

THE RESOURCEFUL TEACHER Series

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Creative Writing



A Composition with No Verbs

Level: Lower intermediate to advanced

Time: 30–45 minutes

Preparation: Be ready to describe a house you have lived in, but without using verbs.

It might go like this:

High ceilings, typical of late 19th century.

Very quiet. Noise in one place, quiet everywhere else.

Lots of space, and cool in summer ...

Lesson outline

1. Ask the students to listen carefully to what you are going to say next, and tell you which grammatical category you are not using. Then describe the house of your choice **verblessly**.
2. Check that the students have noticed the omission. Then ask each of them to write a half-page description of a house they know well, leaving out verbs. Tell them these will be shared in groups.
3. Group the students in fours or fives to listen to each other's texts.

Rationale

This is a syntactic awareness exercise: you notice the role that a part of speech actually plays when you are required to avoid it. Working largely in noun phrases alters the way you think and create, and illustrates the fact that arbitrary limitation can actually foster creativity.

Acknowledgement

We learnt this exercise from *Sing me the Creation*, Paul Matthews, Hawthorn Press, 1994.

Level: Intermediate and above

Time: Lesson 1: 25 minutes
Lesson 2: 30 minutes

Preparation: Supply of A4 paper.

Lesson outline

Lesson One

1. Give the class a topic that interests them, writing it on the board, e.g.
My best friend
Places I have been or
A teacher who I have known.
2. Let them write, at the top of an A4 sheet of paper, one short sentence relating to your topic, e.g.
My best friend is called Anna.
Last year I went to Mexico.
When I was at school, my class teacher was Mr. Evans.
Tell them that these papers will be passed around and added to.
3. They pass the paper on to the next student, who then writes 15–20 questions about their statement. Tell them to leave a space between each question. At this stage you should go round correcting any mistakes they have made. (Don't be tempted to reduce the number of questions that they have to write – the last ones on their list are often the most interesting.)
4. The papers are passed on again. The recipient reads the statement and the questions that go with it, and answers them all (inventing answers as he or she wishes). The answers go in the spaces left between the questions.
5. As before, you point out any errors that occur, or with a lower-level class you might want to take in the papers and correct the questions and answers. Make sure the students put their names on the papers before they are collected.