

WHAT EVERY LANGUAGE TEACHER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

MOST COMMON MISTAKES STUDENTS MAKE

NOW YOU CAN LEARN
**VALUABLE
LESSONS**
FROM EACH
AND EVERY ONE
OF THESE
MISTAKES

EVERY STUDENT
MAKES MISTAKES

SOME SHOULD NEVER BE CORRECTED.
OTHERS SHOULD ALWAYS BE.

 RECOGNIZE AND ADDRESS THESE MOST COMMON MISTAKES MADE BY LANGUAGE STUDENTS

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Do You Recognize These 5 ESL Listening Mistakes?

MOST ESL STUDENTS IDENTIFY THE GOAL OF ESL CLASSES AS HELPING THEM TO SPEAK ENGLISH BETTER.

But to speak better, they have to listen better. Speaking and listening comprehension are like the two sides of the same communication coin. Students who lack the proper listening skills will have a much harder time communicating in English.

NO RULES

One of the hardest things about improving listening comprehension is that you can't give your students a set of rules like the ones you give them for correct grammar and proper speaking. Students simply practice listening – either they get it or they don't.

Now, there is of course a set of things you can do, certain ways to approach listening exercises to maximize the listening comprehension potential. Here, I'll focus on the mistakes ESL students make when approaching listening practice. Teach them to work on eliminating these, and they'll be better prepared to meet a listening challenge.

5 LISTENING MISTAKES ESL STUDENTS MAKE

1 GIVING IN TO MENTAL BLOCK

When you're not a native speaker, listening takes massive amounts of effort and concentration. Just to picture what your students have to face, try listening to an interview in a foreign language you barely speak: it's hard, isn't it? What happens after a few minutes? You simply decide you don't understand, give up and shut the audio off. What do our students do when they don't understand a conversation in a real life situation? Of course, they can't shut it off, but they might just decide it's too hard, and simply tune out. Give up.

What to do: Tell students that in a real life situation, there's nothing wrong with asking the native English speaker to slow down, repeat or rephrase. Native speakers are often polite, understanding and absolutely willing to help out. Students must be taught right from the start to lose the fear of asking for repetition or clarification.

2 TRANSLATING IN THEIR HEADS

Some students have the nasty habit of translating what you say, in their heads, as you speak. This is terribly tiring, it does not help students develop fluency, and in fact, it hinders it as they must constantly pause to translate before they can reply.

What to do: Teach students early on (even if they're beginners!) about the importance of thinking in English. Translating is hard enough as it is: it takes professional interpreters years of practice to get simultaneous translation just right. Remind them that they are not training to become translators -- they are learning to speak English. And if they want to speak it, they gotta think it!

3 BEING TOO AMBITIOUS

There's nothing better than having students who are motivated take their listening practice into their own hands. They buy audio and video CDs, listen to music or podcasts or even watch entire movies in English. The problem arises when they don't recognize their own limitations. They buy a CD that is not appropriate for their level. They watch an entire movie where the protagonists are gansta rappers and then feel absolutely deflated because they did not understand a single word.

What to do: When you catch students biting off more than they can chew in terms of listening practice, you'll need to steer them in the right direction. Recommend films where the actors speak very, clear educated English and instruct them to approach the listening in steps. First they watch with subtitles in English and then they turn off the subtitles. Maybe they should watch the movie in parts and not all of it in one sitting. Also, tell them that a short, but focused listening exercise is a lot better than a longer listening where you have more chances of getting lost.

4 DOING OTHER THINGS AS THEY LISTEN

Depending on the listening exercise, they might have to take notes as they listen. But happens when students write things down or look up words in the dictionary right in the middle of a conversation?

Though it is useful for them to find out the meaning of a word they don't understand, this type of behavior won't help them improve overall listening comprehension.

What to do: Students must understand that sometimes it's more important for them to understand the conversation in general, than the meaning of a single word. Convey to your students that, in fact, it's not necessary for them to understand every single word all the time. Listening comprehension takes time to build, and they start by listening and getting the gist of a conversation. Then, they are able to listen and pick up more details. In time, there will be few words they won't understand.

5 NOT USING THE RIGHT LISTENING STRATEGIES

We've already established that listening (really listening, not just hearing) takes a great amount of effort. To really make the most of this effort and not let the listening practice become just another tiresome task, students must employ certain listening skills. A lot of students don't know they exist, least of all know how to use them.

What to do: Familiarize students with the different types of listening strategies, which include:

- Listening for gist – students try to get the main idea/context
- Listening for key words – students try to listen for a specific word, idea or thought, for example, a date, historical fact or piece of information
- Listening/checking for comprehension – a great strategy is listening to what someone has to say, like directions to get to a place, and then saying them back to check for comprehension

YOU CAN'T GIVE YOUR STUDENTS RULES FOR LISTENING LIKE YOU DO FOR SPEAKING OR WRITING, BUT YOU CAN GIVE THEM A POWERFUL SET OF TOOLS.

Listening comprehension is not an exact science, not in any language, and not even for native speakers (sometimes we hear what we want to hear, right?) Help students set realistic expectations and goals, and provide them with the set of tools that will get them there.

7 Worst Pronunciation Mistakes Students Make Around the World

Proper English pronunciation can be a big problem for some ESL learners and more difficult for some students than for others. A student's native language determines, for the most part, the degree of difficulty and the types of difficulties students will have. In my experience, ESL students whose native language is Chinese or Japanese have a much harder time than those whose native language is Spanish, Portuguese or French. But despite the differences between countries, there are certain mistakes that are the most common among ESL students all over the world. Here, you'll see not only what they are, but also how to help your students overcome them.

HOW TO PROCEED

1 PRONOUNCING THE "TH"

The "th" is one of the hardest consonant sounds to pronounce. It can be pronounced in three different ways: as a "d" (/ð/) as in this, that, these, those, they or them, as the voiceless /θ/ in three, thing, thought, or as a /t/ as in Thai or Thames. The pronunciation of the /θ/ is especially difficult for some - students often say tree instead of three.

How to fix it: Go over the difference between the three types of pronunciation. Don't forget to mention that the third one is the least common. As for the difficulty in pronouncing the /θ/, show students how to place their tongues between their teeth and force air out to make the right sound.

2 PRONOUNCING THE SCHWA

The schwa ([ə]) is a sound that is typical in unstressed syllables, for instance in long words like mem(o)ry, choc(o)late or shorter ones like th(e) or t(o). The usual mistake is for students to pronounce the word syllable by syllable: me-mo-ry.

How to fix it: Introduce the schwa to

students and give them plenty of examples. Remind them of the fact that English is a stressed, not a syllabic language, and that unstressed syllables or words in English often have this sound.

3 CONFUSING THE "L" AND THE "R"

The "r" and "l" sounds are the stereotypical mistake Japanese students make – they say lice instead of rice. But it is also a difficulty that occurs in other Asian languages.

How to fix it: The problem usually lies in the position of the tongue. To eliminate the confusion first focus on practicing one sound – the "r" –, then the "l". In both cases, show them and contrast the position of the tongue and teeth.

4 PRONOUNCING THE SHORT "I"

The short "i" or [ɪ] as pronounced in words like live, sit, fit, hit usually poses a problem as students may be inclined to pronounce them as leave, seat, feet, or heat.

How to fix it: Give them plenty of practice with these confusing word pairs: live-leave, sit-seat, fit-feet, hit-heat, etc. First say each and ask them if they can hear the difference. Next, repeat each set and have your students repeat. Be sure to either write the words on the board so they can see the difference in spelling or show them word cards. The more practice you give them, the better they'll pronounce these words.

5 CONFUSING THE "W" AND THE "V"

This is a typical pronunciation problem in some European nations. Some students have a hard time pronouncing the "w" sound. Water is pronounced as vater, west is pronounced as vest, and so on.

How to fix it: If you have students who have a hard time pronouncing the "w" show them how to round their mouths into an "o" and then unround them to produce the right sound, like this (bit.ly/YmKeNk).

6 PRONOUNCING THE MAGIC "E"

Some students may have a hard time noticing the difference between words like not and note or bit and bite. They may be tempted to split them into syllables: no-te and bi-te.

How to fix it: Once again this is a problem that can be fixed by practicing word pairs. Help them notice that note is different from not in that it has the extra "e" but it's still not pronounced. The effect of the magic "e" is that it changes the pronunciation of the word.

7 PRONOUNCING SILENT CONSONANTS

This is one of the problems I have personally encountered the most with native Spanish speakers. They sometimes tend to pronounce consonants that are silent, like the "d" in Wednesday or the "g" in foreign.

How to fix it: In my experience, fixing this problem is as easy as writing down the word on the board and crossing the silent letter out. It is very important for you to not only verbally correct the pronunciation and have them repeat, but also write it down. As many times as you have to.

AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, SOME OF THESE MISTAKES ARE MADE MORE OFTEN BY SOME STUDENTS THAN OTHERS DEPENDING ON THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN. ONCE YOU IDENTIFY THE MISTAKES THEY MAKE OFTEN, IT IS VITAL FOR YOU TO ADDRESS THEM AND HELP THEM WORK TO IMPROVE THEM.

Write it down. Have them repeat. Work with word pairs. Soon enough they'll be making fewer mistakes.

Pronunciation 101: 7 Things Students Need to Hear You Say

Bad pronunciation is bad news for ESL students. It negatively affects comprehension and so, negatively impacts on communication. The problem is compounded by the fact that good pronunciation is often a mystery to ESL students. Why is it that some words with a similar spelling sound the same but others are completely different? Why are some words pronounced exactly the same in their native language but others are not? Mysteries are not good. Here are some of the things you need to explain to your ESL students to take the mystery out of English pronunciation.

7 THINGS YOU NEED TO EXPLAIN TO YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION:

1 REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

The goal of pronunciation practice is to pronounce correctly, not sound like a native English speaker. Only children who are exposed to a second language for extended periods of time are able to eliminate their foreign accent because their brains are still flexible enough to do so. There is such a thing as accent reduction, but a foreign accent in an adult will never be completely eliminated. Furthermore, an accent is a part of who you are, a part of a student's cultural heritage. Students should accept this and strive to improve pronunciation instead.

2 STRESSED VS. SYLLABIC

It is tremendously useful for students to understand that English, unlike other languages, is a stressed language. This means that in a sentence some words are stressed more than others. In syllabic languages, like Spanish for example, it makes more sense to focus on pronouncing each word, syllable by syllable. But if we were to do this in English we'd sound like robots. Try saying, "Your book is on the table" by pronouncing each

word – doesn't sound like fluent, human speech, does it? It is vital for students to understand that making the effort to pronounce every single word does not lead to good pronunciation.

How many times has a student asked you how to pronounce an article like *the* or *a*? They need to understand that articles and other non-stressed words are not clearly pronounced but rather "swallowed". This is why two separate words like *is* or *on* are not pronounced separately in the above example, but combined to sound like one "ison".

3 LINKING SOUNDS

Related to the previous point, and the fact that pronouncing each word separately is a bad idea, is that quite often two sounds are linked to sound like one word (sometimes even more than two words are linked). This is often the case with the verb *is* when it's followed by an article or preposition that starts with a vowel (an, a, on, at). "He's an architect" sounds like "He – za – narchitect". This happens when a word ending with a consonant is followed by a word starting with a vowel. Something similar happens when we ask, "What did you do?" (sounds like wha diju do?) In this case, the two sounds are combined to form a new mixed sound.

4 SILENT LETTERS

Just like there are words in a sentence that are not clearly pronounced or stressed, a single word may have consonants that are not pronounced, either. ESL students are often unaware of this. Words they often mispronounce are those that end in a "b", like bomb, dumb, or comb. Others have trouble with the silent "g" in foreign, sign or champagne. Be sure to clarify in which cases letters are silent.

5 SOUNDS THAT DISAPPEAR

There are words that have consonant sounds that are not exactly si-

lent, but simply disappear. This is the case with the "d" in *and* (often pronounced *an*) and the "t" in *it* or *but*. In "I went there last night" we wouldn't pronounce the final "t" in *went*, *last* or *night*.

6 SPELLING VS. PRONUNCIATION

Students must understand that quite often the spelling of a word is no indication of how it should be pronounced (and by the same token the pronunciation of a word is no indication of how it is spelled). The "th" for example sounds like a "d" in *then* or *than*, but completely different in *thing*, *three* or *thousand*. Students must learn to distinguish between letters and sounds, i.e., same letters may have different sounds depending on the letters that follow it or precede it.

7 UNDERSTANDING THE SCHWA

The schwa sound is one of those little mysteries that ESL students often hear about but never truly grasp. The schwa, whose phonemic symbol looks like an upside down "e" ([ə]), is an unstressed, weak sound that occurs in many English words. In the phrase "a story about a girl" the three "a"s are schwa sounds. The same happens with the "e" in *the* or the "o" in *to*. ESL students who master the schwa are well on their way to improved pronunciation.

THERE IS NO MYSTERY TO CORRECT ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION – NOT WHEN YOU EXPLAIN THESE BASIC CONCEPTS TO YOUR STUDENTS. ONCE YOU DO, THEY WILL BE BETTER ARMED TO UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE AND THE ONE THEY ARE TRYING TO LEARN.

7 Little-Known Factors that Could Affect Students' Pronunciation

Proper pronunciation is vital to your ESL students' success. Pronunciation plays a very important role in communication – for your students to communicate effectively, they must speak clearly and make themselves understood. Sometimes simply using the right vocabulary and structures is not enough. Now, why is it that some students do better at acquiring the proper pronunciation than others? Here are the factors that could possibly answer this question.

7 FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT YOUR STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION:

1 STUDENTS' AGES

As an ESL teacher you've probably already noticed the difference between teaching young learners and adults. The younger your students are, the easier it is for them to acquire an accurate pronunciation – and it becomes increasingly difficult as they age as the brain's original plasticity diminishes, and it becomes more rigid. Now that said, this does not mean adult students should give up trying to improve their pronunciation. It just means they have to work harder. If you teach adult ESL learners, be ready to plan and devote some of your class time to targeted pronunciation practice.

2 LEARNERS' ATTITUDES

Research and studies consistently show that ESL students with a positive attitude towards learning English learn faster. By the same token, students who are genuinely open-minded and interested in improving their pronunciation often do improve it. It is truly amazing what the right attitude can do.

On the other hand, students who have prejudices or a natural dislike for English will be less successful than those with a positive attitude and open mind. If you have students who are openly negative or complain about the English language, try to have a nice long chat to address these issues. Before you can help students overcome their pronunciation barriers, you'll need to help them overcome these others barriers first.

3 STUDENT MOTIVATION

Out of these first three internal factors, motivation is the one that can really make a difference. Highly motivated students will in all likelihood have a better pronunciation. What motivates students to speak better? Most simply want to fit in - they don't want to be discriminated against because they have a "funny" accent. Others, like adult learners, really need to speak clearly and effectively for professional business communication. If you have students who seem to lack motivation, use their passions to help them find it.

4 NATIVE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE

Students from different nationalities have varying degrees of difficulty learning proper pronunciation. The difficulty depends on how different their native language is from English. For example, English is a stressed language, Spanish is a syllabic language, Chinese is a tonal language. Phonemes are different in each, as well as the way the mouth, teeth and tongue are used. Your students may have difficulty articulating some sounds because they simply do not exist in their native language, sounds like the "th".

First, you'll need to assess your students' difficulties and formulate a plan to overcome them. Identify the pronunciation problems. Is it a problem with stress? Some phonemes more than others? With Japanese students you may have to practice the "l" and the "r". Whatever their difficulties are be sure to tailor your pronunciation exercises to help your students overcome them.

5 EXPOSURE TO ENGLISH

It will come as no surprise that ESL students who live in English-speaking environment acquire better pronunciation faster because they are immersed in the language. But not all ESL students are immersed in an English-speaking environment. The degree to which they are exposed to English on a daily basis will determine how fast they'll be able to improve their pronunciation. So, children who go to bilingual,

English-speaking schools should have a better pronunciation than those who study English only a couple of times a week. If you have students who don't have enough exposure to the English language, encourage them to increase it, either by listening to authentic audio or hanging out with English-speaking locals.

6 NOT EXPLICITLY TAUGHT

One of the factors that may be affecting your students' ability to acquire proper pronunciation is quite simply that it is not being explicitly taught in the classroom. This is one of the things that ESL classes often lack and one of the things that makes a world of difference in the acquisition of pronunciation. Do you correct their pronunciation mistakes as they speak, or do you give them specific pronunciation exercises that target certain phonemes, word pairs or verb endings? Be sure to devote some class time specifically to pronunciation practice.

7 NATIVE VS. NON-NATIVE INPUT

Students' pronunciation largely depends on the pronunciation they hear on a daily basis. If they are immersed in a community where most of the individuals speak English with a non-native accent, this will surely influence their own pronunciation. Moreover, if the teacher has a non-native accent, it will affect students' pronunciation as well.

OF COURSE, YOU CAN TEACH ENGLISH IF YOUR ACCENT IS NOT NATIVE PERFECT. BUT IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO STRIVE TO IMPROVE YOUR PRONUNCIATION AS MUCH AS YOU CAN. IT IS ALSO VITAL FOR YOU TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO SEEK OUT NATIVE INPUT, EITHER BY JOINING ACTIVITIES OR GROUPS WITH ENGLISH SPEAKERS OR SPENDING SOME TIME IN AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRY.

Students must be proactive in their hopes to secure the right English pronunciation, but teachers are the coaches in this endeavor. These are the two sides of the pronunciation coin – partners working together to achieve a common goal. One can't achieve it without the other.

Do Your Students Make These Stress and Intonation Mistakes?

Do you have ESL students who do the robot? No, I don't mean the dance. I mean speak in a monotone, with no color, no feeling. It doesn't mean that they don't feel the language. They probably just don't know how to use stress and intonation to convey intention and meaning.

Most of the time, students who have trouble using the right stress and intonation speak native languages with very different rules. English is a stressed language, and this means that more attention should be paid to where you put the stress in a word or sentence, rather than the number of syllables. Check out these very common stress and intonation mistakes and what you can do to help your ESL students kick the robot to the curb.

MOST COMMON MISTAKES: STRESS

1 STRESS ON THE WRONG SYLLABLE

The student says hó-tel instead of ho-tél. This type of mistake may lead to misunderstandings, and the speaker's meaning or intention may not be at all clear. An added complication is that there are plenty of words that have a different meaning when they are stressed differently. This is the case of ré-bel and re-bél. Or désert and dessért. Finally, if there are too many mistakes with word stress, the listener may become impatient or confused, and this is not good for communication.

2 STRESS ON THE WRONG WORD

Just like placing the stress on the wrong syllable within a word, placing stress on the wrong word in a sentence may lead to confusion or the speaker's inability to convey exactly what he/she means. Let's see an example. A sentence like, "John got a new job" can be stressed in different ways (stress can be placed on John, new or job), all of which convey different meanings. If you ask students, "Who got a new job?" they should re-

spond placing the stress on John. But if you ask them, "What did John get?" they should place the stress on job.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Draw your students' attention to the matter of stress. Explain that English is a stressed language and that word and/or sentence stress is important to convey the right meaning. Use clapping or tapping to indicate where the stress goes.
- Go over some basic rules of word stress. For example, when the same word can be both a noun and a verb (rebel, insult, suspect), explain that the first syllable is stressed in the noun and the second syllable is stressed in the verb.
- Indicate stress visually. You can mark the stress the way dictionaries do (*/hou'tel/* for hotel), use bigger or smaller circles as seen above (ho-tél) or use Cuisenaire rods. These are also useful to show where the stress goes in a sentence.
- Contrast. If it's hard for students to hear the right word stress, say it different ways – put the stress in different syllables so they can hear the difference and hear the right stress.
- Be sure to contrast the difference between placing stress on different words: I want to learn English vs. I want to learn English. Can your students tell the difference in meaning?

MOST COMMON MISTAKES: INTONATION

3 NO RISING PITCH

This is the intonation mistake I encounter most often. Yes/No questions typically have a rising pitch towards the end, and lots of students end their sentences flat so they don't sound like questions at all: Do you like chocolate. They sound like statements. Students often have more trouble imitating the rising than the falling intonation.

4 USE THE WRONG PITCH

Students often don't use the right pitch to convey feelings. A single word like really can express completely different feelings: "Really" said with a falling intonation expresses disbelief, while "Really?" with a rising pitch expresses surprise.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Exaggerate. Even though it may not sound "natural", it's the best way to get the point across and students have a better chance of hearing the differences. Make the rising pitch as high as you can, and the flat intonation sound monotone. Make sure your face also shows the right feeling.
- Go over patterns, such as:
 - Yes/No questions have the rising pitch towards the end.
 - Questions that begin with wh-words have a falling intonation.
 - Statements have a falling intonation.
 - Question tags may have either depending on the intention of the speaker. Questions tags that are comments or observations have a falling intonation while questions tags used to check information or express uncertainty have a rising intonation.
- Use rising intonation to express surprise.
- Use falling intonation to express sarcasm or disbelief.

IN THE ESL CLASSROOM, SHOWING IS BETTER THAN TELLING.

Skip the explanations regarding theory or linguistics. Show them how to place stress to convey meaning. Exaggerate surprise or looks of disbelief so students get the full effect of the intonation. Stick to it and give it time. Soon enough you won't have any more robots in your class!

7 Ways to Correct Your ESL Student's Intonation Once and for All

Intonation is one of those crazy little things that can make one speaker sound bored and another interested – while they use the same exact words. Intonation adds a dimension to the English language, a richness that goes beyond the mere use of the right words and the right grammar structure. It's what helps you say a lot, in perhaps just a few words. ESL students learn intonation by imitation and understand it the more they listen to native English speakers, but it takes more than that, more than just listening. Intonation has to be taught. And corrected. And here's how.

CORRECTING ESL STUDENT INTONATION: 7 WAYS

1 RISING VS. FALLING

The very first thing ESL students must understand about intonation is the difference between rising and falling intonation. The best way to illustrate this difference is to say the same sentence with both and discuss the speaker's intentions in each case.

You're John, aren't you? (The speaker is certain.)

You're John, aren't you? (The speaker is uncertain.)

Isn't that funny. (The speaker is making a comment.)

Isn't that funny? (The speaker is asking a question/seeking confirmation.)

Be sure to illustrate the difference with arrows and repeat the correct intonation for each case. Then, have students repeat examples in both rising and falling intonation. They may not get it at first – both may sound exactly the same. Have them repeat till they can clearly express both the rising and falling intonation.

2 FOCUS ON THE RISING PITCH

A lot of students end questions or sentences flat – no rising pitch at the end, and sometimes this rising pitch is absolutely necessary to convey the right

intention. If a student says "Sorry", it sounds like an apology. But if they are trying to get someone to repeat what they've just said, they should say, "Sorry?" Sometimes you need to exaggerate the rising pitch at the end and have students repeat. Don't worry if it sounds exaggerated at first. It'll sound more natural later as they gain confidence.

3 USE SHORT SENTENCES

In the beginning, the best way for students to both hear and repeat a rising or falling intonation is through very short phrases and sentences.

Sorry. Yes.
Sorry? Yes?

Then, work your way towards longer phrases and sentences.

4 BUILD TOWARDS LONGER PHRASES

This is a great strategy to use when students are having a particularly difficult time with longer sentences. If you want your students to ask, "Would you mind closing the window?" start by saying and repeating the last word and working your way backwards:

Window?
Closing the window?
Mind closing the window?
Would you mind closing the window?

5 PRACTICE DISCERNING

Just as important as using the right intonation is discerning the speaker's intention based on the intonation he/she uses. Give students exercises where they must listen (either you or an audio track) to different types of intonation, and ask them what the speaker's intention is.

Say: Isn't it hot. Ask: Am I asking a question or making a comment about the weather?

Say: Don't you like coffee? Ask: Do I sound certain or surprised?

Finally, say "You have to go?" And simply ask your students what you're indicating with your intonation (surprise).

6 ONE WORD ANSWERS

Another great way to practice intonation is by asking students to reply to a variety of situations with only one word. Because they can only use one word, the intonation has to be just right to carry the right intention. For example:

Say: What do you say to a friend who's just arrived late?

Student: Late.

Say: Your friend has not arrived yet, but you're not sure why. What do you say to your other friend?

Student: Late?

7 WATCH MY CUE!

Try this game to keep your students on their toes. Write out some short phrases on some cards but don't punctuate them. Give each student a card. Your student has to read the phrase, and say it out loud, but first they have to see what you indicate with your hands. Sweep your hand up if you want them to use rising intonation, but sweep it down if you want them to use falling intonation.

You won the lottery. (sweep you hand down)

You won the lottery? (sweep you hand up)

See how many get it right! And have other students say what is being expressed (surprise, certainty, comment, etc.)

INTONATION MAY BE A PAIN TO TEACH BUT DON'T TRY TO AVOID IT. YOU OWE IT TO YOUR STUDENTS TO GIVE THEM ALL OF THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO COMMUNICATE ACCURATELY AND EFFECTIVELY. AND INTONATION IS ONE VERY POWERFUL COMMUNICATION TOOL.

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Get Students to Stop Translating and Start Thinking in English

"HOW DO YOU SAY, 'QUE TENGAS UN BUEN FIN DE SEMANA' IN ENGLISH?" HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOUR STUDENTS ASKED YOU TO TRANSLATE SOMETHING FROM OR INTO THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE?

How often do you have students who translate things in their heads before answering you? By contrast, how often do you have students who provide a natural-sounding reply, spontaneously and automatically, without even blinking an eye? Chances are most of your students still translate in their heads – at least some of the time. Our goal as teachers is to guide students towards increasingly thinking in English and drop the crutch of translation. But we all know this is precisely one of the hardest things to achieve. So how do we do that? How can we effectively get our ESL students to think in English?

WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT FOR ESL STUDENTS TO STOP TRANSLATING AND START THINKING IN ENGLISH

Consider their main goal. They want to learn to speak English, not become translators. There's no point in them speaking their native language in their heads while they're trying to learn another.

It's counterproductive. The constant comparison of one language to another hinders naturally flowing speech. Experienced interpreters are real pros at this, but your students are not.

Some things are simply too hard to translate. This creates a situation where the student is desperately trying to remember how to say the one word they have in their minds in English, while they should be trying to recall a recent lesson instead.

Now, that we've established the importance of getting students to think in English for the duration of the class, let's see ways to help them achieve this ever-elusive state.

HOW TO GET YOUR STUDENTS TO STOP TRANSLATING AND START THINKING IN ENGLISH

1 USE AN ENGLISH-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

If you teach ESL by only speaking English in class, then you often supply definitions or explanations of words in English. Ask students to use Eng-Eng dictionaries, and it will contribute to your efforts.

2 MIME FEELINGS AND ACTIONS

When you teach feelings like "sad", "happy", "scared", etc. --it's a lot simpler to translate them. But it's so much more fun to act them out – for you and your class! The same goes for actions like opening closing things, walking, running, etc.

3 TEACH LANGUAGE IN CONTEXT

A student writes a word on the board, points to it and asks what it means. Most of the time we have no idea where they got it, which leads us to ask questions about the context. After all, there are plenty of words that have different meanings in different contexts. This is precisely why language must be taught in context. For example, would you teach the Past Simple by presenting a list of verbs and their past forms? What if there are verbs they don't understand? Your best course of action is to introduce the context first. Tell students what you do every day, and then tell them what you did yesterday. This eliminates any need for translation.

4 INTRODUCE SET PHRASES AS SET PHRASES

Has a student ever asked you to translate the meaning of "You're welcome"? In most languages a literal translation is ridiculous, but providing a similar phrase in the students' native language is not necessary, either. When students ask for translation simply say a set phrase is a set phrase. Make sure they understand it's a reply to "Thank you". They will probably figure out the equivalent in their language, but with some expressions an equivalent is hard to come by – think of proverbs or idiomatic expressions. The goal is for them to

understand the meaning of the phrase and when it's used.

5 USE VISUAL AIDS

Like miming, visual aids such as flashcards, illustrations, posters and even video are great ways to avoid translation.

6 USE OPPOSITES OR SYNONYMS

Use words they already know in lead in questions: Are you happy to see your friend? You're glad to see him. Check out these other great ways to teach vocabulary. No translation needed at all!

7 TEACH LANGUAGE IN GROUPS

The need for translation will be eliminated if you teach words in groups that make sense, for example, "eat" and "drink" with a list of food items.

8 PRETEND YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

If students try to say things in their own language, simply say you don't understand. Try to lead them to say what they want to say in English. This is by far my favorite strategy. If a student speaks to me in Spanish, I love to say, "Yo no hablar español" with a thick English accent (besides being absolutely fluent in Spanish, I'm also a good actress). Because it's funny, it predisposes students better than a reprimand!

THERE IS STILL MUCH DEBATE AS TO WHETHER AN ESL CLASS SHOULD BE ENGLISH ONLY OR INCLUDE SOME ELEMENTS OF THE NATIVE LANGUAGE.

I have personally had excellent results speaking only English in my classrooms. There have been very few occasions in which I had to explain something to a student in Spanish, but those were very special cases or students with some type of learning difficulty. When I teach Japanese students, I can't use their native language at all. I can't speak a single word in Japanese, but that doesn't impact the lesson negatively, in fact, it is very helpful, as students are not tempted to use their native tongue.

8 Mistakes Your Students Must Overcome Before the Test

SIGH... IT'S TIME TO REVIEW AGAIN. THAT GLORIOUS MOMENT WHEN YOU GET TO SHOW YOUR STUDENTS JUST HOW MUCH THEY HAVE LEARNED AND WHAT STILL NEEDS A LITTLE WORK BEFORE THE TEST.

If you are conducting a review that is focused not on the number of units they've seen, but on the goals they have met along the way, you'll see that there are some classic mistakes that students typically make – no matter what their level is.

Here's a list of mistakes ESL students often make in class. You can take this as a checklist to make sure you are reviewing what you need to review and ensure that they don't make these again.

8 MISTAKES YOUR STUDENTS MUST CORRECT BEFORE THE TEST:

1 PROBLEMS WITH SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Some of the most painful things us ESL teachers have to hear are “she have”, “he don’t” or “people doesn’t”. Ouch! This is such a typical mistake we probably hear it on a daily basis – even advanced students let one of these slip every now and then. Because this is something they repeat and are used to repeating, they may “listen” to our correction but often don't take the time to really let it sink in. If you have students who make the same subject-verb agreement mistakes, take the time to stop and really bring their attention to it.

2 INCORRECT VERB TENSES

These mistakes crop up again and again. If there's one thing students need to focus on as they review for a test is the tenses they've learned, whether they are simple or advanced. Help them out by providing plenty of comparative charts – graphic organizers or timelines are more helpful than long-winded explanations.

3 MISSING OR EXTRA ARTICLES

Some students add an extra “the” when they shouldn't (“The children play the Angry Birds.”) or omit an article that should be there (“I ate piece of toast for breakfast”). If your students make lots of mistakes with articles, be sure to give them a good review.

4 REPETITIVE USE OF FALSE FRIENDS

Lots of languages, if not all, have “false friends” with the English language. For example, embarazada means “pregnant” in Spanish not “embarrassed” (and this confusion can make for some pretty funny classroom situations). There are examples like this one in many other languages. If you have students who resort to false friends, or even like to make up words (I've had my share of those, too!), tell them that no matter how funny it may seem, they should try to use words they are sure are correct because they've learned them.

5 PRONUNCIATION OF SILENT CONSONANTS

If you have students who still pronounce the silent b in “comb” or “bomb”, you need to take a minute to write these down on the board and show them exactly which letters they need to pronounce. The same goes for words like “Wednesday” (when the student pronounces the first d) or “muscle” (when the student pronounces the c as a “k”).

6 SPEAKING THROUGH LITERAL TRANSLATIONS

Everything seems to be going well in your classroom. Your students are very attentive and no one is speaking their native language. But then someone says, “I have 20 years.” If you, like this student, are also a native Spanish speaker, you'll know for a fact your student just did a literal translation in his/her head. Students

will do this, you can be certain of that, but it's something you need to correct right away, lest they keep doing it.

7 WRONG PREPOSITIONS

This is one of the hardest mistakes to correct. There are so many uses for so many different prepositions, it's hard for students to keep track of them all. One of the best ways to help out students who perpetually use the wrong preposition is to organize them into contexts, for example prepositions of place. We say we are “at school”, “at work”, “at home”, but “in the living room”, “in the bedroom” (“in” a particular room). We may also point out the difference between saying “at the bank” (in a banking situation) and “in the bank” (literally inside the building as opposed to outside).

8 COUNTABLE / UNCOUNTABLE MIX-UPS

Students in all levels will get countables and uncountables mixed up and incorrectly use “a little”, “a few”, “many”, “much”, etc. Again, charts and graphics are very helpful in this case, to help students see exactly what they're doing wrong. You can use the classic two-column list to contrast (“a few cars” vs. “a little traffic”) or any of these strategies.

STUDENTS MAKE MISTAKES, AND THEY WILL IN ALL LIKELIHOOD CONTINUE MAKING THEM.

But the review lesson is a wonderful opportunity to show your students what their weaknesses are, not to make them feel bad of course, but to help them focus on what they need to improve.

Some mistakes will turn into bad habits over the years, things that are so firmly entrenched in their speaking that it becomes increasingly harder to correct. You'll need to correct these as soon as possible to give your students the best chance to improve their English.

Correcting Errors in Writing and Speech: When, How, & How Much

Recently my teenaged daughter was watching as I corrected student papers.

"Mom," she exclaimed. "That's wrong. It's 'she goes to school,' not 'she go.'"

"Yes," I replied. "I know that."

"Well, aren't you going to do something about it?"

"What do you think I should do?"

"Well, mark it, of course!"

I then showed her where I had indeed marked the same error, earlier in the paper, before the five or six other instances. "I still think you should mark the others," Shoshana said.

"And what good do you think that would do? Will it make the student learn English faster?"

"Well, no —"

"How will it make the student feel?" I asked. "How would it make you feel if a paper that you wrote in Spanish came back covered with red ink?"

"I can't write anything this long in Spanish," was her reply.

"But the couple of sentences you do write are correct, I guess." At least that was true of my experiences in second language learning: I have a limited range of what I could say or write in French or Russian, but the little I can produce is precise due to the meticulous correction of my attentive teachers.

Although a small incident, the conversation highlights a number of misconceptions about correcting error in second language writing (and speaking, for that matter): that every error should be corrected, no matter the situation and no matter how small, and that correcting error somehow results in improved language production, and that the learner's emotional response to correction doesn't matter. All three assumptions are incorrect, in my experience, leading to the principles of error correction I have developed.

PRINCIPLES OF ERROR CORRECTION IN SPEECH & WRITING

1 CONSIDER THE SITUATION.

Is the language situation an informal situation or formal one? Is the student speaking extemporaneously or writing a first draft, or has she had time to plan and reflect? Who are the participants in the situation — other students or the larger community, for example? All of these considerations matter in deciding if it's appropriate or not to correct student error. Even native speakers, actually, sometimes make mistakes like subject/verb agreement errors when engaged in spontaneous speech in an informal situation. It's just that nobody really notices their errors. We tend to be more attuned to the errors students and nonnative speakers make as we're looking for them: we assume native speakers "know better" and won't make errors.

2 FOCUS ON LANGUAGE AS COMMUNICATION.

What is the purpose of language: to show how correct and elegant we can be in our production, or is it to communicate a specific message? Unless you are a poet, for example, whose business is the beauty of language, and for whom the main purpose might be its beauty, the ultimate goal of language is most cases is to get across a specific message. If the student has achieved that, his production is probably "good enough," in most cases.

3 FOCUS ON PURPOSE OF CORRECTION.

Why do we correct student error? Is it to show our expertise, to show the student her errors so she'll learn from them? To demonstrate our editing skills? To show we know more than our students? In most cases, of course, the purpose of correction is to help the student revise her writing or improve her fluency and accent. In order to do this, correction should be limited and focused on specific points for improvement: for example, verb tenses or intonation patterns. If every error is noted, it becomes too overwhelming for the student to begin

to know where to improve.

4 FOCUS ON LARGER, OR GLOBAL, ERRORS.

Which errors should be corrected? Should all student errors be marked? If they are mistakes, the instructor should point them out, shouldn't she? Again, we should go back here to the purpose of correction. If the purpose is to help students improve production, then correction should be limited to one or two areas for students to focus on which are important to overall comprehensibility: the student's pattern of run-on sentences, for example, or stress patterns, not a single misspelling or mispronunciation. Isolated issues of misspelling and mispronunciation usually do not detract from overall comprehensibility (if this were the case, most native speakers of English would on occasion lapse into incoherence) -- rather, the instructor should look for the global problems — problems in verb tense switch, for example, usually effect overall comprehensibility of a message.

5 FOCUS ON PATTERNS OF ERRORS.

In addition to considering the seriousness of an error, the instructor should consider the frequency of the error. If the student has a concern with almost always omitting articles ("a," "an," and "the"), this is a problem that should be addressed because omitted articles are distracting from the overall message and can affect overall comprehensibility of the writing.

6 COST-BENEFIT

Are all errors even worth the time and trouble to correct? For example, prepositions in English, especially the more abstract ones that don't refer to a literal place, are very difficult to teach as they are idiomatic and dialectal: for example, in American English I "come around" to see a friend, while in British English I "come round." Is it "go down" the street or "go up" the street? They mean the same thing. And if a nonnative

speaker mixed up these expressions, I probably wouldn't notice, much less be confused. So considering the difficulty in learning prepositions, and the overall unimportance of them, it probably is not worth the time investment to learn them. This also goes for trying to "correct" specific nonnative English speech sounds, like the non-English trilled "r." It is all right in most cases, unless the student is training to be a spy, to retain some nonnative "accent" in both speech and writing.

However, through considering such issues as overall comprehensibility and goals of correction, the instructor can turn the potentially negative exercise of giving corrective feedback into a positive learning experience.

7 TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO SELF-CORRECT.

Finally, it's usually not enough for the instructor to just show where the errors are. The student also must know how to correct them, so the instructor should demonstrate for the student how to do this — how to check that the verbs agree with the subject, for example — rather than just making the correction herself, from which the student learns nothing. It is, of course, ultimately the goal for the student to use English independently, which means monitoring and correcting his own language production.

8 CONSIDER STUDENT AFFECT.

Last but really not least, student affect, emotional response, has to be taken into consideration. A paper that comes back covered in red ink accompanied by the instructor's biting comments at the end — we've all probably experienced something like this at some point — may very well result in the student giving up, which is, of course, not the goal. The goal is for students to move forward, improving from the place they are. This involves carefully weighing what comments and marks on papers will mean to students how they will be affected by them. Do they know what subject-verb agreement means? Have I taught that yet? Do they know how to correct it? What are the positive aspects of the students' speech and language production that I can mention and which they can build on while working on their weaker spots? Marking papers and giving feedback does really involve addressing many aspects of student need.

**CORRECTING STUDENT ERROR IS
A SENSITIVE ISSUE THAT MOST
INSTRUCTORS WOULD PROBABLY
RATHER NOT DO.**

Correct Me if I'm Wrong: Error Correction in Writing & Speech

ONE OF THE BANES OF A TEACHER'S EXISTENCE IS THOSE STUDENTS WHO ARE ALWAYS RIGHT.

They are never wrong, and if you think they are wrong, and produce evidence that they are wrong — well, both you and the evidence are wrong! (“Okay, today is not Mexican Independence Day -- despite the students in traditional dress celebrating in the quad.”) These contrary students are there to contradict and argue the most minor of points.

But perhaps even worse than the student who never admits to being wrong and never accepts criticism is the student who wants to have all of her failings pointed out, no matter how minor. She would like you to interrupt her when talking to point out mistakes in pronunciation and grammar, and if you don't do this it's a sign that you are failing at your job as an instructor. Clearly some discussion is needed for such students, as well as the class as a whole, on the rationale for error correction and when it is appropriate.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ERROR CORRECTION

1 FOCUS ON MEANING

Language, is after all, about communication, therefore the focus, especially in the beginning stages of language learning, should be on communicating clearly, if not with perfect accuracy, and in a variety of situations. For example, like many other American second language learners, I can communicate with a good deal of accuracy in my second languages of French and Russian on a limited number of topics: in almost anything related to school and other familiar topic like family, I have been told I have near-native control. But outside that limited range of topics, my ability to communicate breaks down because, again like many American second language learners, I was not allowed to progress to learning a new topic or level of conversation or writ-

ing until I had achieved near-perfect pronunciation and grammar in the current one. I would rather my students have a range of topics they can discuss and write about, comprehensibly if not perfectly.

2 FOCUS ON GLOBAL ERRORS

Focusing on global errors is an academic way of saying “Pick your battles.” That is, it makes little sense to mark all the grammar errors in a student's paper if there are numerous concerns with organization, development, and vocabulary that are going to force major revision anyway — creating a new set of grammar errors. Rather, do correcting in stages, first focusing on the global then perhaps the more “local” errors of articles and punctuation, for example.

3 DON'T INTERRUPT

Being interrupted while trying to communicate a message is a universally frustrating experience. I would never do it to a native speaker who happens to use a nonstandard form in online production, so I would not do it with a second language learner who is struggling to communicate. Rather, the student should be noticed for the effort and eventual success at communicating after she is finished and then as appropriate some concerns pointed out. This strategy has an additional benefit in that the concerns you point out — e.g., “be careful about dropped word endings” — is advice that will probably apply to most of the class, so no one is singled out, and the other students also benefit from the instruction.

4 ADJUST EXPECTATIONS

Second language learners, especially those coming to the second language as adults, although capable of near-native like speech and writing and certainly proficient and comprehensible second language production, are still going to differ from native

speakers. They will especially vary in the idiomatic, that part of language without a set of formal rules and which follow largely native speaker “intuition,” such as two-word verbs (I was given “the run around” or “the run about”?) These differences should be accepted, and some nonnative “accent” in both spoken and written production accepted, especially if it doesn't interfere with meaning.

TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT ERROR CORRECTION

Error correction is really an instructional strategy, meant to help students improve their second language acquisition, so it is important to not only have a set of principles of error correction but also to be able to talk to students about your guiding principles: why you don't correct every written or spoken error, for example. Many students expect and want each error corrected, and may become confused or frustrated if you don't, perhaps doubting your competence as a teacher (you don't correct because you yourself don't know the correct form or because you don't know how to mark a paper properly.) There are some methods to guide students in understanding error correction.

1 TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT FLUENCY IN READING AND WRITING.

Fluency, the ability to speak or write without hesitation, is extremely important to general comprehensibility of the speaker or writer, probably more so than flawless production that proceeds very slowly for fear of making an error. In addition, aiming for flawless production probably limits acquisition: fewer vocabulary words and structures are attempted because risking use of new forms almost certainly results in errors at first.

2 TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING ITSELF

Language acquisition does not come from being corrected. There is little evidence that correcting errors and focus on perfection will lead to acquisition. Rather, acquisition occurs in predictable steps and from continual engagement with the second language through practice in spoken and written tasks: correction doesn't necessarily speed up this process. Error correction may actually be more practice for the teacher in the art of error correction than help for the students in acquisition of language.

3 MISTAKES ARE NOT TO BE FEARED

Mistakes are part of the process. Taking risks, trying out new vocabulary and structures, is part of the progress of learning new language: trying it out, getting some focused feedback at the end, and trying again. Correcting every error, and focusing on the incorrect rather than correct, often encourages students to not take risks, to not speak up in English class, unless they know exactly how they should say it, for fear of the teacher interrupting them to explain a grammar or pronunciation point—which will develop the theoretical understanding of the point but probably not the use of it. Students can really only learn the use of a second language through actual use of, not the discussion of, it.

4 TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT YOUR ERROR CORRECTION STRATEGY

Because the teacher did not overtly correct you does not mean she didn't correct you at all: rather, she might have modeled the correct form after the use, for example ("Oh, I see, you visited your friend yesterday?" or summed up at the end some general areas to work on: "Remember to check your word endings before handing in a paper.") Because the teacher didn't correct every error in your paper or dialogue does not mean she didn't mark it at all. She may have focused on a couple of major problem areas to work on: repeated problems with verb tense, for example, rather than the one missing article.

5 GIVE STUDENTS SOME OF WHAT THEY WANT: EXPLICIT CORRECTION.

Often an instructional strategy will not work if students are simply convinced that it won't. If your students are used to having all of their errors corrected, try correcting students during production, or marking every error during a paper, and then ask how that works for them compared to the strategies of focused correction. Do they think that having every error pointed out helped them learn better? Often the answer is "no," especially if they experienced the frustration of the teacher interrupting them while they were in the midst of communicating a complex thought. You may then refer to your original explanation of how and why you address student error. Or if students remain convinced of the value of correcting every error, you may continue doing this, while still trying to introduce them to more focused correction by sometimes using this strategy.

GIVING STUDENTS FEEDBACK IS AN ART FORM, TOUCHING ON VALUES AND EXPECTATIONS OF BOTH TEACHER AND LEARNER.

There are some general principles of effective error correction, such as focusing on major concerns over minor and communication over correctness, that have been proven more effective than others and that should be introduced to students

4 Simple Steps to Fostering Accuracy in Your Students

ESL TEACHERS MUST WALK A FINE LINE.

Our goal is fluency in our students, and we design curriculum and lesson plans to meet that goal. We are excited when our students use language correctly and begin to attain fluency. Even when they have not reached fluency, we celebrate the little victories along the way. After all, language learning takes time, and no student or teacher should expect immediate perfection. But in our excitement, it's possible to overlook errors in our students' language use. We accept questionable pronunciation and grammatical errors because our students are doing more today than they did last week.

This isn't necessarily a big issue in the classroom. All of your students are in the process of learning English, and you have the experience to know what your students mean even if it isn't exactly what they are saying. But what happens when your students leave the classroom? What happens when they need superior language skills for their careers or when speaking with unsympathetic English speakers? In these and other situations, accurate language use is important.

THE FINE LINE

If we think about it, we know that accurate language use is important. We want our students to have good pronunciation, choose language appropriate to the context, and speak fluently and free of grammatical errors. This goal, though, is difficult to achieve. And to get there, teachers must walk the fine line between correcting their students' incorrect language use while not discouraging them from speaking. If our students feel overcorrected, their speech is likely to become slow, choppy and hesitant. The good news is you can make efforts to foster accuracy in your students in ways that will not discourage them from using the language they know. Here are four simple ways to do that.

1 START EARLY

It is easy to emphasize courageous language use so much that accuracy is less than a second thought. To avoid this trap, emphasize accuracy issues early in your lessons. Make sure, when you present a lesson to your students, they are clear about correct language usage, the right pronunciation and the potential errors they could make. Take time to point out how to use this language accurately. By emphasizing accurate language use early, your students will be thinking about their own accuracy as they experiment with the new language structures they are learning.

2 CAN YOU REPEAT THAT?

Another key element to fostering accuracy in your students is repetition. By offering your students many opportunities to see and practice correct language usage, you will engrain in them the language patterns you want to see. Keep in mind you do not have to limit repetition to one lesson. Consider covering the same grammar topics or vocabulary several times throughout the year. There is no reason you cannot teach noun clauses in the career unit and then again in the food unit of your class. You could also teach food vocabulary a second time when you talk about restaurant careers. Don't feel as though you are wasting your students' time when you go over a topic more than once. It often takes several times going over the same material to really cement it in their minds.

3 MAKE A POINT

Communication is of utmost importance, and you should encourage your students to use the language that they know. But you can balance this emphasis on communication with reminders of the need for accuracy. If your students do not know why they need accurate language usage, they may not be motivated to strive toward it. Take every possible opportunity to

stress that accuracy is important in language use. When your students see that accuracy is important to you and they understand why it is important in real world language use, they will value it themselves and as a result will try to achieve it.

4 YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME

When teachers correct and over correct their students, there are several possible negative outcomes. But who says you have to be the one to point out all the language errors in your classroom? Make your students responsible for noticing and correcting their own errors. Teach them how to make corrections as they speak. Give them tools for self-evaluation. And do not discourage peer correction. When everyone in the class plays a part in fostering accurate language, you are no longer the bad guy who loves to see your students make mistakes.

Accurate language is important for language fluency, and with these simple strategies you can encourage accurate language in your students. Give attention to accurate language early in your lessons, teach your students the value of accurate language use and encourage them to be aware of their own mistakes. If you do these things, you will see your students reaching new heights in their language fluency.

Teaching in Japan:

5 Common Student Mistakes

WHEN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE, YOU WILL ENCOUNTER A LOT OF MISTAKES.

While you can choose to simply correct those mistakes and move on, it is usually worth looking at which mistakes crop up time and time again. Common mistakes can be due to the way you're teaching something, or they can be due to a feature of the student's native language. It is important to understand not only what the common mistakes for Japanese learners of English are, but why they pop up so often.

THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES ARE THE FOLLOWING:

1 I RIKE RED!

Those racist impressions have some truth behind them – Japanese speakers often mix up the sounds “R” and “L” when they speak English. This isn't just confusion about which letter to use – most learners genuinely can't distinguish the difference between the two sounds. While Japanese does not use an “L” sound, but its “R” is not quite an “R” as we would say it, either. Practice the two sounds, and notice where your tongue is. Their sound is somewhere in between the two.

When English words get transcribed into Japanese, they are written in katakana – the alphabet for imported words. This alphabet (like the rest of Japanese) doesn't have an “L” – or a “V”, for that matter. Ls become Rs and Vs become Bs, while both “th” sounds become either S or Z. Consonants also don't exist without vowels after them (except for “n”), so “hot” becomes “hotto” etc. When you can translate English words into katakana, you'll start to recognise why students pronounce things the way they do.

The best way to practice this is to get students to focus on their tongue and teeth placement when making the sounds, and to drill them with certain words over and over. Only practice can help with this – and discouraging the use to katakana in their books to “help” with pronunciation!

2 I ATE FRIED POTATO AND PAN.

A lot of imported words are used in Japanese, especially relating to imported

food or ideas. You can recognise them from the katakana alphabet that offers “hamba-ga” and “ko-ra” on the menu. However, not all words are adopted from English. Study the language and you'll soon find a lot of strange words, such as “arubaito” (from the German “arbeit” – work – which in Japan is the word for a part-time job) or “pan” (bread, from Portuguese or French).

A lot of students assume that if a word is written in katakana, then it must be the English equivalent. Sometimes the words are English, but the meaning has changed – “fried potato”, you may have guessed, is fries/chips, but there are some far stranger words that you'll come across. Take, for example, “pasacon” – which is a shortened version of “personal computer”, or “baikingu” – from the word “Viking”, but in Japan it's used to describe an all-you-can-eat dinner special.

You'll have to teach students that, sadly, katakana and English are not the same thing. It's a good idea to arm yourself with knowledge of these imported words, so you can figure out what your students are trying to tell you.

3 I AM VERY ENJOY!

One thing that cropped up all the time was the use of “enjoy” (or even “enjoyment”) as an adjective. When your students tell you that “I was enjoy”, what they mean is that they enjoyed something, they had a good time, or it was fun. The mistake comes from attempting to translate “tanoshii” or “tanoshii-katta” from Japanese.

“Tanoshii” is a word that means fun, enjoyment, or pleasure, but the way that it's used is different in Japanese. In English, we ascribe emotions to ourselves – “I am angry” or “she was happy” – but it's a little different in Japanese. If you directly translate the sentence “Watashi wa kowai desu”, it could mean either “I am scared” or “As for me, [it is] scary”.

So, what semantically means “I had a good time” comes out as “For me, it was enjoy” – and as it seems to be a sentence that crops up a lot, it's good to know what your students are trying to say. Teach some stock phrases rather than all available possibilities, to avoid confusion.

4 PLEASE TEACH ME YOUR PHONE NUMBER.

It sounds a little strange, but the confusion

between “teach” and “tell” is a common one, and down to a very simple reason – the word for both is the same in Japanese (“oshiete”). When you've grown up only knowing one word to mean several things, it can be confusing to try distinguishing between two meaning – why is it “tell” here, yet “teach” here?

Japanese and English often disagree on the usage of words. Another example is coming and going. In English, you might text “I'm coming now!” if a friend asked you where you were, and you were enroute to their location. In Japanese, however, you would say “I'm going now”, which sounds a little strange to native English speakers.

It's good to be aware of these differences, so that you can catch them and correct them. The more Japanese you learn, the easier it will become to identify mistakes and understand why they happen.

5 I READ BOOK IN A SCHOOL.

Japanese does not use articles (the, a, an) – or plurals, for that matter. Actually, it often omits pronouns (he, she, I, you) – so “Hon o yonda”, a perfectly valid sentence in Japanese, translates to “read book”. It can take a lot of time (and confusion) to teach students to use pronouns for every sentence, and even more to get them to understand articles. Many students end up randomly shoving articles before nouns in the blind hope that they're right.

In English, the rules of when we use “the” are pretty confusing, even for native speakers. There's no need to go into a lot of detail with beginner students – you'll scare them off. The basic idea is that if we both (speaker and listener) know WHICH book/boy/sandwich you're referring to, we can use “the”. If there's only one of these things and we don't use “the”, we have to use “on”, “a/an”, or turn it into a plural. Otherwise, when your kids say “I love cat!” it sounds a little dubious.

STUDENTS GET FRUSTRATED WITH THE COMPLICATED NATURE OF ENGLISH OFTEN ENOUGH, SO DON'T FOCUS ON EVERY TINY MISTAKE UNLESS THEY'RE ADVANCED LEARNERS.

Praise them for their efforts, and gently correct them as they go along. The more you know about their language, the more you can help them by recognising their mistakes and catching them early on.

5 Non-Verbal Ways to Do Error Correction

EFFECTIVE ERROR CORRECTION IS ONE OF THE THINGS ESL TEACHERS STRUGGLE WITH THE MOST.

If you correct them too much, you might make them feel discouraged and compromise their fluency for the sake of accuracy. If you correct them too little, they'll continue making the same mistakes. Achieving the right balance is a daunting task, although not an impossible one. And when doing on the spot correcting, do you simply supply the right answer? Although it is certainly an option, you should sometimes give your students the chance to correct themselves. There are several verbal strategies you may use, like asking them to repeat what they've just said, or repeating the sentence yourself but pausing to let the student fill in the "blank" correctly.

HOWEVER, HERE ARE THE 5 BEST NON-VERBAL WAYS TO DO ERROR CORRECTION.

1 USE A GRAMMAR FLAG

Once you have your students actively engaged in some drilling exercises, use a little red flag to "flag" their mistakes. The flag goes up if they make a mistake and students instantly know they should go back and say it again. You may also use the flag in others types of activities, or whenever you wish to work on accuracy.

2 USE FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Students are sometimes self-conscious enough without having to endure constant corrections. So, how can you effectively correct them and not stomp on their confidence in the process? When a student makes a mistake, like saying a verb in the past tense incorrectly, use an exaggerated facial expression to signal the mistake. Give them an open-mouthed, wide-eyed stare. Or arch an eyebrow. The more "theatrical" the facial expression is, the funnier it'll be. You'll be effectively signalling that a mistake has been made, but students won't

take it so seriously.

3 USE GESTURES

Another very effective way to show students they've made a mistake is through gestures, some of which may be specific to the kind of mistake. Teachers typically gesture backwards with their hands or point to the back to show students they haven't used the verb in the past. Students often use the wrong pronouns: it's quite common to hear a student say, "She went to the movies with your boyfriend." To which you simply reply by pointing to yourself with a look of shock or surprise. You may also implement a gesture to indicate that students should repeat something, or say it again, and if they repeat the mistake, you can raise a finger to show them where in the sentence the mistake is, though they have to figure out what they are doing wrong.

4 USE VISUAL REMINDERS

Very often students forget the final "-s" in the simple present, third person singular. You may have a big S stuck on a wall that you can point to on such occasions, or point to something that will trigger the right response, like the picture of an S-shaped snake. Visual reminders are also great for vocabulary-related mistakes. A student may say "childs" instead of "children". You point to a picture of a group of children to indicate that something is wrong: the student has to figure out he or she used the wrong plural.

5 USE FINGER COUNTING

How can you correct mistakes in word order in a non-verbal way? Finger counting is simply perfect for this! Say a student used the wrong word order to ask a question: "You are a teacher?" Ask the student to repeat the question and then show him or her how you count the words on your fingers. Show the student how the first two fingers are in the wrong order, so that the student understands the question should start with "Are you..."

You can get as creative as you like with your facial expressions, gestures, and visual reminders. Remember here that the ultimate goal is to help students learn from their mistakes, and if you simply supply the right answer, they may not fully internalize it.

SOME TEACHERS HAVE EVEN BEEN KNOWN TO HUM WELL-KNOWN SONGS TO TRIGGER THE CORRECT RESPONSE, LIKE DEPECHE MODE'S "PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE" WHEN STUDENTS MAKE THE CLASSIC MISTAKE, "PEOPLE IS".

The Upside of Errors: When and Why to Avoid Correcting Students

"I TEACHED MATH IN MY HOME COUNTRY," A STUDENT SHARES ON CAREER DAY. THE TEACHER RAISES HER EYEBROWS AND WAITS FOR THE STUDENT TO CONTINUE.

"I mean, I taught math in my home country." This is a perfect example of when not correcting an ESL student is the best way to handle an error. By signaling her student with a small gesture, the teacher helps the student understand that he made an error. He thinks back to what he said, and then produces the correct structure. This is what in language studies is called self-correction.

Self-correction is just what it sounds like – when students correct their own mistakes rather than depending on the teacher to correct them. Self-correction happens naturally in speech, both with first and second language learners and in spoken and written language. And students who are able to self-correct have many advantages over those who do not.

SELF-CORRECTION BASICS

1 STUDENTS WHO SELF-CORRECT SHOW THAT THEY UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE.

They are able to recognize mistakes, even in their own speaking and writing, and know what the correct structure should look like. They are then able to produce that correct language on their own even if it is on the second try.

2 STUDENTS WHO SELF-CORRECT ARE MORE PREPARED FOR THE REAL WORLD.

They depend less on their teacher and more on themselves, and they take more responsibility for their own quality of language. When they do this, they can better function in real life language situations and are able to better communicate with native speakers, even when they make mistakes, because they are able to identify and correct those mis-

takes without help from someone else.

3 SELF-CORRECTION BEGETS INCREASED AWARENESS.

Students must have some level of self-awareness when it comes to their language use if they are going to self-correct. But as students learn to self-correct, they become more aware of their language use and therefore any mistakes they are making. When students are more aware of mistakes, they make fewer. As a result, they become better at self-correcting. Getting students to self-correct, then, begins a positive cycle of awareness and correct language production.

DEVELOPING SELF-CORRECTING STUDENTS

Self-correction can be developed. For students with little experience self-correcting, you can give them sentences with errors that they need to correct. Spending a few minutes on this type of activity each day will increase student awareness of language errors. Creating examples inspired by actual student errors is a good way to make sure your sentence corrections will make a real impact on how your students speak. You can also use examples depicting errors common with speakers of your students' first language. You may also create examples that highlight grammatical concepts you have recently taught in class. Each of these may serve a different purpose, but all of them will help your students become better self-correctors.

Another way to encourage error awareness and self-correction is to signal your students when they make an error. You can use verbal signals, asking them to repeat themselves for example, or use simple physical clues like raising your eyebrows. If students still struggle with identifying their mistakes, give a more obvious signal like raising your hand when they make an error. The more natural your signals are, and the more subtle they are, the more

prepared your students will be for self-correcting on their own.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Making students aware of their mistakes is like walking a thin line – too much and you will end up discouraging your students rather than empowering them. For this reason, remember what level your students are at. Don't expect perfect speech from beginning level students, and don't expect them to correct every error they make. For any student, when errors occur in many contexts, try focusing on one or two and let the rest slide (for now). Building a student's foundation in self-correction is often a slow process and one that should not be rushed. You can always help them tackle more areas of error later, and you want them to feel good about the language they are producing.

CREATING A CULTURE OF SELF-CORRECTION CAN BE CHALLENGING.

Sometimes students will realize their mistakes on their own. Other times the teacher will have to offer a signal that self-correction is needed. She may make a physical signal or say something like, "What was that? Excuse me?" Though establishing a classroom culture where students self-correct may be challenging and time consuming at first, it is well worth it as your students become more effective and more confident English users. They become more independent and are ready to take their English skills out into the real world.

How to Correct Mistakes

Throughout their studies, students will make lots of mistakes. It is an important part of the learning process. If they are not making mistakes then they are not being given difficult enough topics and structures to work with. You have to choose material that is challenging but manageable for your class and correct mistakes in positive ways. Singling out students who make errors will make students feel self-conscious and shy so some tact when correcting mistakes is important.

HOW TO PROCEED

1 PRACTICE

When introducing new vocabulary, emphasize correct pronunciation and during the drilling exercises have students practice using choral repetition. This means students are not immediately singled out to pronounce new and unfamiliar words and they can become accustomed to the sound of the words together. The next step is generally to call on students or have students volunteer to pronounce words or phrases. It is an important step to check pronunciation on an individual basis however it means that a student is being singled out to perform independently in front of the entire class. Correcting mistakes at this level is the most challenging but you can use the same process to correct errors in any situation.

2 SELF-CORRECTION

The best way to correct mistakes is to have students correct themselves. Ideally a student will realize a mistake has been made and fix it automatically but that is not always the case. If a student answers a question incorrectly you can gently prompt them to revisit their answer. One of the ways to do this is to repeat what the student said placing emphasis on the incorrect portion, for instance "I have play baseball." and saying it in a questioning way. At this point the student has an opportunity to think about and revise his initial response. You may have your own method of prompting students with a facial expression or phrase which they associate with being incorrect but avoid say-

ing words such as wrong, incorrect, or no in response to mistakes. They are negative and will have ill effects on your students' confidence in the classroom.

3 PEER CORRECTION

When a student is unable to self-correct, peer correction might be appropriate. If a student raises his hand while you are waiting for a student to self-correct, you may want to call on that student for the correct answer or, after waiting a short time for a student to self-correct, you could ask the whole class the same question and encourage a choral response. Especially with challenging questions, this is a good method because then it is unknown who in the class has the right answer and who does not. Just repeat and emphasize the correct answer by writing it on the board and explaining why it is correct. This is a good method of correcting mistakes because it shifts focus away from the student that provided the original incorrect answer.

4 PROVIDING THE ANSWER: LAST RESORT

Sometimes individual students as well as entire classes have no idea what the answer to your question is. If providing hints and examples does not lead them to the correct answer, you will have to provide it. Generally this is a last resort and means that a lot of review activities may be in order but keeping a positive attitude and explaining the answer good-naturedly will do a lot to keep your students positive about learning English. Asking similar questions in a simpler form will build student confidence again so that the lesson can continue smoothly.

AT EVERY STAGE OF AN ACTIVITY, PRAISE SHOULD BE GIVEN.

If a student volunteers to answer a question, you can thank him immediately for volunteering which will boost his self-confidence. At that point if the student provides an incorrect answer you can correct in an encouraging way by saying "Almost." If the student gives the correct answer, be sure to say "Good job!" or "Excellent work!"

As long as you are positive in your method of correcting errors, reassure your students that they are doing well, and do not get upset with them for making mistakes, they will continue to volunteer and try their best because making mistakes is OK. That is how learning should be. If students never take risks, they will not improve.

How To Provide Quality Feedback In The ESL Classroom

PROVIDING FEEDBACK THROUGHOUT LESSONS IS IMPORTANT. IT IS SOMETHING THAT WILL BECOME SECOND NATURE WITH JUST A LITTLE BIT OF PRACTICE. FEEDBACK SHOULD BE USED TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO WORK HARD AND INDICATE WHAT THEY NEED TO FOCUS ON WHEN THEY ARE HAVING DIFFICULTY.

Feedback often takes one of three forms: verbal, visual, or written. In this article we'll take a look at how teachers can use these different methods to provide feedback in the ESL/EFL classroom.

WAYS TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK

1 VERBAL FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

During lessons, teachers use a lot of verbal feedback to let students know how they are doing and also to transition from one section to another. Short expressions such as "Great!" or "Good job!" can be used to praise students for correct answers. Rather than tell students directly they are incorrect, it is better to ask them to try again or reconsider their answers. The goal is to elicit the correct answer from the class and students should not be afraid of being wrong so keep your reactions positive. You can summarize how students did and introduce the next topic for transitions by saying "Alright! You did so well talking about food. Now let's move on to ~." This will reinforce the fact that students should keep up the good work. If student responses are a little lackluster, you can point that out in your comments too. By saying "I know it's Friday but I need a bit more energy in this next section, OK? *wait for student response* OK! Great, now we're going to talk about ~." you show that you empathize with students while still pushing them to do their best. It is easy to include verbal feedback in every stage of your lesson.

2 VISUAL FEEDBACK

Visual feedback can come in two forms. The first is any expression or gesture you use with or without verbal feedback that indicates how students are doing in class. A smile or thumbs up would be one form of visual feedback. When using visual feedback, it is not always necessary to add verbal feedback and could save you time when working through an activity quickly. You can also prompt students to reconsider their answers and self correct using visual feedback. If you use the same expression each time students say the incorrect answer, they will pick up on that. This visual feedback allows you to give students another chance without verbally telling them they are wrong. Another form of visual feedback can accompany written evaluations. This may take the form of stickers, stamps, or even charts that reflect student accomplishments. You may choose to have a display in the classroom that visually represents how well the class is doing in reaching their goals so that students can see how much progress they have made and stay motivated.

3 WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Teachers often have the opportunity to give students written feedback on homework assignments, on exams, and at the end of each term. These are great opportunities to point out what students did well and what areas they still need to work on. You should provide students with some suggestions of what they could do to improve and offer to assist them by meeting with them for tutorials or providing them with extra study material. You can also allow students to provide feedback for each other. Doing this during role play exercises, for example, means that students who are not performing still have to pay attention. Categories could include pronunciation, creativity, and performance so that the presenting students are marked on how well they were understood, the quality of their

script, and the quality of their acting. Students could be graded as a group or individually. Student evaluations should not have any bearing on the grades that you give students but you might want to use the information to say which skit was the best and who the best actor was.

REGARDLESS OF HOW OFTEN YOU USE THESE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FEEDBACK, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT STUDENTS ARE GIVEN A CLEAR IMAGE OF THEIR PERFORMANCE AS WELL AS THEIR GOALS.

This will help them focus on what is most important. Giving constructive criticism and providing students with both the materials and support they need to succeed are important. Doing these things will help students excel in their studies and maintain a positive attitude towards education.

7 Things Your Quiet ESL Students Are Not Telling You

ISN'T IT GREAT WHEN WE HAVE ESL STUDENTS WHO ARE VERY VOCAL ABOUT THEIR NEEDS?

They arrive to their first day of class, tell you all about their English-learning background and describe what they hope to accomplish. When they don't understand, they tell you. If you're going too fast, they ask you to slow down. If only all ESL students were like that...

By contrast, we are sometimes met with a quiet room full of blank stares. How do you know what's going on in their heads if they don't say anything? If you have students who are too quiet, chances are there is something they are not telling you, which you'll need to find out – fast!

IMPORTANT THINGS YOUR STUDENTS ARE NOT TELLING YOU:

1 I'M HEARING TOO MANY NEW WORDS.

Do you give your students long lists of vocabulary words or do you introduce new vocab in digestible sets of five to six words? When you give them instructions, do you use words they may not understand? Students who are too shy or don't want to be disrespectful may not tell you they did not understand half of what you said or the story you read. Make sure you introduce new vocabulary as appropriate, i.e. before reading a story or giving instructions for a new task. Check for comprehension of the new words, and only then proceed with the task.

2 IT'S TOO HARD FOR ME TO DO THIS ON MY OWN. CAN I WORK WITH A CLASSMATE?

Some students are overwhelmed by an exercise or task, and would feel much more comfortable working with another student. Don't underestimate the value of pair work or team work. Lots of students enjoy it and thrive in this type of task. Of course, not all tasks should be completed in pairs or

teams. But they shouldn't have to do everything on their own, either.

3 PLEASE DON'T PUT ME ON THE SPOT.

Some students love being in the spotlight, the center of attention. Others would prefer to blend into the wallpaper. If you believe a student in particular is having a hard time with an exercise or task, or if they can't answer a question, don't insist in front of the entire class. Check back with the student at the end of class to make sure he/she understood.

4 PLEASE, BE PATIENT WITH ME. I'M TRYING MY BEST.

You've probably seen this happen. A student says he/she does not understand something, and you explain. The student still does not understand, so you re-phrase and try again. The student still does not understand. Under no circumstances must we lose our patience. You try by all means possible to help the student grasp whatever it is he or she is having trouble grasping, and if they still don't, you set a moment to talk about it, perhaps after class.

5 I NEED SOME TIME TO THINK BEFORE I ANSWER.

Some people don't like long silences or pauses, and ESL teachers are no different. But sometimes students don't answer questions as quickly as we'd like them to. The question dangles in the air, and if the student takes too long, we either answer it ourselves or ask another student to do it. Some students need time to think. Give them a few extra seconds, and then perhaps a clue or a nudge to steer them in the right direction.

6 I DON'T CARE ABOUT "MR. SMITH" FROM THE BOOK. THIS IS BORING!

Nine out of ten times when students are bored, they are bored with the

coursebook. But they might not tell you that. They are not interested in some fictional character's conversations with his boss or family. Though we should use a coursebook in class, sometimes it's best to adjust it and adapt it to better suit our students' interests.

7 I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOUR HANDWRITING.

Students take forever to copy from the board and whisper amongst themselves while they do so. You don't know that what they are whispering is, "What does question number 2 say?" Some students struggle with your handwriting, but they won't tell you that. Instead of guessing, it's far easier to just ask, "Is my writing clear? Let me know if you can read it all." Try switching from cursive to print handwriting. For longer exercises, you might want to consider giving them copies – it certainly saves time.

Let's bear in mind that cultural differences may come into play. In some cultures students are taught to respect their teacher, and they don't want to offend. In others, it is not accustomed for students to make eye contact with their instructor.

Students are also different throughout the world. Some are naturally talkative, while others are timid and shy. Whatever the reason for your students keeping quiet, just make sure it's not due to the ones mentioned above!

10 Best Pieces of Advice You Could Ever Give Your ESL Students

ESL students come in all shapes and sizes, from adorable little preschoolers to senior citizens who want to learn another language in their free time. In the middle, we have all sorts of students, with different backgrounds and interests. Yet there is one thing they all have in common: they are learning English as a Second Language. Of course, some are learning of their own volition, while others (usually children and teens) are being forced to study English. No matter who your students are, the fact remains that they want or need to succeed at learning. Here are the 10 best pieces of advice you could give your students to lead them towards success:

TOP 10 PIECES OF ADVICE FOR YOUR ESL STUDENTS

1 REMEMBER WHY YOU'RE LEARNING ENGLISH

Sometimes the going gets tough. Students are overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to do for their other classes. Adults have too much going on at work. When students start complaining about their workload, suggest that they look at the big picture. The business English students need to remember that improving their English skills will open doors to better job opportunities. Young learners need to remember that they have an important international examination coming at the end of the year. Every student has a reason for learning English. Make sure they never lose sight of what it is.

2 SET MILESTONES FOR YOUR OVERALL GOAL

Some students are very clear about what they hope to accomplish. Some want to sit for the PET this year, the FCE next year and the CAE the following year. Others want to go from beginner to intermediate to advanced. If you have students who are unclear about what they can accomplish, specifically, and their timeframe to achieve this, maybe you can give them a nudge in the right direction and help them set some milestones.

3 NOURISH YOUR BRAIN AND YOUR BODY

Students who are tired or hungry have trouble concentrating in class. If you have students who are burning the candle at both ends, remind them of the importance of getting enough rest and balanced meals. Their performance inside and outside the classroom will improve by leaps and bounds if they take proper care of themselves.

4 DO THE WORK!

There is one essential piece of information that students often forget. You, as the teacher, are not solely responsible for their learning. Students must do their share of the work after class, and this means not only doing homework but also reading extra material, listening to audio, watching videos, writing emails, and working on whatever skills they need to improve.

5 PINPOINT YOUR WEAKNESSES

Some students will tell you they're great at writing but lousy at speaking. Others have perfect listening comprehension, but get tongue tied when they have to speak. Students must be very aware of what they need to work on (and if they're clueless, be sure to tell them what it is!) This way, they can focus their after-school efforts towards improving that which needs extra work.

6 TALK TO NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Having normal conversations with native English speakers will do wonders for your students' confidence and speaking skills. It all depends on where you live, but where do all of the foreign expats hang out? Are there any MeetUp groups in your city for English speakers? Any other clubs or organization where English speakers meet? Encourage your students to join them and be exposed to real, everyday English.

7 HAVE FUN WITH ENGLISH

Tell your students to buy word search books in English! It will increase their vocabulary. What about online games? Do they enjoy role-playing video games? Most are played in English.

Improving English skills is not all about spending hours completing grammar exercises. Suggest some fun activities they may enjoy – in English!

8 LISTEN TO YOURSELF!

There are students that make the same mistakes – again and again. You correct them, but they repeat the mistake the very next day. Advise students to listen to the mistakes they make – really listen, and not be so quick to dismiss them. That is the first step towards improving and changing.

9 BE METHODOICAL AND CONSISTENT

If a student wants to improve their listening comprehension by watching videos on CNN.com, they should have specific days and times to do it – say twice a week right after their ESL class. They should listen to the same type of audio – in this case short news stories for a certain period of time before moving on to longer videos or audio. Switching from one activity to another may not give them the results they want. Encourage them to stick to one method until they get results.

10 NEVER GIVE UP

This may be the hardest piece of advice you'll ever have to give. There are students who have been studying English for years, and always end up in the same place, not advancing to a higher level. Some take international examinations several times with no success. The best thing you can do for your students is to tell them they shouldn't give up. If a student feels he has reached a plateau, quitting will mean that he'll probably forget and lose most of what he's learned. Quitting is not an option. They must stick to it until they meet their goal, or at the very least redefine a goal that may be a little too unrealistic.

BEFORE YOU CAN ADVISE YOU STUDENTS ON ANYTHING, OF COURSE, YOU HAVE TO LISTEN TO THEM, AND KNOW WHAT THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES ARE. Remember you are not just teaching English grammar and vocabulary. You are also showing them how to learn.

Whoops, I Did It Again: Talking About Mistakes

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

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

TALKING ABOUT MISTAKES IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1 A BIG MISTAKE

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

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

interview him about his crime. Encourage creativity!

2 A PERSONAL MISTAKE

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

3 MAKING AMENDS

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

homework and our teacher assigns twice as much to the entire class? At other times, the person affected by our mistake is someone that we have wronged. We blame someone else for something that they did not do. We cause physical harm to someone in a moment of anger. We betray a friend and then live to regret it. Get your class thinking about the ways that another person could be affected by a mistake that they might make, and invite your students to share their ideas.

Then take the discussion a step further and ask what they would do in a situation where they had made mistakes that affected another person. Would they ignore the mistake and act as though it never happened? Would they approach the person and apologize? Would they buy the person a gift with the silent message that they regret their actions? Each person who has made a mistake will take very different actions than another person might, but are there cultural expectations involved in that person's choice? Put your students in discussion groups to talk about what they would do and what most people from their home culture would do in certain circumstances of transgression. You may want to give them some questions to discuss such as the following:

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

After the groups have discussed the questions, ask volunteers to role-play those situations or any others that come up in the discussion.

WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES, THAT IS TRUE, BUT NOT EVERYONE ADDRESSES THE CONSEQUENCES OF THOSE MISTAKES IN THE SAME WAY.

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