

# GENERAL NICE AND USEFUL IDEAS FOR CLASS

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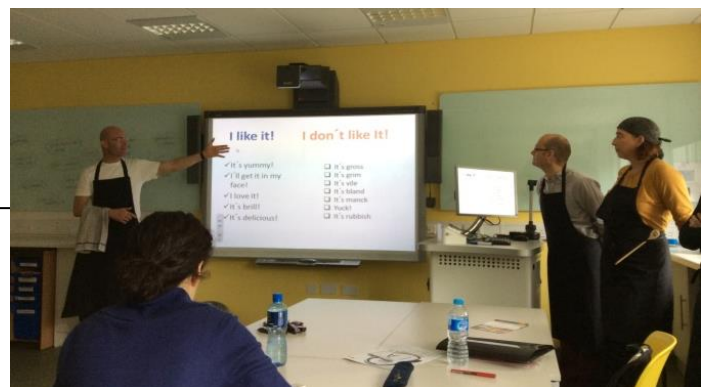
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## Warm up activities or icebreakers

*They are used to wake the students up and to engage them in the learning process. These ice-breaking activities get the students focused and are highly motivating to introduce a task or a topic and can also be used in the middle of a session, just to change the pace of the lesson.*

**Personal links.** At the beginning of the year, with a new group, it could be a nice idea for the teacher to foster rapport with the students to talk about his/her personal life: family, favourite sports, their hobbies... This could be done with pictures and some personal objects. One way to do it could be using facts about you to prepare the lesson and to make sentences which include words related to the topic.

**The Three Yes.** Starting the class with three questions you know everybody will answer with a yes, and asking them to raise their hands if so. This is a good way to start the class. The movement and excitement make them take a positive attitude, and encourages participation.

**Using several images** related to a topic is another useful way to introduce it. It arouses creativity. Or just use a fragment of an image and make them guess what it could be about.

**Two true statements and a lie.** The students get involved by trying to guess which one is wrong.

**Objects related to a subject.** The class is split in small groups. Each gets an object related to a certain topic, and the groups have to discuss which the connection is between the objects and the topic. It could be objects related to the teacher's life to create personal rapport.

**Brainstorming.** It is a nice way to start a topic as it is engaging and could bring out multiple ideas. It could be done in small groups and then carry out a massive brainstorming all together. Each group can write their ideas in stickers with a specific colour, so all teams can show what they did to the rest of the class at the end of the activity, by sticking them on the wall or the board. This can be done asking students to get up one by one and say their piece of information aloud and post it on the board, so that we make sure that nothing is repeated.

This could also be held as a kind of competition: split the class in groups and ask them to find and write down, in two minutes time, as many expressions as possible to strongly express like or dislike. Strongly like: I love it, it is awesome, I adore it.... Strongly dislike: I loathe it, it's disgusting, it's hateful... Then each group will share them with the rest of the class.

## Main activities

**3-2-1 Bridge.** This is a routine for activating prior knowledge and making connections. This routine asks students to bring out their initial ideas, questions and understandings about a topic and then to connect these to new thinking about the topic after the new knowledge. This can be introduced by having students do an initial 3, 2, 1 individually on paper - 3 thoughts, 2 questions, and 1 analogy-. Students might then read an article, watch a video, or

engage in an activity having to do with the topic, something that pushes students thinking in new directions. After that, students complete another 3, 2, 1 with their new responses to the topic. Students then share their initial and new thinking, explaining how and why their thinking changed. The teacher should tell students that their initial thinking is not right or wrong, it is just a starting point and that new experiences take always our thinking in new directions.

**Mind mapping.** This is a technique developed by Tony Buzan, who wrote a very interesting book called 'Mind maps for kids'. In mind maps, ideas are connected and linked between them using graphic resources. This is useful because our brain doesn't work in a linear way.

**Blank mind maps – Create your map.** In order to analyse the way in which different concepts are linked we can create blank mind maps that the students have to complete. But we can also give the concepts to the students, for example using flashcards, and ask them to imagine how these concepts are connected.

**Questioning.** A group of appropriate questions creates the proper atmosphere at the beginning of a lesson. It brings back previous knowledge and activates the brain and it is considered one of the most potentially effective ways of engaging students in their own learning process. However, this should be done avoiding the simply yes/no questions, the “Socratic Method”. This consists on using certain kinds of questions for certain kinds of tasks to guide the students in answering, so that students build their own learning, and so that the teacher has a better idea of where there may be gaps that need to be covered.

**Find someone who.** The students get a sheet with questions –without the key preposition required, gaps that the student have to fill first- and go around practicing those questions and changing partners as many times as they can. *What are you good ...at...? What are you afraid ...of...?* Students develop language related to asking questions.

**The missing word.** Students are given a card with sentences with a gap. They will move around the class and they will find a partner. Example: working in pairs, person A - What are you good...? Person B - What are you afraid...? They both have to ask each other follow-up questions about this to start a natural and fluent conversation. An alternative way to elicit the missing word consists of the teacher reading all the sentences aloud, without pronouncing the preposition so that the students must say them aloud.

**Find the missing half of your sentence.** The teacher gives the students different sentences. Each sentence matches with another one, forming a conversation. The students will have to move around trying to find someone whose sentence matches his/her own. They are encouraged to memorize the sentences after reading them, just to make the activity more fluent and natural. And they have to say aloud their sentence each time they meet someone new, in this way they will practice it several times before finding their partner, after what they will sit down.

**Find the matching word.** The teacher gives the students cards with collocations –words that go together in a fixed position like “cats and dogs” or “salt and pepper”. The words are related to the topic environmental issues (such as FLORA/FAUNA, SOLAR/PANELS or FOSSIL/FUELS). This is a natural way to learn a vocabulary, as these words tend to be in a certain order together. The students have to find the other student who has the card that matches his/her own. Then they work on the meaning of those concepts. The concepts can be placed by the

students in a graph, showing for example the relationship between usefulness and danger for the environment. Then the teacher can start a discussion about why students have placed these concepts in the graph.

**Using pictures instead.** You can distribute pictures and concepts related to the lesson, so each student has to find their partner. It can also be an excellent activity for reviewing the lesson.

**Activity for practicing with texts.** Give just the heading and ask the students what it could be about. Then they can turn the paper over and read the text, first reading it roughly, just looking for gist, general meaning. Then, reading it more carefully searching for more specific information.

**READING. The jigsaw strategy.** It is an efficient way to learn in a cooperative style, it encourage listening, engagement. First, do groups using letters A B A B, remember to make the students call out their letter, so they will remember it easily. Then each letter gets an essential part of a whole, half of a text, for example, so that one student will focus on the one part of it, and the other on the second which later they will share.

First, the students read their text quickly just to find general information, the gist, without stopping in the difficult words, just to get a rough idea of the content to answer general questions –they read before reading the text, in order to focus on the basic information they must look for in the text-.

Later they will read it more carefully searching for specific information to answer more specific questions. In both cases, first, all “As” gather together, and the same do “Bs”, so the weaker learners get the chance to achieve the goals in small groups, before getting to next step: in pairs “As” will share their information with and the other way round... Students must work together to accomplish a common goal, each A depends on a B to do it. No one can be completely successful unless everyone works as a team. This facilitates interaction among students making them value each other as contributors to the common task.

**Scrambled eggs activity.** This is a group activity that consists on rearrange pieces of paper with words in the right order and it helps develop skills related to logical thinking such as organizing ideas, analyzing and taking decisions. The students, in groups, have to sort them out. It could all of them be pieces of a whole, sentences or paragraphs of a bigger text, or just words belonging to a sentence. Once all groups have finished, they can check their result with other groups going around the class. Depending on the content it could be difficult to solve, especially if it is a controversial statement, but the teacher can make it easier by using a full stop at the end of one of the pieces or capital letters at the beginning of the sentence... This technique could also consist on organize in a chronological order certain information in a timeline.

**Mix-match activity.** Instead of using another handout, just cut it into pieces of equal length and ask students to match up the words with the definitions. Or you can give them in the same way the answers to some questions written on the board, ask them to match their sentences with those on the board.

**Arrange the words.** The teacher gives each group an envelope with different words. We have to arrange them in different columns, according to the different sounds in their pronunciation. For example: jam, yam, jello, yellow, job, yob, jewel, yule, jaw, your... The teacher pronounces one of these words, and one student in the group must hold up the

corresponding card. The first team that gives the correct answer gets a point, so this can be done as a competition. The students can distribute the cards, giving a couple of them to each pupil so that all of them have the opportunity to participate.

**Explain your definition to the rest of the people.** The teacher hands out pieces of paper with words and their definitions, then students will have to memorize the information. Students move around the class till the teacher claps or the music stops. Then each student will explain his/her definition to someone else who also will explain him/her his/her definition. In this interactive way, through many repetitions, the word will easily stick. If we rely on the text we don't force ourselves, and memory doesn't work.

**Snapping your fingers to show the stress.** In order to show our students where the stress of the sentence goes, we can click our fingers, and we can also point at the syllables that have the stress on written sentences on the board. We can underline the syllable with the stress or humming...

**A mumble drill-** Each one practice the learnt words at the same time but at their own pace, but just loud enough for him/her to practice pronunciation and memorize the new vocabulary. It is different to a drill, when all students repeat the same word aloud and at the same time.

**Tongue twister chain (the rumour).** Five students stand up in a line. The first student will whisper a tongue twister to the second one; the second will whisper it to the third, and so on. But they have only one try. The last student will say it aloud, in order to check if it was the correct tongue twister. The winner is the group that got closer to the original tongue twister.

**Questionnaire.** Sometimes it can be more effective make the students to find the information by themselves instead of lecturing them. One engaging way to do it is by asking them to use a questionnaire. First students have to think about 6 questions (open and closed) to ask someone about the topic, it could be done in pairs, around the school, at home... they have to write down the answers and then, in groups they could do a presentation for the rest of the class. Ways to approach people: *Would you mind answering some questions? Would you have time to answer some questions?*

**Debates.** This teaching tool enhances critical thinking and talking actively. It allows sharing different points of view and it is perfect to engage students working in groups while encourage all students to develop their oral skills and public speaking. One way to organize a debate is following these steps: the teacher brings up a controversial statement or topic –this engages students always- and then a letter, A or B, to every student, so that there are two groups in class: A and B. Each student belonging to A group should write at least three points in favour, even if they personally disagree. Students belonging to B should look for three points against. Using the **mushrooming group technique**, (very useful to help students less confident, to order idea and get new ones, to reflect and to foster communication) students will start with talking in pairs and then in groups of four, then talking to 8, and so on. This helps students to rely on their own position and getting ready for the following debate between “As” and “Bs”. It is a great opportunity to use polite ways to express disagreement.

Another way is the class is to split the class into two different groups: those who agree and those who disagree. A discussion is held, trying to convince those who don't share your own

position. As part of this debate, the students can fill in a table with the pros and cons of each possibility. Students could be also asked to find arguments to defend the opposite position. Ask them to come to a compromise. This activity could make some students feel uncomfortable, so after the debate, it is important to revise all possible positions and to make a final point, making clear that, as frequently there is no right or wrong position, all possible points of view could be acceptable.

**Listening.** It's a good idea to prepare students before a listening take place so that you make sure the students are really focused. You can do this by showing an interesting **picture** to catch their attention and as kind of a clue. Then ask them what they think it is going to be about. Or give them a **title** and ask them to guess... Or use **questions** related to the topic of the video or audio. It is highly recommended to choose a subject connected to the students' interests so that it gets personal. Write the questions on the board so they keep focused and know what they have to look for.

**Running dictation.** This activity is quite exciting for the students as involves movement around the class and working in groups in a fast and efficient way. We write a text in a card, placed at a certain distance where the groups are. One student in each group should run and memorize part of the text and then go back to the group and dictate it to another person who writes. Someone in the group is in charge of checking the spelling. Whenever the teacher claps, the person who must run will change. The group that wins is the one that got the complete text without any mistake.

**Role playing.** In this activity the students, working in groups, are asked to prepare a small drama performance in order to practice new vocabulary. The teacher could give them a handout with different situations, to help them, and they will create natural dialogues according to those situations, using the required words, and then act playing their roles.

**Problem-solving.** This is a useful tool for encouraging critical and creative thinking and it encourages students to be more proactive about using the knowledge and skills they have been learning to solve problems. Working in groups is the most interesting way of carrying on this activity.

**Find the mistakes in the sentences on the board.** In this way the students pay attention in a different way and probably those things will stick better in their memory.

**Repertory grid technique RGT.** This is a way of eliciting and analyzing knowledge according to personal meaning where the information is displayed in two directions. For example you can draw two perpendicular lines: in the vertical position you can set how important to everyday life are the senses according to the student's opinion, while in the horizontal position you can set the five senses. This could be done in groups, and the start a debate with the whole class. Other educational applications: the assessment made by the students about different activities made in class, as a feedback for the teacher. The teacher can use it to create a sociogram before grouping students to carry on team works for a long period of time, making sure the students will feel safe and that in each group are students of different levels of learning, so that slow learners can be help by those who learn faster.

**Pie chart graph.** It is another way of organizing information. First step, talking about the topic could be done by the teacher; then students can organize the information individually and

then share it in small groups. After that, a member of each group could even go to other groups to complete some information. Finally, they can have some 5 minutes to create the pie chart in a creative way; it could even be a small contest! The teacher should go around all the time to check everybody is working.

**What makes a good presentation?** Presentations are another great way to practice team work, and public speaking. It also helps to review contents or to share information with the rest of the class. These are tips to get a good presentation:

- Start making eye contact with everyone in the audience and smile.
- Including objectives and aims at the introduction.
- Effective organization (well-structured: introduction, core, conclusion).
- Visually attractive, use realia, videos, pictures...
- On topic, centred, use KEY concepts.
- Adequate pace and rhythm.
- Avoiding speeding up. It is easy to do so when we are nervous.
- The three C's: Be Concise, be Cooperative and Compromise.
- Make it engaging:
  - Good use of body language and intonation.
  - Be careful not to give the back as reading from the screen!
  - Make eye contact.
  - When possible, make it personal, emotional to engage the audience.
  - Adapted to the audience.
- Use a **punchy ending**, make the last piece count! Use a famous quote, a something funny that tries to explain an important point; asking an open challenging question that relates to the students' personal lives that lead to a debate... Finishing in an unexpected point is also very effective. The main purpose of the punchy ending is to make people remember the very last part of your presentation.

## Activities with music

**Music and imagination.** The teacher has to choose an inspiring piece of music, like 'The ascending of the lark', by Ralph Vaughan Williams. While listening to it students must try to answer the following questions: Where do you think the story takes place? Who is the main character or characters? Is it about people, animals, imaginary creatures? What happens in the story? Is it something happy or sad? Can you imagine a beginning, a middle and an end for the story?

**Follow the music.** Music is playing and students move around the room sharing a piece of information the teacher has previously given to them. When the music stops, the students must stop and talk to their peers. The objective will be to elicit a specific word describing it to others. Students should make sure that their partner has correctly understood the information, but avoiding asking 'Do you understand?' as this question is usually answered



with a 'yes' because nobody wants to look silly, or maybe they truly think they understand even if it is not the case. Instead, students should ask specific questions about the piece of information they have just given, focusing on the core elements that define it. This kind of questions might help to know that the other person has correctly grasped all the nuances of the word. After a while, students will write these words on the board, including the corresponding definitions.

**Another version** of the same activity. When the music stops the students say something they recently learnt and explain its meaning.

**Find a title.** Students have to listen to the music and find an appropriate title for it and justify their choice.

**Paint it.** Listen to the music and choose the colours that you think better represent the changes in emotion.

**Match it with a picture.** The teacher plays five short extracts and students must find the most appropriate picture for each of one.

## Review activities

**Vocabulary revision.** Working in groups, students have to recall all the words that they learnt the previous day in just one minute. Only one person will write the list, and the first group who finishes wins.

**Who wants to be a millionaire?** Students are grouped in different teams of 4 -5 members. One of the students sits on a chair, while the others stand behind him. The teacher asks a question, and the students on the chair – who represent their respective teams – make a sound when they know the answer, they can use musical instruments or just raise their hands. The quickest one will have the opportunity to answer. If he/she is right, he/she gets a point. If he is wrong, a student from a different group can have a go. After the question, the students swap positions, so everybody has the opportunity to participate. To make it fun, we can also include the possibility of 'phoning a friend' or 'asking the audience'.

**Back to the board.** You write something on the board while someone is sitting there, back to it. People have to give him/her clues, without using the word, descriptions, concepts related to it... As students love games and challenges they will develop the language because they are engaged to the task. It can be used as a recalling activity or warm up.

**Speed review activity.** It is useful to wake students up and it can be used also as a warm up, but it is perfect to quickly review some content given in previous lessons. It is also a way for the teacher to save time. Split the class in two groups. Each person has to think about a word learnt the previous days and define it. Then he/she has to choose someone in the group and throw him/her a small ball that means that is next one choosing a word... if it is too easy the teacher set 5 seconds or a short period of time. Everybody in the group has to pay attention, so that if the definition is not correct they have to tell so. If someone cannot find a new word, then he/she is eliminated and goes out of the group till there is only one left, the winner.



**Still true/false game.** It is very useful to revise concepts. Half of the class may be in front of the other half, sitting in two rows of chairs. The teacher will place two chairs each one with one of these words: True or false, both at the end of the corridor between students. Each pair of students, belonging to different teams- one in front of the other- is given a number. The teacher will read a statement that could be either true or false. After that, he/she says a number aloud –not before reading the sentence, because in this way all the students will be paying attention-. As soon as the students hear his / her number they must run and try to sit first on the chair with the appropriate word depending on the statement. The winner is the faster one. The teacher could ask the students to find a name for each group.

**Guessing game.** In order to revise the new words the teacher reads definitions aloud, and asks students to guess the word. Later, she asks students to the same activity: one student says the word and the other gives the definition. These activities involve repeating the new words many times so students get familiar with them.

**The ball.** The students stand up in a circle and a ball is given to them by the teacher. The one who has the ball must remember one of the words that they have learnt and give a precise definition. After that, the student throws the ball to another student. If one of them can't remember a new word, then it is out. If they are really good, the teacher can give them just 3 or 4 seconds to recall a new word, so that the game goes on. This is a competitive activity that engages students and it is very useful in order to revise the vocabulary that has been used in previous lessons.

**Revising what you learnt.** This is a good way to check if students have memorised the relevant information we are interested in. The teacher asks a question and students in teams –which could choose a name before- raise their hands if they know the answer, so each group can get points if their members are quick. It is a kind of engaging competition that helps students to remember what they have previously learnt.

**I went to the shop.** This activity is a game to revise information in a fun way. The students must use this structure adding new words each time. Example: 'I went to the shop and I bought an apple', next student: 'I went to the shop and I bought an apple and a pear' and then the next one: 'I went to the shop and I bought an apple, a pear and an orange'... This is what we would do if we were working with fruits. Another example: working in groups, students are asked to revise all the different tests that students have to take during their school life. You can say 'I went to school and I took my key stage 1 SATs test'. Later: 'I went to school and I took my key stage 1 SATs exam and then I took my key stage 2 SATs exam', and so on...

**Vocabulary revising.** The teacher says aloud the definition and the students raise hands to answer. Later students can try this in pairs.

## Wrap-up activity

*It is essential to give the students closure on what they have learned during the lesson. This is a unique opportunity to effectively cool them down and wrap things up in benefit of the students' learning. **Make those last minutes matter!***

**Think about 3, 2, 1 things.** This strategy provides a structure for students to record their own comprehension and summarize their learning. It also gives teachers the opportunity to identify areas that need re-teaching, as well as areas of student interest. 3 Things you learnt today. 2 Things you are going to try out with your host family. 1 Thing you think that you could possibly use in your classroom in Spain. This could also be done with students such as: 3 Things you learnt today, 2 Things that you found interesting and that you'd like to learn more about. 1 question you still have about the material.

Don't forget to review the students' responses. You can use this information to develop up-coming lessons.

**Lesson in a bottle.** The teacher should prepare a plastic bottle for the lesson with some questions inside like: What was your favorite activity? What can you teach for you classmates from today's lesson? Tell everyone a new word you learned? What topics were discussed during the class? What was the most important thing you learned today? Can you remember the homework assignment? At the last 5-10 minutes of the lesson the teacher takes the bottle and in teacher invites everyone to sit on the floor and make a circle –if there is no space it could be done just taking names from a box with the student's names in it-. If the students are sitting in circle, a volunteer can spin the bottle placed in the middle. The student who should open the bottle and answer a question is the one who is pointed by the cap of the bottle. This will make your students leave the classroom in a very good mood!

From the blog: *"teaching English with magic"*.

**What did you learnt today?** Turn to the person next to you and discuss what you have learnt today.

Find seven ways to end a lesson here



## Attention getters –or callbacks-

*These are excellent tools for any teacher to settle down students, to get them focused, again before carry on with the class.*

**Give me Five!** While the teacher raise his/her hand. 1-Eyes are watching; 2-Ears are listening; 3-Lips are closed; 4-Hands are still; 5-My heart cares. Students follow by putting a hand up.

**Three / two / one claps.** The teacher asks: "can you clap three times?" and the students do so; then, two times and finally once. In this way the students following the instructions get focused again and keep silence.

**1 2 3 eyes on me!** The teacher says. 1 2 Eyes on you! Answer the students.

**The teacher raises his/her hand** and quietly waits for the students to raise their hands and get quiet.

**Using fingers to count down.** After asking them to get quiet, put your hand in the air and count slowly down using your fingers. Don't say a word. If they don't calm down before you finish there should be a small consequence, so they know it is better to do it quickly. **Another way of using your hand**, consists on raising fingers very slowly, from none to five; every finger you raise, that's 1 minute off from the break for the day or next day. When they see you counting, they are quick to bring it to the attention of everyone else. They get quiet very quickly and the teacher let them know how many minutes they lost keeping track on the board so they see how their behavior affects their day... and that there are consequences.

**Touching your ear as a sign for the students to listen.** When the teacher wants the student to keep quiet in order to listen to the pronunciation, he/she just touches her ear, so students know it is time to be quiet and listen to her. It probably works better with not so young students.

**Do what I do not what I say.** It could be also a warm up activity to start the lesson; it raises awareness and focus the attention. The teacher starts doing things like touching his/her ear while saying "touch your mouth" or touching his/her knee while saying "touch your head"... Students will love it!

**Echo clap.** The teacher claps a pattern and the students repeat it. It's a sign for them to get quiet.

**Freeze movement.** You have to explain to them that they have to freeze as soon as you ask them to do so. This is taken from a drama class.

**Silence game.** All students get out of their seats and form a row according to the instructions of the teacher, but it must be done in absolute silence. They can be asked to create organize themselves according to age –in this case they can use their hands to find out their birthday-, or from the shortest to the tallest one... or maybe they have to organize themselves according to the information in a flashcard the teacher gave to them.

**Being like a mirror.** This exercise must be done also in silence and the students, placed in pairs, should one follow the movements of the other, like if they were on both sides of a mirror. This could be done by all students following the movements of just one student –it could be a volunteer or the teacher itself-. This boots creativity and it's very relaxing!