

Teaching **English** training videos



Activities

Debates, stories and information gaps

Unit 6 Activities

Debates, stories and information gaps

1 Before you watch

Work with a partner if you can. Talk about activities you use to get your students speaking. The list below may give you ideas. Which ones do you use?

Speaking activities

- Role-play
- Storytelling
- Questionnaires
- Debate
- Dialogue building
- Information gap
- Student presentations

Choose one of the activities you do and talk about how you prepare the students to do it.

2 Watch

Watch Programme 6. Which activity do you see each teacher organise in class? One teacher organises two activities.



Pathumporn



Montakarn



Supote



Sumalee

- A** *Debate*
- B** *Dialogue building*
- C** *Information gap*
- D** *Storytelling*

What age were the students who did each activity?
Can you use all the activities for any age?

3 Watch again

Look at the activities in the box. Which advice below, A, B, C, or D, describes how to prepare for each activity? Write the letter of the box next to the activity. Watch the programme again to check your answers.

- Storytelling
- Debate
- Dialogue building
- Information gap

A Pre-teach the language the students need to find out the missing information, and make sure that the students don't see what information their partners have.

B Organise the physical layout of the class and choose a topic that is relevant to the students. Decide on the groups before the class, and decide who will control it, and if you need someone to judge it. Let them **brainstorm** points they might make, and give them practice in language they might use.

C Pre-teach a few essential words, but not all the vocabulary they will meet, give them the first part, and ask them in groups to work together to predict what happens next.

D Set the scene, build up the story in the imagination of the students. Get students into pairs to predict what is going to happen with the conversation, then they can compare what they predicted with what comes up on the tape. Then ask them to practise.

4 Analysis and reflection

Pathumporn uses an **information gap** activity to create speaking opportunities between pairs in her class. Look at what John Kay says about information gap activities:

'In order for communication to be realistic and authentic, it is essential that one person has information which the other person doesn't have. Therefore, you have an information gap. To find out the missing information, the students need particular language . . . Once the students have this 'useful language' they can question each other and find the information.'

Look at the definitions below of different gaps that can be exploited. Work with a partner if you can, think about activities *you* do with your students, and add an example activity to each type of gap.

The information gap

This kind of gap is very commonly exploited by teachers. Student A has some information, e.g. concerning the prices of food. Student B needs to know these prices, and so asks A questions to find the information.

The information gap is ideally suited to pair and small group work and usually relies upon pre-prepared information cards.

Your example(s):

The experience gap

All students in classes have had different experiences in their lives – so this is immediately a gap. In some classes this gap is very marked. For example, a multilingual adult class in the UK will have had very different life experiences. A **monolingual** primary class will obviously show less difference.

Questionnaires can exploit the experience gap – particularly those that aim to practise past forms, e.g. a questionnaire to find out what games people played when they were children.

Your example(s):

The opinion gap

Everyone has different opinions, feelings and thoughts about the world. Finding out about someone's feelings and opinions helps close the gap between people. The number of personalised activities in many textbooks shows the value of this gap.

Your example(s):

The knowledge gap

Students know different things about the world. This gap can be exploited in brainstorming and general knowledge-style quizzes.

Your example(s):

Adapted from the Teaching English website:
www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/speak/find_gap.shtml

Look at the examples you have given. Are some types of gaps more suited to particular age groups?

Planning an information gap activity

Now think of a lesson you are going to do in the next two weeks. Write down an activity you could use to encourage the students to speak in pairs or groups that exploits a gap (in information, in experience, in opinion, in knowledge).

Gap activity:

After you do the activity, write a simple evaluation of it, you can answer some of the questions in the box to help you decide what to write.

Activity evaluation:

Did the students enjoy it? Why? Did it motivate them to speak English? Did they understand what to do? Would you make any changes to the activity if you used it again?

5 Additional activity

Speaking activities can be **personalised** by asking students to talk about things that are 'real' and relevant to them. **Personalisation** increases motivation, and helps the target language be memorable to students. In this section you will look at two ways of personalising language practice.

1 Same topic for different ages

If you can, work with a partner. What age range of students would find the following most interesting?

Age range

- 4–5
- 6–8
- 9–12
- 13–16
- 16+

Aspect of clothes

- Clothes for different jobs
- Clothes that are in or out of fashion
- Clothes they would never wear
- The clothes they are wearing today
- The importance of clothes as a statement of group identity
- The world of fashion; models, trademarks

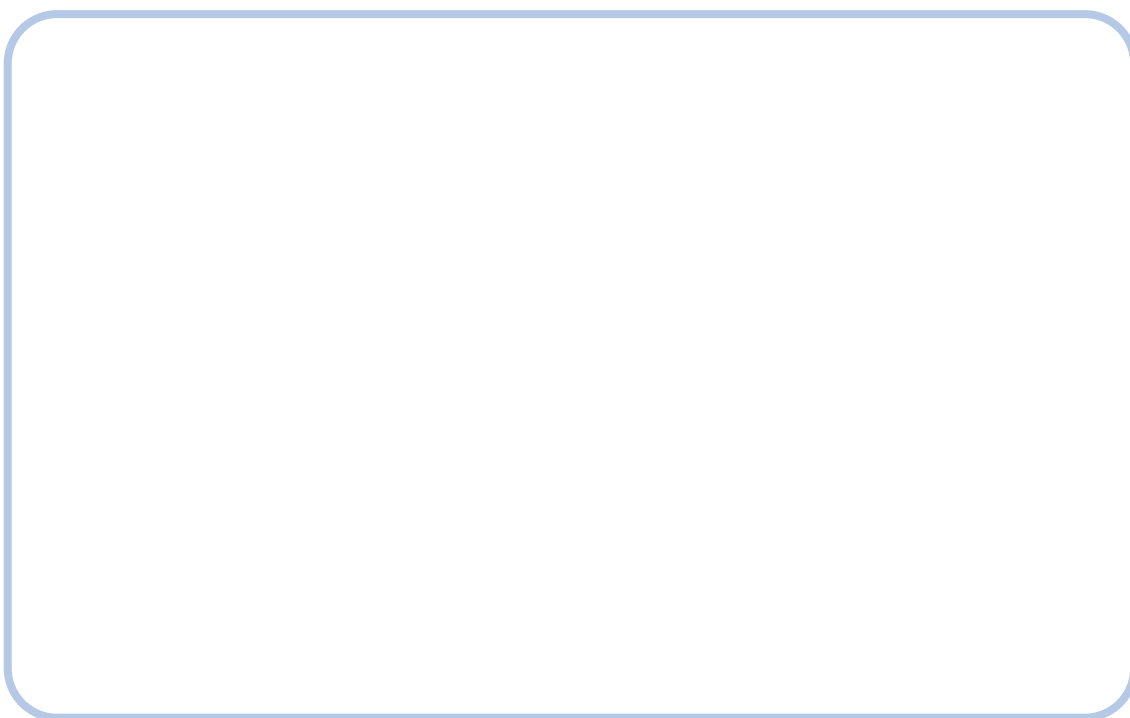
Now choose another topic and think how you would use it to interest students of different ages.

Possible topics: Colours, toys, animals, the classroom, daily routines, work, the house, hobbies, music, school, computers, sports, sports teams, music.

Choose one of these topics (or a topic of your own).

What aspects of your topic would you look at to suit students of different ages and interests?

Think about the students you know best but also think about different age groups. Would you deal with the topic in the same way or differently?



2 Student-generated questionnaire

Students can write questions to produce a questionnaire that aims to practise a language area.

Look at two sets of questions, A and B, below, for pair work speaking practice about weekday routines. Both of them ask for personal information, but one set of questions will produce more interesting answers. Which set? Why?

a

Find out from your partner:

- What time do you get up?
- What do you have for breakfast?
- How do you go to school?
- What time does school begin?
- How many lessons do you have every day?
- What time do you finish school?
- What time do you get home?

b

Find out from your partner:

- Do you use an alarm clock to wake up?
- Do you get up straight away?
- Can you eat breakfast as soon as you get up?
- What wakes you up most in the morning?
- Do you choose your clothes the day before?
- Do you talk a lot at breakfast?
- Do you eat breakfast standing up or sitting down?
- Do you listen to the radio, or watch television at breakfast?

The questions in B are more personalised. They ask for information that is meaningful and personal.

Write some questions for a mini-questionnaire about hobbies. Try to ask questions that personalise the topic, i.e. questions that encourage the students to answer with personal information about themselves.

Topic: hobbies

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

6 Suggested classroom activity

Picture dictation: An ideal room

This activity is a personalised picture dictation for teenagers. Each student draws a plan of their ideal room and all the things they want in it. Students then tell a partner about their room. The partner draws what is described. To finish, the students can look at the picture their partner has drawn to see how accurate it is and then students can discuss their rooms with each other.

For example:

- What are the good and bad points about each room?
- Which room do you like best? Why?

Suggested procedure

- 1 Pre-teach or revise items of furniture and 'right', 'left', 'top', 'bottom' and if you haven't already taught these, 'there is' and 'there are'.
- 2 Each student draws their ideal room or favourite room in their house on the top half of a large sheet of paper. On the bottom half of the paper, each student draws an empty box.
- 3 The students should sit in pairs. Make sure they can't see each other's paper.
- 4 Students take it in turns to describe their room/draw their partner's room on the paper.