

HOW TO PLAN LESSONS

LIKE A PRO

29 TOP LESSON PLANNING SECRETS EVERY TEACHER SHOULD KNOW



TAKE THE GUESS WORK
OUT OF PLANNING

LEARN
HOW TO STRUCTURE LESSONS
AND ORGANIZE THE VERY
PRECIOUS CLASSROOM TIME
IT IS EASIER
THAN YOU THINK

 TIME TO LOOK AT LESSON PLANNING IN A NEW LIGHT: INGENUOUS IDEAS TO REACH STUDENTS

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6 Super Easy Steps to Creating a Winning Lesson Plan

COMING UP WITH LESSON PLANS IS AN EVER PRESENT TASK FOR MOST TEACHERS, AND ESL TEACHERS ARE NO EXCEPTION.

We have books, standards, and standardized tests to which we often teach. Sometimes, though, we can become so overwhelmed with the material that we fail to make a careful plan for sharing it with our students. However, that can be the exception rather than the rule if you follow these super simple steps for creating a winning lesson plan!

HOW TO CREATE A WINNING LESSON PLAN: 6 SUPER EASY STEPS

1 KNOW YOUR PEOPLE

Before you can make any kind of effective lesson plan, you have to know your students. What age are they? Why are they studying English? What is their current proficiency level? You may already know those answers, but ask yourself the less obvious questions, too. What learning styles do they lean toward? What topics interest them? What cultures are represented in your class? Also, keep in mind any students who may have additional or special needs during the lesson.

2 KNOW YOUR PLAN

Officially, you should know your learning objectives. Put more simply, this means knowing what you hope to accomplish by the end of your lesson. Do you want your students to know a specific set of vocabulary or a new grammatical structure? Do you want your class to practice using the language they already know or be comfortable with a dialogue in a specific situation? These are the language specific objectives for your lesson.

If you are teaching content, think about ways to tie it to reading, writing, listening and speaking for your English students. Always keep in

mind your ultimate goal, and knowing where you plan to get by the end of the lesson will help you as you work your way through it.

3 KNOW YOUR PRIORITIES

What are the most important things your students should know from the lesson you are planning? What would you like them to know but can be cut if necessary? What extra bits of information would you like to present to the class but feel confident they are not essential to the lesson or for your students' understanding? Decide the answers to these questions before you go into detail with your lesson plan. For example, in a speaking class learning a specific set of vocabulary may be secondary. Learning cultural nuances may be a third level priority. When you define your priorities at the start of your lesson planning, you can be sure that your students will learn what they need to learn by the end of your class.

4 KNOW YOUR PIECES

Just like any good story, a good lesson plan needs a beginning, middle and end. Plan a way of introducing the subject that will get your students thinking about what they already know, making connections in the brain. Plan more than one activity to introduce and practice new material. As you do, note any vocabulary or grammatical structures or other language specifics your student will need to successfully accomplish the tasks and make plans to review them as necessary. Also, think about whether you will need more than one class period to cover all the material in your lesson. Finish by planning a closing element to your lesson in which your students review and apply the information they learned during class.

5 ANTICIPATE YOUR PACE

One of the hardest tasks for a new teacher is determining how much time a given activity will take. Often the activities we think will take the

largest portion of a class period are over in a matter of minutes and those we expect our students to breeze through end up trapping them like so much muck and mire.

Make sure you are ready for anything in your class by over planning activities for each lesson. It is easy to scrap an optional activity at the last minute if you run out of time but not as easy to add an activity when you have not planned for it. Be ready for anything, and after you present your lesson make note of how long you spent on each activity.

6 PROCESS YOUR OUTCOME

It is always beneficial to spend a few moments after a lesson evaluating how it went, but your evaluation does not have to be a complicated process. Take three colored pencils – green, yellow and red, for example – and mark up your plan. What was good? Underline it in green. What was bad? Underline this in red. Is there anything that could be improved? Underline this in yellow and make a few notes.

This will not only help you the next time you go through the same material with a future class, it will help you plan upcoming lessons better for the class you have now!

DIFFERENT TEACHERS WILL WRITE DIFFERENT TYPES OF LESSON PLANS.

Some may choose to include curriculum objectives as required by their administrations, and others may conduct their lessons from a skeletal outline. No matter where you fall in the spectrum of written plans, as long as you walk through these six points for lesson planning, both you and your students will have a positive experience with the material you present in class.

5 Secrets of Writing Great Lesson Plans

WRITING A LESSON PLAN WILL ENSURE THAT YOU ARE PREPARED FOR YOUR CLASS AND WILL MAKE IT RUN MORE SMOOTHLY. IT IS IMPORTANT TO BREAK THE MATERIAL UP INTO SEVERAL SECTIONS AND CHOOSE ACTIVITIES SUITABLE FOR EACH. KNOWING APPROXIMATELY HOW MUCH TIME AN ACTIVITY WILL TAKE IS IMPORTANT, BUT AFTER THE FIRST LESSON YOU MAY NEED TO ADJUST THINGS ACCORDINGLY. IT IS BEST TO BE FLEXIBLE SEEING AS DIFFERENT CLASSES WILL RESPOND TO MATERIAL DIFFERENTLY.

If at any point students struggle, you will have to dedicate more time to instruction or drilling before moving on to practice activities. For the purposes of this example let's assume that an English class is forty-five minutes long.

HOW TO PROCEED

1 WARM UP

A warm up activity can be used in a number of ways. It can get your students thinking about material that will be used later on in the class, review material from a previous class, or simply get your students thinking in English, moving around, or awake. This activity should only take up a small portion of your lesson, perhaps five minutes.

2 INTRODUCTION

A good introduction will create a need for students to learn the material you are going to present and get them interested in the day's topic. This is the part of the lesson where the teacher does the most talking so try to get students involved and use choral repetition to keep students talking about half the time.

Depending on how complex the topic is or how much new vocabulary there is, the introduction could take some

time but in most cases, about ten minutes should be sufficient.

3 PRACTICE

The practice activity would normally be about ten minutes and have students working individually or in pairs. Practicing model dialogues, completing worksheets, and doing short activities would be appropriate. This may take about ten minutes including going over the answers or having some demonstrations.

4 PRODUCTION

In the production activity students should have to produce material on their own. Rather than reading sentences, perhaps they have to answer questions or make their own sentences. Longer activities such as board games, which can be played in groups, or activities for the whole class, where students work in teams, would be best. The remaining class time can be devoted to this activity.

5 REVIEW

It is a good idea to plan another five minute activity that can be done at the end of class as a review or used as the warm up in the following lesson. If the production activity does not take up the remaining portion of the class period, you have a backup plan.

IMPORTANT

When writing lesson plans, be sure to include what part of the textbook you are covering in the lesson, the target structure, new vocabulary, directions for all the activities you intend to use, and the approximate time each section of your lesson will take. The idea behind a lesson plan is that another teacher could pick it up and successfully teach your class without further instructions. If there is an activity where you plan to ask the students questions so that they use the past tense in their responses, write down the questions you plan to ask.

It is more difficult to think of appropriate questions on the spot and you are more likely to ask them a question using vocabulary they are unfamiliar with as well. If there is a group activity in the lesson, write down about how many students should be in each group because two to four students is a lot different than five to ten.

Writing out your lesson plan can also help you figure out what material you must prepare for a lesson because if your production activity will only take about ten minutes, then you are obviously going to need an additional activity to end the class with.

Not all lessons will be conducted the same. In some instances, the introduction of new material may take an entire lesson or the production activity may be an entire lesson. It is always good to have familiar activities to fall back on in case something doesn't work quite the way you had planned.

If students are playing the board game without actually speaking, in other words just moving their pieces around the board, they are not getting the necessary practice so you may have to either join the group having difficulties or change activities altogether.

AT ANY RATE, LESSON PLANS ARE ENORMOUSLY HELPFUL AND IF THE FOLLOWING YEAR YOU FIND YOURSELF TEACHING THE SAME MATERIAL, PREPARATION WILL BE A BREEZE.

Formula for Success: The Magic of the Five-Point Lesson Plan

Lesson planning should be an outlet for both inventive and pragmatic teaching solutions. Using the five point lesson plan takes the guess work out of planning, and leads you straight to that magic solution you have been looking for.

Try out the five point lesson planning system for continued success.

The five point lesson plan system provides teachers with a template for how to structure lessons and organize the very precious classroom time. The approximate timing for each point is based upon a ninety minute class.

WHAT IS THE FIVE POINT LESSON PLAN SYSTEM?

1 THE WARM-UP

The idea of a warm-up is not a new one, but this plan stresses what an important role it plays in each and every class. Every lesson should begin with a light-hearted activity with the purpose of getting students revved up for class, and might even get them up out of their chairs. The warm-up should be concise—limited to no more than ten minutes. It also should focus on the practice of anything the students have recently been exposed to, whether it be from the last lesson, or from a month ago. This technique helps ensure that previously studied material doesn't get left behind or forgotten. Introducing it in a fresh, energetic way will inspire students to participate and give them confidence. The last guideline for the warm-up is that it should be simple to introduce and easy to carry out. The warm-up is not the place to launch into a complicated game with a lot of directions. The point of the warm-up is to keep it light and airy and allow students to get moving with their bodies and more importantly, natural language skills.

2 INTRODUCTION

The introduction is the only part of the lesson that might be constituted as lecture. It consists of a short expla-

nation of either a new grammar point, or a review of the last grammar point that needs continuation. The introduction often includes some board work or handouts to provide the students with some reference materials. The introduction should also be fairly brief—no more than 15 minutes--because it is really the only time when the teacher is presenting material to students. With that said, it is important to present the information in a student-centered way wherein the students can ask questions, and comprehension checks play a role in the introduction before you move on to practice.

3 PRACTICE

The practice section gets the bulk of attention and time in your lesson. The practice is the follow-up to the introduction, so therefore should focus on practicing whatever was explained. It is a good idea to have two to three practice activities lined up, and to make sure that you account time for the set-up of activities. Practice should be thorough and last about 30 to 40 minutes. This is the creative section of your lesson plan, and should contain a lot of varied practice that focuses on incorporating the four language skills. Grammar doesn't do anyone any good until it can be used for practical application. Bring in real-world practice, and utilize games, technology, rounds, and any other method you can think of to keep students engaged and actively practicing language.

4 HOMEWORK CORRECTION ACTIVITY

Sometimes it is easy to overlook homework or hard to find time to correct it. If you make it a point to spend time reviewing homework in your plan, you will be more mindful when you give assignments. It is imperative that students do some kind of homework after every lesson. Even if it is something simple like writing three sentences or doing a quick page of fill in the blanks. It is important to give them something to take home to reflect upon the lesson

and draw out possible problem areas or questions. This fourth point is wonderful because it asks the teacher to look at homework correction creatively. Make it an experience. Turn it into a game, or assign points. However you choose to make it interactive, it has to be more than just reading out answers for check marks. This section shouldn't be more than 10-15 minutes and many times this section can be moved to point number two to jump start your review.

5 THE WRAP-UP

The wrap-up is the conclusion of the lesson. A few elements need to be covered at the end of the class, and by building it into your plan, you will never again be hollering a homework assignment to students as they are running out the door to the next class. The wrap up has a few elements in it, and should only be 5-10 minutes long. First, it should contain a homework assignment and explanation of that assignment. Within the explanation should be clear directions written on the board and reviewed verbally. Following that should be at least two examples done as a class. After that reiterate when it is due and what pages or sections will be covered. If you know that you are going to have students do something interactive with their homework, try to alert them ahead of time so that they come to class prepared. There is nothing worse than half of the class blowing off the homework, so the brilliant activity you designed to cover it, falls flat. The wrap-up should give students one last element to walk away with. Whether it is going back to your first example or asking them to consider a question about grammar, end on a high note.

THE FIVE-POINT LESSON PLAN CAN HELP YOU ORGANIZE YOUR IDEAS, SAVE YOU TIME, AND CREATE A RHYTHM TO YOUR LESSONS THAT IS SEAMLESS.

Try this formula and you will discover solutions to your biggest lesson planning setbacks!

Organize & Mobilize: 3 Ingenious Ways to Plan Productive Lessons

LESSON PLANNING CAN SOMETIMES BE A SOURCE OF STRESS AND INSECURITY AMONG TEACHERS OF ALL STAGES, BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A STRUGGLE.

The following tips will give you an opportunity to look at planning in a new light. Organize yourself and mobilize your students by trying out the following 3 ways to create productive lessons.

HOW TO PLAN PRODUCTIVE LESSONS

1 ORGANIZE LESSONS BY THEMES OR GRAMMAR POINTS

Timing, repetition and practice all play fundamental roles in structuring interesting, well-timed lessons, as does zeroing in on themes or specific grammar points. One way to combine all of these elements while also doubling productivity is to organize lessons with a theme or grammar point. The point or theme should be a timely one that is central to what students really need to work on.

There are two roads you could go down here. One option is to inform students and engage them by getting them excited about a particular theme or grammar point. It could be fueled by an event or holiday that is coming up like the Presidential Inauguration or the Fourth of July. If this is the case, you should include the history of the event or holiday, and arrange a celebration or other memorable way to commemorate the event. In addition, lessons focusing on a particular grammar point can take center stage to prepare students for a project or assignment. It is a great way to involve students in choosing the point to focus on for a day, and have it culminate in one bigger activity later, like a debate or preparation for a significant outcome.

The second way that you could plan a lesson by theme or grammar point, is to do so without the students knowledge. For example, you may notice that students are struggling with pronouns in general. To approach the problem, you decide that every section of your lesson is going to somehow practice pro-

nouns. This is a very productive way to incorporate grammar practice on one over-arching topic while working on other topics or themes at the same time. An example of doing this might be possessive pronouns. In each section of your lesson, you would include different types of practice for possessive pronouns. You could start out with classroom language and possessives, then move into adjectives practice with possessives, and lastly introduce your new point and somehow practice it, also using possessives.

Whichever way you choose, formulating lesson plans with one theme or grammar point can be incredibly stimulating for students and a nice change of pace for everyone. There are innumerable ways that you could adapt lessons in this way.

2 TAKE NOTES AND INVENT NEW WAYS TO PRACTICE GRAMMAR

Often after months or years of lesson planning, the spark can go out of the process. Planning can become mundane and can often lead teachers to recycling plans over and over again adding little new content. To prevent this stagnation, try incorporating one new activity per week and carrying that into multiple classes, if appropriate. When you try out a new activity, game, or practice it can be useful to try it out in different groups and ranging levels, and note the results.

In order to develop new ideas, it is important to be present in your current lessons. Making it a habit to take notes during class is a wonderful way to document how your new and old ideas are taking shape. You can note how particular activities are going, what difficulties students are facing, and anything else that might be useful for future lessons. While facilitating activities ideas may strike you on how to tweak it to make it better or a new idea might materialize. Be sure to jot down ideas during lessons, and incorporate changes and new ideas to your lesson plans!

3 INCLUDE THE FOUR SKILLS

While teaching ESL, it is es-

sential to focus upon the four skills of language acquisition. The four skills are speaking, listening, reading and writing. It may become easy to put speaking and listening ahead of reading and writing, but it is crucial for the ESL learner to receive practice in each of the four areas each and every class. When sitting down to create lessons or review lessons you have already prepared, make sure that lessons include reading, writing, speaking and listening practice. This doesn't mean that every lesson must contain long, drawn-out activities in each area, but yet in practicing language, the four skills should be mixed together to create a natural cohesion. An example of this is taking one point, for example, family and designing activities that practice the four skills around that topic. You might start off with a verbal definition of family participants, followed by pronunciation and spelling practice of each of the roles. Then you could perform a board activity where students have to read and recognize each of the roles (brother, sister, aunt, etc) maybe by introducing a family tree. Then to wrap up the lesson, students create and write out their own family trees. In this lesson, there is one theme which incorporates practice of all four language skills.

In thinking about the four skills that create language, some lessons can be created that focus on two intertwining skills. The usual combinations are reading and writing or speaking and listening. Think about shifting those combinations for endless possibilities. You could combine listening and writing, speaking and reading, or speaking and writing. Challenge yourself to come up with interesting and unusual combinations!

LESSON PLANNING CAN BECOME A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND A WAY TO PRODUCE FRESH IDEAS.

It is important to always pay attention to what students need and desire out of your class and tailor lessons to those individual needs. Planning can incorporate your personality combined with ingenious ideas to reach students and keep them advancing their language skills.

The Year at a Glance: Lesson Planning Now for a Smooth Year Later

For some, thinking about a year's worth of lesson planning can seem overwhelming. When you do not know what you will cook for dinner tomorrow, planning what you will teach eight and a half months into the school year may seem comical.

Those who plan their entire school year before it even starts, though, will have a better grasp on the pace of the year. Not only that, more organized teachers have more organized students, and organization can make a big difference when it comes to academic progress. You do not have to be intimidated if you have never planned an entire year at once: it is easier than you think. Just take these steps one at a time and you will be ready for graduation before the first day of school rolls around!

HOW TO PLAN YOUR LESSONS IN ADVANCE

1 NOTE YOUR MATERIAL

What material do you actually have to cover in your class? Depending on where and who you teach, your administration may answer this question for you. If you have more freedom in your classes, you should stop a moment to take stock of what you want to cover by the end of the semester or school year. By taking a bird's eye overview of your material, you will already have the end of the academic year in sight before you even start.

2 NOTE YOUR TIME

How much time do you have before the end of school? The number of months, weeks or days you have to cover your material will determine how quickly you need to go through it. Start by getting out your calendar and measure your year in months, weeks, or another unit if that suits you better, and determine just how much time you have to cover what you noted in step one.

3 NOTE LOGICAL DIVISIONS

Going back to your material, look for logical breaks in the list of what you plan to teach. These breaks may be chapters, units, themes or level of difficulty. For example, if you were teaching grammar, you might divide your material

into simple tenses, progressive tenses, perfect tenses and perfect progressive tenses. If you are teaching more than one subject to the same group of students, try taking one subject at a time rather than looking for continuity across the curriculum.

4 PLUG IN YOUR CONTENT

Now is when you start to put your material on the calendar. Start penciling in units or logical groupings for each subject into each month or week. You do not have to go into minute detail at this point. You are just getting a rough idea of what material will fall on what page of the calendar. As you do this, also write in special scheduling items like holidays, standardized testing and special parties and events. You can feel free to use ink for these entries.

5 PENCIL IN EXAMS

Now that you have an idea of the weeks and months certain units fall into, pencil in a day for assessment at the end of the content block. Right before each of those days, pencil in a review period. These review days are important first for getting your students ready for their assessments but also for building in time to catch up in case your lessons get slightly off schedule. Along with your tests, mark when you want students to turn in big assignments or projects. Make sure you are not expecting more than one big project from your student on any given day. This will keep their stress levels low and your grading pile small. You might also want to anticipate other out of the ordinary events like field trips or holiday parties. Even if you are not exactly sure when they will happen, you should still allot time for them on your calendar. You can always shift things around later, but it is far more difficult to make time for them out of nothing once you are in a teaching crunch.

6 DO SIMPLE DIVISION

Your calendar is starting to fill in but you still have your lessons to mark. Simply count up the number of days that are still open on your calendar and divide your material equally among those days, month by month or chunk by chunk. This

will be your ideal schedule. If you can keep to this plan, you will have plenty of time to present your material to your students and still have days for fun. Plus, all your official days are already scheduled, so you will not be taken off guard when it is time for testing or other events.

7 GET SPECIFIC

Most of your yearlong plan is now complete. You will still need to create specific lesson plans for each day, if you are not revamping and revising a plan you used last year, but that is one of the fun parts of teaching. Let your creativity shine here, and take a moment to be sure you are teaching to all the learning styles. Also, do not feel pressured to have your entire detailed lesson plans complete and articulated at this point. You can take one day at a time, one week at a time, or several pages on the calendar at a time as you do your detailed plans. Different teachers will have different preferences. What is most important is that you know what lessons will happen on what days. As long as you do not procrastinate in planning as you go, you should have stress free preparation for classes.

8 GLIDE THROUGH

No one ever said teaching was easy, and even if they did, they would have been lying. You will not have a year without work and planning, making adjustments and having your flexibility challenged. What you will have is a year that is coherent, smooth and articulated, even if it is only in your own mind. Your students will note the difference in your teaching and classroom management when you have all your plans in place, even if they do not know what it is they are noticing. They will be less stressed, and so will you!

IF YOU ARE A TOP DOWN PROCESSOR, PLANNING AN ENTIRE YEAR AT THE START OF SCHOOL MAY COME NATURALLY, BUT EVEN IF YOU ARE NATURALLY BOTTOM UP, YOU CAN DO IT.

When you do, you may just find that planning the entire year at a glance is your new favorite way to get ready for the start of school each fall.

Reuse and Recycle: Strategies for Reusing Lesson Plans

ONE BATTLE ALL TEACHERS FACE IS TIME MANAGEMENT. LET'S FACE IT: THERE IS A LOT TO DO IN A DAY — FROM LESSON PLANNING TO STUDENT MANAGEMENT TO PAPERWORK AND FOLLOW-UPS.

In addition to that teachers need to keep lessons fresh, exciting and innovative. Use these tips to reuse and recycle your lesson plans and you won't be drowning in unnecessary prep work.

HOW TO: REUSING LESSON PLANS

1 REWORK IT

Sometimes we teachers can get into a rut with our activities and we don't realize that things might be getting a little bit stale. It is easy to get into habits and when something works it makes it that much easier to stay the course. One way to liven up lesson plans is to occasionally rework how you are setting them up and shift things around. Simple things like changing the order of when you do things can make a difference. If you always find that you are running low on time in certain areas of your lesson plans, this may be another reason to change things up. Try altering your plans so that students don't always know exactly what to expect.

Continuity is a good thing, but so is variety. Some examples are: do a mingling activity right at the beginning of class, have some music playing when they enter the room and create a backwards day where everything they do is the opposite of normal, or call it a review day and students dictate what topics the class covers and when. Another way to rework your plans is to find different ways to review homework that can be used to energize the class. Formulate hands-on activities based on the homework instead of just going through it and correcting it.

You can also look at what you are assigning them for homework and see if

there are more in-depth activities you could do based on what they have done at home. Incorporating short presentations or speeches is another way to gain some variety and break routines. Project-oriented work gives students renewed goals to work toward, and it will give you an opportunity to try some new ideas.

2 ADAPT FOR DIFFERENT CLASSES

One of the best lessons you can learn as a teacher is simple. You can do the same activity in all of your classes. The trick is to adapt it based on a few key elements.

Take the activity that you used for one class to practice one tense or grammar point and find a way to tweak it and use it for another grammar point in another class. Many activities don't simply depend on the grammar point itself, so you can take the idea and apply it to other topics. Another way to change-up an activity is to just make it simpler or more difficult based on their level.

All students need to practice past tense, so if you have a great activity for beginners take the same activity and add an element of difficulty to it for your more advanced students. You can do this for many of your activities, and you will find that making slight changes creates a more effective activity for the next time you plan to use it.

3 GO ONLINE

There are obviously numerous websites out there to help you with ideas for lesson planning. If you often go to the same sites for activities, you might be limiting yourself. Broaden your search and find some new websites to find inspiration. Try finding a few websites that offer different types of worksheets, activity ideas and online resources.

Many websites also get wonderful contributions from teachers of things they have created and have decided to share with other teachers. Complex board games, card cut-outs that can be laminated and printable quizzes and worksheets are all good options to be on the lookout for.

4 EXAMINE NEW THEMES

Often teachers get accustomed to supplementing a grammar lesson with particular themes or topics. Some of them are very difficult to alter like, for example giving directions to practice prepositions. It's a very common theme, so why not examine another way in which students could use that same grammar point. Changing the theme from giving directions to moving house would be enough to freshen up an old lesson plan.

Look at ways you can incorporate topics that integrate current events, pop culture or socially-relevant material. Provide variety in your lesson plans by devising new ways in which students can practice an old grammar point.

REUSING AND RECYCLING LESSON PLANS IS A SKILL THAT WILL SERVE YOU WELL THROUGHOUT YOUR TEACHING CAREER.

In looking at ways to alter and change routines, you will find yourself becoming more flexible and open to trying new things.

Don't forget to take risks, keep notes on the success of activities, and have the students evaluate your plans and activities.

Mind the Gap! 10 Fun Fill in the Blanks Activities for Any ESL Class

A GAP-FILLING EXERCISE IS PROBABLY THE QUINTESSENTIAL ESL ACTIVITY.

They're easy for teacher's to create, easy for students to complete, and may be designed for any vocabulary list or verb tense. Since they're so common in the ESL class, why not give them a new, fun twist? Here are some ideas for blanks your students will enjoy filling.

TRY THESE 10 FUN FILL IN THE BLANKS ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR NEXT ESL CLASS

1 ILLUSTRATED BLANKS

This exercise imitates the style of storybooks that have gaps in the story filled with pictures. This is probably the best type of gap-filling activity with very young learners, especially those who can't read or write just yet. Copy a short story onto a Word document. Delete some of the key vocabulary and paste some small pictures into the gaps to represent the word you deleted. You'll have to fiddle with the formatting, the size of the images and spacing of the Word document, but it's not that hard to do.

If your students can read, they read the story and fill the blanks with the help of the illustrations. If they can't read, you do the reading and pause to allow them to look at the picture and fill in the blanks.

2 DRAWING A BLANK

This is a variation of the activity mentioned above. Give each of your young learners a copy of the same story with the blanks in the text. Make sure that the blanks are big enough, i.e. that there is enough space for students to fill the gaps with their own drawings. Check answers by having students take turns reading the story out loud.

3 A GAP IN MY MEMORY

This is another way to practice key vocabulary. Write some sentences

on the board and ask students to read them out loud. Then proceed to erase the key vocabulary. Ask students questions to fill in the blanks: Sarah wants to buy a _____. What does Sarah want to buy?

4 MUSICAL BLANKS

This is a classic and one that many of you have probably already tried, but it can't be left out of a list of great gap-filling exercises. Play a song for your students to listen to and provide the lyrics with blanks they must fill. You can handle the exercise in a number of ways. You can play the song and then give them lyrics to complete, or you can play the song while they fill the gaps at the same time.

5 VIDEO BLANKS

This is exactly like the Musical Blanks only in this case you use a short video: a scene from a sitcom, a YouTube video, or a CNN news video for more advanced learners. You'll probably have to create the script yourself in most cases, but BusyTeacher.org has plenty of scripted videos you can use!

6 FAMOUS COUPLES

A great way to teach vocabulary is to introduce it through very common pairings, for example: apples and bananas, bacon and eggs, black and white, mom and dad, burger and fries, etc. Create a set of cards in which only one of the words appears: ____ and fries, burger and _____. Ask students to pick up a card and fill in the blank.

7 OH, SNAP!

This game is similar to the game of Snap (www.ehow.com/how_2051010_play-snap.html)! Write sentences with gaps on small cards to create your deck of cards. Make sure that you include sentences with blanks that may be filled with the same word, for example: "_____ are red" and "I like to eat _____ and bananas". Both can be filled with the word "apples". Students take turns turning over cards and

shout "Snap!" when the blanks on the cards may be filled with the same word.

8 MEMORY GAME WITH BLANKS

This is another game you can play with the same cards you use for Snap! In this case place all of the cards face down. Students take turns flipping them over, two at a time. The goal is to find two cards with blanks that may be filled with the same word.

9 FILL THE BLANK AS A TEAM

Divide students into two teams. Give one student a card with a sentence that has a blank. The student must figure out which word goes in the blank and then give the team clues as to what the word is.

Say you're teaching a lesson that includes sports vocabulary. Sentence: David Beckham plays _____. The student has to provide clues about the sport without reading the sentence or mentioning the player's name: It's something you play with a ball. You play it in a field. Each team has 11 players, etc.

10 FILL IN WITH PHONEMICS

Fill in the blanks AND practice pronunciation at the same time. For this type of activity you can either put a phonemic symbol for each blank, or a word that includes the same phoneme. Example: "I asked my mother to _(lie)_ me a new book bag". Answer: buy

GET CREATIVE! DON'T GIVE YOUR STUDENTS THE SAME OLD BLANKS TO FILL.

Make them a little more challenging, make them different!

Don't Do It: 10 Things Never to Do in the Classroom

Teachers are the head of a classroom, and with that responsibility comes a certain amount of authority. Remember that all teachers have bad days and make mistakes. This list of 10 things never to do in the classroom is to help you avoid those missteps and get you back on track if you slip.

10 THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO IN THE CLASSROOM

1 LOSE YOUR TEMPER

Losing your temper in any classroom can be disastrous. This especially applies in Asia where showing strong negative emotion is one of the worst things you can do. All teachers have bad days, get irritated with students, and struggle to maintain composure at one time or another. You really do not want to lose your temper so that you end up shouting, yelling, or crying. If you feel yourself getting angry it might be a good idea to step out of the room or remove yourself from the situation and count to one thousand.

2 LOSE CONTROL

One thing you will never gain back if you lose it is control. Don't let the students in any class walk all over you, take control of your lesson, or get unruly in any way. Sometimes student might become overly-excited or obnoxiously loud during an activity, and you need to be able to bring them back down. Students need to respect you, and if you are too passive and don't have boundaries you are bound to lose control at some point. One great strategy that works with both kids and adults is to create a signal that when they see it, they know they are expected to do the same thing, and get quiet. Some popular options are: raising your hand, clapping if it isn't too noisy already, or waving. It is a domino effect when you reach a few students, the rest will follow and you will regain control.

3 GO CRAZY WITH HANDOUTS

Too much paper is just not a good idea. Temper handouts with activities that involve students and don't just keep them sitting idly by doing boring rote work and

trying to weed through your ten-page grammar explanation. Use the board, interact with students and never rely on paper to do your job!

4 EAT LUNCH

You'd be surprised how many teachers bring their lunch into the classroom! This is just not appropriate with any level or any age. Drinking a morning cup of coffee or bringing in donuts or snacks for the group is one thing, but don't eat your afternoon meal while class is in session.

5 GET OVERLY INVOLVED

Depending on your circumstances, it can become pretty easy to become overly emotionally involved with your students. Because you are teaching a language, you may learn a lot about students during the class, and you may even need to extend some help to them outside of the classroom. Be careful to have boundaries for yourself and don't get too caught up in students' problems. Also be wary of creating personal relationships outside of the class. This can easily happen when teaching adults, just be sure it doesn't interfere with the classroom dynamic.

6 MAKE FUN OF STUDENTS

It may seem obvious that you shouldn't ever mock or make fun of students, but sometimes what seems to be a harmless joke or comment can wound a student's confidence and self-esteem. It is a great talent to be able to use humor in the classroom and also show students how to laugh at themselves. Just be careful that your jokes or sarcasm aren't aimed at particular students in a personally harmful way.

7 SIT DOWN

Sitting down through an entire class is just not appropriate. In Asia, for example, the teacher is expected to stand or walk around throughout the whole classroom period. Sitting down for too long delivers a message of laziness, unless you are injured or ill. When in the classroom it is a time to interact, to circulate and to lead the students. You also don't

want your students always sitting down and not moving around. Give them the opportunity to mingle around, stand at the board, or do group work away from their chairs.

8 BE LATE

Being late is a big problem in many countries and for many nationalities of students. It is very important to model the behavior you want from students. Being late very occasionally or sometimes coming in a few moments late is not a problem. It's when you are chronically late that you show the students it is acceptable for them to be late as well. Be as punctual as you possibly can, and when you are late be sure to apologize to students.

9 ONLY FOLLOW THE BOOK

Sometimes teachers fall into the trap of teaching everything directly from the textbook. This is not only boring and tedious, - it is doing your students a disservice. Because they are learning a language, students need a lot of opportunities to practice and to experiment with their new skills. If you only focus on what the book dictates, the students will miss a lot.

A textbook is a guide and can provide ideas about the order of topics and the structure to follow. Be sure that you are connecting your activities to the book, but not solely doing everything from that one source.

10 PLAY FAVORITES

All students in the class need to get your attention and your direction. It is okay to have your favorite students as long as you don't give them concessions that you don't provide to anyone else. It is only natural to hit it off with certain students, just be sure that you are fair to all the students in your class and give everyone adequate consideration and praise.

WE'VE PROBABLY ALL MET TEACHERS THAT HAVE DONE AT LEAST ONE OF THE ITEMS ON THIS LIST.

Look at your own style and be confident that you won't ever perform any of the ten things on this list.

Avoid a Deer-in-the-Headlights-Stare: With Simple Instructions

WE'VE ALL EXPERIENCED THE ALL-TOO-FAMILIAR BLANK STARE RIGHT AFTER GIVING WHAT YOU THOUGHT WERE AMAZINGLY CLEAR AND CONCISE DIRECTIONS.

The blankness is then followed by whispers, confused looks and lots of questions. I've developed some targeted methods to dodge that deer-in-the-headlights stare, and to ensure that students will not confuse themselves or others during an activity. Follow these steps, and you'll be an expert at giving simple instructions that truly payoff.

TIPS TO SIMPLIFYING INSTRUCTIONS

1 USE SIMPLE LANGUAGE AND KEEP IT BRIEF

The number one key to giving simple instructions is to keep your language simplified at all times. Think ahead of time how you are going to explain it, and make the assumption that the activity is completely new to the entire class.

Explain things with short sentences, easy words, and uncomplicated grammar. It takes some getting used to cutting out extra language and to say only what you need to say.

2 USE THE BOARD OR PROVIDE A VISUAL

Utilizing the board to get your point across can greatly take the pressure off your verbal instructions. If it is a game, you can show them how you are going to organize teams and keep score on the board. If they will be using the board to play the game, lay it out in front of them as you explain. Tic Tac Toe is a great example.

As you explain, you can draw the diagram and explain that one team is X and the other team is O. One person takes a turn and answers my ques-

tion. If it is the X team's turn, one person answers correctly, then the team can put an X in one of the nine boxes. This would be quite difficult to explain only using language. For more complex activities, a handout that they can refer to during the activity is a great tool. Showing it on the board or providing a handout with explicit step-by-step instructions will make your job a lot easier!

3 MODEL THE EXERCISE: GIVE EXAMPLES

Never begin a game or an activity without first going through a few examples! You can use your sharpest students as your helpers to go through your instructions and your expectations. Then model the game or activity. Show them exactly how it will go in the beginning, the middle and the end. For games, you'll want to stress what the goal is and how to win the game. Be sure to include two to three concrete examples in your modeling.

4 REPEAT YOURSELF

It always helps to be repetitive so that you can be sure you didn't leave anything out. Go through the directions a second time especially if you can see that students aren't 100% sure about what they are supposed to do. You can also just repeat the model, using a different example.

5 DO COMPREHENSION CHECKS

Don't assume that all the students understand! Check to make sure and this will save you time and agony later. A few ways to do this is to question random students about the activity or game. For example, "John, how many X's do I have to get in a row to win the game?" or "Jane, do I get to put an O in my square if I get the answer wrong?"

It may seem simple, but checking to make sure comprehension is there may prevent you from having to inter-

rupt the game to explain again.

Another tip is to focus some of the comprehension checks on students that chronically have problems following or understanding instructions. It is a pretty sure bet that if one of the weaker students is with you, the rest of the class is on the same page.

6 ANSWER QUESTION BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Don't forget to answer their questions before they jump into the activity. This is especially important when they will be working in groups or pairs. Give the students a chance to look through any handouts and see if that sparks any additional questions.

WHEN GIVING INSTRUCTIONS TO ANY ESL CLASS, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO BECOME AN EXPERT AT GIVING GOOD, CLEAR, CONCISE ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS.

Your students will appreciate it and it will save you a lot of grief. Don't forget to use humor, be as animated as possible, and remember, there are no stupid questions!

7 Things Your Quiet ESL Students Are Not Telling You

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

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

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

IMPORTANT THINGS YOUR STUDENTS ARE NOT TELLING YOU:

1 I'M HEARING TOO MANY NEW WORDS.

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

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

Some students are overwhelmed by an exercise or task, and would feel much more comfortable working with another student. Don't underestimate the value of pair work or team work.

Lots of students enjoy it and thrive in this type of task. Of course, not all tasks should be completed in pairs or teams. But they shouldn't have to do everything on their own, either.

3 PLEASE DON'T PUT ME ON THE SPOT.

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

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

You've probably seen this happen. A student says he/she does not understand something, and you explain. The student still does not understand, so you re-phrase and try again. The student still does not understand. Under no circumstances must we lose our patience.

You try by all means possible to help the student grasp whatever it is he or she is having trouble grasping, and if they still don't, you set a moment to talk about it, perhaps after class.

5 I NEED SOME TIME TO THINK BEFORE I ANSWER.

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

Give them a few extra seconds, and then perhaps a clue or a nudge to steer them in the right direction.

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

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

7 I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOUR HANDWRITING.

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

LET'S BEAR IN MIND THAT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES MAY COME INTO PLAY. IN SOME CULTURES STUDENTS ARE TAUGHT TO RESPECT THEIR TEACHER, AND THEY DON'T WANT TO OFFEND. IN OTHERS, IT IS NOT ACCUSTOMED FOR STUDENTS TO MAKE EYE CONTACT WITH THEIR INSTRUCTOR.

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

7 Most Common ESL Problems and How to Solve Them

AS FAR AS YOUR ESL CLASS IS CONCERNED, YOU COULD FACE A MULTITUDE OF PROBLEMS – OR NONE AT ALL.

A typical ESL class, anywhere in the world, has its own set of typical problems and challenges. Is there any way to avoid them? Not likely. Is there any way to prepare for them? Absolutely! And here are the 7 most typical problems you'll face as an ESL teacher, each one followed by some ways to deal with them.

7 MOST COMMON ESL PROBLEMS AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM

1 STUDENTS SPEAK MORE OF THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE THAN ENGLISH

The lower the students' level or ages, the more probable it is that they will speak their native language most of the time. Some will even chat in pairs or small groups, completely oblivious to what is going on in class. **SOLUTION:**

Now, each ESL class is different, and they all have different goals, but no matter what their age or level, students must understand that they must at the very least try to speak as much English as they can, even if it is for simple greetings, requests or statements. For younger students, turn it into a game. Create a chart with the students' names and give those who did not speak their native language throughout the class a star. Or create a point penalty system. Once a student reaches a certain number of points, they must do something in front of the class, like tell a story or answer questions from classmates. These might not work for older students. But they will certainly try to communicate in English if you pretend you don't speak their native language.

2 STUDENTS TAKE CONTROL OF THE LESSON

You've probably seen this happen. A student comes into class all excited about something that's happened and dying to tell everyone. They get everyone else excited about the topic and before you know it you have a group of students who've completely taken over. Another common situation, particularly with youngsters, is when they propose all

sorts of changes and/or improvements to an activity you've set out for them.

SOLUTION:

Take control back. In the first case, firmly, yet kindly, let your students know that you have to get the lesson underway. Tell them that if they finish their work, they can have a few minutes at the end of the class to talk about whatever has them so excited. In the second case, firmly tell them that you have already planned the lesson/activity, but that you will certainly include their ideas next time. Don't forget to thank them for sharing or providing feedback!

3 ONE STUDENT DOMINATES THE LESSON

This is the type of student I like to call the "eager beaver": they always raise their hands first or just blurt out the answer with absolutely no regard for the other students in the class. They are often competitive and like to win. **SOLUTION:**

Never call out an eager beaver in front of the class. This enthusiasm should not be squashed, - it should simply be channeled in the right direction. Say, "I know you know the answer, Juan, but I'd love to hear from someone else". Also try this: let the eager student be your helper for the day. Tell him/her the job is to help classmates find the right answers or help those who are having trouble completing an exercise.

4 STUDENTS ARE TOO DEPENDENT

The other side of the coin is when you have students who constantly seek your help. They may ask you to help them complete an exercise or just blurt out they can't/don't know how to do something on their own. **SOLUTION:**

It's very important to empower students and help them feel that they can indeed do it. Say you give them an exercise in which they have to decide which article to use, "a" or "an". Look at the first item "apple" and ask your student, "Is it a apple or an apple? What sounds right to you?" Once they give you the correct answer, tell them to try the next one. And the next one. "See you CAN do it! Good job!" Sometimes students feel

overwhelmed by the blanks, and all they need is a little nudge.

5 STUDENTS ARE BORED OR UNMOTIVATED

Students eyes are glazed over, and you blame the boring coursebook or the Future Perfect. **SOLUTION:**

It's a hard truth, but the reason your students are bored is YOU. It is your responsibility to engage students and keep the lesson interesting – no matter what you are teaching. Teaching the Future Continuous tense? There are ways to make the topic more engaging. Talking about business? There are ways to make the topic more fun.

6 STUDENTS ARRIVE LATE OR DISRUPT THE CLASS

A cell phone rings, while a latecomer joins the class. You barely say two words and another student shows up. And the interruptions go on and are worse in larger groups. **SOLUTION:**

Set the classroom rules from the start. Ask students to turn off cell phones and other technological devices at the start of class. Give your students a five to ten-minute grace period for arriving, but tell them they won't be able to join the class after that.

7 STUDENTS DON'T DO HOMEWORK

Some students never do homework or any work outside the classroom. This is often the case with adults who say they never have time. **SOLUTION:**

Young learners and teens have no choice. They must do their homework and if they don't, simply notify the parents that the student is not completing tasks to satisfaction. As for adults, give them options. Tell them to do at least one five-minute exercise a day (or a week). Ask them how much they can commit to. Be clear in communicating that that may fall behind and not meet their language learning goals.

DON'T LEAVE ANYTHING TO CHANCE. HAVE A PLAN AND STICK TO IT. HAVE RULES AND STICK TO THEM. FOR IF YOU DON'T, YOU'RE LEAVING YOURSELF WIDE OPEN TO TROUBLE.

7 Techniques that Will Increase Student Talking Time

Lots of ESL teachers complain that students don't talk enough. They're too quiet. They just sit there and don't say anything. There are several reasons why students are quiet, but guess what? One of them is you!

Don't take this the wrong way. You do a splendid job. But the more you speak, the less they speak. And you don't want your students to come to class simply to listen to you, right? So here are 7 techniques that will help you speak less and increase student talking time like you never imagined you could.

TRY THESE 7 TECHNIQUES TO INCREASE STUDENT TALKING TIME

1 GIVE THEM TIME TO ANSWER

Is it realistic to expect every student to reply promptly and accurately? Of course not. Some students may be able to fire off a rapid response, but this is not always the case. Some students need time to understand and process what you've said/asked. Then, they need time to come up with the right response. So if you want to speak less and get them to speak more, you'll have to give them those precious seconds they need. If it's hard for you to wait, count. Five seconds. Or more if you can. It may be hard at first for you and the other students to take those few seconds of silence, but it'll be worth it.

2 DON'T ANSWER EVERY SINGLE QUESTION YOURSELF

Have you ever stopped to think that when one student asks you a question, another student may know the answer? Try this technique:

S1: Why is this answer wrong?

T: Mmmm... (looks around the classroom or even directly at another student)

S2: Because "beautiful" is a long adjective and so the comparative is "more beautiful".

And isn't it beautiful when your students can help each other, and you don't have

to say a single word?

3 USE PAIR OR GROUPWORK

Quite often we act out role plays with another student. But if you get students into pairs for the role plays and simply walk around to assist, you will speak less, and they will speak more. The same goes for groupwork, whether you have them do a writing task, like write a story together, or a speaking task, like a discussion.

4 HAVE THEM READ/EXPLAIN INSTRUCTIONS

If the instructions are in the coursebook or the worksheet, why must you read them out loud and explain them to the class? If they are pretty straightforward, have a student read them to the class and another explain/rephrase if someone hasn't understood.

This is also a great way to keep eager beavers happy: they get to explain something that is very clear to them, and those who need a little extra help still get the assistance they need.

5 ASK OPEN-ENDED INSTEAD OF YES/NO QUESTIONS

If you ask students yes/no questions, that's basically what you'll get – a yes or a no (and the occasional "maybe"). The more questions you ask with where, why, how often, when, etc. the more they'll have to speak. But just don't stop at one question:

T: What kind of music do you listen to?

S1: I listen to rock music.

T: Why?

S1: Because I like it.

T: Where do you listen to it?

S1: I listen to it everywhere: at home, on the bus, on my way to school...

T: (asks S2) How about you, Tommy?

And Tommy should have a pretty good idea of what he can say about his music preferences.

6 SAY ONLY WHAT IS NECESSARY

Don't echo back what students say. Don't blabber on and on about your weekend. Don't fill the silence with useless chatter. Of course, you can have relaxed conversations with students, but save those for either the very beginning or the end of class, or what's even better, the break. During class time, try to focus your efforts on getting them to speak.

7 DON'T TELL, ELICIT

When we tell students the answer, they passively receive it. They ask, "What's this?", and you say, "It's a stapler". It's too easy for everyone, including you. If students don't remember a word, for example, try to elicit it from them and feel free to give them clues.

S1: What's this?

T: Oh! You mean this device we use to staple papers together? What's this called?

S1: It's a stapler.

Much too often we tell: Remember when we talked about the different types of weather? We have cloudy, sunny, etc. Don't tell them what they are if you've already seen it in class! Get them to say it!

ACHIEVING THE RIGHT BALANCE

A special mention must be made regarding how much a student is expected to speak. I subscribe to the theory that in the case of beginners, the ratio of TTT vs. STT should be 50-50, and this percentage should progressively change till you achieve a 30% TTT vs. 70% STT. In very advanced learners, it could even reach a 10-90. You need to figure out what works for each class, but in most cases you should not be talking more than your students.

The one, simple way to get students to speak more is for us to resist the urge to speak. Why don't teachers shut up? Sometimes it's because we feel uncomfortable in the silence. Sometimes it's because we quite simply like to talk, and we enjoy the chatter. But leave the chatter for the teacher's room.

10 Valid Reasons to Skip an Exercise in Your Coursebook

WHAT WOULD ESL TEACHERS DO WITHOUT THE COURSEBOOK? IT'S OUR VERY OWN GPS FOR GUIDING OUR STUDENTS TOWARDS THE ESL FLUENCY THEY SO DESIRE. OR IS IT?

Could it possibly show us the wrong turn or lead us straight into a dead end?

While things may not be that dramatic with our trusty ol' coursebook, it is true that coursebooks are not perfect: we may, on occasion, have to ignore what it says and choose to take another route instead. If you're unsure about when it's OK to skip exercises from your coursebook, here are some valid reasons to just go ahead and take that detour.

10 REASONS TO SKIP AN EXERCISE (OR TWO) IN YOUR ESL COURSEBOOK

1 IT'S TOO EASY

Coursebooks are written to suit a range of students who fall into a particular level (beginner, intermediate, etc.) But we may sometimes find that a particular exercise is not challenging enough for your group of students.

If it's an exercise that lists verbs and requires students to write the verb in Simple Past, by all means skip it and replace it with something that is a bit more productive. For example, have students ask each other questions in the past with "did", which would then require them to answer by using the verb correctly in its past form. This way, students practice longer more complete answers and use the verbs in context.

2 IT'S TOO HARD

By the same token, there may be an exercise that is simply too difficult and may eventually lead them to lose confidence. You may choose to give them a simpler version of this

complicated time-waster.

3 IT HAS COMPLICATED INSTRUCTIONS

Some exercises provide directions that are not at all clear – sometimes even you don't get it! It may require a complex series of steps or use words students don't understand. There is no reason to subject them to something that will only end up frustrating them. Nor is it reasonable for you to waste time trying to figure it out. If the goal is to practice modal verbs, just give them an acceptable equivalent to practice exactly that.

4 IT'S PLAGUED WITH MISTAKES

Guess what? Coursebook writers are human! They make mistakes, too. If you find an exercise that has several mistakes, inconsistencies or inaccurately explains a grammar point, don't use it.

5 IT'S TOO REPETITIVE

One of the best ways to keep students engaged is to give them variety. If they've already done a particular type of exercise, for example a True or False, this week, why not change it for another type like a Multiple Choice exercise? Or just skip the T/F and ask them your own questions to check for comprehension.

6 IT'S NOT PART OF THE COURSE SYLLABUS

Sometimes you come across a grammar point you're not supposed to teach for that level, or perhaps you'll be teaching it later. If it's not in your syllabus for that course, skip it.

7 IT'S BETTER SUITED FOR HOMEWORK

Some exercises are too long and require students to work quietly for an extended period of time. If you'd rather do something that's a bit more

fun and engaging, simply assign it for homework.

8 STUDENTS HATE IT!

This is one of the advantages of having previously used a coursebook with another class – you know what works and what doesn't. Skip exercises you know students did not like or were bored doing. This goes especially for speaking tasks or discussion points that usually fail to get the conversation going.

9 YOU'RE OUT OF TIME!

If you're running out of time and still have one last exercise to finish the unit, replace it with a 5-minute cool down.

10 IT'S OUTDATED

Sometimes coursebooks include facts or information that is seriously outdated. This is particularly the case when it comes to technology. Replace the reading or exercise with another that includes more recent, updated information.

THE COURSEBOOK IS THE BACKBONE OF YOUR COURSE; IT LENDS SUPPORT AND STRUCTURE TO YOUR CLASSES, AND HELPS STUDENTS MONITOR THEIR PROGRESS. HOWEVER, SOME STUDENTS DO RELY MUCH TOO HEAVILY ON "THE BOOK".

What do you do if a student calls you out on the fact that you're skipping exercises? It's simple. Review his or her language goals and tell your student that your priority is to help them achieve these goals. If you choose to skip or replace exercises, it is because you deem it best.

Sometimes we all need a little course correction. If you take a detour and give your students a route that is more scenic than the one proposed by the book, they will probably thank you for it.

7 Ways to Turn the Boring Coursebook into Engaging Speaking Tasks

MOST ESL TEACHERS NEED A COURSEBOOK TO FOLLOW. IT GIVES US A STRUCTURE. IT GIVES STUDENTS A STRUCTURE.

But it does not give us fun, engaging speaking tasks. At least, most coursebooks don't, which is unfortunate since most students sign up for ESL classes to learn to speak English. However, because we are resourceful teachers, we can always supply the engaging speaking tasks that coursebooks seem to be missing. Here are some great ways to turn that boring coursebook around:

7 THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH THE COURSEBOOK

1 YOU GOT THE JOB!

Most ESL coursebooks include a unit on jobs or professions. Activities usually involve describing what each profession does or involves. To make these tasks a little more engaging, have your class conduct job interviews instead. Divide students into pairs: one student is the interviewer and the other is the interviewee. Go around the class and give each pair a different profession or job to interview for.

2 SHOPPING INFORMATION GAP

An information gap exercise is a great way to engage students in speaking tasks. In a Shopping Information Gap, students are divided into pairs, and each is supplied with a worksheet with some information missing from it. Students ask each other questions to find the missing pieces. Or, try this worksheet for Personal Information (busyteacher.org/1513-personal_information_simple_present.html), but you may create your own information gap exercise on any coursebook topic.

3 FIND SOMEONE WHO...

This is another classic activity, one that is quite popular among ESL teach-

ers. Students are given a worksheet, like this Winter Vacation Find Someone Who (busyteacher.org/4140-winter-vacation-find-someone-who.html), and their task is to ask the questions that are modeled in the worksheet, or come up with the right questions to find out who among their classmates has done something in particular.

A great way to practice present perfect questions with "ever". Try using a famous fictional character, like James Bond and ask your students to find someone who "has driven a sports car", "been to India", "used a spy gadget", etc.

4 MEET MY FRIEND!

This is the ideal speaking task for beginners. In the worksheet, you'll find cards with personal information on one side, and blanks to be filled in on the other. Students are divided into pairs, and they interview each other. They must supply the information given on their card, and take notes on their partner's. Then, each must report what they have found out about their new friend.

5 ROCK N' ROLE PLAY

Role plays are another classic speaking activity. And most coursebooks include role plays. But not all students enjoy them or take advantage of their opportunity to speak. The problem is not acting out the role play but how well the roles have been set up. To ensure successful role plays, you must go beyond the typical, "Student A is the client, student B is the customer". When preparing role play cards or instructions include a lot of details and complications.

For example, divide students into groups and tell them they play in a Rock n' Roll band. Give each of them a different weekly schedule of activities. They must check their schedules and set up at least two practice sessions for the week. The more filled up their schedules are the harder it will be for them to schedule their rehearsals.

6 TABOO

This popular board game can be adapted to suit any vocabulary. Some course materials even come with their own Taboo cards. But it's not too hard to make your own. Each card should have a word to be described, as well as a few others words that can't be used in the description. For example, if the word is "cow", the other words that can't be used might be "milk", "dairy", or "udder". Award one point for each word guessed correctly, and the team with the most points wins.

7 LET'S DEBATE!

Class debates are amazing opportunities for extended speaking practice. As in the role plays, the effectiveness of the debates lies in how successful you are at engaging students. Some great topics for debate are:

- Pros and cons (of social media, email, the Internet, etc.)
- Solutions to a problem (global warming, energy crisis, etc.)
- Planning meetings (city planners deciding which problems need to be addressed, for example, and encourage students to use modals to say what should, could, or must be done)

FEEL LIKE THROWING THE BORING COURSEBOOK OUT THE WINDOW? NO NEED TO!

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em, right? Instead of working against it, work with it. Take what you need from it and create your own engaging speaking tasks. Or try any of these ideas and you will not only get your students to speak, you may have a hard time getting them to stop!

So What Book Are You Using?

How to Select a Great Textbook

OFTEN WHEN IN THE TEACHER'S ROOM, ANOTHER TEACHER WILL ASK ME, "SO WHAT BOOK ARE YOU USING?" I USED TO SMILE AT THIS: "WHAT BOOK ARE YOU USING?" NOT "WHO ARE YOUR STUDENTS?" OR "WHAT LEVEL OF CLASS DO YOU HAVE THIS SEMESTER?" IT SEEMED A PRETTY SHALLOW QUESTION.

However, through experience, I no longer view it this way: what book a teacher uses — or doesn't use — reveals a lot about her teaching style and curriculum.

For example, a teacher who uses Azar's grammar series, with its clear charts and explanations of grammar points, probably takes a rather traditional, structured approach to grammar. The teacher's colleague who uses Molinsky and Bliss's "Side by Side" series probably takes an audio-lingual approach to language instruction, with a focus on oral language and repetition of patterned drills.

If I'm not familiar with the textbook the teacher names, I can find out about from him, perhaps look over a copy if he has one, and I might decide to try it next semester for my own class. Traditionally, in fact, before the electronic revolution, the textbook was considered the cornerstone of a class, much of the curriculum and instruction based on it.

So how do you go about choosing an excellent textbook for your class? There is a process that will ensure picking out a strong, if not ideal, textbook.

HOW TO SELECT (OR NOT SELECT) A GREAT ESL TEXTBOOK

1 GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

Find out as much as possible before your class meets about your students. How old are they? What level of English speakers? What motiva-

tion do they have for learning English: academic, vocational, social? Do they live in or outside an English-speaking country? Are they long-term residents or newly arrived? Answers to these questions will provide you with information needed to choose materials: you wouldn't want a text based on conversational American English, for example, for a population living outside the U.S. and wanting to study English primarily for succeeding in a British university.

2 GET TO KNOW PUBLISHERS AND THEIR WEBSITES

It is through these channels that you will get the most up-to-date news on what's available. You can also sign up to receive print or electronic updates on their merchandise. Some major publishers for ESL are Pearson Longman, Heinle and Heinle, Cambridge University Press, Prentice Hall Regents, and Oxford University Press. They all maintain extensive websites on which you can view material, many still offer a traditional paper catalogues as well.

In addition, many publishers have sales representatives who cover certain areas, like northern California, who once you have contacted the publisher once, will check in with you regarding materials needs for the next term.

3 SELECT OPTIONS

Now that you know something about your students, and you know some of the publishers, you can begin checking out some of the materials. Most publishers divide their materials by level and skill. For example, say I've just been assigned a class of advanced level reading for the fall. In looking at Cambridge University's online catalog, I first selected "ESL," then "teachers," then "English for Academic Purposes," for students studying for the purpose of entering college. I then scrolled down the resources that came up—many writing texts but only

one reading, Making Connections, which has three levels of readers at the intermediate level, low intermediate, intermediate, and high intermediate, and is based on academic text, for the purpose of academic preparation. This text looks very promising even though my students are called "advanced"—"advanced" is relative, depending on the program—and the books are intermediate. I'm going to look up the name of my Cambridge representative and see about an exam copy. Some sites also allow you to view chapters of the book.

ONCE I HAVE EITHER THE BOOK ITSELF IN FRONT OF ME OR PAGES FOR VIEW ON MY COMPUTER SCREEN, WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR? THERE ARE SEVERAL FEATURES YOU SHOULD CONSIDER IN MAKING THE FINAL SELECTION.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS IN SELECTING A TEXT

1 WHAT IS THE RATIO OF PRINT TO PICTURES?

Is there too much dense print for students to comfortably read? Or perhaps, as is often the case with textbooks at the secondary level these days in the U.S., are there too many pictures and graphs and print to really process effectively? There should be a comfortable balance between print and nonprint material: what that is varies teacher to teacher and class to class. For a reading class, for example, I wouldn't want tons of dense print but also no more than one image or graph per page.

2 WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITIES ARE STUDENTS ASKED TO DO WITH THE TEXT?

How will it fit into your overall class? An ESL textbook is not just for reading, of course. Even with my reading text, I'd want prereading and postreading questions, to help students process

and understand the material, and I'd want there to be discussion points at the end because interaction between peers is especially important in an ESL class, and I'd want essay-type questions related to the topic to practice writing skills.

3 WHAT OTHER FEATURES DOES THE BOOK OFFER?

Are there CDs or DVDs? Are they extraordinarily expensive? Is the textbook itself expensive? Too expensive for students? Weigh the value of the text against the cost. Make sure that you, your students, and the school are getting good value for the money.

4 IS THE TEXT PART OF A SERIES?

Many ESL texts come in leveled series. For example, American English File and American Headways, both through Oxford University Press, are leveled series from beginning to high intermediate. If you like the text, and it is part of a series, this can be helpful to your ESL program, or your multi-level class, as students would have a uniform text and activities across levels.

5 IS THERE A WEBSITE?

Many ESL books, especially if the book is one of a series, have accompanying websites. Longman's Side-by-Side, for example has podcasts, author interviews, and links to standards information. The website for the Azar grammar series has a blog for teachers. There are websites that are more student-focused, such as the one for Oxford University Press's American English File, which has a student site with supplementary activities for practical English, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar games. This site is especially helpful for the student who finishes her work quickly and needs some extra activities to keep busy.

CLEARLY, A LOT OF CONSIDERATIONS GO INTO CHOOSING THE RIGHT TEXTBOOK.

However, by knowing where to go and what questions to ask, the teacher can pick out the perfect text for her class to keep them engaged.

Thinking Outside the Book (Textbook, That Is)

TEXTBOOKS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF AN ESL CLASS. THEY PROVIDE DIRECTION AND EXPLANATIONS OF KEY ESL CONCEPTS. WHILE TEXTBOOKS ARE OF GREAT VALUE TO THE ESL TEACHER, THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE TEXTBOOK IS VAST AND HAS LIMITLESS POTENTIAL.

If you think about what resources you have around you, there are many possible activities you can do with your class, **outside the textbook**. Read on to get started thinking outside the textbook.

HOW TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOOK

1 DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

Magazines and newspapers are some of the best reading materials that you can use with your ESL students, and **there are several activities you can do with just one paper**. With just a newspaper you can review and practice all three reading strategies that your students should know.

- **Skim** some articles for the main points. Encourage your students not to read every word, but to focus on headlines, subheadings, and portions of the rest of the article.
- **Scan** the paper to see when a movie might be playing or for the events that will happen locally this weekend. When scanning, students should look for answers to specific questions.
- Finally, **do some careful or detail reading** for other articles, and ask comprehension questions. Also, review unfamiliar vocabulary with your students. You will find many opportunities to expand their knowledge of vocabulary in the newspaper. There is also culture to be learned from the paper, especially in the obituaries.

Your students can see what a culture value is by noticing what is mentioned in an obituary. In addition, do some compare and contrast work between

this newspaper and one from a student's native language. If possible, **borrow a foreign newspaper from the library** and ask your student to explain the different sections. He will be challenged to use English to explain to the rest of the class, and they will learn more about his culture.

2 SOMETHING MAY CATCH YOUR EYE

Now that you are out of the book, **keep going with a movie**. Movies are a great resource for many different classroom activities. Some ESL programs have entire classes devoted to American film. How you decide to use movies in your classroom is up to you. Generally, you can **choose to use one movie and do several activities** with the whole movie or particular scenes. The other option is to **pick and choose scenes from different movies** and do one or two activities with each.

One activity you can do with any movie scene is a *cloze listening exercise*. Be warned, this will take some preparation ahead of time. Before you meet with your class, type out the dialogue from a particular scene of the movie. Then delete key words in that dialogue and leave blank spaces for your students to fill in as they listen. If you have already taught them the vocabulary, play the scene one or two times and have them fill in the blanks. Then have students compare answers and give them the correct answers. Then have groups of students read the dialogues as if they were the actors.

If you have not taught the vocabulary to your students prior to watching the movie clip, give them a word bank from which to choose the answers. Before watching, read through the words in the word bank and review their pronunciation so your students will be able to recognize the words when they hear them. It is also beneficial to your students if they think of words that would logically fit into the blanks in the dialogue before watching the clip. They may be able to guess some words correctly, but most likely your students will come up with

synonyms for the words actually in the scene. You can then explain to your students that **guessing** in this manner **is a useful strategy for ESL reading**. When they encounter an unfamiliar word in their English readings, they can guess at the meaning of the word based on the context, and they should be able to determine a synonym or a word with similar meaning to the target word. This will increase their comprehension without them having to use a dictionary.

3 GET OUT (AND ABOUT)

To get your students using language in authentic situations, **take a field trip**. It does not have to be something elaborate or requiring special transportation. Think of the resources that lie within walking distance of your school, and make use of them. This may mean that your students go to a restaurant and place an order or ask the server questions about a menu item. If you teach in a city and there are public courthouses nearby, take your students to listen to some of the proceedings and then discuss what was said with them after returning to your classroom. If you teach near a beach or a public park, take your students out to do some surveys with people who might be there. There are also many restaurants, theaters, post offices and other businesses that will give free tours to students. All of these trips are great speaking activities and listening comprehension activities for your class, and it can also be a way to learn less common vocabulary in a purposeful way.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO KEEP YOUR STUDENTS' NOSES IN THEIR TEXTBOOKS TO ENSURE A PRODUCTIVE ESL CLASS. SOMETIMES THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR STUDENTS IS TO GET OUT OF THE BOOK AND INTO THE REAL WORLD.

Your students will be challenged, but the opportunity for learning will be unlike anything chapter six has to offer. So next time you want to liven up your class, get out of the book and into some real life situations to practice English.

How to Turn a Disaster ESL Lesson into a Triumph

IT HAPPENS TO EVEN THE BEST TEACHERS: A WELL THOUGHT OUT, CAREFULLY PLANNED LESSON GOES HORRIBLY WRONG AND YOU ARE STUCK IN THE MIDDLE OF CLASS WITH CONFUSED, FRUSTRATED, AND DISENGAGED LEARNERS.

Students can react to material in different ways than you anticipated and new activities may take less time, be more challenging, or not work out quite the way you expected.

Never continue following a lesson plan that is failing.

This will only waste everyone's time and students will not get the most out of their lesson with you. It is hard to think of new ideas and come up with an alternate plan during a lesson but this is the best course of action.

HOW TO TURN A DISASTER LESSON INTO A WELL-DESERVED VICTORY

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Identify what went wrong so that you will not repeat the mistake with another class. This will also help you determine if it is the lesson or activity itself or the particular students you are working with that led to this issue in the first place.

If students do not understand the material you are covering, rephrase your introduction with mini **comprehension checks** throughout. Ask students to explain to you what you are teaching and even translate it if necessary to ensure that everyone has a more thorough understanding of the lesson material.

If an activity **did not work out the way you planned** or **finished earlier than expected**, you can stall a little by asking students to demonstrate their knowledge of the material while you decide what to do next.

These are two very common occurrences especially for **new teachers** who assume that students clearly understand material after just a short introduction and are still learning about **student behavior**, **lesson plans**, and **time management**.

2 CHANGE COURSE

You are going to have to finish the class and maximize the class time you have with your learners, so, decide how to proceed. Often it takes only about five minutes to realize something is wrong, decide to change course, and transition into another activity. **The longer you have been teaching, the more backup activities you will have stored in your memory**, so, draw on your past experiences for inspiration.

Thinking on your feet in front of an audience, regardless of its size, is stressful but remain calm and remember that whatever you choose also has to require no real preparation and only the materials you have in your classroom. By keeping this in mind you will automatically focus on simpler exercises. Once you have thought of another activity you can relate to the topic you have been talking about, segue into it as if it were a planned part of the lesson. You can say something like

"OK, I think we have had enough of the board game for today, now I'd like you to ~."

An activity that was finished too soon or was uninteresting to students has effectively been pushed aside with this brief sentence and the class can move forward.

3 END ON A HIGH NOTE

Finish the class with a short, fun activity that you know students enjoy. This can be a familiar **warm up activity** like ESL Shiritori or an exercise like Crisscross which can be adapted to any topic.

Your lesson can then **end on a positive note** and this will be the most recent memory students have of your class when they walk out your door for the day. **Students will forgive failed activities from time to time if you do not force them to suffer through them for long** and come back strong after realizing your mistake.

BY TURNING A DISASTER LESSON AROUND, YOU ARE SAVING YOURSELF AND HELPING YOUR STUDENTS.

This is a skill and as such requires a lot of time and experience to improve.

One way to help you prepare for this unfortunate yet inevitable situation is to **plan an extra activity for each lesson** (this is where BusyTeacher.org is your best friend). This can be something short and should function as a review. It will be easier to transition if you already have a back up plan and you can simply expand on it or repeat it several times if you have more time than you expected. If you do not use the activity at the end of your class period, you can use it as a review in the next lesson. It is just that easy. Good luck!

When Things Go Awry: Problem-Solving on Your Feet

As teachers, we know possibly better than anyone else that when things go wrong, they can really go wrong.

Being able to solve problems on your feet is one of the most valuable skills a teacher can have. There are so many variables as to what can go awry in a classroom that generally luck would have it, many things tend to go wrong at the same time. Face problems head on with these tips, and you will be able to handle the worst of classroom disasters!

HOW TO: Problem-Solving on Your Feet

1 STAY COOL

It may seem obvious, but when a situation goes wrong in the classroom, the number one element that will serve you best is to simply, stay cool. Sometimes this is easier said than done. Problems that arise in the classroom can be embarrassing, mentally taxing, and downright excruciating. If you stay calm though, it will only help you to see the picture in front of you clearly, and also discover what the solution is.

For example, if an activity is not going according to plan and is failing the objectives you had set for it, if you were to get worked up, you may just add to the problem. With a clear head, look at what the students are doing, and then examine what you assigned them to do. If the two don't come close to matching, the next thing to do is to find the disconnect. Perhaps students weren't clear on their directives, or they took it upon themselves to change the activity once they got into it. Don't get upset with the class, but definitely intervene and rectify the situation.

2 USE HUMOR

Some classroom difficulties are easier to rectify than others. If you come across a particularly unsettling situation, like having technical difficulties, try to intersperse some

humor. Perform any solution you can think of to fix the problem while making fun of either yourself or the technical problem itself. It does wonders to lighten the mood, takes the pressure off, and gives you time to really assess the problem. Students are generally understanding when a technical or computer issue arises. Engage the class with a joke or funny story while you are working on fixing the issue. This way, the students' attention will remain on you, and it won't be an excuse for them to start side conversations, begin texting, or worse, become unruly or out of hand!

Show them that you can handle the situation and if you can't fix the problem, all is not lost.

3 BE PREPARED

There are all kinds of problems that can happen when you are not prepared or when you are not prepared enough. If, for example, you are trying out a brand new activity and are uncertain as to how it will go, prepare yourself that it may not go as well as you hope and it may not take as long as you think it will. Try to troubleshoot new activities by noticing any gaps or things that may not be clear for students. Estimate the time to be less and if it goes longer, then you be prepared for that as well. If it falls short, falls flat, or is just plain bad you can try a couple of things.

If it falls short, you want to have enough planned so that you are not left struggling to fill the class time. Always have an arsenal of quick games or activities that you can whip up if something falls short. If your objective is lost to the students, and they don't jump in to the activity, you can try re-explaining it or asking what questions they have about what they should be doing. Give the activity a second chance to launch and see if there is anything that you can quickly tweak to make it more palatable.

If you need to abandon an activity,

do it in a way that the students will respect. Either admit that it didn't go well and ask them for their feedback, or tell that you have other things planned for the day and that time is running low. You don't have to prepare yourself in advance for things to flop necessarily, but you do want to make sure to always well-equipped to deal with equipment failures, student distractions, or logistics gone wrong.

4 BE FLEXIBLE

If things don't go quite as you had planned, flexibility is a great trait to develop. Don't take it personally that your activity flopped or that students were particularly uncooperative. Allow yourself and the class to move forward without getting stuck in the bad juju of a situation that went wrong. It is really important to be their guiding light in all situations, but particularly during a storm. If you display flexibility and can switch gears it can be a remarkable example and learning moment for students.

5 ASK FOR HELP

There is no harm in asking a student or another teacher for help. Often with technical problems, your students may be just as savvy as you are, and you can enlist their help while you manage the class. If there are other teachers close by you could possibly send a student out to locate and bring back help. You will no doubt learn how to fix the problem, and never forget it. There is no harm in asking for or requesting help as long as it isn't a weekly occurrence.

DON'T LET ONE GLITCH (OR SEVERAL) GET YOU DOWN.

Teachers are resourceful beings and we always find a way to rescue ourselves and our students from painful situations. Don't beat yourself up, and if all else fails, cut yourself a break, have a good laugh and trust that you pulled out the best possible solution in that particular scenario!

ESL Teachers Beware: Are You Making These Mistakes in Class?

NO ESL TEACHER IS PERFECT, NO MATTER IF YOU'VE BEEN TEACHING FOR 20 MINUTES OR 20 YEARS (PRESENT COMPANY INCLUDED!) ANYONE CAN MAKE MISTAKES, MOST OF WHICH ARE RESULTS OF OUR TRYING TOO HARD OR BEING TOO IMPATIENT.

One of our classic blunders for instance is too much TTT (Teacher Talking Time). Of course, we don't **want** to talk more than the students. But we find ourselves explaining and over explaining, or simply getting too chatty in our efforts to bond with students. Here are some more of the worst mistakes you can make in your ESL class:

ARE YOU MAKING THESE MISTAKES IN CLASS?

1 YOU INDULGE IN USELESS BLABBER

This is what I also call the "saying out loud things that you should just keep to yourself" syndrome. It goes something like this: you say to your class, "OK, so we're going to play this game, but we're going to use the board instead of these cute little photocopies I had planned to give you, but I can't give you as the copier is broken. Sorry about that, but these things happen, and well, we need to adapt and adjust to what we have... OK... Oh, I'll need another marker because this one is not working properly..." And it goes on and on and on...

Needless to say, students don't need to hear all of this. Quite frankly, in some levels it can be quite confusing – they may not even understand half of it. Repeat after me: Silence is good. It's OK for students to have some quiet time while you set up a game or activity. Moreover, keep any problems you may have had with the school's equipment to yourself. It's more professional, too.

2 YOU COMPLETE THEIR SENTENCES FOR THEM

Your student says, "Playing soccer is..." And you jump in and say, "fun?" Talk about eager beavers! Sometimes the teacher is the eager beaver in class and doesn't give students enough time to come up with the right word or answer. Students need time. If you jump the gun and complete the answer for them, you're taking away their opportunity to prove to you just how much they've learned. Also, consider that it could actually annoy the student. What if, in the situation above, the word the student was actually looking for is "boring"?

Completing students' sentences is like cutting someone else's food. You do it when they're little, but at some point they have to start doing it for themselves.

3 YOU ASK THEM IF THEY UNDERSTAND

Imagine I am looking straight into your eyes, and I ask you "Do you understand?" Most students will feel compelled to squeak out a tentative "yes"... Who would actually face the teacher and say "no"? Who wants the rest of class to think that they are not the brightest bulb in the box? Don't put your students in this position.

There are ways to check for comprehension without having to put students on the spot. Try asking them questions, instead, to make sure they've understood.

4 YOU ECHO THEIR ANSWERS

A student says, "I work at Google." You say, "You work at Google. Great! You work at Google." First of all, there is absolutely no learning value in parroting your students. Second, if you do it immediately after they speak, you may be interrupting their train of thought and may even cut them off from whatever else they were going to say. What if your student was about to

tell you what he did at Google?

After a student speaks, give him or her time to add something else. If you feel compelled to say something, simply reply with a "How interesting!" And pause to give them time to add a new piece of information.

5 YOU DON'T CHECK TO SEE IF THEY'VE UNDERSTOOD YOUR INSTRUCTIONS

So, you rattle off a set of instructions in rapid-fire succession and say, "OK, let's get started!" This is usually when students start whispering to each other things like, "What did she say?" or "What do we do now?"

Always check to see if they've gotten your instructions straight. Ask the class, "OK class so what do we do first? And then? Good! You may begin." If it's an exercise they must complete, it's a great idea to do the first question with them as an example.

6 YOU GIVE THEM UNCLEAR INSTRUCTIONS

This mistake goes hand in hand with the previous. Try to use words you know they will understand. Give them steps that are easy to follow, and if you can number them, so much the better. This is particularly true for special projects like crafts, where students are expected to follow a series of steps. If they are not familiar with any of the vocabulary make sure you explain it to them first, this includes words like "stapler", "paper clips" or any other materials they may not be familiar with.

AS MENTIONED EARLIER, ANYONE CAN MAKE MISTAKES. I AM ONE OF THOSE TEACHERS WHO COMPLETE STUDENTS' SENTENCES. GUILTY AS CHARGED!

After 20 years, I still need to stop myself every now and then, but this is something I tend to do when I'm running out of time for an activity. So, don't be shy and speak up! Are you guilty of any of these blunders?

Top 10 Websites for the ESL Teacher

THE LONGER YOU HAVE BEEN TEACHING, THE THICKER YOUR FILES ARE GETTING, BUT IT IS NEVER TOO SOON OR TOO LATE TO ADD TO YOUR POOL OF RESOURCES!

You may already be familiar with the following websites, or this might be your first introduction. Either way, each of them can be a ready resource for your ESL teaching needs and a way to freshen your teaching plans and answer your questions.

TOP 10 ESL WEBSITES

1 ENGLISHGRAMMAR.ORG

Every ESL teacher has to teach grammar, even if that is not one of your course names. This site lists the grammar rules of English alphabetically, and they are easily accessible. Not only that, they provide PDF files of lessons on these rules that you can use with your students.

2 ESLPARTYLAND.COM

Are you looking for some out of the ordinary materials to use in your classroom? This site includes materials for teaching with film and video, the internet and music.

3 ITESLJ.ORG/QUESTIONS/

What is the point of language study if it is not to speak the language in question? Give your ESL students something to talk about with this compilation of discussion questions you can use in class. Click on the topic you are planning on studying and find more than enough questions to keep your class in conversation for as long as you want to let them talk.

4 ESLVIDEO.COM

While you are at it, why not make up your own quizzes from your favorite videos on YouTube? With ESLvideo.com you can create your own quizzes and even have your stu-

dents search by teacher to find them. If you are looking for comprehension activities that are ready to go, this site also has videos and quizzes from other teachers sorted by fluency level that your students can access anywhere and anytime.

5 PINKMONKEY.COM

If you teach literature in any of your ESL classes, PinkMonkey.com has seemingly limitless resources for you. Here you can find book notes and activities for you and your students for free. With over 460 books listed, you will never need another set of Cliff's Notes again.

6 BRIGHTHUB.COM

This site offers a bounty of information to the ESL teacher. Here you can read articles about teaching ESL as well as find lesson plans for different times of the year. Are you out of ideas for games, vocabulary or activities for your students? Get some inspiration here.

7 DICTIONARY.COM

Neither you nor your students wants to carry around a ten-pound English reference dictionary, but you likely already carry something that gives you internet access. If so, bookmark dictionary.com for easy reference. This site will give you definitions of English words as well as thesaurus entries and a word of the day. There are also many other helpful resources this site offers.

8 USINGENGLISH.COM

Looking for something a little more intangible than simple definitions? Check out the dictionary of idioms available from usingenglish.com. There are hundreds of idioms listed on this site as well as phrasal verbs and other grammatical irregularities your students may need help with.

9 ETS.ORG/TOEFL

If you are a teacher of English, the odds are that you probably have not taken the TOEFL. Your students, on the other hand, will be working towards a proficient score on that test to prove their English skills. Familiarize yourself with the test and what your students will have to know to succeed on it with the information here on the official TOEFL site.

10 BUSYTEACHER.ORG

If you are reading this, you already know that busyteacher.org is an essential resource for the ESL teacher. Why not take some time to explore other tools that we have to offer including free worksheets, flashcards, ideas for vocabulary, and teaching ideas, just to name a few.

You will never know there was so much available to you so close to home!

Top 10 Websites for Business English Teachers

NO MATTER HOW WELL EXPERIENCED OR QUALIFIED ONE IS, SOMETIMES WE REACH STUMBLING BLOCKS ALONG OUR CAREER PATH.

Oftentimes this is generally due to the stress of teaching specific classes, or it may just be that the teacher themselves is running out of ideas. Never fear, however, because there is a wide range of different options available today! Not only are there books out there which will help with ESL teaching, but one can also look up a wide variety of different resources which are available on the Internet. Don't allow yourself to get bogged down anymore, as there is so much information available on the World Wide Web that it would be silly not to have a look here.

TOP 10 SITES FOR BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHERS

1 ABOUT.COM

This isn't a website which is specifically devoted to TEFL or ESL, of course, but there is a rich bank of information here for the teacher who might find themselves stuck. It includes a variety of different articles including ideas for games, teaching older and younger learners and much more. This website has a long history of providing information on a huge range of topics and one is bound to find some interesting facts and pieces of information right here.

2 BUSINESSENGLISHSITE.COM

This comprehensive site is designed more with students in mind, and hosts a wide range of activities for them to go on and complete in order to improve their own language skills. But don't be turned off by this right away, as there is still a lot of very useful information here. For those who are stuck with ways of helping their own class practice, then it is the perfect opportunity to gather some ideas from. Have a look through the exercises, and see how you can customize them to suit your own classes.

3 BREAKINGNEWS ENGLISH.COM

For those of us who happen to be somewhat stuck for materials to read in the

class, this website can be a lifesaver. Discussing current events within the classroom can undoubtedly lead to a lot of heated debate and whilst it ought to be kept in check, it will undoubtedly encourage the students to speak their mind and practice their English more thoroughly. Regularly updated, this website is something every teacher should keep bookmarked!

4 ESLPARTYLAND.COM

This website also shows a comprehensive list of different activities to make the classroom learning experience a little more fun. What's great about this particular site, however, is that it has some lesson plans already made out which one can freely customize to suit the specific class. Whilst it caters to all kinds of English teachers, there is no reason why it cannot be done to suit business English lessons as well. It also breaks them down into various categories including the likes of grammar training, teaching with music and much more.

5 ESSLIBRARY.COM

Much like the previous website, this particular one will cater towards both students and teachers and is another excellent place to pick up the likes of lesson plans and other ideas. It is possible to sign up with this website in order to get the likes of flashcards and other resources pertaining to English teaching. Definitely worth a look if one is seeking out some solid learning materials for students.

6 BOGGLESWORLDES.COM

Another great site which has a huge amount of information on it. There is a section where a lot of different activities are displayed and one can pick and choose from these. Of course, they are just ideas and when stumbling upon websites like this, it is important to tailor one's classes to suit the students themselves. This site also has sections for other types of learners, should the teacher require information of various kinds for teaching different age groups.

7 ESLGOLD.COM

Another rich resource, not only for

people who are teachers but students can also gain a lot of benefit from this website as well. This is a list of different exercises which the student can participate in and, as teachers are sometimes like magpies, it would often be a good move to have a look through the exercises yourself and see how they can be taken and applied to classroom situation.

8 ESLAMERICA.US

Whilst business English tends to focus more on conversation, sometimes students might need to go over various grammatical structures in order to reinforce them in the mind. This website provides links to various different grammatical exercises which can incredibly helpful to teachers who might need a little bit of inspiration within this field. A lot of people do not enjoy grammar and find it difficult, therefore this website will give simple guidelines in its instruction.

9 TESOL.ORG

Not only will this provide advice for teachers, but there is also a supportive community here where teachers can get together and exchange various ideas. Sometimes reading through Business English manuals and following instructions isn't enough, and one needs to speak with others in the field, some of whom may have more experience and better qualifications. One can never learn too much.

10 USING ENGLISH.COM

Another extra website which will provide many different ready-made Business English lesson plans and other sources of information. One can never have too many of these on a favourite's list, so it is important to keep everything organized and pick from what is needed for the next class.

THERE IS TONNES OF INFORMATION OUT THERE ON THE WEB. What has been listed here is only a sample of some of the more comprehensive websites. Whether one is a beginning teacher or experienced, it never helps to remain closed to new ideas and therefore expanding one's own education is key to progressing and becoming a better teacher.

Blog, Vlog, What's a Glog?

Glogster for Teachers

THESE DAYS PEOPLE SEEM TO BE DOING SO MANY AMAZING THINGS ON THE INTERNET. THERE IS NO REASON WHY TEACHERS, EVEN ESL TEACHERS, CANNOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SUCH EXCELLENT RESOURCES AND START USING TECHNOLOGY IN THEIR CLASSES.

Blogs and even vlogs, that is video blogs, have become quite common but what is a glog? Well, glogs are digital posters and Glogster (www.glogster.com/) is a website where you can make them. Not all teachers will be in a position to use glogs in their classroom but if your school has a computer lab or your students all have computers and internet access, then glogs can be a great way to make learning more fun! Even with just a classroom computer, you can find a creative solution which allows students to use glogs in class from time to time.

HOW TEACHERS & STUDENTS CAN USE GLOGSTER TO MAKE LESSONS MORE FUN

1 ABOUT GLOGSTER

Glogster offers many different account options but if your school is not willing to pay for multiple accounts, do not worry, there are free education accounts too which gives you access to everything you need to make your own glogs. Creating glogs is very intuitive, the visuals are easy to customize to appeal to students of all ages, and you can even embed your own videos, images, and sounds in glogs. The site has a tutorial that you can watch and plenty of great sample glogs that you could use as is or as inspiration for your own creations. I would like to suggest several ways ESL teachers and students can use this site.

2 GLOGSTER FOR TEACHERS

Teachers can use glogs in two ways. Firstly, you can create digital posters to print out and display in your classroom. In just a short time, you can create visually stunning posters that will impress your colleagues and your students.

Classroom posters for rules, special announcements, or even classroom English phrases could be made using Glogster. To make things even more interesting, you can also adapt the idea of a digital poster to suit your teaching needs.

Glogs, such as this one (hermione11185.edu.glogster.com/paraphrasing/) designed for an advanced English for academic purposes class, can be used to structure entire classes or even homework assignments by linking or embedding all the necessary resources to one page, the glog. In the example above, students are directed to various sites to complete quizzes, view lectures, and examine other resources before being asked to complete a couple assignments.

A great advantage to using glogs for lesson and homework assignments is that you can include as many resources and scaffolding as your lowest level student needs while higher level students can simply move through the assignments without reviewing the extra material. In this way, each and every student can have the individual support he or she needs to successfully complete tasks. Using a glog to structure a complex lesson also frees you up to monitor students more closely and provide more support to students who are struggling with the material. It is almost like having an extra teacher in the classroom!

3 GLOGSTER FOR STUDENTS

Students can use glogs in the same way teachers can. At the end of a unit, you can ask students to create individual or group posters to dis-

play in the classroom and/or present in class as a review or for a poster competition. If your students feel very comfortable with technology already, they can create their own interactive glogs with resources, questions and assignments for their classmates to use, again, probably as a review. These types of tasks allow students to show off their creativity while also demonstrating their mastery of course content.

SINCE ENGLISH IS A COMMUNICATION TOOL, IT SEEMS SILLY TO HAVE STUDENTS COMPLETING ONLY READING AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS FOR HOMEWORK.

By using a glog you can include listening tasks and, by using additional resources such as Voicethread (voicethread.com/), even speaking assignments. If you think that students should be practicing all four skills both in and out of the classroom then glogs might be a good place to start. Posting a link to the glog you want to use on your class website or even just handing out the address makes assigning homework easy and students can look forward to the exciting new material you have prepared for them. When was the last time a homework assignment looked so colorful?

Think of all the paper and ink you will conserve by becoming a tech-savvy teacher! If you have not started making your first glog yet, now might be a great time to begin.

Tired of PPTs? We Know You Are. Time to Try Prezi!

NOT EVERY TEACHER IS ABLE TO SHOW DIGITAL PRESENTATIONS LIKE POWERPOINTS (PPTS) IN THEIR CLASSROOM.

However, those that are might have discovered that these presentations can be rather uninspiring both during the creation process and for students watching the presentations. There are many ways to make activities using PowerPoint and if you are not familiar with how PowerPoint can function in this way, browse Busy Teacher for some great, interactive games. Unfortunately, many people do not use PowerPoint in this way and the result is presentations of nearly identical slides covered with words often too small for the audience to read. If you are still set on giving a presentation, consider using Prezi.

PREZI: WHAT IT IS AND HOW YOU CAN USE IT

1 ABOUT PREZI

Prezi (prezi.com) is a free online program that makes the creation and delivery of presentations fun again. Its website bills it as the 'zooming presentation editor' and now that it has included a feature that allows you to import your old PPT slides, it is even better than before since you can start by updating reliable presentations you have used before rather than having to start over entirely! The available tutorials (prezi.com/learn) are easy to follow but you could also just jump right in and see how it goes since much of the program is rather intuitive. The initial mini tutorial (bit.ly/XPLNkv) is really all you need to get started. It is not necessary but I highly recommend using an external mouse rather than a laptop touchpad when creating a Prezi because it makes moving around the presentation space far easier.

2 FOR TEACHERS

PowerPoint, like Word, is here to stay but variety is the spice of life and students who see PPTs fairly often either in your class or others might start to see presentation time as nap time. By creating visually attractive, bold presentations, you will engage students more fully in your presentations. The zooming feature of Prezi makes these presentations more dynamic than PPTs.

In addition to changing the program you use, remember that students will often lose interest if you speak uninterrupted for long periods of time. Be sure to include discussion questions, polls, and other materials that require student participation throughout the presentation. English class may be the only time students have the opportunity to practice using English so maximizing the time students can speak and interact is imperative. If you lecture for more than five minutes at a time, your students are probably not listening to you. This is especially true for younger students whose attention span is even shorter.

3 FOR STUDENTS

One of the best aspects of Prezi is that students working on group projects can edit the same Prezi at the same time. Whether students are sitting in a computer lab together or working separately in their own homes, they can coordinate their efforts to edit sections simultaneously without interrupting the work of others. Since the zooming feature is a highlight of Prezi, students might be more inclined to restrict the amount of text displayed at any one time, which is often a challenge for students creating PPTs, by using more slides or paths.

Remind students that images are just as powerful and often more powerful than words and that presenters should do more than simply read from the presentation. It is far more chal-

lenging to deliver presentations like this but students should be encouraged to use notes and practice in advance so that they are fully prepared.

PRESENTATIONS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF TEACHING REGARDLESS OF WHAT SUBJECT YOU TEACH.

For students who understand limited amounts of English, the PPT format may not be the most helpful in aiding comprehension because PPTs are often rather text heavy. Prezi, on the other hand, makes integrating other forms of media easy and forces the presentation creator to think more carefully about what the audience sees at a given time. While creating a Prezi might seem more time consuming initially, you will find that once you have made a couple presentations that this is not the case and if you spend any additional time tweaking minor things, it is simply because you are having so much fun!

Why Use The Internet In TEFL/TESOL?

In the pre-Internet world most dialogue in the classroom was between the teacher and the student, but with the advent of the Net we now have a choice of writing and communicating to a wider audience. There is no one unified method of instruction, but some of the more popular choices are the World Wide Web, E-mail, language learning sites and virtual classrooms.

The Internet differs in fundamental aspects from traditional conversational speech and from writing as a medium of computer-mediated communication, as it has a lack of simultaneous feedback, which is so critical to successful conversation. However new innovative uses of screen capture software are making effective inroads into this deficiency.

Should Standard English be the approved medium when we have this exciting new possibility of truly creative language writing? Or should we let blogging run its interactive course, as it is indeed revolutionary in allowing publication of personal reactions, which would otherwise have no audience?

The Internet has no borders, but in the teaching process we must use it as an empowering tool, to methodically direct students to targets effectively according to students' proficiency levels and language abilities.

THE INTERNET – A 24/7 RESOURCE

The Internet provides students with opportunities for exposure to natural and authentic language use, not only during but also outside the class. There is a wealth of information and unlimited resources that teachers can use in getting students to make worksheets for class, or in homework assignments. This makes learning English part of students' daily lives providing functional communicative experiences and an ongoing process. However exposure is not enough to

facilitate language acquisition and students need to be involved in meaningful tasks that integrate proper usage of computers and the Net e.g. WebQuests. The Internet has become a vital part of life and learning how to use it is an essential skill.

Through usage for learning English, students also develop basic information technology skills simultaneously e.g. word processing, Web-browsing, E-mail etc. and increase their competence in the highly competitive global marketplace. As the Internet offers a variety of topics it is appealing and can satisfy a diverse audience. The information available is current and frequently updated therefore providing a 'living' text. Using the Internet is fun as websites are full of animation, colors, sounds, pictures, interactive forms and digital video clips.

The Internet as a medium is highly motivating, thereby enhancing student autonomy and allowing them the opportunity to manage their own learning.

It is intrinsic, trendy and fascinating as realistically our technological society is still in its Internet infancy despite the apparent speed of advancement.

HOW CAN THIS RESOURCE BE UTILIZED FROM THE ESL PERSPECTIVE?

Many students are computer illiterate even in their own language and the 'older generation' especially display technophobia, or are genuinely frightened of 'surfing' in English. The teacher does not have to be an IT expert to employ modern technology, but should commence with identifying the different uses of computers by students, review the different parts of the computer and keyboard, familiarize them with some basic computer and word processing terms/definitions, netiquette and then proceed to the exploration and practice of some basic computer operations. This makes

the tasks meaningful and not merely computer study in isolation.

The Internet is not always accessible in the educational setting due to the country or teaching institution's financial situation. However the resourceful teacher can adapt lessons for the traditional classroom, if no computers are available and assign computer practice activities for homework, if appropriate.

It is important to remember that the primary goal is not to teach computers but a 4 skills course (reading, writing, listening and speaking) utilizing the Internet. Therefore pair work and group participation activities remain essential for collaboration, unlike the computer class where there is little or no interaction with classmates. By helping each other the students often duplicate this social skill in other learning activities.

We can begin with the online sources to do vocabulary and grammar exercises, then use the sites to complete tasks, then become creative and as student skills increase the teacher can design lessons accordingly.

The Internet gives students the opportunity to build knowledge together by expressing themselves in print and then assessing, evaluating, comparing and reflecting on their own views and those of others. They have the opportunity to talk with many people at the same time and not wait their turn, as in the conventional oral group classroom setting. Communication with native speakers allows learners to practice specific skills such as negotiating, persuading, clarifying meaning, requesting information, and engaging in true-life, authentic discussion.

By exchanging e-mails with other students from different parts of the world through 'keypals', there is meaningful communication with native speakers in real situations, improving writing skills, and allowing learners to par-

ticipate in the culture of the target language, which additionally can enable them to learn how cultural background influences one's own view of the world. It should be explained to students that having a keypal is their responsibility and they should answer/originate e-mail outside class, thus increasing autonomy.

SOME FURTHER EXAMPLES OF USING THE INTERNET FOR ESL/TEFL/TESOL INCLUDE:

- Business English – exploiting authentic materials, providing vocabulary practice, writing e-mails emphasizing tone, structures and layout, scanning practice, research resource for presentations using current and relevant information, commercial websites and Internet terminology.
- Youtube videos – improve listening skills and vocabulary.
- Distance learning courses – for students and teachers alike.
- E-mailing students pre-lesson with material/texts to be used in the classroom.
- Creating a publication together – newsletter, magazine etc.
- Checking designed ESL sites/authentic material.
- Teachers can find photocopiable worksheets/lesson plans/flashcards/games etc.
- Setting up self-access centres (SACs) depending on equipment and facilities, financing, student benefits.
- Customized learning programmes for vocabulary word lists, learning in chunks.
- Free Skype conversations.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES?

- Internet use helps learners to gain input in the language learning process.
- This form of communication provides more equality of opportunity for self-expression and indeed more chances to interact in the written form. This increases con-

fidence to experiment in the second language.

- It is the greatest source of information not in book form, can be used as an encyclopedia and can have real worth in promoting higher thinking skills. Students focus less on rote learning and basic understanding and employ logical skills for searching and then evaluate and judge the usefulness of gleaned information to put their work together.
- Some studies indicate that such ESL learners produce more written sentences when compared to the oral group situation in the classroom environment. It is also useful not only for the quantity but also the quality of language as learners have a greater variety of speech discourse and use more complex language.
- The Internet changes the interaction between learners and teachers as students can optimize their computer 'talking' time. Furthermore, it changes teacher and students' roles over content and discussion making learning more student-centered with the choice in topics raised and the student becoming involved in decision – making. The students construct their own knowledge and the teacher becomes a facilitator in the process.
- The Internet has unlimited supplemental language resources such as reading texts, pronunciation exercises etc. which students can access to improve technically in the language. Games with learning components are also fun activities, which the teacher can also create.
- Students can use authentic sites created by native speakers, rather than EFL learning type designed ones.
- The Internet is a platform for experiencing and presenting creative works such as essays, poetry and stories and for providing supplemental language activities in specific areas of language learning. Web pages and projects can be published or e-mailed to other students thus creating interest and motivation even outside the class.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES/DISADVANTAGES

- Communication with other non-native speakers may affect reading skills defectively and student control of input lacks the normal continuity and coherence normally modeled by the teacher. However this can be balanced by introducing native speakers into the tasks and effective teacher feedback.
- A multitude of materials can be accessed and integration of the materials into the second language may create difficulties, unless the teacher has specific goals for using the technology.
- There are delays and time wastages, which are inevitable due to training, familiarization, computer hardware/software problems etc. But the teacher must not neglect the communicative teaching approach, which must always be the priority in the lesson. For example the teacher can check student e-mails are error free before the correspondence is transmitted, thus incorporating listening and speaking skills into the exercises.
- Student monitoring/evaluation, plagiarism, inappropriate sites, etc. need to have appropriate policies and planning in place to pre-empt foreseeable problems. The teacher must also be familiar with technological changes by undergoing CPD to ensure the Internet remains a fun and rewarding language experience, for all concerned.

CONCLUSION

The Internet is a highly versatile resource, provided it is used properly and with discretion. In the future human interaction will be enhanced as sound/video techniques such as voice recognition devices and webcams become more accessible and popular. Speaking is very different from writing, even if it is synchronous. On-line communication restructures class dynamics in a positive and effective manner, but it should be a teaching aid rather than a methodology. We can rest assured that we will always need great teachers.

Beyond Facebook: How to Use Social Networking Productively

WE'VE ALL EXPERIENCED IT IN THE CLASSROOM: YOU TURN YOUR BACK TO WRITE ON THE BOARD. WHEN YOU TURN BACK, YOU FIND THE MAJORITY OF THE CLASS HAS WHIPPED OUT THEIR LAPTOPS, SMART PHONES, AND IPADS AND IS BUSY TYPING AWAY, OBLIVIOUS TO YOU OR THEIR CLASSMATES, IN SOME KIND OF ELECTRONICS-INDUCED DAZE.

You try instituting rules such as "Turn off your electronics and keep them off during class," with the result that now students text under their desks, with the apparent logic that since their hands can't see what you're doing, you can't see what their hands are doing. Sometimes you'll go up to a student, when he is supposed to be working independently on class work, who is typing away at his laptop, and ask what he's doing. He'll say with a straight face, "The assignment," while his computer screen shows his Facebook profile.

So it appears that in trying to beat students in the electronics war, we may lose. But can we join them? Can we in some way productively incorporate the social media that is so much a part of our students' lives that they can't leave it outside the class for a few hours a day into the curriculum?

But first, what if this is not your class? What if your class is not tech-savvy? I've begun from the premise that the millennial generation is, as a group, knowledgeable about technology, but in some ways electronics and technology has widened the gap between the haves and have-nots: I've also had immigrant students in my class who can't afford an internet connect and therefore don't have email addresses, which seems to me also problematic for a student today. What can be done in this case? What are ways to address both the needs of the technology "have" and "have nots" in our classes while keeping the focus on language learning?

TO BEGIN

1 PAY A VISIT TO THE SCHOOL LIBRARY, OR "LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER," AS IT IS OFTEN CALLED THESE DAYS, HIGHLIGHTING ITS CHANGING ROLE AS NOT JUST A SOURCE FOR BOOKS.

Almost all libraries have a computer room and free internet connections for students. And there are free websites, like Gmail, where students can set up an email account.

2 HAVE STUDENTS EMAIL EACH OTHER.

They can trade email addresses (preferably with classmates of different language backgrounds) and check in with each other periodically, especially when they have missed class. This is a way of keeping up with class and also practicing their written English.

3 IN ANOTHER VISIT TO THE LIBRARY, PRACTICE SENDING DIFFERENT KINDS OF EMAILS: A COPY TO A FRIEND, TO MULTIPLE FRIENDS, WITH AN ATTACHMENT, AND SO FORTH.

Even proficient users of email will do things like sending an email without an important attachment, or copying the person or people (which can be relationship-breaking). Teach to students to get in the habit of reviewing their email for these concerns before pressing "send."

4 TEACH SOME OF THE LANGUAGE OF EMAIL/TEXT: LOL, IMHO, ETC.

This language is prolific on the internet now and students should have a basic understanding of these terms. Have students complete assignments using some of this language. Have them "translate" an email in Standard English to email English, or vice versa. Have students email each other and include at least one of these terms per email. Give a quiz on the

terms.

5 TEACH SOME OF THE BASICS OF EMAIL/COMPUTER MAINTENANCE, SUCH AS CLEANING YOUR MAILBOX ON DAILY BASIS AND EITHER STORING OR DELETING MESSAGES.

Teach students how to set up email filters. Talk to students about antivirus software and keeping computers at the appropriate temperature.

6 SET UP A CLASS EMAIL NEWSLETTER AND SEND OUT IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON A REGULAR BASIS.

Students can add to it.

MORE ADVANCED WORK

1 MANY INSTRUCTORS MAINTAIN A CLASS WEBSITE.

Put students in charge of this project. They can then set up their own profiles on the site, which can function like a class "Facebook": students can periodically update their pages, adding information about their lives and studies. Have students comments on each other's statuses.

2 SET UP A CLASS BLOG.

Have students blog about a book you are reading or other assignments. To keep the discussion going, the teacher can periodically comment on the blog and require students to also comment at certain intervals. The topic can change according to what is happening in class and what students are studying.

3 TEACH EMAIL/INTERNET COURTESY AND CONVENTIONS: LIKE NOT TYPING IN ALL CAPS (SHOUTING) AND INCLUDING A TOPIC IN THE SUBJECT LINE.

Discuss different kinds of email appropriate for different situations (emailing a friend about a date on Saturday

versus a potential employer about a job). Give assignments of composing these different emails.

4 TEACH SOME BASIC RESEARCH SKILLS.

One of my favorite examples to offer on the pitfalls of web searches is that if you Google the word “Holocaust,” you will get millions of hits, and many of them will be websites set up by hate groups whose mission is Holocaust denial, rather than any legitimate research on the topic. Teach students how to narrow searches (e.g., “Holocaust research” rather than just “Holocaust” or “Holocaust and the United States,” to narrow the focus to the U.S. role) and how to evaluate sites for legitimacy (a university website vs. an unidentified person’s homepage). Have students complete a small research project on a topic of their choice.

TECHNOLOGY, ELECTRONICS, THE INTERNET, AND SOCIAL NETWORKING ARE A PART OF OUR STUDENTS’ LIVES, FOR BETTER OR WORSE.

Indeed, they are now very much part of the larger culture, and students should be proficient in them. These are some of the uses of technology and social media in the classroom that, rather than being waste of time, can be incorporated in the curriculum and used to enhance students’ English learning.

If you can't beat em', join e'm... on Facebook! Using social media

IT HAPPENS MORE TIMES THAN I CAN COUNT. "STUDENT X, PLEASE PUT AWAY YOUR CELL PHONE." "STUDENT Y, PLEASE STAY ON TASK." "STUDENT Z, PLEASE STOP CHECKING FACEBOOK AND WORK ON YOUR TIMED READING."

In the daily battle to keep students' attention in class, social media is a very present foe. It distracts. It deters. It hinders. But, it doesn't have to be this way. The very tools that occupy 60% of our students' days and thoughts can be used to our advantage. They can be a secret weapon for us because (most of) our students are familiar with it. Here are some tips of going with the flow and making social media work for the classroom.

WHY USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

For starters, Facebook is stomping grounds for many of our students. Many of our students may be far from their home country, and they see Facebook as their connection to back home. It's how they bond with friends, it's how they share cute cat videos that make them laugh. It makes them feel comfortable, and being comfortable is a prime place for language learning to take place. With their feelings of insecurity lowered, they will be more willing to produce more language.

1 WEBSITE LITERACY

The Internet is here to stay. With increasingly paperless systems, we need to teach our students to not only be literate in English, but be web-literate as well. They need to learn how to scan websites, how to look for main ideas on a crowded web page, how to navigate a menu, and even how to recognize ad scams and potential virus attacks. Our students are going to be citizens of a digital world, and if the only English we teach them comes from paper, we are doing them a disservice.

2 TEACHES "REAL" LANGUAGE

The best part about Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites is that everything is real English. It's not watered down dialogues from 1980 printed in textbooks meant to highlight specific grammar points, it's real English being used by real native speakers. They get to see the grammar they've been studying live and in action. Of course, this precipitates the need of encouraging your students to interact with other native speakers on the network and not just friends who speak their first language.

Social media also uses modern and current English usage. While there is a need to teach our students academic English, there is also a need to instruct them on the different "English"s that exist. There's a time and a place for LOL (and it's not in essays or homework) but our students need to see it to know when and how to use it. Regardless of the register (academic or slang) they're using, students are reading and writing in English when they engage with social media.

3 INTERACTION

Students not only get access to reading and writing in this real English, they can also develop conversational skills by commenting back and forth. They learn how to respond to others' comments and even build arguments with successive commenting.

In a classroom, students interacting with each other also builds a positive classroom learning environment. Requiring students to comment once or twice a week on each other's pages or on a class group page will help to facilitate understanding and camaraderie between your students which will ultimately result in improved in-class relations.

4 BUILDS FLUENCY

Just like speaking, our students

need to develop fluency in both reading and writing. They need to develop an ease of language comprehension and production where they stop trying to translate every word and they become language producers with minimal pause and hesitation.

Social media is a great way to build literacy fluency. With the shortened sentences, students are able to read more content faster. Since social media is already informal, they will hesitate less, plan less, and produce more with little hesitation of "is this right?" Sure, mistakes will be made. I can't even begin to count the number of mistakes I make on my own page. But, the more they produce, the more they will learn and improve.

HOW TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA IN CLASS?

1 BLOGS

The most popular and accepted form of social media in the classroom is blogs. They're a great place for students to practice what they're learning and express themselves in a low-pressure environment.

2 FACEBOOK - GROUPS

Assuming all of your students have an existing Facebook account, create a group page with all of your students. By having one central location, students can post questions about homework, opinions on a class reading, and share concerns about the class in a way that they may not feel comfortable in other settings. Having a group page such as this will increase student feelings of ownership in the class and will give students the opportunity to help each other out.

As a teacher, you can use the group page to remind students of upcoming assignments, share links to helpful websites, upload documents, and help answer any questions that your students can't answer. Since most of our classroom is online, having one

place to integrate websites, documents, and feedback will help students develop these integration skills and think about things from multiple perspectives.

3 USE A CLASSROOM VERSION OF FACEBOOK

With all the positive things about social media, it is important to be aware of the potential dangers associated with websites like Facebook. Also, some students may want to keep their school life separate from the private social media life. If you're teaching young students or students who aren't comfortable using their websites in this way, there are a number of websites out there that have similar functions as social media, but without the security risks. Websites such as Edmodo offer a Facebook feel but in a totally protected and safe environment for your students.

4 TWITTER

Twitter, the website where people share ideas using only 160 characters, can have a very positive effect in the classroom. Students can use this site to share their opinions about topics in the classroom and start a discussion. They can share pictures to further emphasize their ideas as well as read updates from celebrities. With each message restricted to 160 characters, students will be more inclined to read more as there is no intimidating block of text - just a short line to be comprehended. The character limit also encourages succinct and clear writing for our students.

TECHNOLOGY DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A FOE. WHILE THERE ARE WAYS TO ABUSE SOCIAL MEDIA, LET'S USE IT TO OUR ADVANTAGE AND MAKE IT AN ALLY.

Adult ESL Learners: Homework Assignments That Work

ADULT ESL LEARNERS MAY NOT HAVE A LOT OF TIME OUTSIDE OF CLASS TO DEVOTE TO THEIR ENGLISH STUDIES BUT ASSIGNING HOMEWORK ONCE IN A WHILE CAN BE BENEFICIAL.

Having students complete exercises at home allows them to maximize their speaking time during class periods. Since adults are often very busy, it is important to assign homework only when you feel it is necessary.

TRY THESE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT IDEAS

1 READING TEXTS AS HOMEWORK? WHY NOT?

For discussion lessons, **send students home with the reading assignment** instead of setting aside time for them to read it silently in class. You should introduce key vocabulary beforehand and give students some topics or questions to think about during their reading so that they will know what to focus on. You can then do some pronunciation practice and comprehension checks in the next lesson. A discussion could also be based on the material students read.

This type of homework activity really makes the most of the time you have with students and gives them an opportunity to think about the material before having to discuss it.

2 USE THEIR IMAGINATION!

This activity is especially good for students of Business English but could also be used in other lessons to focus on giving advice, voicing an opinion, or politely agreeing or disagreeing.

Give students a dialogue to read and ask them to think about the different characters. These dialogues could be based on work, school, or personal interactions. In the next class, discuss students' opinions of the characters

from the dialogue and give students some options for **what the next part of the dialogue could be**. Ask students to defend their choices. For instance, give students a conversation in which two colleagues are discussing Employee C and end the material you give them for homework with one person complaining that Employee C did not deserve to get a promotion.

In the next class you can talk about the appropriateness of this conversation, what students think of the two characters, and what the other character should say next.

3 'INTERVIEW YOUR GRANNY ABOUT ...'

Simple interview activities can be done with students of all ages. For this activity, **ask students to interview family members or friends**. This is especially good practice for using reported speech but can be used to talk about other topics too. You can provide students with some basic questions to give their interview some structure and have them build on it using their own questions.

In the next lesson, students can report their findings and discuss the material with the rest of the class.

4 ROLE PLAYS FOR HOMEWORK ARE FUN, TOO

Adult learners are generally more reluctant than younger students to do role plays but if you think your class would be willing to give it a try, **sections of the activity can be assigned as homework**.

Students will have to work together in class if you want them to develop their own scripts but they can practice and memorize their lines as homework. Since students may not be able to meet one another outside of class, be sure to give students some time to practice together in their groups before the final presentation.

You must allow enough time for students to prepare for the role play so **spread it out over several weeks**.

Remember that you do not have to make it the focus of all your lessons from the time it was introduced until its completion. Introduce the activity in one lesson, check to see if students have any questions about it in each class period after that, give them time to practice, and finally have students present their role plays.

5 WORKSHEETS WORK WONDERS

Some worksheets may also be appropriate for homework. If there is an exam coming up, students may appreciate optional study material for further practice.

While **crosswords** are not a great use of class time for adult learners, providing students with an occasional crossword for homework may be fine. They are enjoyable and do not take long periods of undivided attention to complete: in fact, crosswords can be done gradually in free time such as during the commute to work. They are good practice material because they focus on **checking vocabulary comprehension or expanding vocabulary** - both of which are very important to adults.

WHILE ADULT LEARNERS MAY HAVE LESS TIME THAN YOUNGER STUDENTS FOR HOMEWORK, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THEY DEVOTE TIME TO THEIR STUDIES IN ORDER TO MAKE PROGRESS.

Talk to students at the beginning of the course about what they expect in regards to homework and ensure that you always give students plenty of time to complete exercises.

5 Most Creative Homework Assignments: Homework That Works

MOST ESL TEACHERS AGREE THAT HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS ARE AN ABSOLUTE MUST IN AN ESL COURSE.

But ESL students, on the other hand, may disagree. Adult learners will argue that they have busy schedules and a life outside the classroom, which translates into “no time for homework”. Young learners and teens may come to terms with the fact that they have to do homework, but do we want them to do it because they are compelled to do it... or do we want them to do it because they are excited to do it? Which would you prefer?

The only way to get young students excited about doing homework, and get adults to set aside some time for it, is through highly creative and thoroughly engaging homework assignments. And here are 5 examples:

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS THAT WORK

1 A WORD BOOK

A Word Book or Vocabulary Journal is a classic among teachers of very young learners who are not adept at using dictionaries: here they have a chance to make their own. Help them design their very own Word Book from scratch, out of construction paper, cardboard, or any materials you have on hand. At the end of a reading task or activity, make a list of the words they have learned for the day. Their homework assignment is to enter each of the new words in their Word Book.

The littlest ones simply copy the word and draw a picture of it, while older students can use the word in a sentence that illustrates its meaning. There is no need to copy “dictionary” definitions. They may also cut out pictures from magazines or newspapers and get as creative as they like. But one thing is certain: these will be words they won't easily forget!

2 DO MY RESEARCH!

This is an extremely engaging way to provide extended practice of any grammar point. Say you want your students to practice comparatives and superlatives. Tell them you need information on this year's Oscar nominations. Tell them to go to Oscar.go.com and give them a list of questions they must answer:

- Which of the nominees for Best Picture is the longest film? Which is the shortest? The most popular? Earned the most money at the box office?
- Which film has the most nominations?
- Which in your opinion is the best film?
- Compare two of the actresses nominated for Best Actress. Who is older? Younger? Taller? Prettier?
- Etc.

You may assign any number of research tasks: ideal places for a family vacation (LonelyPlanet.com), best restaurants in the city (Zagat.com), or anything based on local information. Just make sure you give them a website to go to, a set of questions to answer or a task to complete, and above all don't forget to plan the assignment with a grammar point or learning objective in mind.

3 IN THE NEWS

This is an ideal assignment for adult students. Most read the newspaper anyway, right? Or watch the evening news. Ask them to choose a news story that has piqued their interest, and have them:

- Write a report on the news story
- Write a dialogue in which a journalist interviews someone involved in the story.

- Answer a question like, “What could have gone differently?”, thus prompting them to use conditionals, for example (If the truck driver had not answered his cell phone, he would not have caused the accident.)

4 EMAIL WRITING

This is clearly one of the homework assignments that works best with adult learners or those who specifically study Business English. Give them an email to read and ask them to write an appropriate reply. Or give them a situation that would require them to compose a message, like a complaint over a bad service experience or an inquiry into vacation rentals.

5 WATCH IT!

Choose a TV series that is shown in English, either with or without subtitles (you may ask students to cover the subtitles). Choose a show that is suitable to your students' ages. Tell your students that their homework for that night will be to watch an episode of *Modern Family*, whether they usually watch the show or not. Give them a task to complete after viewing the episode: a synopsis of the episode, a character description, or a questionnaire (Do you usually watch this show? If not, would you start watching it? Why/why not?)

ANOTHER GREAT WAY TO GET STUDENTS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN THEIR HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS IS TO ASK THEM TO COME UP WITH SOME IDEAS FOR CREATIVE ASSIGNMENTS ON THEIR OWN AND SHARE THEM WITH THE CLASS. THEY MAY SURPRISE YOU!

And if you're still stumped as to which worksheets to assign to practice grammar, vocabulary, or reading, BusyTeacher.org is always available to help, 24/7, with wonderful ideas for activities and great ready-to-print worksheets.

Assign Highly Effective Homework Your Students Will Actually Enjoy

HOMework IS A GOOD TEACHING TOOL. IN ORDER TO BE USED EFFECTIVELY YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE IT IS HELPING YOUR STUDENTS AND THAT THE EXERCISES YOU ASSIGN ARE NOT JUST BUSY WORK.

Students will know if homework is really benefiting them or not so be sure to make it worth their while or they will be less willing to complete assignments in the future. Let's take a look at the different steps you can take when it comes to using homework appropriately.

5 SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

1 PREPARING FOR IT

Homework should be a review or further practice of something learned in class so ensure that whatever homework you have assigned can be completed by students independently and with ease. To do this, conduct several comprehension tests and practice activities in class so that students feel confident enough with the material to work on their own. Encourage students to ask questions about anything they are unclear on. Indicate what pages of the textbook you are using so that students can find key information later on when you are not available to help them.

2 GIVING IT

Think about the objective of each homework assignment before giving it to students to make sure that it will actually benefit them. Also, try to use a variety of exercises rather than the same ones over and over again. When handing out homework, go over the directions in class to check that students understand what they are expected to do at home. Have students read the instructions aloud and ask them if they have any questions about the exercises.

Do not assign new material as homework as students will not understand it and only become frustrated with the exercises as well as less open to discussing

the topic in class. Sometimes you might want to give students the opportunity to think about a topic before you introduce it in class but in this case you should assign something very general for example tell students to try to think of three directions related words for the next class. This is not something you would collect so students do not have to give it a lot of thought or get stressed about it. In this case, you can spend some time at the beginning of the next class eliciting words from students about directions.

If some of your students find homework assignments too challenging, arrange a tutorial once or twice a week either before or after school so that students can get extra help.

3 CHECKING IT

Once students have completed homework, you have to check it. This can be done a number of ways and depends a lot on the type of activity you assigned. You should check most writing exercises thoroughly for grammar, spelling and punctuation errors before asking students to present their work to the class. This will help them practice the right material rather than repeating mistakes. If the worksheet consists of fill in the blank or short answer type questions, check answers as a class before collecting the sheets from your students. This may mean that students who did not complete the homework will fill in the answers as they come up in class but if you notice a student doing this, you can mark him down for not doing the work at home and should take some time to talk to the student individually.

4 GRADING IT

Not all homework has to be graded but this encourages students to actually do the work. Be sure to collect all homework assignments even if all you do is ensure that they have been completed. Other activities, such as the writing exercise mentioned above, you may consider giving grades on. It is up to you how many points the exercise is worth.

When grading subjective material try to create a rubric which you can use to help you grade all the work the same way. Breaking down points into different categories such as spelling, content, and grammar will certainly help you with grading fairly.

5 RETURNING IT

When you return the homework assignments to your students give them another opportunity to ask questions about the material and encourage students with questions about their grades to meet with you after class to discuss their concerns.

Students who consistently perform at a low level might need a second opportunity to complete the exercise once they have a better understanding of what you are looking for. This will give them the chance to earn more points towards a higher overall grade. In this situation, it is still better to be proactive and give these students special attention to begin with but a combination of both approaches may be the most successful.

HOMework IS A VALUABLE TOOL THAT CAN ASSIST STUDENTS BY GIVING THEM EXTRA PRACTICE USING COURSE MATERIAL.

By reserving larger reading and writing assignments for homework assignments, you can maximize your class time by conducting lots of speaking and listening activities. Homework also gives you more material to better evaluate individual student performance so it is very helpful when used correctly.