

Five Fabulous Favorites

The whats, whys, and hows for five things that I do

in my classroom that have proven especially successful.

There is quite a variety here, so there should be something for everyone!

SPELLING SETS

Language is a puzzle, so let's get our students skilled and thrilled with solving puzzles!

RELAXED PRONUNCIATION DICTATIONS

A 'bottom-up' listening exercise that is highly effective in helping students get used to natural, native-English speech.

BALLOON BUMP

A playful activity for brainstorming topic-based vocabulary and for practicing sequential vocabulary such as numbers or days of the week.

TEXTLESS STORYBOOKS







Using books that convey their narrative exclusively through images to elicit oral communication. This thoroughly engaging activity is a favorite with students, and can easily be tailored on the spot to accommodate and challenge a full range of language skill levels, and almost any age.

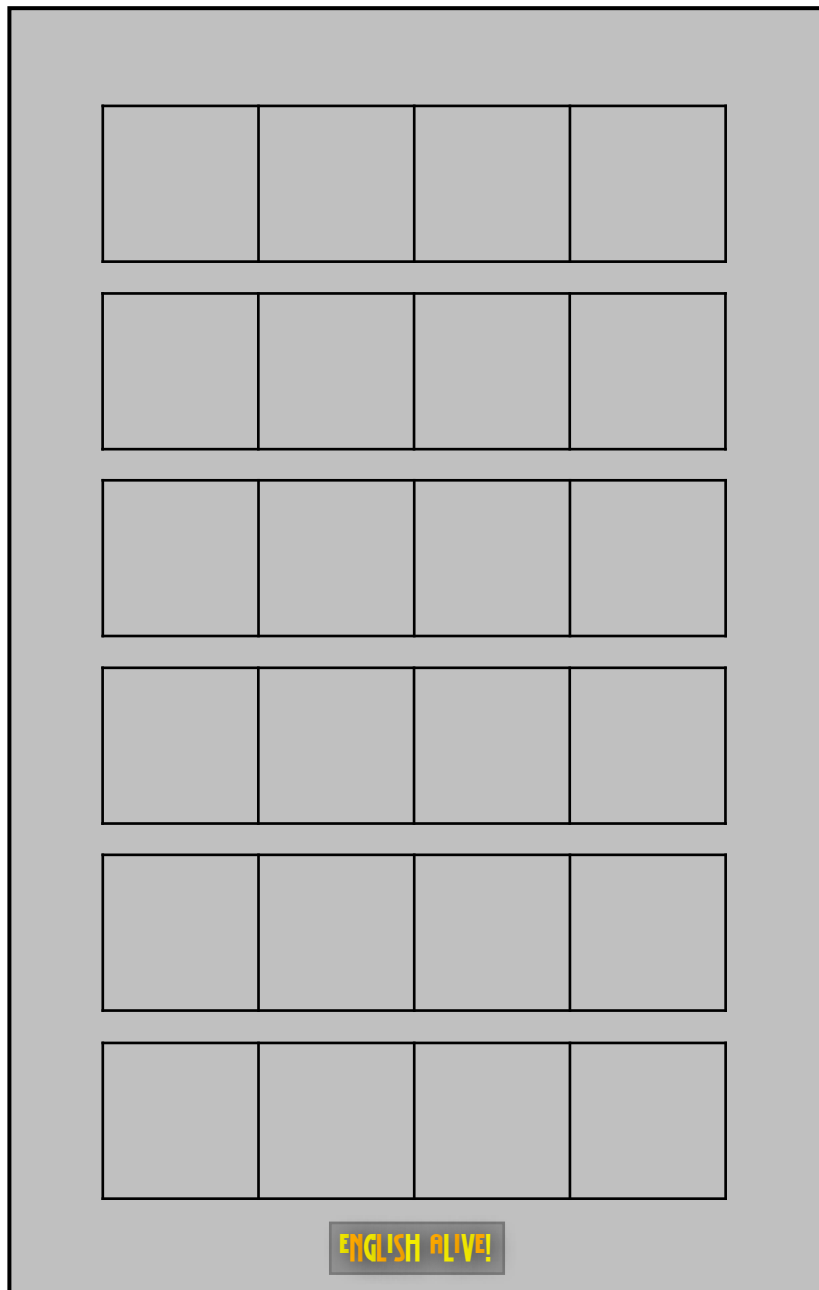
LISTENING HOMEWORK

Some suggested whys and wherefores of designing and creating listening homework.

SPELLING SETS

Spelling Sets are phonics puzzles in a simple format that can be adapted to other language targets, such as sentence building. Minimally, they comprise image cues and tiles to be arranged into the proper order to accompany each image cue.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|
|  | b | a | g |  | c | o | t |
|  | c | a | t |  | j | u | g |
|  | s | i | ck |  | t | e | n |



↑
tiles for Spelling Sets
Cut these along the lines
to make a set of tiles.

side A for Spelling Sets
This is for the playing
board, which is optional.

↙

∞ Spelling Sets ∞

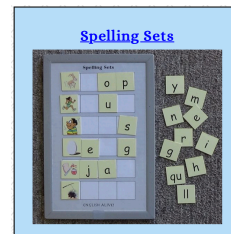
| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

ENGLISH ALIVE!

If you like this idea, you can get templates to use in your own classroom. Just go back to the Teachers' Page and look for "Spelling Sets."



Click that link!


↑
side B for Spelling Sets

checklist for Spelling Sets

Spelling Sets: level 1 Student Checklist

ENGLISH ALIVE!

student name: _____

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-2 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-3 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-4 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-5 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-6 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-7 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-8 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-9 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> | 1-10 |  |  |  |  |  |  |

RELAXED PRONUNCIATION DICTATIONS

Why can't someone who has been studying EFL for years still not understand what is being said in an English-language movie? Blame 'teacher talk.' In this bottom-up exercise, students exercise their aural skills to figure out, piece by piece, a sentence that the teacher utters multiple times—enunciating it the way English is really spoken by native speakers! Here is a summary of some common phonetic shifts that occur when native English speakers are engaged in conversation, especially if it is relaxed and casual.

For a list of Relaxed Pronunciation Dictations that you can use in your classroom, go back to the "For Teachers" page and look for the two fish at a desk. One is giving dictation, one is taking dictation. Follow that link!

ellipsis Something—a word or a sound—is omitted:

You come 'cause of the free food?

Translation: Did you come because of the free food?

linking with vowels When a word begins with a vowel sound, it often links with the word before it:

How muchizzit fora baguvapples?

Translation: How much is it for a bag of apples?

'and'/'or' Small, common 'grammar' words are especially susceptible to reduction:

Would you like bacon 'n' eggs, 'r pancakes 'n' sausage?

Translation: Would you like bacon and eggs, or pancakes and sausage?

ellipsis of initial vowel sounds Initial vowel sounds are susceptible to getting dropped (elided):

Fits okay, I'll wait here.

Translation: If it's okay, I'll wait here.

reductions to the schwa The most common sound in English is 'the schwa' /ə/. (This is, for example, the first sound in the word 'about.') Any short vowel sound can get reduced to the schwa, usually in unstressed syllables:

Our marrəge was a big məstake, but we cərracted it təday with a dəvorce.

Translation: Our marriage was a big mistake, but we corrected it today with a divorce.

the flap The flap is a quick touching of the tongue to the upper palate of the mouth. (It's close to the sound /d/, and to be honest I can't hear the difference myself. So I will spell it as a double d.) What is ostensibly the sound /t/ will often be reduced to the flap when it is sandwiched between two voiced sounds:

Put a liddle budder in the wadder before you add the pasta.

Translation: Put a little butter in the water before you add the pasta.



reductions with helping verbs Things often get smooshed together when can, could, will, would, should, have and etc. are used:

I gotta admit, I couldna done it without you.

Translation: I have got to admit it: I couldn't have done it without you.

silent 'h' The initial /h/ is often dropped in the personal pronouns *he, his, him, her* and *hers*. This leaves the word starting with a vowel sound, so it links easily with the previous word:

He wanted to seer beforee left, buttis friends were waiting.

Translation: He wanted to see her before he left, but his friends were waiting.

reductions in function words Function words (words that perform a grammatical function) are especially susceptible to reduction and ellipsis:

Joo know how long they b'n here?

Translation: Do you know how long they have been here?

'nt' reduction The sound /t/ often gets dropped in an 'nt' combination.

After twenny inches of snow, he wannid winner to be over.

Translation: After twenty inches of snow, he wanted winter to be over.

dropping initial words The first word or words of a sentence may be omitted if the sentence is comprehensible without them. This happens mostly when the initial words are function words:

Care for some coffee?

Translation: Would you care for some coffee?

the glottal stop The glottal stop is "a consonant formed by the audible release of the airstream after complete closure of the glottis." Clear? Consider how a native speaker, speaking quickly, might render the middle sound of 'something' and 'cotton' in this example:

I think sum*m's wrong with this co*n shirt.

Translation: I think something's wrong with this cotton shirt.

linking with same or similar consonants When a word ends with the same or a similar sound as the first sound of the subsequent word, the two words usually link:

I gottired of that blackat and itstupitail.

Translation: I got tired of that black cat and its stupid tail.

'of' It's short, it's common, and it's a function word. Of course it often gets reduced:

We have a lotta hot chocolate, but we're outta coffee.

Translation: We have a lot of hot chocolate, but we're out of coffee.

BALLOON BUMP

What could be simpler? The teacher bumps a balloon into the air and says, "One." The teacher can now step out, and the kids will happily practice their English numbers without any further prompting.

- * Any sequential lexical set can be used.
- * Call out a word to be spelled. Each bumper gives one letter in turn.
- * Start a category—but don't say what it is!

Your adult students don't want to miss out on the fun. Have them build a sentence—off the top of their heads—by each person adding one word as they bump the balloon.



TEXTLESS STORYBOOKS

A picture paints a thousand words. This is especially true when one is ‘reading’ a textless storybook in which each page has been endowed by its author with a rich treasury of details to talk about. And if the narrative is compelling, what a fabulous tool for a language teacher!

What has worked wonderfully for me is to have the students take turns pointing out one component of the page we are viewing. [NOTE: This approach is probably not suitable for classes of more than five or six students.] I may then reiterate or expound on what the student says in order to introduce new vocabulary or model useful language structures.

The beauty of this activity is that each student can participate at whatever language level is comfortable for them. Even an absolute beginner can understand the story perfectly well, since there is no text to act as a barrier. And since that beginner cannot produce any English yet, they can just point to whatever feature on the page they wish to. The teacher can then supply the vocabulary relating to it. The chances are much of the vocabulary will be repeated throughout the book, giving the opportunity for students to acquire the vocabulary without formally studying it.

On the other hand, even an advanced student can enjoy pointing out what most catches their fancy, and describing it and discussing it at whatever level they find to be a pleasant challenge.

When choosing a book, look for a narrative that draws the reader along, and is full of surprises. Whimsy often abounds in this genre of book, bringing a delightful ease and playfulness to the mood of the class time.

As you work with different books, you will probably find that each it has its own charm and opportunities for language teaching and practice. One book might be good for predicting (“What do you think will happen on the next page?”), another might have a strong focus on human relations, etc. I tend to find the present tenses (simple present, present progressive and present perfect) to be the most natural to use when talking about images we are viewing together. But again, you may find certain books are conducive to the use of particular sentence structures, whether tenses, conditionals, or what have you. The more I use a book, the better in tune I become to the linguistic opportunities it opens the door to.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE BOOKS I HAVE USED FOR THIS ACTIVITY:

Banyai, Istvan. Zoom. Puffin Books, 1998. ISBN 0-14-055774-1.

Graham, Alastair. Full Moon Soup. Dial Books, 1991. ISBN 0-8037-1045-3.

Ludy, Mark. the Flower Man. Green Pastures Publishing, Inc., 2007. ISBN 0-9664276-4-5.

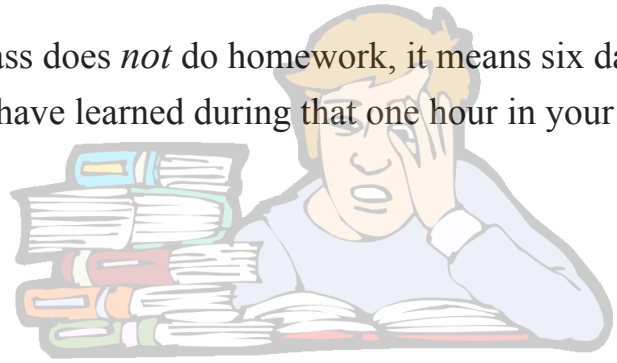
Wiesner, David. Flotsam. Clarion Books, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0-618-19457-5; ISBN-10: 0-618-19457-6.



DAILY LISTENING HOMEWORK

WHY HOMEWORK?

If an EFL student who attends a once-weekly class does *not* do homework, it means six days and twenty-three hours to forget what they may have learned during that one hour in your class. ‘Nuff said?



WHY DAILY HOMEWORK?

1. When developing a skill, it is an accepted truism that brief, frequent practice is far more effective than infrequent, extended practice. (Think of the piano teacher nagging their student week after week, “Practice every day!”) And learning a language is at least as much about skill as it is about knowledge.
2. Consider the difference in status between something special you do once a week (a *foreign* language) and something that is a natural, assumed part of your daily life—like brushing your teeth (but more interesting). ‘Normalizing’ English can foster a healthier attitude in the student towards the language.

WHY LISTENING HOMEWORK?

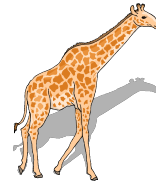
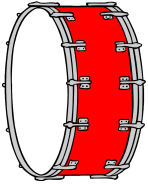
1. Aural input is usually the de facto initializing mode in both language learning and language use. Yet is it totally absent from traditional homework formats.
2. Is it difficult for an EFL student to get used to hearing native English spoken at a natural speed unless they get lots of aural input. One hour a week is not likely to be sufficient.
3. Responding to a human voice—even a recorded one—is more like genuine human interaction, and may go far in fostering the idea of, the feeling for, English as a mode of communication rather than as an academic task.
4. Listening homework still activates the brain’s visual functions (reading text, looking at images) and muscular functions (writing and drawing), but has the added benefit of activating the brain’s aural functions. The more ways the brain processes the target language, the more synaptic connections will be formed to hold onto the language.
5. What other homework can you give a very beginning student—one who can’t read a single word yet—that truly uses English in some way?

Daily Listening Homework — Examples

DAY 1 — Track #1

Audio:

Draw a red circle around the apple. Draw a blue square around the queen. Draw ... (etc.)



DAY 2 — Track #2

Audio: Write the numbers.

Number one is, "There is a mole on a box and there is a dog next to a log."

Number two is, "There is a mole in a box and there is a frog next to a log."

Number three is, "There is a hole in a box and there is a log next to a frog."

___ There is a mole in a box and there is a frog next to a log.

___ There is a hole in a box and there is a log next to a frog.

___ There is a mole on a box and there is a dog next to a log.

DAY 3 — Track #3

he

me

me

she

be

we

by

be

we

me

my

he

she

he

she

be

shy

my

shy

by

she

we

Audio: Draw a yellow circle around the word HE. Around HE, draw a yellow circle.

Draw an orange circle around the word WE. Around WE, draw an orange circle.

Draw a pink circle around the word SHE. Around SHE, draw a pink circle. (Etc.)

DAY 4 — Track #4

Audio:

Draw a green line under the sound /ay/.

(Optionally: Draw a green line under /ay/ in day, gray, and say.)

Draw a purple line under the sound /ee/.

(Optionally: Draw a purple line under /ee/ in Belly, Jean, see, me, and we.)

One day Belly and Jean go to the pond. Belly and Jean see a gray duck. The gray duck is sad. The gray duck has lost its mum. "Will you help me?" says the duck. "Yes, we will help you," say Belly and Jean.

DAY 5 — Track #5

Audio:

Number one: Where? Where do Belly and Jean go? (Optionally, read the answers.)

Number two: What? What do they see? (Optionally, read the answers.)

Number three: How? How is the duck? (Optionally, read the answers.)

| | | | |
|----------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1-Where? | They go home. | They go to the log. | They go to the pond. |
| 2-What? | They see a gray duck. | They see a mum. | They see a red duck. |
| 3-How? | It is happy. | It is mad. | It is sad. |

Audio: They have fun in the sun. Write: They have fun in the sun.

They have a picnic on the grass. Write: They have a picnic on the grass.



_____ .



a
fun
grass
have

DAY 6 — Track #6

_____ .

