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ACTIVITIES

Chris Cotter

Thank you for downloading **Better Language Teaching's FREE ACTIVITIES**.

Before you look at all the activities, I'd like to ask a small favor. I'd like you to honestly answer these questions.

- Do you struggle to come up with original, interesting, and challenging ideas?
- Do you find yourself repeating the same few activities again and again?
- Do you want more flexibility in your activities, allowing for more dynamic classes?
- Do you simply want to replenish your teaching bag of activities and games?

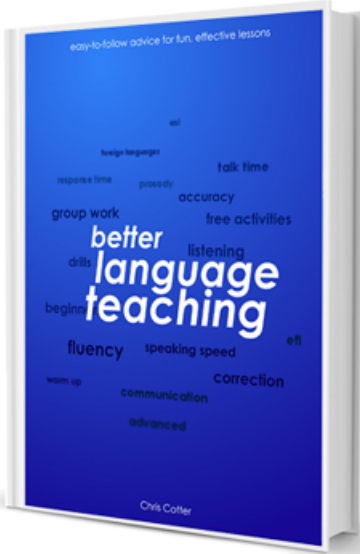
If you said "yes" to even one of the above questions, then I encourage you to try one of the activities today... Not tomorrow or the day after, but today. They represent just a small sample of all that you'll find in my ebook.

- Imagine a whole new set of fresh ideas for your classes.
- Stop wondering about how to tweak activities for more practice.
- Consider a class actively and fully engaged with learning, all the time.

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Ask and Ask Again

Purpose: To focus on speed instead of accuracy when producing answers.

Info: Students have more than one opportunity to answer a set of questions, so receive several chances to practice and improve responses. This builds confidence. This activity works particularly well with students who hear a question, mentally translate it, think of and translate an answer, and finally produce a response.

Step One: The teacher arranges students in pairs and distributes a worksheet with up to ten questions for each person. It's advised that all the questions are centered on a singular theme.

Step Two: The teacher explains that one student asks questions from the worksheet (student A) and the other student answers the questions (student B). In addition, student A keeps a record of how many questions are asked, including follow up questions. Students have a fixed time to go through as many questions as possible, ideally two or three minutes.

Step Three: The activity begins. Students ask/answer the questions as the teacher keeps time.

Step Four: At the end of two or three minutes, student A counts the number of questions covered. This figure becomes the target number. The same questions are asked again, and student B expands on the answers as much as possible. The teacher allots more time to conduct this step, about five minutes.

Step Five: At the end of five minutes, student A counts the number of questions covered. The new figure should be more or less equal to the previous figure, even with the added time. This indicates improved performance. However, the past steps haven't been a real conversation per se. It's now time for the pairs to exchange information together. Student A goes through the same questions once more, but both students ask follow-up questions to generate a conversation. Students limit the talk to three minutes, marking only the questions asked from the handout. Additional follow-up questions aren't counted to the total.

Step Six: Pairs count how many questions were asked from the worksheet in Step Five. The pairs should only have used one or two questions from the worksheet, with the remaining questions based on responses.

Step Seven: Students switch roles and repeat the above steps. Student B selects different questions from the worksheet for his partner.

Variation One: This activity can be used in private lessons too. All the steps remain the same, and again the focus is on improved fluency. Accuracy also improves, although the teacher shouldn't focus on correction because this will further hinder speaking speed.

Intros

Purpose: For students to get to know one another and improve fluency.

Info: Although this lesson works well when students don't know one another, it may also be used to segue into the target language of the lesson. And because everyone repeats the conversation several times, fluency improves.

Step One: The teacher writes two questions on the board for self-introductions. For example:

- What are your hobbies?
- Where did you go for your last vacation?

Of course, the questions can be slightly more difficult if students are more advanced. In addition, questions can focus on the topic of the lesson. If the lesson were on regrets for higher-level students, these would make good questions:

- What is a regret?
- What regrets do you have in life? Please explain.

Step Two: Students line up in two rows (row A and row B). Students from row A face students from row B, and this forms each student's initial partner.

Step Three: Students begin to ask and answer the questions in pairs. Follow-up questions are a must, and students continue speaking until the teacher says, "Stop!"

Step Four: After several minutes, one row of students shifts to the left. Each student now faces a different person, and thus forms new partners. The students ask and answer the questions again until the teacher says, "Stop!" Although answering the same questions, a part of the conversation will differ. This not only means that fluency improves with the repeated portions of the conversation, but that interest in the activity remains high.

Step Five: After several minutes, one row of students again shifts to form new partners. The students repeat the conversation one final time.

Variation One: In larger classes, it's difficult to impossible to line up all the students. If such is the case, then students should simply stand and find a partner to ask and answer the questions with. After several minutes, the teacher says, "Stop!" Students then find a new partner in the class and repeat the process. This variation sounds a little chaotic (and looks chaotic too), but it achieves the same results as outlined in the steps above.

Variation Two: Students talk to a partner for a few minutes, as per the steps above. When pairs change, each student tells his new partner about the previous conversation. If the teacher opts for this variation, then he must tell the students beforehand to remember the information. In addition, the teacher shouldn't repeat the conversations.

Milestones

Purpose: To talk about important, life-changing events.

Info: This activity is intended for students to use the second conditional, as they speculate on what their lives might be like had particularly important, life-changing events never happened. However, if students haven't yet studied the second conditional tense, then this activity may be used to talk about important events.

Step One: The teacher writes on the board the following word: *Milestone*. He asks for the meaning from the class. If no definition or example is forthcoming, then students get into pairs, check their dictionaries, and discuss the meaning. After several minutes, the teacher asks for the meaning once more and writes the definition on the board.

Step Two: The teacher provides an example of a milestone in his life. It should consist of the milestone itself and then a reason as to its importance. For example:

I came to Japan after graduating university. It changed my life because it was the first time to live abroad. It was a different culture and a different language that I had to learn and overcome.

Step Three: Students take several minutes to think of three milestones in their lives. The milestones don't need to be in order of importance, but each should simply represent life-changing events. Reasons should also be provided. (Note: If the teacher wishes to spend less time on this activity, then students may think of one milestone to discuss.)

Step Four: Students get into pairs and talk about their milestones. Each partner asks additional questions to gather more information, thus making the conversation more rounded and fulfilling. The pairs should talk for fifteen minutes.

Step Five: The teacher now asks, "How would your life be different if you had never...?" The teacher provides an example based on his earlier milestone.

If I hadn't come to Japan, I would never have become a teacher. I would never have met my wife, so I would probably be married to someone else!

Step Six: Students receive several minutes to think of how their lives would be different had their previously discussed milestones never happened. Students string together as many different subsequent events as possible.

Step Seven: Students get into the same pairs and talk about how their lives would be different. Again, to provide a rich and interesting discussion, as well as to improve talk time among the pairs, students ask one another follow-up questions.

None of Your Business!

Purpose: To provide reasons for actions and events.

Info: Intermediate students get the most practice out of this activity, as they need to quickly provide answers. Lower-level students may find this difficult because a lack of vocabulary and grammar structures. Advanced-level students may find this somewhat easy because of the short answers typically provided.

Step One: The teacher writes up to ten questions on the board. These questions should focus on the students and their lives, such as:

- What did you do last weekend?
- What are your plans for this weekend?
- What countries have you visited?

The teacher also writes the following mini-dialogue on the board:

Student A: <asks a question>

Student B: <answers the question>

Student A: Why did you...?

Student B: None of your business! -or- Just because!

Step Two: Students get into pairs. As per the mini-dialogue above, student A asks a question and student B answers it. Follow-up questions in with *Why?* are asked again and again, as student B provides answers. It's important that students ask questions with complete sentences, as this will force them to practice key structures.

Step Three: When student B can no longer answer the question, he answers, "Just because!" When he doesn't want to provide an answer, perhaps because it's too personal, then he answers, "None of your business!" The teacher should explain the meaning of both phrases before the activity begins.

Step Four: Pairs switch roles and repeat the activity. Here's an example conversation:

Student A: What did you do last weekend?

Student B: I saw a movie last weekend.

Student A: Why did you see a movie?

Student B: Because my girlfriend wanted to see the new movie with

Student A: Why did she want to see the movie?

Student B: Because she's in love with him.

Student A: Why is she in love with him?

Student B: Just because!

Six Sentences

Purpose: To focus on accuracy as students provide a narrative of only six sentences.

Info: This activity requires students to write their answers. Speaking activities allow students to quickly repair any communication breakdowns with requests for additional information/clarification. Written activities don't allow easy repair, so students must focus on accuracy as well as narrative.

Step One: The teacher selects a topic before the start of the lesson. The topic should be relevant to the level of the class. It should also allow natural use of the target language, assuming the class focuses on a specific grammar or language point.

Step Two: The teacher provides the topic to the class as a question. Students must write an answer, but with only six sentences. For example:

Question: How would you describe yourself in six sentences?

Although any level-relevant topic works well, a question that allows students to answer something about themselves often generates more interest and better participation.

Step Three: Students spend about five minutes answering the question. The answers should be rich and interesting, but six sentences also require some brevity.

Step Four: Students get into pairs and exchange the written answers. Pairs read the information, and then ask/answer the one question they most want to know.

Step Five: Optional. Students work in pairs providing correction to one another's written answers. Dictionaries may be consulted. The teacher may also provide one-to-one assistance when needed.

Steal the Conversation

Purpose: To promote more realistic participation in conversations.

Info: Different cultures have different rules when talking. For some, it's polite to wait for the other person to stop speaking. For others, it's polite to never disagree or ask for clarification. This activity is designed for cultures which follow these rules, as most speakers of English interrupt, disagree, ask for clarification, and so on.

Step One: The teacher prepares a list of questions around a topic before the start of the class. There should be at least five questions so that the class can go through the activity more than once.

Step Two: It's recommended that the teacher arranges the class into the following groups:

Less than eight students in the class: Keep everyone together in one large group.

8 - 10 students: Keep everyone together or break the class into two equal groups.

More than ten students: Divide the class into groups consisting of four or five students.

Step Three: The teacher writes the first question on the board. One student begins the discussion. If he speaks for thirty seconds, he receives a point. If he speaks for another thirty seconds, then he receives a second point. This continues until someone steals the conversation. It's important for the teacher to accurately monitor how long students talk so as to correctly award points.

Step Four: A student who successfully steals the conversation interrupts the initial speaker. In so doing, the person who steals the conversation now receives a point. What's more, he receives an additional point for every thirty seconds that he speaks. This continues until another person similarly steals the conversation.

Step Five: The teacher continues with the question until the conversation begins to lag, it moves far off topic, or for a predetermined set amount of time.

Note: If there are several groups, the teacher won't be able to monitor each conversation. One person from each group monitors and awards points for his respective group. When it comes time to talk about another question, a new person becomes the monitor and awards points.

Talk and Trade

Purpose: To answer questions, recycle and reuse information, and provide clearer information.

Info: This activity works well when discussing current events, although it can also be used for any conversation or topic. It can also be used for any level of class. Students talk about a question or statement for several minutes, then repeat the conversation with new partners. This improves fluency and accuracy. It also improves structural clarity.

Step One: The teacher prepares a list of questions or statements on slips of paper. There should be one question/statement per slip, and all questions/statements should be related to the topic or grammar structure. In very large classes, some questions may be reused rather than providing thirty or more original questions/statements.

Note: If statements are provided, then they should be controversial which allows students to easily agree or disagree.

Step Two: Each student receives one slip of paper and a few minutes to think of answers.

Step Three: Students find a partner. Student A reads his question and provides an answer. A conversation should follow, so student B must provide additional comments and questions. The discussion continues for two or three minutes. **Note:** Although students will likely be able to speak much longer, the teacher also wants students to have several conversations with several partners. Hence the activity imposes a time limit.

Step Four: Student B now reads his question and provides an answer. As in Step Three, a conversation follows for two to three minutes.

Step Five: The teacher says, *Stop and change!* Both students in each pair exchange the slips of paper with the questions/statements. Students now find new pairs.

Step Six: In the new pairs, student A reads his new question/statement. He also gives an answer or opinion, and a new conversation ensues. He will use much of the same information from his previous discussion, even if the conversation with the new partner differs. Students talk for several minutes and then change roles.

Step Seven: The teacher repeats Step Five as many times as he desires. Students are able to more succinctly support key ideas as they recycle and refine their answers. If used as a Warm Up, then students should change pairs only once to keep the time limited.

Talk and Walk

Purpose: Talk and Walk requires student to hold a conversation while performing an unrelated but simple task - walking. The movement proves slightly distracting, particularly so for beginners, so they must more intently concentrate on language production.

Info: Students hold short conversations in pairs. They do so while walking, which adds an effective physical element to the activity. Talk and Walk works best with lower-level students in the Application portion of the lesson.

Step One: The teacher writes two questions on the board. One question starts the conversation. The other question serves as the emergency back-up question should students get stuck and their conversation lags.

If necessary, the teacher should check comprehension of the questions. He may also want to provide a sample answer for the class.

Step Two: The teacher establishes a start and end point for the walk. Students should be able to walk for at least two minutes, guaranteeing ample time for a real albeit short conversation. A hallway proves ideal, but any large, open space will work almost as well. The classroom may also be used, but desks may need to be moved to provide the needed space.

Step Three: Students get into pairs. One student asks his partner the first question from the board. The partner answers it, as well as provides additional information, follow-up questions, and so on. This is done as the two are walking side by side. Conversations should continue until the pair of students reach the end point indicated by the teacher in Step Two.

Step Four: The teacher wants to ensure enough space between pairs. Once the first pair of students gets ten or fifteen steps ahead, then the second pair of students begins to talk and walk.

Step Five: Steps Three and Four continue until all the students have talked and walked. The teacher may opt to repeat the activity by with new questions, new partners, or both.

What's Missing?

Purpose: To connect ideas and narratives together.

Info: *What's Missing* serves as a great tool for intermediate students who often have trouble linking together ideas and extended narratives. An element of creativity also keeps participation and interest high.

Step One: The teacher selects a story, scene, or happening for the class. There should be three events described. Here's an example for a lower-intermediate class of students:

Event #1: Alex always had big dreams. Unfortunately, he was very, very poor. He delivered pizza for a living. And because the pizza was free, he ate it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Event #2: One day a customer didn't have enough money for a tip. He apologized and gave Alex a lottery ticket. He said, "If you win, you can keep all the money."

Event #3: He became a fabulously wealthy musician. He traveled the world, had millions of fans, and become known as the "Prince of Pop."

A story, scene, or happening all work equally well in getting students to provide links. Longer narratives can be used as a listening or reading activity too. The teacher can present the information orally or as a printable.

Step Two: Students get into pairs. They receive the first event. Lower-level students should focus on comprehension. Upper-level students, if given a somewhat narrative than the above example, should talk about the information.

Step Three: Students receive the third event. Again, lower-level students focus on comprehension. Upper-level students discuss the information.

Step Four: Students now link the first and third events. Students work together to create a narrative. The teacher should assign a minimum number of sentences to link the information, such as three sentences. He may also require students to use specific grammar, a minimum number of adjectives or adverbs, etc., which will push students towards improved use of the target language and/or greater creativity.

Step Five: Pairs form groups of four. They each read their narratives to one another.

Step Six: Optional. The teacher reads aloud the narrative that he prepared for the class. Upper-level students can discuss the differences, as well as what they liked or didn't like.

Write on Your Partner's Back

Purpose: This activity improves spelling, especially of newly learned words.

Info: Write on Your Partner's Back gets students to spell words on a partner's back. The physical movement, writing in a different medium, and concentration greatly helps retention.

Step One: Students get into pairs. Each student receives a different list of five to ten words. These words should have been studied in previous steps of the lesson. However, if the teacher wishes to review important or difficult vocabulary from previous lessons, then he may do so too.

Step Two: Student A faces the back of his partner. He selects a word from his list and, with his index finger, writes it on his partner's back. It's important that student A write each letter separately and slowly, and that he also uses the entire "writing space" of his partner. Student B won't be able to correctly guess the word if the letters are written too small or too quick.

Step Three: Student B guesses the word. If correct, the two students switch roles. If incorrect or he doesn't have guess at all, then student A rewrites the word. If student B again can't provide a guess, then student A should give the answer and spell the word.

Students continue through all the words until finished.

Variation One: Students stand in a line of four or five, much like a conga line. Each student faces the back of the person in front of him. The person at the back of the line writes letter by letter on the next person's back, who then writes letter by letter on the next person's back, and so on down the line. When the word gets to the front of the line, then the first student says the word aloud. If correct, then he moves to the back of the line and the whole process is repeated. If incorrect, then students receive one more try.

Variation Two: This variation is similar to Variation One, just with an element of competition. Each line of students represents a team competing with other teams for speed.

The students at the back of each line begin with the same word. When the teacher begins the activity, then each team must write letter by letter as quickly as possible on the back of the next person, who then writes on the back of the next person, etc. When the word reaches the front of the line, then the first student whispers it to the teacher. If correct, the team receives a point. If incorrect, they must try again. Only the first team with the correct answers scores a point. Longer or more difficult words may be worth more points, which further increase the competition.

The team with the most points at the end wins.