



# WARMERS AND FILLERS



**BRITISH COUNCIL SPAIN – WARMERS AND FILLERS**



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# MESSAGE FROM...

## **DIRECTOR TEACHING OPERATIONS, ENGLISH AND EXAMS**



I began my teaching career in Egypt, but also worked in Barcelona. After some time in Asia, my new post is based in Madrid: my return finds a challenging educational landscape, one re-shaped by bilingualism and technology,

met by a vibrant community of teachers. It's great for us to be involved in these changes: working in over 100 countries, we rarely touch as many lives as here. Something that never changes, though, is the paramount importance of class teachers and their pursuit of best practice. I've made a contribution to this booklet – making no claims to originality, but Alphabet Shopping (page 4) really engages learners – and I've done so knowing our network breathes creativity and professionalism: 13 centres in Spain helped with this booklet. Our Royal Charter states our purpose as the promotion and advancement of education. I hope this project helps fulfil some of our obligations to friends, teachers, and learners everywhere. Good luck with the activities – there's something for everyone here, I'm sure.

**ANNA SEARLE**

## **COUNTRY DIRECTOR SPAIN**



I'm delighted to see this booklet go out to you, the teachers in our local community. Our conferences are now established in the academic calendar, allowing us to offer something of value

to those doing such great work in ELT in Spain. In striving to improve our services, we listen attentively to feedback gathered at each event. One theme recurs consistently: you, the educators, like us to provide practical activities to enhance your teaching. Now, taking this request to heart, we have produced a booklet for you to keep handy in your staffrooms across Iberia. Every idea here comes from the vast experience of our team; each activity has been tried and tested in our own centres. Personally, it's a few years since I was in class, but old favourites stand the test of time because they work. Give 'Shouted Dictation' (page 5) a go: I promise the learners will shout for more! My best wishes for the coming year.

**ROD PRYDE**

## **OUR FAVOURITE WARMERS AND FILLERS: ABOUT THIS BOOKLET**

Every teacher has a warmer or filler that they really like: as an organisation, we have lots, so we decided to share some with you. In this booklet you'll find over 30 ideas for warmers and fillers, all of which have come from a British Council teacher or manager – every one of our teaching centres in Spain contributed, and we'd like to thank all of them for their efforts.

Of course, in the teaching world there's no such thing as originality – we use ideas that spread by word of mouth, or we adapt and change ideas we've read about in books. Just to clarify, then, none of our staff claims authorship or ownership over any of these suggestions, and if you find them in other books, so much the better – if they're popular, they must be valid. But we would like to apologise to anyone who has published any of these ideas before: we have not knowingly used commercially available materials, and we would have attributed all the activities to their originators if we could.

We haven't ordered the activities in any way: we wouldn't want you to look only in one 'section' of the booklet because you are, say, a teacher of adult English. It may be that by flicking through Primary and Secondary tasks, you find something that you can use, or at least adapt, to your own context. Be sure to experiment, and you'll be sure to find your rewards. And what's the difference between a warmer and a filler? Very often it's in how we choose to use tasks: generally speaking, a warmer is something you do at the start of class to get learners switching from L1 habits into L2, while a filler is something you use to change pace, vary patterns of interaction, or use to usefully exploit 10 minutes at the end of class. So try them out, and don't be afraid to ask your learners which ones they like.

**Martin Goosey**  
**ATCM Professional Development**  
**British Council Madrid Young Learners**

**Llanos Gomez**  
**Communications Manager**  
**British Council Spain**

## ALPHABET SHOPPING

**Contributed by:** Anna Searle

**Learning Objective:** Recycling irregular past tense (went/bought/found) and revising vocabulary around shopping/things we own.

**Age:** Any age above Junior, but works best with teens.

**Level:** Elementary

**Interaction:** Whole class

**Class Time:** 10 minutes (can be extended for more vocabulary).

**Preparation/Time:** None! You can prepare some pictures of previously introduced vocabulary around things we own, shopping but good to let the students use their own examples for a more genuine shopping experience.

**Procedure:** Line up around the room (sitting or standing, but with teens, it's good to get them standing up to add movement to the warmer). Do not explain the game, other than listen to what I say, and choose an item you want to buy at market when it is your turn. If you get it right, you remain standing up, if you get it wrong, you will have to sit down. When you have worked out what the theme is, shout out! Teacher leads with "I went to market and I bought..." (name item bought) e.g. an apple.

**Student 1** follows "I went to market and I bought..." (names item – see variations below) e.g. a banana.

**Teacher** "Yes good, next."

**Student 2** follows "I went to market and I bought..." (names item) e.g. a carrot.

**Teacher** "Yes good, next."

**Student 3** follows "I went to market and bought ..." e.g. dog food.

**Teacher** "Yes good, next."

**Student 4** follows "I went to market and bought..." e.g. shoes.

**Teacher** "No, sorry, sit down."

**Student 5** follows "I went to market and bought ..." e.g. some earplugs for my iPod.

**Teacher** "Yes good, next."

The theme here is listing in alphabetical order the items they say they buy, if a student doesn't follow the alphabetical order, they sit down. Most groups can guess the theme is alphabetical by letter G or H, which is good as things to buy gets more difficult further down the alphabet! You can then continue with the alphabet with the rest of the class, and invite the students who sat down to stand up and join in again, in alphabetical order until they have all practised the simple phrase and added a vocab item. You can also use this warmer to work on the pronunciation of difficult past tense irregular verbs.

**Variations:** To add variety, choose different themes for the sequence: instead of alphabetic choose only vegetables, or only fruit, or only clothes items. The students need

to work out the theme behind the sequence. Another variety is to use other relevant past tense irregular verbs “I went to the zoo and saw....” (an alligator), “I went to a party and met ...” (someone from Angola) for countries, nationalities, etc.

**Further Commentary:** These can get difficult further down the alphabet so be ready to help out or skip some letters!

### SHOUTED DICTATION

**Contributed by:** Rod Pryde

**Learning Objective:** To have fun and practise real-life listening.

**Age:** Senior, Adult

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** One class in two teams.

**Class Time:** About 10 minutes.

**Preparation/Time:** Minimal - just select texts and prepare marking guidance.

**Procedure:** Divide class in two groups (e.g. red and blue), then into same-colour pairs, then give one of each pair a short dictation text appropriate to level and recent learning. Next place one of each pair at opposite ends of room.

Give five or ten minute timeframe. Start dictation one pair to another, all simultaneously (shouting). Stop at end of time period. Collect texts, hand out marking grid, opposite teams

mark, add up points, announce winning team. Restore order or exit discreetly.

### ALPHABET RACE

**Contributed by:** Marielisa de la Mata

**Learning Objective:** Lexis, Practice, Structures. (High levels – word building; using suffixes, collocations, etc.)

**Age:** Primary, Junior, Senior

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** A race/Teamwork

**Class Time:** As long as it takes : 20 minutes usually.

**Preparation/Time:** Chalk, board pen, music e.g. prepare flipchart, print cut-outs (10 minutes).

**Procedure:** Basically this is an Alphabet race which means you put students into two teams and write two sets of the letters of the alphabet on different sides of the board that you want them to practise. Students are sitting in their places and it is mandatory that they be sitting when they get passed the piece of chalk or IWB pen or they are penalised. Tell them this 2 or 3 times. Then tell students in what order they'll run up to the board and that they must write a word starting with that letter of the alphabet. I usually start with A and go on to the next letter consecutively. If they can't think of a word with that letter I let them go on to

the next. Start by handing the first 2 students the chalk/pen and play the Chihuahua song, which is the cue to run up to the board. They really enjoy it and you can practise all kinds of lexis, structures, irregular verbs, etc.

**Variations:** Adapt it to higher levels if you want to; like FCE affixes, collocations, etc.

### TWENTY QUESTIONS

**Contributed by:** Leticia López

**Learning Objective:** Asking questions / Practising short answers

**Age:** Any

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Group work

**Class Time:** It's a filler; maybe at the end of the class when they've tidied up.

**Preparation/Time:** None. You only need a whiteboard and a marker to note down the number of questions they make. (Maximum 20 minutes).

**Procedure:** One person in the class thinks of something (or someone) and the rest of the group has to ask yes/no questions (up to 20 questions) to guess it.

**Variations:** To practise short answers, the person answering the questions is not allowed to say "yes" or "no" and he/she can only answer with an appropriate answer. i.e. alternative ways of doing the task.

**Further Commentary:** It may be used with all ages/levels as students can decide to make simple or complicated questions. It can also be used for reviewing vocabulary see in class.

### WORDIA WORK

**Contributed by:** John Liddy

**Learning Objective:** If connected log on to <http://wordia.com/options>: latest word, games / video. Good way of getting students to focus on language learning at start of lesson.

**Age:** All ages depending on word. Teacher can choose word or students can.

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Whole class or groups.

**Class Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** None except for some basic instructions.

**Procedure:** Open Wordia, choose word or video or game.

**Variations:** Teacher can prepare word beforehand. Can be used without internet connection. Use dictionaries if you want.

**Further Commentary:** Helps students to build up vocabulary lists.

### PERSONAL SPIDERGRAMS

**Contributed by:** Justin Hodge

**Learning Objective:** Get to know you / Yes / No questions.

**Age:** Junior +

**Level:** Elementary and above

**Interaction:** Teacher to whole class, then in pairs.

**Class Time:** 10-40 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** 5 minutes

**Procedure:** Write your name in the middle of the board. Start a spider chart around it with people, places, dates, hobbies, pets, etc. that are related to you. Tell students to guess the relationships, but you can only answer “yes” or “no”. Ask students in pairs to do the same with fewer people, places, dates, etc.

**Variations:** 5-10 people, etc.

**Further Commentary:** Useful to tell the class about yourself. Make sure students have formed question correctly.

### PASS THE WORD

**Contributed by:** Silvia Girimonti

Learning Objective: To practise vocabulary

**Age:** Any

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Group work

**Class Time:** 5-15 mins.

**Preparation/Time:** Simply select the lexical/grammar area you want to practise/revise

**Procedure:** Teacher or one student takes a ball (tennis ball for example), says the first word/phrase to be revised (for example

irregular verbs) pass the ball to another student who has to say a word and pass the ball again. The ball can't be stopped for more than 15 seconds.

**Variations:** Instead of a ball, students can write words on a piece of paper and pass it round.

### ALIBI

**Contributed by:** Richard Pickup

**Learning Objective:** Use imagination, elaboration, spontaneous English, past continuous tense.

**Age:** Upper Juniors/Seniors/Adults

**Level:** Intermediate up.

**Interaction:** Individuals to the whole class.

**Class Time:** 10 minutes.

**Preparation/Time:** 1 or 2 minutes to start imagining.

**Procedure:**

1. Students think about what they were doing last Friday.
2. Ask students to elaborate/make up a strange story.
3. Teacher accuses someone of a murder.
4. Students have to give excuse/alibi and accuse each other.

**Variations:** Drama – reactions, gasps! Pointing, standing up in surprise/disgust.

**Further Commentary:** The more elaborate the excuses/alibis, the better.

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

**Contributed by:** Sylvia Pavlakovich

**Learning Objective:** To practise fluency

**Age:** Junior, Senior, Adult

**Level:** Intermediate +

**Interaction:** Pairs

**Class Time:** 10 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Print cut-outs: have unusual or funny conversation starters written on them.

**Procedure:** Cut-outs have unusual or funny conversation starters written on them. In pairs, students take turns to read out their openers. Their partner has to respond in a convincing way.

**Variations:** This exercise can be timed, i.e. 30 seconds to respond or maintain a conversation.

## BACKS TO THE BOARD

**Contributed by:** Jenny Dale

**Learning Objective:** To revise vocabulary

**Age:** Any

**Level:** Any

**Preparation/Time:** None

**Procedure:** Students sit with backs to board and mime word and team guess it. Students brainstorm words and write them down and then describe them to partner, according to topic being worked on at time.

**Variations:** Groups of 2/3 or 4.

## FLASHCARDS

**Contributed by:** Cheryl Kirkland

**Learning Objective:** Revise vocabulary and grammatical structures (questions).

**Age:** Primary/Junior

**Level:** Beginner and Elementary

**Interaction:** Whole class

**Class Time:** 10 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Flashcards from course book or make your own.

**Procedure:** One student chooses a flashcard and the class have to guess what it is (e.g. “Is it a rabbit? Can you jump? Have you got an apple? Do you like cheese?”)

**Variations:** Split class into 2/3 groups or in pairs.

## PAIR INTERVIEWS

**Contributed by:** Misa de la Mata

**Learning Objective:** Question forms/ Breaking the ice/students revise question forms.

**Age:** Senior

**Level:** Upper Intermediate

**Interaction:** Pair work

**Class Time:** 30 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** None (graph up on board).

**Procedure:** Get students to look at board, graph – sequence, order of questions. Then



in pairs must write 6 (interesting questions). Interview partner. Follow up: homework: writing a profile on partner.

**Variations:** Put example questions on cards, pass them around (get an idea of the question).

**Further Commentary:** NOT “What is your favourite colour?” Arghh!!!

### THE JUMPING GAME

**Contributed by:** Devin Unwin

**Learning Objective:** Revision which appeals to kinaesthetic learners.

**Age:** Primary to young seniors

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Teacher to students (whole class).

**Class Time:** 5-7 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Yes or no, depending on what level it is and what media you’ve chosen.

**Procedure:** Get students to stand in a line/queue in front of the white board. Write ‘Yes’ on one side of the board and ‘No’ on the other. Ask students comprehension questions on a previously watched video or read book.

**Variations:** Alternatively, at a higher level you could ask for opinions: “Bull fighting is an art form”; “Women cook better than men”,

etc. You could write ‘Maybe’ in the middle section of the board (in this case students would only be allowed not to jump 3 times, otherwise they might not move at all!)

**Further Commentary:** Good fun. Would need a willing ‘older’ group obviously!

### STICKWORDS

**Contributed by:** Rebecca Mercer

**Learning Objective:** Spelling previously introduced vocabulary.

**Age:** Young learners mainly, but I’m sure older ones and adults would enjoy it just as much.

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Pair work

**Class Time:** 10 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Buy a box of toothpicks / cocktail sticks and prepare a list of +/- 5 words.

**Procedure:** Give out generous bundles of sticks to each pair. Read out a word from list. Students spell the words on desks using the sticks. Award points for correct spelling and speed. The pair with most points wins.

**Further Commentary:** Demonstrate activity first for YLs showing them easiest way to form letters. Sticks cannot be broken. Students must use capitals only.

## DIDYA?

**Contributed by:** John Macmillan

**Learning Objective:** Practise past simple questions / Revise leisure activity vocabulary.

**Age:** Any

**Level:** Pre-intermediate

**Interaction:** Pair work or milling activity with whole class.

**Class Time:** 15 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** None

**Procedure:** Students work in pairs and ask their partner yes/no questions to find out about their plans. They note down the activity they ask, and put a tick or a cross to record whether their partner did it or not, e.g. “Did you... watch TV?”. – “No, I didn’t.” “Did you... wash the dishes?” – “Yes, I did.”

When each student has a list of activities that his partner has or hasn’t done, they report to a different partner, or to the class, e.g. “Raquel didn’t watch TV at the weekend. She washed the dishes. She didn’t go to the cinema...”

**Variations:** This activity can be used to drill other structures such as the present continuous – talking about plans for the coming weekend/holiday. E.g. “Are you... going clubbing this weekend?” You can also use the structure “Have you ever... been to Moscow?”

Instead of doing the activity in groups of two, it can be turned into a milling activity. Students first write a list of activities to ask others, and they keep tally marks to see how many people in the class have done the activity. They then report back the most popular and least popular activities for that weekend.

## REGISTERS

**Contributed by:** Sheona Smith

**Learning Objective:** To create an appropriate atmosphere for learning; to establish classroom routines and change over from playground, dining hall, etc.; to revise previously introduced vocabulary and promote learner autonomy

**Age:** Primary (lower age range).

**Level:** Beginner upwards

**Interaction:** Group work

**Class Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Flashcards to be used or pinned up, register, etc.

**Procedure:** It is essential that the teacher establishes the routine for several classes before handing over to the students.

**Stage 1:** Have students come in to class, leave bags, pencil cases, etc. on desks and come to sit cross-legged in a circle together with teacher. It’s important that the teacher sits at the same height as the students.

**Stage 2:** Selected student takes the register by calling out the names of the students and asking them to provide a word from a topic specified by the teacher. Student says “Today’s topic is Food - Guillem Sastre”. Guillem responds with any food item he can think of.

**Stage 3:** The same student then takes over the role of teacher following the same routine as would the teacher, i.e. holding up the flashcards to elicit from students or pointing to them if they have been put up round the room.

**Variations:** Rather than have students take register, the students can be shown how to do simple yoga movements, i.e. stretching arms, legs and rolling shoulders which they then go on to lead. Each class a different student is selected by moving down the register.

This activity can also be done at the end of class to do a plenary type of activity where students reflect on what they have learned and can remember from the lesson.

The exercise type can be changed to something more dynamic should the students look tired.

**Further Commentary:** This is a simple but very effective way of getting the children into the right frame of mind for the class. The students appreciate being given the

responsibility to lead the class and the fact that each student has an opportunity to act as teacher maintains the novelty of the activity. It is important that the teacher also participates and follows the indications of the ‘substitute teacher’. This helps to create a feeling of equality and confidence.

## GUESSING PICTURES

**Contributed by:** Jennie Gant

**Learning Objective:** To practise asking and answering questions about things you did in the past.

**Age:** Any

**Level:** From Pre-intermediate up to Advanced

**Interaction:** Pair work

**Class Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Nothing – all the material comes from the students (hooray!)

**Procedure:** Ask students to take a pencil and divide a page in their notebooks into four squares. Then students (keeping their work secret and showing nobody) choose a square and in it they should draw a picture or a symbol which shows something that they did yesterday. Give them a minute to think and draw (and go around the class whispering possibilities to anyone stuck for an idea, e.g. if they did their homework, they could draw a book and a pen – but no words).

Then ask the students to choose another square and draw something to represent something really great they did last month. Then another square and another sketch for something they did but they hated last year and finally the last square is for sketching something to represent the best thing they have ever done in their entire lives! Remind students that there should be no words on their page of sketches and allow for a moment of frantic rubbing out. Then ask students to find a partner. (So you have a room full of pairs – A and B.) Student A should take Student B's pictures and talk to B about them, guessing aloud what they might mean. (Student B should remain silent and allow A to guess, however wrong she gets it!) Then they switch roles and it's Student B's turn to look at A's sketches and have a guess. You should monitor unobtrusively here – a great chance to note down general errors which can be worked on later in the lesson. Then ask the class to stop guessing and start asking. Students try to find out what their partner's activities really were by asking questions to which their partner may only reply with a 'Yes' or a 'No' (i.e. Student A asks "Did you go to the beach last month?" Student B replies "No"). Teacher monitors – another chance to see if you need to work on question formulation.

Finally you say "OK, you may explain now". Student A can finally tell B about her pictures and then B can talk about his. (Depending on the level and type of class, this usually generates some great conversation, as having tried to work out what the pictures mean, students are very interested in what they really mean.)

**Variations:** You can tell students to remember what they hear in the last stage and then have students switch partners and tell their new partner all about their previous partner's past, or develop this into a written piece where names are not mentioned. Put the writings on the wall the next lesson and students go around the classroom reading them and trying to guess who did what. Or you could use the information you have heard to create a mingle activity for another lesson, where students have to talk to all the others in the class and find out who has been skydiving or who went to a football match and hated it....

**Further Commentary:** I first saw an exercise like this in a training session and I enjoyed doing it myself. I have changed it a little bit and used it a lot. I like this activity as it's very personalised, with all the details coming from the students themselves and it gives them a chance to

talk about things that happened in their past and ask for details of situations in the past of someone else, which is a very usual type of conversation between friends or new acquaintances; so this type of practise should be really useful in preparing our students for authentic situations they find themselves in outside of the classroom, too.

### THE POST CHRISTMAS WARMER

**Contributed by:** Lesley Denham

**Learning Objective:** To talk about holidays and change chip back to English after the break.

**Age:** Adult/Senior

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Pair or Group work or Individual

**Class Time:** 15-20 minutes depending on how much the students get involved in it!

**Preparation/Time:** None – you just need paper.

**Procedure:** Give each group some paper which they tear into the same number of pieces as there are students in the group.

1. Each student writes one present they got over the holiday on their piece of paper. Ask them not to put 'money' or something very general if possible.
2. Fold the papers and pass them on to the next group.

3. Open the papers and try and guess who got each present.
4. Check your answers as a group.
5. Encourage students to ask questions about the presents and around this, the holiday too.

**Further Commentary:** Works very well if students write interesting presents on the paper!

### WORD CARD FILLERS

**Contributed by:** Lesley Denham

**Learning Objective:** Recycle vocabulary either from a vocabulary list, vocabulary box, or vocabulary from a unit.

**Age:** Adult

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Pair or Group work or Individual.

**Class Time:** However long you need while another group is finishing an exercise. Also to use while waiting for students to arrive for class.

**Preparation/Time:** None – you just need the words from the list/unit/box. It is better if you have the words on card so they can be handed out to students. E.g. prepare flipchart, print cut-outs (10 minutes).

**Procedure:** If you have the words on cards, then they can be recycled in many ways and used as a filler or when you need to wait for groups to finish exercises, etc. Very low tech!

Give each pair/group a pile of words and they can do any of the following:

1. Put them face down and take turns to define the words so the other students can guess the word on the card. If they don't know the word on the card, they put it back and take another.
2. Put cards face down. One student picks up a card and makes a sentence using the word. Next student takes a card and has to continue to make a story building on the first sentence and incorporating their word. This continues.
3. One student in teacher role 'tests' the other students giving definitions of the words and the others have to say what the word is on the card.
4. Put cards face up. Student picks a card and gives a definition. The others decide if it is correct or not.
5. Put cards face down and a student picks up a card and has to mime the meaning so the others can guess.
6. Put cards face down and a student picks up a card and has to draw the meaning so the others can guess.
7. Put cards face up and students put them in order according to their favourite words.

**Further Commentary:** This works well if you say goodbye to the words every term. To

make sure students have a copy of the words from each term, allow time for groups/pairs to write a test (having distributed the words among them) for the other pairs/groups. This test can be in the form of matching definitions, filling in gaps, matching pictures and words, etc., but is written and corrected by the students. They then keep a copy of the tests as a record of the vocabulary.

### THE HOMEWORK GRID

**Contributed by:** Mark Bowthorpe

**Learning Objective:** Review/consolidate homework or classroom exercise.

**Age:** 10+

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Individual and group work

**Class Time:** Up to 30 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** None – only drawing the grid on the whiteboard (or use a pre-boarded grid, which would take longer).

**Procedure:** For homework or in the previous class students need to have done a grammar or vocabulary exercise and not corrected it. Teacher draws a grid of 16 squares on the board (4 by 4).

Teacher numbers grid using same numbering as homework/classwork exercise, e.g. 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, etc., so that each square corresponds to question.

Divide class into 2 or 3 teams.

Teams have 5 minutes to compare answers and agree on most likely answer. Teams take it in turns to nominate a question and give the correct answer. If the answer is correct, the team wins that square on the grid and the next team takes a turn. If the answer is wrong, the teacher doesn't correct and the next team takes a turn. The objective is for teams to win three squares in a row by answering the corresponding questions correctly.

Continue until all questions are answered correctly or have a time limit.

**Variations:** For a shorter or longer warmer, vary the size of the grid.

Can be also be done without a previous task. Just write up questions on the board or provide on a handout. Can be focused on any area of grammar / vocabulary. Can also be used with Cambridge exam type materials as a light-hearted variation on the usual approach, i.e. alternative ways of doing the task.

**Further Commentary:** Give time limits to keep it snappy.

## BINGO GRIDS

**Contributed by:** Dan Ashton

**Learning Objective:** Receptive and productive revision of previously introduced vocabulary and grammar.

**Age:** Any

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Pair or group work

**Class Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Give the students a template of a bingo grid, for example 3 x 3 squares. Dice for variations.

**Procedure:** Focusing on previously introduced vocabulary or grammar, tell the students to complete the bingo grid, e.g. "complete the grid with different types of natural disasters" or "complete the grid with things you would do if you won the lottery". Once students have completed the grid, read out different answers. Students cross out any of their answers that are read out. Make the activity competitive by attributing points to teams who cross out a line and then the entire box. This variation practises receptive and productive skills.

**Variations:** Students complete the grid and then number the squares (1 to 9). Roll the dice (on the IWB if you have one). Students race to raise their hands and shout out their answers, crossing off the box if it is correct (if you wish, other groups listen and cross off what is said, should they have it). This gives the students the opportunity of producing their answers orally and also allows for even participation as teams cannot read out their

answer, for box number 5, for example, if they have already done so.

When working with a specific grammar point, such as phrasal verbs or idiomatic expressions, students can complete the grid, for example, with phrasal verbs beginning with 'put'. Then students number the boxes 1-9. Roll the (IWB) dice. Students race to raise their hands and give an example sentence of the phrasal verb in the box. If their example is correct, students cross off the box.

**Further Commentary:** This activity is highly adaptable and can be used for all levels and ages. The competitive element encourages student participation. The task can be as controlled or as free as you want, depending on the level and task objective.

### BOARD SWATTING

**Contributed by:** Suzanne Anderson

**Learning Objective:** To give receptive practice of new vocabulary (I normally do this activity at the end of the lesson).

**Age:** Primary

**Level:** Beginner up

**Interaction:** Group work

**Class Time:** 10 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** 1 minute

**Procedure:** Write new lexical items on board (this could be on a prepared IWB flipchart).

Put students into teams, in a line in front of the board. The people at the front of the lines have a fly swatter (or a ruler will do). Teacher describes the word or expression and the first person to swat the word/phrase gets a point. The team with the most points wins.

**Variations:** I normally do this with new vocabulary but have used it with past simple verbs too (write the past simple verbs on the board but say the infinitives).

### CONVERSATION CIRCLES

**Contributed by:** Kevin McLeod

**Learning Objective:** Ice breaker / get to know you / question forms.

**Age:** Any

**Level:** Pre-Intermediate upwards

**Interaction:** Pair work

**Class Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Depends on level: could be 1 minute or less to 5 minutes or more for lower levels.

**Procedure:** Split class into 2 even numbered groups and get them to form 2 circles: an inner circle looking outwards and the outer circle looking inwards at the person in the other circle. Students are paired up and have to ask and answer a question with their partner. These can be on their learning experience, reason for learning, main problems



with English, tips on how to improve, etc. or other areas such as get to know your classmate, holidays, free time activities, etc. Teacher has a bell and rings it every couple of minutes to let the outer circle move round one person so people are working with a new partner. A couple of minutes with them and move on and continue until all pairs have been together.

**Variations:** Can follow up with feedback from students on interesting info they have heard and/or from teacher on any mistakes.

**Further Commentary:** Fun and lots of speaking generated.

## CATCHPHRASES

**Contributed by:** Thomas McWhirter

**Learning Objective:** To promote deducing meaning from common catchphrases.

**Age:** Senior and Adult

**Level:** Upper-intermediate and above

**Interaction:** Group work

**Class Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** To print sheets (5 minutes)

**Procedure:** Put students into groups of 3 or 4. Give each student a sheet with 8 common catchphrases. Ask the students to fold the paper along the dotted line so that they cannot see the meanings of the catchphrases.

The teacher can read aloud the definition of a catchphrase on the sheet to the class. In groups students have a maximum of 10 minutes to explain to their colleagues, or guess the meaning of the catchphrases. At the end of this time the teacher can get some class feedback regarding the meanings. The students now unfold the paper and can read the meanings of the catchphrases with the teacher answering any questions the students may have.

**Variations:** At the end of the activity, students can think of some catchphrases popular in their language, and explain their meaning to the class. The class or the teacher may, or may not, be able to think of an equivalent catchphrase in English.

**Further Commentary:**

### Catchphrases

A catchphrase in its purest form is one that has caught on with the public and which might have been first said by an entertainer, or which might have developed through repeated use. Sometimes they can verge on proverbs, others can sound more like slogans while others are funny when used in the right context.

Here are some common catchphrases. Do you know, or can you guess when they might be used?

1. The buck stops here.
2. To cry all the way to the bank.
3. Happy as a sandboy.
4. Keeping up with the Joneses.
5. Always the bridesmaid but never the bride.
6. It isn't over till the fat lady sings.
7. It would be cheap at half the price.
8. There's life in the old dog yet.

---- **Fold goes here** ----

1. The buck stops here - This is where the ultimate responsibility lies. Harry S. Truman had these words on a sign on his desk in the oval office.
2. To cry all the way to the bank - To be in a position to ignore criticism because of your financial position. This expression was popularized by Liberace when his reviews were bad.
3. Happy as a sandboy - Very happy with one's lot. Arising from the expectation that boys who used to deliver sand from door to door had a useful job and could be contented.
4. Keeping up with the Joneses - Striving not to be outdone by one's neighbours. Comes from the title of a comic strip which appeared in the New York Globe from 1913-31.

5. Always the bridesmaid but never the bride - Always the runner-up but never the winner. From a slogan for Listerine mouthwash in the 1920s.
6. It isn't over till the fat lady sings - A warning not to count your chickens until they are hatched. It possibly has something to do with Kate Smith singing God Bless America at the end of baseball games in the 1930s.
7. It would be cheap at half the price – Very reasonable. A slightly nonsensical phrase, dating probably from the 19th century.
8. There's life in the old dog yet – Said of the unexpected possessor of some power when that person is thought to be 'past it'. It was used as the title of a painting in 1838 by Sir Edward Landseer.

### TIMED TOPICS

**Contributed by:** Greg Gobel

**Learning Objective:** For learners to practice speaking fluently about topics they are interested in.

**Age:** Junior, Senior, Adult

**Level:** Pre-intermediate and above

**Interaction:** Pair work

**Class Time:** 10 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** No preparation time

**Materials:** Whiteboard, whiteboard pen, 1 die.

**Procedure:**

1. Put 1,2,3,4,5,6 in a column down the left side of the board.
2. Elicit from the students topics that they like to talk about with their friends (e.g. football, shopping, the weekend, last weekend, environmental problems, my smartphone's apps, etc.).
3. Quickly write the first six topics the students say – 1 for each number.
4. Roll the die and tell the students they have 1 minute (or 30 seconds, 45 seconds, or up to 2 minutes – vary the time according to students' ability/level). Cross out that topic on the board.
5. Students talk about the topic with their partner for the designated time. While students talk to each other, the teacher monitors and collects mistakes or uses of good language and saves these for later.
6. Teacher calls "Stop!" and quickly gets feedback from a few students. (Ask, "What did your partner say about \_\_topic\_\_?")
7. Do steps 4-6 for a few more topics.
8. Present a few uses of good language to praise the class. Then board a few mistakes for the class to correct.

**Variations:** You can feed useful expressions or question forms if you want a specific language focus in addition to the fluency practice.

**Further Commentary:** You can do this activity as a warmer, filler, or extra activity at the end of a lesson.

You can feed topics into the list if you want a specific topic (maybe related to the lesson's theme, or a theme from a recent lesson).

**THE LIE GAME**

**Contributed by:** Frank O'Connor

**Learning Objective:** Question Formation

**Age:** Adults or adolescents

**Level:** Pre-intermediate and higher

**Interaction:** Pairs (or small groups)

**Class Time:** 15 minutes +

**Preparation/Time:** A few minutes pre-teaching words/phrases about lying, e.g. tell a lie, tell the truth, you're a liar!, a white lie; then talk about when you lie.

**Procedure:** Each student chooses 3 numbers from 1-10 and writes them down secretly. Then give out the questions. In pairs, students ask and answer the questions but they must lie when answering the numbers they have been chosen. Their partner must guess which answers are untrue. Students can ask as many questions as they like to find out more details, e.g. No.1 – "What did you steal? How did you feel? When did you do it? Did you get caught? Did you do it alone?" Etc.

**Variations:** You can vary the questions to suit your group/level.

**Further Commentary:** Called 'The Lie Game', this is more of a filler than a warmer – probably a bit too long for the latter. I can't remember where it originated but this a version I've adapted, and it's never failed me in class. Good for the start of the course. Here are the questions:

1. Have you ever stolen anything?
2. Have you ever been to France?
3. What's your favourite kind of weather?
4. Who's your favourite pop star?
5. Do you like English?
6. How often do you have a shower or bath?
7. What's your favourite football team?
8. Can you play an instrument?
9. What job would you like to do in the future?
10. Have you ever cheated in an English exam?

### THE ALPHABET MYSTERY

**Contributed by:** Aidan Holland

**Learning Objective:** To revise previously taught lexical sets / To get students thinking in English.

**Age:** Any

**Level:** Could be done with most levels.

**Interaction:** Teacher led at whole class level.

**Class Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** None

**Procedure:**

1. Ask students how the words are organised in a dictionary. You might want to check this concept with the students to check everyone has understood what alphabetical order is.
2. Tell students that you are going to play a short game as a class in which it is important to think about the alphabetical order of words.
3. Now, tell the students you are thinking of a word and ask them to guess what it is. Tell them they have a limited number of guesses, say 10-12. The students take turns to guess the mystery word and as they make guesses the teacher writes the words in one of two columns on the board. The teacher should write them in the left hand column if the word comes before the mystery word alphabetically and in the right if it comes after the mystery word.

### WORDBUILDER GAME

**Contributed by:** Anne Fairfield

**Learning Objective:** To introduce a topic / To revise vocabulary.

**Age:** Any

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Team work

**Class Time:** 5 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Teacher divides board in 2 (even better if you have 2 boards or an old fashioned blackboard with leaves that can be opened and closed) and writes a word vertically in each half of the board.

**Procedure:** Divide class into 2 teams. Show students the word and, if necessary elicit the theme / topic. One student from each team, in turn, comes to the board and writes a word connected to the theme. The student's word must include one of the letters from the teacher's word. E.g. The theme is 'Jobs'. The teacher writes the word EMPLOYMENT on the board vertically. Students have to write the names of jobs beginning with 'E' (Engineer), ending in (judgE), or including any of the letters (hairdrEsson), around the vertical word. It is not necessary to start with the first letter (E): students can choose whichever letter they want.

## WORD STORIES

**Contributed by:** Mary Frances Litzler

**Learning Objective:** Revise previously introduced vocabulary.

**Age:** I do this with adults but it could be done with younger learners (adolescents).

**Level:** Intermediate and higher (A2.2+).

**Interaction:** Normally done in groups but can be done in pairs.

**Class Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** 2 minutes (finding the best words from the previous lesson/s).

**Procedure:** Teacher puts 3-6 words on the board that are typically difficult. Students work in groups to invent a story. Teacher circulates to confirm that they are using the words correctly. Afterwards, volunteers can read their stories/teacher gives feedback on words that are still causing trouble or gives additional examples.

**Variations:** Students can change groups after inventing a story and they report their stories to the new group.

**Further Commentary:** This exercise works well with groups that tend to trickle into the classroom little by little at the beginning of the class period. Latecomers are told to join groups that have already started.

## SUN AND MOON

**Contributed by:** Martin Stanley

**Learning Objective:** Get the blood circulating and tongues loosened.

**Age:** Any

**Level:** Any

**Interaction:** Teacher-led whole group work.

**Class Time:** 5-10 mins

**Preparation/Time:** 1 to 2 minutes

**Procedure:**

1. Get students on their feet and huddle together.
2. Explain you're going to call out 2 words, e.g. 'Dogs' and 'Cats' and that 'Dogs' are on the left-hand side of the room and 'Cats' the right.
3. Explain that students should follow their instincts (if you have to spell it out, then give an example: "Maybe you like cats or have a cat...")
4. Once students have divided, start questioning their choices with provocative questions or statements: "Come on David, dogs are stupid!" or "Dogs are more loyal, cats just scratch you!"
5. Huddle again and repeat with different pair.
6. Repeat with 2 or 3 pairs.  
NB Good pairs include 'Countryside/City', 'Beer/Wine', 'Sun/Moon'.

**Variations:** It could be tied into the lesson topic. For example, if the topic is sport then you could have pairs such as 'Watching/Playing', 'Team sports/Individual Sports'. You could get a student or students to prepare the game or have them suggest pairs.

## STRANGE PRESENTS

**Contributed by:** Jessica Knight

**Learning Objective: Practising Functions:** thanking & explaining use of English /

**Cultural Awareness:** 'British Politeness'.

**Age:** Any

**Level:** A2 and above.

**Interaction:** Group work

**Class Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Preparation/Time:** Prepare and cut up papers – 5-10 minutes.

**Procedure:**

1. Students sit in a circle and cards with strange presents (e.g. a 'a bucket with a hole in it'; 'the back end of a stage horse costume') are dealt out among them.
2. Teacher explains that today is everybody's birthday.
3. Students take turns to give their presents to others who must then: a) thanks them profusely, and b) explain why the present is perfect for them.
4. If the other students are convinced they keep the gift. The student with the most presents at the end wins.

**Variations:** Imaginative students can invent the presents themselves.



## WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE WARMER OR FILLER?

We began this project as a way to present you directly with some practical classroom activities. Now, in the spirit of mutual respect, we'd like to ask you what yours are. If we receive enough new ideas, we hope to produce another booklet in time for our own annual teachers' conference, this year to be held simultaneously in Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao and Valencia on Saturday, September 29.

We have two places you can leave your favourite warmer and filler ideas with us:

- Send us a message on our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/BritishCouncilSpain](https://www.facebook.com/BritishCouncilSpain)
- Alternatively, you can send us an e-mail directly to: [teacher.training@britishcouncil.es](mailto:teacher.training@britishcouncil.es)

Many thanks! We look forward to hearing your warmers and fillers, and to seeing you at our conference in September. Keep visiting our website [www.britishcouncil.es](http://www.britishcouncil.es) for information on professional development opportunities.



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