

HOW TO GET YOUR STUDENTS TALKING IN NO TIME!

# ~ SIMPLY ~ SPEAKING

30 TOP SECRETS EVERY SPEAKING TEACHER SHOULD KNOW AND USE

IT'S INTIMIDATING.  
IT'S CHALLENGING.  
IT'S DIFFICULT.

SOMETIMES IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE.

WHAT IS IT?

SPEAKING  
IN A SECOND  
LANGUAGE



HOW DO WE  
TEACH  
A PERFECT  
SPEAKING  
CLASS?

"... FUN WAYS TO GET YOUR STUDENTS  
SPEAKING UP AND HAVING A GOOD TIME  
WHILE THEY PRACTICE THEIR ENGLISH..."



TRY THESE FUN AND SIMPLE GAMES TO GET YOUR STUDENTS TALKING IN CLASS

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# What Does She Look Like? How to Teach Students to Describe People

*Ask a student to describe someone in their family.*

Answers vary from the basic use of adjectives (tall, short, intelligent) to a complete loss for words. Rarely do they give good, solid descriptions, the kind that really allows you to picture what the person's like. Describing people is not as simple as it sounds. So here are some tips you might find useful when teaching students to do it.

## 9 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL DESCRIPTION

### 1 SET THE CONTEXT

When is it necessary to describe oneself or someone else? Let's face it. It's not something that comes up in everyday conversation: there are a limited number of situations in which we are required to describe people:

- When we are getting to know someone, we may mention and describe someone in our family
- When someone has to meet someone they've never met before face to face (they're picking them up at the airport)
- When we're trying to get someone to meet someone else (to go on a date, for example).

So instead of randomly teaching students how to describe people, try to fit it into a context. Good opportunities are when talking about family, talking about airport situations or even business meetings (arranging to meet someone at a restaurant for a business lunch).

### 2 INTRODUCE 'WHAT'S HE/SHE LIKE?'

Say your class is talking about their families. Introduce common adjectives to describe character and personality if they're not already familiar with them. Then, go back to their families: *Juan, you have a brother. What's he like?* Prompt students to use any of the adjectives they've just learned. Students take turns describing family members – only in terms of character or personality. Students take turns asking each other:

*What's your mother like? What's your sister like? What's your boyfriend like?*

### 3 INTRODUCE 'WHAT DOES HE/SHE LOOK LIKE?'

Introduce adjectives used for physical description. Make sure students understand that in some cases they must use adjectives with the verb to be (he is tall, she is slim), but that in other cases they must use the verb to have (he has brown hair, she has blue eyes). Go back to their families: *Juan, you have a brother. What does he look like?* Students take turns describing family members – only physical descriptions right now. Students take turns asking each other: *What does your brother/mother/sister look like?*

### 4 CONTRAST THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO

Make sure students understand the difference between asking 'what's he like' and 'what does he look like'. Have students take turns asking each other and answering both questions. Have them ask about family members, best friends, bosses, etc. Stress the fact that the word like is not used in the answer in either case. If necessary, show what happens when we ask questions with the verb like (Does he like chocolate?)

### 5 TO BE VS. TO HAVE

Make sure understand in which cases they must use the verb to be (when using adjectives like tall, sensitive, polite, etc.) and in which cases they must use the verb to have (blond hair, brown eyes). Split the board into two columns and have each student contribute an example for each.

### 6 MODIFYING DESCRIPTIONS

The next logical step is to teach them how to adjust and modify descriptions so that they are more accurate. For height, for example, saying that someone is either tall or short may not be very accurate, so teach them to say he/she

is medium height/not too short/a little short/quite tall/rather tall, etc.

### 7 COMPARISONS

You probably won't get to it in the same lesson, but at some point you will teach them comparatives and superlatives. This is a great opportunity to review descriptions and make some interesting comparisons with both short and long adjectives: *My brother is quieter, and I'm more talkative.*

### 8 BEING POLITE

When teaching students how to describe people, it is also recommended that you teach them how to do so in polite terms. Teach them different options for the word fat, for example, words like stout, big boned or overweight. The same thing goes for adjectives like stupid or dumb. When referring to race or ethnicity, teach them the socially-accepted terms: Asian American, Latin American, African American, etc.

### 9 DESCRIBE! DESCRIBE! DESCRIBE!

Give your class lots of practice describing people. One of the best ways to do this is to use celebrity photos. Here are some ideas for fun activities:

- The Dating Game: in pairs, Student A chooses three candidates from the pile of celebrity photos and describes each to Student B. Student B has to pick the one he/she would like to date.
- Who am I?: in pairs, Student A chooses a secret celebrity identity and describes himself/herself. Student B has to guess who he/she is.

**IT MAY NOT BE THE MOST ESSENTIAL THING THEY'LL LEARN IN CLASS, BUT IT IS DEFINITELY NECESSARY.**

With the right words and expressions, there will be no confusion as to who will be picking them up at the airport!



# Go With the Flow: 5 Activities for Improving Student Fluency

## EVERYONE KNOWS THAT TIMING IS IMPORTANT IN MUSIC, BUT ARE WE STRESSING TIMING WHEN IT COMES TO ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE?

We may not think about it often, but timing is important in language use, and having good timing is part of having good fluency in a foreign language. Fluent students produce sentences with the correct stress and timing as well as contribute to conversations at the appropriate moments. They do not have long pauses in what they are saying or wait long periods before jumping into a dialogue. It only helps your ESL students when you take time to talk about fluency. And when you are ready to do that, here are five classroom activities you can use to help your students improve theirs.

## IMPROVE YOUR STUDENTS' FLUENCY USING THESE TECHNIQUES

### 1 ONE SIDED CONVERSATION

If your students struggle with jumping into conversations at the right moments, try this challenging activity to get them speaking up sooner. Write a dialogue between two people, and then perform that dialogue with another native speaker before coming to class. When you do, record only your partner's speech, leaving your voice out of the recording. Then, bring the dialogue and recording to class. Give each student a copy of the dialogue, and then have students take turns reading their part of the dialogue along with the recording of the native speaker. If your students are too slow to speak up, the recording won't hold the conversation for them. If they are able to keep good time with the recording, they are showing signs of good fluency.

### 2 RHYTHM AND RHYME

To improve student fluency within sentences, try doing chants and rhymes as a class. Depending on the age of your students, you may want to go with anything from nursery rhymes to popu-

lar poetry or lyrics to current hits. Give each student a copy of the rhyme you will be using. Then stand in front of the class and read the rhyme for them. The next time through, your class should read along with you. Don't modify your speed or intonation to aid your students. The goal in this activity is for them to keep up with you as you read. This will help them mimic your pace and intonation as you read aloud, which in turn will help them with their fluency when they speak. You can also do this with prose.

### 3 PILE ON

No, you won't be encouraging your students to jump on a classmate making a huge pile of arms and legs. To help student fluency at the sentence level, try piling words and phrases on to a simple sentence. Start with a basic sentence, something as simple as you can make it.

*John runs.* Say the sentence for your students and then have them say it back to you. If they can read the sentence comfortably, add a word or phrase.

*John runs away.* Say the new sentence and have your students repeat. Once they are comfortable with the expanded version, add another phrase.

*John runs away from the wolf.* Repeat the process and have students repeat the sentence until they can comfortably say it fluently. Keep piling on words and phrases, one at a time, until you can't make the sentence any longer.

*John runs away with his arms flying wildly from the rabid wolf with sharp claws who is chasing him to get his dinner.*

With each addition, give students time to practice reading it aloud until they can say the sentence with fluency. Starting small gives students a chance to cement the pace in their minds before you make the sentence longer and longer. You can make this activity fun, too, by adding inventive or silly phrases to your sentences.

### 4 CREATE CONVERSATION

ESL teachers often work hard to

recruit conversation partners for their students. If you are lucky enough to teach in a school that has native speaker classes as well as ESL classes, you may have a great resource at your fingertips. Pairing your students up with native speakers to talk, either on given topic or one of their choosing, is very helpful for nonnative speakers. Sometimes though, it's good to take these conversations to the next level. Instead of pairing your students one on one with a native speaker, group two native speakers with one or two of your ESL students. Make sure everyone knows that the native speakers are to talk with each other as well as with your ESL students. Then, challenge your students to jump into the conversations at appropriate moments rather than just observe the conversation between the native speakers. This may be challenging and possibly intimidating for your students, but it will ultimately get the words rolling off their tongues more easily.

### 5 TEACH FILLERS

No one is ready with the perfect words all of the time every time. Once in a while, even the greatest talkers need a moment to collect their thoughts. Teaching your students the strategies that English speakers use as conversational place holders will give your ESL students the correct tools for when they need a moment before speaking. Different languages use different conversational holders. The most popular in English is probably "um..." Native speakers use this sound to indicate that they are not finished with what they have to say. Without realizing it, English speakers use this phrase while they think of responses, questions and comebacks. Though "um" is not appropriate for speeches or formal presentations, your students can put this phrase to good use in casual conversations when they need a moment to think. The phrases ah and hmmm will also fit the bill as conversational place holders, and giving your students a chance to use these natural speech tools will help them become better overall speakers.

# Speak Up: 6 Fabulous Games to Get Your Students Speaking

**MANY ESL TEACHERS FIND THAT THEIR STUDENTS ARE TIMID SPEAKERS OR RELUCTANT TO PARTICIPATE IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS.**

It's only natural. After all, they are trying to talk in a language they are still working on learning. Still, silence can be deadly in the ESL classroom for your students and you. When you want to get your students to speak up, try one of these fun and simple games to get them talking in class.

**TRY THESE 6 INVOLVING ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS TO SPEAK UP**

## 1 THIS IS HOW WE ROLL

You can use this simple game as a get to know you at the start of school or later as a get to know you better activity. All you need is one standard die and six questions – either ice breakers or ones that elicit opinions, experience or other personal thoughts. Be creative and choose the ones you'd like to hear your students answer. Give students a list of the questions, and make sure they are numbered on the paper. Then, have students take turns rolling the die. Whatever number they roll, that is the question they must answer. You could do this activity as a class, in smaller groups or as a public speaking activity. For the latter, have students prepare answers to each question as homework and then have them share in front of the class after they roll.

## 2 HUMAN EXPERIENCE BINGO

Your students are probably already familiar with the rules of Bingo. Simply get five numbers in a line on a chart. You can use this as a basis for another get to know you game. Work with your class to compile a list experiences that a person might have had. For example, gone scuba diving, made a birthday cake and eaten sushi would all be good experiences. Work together on the list until you have about 30-40 different experiences. (You can also compile the list on your own if you prefer.) Then, give students a blank bingo board (a 5x5 chart) and have them write one experience in each of the boxes. On your word, students mingle and talk to each other to find someone with each experience they have chosen. If a

student finds someone who, for example, has gone scuba diving, that student signs the square where your student wrote it on his Bingo board. The first person to get five in a row yells, "Bingo!" Another variation is to arrange students speed dating style: two rows of chairs facing each other. Each pair then gets two minutes to talk with each other. When time is up, the students in one row shift one chair to the right. The game is over once someone has gotten five spaces in a row on their bingo board.

## 3 TRAIT ROULETTE

This game works best for students who already know each other fairly well. Work as a group to come up with a list of several character traits a person might have. (Try to stick to positive traits.) You might include adventurous, sympathetic and generous. Then write these traits on small slips of paper and put them in a bag. Each person takes a turn drawing one character trait from the bag in front of the class. The student must then announce who in class (and you are fair game, too) possesses that character trait. Of course, a name isn't enough. The person must tell a story or give an example of why he made his particular choice.

## 4 STORY STARTER HOT POTATO

Put the list of story starters in your writing drawer to double duty with this silly and fast paced game. Students play in small groups of around five members. Students should arrange their seats in a circle. Give your class a story starter at the beginning of the round. Starting with the person whose birthday is closest to today and them moving around the circle, each person gives his group one sentence of the story. After one person is done, the person sitting to his left adds a line where the first person left off. Students continue around the circle, adding one sentence at a time, until the music stops or until you give another signal. Whoever is in the middle of his sentence or is struggling to think of a sentence when the music stops is out. He must leave the circle. Then students play a second round either continuing the story or with a new story starter. When you stop the music, whoever's turn it is is eliminated. Play continues until the final round when the person not speaking when the music stops is the winner.

## 5 FIND YOUR PARTNER

Prepare a small slip of paper for each student in your class. Each paper should have one word on it that goes with a word on another slip of paper. For example, matching pairs might be fork and spoon, day and night, bat and ball, or table and chairs. Fold the papers and put them into a hat. Each person then draws one slip of paper. On your word, students must circulate and talk to one another trying to find their partner. Once two people think they are a match, they come to you to see if they are right. If they are, they sit down. Play until everyone has found their partner. Then have those partners work together to create a new pair of words that go together. Repeat the game with these student given examples.

## 6 HIDE AND SPEAK

To prepare for this energetic and fast paced game, write several questions each on one index card or post-it note. These questions can be get to know you questions, comprehension questions or questions using current vocabulary words. Before your students arrive, hide these cards throughout your classroom. At the start of class, break your students into two teams. Explain that you have hidden cards throughout the room. On your word, students will search the room for the cards you have hidden. They can only pick up one card at a time. When a student finds a card, he must bring it to you and answer the question on the card. If he answers it correctly, he earns the card for his team. If he does not answer it correctly, he must get someone else from his team to help him find the answer. Once students have correctly answered the question on their card, they can search for another card. At the end of the game (after a certain amount of time or when all the cards have been found) the team with the most cards in their possession wins.

**SPEAKING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE FORCED OR BORING WHEN IT COMES TO ESL CLASS. THESE GAMES ARE JUST A FEW OF THE FUN WAYS TO GET YOUR STUDENTS SPEAKING UP AND HAVING A GOOD TIME WHILE THEY PRACTICE THEIR ENGLISH.**

# 6 Practical Questions to Ask About Your Students' First Language

*It's a question I have struggled with throughout my teaching career: Should I allow my students to use their first language in the ESL classroom?*

Keeping an English only classroom has its benefits. Students achieve good language acquisition even if it's a little slower in coming, and they don't become overly dependent on translators and dictionaries. Of course, if I allow first language use, it decreases student stress and helps tackle tough language barriers. My students usually want to use their first language in class, but is that what's best for them? If you have struggled with this question, or are struggling with it now, here are some questions to ask yourself before making your decision.

## ASK YOURSELF THESE 6 PRACTICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS' FIRST LANGUAGE

### 1 WHAT IS YOUR SCHOOL POLICY?

Some schools advertise English only classrooms, and if yours is one of them you may find answering the L1 question is very easy. If your school has a policy to keep students' first languages out of the classroom, then you should do just that. When an ESL student signs up for courses and pays tuition for English only classrooms, he should get what was promised.

### 2 WHY DO YOU WANT TO ALLOW L1 IN THE CLASSROOM?

Oftentimes, ESL teachers are also second language learners. When a person travels to a foreign country to teach English, she may also spend her time studying the language of her students. Some teachers may be tempted to allow their students' L1 in the classroom because they want to learn that language. This, however, is not a good reason to allow your students to speak their native

language in class. Behind that classroom door, you are the teacher and not the student, and your students and their English education should be the priority. So if you are looking to boost your own second language skills, save it for outside the classroom and focus on your students while you are in it.

### 3 WHAT CLASS ARE YOU TEACHING?

Are you teaching a conversation class? Are you teaching business English? Thinking about the goals of the class may help you answer the L1 question. If the goal of the class is to get students speaking English (such as in a conversation class) allowing students to use their first language may be counterproductive. However, if you are teaching skills that your students will use in a bilingual environment (such as the business world), allowing use of native languages may be more like what they will encounter when they have completed their English studies.

### 4 WHAT LEVEL ARE YOUR STUDENTS?

Advanced level students have very few reasons for using a bilingual dictionary or translator in class, but beginning level students are another matter. When a person is first studying English, the amount of information she is expected to learn can feel like drinking water from a fire hose – too much, too fast and too hard to get. For these students, allowing L1 use (to some degree) may be reasonable and even helpful. Teachers and students must be careful in this situation, however. Some students may become so overly dependent on translating to their first language that they hinder their second language acquisition.

### 5 MIGHT STUDENTS OVERUSE THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE?

Learning English involves more than just memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. Becoming fluent in English also includes developing a variety of speaking strategies – asking questions, clari-

fying and giving explanations. As students advance in their speaking skills, these conversation strategies should be required of them. If allowing use of a first language will inhibit development of these skills, it should be avoided.

### 6 WILL ALLOWING L1 CAUSE MISUNDERSTANDINGS?

When I taught ESL in China, nothing could make me use Chinese in the classroom. This is because my Chinese skills were so bad that using it with my students would only have confused them. Your own language abilities, if they are like mine were, may be reason enough to avoid using your students' native language in the classroom. The students can speak it fluently. Can't they help each other understand through use of L1? Maybe. But what happens if a student gives a classmate an incorrect explanation in their first language and you do not understand what they have said? This misunderstanding could lead to more problems and misuse of language later. Thinking about how well you know your students' L1 might also be a factor in whether you allow it in the classroom, and it's a question worth asking yourself.

### ULTIMATELY, ONLY YOU CAN DECIDE WHETHER TO ALLOW YOUR STUDENTS' L1 IN THE CLASSROOM.

Whatever your decision, it will have both advantages and disadvantages. Weighing them against each other will be the best way for you to decide what should happen behind your classroom door.



# What Place Does Grammar Have in Speaking Class

**GRAMMAR IS A KEY PIECE OF ANY LANGUAGE, AND STUDENTS OF SECOND LANGUAGES SPEND MUCH OF THEIR TIME LEARNING GRAMMATICAL RULES AND FORMS.**

At times, though, a student can focus on grammar too much. Throughout my years of teaching ESL, I have had many students who spend the majority of their language learning energy on grammar, writing and reading. Sometimes these students overly pursue written language and don't spend any time on the spoken language. When this happens, the speaking teacher may not know where the fine line between grammar and speaking is, or if there even is a line dividing the two. The following are suggestions on how to include grammar in the speaking classroom without letting it overwhelm your speaking class.

## **TRY BALANCING GRAMMAR AND SPEAKING IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS**

### **1 KEEP IT COMMUNICATIVE**

Communicative classrooms are stressed more these days than they were in the past. ESL teachers want to encourage their students to speak and communicate rather than memorize or follow scripted conversations. Grammar is necessary for good communication, but a communicative classroom entails more than that. When you encourage your students to communicate creatively with the language they know, there are sure to be grammar errors. On the other hand, encouraging this creativity with language more closely approaches how language is used in the real world. In first and second languages, creative communication means getting your message across with whatever tools you have at your disposal. When the grammar isn't right, as long as the message gets across the communication is a success. So in your next speaking class, don't force prescribed grammar into your students' speaking. Let them use what they know

to get their points across and let the grammar be what it will be.

### **2 WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE**

Even with creative language use, though, there are times when the correct grammar is essential to getting the message across. Think of the conditional structure in English, for example. The difference in verb tense can mean the difference between something that happened and something that didn't. "I would have called you" and "I called you" have very different meanings. For situations such as these, it is important to explain the correct grammar to your students and require them to use it appropriately. Teaching grammar this way doesn't mean you aren't maintaining a communicative classroom. On the contrary, without this stress on grammar your students will not be able to communicate accurately. So take a few minutes to give grammatical instruction, and then move on to using what your students have learned. Offer corrections if students are miscommunicating because of grammatical errors.

### **3 EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE**

Most conversation classes that I have taught have been topical in nature. Whether in a restaurant, at a sporting event, or the business world, instruction and activities are focused on one subject area or one topic. These situational contexts can be the perfect venue for introducing grammatical concepts to your class. When the grammar comes naturally as part of the topic at hand, it enhances the lesson rather than retracting from it. For example, I have found that units on sporting events are a great opportunity to talk about interjections. Though not all that common in every day speech, expressions such as yay, go, shoot, and score are peppered throughout the speech at any major sporting event. So before I role-play such a scenario with my students, I take a few minutes to discuss inter-

jections and their function in spoken language. Then, I encourage my students to use interjections as we put ourselves at an imaginary professional sporting event and they use the language they are learning.

If you find yourself teaching a speaking class and are wondering where grammar fits into the picture, here is what I have learned based on my own experience. Let grammar into the picture when it comes naturally or is necessary for correct meaning. But if your students can get their meaning across through creative language use, let them. Eventually they will learn the correct grammar for every situation (if they continue their studies), but they may not develop the courage and creativity to communicate if they are not given the chance in speaking class.

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

*"I taught 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.



# 3 Determined Discussion Strategies for Intermediate Students

## INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS HAVE A LOT OF SKILLS TO LEARN AND DEVELOP.

One key ingredient to their success is receiving constructive discussion opportunities. Employ these 3 determined discussion strategies to get your students talking up a storm.

## TRY THESE 3 DETERMINED DISCUSSION STRATEGIES FOR INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

### 1 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

A wonderful jumping off discussion topic is similarities and differences. It will be stimulating for student to examine characteristics, traits, facts, and descriptive language all in one activity. The point of discussing similarities and differences is to compare and contrast very different or even very similar objects, people, or emotions. First brainstorm a list of thirty to forty elements with your students. These could include famous people, animals, places, weather, food items, or anything else that your students can think of. Some examples could be: *Julia Roberts, ice cream, zebra, sunshine, love, rainbow, coffee, Africa, etc.*

Once you have a comprehensive list, write them out on separate cards. Have one student draw two cards. The class must then come up with as many similarities and differences that they can for the two things called out. If you want to add a competitive element, split students into teams. The last element of this discussion exercise is to inform the students that each item on their lists can be challenged by the other team. Students will have to defend their statements, provide examples, and apply reasoning as to why their comparisons makes sense. This is a high-energy activity that allows students to devise creative and unusual statements.

### 2 DIFFICULT SITUATIONS AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

A wonderful activity that evokes active listening and careful speaking is the topic of difficult situations and problem-

solving. These activities bring to the center stage useful topics like question-creation, modals, and conditionals. When students have been in a class together for awhile, they develop very supportive relationships. Approaching difficult situations not only facilitates hearty conversation, but it also helps strengthen those classmate relations and addresses sensitive material. As the teacher, you can be the judge of whether to present the situations based on classroom dynamics or hypothetical examples.

A natural way to introduce problem-solving is to present the class with a problem. If you are in another country, maybe it is a question or problem you have with a cultural difference. It could be a tough decision that you need to make, or some kind of moral dilemma. Choose what you think your group will respond to, but no matter what, make it personal and real. Present your dilemma in a conversational tone, and then ask the students for their thoughts and suggestions. This example should display to students that they need to ask questions to gain background information, and that they should try to view the issue from your perspective. One last point to make is that there are no easy answers. Once you have done your introduction, you can ask students to describe a difficult situation they have dealt with in the past or one they might be experiencing at the moment.

Before you ask them to get personal, you could do a speaking exercise to warm them up called 'what would you do if'. List out possible scenarios like:

*What would you do if...*

*You saw your best friend steal something?*

*You really like your brother's girlfriend?*

*You found \$300 in the bathroom at the mall?*

With this exercise you can also have students add in hypothetical background information. Ask students to create sample scenarios based on the questions. For example 'you saw your best friend steal'. What did he/she steal? Was it something he/she really needed, but could not afford? Where did he/she steal it from? If you do this exercise first, it may naturally evolve into the students sharing their own similar experiences.

### 3 FINISH THIS SENTENCE

'Finish this sentence' can be a quick discussion activity or you can employ strategies to make it more complex. However you decide to incorporate it, it will give your students the opportunity to express themselves, question one another, and explain why they answered the way that they did. You can do a list of these or spread them out throughout a period of time. Come up with a list of sentences that the students must complete, so that you have it ready to go whenever you decide to jump into it. This is one of those activities that could become a standard part of your class where you put one on the board and have a short discussion. Some examples are:

*My/Teacher's best quality is...*

*Our class is....*

*Our country is...*

*This year is....*

*This class is important because...*

*The most important thing in life is...*

Students go around the room and profess their answers to the questions. No two students can have identical answers, so if it has already been said, students need to formulate a different answer. For each answer provided, students in the class should ask as many questions to one student that they can think of in one minute. For example if I say, "My best quality is my honesty," students would then fire questions at me, such as: Why do you think honesty is your best quality? Can you give an example of this? Do you think your spouse/mother/brother would agree? Why is honesty a good quality? And so it goes until time runs out, and then the next student answers questions regarding his or her answer. One other way to perform this activity is for students to fill in the blank individually, but as a class they must decide on only one answer that everyone agrees is the best possible answer. This promotes honest discussion, and the students must work together to formulate their best answer as a group.

**DISCUSSION FOR INTERMEDIATE LEVEL STUDENTS SHOULD ENCOMPASS NATURAL LANGUAGE, PRACTICE OF KNOWN STRUCTURES, AND A SAFE ENVIRONMENT.** Take these three discussion options and adapt them to your particular group for the best, chattiest results!

# Start Them Up: Achieving Natural Language at the Intermediate Level

ONCE STUDENTS EVOLVE INTO INTERMEDIATE LEVEL SPEAKERS, THEY ARE READY FOR A LOT MORE NATURAL LANGUAGE PRACTICE.

It might seem daunting to veer students away from the safety of scripted or very predictable language, but revving students up about utilizing natural language isn't as hard as it seems.

## HOW TO ACHIEVE NATURAL LANGUAGE AT THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

### 1 SMALL TALK OPENERS

When students begin to speak with some amount of fluency and have mastered some really tough grammar topics, they are definitely ready to learn the art form of small talk. Providing small talk amongst students at the beginning and end of every class can be a very organic way to get them speaking naturally. Step back from goal-setting with students for these warmers or wrap-ups and simply begin some small talk casually and conversationally. It is common for people to talk about their weekend plans or experiences, ask how someone is feeling that has been ill, or ask for a restaurant reference. You can have goals in the back of your mind for your small talk exercises, but don't control the conversation: let it flow.

Using small talk openers can also teach new expressions in a natural way and students can choose to write them down, use them outside of class, or utilize them in-class. You may also want to have conversations about small talk. Define what it is, ask them to point out times in the class when they have experienced small talk, and ask them if they use it in the real world. Brainstorm small talk openers with students, and then sprinkle those in to your warmers and wrap-ups. There are a lot of options for also creating lessons around situational small talk if you would like students to delve more deeply into it, or in challenging them to come up with new ways to utilize small talk. Some great openers to consider introducing or bringing up are:

*How's it going today, class?*  
*What's happening this weekend?*  
*Did you know there is ...(a concert in the park)...this ...(Saturday)?*  
*Is this seat taken?*  
*Do you mind if I ask you where you*

*got that....(blouse, purse, etc)?*  
*This weather is crazy. Is it always this hot in the summer?*

There are so many variables as to how you can phrase small talk, and what you might come across to introduce. Students should learn how to politely answer unexpected questions, ask for clarification if they don't really understand, and employ strategies to continue a conversation that begins this way. Let your students take the lead on small talk, and make it a usual occurrence in the classroom.

### 2 OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Have you noticed that intermediate level students love to ask questions? They are curious, want to find out personal details, and enjoy showing off their language skills. Use this to your advantage and do varied exercises with open-ended questions. So often students are accustomed to asking yes or no questions which really doesn't jump-start any kind of thought-provoking conversation. One example that you could bring in to illustrate what you mean is to role play a teenager talking to his or her parent. This can be fun to do whether you have a class of adults or teens. It will drive the point home that you will only get substantial information if you use open-ended questions. It also displays how in conversation, we need to really listen to the other person, ask follow-up questions, and show interest in what the other person is saying. For the teen to parent role play, simply ask for two volunteers. One student will be the parent, who really wants to connect with their teen. That student asks a lot of closed questions. Student Two is the bored and annoyed teenager who just wants to evade the questions, give non-answers, or the shortest answers possible. Here's an example of what your volunteers might say:

Parent: "How was school today?"

Teen: "Fine."

Parent: "Did you enjoy gym class?"

Teen: "No." (eye roll)

Parent: "Are you hungry?"

Teen: "A little."

This could go on for a little while until you tell them to stop. Ask the class for their observations. Discuss what the parent did wrong, and the missed opportunities to get more information or to engage their teenager. After a good discussion, have students do another role play with this scenario and see how it changes when open-ended questions are used. You

could first brainstorm with the class things the parent could have said differently, and get them thinking about how to phrase open-ended questions. A few examples could be:

*What did you do today/at school/?*

*Why didn't you enjoy...?*

*What was the best/worst part of your day?*

*I'm sorry you didn't have fun in gym class. What was so horrible about it?*

After the introduction of open-ended questions, make a point to have students practice this with one another as often as possible. Point out missed opportunities, or ask them how they could get more information when they forget to use this method.

### 3 TASK-CENTERED SPEAKING

Task-centered speaking gives students the freedom to craft language that is all their own, while still carrying out a task or accomplishing an outcome. Get into the habit of formulating activities that allow students to use language in this way as often as you can manage it. Outcome-based speaking works really well for mingling activities, small group discussions, and games. Define the outcome clearly for the students either as a group or individually, and give students reminders throughout the activity. If you are giving individual outcomes to students, it can be entertaining to keep those private until the end of the activity. Challenge students to discern what all the tasks were. Don't forget to address the tasks during the wrap-up of activities. You could also sometimes have students formulate tasks for themselves or one another. Examples of task-driven work might be challenging, creative, simple or adventurous. Include things like:

*Speak only in the third person for this whole exercise.*

*Use tag questions as much as possible*

*Get information using conditionals*  
*Speak quietly/loudly/angrily/romantically (fun to assign each student a different adverb)*

**ACHIEVING NATURAL LANGUAGE WITHIN PERIMETERS IS CHALLENGING, BUT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BORING.**

Excite students by implementing these strategies to produce natural language and see them take off in all kinds of interesting directions.

# Frankly My Dear: Opening Up Viewpoints for Advanced Learners

## ADVANCED LANGUAGE LEARNERS NEED TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE OPINIONS AND DESCRIBE THE REASONING FOR THEIR VIEWPOINTS.

It is a wonderful way to develop vocabulary, utilize complex grammatical structures, and engage in interesting dialogues. Open up viewpoints for your advanced learners and learn a lot about them while they improve very important skills.

## HOW TO TEACH STUDENTS TO OPEN UP VIEWPOINTS

### 1 PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE

Teaching students how to use persuasive language appropriately can give them the outlet they need to discuss opinions, world issues, and controversial topics. When presenting persuasive topics you don't have to focus solely on persuasion. It can be productive simply to have students defining their opinions and organizing thoughts while also building confidence. The outcome you want is for them to feel strongly about something and to have the language to communicate it. You don't want students to become argumentative or overly-opinionated during the learning process.

Once you have devised goals with the students, a perfect starting point is ranking exercises. You can come up with any number of topics and ask students to rank their opinion on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to ten (strongly agree). Here you may choose to introduce other language sometimes seen on surveys. These can be things like: indifferent, somewhat disagree/agree, or not applicable. For your ranking exercise present a range of topics. They could be hot-button issues, culturally-relevant topics, or familiar, non-intimidating subjects. Here are some examples:

*If you work hard, you will be successful.*

*I can get a higher paying job if I speak good English.*

*Foreigners should pay more at restaurants.*

*Women should earn the same*

*wages as men.*

*Technology has made life better in most ways.*

Once all students have ranked the statements, they can begin discussing their opinions in a variety of ways. You could do one big group discussion or put them in small groups or pairs. Before you send them off to start discussion, review or brainstorm some key phrases used when presenting opinions persuasively. Some examples are:

*In my opinion....*

*I don't think...is right/positive, because....*

*My feeling is that....*

*I don't see how....*

*I feel very strongly that....*

*Frankly, I think that... is wrong/in-correct*

These phrases are used to introduce where their opinion lies. Making those statements is the easy part. They must then back up their statements with thoughtful arguments that are heartfelt and to the point. Allow them to practice uninterrupted and observe what happens. Then bring them back together as a group and debrief what their discussions entailed, how many items they discussed, and how they felt they did expressing themselves.

### 2 POLITELY DISAGREEING

It is important to stress that expressing viewpoints has a time and a place, and students need to also respect the opinions of other people. When starting out, students may get anxious to express their opinions, so be sure to set guidelines for discussion and speaking activities. You may want to address how to interrupt, politely disagree, and how to focus on opinions not personal attacks. Disagreeing politely is an art form, and it creates opportunities for students to use humor, craft meaningful arguments, and challenge each other to defend opinions. It is important to approach the topic of disagreement within an environment of respect. When done correctly, students learn to defend themselves and their beliefs even when it might be difficult or contrary to the popular way of thinking.

One way to practice disagreeing with one another is to create debates where students must argue points on both sides of their beliefs. When they have to defend something they are against, it will show them that there are two sides to every argument and that both sides have good points.

### 3 CURRENT TALK TOPICS

To keep viewpoints in the forefront of lessons continuously, you can institute a daily talk topic. Arrange it however you would like, but ideally a set amount of time each lesson focuses on open discussion of one particular topic. You could also weave the topic into other parts of the lesson if it is appropriate. You can assign a topic of the day at the beginning of class, tell them what it is at the end of the lesson for the following class, or assign the duty to one student per day. Whichever way you choose, be sure that the topic will promote healthy, stimulating dialogue to get everyone interacting. If you want to incorporate reading or writing with your daily talk topic, you could choose a short article to be the jumping off point for discussion and vocabulary. This can work well if the students need some direction initially. A short reading can spark a lot of conversation and really get conversations progressing. You may also want to have students write about the topic before or after the discussion to organize thoughts, expound more on their viewpoints, or to summarize. Daily talk topics should relate to the students' daily lives. Topics would be very different if you are teaching an advanced high school class versus an advanced class of older learners. Make the topics applicable to them so that they have some stake in the conversations. This will motivate learners not only to speak, but to listen to their classmates.

### EXAMINING VIEWPOINTS FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS CAN LEAD TO A WHOLE NEW PHASE OF EXPRESSION.

Opening up viewpoints in the right format and environment is definitely the way to help students progress and develop.



# 3 Strategies for Interpreting Slang for Advanced Learners

**ADVANCED LEARNERS ARE ALWAYS ANXIOUS TO STUDY AND MASTER IDIOMATIC AND STREET-WISE LANGUAGE.**

Using slang is one primary way for students to test the waters of fluency and begin communicating in expressions as native speakers do. Apply these 3 strategies to help students interpret the cumbersome world of slang.

## TRY THESE 3 STRATEGIES FOR INTERPRETING SLANG FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS

### 1 WHAT THEY HEAR

It's very useful for students to hear slang terminology in natural speech at a regular speed. To do this, speak to students using a number of expressions without defining the new language concepts. Present slang in context using stories and examples and do your best not to slow down your speech. Always speak to them in a conversational tone utilizing a number of slang words and phrases. Students should listen to see how many expressions they can pick out of your story, and how accurately they can piece them together. Chances are when you first start presenting slang this way, they will miss several words or phrases entirely or record them incorrectly. This is normal and once they see how many they missed or misheard, they will be that much more interested in doing better the next time. Don't let missing expressions hinder their confidence, especially if you have littered your story with phrases they have never heard before.

Give students time to compare their answers in small groups or pairs. Students can spend time discussing what they heard and the possible meanings. After they have determined what they heard, they can then begin to pick apart the expressions, and attempt their own examples of how to use each slang expression. This is a lot to accomplish, so you may want to split it into two parts so students aren't overwhelmed. You could also go over the answers as a group and then have them reconvene into their groups to determine their individual examples for new phrases.

### 2 COMPREHENSION CHECKS

Comprehension checks are vital as students are learning how to practically apply the slang they are learning. Doing comprehension checks ensures that students not only understand the expression, but also have a good idea of how and when to use it. There are a lot of ways to reinforce the new vocabulary and highlight practical use. Quizzes assembled in various ways can be used so that students can gauge their own progress, and the quizzes don't have to be overly-serious or stress-inducing. Think about ways to create and go through quizzes that will be memorable and entertaining. One way to do this is to have students take a short quiz independently and then assemble them into groups for the correction and explanation of the quiz. Provide twists to correction, like handing out poker chips or fake money to have each team bet on how successful they believe their answer is before the answer is provided. For multiple choice quizzes, try forming two teams and do a race to the right answer. In this instance, one team must be the first to respond to the question by buzzer or hands, and then before they provide the correct answer, they must first dispel each answer that is incorrect.

Using new slang situationally is a wonderful comprehension check as well as a way to review lots of new vocabulary. A good stand alone activity is to provide them with situations and have students role play or create short conversations on the spot. You could use cards with various situations and hand them out to small groups or pairs. Then ask students to conversationally insert the slang they have learned where appropriate. Your situations could be things like:

*Meeting someone new at a party*  
*Running into a friend or teacher at the park*  
*Complaining about an exam to a friend*  
*Ordering food at a restaurant*  
*Asking for help with directions*

Students will enjoy using the new words and phrases, and may begin correcting one another, incorporating slang into daily use, or asking for more and more and more.

### 3 USE TV AND MOVIES

Where can you find a lot of natural language usage that also exposes students to other accents, faster language, and unlimited slang? Movies and TV are a wonderful resource for any teacher tackling slang, and with the addition of the internet everything you might be looking for is right at your fingertips. Look for TV shows that are popular with students to engage them, challenge their listening, and provide memorable clips with humor. Sitcoms are perfect for one-on-one slang usage, and you can create whole lessons around one or two clips. Using movies may take a little more prep time, but if you happen to have a class that loves to watch movies, it's a great way to have them listen for new language and have ready-made situational examples to refer to. Animated films are a good choice, or dramas that have a lot of dialogue and not much action. Stay away from raunchy comedies, complex thrillers, and action movies with little speaking. Some great movie options are: *When Harry Met Sally*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, *Runaway Bride*, and *Father of the Bride*.

Movies and TV provide a great resource to display natural language, and also to focus on relationships, conversations in general, and conflicts. Students will pick out a lot of interesting language, not just slang and they will enjoy being able to sit back and watch language in action. Be sure to always have goal-driven lead-in and wrap-up exercises, possible fill-in-the-blanks, and discussion topics that weave in the slang and situations that were approached. Experiment with what works best, and you might just find your advanced students asking to view an entire movie or episode.

**STUDENTS WILL FIRST BE EXPOSED TO SLANG THROUGH YOUR EYES AND YOUR EXPLANATIONS.**

Give them the tools to decipher slang for themselves by employing these strategies that are sure to get them slinging slang in no time.

# 3 Spectacular Speaking Activities for Advanced Learners

**TEACHING ADVANCED LEARNERS IS INCREDIBLY FUN AND REWARDING, BUT SOMETIMES IT CAN FEEL LIKE THEY HAVE MASTERED EVERYTHING YOU COULD POSSIBLY TEACH THEM.**

When it comes to communicating, there is always more they can learn to reach the highest fluency level possible. Try these 3 spectacular speaking activities and watch their skills evolve to a new height.

## **TRY THESE 3 SPECTACULAR SPEAKING ACTIVITIES FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS**

### **1 OPEN DISCUSSION**

Open discussion is essential for advanced students to create and experience natural language. The guidelines for open discussion might vary from group to group, but the main elements should remain: each lesson students are exposed to a certain amount of conversation time that is not mediated, where correction does not take place, and where topics are allowed to ramble on according to the whim of the class. Students should lead these open discussions, and in facilitating true open discussion, you want to have some goals and outcomes that the students are aiming for, but do not exactly map out how they are going to get there. These outcomes can be quite generalized, structured around topics and could change for each discussion. You can get ideas from observing students during class time and examining what they need to practice, where there are questions, and what the group on a whole is interested in. An outcome could be as simple and general as, "in this discussion, see how many idioms you can work into the conversation without forcing it." Another example outcome could be, "Try not to talk about yourself. Learn about others while speaking during this discussion." Involve students in the outcomes as they have wonderful ideas as well.

Sometimes as teachers, it is difficult to let go of the grammar reigns and allow

students to speak without a particular structure or usage in mind. This is particularly what advanced students need and crave. This is not to say that open discussion is a free-for-all in which classroom rules and etiquette do not apply. On the contrary, open discussion is a vehicle for students to communicate with one another within appropriate guidelines while learning a lot about applying usage in practical application.

### **2 MATCHMAKING**

Discussion exercises that focus on relationships can open up a whole new realm of possibilities for advanced level English speakers. There are a number of ways to bring in the topic of relationships and/or dating in advanced classes. One way to have students explore these topics is to do some version of a matchmaking exercise. Matchmaking exercises work well because students will use a lot of varied language concepts while not taking themselves or the activity too seriously. This is also a topic everyone is interested in, whether they admit it or not, and you can pick and choose which elements students are expected to focus on. Matchmaking activities encompass topics like characteristics, dating challenges, preferences, past experiences, and future expectations. One possibility is to ask the students to create a dating profile or synopsis for another student in the class. This could be accomplished in an interview format where students first come up with a list of questions to be answered and then determine the answers in pairs. This way, they are answering the questions as if they are another student, so it is less intimidating and becomes a light-hearted way to express what they know about each other. When the students have completed their profiles they can present them to the class, and the class then guesses who they pretended to be. You could also approach matchmaking as a role play where students are given specific characteristics, like handsome, successful and egotistical. Another student might have the characteristics angry, beautiful, and lonely. As they are mingling they ask and an-

swer questions as a person with their characteristics would answer. They are then expected to find a good match for themselves. The results are often hilarious, creative, and unexpected.

### **3 SPOKEN WORD**

There are a lot of opportunities where you could creatively have students perform some type of spoken word in front of the class. These exercises tend to work best when they are spontaneous so students don't have time to be nervous, and preparation is also limited. Spoken word leads to a lot of natural language and each student gets a chance to be in the spotlight for a very short time. One way to facilitate spoken word is to utilize those magnetic poetry kits that were so popular a few years ago. If you don't have any of these in stock, they are very useful tools in all levels of ESL classes. There are several themes now and each kit supplies you with 500 or so words on little magnetic pieces that can be put up on the board or handed out in random to students. If you don't have any of these, make some cards with random words and include every part of speech. Don't tailor the cards to specific vocabulary or themes, just create them indiscriminately and hand them out just as randomly. The wonderful thing about the magnetic poetry pieces is students are able to look at hundreds of words to compose a short, eloquent piece of poetry, create one or two lines to speak about, or have other students choose a few words they must include in their spoken work. The spoken work could have a specific aim like, try to be funny, use sarcasm, or rant about a pet peeve. It could also just be left to the words. Students could create something on the spot, share it with their classmates and then expound on it for one or two minutes.

**REACHING NEW LANGUAGE HEIGHTS FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS IS EXCITING TO WATCH AND TO FACILITATE.**

Utilizing these 3 spectacular speaking activities will give your students new ways to speak to one another and increase communication skills.

# Brick by Brick: How to Teach the Building Blocks of Language

## IF YOU ASK THE AVERAGE PERSON ON THE STREET WHAT THE BASIC UNIT OF LANGUAGE IS, THEY WILL MOST LIKELY SAY IT IS THE WORD.

After all, words combine to make sentences which convey meaning. If a person does not understand a particular word, they may struggle to understand the overall meaning of a sentence. And while words do convey meaning, they may not be the best place to start when it comes to teaching English. Taking groups of words, or lexical units, may be a more efficient and productive way to teach language – groups of words at a time.

## WHAT ARE THE BASIC UNITS OF MEANING?

A lexical unit, by definition, is the basic unit of meaning in a language. How does that theory play out in the ESL classroom? It's really quite simple. Lexical units are the smallest unit of meaning. Sometimes they are a single word. Sometimes they are a phrase. Other times they are idioms or parts of words. Basically, anything that contains a basic unit of meaning (before it is combined with another lexical unit) is a lexical unit. Each of the following, though they vary in length, is a lexical unit.

*Un- (part of a word)*

*Boy (word)*

*Pull over (phrasal verb)*

*Upside down (colocation)*

*How do you do? (conventional phrases)*

*(drinks) on the house (idioms)*

*All's well that ends well. (sayings)*

*First of all (sentence frames)*

Though they fall throughout the spectrum from one syllable to multiple words, each of these is a lexical unit. Each phrase has one basic meaning. The number of words that make up each phrase is irrelevant.

## WHY TEACH LEXICAL UNITS?

Some would still ask why bother teaching lexical phrases. If most of them are made up of single words, why not

start there? The reason lies in how the brain processes language. Translating phrases and sentences word for word does not always produce understanding. Idioms are perhaps the clearest example. When translated word for word, they often make no sense whatsoever to speakers of other languages. But when translated phrase by phrase, they make sense. The reason is simple. Whether they are one letter or several words, lexical units make up language. Language is the collection of these lexical units (also known as the lexicon). So teaching in these units of meaning is actually more efficient than teaching word by word.

So now that you see the value in teaching lexical units, how exactly does one tackle it in the classroom? Here are some suggestions for simple activities you can do with your students to raise awareness of and practice using lexical units.

## HOW TO DEAL WITH LEXICAL UNITS IN THE CLASSROOM

### 1 TEACH IN PHRASES

Think about lexical units the next time you introduce a vocabulary unit to your class. Rather than teaching word by vocabulary word, teach lexical phrases to your students. Use collocations and phrases. Challenge them to write a definition of a group of words rather than a single word, or have them translate a lexical phrase from English into one word of their native language. When you put emphasis on groups of words rather than translating or defining each word of a lexical phrase, your students will learn the phrases and use them.

### 2 GET AUTHENTIC

When you use authentic English texts with your students, they are sure to see lexical phrases peppered throughout. Challenge your students to go on a lexical phrase scavenger

hunt in an authentic written passage. Divide students into groups of two or three and see how many phrases your students can find in a given passage from the newspaper or a text book. Once all the groups are finished, come back together and make a comprehensive class list of the lexical phrases they found. Then challenge your students to use those phrases in class in the following days. Recognize any students who successfully use the lexical phrases in their speech.

### 3 SMALL TALK

Make room in your class time for small talk. Many lexical units are common in small talk. Make a game of practicing these lexical units with your students. Give each student a card which has a lexical phrase written on it. Then, let students mingle and talk with one another. Their goal during this game will be to use their phrase in their small talk conversation.

### 4 THE MORE THE MERRIER

Using the same phrases from your small talk exercise, have two people come in front of the class to role play a small talk conversation. Throw out a challenge to see who can use the most lexical phrases in the conversation without repetition. If you like, create teams and award points to each winner in the faceoff.

### 5 TRY SENTENCE DIAGRAMS

Often times, when you diagram sentences syntactically (not necessarily how you did in your ninth grade English class) you will see what words naturally group together. If you are working with intermediate or advanced students, give them a go at syntactic diagramming and see if the picture (sentence tree) helps them understand the concept of lexical phrases.

### 6 LISTEN UP

Give your students some practice hearing lexical phrases while



bringing some fresh tunes into the classroom. Since lexical phrases are often found in songs, create a fill in the blank listening exercise for your students with one of your favorite songs. Leaving blanks for lexical phrases rather than individual words, challenge your students to listen for the phrase that correctly completes the lyrics. After listening two or three times, talk about the phrases they heard and how to use them.

## 7 DO AS I SAY

Give your students an example of lexical phrases in your own speech. Challenge your students to listen for lexical phrases as you talk to them and then use those same lexical phrases in their own speech. To do this, take a few minutes to tell your students about a topic of your choice. You might talk about a vacation you would like to take, for example. As you tell them about your topic, have them write down any phrases they think they could use to talk about their own ideal vacation. You may want to give groups of students a chance to compare what they wrote down. Then have students share with the class their own ideal vacation using some of the same lexical phrases you used when talking to them.

Ultimately, the most effective way to teach lexical phrases to your students is to continually reinforce them from the front of the classroom. Human nature is to forget much of what we learn in a very short time. When you stress lexical phrases to your students and reinforce their use in class, your students will remember more and use them properly in their speech.

# 6 Tips to Help ESL Students Give Killer Oral Presentations

*"I can't speak English." "I need to feel more confident when I speak." ESL teachers hear this type of complaint from students again and again.*

Of all the skills they need to develop to communicate successfully in English, speaking is the one most of them agree they need to work on. To help your students overcome the speaking hurdle, you might want to consider giving them oral presentations. And here's why.

- It is the perfect opportunity to speak with no interruptions for several minutes. It definitely beats giving one-word answers to your questions.
- It is great for boosting student confidence when speaking.
- It is the perfect lead-in for discussion or questions from students.

## THINGS TO CONSIDER:

### 1 WHAT?

What will each talk about? The sky's the limit in this regard. If it's a one-time, final presentation, they may choose any topic they feel comfortable talking about. Or you can make it a regular activity and assign topics related to what they've been learning in class. For example, if you've been practicing conditionals, you may have each talk about a place they have never been to before but would like to visit. They may talk about everything they would do there.

### 2 HOW LONG?

The length of each presentation will depend on the number of students you have in your class, and whether you'll have them all present in one day or over several days. Some students get very nervous about giving long presentations. Here's a tip. Tell them they'll have to speak for 10-15 minutes, and they might freak out. On the other hand, if you tell them they only have to speak for two minutes, they will probably speak for five. And if you say five, they'll probably go on for a bit longer, too.

### 3 HOW?

Will they use special equipment?

Power Point slides? Posters or photos? You may leave this entirely up to them. You may say they have to use at least one visual aid: a map, a photo or poster – whether they give a full slide presentation is up to them, though I recommend using this with Business English students as it gives them great practice for real presentations.

## AND NOW WITHOUT FURTHER ADO...

## 6 TIPS TO HELP YOUR STUDENTS GIVE KILLER PRESENTATIONS

### 1 STATEMENT – DETAILS – EXPANSION

To help students organize their presentation, teach them this technique. First, they must think of a statement: I have never been to Paris, but I'd love to go there. Next, they must give a few details to support the statement (and use visual aids): There are many wonderful things I would do there like ... Finally, they can make a closing statement that expands upon the initial one: If I go to Paris, I won't be disappointed. This simple formula can help them talk about most anything. A different way of presenting this is by calling the initial statement the introduction, the supporting details the main body of the presentation and the final comment the conclusion.

### 2 WHEN? WHERE? WHAT?

Another great way to help them think of what information they should include in their presentation is to tell them they must answer most of these basic questions: when, where, what, why, who, how. By simply addressing these questions, they should have a clear idea of the points they need to cover.

### 3 NOTES

Make sure students understand that it is not necessary to write the entire speech down. This is meant to be a speaking exercise – not a reading out loud of one's notes. Show them how to use key words and phrases to help them remember what they want to say.

These notes should serve as prompts – they will lead them in the right direction and help them remember which point to mention next.

### 4 USE COMPLETE SENTENCES

"So last summer we went to beach, and then my cousins joined us, and then we played volleyball and swam in the ocean, you know, and we had a great time..." is not good speaking. It's rambling. Instruct students to use clear language. Show them how to organize their speech, so they don't use sentences that run on and on and on. They must learn to not only speak, but to organize their thoughts coherently.

### 5 LOUD AND CLEAR

Students should strive to pronounce clearly – no mumbling allowed. They should try to pronounce as clearly as they can even if it means they have to slow down a bit. At first, it's okay to sacrifice speed for accuracy. The more they practice, the faster they'll speak.

### 6 VISUAL AIDS

You may choose to make them compulsory or not, but make sure they understand they should choose a visual aid not because it's the flashiest thing, but because it will help drive their point home. They may choose to use maps, photos or even real objects.

## GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE QUESTIONS FROM THE CLASS ONCE THEY FINISH.

And don't forget to give each presenter feedback on their presentation. Try to be specific. "Good job!" sounds great, but it won't be as helpful as saying, "You used great specific vocabulary, but you need to work on your verb tenses. There were several times where you needed to use the simple past, and you used the present."

Bear in mind that even beginners can give simple, one or two-minute presentations. It will help them gain confidence step by step, and build towards longer and better speaking.

# Get Out of Your Class: How to Use Fieldtrips for Speaking Lessons

## IT'S TIME TO TALK, FOR YOUR STUDENTS THAT IS.

That's because they are in your speaking class. You pride yourself on making class exiting and engaging. You want your students to talk more than you do, and you see them improving their English speaking abilities every day. Sometimes, though, it's just time to get out of the classroom. Other teachers get frustrated, feeling they cannot take their speaking class outside the classroom walls, but you know better. You know that field trips can be one of the greatest assets to your speaking curriculum. And even if you don't quite know how to make the most of field trips for your speaking class yet, you will when you use the following ideas.

## HOW TO USE FIELD TRIPS FOR THE CLASSROOM BENEFIT

### 1 FIELD TRIPS ARE REAL

The speaking that your students do on a field trip is real. Not to say that speaking in the classroom isn't, but sometimes fabricated classroom exercises can come off a little artificial. When your students speak during a field trip, they are in real contexts talking to real people. The type of language they use has a clear purpose – communicating with the people around them. Not only that, the places where they are having the conversations are more real. Your students may encounter background noise or other challenges that they have not experienced in the classroom. This will be challenging as they listen and as they speak, but when they do their language skills are sure to improve.

To use the reality of field trips to your advantage, don't try and make things easier for your students. Challenge them to communicate even though their surroundings may be less than ideal. Encourage them to raise their voices when necessary or use the language they do know in creative ways. Show them how to ask questions appropriately, both in the words that they use and the body language that comes along with them.

### 2 FIELD TRIPS PROVIDE CONNECTIONS

Getting your students out into a non-classroom context gives them a chance to make different and tangible connections with the material you are teaching. If your speaking class is anything like mine have been, you teach along thematic units. When your field trip ties into those themes, your students can make concrete connections with language that might otherwise be intangible. They can see, feel, smell and fully experience the context, and that experience will help their language knowledge really stick.

When you can, tie in your field trips thematically. Getting tours or a sporting location, office facility or restaurant would tie into units on sports, business and food. Teach your students the vocabulary beforehand, but point out the tie-ins when you are on your field trip. If possible, give your students a chance to touch objects, move around the environment and experience their surroundings with every sense they possess. Your students will remember the meaning of "sour" better when they bite into a lemon wedge, and because they shouted into an empty theater from the stage, they will remember the meaning of "echo". The more your students experience the context, the better they will retain the knowledge about it.

### 3 FIELD TRIPS PROVIDE VARIETY

You can do so many different speaking activities with your students when you guide them out of the classroom and into the world. Doing interviews is an easy one. When your students are getting a tour of an unusual place or meeting interesting people at those places, require your students to ask questions. If possible, arrange one on one interviews and help your students prepare before the trip. Before you take your trip, have students discuss their expectations and make predictions about the trip and what they will learn. After the trip, have students discuss their predictions and

whether they were wrong or right. Have them talk about the things they learned and make a list of things they would still like to know. You may even want to have your students do follow up interviews to get that additional information or to do research on a related topic. Your students will continue to make connections between the information they already know and the new language they are learning when they are using language for practical purposes with clear goals.

### 4 FIELD TRIPS ARE INTERESTING

Field trips have one more important quality to offer your ESL students: excitement. If your students have travelled overseas to study English, a field trip can be an exciting way to see into the world around them. It can be a lesson in culture or a reminder of home. In either case, field trips will engage and interest your students, and happy students are better learners. Most students are excited to talk about what they have learned and what they experienced on their fiddle trips. And that enthusiasm can be just what you need to maintain or increase momentum in your class. Use the memories your students make during the field trip to spark discussions on interesting topics. Bring culture into your discussions, and let your students talk about the challenges they faced when they were out in the real world.

Whether you are an experienced ESL teacher or are new on the job, you see the benefits of field trips for students in your speaking class.

**IN FACT, THE MORE YOU USE FIELD TRIPS TO ENCOURAGE REAL, AUTHENTIC AND MEMORABLE LANGUAGE USE, THE MORE YOU WILL WANT TO INCLUDE THEM IN YOUR LESSON PLANS. AND WHEN YOU DO, EVERYONE WILL EXPERIENCE THE BENEFITS.**



# “I Just Want to Say...”: Using Key Phrases Across Language Skills

TRADITIONALLY, LANGUAGE HAS BEEN TAUGHT IN DISCRETE PARTS: LEARNERS ARE TAUGHT SPEAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS SEPARATELY FROM READING AND WRITING, AND VOCABULARY IS SEPARATED FROM GRAMMAR.

However, anyone who has seriously studied a second language knows that language is much more holistic and difficult to divide up into separate elements. Particularly problematic is the tendency for second language classes to focus on lists of related vocabulary words (e.g., “words for the weather,” “words for health”) separately from grammar, which is usually focused on the verb phrase, particularly on how to conjugate or analyze verbs according to their “person” (e.g. first person: “I go”, second person, “you go,” etc.) This methodology not surprisingly results in students able to reel off related words on demand or conjugate verbs, but not do much else in their second language. Because of this focus of study on grammar and vocabulary isolated from any context, it's not uncommon for students to come out of four years of high school study of a foreign language really unable to communicate in it. A lot of the research on second language learning suggests that words are actually learned “in the company they keep,” or in phrases, rather than in isolation. Phrasebooks, for example, with commonly used phrases, have been popular for years to pick up some quick, productive language before visiting a foreign country. In addition, research shows that a large portion of spoken language, and a smaller but still significant portion of written language, exists in short, ready-made phrases (“Last time I checked —”... “On the other hand —”). Given that learning phrases seems a much more “natural” way to learn language, and that it's a quick way to give students some productive speech, some focus should be given to learning phrases across the language skills.

## IMPORTANT ISSUES IN TEACHING PHRASES

### 1 CHOOSE THE MOST SALIENT FOR STUDY

Of primary consideration in teaching students phrases is determining which ones to teach: the focus should be on the more commonly used phrases in conversation and writing. In addition, studying a limited number of phrases over the course of the semester and learning how to use them well in conversation and text is of more value than studying a massive number and learning them only superficially. Phrases are usually three to six words long.

The teacher can look through her own textbooks as well as analyze student conversations to determine which phrases to teach. Otherwise, there is research available that shows which phrases are commonly used in conversation and writing.

### 2 STUDY PHRASES IN CONTEXT, NOT ISOLATION

Just as it is of limited value to learn single words out of context — the learner has little idea of how to use these words in actual speech or written production - it is not very productive to learn longer phrases out of context. Phrases should instead be learned while analyzing the conversations and texts in which they occur.

### 3 SPECIFIC LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

Phrases have specific language functions: to open a conversation, to introduce an opposing point, to summarize and conclude.

## METHODS FOR TEACHING PHRASES FOR SPEAKING AND LISTENING:

First calling student's attention to phrases, then explicitly teaching them, and finally practicing them in authentic situations in which students have been given a specific role and

task, such as an unhappy customer writing to a company's manager about a poor product, are tasks the teacher can assign. Some specific phrases and tasks follow.

**Conversation Phone Calls:** There are phrases associated with making phone calls which are different from that of face-to face conversations. For an obvious example, a speaker on the telephone usually identifies herself with “Hello, this is Stacia,” a phrase almost never used in person. There are also phrases for getting to the main point after the initial greetings: e.g., “The reason I am calling is —” and to conclude and say goodbye, e.g., “Thanks for your help with this”... “I'll look forward to hearing from you tomorrow, and “Have a good day.” Teaching these phrases and their functions also reveals something about the nature of a phone call in American English: it is brief, purposeful, and with specific and expected “movements”: the greeting, the statement of purpose, etc. This demonstrates people usually call each other with a specific purpose in mind, different from many face-to-face conversations, and if the caller doesn't come quickly to a purpose, the callee is likely to be annoyed. Having students practice these conversations, with set or less guided dialogues prepares students for the actual language used on the telephone.

**Face-to-Face Conversations:** Face-to-face conversations also have their specific phrases for certain functions, although they may be less defined than those of telephone conversations. There are also phrases related to more informal settings, such as between friends or grocery store clerks and customers, and more formal, such as between office managers and employees. The phrases also reveal the conventions to these conversations, although again the expectations may be looser than in telephone calls. In addition, it is these phrases that really reveal the gap between actual language use and the language stu-

dents may have been taught in prior ESL or EFL classes, as often these common phrases are different from what students were previously taught.

## CONVERSATIONS FOR INFORMAL SETTINGS:

**Friends / acquaintances:** Common greetings between friends usually begin with “How’s it going?” to which the response is almost invariably “Fine, and yourself?” or closely related expressions: “Not so bad! And you?” or “Pretty good. And how about you?”

In informal American English, particularly among young people, “Hey” seems to have replaced “Hi,” or “Hello” for the opening greeting.

For coming to a main point of an informal conversation, some signaling phrases such as “I just want to say —” or “I’ve been meaning to ask you —” are often used.

Just as “good morning” or “hello” are rarely used in informal face-to-face conversations, they rarely end with “good-bye.” Rather “Sorry, I’ve got to go,” or “Nice seeing you!” or “Take care, now” are commonly used.

**Salespeople / Customers:** “May I help you?” is the traditional way a salesperson greets a customer in English. For coming to the main point of the transaction, he might say, “And are you looking for anything special today?”

To conclude, the common response to the customer’s thank-you for service is the salesperson’s “No problem.” Again, “you’re welcome” is not heard so much today in actual conversation.

## CONVERSATIONS FOR FORMAL SETTINGS:

Conversations for more formal settings, such as business meetings between relative strangers, have their own set of phrases, such as “It’s nice to meet you,” although the extremely formal

“How do you do?” (to which the expected response is a repetition: “How do you do?”) has almost disappeared from American English. More formal meetings usually have an agenda and a leader who guides the meeting in reaching main points: “We have

a couple of things we really need to discuss today —” or “The really critical item on the schedule is —” The meeting might then conclude, again with the from the leader, “I think that covers it for today,” or “To wrap things up —” Adherence to the schedule is generally expected, and people who attempt to deviate from it may be rebuked with something such as “Well, to get back to the main point —” Failing to recognize the function of this phrase, to draw the group back to the main topic, results in annoyance from the other participants.

## METHODS FOR TEACHING PHRASES FOR READING AND WRITING

**Notes:** Rarely are notes in complete sentences: In informal notes, English actually becomes a pronoun-drop language, as is standard in some languages, like Spanish, where the subject pronoun may be dropped: “Am at the store,” “Had to take the car in,” and “Dinner on the stove,” are some common phrases in personal notes, getting right to the main point with minimum greeting or closure.

**Business Letters:** Business letters in particular seem replete with phrases to perform a certain function: “To Whom It May Concern,” to open, “It has come to my attention —” to come to the main point... “Looking at this situation from a customer’s perspective —” to raise an opposing or differing viewpoint, and “Please take this matter under consideration,” to conclude are some examples of phrases used in business letters.

**Essays and Reports:** Again, formal essays and reports are filled with phrases that not only perform specific functions but also signal the reader and writer’s membership in an academic community: “It has long been thought by experts —” to open a discussion... “Therefore, this suggests the importance of —” to raise a main point, “However, other evidence might suggest —” to recognize other viewpoints, and to summarize, “In conclusion, further study is warranted —”

Language should not be taught in discrete elements: it is by nature holistic. From learning the English phrase, students learn vocabulary as well as grammar related to specific language

contexts. Phrases also teach specific conventions and functions of language: how to open a conversation, recognize when a meeting leader is stating a main point, and so forth. In addition, use of these phrases actually signals the speaker or writer’s membership in a community.

TIME INVESTED IN TEACHING COMMONLY USED PHRASES IS THERE WELL-SPENT ON GIVING STUDENTS PRODUCTIVE LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC SITUATIONS.

# 7 Conversation Based Idiom Activities for ESL Students

## TRY THESE 7 CONVERSATION BASED IDIOM ACTIVITIES WITH YOUR ESL STUDENTS

### 1 IDIOM INTRODUCTION

To introduce the topic of idioms to your students, lead a class discussion about the way people talk. Explain that idioms are phrases that have a meaning different from their literal meaning. Ask students to volunteer any such phrases they have heard. Then give them a few examples to cement the understanding of idioms in their minds. Have groups of students work together to list as many idioms as they can think of.

### 2 IDIOM RESEARCH

Give groups of three students a set of four or five idioms to research. For each idiom, they should find a definition (available online), give an example of the idiom in context and explain its origin (if possible). The group should then use this set of idioms in a dialogue they write together. Once all groups have finished, have each group share its dialogue with the rest of the class.

### 3 LITERATURE'S IDIOMS

Choose a reading selection for your students that is sprinkled with idioms. If you are not already working with such a text, try 'My Momma Likes to Say' or 'Even More Parts' or other similar idiom based picture books. Then, have groups of three or four students read the texts and locate any idioms within it. The groups should then discuss those idioms and try to determine their meanings based on the context. Have each group work with one book each day until every group has dissected each literature selection.

### 4 MIXED UP IDIOMS

Write some original sentences

that use unusual or interesting idioms. Transfer the sentence to index cards one word per card. Give pairs of students one set of cards and see if they can unscramble the sentences and guess the meaning of the idiom in that sentence. Have pairs of students write their own sentences on index cards, also including idioms, and exchange with a partner. Students then try to unscramble those sentences as well.

### 5 PHOTO FINISHES

Give groups of four to five students an unfamiliar idiom along with two pictures. One picture should be the literal representation of the idiom. (Do an image search at [google.com](http://google.com) to find these.) The second picture should be the nonliteral meaning of the idiom. The groups should look at these pictures and work together to interpret the meaning of the idiom. Once they have figured it out and checked their answer with you, have them share their interpretation (and pictures) with the class.

### 6 IDIOMATIC CULTURE

Give your student a list of common U.S. English idioms and challenge groups of about three students to make conclusions about U.S. culture based on the idioms. Then, give those same groups a list of British idioms and ask them to do the same.

### 7 IDIOM INTERVIEWS

Have students interview each other on the topic of idioms. Students should ask for information on what idioms have given their fellow students trouble in English and why they think learning idioms is or isn't important. Then, ask each person in your class to do a second interview, this time with a native English speaker. These interview questions should elicit the native speaker's opinion on learning idioms. Is it important for ESL students? What advice would the native speaker give an ESL student who is trying to learn idioms? What idioms do they think are

the most important for ESL students to learn?



# 5 Must-Know Tips on Teaching Idioms

Idioms are sometimes not included in ESL classes but this is a disadvantage to students who will at some point encounter them either in their studies or in real life. Learning a language is complicated and idioms are one of the more interesting topics. Here are some things to think about when talking about idioms in your classes.

## READY TO TEACH IDIOMS? CHECK OUT THESE 5 TIPS:

### 1 AMOUNT: NOT TOO MANY AT ONCE

Planning an idiom filled lesson may not be the best approach to introducing this topic. Idioms are complex and difficult not only to understand but also to explain so consider introducing only a small number, maybe three to five, at a time. You can do this by including them in your usual lessons (see our Idiom Worksheets section for free lesson materials on this topic: [busyteacher.org/classroom\\_activities-vocabulary/idioms-worksheets/](http://busyteacher.org/classroom_activities-vocabulary/idioms-worksheets/)). This approach will give you enough time to cover them thoroughly and allow students sufficient practice time without overwhelming them.

### 2 THEMES: RELATED TO YOUR TOPIC

You can include idioms in your normal lessons by introducing them thematically. If they are related to the topic you are studying, students will have an easier time remembering them and will be familiar with the vocabulary you are using. When talking about pets, for instance, you can introduce idioms such as “work like a dog” and “dog tired” which are related to the topic and will give students something to discuss. What makes idioms so interesting is that they are a unique combination of words that have completely different meanings from the individual words themselves.

### 3 LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE+

Many teachers do not introduce idioms to students who are not at the advanced level. In some ways this seems like a good approach because idioms are complex and have different meanings than their words alone suggest. However, idioms do not have to be just for advanced students, you can introduce them earlier as long as you choose ones that are appropriate for your students. Obviously beginners may not have the vocabulary and comprehension skills to learn certain idioms however, intermediate students could definitely benefit from learning about this aspect of the English language. Using the two examples above, you can even discuss how these phrases may have been created. Do your students think that dogs work really hard or get exceptionally tired? Maybe or maybe not but it is an interesting thought.

### 4 COMPREHENSION: MAKE SURE THEY UNDERSTAND THE INDIVIDUAL WORDS FIRST

Students have to know or understand the individual words of an idiom before understanding the idiom itself. Avoid introducing idioms which use new vocabulary words and be able to simplify the meaning of idioms. You could say, for instance, that “work like a dog” means to work very hard. Students will have to know all the words you use in your explanation as well so use the simplest language you can. Even with advanced learners, simplifying idioms to their basic meanings make them easier to understand and learn.

### 5 PRACTICE: ASK AND ANSWER

Students need to practice not just using idioms in sentences but also responding to their use and understanding their meaning. For instance, students may be able to create a lot of sentences using the phrase “morning, noon, and night” by saying “I study morning, noon, and night.” and simply changing

the verb to make more sentences. To give students practice hearing the idioms used, ask them questions using idioms. By asking questions, you can also prompt students to use idioms correctly. For this example say “What is something you do morning, noon, and night?” Students should also be asked to identify situations that best demonstrate the meaning of idioms. For this activity simply prepare two or three sentences that do not use idioms and ask students to choose the one that best matches the meaning of the idiom they are learning. Using this example again, the correct answer might be “My father goes to work early in the morning and does not even get home until nine in the evening.” This gives students more time to think about what the idiom means. It is important to do practice exercises that test the students’ ability to use idioms as well as understand them.

IDIOMS MAY NOT BE SOMETHING YOU ARE PREPARED TO INTRODUCE TO YOUR STUDENTS BUT AT SOME POINT IN THEIR STUDIES, IDIOMS WILL BE IMPORTANT AND YOU CAN GIVE STUDENTS A HEAD START BY GETTING THEM ACCUSTOMED TO THESE TYPES OF PHRASES EARLY ON. JUST A HANDFUL EACH SEMESTER WOULD BE A GOOD START.

# How to Teach English Idioms and Their Meaning

Should we or shouldn't we teach English idioms to ESL students? Although it is uncommon for ESL students to use them comfortably and effectively, if we choose to not teach them idioms, they'll be missing an important cultural element of the language they strive to speak fluently. However, it stands to reason that idioms should be taught to upper-intermediate or advanced students, individuals who are ready to take their English fluency to the next level.

To make sure that the time you spend teaching idioms is not time wasted, follow these steps and instructions:

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 CHOOSE 5 TO 8 IDIOMS THAT MAY BE EASILY GROUPED

Most idioms fall into simple categories, like idioms with animals or parts of the body. Choose 5 to 8 from any category, for example idioms with time. If you choose more than 10, you'll only succeed in overwhelming your students, and they won't remember any of the idioms they saw in class. So, to teach idioms with time, you may teach the 8 idioms found in this worksheet called Time Flies When You're Having Fun ([busyteacher.org/3499-time-flies-when-you-are-having-funtime-idioms.html](http://busyteacher.org/3499-time-flies-when-you-are-having-funtime-idioms.html)). Before presenting the idioms, make sure students understand that they are usually used in spoken English, and rarely in written form, with some exceptions (they are widely used on the Internet, in blogs, ezine articles, etc...but students must understand that their use is informal).

### 2 INTRODUCE IDIOMS IN CONTEXT, NEVER IN ISOLATION

Some ESL teachers simply go over a list of English idioms and their definitions or explanations. However, to ensure that students not only understand them, but also learn to use

them, present idiom examples in context, for example, in simple conversations where the meaning of the idiom is clear. To introduce the idiom to give someone a hard time, present a conversation like this one:

- Juan: Hey Sarah, you look sad. What's up?

- Sarah: Well, I didn't play very well today during volleyball practice, and my teammates were not very understanding. They said I was clumsy and had to focus more on the game. They said a 5-year old girl played better than me.

- Juan: Oh! I'm so sorry they gave you such a hard time.

Ask students to guess or figure out the meaning of the idiom. Correct as necessary. Ask them to provide other examples of what it means to give someone a hard time. Then, move on to another conversation for another idiom.

### 3 STUDENTS CREATE CONVERSATIONS USING IDIOMS

Remember that the goal is to get students to not only understand idioms, but also learn how to use them effectively. Divide the class into pairs. Each pair of students gets one or two idioms to work with. They must write a conversation and use this idiom in it. Walk around the classroom to assist students and check for accuracy.

### 4 STUDENTS ACT OUT THEIR CONVERSATIONS

Each pair stands before their classmates and acts out the conversation they wrote. This way they not only practice using the idiom phrases, they hear other examples from classmates, other ways in which these idioms may be included in conversation.

### 5 PRACTICE WITH GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

The worksheet for Time Flies When You're Having Fun ([busyteacher.org/3499-time-flies-when-you-are-having-funtime-idioms.html](http://busyteacher.org/3499-time-flies-when-you-are-having-funtime-idioms.html)) provides a matching game and a gap-filling exercise. There are plenty more worksheets like these at BusyTeacher.org's Idioms worksheets section: [busyteacher.org/classroom\\_activities-vocabulary/idioms-worksheets/](http://busyteacher.org/classroom_activities-vocabulary/idioms-worksheets/)

## 6 USE REAL LIFE, AUTHENTIC MATERIAL

Show students how some of these idioms are used in the media, in newspaper and magazine articles, and in songs, cartoons, videos, advertisements, etc. Thanks to the Internet, all you have to do is Google an idiom, and you'll find plenty of sources! If you Google, "gave him a hard time", you'll run across a Daily Mail article that states voters gave a British politician a hard time. You don't have to read the entire article, just the headline and the basics will do for students to see how this idiom is used in a newspaper headline.

**JUST REMEMBER TO KEEP IT REAL. YOUR STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW THAT THERE ARE REAL PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO ACTUALLY SPEAK LIKE THIS, AND SAY THESE THINGS. SOON ENOUGH, THEY MAY FEEL READY TO START USING SOME OF THESE THEMSELVES.**

# 7 No Prep Activities for Teaching Idioms

## TRY THESE 7 NO-PREP ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING IDIOMS

### 1 GUESSING GAME

Write three or four idioms on the board that all touch on one theme (e.g. animals, body parts). Have students work in groups to see if they can guess the meaning of the idioms. Walk around your classroom and check their answers awarding points for any correct definition. Then share the meanings of the idioms with your class and give them an example in context. Move on to another group of idioms around a second theme. Repeat the activity. The first team to reach ten points wins the game.

### 2 CLASS IDIOMS

Keep a running list of idioms in your classroom. As students hear an idiom or come across one in their studies, add it to a list on a bulletin board or poster board in your classroom. Your students can then use this list as a reference during conversation periods or when writing.

### 3 IDIOM TRANSLATION

Have each of your students write a dialogue rich with idioms. You may want to encourage students to check online idiom dictionaries as they write. Then, have students exchange papers with a partner. The second student must then rewrite the dialogue eliminating all of the idioms but without changing the meaning of the conversation.

### 4 IDIOM REVERSE TRANSLATION

Have students choose an original composition and rewrite it using as many idioms as they possibly can. Students can model their stories after any children's book rich with idioms. (If you aren't sure where to start, try any of these books by Fred Gwynn: A Little Pigeon Toad, The King Who Rained,

A Chocolate Moose for Dinner.) After rewriting their stories, have students exchange papers and highlight the idioms that their classmates used in the story.

### 5 THE GREAT IDIOM RACE

After you have studied idioms and your students have learned several, play a game with your class to see who can use the most idioms. Break your class into two groups: boys and girls or older students and younger students. Give each team a container to keep track of idiom use. (You can also keep a tally in a corner of your classroom.) During class, if a student uses an idiom, put a marble, bean or other counter in that team's container. Watch as the two containers fill faster and faster as the competition heats up. At the end of the semester, see which team has used the most idioms. The other team must then serve them at a pizza party or other celebration.

### 6 SELF STUDY QUIZZES

In classrooms with internet access, let your students work on classroom computers or connect to the wi-fi network via their smart devices. Several web sites offer self study idiom lessons and quizzes. Have your students start with [a4esl.org](http://a4esl.org) (self study idiom quizzes) and then see where their studies take them.

### 7 BUSY TEACHER RESOURCE

Don't forget to check out [busyteacher.org](http://busyteacher.org) for worksheets on idioms ([busyteacher.org/classroom\\_activities-vocabulary/idioms-worksheets/](http://busyteacher.org/classroom_activities-vocabulary/idioms-worksheets/)). We have idiom exercises perfect for any classroom, all with just a click of the mouse.



# You Know What They Say: How To Teach Idioms

**YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY. DON'T BE A BUMP ON A LOG. A ROLLING STONE GATHERS NO MOSS. PUT IDIOMS ON THE MENU. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BEAT THEM INTO THE GROUND, BUT AT LEAST TAKE THEM HOME AND INTRODUCE THEM TO THE PARENTS. THEY'LL BE GUNNING FOR YOU IF YOU DON'T.**

The idea of teaching idioms to your ESL class can be intimidating, but you do not have to let it scare you off. Your students will get a kick out of taking on some English idioms, and you will be laughing all the way to the bank once you do.

## HOW TO TEACH IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

### 1 TAKE A GUESS

The first step in introducing your students to some common idiomatic expressions is to give them a list of the expressions you want to teach. Have them read the idioms and then try to guess what each of them might mean. Then, make it a game by giving them a random list of the meanings that match the idiomatic expressions. See how many idioms each individual student can match to its meaning, and then break your class into groups to compare their answers. In their groups and then as a class have students discuss which expressions they already knew, which they were able to figure out, and which seem most unusual to them. To light a fire under someone may obviously mean to motivate or hurry him or her, but break a leg may not seem like the well wish it is. Your selection may include idioms your class has already studied or be a collection of completely new ones if you want to challenge your students. You may also be surprised as to which idioms your students are able to understand and which puzzle them.

### 2 HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Now that you have introduced your

students to some English idioms, invite them to share idioms from their native language. You can group students with the same native language together. This may make it easier for them to jog one another's memories. Have each group make a list of ten to twenty idioms in their native language and then ask them to translate them word for word into English. Do not worry if the phrases seem strange and do not make sense. Most likely, they will not. Then have groups switch lists and see if students can guess at the meaning of each idiom. This will get students talking to one another as they try to cipher the meanings behind the phrases. After the groups have discussed the meanings, pair students and have them explain the actual meanings of the idioms to each other. This will give further purposeful conversation opportunities to each student. Have each person choose one idiom from their partner's language that they like. Then have them explain the idiom to the class and say why they like it.

### 3 LET'S REVIEW

After your students have had some practice using English idioms, it is time to review. Why not stay in the playful character of idioms themselves by reviewing with a game? Charades is a great way to review idioms and have fun in the process. First, explain the rules of charades. The person acting out the phrase should not speak but must get his or her team to say the expression based only on body language. It should not be too difficult for your students to recognize the idioms being acted out since they have already been working with these expressions and should know them fairly well by now. Your class will have a ball watching each other act out expressions that may or may not have any connection to their actual meanings.

If acting is not something your class feels comfortable doing, playing Pictionary with these phrases can be just as much fun. Have two students from

each team come up to the white board at the same time. After showing them the phrase, the two students should race to draw the expression so their teammates can call it out. The first team to call out the correct answer wins the point. After a predetermined amount of time, you can let each team have one guess based on what the other team has drawn.

You can also put your idioms into a crossword puzzle review. Supply the meanings as the clues and use the idioms themselves as the answers. Several web sites allow you to simply plug in the words and clues and will generate a crossword puzzle for free.

Use BusyTeacher's FREE tools to create your own idiom activities in seconds: create a tile puzzle or a double puzzle!

**THOUGH THEY CAN SEEM INTIMIDATING, IDIOMS CAN BRING FUN AND ENERGY INTO YOUR ESL CLASSROOM WHEN YOU TEACH THEM WITH A LIGHTHEARTED SPIRIT.**

Change up your normal routine and do some idiom fun with your class today.

# How to Use Idioms to Drive the ESL Curriculum

*Some years ago, there was a popular television show in the U.S., a romantic comedy about the trials and tribulations of early married life, called “Mad about You”.*

An interesting title, actually, as it was definitely an American program, set in New York City, but the idiom “mad about,” in the sense of “to like” or “to love” very much, is British English, while Americans are more likely to say “crazy about.” Once in class when I was briefly recounting an episode from the show — discussing plots of TV shows is actually good conversational practice as they are usually uncomplicated and easy to follow — my students appeared confused, and I couldn’t understand why, as the plot was not difficult. One of the students finally spoke up: “I don’t understand if the show is about love and marriage it’s called ‘Mad about You.’ Doesn’t that mean they’re angry, hate each other, might divorce?” Oh, I understood now. “No, Jaime, not ‘mad at’ you but ‘mad about’ you, something completely different.” It was strange how one word can change completely the meaning of an idiom. And actually there are quite a few of these that can potentially be confusing, especially the more figurative the expression is — that is, the more it is removed from tangible experience. Often idioms or word combinations have both a literal and figurative meaning, while others have only the figurative, idiomatic meaning, and some were once literal in nature, but the literal meaning is no longer in use. So there are several potentially confusing levels in idioms to watch out for in instruction: teaching the correct combination of words for the correct meaning and teaching both figurative and literal meanings.

## 5 IMPORTANT IDIOMS YOUR STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW

### 1 ‘TURN AROUND’

This is one of those idioms that has both literal and abstract meanings: it can mean literally to turn

around while driving or walking and go in the opposite direction. It also means, figuratively, to change oneself or one’s life completely: “I really need to turn myself around” or “We really need to turn around this project.” The expression is heard frequently in the U.S., not surprising in a culture with a strong belief in the positive value of change. (President Obama ran his first very successful campaign on a theme of change.) The figurative “turn around” is related to the literal one: if I want to turn around my life or my relationship, I want in some way to go in the opposite direction.

### 2 ‘SET BACK’

This is another idiom that has both literal and figurative meanings. In a couple weeks in California, we will set back our clocks as we do every fall as we go off daylight savings time. This is the literal meaning: we physically take our clocks or watches and set them back one hour. “A setback, “however, the noun form, means a disappointment or loss: “Her layoff from her job was a real setback for her and her family.” Again, the literal and figurative meanings are closely related in that a life setback almost sets one back in time to an earlier point before having what was lost.

### 3 ‘BEAR IN MIND’

This means to keep something in mind or to remember it: “Bear in mind, on Friday we are updating the software, so plan accordingly because the computers will be offline.” There is no literal equivalent to this, except that one meaning of “to bear” is to carry, so if you “bear something in mind,” it is as if you are carrying it the way you might “bear arms,” or a carry a weapon, for example.

### 4 ‘BEAT AROUND THE BUSH’

This idiom means to avoid the main point, to evade. It is most often used in imperatives: e.g., “Don’t beat around the bush,” or “Stop beating around the bush! Tell me what you

mean.”

The popularity of the expression in the U.S. might show the importance of directness in the culture and impatience for indirectness. Its connection to a literal meaning seems to have disappeared but may be related to hunting: a hunter who “beats around the bush” hits with his stick only the outside of the bush instead of attacking the center, where snakes and other trouble may hide.

### 5 ‘GET INTO THE SWING OF’

This idiom means to get accustomed to a routine or practice: “He had some trouble with his new job, but now he’s really gotten into the swing of it.” the expression seems to be drawn from dance: if I get into the swing of a new dance, I am dancing in rhythm to the music and the rest of the dancers.

## METHODS FOR TEACHING WORD COMBINATIONS/ IDIOMS

Idioms are difficult to learn so require careful instruction. By following certain practices, however, students can learn these important expressions.

### 1 FOCUS ON LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE MEANINGS

Begin by defining the idiom in question and connect the figurative meaning to the literal one, if possible: e.g., connect “miss the boat,” literally, to be left standing on the pier as the boat sails, to “miss the boat” figuratively: to miss out on some key point or opportunity. Students will usually readily see the connection, which will help them learn the idiom. Have them discuss the different meanings in groups. This is also a perfect time to discuss usage, how we actually use these idioms. For example, I might say, “I really missed the boat on that point, and I am sorry.” I would probably not say, “The boat was missed by me there”

or “That country has missed the boat in this process” as the idiom is used in the active voice and applied to individuals.

## **2 FOCUS ON CORRECT COMBINATIONS OF WORDS AND DEFINITIONS**

As we saw with “mad about” and “mad at,” correct combinations of words are important, and one word can make a difference. Have your students do some fill-in-the-blanks to practice correct combinations of words for context: e.g.: The couple really love each other, they are mad \_\_\_\_ each other.

## **3 FOCUS ON ACTUAL USAGE**

Correct usage, how we actually use this language in context, is important to learn to avoid potential embarrassing or even dangerous mistakes: for example, I might tell husband to “stop beating around the bush”, I would avoid this language with my boss as it is too informal for the relationship.

## **4 PRACTICE IN JOURNALS AND DIALOGUES**

A very good way for students to practice idioms is in journals for writing and dialogues for speaking. You may assign a journal, possibly a topic, and tell students to use at least three idioms in their journals. The instructor can then mark the journals for correctness in grammar, word combinations, meaning, and usage.

### **IDIOMS MAKE A LARGE PORTION OF OUR SPOKEN AND EVEN WRITTEN SPEECH AND ARE IMPORTANT TO LEARN.**

They are difficult to learn due to their figurative nature, however, with a focus on form and usage as well as practice, your students can be using them in no time!



# 10 Sports Idioms Your Students Need to Know for the Workplace

**SPORTS ARE SOMETHING OF AN OBSESSION IN AMERICAN CULTURE, AND DISCUSSION OF THEM IS NOT LIMITED TO THE SPORTS FANATIC.**

In fact, some knowledge of sports may be required even of people who don't enjoy them to even successfully engage in small talk, for example. In addition, understanding idioms from sports may be required to function not only in informal situations but more formal: recently at the Democratic National Convention, for example, former President Bill Clinton's speech was said by a reporter to have "hit it out of the ballpark," a term drawn from baseball, when a player hits the ball so hard and far that it allows everyone on base to score: therefore, I know from this idiom that Clinton's speech was a rousing success, at least in the view of this reporter. Knowing idioms like this is important to function in both informal and formal situations in American English, so teaching these idioms should be part of the ESL curriculum.

## 10 COMMON SPORTS IDIOMS FOR THE ESL CLASS

### 1 TO DO AN END RUN AROUND

— American football: when a player goes around a teammate to score instead of passing the ball.

Idiomatic Meaning: To leave a key person out of a process.

### 2 TO HIT IT OUT OF THE BALLPARK

— Baseball: a ball that is hit out of the ballpark will allow everyone on base to score.

Idiomatic Meaning: to meet a goal more than was expected.

### 3 A SLAM DUNK

— Basketball: to score in one shot by evading blocking to shoot the ball through the hoop.

Idiomatic Meaning: to meet a goal easily and without opposition.

### 4 OUT IN LEFT FIELD

— Baseball: Left field is "out," where the game is not played and no scores made.

Idiomatic Meaning: A person who is out in left field makes off-topic or outlandish remarks, that don't seem part of the "game."

### 5 THE HOME STRETCH

— Baseball: the very last part of the game at the end of the ninth inning.

Idiomatic meaning: The "homestretch" of a project is the final phase.

### 6 TO STRIKE OUT

— Baseball: a player who swings at a ball three times and does not hit it properly strikes out and must go to the end of the line.

Idiomatic Meaning: To strike out in a business deal is to fail after trying.

### 7 TO NOT GET TO FIRST BASE

— Baseball: a player who strikes out cannot go to first base to attempt to score but must go to the end of the line.

Idiomatic Meaning: To try at a venture or project but fail to even complete the first stage.

### 8 A HOME RUN

— Baseball: to run around the bases to home plate and score.

Idiomatic Meaning: a big success.

### 9 TO PASS THE BALL

— American football and basketball: to hand off the ball to a teammate rather than trying to score oneself.

Idiomatic Meaning: To give a task, usually undesirable, to a colleague.

### 10 TO DROP THE BALL

— American football: Accidentally dropping the ball allows the other team the possibility of scoring.

Idiomatic Meaning: To make a serious mistake, usually through inattention or carelessness, that affects a whole team or group.

## METHODS FOR TEACHING SPORTS IDIOMS

### 1 DISCUSSION OF THE SPORT

Many ESL students have little knowledge of American football, basketball, and baseball and therefore might have trouble connecting idioms to the sport. Spend some time explaining each sport, the object of the game, and how it is played.

### 2 MATCH THE IDIOM TO THE SPORT

Once students understand the sports, connect the idioms that go with it. For example, once students understand the object of baseball is to hit the ball, run around the bases and get back to home plate, and avoid being called "out," then students will begin to understand how "to strike out" and "to not get to first base" are connected idioms.

### 3 MATCH THE DEFINITION TO THE IDIOM

Once students have connected idioms to their respect sports, they can begin to produce definitions for each idiom, first by matching the definition to the idiom and then by generating the definitions on their own.

### 4 PRACTICE IN CONVERSATION

It's now time to practice the idioms in speaking. Have students choose about three idioms and practice using

them first in a short “speech” or monologue on their own and then practice using them in dialogue.

## 5 TEACH CORRECT PRONUNCIATION

Idiom instruction is the perfect time to teach correct stress and pronunciation, especially what the French call “liaison,” or the connecting of words in rapid speech. To just take the first idiom on the list, the phrase “to do an end run around” is not pronounced that way, with each syllable receiving equal stress, but rather something like “tuh-do-uh-end-run-uhround,” with the content words stressed and the structure/grammar syllables unstressed “schwa” sounds pronounced “uh,” and then the whole phrase run together. This is native, fluent speech, and because idioms are even more connected than most speech, a perfect time to teach liaison.

## 6 PRACTICE THE IDIOM IN WRITING

Believe it or not, these idioms are so pervasive that they are used in writing, sometimes relatively formal writing, like business memos and letters. A team leader might very well email his team with gratitude that they are finally in the “home stretch” of a project. Have students see if they can use three to five idioms in a memo or letter on a specific topic either assigned by the teacher or generated by the student.

**TEACHING SPORTS IDIOMS MAY SEEM A PERIPHERAL PART OF THE CURRICULUM THAN SOME CONCERNS, SUCH AS TEACHING CORRECT SENTENCE STRESS AND WRITING.**

That is true to some extent, but these idioms are such a large part of U.S. culture that pronunciation and writing tasks can be easily connected to them.

# 7 Idiom Activities to Get Your Students Creativity Flowing

## TRY THESE 7 IDIOM ACTIVITIES TO GET YOUR STUDENTS' CREATIVITY FLOWING

### 1 BACK TO THE SOURCE

Can your students guess how an idiom might have originated? If not, can they tell a creative story that shows how the idiom could have come to be? Give groups of three or four students a choice of idioms, and then ask each group to write a short story that illustrates how that idiom came to be. Have students illustrate their stories and then post them in your classroom for the rest of the class to enjoy.

### 2 PICTURE PERFECT

Younger students will especially enjoy illustrating idioms and their meanings. Have each student choose an idiom to illustrate. Give her a large sheet of paper, which she should divide into two sections. On one half, she draws a picture that illustrates the meaning of the idiom. On the other half, she draws a literal representation of the idiom. Post the pictures around the room and challenge your class to guess which idiom their classmate illustrated, looking to both pictures as clues. If you like, you can also compile these idioms into a class book that will be available during independent reading time.

### 3 A PIECE OF CULTURE

Once your students have an adequate understanding of idioms in English, ask each person to share one or two idioms from his native language with the class. Each person should write down a word for word translation of an idiom in her first language and hand it in to you. You then compile all of the idioms on one sheet and make copies for each of your students. In groups, students must work together to guess the source (student and culture) and the meaning of each idiom.

### 4 GESTURES

After your students are familiar with several idioms, play this charade type game to review. Write each idiom on an index card, shuffle them, and have them ready for each student as he takes his turn. On his turn, the student comes to the front of the room, chooses a card and then acts out that idiom. The rest of the class must guess which idiom he is acting out. If you like, play in teams with two students acting out the same idiom. The team to correctly guess the idiom first scores a point.

### 5 ORIGINAL IDIOMS

Challenge your students to create their own idioms. For their non-literal phrase, have each person describe the situation which could have brought about the new idiom and draw a picture of that situation. Then, have students write the idiom on the back of their picture. Hang these pictures from your ceiling (paper clips and string are often all you need) so students can see the pictures and guess the idioms on their backs.

### 6 MOVIE REVIEW

Have each student write a movie review working with one other classmate. Students start by writing a review using as many idioms as possible. Then, using smart phones, personal technology devices or a video camera, have students perform and record their movie reviews and then email them to you. Set aside some class time to watch the reviews while munching on popcorn letting students enjoy their own and their classmates' hard work and entertainment.

### 7 IMPROVISATION

Improvisation is a sure fire way to get your students engaged and energetic about learning English. To bring idioms into the improv ring, create three sets of index cards one with several idioms (one to a card), a second with various settings for the

scene, and a third with some characters that your students will have to play. Choose two people to improvise the situation. Each person chooses a character card and an idiom card. The pair chooses a situation card. The volunteers continue with the scene until each person has appropriately used their idiom. Then, give another pair a turn strutting their stuff.



# Cool as a Cucumber:

## Delectable Uses for Food Idioms

**IDIOMS IN GENERAL ARE A MOMENTOUS AND EXCITING DEVELOPMENT IN EVERY LEARNER'S EXPERIENCE.**

Food idioms provide substance everyone can relate to and enjoy. Your students will definitely devour these delectable uses for food idioms.

### HOW TO TEACH FOOD IDIOMS

#### 1 ILLUSTRATE LITERAL MEANINGS

When starting out, students will be chomping at the bit to learn any idioms, so it is best to choose a topic that is easy to digest. Food idioms are the perfect choice, introducing them incrementally is essential. A playful way to get students in tune with how idioms are used is to first take them literally. Give student a list of food idioms and ask them to illustrate the literal meanings. Doing this will help them to define the idiom first in their own terms, and then move into exploring how to apply idiomatic phrases in natural language.

Begin with a handful or so of your favorite food idioms that you think would be fairly easy to define with a drawing. A few good ones to start out with might be:

*Have Egg on Your Face*  
*Drink Like a Fish*  
*Easy as Pie/Piece of Cake*  
*Walk on Eggshells*  
*Butter Up*

These are all good choices to have the students illustrate. You can devise this activity in a number of ways, but you want to be sure that it incorporates language and actual usage of the idioms. Explain the difference between literal and figurative language, and then ask them to create drawings that illustrate the literal meaning of the food idioms. Once they have done so, you can have them write humorous captions that capture the meaning of the drawing and explains the use of the expression. Having the illustrations will serve as a memorable way for students to remember what the idi-

oms mean, and how best to use them correctly.

#### 2 USE STORIES TO ILLUSTRATE MEANING

Get your own creative juices flowing and whip up a short story that has ten to fifteen food idioms sprinkled into the text. Students should locate all the idioms and then they can attempt to figure out the figurative meanings in context. This exercise is a wonderful comprehension check because it involves discussion of what the idioms mean, and appropriate ways to use them. It is a good idea to add in a few difficult expressions along with several that are well-illustrated throughout your story. After they have had some discussion time, you may want to give them some fill-in-the-blank exercises or comprehension questions that incorporate the idiomatic definitions. However you would like, creating your own story gives flavor to your idioms, and your students will enjoy your composition. Here is a very short example:

John's dad came home one afternoon and said he could no longer bring home the bacon. His Dad said, "I lost the job that I never liked, and now I just went from the frying pan into the fire." John told his father he must make his bread and butter doing something he really loved to do. That way work doesn't quite feel so much like work. His dad took his advice, buttered up Steve Jobs and got a job creating iPhone apps. His dad told John it wasn't easy working at a new job, but he had no problem remaining as cool as a cucumber under the pressure.

You can be as silly or obvious as you like, and provide more detail than this example. You can also have students write their own creative stories utilizing a few idioms and sharing their writing with the class.

#### 3 SITUATIONAL EXAMPLES

Situational examples are gener-

ally necessary when it comes to introducing and defining any idioms, and food idioms can be extraordinarily entertaining. Begin with a list of very common food idioms that students might have heard before. Test the waters, and put a few of them on the board. Ask the students if they have heard the idioms and if so could they provide an example of how to use it. From there provide idioms they have not heard before and give them a few anecdotal examples to demonstrate the idioms. Be sure to do a lot of comprehension checks as you go, and don't move too fast through your examples. Once you have given them a number of situational examples, and they are getting into it, challenge students to provide their own examples for the idioms they have learned. You can do this in pairs or groups, so long as the students are creating original examples and not just copying yours. To focus on food idioms specifically, you can apply the challenge that their examples must be in regards to cooking, the kitchen, or dining out. This makes creating their examples more challenging and memorable. An example could be: Our waiter was very charming, and even gave us a free dessert. He was definitely the cream of the crop. Some examples will be short like this one, but others may require more explanation. If you want to make it into a game, get out your timer and have students provide situational examples before the timer runs out. Students enjoy learning what idioms mean, but they also appreciate direction on how to insert them into conversation naturally. It's an important step to make sure they use idioms correctly and that they don't overuse them.

**INTRODUCING AND PRACTICING FOOD IDIOMS CAN REALLY MAKE STUDENTS' MOUTHS WATER FOR MORE AND MORE EXPOSURE TO IDIOMS.**

Keep the flavor coming, and give them plenty of fat to chew on with these delectable food idiom uses!

# 6 Simple Steps for Teaching Content Vocabulary

## ARE YOU TIRED OF THE SAME OLD BORING PRESENTATIONS, HANDING OUT LISTS OF VOCABULARY WORDS AND DEFINITIONS TO YOUR ESL STUDENTS?

Are you looking for a new and engaging way to present new vocabulary to your English class? If you answer is yes, try this simple six-step process for getting new words into your students' lexicons.

## EXPERIMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING IDEAS AND GET A GOOD RESULT

### 1 CHOOSE YOUR TOPIC

You may be following a curriculum, or you may have the freedom to choose your own material in your ESL classes. Either way, you can't teach your students a new set of content vocabulary if you don't first know what topic you want to cover. Teaching students new vocabulary centered around a theme makes it easier for their vocabulary learning efforts. So the first step in any vocabulary lesson should be to decide what theme your vocabulary will center around and then compile or review the specific vocabulary you want to teach.

### 2 SEE WHAT THEY ALREADY KNOW

Before introducing the new vocabulary to your students, see what they already know about the topic you have chosen. If you do, you will have a better understanding of what your students know and how well they will learn the material you will present. Will this vocabulary unit be a difficult one for them? Do they already have a strong foundation in this subject? In addition to informing you, bringing up what they already know will help them make mental links to new information. Think of the mind like a set of Lego blocks. New information is retained most easily when it is connected to information the learner already possesses.

To see what they already know, write

the topic on the board, picnic for example. Then as a class, brainstorm all the words they already know associated with the topic. In this case, your students might offer words such as the following: summer, eat, kite, blanket, basket, food, fried chicken, potato salad, ants, etc.

### 3 FIND CONNECTIONS

Once you have gotten as many words on the board as your students can come up with, it's time to sort them logically. You can either do this as a class or have small groups of students do the sorting. If you choose group work, have three or four students work together to group the words as they choose. Any organizational strategy will work as long as it is logical. In the picnic example, students might group food (fried chicken and potato salad), items to bring (blanket and basket) and activities to do there (eat and fly kites). Encourage students to fit all of the vocabulary into their organizational scheme if at all possible.

### 4 GIVE IT A NAME

Once your students have grouped their words, it's time to label the categories. Some students may have already given the groupings titles, but if they haven't now is the time to do so. Then have students make a chart with a column for each category they have. In my picnic example, I would make a chart with three columns and put the titles at the top of each column. Once they have their charts, students should list the words under the appropriate category.

### 5 EXPAND YOUR MIND

After the titles are in place at the top of the chart and the words are listed underneath them, encourage your students to add any other words that come to their minds. You might encourage them to take each category and think about other items that would fit into it. As they come up with these words, they should add them to their charts.

Once they have run out of ideas, pres-

ent to your class the new words that you have planned to teach. Your list may contain some of the words your students have already listed, or your list may be completely new. In either case, present new words to your students and explain their meanings. As you present the words, have your students add them in the appropriate columns. Note, because students have been working in groups, not every student will have the same categories on her paper. That is not important. What is important is students listing new words in their chart in logical places. If students find a word or two impossible to fit into their existing lists, have them add a column to their chart. Then have them brainstorm any other words they know that would fit into each new category they add.

### 6 PUT IT TO GOOD USE

Now that your students have brought out all their existing knowledge about your topic and you have added the new vocabulary you intended to teach, it's time to put this vocabulary to use. You have as many options for assignments as days in the year, but here are some simple ways for your students to use their newfound vocabulary.

- Write a skit as a group and perform it in front of the class
- Write an informative paragraph
- Write a creative story
- Give a speech about the topic
- Create an original crossword puzzle complete with original clues
- Play a game which requires students to use the new vocabulary
- Go to an environment where they will have to use the new vocabulary in conversation
- Watch a video that uses the new vocabulary and test student comprehension

If you are tired of the traditional list of words and definitions when it comes to teaching new vocabulary, try this simple six step process. Your students will be more engaged and make better connections between what they are learning and what they already know, and you'll feel good about how well they remember new vocabulary.

# 5 Easy Ways to Develop a Vocabulary Unit From Scratch

WHETHER YOU ARE TEACHING A VOCABULARY SPECIFIC CLASS OR ANOTHER ESL STANDARD, VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION IS SURE TO BE PART OF YOUR INSTRUCTION.

When you are teaching English as a second language, vocabulary is an area your students will always need to expand. Beginning students may not know where to start with vocabulary, and as students progress their vocabulary lists become more complicated and specific. Sometimes as a teacher, though, it can be confusing or frustrating to know which words to teach. What do your students know? What do they need to know? Here are several different approaches to designing and teaching a vocabulary unit from scratch.

## TEACHING VOCABULARY WITHOUT CONFUSION

### 1 K/W/L

A k/w/l (Know/Want to Know/Learned) chart is sometimes the best place to start when teaching a new topic to your students. Start by having students work in groups or lead the whole class in discussion. Give your students the topic you will be teaching. For example, sports, food, careers, travel – these or more specific topics often serve as the basis for a vocabulary unit. Then brainstorm with your students or have them work together in groups to make a list of what they already know about the topic. Student knowledge will vary. Some will know more than others, and some will know things that no one else does. Still others may have little to no knowledge on the topic at all. Once you have a compilation of what your students as a group already know, ask them what they still want to know about the topic. You can make a list of questions and note any vocabulary related to those questions. Then, between your two lists, you should have a good set of vocabulary from which to draw. You might want to include all of the topic related words or only some of them in your unit. You can also add other words related to the topic that you think they should know but didn't come up in your conversation. Working together should help you compile a collection of words from which to choose

your vocabulary unit.

### 2 VOCABULARY WEB

An idea web is a familiar way to start writing, but you can use a similar method to come up with words for a vocabulary unit. Though you can do this activity with your students, it is probably more productive to do it on your own. Start by writing your topic in the middle of the page, and then draw spokes off of it (as if your topic was the center of a wheel). At the end of each spoke, write a word that relates to the topic. Then draw spokes off of each of the secondary words, and add more detailed vocabulary related to each of those. Continue until you feel you have exhausted the topic and the subtopics, then step back and look at your words. Choose the ones you think would be most useful for your students. Include some easier words, some more complicated words, and also some which will present a challenge. Then use these words as the material for your vocabulary unit.

### 3 SOURCE STARTER

Sometimes learning words in context makes them easier to remember: in fact, that is usually the case. So starting with a video or written piece may be the best way to come up with your vocabulary unit. Like other vocabulary unit activities, you can do this with your students or on your own. Start with a written piece – a newspaper article, a short story or an excerpt from a longer piece. (This is also a great way to bring realia into the classroom.) Then, read through it noting any words your students either don't know or don't know well. Look for uncommon words, complicated words, words that are essential for understanding the meaning of the text, or words centering around the theme or subject of the piece. Make a list of these words. Once you have finished reading and analyzing the piece, look at your list and make any additions or subtractions you think are necessary. You can include synonyms or antonyms of your words as well. You can also follow the same process with a video if you choose. Either use a transcript or make notes as you listen to compile a similar vocabulary list. Now that you have your vocabulary words selected,

present them and the original source to your students.

### 4 PICTURE THIS

In a similar vein, pictures can also be a great starting point for creating a vocabulary unit. I love the pictures in I-Spy style books that are packed with items often related to each other. Picture dictionaries also provide great resources for creating a vocabulary unit. You can also use pictures of real life, tourist photos, or photo essays. Try National Geographic Magazine for some striking pictures all centered around one theme. Identify items in whatever picture(s) you choose to use. Don't forget to look for verbs that are happening in the pictures as well. Make a list, and then add related words. You now have your vocabulary unit and a theme around which it centers.

### 5 CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Sometimes curriculum standards make our lives as teachers easier, and sometimes they make them more complicated. Whatever your opinion of curriculums today, vocabulary units are often already a part of the material for a given course. In my experience, curriculum designated vocabulary units center around a theme most of the time, and that can be a great place to start when compiling your own vocabulary units. Look at the list as it stands, and then think about areas that are not represented in the list. You may decide to add synonyms or antonyms or other related words. It's okay to expand these dictated units, though not always okay to take away from them.

WHATEVER METHOD WORKS BEST FOR YOU, REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN ALWAYS CHANGE, ADD OR REMOVE FROM A VOCABULARY LIST ACCORDING TO YOUR PREFERENCES.

I love to teach groups of words or vocabulary families whenever I can, and I find that students learn well that way. Whatever method you decide to use, give your students a chance to guess the meaning of words from context, give them recognition tasks, and then give them production tasks with your vocabulary unit. If you do, they are sure to come away from your class with lots of practical knowledge and an expanded vocabulary to boot.



# Riddle Me This: 5 Practical Uses for Riddles in the ESL Classroom

## WHY DID THE ESL TEACHER USE RIDDLES IN THE CLASSROOM?

Well, I suppose you could answer that question several ways. Riddles aren't something that most English as a second language teachers immediately go to for classroom work. At first glance, the humor in them doesn't often reach across language barriers. We may like riddles personally and find them funny, but using them in the classroom? How does an ESL teacher translate the humor from one culture to another? How can we get our students to get riddles? Why bother bringing riddles into the ESL classroom at all? Don't give up. Introducing your students to riddles and using them in language study is actually easier than you think, and riddles can be a valuable resource to the ESL teachers who are willing to use them. Here are some practical uses for riddles in your ESL class.

## 5 PRACTICAL USES FOR RIDDLES IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 GROUP DISCUSSION

Why did the chicken cross the road? Depending on where your students call home, they may have all sorts of ideas. Though riddles are intended to be humorous and depend on word play, that doesn't mean you and your students can't take a little literal break when it comes to these silly questions. When you introduce a riddle to your class, let groups of students talk for a few minutes about what the answer might be. Encourage your students to think both about the humorous answer as well as a more serious one. Then, have groups of students share their ideas with each other. Though the ultimate intention of riddles is humor, these questions can function as good conversation starters and get your students sharing ideas and using language in the classroom with each other.

### 2 TEACHING HOMOPHONES

In one typical riddle structure, the solutions to riddles depend on an alternate meaning of a key word in the question. For example, "What has four wheels and flies?" One's natural instinct is to imagine a type of vehicle that fits the description. Planes? Helicopters? Something else? When you do, though, you won't come up with the "right" answer to the question. That's because this riddle is based on two different meanings of the word fly. Because of how it's worded, the question makes the listener picture the motion of flying, but the answer depends on another meaning of the word. Rather than the action of flying, this riddle is asking about the insect called a fly. The correct answer to this riddle depends on using the noun form of fly. When they do, your students may come up with the correct answer to the riddle on their own: a garbage truck. A similar riddle is this: What is black and white and red all over? Or should we say read all over? The answer is a newspaper, and your ESL student must know the two distinct words (red and read) that sound alike in English. Once your students understand how homophones are used in riddles, you can challenge them to write their own riddles that depend on two different meanings of one word.

### 3 TEACHING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

Another common theme among riddle answers is literal versus idiomatic meanings. When the riddle is "Why did the man throw the clock out the window?" we are imagining a literal interpretation of events. We see the man taking his alarm clock and throwing it out the window, which we all might want to do on Monday mornings. The key here, though, is the idiomatic expression that answers the riddle. He wanted to see time fly. The man in the riddle is acting out a literal depiction of an idiomatic expression. ESL students spend much time learning English's idioms. A fun way to review

them is to use this type of riddle in your classroom. Once your students know a good pool of idioms, challenge them to write their own riddles using one of those expressions with a literal expression!

### 4 PUNCTUATION IN DIALOGUE

Punctuating dialogue can be confusing. I have spent many class periods instructing students in the proper use of quotation marks, commas, and speech tags. The next time you do the same, you can use riddles to make the practice more interesting with the classic riddle genre – knock-knock jokes. Because every knock-knock is a conversation between two people, writing them out is a simple way to give your students practicing writing dialogue, and you'll get the opportunity to talk about homophones, idioms and cultural humor as well.

### 5 DON'T FORGET ABOUT FUN

Why do young and old ultimately like riddles? Because they are fun. Riddles do have practical applications in the ESL classroom, but the benefits of riddles aren't all academic. Sometimes the best thing you can do in your classroom is encourage a little laughter. Working with riddles gives your students a chance to be creative and witty as they study and learn the English language and hopefully gets everyone in the room chuckling, too!

# 8 Simple DIY Manipulatives

## Perfect for Your ESL Classroom

**WHETHER YOU TEACH CHILDREN OR ADULTS, IN AN IMMERSION SETTING OR A SECOND LANGUAGE SETTING, MANIPULATIVES ARE A GREAT ADDITION TO YOUR CLASSROOM.**

With them, your students can learn language with hands on activities, and manipulatives give your kinesthetic learners something to handle as they learn. If you have never used manipulatives in the classroom (or even if you are a strong proponent of them) here are some easy DIY manipulatives you can use in your ESL class today.

### **TRY THESE 8 SIMPLE DIY MANIPULATIVES FOR YOUR ESL CLASSROOM**

#### **1 STORY DICE OR STORY STONES**

When your goal is to get students talking, story dice or story stones are the perfect motivator. Use either blank dice or flat smooth rocks. Write words on those rocks or draw pictures on the. (They can do double duty as action dice. See number 3 below.) You will want to include some nouns such as people, objects or places as well as some actions. (Don't feel pressured to be a good artist for these. I am the queen of stick figures, and they work just fine.) Then have students roll the dice or choose five to seven rocks from the bag. They must then tell a story incorporating each of the items they have chosen or rolled. If you want to make this DIY even easier, give each student three stones and have them draw two people/objects and one action. You'll be amazed at how creative your students can be.

#### **2 POPSICLE STICK VOCABULARY**

Words, words, words. They are everywhere in any ESL class. You can make a simple manipulative with popsicle sticks and a marker. Just write one word on each of several popsicle sticks. Put them in a learning center

and students can give each other practice spelling tests. Use them to play a game of charades or Pictionary. Or have students pull three or four and put them into a sentence, filling in the necessary grammatical blanks for those sentences.

#### **3 ACTION DICE**

Blank dice aren't all that difficult to find. You may decide to go with traditional dice that you can label with a sharpie or purchase some "white board dice". You can also make your own dice with this paper box template. Whatever you decide to do, you can use your dice to make an action game for a great verb teaching activity. Label each side of the dice, and have each student take a turn rolling them. That student must then do the action on the dice. If you want, combine the action die with a second die labeled with nouns, animals or people for example. Then have each student act out the animal or person doing the verb that they rolled.

#### **4 VOCABULARY CARDS**

Vocabulary cards encompass a variety of cards that can be used for many purposes in the ESL classroom. Many websites offer printable flash cards, which you can use for teaching and reviewing vocabulary or make available in a learning center. You can also use one sided vocabulary cards for matching games. Have students lay all the cards on a flat surface and turn over one pair at a time. You can have them match pictures to vocabulary words, definitions, synonyms or antonyms. You can also use these cards to create Bingo boards for vocabulary practice and review.

#### **5 MAGNETIC LETTERS**

Though not exactly DIY, using magnetic letters for spelling activities will give your students something to handle when they practice forming words. Provide a cookie sheet or oil drip pan (available at car part supply stores and very inexpensive) as

a magnetic board on which students can work. If you want to pretty it up a bit, cover it with fabric or wrapping paper of your choice. Then provide vocabulary cards or a list of vocabulary for students to use as models when arranging their magnetic letters. Young children will particularly enjoy this activity and will absorb vocabulary and spelling as they play.

#### **6 ICE BREAKER BLOCKS**

For years, I have been using a Jenga game to get my students talking in class. I used a list of ice breaker questions that I found online to transform a physical block tumbling game to a speaking and get to know you one. I wrote one ice breaker on each block. Now, when my students pull a block from the tower, they must answer the question before putting the block on the top of the tower. My students love this game, and they often want everyone to answer the question before the next person takes a turn. Who am I to disagree with ESL students talking in class? This game is good for more than just the first week of class, too. Even students who know each other well enjoy finding out interesting facts about their friends and classmates.

#### **7 ARTICULATION BOXES**

If you want to give your students something to hold that will also teach language (and you are looking to get out of the flashcard rut, too) articulation boxes may be for you. Start with a small box (a jewelry gift box is the perfect size) and cut a long piece of paper the right height to fit into the box. Then fold the paper accordion style and glue the first page to the lid of the box and the last page to the bottom of the box. On each page, glue pictures or small items that will get your students talking. You can use pictures of vocabulary words, often centered around the unit you are currently teaching. You might even want to let your students make their own boxes. Then use them as story starters, vocabulary drillers or puzzles. (Write a

question on the first page and then glue one clue on each subsequent page. Write the answer to the puzzle on the last page of the book.) Once you have a decent collection of articulation boxes, they make for a great learning center for your students' free learning time.

## 8 LEGO WORDS

If you are teaching sentence structure or parts of speech, Lego words are the perfect manipulative for your students. Duplos, or large connecting blocks, give more room for word labels. You can get them cheaply at many children's resale stores or buy new ones for a slightly larger investment. Print out labels with various words and stick them to the blocks. You can use random colors or coordinate the block color with the part of speech for each word. Then have your students put them together to make sentences or words. You can make color patterns for them to follow using the different parts of speech, or you can challenge your students to see who can come up with the longest grammatical sentence and, resultantly, the largest tower of blocks. You can also use these blocks for many other vocabulary games.

### MANIPULATIVES AREN'T ESSENTIAL FOR THE ESL CLASS, BUT THEY DO TEND TO MAKE YOUR ACTIVITIES MORE FUN.

Try one or more today and watch your students take learning to a whole new level just by holding language in their hands.



# 7 Outcomes, 1 Exercise:

## The Key to Great Communication

**IT'S INTIMIDATING. IT'S CHALLENGING. IT'S DIFFICULT. SOMETIMES IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE. WHAT IS IT? SPEAKING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE.**

Unless you are a gifted language learner, mustering the courage to speak up in a language you are just learning is tough. ESL teachers are there to help their students grow and learn and eventually become fluent in English, which includes effective oral communication. Teachers give their students experiences that build a foundation of confidence and communication skills. Getting your students communicating effectively doesn't have to be very complicated, either. This simple classroom exercise developed by Yoda Schmidt can open the door to many positive communication experiences between your students, and it doesn't take much preparation on your part.

### THE KEY TO GREAT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN YOUR STUDENTS

#### 1 HUDDLE UP

Start by putting your students into groups of four. Give each person a short (level appropriate) article to read. Two students get one article, two a second article. Give your students time to read the articles. Their goal is to remember as much detail from the article as possible. This can be especially challenging as they may not take notes as they read. Then, after about ten minutes, take the articles from your students. In pseudo jigsaw style, the two students who read the first article give its information in detail to the students who read article number two. Then the pair that read article number two explain their article to the first pair.

#### 2 SHIFT

Once everyone has had a chance to explain their articles, shift pairs. The first pair from each group of four shifts to the second pair from the next group. Then have each pair administer a 20 question comprehension quiz on

the article that they read. The first pair should administer the quiz on the first article to the second pair and vice versa. Most likely, students will not score very highly on the quiz, but this is actually a good thing. It leads to our first positive outcome.

1. Students realize that they are not communicating effectively.

Though unpleasant, this step is important if your students are to move to a deeper and more effective level of communication.

#### 3 REPEAT

Motivated students won't stop there. Although their first performance may have been poor, they will be eager to try the exercise again. Another day, have students repeat the exercise with two new articles. Again, the first pair reads one article, the second pair another. After ten minutes, each pair takes the opportunity to explain their article to the other pair. This time, though, when pair one explains their article to pair two, the listening pair will listen better. Without any prompting from you, you will see that,

1. Listeners will ask clarifying questions.
2. Listeners will speak up when they do not understand something.
3. Listeners will make sure they heard correctly.

This type of listening is known as active listening. In the first time through the exercise, listeners will simply accept what speakers give them. They will merely receive information. They will be passive listeners. When students are listening actively, however, they will play a role in getting the information the speaker is giving. They recognize when they do not completely understand, and they make efforts to get the information they need.

Your listeners won't be the only ones

who change, however. In addition, speakers will become more careful communicators. They will work with their listeners to increase their comprehension.

1. Speakers will make sure they were understood.
2. Speakers will define unfamiliar words for listeners.
3. Speakers will point out the key points in the article and will encourage their listeners to remember that information.

As their listeners work harder to understand, speakers work harder to be understood. These changes will happen instinctually. You can help by instructing your students how to communicate more successfully, but most likely they will happen whether you try to bring them about or not.

#### 4 WHY IT MATTERS

These speaking and listening strategies are important for real world communication. When your students find themselves outside the classroom, active listeners and intentional communicators will have more success understanding and being understood by native speakers. For this reason, a simple exercise such as this one can make a great difference in your students' post ESL program communication abilities.

**IF YOU HAVEN'T USED THIS TYPE OF ACTIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM BEFORE, DON'T FEEL OVERWHELMED BY THE AMOUNT OF PREPARATION.**

You can find articles at every reading level with comprehension questions on many websites. You can start with these articles from English for Everyone ([www.englishforeveryone.org/Topics/Reading-Comprehension.htm](http://www.englishforeveryone.org/Topics/Reading-Comprehension.htm)) as you build your own classroom library of articles and comprehension questions. The more practice you give your students with active communication, the more it will benefit them in the long run.

# Where Do We Go From Here? 6

## Simple Ways to Use Maps in Class

### WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING, MAPS PROBABLY AREN'T THE FIRST THING TO COME TO MIND.

In fact, most people would probably be surprised to hear that maps can be quite useful for students of English as a second language. Maps are visually based, but you can do so many linguistic activities with them. With a little creativity and direction, maps can be the starting point for all kinds of creative language practice in the ESL classroom. Here are some of my favorite ways for using maps in my ESL classes.

### HOW TO USE MAPS IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

#### 1 GIVE DIRECTIONS

Directional words can be challenging for many ESL students. North, south, east and west can be elusive, but even words as simple as right and left are worth practicing. Maps can provide the material for a listening comprehension activity for reviewing directional words like these as well as straight, turn around, backwards, backtrack and stop. To give them the listening practice they need, give each student a copy of a map (either an authentic map or one you have created). Announce the starting point (often the location of your class) and then give your students a set of oral directions. "Go straight three blocks. Turn left." As you give the directions, they should follow along on their maps. Once you have given all the directions, ask your students where they are on the map by pointing to it or marking it on their copies. You can extend this activity as well by practicing locational prepositions. Follow the same procedure as above, but this time give directions like, "Turn after the library." You will have a clear understanding of who understood your directions and who still needs practice with directional words and prepositions of location.

#### 2 WHERE WOULD YOU GO

Believe it or not, maps are a great way to practice the conditional tense, too. Starting with a map filled with interesting locations, ask your students where they would like to travel for vacation. Ask your students to plan their vacation, where they would go, how they would get there,

what they would do and what they would bring with them. You could ask students to write out their plans or give a presentation to the class. You might even want to display the map in your classroom and then post your students' travel plans near the locations they chose. If you like, extend the lesson to reading and research practice by having students gather additional information about their vacation destination.

#### 3 MODEL YOUR OWN TOWN

Creating your own cities is a popular pastime. (If you don't believe me, just look at all the SIM games available on the market.) Your students may enjoy the group activity of creating their own towns. Working in groups of three or four, have students create a layout and then map of their ideal town. This activity not only gives students conversation practice as they work with their classmates. It is also a great way to practice vocabulary associated with locations. Instruct your students to include all the locations a town could need: restaurant, school, shopping mall or department store, library, gas station, residences, hospital and any others you choose to include in your vocabulary unit. Have students diagram their towns on poster board and then display them in your classroom or along the hallway. You can also have your class vote on the town they would most like to live in. (They should not be allowed to choose their own.) Extend the activity by having students write about the town they would choose and why.

#### 4 COUNTRIES AND CULTURES

With a class full of international students, talking about countries and cultures is a must. Use a map to help your class become familiar with their classmates' home countries. (If you are teaching a class overseas, you can have your students research different countries of the world rather than talking about their home country.) Have your intermediate or advanced students give a five minute presentation on their home country using a world map or a map of their country. Students should talk about popular locations and what makes their culture unique. To extend the activity, have students talk about the geographical makeup of their home country. Review geography terms with your class

(desert, mountains, river, ocean, etc.) and then challenge them to use as many as possible in their presentation. Leave the maps posted in your classroom, and then when you test on the geographical vocabulary ask your students to name a country with certain geographical components.

#### 5 TRAVEL ROLE PLAY

Encourage your students to take a vacation in their minds by choosing a location on the map to visit. Have students do research and then write as if they were at their vacation location. They should research the weather and things to do at their vacation spot. You may want to have students write post cards or letters to family describing the place (you can find instructions on how to teach personal letters here) or have students write imaginary journal entries about their vacation. To extend the activity, you could also have students write a tourism pamphlet encouraging others to visit their location. If you do, post these around your classroom and let your students read each other's work.

#### 6 COMPARE/CONTRAST WRITING

Essays are a big part of academic English programs, and none is more common than the compare/contrast essay. You can use maps to serve as inspiration for your students' essays by displaying a historical map and a modern map of the same location. Most history classrooms have these historical maps, but you can also find them on line. Ask your students to study both map and then write about how the place has changed over time using the compare/contrast essay format. To extend the activity, have students make predictions about how the same area may change in the future.

I have found that maps are extremely useful in giving my students interesting ways to practice the language that they are learning as well as introducing them to new and useful vocabulary. In an ideal world, I would have the budget to take my students to the most interesting places in the world and then have them use those experiences as inspiration. Until then, I'll keep my maps and keep challenging my students to use them to expand their English language skills.