

First lesson with a new class – teachers' notes

v 1.1 October, 2014

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Level: Flexible

Skills: Speaking, Listening

Topic area: Personal Info, motivation

Required resources: (Coloured) paper for name tags, pre-prepared video recording self-introduction + projector (optional), half A4 sheets of paper for student profiles, post-it notes for goal setting.

Time: 2hrs +

Number of students: 6+

Objectives:

1. **Motivation:** Access and generate students' motivation for learning
2. **Community:** Help students feel comfortable and get to know each other
3. **Rapport:** Establish the teacher's credibility and build student-teacher rapport
4. **Needs:** Analyse students' needs
5. **Expectations:** Set teacher expectations and hear student expectations

This lesson is designed to be modular – pick and choose the activities that you like for your first lesson and spread different activities over the first few lessons. The focus is on motivation and engagement.

The lesson plan was presented at UECA PD Fest “Teacher and Learner Engagement” on 22 March, 2014, and Navitas Big Day In on 3 October, 2014.

1) Name tags

Give Ss paper to write name tags and place on the desk in front of them

(Tip: coloured paper works well so you can recycle them for the first few classes and so the name tags stand out in the class photo at the end of the lesson.)



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2) Getting to know each other (speed dating + 3 true / 2 false)

A) Speed dating

- This is sometimes called “train tracks”. Ss sit or stand in two rows, so that each is facing a partner. (If you have an odd number of Ss make a group of three on the end of the line.) Give Ss a set time limit to find out as much information about their partner as possible. (You can see what time limit works for you depending on how many Ss you have and what their level is, but 90 secs – 2 mins seems about right.)
- After the time limit, say “Change partners”. One line of Ss moves to their left and the other remains where they are, so that everyone has a new partner. (The person on the left end will need to walk around to the other end of the line.)
- Continue until you get back to the original partners (this will mean everyone has met half the class).

(Tip: monitor during the conversations to check Ss’ use of question forms and to help Ss think of more interesting questions if they need help. For some ideas about asking interesting questions see:

<http://ideas.ted.com/2014/07/28/how-to-turn-small-talk-into-smart-conversation/>)

B) 3 true / 2 false

- Write 5 sentences on the board (or have them pre-written on a PPT), which give personal information about your life. 3 of these sentences should be true, and 2 lies. Use a variety of tenses (past / present / future) in your sentences.
- Tell Ss to ask you 10 questions to work out which sentences are true and which are false. Explain that you will continue to lie to try to make them believe all the sentences are true, so they need to ask you questions to trick you. (E.g. If your sentence is “I own a dog” some good questions might be, “What’s its name?” “Where do you take it for walks?” etc.)
- (Tip: use this as an opportunity to assess Ss’ needs in question formation. Probably don’t do too much error correction at this stage, as Ss are finding their voice in the class, but note issues for later practice.)
- After 10 questions, reveal which sentences are true or false using your pre-recorded video introduction. This is a 30 second video introducing yourself to the class and including the information that is in your true / false statements. You can record yourself using a phone or webcam and either bring the video to class on your USB, or upload it to a video-sharing website (e.g. <https://www.videosprout.com>, <https://www.dropbox.com/>). The reason for introducing this now is to preview the video introduction homework task that Ss will need to complete (see Homework 1 below).



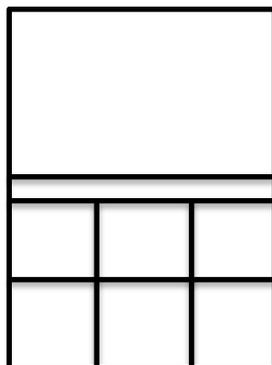
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- The next stage of this activity is to have Ss do the same as you – i.e. write 3 true and 2 false sentences about their life using a variety of tenses. You could do this now, or as a warmer in another lesson in the first few days. (Tip: This is a good opportunity to assess students’ grasp of tenses and simple sentence formation.) Ss swap their sentences with a partner and ask and answer 10 questions to try and trick each other into revealing which sentences are lies. Follow-up by finding out who is the best liar.

3) Getting to know yourself (student profile)

This is an adapted version of Kevin Ryan’s student profile activity described at ELT Podcast: <http://www.eltpodcast.com/archive/lounge/firstlessons.html>.

- Hand out half an A4 piece of paper to each student. Leave some extra sheets on the tables for “mistakes” and emphasise that mistakes are good because we learn through them.
- Ask Ss to place the paper vertically (they may look at each other and wonder what that means - this could be an opportunity to explain “vertical”).
- Ask Ss to draw a horizontal line in the middle of the paper (again, checking understanding of “horizontal”. Tip: throughout this activity, explain that Ss need to ask each other and you questions in order to clarify instructions and that you welcome questions).
- Ask Ss to draw another horizontal line about 2cm above the first one. Then, in the space below, draw another horizontal line and two vertical lines so that you make 6 squares. The paper should look like this:



- Then, start asking Ss questions and have them fill in answers in the boxes - they shouldn’t write full sentences, just short answers of a few words. The questions you choose completely depend on the focus you would like. You could ask general GTKY questions like “Where are you from?” “What is your favourite hobby?” etc. Here are some suggested questions to target motivation:
 1. What’s your favourite website for practicing English?
 2. What motivates you the most to learn English?
 3. What English skill do you need to improve the most?

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4. Why did you choose this university/ school/ city?
 5. What's your major?
 6. What's your greatest achievement to date?
- Collect the profiles and redistribute them to different Ss (Tip: try to make sure that the Ss are not sitting near each other and that if Ss A has Ss B's profile, then Ss B doesn't have A's, they've got someone else's.).
 - Ss then need to mingle and ask questions to find the profile's owner, then write the owner's name in the middle rectangle. Before they mingle, elicit a few questions that Ss would ask to obtain the information (e.g. "Is TED.com your favourite website for practicing English?" / "What's your favourite website for practicing English?"). Emphasise that Ss should ask different questions to each person they speak with (i.e. don't ask everyone about their favourite website). Once Ss have found the owner, they should discuss more of the information written on the profile.
 - Ask Ss to return to their desks with their own profile, which now has their name on it.
 - Finally, ask Ss to draw a picture of their "ideal self" speaking English - i.e. how do you want to look when you're communicating in English? (This is designed to help Ss explicitly engage in creating a positive new identity in English¹).
 - Ask Ss to explain their drawings to their partners.
 - (Tip: it's useful to then collect the profiles as they will help you remember the names and some basic information about your new Ss. Return the profiles later in the course or at the end of the course and have Ss compare how they feel now / how much they have learnt throughout the course.)

4) Brief course introduction

Depending what type of course you're teaching, this may be a good opportunity to give a brief course introduction. Focus in particular on the student learning outcomes. Tips:

- For an idea about sharing learning outcomes, see here: <http://www.eltideas.com/teaching-ideas/communicating-learning-outcomes-to-students/>
- Don't give too much vital information on the first day, as Ss may not take everything in.
- In order to do the goal setting activity next, it's good to give Ss at least a basic overview of what they can expect in the course.

¹ According to Pavlenko and Norton, learning is "a process of becoming a certain person, rather than simple accumulation of skills and knowledge," and imagination is a way to "create new identities," since language learning in particular "reflects the desire of learners to expand their range of identities and to reach out to other worlds." (Pavlenko, A. & Norton, B., 2007, "Imagined communities, identity, and English language learning" in *International handbook of English language teaching*, p.590)



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5) Goal setting

This can be a weekly activity that gets established on the first day. The idea is to get Ss to create realistic goals that they are accountable for.

- Ask Ss why setting goals is important, if they have set goals for studying English before, if they have been successful etc.
- Elicit / explain what SMART goals are (i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound - see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria for more information)
- Give each Ss a post-it note and ask them to write a goal for their first week. (Tip: If Ss need support with developing goals, make some suggestions, but remember that the goal needs to be relevant to them to be useful. Ss will develop the capacity to create more effective goals the more you repeat this activity and as they identify the English skills that they need to practice most.)
- Ss stick the post-it notes onto a goals sheet on the wall. (Tip: ask Ss to stick the notes together with a buddy - they will follow-up with that buddy next week to see how successful they've been in achieving the goal.)

6) Name game

For the last 10-15 minutes of the class it's good to do some kind of name-remembering game to help create a sense of community. There are many versions, so you can find your favourite. One example is:

- Ss stand/sit in a circle (or just remain at their desks).
- The first person says their name and another piece of information (e.g. university major, nationality, hobby, favourite food etc.) E.g. "I'm Saki and my favourite food is different tropical fruits."
- The next Ss introduces themselves, and the previous Ss. E.g. "I'm Afonso and I really love tapioca. This is Saki and she likes tropical fruit."
- Continue around the circle until the last person says everyone's name.

A variation on this game is to have students give themselves an adjective to describe themselves, which starts with the same letter as their name. E.g. First person: "I'm Super Saki." Second person: "I'm Awesome Afonso, and this is Super Saki" etc.

7) Class photo

Finally, take a photo of the class with everybody holding up their name badges that they wrote at the beginning of the lesson. Use this to help remember the Ss names yourself, and also print it out to put on the wall, or post it to your class' community website to help Ss remember each other's names. This can be a fun, positive way to end the class.



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Homework 1: Video intro

Ask Ss to create a 30 second video to introduce themselves to you and the rest of the class. (Tip: If the videos are much longer than 30 seconds they tend to get a bit boring.) If you have already shown them your video introduction then they should understand the task more easily. Give Ss support by providing some questions (written out). For example, they could choose to answer some of the following:

- Where are you from?
- What is your major?
- What do you like doing in your spare time?
- Why did you choose this school / country?
- What do you want to see in this city?
- What do you want to achieve in this course?

They should be questions that the rest of the class are interested in hearing, but of course information that the Ss are happy to share.

Ss can record their video with their smartphone / webcam etc. Encourage Ss to help each other record. (Tip: don't worry if you don't know how to use the technology yourself – chances are, your students will!)

Ideas for sharing the videos with the rest of the class:

- Ss upload their video to a video-sharing site. A good site is <https://www.videosprout.com> because it's very simple to use (just sign up for free with an email address) and the videos are private by default. Large video sharing sites like YouTube or Vimeo have private video sharing options, but the settings and sign-up process are much more complicated than VideoSprout.
- Ask Ss to either email the links to their videos to you, or to post them on your class community website.
- Alternatively, Ss can bring the video to the follow-up class on a USB stick and there's no need for uploading.

The non-technical option for this is just having Ss present a short introduction live to the class, or in groups. However, the benefit of the video, especially at the start of the course, is that it lets Ss practice their intro and record it as many times as they like without the pressure of public speaking (although, emphasize that it doesn't need to be perfect and to not spend too long making it). It could also serve as a benchmark for their speaking at the start of the course.



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Homework 2: Expectations email

Ss write an email to you outlining their expectations for the course. This is an opportunity to conduct a needs assessment of their writing as well as provide some initial instruction in email etiquette. Provide support for the students by giving them some questions and/or a suggested structure. Some suggestions for questions:

- Why are you taking this course?
- What do you expect to learn in this course?
- What do you expect the teacher to do?
- How many hours each day do you expect to work outside class time?
- What do you think you'll find most challenging about this course?
- Why are you studying in English? What motivates you the most to learn English?

Alternatively, this writing could be done during class time as a letter.

Follow-up lesson (video intros)

A few days after the initial lesson, spend some time in class sharing the videos.

- Ask Ss to bring their 30 second video intros (on USB or shared on a website).
- Tell Ss that you are going to watch each of the videos and that they need to write down each person's name and 2 questions that they would like to ask that Ss. E.g. if the Ss says they are studying engineering, the question could be "what type of engineering do you study?" or "what do you want to do after you graduate?" etc. (You can download a blank table for this exercise [here](#).)
- After watching all the videos, Ss mingle and ask their questions to each other. This can continue for quite a while as Ss get to know each other and ask various questions based on the videos.

How did it go?

If you've used this lesson with your class, please let us know how it went and any ideas for improvement at www.ELTideas.com/contact



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