

SWAPSHOP

Send in your teaching suggestions, ideas or anything you would like to share with your fellow teachers. However simple they may seem to you they could be new to someone else. We shall publish your ideas here.

Personalising stories

Take a short, basic story of about ten sentences, containing vocabulary and structures suitable for your students. Try not to include any adjectives or adverbs.

As a first stage you could jumble the sentences and then get your students to work together to establish a rational order. (Careful here: there may be more than one way of doing this, and it's going to be their story, not yours!)

Then get each work group to personalise their version of the story by adding in modifiers: adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, etc. Help with the language if you like, but leave the creativity side of things to the students.

Get these written up if you like and then circulate them to the rest of the class (or put them on a bulletin board). The students will enjoy reading other versions of their story.

Disappearing sentences

This exercise is good for concentrating on simple past tenses and showing how the past is used sequentially for narrative purposes.

Choose a suitable text, that is one that tells a simple story in which events happen in a particular order.

Draw a vertical line in the middle of the board, and then divide the left half with another vertical line. You should now have three columns, the right hand one being twice the size of the other two.

Now read the text aloud to them a couple of times. As they listen, get them to write down the verbs only. Then they put down their pens until told they can pick them up again.

Elicit from the class as a whole the verbs in the order they occur (in their past tense forms) and list these in the middle column of the board. Leave the other columns blank at present.

Now, using the verbs as 'clues', get the class to reconstruct the missing subject, object and other modification for each sentence. Write these in the left and right columns alongside the corresponding verbs. The teacher may have to give a few hints to elicit all the information but it is surprising how much the class can put together working as a single unit. The teacher reads the passage again and the students follow it on the board.

Now the students take it in turn to read one sentence on the board. After the first 'round' the exercise is repeated but after each sentence the teacher now erases one or more words from each sentence as it is read, leaving the verbs as anchor points.

The students now have to use their memory skills to put in the missing elements, as the board contains increasingly less information. It is interesting to see how they look at where the words were as they formulate the sentences.

When only the verbs remain the teacher can ask the students to write up the 'story' to do in pairs or perhaps for homework.

Another followup activity is to work on the same story in a following lesson, adding in descriptive elements using the past continuous. This stresses how the past must be sequential (e.g. 'John got up' must come before 'he had a shower') but the past continuous (e.g. 'The birds were singing in the trees') can be used at any point in the story. This allows the students the chance to personalise their stories and gives them a little creativity while linking the tenses to particular functions.

[This drill-based activity was taken from a 1975 lesson plan. It would be interesting to hear reactions from readers twenty years later - Ed.]

10 tips for error correction

- 1 All students need encouragement. Be supportive, quick to praise and slow to condemn. Try to eliminate the word 'wrong' from your vocabulary; think 'inappropriate', 'not quite right in this particular context', etc.
- 2 When you correct written work use green or blue ink or pencil (in fact whatever the student didn't use). This is less aggressive; long use has given red ink negative connotations.
- 3 In some cases, a minute's conversation with a student on his written work can be worth more than ten minutes spent on written comment he may never read.
- 4 Paired correction can be both a time-saver and a valuable learning technique. However, your students do need clear directives if this is going to work.
- 5 Establish your own marking codes (e.g. T = tense error, R = run on sentence, etc.) and teach this to students at beginning of session. Have a copy on the classroom wall for reference.
- 6 You should also have a phonetic chart on the wall with symbols and key words. It takes very little time to teach the symbols at the beginning of the year. When a student mispronounces silently point to the chart.
- 7 Encourage students to have a place (e.g. the back page of an exercise book) to record their spelling mistakes. This will come in handy when revising for exams, as these will be likely spelling errors for that particular student.
- 8 If your students have a grammar book then underline written mistakes and put a page number beside them so that students can look up the point for themselves. Alternatively, in the same way you can direct them to remedial exercises in a grammar book that has supplementary exercises. This also gives the students a record of frequently made mistakes.
- 9 If you are going to correct a piece of written work with symbols and underlining and expect a second copy from the student, make sure you are strict about getting the second copy in. If you are lazy about this the student will be too, and the whole system will fail. Be disciplined, and establish a system to control work received.
- 10 In oral work, correct silently. Count on your fingers the number of words into the sentence that the mistake was made or 'chop' in the air with your hand when inappropriate language occurs. This gives the student a chance to refocus immediately on his 'error' and if he can't sort it out then maybe someone else in the group can.

A B C Building bricks D ✓ X

When a teacher asks a question and someone in the class calls out the answer the teacher has no way of knowing what every student would have answered. Well, here's a suggestion. Take a simple baby's building brick and paint it white. Then on each face of the cube paint one of the following symbols: **A B C D ✓ X**. The first four of these are suitable for multiple choice, the latter two for true/false and yes/no questions. Students merely cup the brick in their hands to show their answer. With very little training and at very little expense the teacher can see at a glance how many of the class are on the right lines and modify his material accordingly. Students seem to enjoy this and have even been known to say to each other "shut up and hold up your brick!"