

An ESL Survival Kit - Best Practices from Thirty Minutes to Review

Do some learners straggle in 10-15 minutes late? Do you hear the same mistakes repeated? Use easily prepared skill-building activities to reinforce correctness, encourage punctuality, and prepare learners to carry out skill-using tasks more competently. Have the activity on the board before the class starts - right on time! Individuals begin to think and work in English as soon as they arrive, for about 15-20 minutes, as the instructor interacts, facilitates the process. The next 15-20 minutes are spent taking up the activity and clarifying any difficulties. It will be time well spent and the positive results will be evident.

From an informal cross-country survey, I learned which openers were the most practical and popular with various ESL levels.

1. Phrasal Verbs! What's the Difference? Did I pass out or pass away?

These enigmatic expressions could keep us in business forever - a preposition or adverb added to a verb changes the meaning. Often there are many meanings to one expression.

Encourage learners to have a 'phrasal verb' section, a page for each verb. New expressions can be added as they are learned.

Here is one example. Add the following prepositions to the verb 'look':

up (to), down (on), around, back, in, into, away, out, over, to, ahead, forward(to)

Make sentences with the new expressions. Are the expressions separable?

I looked up the number. I looked the number up. I looked it up.

He looked up to his parents. He looked up to them.

Possibilities for this activity are endless with different verbs and prepositions!

The little word 'up' can be used more than 75 verbs! How many can you think of?

Start with the letter 'a' - acted up, added up, then go to 'b', build up, break up. Continue with each letter of the alphabet. Do one or two letters each day, but the expressions are only useful if learners can make sentences to show the meanings!

For variety, use several verbs and one preposition. Add 'out' to these verbs:

turn, get, take, break, drop, look, lock, stay, put, fill, make, pass, miss, run, pick

A reverse activity - replace a word or phrase with a phrasal verb from a list:
looked after ran into looked over showed up turned down put off called off
got over threw up brought up held up put up with

The coach *cancelled* the game. The meeting was *delayed*.

She *tolerated* her miserable boss. The baby *was sick to his stomach*.

We were *delayed* in traffic. She *recovered from* her illness.

He *rejected* the offer. He finally *appeared* at the meeting.

She *reviewed* her notes before the test. We *happened to meet* him at Tim's.

The grandmother *babysat* the children. They *raised* their family in the city.

2. Monday Morning Malaise! You had a busy weekend and you need an opener that requires little effort to prepare, but is still a valuable learning experience!

Past Tense Forms and Pronunciation Practice.

Simply write a sentence on the board, leave out the verb!

Learners think of as many past tense verbs as they can to fit the sentence.

Make a pronunciation chart for the verbs.

I _____ the letter. d id t irregular

mailed posted stamped wrote

I _____ dinner. prepared hosted cooked ate

For more advanced learners, use this sentence and have class make a positive and a negative list.

I _____ my friend. positive negative

congratulated (id) ignored (d)

introduced (t) cheated (id)

For variation, use the present perfect tense. I _____ already _____ the car.

3. Open-ended Sentences. I'll start, you finish!

Encourage good sentence structure; allow learners to express opinions.

Finish the sentences, then add two or three more sentences.

I wish ... If I taught this class ... The world would be a better place if ...

A good friend is one who ... If I could be anyone or anything I wanted ...

4. Wuts Rong? Corekt oll mistakes inclooding the tittle.

Instructors and learners love this activity!

- A. Please explain me this.
- B. I went to shopping on last weekend.
- C. He wish he can speak inglish more better.
- D. We arrived to canada on august 2003.
- E. Why you didn't came to party?
- F. I'll call you when I'll get to home.
- G. Pleas tell to me what is your problem.
- H. My frend she likes to go to camping but I didn't.
- I. Where you been since two weeks?
- J. How much coffee she drinks everyday?
- K. Our teacher has a worm smell.
- L. He is very much mad about some sing.

some sink.

some think.

5. Fran(k), I'd like to see your behind!

Use a few of these expressions in sentences each day as an opener.

in order/ out of order/ back order/ on order/ in order to

in the way/ on the way/ out of the way/ by the way/ by way of

No way/ my way or the highway/ My way is way better than

behind in my work/ behind the desk/ behind schedule/ behind me

behind the candidate/ behind the scenes/ in front of/ at the front

out of work/ out of the office, out of a job, out of coffee/ out of town

out of luck/ in luck/ no such luck/ just my luck/ beginner's luck

6. Why is English so complicated? There are many suffixes that change verbs to nouns. There is no rule. It is simply memory work. Use a few each day to reinforce and add to learners' vocabularies.

Change the following verbs to nouns, then work in pairs or groups, one asks a question using the verb, another answers using the noun.

succeed suggest deliver prove explain describe pronounce criticize
sympathize lose sell register prepare discuss complain give analyze
confuse believe choose rob prefer argue die fail arrive protect insure
begin arrange graduate depart memorize know live advise sign recover

7. Where did you go? I went to crazy! Place the words on a 'go' chart.

to a ,an

to the

to

zero

to a party

to the doctor

work

shopping

to an appointment

to the pharmacy

London

visiting

school skating library out Europe health club inside church upstairs

swimming restaurant Ottawa movies dancing supermarket camping

dentist college back theatre bar hairdresser meeting wedding

8. Articles are fun - only for ESL teachers!

Many languages do not have articles, and this makes it difficult for our learners. When they make their own sentences, it helps to reinforce correct usage. A or an means one of many, the means that one. A or an cannot be used with noncount or plural nouns. The can be used with noncount and plural nouns.

Have learners form sentences to show their understanding of article usage.

a test/ the test/ the tests/ tests

We had a test yesterday The test was easy. He marked the tests. I love tests.

an apartment/ the apartment/ the apartments/ apartments

a problem/ the problem/ the problems/ problems

furniture/ the furniture homework/ the homework advice/ the advice

9. More memory work! It's not illegal, but often misunderstood!

There are nine 'not' prefixes in English. In many languages there is only one.

Add the correct 'not' prefix to each word.

im in mis dis un a non il ir

correct proper continued understand typical fat legal regular polite
reversible legible considerate transferable alcoholic clear possible
reverent managed kind perfect responsible efficient obedient able

It makes the activity more interesting and more valuable to have one person ask a question using the word and another answer using the new word.

10. An easy, lazy day for you. Learners work harder than you do!

Direct questions need review! Have learners finish the question beginnings.

what colour what size what kind what time which bus where have
why did when should why didn't why can't why wouldn't who whose
Now finish indirect questions; I want to find out... when, why, how, how much,
how many, what kind of, how come, whether, which one, whose, where.

10. Preplanned opening activities

1. Have one or two people describe (in about five minutes) a personal event in their lives, e.g., a wedding, a special party or celebration, getting a driver's license, a graduation.
2. Assign one or two people to describe a tourist attraction in or near your city - tell location, cost, times of admission, parking facilities, special features - bring brochures.
3. Ask one or two people to prepare a brief report on a recent news event - general interest, sports, politics - tell when, where, who, what, etc.
4. Have one or two students describe their favourite T.V. show - the kind of show, the day and time, the characters, and tell why they like it.

For the activities above, encourage the class to ask questions, request clarification, take notes.

5. Class discussion topics - encourage class to think about, make notes, and be prepared to discuss the following:
 - A. Qualities of a good student, employee, supervisor, teacher, husband, wife, mother, father, mother-in-law, grandparent, political leader, neighbour, doctor, restaurant server, apartment superintendent, librarian, city mayor, councilor.
 - B. Successful job interview tactics - dos and don'ts.
 - C. Pros and cons of doing extra homework assignments in ESL.
 - D. Living in a big city versus living in a small town.
 - E. Pros and cons of owning a business or working for a company.
 - F. What it would be like to live in Utopia!

At the end of class, ask each learner to tell one thing he/she learned during that lesson. Many teachers reported that people remembered the opener more often than other activities. I'd like to know how your class responds.

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