

Teach and Trade

by LEAH JORDANO-KUDALIS

Teach and Trade is a versatile vocabulary-building activity that my students love. It is designed to introduce key vocabulary in a learner-centered, engaging way and makes an upcoming unit or text more accessible. Learners become experts in one or two words and become familiar with most target words they subsequently come across. This activity, which I developed after glimpsing my students participate in Quiz, Quiz, Trade (The Teacher Toolkit, n.d.) in another class, is appropriate for adolescent and adult English as a second or foreign language learners at all levels, and it can easily be adapted for younger learners.

STEP BY STEP

Teach and Trade can take anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes, including the warm-up. In general, the higher the learners' proficiency levels, the quicker the activity. Although learners should be assigned level-appropriate words, the higher the general proficiency level of the learners, the more efficiently they tend to explain and comprehend the vocabulary during the teaching phase.

MATERIALS

Each student will need one half-sheet of A4 paper. This is the perfect opportunity to reuse and recycle: as long as a piece of paper has one clean side, it can be used. I usually collect used A4 handouts and cut them in half for this activity.

Students will also need access to dictionaries. In a high-tech setting, students might use online dictionaries via smartphones, but in a

low-tech setting, you will need to provide at least one dictionary for every three students. If you are in a low-tech setting and cannot provide access to dictionaries, it is best to instead engage students in the Definition-Slip variation of Teach and Trade, explained below after the Procedure section.

If possible, provide a few markers for writing. Learners can use a marker to write their key word at the top of their half-sheet of paper. If markers are unavailable, the word can be written in pen or pencil.

I also like to use small slips of paper on which I write one key word for each learner. In mixed-level classes, doing this allows me to quickly assign a word appropriate to each student's level when passing out the word slips. If you do not have any paper or the time to prepare word slips, you will instead need a blackboard and chalk or a whiteboard and a marker, and you can simply write a numbered list of the target vocabulary items on the board and assign each student a number.

If possible, you might use a computer and printer to prepare your word slips so that you can quickly duplicate 15 word slips for a larger class instead of copying them by hand.

PREPARATION

Preparation includes selecting key words and, ideally, writing them on small slips of paper.

1. Before class, choose the words your learners need to focus on to best participate in the unit or to comprehend

The goal is to expose learners to key words without overwhelming them.

a text. When you select words, keep the following in mind:

- *Choose high-impact words:* Instead of choosing obscure words that learners may never see again, select words that most of your learners don't know but are likely to encounter relatively frequently. These words should be useful for understanding subject-area content and for expressing on-topic ideas.
- *Limit numbers:* The goal is to expose learners to key words without overwhelming them. Some learners will already know some of the target vocabulary, but you should still limit your list to no more than 15 words. This means that, depending on class size, most teachers will assign each word to at least two students; alternatively, you might choose morphological variations (e.g., infinitive/simple; past/past participle; adjective/noun) of the same 15 words. If you create morphological variations, you can later group students for a subsequent activity—and incorporate grammar into your lesson—by asking them to find the various versions of the word they are holding at the end of Teach and Trade. For example, if you have 41 students, you might include *sing/sang/sung* as three variations of one word and *feminist/feminism* as two variations of another word; after the Teach and Trade activity, you could have the learners holding these variations team up and work together on a follow-up activity.
- *Differentiate:* Choose words of varying levels of difficulty. Because each

learner focuses on one word, that particular word should challenge him or her. If you have vastly different levels in the same group, you might give your most proficient students two challenging words to prepare and other students just one; the students who prepare two words can later choose their favorite word to use during the interactive phase. During the trade, all learners will interact with one another's words, which, depending on each student's proficiency level, will serve either as a first exposure or as a review.

2. *Prepare the word slips.* Write one key word on each slip of paper. If you have access to a computer and printer, it is usually faster to insert a table into a word-processing program, type in the words, enlarge the text size, print, and cut the paper into slips. Again, if you don't have paper or time, you can write the words in a numbered list on the board.

<i>Word</i>	
<i>Part of Speech</i>	<i>Quick Drawing</i>
<i>Paraphrased Definition / [Translation]</i>	
<i>Sentence [Caption] Using the <u>Word</u></i>	

Figure 1. A template for a vocabulary half-sheet. This template shows the required information, but it is unnecessary to follow this exact formatting or to draw the lines shown here.

3. *Prepare an example word sheet.* Refer to Figures 1 and 2 and follow the directions in Step 3 of the Procedure section. For my example, I like to take the opportunity to choose a word that learners will need to know for the upcoming text or unit, but you can feel free to copy Figure 2. It is best to prepare both a half-sheet example and a large example that the whole class can read. The large example will be used first, to guide learners in preparing their half-sheets; after they have finished preparing, you can use the half-sheet example to model the interactive phase of the activity. If you have the technology, you can take a photo of your half-sheet example and project it onto a screen as the large example. If you don't, you can use large paper and a marker to make an example big enough for all to see, or you can simply draw your example on the board.

PROCEDURE

1. *Introduce the context.* Conduct a quick warm-up to orient the learners to the context of the key words. If you have selected vocabulary from a particular

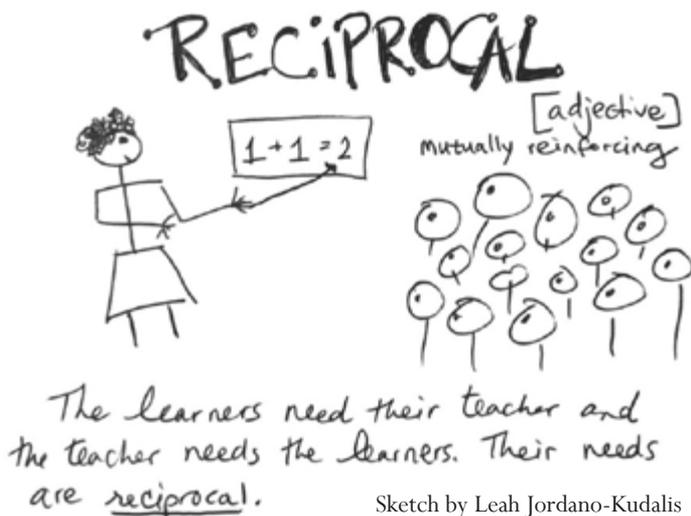


Figure 2. An example of a completed vocabulary half-sheet. Notice that the key word is clearly written across the top and that this example includes all the information in the template, but without the labels. Also, it's okay if the drawing takes up the most space.

text, you might ask learners to look at the title, subtitles, and graphics and then predict what the article will be about. Or you might ask a theme-related question for students to briefly discuss. Warm-up activities can vary but should be quick and give learners general context for the vocabulary.

2. *Distribute materials.* Pass out half-sheets of paper and, if available, markers to share. Learners will need a pen or a pencil. Also distribute the word slips, remembering that this is your chance to differentiate among your more- and less-proficient learners. Alternatively, if you have written all the words in a numbered list on the board, assign each learner a number.
3. *Give instructions.* Show learners the large example of a completed word sheet so that they can see its details. Refer to the example and give learners these step-by-step instructions:
 - A. Use a marker or large, dark letters to **copy the key word** from your word slip (or the board) across the top of your half-sheet of paper.
 - B. **Read** your word and look up its definition. Try to **understand** it. Ask if necessary.
 - C. **Write the part of speech** in small letters below the word.
 - D. **Paraphrase** its definition. Add synonyms if possible. (Each teacher can decide whether students should add a translation; in most cases, it is beneficial to avoid doing so.)
 - E. Most importantly, **make a drawing** that illustrates your word. Use your imagination. Your drawing might have to be abstract, and that's fine.
 - F. If you have extra time, **write a caption** for your drawing **that uses the key word**.

The drawing is the most important part of the word sheet because it provides for the richest discussion about the word during the teaching phase of the activity. However, I sometimes encounter students who say they can't draw. In response, I reassure them by cheerfully saying, "No problem. You don't have to make a *good* drawing; it's just important to use your imagination. Also, the sentence you write below your picture will help explain what you draw." I then point out that they have only a few minutes to prepare their word sheet, so no one will have time to make a true piece of art. With reassurance, learners are usually happy to go forward.

4. *Prepare and support.* Give students time to independently prepare their word sheets; I usually allow about eight minutes. Less-proficient and younger learners might need more time, but they will get faster as they become familiar with the activity. While students are preparing, be sure to walk around and help; this will also serve as an informal formative assessment. You might need to guide a student to the proper definition to fit the context, help a student understand the definition of a word, encourage a student to paraphrase, or suggest a possibility for the sketch. When all students have finished drawing, ask them to put down their pens and pencils to watch you. Tell students you know that not everyone had a chance to write a sentence on the word sheets, but that's okay because all students will have a chance to explain their drawing.
5. *Model a Teach and Trade conversation.* Select a student (preferably, a more-proficient one) and ask him or her to stand with you in front of the class. Show the student your example half-sheet and ask the student if he or she is familiar with your word. Explain your drawing. Tell the student about the word and read your sentence. Once you are sure the student understands your word, point to that student's word sheet and ask, "What

word do *you* have?" Listen and engage in a short conversation about it, making sure the student also explains his or her drawing by asking, "What does your drawing show?" if necessary. Then ask to trade vocabulary sheets. With your new sheet (and new word!), turn to another learner and briefly demonstrate that you would then begin a new conversation about your new vocabulary item with your new conversation partner.

6. *Mingle.* Now that your students understand the process, ask them to stand up, move around, and "teach and trade" until they have completed the process with at least five peers. Remind them that they will leave each interaction holding a new word, although they might eventually get their original word back or come across a word more than once. Because we acquire and retain vocabulary better after multiple exposures (Rott 1999, 589) and even more so the more we are cognitively involved in processing the word's meaning (Eckerth and Tavakoli 2012, 237), repetition can help us learn!
7. *Reflect.* After a set amount of time—usually about ten minutes—ask learners to return to their seats. Invite learners to share one new word they learned. Then ask if there are any words learners still need clarification for.
8. *Assess.* It's a good idea to collect and look over the word sheets. You might notice that a learner has focused on the wrong definition for your context, that learners need a lesson in paraphrasing, or that learners need additional grammatical information about how to use a word correctly or about nuances in its meaning.

DEFINITION-SLIP VARIATION

In this variation, you provide learners not only with the word but also with each word's definition or synonym(s) and part of

Teach and Trade helps learners increase both the size of their vocabulary and the depth of their word knowledge.

speech. This takes significantly more teacher preparation but can be useful for lower-level students or for classes that do not have access to dictionaries. This variation reduces the time students need to prepare their word sheets, thereby allowing more time for interaction, but it takes away some of the opportunity for developing autonomous study skills.

WHY TEACH AND TRADE WORKS

Teach and Trade helps learners increase both the size of their vocabulary and the depth of their word knowledge. This happens because learners think critically about key words, use them to communicate meaningfully, process words in context, and come across them repeatedly. Eckerth and Tavakoli (2012, 227) found that both word-exposure frequency and demanding cognitive processing help students learn vocabulary, but that learners who use more demanding cognitive processing to learn will retain vocabulary better over time. In Teach and Trade, learners use such cognitive processing to paraphrase a definition, figure out a word's part of speech, contextualize a word by creatively illustrating it, and compose their own sentence—often as a caption for their illustration.

A great deal of repetition is involved; moreover, interactive exercises—that is, ones in which learners convey authentic messages, negotiating meaning with each other—are more effective than exercises in which learners simply repeat, get translations, or see pictures (Luan and Sappathy 2011, 17), and this type of interaction is at the heart of this activity. Teach and Trade also appeals to learners of all styles: all in all, the process is visual, verbal, aural, kinesthetic, solitary, and social. Finally, it gives space for learners to go at their own pace, so all students improve their vocabulary as well as engage in valuable communicative practice.

CONCLUSION

Teach and Trade is both effective and fun. Language is meant for communication, and this activity invites learners to communicate their own creative ideas with peers. Because it requires only half a sheet of used paper and a pen or a pencil, it is feasible to do even in low-resource settings. The next time you need to introduce a list of new vocabulary, consider Teach and Trade.

REFERENCES

- Eckerth, J., and P. Tavakoli. 2012. The effects of word exposure frequency and elaboration of word processing on incidental L2 vocabulary acquisition through reading. *Language Teaching Research* 16 (2): 227–252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168811431377>
- Luan, N. L., and S. M. Sappathy. 2011. L2 vocabulary acquisition: The impact of negotiated interaction. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies* 11 (2): 5–20.
- Rott, S. 1999. The effect of exposure frequency on intermediate language learners' incidental vocabulary acquisition and retention through reading. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 21 (4): 589–619.
- The Teacher Toolkit. n.d. Quiz, quiz, trade. <http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/quiz-quiz-trade>

Leah Jordano-Kudalis holds master's degrees in TESOL and in social psychology and has served as an English Language Fellow in Rwanda (2017) and the Philippines (2018).