

Quick and Fun Activities to Practice New Vocabulary

Tammi Santana

APPI's 23rd Annual Conference
"The English Classroom Revisited"
Lisbon, 30th of April - 2nd of May 2009

PASSWORD

Memory: There are ways we can explain vocabulary to our students, definitions, images, demonstration, but one of the most effective ways for them to remember is through association. We take in new information by attaching it somehow to information we already have stored in our brain. And if the association is personal to our students, even better.

Level: Pre-intermediate and up

Age: 10 to adults

Timing: 5 minutes or longer

Materials: Groups of 5 unrelated words on cards or on a list. You may use words that come up spontaneously in class.

Grouping: 2 teams with 2 students on each team. Each team member faces his mate.

Procedure: Give student 1 on team one 5 words. Student 1 gives one associated word for the first word on his/her list to student 2 on team 1. Student 2 says the first word that comes to mind. Student 1 gives another word until student 2 guesses the word or until student 1 says “password”. This activity is timed (between 30 seconds and 1 minute, depending on the level). The same procedure is repeated with team 2. After this, student 2 team 1 gives the associated clues to student 1, and finally, the turn goes back to team 2.

Notes: Only 1-word clues may be given. You cannot use any part of the word in your clue nor can you use gestures. Proper names and brands ARE accepted. Make certain the rest of the class sees the words on the list in order to involve the whole class.

PASAPALABRA

Memory: Sometimes with all the new memory techniques and tricks, we forget about good-old-fashioned rote memory – repetition is powerful for many minds.

Level: ANY

Age: ANY

Timing: 5 minutes ONLY! Do not extend

Materials: Any vocabulary or grammar list with 10 related items. For example, the 7 Deadly sins, opposites, irregular verbs, irregular plurals.

Grouping: 4 to 6 students

Procedure: Teacher gives the first word on the list to student 1. For example, T says “child” and student 1 must say “children”. Continue with the remaining words on the list. If the student makes a mistake, student 2 has a go, but starting again with the first word on the list. If they get very good, you can time them to see who finishes the list the quickest.

Note: It is amazing the attention that is paid by the rest of the class while they are awaiting their turn.

QUEEN FOR A DAY

Memory:

Level: ANY

Age: 6 to adults

Timing: 10 minutes or more

Materials: 1 chair, 1 queen's crown, 1 picture or word card in front of each s. For example, pictures with animals, clocks with time, places.

Grouping: Between 6 and 10 students standing in a line, facing their picture. STUDENT 1 sits on the throne (chair) with her crown on her head.

Procedure: The last student in the line (the queen is the first in line) must begin by calling out one of the other student's words. That student continues by saying another student's word. She who makes a mistake goes to the end of the line. The object is to de-throne the queen.

Notes: You cannot go back in forth with same students, for example, "tiger" "lion" "tiger" "lion". Make it more challenging by demanding perfect pronunciation and by not allowing any pauses. Teenagers are really good at this and young learners are fantastic. Adults? Well, try it with them and see for yourself.

BLACKBOARD SMUDGE OUT

Memory: Demonstration is the best way to instruct your students on a new activity or game. If they know you regularly give them a "for example" after explaining an activity and before beginning the task, they begin to relax and when they relax, their affective filters go down and they are able to take in more information and consequently, remember better.

Level: ANY

Age: ANY

Timing: 10 minutes

Materials: Between 10 and 20 pictures or word cards splashed on the board or table. 2 different colored markers.

Grouping: 2 teams with 2 students on each team. 2 students sit down with their backs to the board. Their team mate faces them.

Procedure: Pre-teach "This is what you use to/do when...." or "this is the thing that...." Simultaneously, both student 1 from team 1 and student 1 from team 2 begin describing any of the words. If their team mate guesses the word, student 1 crosses out (or takes that word) with their colored pen or chalk.

Notes: Gestures and miming ARE allowed. This gets exciting when they are fighting for the last words.

CLASS VOCABULARY SET

Memory: It doesn't matter what you do with new vocabulary, as long as you do SOMETHING.

Notes: There are a lot of words and expressions that come up spontaneously in every class. Put these words on a small piece of paper and review them at the end of each session. (10 words per day is a good goal. Too many words at one time is unsuccessful for the memory). Write the word exactly how it comes up in class. Not "to be fed up with" but "I'm fed up with traffic". Then review again at the beginning of the next class, eliminating the words they can remember well. Make this your routine; it works!! Then periodically you can play games with the words you have accumulated.

Extra Activities:

1. Make categories
2. Tic tac toe, 3 in a row
3. Lace a sentence together.
4. Pictionary
5. Pairwork for fast finishers or 5-minute fillers for the end of class
6. Vocabulary Dice

FLYSWAT

Memory: Visuals are effective!

Level: ANY

Age: ANY

Timing: 5 minutes

Materials: Between 10 and 20 pictures or word cards splashed on the board or table. 2 to 6 flyswats.

Grouping: 2 to 6 students

Procedure: Each student gets a flyswat. Teacher calls out, describes, defines or mimes a word or picture.

Notes: You can proceed as stated above by calling out a definition or an association for isolated words and expressions as well as by telling a story have the students slap the pictures or words which come up in the story.