

Activating Language!

**Ideas for Teachers of
Literacy, English as an Additional
Language / Dialect (EAL/D), Languages
other than English (LOTE)**

by

R F Holt



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Note:

Activities are listed by macro-skill focus and their general levels are referred to by the symbols

E early primary or elementary

M middle primary or intermediate

U upper primary or secondary or post intermediate

The teacher gives a description or definition of something and the pupils have to guess what it is. Two simple examples would be:

It is a very small animal. It has four legs and a long tail and it likes eating cheese. (Mouse.)

These come in pairs and are made of wool or leather. You wear them to keep your hands warm. (Gloves.)

The activity can, of course, be extended with more advanced learners to more complicated items, such as:

It's a tree that grows in tropical climates. It can be big or small and has a very thin trunk. Its fruit can be eaten ripe or green. When it is ripe the fruit is yellow or orange in colour; when it is green its fruit is pale green. People from Thailand and other parts of Asia like to eat the green fruit shredded in salads. (Pawpaw or papaya.)

Variations:

- a. The format can be in the form of a competitive quiz whereby the teacher reads out, say, ten descriptions and pupils have to write down the relevant words.
- b. To increase the level of difficulty, after practising the process in the above form, it can be reversed by the teacher naming a word and asking pupils to describe/define its meaning.
- c. A wealth of related activities, including games, can be found by browsing the Internet under any of these terms: vocabulary activities; vocabulary revision activities; games for vocabulary revision; revision activities - vocabulary.

The teacher draws two identical island shapes on A4-size sheets. On one (map A) he/she draws lots of features, using symbols and/or names (for example., river, mountains, swamp, forest, village, bay, reef, inlet, cave, village, hidden treasure, beach, fresh water stream, smaller island – and, as an aid for orientation: compass points, scale in kilometres, etc.). On the other (map B) she/he draws only a limited set of features from map 1 (for example., 3-5 items plus compass points and scale).

(Many similar activities/materials can be found on the Internet by browsing under *Following Oral Instructions/Directions* and *Following Verbal Instructions/Directions*.)

Pupil-pairs are organised so that they cannot see each other's page (for example., they sit back-to-back or a barrier, such as a sheet of cardboard, is erected between their facing desks). One is given a copy of map A and the other map B. The task is for pupil A to instruct B to fill in all the features of the island. B is encouraged to ask questions during this process. Finally, when completed, A and B compare their maps and discuss results.

Variations:

- a. To give both pupils equal practice, erase 5-6 items from map A and 5-6 different items from map B, keeping all other items common between maps.
- b. To increase the level of difficulty no questions are allowed by the pupil who is following the directions given by her/his partner.
- c. Using materials such as Lego or felt-board stories or miniature farm animals, pupil A arranges one of these material-sets on a board; for example, from Lego blocks A could build a house or from felt board materials A could depict a scene, or arrange a farmyard scene with the miniature figures. Pupil B, seated all the while behind a barrier, also has an identical set of the relevant materials; A has to give B directions so that B can replicate A's arrangement. When completed both pupils compare results and roles can then be reversed.
- d. To raise the difficulty level, real tourist maps of cities or other areas, such as a zoo or a museum or theme park, can be used by the teacher who erases 5-10 locations (for example. hospital, art gallery, bridge) from map A and another, different 5-10 locations from map B. The missing locations are listed separately on each respective map and the task is for each pupil to locate them, without naming them, by starting from the same entry point and following the other pupil's directions. When located each destination is labelled on the map. Finally, A and B compare their maps and discuss.

(continued over)

The teacher cuts up a brief story , or a coherent part of a story, into its sentences and mixes them up. Pupil-pairs have to try to reassemble them in the right order. Different pairs' versions can be checked by the whole class by having them read out aloud.

Numerous Internet sites are useful for locating suitable texts, such as: *World of Tales*; *Australian Aboriginal Myths and Legends*; *longlongtimeago – folktales*; *pitara – folktales*; *Americanfolklore- ESL Reading*

Variations:

- a. To increase practice use two or more different stories for different pairs; when finished with one story pairs can then swap stories with another pair and repeat the activity.
- b. Use the technique with other text-types, apart from narrative, such as: recount, report, procedure, discussion.

This activity is likely to generate a certain amount of excitement and noise so teachers might need to advise colleagues or perform it in a relatively isolated area. See also the Internet under *Running Dictation esl*.

The teacher prepares on the computer a short text (with at least the same number of sentences as there are pupils in each group), appropriately familiar in terms of content, on a large sheet of paper (preferably size A3), with each sentence starting on a new line.

The class is divided into groups who choose a 'scribe' who will write down the text. The large-format text is placed on an outside wall close to the classroom. The nature of the task is explained as 'speed combined with accuracy'.

Pupil 1 from each group races to the relevant wall outside the classroom, reads Sentence 1 and tries to memorize it. He/she races back to his/her group, speaks the sentence to the scribe who writes it down. As soon as the group is satisfied that they have accurately recorded the first sentence, Pupil 2 does the same with Sentence 2, and so on until all the text sentences have been written down by the groups. The teacher grades the groups by speed, i.e. the fastest group to complete the task, then the next fastest.

Next, each group checks their notes and produces a final, definitive version.

Fun with competitive scoring can be managed as follows: if there are four groups of six, then the fastest group is awarded, 20 points, the next fastest 17 points, and so on; then each group's final text version is compared with the original, placed on the classroom whiteboard, and a point is deducted for each error - whether spelling, vocabulary or grammar - and final tallies are calculated. Typically there might be minus scores.

Variations:

- a. In the final phase of marking and scoring for errors, the groups have to exchange their final version with another group.
- b. Instead of having pupils read from a printed text, they have to run to the teacher who reads a sentence of the text out loud. (That is, pupils have to listen and remember, rather than read.)
- c. Instead of a written text, a series of pictures can be used, whereby pupils have to run, look, then describe what they see.
- d. Afterwards take away the groups' texts and have them work together to rewrite the text from memory.
- e. Level of difficulty can be increased by increasing the number and/or complexity of sentences.