

PRACTICAL ENGLISH TEACHING

A magazine for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language, published four times during the school year. Vol 10 No 4 June 1990.



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Cover designed by: Christine Cox

Teaching tips

This is an occasional section featuring teaching ideas which are shorter than usual P.E.T. articles. Try out the following tips submitted by Bryan Robinson, Mike Bradwell, Jo-Ann Costa, Ninfa Pagano, N. McBeath and Annalia Massarek Stock.

Tuning in

Using authentic news broadcasts is a highly motivating exercise which demonstrates to low level learners that they can understand authentic English. It trains them in prediction skills and in listening for detail.

Materials: You need one or more cassette-recorders and a copy/copies of a news broadcast. Make a transcript of the part you're going to use (see figure 1). Alternatively you could always make your own semi-authentic text and tape, based on local or fictitious stories to better suit your classes. You also need a copy of the worksheet (see figure 2) suitably adapted. You could draw this on the blackboard and/or make photocopies for everyone.

Procedure:

1. Introduce the topic of the news, and ask your learners about recent headline stories. Try to elicit some of these and write them up under the *wh-* column headings, as on the worksheet.

2. Ask about the times of news broadcasts on the radio, and the names of presenters. Write these up, too.

3. Begin the listening task itself by presenting the worksheet to the class, and explaining their first listening exercise to them. You are going to play the tape once or twice and you want them to a) write down the correct time, and b) choose the correct name for the presenter.

4. Play the cassette right through and then check their answers. You should have almost perfect results.

5. Write on the board a jumbled list of countries, nationalities and cities. The list should include all of those in the text, plus one or two others. Ask the class to copy the list, and then to circle the words as they hear them on the cassette. Point out that some of them may be irrelevant, and that others may be repeated.

6. Play the cassette twice and then have them compare their answers in pairs or small groups.

7. Once you are happy that they have completed that part more or less successfully, ask them to listen once more and to divide the list into different news items. They should concentrate on using the pauses and on the logical combinations of ideas they had earlier predicted.

8. (optional). Ask students to listen intensively to each of the news items in order to fill in the *wh-* boxes on the worksheet. You may need to direct this

part of the exercise very closely. If you have more than one cassette-recorder you can have them work together in small groups, while you provide individual help.

9. To round off the exercise, distribute copies of the text and compare these with their versions.

Follow-up activities: grammar work, based on the selection of present perfect and present continuous tenses common in news items; parallel writing, and acting out of news items; discussion work, based on the topics. ■

Figure 1: transcript of a Radio 4 news broadcast

'BBC News at 6 o'clock. Good evening, this is Harriet Cash.
We've just heard from Washington that the Americans are taking action against Syria because of its support for terrorism. The measures include cuts in exports and a reduction of the American staff in the Embassy in Damascus.
The Foreign Office has said the Americans didn't tell Britain about President Reagan's initiative to improve relations with Iran. And in the Commons the Foreign Secretary has reaffirmed that Britain will not negotiate with terrorists to obtain the release of hostages.
The South Africans say their forces have attacked a guerrilla base in Southern Angola with casualties on both sides.
The annual rate of inflation has stayed at the same level: three percent.
The Dutch authorities say two IRA men escaped from the Maze prison, they will be extradited to Britain.
Scotland Yard are investigating a fire-bomb attack on a house in East London in which three Asian men died.'

Figure 2: sample worksheet

Time: _____ Presenter's Name: a) Harold Cass
b) Hermione Last
c) Harriet Cash

	Where?	Who?	When?	What?	Why?
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					

Bryan Robinson is a freelance teacher and teacher-trainer based in Spain. He specialises in organising training courses

designed to meet highly specific needs, both inside and outside EFL.

Soaps

This is a straightforward, fun activity which is very involving for either teenage or adult groups. I first used it teaching on three hour a week general English courses but I have found it adapts well to short intensive courses providing an excellent climax to the course or a part of it.

Activity: soaps.

Aims: to elicit, plan, script and then act out a lengthy role-play for fun.

Level: from pre-intermediate up.

Time: three hours including review/feedback.

Materials/preparation required: None, but a lot of board space will help.

Language areas which could be focused on: present perfect v past simple; vocabulary for describing character and personality; functions such as, persuasion, invitation, requests, advice; pronunciation.

Procedure:

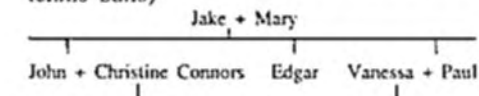
1. Elicit the titles of the best internationally known TV soap operas, for example, *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Falcon Crest*.

2. Discuss attitudes to them ('Everybody hates them but everybody watches them'; 'The characters are all larger than life'; 'All those things can't possibly happen to just one family!')

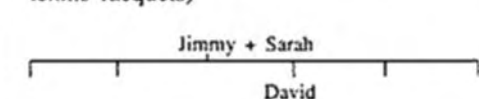
3. Write up what the group considers to be the basic characteristics of the genre. This list will probably include things like: two families, big business, high finance, black sheep, an addict/alcoholic, a mentally/physically handicapped relative, wife-swapping, inter-marriage, divorce, blackmail, business intrigue, sex.

4. Let this list sink into the class memory and then suggest that you collectively invent a new soap. Ask them for a title and follow this by eliciting the two family trees. One group came up with the following:

The McEnroe family (who manufacture tennis balls)



The Connors family (who manufacture tennis racquets)



Have the class attach 'labels' from the list at three (above) to the characters: for example, Edgar is an alcoholic; John McEnroe is married to Christine Connors;—

Vanessa is being blackmailed by David Connors because ... Let their imaginations run riot. They'll love it.

5. Now move on to planning and scripting. Say that this week the series has reached episode five and that you are going to plan and write it together. Ask how many scenes there typically are in one episode of a soap (eight?) and elicit where they all take place (bedroom?, office?, restaurant?, car?). Suggest the group now fill in the characters who appear in each scene and, using the grid below, fill out the storyline.

Where?	Who?	When?	What?*
1. Office	Jake John Vanessa	9.00 am	Board meeting to discuss...
2. Bedroom	Vanessa	4.00 pm	She receives an anonymous call...
3.

6. On completing the grid, group the class and ask them to choose which scenes they'd like to script. Then give them the time to get on with it, while you give help individually as required.

7. Act it out! If you're able to video or audio-tape the performance so much the better. If not give them written or verbal feedback later. ■

See previous author note.

*If you want to use this exercise as a specific language review task now is the time to clearly elicit the functional items, or whatever, you have targeted.

Acknowledgement

I think that the origins of this idea came from a seminar led by John Pidcock, of the British Council, Barcelona in about 1980.

The transformation dictation

Time: 20 to 40 minutes.

Procedure: dictate from your own experience, the students transform to theirs. You write down what you are saying as they write. A version of this example was used the first day of a course I taught on.

You say and write: 'At the end of this week I'm going to Scotland. I'm going to go climbing in the mountains. My sister Susan... and so on.' As you can see you can control grammar and structure. The lexis is changed by the students.

A student writes: *At the end of this week I'm going back to Italy. I'm going to start work again on Monday. My uncle Mario ... etc.*

Other scenes: *My name is Mike. I was born in ..., I spent my last vacation in ..., My father works in ..., If I were ..., A big problem in my life is ... (tricky one!)*

What to do with the results: Students correct (free pencil method) each other's work; Students read to each other in small groups; Students tell each other about a third student's writing they have read.

Extension: Teacher personalises a text from a coursebook. Choose a text which talks about someone else or someone else's experience. But first speak about your own experience and then let students speak of theirs. Your experience should parallel the text to be read in the textbook. You will find that after students have worked from their own experience they'll approach the text in their textbook as an extension of their own.

In a good class it's not the content that counts, it's the personal input from the students. Content should enhance personal commitment. ■

Mike Bradwell is a Pilgrims trainer and has taught in Paris for 16 years.

Students tell stories

This activity is based on the concept of student-centred learning. Therefore the teacher should ensure that the students understand he/she is available for assistance if asked; otherwise the teacher should not intervene other than to arrange the regroupings and to give instructions, which means that the development of the narrative and the concomitant interaction are student-dependent. The standards of judgment (as regards acceptability of grammatical forms, register, lexis, etc.) must be student-rather than teacher-designated, since the activity aims to foster student autonomy and co-operation, in addition to providing an opportunity to develop oral and written narrative skills.

Minimal assumption: past simple of regular and irregular verbs, some knowledge of cohesive devices, metalanguage required to ask for assistance.

Level: upper elementary to advanced.

Minimum class size: eight.

Time: one to one and a half hours.

Aids: sets of two different cut-up picture stories, such as in *Composition Through Pictures* (1)

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into four groups (A, B, C, D). Check that students are certain of their group codes in order to avoid confusion later.

2. Give out one picture story to groups A and B, the other to groups C and D. Instruct the groups to reassemble the story (the rationale here is simply to focus attention on the narrative). Next instruct the groups to write notes (not complete sentences) so that each of them can retell the story. It is vital that students understand that each of them will be required to narrate the story - no sitting back and letting others do the work or the activity will collapse!

3. After each group has decided on its version of the story, put groups A and B together, C and D together, instructing them to compare their stories and make improvements. Then take back the picture stories so that they will have to rely on their notes.

4. Pair off one student from Group A with one from C, one from B with one from D. They must exchange stories, taking notes as they go along. Interruptions for repetition and clarification are to be encouraged.

5. Now pair off one student from A with one from B, one from C with one from D (they will have heard the same story). Together they write the story they were told.

6. Pairs exchange the narratives they have written for peer correction and improvement. Alternatively the teacher may wish to collect them and use them as a basis for subsequent classwork: peer correction or an analysis which leads to work on common difficulties, for example.

7. For homework students write the story they originally reassembled from the pictures, using the notes made in steps two and three. I would suggest that the homework activity is most profitable after step six peer correction, since students will then be able to put into practice what they have learnt from these steps. ■

Jo-Ann Costa has been teaching for 18 years, in England and in Italy, where she has been involved in teacher training. She is particularly interested in teaching young children, student-centred learning and drama in the classroom.

Reference

(1) *Composition Through Pictures* by J. B. Heaton (Longman).

Spot the mistake

Certainly many teachers like me have all too often realised that, no matter how long you dwell on correcting the most common mistakes students make in their written work, they keep on repeating the same ones again and again.

Personally I have tried the most common ways to make correction more effective, for example: writing a symbol at the end of the line where the error occurs, which corresponds to the kind of mistake students have made (P = punctuation, Sp = spelling, St = structure, etc.); underlining their mistakes in order to make them recognise and correct them; peer evaluation and so on. Nevertheless, some kinds of mistakes were still there.

That's why I decided to think up a different strategy to emphasise and discuss students' errors in a kind of 'all-class-involved way', but still respecting the principle of self correction.

1. While examining their written work write down a list of their most frequent mistakes with the whole sentence in which they occurred (for example, 'he don't know how to get there', 'I'm got two sister').

2. In the first part of the following lesson write these wrong sentences on the blackboard one by one, stimulating comments on each of them. Ask the students to look at the sentence and see whether they can find a mistake and, if so, --