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# 13 Great Ways to Explain Even The Most Complicated Grammar Points

**THE BEST WAY TO LAY A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR YOUR STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF GRAMMAR POINTS, FROM THE SIMPLE TO THE MOST COMPLEX, IS TO PROVIDE A CLEAR AND WELL-ORGANIZED MODEL, RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING.**

If we follow this solid model with lots of relevant examples, the students can immediately begin to build their own sentences using this grammatical tool box. They will quickly be on their way to controlled practice, and then to the ultimate aim of language learning, using the material independently and fluently to express what they want to say. There is a knack to providing good grammatical models, and here are my top tips for building a strong foundation for your students:

## **HOW TO EXPLAIN ANY GRAMMAR POINTS: 13 GREAT WAYS**

### **1 DIVIDE AND CONQUER**

Before you reach for a grammar textbook, isolate your grammar point and take a really close look at it. How does it work? What constituent parts does it have? Parse out the structure, learning for yourself, from the inside out, how it is formed and used. What kind of conjugations can you see? What forms are the verbs in? How are the different elements ordered?

### **2 CALL THE PROFESSIONALS**

Then it's time to get some guidance from the grammar experts. A solid grammar book is indispensable to successful ESL teaching, so try to find one that's packed with clear explanations and good examples. I often find that the textbooks guide me towards explanations of those strange exceptions to the rule, and justify oddities of the language in ways I wouldn't have discovered on my own. There are numerous online resources - including BusyTeacher, of course!

### **3 TEST THE RULES**

Composing your own examples is a terrific way to make intimate contact with

the grammar point. Prove the rules that you just encountered in the textbook. Do they always apply? When you change something about the structure, why does it sound wrong? Which aspects of it are your students likely to find difficult? Using the structure yourself puts you in your students' shoes, as you're using just the same material that they'll shortly be working with.

### **4 ASK, DON'T TELL**

A lot of the time, depending on which level you're working with, your students may actually have seen your target structure before. They might be fluent with it - in which case, treat your study of the grammar point as a brief review - or they may be aware of it, but not yet able to use it independently. Try to elicit the structure, even before introducing it. If the students can walk you through the different elements, order, conjugations and exceptions, so much the better.

Move as quickly as you can from presentation of this material - diagrams on the board, initial examples from the textbook, a quick story - to practice, so that the teacher backs away and allows the students to begin using the structure by composing examples. Ask questions throughout this process: some good check questions come from making deliberate mistakes with the structure and seeing if the students can spot them, and from asking about time, direction of action, etc. Initially, these questions can be closed (yes/no) but you could then branch out into other forms, as well as asking for corrections, e.g.:

Teacher: So, if we say that 'he had eaten breakfast before he went to school', does that mean he was hungry when he got to school?

Students: No, he wasn't.

Teacher: Good! Is it OK if I ask, 'Had he eaten after he go to school'...?

Students: (After some thought) No... That's wrong... 'Had he eaten before he went to school'.

Teacher: Good job! If he got to school at eight o'clock, what time might he have eaten breakfast?

Students: Maybe seven?

Teacher: OK, that's probably true, but how about a full sentence, guys?

Students: He might have eaten breakfast at seven o'clock.

Teacher: Great job with the past modal!

I firmly believe that this kind of active, engaged dialogue is the best way to encourage the students to really wrap their minds around the structure and its implications, rather than simply repeating a dry, academic process because they've been told to. Grammar work should be relevant and personalized by using your students themselves and little narratives through which the meaning of the structure becomes clear. Adding other structures (a past modal in our example above) cements this understanding by connecting the new structure to language the students already know.

### **5 USING TIMELINES**

Draw a straight line across part of the board, with 'NOW' somewhere on it. When presenting a tense, especially a continuous or perfect form, mark the actions and events on the line and illustrate the connections between them. Your students' understanding of tenses can be transformed with this simple tool.

### **6 USING DIRECTION ARROWS**

The fastest way to teach the passive form, for example, can be to use directional arrows to explain the action of the verb, i.e. who is doing and who is receiving the action. These can be used to connect the words of the sentence, or cartoon characters who are playing out the events of the sentence.

### **7 INDICATING STRENGTH**

A vertical line with the lexical group hanging off in descending order of strength can quickly show the relationships between the group's members. Modal verbs are a good example:

Must

Need to Should

Can / May

Ought to

Coloring the words (from red down to blue) also gets this point across well.

## 8 USING CARTOONS

Simple line drawings help enormously, and I encourage newer teachers to include basic drawing in their new skills set. They can replace the verbs along a timeline, requiring the students to remember both the verb and its conjugation. They can express the strength of modal verbs, as above, or express countability in nouns, the direction of action in presentation of the passive/active grammar point, etc.

## 9 AND / OR GATES

These symbols, taken from the study of electronics, help us teach the conditional forms by showing each condition and its potential results.

## 10 EXAMPLE AFTER EXAMPLE

Your students will tell you, through their body language, facial expressions, responses and levels of distractibility, when they're now able to create the examples without any further help. As you proceed through your own examples, be aware of their reactions, and only provide as many examples as necessary before turning over responsibility to your students.

## 11 KEEPING IT REAL

Include your students, your city, famous people and other relevant elements in most of your examples. This helps to engage the students and plays down the academic, dull side of grammar. Remember that, when we really get down to it, everyone's favorite subject is themselves!

## 12 ASK GENUINE CHECK QUESTIONS

Much has been written about the dangers of asking 'Do you understand?' but it's worth reiterating: your students will probably not give an honest answer, and even if they do, it's a lazy way of checking understanding. Ask closed, then open questions, as mentioned above.

## 13 HAVE 'PLAN B' READY

Sometimes your presentation doesn't work well, or your exam-

ples fall flat. For the trickier grammar points, have a backup method with its own examples. If the students are simply feeling quiet, ask for written examples (I begin this with a welcoming gesture and, "Over to you, guys!") for them to demonstrate understanding before moving onto spoken examples.

**GRAMMAR NEED NOT BE PAINFUL OR DIFFICULT, BUT TEACHING IS SUCCESSFULLY RELIES ON CLEAR, CONCISE MODELS AND PLENTY OF FUN, RELEVANT EXAMPLES.**

Good luck with your grammar teaching!



# Get Your Students Flipping: 10 Ways to Use Reversi to Teach Grammar

**HAVE YOU EVER USED THE GAME REVERSI OR OTHELLO, WHICH IS SIMILAR TO THE JAPANESE GAME GO, TO TEACH GRAMMAR?** This simple game has players flip tiles repeatedly to show either the black or white side. It may surprise you how versatile and easy to use this game is when teaching English to speakers of other languages.

## 10 FUN WAYS TO USE REVERSI TO TEACH GRAMMAR

The game itself is simple, and it is easy to modify for use in class. You do not even need a game board. Just use simple playing cards to set up your game. Make sure each pair of students has a flat surface to play on. One person will be the number side of the card and the other person will be the pattern side of the card. Start with four cards on the table in a two by two grid alternating pattern and number sides. Players will strategically place their cards so that more cards of their side are showing at the end of the game. To turn cards to their side, a player places one of their cards at the end of a row (whose other end card matches their side) and then flips all the cards in that row to show their side. In other words, in a row of three cards, pattern-number-number, a player can place a pattern card at the opposite end and then turn all the cards to show his side, pattern-pattern-pattern-pattern. If the original row was number-pattern-number, the player of pattern side would not be able to play a card on that row. You can decide whether you allow players to play diagonal rows in their game. It is possible to play a card so that you can turn cards in more than one row. At the end of the game, the player with the most cards showing on their side wins. You can label your cards with the target structure by writing the words on the cards or by printing the words on labels and then affixing those to your playing cards. You can then label each set of cards for what grammar point it tests and use them multiple times in your classroom.

### 1 WORD FORMS

Many English words can have different parts of speech, but different parts of speech take have forms. Prefixes and suffixes are simple ways to change words from nouns to verbs or adjectives to adverbs. You can use Reversi to review dif-

ferent word forms as students play. Decide which forms you will test during the game (nouns and verbs, for example) and write them on either side of the playing cards. Make sure to mix up the word forms and the sides of the cards. Before students can flip a card, they must give the form on the hidden side of the card. If they are unable to give the alternate form of the word, they cannot flip the card and thus turn it to their own side.

### 2 IRREGULAR PAST TENSES

Past tense forms are another easy way to use Reversi in the grammar classroom. On your playing cards, write the present form and the past form of irregular verbs, varying which goes on which side of each card. Then when students want to flip one of the cards on their turn, they must give a sentence using the verb form which appears on the opposite side of the card.

### 3 VERB REVIEW

You can use Reversi to review almost any verb tense your students are learning. Simply put the simple form on the front of each card and either the target verb form on the other side. Have students make sentences using the target verb form before they can flip a card.

### 4 SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

In this version of Reversi, you will not need to put different forms of the same word on either side of each card. You can simply label your cards on one or both sides with a subordinating conjunction. In order to flip each card to their side, a player must give a sentence using the subordinating conjunction correctly.

### 5 PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions are another grammar point you can practice with a game of Reversi. Simply write or label each playing card with a preposition. Then when players want to flip the card, they must use the preposition correctly in a sentence. If you like, limit the prepositions to those defining location and have your student use each one to describe an item in your classroom.

### 6 REPORTED SPEECH

You can play Reversi and practice reported speech at the same time as well.

Simply write the direct quotation on one side of a card and the quoted speech on the other side of the card (have students do this to save yourself prep time) and play that way. You could also play with the traditional game board if you have a stack of cards with just quoted speech on them. Just make students convert that quote to reported speech before they are allowed to take a turn.

### 7 CONTRACTIONS

Help your students practice contractions and their pronunciation by labeling one side of your card with the contraction and another with the two word expression which means the same thing. Students must give the contraction and/or use it in a sentence to flip the card.

### 8 NONCOUNT NOUNS

It can take some practice before ESL students remember which quantifiers go with which noncount nouns. They can practice matching them when you put a quantifier and an appropriate noncount noun on opposite sides of a card when playing Reversi.

### 9 PASSIVE VOICE

You don't have to write out entire passive and active sentences to give your students practice forming passive verbs. Simply put both forms of the verb on your Reversi cards and have students give either the verbs alone or use them in sentences before flipping each card.

### 10 YES/NO QUESTION FORMATION

Students can practice forming yes/no questions with Reversi when you label one side of each card with a statement and the other side with that same sentence written as a question. Students will have to convert the question to a statement or vice versa before they can flip a card during play.

**IF YOU LIKE THESE GRAMMAR TEACHING IDEAS BUT ARE STILL UNCLEAR ABOUT HOW TO PLAY REVERSI, DON'T WRITE THESE GAMES OFF.** Reversi is simple to play and you can find the rules at [www.ask.com/wiki/Reversi](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Reversi). Most of your students probably already know how to play as well, so you can have them clue you in on the finer points of game strategy. They will love the opportunity to teach you something in class.

# Practicing the Simple Present and the Present Continuous

IF YOU ARE TEACHING BEGINNING LEVEL STUDENTS, TRY THESE TEN ACTIVITIES THAT REQUIRE THE USE OF THE SIMPLE PRESENT AND THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS.

## TRY THESE 6 SIMPLE ACTIVITIES ABOUT FAMILIES

### 1 CHARADE IT

Charades is a great way to elicit the present continuous tense your students. Simply have one person act out an activity they do on a regular basis, (such as brushing their teeth, studying, or starting a car) and have the rest of the class make present continuous statements that guess at that action. After someone has guessed the action correctly, have students volunteer sentences using the simple present which they think are true of the person giving the charade. For example, you brush your teeth twice a day, or you use crest toothpaste.

### 2 TWENTY QUESTIONS

Twenty questions is one of my favorite activities for practicing question formation. And it is a great way to elicit simple present and present continuous questions from your students. Have one person choose a verb or activity for the class to guess. Then have the other members of the class ask yes/no questions about the activity using the simple present or the present continuous. They have twenty questions they can ask before they must guess what the verb is. For example, student might ask the following questions: Do you do this every day? Are you doing right now?

### 3 WAIT A MINUTE MR. POSTMAN

When people take vacations, they enjoy sharing their experiences with people they care about. Have your students pretend they are on a dream vacation and write a postcard or letter to someone they care about. In the

post card they can describe what they are doing right now using the present continuous and talk about their everyday routines using the simple present. If you like, review with your class how to address postcards.

### 4 VACATION PROMPTS

If you like, continue with the vacation theme (don't we all like to imagine getting away from it all?) and give your students some prompts to complete sentences about their dream vacations. These prompts should elicit the simpler present and the present continuous. Your list of prompts might include the following: every morning..., all around me..., right now..., today..., every day..., etc. Have your students complete these sentences in writing or work with a partner to complete the sentences orally.

### 5 TABOO QUESTIONS

This activity will really get your students talking, and thinking, too. Start by making a list of questions about taboo subjects – how old are you, how much do you weigh, how often do you shave your armpits, what color underwear are you wearing, etc. If you like, have your students work together to make the list. You should also include some normal, non-taboo questions in your list. All of the questions should be written in the simple present and the present continuous. Then, the class rank these questions in order from those they would most like to be asked to those they would least like to be asked, and divide the ranked list into five different groups. Group one, the questions they would most like to be asked, are worth one point. Group five, the ones they least want to be asked, are worth five points. The other questions earn points where they are in between. To play the game, students will race to earn fifteen points. Each student takes turns choosing the rank of question they want to answer. A classmate chooses a question at that level, and the player answers it. They then earn that many points for their answer. The

first person to fifteen points wins. Students will have to decide if they want to answer uncomfortable questions and earn more points, or if they want to play it safe and keep a lower score.

### 6 COIN TOSS QUESTIONS

This activity is simple. Prepare by making a list of questions using the simple present and present continuous. Each person works with a partner for the activity. On a student's turn, she chooses a question, which she will either answer or ask her partner. Then she flips a coin – heads she answers it, tails her partner answers it. Have students play for a certain amount of time or until they run out of questions.

### 7 A PICTURE IS WORTH...

Pictures are a great way to elicit the present continuous. Have students work with a partner to talk about a picture. (You can find some interesting and unusual pictures at here.) Students should describe what they see using both the simple present and the present continuous.

### 8 MR. KNOW IT ALL

What do your students know about their home countries? Probably a lot. So give them a chance to share what they know with their classmates in this fun activity. One student will pretend to be a tour guide for a place in their home country (or another place of their choosing). They should describe the area and its attractions to the rest of the class, and their classmates should feel free to ask questions about the location. The discussion should happen in the simple present and the present continuous.

### 9 ALL ABOUT US

How aware are your students as to what is going on around them? Give your class a chance to quiz each other on how well they know their classmates habits with this fun quiz. One person closes their eyes. Their part-

ner then asks them questions about their classmates - everyday habits as well as what is going on right now. For example, someone might ask the following questions: What color are Kim's shoes? What does Miguel eat for lunch every day? Who is Sergio sitting next to right now? After a certain amount of time, have students change roles. Who knew their classmates best?

## 10 BABY PICTURES

If you can get a hold of a baby picture for each person in your class, try this fun and memorable activity. Show each person's baby picture in a PowerPoint slide show. Have your students guess who is in the picture and give their reasons why using statements in the simple present and present continuous. You might also have students describe the picture as well.

# Top 5 Exercises for Practicing Past, Present, and Future Continuous

**ANY GRAMMAR TEACHER KNOWS THAT CONTINUOUS TENSES, ALSO KNOWN AS PROGRESSIVE TENSES, DESCRIBE AN ACTION IN PROGRESS AT A CERTAIN POINT IN TIME.**

If the point in time in question is in the past, then the past progressive tense is used. If the point in time in question is in the future, the future progressive is used. And if the point in time in question is right now, the present progressive is used. Though it can be confusing for ESL students at first, once they see this simple pattern they should become quite adept at using the progressive tenses. When it's time to test these three tenses together, here are some activities you can use to challenge your students and help them review.

## TOP 5 EXERCISES FOR PRACTICING PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE CONTINUOUS TENSES

### 1 YOU DID WHAT WHEN?

In this simple game, which requires no prep, students work in pairs to guess the correct progressive tense. One person gives a phrase using the -ing form of a verb such as studying for the final. The other player must then give complete sentences trying to guess when that person did the action or when they will be doing the activity they named. The guesser might say something like You were studying for the final at the end of last semester. The person who gave the phrase then says if the event occurs earlier or later than the time they gave. The second student keeps giving sentences until they have guessed the correct time for the event. Students then switch roles.

### 2 NOT QUITE THE SAME

Your students may have a lot in common with each other, but how much of those commonalities happened at the same time? In this activity, students try to find something that is true for both themselves and their partner but that were true at different times. The goal is to find something that is true for one

person in the present (using the present progressive) and was true for the other in either the past (using the past progressive) or will be true in the future (using the future progressive). If the two students shared that activity at the same time, for example, if they are both studying English right now, it does not count. Divide your class into pairs and then give them five to ten minutes to find as many matches as they can. At the end of the time, the pair with the most things in common wins the round. If you like, switch up partners and play again.

### 3 TELL AND RETELL

This game will require students to use the present progressive and the past progressive to tell a story. Play in groups of three or four. One person chooses a scene and describes what is going on. For example, she might say she is sitting on the beach listening to music and watching swimmers race. She then adds a sentence beginning with, "When all of a sudden...". The second person must then take up telling the story. He first recaps what the first person said (she was sitting on the beach, listening to music and watching swimmers race) when all of a sudden a shark washed up on the beach. He then continues the story in the present progressive. The shark is chomping his jaws, and he is trying to eat a surfer for dinner. When all of a sudden... Play then goes to the next person who continues the story, first recapping what the first two players said. Once everyone in the group has had a chance to add to the story, students share what each thinks will be happening an hour in the future using the future progressive.

### 4 TIME WILL TELL

Do you keep a pile of old magazines laying around your classroom? If so, try this activity that gets students describing the pictures in their magazines. One person chooses a picture from a magazine and describes what is happening. The other person rolls a die. If the number is odd, he describes the picture as if it happened in the past. If the number is even, he describes the pic-

ture as if it is happening in the future. If you like, you can have pairs of students complete the activity orally or have each student work with their own picture and write out their answers.

### 5 I KNOW WHAT YOU WERE DOING LAST SUMMER

Get ready for this fun guessing game by putting slips of paper in a hat with different times in the past and future. Have half of your class draw a time from the hat, and then sit with a partner. The first person will then make sentences using either the past progressive or the future progressive describing what they think their partner was or will be doing at the time they drew from the hat. For example, if the time were 2050 a person might say the following. You will be driving a Mercedes. You will have finished law school. You will be living in New York City. This student continues making sentences about his partner until that person is able to guess the time the speaker drew from the hat. When the second player guesses correctly, she pulls a time from the hat and makes up sentences about her partner's actions at that time.

**THINGS ARE CONSTANTLY HAPPENING AROUND US, AND THINGS WILL BE HAPPENING UNTIL THE END OF TIME. THE MORE COMFORTABLE YOUR STUDENTS ARE WITH THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE PROGRESSIVE TENSES, THE MORE EASILY THEY WILL BE ABLE TO TALK ABOUT THESE EVENTS. WHY NOT GET THEM STARTED TODAY?**



# There Is, There Are, There Was, There Were...6 Activities

**WHETHER YOU ARE INTRODUCING VERB TENSES TO YOUR STUDENTS FOR THE FIRST TIME OR YOU ARE REVIEWING THEM AT THE END OF YOUR ENGLISH PROGRAM, THESE ACTIVITIES WILL GIVE YOUR STUDENTS A CHANCE TO USE MULTIPLE VERB TENSES ALL IN THE SAME ACTIVITY.**

**ENJOY 6 FABULOUS ACTIVITIES FOR GETTING YOUR VERB RIGHT**

## 1 VERB TENSE CHART

One simple activity which will evaluate how well your students know their verb forms is having them complete a verb tense chart. Make three columns on your chart – past, present, and future. Then decide which verbs you want to test your students on. Put one verb on each line on your paper but in only one of the columns, and vary which form (past, present, or future) you complete on the chart. Make copies of the chart for your students and have them fill in all the missing verb forms. When they are complete, every space in the chart should be full.

## 2 THE MOST DEPRIVED

This is an active game that will not only get your students moving but will also challenge them to choose the right verb form when they speak. Have students arrange their chairs in a circle and have one person stand in the middle of the circle. You should have one fewer chair than you have students. The person in the middle makes a negative statement about his past, present, or future about something he didn't have, couldn't do, etc. For example, students could say any of the following: I have never eaten steak, I did not have a first birthday party, or I will not get a vacation this year. Any student for whom the statement is also true must get up from his seat and sit down in an open seat. At the same time, the student in the middle will dash to fill one of the seats

her classmates vacates. Once everyone is sitting again, you should have one person in the middle. That person then takes a turn making a most deprived statement. Continue until you run out of time for the activity.

## 3 EXTREME MAKEOVER

Before and after pictures are inherently fascinating. We love to see how a person or object can transform from ugly to beautiful (or sometimes vice versa). Gather some before and after pictures for use in this activity. The pictures can be of people, buildings, historical sites, or anything that appeals to your class or ties into your current unit. Give a pair of students both pictures and then have them point out the differences between the two using past and present verb forms. Also have them make predictions about the person, place, or thing in the future.

## 4 TRAVEL AGENT ROLE PLAY

Everybody likes to take vacations, but sometimes our best efforts do not turn out the way we hope them to. In this role play, one or more students plays the vacationers who booked a trip through a travel agency. The other person plays the travel agent who booked the trip. The vacationers are back at the travel agency to complain to the travel agent. Their vacation was nothing like it was supposed to be. Students will tell the travel agent how their vacation was supposed to be and how it really was using various past tenses as well as conditional forms. They can also make demands for recompense using future tenses. If you like, have groups of students perform the role-play in front of the class and follow up with a vote on which vacationers had the worst experience.

## 5 I SPY

I just love using I-spy books in the ESL classroom. They are great for vocabulary development and story generation. In this activity, they can

also be used to practice various verb tenses. Project a complex picture from an I-spy book for your class for a very short period of time. Thirty seconds usually works well. Challenge students to notice everything they can from the picture. Then hide the picture and ask students to share what details they remembered from the picture. Another activity you can do with the same picture is to sit your students in two rows facing each other – one row with their back to the board. Have one person look at the complex picture for a short period of time and then give instructions to his partner as she attempts to draw/recreate the picture.

## 6 WHAT HAPPENED?

This fun activity gets students involved in stumping their classmates. Have one person volunteer to leave the classroom for a few minutes. Once that person is in the hallway, have the students in class make several changes to the classroom. They might change seats, move decorations, or erase the front board. After the changes have been made, the first student returns to the room. She must then see how many changes she can identify. She can make statements in past or present tenses. If she finds all the changes, she gets a free homework pass to use at her leisure.

**MIXING UP VERB TENSES IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR ESL STUDENTS TO PRACTICE.**

In real world language use, they will have to understand and produce many verb tenses in the same conversation. That is why it's essential to practice these skills in class before encountering them in the real world. Though some students may be intimidated by using the past, present, and future all at the same time, the practice will do nothing but benefit them once they are no longer in your classroom.

# 11 Games for Practicing Countable and Noncountable Nouns

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR SOME FUN REVIEWS OF COUNT AND NON-COUNT NOUNS WITH YOUR ESL STUDENTS, TRY THESE SIMPLE GAMES.

You can count on your students having a great time and learning, too.

## 11 FUN GAMES FOR PRACTICING COUNTABLE AND NONCOUNTABLE NOUNS

### 1 PICTURE PERFECT

Pictures are a great way to get your ESL students talking. Learners use visual input to access vocabulary and use grammar to express their ideas. This game focuses on the differences between count and noncount nouns in pictures. Put your students in pairs, and give each pair two pictures. The pictures should be very similar and should contain both count and noncount items. Each person gets one picture and cannot let their partner see it. Students must then ask each other questions about the objects in their partner's picture to see what the differences between the two are. For example, one student might ask if there is any rice in the picture and the other student might answer there are three bowls of rice.

### 2 PICK A QUANTIFIER

This is a simple game that you don't need to do any prep for. Start by having your students brainstorm as many noncount nouns as they can along with the quantifiers that are used to count them. Then, write the quantifiers only on small slips of paper and put them in a hat. Erase the noncount nouns, and then give students turns drawing a quantifier from the hat and using it in a sentence with an appropriate noncount noun. Each noncount noun can only be used one time.

### 3 NONCOUNT BINGO

How much do your students have in common? Help them find out with this version of Bingo. Start by giving each student a blank bingo board and having them fill in the twenty-four blank spaces with twelve noncount nouns and twelve count nouns. Once the boards are finished, start the game. Students will have to find someone in their class that has something in common with them in regards to a noun on their board. For example, two students might find they both drank a glass of milk for breakfast or that they are both great at grammar. When students find a match, they should write a sentence in their square such as, "Carlos and I both had a glass of milk for breakfast." Play until one student has filled five squares in a row and calls out Bingo. Have that student share with the class the sentences that won her the game.

### 4 IF IT'S TOO HOT IN THE KITCHEN

This game takes some preparation, but it is fun and will elicit plenty of laughs. Start by preparing a series of instructions that might be part of a recipe. (Ten to fifteen steps is usually a good number, or you could have one step for each member of your class.) For each step, leave a blank where the ingredient would go. (For example, add one cup of ... and fold in three ...) Make sure your sentences elicit both count and noncount nouns. Give each member of your class a copy of the instructions, and have them fill in the first blank. Then have them fold over the top of the paper covering their answer and passing the paper to the next person. That person fills in the second blank, folds the paper over, and passes it on. Continue until all the blanks are filled. Then collect the papers and read the recipes to your class. Have them vote on whether each recipe would be something they would be willing to try and which was the best sounding recipe overall.

### 5 GUESS THE FILL IN THE BLANK

On your board, write five to ten sentences that elicit count and noncount nouns. It's best if at least some of the sentences are opinions. (For example, drinking some ... is the best way to start the day.) Have each person write a list of words that they would use to complete the blanks. Tell them, however, to put their answers in random order on their paper. After the questions are answered, have students switch their paper with a partner. That person will then try to figure out which answers go in which blanks. Have students check with their partner to see how many answers they matched up correctly.

### 6 PARADISE BOUND

What would a person need if they were stranded on a desert island? This fun game will give your students a chance to discuss it. Put your class into groups of about four or five. Tell your class that each group must decide on what items they will need to survive on their island. They can only bring ten items (though they can choose the quantity of the item that they want) and at least four of those items must be noncount nouns. Have the group discuss it and then present their final list to the class after everyone is finished.

### 7 WHAT IS YOUR TRUE AGE?

In this game, students will answer questions to see how healthy their lifestyle is. Start by preparing a list of questions (using both count and noncount nouns) about their lifestyle – foods they eat, activities they do, personality traits, etc. You can also have students make their own lists based on what they think makes a healthy lifestyle. Make sure your questions include both count and noncount nouns. For each healthy answer, students should subtract one year from their age. For each unhealthy answer, students should add one year to their

age. After answering all the questions, have students share their modified age with the class.

## 8 THE WORST CASE SCENARIO GAME

If you have seen *The Worst Case Scenario Handbook*, you have seen the strange situations that people might get themselves into. In this game, students choose a random page of the book by calling out a number and then turning to that page. They read the situation on that page but do not read how to survive it. Students then name three things (using both count and noncount nouns) that would help them survive that situation. If you like, play this game as an entire class or in groups of four or five. After each person gives their answer, have students read how to survive the situation and see if the player mentioned any items that are actually listed in the survival guide.

## 9 A ROLL OF THE DICE

This simple game requires no preparation on your part other than having dice handy. Put students in pairs, and give each pair one standard six-sided die. Student's take turn rolling the die. If they roll a one, two, or three, they make a statement about something in your classroom that has that quantity. If they roll a four, five, or six, they make a statement about your classroom using a noncount noun and its appropriate quantifier. If a player can give his answer in less than ten seconds after he rolls, he scores a point. If he cannot, he doesn't score anything for that round. The first player to ten points wins.

## 10 WHAT'S THE CATCH?

Start this activity by making two sets of cards. One set should be several places that a person might go – a restaurant, college, a new home, a classroom, etc. The second set of cards should list problems that location could have – there is no bathroom, it smells like onions all the time, etc. Put students in pairs to play. One person draws a location that they are going to. The other person draws the problem that location has. The person with the location asks his partner yes/no questions using count and noncount nouns until he figures out what the problem is at his location.

## 11 TIME TO REDECORATE

How much do your students like your classroom? What would their ideal classroom look like? Have your students imagine what they would do to your classroom to make it perfect, and then have each person present their ideas to the class. Students should draw a picture or make a diagram as well as list the changes they would make to the classroom. Have each person present their ideas to the class in no more than five minutes. Then have the class vote on whose classroom they think is the best version.

# All the Exercises Students Need to Learn & Practice English Nouns

Nouns, after all, are an essential part of the English language. These exercises are designed to go along with the concepts presented in that article. They will give your students an opportunity to practice using and working with nouns in English.

## TEACH AND PRACTICE NOUNS USING THESE IDEAS

### 1 CONCRETE AND ABSTRACT NOUNS

A simple exercise is all your students need to practice identifying the difference between concrete and abstract nouns. Give students a list of several nouns that include members of both categories. Then, have students work individually to separate the nouns into the two categories: concrete and abstract. Remind your students that concrete nouns are those that a person can see or touch. Abstract nouns are those that identify things a person cannot see, such as emotions and ideas. Once students have sorted their lists, go over each noun with your class, explaining any unfamiliar vocabulary or classification confusion as necessary.

### 2 COMMON AND PROPER NOUNS

Beginning students might not be ready to read newspaper articles in a reading comprehension activity, but that doesn't mean you can't and shouldn't use the realia in class. After you have explained the difference between common and proper nouns, give your students part or all of a news article which contains both common and proper nouns. Ask your students to find any proper nouns in the piece. They should be able to do this even though they might not understand what the words themselves because proper nouns are capitalized. Make a list with your class of all the proper nouns they found in the article. Then challenge your students to come up with a common noun that could replace each proper noun. For example, if your article talked about Arnold Schwarzenegger in Los Angeles, you could change those proper nouns to common nouns by referring

to a movie star (or former governor or a man) in a large city. If you want to extend the exercise, give your students a list of around ten common nouns and challenge them to come up with a proper noun that could replace each one in a sentence.

### 3 NOUNS IN A SENTENCE

If you are teaching strict beginners, you will want to keep this exercise very simple. But if your students are able to understand sentences with a little more complexity, feel free to challenge them with this activity which asks students to identify the roles nouns play in a sentence. In simple terms, nouns can either be the subject of the sentence, the object of a verb, or the object of a preposition. For students just learning English, write a sentence on the board that contains only one or two nouns. Ask your students to identify the noun(s) in the sentence and say what role it is playing – subject, object, or object of the preposition. (Avoid using sentences with indirect objects unless you have already taught your students about them.) For students a little more advanced, write as complicated a sentence as they can manage, tell them how many nouns are in the sentence, and then ask them to identify each noun and its role in the sentence. Review answers and answer any questions your students have.

### 4 SINGULAR AND PLURAL NOUNS

Practicing singular and plural nouns is really quite simple. A student starts with a singular noun and writes its plural form. Or she might start with the plural form and write the singular form. You can make this activity a little more interesting for your students by turning it into a relay race such as this review exercise. Divide your class into teams of four or five students. Each team will need a cup set at the front of the room. In the cup, you will have a set of tongue depressors or Popsicle sticks, each of which has one singular noun written on it. Each cup should have ten to fifteen sticks in their cup, which include regular and irregular plural nouns, and each team's words should be the same as those of the other teams. On your go,

one person from each team rushes to the front of the room, grabs a stick from their team's cup, and writes the plural form of that noun on the board before running to the back of his team's line. The next person can either choose a new stick and a new word or make a correction to one of the words already on the board before returning to his team. The teams continue until they have pluralized all the nouns in their cup. The first team to finish scores five points, the second three points, and the third one point. (Feel free to adjust these points depending on how many teams are playing.) Each team also scores one point for every correctly pluralized word on the board once they are finished. Add up the points and declare the winning team.

### 5 COLLECTIVE NOUNS

You can find a great list of collective nouns at [busyteacher.org/16696-list-of-collective-nouns-people.html](http://busyteacher.org/16696-list-of-collective-nouns-people.html) (Note: these collective nouns all refer to people, but you can add your own entries to the list for animals, etc.) Help your students remember which nouns are collective and what they describe by making up a set of playing cards. For each collective noun, write the collective noun on one blank index card and the objects it refers to on another blank index card. Then have your students use these cards to play go fish or memory in which they must match each (singular) collective noun to its (plural) members.

### 6 NONCOUNT NOUNS

If you are studying noncount nouns in class, you could probably fill the day with exercises. You can find five different fun-filled activities, which practice count and noncount nouns, at [busyteacher.org/14285-non-count-nouns-5-fun-filled-activities.html](http://busyteacher.org/14285-non-count-nouns-5-fun-filled-activities.html).

**NOUNS REALLY ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, AND IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOUR STUDENTS UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE, THEIR ROLES IN A SENTENCE, AND HOW TO USE THEM GRAMMATICALLY.** Try these exercises with your students and give them the foundation they need on which to build their future English language knowledge.



# Everything Your ESL Students Need to Know About Nouns

**NOUNS – ONE OF THE BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS OF LANGUAGE, AND ONE OF THE FIRST BITS OF GRAMMAR STUDENTS LEARN IN ANY LANGUAGE.**

The English language contains more nouns than any other type of word. Without nouns, we couldn't talk about the things around us. We couldn't form sentences and share ideas. We couldn't communicate at all. In ESL classes, nouns are one of the first things students learn about. But these language building blocks are so important, so common, it's easy to overlook one of their facets.

**CHECK IF YOUR STUDENTS KNOW IT ABOUT NOUNS**

## 1 WHAT ARE NOUNS?

You probably learned the answer in first grade. Nouns are words for persons, places, or things. Nouns that name things include the things we can see around us as well as ones we can't, like ideas and concepts. Nouns that we can see are considered concrete nouns. Those that refer to ideas, feelings, and emotions as well as nouns that a person cannot see or touch are referred to as abstract nouns. Nouns include proper nouns, specific nouns referring to specific people or places, which start with a capital letter. For example, Paris is one specific city in one specific location. It cannot refer to any city in any location. Nouns also include common nouns, general words which refer to any one noun of a particular category. For example, boy can refer to any male child under a certain age.

## 2 WHAT DO NOUNS DO?

Nouns have specific functions in a sentence. If they are the perpetrators of the action in a sentence (the verb), they are the subject of the sentence. If they come after the verb and are the receiver of the action, they are objects of the verb (also called the predicate noun). They can also serve the role of indirect object in a sentence. They might also follow a preposition to complete a prepositional phrase in which case they are the object of the preposition. Sometimes they fill

the less common roles of object complement, predicate nominative, and the noun in an appositive, but your students won't have to know about those functions until they are more advanced in their English studies.

## 3 SINGULAR AND PLURAL NOUNS

A singular noun refers to one of something. A plural noun refers to more than one of something. In English, nouns are generally made plural by adding *-s* to the end of a noun: dog/dogs, house/houses, boy/boys. Nouns which end in *-s*, *-ch*, *-sh*, *-x*, or *-z* are made plural by adding *-es*: witch/witches, box/boxes, pass/passes. Nouns that end in *-y* can follow one of two patterns. If the letter before *-y* is a vowel, add *-s* to make the noun plural: boy/boys, tray/trays. If the letter before *-y* is a consonant, change *-y* to *-i* and add *-es* to make the noun plural: baby/babies, sky/skies. In addition, English includes countless irregular plurals, which ESL students will have to memorize: man/men, child/children, and fish/fish, for example.

## 4 COLLECTIVE NOUNS

One type of noun that can be confusing to ESL students is collective nouns. These are singular nouns which refer to several members of one body. For example, crowd is a singular noun, but it refers to many people gathered together. Another example of a collective noun is a school of fish. The school contains many fish, but the word itself is singular. Collective nouns take singular verbs. The school swims. The crowd roars. Be sure your students understand what a collective noun is and why it takes a singular verb. Other collective nouns include bunch, set, bouquet, audience, jury, family, flock, herd, and team, though there are many more than these in the English language.

## 5 NONCOUNT NOUNS

Another type of noun which can be confusing for ESL students who are learning about singular and plural nouns is noncount nouns. Noncount nouns are those which cannot be counted without

the addition of a quantifier. For example, rice is a noncount noun. It cannot be made singular or plural without another word to modify it.

I have one rice on my plate. (wrong)  
I have many rices on my plate. (wrong)  
I have one/many grains of rice on my plate. (right)

In the above sentence, grain serves as a quantifier for rice. It allows you to communicate a specific number of that object. Other noncount nouns include (pieces of) homework, (pieces of) furniture, (cups of) milk, coffee, and tea.

## 6 MAKING NOUNS POSSESSIVE

Some ESL students may become confused with possessive nouns. These nouns take 's at the end of the word. They do this to indicate possession.

- The boy's car is in the driveway.

In the above sentence, the 's at the end of the word boy indicates that the car belongs to the boy, and only that one boy. Plural nouns can also be made possessive. If a plural noun (or any noun for that matter) already ends in *-s*, simply add an apostrophe to make the noun possessive: the boys' cars, Chris' book, etc.

## 7 ENGLISH NOUNS AND GENDER

Generally, English nouns do not have gender (unlike those in the native languages of many ESL students). For example, book is considered "it" rather than he or she. Some nouns in English do carry the idea of gender, but often they have two versions each of which refers to either a man or a woman: waiter/waitress, actor/actress, etc. One exception to the lack of gender rule is cars, boats, and other vehicles, which are sometimes referred to in the feminine sense. E.g. My boat is on the water, and she is beautiful.

**NOUNS ARE COMMON, THEY ARE BASIC, AND THEY CAN STILL BE CONFUSING FOR SOME ESL STUDENTS. IF YOU GO THROUGH THESE DIFFERENT POINTS IN REGARDS TO NOUNS, YOUR STUDENTS WILL HAVE A GOOD FOUNDATION ON WHICH TO BUILD THE REST OF THEIR ENGLISH STUDIES.**

# 5 Simple Steps for Teaching and Practicing Reported Verbs

**REPORTED VERBS ARE LIKE SECOND HAND VERBS -- SPEAKERS USE THEM TO SAY WHAT SOMEONE ELSE HAS ALREADY SAID.**

Quite often, we use quoted speech to repeat what someone has said. However, quotations require the second speaker to say exactly what the first speaker said before them. In written English, it's not usually an issue, but in spoken English quoted speech can cause confusion at times. Another option for telling a third party what a first party has said is using reported speech and thus reported verbs. Reported speech communicates to a third party what a first party said but without using the exact wording. Teaching reported speech is likely a topic for your advanced English students, but if you have high intermediates you could introduce the idea then as well. Here's how to go about it.

## HOW TO TEACH REPORTED VERBS IN 5 EASY STEPS

### 1 REVIEW QUOTED SPEECH WITH YOUR STUDENTS

Your students will have to understand what quoted speech is before they can learn how to correctly use reported speech. Quoted speech is a direct quotation of what someone has said. In writing the words, when a second person repeats them, are surrounded by quotation marks and follow certain punctuation patterns.

When the speaker tag is at the beginning of the sentence, a comma follows it and the quoted sentence(s) can end with a period, question mark, or exclamation mark.

He said, "I am coming to the party."

When the speaker tag is at the end of a sentence, the quoted sentence(s) must end with either a question mark, an exclamation mark, or a comma, and the speaker tag is followed with a period (even if the original speaker asked a question).

"I am coming to the party," he said.

"Are you coming to the party?" she asked.

### 2 TEACHING THE BASICS OF REPORTED SPEECH

When an English speaker changes quoted speech to reported speech, the original sentence becomes a noun clause (dependent clause) in the new sentence. When statements become reported speech, the noun clause can optionally begin with the word "that". For questions that become reported speech, the noun clause begins with if or whether. The three most common verbs used with reported speech are **say**, **tell**, and **ask**. Each follows its own pattern when used in reported speech. Generally, though, changing quoted speech to reported speech involves changes in pronoun use and verb tense.

Pronouns should be changed to keep the meaning of the sentence logical.

Present verbs in the quoted speech become past verbs in the reported speech.

"I am happy."

She said (that) she was happy.

Present progressive verbs in the quoted speech become past progressive verbs in the reported speech.

"They are leaving in the morning."

He said (that) they were leaving in the morning.

Simple past, present perfect, and past perfect verbs in the quoted speech become past perfect verbs in the reported speech.

"Jake took that class last semester."

He said Jake had taken that class last semester.

"I have visited Maui."

She said that she had visited Maui.

Simple future verbs using "will" in quoted speech use "would" instead in the reported speech.

"It will rain tomorrow."

The forecaster said it would rain tomorrow.

Modal verbs in quoted speech experience these changes in reported speech: can becomes could, may/might or could, will/would, must or have to/had to, shall/would or should.

Might, should, and ought to remain the same in reported speech.

"A police officer can stop you for running a red light."

He said (that) a police officer could stop you for running a red light.

Imperative statements in quoted speech become infinitive verbs in reported speech.

"Go home!"

He said to go home.

### 3 TEACH STUDENTS TO USE SPECIFIC REPORTING VERBS

#### SAY

When changing a direct quotation to reported speech using say, change the pronoun as necessary in the reported speech and make a present verb past tense. It is optional whether or not to start the reported phrase with "that".

"I am your father." (quoted speech)

He said (that) he was your father. (reported speech)

If the verb in the quoted speech is already in the past tense, it remains in the past tense.

"I did my homework last night." (quoted speech)

He said (that) he did his homework last night.

Generally, say is used as a reported verb for something that was said at an earlier time. It is sometimes possible to use say as a reported verb directly after the first person has spoken if more than two people are having a conversation and one person does not hear or mishears what the first speaker says. In this case, do not change the tense of the verb.

Speaker 1: "I am going to ask him out."

Speaker 2: "What?"

Speaker 3: "She said she is going to ask him out."

#### TELL

Tell follows a slightly different patterns when used in reported speech. Since tell is a verb which takes a direct ob-

ject, reported speech using tell must include a reference to the original hearer of the statement. That reference should come directly after the verb tell in the sentence. The person reporting the speech does not have to be the person who heard the original speaker.

"I am planning on selling my car."

He told me (that) he was planning on selling his car.

"She will not pass her driver's test."

Michael told his brother (that) their sister would not pass her driver's test.

## ASK

When ask is used in reported speech, the quoted speech was a question, and including a direct object is optional for reported speech using ask. Yes/No questions in reported speech are phrased as if or whether clauses.

"Are you going to the mall later?"

He asked if you were going to the mall later.

He asked you whether you were going to the mall later.

Information questions in reported speech follow the same patterns as statements except that they use the question word as the subordinating conjunction in the noun clause rather than that, and the subordinating conjunction is not optional.

"Where did you get that?"

My mother asked (me) where I got that.

"What's the soup of the day?"

The customer asked the server what the soup of the day was.

## 4 ALERT YOUR STUDENTS TO OTHER REPORTING VERBS AND THEIR PATTERNS

English is full of reporting verbs, and memorizing the sentence pattern for each one can be overwhelming for even the best ESL students. Teaching them in categories, groups of verbs which follow the same pattern, is a better option for most students. Here are the most common reporting verb patterns with some verbs that follow each of them. (Some reporting verbs do fit into more than one category.)

Reporting verb/object/infinitive: advise, encourage, warn: *He warned us to study for the test.*

Reporting verb/infinitive: agree, decide, promise: *He decided to quit his job.*

Reporting verb/(that)/verb: say, admit, promise: *She promised (that) she*

*would call me after the interview.*

Reporting verb/gerund: deny, recommend, suggest: *He denied cheating on the test.*

Reporting verb/object/preposition/gerund: accuse, blame, congratulate: *She congratulated her daughter on graduating college.*

Reporting verb/preposition/gerund: apologize, insist: *They insisted on coming with me.*

## 5 FOLLOW UP WITH A LESSON ON ADVANCED REPORTED SPEECH

These instructions are true when the reporting verb (say, tell, ask, etc.) are in the past tense. You and your students will find that when the reporting verb is in a present or future tense, the verbs in the reported speech follow different patterns. Once your students have mastered standard reported speech, move on to more advanced reported speech patterns.

### LEARNING REPORTED SPEECH IN ENGLISH IS IMPORTANT, BUT IT'S NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART.

If you walk your students through these steps, they will learn to recognize and use reported speech in their day-to-day English use.



# A Review of Subject-Verb Agreement with Exercises Part 1

## A NEW CLASS OF NOVICE LANGUAGE LEARNERS ENTERS THE CLASSROOM TO BEGIN THEIR JOURNEY TO FLUENCY IN ENGLISH.

With a whole new world and its lexicon in front of them, where does a teacher and an ESL student start? As you know, one of the earliest topics covered in ESL classes is subject-verb agreement. Without that, even the most simple sentences will not be grammatical. But achieving correct subject-verb agreement may be more complicated than your students realize. Here are some tips to make sure your students' subjects and verbs are getting along and exercises to practice getting it right.

## GET YOUR SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT RIGHT FOR YOUR CLASS

### 1 BASIC SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

In essence, subject-verb agreement is simple: singular subjects take singular verbs and plural subjects take plural verbs. Other languages may have different verb endings for singular and plural, masculine and feminine, first second and third person subjects. Regular English subjects and verbs fall into only two categories. Singular first person, second person, and plural nouns (I, you, we, you, they, the women, my brothers) take the base form of regular verbs. (I see, you see, they see, etc.) Singular third person nouns and pronouns (he, she, it, Tom, the woman) add an -s to regular verbs for proper agreement. (He sees. Tom sees. The woman sees.) In essence, that is subject-verb agreement. The nouns may be common nouns or proper nouns, but either way they will follow this pattern of verb agreement.

*Practice: To give your students experience with simple subject-verb agreement, give them a list of several nouns and pronouns in English as well as a list of several regular verbs. Have students use*

*the subjects and verbs to write grammatical sentences, paying attention to the verb endings for first person singular nouns.*

### 2 IRREGULAR PLURAL NOUNS

While most nouns in English end in -s when they are plural, not every noun follows this pattern. Some irregular nouns take irregular plural forms, and these irregular plurals can cause confusion for your students. Nouns that might especially cause confusion for your students are those that take the same form for both singular and plural nouns. Such examples include deer, fish, sheep, moose, series, species, and wheat. In these cases, students will have to determine the context of the noun before deciding whether it is singular or plural and therefore which verb ending to use.

*Practice: Let your students roll their fate with this fun review of subject-verb agreement with irregular plural nouns. On one blank die, write six different irregular plural nouns. On another blank die, write the numbers 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 4. Students take turns rolling the dice to determine the subject of their sentence. If they roll a one they must form a sentence using the irregular noun in its singular form. If they roll a two, three, or four, they must form a sentence using the irregular noun in its plural form.*

### 3 INDEFINITE PRONOUNS

Indefinite pronouns are those that do not refer to any one specific person or thing. Some are singular while others are plural. The most common singular indefinite pronouns in English are *anyone, no one, everyone, everybody, someone, and nobody*. Though they can refer to any person in existence and, in the case of everyone and everybody, all people in existence, these pronouns are always singular and as a result take a singular verb.

No one takes English III before taking

English I.

Someone likes to text in class.

Make sure your students are clear that these subjects are singular, particularly in the case of everybody and everyone. Though they refer to a group of people (much like collective nouns, which we will discuss below) they are singular and must take a singular verb.

Everybody is here.

Everyone eats lunch at noon in our school.

Each is another indefinite pronoun that can cause students confusion. Though it often precedes a prepositional phrase containing a plural noun, the word itself is singular and takes a singular verb.

Each of the movies starts at a different time.

Each of the students has finished his test.

The indefinite pronouns all and some, on the other hand, are plural. They therefore take plural verbs.

All students take English III before taking English I.

Some students like to text in class.

None is an indefinite pronoun that is an exception to the rule: it can be either plural or singular depending on what it refers to in its context.

None of them text in class.

None of them texts in class.

*Practice: An easy way to practice agreement with indefinite pronouns is with a fill in the blank exercise. Give students several sentences in which the indefinite pronoun is replaced with a blank and give them a list of the indefinite pronouns from which to choose to complete the sentences. Students can choose what they think is the best pronoun to complete the sentence provided it agrees with the verb.*

**WE AREN'T DONE DISCUSSING SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT QUITE YET.**



# A Review of Subject-Verb Agreement with Exercises Part 2

## PART TWO OF WHY CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG- A REVIEW OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT WITH EXERCISES WALKS YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS THROUGH MORE STICKY SITUATIONS WHEN IT COMES TO CORRECT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT.

Keep reading to make sure your students have it all straight.

## BE VERY CLEAR ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

### 1 COMPOUND SUBJECTS

Compound subjects are those that contain two separate subjects and are joined with *and* to form a plural subject. Either or both of the subjects can be singular, but the resulting compound subject is plural.

My sister and I live in the same apartment.

My sisters and I live in the same apartment.

Because these compound subjects are plural, they take a plural verb. Make sure your students understand that phrases like *as well as*, *together with*, and *along with* are NOT the same as *and*. Although they may seem to link two different subjects, they do not create a compound subject. Take the following sentence as an example.

Michael, as well as his brother, attends the University of Delaware.

Michael is the subject of the sentence. His brother is not part of the subject. As a result, the verb is in its singular form. Here is another example.

Snow White, along with the seven dwarves, hates the evil queen.

Again, the subject is singular and therefore takes a singular verb.

Similarly, the words *or*, *either*, and *neither* may seem to refer to two things, but they also take a singular verb when the subjects they connect are both singular.

Either Michael or David studies Spanish in school.

These words can also be used to connect plural subjects or one singular subject and one plural subject. When they connect both singular and plural subjects, the verb agrees with whatever subject is closest to it. As a result, both of the following sentences have correct subject-verb agreement. Either Becky or her sisters take care of the neighbor's dog.

Either her sisters or Becky takes care of the neighbor's dog.

Even though the second sentence is grammatical, it sounds strange even to native speakers. So when possible, place the plural subject closer to the verb as in the former sentence.

More likely than not, your students will have to memorize these phrases that seem to compound the subject of a sentence but do not.

*Practice: To practice forming grammatical sentences with connected subjects and compound subjects, write several subjects on index cards. Each card should have one subject. In a separate pile, write several connectors each on their own index card. Have students take turns drawing two subject and one connector cards. They must then make a grammatical sentence with correct subject-verb agreement using those three words.*

### 2 EXPLETIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Another point with which many ESL students struggle is the use of *here* and *there* as the subject of a sentence. In fact, these words are never the subject of a sentence, even if they are the only words which appear before the verb.

There is one apple in the refrigerator. Here are the papers that you must fill out.

In each of these sentences, the subject appears after the verb: the apple and the papers. As a result, the verb agrees with that subject, not *here* or *there*. This type of sentence is called

an expletive construction.

*Practice: Using the subject cards you used in the previous exercise, have students choose one subject card on their turn. He or she must then make a sentence starting with either *here* or *there* and use the phrase on their card as the subject of their sentence.*

### 3 COUNT NOUNS AND NONCOUNT NOUNS

Count nouns are typical nouns that can be counted. Most nouns fall into this category. Noncount nouns, on the other hand, are less common and can be trickier when it comes to subject-verb agreement. Noncount nouns are those which cannot be counted or identified in number: rice, furniture, paper, homework, coffee, snow, and sand. In English, you cannot talk about two rices or eight furnitures. These nouns take a singular verb unless they are used with a quantifier. Sand feels rough on your feet. Several grains of sand feel uncomfortable in your clothes.

In the second sentence, the word "grains" is used as a quantifier and becomes the subject of the sentence. Since grains is plural, the sentence takes a plural verb. Different noncount nouns take different quantifiers: grains of rice, pieces of furniture, cups of coffee, etc.

*Practice: Review with your students which quantifiers go with various noncount nouns. Then have each person write two sentences for each of several noncount nouns: one with a quantifier and one without. Sentences without quantifiers should take singular verbs. Sentences with quantifiers may take singular or plural verbs depending on the sentence.*

### 4 COLLECTIVE NOUNS

Collective nouns are tricky. Collective nouns are singular nouns which refer to a group of people or objects. They include crowd, herd, team,

and audience. Though the collective noun itself is singular, the word represents several objects in one group and can therefore cause confusion for ESL students when it comes to verb agreement. For example, crowd is a singular noun which refers to many people in one place. Similarly, a pack is a singular noun which refers to several dogs in one group. Take note that collective nouns take the singular form of the verb in the sentence.

The pack is drawing near.

The team takes its losses hard.

Help your students understand that these nouns are singular items which by definition contain several members. The nouns themselves, however, are singular.

*Practice: Give your students a list of several collective nouns. Have students work with a partner to determine another way of communicating that idea without using the collective noun. For example, you could express the idea of team by saying the players on the New York Yankees. Then have the pairs work together to write two sentences for each collective noun, one using the collective noun and taking the singular form of the verb and the other using the substitute words using the plural form of the verb. Encourage students to use a dictionary as needed throughout the activity.*

### **ON THE SURFACE, SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT SEEMS SO SIMPLE.**

Singular nouns take singular verbs. Plural nouns take plural verbs. Unfortunately, the more you delve into the English language, the more complicated subject-verb agreement can become. Some singular subjects appear plural while some plural subjects appear singular. These not so typical subjects can cause confusion for your ESL students. If you walk your students through each of these types of subjects that they might encounter in English and the appropriate verbs to accompany them in a sentence, they are sure to find success.

# Predi-what? How To Help ESL Students Understand Predicates

## PREDICATE.

It's a big word to refer to everything from the verb to the period in a sentence. Sometimes, the predicate is simple, just one word. Other times it contains vast amounts of information about the action, its receiver and doer, when and where something happened, and other important points. Since sentences start with subjects, we usually start by teaching about them, but we can get stuck there and never get to the verb and beyond. In this article we will talk about what a predicate is, what they contain, and what your students need to know about them.

## WHAT IS A PREDICATE?

Every sentence in English has two main parts: the subject and the predicate. The subject of the sentence is the doer of the action. What that subject does is the verb, and the verb is the primary piece of the predicate. No sentence can be without one nor can any predicate. Predicates can be simple, just one word, or they can be many words. Perhaps that is what can make them confusing to ESL students. They don't fit a straightforward pattern. Here are some of the pieces that may make up a predicate in English.

## PREDICATE VERBS

The one thing every predicate has to have is a verb. But even predicates with nothing other than a verb can be somewhat complicated. Some verb-only predicates may only have one word, while others have many words. That's because the verb of a predicate can be a simple verb, a verb plus its auxiliaries, or a compound verb (two or more verbs joined by a coordinating conjunction). The following sentences show three very different predicates.

*The students study.*

*The students have been studying.*

*The students study, take the test, and pass the class.*

Even at the beginning level, your ESL students should be able to identify the verb in a sentence, and when they do, they are taking the first step to understanding a sentence's predicate. Often, the verb is the action or movement performed by the subject. Sometimes the verb is a linking verb: am, is, are, was, were, been, or being. If a sentence does not contain a verb, it is not a grammatical sentence and does not have a complete predicate. Making sure each sentence has a verb is something beginning level ESL students should be able to do, and it's essential to them being able to write and speak grammatical sentences.

## PREDICATE OBJECTS

Objects often appear in predicates -- they tell the reader or listener about the receiver of the verb. Though an object is not essential for every predicate, it is possible for a predicate to have two different types of objects: you probably know and teach these as direct objects and indirect objects. The verb in the sentence determines whether no object, a direct object, or both a direct and indirect object are in the predicate. For some verbs, their objects are optional. For others, the object must be there in order for the verb to make sense. Most often, ESL students start by learning verbs which do not have an object or have an optional object: jump, read, study, etc. These verbs make for the simplest predicates, those with only one word.

*I jumped.*

*She reads.*

Once ESL students are familiar with these simple verbs, they usually move on to verbs which take a direct object: have, see, hit, etc. Verbs that take a direct object give the listener information about the receiver of the action. In such sentences, the predicate includes the verb as well as the direct object.

*Sally ate a cake.*

*We saw the movie.*

In the first sentence, cake is the direct object. It is the receiver of the action eat. In the second example, the movie

is the direct object. It tells the listener what we saw.

Some English verbs take both a direct and indirect object. The indirect object tells the listener to whom or for whom the verb is performed. Sometimes the indirect object follows to or for and comes after the direct object. Other times, it comes between the verb and the direct object without the use of to or for.

*She read the story to her brother.*

*She read her brother the story.*

You can help your students identify indirect objects in a sentence by asking them to move the possible indirect object into a phrase starting with to or for. If the sentence still makes sense and the meaning hasn't changed, that noun is the indirect object. When a verb takes a direct object as well as an indirect object, both of them and the verb make up the predicate of the sentence.

## PREDICATE ADJECTIVES AND NOMINATIVES

Sometimes a predicate contains either an adjective which describes the subject of the sentence or a noun which describes the subject of the sentence. These words follow a linking verb and identifies the subject, it is called a predicate adjective. If a noun follows a linking verb and identifies the subject, it is called a predicate nominative.

*The students are determined.*

*(predicate adjective)*

*The teacher seems happy. (predicate adjective)*

*The student is a prodigy. (predicate nominative)*

*The leader is a tyrant. (predicate nominative)*

It is not essential for your students to know these technical terms. What is important is that they are able to identify and label adjectives and nouns that are part of the predicate and be able to tell when those words actually modify the subject of the sentence.

## ADJECTIVES, ADVERBS, AND PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

When adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases give the listener more information about the verb in a sentence, they are also considered part of the predicate. Adverbs can appear almost anywhere in a sentence, so your students will see them in various places in a sentence predicate.

*I ran quickly to the brick house.*

*I quickly ran to the brick house.*

*I ran to the brick house quickly.*

In each of these examples, quickly describes the verb and it is part of the predicate of the sentence.

These examples also contain adjectives and a prepositional phrase. These generally come after the verb. In this case, the prepositional phrase is telling the listener where I ran and is thus modifying the verb. Brick is simply describing the house. In these examples, the verb, the adverb, and the prepositional phrase are all part of the predicate, regardless of the order they appear in the sentence. Taken together, they are considered a verb phrase.

## DEPENDENT CLAUSES

Some predicates will also include a dependent clause, which modifies the verb, an object, or the entire sentence. They will begin with a subordinating conjunction. (You can find a list of subordinating conjunctions in English at <http://www.myenglishteacher.net/subordinatingconjunctions.html>)

*I saw the house that they say is haunted. (adjective clause)*

*I saw the house before they demolished it. (adverb clause)*

*I watched the movie when I came home from school. (adverb clause)*

In each of these examples, the dependent clause is modifying either the object of the verb or the verb itself. Because of this link to the verb, they make up the predicate of each sentence. Your students should eventually be able to use dependent clauses fluently in both their written and spoken English.

**PREDICATES IN ENGLISH CAN BE  
CONFUSING, PERHAPS BECAUSE  
THEY CAN LOOK SO MANY**

### DIFFERENT WAYS.

By breaking them down into their possible parts and seeing the relationship between those parts, your students should eventually be able to identify them in any English sentence.



# The Battle Against 'Maybe' – 5

## Methods for Modal Verb Practice

### THINK OF THOSE WORDS WHICH APPEAR TOO OFTEN IN YOUR CLASSROOM.

For me, it's 'like', that approximate, short-cut word which has become so popular, 'fine', which really doesn't tell me much about how you are, or what you thought of the movie, and 'maybe'. This last one serves many uses and expresses some degree of uncertainty, but I've been trying to persuade my students that there is a lot more nuance available by replacing 'maybe' with the family of Modal Verbs.

Just as a reminder, the modal verbs are:

- Can/Could
- May/May have
- Might/Might have
- Will/Would (have)
- Ought to (+have)
- Should (+have)
- Must/Must have (had to)

[In each case, the latter of a pair is the past form, e.g. 'I can swim a mile nowadays', versus, 'I could swim a mile when I was a teenager', or, 'That might be George Clooney over there!' versus, 'That might have been George Clooney we saw yesterday'.]

I assure my students that mastering the modals is actually pretty easy, as they all operate on a similar formula:  
Present: Mod. V + inf  
Past: Mod. V + have + past participle

Once the formula is learned, and students begin to differentiate between the modal verbs, their ability to express possibility, probability, permission, ability and willingness becomes more specific and precise.

Let's try an example. The other day, one of my students said, 'Maybe I go to movies this weekend'. We fixed the first problem – 'movies' takes the definite article 'the' – and then discussed when the event was happening. In many languages, including Chinese, there is no change in the verb to express the future form -- a time expression is added ('this weekend') instead. This works for a lot of English expressions, but here we need 'will' because

we're talking about a plan for the future.

Then I asked my student about how likely the event was. Was the student just considering going to the movies (may/might), or had they bought tickets already ('will certainly', or simply 'going to go', which implies premeditation). I impressed on them how much information is carried by these short, modal verbs: suddenly, I know not only what his plans are, but also how likely they are to happen.

Methods for teaching modal verbs are ably discussed on the site so we're going to focus on methods for encouraging practice. They all center on considering how we might elicit these words from our students -- this is sometimes difficult, especially if they're uncertain about the usage, so ensure that a simple, visible explication of the structure and its form is clearly expressed on the board, or in the students' notebooks, before you begin. This gives them a 'quick reference guide' which can be very helpful.

The most important thing to remember here (and whenever our students are learning tricky, new structures) is that production is the key. If they have used the expressions spontaneously and accurately, then (and only then) can we say that the language point has been 'learned'.

### CONCENTRATE ON MODAL VERB PRODUCTION USING THESE IDEAS

#### 1 SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

Whenever you hear a 'maybe' from your students, consider whether a modal verb would express things better, and offer a correction: "'Maybe he is running late' is OK, Fiona, but I think 'He might be running late' is even better. Actually, it's already ten minutes into our class, so I'd say, 'He must be running late!'"

Consider having a chart of the modal verbs on the classroom wall, orga-

nized by strength -- font size or color could vary to emphasize this change. From weak to strong, they would be ranked something like this:

May – Might – Could – Can – Ought to – Should – Must

Experiment with these modals to see how you feel about their relative strengths.

#### 2 WHAT CAN YOU DO?

When first teaching 'can', I use a simple game. I ask a student if they can sing, or dance, or play tennis, and receive the appropriate answer ("Yes, I can" / "No, I can't"). They then ask the student next to them a similar question, and it moves around the circle. At the end, you could ask the class about the abilities of the students we've heard from, or use this as a memory game: The student has to list the abilities (or lack thereof) of all the previous classmates, e.g. "Jade can skate and Wang can dance salsa, but Hiroshi can't play piano".

A quick word here on pronunciation: I grew up in England, so my "can" is pronounced /kan/ (using the short 'a' from 'map', 'cat' and 'basket') while my "can't" is /ka:nt/ (using the long 'a' from 'arm', 'father' and 'carpet'). I've found this differentiation in the vowel sound useful and clarifying, but if you're teaching US English, your students should know that Americans don't make this distinction.

#### 3 TWENTY QUESTIONS

Arrive to your classroom carrying a mysterious box. You can decide what this box (either literally or figuratively) holds, and then use sequential, simple clues to elicit lots of modal verbs from the class. E.g.

Teacher: So, we know it's not an animal, so it can't be a cat, but we know it's expensive and rare, so what could it be?"

Students: It could be a diamond! / It might be some gold! / It must be your wedding ring because you're not wearing it today!

## 4 DISCUSS L1

As I mentioned above, almost every language has a system for expressing relative levels of possibility. Investigate this with your class, perhaps in the form of an interview where students teach their classmates a little of their first language, to show how possibility or permission is expressed. Gaining insight into other languages helps the process of learning English by giving context and examples which prove that modal expressions are actually global, and not restricted to English.

## 5 STORY TIME

When first teaching modal verbs in the past (would have, might have, could have) I tell the students the story of a young man who is having a terrible day. He wakes up late because he forgot to set his alarm clock. He misses the bus, and forgets his keys. Rather than taking a cab, he waits for the bus, and arrives half an hour late. He misses the beginning of an important meeting, and his boss is furious at this repeated tardiness. Later that day, he finds he has been fired. What should he / could he / might he have done differently?

(e.g. 'He should have remembered to set his alarm clock... He could have taken a cab instead of waiting for the bus... He might have been forgiven if being late was not already his habit.)

Immediately, we're stepping into the territory of the conditional forms (if ... will / if ... would / if ... would have) and I tend to teach these roughly in parallel with the modal verbs where possible.

**IN ADDITION, MODAL VERBS CROP UP ON VIRTUALLY ALL OF MY QUIZZES AND EXAMS, CHECKING THE STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE AND THE RELATIVE STRENGTHS OF EACH ONE.**

I also incorporate modals into Jeopardy-style games, and demand modal verb-based sentences from late students as a light-hearted punishment.

I hope that your students take quickly to modal verbs and use them with confidence, expanding their ability to express themselves and adding nuance to their English.

# 6 Types Of Pronouns And How To Teach Them To Your Students

**HE, SHE, IT, YOU, WE, THEY... FOR GOOD OR ILL, PRONOUNS IN ENGLISH ARE FAR MORE COMPLICATED THAN THESE BASICS.**

Pronouns change depending on person, number, and function in a sentence. We use different pronouns for people we know and people we don't. We use pronouns to ask questions, to draw attention to certain objects, and to show ownership. It's no wonder that pronouns are a topic we discuss frequently in ESL classes. So the next time you have pronouns on your to discuss list, here is a quick review to keep all those pronouns straight.

## HOW TO TEACH AND REVIEW PRONOUNS EXPERTLY

### 1 PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Personal pronouns are those that refer to people, places, things, and ideas. Personal pronouns are some of the first words ESL students learn because they are so frequent and important in speaking and understanding English. Personal pronouns can be divided up into two major categories. Some personal pronouns are subject pronouns (I, we, you, he, she, it, they) while others are object pronouns (me, us, you, him, her, it, them). It is important for ESL students to know the difference between subject and object pronouns. Subject pronouns function as the subject of the sentence. Object pronouns function as the object of a verb or a preposition. It is not uncommon, particularly when a pronoun is the object of a preposition, for students to incorrectly use a subject pronoun. In fact, native speakers do it, too. One particularly confusing use of subject and object pronouns comes when they are part of a compound subject (or object). Because they are linked with another noun in a compound subject, it is easy to accidentally choose the correct pronoun.

*Practice: Give your students several sentences that contain compound subjects and compound objects of verbs and prepositions*

*used both correctly and incorrectly such as the ones below. Have students read each sentence omitting one of the nouns in the compound portion. If the correct pronoun is in the sentence, it should still make sense when the other part of the compound portion is omitted. If the incorrect pronoun is used, students should be able to tell from the context.*

Me and my sister are going to the movies. (incorrect)

He gave the cupcakes to Jackie and me. (correct)

You'll have to go through I and Adam to get to him. (incorrect)

Alison and I will have chemistry together next year. (correct)

### 2 POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

Possessive pronouns show ownership. Some possessive pronouns are used with a noun in a sentence to show ownership (my, our, your, his, her, its, their). Other possessive pronouns are used independently (mine, ours, yours, his, hers, its, theirs), that is, they do not appear alongside a noun.

*Practice: Give students several sentences that use possessive pronouns, both with nouns and without, but omit the pronouns from the sentence. Have students work with a partner to decide which pronoun correctly completes each sentence.*

### 3 INDEFINITE PRONOUNS

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific person or thing. They are used in general statements or when a specific noun is not known. Most indefinite pronouns are singular (anybody, everybody, somebody, neither, someone, something, etc.) while others are plural (both, few, many, several, etc.). Some indefinite pronouns can be either singular or plural (all, any, most, none, and some).

One common area of confusion for ESL students is between the use of who and whom, both of which are in-

definite pronouns. Who is a subject pronoun. It is used as the subject of a sentence. Whom is an object pronoun, and it is used as the object of a verb or a preposition. The use of who and whom is traditional grammar. However, as languages do, English is experiencing a shift in the use of who and whom. Whom is generally replaced by who in casual writing and in spoken language. Native speakers generally only use whom in formal writing and sometimes not even then. You will have to make sure your students know the difference between who and whom and are able to use them grammatically. Whoever and whomever follow the same pattern. Whoever is a subject pronoun. Whomever is an object pronoun. Native English speakers tend to use whoever except in very formal writing.

*Practice: Here is a good worksheet for practicing correct usage of who and whom:*

<http://bit.ly/1J9mAeu>

### 4 DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS

Another type of common pronouns is demonstrative pronouns. This, that, these, and those are demonstrative pronouns in English. Be sure your students do not confuse demonstrative pronouns with demonstrative adjectives (also this, that, these, and those). Demonstrative pronouns take the place of a noun. This is fun. While demonstrative adjectives are used to modify nouns. This game is fun.

This is generally used to refer to a single object that is near the speaker. That is generally used to refer to a single object that is farther away from the speaker. Likewise, these is generally used to refer to multiple objects that are near the speaker. Those is generally used to refer to multiple objects that are farther away from the speaker.

*Practice: Using a standard six-sided die, either in groups or as a whole class, have students roll a number. Students will need to make a sentence correctly refer-*

*ring to something in the classroom using the demonstrative pronoun they rolled. 1: this, 2: that, 3: these, 4: those, 5: roller's choice, 6: use two demonstrative pronouns of your choice in one sentence.*

## 5 REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS

English has several reflexive pronouns, and as their name suggests, they refer back to nouns or pronouns used earlier in a sentence. English reflexive pronouns end in self or selves.

Here is a worksheet you can use with your students to review and practice reflexive pronouns:

<http://busyteacher.org/2037-reflexive-pronouns.html>

## 6 INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS

Interrogative pronouns are those pronouns which are used to ask a question: who, whose, whom, which, and what. You can find a quick review of interrogative pronouns here:

<http://busyteacher.org/17533-interrogative-pronouns.html>

**PRONOUNS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. IF YOU TAKE THE TIME TO TEACH AND REVIEW THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PRONOUNS USED IN ENGLISH, YOUR STUDENTS WILL BE SURE TO BENEFIT.**



# Gradable & Nongradable Adjectives: What You Need To Know

## ARE YOUR STUDENTS FAMILIAR WITH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRADABLE AND NONGRADABLE ADJECTIVES?

If you haven't tackled that subject with your ESL class, here is a step by step explanation of these two types of adjectives and the adverbs that go with them in English.

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE ADJECTIVES

### 1 WHAT IS A GRADABLE ADJECTIVE?

When I hear the word gradable, it makes me think of report cards and assigning As, Bs, and Cs to a student's performance in class. In a way, grades on a report card are kind of like gradable adjectives. This subset of English adjectives refers to descriptive words that can express different degrees of a given quality. For example, you might see a girl and think that she is pretty. Well, how pretty is she? Is she fairly pretty? Extremely pretty? Just a bit pretty? Likewise, you might have a friend who falls for every practical joke in the book. That friend is naive, but is he intensely naive? Or just a little naive? These adjectives and others like them can refer to someone or something with a high degree of that quality or a low degree of that quality, all with the same word! Since these are adjectives that can express a range of degree, gradable adjectives can be used in the comparative and superlative forms. When comparing two nouns with a gradable adjective, you might say one house is bigger than the other. If a given item is at the top of the list, you would use the superlative form. That was the hardest test I have ever taken. In both cases, two items are being compared which both possess the quality of that adjective but do so in differing degrees.

### 2 WHAT IS A NONGRADABLE ADJECTIVE?

Nongradable adjectives, on the other hand, are the opposite of gradable adjectives. They do not describe a quality of various degrees. They are more black and white, yes or no. You either have it or you don't. To think of the report card analogy, these adjectives are pass/fail. Generally speaking, these adjectives are considered all or nothing. A noun either possesses that quality or it doesn't. They aren't used in the comparative or superlative forms because if two items possess that quality, then they both possess it in equal measure (since it's an all or nothing quality to begin with). For example, deep sea diving without scuba gear is impossible. It sounds strange to ask, "How impossible is it?" It just is impossible. It possesses that all or nothing quality. You also would not say that breathing underwater is more impossible than breathing in outer space since both possess that quality equally.

### 3 CLASSIFYING ADJECTIVES ARE NONGRADABLE

One particular type of nongradable adjectives are classifying adjectives. Classifying adjectives are those which label their noun as a particular type or as a member of a particular class. Here are some examples of classifying adjectives.

*She has a nervous disorder.*  
*I speak two foreign languages fluently.*  
*That hotel has an indoor pool.*

Classifying adjectives do not take comparative or superlative forms. However, sometimes classifying adjectives function as normal (non-classifying) adjectives and can be gradable.

*How many musical instruments do you play? (classifying adjective, nongradable)*  
*She is a very musical person. (normal adjective, gradable)*

The context of the adjective should be used to determine if it is a classifying adjective or not.

### 4 GRADABLE ADVERBS IN THE MIX

So gradable adjectives are qualities that a person or thing might possess in different measures. Nongradable adjectives are qualities that a person or thing either possesses or doesn't. There is no varying degree of possession of nongradable adjective. As a result, nongradable adjectives are not used in the comparative and superlative forms. Likewise, English speakers do not use gradable adverbs to modify nongradable adjectives, but they do use them to modify gradable adjectives. What is a gradable adverb? It is an adverb that describes how much of a certain quality (adjective) a noun possesses. Gradable adverbs include a bit, extremely, barely, hardly, and rather. A speaker can, therefore, say, "I am extremely tired," since tired is a gradable adjective. He would not, however, say, "I am not an extremely native speaker," because in this sentence native is a classifying adjective and therefore nongradable.

### 5 NONGRADABLE ADVERBS

Nongradable adjectives don't get left out in the cold when it comes to adverbs, however. English possesses nongradable adverbs which can be used with nongradable adjectives but cannot be used with gradable adjectives. Since these adverbs express complete possession of a particular quality, they fit naturally with nongradable adjectives but sound strange with gradable adjectives. Nongradable adverbs include extremely, absolutely, and completely.

*That stunt man is completely insane. (nongradable adverb with a nongradable adjective, correct)*  
*That professor is absolutely old. (nongradable adverb with a gradable adjective, incorrect)*

## 6 AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

One adverb exception is very, which is used consistently with both gradable and nongradable adjectives.

*I am very tired. (gradable adjective, correct)*

*He is a very brilliant scientist. (nongradable adjective, correct)*

### TEACH IT EXPERTLY

To teach your students the difference between gradable and nongradable adjectives, draw a line across your board and label it with a gradable adjective such as hot. Ask your students to offer different nouns that might be described as hot. When they do, ask how hot those items are and place them on the line as if it were a spectrum. On your line, you might have the sun which is extremely hot, freshly baked bread which is very hot, a cup of coffee which is somewhat hot, and bath water which is a little hot.

Now write the word boiling on the board and draw a line beneath it. Ask your students to offer some nouns which might be described as boiling. As they do, ask them to suggest where on the line these items should go. Your students should realize, and you should point out, that an item is either boiling or it is not. It cannot be graded on the line since it is an all or nothing quality.

If you like, repeat the exercise using these pairs of gradable and nongradable adjectives:

Cold/frozen

Happy/overjoyed

Scared/terrified

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

To help your students remember the difference between gradable and nongradable adjectives, try this exercise. Have groups of three or four students brainstorm a list of twenty adjectives. Then have them sort the list into gradable and nongradable adjectives. Challenge students to come up with a gradable adjective that has similar meaning to each nongradable adjective and vice versa (as in the examples above). Then have students write ten to fifteen sentences, fill in the blank style, which their classmates will have to complete with either a gradable or

nongradable adjective. Make sure students are using gradable and nongradable adverbs in their sentences.

**IF YOU HAVEN'T GONE THROUGH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRADABLE AND NONGRADABLE ADJECTIVES WITH YOUR STUDENTS, GIVE IT A TRY. IT WILL HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THE NUANCES OF VOCABULARY AND GIVE THEM THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO USE MORE PRECISE LANGUAGE WHEN THEY SPEAK.**

# Much or Many? Few or a Few?

## Clearing Up the Confusion

**ENGLISH VOCABULARY IS A BEAUTIFUL THING, BUT IT CAN BE CONFUSING WHEN TWO WORDS SEEM SO SIMILAR.**

Help your students get their ideas and their words straight by pointing out the difference in these easily confused adjective pairs.

### HOW TO TEACH THESE COMMON PROBLEM AREAS EASILY

#### 1 MUCH OR MANY

Both of these adjectives are used to describe the quantity of a noun, but they are not used with the same nouns. Many is used with plural nouns. You might ask how many assignments students have or how many movies they watched over the weekend. Much is not used with plural nouns. In fact, it is limited to use with noncount (mass) nouns. If your students have studied noncount nouns, they know these are nouns which cannot be counted or quantified without the use of an additional word (known as a quantifier). When your students want to ask about the amount of a noncount noun, they should use much. How much homework to you have? How much money does it cost.

#### 2 FEW OR A FEW

Is few is a plural form of a few? No. In fact, the phrases actually have opposing meanings. A few is used with countable nouns to express a small number, but a number that is positive. I have a few ideas. She went with a few friends. Few on its own, however, expresses a negative or lack in number. She has few friends means she doesn't have very many. She should have more. I have few feelings about the test. I don't really have feelings either way, or if I do they aren't worth mentioning.

#### 3 LITTLE OR A LITTLE

Where a few is used to express a small number of count nouns, a little is used to express a small amount of noncount nouns. There is a little milk left in the container. I have a little homework left to do before tomorrow. Little, on the other hand, describes the size of a

given noun. A puppy is little. Your car is little. It does not express quantity of any sort.

#### 4 EACH OR EVERY

While each and every may frequently be used together in casual English, the two words actually have quite different meanings. When a speaker uses each, he is referring to individual items. Each teacher will give a separate grade. Each meal will be put on its own bill. Every, on the other hand, refers to all the items of a given set. She goes to the movies every Friday means that whenever Friday comes along, she will be going to the movies. It happens whenever Friday comes to pass, that is every time the day rolls around.

#### 5 INJURED OR WOUNDED OR HURT

In some circumstances, the three words can all be used to describe the same situation, but your ESL students should know the difference between the three words and when it is appropriate to use each of them. English speakers use the word injured to describe a victim of a negative circumstance. The injured person may have suffered physical harm at the hand of another, financial trauma, or emotional damage. Injured implies that another person caused the negative effect to the injured person. Wounded, however, does not imply the involvement of another person. It does imply a physical injury. A person can be wounded in an accident or by another person. Hurt is perhaps the most general adjective of the three. Hurt describes an experience of pain. That pain can be physical or emotional. She might hurt because she broke her foot or because her boyfriend broke up with her.

#### 6 FARTHER OR FURTHER

One little letter can make a big difference between two words, and farther and further are perfect examples of that. Farther is an adjective always used to express distance. She ran farther than he did. How much farther do we have to go to get to his house? Further does not express distance but expresses the idea of subsequent or continuing

circumstances or items, the idea of furthermore. We will discuss the problem further in class tomorrow. We will need to discuss this item further.

#### 7 LESS OR FEWER

Once again the difference between countable and noncount nouns makes a difference in which adjective a person should use. Less is used with noncount nouns to indicate a smaller amount. She has less homework than he does. She has less furniture in her apartment than I do. Fewer is used with countable nouns to indicate a lower number. She has fewer chairs than I do. He has fewer assignments than she does.

#### 8 LAST OR LATTER OR LATEST

Last and latter are similar in meaning, but not in function. Last is the opposite of first and means a final item. This is the last class in the program. Latter is the opposite of former, and it means that of a list just presented, we are referring to the last one. Between cake and ice cream, I prefer the latter. Latest does not have to do with sequence (like last or latter) but with time. The opposite of latest is oldest or most ancient. Use latest to refer to the most recent in time. Her latest boyfriend was my favorite.

#### 9 HIGH OR TALL

While both adjectives refer to vertical position, they are used in reference to different things. Tall is in reference to an item's height or vertical size. High is used to refer to the distance something is from the ground. If a person is ten feet tall, their body takes up ten feet in vertical space. If a person is ten feet high, it means there are ten feet in distance between them and the ground.

#### 10 SICK OR ILL

Though often used interchangeably, ill is actually a broader term than sick. Sick refers to a physical ailment due either to disease or circumstance. She was sick from the bumpy ride. He is sick with a cold. Ill can mean sick, but it can also mean bad, poor, or unwell. He is ill with a cold. He was ill advised to take the bumpy trip.



# How To Teach The Difference Between Adjectives And Adverbs

## DESCRIPTIVE WORDS ARE A GREAT WAY TO COMMUNICATE DETAIL IN A SENTENCE, BUT HOW DOES AN ESL STUDENT DECIDE IF AN ADJECTIVE OR AN ADVERB IS THE RIGHT CHOICE?

How does he know which one he is looking at on the page? Here are three simple strategies you can teach your students for telling the difference between adjectives and adverbs in English.

## HOW TO TEACH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

### 1 FORM

The first and most straightforward way to distinguish between adjectives and adverbs is by their form. The majority of adverbs in English, particularly those that modify verbs, end in *-ly*. That's really only a guideline, though, since many adverbs do not follow the *-ly* rule. But your students can make an educated guess that if they see a word that ends in *-ly*, the odds are more for than against that it is an adverb.

Practice: Practicing distinguishing between adjectives and adverbs based on form is a rather straightforward process. Students look at a word and decide which category it belongs to. You can make the activity a bit more interesting, however, with this game. Put your students into groups of three. You will need one and a half decks of cards for each group. On twenty-six cards, write a collection of adjectives and adverbs. (I like to put a blank label on the card and then write the word on that label. Then I can reuse them for another activity by either removing the label or covering it with a fresh one and writing a new word on it.) Make sure your adverbs are evenly divided between ones ending in *-ly* and ones that don't. You can find a good list of English adverbs at [www.espresso-english.net/100-common-english-adverbs/](http://www.espresso-english.net/100-common-english-adverbs/)

To play the game, shuffle all the cards

together and divide them evenly between two players. The third player will be the judge and should have a dictionary available. The two players hold their cards in their hands, face down, and take turns flipping one card over to a common pile. If a card has an adverb on it, students race to slap the pile. The first person who slaps the card (and the pile) gets to keep all the cards in the stack. Players then start a new pile, flipping cards until they slap for the next adverb. When all the cards have been flipped over, the winner is the one who has the most cards in their possession. The third player then plays a round with the winner and the loser becomes the judge.

### 2 FUNCTION

The function of a word in a sentence is a much more reliable, albeit more complex, way to determine if a word is an adjective or an adverb. Both parts of speech are descriptive, but they describe different things. Adjectives describe nouns. Adverbs, on the other hand, describe adjectives, verbs, and other adverbs. They answer the questions how, how much, when, and where or show time, manner, place or degree. Students can tell the difference between an adjective and an adverb when they can identify what the word in question is modifying.

Practice: I like to call this game the longest sentence, and it can be played individually or as a class. All you need is a writing surface and a standard die. Write a short sentence on the board, one that does not contain any adjectives or adverbs. Students will compete to see who can make this sentence longest by adding adjectives and adverbs, one at a time. If you are playing in teams, have one person from the first team come to the board. Have him roll the die. If he rolls an even number (two, four, or six) he must add an adjective to the sentence. If he rolls an odd number (one, three, or five) he must add an adverb to the sentence. The word must make sense and be added in the correct location or his team forfeits the round. Then a

person from the other team comes up, rolls the die, and adds another word. Continue playing in this manner until one person cannot add another word to the sentence. The last team to add a word scores a point. Start again with a new sentence. Play until one team reaches five points.

### 3 LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Adjectives in English follow a very standard placement – they come before the noun that they modify. It's as simple as that. When you have multiple adjectives modifying the same noun, the order of those adjectives can get somewhat complicated, but there is still a predictable pattern: quantity, quality, size, age, shape, color, origin/material, and qualifier. Adverbs, on the other hand, can appear almost anywhere in a sentence. They often come after the verb they modify, but they can also come before an adjective or adverb, at the beginning or end of the sentence, or before a verb they modify.

Practice: Sentence diagramming is a good way to help students see how adverbs and adjectives fit into a sentence, but diagramming isn't for everyone. To give your students a chance to practice identifying adjective and adverbs based on their location in a sentence, write a long sentence on the board which contains several adjectives and adverbs. Instead of writing out the adjectives and adverbs, however, replace each with a different letter of the alphabet. Have students predict what part of speech should go where each of the letters is. Then write the sentence again with the adjectives and adverbs and have students see if their predictions were right.

### 4 A NOTE ON ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

While it's pretty straightforward to use adjectives to describe nouns and adverbs to describe verbs, there is one exception that you should cover with your students. The exception to the rule is this: when you are using good/



well (or any adjective/adverb pair) with a linking verb or a verb that has to do with the five senses, choose the adjective rather than the adverb. Take the following two sentences for example:

*Dinner smells so good.*

*Dinner smells so well.*

Even though good is describing how dinner smells, it is the correct choice for the sentence because “smells” has to do with the five senses. Here are some similar examples:

*You look good in that dress.*

*His acceptance speech sounded really good.*

*I made cookies with salt instead of sugar. They tasted bad!*

*It feels good to win the game.*

The following examples use a linking verb, which I often compare to an equals sign for my students. Because of this, the word appearing after the linking verb is actually describing the subject of the sentence and thus should be an adjective rather than an adverb.

*She is graceful. (correct)*

*She is gracefully. (incorrect)*

**KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS IS THE FIRST STEP TO BEING ABLE TO CHOOSE THE CORRECT WORD WHEN SPEAKING OR WRITING. THESE EXERCISES WILL GET YOUR ESL CLASS MOVING ALONG THAT PATH AND GIVE THEM MOMENTUM TO CONTINUE SUCCESSFUL STUDIES IN ENGLISH.**

# "Adjective Dance Revolution" & 5 Other Activities For Practicing

## ARE YOU TEACHING BEGINNING LEVEL STUDENTS HOW TO SPEAK WITH STYLE, THAT IS, HOW TO INCLUDE ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS IN THEIR SPEECH AND WRITING?

Here are some fun and sometimes fanciful activities that will get your students in the adjective/adverb mood.

## HELP YOUR STUDENTS USE ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS GENEROUSLY

### 1 SILLY SENTENCES

Are your students writing simple but boring sentences? Are you encouraging them to include adjective and adverbs in what they are saying but running into resistance from them? This fun and lively activity will get your students in the mood to say exactly what comes to mind by using adjectives and adverbs. Start by writing a simple, adjective and adverb free sentence on the board. Your sentence might be something like this: The boy ran to the store. Then talk about how adding adjectives and adverbs to this sentence can make it not only more interesting but also tell a different story. The young boy ran quickly to the huge department store. The silly boy ran clumsily to the joke store. They are quite different stories, aren't they? Help your students picture what each sentence says about the boy and his circumstances. Then encourage your students to add adjectives and adverbs to the base sentence to create their own story. They can be as silly or as serious as your students want them to be. After students have shared their sentences with their classmates, put another simple sentences on the board and see what other stories your students come up with.

### 2 ADVERB CHARADES

If your students like to get up and get moving in class, and who doesn't, try this full body exercise as an ad-

verb and verb review. On several slips of paper, write a verb/adverb phrase such as fall loudly, play energetically, cook poorly, read actively, or teach enthusiastically. If you can make the phrase silly, it will be even more fun for your students, but make sure they have some familiarity with each of the words on the paper slips. Then put them all into a hat and have students come up front one at a time and draw a slip of paper. Students must act out that phrase for their classmates who must guess both the verb and the adverb to score five points. Also award five points to the actor if someone is able to guess his phrase in less than thirty seconds, three points for a guess in less than a minute, and one point for a guess in more than one minute but before everyone gives up. Make sure everyone in class has at least one chance to show their stuff. Then tally your results and award a prize to the winner.

### 3 AWESOME ADJECTIVES

This adjective review also serves as a bonding activity for your students. Have everyone sit in a circle and start with a blank piece of paper. On that paper, students write their name. Under their name, they write one adjective that they think describes them. Everyone then passes their paper to the right, and each person adds an adjective to describe the person whose name is at the top of the page. Tell your students to make their adjectives positive ones that will encourage their classmates. When everyone has written on the page, pass papers again and have each person add an adjective. Continue until each page reaches its original owner. Students can then read what their classmates have to say about them. If you like, have your students draw a self-portrait and write the adjectives their classmates used to describe them around the outside of the paper.

### 4 CHOOSE ONE

This activity is done in pairs, and

you will need copies of several different pictures, the more detailed the better, for each pair. Students start by placing all of their pictures face up on the table between them. One person gives one adjective describing one of the pictures or an element in one of the pictures. The second person must then guess which of the pictures his partner is describing. If the person cannot guess, the first person gives another adjective and the second person makes another guess. This continues until the second person guesses the correct picture. Students remove that picture from the table. Now students reverse roles describing a picture and guessing at the correct one. This activity is a great way to bring informational material into your classroom to support a unit you might be teaching (such as pictures of professional sports teams or players when teaching a unit on sports).

### 5 IT'S IN THE BAG

This is a fun game to play around Halloween, but it works for any time of the year, too. In several brown paper lunch bags, place some unusual objects, and number the bags on the outside. Have one student come up, one at a time, and feel what is in a bag. They can take notes as they feel each object, but they cannot look inside. As they are feeling the objects, students may return to their seats to write down their guess or notes for each bag. Students move back and forth between the bags and their desks as needed. For each bag, they must guess what the object was that they felt. In addition, they must write a sentence using as many adjectives as they can to explain why they guessed the item that they guessed. For example, a student might guess that bag #2 contained popcorn because it felt greasy, light, bumpy, and grainy on the outside. Once everyone has completed their sentences, reveal what was in each bag and see how many students guessed right for each one.

## 6 ADVERB DANCE REVOLUTION

Are your students outgoing? Do they like to move and groove? If so, this adverb activity will be perfect for them. Start by brainstorming with your class a list of the different ways a person can move. (Your list might include jump, slide, squat, etc.) Write your list on the front board. Draw a line dividing your board and on the other side brainstorm a list of how a person might move. (Your list might include slowly, boldly, passionately, clumsily, etc.) Now give each person in class or each pair of students eight index cards. On each card, students must match up a movement with a way of moving (such as jump passionately). Encourage students to be creative. Once all the cards are filled out, tell students they will use these cards as dance moves, and they should arrange their moves in order to make a perfect dance. Put on some lively music while your students move and arrange their cards to perfect their dance routine. After you have given students enough time, encourage individuals or pairs to come up and demonstrate their dance for the class.

### **PART OF WHAT WE ESL TEACHERS NEED TO DO IS ENCOURAGE OUR STUDENTS TO BE SPECIFIC..**

These activities for using adjectives and adverbs to just that. They are fun and whimsical and will get your students moving and grooving with descriptive language as they use adjectives and adverbs to enhance their sentences.

# All about Adverbs: Every Level

## Review with Exercises Part 1

### ADVERBS, ADVERBS EVERYWHERE.

No matter what level students you teach in your ESL classes, you likely touch on the topic of adverbs. Beginning students are just learning how to use the descriptive words. Intermediate and advanced students learn about adverb clauses and reducing them to adverbial phrases. If not earlier in their studies, post-advanced students are learning how and why to avoid adverbs and choose more vivid verbs instead. So whether you are teaching students just starting out on their English learning journeys or you are teaching students who have already mastered fluency in their ESL classes, this article is for you.

### TEACH AND REVIEW ADVERBS USING THESE SIMPLE HINTS

#### 1 BEGINNING/LOW INTERMEDIATE: BASIC ADVERBS

The first thing language students need to know about adverbs is what they are. Adverbs are one of the primary parts of speech, and they are used to modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Often adverbs end in *-ly*, which may make them easy to locate in a sentence, but that is not always the case. Some of the most commonly used adverbs, such as *very*, do not end in *-ly* and so can be more of a challenge to locate. Therefore, the best way to identify adverbs in a sentence is to ask if a word in question answers one of the following questions: How? When? Where? To what extent? How often? If a word answers one of these, it is an adverb of time, manner, place, frequency, or degree.

Practice: To practice identifying adverbs, give students a choice of four words, only one of which is an adverb. Have them ask themselves the adverb identification questions about each word (Does it tell how? When? Where? To what extent? Or how often?) before deciding which of the four choices is the adverb. Adverbs can appear just about anywhere in a sentence. See the following examples.

*Quickly, she ran for the teacher.*  
*She ran quickly for the teacher.*  
*She ran for the teacher quickly.*

In each sentence, the adverb *quickly* is correctly positioned. However, if an ad-

verb modifies an adjective or another adverb, it will most likely come directly before that word.

*He is extremely intelligent.*

*The surgeon moves his hands so carefully.*

Practice: Give students several sentences which use adverbs in different positions. Have them decide if the adverb is modifying the verb or if it is modifying an adjective or another adverb. If the adverb is modifying the verb, have students rewrite the sentence putting the adverb in a different but correct position in the sentence.

Like adjectives, adverbs can be used comparatively and superlatively. For most one syllable adverbs, English speakers form the comparative by adding *-er* at the end of the adverb, *-est* for the superlative. For most adverbs of two or more syllables, English speakers use *more* before the adverb for the comparative form, *most* for the superlative form.

Practice: Give your students several adverbs of varying syllable length in their positive (base) forms. Have them write two sentences for each adverb – one using it in its positive form (paying attention to its location in the sentence) and one in its comparative or superlative form. To make the exercise more personal and engaging, have students write sentences about their classmates without using that person's name, and then see if the class can guess who each sentence is describing.

#### 2 INTERMEDIATE: ADVERB CLAUSES

Once your students are at the intermediate level, it is a good time to introduce or reintroduce adverb clauses. Adverb clauses are dependent clauses that give additional information about the sentence: the time something happened, a cause and effect relationship in the sentence, a contrasting idea, or the conditions related to the main clause. They answer the question *how*, *when*, or *why*, just as an adverb would. Every adverb clause must contain both a subject and a verb and be connected to an independent clause. The words that introduce adverb clauses, and therefore make grammatical connections to the main clauses, are called subordinating conjunctions, and

these words make an adverb clause a dependent clause. Some common subordinating conjunctions include *before*, *after*, *since*, *whenever*, *because*, *even though*, *although*, *if*, *unless*, and *in case*.

Practice: Give students several sentences that contain an adverb clause. Have them underline the adverb clause in each sentence and circle the subordinating conjunction. Then, ask students which question (*how*, *when*, or *why*) the adverb clause answers.

Adverb clauses modify an entire independent clause, so they can come at the beginning or the end of the sentence. Their location, though, dictates their punctuation. Generally speaking, when an adverb clause comes before the main clause of a sentence, it is followed by a comma. *Because Tom was afraid to ask her, Brenda went to the dance with another boy.*

However, if the adverb clause comes after the main clause, it does not need a comma separating it. *Brenda went to the dance with another boy because Tom was afraid to ask her.*

Practice: To practice punctuation of adverb clauses, play this simple game with your students. Divide the class into two teams. Each person gets two index cards. On one index card he writes an independent clause. On the other index card, he writes a dependent clause beginning with *because* that relates to the independent clause he has written. For example, one student's cards might read as follows.

*Our teacher is the best*  
*Because she lets us chew gum in class*

Once everyone has written their cards, put all the cards for each team in its own pile. Shuffle them, and then exchange them with the other team. Each team then works together to match each independent clause with its dependent clause. Students should form sentences with these cards making sure to start some sentences with the adverb clause and others with the independent clause. Students should pay close attention to punctuation of the clauses in each sentence.

This quick review should get your beginning and intermediate students on the right page when it comes to adverbs.



# All about Adverbs: Every Level

## Review with Exercises Part 2

**YOUR STUDENTS HAVE COME BEYOND THE BASICS AND ARE READY TO TACKLE SOME MORE CHALLENGING ASPECTS OF ADVERBS IN ENGLISH.**

Part two of All about Adverbs: Every Level Review with Exercises will walk you and your students through changing adverb clauses to adverbial phrases and when and why to use (and not use) adverbs in English.

**GET DEEPER INTO ADVERBIAL STRUCTURES EXPERTLY**

### **1 HIGH INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED: REDUCING AD-VERB CLAUSES TO ADVERBIAL PHRASES**

Once your students are competent using adverb clauses, you will want to teach them how to modify those clauses into adverbial phrases. An adverbial phrase is simply a reduction of an adverb clause in a sentence. Look at the following pairs of sentences as examples. In each pair, the first sentence contains an adverb clause, the second an adverbial phrase.

*While she was studying for the exam, she fell asleep.*

*While studying for the exam, she fell asleep.*

*Before I played video games, I finished my homework.*

*Before playing video games, I finished my homework.*

Adverbial phrases can only be used when the subject of the adverb clause and the subject of the independent clause are the same, and the resulting phrase modifies the subject of the main clause. If someone uses an adverbial phrase in a sentence which does not have the same subject as the main clause, such as the following example, it is called a dangling modifier (or participle) and is incorrect.

*While studying last night, the power went out.*

Practice: Give students several sentences which include an adverb clause. Have them decide if each adverb clause can be reduced to an adverbial

phrase. If they think it can, have them circle the subject of both the adverb clause and the main clause in the sentence. Then give students several sentences which have adverbial phrases or dangling modifiers. Have students decide which sentences are correct and which are incorrect.

To reduce an adverb clause to an adverbial phrase, take out the subject of the adverb clause as well as the “be” verb. If the phrase does not contain a “be” verb, take out the subject and change the verb to its –ing form.

Practice: Give your students several sentences that contain adverb phrases. (You can use the same sentences as the previous exercise.) Have students work with a partner or on their own to change each adverb clause into an adverbial phrase.

### **2 ADVANCED/POST ADVANCED: AVOIDING AD-VERBS IN FAVOR OF MORE DESCRIPTIVE VERBS**

Once your students are fluent or near to it, your expectations about their use of adverbs should change. While adverbs do give the listener and reader more information when they are used, they are not the most efficient way to give that information. In fact, using adverbs might actually decrease your students’ vocabularies once they reach this level of language studies. Why, you ask? Because adverbs, while encouraged with lower level students, are an inefficient means of communication. They are “lazy” in a manner of speaking. Speakers can use generic verbs and slap on an adverb to be a little more specific. Vivid verbs, on the other hand, paint a more powerful picture for the receiver of language. They are one-word carriers of emotion and imagery. Students who use vivid verbs have more powerful impact in their use of English. Consider the following two sentences. The boy ate his lunch quickly. The boy devoured his lunch. While the second sentence uses fewer words, it paints a more detailed picture. And using the right verb can make all the difference in a sentence. In the second example sentence, we can picture a boy who is starving, or at least feels like he is.

But in the following sentence, which could also be described as him eating quickly, we get a different image, that of a boy who is in a hurry to be somewhere else. The boy inhaled his lunch. Though each of the verbs could be described as eating quickly, each has a different nuance of meaning and therefore communicates more information to the listener.

Practice: One of the best tools for teaching students to use precise language is a thesaurus. By this point in their English studies, students should know what a thesaurus is and should be able to use the reference book easily. To practice using precise language, have students write several sentences using a common adverb with a common verb. Then have students switch papers with a partner and rewrite their classmates’ sentences using precise verbs. They should use the thesaurus for help in finding the best verbs for their sentences. Then, challenge students to rewrite each sentence using a different precise verb but still keeping the same general meaning of the original sentence. Ask volunteers to share their sentences and explain the difference between each of the precise verbs they used for their rewrites.

### **WHEN IT COMES TO ADVERBS IN ENGLISH, THEY RUN THE GAMUT.**

Beginning students learn to use adverbs to communicate more thorough information in their sentences. Intermediate and advanced students learn even more complicated patterns of language by using adverb clauses and adverbial phrases. And just when it seems they have accomplished all they need to accomplish in relation to adverbs, they should opt for verbs that are more precise over using adverbs in their speech and writing. With each step along the road, students learn a different use for adverbs that will bring them closer to their goal of fluency in English. No matter where your students are on their English learning journeys, take some time to review adverbs with them and try one or more of the exercises mentioned in this article. In so doing, your students will have a better command of the English language and become more accomplished speakers and writers.

# Future Time Clauses: A Summary Of What Students Need To Know

## ENGLISH IS FULL OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF CLAUSES, AND LEARNING THEM ALL AT ONE TIME CAN BE OVERWHELMING FOR ESL STUDENTS.

Perhaps that's why so many teachers choose to cover just one specific type of clause at a time with their students. In that vein, this article looks at future time clauses. These clauses can be tricky since they talk about the time of future events and display verb tense changes – always something ESL students need instruction on. So if you are ready to walk your students through the use of future time clauses, read on for essential information as well as exercises you can do in class with little to no preparation.

## TEACH CLAUSES USING THESE SIMPLE IDEAS

### 1 TIME CLAUSES IN GENERAL

Time clauses are dependent clauses that give specific information as to when something will happen. Because they are dependent clauses, they must be joined to an independent clause in a sentence. As with any other clause, time clauses contain a subject and a verb and generally start with a subordinating conjunction. In English, time clause subordinating conjunctions include until, till, as soon as, before, after, when, and while. Time clauses can also begin with a time expression such as the minute or the moment. (E.g. I will call you the minute he comes home.)

Practice: For general practice on time clauses, try this busy teacher worksheet: [busyteacher.org/9022-time-clauses-worksheet-ii.html](http://busyteacher.org/9022-time-clauses-worksheet-ii.html)

### 2 FUTURE EVENTS

In English, the verb tenses in time clauses are not what your students might expect. Since future time clauses talk about events in the future, ESL students might wrongly assume the verbs in future time clauses are written in the future tense. However, that is not the case. In a simple future time clause, a sentence will talk about two events that happen in the future – one before the other. Either event can be expressed in the time clause depending on which subordinating conjunction you use in that clause.

When writing the sentence, one event is expressed in the main clause using a future tense. The other event, the one expressed in the future time clause, is expressed in the simple present, NOT the simple future.

*I will study until I know every answer.*

*I will call you when I get home.*

*Before you go, would you give me your phone number?*

Even though the knowing every answer, getting home, and going are all events that take place sometime in the future, we use the simple present tense in the time clause. (This construction is similar to that of if-clauses in English.)

Practice: To practice verb tenses in future time clauses, have your students work with two or three others to list ten to fifteen events that will happen next week. Then have the groups write down one thing that will happen right before or right after those events. Finally, have student put the two events into one sentence using a time clause: one event should use the simple future tense while the event in the time clause will use the simple present tense. Students should use the subordinating conjunctions before and after to start their time clauses.

### 3 SIMULTANEOUS EVENTS

Sometimes, a time clause expresses an event that happens at the same time as another future event. In this case, the verb in the time clause is expressed in the present progressive.

*I will clean the kitchen while you are doing your homework.*

*While she is getting ready, he will be warming up the car.*

In each case, the event in the time clause (getting ready or doing homework) is happening at the same time as the other event. The subordinating conjunction that expressed this idea is while. Because these events occur at the same time, you can write the sentences with either event in the time clause without changing the meaning of the sentence, but you do have to change the verb tense.

*You will do your homework while I am cleaning the kitchen.*

*She will get ready while he is warm-*

*ing up the car.*

Practice: Have your students return to the list of future events they wrote in the previous exercise. For each of the events they listed, have students list an event that could be happening at the same time as the original event. Then have students work together to write sentences using time clauses – two for each pair of events – making sure the event in the time clauses is expressed using the present progressive tense.

### 4 OTHER FUTURE TIME CLAUSES

Occasionally, your students might want to express an event in the future progressive or future perfect in a time clause. These verbs, in the time clause, should be changed to the present progressive and the present perfect as in the following examples.

*I will be sleeping. You will get home. You will get home while I am sleeping.*

*I will have taken the test tomorrow. Then I will go to the party.*

*After I have taken the test, I will go to the party.*

### 5 WHEN THE TIME CLAUSE IS THE OBJECT OF THE VERB

Be careful. Sometimes noun clauses look like time clauses, specifically those that start with when. Though the noun clause is a dependent clause and may start like a time clause, the grammar of these clauses is different. In such cases, future events are expressed in future time. *I don't know when she will introduce us.*

Even though the introducing happens in the future, the event is the object of the verb know and is therefore not a time clause nor does it follow the rules for verb tenses in time clauses.

**FUTURE TIME CLAUSES IN ENGLISH ARE A COMPLICATED SUBJECT, AND YOUR STUDENTS WILL BENEFIT FROM A SINGLE LESSON DEVOTED TO THIS SPECIFIC TYPE OF DEPENDENT CLAUSE.** When you do, be sure to cover the specific structures mentioned here, and your students are sure to be successful.

# How to Teach Reduction of Adverb Clauses in 6 Easy Steps

## ARE YOU TEACHING ADVANCED GRAMMAR?

Are you looking for a challenge for your students? Once your students have learned how to use adverb clauses in their writing and speech, move them on to this next step: reduction of adverb clauses to adverbial phrases. It's easy if you follow this six step teaching process.

## HELP YOUR ADVANCED STUDENTS SOUND MORE NATURAL USING ADVERB CLAUSES

### 1 REVIEW ADVERB CLAUSES

Before you can teach your students how to reduce adverb clauses, they will need to be comfortable with using the clauses in a sentence. Adverb clauses are dependent clauses which answer the questions how, why, or when. They must contain a subject and a verb as well as a subordinating conjunction. The following sentences contain adverb clauses.

*Although it was early, we decided to go home.*

*He is going to ask her out even though she already has a boyfriend.*

*If it rains on Saturday, the party will be cancelled.*

Note the punctuation patterns in these sentences: if the adverb clause come first in the sentence, it is followed by a comma. If it comes after the main clause, no comma is used.

### 2 CHECK TO SEE IF THE CLAUSE CAN BE REDUCED

Not all adverb clauses can be reduced to adverbial phrases. Point out to your students that the subject of the adverb clause and the subject of the sentence must be the same in order to reduce the adverb clause. If the subjects are not the same, the adverb clause cannot be reduced.

*While Sarah was studying, she*

*fell asleep. (can be reduced)*

*While Sara was talking, I fell*

*asleep. (cannot be reduced)*

### 3 REDUCING CLAUSES WITH A "BE" VERB

If the adverb clause contains a "be" verb (am, is, are, was, were, been, being), students must follow two steps to reduce it to an adverbial phrase. First, students should omit the subject of the adverb clause. Then they should admit the be verb. They can then rewrite the adverb clause as an adverbial phrase.

*While she was studying, Sarah fell asleep.*

*While studying, Sarah fell asleep.*

*Although he was late, he was admitted to the movie.*

*Although late, he was admitted to the movie.*

### 4 REDUCING CLAUSES WHICH DO NOT CONTAIN A "BE" VERB

Now that your students know how to do a simple reduction of an adverb clause, one that contains a "be" verb, it's time to move on to more complicated reductions. If an adverb clause which can be reduced does not contain a be verb, students must follow these two steps. First, omit the subject of the adverb clause. Second, change the verb in the adverb clause to the -ing form of that verb. Then rewrite the adverb clause as an adverbial phrase.

*After he finished the book, Jack put it back on his shelf.*

*After finishing the book, Jack put it back on his shelf.*

*Before she goes to the train station, Maria will check the train schedule.*

*Before going to the train station, Maria will check the train schedule.*

### 5 EXPRESSING SIMULTANEOUS ACTIONS IN ADVERBIAL PHRASES

Once your students are comfortable

with reducing adverb clauses to adverbial phrases, it's time to explain some of the more irregular reductions. The first of these irregular constructions is reducing an adverb clause that begins with "while". When an adverb clause begins with "while", it expresses the idea that the two actions in the sentence happened simultaneously. Adverb clauses beginning with "while" can be reduced following the regular pattern. However, when the clause comes at the beginning of a sentence, the subordinating conjunction "while" can also be omitted in the adverbial phrase and the verb appears in its -ing form. Starting a sentence with an adverbial phrase which begins with an -ing verb communicates the idea of simultaneous actions even without the use of "while".

*While they were riding their bikes, the students saw a circus coming into town.*

*While riding their bikes, the students saw a circus coming into town.*

*Riding their bikes, the students saw a circus coming into town.*

*The students saw a circus coming into town while riding their bikes.*

*Wrong: The students saw a circus coming into town riding their bikes.*

### 6 CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS IN ADVERBIAL PHRASES

Sometimes an adverbial phrase at the beginning of a sentence which also starts with the -ing form of a verb communicates a cause and effect relationship between the adverbial phrase and the main clause of the sentence. These phrases originate from an adverb clause beginning with because.

*Because she forgot her phone, she didn't get the message until it was too late.*

*Forgetting her phone, she didn't get the message until it was too late.*

When an adverbial phrase begins with "having" plus a past participle, it

communicates the idea of because in addition to the idea of before.

*Because she had eaten escargot on her trip to France, she knew she wouldn't want any at the party.*

*Having eaten escargot on her trip to France, she knew she wouldn't want any at the party.*

*Because he went to the police, he was afraid the mob would come after him.*

*Having gone to the police, he was afraid the mob would come after him.*

It is possible to leave a “be” verb in an adverbial phrase at the beginning of a sentence. The use of “being” at the beginning of a sentence and adverbial phrase stresses the cause and effect relationship between the adverbial phrase and the main clause. The following three sentences all have the same meaning.

*Because they were unable to find the theater, they missed their friend's play.*

*Being unable to find the theater, they missed their friend's play.*

*Unable to find the theater, they missed their friend's play.*

**REDUCTION OF ADVERB CLAUSES TO ADVERBIAL PHRASES ISN'T GRAMMAR FOR THE FAINT OF HEART. BUT IF YOU TAKE IT STEP BY STEP, YOU CAN BE SURE YOUR STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO USE AND UNDERSTAND THE GRAMMAR THAT IT TAKES.**



# It's All Relative: 6 Class Activities for Practicing Relative Clauses

## ARE YOU LOOKING FOR SOME NOT-SO-TYPICAL ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTICING RELATIVE CLAUSES?

Try one of the following.

## ENJOY THESE 6 SIMPLE CLASS ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTICING RELATIVE CLAUSES

### 1 THE LONGEST SENTENCE

How much do your students know about world-famous people? You might find out in this simple game which requires students to use relative clauses. In each round, two students will face off to find out who knows more information about a given person. Have the youngest person of the two go first and make a simple statement about a famous person. (For example, Albert Einstein was a scientist.) The next person must then add a piece of information to the sentence (using a relative clause) without changing what the first person said. (For example, Albert Einstein, who discovered the theory of relativity, was a scientist.) Play goes back to the first person who must add another piece of information to the sentence, and so on. When one player can no longer add a true piece of information to the sentence, the other person scores a point. If you like, divide your class into two teams and have one person from each team come to the front of the room each round. You can play this game orally or in writing.

### 2 PUZZLE IT OUT

Help your students review the structure of sentences containing relative clauses with this hands on activity. Write several sentences using relative clauses in the middle. Then cut apart your sentences into three pieces – the beginning of the sentences, the relative clauses, and the end of the sentences. Shuffle all the pieces together and give them to a group of three or four students. They must then work together to assemble each of the sentences correctly with the pieces you have given them using context clues.

### 3 CHAIN WRITING

You can have your students work

together to write a funny story in this pass the paper activity. Have each person in your class start with a blank piece of paper. They will write one sentence on the paper that begins with the following: It was the day that... They will then complete the sentence, fold over the top of the paper, and then pass it to the next person. That person completes this sentence: There was a girl/boy who... They then fold over the top of the paper and pass it to a third person. That person finishes this sentence: She met a girl/boy who...

When the fourth person gets the paper, they finished this sentence: They had to defeat a monster that... The fifth and final person finishes this sentence: The outcome was something that... When all five people have finished their sentences, have them give the papers to you. You will then unfold each paper and read the completed story. Your students are sure to get a laugh from these silly, multi-author stories.

### 4 CLUES FOR YOU

In this game, students will give clues to an object as the class tries to guess which object it is. Divide your class into two teams. Have each team take turns choosing an object in the room to give clues about. Each clue should start with, "This is something that/which..." Each team will give three clues for its chosen object. If the other team is able to guess the object after just one clue, they score three points. If they need two clues to identify the object, they score two points. After three clues, they only score one point. If they are unable to guess the object after three clues, they score zero. Play until one team reaches twelve points.

### 5 IT'S ALL BALDERDASH

Balderdash, by definition, means a lot of nonsense. It also happens to be a board game which is great fun to play in class. If you don't have the game itself, you can play this modified version, which will give your students a chance to practice using relative clauses. Start by printing off a list of unusual holidays and observances that your students will probably not be familiar with. Your entries should include the date and the

reason for the observance. Then cut your list into small slips of paper and put them into a hat. Have students draw one from the hat without showing it to their classmates. They will then use that slip to write three sentences about that date. One of the sentences should say the date and what the true observance is. The other two sentences should say the date and give false observances. For example, one person's sentences might read as follows:

*July 4th is the day that Americans drink and wear green.*

*July 4th is the day that Americans celebrate their independence.*

*July 4th is the day when Americans remember their deceased loved ones.*

Each student then takes turns reading their sentences to the class. The rest of the students try decide which statement is true.

### 6 APPLES TO APPLES

This simple game is popular with players of all ages. In the game, each person gets five cards with random words on them which they must link to another random word logically. You can make your own modified version of the game by writing vocabulary words and common English words on index cards. (The more cards you have for each group of three to four players, the better. You can even have students make their own cards before starting the game.) Have groups shuffle their cards and then deal five to each person in the group. On a player's turn, he lays one of his cards face up on the table. The other players must then choose one of the cards in their hands that they think best connects with the one their classmate played. Once everyone has laid down their cards, players take turns explaining the connections between the cards using relative clauses. For example, if I had the cards holiday and mug, I might give this explanation: People drink mugs of eggnog on the winter holiday which is Christmas. The person who played the first card chooses which connection he likes best, and the person who made it scores a point. Keep playing until everyone has had at least one opportunity to lay down the first card in the round or until one player scores five points.

# Connectives: Help Students Put Their Thoughts Together

## ENGLISH GRAMMAR CAN BE COMPLICATED, ESPECIALLY TO SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

And some students struggle with sentence structure so much that they opt to use the most simple construction they can to avoid grammar errors. Though this may be a good strategy for some students, for others they really need to push their language use to a more complex place. They must do this in order to sound more fluent and capable in English, and part of getting language to that more fluent place is using connectives. Connectives are grammatical constructions that link one idea to another. They help students use language to match their more complex thinking and ideas. This can sound intimidating to lower level students, but there's good news. Connectives aren't limited to just one grammatical strategy. Students can use many different grammar constructions to get their ideas across and still have them connected. Here we look at 4 types of connectives your students can use to express their ideas. You can teach just one or all of the strategies. Just tailor what you teach to the abilities of your students.

## HOW TO TEACH CAUSE AND EFFECT CONNECTIVES

One of the most common relationships between ideas, and one that ESL students learn early in their English studies, is that of cause and effect. How did one thing influence or cause a second thing? Expressing these connections between ideas is important, and the good news is that there are several ways to do so.

### 1 CONJUNCTIONS

One of the easiest constructions to show cause and effect is with the use of coordinating conjunctions. These conjunctions join two independent clauses to make a compound sentence, and even beginning students can learn how to use them. Conjunctions that communicate the

idea of cause and effect are so and for. You can see in the sentences below how they link two ideas together to show their relationship.

*He was in love with her, so he asked her to marry him.*  
*He asked her to marry him for he was in love with her.*

### 2 PREPOSITIONS

Another simple way to show cause and effect between two ideas is through the use of prepositions. ESL students (and teachers) don't automatically jump to prepositions to communicate cause and effect relationships, but there are some that fill that role. See how the prepositions in the following sentences link the ideas in the sentence.

*He asked her to marry him because of his love for her.*  
*He asked her to marry him due to his love for her.*  
*He asked her to marry him due to the fact that he loved her. (Note this expression is used primarily in very formal situations.)*

### 3 ADVERB CLAUSES

Adverb clauses are a great way to show cause and effect relationships between ideas, and intermediate students should have some familiarity with them even if they aren't completely comfortable using them yet. See how the following adverb clauses link ideas in a cause and effect relationship.

*He asked her to marry him because he loved her.*  
*He asked her to marry him since he loved her.*  
*He asked her to marry him now that he loved her.*

### 4 TRANSITIONS

Transitions are a way to connect ideas that appear in separate sentences. Even beginning level students can learn to use transitions to link their thoughts. The following transitions show a cause and effect relationship between ideas.

relationship between ideas.

*He loved her. Therefore he asked her to marry him.*  
*He loved her. Consequently, he asked her to marry him.*  
*He loved her. As a result, he asked her to marry him.*

## REMEMBER CONNECTIVES THAT EXPRESS CONTRAST

Not all ideas have a cause and effect relationship. Sometimes, a speaker will want to link ideas together to stress that they are different or in contrast to one another. ESL students have many options when it comes to expressing contrast. In fact, they can use the same strategies they used to express cause and effect. Here are some ways you can encourage your students to link their ideas that show contrast.

### 1 CONJUNCTIONS

Coordinating conjunctions are fairly simple grammar that beginning students should be able to use or at least understand. Thankfully English does include coordinating conjunctions which communicate an idea of contrast such as those in the following sentences.

*She accepted his proposal, but she didn't love him.*  
*She accepted his proposal, yet she didn't love him.*  
*She didn't love him, but she accepted his proposal anyway.*  
*She didn't love him, but she still accepted his proposal.*

### 2 PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions are simple grammar that can pack a punch of meaning. English does include several prepositions which communicate the idea of contrast.

*She accepted his proposal despite her dislike for him.*  
*She accepted his proposal in spite of her lack of love for him.*  
*She accepted his proposal de-*

*spite the fact that she didn't love him.*

### 3 ADVERB CLAUSES

Subordinating conjunctions such as even though, although, though, whereas, and while are great ways to communicate that ideas are in contrast. Intermediate students who have studied dependent clauses should be able to use this grammatical technique to link their ideas in a relationship of contrast.

*She accepted his proposal even though she didn't love him.*

*She accepted his proposal although she didn't love him.*

*While she didn't love him, she accepted his proposal.*

### 4 TRANSITIONS

Ideas of contrast don't have to appear in the same sentence. Here are some transitions your students can use to show that the ideas in separate sentences are in contrast with each other.

*She didn't love him. Nevertheless, she accepted his proposal.*

*She didn't love him. Nonetheless, she accepted his proposal.*

*She didn't love him. However, she still accepted his proposal.*

## CONSIDER CONNECTIVES THAT EXPRESS CONDITIONS

Sometimes one action depends on a certain condition rather than another action. You can help your students express these necessary conditions by using connectives, no matter what level your students' English is at.

### 1 CONJUNCTIONS

While we most often think of the coordinating conjunction "or" as giving a choice, it can also be used to show that a certain condition must be met for another action to take place. Even beginning students can express the idea of necessary conditions this way.

*She must love me, or I will not marry her.*

*She must love me, or else I will not marry her.*

### 2 ADVERB CLAUSES

You can spend days teaching your students about conditional state-

ments. When you don't have the time for that, show them how these subordinating conjunctions can show how certain conditions are necessary for a given outcome.

*I will not marry her unless she is in love with me.*

*If she does not love me, I will not marry her.*

*I will marry her whether or not she loves me.*

*In will not marry her in the event that she does not love me.*

### 3 TRANSITIONS

Using the transition "otherwise" is a great way to communicate a necessary condition without making a complex or complicated sentence in English. *She must love me. Otherwise I will not marry her.*

**HELPING YOUR STUDENTS PUT THEIR IDEAS TOGETHER DOESN'T HAVE TO BE COMPLICATED. WHEN YOU WANT YOUR STUDENTS TO EXPRESS IDEAS OF CAUSE AND EFFECT, CONTRAST, OR CONDITION, TRY ONE OF THESE CONNECTIVE STRATEGIES AND BE IMPRESSED WITH HOW WELL THEY CAN COMMUNICATE THEIR THOUGHTS, EVEN IF THEY ARE USING SIMPLE LANGUAGE TO DO IT.**



# Coordinate or Subordinate? Making Sense of English Conjunctions

## “CONJUNCTION JUNCTION, WHAT’S YOUR FUNCTION...?”

If you every watched School House Rock, these words should sound familiar. Conjunctions are an important part of the English language because they connect clauses to make compound and complex sentences, sentences that are interesting and sophisticated. Different types of conjunctions do different things. Here is a quick review of these different types of conjunctions for your ESL students.

## A QUICK REVIEW OF CONJUNCTIONS AND HOW THEY MAKE BETTER SENTENCES

### 1 COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

Coordinating conjunctions are perhaps the easiest conjunctions to understand and apply in the English language. They join two independent clauses to make a compound sentence. In a compound sentence, both parts of the sentence have equal weight: they both have a subject and a verb and can stand on their own as an independent sentence. The use of a coordinating conjunction connects these two clauses to make a more interesting sentence. English has seven coordinating conjunctions: and, but, or, yet, so, nor, and for. English speakers use and to communicate the idea of addition. They use but and yet for a contrast. Or communicates a choice while nor says neither option is a choice. (Note, when using nor to join two independent clauses, the first clause should have a negative verb while the second clause has a positive verb. The negative in the second clause is linked to the use of nor.) So and for communicate a cause and effect relationship. When a coordinating conjunction joins two sentences, a comma comes after the first independent clause and before the coordinating conjunction.

*They went to the restaurant, and they went to the movies.  
He liked the movie, but he didn't like the restaurant.*

*He doesn't eat soup, nor does he eat salad. (note the negative verb in the first clause and positive verb in the second)*

Practice: To give your students some practice using coordinating conjunctions to form compound sentences, have pairs of students write one sentence with each coordinating conjunction, using commas correctly, on a sheet of paper. Then have them transfer each independent clause to a separate index card omitting the comma and the coordinating conjunction. Have each pair shuffle their cards and then exchange them with another pair in the class. Each pair must now try to find logical combinations with the independent clauses on the note cards and try to recreate and write down the seven compound sentences the first pair came up with.

### 2 SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

Subordinating conjunctions are more complicated than coordinating conjunctions, as a rule. They join one dependent clause to an independent clause to form a complex sentence. The dependent clause, also called the subordinating clause, depends on the independent clause, or main clause, for its meaning. The dependent clause cannot stand alone though they can come at either the beginning or the end of a main clause. Some of the most common subordinating conjunctions in English are listed below.

#### TIME CLAUSES

After, before, once, since, till, until, when, whenever, and while are subordinating conjunctions which communicate a time relationship. Some of these words can also be used as prepositions (as can other subordinating conjunctions), so make sure your students can tell what role the words are filling in a sentence. If one of these words is followed by a noun or noun phrase, it is a preposition (e.g. after the party). If it is followed by both a subject and a verb, it is functioning as a subordinating conjunction in a complex sentence.

*We will go to the restaurant after we go to the party. (subordinating conjunction)*

*We will go to the restaurant after the party. (preposition)*

#### CLAUSES OF CONTRAST

Although, even though, rather than, though, and whereas all show a relationship of contrast between the main clause and the subordinating clause.

*I will drive her to the airport even though I don't like her.*

*Rather than take a plane, I will take the scenic train.*

Notice that, while most subordinating conjunctions are just one word, some consist of two or more words.

#### COMPARISON

As, as if, and as though all show a relationship between the main clause and the dependent clause which compares one to the other. While English speakers may use like in similar constructions, some grammar books say it cannot be used as a subordinating conjunction. You may want to point this out to your students. *He looked as if a dog was chasing him.*

#### CONDITION

Sometimes the subordinate clause states a condition related to the main clause. The most common subordinating conjunction in this category is if, but others include as long as, even if, if only, and unless.

*Unless he apologizes, I will not speak to him.*

*I will only speak to him if he apologizes.*

#### PLACE

When where and wherever are used as subordinating conjunctions, the dependent clause communicates something to do with place. *Your book must be wherever you left it.*

#### CAUSE AND EFFECT

Some subordinating conjunctions show a cause and effect relationship between the main clause and the subordinating clause. Such subordinating conjunctions include because, now that, so



that, and in order that. *He aced the test because he studied all night.*

In this example, the dependent clause causes the main clause to happen.

*He studied all night so that he would ace the test.*

In this example, the main clause causes the dependent clause to happen.

### 3 PUNCTUATING SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

When a dependent clause starting with a subordinating conjunction comes at the end of the sentence, no comma is needed. When a dependent clause starting with a subordinating conjunction comes at the beginning of a sentence, it is followed by a comma.

*She went out with him because her friend wanted her to.*

*Because her friend wanted her to, she went out with him.*

*Neither of them had fun while they were on their date.*

*While they were on their date, neither of them had fun.*

*They will not go out again even if their friend asks them to.*

*Even if their friend asks them to, they will not go out again.*

Subordinating conjunctions are not the same as relative pronouns (who, which, and where), which follow different punctuation patterns.

Practice: To help students choose the correct subordinating conjunction in a sentence, give your students a list of several fill in the blank sentences where the subordinating conjunction has been omitted. Using a work bank, have students choose one or more answers which will correctly complete each sentence.

### CONJUNCTIONS IN ENGLISH RANGE FROM THE SIMPLE TO THE COMPLICATED, BUT YOUR STUDENTS WILL HAVE TO BE COMFORTABLE WITH ALL OF THEM TO REACH FLUENCY.

Take some time to review these types of conjunctions with your students and you are sure to see their written and spoken English improve and their sentences become longer and more complex and more like those of native speakers.

# How to Teach Students About Articles, Determiners, & Quantifiers

## RARELY DOES A NOUN HANG AROUND ON ITS OWN.

Besides the comfortable companionship of adjectives, nouns tend to keep certain words close to them. These words, which you and your students know as articles, determiners, and quantifiers, help the reader or listener know which of a multitude of nouns the speaker is referring to. The question is, how does a person use them? And how does someone teach their ESL students how to use them correctly? While many ESL students will have little to no trouble with these often tiny words, some students have native languages which do not use articles or use a completely different system for choosing articles. They may find that these little English words are a whole lot of trouble. What follows is a breakdown of these noun companions and how to teach them to your students.

## WHAT ARE DETERMINERS?

Determiners are a class of words in the English language that point out which of a particular noun a speaker is referring to. They are not a part of speech but are actually a linguistic category of words. Determiners can be used to refer to a specific noun or a general noun. In some ways, they are like adjectives, giving additional information about the noun with which they are paired, but there are a limited number of determiners in the English language. And while not every noun has a determiner, a noun never has more than one determiner. There are several classes of English words which fall under the category of determiner: articles, numbers, indefinite pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and possessive pronouns. Read on to learn more about each of these parts of speech.

## ARTICLES

English has three articles – the, a, and an. These simple little words tell the listener what particular noun a speaker is referring to. The refers to a specific

noun. It refers to the only one of that particular noun in existence (the Sears Tower), or it may refer to a specific noun that was mentioned earlier in the sentence or conversation. (I bought a book. The book is on the table.) A, on the other hand, is a general article. When used with a noun, it refers to any of that particular noun in existence. (He ate a pear.) It is not referring to one specific noun nor is its unique identity important. An works the same way as a with one difference. English speakers use a before nouns which begin with consonant sound, an before words which begin with vowel sounds (a book, a ride, an apple, an egg). Note that it is not spelling which determines whether to use a or an but the initial sound (a university, an hour). Some is sometimes referred to as an article though technically it is an indefinite pronoun. Some teachers choose to tell their students that some is the plural form of a or an since the latter are only used with singular nouns. The can be used with either singular or plural nouns.

## TEACH THESE SMALL WORDS WITH EXPERTISE

### 1 NUMBERS

Numbers are one of the first things an ESL student studies. In fact, learning to count in some foreign language is something almost anyone can do. But counting and using numbers as determiners are not exactly the same thing. When a number is used as a determiner, it comes before the noun and specifies the specific number of that noun to which the speaker is referring. Sam had two books, six pencils, and four assignments.

### 2 INDEFINITE PRONOUNS

Indefinite pronouns are those which do not refer to a specific noun. In that way, they are similar to the word a, but they give more information than it does. Indefinite pronouns include anyone, anywhere, somewhere, some-

one, more, several, few, many, both, all, and any. Anyone and someone refer to a nonspecific person. Anywhere and somewhere refer to a nonspecific person. More is used to mean in addition (I want more cake). Few, several, and many refer to a general amount of a given noun (He has read several books). Both and all refer to all of an item, whether the number is unspecified or the number is two (as in the case with both). In most cases, an indefinite pronoun can be replaced with a, an, or some in a sentence without affecting the grammar of the sentence, but it will slightly affect the meaning of the sentence.

*She has some books. (an unspecified number)*

*She has many books. (an unspecified large number)*

*She has few books. (an unspecified small number)*

### 3 DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS

English has four demonstrative pronouns: this, that, these, and those. They are used to refer to specific nouns that are either singular or plural and are relatively near the speaker. This refers to a singular noun near the speaker. These refers to a plural noun near the speaker. That refers to a singular noun that is farther away from the speaker. Those refers to a plural noun that is farther away from the speaker. There is no hard and fast rule whether to use this or that, these or those. The specific distance does not determine the word choice. It is the general impression of the speaker which determines which word is the best choice in given circumstances.

### 4 POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

A possessive pronoun is used to show possession of a noun. English has a finite set of possessive pronouns: my, your, his, her, its, our, and their. These pronouns agree in number with the noun showing ownership.

*My coat is on the back of his chair.*

## 5 QUANTIFIERS

Quantifiers are worth a mention here though they are NOT determiners. Quantifiers are used with a noncount noun to make that item countable. They do not fill the role of a determiner. They are actually nouns and are preceded by their own determiners.

*He carried a bucket of water.*

In the previous sentence, bucket is the noun and a is the determiner (article). Water is also a noun, but in this sentence it is the object of the preposition. It does not have a determiner though it is possible for a noncount noun in a prepositional phrase to also have a determiner as in the following sentence.

*Have a cup of this coffee. It is delicious.*

**THOUGH THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF DETERMINERS IN ENGLISH, EACH NOUN WE FIND WILL ONLY USE ONE OF THEM.**

Often, it is best to introduce one type of determiner to your students at a time. As you do, be sure to point out to your students that they are members of the linguistic category or class of determiners and are not a part of speech though several parts of speech belong to the class of determiners.

# How To Review Parts Of Speech: 5 Quick and Easy Games

## ARE YOU READY TO REVIEW PARTS OF SPEECH WITH YOUR ESL CLASS?

Try one of these fun and competitive games to get their minds working and their spirits revved up.

## CHECK OUT THESE GAMES TO PRACTICE PARTS OF SPEECH

### 1 PUZZLE ME THIS

In this game for three to four players, students race to get all the pieces of a puzzle first. For each group of four, you will need one standard die, a list of sentences, and four full page magazine photos (or other pictures) cut into twelve squares and shuffled. Put the pieces to each picture in a separate envelope. Each student chooses one envelope, and s/he will be racing to get all of the pieces to complete her puzzle before the other people in the group complete theirs. Roll to see who goes first. One each player's turn, they roll the die. They then have to identify a word in that sentence with the part of speech that they rolled (1-noun, 2-verb, 3-adj., 4-adv., 5-preposition, 6-player's choice). If a player gets the answer correct, he gets to take one puzzle piece from his envelope and put it on the table in front of him. Play continues around the table. The first player to get all his pieces and put his picture together wins the game.

### 2 PART OF SPEECH JEOPARDY

To set up this game, you will create a grid of sticky notes on your front board. You should have five columns titled adjectives, adverbs, nouns, verbs, and prepositions. Each column should have five sticky notes under it. Write a sentence on the STICKY side of each note. Make sure each sentence contains the part of speech in its column. Then stick the notes to the board. On the nonsticky side, write a point value for each question starting with \$100 and going to \$500 moving down the column. Divide your class into three

teams. Have one person from each team come to the front of the room. The youngest person chooses a category and a dollar amount. You remove that sticky note from your board and read the sentence. If a player knows the answer, he or she raises her hand. The first student who raises her hand gets to answer. If she chooses the word from the sentence that matches the column title, her team earns those points. Three new students come up to the front. The player from the team that won the last round gets to choose the category and dollar amount. Play this way until all your sticky notes are gone. The team with the most points wins.

### 3 WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE

You can play this game by reading sentences aloud or projecting them on your front board. Each student will need note cards labeled with the five major parts of speech. You should also have a list of dollar amounts on the board or a poster (\$100, \$200, \$400, \$500, \$1000, \$2000, \$4000, \$8000, \$16,000, \$32,000, \$64,000, \$128,000, \$250,000, \$500,000, \$1,000,000) with a marker for each student (magnets or clothes pins labeled with student names work well). Project a sentence on the board with one word underlined. Students should then choose the card that has the part of speech for the underlined word. Each student holds his card facing front and close to his body so only you, the teacher, can see. Everyone who chose the correct card gets their marker moved up one level. If someone chooses incorrectly, they get moved down one level. Project another sentence and have students choose the correct part of speech card. The further into the game you go, the longer and more complicated the sentences should become. The first person to reach the top of the chart wins the game and the fictional million dollars.

### 4 THE STICKY GAME BOARD

This game is designed for use with up to four players. If you want to have your whole class play, just make up enough sets so everyone can play in their own group. Start by writing sentences on index cards. Each card should have a sentence written on it which contains at least one noun, verb, adj., adv., and preposition. Each group will also need one standard six-sided die and a pack of small sticky notes. Students set up the game by 1. shuffling the sentence cards and putting them face down 2. laying out a path of twenty-five sticky notes on the desk and 3. choosing a small object to be their game marker (paperclip, penny, etc.). On their turn, students roll the die to see which part of speech they must identify in the sentence (1-noun, 2-verb, 3-adj., 4-adv., 5-preposition, 6-player's choice). They then choose a sentence card from the stack and choose the correct word in the sentence. If their answer is right, they roll again to see how many spaces they move along the sticky trail. The first person to reach the end of the path wins.

### 5 PICK A STICK

This simple review game can be played as a whole class, in small groups, or by individual students at a learning center. Start by writing several words each on one popsicle stick. Label paper cups with each part of speech you have written on your popsicle sticks and keep one blank cup to hold all your sticks. On their turn, a student chooses a stick, reads the word, and puts it in the correct cup. Have students take turns or work independently to sort all the sticks into their proper cups.

REVIEWING PARTS OF SPEECH MAY BE BASIC, BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BORING. TRY ONE OF THESE GAMES WITH YOUR STUDENTS AND GET THEM ENGAGED WHILE THEY HAVE FUN LEARNING.



# Bold Isn't Always Better: an ESL Guide to Using Indirect Questions

## HAVE YOU EVER BEEN OFFENDED BY THE DIRECTNESS OF A QUESTION EITHER FROM ONE OF YOUR STUDENTS OR FROM SOMEONE ELSE?

It's possible that the question made you uncomfortable because it was a direct question, that is it wasn't hedged in a larger sentence to soften the inquiry. It's important in English to know when and how to ask indirect questions, ones that soften the edge of direct questions. Here is how you can go about teaching indirect question to your ESL students.

## LET'S MAKE INDIRECT QUESTIONS AS EASY AS A PIE

### 1 DIRECT AND INDIRECT QUESTIONS

Direct and indirect questions refer to different grammatical structures. They are used in grammar to distinguish between a question in a main clause and a question in a dependent clause. Most questions that ESL students ask and answer are direct questions. They appear in the main clause of a sentence. Indirect questions, also called embedded questions, are common among English speakers, and your students should know how to form them. These are questions that appear in a dependent clause in a sentence. Embedded questions are used for several reasons. In some cases, an indirect question is more polite than a direct question. In many ways, an embedded question is softer and can take an aggressive edge off of a direct question. Indirect questions are also used in more formal speech or in business situations.

### 2 DIRECT QUESTION FORMATION

In English, there are two steps in forming questions. When the question is an information question (using who, what, where, when, why, or how) the question is formed by moving the question word to the front of the sentence and changing the word order of the subject and verb.

*He will go where. (underlying structure)*

*Where will he go? (direct question)*

If the verb has a helping verb, also called an auxiliary verb, it is moved before the subject of the sentence. If the verb does not have a helping verb, do is inserted before the subject of the sentence to

make a question.

*You ski. (underlying structure)*  
*Do you ski? (direct question)*

### 3 INDIRECT QUESTION FORMATION

Indirect questions are different from direct questions in more than name. Since they are questions embedded in a dependent clause, they do not require the movement of the helping verb or the insertion of do. The question word, however, is still moved to the beginning of the clause. Take the following examples. The first sentence shows the underlying structure of the statement. To change it to a question, we must move the question word to the beginning of the sentence and change the order of the helping verb. We also end the sentence with a question mark because the main clause (in this case the only clause) is a question.

*You are going where. (underlying structure)*

*Where are you going? (direct questions)*

Now look at the underlying structure of the embedded question. *She wants to know you are going where. (underlying structure)*

To change the dependent clause to question format (form an embedded question), you must move the question word to the beginning of the clause, but you do not change the order of the helping verb. *She wants to know where you are going. (indirect question)*

And since the question is embedded in a dependent clause, you do not use a question mark at the end of the sentence.

Here is another example. We start with the underlying structure of the sentence and then add do to form a yes/no question.

*He likes me. (underlying structure)*  
*Does he like me? (direct question)*

We can also embed this question in a dependent clause. But because it is a yes/no question, we will use if at the beginning of the dependent clause rather than adding do as in the question above.

*I wonder he likes me. (underlying structure)*

*I wonder if he likes me. (embedded question)*

Note that the embedded question does

not end with a question mark. This is an area where many students make mistakes, but the punctuation of the sentence depends on whether the main clause is a statement or a question. In this case, the main clause is a statement, so the punctuation of the sentence as a whole is for a statement. Other phrases that may begin an indirect question include the following.

I was wondering...

I'd like to know...

I can't remember...

I have no idea...

### 4 QUESTIONS EMBEDDED IN QUESTIONS

It is possible for an embedded question to appear within a question. In such cases, the sentence is punctuated with a question mark because the main clause is a question. Take the following sentences for example.

*He likes me. (underlying structure)*

*Does he like me? (direct question)*

*You know he likes me. (underlying structure)*

*Do you know if he likes me? (embedded question within a question)*

It is correct to punctuate the last sentence with a question mark because the main clause is a question: do you know...? The use of a question mark at the end of the sentence has nothing to do with the embedded question. It could just as easily be embedded in a statement and be followed by a period. *I have no idea if he likes me. (embedded question within a statement)*

Some phrases that might introduce an indirect question within a question include the following.

Can/could you tell me...

Do you know ...

Do you have any idea ...

Is there any chance that ...

### USING EMBEDDED QUESTIONS REQUIRES A FIRM UNDERSTANDING OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR, AND IT ISN'T FOR STUDENTS JUST LEARNING THE RULES FOR THE LANGUAGE.

But high intermediate and advanced students will need to use and understand indirect question use. When it's time to tackle the subject with your class, take it slowly, one step at a time, and your students will end up being able to use them correctly and, hopefully, easily.

# 4 Types of Sentences Your Students Need to Know

**NOT EVERY SCHOLAR LIKES GRAMMAR, BUT IF YOU TEACH ESL STUDENTS HOPEFULLY THEY AT LEAST HAVE A TOLERANCE FOR THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.**

Still... If they have yet to develop this appreciation, perhaps breaking down these four types of English sentences will help. Starting with simple subject and verb sentences, you can walk your students through the intricacies of English grammar one sentence at a time. And once they understand how the sentences break down, they can start putting them together on their own.

**TEACH THESE TYPES OF SENTENCES FOR YOUR STUDENTS' IMMENSE BENEFIT**

## 1 SIMPLE SENTENCES

The grammatical category of Simple Sentences is what it sounds like – simple. Simple sentences require nothing more than a subject and a verb, though they often include plenty of descriptive words and phrases. A simple sentence is one independent clause. Almost every English student can identify and produce this type of sentence (unless you are teaching absolute beginners). If your students are advanced beginners and above, they are probably already familiar with this type of sentence structure and ready to move on to the next type.

## 2 COMPOUND SENTENCES

Compound sentences aren't all that complicated either, though they may look otherwise to your ESL students. Just like a compound word, a compound sentence is two simple sentences joined together – to equally important pieces paired together. In compound words, a speaker just puts two words together to make a new English word: school + house = schoolhouse. No special grammar is needed to make a compound word. In compound sentences, however,

you need a coordinating conjunction to join what would otherwise be two independent clauses. Coordinating conjunctions in English include and, but, and so. Though it is common in spoken English to start a sentence with these words, grammatically it is incorrect. When used correctly, these words take two simple sentences and make them into one compound sentence. A compound sentence starts with an independent clause, which is then followed by a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and the second independent clause. For example, *They went to dinner, and then they saw a movie.*

These clauses could be separate and independent sentences, but and makes them something more. Both clauses in the compound sentences must have a subject and a verb. If the second clause does not contain a subject, as in the following sentence, it is not a compound sentence.

*They went to dinner and then saw a movie.*

This sentence is a simple sentence with a compound verb since only the verbs are joined with the coordinating conjunction and there is no subject written with the second verb. Make sure your students can pick out a subject in each clause of a compound sentence and distinguish that from a simple sentence with a compound verb.

## 3 COMPLEX SENTENCES

Complex sentences aren't for the timid language learner. They are sentences which contain one independent clause and one or more dependent clause. While coordinating conjunctions are used to join an independent clause to another independent clause, a subordinating conjunction joins a dependent clause to an independent clause. English contains many subordinating conjunctions, so I won't mention them all here. Some of the most common are after, because, before, if, since, that, unless, and until.

Subordinating conjunctions show some kind of relationship of meaning between the independent clause and the dependent clauses. Some complex sentences show a cause and effect relationship between the clauses. The subordinating conjunction used most often to show cause and effect is because. In such a structure, the cause goes in the dependent clause and the effect goes in the independent clause.

*He was happy because he aced the test.*

When a dependent clause comes after an independent clause in a complex sentence, no comma is used. If, however, the dependent clause comes before the independent clause in a complex sentence, it is followed by a comma.

*Because he aced the test, he was happy.*

This pattern is also true for most subordinating conjunctions and dependent clauses. When the dependent clause precedes the independent clause, it is followed by a comma. When it follows the independent clause, no comma is used.

*Until I get them right, I will keep practicing subordinating clauses. I will keep practicing subordinating clauses until I get them right.*

Intermediate students should have some familiarity with complex sentences and will continue to study them through their advanced classes.

## 4 COMPOUND-COMPLEX SENTENCES

Once your students understand and are able to use both compound sentences and complex sentences, they will be ready to move on to Compound-Complex sentences. These most complicated of English sentences are a combination of compound sentences and complex sentences as the name implies. A compound-complex sentence in English contains at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. In essence, it is the combination of a complex sentence with an additional inde-

pendent clause. This is an example of a compound-complex sentence.

*I will drive you to the building, and I will wait for you while you have your interview.*

This sentence has two independent clauses (I will drive you to the building and I will wait for you) as well as a dependent clause (while you have your interview). It contains both a coordinating conjunction and a subordinating conjunction. While compound-complex sentences aren't ideal for sentence diagramming, they are used in both spoken and written English, and your students should be able to understand them before they complete their English studies. They aren't as daunting as they seem, however. If your students are comfortable with compound sentences and complex sentences, this last category of English sentences should be a simple next step.

### **WHEN SENTENCES CAN GET SO COMPLICATED, WHY NOT JUST STICK TO SIMPLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD GRAMMAR FOR ESL STUDENTS?**

There are actually several reasons your students need to understand and be able to use all of these sentences. First, the people around them will use these more complex sentences. Native speakers form complicated sentences without even realizing it, and your students won't understand what they are saying if they haven't learned these more complicated sentence patterns. Secondly, if your students have any future planned in the business or educational world, they will be expected to understand and produce sentences like these in formal writing and speech. Thirdly, and not lastly, others will make judgments of your students based on the variety and complexity of the language they use. To make the best impression, your students should be comfortable using all these types of sentences -- variety in sentence structure is perceived as intelligence. These are just a few of the reasons your students need to know compound and complex sentences, so what are you waiting for?



# In, At, To, & Through: 5 Super Fun Activities for Teaching Prepositions

## PREPOSITIONS ARE PRIMED WITH POTENTIAL!

You can do lots of in class activities that review prepositions and engage your students at the same time. They don't have to be complicated, either, since we use prepositions frequently in our everyday speech. Here are some fun activities that you can use with your ESL students to help them review prepositions in class, and as a bonus, most of them require little to no preparation on your part.

## EXPLORE THESE AMAZING PREPOSITION ACTIVITIES

### 1 PAPER SHAKE

Effective activities don't have to be complicated. They don't have to cost a lot of money, either. This fun preposition activity requires nothing more than some paper scraps and a table to play on. Put your students in groups of two or three. Each group will need a collection of paper scraps, different sizes and different colors. Before starting the preposition activity, review with your students the vocabulary they will need to identify each paper scrap including colors, shapes, and sizes. When students are ready to play, have one person hold the paper scraps in their hands and drop them on the table from about two feet up. Students in that group should then take turns describing where the different paper scraps are in relation to each other using prepositions as they do. For example, a student might say the big triangle is underneath the small blue circle. After everyone has given two sentences about the paper positions, have the next person gather the scraps and drop them in a different arrangement.

### 2 SIMON SAYS

Simon says is a simple children's game where players have to listen carefully to the leader (dubbed Simon) and do whatever actions he or she calls out, that is provided she uses "Simon says" in her instructions. Players who do the wrong action or who act out an instruction that is not preceded by "Simon says" are out. Play continues until only one player remains, and that player then gets to be

"Simon". You can use this game to target prepositions in your ESL classes by including a preposition in every command that Simon says. For example, have students stand near their desk chair, and use the chair in your instructions. Simon says stand next to your chair. Simon says sit behind your chair. Simon says stand on your chair. Students will have fun playing the game and listening closely, and you will know that your time is productive since you are reviewing the all important prepositions your students need to learn as well as useful classroom vocabulary.

### 3 PREPOSITION BINGO

Bingo is a great game to challenge your students' abilities to listen carefully and understand vocabulary, in this case prepositions. You don't even have to spend a lot of time preparing Bingo cards since students can do that for themselves. Start by making copies of preposition illustrations such as this one. Make sure you have at least sixteen illustrations. Then have your students cut the illustrations apart and glue them into a four by four grid in any order they choose. You will also need a copy of the cards cut apart and shuffled together that you will use to call from. To play, choose one of your cards from your stack and describe the picture using the target preposition, e.g. the ball is under the box. Students must then place a marker on that picture on their grid (if they included that picture on their paper). Call one preposition after another until someone has four prepositions in a row marked – horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. That person should yell, "Bingo!" Check his card to make sure you called all the prepositions he marked off. Then play another round letting the winner call the cards for the rest of the class.

### 4 POOR PUPPY

If you teach young ESL students, they will enjoy this preposition activity that lets them bring a special friend to class. The day before the activity, invite your students to bring a stuffed animal of choice to class, and bring some of your own, too, in case students forget. They will be using these animals for a preposition activity. (You can also have a show and tell time with their special friends to

get an additional speaking activity into your day.) Cut small strips of felt in different colors, about five for each student, that will be "band-aids" for the activity. If you like, glue a small white piece of felt to one side of the rectangles to make them look more like band-aids. The felt should stay in place on any furry stuffed animal. Pass out the felt band-aids and get ready to play. Say to your class, "Poor puppy. He needs a band aid \_\_\_\_\_." You can fill in any area of the body paired with a preposition such as the following: behind his ear, under his paw, around his tail, etc. Walk around the room and check that students are putting their band-aids in the correct location. If you like, allow students to call out where the puppy is hurt and needs a band-aid.

### 5 A SUNDAY DRIVE

Prepositions are great for giving directions. You can get your whole class involved in this large scale preposition review. To start, divide your class into groups of three or four students, and give each group a large piece of paper. On this paper, each group will draw the layout of a town. Have groups start by placing specific locations on their maps – library, police station, school, grocery store, etc. (This is a good chance to use vocabulary from your current unit. Just be creative with the buildings students must include on their maps such as soccer stadium for a sports unit and Kathy's Kitchen for a food unit.) You can either have them draw these locations or give them a set of photocopied pictures. Once their buildings are on the map, students should draw in several roads throughout the town. Give each group a small toy car and then give them directions. "Drive past the bakery. Go behind the toy store. Etc." As you give directions, watch each group move their car along the roads to make sure they are following the directions correctly. Alternatively, you could give each students a copy of a premade map and give them several directions in a row. At the end of your directions, check to see that each student arrived where you directed them.

**THESE PREPOSITION ACTIVITIES ARE SIMPLE AND ENGAGING.**



# In, At, or On? 6 Simple Activities for Practicing Prepositions of Time

## PREPOSITIONS, PREPOSITIONS EVERYWHERE!

Simply teaching your students all of the prepositions in English is overwhelming for everyone involved and not usually a good idea. I suppose that is why we tend to teach them in bunches, prepositions of location, prepositions of time... The following exercises focus on prepositions of time and give you a variety of exercises you can use to practice these little words in class. So read on and see how many you have used with your students and how many you want to make time for in the future.

## USE THESE 6 SIMPLE ACTIVITIES FOR PRACTICING PREPOSITIONS OF TIME

### 1 PREPOSITION MEMORY

Memory is a great game to play with ESL students, and the game is easy to tailor to your specific goals. To play preposition of time memory, write several fill in the blank sentences missing their time preposition on index cards. Then write the answers on separate cards. To play, students shuffle the cards, lay them in a grid face down, and then take turns flipping two cards at a time looking for a match between the fill in the blank sentence and the preposition needed to complete it. If a player gets a match, he takes another turn. Play until all the cards are gone. The player with the most cards wins the game. You can also play the game without the answer cards. In such a game, students would seek to match two fill in the blank sentences that require the same preposition to correctly complete the sentences.

### 2 PREPOSITION DASH

Another fun activity for practicing prepositions of time will get your students moving from head to toe. Using the same fill in the blank sentences from the memory game or creating a new set of sentences, you will read a sentence aloud to your class and students will have to choose the correct preposition to complete the sentence. The answers

should be posted in your classroom on different walls. For example, you might have a sign on one wall that says ON, on another wall one that says IN, and on another wall one that says AT. After you read a question, students run to the wall with the correct answer. You will get a quick and easy read on how well students know and can use these prepositions.

### 3 PANTS ON FIRE

How well can your students bluff? You will find out with this preposition of time card game. Start by preparing a set of cards that have several prepositions of time on them. You might have phrases such as the following: in the summer, in January, at 5:00, on Tuesdays, etc. Have enough cards so that there are around twenty-five cards for each group of five that will be playing. Then, have students get into groups of five, shuffle the cards, and deal them out. Play starts when one person asks the person to their left a time question. For example, "When do you get up in the mornings?" The answering student must then choose one of the cards in his hand as the answer to the question and places it in the pile in the center of the players. If he has a card that says at 7:00, that might be a good one to play and be very believable. But if all he has in his hands is "in winter" he will have to play that card, which will clearly be a lie. The student who asked the question then decides if she thinks the other player's answer is true or false. If she thinks the answer is true, she says nothing and the next person asks a question. If she thinks it is false, she says something like, "Liar, liar, pants on fire". If the answer was a lie, the answering student must take all the cards in the center of the table. If the answer was true, the asking student must take all the cards in the center of the table. Play until one person has gotten rid of all her cards or until you call time up. The person with the fewest cards when time is called is the winner.

### 4 FISHING FOR ANSWERS

This is a full class conversation

activity that gets students using prepositions of time. Give each student between three and five index cards with prepositional phrases of time written on them. (You can use the cards from the previous activity, make new ones, or have your students make their own.) Students then mingle around the classroom trying to get their classmates to say the phrases on their cards. To get an answer, a student asks a classmate a question which he thinks the other student will answer with the target phrase. For example, if his card says IN THE WINTER, he might ask, "When do people usually ski?" If his classmate says the correct phrase, he can discard that card. Play until everyone has gotten rid of all their cards.

### 5 PERSONAL TIME SCHEDULES

Have your students write one or more statements about themselves on index cards, each using a preposition of time. For example, someone might write, "I was born in the winter," or "I have a dentist appointment on Tuesday." Then collect all the cards, shuffle them, and hand them out to your class making sure no one gets their own card back. Students must then ask their classmates questions to determine who wrote that statement. (Students are not allowed to show their card to their classmates or ask, "Did you write this card?") When someone finds the person who wrote his card, he can sit down. Play until everyone has found the person who wrote his card.

### 6 GUESS THE QUESTION

To do this activity, make a list of around ten fill in the blank statements which must be completed with a preposition of time. Give each person in your class a copy of these questions, and have them complete the sentences with true answers without showing their answers to anyone else in class. Then put each student with a partner. Students take turns reading an answer only to one of the fill in the blank sentences. Their partners must then try to determine which sentence their answer completes.