

GUIDE TO TEACHING IN CHINA

Useful Tips for Teaching in China



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A high-contrast, black and white photograph showing the silhouette of a person riding a bicycle on a paved road. The cyclist is positioned on the left side of the frame, moving towards the right. The bicycle has a basket on the front handlebars. The ground is a light-colored pavement with visible expansion joints. A long, dark shadow of the cyclist and the bicycle is cast onto the pavement in the foreground, indicating a low sun position. The overall mood is dramatic and minimalist.

TEACH ENGLISH IN CHINA

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You've decided to become an English language teacher in China. Great choice. To help you get the most from your experience and to help your students get the most from theirs, we've compiled the best teaching tips from some of our most experienced and passionate people.

Our guiding principle is: teaching English isn't difficult. You only need to do three things.

1. Engage your students. No one can learn if they're bored.
2. Help your students understand. Explore the meanings of new language, culture and concepts with your learners.
3. Ensure your students learn. Feedback, praise and context will help achieve this.

Finally, you'll need to know who your learners are. You'll find guidance for these in these topics in this guide.

Enjoy.

For more useful tips on teaching in China, go to ef-teachers.com/develop

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CAN I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE?



Last week, one of my colleagues, turned to me and asked “Ross, do you have ADHD?”

I didn't quite know how to respond. I was switching between watching thirty second segments of a TED talk, chatting with someone on Skype, sending a text message and now I was about to get embroiled in an argument on why I didn't need to be prescribed Ritalin.

Sound familiar?

If it does, don't worry. With social networking, instant messaging and internet marketing, the modern world has conditioned us to have shorter attention spans than ever before. Sir Ken Robinson calls it, “the most intensely stimulating period in the history of the Earth.” These distractions don't end when students walk through the doors of our schools.

While we're asking students to focus on English, they're being distracted by a hundred other things. As English teachers in China, we're competing for our students' attention with smart phones, iPads and advertising hoardings.

So what are we going to do about it? Confiscate tablets at the front desk? Block mobile reception in schools?

I believe we need to change our mindsets. Our primary responsibility as teachers is to engage our learners in the classroom. Yes; learning, instruction, phonology, grammar and feedback are all important, but if we can't engage our students from the moment they enter the classroom, we're doomed to coming off second best in a battle for students' attention.

And when our students aren't paying attention, let's not point the finger and ask who has ADHD. Let's look in the mirror and ask ourselves what we should be changing in order to make this class so engaging and so personalized that our students will be frustrated by incoming phone calls and text messages, not us.

Ross Thorburn
Training & Development Manager

SUCCESSFUL LANGUAGE TEACHING IS ABOUT CONNECTION



What is language, if not a means to connect with other people?

We all have an innate need to communicate, to connect with other people. In education, this is especially important. Too many teachers communicate without connecting. They just ‘don’t care anymore’. So why does connection matter in language teaching?

Just as students don’t learn effectively from a teacher they don’t like, they also don’t learn from a course book they don’t like, or in a peer-group where there is no sense of community, or if they don’t like the subject.

Some connections are more important than others, but as educators, it’s still our job to provide the best possible environment for our learners. To solve this, we need to focus on improving the connections that our learners have with language learning.

Connection with Materials

I know, everyone complains about their course book. It’s almost a joke that the course book is too easy, too hard, not relevant, too sterilized, culturally obsolete, doesn’t recycle language, or is just badly written.

What everyone is trying to say is that the course book doesn’t connect to, or ‘fit’ their students. It’s not the course book’s fault; I’d be utterly amazed if it did. No course book can cover every interest for every student, and teach it at the right pace.

It’s like the old days in the UK when there were only four channels on the TV. 60 million people watching just four stations... 95% of the time, you were bored to hell, and when there was a program that held your interest, it was over too fast. It’s the same with our course books. When they do connect with a student, it’s only for a fraction of their learning time.

So what’s the solution?

Use real life, authentic materials that are personally relevant and have meaning for each student. Sounds impossible in a classroom setting, but it’s not.

Connection with Language

Think back to your school days. Which subject did you hate? Did you get good at it?

Chances are you didn't. We don't learn what we don't like. We don't like a subject because we're not given a reason to like it. Every subject is interesting to someone, because it made a connection with them.

- History doesn't have to be about remembering dates, it can be about human stories of life and death.
- Physics doesn't have to be about equations, it can be about peering into the beating heart of the universe.
- Language doesn't have to be about grammar, it can be about learning a new culture and way of thinking.

Connection with Peers

I've taught and observed countless classes. The best, the very best, all have a sense of community.

Where the students work together to achieve a goal, rather than compete. Where students are inclusive, rather than exclusive. Where everyone is engaged, and achieving, rather than just the 'best' students.

When teachers work hard to build a community in their classes, it shows—clearly and immediately. Happier students, higher levels of engagement and a genuine interest in learning are apparent. If there is no community, no connection with peers, learning can still take place—but it misses learners' huge potential.

Connection Centered Approach

In the future, I want to see a connection-centered approach. Language teaching is evolving. We went through teacher-centered, then student-centered approaches. Now it's time for a connection-centered approach, focusing on the connections that our learners have and make while learning the language.

That's how we truly support our learners, and stay relevant as language training organizations.

Dave Weller

Marketing Supervisor

PUT YOUR PHONES AWAY. ON SECOND THOUGHTS, DON'T.



How many of us start lessons by asking students to put their mobile phones away?

Probably too many. The vast majority of our students at EF in China come to class with a computer more powerful than all of NASA had in 1969. NASA used their technology to put men on the moon with a rocket. Our students use their technology to fight zombies with plants. Doesn't that sound like a waste?

Mobile phones dominate how we interact with each other and access information. Phone usage continues to increase year on year, regardless of where you are in the world. Well, almost. There is one place where mobile phone use is almost always discouraged. I don't mean North Korea. I don't mean China Eastern airlines. I mean the EFL classroom.

How long has it been since you last looked at your mobile phone anyway? Five minutes? Ten? Half an hour at the most? If our students are using their phones half as much as we are, we'd better figure out a way of helping them use their phones to communicate in English.

So what should we do?

1. At the class level: forget writing, teach typing. Writing with a pen and paper is a 20th century skill. Our students need practice typing English with their thumbs. Turn writing tasks into an opportunity for students to send emails to you and each other. You can display these emails on your class IWB or projector screen.
2. At the center level: tell your center manager to invest in the Doceri app. This lets you link your tablet to your classroom computer which allows teachers to move around the classroom more and prepare board annotations ahead of time.
3. At the institution level: implement a BYOD (bring your own device) policy for students. The money saved from investing in tablets can be put into getting high quality Wi-Fi and training teachers to incorporate mobile devices in lessons.

Mobile phones are everywhere. Let's make sure our students aren't learning English in the North Korea of language classrooms.

Ross Thorburn

Training & Development Manager

DID YOU EVER SEE FIGHT CLUB?



If you have, you'll know one of the reasons that *Fight Club* is great is because of the ending. Ed Norton and Helena Bonham Carter look out over a sea of destruction while Black Francis croons and screams an apocalyptic tribute to mental illness. Brilliant.

But why am I talking about Brad Pitt's last decent film? What do multi-million dollar movies and English lessons have in common? They both need good endings. Research by psychologists has shown that students remember more about the first and last five minutes of a class than they do about the rest. IMDB has shown that almost nobody liked "No Country for Good Men" because the ending sucked. Every TEFL teacher has heard of warmers, but what about wrap ups? Here are three ways to make sure your next lesson is more "Sixth Sense" than "Return of the King".

1. Back to the board (A.K.A. hot seat)

Two students sit at the front of the room facing the rest of the class. You write key phrases from the lesson on the board while the rest of the class

describes these to the students at the front. You'll hear your class paraphrasing like crazy and having a lot of fun at the same time.

2. One minute story

"We learned ten new words today. You have one minute to write a story using at least seven of them. The funniest wins." You'd never have known your students could be this creative.

3. Clean the board

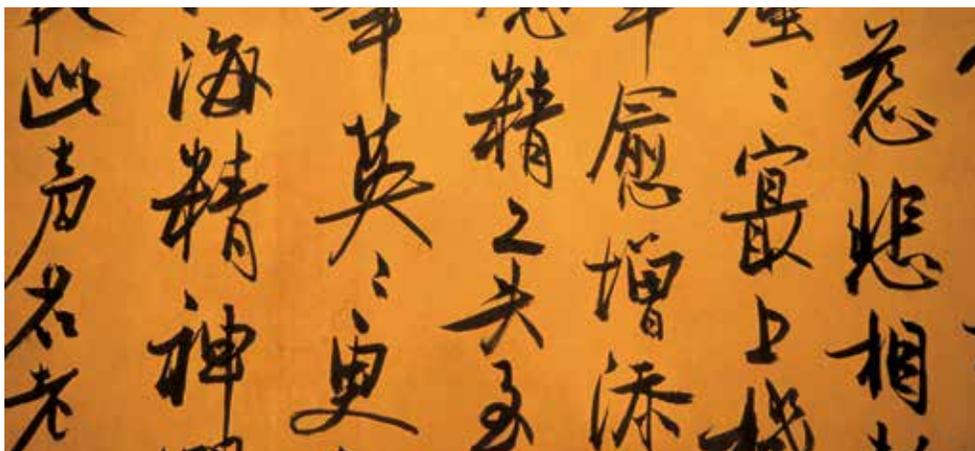
Students come to the front of the class one by one, erase a word and make a sentence with this. Continue until all your students have spoken or the board is bare.

Ending your lessons 'with a bang' won't just encourage your students to come back to class; it will also ensure they remember more of what they learned.

Ross Thorburn

Training & Development Manager

CULTURE CONVEYS CONCEPTS



One aspect of language teaching that can easily be overlooked is the importance of culture. The culture of English-speaking countries influences the use of English, so when learners are trying to improve their English, they need exposure to or explanation of the target culture as well as the target language. Without this, seemingly simple sentences can be confusing or incomprehensible.

Take, for example, the sentence, “She had a headache so she stayed upstairs.” This seems very straightforward to an English person whose idea of a “home” is a house with 2 floors, in which the bedrooms are upstairs (is this the 1st floor or the 2nd floor? – More cultural confusion). However, in a country where the vast majority of people live in apartments the idea of “staying upstairs” seems odd. Why would you go to another person’s apartment above you when you have a headache? In some parts of northern Russia, farm houses have an upstairs where animals are kept so in the winter they stay warm from the heat of the living quarters on the ground floor. “Staying upstairs” if you have a headache would seem very strange in this context.

Imagine a Chinese learner reading about people going to a restaurant and seeing the sentence, “They split the cost of the meal based on what they had.” A typical Chinese restaurant experience would involve shared dishes, so the idea of measuring what each person had eaten seems weird, whereas in England people would have ordered distinct meals for themselves so they could split the bill that way. Also, it’s generally more common for diners to split a bill in England, whilst in China often one person will ‘请’ (invite) the others.

In our classes, it is therefore important to remember that culture and language cannot be separated and we might need to supplement lessons to allow learners to fully understand the meaning of language through also understanding the cultural context it is related to.

Ben Felton
Center Education Manager

ECHO, ECHO, ECHO



Who do you think the following exchange is taking place between?

- A: What are you doing this weekend?
B: What are you doing this weekend?
A: Maybe I'll go to the cinema.
B: Maybe I'll go to the cinema.
A: Really?
B: Really?
A: What?
B: What?

Were the participants:

1. Person A and their talkative parrot?
2. Person A and their annoying younger sister?
3. Person A and their English Language Teacher?

Sadly, the most likely scenario for this kind of repetitive interaction is probably the learner-teacher "conversation." If learners share an answer in class, they may well hear it repeated back to them by the teacher.

Why not echo?

1. If a teacher repeats a learner's answer, who gets more time speaking? Not the learner.
2. Echoing damages the chance of any genuine, real-world communication and doesn't give learners a good model to follow outside of the classroom.
3. By echoing every answer from learners, they no longer need to listen to each other as any good answers will be repeated by the teacher. This will have a detrimental effect on student interaction in the classroom as well as their engagement.
4. Echoing suggests and reinforces the idea that only what the teacher says is valid, and if learners make comments that are not echoed their opinions are not valued. Clearly this is not helpful in a learner-centered classroom or for learner motivation.



Why do teachers echo?

“The student gave a good answer so I want others to know it is good.”

Acknowledging correct answers is important, but there are a wide variety of things you could do instead of echoing, such as saying, “Yes, good, right,” giving a thumbs up, a nod, a smile, boarding the answer, counting off another right answer, and many more.

“The student spoke quietly and I don’t think other students heard.”

Why not ask the student to repeat their answer more loudly? You could ask them, simply say, “Louder,” or put your hand to your ear and take a step away from the student to gesture they should repeat their answer more loudly. If other students didn’t hear the initial answer, they will be listening the second time and you will ensure more student-student interaction.

Can it ever be good to repeat learners’ answers?

Reformulation: A learner may give a good answer but the grammar isn’t exactly right. As a teacher, you decide that it is not the right time to focus on this error, but give the learner’s answer again in the correct form as a method of brief error correction.

Delayed feedback: After a task or activity, the teacher may choose to highlight some good examples of language used by learners, and in this case repeating what a learner said can be very motivational for the learner who said it as well as provide a target for others to aim for.

Echoing can be a hard habit to break, but a worthwhile one to change. If I ever catch myself echoing a student, I just listen to the voice in my head telling me to, “Shut up, shut up, shut up...” That echo is a useful one

Ben Felton
Center Education Manager

GIVING INSTRUCTIONS



Giving instructions is crucial to running a successful activity in the classroom. If you don't get your instructions spot on, your classroom may well degenerate into something like this;

*“Huh? What’s going on? Dunno, teachers said
– hey, that’s mine-what’s this-
I would like to buy 10 apples – teacher’s pet
– like your shoes – zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz-
teacher can I go to bathroom please – OW that hurts
– vroom vroom my car is fast – teacher he hit me!-
nyah, nyah nya-nya-nyah!....*

Or even worse ... polite silence.

To make giving instructions easy every time, I like to use a simple process.

The 4 Step Formula for Giving Great instructions

1. Show ‘em
2. Tell ‘em
3. Ask ‘em
4. Give ‘em

That’s it. Let me explain.

1. Show ‘Em

If possible, model the activity. Actually show them what it looks like.

Let the students help you to do this. If it’s a dialogue, ask a capable student to help you role-play an example. If it’s a worksheet, show them an example on the board.

You set the standards when you show a perfect example. Setting the standards gives you a higher chance of drawing out better quality work.

‘Show ‘em’ also applies to re-arranging students into pairs, small groups, or any seating re-arrangement. Don’t give the students too much choice which will paralyze them, decide for them for the sake of speed and convenience.

2. Tell ‘Em

Plan your instructions. As you plan your lessons, run through what you’re going to say in your head or out loud.



Grade your language so that the students will understand you. Are there any words that they won't understand? Leave out the 'um, er, yeah, like, OK' fillers that creep into our daily speech.

Simplify and shorten your instructions. How can you say what you need to in the minimum number of words?

Stage your instructions. Turn them into a list. Hold up your fingers for emphasis as you count through them. By turning instructions into bite-size chunks, students are more likely to remember them.

3. Ask 'Em

You've set the stage and filled their ears with instructions. Did they listen? Did they understand? You'd better find out before you tell them to begin.

I've always found that the question "What do I want you to do?" works wonders. You can even tease out understanding of this for lower level classes by starting the answer for them, "I want you to...?" and using body language to signal your intent.

If you used a list for your instructions, ask different students for different bullet points. Make sure that weaker students understand (but don't always pick on them to answer, the class will catch on).

Oh, and whatever you do, don't ask 'do you understand?' Just don't. Students will either say nothing, or 'yes' just to save face. Either way, you won't really know if they understand.

4. Give 'Em

Now, finally, you can give students any worksheets or materials that they need to complete the task.

Now you can let them re-arrange their chairs if the seating has been rearranged.

Do so beforehand, and watch the attention focused on you evaporate as you're no longer the most interesting thing in the room

Dave Weller
Marketing Supervisor

AVOID CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS



Consider the following two sentences spoken by a Chinese learner of English:

- (1) 'May I please to have cheese sandwich?'
- (2) 'Give me a cheese sandwich.'

How would the reactions of a teacher in a classroom setting vs. a native speaker in a natural context differ with regards to these utterances?

A teacher may correct (1) and possibly even praise (2) based on grammatical accuracy. Outside of the classroom, linguistic mistakes such as (1) are readily accepted by native speakers. Everyone loves the "poor foreigner" who is trying to learn their language, and may even view it as endearing. Experts have also suggested that it provides the native speaker with some kind of superiority complex. However, cultural mistakes such as (2) are rarely forgiven; by not saying 'please' or using an indirect question the speaker risks offending the listener, receiving a lower level of service and maybe even no sandwich at all!

An understanding of the social norms associated with a language is necessary in order to build relations and communicate effectively with others. For instance, in England 'please' and 'thanks' are fairly ubiquitous, even when speaking with close friends or family. In China however, the use of polite language with people you are close to would create a sense of distance.

So why the hard feelings? Is it that the non-native lacks the respect and effort to find out about the cultural norms? Or is the unhappy waitress in the cafe engaged in some form of cultural imperialism by expecting the non-native to form a polite indirect question and say 'please'? Whatever the case may be, it seems clear that the language learner needs to be equipped with both the linguistic and cultural knowledge to engage in international communication which enables them to both procure their needs and build relationships with others.



In conclusion then, since concepts and social norms differ across cultures, it is important that users of a foreign language are made aware of these differences. This is relevant both in and out of the classroom and applies to students as well as staff.

Can you think how the above ideas would be relevant in the following situations?

When teaching a low-level class on Describing Appearance one student uses the target language to say, “She has a big mouth.”

In a class on Talking about Health, when students play the role of a concerned friend or doctor they ask:

- “What’s wrong with you?”
- “What’s wrong?”
- “What’s your problem?”

Which of these would be best to cite as a good model, and which would you correct?

Mark Manning
Center Education Manager

THE SOUND OF LEARNING



Listen. You can't hear learning taking place, can you? You can't hear the cogs in students' brains turning as they try to get their heads round a new language concept, can you? You can't hear the humming of a learner's brain as they internalize a new word, can you? Well, I think you can. The best classes I've ever observed and taught all had this sound in abundance. You've heard this sound before. You know what it sounds like.

What's the sound? Silence.

The problem is it sounds exactly the same as the "sound of boredom" and the "sound of confusion". So we're scared of it. But we shouldn't be.

What do the researchers think?

They reckon that students (especially those at low levels) need "wait time" to translate from their first language to English in their heads (called "code switching"). Longer wait times lead to more language production for students. On average

teachers don't wait long enough (often less than two seconds) before answering their own questions. Some other ESL researchers think you should wait up to 30 seconds before giving an answer.

But, that's not what the students want, is it?

Well, again, I beg to disagree. I recently did an activity with a group of new teachers. I asked them to brainstorm adjectives to describe "good teachers" and then asked them to interview students about what "good teachers" are like. Which adjective came up most? "Patient". What do patient people do? They wait.

So, next time you're in class, listen. And if you can't hear anything at all, then that might just mean your students are learning.

Ross Thorburn

Training & Development Manager

THE KARATE KID: WHAT MR. MIYAGI CAN TEACH US ABOUT TEACHING ENGLISH



One of the greatest stories ever told about a teacher and their student is that of Mr. Miyagi and Daniel LaRusso in the 1984 classic, *The Karate Kid*. If you haven't seen the film, it tells the story of a bullied underdog, Daniel, who learns about life and karate from the caretaker of his apartment block, Miyagi. In addition to the moving tale of overcoming adversity and crane kicks, this movie contains a lot of wisdom about learning and teaching. Even if you aren't familiar with *The Karate Kid*, the following quotations still hold timeless wisdom. (As you read the quotations, bear in mind that English is not Mr. Miyagi's first language, and he has some fossilized errors, but we can still learn from his teaching style.)

“Wax on, wax off”

In the early days of learning from Mr. Miyagi, Daniel is made to wax cars, sand floors and paint fences. Miyagi demonstrates the correct technique to use, observes Daniel use it, and corrects any faults he sees before watching him again to check. This is a simple approach but holds a number of key things to remember in our classes:

1. Demonstrating an activity can replace verbal instructions and add clarity;
2. Monitoring activities is vital to being able to help learners improve by giving beneficial feedback;
3. Students need frequent, personalized feedback;
4. After receiving feedback, students need a chance to try again with the language. Don't just save feedback to the end or after class, but make it an ongoing part of every lesson

After his initial tutelage, Miyagi leaves Daniel to practice his chores (an obvious nod to the importance of encouraging learner autonomy) but Daniel gets annoyed when his time spent learning from a karate master has made him great at waxing cars, not kicking ass. Miyagi is then able to show him how, with the exact same motion, Daniel can block a punch. What he learnt whilst waxing cars is, in a different context, an important part of fighting. Here we see the value of using different contexts to motivate and further develop our learners. For example, language used to offer advice to a friend with relationship troubles could be used to give advice on an interview or new project at work.

THE KARATE KID: WHAT MR. MIYAGI CAN TEACH US ABOUT TEACHING ENGLISH

“First learn stand, then learn fly”

The grammar of this utterance may be questionable, but the idea is very valuable. It is obvious that learners must first know lexical items before they can put them together in sentences, and as teachers we must support them in this by ensuring that the meaning of language is clearly established and checked before moving on. Classes should include a pronunciation focus with clear modeling and drilling so that learners sound right when using language in context. The teacher should also clarify how target language fits into a larger utterance, such as by showing parts of speech or common collocations.

“Trust quality of what you know, not quantity”

Daniel LaRusso had to learn how to use karate in a short space of time. Instead of trying to learn a large number of different techniques, Miyagi focused on teaching him a few basic moves so well that they could be applied quickly and effectively in a real-world context. Students always want to learn more words, but expanding their vocabulary in this way might not be as useful as they hope. Students need to be able to use what they know effectively when communicating, so teachers need to ensure they have a full understanding of what a word or phrase does or doesn't mean, and how it is used. Students also need time to practice and receive feedback which shows learners what they did well, to reinforce this for future use, as well as what they can improve on.

“No such thing as bad student, only bad teacher”

Every teacher has had classes in which students struggle to understand a language point, or can't find the answers to a listening activity. It's very easy to blame the student in this case, especially if everyone else in the room understands. However, if a student doesn't understand something when explained in a certain way, it is the responsibility of the teacher to try a different way. Students don't want to give up and accept they don't understand something, so the teacher shouldn't give up on trying to clarify what they mean. Similarly, if a student seems disinterested in a lesson, the teacher is the person who needs to make an effort to re-engage the learner. This is not always easy, but one of the brilliant things about being a teacher is the frequency with which we can use our creativity to overcome obstacles like this.

If you haven't seen *The Karate Kid* in a while, or ever, go and find a copy now to watch. The fashion sense may not have stood the test of time, but the important lessons do. And remember, “Either you karate do yes or karate do no. You karate do 'guess so,' squish!”

Ben Felton
Center Education Manager

WHY BOTHER WITH FEEDBACK?



A few days ago I observed a class. The students were engaged, spoke lots of English, stayed on task and laughed when the teacher made jokes. There was just one thing missing. The thing that learners desire above all else. Feedback.

As soon as the lesson finished, I thanked the teacher for letting me observe and asked her if she'd like to chat about the class. "Absolutely," she said, "I'd love to get some feedback."

Chatting with her later, it struck me how ironic it was that the first thing the teacher would ask for would be the last thing she'd think her students would want. It's not just teachers who are desperate for feedback on their performance, according to Forbes.com, Generation Y believes that "Feedback is the breakfast of champions" and instead of dreading annual performance reviews, most of those born post-1980 actually go out of their way to ask for feedback from their boss.

So what about learners of English? Is feedback important for them too? More than you'd believe. Research on second language learners in Canada in the 80's proved that without feedback on

language production, even children and young adults who receive their entire education in their second language will never reach mastery. If that's not convincing enough, research on Chinese learners living in Australia showed that they valued error correction more than anything else in the classroom. To me, this makes perfect sense. If you want input, you can go online and watch English movies. If you want vocabulary, you can go to one of hundreds of flashcard websites. If you want an English environment you can go to any expat bar in China. So why bother going to a language school? Feedback.

After her class, the teacher asked me, "What did you think of my class? What feedback do you have for me?"

You know what we spoke about?

Feedback.

Ross Thorburn

Training & Development Manager

THE HABIT OF LEARNING



“Teacher, how can I learn English better/faster/more easily?”

How often do teachers hear a question like this? Learners are interested in finding ways to learn English as quickly and efficiently as possible, and they often look to us as teachers to provide them with the answer. This answer can be complicated by the fact that our students have plenty of other things going on in their lives and cannot always give much time or energy to studying.

We know that the more effort students put in to studying, the more they can get out of it. What advice can we give learners to help them find the time and willingness to study or practice English? Willpower and Habit Formation give some possible answers to help learners help themselves to progress.

Willpower is a limited resource

Logging on to Englishtown or picking up an English book are conscious decisions that are not always easy to make, especially with Candy Crush or House of Cards only a few clicks away on your phone. Making this decision requires willpower, and studies have shown that willpower is a limited resource.

Students may have had to force themselves to finish a report instead of WeChatting, help their children with their homework instead of using the iPad, or go shopping instead of having a refreshing baijiu. All of these will have depleted their willpower and might not leave them enough to choose study over relaxation. How can we ensure that other life decisions don't get in the way of studying?

Habitual behavior runs on automatic pilot

Every day we do things on auto-pilot. You don't need to use any willpower to have your morning coffee or check your favorite websites because you have formed the habit of doing these things. Conversely, it takes an awful lot of willpower to overcome a habit you might want to stop, such as smoking or drinking.

If we assume that our students will always have other things draining their willpower, a good way for them to consistently study English will be for them to make it one of their automatic habits. If practicing a few words of English is as natural as checking social media updates, students will find themselves with a lot of time and energy to improve.

Forming the habit of learning

How can learners form a long-lasting habit of studying English? From your own experience you probably know that it is difficult to form new habits, but here are a few steps that should lead to greater success.

- 1. Start very small**—“I will study English for 2 hours every day” is probably not going to stick if students have jobs, families or friends. “I will review vocabulary for 3 minutes each evening,” is more realistic and can be built on. Three minutes becomes 5, or 10, or more, without the shock of a big change.
- 2. Create positive rewards for the habit**—“If I study every day this week, I'll go to the cinema on Sunday.” Find a way to enjoy the habit and reward yourself for doing it.

- 3. Don't miss a day**—Missing one day easily turns into 2, then 4, then the loss of the habit. Be aware of the voice in your head telling you not to bother, and overcome it. If you start small, you'll feel silly for missing a day because the time commitment is so short.

- 4. Change your thinking**—Instead of saying, “I don't have time,” say, “It isn't a priority.” The chances are learning English is a priority, so students do have time for it.

Forming the habit of teaching

The above ideas apply to improving your teaching too. If you need to include more connected speech or feedback in your classes, you can approach this in the same way. Start off with just one example of connected speech in every single class, and then build on it. Before long, it will be easy and natural for you to point out assimilation and weak forms to learners.

Try out these ideas for yourselves and see how you can make them work. Once you understand how they can be used to improve your life, you will also have another way to answer, “Teacher, how can I learn English better?”

Ben Felton
Center Education Manager

TARGETING STUDENT NEEDS

Individualization, differentiation, and personalization have become buzzwords in education, but little agreement exists on what exactly they mean beyond the broad concept that each is an alternative to the one-size-fits-all model of teaching and learning. For example, some education professionals use personalization to mean that students are given the choice of what and how they learn according to their interests. In the EFL classroom, we might refer to techniques such as adapting materials to fit our students' needs, or during lessons, providing examples from relevant contexts to demonstrate the meaning of new language.

Whichever term you prefer, it's hard to disagree with the concept. Achieving this, particularly in larger classes however, can be a challenge. Teachers are faced with mixed levels and mixed abilities which often result in lessons being pitched down the middle in hopes that there will be something for every level of ability. Add to that, in some school set ups, teachers are often meeting many of the students in their class for the first time making it tempting to teach the lesson, as opposed to the individual students. In teaching to the middle of the group, however, we might be accused of not actually helping anyone reach a learning goal.

To tackle this challenge, I believe we need to expand our definition of the above terms to capture more than the content of the curriculum or materials used in the class. If we look at a lesson as a series of stages or learning activities taking place in real time, within each of those 5-15 minute live episodes are opportunities or teachable moments

where teachers can mold the lesson to address a particular challenge, question, or idea that a student shares and creates that personalized take-away. Pushing students to make mistakes can have its rewards as long as we respond to errors in a meaningful way.

Of course, as in any other live event, one can't plan for everything that might occur during a lesson. I would argue that you can plan to try to initiate teachable moments, though. Asking questions is one way to position students as contributors in the lesson where they can be challenged. Assigning speaking tasks is another. Adrian Underhill (celebrated teacher training guru) advocates asking challenging questions but even more importantly, listening to the response so you can decide whether this moment deserves any additional precious class time. Remember thoughtful feedback can also come from students.

Challenge is personal, and as long as we go about it in a supportive way, I believe we will achieve better teaching and ultimately, better, personalized learning as well.

Wil Dekker
National Director

WE FORGOT TO TEACH THE 3 MOST IMPORTANT WORDS IN ENGLISH

Last summer, somewhere 37,000ft above the Middle East, in line for the bathroom, I overheard these words: “They’re so rude. They never say please or thank you.”

You get no prizes for guessing who the flight attendant was complaining about: the hapless Chinese passengers on the VS251 from Pudong to Heathrow.

Every year China spends \$2.1 billion on English language education to help its people interact with the rest of the world and every year 100,000 foreign teachers move to China to get the job done. The end result? Dozens of enraged flight attendants and thousands of oblivious Chinese air travelers.

Or is it worse? Imagine you went to a job interview and couldn’t say “please” or “thank you”. What would happen? Imagine you went to study abroad, stayed with a host family and couldn’t say “please” or “thank you”. What would happen? Imagine you went into a bar, ordered a drink and couldn’t say “please” or “thank you”. What would happen?

Anything from unemployment, to eviction, to receiving a serving of saliva in your Long Island ice tea. All of these are likely to happen to our students if we continue to forget to teach them the 3 most important words in English; “please” and “thank you”.

So, what can we do about it?

Here are three ideas to help your students remember their P’s and Q’s:

1. Discuss the differences between “thank you” and “xie xie”. When do we say them? Who do we say them to? There are more differences than you think.
2. Show students dialogues with the “please” and “thank you”’s removed. Ask them to guess the missing words and add these to the dialogues.
3. Create intercultural miscommunication case studies, give these to your students and ask them to figure out what went wrong.

Next time you’re on a plane home at 37,000ft, in line for the bathroom, listen to the flight attendants. If some of your students are on the same flight, you just might overhear these words: “They’re so polite. They always say please and thank you.”

Ross Thorburn

Training & Development Manager

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE



In one of his TED talks, Wade Davis tells how in 1957, five missionaries attempted to contact the Waorani tribe in North Eastern Ecuador and made a critical mistake. They airdropped 8"x10" glossy photos of themselves in what they considered to be friendly gestures, but forgot that the rainforest tribesmen had never seen anything two dimensional before in their lives. Picking up the photos from the forest floor, and failing to find the figure behind the form, the tribesmen concluded that the photographs had to be calling cards from the Devil. When the missionaries arrived a few weeks later, they were speared to death. The moral of the story? Know your audience. Here are three things I have learned about our audience, Chinese students, over the last eight years.

1. Teach weak forms

When words are put together in Chinese, they don't change. In English, they do. As a result, Chinese speakers tend to pronounce words, 'too fully'. For example, "cup", "of" and "coffee" when put together sound more like "cuppa coffee". Show your students when and where this happens.

2. Teach ellipsis

"Where are you going?" "The shops." Sounds perfectly natural, right? But how often do we teach "I'm going to the shops" in response to this question? In English, we can miss out the "I'm going to" bit. The bits you can miss out are different English in Chinese. This is ellipsis.

3. Teach elision

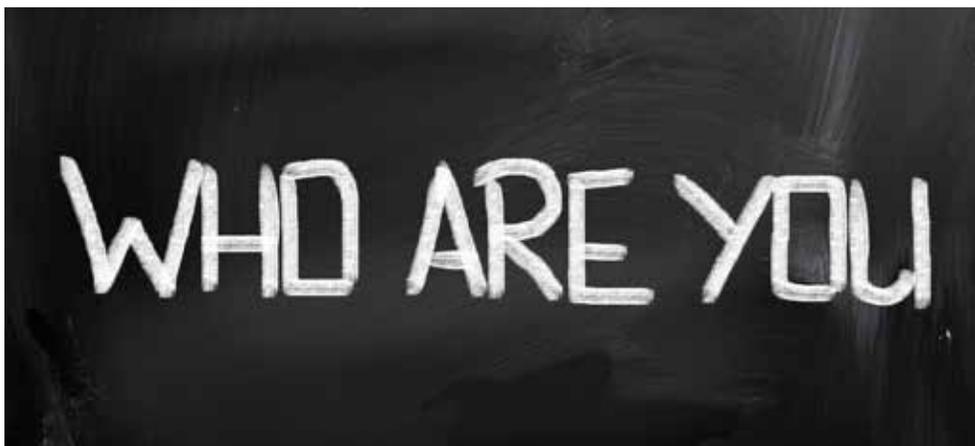
Elision is when we miss out sounds after putting words together. Try saying these separately, and then together; "second", "hand". When we put them together, the "d" in the middle disappears. Don't believe me? Try, "text", "book". BOOM! The "t" has disappeared from the middle. A good rule of thumb is when there are three consonants in a row, the middle one disappears. Amaze your friends! Help your students.

Your students are unlikely to spear you to death for not knowing them well enough. But if you don't get to know them and help them accordingly, they may sound bad enough to make listeners want to spear themselves to death.

Ross Thorburn

Training & Development Manager

WHO ARE YOU?



Over the past few years I've often overheard the same comments from both new and experienced teachers. Here are a few I hear when teachers begin working with teenagers. If you've been working as a teacher for a while I'm sure you will recognize a few of these:

'My students never listen.'

'They won't speak with each other no matter what I do.'

'The boys never want to work with the girls when I tell them to.'

'They just don't seem to care.'

'I spend hours making materials and planning a fun project but they tell me it's boring and they want to do something else.'

Where does this animosity or at least disinterest come from? Why is it so much more prevalent with teenagers compared with younger or older groups? Why do teachers come away feeling a class was silent or getting students to talk is like pulling teeth? Why is it some teachers can end up so distant from their students?

For anyone suffering in a difficult class like this I have 3 words which I think could make all the difference.

Who are you?

Take a second and think about this question because this question is the first one which will cross your student's minds when you walk into the classroom. Do your students know you? What do they know about you? Do they know your full name? Do they know if your single, married, have children? Do they know how long you've been in this school/country? Do they know why you came here? Do they know why you wanted to become a teacher? Do they know where you have travelled in your life? What you have done? What you have seen?

Who were the teachers who affected you most growing up? Which were the classes you enjoyed most? Were they faceless teachers who just came in started teaching immediately and left the second the class was over or where they the teachers who came early, sat and talked with students about day to day life, seemed passionate about their subject and were always happy to speak with their students. I feel confident it was the later.

Next time before you walk into that class think about this question and maybe bring in a few pictures to help start to answer it. Who are you?

Stuart Marriner
Director of Studies

TOWARDS YOUR FUTURE

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CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS