

# HOW TO REVIEW & TEST

## LIKE A PRO

30 TOP SECRETS ABOUT SUPER EFFECTIVE TESTS & REVIEW STRATEGIES

**TURN**

YOUR DULL  
REVIEW LESSONS INTO  
RAZOR-SHARP  
**LEARNING**  
OPPORTUNITIES

TESTING  
DOES NOT  
HAVE TO BE  
**THE MOST**  
**BORING**  
PART OF THE UNIT

CONSOLIDATE EVERYTHING  
**INTO A COHESIVE**  
LANGUAGE LEARNING  
EXPERIENCE

 HOW DO YOU MAKE SURE STUDENTS HAVE GRASPED THE INFORMATION YOU COVERED?



# CONTENTS

- HOW TO REVIEW AND TEST**
- 3 **MUST READ:** How to Teach Review Lessons: Success Strategies
  - 4-5 **REVIEW:** Are You Sure You Understand? 4 Engaging Ways to Review
  - 6 **REVIEW:** 8 Top Tips for Giving Your ESL Class a Review Lesson They'll Love
  - 7 **REUSE:** Reuse and Recycle: Strategies for Reusing Lesson Plans
  - 8 **VERB TENSES:** How to Do a Comprehensive Review of Verb Tenses for Intermediate ESL Students
  - 9 **GRAMMAR DRILLS:** Quick Grammar Drills for Review and Practice
  - 10 **VERB TENSES:** Are You Tense About Tenses? 5 Tense Review Activities
  - 11 **COMPREHENSION:** What's Sticking With Your Students? Six Simple (and Sticky) Strategies for Checking Comprehension
  - 12 **CHECK ANSWERS:** That's Correct! 7 Great Ways to Check Answers with Your ESL Class
  - 13 **BEFORE THE TEST:** Reviewing ESL: 8 Mistakes Your Students Must Overcome Before the Test
  - 14 **REVIEW:** 7 Steps to Fail-proof Your ESL Review Lesson
  - 15 **VOCABULARY REVIEW:** 6 Absolutely Essential ESL Games for Vocabulary Review
  - 16 **GRAMMAR REVIEW:** 5 Great Games for Grammar Review
  - 17 **VOCABULARY REVIEW:** 7 Killer Resources for Vocabulary Review
  - 18-19 **TESTS:** 12 Teacher Tips for Writing Good Test Questions
  - 20 **TESTS:** Testing 1-2-- Tips on How to Create Effective Tests
  - 21 **TESTS:** How To Test Your ESL Students: Best Practices
  - 22 **TESTS:** Tests Are Your Friends: How to Make Test Preparation Fun
  - 23 **TESTS:** 6 Strategies for Assessment in the ESL Classroom: What Type of Tester Are You?
  - 24 **COMMUNICATIVE ASSESSMENTS:** How to Create All-Purpose Communicative Assessments for ESL Students
  - 25-26 **HOW TO ASSESS:** Top 10 Ways to Assess Your Students
  - 27 **INFORMAL ASSESSMENT:** Testing by Walking Around: Great "Quick and Dirty" Informal Assessments for the ESL Class
  - 28 **SPEAKING:** How to Evaluate Speaking
  - 29 **WHY DO THEY FAIL?:** 5 (Not So) Surprising Factors that May Affect Your ESL Students' Test Scores
  - 30 **SPEAKING:** 6 Best Tips for Reviewing for an ESL Speaking Test
  - 31 **TESTS:** 5 Keys to Designing and Conducting Effective ESL Speaking Tests
  - 32 **TESTS:** 7 Ways to Create Tests that Make Students Feel Good about Themselves
  - 33 **MORE WAYS TO TEST:** Mind the Gap! 10 Fun Fill in the Blanks Activities for Any ESL Class
  - 34 **MORE WAYS TO TEST:** Beyond Multiple Choice: 7 Additional Ways to Test Your ESL Students
  - 35 **HOW TO GRADE:** 3 Easy Steps to Grading Student Essays

# How to Teach Review Lessons: Success Strategies

**IT IS BEST TO REVIEW OFTEN THROUGHOUT THE COURSE TO KEEP MATERIAL FRESH IN STUDENTS' MIND AND ESPECIALLY BEFORE MAJOR EXAMS WHICH COVER A LOT OF TOPICS. REVIEWING WILL HELP STUDENTS FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE WITH OLD MATERIAL AND GIVE YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMBINE TOPICS WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN STUDIED SEPARATELY.**

If there is a particular warm up activity that you always use to start your lessons, you can do that but there is generally so much material to cover during a review lesson that a warm up activity is not necessary.

**FOR CERTAIN CLASSES A STUDY GUIDE MAY BE APPROPRIATE.**

In this case, provide students with a study guide which summarizes what they have learned and what will be covered in the exams. Include the target structures and key vocabulary from each chapter and any diagrams or maps that they should be familiar with. This does a lot to build student confidence because they have a hard copy of what they should review and what sections of the course you feel are most important.

The study guide should include every type of question students will encounter on the exam, all directions such as "Circle the correct answer", and any additional material you would like them to review but may not necessarily be on the exam. Sometimes simply the format of the exam confuses and frustrates students so this guide will help them with that and they will be better equipped to perform well.

When using a study guide as the basis for your review lesson, ensure that it is interactive. Have students translate the vocabulary words on the sheet, leave blanks in target structures for students to fill in, and list only the questions of a model dialogue so students have to write down their answers. This way, the study guide can serve the purpose of helping students with their individual review as well as

structuring the review lesson.

Have students speak as often as possible throughout the lesson as the exam will most likely be a test of their writing, listening, and reading skills.

Some classes may be very confident with the material on an exam or perhaps you have set aside two class periods for review activities so, if there is time, you can conduct a Quiz Game as a fun review activity which will take an entire thirty to forty-five minute period.

To conduct this activity, prepare five categories with five to six questions each. The categories, for example, may be "Vocabulary, Translation, Classroom English, Answers, Questions" where students have to translate words or phrases for the first two categories, explain or act out classroom English phrases for the third, answer questions for the fourth, and provide the question for the answer that was provided for the fifth. For scoring you may choose to award only one point for correct answers for the first category but five for correct answers for the fifth category.

To play have students form groups of three to five, explain the categories and scoring, choose the first category, and the first group to correctly answer the question gets the points and is allowed to choose the next category. The game ends when all the questions have been answered or the class ends and the group with the most points wins. As an incentive the winners might receive a couple extra credit points on the exam or something similar.

Conducting a review lesson or two before every exam will give students a better idea of what to expect on the test and make them more confident with that material. Reviewing topics frequently throughout the course will put less pressure on you and students in these major review lessons. Larger writing activities allow students to

draw upon all their English education to complete the exercise, games such as the Quiz Game described above can give students a break from learning new material halfway through the term to review what has already been covered, and short quizzes on older material can highlight what points need special attention during a big review lesson. If students enjoyed playing a particular game or doing a specific activity for a topic when it was introduced, conducting the same game or activity as a review later on would be appropriate too.

**THERE ARE SO MANY METHODS OF CONDUCTING BOTH LONG AND SHORT REVIEW ACTIVITIES AND USING A VARIETY OF THEM WILL GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS ASSISTING ALL YOUR STUDENTS WITH THEIR ENGLISH ACQUISITION.**

# Are You Sure You Understand?

## 4 Engaging Ways to Review

**IT'S THE END OF A UNIT, AND YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE STUDENTS HAVE GRASPED THE INFORMATION YOU COVERED. YOU ASSIGN A REVIEW WORKSHEET FOR HOMEWORK, AND STUDENTS FILE INTO CLASS THE NEXT DAY TO REVIEW IT.**

You ask students for their answers, they give their answers. It's all very functional, until you look around and see bored faces with a few students falling asleep. "Teacher, we've studied this before. We already know this," you hear a few students say. How can you make review more exciting so that students actually get the practice you want them to have? Here are a few activities that work for any review or homework exercises with very little preparation ahead of time.

### TRY THESE 4 ENGAGING WAYS TO REVIEW

#### 1 CONNECT 4

When reviewing any homework or practice exercise, allow students to work individually on the assignment or give it as homework the night before. Then, split them into two or three groups (three groups is the ideal number for this game, although four groups is possible). Give students time to discuss their answers and instruct them to have only one answer for the entire group.

While the students are checking their answers with each other, draw a grid that is at least 5 rows x 5 columns on the board. Although you could have a slightly larger grid if needed, smaller grids won't work as well. Inside each box, write the number of a question. If you have more than 25 questions, you can leave some questions as "bonus" questions, or draw a larger grid. If you have less than 25 questions, you can put up 12 "question" boxes where students must answer questions, and 12 "explanation" boxes where students explain why the answer is correct (this set up works great for error correction sentences), and a free space.

Explain to the students that the object is to answer four connected questions in a row, column, or diagonal line. Allow them a few minutes to plan a strategy of which four questions they would like to answer. Start with one group and allow them to choose one question to answer. If they are correct, they get their team's initials in the space. If they are incorrect, the space remains open for another team to answer. Then, the second team chooses a space. Remind the teams that they should play offensively to fill as many spaces as quickly as possible, but they should also consider choosing questions to "block" their opponents. The first team to connect four spaces wins!

If you have extra questions, these would work well as bonus questions. Have the numbers listed on the board outside of the grid, and tell students that if they choose to answer one of those questions, they can erase an opposing team's initials from any box. To put their own initials in the box, they must wait for their turn to come again and answer a different bonus question.

#### 2 HUMAN TIC-TAC-TOE

Another interactive game to play with students is Tic-Tac-Toe. This game could work well with reviewing homework questions previously done with students, or this could be done by writing review questions the students haven't seen yet. To set up this game, arrange nine desks in the middle of the room in a 3x3 grid. Draw a 3x3 tic-tac-toe grid on the board as well to help students visualize the set up. Divide students into two teams and have them stand on opposite sides of the classroom (or sit in any extra desks off to the side that you may have).

Explain the strategy of tic-tac-toe to your students, and inform them that since the middle space is the best location, that is where the hardest question will be, the corners will be medium difficulty questions, and the

middle-outside locations will be the easiest questions. I find it helpful to number the grid on the board 1-9 so students can choose questions easily.

The first team nominates one student to choose a spot on the board based on which location the team wants and how difficult of a question they would like to answer. Tell the student to stand by the chair that (s)he wants. Walk over to the student and show the question written on the note card, and set a time limit for that student to answer the question. Instruct the class that only that student may answer the question, - the teammates cannot help. If the student answers the question correctly, they may sit and remain sitting in that spot. If the student answers the question incorrectly, they return to their team. You can either use the same question again for that chair, or have a new replacement question for someone else to try. (I prefer having replacement questions as it can be too easy if students know the question in advance). The game continues until a team has three members sitting in a winning format.

I usually have enough questions prepared to play at least three rounds as students get very competitive with this game. After we have finished the rounds, I have a paper with all of the questions printed on it. Sometimes we review the questions as a class, and sometimes I just allow the students to take it home and study from it in case they missed any of the questions asked to a different classmate.

#### 3 BINGO!

Everyone's favorite classic game can also be used as a review tool. Most obviously it can be used to review vocabulary, but it can also be used to review grammar and other skills as well. For example, you can show questions on a projector individually that might be fill in the blank (e.g. Tom \_\_\_\_\_ to the store yesterday... and students would look to see if they had went on their bingo

sheet). Just be careful if more than one answer could fill in the blank to mark your master bingo list accordingly. Creating bingo sheets is easy by using any of the free online bingo generators, and you could review all kinds of topics: any of the verb tenses, phrasal verbs, gerunds/infinitives, adjective clauses, noun clauses, etc.

## **4 CLASSIC GAME SHOWS**

Of course, there are also the classic TV game shows that make for great review activities. Turn a PowerPoint into a Jeopardy question board and allow students to write on individual white boards to answer. Or, for less teacher preparation, play Family Feud face-off style by having a bell or a Staples' "That was easy" button when you ask a question and whoever hits it first gets to answer.

### **REVIEW IS A CRITICAL PART OF LANGUAGE LEARNING, AND YET IT'S EASY FOR STUDENTS TO TUNE OUT.**

Creating a little competition will motivate students to pay more attention to the review process and hopefully improve retention. Just remember to save time for extra explanation of some difficult questions if necessary as students can become too focused on the competition and not on the learning.



# 8 Top Tips for Giving Your ESL Class a Review Lesson They'll Love

**REVIEW LESSONS ARE VERY IMPORTANT AND OFTEN A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO CONSOLIDATE EVERYTHING YOUR STUDENTS HAVE LEARNED. BUT LET'S FACE IT. THEY ARE USUALLY VERY BORING.**

So boring in fact, that we don't enjoy them, and students often feel they are not really doing anything productive.

So, here are some tips that will turn your dull review lessons into razor-sharp learning opportunities!

## **HOW TO GIVE YOUR ESL CLASS A REVIEW LESSON THEY'LL LOVE: 8 TOP TIPS**

### **1 DON'T GO THROUGH A LIST**

Of course, students need to review the vocabulary and grammar they've learned, whether you're reviewing for a unit test or the final exam. Naturally, you'll have a list of these items. But there's no need to dump the list on your poor, unsuspecting students. Long lists of vocabulary words may scare them, even discourage them.

Instead, organize what you need to review into sets of easily digestible knowledge. Group the vocabulary into smaller lists. Practice grammar and expressions they should review. But don't spend your review lesson checking off items from a single, seemingly never-ending list.

### **2 DON'T BLAST THEM WITH ALL THE GRAMMAR THEY HAVE TO STUDY**

Another scary thing for students is to suddenly realize they have several the past, present and future. Now this is something that is a lot easier for students to relate to! In your review lesson, you should review the grammar they need to know to talk about their past experiences, their present endeavors or future plans. More importantly, it will help them understand that they did not learn all of these tenses because they had to know them. They will know the purpose behind

knowing these tenses.

### **3 PLAY GAMES!**

Nothing eases the tension from an upcoming test better than a few relaxing games. But make sure that you play games that will help students review essential grammar or vocabulary. Here are some great examples, plucked right from our BusyTeacher website:

- Wh- Questions Grammar Game
- Grammar Revision Board Game
- What Is This? Yes/No Guessing Game
- Present Simple Wh- Questions Game
- And more!

### **4 GIVE IT SOME VARIETY**

And while students love to review through games, you can't base an entire review lesson on games. Or worksheets. Or a video. Or speaking tasks. Depending on your students' level, there are any number of review tasks to choose from. How about reviewing key vocabulary with your young learners through a crafts project? Or reviewing expressions through a short play they have to act out? The point is a review lesson should not only be a time to complete piles and piles of worksheets.

### **5 SURPRISE THEM!**

Who says review lessons have to be serious and boring, just because an all-important test looms on the horizon? Tell your students that they will participate in a Quiz Game Show. Design a game where students can answer questions for points. A Jeopardy type of game works great for review lessons because you can choose the topics you want them to practice.

### **6 TAKE QUESTIONS FROM STUDENTS**

This is really a great review activity, but especially if you have a group of adult learners who have been committed and attentive throughout the course. The day

before the review lesson, ask them to look through their course material, and write down anything that they don't remember, missed, or are unclear on. Take turns answering their questions and clarifying – chances are several students will have the same questions, so this will be a very productive time for all.

### **7 HAVE A STUDENT TEACH**

The key aspect of a review lesson is that it is a re-view. They are viewing something they have already viewed in the past. So while some students may not remember certain points, or may even be a little confused, there are those who understand things quite clearly. Ask a student to clarify a point or answer a question from a classmate.

### **8 INTRODUCE SOMETHING NEW**

Let's say most of us are already using fun games to review. Some may already be your students' favorites, but there are others they've probably grown tired of playing. Why insist on playing a game they've already played all year long? For the review lesson, try to introduce at least one game or activity they have never played before. That should keep them on their toes!

### **THE ESSENTIAL WAY TO GIVE YOUR STUDENTS REVIEW LESSONS THAT THEY'LL LOVE IS TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX.**

Think of all the times you had boring review lessons, whether as a teacher or a student yourself. Ask yourself: what would you have done differently?

# Reuse and Recycle: Strategies for Reusing Lesson Plans

**ONE BATTLE ALL TEACHERS FACE IS TIME MANAGEMENT. LET'S FACE IT: THERE IS A LOT TO DO IN A DAY — FROM LESSON PLANNING TO STUDENT MANAGEMENT TO PAPERWORK AND FOLLOW-UPS.**

In addition to that teachers need to keep lessons fresh, exciting and innovative. Use these tips to reuse and recycle your lesson plans and you won't be drowning in unnecessary prep work.

## HOWTO: REUSING LESSON PLANS

### 1 REWORK IT

Sometimes we teachers can get into a rut with our activities and we don't realize that things might be getting a little bit stale. It is easy to get into habits and when something works it makes it that much easier to stay the course. One way to liven up lesson plans is to occasionally rework how you are setting them up and shift things around. Simple things like changing the order of when you do things can make a difference. If you always find that you are running low on time in certain areas of your lesson plans, this may be another reason to change things up. Try altering your plans so that students don't always know exactly what to expect. Continuity is a good thing, but so is variety. Some examples are: do a mingling activity right at the beginning of class, have some music playing when they enter the room and create a backwards day where everything they do is the opposite of normal, or call it a review day and students dictate what topics the class covers and when. Another way to rework your plans is to find different ways to review homework that can be used to energize the class. Formulate hands-on activities based on the homework instead of just going through it and correcting it. You can also look at what you are assigning them for homework and see if there are more in-depth activities you could do based on what they have done at home. Incorporating short

presentations or speeches is another way to gain some variety and break routines. Project-oriented work gives students renewed goals to work toward, and it will give you an opportunity to try some new ideas.

### 2 ADAPT FOR DIFFERENT CLASSES

One of the best lessons you can learn as a teacher is simple. You can do the same activity in all of your classes. The trick is to adapt it based on a few key elements. Take the activity that you used for one class to practice one tense or grammar point and find a way to tweak it and use it for another grammar point in another class. Many activities don't simply depend on the grammar point itself, so you can take the idea and apply it to other topics. Another way to change-up an activity is to just make it simpler or more difficult based on their level. All students need to practice past tense, so if you have a great activity for beginners take the same activity and add an element of difficulty to it for your more advanced students. You can do this for many of your activities, and you will find that making slight changes creates a more effective activity for the next time you plan to use it.

### 3 GO ONLINE

There are obviously numerous websites out there to help you with ideas for lesson planning. If you often go to the same sites for activities, you might be limiting yourself. Broaden your search and find some new websites to find inspiration. Try finding a few websites that offer different types of worksheets, activity ideas and online resources. Many websites also get wonderful contributions from teachers of things they have created and have decided to share with other teachers. Complex board games, card cut-outs that can be laminated and printable quizzes and worksheets are all good options to be on the lookout for.

### 4 EXAMINE NEW THEMES

Often teachers get accustomed to supplementing a grammar lesson with particular themes or topics. Some of them are very difficult to alter like, for example giving directions to practice prepositions. It's a very common theme, so why not examine another way in which students could use that same grammar point. Changing the theme from giving directions to moving house would be enough to freshen up an old lesson plan. Look at ways you can incorporate topics that integrate current events, pop culture or socially-relevant material. Provide variety in your lesson plans by devising new ways in which students can practice an old grammar point.

**REUSING AND RECYCLING LESSON PLANS IS A SKILL THAT WILL SERVE YOU WELL THROUGHOUT YOUR TEACHING CAREER.**

In looking at ways to alter and change routines, you will find yourself becoming more flexible and open to trying new things. Don't forget to take risks, keep notes on the success of activities, and have the students evaluate your plans and activities.

# Do a Comprehensive Review of Tenses for Intermediate Students

ENGLISH GRAMMAR, PARTICULARLY ITS COMPLEX VERB TENSE SYSTEM, CAN BE CONFOUNDING FOR ESL STUDENTS. MANY INTERMEDIATE LEVEL STUDENTS WHO HAVE SOME LEVEL OF CONVERSATIONAL FLUENCY HAVE BEEN TAUGHT THE VARIOUS VERB TENSES BUT DON'T USE THEM BECAUSE THEY DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND AND HAVEN'T INTERNALIZED THEM.

However, to reach a higher level of academic success, students have to control grammatical accuracy, including the verb tense system.

Often students have learned the verb tenses in isolation of each other, when in fact verb tenses interact and relate: if I'm telling a story about an accident I was involved in yesterday, for example, I'm likely to use simple past, past progressive, and past perfect tenses. It helps students to see there is some pattern and organization to our verb tense system, and that the verb tenses are related. It can be particularly helpful, for example, to show how all the verbs within one timeframe relate to each other because these are the verbs tenses that are most likely to occur together.

Teaching this can be accomplished through a careful review for those intermediate-level students who have been exposed to the major verb tenses but don't necessarily use them accurately.

## STEPS TO A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF OUR VERB TENSE SYSTEM: GENERAL PRINCIPLES

**1** Often students will not understand the pattern of our verb tense system, or even that there is one, although if they are at the intermediate level or higher, they may be using many tenses with varying degrees of correctness. **Show students the pattern**, that verb tense can in fact be organized in terms of timeframe (past, present, and future) and of aspect, or the particular way of looking at that time frame, the simple or progressive aspect.

**2** Put a chart on the board or give

out a handout, dividing the verbs up into present, past, and future tenses and then by progressive, perfect, and simple aspects.

**3** Offer examples. **Visuals are also helpful.** For example, a straight line connecting the past and present can indicate perfect tense:

*I have driven for ten years* \_\_\_\_\_  
2001      2011

**4** Teach the meaning and use of the verb tense along with the form. Contrast the tenses with each other: e.g., "I drive," simple present, means "I usually drive" or it is my habit to drive... "I am driving," present progressive, means I'm driving at the moment, right now.

## PROVIDE MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE

Students must practice a skill like use of verb tenses **both in speaking and writing** for it to become internalized. Students have probably encountered many of these verb tenses, again, but have not acquired them in the sense of being able to recall and use them fluently in the correct situation. Additional practice will help that.

Give examples and practice in meaningful context, the way the tenses would be used in a real-life situation, such as the use of future tenses in the context of a discussion about plans for the summer, for example.

## SPECIFIC VERB TENSE PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS:

**1** Call on students: e.g., "Jose, how long have you driven?" The teacher should call on students after handing out the chart for verb tense review and get them to practice using the various tenses. Students will then have to refer to their chart to form the sentence.

**2** Give out a paragraph with mistakes in the various verb tenses. Have students work together to proofread it.

**3** Have students interview each other using the various verb tenses. Provide the interview questions or have students brainstorm them.

**4** When doing a class reading, take note of the verb tenses used. Show how in the narrative past, for example, tenses shift between simple past to past progressive and past perfect.

**5** Give writing assignments that will focus on a particular time frame, such as the narrative essay that will call upon uses of the various past tenses. Have students write the essays, bring them in, and proofread each other's work.

**6** Engage in class activities that will get students to interact in a meaningful way: "Alibi" is a fun activity for teaching the past progressive and simple past, for example. Tell students a murder was committed ("The teacher was murdered last night at 7 pm. Students are suspected.") They must interview each other ("What were you doing last night at 7 pm?") and decide who has strong and weak alibis. Setting up interactive activities like this in which students have to practice using the language shows a meaningful context for it and helps students internalize its use.

**7** Do peer editing assignments that focus on verb tense: when turning in assignments, have students trade with a partner and check each other's work, focusing on verb tense.

## VERB TENSE IN ENGLISH IS COMPLEX, AND IT IS NOT EASY TO TEACH OR LEARN IT.

However, teaching it and increasing students' accuracy can be accomplished through a systematic presentation, clear visuals, focus on both form and function, raising awareness of verb tense in reading other's work and in editing their own, and in plenty of opportunities to practice the verb tenses in meaningful activities to internalize their use.



# Quick Grammar Drills for Review and Practice

Learning a second language almost certainly includes having an ongoing relationship with unfamiliar grammar. Every ESL student needs practice with elements of grammar, and sometimes teachers want a quick activity to fill that need. Most classes find they have five minutes to fill here and there, so grammar review is a useful and beneficial topic to fit into those five minutes. Your reason for quick grammar drills may be because the class needs practice or it may just be because you have a few unscheduled minutes of class time.

## ENERGIZE YOUR GRAMMAR LESSONS WITH THESE QUICK LITTLE DRILLS

### 1 WRITE ONE

To review a specific grammatical structure or principal that you have been studying in class, ask each person in your class to write one multiple-choice question. You can specify what you want the question to test, or you can let your students choose from several topics you have already studied. Ask each person to turn in his or her question and then present one or two of them to your class. If you have more questions than you can go through in the time you have, keep the remaining questions to use the next time you have a few minutes you would like to fill. If you want to make the exercise a little more challenging, have each student specify on his paper which choice is the correct answer and why. **Having your students explain the rule behind the question will help to solidify it in their minds.**

### 2 TRANSFORM IT

Though most teachers of writing want their students to avoid the passive voice, the structure is one that ESL students must study and understand. A simple review of the passive voice, and a challenge for your students, is to take a short passage (two sentences up to a paragraph) and rewrite it changing active verbs to passive ones. If you have already taught your class how to write

the passive voice, this activity will serve as useful practice for the grammatical structure. If you have time, ask your students to notice how much information is lost when sentences are written in the passive voice.

### 3 HOMOPHONE MINUTE

Homophones are a topic that is always worth reviewing with your class. Students of all ages consistently confuse sets of homophones such as *to/two/too* and *there/their/they're* as well as many others. When you have a few minutes of free class time, **write a set of homophones on the board and ask each person to write a sentence using each one.** You may want to review which meaning goes with each word before your students write their sentences, or test to see how much they already know by saving definitions until after they have turned in their sentences.

### 4 REWRITE ME

As a review for verb tenses, give your students a paragraph from a reading book, a magazine or another resource. For paragraphs written in the past tense, ask your students to work in pairs or groups of three or four to rewrite the paragraph in the present tense, as if the events are happening at the present moment. You could also ask your student to **rewrite the paragraph** using future tenses. This will serve as a good review for verb tenses and also give your students some time to practice their speaking as they work in their small groups.

### 5 MINI MAD LIBS

You can review parts of speech with your students by completing *Mad Libs* as a class. You can find this type of interactive activity online on many web sites, but there are also printable versions available. You will ask your students to give you words with a specific part of speech, and you will fit them into a paragraph resulting in a silly story. Though some of the humor may be lost on your students, they will still benefit from volunteering words that fulfill spe-

cific parts of speech.

### 6 CLOZE ENCOUNTERS

A cloze paragraph is an easy way to see just how much grammar your students understand, but it does take some advance preparation. In this type of exercise, you should prepare a few sentences up to an entire paragraph for your students to work with. For the passage, replace every fifth, seventh or tenth word with a blank line that your students will fill in. The more advanced your students are, the more frequently you can include a blank. They must then fill in words that are grammatical and make sense contextually. **Since a cloze exercise does not test one particular skill but rather general grammatical knowledge, you should plan to use this exercise for review.** Simply prepare a few cloze paragraphs and have them copied and ready to pull out of your desk drawer when you have a few free moments to fill during your next class!

### 7 PUNCTUATION CHALLENGE

When you have time to prepare an activity in advance, giving your students a text in which they must place all punctuation and/or capital letters is another useful means of grammar review. Like the cloze exercise, this type of activity tests a general level of knowledge rather than drilling a specific skill. Having **some paragraphs ready to hand out at a moment's notice** will make good use of a few free minutes in class provided you take some time to get the paragraph ready ahead of time.

**A FEW FREE MINUTES AT THE END OF CLASS CAN TURN OUT TO BE A PRECIOUS OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW OR PRACTICE SOME GRAMMAR WITH YOUR STUDENTS.**

When you have these tools ready in your back pocket (or just in your desk drawer), you will always be ready to make use of your class time. Not only that, these activities may give you a new understanding of just how much English grammar your students really understand!

# Are You Tense About Tenses?

## 5 Tense Review Activities

**THERE IS NO NEED TO BE TENSE ABOUT TENSES. ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS ARE PROGRESSING IS TO PROVIDE OCCASIONAL REVIEW OF SEVERAL OF THE TENSES THE STUDENTS HAVE BEEN LEARNING.**

It can work really well to combine that review with other topics, themes or grammar points so that students can get the most out of a refresher lesson.

### TRY THESE 5 TENSE REVIEW ACTIVITIES

#### 1 FLASHCARDS

Flashcards are suitable for most any level of tenses or conjugations. They are valuable because once you have made them you can use them for all different types of drills, activities and prompts. Students appreciate the opportunity to work with cards as they are something hands-on that they can touch and manipulate. **You can generate all types of card activities, and remember that the point is to get the students working together.** You'll definitely want to have a selection of cards for irregular past tense verbs. You can create sets of cards for all the irregular verbs and then use them as prompts, to play matching games, or to do perform various drills. Then once you get to higher level tenses you can refer back to the past tense cards and combine them with helping verb cards or time markers.

#### 2 MAKING QUESTIONS

Students always struggle with question formation in any tense. Basing activities around this practice can be really useful in order to solidify one tense or compare several at a time. There is also the issue of creating *information questions vs. yes/no or closed questions*. It's a good idea to practice both types in a variety of ways. You could provide simple prompts like:

Mary/movies: See how many questions they can make with simple prompts.

You could do a mingling exercise like *Find Someone Who* and use all the

tenses they have learned recently. If you provide the prompt, the students will have to formulate the questions. For example, **Find someone who...** *Has had a tooth ache (what will they have to ask each other?) Had been a doctor in their country. Has been learning English for more than 4 years.*

#### 3 NAME ALL THE TENSES

**Finding fun and realistic ways to show learners how tenses operate and differ can be very informative.** A worthwhile way to review tenses is to bring in a variety of different kinds of passages. You can focus on your students' interests and provide an assortment of clippings from newspapers, magazines, use the internet, or even compose your own. **The best types of passages are ones that weave in several tenses, tell a compelling story,** and use some other element like humor or satire. That way the students aren't only analyzing the tenses, but they have a lot more to discuss and ask questions about.

Often it can be fun to create some kind of competition for these activities as well. You could give them a time limit and tell them that the person who finds 5 different tenses and identifies them is the winner. There are a lot of ways to use passages that don't simply require the students to read and answer questions. If you want to focus on tenses, another engaging way is to do a cut-up passage, in which you provide a passage that is cut up into sentences and mixed up. The students then have to figure out the order and identify the tenses used in each sentence. This is a way to practice sequence and to provide students an opportunity to use critical thinking skills.

#### 4 SING IT OUT LOUD

Using music in the classroom can be a great way to review tenses and shake up the routine. Generally when choosing a song you want to choose carefully to make sure the language is understandable and that the tenses being used are consecutive throughout the song. **If you can find a song that has two or three repetitive tenses**

**and also has a strong meaning that can be analyzed, you have found the perfect song.** The best way to present music in class is to first review the tenses that it focuses on. Then introduce the band or artist, and then jump into the music. With most songs, it is a good idea to have a cloze exercise ready to go and decide how you want to present the music. You can have them listen to it several times, you can give them the fill-in-the-blank worksheet the second time through, or you can even have them learn and sing parts of the song if you are so inclined. Any combination that takes your class and their level into consideration will be a welcome break from the usual grammar activities. Many teachers consult the artists like the Beatles, Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson or the Rolling Stones to find a song that is applicable. There are lots of resources online for the lyrics as well as for downloading songs.

#### 5 SENTENCE MATCHING

**There are a few ways you can do sentence matching to make it more or less interactive.** You can do them on a worksheet and have students match two parts of a sentence or match a sentence to its tense. Another way would be to do this in a card game format where each student gets multiple half sentences. They then walk around the room and find the missing half of their sentence by asking questions pertaining to their card. Combinations must be grammatically correct and logical. Remind students that they should pay attention to punctuation. You can also do this on the board and make it a race between two teams who can match the most sentences correctly. You'll definitely want to include challenging structures and have some halves that could have multiple answers.

#### GRAMMAR, ESPECIALLY TENSES, CAN SOMETIMES GET WEIGHED DOWN IN THE MUNDANE.

Every so often it is necessary to mix things up and prepare activities that the students don't do very often. It is also a good tool to observe how the students are putting their learning to practical use.

# 6 Simple (and Sticky) Strategies for Checking Comprehension

The unit is finished and the test is later this week. What will you do to help your students review? Here are some fun and easy ways to check how much they know and remind them of what they don't that take nothing more than a pack of post-it notes!

## TRY THESE 6 SIMPLE (AND STICKY) STRATEGIES FOR CHECKING COMPREHENSION

### 1 POST-IT JEOPARDY

The next time you are looking for a fun way to review before a test, try making a Jeopardy board out of post-it notes. On the sticky side, write the "answer", and write the point value on the other side. Then arrange the post-its into categories: grammar, vocabulary, content, etc. To play, the student whose birthday is closest to today chooses the first category and point value. You remove the post-it and read the answer to the class. Call on the first person to raise his hand for the "question", and only accept answers that are phrased as questions. Award points to individuals or teams of students. Not only is this activity good for reviewing information before a test, it gives your students additional practice in forming questions.

### 2 QUESTION FLAGS

Another way to review information before a test uses post-its and tongue depressors. Write several review questions on a corresponding number of tongue depressors. Make sure you have at least one question for each person in your class. You may want to think about categories of questions as you write them: vocabulary, grammar, etc. Vary the categories depending on what information you are reviewing. Then choose one color post-it to represent each category, and affix a note of that color to the bottom of each tongue depressor. Put all the questions in a can with the post-its up, and let each person choose one review question. If the

students answers her question correctly, she should write her name on the post-it and stick it in a designated area in the front of the room. After a month, a marking period or some other designated amount of time, the person with the most post-its on the board is the class champion.

### 3 WHOLE CLASS CHECK

It is inevitable that in your ESL class, some students will be talkers and others will be silent during class. This can make it difficult to know just how much each student understands, especially during listening comprehension lectures. To check in real time exactly what your students are getting, give each student a post-it note, and ask a comprehension question. Have your students write their one word answer on the post-it and stick it to their foreheads. This silly way of checking on what each student knows will subvert some students' tendencies to be quiet during class. Plus, since your students are facing you, no one will be intimidated by his classmates looking at his answer.

### 4 SEQUENCE REVIEW

This exercise is particularly useful when you are reviewing a piece of literature your students have read. Ask your students to think about the important events in the narrative they read. Each student then writes 10 events from story on individual post-its and copies those events in chronological order on a separate sheet of paper (the answer key). Hand out small zip lock bags to your class and have them first mix up the order of the notes and then place them into the bag with the folded answer key. Pairs of students can then exchange bags and place their classmate's events in the correct sequence, then they can check them against the answer key when finished.

### 5 TICKET FOR DEPARTURE

To close out your day and get a litmus test on what your students re-

member most from the day, require each student to give you a ticket before he or she leaves for the day. To create the ticket, simply give each person a post-it note and require that he writes one thing that he learned during the day's lessons. As he walks out the door, the student hands you his ticket. He remembers more of what you covered in class, and you get a read on what your students enjoyed and remembered from today's material.

### 6 HIT OR MISS

You can add excitement and a little bit of chance to your next test review by playing this simple game that requires nothing more than a pack of post-it notes. Prepare for the game by writing each of your review questions on the sticky side of a post-it note. You will also need several post-its with no question written on them. Place the question sticky notes and the blank ones in a grid pattern on your front board. You should vary the size of the grid based on the number of questions you have for your students. For example, if you have 20 review questions, create a 6x6 grid. Scatter the questions among the grid and fill in any empty spaces with the blank post-its. Each student takes a turn choosing one of the sticky notes. If that note has a question written on it, the student must answer the question correctly in order to keep the sticky note. If there is no question on the sticky note, the student keeps it. An unanswered question goes back in its place on the board and waits until another student chooses it. Once all the post-its are taken, count up the notes. The student with the most notes wins the game.

**WHETHER YOU ARE REVIEWING A LITTLE OR A LOT, THESE CREATIVE AND FUN ACTIVITIES REQUIRE LITTLE PREPARATION BUT ARE GUARANTEED TO BRING BIG FUN TO YOUR CLASSROOM!**

Plus, you won't get stuck in a review rut.



# That's Correct! 7 Ways to Check Answers with Your ESL Class

*"Number 1 is A, number 2 is C, number 3 is B, number 4 is C, number 5 is A..."*

You're probably already yawning and wondering where this is going. Reading out answers to exercises is probably the most effective way to bore your students and send them straight into a snore-induced stupor they won't easily come out of. That's right. It's even more boring than memorizing past participles or repeating phonemes.

But we all have to check answers sometimes, right? It's a wonderful learning opportunity for ESL students (remember the whole learning from mistakes thing?), but the problem is not the stopping to check answers, it's the HOW you do it.

So here are some wonderful ways to check answers with your class – strategies that are guaranteed to not induce any yawning or snores of any type.

## HOW TO CHECK ANSWERS WITH YOUR CLASS: 7 GREAT WAYS

### 1 SUPPLY THE ANSWERS

You can either hand out copies of the answer sheet or write the answers on the board before class. This way you can simply give them five minutes to check their answers and walk around the classroom to attend to any questions or doubts that may arise. This method works great with adults and autonomous learners who easily grasp their mistakes when confronted with the correct answer.

### 2 CHECK THROUGH PAIR OR GROUP WORK

Divide students into pairs of groups of no more than three or four to compare their answers. This type of answer checking encourages speaking as students explain to others what their mistake is and why it's wrong. This method works best with beginner to intermediate students, or for answers that are easy to explain. For example, a student

may easily correct a peer on the correct past participle of "swim".

### 3 THE SNAKE GAME

This is a fun game that is perfect for checking answers and works best with long exercises of 20 or more questions. Make a grid on the board like so:

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20

Divide your class into two teams. Team A starts by answering Question number 1. If they answer correctly circle the number 1 in red. Team B continues by answering Question number 5 and also gets a circle (of another color) for a correct answer. Team A now has the option to answer Question 2, 6, or 7. And so each team moves across the grid - the snake can move horizontally, vertically or diagonally – and the team with the longest snake wins!

### 4 SUPPLY THE ANSWERS – IN THE WRONG ORDER

This method works best with gap-filling exercises, for example if students have to fill in the blanks with words or verbs. Write all of the correct answers on the board in random order and as students check their answers, they must find them from the options provided.

### 5 FOCUS ON THE HARD QUESTIONS FIRST

Sometimes you'll come across a question that was hard for most, if not all, of the students in your class. And this question in particular may take more explaining than the rest. So, why not tackle the hard ones first and get them out of the way? Before checking their answers, ask students to raise their hand if they had a hard time with a question in particular – find out if this was the case with other students in the

class. Go through each of the questions they had trouble with and finally check the remaining answers to make sure they got those right as well!

### 6 BE RANDOM

The thing that probably bores students the most is the monotonous drone of the teacher's voice as he/she gives one answer after another in strict order. Nothing shakes students up more than randomness. So, give the answers in random order. Call on students randomly. Then ask your students who wants to give the next answer. Then supply an answer yourself. That will keep them on their toes! By not letting them know what to expect, your students will be attentive and engaged.

### 7 WAIT BEFORE CONFIRMING IF AN ANSWER IS CORRECT

This is something that can easily be done with higher levels or adults. When a student gives you their answer, don't confirm right away if it's right or wrong. Ask them, "Why did you write/how did you come up with that answer?" Students will be forced to go through the process that led them to reach their conclusion. Then, you can ask another student if they agree and if they reached the same conclusion. A terrific exercise!

### THE METHOD FOR CHECKING ANSWERS WILL LARGELY DEPEND ON THE SIZE OF THE GROUP, THE LEVEL, AND WHETHER THEY ARE CHILDREN OR ADULTS.

Choose the one that you think will work best for your particular ESL class. Choose the method that will maximize their learning from mistakes.

Checking answers doesn't have to be a tiresome chore that you have to get done as fast as possible. Instead of seeing it as an unavoidable task, look at it as another learning opportunity within your arsenal of fun activities to do with your ESL class.

# 8 Mistakes Your Students Must Overcome Before the Test

**SIGH... IT'S TIME TO REVIEW AGAIN. THAT GLORIOUS MOMENT WHEN YOU GET TO SHOW YOUR STUDENTS JUST HOW MUCH THEY HAVE LEARNED AND WHAT STILL NEEDS A LITTLE WORK BEFORE THE TEST.**

If you are conducting a review that is focused not on the number of units they've seen, but on the goals they have met along the way, you'll see that there are some classic mistakes that students typically make – no matter what their level is.

Here's a list of mistakes ESL students often make in class. You can take this as a checklist to make sure you are reviewing what you need to review and ensure that they don't make these again.

## **8 MISTAKES YOUR STUDENTS MUST CORRECT BEFORE THE TEST:**

### **1 PROBLEMS WITH SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT**

Some of the most painful things us ESL teachers have to hear are “she have”, “he don't” or “people doesn't”. Ouch! This is such a typical mistake we probably hear it on a daily basis – even advanced students let one of these slip every now and then. Because this is something they repeat and are used to repeating, they may “listen” to our correction but often don't take the time to really let it sink in. If you have students who make the same subject-verb agreement mistakes, take the time to stop and really bring their attention to it.

### **2 INCORRECT VERB TENSES**

These mistakes crop up again and again. If there's one thing students need to focus on as they review for a test is the tenses they've learned, whether they are simple or advanced. Help them out by providing plenty of comparative charts – graphic organizers or timelines are more helpful than long-winded explanations.

### **3 MISSING OR EXTRA ARTICLES**

Some students add an extra “the” when they shouldn't (“The children play the Angry Birds.”) or omit an article that should be there (“I ate piece of toast for breakfast”). If your students make lots of mistakes with articles, be sure to give them a good review.

### **4 REPETITIVE USE OF FALSE FRIENDS**

Lots of languages, if not all, have “false friends” with the English language. For example, embarazada means “pregnant” in Spanish not “embarrassed” (and this confusion can make for some pretty funny classroom situations). There are examples like this one in many other languages. If you have students who resort to false friends, or even like to make up words (I've had my share of those, too!), tell them that no matter how funny it may seem, they should try to use words they are sure are correct because they've learned them.

### **5 PRONUNCIATION OF SILENT CONSONANTS**

If you have students who still pronounce the silent b in “comb” or “bomb”, you need to take a minute to write these down on the board and show them exactly which letters they need to pronounce. The same goes for words like “Wednesday” (when the student pronounces the first d) or “muscle” (when the student pronounces the c as a “k”).

### **6 SPEAKING THROUGH LITERAL TRANSLATIONS**

Everything seems to be going well in your classroom. Your students are very attentive and no one is speaking their native language. But then someone says, “I have 20 years.” If you, like this student, are also a native Spanish speaker, you'll know for a fact your student just did a literal translation in his/her head. Students

will do this, you can be certain of that, but it's something you need to correct right away, lest they keep doing it.

### **7 WRONG PREPOSITIONS**

This is one of the hardest mistakes to correct. There are so many uses for so many different prepositions, it's hard for students to keep track of them all. One of the best ways to help out students who perpetually use the wrong preposition is to organize them into contexts, for example prepositions of place. We say we are “at school”, “at work”, “at home”, but “in the living room”, “in the bedroom” (“in” a particular room). We may also point out the difference between saying “at the bank” (in a banking situation) and “in the bank” (literally inside the building as opposed to outside).

### **8 COUNTABLE/ UNCOUNTABLE MIX-UPS**

Students in all levels will get countables and uncountables mixed up and incorrectly use “a little”, “a few”, “many”, “much”, etc. Again, charts and graphics are very helpful in this case, to help students see exactly what they're doing wrong. You can use the classic two-column list to contrast (“a few cars” vs. “a little traffic”) or any of these strategies.

### **STUDENTS MAKE MISTAKES, AND THEY WILL IN ALL LIKELIHOOD CONTINUE MAKING THEM.**

But the review lesson is a wonderful opportunity to show your students what their weaknesses are, not to make them feel bad of course, but to help them focus on what they need to improve.

Some mistakes will turn into bad habits over the years, things that are so firmly entrenched in their speaking that it becomes increasingly harder to correct. You'll need to correct these as soon as possible to give your students the best chance to improve their English.

# 7 Steps to Fail-proof Your ESL Review Lesson

What exactly is a “review lesson”? You’re not teaching anything new, but you’re not testing your students’ knowledge, either. Review lessons are located in this limbo, a nebulous cloud filled with many things, from structures your ESL students have effectively learned and started using, to words they have completely forgotten. It’s grammar, vocabulary and useful phrases all thrown together in the mix. So how do you create a review lesson that is really useful to your students (and not just a way to buy time till they have the test)?

## WHAT A REVIEW LESSON IS AND WHAT IT ISN’T

A review lesson is not some dead expanse of time between the moment your students are learning things and the moment they are tested on it. It is not just a way to fill the time you have before the test. It is an integral part of your overall teaching strategy, an opportunity to consolidate everything you’ve taught into a cohesive language learning experience. So with this in mind, let’s see 7 ways to fail-proof your review lesson so you and your students make the most of this learning opportunity!

## 7 STEPS TO FAIL-PROOF YOUR REVIEW LESSON

### 1 SEE THE BIG PICTURE

Before you can actually start planning your review lesson/s, you need to look at the big picture, in other words, see where your students started and where they are now, taking into consideration the grammar and vocabulary they learned along the way.

For instance, say they started as beginners. First, they learned to introduce themselves and talk about themselves (verb to be). Then they learned to talk about their everyday activities (simple present). Finally, they learned to talk about what they did at some point in the past (simple past). This is just a simple overview for illustrative purposes, of what a beginner may learn throughout an entire school year,

but my goal is to show you how to see the path that leads your students from Point A (starting point) to Point B (where they are now, whether you are reviewing for a chapter test or midyear/final examination).

### 2 BREAK IT DOWN

Next, you’ll need to break down everything you need to review into parts so you can devote the right amount of time to each. But here’s an important caveat. Some teachers like to break the review down into “chapters” or “units” and devote, say, 15 minutes to each. This means that if you’re having a test that covers Units 1 to 5, you’ll break your review into five parts. This may not be the best course of action. What if what your students learned in Units 1 to 3 was relatively simple? What if what they learned in Units 4 and 5 was the hardest? You’ll need to consider your students needs first.

### 3 CONSIDER WHAT THEY NEED TO REVIEW THE MOST

So, this step and number 2 actually go hand in hand. As you go through the material and see the grammar and vocabulary your students need to review, try to remember what they had the most trouble with. Was it the Past Perfect? The Third Conditional? Mark these as points to place some emphasis on during your review. Finally, create review units that make sense and are tailored to your students’ needs, and plan what you’ll review each lesson before the test.

### 4 COMPILE A LIST OF OBJECTIVES

It’s hard for students to keep track of everything they’ve learned. So instead of saying, “We’re going to review for the upcoming midterm examination” say, “We are going to review everything you learned to do in the semester.” As you review, walk your students through each of the goals they’ve met: “First, you learned to introduce your-

self and others.”

### 5 REVIEW EACH GOAL THROUGH PRACTICE

Instead of reviewing the verb to be just because they saw that in the first unit, review what they learned to do with it. Have them use the verb to be in a variety of contexts: ask them to talk about where they and their classmates are from, or what nationality they are. Don’t launch into a speech about how the verb to be is conjugated. They have that in the book! Review how it’s used and how they can use it.

### 6 USE A VARIETY OF METHODS

You can’t review everything they’ve learned by having them talk about it. Review useful expressions and phrases through role plays. Review grammar through games. Review vocabulary through a writing assignment. Just make sure they know that they are reviewing something they learned to do (“Talk about our favorite animals” and not just “animal vocabulary”).

### 7 PROVIDE EXTRA PRACTICE

If during the review you see that your students have a particular difficulty, tell them what they should focus on as they study for the test at home and what they can do to continue practicing on their own. For example, students who are having a hard time with the past participles can do this worksheet ([busyteacher.org/8654-find-the-past-participles.html](http://busyteacher.org/8654-find-the-past-participles.html)) for extra practice before the test.

**SO, THE REAL KEY TO AN EFFECTIVE REVIEW LESSON IS NOT THE LIST OF CHAPTERS OR UNITS YOU’LL HAVE TO REVIEW, BUT THE GOALS THEY’VE WORKED THROUGH, AND THE TOPICS AND STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORTED THEM IN REACHING THESE GOALS.**

Keep this in mind, and you’ll prepare your students to obtain not only top-notch test results, but also a learning experience they won’t forget!



# 6 Absolutely Essential ESL Games for Vocabulary Review

Well, it is that time again. You have finished your unit on (insert topic here) complete with vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading and writing activities, but you are not entirely done. The test is coming in just a few days, and your students need some review. When vocabulary is on that agenda, try one of these fun games to review the words your students have recently learned!

## TRY THESE FUN ESL VOCABULARY REVIEW GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

### 1 CHARADES

Charades is a fun and lively game for your ESL class to play when reviewing vocabulary. Your students will be energized and enthusiastic when their acting skills are put to the test for their classmates. It is easy to have a charade vocabulary review ready for your class at almost any time and on a moment's notice with minimal advance preparation. The easiest way to be ready at any time is to keep a collection of vocabulary cards for the words your class has studied. When you are ready to play, divide your class into two teams. Individuals will take turns acting out one of the words from the cards that you have prepared. They will choose this card randomly on their turns and will have 2 minutes to get their team to guess the word without using books or notes. The actor cannot use any sounds but must communicate only through actions. The rest of the team should shout out any answers that come to mind. If the team is able to guess the word within the designated time, they score a point. If after two minutes the team has not guessed the word correctly, the other team gets one chance to guess the word. If they are correct, they score a point and then continue with their turn. Continue playing until you run out of time or you run out of words. The team with the higher score at the end of the game wins.

### 2 Pictionary

Pictionary is a similar and just as entertaining game to play for vocabulary review. The rules are similar to those of charades except that instead of acting out the word, the clue giver is permitted only to draw on the white board in front

of the class. He cannot use any symbols, numbers or letters in his drawing. Again, give each person two minutes to try to get his team to guess the word. If he is unsuccessful, give the other team a chance to guess. Score the game the same way that you would score charades and announce the winning team at the end of the game.

### 3 CLAYMATION

How creative are your students? How daring are they? If you think they would have fun with this activity, modify the same general idea that you used in charades and Pictionary with clay or play dough. Again, the rules are generally the same but in this version your students will not be acting or drawing. They will be molding clay to communicate the target word to their teams. Follow the same general rules, but this time you may want to give each person three to five minutes before turning it over to the opposite team for their guess. Scoring is done the same.

### 4 ALL OF THE ABOVE

If you want to energize your students even further, add a little element of chance to the festivities. Using a six-sided die, have your students roll to see whether they will give a charade, draw a picture or form their clues out of clay. For rolls of one or four, the student will give a charade. For rolls of two or five the student will draw his clues. For rolls of three or six, your students will use clay to give their clues. In all cases, no letters, symbols or numbers are allowed when giving clues. The element of surprise will make the review even more exciting and entertaining for everyone!

### 5 BINGO

Bingo can be another good game for vocabulary review though perhaps not as lively. Give your students a blank bingo boards and ask them to put the review words into the squares randomly. You should have some strategy for choosing the words to call and then which your students will mark on the cards. You may want to choose words randomly from a list. You may, instead, write the words on cards and choose them randomly from the deck or simply put small slips of paper into a hat to draw random-

ly. Whatever method you think will work best for you, once you have chosen the word do not read it. Instead, give the definition of the word to your class. Each person must then determine if he has the word that corresponds to the definition on his bingo board. When anyone gets five squares in a row, he should shout, "Bingo!" Warn your students not to clear their boards until you have checked the winner's words to make sure they did not have an incorrect answer. Give the winner of each round a prize or allow him to call the words for the next round though you may need to supply the definitions.

### 6 MEMORY

A memory style card game can be another effective way for reviewing vocabulary, but you or your class will need to do some advanced preparation before you play. You will need a set of cards for the vocabulary you want to review. For each word, one card should have the target vocabulary word and another card should have the definition of the word. The players should then shuffle the deck and lay all the cards in a grid pattern face down on a large playing surface. Each person turns over two cards each turn trying to find a match. If the cards do not match, he turns them over again and the next person takes a turn. If they do match, he keeps the cards and gets an additional turn. The player with the highest number of cards at the end of the game wins.

You can modify this game to practice matching words with their synonyms or their antonyms, too. For each, instead of using the definition card to match the vocabulary card, use a card with either a synonym or an antonym printed on it. Play continues the same as above. Just be sure you keep the sets of cards separated so you are ready to play at any time.

**VOCABULARY IS A PART OF EVERY ESL CLASS, BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN IT HAS TO BE BORING.**

These games are both fun and educational and are never boring. The next time you have vocabulary to review, change things up with a game and help your students see that fun can be effective learning, too!

# 6 Super ESL Games for Grammar Review

## HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED THAT STUDENTS START DISAPPEARING RIGHT ABOUT THE TIME YOU START REVIEWING FOR A TEST?

Review lessons can be boring enough, but grammar reviews are precisely the type of thing that makes students want to skip class and reappear only for the test. Now, what if you were to give your students a grammar review they wouldn't want to miss? Here are some classic games you can adapt to any level and use to review essential structures. You will have a full classroom during your reviews lessons – guaranteed!

## TRY THESE 6 SUPER ESL GAMES FOR GRAMMAR REVIEW

### 1 SHOOT FOR POINTS

We often need to review things that are no fun, things like the past simple or past participle of irregular verbs. Instead of the classic Q & A, try this. Use a large container or trash can as your “basket”, give your students a ball and have them shoot for points. But here's the catch: you'll ask them a question in past simple, and they'll have to remember the past correctly in order to earn the chance to shoot. They can get 10 points for scoring or five if they miss (because at least they answered the question correctly). You can try any variety of this type of game, whether you use large balls or small ones, or even a wadded up piece of paper.

### 2 BOARD GAME

Everyone loves a board game, and your ESL students will particularly appreciate one if it's not only loads of fun, but also a helpful way to review essential grammar. You can design your own to include the tenses and structures your students have learned, or use any of the ones already available at BusyTeacher.org. This Grammar Revision Board Game is a perfect example: [busyteacher.org/14264-grammar-revision-board-game.html](http://busyteacher.org/14264-grammar-revision-board-game.html).

### 3 TIC TAC TOE

Tic Tac Toe is another versatile game, one that can be adapted to suit a wide variety of needs. What you need to decide first is which grammar your students need to review for the test. Then, write the topics on nine index cards or large enough pieces of paper. Arrange the cards face down on a table or stick them on the board, in the classic Tic Tac Toe 3 x 3 grid.

Next, teams take turns choosing a square (you can add letters across and numbers down to make it easier to call out the squares). You turn over the card and reveal to your students the tense/structure/grammar point written on it. Students must then either provide an example or ask a question that another team member must answer correctly to get their X or O on that square. Of course, the first team that gets three Xs or Os across, down or diagonally wins.

### 4 SNAKES AND LADDERS

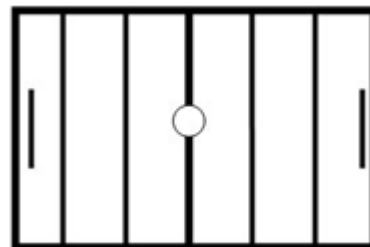
To play this classic game in your grammar review lesson, you'll first need to prepare some cards: they may have verb tenses written on them, questions your students must answer or prompts from which to say a complete sentence.

The rules are simple, but the game is so much fun! Students must first choose a token to move around the board (a different colored button for each will do nicely!) Then they take turns rolling the dice to move across the board. They must take a card and answer correctly to remain on that spot, or move back two places if they are incorrect. If they land at the bottom of a ladder, and they answer correctly, they get to move up the ladder, but if they land on a snake's head they automatically move down to where its tail is. Here's a blank template you can use ([busyteacher.org/9177-snakes-and-ladders-blank-template.html](http://busyteacher.org/9177-snakes-and-ladders-blank-template.html)) or create your own.

### 5 FOOTBALL!

This is a game I've played with students of different ages and levels

with tremendous success. First, you'll need to draw a playing field like this one on the board or a large piece of paper:



Next, divide your students into two teams. Place a “ball” token at the center. Then, students must answer questions correctly to approach the posts and score a goal. For example, Team A answers correctly and moves right one step closer to their goal. Team B answers correctly and moves the ball left back to the center. Team A answers incorrectly and can't move the ball at all. Team B answers correctly and moves left one step closer to their goal. If Team A were to keep answering incorrectly and Team B correctly, then Team B will continue moving left to eventually score a goal. When a team scores, the ball moves back to the center, and the team that did not score last starts. The team with the most goals wins.

### 6 JEOPARDY

I've mentioned this game in several articles, and it happens to be my personal favorite. There is so much you can do with it - you can review everything they've learned in a single fun game. You'll find it explained here: [busyteacher.org/5878-what-you-can-do-with-a-whiteboard-10-creative-esl.html](http://busyteacher.org/5878-what-you-can-do-with-a-whiteboard-10-creative-esl.html). All you have to do is replace the categories at the top with tenses or structures you want them to review.

**NOT ALL GRAMMAR REVIEWS HAVE TO BE CUT AND DRIED. DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF GAMES - THEY HELP STUDENTS USE THE RESOURCES THEY'VE ACQUIRED IN CREATIVE WAYS.**

They engage learners to put the things they've learned to good use. The competitive environment motivates them to give it their best effort.

# 8 Killer Online Resources for ESL Vocabulary Review

It's no big secret that English vocabulary is essential to your students' success, not only when it comes to doing well on tests, but also if they wish to improve their overall English fluency.

First, you need to teach vocabulary like a pro. Then, you need to review the words they've learned, preferably through some fun games. But it doesn't stop there. To really acquire new vocabulary, students must constantly practice and use new words. With these 8 vocabulary learning resources, your students will have the extra practice and review they need. Try some of these online activities in class to review for a test or instruct students on how to review vocabulary when they're on their own.

## 8 KILLER ONLINE RESOURCES FOR ESL VOCABULARY REVIEW

### 1 WORDDYNAMO

It's no exaggeration. This is one dynamite online resource for advanced vocabulary review. Powered by Dictionary.com, WordDynamo ([dynamo.dictionary.com/](http://dynamo.dictionary.com/)) offers lots of different ways in which students can practice and review vocabulary, from matching games to crossword puzzles and flashcards. The site is not specifically tailored to ESL students, so most of the vocabulary may be too advanced, but I always recommend this resource to students who are planning to take the TOEFL as there are exercises that are specifically targeted to this group. For your less advanced ESL students, I'd recommend checking out the Elementary School level lists - they may offer just the right amount of challenge to beginner/intermediate ESL students.

### 2 SPIN&SPELL

Spin&Spell ([www.spinandspell.com/game.swf](http://www.spinandspell.com/game.swf)) is a fantastic online resource for young ESL learners. The app gives you five categories to choose from: clothes, food, transportation, animals or home vocabulary. Once students have chosen a category,

they will find lots of words to review. They can choose to spell each word by themselves by clicking on the appropriate letter in the spinning wheel, or they can choose to see how each word is spelled. In the classroom, you can set up teams to challenge each other for points.

### 3 LEARNINGCHOCOLATE

LearningChocolate ([www.learningchocolate.com](http://www.learningchocolate.com)) is an online vocabulary platform that provides great practice for students of all ages. Though the images are not that great in some cases, it still gets the job done. Students have a variety of matching exercises to complete, and may even listen to and write each word. There's also a nifty little dictation exercise! Wonderful for self-study!

### 4 MYVOCABULARY

MyVocabulary ([www.myvocabulary.com](http://www.myvocabulary.com)) is another site that is not specifically tailored to ESL students, but offers some interesting vocabulary lists and activities. If you go to Themed Puzzles section, you'll find vocabulary activities for all of major holidays like Halloween, Christmas, Thanksgiving and more.

### 5 VOCABULARY.COM

Vocabulary.com is an invaluable source of vocabulary for advanced learners, particularly adult learners who have reached a language plateau they can't seem to get out of. Under Vocabulary Lists they have words that relate specifically to today's news and current events. A great complement if you wish to discuss current events with students.

### 6 ENGLISHMEDIALAB

([www.englishmedialab.com](http://www.englishmedialab.com)) In their Vocabulary Games section, EnglishMediaLab provides dozens of lists and activities to choose from. There are memory games with or without audio, video lessons, interactive quizzes and online games that are great for beginners in particular. Now of particu-

lar interest to more advanced students is the Idioms section, where students will not only see the definition of each idiom but also read it and hear it being used. Finally, there are links to online games designed for the classroom, with classics that any ESL teacher will enjoy playing with their class, like Jeopardy.

### 7 ESLGAMESWORLD

ESLGamesWorld ([eslgamesworld.com](http://eslgamesworld.com)) offers interactive classroom games that your students will absolutely love. There are games to practice grammar and sentence structure, as well as great vocabulary games featuring classics like Snakes and Ladders, but also picture labeling games and listening games, as well as an assortment of other types of games. There are also fantastic Vocabulary Quizzes on a wide range of topics, including phrasal verbs.

### 8 CAMBRIDGE.ORG

You'd be surprised at how many free online resources Cambridge offers for ESL learners to practice vocabulary. Although these resources are designed to accompany some of the books published by Cambridge University Press, they can be used for vocabulary review, whether you are using these books in particular or not. For instance, if you're teaching students who will be sitting for the PET, Cambridge offers a Vocabulary Trainer through which they can review all of the PET vocabulary they'll need. Although it's meant as a complement to their Objective PET book, any student taking the test will benefit from this practice. The same happens with the First Certificate. There's a Vocabulary Trainer for FCE any student can use.

**EVERYTHING YOU DO IN CLASS TO REVIEW VOCABULARY WITH STUDENTS GOES A LONG WAY TOWARDS HELPING THEM IMPROVE THEIR ENGLISH SKILLS.**

But don't forget to give them enough resources so that they can continue working on their own at home.



# 12 Teacher Tips for Writing Good Test Questions

**WE ALL WANT OUR STUDENTS TO SUCCEED. WE TRY TO ENCOURAGE HONEST LEARNING AND DO NOT JUST TEACH TO THE TEST.**

We do assess our students, but can we influence their success merely by the test questions we write? We most certainly can. Following are some helpful tips learned from experience to help you write successful test questions.

## MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1

The grammar you use in your answer choices may be influencing how your students choose an answer. Make sure all your choices are grammatically parallel. In other words, if you ask, “*Where does a rabbit live?*”, phrase all your answers as prepositional phrases.

- A. *In a house*
- B. *In a car*
- C. *Under a bridge*
- D. *In a warren.*

If you offered choice E. *dangerously close to the highway*, it will obviously be incorrect because it is phrased differently than the other choices.

2

Though every education student has probably heard it, watch your vowels. Always give the possibility of either a or an when asking a question. You can include the choice either in the question itself or in the answers.

*What does a rabbit eat for breakfast?*

- A. *a carrot*
- B. *a protein shake*
- C. *an egg*
- D. *a piece of toast,*  
(*or a rabbit eats a(n) \_\_\_\_\_*  
*for breakfast*).

3

Keep all your answers around the same length. If one answer is sig-

nificantly longer or shorter than all the rest, it will likely be the best choice or an easy elimination. Try to write about the same amount for each answer option to avoid give away answers.

## FILL IN THE BLANK QUESTIONS

4

There is a difference between recognition knowledge of a word and recall knowledge of a word. Recognition knowledge means you understand the word when you hear it or read it. Recall knowledge means you can and will use the word in your own speech or writing. Everyone no matter what his language has a greater recognition vocabulary than a recall vocabulary. Test your students' ability to understand the material you have presented, their recall knowledge, by providing them with a word bank. The word bank can have more words or the same number that your students will need to fill in the blanks. Because providing a word bank tests their recall knowledge, it is a better measure of what they have learned than testing their recall knowledge and asking them to elicit vocabulary words on their own.

## TRUE FALSE QUESTIONS

5

Do not try to trick your students with questions that have minor changes in them to make them false. When testing on literature, do not make up false names for characters or change letters in words to make them incorrect. This is confusing for your students and does not give you a useful gauge on their comprehension of the material. Instead, try to test general comprehension of the material.

6

If you really want to know what your students have learned, have

them correct the false statements to make them true. This will eliminate random guessing and also give you a better idea what concepts your students might not understand yet. You may also find that you have to cover specific material again or explain a concept in another way.

## DIFFICULTY LEVEL

7

Start your test with the easiest questions and move toward those that are more difficult. Though you might want to mix up the order to challenge your students, going from easier to harder questions alleviates stress for your students and makes for a better testing experience. Not to mention, standardized tests like the SAT and TOEFL follow this organization, so structuring your tests that way will help your students on these important tests in the future.

8

Test multiple learning levels. The majority of your questions should target the lower learning levels of recall, comprehension and application. Do not be afraid, however, to add one or two questions testing higher levels of learning like analysis, synthesis and evaluation (see Bloom's taxonomy of learning for more information on learning levels). Test these higher levels sparingly, especially if you have not spent a lot of time during class on these types of activities.

## GENERAL TIPS

9

Give your students experience with the types of questions with which you will be testing. The test should not be the first time they have seen a fill in the blank or made corrections to an incorrect sentence. Your students should have practice with the form so you can test the content and not the form.

# 10

Tell them ahead of time what will be on the test both in structure and in content. It does not hurt you as a teacher or skew your test results to give your students a heads up about the type of questions that will be on the test. Giving your students this information ahead of time means you cannot write your test the night before, but that makes for a higher quality piece of evaluation anyway. Also, give them some idea what content will be covered on the test though you do not have to give specifics. Page numbers, lecture dates or book chapters are sufficient.

# 11

Include the points each section is worth. This way students can budget their time to be most impactful for them. Neither you nor they want them to spend ten minutes struggling to answer a question of minimal importance. Let them have full knowledge of what is weightiest as they take the test so they can prioritize as they take it.

# 12

Expect your students to have “foreign” handwriting. Even though English is taught in places all around the world, handwriting is not the same everywhere. Do not be surprised if your students consistently write in a penmanship style that is challenging for you to read.

**WHEN A PERSON IS SCARED, ANGRY OR IS EXPERIENCING ANY STRONG EMOTION, LANGUAGE WILL INSTINCTIVELY REVERT TO WHAT IS MOST NATURAL FOR THAT PERSON. DO WHAT YOU CAN TO RELIEVE AS MUCH OF YOUR STUDENTS' STRESS AS POSSIBLE BY WRITING GOOD TEST QUESTIONS SO THAT YOU ARE TESTING THEIR KNOWLEDGE AT ITS BEST, NOT ITS WORST. IT WILL MAKE YOU A BETTER TEACHER AND YOUR STUDENTS BETTER LEARNERS.**

# Testing 1-2--Tips on How to Create Effective Tests

## MASTERING THE ART OF ASSEMBLING YOUR OWN LANGUAGE SKILLS TESTING WILL BE A VALUABLE ASSET THROUGHOUT YOUR TEACHING CAREER.

There are lots of resources out there to help you and depending on where you are working, you can choose to do less formal testing and veer more toward assessment and evaluation of broad skills or hone in on more targeted areas. Test yourself out with these tips to creating effective tests, and with a little trial and error your design skills and question-writing abilities will ace the test.

## HOW TO CREATE EFFECTIVE TESTS

### 1 READING AND WRITING

The challenging thing about providing good solid tests for language learners is that you have several skill areas that you are assessing as well as topical knowledge and fluency within those areas. The two areas that you can assess with a written test are reading and writing skills. A written test can be an effective tool for assessing vocabulary usage, reading comprehension, writing skills, and also comprehension of tense and grammatical structures. There is a lot to consider when putting a written test together: you want it to be a cohesive review of what they have been practicing, you want it to be useful for discussion afterwards, and you want it to be as useful as it can possibly be without being too intimidating.

If you are expected to generate a formalized midterm and final exam test, or other testing to move students through levels, the focus should be on giving students a sense of accomplishment through test-taking. Test-taking is really important in a lot of institutions and countries, so take the fair approach and prepare students anytime you are doing any kind of formalized testing. Doing review sessions, giving them worksheets, and even providing very similar exercises as to what will be presented on the test are all useful ways to make sure students are ready for the test.

### 2 TEST QUESTIONS

You'll want to become well-versed in the various types of questions to include on tests and be sure (for your own sake!) that you make the tests easy to grade. Including variety on any test is a beneficial for you and for the students. If you have to cover several chapters of material, divide the test into manageable chunks. A good starting point is to refresh yourself by going through the book and your lesson plans for ideas. Then pick out what you would like the main points of the test to be. You might have something like five to eight different sections on the test, depending on what you need to cover. Create sections that focus on vocabulary, reading comprehension, grammar, writing, and anything topical that needs to be tested. Once you have determined your sections, you can then decide what combination of question types you want in each section. You have a lot of choices here. Don't stick to only one or two. Challenge the students and provide ways in which they can express their knowledge.

Typical tests can include any combination of the following:

- The ever-popular multiple choice questions
- Fill-in-the-blank (good for grammar)
- Matching exercise (good for vocabulary)
- True and false
- Written sections like answering questions or writing short essays
- Reading Comprehension

Once you have determined the sections and the question types it is time to sit down and write your test questions (and answers). You can take questions from homework assignments, in-class work, or get some help from online sites. You could also develop totally new and fresh questions on your own. Choose topic areas that interest the students, are timely, and even provide some humor. One way to reach students is to use your students' names in a few of the questions or have a running joke throughout the test. Students enjoy locating these and you could even provide extra points if they catch on. The last factor to establish is the difficulty of your test questions. It is a delicate dance to get just the right combina-

tion of difficulty without being too simple, too difficult, or too confusing. You don't want to purposely trick the students as many tests like to do with multiple choice questions. You want them to have to think things through and pay close attention to details. Always read through your tests several times and proofread them carefully. Make sure you don't have duplicate questions within the test, grammatical mistakes (embarrassing!) or any other error that might baffle students. Check your answer key and make sure you haven't created any obvious patterns, and last but not least, write a test that students will succeed at taking and will feel good for having experienced.

### 3 LISTENING AND SPEAKING

Since there is no way to test speaking and listening portions on a written exam it will be necessary to do some kind of individualized assessment which can combine the two skills. Often a good option is to do an oral interview of sorts with different topics and questions that review what students have been practicing. Another way to test for these two skills is to test them separately. Doing a listening test that either the book provides or putting one together from online sources will give you an idea of where students are with listening skills. Other ways to test listening could be giving them a dictation, or asking oral questions that they have to answer in written or spoken form. For the speaking portion of a test, you could have students answer questions or give brief impromptu speeches. Students could be given a topic for which they have to speak about for 1 to 2 minutes and then you assess them on very clear guidelines. It is necessary to provide the students with the worksheet of what you will be assessing. If you are focusing on pronunciation and past tense verbs, they should be informed of the perimeters before the test.

## TESTING IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS AND ASSESSING STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IS VERY VALUABLE FOR TEACHERS.

Teachers should not shy away from providing brilliant, level-appropriate assessments that serve students in a larger capacity than just getting a high score on a test.



# How To Test Your ESL Students: Best Practices

**YOU MAY HAVE HORRIBLE MEMORIES OF TAKING TESTS AS A STUDENT BUT NOW THAT YOU ARE TEACHING, IT IS IMPORTANT TO TEST YOUR STUDENTS ON THE MATERIAL YOU COVER IN CLASS.**

Tests are essential because they allow both you and your students to evaluate their performance. You will discover what areas they are struggling with and they will find out where they need to focus their attention. Here are some things to remember when testing students.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 FREQUENCY

Rather than save material from the whole year to include in one massive exam, consider quizzing students at the end of each chapter and then every quarter or semester to break material up into more reasonable amounts. It may seem like students are always preparing for a quiz or test but as long as they have clear goals and material is covered thoroughly, they should adapt to the routine easily. Another benefit is that with more tests, each one is a lower percentage of the overall grade so there is less anxiety about performance on individual tests.

### 2 CONTENT

Sometimes tests should focus on very specific material while others should be more comprehensive. It is important to check that students are retaining information in the long term and not just memorizing information. Use questions or question types that students have already seen in class. Springing a new type of question or activity on them during an exam can be incredibly confusing while including the exact questions from the study guide can be too easy. Take the middle ground here. Use familiar formats and ask different questions or variants of questions. This will give students the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned without getting bogged

down in reading directions.

### 3 VARIETY

If possible try to include a variety of exercises in your tests. Not every school is able to do this but interview tests can be very effective because students have to demonstrate their ability to listen and speak as well as read and write. Since the first two are critical for students who will have the opportunity to speak English outside the classroom, they are also very important in the evaluation process. You can also use projects to grade students if you are willing to attempt something new. Perhaps for one semester skits can be the primary factor in determining overall grades. While these can be a challenge to evaluate compared to multiple choice questions, they also give students who do not perform well on tests the chance to more fully demonstrate their abilities.

### 4 PREPARATION

It is important to help students prepare for exams so that they can feel confident going in to them. By creating a study guide, reviewing material in class, giving students information about the test, and answering any questions students have, you will help them immensely. Stress can reduce student performance so simply encourage them to study the material and do their best. By reducing their anxiety, you have ensured that they will be more successful.

### 5 INCENTIVE

You can also set goals for your students when it comes to exams so that they have something specific to work towards. Depending on your students, you should consider individual and class goals. Make these reasonable but challenging and do not reveal individual test scores to the class as this might cause some students some embarrassment. You may decide the goal should be a class average of 85%. Assuming that students per-

formed about this well on past exams, this should be a reasonable and attainable goal. The incentive might be that you will not assign homework for one week which will help motivate students to achieve their target score.

### 6 REVIEW

After returning the graded tests to students, go over the answers so that students can figure out what they did incorrectly. Simply telling them the answers will not help them understand their mistakes. You can mark the papers without correcting them and then go over each and every question in class so that students can correct their answers and ask questions. While students really should take advantage of this opportunity to correct their mistakes so that they have correct material to review another time, you may need to use an incentive to encourage students to make corrections.

**IN MOST COURSES, YOU WILL HAVE TO GIVE YOUR STUDENTS TESTS ON THE MATERIAL YOU COVER IN CLASS.**

While they are actually great tools to gauge how well students are doing, tests also cause learners a lot of anxiety so try to make them as painless as possible. You are not out to make students miserable so avoid trick questions. Approach the material directly and in familiar ways so that students can succeed.

# Tests Are Your Friends: How to Make Test Preparation Fun

Your current unit has come to a close, and you have put your heart and soul into your classroom activities over the past weeks. Your students have had a good time and have learned, too, and now comes the most dreaded part of all. No, it is not the unit end test but getting your students ready to take it. With all the creativity and energy you put into the lessons along the way, how can a review of the material be at all interesting? Here are some ideas to try the next time you have to get your students ready for the test.

## HOW TO ADD FUN TO TEST PREPARATION

### 1 LET YOUR STUDENTS WRITE THE TEST

Well, maybe you do not want them writing the test itself, but you may want to let your class write the review questions. By assigning each person to write a specific number of review questions, either in class or for homework, they become the teachers during the review. As any teacher knows, teaching a subject only makes you know it even better, so having your students write the review and conduct their parts in class will make them experts on the information assigned to them. Depending on what your unit covered, you will need to break the information up among individuals or groups in your class. You can divide the information by page numbers (give each person one or more pages and the information on those pages), by topic (assign certain topics you have covered to individuals or groups), or randomly assign content by pulling topics out of a hat. No matter how you break the information into pieces, assign each person or group to write five or more review/potential test questions that cover the information. You may want to motivate them to do the best job they can by choosing to include one or more of the best questions in the test itself and letting them know you will be doing it. That way, the writer of that question should have no problem getting the answer right

and neither should your class if they pay attention during the review!

### 2 FOSTER CREATIVITY

Another way to let your students do the review starts once again by assigning topics to groups of students. This time, instead of writing review questions, ask each person to do one of two things. The first option is to teach the material to the class a second time. They can use any method they choose, and making them responsible for the review will ensure that they engage throughout the process. The second option is to present the information to the class in a creative way. They may choose to do a skit, a song or another presentation that will free them to think out of the box. The more outrageous the presentation, the more of an impact it will have on the viewers, and your class will be sure to remember the information during the test. If you make a habit of reviewing in this manner, your students just may get competitive about how creative they can be, and the end of every unit will become a celebration and students will look forward to it with energetic anticipation!

### 3 MAKE A GAME OF IT

Perhaps the best method of test preparation is to play games with your class. You can find several ideas for ESL games on Busy Teacher, but here are some that work well specifically for review of material. Charades and Pictionary are great reviews of vocabulary you have covered in class. Not only will your students have fun, they will be energized with creativity and showmanship. To review content, try Jeopardy with your students. Though you will have to write the questions ahead of time, your students will have fun buzzing in, working in teams and getting in some terrific practice forming questions in English. If your students wrote test review question in the first activity, use those questions to play classroom baseball. Divide your class into two teams and get one team “up at bat” first. Designate

each corner of the room as a base. Ask a question, and if the first person answers correctly, he walks ahead a base. If the answer is incorrect, he is out. Continue to play and only count points as players pass home plate. After three outs, the other team is up at bat. If you really want to make things tough on the teams, let the team “in the field” choose the review questions to ask of the players at bat. They must know the answer to the question they ask, but they can use their books and notes and work together to come up with the questions. If the team asking the questions gives a bad question, the other team automatically scores a point.

### TEST REVIEW DOES NOT HAVE TO BE THE MOST BORING PART OF THE UNIT.

In fact, it can be fun and engaging and something your students look forward to the day before a test. By putting the material in the hands of your students, they not only review the material but also put themselves in the role of teacher cementing the information in their minds like no other activity can.

# 6 Strategies for Assessment: What Type of Tester Are You?

**THOUGH IT IS PROBABLY MOST STUDENTS' LEAST FAVORITE PART OF EDUCATION, TESTING IS NECESSARY.**

In almost any language program, at one point or another, students will have to take tests. And since most students will one day have to perform well on a TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test or other language assessment, giving your students a chance to practice their test taking in your classroom will only help them in the future. Even so, not all tests are created equal. Different testing methods test different types of knowledge and require different test taking skills. Here are some of the most popular types of tests that ESL teachers use in their classrooms.

## 6 MOST POPULAR TYPES OF TESTS FOR YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 MULTIPLE CHOICE

Multiple choice tests have been a popular choice for educators for many years. Each question gives students several options for answers, and they choose the correct answer from among the incorrect answers. Multiple choice tests are easy to grade and can cover a large range of information without taking too much time or being too overwhelming. Using these tests in your classroom may help prepare students for standardized tests. Multiple choice tests, however, may not give teachers the most accurate measure of a student's language knowledge and may overly rely on test taking strategy. Some teachers may be tempted to use the same tests year after year, and savvy students may find less than honest ways to score high on these tests.

### 2 ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE

True/false tests, a type of alternative response tests, are another long time favorite for many different teachers. Each question presents a statement, and the student must decide whether that statement is correct or not. True/false tests are another easy grader, but again depend heavily on test taking strategy. When students must correct false statements and make them true, you may get a better measure of their overall lan-

guage knowledge. These types of tests can be tricky, though. Small details can throw off even the best students, and test takers may spend much of their time second guessing their answers.

### 3 MATCHING

Matching tests require students to pair items in one column with those in another. Some language teachers may ask their students to match English words with those same words in their first language. Others may provide lists of places and people who go together. Matching tests can cover a large range of material and offer an easy grading experience for the teacher. When students match items for a test, they have some base information for each answer. They know that each item must coordinate with another. Perhaps this decreases test stress because even those with no knowledge of an answer have a chance to get the question correct. However, one mistake on a matching test can throw off so many answers a student has no hope of passing. When letters A, B and C just don't jive with numbers 1, 2 and 3, a student can become paralyzed and perform even worse.

### 4 COMPLETION

Completion tests require students to give some information to complete a sentence on the page. Completion tests might be fill in the blank tests, cloze tests, or free answer tests. Completions give students a chance to show the teacher what they know rather than testing for what they do not know. Language students can use their entire knowledge of English to come up with an answer that makes sense for each question, and these tests check how well a student can communicate rather than how much he has memorized. Completion tests may be harder on the teacher since they require more time to grade. Also, the teacher needs to have flexibility on the answers since students may not choose the exact word the teacher had in mind. Providing a word bank can help students with these types of tests, but smart teachers will give students more options than they will need to complete the test. For example, a test with 20 questions might have 30 words in the

word bank. (Having an equal number of questions and answers would make this a matching test.)

### 5 ESSAY

Essay tests are less common in the ESL classroom since they require a larger base of general knowledge than simpler test forms. Essay tests, however, are highly communicative. Students can be creative with the language they know, and strong students will find correct ways of expressing their ideas even if they do not remember exactly what was taught in class. Essay tests can be stressful for ESL students, though. The idea of filling in a blank page can be paralyzing to students whose confidence is wavering. And beginning students may not have enough base knowledge of English to succeed with this type of test. Grading essay tests can be challenging as well. So much of essay grading is subjective, so teachers who use a rubric to grade essay tests will find their scores most objective.

### 6 ORAL TESTING

Oral testing is particularly important in language classrooms because spoken language is the ultimate goal in any language program. Oral tests focus on students' ability to communicate with what they know. Since spoken language is creative and flexible, students may find that oral testing gives them opportunities to self correct, ask for clarification and use language creatively. A one on one interview, though, can be intimidating, especially for shy students. Those that are quiet in class can find the pressure of a private conversation with their teacher enough to throw their performance on the exam. Teachers, on the other hand, may appreciate the opportunity to hear students who choose not to speak on a daily basis in class. Grading oral tests can be more subjective or more objective depending on how the test is structured.

**ULTIMATELY, THE BEST TEACHERS WILL INCLUDE ALL OF THESE TESTING STRATEGIES IN THEIR CLASSROOMS.**

By doing so, they decrease the influence of the test itself and really get to the heart of their students' knowledge.



# Create All-Purpose Communicative Assessments for ESL Students

For English as a second language teachers, deciding on the best type of assessment for your students can be complicated. On the one hand, standardized tests and district requirements want statistics, numbers and percentages from your students, which prove your students' success in learning as well as yours in teaching. Real proficiency in language is something different, though, and shouldn't assessments be designed to measure that type of proficiency? Perhaps there is some middle ground, some way to design your assessments so they provide measurable success in real language situations.

## HOW TO CREATE ALL-PURPOSE COMMUNICATIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR YOUR ESL STUDENTS

### 1 WHAT IS COMMUNICATIVE ASSESSMENT?

Communicative assessment is a method of determining your students' overall proficiencies in English. This type of assessment is sometimes considered more beneficial to the student because it gives them practical feedback about real language use in real life situations. Traditional testing methods like cloze tests, multiple choice exams, and fill in the blanks, though they may give you a reliable measure of whether your student has learned a specific language principle, do not measure real language use in realistic settings. If the true purpose of language studies is to acquire a second language, shouldn't assessments focus on measuring that proficiency? Thus, some educators prefer to use more communicative assessments to measure the abilities of their students in real language situations.

### 2 HOW TO DESIGN A COMMUNICATIVE ASSESSMENT

Ideally, communicative assessments would measure the overall success your students have achieved in ESL, but measuring the entirety of skills and abilities of a person's language use is not practical nor is it feasible. Therefore, when you are designing a communicative assessment, you must determine the specific language skill you want to measure. Do you want to measure how well your students might do at a job interview? Do you want to determine if they

would be able to take a college course in English? Do you want to know if your students are able to order lunch at a sit down restaurant? Once you have decided on the specific language task you want to measure in your students, think about the language tasks that are necessary to be successful in that situation. For example, if you want your students to be able to fill out a job application form, they will need to be able to read and understand the vocabulary on the form and write the information to fill out the paperwork. If you want your students to be able to take a college level course, it will require skills in several areas. They will need to be able to listen to and comprehend the lecture. They will also have to take appropriate notes. They will need to read and understand the assigned texts. They may need to participate in study group discussions. They will need to read exam questions and respond appropriately. They will also need to write the required papers and complete the required homework assignments. Once you start to break a situational language goal into its component parts, you may be surprised at how many skills your students will need, but once you have that list you will know the skills that you should measure in your communicative assessment.

### 3 RECREATE THE CONTEXT

Now that you know the skills you need to assess, it is time to recreate the context for your assessment. How you do this will vary greatly depending on the situation for which you are testing. Perhaps you will give them a job application form as their test. Maybe you will play a recorded lecture and ask your students to take notes, then collect those notes and evaluate them. Whatever you do to recreate the situation for your students, you should pay particular attention to the materials you use to recreate that situation. Be sure that you are using authentic materials, not materials designed for ESL students. For example, you giving a lecture and expecting your students to take notes on the material, even if the material is in a subject area completely separate from English, will not be an effective way to create a communicative assessment. This is because as an ESL teacher, your pronunciation, vocabulary choice, speaking rate and many other factors are different from someone who

does not teach English as a second language. Therefore, the ideal in this case would be to invite a guest lecturer into your classroom or have your students sit in on someone else's lecture and be tested on that material. This way, the speaking is more reflective of what your students would be exposed to in a typical college course. One other factor to keep in mind for designing the context in which the assessment is given is to include the unexpected. In real life situations, you can always expect the unexpected. Including an unexpected element in your assessment makes the situation more realistic and requires your students to think on their feet.

### 4 THE QUESTION OF SCORING

Now that you decided on an area to test your students in and you have laid out how you will create that context, it is time to think about how to score your students' performances. Communicative testing has suffered much criticism because often the evaluation is subjective. It is up to the person administering the assessment to determine if a student's performance exceeded expectations, was adequate or was insufficient to warrant a passing grade, and those results are not ones that will please the statistic seekers. Ideally, the second language student would perform on the task as a native speaker would, but even the best teachers would be subjective in that measurement. An excellent tool for taking what could be subjective assessment and making it more objective is a scoring rubric. By using this tool, you define levels of performance prior to the assessment itself and then determine which level each student performs at during the assessment.

### BY WALKING THROUGH EACH OF THESE STEPS FOR CREATING COMMUNICATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR YOUR ESL STUDENTS BOTH YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS WILL BENEFIT.

The realistic measure of real language efficacy rather than the ability to perform well at test specific tasks will give both of you a better understanding of what areas you need to focus your efforts on for future language learning. Not only that, with objective scoring methods you can also please those looking for numbers and grades. In this way, you get the best of both worlds for you and your students!

# Top 10 Ways to Assess Your Students

**PART OF TEACHING IS ASSESSMENT. COLLEGES OFFER ENTIRE COURSES ON WAYS TO ASSESS STUDENTS OF ENGLISH. IT IS EASY, HOWEVER, FOR TEACHERS TO GET STUCK IN A RUT OF ASSESSMENT.**

If you are looking for a new way to assess your students or just want a reminder of some oldies but goodies, read on for a look at ten of the most popular ways to assess ESL students.

## HOW TO ASSESS YOUR STUDENTS: TOP 10 WAYS

### 1 ORAL INTERVIEW

You can do a one on one interview with each of your students to get a good idea of their listening and speaking abilities. You can schedule these types of interviews during class (perhaps take each student into the hall to have a private discussion while the rest of the class does seat work) or schedule with students individually. Asking questions that use grammatical structures and vocabulary that your class has studied will help you know exactly what each student has grasped. Do not penalize a student for not knowing content if he or she can compose grammatically and situationally correct statements or questions in response to your questions.

### 2 CLASS PRESENTATION

A presentation in class assesses a different aspect of spoken language. When you ask a student to speak in front of the class, he is able to prepare and practice what he wants to say. He can also research information on his topic. In this case, the grade you give your student should be based on both content and presentation.

### 3 ROLE PLAY

Another way to assess your students' speaking abilities is by having them perform role-plays in front of the class. By giving them a situation and roles to play, you can see how cre-

atively your students are able to use language with one another. Be listening for content and grammar as with any oral assessment, but you can also be attuned to how your students are making creative use of their language to communicate with one another. Even if they show grammatical imperfection, are your students able to understand each other? Are they able to use the language skills they possess to get their point across to their partner? These are important skills and ones you should foster in your students.

### 4 CLOZE EXAM

A cloze exam is an atypical way to test the understanding your students have of grammar. To write a cloze exam, write an original paragraph or take one that your students have used in their studies. Then replace every fifth or sixth word with a blank. Ask your students to fill in the blanks with words they think would be most logical and grammatical. You will see a variety of answers among your students, but as long as the answers are grammatically and logically correct, the student should receive full credit.

### 5 FILL IN THE BLANK

A fill in the blank test may seem similar to a cloze exam, but this type of test is used to test a specific grammatical structure or set of vocabulary. You can write individual sentences or an entire paragraph for your students, but it is probably best to provide a word bank in either case. You may choose to supply more words than will be necessary to fill in the blanks to make the test more challenging. This will force your students to choose the best answers rather than matching ten words with ten blanks.

### 6 WRITING SAMPLE

Having your students give you a writing sample is another good way to assess their proficiency with grammar. If you have them write some-

thing for homework, you run the risk that someone other than your student will do the writing. Often friends or native speakers will correct a nonnative speaker's writing with the intention of helping, but this will not give you an accurate picture of your student's writing. To avoid this, have your students do a periodic in class writing. Give them an adequate amount of time to write about a subject that you assign. You will then get an accurate look at their grammatical and writing proficiency. Follow up your assessment with some mini-lessons on common grammatical pitfalls that the class exhibited.

### 7 PORTFOLIO

To expand the material you base your students' grades on, why not assign each person to assemble a portfolio. A portfolio is a collection of work samples that cover several aspects of the assignments your students have completed. This is an especially effective way to assess your students if you have the same class for reading, writing, listening, speaking and grammar. Ask each student to compile a collection of ten works for you to grade. You can include specific assignments on the list, but you can also give a category and ask your students to present their best work. Ask for a grammar homework assignment, a writing sample and a vocabulary exercise, for example. Your students can then choose the work that they are most proud of. They may feel more encouraged to be graded on their strengths rather than their weaknesses.

### 8 ONLINE QUIZ

You do not have to spend as much of your class time assessing your students as was often necessary in the past. With the extensive collection of online resources for ESL students, you can require your students to spend time at home or in a language lab period working on exercises and quizzes available online. Have your students print out their final scores or e-mail them to you. In so doing, your

students will still get feedback on their work and knowledge, but you will not have to give up valuable class time for it to happen.

## 9 MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAM

Sometimes the classics are often the way to go when assessing your students. If you choose to give a multiple-choice exam, keep these pointers in mind when writing the questions. Make sure all the answers are grammatically correct. Your students should not be able to eliminate an answer based on grammar alone (unless, of course, that is what you are trying to test). Also, try to keep all the answer choices around the same length. If you choose to include the options “all of the above” or “none of the above”, make sure they are options for additional questions. If you keep these tips in mind when you write your multiple-choice quiz, you will get better results from your students.

## 10 TRUE/FALSE QUIZ

The true/false quiz is also a classic that is used by most teachers. When you use this type of test, do not give trick questions that focus on minor details. Even more important, have your students correct the questions that they say are false. If they are making the corrections rather than just identifying the mistakes, you will make sure they are answering from what they know rather than making lucky guesses. You can assign one point to each answer and another point to each correction on the test.

**THERE ARE MANY OTHER WAYS YOU MAY FIND VALUABLE IN ASSESSING YOUR STUDENTS, AND THEY WILL EACH BE USEFUL IN THE CLASSROOM.**

The more variety you use in assessing your students, the better your picture will be of their overall language skills.



# Great “Quick and Dirty” Informal Assessments for the ESL Class

*“Oh, no! There’s a scheduled test on Friday? I forgot all about it! What am I going to do?” “Well, you could go through the book and get material there. Sometimes the Internet has some helpful things, too.” “Thanks. I just wish I had planned better. I hate tests!”*

It probably seems at first glance that this is a conversation between two students in the hall or cafeteria. Actually, however, it was between two teachers in the staff room. Testing can be as stressful for teachers as for students: difficult to plan for, put materials together for, schedule time for, as well as give an appropriate amount of credit for. Particularly hard on everyone is the big unit exam or midterm that covers a large chunk of course material and poses a number of instructional dilemmas: for example, the student who is doing well in class but fails the test miserably, or the student who does well on all parts of the test but one heavily weighted portion. And then there are the students who just don’t show the day of the test, claiming “family emergency.” Finally, there is the stress that is generated in both students and teacher to have so much of the grade based on the one test. How, really, with such a test does the teacher fairly represent the students’ work? The answer may lie in the type of test. Informal assessment rather than the “big test” seems to address a lot of these issues. It’s assessment “by walking around,” to borrow a term from business. Just as in a well-run business the manager does not hide in his office but actively gets out and sees what is happening with his staff and product, so should the teacher not just hide behind his desk but rather get up and actively engage with students and check in on how they are progressing. The question is how to use that habit for assessment.

## PRACTICES FOR ASSESSING BY WALKING AROUND

### 1 WALK AROUND—LITERALLY

One of the best ways to informally assess ESL students is to simply walk around. Stand back and note the conversations students are having: What pronunciation and oral grammar issues need to be addressed in the future? Are they engaging with each other appropri-

ately, such as taking turns and actively listening? Make a few notes about instructional issues that should be addressed in upcoming classes. The teacher can learn a lot about students just by walking around and listening.

### 2 SIT IN ON A GROUP

To get a clearer, more detailed of student ability than the “snapshot” provided by walking around, the teacher can also choose to sit in on one or more groups by pulling up a chair and joining it—not to become an active member, necessarily, but to get a more in depth look at how students are relating to each other. This works especially well for discussions on important issues such as the death penalty. By sitting in on a group, the teacher can get a clearer idea of how well students are supporting their own ideas, listening to other’s ideas, and respectfully disagreeing with each other when appropriate. The teacher can also note those students who are “hiding out” and not really participating, which might not be as apparent when just walking around.

### 3 INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS

Having informal conversations with students can also give you quite a bit of information on your student. I remember reading a novel in which the main character, a doctoral student, ran into his advisor in the elevator, where between floors the advisor asked him a few questions about his dissertation. When they got to their floor, the advisor congratulated the student, who then realized that he had just successfully defended his dissertation. While I would not recommend going that far with informal assessment, I think the anecdote shows the power of this kind of assessment—the student was able to reveal a lot more about what he knew in the “low stakes” atmosphere of a private and impromptu conversation than in a meeting in front of a committee. Similarly, a student can better reveal his competency in casual conversation in English in an actual casual conversation than he would by standing in front of the class.

### 4 WATCH STUDENTS IN CONVERSATION

Partner and group work also reveals a lot about student learning in ESL: language and learning both occur in communities, so this is not surprising. Again, sometimes, perhaps at break or between activities, just watch students as they interact with their peers and note areas for pronunciation, conversation, and vocabulary instruction. One of my proudest teaching experiences was watching the class that entered frightened of or openly hostile to the writing process as well as suspicious of each other go from silent “notes to myself” writers to a community that actively sought and gave each other feedback on their writing. This was accomplished in part by watching them in the writing process then giving feedback on what could improve and modeling those behaviors. Such a transformation, however, probably would not have occurred without carefully observing and analyzing the class behaviors in the writing process.

### 5 NOTE STUDENT WRITING AND WRITING PRACTICES

As shown in the example above, informal assessment is not just for oral skills, - it can be used for written ones. It’s helpful just to observe what students do when they write as so many of them hate it. Many students, for example, get themselves into very strange positions, literally, when writing—half lying on the desk, for example, and looking at the paper from a prone position. Talking to students about alternative positions, as well as the possibility of using a computer, can help here. Other students may hate writing because it seems so repetitive and dull to them—“My Summer Vacation” over and over. Informal assessment can help get to the source of problems like these and allow the teacher to adjust the curriculum.

**REMEMBER, THE PURPOSE OF INFORMAL ASSESSMENT IS NOT NECESSARILY FOR A GRADE—ALTHOUGH I SOMETIMES AWARD DAILY PARTICIPATION POINTS FOR TAKING PART IN CONVERSATIONS.**

Mostly, however, this kind of assessment is to inform the teacher of what areas to emphasize for materials and instruction and therefore is arguably as valuable or more so that the traditional “big test.”

# How to Evaluate Speaking

You are in a small classroom at your local language school or university. It is almost the end of the semester, and your speaking class has been fun all year. They have learned vocabulary, done role plays and strategic interaction, and practiced speaking to one another and to you. The big question now is how do you evaluate their progress? You either speak or you don't, right? It's either good or it isn't. The good news is this: you can give objective grades in a speaking class.

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN EVALUATE SPEAKING

### 1 CREATE A RUBRIC

Most teachers will be familiar with the concept of grading with a rubric, a table with different criteria and a grading scale. If you have never created a rubric before, it's really quite easy. Simply choose the criteria on which you will grade students and list them along the left side of the page. Then create an even number of columns along the top of the page. Four is the easiest to start with if this is your first rubric. These columns will represent potential skill levels of your students. For each criterion, define what level of the ability a student at each of the four levels would exhibit. For example, the most straightforward way to label the boxes on the rubric would be, "Meets expectations high, meets expectations low, slightly underperforms, does not meet expectations." The more rubrics you make, the more detailed you can be in your descriptions. Then, as you evaluate each student, determine at which level he or she is performing. Take the average level among the criteria and you have an objective grade with suggestions for areas in which your student can improve.

### 2 PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation is a basic quality of language learning. Though most second language learners will never have the pronunciation of a native speaker, poor pronunciation can obscure communication and prevent an ESL student from making his meaning known. When evaluating the pronunciation of your students, listen for clearly articulated words, appropriate pronunciations of unusual spellings, and assimilation and contractions in suitable places. Also listen for intonation. Are students using the correct inflection for the types of sentences they are saying? Do they know that the inflection of a question is

different from that of a statement?

### 3 VOCABULARY

After noting your students' pronunciation levels, move to vocabulary. Vocabulary comprehension and vocabulary production are always two separate banks of words in the mind of a speaker, native as well as second language. You should encourage your students to have a large production vocabulary and an even larger recognition vocabulary. For this reason it is helpful to evaluate your students on the level of vocabulary they are able to produce. Are they using the specific vocabulary you have instructed them in this semester? Are they using vocabulary appropriate to the contexts in which they are speaking?

### 4 ACCURACY

Grammar has always been and forever will be an important issue in foreign language study. Writing sentences correctly on a test, though, is not the same as accurate spoken grammar. As your students speak, listen for the grammatical structures and tools you have taught them. Are they able to use multiple tenses? Do they have agreement? Is word order correct in the sentence? All these and more are important grammatical issues, and an effective speaker will successfully include them in his or her language.

### 5 COMMUNICATION

A student may struggle with grammar and pronunciation, but how creative is she when communicating with the language she knows? Assessing communication in your students means looking at their creative use of the language they do know to make their points understood. A student with a low level of vocabulary and grammar may have excellent communication skills if she is able to make you understand her, whereas an advanced student who is tied to manufactured dialogues may not be able to be expressive with language and would therefore have low communication skills. Don't let a lack of language skill keep your students from expressing themselves. The more creative they can be with language and the more unique ways they can express themselves, the better their overall communication skills will be.

### 6 INTERACTION

Being able to say what you mean with a foreign language is one thing,

being able to interact with others is another. Ask your students questions. Observe how they speak to one another. Are they able to understand and answer questions? Can they answer you when you ask them questions? Do they give appropriate responses in a conversation? A student with effective interaction skills will be able to answer questions and follow along with a conversation happening around him. Great oratory skills will not get anyone very far if he or she cannot listen to other people and respond appropriately. Encourage your students to listen as they speak and have appropriate responses to others in the conversation.

### 7 FLUENCY

Fluency may be the easiest quality to judge in your students' speaking. How comfortable are they when they speak? How easily do the words come out? Are there great pauses and gaps in the student's speaking? If there are then your student is struggling with fluency. Fluency does not improve at the same rate as other language skills. You can have excellent grammar and still fail to be fluent. You want your students to be at ease when they speak to you or other English speakers. Fluency is a judgment of this ease of communication and is an important criterion when evaluating speaking.

### THESE CRITERIA, PRONUNCIATION, VOCABULARY, ACCURACY, COMMUNICATION, INTERACTION AND FLUENCY ARE ALL MARKERS OF A STUDENT'S OVERALL SPEAKING ABILITIES.

Students may excel in one and struggle in another, and not necessarily the ones you might think. Help your student understand these qualities of effective speakers. Let your students know that you will be listening for these qualities when you evaluate their progress and encourage them to improve their English in these areas. Also, listen to them both when they talk to you and when they talk with other students. They should be able to speak well with one another. After all, most of the English they will use in the future will be with other nonnative speakers. Finally, remember that a true evaluation will take into consideration more than just the oral interview on the final exam. Listen to your students throughout the semester. Note how they improve in these areas. Encourage them as speakers and learners, and you are sure to reap the benefits, too.

# 5 Surprising Factors that May Affect Students' Test Scores

**WHEN ESL STUDENTS DON'T DO SO WELL ON THE TEST, WHAT DO YOU THINK? THAT THEY DIDN'T STUDY? IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.**

Although no one questions the importance of preparing for a test, success in passing or getting good scores in an ESL test is determined by several factors, most of which come into play way before the actual moment students take the test. Here are the five factors you should keep in mind and what you can do to help your students achieve success.

## 5 FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT YOUR STUDENTS' SCORES OR PERFORMANCE

### 1 SELF-STUDY TIME

First on the list is a factor that a lot of students underestimate, particularly adult learners. They show up for class, pay attention, actively participate and leave the classroom thinking, "My work is done." This could not be further from the truth. The work your students do in class is actually only the beginning. This may not be the case for other subjects or classes, but ESL is a whole other ballgame. Let's backtrack and think about why students take ESL lessons. They need to improve their English communication skills. And they won't achieve this goal, let alone do well on the test, simply by attending classes, no matter how hard they work during class.

**What to do:** Whether you have young learners or teens who are accustomed to doing homework, or adults who say they never have time, you must encourage them to do some extra work at home on a regular basis. Now, if you give them really creative and fun homework assignments, there won't be any excuses.

### 2 ABSENTEEISM

Out of the five, this one's the most obvious reason why some students don't do well in tests. And this

is often a big problem in adult ESL learners. We must accept the fact that they have busy lives, impossible schedules and often make a huge effort to come to class. But if they are absent one too many times, it will undoubtedly affect their performance.

**What to do:** You can't force students to come to class. But you can help your students be accountable for what they fail to do. If you have students who are frequently absent make sure they understand what the consequences are.

### 3 TEST ANXIETY

This is a factor that comes into play when students are taking standardized tests like the Cambridge ESOL or TOELF, TOEIC, etc. Have you ever had students who did brilliantly in the practice tests, but then failed the real deal? Sometimes students don't do well on a test, not because of a lack of preparation but because, simply put, they get so nervous they can't perform to their full potential.

**What to do:** Training and preparation for a test goes a long way towards soothing nerves and insecurities. Make sure they are more than familiar with the test structure and know exactly what is expected of them. Finally, the best way to calm anxiety or panic is to tell them that they should simply do their best. In the worst case scenario, they can take the test the following year, and they will have a valuable testing experience under their belt.

### 4 UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEST STRUCTURE

Often, students don't do well on a test because they don't understand the test structure: they don't know what they're supposed to answer or write, or how they should respond.

**What to do:** Naturally, when students are taking tests like the Cambridge ESOL, they should be familiar with all of the sections and parts and what is required of them in each. For your own tests, don't forget to tell students exactly what to expect. Will you be giving them a multiple choice test? Is there a speaking task? A writing task? Don't surprise them with these things on the day of the test.

### 5 FOCUS ON FLUENCY

This is one of factors that you should be paying attention to right from the start. Let's assume your students are taking ESL lessons to improve their English speaking skills – their goal is to attain fluency. But some students lose sight of this fact and don't study to attain fluency, they study to pass the test. So they memorize rules and make charts and lists, which is fine, but when you ask them to reply to you in a conversation they don't know what to say.

**What to do:** Studying English as second language is not like studying math or science. In fact, it's not even how kids in English-speaking countries usually study English. In ESL, the focus is on acquiring a second language and improving communication skills in this language. Help your students understand they should strive to communicate in a meaningful way, in writing or speaking, instead of memorize the rules for reported speech. They won't be asked the rules on the test, but they will be expected to use real, everyday English.

### NOW, WHY IS ALL OF THIS IMPORTANT?

While it's great that you give your students plenty of chances to review before a major test, it's also essential that you keep these factors in mind from the start, not only to guarantee good test scores, but also ensure that your students are getting the level of fluency they aim to obtain.



# 6 Best Tips for Reviewing for an ESL Speaking Test

**SPEAKING ENGLISH IN DAY-TO-DAY SITUATIONS IS OFTEN A SOURCE OF FRUSTRATION FOR ESL STUDENTS – IMAGINE HOW FRUSTRATING IT IS FOR THEM TO TAKE A SPEAKING TEST.**

Tests in which ESL students are required to show whether they have the skills, vocabulary and structures to succeed in communicating in English are quite common in international examinations like the Cambridge ESOL Exams. It is vital for students to prepare for these, or any speaking test you choose to give to your ESL class, and it is your job to review what they will be tested on. Here are 6 tips that should make a big difference in your review and practice lesson.

## 6 BEST TIPS FOR REVIEWING FOR A SPEAKING TEST

### 1 GO OVER WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM

Students are rarely required to simply “speak” during a speaking test. There are a number of things they must be able to prove they can do, and these depend on the particular test. No matter how many speaking tests your students have had in the past, it is very important to go over what will be expected of them in each particular case.

Let’s see an example. The speaking test for the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) Exam has four parts: in the first, the student is required to provide information about him/herself and express opinions, in the second part, the student is shown a pair of photographs and is expected to describe them and make comparisons, the third part is a collaborative task, where the student talks to another candidate and together they must reach a decision. And finally, the last part is a discussion with the other candidate based on the previous task. It might seem like a lot but it often takes no more than 15 minutes.

If your students are taking a standardized test like the FCE, make sure you go over the exam format well in advance. But the same goes if you are giving your class your own custom-made speaking test. Will you be placing them in pairs or will each speak on their own? What types of questions or tasks should they expect? Will you test them through role plays? Simply telling your students that they can expect “a speaking test” will only let the anxiety build up.

One important caveat: telling them what is expected of them does not mean that they should prepare or memorize specific answers, or even a long speech. They must understand the types of things they will be asked, try to listen carefully and provide the best answer.

### 2 REVIEW THE VOCABULARY

Each test has an expectation in terms of the vocabulary the student is required to use – some even provide vocabulary lists. Should you print out the list and go over each word, one by one, to make sure they know them all? This is not only totally unnecessary, - and it’s also very tedious and boring for your class. Instead, look at the list and make sublists organized by topics. In the example above, you’ll see that there are many words related to health, others are adjectives used for physical description. Plan review activities for each subset of words where students have the opportunity to use these words.

### 3 REVIEW THE STRUCTURES

In some cases, your students will need to know very specific structures and grammar in order to succeed in the test. For example, because candidates are required to make comparisons in Part 2 of the FCE Speaking Test, it stands to reason that they should practice comparatives. They are probably reviewing plenty of verb tenses and structures for the written test, but make sure they get oral practice as well.

### 4 REVIEW USEFUL PHRASES

The Cambridge tests have phrases that are typically used because the tasks usually require the same thing. In Part 3 of the test students must reach an agreement, so it is very useful to review phrases used for agreeing and disagreeing, for example.

### 5 PROVIDE SPECIAL TIPS

Besides the vocabulary and structures they will need to use, it is also a great idea to provide some extra, useful tips. For instance, when students are asked questions by the examiner, it is best that they first answer the question directly, and then expand by providing more details, than vice versa. Also, you may tell them that it’s very useful for them to record themselves as they practice at home, and try to pick up on any difficulties they may have.

### 6 GIVE THEM PLENTY OF PRACTICE

This is probably the most essential point in preparation for any speaking test and the one you’ll spend the most time on. Give your students the opportunity to practice with exercises that recreate the test scenario.

**REMEMBER: THE GOAL OF THE REVIEW LESSON IS NOT TO TEACH THEM SOMETHING NEW.**

Your goal should be to provide your students with two essential things: first, the information they need to know to be prepared (you won’t want them to get caught unawares) and second, the practice they need to boost their confidence.

# 5 Keys to Designing and Conducting Effective Speaking Tests

Most ESL students approach English classes with the desire to improve their communication skills in English. A great deal of the day-to-day activities involves speaking tasks. So why is it that we give more importance to the written exam than to the speaking test? The answer is quite obvious. Written tests are easier to design and easier to grade – after all most answers are clearly right or wrong. But how do you design a speaking test and furthermore, how do you grade your ESL students when there are so many things to evaluate? How do you design effective speaking tests, i.e. tests that really evaluate your students' progress in terms of oral communication skills? Let me break it down for you into five essential points:

## THE 5 KEYS TO DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE SPEAKING TESTS

### 1 LOWER TEACHER PARTICIPATION

The first thing you'll have to consider when designing effective speaking tests is that you'll have to speak less. A lot less. Your students should do all of the speaking, in fact, and you should simply listen. Try to avoid speaking tasks where you have to participate, unless of course you are testing a single, private student.

### 2 CREATE A LIST OF OBJECTIVES

One of the things I always recommend is that you constantly remind students of the objectives they've met. These objectives are not things like "learning the simple past" but more practical, context-based goals like "learning to talk about what you did in the recent past".

The purpose of the speaking test is not only to test your students' abilities to function in an English-speaking environment and see to what extent they have developed their communication skills, but also show your students that they have indeed mastered the objectives you set forth for them at the start of the term. When designing the test, think back to all of the practical situations and everyday scenarios your students learned to navigate throughout the term. Your list of objectives may look like this if you have beginners:

- Greet others and say where you're from.
- Talk about favorite food, drinks and eating habits.
- Ask for clarification/ask someone to speak louder/more slowly.
- Speaking English on the telephone.
- Etc.

### 3 INCLUDE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SPEAKING TASKS

Once you have defined the topics you want to test them on, define the types of speaking tasks they'll need to complete. I suggest at least two different types, but if you have time to include three, so much the better.

The first speaking task should be an activity where each student has 60 seconds to talk about something. You can do a number of things:

- Give them a short paragraph to read and ask them to report back in their own words (for example, a short celebrity bio).
- They listen as you read a short paragraph and then report back in their own words.
- Give them a "topic card". They must read the topic or question and speak about it for 60 seconds, for example, "Tell us about the things you like to do in your free time".

The second speaking task could be an interview type of activity. Divide students into pairs and give them a topic they must ask each other questions about, for example, "Find out what your partner likes to do in his/her free time". After the interview, each student must report his/her findings.

The last speaking task should be a role play. Prepare role cards for a variety of situations and hand them out. For instance, Role Card 1A could say: You want to invite your friend to the movies but you need to find out what day and hour is best for him/her. Role Card 1B can say: Your friend wants to go to the movies but you're busy Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening.

### 4 DESIGN AN EVALUATION RUBRIC

How do you grade your students across these various tasks? Prepare an evaluation rubric. First you have to decide

exactly what you'll evaluate. How about objective (if they achieved it), accuracy (if they made grammar/usage mistakes) and vocabulary (including expressions and set phrases)? I suggest something like this:

Reporting: Objective	___/10
Accuracy	___/10
Vocabulary	___/10
Average	___
Interview: Objective	___/10
Accuracy	___/10
Vocabulary	___/10
Average	___
Role Play: Objective	___/10
Accuracy	___/10
Vocabulary	___/10
Average	___
Final Grade	___

I'd give 10-9 points to students who communicate clearly and effectively and make practically no mistakes, 8-7 - to those who make few mistakes, 6-5 - to those who make enough mistakes so that they are not clear some of the time, 4-3 - to those who were very hard to understand, and 2-1 - who did not come even close to completing the task. But these are just suggestions. You can also use this rubric available from Scholastic.com.

### 5 GIVE FEEDBACK

Finally, just as essential as the test itself, and more important than the grade/score, is the feedback you'll give your students on how they performed. Did they meet the objective for the task, i.e. did they find out the information they were supposed to find out? Did they repeat the same words or expressions? Did they make mistakes related to grammar and usage? Did they speak too little/too much? Don't forget to first tell them what they did great, and then tell them what they need to improve: Maria, you used great vocabulary and remembered all the right expressions. You need to focus on choosing the right verb tense.

**FOLLOW THIS BLUEPRINT, AND YOU'LL NOT ONLY EFFECTIVELY GAUGE HOW MUCH YOUR STUDENTS HAVE LEARNED, YOU'LL ALSO GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE FOR THEMSELVES.**

# Create Tests that Make Students Feel Good about Themselves

**WHEN YOU TELL YOUR ESL STUDENTS THAT THERE'S A TEST COMING UP, THEY WON'T BE SURPRISED. TELL THEM THAT THE "GRADE" IS NOT IMPORTANT, AND THEY JUST MIGHT BE A LITTLE BEWILDERED.**

You see, ESL students still think like "students" who need to get a certain "grade" in order to "pass the course". And while it may be necessary to give them the official grade or score, your students' goal should not be to "pass the course" with a certain grade. Their goal should be to speak English better. The test is a way for you - and for them - to see how much they've learned, how much more they can speak English now than before.

So, when you create a test, think about ways to show them exactly this – how much they've progressed – and by contrast which things they need to continue working on. Here are the 7 keys to designing tests that will achieve just that.

## 7 KEYS TO CREATING EFFECTIVE TESTS

### 1 REMEMBER THE INCENTIVE

If your students' incentive for taking the ESL class is speaking English better, you should design a test that works towards motivating them further. The test should be challenging enough to put them to the test, but not too hard. Some teachers pride themselves in giving tough tests that only a select few are able to pass. But this is demoralizing to ESL students and won't encourage them to continue studying.

### 2 INCLUDE VARIETY

Don't make the entire test multiple choice. Include one of those and then a fill in the blanks or a matching exercise. Some students are better at reading and writing, others at listening and speaking. Make sure you evaluate each of the four skills equally. In

addition to the usual written tasks, give them a short reading/writing assignment (an email they must read and reply to), a reading assignment (with a multiple choice, true/false exercise, or open-ended questions) and a listening task (a short audio to listen to (or video to watch!) or a set of questions you may choose to read them), as well as a separate speaking test, where students will have the chance to show off their communication skills

### 3 ADJUST TO STUDENTS' LEVEL AND AGES

Young learners will do great with multiple choice and matching tasks that include images. Include fewer images the older they get. Adult learners should do more reading and writing, maybe less matching. Try different exercise types that are suited to your students' level and ages.

### 4 THINK IN TERMS OF GOALS

Does each task help you evaluate what you want to evaluate? Are the learning goals clear and apparent for each task? For example, a matching task where you have words on one side and the definitions on the other clearly evaluates vocabulary. A fill in the blanks exercise that you must complete with the right verb tense clearly evaluates grammar. But what if one of the goals is to "speak English on the telephone"? You could have a phone conversation with part of the dialogue missing, which your students have to complete.

### 5 DON'T THROW THEM A CURVE BALL

It's good to be creative with the types of questions and tasks you give them, but don't give them a task they've never done before the test. They may get confused or not understand the instructions, and you don't want to be responsible for creating a feeling of insecurity when they should be feeling the opposite. Never test them on

something they've never seen before or use words they may not know.

### 6 USE REAL PEOPLE, SETTINGS AND CONTEXTS

If you include a short paragraph for reading comprehension, make it a biography of a real person, for example, an actor, artist, or singer they admire. If it's a description of a place, use a real place, not a fictional land that doesn't exist. Remember, they're learning to communicate in the real world.

### 7 RETURN THE TEST WITH MORE THAN JUST A GRADE

This is perhaps the most crucial element, one of those rare learning opportunities. The feedback you give each individual student will be a real eye-opener, a true assessment of what their strengths and weaknesses are, what they have successfully learned and what they need to continue working on. If you give feedback the right way – by mentioning both the students' strengths and weaknesses – they get to take away more than just a number or a percentage on a piece of paper!

## THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, YOU'VE GIVEN YOUR CLASS PLENTY OF MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES.

The test experience, whether it's a unit check or final test should be just as meaningful. Instead of learning something new, they'll be able to see just how much they've learned and how far they've come along.



# Mind the Gap! 10 Fun Fill in the Blanks Activities for Any Class

**A GAP-FILLING EXERCISE IS PROBABLY THE QUINTESSENTIAL ESL ACTIVITY.**

They're easy for teacher's to create, easy for students to complete, and may be designed for any vocabulary list or verb tense. Since they're so common in the ESL class, why not give them a new, fun twist? Here are some ideas for blanks your students will enjoy filling.

**TRY THESE 10 FUN FILL IN THE BLANKS ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR NEXT ESL CLASS**

## 1 ILLUSTRATED BLANKS

This exercise imitates the style of storybooks that have gaps in the story filled with pictures. This is probably the best type of gap-filling activity with very young learners, especially those who can't read or write just yet. Copy a short story onto a Word document. Delete some of the key vocabulary and paste some small pictures into the gaps to represent the word you deleted. You'll have to fiddle with the formatting, the size of the images and spacing of the Word document, but it's not that hard to do.

If your students can read, they read the story and fill the blanks with the help of the illustrations. If they can't read, you do the reading and pause to allow them to look at the picture and fill in the blanks.

## 2 DRAWING A BLANK

This is a variation of the activity mentioned above. Give each of your young learners a copy of the same story with the blanks in the text. Make sure that the blanks are big enough, i.e. that there is enough space for students to fill the gaps with their own drawings. Check answers by having students take turns reading the story out loud.

## 3 A GAP IN MY MEMORY

This is another way to practice key vocabulary. Write some sentences on the board and ask students to read them out loud. Then proceed to erase the key vocabulary. Ask students questions to fill in the blanks: Sarah wants to buy a \_\_\_\_\_. What does Sarah want to buy?

## 4 MUSICAL BLANKS

This is a classic and one that many of you have probably already tried, but it can't be left out of a list of great gap-filling exercises. Play a song for your students to listen to and provide the lyrics with blanks they must fill. You can handle the exercise in a number of ways. You can play the song and then give them lyrics to complete, or you can play the song while they fill the gaps at the same time.

## 5 VIDEO BLANKS

This is exactly like the Musical Blanks only in this case you use a short video: a scene from a sitcom, a YouTube video, or a CNN news video for more advanced learners. You'll probably have to create the script yourself in most cases, but BusyTeacher.org has plenty of scripted videos you can use!

## 6 FAMOUS COUPLES

A great way to teach vocabulary is to introduce it through very common pairings, for example: apples and bananas, bacon and eggs, black and white, mom and dad, burger and fries, etc. Create a set of cards in which only one of the words appears: \_\_\_\_\_ and fries, burger and \_\_\_\_\_. Ask students to pick up a card and fill in the blank.

## 7 OH, SNAP!

This game is similar to the game of Snap! Write sentences with gaps on small cards to create your deck of cards. Make sure that you include sentences with blanks that may be

filled with the same word, for example: "\_\_\_\_\_ are red" and "I like to eat \_\_\_\_\_ and bananas". Both can be filled with the word "apples". Students take turns turning over cards and shout "Snap!" when the blanks on the cards may be filled with the same word.

## 8 MEMORY GAME WITH BLANKS

This is another game you can play with the same cards you use for Snap! In this case place all of the cards face down. Students take turns flipping them over, two at a time. The goal is to find two cards with blanks that may be filled with the same word.

## 9 FILL THE BLANK AS A TEAM

Divide students into two teams. Give one student a card with a sentence that has a blank. The student must figure out which word goes in the blank and then give the team clues as to what the word is. Say you're teaching a lesson that includes sports vocabulary. Sentence: David Beckham plays \_\_\_\_\_. The student has to provide clues about the sport without reading the sentence or mentioning the player's name: It's something you play with a ball. You play it in a field. Each team has 11 players, etc.

## 10 FILL IN WITH PHONEMICS

Fill in the blanks AND practice pronunciation at the same time. For this type of activity you can either put a phonemic symbol for each blank, or a word that includes the same phoneme. Example: "I asked my mother to \_(lie)\_ me a new book bag". Answer: buy

**GET CREATIVE! DON'T GIVE YOUR STUDENTS THE SAME OLD BLANKS TO FILL.**

Make them a little more challenging, make them different!

# Beyond Multiple Choice: 7

## Additional Ways to Test Students

Test: a set of questions, problems, or the like, used as a means of evaluating the abilities, aptitudes, skills, or performance of an individual or group, examination. – from *Dictionary.com*

ESL tests are an absolute necessity, whether they are all-important end-of-year examinations or simple chapter tests.

But they are necessary for more than the grade/score your students obtain. They are important because they are concrete proof of what your students have learned and what they need to continue working on.

I like to think of tests as a gauge, not of course as an instrument that gives you a precise measurement, but rather a tool that allows you to assess your students' skills and to what extent they can perform in an English-speaking setting. Now, must all tests be written, multiple choice, matching or fill-in-the-blanks exercises? According to the definition above, a test is a set of questions, problems, or the like. "Or the like" includes any and all strategies and techniques that will allow you to effectively evaluate your students' skills. Here are 7 testing strategies that fall into the "or the like" category.

### TRY THESE 7 ADDITIONAL WAYS TO TEST YOUR ESL STUDENTS

#### 1 ART/CRAFTS PROJECTS

Very young learners can't write or speak as much as older students, which is why we often choose not to "test" them. Although they grasp a lot more than what they can produce verbally, there are still plenty of things they can "produce" to show you how much they've learned. Say they learned to talk about themselves and their family. Ask them to draw a family portrait and say as much as they can about it, even if it's just naming the people in it.

#### 2 PICTURE TESTS

If your students are old enough to read at least words, prepare a test with images they have to label or match. You may also have them cut out the images and the words, and then glue them in matching sets on another piece of paper. Have them label the parts of the body. Or classify animals as "wild", "farm" or "domestic".

#### 3 ROLE PLAYS

Role plays are excellent for evaluating student performance at any level or age. With very young learners, I recommend using puppets or dolls. Have the children manipulate the puppets so they can greet each other and ask each other questions. They may even put on their own puppet show if they're old enough!

#### 4 WRITTEN PROJECTS

There are any number of written projects students may present for assessment. You may start a project at the beginning of the school year, which they need to build on and present at the end, kind of like a road map of where they started and where they ended up. Or ask them to research something they're interested in, like a celebrity or sport, and present a written report complete with images.

#### 5 ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Oral presentations are my favorite way of assessing advanced adult learners for whom the basic multiple choice test is simply too easy. Have students prepare a PowerPoint presentation. You can evaluate their writing skills in the slides they prepare and their communication skills in the oral presentation. There's no limit to what your students may choose to do as their oral presentation. Dress up as a historical figure? Or pop star?

#### 6 GROUP PROJECTS/PRESENTATIONS

To assess the class as a group, have them write their own play to perform. Or have pairs write their own role plays/interviews and act them out. Younger students can work together to create a diorama. The advantage of these types of assessment is that you'll be able to evaluate not only what they produce as a final result of the collaboration, but just how well they're able to collaborate in English (make requests, ask someone for assistance, give/ask for instructions, agree/disagree, etc.)

#### 7 MULTIMEDIA TESTS

For a completely novel approach to testing, create your test as a PowerPoint presentation instead of a paper test you'll print and hand out. Students can read each slide and complete the tasks assigned to them on a separate sheet of paper, from replying to an email to watching a video embedded in the slide. If you have a classroom with plenty of computers for all, they can even pace themselves, and they won't have to wait for their classmates to finish a task before continuing to the next slide. The best advantage to this type of test is that you can include a variety of multimedia files (image, audio and video) all organized into a single testing experience.

#### TRY TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX – OUTSIDE THE RECTANGULAR PIECE OF PAPER THAT HAS A TEST PRINTED ON IT.

These other ways of testing your students' progress and performance are just as valid as any standardized test. If you create each testing experience with your students' goals and needs in mind, you can't go wrong.

# HOWTO: 3 Easy Steps to Grading Student Essays

In a world where number two pencils and bubbles on an answer sheet often determine a student's grade, what criteria does the writing teacher use to evaluate the work of his or her students? After all, with essay writing you cannot simply mark some answers correct and others incorrect and figure out a percentage. The good news is that grading an essay can be just as easy and straightforward as grading multiple-choice tests with the use of a rubric!

## WHAT IS A RUBRIC?

A rubric is a chart used in grading essays, special projects and other more items which can be more subjective. It lists each of the grading criteria separately and defines the different performance levels within those criteria. Standardized tests like the SAT's use rubrics to score writing samples, and designing one for your own use is easy if you take it step by step. Keep in mind that when you are using a rubric to grade essays, you can design one rubric for use throughout the semester or modify your rubric as the expectations you have for your students increase.

## HOW TO GRADE STUDENT ESSAYS

### 1 WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE?

When students write essays, ESL teachers generally look for some common elements. The essay should have good grammar and show the right level of vocabulary. It should be organized, and the content should be appropriate and effective. Teachers also look at the overall effectiveness of the piece. When evaluating specific writing samples, you may also want to include other criteria for the essay based on material you have covered in class. You may choose to grade on the type of essay they have written and whether your students have followed the specific direction you gave. You may want to evaluate their use of information and whether they correctly presented the content material you taught. When you write your own rubric, you can evaluate anything you think is important when it comes to your students' writing abilities. For our example, we will use grammar, organization and overall effect to create a rubric.

### 2 WHAT IS AN A?

Using the criteria we selected (grammar, organization and overall effect) we will write a rubric to evaluate students' essays. The most straightforward evaluation uses a four-point scale for each of the criteria. Taking the criteria one at a time, articulate what your expectations are for an A paper, a B paper and so on. Taking grammar as an example, an A paper would be free of most grammatical errors appropriate for the student's language learning level. A B paper would have some mistakes but use generally good grammar. A C paper would show frequent grammatical errors. A D paper would show that the student did not have the grammatical knowledge appropriate for his language learning level. Taking these definitions, we now put them into the rubric.

Grammar	Free of most grammatical errors	Some grammatical mistakes but generally shows successful grammar usage	Frequent grammatical errors	Appropriate grammatical knowledge not displayed for current language level
Organization				
Overall Effect				

The next step is to take each of the other criteria and define success for each of those, assigning a value to A, B, C and D papers. Those definitions then go into the rubric in the appropriate locations to complete the chart.

Grammar	Free of most grammatical errors	Some grammatical mistakes but generally shows successful grammar usage	Frequent grammatical errors	Appropriate grammatical knowledge not displayed for current language level
Organization	Essay shows clear organization with appropriate transitions	Essay shows good organization but may lack appropriate transitions	Essay lacks clear organization and appropriate transitions	Essay is disorganized and confusing
Overall Effect	A strong overall effect with clear communication and support	A good overall effect with some support and adequate clarity	Essay struggles overall and does not give a coherent message	Essay has a poor overall effect and does not fulfill assignment

Each of the criteria will score points for the essay. The descriptions in the first column are each worth 4 points, the second column 3 points, the third 2 points and the fourth 1 point.

### 3 WHAT IS THE GRADING PROCESS?

Now that your criteria are defined, grading the essay is easy. When grading a student essay with a rubric, it is best to read through the essay once before evaluating for grades. Then reading through the piece a second time, determine where on the scale the writing sample falls for each of the criteria. If the student shows excellent grammar, good organization and a good overall effect, he would score a total of ten points. Divide that by the total criteria, three in this case, and he finishes with a 3.33, which on a four-point scale is a B+. If you use five criteria to evaluate your essays, divide the total points scored by five to determine the student's grade.

**ONCE YOU HAVE WRITTEN YOUR GRADING RUBRIC, YOU MAY DECIDE TO SHARE YOUR CRITERIA WITH YOUR STUDENTS.** If you do, they will know exactly what your expectations are and what they need to accomplish to get the grade they desire. You may even choose to make a copy of the rubric for each paper and circle where the student lands for each criterion. That way, each person knows where he needs to focus his attention to improve his grade. The clearer your expectations are and the more feedback you give your students, the more successful your students will be. If you use a rubric in your essay grading, you can communicate those standards as well as make your grading more objective with more practical suggestions for your students. In addition, once you write your rubric you can use it for all future evaluations.