**How to Teach Secondary Students (Without Losing Your Sanity in the Process)**

Liam Tyler, Macmillan, IPT International Professional Training

**Introduction**

Working with secondary students is notoriously difficult; indeed, without the proper approach, a teacher can easily lose his or her sanity! However, as has been argued, secondary students also have the potential to be the best language learners. Here are some essential tips on how to teach secondary classes.

**A. How to start an English lesson**

Rather than simply opening the book at the page from your last lesson, use a range of interesting warmers and lead-ins.

Try the following:

Sentence hangman (for leading in to grammar)

\_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_.

1 point for guessing a letter correctly.

5 points for guessing a word correctly.

10 extra points for finishing the sentence.

-1 point for guessing a letter correctly.

-5 points for guessing a word correctly.

-10 extra points for finishing the sentence.

Vocabulary/Grammar bingo (a simple warmer for revising vocabulary or grammar)

Choose a list of words you would like to revise. Ask the students to divide a piece of paper into 6 (or more) sections, then choose at random words to write in each box.

Collect the pieces of paper from the students and re-distribute them so that each student has a new piece of paper (with words written by someone else in class). Read at random definitions from the list of words; if students hear a definition which matches a word on their paper they cross off the word. The first person to cross off all their words shouts ‘bingo’! Then check the list to ensure the student has crossed off the right words.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ambitious | clever | journalist |
| badly-paid | creative | calm |

This can also be done with grammar structures, with students writing full sentences including examples of different structures in each box instead of just single words.

See *Gateway Teacher’s Books* for more great ideas for warmers, lead-ins and revision activities!

**B. How to survive the last 10 minutes of a lesson / How to rescue a lesson that is dying**

It’s quite simple: use activities like the ones above! When you plan a lesson, always have a ‘Plan B’ of possible rescue activities that you can use, just in case the students get bored or you find you have a spare 10 minutes you haven’t planned for.

**C. How to correct grammar exercises (without students falling asleep)**

Teachers so often fail to take advantage of the learning opportunities that checking grammar can present. Don’t just ‘go through the motions’ of asking students for their answers one-by-one, mix things up a little!

* DON’T ask students one by one in a set order. Ask in random order to keep them on their toes.
* DON’T just ask for the answer. Ask them to explain WHY it’s the answer.
* If a student answers in a soft voice, DON’T move closer to them – move further away so they have to speak up.
* For variety, YOU answer the questions (and get a few wrong to test them).
* If the exercise was for homework and someone didn’t do it, they still have to answer NOW.
* DON’T just instantly correct mistakes – throw it back to the students and see if they can self-correct first.

**D. How to encourage teenage students to speak in English**

Motivation is the key with secondary students, but it’s often difficult to get right. The concept of deferred gratification (i.e. working hard now in order to gain reward at a later time) is often lost on teenagers. That’s why we need to substitute long- and mid-term motivation by creating in students the immediate desire to do an activity.

Some further considerations are:

* Correcting approrpaitely: Listening to WHAT students say, not just HOW they say it.
* Ensuring the students have the right language to do the task (functional phrases are important here – see *Gateway* speaking skills boxes for useful task-completion language).
* Deal with task avoidance behaviour by making sure instructions are clear (concept checking instructions is a good idea); providing extra ‘scaffolding’ for speaking tasks if needed; taking a new/personal approach to activating language.

**E. How to calm students down and get them concentrating**

We’ve all had classes where things get a little bit too rowdy. Sometimes we need to take steps to calm things down a little.

Column dictations and individual writing tasks are excellent for calming things down and getting the lesson back under control. They can incorporate grammar or vocabulary, or be a basis for speaking tasks.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Make | Do |
|  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Adjective | Comparative form | Superlative form |
|  |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Agree | Disagree | Not sure |
|  |  |  |

**F. How to deal with mixed ability**

Having students of different levels in class can cause problems, and it can often be difficult to move at the right pace: not ‘flying with the fastest’ so that some students are left behind, or not going too slow and making stronger students suffer. Ways to deal with this include:

* Using online materials and grammar extension activities in Gateway.
* Making use of project work so that students can work at their own pace/level.
* Making tasks as open-ended as possible so that stronger students are free to go as far as they can with the language (e.g. not ‘*Find 5 things in common with your partner*’, but ‘*Find a minimum of 5 things in common with your partner*’.
* Planning activities for fast finishers (such as additional tasks for reading; asking students to think of extra questions to ask you).

**H. How to remain calm, sane and happy when classes are ‘difficult’**

* Remeber that Friday is only X days away
* Check out the teaching tip videos at Gateway Online or see the Gateway facebook page.
* Remember that you are not alone! There is a huge community of English teachers out there, ready to share ideas and experience.

Have you done any of these things:

* read/written a teaching blog?
* posted a comment in an online teaching forum?
* participated in a webinar?
* entered an online lesson plan competition?
* become a member of IATEFL?

All these things are possible – connect to the global community of teachers!

**Useful websites**

[www.gateway-online.net](http://www.gateway-online.net/)
[www.facebook.com/macmillangateway](http://www.facebook.com/macmillangateway)
[www.iptrussia.ru](http://www.iptrussia.ru)

[www.onestopenglish.com](http://www.onestopenglish.com)

www.macmillanenglish.com/webinars