

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

- Active Listening
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Guidelines for Active Listening

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Active listening is a communication skill which involves feedback from the listener to the speaker to be sure that the message has been understood. It is an extremely effective approach to language learning since it provides a way for limited English speakers to know when they understand as well as when they have been understood. It also lets the teacher or native speaker of English know how much was understood and where clarification is needed.

How does it work? In a conversation or other verbal interaction, the listener gives feedback to the speaker by repeating or paraphrasing what the listener understood the speaker's message to be. The speaker has an opportunity to confirm that the message was understood or to clarify the message. One of the reasons active listening is so effective is that it gives the responsibility for understanding to the listener with a definite strategy for checking it out.

Active listening can be taught as a concrete communication skill in ESL classes. Several classroom activities which provide practice in active listening are described briefly below.

Listen, Repeat, Do is applicable for English language students of all levels. We all have occasion to follow instructions in a number of contexts from completing exercises in the classroom to following instructions on the job to locating an address. Listen, Repeat, Do can be practiced with one or two step instructions and up-leveled to multi-step instructions using technical vocabulary, depending on the English level of the students. (See the following SCANS Plan for a more detailed explanation.)

Information Gap or barrier activities are also very versatile and can be developed at a variety of levels and in various topic areas. Students work in pairs sitting across from each other with a notebook or folder providing a simple screen so that neither partner can see the other's work. The "work" may be grids each is trying to complete or pairs of identical objects (such as cuisenaire rods) may be used in the pattern they are trying to duplicate. The focus is on cooperating so that a task is completed successfully through teamwork. Each time instructions are given, the listener must repeat what was heard. Either partner may ask questions any time more information is needed. Success is measured when the barricades are removed and the work is compared.

Sharing through Active Listening is particularly appropriate for EL/Civics lessons. All students but one (the "listener") read a level-appropriate newspaper article or story that deals

with an issue of importance to the class. Each person tells a small part of the story to the listener who feeds back that portion, gets confirmation of understanding, then listens to the next part and so on until the group is satisfied that the listener has the same understanding they do.

Guidelines for Inviting a Speaker into the Adult EL/Civics Classroom

Classroom Without Walls, English Language and Literacy Center, St. Louis, MO July 2002

Rationale

Experienced ESOL teachers adapt their speech to their students' comprehension limits. At the same time, students learn to understand their teacher's sheltered English with its predominance of short, declarative, positive sentences in the active voice using textbook grammar. There is thus a communication gap between teacher-talk with its artificial clarity and the "real" unsheltered language of the outside community where short, declarative, positive sentences in the active voice using text book grammar is not the norm. Speakers from this outside community are invaluable at helping to close the gap by their use of unsheltered English and the unique genres of their specialty.

Depending on the level of the students and the size of the communication gap, however, the teacher may need to mediate the speaker's presentation for focus, language use, presentation length, and dealing with questions. Preparation and/or practice time also needs to be built into the syllabus for student participation so that they can develop the confidence to carry much of the responsibility for choosing the speaker, inviting the speaker, arranging the room, meeting/greeting the speaker, introducing the speaker, ensuring the speaker has the equipment and/or props he/she needs, chairing the questions from the students, thanking the speaker after the presentation, escorting him or her back to the parking area, organizing thank-you letters to the speaker and restoring the room to its former order.

Mediating the presenter's role:

- 1) ***Presentation focus:*** Experts usually have a lot of knowledge that they wish to impart. If you then tell your expert that your class meets for 3 hours on Wednesday mornings, he or she may try to share the entire corpus of expertise with your students. Talk to the speaker and find out what the current high-priority issues are. From them, select one or two, or let the speaker select one or two of his favorite topics at the most, for the presentation. Keep in mind that your students are in your class because they are NOT fluent in English. By limiting the focus, you can increase the redundancy and thereby increase the likelihood of all the students understanding the presentation.
- 2) ***Presentation language:*** Share some of your ESOL communication secrets with your

speaker. Some native-born English speakers think that speaking with an artificial foreign accent, or throwing in a few words learned from trips to Mexico or Germany help LEP (Limited English Proficient) students understand. Urge the speaker to use short sentences and to avoid as much as possible referential words like “it” and “there is/are”. Suggest writing a short agenda on the board that will help the speaker and the students stay with the focus topic. Pictures, if large enough and really illustrative of the topic, will help to support meaning. Teach your students any unusual vocabulary items before the speaker comes. Urge the speaker to give out leaflets, flyers etc. at the end so as not to distract the students’ attention from the task of listening.

3) **Presentation length:** Decide your students’ optimal attention span ... from 10 to 30 minutes is the normal range. Ask your speaker to limit his or her presentation to that time with a question and answer session of equal length.

4) **Question time:** This is a rich opportunity for your students to test their English skills on a fluent English speaker, but their anxiety level will be high. Have the students plan their questions in an earlier classroom sessions. Question-making is one of the most difficult tasks in another language, so urge the students to ask questions in which they are really interested. Then have them write the questions down on a card. Collect the cards and give them back to the students just before the presentation. With a written question in their own handwriting in front of them, this part of the presentation will flow a little more easily.

5) **Goal Of Presentation (What do you want the students to take from the presentation?)** If the students have actively participated in the selection of the topic, the preparations will flow easily. Conversely, if they have been omitted from the Student Choice part of this activity, students may find it difficult to involve themselves in “foreseeing” the needs of a speaker because they have no sense of possession or of what the speaker has to do with their language needs. So, survey the class interests and make the goal very clear in your lesson plan so that, if necessary, you can remind the class what the outcome goal is.

6) **Choosing the speaker:** Two things, at least, are critical here: the targeted speaker must know the subject thoroughly; and the speaker must understand how to talk about that subject to adult ESOL students so that they can understand both the content and the social and cultural issues involved.

7) **Inviting the speaker:** The invitation should be the responsibility of the students, although the teacher may need to do some behind-the-scenes research to ensure that an appropriate speaker is chosen. Will the invitation be made in person, by phone or by letter? However the invitation is made, the lesson plan needs to include practice for all students in the appropriate language, format (if it is written); the class goal, time and place, and a request to know what preparations the class should make to facilitate the speaker. Depending on the environment of the class, the appropriate administrative staff should receive timely notification of the impending visit.

8) **Arranging the room:** The underlying goal of the presentation is for the students as community participants to become more familiar with the community. For the hour or so that the speaker is in the room, therefore, the room should reflect that goal. A semi-circle of chairs is

ideal. Some classrooms however, make rearrangement of the furniture impossible. Make whatever adjustments are possible towards creating an informal atmosphere.

9) ***Ensuring the speaker has the equipment and/or props he/she needs:*** The invitation should have elicited from the speaker what props he or she will need. This is time for a checklist that should be evident in the room to show whose responsibility it is to ensure that there is a clean board, chalk, an overhead etc. That same person needs to make sure that there are backup supplies available if something breaks.

10) ***Meeting/greeting the speaker:*** Again, all students should participate in learning the language functions necessary for meeting, greeting and explaining their presence/purpose to a stranger. This is another item for the checklist and the lesson plan.

11) ***Introducing the speaker:*** This may be the same person who will do the meeting and greeting. However, the language functions will be different and should include a level of formality appropriate to the speaker. Again, this needs to be rehearsed by all students beforehand.

12) ***Chairing the questions from the students:*** Here again, there are cultural patterns that we observe in the U.S. during the course of a meeting. Practicing the appropriate patterns in the classroom will prepare the students for community interaction.

13) ***Thanking the speaker after the presentation:*** The student who did the meeting, greeting and introducing, should probably do this unless the students decide differently. In any event, all students should practice the appropriate language functions together with learning to gauge when the class has run out of questions, or the speaker needs to leave, or classroom time is over.

14) ***Escorting the speaker back to the parking area:*** This is a nice act of courtesy that may or may not be appropriate depending on the environment and gender of the speaker. If the classroom door opens directly on to the parking area, or it is daytime, the escorting may not be necessary. The criteria for this courtesy need to be decided by the students and taught.

15) ***Organizing thank-you letters from the students:*** All students should learn to write, using appropriate layout and language, letters of thanks.

16) ***Restoring the room to its former order:*** Relations with the custodial staff have more likelihood of remaining cordial if the room is restored to its former order. Clean up any spills if refreshments were served, and use a prepared floor plan to put tables and chairs back where they belong.

Guidelines for Discovery Learning

Classroom Without Walls, English Language and Literacy Center, St. Louis, MO July 2002

Discovery Learning (DL) is a powerful teaching tool that invokes the adult student as an assistant in the teaching act and promotes learning through sensory experience.

We, as teachers, can explain a flag in about one or two sentences using six words: “flag, red, white, blue, stars, stripes”. The whole presentation can take less than one minute. Students, however, do not learn at the same speed with which we teach. In fact, students need a pause to reflect and time to process the new language and information input before the conceptual whole can come into sharp focus. Discovery Learning is particularly valuable in the civics classroom where explanations and definitions need to be sensory and concrete thus allowing the student’s internal Teaching Assistant to become active.

The method works particularly well with students with little prior knowledge of English and/or low literacy. Discovery Learning invites the adult student to participate in content-centered lessons by calling upon sensory learning, focusing attention on the “Big Picture” and engaging students’ natural curiosity about their environment. The method works less well where the students are learning about a process containing two or more steps, for instance, filling in the Citizenship application.

Examples of DL at work might include, in a lesson on the flag, passing round a real flag. The teacher says nothing, but by gestures, encourages the students to open the flag, examine both sides, discover the binding and grommet holes, touch the stars and stripes and comment to each other in their native language if they wish as they pass it to the next student. At this point, the “Big Picture” is the flag. It is not a set of isolated vocabulary items. When “discovery” time is

over, the students can complete the standard work sheet with colors and/or words. Remaining in their memories, however, is a lasting impression of the feel of the fabric, the colors, the design and the smell of the flag. For those few silent minutes of the lesson, the students focused on a “real” object without the distraction of trying to understand through a language medium over which they have only minimal control.

Discovery Learning can work with higher-level students too, particularly where the concept being taught is really too large for students to relate to. An example of DL at work would be to take the class out to stand on the sidewalk (or look out the windows, although that discovery will lack sensory input). The teacher can tap the sidewalk, look from one end to the other, walk to the curb, and ask, “What is this?” After someone comes up with, “Sidewalk”, the next question to ask is, “Who owns the sidewalk?” A few tentative answers will include, “School” or “Landlord”. Accept the students’ ideas and continue with, “How much?” (rubbing fingers and thumb together in the international gesture for money). Be sure that the students have really looked at the sidewalk, noticed its width and thickness, its imperfections and irregularities, its cleanliness and/or dirt, but do the teaching by example and without words wherever possible. Shuffle across the sidewalk so that students can hear the sand underfoot, stub (gently!) your toe against irregularities, walk heel-to-toe across the sidewalk to take an informal width measurement, poke at the trash and/or weeds. In other words, invoke each student’s Teaching Assistant. By the time the students return to the classroom, they should carry a self-developed image of the look and feel and sound of something most of us use daily but rarely consider reflectively. However, it will be an image based on each student’s own awareness and sensory evaluation. The teacher should take a photo of this little field trip (be sure students are in the picture) to put up in the classroom. This picture can provide a springboard for addressing with student participation the daunting issue of taxes. With awareness, and sensory build-up of the conceptual whole, plus the language skills to make discussion possible, topics like ‘*taxation without representation*’ begin to take on reality and the bigger issue of participatory citizenship becomes compelling.

Guidelines for A Field Trip with Adult ESOL Students

Classroom Without Walls, English Language and Literacy Center, St. Louis, MO July 2002

In the adult ESOL educational environment, moving students out of the classroom and into the ‘real world’ to interact verbally, socially, and intellectually with the American cultural scene presents a series of challenges. Not the least of which is that many students view out-of-class activities or projects as non-academic even though they want language skills that can be transferred to their life experiences.

Besides a syllabus containing clearly defined academic goals, teachers need to address a number of additional issues before taking or planning a field trip. They include cost, organizational support, recruiting and orienting volunteer chaperones, insurance (release forms), pre-trip, in-trip and post-trip activities, rules of conduct during the trip, contingency plans for dealing with emergencies, informational preparation of site hosts, researching the host site for resources and pitfalls, route maps and itineraries

Cultural Adjustment

As with anything new, adult students must see how a field trip is of value to them. The outcome of any project should be clear and clearly articulated. Students can then justify their involvement and permit themselves to take risks in trying this new thing. Instructors can emphasize oral fluency, an increase of accurate vocabulary use, or increase in reading/listening comprehension skill, as they wish, as a result of group work or project.

Rationale for Field Trips

Leaving the confines of a classroom can help to create concrete mental images, help spatial orientation, expand the students' knowledge base. Students, in preparing for a trip, use and integrate many other skills. Planning requires speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. As these skills result in a real and practical event, they become more valuable to the student and, we would hope, more learning takes place.

Following are some of the issues that the instructor needs to address in undertaking learning outside the confines of the classroom without walls:

- 1) **Cost:** Some institutions will help finance trips and projects; some won't. This will affect transportation choices.
 - a. Groups in some areas can use public transportation effectively; in others, the automobile or private busses are the only logical means. However, there is foot power and depending on location, this may be as good as it gets.
 - b. Students can raise money. Upper level classes can write grant proposals for funds. These proposals can go to board members or local businesses or United Way agencies. Bake sales may be a possible fund-raiser. One never knows what will result until one tries.
 - c. Students can pay their own costs.
 - d. Students can research freebies, even though it may still cost something to get there.
- 2) **Organizational support:** All schools, churches, NGOs have rules, regulations and procedures. Teachers should work within the confines of their particular situation. This means finding and working with the persons who can give permission and who are knowledgeable about the insurance issues. The responsibility is ultimately on the teacher to ensure the safety of all students when on a field trip. This means having contact names and phone numbers (much easier now with cell phones) and informing the institution and families of the destination, the departure and return times and the nature of the trip.
- 3) **Recruiting and orienting volunteer chaperones:** Even with a small, advanced level class, teachers will be wise to have an adult volunteer along on the trip because if the teacher has to deal with an emergency, someone else needs to be able to take responsibility for the rest of the class. A good rule of thumb is to have one native English-speaking adult for every 10 ESOL students. The volunteers need to have their tasks clearly defined. Be very clear to the volunteers that although the trip may incidentally involve some sightseeing, their primary goal is to facilitate the students' prescribed activities. The field trip is an outdoors classroom with educational goals to accomplish. Therefore, the volunteer/s should be familiar with the site, the lesson plan, the worksheet the students have to complete, and have the ability to keep a group of ten or so ESOL students more or less together so that they can enjoy the trip, learn from it and arrive back at the return pick-up spot at the appointed time.
- 4) **Insurance (release forms):** Most classroom host organizations will have their own insurance. This insurance company will have release forms for the students to complete so that the company can indemnify you and the school in case of accidents.
- 5) **Pre-trip, in-trip and post-trip activities:**

- a. **Pre-trip** activities for the students include
 - i. choice of where, when in relation to curriculum, and how to take the class into the community;
 - ii. writing grants or raising funds;
 - iii. arranging transportation;
 - iv. planning routes;
 - v. making site contacts and reservations;
 - vi. securing guides.
- b. **Pre-trip** activities for the instructor include:
 - i. Visiting the site, scoping out problems, bathrooms, coffee shops; gift shops etc.
 - ii. Selecting site materials for classroom preparation and pre-trip activities (oral: telephone conversations; written: requests for materials, information, monetary support; reading: maps, brochures).
 - iii. **In Class:** Coordinating group work, handouts. Developing list of site contact names and phone numbers, volunteers. Developing content forms for in-trip activities, for example, Q&A, fill in the blank sheets, area maps and trip maps, notes on specific items or events.
- c. **In-trip** activities include:
 - i. Ensuring all (that is, students, volunteers, and drivers) are on task and know/follow the planned schedule;
 - ii. Ensuring that students are finding and recording the information they are seeking;
 - iii. Monitoring the weaker students to coach them how to keep abreast of the welter of new information that is available.
- d. **Post-trip/Follow up** activities include:

- i. Coordinating the work of trip scribes, selecting photos, recording stories (best, worst, funniest), overseeing reports to grantors and thank you letters to guides.

- 6) **Rules of conduct during the trip:** Problems that can occur include first language chatter during host site presentations, failing to return on time to the designated return trip pick-up point, leaving litter at the host site etc. When or if this happens, teachers may want to examine the in-trip activities to consider whether students are being sufficiently challenged. An alternative is to hold a roundtable discussion in the classroom to explain the problem behavior and its consequences and to ask for suggestions on standards of conduct for field trips in the future. The rules of conduct proposed by the students should then be written and posted in the classroom.
- 7) **Contingency plans for dealing with emergencies:** Most instructors know to carry a supply of Kleenex, Band-Aids and aspirin. These will cover most minor emergencies. Occasionally, the emergency may be more serious. The Instructor, therefore, needs to know which students have medical insurance before calling an ambulance. In the case of a car accident, students need to know what documents to carry with them (driver's license, insurance and car registration). A cell phone can be a valuable resource on a field trip.
- 8) **Informational preparation of site hosts:** If your students are going to hear and/or see a presentation that will be open to the general public, the instructor needs to prepare the students during the in-class preparation for the content and vocabulary. If the presentation

will be tailored to the needs of the class, site presenters will be helped by knowing to limit the presentation to the attention span of the students, and how to use short sentences, redundancy and visuals to support meaning.

- 9) ***Route maps and itineraries:*** Important travel conventions can be explored through the use of maps. Students can help to plan the trip route, writing down the landmarks, distances and anticipated travel time.