

Lucy Pollard's Guide to TEACHING ENGLISH

**An essential resource
for EFL teachers**



The basics of teaching English
Approaches to teaching
Presenting & practising language
Listening, speaking, reading, writing
Planning lessons
Error correction
Pronunciation

*This ebook answers teachers' most
frequent questions*

3RD EDITION

CHAPTER 1: THE BASICS OF TEACHING ENGLISH

1.1 Use of English and use of mother tongue

We should try to use English as much as possible with our students. When teaching students at intermediate level and above, all teaching can be done in English. There should really be no need to use the students' mother tongue at these levels. Grammar explanations and definitions of words can be given in English. Explanations for activities and instructions can also be given in English.

At lower levels, you might find yourself using the students' mother tongue more often. Nevertheless, try to use English as much as possible. As your students progress, you will find that you'll use English for instructions more and more frequently. When you are presenting new language, try to illustrate the language through the use of pictures and/or mime. This is preferable to translating. Techniques for presenting language can be found in Chapter 3.

You might want to dedicate one of your first lessons with a class to the study of classroom language. By classroom language I mean phrases such as: open your books, turn to page 10, work with a partner, etc, etc. You can write the language on the board, demonstrate it through mime or show pictures of people opening their books, working with a partner etc. It's important to practise the pronunciation of these phrases and to revise them regularly. In a subsequent lesson, you can give the phrases to students with the words jumbled up (for example: 10 to page turn); and ask them to re-order the words and match them to pictures. Finally, you can write the phrases on large pieces of card and display them in your classroom so that they are constantly visible.

You might occasionally decide to use the students' mother tongue (if you speak it, of course). A time when this is advisable is when your students just haven't grasped what you are saying in English. If you need to deal with something quickly, it is generally quicker in the students' mother tongue (if you speak their language). For example, it could take a very long time to explain the word "soul" using only English and the students might misunderstand if their culture doesn't have a similar concept. You might also need to give some information about an open day or a special event at school and you think it will be done more quickly in their language.

1.2 Using the blackboard, whiteboard

You will need to learn how to write on a board. This is not as easy as it appears. Getting a line straight and writing at a size that can be seen takes practice. Practise in an empty classroom one day. While you're there practise writing on the board side on (i.e. positioned in such a way that your back is not to the class). This will be very useful especially if you intend to teach children. You'll be able to keep an eye on what's happening whilst writing.

- It increases STT whilst reducing TTT;
- Students learn to work autonomously; they learn to do things without the teacher. This will help them in their learning outside the classroom. Of course, the teacher is on hand if required;
- Every student has the opportunity to contribute; this is almost impossible when conducting teacher-led activities. Consider a 20-minute speaking activity. If you choose to perform it as a whole-class activity with a group of 20 students, each student will speak for an average of 1 minute. If your students do the same activity in pairs for 20 minutes, each student gets the chance to speak for 10 minutes. Much more efficient use of time!

1.6 How to organise group and pair work

At the beginning, it's probably easiest if you just ask the students to work with whoever is sitting next to them. You can go around the class saying, "you two work together", "you two work together" etc. Have students work with their neighbours for a few lessons. This allows students to get used to pair work and group work; it might be completely new to them. Always working with the same person will provide a comforting routine until they are used to this way of working. If they work with a familiar person, it will be easier for them.

You can start grouping students differently when they are used to that way of working. In fact, it's advisable to change the make-up of groups to help avoid over-familiarity. By working with others, students can discover other ways of working and speaking. Dividing students in different ways helps you to separate the noisy students and also to see which students work well together. It also contributes to a sense of cooperation in the classroom.

If you have a group of students of mixed-level, you might ask all the strong students to work together which allows them to do a more challenging task whilst the students who are not so strong do a less challenging task. Alternatively, you could put stronger students to work with weaker students, which allows strong students to explain difficult points to the weaker ones.

If the class are discussing a gender-related topic, it might be interesting to ask all females to work together and all males to work together. Alternatively, you could mix males and females. The same might be applied to age-related topics, city and suburb dwellers, etc. Think about how you would like groups to be formed before going into class.

Always remember that if you are asking students to move to form a group (rather than just asking them to work with their closest neighbours), it will take a few minutes to organise. You will need to factor this into your lesson plan.

1.7 What does the teacher do during pair and group work?

You can quite simply let students get on with the task. However, this doesn't mean ignoring them and letting the task disintegrate.

that caters to all needs; for example, sometimes focusing on language work and at other times on spoken English. It will be more important to create balance and do activities that cater to different needs at higher levels. Generally speaking, at the lower levels, students have very similar needs.

For a new teacher, the intermediate levels are the easiest to teach. If you have a choice, request those levels when you first start teaching.

1.13 Essential elements for students to learn

These are the aspects of language that students need to learn and as such are the things you'll be concentrating on in class. They can be broken down into aspects of language and language skills.

Aspects of language include grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functions and levels of formality. Let's take a look at each of these:

Grammar includes tenses, formation of questions and negatives, prepositions, pronouns. This is how many of us have studied languages at school. Before starting to teach you should consult a good grammar book. Books by Michael Swan are excellent; they're very detailed and technical and you might find them difficult at the beginning. If you prefer an easier option, you can look at *Advanced Grammar in Use* by Martin Hewings; this book is intended for high level students but teachers can also learn a lot from it.

Vocabulary: this is a basic building block of language learning. Students need to know words, their meanings, how they are spelt and how they are pronounced. When teaching vocabulary, make sure you explain the meaning as well as the spelling and pronunciation.

Pronunciation: students need to know how to pronounce individual sounds as well as combinations of sounds. As a teacher, you'll focus on the sounds students find difficult. This basically means the sounds that do not exist in the students' mother tongue. For example, the "th" sound is difficult for many learners because their language doesn't have that sound.

Functions are set phrases that we use in specific situations. Examples of functions are the use of "how do you do" when you first meet somebody. "I'll have the fish" when ordering in a restaurant. Functions cannot be translated word for word into another language and they usually only carry meaning in specific situations.

Levels of formality: students need to develop an awareness of and an ability to produce language of varying degrees of formality. Certain situations and contexts call for the use of formal language; e.g. a business letter, a discussion with one's university professor. In other situations, more informal language can be used; e.g. an event for students; an e-mail exchange with a friend. As teachers, we need to raise students' awareness of the varying degrees of formality and help them distinguish between them as well as use them.

CHAPTER 3: PRESENTING AND PRACTISING LANGUAGE

As stated in Chapter 1, students need to learn various aspects of language: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and functions. In order to learn this language, teachers need to present the new language to students and create situations where the language can be practised. Revision and further practice are also essential in subsequent lessons. The amount of revision carried out in later lessons will depend on the students' level and on their mastery of the language point.

Here we will look at how to present grammar, vocabulary and functions, how to revise language and how to create situations to practise both new and known language. Pronunciation will be the topic of a separate chapter.

From a language learner's point of view, presentation of language is probably the most important aspect of studying English. Students expect lessons to contain some degree of language study, either long and intensive or short and sharp, depending on whichever is appropriate – it's most often what they note in their books and take away with them.

The stages are:

1. find out how much students already know about the language point;
2. presentation;
3. check students have understood the presentation;
4. practice (controlled and/or free).

In following lessons:

1. If it was the first time the students encountered the language item, you can do another brief presentation and then do some more activities to practise the language.
2. If students are familiar with the language item, you can go immediately to more practice activities.

3.1 Stage 1: Pre-checking knowledge

Before presenting any language, it is useful to find out how much your students know about the language point in question. You can get an idea of what they have studied by looking through their course book and previous work. However, the fact that the students have studied a particular language point does not mean they know it. In class, you can check to what extent they know the language by eliciting phrases that include the language point. This can be done relatively quickly; e.g. you can show pictures of people in action to your students and ask them what the characters are doing to check

CHAPTER 8: PLANNING A LESSON

In this unit we will look at how to set about planning a lesson. It is important for you to engage in some form of planning for each lesson. At the beginning, planning will take a lot of time; it might even take longer than the actual lesson itself! However, all is not bleak; with time you will get more experienced and you will be able to plan much more quickly, pulling out lesson plans and activities you have already used. Many experienced teachers plan their lessons in no time at all.

First of all, let's take a look at the benefits of having a good lesson plan. The plan will give you aims for your lessons; it will remind you what to take with you when you go in to class; it will give you guidelines whilst you are in the classroom and it will prevent you from drying up while you are there. Having a plan will also provide your lesson with structure; whilst the students might not notice this, they will certainly notice if your lessons lack structure.

The format that your lesson plan takes will depend on many factors: the situation you are in, how much time you have and even how long you have been teaching. Speaking for myself, my lesson plans are more a series of notes; I note which pages and exercises of the course book I'll do with my class; I also note supplementary activities and language to pre-teach or focus on. I think about how much time each activity will take but probably don't write everything down on the plan. But then I have been teaching for over 14 years; when I started out, my lesson plans were very different! Some teachers might go into class with no plan at all; others might go in with just the course book and work through it page by page. Lesson plans are very much a case of what works for you and the situation you find yourself in. They are possibly the most personal and individual part of teaching

The comments below will help you consider the aspects that should be included in lesson plans or at least considered during the planning stages. In some settings it is necessary to produce a very detailed plan; for example, if you are being observed as part of a course or as part of a school evaluation. If your plan is to be used in a situation where you will be tested or observed, I suggest you check with your tutor or assessor exactly what they would like to see in your plan. I can give guidelines but different people and different situations require different aspects to be covered.

The things to consider when planning a lesson are:

8.1 Recent work

Think about what students have been working on recently. If they have done a lot of skills work recently, it might be time now to do some language work. If there has been a theme through the last 2 or 3 lessons, it might be time to consolidate that work and/or move on. Aim to get balance over the lessons so that students don't lose interest.