

TEACHING EFFECTIVELY WITH LIMITED MATERIALS

So far this month in the Teacher's Corner, we have discussed how to use learning teams, stations, teacher-supported groups, and leveled assignments to address some of the most common challenges in English language classrooms. In addition to working in large, multi-level classes, many teachers and students around the world must try to teach and learn with limited access to materials.

With the demand for English classes growing, some teachers are not provided with enough textbooks or resources for the students in their classes. Using learning teams can help alleviate a shortage of materials by allowing students to share the items needed to complete a task. Learning stations and teacher-supported groups can also reduce the number of students that need to use books or other materials at the same time. This week, we will consider some specific ways to provide effective instruction and plan engaging activities with limited teaching materials.

TEACHING WITH SONGS

Songs are a great way to teach English to students of all ages. Music is not only fun and engaging, but singing songs also helps learners remember phrases or key information.

An easy way to help your students learn from music is to write songs about the content you are teaching. Type out the lyrics and make copies for students, or project them in your classroom. Alternatively, write the lyrics on paper large enough for learners to see, or have students copy the lyrics from the board into their notebooks. Songs should include key vocabulary, verb tenses, or other concepts you want students to review. Frequently practice the songs so that your students will remember the information. As an extension, challenge students to work in groups and write their own songs as a way to reinforce the topic. When students have finished, each group can perform for the class and even teach their song to others.

Popular music is another great teaching tool. Popular songs often contain words and phrases that can be extracted to demonstrate collocations, verb tenses, or vocabulary related to a specific topic. Songs can also teach about values, social issues, and common themes. Many popular songs can be accessed on the internet via artist websites, YouTube, or streaming services such as Pandora or Spotify. These can be played with a computer or mobile device in your classroom. Additionally, you can download songs, lyrics, and teaching tips from the [Sing Out Loud American Rhythms](#) collection on the American English website.

For more great ideas about how to use songs in the classroom, see the *English Teaching Forum* article [Beyond the Gap Fill: Dynamic Activities for Song in the EFL Classroom](#).

SKITS AND READER'S THEATER

Skits and reader's theater are easy activities to implement and do not require many materials. Learners will need pencils and paper to create a script. Props and costumes can be used, but are certainly not required. Both of these activities are completed in a group and require learners to use all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

A skit is a short performance depicting a situation where students interact with and speak to one another. You can use skits to review any content that you have taught. Skits are useful to help students practice everyday interactions in English or more specific skills such as key vocabulary, verb tenses, or other concepts. You can determine characters, roles, and write a script for a skit yourself, or have students complete these steps in groups. As a scaffold, you can work with your class to create a list of useful phrases or words related to the topic on the board before they begin. Once students have had time to practice, have each group perform for the rest of the class.

Reader's theater is similar to a skit, but the script depicts a story or is adapted from a text. Reader's theater is a great way to build reading fluency, increase vocabulary, and teach students to read with expression. There are many pre-made reader's theater scripts available in books or online. You can find reader's theater scripts on [Dr. Chase Young's website](#) and [Teaching Heart's Reader's Theater page](#). These scripts can be used by dividing your class into groups with the appropriate number of characters, allowing students to practice, and then having groups perform the reader's theater for the class. If your students study a text in class, you can also create your own script based on the events in the text. If students are more advanced, they can write and perform their own reader's theater scripts. Each group can be assigned a different part of the text to portray in their reader's theater performance. Again, props and costumes can be added but are not necessary. For more ideas about how to implement reader's theater in your classroom, take a look at the Shaping the Way We Teach English Webinar [Introduction to Reader's Theater for EFL Classrooms](#).

GAMES

Many familiar games can be adapted for the purpose of practicing English. Here are some easy ways to use games that do not require a lot of materials in your classroom.

Charades: This is a game where one person performs actions in front of a group and the audience must try to guess what the actor is trying to convey. The actor must not speak or give any clues. It can be played by the whole class (split into competing teams), or in small groups of students with each person taking a turn to act something out. If there are specific words you want students to practice, prepare a set of word cards for actors to choose from before playing the game.

To practice verb tenses, have the actor(s) perform action verbs. Require audience members to use a particular tense in their guesses. For example, if your class is learning past continuous, students must say, “You were _____ing” to the actor. If they are learning future continuous, they say “You will be _____ing” or “You are going to be _____ing.”

Charades can also be used to practice vocabulary words. Feelings/emotions, animals, types of weather, words related to daily routines, sports, adjectives that describe people, and other similar categories work well for playing charades.

Guess the Picture: This game is similar to charades, but rather than acting, the student draws pictures to try to get the audience to guess a word. This can be done on the chalkboard or whiteboard, on paper, with chalk on pavement, or by drawing in sand or dirt with a stick. The student who is drawing must not speak or give any clues, and also cannot use any letters/words or numbers in the drawing.

Playing Pictionary can practice the same concepts and skills described above for use with charades. Require students to guess using a specific tense or structure that they have learned and that you want them to practice.

Card Games: There are many games and activities that can be played using only index cards. Each time you present a new concept or new vocabulary in class, create a set of cards that students can use for different activities such as the ones described below.

Matching - Students can play concentration or you can distribute the cards and have students find a classmate with a match by moving around the room. This activity works well with vocabulary words and definitions, synonyms and antonyms, and regular or irregular verbs in two different tenses (such as present and past).

Sorting - Students can use cards to sort words into categories such as parts of speech, verb tenses, or synonyms and antonyms. Vocabulary words related to different topics like weather, occupations, foods, or sports can also be great for sorting.

Activate Games for Learning American English - The American English website features a collection of [free board games](#) that can be printed and used in your classroom. The games have different themes and offer students a chance to practice different language skills, even if they play more than once. To use the games in your classroom, you will need dice and game pieces. For ideas about materials to use, watch the [Teaching Tip](#) that goes with this resource.

STUDENT-CREATED MATERIALS

Students can also get involved in creating materials for use in your classroom. Many of the suggested activities for learning teams from Week 1 of this month's Teacher's Corner will result in posters, advertisements, stories, poems, or scripts that you can use to teach or display in your classroom for reference. Another idea is to have students create vocabulary charts with words, definitions, pictures, and example sentences. These can be displayed and used throughout the course. Lists or charts can also be made for parts of speech, question words, sentence starters, or any other concepts you want students to remember.

Creating materials also helps students review and process what they have learned. A great way to engage students with creating materials is to have them design worksheets or quizzes for their classmates. This often motivates learners because they have a chance to fulfill a different role. You can do this in your

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classroom if you use learning teams, or with small groups of 2-3 students. Tell each team or group that they must design a worksheet or quiz with a specific number of questions based on the topic you want students to review. They can include things like multiple choice questions, true/false questions, fill in the blank, short answer, riddles, crossword puzzles, or any other type of exercise that suits the topic. Also have students create an answer key. Then, have groups exchange worksheets or quizzes with a different group. When they are complete, groups return their work to the students who created the activity for assessment.

For more ideas about how to get your students involved in creating materials, try the article [Encouraging Learners to Create Language-Learning Materials](#) from *English Teaching Forum*.