

All in the Family Photo

LEVEL: Beginner and Upper Beginner

TIME REQUIRED: 30–45 minutes

GOALS: To use vocabulary about family members; to practice using basic pronouns and comparative and superlative adjectives; to write sentences about and talk about family members

MATERIALS: Chalk and blackboard, or markers and whiteboard or poster paper; pencils and paper; glue or tape; family photos or sketches (each student brings one to class)

OVERVIEW: This activity can build community and relationships in the classroom, especially at the beginning of a school year or semester. Students will use family photos in writing and speaking exercises to practice using family vocabulary, numbers, basic pronouns, and comparative and superlative adjectives. Students should be familiar with these concepts before they do this activity. Ideally, students will bring in printed photos of their families, but photos on mobile devices or drawings of families could be used. Each student will list family members or label them in a photo or drawing, write basic sentences about each person, and tell others about the family members. The activity can be adapted for different proficiency levels, even within the same class.

PREPARATION:

1. About a week before you plan to begin the activity, tell students that they will need to bring in a photograph of their family by a specific date—the date you will begin the activity. Telling students about this activity at least one week in

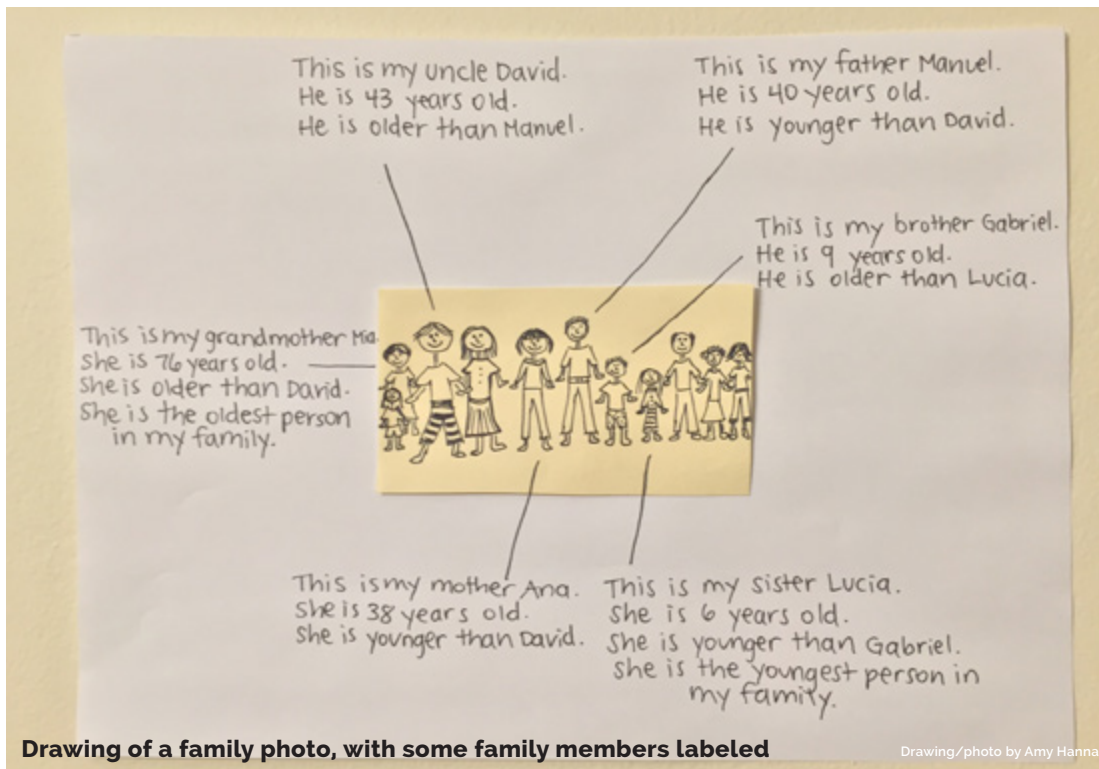
advance gives them time to find a photo or take one if they need to. Bringing in your own family photo, posting it on the board, and reminding students about the upcoming activity each day will help.

Ideally, photos would be printed so that students can mount them on paper. If students have no photograph, have them draw a picture of their family. If students have pictures on a mobile device, they should make a sketch of a family photo, recreating it with stick figures. They can show the real photo during the activity when they tell their classmates about their family.

2. Gather one piece of large paper per student, glue or tape, pencils, chalk or markers, and your own family photo.
3. Glue or tape your family photo to the center of a piece of paper, leaving space surrounding the picture for your writing.
4. Review vocabulary related to family members, the numbers 1 to 100, and pronouns to be sure students understand the concepts needed for the activity. If your students are ready, you can also review comparative adjectives (in this activity, *older* and *younger*) and superlative adjectives (*oldest* and *youngest*).

PROCEDURES:

1. Tell students they will use their family photographs and vocabulary to write and talk about their own families. Ask them to help you generate a list of family members



and relatives, and write their suggestions on the board or chart paper. Family members on the list could include the following:

- mother
- father
- sister
- brother
- aunt
- uncle
- cousin
- niece
- nephew
- grandmother
- grandfather
- great grandmother
- great grandfather
- sister-in-law
- brother-in-law

2. Display your own family photo, mounted on the center of a sheet of paper. Tell students to imagine they are shopping with someone from their family, perhaps a sibling or parent, and they meet a classmate at the market or store. What would they say to introduce their family member to the classmate? You may want

to ask, “How do you introduce your family member to your friend? What do you say to your friend?”

- 3.** Depending on your students’ responses, you may need to explain that when people talk about their family, they can use the sentence frame “This is my _____ [name] _____” to tell about their relationship to someone and to give that person’s name. Examples are “This is my cousin Judy” or “This is my brother Marcello.” Write this sentence frame on the board near the list of family members if you think students will need to refer to it.
- 4.** Using your family photo, the sentence frame “This is my _____ [name] _____,” and the list of family members the class has created, label each of your family members in the space surrounding the photo. You may want to draw a line to each of the people pictured and leave enough space to add a few short sentences about them. If your class is large, you might want to recreate your photo on the board so that all students can see what you are doing.

Draw a large, quick sketch of the photo, even using stick figures, to help the class understand what you are doing as you model the activity for them.

5. Tell students that they can give more information about their family by talking about each person's age and that they can do so by using the sentence frame "He/She is ___ years old." You can write this on the board as well if it will help your students. Model adding this sentence to tell more about each of the family members in your photo.
6. Hand out the paper, glue or tape, and pencils to students. Give them time to mount their photos or drawings, label each family member, and write each person's age. While the class is working, circulate throughout the room to assist students as needed. You may want to tell students with very large families to label a limited number of family members for this activity if time becomes an issue.
7. Explain to students that they can also add comparisons about the ages of their family members. Choose two of your family members and tell the class their ages. For example, you might say, "My sister Fatima is 27 years old, and my cousin Maryan is 16 years old." Then you could ask, "How can I compare the ages of Fatima and Maryan?" or other questions that will prompt students to use the comparative adjectives *older* and *younger*.
8. Model adding sentences with comparative adjectives about age to your family photo, writing "He/She is older than _____" or "He/She is younger than _____." For example, where you have labeled your sister "Fatima" and given her age, you can add, "She is older than Maryan," or with Maryan's information you can write, "She is younger than Fatima." If your students need the support, you can write the sentence frames on the board as well.
9. Give students time to add comparative sentences about the ages of their family members on the paper around their family photos or sketches.
10. Find the oldest member of your family (without actually telling students that person is the oldest). Explain that the person has been alive for more years than anyone else in the family and ask, "How could I use the word *old* to tell that this person has been alive the longest?" or "How can I compare the age of this person to the age of everyone else in my family?" You are trying to elicit the word *oldest* from your students. You can add the sentence "He/She is the oldest person in my family" to your family photo.
11. Repeat the process in Step 10 for the youngest person in your photo, explaining that the person has been alive for fewer years than anyone else in your family; try to elicit the word *youngest* from your students. Then, add the sentence "He/She is the youngest person in my family" to your family photo. You can write this sentence frame on the board if you think your students will need to refer to it to complete their own writing.
12. Tell students that they will introduce their family to a group of classmates, and they will listen to learn about other students' families. Model the introductions by using your own family photograph and saying, "This is my family" before sharing more information about each member. For example, you can use your photograph and the sentences you have written and say, "This is my mother, Marisol. She is 59 years old. She is younger than my Uncle Frederico." You can also remind students to display their mounted photos, mobile phones, or papers where others can see them, not facing away from the audience. Help them remember to speak to the group and not down to their papers.
13. Give students time to practice their introductions before they get into small groups to share information about their families. You might say something

like, “I am going to give everyone five minutes to practice what you will share with your group. You can use your writing to help you remember what to say. Practice speaking clearly and loudly so that others in the group can hear you. Remember to be sure others can see your photo while you are speaking.”

14. Divide the class into groups of three or four students. You can use any method to group the students, but keeping the groups small will keep students on task and engaged in the activity.
15. Explain the task. You can say, “You will show your photo to your group and talk about the people in your family. When you talk, speak loudly and clearly because many people in the room will be speaking at the same time. Make sure everyone in your group has time to share, and make sure that you listen when others speak.” If your class needs specific instructions, you may want to suggest a strategy for deciding the order of presentations within the group, such as by alphabetical order of the group members’ names, by family size (smallest to largest), or by birthday month.
16. Tell the students to start sharing in their groups. While they are sharing information about their families, you can move around the room and listen to their introductions. Pay special attention to what students are doing well and to common mistakes you notice. You might want to write these down on a notepad so that you can provide feedback at the end of the activity. If you want to, you can mix up the groups and repeat this activity multiple times. This will give students a chance to discuss their families with more of their classmates and to get more practice using and listening to the language structures.
17. Once your class has finished sharing, you can post students’ family photos or sketches in the classroom to give everyone a chance to continue learning about each other’s families.

VARIATIONS

1. Students could be paired and be responsible for introducing their partner and presenting facts about his or her family to the class. This will build community and help students learn more about each other. Depending on what information you have students include, the following sentence frames could be provided as support if needed:
 - This is [partner’s name].
 - He/She has ____ brothers and ____ sisters.
 - He/She has ____ cousins/aunts/uncles.
 - The oldest person in his/her family is ____ . He/She is ____ years old.
 - The youngest person in his/her family is ____ . He/She is ____ years old.
2. As part of the presentation, you could also challenge each set of partners to make comparisons between their families by using language such as “My sister is older than his/her brother” or “My father is younger than his/her father.”
3. If you prefer not to have students present to the class, you can still ask partners to compare their families. Instead of sharing the information orally, partners could write comparative sentences and submit them as an assignment.

EXTENSIONS

1. Many vocabulary terms and language structures can be practiced with this activity. If your class is learning about hobbies, students can write and talk about the things their family members like to do by using the sentence frame “He/She likes to _____” and adding verbs such as *read*, *paint*, *dance*, *play*, *sew*, and *garden*. Students could also include something they like to do with each of their family members by

saying, “I like to _____ with my _____” (for example, “I like to draw pictures with my cousin”). If the class is learning about describing physical characteristics, students could add information about their family members’ heights, eye color, and hair color by saying, “He/She is _____ (tall/short). He/She has _____ (brown/green/blue) eyes and _____ (black/brown/blond) hair.” If students are learning about personality traits, they could add a description of each family member, saying, “He/She is _____” and using words like *funny*, *caring*, *helpful*, and *stubborn*.

2. Students could interview one of their family members and then provide an in-depth profile of that person. The class could generate the interview questions, or you could use the suggested questions below. If students do not have a family member who speaks English, they can ask the questions in their native language and then use the information to develop the profile in English. Questions could include the following:

- When is your birthday?
- Where were you born?
- What are your favorite foods?
- What do you enjoy doing as a hobby?
- Did you go to a university? If yes, what did you study?
- Where do you work? What do you do?
- What do you think is one of the best qualities of our family?

After students have interviewed someone, you can have them write a paragraph about their family member and/or present a summary of their interview to the class or a small group. To help students with their writing or the presentation, you might want to use these sentence frames:

This is my _____. His/Her name is _____. His/Her birthday is _____, and he/she was born in _____. He/She likes to eat _____. His/Her hobby is _____. He/She works at _____ and is a/an _____. He/She went to _____ University and studied _____. He/She thinks our family is _____.

SCAFFOLDING

1. Though this activity is designed for beginners, it can be adapted to meet the needs of students at different proficiency levels within a classroom or across different classes. More advanced students could be given flexibility in the writing portion if you simply provide them with a list of what they need to include such as name, family relationship (to the student), age, and comparison to others’ ages in the family. Students could also give information about family members’ hobbies, occupations, educational background, likes, and dislikes.
2. The speaking portion of this activity can be more formalized by having students practice their presentation with a peer until they no longer have to rely on their own written statements. The idea is not to get students to memorize the presentation, but rather to give them a chance to practice the language structures before they try to produce them on their own. Then, students can present their photos to a small group and independently produce the targeted language structures to tell about their families. If you feel this may be too challenging for your students, you might ask them to choose only two or three family members to talk about.

This activity was written by **Amy Hanna**, who has taught ESL to students in primary school, university, and adult education classrooms, trained teachers in TESL methods, and developed materials for English language programs in the United States and abroad.