

## Teaching Tips

**T**hese helpful Teaching Tips borrowed from [www.englishclub.com](http://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.

### **Pronunciation**

#### *How:*

1. Model the word yourself. This means you say it in a normal way to the students. Then get the students to repeat it after you, all together like in a chorus until they get it nearly right. Don't worry if they aren't perfect. Who is?
2. Then model the word again and ask individual students to repeat the word after you.
3. You could put the word on the board and ask the students how many syllables it has and then practise some stress placement. Ask them which is the stressed (strong) syllable. For example: before – 2 syllables: be – FORE (the second syllable is stressed);  
after – 2 syllables: AF – ter (the first syllable is stressed);  
computer – 3 syllables: com – PU – ter (the second syllable is stressed).

#### *Why:*

1. It helps the students to improve their pronunciation which is very important because there's very little point in students learning a new word, learning what it means and how to use it in a sentence, if no one understands them when they say it because their pronunciation is so bad.
2. Doing a little pronunciation work can fill time here and there in a lesson. It's especially useful as a filler (a quickie activity to fill those few minutes at the end of a lesson when you've run out of material but it's a little too early to let the students go).

#### *Extra info:*

If you're planning to do some syllable work or stress placement or use the phonetic alphabet it's a good idea to write the words, syllables, stress and phonetic spelling down before the lesson because it is hard to do it spontaneously during the lesson! For some reason you may get muddled and write the stress on the wrong syllable, etc.

#### *How:*

1. If you have a small enough group that you can be heard by everyone, just say something like "OK, you can stop there. Well done, everyone. Thank you, you can stop now. Yes, that includes you, Mike!" Then give the students a few seconds to finish their sentences until the room falls quiet. Let them finish what they were saying.
2. If you have a big group so you won't be heard if you try to talk over everyone then don't bother to shout yourself hoarse, simply have a certain place in the classroom where you go and stand when you want everyone's attention and go and stand in it. The students will stop talking very soon. (Try standing in front of the board, facing the class which gets their attention because for the previous ten minutes or so you've been cruising round the room monitoring.) You can explain to students at the beginning of the course, "When I want your attention I will stand here and you will stop what you are doing and listen to me because I don't like shouting for your attention. Is that clear?"

### **Stopping an Activity**

*Why:*

1. It's not important if the students have finished the activity – it's the taking part that counts, as they say.
2. It's a good idea to stop things while they are going swingingly because it means you never hit the students' boredom threshold. Leave them wanting more and enthusiasm will remain high. On the other hand, don't stop it too soon because not everyone will have had a chance to speak or guess the answers yet so they'll feel cheated.

**Feedback***How:*

1. Ask one of the students what the answer to question 1 is. If she / he gets it right, fine. If not, ask if anyone else knows the answer. (If nobody knows and nobody can guess, you'll need to give it to them.)
2. Ask one of the students what the answer to question 2 is. If she / he gets it right, fine. If not, ask if anyone else knows the answer. (If nobody knows and nobody can guess, you'll need to give it to them.)
3. Ask one of the students what the answer to question 3 is. (Are you getting the hang of this?)
4. In the "True or False?" activities on the worksheets, the feedback questions would be: "How many of your guesses were right? / How well do you know your partner? / Which of your partner's answers surprised you?"

*Why:*

1. Getting feedback from the students (i.e. information about what they've just done) means you can check how they coped with the exercise. You don't only need to get the answers. You can find out if they liked that type of exercise or not – if not, can they suggest ways to improve it?
2. You can check their pronunciation. You can deal with queries. You can allow the feedback session to develop into a class discussion, if you like. Whatever.

*Extra info:*

You can initiate a feedback session about the lesson as a whole as a filler (five-minute activity) to fill the last few minutes of a lesson by asking the students to decide which of this lesson's activities was the most enjoyable / useful and why, then compare their choices with their partner's or have an open-class discussion about it where the whole group talks to you and airs their views.

**Dealing with Vocabulary Queries***How to avoid doing it:*

1. Get the students to read the exercise completely before starting to actually do anything. They can underline the words they don't know, or (more positively) underline the words they do know. When a student asks you to explain the meaning of a word, don't. Ask the other students if anyone can explain it.
2. You could put the students in pairs or small groups and get them to explain the words they don't know to each other. This sounds daft but it's quite logical really – the words Mike is having difficulty with won't necessarily be the same ones that Ann is struggling with. (Beware of the students' tendency to translate the words. See Teaching Tip "Translating" for further information on translating.)
3. It's a good idea to get the students to try to guess the meaning of the word from the context it's in. (See Teaching Tip "Guessing Answers", "English at School". – № 4, 2003 for further information on "deducing meaning from context".)
4. Get the students to look the word up in a (preferably English to English aka monolingual) dictionary, should such a thing be available. (See Teaching Tip "Using Dictionaries" for further information about dictionaries.)

*Why to avoid doing it:*

1. You are not a dictionary. You don't even look like one, do you?
2. There's a world of difference between telling someone something (spoon-feeding students who soon get into the habit of switching off, being passive, letting the teacher

do all the work for them and not bothering to try to remember a single thing) and teaching someone something (creating an environment and a set of circumstances in which someone can actively learn, practise new skills, and develop confidence in his / her own abilities).

3. One day, out there in the big wide world, the students will be faced with situations in which they will not know all the words and you won't be there to help them. Then what will they do? (With any luck they will be able to fall back on all the useful skills you've taught them in class.)

### *Explaining new vocabulary:*

As a last resort, give the students an explanation of the new word or phrase in English. It's a good idea to give them an example sentence or two containing the word or phrase so that they can see how to use it. You may find it useful to demonstrate or mime the word to convey its meaning quickly. Or maybe a quick line-drawing (of the "stick-man" type) would convey the meaning more quickly? Sometimes a synonym is useful (e.g. wealthy = rich) or an opposite (e.g. wealthy = the opposite of poor).

### *Extra info:*

If a student still thinks you should explain all the new words to him refuse and explain like this: "If you give a starving man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him how to fish he can feed himself for life." (Try to explain "starving" as "very, very, very hungry".)

In this case the "fish" is the explanation of a word, given by you. The "how to fish" is the ability to guess words from context, the confidence to ask a peer (a classmate, a colleague, etc.) if they know the meaning, and the ability to use a dictionary.

## **Eliciting**

### *How:*

1. Instead of giving information, ask if anyone in the class can provide it. When a student asks "What does this mean?" or "What's the past of this verb?", etc. say something like "That's a good question – what do you think?", "Can you guess?", "Can anyone help Maria here?"
2. If you want to teach some vocabulary, for instance, then rather than giving it to the students, try to get them to give it to you. For example, you want to teach the word "cow". You could draw a little picture on the board. You could explain what a cow is or you could elicit the word from the students along these lines: "What do we call / What's the word for an animal which makes milk and goes "mooo"? With any luck the students will say "cow". There you go – you've elicited the word "cow" from the students. You didn't say it to them – they said it to you; that's eliciting.

### *Why:*

1. If you don't elicit you run the risk of telling the students everything they want to know and ending up spoon-feeding them. (See Teaching Tip "Dealing with Vocabulary Queries" – the "Why to avoid doing it" part for further explanation.)
2. Eliciting means getting information from people as opposed to giving it to them – asking, throwing questions back at the students, in a nutshell.

### *Extra info:*

It's good when you take the register, always to elicit today's date from the students ("What's the date today?") because even at high levels students are shockingly bad on dates.

Sometimes students don't understand the value of eliciting. They think that you're not doing your job if you don't answer their questions. If you have a student like that try explaining like this: "I know I know the answer but I'm not the one learning English here. What is important is, do any of you know the answer?" or "Why should I explain again? We did this last week!"

If you try to elicit something and obviously no one knows what you are getting at or they've all forgotten it or they haven't done their homework then don't keep on trying to get it out of them. Flogging a dead horse will get you nowhere and it just embarrasses / irritates the students and wastes valuable lesson time.