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Abstract: *As a teacher, we know the benefits of these mandatory classes to student learning, but we also know that student learning does not happen without their buy-in. Not only must our lessons be meaningful, but students must value them and provide them with a practical connection to what they already know. We developed a warm-up activity that allows students to connect their lessons and see their learning as meaningful in their lives.*

Keywords: *Benefits, personalization, image sharing, ask the right question, word questions.*

In the dictionary "A warm-up generally consists of a gradual increase in intensity in physical activity (a "pulse raiser"), joint mobility exercise, and stretching, followed by the activity. For example, before running or playing an intensive sport, athletes might slowly jog to warm their muscles and increase their heart rate".

When you start a language lesson, it is important for you as a teacher to first get the students into the right mindset. This applies to all ages and levels. ESL warm-up activities for adults may be slightly different than ESL games and activities for children and teens, but they are just as important. Until students are focused, they will not retain new information. The warm-up provides an opportunity to refocus students' attention. For example, a warm-up can help if students are tired from school or work, stressed or worried about personal matters, or come to class too excited or tired.

Below we'll suggest 5 warm-up activities, the best warm-up activities are all about getting students engaged, and providing them with new interesting ways to work together and connect. They should make the students feel stimulated and allow for personalization where possible. Don't error correct during warm-up activities. The emphasis should be on fluency and building trust and rapport. Here are some great warm-up activities suitable for teens and adults to get your classes off to a flying start!

Photo sharing mingles (10-20 minutes) Get your students to get to know each other, by getting them to find a meaningful picture on their phones, and sharing it with the other student. This should preferably be a photo they took, but an image from an online search is also ok. Students are then told to mingle (or go into breakout rooms online) and ask and answer questions about each other's photos. Encourage students to ask lots of follow up questions.

Asking correct questions (10-15 minutes) the teacher explains that students can ask other students different questions (or even the teacher!). However, questions will only be able to be answered once the whole class agrees the question is grammatically correct.



Students work in pairs to think of interesting questions for others and check their grammar. When all the pairs are ready with two or three questions to ask, pre-teach the answers "none of your business" or for higher levels "I'd prefer not to answer that question" in case these are needed. Begin to let each pair, in turn, ask a question to others in the class (not their partner) and remember, as soon as you hear a question that isn't correct, shout "stop!", board what was said and underline any problem areas. Only when the whole class has corrected the question successfully can an answer be given.

Vocabulary race (15-20 minutes) Vocabulary warm-up activities are a great way to elicit vocabulary from a class and introduce a topic. Tell students you are going to show them an image and that they will need to list as many words connected to the picture as they can. Show them an example image first. If the example image is a photo of a kitchen, you could ask "What can you see?" and write up words such as "sink", "washing machine", "kettle"...

Explain that the team with the most words will win and that they have to write the words down for them to count as points. Then, divide students into pairs and give them the picture (sent to their breakout room chat online, face to face as a print-out or on the IWB (interactive whiteboard)). Give them a time limit of 5 minutes or more.

When the time is up, students total up their words. The winning team has the most words! Afterwards, go around the class, giving each pair a turn to say one of their words. Write the words on the board until all the words have been written up. For higher levels, your examples could include multiple words, for example, "linoleum floor", "tea towel". You could make it more interesting by explaining beforehand that if they think of a word that another team didn't think of, that it will count as 2 points. This will encourage them to stretch themselves and even get creative. Remind them that all vocabulary must be visible, so they can't say "cliché housewife with a feather duster" unless there is one pictured!

Warm-up activities for higher levels, as many uses for a potato (20 minutes)

These types of warm-up activities are to be done in competing teams. For online classes, students can be divided into multiple breakout rooms once the instructions have been given. Each team has to think of as many uses of a potato as possible. The team that thinks of the most uses wins! Give students a few examples to start them off e.g. a paperweight, to play catch with a child. Encourage them to be creative e.g. a weapon, a gift on a first date... Remember to tell them that they must write their ideas down (or send them to you in the online chat) – to prove the number of ideas they have thought of.

Start a timer for seven minutes. When the time is up, ask the students to total up the number of uses. Go around each group in turn, asking them to say one of their ideas to the rest of the class. Do this until all of the ideas have been proposed, encouraging different students from each team to speak each time.

(adapted from eslgames.com)

Special word detectives (30 minutes) Give each student one word on a slip of paper or as a private message online. This word must be unusual, e.g. elephant/diamonds/Jupiter

Choose one topic that is easy to talk about e.g. your family / your home town or city. The challenge is for students to mingle and talk about the topic, and use their special word



without the other students noticing. Encourage students to note down any words they think might be the 'special word' of other students.

Afterwards, the teacher selects each student in turn, asking the rest of the class what they thought their word was. The fun part is trying to get the class to collectively decide on the one word they thought was the given word. Did the student manage to hide the word well? Or was it glaringly obvious? Was what they said a lie, or did they manage to make a true sentence using their word?

The thing of my dreams (25-30 minutes) Students spend 5-7 minutes drawing the "something" of their dreams. It could be the house/car/pet/boyfriend of their dreams for example. To take the pressure off students that can't draw very well, insist that all the drawings must be drawn very badly ("it's not art class, it's English class!"). Put some music on of a genre of their choice (if necessary, search for a 'clean' version to avoid explicit lyrics, or search for 'instrumental' versions to avoid distracting lyrics altogether). When everyone has been drawing for a few minutes, tell them they can also add vocabulary around the drawing.

Finally, students take turns to show and tell or do this in smaller groups (or in breakout rooms online).

Why not use the drawings to expand into the lesson you are going to teach? They could write a story involving what they have drawn. They could use conditionals to think about what would happen if their dream worlds combined? Why not make future plans to make their dreams a reality?

To sum up, effective warm-up activities for teaching English should be:

Considerate towards your students' emotional/physical state when they enter the classroom (for example, if students are tired, use a warm-up with movement to energize them)

1. Simple to understand and execute;
2. Easy to carry out;
3. Age- and level-appropriate;
4. Time-efficient (not take up too much time);
5. Interesting and appealing;
6. Leading towards the lesson content or target language;
7. Using mostly known vocabulary to increase students' participation and confidence.

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