
Bringing acting to class: The role of role-plays

Webinar handout

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Why role-plays?

Role-plays are a popular part of language lessons and found in most textbooks.

But why are they useful?

1. They're simulations of real-life situations. They give students an opportunity to really practise using the grammar and lexis they've learnt in a realistic situation.
2. They're *realistic*, but they're *not real*. This can give students confidence to speak as they are acting. When playing a role, they can be someone else and express opinions that are not their own in safety while still practising the language.
3. They're fun! Perhaps the most important reason to use role-plays. Students can lose themselves in an engaging role-play and this encourages them to take risks with the language and enjoy interacting.

The importance of preparation

Preparation time optimises how useful a role-play can be. Without enough time to think about what they're going to say, students will be nervous, the role-play will be short, and they'll make more mistakes or not use the target language. The amount of time you allow depends on the task and the student level, but I would allow a minimum of 3 minutes and let them take notes.

In summary, preparation will -

1. Enhance fluency.
2. Reduce inaccuracies.
3. Encourage creativity and imagination for the situation.

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4. Increase confidence. With more confidence students will speak more and enjoy the activity more.

Some alternative role-play activities to try

We all know the classic role-plays of asking for directions or ordering food in a restaurant, but here are a couple of more flexible alternative ideas that could be added to a lesson.

1. *The talk show role-play* – In class we often ask students to give their opinions on various topics. But we can take this further and make them say more by introducing role-play. Get them to discuss a topic but, before they start, give them their opinions. They *have to disagree* with each other! For example, one student thinks cats are the best pets and the other prefers dogs (...or you could choose a more serious topic!). If they disagree, this extends the discussion and pushes their resourcefulness both in thinking of relevant arguments and using appropriate language. To take this further, set up a TV talk show role-play and introduce a third role - the presenter. This student is neutral in opinion but needs to encourage the others to speak and make the show interesting.
2. *The celebrity interview role-play* – This can be adapted to whatever topic you're working with in class, and you can use it to extend a lesson or provide some productive speaking practice. One student plays the journalist asking the questions, the other plays the celebrity talking about their life. If the topic is sport, the celebrity is a famous athlete. If it's food, the celebrity is a famous chef. Give them some prompts to help them prepare – like: *their childhood / how they became famous / their life now*. Let the 'journalist' write some questions and the 'celebrity' create their imaginative answers.

Watch a recording of Kris' webinar here: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-events/world-teachers-day-2023/world-teachers-day-2023-thursday-5-october>