

Ideas for pre-teaching vocabulary

Before reading and listening tasks, it's often necessary to make sure students understand a few key words. This is called 'pre-teaching'. There are a number of ways to do this. Here are some ideas:

Give a definition: Use a short sentence to explain the meaning of a word. You could also use a learner dictionary to find on-level definitions, e.g. *dive – to swim underwater, usually with breathing equipment*. (from *Cambridge Essential English Dictionary*, Second Edition).

Draw/Show a picture or object: One of the easiest ways to teach students new words is to draw a picture on the board, or show a picture on an interactive whiteboard or a computer or tablet. Using (or drawing) funny and/or interesting pictures is a good way to ensure students remember the new words, e.g. to teach the word *dive* you could find a picture of a diver with a big shark behind him.

Act it out: With lower-level students it can be useful to show the word by acting it out, rather than giving definitions which may use above-level vocabulary.

Elicit it: Elicitation allows you to check which words students may already know. Don't tell them the word you want to teach. Elicit it by asking questions or saying open-ended sentences, e.g. *What is the activity when we swim under the sea and look at fish?* or *When we swim under water and look at fish, we ... ?* (dive).

Gapped sentences: It's useful for students to see the word in a sentence to understand the context. Write a gapped sentence(s) on the board (this can be one from the text), e.g. *Cristina _____ in the Mediterranean Sea every summer. She loves to see the beautiful fish under the water.* (dives). Allow students to guess what word goes in the gap, but don't confirm if they're right or wrong. After they read the text, they can guess again. Then confirm their answer.

Discussion questions: With stronger students you can write discussion questions containing the new words on the board. Then give students one or two example answers to these questions. Students try to guess the meaning. Give more example answers, if necessary. You may then wish to allow students to ask and answer these questions for themselves.

Pre-teaching for listening: You can use any of the above ideas, or others you may have, to teach new words before students listen. It may also be useful to model the pronunciation of the words so students are used to hearing how it sounds. This is particularly useful when a word has an unfamiliar spelling rule. If you don't want to model the word, it can be useful to write the word in IPA on the board (you can find this in all dictionaries).

Extra activities – how to ...

Bingo

Use: to revise numbers, times, prices, years, etc.

Dynamic: whole class

Procedure:

- Decide what kind of numbers you want to revise, e.g. *times*, and write 25 of these numbers on the board in numerals, e.g. 10:20, 11:30, 16:55, etc.
- Ask students to draw a bingo grid with four columns and two rows. Tell them to complete it with eight times from the board.

- Play the game as a class. Read out the numbers on the board in random order, making a note of the ones you read out.
- Students cross out the numbers on their grid as they hear them. The first student to cross out all their numbers calls out 'Bingo!'. Check that the numbers they crossed out were ones you actually read out, then announce that they're the winner.
- Depending on the kind of numbers you have chosen to revise, you may wish to adjust the difficulty of the activity. For example, if you are working with numbers 1–100, include some pairs of numbers that you know often cause students problems, e.g. 14 and 40, or 16 and 17, etc. With times, you can use the 24-hour clock, e.g. ten twenty, eleven thirty, or with *o'clock*, e.g. twenty past ten, half past eleven, five to five, etc.

Spelling competition

Use: to revise general vocabulary and reinforce the alphabet

Dynamic: whole class

Procedure:

- Nominate a student and give them a simple word to spell aloud by asking: *How do you spell '(word)'?* Nominate students in turn and ask each one to spell a word, e.g. *Hello, book, open*. Choose students at random to prevent students feeling stressed as they see 'their turn' approaching.
- When a student makes a mistake, they are eliminated and have to sit down. Move on to the next student with the same word until someone spells it correctly.
- Gradually increase the length and difficulty of the words, e.g. *yellow, question, police officer*, leaving words which you know students often have problems spelling until later in the activity.
- Eliminated students listen to the words and try and write them down before the nominated student completes the word. They then check their own spelling by listening to the student. The winner of the game is the last student standing.

Grammar auction

Use: to revise a specific grammar area or general grammar

Dynamic: whole class (in teams)

Procedure:

- Prepare 10 to 15 sentences containing either items of grammar from the unit you're currently working on or areas of grammar which you know students find problematic. Some of them should be correct and some incorrect.
- Write the sentences on the board and explain what an auction is (when you sell something to the person who offers the most money).
- Put students into small groups, tell them they have £100 and they need to buy the correct sentences. In their groups, students discuss which sentences they think are correct and decide which to buy and how much they are prepared to pay for each. Don't help or allow students to look at their notes or the Student's Book.
- Take the role of auctioneer and sell each sentence to the group which offers the most money. Keep track of how much each group has spent. Remind students that once they have spent all their money they can't buy any more sentences, so they shouldn't spend too much too soon.
- After all the sentences have been sold, go through them one at a time, revealing which are correct and which are incorrect. Ask students to correct the mistakes.

- The winning group is the one who has bought the most correct sentences. If it's a draw, then the group with the most money left wins.

Guess who?

Use: to practise question forms: present simple, present continuous, past simple, etc.

Dynamic: whole class (with optional group/pair extension)

Procedure:

- Tell students that you are thinking of a person and that they have to guess who it is by asking *Yes/No* questions.
- If you wish to practise a specific grammar area, you might tell students that this person is living (for present tenses), dead (for past tenses), etc. Alternatively, you can use this activity to practise question forms in general by not specifying anything about the person.
- Put students into pairs or small groups to brainstorm possible questions. Specify a total number of questions, between five and ten, for the class to try and guess who you're thinking of. Students then take turns to ask you some of the questions they thought of. Make sure you reply only with *yes* or *no* (NOT *Yes, he/she is.*) in order not to give away if the person is a man or a woman.
- Students win if they guess the person within the specified number of questions. The teacher wins if students can't guess the person.
- Continue the game either as a class, by asking a student to choose a person and take over from you at the front of the class, or by putting students into pairs or small groups to play.

Memory game

Use: to revise a specific lexical set, e.g. common objects, clothes, food

Dynamic: whole class

Procedure:

- Before the class, decide which lexical set you want to test students on and collect a selection of ten objects to take into class, e.g. for *clothes*, some earrings, a raincoat, a scarf, etc. Alternatively, source pictures of these items if you do not have the objects themselves readily available.
- Show each object to the class and elicit the word for it before putting it out of sight, either in a bag or a box or simply behind your desk. Don't allow students to make notes at this point.
- When you've shown students all the objects, put them into pairs and give them three minutes to write down as many of the ten objects as they can remember. Ask them to do so by using the grammar you'd like students to use in their replies, e.g. *What objects do I have?* (to elicit answers with *have*), *What objects are there in the box?* (*there is / there are*), *What objects did I show you?* (past simple), etc.
- Take feedback as a class. Pairs win one point for every object they remember correctly. The pair with the most points wins.

Listing game

Use: to revise a specific lexical set, e.g. food, common objects, etc.

Dynamic: groups

Procedure:

- Before the class, decide which lexical set you're going to test students on and decide the best sentence to lead in to this. If, for example, you want to revise food, you can say: *I went to the shops and I bought ...*. However, if students haven't seen the past simple yet, you could adapt the game to revise common objects: *In my bag there's ...*, etc.
- Demonstrate the activity with the lead-in sentence and then the first item, e.g. *In my bag there's a pen*. Gesture to a student to repeat your sentence and add an item, e.g.

In my bag there's a pen and a notebook. They nominate the next student who repeats the sentence and adds another item, and so on until the list is too long to remember.

- Put students into groups of three to five to play together. Depending on your students, you may wish to adjust the difficulty of the activity. For example, ask students to include the number of each item, e.g. ... *three coursebooks, a notebook and five pens*. Or if students have studied quantifiers, you can suggest they use these in their answers, e.g. ... *some coursebooks, a notebook and a lot of pens*.

Backs to the board

Use: to revise a specific lexical set or general vocabulary

Dynamic: whole class (in teams)

Procedure:

- Put students into small groups of four to five. If possible, mix stronger and weaker students so no group is noticeably stronger or weaker than another.
- Tell students in each group to sit close together, leaving space between the groups so they can't easily hear one another. Tell one student in each group to sit with their back to the board and the others to sit so that they can see the board.
- Explain that you're going to write a word or phrase on the board and that the students who can see the board have to communicate the meaning to the student who can't. They can use any method to do this, drawing pictures, mime, synonyms, simple explanations, etc. However, use of their own language will mean they are disqualified.
- When the student(s) with their back to the board think they know the word, they put their hand up. Ask the word from the first student to put their hand up and, if they're correct, award their group a point. If they aren't, the other teams continue. Any student who shouts out the answer is also disqualified.
- The winning group is the one who has the most points at the end of the game.

Tennis

Use: to revise specific word pairs, e.g. opposite adjectives, past simple / past participle forms, collocations

Dynamic: pairs

Procedure:

- Explain which lexical set you're going to work on, e.g. *adjectives*. Demonstrate the activity by asking a stronger student to help you. Say an adjective, e.g. *old*, and ask the student to respond with the opposite, i.e. *new*. The student continues with a different adjective and you respond with its opposite.
- Tell students that, just like in a real game of tennis, it's important not to pause for a long time. If one of the students pauses too long between items, they lose that round, e.g. in *A old B new – good A bad – big B ummm ahhh ... small*, B would lose.
- Put students into pairs to play together. Tell them they should continue for as long as possible. If one student loses the round, they start again.