

# 'LEARNING TO LEARN' TIPS AND TRICKS



## COUNTRY DIRECTOR SPAIN

This summer I took over from Rod Pryde as Country Director Spain. I am absolutely delighted to have the opportunity to continue his sterling work, as I've long had a love affair with Spain. Indeed, this is something of a homecoming for me, as some years ago I was Director of the British Council in Barcelona. As a former teacher of English myself, I recognise the work you have all done in recent years to really drive forward the quality of English and Bilingual Education. This is a collective effort by you - our friends - teachers and learners across the country. I'm really pleased that our teams from across the British Council in Spain are able to work with you so closely. Our annual teachers' conferences, participation in other regional events and cooperation with various teacher associations all contribute to this endeavour, but there's nothing like making use of our primary resource - our own staff - to put practical tips and suggestions directly into your hands. Our chosen theme this year is 'Learning to Learn', in which our colleague Gail Ellis from Paris is an expert and published author. I'm sure you'll join me in thanking her for attendance here and for her contribution to this publication, as well as to all those other members of staff who have helped publish this useful resource. Good luck in trying out the activities - let us know through social media what your favourites are: we'd love to hear from you!

**Andy Mackay**



## ADVISER YOUNG LEARNERS AND QUALITY, EU

It is a great honour to be giving this year's opening plenary at British Council Spain's annual teachers' conference on the theme of 'Learning to Learn'. This is an area of learning I have been involved in since the early 1980s, as part of the Council of Europe's objective to promote autonomy in language learning. Learning to learn is an important aim of curricula throughout the world, as it underpins all learning in all areas of the curriculum and in life. It is by no means a new concept, but I believe it is becoming increasingly important in the 21st century as children and adolescents are surrounded by all kinds of digital media. They need to learn how to concentrate and focus and to identify and use effective learning strategies. This metacognitive aspect of learning requires the development of explicit skills of reflection and analysis, and entails learning how to learn intentionally. You, as the teacher, play an essential role in this process, by providing opportunities for reflecting on and experimenting with the process of language learning. This booklet provides practical tips and activities to support you in this process from many of our own classroom practitioners, and on the next page I discuss the importance of reviewing in the learning process.

Enjoy trying them out with your students!

**Gail Ellis**



## REVIEWING

Gail Ellis

Age Range of Learners: All  
Suitable for Level/s: All

### What's Your Suggestion?

Reviewing is a general learning strategy that can be encouraged in learners of all ages from primary to adult.

When to review: reviewing can take at different stages of a lesson. For example; at the beginning to review previous learning and help learners make connections to what they did in a previous lesson; during learning between the stages of the lesson, to help learners stay focused and to voice any difficulties they may have; at the end of a lesson, to help learners become aware of what and how they have learnt and areas they need to improve.

How to review: the teacher will play a guiding role, modelling both

the process and the language for reflection in order to develop the learner's ability to talk systematically and explicitly about their learning. You will need to manage reflection time carefully to ensure it becomes an integral part of each lesson. Reviewing can be conducted by using five reflection questions:

What did you do?  
What did you learn?  
How did you learn it?  
How well did you do?  
What do you need to do next?

Initially, reviewing can be conducted as a whole-class plenary, but as learners become more familiar with reviewing, group discussion, peer assessment or individual reflection can take place.

### How Does This Help Learners?

Research shows that over 80 per cent of a lesson can be forgotten if reviewing does not take place immediately or shortly after a

learning period. Just doing an activity is not enough! However, this metacognitive dimension of learning is often neglected.

Reviewing encourages learners to reflect on their learning in order to develop a better understanding of what and how they are learning. It is crucial to successful learning as it helps learners monitor their progress, maintain motivation, and identify their strong and weak points so they know what their next steps need to be.

### Further Commentary:

It is often thought that children are too young to express their opinions or views about how they learn. However, research has shown that even very young children possess a considerable degree of metacognitive knowledge and ability. With young and low level learners, reviewing can take place in the mother tongue or shared classroom language. Classroom practice shows

there is no loss of the benefits of learning to learn tasks if the mother tongue is used to discuss learning and for reviewing.

For further guidelines on reviewing, see my book 'Teaching Children How to Learn', Delta Publishing.

## WRITE YOUR OWN REPORT CARD

Andrew David McMullen

Age Range of Learners: Primary, Secondary  
Suitable for Level/s: Beginner to Upper Intermediate

### What's Your Suggestion?

In a class close to the end of term, show your learners a blank example of the report card you're going to show their parents. Explain how you work out the marks you're going to give them and what they mean. I always take this opportunity to revisit some of the tasks we did

over the term, asking my learners to tell me, or discuss together, if they enjoyed the tasks and, more importantly, what they got out of them. Then ask your learners to write their own report cards, along with comments, that they think reflect their own progress.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

This activity provides an easily-graspable context in which learners

are encouraged to reflect on what they got out of activities, where they've made progress, and what they've found difficult – in short, reflecting on the learning process. Young Learners can really enjoy 'being the teacher' too. My experience of being a teacher tells me to never underestimate a Young Learner's ability to accurately reflect and self-assess.

## **'NO!' TO EMPTY EXAM PRACTICE**

**Bernadette Maguire**

Age Range of Learners: [Any](#)  
Suitable for Level/s: [Any Exam Level](#)

### **What's Your Suggestion?**

Learners should be encouraged, in as active a way as possible, to identify the strengths as well as the weaker areas of their linguistic performance in general. They should be helped during this identification process and then systematically

supported in the subsequent action. Whilst learner autonomy should be encouraged, they will probably need systematic assistance with this. It is not enough to identify the need and then leave students to their own devices, especially at the beginning of the process. 'No!' to empty exam practice!

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

It's surprising how much students DO understand many of the issues surrounding their own learning and they are, more often than not, aware of the nature of their difficulties. But it is also true that they sometimes feel 'trapped' and unable to find their way around a specific issue: Speaking, for example. It's not enough to tell them to 'speak more in class' or to 'practice more at home' without providing them with the necessary tools and support. There are infinite resources for face-to-face teaching and for on-line learning available for practically any issue.

## **JUNIOR/SENIOR READING RECORDS AND INTRODUCTION TO USING THE LIBRARY**

**Vince Smeaton**

Age Range of Learners: [Higher Primary to Secondary](#)  
Suitable for Level/s: [All](#)

### **What's Your Suggestion?**

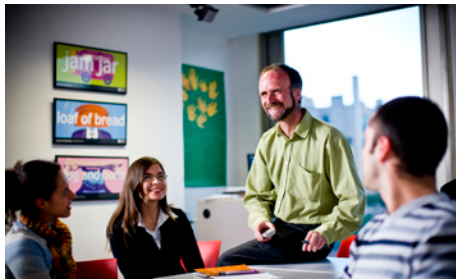
Apart from the standard library induction, I take my groups to the library after I have asked them what they like to read. I then suggest they look for the books in this category and help them where necessary. I tell them they will be writing book reviews for me and that the best ones will be on the wall at parents' evening. The review can be any style, but it's good to emphasise that it will have to include details about the beginning, middle and end. Then prior to going to the library I go through blurbs, front covers



and skim reading techniques. The students then choose the books that interest them. On returning to class the students read a little of the book, report back on their book, why they chose it, how they decided, and what the beginning is like.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

Reading seems to have become almost a lost art, especially at secondary level. This activity structures choosing and reading approaches, and means learners will read some of the book they chose from the library visit. This is particularly relevant for teens, for whom there may not be a reading record as such, though the library



visit technique can be useful with younger readers too. During the term they exchange and read other students reviews too.

## **UNDERSTANDING LISTENING**

**Dylan Harper**

Age Range of Learners: **Adult**  
Suitable for Level/s: **All**

### **What's Your Suggestion?**

When it comes to listening outside the classroom, learners often try and apply the same fierce analysis to a two-hour movie as they would to a two-minute recording in the classroom. Based on my experience, I suggest that the ears, like the eyes, process information on a cline of perception, that intonation patterns and contextualised language can enter the brain unconsciously. Do something else mechanical, like the washing-up, as you would during any wallpaper movie, is my suggestion.

Trust the brain, and with trust will come confidence.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

Learners almost universally believe that the best uptake results from the most intensive intake. Society conditions almost all of us to live in the front of our minds, and that bloody determination coupled with hard work is the route to success. Not so perhaps with language learning, as has long been investigated in pursuit of better teaching methodologies. Are there barriers capable of being raised in the unconscious mind? Probably, but as variety of input and output is desirable within the classroom, so surely is variety of processing without.

## **FICTIONAL LEARNERS**

**Suzanne Anderson**

Age Range of Learners: **Teens, Adults**  
Suitable for Level/s: **Intermediate up**

### **What's Your Suggestion?**

Students are given five descriptions of fictional language learners (age, job, hobbies, motivations for studying, language learning experience, and so on). In pairs, they discuss each student and then decide who will make the most progress and why, e.g. willingness to make mistakes, abilities in L1, learning strategies, attitudes, et cetera.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

This activity is designed to raise students' awareness about what makes a good language learner and to consider their own strengths and weaknesses. In my experience, it leads naturally into discussion about the importance of recording and/or reviewing vocabulary, dedicating time to study outside of class, and so forth. And it is a good opportunity for the teacher to get to know the students at the beginning of the course.

## WORKING OUT THE MEANING

Alison Smith

Age Range of Learners: [Teens \(12 up3\)](#)

Suitable for Level/s: [Intermediate up](#)

### What's Your Suggestion?

When you are reading something in English keep a small note book with you. When you come across a word you are not familiar with write it down in your book. Read the sentence again and try to infer the meaning of the word by the context. Write a definition for the word in your book. If you are not able to do this, use a dictionary to find a definition for the word and write that in your book.

### How Does This Help Learners?

This encourages students to not automatically reach for a dictionary. It makes them more aware that they are able to infer the meaning of the

word in L2 in the same way they do in L1.

## TV SERIES

Eliza Markaki

Age Range of Learners: [Teens, Adults](#)

Suitable for Level/s: [Intermediate to Advanced](#)

### What's Your Suggestion?

Who doesn't love watching and talking about their favourite TV series? Students should be encouraged to watch TV series in their free time (maybe it can be their homework for the weekend?), with or without English subtitles depending on their level. For each episode they watch, students will have to record any new vocabulary, idioms and expressions and/or collocations they encounter, and present them in the class (including meaning, pronunciation, how it's used in a sentence, and so on).

### How Does This Help Learners?

This activity promotes independent as well as cooperative learning. It will motivate and inspire students to learn and teach one another on their own, without teacher interference. We are all aware of how much students love 'being the teacher' for a few minutes!

## FRIENDS, DICTIONARY, AND FINALLY ME!

Hannah Norwood

Age Range of Learners: [Higher Primary to Adult](#)

Suitable for Level/s: [All](#)

### What's Your Suggestion?

When a student has a question about a new word, set up rules that they must ask their friends / classmates first; then check in the dictionary; and only then can they ask you, the teacher. You must set this up at the start of the course and continually reinforce it: "Have you

asked anyone? Who? And looked it up in the dictionary? OK, in that case I'll help you..."

### How Does This Help Learners?

It encourages real-life learning, as it mirrors what we'd naturally do: try to figure it out for ourselves; then ask a friend; then look to other resources. The process thereby encourages students to be more independent learners, because obviously they are less reliant on the teacher to source the information they need to achieve their linguistic aims or to make progress.

### Further Commentary/Attribution:

It's also worth being completely transparent with the learners about your aims when doing this, so they understand it's not a question of you avoiding the answers or because you don't like them somehow, but because it will make them more independent and therefore more confident and self-reliant.

## SELF-TIMING

Jenny Dale

Age Range of Learners: [Secondary to Adult](#)

Suitable for Level/s: [FCE / CAE](#)

### What's Your Suggestion?

To try and get students to become aware of controlling the timing in exam reading tasks, get them used to having a limited time for skimming and scanning activities by setting strict time limits - for instance by using the countdown clock on the interactive whiteboard or an alarm clock. You could also encourage them to start self-timing while doing practice tasks at home or online.

### How Does This Help Learners?

It's natural to read the text more than once in an exam, but by doing this the students realise that the first reading must be limited to xx minutes: when the timer sounds they must be prepared to review the text quickly. So the teacher should

help them understand the timing of the exam task overall by breaking it down into smaller, shorter-timed chunks.

## DO YOU REALLY NEED TO UNDERSTAND EVERY WORD?

Lesley Denham

Age Range of Learners: [Teens, Adults](#)

Suitable for Level/s: [Intermediate up](#)

### What's Your Suggestion?

Take the first few paragraphs from the story 'Emergency Landing' on the British Council/BBC website [TeachingEnglish.org.uk](http://TeachingEnglish.org.uk), and take out

all the words that go around the key words. Leave enough key words so that students can understand the story even though there are gaps. Give students a copy and ask them to predict what is happening. Ask them how they can understand it with all the gaps and what type of word is missing. When you have got the overall meaning, play this part of the story from the website or give students a complete copy so they can check their understanding. Go on to finish the story.

### How Does This Help Learners?

By showing students that they can understand a story even though all the text is not there, it may encourage them to read without

stopping and using a dictionary all the time. Students often feel that they have to read and understand every word and this activity trains them to see that even with a few key words they can follow a story.

## IT'S MY TURN TO BE THE TEACHER!

Lisa Frost

Age Range of Learners: [Primary](#)  
Suitable for Level/s: [All](#)

### What's Your Suggestion?

This is an activity whereby fast finishers review vocabulary from the course. They can use flashcards with key vocabulary from lessons, and it has also worked very well with flashcards that come with phonics courses. Over the first couple of lessons I introduce new vocabulary using flashcards and we do a variety of revision activities using them too. I also introduce peer correction for pronunciation. Once



they are familiar with flashcards, I then ask one of the stronger pupils to play the teacher. They hold up flashcards for the other children and elicit the vocabulary and correct pronunciation. Once pupils have understood how this works - and as soon as I have two children who have finished an activity - they can begin working with the cards. I encourage them to share the role of teacher. As a variation, I sometimes give them a pile of the words and they can also work together to match the written form with the image. If the activity becomes too noisy or I can see that the 'teacher' is having a little difficulty with their 'class', we can have a brief talk about how difficult it is to be the teacher when the pupils are not listening or taking turns or cooperating effectively.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

This is a simple fast finisher activity that encourages learners to review vocabulary and pronunciation,

encourages them to reflect on their own learning, and can also encourage empathy with the teacher in terms of classroom management. It's a fun activity and easy to set up and use on a regular basis. The cards have a 'home' so that the pupils can get on with the activity autonomously. From time to time it's useful to go through the cards and have the children identify which ones they find easy and which ones they need a little more time with. You can then take out the easy ones and review them at the end of term instead of on a weekly basis.

## **MISTAKES ARE GEMS IN DISGUISE**

**Maria Piperides**

Age Range of Learners: [Primary to Lower Secondary](#)  
Suitable for Level/s: [All](#)

### **What's Your Suggestion?**

Gently and persistently re-educate

learners that their mistakes and errors are keys to their progress and should not be ignored.

For Primary, their recurring errors are like the treasures they need to find and their learning journey / objectives are like a treasure map. They make individual or group posters to celebrate milestones and develop their self-awareness and self reflection skills, and eventually peer and self-correction. The more mistakes / errors / areas of weakness they can identify, the more gems they will be able to collect for their treasure chest as they make progress.

An example: the pronunciation of 'ESpain'. Students tune in to this sound and cheer each other on when the correct pronunciation is mastered – in speaking and pronunciation in particular this activity fosters a supportive and reflective learning environment.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

It helps develop appreciation for reflection and self-correction, awareness of progress and effort. It also builds confidence and group dynamics.

## **LOST IN TRANSLATION**

**Michael Leahy**

Age Range of Learners: [Higher Primary to Adult](#)  
Suitable for Level/s: [All](#)

### **What's Your Suggestion?**

Either the teacher or the learners select useful phrases / target language from the lesson to put in a first column. Then students work together to agree on an L1 translation to place in a second column. Then, at a later stage, column one is folded over and learners rewrite the original English phrase from memory in a third column. When ready they can check back to see how they did. The teacher can use this activity



to highlight L1/L2 interference, false cognates, collocations, multi-word verbs, tense/aspect differences and much more. It also helps teachers understand more about their students' L1, so everyone's a winner!

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

Learners develop noting skills and start to bridge the L1/L2 gap. They enjoy using their L1 in the learning process and find a place for it in a structured and controlled activity. Direct translation also helps raise awareness of online translation software issues, as learners move towards more natural sounding English.

Plus, providing appropriate opportunities for learners to use their home language to support and demonstrate their understanding of learning content is one example of the British Council embracing Multilingual Approaches!

### **Further Commentary:**

Thanks to my former colleague and

EFL author Dave Tucker for introducing me to this idea.

## **DEVELOPING LEARNERS' WRITING PORTFOLIOS**

**Nicholas Rowe**

Age Range of Learners: **Teens, Adults**  
Suitable for Level/s: **B1 and above**

### **What's Your Suggestion?**

As part of an in-class process writing project, or as a homework task, students use Tom Cobb's [www.lextutor.ca](http://www.lextutor.ca) website to upload their personal writing portfolio and compare it with the most commonly used lexical items in general and academic English writing. The advantage of using Cobb's site is that, with its focus on any vocabulary token's usage frequency, the learner can correct their own writing, assess its validity, and expand their vocabulary range. As learners upload and measure their

writing portfolio against the British National Corpus high frequency wordlists and Averil Coxhead's academic wordlist, they develop the skills required to measure the lexical appropriacy of the vocabulary they are using for a variety of written genres.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

Learners who regularly upload their writing portfolio gain a better understanding of two key issues which may be preventing them from

becoming more effective writers in English: how the excessive repetition of basic vocabulary tokens impacts on the readability of their writing, and the importance of automating and producing as wide as possible a range of the 'high frequency' vocabulary items, which make up around 80 per cent of an average English script. Cobb's website allows students to take control of developing their productive vocabulary, as they can check their portfolio in their own time. In



addition, by providing lists of the ‘high frequency’ lexis which the student is not using / underusing, the writer can more accurately self-assess their productive vocabulary, expand their knowledge of the most frequently used words, and become more adventurous writers.

## NOTICE IT, USE IT

**Rebecca Place**

Age Range of Learners: All (but especially good for Early Years and Primary)

Suitable for Level/s: A2 to C2

### What’s Your Suggestion?

This is a technique I encourage my Infant and Primary teachers to use when they are preparing to tell stories in class.

- Take a storybook with attractive illustrations.
- Read each page and jot down up to four words or expressions which catch your eye – e.g.

language you know but don’t use, interesting collocations or turns of phrase.

- Tell the story using your notes and the illustrations, rather than reading from the page.

### How Does This Help Learners?

Learners (in this case, teachers on TDU courses) use more interesting language than they might normally employ, making the story their own and boosting their confidence as storytellers.

### Further Commentary:

The same technique can be used with learners of all ages and levels, especially in peer reading activities in groups or pairs, to help develop linguistic enrichment. The teacher may have to help with explaining unknown lexis first, but the technique will also help learners’ speaking skills, helping fluency through re-telling stories or anecdotes.

## VOCABULARY REVISION

**Roger Dowling**

Age Range of Learners: Higher Primary to Secondary  
Suitable for Level/s: All

### What’s Your Suggestion?

I find that students retain new vocabulary learned in class by revising it through a game the following class and again at the end of each month. This can be done by a simple game of Hangman, Pictionary, or board races where the students compete to write a correct sentence which includes the new vocabulary. This can also be done as a quiz where students in teams devise questions or definitions for the opposing team, who have to guess the correct word associated with it. This can also help with pronunciation and grammatical structures.

### How Does This Help Learners?

By revising vocabulary in this way,

students tend to retain it better, and surprisingly still remember it at the end of the term!

## THINKING HATS FOR WRITING

**Ruth Horsfall**

Age Range of Learners: Teens, Adults  
Suitable for Level/s: B2 up

### What’s Your Suggestion?

This technique helps students to come up with more things to say when doing a piece of writing by encouraging them to think in different ways: they do this by putting on different ‘Thinking Hats’. Using De Bono’s Thinking Hats as an inspiration, students are given a discussion topic or essay title and have to brainstorm in groups what they could write on the topic according to which ‘Thinking Hat’ they are wearing. For example, the Green Hat represents ‘creativity and

alternative ideas' and the Yellow Hat encourages 'positive ideas, benefits and value', etc. Students should be given the opportunity to reflect on what to write about the topic whilst wearing a particular Thinking Hat and, in groups, pairs, or individually, write down ideas for their essay from each of the six thinking hat perspectives.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

Once students understand the concept of the six 'Thinking Hats', they can use this tool alone when planning writing in order to inspire their thinking and write more extended and involved texts. It should help them build on their own ideas, encouraging them to create more sophisticated and exploratory texts. By learning how to think more critically by themselves, students are able to become better speakers and writers of English.

### **Further Commentary:**

The 'Six Thinking Hats' technique

can also be used in groups and pairs to assist students in enriching their conversation skills, helping them consider different sides to topics and ideas: especially useful in exam style oral tests and general speaking in English.

## **MY 'IMPERFECT' ENGLISH**

**Sheona Smith**

Age Range of Learners: **Teens**  
Suitable for Level/s: **B1 up**

### **What's Your Suggestion?**

Before recording learners in spoken tasks, the teacher finds a couple of suitable recordings of native speakers and transcribes exactly what the speakers say. It is a good idea to keep this to about one and a half minutes of speaking time. This transcript is shown on the IWB / projected onto a board. The learners try to guess who the speaker is from possible personalities given. The



students should be able to notice the inaccuracies, pauses, hesitation devices, and false starts that appear in the script. (It is a good idea to choose a speaker whose production is a good example of this - like Adele!) If not, the teacher can highlight these. Once the learners are aware of what authentic spoken texts look like, they transcribe a favourite actor or personality for homework. They can then move on to recording and transcribing classmates and themselves.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

The main objective is to allow learners to see that it is unrealistic to aim for 100 per cent accuracy in spoken texts. They become aware of the fact that native speakers do not speak 'perfect' English and in fact use different strategies to deal with 'real time' communication. This will therefore help the students set themselves more realistic goals in their language learning and boost confidence in those who are more

timid. Transcribing others and oneself can help raise awareness of typical collocations and improves the learners' 'noticing' of language and strategies. Students also have the opportunity to evaluate their own spoken production and find recurrent errors.

#### **Further Commentary:**

This is an adapted version of an activity presented by Jamie Keddie in his 'Video Telling' talk (you can find this on YouTube, for instance).

## **A SONG FOR EVERYTHING...**

**Ross Smith**

Age Range of Learners: [Early Years, Primary](#)  
Suitable for Level/s: [Beginner](#)

#### **What's Your Suggestion?**

I use the well-known song 'Frère Jacques' to teach language chunks, questions, and to recycle vocabulary

at this level. We sit in a circle and all sing together, e.g.

*What's your name?  
What's your name?  
I am (teacher's name)  
I am (teacher's name)  
What's your name?  
What's your name?  
I am (learner's name)  
I am (learner's name)  
(And so on...)*

As you go through the term you can use the same tune but change the language to suit the topic. E.g. 'What age are you?' 'Season are you?' 'What do you like?' (For food, sport, hobbies, and so on.) 'What don't you like?'

You can make it more challenging by getting students to sing the song and do a mime at same time. For instance, 'What toy are you?' '...I'm a robot...' (speaking like a robot!) '...I'm a car' (miming driving!)

#### **How Does This Help Learners?**

The tune is easy to remember, while the repetition helps to reinforce question and answer. I've asked primary students to think of a question and answer they want to revise but to sing it to the tune without my aid and it has been successful every time, as they see it as a game and not simply a speaking exercise. Students have told me if they forget the question, singing the tune helps them remember.

#### **Further Commentary:**

I am now experimenting with different children's songs to explore different language areas. The idea came from an Early Years welcome routine which I have since developed.

## **ROUTINE AND VARIETY**

**Sally Trowbridge**

Age Range of Learners: [Primary](#)  
Suitable for Level/s: [Elementary](#)

#### **What's Your Suggestion?**

If playing hangman to revise vocabulary is part of your class routine, you could play a shark version of hangman to add variety and keep them interested. Draw ten steps going down into an open and toothy shark's mouth. For each 'wrong' letter, draw a stick man on a step. The class lose if the stick man runs out of steps. LearnEnglish Kids ([learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org](http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org)) also has an online version of hangman featuring a monkey.

#### **How Does This Help Learners?**

Young Learners like the security of class routines. They know what is expected of them without lots of explanation from the teacher. If they know what is coming next they are more likely to stay on task. Including a bit of variety within the routine keeps the children interested and adds challenge.

#### **Further Commentary:**

The idea is from the article I wrote

on TeachingEnglish: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/kids-learning>.

## TACKLING USE OF ENGLISH

**Peter Blagdon and Anne De Leon**

Age Range of Learners: **14 up**  
Suitable for Level/s: **FCE / CAE**

### What's Your Suggestion?

Learners use an 'error log' to record their errors from Use of English exercises. They identify the error, record which part of the exam it is from, note down the correct version of their mistake (from given answers or teacher in class) and then finally write a sentence using the language correctly. This is done in class and then for homework. At the beginning of each subsequent class students peer teach each other what they have learnt. Students regularly review their error log and when a student feels confident with an error

they can cross it out, adding a sense of progress.

### How Does This Help Learners?

Students learn self-reflection skills and how they can improve independently of a teacher's guidance. It gives them a systematic method to addressing their own personal needs and a sense of progress when they can see an error is no longer occurring in their work.

### Further Commentary:

Thanks to Andrew McMullen, of our Alcobendas centre, for this idea.

## THE POWER OF PODCASTS

**Craig Wealand**

Age Range of Learners: **Teens, Adults**  
Suitable for Level/s: **B2 up**

### What's Your Suggestion?

Tell students to open iTunes (or

an Android equivalent, such as the Stitcher podcast app downloaded from the Google Play store), and search for and subscribe to podcasts in English on their favourite hobbies, topics, and pastimes.

They then listen to the podcasts at the gym, in the car, walking the dog, doing the shopping, and cleaning the flat. The message is simple: multi-task your way to better listening comprehension, vocabulary and grammar!

### How Does This Help Learners?

Learners are often unaware of the wealth of free and easily accessible audio content on the internet. Advances in technology now provide



learners with a vast selection of relevant and entertaining English material on their phones and mobile devices. Available in seconds and tuned in to learners' likes and interests, podcasts are revolutionizing access to original audio material and self-study.

### Further Commentary:

1 podcast for fun at [www.inglespodcast.com](http://www.inglespodcast.com)

## ENGLISH EVERYWHERE!

**Elizabeth Beer**

Age Range of Learners: **Higher Primary to Adult**  
Suitable for Level/s: **Beginner to Pre-Intermediate**

### What's Your Suggestion?

Ask students to make a note in their personal diaries or to snap a photo on their phones every time they see an English word in their everyday lives. This could be the name of a shop, an ingredient on a package, a



phrase on a t-shirt, and so on. They must try to work out the meaning through the context and their knowledge of English. Every month, students participate in a 'show and tell' session, where they work with a partner or small group and share with each other the phrases they have discovered. The teacher monitors and clarifies any difficult words, and draws whole class attention to useful phrases and vocabulary. Students can keep a diary of phrases, or the teacher uses them to build a word wall for class display.

#### **How Does This Help Learners?**

Students are able to:

- See how much English is used as a global language
- Practise guessing words through context and knowledge of syntax
- See how they can learn English outside of the classroom in bitesized chunks.

## **ELABORATION - OR HOW MUCH YOU KNOW ABOUT A WORD**

**Nelson Arditto**

Age Range of Learners: **Teens, Adults**

Suitable for Level/s: **Intermediate up**

#### **What's Your Suggestion?**

When students learn a new word, write it down with a definition and example sentence. It helps if the example is about them. But don't let forget about it once they've written it down! If they want to use it in speech or writing, they should keep adding more information to it when they come across it again in a different combination; for example, word families, collocations, synonyms, opposites, etc. For example, the word 'success' (n) / 'to be a success' (phrase) / 'successful' (word family) / 'a roaring success' (collocation) / 'a total triumph' (synonym) / 'fail miserably'



(opposite); and so on. The more combinations learners learn, the more they expand their vocabulary.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

Adding new words to vocabulary notebooks all the time is not enough. Elaborating on words you already know, that is, adding new information to old information (also known as ‘encoding’), allows learners to make more associations to these words and use it in a variety of lexical combinations. This helps with acquisition as it engages the learner in noticing the word for longer periods of time. It also helps with fluency, as using words in phrases and lexical chunks improves productive skills. Remembering one word or part of a collocation, activates recall of all the other phrases.

### **Further Commentary:**

This idea is founded in sound learning theory: I researched vocabulary learning strategies for

my MA dissertation (University of Leicester, 2009).

## **WALKING BACKWARDS**

**Rosemary Lindsay**

Age Range of Learners: *All, except Primary*  
Suitable for Level/s: *All (but especially exam levels)*

### **What’s Your Suggestion?**

When dealing with Listening or Reading comprehension, give the students the answers before they read/listen. In the case of Reading, they look for, and highlight, the relevant answer-giving passages in the text; in the case of Listening, they listen for the key words/phrases that give the correct answer, writing them down as they go. In both cases they can check with a partner and then read the script to consolidate.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

Although a really simple exercise,

it teaches students to attune their ears and pick up on (and avoid) the ‘red herrings’ in the Listening tests and learn to understand the ‘fine tuning’ between the options in the Reading texts.

## **WEEKLY LEARNING LOG**

**Eliza Markaki**

Age Range of Learners: *All*  
Suitable for Level/s: *All*

### **What’s Your Suggestion?**

Students keep a learning log where they can record their learning at the end of each week. The log could include the following:

*This week I learnt:*  
*What I liked the most was...*  
*Things I have done well:*  
*I need to work more on...*

This can be given as a template to the students.

### **How Does This Help Learners?**

By completing the log at the end of each week, students will have the opportunity to reflect on their learning, praise themselves for the things they’ve learnt and have done well, and consider the areas they need to improve on.

## **EXPLOITING QUIZLET**

**Kevin McLeod**

Age Range of Learners: *Teens, Adults*  
Suitable for Level/s: *B2 up*

### **What’s Your Suggestion?**

Ask students to view an episode from a TV series for homework (we have used ‘Modern Family’ as the episodes are quite short). In the next class, students have to explain to their peers what happened in the episode, taking it in turns from the start of episode through to the end, and asking about any vocabulary they did not understand. The teacher has viewed the episode and placed in Quizlet ([www.quizlet.com](http://www.quizlet.com)).

com) lexis that they think is useful for students to know. In class they go over this together and elicit how to use the vocabulary in context. In future classes, learners review other episodes (normally one a week for homework) and see what vocabulary is repeated and what new expressions they have learned. As the teacher keeps adding vocabulary to Quizlet, students can go back to it to review vocabulary and expressions.

### How Does This Help Learners?

They see the importance of not just watching a TV programme but to actively learn from it. They realise that you have to learn lexis in context and use the expressions, where possible, to help remember them.

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Thanks to all our Teaching Centre and Exams staff for their contributions!

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A1 B2

