

Effective Reading / Speaking Activities for Multi-Level Classes



TESOL

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These activities are carefully designed to

- challenge students at their own level of competence so that every student feels excitement at ‘the edge of learning’
- provide support for every student
- ensure maximum participation: students become engaged and motivated when they see that their participation is important and is expected.
- provide feedback; students can see their errors and their successes during the activity.
- create a learner-centered classroom with high student motivation and retention.

The activities can be used to teach any content

and require little or no preparation time by the teacher.

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1. Individuate instruction with different tasks for different students

My Job, Your Job:

Assign appropriate tasks to different students. Beginners do an easier task, perhaps copying definitions and context sentences from their dictionary for five words in the reading. Intermediate students might answer T/F questions about the same reading. Advanced students might write general comprehension questions, make a time-line or chart, etc. Students can re-group to teach each other.

Questions Outside the Room:

Easier task: Some students go away and practice reading aloud a list of questions you have given them about a reading passage. (Two options for this group: a) You may give one student the list of questions to dictate to the other students, or b) you may give every student the list of questions to practice reading aloud.

More challenging task: Meanwhile, back in the room, your more-advanced students stay put and read the passage silently.

Bring the 'outside' students back. Pair them up; each 'outside' student asks the questions and gets answers from their 'inside' partner. (I learned this activity from Kevin Keating, who teaches at the University of Arizona – thanks, Kevin!)

Multi-Level Dictation:

Provide three choices: a blank sheet of paper, a medium-level cloze, and a cloze with only a few blanks. Students choose for themselves which level they want to do. Each student fills out their paper as well as s/he can during your dictation. Then trios group up to compare their papers. Suddenly, the low-level students are the authorities: they probably have the papers with the most correct answers!

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1. Individuate instruction using the same task, making sure this task is one that each student can do at their own level.

One-Minute Repeated Reading

Everyone in class begins reading a passage silently. Stop them after a short time. Each time they start reading again, the class starts over from the start of the reading passage.

With each repetition, students read farther and comprehend more -- and each student is working at his/her own level.

This routine illustrates for students that reading the same passage more than once can be useful!

Mingle Mingles, where students pair off with a succession of partners, are an excellent way to preview, review, ask questions, or share information. Here are three good variations:

1. Mingle with cards: Students write or draw a brief note about what they want to say (from their own experience or about something they read or heard in class). They circulate, telling this information to one partner after another.

(This routine gives students repeated practice as they teach something they know again and again. They don't get bored because each time they find a new partner, they're hearing something different.)

2. Mingle, Swapping Cards: Same activity, but this time they trade notes with each successive partner as they mingle. This makes it more challenging, because they are teaching a new idea each time they go to a new partner!

3. Building up a Chain: Students carry a notebook and write down a list of the ideas they hear they as they mingle with partner after partner.

Tip: Sometimes students wander around without finding a partner right away. To avoid this, establish one area of the room for finding a partner and a separate area for talking. My favorite way to accomplish this is "*Touch the Wall and Talk*." In pairs, students go to the wall. They both touch the wall as they talk. Then they walk -- silently -- to the middle of the room, where each makes eye contact with another student. The new pairs walk off to Touch the Wall and Talk.

Vocabulary Cards: Students write each target word on a card. On the back, they write a translation, definition, sketch, sentence, etc., using the word. They play with these cards in pairs or small groups, quizzing each other, telling what that word reminds them of from the reading, or using their words in original contexts. (adapted from Zero Prep)

Quick Write: After a reading, students write as much as possible for one minute about what they read. Some students may produce a full page of sentences while others write just a few words and phrases or draw a picture. Students pair up to discuss what they wrote.

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4.12 FIND A SENTENCE

“In-reading” tasks can make the difference between students reading mechanically or reading with real interest and comprehension.

LEVEL: Intermediate—Advanced

Procedure:

1. Tell students, “While you are reading this, I want you to choose one sentence and write it down to share with the class.” Offer one of the following options:

- a. a beautiful sentence
- b. a very interesting sentence
- c. a surprising sentence
- d. a sentence that contains the main idea
- e. a sentence the student doesn’t understand
- f. a sentence that reminds the student of something
- g. a sentence that makes great sense to the student
- h. a sentence the student agrees or disagrees with
- i. a sentence that upsets the student

Note: Option e is particularly effective because when students slow down to identify a sentence they think they don’t understand, they suddenly understand it!

2. You have choices here. Students may write their sentences on the board for class discussion. Or they share their sentences, in small groups, telling why they chose that sentence.

Variation: You may present the entire “menu” of prompts to give students more choice and/or to elicit more than one sentence from each student.

Mark the Margins

Level: beginning through advanced

Aim: This 'in-reading' activity activates student's best reading strategies by requiring them to respond with margin notes as they read. Students understand the content better when they mark the margins. This also helps them stay on task because their margin-marking is visible to the teacher. Most important, using this routine regularly helps students gain confidence and independence as readers.

Procedure:

1. Students make brief notes in the margins as they read. If it's not appropriate to write on what they're reading, they can lay (or better, tape) a strip of blank paper beside the text and mark on that. The notes vary with the purpose of the reading. Here are a few possibilities:

A I **a**lready do this.
M I want to do this **more**.
? Other response (e.g. I don't understand, or not applicable)

→ I understand
? I don't understand

me This reminds me of something that happened to **me**.

For the margins beside word problems in math, students can list the operations they'll use to solve the problem, then compare these notes with a classmate before going ahead with the calculations.

+ add
- subtract
x multiply
÷ divide

A I **a**gree
D I **d**isagree
N I have **n**o opinion yet

F **f**act
O writer's **o**pinion

C **c**ause
E **e**ffect

I **i**nteresting to me

N **N**ew to me.
A I **a**lready knew this.
T I can **t**each this to somebody.

2. Students mingle to discuss their margin marks with classmates. Advantages:

- Everyone has something to contribute.
- Early finishers can talk with a series of partners while slow readers get the time they need.
- Students learn that people have different responses to the same reading.

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2.2 RECONSTRUCT THE STORY

Sometimes the simplest activities are the most adaptable and repeatable.

This activity can be used for pre-reading or as a quick warm-up.

LEVEL: Beginning—Advanced

AIM: Listening, speaking, reading

Procedure:

1. Tell a story one time. Students listen but do not take notes.
2. Students write down three things they remember from the story.
3. In plenary or in small groups, students retell the story.

Note: Grouping changes the challenge level. In a multi-level class, an advanced student may work alone, while other students work in same- or mixed-level groups.

Extension (writing option): After the three steps above, students write the story as fully as they can. In small groups they compare their versions and write additions and corrections on their own papers.

Note: To use this activity as a preview, tell a synopsis of the longer story you are about to read.

Resources:

Teaching Multilevel Classes in ESL. Bell, Jill. Dominic Press, 1991. ISBN 56270-032-4

Teaching Multi-Level Classes. Hess, Natalie. ALTA Book Center Publishers., 2001. 1-800-258-2375 ALTAESL@aol.com

Zero Prep: Ready-To-Go Activities for the Language Classroom and Zero Prep for Beginners, Pollard, Hess, Herron. ALTA Book Center Publishers.