate words with letters is also a great way of expanding their vocabulary and because it is all related to their needs there will be more motivation as they'll have more chances to use this language in their everyday situations.

## 6 MIRROR MIRROR...

Language and phonetic acquisition is much more difficult for adult learners after they're used to the sounds of their own mother tongue. Each language differs in sounds and it's often more challenging to get pronunciation right from the onset. Additionally adult learners are shier when

repeating sounds over and over again and can often become frustrated in the fact that they don't pick things up immediately.

Tutors can distribute handheld mirrors throughout the class and have their students examine the movements of their mouths and lips as they sound out the sounds. All teachers should model the sound first and exaggerate it so the participants can clearly see the movement of the mouth as the sound is made. Have the learners repeat these methods and they'll be able to pick up the phonetic sounds of the letters easier as they'll be able to see and control their mouths in front of the mirrors.

Adult learners prefer structure and having rules. While this method does not distinctly have a list of rules it will help them to visually see what it is they're doing right or wrong.

## 7 READ IT...

A great way to continue practicing recognition of letters, individual sounds, and diphthongs in English is to have your participants read. When adults feel like they're making progress and see changes in their L2 abilities, they'll feel like they've achieved part of their goal in their second language acquisition. Be sure to either create your own materials with core words and easy sounds to suit them. Choosing simple children's books is not appropriate in any case of adult learning as it could be seen as insulting, which is why great care needs to be taken when selecting language materials for adults.

## TEACHING OR REVIEWING THE ALPHABET WITH ADULT ESL LEARNERS DOES NEED APPROACHING CAREFULLY.

These are just a few simple and tried methods that will encourage your learners to practice without feeling they're being treated like children. In saying this, after they feel more comfortable in their new learning surroundings more fun activities can be gradually be introduced for review. Be sure to modify all learning materials to suit the needs of the class and always bear in mind you're working with adults not kids.

# Teaching in an Individual Tutoring Setting: Keeping Them Awake

## TEACHING IN AN INDIVIDUAL, ONE-ON-ONE SETTING IN SOME WAYS SOUNDS IDEAL.

The student has the full attention of the instructor, focus on her specific problems, and no distractions from peers. However, any instructor who has taught one-on-one can tell you that individualized instruction presents its own unique challenges. Fortunately, those challenges can be addressed with planning on the part of the instructor and turned into advantages.

## DISADVANTAGES OF ONE-ON-ONE INSTRUCTION

### 1 LACK OF INTERACTION

Language learning, and language use in general, is based on interaction with others. In a regular-sized classroom, the instructor has the option of setting up a number of opportunities for interaction: small groups of three to five students, pair work, and surveys, in which the entire all of the classmates interact with each other. In one-on-one instruction, however, these opportunities are obviously reduced to student-teacher interaction, which can grow monotonous over the course of a two-hour block.

### 2 LACK OF COMMITMENT

In a traditional-sized class, students are often kept coming to class because they feel a sense of obligation: their help is needed on their group project, for example, or they are completing some exercise with a partner. Or they may simply want to see their classmates because of relationships that have formed over the course of a term. In one-on-one instruction, however, there is only the instructor depending on the student (and of course the instructor doesn't really depend on the student), so that sense of obligation for showing up is diminished. It is easier to just reschedule class when you don't feel like going if you are the only student in that class. The class is mostly according to the student's own sched-

ule, and therefore there is an informal quality to the class that can create less commitment.

### 3 LACK OF FOCUS

Along with the cavalier attitude toward the schedule that the informal nature of one-on-one instruction brings is also a lack of focus to the instruction. In a more traditional class, there is a set curriculum: the students and the instructor both know that they are there to teach and learn intermediate grammar skills for ESL, for example. In a one-on-one class setting, however, things are not nearly so clear-cut, and for the teacher inexperienced with one-on-one instruction, this can create a situation in which instruction rapidly disintegrates to "Well, what do you think we should to study today?" Generally, of course, the student doesn't know, having reasonably expected the teacher to have figured that out.

Fortunately, using some basic principles of one-on-one instruction, each one of these disadvantages can be turned into advantages.

## ADVANTAGES OF ONE-ON-ONE INSTRUCTION

### 1 INCREASED INTERACTION WITH THE INSTRUCTOR

A smaller class size does mean more one-on-one attention to the student's specific needs. In a large class, it may take two weeks or more to even learn each student's name. In a one-on-one class setting, however, at two weeks into the class, the instructor not only knows the student's name, but also what his goals are professionally and academically, what his strengths and weaknesses are as a learner, his preferred learning modalities (e.g., visual or auditory), what skills he really needs to build in English, such as pronunciation or writing, and what his needs in English learning are: academic writing, for example, or conversation for social purposes. In addition, the instructor will have picked up on some personal infor-

mation, such as significant life experiences and favorite activities. The term might very well be over in a regular-sized classroom before the instructor learns this information about even one student. Knowing more about the student — and of course, letting the student know you as an individual — increases the student-teacher bond and makes the student less likely to want to miss class. And of course knowing more about your student helps in tailoring instruction to his specific skills level and learning needs.

### 2 BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STUDENT

Again, the teacher and student are more able to get to know each other in a one-on-one setting than in a traditional class. This allows the teacher to build the relationship with the student and establish a certain amount of trust. In a larger class, the individual student can feel alienated from the instructor and other students, and this is particularly problematic in a language class, especially for shy students, who already fear being judged by others. In a one-on-one situation, however, the student is more likely to build trust with the teacher that will allow her to take the risks necessary to advance in language learning — not fearing other students will laugh at her pronunciation, for example, or that the teacher will come down hard on her for using the wrong word ending.

### 3 FOCUS ON STUDENT NEEDS AND INCREASED MOTIVATION

One major reason students stop coming to ESL class is that the class is simply not meeting their needs, and adult students "vote with their feet" — that is, their displeasure is expressed by leaving. It's not always the teacher's fault, of course — she is working with an established curriculum that is antiquated, focused on conjugating verbs, when students really need to learn how to use every day conversation, for example, or most of the students are at

an advanced level and need vocabulary and reading skills for professional purposes while the curriculum is based everyday “survival” English. This problem of mismatch is avoided in one-on-one instruction as the curriculum is built for the needs of the specific student, creating more motivation to keep coming to class.

## **4 ABILITY TO SHIFT GEARS AND FOCUS FROM WHAT ISN'T WORKING TO WHAT DOES.**

Another difficulty with teaching a regular-sized class is that when the teacher does realize the curriculum is not matched to student need, it is often too late to fix: the syllabus has been designed, the books and materials ordered, and the students placed in that class, so adjusting the course is very difficult, and the teacher just slogs on the best she can with the existing curriculum. However, in one-on-one instruction, making adjustments to the curriculum is easy: the teacher can simply note if the material is too easy or difficult for the student, for example, and fine-tune the level accordingly for the next session. Or the teacher can ask the student after each session what she thought of the class and if it is meeting her needs: students generally are able to answer this, and again, the teacher can make adjustments accordingly.

**SO WHILE IT MAY SEEM AT FIRST THAT ONE-ON-ONE INSTRUCTION HAS NONE OF THE ADVANTAGES OF THE REGULAR CLASSROOM AS WELL AS MANY DIFFICULTIES OF ITS OWN, THOSE DISADVANTAGES CAN BE, THROUGH CAREFUL PLANNING FROM THE TEACHER AND CLEAR COMMUNICATION WITH THE STUDENTS, TRANSFORMED INTO THE UNIQUE BENEFITS OF INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION.**

# Teaching One-on-One: A Teacher's Dream of Individualizing

**MANY INSTRUCTORS, WHEN APPROACHED ABOUT TEACHING IN A ONE-ON-ONE SETTING, MAY THINK FIRST OF THE NEGATIVES: THE ISOLATION FROM COLLEAGUES, THE LACK OF A STANDARD CURRICULUM, AND THE DEARTH OF MATERIALS AND GENERAL SUPPORT.**

Often such “classes” are even removed from a school setting, taking place at the student’s home or work place. However, what may appear to be its many drawbacks can actually be turned into a one-on-one instructional situation’s advantages. An instructor in a one-on-one situation has the unique possibility to schedule and meeting place flexibly, individualize instruction, and build her own curriculum based on student need.

## **EXPLOITING THE ADVANTAGES OF ONE-ON-ONE INSTRUCTION**

### **1 FLEXIBILITY IN MEETING TIME AND PLACE.**

In one-on-one instruction, student and instructor have the option of meeting at a mutually convenient time and therefore are less distracted by other obligations and can focus on the class. In addition, they don’t have to meet at the campus: they can also meet at the student’s home, or workplace, or a café. Classrooms are notoriously lacking in context, which means instructors are constantly trying to make up for this lack through visuals like pictures and video, music, taped lectures and discussions, and the like. However, a café has a ready-made context through vocabulary and conversations related to eating, as well as the simple conversations related to socializing that occur between customers and staff on a busy day, language in its natural context. In addition, meeting in the student’s workplace creates an opportunity for the acquisition of technical and professional vocabulary: even meeting in the student’s or instructor’s home can provide opportunities for learning the language for appliances,

for example, that the student has not yet learned in English. So flexibility of both meeting time and place is one of the unique advantages of one-on-one instruction.

### **2 DESIGNING INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION.**

An important advantage to individualized instruction is of course tailoring the class to student need. At the beginning of each term with a new student, I administer both a short skills diagnostic, to determine how much English the student already knows, as well as a needs assessment, to find out what the student wants to learn. These instruments will inform me what to teach the student and at what level, and for what situation student most wants to learn English, such as English speaking skills for the workplace. From these two tools, I can build course materials that target the individual student’s needs. This would not be possible in a traditional pre-packaged course. So, for example, if I determine that my student this term is at the low intermediate level and is mostly interested in learning vocabulary and speaking skills for business and professional purposes, I already have an idea of how I’m going to structure the course around conversation and vocabulary for the workplace, supplemented with pronunciation practice. I will also have an idea from the initial skills and needs assessment which kind of textbook and materials to use.

### **3 FLEXIBILITY IN CONTINUED TAILORING OF INSTRUCTION.**

In a typical ESL class of thirty students, the instructor may find himself losing half the class with any given activity: if it’s a speaking and listening activity, for example, he might find those students who are there for reading and writing skills sitting back and looking bored, while if he introduces a short academic text, the students who are there for more social conversation will be lost. This is not the instructor’s fault

-- it is the very nature of the diversity of an ESL class with students there for a variety of needs. In a one-on-one situation, however, the instructor can focus on the needs specific to the single student, such as improved pronunciation and academic vocabulary, and skim over the parts of the text that don’t address those skills — or better yet, skip the text and design activities specific to the student’s needs.

### **4 TRYING OUT NEW MATERIAL.**

If you have a new textbook you’d love to use, but aren’t sure where to use it, the one-on-one session might just be the place for you to try it out. For example, I just tried a textbook structured around a series of episodes from radio talk shows on controversial issues such as capital punishment. The student response to the material was positive, as is almost always the case with more innovative material, as students have grown used to the dry rote conversations and grammar instruction that is more typical of an ESL class.

### **5 DEVELOPING OWN CURRICULUM.**

Have a book you’re dying to write? Most teachers probably do! This is your chance to write your own materials to meet student need. For example, I have a particular interest in teaching idiomatic phrases, such as “on the other hand” and “in my opinion” that is so common in every day speech as well as informal and formal writing -- a lot of language is actually made up of these “ready-made” phrases. However, not much attention is paid to these phrases and idioms in traditional ESL classes. The one-on-one session, then, is a unique opportunity to develop and experiment with more nontraditional curricula, which students nearly always respond positively to. Having received a positive response, the instructor can continue developing materials over the term, which can later be compiled into a



book form for future classes or even possible publication.

## **6 INNOVATIVE AND VARIED ACTIVITIES.**

There actually are a lot of inventive activities out there for ESL students, such as the use kazoos, little flute-like instruments that the student can talk into and hear her voice transformed into “music,” as the kazoo, a wind instrument, emphasizes speech pitch patterns when spoken into. This makes it an ideal instrument to teach intonation. The trouble is the logistics of first finding, then purchasing, kazoos for thirty students, then distributing them and showing how they are used, and then trying to collect and recycle them. The instructor begins to do a quick cost-benefit analysis of the value of such an activity, no matter how inventive, given all of the constraints. However, there is little difficulty in providing for and then teaching the use of a kazoo to one student. Because the class is so small, one-on-one instruction is an ideal place to try out those new activities you’d like to but were afraid to. If the activity doesn’t go so well, the teacher just has one disappointed or confused student to placate rather than an entire class of thirty. And if the activity does go well, the instructor can then put it in her repertoire of activities to perhaps use in a larger setting.

### **AT FIRST GLANCE, ONE-ON-ONE INSTRUCTION SEEMS TO HAVE MORE POTENTIAL PITFALLS THAN BENEFITS, SUCH AS THE LACK OF MATERIALS AND SUPPORT.**

However, if addressed correctly, individualized instruction also presents unique opportunities for flexibility and creativity in scheduling and curriculum.

# 12 Dos and Don'ts for the One-on-One ESL Tutor

## ARE YOU TUTORING ESL STUDENTS TO PASS THEIR ENGLISH COURSES?

Tutoring students who are taking English for course credit can be a meaningful experience, but it can also put us English language professionals in compromising ethical situations. If you are tutoring, you have probably been asked to complete homework, write essays, and possibly even take tests for students that are also your clients. Your internal ethical bells start ringing, but where do you draw the line? Here are some essential dos and don'ts for the one-on-one ESL tutor.

## CONSIDER THESE TIPS TEACHING PRIVATE STUDENTS

### 1 SHOULD I DO THEIR HOMEWORK?

If you have never tutored, you will definitely say no immediately. If you do tutor, you have probably done homework in certain instances. Should you? Probably not. The best answer:

- Do: Mimic the homework in an alternative exercise and practice that first.
- Do: Tell them where they have incorrect answers and ask them to retry until they get the concept right.
- Don't: Do it for them without explanation!

### 2 SHOULD I BAIL THEM OUT?

Your student ditched her high school class to go swimming with her boyfriend and then comes to you, pays you, and asks you to teach the lesson to her so she can complete her homework.

- Do: She's paying you to teach her something, not to judge her irresponsibility. At least she still wants to learn!
- Don't: Do it every week or you are feeding negative behavior.

### 3 SHOULD I EDIT THEIR ESSAYS?

Your student wants you to revise his 300 word essay due the next day.

- Do: Read it and give general advice about where it could be stronger and identify his grammar trouble spots for which to scan.
- Don't: Correct the English and turn it into something only a native could have written!
- Don't: Let him con you into writing the whole thing for him!

### 4 SHOULD I ACCEPT THEIR GIFTS?

They like you and bring you things, or their family invites you to dinner.

- Do: Accept or go to dinner if it is culturally appropriate where you are teaching! Many cultures view this type of gift giving as a part of your pay. Ask another teacher friend if he accepts gifts.
- Don't: Accept gifts in exchange for completing tasks for which you are uncomfortable (like writing their essays).

### 5 SHOULD I TEACH ONE-ON-ONE WITH THE OPPOSITE SEX?

This question might be bizarre for a first worlder that is not living abroad, or for a man, or maybe not if you have ever worked with teenagers. If we are honest though, we should admit that it can be uncomfortable in any culture to work one-on-one and can also lead to problems.

- Do: Set boundaries, such as teaching in a public place or keeping the door to the outside open.
- Don't: Give lessons to people of the opposite sex in a closed space alone!
- Don't: Ever take on a student that does not seem serious about learning.

### 6 SHOULD I GIVE THEM MY PERSONAL CONTACT INFORMATION?

- Don't! Or only if you have to because your personal information is the same as your work. This can only lead to trouble. Even if you are teaching abroad, buy two cell phone chips – one for work, and one for play.

### 7 SHOULD I TEACH IN MY HOME?

If your home is your office.

- Do: Set up a separate space away from your living environment to host students, even if it means you have an outdoor classroom space!
- Do: Establish set hours for visits.
- Don't: Have class on your couch or at your kitchen table. This is unprofessional and degrades the seriousness of your lessons. Plus it is an invasion of your personal space.

### 8 SHOULD I MAKE THEM PRACTICE CONVERSATION?

Your student only wants to practice memorizing irregular verb tenses to pass his exam, but his pronunciation is terrible.

- Don't: Force them to learn what they are not interested in learning. Only teach conversation and correct their pronunciation if they give you permission.

### 9 SHOULD I SPEAK THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE?

You live in Colombia and speak Spanish fluently.

- Do: Use the first language to explain grammar and tricky concepts, especially if they are trying to pass a course and have specific questions.
- Don't: Speak all of the time in

Spanish or use it to discuss personal details about your lives! Use those moments as opportunities to engage the student in English conversation.

## STUDENT'S REQUESTS OR FROM A WEIRD WORKING SITUATION, LISTEN!

Questioning what is appropriate is a critical function of any teacher, even if you are informally tutoring.

## 10 SHOULD I EXPLAIN THE RIGHT ANSWER OR THE ONE THAT WILL GIVE THE MOST POINTS?

Your student's teacher is wrong, but you know what answer she is looking for.

- Do: Explain the right answer first, and then explain that the teacher might be looking for a different answer that is a common ESL error. You might end up having a discussion about a difficult grammar concept that even confuses teachers!

## 11 SHOULD I CRITICIZE THEIR ENGLISH COURSE?

Your student's course is just awful, cramming memorization of vocabulary into bad writing exercises. It is also evident that the teacher has no idea how to teach ESL and is why your student needs a tutor.

- Do: Keep it positive! Just help your student learn where her class is failing her.
- Don't: Get negative about how awful her course seems. You can commiserate with her suffering to form a bond, but keep it humorous and lighthearted.

## 12 SHOULD I TEACH THEM NEW THINGS?

You have this eager mind and you want to fill it! Isn't that why we are teachers?

- Don't: Teach a bunch of new concepts that you find interesting, even if your student wants to learn them. You will distract her from her end goal of passing her course.
- Do: Use her course material to expand ideas and help her make connections about their subject matter to other English concepts. This develops cognitive skills and infuses ESL learning.

## IF YOUR ETHICAL BELLS ARE RINGING FROM YOUR TUTORING

# How Do I Even Do That? Principles of Teaching ESL Online

**THE WORLD IS IN THE MIDST OF A TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION THE LIKES OF WHICH IT HASN'T BEEN SEEN SINCE THE RENAISSANCE: THE AMOUNT OF ELECTRONIC INNOVATION JUST OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS IN TERMS OF DEVICES AND SOCIAL NETWORKING IS OVERWHELMING.**

Terms like gps, the cloud, and app have become part of our everyday vocabulary. A year ago, I couldn't operate a smart phone, gps system, or use an e-reader -- those are skills I possess now. In addition, five years ago I probably wouldn't have considered teaching an online class -- today I consider myself proficient at online teaching. Teaching online may seem uniquely suited to some classes: for example, I teach fiction writing classes to adults on a website devoted to writing and responding to it -- the students are motivated and self-directed learners because they have chosen the course, and writing is a subject that is easy to assess and discuss in an online setting.

But what about classes that seem by nature less suited for an online setting? How does one even begin teaching ESL online, or should the instructor not even try and say "no" to the class in an at face value reasonable belief that the teacher just can't do it, and students won't be served?

However, there actually is a rationale for teaching ESL online, and there are some basic principles to create a successful online ESL class.

## **RATIONALE FOR TEACHING ONLINE ESL CLASSES**

There are actually a few defensible reasons for online classes, beyond the obvious financial one (i.e., forty students can be crammed into an online class at much less cost to the school than a traditional face-to-face class because there is no facility nor support staff like custodians to pay for.) However, there are positive ped-

agogical reasons, rather than financial, for online instruction that apply to ESL classes as well as to classes in other fields.

## **1 ACCESSIBILITY TO STUDENTS**

All students generally, ESL students specifically, have limitations in their lives that prevent attending traditional classes — a major reason ESL students have trouble progressing in English. There are geographic, transportation, work, and childcare limitations. Online classes remove some of these barriers: students don't need to travel to a campus or hire a sitter, for example, to attend an online class. It is for this reason, actually, that technology has been seen as somewhat of a social leveler — removing some of the barriers to access to information and education, for example, that have traditionally separated social classes.

## **2 MORE FOCUS**

Because students attend class at their own convenience, usually, they are more focused on the work. They aren't worried about a meeting they have to make right after class or what their children might be doing at home. More focus is then possible on the actual course content and students aren't as distracted when posting to a discussion board or completing a course reading because they are accessing the class at their own convenience and can focus on the material.

## **3 FEWER CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS**

It is, believe it or not, possible to be disruptive and a troublemaker in an online environment as well as a face-to-face one, but it is more difficult. If a student begins rambling off topic about the movie she just saw that weekend, for example, in a face-to-face environment the instructor has little choice than to bring the discussion to a screeching halt and deal with

that student. In an online live chat, however, the instructor can choose to ignore the comments (sometimes pretending, as I like to, that I didn't see them until later because of the "lag time" in responding in online chats, if two participants were typing at the same time.) The instructor can then refocus the discussion on the class topic.

## **4 MORE AND VARIED PARTICIPATION**

Often the most frequent participants in a traditional class discussion are not the most insightful -- they are simply the most extraverted and capable of quick responses and extemporaneous speech. More introverted students, however, actually have been shown to thrive in an online environment because they need time to compose their thoughts, which is possible when posting to an asynchronous (out of real time) discussion thread. Often these more introverted students, who might rarely speak in class, offer very thoughtful comments online.

## **5 LIVE CHATS OFFER THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS**

Finally, live chats, in which the students and instructor meet in "real time" at a designated hour in a chat room, can offer the best of both worlds as the discussions have more context, all participants being present at the same time, as well as more focused: again, they are all attending at a pre-selected time convenient for everyone and are less distracted.

So these are some of the advantages of online instruction. There are also some definite principles for keeping instruction running smoothly and avoiding some of the pitfalls that can exist in the online world.

## **PRINCIPLES FOR TEACHING ONLINE ESL CLASSES**



## 1 CLARITY

Expectations, due dates, objectives should be clearly establish the first week. Because the context is reduced and teacher and students are not in the same room at the same time, there is more chance for miscommunication. This can be addressed through clear deadlines, assignment directions, and due dates posted prominently on the site, in several places, and sent out in email messages to students as well, if possible. If student confusion persists into the second week, step up efforts to clarify through live chats, and if possible, that are audio-enhanced, and which students almost always find more clear and personal.

## 2 CONTACT

Maintaining constant contact with students is of utmost importance because students and teacher don't see each other informally in the halls between classes, where students can stop the instructor with a quick question. Checking into the course site regularly — daily, if possible — and seeing if there are questions posted, responding quickly to email, calling students if necessary, turning around student papers quickly, and taking active part in the threaded discussions all show students that you are serious about the course and their individual progress.

## 3 PROVIDE WORTHWHILE CONTENT

Thoughtful posts, related links to websites and articles, and posting your own written “lectures” on the course all demonstrate to the student that you are an authority on the course topic who is concerned about their progress — a more difficult task in an online setting as students do not see you regularly and “live,” so they have less sense of you as a professional. Providing worthwhile content demonstrates your seriousness and professionalism.

## 4 ENCOURAGE OR REQUIRE STUDENT INTERACTION

As in traditional classes, students often learn the most from each other because they are at the same developmental level and have more understanding of each other's needs.

Require students to post to a weekly topic at length on course material and then to respond to at least one other student's posts. Students quickly develop collegial relationships this way and may even arrange to meet outside the class setting: for example, I have arranged to meet in person both students and classmates with whom I'd developed relationships in online writing classes. Often these relationships might actually be more authentic and less superficial than face-to-face ones as a lot of the idle conversation that occupies most of our face-to-face interactions is stripped away in an online environment. And again, it has been shown that online interaction like this is actually more effective for ESL and/or introverted students as they have more time to actually compose a response rather than speaking extemporaneously, which is more difficult for them.

## 5 SET UP CHATS AND IF POSSIBLE AUDIO OR WEBCAM ENHANCED CHATS

It is through these chats that students gain a sense of the instructor as a person: many students have mentioned to me the value of “attaching a voice to a name.” In addition, it is also often easier to clarify course expectations in audio/video enhanced chats as the context is not so reduced as in discussion boards because misconceptions can be cleared up at once.

### AT FIRST BLUSH, TEACHING AN ONLINE ESL CLASS CAN SEEM A DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE TASK.

However, by establishing clear expectations, maintaining contact, and providing worthwhile content, the instructor can turn the possible pitfalls of online instruction into positives.

# Teaching ESL Online: Pros (There Actually are Some) And Cons

**GIVEN THAT WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF A HUGE SHIFT IN SOCIETY, ONE BASED MORE ON ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION THAN FACE-TO-FACE, THE AVERAGE TEACHER WILL PROBABLY BE ASKED TO TEACH AN ONLINE CLASS AT SOME TIME.**

It may be the teacher's natural impulse to respond with a resounding "no." After all, teachers usually go into the field mostly for the interaction with students. When I began teaching online several years ago, I could only see the negative: the distance from students, the not being able to attach names to faces, the lack of clarity, the difficulty or impossibility of establishing any kind of classroom "presence" or individuality of instruction. Indeed, these all are potential problems with teaching online. However, with work and planning each of these problems can be addressed and in so doing discover the unique benefits of online instruction.

## DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE INSTRUCTION

### 1 LACK OF CLARITY

The further something is removed from reality, from "virtuality," the more potential there is for communication gaps and misunderstanding to occur. It's well known, for example, that telephone conversations are less clear by nature than face-to-face communication because the parties are not in the same place and cannot see facial expressions and so forth for additional clarification and input. Computer communication is even one step further from reality in that there is not even a voice often involved, just the printed word, and also participants are usually removed from each other in time as well as place. It's not uncommon for the first two weeks of a course for students to be confused as to objectives and expectations of the course as misunderstandings usually can't be cleared up on the spot as they would in a traditional class.

### 2 LACK OF INTERACTION

There is also the real possibility of lack of interaction in an online course. If participants only sign on to the site once or twice a week, the ability of establishing a connection or getting to "know" any of the other faceless names in the course is greatly diminished, as it would be in an onsite class if a student only showed up once a week, coming late and leaving early (or coming at a different time than everyone else), and never interacting with anyone else.

### 3 LACK OF CUSTOMIZATION OF CURRICULUM

Often online classes come as "standard" packages, with all assignments, readings, and "lectures" (in written form) already determined. What then is there left for the instructor to do? How does she establish any kind of presence in these classrooms? How does she individualize instruction for individual student and specific class need?

There are, fortunately, methods to address these negative aspects of online instruction, and in doing so, actually turn them into positives.

## POSITIVES OF ONLINE INSTRUCTION

### 1 INCREASED CLARITY

Put it in writing. Again and again. And then give it to them orally. And live.

Spend the first week of class clarifying expectations. Put them in the syllabus, in announcements, email them to students. Set up a live online chat, if possible, and answer questions. Some instructors are even able to videotape themselves in a welcome-to-the-course introduction and post it on the site. All of this can make expectations actually more clear than just being told once, and "on the fly," in a face-to-face class situation because the objectives

and standards of the course have been given to students repeatedly and in multiple modalities.

### 2 BUILD IN OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION

Make use of multiple means for students to interact with each other and with you, the instructor. Set up topics on discussion threads, requiring students to respond at length to both the topic and each other, set up live chats for students to pose questions on course issues, and take advantage of any other programs available that further enhance discussions with audio and video. By the end of the course, with all the opportunities to get to know each other and interact professionally, students have often formed a community and feel they know each other in a way that wouldn't have occurred in a more traditional setting. The communication can actually be more intense in an online setting than in a traditional onsite one as it is more focused. Students are generally attending at their own time or at least at a preferred time, in the case of live chats, with their classmates and instructor, so they are less distracted -- they are not speaking extemporaneously on a topic they know little about, as is often the case in traditional class discussions, but rather have had some time to think about the question and their responses, and they are not sitting passively listening to lectures but are able to interact with them through blog posts, for example. So in summary, the communication is more intense often in an online situation because outside distractions are blocked and students tend to be more focused on the topic and each other. Students are often trading contact information by course end in a way that they wouldn't, normally in a traditional class.

### 3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR CUSTOMIZATION

The online world remains in some ways the "Wild West," vast expanses of unexplored and unsupervised fron-

tier, and this, while presenting challenges, also presents unique opportunities: the instructor can customize and create and try out materials and instructional methods that would not necessarily have been possible in a traditional structured onsite environment. I've written articles and posted them, for example, on course topics, and set up student reader response groups that I would not have been able to try out in one of my onsite classes, given the limitations of course design as well as limitations on student and teacher schedules.

## **4 REMOVAL OF BARRIERS**

Students in my online writing classes, for example, attend from all parts of the English-speaking world, from California to England to the New Zealand, and are able to attend class together because the internet has in some ways removed time and space limits. Learning people's perspectives from these different parts of the world would not have been possible in a traditional onsite class in Sacramento, California, where I normally teach — and is made possible through onsite chats and discussions.

### **THE EXPANSE OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB REMAINS IN SOME INSTANCES UNEXPLORED TERRITORY: FRIGHTENING AND FULL OF PITFALLS.**

However, through carefully planned exploration and innovation, the pitfalls can be navigated and transformed into a paradise of original instruction.

# Engaging Lessons: 5 Techniques to Change Your Online Lessons

## WHO DOESN'T LOVE TECHNOLOGY?

It's safe to say it has made our lives much easier, at least for those who know how to use it and take advantage of it. In the case of learning for instance, the use of technology has opened up a whole new world. Students now have access to all kinds of material and to the lessons themselves through their computers. Online lessons are becoming an ever so popular way to learn and although this is great for teachers, it is also a challenge since teaching on line requires a different set of skills. As the saying goes, "where there is a will there is a way" and believe me, there is more than one way to make your virtual lessons a success.

## USE THE FOLLOWING IDEAS TO IMPROVE YOUR ONLINE LESSONS

### 1 LET THEM SEE IT

In face to face lessons, students have more tangibles, more things to see and touch. There are books, whiteboards, cards, TVs and more. The use of tangible material in the classroom keeps students focused on what is at hand. Many teachers believe that in virtual lessons the use of a book is enough to solve this issue but, simply having your student follow along in a book will not give them the variety of visual material they may need to feel stimulated. There are other things you can do that will have a similar effect such as introducing digital material. Sharing worksheets, pictures, illustrations, videos and audio, among many other things will keep them busy and motivated. Also make sure to write down all corrections you make and to share them with the student, that way they can have a visual record of what needs to be improved.

### 2 IT'S NOT ONLY WHAT YOU SAY BUT HOW YOU SAY IT

Yet another challenge in online lessons is that even when using cam-

eras, students often have difficulties seeing the teacher clearly during online lessons. The issue here is that teachers of English typically rely on body language when teaching. It is one of our biggest assets in the classroom. Although live video image is always an option, very often there are delays in the transmission of sound and image which may lead to problems in the lessons themselves. Students might get distracted and that might affect the whole learning process. So what can we do? The best answer is, camera or no camera, use your voice as your primary tool. After all, body language may not be an option. Change your tone of voice during the lesson, speak faster then slower, speak energetically.

### 3 LET THEM DO IT

As many of you know, people in general learn by doing. Tasks and activities used in the learning process help learners retain content. For this reason, I recommended you use lots of tasks in each lesson. Questions are great too and will certainly keep them on the edge of their seat since they promote critical thinking skills. This doesn't only apply to online lessons but lessons in general. With online lessons the added bonus is that by keeping them busy they won't have time to get distracted.

### 4 LET THEM KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

I'm sure you all agree that in teaching, planning is everything. Teachers have to know in advance what they are going to cover in each lesson in order to be prepared. Well, let me tell you, for students it's not all that different. They should also know what will be covered at the beginning of each lesson. Otherwise, since they can't see all the material you'll be using in addition to the book or program you have chosen, they might get the feeling that everything is "up in the air". By setting clear objectives, they'll understand what the purpose of that lesson is.

So, make a checklist: tell them what they will be able to "do" by the end of that lesson. This will help them realize what they are achieving and how this achievement will help them in real life. Remember, language goals are always related to real life needs.

### 5 MAKE THEM FEEL COMFORTABLE

Why do students choose online lessons over face to face lessons? Maybe they have very little time to reach other locations to take their lessons or maybe they live and /or work in very remote locations and it is the only choice. The point is, it isn't always because they want to, sometimes it's because they have to. Not everyone feels comfortable learning with technology -- not seeing the teacher in person can make many feel insecure. Keep in mind that teachers have a social role in the teaching/learning process. It is important for teachers to provide a nurturing and friendly environment where they can communicate and provide feedback. Ask them how they feel, check to see if they are learning everything as they should, perhaps you can use a task to make sure.

**IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH TO BE A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE TEACHER, JUST MAKE SURE TO BE ORGANIZED AND PUT YOUR HEART AND MIND TO IT!**



# Teaching on Skype®: Essential Guide of Dos and Don'ts

**OUTSOURCING ESL/EFL HAS BECOME EXTREMELY POPULAR INTERNATIONALLY, AND MANY ESL TEACHERS, ESPECIALLY NATIVE SPEAKERS THAT WANT TO WORK FROM HOME, ARE FINDING IT LUCRATIVE TO MAKE A MOVE TO SKYPE® LESSONS.**

How do we prepare ourselves to teach over the computer though, even with video? Whether you are planning on teaching one-on-one or in groups, here are some essential “dos and don'ts” for teaching online.

**DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THESE ESSENTIAL STEPS WHILE TEACHING BY SKYPE®**

## 1 SET YOUR SCENE

**DO:**

- Make sure you choose a quiet place for your class and always use the same place. Much like a classroom, students will learn better if you keep the environment as constant as possible. A one-color background wall in a learning stimulating color like red or yellow is a good place. The setting should be free from distractions and background noises. Put your Skype® status on unavailable and only talk to the student.
- Realize that setting also includes your personal appearance, as you, the teacher, are the star of the setting! Even though you are at home, take your pajamas off, comb your hair, and even put makeup on if you would do so for the classroom.

**DON'T:**

- Answer incoming calls or the door or emails during your call! This is a classroom -- treat it like one.
- Look too different from class to class or move your classroom around.
- Eat or drink while teaching, or chew gum.

## 2 HAVE YOUR TECHNOLOGY READY

**DO:**

- Test your microphone and speakers five minutes before the call.
- Have your documents ready that you want to share open beforehand on the computer.
- Have a back-up plan if something goes wrong with your technology – a cell phone online to call your student, for example.

**DON'T:**

- Put papers or learning materials up to the camera. Odds are they will not be relayed well over the connection and will detract from learning. Send things via document share instead.
- Wait until the last minute to be available before a class.

## 3 PREPARE YOUR CLASS

**DO:**

- Design learning objectives for each class and post them immediately as a message or on your first slide to teach. Even if it is a conversation class, you want to establish the session as a classroom environment.
- Use PowerPoint to teach. You can prepare slides beforehand for what you want to teach and do a mini presentation for your student or for your class. To access, go to “share screen” under the call tab. This is a great tool for all of your teaching materials! It is good to keep presentation sessions short, to 15 minutes or so, because you will not be able to see your students and their reactions. Have regular check for learning breaks where you go back to video. For groups you can have check for learnings in the messenger application. Ask questions and then have them message back answers because they cannot all talk at the same time. Then discuss.

- For conversation class, message questions as you speak and have them type and respond verbally. This is a great tool to integrate writing and speaking together, and to also involve all in a group class.
- Have students complete short assignments/worksheets during class via share documents. This can be especially helpful if you have a large group: you can divide half to work on an assignment for the first part of class and then switch the groups to give more speaking time and attention to students. Sharing documents is a great tool for testing as well.

**DON'T:**

- Talk for too long without getting feedback from students. Interaction is important to check for learning and understanding.
- Treat your class as something casual. You are using a technological tool that has typically been used for casual purposes, but you need to apply it in a professional way. It is not an excuse to not prepare materials for your students. Make sure you have learning objectives.

## 4 DRAW BOUNDARIES

**DO:**

- Make yourself available for questions and help outside of class. Encourage students to find you during set “office hours” to message questions or call.
- Be personable but not too casual with students. They need to view it as a professional class. You can accomplish this by using a set time, like the first five minutes of class, for asking personal questions about their families, work, or school. Be strict about how much time you spend on this portion of class!

**DON'T:**

- Be available all of the time for students. Be strict that you are

available for set hours or appointments one or two days a week, or not at all! You may use Skype® in your personal life and that is your right to keep it a private recreational tool.

- Spend the entire class gossiping or talking about personal issues. Your students are probably very interesting and have global experiences that you want to know about, but keep the conversation structured within learning objectives!

**TECHNOLOGY HAS EMPOWERED US AS TEACHERS TO MAKE QUALITY ESL/EFL EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO ALL WHO WANT TO LEARN GLOBALLY AND HAVE A COMPUTER OR SMARTPHONE AVAILABLE TO THEM.**

Skype® is a great interface because it is accessible and easy to use for even those who are less than technologically savvy. Make sure however, that you treat your Skype® teaching as classes and not as informal chat sessions, prepare your lessons and technology beforehand, and stay professional. If you follow those guidelines, you can realize the flexibility of working from where and when you want while still doing what you love!

# Teaching Remotely: Use These 7 Tips for Teaching by Skype

**WITH THE BUSY LIVES PEOPLE LEAD TODAY MORE AND MORE STUDENTS ARE CHOOSING TO STUDY REMOTELY BY HAVING THEIR LESSONS OVER SKYPE.**

Teaching and learning using this method is undeniably convenient for both student and teacher. Busy professionals can learn without leaving their desk, students can study with a native speaker from wherever they live in the world and teachers can work in the comfort of their own home. Teaching in this way requires clear guidelines and good preparation and organisation.

**USE THESE TIPS TO INSTRUCT OVER SKYPE SUCCESSFULLY**

## 1 GOOD EQUIPMENT

It's important that you have good equipment. Although it's not essential it's advisable to have headphones with an attached microphone. You will hear your students much more clearly than by just using your computer's speakers. If possible you should also ask students to use headphones. You should also use a Webcam and ask your students to do the same. It is possible to teach without one but it is a far more enjoyable and effective process if you and your student can see each other.

## 2 TIMETABLING

You need to be strict about class times and stick to them. Time Zones may need to be considered and very clear instructions need to be given to the student so that they are clear about the timing of classes. Regular slots are best as then everyone knows where they are but with flexibility for necessary changes. It is very important to have clear rules about start times. Having a five to ten minute no show policy is important. If the student doesn't connect within the time agreed they lose the lesson and their payment. You also need to time your lessons well to fit into the time

slot. Also a clear cancellation policy is necessary to assure you have time to re-schedule lessons.

## 3 PAYMENT

Payment needs to be made before the lesson as otherwise you could find yourself sitting around waiting for students to connect. The best method is to set up a PayPal account and ask the student to pay before the start time. If you set up an alert you will know they have paid and that you can go ahead with the lesson. You can put a time limit on it i.e. they must pay at least fifteen minutes before the lesson. That way you also know that they are going to show up.

## 4 LOCATION

Of course it's important that you conduct the class in a quiet space but make sure that you stress that your students should also do this. Some students may try and have their class in a café or other public area but the ambient noise makes it a very uncomfortable and difficult experience. Insist that they choose a quiet space.

## 5 PREPARATION

As well as having good logistics in place you will need to be prepared for the lesson itself. Many students who use this method want conversational classes and will be pretty relaxed about the lessons. However the conversation needs to be directed by you and it is a good idea to send the student some material or a link to a news item or topic that you will discuss during the lesson.

Skype lessons can also be useful for exam preparation and Business English. The important thing here is that the materials are organised in advance. It could be an idea to recommend a Course Book for the student to use and use that as the basis for your lessons. Students could send you assignments by email or use Dropbox or Google Drive. This will mean you can share documents and resources

with students without emailing attachments. All of this technology makes it much easier to teach remotely.

## 6 DURING THE LESSON

It is important that very clear instructions are given during lessons. Although Skype connections are usually good it can be more difficult for students to hear you than if they were in the same room. Clear lesson plans are also advisable so that you can cover the focus areas within the time frame and make sure your student has the necessary materials well in advance. Otherwise treat the lesson in the same way as any other lesson but make sure your instructions are even clearer than usual and you are even more organised.

## 7 GIVING FEEDBACK

Although you will of course be giving feedback during the lesson, many students like to receive some written feedback after a lesson. Take ten minutes to send a quick email pointing out the things the students have done well and other areas that they should focus on. For example if you have noticed a particular pronunciation mistake tell them and ask them to focus on this before the next lesson.

**THERE IS NO REASON WHY SKYPE LESSONS SHOULD NOT BE AS ENJOYABLE AS NORMAL LESSONS.**

Making sure you have clear guidelines in place and are well prepared and organised will make this a good experience for both you and your students.

# How to Set up a Classroom Crime Scene and 8 Activities

## AS A TEACHER, I AM ALWAYS LOOKING FOR CREATIVE AND MEMORABLE WAYS TO TEACH LANGUAGE CONCEPTS TO MY STUDENTS.

Every year I try to include at least one large scale language lesson. It might be the English Language Olympics. It might be my class writing and performing their own play for the rest of the school. This year, I am really excited to set up a classroom crime scene and use it as inspiration for several language activities with my students. It's not that hard to do, but the impact it has on students is immeasurable. Here's how you can plan a crime scene for your ESL students and what to do with it once it's set up.

## SET UP A CLASSROOM CRIME SCENE EXPERTLY

### 1 DECIDE WHERE IT WILL BE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

A classroom crime scene takes up a fair amount of space in your classroom. If you share your classroom with someone else or you rotate through different rooms at school, you will need to talk to your coworkers about your plans. Nothing is worse than planning and setting up a large scale prop and then having someone else take it down. So talk with anyone who might be affected by your crime scene (you might even want to encourage them to use it for their classes) and then decide where in the classroom you are going to set it up. If you are planning on making it the center of your lessons for the time it's set up, go for the gusto and set it up in the center of your class or at the front of the room. If you only want to supplement your lessons with the crime scene, choose a corner where it's somewhat out of the way.

### 2 THINK ABOUT YOUR CRIME

You can set up a crime scene without a specific crime in mind, but I like to

have a little method to my madness. So I suggest thinking about what crime you are trying to stage in your classroom. When choosing your crime, you have to think about your students. This activity works with kids in elementary school, middle school, high school, and even adults, but "crimes" those audiences will be comfortable with will vary greatly. For elementary school students, choose something nonviolent and include playful characters if possible: a unicorn broke into the class and searched through the teacher's desk looking for glitter, a stuffed animal came to life and tried to make a home for himself from the books on your shelves, a gorilla escaped from the zoo and settled into your reading nook with a good book, or your classroom pets broke out and role played students and teacher in the wee hours of the morning. For older students, you can be a bit more realistic or graphic with your crimes IF your class can handle it: stage a murder by a student who was not accepted into the school, a night janitor tried to steal the answer key for final exams, or something along those lines. Whatever you choose, don't push your students farther than they will be comfortable with, and keep fright to a minimum.

### 3 SET UP YOUR CLUES

Now that you have your place and idea determined, it's time for the fun – setting up the clues. Let's say I was going to set up the unicorn example from above. I would try and think about what clues might have been left behind. I might punch a large hole through a folder and its contents (from the horn). I would turn my desk on its back and pull out all the drawers, leaving paper and other supplies scattered around the floor. I would have evidence that the unicorn went through several art supplies – whatever I had handy. I might leave some hoof prints on the floor with washable paint. And I would leave a light trail of glitter from my desk to the window or the door showing the unicorn's es-

cape.

### 4 ROPE OFF YOUR AREA

You might think setting up the clues is all you will need to do, but don't stop there! If you don't do something to keep your students out of the crime scene, your evidence will be tampered with almost immediately. I like to set up a few chairs around the scene (not part of the crime set up) and string caution tape around them. This tells students that they cannot go into the area though they can look at it as much as they like. Before you let anyone else in your classroom, take a picture of your crime scene. You did a lot of work, and you'll want evidence of your creativity.

### 5 INTRODUCE IT TO YOUR STUDENTS

If it's possible, enter your classroom at the same time as your students the next day and act as though you are shocked at the scene before you. This makes the whole scenario more realistic even though your students will know it was planned, especially once you start using it for language activities. Encourage your students' enthusiasm and curiosity about the crime scene, and take lots of pictures of their reactions.

## HOW TO USE YOUR CRIME SCENE

Now that your crime scene is set up, you can use it for all kinds of language activities with your students. Some of the activities will depend on their language level, but here are some activities that you might want to try.

- Use the crime scene to review prepositions. Have students write five to ten sentences describing where different items and clues are in the scene.
- Have students write a list of any clues they find using the passive voice. (The desk is turned over.



Glitter is spilled on the ground.)

- Have students think about the clues they see and come up with a solution to the crime. They can then write a narrative of what happened.
- Have one student role play the detective and interview other students about what they saw and what they know.
- Use the crime scene as an opportunity to review modal verbs. Have students share their thoughts on what could have happened and then make suggestions on how the police should proceed.
- Encourage students to talk about the way things should have gone by using conditionals to describe what didn't happen at the crime scene.
- Have students use this crime scene as inspiration for their own great crime. Have each person think of a crime that could have happened in the classroom and write five to ten clues they would put in place for the class to find. If you like, create the best crime in your classroom.
- Have students predict what the perpetrator is doing now and what he was doing or thinking as he committed the crime with a review of progressive tenses.

**SETTING UP A CLASSROOM CRIME SCENE MAY NOT BE FOR EVERYONE, BUT ONE THING IS TRUE. IF YOU TAKE THE TIME TO CREATE THIS LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR STUDENTS, THEY WILL NEVER FORGET THE LESSON OR YOU, THEIR TEACHER.**

# Being Wrong Is The Best Thing: 8 Methods for Error Correction

**MY FATHER TAUGHT ME A VENERABLE BUT VALUABLE MAXIM: IT'S NOT A MISTAKE... IT'S A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY.**

I've taken this advice to heart, and I apply it in my classroom to help students become less self-conscious and discouraged by their language mistakes. Gone are the days of punishments and humiliation for giving an answer other than the 'correct' one. As ESL teachers, we're in the business of encouraging fluency, which is so closely tied to confidence that we must consider carefully every opportunity to build up our students' self-belief, and their readiness to spontaneously contribute, no matter the 'risks' of making a mistake.

I remind my students that mistakes are a fundamental part of the learning process, and they are absolutely inevitable. My students are often mystified when I announce, "Mistakes are wonderful!" or "Being wrong is the best thing that can happen!" This is especially true of students from Asian cultures which sometimes seem to offer little alternative to the correct answer except harsh criticism from classmates and teachers alike. This promotes shyness and silence – two of our greatest enemies in the classroom – and, although it is often deeply culturally engrained, I endeavor to uproot this philosophy from the outset and replace it with a classroom atmosphere which is tolerant of mistakes, and even encourages them.

Over the years I've developed some methods of correcting my students' mistakes which embody this light-hearted, compassionate approach. Every education system is different, although I have always felt that producing language, imperfect as the results might be, is the fastest – and perhaps the only – way for our students to improve. I urge my fellow teachers not to let mistakes create obstacles to production, but to use them as examples, and then move right along.

## 8 EFFECTIVE METHODS TO CORRECT WITH COMPASSION

I've found, time and time again, that gentle encouragement and a respect for the vagaries of the learning process serve so much better than criticism or sanction. Consider these aspects of error correction for your ESL classroom (or elsewhere).

### 1 TARGET YOUR CORRECTIONS

If we pulled up our students for every mistake they made, it would dominate the class and create unnecessary anxiety. Choose language points on which to focus, and ignore the rest. These points could include:

- Grammar and vocabulary which was covered recently, or which will appear on an upcoming test.
- Mistakes which are influenced by the students' first language (L1). Examples of this include 'Chinglish', the result of habituated, direct translation from Chinese to English.
- Long-standing problems. An example would be Spanish-speaking students who drop the final 's' from nouns and verbs, or Koreans who confuse /p/ and /f/ sounds.

### 2 ENCOURAGE PEER CORRECTION

Advice is often readily received from friends and classmates, while corrections from the teacher carry a certain weight which might promote nervousness. Open up the problem to the class, rather than correcting it yourself, to turn the mistake into a shared learning moment.

### 3 LAUGH IT OFF

Many mistakes are funny, and some are hilarious: many ESL teachers keep a diary of the comical errors they encounter. Humor more

deeply etches the moment in the students' minds, raising awareness and increasing the chances of self-correction in the future. Laughter also evaporates the seriousness of the moment, a good reminder that learning should be fun.

### 4 SEND IT BACK WITH INTEREST

The majority of language mistakes are spotted and corrected by the students themselves, but only when they're made aware that the mistake exists. I embody the principle of 'Ask, Don't Tell', so when I hear a mistake, I send it back as a question. For example:

Student: Last weekend I go shopping.

Teacher: (Raising an eyebrow) Go?

Student: Oh... sorry... Went shopping...

Teacher: Much better!

### 5 USE GESTURES

Perhaps three-fourths of error correction in my classroom is done without my having to say anything. A system of gestures can be used to quickly communicate all of the following:

- Word Order (crossing hands)
- Tense (thumb back over your shoulder for the past, pointing at the floor for present, pointing into the distance for future -- alternatively, simply tap your watch)
- Third Person Endings (draw a big 'S' shape in the air)
- Fragmented or Short Answer (expanding hands gesture)
- General Reminder (hands on hips, waiting for a better version -- this works best for mistakes which are rooted in language points the class has repeatedly covered)
- Be Careful! (a raised finger or other body language which communicates 'caution')
- Can Do Better... (a frown, carefully deployed, shows the student they have missed something)

- You Got It! (thumbs up, as soon as the problem is corrected)
- Not This Again! (exasperated eye rolling, or pinching the bridge of the nose: this works for mistakes which almost everyone has learned to self-correct, and which the teacher might deliberately have turned into a 'pet peeve' to further raise awareness)
- One More Time? (cupping a hand to your ear and leaning in, as if you had missed the student's first try)

**AND I HOPE THESE TIPS HELP TO CREATE A LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH YOUR STUDENTS BECOME USED TO ANOTHER FAVORITE MAXIM OF MINE: DON'T BE SHY – GIVE IT A TRY!**

## **6 BLAME THE PRODUCT, NOT THE STUDENT**

Particularly when correcting written work, I always try not to say, "You've spelled this wrong," or, "Your grammar is poor here". Use the passive voice instead: "This sentence needs to be re-thought," or, "This article would benefit from a little more editing," or, "Could this be expressed more clearly?"

## **7 "WHEN?"**

A great many ESL errors concern tenses. Many of our students' first languages do not conjugate for tense, or use a grammatical particle (as in Chinese) to quickly express chronology. If the student forgets a time expression or fails to conjugate, I often simply throw in the question, "When?" This is a shorthand way of asking, "When did that happen?" and always gets the student thinking. I make the point repeatedly that, unless my students take care of their tense-related grammar and time expressions, I won't know what they mean.

## **8 LET IT GO, THEN TRACK BACK**

Especially when the students are reading aloud, I try to let pronunciation and intonation errors go until the student has finished reading, and then go back to fix them. Marking the problem on your own copy is helpful. So as not to single the student out, I normally drill the pronunciation issue with the whole class.

**THE COMPASSIONATE RAISING OF AWARENESS AND THE BUILDING OF OUR STUDENTS' CAPACITY FOR SELF-CORRECTION ARE BOTH HARD-WON SKILLS FOR A TEACHER,**

# 'Just a Minute': 5 Steps to Making Fluency Fun

## SOME GAMES HAVE THE MOST CURIOUS ORIGIN.

Legend has it that, back in the school days of the BBC radio quiz show creator Ian Messiter, he was caught daydreaming in class by a particularly stern teacher. Ian's punishment was to repeat verbatim everything the teacher had said during the previous minute, without hesitating or repeating himself. History does not record how Ian fared in this embarrassing challenge, but it gave the young man an idea.

When the time came for Messiter to design radio quiz shows for the BBC, the thought resurfaced and became the format for a hugely popular game. The contestant would speak on a given subject for a full sixty seconds, "without hesitation, deviation or repetition". Over eight hundred episodes later, Just A Minute has deserved popularity around the world, and it is wonderfully adaptable to the ESL classroom.

The BBC version is played by four contestants, a mix of regulars and invited guests. I've played this game in the ESL classroom by dividing the class into two teams and rotating through each team so that everyone has a turn. The game takes exactly one minute per student, plus set-up time between contestants. Here's the procedure:

## JUST A MINUTE: HOW TO PLAY WITH YOUR ESL CLASS

### 1 SETTING UP

Divide the class into two teams in whichever way you prefer – based on seating, organized by age, nationality, ethnicity or gender, or using captains to choose their teams, etc.

### 2 SUBJECT PREPARATION

Ask each team to prepare a list of subjects on which their opponents will have to speak for one minute.

These should suit the level of your students. The best topics are those which challenge the students' vocabulary without being too difficult. Good examples include:

- My home town
- My favorite sports team
- My family and friends
- The best vacation I've ever been on
- The worst hotel I've ever stayed in
- The best advice I was ever given
- The skill I'd most like to have
- What you might see at the zoo / in the park / at a ballgame / at an art museum...
- What you can do as a tourist in New York / Tokyo / Jeddah / London...
- I love my English class because...

### 3 RULES

Explain the rules and be ready to model the game for students who may not have seen it before. They must speak continuously for one minute. No long pauses are allowed, only those a presenter would normally take. They may not change the subject or repeat information or opinion -- the opposing team can raise an objection if they feel this has happened, best done by raising a hand.

### 4 KEY ELEMENT

Every student should take part. The teams can organize themselves, or the teacher could choose the next contestant in whichever way works best. A large wall clock is useful to keep track of time. There's no need to wait for the second hand to reach the top of the minute: you could announce that the contestant will begin speaking at the 30' or 45' mark, for example, and continue for sixty seconds.

### 5 WINDING UP

Once the contestant has completed their minute, give them a score which will be tallied on the board.

I'm very generous with this, giving 10/10 to anyone who doesn't break the rules. If there's some pausing, or the student repeats a thought, consider giving them an 8/10 or 9/10. You might give bonus points for especially good choices of vocabulary or particularly effective use of a tricky grammar point.

While the students are speaking, their classmates (of both teams) should respectfully listen. During this time, the teacher can silently encourage the speaker, especially if they are of a lower level. Nodding, smiling and using a range of 'keep going!' gestures has had good results. If they really hit trouble, the teacher could drop in a hint – an aspect of the topic the student has yet to cover, or a piece of vocabulary which might unlock a few more seconds of speaking.

## WHY THIS GAME WORKS

Just A Minute has been an instant favorite with virtually every group to whom I've introduced it. Everyone faces the same challenge, and it's a good chance for students to support and encourage each other while working to achieve the objective of winning the game. Though simple, this format has many positive aspects:

- It helps students to develop confidence by challenging them to speak in a light-hearted setting, but in front of an 'audience' of their classmates and their teacher. Successfully completing the one minute is a sure sign that the student's ability to speak spontaneously – without notes or preparation – is improving.
- The game is also good fluency practice, requiring the quick recall of appropriate vocabulary: this is especially true if the teacher gives bonus points for especially impressive word choices.
- Depending on the topic, the game



can also become good practice for specific target language (sports, buildings in a city, hobbies, family, etc).

- There will also be quite a lot of 'filler' language required, while the student is thinking about what to say next. This isn't cheating -- in fact, the BBC version includes plenty of this introductory of transition language, e.g.:
  - Another thing I absolutely love about the LA Dodgers is...
  - When thinking about Paris, the first image which comes to mind is the...
  - If I had to live my life again... I mean, it's not something any of us can ever do, of course, but it's an interesting intellectual exercise... If I had that chance, I'd most certainly...
- A quick feedback session after each contestant has finished (or at the end of the game itself) can help correct problems without interfering with the main objective of enhancing fluency. The teacher can make notes on vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar issues -- students tend to welcome these comments, and the teacher can judge whether to deliver this help in front of the whole class, or to the individual student.

**I HOPE THIS GAME IS A FUN ADDITION TO YOUR FLUENCY AND CONFIDENCE PRACTICE, AND THAT YOU'LL FIND WAYS TO ADAPT IT TO SUIT YOUR OWN CLASSROOM.**