

TOP  
**10**  
SERIES!



**BridgeTEFL**<sup>®</sup>

Premier English Teacher Certification

# TEACHING ENGLISH TO ADULTS

A COLLECTION OF OUR TOP 10 ARTICLES RELATED TO TEACHING ENGLISH TO ADULTS, INCLUDING CLASSROOM TIPS, GAMES & ACTIVITIES, AND FIRST-HAND ADVICE FROM TEACHERS IN THE FIELD.

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# INTRODUCTION



If you teach English to adult students, or are thinking of doing so, this eBook is for you. In it, you'll first get an overview of teaching this demographic versus teaching young learners, including a look at the regions where EFL teachers typically work with each group. You'll also find effective techniques related to teaching adult students, such as teaching classes of varying levels and dealing with challenging student types.

In addition to rich, theory-based content by experienced teachers, we'll drill down into the practical side of teaching adults by sharing real classroom ideas, such as games and activities, that you can use with your own adult students either online or in the classroom.

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# TEACHING ADULTS VS. TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS: POINTS TO CONSIDER

You've downloaded this eBook because you want to learn more about teaching English to adults. However, before we dive deeper into that topic, let's start with an overview of some of the major differences in teaching adults vs. teaching children, including the main pros and cons of each group.

## TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS



**Points to consider:** Some people prefer teaching adults because they are nervous that teaching kids will be too challenging, especially if they lack experience. However, consider these advantages to working with young students. And remember that being open to teaching any age group will increase your appeal to employers!

- Young students, and particularly elementary-aged kids, tend to have an **unbridled enthusiasm for learning** and won't hesitate to jump into fun English games you plan for class.
- Young learners tend to **lack the self-consciousness of adults**, so they are not shy about pronouncing new words or taking part in activities in which they may look silly in front of their classmates.
- It's **easy to see substantial progress** in young learners' English level, since they are able to absorb so much information and thus develop language skills so quickly.

## TEACHING ADULTS



**Points to consider:** As a teacher of adults, your students will often be working professionals, and teaching this demographic is typically referred to as teaching Business English. However, it's possible to have students from all walks of life, not just business professionals, including college students, stay-at-home moms, or retirees.

While adult learners may be more self-conscious or serious than children, they have their own unique advantages in the TEFL classroom.

- A major pro of teaching adult students is that many are in English class by choice and for their own personal or professional enrichment, so they tend to be **motivated students**. Even students who are in class under the requirement of an employer are still often motivated by meeting their employer's expectations.
- When teaching mature, autonomous adult learners, you'll **spend less time on classroom management** than you would teaching children, allowing for more focus on learning.

**Countries where it's common to teach young**

**learners:** While it's possible to teach English to young learners in any country, the main region where TEFL jobs involve working with children is Asia, specifically in countries such as China, South Korea, and Thailand. Another region where TEFL jobs may involve teaching children is Europe. It is less likely that TEFL jobs in Latin America will involve teaching young learners.



*"I taught at an international kindergarten in Hungary— it was a blast! It was a summer camp, so each week we had a different theme. One week we learned about cooking, and at the end of the week we all got*

*to go to a sushi restaurant. My students were fascinated by it! That summer, I grew so close to my students because we got to learn and discover new things together."*

– Kimmy, teacher of young learners in Hungary

**TEACHING CLASSES OF BOTH CHILDREN AND ADULTS**

If you can't decide which age group would be best for you, or you simply want to be a more marketable English teacher, you can make yourself available to teach classes of adults and classes of young learners.

**Countries where it's common to teach all ages:**

Europe and North Africa are the main regions where both young learners and are taught, but certainly in Asia (particularly Japan and Indonesia) and Latin America there are positions in which you may teach all ages as well.

**Teacher Feedback:** Meredith is a BridgeTEFL **CELTA course** graduate who taught both adults and children in Japan.

Learn more about TEFL locations around the globe or browse open teaching jobs on the **BridgeTEFL Job Board**.

▪ Adult students come from various professions, industries, and educational backgrounds, so **they bring a wealth of knowledge to the class** that can provide material for dynamic, engaging class discussions.

**Countries where it's common to teach adults/Business English:**

The main regions where teaching jobs involve working with adults students are Central and South America, Europe (where both age groups are commonly taught), and the Middle East.

**Teacher Feedback:** Wes Choc is a **TEFLOnline.com** graduate who taught adults students in Ecuador.



*"... my classrooms were made up of bartenders, stewards, waiters, chefs, engine room staff, and tour guides. Conspicuously eager to understand more than what they already knew, I was always well-received with smiling anticipations each day and perfect attendance. This was indeed enjoyable 'work'."*

– Wes, teacher of adult learners in Ecuador



*"The adult students are usually very open to talking about themselves, and the classroom provides an opportunity for both learning English and engaging in conversation about each other's cultures. The kids I teach are very funny and energetic, they are always eager to use what English they do know and talk with me during and outside of class!"*

– Meredith, teacher of both adults and young learners in Japan

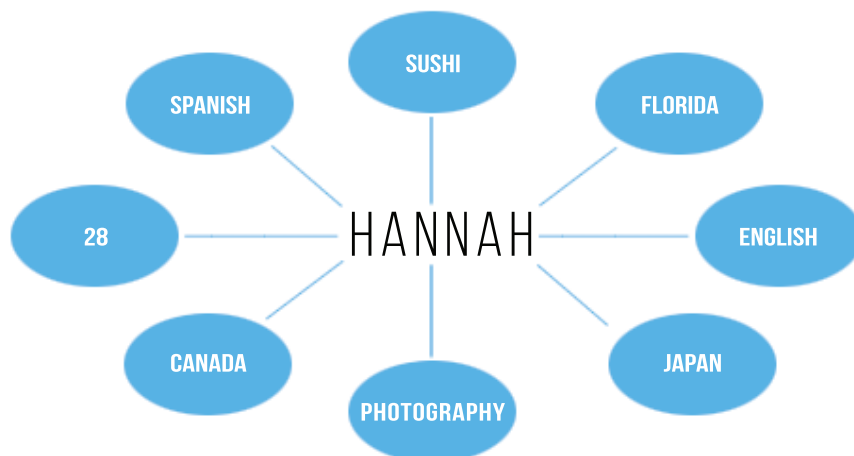


# 1. ICEBREAKERS FOR ADULT STUDENTS

Icebreakers can be used on the very first day of class to make students more comfortable when they don't know their classmates or you. However, icebreakers are also useful with your everyday classes to set the tone for the class and start with a bang. Remember, adult TEFL students might be arriving to English class tired after a long day at work, or they may have other work or home responsibilities on their mind, so you'll need strategies to get them feeling engaged and energetic! These are some ideas to do just that.

## WHAT'S THE QUESTION?

This is a fun icebreaker to introduce yourself to your students, and then have them get to know each other. It can also be adapted for general practice in asking Wh-questions (who, what, when, where, and why).



Put your name in the center of the whiteboard, with a circle around it. Draw smaller circles around your name and in each one, write a word that describes you in some way. It could be where you are from, your favorite food, where you grew up, etc. Make some of them easy and others more challenging.

Introduce yourself and tell students that the words on the board describe you. Give them a few minutes to think about what the questions might be for each of the words that surround your name. Students then have to ask questions to get to know you.

**Some example questions they could ask are:**

- Were you born in Canada?
- Did you grow up in Florida?
- Did you study English in college?
- Where does your family live?
- What language are you studying?
- Is your hobby photography?
- Where did you teach English before here?
- How old are you?
- What is your favorite food?

When they've guessed all the questions, it's now your students' turn. Give them a few minutes to draw similar word maps about themselves. Then they can work in pairs asking and answering questions about each other. When the activity is over, call on students to introduce their partner and tell the class something interesting they learned about him or her.

## TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

This game always seems to get adult classes going, especially when the teacher participates (since students are always curious to learn juicy facts about you)! The way this game works is students think of three unusual statements about themselves: two must be true and one must be false. As the teacher, you can start with an example, such as:

- One of my hobbies is surfing.
- I speak Arabic.
- I once dyed my hair pink.

The goal for the rest of the students is to ask questions to determine which statement is false. They

might ask questions such as:

- Where did you learn Arabic?
- Why did you dye your hair pink?
- Where is the last place you surfed?
- How do you say "How are you?" in Arabic?

This fun, whole-class activity can be a great icebreaker or even a time-filler when your lesson goes shorter than expected.

## FINISH THE SENTENCE

This is a simple activity that is surprisingly fun (and often funny)! Write several creative half-sentences on slips of paper that you think will engage the students or grab their interest. Some examples could be, "He never thought it would happen, but one day..." or "Maria woke up in the morning, and suddenly realized..." Students, in pairs, select a half-sentence and work together to come up with three possible endings to create sentences. Encourage them to be funny and creative. Then pairs read the finished sentences out loud.

For an added challenge that's sure to wake the class up, time them for 30 seconds and have them talk the whole time, expanding the story spontaneously. Another variation is to have one student start by finishing a half-sentence, then having a contest to see who can provide the next line the fastest.



### TEACHING TIP

Sometimes the class will not go according to your lesson plan. This is okay! Sometimes you just have a plan B in mind, so you have something ready just in case things don't work out the way you thought they would.



## 2. HOW TO TEACH CLASSES WITH MIXED ABILITIES

Whether you teach kids or adults, one common complication in English language teaching is finding that, despite the use of placement tests for incoming students, students of many different skill levels are often placed together in our classroom. This may be because the school does not have a sufficient number of students of a certain level, or because a student tested inaccurately during the intake interview (perhaps due to nervousness, for example). Regardless of the reason, it's important to be prepared.

Imagine a situation in which the moment the teacher passes out a reading comprehension exercise, Sergio is already finished while Juan has no idea how to begin. What can we as teachers do? Should we bore Sergio by adopting the "convoy" approach to teaching – in which everyone sticks with the slowest boat? Or, should we start checking the answers and ignore Juan's problem by telling him to work on the paper at home?



**One suggestion to handle students of varied levels is to change your expectations.**

Expect and accept that there will be varied ability in every class of language learners. After all, we work with infinitely variable human beings. It was the well-known teacher trainer, Mario Rinvolucri, who said, "...we do not teach a group but thirty separate people. Because of this, the problem of mixed abilities in the same room seems absolutely natural, and it is the idea of teaching a unitary lesson that seems odd."

**Once you have embraced the idea of diversity, here are some ideas to consider.**

- Plan different activities for different students.
- Design group tasks and assign people with mixed abilities to each group.
- Design open-ended group tasks and assist groups that need more support.

Let's admit that these techniques are more challenging for the instructor than teaching a unitary lesson, but they are often more effective for our students. You can address individual needs. – Full speed ahead!



Differentiate your instruction by challenging advanced learners in a Reading/Writing class when they have finished an activity early. Have them rewrite an excerpt from the reading in another tense, from another character's perspective, or with descriptive words that change the tone.

## 3. UNDERSTANDING FLUENCY: THE BASICS



Do you ever wonder what someone means when they say they are “fluent” in another language? If you’ve studied a language yourself, you may have similarly wondered how to know when you’ve crossed the line from knowing *un poquito* in Spanish, for example, to being *fluido*.

### **TEACHERS CAN EVALUATE FLUENCY BY ASSESSING THE FLUIDITY AND COHESION OF AN ENGLISH STUDENT’S SPEECH.**

**Fluidity** means the ability and willingness to produce longer utterances with a minimal amount of pausing. When analyzing **cohesion**, teachers need to consider whether or not what was said makes any sense. Most ESL/EFL teachers are likely familiar with students, or even native English speakers for that matter, who can speak with

great fluidity at length but without much of a point.

**Fluency** can also be defined more generally as the speed at which learners can access certain concepts or language items. In this sense, fluency can be applied to more than just speaking. It can also be applied to the other three language skill areas: reading, writing, and listening.

English language teachers need to allow for fluency practice in each of these skill areas, especially for more advanced learners. Below are a few ways to practice fluency for reading, writing, and listening.



### LISTENING

Choose a story that contains a few terms that are unknown to the students. Write any new words on the board. Read the story to the students each day, starting slowly. Each day, read a bit more quickly and also erase a few of the new words off the board. Eventually, you'll be reading quickly and the students will be accessing the concepts more quickly as well. As an adaptation, allow the students to dictate the rate at which you read.



### READING

The same can be done with reading. Ask the students to read a text several times over several days. Each time, you can either set a new reading task or keep track of how far they get in the text at the end of a set time limit. Theoretically, they should be able to get further in the text after each reading under the same time limit.



### WRITING

A similar approach can be taken with writing, but instead by measuring the number of words produced. Each day, give the students a writing prompt and a time limit. Keep the time limit consistent. Also keep a record of the number of words produced in their text, and be sure to compliment them on the content of the writing. As the focus is on fluency, you don't have to bother as much with error correction.



### TEACHING TIP

Capture student-generated language on the board to extend students' exposure to it. Why? It motivates students to see their language used for instruction, gives you insight for later error correction, saves on prep time, and supports visual learners.

# 4. LAST MINUTE, NO-PREP TEFL ACTIVITIES FOR ANY CLASS

Imagine you finish teaching a carefully planned out lesson only to glance at the clock and see 20 (terrifying) minutes remaining, with nothing for your students to do! Or what if you are asked to sub a class at the last minute, without being provided with a lesson plan? Stay calm! We've got you covered with these easy, last-minute TEFL lesson plans and activities that can be adapted to any level, for situations just like these. Best of all, they are more than just time-fillers; these activities can target specific grammar points and vocabulary, provide pronunciation practice, and encourage speaking.

## PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE— MINIMAL PAIRS

Don't worry if you can't quite remember what minimal pairs are; this pronunciation game is easy for the teacher and fun for students. Best of all, it requires no real preparation and just a white board and marker.

### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY: STUDENTS IDENTIFY CORRECTLY PRONOUNCED WORDS

#### How to play:

1. Make two columns on the whiteboard, and label them "right" and "left."
2. Think of pairs of short words your students already know that are exactly the same in pronunciation except for one different sound (these are called "minimal pairs"). Examples of minimal pairs are: she's/cheese, this/these, very/ berry, bad/bed, fan/van, etc. (for more examples, this website is helpful: [www.englishclub.com](http://www.englishclub.com)). Choose five pairs and for each,



LEFT	RIGHT
she's	cheese
this	these
very	berry
fan	van

write one word on the right and one word on the left side of the column.

3. Practice saying all the words with the class first, then tell students you will now call out a word from the board, and they should raise their left or right hand, depending on which column they see the word in. Reveal the right answer after each example.
4. After the warm-up, you're ready to play. Each student will number a piece of paper 1-5. Now you call out one word from each pair on the board. As you do, students write an R or L, depending on which word they hear. Review answers with students.
5. Change the words and play again.

**How to change it up:** Have a student come to the front of the class and call out words.

## LAST MAN STANDING

### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY: VOCABULARY REVIEW

**How to play:** You'll need a ball or something soft to throw from student to student. In a pinch, you can use a balled-up piece of paper.

1. Think of a vocab theme, with the students' level in mind. Examples for lower level students include: jobs, family, or foods. For higher levels, you could use verbs, adjectives, or nouns under a certain theme, such as words related to a party or to a business meeting. You can brainstorm words on the board first, then erase them all.

2. All students stand. Start the game by naming your category ("fruits" for example) then throwing the ball to a student. He or she catches it, names another fruit, and then throws the ball to another student, who names another one, then throws the ball again. If a student cannot think of a word, he or she has to sit.

3. The "last man standing" wins!

**How to change it up:** You can call on a student to choose the category. You can shout out a new category mid-way through the game. You can also play this game using word association, instead of categories, so there is no wrong answer.

## TEFL TABOO

### GOAL OF THE ACTIVITY: SPEAKING AND DESCRIBING

**How to play:**

1. Ask students to brainstorm some new vocab words they have learned so far in class. Have a student write them on the board as you choose about 10-15 good ones and write 5 each on separate pieces of paper for each group. Erase the board.

2. Depending on the size of the class, divide students into small groups of about 4 and give one student in each group a paper with the words.

3. Of the four students:

- One will be the "reader," describing the word (or, if you have groups of more than 4, then other students can help describe the word)

- One watches the time (two minutes)

- One has a "buzzer" (they can just hit the table or say "out!") in case one of the words is said by mistake


- One sits in the "hot seat" and tries to figure out the target word

4. When the teacher says go, the 2-minute "timer" starts and the student in the hot seat tries to guess as many words as possible, as described by the reader. The reader cannot say the word or any form of it. If he or she does, then the buzzer is hit and the reader moves on to the next word.

5. For the next round, rotate the list of words from one group to another and have students switch roles.

**How to change it up:** You can have students come up with the words in groups at the start of the game. For example, have them think of as many verbs as they can, or as many nouns related to a certain topic. Then pass each group's list to another group and play. Or, your school may have the real version of this game, which is great for advanced students!

These are great games for a TEFL teacher to have in his or her "back pocket" to avoid emergencies or empty class time. You don't need any special materials, and students will enjoy the chance to get up and move around.

To see EFL teachers in the classroom demonstrating different English teaching games, techniques, and lesson ideas, [CHECK OUT OUR FREE BRIDGETEFL VIDEOS!](#) 



## 5. TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR WITH THE GUIDED DISCOVERY APPROACH

Imagine you are planning to teach a lesson in verb tenses. You start out your lesson by defining the tense, giving examples in sentences, and then passing out a worksheet for your students to practice. This may be a very familiar grammar instruction technique to many of your students. But grammar instruction can, and should, be more than perfunctory. You want to teach language, after all, and language is so much more than the knowledge of grammar rules, isn't it? **Consider, instead, a communicative approach to teaching grammar.**

## BENEFITS TO USING A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO GRAMMAR TEACHING

Using a **communicative approach** calls for teaching your students grammar so that they remember it and understand its relationship to other grammatical forms; then they can use it autonomously and in unique situations: Communication!

To achieve this, teachers can introduce grammar in a relevant context, using what is called a **Guided Discovery approach** with an emphasis on top-down processing. For you and for your students, this will be a more memorable, and effective, learning experience.

## WHAT IS GUIDED DISCOVERY?

Guided Discovery is an approach that removes you, the teacher, from the main role of “explainer” and extends to the students the opportunity to question and discover the target grammar. When they have done that, they can then construct their own knowledge of what it means and how it is used.

## HOW DOES THIS APPROACH WORK?

For this concept to work, you have to create materials and a setting that places the target grammar in a context that is relevant and interesting enough for the students to care about. When their interest is piqued, they have a task that can only be completed by actively engaging with the language. While they are engaged in the task, you take on the role of “monitor,” remaining outside the activity until you are needed (for example, if communication breaks down). If you have set up the activity well, students will work toward the goal while relying on each other for practice and feedback.

When you start with whole language (e.g. an article) and the students have to discover the language and how it works (i.e. the rules, the standards, the exceptions, etc.), you are incorporating a top-down approach to language inquiry.

## EXAMPLE OF A SIMPLE GRAMMAR LESSON USING GUIDED DISCOVERY

Have students read a brief, interesting newspaper article. Give them a graphic organizer (a visual display that demonstrates relationships between facts, concepts or ideas) with four sections labeled: **present/past/future/I don't know**. After reading the article for comprehension, students must work collaboratively to organize all verbs from the article into the categories on the graphic organizer. They can reference grammar resources.

When they are done, have each group list three things they notice about the verbs in each category. Share the lists. While monitoring, you will clearly see problems students are having. After addressing all comments and questions, you can dive into direct instruction in order to differentiate between the forms they found, by explicitly teaching each form. But now that the students have spent time analyzing and discussing the grammar, they will be more motivated to learn from your direct instruction so that they can confirm or correct their ideas and those of their classmates.

Now you're not just teaching grammar rules; you've used a Guided Discovery approach to help students see the connection between grammar concepts they already know, and build on those connections in a proactive, communicative way.



### TEACHING TIP

Keeping a journal of student difficulties and errors in class can help you fill in learning gaps and plan future lesson plans. For example, if you notice the same error repeated by multiple students, you can easily plan a whole class to readdress that point.

## 6. TEACHING ENGLISH IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM

While many teachers consider the language level and age group they would prefer to work with when teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), another sometimes overlooked consideration is whether they will be teaching in a monolingual or a multilingual classroom setting.



### THE MONOLINGUAL CLASSROOM

A monolingual classroom means the students all share the same mother tongue. For example, imagine you are teaching English at a language school in Mexico. Your students are locals from the community, and the majority of them are from Mexico. You may also have some students from neighboring countries, but all students will still speak Spanish, so this class is monolingual.



### THE MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM

A multilingual class, on the other hand, is one with students from various countries who may all speak different languages. For example, if you teach English at a language school in the U.S., you might teach local residents as well as students who have come from abroad to study English in an immersive setting. Your multilingual class, therefore, could have students from the Middle East, Europe, Asia, or any region.

### WHAT ISSUES WILL I HAVE TO CONSIDER IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM?

Since most TEFL-certified teachers are trained for jobs in monolingual classrooms, let's take a look at the challenges you will face in a multilingual setting, and how each can be turned into an advantage.

- **There is no common first language among students in a multilingual classroom.**

Students in a multilingual classroom can't chat in their first language or turn to their classmate to clarify a grammar point or define a vocab word in their mother tongue. All communication has to be in the common language—English. While more challenging, this is great practice for students!

- **Cultural experiences of students differ.**

The fact that students come from vastly different countries and cultures makes for great conversation starters in class. As the teacher, you can use culture as a springboard to introduce class topics like worldwide holidays, food vocabulary, or otherwise stimulate the class with new perspectives.

- **Students in a multilingual class are making different mistakes in structure and pronunciation.**

Students in a monolingual classroom often understand each other not because they speak correctly,



but because they make the same mistakes. For example, a classroom of Chinese students may all struggle with the “r” sound in English, so they understand their classmate when he mispronounces words with “r.” However, if that same Chinese student is in a multilingual classroom, he will need to pronounce “r” words so that everyone in the room understands him. This has the potential to make all students in the class better speakers and listeners.

▪ **Students have different learning styles.**

Learning styles differ between students and between cultures. In a multilingual classroom, you’ll have students from cultures where the teacher’s role is to lecture and give tests, mixed with learners from cultures where students are encouraged to actively participate in class. Pair work and small groups made up of students from different cultures can be the perfect opportunity for students to get out of their comfort zone and try a new approach to learning English.

As a **TEFL-certified** English teacher, your career can lead you in many directions, including monolingual or multilingual classrooms at home or abroad. Making the most of the unique circumstances you and your students will face in a multilingual classroom will help to make you an engaging and effective teacher.



**TEACHING  
TIP**

“Flip” your reading classroom! Giving students readings to complete at home, where they traditionally do practice activities for homework, leaves class free for teacher-guided instruction and activities. Understanding the benefits, students will complete homework so as not to miss valuable in-class instruction.

## 7. FUN TEFL GAMES FOR ADULTS

So, you landed your first TEFL gig for adults. You might be thinking: “What am I going to teach now without my arsenal of fun TEFL games?” Fear not, dear teacher! While adults may appear serious, with a little encouragement, they can enjoy a good game just as much as your average elementary-schooler. With adult learners, however, be sure to explain how the game you play targets a particular language point or encourages fluency, so that adult students don’t feel they are “wasting their time” (or money!)

Also bear in mind that not all games work well with adults (you can toss Simon Says aside), so here are a few favorites that are guaranteed to get your adult students out of snore mode and into play mode.



### WHAT’S MY JOB?

This game can be played a variety of ways (What’s my job?/What’s my problem?/Where am I?) but the premise is the same. Using “What’s my job?” as an example, start by eliciting students’ jobs and vocabulary for professions. Discuss. Then tell students you just got a second job and they have to guess what you do by asking yes/no questions.

#### They might ask questions such as:

- Do you work in an office?
- Is your job fun?
- Do you wear a uniform?
- Do you make a lot of money?

Write a few of the questions on the board as they ask them. After they get the hang of the game and guess what your job is, students are ready to play. Write the names of other well-known jobs on post-it notes and stick one post-it-note on each student’s back (they cannot look!).

The students must now mingle around the classroom and ask other students questions about themselves to figure out what their job is. Each student’s goal is to guess what his or her job is based on the answers to the questions they ask classmates.

- Do I work outside?
- Is my job dangerous?
- Do I work with other people?
- Do I work at night?

After they are finished, a follow-up activity is to have a student volunteer to think of his or her own job/famous person/problem and as a class, other students ask questions to guess.



## JEOPARDY

Jeopardy might be the holy grail of classroom games. Here's a fun and educational version for your ESL class that works well for reviewing different grammar points:

- Prepare one or two rounds of Jeopardy, depending on how much time you have. You can set it up just like the TV show, with clues valued at \$100-\$500 for regular and \$200-\$1000 for double Jeopardy. Then, create language-related categories that are centered on the topics you want to review, such as "past-continuous," "food vocab," and "how often." Write the value of the clue on one side of paper and the question on the other side.
- Students divide into 2-3 teams, depending on the size of the group. One team will call out the clue, such as "past-continuous for \$300." The teacher reads the clue, and the first person to raise their hand gets a chance to answer (Just like real Jeopardy). The team that answers correctly first gets to choose the next clue.
- Keep track of the score on the whiteboard or chalkboard. Subtract money for wrong answers.
- Finish with a final jeopardy clue, typically something from a class discussion or reading that will test their memory. They get to choose their wager just like the real show.

Have fun, and be prepared for your adults to be fired up and jumping out of their seats on this one!



## WOULD YOU RATHER...?

This game is a fun way to practice the modal "would" for questions and it's also good for speaking practice. Start by putting an example of a "would you rather" question on the board to start a class discussion. For example, tell students they have to choose: would they rather have a surprise test or have to talk in front of the class for one full minute. This should spark discussion! Provide a few more examples, suitable to their level, such as:

- "Would you rather be lost in a bad part of town or lost in the forest?"
- "Would you rather never use social media again, or never watch another movie or TV show?"
- "Would you rather be famous or rich?"

Then have students work in small groups or pairs to make up their own "would you rather" questions. Encourage them to be as ridiculous, silly, or as deep they want. Once they've made up their questions, students ask each other and then follow up with "Why?"



### THE GREAT DEBATE

This is a good choice for more advanced students. Show photos of controversial subject matter, such as a photo essay of a current event in world news. You can also read an article about the topic if you want to go more in-depth, and pre-teach related key concepts and vocabulary.

Divide students into two teams and assign each team an opinion on the matter. For example, one side does not believe global warming is real and the other side does. It is important to assign opinions so students will speak freely in their roles and not feel like they are actually sharing their personal thoughts. Adults can be very passionate about this one, especially when discussing relevant current events.



### BOARD RACE

This game gets students up and moving, so it can be especially good for the end of class, when students may be getting listless. It can be used to review a range of grammar topics and vocabulary, or even pronunciation! Here's how this classic TEFL relay-race works.

First, split the class into two teams (or more teams if you have a very large class) and have them line up at a distance from the board (put a tape line down on the floor if possible, that they must stand behind). Give the first person in line on each team a whiteboard marker.

On the board, draw a line down the middle and write a level-appropriate topic at the top, such as "jobs" or "verbs for the office." When you say "go," the first student from each team must race to the board and write a vocabulary word (or two or three— as many as you decide) under that topic and then pass off the marker to the next, waiting team member to do the same. At the end of a set amount of time, say "stop" and count up the points. Each team wins one point for each correct word. Any words that are misspelled are not either counted or worth half a point.



### TEACHING TIP

Try this old-school method of filling unplanned time in a lesson. Keep a stash of interesting magazine pictures as writing or speaking prompts. Give students a basic directive and see what they come up with! Pictures are cheap, easily collected, and can be used repeatedly for various activities.

## 8. INTERVIEW WITH ONLINE ENGLISH TEACHER, KRZL NUÑES



My first stint as an English teacher started five years ago, in the comfort of my house, in front of a laptop, and with a pair of noise-canceling headphones. I had just been accepted by a Philippines-based company to teach English to Japanese students online. My first student was Tsuyo, a cheerful engineer who loved to talk about the outdoors and scenery in his city. At the end of the course, he thanked me for the classes and said that he would help me if I ever planned to travel to Japan!

Looking back, getting that online teaching job was a privilege as it opened a lot of doors for me as an ESL teacher, especially considering that I come from a non-native English speaking country. After that job teaching online, I have gone on to teach in traditional classroom-based positions for several other institutes in different countries, and time and again my experience as an online teacher not only made my work more interesting, but also helped me improve my classroom teaching skills. Here are just some of the reasons why:

### **Online TEFL made me resourceful**

Some people think that studying English online would be a bit dull and limited no matter how advanced the communication means may be. As an online teacher, I learned to be creative, looking for or developing my own activities to hold students' attention. Whether it was a "Spot the Difference" game or talking about interesting topics – not just the usual ones of work and travel– I used pictures a lot and shared online resources for practicing English. Once, I tried playing a **tic-tac-toe speaking game**, which I usually utilize in the classroom, in an online class. For this, I used PowerPoint as the game board and shared the screen with my student. It occupied half of the class time, we practiced a lot of new vocabulary, and he said that he liked it a lot!

### **Knowing different cultures taught me to deal with people better**

"Japanese students need to feel that they can trust you before they can open up to you." This was one of my first mentor's many reminders before I started teaching. Because of this, I got to be conscious of how I would

start conversations and make corrections. It's fun meeting people of various nationalities, but teaching them requires a lot of awareness about their culture. Some students could be warm and friendly, while others could be straightforward in speaking their thoughts. I've learned to adjust my way of teaching simply based on my knowledge of cultural diversity.

### **I learned to be prepared for anything**

Despite having efficient, modern video-chat programs and being comfortable behind a screen, we get those occasional troubles while teaching online: slow connection, distractions from both sides, you name it. Once, I was teaching a student and it suddenly rained heavily. The rain splattering on the roof drowned our voices out so much that I had to run downstairs with my laptop to find a quiet place. In another class, our neighbors' dogs started barking collectively. Quick as I was to apologize, I used that moment to ask my student if she had pets. Incidents like these do happen, but it's important to be ready for anything and have a backup plan just in case.

### **My students are, simply put, my main drivers**

How could I forget that Spanish student I taught who used to commute for six hours a day to work? Or that Japanese girl who was having classes on her phone while on the train home? These stories, even the simplest ones, like a lady telling me about her hobbies, are what have made my online teaching experience memorable. And with these, I always look forward to the next classes, knowing that there will always be a fun fact to share, a new story to hear, and a new student to help with his or her English skills.

*If you would like to teach English online, the [Bridge Specialized Certificate in Teaching Online](#) can provide the targeted training you need.*



### **TEACHING TIP**

Differentiate your instruction by challenging advanced learners in a Reading/Writing class when they have finished an activity early. Have them rewrite an excerpt from the reading in another tense, from another character's perspective, or with descriptive words that change the tone.

# 9. CHALLENGING ADULT TEFL STUDENTS AND HOW TO HANDLE THEM

This eBook is focused on teaching adult learners, but even if your TEFL career involves teaching classrooms of corporate executives instead of kindergartners, you will still have classroom management issues to tackle, such as dealing with challenging students. **Here are 5 common student types you'll run across and strategies for recognizing, understanding, and dealing with them to keep your classroom running smoothly.**



## 1. THE DOMINATOR

This student is eager, enthusiastic, and anxious to demonstrate what she knows (this student type can also be the familiar teacher's pet). It's great that she's an involved and motivated student but unfortunately, she articulates this eagerness by being the first to call out the answer every time you ask the class a question. Her outbursts rob other students (who may be more introverted or just need a moment to formulate their answer) of the chance to participate because they can't compete with the Dominator.

### **How to deal:**

As the teacher, your students look to you to facilitate a fair classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Therefore, even though your students are adults, it's okay to make class rules. Putting a rule in place that requires students to raise their hands when they know an answer, rather than blurting it out, gives you the opportunity to call on less vocal students. Also keep in mind that many Dominators don't mean to disrupt; they just want to do their best in class or they simply value the opportunity to practice talking in English. Therefore, another solution to dealing with this enthusiastic student type is to pair up two Dominators for partner work, giving both of them the outlet they are seeking.



## 2. THE CLASS CLOWN

You remember this student from when you were in high school or college (or maybe you were this student). He's always got a witty retort to the teacher's question, and loves making the class laugh. Sure, it can be funny, but if his antics keep his classmates (or him) from learning English, it's a problem.

### **How to deal:**

With adult students, it might seem like ignoring this student would be the solution, but the Class Clown is attention-seeking, so that will likely just make him joke around more. Instead, try physically moving toward the student while you're teaching. Walk over and stand by him while you're teaching or give him a task, like keeping score game or moderating a class debate. Even though this student is an adult, don't forget to praise him for good work so that he gets the attention he needs in other, less distracting ways.



## 3. THE SILENT STUDENT

Adult students might be silent for many reasons: fear of making a mistake, general shyness, or just a preference for listening and observing over speaking up. Whatever the reason, silence is deadly in the EFL classroom, where communicating in English is the goal.

### **How to deal:**

Try talking privately to the student after class to find out why she is quiet in class. She may not even be aware she's not participating! Keep in mind, too, that some students need more time to think about their answer before responding to the teacher's question. Therefore, after you ask a question, try giving the class a couple of minutes to write down their answers individually before you call on anyone. Another good technique for taking the pressure off quiet students is utilizing partner or small group work. It's much easier for shy students to speak to one or two people than it is to a whole class!





#### 4. THE TRANSLATOR

Imagine that you've painstakingly created vocabulary flashcards for your class of Saudi Arabian students so that they can associate the new vocabulary you are teaching with an image, rather than with an Arabic word. Yet there's one student who insists on calling out the Arabic translation right after each English word is presented—just what you're trying to avoid!

**How to deal:**

While translation is usually discouraged in the EFL classroom, the truth is, some students do learn this way and maybe he's one of them. Have a private conversation with this student and instead of chastising him with "no translating in class," validate the fact that this learning method works for some students. Then ask him, for the courtesy of others in the class who learn visually, to please write down, rather than say the translation, if he feels this method benefits him.



#### 5. THE ARGUER

The Arguer has a gift for analyzing concepts and pays great attention to detail, but as a result, she seems to challenge every grammar or speaking point you present. For example, you're teaching students how they might hear native speakers pronounce the phrase, "Don't you?" as "dōnchū?" The Arguer will tell you you're wrong because it's nowhere in the book!

**How to deal:**

First, always stay cool, calm, and patient and avoid arguing with the Arguer. Instead, present evidence of your point rather than simply relying on your expertise as "the teacher." For example, make an activity out of bringing in a short song or clip from a TV show, in which students can hear this pronunciation for themselves. Or, ask the Arguer to bring in similar examples to demonstrate her own point.

Challenging students often represent different learning styles, so bear that in mind when faced with The Dominator, The Arguer, or other student personalities. Knowing what challenges you and your adult TEFL students can expect and having a plan for dealing with them can make your classroom much easier to manage.



## TEACHING TIP

Increase class participation with this simple technique. When asking the class a question, tell students to write an individual answer and share it with a neighbor before answering out loud. This helps level the playing field amongst outgoing and introverted students – giving everyone a chance to think.

# 10. USE SONGS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM!

In order to teach a successful English lesson, you need to keep your students engaged. Using popular songs in the EFL classroom is a fun way to add some energy to a lackluster grammar topic while giving students a lesson in American pop culture at the same time!

It's usually best to use a popular song that students are familiar with. This gets students interested in the lesson right away and allows them the chance to sing along when they hear it later! Teachers can pre-teach vocabulary in the song so students don't get stuck on words they don't know.

## HERE ARE THREE WAYS YOU CAN USE SONGS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

### The classic gap fill:

Find the lyrics to a song you want to use (go to a site like [www.lyrics.com](http://www.lyrics.com) to get them). Then create a new document, replacing strategic words with blanks. Perhaps you can focus on a specific grammar point you have studied recently. For example, if you just learned imperatives for direct orders, you can use a song like "Hey Jude," and leave off the verbs that start each line. Have students work either individually or in small groups to fill in the missing words as they listen. Either give them the whole song, or cut it up into verses and give each group one verse.

### Error correction:

This game is good for more advanced students who need to sharpen their listening skills (though it can be adjusted to suit all levels). Similar to the gap fill, in this exercise you can put students in groups or have them

work individually to correct the mistakes, rather than fill blanks, in their copy of the song lyrics.

### Draw the verse:

This is a good activity for any level, as long as you adjust your song choice in regard to vocabulary and verb tense. First, put students in small groups and tell them they are going to listen to a song and decide what it's about. Then play the song and have a class discussion about it.

Now you're ready to give each group a verse of the song (that you previously divided) and ask them to draw what they see in the verse. Once the groups have finished, you can tape the drawn verses up on the board at the front of the class and play the song again, so that everyone can "see" the song as it is played.

Now you have a few more ideas to get students excited about learning English vocabulary and grammar. Once you start using songs in the classroom, you will never listen to music the same way!



## TEACHING TIP

Previewing vocabulary helps students understand an audio or video lesson better. Prepare a list of words that they will hear and review them as a class to teach their meanings prior to the activity. This not only makes students feel more confident about their comprehension skills, but also saves you time since you can play the material fewer times and get fewer vocabulary questions afterward.



As you embark on, or continue in, a career in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) to adult students, we hope these tips, techniques, and activities provide inspiration and resources you can use.

Explore more articles about teaching English on the [Bridge TEFL blog](#) or browse options for TEFL certification for new teachers and professional development for current teachers at [WWW.BRIDGE.EDU/TEFL](http://WWW.BRIDGE.EDU/TEFL).



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