

THE RESOURCEFUL TEACHER Series

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THINKING IN THE EFL CLASS

Activities for blending language learning and thinking

believe

UNDERSTAND

imagine

REFLECT

thoughts

plans ideas

dreams



2.16

Guided picture composition

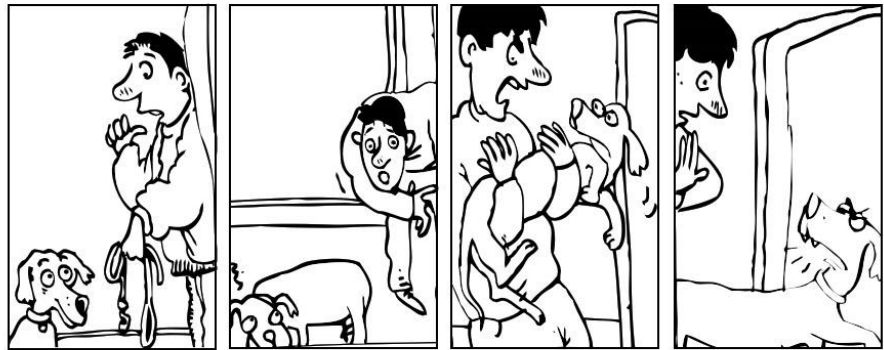
Memorising

Focus: This is an example of an eight-step memorising procedure (see previous activity).

Level: Pre-Intermediate upwards

Time: 20–40 minutes, depending on length of composition you want students to write

Materials/Preparation: A guided picture composition. For this, you need a set of pictures or a cartoon strip that tells a story that you think will amuse or interest your learners. Make as many photocopies of the set as you have students. Cut off the punch line pictures, and jumble the rest, keeping them in sets, one for each student.



in class

- 1. Slow reveal** Give a set each of the jumbled pictures to individuals, pairs or small groups of students. Ask them to look through the pictures and put them in a possible order. Discuss the possible orders with the class, asking them to justify their sequences. Once you have all agreed a good order, ask students to number the pictures.
- 2. Comprehension** Write the numbers of the pictures up on the board with space underneath them. Start work on the first picture. Elicit from students ideas about, e.g., the name and setting of the main character. Write up prompts on the board under the number 1 to help students to remember these ideas. Thus, if your picture story is about a man taking a dog for a walk, you might elicit the ideas *next door neighbour, Fred, dog, Spot*. Put these words up together with any little helpful phrases that students come up with, such as *every morning* or *to take the dog for a walk*.

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Guided picture composition

- 3. Noticing** If students come up with rather easy language or with incorrect language, you can extend it or correct it and then star or underline on the board anything you particularly want them to notice. So, for example, if you want the story to be in Past Simple, write this and the words *Last Saturday morning* clearly on the board, and point to it any time a student makes an avoidable mistake with the tense of their offering. If you want students to use a variety of time linkers (such as *and then, later on, a bit later, after ...ing*), you could write a list down one side of the board so that they can choose from the range as they go through the story. If you want students to get used to thinking in terms of lexical variation, you could list words to use instead of *the dog*, e.g. *the mongrel, the animal, the creature, his pet, Spot*. Again, as they go through the story, students can choose from this list.
- 4. Rehearsal** Once you have some notes up on the board about the first picture, ask a student to tell that part of the story from memory using the board prompts. It's not a test, so ask others to help if the student falters. Once it is correct, you can ask another student or the whole class to repeat it.
Work on picture 2 in the same way. Once students have got a good sentence or two for picture 2, ask them to loop back and tell the story from picture 1, the beginning, again.
Keep working in the same way, i.e., help students to tell the part of the story connected to the next new picture, and once they can do this, ask them to loop back to the beginning or to an earlier picture to tell more of the earlier part of the story. To vary the procedure here you can ask individuals, pairs, groups or half the class to loop back and tell the story from the start.
- 5. Removal** While the students are rehearsing as above you can gradually offer less and less help so they are doing more story-telling on their own. If you feel the class is *very* competent, you could remove (some of) the word prompts from the board.
- 6. Surprise** (*In this example of the activity, I have switched the order of stages 6 and 7.*) Once students have dealt with all the pictures and can tell the story so far pretty well, let them into the secret that in fact the story doesn't end at the last picture they have; there are in fact more pictures. Ask them to predict what might happen next in the story. You could ask them to do this in pairs and then, after a minute or two, list their ideas on the board. Then hand out the final picture(s) and discuss whose prediction was closest. Work on the final part of the story and the punch line as you did with the earlier pictures.

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Guided picture composition

- 7. Reproduction** Next, give students time to write the story down using the pictures and the word prompts, if you have left them on the board. They could finish this off for homework if you wish.
- 8. Crazy questions** Finally, ask questions such as ‘How many lines are there in your story?’ ‘How many times does the past of an irregular verb appear?’ ‘How many different words have you used for *dog*?’ Or point to where one of the picture numbers and notes used to be on the board and ask them to use their ‘magic eyes’ to see what used to be written there. Many students have a somewhat photographic memory and will be able to ‘see’ what was there.

4.6

List poems

Listing

Focus: Writing and reading. Grammatical structure depending on the poem frame (see below).

Level: Elementary upwards

Time: 20 minutes

Materials/Preparation: You need the list poem below for students to read.

in class

1. Give students the list poem to read, and help them to understand it.



I love it when ...
I love it when people smile at me.
I love it when music starts to play.
I love it when dinner is ready.
I love it when there is a sunny spot in the garden.
I love it then. I love it then.

2. Ask students to write the title on a piece of paper and then to write four sentences starting with *I love it when ...* The sentences should be different from the ones in the poem above, and should be true about them. They should finish the poem with the final line as above.

3. Go around helping students with vocabulary and, if necessary, ideas.

4. When most students are ready, ask those who want to, to read their poems out loud.

Variations

A Texts can be taken in, corrected and then read out loud by you while students try to guess who wrote them.

B The poems can be displayed on a wall or collected on a class web page. Students can then read each other's poems.

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4.6

List poems

- C Any poem that has a title, a repeated grammatical structure and an ending can be used. There are many list poem sites on the internet. These could be interesting for students to read.
- D Other possible topics are: *My brother/sister drives me crazy when s/he ...*, *My best friend never ...*, *Something I find interesting is ...* .

Acknowledgement

I first learned about list poems from Tsai and Feher (2004).

4.13

Flip it and see

Reversals

Focus: Speaking. Present Simple. Vocabulary development.


Level: Intermediate upwards

Time: 30 minutes

Materials/Preparation: Think up an unusual two-noun object for step 4.

in class

1. Write up a list on the board of two-word objects and devices such as these:



Fridge magnet	CD player
Tree house	Cuckoo clock
Coal shed	Guitar string
Traffic light	Bike lock
Car park	Book mark
Picture hook	Lamp post
Garden fence	Summer dress

2. Check that students can tell you what they all are and what they are for.
3. Ask students to write a list of new objects by recombining the words or reversing or changing the order of the first and second words. So, for example, *string guitar*, *fridge mark*, *tree lock*, or *coal park*.
4. Talk about your own example and say what this newly-made device could be. So, for example, 'I've got a *fridge player*. This is a special new device that means every time I open the fridge, music plays. I can choose the music just like I can choose the ring tone on my mobile phone!'

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Flip it and see

5. Ask students, alone or in pairs, to prepare to talk about some of the new devices they have come up with.
6. When ready they can share these out loud in the class.

Acknowledgement

This idea is based on Bowker (2007, p. 109).

5.13

Potato talks

Using generative frameworks

Focus: Helping students to find things to talk about on a given topic. Speaking and listening.

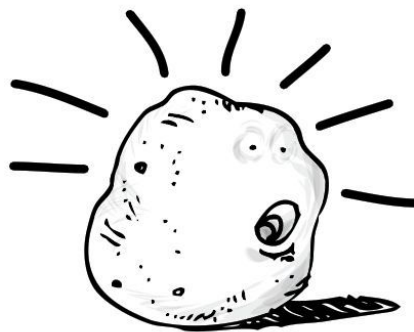
Level: Pre-Intermediate upwards

Time: 20 minutes

Materials/Preparation: Bring in a potato and an apple, each wrapped separately in a paper bag. Have a mental list of categories of things that could be said about them; see below for ideas.

in class

1. If your students have difficulty thinking of ideas of what to say for talks, oral interviews or conversations, help them by putting a potato where they can see it in front of the class. Write the word *potato* on the board and draw spokes coming from it.
2. Ask students to come up with any sentence they like about the potato. Wait.
3. A student may say, e.g., 'It's brown'. Accept the offering happily and write the word *colour* at the end of one of the spokes. Ask for another sentence. Someone might say 'I don't like them very much!' Write *personal opinion* at the end of a spoke.



4. Continue in this way, hinting at things that could be said about the potato or asking direct questions, e.g. 'How can we cook them?' or 'Does anybody know where they came from originally?' or 'In primary school did you use them to print things?' Every time you have an offering from a student accept it enthusiastically and write down the *class* of contribution at the end of a spoke, e.g. *products*,

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Potato talks

geography, art and craft, types, contents, health etc. Keep going until you have ten or so categories including *history, science, shape, what it's made of, price, politics, different names for* (e.g. *spuds*), *connected expressions in English* (e.g. *couch potato*). Complete this category list yourself if your students don't come up with them all.

5. Next, put students in pairs and ask them to talk about potatoes for three minutes. If they get stuck, they can look at the board and find another category. They should make sure they say something for each category.
6. Once the time is up, congratulate students for keeping going, and ask if anyone thought of anything different to say. Add any new category of comment to those on the board.
7. Ask them to talk again in pairs. But rub out the word *potato* and open your second paper bag. Bring out the apple and place it where they can see it. Write the word *apple* in the centre of the spokes on the board. Set them off for another three minutes.
8. After the time limit is up, ask them what they said under each category and refine any language you need to. Congratulate them again on keeping going. Add any new categories to the board.
9. Give students two minutes to memorise the ten or more categories of comments that are at the end of the spokes on the board. After two minutes, have them close their eyes and see how many they can remember.

Follow-up / Variations

Next lesson, ask students to call out the categories of comments from the lesson above. As they call out *colour, shape, price, personal opinion* etc, write these up on the board. Then put a completely different topic on the board, e.g. *Africa* or *the 1900s* or *mobile phones* or *Johnny Depp*. Set them off talking about the topic in pairs for three minutes.

Once students have learned the categories and have had a couple of practices, let them choose the topics. Also, ask them to work in pairs, changing roles; one person is now the speaker while the other person listens, and if the speaker gets stuck, jogs the speaker's memory about different categories of topic they can talk about.