

ENGLISH TEACHING FORUM

ARTICLES • Exploring and Expressing Culture | Cooperative Game-Playing
READER'S GUIDE • Questions for analysis and discussion
TEACHING TECHNIQUES • “Friendly” Peer Feedback | Narrow Reading |
Extended Icebreaker | Pairing Techniques
MY CLASSROOM • Kyrgyz Republic
TRY THIS • The Mystery Bag
THE LIGHTER SIDE • Reverse Categories

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NOTES FOR TEACHERS

English Teaching Forum supports the teaching of English around the world through the exchange of innovative, practical ideas. Below is a description of each section of the journal, along with suggestions about how to use it.

ARTICLES provide practical, innovative ideas for teaching English, based on current theory.

READER'S GUIDE corresponds to the articles in each issue and can guide your own understanding as well as discussions with colleagues.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES give English teachers the opportunity to share successful classroom practices.

MY CLASSROOM focuses on one teacher's classroom and describes ways that the teaching environment shapes learning.

TRY THIS gives step-by-step instructions for carrying out language-learning activities in your classroom.

THE LIGHTER SIDE features an English language-based puzzle that can be photocopied and given to students to solve individually or collaboratively.

This issue of *English Teaching Forum* is dedicated to the memory of Lisa Harshbarger, a former Regional English Language Officer (RELO) with the Department of State. She passed away earlier this year.

Lisa served as a RELO based in Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Hungary, and the Philippines. She published work in *Forum* and was a longtime member of *Forum's* Editorial Review Board. She was also an English Language Fellow in Serbia and Slovenia and a Fulbright Junior Lecturer in Yugoslavia.

Lisa will be missed by all of us in the Department of State's Office of English Language Programs, which publishes *Forum*, and by the many teachers around the world with whom she worked.

Search for related articles at americanenglish.state.gov/forum; the archive goes back to 2001. **Submission guidelines** are also posted on the website. Email manuscripts to etforum@state.gov.

ON THE COVER

Blue Springs is a painting by Gene Foust, who has been creating art since he was in grade school; he still remembers the first art kit he received as a child. Creativity runs in his family through music, arts, and crafts. He received his BA from Truman State University. His paintings are impressionist in style and emphasize color relationships. He enjoys creating art at his home in the northeastern part of the state of Missouri; in fact, the inspiration for *Blue Springs* came when he was taking a walk in the woods near his home. His work can be viewed on his Etsy website, <http://www.etsy.com/shop/FoustArtGallery>.

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Exploring and Expressing Culture through Project-Based Learning

Teaching in Vietnam recently, I had opportunities to work with some amazing students and teachers. Being in such a position lent itself well to cultural exchanges inside and outside the classroom. However, it was clear to me, to my colleagues, and I believe to the majority of students that there was a need to dig deeper—to move beyond the cultural dos and don'ts and the comparisons of cultural practices and behavior. As teachers, we must also support and motivate students to reflect on and investigate how one's own and others' cultural beliefs, attitudes, and norms are shaped. Additionally, being in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context requires English-language support and activities that motivate students to engage in English. This article presents four lessons based on project-based learning (PBL) that I used with EFL students in Vietnam and that other teachers can use with students in their own contexts. The lessons focus on developing students' English proficiency, research and analytical skills, and their ability to produce and present work collaboratively. Furthermore, these lessons aim to create not only a successful learning experience but also a more understanding and peaceful world.

DEFINING INTERCULTURAL-COMPETENCE EDUCATION

According to Dearsdorff (2006), *intercultural competence* is “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes,” as well as “the awareness, valuing, and understanding of cultural differences; experiencing other cultures; and self-awareness of one's own culture” (247).

In Vietnam, primarily teaching students at a university, I had to ask myself, “What

intercultural situations do I need to prepare my students for?” Having interactions with foreigners was a relatively new phenomenon for the majority of my Vietnamese students. Additionally, many of them were preparing for jobs in the tourism industry or as English-language teachers themselves. They will certainly need to develop their knowledge of other people, cultures, and perspectives. They will also need to articulate the diverse cultural practices of Vietnam (a country with over 50 distinct ethnic groups), as well as develop greater intercultural awareness and competence with their future clients and students. Considering these student-driven

As teachers, we must ... support and motivate students to reflect on and investigate how one's own and others' cultural beliefs, attitudes, and norms are shaped.

goals helped me to better understand what intercultural competence means for my students and how to structure intercultural instruction within our courses and programs.

A major goal of intercultural-competence education is to facilitate a shift in viewpoint from a dualistic or *ethnocentric* perspective of culture (i.e., seeing the world in terms of “my/our way is the best”) to a more culturally *ethnorelative* understanding of seeing the world (i.e., accepting that there are multiple ways of seeing the world and living life, as well as holding off negative evaluation of a cultural trait without further thought and inquiry) (Bennett 2004; Peterson 2011). Additionally, well-designed intercultural-competence education should go beyond *surface knowledge*—objective and observable aspects of culture (e.g., food and clothing)—to *deep culture*, often understood as subjective underlying aspects of culture (e.g., attitudes and beliefs of gender roles). These definitions and goals of intercultural-competence education informed the design of the activities we developed for our course and students.

Importantly, my Vietnamese colleagues and I wanted to get away from using only paper-based assessment of our students' understanding of intercultural communication and awareness of other cultures. We felt strongly that we needed to develop alternative assessment methods that stimulate creativity and encourage greater use of English both inside and outside the classroom. We decided to design a project where students could build intercultural competence weekly and apply their knowledge, skills, and ability to real-world concepts that were geared toward their current and future academic, personal, and professional needs. The use of PBL helped guide us to design pedagogically sound lessons and activities. Before I discuss the lessons in

more detail, it is important to be clear on how PBL is defined and how it can be applied.

UNDERSTANDING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

The Buck Institute for Education, a leader in the development and research of PBL, describes PBL as follows:

Students work on a project over an extended period of time—from a week up to a semester—that engages them in solving a real-world problem or answering a complex question. They demonstrate their knowledge and skills by developing a public product or presentation for a real audience. As a result, students develop deep content knowledge as well as critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills in the context of doing an authentic, meaningful project. Project Based Learning unleashes a contagious, creative energy among students and teachers. (Buck Institute for Education 2019)

Within English-language-learning contexts, PBL has been shown to be a powerful method that enables the integration of academic, social, and linguistic communication skills with the application of real-world issues and contexts. However, research also reports conflicting perspectives by English-language learners on how they view the usefulness of PBL activities toward their English-language development (Beckett and Slater 2005). With this said, it is clear that careful planning and scaffolding of PBL that integrates both intercultural and English-language-learning goals are essential to the successful completion of PBL activities in an EFL context.

The following framework describes the High-Quality Project-Based Learning

Having interactions with foreigners was a relatively new phenomenon for the majority of my Vietnamese students.

(HQPBL) that we used to design lessons to develop our students' intercultural competence, English-language proficiency, and academic skills.

FRAMEWORK FOR HIGH-QUALITY PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

The Buck Institute for Education facilitated the development of a framework for HQPBL based on six criteria (High Quality Project Based Learning 2018):

1. Intellectual challenge and accomplishment: Students learn deeply, think critically, and strive for excellence.
2. Authenticity: Students work on projects that are meaningful and relevant to their culture, their lives, and their future.
3. Collaboration: Students collaborate with other students in person or online and/or receive guidance from adult mentors and experts.
4. Project management: Students use a project-management process that enables them to proceed effectively from project initiation to completion.
5. Reflection: Students reflect on their work and their learning throughout the project.
6. Public product: Students' work is publicly displayed, discussed, and critiqued.

Following are four PBL lessons applying aspects of this HQPBL framework that I used in Vietnam and recommend for use in other contexts.

PBL LESSON 1: CHALLENGING CULTURAL STEREOTYPES—VIDEO PROJECT

In planning and designing a project-based lesson for our Intercultural Communications courses for third- and fourth-year university students, my Vietnamese colleagues and I first aligned the course objectives we wanted to integrate into the project. The objectives specified that students would be able to do the following: (1) apply intercultural-competence terms and theory, (2) conduct research and identify quality sources of information, (3) apply citations to reference information presented, (4) use objective language when describing people and cultural practice, and (5) develop English-language fluency and accuracy. The lesson we developed required students to discuss cultural stereotypes, conduct research on the background of the stereotypes, and apply their knowledge of the course content and English language to challenge the stereotypes. We also felt that a video project would motivate students more than only paper-based assessment. The HQPBL framework is used to illustrate how the lesson was structured (High Quality Project Based Learning 2018).

Intellectual challenge and accomplishment. To reinforce and deepen students' understanding of the concept of stereotypes, we used the Stereotypes and Generalizations Activity (see Figure 1). This activity provides students with examples of stereotypes, along with alternative examples of how to discuss culture and people in relative and objective terms. This was our method to address the PBL criterion of having “students learn deeply” and “think critically” (High Quality Project Based Learning 2018). From an English-language-learning perspective, this activity also serves as an introduction to using adverbs of frequency to practice speaking in

Stereotypes and Generalizations Activity

A. Background

Did you ever hear anyone say any of these things?

- You can't trust people from [Country A].
- People from [Country B] are so smart.
- People from [Country C] are always late.
- People from [Country D] are fat.
- People from [Country E] eat dogs.

Are these statements completely true? Of course not! They are *stereotypes*—the automatic application of information we have about a country or culture group, both positive and negative, to every individual in it. This information is often based on limited experience with the culture, so it is incomplete at best and completely wrong at worst. If you consider only stereotypes when interacting with people, you are probably not seeing them for who they truly are.

What is the alternative? To start, you can talk to people from that culture or do research to find more information. For example, you might ask, “What are the reasons that many Vietnamese live with their extended families?” and “Do all Vietnamese live with their extended families?” Finding answers to these and related questions can lead us to think more objectively.

To understand the world objectively, you must explore and understand the different experiences and behaviors of people in a culture. Of course, people from a cultural group can share certain values, beliefs, and behaviors, but you should not assume that these behaviors apply to everyone. It is also important to understand why the behavior exists. What are the historical, political, and/or financial events that shape the culture?

B. Activity

This exercise gives you practice in differentiating between stereotypes and thinking objectively. Read each statement below and decide whether you think it is a stereotypical statement (write “S” in the blank) or objective statement (write “O” in the blank).

1. ___ “Maria is from Country Q, so she will definitely be late.”
2. ___ “Many people in Country X value their family life, so it’s not surprising that Tim still lives at home.”
3. ___ “Country Y is a violent country. Everyone carries a gun.”
4. ___ “Many people from Country Z trust their family to know what is best for them, so they don’t mind arranged marriages.”

Figure 1. Stereotypes and Generalizations Activity

language that is more objective and relative. We went over this activity with students in class using a computer and overhead projector.

Collaboration. Group work is essential in enabling all students to participate in meaningful and productive ways, especially with larger classes. We assigned students to groups of four or five at the beginning of the semester. In their groups, students selected

their own topics based on stereotypes they have heard (or that they possibly have) within their own and/or other cultures, genders, socioeconomic classes, ethnic groups, and ideas. Before moving forward, we had the student groups present their topics to the class. This allowed the instructors to provide feedback to ensure that groups were on the right track. It also allowed their classmates to hear and—ideally—apply the feedback we provided.

Challenging Stereotypes: Presentation and Scoring Organizer

Stereotypes can come from limited or incomplete information about culture and lead to both explicit and implicit biases towards others. One of the best ways to address this is to research cultures and develop a deeper and more objective understanding of them. It is also important that you do not stereotype when you are talking about your own culture.

In addition to providing your own perspective and experience, think of how other people from different regions, ethnic groups, ages, and genders might view the topic. Thinking about and providing a diversity of beliefs and practices can help present a more accurate picture of society and culture, and not a stereotypical one.

Instructions: Complete sections A through D below and review the language-use specifications in section F. Section E will be completed at the conclusion of the project.

A. Definitions (20 points):

Provide a definition for each of the following terms.

1. stereotypes: _____
2. bias: _____
3. prejudice: _____
4. discrimination: _____
5. racism: _____

B. Stereotypes and Information (30 points):

- Present three stereotypes. These can be about cultures (your own and/or other cultures), gender, economic class, ethnic groups, ideas, etc.
- Provide information and examples showing that the stereotypes are not always true and that the bias is not appropriate.

Stereotype 1: _____

Information and examples: _____

Stereotype 2: _____

Information and examples: _____

Stereotype 3: _____

Information and examples: _____

C. Practice the Language of Objectivity (15 points): Write three example sentences about a person with a different age or from a different region, ethnic group, or gender.

- Use language such as *some*, *sometimes*, *many*, *at times*, *rarely*, etc.
- Do not use language such as *never*, *always*, *all*, *everyone*, etc.

Example 1: _____

Example 2: _____

Example 3: _____

D. Practice the Language of Reference (15 points): Write three sentences containing a reference to your research on stereotypes and bias.

- Use expressions to reference where you learned the information, such as “According to the website X, ...”; “According to my American friend X, ...”; “I learned the following information from X, ...”; etc.

Reference 1: _____

Reference 2: _____
 Reference 3: _____

E. Conclusion (10 points):

1. Explain why it is important to challenge stereotypes, biases, and prejudice, as well as to think and speak objectively:

2. Describe what you learned from this project:

F. Language Use (grammar, pronunciation, fluency) (10 points):

Consistently uses correct grammar tense

Speaks clearly, with pauses after each sentence

Pronounces final consonants (e.g., final /s/ and /ed/)

Uses appropriate word and sentence stress to emphasize keywords

Figure 2. Challenging Stereotypes: Presentation and Scoring Organizer

Project management. As teachers, we can be guilty of providing directions for an activity or project and then leaving students to figure out the rest on their own, an approach known as the sink-or-swim method. However, for students to produce high-quality work, teachers must provide support in managing the project. Providing students with guidelines is important in any activity, but particularly in PBL. If we want our students to strive for excellence by producing quality work, we as teachers need to make our expectations as clear as possible. With this in mind, we provided a graphic organizer for students to review and complete as a group and send to their instructor (see Figure 2). This graphic organizer informs students of project requirements for organization, language, grammar, and application of the course objectives. In addition, it gives students ideas on how they need to organize their presentation on stereotypes, gives

transparency on how they will be graded, and helps ensure that they will meet all the requirements of the project.

Authenticity. The graphic organizer in Figure 2 is important to ensure that students select quality topics related to stereotypes that will be relevant and meaningful to their understanding of the world and others. This real-world focus helps students realize that they can apply this information to their interactions with others outside the classroom. We stressed to students the necessity of conducting research to develop a deeper and more objective understanding of others, as well as citing where they gathered their information. It was evident that research skills—including applying proper citation—was an area that our students needed to develop. The graphic organizer reinforces this point. We required students to submit their organizers for feedback before moving forward to the production stage of their projects.

Stereotypes can come from limited or incomplete information about culture and lead to both explicit and implicit biases towards others.

Reflection. Before students began working on their own projects, we provided them with a model showing how the final video product might look. The first semester we conducted this project, I created a model myself. This helped students see what was expected of them, and we could analyze how the model met the project requirements. Additionally, it was useful for me as the teacher to understand the process of doing the project. I was able to identify areas of the project that could be challenging for the students and address these areas early on. In the second semester, we were able to show student-made models from the previous semester. This is ideal, as students can better relate to the style and content of their peers. It also sets a high bar of quality that students can attempt to meet and surpass. If for some reason teachers are unable to create and provide their own model prior to the course, I suggest searching the web to find a model that they can present to students.

Another important aspect of reflection is feedback from the instructor. We required students to submit their outline by email before making their videos. The idea was to make sure students were on the right track with meeting project requirements and to provide support as needed. Students were also required to resubmit their outline before being allowed to continue to the next step of creating their videos.

Public product. My colleagues and I agreed that having students create a video project would allow greater creativity and learning of intercultural terms and concepts. We also felt that completing video projects would be less intimidating for students than presenting in front of the class, thus enabling them to focus more on language use and accuracy. Having students create and submit their work through video also allowed time in class for group work on the project and for receiving support from the teachers and peers. Classroom presentations often take a large amount of class time and frequently allow only a small number of students to participate. We felt that having students work in groups in class with our support,

where they could ask questions and talk with us and other students about how their projects were developing, was a more effective use of class time than holding class presentations.

We also provided students with a free, easy-to-use online video software, Adobe Spark. We took time in class to show students a video tutorial on how to use the software and how to sign up for a free Adobe Spark account. We also wanted students to be able to publish, share, and comment on one another's final video projects. We created a course Facebook group page at the beginning of the semester that we frequently used as a course learning management system and had students post their final video projects there. That made it easy for teachers and students to post comments in the form of feedback and questions.

Student Reflection and Feedback

At the end of the course, we distributed a survey asking students to provide feedback on the project-based lesson. Following are comments from two students that I feel summarize the experience of the majority of the class:

***Student 1:** For me, the final project is very significant and meaningful. It is not [only] the way I and my friends in class show what we learned from subject from my teacher, but it also shows our knowledge about cultures around the world. Furthermore I can practice my speaking skills and studying myself about culture which I didn't know before.*

***Student 2:** I got more information about a new concept: stereotypes. Actually, I sometimes used it on unknown person. But after I searched about stereotypes on the internet, I knew that it's wrong when stereotyping someone. So I try not to stereotype, not to evaluate someone too soon. Through this assignment I found stereotypes not only in Vietnam, but also in other countries.*

As can be seen from these comments, Student 1 felt the project allowed her to demonstrate

Having students present their work to others who are not their classmates is a key component to PBL.

her knowledge about other cultures and her English speaking skills. Student 2, meanwhile, felt that the project helped her to develop and apply research skills that in turn changed how she views others—a shift from an ethnocentric to a more ethnorelative perspective.

PBL LESSON 2: CHALLENGING CULTURAL STEREOTYPES—POSTER PRESENTATION

A lower-tech alternative to the video project is to have students develop poster presentations, which are a way for students to share their work and do not require students to have access to computers or the Internet. Instead, students present their findings on poster board and use images from magazines, photos, and/or drawings to illustrate their project. Students present their findings through explaining the information and illustrations on their posters, through role play, and possibly through answering questions, from the audience. Poster presentations also allow students to rehearse and prepare by presenting to their classmates first. The familiarity of the classroom and classmates enables students to build confidence, reflect on what needs to be modified, and receive feedback on content, language, and presentation skills.

Having students present their work to others who are not their classmates is a key component to PBL. One suggestion is to have students present to others, but within their own classroom. This often helps lower the anxiety that students might feel about giving presentations. Teachers can coordinate with colleagues to invite students from other classes or possibly invite other faculty and staff. If possible, students can also present their posters outside the classroom, perhaps on campus or in a welcoming and safe space within the community (to younger students

in other schools, to community clubs and organizations, etc.). If time allows, students can present their posters more than once and in more than one location. This repetition allows students to further reflect on their performance, build language and presentation skills, develop expertise, and connect with the community.

PBL LESSON 3: TEENS TALK!

This lesson was inspired by *American Teens Talk!*—an archive of audio interviews with U.S. American teens, accompanied by written transcripts and discussion questions, that is available on the U.S. Department of State’s American English website (<https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/american-teens-talk>). The following describes the lesson using the HQPBL framework.

Authenticity. *American Teens Talk!* proved to be an excellent resource for developing listening comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and greater awareness of the multicultural society of the United States. Because the interviews are conducted with U.S. American teens, listening to them serves as an excellent activity that captures students’ attention. In our case, it also motivated students to reflect on, inquire about, and share their own background and daily life.

Intellectual challenge and accomplishment. I chose several *American Teens Talk!* interviews that I felt the students would find interesting and that would be appropriate for their language level. Because of limited time, I focused on one interview with a Vietnamese American teenager. I could see that the students were interested in her life and the fact that she and her family continued a number of traditional Vietnamese customs in

Vietnamese Teens Talk! Activity

Part 1. Having a conversation is like playing tennis or badminton, using questions and answers. After asking a question, you need to *listen* to your partner's answer so you can ask an appropriate follow-up question. Let's practice! 😊

1. First, write an answer to the following question:

“What have you been doing this week?”

Example answer: “I've been going to school and playing outside with friends, mostly.”

Your answer: _____

2. Pass your answer to your partner. He or she will write another question, based on your answer.

Example question: “What are you doing in school?”

Your question: _____

3. Give your question to your partner. He or she will write a response.

Example answer: “We just finished our end-of-grade tests. School ends in two weeks.”

Your answer: _____

4. Keep your paper and write a response to this question:

“Is there anything that you would like to say to students in other countries?”

Your answer: _____

Vietnamese Teens Talk! Recording

Part 2. Now you will make your own *Vietnamese Teens Talk!* recording. Here's how:

1. **Practice** your conversation with your partner. Help each other with grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Try to sound as natural as possible.
2. **Record.** When you are ready, use a phone to record your conversation. Hold the microphone close and record in a quiet place. Re-record if you aren't happy with the first recording.
3. **Photo.** After both of you have recorded, take a photo of each other individually and together.
4. **Share.*** Email me the photos and audio recording. We will share your recordings and photos with one another and students around the world.

*** Note:** Social media allows information to be shared easily with others, which can be beneficial. However, teachers should be aware of privacy and confidentiality concerns in sharing student photos and audio recordings on the Internet. It is recommended to explicitly discuss guidelines with students, perhaps have them sign waivers or contracts, and give them the option not to have their personal information and/or photos posted.

Figure 3. Vietnamese Teens Talk! activity

the United States. I have observed that many of my EFL students have a rather limited and narrow perspective of who U.S. Americans are, what we look like, and how we live. The diversity of teenagers in *American Teens Talk!* helps to widen and deepen students' understanding of the diversity of U.S. Americans.

Collaboration and project management. I created an activity that modeled *American Teens Talk!* to help the students create their own interviews; I appropriately named the activity *Vietnamese Teens Talk!* (see Figure 3). The activity aims to help students develop their ability to create their own interview questions and practice interviewing each

**I created an activity that modeled *American Teens Talk!*
to help the students create their own interviews;
I appropriately named the activity *Vietnamese Teens Talk!***

other using the questions. The majority of our students had smartphones to audio-record and take photos of each other, so I saw this as an opportunity for students to actually be encouraged to use their smartphones in the classroom. They were certainly happy to oblige!

Public product. The students completed the assignment out of class and emailed me their audio and photo files, which I then posted on the following blog: <https://vteenstalk.blogspot.com/>. Students were able to listen to their own interview recordings and share them with friends and family if they desired. I observed that students who did not submit their recording before the deadline submitted them after I shared the blog page with them. I think that seeing the recordings and photos published on a webpage motivated other students to complete the project, as all students did eventually submit their recordings.

Reflection. One of the most valuable aspects of this PBL activity is that it encouraged students to practice and engage in speaking English outside the classroom. This is something that can be difficult for teachers to motivate students to do in an EFL setting, particularly in places where there are not many English-language speakers to engage with.

PBL LESSON 4: ANALYSIS OF COMMERCIALS AND CULTURE

Analysis of cultural themes in commercials is a fun way for students to build greater awareness of cultural values, norms, and practices within diverse societies. My colleagues and I used this assignment several times throughout the school year in various

courses. We used YouTube as a resource to search for commercials and modeled the assignment in class.

Intellectual challenge and accomplishment. This activity can promote greater media literacy and consumer consciousness, essential skills in the twenty-first century. Commercials in the students' first language can be analyzed for themes in their first culture, while commercials in English can be used for analysis of cultural themes in other countries, as well as the English language. Both approaches can work in the EFL classroom, depending on the goals of the course and the level of the students.

Authenticity. Students are inundated with advertisements in print, digital, and video media. Building greater media awareness through developing analytical skills is critical to students as consumers and producers of content. Many of my students actually sell products online themselves and know the power and value of advertising. This activity is more relevant now than ever, and explaining how to apply these skills in the world outside the classroom can certainly boost interest and motivation.

Collaboration and reflection. We created a group page on Facebook as a platform for students to post, describe, and comment. Following are the instructions for the commercial-analysis assignment:

Instructions: This week, analyze and post a link to an online commercial on our Facebook group page. Provide answers to the following questions:

- What cultural values, norms, and practices are in the video?
- How are these cultural values, norms, and practices used to advertise the product?

- Does the commercial influence you and other people to buy the product? Why or why not?

Project management and public product.

To make this assignment a project-based lesson that could be completed in a relatively short time and with low-tech resources, students can create their own print advertisement on posters. Students then present their advertisements, explaining the cultural values that the advertisement is based on to connect with and influence the advertisers' audience. Selected advertisements can target the first culture or a foreign culture. If time and resources allow, students can also produce, record, and edit a video advertisement in groups. I recommend that students first use a storyboard to plan the video and receive feedback from the teacher. Students can then act out their commercial, video-record it in English, and post it online to share with the class and others.

ADVICE FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING PBL ACTIVITIES

Planning and scaffolding of PBL is essential to ensure clarity and a successful experience. The following advice is based on my experiences with implementing project-based lessons in the EFL classroom:

1. The course and English-language goals and rationale of the project should be clear to teachers and be made explicit to students.
2. Teachers can and should collaborate in the design and implementation of PBL. This way, teachers can support students and each other throughout the process.
3. PBL can be a new method of learning and evaluation, so patience in the process is important. Sufficient time should be given in and outside class for students to prepare.
4. Support students for success. Provide an outline and rubric to make the goals

and requirements clear and to make grading easier later. Also provide a model example and analyze it as a class.

5. Allow students to choose their own topics. It is fine to provide examples and options, but encourage students to think of other topics on their own.
6. Make sure students designate roles and share work in their groups. Students should make clear what each person contributed.
7. If using multimedia, students will need guidance. Take time in class to go over how to use technology and any multimedia tools. Keep in mind that some students will be more proficient at using technology and can serve as group leaders in this area.
8. Technology is not a requirement for PBL. A lower-tech option is to have students prepare posters.
9. Provide feedback throughout the process in class, on outlines, and/or through a graphic organizer. This approach saves time in grading later and tends to lead to higher-quality projects.
10. Think of ways that students can share their work with peers and with others outside their class. Sharing work in this way can increase motivation and the quality of projects. The classroom (or another space) can be set up for mini-conferences, and students can share projects with peers and other invited guests.

CONCLUSION

Successfully implementing PBL takes time, patience, and careful planning, but the potential results make it all worthwhile. We must move beyond comprehension of terms and language exercises from the textbook and instead seek ways to challenge students by engaging them in real-world

issues that are authentic and collaborative. If we want students to think critically and communicate effectively in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, they will need such skills to thrive. PBL can be challenging to implement, but with proper planning and reflection, you can develop effective, manageable, and motivating learning experiences in your classroom. Learn from the process and keep refining your project-based lessons with each class. The results of your efforts can have a wide-reaching and positive impact on the lives of our students and our world.

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Cooperative Game-Playing in the EFL Classroom

The use of games in language classrooms is popular among many English-language teachers and educators. Engagement in game-based activities gives learners a chance not only to experiment with the language being learned in a natural and fun way but also to sharpen their English skills. Furthermore, a sense of trust and responsibility is promoted when students are in collaboration toward their team's goal.

However, during my years of teaching experience, some of my students ask to switch to another team because they cannot collaborate effectively with their teammates; they feel they are unable to share responsibilities effectively or make use of the strengths of individual members. Others complain that they are often on the losing team, owing to their lack of awareness of effective game strategies. Some advanced students want to be grouped with those at the same level rather than with those at a lower language proficiency. They sometimes protest that games do not help them hone their language skills, but rather are a waste of class time.

What successful strategies can teachers use to tackle these issues? How can teachers organize games in which students not only get beneficial language practice but also cooperate well with others? In what ways can lessons of teamwork, tolerance, and strategic planning be introduced to learners of English?

DESIGNING GAMES WITH STUDENTS IN MIND

It is true that game-based activities can bring numerous benefits to language learners. Wang

(2010) suggests that the employment of communicative language games can (1) enhance students' learning motivation in a convivial and exciting way, (2) provide learners with opportunities to decode the language in real-life scenarios, (3) encourage rich and meaningful language practice, (4) create a learning environment where a sense of security and support is perceived, and (5) promote collaborative partnership. However, this article does not concentrate exclusively on favorable aspects of language games. Instead, it aims to suggest practical strategies and effective approaches to designing games with the following characteristics:

- Students receive mutual support from their teammates, fostering positive group dynamics.
- Students become strategic planners willing to take risks and exchange their roles in different rounds of the game, alleviating possible anxiety for lower-level students.
- Students learn lessons of tolerance, sympathy, and teamwork, contributing to the development of successful learners beyond the classroom walls.

EXAMPLES OF POORLY PLANNED GAME-BASED ACTIVITIES

Activity 1:

Teacher's instruction: "I will divide our class into groups of four students. Then, I will show 12 questions on English tenses one by one. Raise your hand if you know the answer. The fastest student will have a chance to answer the question. Each correct answer brings your group one point."

Comment on Activity 1

The teacher put students in groups even though doing so does not lead to any teamwork; there is no time for strategy planning and no opportunity for students to share responsibilities. Moreover, when excitement runs high, students with advanced skills may seize every chance to raise their hands and answer the questions, impeding lower-proficiency students' engagement in the game.

A suggestion to make this activity a more team-building exercise, if there are four students in each group, is to prepare four question sets of relatively the same difficulty level—for example, the four sets could be based on tenses (e.g., past simple, past continuous, present perfect, and future). There could also be sets based on four different topics. Then, ask each team to give each member one question set. Four question sets mean that there will be four rounds, with each team member getting involved in one round. The idea is to ensure that lower-ability students get involved in the game and have just as much to contribute as other members because the questions are equally challenging. The teacher might want to allow team members to change their question sets or ask for their teammates' support. This would promote collaboration within the team.

Activity 2:

Teacher's instruction: "I will divide you into groups of three. Each group will do a word-search activity. There are 15 vocabulary items that you have studied already. Work in your teams to finish the word search. The fastest group is the winner."

Comment on Activity 2

Because of insufficient discussion time within the team, students may work individually to search for 15 words. In order to handle this issue, you can give students one or two minutes to seek the most effective way to do the word search. You might give explicit advice: "If there are 15 words, why doesn't each of you look for five words?" Then, have the three team members work at one table so that they can search for their designated words but simultaneously keep track of the team's progress.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL TEAM-BONDING GAMES

The two examples in the previous section show that designing a language game to engage all team members is not a straightforward task. However, the Before-During-After strategies below can help teachers plan games in which students not only have fun but also learn to collaborate effectively.

Before the Game-Based Activity

1. *Take the task difficulty into consideration.*

Team games are usually played by groups of three or more students. Therefore, if the task is too easy, it might result in member domination where one or two players assume responsibility for the entire activity. This has a detrimental impact on learners' motivation, especially in the case of less-advanced students because they might perceive that they do not have a clear role or are unable to make a meaningful contribution within their own group. At the other end of the spectrum, the winning team members may not feel any satisfaction, as the task was not worth their effort. Thus, the right level of challenge is of paramount importance to deepening students' engagement in team games.

2. *Break up a single game-based activity into different tasks.*

As demonstrated in Activity 1 above, teachers can turn an activity into multiple smaller tasks by designing question sets so that students can select tasks based on their strengths or

interests, increasing the chance that they will have a share of responsibility within the group. In brief, the success of a team game depends on a clear division of the team burden.

3. Allocate one or two minutes for students to discuss their responsibilities.

This step is often overlooked by foreign-language teachers because of time constraints. But group discussion gives learners time to evaluate their strengths, weaknesses, and interests so that they perform tasks that match their ability. Moreover, brief group discussions create a sense of direction within a team and a better understanding of each student's roles and duties prior to the game. It also gives students a chance to work together to develop strategies for playing the game.

4. Provide a table of student roles (see Table 1 for a sample).

Having students write down their specific roles fosters a sense of equality and of belonging to the team. Individual members will see that they are working together toward the team's goal and contributing to the team's success. Additionally, students may swap roles in later rounds of the game in order to get experience in different aspects of the game or simply to change the group's strategies.

During the Game-Based Activity

1. Organize more than one round of the game.

As mentioned in the discussion of Activity 1 above, multiple question sets enable learners to play the game several times. It is a good idea to plan a short interval to let students revise strategy. Think about why most sports have a break during games. Players need time to assess their performance and adopt different tactics. Team games in foreign-language classrooms are similar. Intervals of one or two minutes help student teams execute their next game plan. The process of self-reflection and strategic planning through game-based activities plays a role in the development of critical thinking. Finally, noise concerns arising from group games are managed by means of game intervals, as students hold quiet group discussions rather than shouting or jumping around the classroom.

2. Continually remind students of their roles.

For activities where students take time to work on a challenging task or puzzle, high-proficiency learners might take over all parts of the task. It is advisable for teachers to circulate around the classroom and ask to see each group's Student Roles Table to make sure students are doing their assigned tasks. If there is a sign of confusion or disorder, the teacher can also ask each group member to explain his or her role. This can serve as

ROLES		
	Round 1	Round 2
Student 1	Walk around the room and remember sentences A and B.	
Student 2	Walk around the room and remember sentences C and D.	
Student 3	Listen and write sentences A and B.	
Student 4	Listen and write sentences C and D.	
Note:	All four members check grammar and spelling when all the sentences have been written down.	

Table 1. Student Roles Table (sample)

a reminder to students and keep the group members on task.

3. Encourage students to exchange roles.

When the first round ends, have students revisit their Student Roles Table. Tell them to exchange roles in the next round of the game. This opens up opportunities for learners to step out of their comfort zone by trying things they might feel less confident about. A role change also helps students think strategically, as they have to decide which members are better fit for which new roles. Furthermore, lower-level students may feel that they are a key part of the team when they take on different roles as the game proceeds.

After the Game-Based Activity

1. Praise the winning team while encouraging the losing teams.

When the game ends, winners are usually the center of attention. The class is filled with exclamatory phrases such as “Good job!” and “Well done!” However, we teachers may not recognize that such comments could be perceived as showing favoritism of one team over another. To prevent this, genuine care and encouragement should be shown to other teams as well. Comments like “All teams did a good job. I was delighted to see how well you collaborated in your groups,” and “Everyone, give yourself a big round of applause for your achievements. You should all feel proud of your work” help cultivate self-esteem among all learners. After all, the point of classroom games is not to declare winners and losers; the purposes are to practice language skills, collaborate, think critically and creatively, and have fun.

2. Give students one or two minutes to reflect on their overall team performance.

A sense of frustration and disappointment is harmful to students’ motivation and should not be a part of their involvement in language-based games; this is another reason not to emphasize winning and losing. Instead, concentrate on a positive side of the activity

(e.g., students’ language-skills development and their teamwork) and give students time to reflect. Below are sample questions that students might answer:

“What do you like about this game?”

“What have you learned from the competition?”

“What language skills have you developed?”

“If you played the game again, what would you do differently?”

Reflection time proves vital to the growth of language learners on both social and professional levels. They can discuss with their own teammates, resulting in heightened awareness of one another’s personalities and perspectives. As a result, group dynamics can be enhanced in future classes and the next game or activity. At the same time, students can listen to other teams explaining their strategies, which they may find useful to apply in subsequent games and projects. Typically, such moments right after the game are set aside for error correction, but reflection time could be just as valuable. Also, if time permits, this could be a good time to solicit students’ feedback for necessary alterations in the game. Below are two sample questions:

“How can this game be improved?”

“Do you know any other team games?”

One of the reasons I support using team-bonding games in the classroom is that groups of students with lower language proficiency are able to beat groups with more-advanced language skills if responsibility is shared properly. When the game ends, a lesson of teamwork could be put forward for class discussion.

PRACTICAL TEAM-BONDING GAMES

Game 1: Running Dictation

This type of game-based activity is probably known to many language teachers. However,

I am including my own version because it demonstrates how group work can be shared equally among members of the team. More importantly, students have opportunities to change roles during the game. Finally, the activity can be used to practice a wide range of language skills and is easily modified to accommodate diverse student levels.

Level: Elementary to Advanced

Time: 15–20 minutes

Language/Skill Practice: Reviewing grammar

Procedure for Round 1:

1. Organize groups of four students.
2. Explain the rules of the game. Two members of the team will walk around the classroom and read four sentences that are written on separate pieces of paper, marked A, B, C, and D, and posted on the walls. These two team members have to remember the sentences (no writing is allowed), then report back to the other two

team members, who will write the sentences down.

Announce that the four sentences are part of a story. Tell the class that after the groups have written down the sentences, they have to reorder the four sentences to form a logical story—and then write one more sentence to complete the story.

3. Put up a Student Roles Table (see Table 1) and allow a few minutes for team discussion.
4. Have each team fill out a Student Roles Table or simply decide on each group member’s role.
5. Tell students to close their eyes. Put the sentences on the wall, then ask students to open their eyes. (Note that with large classes, you might have to place several copies of each sentence around the room.)
6. Tell the class that the winning team is the group that finishes first, with no mistakes. Then start the game.

ROLES	
Student 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a task to earn an advantage or find a hidden advantage. • Keep track of the time. • Check to make sure the writing meets the conditions.
Student 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write the first two sentences. <p>(Students try to write their own sentences. However, if they get stuck with vocabulary or grammar, they can ask their teammates for assistance. Also, if any other team uses an advantage and sends a member to help, students will write with the support from other groups as well.)</p>
Student 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write the next two sentences.
Student 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write the last two sentences.
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together to form a story plot first. • Decide who writes sentences with required conditions. • Decide whether you want to write the whole story first and then edit, or whether you want to edit carefully as you go. • Save the advantages you have to help other groups. • Gather to check grammar and spelling together.

Table 2. Student Roles Table for We're Against the Clock!

7. As students play, circulate and check students' sentences. If there are mistakes, tell students to recheck and revise their work. The team members who walked around and read the sentences must go back and reread the sentence(s), report back, and help teammates who are writing the sentences.
8. Prepare short, funny English video clips and have the winning team pick one to watch. In this way, the class will share enjoyable moments together after the game. You could also let the winning team choose a song for the class to sing or listen to.

Another idea is to tell all the teams to politely express congratulations. They can use phrases such as "Congratulations," "Good job," and "Well done." Students receiving these words and phrases of praise can smile back and say, "Thank you."

Note: During the game, make sure that Students 1 and 2 will not write the sentences; they are allowed only to report back to Students 3 and 4. If time permits at the end of the game, read out loud the extra sentences produced by various groups to finish the story and applaud their creativity.

Sample Sentences for Round 1

These sentences focus on students' knowledge of the past tense in English.

- A. While she was cooking her meal, the lights went out.
- B. Mary was studying at 7 o'clock last night.
- C. Suddenly, she heard a strange noise in the living room.
- D. Then she stopped doing her homework to cook something.
- E.

(The most logical order of the sentences is B, D, A, C. Student groups collaborate to write the fifth sentence of the story.)

Procedure for Round 2:

The procedures in Round 2 are the same as the procedures in Round 1, except that students must swap roles. Students 1 and 2 write the sentences, while Students 3 and 4 read and remember them.

Sample Sentences for Round 2

- A. She even asked for my telephone number and address.
- B. I asked myself, "What should I do?"
- C. Yesterday, a beautiful girl said "hello" to me.
- D. But I had never seen her before in my life.
- E.

(The most logical order of the sentences is C, A, D, B. Student groups collaborate to write the fifth sentence of the story.)

Benefits of Game 1

This activity provides practice with English tenses (past tense in these examples, but the activity can be adjusted to review other tenses), reading comprehension, and logical thinking. In addition, students need to focus on spelling, and teachers can create sentences with recently learned vocabulary for review. The role changes in Round 2 contribute to equality of opportunities among team members.

Game 2: We're Against the Clock!

This is one of my favorite games because student groups are not against each other, but they unite to compete against the clock (a certain amount of time allotted by the teacher). The participants should work in their own teams to complete the tasks but simultaneously support other teams. Otherwise, the class will lose the game to the clock. When the game ends, the class can discuss lessons of teamwork, generosity, and strategy.

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Time: 20–25 minutes

Language/Skill Practice: Creative writing

Procedure:

1. Prepare a list of six numbers—for example, 6, 9, 10, 7, 11, and 5 (for classes of advanced students, you can select more numbers and/or larger numbers).
2. Organize groups of four students. Tell each group to write a short story on any topic, using any tense—with the condition that the number of words in each sentence must be the same as the designated number. For instance, with the numbers listed in Step 1, the first sentence must have six words, the second must have nine words, and so on.
3. Allow groups 12 minutes to write their story. (Time can be adjusted depending on students' level.)
4. If you want, you can introduce extra conditions to make the game more challenging. Conditions should be appropriate for your students' level and needs; an example of a condition I have used is, "There must be at least two phrasal verbs in the story." I added this condition to draw my students' attention to phrasal verbs, which we had covered in previous lessons. The game might be used to practice a range of grammar points, with conditions such as, "There must be at least three different modal verbs." However, teachers can create other conditions fitting the objectives of the lesson or challenging the students in some way, such as, "There must be no letter *h* in the first sentence" or "The last word of your story must be *happy*."
5. Tell students that the class beats the clock when (1) all the teams have finished their writing before the allotted time, and

(2) there are no more than three spelling and grammar errors in each story.

6. As an optional step, announce that besides the writing task, you have hidden four types of "advantages" in the classroom. (Note that you must prepare and hide the advantages before class begins.) Advantages I have used include the following:
 - Your group has two extra minutes to write.
 - Your group can back up other teams (send one member to other groups to help them with their writing).
 - Your group needs to write only five sentences instead of six.
 - You may call for teacher assistance with vocabulary and grammar.

Note that instead of hiding the advantages, you could also have teams earn them by answering questions, doing well on a quiz, or completing some other task of your choice.

7. Tell students that they can give the advantages to other teams—and that the clock will "win" if all groups cannot finish their writing on time. Tell them, "If you complete your writing but still have an advantage, you should help other teams. On the other hand, if your team is in trouble, you can shout, 'We need help!' and see whether other groups have advantages they can use to support your team."

What is the reward for the winning team, which in this case is the whole class? If you feel confident, you can sing an English song to your students or ask them to perform a chicken dance with you. This will definitely build rapport between you and the students. Otherwise, have students pick a story for you to read out loud in the next class,

or you can ask them to suggest a short movie they want to see.

8. Once the rules are explained and understood, give teams a Student Roles Table (see Table 2) so that they can strategize and make sure everyone contributes.
9. When time is up, groups exchange their stories with other groups to check the required conditions. Each sentence length must match the designated number, and (for example) the story must include at least two phrasal verbs. During that time, the teacher can walk around to check for spelling and grammatical errors.

Reflections on Game 2

1. Tell the receiving groups to express sincere thanks to the giving groups.
2. Invite the giving groups to explain how they helped the class reach the goal.
3. Invite the class to comment on related questions:
 - “Why should we help people who need it?”
 - “When we receive help from others, what should we do?”

The reflection for this activity gives students extra speaking practice, improves class rapport, and helps students realize the importance of giving and taking.

Benefits of Game 2

With regard to skills development, one of the purposes of this game is to review phrasal verbs (or another grammar point of the teacher’s choosing). However, the conditions

must be given with care because they can make the game challenging.

This team-bonding game encourages students to collaborate as a team and to support other teams, too. Student groups should make decisions on who will fulfill each role. If they have an advantage, how will they use it? Will they use the advantage themselves or save it for another team? The goal is not only to complete their writing task but also to move other teams forward. In this way, a sense of collaboration and support is established within the team itself and within the entire class.

Game 3: We’ve Got It!

Level: Elementary to Advanced

Time: 10–15 minutes

Language/Skill Practice: Reviewing vocabulary

Material: A list of categories

Procedure for Round 1:

Put students into groups of three. Write six categories on the board. Then, write any letter. Next, require students to come up with a word in each category that begins with this letter. When the team has written a word for each category, all three members shout, “We’ve got it!” Have one member write the words on the board. If the words fit the categories and are spelled correctly, the group gets a point. Table 3 gives an example.

You can have groups work on one letter at a time, or you can pick three or four letters for the first round.

Note that in order to ensure that the team members are working toward the same

Letter	Job	Place	Food/Drink	Animal	Celebrity	Transportation
t	teacher	town	tea	tiger	Taylor Swift	train

Table 3. Sample categories, with entries for the letter t

goal together, not separately, you can give each team a large piece of paper with all the categories so that they have to write their words on it. In this way, they can (1) work independently to find words in the categories they take responsibility for and at the same time (2) support the team in finding words for other categories if they happen to know words that fit their teammates' categories.

Procedure for Round 2:

Tell students to suggest one letter to challenge the other groups. If there are seven groups, prepare seven pieces of paper numbered from 1 to 7. Then, have one student in each group randomly pick a number. The group with number 1 will challenge the group with number 2, who later challenges the group with number 3, and so on. If the challenged group comes up with all the words correctly within 45 seconds, that group can ask the group that sets the challenge to sing an English song or act out a certain instruction (e.g., walk like a robot or make a sound like a cat). If the challenged group cannot complete the task in 45 seconds, then the group that sets the challenge decides what the challenged group should do—but only if the group that sets the challenge is able to fill in the categories!

Note: Do not permit students to pick *j*, *x*, *q*, or *z* because it is difficult to form words that start with these letters.

Procedure for Round 3:

If time permits, teachers are encouraged to participate in this round with the class, as the benefits are significant. From my experience, when I get involved in a small competition with my students (usually with groups of five or six), the class atmosphere is great fun. To be fair, I tell my students to create their own favorite categories. Then, I select any student to pick a letter, and we play the game.

My students are excited to challenge me, and in all honesty, I have lost more than I have won. But this approach is a demonstration of the power of teamwork. My students are aware that one person with “advanced”

knowledge does not always beat an entire team, and that they still have a chance to win if they share responsibilities properly and work collaboratively toward the team's goal.

Benefits of Game 3

One of the objectives of this activity is to review vocabulary. The selected categories should be based on topics the class has studied. On the other hand, the activity has the potential to enlarge students' vocabulary range as well. Furthermore, when students share responsibility, they can learn the value of teamwork.

Note: For larger groups, challenge them with more categories (e.g., eight or ten). Moreover, make sure students shout, “We've got it!” instead of “I've got it!” when they complete the puzzle. The “We” rather than the “I” intensifies a sense of belonging to a team. Finally, providing an interval of a minute or two between rounds gives students time to strategize as a group and work as a cohesive and unified team.

PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS

A common problem in organizing game-based activities is some students' belief that games are a waste of time lacking any valuable language practice. Giving a concise explanation of the game's benefits bolsters students' motivation. I usually start by saying, “This game will help you to _____” to help my students understand the purpose of the game. When the game ends, you can review the language points that students have practiced. This approach reinforces the idea that these games are not only for playing but also for learning.

Another issue is that high-proficiency students may not want to be grouped with those at a lower level. Meanwhile, less-advanced students may feel that their contributions are not appreciated. These attitudes are likely to have damaging effects on group dynamics in the long run; Oakley et al. (2004, 9) contend that “being part of an ineffective or dysfunctional team may well be inferior to independent study in promoting learning and can lead to extreme frustration and resentment.” One

effective solution is to provide a Student Roles Table and have students decide who best fits each role; then, in the second and third rounds of the game, have students exchange roles. Students thus have to restructure their teams and collaborate while tapping one another's strengths. More importantly, all learners are given a chance to become key players on the team, consequently building their self-esteem. Another recommendation is to allocate reflection time for students to evaluate their teamwork and suggest ways to enhance their overall team performance next time. This can strengthen bonds within a team.

Friehs (2016) writes that some teachers oppose the use of games in the classroom because the competitive nature of games might contribute to an unfavorable learning environment. Clearly, the problem of having “winners” and “losers” is a concern, and language teachers should be prepared to handle the issues of disappointment from teams that “lose” and/or excessive pride from the team that “wins.” During game play, a thorough observation of students' attitudes and the class atmosphere is necessary so that any issues are immediately remedied. If possible, collect students' opinions for modification of subsequent games. Overall, the teacher and the learners should fully understand that the objective of any team-bonding game in the classroom is to open up collaboration opportunities for students to bond with their peers while improving their English skills, not to promote competitive attitudes.

CONCLUSION

Games not only offer authentic language practice but, more importantly, have the potential to shape students into critical thinkers who are willing to take risks, show compassion for their teammates, and see the value of teamwork and tolerance. As in Game 1, a sense of equality is emphasized when all members perform different roles regardless of their language abilities. In Game 2, students become more strategic and compassionate game players when they collaborate within their own teams and exchange mutual support to move other groups forward. In Game 3,

students recognize the power of teamwork when groups stand a chance of defeating “stronger” players, even their teachers.

The suggested three-stage strategy is conducive to successful language games:

1. Before the game, take into account the shared responsibility among team members, provide a Student Roles Table, and give time to strategize.
2. During the game, allow time for brief intervals and encourage students to swap their roles.
3. After the game, allot a few minutes for students' evaluation of their team performance and reflection on the game.

Following these crucial steps, language teachers should feel confident to incorporate games in their lesson plans and be ready to relish the enjoyable learning environment that language games can create.

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READER'S GUIDE

This guide is designed to enrich your reading of the articles in this issue. You may choose to read them on your own, taking notes or jotting down answers to the discussion questions below. Or you may use the guide to explore the articles with colleagues.

For example, many teachers discuss *Forum* at regularly scheduled meetings with department colleagues and members of teachers' groups, or in teacher-training courses and workshops. Often, teachers choose an article for their group to read before the meeting or class, then discuss that article when they meet. Teachers have found it helpful to take notes on articles or write a response to an article and bring that response to share in a discussion group. Another idea is for teachers to try a selected activity or technique described in one of the articles, then report back to the group on their experiences and discuss positives, negatives, and possible adaptations for their teaching context.

Exploring and Expressing Culture through Project-Based Learning (Pages 2–13)

Pre-Reading

1. Do you know what project-based learning is? If so, how would you describe it to someone who is not familiar with it? If not, what do you think project-based learning involves?
2. If you have taught English using project-based learning, what was the focus? Were you satisfied with the results? What benefits and possible drawbacks did you notice?
3. What does “expressing culture” mean to you? What does “exploring culture” mean to you?
4. What stereotypes do you think people from other cultures might have about your culture? What stereotypes do you think you might have about other cultures?
2. Reread the Stereotypes and Generalizations Activity description in Figure 1. Fill in the blanks in Part B. If possible, compare your responses with a colleague's. If you disagree on any of the items, discuss why. When your students do this activity, make sure they have time to explain the reasons for their responses and to discuss—in groups or as a class—reasons why they might disagree with one another.
3. The article suggests that it's important for students to share their work with others outside their classroom. In your situation, is it easy for students to share their work with peers in other classes? How could your students share their work with people outside your school?
4. The author describes a project that he calls *Vietnamese Teens Talk!* What does that project involve? Could your students carry out a similar project? What challenges might you and your students have to deal with? What could you call your project?

Post-Reading

1. Think about the courses that you teach. In which course—or courses—would these activities fit best?

5. In Lesson 4, students use commercials to analyze cultural values, norms, and practices. Pick out a commercial that is currently being shown in your country or region. Watch it several times. What cultural values, norms, and practices do you notice in the commercial? Could you use this commercial as an example in your class?
6. Think about experiences you have had with stereotypes—stereotypes you might have had or stereotypes other people have had. Would you be willing to share any of those experiences with your students as part of this overall assignment? Have you had an experience in which a stereotype you had eventually changed or disappeared? What caused the change?
7. Have your students ever expressed or discussed concerns about stereotypes with you? How could you use any or all of these activities to help your students deal with their concerns?

Cooperative Game-Playing in the EFL Classroom (Pages 14–23)

Pre-Reading

1. Do your students play games in your English classes? If so, what are the purposes of the games? If not, what are the reasons?
2. Have your students ever told you that they don't want to play games in your classes? If so, what reasons did they give? Did you agree with them?
3. If you played games in English classes as a student, did you enjoy them? Did they help you learn or practice using the language? Was there anything about the games you disliked?
4. What do you think makes a game “cooperative”?
5. Think about games you have played in English classes and games that you have had your students play. Would you say that those games are cooperative? Why or why not?
3. If your students play games in your classes, do you tend to keep giving them different games to learn and play? Or do you prefer to use and reuse just a few games that you adapt, according to the goals of the unit or lesson you are working on? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?
4. The author provides two sets of sentences that can be used in this version of the Running Dictation game. Brainstorm a few more sets of your own. After your students have played the game, can you ask them to create more sets themselves? These sets could be used by other groups or in future classes that you teach.
5. What do you think are appropriate rewards or “prizes” for students? Do you think prizes should be given at all?
6. The author notes that “Giving a concise explanation of the game’s benefits bolsters students’ motivation” (page 22). The next time your students play a game, make sure to explain the game’s benefits. Do you notice an increase in their motivation?

Post-Reading

1. If you have a game that you often ask your students to play, think about how cooperative it is. Are there ways you could make it more cooperative?
2. Would you agree that the more cooperative a game is, the more enjoyable it will be for students to play? Why or why not?
7. Now that you have finished reading the article, has your opinion about using games in language classes changed in any way? Please explain.

Peer Feedback in Second-Language Writing Classes: “Dear My Friend ... ”

by ÖZGE YOL



Peer feedback is an essential component of writing classes, as polished writing and improved writing skills are products of multiple revisions. However, teachers and students may sometimes find the peer-review process frustrating and might even question the benefit of it. To positively shift my students' perception of peer feedback and transform it into an effective component of their writing process, I designed this “write a letter to your friend” activity. It replaced

the traditional in-class peer-feedback task, during which students switched their papers with each other, read the papers, and then discussed the issues they noticed.

The problem with this traditional way in my class was that my students mostly focused on fixing language problems rather than commenting on content and organization. This peer-feedback letter activity facilitates students' engagement with a peer's paper

through the use of guiding questions. Students use their answers to those questions to form constructive feedback, expressed in a letter. They then have a one-on-one conversation to better understand the points made in the letter and discuss further questions and issues.

INTRODUCING THE TASK

The detailed description of the task is below. Teachers should feel free to adapt the task based on their learning context and the needs of their students. This task can be implemented in stages, depending on the class schedule or the level of the students. Providing students with enough time for a real engagement with their peer's paper is important, so I recommend that the main task (i.e., the first five steps) be assigned as homework and that the one-on-one feedback conversation take place in class.

It is crucial to introduce the activity in class. In fact, the activity should first be practiced in class by walking students through each step (starting from Step 2). In this way, the teacher can immediately deal with questions and concerns of the students and clarify the expected outcome of the tasks. Teachers who use a student rubric for the writing assignment can go over the rubric with students, make sure they understand it, and encourage them to use it for their feedback.

Note that the activity below is described for paper-based exchanges of essays. However, teachers can easily adapt the activity for online or digital exchanges—if the students are digitally savvy. Students can exchange essays via email and provide feedback by using the Review feature of Microsoft Word. They can attach the reviewed essay to an email along with their letter. Digital exchange can also be implemented through Google Docs, which allows multiple users to access the same document. In any digital exchange, though, it is crucial for teachers to demonstrate how to use that certain program or platform in class so that students know how to access the essays, make comments, track changes, and accept or reject changes.

Below is the introductory part of the peer-review assignment I have used in my classes.

Take-Home Peer-Review Assignment

Assignment: You will read your peer's essay and provide feedback (comments) to him or her in a letter. In your feedback, you will focus on major content, such as the development of ideas and the organization of paragraphs. This assignment will help you to understand and practice the revision process in writing an essay. Your feedback will also help your peer improve the essay.

Directions: Please help your peer improve his or her essay draft by following the steps described below. *Please do not mark or correct any grammar on your partner's paper while following the steps!*

Important: Please provide quality feedback. That means that your comments need to be thoughtful and helpful. Remember, if the essay is already well-written, you still need to provide constructive feedback on the strengths of the paper.

THE STEPS TO FOLLOW AT HOME

The task itself is composed of seven steps. Students are guided from the beginning step, exchanging their essays, to the last one, discussing the feedback with their peers. Below are the steps that students need to follow as their homework. (Again, these steps are written for the exchange of paper copies; as explained above, teachers can use a similar procedure with exchanges of digital versions of essays.)

Step 1: EXCHANGE

Exchange essays with your partner and take your peer's essay home with you.

Step 2: SKIM

Quick read: At home, skim your partner's essay all the way through without a pen in your hand. Then, briefly write your first thought about the content of the essay in your notebook or on a sheet of paper. Consider whether and in what ways the essay answers the essay prompt. Think

about the strengths of the essay—the parts that were most interesting to you as you read. Also, think about how the content can be improved. You can check the rubric to better understand the expectations for the content of the essay.

Step 3: SCAN

Detailed read: Scan the entire paper and prepare a brief outline of the essay by checking the essay’s thesis statement and the topic sentence, supporting ideas, examples, and conclusion sentence in each body paragraph. On the outline you prepare, mark “N/A” if any of these components is missing. Put a question mark (?) if any of these components is not clear.

Step 4: REREAD

Reread your partner’s essay one more time, focusing on strengths of the essay and points to consider for improving it. You can take notes on the essay if you like.

Step 5: WRITE A LETTER

After reviewing your notes, list what you feel are the essay’s strongest points and explain the reasons why you find them strong. Then, choose points that need improvement. Carefully write or type an explanation of each of these points and provide suggestions for how to improve each one. This feedback must be written in complete sentences in a letter form. You can check the provided example letter (see Figure 1). Make sure your letter is well-organized and understandable. *Again, remember not to mark or correct any grammar on your partner’s paper.*

Step 6: BRING YOUR LETTER TO CLASS

On the due date, bring two copies of your letter to class (one copy for your partner and one for your teacher), as well as your peer’s essay.

FEEDBACK EXCHANGE IN CLASS

After composing the feedback letter at home, students bring two copies of their letters to class. In my course, I graded peer-review work as a part of the writing assignments, so I collected one of the copies for evaluation and for providing feedback to the feedback givers. Students share the other copy with their peers, as explained in Step 7 below. Depending on the length of the

writing assignment, five to ten minutes of peer-feedback exchange can be provided in class. The teacher should supervise this feedback-exchange session in case students need guidance.

Step 7: SHARE WITH YOUR PARTNER

In class, you and your partner will talk about your feedback. Give your letter to your peer and let him or her read it. Then, provide a brief explanation of the points you made in the letter. If your partner has difficulty understanding your comments, try to explain them in a different way. You may also ask me (your teacher) for help. Please remember that your goal is to help your partner notice the essay’s strengths and the points to improve in order to continue to develop the essay before the final draft.

SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER FOR TEACHERS

It is important to provide scaffolding for the students during this task. As the teacher, you can provide guiding questions for the skimming, scanning, and rereading steps, as in the examples below. These questions should be adapted, depending on the genre of the writing task and the learning context. Students do not need to respond to all of these questions, and of course other questions are possible.

- o Is the main idea of the essay clear? Why do you think so? If not, how would you change it?
- o Is the main idea of each paragraph clear? Why do you (not) think so?
- o Do the topic sentences of the body paragraphs introduce the main points of the paragraphs? If not, what could the writer do to improve them?
- o Is the main idea of each paragraph supported by sufficient supporting details? If not, what would you recommend to the writer?
- o Are the details related to the main point? What is the proof? If not, what would you suggest that the writer change?

- o Does the essay follow the conventions of the assigned genre (informative, argumentative, prospectus, and so on)? How do you know that? Provide examples.
- o How does the writer make transitions between ideas? Do you think those transitions are effective? If not, what would you suggest the writer change?
- o Does the writer discuss interesting, challenging ideas? How does he or she do that?

Providing a sample peer-feedback letter can help students understand its structure. However, some students may take the example too seriously and try to replicate its exact structure. To prevent this problem, the teacher should clarify the purpose of the sample.

Figure 1 shows a sample letter that I introduced in my classes.

CONCLUSION

As a freshman-composition instructor, I implemented this activity with adult learners of English as a second language and received positive comments from the students, but the activity can also be implemented in diverse contexts with various learner groups. You can modify the language of the task, the questions, and the sample letter based on the proficiency level and the needs of the students and on the expectations of the writing task. One reason this activity worked well in my classes is that students realized that peer feedback does not equal error correction. Writing a letter personalized the feedback and added a meaningful communicative writing task to the peer-review process.

Özge Yol is a former composition instructor and ESL/EFL teacher. She is currently a doctoral candidate in the Educational Theory and Practice program at Binghamton University.

Dear Asma,

I enjoyed reading your essay about environmental pollution. I think your hook is captivating! You also ended your essay with an interesting anecdote. Not only did you remind us of the main points, but you gave the reader a final, related idea to think about. In addition, I really liked that you varied your use of words and phrases to express the key points. Your language was clear and to the point.

I would like to make suggestions on how to improve your essay for the final draft. First, I think that you should be careful not to make this expository essay sound like an argumentative essay. In this genre, you are expected to explain only the facts, and you should not argue your opinion. Your reader needs to be informed, not persuaded. At some points, you revealed your viewpoint on the issue. For example, in paragraph 3, you say that the environmental law is “a strange, silly rule.” However, you should avoid using words that show emotion and opinion. Another point to work on is repetition. I found that body paragraph 1 contained at least three sentences telling the impact of using plastic bottles. If you have a different point to make, you should use different language or provide other examples so that your readers notice the difference. Lastly, in the second body paragraph, you should elaborate on the main idea, as that paragraph ends abruptly. One way to do this could be by providing more examples of the areas where water pollution is high.

This is my feedback on your paper. Thank you for sharing it with me. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. My email address is _____.

Best,
Xu

Figure 1. Sample peer-feedback letter

Using Narrow Reading to Develop Fluency

by GUY REDMER

Most teachers who use textbooks know that they are restrictive by nature. Units jump from topic to topic without recycling much vocabulary. This has often left me wondering how to truly develop reading fluency in terms of word recognition.

One effective solution may be narrow reading (NR)—that is, reading several texts about a single, narrow topic. NR may involve reading five short texts about water pollution or constantly immersing oneself in articles about Asian cuisine. NR is championed by some as benefiting word recognition due to a decreased vocabulary load; that is because in NR, a core set of word items is recycled. The vocabulary is far more salient, allowing for a noticing effect (Han and D'Angelo 2009)—the idea that noticing certain features of language aids acquisition.

NR has been the topic of a handful of studies. Notably, running news stories have been found to contain significantly higher word repetition and fewer word types than unrelated stories (Kyongho and Nation 1989; Schmitt and Carter 2000). In an experimental inquiry, Kang (2015) found that NR resulted in greater receptive and productive knowledge of target vocabulary. Chang and Millett (2017) explored the effects of NR on reading speed and comprehension with significant results. And there are both L1 and L2 findings indicating that repetition in context leads to reading fluency (Chen and Truscott 2010; Webb 2007).

Based on what we know about NR to date, I was inspired to try it as a supplement in an undergraduate English as a foreign language (EFL) course. I teach in Taiwan, and every academic year one of my university classes is made up of non-English majors. I decided

to do NR with this group and have them record reading speed as well as answer comprehension questions. I theorized that if the benefits of NR were present, it could be highly motivating.

MATERIALS

I used running news stories, as these can be found in both print and digital formats. To be clear, a running news story is one that is continued over a period of time as the story develops. Similarly, NR can focus on a single news story covered by various media outlets. To access this material, teachers worldwide can explore English-language newspapers in their country. One advantage of newspapers is that they are often available in both print and online formats. There are also online news sources designed for English learners, such as Voice of America (learningenglish.voanews.com) and News in Levels (www.newsinlevels.com). The latter offers the same news story in three levels. If all the levels are generally comprehensible to learners, this format could



also be used as a type of NR. Both of these sites feature an audio recording of each text.

PROCEDURE

To begin, a teacher needs to identify reading topics that would be perceived as interesting to his or her particular class. In my case, in a fairly short amount of time, I was able to find enough material to make sets of recent running news stories. They were accessed from one of Taiwan’s English-language newspapers and a website covering Taiwan news in English.

After a teacher selects an appropriate topic (or multiple topics), the next step is to determine readability level and vocabulary load. This leads to another reason that running news stories are optimal choices: typically, the length is relatively short, so a teacher can scan the articles to determine whether there is a high degree of word repetition between them. But this information can also be just a click away. In determining vocabulary load, I used lexical profiling software called VocabProfile English (www.lextutor.ca/vp/eng/). It’s free and includes a tutorial. A user can simply copy and paste any text up to 35,000 words. The program will then analyze the text for a range of features, which include a list of words from the most frequent 1,000 word families, words from the second–most frequent 1,000 word families, content words, and any words from the Academic Word List (sometimes referred to as the AWL). Proper nouns are separated. Importantly, each word type is listed along with the number of tokens. Tokens are the total number of words, whereas types are distinct words in a text. (For example, in

the sentence *The teacher prepared lessons for the morning classes and evening classes*, there are 11 tokens but only nine types: *the, teacher, prepared, lessons, for, morning, classes, and, evening.*) Moreover, a type–token ratio is calculated. This information is necessary to determine whether there is indeed a high degree of word repetition with fewer word types overall.

After the texts are selected, comprehension questions can be made for each reading or for the set as a whole. I opted to write five multiple-choice questions for a whole set, although some teachers may prefer questions after each reading. My questions largely focused on main ideas and key details. To illustrate, one of the NR topics was Princess Mako of Japan and her engagement. One question was, “Who is the woman marrying?” Another question was, “What has not yet been decided about the marriage?” Five choices followed each question. The questions were relatively easy to write. The purpose of the questions was to simply confirm that the students comprehended the readings.

The teacher’s preparation is summarized in Table 1.

Each set comprised five articles on a particular running news story. The word count for articles averaged between 400 and 500 words. Printed sets were stapled, typically with a total of five pages per set. They were distributed to students at the beginning of the class. Of course, stapling the readings is not necessary if a teacher finds it impractical. Also, in some class environments, it may be more

Step	Rationale
1. Determine a topic and select materials.	Topics should be perceived as useful and/or interesting to learners in order for NR to be maintained.
2. Check vocabulary load manually or with software such as VocabProfile.	This will confirm the type–token ratio and degree of word overlap.
3. Write or select comprehension questions.	This measurement will confirm that reading for meaning is taking place.

Table 1. Preparation for NR of texts

efficient to project the readings onto a screen and thereby save paper.

The students were instructed not to go back and reread any text. They were also told not to skim or read at a forced rate. An online stopwatch was projected onto a screen for the entire class to see clearly. Naturally, timing can be done by a clock or watch, smartphone, or other device. If done this way, the teacher could prewrite time intervals on the board and point them out as the time counts down. I told the students to begin reading upon hearing my signal. Immediately after reading, students were to check the screen, record their time, and calculate their reading rate. Finally, students were instructed to answer the reading-comprehension questions after all five readings.

Thus, the basic in-class procedure for students was as follows:

1. Silently read the article.
2. Note the time.
3. Calculate the reading rate.
4. Repeat with the next article.
5. Answer comprehension questions.

The entire class consistently got excellent scores on the reading-comprehension questions. But what was more interesting was that reading speed increased significantly from reading to reading within each set. Moreover, all students later reported that they perceived some improved word recognition through NR.

CONCLUSION

My classroom experience with NR involved young adult learners and news stories. The dedicated time was approximately 40 minutes of a 100-minute class. There was no direct instruction of vocabulary offered. But many variations are possible, of course. Some are as follows:

- Topics can supplement a textbook. This would recycle and reinforce vocabulary that students may be required to know for exams.
- Graded readers or short fiction can be used, especially with younger or lower-level learners. In this scenario, each student would read different versions of the same title while keeping a record of reading speed.
- Sets of NR readings could be spread out over a number of classes. This would have the added benefit of repeated exposure over a period of time.

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Extended Icebreaker

by ALEX BARRETT

Icebreakers are first-day activities that are meant to give students and the teacher an opportunity to get to know one another. They are helpful activities for taking a class full of strangers and turning them into friends (or at least acquaintances). However, icebreaker activities tend to be short and limited in the extent to which students can interact. How well can we really get to know someone during a 30-minute activity on the first day of class?

I have used the activity described below across a variety of contexts and levels, most recently at the university level in China. It started when I noticed that students in my classes expected an icebreaker activity on the first day, participated begrudgingly, and then seemingly tried their best to limit their interaction with most of their classmates throughout the rest of the course. This was a problem for me, especially since I wanted them interacting and using English as much as possible. So I decided to extend my icebreaker.

SETUP

This activity takes a few minutes per day and can be used for a few weeks or throughout the entire course. I think this activity works best at the beginning of the lesson because it serves as a warm-up that gets students speaking right away. It is ideal for English learners who are at least at a level where they can carry on a simple conversation for a couple of minutes, but it can be adapted for lower-level students as well.

Before the class, you just need to select a speaking prompt. I have always used *would you rather* questions as my prompts because

they are fun and personal, and they can easily generate conversation for a few minutes or more, depending on your students. You can find long lists of *would you rather* questions with an online search or come up with your own (in fact, Activate Games has a board game with many examples: <https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/activate-board-games#child-1482>). Here are some of my favorites:

- Would you rather have thumbs on your feet or a tail? Why?
- Would you rather be able to fly or to breathe under water? Why?
- Would you rather leave your country but never be able to return, or stay in your country but never be able to leave? Why?

In my opinion, sillier questions make the activity better; they allow personalities to shine through, and that helps students get to know one another faster and better. Also, remember that it's important to add *why* to the end of the question so that students have to justify their answers, which helps them talk more extensively.

PROCEDURE

On the first day of class, write your speaking prompt on the board so that students can see it. Then say or write the following directions:

1. Stand up and find a student you do not know or have not spoken to.
2. Introduce yourself—and be sure to learn that student's name.

This activity takes a few minutes per day and can be used for a few weeks or throughout the entire course.

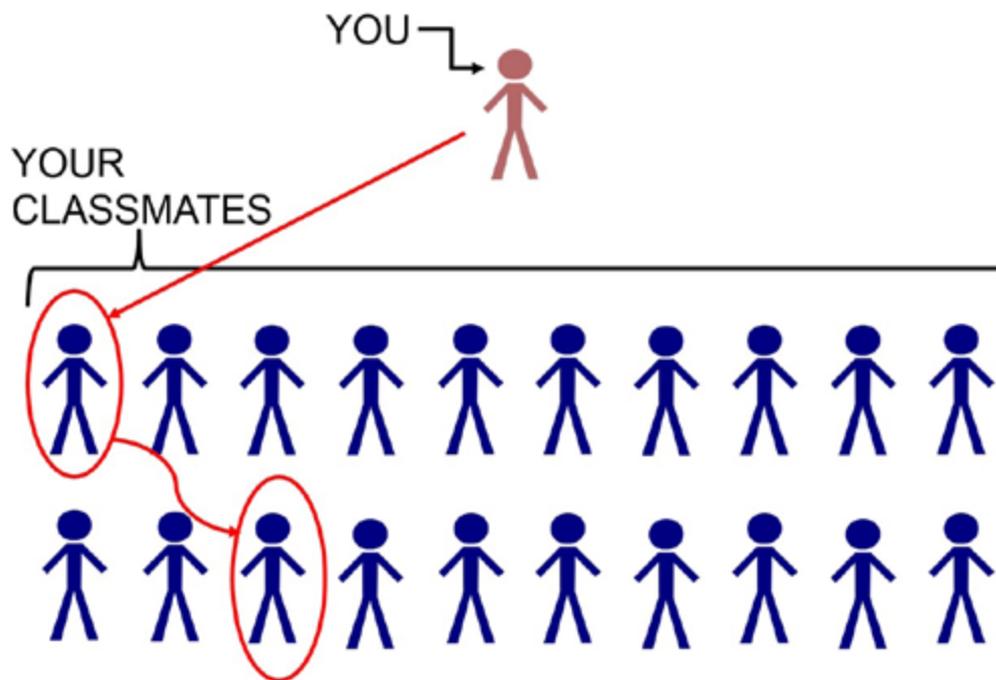
3. Ask that student this very important question [*point to your speaking prompt here*], listen to the answer, and answer the question that student asks you.
4. Keep the conversation going by asking and answering more questions.
5. Continue the conversation for a few minutes, until I say, “Stop.” Then you may return to your seat.

Seems easy, right? Here’s the catch: you do the same thing in the very next lesson, but with one minor change (besides having a new speaking prompt). In the next lesson, you will write the new speaking prompt on the board, but you will add one step in the directions. After Step 3, when both students have had a chance to respond to the prompt, they must point out to their new partner the person with whom they spoke in the previous lesson, then tell their new partner that person’s name and how he or she answered the previous prompt.

Yes, this means that students actually have to remember the names and answers of their

partners. On the first day, they may not have realized that they would be held accountable for this, or they may have forgotten their partner’s name. If that’s the case, encourage them to do their best to memorize the names and answers for the next lesson, when they will do the activity again. Knowing they will continue this activity daily will inspire them to remember more actively. It’s not necessary to have students go back to ask previous partners their names if they have forgotten. However, if your class seems to have a lot of difficulty remembering their classmates’ names, be sure to remind them not to be embarrassed and to reintroduce themselves if they need to. You can even plan for this one day by changing the first step to *find a student whose name you have forgotten!*

After the second day, the speaking prompt will change, but the instructions will stay the same. Students will find someone they haven’t yet spoken with, respond to the prompt, and then point out and name the person they spoke with in the previous lesson (see Figure 1). Although there may be some overlap, in a class of 21 students, one student can learn the



Graphic by Alex Barrett

Figure 1. In each lesson, a student will meet one new classmate directly; that classmate will point out, identify, and say something about a second classmate.

Students actually have to remember the names and answers of their partners.

names of the entire class within ten lessons by just spending a few minutes at the beginning of each lesson. Not only that, but everyone will have gotten to know something personal about all the students in the class.

Remember to get yourself involved, too. Students will appreciate getting to know you just as well as their fellow classmates, and getting to know your students better is always a benefit. Plus, by participating, you can not only gain insight into your students' language performance but also secretly test students to make sure they are remembering names!

VARIATIONS

The easiest element to change in this activity is the speaking prompt. Although *would you rather* questions work well, you may also want to use a prompt that prepares students for that day's lesson or one that allows them to review the previous day's topic. For example, if you are studying the present progressive, you can have students ask, "What colors are you wearing today?" That prompts students to answer with specific vocabulary or a targeted grammar point: "I am wearing a red shirt." Simple responses like this can then be extended with follow-up questions about color or fashion choices. After students have become familiar with the activity, you can even have them suggest their own prompts.

If the students are lower-level speakers, you can give simpler prompts that require them to brainstorm about a topic. Prompts such as "Name three things you know about kangaroos" and "What do you want to eat for dinner tonight?" are good for beginners and upper beginners. On the first day of class, you may also need to show them how to do the steps by demonstrating a simple introduction, followed by a sample question and response.

You can also speed up the process of name-remembering by having students recall two or even three of their classmates' names each time. This works well for larger classes, where there might not be enough lessons in the course for students to get all of their classmates' names. Or you can extend the activity by having students mingle with more than one student. For example, a pair of students can meet and discuss the prompt for a minute or so before moving on to new partners; this can continue for a few rounds or for a specific amount of time.

CONCLUSION

When I started doing this activity, I noticed immediate positive effects. As more and more students became familiar with one another, the level of interactivity in the class increased, doing pair and group activities became much easier and more productive, and students were more supportive of one another. Overall, there was a sense of community in the classroom, and students felt at ease in that community.

Additionally, while doing the activity, students are able to practice several language skills, such as reporting, asking questions, and making small talk. Language is a tool for communicating and forming relationships between people; this activity makes those two things much more accessible by creating and sustaining the opportunity for connection.

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Pairing in EFL Classes

by DO NA CHI

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) at a language center for young adults, I want to create interesting activities that can engage my students. Because these students have been learning grammar and vocabulary in mainstream programs, I see learning at the center as a chance for them to practice what they have learned, and I try to integrate communication into every classroom activity. Therefore, I am interested in having students work together.

The problem that concerns me is how to pair my students. From my experience, students usually sit next to classmates they like and then work with those partners all the time. This can be positive for the students because working together for a long time helps them understand each other and often cooperate better. However, the downsides are the lack of interaction with other students and limited opportunities to share information with and learn from others. As the teacher, I need to find ways to make sure my students work with more partners.

Peer allocation should ensure that the students will not work with the same peers over and over again and that each member in the class will have a partner. In this article, I suggest short communicative activities for peer allocation that I have used, with the aim to make students orally interact with others.

I begin by sharing strategies for beginning-level EFL classes—ways to help learners find partners while also reviewing vocabulary:

(1) I give students cards with one word on each card and ask them to find partners who have a synonym of the word they are holding. For example, a student with a card saying *mom* will match up with the student who has the card saying *mother*. Other pairs of words that I have used are *dad—father*, *sad—unhappy*,

great—wonderful, *hi—hello*, *glad—happy*, *start—begin*, *little—small*, and *fall—autumn*. Slightly more advanced examples include *handsome—good-looking*, *important—significant*, *long—lengthy*, and *necessary—essential*.

(2) I use cards of antonyms; students must find partners holding cards that have words with opposite meanings. For example, a student having a *tall* card will look for a partner who has the *short* card. Other examples I have used are *wet—dry*, *good—bad*, *light—dark*, *thin—fat*, *fast—slow*, *old—new*, *night—day*, *active—passive*, *sweet—bitter*, *big—small*, *go—come*, and *lazy—hardworking*.

(3) I make use of cards with words of the same family. For example, a student holding the card marked *beauty* needs to find a partner with the card saying *beautiful*. Using this technique, students learn or review vocabulary and reinforce their knowledge of word families. Other examples are *care—careful*, *wise—wisdom*, *long—length*, *strong—strength*, *able—ability*, *believe—unbelievable*, *free—freedom*, *bake—bakery*, *decide—decision*, and *study—student*.

(4) Another matching strategy is to use symbols or pictures and words. If a student has a card showing the picture of a book, he or she needs to find a partner who has the card with the word *book*. Many words are possible, of course, including *car*, *doll*, *school*, *pen*, *hat*, *shoes*, *gloves*, *tie*, *skirt*, *hospital*, and *restaurant*.

Meanwhile, for classes of more-advanced EFL students, I suggest the use of cards at the sentence level:

(5) Prepare pairs of cards in which one card in the pair has a question, and the other card has an answer to that question. Ask students to find partners who have the answers for their question cards—or questions for their answer

cards. For a class of 20, after dividing the class into two groups, I will have ten cards of questions and ten cards of answers. (Larger classes will require more sets of cards, or there can be more than one copy of each pair of cards.) The students will move around, asking and answering, and decide if the question and answer match. Figure 1 provides examples.

(6) I make use of complex sentences with two clauses. Each card contains one clause, and the students will need to find the missing clause that forms a meaningful complete sentence. For example, “if it rains too heavily” would match “we should not go out.” After a lesson on conditional sentences, I used this activity to help students review. Other examples with “if” clauses include the following:

“if I have any questions” and “I will ask you”

“if you stay up late tonight” and “you might be late for school tomorrow”

“if I have a secret” and “I won’t tell anyone”

“if I had come home earlier yesterday” and “I would not have been punished”

“if you don’t eat breakfast” and “you’ll be hungry all morning”

“if you want to do something well” and “you have to keep practicing”

This technique can also be used to review other grammatical structures:

“because it was raining” and “I stayed inside”

“even though I was tired” and “I played basketball”

“before you eat” and “you should wash your hands”

“when I feel happy” and “I always smile”

Of course, other sentences and other structures are possible.

(7) I use definitions and descriptions. One group holds cards with words, and a second group gets cards of definitions or descriptions. For example, “an action that you can do in a pool” can match “swimming.” Other examples are possible:

“this person designs houses” and “an architect”

Question	Possible Answer
How do you spell the teacher’s name?	M-A-R-G-A-R-E-T
How long does it take to ride a bike from here to the city center?	1 hour
What is the first thing that we do at school on Monday?	sing the national anthem
What class do we have after this?	mathematics
How can people get to school every day?	by bus
What is one thing we can do at the city center?	go shopping
What do many people eat for breakfast?	bread or rice
Where do sharks live?	the ocean
When does our class begin?	9 o’clock
How many moons does Earth have?	one

Figure 1. Sample questions and answers that could be used to pair students

“you can buy cakes at this place” and “a bakery”
 “you need a racket to play this sport” and
 “tennis”

“you can do this in the kitchen” and “cook”

(8) Another pairing activity is to have students fill in the blanks in sentences. I divide the class into two groups. Students in one group hold cards containing incomplete sentences with a missing word or phrase; students in the other group hold cards with words or phrases. Students need to decide which words or phrases fit in which sentences. This activity can help students review both vocabulary and grammar because after matching, the sentences must be meaningful and grammatically correct. Figure 2 gives examples.

After pairing is complete, teachers might want to ask the students to read out loud their complete sentences and, if necessary, provide explanations of the meaning or sentence structure.

When designing the cards, I make sure that there will be no question that can match two answers, no word or phrase that can fill two blanks, and so on. And, although some students may have trouble finding their partners at first, when several students have

already found their matches, those who have not will have a smaller group of remaining students to find their partners more easily.

Students can help create the cards. They can design the cards; for the activity that involves matching words and pictures, the students helped me draw pictures of the objects. Students can also contribute to the contents of the cards by thinking of—for example—synonyms, antonyms, or sentences that can be used on the cards. Teachers could even use a pairing activity to pair students and then ask each pair to create more cards that could be used in that pairing activity in the future.

When pairing is complete, the students will be ready to work together in the upcoming activity or activities. Pairing can be easy, as the teacher can assign matching numbers or letters, or simply ask students to choose their own partners. But pairing can also be a way to review what students have learned, promote their understanding of English, and give them a chance to communicate and converse with a variety of classmates in English.

Do Na Chi is a lecturer in the English Language Education program at An Giang University, Vietnam. He teaches academic writing, English linguistics, and literature.

Sentence	Word/Phrase
If I ____ my own house, I would have a party.	had
An hour is ____ 60 minutes.	equal to
Susan is ____ swimming.	interested in
My school is ____ the city center.	located in
An essay contains many ____.	paragraphs
I need ____ when it rains.	an umbrella
I don't know ____ the bus stop is.	where
Did you enjoy ____ last night?	dancing
Would you like ____ outside?	to go
A minute has 60 ____.	seconds

Figure 2. Examples of words and phrases that can complete sentences in a pairing activity

Mukadas Tashieva has a personal history that reflects the changes her nation continues to undergo as it transitions from Soviet Kyrgyzstan to the post-Soviet Kyrgyz Republic. As a faculty member at the Osh State University Faculty of Foreign Languages and Culture, a leader and trainer for the Kyrgyzstan Forum English Teachers' Association (KFETA), and an English Access Microscholarship coordinator and instructor, she has many roles as both an educator and a leader. Her classrooms blend modern teaching methods and traditional practices to improve student outcomes, especially in English.



Mukadas Tashieva in teacher training for Aravan English teachers, sharing her experience in teaching young learners

Throughout her childhood, education was important to Mrs. Tashieva's family of six, as her mother and father were teachers. She attended a village school in the mountainous Kara-Suu region, where students would either walk or arrive by horse. Under the Soviet educational system, education was free and compulsory, teachers were strong, and classes were highly structured. There were challenges, however, as curricula often were outdated and lacked opportunities to develop critical thinking. According to Mrs. Tashieva, "As a first-grader, I remember going into the red schoolhouse and watching the 'pioneer' senior-class members help younger students who didn't know where to go and what to do in school. They helped us, especially with learning the alphabet . . . and I hoped to become a leader like them." This drive to help others through compassionate leadership guided Mrs. Tashieva through her studies and came to define her personal and professional ambitions.

In 1991, Kyrgyzstan declared independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, renamed itself the Kyrgyz Republic, and established a democratic government and market economy. Changes affected life throughout the country, including the remote villages. Mrs. Tashieva recalls, "We had independence, but we struggled to change and to survive in this new system, as there were few jobs, and businesses were just starting." As economic, political, and social reforms took place, new ways of life had to develop. Language also had a significant role in the transition, and while Russian maintained its predominance, the native Kyrgyz language was reintroduced and emphasized as a source of pride. Meanwhile, with the opening of borders and access to the global economy, English emerged as a valuable skill in an increasingly difficult job market.

Mrs. Tashieva's family relocated to a larger city, Osh, the de facto capital of Southern Kyrgyz Republic, in search of better opportunities. "Everything changed quite suddenly," Mrs. Tashieva remembers, "and no one knew what the government would do or what would happen next." She recalls her mother working

three jobs, while her father traded goods and began working as a police officer; the rest of the family bartered and worked as they could to make ends meet. "We were lucky that we had most of what we needed," she says. "My parents worked very hard to ensure that." During this time, Mrs. Tashieva developed empathy for those less fortunate, and she has consistently contributed her time and energy to finding opportunities for individuals with the motivation to better themselves and improve their livelihoods.

Regarding her education, Mrs. Tashieva remembers a difficult experience when her family moved to the city: "I didn't understand why I was placed in the lower-level English class, as I was motivated and I loved studying languages. . . . I then came to understand that all village students were placed in the lower levels and was disappointed." By 1993, teachers' salaries were low and unreliable, and extra courses were offered to students whose families could pay; she watched English courses through a window from the hallway and tried to follow along. "I wanted so badly to participate and learn more English, but this was my only chance," she says, "I understood there was no way we could afford it at that time." These experiences guided Mrs. Tashieva in her decision to become a teacher; she promised not to judge students on their background and to include those who weren't lucky enough to have extra money or support but wanted to learn.

Reflecting on her school experiences, Mrs. Tashieva universally praises her teachers for their strength. Some criticism, however, is warranted. "To this day," she says, "I do not like red ink, as bad marks and mistakes were always in red. . . . There wasn't enough feedback, so I didn't know what I was doing wrong or what I should improve." Classes were almost always lectures, textbooks were usually in Russian, and students took notes that they memorized and recited many times. Mrs. Tashieva says, "I promised that if I became a teacher, I would be a good teacher, but I would not be boring." Observing her classes today, it is evident that she has kept her promise to herself. Students are actively



At a professional-development winter camp in Chiyirchyk, members of the Kyrgyzstan Forum English Teachers' Association gather to promote team-building and develop regional initiatives.

engaged in class activities and ask questions throughout. They often search the Internet for materials to complete class projects and take great pride in showcasing their efforts to the world through social media platforms. It is evident to anyone observing these classes that Mrs. Tashieva is fostering the development of young leaders with the English skills necessary for the modern economy.

Mrs. Tashieva attended five schools, as her family moved throughout the South, and she learned to address challenges on her own and trust in herself. In the tenth grade, she joined a group of volunteers at a center for children with disabilities and taught as she was able, developing her own language skills along the way. She was accepted at a university in the Northern capital city of Bishkek in 2003. She recalls, "I learned the differences between the North and the South when I began studying in Bishkek and encountered some difficulties. At the time, I felt I had to hide my accent to try and fit in." Now, through her classwork and community work, Mrs. Tashieva stresses to students that whether you are from an urban or a rural place, an advantaged or a disadvantaged family, you can strive to be and do your best.

Mrs. Tashieva earned excellent marks; at the same time, images of life and culture in the

United States captivated her, establishing a long-term personal goal to see the nation in person. She says, "I knew I was getting closer to my dream of moving to the United States, and once I felt comfortable and demonstrated my skills in university, I no longer hid my birthplace or accent and educated others about the South." Family comprises the center of Kyrgyz culture, and respect for elders is paramount; when Mrs. Tashieva married, her studies were put on hold as she joined her husband's family and began her own.

Still, continuing her studies and completing her degree were priorities. "I was lucky to have the support of my family and my husband in furthering my education," she says. After completing her degree in English-language interpretation, Mrs. Tashieva worked as a faculty member, teaching at Osh State University. She says, "From the first class, I realized that while I understood how to apply linguistics to interpret and translate, the only teaching methodologies I knew were the traditional methods I had grown up with. I had to find other options." She continued hunting for methodology trainings and seminars and participated in professional-development opportunities. She and a group of colleagues worked together to complete the E-Teacher Scholarship Program and followed the American English Live webinar series. "I took

each instructional technique and strategy presented in these resources and applied them in my courses to see what would work with my students,” she says. Mrs. Tashieva observed that repeated attempts were necessary to implement project-based learning and other learning strategies, as they were so different from what students had experienced before.

The transition of Kyrgyzstan to the independent Kyrgyz Republic resulted in significant changes to education and challenges to teachers. Salaries rapidly destabilized, and schools had difficulty being at once traditionally Soviet and newly Kyrgyz. While Mrs. Tashieva could do little to improve working wages or conditions in schools, she identified teachers as being key to improving and maintaining the quality of education throughout the nation as it continued to transition. KFETA had existed in principle for several years, but membership and participation in the teachers’ organization had dissipated. Mrs. Tashieva set about rebuilding the organization. In coordination with the U.S. Embassy, English Language Fellows, Fulbright scholars, volunteers at nongovernmental organizations, and the Kyrgyz Republic Ministry of Education and Science, she worked with teachers to improve the quality of English as a foreign language

teaching and learning in the South by developing a community of practice.

Soon, Mrs. Tashieva was being called across the region to assist teachers in implementing student-centered approaches to communicative language learning. As a mother of four boys, she became adept at balancing family, teaching, and her volunteer work with KFETA, which functions as a nongovernmental and fully self-funded organization. She worked together with community leaders and stakeholders to mobilize KFETA into a professional community of practice with educators from around the country contributing. Now, she works in concert with her university colleagues, who volunteer as teacher trainers and regional coordinators throughout remote regions in the South. Maintaining this self-funded community of practice requires tremendous dedication by leaders and organizers. She says, “We don’t have any seasons or weekends off because even in hot or cold weather, and on Sundays, we provide trainings for teachers. We are responding to their needs and requests.” The gratitude and mutual respect within the professional community of practice is evident as instructors take their own free time and resources to arrange winter camps and social events to strengthen and support the organization.

ACCESS TEACHING AND COORDINATION

Mrs. Tashieva has worked with the U.S. Department of State’s English Access Microscholarship Program since 2014, when she started a group for children with disabilities. She initially identified a need to adapt her practices to accommodate students with mixed abilities. She says, “There wasn’t a clear English-language methodology for classes of teenagers with cerebral palsy, epilepsy, physical handicaps, and developmental delays, all from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.” At first, she found it difficult to manage the students as one, much less get them to collaborate. “Many were shy and scared, even closed. Many of



Photo by Kishimzhan Tmanaliev

Mrs. Tashieva leads an outdoor professional-development summer camp for regional English teachers at Salkyn Tor resort, outside Osh.



Mrs. Tashieva opens a recent Forum Regional Conference: Interactive Teaching and Learning Techniques for Young Learners and Children with Disabilities, held at Osh State University.

Photo by Eralli Torogelдиев

them had secluded lives with little to do,” she says. Mrs. Tashieva found that the key to motivate students was to convey to them that they were one big family. She guided students, getting them to help one another, and provided a glimpse of a future that mastering English could provide, all while incorporating accessible and inclusive games and activities. Mrs. Tashieva realized that “when you do not feel sorry for and do not pay attention to disabilities among students, then even they forgot about it and stop holding themselves back.” By the end of the project, a girl with cerebral palsy started completing her own tests and referred to Mrs. Tashieva as her second mother. Students from other groups spoke with excited emotions about their experiences interacting with and supporting their classmates.

Mrs. Tashieva earned the opportunity to participate in the Study of the U.S. Institutes (SUSI) program and achieved her childhood dream of visiting the United States. Upon her return to the Kyrgyz Republic, she set about building the connections needed to maintain and expand the communities of practice she had cultivated. By organizing camps and social events for instructors, she attracted regional KFETA coordinators to expand coverage to underserved regions. KFETA now has over 200 members, and they remain committed to developing their professional skills by employing communicative approaches to

language acquisition and learning. Maintaining KFETA and supporting other programs and initiatives require that Mrs. Tashieva constantly field emails, text messages, and phone calls while traveling throughout the country, all while balancing her responsibilities as a wife and mother in a traditional family home.

CONCERNS AND GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

Mrs. Tashieva continues to refine her personal goals and intends to develop her professional skills in educational leadership. Her overarching objective is to improve the quality of the national public education system in the Kyrgyz Republic for future generations. To do so, her focus remains on developing the professional skills of schoolteachers for the benefit of their students. She says, “When they [teachers] are well educated and professionally ready to teach children, then we can foster young people to help our society. Through education, we will build citizenship in the Kyrgyz Republic and a new generation of people who will develop and care about the future of our country.”

This article was written by **Jonathan Mettille**, who holds a PhD in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development from the University of Louisville and served as an English Language Fellow in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2016–2017. He is currently an ESP training specialist in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Mystery Bag: Listening and Speaking Skills for Young Learners

LEVEL: Beginner through Intermediate

TIME REQUIRED: About 20 minutes the first time; each time after that, 10–15 minutes

MATERIALS: A bag to serve as the “Mystery Bag” (see details below); an object or objects to place in the bag

BACKGROUND: Show and Tell is a classic activity in U.S. kindergarten and early-elementary classrooms. Children can show a special object they bring from home and tell their classmates about it. Children usually explain who gave the object to them or where they got it, why it is special, how it works, and so on.

In my experience, when the “special object” is put in a bag, the activity becomes a game with much more to offer in terms of whole-class participation and durability. And if the object is in a beautiful, “magical” bag, that creates anticipation and motivation for listening, speaking, and vocabulary building, and the activity becomes ... The Mystery Bag!

For young learners, ample listening and speaking practice through games, songs, rhymes, and stories is the foundation for conversation and extended talk and later reading and writing. A highly motivating guessing game like The Mystery Bag, which gives young learners practice asking and answering questions in an authentic context, can help build this knowledge.

I used The Mystery Bag with beginning and intermediate children in first-grade through fourth-grade (ages 6–11) English as a foreign language (EFL) classes in Mexico, and it has been a staple of my teacher-training workshops in Mexico, Jordan, and Colombia for both private- and public-school EFL teachers and teacher trainers. You can use this activity for introducing vocabulary and basic questions to beginners or for reviewing and practicing vocabulary and grammar.

I will begin by laying out the basic procedure for The Mystery Bag for high beginners who already have basic vocabulary across a variety of topics as well as basic grammar. I will then explain how to make the game simpler for beginning learners and more complex for intermediate young learners.

PROCEDURE—HIGH BEGINNERS:

Before you begin, it is a good idea to review yes/no questions with the verbs *be* and *do*. For this game, relevant questions and answers with *be* include “Is it yellow?” ... “Yes, it is” or “No, it isn’t,” and for *do* (*does*), “Does it fly?” ... “Yes, it does” or “No, it doesn’t.” Write the patterns for these questions and answers on the board while students are learning the game, which takes place as follows:

1. Choose a vocabulary word from one of your units. For example, if the class is studying animals, you might choose *frog*.



Sample Mystery Bags—but any bag can work.

Photo by Jorge Catalan

2. Put a representation of a frog in the Mystery Bag before the children come to class. It could be a stuffed toy or a frog made out of wood, yarn, glass, etc., or it could be a picture of a frog.
3. Tell the children the rules.
 - a. Figure out what is inside the bag (in this case, an animal) by asking yes/no questions.
 - b. Do not guess the name of the object until after ten questions have been asked. (Some teachers may want to set the limit at five questions rather than ten.)
 - c. If the class has no idea what the object is after ten questions, students may ask for a hint from the teacher or a student holding the bag, depending on the language level of the students, by saying, “Can you please give us a hint?”
 - d. Everyone must participate by raising hands quietly.
 - e. Students who shout out will not be called on.
4. Assign student roles. You can say, “I need someone to come to the front of the room and someone to count the questions.”
5. Have the students you call on say, “May I come to the front?” or “May I count the questions?”
6. The student who comes to the front of the room will answer the questions. Have him or her look into the bag without saying what the object is.

7. Have this student call on someone who is quietly raising his or her hand to ask a question. The teacher supports the students by referring to the written examples on the board and having the students support one another by helping. However, make sure that the student who needs help repeats the question correctly.
8. The volunteer will answer the question with a chunk: Yes, it is. /No, it isn't. /Yes, it does. /No, it doesn't.
9. When nine questions have been asked, the student who is counting the questions will say, "One more question."
10. After ten questions, ask students to raise their hands if they think they know the answer. If most children know, have them say the answer in unison: "It's a frog!" If no one knows, teach the children to ask, "Can you please give us a hint?" Then give them a big hint: "It is green and jumps."

VARIATIONS

- After the children get used to the format, have them bring in an object (in this case, a representation of an animal) from home—one student per class session. (Make sure you have extra objects on hand in case the student forgets.) Have the child put an object from home in his or her school bag and bring the object to you before class. There is a big payoff for doing the activity this way, as children are excited to bring something from home.
- Build up the kinds of questions your students can ask about animals. Start with vocabulary about appearance, food, and habitats, and then add movements. Questions might include "Does it have four legs? ... Does it eat meat? ... Does it live in the desert? ... Does it swim?"

ABOUT THE BAG

Any bag will work. The more special and magical-looking the bag is, though, the more you will pique the children's curiosity. I have

asked a parent volunteer to make a bag out of burgundy satin or velvet with a gold question mark sewn on the front and sparkly gold rope to close it. However, it's fine to start with an ordinary bag. Find or make an attractive bag, and the interest you create around the activity will do the trick. Nice pillowcases make great Mystery Bags and are just the right size for all kinds of objects.

VARIATIONS FOR BEGINNING TO INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

Figure 1 shows how you can adapt The Mystery Bag from beginner to intermediate levels of English.

Procedure for Beginners

Figure 1 shows that the procedure for beginners is teacher-led, with a fixed set of vocabulary known to the children. The children practice one type of question, most likely "Is it _____?" There is a lot of repetition and scaffolding. To make things even easier, you can have the learners ask questions in chorus.

The procedure might look like this:

1. Review a set of vocabulary that you are teaching (e.g., colors with colored pencils).
2. Put the pencils in the Mystery Bag one by one, with the children saying the name of each color as you do.
3. Ask for a volunteer to come to the front, look into the bag, and choose a pencil without taking his or her hand out of the bag.
4. Model the question for the students: "Is it a [red/green/blue/yellow/brown/black] pencil?"
5. Model how to raise hands quietly.
6. Choose one of the children to ask the question: "Is it a _____ pencil?"

7. The volunteer answers, with your help: “Yes, it is” or “No, it isn’t.”
8. Repeat until someone guesses the correct color.
4. Have the volunteer who chose the color answer the questions alone, or have two children come up to support each other.

Procedure and Variations for Intermediate Students

For intermediate-level students, follow the same procedure for high beginners, with the following variations:

You can repeat the game up to three times because it is quick. You can add a new color every day.

Variations for Beginners

1. Have the whole class chorally repeat the questions asked by the volunteer students.
2. For very young learners, asking, “Is it red?” will suffice. If the category is fruit, a question could be, “Is it a banana?”
3. Change the objects or have a variety. For example, you can have colored pencils and markers.
1. Increase and vary language use to achieve your objectives. For example, I had the entire class ask the student with the bag in chorus before they started to guess, “Could you show us the shape and the size?” The student then tightened the bag around the object to reveal the form.
2. To help students ask a variety of questions about animals, for example, I cued the class to say chorally: Ask about what it looks like, what it eats, where

Beginner	High Beginner	Intermediate
Teacher-led	Increased student roles with more complex dialogue	Student-led
Fixed-set vocabulary: 7 colors, numbers 1–10, 6 kinds of fruit	Fixed-theme vocabulary: animals, clothes, school supplies	No set vocabulary or topic; anything goes!
Review and remind students of vocabulary.	Review types of questions to ask (e.g., Is it bigger than my hand? ... Does it eat meat? ... Does it live in the forest? ... Does it run fast?).	Ask for precise comparisons and detail.
One type of question is practiced (e.g., Is it _____?).	More than one type of question is practiced (e.g., Is it/Are they _____? ... Do you/Does it _____?).	A variety of questions is encouraged and practiced (e.g., Could you use it to eat with? ... Would you bring it to school?).
Establish routine questions; let struggling students ask first.	Struggling students may ask friends for help and then repeat.	Students learn many ways to ask for help.
Students ask questions in chorus.	Students ask questions individually.	Students could ask others to ask a specific type of question and ask for clarification.

Figure 1. Comparison of elements of The Mystery Bag for students at different levels

it lives, and how it moves. This happens with time and practice through daily repetition and gesturing.

3. Make the activity even more interactive by having pairs of students think of a question before the game starts. If you wish to add writing practice, they can prepare by writing the question in their notebooks.

MAKE IT PART OF YOUR INSTRUCTIONAL ROUTINE

During classroom observations, I find that many teachers bring highly motivating activities into their classrooms, only to move to another one the next day, fearing student boredom. The Mystery Bag builds on several curricular objectives at the same time—it's an activity that keeps on giving and never gets boring. The novelty lies in a new object and a new student in front of the class every day.

Furthermore, making The Mystery Bag a part of your instructional routine will give it more mileage. As with Total Physical Response, a lot of vocabulary and grammar can be embedded into this activity, providing comprehensible input.

In my EFL classes, The Mystery Bag came after a 15-minute Circle Time and right before storytelling. Students knew that when I led them back into their seats to close the circle and reached for the Mystery Bag, they were to raise their hands to be chosen for a role and to ask the coveted first question.

Be warned: Once you start The Mystery Bag, you will not be able to stop! I first introduced it to an active group of second-graders. We continued to play throughout third grade, but I decided that they were too old in fourth grade, so I dropped it. After the first week, the children wanted to know what happened to The Mystery Bag! I decided I would use it occasionally to introduce a new topic or a text, or to practice asking questions, since it created great motivation to speak.

Neither children nor adults can resist the temptation of a guessing game. The Mystery Bag allows all children to shine by bringing in special objects from home and is a meaningful activity with built-in scaffolding to increase the listening and speaking skills of young learners.

This activity was written by **Wendy Coulson**, a 2017–2018 English Language Fellow in Medellín, Colombia, who has served as an English Language Specialist in Jordan. She is an education consultant who designs education programs for NGO development projects and creates EFL curriculum and teacher-training courses, specializing in teaching young learners, EFL methodology, and limited-resource classrooms.

Reverse Categories

In category games, players get categories and a set of letters. For each category, they think of a word that starts with those letters. So the category “Colors” and the letter *R* could lead to *red*.

In these puzzles, you will do the opposite. We give you the letters and words—but you have to think of the categories that the words belong to. For example, suppose you see *tree* and *flower*. You know that they are kinds of plants. Now you look for more words that fit the same category, such as *bush*. Some words may fit in more than one category, but each word is used only once.

Most people will find Puzzle C the most difficult. (Hint: You might think about grammar. ...)

Puzzle A. Think of four categories and complete the chart with these words:

camel *Spain* *grapes* *snake* *tomatoes* *sandwich* *turtle* *China*
golf *cricket* *tennis* *Greece* *soccer* *Turkey* *giraffe* *cookies*

First Letter	Category:	Category:	Category:	Category:
C				
G				
S				
T				

Puzzle B. Think of four categories and complete the chart with these words:

belt *hiking* *jet* *bird* *huge* *hat* *jacket* *supersized*
skiing *jumbo* *shirt* *jogging* *Superman* *big* *biking* *helicopter*

First Letter	Category:	Category:	Category:	Category:
B				
H				
J				
S				

Puzzle C. Think of five categories and complete the chart with these words:

toy *for* *wet* *fly* *true* *after* *water* *friend* *to* *window*
with *free* *try* *ask* *walk* *apple* *air* *traffic* *active* *furniture*

First Letter	Category:	Category:	Category:	Category:	Category:
A					
F					
T					
W					

Answers to *THE LIGHTER SIDE*

REVERSE CATEGORIES

(Note: In each puzzle, categories can appear in any order.)

W	W	walk	wet	with	window	water
T	T	try	true	to	toy	traffic
F	F	fly	free	for	friend	furniture
A	A	ask	active	after	apple	air
		Verbs	Adjectives	Prepositions	Countable Nouns	Uncountable Nouns

Puzzle C.

S	S	shirt	skiing	Superman	super-sized
J	J	jacket	jogging	jet	jumbo
H	H	hat	hiking	helicopter	huge
B	B	belt	biking	bird	big
		Things We Can Wear	Outdoor Activities	Things That Fly	Synonyms (for large)

Puzzle B.

T	T	Turkey	tennis	turtle	tomatoes
S	S	Spain	soccer	snake	sandwich
G	G	Greece	golf	giraffe	grapes
C	C	China	cricket	camel	cookies
		Countries	Sports	Animals	Kinds of Food

Puzzle A.

The lesson we developed required students to discuss cultural stereotypes, conduct research on the background of the stereotypes, and apply their knowledge of the course content and English language to challenge the stereotypes.

(See page 2)



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