

Auctions to Reinforce Understanding

by HAYNET RIVERA FLORES



An auction is a process of buying and selling goods or services by offering them up for bid, taking bids, and then selling each good or service to the highest bidder. Participants bid openly against one another; each bid must be higher than the previous bid. Obviously, you as an English teacher are not going to sell goods or services; instead, in this activity, you will sell sentences!

This activity, which you can adapt to your students' needs, can be an effective and enjoyable way to finish a lesson to check your students' understanding and a way to review at the beginning of the next class.

What follows is a breakdown of the activity. It can be adapted for most levels, including beginner, and typically requires 30 minutes or less—again, the activity is flexible. The main goals are to review a targeted grammar structure (or vocabulary or, at lower levels, numbers) and to give students a chance to work together and have fun.

For the activity, you will need a set of sentences, as described below; large pieces of paper with the sentences written on them or just a board and a marker; and, if possible, fake money—bills and coins.

PREPARATION

Decide which language point you are going to review and write five or more sets of four sentences each. One of those sentences should be correct; the others must have at least one error. The error could be with grammar, vocabulary, spelling, or any other point you would like to review. The sentences could be similar to ones that you have used in the classroom.

Decide how much “money” you are going to give to your students, using the paper bills and the plastic coins, and try to use different denominations. For example, you might give each team in the game \$500: three \$100 bills, two \$50 bills, three \$20, two \$10 bills, two \$5 bills, five \$1 bills, and \$5 using coins. You can also do the activity without this fake money, but using “money” helps students feel as though they are really buying something. You can use the currency of your country or simply keep track on the board of how much money each group has.

PROCEDURE

The steps of the activity are as follows:

1. Divide the class into teams of no more than three or four students. Give each group a number or color.
2. Explain to the students that they are going to be in an auction and they have

to bid—offer to spend money—as in a real auction.

3. Tell your students that you will show them four sentences but that only one of those four sentences is correct, and they have to “buy” the correct one. In order to buy a sentence, the team needs to bid—offer money to buy it. If the team buys the correct sentence, you (the seller) will give back the same amount of money the team offered; if that sentence is incorrect, the team has to give you the money that was bid. The group that bids the most money for a sentence gets to buy that sentence.
4. Write on the board the first four sentences. If you have already written them on poster paper, paste it where all students can see the sentences. You can also project the sentences on a screen.
5. Give students time to read the sentences and discuss them as a team. Then ask students, “How much money do you offer for the first sentence?” The first team that offers money (“We bid 50 dollars!”) will catch your attention. Repeat to the class how much money that team offered and ask if any team would like to offer more: “The Orange team has offered 50 dollars. Do I hear 60?” Bidding continues in this way, and when it slows down, you repeat the highest offer and give teams another chance to bid: “200 dollars once ... 200 dollars twice ... Sentence 1 is *sold* to the Blue team for 200 dollars.” At that point, the Blue team “owns” Sentence 1.

6. Once you have sold the sentence to the highest bidder, write next to the sentence the number or color of the team and the amount of money that team bid.
7. Repeat the same procedure with each sentence you have written. After you have finished selling the four sentences, check the sentences one by one. It’s best to check the sentences as a class.

If your class has been studying irregular verbs, focusing on the past tense, you might offer the following four sentences:

1. I didn’t went on vacation last month.
2. My parents bringed me food when they visited.
3. What were you doing when the phone rang?
4. Mari couldn’t spoke English when she was a child.

Sentence 3 is the correct one, so if a team bought that sentence, you will “give” that team the amount of money it bid. However, if any teams bought any of the other sentences, which are incorrect, they have to “give” you the amount of money they bid. You can adapt the activity according to your needs; for example, if you are studying the present perfect tense, write sentences using that tense.

VARIATIONS

Of course, variations are possible and can make the game more meaningful, interesting, and beneficial for your students. For example, when checking the sentences, you can say

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that if a team is able to correct an incorrect sentence it bought, you can give that team some money back (you can decide how much, but it has to be consistent from team to team). This motivates students to find an error in the sentence.

Also, you don't have to tell your students how many correct sentences there are. That is, every sentence might be correct, or half of them might be correct, or perhaps only one is correct. This way, if students hear one sentence that they know is correct, they still have to evaluate every other sentence carefully because those sentences might be correct, too. Teams are permitted to bid on more than one sentence in each set.

You can adapt the activity for a variety of grammar points. Or you can use it for trivia, to check students' knowledge of a topic, and simply to check students' comprehension of questions being asked. That is, you could ask a question with four choices given as possible answers, and students would have to bid on the correct answer.

After students understand the activity, it is possible to make the activity student-run. Students, in groups, generate sentences and run the auction. In that way, they experience using the language used by a teacher and the language used by an auctioneer.

CONCLUSION

The first time a class does this activity, there is often some confusion. But after that, students understand the dynamics of an auction and tend to have a lot of fun. At the same time, though, they are checking structures, reviewing vocabulary, and working together.

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Answers to *THE LIGHTER SIDE*

A SCRIPT BY THE NUMBERS

Early one afternoon, A meets B on campus.
A: Wow, that's a lot of books! How many do you have there?
B: Seven. One for each day of the week. And they're heavy!
A: Where are you taking them?
B: Back to the library. Six of them are overdue. The other one is due today!
A: Will you have to pay a fine?
B: I'm afraid so. The library charges one dollar for every day a book is late.
A: Sorry to hear that. What are the books about?
B: This one is about the moon. And I have two biographies—one on Cleopatra and one on Henry VIII.
A: What about the other four books?
B: These two are guides for healthy eating, and these two are about the environment.
A: They all sound interesting! Say—how will you get to the library?
B: I have three choices: walk, ride my bike, or take the bus.
A: Actually, you have four choices. I could take you there on my motorcycle.
B: Great idea! And maybe you could help me pay the library fine, too!
A: Sorry, there's zero chance of that. I don't have any money!
They get on A's motorcycle and ride away to the library.
Answer to the Bonus Question: 33