

English Club Teaching Tips

These helpful Teaching Tips borrowed from www.englishclub.com are written in plain, jargon-free English. They will be of general help to new teachers or others who simply wish to brush up on their technique.

Reading before Writing

How:

1. Tell the students to read the whole exercise first before writing anything. (This will be unbelievably hard for some students to do.)
2. Once they've read it all, let them begin doing the exercise.

Why:

1. It's a good idea to read the whole exercise before starting to write anything because sometimes more than one answer is possible but, in the exercise the students are doing, only one answer is the right one.

For example: a gap fill with these possible answers: *take photos, buy souvenirs:*

I always _____ when I am on holiday because they help me to remember it. Could be either answer! But not if you've read the whole exercise first because you know that one of the later sentences is:

I _____ a lot of _____ on my last holiday because I had a new camera.

This is also true for the Cambridge exams such as First Certificate and as a useful strategy in exams in general.

2. Another reason is that the students can answer the questions they know the answer to and guess the rest (from a smaller selection because they've used some of the answers already and so have a higher percentage chance of guessing the right answer). A process of elimination.

Extra Info:

Exam students are strongly advised to read everything before putting pen to paper for the reasons stated above. Apart from anything else it gives them more context to help them.

Brainstorming

How:

1. Ask the students to think of all the words they know connected with the topic.
2. Tell the students to write them on a piece of paper.
3. Give them a couple of minutes to do so.
4. Put them in pairs or small groups to compare their vocabulary and transfer words they hadn't thought of from their partner's list to their own.
5. Feedback (see Teaching Tip "Feedback". – "English at School", No 4(8), 2004) on to the board.
6. You could do it all on the board in the first place – just ask the class to give you words to write on the board or give board pens to one or more students and get them to do the writing.

Why:

1. If students have already activated their vocabulary related to the topic they will not be searching for words so much when they start the speaking activities. This should enable them to be more fluent.

Extra Info:

Brainstorming can be used as a warmer (a five minute activity at the start of the lesson) just to get the students in the mood and to start them thinking about the topic or as a filler (a five minute activity at the end of the lesson) to see how many words the students remember from the lesson. It can also be used as revision – “Write down all the words you can remember about X, which we studied last month.”

Personalising**How:**

1. It's been done for you on the worksheets. All the gap-fill exercises, question-forming exercises and even the majority of the grammar analysis exercises have been made to include that ever-important word “I”. The discussion questions are mostly aimed at encouraging the students to give their personal opinion on aspects of the topic.

Why:

1. Students like talking about themselves. And why not? Who doesn't?
2. They will remember new words, etc. better if they have had the opportunity to use them in exercises, both written and spoken, that are relevant to their own experience in some way.
3. Apparently, when mother-tongue speakers talk, some of the most frequently used words are *I, me, you*.

Extra Info:

A lot of coursebooks seem to try to make things look “realistic” for the students in this way. They show a photo of a man and a woman and say something like “This is Bob and Pam”. Then they provide some sort of exercise which features *Bob* and *Pam* which may go something like this:

Write the following verbs in the sentences below: *get up, go*

1. *Bob and Pam* _____ *very early every morning.*
2. *Bob and Pam* _____ *to work by bus.*

The chances of the students being really interested in Bob and Pam are slim and so are the chances of them remembering the target language (target language is the words and / or grammar structure you are trying to teach them).

There may be nice colour photos of people supposedly called Bob and Pam but, it's hardly realistic. The students know full well that the people in the photos are called just about anything except Bob and Pam because they are models or actors or whatever. They certainly don't care what time they get up and how they get to work.

That's where personalising comes in. Sentences like: “*My partner* _____ *very early every morning*” can be turned into questions (e.g. *Do you get up very early every morning?*) which will begin a real, personally relevant conversation between two students in which they can talk to each other about themselves. (*Yes, I do, I have to be at work by 8.15 every day including Saturday...Really? What do you do?, etc.*)

Translating**How to avoid doing it:**

1. Refuse to give translations for new vocabulary yourself. Pretend / admit you don't speak the students' language.
2. Encourage the students to guess the meaning of words they don't know or to ask each other for help or to look it up in a monolingual dictionary instead (see Teaching Tips: “Guessing Answers”. – “English at School”, No 4, 2003; “Dealing with Vocabulary Queries”. – “English at School”, No 4(8), 2004 for further explanation).

3. Explain that you are a teacher, not an interpreter.
4. Remind students that you are a teacher, not a dictionary.

Why to avoid doing it:

1. There often isn't a direct translation for a word or phrase, there is only an "equivalent", sometimes not even that. Try translating a couple of modal verbs (like "must" or "would" and you'll see what is meant) and it's doubtful that there is a translation for "Yorkshire Pudding" in any language (because it's something solely British so other countries will presumably never have needed a word for it). "Get" is hard to translate, as are phrasal verbs.
2. Translating slows students down which means you run the risk of getting bogged down in the fruitless pursuit of a word which isn't English anyway.
3. Thinking in two languages simultaneously (which is necessary for translating) is very hard. People pay simultaneous interpreters quite a lot of money to do this and you need to be very good at both languages to do it successfully. ("If you are a professional interpreter you may translate in my lessons, no problem – but funnily enough I haven't come across any such students yet!")
4. False friends can cause problems.
5. Often there is only one word in the students' language to translate two English words.

Extra Info:

If you encounter students who are convinced that translating English into their own language is an essential part of learning English try discouraging them by explaining like this: "Let's imagine that I am a piano-teacher and a student wants to learn to play the piano so she / he has piano lessons with me. She / he may not be able to play the piano but she / he is an expert guitarist and brings his / her guitar to the lesson. I play a tune on the piano and she / he tries to copy it on the guitar. But it doesn't sound the same. In fact it doesn't sound like a piano at all. Well, it wouldn't, would it? I suggest that she / he tries playing it on the piano but she / he tells me that she / he will only be able to play it on the piano if she / he can play it on the guitar first. The lesson continues with me playing the piano and the student "translating" the tunes onto the guitar. At the end of this course of piano lessons, do you think the student will be able to play the piano? I think not."

Pacing

How:

1. Change the pace of the lesson by breaking things up a bit. Instead of simply doing one activity straight after another, allow a little time for something different (pronunciation work, for example – see Teaching Tip "Pronunciation". – "English at School", No 4(8), 2004 for further information).
2. You can also change the pace during a lesson by allowing time for a brainstorming session (see Teaching Tip "Brainstorming" for further explanation).
3. Another way to liven up the pace is to put a time limit on some activities – "You have two minutes for this, so get going!" Or introducing an element of competition – put the class into small groups and tell them that these are teams and the first team to finish this activity is the winner. (Prize – no homework, or something like that.) Maybe the activities which involve matching words with pictures would be a good one for this.
4. Use other material during the lesson – your coursebook, etc.
5. Wake people up by giving them a two minute test on last week's vocabulary.
6. Allow silence at appropriate times during the lesson – while students are reading the questions or during speaking activities when students are formulating a response (thinking of something to say). Silence in the classroom can be a bit unnerving at first but it doesn't mean you're not doing your job – students need time to absorb information and time to think. We all do.

Why:

1. The lesson will become rather monotonous if it's just a case of "Do Activity 1, then do Activity 2, then (lo and behold) do Activity 3".

- The lesson will become even more monotonous if the students spend all lesson with the same partner – change the partners over, make small groups instead, or (especially in a brainstorming session) have the group brainstorming directly to you.

Extra Info:

Exercises may be numbered 1, 2, 3, etc. but that doesn't mean you have to do them in that order or feedback (see Teaching Tip "Feedback") in that order. In the discussion activities you may tell students to read all the questions, select the three that interest them most and talk about them. When feeding back from another exercise you may ask for the answer to number 5, then number 2, then number 4 – it keeps the students on their toes!

Remember!

Dates:

1985 – nineteen (hundred and) eighty-five

2000 – two thousand / the year two thousand

2002 – two thousand and two

1806 – eighteen (hundred and) six / eighteen oh six
the 5th century – the fifth century

American: month/day/year

3.2.89 or 3/2/89

March second nineteen eighty nine

British: day/month/year

3.2.89 or 3/2/89

the third of February nineteen eighty nine