

## 1 Activities using no resources

### 1.1 Action mimes

Language Continuous tenses

Level Elementary upwards

Age Young adult

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This is a popular drama warm-up exercise which is usually done in a circle, but which can be easily used in any situation where students have at least some space in which they can stand up. It is especially useful for the initial presentation of tense forms, and for subsequent revision and comparison.

#### **Procedure**

1. Establish a set sequence in which students take their turn – along rows or around a circle, for example. If concentrating on the present continuous tense, the teacher begins with a target sentence like:  
‘He is playing tennis.’
2. The next student in the series then mimes playing tennis, and thinks of another sentence:  
‘She is typing a letter.’
3. This then passes on to the next student to mime, and so on. Encourage correct usage of ‘he’ and ‘she’.

#### **Variations**

- i) The mime is done first, and the next person guesses what the mime represents. This is particularly useful for demonstrating the use of other, awkward, continuous tenses, such as:  
‘He was riding a bicycle.’  
‘She has been behaving like a monkey.’

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- ii) Instead of using ‘he’ and ‘she’, use real names to indicate who should perform the action, therefore breaking the usual set sequence. This keeps everyone on their toes, and is a good ‘getting-to-know-you’ exercise with a new class.

## 1.2 Adverb game

Language Adverbs

Level Elementary

Age Any

### Procedure

1. One student leaves the classroom, or moves out of earshot. The rest of the class decides on an adverb of action. When the class has thought of a suitable adverb, bring the first student back. He or she must now discover what the chosen adverb is by asking other students to perform actions in the manner of that adverb.
2. It will probably be impossible for the student to guess the adverb first time, so he or she continues by asking a different student to perform a different action using the same adverb. This carries on until the adverb is guessed correctly, or until the teacher decides that this will not happen (possibly after six or seven attempts). Another student then leaves the room, and the class decides on a new adverb.

This is a well tried and tested exercise, but it still produces some memorable and original sentences for students:

‘Please blow your nose.’ (Answer: romantically)

‘Please stroke the cat.’ (Answer: violently)

### Preparation

If you are doing this exercise with a class for the first time, it might be worth having a small ‘stock’ of adverbs and commands ready to give them, which will then start them thinking of their own ideas. Possible examples at this early stage follow:

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#### *Examples of adverbs:*

angrily, badly, carefully, carelessly, crazily, dangerously, happily,  
 lazily, painfully, quickly, quietly, sadly, slowly, stupidly, violently.

#### *Examples of commands:*

do your homework, eat breakfast, feed the dog, get dressed, go for a  
 walk, hitch a lift, play the violin, read a book, smoke a cigarette, take  
 a shower, wait for a bus, watch TV.

### **Variation for large classes**

An alternative method of presenting the exercise if you have a large class is to arrange students into sets of competing groups, which must then compile lists of adverbs for the other teams to guess. When the lists are ready, go to the first team, and allow any member of any other group to select an action for a member of that team to perform. The first person to guess the adverb being demonstrated wins a point for his or her team. Move on to the next group.

Alternatively, you may wish to have every member of the selected group performing the adverb, which removes the pressure from any one individual in that team.

### **1.3 Alibi**

**Language** Question and answer forms; past tenses

**Level** Intermediate–Advanced

**Age** Adult upwards

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This parlour game will be familiar to many teachers in some form. A crime (usually a hideous murder) is said to have been committed the previous evening. Build the tension by suggesting that three students in the class are suspected. Choose the students and name them.

#### **Procedure**

1. Ask these three students to leave the classroom (or move out of earshot) and devise their ‘alibis’ for the previous evening. Stress to them that they must know the *exact* details of what they did and

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- where they went. Also stress that they must claim to have been together the whole time.
2. While the three students are deciding on their story, split the rest of the class into three groups, each of which will interview each suspect in turn. If they have a pen and piece of paper, they can nominate a note-taker; otherwise the whole group will, like good detectives, have to rely on memory. Together, group members decide on some good questions to ask. They can also decide who will ask the questions, and where the suspect will sit (or stand).
  3. After 5–10 minutes, bring the three suspects back into the classroom. One goes to each group for questioning, which can last for about five minutes, and then the groups swap suspects. All three groups get the chance to question all three suspects separately.
  4. Any difference between the suspects' stories will be seen as proof of guilt. Maybe not all the suspects are guilty – it is up to the interrogating groups to decide. At the end of the questioning sessions, gather the evidence from the three groups orally, and take a class vote to decide which (if any) of the students is guilty.
  5. If you have any time remaining, the class may wish to decide on a suitable punishment.

**Acknowledgement**

This method of setting up the activity comes from Penny Ur's book *Discussions That Work*.

**1.4 Change it**

Language Any

Level Elementary upwards

Age Any

**Procedure**

This is a substitution drill, which can be an effective method of getting students to focus on and internalise particular constructions, examples of which are given below. Such drills can be done in a circle if desired.

1. Begin with a single sentence, using the target language pattern:  
‘The newspaper said the situation was unstable.’

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2. In turn, students change any word in the sentence, and say the new sentence aloud. Anything which is both grammatical and comprehensible is permitted.

‘The newspaper said the mountain was unstable.’

‘The scientist said the mountain was unstable.’

‘The scientist thought the mountain was unstable.’, etc.

**Variations**

- i) If you wish to concentrate on adjective prefixes, for example, feed in a positive adjective, such as ‘moral’. The next student repeats the initial sentence, but using the opposite of that adjective:

‘The newspaper said the situation was immoral.’

Students change other words in the sentence to fit the new adjective:

‘The judge said the criminal was immoral.’

- ii) If revising vocabulary sets such as ‘food’, start with:

‘Alan will take an apple on the picnic.’

Give another name, for example Brian, and the next student must repeat the whole sentence using a food which begins with the same letter as the new name:

‘Brian will take a banana on the picnic.’

*Possible language practice topics:*

Comparatives; irregular verbs; opposites; prepositions of place (*in the box, on the wall*, etc.); pronouns; tenses and time phrases (*last week, tomorrow*, etc.); vocabulary sets.

**Rationale**

Drills like these can be very good if used occasionally for revision purposes, but should probably not be relied on too heavily as this could lead to demotivation.

## 1.5 Changes

Language Describing objects

Level Elementary upwards

Age Any

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The purpose of this exercise is to describe how you might change the function of a place or object.

### **Procedure**

If you are in a classroom, you could ask the class how they would change it into a prison cell, a doctor's surgery, a library, etc. If you have no classroom, you could choose any prominent local feature and ask students how to change it into an airport, a hospital, a zoo, or just into a better school.

*Example:* Changing the park into a zoo (Intermediate level)

'Monkeys could live in those small trees.'

'We would have to build a cage to stop birds escaping.'

'There isn't enough water for crocodiles.'

'The lions would scare the horses if they were too close.'

### **Variation**

If you have a blackboard available, ask students to draw their planned changes on it, labelling the additions and explaining how and why those changes should be made.

### **Variation for advanced students**

Suggestions for changes are limited only by the imagination. With an advanced class you might even want to move on to describe changes which would make systems and processes more efficient: booking an appointment with a doctor; taking a book out of the library; taking money out of the bank, for example. You will probably find, however, that such changes are much more difficult to imagine and describe than the physical ones.

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## 1.6 Cheating story

Language Narrative forms

Level Intermediate–Advanced

Age Any

This is really a variation of ‘Guess the story’ (1.18). However, in this case the teacher starts with no particular story in mind – although the class does not know that.

### Procedure

1. The class is allowed twelve yes/no questions in an attempt to discover what they think the teacher’s story is. The teacher answers ‘no’ to every third question, and ‘yes’ to all the others. Remember not to answer a question at all unless it is in good English. It is important throughout this exercise for the class to believe that they are ‘discovering’ the teacher’s story, otherwise ‘writer’s block’ might set in and obstruct the creative process. Therefore it is an idea to give the impression of careful thought before answering a question.
2. After asking twelve correctly formed questions, the class has to construct a story from the answers which they have been given. At this stage the teacher should not interfere by correcting the language. This can be done after the story has been completed.
3. After the exercise, you may wish to explain to the class how it was done. If you do this, remember that the next time you do the exercise you must use different rules to decide when to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Your students might even want to guess what these criteria are while they are asking questions.

#### *Alternative rules:*

‘No’ if a word in the question is repeated; ‘Yes’ otherwise.

‘Yes’ if a question uses the verbs ‘do’ or ‘have’; ‘No’ for ‘be’ or modals.

‘No’ if a student hesitates when asking the question; ‘Yes’ otherwise.

### Acknowledgement

This is adapted from an idea in Keith Johnstone’s book *Impro*, in which he suggests answering ‘yes’ to any question ending in a vowel,

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‘maybe’ to any question ending in the letter ‘y’, and ‘no’ to all other questions.

There are many other suggestions in his book which are relevant to the EFL classroom.

**1.7 Clapping association**

Language All vocabulary

Level Elementary upwards

Age Any

The first of this series of ‘clapping’ activities concentrates students’ attention on word meanings through the use of a word association exercise.

**Procedure**

1. In the class, which could follow the ‘circle’ principles described in the introduction, set up a regular four-beat rhythm: clap hands twice, then click fingers twice. Students only speak during ‘clicking’ time, so ‘clapping’ time is their opportunity to think. Even though there are only two ‘clicks’, contributions need not be of two syllables. Words of up to four syllables can be used quite easily, as long as they can be fitted into the (approximately) two seconds allowed for each turn:

<think>      ‘duck’      <think>      ‘animal’ . . . etc.  
[clap] [clap] [click] [click] [clap] [clap] [click] [click] . . .

2. Setting up the four-beat rhythm as a word-association drill means that each student must, in turn, shout out the first word he or she thinks of which is in any way associated with the previous word in the sequence. For example, if the teacher begins with the word ‘duck’, the sequence might continue:

‘water’–‘blue’–‘red’–‘light’–‘dark’–‘night’–‘sleep’–‘dream’–etc.  
  {{‘knight’}–‘king’–‘queen’–etc.)

3. Any student (or the teacher) can stop the rhythm at any time to challenge an association. A reasonable explanation of the link between the two words in the sequence must then be given – in good English, of course – before the activity continues.



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### **Rationale**

The value of the exercise lies in helping students to think about the range of meanings underlying the words which they use. As this is an oral exercise, if an association is given which takes advantage of homophones (words which sound the same – such as ‘night’ being heard as ‘knight’ in the example above), then this is perfectly acceptable.

### **1.8 Clapping story**

**Language** Narrative forms

**Level** Intermediate–Advanced

**Age** Any

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This variation of the clapping activity allows students to produce their own original fictional material, which can then be utilised to revise past tense narrative forms.

### **Procedure**

1. Within the four-beat rhythm, the teacher starts the first sentence of a story on the two clicked beats. A good way to start is ‘There was’, which introduces the past tense narrative form immediately, but leaves the topic and characters of the story to be decided by the class.
2. In turn, on the clicked beats, each student then adds two or three words to the story. The teacher stays in the ‘circle’ and can use this presence to keep the story going. Phrases such as ‘but then’, ‘after that’, ‘so he’, and ‘however’ are good for this purpose.
3. When you have a long enough story, stop the clapping and get students to try to remember as much of it as possible, and correct it into good English. The time lapse between the creation and the correction will have allowed them to identify some of their own mistakes, either automatically or by listening to others.
4. As a follow-up, students can be asked to act out portions of the story. Some of the material produced might allow the use of the ‘Tableaux’ activity (1.26) for more detailed language study.

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## 1.9 Clapping verbs

Language Irregular verbs

Level Elementary upwards

Age Any

### Procedure

1. Set up the four-beat rhythm as described above, but the teacher should be ready to speak on every third turn, using the list of irregular verbs below.
2. The teacher starts by calling out the infinitive of a verb. In time with the rhythm, the first student in the sequence calls out the past simple form, and the second calls out the perfect form. Then the teacher calls out another infinitive. The pattern continues around the 'circle'.
3. Encourage students to identify mistakes. Younger groups might like the idea of paying a forfeit for missing a turn or getting a word wrong. If your class is arranged in a real circle, running once around the circle might be a good energy-raising possibility. Otherwise some other suitable physical exercise (such as five press-ups) could be used, but it would probably be better to keep the verb sequence going while such forfeits are paid.

### Rationale

This is an excellent way of revising irregular verb forms so that they become an automatic part of students' language. Don't be afraid to repeat the same verb during a session – it can only help students to memorise the forms.

*Verbs for use with this exercise:*

hit	(hit, hit)	leave	(left, left)	bite	(bit, bitten)
spend	(spent, spent)	fly	(flew, flown)	wake	(woke, woken)
beat	(beat, beaten)	meet	(met, met)	sell	(sold, sold)
swim	(swam, swum)	lay	(laid, laid)	wear	(wore, worn)
choose	(chose, chosen)	blow	(blew, blown)	hold	(held, held)
hide	(hid, hidden)	tear	(tore, torn)	hang	(hung, hung)
eat	(ate, eaten)	lie	(lay, lain)	shake	(shook, shaken)
throw	(threw, thrown)	rise	(rose, risen)	freeze	(froze, frozen)
teach	(taught, taught)	dig	(dug, dug)	catch	(caught, caught)
stick	(stuck, stuck)	fall	(fell, fallen)	feel	(felt, felt)
mean	(meant, meant)	sing	(sang, sung)	forget	(forgot, forgotten)