Communicative activities

for language teaching for lower levels

Many teachers seem to think that using games in low level classes is almost impossible. The same is true for ideas on how to bring speaking and pair work into a class for beginners. These activities are all designed to motivate lower level learners to speak in pairs or small groups.

Lower level learners often find it difficult to speak spontaneously, so these activities incorporate 'thinking time' during which learners can prepare for speaking by planning what they are going to say, and asking the teacher or using a dictionary to look up missing vocabulary.

The following activities are short, easy to explain and can be used with minimal materials and preparation time for the teacher. They can be designed for use as a warmer or a filler in the middle or at the end of a class.

All exercises are suitable for beginners because they don’t demand more than simple questions and answers. But the language content of the exercises can easily be adapted to a higher level of proficiency.

1. Names. Time 5—10 minutes

Step 1: Each student writes his full name on a piece of paper. All the papers are collected and redistributed so that everyone receives the name of a person he does not know.

Step 2: Everyone walks around the room and tries to find the person whose name he holds. Simple questions can be asked, e.g. 'Is your name . . .?' 'Are you . . .?'

Step 3: When everyone has found his partner, he introduces him to the group. Everyone can ask him a few questions about his family, hobbies, etc.

1. Name circle. Time 5-10 minute

The teacher begins by giving her/his name. The student sitting to the left of the teacher continues by first pointing at the teacher and saying, 'This is …(teacher’s name)'then at himself giving his own name. In this way everybody in the circle has to give the names of all the people sitting to their right before introducing themselves. Those students whose names have been forgotten by the person whose turn it is, have to stand up. They may sit down again when their names have been recalled correctly. A toy or something like that can be used to relax the atmosphere. It is handed from one person to the next in the circle.

With more advanced students can be used more complex statements, e.g. 'The man with the dark hair is Ivan. The girl with sunglasses sitting next to him is Ann.'

1. About pictures.Time 15-20 minutes

Step 1: The teacher needs to prepare different pictures (of objects, people, animals, food etc.) in advance. Suitable pictures can be found in newspapers, magazines or on the internet.

Step 2: All the pictures are put on a table. Each student chooses two: one picture of something he likes; one of something he dislikes.

Step 3: Each student shows the two pictures to the class and explains why he likes or dislikes them. Students can choose a picture that they have strong feelings about (positive or negative) and one that leaves them cold.

1. The clap clap game. Time 5-10 minutes

Step 1: Students sit in a circle and all clap three times.

Step 2: The person whose turn it is should say a word that hasn’t been said before in the category you are practicing, e.g. months, jobs, countries or colours, on the fourth beat.

This continues until someone says something that has been said before or pauses too long.

1. Clusters. Necessary equipment - a music player.

Time 15—30 minutes

Step 1: The students walk around the room while the music is playing. As soon as the music is switched off the teacher gives a command, e.g. 'Stand together in groups of four.' When the students have splited into groups the music continues and everybody again walks around alone until the next command. Possible commands:

* 'Shake hands with as many people as possible';
* 'Stand together in groups of four and agree on a song you want to sing';
* 'Find people whose birthday is in the same month as yours.'
* Stand on a foot for one minute

Step 2: After about five to eight commands the game can be finished.

1. Back to back. Necessary equipment - a music player. Time 10-20 minutes

Step 1: While the music is playing or the teacher is clapping, everybody walks around the room observing other people's appearance, clothes, hairstyle, etc. As soon as the music stops, each student pairs up with the person standing nearest and they stand back to back. Taking turns, each of them makes statements about the other's appearance, e.g. Student Α: Ί think you're wearing black jeans.' Student B: 'That's not right. My trousers are blue, but they aren't jeans' etc.

Step 2: After a few minutes the music starts again and all partners separate. When the music stops a second time, the procedure described in Step 1 is repeated with a different partner. Five or four description phases are sufficient.

Each student is allowed to keep making statements as long as they are correct. As soon as he says something that is wrong, it is his partner's turn to start describing him.

1. Is that Sentence Correct?. Time: 10-15 minutes. Materials: Blank paper, vocabulary words

Step 1: Give your students a few different vocabulary words. It should be something the student is quite familiar with already. The challenge in this activity is not the actual word; it’s using it in a sentence.

Step 2: Give the student a few minutes to make one sentence using each word. Do not offer any assistance or correct any errors. The teacher should also make some sentences using the same words, some of which are correct and some of which are not.

Step 3: The student reads their first sentence and discusses with the teacher if it is correct or not. The teacher reads their first sentence and the student must decide if it’s correct or not and why. Continue until all the sentences are finished.