BUSY TEACHER’S BACK TO SCHOOL SURVIVAL GUIDE

33 TOP BACK-TO-SCHOOL SECRETS EVERY TEACHER SHOULD KNOW

BEGINNINGS ARE USUALLY NOT EASY

COMING BACK TO SCHOOL AFTER SUMMER BREAK CAN BE DEMANDING FOR BOTH THE STUDENTS AND THE TEACHERS

GOING INTO A NEW CLASS ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL CAN BE EXCITING AND INTIMIDATING FOR NEW TEACHERS AND EXPERIENCED TEACHERS ALIKE

WITH THIS BOOK YOU’LL BE OFF TO A GOOD START

GET BACK INTO THE SWING OF THINGS AND MOTIVATE YOUR STUDENTS

JUMP START YOUR SCHOOL YEAR

MAKE SURE YOU ARE READY AT THE START OF THE RACE BEFORE IT IS TIME TO START RUNNING
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Busy Teacher’s Top Ten: Back to School Checklist

ANOTHER FALL HAS RUSHED SUMMER FROM THE SCENE, AND FOR TEACHERS THAT MEANS ONE THING: SCHOOL.

Teachers have a lot of work to do to be ready before their students return to class. Make sure you are not missing anything with this back to school checklist.

BUSY TEACHER’S TOP 10: BACK TO SCHOOL CHECKLIST

1. Lessons plans are the most important element to a successful start to the school year. As a teacher, you want to feel organized and in control from the first day of class. If you have been teaching one year or twenty, it is valuable to go through your teaching notes from last year and perhaps even earlier. Hopefully, as you went through the year, you marked which activities were successful with your students and which ones you planned to avoid in the future. Now is the time to look at these notes, not the day before you are getting ready to teach that lesson. If you take the time out now, you can focus more of your time and attention on the lessons which need more while being reassured that you have a firm handle on your other lessons.

2. If you are a first year teacher, you may have a little more work to do than someone with prior years to fall back on. If this is the case, do a rough plan of your entire school year and all the subjects you will teach. If you have nine months of class and twelve chapters to cover in grammar, you will have to cover each chapter in approximately three weeks. You should make a plan for each of your subjects so you know exactly how quickly you must cover the material. While you are planning your year, be sure to schedule in make-up days or even make-up weeks. This way when you get behind, as most teachers find is inevitable, you know you will have an opportunity to make up the material you missed. Scheduling these times before the year even begins will decrease your stress level and your students’, too because you will never feel the pressure that you will never catch up with your original schedule.

3. Having your own classroom can be both a blessing and a struggle. Teachers often find themselves frustrated because decorating is the last thing they have on their minds. Keep your classroom simple yet stimulating for your students. There are many bulletin board designs that you can simply tweak to last the whole school year. For example, turn one bulletin board into a tree, and each month change the item on the tree – apples in fall, icicles in winter, flower buds in spring and fruit near the end of the school year. You can have your students do craft projects to decorate the tree, and they will find pride in having their work displayed. Other options for a yearlong bulletin board would be a clothesline where you hang outstanding papers or a tic-tac-toe style grid in which, as a class, you write a summary of the important events each month in one box. By investing a little planning time before the year begins, you will save yourself much time later on when you have more pressing needs than bulletin board ideas.

4. It is not only your first day of school coming up, but your students’ first day, too. ESL students are often starting their studies in a new school and sometimes in a new city or even country. Therefore, anything you can do to help your students feel welcome will make their first days at school more enjoyable. One option for welcoming them is to prepare some kind of welcome board outside your classroom door. This way, even before they step over the threshold, they feel like they are wanted. It can be much too easy for ESL students to feel like they are in the way or not as good as other students. By seeing their names in a welcoming design, they will know that you, their teacher, are happy to have them in class and want them to feel welcome. Your design can be as simple as using letter cutouts to spell “Welcome to ESL 101” and then cut outs of books with each student’s name written upon one. You can also make your welcome board more elaborate and tie into a yearlong theme or use a world map to show where your students come from (if your class is highly diverse). No matter what you do, your students will feel like they are part of an exciting new adventure when you take the time to welcome them with their names outside the classroom.

5. The final element of your classroom that will need preparation is your students’ desks. Hopefully you know what arrangement works best for you and your teaching style (desks moved together to make bigger tables rather than rows of disconnected seats, for example), so get this ready ahead of time. If you can, fill in your students’ names on a seating chart and put their names on the desks as well. Include pictures of your students in your seating chart if possible. This will help you learn your students’ names faster and aid any substitute teachers you may need throughout the year. Even if you cannot get pictures of your incoming students, be as prepared as you can be by making sure all the final touches are done in your classroom. Label cubbyholes, coat hooks and lockers with your students’ names as well. You will want your students to know they have a place in the classroom that they can call their own this year.

6. Now that you have your rough lesson plans for the year and have your classroom ready, you can make a knowledgeable supply list for your students. Your list will depend greatly
on what your school provides to students. Think about things they will need throughout the year: pencils, pens, crayons, notebooks, construction and other specialty papers, markers, tissues, an art smock, book covers, snacks at certain points in the year, etc. You know better than anyone else what your students will need, and the sooner you let them and their parents in on that knowledge, the better prepared your students will be for the school year. Keep in mind, many ESL students’ parents do not speak English, so keep your items simply worded and perhaps provide translations. Mailing this list out before school starts is ideal, but if you cannot do that, at least give it to your class the first week of school.

Believe it or not, even before school has started is the time to start thinking about field trips. Try to think what language centered, out of classroom experiences will be beneficial to your students. Will you be doing a unit on sports? If so, is there a stadium or an arena nearby that you can tour? Will you be studying local history? If so, look for some landmarks that played a significant role in your area’s past. Are you studying a particular piece of literature? Check to see if that piece has a screen version coming out or a stage version in production. Plan to take your students there for an intense listening challenge. With almost any unit you will be teaching, there is likely to be a location that you can take your students. When planning, think about what time of year you will be covering the unit and what your budget is for transportation, tickets and other pieces of your field trip. If you need approval for such an activity, get your request in now before your co-teachers can take more than their share of the budget.

Have you spent all summer in a bathing suit and sandals? It is time to get those professional clothes out of the closet and make sure they are free of wrinkles and in good condition now that school is just around the corner. You will be far too busy on the first day of school to worry about pressing a shirt, so do it now. Also, make sure you have other wardrobe necessities – ties, pantyhose, dress socks, shined shoes and jewelry – ready to grab in a hurry on the first day of school. You may want to treat yourself to a new suit or dress to wear on the first day to give you the feeling of professionalism and excitement as the new year begins.

Finally, keep in mind that your class will need time to get to know each other as well as you, so plan some icebreakers on the first day. Depending on the language level of your students, you may want to keep the language and vocabulary very basic. Busyteacher.org has many resources for these types of activities.
Getting Back in the Swing: 4 Tantalizing Tips for a New School Year

COMING BACK TO SCHOOL AFTER SUMMER BREAK CAN BE DEMANDING FOR BOTH THE STUDENTS AND THE TEACHERS.

Get back into the swing of things and motivate your students as you approach this new year! Follow these four tantalizing tips to jump start your school year and students will be anxious to come back for more.

HOW TO START A NEW SCHOOL YEAR: 4 TIPS

1 ORGANIZE

The more organized and prepared you can be, the better you will feel about the first week back to school. It is important to have yourself and your lesson plans organized, but even more essential is having your classroom and your first week of ideas clearly arranged. Depending on the age of your students you’ll want to think about how you can make the most of your classroom space and what would make your students most comfortable.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER ARE:

• How you want the desks or tables placed.

• What books and supplies will you have available for student use and how will they be organized. You may have a whole bookshelf of textbooks, dictionaries, resources and classroom supplies. Devise a system for their organization and also for student use.

• Creating bulletin boards or other areas where you will post student work and class information.

• What else can you do to the classroom to make it inviting and comfortable for students? Will you play music, have fun messages on the white board, or have subtle surprises waiting on each of their desks?

2 STUDENT SURVIVAL KITS

One tactic to welcome students into their new classroom and to the new grade is to provide them with a survival kit. First you will want to define what survival is for lower levels. Then you can distribute the kits which can be adapted for any grade or level and even work for adults. Here is an example of things to include in the kit that each student will receive:

- A lollipop to help you lick your problems
- Tissues to wipe your eyes after sleeping during class
- A sponge to soak up knowledge
- A Tootsie Roll to help you roll with the punches
- An eraser so each day you can start with a clean slate
- A paper clip to hold everything together
- A pencil to “write your wrongs”
- A candle for when you’re up late studying
- A piece of string to help you tie up loose ends
- A pack of gum so your class can stick together
- A cotton ball for when you can’t hear yourself think
- A Band-Aid to heal your wounds
- A button to remind you that sometimes you should “button your lip”
- A penny so you have enough “cents” to realize you are a valuable person
- A safety pin for little emergencies
- A pet rock to become your homework rock that will remind you to always do your homework

The student survival kit is a lot of fun and generally gets a lot of laughs, but it also comes along with a lot of explanation about new expectations. By providing them with concrete items and catch phrases you can begin to set the tone of the class and put systems in place.

For ESL students you will have to explain some of the play on words you have used. You could make that into a game to see if the students can explain to each other the double meanings of some of the phrases. Once the students understand all the language of the survival kit, you can transition into setting some of the rules for the group. Talk about each item and what rule or class ideal it relates to. You can have the students brainstorm a list. For example, “We always help each other solve problems” or “if the teacher says be quiet, button your lip”. Also, you are doing the survival kit to approach the students right away with some humor and good intentions so don’t be too serious. A good follow-up activity to this one is to have the students devise five to ten items that they would put into a teacher survival kit and why!

3 PRINGLES TIME CAPSULES

Pringles time capsules are a very unique way to start off any year. It takes some forethought and some eating or emptying out of Pringles cans assuming you are in country where you can find them. They are just the perfect size for this type of activity, but you can use any medium sized container with a lid. Time capsules are a wonderful team-building activity for the first week of school. You can form lessons around time, specifically future and past and explain what a time capsule is. Students create them in pairs or individually. Ideas for things to include inside can depend on what you have topics you will covering over the year or what is happening at the moment. Some things to think about including are: A current news article, a current photo of the student making it, a tracing of your hand and/or feet, a treat that will eat when you open the capsule, and some kind of writing. Students could write themselves a letter about their hopes for the year or explain what is happening in their lives at the present time. They will seal the capsules and you will store them (lock them up) for the year. When the end of the year comes, students have the pleasure of opening up their time capsules to see how much
they have grown and how much has changed in one short year!

4 BREAK THE ICE

It is imperative during the first week of classes to have plenty of warm-up and ice breaking activities prepared. Anything to get the class loose and speaking is applicable. Name games are always popular. A favorite standby is having the students choose an adjective with the same letter of their name (Joyful Jane, Naughty Nat) and then getting to know them by playing a memory game until everyone would be hard pressed to forget the names. Another way to get them talking is to do some mingling activities like find someone who (always wakes up early, likes pizza, eats sushi, etc.), or class surveys where they have to find out basic information. Examples could be: how many students have a birthday in December, Which students don't like rice, etc. The more lighthearted the icebreakers are, the more successful they will be! Also, don't get caught up making any of them too complicated. You want to spend the class getting to know the students, not explaining confusing activities.

THE START TO A NEW SCHOOL YEAR CAN BE EXHILARATING, EXCITING, AND INSPIRING.
Welcome your students with open arms with encouraging activities for the best results!
Starting Off Strong: The Critical First Days of the Semester

WE’VE ALL HAD THOSE BAD DAYS: YOU FORGOT YOUR TEXTBOOK; THE COPY MACHINE WAS BROKEN WHEN YOU GOT TO SCHOOL; YOU KEPT GETTING ONE OF YOUR BEST STUDENTS’ NAME, AND SO FORTH. BAD DAYS HAPPEN. However, it’s important to assure to the best of your ability that bad days don’t occur in the first couple of weeks of school, even with their increased probability of things going wrong. These first days are the students’ first glimpse of you and the class, possibly also of the school. It doesn’t take much to scare off a student in this early period. However, present students with a calm demeanor and a well-run class, and they become your dedicated students.

KEYS TO A GOOD START

1 KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

It seems obvious, but the elementary step of learning students’ names is really key to having a good semester and to classroom control. It is very hard to ask students to do something, for example, like stop talking or move into groups, if you don’t know their names. And of course learning student names is the first step to learning who students are as individuals, which is vitally important to teacher effectiveness. It is through knowing students as individuals, their backgrounds, likes, and dislikes that a relationship and knowing how to teach the individual student is based on. On the first day of class, having students fill out a profile in which they include information on their first language, prior language experiences, favorite books or movies, and hobbies, helps toward this end of knowing your students.

2 KNOW YOUR STUDENTS’ LEARNING NEEDS

As important as knowing who your students are as individuals is knowing who they are as learners. On the learner profile that students fill out at the beginning of the semester also get information as to the students’ educational background: prior college experience and English learning experience, for example. This can inform how you will structure the rest of the course. A class of students who have been mostly educated in another country has different learning needs than the ESL class of mostly U.S.-educated students: the latter class has much more knowledge of U.S. culture, of course, and therefore might need more focus on academic English than the foreign-educated group, who may have strong academic skills but less understanding of U.S. culture.

You can also by gathering initial information get to know individual student learning needs as well as the overall class needs: which students seem to learn better in groups and which seem to prefer learning individually, for example, and who the kinesthetic learners and who the visual learners are. Knowing which strategies you will need to emphasize for your students will increase your effectiveness as a teacher.

3 ADJUST THE CURRICULUM

Also of vital importance toward this goal of effective instruction is knowing the curriculum in relation to learners, and gauging students’ prior skills related to the curriculum. A diagnostic or pretest of some sort is important to see how prepared students are for the course content. I make my diagnostics informal and ungraded, such as a short writing sample on “A Life Lesson.” Having this pretest is helpful because if I had planned to spend little time in my writing class on the paragraph, for example, moving into the essay rather rapidly, but the pretest reveals that most students don’t know how to structure a paragraph with topic sentence and supporting details, this will indicate I’ll have to restructure my syllabus, spending more time on paragraph structure before moving on to the essay. The curriculum should be adjusted to meet student needs in most cases, rather than adjusting the student population to meet curricular needs. There are exceptions to this, of course: sometimes a diagnostic might reveal that a student has so few of the needed skills for my class that I will advise a lower level class—or there are rare times when the student can actually move up to a higher level class. At any rate, there should be a fit between the curriculum and students that should be addressed at the beginning of the semester, not left until midterms, when it will be too late for students to change classes.

4 IMPLEMENT THE SYLLABUS

After the preliminary information on the students and their skills is gathered, this can be used to implement a syllabus and routines for the course. For example, if you have a group of mostly new speakers of English educated in places outside of the U.S., you can start each period with a short time for small talk just to get students used to speaking English informally, as well as plenty of short, activities focused on practice of conversational skills and small, low-stakes quizzes. More advanced speakers of English or those with more exposure to U.S. culture might be bored with such a curriculum, and focus on more advanced academic skills, such as reading a number of essays or a short novel with attendant writing practice, would be more appropriate. Also at an advanced level more focus on refining pronunciation and acquiring a more academic vocabulary and grammar are more relevant than conversational and fluency practice. All the information gathered on student learning needs informs the general outline for the course.

5 IMPLEMENT THE DAILY ROUTINE

Once I have the information for the semester’s schedule, I can plan the daily routine. If students need work on writing skills, for example, I might plan to spend a part of each meeting in journal writing for fluency. The beginning part of the semester is also a time to establish with students the protocol for entering a class late, finding papers, what to do in the case of absence, and so forth. Having students learn these routines contribute greatly to a class that runs smoothly with few interruptions.

BEGINNINGS ARE USUALLY NOT EASY. However, through learning about your students and implementing a sound curriculum and set of routines, a strong beginning that sets up a sound middle and a wonderful end is assured.
What Every New Teacher Should Know About the First Day of Class

GOING INTO A NEW CLASS ON THE FIRST DAY CAN BE EXCITING AND INTIMIDATING FOR NEW TEACHERS AND EXPERIENCED TEACHERS ALIKE. DEPENDING ON YOUR TEACHING SITUATION THERE ARE A LOT OF VARIABLES TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT AND GOOD PLANNING WILL BE YOUR FRIEND.

The first day of a new class is always exhilarating, and if you have nerves, there is no need to worry. With these tips for what every new teacher should know about the first day of class, you can march into your first-day well-prepared and worry free!

WHAT EVERY NEW TEACHER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

1 PLAN WELL AND BE FLEXIBLE

Most new teachers tend to over-plan their lessons for the first while. This is not a bad thing. You can never be too prepared for that first lesson. When you are planning, here are some things to think about.

- The lesson, especially the first one will never go exactly as you imagined it or planned it. Teaching can be unpredictable and that is why it is so much fun.

- Don’t worry about time on the first day. If an activity takes 20 minutes that you thought would take 40 minutes, give yourself a break and move into your next transition.

- Don’t try to control too much. The goal of the first class is to get everyone familiar and learning names, to give some explanation of what is to come in the class, and to make your students feel welcome and excited. If you can accomplish those things on your first day, you have done your job!

- Don’t take things too seriously and let the students settle in as well. Often the students are just as nervous as you are and really just want to get through the first day without any problems. Remember to put them at ease by creating rapport and using humor.

2 TALK ABOUT YOURSELF

You’ll want to have at least one brief activity that allows the students to get to know you a bit and ask you questions. This should be a relatively small chunk of your lesson plan, as you really want to focus on the students. It will put them at ease to get to know something about you and if you show them you are willing to put yourself on the spot, they will be more inclined to follow suit. There is one activity that works wonders in this department, and can be pulled out at a moment’s notice if you find yourself with extra time. Think of three to five answers to questions students might ask you. Be sure to add in a tricky one or two. You then write just one word answers on the board. For example: Six, blue, twelve, Thailand. The students then ask you questions about your answers, trying to guess the question. Stay away from things that are too easy like age or country, because then it really isn’t much of a game. There will usually be one or two answers that may stump them and you can all have a good laugh when you reveal your answers. (six -- # of my siblings, blue — color of my car, twelve — countries I have visited, Thailand — my favorite country).

3 KEEP EXPECTATIONS REASONABLE

As a new teacher, don’t be too surprised or disappointed if the first day of class doesn’t go exactly the way you had planned. It may be less exciting than you thought it would be or maybe you had a great time, but forgot most of your lesson plan. You may need time to get into your rhythm with the class and they are still trying to figure you out. Provide a number of warm-up activities that aren’t too hard to explain or difficult to carry out. That way, if something falls flat, you can just move into the next thing on your agenda. Sometimes you may plan to do four activities, and you only get to do two of them. Give yourself the freedom to stray from your lesson plan on the first day.

4 SET THE TONE

One of the most important things that you want to accomplish on the first day is to set the tone of the class. If you are too serious or too wild on the first day, that may put you at a disadvantage later. Plan activities that are moderate, use humor to engage students, and connect with your students. You want to provide structure for the students and also show them that you are the teacher and you do have expectations. Go through a syllabus or course description and address any questions they might have. Be as relaxed as you can, and be yourself. That will surely set the tone of positivity in the classroom.

TEACHING FOR THE FIRST TIME CAN BE SCARY, BUT IT DOESN’T HAVE TO BE AN ORDEAL.

If you use the above tips and trust your capabilities, you will make it through the first day with many experiences and funny stories to share! You will also have many more first days to approach, so getting into a good routine from the beginning is advisable.
I Have My Own Class! Planning And Setting Up Your First Class

There’s always a bit of euphoria for me at the beginning of the school year in late August — a fresh start, new students, a chance to try out new routines. This truly is the New Year to me, not that thing on January 1. However, the excitement I feel at the beginning of each new year pales next to what a new teacher feels at getting her first class. All of the classroom management, the curriculum and instruction, the day-to-day lessons and decision making — are hers and hers alone. This initial excitement might be followed quickly by panic. Oh, no. It is all hers, alone — with an emphasis on alone. Teachers are in fact isolated much of the time — the only adult or professional in a class that may well be isolated from other classes, especially if it’s an ESL class, which traditionally have not been seen as part of the school community. So given these circumstances and the bare room you’ve probably just been given, with a class that starts on Monday and this is Thursday afternoon, what are some ways to begin to set up your room?

**HOWTO: PLANNING AND SETTING UP YOUR FIRST CLASS**

1. **YOU AREN’T REALLY ALL ALONE. REACH OUT**

Many of us deal with stress by turning inward and pretending everything is fine, all fine. This is a bad time to do that. Most of us have an existing network we can turn to — family, friends, and former classmates, for example — who probably are very willing to help or donate materials for class. My friend, for example, in setting up her bare classroom, turned to her mother, herself a teacher, for a set of encyclopedias and her tech-savvy brother for some old computers.

2. **FIND OUT ABOUT THE STUDENT POPULATION**

Knowing your students is key to serving them well. So even before the class meets, have a chat with the principal or program leader and find out about the students’ average age, where most students are from, and what their prior education is. With my first class, for example, knowing most of my students were Vietnamese immigrants, young parents, with little prior education told me that we should focus on literacy and vocational English.

3. **NETWORK. BEG, BORROW, STEAL**

We have a sense that teachers are held in low esteem in our culture, and that may be true, compared to doctors or lawyers, for example. But I continue to be amazed at how people will bend over backwards if I knock on their door and say, “Hi, I’m Stacia, and I’m the teacher for the ESL class that starts on Monday.” I’ve been offered extra chairs, free reign of the copy machine and coffee maker, extra keys, a boom box — all right, so there probably is a pity factor involved, I suspect, and that’s all right. (That poor woman in there with all those ESL students...) This is mutual to a degree -- I certainly feel sorry for anyone who doesn’t teach ESL. In any case, I’ve yet to have anyone turn his back on me over students. People like helping, but usually don’t know how. They are more than willing to help, usually, if asked directly: “My class starts on Monday, and I believe there will be fifty students, but we have only twenty chairs. Any ideas about what we can do?”

4. **FURTHER RESEARCH THE STUDENTS**

Once you’ve had them in class for the day, you’ll be able to find out more on your students. You might want to devote the first day to just getting to know each other: what do students want to learn? How much do they already know? To teach effectively, curriculum really needs to be based on the answers to these two questions. If I find out, for example, that my students already have basic conversational skills, I don’t want to focus on very beginner English but look at materials more in the high beginner range.

A good use of time the first day is to get a needs assessment from all of the students, either through a simple survey or interview, with questions like “What are your goals?” or “What do you want to learn from this class?” or “Do you want to work on conversational skills the most or academic skills?” You will probably see trends in the information you gather, as students with similar goals will often attend the same class. The same can be said of students’ level — you will probably find students grouping around the same level, often high beginning, when they attend the same class, even if the class is officially “multilevel.” However, giving students a diagnostic of some sort helps in giving a general sense of students existing level although it may take a couple of weeks of working with an individual student to get a completely accurate picture of his skills. A diagnostic I like to give is having students listen to a short news report and then writing a paragraph paraphrasing the report. This gives you a beginning picture of students’ writing and listening skills.

5. **PLAN THE CURRICULUM**

Now that you have the basic infrastructure of your class laid, at least some tables and chairs, and you know what your students want to learn and a little bit about what they already have learned, it’s time to think about curriculum. Don’t reinvent the wheel here. It may be you are able to write materials on a regular basis, but it is fine to also rely on existing curriculum. Find out what existing standards there are for students at your level.

6. **EXPAND YOUR EXISTING NETWORK**

Become familiar with the school library: there usually is a room, or a shelf, at least, of ESL materials — books, CDs, DVDs, tapes—that you can check out. Now that you know your students’ level, introduce yourself to the curriculum specialist and see what suggestions she has for your students. Or visit a couple of ESL sites, such as Longman’s or Oxford’s, find out who your local sales representative is, if possible, and ask her what she recommends.

**IT’S NOW THE FIRST WEEK OF SCHOOL, AND YOU WERE ASSIGNED JUST LAST WEEK. HOWEVER, YOU HAVE SET UP YOUR CLASS, GOTTEN TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS, AND CHosen CURRICULUM. YOU’RE ON YOUR WAY TO A GREAT SEMESTER!**
Surviving Back-to-School

Every teacher has experienced it: students come back from an extended break, or sometimes even a short break like a three-day weekend, and seem to have forgotten everything, from where you store the paper to the verb “to be.”

One memorable first day of the semester after winter break, when going over the syllabus, a beautiful young woman asked me why there was a rule about attendance. I explained that absences caused a loss of instruction. She looked at me with wide blue eyes and asked, “What’s instruction?” And I realized we indeed had our work cut out for us. Such questions -- “What’s instruction?” “Where’s the paper, again?” or “Do I really need to do the homework?” -- are common in the first weeks of school or after long breaks. Rather than despair, however, there are active steps instructors can take to get students oriented, or reoriented, to class while maintaining their own sanity. These steps address the problems students have to getting back into the flow, which tend to fall in several main ideas.

1 RULES AND PROCEDURES

Most of student confusion over class tends not to be over actual course content but class rules and procedures—for when to talk in class, how to leave class for whatever reason, what to do when arriving late, and so on. All of these procedures and rules seem to consume the most time and cause the most confusion yet are necessary for the smooth running of a class.

2 MATERIALS

Where are the handouts kept? The extra paper? Does the teacher have a stapler? Materials, where they are kept in class, and if students should bring their own, also seem to cause a lot of anxiety in students and take up a lot of time.

3 CONTENT

The course content, what students are supposed to be learning, is of course why we are there and the most important element of class—but also what seems to get shoved aside at times as we deal with rules, procedures, and materials. In addition, this area can also cause confusion in students, obviously, who have been away from the class for awhile and may not quite know anymore where we are in the book.

So there is a lot of room for confusion in arriving in for the first time or returning to class, but there is help. On those days when students are wandering around the classroom saying things like “Where are the books, again?” and “When is break?” and “What page are we on?” don’t despair. There are several steps a teacher can take to orient her confused students.

STEPS TO TAKE TO ORIENT STUDENTS & SURVIVE BACK-TO-SCHOOL

1 PUT IT IN WRITING

If something is important enough to be a rule, it’s important enough to put in writing. Otherwise, it tends to remain ephemeral, a bit of smoke easily forgotten. Consider creating a list of your 10 most important class procedures, from what to do when you are late to how to contact the teacher, and posting it in class, or put it on the syllabus, post it or on your website, or perhaps all three.

2 SAY IT. REPEAT IT. AGAIN

You probably have heard the journalistic saying, “Tell them what you’re going to tell them. Tell them. Then tell them that you told them.” While this might seem overkill, it does emphasize the value of repetition in learning. People probably don’t internalize rules until they’ve heard them several times, so repeat or refer to the procedures several times in the first days of class.

3 DISCUSS IT

Consider letting students have extended discussion on the rules—which ones they don’t understand or find necessary, which ones they believe make sense, which ones could probably be thrown out, and which ones to add. Often, students have a good internal sense of appropriate behavior, even if they don’t practice it. Discussion also helps them better internalize the rules.

4 LABEL IT

If paper and other supplies are in specific cabinets you would like students to know about, it might make sense to label it, so you aren’t repeating several times a class session where the books are but can just point. This also holds true for the activities of the day: if you write on the board what you will be doing, every time a student asks, “What page are we on again?” you can just point.

5 PRACTICE IT

When students come in late, pause your lecture just long enough to say, “Michael, the handouts are on the table up here. Please get them and take your seat.” This models the behavior you want when students enter late and that there is a specific place where the day’s materials are kept.

6 JOURNALS

Journals can be a valuable way to review content material students may be having trouble grasping: one or two pages summarizing the material itself, questions, comments and reaction, and new vocabulary can not only help students process the material, but also give you a good understanding of what students understand and what they are struggling with. Those areas can be addressed then in lecture and discussion.

7 QUIZ

When students know they are going to be tested on something, they are more likely to learn it, so after a week or two consider giving a short quiz on the rules and procedures as well as on content. This should not be a “pop” quiz but a quiz with at least a day for review scheduled.

8 REFRESHERS

After students have been away from class for spring break, for example, consider some refresher work as necessary on the classroom expectations, either through discussion, lecture, or a quiz. The same can be done for classroom content, with a review of the current chapter.

CLASSROOM PROCEDURES AND CONTENT ARE NOT SO EASILY LEARNED BUT EASILY FORGOTTEN, SO LEARNERS HAVE TO BE REORIENTED SOMETIMES EVEN AFTER A SHORT TIME AWAY. However, teachers stand a better stance of solidifying their students’ understanding of procedures and content through lecture, discussion, practice, and refresherers.
The 9 Best New School Year’s Resolutions for ESL Teachers

AT THE START OF THE NEW YEAR WE OFTEN GIVE OUR ESL STUDENTS ACTIVITIES RELATED TO NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS.

We ask them to think about what goals they have and what they want to achieve in the coming year. Consider the start of the new school year. Do you make new school year’s resolutions for yourself? Well, if you haven’t yet, now’s a good time to do it. Here are some suggestions for things you can resolve to do and make this the best school year ever!

TOP 9 NEW SCHOOL YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS FOR ESL TEACHERS

1 GET FIT!

No, you don’t have a desk job where you sit for hours on end. You walk plenty around the school and the classroom. But that does not make you fit. If you haven’t already incorporated a good exercise routine into your weekly schedule, you should resolve to do so. Why? Because being a teacher is often stressful, as stressful as most jobs, and we owe it to ourselves and our students to be in tip top shape so we can give tip top lessons.

2 MOVE UP!

What will it take for you to get a raise, a promotion or a better teaching position? A teaching degree? TESOL certification? Webinars, seminars or courses? Think about where you are now, decide where you want to be by the end of the school year and consider your options. Are you happy where you are right now? Or do you want to be even more successful? Resolve to move forward in your career.

3 CHANGE IT UP!

If you’ve been working and teaching in a particular way for some time, now’s the time to make some changes. Maybe your classroom needs a makeover. Maybe you’d like to use different books and materials. Perhaps start using technology in the classroom? Resolve to use a new technique, strategy, activity or game, at least once a month. That will keep your teaching fresh!

4 FIND BALANCE!

If you’re familiar with English proverbs, you know what they say about “All work and no play...” Spending all of your free time grading tests, making photocopies or designing games? Your students are so lucky to have such a dedicated teacher! But you need time for YOU, time to spend with family, friends or simply enjoying things you love. If you find yourself spending way too many weekends working, then maybe you should resolve to achieve the proverbial work-life balance.

5 WORK SMARTER...

... not harder! In order to achieve the balance mentioned above, you might want to resolve to get organized. There are phone apps that will do wonders for your productivity. Why spend hours creating a board game from scratch when you can download and print one for free? Why take the time to scour the Internet for suggestions for activities when you can ask colleagues for recommendations? Resolving to implement these shortcuts will not make you a lazy teacher – it’ll make you a smarter one.

6 TAKE IT IN STRIDE!

Are you fighting a school system that dates back to the Dark Ages? Does your school lack the funds to invest in new equipment? Low salary got you down? First, remember why you are teaching: it’s your calling, it’s what you love to do, right? Next, forget about the negatives and resolve to focus on the positives. So you don’t have new computers -- what do you have? It’s amazing what you can do with a box of scrap materials.

7 LISTEN UP!

Do you know what your students want? Not what the school wants, or their parents want or the coursebook wants? You might want to resolve to find out. Why are they learning English? Do they want to? Does their company want them to? What challenges or difficulties are they facing? Find out!

8 CHEER THEM ON!

We are so much more than ESL teachers. We are our students’ cheerleaders! Part of our job is to tell them they can learn English, they can speak it – they can do it! Resolve to empower, encourage and motivate them on a daily basis, and soon enough you’ll see the results. And so will they!

9 MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Teaching is rewarding because we make a difference. We teach students to do things they could not do before. But sometimes we lose sight of this. Resolve to help your students achieve their language learning goals. And you will surely achieve your own!

YOU MIGHT BE THINKING, “NOBODY ACTUALLY KEEPS THEIR NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS – WHAT’S THE POINT?”

Of course, nobody is forcing you to do the things you “resolve” to do. The point is that making New Year’s resolutions is an exercise – an exercise that helps you take stock of what you’ve accomplished so far, what you’d like to change and where you’d like be in the future.
The Year at a Glance: Lesson Planning Now for a Smooth Year Later

For some, thinking about a year’s worth of lesson planning can seem overwhelming. When you do not know what you will cook for dinner tomorrow, planning what you will teach eight and a half months into the school year may seem comical.

Those who plan their entire school year before it even starts, though, will have a better grasp on the pace of the year. Not only that, more organized teachers have more organized students, and organization can make a big difference when it comes to academic progress. You do not have to be intimidated if you have never planned an entire year at once: it is easier than you think. Just take these steps one at a time and you will be ready for graduation before the first day of school rolls around!

HOW TO PLAN YOUR LESSONS IN ADVANCE

1 NOTE YOUR MATERIAL
What material do you actually have to cover in your class? Depending on where and who you teach, your administration may answer this question for you. If you have more freedom in your classes, you should stop a moment to take stock of what you want to cover by the end of the semester or school year. By taking a bird’s eye overview of your material, you will already have the end of the academic year in sight before you even start.

2 NOTE YOUR TIME
How much time do you have before the end of school? The number of months, weeks or days you have to cover your material will determine how quickly you need to go through it. Start by getting out your calendar and measure your year in months, weeks, or another unit if that suits you better, and determine just how much time you have to cover what you noted in step one.

3 NOTE LOGICAL DIVISIONS
Going back to your material, look for logical breaks in the list of what you plan to teach. These breaks may be chapters, units, themes or level of difficulty. For example, if you were teaching grammar, you might divide your material into simple tenses, progressive tenses, perfect tenses and perfect progressive tenses. If you are teaching more than one subject to the same group of students, try taking one subject at a time rather than looking for continuity across the curriculum.

4 PLUG IN YOUR CONTENT
Now is when you start to put your material on the calendar. Start penciling in units or logical groupings for each subject into each month or week. You do not have to go into minute detail at this point. You are just getting a rough idea of what material will fall on what page of the calendar. As you do this, also write in special scheduling items like holidays, standardized testing and special parties and events. You can feel free to use ink for these entries.

5 PENCIL IN EXAMS
Now that you have an idea of the weeks and months certain units fall into, pencil in a day for assessment at the end of the content block. Right before each of those days, pencil in a review period. These review days are important first for getting your students ready for their assessments but also for building in time to catch up in case your lessons get slightly off schedule. Along with your tests, mark when you want students to turn in big assignments or projects. Make sure you are not expecting more than one big project from your student on any given day. This will keep their stress levels low and your grading pile small. You might also want to anticipate other out of the ordinary events like field trips or holiday parties. Even if you are not exactly sure when they will happen, you should still allot time for them on your calendar. You can always shift things around later, but it is far more difficult to make time for them out of nothing once you are in a teaching crunch.

6 DO SIMPLE DIVISION
Your calendar is starting to fill in but you still have your lessons to mark. Simply count up the number of days that are still open on your calendar and divide your material equally among those days, month by month or chunk by chunk. This will be your ideal schedule. If you can keep to this plan, you will have plenty of time to present your material to your students and still have days for fun. Plus, all your official days are already scheduled, so you will not be taken off guard when it is time for testing or other events.

7 GET SPECIFIC
Most of your yearlong plan is now complete. You will still need to create specific lesson plans for each day, if you are not revamping and revising a plan you used last year, but that is one of the fun parts of teaching. Let your creativity shine here, and take a moment to be sure you are teaching to all the learning styles. Also, do not feel pressured to have your entire detailed lesson plans complete and articulated at this point. You can take one day at a time, one week at a time, or several pages on the calendar at a time as you do your detailed plans. Different teachers will have different preferences. What is most important is that you know what lessons will happen on what days. As long as you do not procrastinate in planning as you go, you should have stress free preparation for classes.

8 GLIDE THROUGH
No one ever said teaching was easy, and even if they did, they would have been lying. You will not have a year without work and planning, making adjustments and having your flexibility challenged. What you will have is a year that is coherent, smooth and articulated, even if it is only in your own mind. Your students will note the difference in your teaching and classroom management when you have all your plans in place, even if they do not know what it is they are noticing. They will be less stressed, and so will you!

IF YOU ARE A TOP DOWN PROCESSOR, PLANNING AN ENTIRE YEAR AT THE START OF SCHOOL MAY COME NATURALLY, BUT EVEN IF YOU ARE NATURALLY BOTTOM UP, YOU CAN DO IT. When you do, you may just find that planning the entire year at a glance is your new favorite way to get ready for the start of school each fall.
What’s in a Name? These Stellar ESL Activities!

IF THERE IS ONE SUBJECT THAT ALL THE STUDENTS IN YOUR ESL CLASS CAN RELATE TO, IT IS THE SUBJECT OF NAMES.

Everyone has at least one, often more, and although your students’ names will have different levels of meaning to them, all people connect with their own names to one degree or another.

The next time you are not quite sure what to cover with your ESL class or you are looking for a starting point for the discussion, try starting with a name and see where it takes you!

TRY THESE CREATIVE ESL ACTIVITIES USING YOUR STUDENTS’ NAMES

1 A DELICATE QUESTION

ESL students are often asked to choose English names for themselves during their time in English classes. When a student travels overseas to study English, that class time encompasses nearly all of his time, especially if he also lives with an English-speaking host family. What does that mean, then, about the students’ given name? Should he forget it until his studies are done? Should he go by his given name rather than the adopted English one? Should the students in his class be expected to learn the names of their classmates when they are from every corner of the globe even though their intention is to study English? Have your students discuss the advantages and disadvantages to taking an English name for language studies. In small groups, ask students to make a list of the arguments on each side of the issue. Which side of the equation has stronger arguments? Since each of your students has some experience in the matter, what advice might they give to someone just starting his language studies? If choosing an English name is what a person decides to do, what criteria should he use when choosing his English name? To bring a practical side to the discussion, give your students a list of English names. You can find these in baby name books or online. Which names are most appealing to them? Which names are most popular?

2 CITY OF A THOUSAND NAMES

One of the greatest honors a person can receive is to have a city named after him or her. There are examples all through the country and the world of cities that bear the names of important people. Among them are Baltimore, Houston, Charlotte, Pittsburgh, New York and Washington D.C. Challenge your students to think what a city named after them might be like. What kind of a city would it be? Would it be modern and streamlined or old and rustic? Highly populated and busy or quaint and scenic? Ask each of your students to describe this city that is named after her. After your students have spent some time thinking about their cities, show them this clip (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZxz5lnj0Fk) from The Big Bang Theory in which Sheldon talks about his Sim-City Sheldonopolis. What does your class think of Sheldonopolis? Did they imagine any similar features in their own city? Assign a small writing project to your students in which they describe the city that will be named after them. If you like, you can ask your students to draw a map to go along with their descriptions. Then display the map and the description side by side in your classroom for the other students to read at their leisure. You may want to title the bulletin board “Our Towns.”

To extend the activity, ask each person which fictional city named after a classmate they would like to visit for a weekend. Have each person make a vacation plan for a two-day trip to the chosen city. This plan should include the sights she would choose to visit in the city and any special activities she would do while in the city.

3 NAMES ON THE DARKER SIDE

A name cannot only be famous, it can also be infamous. Such names send shivers down the spine, names like Darth Vader (from the Star Wars saga), Captain Hook (from Peter Pan). Even if you knew nothing about the characters, you could probably figure out that you would not want to meet them in a dark alley at night. What is it about the names themselves that make them perfect for villains? In this activity, you can challenge your students to come up with some rules for creating great villain names. Start by brainstorming a list of all the villains they can think of from television, movies or books. You can also check out a list of famous villains for more ideas. Then looking at your lists, set groups of students to decide what makes a great villainous name. The groups can use any criteria they like to make their decisions. When students feel comfortable with their analysis, challenge them to come up with several of their own villainous names. If possible, write out the names from every group on one long adding machine tape and post it along a nearby hallway. If you like, you can ask students to choose one villainous name and write a character sketch for him or her. Alternately, you could have pairs of students role-play interviews with one or more of the villains in front of the class. Once the descriptions are written, students can pair them with an illustration and display them near the ticker tape of bad guys. Title your wall, “Your school’s name’s most wanted.”

You might also want to have your students come up with a list of crimes each character might be wanted for. Wrap up the activity by having your students vote on which villain is the vilest.

ONE THING THAT EVERYONE HAS IS A NAME, AND WHETHER THAT NAME IS KNOWN BECAUSE OF GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS OR BECAUSE OF DASTARDLY DEEDS, WE REMEMBER THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE AN IMPACT ON OUR WORLD.

If you challenge your students to use their imaginations when it comes to their names, you may be surprised at whose names our world might know in the years to come!
Fun ESL Activities You Can Do With A Name

“For those who can remember names that is half the battle.” — John A. Holmes

Everyone has a name, even if parents cannot remember them at times, and what better place to start your ESL class than with some fun activities that use their names?

Fun ESL Activities You Can Do With A Name

1. Acrostic Origins
   Acrostics are a fun place to start when doing a lesson using names. Before introducing what an acrostic is, write your name vertically on the white board. Then challenge your students to think of an adjective which describes you that starts with each of the letters you have written. For example, for the name Sue you might say sweet, understanding and energetic. Once your class has completed the acrostic, write another name on the board and repeat the activity. You can also use short phrases in the acrostic instead of single words to describe a person if you or your class is struggling with a particular letter. This activity is also a good time to put the English dictionary to use by checking for entries that begin with a specific letter. Round out the activity by having your students write acrostics of their own full names, and then post them in your classroom to give students a chance to get to know each other a little better. You may also want to have your students write acrostics for other names, perhaps for a pet or family member or for a famous person or celebrity.

2. Origin of Names
   Many people have a story of how they got their name. For some, the name has been handed down through generations in the family. For others, children are named after a family friend or important person in the parents’ lives. For some, their names are chosen because of the meaning behind the name or the hopes the parents have for their child. Discussing names is a natural place to get in some conversation practice as your students share their stories and ask questions of their classmates. In groups, have your students discuss how their parents chose their name and the story behind it. If your students do not know the story of their name, have them discuss what names they have either given pets or want to give to their future children. Students should explain why they chose a particular name and what their hopes were for the recipient of that name. You can also use this opportunity to discuss the English names your students may have chosen to use. Ask them how they came about using these names and what their thoughts were behind the selection. Just make sure that none of your students feels criticized about his choice of a name for either himself or someone else. Each student should be able to share about at least one type of name, and some may be able to share about several. Encourage your students to practice their speaking as much as they can, and give groups enough time so that everyone has a chance to share.

3. Party Names
   Not all activities about names have to be serious. This game combines general knowledge with speaking practice, particularly practice asking and answering questions. Prepare for the game before class by writing names of well-known people on slips of paper. Make sure your students will know who these people are. To start the game, tape one of the names to each person in your class. After everyone has a name, your students are free to move about the classroom asking yes/no questions of their classmates to try to figure out who they are supposed to be. Once a student has determined his or her correct identity, he can sit down. Continue until the whole class is sitting. You can tailor this game to the goals of your class. You can play a serious game by giving historical names to your students, or you can play a lighthearted game by giving very unlikely names to unlikely students (for example, placing the name Lady Gaga on a male student’s back). Either way, your class will be actively participating and practicing their language skills as they play the game.

4. A Rose by Any Other Name
   Perhaps one of the most famous quotes about names is Shakespeare’s “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” spoken by Romeo. Give this quotation to your students and ask if they agree. Then have a class discussion about the following topic: does your name determine your character, or does your name have no influence on the person that you become. Students are sure to have varying opinions on the idea of a name determining who you are. Encourage open communication among your students, and ask each one to explain his thoughts behind his answer. Then have your students spend some time writing a paragraph that either agrees or disagrees with Shakespeare’s statement. Make sure they give examples or evidence to support their opinions.

Everyone has a name, and some people have more than one. Use these activities about names to help your students get to know each other and themselves a little more and practice their English in the process.
Fun and Games in the ESL Class: Designing Your Own Games

Almost everyone likes games. They are fun, energize the players and require their players to use imagination and brain power. What is there not to like when it comes to games? Games can provide an additional benefit to the ESL teacher – they can give your students practice using their English skills. With this unit on making games, your students will walk through the process of creating and producing their original games as they use their English along the way.

DESIGNING YOUR OWN ESL GAMES

1 GAME RESEARCH

Before your students can create their original games, they will need to do some research on what kinds of board games people like and what is already available. If possible, take your students to a toy store and let them peruse the aisle that houses board games. Each person should write down the names of the games that are available for purchase. If there is not a toy store nearby, take your students to a large department store. Target, Wal-Mart and other department stores usually have a toy section and within that section a shelf or two of board games. As your students are writing down the names of the games available for purchase, encourage each person to read the information that the box offers. They may be able to determine the overall concept of the game as well as the rules and objectives. The goal of the activity is to get a general sense of what each game is and how to play it.

2 AN ORIGINAL IDEA

Now that your students have some exposure to what games already exist, it is time for them to start using their own imagination. First, each person should determine whether he wants to design a game of chance or a game of skill. Looking back on the list that each person made in step one, the games there can be classified into either games of chance or skill. A game of chance depends on your ability to roll well or choose good cards during play. These types of games include Chutes and Ladders and Candyland. Other games require skill or strategy from the players. This type of game includes Monopoly and Jenga. With skill games, the decisions that players make determine the outcome of the game.

Once your students have decided on a game of chance or a game of skill, they should start thinking of the overall concept of the game. Will players imagine themselves in a post apocalyptic world of zombies or will they role-play bunny rabbits making their den? This is where your student’s personality will really come out in his game. Once the overall concept of the game is determined, your students should decide what the goal of the game will be. Will it be to kill all the zombies or create the most harmonic rabbit den? The final goal should fit with the overall story.

3 HOW TO PLAY

Now that each person has his overall concept and final goal, it is time to decide how to get from point A to point B. Will players travel along a game board, rolling dice as they go? Will they have to answer questions and get clues to the mystery that they must solve? Have your class use the games that they listed in the first step as inspiration for their original game. After deciding how progress will be made, your students should determine what rules the players must follow as they move throughout the game. Here is another place to gain inspiration from games that are already in production. In general, the fewer rules a game has the easier it will be to play and, perhaps, the more appealing to its players. Have your students try to compose three to four rules that players should follow while playing their games.

4 MAKING IT HAPPEN

The final step is where creativity meets practicality. Your students must now produce the games they designed. First, each person should physically create his or her game. You will want to have as many resources available to your students as possible at this point. Some may need computers to produce cards for their game play. Others may need dice or props. Many will need large pieces of cardboard that can be made into game boards. Have each person determine what he needs to make his game and then do whatever it takes to make it happen.

The second element for making the game happen is to write a set of instructions for players to follow when playing the game. If you have any games in your classroom or at home, let your students read the instructions that came with the game. These are often in a booklet or printed on the inside lid of the game box. You can also find directions for playing games online, and you can allow your students to read these instructions and use them as models as they write their own instructions. Each person should type up his instructions once they are written and package them with the other elements that he created for his game. Now all that is left to do is play the game!

5 PLAY TIME

You may want to spread this activity out over several days to avoid burnout on the part of your students. Group your class into teams of four. Each team will then play a game created and produced by another member of the class. The creator should not be a participant in the game but should be an observer of the group as they play. The group will need to follow the instructions that the creator wrote. The game creator should watch to see how well his classmates are able to play his game, how clear his instructions were and how much fun the group seems to be having. If the group gets stuck, he should step in and help. Once all the games have been played, each person should write an evaluation of his game. He should note how well his classmates were able to play and how much they seemed to enjoy the game as well as any modifications he thinks should be made.

CREATING AND MANUFACTURING A GAME IS NO SIMPLE TASK, BUT IF TAKEN SYSTEMATICALLY IT IS SOMETHING THAT ANY OF YOUR STUDENTS CAN ACCOMPLISH.

With reading, writing and speaking in the mix, your students will use many of their language skills over the course of this unit and will finish with an originally and (hopefully) entertaining game!
WE’VE ALL EXPERIENCED THE ALL-TOO-FAMILIAR BLANK STARE RIGHT AFTER GIVING WHAT YOU THOUGHT WERE AMAZINGLY CLEAR AND CONCISE DIRECTIONS.

The blankness is then followed by whispers, confused looks and lots of questions. I’ve developed some targeted methods to dodge that deer-in-the-headlights stare, and to ensure that students will not confuse themselves or others during an activity. Follow these steps, and you’ll be an expert at giving simple instructions that truly pay off.

TIPS TO SIMPLIFYING INSTRUCTIONS

1. USE SIMPLE LANGUAGE AND KEEP IT BRIEF

The number one key to giving simple instructions is to keep your language simplified at all times. Think ahead of time how you are going to explain it, and make the assumption that the activity is completely new to the entire class. Explain things with short sentences, easy words, and uncomplicated grammar. It takes some getting used to cutting out extra language and to say only what you need to say.

2. USE THE BOARD OR PROVIDE A VISUAL

Utilizing the board to get your point across can greatly take the pressure off your verbal instructions. If it is a game, you can show them how you are going to organize teams and keep score on the board. If they will be using the board to play the game, lay it out in front of them as you explain. Tic Tac Toe is a great example. As you explain, you can draw the diagram and explain that one team is X and the other team is O. One person takes a turn and answers my question. If it is the X team’s turn, one person answers correctly, then the team can put an X in one of the nine boxes. This would be quite difficult to explain only using language. For more complex activities, a handout that they can refer to during the activity is a great tool. Showing it on the board or providing a handout with explicit step-by-step instructions will make your job a lot easier!

3. MODEL THE EXERCISE: GIVE EXAMPLES

Never begin a game or an activity without first going through a few examples! You can use your sharpest students as your helpers to go through your instructions and your expectations. Then model the game or activity. Show them exactly how it will go in the beginning, the middle and the end. For games, you’ll want to stress what the goal is and how to win the game. Be sure to include two to three concrete examples in your modeling.

4. REPEAT YOURSELF

It always helps to be repetitive so that you can be sure you didn’t leave anything out. Go through the directions a second time especially if you can see that students aren’t 100% sure about what they are supposed to do. You can also just repeat the model, using a different example.

5. DO COMPREHENSION CHECKS

Don’t assume that all the students understand! Check to make sure and this will save you time and agony later. A few ways to do this is to question random students about the activity or game. For example, “John, how many X’s do I have to get in a row to win the game?” or “Jane, do I get to put an O in my square if I get the answer wrong?” It may seem simple, but checking to make sure comprehension is there may prevent you from having to interrupt the game to explain again. Another tip is to focus some of the comprehension checks on students that chronically have problems following or understanding instructions. It is a pretty sure bet that if one of the weaker students is with you, the rest of the class is on the same page.

6. ANSWER QUESTION BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Don’t forget to answer their questions before they jump into the activity. This is especially important when they will be working in groups or pairs. Give the students a chance to look through any handouts and see if that sparks any additional questions.

WHEN GIVING INSTRUCTIONS TO ANY ESL CLASS, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO BECOME AN EXPERT AT GIVING GOOD, CLEAR, CONCISE ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS. Your students will appreciate it and it will save you a lot of grief. Don’t forget to use humor, be as animated as possible, and remember, there are no stupid questions!
4 Simple Steps for Building Confidence in Your Students

PART OF LEARNING A LANGUAGE IS MAKING MISTAKES.

Every ESL teacher knows this and sees their students making mistakes in their classroom every day. We don’t like it, but we know it is reality. But for our students, making mistakes can feel like something far greater, sending the student a message that he would never want to hear. Students can get discouraged or frustrated when they make mistakes, and this can affect how they feel about themselves and their language learning abilities. Students who lack confidence are less likely to use the language that they do know, and their language learning could potentially be snuffed. That’s why part of our role as teachers is to encourage our students and help develop their confidence. Confidence counteracts the stress and discouragement that comes from making mistakes. How does a teacher build confidence in her students? Here are four suggestions.

SEVERAL TIPS TO HELP STUDENTS BECOME MORE CONFIDENT

1 REPETITION OF LESSONS

When I was in graduate school, I took a class on language syllabus design. We talked about various types of syllabi and classroom structures. One thing I remember vividly from that class was our discussion on cyclical syllabi. I had never heard the term before, and once I understood it I realized I had never had that type of class before. In a cyclical classroom structure, the same topics are visited multiple times, either throughout the year or over the course of several years. For example, beginning students may do a unit on food. When those students reach the intermediate level, they may do another unit on food, and again when they are in advanced classes. Though the student is completing three units on food, each time the material gets more in depth and more difficult. The advantage to this type of structure is that students have a foundation on the subject each time it comes up again in class. When students have a foundation, they can absorb new information more easily and feel confident at their ability to perform at a higher level than if they had never studied the material at all.

2 REPETITION OF ACTIVITIES

In addition to repeating the subject matter in class, repeating class activities will help build confidence in your students. This does not mean giving your students the same worksheets and exercises day after day. In class, particularly group discussions, will give your students a chance to learn each time the work with a different partner and then apply that knowledge in the next conversation. For example, after reading a short story, have students work in pairs to discuss how they feel about the main character and another possible ending the author could have written. After about five minutes, have students change partners and discuss the same questions. Your students will be able to apply the knowledge they gained in the first conversation in the second. When your students have been successful with the questions in their first discussion and can use what they have learned, they will feel more confident about speaking and sharing their ideas.

3 SUMMARIZING AT THE END OF CLASS

Anyone who has talked to a teenager after his day at school is sure to know the answer to, “What did you do today?” Nothing. With some students, it’s just a reluctance to talk about their days. But for other students, it is hard to realize and then remember what they learned in class. Taking a few minutes at the end of class to summarize what you taught (and what they learned) can make the difference in these reluctant students. The few minutes you take to write down what your students have accomplished and the material they have learned will boost their confidence. They will be able to agree with you that they did learn something in class today, and they will be ready to learn new material in the days to come.

4 GOAL SETTING

Okay, I’ll admit it. Sometimes I add items to my to do list just so I can cross them off. For me, like many others, having a sense of accomplishment makes me feel good about what I have done and gives me the push to keep going. Your students will react similarly when they reach the goals they have set. Taking time in class to help your students establish both short term and long term goals has many benefits. Not only do they know where they are heading in their language learning. They also see when they have reached those goals, and that makes them believe they can reach the next goals they have set. Taking a few minutes to review goals with your students periodically will help them see just how much they have accomplished and push them to keep working hard.

IT’S HARD TO BE MOTIVATED WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE YOU CAN’T GET ANYTHING RIGHT AND YOU AREN’T MAKING ANY PROGRESS.

By giving your students the tools for success in your classroom and showing them that they have accomplished things in their language learning, you will give them the confidence they need to be productive and successful students in your classroom and in life.
Four Keys to Good Communication with Your Students

Whenever I tell people that I taught English as a second language in China, almost universally their first question is, “Oh, do you speak Chinese?”

Well, no. In fact, I wouldn’t claim fluency in any language other than English though I do know smatterings of a few. And because of that, teaching solely in English to students who are just learning the language makes communication, well, complicated for a lot of ESL teachers. Good communication with non-English speaking students is not impossible, though. In fact, if you have the right tools, you can have excellent communication with a group of students who are just learning English.

Here are some tools that I have used to foster good communication with my students in the classroom.

TRY THESE 4 KEYS TO GOOD COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR STUDENTS

1. EXPLANATIONS

One of the most natural tools for teaching English concepts to any class is explanations. Teachers teach, and when they do they explain grammatical concepts, vocabulary words or appropriate discourse strategies. Most of the time there is a spoken element in the explanation. The teacher speaks about the language concept to the students. Explanations can encompass more than just the spoken word, however. Written explanations also fall into this category. Whether it is a chapter in a text book or a handout that your students can follow, ESL teachers use these methods to explain language to their students, and both types of explanations are the first key to good communication with your students.

When you use visual aids to communicate with your students, you pass the language barrier and get right to the heart of meaning. The term visual aids encompasses a lot of things you can use in your classroom. Pictures, charts, tables and objects are all types of visual aids. When teaching concrete vocabulary, visual aids like picture dictionaries are essential, but don’t stop there. You can use visual aids to teach grammatical concepts as well. I can’t tell you how often I have used Azar’s diagrams of the twelve tenses in English. And by giving my students those visuals, they have a concrete picture of an abstract concept. Not only does this improve our communication, it makes them more successful learners and more motivated students. Because we often struggle with a language barrier, using visual aids makes communication less dependent on words that they might not understand.

2. VISUAL AIDS

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and no place is that more true than in the ESL classroom.

3. REAL LANGUAGE

Once you have given an explanation and used a visual to help your students understand the day’s lesson, the next step is giving them examples in English. Theory is all fine and good, but your students need the practical and real examples that sample sentences afford. This shows them not only why a particular concept follows a certain pattern but how to use that concept in practical and real settings. Offer your students written examples as well as oral ones. Even the lowest level students will benefit from having examples written on the board (even if they can’t yet read or understand them). As you provide examples, give your students more than one, and don’t forget to include examples of the exceptions to the rules, too, when they are ready to handle them.

4. TAKE AWAYS

Now before you get too carried away with giving your students examples, remember that they are there to learn to use English correctly. So the last tool for communication with your students gives them a chance to contribute to the lesson. Once you have explained the concept of the day, given a visual and supplied some examples, challenge your students to give some examples of their own and then write them on the board. Having your students contribute examples serves several functions.

First, it makes your classroom more student centered. No ESL teacher should be the one and only speaker in their classroom. Getting your students to speak is essential, and asking them for examples of what you have just taught will let them know you want them to actively participate in class.

Second, by eliciting examples from your students you will be able to tell how well they have grasped the concept you are trying to teach. If your students are unable to supply appropriate examples, you may need to go back to step one and reexplain the language concept you are trying to teach. Or you may need to go back to step three and provide some additional examples. Eliciting examples from your students gives you a read on how well they understand and where you may need to clarify.

Finally, student examples also challenge your students to be creative with their language knowledge. Ideally, your student examples won’t be near cookie cutter duplicates of your own. Challenge your students to use the language they know to be creative and bold in what they say in class, using the new grammar or vocabulary you have taught. Affirm correct examples. Make minor corrections for examples that may need it. Above all, encourage your students to be vocal and make a habit of communicating.

FOR TEACHERS, GOOD COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL.

Without it, your students become frustrated and you become ineffective. They next time you are teaching something new to your ESL students, try using these four tools for ensuring good communication, and you will find that everyone in the classroom feels better about what they have learned!
Four Simple Steps to Fostering Accuracy in Your Students

ESL TEACHERS MUST WALK A FINE LINE.

Our goal is fluency in our students, and we design curriculum and lesson plans to meet that goal. We are excited when our students use language correctly and begin to attain fluency. Even when they have not reached fluency, we celebrate the little victories along the way. After all, language learning takes time, and no student or teacher should expect immediate perfection. But in our excitement, it’s possible to overlook errors in our students’ language use. We accept questionable pronunciation and grammatical errors because our students are doing more today than they did last week.

This isn’t necessarily a big issue in the classroom. All of your students are in the process of learning English, and you have the experience to know what your students mean even if it isn’t exactly what they are saying. But what happens when your students leave the classroom? What happens when they need superior language skills for their careers or when speaking with unsympathetic English speakers? In these and other situations, accurate language use is important.

THE FINE LINE

If we think about it, we know that accurate language use is important. We want our students to have good pronunciation, choose language appropriate to the context, and speak fluently and free of grammatical errors. This goal, though, is difficult to achieve. And to get there, teachers must walk the fine line between correcting their students’ incorrect language use while not discouraging them from speaking. If our students feel overcorrected, their speech is likely to become slow, choppy and hesitant. The good news is you can make efforts to foster accuracy in your students in ways that will not discourage them from using the language they know. Here are four simple ways to do that.

1. START EARLY

It is easy to emphasize courageous language use so much that accuracy is less than a second thought. To avoid this trap, emphasize accuracy issues early in your lessons. Make sure, when you present a lesson to your students, they are clear about correct language usage, the right pronunciation and the potential errors they could make. Take time to point out how to use this language accurately. By emphasizing accurate language use early, your students will be thinking about their own accuracy as they experiment with the new language structures they are learning.

2. CAN YOU REPEAT THAT?

Another key element to fostering accuracy in your students is repetition. By offering your students many opportunities to see and practice correct language usage, you will engrain in them the language patterns you want to see. Keep in mind you do not have to limit repetition to one lesson. Consider covering the same grammar topics or vocabulary several times throughout the year. There is no reason you cannot teach noun clauses in the career unit and then again in the food unit of your class. You could also teach food vocabulary a second time when you talk about restaurant careers. Don’t feel as though you are wasting your students’ time when you go over a topic more than once. It often takes several times going over the same material to really cement it in their minds.

3. MAKE A POINT

Communication is of utmost importance, and you should encourage your students to use the language that they know. But you can balance this emphasis on communication with reminders of the need for accuracy. If your students do not know why they need accurate language usage, they may not be motivated to strive toward it. Take every possible opportunity to stress that accuracy is important in language use. When your students see that accuracy is important to you and they understand why it is important in real world language use, they will value it themselves and as a result will try to achieve it.

4. YOU’RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME

When teachers correct and over correct their students, there are several possible negative outcomes. But who says you have to be the one to point out all the language errors in your classroom? Make your students responsible for noticing and correcting their own errors. Teach them how to make corrections as they speak. Give them tools for self-evaluation. And do not discourage peer correction. When everyone in the class plays a part in fostering accurate language, you are no longer the bad guy who loves to see your students make mistakes.

ACCURATE LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR LANGUAGE FLUENCY, AND WITH THESE SIMPLE STRATEGIES YOU CAN ENCOURAGE ACCURATE LANGUAGE IN YOUR STUDENTS.

Give attention to accurate language early in your lessons, teach your students the value of accurate language use and encourage them to be aware of their own mistakes. If you do these things, you will see your students reaching new heights in their language fluency.
The Upside of Errors: When and Why to Avoid Correcting Students

“I taught math in my home country,” a student shares on career day. “The teacher raises her eyebrows and waits for the student to continue. “I mean, I taught math in my home country.” This is a perfect example of when not correcting an ESL student is the best way to handle an error. By signaling her student with a small gesture, the teacher helps the student understands that he made an error. He thinks back to what he said, and then produces the correct structure. This is what in language studies is called self-correction.

Self-correction is just what it sounds like – when students correct their own mistakes rather than depending on the teacher to correct them. Self-correction happens naturally in speech, both with first and second language learners and in spoken and written language. And students who are able to self-correct have many advantages over those who do not.

**SELF-CORRECTION BASICS**

1. **STUDENTS WHO SELF-CORRECT SHOW THAT THEY UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE.**

They are able to recognize mistakes, even in their own speaking and writing, and know what the correct structure should look like. They are then able to produce that correct language on their own even if it is on the second try.

2. **STUDENTS WHO SELF-CORRECT ARE MORE PREPARED FOR THE REAL WORLD.**

They depend less on their teacher and more on themselves, and they take more responsibility for their own quality of language. When they do this, they can better function in real life language situations and are able to better communicate with native speakers, even when they make mistakes, because they are able to identify and correct those mistakes without help from someone else.

3. **SELF-CORRECTION BEGETS INCREASED AWARENESS.**

Students must have some level of self-awareness when it comes to their language use if they are going to self-correct. But as students learn to self-correct, they become more aware of their language use and therefore any mistakes they are making. When students are more aware of mistakes, they make fewer. As a result, they become better at self-correcting. Getting students to self-correct, then, begins a positive cycle of awareness and correct language production.

**DEVELOPING SELF-CORRECTING STUDENTS**

Self-correction can be developed. For students with little experience self-correcting, you can give them sentences with errors that they need to correct. Spending a few minutes on this type of activity each day will increase student awareness of language errors. Creating examples inspired by actual student errors is a good way to make sure your sentence corrections will make a real impact on how your students speak. You can also use examples depicting errors common with speakers of your students’ first language. You may also create examples that highlight grammatical concepts you have recently taught in class. Each of these may serve a different purpose, but all of them will help your students become better self-correctors.

Another way to encourage error awareness and self-correction is to signal your students when they make an error. You can use verbal signals, asking them to repeat themselves for example, or use simple physical clues like raising your eyebrows. If students still struggle with identifying their mistakes, give a more obvious signal like raising your hand when they make an error. The more natural your signals are, and the more subtle they are, the more prepared your students will be for self-correcting on their own.

**HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?**

Making students aware of their mistakes is like walking a thin line – too much and you will end up discouraging your students rather than empowering them. For this reason, remember what level your students are at. Don’t expect perfect speech from beginning level students, and don’t expect them to correct every error they make. For any student, when errors occur in many contexts, try focusing on one or two and let the rest slide (for now). Building a student’s foundation in self-correction is often a slow process and one that should not be rushed. You can always help them tackle more areas of error later, and you want them to feel good about the language they are producing.

**CREATING A CULTURE OF SELF-CORRECTION CAN BE CHALLENGING.**

Sometimes students will realize their mistakes on their own. Other times the teacher will have to offer a signal that self-correction is needed. She may make a physical signal or say something like, “What was that? Excuse me?” Though establishing a classroom culture where students self-correct may be challenging and time consuming at first, it is well worth it as your students become more effective and more confident English users. They become more independent and are ready to take their English skills out into the real world.
6 Practical Questions to Ask About Students’ First Language

IT’S A QUESTION I HAVE STRUGGLED WITH THROUGHOUT MY TEACHING CAREER: SHOULD I ALLOW MY STUDENTS TO USE THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE IN THE ESL CLASSROOM?

Keeping an English only classroom has its benefits. Students achieve good language acquisition even if it’s a little slower in coming, and they don’t become overly dependent on translators and dictionaries. Of course, if I allow first language use, it decreases student stress and helps tackle tough language barriers. My students usually want to use their first language in class, but is that what’s best for them? If you have struggled with this question, or are struggling with it now, here are some questions to ask yourself before making your decision.

ASK YOURSELF THESE 6 PRACTICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS’ FIRST LANGUAGE

1. WHAT IS YOUR SCHOOL POLICY?

Some schools advertise English only classrooms, and if yours is one of them you may find answering the L1 question is very easy. If your school has a policy to keep students’ first languages out of the classroom, then you should just do that. When an ESL student signs up for courses and pays tuition for English only classrooms, he should get what was promised.

2. WHY DO YOU WANT TO ALLOW L1?

Oftentimes, ESL teachers are also second language learners. When a person travels to a foreign country to teach English, she may also spend her time studying the language of her students. Some teachers may be tempted to allow their students’ L1 in the classroom because they want to learn that language. This, however, is not a good reason to allow your students to speak their native language in class.

3. WHAT CLASS ARE YOU TEACHING?

Are you teaching a conversation class? Are you teaching business English? Thinking about the goals of the class may help you answer the L1 question. If the goal of the class is to get students speaking English (such as in a conversation class) allowing students to use their first language may be counterproductive. However, if you are teaching skills that your students will use in a bilingual environment (such as the business world), allowing use of native languages may be more like what they will encounter when they have completed their English studies.

4. WHAT LEVEL ARE YOUR STUDENTS?

Advanced level students have very few reasons for using a bilingual dictionary or translator in class, but beginning level students are another matter. When a person is first studying English, the amount of information she is expected to learn can feel like drinking water from a fire hose — too much, too fast and too hard to get. For these students, allowing L1 use (to some degree) may be reasonable and even helpful. Teachers and students must be careful in this situation, however. Some students may become so overly dependent on translating to their first language that they hinder their second language acquisition.

5. MIGHT STUDENTS OVERUSE THEIR L1?

Learning English involves more than just memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. Becoming fluent in English also includes developing a variety of speaking strategies – asking questions, clarifying and giving explanations. As students advance in their speaking skills, these conversation strategies should be required of them. If allowing use of a first language will inhibit development of these skills, it should be avoided.

6. WILL ALLOWING L1 CAUSE MISUNDERSTANDINGS?

When I taught ESL in China, nothing could make me use Chinese in the classroom. This is because my Chinese skills were so bad that using it with my students would only have confused them. Your own language abilities, if they are like mine were, may be reason enough to avoid using your students’ native language in the classroom. The students can speak it fluently. Can’t they help each other understand through use of L1? Maybe. But what happens if a student gives a classmate an incorrect explanation in their first language and you do not understand what they have said? This misunderstanding could lead to more problems and misuse of language later. Thinking about how well you know your students’ L1 might also be a factor in whether you allow it in the classroom, and it’s a question worth asking yourself.

ULTIMATELY, ONLY YOU CAN DECIDE WHETHER TO ALLOW YOUR STUDENTS’ L1 IN THE CLASSROOM. Whatever your decision, it will have both advantages and disadvantages. Weighing them against each other will be the best way for you to decide what should happen behind your classroom door.
Let Them Talk: Five Student Advantages to a Noisy Classroom

WHAT TEACHER FINDS HIMSELF SMILING WHEN HIS STUDENTS ARE CONSTANTLY TALKING OVER HIM? AN ESL TEACHER, OF COURSE.

Language classrooms are the perfect environment for teachers to encourage talking in class. Keeping lectures to a minimum and challenging students to speak up and use the language they are learning are keys for a successful English instructor. It’s not because English teachers don’t have a lot to say. Quite the contrary. What is more important, though, are the advantages that students in communicative and student centered classrooms have over those in more traditional, and quieter, classrooms. When you get your students talking more than you do in class, here are some things you both can expect.

5 STUDENT ADVANTAGES TO A NOISY CLASSROOM

1 STUDENTS PUT THEIR LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE TO PRACTICAL USE

Whether your students are taking English classes for business reasons, to increase educational opportunities or for personal reasons, their ultimate goal is communication. When you, the teacher, talk less and your students talk more, your students are putting their language knowledge to practical use. The more you can get your students talking in class, the better off they will be. They will have more experience speaking and more confidence in their ability to communicate outside the classroom because they have already done it inside the classroom.

2 STUDENTS GET CREATIVE WITH LANGUAGE

When students are talking frequently in class, they will inevitably find times they do not know a specific vocabulary or grammar construction they need. But that doesn’t have to be the end of what they have to say. The more your students talk in class, the more they will find that they can get their message across even if they are missing specific knowledge in grammar and vocabulary. Students get creative with language. Anyone with this skill has an advantage in real world talk. Second language learners are bound to struggle when communicating with native speakers from time to time, and students who can be creative with the language that they do know will have an easier time getting their message across even if the grammar is imperfect when they do.

3 STUDENTS HELP EACH OTHER OVER LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Sometimes, students won’t be able to depend on their own creativity to get their message across, but that doesn’t mean that you, their teacher, have to run to the rescue. When your students are talking more than you are in class, communication struggles for specific students often become group challenges. You will find that your students help each other over language barriers. Students correcting students have many advantages. Students with the answers build their own confidence. Students getting help are willing to listen to their peers and feel that they can achieve the language proficiency that their classmates have reached. Helping students also remember information better because they are now teaching it. The students themselves become the authorities on correct language usage.

4 STUDENTS PAY MORE ATTENTION

Noisy classrooms can be a challenge to manage, but there is an advantage to the teacher when students do the majority of the talking. Students pay more attention when the teacher speaks. It is difficult for anyone to pay close attention during a lecture, and a lecture in your second language can be an even tougher pill to swallow. When you do less talking and your students do more talking, they put more value on your words and know that what you say must be important when you stop them to give information in class.

5 EVERYONE PARTICIPATES

Finally, getting your students talking rather than listening to long lectures enables them to engage in class to the fullest extent. When students are doing group work and talking in pairs regularly, even shy students won’t be able to sit on the sidelines for long. Everyone participates in class and makes communication happen. No one simply observes communication that is happening around them and withdraws, and that is, after all, what all teachers should strive towards.

THESE ADVANTAGES ARE JUST A GLIMPSE OF HOW YOUR STUDENTS WILL BENEFIT FROM A STUDENT CENTERED CLASSROOM.
The more they speak, the more confident they will be when they have to communicate in real life situations. Don’t be discouraged, however, if your students are reluctant to speak up in class at first. In some cultures, the expectation is that only the teacher will speak and that the students’ only job is to listen attentively. Just take time out to explain your classroom expectations for your students as well as the cultural expectations for ESL students, and even those who want to show respect through silence will find better ways to let you know they value what you have to say.
5 Ways to Help Students Start Improving Academic Vocabulary

MANY ESL STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY YOUNG ONES, COME TO CLASS WITH FAIRLY STRONG CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH SKILLS, WHICH THEY HAVE LEARNED FROM INTERACTIONS WITH THEIR PEERS ON PLAYGROUNDS, IN PARKS, AND OTHER AREAS OF PLAY AND SOCIALIZING.

What many young ESL student lack is academic English, the language used for academia, the professions, and business. Academic English is what is used in college classes and professional work, and research shows that a strong vocabulary leads to higher educational gains, higher-paying jobs, and improved life quality overall. With so much at stake, it is clear we should be concerned about our students’ academic vocabularies. But how specifically do we address it? And what exactly is it? How does it differ from conversational vocabulary?

QUALITIES OF ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

1 MULTISYLLABIC

Academic vocabulary tends to be multisyllabic, comprised of morphemes, or word parts, each of which carry meaning. Conversational vocabulary, on the other hand, because it is more contextualized, relies less on the words carrying meaning than academic vocabulary. Conversational English is contextualized, and the context carries the meaning. For example, a recent conversation with my daughter went something like “What time should I pick you up?” “Five, Mom.” “I’m sorry, what time?” “Five!” Not one word in that exchange has more than one syllable because of the context and the ability to clarify: I was able to check with my daughter about what time she had said. The context, of a mother dropping her daughter off in the morning and asking about the pick up time, is also familiar to most readers and requires little elaboration.

Look at this similar exchange in academic vocabulary:

To: Parents
From: Principal
Re: Departure Time

In order to depart in a timely manner, please arrange to have your child at the school by eight a.m. Please ensure that he or she is prepared with appropriate clothes and lunch. Failure to follow these directions will result in the child’s inability to participate in the trip.”

Note the numerous multisyllabic words here, the long and detailed sentences, and the impersonal tone—all are features of academic vocabulary in contrast to the personal, immediate, and monosyllabic nature of conversational.

2 LATIN ORIGIN

Many words in academic vocabulary are of Latin origin because institutions of higher learning in England used Latin while English, a Germanic language, was used in more every day settings. This is one reason students have difficulty with academic language—its vocabulary is very different from that of the English they already know. For example, in academic/medical vocabulary, it is “obese female” as opposed to the more familiar conversational (and rude as opposed to impersonal) “fat girl” or “fat woman.”

3 ABSTRACT

Academic vocabulary tends to be abstract, dealing with ideas rather than the concrete, as with conversational vocabulary. “Capitalism,” “violence,” “educational system,” “legislation,” “law enforcement”—all of these are abstractions I have seen in the news recently, and more suited for news reports or academic essays. More commonly, in conversational English, they are “money,” “fighting,” “school,” “law,” and “police” or “cop.”

Students already know the conversational version: what they need to learn is the academic equivalent or “translation.”

4 TECHNICAL

Academic vocabulary is technical and precise, meant to convey specific ideas, often when the context is reduced. So while a parent may tell his child to “Get down from there, now!” from an amusement ride, the sign on the ride may read “Please demount the amusement ride when finished.” The academic version, for example replaces the familiar “Get down!” with “Dismount” and the nonspecific “there” with “amusement ride,” demonstrating the difference between the two forms due to context.

5 IMPERSONAL

Finally, again because of the reduced context and distance between addressee and addressee, academic language is impersonal. While a parent might tell her child “Hurry up, or I’ll leave without you!” a letter from the bus company, because of the lack of relationship between the two parties, might say “Those who do not arrive promptly at 7 am are in danger of being excluded from the trip.” Although the basic idea is the same, the language is very different.

METHODS TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

1 READ

One of the major methods to improve students’ academic vocabulary is to read extensively—academic essays, reports, and excerpts from content textbooks. In this way, students will be exposed to a number of different academic words, some of them from their future majors.
KEEP A WORD JOURNAL

Studies show that students not only need to be exposed to higher-level vocabulary, but they also need to work with it in order to acquire it and make it a part of their own vocabularies. One way to do this is the use of a word journal, in which students record at least three new words they have encountered in each reading, a definition, the part of speech, and a new sentence with the word. This provides some extra processing to help students assimilate the new word into their own vocabularies.

TEACH MORPHOLOGY

Learning morphology, or the parts of words, is an excellent way to help students decode new academic words. Again, academic vocabulary is multisyllabic, and most of these syllables, or morphemes, carry their own meaning. As a simple example, words that end in “—ment” in academic English are almost always abstract nouns: government, employment, containment, etc. In another example, “morphology” is comprised of two morphemes, “morpho” or shape, form, and “—ology,” meaning “study of.” So “morphology” is the study of (word) forms.

SET UP DISCUSSION GROUPS

To further acquire academic vocabulary, students can be assigned groups, given a specific academic topic, such as gun control and the United States, and some academic vocabulary to go with it: “legislation,” “Congress,” “(Second) Amendment,” and so on. They can then discuss what they think about how gun control is practiced in the United States, using the vocabulary assigned.

ESSAYS

Finally students can write essays on academic topics, like the difference in the legislative process, or how laws are passed, between the U.S. and other countries. This topic, unlike more common topics like “My Favorite Place,” is more likely to draw on academic vocabulary because even to discuss such an abstract process as passing laws I will need abstract, multisyllabic words, unlike those used in describing specific places.

ACQUIRING NEW VOCABULARY, AND AN ACADEMIC ONE, IS A DIFFICULT PROCESS, REQUIRING COMMITMENT OVER A PERIOD OF TIME. However, the rewards in increased educational and employment opportunities make the effort worth it.
What You Can Do with Buttons: 8 Activities You’ll Splash with Color

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU PUT AWAY AN ODD BUTTON WITH THE HOPES OF USING IT AGAIN? IF YOU HAVE AN OLD JAR FULL OF BUTTONS YOU’VE COLLECTED OVER THE YEARS, NOW’S THE TIME TO USE THEM: WITH YOUR ESL CLASS.

Here are some fun, fabulous activities and uses for those old buttons.

CRAFTS:

1. SOCK PUPPETS

Making puppets out of old odd socks and buttons is as easy as pie. Students choose two buttons for the eyes, some yarn for the hair and draw a mouth and nose. Now, the best part about the sock puppets is how you’ll be able to use them for role plays and speaking activities. Some children are self-conscious about speaking in front of the class, but any group with a bunch of puppets is a pretty chatty group!

2. COLORFUL BUTTON JEWELRY

By simply stringing buttons, your class will be able to make rings, bracelets, necklaces and all sorts of pretty jewelry. These make lovely Mother’s Day gifts, but why not also use the fresh batch of jewelry for a shopping lesson? Divide students into pairs and have them practice different shopping scenarios. They may even wish to bargain and trade with their classmates!

3. BUTTON BARNYARD

Have your students work together for this fun collaige. Give them a large piece of poster board and tell them they will create a barnyard full of animals. Give them plenty of buttons to use of varying sizes – if you’ve got big ones, so much the better. Show them how they can create a cat by placing a small round button on top of a large one. Or a chick with the same two buttons, only the smaller one is placed to side for the chick’s head. Try creating different animals with buttons and glue them all onto the poster board for a fun, colorful barnyard your little ones will love. Don’t forget to draw ears, beaks and tails to complete your animals.

4. BUTTON BOOKMARK

Students often need sheets with the past and past participles of irregular verbs to study till they can get them all straight. So, with your help, and your colorful buttons, they can make bright bookmarks they can use in their English books. Hand out rectangular pieces of poster board and have students divide each into three columns. They must copy a list of irregular verbs and then proceed to complete the other two columns with the past and past participle for each. When they’re done they may decorate their new bookmark with a large button at the very top that will help mark a page in their books. But make sure they’re not around when you take a test!

5. BUTTON BINGO

When you create your own fabulous Bingo cards, what do you have your students use as markers? Little pieces of paper you’ve torn or cut up? Doesn’t sound very fabulous. Use your supply of buttons and hand out enough for each student!

6. GAME PIECES

You’ve designed your own colorful board game from scratch for guaranteed hours of fun. Now, all you need are some pieces your students will be able to move around the board. What will you use? How about some of your most fantastic and colorful buttons? If all you’ve got is some old boring ones, then ask your students to help you give them some pizzazz – decorate them with sequins or beads. Each student may even have his/her own to keep.

7. COUNTING SONG

Teach your young learners the “Ten Little Indians” song, but with buttons: “One little two, little three, little buttons...” Buttons are also great for helping them learn to add and subtract in English.

8. BUTTON TOSS

Take a large piece of cardboard and divide it into as many cells as you’d like. Each cell must include a new vocabulary word, a question in English, a verb – or all three! You can make your board as fancy or as simple as you like. Hand out buttons to each of your students. Students toss one at a time and depending on where the button lands, they must use the word in a sentence, answer a question or say the verb in past, future, etc. You may also choose to make a board based on a theme, for example, Halloween, Thanksgiving or Christmas.

IF YOU’RE RUNNING OUT OF BUTTONS, ASK YOUR STUDENTS TO BRING SOME. AND DON’T FORGET TO RAID YOUR MOTHER’S OR GRANDMOTHER’S SEWING BASKET! THERE ARE SURELY LOTS OF BUTTONS THERE.
What You Can Do with Cardboard Boxes: 6 Fun Activities and Crafts

LET’S TAKE A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE... WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN WHAT WAS THE BEST THING ABOUT BUYING LARGE, HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES?

Were we even remotely interested in the new refrigerator or TV set? Not really! We wanted to play with the box! There are great ways to use cardboard boxes in the ESL classroom and here are just a few to get you started:

6 FUN ESL ACTIVITIES AND CRAFTS WITH CARDBOARD BOXES

1 CARDBOARD BOX CASTLE

Fairy tales are all the rage right now, with girls and boys, and you can have fun with fairy tales in your ESL class. But first, why not make this easy cardboard box castle with your class? Watch the video, follow the simple step-by-step instructions and help your students decorate your castle. With the help of some small dolls or action figures, act out scenes from a fairy tale you’ve read for role plays with a twist!

2 DIORAMAS TO DIE FOR!

Dioramas are perfect for capturing a scene from a story – and cardboard boxes are the ideal material for your class diorama. Simply cut out a rectangle from one of the sides of the box, like a window. Then have your class assist you in recreating a scene from a story or book you've read. They can use a variety of materials, from modeling clay to cardboard cutouts.

Dioramas are also great for re-creating typical animal habitats, like rainforest or jungle, or even a room in a house. Divide your students into groups and assign each room in the house for them to re-create in their own diorama. And don’t forget holiday dioramas: from the first Thanksgiving to a spooky graveyard filled with monsters for Halloween, the possibilities are endless!

3 WE BUILT THIS CITY! ON CARDBOARD BOXES!

Want to practice asking for and giving directions? How about using a miniature town instead of an old, boring, flat map? Use small cardboard boxes of different sizes, like small cereal or cookie boxes. Have your students create a building out of each: movie theater, bank, school, etc. all of the essential places in a town. Next, you’ll need a large piece of cardboard to build your town. Arrange and glue all of the buildings to form streets your students will travel around. Your class can make the town as detailed as they want by adding fire hydrants, stops signs, and bus stops! Use toy cars to drive around and ask for directions.

4 BOXED WORDS

It is essential to help your students acquire more vocabulary, but why not capitalize on their innate curiosity? How many times has a student asked you about the meaning of a word? Countless times, most likely. What if you had a card for every vocabulary-related question a student asked? Set up a Vocabulary Box in a corner of the room! It can have a slit on the front or the top, like a ballot box. Wrap it up in pretty paper and leave the slit as the only opening. Each time a student asks about a word he or she does not understand, go through the following steps:

• Use the word in a sentence and see if anyone can guess the meaning from the context. Supply as many as necessary. Try not to give them a definition first.
• Once they’ve figured it out, try to come up with a good definition as a class.
• Write the word at the top of an index card, the definition below that and finally an example of the word used in a sentence.
• Put the card in the Vocabulary Box.
• At the end of the month (or school year) depending on the number of words accumulated, you can open the box in a grand ceremony and see how many of the words they still remember, how many they’ve forgotten or not used at all since that day in class. This will also give them an idea as to how useful a new word is.

5 MAIL CALL!

Surely you’ll have your class practice plenty of letter writing, but it’s so much more fun to have a mailbox to put their letters into! Have each of your students write a letter to a classmate, put it in an envelope and address it. Students put their letter into the mailbox. Then you can be the postman/woman and deliver them or have another student act as postman/woman. You can also use the mailbox for homework assignments or special occasions such as Valentine’s Day or Christmas, where students will get the chance to write to Santa. Watch this tutorial (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPGWAbYBJu4) to make your mailbox and decorate it with your class!

6 ROBOT HEADS

What would a robot family talk about at the dinner table? “Pass the nuts and bolts, please”, one of them could say. For a fun family role play activity, first have your students create a robot head out of a cardboard box for each of the family members. When they’re all done, students take turns acting out different role plays, but as robots! In the shopping role play, what would the momma-bot buy at the store? What about household chores? You can have any role play you like, but the robots will certainly make them more interesting!

WHEN IT COMES TO FUN ESL ACTIVITIES, WHY NOT THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX, OR RATHER IN THIS CASE INSIDE IT?

Why not capitalize on our innate fascination with boxes and the opportunities they hold?
Seeds and Beans: 5 ESL Activities for Fruitful Results

FALL IS A SEASON OF HARVEST, A TIME IN WHICH WE REAP THE REWARDS OF THE SEEDS WE’VE SOWN. THERE ARE LOTS OF ANIMALS THAT GATHER FOOD AND SEEDS BEFORE THEY HUNKER DOWN FOR THE WINTER. BUT WE CAN TEACH OUR ESL STUDENTS THAT WE CAN GIVE THOSE SEEDS ANOTHER, MORE FUN USE.

Here are some great ESL activities with seeds and beans you can enjoy with your class in the fall – or any time of year.

HOW TO USE SEEDS AND BEANS IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

1 WET PAPER TOWEL OR SOIL?

Every student has at some point participated in a germination project, but here’s one with a twist. Students will observe seeds or beans germinating in both wet paper towels and soil, and compare which is better – a great way to practice comparatives.

Prepare 2-4 plastic cups with soil and line another 2-4 with paper towels. Use a pencil to push the seeds or beans into the soil but up against the plastic so they’re visible. Place some other seeds in the other cups between the plastic and the paper towels. Allow students to water the cups – make sure they don’t overdo it! Keep all cups in the same place, preferably a dark, warm corner of the classroom, and use distilled water for better results.

Help them create a log where they will record the germination process, then, make their comparisons. Which method seems better? Which seeds germinated the fastest? Which plants grew tallest? Number the cups for more specific comparisons: Plant number 2 germinated faster than plant number 3.

2 SUNNY SUNFLOWERS

In the months up ahead your ESL class may be a little deprived of sunshine. So why not bring some into your class with these very bright sunflowers! Give each of your students a piece of paper and plenty of sunflower seeds for the flower’s center. They finish up their flower with bright yellow petals and put them up on a wall or bulletin board for a field of sunflowers that will warm their hearts through the winter.

3 WHAT’S SHAKIN’?

Seeds and beans are excellent for making musical instruments. Here are several ways in which you can make maracas with your ESL class (and recycle materials!):

• Put two tablespoons of seeds, beans or rice into plastic water bottles, then cap. Students paint the outside of the bottle and decorate with strips of colored paper.

• Put two tablespoons of seeds, beans or rice into a plastic cup. Place another cup over the first and seal with electrical tape or masking tape. Students decorate their maracas and grab them by the middle to shake.

• Use any type of lidded container, like yogurt or cream cheese. Make a slit in the lid just big enough for you to push a craft stick through. Put your seeds or beans inside the container and seal shut with electrical tape. You can also secure the stick in place with some tape.

SEEDS YOU MAY WANT TO USE INCLUDE BIRDSEED, SUNFLOWER SEEDS OR ANY THAT YOU CAN BUY IN BULK FOR A LOW PRICE. GREAT BEANS TO USE ARE LENTILS, SPLIT PEAS, POPCORN KERNELS AND EVEN LARGER BEANS LIKE KIDNEY BEANS OR WHITE BEANS.

4 BEAN BAG BUDDIES

Every ESL class needs bean bags, right? How about if you make some with your class? This will require some previous work from you at home. Take two five-inch squares of fabric and sow them together all around, making sure you leave an opening for turning them and filling them. Make as many as you can/like, but the more, the better for your class. Help your students fill the bags with seeds or beans, and sew them closed. Your students will be responsible for adding the finishing touches with button eyes, mouth and nose, and yarn for hair.

5 BALLOON BALLS

And what would an ESL classroom be without balls? You can also make some with seeds! You’ll need at least three balloons for each ball, and preferably a funnel, but if you don’t have one, a rolled up piece of paper will do.

Blow up one balloon and keep it inflated for 60 seconds – this will stretch it out a bit. Place the funnel or rolled up piece of paper deep inside the balloon. Fill with birdseed or lentils. Cut off the top of the balloon. Cut off the tops of two more balloons. Stretch one over the balloon that has been filled so that it covers it completely but especially the hole. Stretch the third balloon over the second. Now you’ll have balls for juggling, throwing, tossing or even de-stressing – these make great stress balls students can squeeze if they need a time out!
What You Can Do with Sticks and Twigs: 7 Original ESL Crafts

On the lookout for some original art projects for your ESL class? You've come to the right place! In the fall, we have an abundance of fall leaves, seeds, sticks and twigs, all of which are kindly provided by Mother Nature – no need to pluck them from trees and harm the environment. Here are some fantastic crafts you can do with your class:

**TRY THESE ORIGINAL ESL CRAFTS WITH STICKS AND TWIGS**

1. **DO FENCE ME IN!**
   A crafts project and lesson on prepositions of place rolled into one! If you happen to have a collection of toy barn animals for your young learners, how about giving them a safe place to hang out? With some sticks and twigs you'll be able to make a pen where you'll keep your animals. Take your twigs and arrange them like this:

   ![Diagonal Lines]

   You can glue the sticks to form your fence, tie them with some yarn, or tie up and add a drop of glue to make sure your fence stays put. Push the bottom ends onto a sheet of Styrofoam that your students may then paint green or brown, and even add a light blue pond. When all the paint has dried, let students arrange the animals inside the pen. Then, move some around and ask students: "Is the chicken on the fence or on the ground? Is it inside or outside the pen?" Let students move animals around and ask their classmates where they are.

2. **FLOWERY TWIGS**
   How about bringing in some colorful flowers into an otherwise dark and bleak winter's day? For this project, your class will need plenty of twigs, yogurt containers and tissue paper of different colors.

   Use some of the tissue paper to wrap around the yogurt container. Cut out small squares out of red, pink, yellow, or blue paper and crumple. Cut out some leaves. Students glue the crumpled tissue paper flowers and leaves onto their twigs and finally arrange their bouquet in the yogurt container/flower pot.

3. **STICK PATTERNS**
   We use so many things in class to paint, why not try with some sticks and twigs and let your students discover the different patterns they can create! Students dip the ends of sticks and press them into some construction paper. If they use sticks of varying size, they may create patterns like this:

   ![Pattern]

4. **GO FISH!**
   With some construction paper, magnets, paper clips, string and sticks, you can create your very own fishing game! To make the fishing rods tie some string at the end of each stick – make sure you pick some sturdy ones. Tie or glue a magnet to the other end of the string.

   Cut out some fish shapes out of colorful construction paper. Glue two shapes together with a paper clip sandwiched in the middle. Young learners may simply count how many fish each team gets within a certain time limit, while for older students you may have questions written on the back of each fish. If students answer correctly, the team gets to keep the fish.

5. **TWIG MOBILE**
   Mobiles are great ways to review members of a family, colors, animals, or any vocabulary. All you need are some sticks and string, plus colorful illustrations you can either print or have your students make. Tie up the sticks like this, or in a similar fashion, adding as many sticks or illustrations as you like:

6. **RUSTIC TWIG PICTURE FRAME**
   These make wonderful Christmas presents! Make sure each of your students has 10 to 12 twigs of 7 to 9 inches long. Help them arrange the twigs leaving a space in the center for the photo they will frame.

   ![Frame Diagram]

   Tie up the corners of the frame with some string or yarn till you have a firm frame. Glue photo to the back of the frame, and glue the back to the frame. Tie another piece of string to hang this picture perfect craft!

7. **TREERIFIC TWIG PENCIL HOLDER**
   This fantastic pencil holder is a fine addition to any office! Give each of your students an empty tin can and enough sticks to glue all around the can's outer edge. Make sure the sticks have been cut to almost the same length. Students glue each stick vertically, one at a time, and one next to the other till the outer side of the can is completely covered. Simple, yet full of rustic charm!

   ![Pencil Holder Diagram]

   **WITH THESE CRAFTS, YOU CAN TEACH YOUR STUDENTS A THING OR TWO ABOUT PREPOSITIONS OR NEW VOCABULARY, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, YOU CAN ALSO TEACH THEM THE VALUE AND USEFULNESS OF EVERY LITTLE THING WE FIND IN NATURE.**
How To Use Art To Teach ESL Concepts

Most teachers are creative people. We have to plan for multiple classes each day keeping our methods and activities fresh and interesting for both our students and ourselves. Not many, though, would consider themselves creative enough to be art teachers. Art can be an intimidating subject full of specialized knowledge and techniques where the only approval a person receives is purely subjective. Do not let this stop you from bringing art into your ESL classroom. There are plenty of ways to use art as a vehicle to teach English to your students and have fun in the process.

**HOW TO BRING SOME ART INTO YOUR ESL CLASSROOM**

1. **WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

   Young children may be the easiest to teach through art. Children love to play with color and mediums (paint, crayon, chalk, clay, etc.) and are not inhibited in their creativity. They may become so involved in the art project they are doing that they do not even know they are learning English at the same time. One easy project you can do will review color words and shapes. Give each student a piece of graph paper, the bigger the squares the better. Have them draw an amorphous shape in the center of the page. Then instruct them to color each of the inside squares with hot colors (red, yellow, and orange) and each of the outside squares with cold colors (green, blue, and purple). Squares that are split by the shape the child drew should be colored with both. Tell your students that they do not have to follow a pattern when coloring their boxes but they can if they would like to. Use their work time to review shapes by discussing each student’s picture with him or her. By the end of the class, your students will have had a fun time coloring and not even realized they were learning in the process.

2. **WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS**

   Middle school students will still have creativity to share, but they may not be as eager to do it with their peers. You can overcome this by showing your class some pieces by other artists. Take the opportunity to introduce new vocabulary as you describe the pictures to your class and then ask them to describe the same piece to one another. You can play an easy conversation game with your students with famous pieces of art. Take ten paintings and display them at the front of your class. Then pair students having one student describe one of the paintings. The second student must then determine which painting his partner is describing. Then switch roles. For each correct guess, award one hundred points to the pair. The pair with the most points at the end wins. Then assign a piece of writing to your students. Ask them to describe their favorite piece from class and say why they liked it. They can also compare it to some of the other pieces if you want them to write a longer piece.

3. **WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

   With older students comes thinking and analysis that is more complex and an ability to connect emotionally with what they see. Review some well-known pieces of art with your students. You can introduce them as you would with middle school students, and even play the same game, but take the discussion a step further and introduce vocabulary that describes emotion. All of your students start learning emotions words with simple emotions like angry, happy, scared, and excited, but use art as a means to introduce even more complex emotion words. What does it mean to be melancholy? Lonely? Crestfallen? Apprehensive? Choose art pieces that allow you to discuss these specific emotions with your students. Ask them how the pieces make them feel. Then ask why. Students will be challenged to use specific emotion vocabulary and connect it with what they see. Show how Edward Hopper depicts loneliness through his pieces. Edvard Munch depicts panic in his painting The Scream. Embrace the serenity that comes from Claude Monet. Feel sentimental from the love expressed by Mary Cassatt in her mother and child pieces. You can use any piece or art you wish, and the emotions that one person may feel from a piece may be different than what another feels. Encourage your student to express their individuality and make personal connections with the art. This activity challenges your students to communicate a new depth of their emotions with new vocabulary and classic art in perfect harmony.

4. **WITH ADULT STUDENTS**

   Adult students may be comfortable with either of the two previous activities, but for those who may be uncomfortable getting emotional about art, take a historical approach. Many resources both in print and online give helpful information about art history. History may be a more comfortable approach for many adults who have been estranged from their creativity for many years. Ask a guest to come into class to present art history to your students, or have the students themselves do some research on artists, particularly those who may have come from their home countries. Then have your students present the information they learned to the class. Before their presentations, spend some time reviewing historical vocabulary explaining words like era, century, and movement. Encourage your students to talk about that artist’s historical context. Everyone is sure to learn about art, but they will also learn about familiar historical events in new language and vocabulary.

These are just a few of the activities you can do with art in the ESL classroom. If you want to have the greatest impact on your students, try to remember any art lessons you had as a child, teenager and adult, and share with them the same activities that impacted you.

If you did not have art, use any or all of the activities mentioned here. In either case, your English class will be more meaningful to your students because it opened doors to art in a new way and they still learned the English language in the process.
How to Use Science to Teach ESL Concepts

WHAT DO YOU GET WHEN YOU COMBINE A CHILD, A DISPOSABLE PLASTIC CUP, SOME SOIL AND MARIGOLD SEEDS? A CHILD WHO IS AS PLEASED AS PUNCH TO GIVE HIS MOTHER A GIFT FULL OF POTENTIAL.

Like those seeds, our students are full of potential as well. With the right conditions, instruction, encouragement, dedication and determination, they will bloom even lovelier than the flowers of which they are so proud. We can take a lesson from the connection students make to a project like this one. Whether you are purely an ESL teacher or you teach content areas as well, using science to introduce and refine ESL concepts with your students makes for memorable and effective classes.

THE VALUE OF SOMETHING KNOWN

Regardless your students’ ages, when you teach science content to ESL students it is best to teach scientific content that they already know. Your students can only absorb so much information at one time. If you teach a familiar concept in an unfamiliar language, they can concentrate on the language rather than the content of what they are learning. Their previous scientific knowledge will reinforce their language learning, and they won’t have to learn a foreign scientific concept concurrently.

FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

It is getting warmer outside, the sun is shining and everyone is thinking about summer vacation. With this season come digging and planting of flowers and vegetables. We look forward to the bounty of our harvest in a few months, but now is the time for work. Planting either flowers or vegetables is a good way to review present and future tenses with your students. As a class, plant individual gardens. It is best if your students can take their seedlings home after they plant them, so plan ahead and save up as many paper egg cartons as students you have. You can give each student either a whole egg carton (twelve spots to plant) or half an egg carton (six spots to plant). Demonstrate for your students how you fill the spots with seed starting soil, dig small holes for the seeds, put the seeds in the holes, cover them with soil again and water them. (Follow the directions on the seed packet if you have never started plants from seed before.) Then leave them by the window to sprout. As you demonstrate planting the seeds, narrate your actions using the present progressive or the simple present. “I am filling the spots with soil. I am digging holes for the seeds. I am planting the seeds. I am covering them with soil.” Allow your students to plant their seeds choosing from a selection you provide. You could also have each student bring in a packet of seeds to share with the class. Lettuce is probably the easiest and most successful plant to grow from seed, but the seeds are very small, so be careful. Put them in pairs while they plant so they can narrate to each other what they are doing practicing using the present progressive tense.

After all the seeds have been planted, give your students some time to imagine what their garden will look like in two months time: then let them draw a picture. You can also provide magazines or seed catalogues for them to cut pictures out of and paste to a garden diagram. Once finished, describe to them what your garden will look like using the future tense. “I will have tall tomato plants. The zucchini will have big yellow flowers. The rabbits will try to eat my lettuce.” Then put your students in pairs again and let them describe their future gardens to one another. Ask for volunteers to share in front of the class. This activity will be memorable for your elementary students, and they won’t even realize they are practicing their English in the process. It wouldn’t hurt, either, if they ate a few extra veggies they grew themselves.

FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

When doing experiments, measurements must be very precise. How can students be precise following directions or giving instruction with measurements if they do not understand the English words for them? They may very well be able to measure out the right ingredients for a reaction if the instructions are given in their native language, but English measurements may raise the difficulty significantly. Use a scientific experiment as an opportunity to review measurement words in English with your middle school students. You can teach measurements words for length, weight, mass or volume. There are endless possibilities for measurement in science activities, but one activity they are sure to enjoy is creating mystery canisters. First, ask a local film development center to donate empty film canisters. You will need three canisters for each student. On the day of the experiment, you will also need a variety of small objects students can put inside each of the canisters. Finally, you will need buckets or tubs of water into which the students can put the canisters. Challenge the students to put different items and various amounts of them into each of the three canisters to make one float, one stay suspended in the water (the lid above the water but the rest of the canister under it) and one sink. Once they have done this, they should use scales to measure the weight of each of the canisters.

Have students discuss their strategies in groups explaining why they chose the items they did. Did all students use the same strategies? Did they use the same materials and different amounts? Did they use different materials and the same amounts? What items could they put in the canisters that might work better? You can challenge them to take the canisters home and find other items there to achieve the same effects. When they come back to class the next day,
measure the weight and check to see how successful this second round of objects was.

FOR OLDER STUDENTS

A very helpful tool for ESL students is understanding word roots. If a nonnative speaker is able to dissect new and unfamiliar English words, she will have a better chance of picking up new vocabulary with ease. Scientific words have many common roots. Take some time during a science lesson to break down some scientific vocabulary into roots and explain their meanings, and review with students how you can use these roots to decipher words. You can teach roots like herb (plant), cide (kill), extro (outside), fract (break) and re (back, again). You should also be able to find lists of other common word roots in some dictionaries or online. Then give them words that use these roots and see if they can determine the meaning. You can give them words like herbicide, exoskeleton and refract. Do some dictionary work, too, by looking up other words that have these roots. Then choose your experiments based on the area of science your chosen words fall into. You can do an experiment with various plants and see how they react to herbicide. You can talk about reflective angles and light refraction. If you have a science teacher at your school, go to her for more ideas about what experiments you can do with your students.

FOR ALL AGES

Finally, many men and women throughout the ages have contributed to the scientific world. Give your students some reading practice and research experience by having them compile information on a famous scientist and then write or present a report. The experience is even more impactful if students are able to research someone from their home country who has made a significant advancement in science. It may also help your students gain increased respect for each other’s native countries after hearing some of the advancements those nations have made.

BY BRINGING SCIENCE INTO THEIR CLASSROOM

It is easy to do and emphasizes the practicality of the language they are studying. It will surely make your class a day to remember.
HOW TO: Teaching With Videos and Media

The Internet has become an almost invaluable means of communication today. Rather than calling on the telephone, one can speak face-to-face with people who are on the other side of the world. As a result, the world of online teaching has also been opened up to people.

China is one country which, at the moment, is struggling with its supply of English teachers. There are simply not enough out there in order to meet the demand which is needed. As a result, many schools are also offering online courses to people who will pay for them. This can give the freelance teacher especially a lot of flexibility.

Of course, teaching via systems such as Skype is only one example of using media in your lessons. For many, telecommuting job like this is often much more convenient. One does not have to travel very far, yet they can still keep ahead of their schedule. Youtube and other such websites also offer free video hosting, and therefore can supply the students and teacher with an abundance of material with which to work. However, you need to be sure of how to properly integrate this into the class effectively.

HOW TO TEACH ENGLISH USING VIDEOS AND MEDIA

1 MUSIC

Music, by far, is one of the best ways of helping teach a language and get certain rules into the students' heads. Traditionally, teaching was done by rote learning. Nowadays, this method is seen by many as simply being somewhat rigid and old-fashioned. In certain cases it does work, but there are much easier ways.

Finding a song which has simple tenses in it (in order to help the class absorb it easier) is pretty simple: BusyTeacher.org has a section with 300+ of free song worksheets. In fact, this has frequently been proved to be a better method by which students can understand how grammar works. If you have access to the Internet, then it might be possible to put Youtube on and click the song. If not, then try and see if it might be possible to bring your own laptop into the class or bring in some CDs. Make printouts of the lyrics, and hand them around to the students.

If the students happen to be studying for an examination which requires grammatical analysis, then it might be a good idea to test them. Play a few lines of a song, and quiz them on what tenses are being used in it. This can often produce some very good results.

3 LISTENING PRACTICE

Youtube, again, can be seen as a saviour to many teachers. Frequently in school, when learning a foreign language, we were all subjected to aural work. This required us to answer a set of questions based on what was heard playing on the tape. Even if you don’t have official tapes or CDs to follow, there is no reason why listening practice can’t be done. Find a simple video on Youtube, involving a conversation between two people, and test the class on it!

OVERALL, MEDIA AND THE INTERNET HAVE MORE OR LESS REVOLUTIONIZED TEACHING AND MADE IT MUCH EASIER.

Who knows what other kinds of developments might take place in the future which will help make learning language easier. As always, be sure to conduct your classes with a little bit of humour and fun in order to keep the students eager and engaged!

2 SKYPE, ONLINE TEACHING, E-MAIL AND MORE

For those of us who are lucky enough to get a few private students, it can always be a great source of income. Sometimes, for whatever reason, we may not be present. Perhaps the teacher has to return home for family reasons. This doesn’t mean that the student has to miss out on their lessons. Distance learning has become a more popular option for many people, and as stated before, there has been something of a revolution when it comes to the world of online teaching.

Using Skype can have its benefits. You can be anywhere in the world, as long as you have access to the Internet. This will undoubtedly benefit both parties. For the teacher, they can still continue to do some of their work and earn a bit of extra money. For the students, particularly if they have an exam coming up, they can get some extra help. Even if the teacher is absent, the student can send e-mails regarding any questions they have. Learning time does not necessarily have to be restricted to the classroom. Many students will even pay a bit extra to have some on-demand help should they need it.
If a picture is worth a thousand words, why use them in the ESL classroom? After all, aren’t we language teachers trying to get our students to communicate and use the language they know rather than communicate through pictures?

If they do not have the language for a particular situation, shouldn’t they seek out the language they need rather than side stepping the issue with a photo or stick figure drawing? In truth, the old proverb may be true when it comes to storytelling, but pictures are invaluable in the ESL classroom. They may, in fact, end up eliciting a thousand words from each of your students, provided you use them with a purpose.

Pictures in conversation class

Pictures can be a great inspiration for conversation class. They will inspire and challenge your students when they use an unfamiliar picture during class. Try one of the following ideas with your students.

1 PICTURES FIRST

The next time you introduce a new unit or start a new topic in class, give your students some pictures related to the subject before you start throwing out new material. This will get them thinking about what they already know about the topic before you introduce new vocabulary and structures. By linking new information to what they already know about the topic, your students will have better retention and absorb more linguistic information.

2 WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

Using a picture of two or more people, ask your students to perform the dialogue that those people might be having. You can use your personal pictures or those from magazine advertisements. Try to get a variety of settings or tie the settings into your current unit as well as a variety of people types. A conversation between an old man and his grandson sitting on a park bench will be different from a conversation between a pretty young woman and a charming young man on the same bench!

3 PICTURE STORY

Pictures can tell a story, and you can use them to challenge your students to do the same. Give a pair of students a series of pictures which tell a story. You may want to copy pictures from an illustrated book, print out a comic strip and white out the words, or even take pictures of your television screen at several points throughout a program. Then have your students use these pictures to formulate the story in their own minds. Once each person has an idea of the story he will tell, have him share that story with his partner.

Pictures in vocabulary class

Using pictures in vocabulary class is an obvious application, but have you used these not so typical ideas with your students?

4 CLASSROOM PHOTO DICTIONARY

Encourage your students to bring in their own pictures of unusual objects and activities to contribute to a classroom photo dictionary. When someone brings in a picture, have her create a page for the dictionary using the picture and a definition along with a sample sentence using the word. After checking the page, add it to the three ring binder in its alphabetical location and allow your students to peruse the dictionary during independent study periods.

5 VOCABULARY CHALLENGE

If you can collect some complicated pictures with many objects in them, you can make your own vocabulary game to use in class. Pictures from I-Spy books work well for this game since your students will be looking for twenty-six objects each round. Have students write the letters A to Z on a sheet of paper and set an appropriate time limit, depending on the language level of your students. Each round your students will try to find something in the picture that begins with each of those letters. The person with the most correct words wins the round, and you can take the opportunity to suggest vocabulary to your class that they may not know.

6 MEMORY MATCHING GAME

Have you introduced new vocabulary to your class lately? Let them review that vocabulary with a memory matching game. Have each student create a pair of cards for the game featuring their own pictures. One card should have just the vocabulary word, while the other should have a picture that represents that word. Lay all the cards facedown in grid format and challenge your students to match the correct picture to the correct vocabulary word. Because your students are creating the cards themselves and checking their classmates as they play, the vocabulary words will be cemented in their lexicons!

Pictures in writing class

You cannot go wrong using pictures in your writing class. Your students will find them inspiring, creative and energizing in their writing. Start by trying one of the following ideas.

7 START WITH A PICTURE

Pictures can serve as great inspiration for story writing. Starting with a picture, have your students write out some ideas about the setting and/
or the character of their story. Then have them write out the plot in bullet points. Now your students will have a firm foundation upon which to build their stories, and the writing will come readily. If you like, display the final story with the picture that inspired it.

CREATE-A-POSTCARD

Are you looking for a smaller writing project for your students to tackle? Send them outside to take some pictures with their cell phones and then print them out to use in class. They can then use these pictures to create their own postcards to “send” to overseas family members. Use the opportunity to talk about addressing a postcard and the different salutations and closings that are appropriate for friendly notes.

PICTURES CAN BE GREAT IN THE ESL CLASSROOM BECAUSE THEY COMMUNICATE WITHOUT LANGUAGE, BUT SO MUCH MORE THAN SIMPLE DEFINITIONS CAN BE ELICITED WITH PICTURES.

Try using one of these ideas or coming up with your own creative uses for pictures in your classroom!
8 Fresh, Fun Ideas for Words and Post-It Notes

TEACHING VOCABULARY TO AN ESL CLASS CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST CHALLENGING ACTIVITIES A TEACHER HAS TO FACE.

When a majority of vocabulary instruction boils down to simple memorization, how does a teacher make class interesting and engaging? Here are some fresh ideas you can use with your next vocabulary unit that will help your lessons stick and allow everyone to have fun in the process, too!

TRY THESE FRESH, FUN IDEAS FOR WORDS AND POST-IT NOTES

1 SYNONYM EXPLOSION

The next time you teach on synonyms, you might want to bring a stack of post-its to the classroom. Start by writing one word on a post-it and putting it in on the front board. Then challenge your students to think of synonyms for the word. If a student offers a correct answer, he or she writes it on a post-it and places it under the first word. A second student follows. Continue trying to make the longest column of post-its possible before moving on to the next word. Reward your students with a homework free evening if they can create a column of post-its from the floor to the ceiling! If you have the room in your classroom, you might want to leave the lists up for a few days and encourage students to find additional synonyms or to use these words in their conversations and written pieces rather than the common word with which you started the activity.

2 PERSONAL PICTURE DICTIONARIES

Beginning English learners can create their own picture dictionaries using a spiral notebook and some post-it notes. Introduce your students to some basic vocabulary, pointing out physical items in the classroom whenever possible, and have them draw each item on a separate post-it. Then, have students write those vocabulary words in their notebooks and stick the post-its over the printed words. Your students can now look at the pictures and test themselves on the vocabulary words. Once a student is confident in the new vocabulary word, he can remove the post-it from the page. Organize words alphabetically or by theme in the notebooks.

3 VOCABULARY LEARNING CENTER

You can give your students the resources to review this week’s vocabulary list at an independent learning center. All you need is a poster, some post-its and a few dry erase markers. Start with a sheet of poster paper and divide it into four sections. Label the sections words, synonyms & antonyms, sentences, and pictures. Then laminate the poster. To review a set of vocabulary words, write each word on one post-it and stick them in the first section. In the second section, students choose words from the list and write synonyms or antonyms on a second post-it. In the third section, students choose other words to use in sentences, which they also write on individual post-its. Any words that are left go in the last section, where words that are left go in the last section, where students draw a picture illustrating the meaning of the word. By the time your students finish all three sections, they will have reviewed all of the current vocabulary words.

4 CLASSROOM DISPLAY

Do you have vocabulary lists that change on a regular basis? You can use post-its to create a permanent bulletin board for new vocabulary words and save yourself the effort of changing the board each week. Simply put this week’s words on post-its and stick them to your permanent display. When test day rolls around, you can simply take the notes down and display next week’s words on a new set of sticky notes.

5 GAME REVIEW

Vocabulary improvisation can be a fun and lively way to review vocabulary with your students at the end of a unit. Break students into groups of four to six for the activity, and make sure you have one or more vocabulary words for each person in the group. To review a word, write it on a post-it and have one student in each group place the note on her forehead. The other students in her group should act out the definition of the word. She must interpret her classmates’ actions and guess the vocabulary word that is on her forehead. Once she does, another student wears a new word and the game continues. Your students will have so much fun with the silliness and energy that this activity promotes, they may not even realize they are learning!

6 RELAY RACE

Vocabulary review does not have to keep your students in their seats. This relay race will have your students racing to learn their vocabulary words for the week. Using a large piece of poster board, create a grid which will serve as the answer board for your vocabulary review. Write one word on each post-it, and place them in the grid. Then divide your class into two teams and have them line up. Give a fly swatter to the first person in line and place the answer grid on a flat surface in the front of the room. To review the vocabulary words, show your class a sentence which can be completed using one of the vocabulary words. You might want to pre-write them on poster board, put them in a power point presentation or use an overhead. Once students see the sentence, they race to the vocabulary choices and swat the correct answer. The first team to choose the correct word gets to place that post-it on their side of a scoreboard. As you give additional sentences, the choices become fewer. Play until all the words are used, and then declare the winning team. You can also do this activity using synonyms, antonyms or defi-
RACE TO THE FINISH

Your students will enjoy playing vocabulary dash with a set of post-it notes. This game reviews any vocabulary with physical representations in the room, for example items in the classroom or body parts. Put students into groups of three students, and give each group a stack of post-it notes with the vocabulary words on it. Then, give the groups thirty seconds to stick the notes on the correct objects. (Note: if you are reviewing body parts, have each group choose one member to be the model and have the words stuck to them.) As your students get better at the game, reduce the amount of time they have to post the vocabulary. They will enjoy the excitement and energy this game creates in the classroom.

VOCABULARY TREASURE

The next time your ESL students tackle content or cover a particular theme in class, let them contribute to the unit’s content with a vocabulary treasure wall. On a section of wall in your classroom, create a treasure area. You can cut a treasure box out of poster paper, draw a pile of treasure on a large poster board, or be creative in how you designate your area. Then, as your students go through their studies and days, encourage them to note any new words that relate to the subject you are studying. For example, if you are doing a unit on baseball, your students might find the words homerun, umpire or World Series. Have any student with a word treasure write that word on a post it. On another post it, he should write the definition, draw a picture, or put down anything else that will help him understand the word. Once those post-its are done, he can put his discovered treasure in the treasure pile. He should first stick the definition note somewhere on the pile. Then, he should stick the note with the vocabulary word on top of that definition. The rest of the students can look at these treasures during free study times, and your class will feel like they are taking some control in what they learn in class.

WORDS REALLY ARE FUN, AND YOUR ESL STUDENTS WILL GET A GLIMPSE OF THAT WITH THESE VOCABULARY ACTIVITIES.

They are simple, straightforward and fun. On top of all that, they work, so grab some post-its and see just how much a sticky note can help your students learn!
Get Your Students Writing With These 6 Writing Activities

JUST HOW MUCH CAN A PERSON WRITE ON A POST-IT NOTE?
When you are using them in the classroom, it’s not how much you write but what you write. You can use these simple sticky notes to get your students started on all kinds of writing projects. Keeping the planning simple makes the writing assignments less intimidating, and this can be extremely important for students of English as a second language. To get your students started with words on the page, try these simple note making activities.

HOW TO GET YOUR STUDENTS WRITING WITH THESE 6 POST-IT NOTE ACTIVITIES

1 PERSONAL NOTES
Part of being a good teacher is having good relationships with your students, but that is not always easy to do when you teach a big class. You can use this simple note writing technique with your students to create one on one dialogue and get them to practice their writing skills at the same time. A few minutes before the school day is over, give each person a post-it note to stick on his or her desk. On the note, encourage your student to tell you something about their experiences that day. You might ask what activities they found particularly interesting or what they may not have understood during the day. If you like, have a ready list of questions posted in your classroom so your students can refer to it each day when they write their notes. Then, once the class has left, go through the class and read these notes. Make notes back to your students (on additional post-its) so they know you have heard what they said. You will feel closer to your students, and you may find out some interesting facts that your students may have been too shy to share during class!

2 ELEMENTS OF STORY
Every story has four essential pieces – the character, setting, conflict and resolution. To make sure your ESL students are including all of these essentials in their next story, do this activity before you write. Give each student four post-it notes (four different colors if possible) and explain the four elements that each story should contain. Keeping it simple is best. Character is who is in the story. Setting is where the story happens. Conflict is the main problem in the story, and the resolution is how that problem gets fixed. Then, have your students write the character, setting, conflict and resolution for the story they will be writing on their four post-its. Now when they go to write their stories, they will have a physical reminder of everything they need to include to make sure their stories are complete.

3 THE NARRATIVE ARC
I often use a six panel comic strip to teach my students about narrative arc when they are writing stories, and the activity easy translates to using post-its in the classroom. Give each student six post-it notes and have her arrange them in a line on her desk. On the first post-it, have your students draw a picture of the main character. On the second, she should draw the setting. On the third note, she draws the problem that the main character encounters. Then, on notes four and five, she draws the problem getting worse and worse. On the last note, the student draws her main character solving her own problem. Once each student has these six pictures, she can use these as a guideline as she writes her story. When she does, her story will come out with a strong narrative arc. Drawing the pictures also helps students who might otherwise be intimidated in a foreign language writing class.

4 STAMP OF APPROVAL
Using small post-it notes, have each person in your class design a stamp that they would like to see printed. The stamp should feature a person, and your students will have to explain why they think that person should have their own official postage. After the stamps are designed, have each person write a letter to the U.S. Post Office explaining why this person should be featured on a stamp. Your students should give three or four good reasons in their letter as well as a short biography of the person. Your students should then include the picture they drew on the post-it and close their letters appropriately. If you like, extend the activity by creating the stamps your students proposed. Several websites let you print your own U.S. postal stamps from an image you upload from your computer.

5 CLASSROOM OPINIONS
How do opinions vary among your students? Is there a majority and a minority when it comes to popular issues? To see what your students are really thinking, have a post-it poll in your classroom! Write a question that touches on a popular issue on your board, and give each student a post-it on which to write his answer. Once everyone’s answers are written, have them stick their post-its to the board to form a bar graph which shows the possible answers to the question. Once students can see where their classmates’ opinions fall, have each person write an essay about the issue. In the essay, he should identify whether his opinion came in line with the majority or the minority, why he chose that side of the issue, and what he would say to sway someone from the opposition.

6 STICKY DIALOGUE
You can use post-its in your classroom to create a conversation with a paper trail. Give each student several post-it notes. On the first, have him answer a question. Any question will work, but you might want to tie the question into a unit you are studying in class or have students share information that will help them get to know one another better. Make sure everyone has written his name on the note, and then have your class
stick their notes on an open bulletin board. Give your class a chance to read what their classmates have written, and then have them respond to one of the notes on their second post-its. Again, students should write their names on the notes and then stick them below the note they responded to. Repeat this activity with a third and fourth post-it. Now that the conversations are finished, review with your students the differences between quoted and reported speech. Each student should then choose one of the conversations and write it using correct grammar and punctuation in both quoted and reported styles.

A BIG, BLANK PAGE CAN BE INTIMIDATING TO ANYONE, AND ESL STUDENTS ARE CERTAINLY NO EXCEPTION. USING SIMPLE LITTLE STICKY NOTES CAN DO SO MUCH TO PUT YOUR STUDENTS AT EASE WHEN IT COMES TO WRITING, AND THE LITTLE NOTES CAN ALSO BE USED TO TEACH BEGINNING CONCEPTS IN WRITING CLASS.

In your next writing class, try one of these post-it activities and see just how much of what you are teaching sticks with your students!
Textbook Too easy? 8 Things You Can Do to Improve It

You can see it in their faces. The textbook is too easy. They breeze through the readings, dialogs and exercises. A task that should take 15 minutes is done in five. What now? Should you change the textbook? In some cases, you’re not in a position to change it. And in most cases, it’s not even necessary. Most of the time, the textbook is easy in the beginning, either because your students are false, not real beginners, or because the textbook starts with a review of the basics before going into the new topics. So, don’t trash the textbook just yet – you’ll probably have more use for it later. Here’s what to do when the textbook activities are not challenging enough for your students.

8 WAYS TO IMPROVE AN EASY TEXTBOOK

1. Add Fun Extras
   - So you’ve finished the first unit in record time and now have some time for supplementary activities. You see the ones supplied at the end of the unit/book are exactly like the ones they’ve just finished in class. Skip them. Devise your own.

   For example, the book has an exercise they may complete to review the past forms of irregular verbs. Skip the exercise and give them a Past Simple Board Game to play instead. And if simply saying the verb in past is too easy, have them make a full sentence and ask a question with verb.

   So, if you find your class finishes textbook activities way too fast, simply add some more and consolidate their knowledge further.

2. Expand
   - The textbook has a list of 10 irregular past participles students must know. Expand the list to include 20 in all. Give them exercises to practice the new participles, as well as those included in the book.

   The same strategy goes for any grammar point. Have they mastered negative tag questions? Introduce affirmative tag questions (it doesn’t matter if you “have to” teach it in another chapter, the best moment to teach it may be now).

3. Change the Cultural Context
   - Say your class has just read a very simple text about a girl’s daily activities: the time she gets up, goes to school, when and what she eats for dinner, etc. After the usual reading comprehension questions, ask the class how many of these activities would be different in their countries. Do they also have eggs and bacon for breakfast in their country? Do they eat dinner at 6 pm, too?

4. Explore Nuances
   - Say you’ve read an email someone has written. Take a closer look at the greeting, closing and vocabulary used. Is it formal or informal? If the email is informal, what words would make it more formal? What can they change to make it more business-like? Or give it a friendlier tone? There are lots of things in the textbook that you can put under closer inspection. Explore feelings. Does the writer of the email sound angry? Irritated? Bored? Excited? What words would convey a different feeling? (For example, I request versus I demand a prompt reply)

5. Work on Fluency
   - Use textbook items as a springboard for activities that will help them improve accuracy and fluency. If the textbook topic for the day is vocabulary for parts of a house and the things in it, give them a decorating magazine with lots of glossy pictures, and have each student describe a room and the furniture in it. Or have students brainstorm what houses will be like in the future.

Remember the 3 P’s? Presentation, practice and performance? If the presentation and practice included in the textbook are too easy, give them lots of performance activities like free-speaking tasks.

6. Use It for Homework
   - If some exercises in the textbook are too dull, assign them for homework. Students will still get the work done, but class time will be used for more interactive, collaborative, fun activities.

7. Compare Similar Structures
   - If you’re teaching the Future Continuous, compare it to the Past and Present Continuous. In which cases would you use each? If you’re teaching the First Conditional, compare it to the Zero Conditional.

8. Brainstorm More Options
   - You’re going over polite requests and the textbook has three examples:

     Would you please...? Could you please...? Would you mind...?

     Brainstorm more ways of making polite requests (I was wondering if you could..., Can you help me..., etc...) Which are more formal/informal?

It’s not hard to make an easy textbook more challenging. Put the ball in your students’ court.

Ask them for ideas, get them to expand, use their abilities to your advantage. Focus on the communicative goal and help them achieve it.

You may use the textbook and follow it to a tee (the straightforward route), or take little detours and show them what else there is to see (the scenic route). Both routes will get your students to their destination, but the scenic route is much more enjoyable and probably more enriching.
9 Fun and Easy Activities with Post-Its

Reading is one of the most important aspects of most English language teaching programs, but it can also be one of the toughest for you and your students. Preparing for, understanding and assessing reading can all be a challenge. Even great reading activities can be simple, however. Here are 9 ideas you can use in your reading program that require nothing more than some sticky notes. Not only that, they are fun and easy, too!

Try These 9 Fun and Easy Activities with Post-Its

1. Questions While Reading

Asking questions while reading can be one of the greatest aids to understanding a passage, either at home or in class. For ESL students, though, questions can become a juggernaut making the end of the reading unreachable. Students may become frustrated, and if they had finished the selection some of their questions may have been answered by the remainder of the article. To help your students over this hurdle, give each student several post-its to use as he reads. When he has a question about the passage or finds himself confused, have him write the question on the post-it and stick it near the place he had the question and continue reading. Then, when he has reached the end of the passage, have him return to his notes and see if any of his questions were answered. Any remaining questions, he brings to a reading group of three or four and asks his classmates if they know the answers. Collect any questions that remain after the discussion groups and talk about them as a class. Your students will eventually have all of their questions answered. Through this activity, your students will also recognize that having questions as you read is okay, and that the questions are often answered by the end of the reading selection.

2. Vocabulary Preview

Before you introduce a new set of reading vocabulary to your students, see what they already know or can decipher about the given set of words. Write the new vocabulary on the board and have groups of three or four students copy each word on to its own post-it. Then ask the students to sort the words in a way that seems logical to them. They can use the knowledge they already have of the words, word roots, or part of speech endings. If possible, have them sort the words on the inside of a file folder, and can keep the words sorts until after the reading is complete. Then, once they have read the words in context and learned what they mean from the reading selection, have the same groups resort the same set of words. Most likely, they will decide on a different sorting logic after learning the meaning of the words.

3. Comprehension Check

You can use post-its to check your students’ reading comprehension as well as teach them how to write a summary. Break your class into groups of four to six students, and assign a reading selection to the group. Once everyone has completed the selection, have your students close their books, and give each person three post-it notes. On each of these notes, each person writes one event or piece of information from the reading selection. When your students complete these notes, give them the word sorts until after the reading is complete. Then, once they have read the words in context and learned what they mean from the reading selection, have the same groups sort the same set of words. Most likely, they will decide on a different sorting logic after learning the meaning of the words.

4. Reading Cloze

You can also use the smallest post-its to create a cloze exercise for your students. Type out a reading passage in a large font, and use the small post-its to cover every fifth word. (Note: you may have to adjust the spacing of the words to make the post-its fit.) Then, challenge your students to write an appropriate word on each post-it to complete the passage. They can check to see if their words match the original words by looking underneath the post-it, but any word which logically and grammatically completes the blank would be an acceptable answer.

5. KWL Board

If you use KWL charts (Know, Want to Know, and Learned) with your students before reading a new reading selection, try this variation, which uses post-it notes. Instead of having students complete individual charts, have them write what they know about a given topic on post-it notes – one idea on each note. As a student completes a note, announce to the class what is on the note and stick it to your board. As your students hear what their classmates know, they may remember facts of their own. Continue until everyone has written down all of their ideas and you have post-ed them. In effect, your class will be brainstorming everything they know about the day’s topic, but the simple addition of sticky notes will make the activity more energetic and entertaining. Once the first part of the activity is done, have students write down any questions they might have about the topic of the day on separate post-it notes. (Use a different color note, again one note per idea.) Follow the same procedure as you did with the first part. After your class reads their selection, have them write things that they learned on a third color of post-it. These go on the board, too. When what a student learned answers one of the questions from the second part of the activity, post the third note next...
to the question note.

6 BOOK REVIEWS

Keep a supply of post-its near your classroom library. When a student completes a book from the library, he writes a one sentence review of the book on a post-it note. He can write what he liked, what he didn’t, or any other thoughts he has after reading the book. Then, when your other students are choosing their next books, they can read the review that the first reader wrote. After this second person finishes the book, she writes her own review and sticks it in the front of the book. The reading and reviewing continue in this manner, and by the end of the school year, you will have a deep understanding of which books are working for your class and which aren’t. Moreover, your students will have peer feedback at their fingertips when it is time to choose a new book.

7 QUICK QUESTIONS

You can get your students to think critically as they read by placing post-it notes in your classroom library books. Write several sticky notes for each book that you have in your classroom, and ask questions such as these: What do you think will happen next? Did the main character make the right decision? What advice would you give the character? Then, place these notes strategically in your classroom books. When a student comes across one of the notes during his or her reading, he answers the question on a separate post-it note, writes the page number on which he found the question, and sticks the note to the cover of the book. You can then check your students’ comprehension by simply looking at the covers of their books and their answers to your quick questions.

8 STEP BY STEP SUMMARY

For students who may have a difficult time writing a summary of a large reading selection or chapter book, they can use post-it notes to write a summary as they read. Simply have students stop at the end of each chapter and write one sentence on a post-it summarizing what happened in that chapter. Then, at the end of the book, the student takes all the notes and puts them together to complete a summary of the entire novel.

9 READ ALOUD COMMENTS

If you find your students either interrupting you or giving you blank stares when you read to the class, you can use post-it notes to make a smoother and more effective read aloud experience. Whenever a student has a comment or question while you are reading to the class, he writes in on a post-it note. He can then stick the post-it to the front board once your reading session is over. You can then answer the question for the whole class or write a reply post-it to that specific student. If you are looking for feedback from all of your students, you can also hand out post-it notes to everyone after you are finished reading and have everyone write something that confused them, something that they thought was interesting, or something that they thought of as you were reading.

THE BEST CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES DO NOT HAVE TO BE COMPLICATED.

And what could be easier than keeping a few sticky notes in strategic places in your classroom? You will have a better read on what your students like and what they understand, and they will feel like they are being heard when you use these understated sheets of paper to open the channels of communication in your class!
What You Can Do with Alphabet Cards – 7 Creative ESL Activities

In ‘The Sound of Music’, Julie Andrews sings, “Let’s start at the very beginning, a very good place to start”.

She’s referring to the musical notes, the basic building blocks for any tune or melody. As ESL teachers, our basic building blocks are the letters of the alphabet. Whether you have a fancy set of alphabet cards or just letters handwritten on slips of paper, there are plenty of fun activities you can plan with your young learners. And here’s a good place to start.

7 CREATIVE ESL ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO WITH ALPHABET CARDS

1 “WHEN YOU READ YOU BEGIN WITH ABC…”

One of the first things we do when we teach the alphabet is simply point and teach, and then point and see if students remember. Turn this letter recognition into a game. Place your alphabet cards one next to the other to lay out a path. You may place them in alphabetical or random order. Give each student or group a game piece they can move along this path. They take turns rolling the dice, they move their pieces, and they must say the letter they land on. If they can’t say it correctly they go back two spaces. The student or team that crosses the finish line first wins!

2 LEARNING TO SPELL

For this game prepare a set of copies with three, four or five-letter words. In the first column paste only the picture, like this:

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   smile
  happy
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Students take turns pulling letters out of a bag. If they get a letter they can use, they add it to their grid. If they can’t use it, they discard it. All of the discarded letters are placed together for all to see. Before students take a letter from the bag, they may choose to use one of the discarded ones.

The student that correctly completes his/her board first wins. This is a highly versatile game, as you can print out sheets with any of the vocabulary you wish to practice.

3 LEARNING TO SPELL – VERSION 2

For this game, prepare a set of images, photos or flashcards for words your students should be able to spell.

Each student gets a picture card. The student who gets this card has the goal of spelling “face”. Students take turns pulling letters from a bag. They take the letters they can use and put the ones they can’t use in a discard area. Students decide if they will pull a letter from the bag or use one of the discarded ones. Once a student successfully spells out the word, they take another flashcard. And so it goes till all of the words have been spelled out. The student who has successfully spelled the most words wins.

4 WORD SCRAMBLE

This is a classic and very easy to play with a set of letters. A great way to review vocabulary! Spell out a word using your letter tiles and then scramble them. Students must unscramble them to correctly spell the word. You can give your class one word at a time, or give each student one word – see who unscrambles theirs first!

5 WHAT’S MISSING?

Place your letter tiles in alphabetical order. Ask students to close their eyes while you remove one. Move the letters closer together to eliminate the obvious gap. Ask students to tell you which letter is missing.

6 SCRABBLE, OF COURSE!

Scrabble is a classic that you simply can’t neglect in an ESL class. If you don’t have your own board game, here’s a great Scrabble board (busyteacher.org/9830-old-scrabble-board-game.html) and letter tiles you can print out. Now here’s a game you can adapt to different levels!

7 ALPHABET RACE

There’s lots of fun racing you can do with alphabet cards. Divide your class into two or three groups. Each group chooses a flashcard with a word they must spell correctly as a team. Place the cards on chairs at one end of the room and the letter cards at the other end. A team member chooses a letter and races to the team’s chair to place the letter below the corresponding card. The next player chooses another letter and so on till the entire word is spelled out correctly. If they make a mistake they continue racing till the word is spelled correctly. The first team that successfully completes the task wins.

DON’T FORGET THAT HERE AT BUSYTEACHER.ORG WE’VE GOT LOTS OF ALPHABET WORKSHEETS AND FLASHCARDS YOU CAN PRINT. Also, bear in mind that you can print them in any size, laminate them, or even turn them into magnets. You can also use foam or rubber letters! It is a small investment to make, and they are much more durable than paper cards. It is indeed absolutely essential that you have your own set of letters if you teach young learners. They’re great for warm ups, fillers or cool downs!
What You Can Do with Celebrity Photos – 7 Fun ESL Activities

WHETHER YOU’RE STUMPED AS TO HOW TO GET YOUR STUDENTS MORE ENGAGED, TEACHING WITH A REALLY BORING COURSEBOOK, OR DEALING WITH A ROOMFUL OF UNMOTIVATED TEENS, CELEBRITY PHOTOS MIGHT JUST BE YOUR SALVATION.

Now I’m not talking about real, glossy photos, but rather the pics and images you can cut out from any ol’ magazine or newspaper. They are tremendously versatile, and if you have a set of photos, you can whip them out at any moment during your class for an on-the-spot, fun-filled activity!

GATHERING YOUR PHOTOS:

• Go through different types of materials: magazines, newspapers, TV guides, etc...

• Once you’ve cut out enough photos, glue them onto some posterboard or cardboard: try to laminate them, if you can. They’ll be better suited to survive the usual classroom wear and tear.

• Try to get pics in different sizes, and don’t forget to get full-body and group shots.

• Get pics of celebrities doing different things: playing instruments, walking on the beach, in full period costume, performing on stage, etc...

• Remember to include different types of celebrities: sports stars, politicians, and writers, as well as actors, singers and musicians. Don’t forget to add some celebrities who are not as well known.

Once you’ve collected enough celebrity pics, you’ll be ready to use them in your ESL class for some fun activities:

TRY THESE 7 FUN ESL ACTIVITIES WITH CELEBRITY PHOTOS

1. SHALL I COMPARE THEE TO...ANOTHER CELEBRITY?

When it comes time to practice comparatives, superlatives and make all types of comparisons, celebrity photos are much more fun than whatever your coursebook might set forth. Show two celebrity pics and ask your class to tell you who is more talented or a better actor. Show one pic of two or more celebrities together and talk about who’s taller, shorter, younger or older.

2. WHAT DOES HE/SHE DO?

Celebrity pics are also ideal when you’re talking about professions: what does he/she do for a living? The more variety of professions you’ve got, the better – they don’t have to be incredibly famous celebrities, nor must students be able to recognize them from the photo -- sometimes simply naming them as you show the photo is enough.

3. CELEBRITY BIO

No matter how self-involved they may be, students often get tired of talking about and writing about themselves all the time. For a fun writing assignment with a twist, ask each student to pick a photo. Their task will be to write as much as they know about this celebrity. You may also have them draw the pic from a bag and ask them to research the celebrity for homework.

4. BEFORE AND AFTER

For this activity, you’ll need before and after pics of several celebrities, perhaps an older celebrity’s current photo and one from when they were younger. Comparisons are very easy to make, but you may also practice verb tenses like the Simple Past or a structure like “used to”: She had/used to have blond/short hair. Now she has red/long hair.

5. HOBBIES

Quite often magazines print photos of celebrities enjoying some of their hobbies and leisure activities. These photos are great for introducing the topic of what you like to do in your free time.

6. CARTOON CHARACTERS

Young learners may not be into major celebrities as teens or adults are, so it is best to replace them with pictures of their favorite cartoon characters or comic book heroes. Is Bart Simpson younger or older than Lisa? Who’s smarter? What about comic book heroes? Superman is stronger, but Flash is faster.

7. SECRET IDENTITY

Sometimes getting your students to ask each other questions is like pulling teeth. This is a fun way to get your class to practice asking questions. Give each of your students a celebrity, but tell them not to show their photo or reveal who they are. Students must ask each other questions to find out who the others are. You can go about this in a number of ways:

- You can have them all ask each other questions and whoever is the first to guess one identity wins.
- You can give each a limited number of questions, say 20, to ask in total, after which they must guess someone’s identity by using the facts they’ve gathered.
- You can divide them into pairs and have them interview each other until one student guesses the other’s identity.
- You can have them ask only yes/no questions.

ESL TEACHERS OFTEN COMPLAIN ABOUT UNRESPONSIVE, UNMOTIVATED STUDENTS. CELEBRITY PHOTOS ARE THE PERFECT ANSWER TO THIS.

No matter how old (or young!) your students are you can always find the perfect set of celebrities to get the conversation going.