

# 39 TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

A VERY PRACTICAL GUIDE TO USING TBL IN THE  
ESL/EFL CLASSROOM



**JACKIE BOLEN**

**39 Task-Based Language Teaching and Learning  
Activities: A Very Practical Guide to Using TBL in  
the ESL/EFL Classroom**

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[www.eslactivity.org](http://www.eslactivity.org)

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# Table of Contents

<u>About the Author: Jackie Bolen.....</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>An Introduction to Task-Based Teaching and Learning.....</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>What are the Advantages of Task-Based Learning Over PPP?.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>5 Reasons to Consider Task-Based Language Learning.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>#1: A Why.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>#2: Learn What you Want to Learn.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>#3: Task-Based Learning ESL Activities are Student-Centred.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>#4: Learn How to Work in Groups with Task-Based Learning Activities.....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>#5: All About Meaning.....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Disadvantages of Task-Based Teaching.....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Problems Teachers Might Encounter in a TBL Activity.....</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>#1: Tasks aren't Well Designed.....</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>#2: Tasks aren't Well Explained.....</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>#3: Students are "Lazy".....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Steps in a Task-Based Language Teaching Lesson.....</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>#1: Pre-Task.....</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>#2: Task.....</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>#3: Feedback.....</u>	<u>14</u>

<u>Task-Based Language Learning Activities</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Agony Aunt (Giving Advice)</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Bucket Lists</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>Bumbling Blindfold</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>Choose Your Own Adventure Group Writing</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>Class Party</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>Comparing</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>Complaint Desk</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>Deserted Island</u>	<u>27</u>
<u>Draw a Picture, but Someone Else is Talking</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>Fill out an Application Form</u>	<u>31</u>
<u>Find Something in Common</u>	<u>32</u>
<u>Five-Minute Debate</u>	<u>34</u>
<u>Infographic Presentation</u>	<u>35</u>
<u>Just a Minute</u>	<u>38</u>
<u>Listing Things</u>	<u>40</u>
<u>Matching</u>	<u>40</u>
<u>Missing Information</u>	<u>41</u>
<u>Mixed Up Sentences</u>	<u>42</u>
<u>Odd One Out</u>	<u>43</u>

<u>Ordering.....</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>Picture Quest.....</u>	<u>45</u>
<u>Postcards.....</u>	<u>47</u>
<u>Proofreading Practice.....</u>	<u>51</u>
<u>Road Trip.....</u>	<u>53</u>
<u>Role-plays.....</u>	<u>54</u>
<u>Running Dictation.....</u>	<u>57</u>
<u>Shopping List.....</u>	<u>59</u>
<u>Sorting.....</u>	<u>60</u>
<u>Story Picture Cards Sequencing.....</u>	<u>61</u>
<u>Story Timeline.....</u>	<u>63</u>
<u>Student Engineers.....</u>	<u>64</u>
<u>Survey Activities.....</u>	<u>65</u>
<u>The Student Becomes the Teacher.....</u>	<u>68</u>
<u>Used Card Salesman.....</u>	<u>69</u>
<u>Vacation Time.....</u>	<u>72</u>
<u>What are you Cooking?.....</u>	<u>73</u>
<u>What Can I do with a _____ ?.....</u>	<u>75</u>
<u>Where are They Now?.....</u>	<u>76</u>
<u>Where are the Places?.....</u>	<u>77</u>



# About the Author: Jackie Bolen

I taught English in South Korea for 10 years to every level and type of student. I've taught every age from kindergarten kids to adults. Most of my time centered around teaching at two universities: five years at a science and engineering school in Cheonan, and four years at a major university in Busan where I taught upper-level classes for students majoring in English. I now live in Vancouver, Canada where I teach academic writing, business English and am an examiner for a popular language proficiency test.

In case you were wondering what my academic qualifications are, I hold a Master of Arts in Psychology. During my time in Korea, I completed both the Cambridge CELTA and DELTA certification programs. With the combination of fifteen years teaching ESL/EFL to learners of all ages and levels, and the more formal teaching qualifications I've obtained, I have a solid foundation on which to offer advice to English teachers.

I truly hope that you find this book useful. I would love it if you sent me an email with any questions or feedback that you might have.

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# **An Introduction to Task-Based Teaching and Learning**

Task-based language (TBL) learning is kind of all the rage these days as part of the overall Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. The focus is on having students being competent communicators as opposed to some of the older models like Grammar-Translation or the Audio-Lingual method where the focus is on mastering specific grammatical constructions or a certain set of vocabulary.

Here's a more formal definition:

Task-based learning (also known as TBL) is a TESOL approach that has a base in Communicative Language Teaching. Teaching and learning happen through a variety of communicative tasks that involve lots of teamwork among students. Well-designed tasks within this approach should elicit the target grammar and vocabulary naturally.

TBL can serve as a nice change of pace from the usual Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) style of lesson or the Test-Teach-Test (TTT) approach where the focus is again on mastering a certain vocabulary set or grammatical construction. Instead, students are free to use whatever language they'd like in order to accomplish the required task. This can help increase motivation as there is more freedom for students to learn what they want to learn.

# What are the Advantages of Task-Based Learning Over PPP?

Many EFL/ESL textbooks and teachers generally follow the PPP model (Presentation-Practice-Production). However, task-based learning has some advantages over this traditional model, including the following:

- Students control the language they learn and produce, rather than being restricted to something pre-selected by the teacher or textbook.
- Task-based learning allows for a natural setting of the context where students can base learning on their experiences. This makes learning more personal and relevant to students in many cases.
- TBL can expose students to many more varied uses of English than PPP can. Think ESL collocations, lexical phrases and patterns—the sky is the limit!
- Language learning can arise from student need, instead of what the next unit is in the textbook. This makes it more memorable for learners and can also serve to be a better use of class time. Don't waste time teaching things that students have already mastered just because it's the next unit up in the textbook.
- It makes an ideal choice for larger classes where students may not get enough practice time with a more traditional teacher-centred classroom.
- Students are generally very motivated to complete the tasks because it's something they've chosen to do (at least to some degree) and is hopefully relevant to them.
- In comparison to PPP, TBL is more student-centred and communicative. Anything we can do to increase student talking time, the better.
- Errors are a natural part of the learning process in TBL and are seen as a learning opportunity. In PPP, it's something a bit more negative in that it's a

variation from the "correct" form the students were taught.

# **5 Reasons to Consider Task-Based Language Learning**

There are many reasons why you might consider incorporating some task-based activities into your English classes. However, here are some of my favourites.

## **#1: A Why**

I love task-based activities because they give students a reason learn—as opposed to just using the language in a meaningless kind of way such as in a “repeat after me” activity. For example, students have to complete something, such as a presentation or some research about a country of their choice, including money and currency, and then make a poster.

## **#2: Learn What you Want to Learn**

The second reason I like task-based activities is that they give students a chance to explore the specific language they want to know. Instead of the teacher always telling them what grammar and vocabulary they need to learn, students discover what they need to know during the process, figure it out (with some help from the teacher sometimes), use it and then often remember it for the long-term because it was something they sought out for themselves.

## **#3: Task-Based Learning ESL Activities are Student-Centred**

I'm ALL about student-centred language teaching. After all, students should be doing the hard work, not me! One of the main benefits of the task-based approach is that students are engaged and working on something the entire time. The teacher talking time (TTT) to student talking time (STT) ratio is often higher in traditional teaching and learning environments than in TBL, where students' speak a lot more in English.

The role of the teacher is to set up the activity, offer some guidance and feedback but that's about it. This results in students speaking English without any motivation or classroom management issues.

## **#4: Learn How to Work in Groups with Task-Based Learning Activities**

I know that many students (and myself too!) often don't like working in groups. However, this is a real-life skill that our students can work on in our classes. Group learning dynamics facilitate many different learning skills as well as real world practical skills: initiating questions, problem solving, brainstorming, creativity, turn taking, etc. I try to set up the tasks and offer guidance throughout so that students have a good experience with them.



## **#5: All About Meaning**

Many textbooks and ESL activities focus on forms and while they do touch on real-life communication, it often feels kind of artificial. It's nice to use task-based language teaching activities to get away from this once in a while.

For example, the tasks in this book focus on meaning and communication and far less on the exact right vocabulary word or grammatical phrase. It's fun for students to try out their language skills in activities like these.

# Disadvantages of Task-Based Teaching

There are a few disadvantages to this style of teaching and learning to keep in mind. Here are a few of the main ones.

- Lesson planning can take longer than with something like a PPP approach. Investing time, however, is usually only when first preparing a TBL lesson—afterwards, it gets easier and faster. After a TBL lesson has been taught several times there is less planning time involved, and more rewards for the teacher and students.
- Course books usually aren't designed for this style of teaching and it can take a lot of time to adapt them to this. Many teachers choose to design task-based lesson plans from scratch instead of trying to adapt something to fit.
- If students have very little in the way of the required language to complete the activity, then it can turn into a more traditional kind of lesson very easily. But if the teacher knows their students' interests and hobbies, choosing the right task can help reduce this issue as students will be highly motivated.
- You may encounter unmotivated students who are reluctant to try out a new learning style in a language class. This is when demonstrating the task and providing a model are vital.
- The potential for a “bad” lesson is higher with TBL than with traditional methods. Talking to other teachers about their experiences with the same or similar lessons is a good way to manage this issue.
- Some students may not enjoy group work, especially if there is a wide range of motivation levels within a single class. If this is the case, try to mix motivated students into each group so that there are leaders to help keep things on track.

# **Problems Teachers Might Encounter in a TBL Activity**

There are some problems teachers might encounter during a task-based lesson plan. These are usually avoided through careful planning though so it's certainly worth spending some time on this.

# **#1: Tasks aren't Well Designed**

The biggest problem with TBL is that tasks aren't well-designed. They need to have enough of a challenge to them that students have to work a little bit hard to figure them out and complete them. However, they also shouldn't be too difficult so that students feel like giving up. Aim for the middle ground here between the two extremes and you'll do well.

One of the best ways to avoid bringing a poorly designed TBL lesson for the first time into the classroom is to do the task yourself. Take note of problems that you run into, time management for micro-tasks that run faster or longer than you think (and adjust accordingly for students' language levels). The added bonus of doing the task also includes a ready-made model for students to see. This may require taking pictures or short video clips of each stage during the task. Ultimately, doing these preparation steps will help reduce the chances of a TBL lesson running into problems.

## #2: Tasks aren't Well Explained

Even the best-designed tasks sometimes fail if students don't know exactly what they're supposed to do. I like to come at it from a few different angles:

- Telling students about it. Generally speaking, if there are more than 10 steps with more than 10-12 words in each step the task instructions may be too difficult for lower level language learners.

- Having instructions written down. Consider using different colour fonts or whiteboard markers to help lower level students, and even higher levels too. Verbs can be red, nouns blue, and key words or phrases underlined. Students often have higher level reading proficiency than listening—use visual aids as much as possible when giving instructions.

- Asking ICQs (instruction checking questions) to test for understanding.

- Circulating around the class, especially at the beginning of the activity to check and see if any groups are going down the wrong path.

- Showing students a model of what a finished task generally looks like.

- Leaving the model up throughout the lesson for students to refer back to.

- Organizing groups so that there's at least one competent language learner in each one. Or, if the general level of the class is low, choose group captains that have good attitudes and motivation levels. Tell students explicitly that they can use their L1 (native language) when they need to, and encourage them to use English when possible. Otherwise too much time is spent on trying to 'police' students to use English when they aren't able to, and the learning environment can dissolve into unhappy and unmotivated paralysis.

## #3: Students are “Lazy”

There are several reasons why students may do the bare minimum just to complete the task and be done with it. If you find this happening in TBL lessons, consider of the following possibilities:

- The task isn't explained clearly.
- It's too easy or too difficult.
- Students aren't interested in the task.
- There is no rapport with the teacher.
- Students don't like their group members.
- Students can easily complete the task in their first language.
- Students haven't been given enough freedom to complete the task with language of their own choosing.

# **Steps in a Task-Based Language Teaching Lesson**

There are a few specific steps in this kind of lesson. Here is a simple overview.

# **#1: Pre-Task**

This is where the teacher introduces the task to the students. This can be done by telling the students about it, giving them written instructions or showing examples of completed tasks. Also, be sure to set minimum expectations for the students so that the more unmotivated students know what is expected of them.



## #2: Task

Students work on the task with a partner or small group, using English for the majority of the activity. I circulate around the class and gently encourage this, as well as offering any assistance with language if students ask me. Also, be sure to monitor for any groups who have gone off track and assist them with getting back to where they should be.

The goal of this stage is fluency and communication. Don't expect a high degree of accuracy. The most important thing is that students can make themselves understood to their partner or group members.

## **#3: Feedback**

This is where students present their task to the class, or at minimum, the teacher. I try to aim for peer feedback as well as teacher feedback but in some situations, this may be more difficult or more trouble than it's worth. Use your discretion. At this stage, the aim should be a higher degree of accuracy.

The teacher should take notes about incorrect use of language they hear more than once and use this as a basis for some class feedback at the end of the activity. Or, a topic to focus on in another class. For example, students are struggling with negatives in the past tense, or aren't sure how to form conditionals.

# **Task-Based Language Learning Activities**

Here are some of my favourite games and activities to consider trying out in a task-based lesson.

# Agony Aunt (Giving Advice)

**Skills:** Listening/Speaking/Reading

**Time:** 15-20 minutes

**Level:** High-beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Printed advice column questions and answers

This activity will get your students talking because everyone knows how to solve other people's problems! If your students are a bit more advanced, you can use actual advice columns. These can easily be found by searching on the Internet for "advice column," etc. The lower the students' level, the more you'll need to grade the language, or you can write your own advice column.

I've done several variations of this activity and it has always been a hit. I begin with an introduction that shows a few advice column letters and answers. Discuss them a bit—most students will be familiar with the concept. Then, give your students a copy of a letter (not the same one from the introduction). For high-beginner to low-intermediate classes, you may want to number each line of the letter and bold new or key words and phrases to make it easier for students to communicate with you and each other.

Each pair or group receives a different letter. Each group is given time to read and think of some advice. You can begin the discussion time by having each group quickly summarize the problem they have read about, then give some advice and discuss that. It's a nice idea that if students are in pairs, one person does the quick summary of the problem while the other ones talk about the advice they'd like to give.

## Teaching Tips:

If you are familiar with local celebrities popular with your students, you can use current gossip to spice up the lesson. If X pop star has just had a public breakup, write a letter from that person asking for help getting back

together, finding a new boyfriend, etc. For the men, a rumor of a football star being traded works well to get advice on how to improve that player's game.

It is important to give students specific task outcome instructions. For example, each pair or group should explain 3 ways the person can try to get back together with their romantic interest, 10 ways to find a new boy/girlfriend, or 5 training and lifestyle changes to improve a player's performance on the field.

### **Pre-Task**

Show some level-appropriate advice column letters. Read them together and discuss. Consider teaching, or briefly reviewing some language used to give advice if students aren't familiar with it (should, shouldn't, might want to, could consider, etc.). Beyond that, students are free to use whatever language they want to convey their advice.

### **Task**

Each pair or group gets a different letter. The text length and difficulty of the problem should be carefully chosen, depending on the level of the students. The worst possible situation is choosing a problem that is too long and/or difficult and students spend most of the class trying to read and understand it. Give students some time to read the letter and come up with some advice.

### **Feedback**

Discuss any challenges with the activity or language problems with the class. Also, discuss the advice given. You could also have the other groups say what they think about each group's advice or ask questions about why the group gave the specific advice that they did.

# Bucket Lists

**Skills:** Writing/Speaking

**Time:** 15-30+ minutes (depends on how many students are in the class)

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** Nothing

Write a sample bucket list on the whiteboard and do a demonstration of how to talk about a bucket list. Give students about five minutes to create a list of three things they want to do, see, or accomplish before they die. Have them partner up to discuss their three wishes for 2-3 minutes, then change partners. Alternatively, students can do a short presentation in front of the class.

## **Pre-Task**

Begin by asking students if they have heard the term “bucket list.” They may say, they are things that you want to do, see, or accomplish before you die. Elicit some examples from students. If possible, show a video clip of a celebrity talking about their bucket list as a model.

## **Task**

Give students 5-10 minutes to create their bucket lists. Asking students open-ended questions can help them generate ideas. For example, “What countries would you like to visit?”, “What talent do you have that you dream of doing as a job?”, or “What do you want people to remember about you the most after you die?”

## **Feedback**

Divide students into partners to share their bucket lists, then have them change partners. Encourage the students to ask each other some follow-up questions about the list.

Or, you could also have students present their bucket lists to the class.

This also makes a nice homework assignment where students can make a video and then upload it to *YouTube*. You can watch in class, or have students watch other videos and comment on them.

# Bumbling Blindfold

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 20 minutes

**Level:** High-Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Blindfold

If you're teaching about directions (go straight, left, right, turn-around, stop, etc.) this is a fun activity. The task is for one student to direct another student from the beginning to the end point.

Blindfold one student and put them at the starting point. The other students have to give them directions so they can get to the finish point without bumping into anything. Be sure to move anything that students could walk into and hurt themselves with. Also caution them that they need to walk slowly and that if they run, they will have to sit down and their turn will be over.

## **Teaching Tips:**

If you have a larger class, you can do this in teams to prevent chaos and confusion. For example, divide the class into two or three groups. Each group must choose a captain to go outside and wait. Then, they will be blindfolded and invited to come back into the classroom.

Choose the start and finish points. Bring one captain into the class and only their team is allowed to give them hints. Time them to see how long it takes. Give them a penalty (+15 seconds) for not using English. Repeat with the next team and compare results.

For intermediate to advanced learners, consider adding rules like the speaker must tell the walker which foot to start walking with, the specific number of steps to take or estimates of distance (e.g. walk 3 meters forward, turn right, walk 1 meter), or even using north, south, east, and west instead of forward, backward, left, and right.



## **Pre-Task**

It can be useful to pre-teach some key vocabulary for giving directions. It may also be necessary to have key direction language up on the whiteboard or a PPT. You can erase 1-3 key words from direction phrases as the activity progresses in order to motivate students to memorize the language.

## **Task**

1. Have one student wait outside the class for a minute.
2. Show remaining students the start and the finish point.
3. Go outside and blindfold the student and lead him/her into the classroom.
4. The other students must give him/her directions to get from the starting point to the finish point.

## **Feedback**

Elicit information about how it went. What did they find easy and difficult? Or, what language did they use to complete the task? Correct any errors with language for giving directions that you heard repeated.

# Choose Your Own Adventure Group Writing

**Skills:** Speaking/Writing

**Time:** 1+ class periods

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** Blank story maps

**Optional Materials:** Story starters

Choose Your Own Adventure stories are fun to read and can be fun to write as well. The group aspect can be helpful for brainstorming story ideas and, of course, many hands make light work when writing one. Even the students most resistant to writing will appreciate that  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a story is less work than an entire story.

If your students are unfamiliar with this style of story, you can show them this example:

[www.halfbakedsoftware.com/quandary/version\\_2/examples/castaway.htm](http://www.halfbakedsoftware.com/quandary/version_2/examples/castaway.htm).

If you show this example to students above the high-beginner level, make your expectations clear or you may well end up with just a sentence or two from each student.

To begin the writing activity, divide the class into groups of 4. You can either give your students a controlled or guided scenario which requires a choice to be made or allow them to freely brainstorm their story from start to finish. Each student will need a blank story map to plan their writing. Each group should work together to begin their story, then break into pairs to write the second stage, and finally, each writes one ending. They will need to discuss the options they write about, so they will each have something different.

It may be helpful to remind students to think about key verbs and nouns that each choice can be made around in the story. It may also be a good idea to

give students a specific number of choices that the character in each story must be presented with.

Some examples of controlled or guided scenarios are:

A. You go to several job interviews and are offered three jobs: one that is highly paid, but will require you to work long hours and live away from your family; one that is low paid, but is rewarding and will give you plenty of free time; and one that has no salary, but pays a high commission and allows you to work the hours you choose. Which job do you choose?

B. Your friend falls and breaks a leg while the two of you are hiking. You cannot get a phone signal. Your friend knows how to read a compass and map, but you do not. Do you turn back alone and try to retrace your steps, stay and hope that someone else passes by, or try to carry your friend back?

C. You are on a spaceship that has just arrived on a new planet. You don't know what to expect when you open the doors. Do you send one person out to explore alone or stay together? Do you walk out with your weapons ready to fire or with your arms open to show you aren't dangerous?

Each group would need to choose two of the options and break into pairs. In a guided style story task, give instructions that the pair or group can add more choices of their own to the story. Each pair would write about one option and lead to another choice. For example, with Scenario A, the choice could be about taking a promotion which changes the working conditions (for example, the low-paid rewarding job could lead to a raise, but much more paperwork), buying a house, starting their own business, etc. Since the two pairs are following different options already, they do not need to face the same type of choice, unless you want them to. So, one pair may choose between staying at the low-paid job they enjoy or being promoted, even though it wouldn't be as enjoyable and the other pair could choose between buying a fancy house with a big mortgage or paying cash for a small apartment.

The writing a story task presents learning and practice opportunities for many writing micro-tasks. One example is making an outline of the story with the different choices in point form which is very useful for graded writing assignments and tests.

When each pair has a new choice to make, each person will choose one option. Working individually now, each person would finish the story by following the option they have chosen. So, there will be one beginning, two middles, and four endings.

### **Pre-Task**

Begin by asking your students if they are familiar with Choose Your Own Adventure stories. Show students some simple examples of choose your own adventure stories. Discuss the various options as a class and make choices to complete the story.

### **Task**

1. Divide students into groups of four. Either give them a scenario (several are suggested above) or have each group brainstorm their own.
2. All four group members will collaborate on the beginning of the story, up to the first point of making a decision.
3. The group will divide into pairs and each pair will collaborate on one option each.
4. When the next option is given, each student will choose one option and write that ending for the story. So, there will be one beginning, two middles, and four endings.

### **Feedback**

Have students in the class read at least one other story, preferably more. The readers have freedom to choose whichever options they like throughout the story to make it customized for them.

I like to do this reading portion of the activity flexibly. Perhaps when people are done some other assignment, they can read a story at their leisure. Or, they can come in a few minutes early from lunch, etc. These stories are nice to have around the class throughout the semester and other classes can even read them as well.

# Class Party

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening/Writing

**Time:** 20-40 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** None

If your course is coming to an end and you want to have a class party or celebration of some kind, get the students to plan the party for you! Set up some group rules first, including the following:

- time/date of the party
- location
- budget
- types of food and drink
- casual or formal dress
- etc.

Then, students can make some plans, give a short presentation to the class and finally vote on which one they like.

## Pre-Task

There are lots of different things to do here. Some ideas include:

- Have students talk in pairs about the last party they went to
- Have students talk about what makes a good party, in their opinion
- Students can talk about a terrible party that they went to
- Students can talk about whether or not they like going to parties

## **Task**

Put students into small groups and explain that their task is to plan a class party. Set up certain parameters such as time, date, budget, etc.

## **Feedback**

Each group presents their ideas to the class. The class votes on their favourite party idea (not their own). Have the actual party that won if at all possible.

# Comparing

**Skills:** Reading/Speaking (or Writing)

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Things to compare

There are some simple tasks that can be done within a lesson as a warmer or review activity. Comparing things is one of them. I like this task because it requires some critical thinking skills and it's also a way for students to personalize the language they're learning. Here are some examples of comparison tasks:

- Compare the weather in country A vs. country B
- Do you have a brother or sister? Compare your daily schedule to theirs
- Think about 10 years ago. How is your life different now?
- Think about two teachers you have. How are they similar? How are they different?

# Complaint Desk

**Skill:** Speaking

**Time:** 10+ minutes

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** None

Complaining, apologizing, and customer service vary from country to country, so your students may not know how to complain in English. In this task, students take turns complaining to a customer service desk and being the representative dealing with the complaints. Give students a scenario, including the type of business and reason for the complaint, or they can brainstorm their own.

Consider beginning the lesson with some useful vocabulary, such as:

Customer: Excuse me,

Customer: I'm sorry, but. . .

Customer: Would you mind. . .?

Salesperson: How can I help?

Salesperson: What exactly is the problem?

Salesperson: I'm terribly/so sorry (to hear that.)

Salesperson: To make up for this. . .

Then, divide students into pairs. If you are not giving them a scenario, give them 2-3 minutes to brainstorm a time when they had a customer service complaint. You may want to make some suggestions, such as defective merchandise, a disappointing meal, or an incorrect bill. Have the pairs then take turns being the customer and being the employee.



Explicitly state and choose if students should learn about and practice English/Western cultural norms for customer complaints and how to speak and behave in this situation—otherwise they may speak English words but act according to their home country’s cultural norms and taboos. For example, in Korea it is assumed that smiling a lot as a service representative will help the upset customer calm down and listen—but in Western culture this is likely to make the customer extremely angry and worsen the situation.

It is important to give a clear and specific task objective to each student in the pair. Student A’s objective might be to get a refund or exchange for the defective merchandise. Student B’s objective could be to make the customer happy with the outcome (refund or exchange) of the communication (as opposed to leaving angry and never wanting to buy anything from their company again).

### **Teaching Tip:**

The higher the level of the class, you may want to encourage your students to use a bit more creativity: try to negotiate a lower bill, or (as customer service) give reasons to deny their request, for example.

### **Pre-Task**

There are a few things the teacher could do at this stage of the lesson. Some ideas include:

- Pre-teaching language used to complain about something.
- Have students talk with their partner about a bad customer service experience that they've had.
- Talk briefly about a bad customer service experience you had and ask students what they would have done in that situation.
- Ask students to give some examples of a very polite complaint and a very angry one.

### **Task**

1. Divide students into pairs. Give them a scenario, or 2-3 minutes to brainstorm their own.
2. Have students take turns being the customer and the customer service representative.

## **Feedback**

There are various things you could do at this stage of the lesson. Consider some of the following:

- In a smaller class, have each pair do one of their role-plays in front of the class.
- Elicit from students about the kind of language they used.
- Talk about the difference between more polite and less polite language for complaints.
- Discuss cultural differences and taboos. What did students find difficult to practice as they spoke and interacted?

# Deserted Island

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** None

This task requires that students think carefully about what the most important things are in a survival situation.

Tell students that there is a terrible storm and their ship is sinking, but thankfully, they can bring five objects with them that are necessary for survival. Or for intermediate to advanced classes, tell students they are the first colonists on Mars and they just crash landed. What items would they need to survive the environmental challenges there (you may need to provide examples)? I generally don't have a list of items to choose from as part of the task is that students can find or use whatever language they need to do the task.

Then, have each group share their answers with the class. They can talk about each item, why they chose it, and how they will use it to survive. Each group can vote on who will be most likely to survive in their class.

## **Pre-Task**

Talk about what is necessary for survival with students. For example, how long someone can live without water or food. Or, different ways to use a survival knife.

Another variation could be to have students talk in small groups about any survival stories they know about or have heard of recently.

You could also show a short clip from *YouTube* about an interesting survival story. A plane crash or shipwreck might work well. Or, a short video about how to build an emergency shelter using materials you can find in a jungle.

## **Task**

1. Tell students that they are on a ship and it's sinking (or a space ship that is crashing). Thankfully, there is an island nearby that is already well-stocked with everything they'll need for survival but they only have a minute (the ship is going to explode) and can only take five things.
2. Each group has to choose five things that are the most important for survival, in their opinion and then state why.

## **Feedback**

Each group prepares a short presentation. They can say each item and 1-2 sentences about why they chose it. Each person in the group should talk about at least one item.

The other groups can vote on who is most likely to survive by choosing another group. The teacher can declare a winner (the team most likely to survive).

# Draw a Picture, but Someone Else is Talking

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

**Materials:** Blank paper

This is a fun way to practice body parts or descriptive words (big, small, long, etc.). The task requires that student A has to describe a picture to student B, who has to draw it.

The students sit back-to-back and one person is the “talker” while the other one is the “drawer.” The person talking describes something that they’re looking at to their partner (a face, a body, a city, a monster) and that person draws what they hear. The results are usually hilarious and fun to show to the rest of the class! After the listener-drawers show everyone their pictures, they then change roles to be the speaker-describer.

## **Teaching Tips:**

This activity can get quite loud so it's best to ask students to spread out in the classroom, if possible.

If you teach absolute beginners this is also a great activity, but you might have to do it in a more teacher-centered way. For example, the students could describe a picture to you that you draw on the board, or you could describe something to them and they all draw their versions of it.

If you’re teaching young adults to adults, you may want to make the activity more age appropriate. For example, Student A is a police sketch artist and Student B is someone who was robbed and they describe the criminal. Or, Student A is a dating service artist and Student B is a client who describes their ‘perfect match.’

## **Pre-Task**

Consider teaching some useful functional language that you can practice with this activity like asking for clarification, such as:

- How \_\_\_\_\_ (long, tall, etc.)?
- What do you mean?
- I didn't understand, could you say it again?
- What did you say? I couldn't hear you.

## **Task**

1. Two students sit back-to-back but close enough to talk to each other.
2. Give student A a picture of some kind, based on whatever you are studying. I usually put something up on the PowerPoint and have the drawer sit with their back towards the screen.
3. Student A describes the picture to student B who must draw it, without looking at the original picture. Student B can ask some questions to student A to clarify if necessary.
4. A and B change roles and repeat the process.

## **Feedback**

Compare the original picture with the drawing and see how students did. Also consider getting feedback from the students about the kind of language they used throughout the activity to ask for clarification about something.

# Fill out an Application Form

**Skills:** Reading/Writing

**Time:** 20+ minutes

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** Application form

During a teacher training course, my tutor mentioned that “writing” is not only writing essays. He said that we can get our students to practice writing just about anything and it would be useful. That comment changed my outlook on teaching writing and it led to including activities like this one into my lesson plans.

One simple task that language learners can do is fill out an application form for a job. Some sub-tasks include using correct punctuation and more formal language, showing dates correctly, writing legibly, giving only relevant information, etc. To find an application form, Google “sample job application form USA.” Here’s one example:

<http://www.careerchoices.com/lounge/files/jobapplication.pdf>. Filling out an application form is a very practical activity. People have to fill them when they want to get a job, visa, or for traveling.

## Pre-Task

Ask students to talk with their partner about some different kinds of application forms that they've filled out in their lives. Ask them if they've ever had to fill one out in English.

Also, consider pre-teaching some of the specific vocabulary that you may find on an application form as students may not be familiar with it. It can be worth pointing out the difference between formal and informal language here and giving some specific examples of each.

## Task

1. Print off some application forms from the Internet.

2. Students fill out the application forms while you circulate and offer some feedback.

### **Feedback**

Students can compare their answers for some of the more difficult questions with a partner.



# Find Something in Common

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Level:** High-Beginner to Intermediate

**Materials:** None

This activity is an excellent way for everyone to get to know each other. The task requires students to find out something they have in common with other members of the class.

The students stand up with a piece of paper and pencil in their hands. They have to talk to everyone in the class to try to find something in common (they are both from Seoul, or they both know how to play the piano). Once they find this thing in common, they write it down along with the person's name. Keep going until most of the students have talked to everyone.

Consider adding the element of a winner who shares something in common with the highest number of students in the class as a more specific task objective.

It also may be necessary to ban certain questions/topics like home town, home room teacher, etc., in order to avoid the activity ending too quickly and nobody doing much talking.

## **Teaching Tips:**

Many students struggle with speaking because it happens in real-time. Unlike in writing, where we can plan first and then produce later, in speaking, planning and production overlap and often happen at the same time. If our students focus too much on planning, fluency can suffer. If they focus too much on production, accuracy can suffer. In this activity, fluency is far more important than accuracy because the students are having short, small-talk conversations. I tell my students not to worry too much about choosing the perfect vocabulary word, or exact grammar constructions, but

instead just focus on communicating quickly, in a way that is “good enough.”

Tell your students that while it is okay to have short conversations about the thing they have in common, the goal of the activity is to try to talk to most of the people in the class, so they need to keep moving and talking to new people. I recommend to my students that they try to spend only 1-2 minutes talking with each person.

### **Pre-Task**

This is a great activity for students to practice the sub-skill of initiating a conversation, which is something that many of them find quite difficult. You could coach your students before the activity starts and give them a few phrases or conversation starters to keep in their heads if they get stuck.

### **Task**

1. Students stand up with a pencil and paper in their hands.
2. They talk to another student and try to find something they have in common by asking some questions. Questions that work well are ones like, “Have you ever \_\_\_\_\_ (lived abroad)?”, “Are you \_\_\_\_\_ (an only child)?” or, “Do you \_\_\_\_\_ (have a brother)?”
3. Once they find something in common, they write that down, along with the person's name.
4. Then, they find a new partner and continue until they've talked to everybody in the class or the time is up.

### **Feedback**

For the feedback portion of this task, elicit from the students any of the following:

- The kind of language they used to start a conversation
- Something interesting they learned about a classmate
- Did they uncover anything that many students in the class have in common?

# Five-Minute Debate

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 10-20 minutes

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** None

In this task, students try to convince their partner of the merits of their point of view. It's possible to debate just about anything!

Give students an age-appropriate controversial statement. If you are knowledgeable about pop culture, you can start with, “so and so is the best X (singer, soccer player, whatever),” if your students are too young for truly controversial topics. In pairs or small groups, have them debate the sides. You may have to assign sides if too many agree or disagree with your premise.

## Pre-Task

You may need to pre-teach some language like, “I think \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.” “I agree with X, but \_\_\_\_\_.”

Or, you could ask students to talk with a partner or small group about some controversial things they've seen in the news lately.

## Task

1. Divide students into pairs or small groups.
2. Give students a controversial statement. I would prepare this in advance, focusing on a recent news item or pop culture, but you could probably think of something on the fly as well.
3. Each student in the pair has to choose a side and then gets a couple of minutes to prepare their arguments.
4. The first student presents their arguments within a certain amount of time (1 minute). The other side presents their arguments in 1 minute.

5. Then, there's time for free discussion/rebuttal until the allotted time is up.

### **Feedback**

Finish with a quick poll to see if anyone changed their side. Ask those students what convinced them.

You could also ask students what convincing language they used during their debate.

# Infographic Presentation

**Skills:** Reading/Writing/Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 2+ hours

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** Computers for each pair or group, Internet access, PowerPoint

**Optional Materials:** Video camera

Presentations are a regular feature of ESL classes, but students may get overwhelmed at the thought of first creating and then presenting a full-length speech. Infographics have become a common way of presenting information, and students can create and use one to provide the “meat” of an informative oral presentation. This will also provide an opportunity to research a topic in English. If students work in an office, they are likely to use PowerPoint at work, so the combination of something familiar (PPT) with something new (English presentation) should reduce stress.

Put students into pairs or small groups (maximum 4) and have them choose a topic of interest to them that has several data points. For example, if they have a favorite team, they can find the team’s current ranking, average points per game, number of championships, and so on to populate the infographic. Students should begin the project by researching several data points and finding an image or two online to use for decoration.

To create the infographic, students will need to reset the margins to create the long, narrow look of an infographic. This is done by choosing a blank layout and changing the slide from landscape to portrait and then adjusting the margins. Start with 10”/25cm by 30”/75cm and adjust if necessary. Students can use images, Smart Art, and/or charts to present the data they will report. However, you may want to give students a time limit for choosing a layout or have them make a sketch before opening PowerPoint, because the number of options can become a time-waster. If time and teaching technology in the classroom permit, it’s generally a good idea to

do a quick demonstration of how to do the task on a projection screen or even a whiteboard (pre-draw it before class begins if needed).

Another excellent option is to use a web-based program like Canva. They do all the hard work for you in terms of design and layout. Again, if the program is not familiar to students you may need to provide a demo in class.

Once the layout has been chosen, students need to fill in the data. If they are using charts, Excel will automatically fill them in. Don't worry, it's pretty self-explanatory and the result is right there for the student to see while working. Once the images are all in place, students should add a brief explanation of each image. All images and text boxes can be resized, and the entire slide can be resized by adjusting the margins if there is more (or less) information than expected.

When students are satisfied with the infographic, it can be saved as a JPEG. It's a good idea to plan before hand where and how the JPEG file will be saved; you may need to ask students to email it to themselves, bring a USB stick, or make sure that it's possible to save the files to the classroom's computers (and that nobody will delete them from other classes using the room).

This will probably have taken an entire lesson, so the presentation will be in the next lesson. You should tailor the focus of the presentation to your students' levels and needs. Lower-level students may just need to practice speaking without a script. Higher-level students may need to practice the use of gestures or inflection.

For the presentation of the infographic, pull up the saved image and have students stand next to the computer to present the data to the class.

### **Pre-Task**

Show students some infographics and discuss what information is on them, how to make certain information stand out and also what some elements of design are.

### **Task**

1. Put students into pairs or groups and have them choose a topic of interest that would have several data points to research and present.
2. Students do some research to gather data and information about the topic.
3. Have students make a sketch of the planned infographic.
4. Using PowerPoint, have the student make the infographic (use a blank layout, in portrait, with the margins set to 10"/25cm by 30"/75cm). Canva is also a nice option for this.

## **Feedback**

In the next lesson, have students present the infographic to the class. According to the student's level, have them focus on speaking without a script, using gestures, or inflection, etc.

I love to have the other groups in the class ask follow-up questions to the group who did the presentation. For example, if the presentation was about Manchester United, a follow-up question might be, "Who is your favourite player on that team?" I generally give groups 1-2 minutes to come up with 1-2 questions after the presentation and then choose groups at random to ask one.

# Just a Minute

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** Whiteboard, timer

This task requires that students talk for one minute without stopping about a certain topic. The other students who aren't speaking have a task as well—they have to listen and ask good follow-up questions.

Elicit from the students some general categories that they think they could talk about for one minute without stopping. Write them on the board. For example, jobs, hobbies, dreams, movies, food, etc.

Put the students into groups of 4 and they can number themselves 1-2-3-4. Then, ask one of the students to throw a paper airplane at the board and whatever word it gets closest to is the topic for the first student. All the number ones must talk about that topic for one minute without stopping and if they stop or have a long pause, they've lost the challenge.

Adjust the time limit to be higher or lower depending on the level of students (beginner = 30 seconds, advanced = 2 minutes). Erase the first speaking round word from the board and continue the activity with the remaining three students in each group except that they have different topics. It's helpful if the teacher does an example speech first with a topic that the students choose.

For intermediate to advanced students, you can make the task objective more specific and challenging: the student should talk about the who, what, where, when, why, and how aspects of the topic. This mirrors elements of a wide variety of speaking tests like the TOEIC, TOEFL, and IELTS exams. Furthermore, you can instruct students asking follow-up questions to make them in-depth questions (something many students struggle to do well):  
Could you elaborate more about \_\_\_\_\_? Why do you think \_\_\_\_\_?



## **Pre-Task**

Explain that students will have to talk about a topic for an entire minute without stopping. Elicit some general topics from students and write them randomly on the whiteboard. Depending on the level of students, you may want to do a brief brainstorming exercise to help them warm-up.

This activity is a variation of the “table topics” from Toastmasters. Have a look on *YouTube* and find some good examples to show students. Elicit from students the positives and negatives for each presentation. You may ask students to keep track of whether or not the speaker touched on who, what, where, when, why, and how during their speaking time. This will help them to develop their own awareness of what listeners look for when someone is talking.

## **Task**

1. The teacher writes topics on the whiteboard (teacher-supplied, or elicited from students). Put students into groups of 4. They number themselves 1-2-3-4.
2. One student throws a paper airplane at the whiteboard. The topic closest to where it hits is the first one.
3. Student one has to talk about that topic for a minute without stopping. The goal is to have minimal pauses and to never stop talking. Do the feedback portion of this task (see below).
4. Another student throws the paper airplane and finds another topic. The number two students talk for a minute. Continue with the third and fourth rounds' students.

## **Feedback**

In a group of four, only one student is talking. The other three students have a listening task. They have to listen carefully to the student who is speaking so that they can ask a good follow-up question (you might consider pre-teaching some question forms, reminding students about the 5 W's + H, etc.).

# Listing Things

**Skills:** Writing (or Speaking)

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

**Materials:** Nothing

There are some simple tasks that can be done within a language lesson. One of these tasks is listing things. This can be useful to review vocabulary covered during a lesson.

Listing things is useful to help students activate their prior knowledge about a topic before diving into new vocabulary. This is especially practical for certain topics like hobbies, sports, weather, etc. that can be found in almost every ESL/EFL textbook so it's likely that students already know a fair bit about the topic before you explicitly teach them.

Here are some examples of listing tasks:

- With your partner, write down 10 sports that use a ball.
- Tell your partner 5 words that describe the weather in the summer. Your partner can do winter.
- Name 10 hobbies that you've tried in your life.

# Matching

**Skills:** Reading/Writing (or Speaking)

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Level:** Beginner

**Materials:** Things to match

There are some tasks that can be done within a lesson of any framework. Matching is one of those tasks and this one is especially well-suited to beginners. Here are a few examples of matching tasks:

- Match the type of weather to the picture.
- Match the sport to a piece of equipment that is needed for it.
- Match the face to the feeling or emotion.

# Missing Information

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 5-15 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

**Materials:** 2 sets of the same information, each with missing pieces

This is a classic task-based activity. There is one complete set of information but each student in the pair only has part of it. They have to work together to get the complete set. You can often find this kind of thing in textbooks, or have a look for “information gap” activities on *Google* and you'll see a myriad of options.

## Pre-Task

This generally involves pre-teaching some vocabulary related to the task.

## Task

1. Put students into pairs.
2. Each student is given one set of information. Both sets of information complete the whole picture.
3. Students have to talk together to figure out the information that is missing from their set and fill it in.

## Feedback

Students can compare what they have with the original, complete version (show the picture on a *PowerPoint* slide). I also like to talk to students about some of the useful language they used during this activity.

# Mixed Up Sentences

**Skills:** Reading/Writing

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

**Materials:** Sentences, Whiteboard or PowerPoint

This task requires students to put words in the correct order in a sentence. For beginner students, put a few unrelated sentences up on the board. Students must reorganize the words into grammatically correct sentences.

For intermediate students you can put up post a “Mixed-Up” conversation on the board or in a PowerPoint presentation. The students then have to organize the sentences into paragraphs, essays, or a narrative, etc. Mixed Up Sentences is an excellent English grammar activity that can be used to review concepts studied in previous classes.

## **Teaching Tips:**

If your goal is to practice specific grammar points, it will probably be faster to make your own dialogue or sentences than to repurpose one from the book.

However, if your students are beginners or high beginners, simply arranging a set of words in the correct order of a conversation may be challenging. In that case, you can save yourself some time by recycling sentences from a textbook dialogue which you covered several weeks or months earlier.

## **Pre-Task**

It can be useful to discuss typical word order in English sentences (subject-verb-object) Or, if this activity is targeting some specific grammatical constructions such as conditionals, then consider a quick review of that. You can also remind students of general rules for how parts of speech are spelled: -ing for verbs, proper nouns have the first letter capitalized, etc.

## **Task**

1. In advance, prepare a conversation using familiar vocabulary, or take a dialogue from a previous, but not too recent, lesson. Randomly arrange the sentences, or parts of sentences, if you want to make it more challenging. It's up to you in this mixed sentences activity but always take into account the level of the students. For the highest level students, you could have them do both. First, arrange the sentences and then put them in some sort of order to make a coherent conversation.
2. Have students work in pairs or small groups to correctly arrange the sentences or words within the sentences.

## **Feedback**

Check answers with the students. Review or highlight any key points that students may be struggling with.

# Odd One Out

**Skills:** Reading/Speaking (or Writing)

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

**Materials:** Groups of words

This is a nice task-based activity that can be used to review vocabulary from previous classes. Write up a few sets of vocabulary words on the whiteboard. I use four words in each set, with one of them being the odd one out. For example orange, cucumber, apple, banana. Cucumber is the odd one out because it's not a fruit.

## Pre-Task

Do an example by way of a pre-task. Have students choose the word that doesn't fit and say why. I often use an ambiguous example to show students that there are many possible answers. The key is to support it.

## Task

1. Make 4-6 groups of four words, with one of them being unlike the others
2. Put students in pairs and have them choose the odd word from each group and also write (or say) why they chose it. For example, cucumber—it's not a fruit.

## Feedback

Have students share some of their answers with the class. Other groups can say whether they had similar, or different answers.

# Ordering

**Skills:** Writing (or Speaking)

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Things to order

There are tasks that can be done within a lesson of any framework. Ordering things is one of them. I like to use this kind of task to review new vocabulary at the end of a lesson. Or, if I think that students already know a fair amount about the topic that day, I may use it as a warm-up activity at the beginning of a lesson to help students activate their prior knowledge.

Some examples of ordering tasks include:

- Put the jumbled up events from the story you just read into the correct order.
- Re-write the months of the year in the correct order.
- Find the incorrect letters of the alphabet. Re-write them in the correct place.
- Put the events from Tim's day into the correct order.
- How do you make instant noodles? Put the steps into the correct order.





2. of something you can recycle.
3. of something healthy you can eat.
4. of someone who works at this university.
5. of something very big.
6. of something strange to see at a school.
7. of a flower.
8. of ALL your group members.
9. of a map.
10. of something small.
11. of 3 people together. 1st person = no feet on the ground. 2nd person = 1 foot on the ground, 1 foot **not** on the ground. 3rd person = 2 feet on the ground.
12. of something wet.
13. of something too hot to touch.
14. of a cat or dog (real!).
15. of someone in a suit and tie.
16. of a bus.
17. of an insect or bug.
18. of a TV.
19. of something dirty.
20. of the best place to eat lunch at our school.
21. of somewhere relaxing.
22. of somewhere stressful.

23. of something interesting.

24. of something funny.

### **Pre-Task**

Put students into small groups and have them discuss some various places around their school. They could consider some relaxing places, a nice place to eat lunch, somewhere they might see an animal, etc. Elicit some answers from the class.

### **Task**

1. Give each group one picture quest paper. Go over the rules together as a class.
2. Give students 5 minutes to talk together and formulate their plan (no pictures yet though!).
3. Send students out to complete the quest (this is not for younger students as the teacher is not able to directly supervise each group but remains in the classroom).
4. Check the pictures from each group as they come back. If there are any mistakes, add six minutes to the total time.
5. The team with the lowest time is the winner.

### **Feedback**

There are a couple of different ideas I have for the feedback portion. The first is quite simple—discuss with the class the easiest and most difficult pictures to do. Point out some of the creative pictures you saw from the teams. Have the groups talk together about the process. Did they have any conflict? Was there a leader on their team?

The other idea takes a bit more time. Each group can show some of their most interesting pictures (one per group member) and put them into a short PowerPoint presentation. Then, each group could talk quickly about each picture and why they like it.

# Postcards

**Skills:** Writing/Reading

**Time:** 15+ minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Postcards

This is a nice writing task that students enjoy. If you can get your hands on some cheap postcards or have some laying around your house or teacher's office, try out this simple ESL writing activity. This activity is ideal for working on common greetings, the past tense (more ideas here: [ESL past tense activities](#)), using descriptive words, as well as using synonyms to avoid repetition.

Distribute the postcards to the students. You can do one per student, or put the students into pairs. They have to look at the picture on the front of the postcard and imagine that they went on this vacation. Then, they can write about their trip to a friend or family member. Students can include things like travel and transportation, foods, things they saw, etc.

Next, the students trade postcards with another student or group. After reading them, they can write a response back of at least a few sentences. Finally, you may want to display them around the class as they're colorful and fun and other students may enjoy reading them!

## **Pre-Task**

Ask students if they know what a postcard is. Get a general description from them. Ask students what kinds of things people write on a postcard such as weather, food, activities, etc.

## **Task**

Give each pair a postcard. They look at the picture and imagine what they did on that vacation, and then pretend that they're writing to a friend or family member.

## **Feedback**

When done writing, each group exchanges postcards and another group has to write a response to what they read. For example, “Wow! Too bad the weather was so bad. But, it sounds like you had a fun time anyway.” You can display the postcards around your classroom (optional).

# **Poster Project Group Presentation**

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 5-10 hours preparation, 1 hour presentation time (depending on class size)

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Large poster paper

This task requires that students make a poster and then do a presentation related to that. It's ideal because there is a large degree of flexibility for students to choose the topic they want and they can learn the language necessary to talk about it.

Put students in groups of 2-4 and assign a topic or theme such as food. Tell students to choose a popular food in their country to research and give information about. If your class is about current events or social issues, each group could choose one of those.

Then, students have to make a poster with some pictures and a minimal amount of text. Emphasize the minimal text because if you don't, many of the posters will be filled with a large amount of text that is impossible to read. It's a good idea to draw a model poster on the whiteboard and draw big pictures with examples of writing size and content. Point these things out as you give instructions. Tell students that they should stand at the back of the classroom, and if they cannot read the text on their poster it is too small.

Once the poster is complete (give class time, or for homework), the group will make a presentation about the topic. I emphasize that each group

member must talk for an equal amount of time and that they must memorize their presentation and cannot read from a paper. Finally, I ask them to prepare a few quiz questions (3-5) for their classmates to test and see if they were listening! You can also include some Q & A time.

### **Teaching Tips:**

This is an excellent activity to use if you want to focus on stress and intonation with your students. You can show them how to use these things to emphasize the key points, or signal a transition.

You could also consider introducing some markers that are present in more formal kinds of spoken discourse such as this one. For example, there are standard ways to introduce a topic, “Today, I'm going to talk about \_\_\_\_\_.”, develop an idea, “I'll talk about three main points related to this.”, transition into another idea, “Now that you've heard about A, I'd like to talk about B.”, or conclude a presentation, “Remember the most important points are \_\_\_\_\_.”.

While not a lot of preparation is required for this since your students are doing most of the work, you need to be clear in your head about what your expectations are and also need to convey this clearly to students. It can be helpful to prepare a list of “Top 10 Dos and Don'ts” on a handout or on a class website or *Facebook* group.

It is extremely important to get students to memorize their speeches and to ensure this, you can allocate a large number of points (20-30%) to it if the assignment is graded. If you don't, the presentation will likely be terrible and will often consist of simply reading from a PowerPoint or a piece of paper. I do however tell my students to bring their script up to the front with them and they can look one time per person without any penalty in case they truly forget what they need to say.

### **Pre-Task**

There are a few things that you could do at this stage but it largely depends on the topic you choose for the presentations.

- Have students list things that might lead to a presentation topic. For example, the most popular foods in \_\_\_\_\_ (Korea). Or, the social issues that are in the news these days.
- Students can talk about presentations in general and what makes a good one, as well as a bad one.
- Teach some presentation language such as, first of all, next, in conclusion, etc.
- Teach some presentation skills such as gestures, eye contact, voice inflection, etc.

Another thing that would be considered a pre-task would be to put students into their presentation groups and have them choose a specific topic. The teacher could give some feedback about the choice and suggest a few helpful vocabulary words or grammatical constructions that students may consider using. However, students are free to use any language they wish in this style of activity.

### **Task**

1. Put students into groups and students can choose a topic.
2. Give explicit instructions about what is required of them regarding the poster and the presentation.
3. Have students prepare the poster and the presentation, either in class or for homework.

### **Feedback**

Students do their presentations in front of the class. The students ask their classmates some quiz questions based on what they talked about.

To encourage active listening, I assign a task to the groups that aren't doing the presentation. They have one minute when each group is done to come up with 2 good follow-up questions. I choose some groups at random to ask one of them.

After all the groups are done their presentations, I like to have some time for each group to discuss how their project went. What went well and what didn't go well. What grade they would have given themselves and why.



# Proofreading Practice

**Skills:** Writing/Reading

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Worksheet with errors

This is a simple task-based activity that requires students to find errors in a piece of writing. It can be used with students of any level.

How you design this activity will vary greatly depending on the level of your students. Beginner-level students can generally only proofread 1-3 things when they start developing self-editing skills. For example, tell them to check that the first word of each sentence is capitalized and has a period at the end. Advanced level students can handle a wide range of errors that include punctuation, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, flawed logic and more.

Not proofreading writing is the biggest writing mistake. This applies to students who are studying English as a second or third language, as well as native speakers. Here's the advice that I give my students about this important topic.

After you write, allow yourself some time to read your work. If you're doing a writing test that is one hour long, I recommend the following:

1. Plan for five minutes. Write a few notes. What is your first, second, and third main point (if writing an essay)?
2. Take 45-50 minutes for writing.

Leave yourself 5-10 minutes to do proofreading. Check writing for any mistakes. I recommend double-spacing, so it's easy to make any changes if you need to. Cross off what you wrote and then write in the line above it.

1. If students do only one thing to improve their writing, it's this!  
ALWAYS proofread. Always! Here's a proofreading checklist I made

for my university students in South Korea that you may want to consider using with yours: [www.jackiebolen.com/proofreading](http://www.jackiebolen.com/proofreading).

### **Pre-Task**

During the pre-task phase, I elicit from the students some of the things they could look for in a piece of writing and then I write them down on the board. The answers, of course, depend on the level but some common ones include:

- Punctuation
- Capital letters
- Subject-verb agreement
- Spelling

### **Task**

1. Prepare a worksheet of sentences, a paragraph or an essay (depending on the level) that has some errors from the checklist on it.
2. In pairs, students have to go through the worksheet to find the errors.

### **Feedback**

Check answers together as a class.

# Road Trip

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening/Writing

**Time:** 20-60 minutes

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** None

In this task, students have to work together with a partner or small group to plan a road trip that they'd like to take.

## Pre-Task

Begin with asking if students know what a road trip is. If they don't, explain the basic idea. Students can talk with their partner about a road trip they've taken in order to brainstorm ideas, or the teacher can do this with the class while writing different places, activities, etc. on the board.

You could also consider pre-teaching some vocabulary related to trips and vacations. Money vocabulary and different countries' currencies will also be of interest to most, if not all, students. For intermediate to advanced students, you might introduce cultural taboos and social etiquette rules as these topics will increase student interest too.

## Task

1. Put students into pairs or small groups.
2. Assign a length of time and approximate budget. Have students plan a road trip together.

## Feedback

Students can do a short presentation about the trip they've planned to the rest of the class. Students can talk with their partner at the end of each presentation about whether or not the trip that the other group planned would be interesting to them.

# Role-plays

**Skills:** Writing/Reading/Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 20-40 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

**Materials:** None

This task requires that students prepare a conversation for a certain situation and then present it to the class. Role-plays are an excellent way to get students practicing using new vocabulary in a real-life context.

Pre-teach some of the key vocabulary related to the lesson topic or situation. Use pictures, elicit answers from students using leading questions, have a word bank, etc. However, one of the hallmarks of task-based teaching is that students can learn what they want to learn. Emphasize that students can use whatever vocabulary they'd like to complete the role-play. Offer yourself as a resource for students who don't know a certain word.

Give students a conversation starter to get them going. For example, if you're talking about *feelings*, use:

A: Hey \_\_\_\_\_, how are you doing?

B: I'm great, how are you?

A: I'm \_\_\_\_\_ (sad, embarrassed, angry, bored, etc.). \*\*\*Anything besides, "I'm fine, thank you, and you?" is good. \*\*\*

B: Oh? What's wrong?

A: \_\_\_\_\_.

B: \_\_\_\_\_.

Another context that I often use this activity with is *illness or injury*. For example:

A: Hey \_\_\_\_\_, you don't look (sound) so good! What's wrong?

B: Oh yeah, I'm not good. I \_\_\_\_\_.

A: Really? \_\_\_\_\_.

B: \_\_\_\_\_.

A: \_\_\_\_\_.

One final context that I use this with is *excuses*. For example:

A: Hey \_\_\_\_\_, you're \_\_\_\_\_ minutes late!

B: I'm really sorry. I've been/I had to \_\_\_\_\_.

A: Hmmm . . . \_\_\_\_\_.

Give students about ten minutes to write the conversation with their partner. Adjust the number of lines and how detailed the fill in the blank sentences are to suit the level of students.

For lower-level students, it can be helpful to have a word bank relevant to the context on the whiteboard so that the writing portion of this activity doesn't get too long (you can also provide them with a detailed, fill-in-the-blank script).

Then, students memorize their conversation (no papers when speaking!) and do a role-play in front of the class. To increase student-talking time, it's best for smaller classes. For larger classes, each pair could join with one or two other groups and perform for them, or students could make a video of themselves and send you the link or upload it to *YouTube*. Play them in the next class.

I like this activity because it's perfect for lower-level students who want to practice “conversation” but don't quite have the skills to do this on their own, and it's also a good way to get advanced students to use some new grammar or vocabulary that you're teaching.

### **Teaching Tips**

Having students make conversations is very useful for practicing functional language and speaking sub-skills. I usually choose one or two functions to mention when I'm giving the instructions for the activity and provide a bit of coaching and language input surrounding that, depending on the level—beginners will need more help.

The functions that fit particularly well with partner conversations include agreeing, disagreeing, apologizing, and asking for advice. The sub-skills that you can emphasize are things like turn-taking, initiating a conversation, speaking for an appropriate length of time, stress and intonation, responding (really?), and cohesive devices, particularly noun pronoun reference: A: I saw a movie last night. B: Which one did you see? A: I saw Iron Man. It was good.

This is one of the most useful things you can do in your conversation classes, especially for beginner or intermediate students so make sure you try it out at least once or twice over the semester. It gives students a chance to have a real conversation which will build a lot of confidence but they won't have the pressure of coming up with something to say on the spot. That said, it gets boring if done every class; I generally do it about once a month for a class that meets twice a week over the course of a semester.

### **Pre-task**

Pre-teach useful language that could be used to complete the role-play. However, emphasize to students that there is a degree of flexibility and they can feel free to use whatever language they'd like.

### **Task**

1. The teacher prepares a conversation starter based on what you are teaching. Consider using multiple conversation starters that are slightly different to make it more interesting at the presentation stage.
2. Write the conversation starter on the whiteboard, PowerPoint, or on a handout.
3. Have students complete the conversation in pairs, using whatever language they'd like. Then, they must prepare to speak by memorizing and adding in stress and intonation. Give some individual help to each pair to assist them in knowing what to stress and how to do it.

## **Feedback**

Have students stand up and “perform” their conversation if you have a small class. In larger classes, there are a few other options (see above).

# Running Dictation

**Skills:** Writing/Listening/Speaking/Reading

**Time:** 20-30 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** The “dictation” + some way to attach it to the walls or board.

This is one of my favorite activities which covers reading, writing, listening and speaking. There are two distinct tasks: Students have to work together to dictate a conversation, poem, etc. and then they have to put it into the correct order. For beginner level students, I would recommend choosing one task. Intermediate and advanced learners can manage multiple tasks and a greater degree of difficulty.

There are a wide variety of English styles you can choose: poems, song lyrics, a short story, famous quotes—the list is almost limitless. For example, you might make up a story or conversation a few sentences long (no more than ten). Put each sentence on a strip of paper, and you can also put another strip of paper on top to prevent cheating. Put these around the classroom in various locations.

The students will be in teams of two. One person is the reader and one is the writer. The reader gets up and reads a bit of the passage and comes and tells it to the writer. They go back to remember more of it and so on and so on. In the end, students have to put the song or conversation in order. If you have beginner students, make sure it's obvious enough what the correct order should be. Intermediate and advanced students can handle something with a bit of ambiguity. When they're done, I'll check their writing and if there aren't many mistakes plus the order is correct, that team is the winner. How many mistakes you allow depends on the level of your students.

Tell your students before the activity starts that standing at the strip of paper and then yelling to their partner instead of walking over to them is not allowed or they will be disqualified.



Here are 2 examples of running dictations I've used in the past:

[Around the house](#)—Intermediate Level

[Introduce Yourself](#)—Beginner Level

### **Teaching Tips**

Make sure you let your students know what cheating is (yelling, the “reader/speaker” touching the pen, using their phone camera) and if that happens their team will automatically be disqualified.

Make sure you move beyond simply dictating the sentences down onto the paper into dealing with meaning as well. You can do this by requiring students to put the conversation, song or poem in the correct order. They can simply write “1, 2, 3, 4” beside each sentence instead of re-writing them. Make sure whatever you choose has some sort of logical order to it. Alternatively, if you choose something that doesn't have an order, you could skip this step.

### **Pre-Task**

The pre-task will likely be the lesson at the beginning of the class on the target grammar or vocabulary. Running dictation is more of a “rounding-off” activity to be used for review.

### **Task**

1. The teacher can prepare a simple story or conversation and put each sentence on a strip of paper. Put the papers around the classroom on the wall, equally spaced out.
2. Divide the students into pairs: one writer and one reader.
3. The reader stands up, walks to the station and reads a paper, then goes back to the writer and tells what they read to the writer, who must write it. The reader can go back to a single paper as many times as required.
4. This procedure of reading, speaking, listening, and writing continues until the team has all the sentences down on their paper.
5. The two students put the story or conversation in the correct order.

## **Feedback**

The teacher can check for accuracy of the task. You might also consider getting feedback from the students about the process of completing the activity.

# Shopping List

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening/Writing

**Time:** 10-20 minutes

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** Nothing

In this activity, one student is the chef while the other one is the personal shopper. The task is for the personal shopper to accurately make a shopping list for the recipe that the chef wants to make. The shopper has to ask the chef questions to achieve this. Be aware that in some countries and cultures, students may not have an awareness of what a “personal shopper” is so this activity may be inappropriate. Or, it may be possible but with a higher degree of explanation, with examples.

## Pre-Task

It can be useful to teach some vocabulary for food measurements. Even very high-level students sometimes don't know things like cups, teaspoons, tablespoons, bunches, bag, etc. Also, bear in mind that the country you're teaching in may not use the same measurement system as your home country.

## Task

1. The first student has to explain briefly to their partner what they want to make. It should be something that they've made many times and can make without using an exact recipe.
2. The personal shopper has to ask questions to compile their list. For example, “Do I need onions or garlic for that?” or, “What kind of cheese do I need and how much?”

## Feedback

The chef can give some feedback to the personal shopper as to whether their shopping list is accurate, or not. The personal shopper can give feedback about how clear the chef's instructions and descriptions were.

# Sorting

**Skills:** Reading/Writing (or Speaking)

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

**Materials:** Things to sort

There are some simple tasks that can be done within a lesson from any framework or methodology. One of these tasks is sorting. I like to have my students sort things at the end of a lesson by way of review.

Or, it's often the case that students have seen the topic I'm teaching before, particularly at the intermediate or advanced levels so I'll use this at the beginning of a lesson as a warm-up. This can help students activate their prior knowledge.

Here are some examples of sorting activities:

- Put the various kinds of weather into what is typically found in spring/summer/fall/winter.
- Which of these emotions and feelings are positive? Which ones are negative?
- Which sports require a ball? Which ones don't?

# Story Picture Cards Sequencing

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 15+ minutes

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** Laminated cards which have a sequence of pictures, one per student plus your own.

This is an activity better suited to higher-level students. The task requires that students work together to put picture cards in a sequence that tells a story.

In advance, prepare individual pictures which tell a story when put together. Give each student in the group one picture. Without showing one another their pictures, students must discuss and describe the images to determine the correct sequence of images which tell a story. When they think they have the correct order, everyone reveals their pictures to see if they are correct.

## Teaching Tips

If the class is very large, have two or even three different sets of pictures, each telling a different story. Clearly mark each set (Set A for one group, B for the second, etc. (each card/picture has an A on it, so all students with an A labelled picture know what group they belong to)), so students know who they should be working with. This is intended to be a mingling activity, but it could be done in groups while sitting.

Make sure the pictures have elements which lend themselves to easier sequencing, such as a clock, the sun/moon, and activities usually done at a certain time, such as eating, commuting, and working.

The books *Zoom* and *Re-Zoom* by Istvan Banyai are perfect for this activity. Just be sure to use a sequence of pages in order.

## Pre-Task

Discuss the elements of a good story with students (beginning, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution). Students will use different words for this but the general idea remains the same.

### **Task**

1. In advance, the teacher prepares a series of pictures which tell a story when put in order. Give each student one picture from the story.
2. Tell students they must discuss their pictures without revealing them to each other to determine the correct sequence of the images.

### **Feedback**

When students think that they have the correct order, they can reveal their pictures to one another to see if they are correct. The teacher can check answers with the class if necessary.

# Story Timeline

**Skills:** Reading/Listening/Speaking

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** None

**Optional Materials:** Sentence strips of important events in a novel

A timeline, or chronology, of important plot events is a useful way to have the class briefly summarize the story chapter by chapter. A timeline will help them keep track of the story while providing practice determining important events. With lower-level students, you may want to scaffold the activity by providing the sentences already written or with a few blanks for the students to order.

## Teaching Tips

If you are providing sentence strips, you can add extra, unimportant plot events and have the students select only the important ones to order.

Penguin has six levels of graded readers that include simplified versions of popular novels and classics.

## Pre-Task

The pre-task could be reading the story itself. Or, you could discuss the elements of a good story and what a basic plot consists of.

You could also have students prepare sentence strips describing important events in the plot. During the activity, another group can put them into the correct order.

## Task

Have the students either order the sentence strips you, or another team have provided. Include some extra plot events that aren't in the story for higher-



level students.

### **Feedback**

Check answers as a class if you have provided the same sentence strips for each group. Or, have the original group check the other team's answers if they have provided them.

As an extension, you could have each group talk about what they think will happen next in the story.

# Student Engineers

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 120-40 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Disposable cups and pipe cleaners/uncooked spaghetti/wooden skewers

**Optional Materials:** Ticking time bomb sound effect

This is a popular activity and is easy to adjust according to what materials you have on hand or can acquire easily. The task is that students have to build something using a certain set of materials.

Have students decide in their groups what they will build and then each group can introduce their product to the class.

## Pre-Task

There are some pre-tasks to consider doing but one of my favourites is to bring in 2-3 common objects (a potato, eraser, and set of chopsticks for example). Put students into groups and each one has to come up with at least five uses for each object. You can have each group use a different object or all groups use the same objects. This helps to get the creative juices flowing.

Another pre-task for higher-level students is to discuss the invention process. For example, idea, prototype, funding, mass production, distribution and advertising, reviews and recommendations, further investment, going public, etc.

## Task

1. In advance, prepare “building materials” so each group has the same assortment of items. You want them to have plenty of each item, at least 20-30 cups and skewers, for example.

2. Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students and give each group the same assortment of items.
3. Give students a set time limit to build their object.
4. Finish the building time and clean up the leftover materials.
5. Give each group some time to prepare their presentation about what the object is and why it might be useful.

## **Feedback**

Each group has to do a quick presentation about what their object is and why it might be useful to somebody. The other groups can listen carefully and after the presentation, they have to think of 1-2 follow-up questions. The teacher can randomly choose a few groups to ask their questions.

In the end, each group has to decide which project they think is the most useful.

# Survey Activities

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening/Writing/Reading

**Time:** 20-30 minutes

**Level:** High-Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Survey handout

The goal of this activity is for students to find out information about their classmates through talking to them.

Give the students a sheet of paper with some questions and tell them they need to find one of their classmates who will fit each slot. My general rule is that one question equals around two minutes for intermediate to advanced students so 10 questions would equal a 20-minute activity; it's one minute per question for beginners because they will not be as good at asking follow-up questions.

The kinds of questions you could put on your paper include things like: "Do you travel sometimes?" or, "Are you a university student?" Then, if their partner answers yes (encourage students to answer in full sentences!), they write down their partner's name and ask them one (beginner) or two (intermediate to advanced) more questions to elicit some extra information. They can only ask each classmate one question. If their partner's answer is no, they should choose another question to ask them.

Prep the activity well by saying what you're looking for: only speaking English, everybody standing up, talking to everybody in mostly full sentences, writing the answers in English. Get a student to ask you one of the questions first and then ask a student one of the questions so your students have two models of what they need to do.

Here is a survey that I would use on the first day of class:

## Get to Know Each Other Survey

**Name** Do you \_\_\_\_\_? **Are you** \_\_\_\_\_? **Extra Information**

(5 Ws + H \_\_\_\_\_?)

from outside this city

in third year

play sports

live alone

eat pizza a lot

an only child

play sports

have a part-time job

have a boyfriend or girlfriend

like horror movies

in second year

take the subway to school

think English is the best subject

enjoying this class

love your school

like studying English

### **Teaching Tips**

This is my other favorite ESL speaking activity that I regularly use in class (at least once a month). It's perfect for beginner to advanced students and it's one of the most student-centered activities that I know of.

Surveys are an excellent way for students to practice some important speaking sub-skills, especially responding appropriately based on what their partner tells them. For example, if they are surprised they could respond with, “Really?” If in agreement, they could say, “Yeah, me too.” If in strong disagreement, they could say something like, “Wow! Why do you think that?” You could even put three categories on the board for “Agree”, “Disagree” and “Surprise” and elicit a few ideas from the students about appropriate things they could say in response to a statement.

Another important speaking sub-skill is turn-taking. I emphasize to my students that there are times when in-depth and lengthy discourses are necessary (a presentation) but doing a survey activity like this mimics small talk. In small talk, the keys are to listen well, ask some interesting questions and follow-up questions, give short, concise answers and not to ramble. I will sometimes give my students an example of a rambling answer and they usually find it funny, but I hope that they get the point too!

### **Pre-Task**

Introduce some of the language related to the topic of the survey. This can be done in several ways but here are a few quick ideas:

- Show student a picture.
- Have students talk with their partners for 1-2 minutes about the topic.
- Have a short class discussion about the topic.
- Get students to shout out some words that they know related to the topic.

### **Task**

1. Prepare the survey, based on whatever you are teaching.
2. Hand out surveys and write up one or two of the questions on the board, making it look the same as the handout. Do two example questions with students, one with you asking a student a question and vice-versa for the second one.
3. Students stand up and talk to one classmate asking them one question (any order is okay). If the answer is “yes,” they write in the name and

- ask a follow-up question. They can write one or two words in the appropriate slot based on the answer their partner gave them.
4. If the answer is no, they must ask another question from the survey until they get a “yes.”
  5. The pair splits up and each student finds a new partner to talk to.
  6. The activity continues until the allotted time is finished.

## **Feedback**

Come back together as a class and the teacher can elicit from the students who had some interesting or unusual answers. For example, in an introduction survey, I will always include a question about who has a twin and who has a part-time job (if high school or university students). These are questions that some, but not all students will answer yes to.

So the teacher can ask, “Did you find anyone who has a twin?” Yes! Min-Gyu does! Then, the teacher can ask him some follow-up questions like, “Are you identical?”

# The Student Becomes the Teacher

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 40-60 minutes

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** None

Have each student prepare a brief lesson introducing a hobby or interest of theirs. For example, if they enjoy football, they could explain the basic rules. If they insist their only interest is playing computer games, have them introduce their favorite game and explain how it is played. Remind them that they will be explaining their topic to an absolute beginner so they should assume that the other students in the class have no prior knowledge about their topic.

## Teaching Tips

This is not a first-day activity because you need to have an idea of their level and what, if any, scaffolding will be required. It's also a good idea to provide students with an example presentation and rules for how many sentences, speaking time, what kind and number of visual aids they must use, etc.

## Pre-Task

Show students some examples of good and bad presentations. *YouTube* is a great source for this. Have students discuss with a partner the positives and negatives about each presentation and then discuss together as a class.

Also, consider teaching students some basic presentation skills such as gestures, eye contact, body language, etc.

## Task

Students prepare a three-minute lesson introducing their hobby or interest. If your class is large or very low level, reduce the time to two minutes. This



can be done during class time, or for homework.

### **Feedback**

The students do their presentations in front of the class. The rest of the class has a listening task. If the class is quite small, each pair of students can ask follow-up questions. If a larger class, each group of four can ask a follow-up question.

# Used Card Salesman

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 15-20 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** Playing cards cut into pieces

This is a negotiation activity. The task requires that students make as many complete sets as possible.

In advance, take a deck of playing cards and cut each card into an equal number of pieces (2-4 pieces is ideal; the more pieces, the longer the game). Mix the cut cards and divide into the number of groups you will have.

Divide the class into groups of 3-5 and give each group their pile of pieces. Give them 2-3 minutes to sort their pieces and see how many complete pieces they can make with the ones that they have, and which pieces they need to complete them. Once the cards have been sorted, instruct them to complete their missing sets. Give them a time limit of about 10 minutes.

The goal is to have the largest number of completed cards at the end. Students will have to negotiate with other groups, trying to get missing pieces while trying to keep all of the pieces they have. You will soon see which group has the slickest salesmen.

## Teaching Tips

You may want to even the odds by having an equal mix of pieces, such as 1-2 complete sets, X number of half sets, and Y number of single pieces. Or you may want to stack the deck, so to speak.

## Pre-Task

Begin by reviewing some negotiating language, like trade. You could demonstrate by offering to trade with a student something from your desk for something on their desk. Elicit some language from students that might

be required to complete this transaction. Write some useful phrases on the board.

For beginner level students, you may need to teach negotiation language phrases. For example, “Do you have a/an \_\_\_\_\_?” and “I’ll give you a/an \_\_\_\_\_ for a/an \_\_\_\_\_.” For intermediate to advanced level students, consider introducing slang and idiomatic expressions like “Are you crazy? No way!” and “Not for all the tea in China!”

### **Task**

1. In advance, prepare a deck of playing cards by cutting each card into 2-4 pieces.
2. In class, tell the students that they must practice their salesmanship on their classmates. Explain that they will receive cut up cards and must try to make sets of complete cards. Emphasize that they must NOT only show their pieces to the other student/group—they should speak English to ask, agree, and refuse the exchange. At the end of the activity, the group with the most sets will win.
3. Divide the class into groups of 3-5 and give each group an equal share of the mixed card pieces.
4. Allow 2-3 minutes to sort the cards, so each group can see which card pieces they have and make note of which pieces they need to complete a set (a set being a complete card).
5. Give students ten minutes to complete their missing sets, but don’t give them any further rules. They should consider as a group whether it would be better to work together or split up and approach different groups at once. I allow some time for groups to formulate their strategy.

### **Feedback**

When time is up, have each group tally how many complete sets they have and how many single card pieces they still have. The winner is the team with the most complete sets.

Give each group a couple of minutes to evaluate the process. What went well and what didn't go well for their group. If they won, why? If they didn't win, why? Elicit answers from the class.

Also, ask students what kind of language they used when negotiating with other teams Correct any errors that you heard throughout the activity. This may lead to more explicit language on negotiation or transactional language.

# Vacation Time

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening/Writing

**Time:** 20-40 minutes

**Level:** High-Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** None

In this task, students have to plan a vacation for someone else to their home country. If you have students from various countries in your class, try to put students from the same country together in a group.

I generally get students to plan a vacation for my parents. I start by showing a picture of them and talking about the kinds of things they like and don't like.

## **Pre-Task**

Get students to talk with their partners about some of the famous places to visit in their country and why people like them so much.

## **Task**

1. Put students from the same country into pairs or small groups.
2. Talk about the person or people they are planning a vacation for. Make it as realistic as possible. I use my parents from Canada who are visiting Korea (that's where I taught for many years). I explain the kinds of things they like and don't like. Students have time to ask me questions about my parents as well.
3. Students have to plan a 1-week vacation for my parents in their country.

## **Feedback**

Each group has to do a presentation about the vacation they planned for my parents. In the end, I choose the one I think my parents would like best and say why.

# What are you Cooking?

**Skills:** Writing/Speaking/Listening/Reading

**Time:** 30-60 minutes

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

**Materials:** None

This is a fun task for adults where they have to plan a 3-course meal based on a set of ingredients from another group.

Put students into groups of three and tell them to write down items from each of the following categories:

- 1 meat
- 1 dairy product
- 3 herbs or spices
- 2 green vegetables
- 5 more vegetables
- 2 grains
- 5 fruits
- 1 tin of some kind of food
- 1 jar of some food
- 1 frozen food
- 1 junk food item
- something salty
- something sweet

Then, collect the papers from the students and redistribute them to the other groups. Each group has 10-15 minutes to plan a three-course meal with their ingredients, along with cooking oil, salt and pepper. However, they are not required to use all the ingredients if they don't want to. It should consist of an appetizer, main course, and dessert.

When each group is finished, give them some time to prepare for their presentation. Each group will present their menu to the class. I usually require that each student in the group talks about one course which is perfect if you put students into teams of three for this activity.

Students can vote on their favourite menu that's not their own! You can prepare a small prize for the winning team.

### **Pre-Task**

Explain what a three-course meal is and give the students some examples. If you have access to a computer and PowerPoint, you could use *Google Image* search and look for a "three-course meal." There are lots of nice examples there.

### **Task**

1. Put students into groups of three. They have to write down the required ingredients in each category. This usually takes around five minutes.
2. Collect the papers and redistribute them to another team.
3. Each team must make a three-course menu with their ingredients (appetizer, main course and dessert). They don't have to use all the ingredients. I allow 10-15 minutes for this, and then five minutes to prepare for the next step.

### **Feedback**

The teams do a short presentation about their menu and the class votes on their favourite.

# What Can I do with a \_\_\_\_\_?

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** An object

Show students some random common object (potatoes are often used for this activity, but I like to use some kind of “trash” to introduce a lesson on recycling.) Have students work in small groups to brainstorm as many uses for the item as possible. Give them a time limit (3-5 minutes), then discuss their answers. If some answers seem too outlandish, have the group explain how or why they would use the item in that way.

## **Pre-Task**

Get students to brainstorm with a partner all of the uses of disposable chopsticks. Look on the Internet for some creative ideas—there are hundreds of them.

## **Task**

1. In advance, prepare an object. A potato is commonly used, but it can be anything.
2. Divide students into groups of 3-5.
3. Give them 3-5 minutes to brainstorm creative uses for the object.
4. As a class, briefly discuss their various ideas.

## **Feedback**

Have the groups discuss which idea they liked best, besides their own and why they liked it so much. Talk together as a class about which idea each group chose.



# Where are They Now?

**Skills:** Speaking/Writing

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Advanced

**Materials:** None

This is a post-reading extension activity that can be done orally or in writing. When you finish a novel or story, have the students imagine the main character five or ten years in the future. Where are they? What are they doing? How have the events in the story affected his/her life?

## Pre-Task

Students can talk with a partner about how their life has changed in the past five or ten years (the length of time will depend on the age of the students). What are the main things that are different? For example, a different school, or working instead of going to school full-time. Maybe they're married now or have children.

Or, you might want to focus on the future and have students talk about what they think their life will look like in 5 or 10 years from now.

## Task

1. After reading a story or novel, put students into pairs or small groups and have them discuss how the character changed throughout the story and why
2. Have each pair or small group write or discuss what he/she thinks the character's life will be like five or ten years in the future.

## Feedback

Have each group give a short presentation in front of the class about part 2 from above.

Ask students what common things they heard mentioned among the groups, and also what unusual things they heard that they never even thought of.

# Where are the Places?

**Skills:** Speaking/Listening

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Level:** Beginner to Intermediate

**Materials:** Map A and Map B. They are the same but each one has some different information missing.

This is a classic information gap activity that's used for teaching directions or locations. Students have to work together to find out what the missing buildings are. You can often find this kind of activity in ESL textbooks or teacher's resource books. Or, search on *Google* for “information gap map activity ESL” and you'll find plenty of nice options.

## **Pre-Task**

It can be useful to highlight some of the key language that students might need to use, both in terms of sentence structure as well as prepositions.

## **Task**

Put students into pairs and give one student Map A, while the other one gets Map B. Students have to ask each other questions to find out the missing locations. For example, “What's next to the school?”

## **Feedback**

Show students the complete map so that they're able to check their answers. Ask students about the process—was it easy or difficult for them? Ask them whether or not they would feel confident asking someone for directions in real life.

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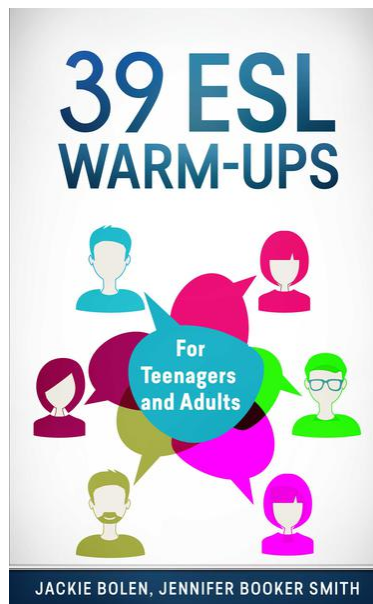
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