

# THE ESL EDGE

HOW TO TEACH ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

## LIKE A PRO

43 TOP SECRETS EVERY ESL TEACHER SHOULD KNOW & USE

### TEACHING ESL

IS ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING PROFESSIONS AROUND FOR US, SUCCESS IS NOT MEASURED BY HOW MUCH WE'VE GAINED, BUT BY HOW MUCH WE'VE GIVEN

ESL STUDENTS COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES, FROM ADORABLE LITTLE PRESCHOOLERS TO SENIOR CITIZENS

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN LEAD THEM TOWARDS SUCCESS

 A BUSY TEACHER'S STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO GETTING THE MOST OF YOUR ESL LESSONS

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# Why You Should Always Start With a Warmer

## STARTING WITH A WARMER IS IMPORTANT FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS.

Your students need a chance to settle down into the class and get their minds focussed on the lesson ahead. Delving straight into difficult subject matter isn't going to help them in the least bit.

We need to slowly ease people into learning, starting them off with something easy and slowly becoming more and more complex. This is generally how a course runs, and in a way the class is much like a miniature course within a course. The students need something easy to get them started, so the wheels in their head can start turning, so to speak. There are also numerous warm-up techniques which teachers use. Testing vocabulary is usually one of the most obvious ones that people will use. There are many more, but it is important for teachers to realize why they warm up classes.

## WHY YOU SHOULD START EVERY LESSON WITH A WARMER

### 1 SETTING THE TONE

Undoubtedly, a warm up lesson will set the tone for what is to take place during the class. This is a great idea for many reasons. Students will have some idea of what to expect, and the topic can easily be introduced to them. For example, if one were teaching a business class about imports and exports, one could have a warm-up exercise where the students can test their own knowledge of related vocabulary. It will allow them to start off in a single train of thought in order to keep them on track for the remainder of the class.

### 2 THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING

A lot of teachers plan. In fact, planning is probably where most of the work goes into a class. Of course, the important parts are gone over includ-

ing the activities and other exercises. But a lot of teachers will forget to do things such as warming up and cooling down. They will often come into the class and pull something off the top of their head. Whilst this can work, it is always good to be prepared. Construct a good warm up session from the materials that are going to be covered in the class itself. This will give the students plenty to talk about at the beginning, and will help ease them into the rest of the lesson.

### 3 INHIBITED STUDENTS

Warm ups and ice breakers are essential for those classes where everybody is new, including the teacher. They will allow everyone to relax and get to know each other. This way, people will become less inhibited and more likely to chat with their peers and with the teacher. It will raise the energy levels, allowing everybody feel a little more at home. It is important for students to feel comfortable in the class, as a first day can be especially daunting. In this spirit, a warm up exercise can work wonders at getting people more mobilised.

### 4 LENGTH OF TIME

Normally it is advised to have a warm up session during the first five minutes of the class. Students need to get from speaking their own language to speaking English. If one is teaching in a country where the official language is not English, then beforehand the students will be speaking their own language. This might continue after they have gone into the class, so it is important to give them some time to get used to speaking English. This way they will also increase in their confidence, and related back to the last topic of helping them to lose their inhibitions. Student participation is key, as this class is for them to improve and therefore they need to be able to speak it as much as possible. This ties in with the concepts of Teacher Talking Time and Student Talking Time. Student Talking Time is meant to increase as the class goes

on. The teacher can consider the class a success if the students end up speaking more English as it proceeds.

### 5 MAKING CORRECTIONS

It is true that students also need to be corrected during class. This will allow them to identify their mistakes and not make them again. Stress how important it is for the students to make mistakes, so they will not feel embarrassed or afraid to speak again. But during the warm up exercises, disregard this. The warm up session needs to have a certain flow. Allow it to continue and then perhaps jot down whatever mistakes were made. Once it is completed, then one will be able to go over the mistakes with the students again and tell them where they went wrong.

## IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO MAKE SURE THAT THE WARM UP SESSIONS ARE A LITTLE BIT FUN. GETTING THE STUDENT RELAXED AND THINKING IN ENGLISH IS THE KEY ISSUE HERE.

Nothing can be learned if the students are tense and unwilling to speak, therefore warming up will allow the wheels in their head to start turning and open up the gateway to knowledge.

# 7 Things Your Quiet ESL Students Are Not Telling You

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

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

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

## IMPORTANT THINGS YOUR STUDENTS ARE NOT TELLING YOU:

### 1 I'M HEARING TOO MANY NEW WORDS.

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

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

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

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

### 3 PLEASE DON'T PUT ME ON THE SPOT.

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

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

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

### 5 I NEED SOME TIME TO THINK BEFORE I ANSWER.

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

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

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

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

### 7 I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOUR HANDWRITING.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **ARE YOU MAKING THESE MISTAKES IN CLASS?**

### **1 YOU INDULGE IN USELESS BLABBER**

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

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

### **2 YOU COMPLETE THEIR SENTENCES FOR THEM**

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

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

### **3 YOU ASK THEM IF THEY UNDERSTAND**

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

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

### **4 YOU ECHO THEIR ANSWERS**

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

tell you what he did at Google?

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

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

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

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

### **6 YOU GIVE THEM UNCLEAR INSTRUCTIONS**

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

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

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

# How to Be a Successful ESL Teacher

**CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'VE CHOSEN TO BECOME AN ESL TEACHER, AND IT'S ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING PROFESSIONS AROUND. YET, YOU MUST BE WARNED – THOUGH TREMENDOUSLY SATISFYING ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, IT MAY NOT BE AS FINANCIALLY REWARDING AS OTHER CAREERS.**

Success, for an ESL teacher, is not determined by how much you make a year – the gains are not precisely material in nature. So what is success for an ESL teacher? And what makes an ESL teacher more successful than others?

## WHAT IS SUCCESS FOR AN ESL TEACHER?

A successful ESL teacher is one that is able to make a good living doing what he or she enjoys doing or does best: teach English as a second language. The phrase “make a good living” cannot be emphasized enough. No, ESL teachers don't buy luxury cars or live in expensive penthouses, but we can most certainly make enough to not only pay the bills and buy groceries, but also go somewhere nice at the end of the school year. ESL teacher salaries vary greatly from country to country, and there are some excellent opportunities abroad. But no matter how much you are paid or where you teach, there are things that will help you get more or better teaching gigs, and have greater success at teaching English as a second language.

## THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

### 1 BE DIFFERENT

Memorable ESL teachers are often successful teachers. They usually obtain more classes or private students through word of mouth and recommendations from former students. So how do you become memorable? You are memorable when you're different and unlike any other teacher a student has had before. And how do you accomplish that? If you let your inner personality shine through, you will be different – guaranteed. Don't be a robot that spews lists of verbs and explanations on when to use each tense. Be yourself and let your students get to know you and what makes you different from other teachers.

### 2 DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF YOUR MISSION

We've already established that as a teacher you're not out to make loads of money, - so, what is your mission as an ESL teacher? To help your students achieve their language learning goals, whether it is to speak, write or understand English better. Don't lose sight of this, and you will help them succeed, which in turn will make you successful as well.

### 3 BE HELPFUL

Successful teachers go above and beyond their expected tasks. They recommend materials for extra practice. They provide information students request. They do research on an examination a student might want to take. Does this take up more of your time? Of course it does! But your students' deepest appreciation is absolutely priceless.

### 4 DELIVER RESULTS

Successful ESL teachers deliver results that can be easily seen and measured by students, and not just by means of exam grades. Always review with your students the goals they have achieved in the semester and at the end of the year. More than a number on a test, they need to see exactly what they learned and compare it to what they didn't know in the past.

### 5 EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

More than just meeting goals, a truly successful teacher exceeds students' expectations. You can tell students they will be able to handle basic social situations by the end of the course, but what if they are also ready for a job interview in English?

### 6 BE PASSIONATE

Successful ESL teachers teach everything with passion, even things that are less than interesting like Reported Speech or the Subjunctive Mood. Passion is contagious when transmitted properly, and passionate students learn more.

### 7 BE GENEROUS

Did you find a really cool website, game or worksheet that you know your students will love? Successful ESL teachers don't keep useful tools to themselves. They share it with other teachers, so that they, and their students, can reap the benefits or have fun, too.

### 8 KNOW WHEN TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Are your lessons boring? You are responsible for making them engaging. Are your students unclear about what they have learned or achieved? You are responsible for communicating this clearly. But on the other hand, successful teachers must also know when it is the students' turn to take responsibility. Why did your student fail the class? Is it because you neglected to provide the right support and guidance, or because he or she never did any homework and showed zero interest during class?

### 9 GET TRAINING

Successful ESL teachers make sure they obtain the necessary training, TEFL or TESOL certification. Any native English speaker can teach English, but you will not be a successful teacher unless you receive proper training.

### 10 EMPOWER STUDENTS

Successful ESL teachers don't coddle their students. They don't translate words into students' native language. They don't finish sentences for them. They don't complete their homework exercises for them. And they don't tell them how to do all of these things. They show them how to do it and provide the necessary tools.

Simply put, we gain personal satisfaction at a job well done, but also learn a great deal from students. **FOR US, SUCCESS IS NOT MEASURED BY HOW MUCH WE'VE GAINED, BUT BY HOW MUCH WE'VE GIVEN.** The more we give, the more our students succeed at learning English. The more our students succeed, the more successful we become as ESL teachers.

# Are You Boring Students? Turn a Snore Fest into a Barrel of Fun!

*You ask your ESL class a question, and you're met with a room full of blank stares. You call out a student's name, but getting an answer from him is like pulling teeth. You notice that someone in the back is actually dozing off (ouch!), and as you walk towards the back of the room, you catch another student texting a friend on their phone... Finally, to add insult to injury, another student is watching a video on their iPod. If there were a sign over your classroom door, it would read "Entering Dullsville."*

While the above description is clearly an exaggeration, every ESL teacher at some point in their teaching career has had to deal with unmotivated students, boring course material or quite honestly been bored themselves with what they have to teach. So, hop onto our express train and leave Dullsville for good!

## HOW TO TURN A SNORE FEST INTO A BARREL OF FUN

### 1 DON'T LET YOURSELF GET SUCKED IN BY BOREDOM

When there is something that you don't like to teach, whether it's the Past Perfect, or Reported Speech, or any other grammar point you absolutely must cover, your students will most likely notice it, unless you do something about it and make the topic fun for the whole class. If you have taught something a million times, like the Past Simple, teach it differently every time! Use different flashcards, different exercises, different games, just make sure there is **something** different, that way it is less likely you will feel bored and by extension neither will your students.

### 2 PUT A CRAZY SPIN ON IT

Kids love it when you pull something crazy, but teens and adult learners also enjoy seeing things that they wouldn't normally

see in a classroom. Say you want to practice making predictions with "will". What if you were to suddenly put a crystal ball on the table and tell students what the future holds for them? Your crystal ball need not be made of crystal – a volleyball or even a balloon will do, and add to the zaniness. Crazy props are **very** effective in engaging students.

### 3 PUT ON THE THEATRICALS

While you're not required to go into full costume (after all you're teaching ESL, not putting on a Broadway show!) it does help tremendously to do voices, make faces, and show off your more theatrical side. Do accents and change voices when you read dialogues, or even use funny characters – give them your best Eliza Doolittle impersonation and show off your Cockney accent as your students do a shopping role play with you!

### 4 MAKE THEM MOVE!

The second you see your students settle in for a nap, make them stand up! Young learners can engage in an active TPR activity. But don't be afraid to get adults out of their seats, as well. Make them walk around the classroom for a role play, or simply get them to come to the whiteboard. You may need a bulldozer to get some teens out of their seats, so try with small actions first, like handing out worksheets, then gradually move on to a greater physical commitment. It is essential that you make your students get used to moving around the classroom from Day 1.

### 5 KEEP YOUR STUDENTS ON THEIR TOES

Get your students used to not knowing what you'll do next. Sit down for one activity, but then stand up or walk around the room for the next – walking from the front to the back is also the perfect way to let students know that the back of the room

is not the place to snooze. Raise your voice suddenly! Change pitch! Clap your hands to get their attention! Use gestures as much as you can, and use sounds to keep them alert. A quiet classroom where the teacher sits at her/his desk for the duration of the class is the perfect setting for a snore fest.

### 6 USE THEIR INTERESTS AND PREFERENCES

You wouldn't talk about President Obama's foreign policy with preschoolers, right? And with that kind of topic, you won't hold your teens' attention for long. But don't make the mistake of thinking that all adults like to talk about "adult" things! They come to ESL class to learn English, not for a history lesson. However, some adults may be interested in business topics or current events. So, make sure you find out what they are really interested in and what their preferences are. Do they want to learn English in a relaxed environment, or they want to talk business?

### 7 POLISH WHAT'S DULL TILL IT SHINES

Quite often the problem is not us or our students, but the rather dull coursebook. You will probably agree that there is no one pointing a gun to your head, saying that you have to follow the book and each activity as shown in the book, right? One of the best things you can do is **adapt** and **change** some of the activities, dialogues and exercises in the coursebook, or **replace** them with others that will get the job done, but not put your students to sleep in the process.

### NOW, YOU'RE OFFICIALLY LEAVING DULLSVILLE, AND THERE'S NO LOOKING BACK.

You're headed to a much better place, one that will provide the perfect learning environment for your students – and keep them engaged for the duration of the course.



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

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

## TOP 10 PIECES OF ADVICE FOR YOUR ESL STUDENTS

### 1 REMEMBER WHY YOU'RE LEARNING ENGLISH

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

### 2 SET MILESTONES FOR YOUR OVERALL GOAL

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

### 3 NOURISH YOUR BRAIN AND YOUR BODY

Students who are tired or hungry have

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

### 4 DO THE WORK!

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

### 5 PINPOINT YOUR WEAKNESSES

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

### 6 TALK TO NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

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

### 7 HAVE FUN WITH ENGLISH

Tell your students to buy word search books in English! It will increase their vocabulary. What about online games? Do they enjoy role-playing video games? Most are played in English. Improving English skills is not all about

spending hours completing grammar exercises. Suggest some fun activities they may enjoy – in English!

### 8 LISTEN TO YOURSELF!

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

### 9 BE METHODOICAL AND CONSISTENT

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

### 10 NEVER GIVE UP

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

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

# How To Provide Quality Feedback In The ESL Classroom

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

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

## WAYS TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK

### 1 VERBAL FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

During lessons, teachers use a lot of verbal feedback to let students know how they are doing and also to transition from one section to another.

Short expressions such as "Great!" or "Good job!" can be used to praise students for correct answers. Rather than tell students directly they are incorrect, it is better to ask them to try again or reconsider their answers. The goal is to elicit the correct answer from the class and students should not be afraid of being wrong so keep your reactions positive.

You can summarize how students did and introduce the next topic for transitions by saying "Alright! You did so well talking about food. Now let's move on to ~." This will reinforce the fact that students should keep up the good work. If student responses are a little lackluster, you can point that out in your comments too. By saying "I know it's Friday but I need a bit more energy in this next section, OK? \*wait for student response\* OK! Great, now we're going to talk about ~." you show that you empathize with students while still pushing them to do their best.

It is easy to include verbal feedback in every stage of your lesson.

### 2 VISUAL FEEDBACK

Visual feedback can come in two forms. The first is any expression or gesture you use with or without verbal feedback that indicates how students are doing in class. A smile or thumbs up would be one form of visual feedback. When using visual feedback, it is not always necessary to add verbal feedback and could save you time when working through an activity quickly. You can also prompt students to reconsider their answers and self correct using visual feedback. If you use the same expression each time students say the incorrect answer, they will pick up on that. This visual feedback allows you to give students another chance without verbally telling them they are wrong.

Another form of visual feedback can accompany written evaluations. This may take the form of stickers, stamps, or even charts that reflect student accomplishments. You may choose to have a display in the classroom that visually represents how well the class is doing in reaching their goals so that students can see how much progress they have made and stay motivated.

### 3 WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Teachers often have the opportunity to give students written feedback on homework assignments, on exams, and at the end of each term. These are great opportunities to point out what students did well and what areas they still need to work on.

You should provide students with some suggestions of what they could do to improve and offer to assist them by meeting with them for tutorials or providing them with extra study material. You can also allow students to provide feedback for each other. Doing this during role play exercises, for example, means that students who are not performing still have to pay attention. Categories could include

pronunciation, creativity, and performance so that the presenting students are marked on how well they were understood, the quality of their script, and the quality of their acting. Students could be graded as a group or individually. Student evaluations should not have any bearing on the grades that you give students but you might want to use the information to say which skit was the best and who the best actor was.

**REGARDLESS OF HOW OFTEN YOU USE THESE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FEEDBACK, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT STUDENTS ARE GIVEN A CLEAR IMAGE OF THEIR PERFORMANCE AS WELL AS THEIR GOALS. THIS WILL HELP THEM FOCUS OF WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT. GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM AND PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH BOTH THE MATERIALS AND SUPPORT THEY NEED TO SUCCEED ARE IMPORTANT. DOING THESE THINGS WILL HELP STUDENTS EXCEL IN THEIR STUDIES AND MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS EDUCATION.**

# How to Teach Using Gestures and Mime

## A LOT OF TEACHING ENGLISH IS ABOUT ACTING.

Keeping your energy high and being creative with your lessons will make your students more attentive. Outside of role play activities, you can use gestures and mime in many different ways. These can aide your students in communicating, understanding, and participating during your lessons.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 GIVING DIRECTIONS

Using particular gestures or expressions in the classroom will lead students to associate them with a particular thing. For example, if you always use the same gesture when you say *"Please stand up."* students will become accustomed to it and stand up when you use that gesture even if you occasionally leave out the oral instruction. You can have gestures for when you want students to repeat something after you, make groups, or sit down too. This can be especially handy when you want to communicate something to your students in a noisy setting. For instance, if you say *"Please turn your desks to make groups of four."* students will begin moving around and making noise as they rearrange their desks so they may miss your verbal instructions to sit down but if you also gesture for them to sit down, at least some students will see it and react accordingly which will cause the remaining students to follow suit.

### 2 VOCABULARY

Using gestures and mime is important when it comes to vocabulary too. You can use them to **elicit certain words and phrases from students**. If you teach very young students, it is also common to associate gestures with words to help students remember vocabulary better. Using

the same gesture every time you say a particular word or phrase will help these students associate the two.

### 3 PRACTICE

In practice dialogues, you can incorporate gestures and mime. If you are teaching a conversation where a customer is complaining about something to a store clerk, for instance, you can tell students that the store clerk should act completely shocked at hearing the news, look apologetic, or whatever else you can think of to make the scenario more realistic. In a conversation where two people are meeting for the first time, have students shake hands **as they would do a real life situation**. These details make practicing dialogues more fun and interesting.

### 4 PRODUCTION

**Activities and games which use gestures and mime can be fun for the whole class.**

If you have just finished a section on feelings, make a list of feelings on the board and have students choose a slip of paper from a hat. Each slip of paper should contain a sentence such as *"You are happy."* Students should keep their sentences a secret. Have one volunteer at a time mime his/her sentence while the rest of the class tries to guess it. This would be a good review activity.

To check individual comprehension, you can use the same basic idea but instead turn it into an interview activity where students have a sheet of paper with all the emotions listed as well as their secret emotion. The idea is that students go around the classroom miming and guessing emotions in pairs and getting a student signature for each emotion. When you go through the worksheet as a class you can have students read aloud

from their worksheets sentences like *"Jane is sad."* and ask Jane to mime being sad for the class.

### 5 CULTURAL

If you are teaching English in a country such as Japan, it is important to consider the fact that lots of communication is **nonverbal**.

When your students have the opportunity to go abroad or interact with other native English speakers, your students may use polite language but if their body language is interpreted differently, they will not have made as good an impression as they were capable of. **Your use of simple gestures will help your students.**

For instance, you can shrug when you do not know the answer, wave to students when you see them outside the classroom, and gesture for students to come up to the board. This will expose students to the types of gestures common in a culture different from their own. Certain gestures may be the same but have different meanings so it is important to explain what they mean to you so that students are not confused.

**GESTURES AND MIME CAN BE REALLY HELPFUL IN NUMEROUS CLASSROOM SITUATIONS AND USING THEM OFTEN CAN ASSIST BOTH YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS.**

Do not force yourself to use certain gestures but do what comes naturally and when you find what works for you, stick with it and your students will adapt.

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

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

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

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

### 1 ILLUSTRATED BLANKS

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

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

### 2 DRAWING A BLANK

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

### 3 A GAP IN MY MEMORY

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

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

### 4 MUSICAL BLANKS

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

### 5 VIDEO BLANKS

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

### 6 FAMOUS COUPLES

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

### 7 OH, SNAP!

This game is similar to the game of Snap! Write sentences with gaps on small cards to create your deck of cards. Make sure that you include sentences with blanks that may be filled with the same word, for example: "\_\_\_\_\_ are red" and "I like to eat \_\_\_\_\_ and bananas". Both can be filled with

the word "apples". Students take turns turning over cards and shout "Snap!" when the blanks on the cards may be filled with the same word.

### 8 MEMORY GAME WITH BLANKS

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

### 9 FILL THE BLANK AS A TEAM

Divide students into two teams. Give one student a card with a sentence that has a blank. The student must figure out which word goes in the blank and then give the team clues as to what the word is. Say you're teaching a lesson that includes sports vocabulary. Sentence: David Beckham plays \_\_\_\_\_. The student has to provide clues about the sport without reading the sentence or mentioning the player's name: It's something you play with a ball. You play it in a field. Each team has 11 players, etc.

### 10 FILL IN WITH PHONEMICS

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

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

Make them a little more challenging, make them different!

# 8 Ways to Improve Your Professionalism as an ESL Teacher

**EVERY YEAR NEW TEACHERS ARRIVE ON CAMPUS OVERFLOWING WITH ENTHUSIASM FOR THEIR NEW CRAFT, UNABLE TO WAIT TO PRACTICE IT.**

They have new ideas, love for their students, good relationships with their colleagues. So why do they often seem disillusioned by the end of the semester? Or why don't they stay and serve well but fail to advance within their careers? It may be that, although good teachers, they lack a certain professionalism, an awareness of themselves as professionals, beyond being teachers, and this might be because they see teaching as more a calling rather than a career, which is admirable, but may be ultimately self-defeating if the goal is to remain in the profession and serve.

## **8 METHODS TEACHERS CAN USE TO IMPROVE PROFESSIONALISM**

### **1 IMPROVE PUNCTUALITY**

Being on time may seem basic, but often the basics get forgotten. One basic is punctuality. Teachers are often overworked and overcommitted, but to always be flying in late for class or meetings lacks certain professionalism. Everyone is late occasionally, of course, but if a teacher can commit to being on time to class and to meetings every day for a week, then for the next, and the next, this will go a long way in improving her professional image.

### **2 MEET DEADLINES. TURN IN PAPERWORK.**

Along with being on time goes meeting deadlines. If you make an effort to turn your attendance and other reports in on or before the deadline, this will get noticed and increase rapport with the administrative staff. It creates a certain amount of pride to hear, "Oh, yes, Mr. Rodriguez is always on top of things!" Also, the staff will then in turn support you on the days you need help because you are running late and need copies made and so forth.

### **3 PAY ATTENTION TO AND MEET OBJECTIVES**

In the course of teaching a class, it can

be very easy to get bogged down or derailed by something relatively peripheral that we and the class are enthusiastic about — a particular holiday, current event, or movie. It's at these times that it's important to go back to the course objectives and remind yourself of what students really need to learn: the Star Wars movie trilogy, for example, although an important part of 20th century American popular culture, is hard to justify spending ten hours of class time on when students have academic vocabulary and American English pronunciation to practice. Review the course objectives on a weekly basis to make sure you are staying close to the course standards and not getting sidetracked.

### **4 IMPROVE EFFICIENCY**

Outcomes are not measured as much in education, traditionally, as other fields — there is no end "product" which can be measured quantitatively or qualitatively. This is especially true in ESL instruction, where it is generally recognized that language learning takes a long time, especially in adults, and there is little or no expectation to produce fluent English speakers at the end of a term. However, there are some ways teachers can themselves improve efficiency: some mornings when I find myself stalling over the roll, for example, I recognize this is as a tactic to avoid getting to the real business of the day, which may be particularly difficult curriculum, such as working on clausal structure that confuses almost everyone. On these days I'll force myself to just pass around a roll sheet for students to sign and immediately begin teaching. Then I'll glance at it after it's circulated to make sure it's accurate and not falsified.

### **5 SHOW RESPECT FOR COLLEAGUES AND STUDENTS**

This can be difficult, certainly, with the teacher who somehow develops a need to barge into your class "looking for" something whenever you begin teaching or the student who unfailingly interrupts your lecture just as you begin, however, it is just these individuals to whom the most respect must be shown. If the teacher is unfailingly polite to them, while stating what she needs -- "Please

wait until I'm finished, and then we'll hear from you"— she not only sets boundaries but also models courtesy.

### **6 REFRAIN FROM NEGATIVITY AND OFFICE GOSSIP**

Teachers sitting around the staff room gossiping is something of a tradition. Most of it is innocent — discussion of a recent movie, for example — but sometimes it can turn negative in the form of complaint sessions about colleagues, the school, and students. Such negativity can pull down your own mood and looks unprofessional.

### **7 VOLUNTEER FOR EXTRA ASSIGNMENTS AND COMMITTEE WORK**

Another way to increase professionalism is to volunteer for extra assignments and committee work. If you serve on a committee designing a new course or set of new course material such as rubrics, you not only show how you are serious about your work, but you also get a chance to work with higher-ups in the department.

### **8 ENGAGE IN CONTINUING EDUCATION**

Finally, the professional teacher should always engage in continuing education, whether at her school site itself, or at a conference, or at a local university. There are always ways the teacher can improve her knowledge of course content, teaching methods, innovative technology, and classroom management, and teachers as educators should be engaged in life-long learning.

**A LOT OF THE MEASURES HERE, YOU WILL NOTE, INVOLVE "POLICING" OURSELVES — IT'S BEEN MY EXPERIENCE THAT WITH TEACHERS FOR ADULTS, IN PARTICULAR, ADMINISTRATORS DON'T TAKE MUCH NOTE OF HOW PUNCTUAL, EFFICIENT, OR PROFESSIONAL THE TEACHING STAFF IS, UNLESS THERE IS A GLARING CONCERN.**

Therefore, it is up to teachers to maintain our own professionalism and create our own standards in how we develop ourselves professionally and how we treat our colleagues and students—which is really the very heart of professionalism.

# What Motivates ESL Teachers?

## Some Ideas to Get You Fired Up!

**WE COULD GO ON AND ON ABOUT HOW REWARDING TEACHING ESL STUDENTS IS. BUT THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS, LIKE IN ANY PROFESSION, IT'S SOMETIMES HARD FOR ESL TEACHERS TO GET UP IN THE MORNING, TOO. WE MAY GREET OUR STUDENTS WITH A GREAT, BIG SMILE, EACH AND EVERY TIME - BUT ARE WE REALLY MOTIVATED TO TEACH THAT CLASS? WHAT MOTIVATES ESL TEACHERS AND WHY IS BEING MOTIVATED SO IMPORTANT?**

Let's assume that you're all teaching ESL because it's your choice, and it's what you enjoy doing the most. Sometimes, that's not enough. And although there may be external factors that contribute to your lack of motivation, like salary or general working conditions, here we look deeper into what motivates you personally - in other words, what gets you fired up for a class no matter where your ESL school is.

Let's consider the "why" first. If you're highly motivated you have better chances at living a healthy, productive happy life. And naturally, this healthy glow and inner happiness will shine through and pour forth into everything you do with your students. You want to give your students the best ESL experience, right? And of course you want them to be motivated, but you have to take care of your motivation first.

Here are some of the things that motivate ESL teachers, - if you feel you sometimes need a little nudge or whiff of inspiration these might just do the trick.

### HOW TO STAY MOTIVATED 24/7

#### 1 ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR VISION

Why are you teaching ESL? Do you believe it's important for those in your country who don't speak English to be able to? Do you want to help people bridge communication barriers? How

important do you think your job is? What do you perceive your job to be like now, and what would you like it to be in the future?

These questions should help you define your vision if you haven't already defined one. If you have a vision, you are in control of your destiny and your own life. A lack of vision will only lead to a lack of control and the inability to make your own choices. That's not very motivating. It's also important to recognize your barriers to making this vision a reality. What can you do to overcome these obstacles? Overcoming barriers is tremendously liberating - and motivating!

#### 2 DEFINE GOALS

Making a vision a reality may seem like a tall order. Which is why we must take it one step, one day, at a time. First, you define a major goal, like something you wish to accomplish by the end of this year or next. A Master's degree? A research project? A better paid job? A teaching position in some exotic location? Surely, you have clearly defined goals for your class. How do you go about achieving them? By teaching them one structure, one set of vocabulary, at a time. The same applies to your major goals. The best way to achieve them is to break them up into smaller, more attainable steps.

For example, if you want to teach ESL in a foreign country, first you do your research into places and requirements, then you go about gathering all of the information you need to supply in order to apply, and so on... Each step that is checked off your list brings you one step closer to your dream, and this keeps you motivated. So, if anything seems to be too big a task, just break it up into simpler, more reachable goals. Once you accomplish smaller goals, you are motivated to tackle the bigger ones.

#### 3 FIND SUPPORT

Nothing is more motivating than

finding a group of like-minded individuals who share the same dreams and are dealing with the same frustrations. Motivation is contagious. If you surround yourself with people, whether they are ESL teachers or not, who are highly motivated and visionary, chances are you will catch the fever and be raring to go!

#### 4 LEARN FROM MISTAKES

The big, fat "F" for failure is something every student dreads, but every teacher, as well. What most forget is that a failure is an opportunity, a chance to keep going till we get it right. The fear of failure sometimes paralyzes, it weakens us to the point of procrastination. Instead, we propose you take each failure as a motivating tool, something that you can use get it right the next time. Use your failures to motivate you, but plan for success. Good planning, time management skills and general organization will get you where you want to go - every time.

**ABOVE ALL, REMEMBER THIS: MOTIVATION IS A LEARNED SKILL. MOTIVATION IS NOT ABOUT AUTOMATICALLY BOUNCING OUT OF BED, GRABBING BOOKS AND MATERIALS AND DASHING OFF TO SCHOOL.** It runs much deeper than that - it's

deeply rooted in your vision, dreams and goals. Keep yourself rooted to that, and you will be motivated to teach any class, any group of students, at any level.

Hopefully, you will find these little nuggets of wisdom helpful. Not feeling very motivated to crank out some worksheets? We can help in that department! BusyTeacher.org has got splendid sets of worksheets for any topic, any season, as well as handy puzzle makers. Just see for yourself!

# 8 Things that Will Give Your Teaching Confidence a Boost

*"My students are not learning." "I'm not a good ESL teacher." "I don't have enough teaching experience." "My students can tell I'm not an experienced teacher."*

And the list goes on... If you have ever thought or even said any of the above out loud, then you lack teaching confidence. In teaching, communication is key, and a lack of confidence can be a real barrier to communicating effectively and helping your students improve their English skills. A lack of confidence is quite common in new ESL teachers, but even the most seasoned ESL teachers have a crisis of confidence every now and then. So here are some tips that will help you boost your confidence and never doubt yourself again!

## HOW TO GIVE YOUR TEACHING CONFIDENCE A BOOST

### 1 CONSIDER YOUR STRENGTHS

Take a good hard look at yourself. What abilities do you have? What do you think you do better than most? Are you funny and engaging in class? Do you know English grammar backwards and forwards? Are you great with young learners? Are you a patient teacher? Every teacher has strengths they bring to class, and weaker areas to work on, but the goal of this exercise is to boost your confidence so focus on your positive qualities. Make a list and then ask a colleague to add some more. Focus on the things that make you unique as a teacher, whether they are personality traits or knowledge you've gained through the years.

### 2 GET SOME PERSPECTIVE

So, you're faced with the task of teaching absolute beginners, who don't know a thing, and you're expected to "make" them speak English by the end of the course. First of all, when faced with a teaching challenge that seems insurmountable ("Get absolute beginners to speak English"), try to break it down into feasible goals. In this case, you'll have an estimate of the number of words they will have learned by the end of the class, and you know they will learn to greet oth-

ers in English and manage in simple day-to-day situations. Focus on helping them achieve these goals, and when they do, your confidence will shoot through the roof! You will have placed knowledge where there was none before. How awesome is that?

Second, in today's world, we have it much easier than ESL teachers 20, or even 10 years ago. We have an amazing wealth of resources right at our fingertips thanks to the Internet, from audio to video tools, as well as handy little worksheets you can download for your class with only a click (hint, hint).

### 3 LOOK FOR EVIDENCE THAT YOU'RE AWESOME!

Nothing is more rewarding than when a student tells us we are good teachers. Do you have a box with the little cards your young learners made for you? Or birthdays cards? An email from a happy student? How about prizes or awards? Your TEFL certification? Look back at the achievements that made you proud. No matter how small they may seem, they made you the teacher you are today.

### 4 REMEMBER A TEACHER THAT WAS NOT SO AWESOME

Did you have a college teacher that literally put you to sleep? Remember your 7th grade Math teacher who never smiled? Well, you're a lot better than that! If you're reading this article, then you're one of the many teachers who care about their students and care about becoming better teachers. We've all had teachers in the past who didn't seem to care about anything except getting their paycheck and their summer vacation. You are not like them!

### 5 STEER CLEAR OF NEGATIVE NELLIES

Do you hang around teachers who do nothing but complain about wages, about the school infrastructure or the educational system in general? Although in many places educators face real problems, it doesn't help you to constantly focus on the negative. This is classic "glass half empty" attitude. If you notice

you are surrounded by these Negative Nellies, try to find another group to hang out with, one with a more positive outlook on things. What is the positive? Your students, of course! And how tremendously rewarding it is to teach them.

### 6 CELEBRATE YOUR STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

Naturally, it doesn't make sense to have a party every time your students learn something new, but why not have a special celebration every now and then? End the course with a special event and go through everything they've learned. Remember when they couldn't ask a simple question correctly? Now they can ask plenty! Thanksgiving is the perfect holiday to celebrate this.

### 7 CHEER YOURSELF ON!

"I have a Business English class tomorrow, and I know nothing about business. My students will see I know nothing." That's exactly the kind of thought you need to avoid. Say to yourself, "Tomorrow I have a new group and my class will rock!" Say it out loud! Do this often. Say, "Damn, I'm a good teacher!" After you finish a class say, "Nailed it!" (Say it out loud, but when you're alone in the room – remember you want to cheer yourself on, but there's no need for students to find out...)

### 8 TEACH AS MUCH AS YOU CAN

The best way to boost your confidence in teaching is simply by teaching, and teaching and then teaching some more. The more you teach, the more confident you'll feel. If you're a new teacher, there's no way around it. Experience does wonders to your confidence.

**IT'S GREAT WHEN SOMEONE ELSE GIVES US A PAT ON THE BACK AND AN INSTANT CONFIDENCE BOOST, BUT WE CAN'T DEPEND ON OTHERS TO KEEP US FEELING CONFIDENT.** You are responsible for developing and nurturing your self-confidence. Try these tips or others – whatever works best for you. Just make sure you don't neglect your biggest cheerleader – yourself!

# Staying Positive: Tips and Tricks to Keep That Smile on Your Face

## TEACHING ESL OR ANYTHING ELSE FOR THAT MATTER CAN BE A CHALLENGE.

Classes do not always go as planned, students may not behave well, and planning, teaching, and grading is a lot of work. In spite of everything, since your attitude affects your students, it is important to remain positive in the classroom. There are a number of simple ways you can make your life easier and deal with teaching related issues.

## HOW TO STAY POSITIVE NO MATTER WHAT

### 1 PREPARE WELL

Doing sufficient preparation before class will make lessons run more smoothly and cause you much less stress than walking into a lesson without a clear plan. Create organized lesson plans and make copies of materials well in advance. When creating a plan, keep in mind that another teacher should be able to pick it up and teach your class without any difficulties. You do not need to include every single warm up question but having some examples will help you get started especially if you teach many different levels and classes every day. While making lesson plans can be time consuming, they will help you maximize class time and you can save all your teaching materials for future use too.

### 2 MISTAKES ARE FUN

Do not be afraid to laugh at yourself especially when you make mistakes. People make mistakes, it happens to us all so it is alright to highlight your mistakes. You can use a mistake as a learning opportunity by giving students the chance to correct you as if it were an intentional comprehension check. You can also just say "Oops, that's not right." and fix your mistake too. Owning your mistakes and deciding what to do with them yourself is definitely better than

having a student point something out that you were trying to gloss over or confusing students by modeling something incorrectly.

### 3 ENCOURAGE

Even if students are struggling, be sure to provide lots of encouragement. Getting upset when students are unable to understand new things is not productive. You can explain key points again using simplified language and sneak in some simple comprehension checks. Really basic questions can help pinpoint where exactly students are having difficulties and go a long way towards building student confidence. If your students are confident and have positive attitudes, you will too.

### 4 BE A GOOD ACTOR

You will undoubtedly have plenty of opportunities to act in the classroom. Being the teacher all the time is boring for both you and students so take advantage of opportunities to be someone else. This will make your lessons more interesting and break away from your routine. For instance, use different voices for each character when demonstrating model dialogues or a role play. See our article on how to teach using gestures and mime. Try to give your students more opportunities to act too. Some classes have one or two blossoming comedians and as long as they are practicing English and not a huge distraction, they can really improve the atmosphere in the classroom. Acting also gives students practice using different tones which is really important. You wouldn't say "Oh, that's too bad." the same way you'd say "That's such great news!" so make some practice activities revolve around acting and tones. Your students may both amaze and amuse you with their performances.

### 5 HAVE A BACKUP PLAN

When students are not responding well to the course material or when things just are not working out the way

you want them to, be prepared to do something else. Stumbling through an exercise that students do not understand, cannot do, or dislike is only going to prolong everyone's suffering. Be prepared to change activities when necessary. Having a few reliable activities to fall back on will save you when things are not going well. You can use these same activities at the end of class if you have extra time.

### 6 SIMPLE THINGS THAT MATTER

Even something as simple as your morning coffee or afternoon snack can help you stay positive. These may be small comforts but they also give you energy and make you more alert during difficult times of the day. If you realize that your energy hits bottom at a certain point of the day, schedule a pick me up before that period. It will help you and your students remain focused and engaged in class.

## IF YOU ARE NOT IN A POSITIVE STATE OF MIND BEFORE WALKING INTO THE CLASSROOM, REMEMBER TO TAKE DEEP BREATHS AND LEAVE IT AT THE DOOR.

Going into a class in a negative state of mind is certainly not going to improve your day and your students will suffer from your lack of energy, involvement, and cheerfulness.



# Tired to Teach? 7 Tips to Detox, De-stress and Regain Your Energy

## THE ALARM GOES OFF, AND YOU GROAN.

Getting out of bed is a feat of sheer will. You love teaching, and you enjoy the time you spend with your ESL students – most of the time. But they are not the problem. The problem is that you are so tired. Maybe it's because you work 40+ hours a week, or you have a whole other set of responsibilities in addition to your classes, but hey, it happens to the best of us!

Fortunately, there's a lot you can do to get out of that energy slump. But first, let's think about why it's important for you de-stress and regain your energy.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO DE-STRESS

A stressed out human being is a ticking time bomb. The running from one class to the next, combined with personal and family responsibilities, not to mention things like the economic crisis, fear of losing your job, poor eating habits, few hours of sleep, etc. is one deadly cocktail. You cannot simply force yourself to go on. Sooner or later your health – physical, mental and emotional – will suffer for it. So, now that we all agree that it is indeed very important to take the time to detox and de-stress, let's take a look at the steps. Set aside a complete weekend (a long weekend is better, and a week off will give you the best results).

## TRY THESE 7 TIPS TO DETOX, DE-STRESS AND REGAIN YOUR ENERGY

### 1 GET UNPLUGGED

Turn off your cell and computer, and leave these and any other technological devices off for the duration of your detox period, ideally. If it's not possible choose one time during the day for you to check in, like first thing in the morning for a few minutes, and then disconnect yourself. This may be difficult, but it will be well worth it. Remember what it was like when we were little

and had nothing better to do than sit on the porch and watch birds fly from tree to tree? Go back to the basics – enjoy time with your family, long walks or a cup of coffee with a friend.

### 2 GET PLENTY OF REST

Allow yourself to sleep in. Indulge in a mid-afternoon nap. Or just lie on your comfiest sofa and look out the window. Let your entire body relax and enjoy the feeling that there is no rush, no place you have to run to right now. If you haven't been getting enough hours of sleep, catch up on your zzzs. When your students see you again, they'll notice the difference.

### 3 FEED YOUR SOUL

Read some of your most inspiring authors. Read magazines as you lounge on your favorite chair. But don't read stuff for work. Read things that will take you back to a more relaxed, care-free place.

### 4 FEED YOUR BODY

With our hectic schedules and busy life, it's far too common for ESL teachers to grab a quick bite instead of sitting down to lunch, or chow down on whatever we can find first once we get home. So, during your detox period, eat good, nutritious food. And take your time. Savor it and enjoy the flavors. Yummy, delicious food does wonders to our mood.

### 5 GUZZLE UP THE H<sub>2</sub>O

It's no big news that most of us don't drink enough water. But few are aware that dehydration causes headaches, false hunger pangs and food cravings, among other symptoms. To find out how much you should drink in liters, simply multiply your weight in kilograms by 0.033. So, if you weigh 60 kg, that works out to about 2 liters of water a day.

### 6 GET EXERCISE

Running from class to class does

not qualify as good "exercise". It's stressful. Take the time to really enjoy some stress-free physical activity. Go jogging, walking, hiking, canoeing, rollerblading or anything you really enjoy doing outdoors.

### 7 TRY MEDITATION

As an ESL teacher you need to keep your students on their toes. You need to provide activities that are challenging, but not too difficult for their level. You need to complete the coursework and help your students meet language goals, but also keep your students' individual needs and learning styles in mind. This takes a lot of mental work! During your detox period, take the time to quiet your mind. A meditation can be as simple as closing your eyes and freeing your mind from all of the clutter, or it can be guided step by step.

Find a quiet spot, free of any distractions and close your eyes. Breathe in and out. Let the tempestuous sea of ideas, problems and issues fizzle out till it's nothing but a calm ocean of opportunities. If you're interested in learning more about meditation, the Meditation Society of America offers some wonderful resources and techniques.

## ABOVE ALL, TAKE SOME TIME OUT FOR YOU.

The person who stands before his or her ESL students every day is a combination of heart, soul and mind, and these working together as a whole are the source of what makes you unique and special as a teacher. Do take care of that.

Want another way to beat day-to-day stress? Be sure to check out more articles in our ESL Essentials section. We provide great ideas that you can use today, to make your day a little less stressful.

# Surefire Ways for ESL Teachers to Cut Down on Stress

Some of us are lucky enough to love what we do. We cherish our time spent with our students, and enjoy all of the energy and enthusiasm they bring into our classroom. Nothing compares to the satisfaction of having achieved a goal – you have taught them what you set out to teach.

Still, there are some ESL teachers who might not be feeling so fortunate. They have no time to enjoy their lessons. They feel stressed out and have a hard time coping with the many difficulties they face on a daily basis.

There are, of course, different types of ESL courses and students. Some might teach Business and E-mail English to private students in high-rise offices, while others may be teaching large groups in a rural area in some remote, foreign location. But no matter what type of course we teach or where, each of us feels a little stressed out at one point or another.

Here, we'll address the most common stressors in ESL teachers and ways in which you can deal with them to live a happier and healthier life.

## HOW YOU CAN CUT DOWN ON STRESS

### 1 BEING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A lot of ESL teachers, particularly beginners, make the mistake of believing they must put on a great show - every time. This means they try to take students from one activity to another seamlessly and with one sole purpose in mind: they must not get bored. This poses several problems. First of all, it's exhausting! Secondly, everybody needs some quiet time to work, even students, and this includes little ones who may need you to switch activities every ten minutes. If you only propose activities that demand high-energy and a great deal of participation from you, you'll wear yourself out, and this can't be good for you or your students.

**How to cut down on stress:** Remember you're not a performer who has to put on a show and keep your students entertained for the duration of the class. Set realistic expectations from the start,

and make sure students know you won't be standing in front of the class doing a juggling act. Plan some quiet activities in between more active ones (even young learners who can't write can draw or complete easy worksheets) and give yourself a breather. Just walk around the classroom checking your students' progress. Plan as many quiet activities as you can to make your classes and your day more relaxed and enjoyable. Remember: you're not a one-man/woman show!

### 2 PREPARING AND GATHERING MATERIALS

A lot of ESL teachers are overwhelmed at first by the sheer amount of materials they must prepare for a single group of students, things that include flashcards, worksheets, photocopies, props, games, etc. If you find yourself spending every evening after work simply preparing for the following day's class, you probably feel you have no time for other things, right?

**How to cut down on stress:** Here at BusyTeacher.org, we've recently published some articles in an effort to help you become more productive. In Top 5 Productivity Tips for ESL Teachers, we recommend that you take at least a couple of hours a week to plan an entire week's worth of lessons AND gather the materials you will need for them. By concentrating all of your efforts into this special planning session, you'll free up the rest of your week!

Another great way to handle the preparation of materials is to share the burden with other teachers. If you're all preparing for the same holiday celebration, divide the tasks: have one buy the decorations, another teacher make photocopies, or another cut out the flashcards.

### 3 MANAGING YOUR CLASS

If you're stressed out because you have an unruly group of ill-behaved students, you need to implement some heavy-duty classroom management strategies. Students may not know what's expected of them in an ESL classroom, so it is your job to set limits, help them come up with rules they agree

to follow, and provide the adequate rewards.

**How to cut down on stress:** Check out '9 Cool Classroom Management Tricks' and see which ones work best with your students. At BusyTeacher.org we have an entire section devoted to Classroom Management, so be sure to check it out!

Some other useful tips to fight 'ESL Stress':

- Don't rush to finish everything at the last minute. Plan in advance. Leave 15 minutes earlier and get to school with plenty of time to relax and have a cup of coffee or chat with your colleagues before it's time for class.
- Schedule activities every week for pure enjoyment. Are you a movie buff? Go to the movies once a week either on your own or with a friend. Have an artistic side? Enroll in a pottery or ceramics class. Feel you need to exercise to unwind? Get yourself a membership to the local fitness center.
- Sometimes, it's better if you just say no. Does the school need volunteers to decorate the cafeteria for a party? Is someone organizing a fundraiser? The drama teacher needs a few extra pair of hands to sew costumes? If you honestly feel you've already got too much on your plate, why add more to it?

### IF YOU REALLY WANT TO RELIEVE SOME OF THE STRESS IN YOUR LIFE, YOU WILL NEED TO COMMIT TO SOME SERIOUS REFLECTION ON YOUR PART.

Which are exactly your main stressors? If you're having a hard time coping, try to find a support group or start one with the other teachers at your school. On the other hand, what gives you the greatest pleasure? Try to bring more happiness into your life and the best way to accomplish this is by doing what makes you the happiest: teaching your students with all of the fun and none of the stress!

BusyTeacher.org does its part to help relieve some of the burden! Browse our astounding variety of ready-to-print worksheets and take a load off!

# ESL Teacher's Meltdown: Problems & Solutions

FOR THE MOST PART, ESL TEACHING IS SURPRISINGLY STRESS-FREE AND A GREAT WAY TO LIVE A FANTASTIC LIFESTYLE IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY. BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE BLACK DOG PAYS US ALL A VISIT.

This is often brought on when the daily challenges that create a positive amount of stress all accumulate at once, and the pressure becomes too much. There are days when many ESL teachers just want to scream and explode in a fit of rage due to the pent up frustrations of a long day where nothing just seem to go the way it should. This article will examine some of the leading problems in the ESL workplace and try to find a solution.

## ESL TEACHER'S MELTDOWN: PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

### 1 PROBLEM - LOW SALARIES

Always in the number one spot for ESL teaching gripes. Some schools offer appalling salaries to decent teachers who always put the effort into classes. Unfortunately, ESL teaching isn't one of the highest-paid professions out there, but in many cases, the wages do not suit the job. Simply compare the different wages throughout different countries. A first-time ESL teacher at a language centre in Jakarta, Indonesia makes around US\$750 a month, a teacher in Korea would be on over US\$2000. Additionally, with most jobs out there, the rate of pay will go up with inflation, but not in ESL teaching. After a little snooping around, teachers will generally find that the wages have been the same for almost eight years in many cases. This is a cause of great concern to many teachers.

**Solution** - Asides from Prozac and living frugally, one of the best ways to deal with the low pay is to get out there and find some extra teaching work. Pick up a few privates here and there, or look into teaching on the in-

ternet. But do it on the sly, and don't let your employer find out as there may be harsh contractual implications for any outside work.

### 2 PROBLEM - LOW TEACHER'S ROOM MORALE

Yup, we've all been there. The harmonious nature of the staff room that was present when you first arrived at the school has all but fizzled out. It started with one person, then a few weeks there were three people whinging and moaning. All of a sudden, a month later the entire staff room is infected with it and there just seems no way out. This low morale has an impact on everything, the way that staff members view their job, their employer, and even the country that they have grown to love has turned into a cesspool of bitter hatred.

**Solution** - Discreetly bring the matter up with your academic manager or HR go-to person. They have been working in ESL teaching long enough, and sure enough, the low-morale issue is a common occurrence that probably happens at even the best of language centres. Your HR manager or Academic Coordinator should provide you with some good advice, while acting on your concerns by putting an end to the bad vibes in the staff room. Once you begin to notice the negativity beginning to show, try to separate yourself from it and do your lesson planning in a classroom or simply go outside and take a walk. Falling victim to the low morale is something that can easily happen to us all.

### 3 PROBLEM - MANAGEMENT

Always another chief complaint from teachers that often arises is the issue of management. The reason for this is management are ultimately the ones who are in charge. Whether or not they're right or wrong, the management are the ones who have the power to make the decisions. In many cases, language centre management has their eyes firmly fixated on one

thing – the almighty dollar. This is true in most cases, and often this immense focus on money will have an impact on you directly. For example, a student wants to study IELTS. They can barely string a sentence together, but they are insistent on doing an IELTS course and will not settle for any other course. You are the lucky chosen one who is dealt this cruel hand of teaching this stubborn student for 60 hours when she can't answer the question 'how are you?' Other areas which management have a controlling hand over are contract negotiations, marketing and course material.

**Solution** - Take it easy, it isn't your problem. Give the student what they want, that's what they paid for. Be honest with the student and tell them they are not suited for the class, and maybe, just maybe the student will listen to you. But otherwise, just sit back, dish out the work, and don't let the right or wrong decisions of others get to you.

### 4 PROBLEM - LAZY STUDENTS

This one doesn't usually bother me, but seems to bother some teachers immensely. Lazy students can become a real pain in the backside, especially after you have gone through the painstaking effort to plan a class that is fun, while educational at the same time. Nothing can be more frustrating than this, especially when it takes places on the busiest day of the week, a Sunday.

**Solution** - Two solutions, the first – let them be, it will be their own demise. The second, bargain with them. Take away certain privileges for laziness, while rewarding them with activities and other treats for completing the work.

### 5 PROBLEM - ARROGANT FELLOW-TEACHERS

Sure, we've all worked with them. They are the type of people who

speak in the Queen's English and proper British accent, who talk to their colleagues in an identical manner as they would address a misbehaving student. You must look out for these people, as generally they walk around with an inflated sense of self-importance. These are the people who discipline a teacher because a student left a paper in the room. These are the worst people to deal with in ESL teaching that can really make your blood boil, especially when they talk to you in a condescending manner as if you were a child.

**Solution** - Take a note of each of the encounters and think of the reasons why you personally felt it was offensive, for example, he spoke in a way that showed total disrespect, or he lectured you in front of a student. Make a note of when the incidents occurred and some details, and pass it on to the Academic Coordinator. It is their job to address your concerns directly with the arrogant sod, taking his ego down a few notches.

## 6 PROBLEM – SCHEDULES

Ah, it's the time of the week when everyone crowds around as if it were the lottery. There's a certain sense of dread and excitement at the same time. After having a number of classes finished this week, you know that either the classes will be immediately replaced with more, or you could, by some stroke of luck, have a relatively easy week where you can slip off early and catch a film. But, you know what? It's a lot worse than that. A teacher's contract has finished, and it's your job to teach a morning class from 9am to 11am, and a new evening class as well! A split shift! Jeez, I'm a teacher, not a bloody chef!

**Solution** - The golden rule... If you signed the contract that states that you would work those hours, there's more chance of that dream wedding with Britney Spears than getting the schedules changed. But, if your weekly hours exceed the contracted hours, make sure that you are adequately compensated for the additional work.

## 7 PROBLEM - TEXTBOOKS NOT BEING RETURNED

A favourite complaint by ESL teachers from over 160 countries, across five continents throughout the world.

There is nothing more annoying than looking for your 'Introduction to Academic Book Volume 3', only to discover that the serial hoarder has stashed it away with 17 other of the schools frequently used textbooks. And the worst part, he's not around to unlock his freakin' locker.

**Solution** - Make your life easier and photocopy the books yourself. That way you can draw in the books, fill in the answers, draw funny little moustaches on the people - whatever, really! The second option is to discretely bring the better to the Academic Manager who will quickly bring about an end to the hoarder's textbook stash.

### AFTER A TOUGH DAY AT THE OFFICE, MANY ESL TEACHERS THINK THAT THEY WOULD RATHER BE DOING ANYTHING ELSE THAN TEACHING.

However, after the end of a day like this, a new day will bring a completely new set of challenges, some good, and some bad. Teaching isn't the only career that boasts stresses, but every job in every field has their its benefits and disadvantages – while many are a lot worse than teaching.

# Top 5 Productivity Tips for ESL Teachers

**DO YOU OFTEN FIND YOURSELF STRAPPED FOR TIME? EVER GET THE FEELING YOU HAVE SPENT WAY TOO MUCH TIME ON SOMETHING THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER AND FASTER TO DO?**

Have you ever thought “there has to be another way, a better, more productive way to get this done”? Do you wish you had more free time to spend on a hobby or with your family? If you have answered any of these questions with a resounding “yes!”, then what you need are ways to improve your productivity, strategies that will help you make the most of your time and allow you to enjoy your classes, free from last-minute rushes and stress. Here are our top productivity tips for ESL teachers:

## **HOW TO INCREASE YOUR ESL PRODUCTIVITY**

### **1 PLAN IN ADVANCE**

Do you sometimes find yourself making flashcards, printing worksheets, or finishing posters the night before a class? Wouldn't it be great if you could wake up in the morning and have your lesson and materials ready, so that all you have to do is grab your stuff and go to class? Well, this is not hard at all to achieve!

Take 2-3 hours once a week to plan the week ahead. Pick one day, say, Sunday evening, and schedule your planning session. Plan your lessons for the week AND gather the materials you will need. Find a way to organize these materials that works best for you. Perhaps you can use a file cabinet, and file your lesson plan and materials for each day, including ESL worksheets, flashcards, a book you plan to read, even special props or realia. If you need to use the school photocopier, try to schedule one day in which you can copy everything you'll need for the week. Try to leave nothing for the last minute or the night before. As soon as you're ready to head for school, all you need to do is

grab your materials for the day. We guarantee your week will go by much smoother!

### **2 ELIMINATE ALL DISTRACTIONS**

If you only set aside two hours on Sunday to plan a whole week's worth of ESL lessons, you need to make those two hours count. Imagine these two hours are sacred and essential to your weekly planning. If possible, put your phone on mute, and if you're at the computer disable all incoming email alerts. Try to resist the temptation to see what's up on Facebook, Twitter, or any other social media site. The energy and effort you put into these two hours of planning will pay off later on in the week, when you have the chance to go out with some friends for dinner or to a movie.

### **3 POOL YOUR RESOURCES**

When you plan a special holiday lesson, chances are most of the other ESL teachers will be planning one as well. Whenever you teach the past simple or the present perfect, chances are another teacher has used a great lesson plan. Schedule a meeting with the other teachers in your school once a month to discuss any special events, celebrations or lessons. There are plenty of websites that sell posters and stickers in bulk, so why not make a big order for everyone? As a group you could come up with a system to share great ESL lesson plan ideas, maybe keep them on file in the teacher's lounge. No man is an island, and neither is a classroom. No teacher should have to work alone when he or she has the possibility of gaining from others' experience.

### **4 GET TO SCHOOL EARLY**

“The early bird catches the worm”, and if you get to school early enough you might just get the photocopier's undivided attention. Also, if you need to set up props, posters, decorate the classroom, or get video

or audio material set up, it's best to get it all done before your students start to arrive. You may even have enough time to enjoy a good cup of coffee in the peace and tranquility of your empty classroom. There's no better way to start a productive day!

### **5 TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS**

There are lots of tools and applications out there that are HUGE time-savers, and will do wonders for your productivity. Digital calendars, timers, and to-do lists allow you to have everything you need, a mere click away.

**AS SOON AS YOU START IMPLEMENTING THESE STRATEGIES, YOU WILL NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE. FOLLOW THESE TIPS, AND YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SCHEDULE SOME TIME FOR YOU, TO SPEND WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS, OR ENJOYING YOUR FAVORITE HOBBY. IT DOESN'T TAKE A WHOLE LOT OF WORK TO BECOME A HAPPIER, MORE PRODUCTIVE TEACHER. IT JUST TAKES SOME PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION.**

# Dealing with Broken Copy Machines & Other Professional Snafus

**IT'S A PRETTY COMMON SCENARIO IN A TEACHER'S LIFE: YOU GET TO WORK, ALREADY RUNNING LATE AND WITH A SET OF COPIES TO RUN BEFORE CLASS — ONLY TO FIND A GROUP OF OTHER TEACHERS CROWDED AROUND, WRINGING THEIR HANDS, MOURNING THE DEFUNCT COPY MACHINE.**

And your lesson that day had depended on those copies. In fact, the more you depend on a set of copies, it seems, the more likely it is the copy machine will jam, break, and go out of commission for the day. The same goes for overhead projectors and computers: the more you rely on them, the more likely they are to fall apart.

## **DEALING WITH PROFESSIONAL SNAFUS AND KEEPING YOUR SANITY**

### **1 DON'T PANIC**

The most important thing is to not panic and to breathe. Beginning teachers, in particular, might go into a minor panic attack over this kind of situation. However, the situation is not as dire as it seems although it may appear so with forty students waiting for you and your now-obsolete lesson. However, panic prevents you from breathing, which prevents you from thinking effectively. Remember to breathe.

### **2 HAVE AN ALTERNATE PLAN**

When lesson planning, it's best to plan ahead for things going wrong, as they generally will. Plan ahead for the copy machine breaking down. Can you write what is on the handout on the board? Or do you have an alternate activity? Some teachers have a series of activities in their "repertoires," ready to pull out at a moment's notice. One such activity is writing "Find Someone Who—" on the board, and then finishing the sentences with ten items: e.g. 1. has been to France. 2. has ridden on an elephant, and so on. This can be adapted for whatever students are studying. If they are studying the past tense, I would phrase the questions in various forms of the past tense. The goal is for students to copy

the questions down and then to write a name by each question—which means they will have to go around the room and learn people's names, which they might not have yet. This is an easily adaptable activity, and students usually enjoy it.

### **3 ONGOING PROJECTS**

If students have some ongoing project they are working on, give them time to work on that. Usually in an English class, there is at least one ongoing project that there never seems to be time for. This might be that day for students to get into their groups and finish their research projects or collaborative stories.

### **4 GO FORWARD WITHOUT THE PLANNED RESOURCES**

I know some teachers who actually like days when they forget their books or the copy machine breaks, and so forth, because this brings out their most creative side: they feel inspired by the need to create that perfect lesson. Take a moment to scan the learning objectives. What way can you possibly teach them without the planned resources? For example, can you teach paragraph structure without the graphic organizer showing neat paragraphs with topic sentences? How about by brainstorming details about the classroom together and then coming up with a suitable topic sentence based on the details? Students can then practice this in pairs based on the school, the yard, the park down the street, etc.

### **5 GET STUDENTS TO HELP**

Most students are very willing to help when the need arises, so ask them to share handouts, write material on the board, and so forth. Call on volunteers to help or get the whole class to pitch in. Students usually appreciate the feeling of being needed and of being an equal to the teacher who can help.

### **6 GET HELP FROM COLLEAGUES**

Other teachers are also usually helpful to another teacher in a jam. They'll willingly help you with the copier, show

you where extra books are stored, and so forth. The only time they might show reluctance to help is when they are so swamped with their own classes that they are unable to—which might make that teacher a prime candidate for help when you are more able to offer it.

### **7 FREE CONVERSATION DAY**

Most ESL students can use some work on conversational fluency in English. On the board, or on index cards if you have them, write common topics of conversation in English: "The Weather," "Work," "School," "Movies," and "Sports," for example. Spend some time discussing what might be said on each topic, then have students get in pairs or groups, select a topic, and go!

### **8 FREE READING DAY**

Similar to conversational fluency, reading fluency is an area where most students could stand some practice. If there is a class library of any sort—even sets of newspapers or textbooks—this is an ideal opportunity to allow students to browse the material and select something to read. Have them fill out an informal report at the end, that you've written on the board, on what they've read: what the main idea is, any vocabulary learned, and one question about the reading. This provides some accountability while extending learning.

### **9 DECLARE A CATCH-UP DAY**

Finally, a teacher can always call a day where the plan went out the window a catch-up/advisory day, in which you'll be available to give individual advice to students on their papers and conference with them about their work and grade. Far from this being a "free" day, this often ends up being one of the busiest of all because students readily respond to this offer, and they might be hanging around long after the period ends.

So those bad days when the copier breaks and you leave your briefcase at home do not have to be bad teaching days. **IN FACT, WITH A LITTLE CREATIVITY, "THOSE" DAYS MAY END UP BEING THE BEST OF ALL!**

# Handling Transitions in the Classroom

## YOU'VE PROBABLY EXPERIENCED IT.

You're in front of your class, having just introduced a complicated grammar point, perhaps the present perfect tense. You've just taken the students through some guided practice and are about to give out the second handouts for independent practice. It is only then you realize the handouts aren't on your desk. They aren't on the podium, either, nor on the table. Where are they? As you frantically search, you are aware of the students breaking into little conversational groups, there are scraps of various languages, a burst of laughter. Oh, no! It's the dreaded transition! When you locate the handouts a few moments later, it takes ten minutes to get the class settled down again and back on task.

Transitions, those instructional moments in which the class moves from one activity to another, are fraught with opportunity for mishaps like those portrayed here — needed materials go missing, students forget what they should be doing, and so forth. The transition can be at a huge time drain, or even worse, the force that derails an entire class period. However, with some planning, the instructor can guide students from one part of a class to another with ease so loss of instructional time is minimized.

## HOW TO MANAGE TRANSITIONS

### 1 HAVE SUPPLIES READY AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

Review your lesson plan before class, note supplies needed, and place them in the same area every day. If you make it a habit to run copies for the next day before leaving campus, you won't be short needed handouts. And if you always keep the handouts in the same place during class, such as on the table in the front of the room, you won't need to stop to look for them. An additional benefit of this is your students will know where the handouts are kept, too, and will automatically pick the copies up when they arrive late rather than sitting and then asking loudly, "What are we doing?"

### 2 PLAN, PLAN, PLAN

If the teacher plans every moment

of instruction, including the transitions, he is more likely to stay with the plan rather than get swept up by the digression of an awkward transition. If students take the opportunity of the pause of going from the reading to the writing activity, for example, to start chatting with their cute seat partners, the teacher can move in and gently remind them, "We're working on writing now, so you should be getting out your portfolios." If the instructor is unsure of what he wants students to do, however, or hasn't planned, students will quickly sense that and go on with their conversation.

### 3 WRITE THE SCHEDULE ON THE BOARD

If the plan is on the board, both teachers and students are likely to stick to it. It's suddenly tangible and real, not something ephemeral that exists only in the teacher's mind. So if the teacher has to go to the door to answer another teacher's question, for example, students can look at the board and say, "Oh, we're supposed to be on page 72 now." And if a student wanders in late and asks, "What are we doing?" the teacher need only point at the board.

### 4 TEACH THE ROUTINE

Writing your plan on the board is part of teaching your instructional routine. Students should, both explicitly and implicitly, learn the typical activities of the class and how to transition, such as how to get into groups with minimal disruption, where to look for supplies like paper and textbooks, and where to get necessary information. If students are taught the routine from the start of class, there will be fewer students saying "What are we doing?" or, worse, "I don't know what to do, so I'm just going to sit and talk with my friends." And if a student does forget and asks "What are we supposed to be doing?" another student will probably point to the schedule or supplies more quickly than you can.

### 5 KEEP ACTIVITIES FOR THE TRANSITION

Teachers should keep both regular activities for transitions as well as specific daily ones. These might be as simple as proofreading an essay coming due—

a regular activity, which students know they can do when the teacher is setting up the DVD equipment for the video they're about to watch—or specific daily activities, such as looking ahead to the assigned reading. Instill in students the value of not wasting time, and instead of sitting at their desks with their hands folded as the teacher struggles with electronic equipment, they can get some of their own work done by reading ahead in the homework.

### 6 PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERACTING

Because those transitional moments when the teacher's attention is focused on something else seem to be a time when students develop the need to chat with each other, give them a legitimate purpose to do so. If you're busy at the beginning of class trying to locate that section in the textbook you just had, tell students to catch up with three peers on what they did over the weekend and to focus on their past tense verbs because you may ask them about what their friends did. Or keep a set of conversational cards, with topics like "the weather" and "sports," on your desk in a box and tell students to select a card from the box and hold a conversation with their peers.

### 7 SET LIMITS

Finally remember to remind students of your boundaries. Sometimes, even if you have done all of the above to handle transitions, there are still those students who seem to seize on the moment of seeing you rummaging through your desk for the missing dry erase markers to come up to you and begin telling you their story on why their homework isn't complete. It's fine to tell the student, "I want to hear you, but I want to give you the attention you deserve. Let's speak after class." This begins to teach the student about appropriate time and place.

### TRANSITIONS, IN CLASS AS IN LIFE, ARE NOT EASY.

But with planning, making the plan transparent to students, teaching students the routine and value of using time wisely, the disruption caused by transitions can be minimized.

# Teaching in a Classroom with Nothing at All

*“So how are you keeping up on all of the technology in your classroom?”* the woman from staff development recently asked me at a meeting. *“Would you like to sign up for any training?”* *“For what?”* I asked. *“Do you mean the overhead projector?”* *“No-o-o,”* she said hesitantly. *“Don’t you have a smart classroom?”*

A smart classroom. It begs the question of what we had before. I thanked the woman from staff development politely and told her I thought I’d be all right.

There is a general perception that our classrooms are loaded with the latest gadgets—smart boards and Ipads and Nooks. And if it’s not being incorporated into the curriculum, it’s because teachers are too stubborn, or stupid, to learn it.

However, if all that technology is indeed out there, it has yet to find its way to most of the classrooms I have contact with. Humanities in general, ESL in particular, is not high on the spending priorities for most educational institutions. We ESL educators have a different technology problem: how to cope with technology several millennia old. Socrates might have taught in my classrooms of plain brick walls and chalkboards.

So if indeed the most advanced technology in your classroom is the overhead, how do you teach with the existing resources, especially with a student population and even teacher population increasingly used to more advanced technology?

## HOW TO TEACH IN A CLASSROOM WITH NOTHING AT ALL

### 1 WEAVE THE EXISTING TECHNOLOGY INTO CURRICULUM

It is possible to use existing resources to their fullest if you use your creativity as well. I really honed my artistic skills—or rather, developed ones I didn’t know I had—when I became an ESL teacher and found myself having to draw clowns and carriages to demonstrate vocabu-

lary in students’ textbooks, vocabulary without accompanying pictures or definitions. Another teacher I’ve worked with will, instead of developing a PowerPoint show because of the lack of needed technology in her room, will instead use her overhead projector and make a set of slides, quickly moving between them—in effect, simulating a PowerPoint show. Before the first day of school, all teachers should assess the existing “tools” in the classroom and how the curriculum will work with it or how it can be made to work.

### 2 BEG, BORROW, AND STEAL ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

If you decide that the tools in your classroom are indeed not sufficient, there are options. Nearly everyone has at least one—maybe several—old or unused electronic devices in their homes. E-waste pick-ups, in which city trucks come by for special pick-ups of electronic garbage, have become common. Maybe some of this material—perhaps in your own or a neighbor’s house—still has a life. There is a classroom, I’m sure, that can use my old Mac desktop, two boom boxes, and a laptop. If you hold your own “e-waste” drive to benefit your class, you might be surprised at what you receive. Often people will dump electronics not because there is anything wrong with them but simply because they are a year or two old. In addition, teachers can often actually use old technology—boom boxes that play cassette tapes, useless to owners of iPods, actually can be used by ESL teachers who work with a curriculum that is still in part on language tapes.

### 3 GAIN SUPPORT

As you are on this quest of bringing your room into the 21st century, people are going to notice you. Some will become your supporters. They may show their support with simple words of advice to more extensive phone calls and offers of equipment. Their motives are usually straightforward: people like to think that they are helping students and schools. Any help should be gratefully accepted and acknowledged, per-

haps with a list of supporters in your class on your class website.

### 4 RESEARCH

Your mission might at some point expand beyond a simple local, informal effort and become formal and extensive. For example, if you decide your class would benefit from iPads or a Smartboard, this has gone beyond the level of your school site or neighborhood. It’s time to do some research on what resources are out there for teachers who want to modernize their classrooms. There are agencies out there that will support this mission and funding to give, but they have to be located. You might start locally and see, for example, if the nearby Apple computer plant makes donations to schools. You can also search the web to see about possibilities. Even in recessionary times, there are still organizations making donations of material and monetary support!

### 5 WRITE A GRANT

Finally, if you find an agency that supports your specific need, you might decide to write a grant. Study the company’s website and guidelines for giving grants: many have specific deadlines and their own forms to fill out, for example. If you decide to go ahead with the grant, keep in mind some general principles: be as specific as possible on what you are requesting, how it will be used, when your goals will be accomplished and why you are a strong candidate for the grant. There are even grant writing workshops available at little or no cost online. In addition, your district might offer such workshops.

It isn’t easy, teaching in a classroom with nothing at all.

**HOWEVER, WITH PERSISTENCE AND CREATIVITY, THE TEACHER CAN MAKE “NOTHING” WORK FOR HER OR CAN BECOME A TRAILBLAZER, TAKING HER CLASS FROM “NOTHING” TO FULLY EQUIPPED FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM.**



# Limited Resources: Tough Challenge Or Useful Experience

## TEACHING WITH LIMITED RESOURCES CAN BE BOTH INCREDIBLY CHALLENGING AND EXTREMELY EDUCATIONAL.

Depending on where you teach, you may be faced with the challenge of teaching classes with limited resources. Teachers will define this term differently depending on what they are used to but in developing countries such as Cambodia, you may have to do without overhead projectors, TVs, and CD players which will limit what you are able to share with students. There may not be a printer or copier available at school either which will take some getting used to.

Let's look at the different sides of this type of experience.

## 1 CHALLENGE

At first, it may be daunting to teach classes without the materials you are familiar with. It can be frustrating to realize that if you only had a certain piece of equipment, the class could be a lot easier to teach, more fun for students, and more interesting too. When planning to teach in an area with limited resources consider taking some materials along to assist you during the transition period. Paper, printouts of materials you have used before, a laptop, an MP3 player, and some portable battery operated speakers as well as spare batteries will help you in class and make the change more bearable. You will be able to show students pictures and videos using your laptop and conduct listening exercises using your music player. It may not be an ideal arrangement but it will allow you to conduct listening exercises using songs and show your students pictures of your family, friends, and hometown. Sometimes students in these locations are also less prepared for classes than students in other areas so try to bring materials with you that they might need to use in class such as pencils and notebooks. You cannot anticipate everything you will need in a school with limited resources but bringing

along some basic things will definitely benefit everyone. While it may take you a while to adapt, students can be very patient especially if they are used to having teachers change quite often and will be more flexible than students you may have worked with before. Since they are used to using the materials available in different ways and perhaps unused to having pieces of technology used in the classroom, they will not be frustrated by what they are lacking whereas you might be. Once you have had time to settle in, the initial challenges will give way to opportunities for you to grow as a teacher.

## 2 EXPERIENCE

Teaching in a school with limited resources will cause you to improve as a teacher because you will have to be more resourceful and find ways to use what is available at your school in your lessons. This may mean asking students to practice writing in the sand instead of on copy paper but then again doesn't everyone love a day at the beach? There is quite a range of what schools can provide you with but asking before you leave home may help you prepare better for your placement. By planning lessons outside of school hours, you should have the opportunity to print and copy materials somewhere else. If you really have to create everything by hand, students may just have to get used to completing exercises in groups and this may not be a significant change from what they are accustomed to. The most important thing to remember is that classes should still contain a variety of activities so that all your students can learn effectively. Since speaking is the primary focus of learning a language there is no reason that a school or classroom with limited resources cannot be an effective learning environment. Once you have adjusted to your surroundings, it will be no different teaching there than in any other location and you will have learned some new teaching methods.

WHILE TEACHING WITH LIMITED RESOURCES CAN PRESENT ENORMOUS CHALLENGES FOR ESL TEACHERS USED TO DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES, IT CAN ALSO BE A GREAT LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND WILL ALLOW YOU TO IMPROVE AS AN INSTRUCTOR. REMEMBER TO USE WHAT IS AVAILABLE TO YOU AND COVER THE SAME MATERIAL YOU WOULD ANYWHERE ELSE. JUST TAP INTO YOUR CREATIVE SIDE AND PREPARE TO AMAZE YOURSELF AND YOUR STUDENTS WITH YOUR INGENUITY.

# 6 Methods to Ignite Enthusiasm in Your Students

Your class is a quiet class. Your students file in at the beginning of a session, quietly take their seats, obediently take notes, and then get up and leave at the end, also quietly. Sure, sometimes a student falls asleep, and there is the occasional flash of hostility between students, but that's all okay in the balance, right, of such a quiet and obedient class?

Well, no, actually this class has a number of limitations, from the lack of interaction (quiet and order aren't always good attributes) to the student boredom (evidenced in falling asleep). What the class needs, what would solve many of its problems, is some student enthusiasm for their work, some investment in it, which would lead almost inevitably to more interaction and discussion of the work between students and students and teacher. This interaction in turn leads to more motivation and enthusiasm to engage in the work, creating a kind of "positive feedback loop," in which success feeds on success. The problem is how to start, how to get students "fired up" in the first place about their coursework?

## TRY THESE 6 METHODS TO IGNITE ENTHUSIASM IN YOUR STUDENTS

### 1 SHOW YOUR ENTHUSIASM FOR THE WORK

Of foremost importance is for the instructor to communicate her own enthusiasm. This does not necessarily mean, as many seem to think, jumping around like a cheerleader and saying "Isn't this fun?" It's my experience that such "enthusiasm" often is meant to serve as a cover for lack of skill, a fact students quickly pick up on. Rather, what is meant by "enthusiasm" here is real passion from deeply connecting with one's work: I've watched students' eyes light up, for example, when I discuss the satisfaction of having readers immediately "get" what I had meant in a story. They had either experienced this themselves, or wanted to, and this created a desire to learn the course content.

### 2 DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF LEARNING THE MATERIAL

"Why do I need to learn this?" and "How is this going to help me?" These are two often-heard phrases, even at the college level, especially in basic or fundamental courses, such as writing or mathematics. They are legitimate questions: if students are going to invest a significant amount of their time learning something, they need to know its value. The teacher should be prepared with an answer, perhaps some examples and real-life instances that called upon the skill, such as the police officer who caused a case to be lost and a suspect go free because he did not clearly detail in his report what had happened at the crime scene. Anecdotes like this clearly demonstrate that a wide spectrum of professions require fundamental skills like writing.

### 3 ALLOW FOR STUDENT INTERACTION: WITH THE TEACHER, OTHER STUDENTS, MATERIAL

People in general, and students in particular, long for some kind of connection. Historically and even today, education in the U.S. is often a solitary pursuit, taking place alone in libraries, coffee shops, or at one's seat in a classroom. However, learning really should be a social endeavor. More ideas are generated and processed more deeply with a peer or peers. Therefore, setting up some kind of group or partner work each class session helps students learn better. If the groups are changed each session, students will get to know each other better as well.

### 4 ALLOW FOR STUDENT-CHOSEN PROJECTS

Little seems to contribute to student enthusiasm more than the students' ability to choose their own topics or projects. When I tell students they are encouraged to choose their own topics for their research papers, there are responses from sighs of relief to broad grins. I tell them I do, however, have one requirement: it must be a topic they are truly interested in, preferably have a passion for. Students rise to the occasion by turning in very credible papers on topics like the history of hip-hop, cited with interviews with leaders in hip-hop—entirely legitimate or even impressive papers that stu-

dents would not have considered writing before because they thought topic was not appropriate for school.

### 5 CONNECT TO THE REAL WORLD: GUEST SPEAKERS, FIELD TRIPS

Another way to generate enthusiasm in the class is to make those connections to the "real world" that students are longing for. One way to do this is through guest speakers with expertise in course topics: a community leader discussing the rights of gay people, for example, if that has been a course topic.

Visits to important local sites that are related to the curriculum also generate student enthusiasm. Even in your city is not located near famous landmarks, field trips can still be of value by visiting areas of local importance, such as canneries or factories. This trip can be connected to the works of John Steinbeck, for example, contextualizing the reading and allowing discussion on the differences and similarities between the novel and "real world."

### 6 PERMIT STUDENTS TO USE THEIR EXPERTISE

Finally, allowing students to use their growing competence helps. Allowing them to take the lead on a final project like a debate or a presentation feeds this enthusiasm as they have been developing their competence all semester long. Allow students to set up groups, choose topics, assign roles, and so forth, with little intervention.

### CREATING MOTIVATION IN STUDENTS AND "MOTIVATING" STUDENTS SEEMS ALMOST A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS AS ULTIMATELY PEOPLE MOTIVATE THEMSELVES.

However, although it goes beyond applying a few simple catch phrases like "Great job!" teachers can help create enthusiasm in students through communicating their own passion in the subject matter, allowing students to explore their own passions, connecting to the "real world," and permitting students to exercise their growing competence in the subject matter.

# 7 Sure-fire Ways to Boost Student Confidence

## QUESTION: ARE YOUR ESL LEARNERS CONFIDENT IN THEIR ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS?

How can you tell? Confident learners participate more, speak more, don't necessarily make fewer mistakes, but feel confident they can communicate effectively in English – they can say what they want to say. Confidence is not exactly linked to accuracy, - it's all about attitude, which helps students get their point across, no matter how many times they stumble or make mistakes.

## WHY IS STUDENT CONFIDENCE SO IMPORTANT?

It's important for students to feel confident because if they don't, they simply don't learn as fast or gain the fluency they need. Students who lack confidence often complain or say things like, "I can't do it"... "I don't know how to say that"... "I'm going to be in an English-speaking country, and I can't speak". If you feel your students' confidence needs a good boost, here are some ways to turbo charge it.

## TRY THESE 7 SURE-FIRE WAYS TO BOOST STUDENT CONFIDENCE

### 1 DON'T CORRECT THEM AS MUCH IN FREE-SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

It's important to correct students' mistakes, but what happens if you correct every other word a student says? When students make too many mistakes, and you make it abundantly clear that that's what they're doing, their confidence starts to suffer. Make the necessary corrections when you're doing targeted practice, but don't interrupt or correct as much during performance activities when it's better for students to just let go of their inhibitions and try to speak.

### 2 OFFER PRAISE

The other problem with corrections is that sometimes all we do is tell them what they did wrong and forget

to tell them what they did great. After a role play activity, praise your students for what they did very well, first: "Good job! You remembered to use all of the vocabulary and expressions we learned today!" And then refer to what they need to work on: "But you were talking about what you did last weekend, and you forgot some of the verbs in past. Why don't you review those for next class?"

Even though you are telling them what they did wrong, they get a more positive message by hearing what they did right first.

### 3 TEACH IN CONTEXT

We should always try to teach in context because it gives students a background to lean on – it's much harder to learn isolated words or grammar without the right context to remember them by. But how does it help boost student confidence? If you use a context students are already familiar with – say shopping – you will allow them to work with a situation they are able to handle. You'll just be using a different language to talk about it.

### 4 GIVE THEM CHANCES TO SUCCEED

In an ESL class, students are at a disadvantage – they don't understand, they can't speak like you do. Which is why it's important to sometimes take the focus away from their weakness (their poor language skills) and place it on their strengths. I do this all the time with Business English students. Say we need to talk about marketing. I tell them, "I'm an English teacher. I know nothing about marketing, so you'll have to explain it to me." This is an incredible confidence boost. They know something you don't, and chances are they'll do a great job explaining it to you.

Teenagers or young learners can talk about places you've never been or things you've never done. Those who have special talents or skills can teach their classmates.

### 5 USE VISUALS

Visuals like flashcards, posters or graphic organizers also provide something students can lean on so that they're not left hanging in mid air. If a student needs to tell a story to the class, they'll feel a lot more confident if they have pictures they can follow along. If a student needs to present a business topic, they'll feel more confident if they have a graphic to lean on.

### 6 MAKE ALL LEARNING GOAL-ORIENTED

I can't emphasize enough the importance of goal-oriented learning. If you set clear goals with your class, at the start of the school year and even at the start of each class, they'll have a better sense of what they've accomplished. Say you start the class by telling students that today they will learn how to check in and check out of a hotel. Finish the class by saying, "Congratulations! Now you're ready to check into any hotel!" They'll be amazed at how much they've learned.

### 7 INSTILL HABITS AND USE REPETITION FROM DAY 1

Getting your students to feel confident they can speak English right from the start is not as difficult as you may think. Teach them essential phrases they will have to use again and again (May I go to the bathroom?, Could you please repeat that/speak more slowly?, Have a nice weekend!). If they constantly repeat these phrases they will soon enough become like second nature – they won't have to hesitate at all. Create habits by having them ask or say similar things every day/week (How was your weekend?- Fine, and yours?) and keep adding to the mix to give them a wider range of expressions.

**CONFIDENT STUDENTS ARE HAPPY STUDENTS.** Confident students feel they can accomplish what they set out to do in their ESL class and beyond, when they have to use their language skills in the real world. What more could you want for them?

# What's Your Passion? 7 Projects to Tap into Learner Motivation

It's sad, but by secondary school students are often already "burned out" on the educational process: they don't see its value, see it as disconnected from the "real world" of their everyday lives and interests, filled with meaningless and trivial tasks that will not help them in mastering what they need to maneuver in the world beyond school. In some cases, they are largely correct: school has become a place more about satisfying bureaucratic than student need: endless tests and boxes to check. But does it have to be this way? Absolutely not. There are numerous methods to connect the classroom to the outside world and in the process awaken passion for the learning process in students.

## HOW TO TAP INTO LEARNER MOTIVATION

### 1 BOTTOM-UP CURRICULUM

By tradition and in most cases by necessity, curriculum is top-down: generated by administrators who pass it down to teachers, who also might tinker with it but have less control than administrators, and finally down to students, who have least control of all, despite being most affected by the curriculum. Although teachers and students have little control over this process, they may, within the confines of the class, reorder it somewhat, designing the curriculum process to originate with students and their needs and interests. This may be done through a short period of assessing students to find their level as well as learning about their needs and interests.

### 2 STUDENT GENERATED TOPICS

One place to start in reordering the curriculum is finding out student passions and let that drive the curriculum. Through class discussions, interviews, and writings, find out what students are truly interested in: twentieth century art? Classic cars? Karate? The topics are bound to be diverse, of course, but there's also likely to be a lot of overlap—more than one student will be interested in art or cars, for example. It is around these topics then a curriculum of discussion, reading, research, and writing can be built.

### 3 LAY THE GROUND WORK

Often students are discouraged and have been sent messages, either overtly or covertly, that their interests as irrelevant, so they refuse to discuss them. Therefore, the teacher must spend some time getting to know her students, and letting the students get to know each other, to learn what students are passionate about. Taking students seriously and asking questions is important: "So you're interested in hip-hop! What about it excites you?" After I spent some initial time with a student talking about this particular passion and assuring him that it was legitimate and appropriate for school, he went on to form a team of like-minded students who did some research on the hip-hop field—there is a body of literature and experts—and did a presentation including some hip-hop music.

### 4 GIVE STUDENTS DIRECTION

Often students have a particular interest, such as women in the military, but beyond Googling the term, don't know where to go with it. The only "research" they may know about is the internet or the library. Pointing out other avenues of legitimate and helpful research, such as interviewing a family member or friend in the military, will give students some direction. In addition, students often think they won't be taken seriously in their efforts to find out more about their interests. One young man, hesitant to contact a leading hip-hop figure, said to me "I totally don't expect him to get back to me." When I reassured him on this, pointing out that people passionate about a topic are usually eager to talk about it to others also passionate, he went ahead and contacted the hip-hop leader—and was "totally" surprised when the gentleman returned his email and gave him some important leads. So guide students to avenues they might take to explore their passions.

### 5 CONNECTIONS TO THE REAL WORLD

Once student interest has been ignited, it will further catch by making connections to the "real world" outside of school. Students often are alienated

from school for just that reason—it seems separate from and unimportant to their "real" lives outside. If teachers can make that connection to the "real world" by demonstrating, for example, that what a student read on pet care in class has direct application to working as a veterinarian assistant, then they can begin to see the value of school.

### 6 LEARNING COMMUNITY, STUDENT INTERACTION

Along the way of sharing ideas from their readings and discussing and writing together, students will look around and realize that they've become a community—a learning community. The teacher is a part of this community and in some ways equal to the students because she is another learner in this community, not possessing all of the knowledge of the different areas of study that the students have, in addition to still being a teacher—as all the students are as well of their areas of interest.

### 7 STUDENT PROJECTS

When the learning community has formed, and students have spent some time reading, writing, and discussing their topics, students are ready to work together on projects. Again, as much students control over the process should be allowed: students should form groups based on their interest and decide what their project will be: if their interest is cars, for example, their project may be a design for a car and presentation about it. They should also assign roles within their groups: team leader, researcher, reporter, resource manager, and so forth. This is the culmination of the term's study and usually gives students a deep sense of control and value for the material in that they are able to produce something that would be valued in the "real world."

**A MAJOR PROBLEM IS THAT STUDENTS OFTEN SEE THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS AS DIVORCED FROM THEIR "REAL WORLD," THEIR PASSIONS.** However, through some methods such as student-generated topics and projects, instructors can help make those connections to the "real world" while igniting a passion for learning.

# 7 Ways to Increase Student Decision-Making and Participation

As teachers in the ESL classroom, we get to make all the rules, and we call the shots. Or do we?

Isn't it a relief when we let go, and let our students make some of the decisions or provide suggestions? I'm not talking about things related to course planning, homework or tests, of course, but little day-to-day decisions like what game to play or even how it should be played. We are already familiar with the benefits of setting classroom rules with your students. Allowing students to actively suggest activities or participate in a decision-making process will not only boost their confidence, it will increase motivation, for after all, they'll be doing something they decided to do.

Here are some great little ways to increase student decision-making and participation:

## TRY THESE 7 WONDERFUL WAYS TO INCREASE STUDENT DECISION-MAKING AND PARTICIPATION

### 1 LET THEM MAKE THEIR OWN RULES

You have a board game, a couple of dice, game pieces and a pile of vocabulary cards. Does it really matter who goes first, who skips a turn or what the penalty is for making a mistake? Let your class decide! Most likely they are very familiar with how board games work. Let them decide what the procedure will be. Just make sure they include the use of the verb or vocabulary cards you have set forth for the game, and that they come up with a penalty for not using them correctly (going back 2-3 spaces).

### 2 LET THEM MAKE UP THEIR OWN GAME!

Give your class a ball and tell them they can play a game with it (one that involves the use of English!) and see what happens. Will they agree? Disagree? Agree to disagree? Reach a stalemate

and require your intervention? What will they do? Won't it be fun to find out! You can give them any number of items from flashcards to a whiteboard, and they may resort to an old favorite, like Tic-Tac-Toe. But whatever they do, it will be their decision.

### 3 IT'S YOUR CHOICE!

If you want to listen to a song in class, or read a book, or have a special crafts project for Christmas, why not let your class choose what they want to do? To narrow down their choices and to be sure they will choose material that is appropriate and relevant, present them with three to five suitable options.

### 4 BRAINSTORM, THEN VOTE!

Another way to reach a decision as a group is to first brainstorm as a group. By definition, brainstorming involves writing down every single idea that comes up, whether it is feasible or not. You can do this, and then eliminate those that are not suitable or appropriate, leaving the group with some good, solid ideas to vote on. If there are too many, try to get the group to narrow them down to three or four. This strategy works great whether you are choosing a movie to watch or an activity for a special holiday party.

### 5 IMPROVISE!

How many times have you seen a student perform a role play – exactly as it is in the book (yawn)? Most students don't feel confident enough to stray from the prepared dialogue, so all they do is repeat the same phrases and questions. In order to get them to use the language in a way that is more spontaneous, try this: once they are comfortable with the textbook dialogue, tell them that they will have to do it again, but they'll have to change as much as they can – they'll have to improvise a bit. Some will merely change names, dates, or locations, but that's the first step. Soon enough they should be comfortable deciding what to say on their own.

### 6 SUGGESTION BOX

Plenty of students have lots of great ideas for activities, games or crafts. But they're too shy to tell you about them – especially in front of the entire class. So put a Suggestion Box somewhere in your classroom and encourage your class to use it. All you need is a cardboard box with a slit students can put slips of paper into. When you introduce the Suggestion Box to your class, teach them ways to phrase their suggestions:

*Some day, I'd like to ... in class.*

*I suggest we ... for Halloween.*

*Why don't we ... for Thanksgiving.*

You can use it all year or ask for suggestions at specific times, for example right before a holiday.

### 7 INTERRUPTIONS OR LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES?

Quite often students interrupt the lesson with a question, doubt, or comment that is completely unrelated to what you are doing. While this spontaneity should not be squashed, it is not advisable for you to abandon your lesson plan altogether. Students will get the idea that they can interrupt you all the time with random comments. So acknowledge the question or idea, and tell the student you will address it, but not now. Write it down on a post-it or on the board and leave it for the end of class.

### SOME OF THESE ENCOURAGE DECISION-MAKING, WHILE SOME ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE MORE BY PROVIDING THEIR OWN IDEAS.

Some of these activities are not something we should do all the time. Some are best reserved for the end of class, as a review activity, or as a reward for good behavior or finishing early.

Why must we be this never-ending fountain of fabulous, fun activities? Why must we tell them what to do all the time? Ask your students to share their thoughts and they might surprise you, - some of their ideas may be better than your own.

# Teacher's Top Ten: Top 10 Ways to Motivate Your Students

**EVEN THE BEST STUDENTS HAVE DAYS WHEN THEY ARE NOT MOTIVATED FOR CLASSROOM LEARNING. WITH A LITTLE NUDGE FROM YOU, YOU CAN TURN THOSE DREARY DAYS INTO SUCCESSFUL CLASSES IN THEIR ESL CAREERS.**

We have already discussed student motivation before. Here are 10 more ways you can motivate your students today.

**10 TEACHER-TESTED WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR STUDENTS' MOTIVATION QUICKLY AND EASILY**

**1** Children fulfill the expectations that the adults around them communicate. This does not mean that every student will score 100% on every test we write. It does mean that if you communicate to a child that he or she is failure, he or she will fail. If you communicate to that same child that he or she will succeed, you will often find that that is the outcome. With every opportunity, encourage your students that they are making progress in their language learning. Point out to them the areas in which you see progress and improvement. For areas in which a student struggles, try to portray a picture of what success will look like. Encouraging your students to visualize their success will aid them in accomplishing those goals you set before them.

**2** Making sure you are teaching to all the learning styles in your classrooms is another way to motivate your students. It is unrealistic to expect an auditory learner to be successful and motivated if her sole instruction comes from reading a textbook. Likewise, a kinesthetic learner will be frustrated listening to his teacher lecture class after class. Make sure, as you plan your lessons, that you are teaching to all the learning styles in your class-

room. If you do, you will engage students who might otherwise struggle to pay attention in class.

**3** When a student disengages from class, it is a good opportunity for you the teacher to notice what methods you are using in class. Although some practices may be fine for most students, timed tests, independent learning time, self checking methods, for example, there will be students who not only do not connect with these methods but who suffer negatively when you use them in your classroom. If a student begins to disengage, be aware of the methods you are using and look for patterns. Though it is difficult to meet every need of a classroom full of language learners, you can take pains to avoid certain methods when it is possible to help certain students perform better in class. This will also help you be intentional about using a variety of methods with your class further engaging all of them.

**4** Sometimes motivating your students is as easy as changing the material you are using. For most teachers, the school chooses a curriculum that they expect each teacher to follow in his or her classes. Even when this is the case, it does not mean that you cannot bring additional resources to class. Sometimes students are turned off by the style or approach of certain curriculum authors. Bringing a different perspective into the class will reengage your students who are turned off by your current materials. In addition, it will challenge those who are already seeing success from the assigned curriculum.

**5** Varying your environment can also be just the thing a reluctant student needs to find fresh motivation. Field trips are always a great way to learn in a practical setting, but even

if that is not possible, take your class outside for today's lesson. Your students may also benefit from a class meeting in the library or in another classroom. You can still meet your daily class goals even if you take your class beyond the classroom walls. Try setting your students to research at the library, observe another class, or listen to native speakers in a public area. There is always language to be learned, so meet your listening, speaking, and reading goals outside the confinement of students' tables.

**6** Providing students with accountability is an important element of being a teacher. Without the idea of a deadline and a grade, many students would never have the self-motivation that is required to successfully learn a language. Be clear with your students when you tell them your expectations. Make sure they know the deadline for a project's completion and what standards you will use to assess that project. You may also consider contracting grades with your students who are at more advanced levels. When you contract grades, your students sign a contract which outlines the requirements to receive an a and a b. Do not give options for lower grades. The student selects which grade he or she will receive in the class and then must complete those requirements satisfactorily. From the start of class, your students know what they need to accomplish, and they know that their success is completely dependent upon themselves. This will get them to be self motivated learners and help them engage themselves in the learning process.

**7** Have you ever seen a child, or perhaps you have one, who is angelic when in public and a terror at home? Some young people have similar behavior patterns when it comes to the classroom. For you they misbehave repeatedly, but a substitute teacher would never know it. You can break

them out of this pattern by bringing outside influences into your classroom. Invite a guest speaker or trade classes for a period with a fellow teacher. The change in style and authority, even for a short period, may be enough to spark some motivation in your students who have become accustomed to your teaching style and expectations.

## 8

Competition is a great way to motivate students. We do not suggest posting grades publicly or otherwise embarrassing your students, but there are many ways to foster a friendly spirit of competition in your class. Games are fun for reviewing and they motivate and engage students. You can also group your class into teams and set them to a challenge. Who can collect the most authentic examples of the grammatical structure you are currently studying? Which team can write the most entertaining skit with this week's vocabulary words? Whatever you are studying, there is some way to add some competition to the mix.

## 9

One never fail motivational method you can use with your students is giving rewards. Tell your students that if everyone in class earns an 80% or higher on a test you will have a pizza party. Tell them that with successful completion of the class novel you will spend a day to watch the movie together. Even something as little as a sticker on a teenager's paper can be enough to spark some giggles and winks but with it some fresh motivation. Design your rewards to your students' personalities, and tell them what your plans are. Students look forward to even the simple pleasures that you can dole out on an ordinary day.

## 10

Finally, though not as enjoyable as other techniques to motivate, consequences of certain actions can also be a motivator to students. Make your expectations clear, and communicate to your student what the consequences will be to certain behavior or work ethic. No one likes to be punished, but when positive reinforcement and lively change ups do

not work, sometimes there has to be negative consequences to your student's actions. Keep your students after school if you have to. Communicate with a child's parents if possible and when necessary. Discipline should be a last resort motivator and only used sporadically.

**EVERYONE STRUGGLES TO BE MOTIVATED AT SOME POINT. WHEN YOU SEE YOUR STUDENTS IN THAT PLACE, TRY SOME OF THESE FUN WAYS TO ENGAGE AND ENLIVEN YOUR CLASS. IF ALL ELSE FAILS, IT MAY BE TIME FOR SOME CONSEQUENCES.**

Variety is enjoyable for students and teachers alike. Avoid getting stuck in a rut and your students will probably find themselves motivated without you even trying to make it happen.

# 10 Tips for Giving Individual Attention to Students in a Large Class

**YOU'VE PROBABLY ASKED YOURSELF THIS ONE SIMPLE QUESTION BEFORE: HOW DO YOU TEACH A LARGE ESL CLASS AND GIVE EACH OF YOUR STUDENTS THE ATTENTION THEY DESERVE?**

The answer is not as simple. Obviously, the larger the class, the more difficult it is. Of course, a large group of preschoolers requires a specific set of teaching strategies and is not the same as a large group of Business English learners. But no matter how old they are or which level they're in, you need to make sure each and every one of your ESL students, at the very least, feels they are getting as much attention as they can get within a large group. It's not about spending large amounts of time with each. It's the little things that add up. And here are the top ten tips to achieve this:

## **HOW TO GIVE INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION TO STUDENTS IN A LARGE ESL CLASS: TOP 10 TIPS**

### **1 ARRIVE EARLY AND CHAT**

The five or ten minutes before class are ideal for pleasant, relaxed chat with students. Those who arrive early will get the chance to speak to you without having to compete with the rest, and you have the opportunity to get to know them better.

### **2 LOOK THEM IN THE EYE AND SMILE**

If you bestow a smile upon a student after they've raised their hand or after you see them come into the classroom, you're acknowledging them in a specific way. This is more than just a body that has entered your class and occupies a space in it, and a smile goes a long way to show them just that.

### **3 CALL THEM BY THEIR FIRST NAMES**

Try to remember their names early on and always address your students by

their first names. Instead of asking a question to the whole class in general, call on a particular student to answer it.

### **4 GIVE THEM YOUR FULL, UNDIVIDED ATTENTION**

Pair or teamwork aside, some students may get to speak directly to you for a few minutes each class. So when they do, give them your full, undivided attention. Don't write on the board or look for flashcards as you listen. Look as if you're hanging on their every word. If possible approach their desk and stand near them.

### **5 START CLASS WITH SHORT DIALOGUES, WARMERS OR ICE-BREAKERS**

Apart from the informal chat you may engage in before class begins, try to start each class with a short ice-breaker or warmer that relates to them on a personal level. On Mondays, you can start by asking them about their weekend. On any given day, ask if they saw a major sports event or awards ceremony.

### **6 REMEMBER BITS AND PIECES OF THEIR PERSONAL LIFE**

In a large class, you won't have the chance to know (and remember!) everything there is to know about every student, but try to remember a few facts that stand out about each one, i.e. if they have brothers or sisters, if they play musical instruments, participate in sports, etc. If there is a student in particular you know nothing about - find out something!

### **7 HIGHLIGHT INDIVIDUAL STRENGTHS**

Help students become aware of what they are contributing to the class and what their particular strengths are. After a written assignment, mention those you especially liked and read them out loud to the class. Do the same after a crafts assignment, a test, or any other activity. Try to rotate among students and mention something each has done particularly well.

### **8 USE THEIR PARTICULAR TASTES AND LIKES**

Young learners like certain types of TV shows, and teens like others. Adult learners may enjoy other things besides TV. Use their likes and preferences: introduce pop culture references in a class with teens or what's new in the world of business in a class with adults.

### **9 STAY ON TOP OF WHO'S ABSENT**

Whenever a student is absent, tell them what they missed and the homework they should do to catch up. If they missed something that is hard for them to understand, offer additional resources, or if possible, offer to explain a few minutes before or after class.

### **10 USE THEIR SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE**

Sometimes we're lucky enough to have a computer expert, a marketing specialist or financial analyst in class. Or a student from the country you're reading about. When you have to teach something a particular student may be an expert at, use their knowledge and ask them to explain the topic or give the class additional information.

### **IT'S NOT HARD TO MAKE STUDENTS FEEL THEY'RE GETTING INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION IN A LARGE CLASS.**

When you put the right strategies and techniques in place, they may even feel they're the only student there! Let them take turns in the spotlight, and they will never feel they're just another name in the class list.



# It's Personal! 7 Ways to Get Students to Open up and Share

*Are you married? Do you have kids? Where do you work? Where do you live? Sometimes, we try to get personal information from our students, and it sounds like an interrogation.*

Yet, this is information that is essential to our goals: we need to know as much as we can (without getting too personal) to tailor activities to their needs, to create rapport, or simply get to know them better. This is particularly challenging with beginners with limited vocabulary or who are very self-conscious about their English-speaking skills. Here are great ways to get your students to open up, without your having to give them the third degree.

## HOW TO GET YOUR STUDENTS TO OPEN UP AND SHARE

### 1 BE THE FIRST TO SHARE

How unfair is it to expect students to tell you all about themselves, without taking the time to reciprocate? If you want each of your students to tell the class a little bit about themselves, lead by example and go first. They'll be more willing to share after you've done it.

### 2 THE "YES" GAME

One student stands in front of the class, and the rest ask him/her questions with the goal of obtaining a "Yes!" This is a game that can be played with any number of structures: Simple Present ("Do you...?"), Simple Past ("Did you...?"), Present Perfect ("Have you ever...?"), etc. When one student obtains 5 affirmative responses from their classmate, they win!

### 3 READINGS THAT LEAD TO SHARING

If you want students to share their views on a specific topic, it may be a little hard to get the discussion going by asking a question up front. Try reading a short piece on the subject

first, followed by some comprehension questions, and THEN ask students to weigh in with their opinions.

### 4 THAT'S RIDICULOUS!

If students are tense about sharing, particularly on the first day of class, break the ice with some comic relief: introduce yourself (using a very funny, made up name) and with a straight face, tell them you are 82 years old. Unless you have an extremely tense class (and thankfully, that is rarely the case) some of your students should understand that it's a joke. Then you confess to the ruse and tell them your real name/age, which is a perfect lead in to your asking them theirs. The same can be done for professions, hobbies, number of languages you speak, etc. Make a false, exaggerated statement, wait till they catch on, and once they're a bit more relaxed, they'll be more willing to share their personal info!

### 5 INTERVIEW YOUR CLASSMATE

This activity is also a fantastic ice-breaker. Divide students into pairs, and have them ask each other questions about their family, background, profession, where/how long they've studied English, etc. Once all the interviews have been completed, students report on what they've learned about their partner to the rest of the class.

### 6 SHOW OFF YOUR PROFILE

Another great way to share personal info indirectly is through a visual aid. Have each student bring a personal photo to class: this will be their profile pic. Give each student a piece of construction paper or poster board and ask them to create a profile. It doesn't have to be flashy or glitzy, perhaps something as simple as this:

Photo  
Name  
Age

Nationality  
Likes  
Dislikes  
Favorite Food  
Etc.

Put up the profiles where they will be visible to all, like the bulletin board. You also have the option to have each student create a profile for a classmate, thus forcing them to ask each other questions. Don't be afraid to try this with adult learners. Business English students may create their own resume in English, which you'll keep on file.

### 7 TIME TO SHARE

What happens when students are too eager to share? This is often the case with young learners who bring their newest toy to class or interrupt the lesson to show you their most recent addition to their collection of knee scars (and of course, go into a play by play account of how they fell off their bike). While it's great that they spontaneously wish to share these things, these outbursts disrupt the class, and often lead to more students jumping out of their seats to compare injuries or share their own experience.

So, here's what you can do. Set aside a time to share, perhaps the first or last five minutes of class. Start the class by asking your students if they did anything interesting they'd like to share. On the other hand, when a student interrupts the lesson to share something, simply tell them you'll want to hear all about it, at the end of class.

### MAKE YOUR STUDENTS COMFORTABLE ABOUT SHARING AND KNOW WHEN TO DRAW THE LINE.

If someone is uncomfortable talking about a certain personal topic, respect that and never pry. **Create a fun, safe environment for your students to share information about themselves, and they will open up!**

# 15 Little Tricks to Get Your Class's Attention (and Hold It)

**BEGINNINGS ARE ALWAYS THE HARDEST. ASK ANY TEACHER WHO WALKS IN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CLASS SESSION AND FINDS CASY TEXT-MESSAGING SOMEONE, KATIE AND SAM CHATting, AND TOM SNOOZING.**

This behavior isn't limited to children, either: inattention is endemic in our fast-paced culture with so much competing media and information distracting us. However, it is necessary to get the class's attention at the beginning of the session to establish order, the plan for the day, and begin instruction. But it's not always so easy.

What can you do to get the class's attention riveted on you?

## STARTING OFF STRONG

Often students goof off because they just don't know what else to do. You can start strong every day by establishing a clear routine and expectations for starting off: that they come to attention, be in their seats, and ready to work. Hold to this routine to establish order in the class. Having a clear plan for the day also gets student's attention.

## 5 TIPS TO GET THE CLASS'S ATTENTION

### 1 CHANGE THE LEVEL AND TONE OF YOUR VOICE

Often just changing the level and tone of your voice, lowering it or raising it, will signal to the students it's time to pay attention.

### 2 USE PROPS LIKE A BELL OR WHISTLE

Better for lower level or younger learners, props like these clearly mark beginnings, endings, and other transitions within the class.

### 3 USE A VISUAL RELATED TO THE INSTRUCTION

Holding up a striking picture related to the session, such as environmental debris if the class topic is related to the environment, is sure to get all eyes on you. Don't comment on it, allow students to start the dialogue.

### 4 MAKE A STARTLING STATEMENT OR GIVE A QUOTE

Writing a surprising statement or quote related to the content on the board has a similar effect: for example "More than half of children in California speak some language other than English at home" if the topic is language acquisition.

### 5 WRITE A POP QUIZ QUESTION ON THE BOARD

Write a basic comprehension question related to the reading on the board. Students have to answer it on slips of paper and turn them in. This gets students focused right away on course material. The question can then lead to discussion after the quiz.

## 10 TIPS FOR HOLDING ATTENTION

Now you have your students' attention, holding it is another story.

### 1 RELEVANT TASKS

Know your students and relate content to them, and relate the content to the course objectives. For example, if the content is the Vietnam War, finding out what they already know about the Vietnam War and how it relates to their lives is important.

### 2 TEACH AT APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Material too hard or too difficult can result in student inattention. Check for understanding or boredom at the beginning. Then tailor the material to the class: for example, if you are teach-

ing the past tense and find students already have control over the simple past and past progressive, find out what they know about the past perfect. Or if you've given all three tenses at them, assuming it's just review, but they appear lost, focus on just one tense.

### 3 USE CHORAL CHANTS OF MATERIAL

Better for lower-level students, having students chant together key phrases or sentences from the material gets them focused on the material. This also provides practice in the rhythm and intonation of English.

### 4 MAKE PRESENTATIONS CLEAR

Use of clear charts and visuals hold students' attention and make the content clear.

### 5 INVOLVE STUDENTS IN LECTURE

Don't just lecture on the past tense with charts and board work, this will surely put everyone to sleep. During the lecture, stop to ask students about last weekend, summer, etc., to keep them involved in the content and practicing the material.

### 6 USE HUMOR

Use of humor related to the content is another attention-getter: students appreciate teachers who know how to use humor appropriately related to the material. For example, relating a brief humorous anecdote about what a bad day you had yesterday to demonstrate past tense verbs will get students' attention and lighten the mood.

### 7 ESTABLISH THE ROUTINE, TASK, AND TIME LIMIT

If students are to work in groups, for example, they should know which group they belong in, what they will

be doing, and for how long.

## **8 PLAN CAREFULLY AND FULLY; MAKE THE PLAN APPARENT TO STUDENTS**

Students will lose focus if the objectives and plan for the lesson are not clear to them. Writing what the class will be doing on the board helps keep focus.

## **9 DIVIDE TASKS INTO MANAGEABLE SUBSKILLS**

If students are going to be participating in a class debate, telling them to “Debate the issue” may result in a lot of students wandering around confused. Outline what is involved in a debate on the board and break it down: today decide the issue and our sides, tomorrow establish the roles within our teams, the next day research, and so forth.

## **10 ESTABLISH CLEAR ROLES**

In doing the debate, to continue the example, everyone within the group should have a task: either preparing some research for the debate, outlining the debate, preparing a counter-argument, etc. If everyone’s role is clear, and everyone has a job to do, this results in less web-surfing and updating Facebook profiles during class. (Yes, adults and ESL students do it, too.)

**FOLLOWING THESE GUIDELINES OF STARTING STRONG AND PLANNING FOR HOLDING THE CLASS’S ATTENTION WILL RESULT IN A LESSON THAT ALL STUDENTS WILL PARTICIPATE IN FULLY.**

# 8 Tips to Encourage Student Participation During Discussions

Getting ESL students to participate during group discussions can be one of the most difficult things an English teacher has to do. For some students, nothing will give them the push they need to share in a group. For most others, though, small changes in your leadership style and your expectations can be just what they need to open up and contribute to the conversation. Here are just a few ideas to help you get those silent students starting to share in your next group discussion.

## HOW TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT PARTICIPATION

**1** Sometimes during discussions, students may not understand what type of answer you are looking for. A simple way to encourage these students to speak is by **giving a model answer**. Answer your own question and show your students what type of answer they should give you. This gives them a grammatical structure on which to base their own ideas and removes some of the intimidation that they might otherwise feel.

**2** Make sure you are not falling victim to a common mistake among teachers, especially inexperienced ones. **Do not be afraid of silence**. The next time you lead a class discussion and no one seems to have an answer to the question, time yourself and wait a full sixty seconds before breaking the silence. Sometimes an uncomfortable silence will be just what a hesitant student needs to speak up. For other students, that small amount of time can be enough for them to gather their thoughts and formulate what they would like to say before they open their mouths. If the teacher is filling in all the conversation spaces, your students are not likely to interrupt and it may appear that they do not want to participate in the discussion.

**3** Be careful what and how much you are correcting. If you are cor-

recting pronunciation and grammar and content all at the same time, it is not surprising that your students may feel too intimidated to open up! **Focus your corrections on one issue** so your students feel as though they can speak without being overwhelmed with their mistakes. Also, encourage your students that their opinions are welcome even if they are not in agreement with yours or their fellow students'.

**4** **Don't put students on the spot.** Calling on a student who is not ready to speak will only increase his or her anxiety and will often cause that person to retreat even further into his or her shell. By refraining from putting pressure on unready students, you take away that fear factor. Though this alone may not get a quiet student talking, it will help **create an atmosphere conducive to speaking**.

**5** Make sure your students know they have freedom to fail during group discussions. This does not mean that you want your students to underperform. What it does mean is that you are not going to criticize your students for making a mistake. When students know that there is freedom to be imperfect, the intimidation level of group discussion will decrease and that in turn will free your not so perfect students to speak.

**6** **Let your students work together.** Sometimes intimidation and a fear of speaking in front of one's peers is enough to shut down students who are unsure of their speaking abilities. For those who might be more willing to talk when only one person is listening, designate one speaker for each group to share with the class and ask the remaining students to share with the designated speaker. Because you eliminate the fear of sharing in front of the entire class, your students may be more willing to participate in their discussion group.

**7**

**Think about how you are grouping your students together during discussions.** If you have some students who are more talkative than others and who also have a tendency to dominate a discussion, put them in a group together. Put all of your quietest students in a group of their own as well. By doing this, you force your more quiet students to engage in the discussion as no one else will be steering it for them.

**8** Something as simple as **where your students are sitting** in a group can contribute to how much they share during discussions as well. If you are leading, make sure your most talkative students are sitting directly to your left and right if you are in a circle. Likewise, seat your quietest student directly in front of you. If you are not leading the discussion, designate a facilitator for each group and arrange your students' seats in the same manner. The amount of eye contact that each person receives from you or the facilitator can have an influence on how much that person speaks during the discussion.

**THESE IDEAS ARE NOT GOING TO SOLVE EVERY STUDENT'S HESITANCY TO SHARE IN GROUPS, BUT THEY WILL GET YOU STARTED MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION IF YOU HAVE STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLE TO PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSIONS.**

The first step toward open discussion is to give your students the model they need and the time to formulate their own ideas for sharing. Then by creating an atmosphere that encourages discussion and not perfection, your students will be less intimidated to share in class. Finally, by strategically grouping and seating your students in their groups, you will create a physical environment in which your students will be willing to share.

Ultimately, each person's participation comes down to him or her, and you cannot force an unwilling student to participate in class. Do what you can to **make your class more open to discussion** and then **challenge your students to step up to the plate** and use the language they are trying too hard to acquire!

# Are We Having Fun Yet? Addressing the “Entertain Me” Attitude

*You've experienced it: you're in the midst of explaining some complicated grammar point, perhaps having to do with the different tenses of the passive voice, writing on the board as you're explaining various examples, and you glance back at your students — uniformly young — and see the glazing eyes, or the eye rolling, or the drifting off.*

At any rate, there isn't a pretense of attending the lecture. Maybe someone even says aloud, “This is boring.” And then you remember, “Oh, no! I forgot to entertain them!” Other than getting sarcastic with, “If you are looking for can-can's and circus acts, you have come to the wrong class,” **what can a teacher do?** A certain amount of curricula probably just isn't very interesting, by its nature. How inherently fun really is instruction in standard punctuation?

There is also the question of how fun teachers should make school. Does making every instructional moment fun set student up for inevitable disappointment? However, the “Are we having fun yet?” attitude is the one we as instructors are facing and seems to be our job to address in some way. So on this issue of the entitled “entertain me” attitude, there are several things to balance as follows.

**HOW TO** Address the ‘Entertain Me’ Attitude in Your Classroom

## 1 ADDRESS THE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Most subject matter, properly addressed — properly taught, that is, — is inherently interesting.

I hated science as an elementary school child because I associated it with reading boring, dense textbooks with impenetrable, Latinate vocabulary and indecipherable charts and graphics. That isn't really science. Science is about asking questions and seeking answers in the natural world. This is how science is taught to my daughter, and science is her favorite subject. If a number of students are complaining

about boredom, look at **how the subject matter is being taught.** Is English being treated as if it is something that exists only in textbooks? Are students being asked to spend an excessive amount of time diagramming sentences or manipulating verb tenses? If so, consider changing the instructional method and add more opportunity for student interaction and actual use of the language.

## 2 DELVE INTO CURRICULUM

Too often students are allowed to only skim the surface of knowledge. Almost anything, however, is boring if only superficially understood and interesting only once enough is known of it. One of my favorite books when I was a teenager was about a girls' soccer team—not something I normally would have been interested in, but the author gave enough detail about the sport and the team relationships to make it interesting. Find those details about the subject that will make it relevant and interesting to students.

## 3 INCLUDE A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES

The “This is boring” complaint can also be a sign that **there is not enough variety of activities within a class period.** The average learner can only attend fifteen or twenty minutes to one activity before needing a change. In just the hour or so it's taken to type this article, for example, I've had to get up twice just to stretch my legs, and my attention span is greater than most of our students'. **Plan for at least two activities during a one-hour class,** and give students a chance to get up and move around in between if the class session is longer.

## 4 ADDRESS THE ATTITUDE

If, after changing the curriculum and making instruction more student-centered, students are still complaining of boredom, it's time to face the attitude head-on. Ask the students if they can tell you specifically what is

boring and what would be less boring. **What is a class that they find less boring and why?** This can be done in an informal and anonymous questionnaire posted on the board, and students can turn in answers on a sheet of paper before they leave. Sometimes you can get valuable information: e.g., “I like Ms. Chang's class because she gives us a chance to get up and move around,” may be a sign that you have some kinesthetic learners in class, and incorporating more activities with some movement might be helpful.

## 5 PREPARE STUDENTS FOR BOREDOM

If, after addressing the curriculum and instruction, as well as student attitudes and learning needs, students still are complaining, “I'm bored,” it's time to address the whole nature of boredom. This is really an extension of addressing student attitude — specifically, the belief that boredom is something negative and something students should never be exposed to. Discuss other situations that are boring, besides class: waiting in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles or in the dentist's office comes to mind. Will the DMV or dentist feel responsible for entertaining the students? Probably not to the extent of their teachers. **What can students do in these situations to keep themselves entertained?** Then go back to the curriculum. Acknowledge some parts of it probably aren't very interesting, such as standard paragraph structure, but also put the responsibility back on the students. What can you notice about this paragraph that is interesting? How does it relate to your life?

**THE NOTION THAT TEACHERS ARE ENTERTAINERS IS ONE DEEPLY INGRAINED IN OUR CULTURE AND DIFFICULT TO ADDRESS.**

However, by addressing the curriculum and student attitude, a richer curriculum is developed, and students become independent enough to entertain themselves instead of waiting for someone else to.

# Grabbing and Holding their Interest: Innovative Uses of Technology

*I admit it: I've taught in classrooms where the Smart board sat to one side while I wrote everything out on the whiteboard - not because I don't know how to use a smart board but because none of my lessons were set up for its use.*

Other times I've gone into writing classes with great ideas about how I was going to incorporate computers that term only to find the classroom was not computer assisted.

Teachers have to go with the resources they have and incorporate them as they will fit in the curriculum. If the teacher is lucky enough of to have a smart board or computer-assisted classroom, this does not mean those tools should dominate the class nor should they be pushed into a corner. Rather available technology tools should be utilized as aids to the curriculum, not the curriculum itself.

## 10 WAYS TO INCORPORATE TECHNOLOGY AND HOLD STUDENT INTEREST

### 1 WORD PROCESSING

Many classes are equipped with a bank of desktop computers. Take advantage of this by spending the first part of class discussing a composition topic then the second part of the class session drafting the essay on a word processing program. If it's possible for separating these two parts of the class by seating pattern, such as meeting in the center of the room for discussion and then moving out to the computers for essay drafting, that really assists in the class session going smoothly as the different parts of the process are kept separate.

If there are not enough computers for all students, they can pair up and engage in collaborative writing or peer review. In addition, one member of a paired group is inevitably stronger in computer skills and can assist the other partner.

### 2 INTERNET RESEARCH

After students have typed their essays first drafts, have them do some research for the second drafts. Have them find out what some of the leading scholars (and they don't write on answers.com) say on the topic of capital punishment, for example.

Give a short lecture on credible material on the internet: I usually begin with the question "Who can put up a webpage on the Internet? Who can post on Wikipedia?" It's surprising the number of adults who believe something posted on the internet must be true and reliable.

Discuss ways to find materials from credible sources: university websites or government websites vs. homepages of unknown individuals and Wikipedia.

Also show some simple tricks of internet searches, such as the use of 'and,' as in "capital punishment and California" to narrow a search because it will only bring up those items with both capital punishment and California mentioned, 'or' to broaden the search, as in 'death penalty or capital punishment', this search will bring up items that mention either 'death penalty' or 'capital punishment,' terms which are used synonymously in the United States.

### 3 USE OF YOUTUBE'S RESOURCES

YouTube has an amazing amount of visual and audio material to contextualize your lectures. For example, instead of trying to explain Woody Allen movies to students when doing a reading on Allen, the teacher can pull up a clip from "Manhattan" or "Annie Hall," which shows much more in five minutes what a Woody Allen movie is than any 30 minute lecture I could give about New York, culture clash between ethnic and mainstream Americans, and the neuroses from living in big cities, etc.

### 4 USE OF SMART BOARD

A smart board is an interactive

whiteboard and a pretty amazing device. It can be written on (with a finger or stylus, not a dry erase marker) and the information can then be saved to a file. The instructor can demonstrate computer applications with an attached PC. Other uses are geography/map skills lessons with the built-in map application smart boards have. Finally, different software for creating stories can be used for students to write and illustrate their own stories together.

### 5 TEXT MESSAGE EACH OTHER

Most of the time we're trying to get students to not text message each other in class, of course. But there can be some value to this form of communication. Have students text message each other on the class discussion or lecture. This involves having to take the academic English of the course content and translate it into text message English, a task that requires some cognitive and linguistic skill. Then have students "translate" each other's text message into Standard English.

### 6 POWERPOINT

Most teachers have standard lectures they give over and over: I routinely give the same lecture on sentence structure with little variation semester to semester as rules on sentence structure do not change or change very slowly. Such lectures can be put on Powerpoint with visuals, - this both engages the learner more and saves resources in not having to make class sets of the same handout each term.

Another use is to give a college lecture with Powerpoint on an "academic" topic you know well, such as diabetes or the causes and effects of WWII. Then have students create their own Powerpoint lectures on topics they have expertise in to give to the class. This taps into all language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They can work in teams if desired and research their topics as needed.

## 7 POST ON BLOGS

Set up a blog on the class website. Students can blog about what they're reading or discussing in class. Require students to make a certain number of relevant posts per day or week on the blog in standard academic English.

## 8 USE OF FACEBOOK/SOCIAL NETWORKING

For group work students are doing, such as peer review or a project they are completing, they can take out Facebook accounts if they don't have them already, "friend" each other, and carry on a dialogue about their work.

## 9 CHAT ROOMS

Chat rooms can work as off campus "office hours." I typically tell students I'll be available for one hour a week in the class chatroom if they have any questions or want to discuss the class. Sometimes a small group of students turn up, and this can lead to some lively discussion on class issues.

## 10 WRITING SITES

Introduce students to writer's sites like Writer's Digest sponsored Fanstory.com, where for a small fee they can log on to read and review other writers' work, post their own, and enter contests. Belonging to a writing community helps enormously with the identity as a writer.

**NOT ALL OF THESE SUGGESTIONS WILL NECESSARILY PROVE USEFUL TO EACH TEACHER'S SPECIFIC SITUATION, BUT THAT IS FINE.**

The point is to take the technology available and incorporate it into your course content in a way that suits your individual class.

# How to Encourage Student Participation

## ENCOURAGING STUDENT PARTICIPATION CAN BE DIFFICULT.

Students who generally perform well will be more willing to volunteer and more confident when completing exercises whereas students who struggle in the classroom will be more reluctant to do these things. As a teacher there are many ways you can encourage all your students to participate in activities.

## HOW TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT PARTICIPATION

### 1 CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Ensuring that you maintain a constructive classroom environment will help immensely. It is important that students not feel like they will be laughed at or given negative feedback. Try to provide students with positive criticism as opposed to reinforcing the fact that they have made a mistake or performed poorly. Making mistakes is simply part of the learning process and students that make mistakes will give you a good idea of what you need to focus on because there are probably other students in your class that have the same questions or misunderstandings.

### 2 ACTIVITIES FOR ALL TYPES OF LEARNERS

Planning exercises that appeal to different types of learners is an essential part of getting all your students to participate. Perhaps some students who perform well on tests are quite shy while students who perform poorly on tests are natural performers and enjoy role play activities. Giving a range of activities that target visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners will increase student participation. The more variety there is in your lessons, the more your students will gain from them. Having a combination of worksheets, role-plays, games, listening exercises, etc. will keep students en-

gaged and provide them with plenty of practice.

### 3 MOTIVATION MATTERS!

In group activities making groups or teams and having races often gets students motivated. Competition will drive students to not only be the best performing group but also work hard to not let down their teammates. These activities should still be conducted in an encouraging and friendly environment so as to not cause your students lots of stress. It is important to have students take turns when working in groups so that all students are required to participate. While working as a group to answer a question is great, there should be a set order that determines which student presents the answer to the class at any given point in the activity. By having students form groups in a variety of ways, you can ensure that students are placed in different groups throughout the course and thus no serious rivalry can take root between groups of students. Sometimes simply the satisfaction of winning is not enough to motivate students and then just as you would for motivating students at the individual level, prizes or points may help.

### 4 INDIVIDUAL LEVEL INCENTIVES

At the individual level incentives such as points or, if acceptable on occasion, some sort of prize may lead students to participate more fully in activities. Participation should always be kept in mind when grading students however besides reminding students that they are graded on participation, it can be challenging for both you and them to keep a record of it. A points system where students acquire stickers or stamps throughout the semester by volunteering to answer questions or doing exceptional work in class would be a good idea. Simply tell students that they need maybe ten points to get one hundred percent for their participation grade in a semes-

ter and that additional points could be considered extra credit. If a student has a little card to collect these stickers or stamps, it will serve as a visual reminder throughout the term of how well they are doing in reaching the target number and will make calculating a student's overall participation much easier for you as well. Towards the end of the term it is a good idea to have a lesson where students place their cards on their desks so that you can give students who have not actively participated much throughout the semester special opportunities to raise their score somewhat as opposed to giving very active students too many extra credit points.

**STUDENTS NEED TO PRACTICE SPEAKING ENGLISH TO IMPROVE SO IT IS IN THEIR BEST INTEREST TO PARTICIPATE FULLY DURING THEIR LESSONS. YOU CAN PLAN LESSONS ACCORDINGLY AND START INCENTIVE PROGRAMS IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TRY THEIR BEST AND SPEAK MORE OFTEN IN CLASS.**



# The 10 Best Ways to Increase Teenage Student Motivation

*Ah, the joys of teaching! Young learners are so full of energy that most activities you propose are met with loads of enthusiasm. Adult learners are focused on meeting their language goals and have a wealth of skills and knowledge to contribute to the class.*

However, things are not as simple with teens. Most are very clever and insightful kids, but this is not exactly the most talkative age group. Have you ever faced a class full of blank stares where most of the replies you hear are “Yes”, “No”, or “It depends”? Have you ever felt frustrated by their lack of interest?

Here are some strategies that should get your teens a bit more motivated.

## HOW TO MOTIVATE ESL STUDENTS

### 1 USE AS MANY REFERENCES TO POP CULTURE AS YOU CAN

Consider your teens' interests. Imagine you want to discuss last week's events to practice the past simple tense. Will they be more interested in what President Obama did last week, or which outrageous outfit Lady Gaga wore to an awards show? If you're not willing to discuss Eminem's latest album, or any of the *Twilight* books or films, then you won't connect with your teen students.

### 2 GIVE THEM A LITTLE FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Little kids like to compete, and teens are no different. Whether they play sports or games on the Wii, they always try to out best each other. Why not introduce some friendly competition into the ESL classroom? Games are easy ways to do this, but you can also have them compete in any activity.

- Give them 60 seconds to write down as many words as they can

related to a topic, like “clothes” or “foods”.

- Tell them that whoever finishes a written exercise first or has the most correct answers, gets to choose a video to watch or a song to listen to in class.

### 3 CATER TO THEIR SKILLS AND EXPLOIT THEIR TALENTS

Most teens are talented at one thing or another. Take your time to get to know them and discover what these talents are.

- Students who are artistically-inclined may draw pictures, sketches or cartoons of a story you read out loud to the class.
- Do you have a student who plays the guitar? Ask him or her to bring it to class and play a song while the class sings the lyrics in English.

### 4 USE PEN PALS TO MOTIVATE WRITING

If your students are not enthused about writing assignments, give them pen pals to write to. At ESL Teachers Board, or any other message board for ESL teachers, you can post a request for pen pals for your students, and find another teacher with whom you can trade email addresses. Writing to pen pals is a great introduction to what they may have to master later in life: business emails.

### 5 MAKE READING AGE APPROPRIATE

To get students excited about a reading assignment, make sure you choose material that will pique their interest. Naturally, books or stories about teens are sure to work, but you can also include celebrity biographies, anything sports-related, or any topic that may interest them, but is also up to their reading level.

### 6 PLAY SONGS TO IMPROVE LISTENING COMPREHENSION

If you play any of the audio that typically comes with course materials, your teens will most likely tune out and not hear a word. The best way to motivate them to listen is by playing songs. But you should also choose songs they like, or can relate to.

- A worksheet for *Photograph* by *Nickelback* can provide a great warm up exercise and a post-listening activity.
- Or, listen to *So Sick* by *Ne-Yo* and ask your students to complete the tasks set forth in the worksheet.

### 7 HAVE VIDEO LESSONS

Videos have great potential in the ESL class. Thanks to recent advances in technology, we no longer need to have a TV and DVD player in the classroom to teach a video lesson. A laptop will do for a small class, and a speedy Internet connection is great, but not entirely necessary, as you can have video files already downloaded to your computer. To keep teens focused on the task, choose short interviews, movie trailers, music videos, or how to videos on YouTube.

### 8 INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY INTO THE CLASSROOM

In the previous point, we mention how easy it is to show videos on a laptop, but you can integrate technology in so many other ways. **Most teens have excellent Web surfing skills, so why not assign them a WebQuest?**

A WebQuest is an online, inquiry-based activity where students are required to search for specific information within links provided by the teacher, and then produce a report or a PowerPoint presentation. Here are some great examples of WebQuests for teens: <http://www.nelliemuller.com/task2.htm>, but you can also

design your own to suit your students' level.

establish rapport.

## 9 PLAY GAMES

ESL games motivate any learner whether they are 5 or 50 years old. But with teens, it's important to choose games that will **challenge them, give them the right competitive feel, and help them effectively practice** an ESL item. A guessing game or any type of quiz show game should get them motivated.

- Try this Passive Voice Quiz Game (<http://busyteacher.org/1638-passives.html>), or design your own with similar categories.
- The 6 Clues Guessing Game (<http://busyteacher.org/1953-6-clues.html>) will have your students competing to see who guesses right with the least amount of clues.
- Need another example of a great game to practice grammar? Download the Wh- Questions Game at <http://busyteacher.org/2752-grammar-game-wh-questions.html>.

ONCE YOU CONNECT WITH THEM, YOU WON'T FIND ANY MORE BLANK STARES. YOU'LL SEE A ROOM FULL OF EAGER, SMILING FACES!

## 10 USE REALIA IN THE CLASSROOM

The use of real life objects is also a great way to motivate students of all ages. But it is particularly effective with teens who are already lacking in enthusiasm.

- **Giving directions:** Choose places that teens frequently visit like malls, concert venues, or sports stadiums. Use anything from real city maps to brochures of these locations to practice giving directions.
- **Tell me about yourself:** Instead of just telling the class about themselves, ask your teens to bring photos, as well as some of their favorite things, like books, CDs, a skateboard, or anything that represents them.

Make sure that at the beginning of the course you discuss what their learning goals are. They may not have thought of this earlier, but they may come to realize that they need English to surf the Internet, understand their favorite band's songs, or chat with foreign friends. And talking about the things that interest teens is a great way to

# How to Build a Learning Community in 6 Simple Steps

*Occasionally in visiting another teacher's classroom, I'll be impressed by the order: everyone is on task, respectful, and knows what to do.*

If they don't, another classmate will help without being asked. They share information with each other freely. They form groups easily without being prodded and assume roles within the group without being told what to do. In such a classroom, students also typically, when they get papers back, check their answers and grades against their peers' or discuss them with the teacher without too much drama and a seeming focus on the work itself, not the grade. They share their experiences with the teacher and classmates, who seem genuinely interested.

So this may seem like a class straight from heaven, created more from divine, rather than teacher, intervention. On the contrary, however, it reflects the teacher's careful craftsmanship over the term to create a learning community, a community in which everyone teaches and learns in an environment that is safe for making mistakes. So how can a teacher create a learning community?

## 1 THINK LONG-TERM AND BIG. ACT IN THE SHORT TERM AND SMALL.

To achieve a strong learning community, teachers must have a vision of the kind of class they want: students working, learning, and teaching in harmony. However, we can't act in the long-term: we can really only act in the short term and in small incremental steps of first getting students used to working in groups, teaching procedures for group work, and developing a safe environment, and so forth. However, the vision will collapse if not put into practice in a series of small steps in the present.

## 2 INTERACTIVE, GROUP-ORIENTED EXERCISES

The first step in developing a learning community is in getting students used to the entire notion of community, which implies a group, rather than individual process. So the first couple of weeks

should be devoted to having students work in various groupings in which they share ideas on a reading, for example, and begin to learn polite ways to advance an opinion or disagree with another person's.

## 3 PROCEDURES FOR GROUP WORK

Because students are working in groups, they need to learn some of the logistics of group work, such as how to select group members, how to divide up roles of leader, recorder, and materials gatherer, and how to get in and out of groups with minimal disruption. The teacher may have to take a couple of weeks teaching these procedures before students will be able to practice them on their own. It is very rewarding when students go from not quite knowing what to do at the beginning of the semester to coming into class, finding partners, setting up their groups, and getting to work with minimal assistance from the teacher. This is the beginning of the learning community, when students are able to function in a group, but it is not quite developed yet—students may be functioning, but for it to be a true learning community, they must thrive.

## 4 SAFE ENVIRONMENT: POLICIES FOR GROUP WORK

A safe environment is also very important to a true learning community. This is an environment where the students feel free to share ideas without being ridiculed—questioned, certainly, but in a respectful manner. This can be achieved by discussing the elements of a safe learning environment, perhaps developing with the students the “rules of engagement,” as I call them, for working in groups. The teacher should also always model respectful, attentive behavior when students are speaking. Even if the student is not particularly polite—interrupting a lecture, for example, to talk off topic—the teacher remaining calm and courteous sends a powerful message of how students should treat each other. Once a safe environment is achieved, the foundation for a learning community is laid.

## 5 FOCUS ON BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

For a learning community to thrive, there must be a focus on the collective. However, the individual student's needs and contributions within that community must also be recognized, or the community dies, as it is made up of individuals. So there must be a balance in focusing not only on group processes and work but also on the individual contributions within that group. This can be done by rewarding both group and individual efforts, providing opportunities for individual students to present before the class as well as in groups, and recognizing both individual ideas and work and group processes and endeavors.

## 6 ALLOW STUDENTS TO DEVELOP AND SHOWCASE EXPERTISE

Finally, students should be allowed as both individuals and group members to showcase the expertise. For example, individual students can demonstrate their expertise all semester long, in class sessions devoted to individual students teaching their peers content they are experts in—how to plant and tend a garden, for example, or how to repair a bicycle. As a group students will also teach other groups their particular interpretation of a reading, for example, or the recommendations they have crafted on some social issue like same-sex marriage. The teacher also becomes a learner here as he learns about students' areas of expertise and perspectives. It is at this time the learning community is really formed because at this point everyone is a learner and everyone is a teacher.

**FORMING A TRUE LEARNING COMMUNITY IS NOT AN EASY PROCESS NOR DOES IT HAPPEN OVERNIGHT OR “NATURALLY.”** It requires careful planning and craft on the part of the instructor and engagement on the part of the students. However, by starting small, teaching students the process of a learning community through group work, and creating a safe environment for everyone to thrive, a true learning community, where everyone teaches and learns, can be achieved.

# Improving Student Relations in Your Classroom

Almost every ESL teacher has experienced it: you walk in the first day, and find a sort of Balkanization going on in your class already, the students divided into two camps, the Soviet students on one side, for example, and the Asian students on the other.

They choose to sit with their friends and family, it seems, but at the same time they aren't interacting much with anyone outside of their tight-knit group. As the semester progresses, the situation does not get any better: while not openly hostile to each other, the two groups also don't talk much—which also interferes with their language learning, as English is generally not being used if students work within their own cultural groups. When you suggest and even direct students to work outside of their groups, they are resistant.

This is obviously not an ideal situation for a number of, namely because of the decreased use of English and because respect of and integration of cultural groups is an important value, as segregation was rejected in the United States many years ago. In addition, broadened world perspective does occur with learning about other cultural groups and their values and beliefs. I am a different and better person for having learned something about Mexican culture, for example, or African American culture. For these reasons, students should be nudged into leaving their own cultural groups and venturing into others, at least during the time of the class session.

## METHODS TO DEVELOP RELATIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT CULTURAL GROUPS

### 1 ACKNOWLEDGE THE UNKNOWN IS SCARY

Many of us have had the experience of attending an integrated high school where the lunch room was anything but—all the white kids, African American, and Latin kids in separate corners, for example. Would you go sit at another group's table? Probably not. Was it because of any inherent dislike of those

kids? Again, probably not—it was just that the act would seem strange. And it was intimidating. So understand how difficult this might be for your students, even if you don't explicitly discuss it during class.

### 2 READINGS OR MOVIES

Numerous stories and films touch the topic of cross-cultural friendship: a fairly recent one I can think of is Clint Eastwood's "Gran Torino," in which the Eastwood character, a grumpy old guy not at all happy about the Hmong family who has moved in next door, slowly, through a series of shared experiences, begins to see them more as family than his own daughter and grandchildren. Showing a movie like this or reading a short story on the topic can lead to discussions on the true nature of family and friendship and how important shared culture really is to that definition.

### 3 CONDUCT A "ROUNDTABLE"

Have students sit in a circle and all share one important thing about themselves—a hobby, interest, experience, etc. Students are likely to find shared interests and experiences across groups and might start a conversation right there.

### 4 PARTIES

Class parties, while having the danger of falling flat or seeming "lame," are also a good way, if planned and conducted properly, for students to get to know each other aside from as students. Besides refreshments, having some activities planned is important. More than one student usually plays an instrument and is willing to provide music, and having conversational topics prepared in advance is also important so the main goal—getting students to talk to each other—is accomplished.

### 5 CONDUCT SURVEYS

Students must gather information about different students in the class: what percentage likes different types of music, for example, which demands each student to talk to everyone. After they can pool results to come up with some statistics for the room. In the course of doing

this, they are interacting with and learning about each other.

### 6 SMALL GROUPS OR PAIR-WORK ACROSS CULTURES

Once students have completed some of the less threatening tasks of surveys and large group sharing, they are ready to move on to more complex groupings. Have students complete relatively simple tasks in pairs or small groups, such as sharing ideas about a reading, and do this in culturally mixed groups. In this way, students will also be forced to use English, their only common language.

### 7 LARGER GROUPS OR PROJECTS

Now that students have completed some of the simpler group tasks, they are ready to move on to large group, extended projects, such as a small research project and presentation on the some part of U.S. culture or history, like the history of the Gold Rush, important to my area of Sacramento, California. Within the group, goals can be laid out, such as what the final presentation will look like—PowerPoint? Film?—the roles within the group, such as leader and recorder, and the timeline for the project. Group projects are especially powerful in producing quality work and forming relations within the class, as students begin to rely on each other for the completion of the project, recognizing each other's individual strengths and weaknesses beyond culture and language.

### ADMITTEDLY, BREAKING AWAY FROM ONE'S OWN GROUP AND VENTURING INTO THE UNKNOWN IS SCARY.

However, in a multicultural society it is a necessary and rewarding process, and there are methods to accomplish integration in a classroom through careful scaffolding of activities such as discussion of multicultural friendship, group discussion and sharing, parties, and projects so that, for the duration of the class, at least, students will work with members of other groups. However, the process of cross-cultural learning shows that once it has begun, it continues—once students take that first step, they continue moving forward in making cross-cultural friendships beyond the classroom.

# Entitled Behavior in Students, Its Source, and Addressing It

**ANYONE WHO HAD BEEN TEACHING FOR AWHILE HAS EXPERIENCED IT. ONE OF YOUR STUDENTS SHUFFLES UP TO YOUR DESK AND CLAIMS TO BE UNHAPPY WITH HIS GRADE.**

Often there is an excuse — sick uncle, dead grandmother, generic “family emergency.” That apparently behind him, however, he’s become uneasily aware of his grade. And since this wasn’t his fault, he wonders if he can do some kind of “make up” work. Often this is a weak student, but sometimes it’s also a strong student, who wants to see her “B” grade changed to an “A.” While you may sympathize with the student’s desire — after all, who wouldn’t want a higher grade than earned? — teachers should refuse these requests if for no other reason than fairness to the students who have been coming regularly. This is just one example of “entitled” student behavior that has become common in our culture.

**WHAT ARE SOME ENTITLED STUDENT BEHAVIORS AND THEIR SOURCES?**

## **1 TAKING TIME OFF; ALTERING THE SCHEDULE IN OTHER WAYS**

This is a major one: students are notorious for coming late, leaving early, and not attending. More immature students in particular have trouble understanding that they must fit college into their lives, not expect the college to revolve around their lives. These attitudes probably stem from not understanding the nature of college work or adult life in general and in seeing the world revolving around their own individual needs.

## **2 MODIFICATION OF WORK SCHEDULE OR CONTENT**

Similarly, besides the schedule, students sometimes expect the class work schedule, such as due dates of major papers and tests also be modi-

fied for their needs. They can also sometimes expect modification of content that they find “boring” or non-essential to life in general.

## **3 EXPECTING/NEGOTIATING A HIGHER GRADE THAN EARNED**

Another common behavior that students demonstrate is to try to negotiate a higher grade, often citing their “hard work.” While of course effort matters, so does a certain level of skill and proficiency at the college level. How then can one diplomatically address the student wanting to raise her grade without the student complaining to the dean (as can happen, especially with higher achieving students)? This can be done by addressing a few key issues with the student:

- **Communication (or Lack Thereof):** It was the student’s responsibility to approach you when she first began to see her grade falling due to her family or health crisis or other concerns. Teachers cannot “read” every student’s individual needs and concerns, - adults are expected to speak up for themselves.
- **Fairness to the Other Students:** Other students in the class have been laboring away, often through difficult circumstances of their own. This difference in commitment should be reflected in grades.
- **Effective Curriculum:** The curriculum and activities for most college classes, including ESL classes, has been designed with care and forethought as to the assignments and how they will build on each other, articulate with other classes, and ultimately benefit the student. Any “make up” work a teacher, however good, can design “on the fly” and that the student will undoubtedly complete in a rush will not be the same quality and ultimately will not benefit the student.

**SUGGESTIONS TO ADDRESS ENTITLED STUDENT BEHAVIOR**

Any time you reject someone’s proposal, no matter how wrongheaded, such as completing a bunch of “make up” work instead of the regular curriculum, a few reasonable solutions should be made to leave everyone at least partially satisfied. Here are a few:

## **1 COMPLETE KEY COMPONENTS IN THE REGULAR CURRICULUM**

Not only does this save you the headache of designing an alternate curriculum for the student and figuring out how to assess it, but it also assures that the student can really benefit as much as possible from the class, given her lack of involvement. Pick out a few key assignments that the students can reasonably complete in the remaining time, decide on the highest grade the student can earn for this modified curriculum — you may decide no higher than a “B” or “C,” for example. Don’t be too disappointed if the student, given her history, fails to complete the work at all. You are simply doing your best to help her: she has to participate in those efforts on her behalf.

## **2 TEAM UP WITH A CLASSMATE AND SHARE NOTES; JOIN A STUDY GROUP. SEEK COLLEGE RESOURCES IN TUTORING**

One of the reasons a student might fall into such a dilemma as not having completed most of the coursework by the end of the semester is that he might have no real idea of what it is to be a college student and the work habits that it requires. The difference between commitment and work habits needed for high school and college in the U.S. is notoriously large. Meeting regularly with a tutor or study group can implicitly model and explicitly

teach the behaviors need to succeed at the college level.

### **3 PORTFOLIOS**

In some classes, such as writing classes, a portfolio might be an appropriate means to alternate curriculum and assessment. In the portfolio, the student keeps a selection of representative work over a period of time to demonstrate progress. This kind of assessment based on individual progress rather than outside standards can benefit some students.

### **4 ADVISE THE STUDENT APPROPRIATELY**

It's entirely possible that despite your best efforts, the "Johnny–Come–Lately" student will just not be able to produce adequate work by the end of the term, given the late involvement in the course. Be prepared to talk to the student about this and various alternatives: repeating the course the following semester or in the summer, taking it at a local community college, and so forth. There a number of ways a student can remedy a situation like this once he comes to terms with it.

### **5 TURN IT BACK ON THE STUDENT**

Another method is asking the student what grade he thinks he deserves or what he should study in the class. Often he'll find he can't really say and realizes that perhaps the teacher can make the best decisions.

**IT ISN'T EASY DEALING WITH THE STUDENT WHO SEES A CERTAIN GRADEPOINT AVERAGE AS HER BIRTHRIGHT. HOWEVER, BY ADVISING THE STUDENT APPROPRIATELY, OFFERING SUGGESTIONS, AND ACTIVELY LISTENING, STUDENT SATISFACTION AND ACHIEVEMENT CAN BE REACHED.**

# Effectively Varying Groups Throughout a Class Session

**ANY TEACHER KNOWS THAT THERE ARE FEW THINGS MORE BORING AND DEADLY TO A CLASS THAN A LOT OF TEACHER FRONTED ACTIVITIES WITH STUDENTS SITTING IN NEAT ROWS, SILENT, NOT CAUSING ANY TROUBLE, BUT NOT INTERACTING EITHER WITH THE TEACHER OR EACH OTHER.**

It's difficult to know under these circumstances how much students are even absorbing. So sometimes teachers try putting students in groups, but this also has limitations as students often just talk off topic or goof off. Or even if the teacher has carefully trained students to work in groups productively, or work alone productively, she'll still get complaints that the class is "boring" or that "we always do the same thing" because perhaps the teacher has only learned one kind of grouping or has a particular preference for grouping strategies. The trick then seems to be not only teaching students how to function in a variety of groupings, but also to vary types of groups across a course and within a class session.

## TRAINING STUDENTS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPINGS

### 1 START OF SIMPLE

A complex skill like working in groups is learned gradually, over a period of time, rather than in one chunk in a day. Therefore it's best to start off simple: having students work in pairs to read to each other, peer review each other's compositions, or have a conversation is good start to getting them used to working with other students, which they may not have done before. In addition, if students work with a different partner each session, then they will start to know their classmates.

### 2 PROGRESS TO MORE COMPLEX GROUPINGS

Once students are working in pairs, more complex groupings can be

learned: working in groups of three or four on some small task such as brainstorming ideas for an essay or collecting information for a survey on student opinions by getting up and walking around.

### 3 TEACH STUDENTS TO FUNCTION IN A VARIETY OF ROLES

One of the most complicated group settings, to be saved till the end of the semester, is working in a team on a major project such as a research paper. Team roles should be assigned: a leader to organize people and tasks, a researcher - to gather information, a resource manager - to collect and bring materials to each meeting, secretary - to record information, and so on.

The teacher might consider creating, or having students create, large posters describing each role and its functions for quick referral. By teaching students the functions of these roles and rotating the roles on a regular basis, by the end of the semester students will have learned all of the roles and can move with ease between being the group leader one day to the recorder the next.

### 4 TEACH STUDENTS TO FUNCTION INDEPENDENTLY IN GROUPS

It may seem paradoxical, but one of the best ways to teach independence in students is for them to work in groups. In groups, the teacher's role of managing the class is deemphasized and is taken over by the group members. The group has to figure out how to successfully complete the task, and then individual students have to work independently for the group good.

Once students have learned to work in groups, they often just come into class, join their group, assign roles, and figure out what to do, with little teacher input.

## VARYING GROUPING TYPES EFFECTIVELY

### 1 FIRST TEACH STUDENTS THE DIFFERENT GROUPINGS

The first step to varying groups effectively is to expose students to a variety of groupings: pairwork, small groups of three or four, "survey" groups in which individual students move around the room, gathering information and interacting with each other, and larger group long-term group projects such as research papers. Once these different groupings have been learned by students they can move on to combining them.

These different groupings should be taught starting with the simpler tasks, such as with a partner answering a question sheet on a reading to progress to more complex groupings and tasks, such as gathering different information from different classmates.

### 2 TEACH FOR THE APPROPRIATE SITUATION

Teachers should not just put students in groups just for the sake of the groupwork: rather, the kind of group should have a purpose and match the instructional task.

Some groupings lend themselves better to specific tasks: conversation and pronunciation practice lend themselves best to pair work, for example, while arriving at a group consensus is better suited for a small group. If the wrong grouping is chosen — a large group, for example, to complete a relatively easy task, pairwork - to discuss a controversial issue — it can seem contrived, at best, or confusing, at worse, as the large group tries to figure out what to do with a simple dialogue best suited to a pair or the pair finds itself overwhelmed in choosing topics to discuss on the issue.

### 3 TEACH EASY METHODS TO TRANSITION BETWEEN GROUPINGS

One of the important elements of a well-run classroom in general is smooth transitions between activities: this is especially true when working in groups, when, if not managed correctly, the class can become nonproductive and chaotic. Teach students to move from pairwork to small groups of four, for example, by simply turning their chairs around and joining another pair, or have students choose a partner from their large group to discuss the material in a pair. A variety of different groupings throughout the session will help keep student interested and learning.

**TEACHING GROUP WORK IS DEFINITELY A CHALLENGE, BUT THE PAY OFF IN TERMS OF INCREASED STUDENT INTERACTION, LEARNING, AND INDEPENDENCE OUTWEIGHS THE DIFFICULTY.**

Learning historically has occurred in social settings rather than isolation because we are social creatures by nature. The benefits in student growth in social skills, independent functioning, and the self worth that comes from being part of a group outweigh the occasional disruption that can occur from incorporating different groupings in the class.



# When Things Go Awry: Problem-Solving on Your Feet

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

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

## HOW TO: PROBLEM-SOLVING ON YOUR FEET

### 1 STAY COOL

It may seem obvious, but when a situation goes wrong in the classroom, the number one element that will serve you best is to simply, **stay cool**. Sometimes this is easier said than done. Problems that arise in the classroom can be embarrassing, mentally taxing, and downright excruciating. If you stay calm though, it will only help you to see the picture in front of you clearly, and also discover what the solution is. For example, if an activity is not going according to plan and is failing the objectives you had set for it, if you were to get worked up, you may just add to the problem. With a clear head, look at what the students are doing, and then examine what you assigned them to do. If the two don't come close to matching, the next thing to do is to find the disconnect. Perhaps students weren't clear on their directives, or they took it upon themselves to change the activity once they got into it. Don't get upset with the class, but definitely intervene and rectify the situation.

### 2 USE HUMOR

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

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

### 3 BE PREPARED

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

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

If you need to abandon an activity, do it in a way that the students will respect. Either admit that it didn't

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

### 4 BE FLEXIBLE

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

### 5 ASK FOR HELP

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

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

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

# How to Turn a Disaster ESL Lesson into a Triumph

*It happens to even the best teachers: a well thought out, carefully planned lesson goes horribly wrong and you are stuck in the middle of class with confused, frustrated, and disengaged learners.*

Students can react to material in different ways than you anticipated and new activities may take less time, be more challenging, or not work out quite the way you expected. **Never continue following a lesson plan that is failing.** This will only waste everyone's time and students will not get the most out of their lesson with you. It is hard to think of new ideas and come up with an alternate plan during a lesson but this is the best course of action.

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

### 1 WHAT WENT WRONG?

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

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

If an activity did not work out the way you planned or finished earlier than expected, you can **stall a little by asking students to demonstrate their knowledge of the material** while you decide what to do next. These are two very common occurrences especially for new teachers who assume that students clearly understand material after just a short introduction and are

still learning about student behavior, lesson plans, and time management.

### 2 CHANGE COURSE

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

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

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

### 3 END ON A HIGH NOTE

Finish the class with a short, fun activity that you know students enjoy. This can be a familiar **warm up** activity like ESL Shiritori or an exercise like Crisscross which can be adapted to any topic. Your lesson can then **end on a positive note** and this will be the most recent memory students have of your class when they walk out your door for the day. **Students will forgive failed activities from time to time if you do not force them to suffer through them for long and come back strong after realizing**

**your mistake.**

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

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

# 7 Ways to Get through to Your “Unreachable” Students

We’ve all had the “unreachable” student who doesn’t seem quite “there,” mentally or physically. He sits in the back of the room, doesn’t respond to questions, doesn’t interact with the teacher or other students, often doesn’t turn in work, and leaves right after class without saying anything to anyone. He avoids eye contact and speaks in a whisper, when he speaks at all. What is going on with this student? He may just be terminally shy, or there may be drug or alcohol abuse involved, or he may have a physical or mental health problem. Whatever its source, what are some ways to deal with the problem?

## HOW TO GET THROUGH TO YOUR “UNREACHABLE” STUDENTS

### 1 INCLUDE THE STUDENT

As much as possible, persist in drawing the student into the class: call on her, try to get her to at least sit in on a group discussion, ask for her opinion. Treat the student as if she is “there,” in other words, even though her actions might say otherwise.

### 2 TALK TO THE STUDENT

Make it nonconfrontational. Ask her about her life and interests. You might find a key interest – a shared interest in books, film, or cars, for example — that can help you relate to the student and share with her, throughout the term, even if the conversations seem one-sided. However, if the annoying teacher brings up a new film or movie enough times before or after class to Ms. Unreachable, she will eventually be forced to respond, especially if you bring in a book to lend her.

### 3 FIND A BUDDY OR MENTOR

Most students can by themselves develop relationships in class that in part keep them coming to class, but the “unreachable” student may need some encouragement in this. With group or pair work, try to set this student up with the same person or people so that a relationship can form. Or speak to a

student who seems tolerant and non-judgmental and see if he will work with the student, serving as a mentor. One of the key elements to success in a class is developing relationships within that class, and this is true even for “unreachable” students who mostly seem as if they don’t want anything to do with the other students. It’s probably not the case, and the not caring or “loner” attitude is mostly a defense mechanism against the possibility of being hurt and also a cover for poor social skills and lack of ability to relate to others.

### 4 TALK TO HIM AGAIN

If your first attempt didn’t work, talk to the student a little more firmly. Ask what is going on, if he feels well, if he is having any problems. You might consider that if the student continues to act withdrawn and does not respond to any of your attempts to reach him, that there might be an underlying physical or psychological issue involved and try talking to him again—gently, very gently—about perhaps checking in at the student health center for evaluation. It’s a sensitive issue that teachers aren’t supposed to involve themselves in much, but you may be the student’s only available advocate. And if a student is showing some of the signs of chronic depression, someone needs to act.

### 5 ENCOURAGE JOURNAL WRITING

Have the withdrawn student—or all of your students, so she won’t feel singled out—keep a journal to record responses to the class material. The student may then “open up” on paper in a way she wouldn’t have face-to-face, and you might find out some material that is useful in understanding the student—what is going on in her home life, for example, or a past or present learning or health concern that might be at the root of the behavior.

### 6 SET UP PERMANENT OR SEMI-PERMANENT GROUPS

What many “unreachable” students—as well as students in general—long for is belonging. This is a broader human

need, of course, and exactly what tends to get lost at large colleges or even high schools, where students rush from fifty-minute class to class, don’t get to know their classmates, and where the instructors might not even know students’ names. My fondest memories of class was where some community was formed. For example, a favorite graduate course was in educational law, not something that would ordinarily be a favorite topic, but the instructor set up the class so that it became a community, where we researched and presented court cases together and in the process learned about each other and knew each other’s strengths and weaknesses. This is a community, and it is precisely what many students, like “unreachable” students, need to draw them into campus life and away from the alienation they are obviously feeling.

### 7 GET OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

Many people feel “stifled” in the confines of a classroom, “unreachable” and less troubled students alike. So getting students away occasionally from an atmosphere of stale air, old books, and chalk dust can be beneficial, even if it’s for a walk across campus to the student union for a cup of coffee shared on the steps. Here students tend to drop their “class selves” and relax, engaging in more authentic interaction, such as laughing and joking, and that may be the case for the unreachable student as well. If this works, other such impromptu outings can be planned: e.g. “Take a walk around campus, note what you see, as many details as possible. Come back and write a paragraph about it.”

**ONLY ONE OR TWO CASES A YEAR, AT THE MOST, OF “UNREACHABLE” STUDENTS TURN OUT TO BE ANYTHING MORE SERIOUS THAN AN INTROVERTED STUDENT MAKING A DIFFICULT TRANSITION TO COLLEGE, THANKFULLY.** With a few steps such as including the student, getting to know her, setting up mentors, engaging in journal writing, and creating a community, the unreachable student can be reached and transformed into a well-adjusted college student.

# 6 Conversations to Have with “Difficult” Students

**MOST OF US HATE THOSE DREADED “WE NEED TO TALK” CONVERSATIONS, HAVING BEEN ON BOTH THE TALKING AND LISTENING SIDES.**

They are, however, sometimes necessary when dealing with unacceptable difficulties generated by one individual. This is true for the classroom as in other walks of life: there are the students who seem to have and cause more than their share of difficulties whether it be academic, interpersonal, commitment, etc. Ignoring the problem does not work, nor does sending the student subtle messages through body language that you are displeased with her behavior. What does work is a quiet and calm conversation. What I find helpful is having a set conversation for specific problems. This works because there are a limited set of student difficulties that take up most of our time, and if I have a set conversation in mind, a routine, I’m less likely to get derailed by an emotional response from the student or taken off on a tangent on an issue of less importance.

## 6 CONVERSATIONS FOR DIFFICULT STUDENTS

### 1 “ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?” (ODD BEHAVIOR)

Sometimes students display such bizarre behavior — sitting by themselves and glowering, openly hostile responses to peers and the instructor -- that it warrants investigation. This is especially true if it’s a sudden change from the student’s past behavior in class. A nonconfrontational inquiry about the student’s well-being after class might be in order and even appreciated. You might find he has been under extreme stress, for example, due to personal or academic difficulties. Listening to the student and suggesting some constructive ways to address his problems can help him get through the difficult period.

### 2 “WHAT’S BEEN GOING ON?” (ATTENDANCE)

Occasionally there is the student who is habitually late and/or truant. As with the difficult student, this may be a continuation of past behavior or a radical departure from it. Again, a calm discussion with the student about what is going on in his or her life can offer clear things up:

sometimes it’s as simple as loss of transportation to more complex sleep disorder issues that keep the student from waking on time.

### 3 “I NEED YOUR COOPERATION” (POOR PEER RELATIONS)

Sometimes a student will exhibit such poor peer relations — belligerent hostile attitude, confrontational, poor participation and help within groups — that a conversation with the student seems warranted. This is often best addressed as a team effort, as in “I need your cooperation.” Put this way, the student may see his efforts to better getting along with peers as part of a larger goal of a pleasant class atmosphere — which it is, of course — and is more likely to work with the student than if he sees his behavior as only about him, which he may very well might, of course. But in gently reminding him, in a call for cooperation, that his behavior affects others, which places him within the context of the human race as a whole, he might very well begin to make more of an effort in class.

### 4 “WOULD YOU LIKE EXTRA HELP?” (GRADES)

Sometimes a student is doing so poorly in class, on nearly every paper and quiz, that it might warrant a private conversation on getting extra academic help in the form of tutoring. Often students are relieved at such an offer and may have been unaware that help was available. I can’t think of a time when a student rebuffed this suggestion, in fact. They probably wanted extra help all along, but were afraid to ask.

### 5 “WELL, LET’S LOOK AT THE GRADEBOOK” (DENIAL)

In contrast to the student experiencing academic failure, realizing it, and wanting help but afraid to ask, is the student experiencing failure and in denial about it, despite the poor grades that come back on papers and tests. When the teacher takes aside the student at midterm and tries to approach the issue, the student may become defensive: there’s no problem, her grades are no worse than her best friend’s, etc. Here the teacher should present the cold evidence, in the

form of the gradebook. Usually here the student admits there is a problem, and then, as in above, the teacher can suggest extra help. Other times, however, the student continues to demonstrate denial and perhaps some paranoia: the teacher doesn’t like her, the quizzes are stacked against her, etc. Continued assurances that this is simply not true and the student should seek extra help may work but again, the student may have to experience more failure before approaching the teacher herself.

### 6 “WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?” (LOOKING BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE DYSFUNCTION AND AVOIDING FUTURE FAILURE)

There is that occasional student—mercifully rare—who makes you wonder why he is in the class: he spends the time in class goofing off, joking with his friends, not participating in the work, and never turns in work. This may warrant a “What are your goals?” conversation, to find from the student what he wants out of life, what his plans are, how the class may help him. Often he can’t say—he registered for no better reason than his best friend did. Occasionally, though, he’ll mention a goal, usually so lofty that he can’t really think of a direct means of achieving it, probably leading to the slacker behavior—a too vague or too unrealistic goal is not much better than none at all. Helping the student clarify the goal with some specific questions : “You say you want to be an actor. What kind? Where do you want to work? Do you want to go to acting school? How does this class help you toward that goal?” may begin to clarify with the student what he wants and how to get there.

**ADDRESSING DIFFICULT STUDENT BEHAVIOR IS NOT AN EASY TASK AS STUDENTS ARE OFTEN IN DENIAL AND THESE MAY BE INGRAINED SETS OF BEHAVIOR.** But by remaining open to being approached and having a set of suggestions for addressing core difficulties, a lot of difficult behavior can be alleviated. Not all “difficult” students are bad people, of course: in fact, most aren’t even difficult people in general. However, they are having, for whatever reason, difficulties in class. With some discussion and intervention, these difficult students can get back on track.

# Deal with Outrageous Student Behavior and Keep Your Sanity

*Last semester, I was teaching an online class for ESL teachers and future ESL teachers.*

There were about 10 students in class and one no-show — a student that failed to come to any of the live chats, post on the discussion boards, or turn in assignments, and was generally a “phantom” on the roll sheet, despite automatically generated reminders from the university, copied to me, and my own nearly daily updates that went out to her, along with the rest of the class.

I did not lose sleep over the student's nonappearance, honestly, as it's fairly common in online classes for adults — students sometimes get busy, forget about their class, or decide it's not a priority in their rush of adult responsibilities, all understandable. This situation was unusual, however, in that two days before the close of the class, as I was saying good-bye to the students who had chosen to attend and accepting their final projects, I received an email from the no-show student. In this email, she apologized for not checking in before, gave the more-or-less generic “dead grandma” excuse, further elaborated with an explanation that she had been given the wrong information by her advisor and had thought the course was two months long and self-paced, and in signing on, had just realized it was not. She then calmly proceeded to outline a plan for completing the course work in a week.

Somewhat flabbergasted, I emailed her back and told her that wasn't possible as the course was hard to complete in a regular term, much less a week. This rejection then set off a shower of emails that went on for a couple of weeks, roping in the poor advisor who had given the “misinformation,” the registrar's office, and the dean of the education department, before it was finally decided Ms. “No-Show” should enroll in a later section of the same course. Throughout it all, the young woman's tone was hostile, blaming, and entitled: both the

advisor and I had done her wrong, and she was entitled to some sort of compensation. Young students shuffling in toward the end of the course claiming confusion and asking to do “make up” work is nothing new, of course. What distinguished this was the young lady's confrontational tone and entitled attitude — both of which instructors increasingly find themselves addressing in students, for a variety of reasons.

## 5 REASONS FOR HOSTILE AND ENTITLED STUDENT BEHAVIOR

### 1 INCREASE IN ANGER IN SOCIETY IN GENERAL

It has been noted that there is increasing hostility in general, from “road rage” to workplace shootings, or at any rate, that people express anger more openly than they would have in the past. So the student infuriated at her instructor over some perceived wrong would have in the past vented to her diary or friends but today feels all right about expressing the anger openly.

### 2 NOT KNOWING APPROPRIATE EXPRESSION OF ANGER

This more open expression of anger in society leads to the next problem — not knowing how to appropriately express anger. Because it is an emotion that has traditionally been suppressed, not a lot of students know how to appropriately express anger and may engage in a lot of nonproductive behaviors such as yelling or “flaming,” the online equivalent, instead of calmly expressing what they feel is wrong and what they would like to see done.

### 3 THE RECESSION

The world-wide recession, perhaps one of the worst in history, has

put a strain on many people, and there is more resultant dysfunctional behavior, like displaced hostility. It is generally easier to vent on your instructor than confront your boss or bank.

### 4 MORE STUDENTS SEEING THEMSELVES AS “CUSTOMERS”

The young lady in the anecdote above mentioned in her emails several times how much she had paid for the course — clearly a consumer view — and that this entitled her to certain rights, presumably a grade. This is of course not unnatural, with students more and more taking on sometimes huge debts to go to college, but it also shifts the relationship somewhat from teacher-student to service provider-client.

### 5 INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Along with the consumer view of student-teacher relations comes institutional support for the student — this is the college's client, after all, and the customer is always right. Twenty years ago if a student claimed temporary insanity or whatnot for her failure to attend class, there would have been little recourse for her as the dean and department chairs may have smiled sympathetically and then told the instructor to go ahead and award the student an “F” as adults are responsible for finding their way to class. Today the initial instinct of the dean was to support the student, agreeing she had indeed been “misinformed” about the class. Again, this change is caused by a differing view of the role of teachers — we are not here to educate but accommodate the “customer” at all costs.

### 4 METHODS FOR ADDRESSING HOSTILE STUDENTS

## 1 LISTEN TO THE STORY, NO MATTER HOW RIDICULOUS

The story after all may be the student's reality. The student may indeed believe that her advisor and teacher had conspired to misinform her the very month she was devastated by her grandmother's death. By hearing out the story and redirecting the student to the problem at hand — "I am so sorry all this has happened to you, but how are we going to address your attendance problem?" — the student and teacher can begin to collaborate on a solution.

## 2 REMAIN CALM

A mistake I made with the example student is that I got annoyed with her from the outset — that she emailed me as the course was about to end and was so confident everything was going to be okay. This annoyance came out in the emails and probably escalated rather than defused the situation. I will in the future remember to remain as calm, sympathetic, and as objective as possible: "Your grandmother died, - that must have been so terrible for you." Remaining calm will go a long way to defuse the situation, as the student will see you as an ally, not adversary, in solving the problem.

## 3 DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

A thing I did correctly in the interaction was limit the interactions to email—a running written record which could be produced to show the student's hostility or that I had never said she could make up my class, if it became an issue.

## 4 SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES

Finally, the instructor should not in these situations just refuse the student's request — although it may be tempting — but be prepared to suggest alternatives, such as taking the course another term. This is likely to leave the student feeling at least partially satisfied.

**HOSTILE STUDENTS ARE NOT EASY TO DEAL WITH. BUT BY LISTENING, REMAINING CALM, DOCUMENTING EVERYTHING, AND SUGGESTING ALTERNATIVES, TEACHERS CAN EFFECTIVELY DISARM THOSE STUDENTS.**