

Motivating speaking activities for lower levels.

These activities are all designed to motivate lower level learners to speak in pairs or small groups.

Planning time has been shown to increase production in speaking tasks. Lower level learners often find it especially 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 relatively short, with minimal materials preparation time for the teacher. They are designed for use as a warmer or a filler in the middle or at the end of a class.

### **Definitions lists**

This activity is good for activating existing vocabulary or revising vocabulary studied in previous lessons.

Procedure:

Choose a vocabulary topic (this can be vocabulary you have recently studied or a topic you want to introduce). Tell students to write a list of 10 words they associate with this topic. To make the activity shorter, reduce the number of words.

Pre-teach / revise structures for definitions e.g. It's a thing which / that.... You use it for... You find this in.... It's an animal / object / place... It's the opposite of... etc.

Tell students to look at their lists and give them time to think of how they can define these words (3 -5 mins).

Now students work in pairs (or groups of 3) to define their words. Their partner must guess the word they are defining.

**A faster moving, fun alternative to this activity is a team game.**

Change the vocabulary to lists of famous people / books / films / objects.

Each team writes a list for another team (students can also 3 or 4 words each on strips of paper to draw out of a hat)

Pre-teach / revise structures for definitions e.g. It's a thing which / that.... You use it for... It's a film / book / object.... He/ She's an actor / a politician.... He's British / American / Spanish...

Each team nominates one person to define the words to their team.

Each team has 1 minute to define as many words as possible.

**What were you doing...? (What are you going to do....?)**

This activity can be adapted to revise a range of tenses (present simple, past simple, continuous, future tenses) by changing the time prompts.

Procedure:

Write a selection of time prompts on the board e.g. yesterday at 6 o'clock, this time last year, on September 11th 2001 etc

Tell students to choose some of the prompts and think of what they were doing at these times. Tell students that they are going to tell a partner / small group.

Give students time 5 minutes to plan what they are going to say and ask for any vocabulary they need.

Students tell their partner / small group. Encourage students to ask for more information. E.g. –I was watching TV yesterday at 6. -What were you watching?

After speaking, students feedback and tell the class what they learnt. E.g. Marie was watching TV at 6 o'clock yesterday. She loves chat shows!

### **Adjectives**

This is a variation on the above activity and is great for practising adjectives. Students personalise the discussion by talking about experiences and feelings.

Procedure:

Write a selection of adjectives relating to feelings on the board.

Tell students to choose several adjectives (increase or decrease the number depending on how long you want the activity to take). Tell them to think of a time when they felt this way, and that they are going to tell their partner / small group about their experience.

Give students time to plan what they are going to say. They can make notes and ask for vocabulary if they want to.

Students tell their stories.

Feedback to the class.

### **Cartoons, cartoon stories and unusual pictures**

There are many copyright-free comic strips, cartoons and unusual images available online; you can also find cartoon stories in many EFL resource books. These can be used in class in a number of ways.

Information gap activity: Order the story

Information gap and jigsaw tasks have been shown to be beneficial task types in terms of promoting obligatory, as opposed to optional information exchange and as a way of promoting collaborative dialogue in the classroom. In this activity, students work in pairs and the information, i.e. the pictures are divided equally between them. Students must work collaboratively to put the story together in the right order. Suitable for strong Pre-intermediate students and above.

Procedure:

Before the class, find a cartoon with at least 4 vignettes. The cartoon can be with or without dialogue. The more vignettes and more elements in the story, the more difficult the task.

Print the cartoon and cut up the vignettes. Divide the vignettes equally between student A and

student B.

Give students time to think about how to describe their pictures and ask for any vocabulary they need.

Pre-teach any difficult vocabulary that has not come up as well as phrases for talking about pictures and sequencing: e.g. In my picture there is... I can see... I think this is the first / second / last picture... Then.... After that....

**Tell students to work together to put the story in the correct order.**

Optional extension: Tell students to write the story.

Write the dialogue

Procedure:

Take a comic strip, a cartoon, or unusual image in which there are several people or characters. If there is dialogue or captions, blank it out.

Display the comic / cartoon / image and elicit ideas from students about what is happening in it. Who are the people / characters? What are they doing? What happens next? What are they saying to each other?

Put students in pair or small groups. Tell them to work together and write the dialogue and /or captions for the comic, cartoon or image.

Students practice their dialogues and read their version out to the class.

### **What's the question?**

This activity is good for practicing questions and for fluency practice on a range of topics.

Procedure:

Write a list of questions (one per student in your class) relating to your chosen topic. For example, if your topic is music, you could think of questions like: Who is your favourite singer? What is your favourite music to dance to? What's the best concert you have ever been to? Who is a singer / group you hate? etc. Adapt the questions to the level of your class.

Give each student a question. Tell students to write the answer to their question (not the question itself) on a piece of paper or a sticky label. Tell them not to show anyone their answer yet.

**Tell the class the topic (e.g. music).**

Give students 5 minutes with a partner to brainstorm possible questions related to this topic.

Now tell students to stand up and stick their label on their chest or hold their paper with their answer in front of them. Students move around the room and ask each other questions to try to discover the questions that the other students were originally asked.

Encourage students to ask follow up questions and try to have a conversation. -What's the best concert you've ever been to? -Michael Jackson -When was the concert? -Why was it good?

Feedback and ask students what they found out.