

1 Warm-ups, breaks and fillers 1: Short energisers

This chapter contains nine activities for waking people up. All can be used at various times in a lesson, though, by and large, the authors use them as warm-ups at the beginning of a lesson. Beyond being energisers, these activities are quite varied.

- ‘Chair swapping for names’ (1.1) gets students moving from chair to chair and, along the way, learning or reviewing each other’s names. Or, again, you can revamp this into an activity which reviews vocabulary rather than names.
- ‘One chair missing’ (1.2) is a lively adaptation of the well-known children’s party game ‘musical chairs’ (but without the music). It too doubles as a review activity.
- ‘Balloon chase’ (1.3), another one that doubles as a review activity, has people batting a balloon around the room.
- ‘I say, you do’ (1.4) is meant primarily to be repeated from lesson to lesson. It’s lively, potentially fun and immensely useful in language learning.
- ‘Newspaper bash!’ (1.5) is a circle game that involves the person in the centre hitting classmates on the head with a rolled up newspaper. You needn’t feel guilty about the hilarity because it’s all in the name of vocabulary review.
- ‘Staccato start’ (1.6) is pure fun. And you can learn a bit about people’s natures too.
- ‘Singing start’ (1.7) is just what it sounds like. Just find a simple song that can be sung as a round (there’s one provided) and you’re ready to go.
- ‘Computer talk’ (1.8) gets students doing something zany at the same time as they concentrate on message and grammatical accuracy. It’s a great closer in a small class or a good activity for end of term in a largish one.
- Finally, comes ‘Bizarre riot’ (1.9), which can’t be described in a nutshell. No, it won’t make your students riot, but it will make them laugh.

*Short energisers***1.1 Chair swapping for names****Level**

Beginner–Advanced

Materials

None

Time

5–10 minutes

Requirement

At least five students

Focus

First names; asking someone their name

This is a fun activity to use near the start of a course to consolidate name learning.

Procedure

1. Form a circle of chairs, one for each participant. If you have more than 15 people, form two circles. If more than 30, form four circles.
2. Try to remember the name of someone else sitting in the circle. Say it out loud, for example, 'Anna!'. If Anna remembers your name, she says it out loud too, 'Tessa!' Immediately, you swap chairs.
3. Encourage Anna to call out someone else's name. If they can't remember a name, they can ask. (That goes for the rest of the activity.) The person named calls out 'Anna!' and they both briskly swap chairs.
4. Ask people to call out another person's name and swap chairs. Ask them to do this as quickly and as often as possible, all at once. As people get going, a noisy, active and somewhat chaotic feeling builds up. The noise will hide individual queries about names and so the uncertainty and embarrassment are masked in the general fun and commotion.
5. Stop when everyone has had a chance to call out the names of all the other students.

Variations

- i) Instead of calling out people's names, students call out:
 - infinitives and past tenses (e.g. 'go' → 'went')
 - antonyms (e.g. 'hot' → 'cold')
 - comparatives (e.g. 'good' → 'better')

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[More information](#)*Warm-ups, breaks and fillers 1*

- words of the same stress pattern (e.g. 'vegetable' → 'comfortable') or of different stress patterns (e.g. 'bored' → 'sleepy')
 - a colour and an object that is that colour (e.g. 'grey' → 'cloud')
 - words having a vowel in common (e.g. 'little' → 'sip') or a consonant (e.g. 'match' → 'church')
 - words or phrases of formal and informal register (e.g. 'Good morning' → 'Hi', 'descend' → 'go down')
- ii) If pairs swap in turn, the activity becomes more serious, but it's easier for everyone to monitor what others call out.

Tessa Woodward

1.2 One chair missing**Level**

Elementary–Advanced

Materials

A class set of four to five inch rectangles of stiff paper or card

Time

10–20 minutes

Focus

Review of vocabulary in collocation

In this chair swapping warm-up, there's one chair too few for everyone in the circle.

Preparation

Choose words that you would like to review with your class and write each word on a separate strip of card (one per student). The higher the level, the more room students may need on your cards. You can make the cards three to four inches for elementary students and as long as six inches for advanced classes.

Procedure

1. Hand out the word cards. Tell everyone they can look their word up in their notes or dictionaries. They also need to find a collocation and write a complete phrase on the back of their card. Give your class an example, thus: if a student has the word 'elephant' on their card, they

Short energisers

- can add to their card either 'large', 'grey' or 'African'. Encourage students at intermediate level to be a bit more ambitious. Give them an example like 'a herd of large, grey African elephants'. At advanced level, a good example is 'the harassed elephants stamped'.
2. Explain that, if absolutely stuck, a student can ask you for help, but not ask another student. Start them off. Circulate, check and help out.
 3. When everyone has finished, form the class into a large circle, with everyone seated except for one chairless student who stands in the middle of the circle.
 4. Each student in turn around the circle reads out their phrase. The person in the middle listens hard and tries to remember as many of the phrases as possible. You might want to set four or five as a reasonable goal.
 5. Once everyone has had a turn, the person repeats all the phrases she or he remembers. When finished, the person in the middle shouts 'Go!'. Everyone whose collocation was called out must move to another chair. The person in the middle joins in the rush for a seat.
 6. Whoever is in the centre now has to wait and listen while those seated again read their phrases out. The phrases will now, however, be in a somewhat different order as some people will be sitting in different places.
 7. Steps 5 and 6 are repeated until all or most of the phrases have been remembered by the various students who've stood in the middle.

Extension

8. Working individually, students try to recall as many of the phrases as they can and write them into sentences. Or, more ambitiously, they can try to work the phrases into a text.

Variations

- i) The words you write on the cards don't need to be ones which your students know. You can, for example, use this activity to pre-teach vocabulary that occurs in a text the class is about to work with. In this case, the activity will take somewhat longer because of the additional time you'll need to allow for students to get clear about the meanings of each other's words.
- ii) On the cards write verbs in different tenses/aspects. Students have to add an appropriate time word/phrase or add some other bit of vocabulary often associated with the verb form at hand. For example, 'would've washed/ + 'yesterday but'.

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[More information](#)*Warm-ups, breaks and fillers 1***Comment**

The initial in-class search for collocations followed by reading aloud and then a scramble for seats gives the activity an interestingly different sequence of paces. It's like going from first gear, to second, to third, all in a rush. Then, in Step 8, the pace slows right down again.

Acknowledgement

Written up by Tessa Woodward

Pierre Jeanrenaud

1.3 Balloon chase**Level**

Beginner–Advanced

Materials

An inflated balloon

Time

5–10 minutes

Focus

Review

This is an excellent activity for getting students to brainstorm vocabulary at speed.

Preparation

Select a vocabulary area for review. At beginner level, for example, parts of the body or colours; at advanced level, ways of walking or snippets of colloquial English such as 'just poke your head around the corner'.

Procedure

Tell students to stand in a large circle. Explain that the aim of the activity is to keep the balloon in the air for as long as possible. It must not touch the ground. But before they can bat the balloon up again, they must first

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Short energisers

call out a word from the vocabulary area selected for revision. Let them know before you start whether repetitions are allowed.

Variations

This frame offers almost limitless possibilities for practising other areas of language, for example:

- **Functions:** Students must call out different ways of prefacing suggestions (e.g. ‘Why don’t you ABC?’), ‘Maybe if you ABC’, ‘It might be a good idea if you ABCed’, ‘What I’d do is ABC’, ‘How about ABCing?’), paying each other compliments, and so on.
- **Grammar:** Write about 20 verbs on the board, in their base, or infinitive form. Students have to call out the simple past of one of them before they hit the balloon. Or, each time the balloon is hit, call out a short statement. Before anyone else can hit it they have to call out a suitable checking-question tag (e.g. T: ‘You’re coming.’ S: ‘Aren’t you?’).
- **Pronunciation:** Write a phonemic symbol on the board, /i:/, for example. Before students can hit the ball, they have to call out a word containing that phoneme. Or, write up symbols of two sounds students have difficulty discriminating, perhaps, /i:/ and /ɪ/. Student A has to call out a word with /i:/ in it before hitting the balloon, Student B a word with /ɪ/ in it, Student C one with /i:/ and so on.

Rationale

The balloon falling towards the ground creates a visual time limit. This strongly motivates students to think fast in order to keep it aloft. This is also an excellent activity to use as part of a campaign to get students used to group co-operation.

Paul Sanderson

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[More information](#)*Warm-ups, breaks and fillers 1***1.4 I say, you do****Level**

Beginner–Intermediate

Materials

Sometimes realia and props of various kinds can be useful

Time

5 minutes

Focus

Learning words and structures that can be acted out

This is for people who like to get up, move around and touch things. It's not new; primary teachers have been using it for years. If you know about the method called TPR (Total Physical Response), you'll see that the activity here is the older, informal procedure that TPR is, in part, based on. If you find that students take to it, you have, in fact, paved the way for using TPR more thoroughly if you'd like to. (See Richards and Rodgers 1986: 87–98 for background and details.)

Preparation

Think of a set of vocabulary your students would find interesting or enjoyable to work with. These words and phrases must be ones that can be embedded in commands, instructions or requests that lead to actions. Here, I'll talk about giving commands since everyone loves to do it! For example, 'Touch something green!'.

Procedure

1. Give your commands. Your students carry them out.
2. Ask a student to give instructions for the whole class to carry out. Or put students into groups or pairs so that one can give commands to the other(s).
3. Tidy up any pronunciation, spelling or meaning problems that remain after this initial demonstration and practice.

Comment

I love this type of work because it's active and you can use it to teach an amazing wealth of language. For example:

Short energisers

- Verbs: e.g. 'touch', 'stretch', 'bend', 'lean', 'turn', 'tap', 'pick up', 'put down', 'turn', 'drop'.
- Nouns: These can be names of things in the room or on posters or of things you can see outside the room or of things you can represent by making cut-outs, etc.
- Prepositions: e.g. 'Put the X on top of the Y in the corner of the room'.
- Adjectives: of colour, size, shape, texture, material, etc. E.g. 'Touch something red/small/round/shiny/rough/flashy/wonderful!' ('Yes, it's my nose!')
- Comparatives: e.g. 'Touch something bigger than you/more expensive than it ought to be'.
- Relative clauses: e.g. 'Pick up something (that/which) you haven't picked up before', 'Say, "hello" to someone (who) you haven't spoken to today'.
- Requests: e.g. 'Could/Can/Will you ...?' 'Would you mind ... -ing ...?' Simple conditions: e.g. 'If you hand me the x, I'll hand you the ...'
- Fun: Students can describe, draw, make cut-outs, sing, chant, intone, jump onto, hide under, lie about, give compliments.

Editor's comment

I recently taught for several months a monolingual group of teenage boys of extraordinarily low motivation. This was one of a very few activities they could all cope with and learn from. ('A proverb a day' (2.8), was another.) Once I had introduced a few phrases (e.g. 'Lean left/right/forward/back'), every lesson began with one of them calling out all the commands he could remember. All the others carried out his commands. I then called out commands he had forgotten and added a new one.

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[More information](#)*Warm-ups, breaks and fillers 1***1.5 Newspaper bash!****Level**

Elementary–Advanced

Materials

One rolled up newspaper (for each circle)

Time

A few minutes

Age

8–88

FocusPractising/reviewing vocabulary in
any lexical set

This is good for practice of any lexical set: animals, furniture, clothes, countries. And it's a great way of remembering names too. Actually, the language is really incidental – the game is a great energiser and/or releaser of tension.

In response to an invitation to share ideas on a course in Hungary, Gabor said, 'I put my students in a circle and then I roll up a newspaper and hit them on the head with it. Like so ... smack!' Well, we were a little dubious about the sound of this, but asked for a demonstration and discovered a wonderful game which I have used on many occasions since then. It has always produced lots of laughter – and occasionally near hysteria. So I would like to share it with you. It's very easy to play and to demonstrate, but rather difficult to describe verbally. Here goes!

Preparation

Decide on a lexical set – 'animals', for example.

Procedure

1. Have the students sit in (a) circle(s) – on chairs or on the floor. There should be at least eight and probably no more than 16 in a circle. If you have large numbers, demonstrate with one circle and then divide the class into several circles.
2. Each student must choose an animal. Round the circle everyone says what animal they are. Go round the circle a second time as it's very important for students to remember the names of the other students' animals as best they can. It's very important for YOU to do so as well! (But you do not have to have an animal name ... yet.) Stand in the middle of the circle with your rolled up newspaper at the ready.

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You are the newspaper basher! YOU say the name of one of the animals, e.g. 'Tiger'. The person who is 'tiger' must respond quickly with the name of another animal in the circle, e.g. 'panda!', and 'panda' must respond quickly with the name of another animal, and so it goes on.

If you have time to hit someone on the head with a newspaper before they can name another animal, that person becomes the newspaper basher. You sit in the circle (and take the name of a new animal).

It sounds easy, doesn't it? But what happens in practice is that as soon as someone hears their animal name called, they panic and go completely blank! The result is a great amount of newspaper bashing and laughter. (Amazing though it seems, people seem to really enjoy being bashed on the head with a newspaper.)

Other rules:

- If someone calls out the name of an animal which has not been chosen by anyone, they replace the newspaper basher in the middle.
- The same happens if they name the animal chosen by the person in the middle (after round one).
- If the newspaper basher hits the wrong person on the head, the circle must give them a forfeit before they carry on, still in the role of basher. The forfeit might be something like 'Sing two lines of a song' or 'Mime a washing machine!'

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Jane Revell