

# Twenty Tips

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## Teaching Tip 1: Pairwork/Groupwork

### How:

1. Make a list of pairs of names before the lesson starts or while the students are coming in, or just tell them when the time comes: "Gianni, you work with Paola; Chiara, you're with Stefano this time."
2. If there is an odd number of students make a group of three but break them up later in the lesson and put them into pairs with someone else so they get more chance to speak.
3. You could put them in small groups to start with if the activity allows. You could even make the activity a competition in small teams if the activity allows, seeing which team gets the most answers right. Use the board or a piece of paper for keeping score.
4. Change the partners quite often so that the students don't get bored with their partner. This is especially important if there is a student who isn't very popular with the others.

### Why:

1. It's good for the students to speak to each other in English (see [TT5](#) for further explanation).
2. It's good for the students to work with another student sometimes rather than alone (see [TT5](#) and [TT13](#)) for further explanation).

### Extra Info:

I don't put my students into groups bigger than 3 because I don't think they get enough chance to speak in such a large group so they switch off, start fidgeting, get frustrated, let the hard-working students do all the work, etc. In a pair, one student is speaking and one is listening and formulating a response, in a group of three, one is speaking, And usually the other two are listening and formulating responses, in a group of four (or more), one is speaking, one or two are listening and formulating responses and the other one is asleep, aware that s/he hasn't got much chance of getting a word in edge-ways. Or of course, in a group of four, two speak to each other while the other two often either fall asleep or end up speaking to each other too, in which case you might as well have put them in pairs in the first place.

If you have an odd number of students don't pair the extra student up with yourself - make a group of three somewhere. I used to take on the "odd" student myself when I started in EFL but I found that it didn't work. The other students weren't daft - they realised they were missing out on the teacher's attention and I realised they were right - I was short-changing them by not monitoring them as I should.

If you've got some talkative and some quiet students, pair the quiet ones together for the fluency activities (as opposed to the vocabulary/grammar activities) to encourage them to talk more. I used to put one talkative student in a pair with a quiet one, thinking that the quiet one would speak more if his/her partner was the chatty type. I was wrong - the talkative one monopolises the conversation and the quiet one is happy to let this happen

## Teaching Tip 2: Reading Aloud

### How:

1. Pick a student and ask him/her to read the instructions for Activity 1/2/3 or whatever. "Marco, please read the instructions for Activity 2 for us".
2. Pick a different student each time.

### Why:

1. It saves you doing it.
2. You can check pronunciation.
3. The other students may well understand the instructions better when read by another student.
4. The students are more likely to listen to another student than to you.
5. If they all read the instructions silently they will all finish at different times. If they listen to someone reading the instructions out loud they all finish at the same time.

### Extra Info:

Getting students to read aloud used to be unpopular because it was unrealistic as we never do it in real life - you read books silently, don't you? Things have changed since then as it has since been argued that we do it, e.g. "hey, listen to this, it says in the paper here that Prince Charles is already, secretly, married to Camilla! Listen - 'Prince Charles allegedly married Camilla Parker Bowles in a secret ceremony at Windsor Castle yesterday. The ceremony was attended only by the prince's closest family and friends. A palace spokesman denied the rumour, saying that...'"

### Teaching Tip 3: Checking Understanding

#### How:

1. Ask your students "Is that clear?"
2. If it's clear, fine. If anyone says "No, can you explain that? /Can you explain again?" don't. Ask if one of the other students can explain it.
3. If nobody understands it, go through an example step by step together. They should get it then.
4. If they still don't get it, go through another example together.
5. If the poor things are still lost either...
  - o Do the whole activity together as a class, if possible, or...
  - o Give up and go to the next activity.
  - o If it's a word they are having difficulty understanding, you could set it for homework and get the students to explain the meaning to you next lesson.
6. Another way to check understanding of instructions is to ask the students to imagine that you are a new student who has just come in - can they explain how to do the activity?
7. Another way to check understanding, not only of instructions, is by concept checking (see TT19).

#### Why:

1. You need to check that the students have understood because they are unlikely to tell you if they haven't - they will simply bumble through the exercise, doing it wrong, probably *aware* that they are doing it wrong, and losing confidence.
2. You need to ask "Is that clear?" rather than "Do you understand?" because the chances of a student saying "No, I don't understand" are very slim - they will feel very stupid. Would you admit to not understanding something in front of others in a classroom situation? I wouldn't!
3. The student who doesn't understand will be convinced s/he is the only one who doesn't get it and will not want to admit that in public. Questions like "Is that clear?" shift the blame to the quality of the instructions instead. Neutral ground - much nicer.

### Teaching Tip 4: Pronunciation

#### How:

1. Model the word yourself. (This means you say it in a normal way to the students). Then get the students to repeat it after you, all together like in a chorus until they get it nearly right. Don't worry if they aren't perfect. Who is?
2. Then model the word again and ask individual students to repeat the word after you.
3. You could put the word on the board and ask the students how many syllables it has and then practise some stress placement. Ask them which is the stressed (strong) syllable... For example:  
before = 2 syllables be FORE = the second syllable is stressed.  
After = 2 syllables AF ter = the first syllable is stressed.  
Computer = 3 syllables com PU ter = the second syllable is stressed.  
Afternoon = 3 syllables AF ter NOON = the third syllable is stressed.

If you know the phonetic alphabet you could write the words in that too.

#### Why:

1. It helps the students to improve their pronunciation which is very important because there's very little point in students learning a new word, learning what it means and how to use it in a sentence, if no one understands them when they say it because their pronunciation is so bad.
2. Doing a little pronunciation work can fill time here and there in a lesson. It's especially useful as a filler (a quickie activity to fill those few minutes at the end of a lesson when you've run out of material but it's a little too early to let the students go).

**Extra Info:**

If you're planning to do some syllable work or stress placement or use the phonetic alphabet it's a good idea to write the words, syllables, stress and phonetic spelling down before the lesson because, I don't know about you, but I find it hard to do it spontaneously during the lesson! For some reason I get muddled and write the stress on the wrong syllable etc.

If you want to do some stress placement work but you don't know which syllable is stressed, look in a dictionary, especially one for students - it will have the stress indicated, usually by an apostrophe thingy. The syllable after the apostrophe thingy is the stressed one, usually.

For example: be' fore 'after computer afternoon

If you look in the first few pages of the dictionary it will explain how it indicates stress placement. Not all dictionaries indicate it in the same way. (For more information about dictionaries in general see [TT20](#)).

**Teaching Tip 5: Speaking to Other Students in English****How:**

1. Put the students into pairs or small groups (See [TT1](#) for further explanation).

**Why:**

1. Making students speak to each other instead of the teacher maximises STT (Student Talking Time) and minimises TTT (Teacher Talking Time). This is a good thing because the students are the ones who need to practise their English - you, hopefully, don't!
2. A lot of students will be using their English to speak to non-mother tongue speakers anyway so they might as well start getting used to it. For example, my students are Italian and they often need English to speak to other European clients and colleagues. Some of them never use English to speak to mother-tongue English speakers at all!

**Extra Info:**

Students like talking to the teacher because it makes them feel important and that they are getting value for money. While this is fine in a one-to-one lesson it is no good in a group because while one student is monopolising the teacher/conversation everyone else is losing out.

When I encounter students who want to talk to me all the time in a lesson (flattering though it is) I advise them (politely) to consider having individual lessons if they want the teacher's full attention all the time. If that doesn't work I explain like this: 100 minutes divided by 10 students = 10 minutes each; so they can each talk to me for 10 minutes and I will listen to each of them for 10 minutes which is sad really when they've paid for a 100 minute lesson. And, let's face it, it wouldn't really be 10 minutes because you have to take time off for taking the register at the beginning of the lesson, sit down, get settled, read the instructions, present grammar points or whatever, do a listening exercise or a role play, and go through homework together, etc. 5 minutes would be more realistic. So there you have it, pay for 100 minutes and get 5. Where's the logic? If that doesn't work I do this: Let the student have his/her way. Yup! Smile and listen very attentively. Make sure that everyone else is listening too. Let him/her start rambling, taking up everyone's valuable time and then just pick him/her up on every grammar mistake and correct his/her pronunciation every second word. I find that the student in question usually enjoys this to start with, getting so much attention - having a one-to-one lesson in front of everybody - but the novelty soon wears off. I either correct the student aloud, frequently, or write his/her errors up on the board as s/he goes along ("don't mind me, do keep going, we can all learn so much from your mistakes").

Generally speaking, correcting a student every few seconds destroys the impact of whatever s/he was saying and makes them (and everyone else) lose the thread. Writing their mistakes up publicly on the board tends to make students shrivel up and die. After this, in my experience, the student is generally quite happy to get on with pairwork. And so are all the other students! Sometimes I have students who don't want to speak much until they can be sure of getting it right and not making mistakes because mistakes are bad things, right? (Wrong!). These students tell me that they want me to talk to them (individually) because they will learn correct English through listening to me. (By osmosis, presumably!) They can't see the benefit of talking to each other because if they make a mistake the other student won't be able to correct them. (Actually, the other student often can correct them, and does correct them and that's what they don't like!). In such cases I explain like this:

Learning English is like learning to play the piano/to drive/to swim etc. When you want to learn to play the piano/drive/swim is it enough to just sit and watch other people doing it or do you need to have a go yourself and make mistakes and practise a lot until you get it right? Speaking together gives you that chance to have a go yourself and the time to practice.

Or like this:

If you honestly think that you will learn correct English by listening to a mother-tongue speaker speaking correct English, why don't you just buy an English video? It's a lot cheaper than paying lesson prices to listen to me.

## Teaching Tip 6: Guessing Answers

### How:

1. When there is a list of possible answers, encourage students to guess the answers (by saying things like "There are two words to choose from and only one gap to fill so you've got a 50% chance of being right!")
2. Encourage students to look at the words before and the words after the gap (in a gap-fill - a.k.a. cloze - exercise) to help them decide what type of word is needed in the gap. Will the answer be a verb? An adjective? A noun? In most exercises this will limit their choice of answers and therefore increase their chances of guessing the right one (see the previous point I made).
3. If they are still looking a bit blank it's probably because they are suffering from "gap-fill tunnel vision" which means that this is what they see:  
*Irrelevant gobbledegook a \_\_\_\_\_ with I needn't read this because it comes after the gap.*  
Would you know what to write in the space? I wouldn't!
4. Encourage them to try to guess the meaning from the context (i.e. the sentence or paragraph the gap is in). Let's look at the same example again, this time with the context: It rained yesterday when I was out but I hadn't got a \_\_\_\_\_ with me so I got wet.  
In this example the context tells us that the missing word is probably going to be "umbrella".
5. This technique also works well when there is a word which the students don't know in a sentence. If they have never seen the word "umbrella" before and it is in the sentence then the sentence will look something like this to the student:  
*Irrelevant gobbledegook an umbskjdhfskjfla with I needn't read this because it comes after the gap.*  
Some students will panic at this point and ask you what an umbskjdhfskjfla is. You don't need to spoon-feed them the answer. If the students use the context to help them they will probably be able to work out the meaning for themselves (see point 4 above) and thus gain confidence as learners.

### Why:

1. The students know a lot more than they think they know - the posh term for this is "passive knowledge". This basically means that somewhere in the past they have seen or heard this word or phrase but they don't remember it consciously. (They don't know they know - they think they don't know, but you know better, you think they know - confused yet?) Anyway, if you can get them to make a guess, the chances are that they will get it right quite a lot of the time. If you put the students into pairs or small groups the chances are that with their combined passive knowledge they'll get most of the answers right, though they won't know how they did it. They'll probably think it's just luck. It isn't. Of course, the upshot of all this is that they get most of it right and consequently feel very good. Their confidence is raised and that is half the battle with speaking a foreign language.
2. In real life (outside the classroom) the students will be put in situations where they don't know all the answers or they don't know all the words etc. If they have developed the confidence to trust themselves to make an educated guess here and there it'll help them survive linguistically.
3. In many English language exams it is necessary to do gap-fill/cloze exercises. Students who leave spaces because they don't know the answer should, in my humble opinion, be deemed "too stupid to live" and dealt with accordingly. Students taking exam courses should be encouraged to make guesses left, right and centre in order to avoid ever leaving a space on an exam paper. If nothing is written in the gap the student will receive no marks. If something is written in the space there is a chance, a fair chance, that the answer will be right.

## Teaching Tip 7: Stopping an Activity

### How:

1. If you have a small enough group that you can be heard by everyone, just say something like "OK, you can stop there. Well done everyone. Thank you, you can stop now. Yes, that includes you, Giovanni!" Then give the students a few seconds to finish their sentences until the room falls quiet. Let them finish what they were saying.
2. If you have a big group so you won't be heard if you try to talk over everyone then don't bother to shout yourself hoarse, simply have a certain place in the classroom where you go and stand when you want everyone's attention and go and stand in it. The students will stop talking very soon. (I stand in front of the board, facing the class which gets their attention because for the previous ten minutes or so I've been cruising round the room monitoring). You can explain to students at the beginning of the course, "When I want your attention I will stand here and you will stop what you are doing and listen to me because I don't like shouting for your attention. Is that clear"?

### When:

1. It's not important if the students have finished the activity - it's the taking part that counts, as they say.
2. It's a good idea to stop things while they are going swingingly because it means you never hit the students' boredom threshold. Leave them wanting more and enthusiasm will remain high. On the other hand, don't stop it too soon because not everyone will have had a chance to speak or guess the answers yet so they'll feel cheated.

### **Teaching Tip 8: Feedback**

#### **How:**

1. Ask one of the students what the answer to question 1 is. If s/he gets it right, fine. If not, ask if anyone else knows the answer. (If nobody knows and nobody can guess, you'll need to give it to them).
2. Ask one of the students what the answer to question 2 is. If s/he gets it right, fine. If not, ask if anyone else knows the answer. (If nobody knows and nobody can guess, you'll need to give it to them).
3. Ask one of the students what the answer to question 3 is. (Are you getting the hang of this?)
4. In the "True or False?" activities on my worksheets, the feedback questions would be: "How many of your guesses were right? /How well do you know your partner? /which of your partner's answers surprised you?"

#### **Why:**

1. Getting feedback from the students (i.e. information about what they've just done) means you can check how they coped with the exercise. You don't only need to get the answers. You can find out if they liked that type of exercise or not - if not, can they suggest ways to improve it?
2. You can check their pronunciation. You can deal with queries. You can allow the feedback session to develop into a class discussion, if you like. Whatever.

#### **Extra info:**

You can initiate a feedback session about the lesson as a whole as a filler (five-minute activity) to fill the last few minutes of a lesson by asking the students to decide which of this lesson's activities was the most enjoyable/useful and why, then compare their choices with their partner's or have an open-class discussion about it where the whole group talks to you and airs their views.

### **Teaching Tip 9: Dealing with Vocabulary Queries**

#### **How to avoid doing it:**

1. Get the students to read the exercise completely before starting to actually do anything. They can underline the words they don't know, or (more positively) underline the words they do know. When a student asks you to explain the meaning of a word, don't. Ask the other students if anyone can explain it.
2. You could put the students in pairs or small groups and get them to explain the words they don't know to each other. This sounds daft but it's quite logical really - the words Gianni is having difficulty with won't necessarily be the same ones that Marco is struggling with. Beware of the students' tendency to translate the words.
3. It's a good idea to get the students to try to guess the meaning of the word from the context it's in.
4. Get the students to look the word up in a (preferably English to English a.k.a. monolingual) dictionary, should such a thing be available.

#### **Why to avoid doing it:**

1. You are not a dictionary. You don't even look like one, do you?
2. There's a world of difference between telling someone something (spoon-feeding students who soon get into the habit of switching off, being passive, letting the teacher do all the work for them and not bothering to try to remember a single thing) and teaching someone something (creating an environment and a set of circumstances in which someone can actively learn, practise new skills, and develop confidence in his/her own abilities).
3. One day, out there in the big wide world, the students will be faced with situations in which they will not know all the words and you won't be there to help them. Then what will they do? (With any luck they will be able to fall back on all the useful skills you've taught them in class.)

#### **Explaining new vocabulary**

As a last resort, give the students an explanation of the new word or phrase in English. It's a good idea to give them an example sentence or two containing the word or phrase so that they can see how to use it. You may find it useful to demonstrate or mime the word to convey its meaning quickly. Or maybe a quick line-drawing (of the "stick-man" type) would convey the meaning more quickly? Sometimes a synonym (similar word) is useful (e.g. wealthy = rich) or an opposite (e.g. wealthy = the opposite of poor). Be careful because all synonyms are not interchangeable.

#### **Extra info:**

If a student still thinks I should explain all the new words to him I refuse and explain like this: If you give a starving man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him how to fish he can feed himself for life. (I explain "starving" as "very, very, very hungry").

In this case the "fish" is the explanation of a word, given by you. The "how to fish" is the ability to guess words from context, the confidence to ask a peer (a classmate, a colleague etc.) if they know the meaning, and the ability to use a dictionary.

### **Teaching Tip 10: Monitoring**

#### **How:**

1. While the students are doing an activity you walk slowly round the classroom and listen to their conversations.
2. You can sit down too, if there are enough chairs, but try to sit in the background a bit or the students will direct their conversation to you.
3. Look at one pair whilst actually listening to a different pair nearby. Correct the pair nearby (which will probably make them jump because they thought you were listening to the pair you were looking at) just to keep everyone on their toes - they never know when you're listening to them so they can't ever switch off or revert to their mother-tongue.
4. Be ready to massage any flagging conversations back into life, to stop students monopolising conversations, to stop students falling out with each other and to offer encouragement and praise where appropriate. Listen and supervise.
5. Take a piece of paper and a pen with you on your travels round the classroom so that you can jot down any howlers.

#### **Why:**

1. If you spend your life in the classroom sitting down, this is your chance to stop numb-bum syndrome - get up and wander round. If you spend your life in the classroom on your feet, this is your chance to put your feet up (not literally, maybe, though I did when I was pregnant!) - sit down to listen to the students.
2. Monitoring gives you the opportunity to hear how the students are coping with the activity and to make notes about pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar points that are causing difficulty. I see the role as one of listener/supervisor/facilitator/encourager - not as one of error corrector.

#### **Extra Info:**

Although it's a good idea to indicate that you're actually listening to the students (even to the point of feigning interest in what they are saying) I wouldn't suggest crouching down to table height in order to listen to the students - it looks silly.

Apparently, (according to books on body language) tipping your head to one side gives the impression that you are listening avidly to someone so if you were thinking of switching off and not listening to your students at all (...me??...never!!), tip your head to one side first and they'll be none the wiser!

I generally don't correct mistakes very much when I'm monitoring - I jot them down and do a bit of error correction later because if I get caught up correcting one student's mistakes during the activity I can't monitor the other students properly and by the time I get back to monitoring I find that everyone has reverted happily to their mother tongue.

### **Teaching Tip 11: Error Correction**

#### **How:**

1. Let the students make mistakes. They need to. We all learn best through making mistakes. Trial and error is the name of the game.
2. Give the students time to realise they've made a mistake and try to correct it themselves. If they can't, maybe someone else can help them. If nobody can help then you can either step in and give the correct form or make a note of it for later.
3. As far as possible, correct mistakes anonymously. Do this by making notes of students' mistakes as you monitor then putting them on the board later and give the students themselves the opportunity to correct them, in pairs or small groups. If no one knows the right answer, give it to them, but only as a last resort. Anonymous error correction is a kind way to deal with mistakes. It isn't important who made the mistake originally - the point is, can the students all correct it? I tend to doctor the mistakes so that even the perpetrator doesn't recognise them as his/her own. For example: Original error: "I have been to Paris last year." = On the board: "I have been to London last week."

#### **Extra Info:**

Mistakes are good things and students need to know that they are. I explain like this: "Please make lots and lots of mistakes in my lessons - new mistakes, mind you, not the same old ones over and over. I like mistakes because we can all learn from them and because if you don't make any I won't have a job. If I find a student who doesn't make any mistakes in my lesson I will move that student to a higher level class because s/he obviously isn't learning anything at this level."

Learning English is like learning to ride a bike - you fall off a lot, but you get the hang of it in the end. You will make a lot of mistakes but you will be able to communicate effectively in the end. Very few people become successful international cyclists and the chances are that even though you can ride a bike you are not a professional cyclist. Very few students reach mother-tongue (supposedly error-free) level but many students learn to communicate very well in English in spite of this. You will probably never have error-free English so accept that you will always make some mistakes - just try to learn from them and learn to live with your linguistic imperfections.

When a student makes a mistake it is usually counter-productive to say "No!" "That's wrong!" "Are you serious?" "How long did you say you've been studying English?" etc. It's often kinder to say "Not bad" "Nearly" "Good try" "That's an interesting mistake" etc.

Some say that you shouldn't laugh at students' mistakes but I often do. They're often very funny so why shouldn't I? I find it breaks the "mistakes taboo" and makes linguistic risks and disasters an acceptable part of the classroom culture. Students catch on very quickly and we have a good giggle together when someone messes up.

The ability to correct themselves when they make a mistake is an important one for students to develop. Encourage it and give them time to correct themselves - don't jump in immediately to correct them, keen though you are to prove that you are doing your job. Most students (and indeed some teachers) seem to think that it is the teacher's job to correct students mistakes but this is not necessarily so. Yes, teachers can correct their students endlessly but how will that help the students' when they go out into the big wide world who will be there to correct them then? It's much better for the students if they get into the habit of listening to themselves when they are speaking and correct themselves as they go along. Obviously they won't be able to correct all the mistakes they make but they will be able to correct a lot of them.

## **Teaching Tip 12: Eliciting**

### **How:**

1. Instead of giving information, ask if anyone in the class can provide it. When a student asks "What does this mean?" or "What's the past of this verb?" etc. say something like "That's a good question - what do you think?" "Can you guess?" "Can anyone help Maria here?"
2. If you want to teach some vocabulary, for instance, then rather than giving it to the students, try to get them to give it to you. For example: I want to teach the word "cow". I could draw a little picture on the board. I could explain what a cow is. Or I could elicit the word from the students along these lines: "What do we call/what's the word for an animal which makes milk and goes "moo"?! With any luck the students will say "cow". There you go - I've elicited the word "cow" from the students. I didn't say it to them - they said it to me; that's eliciting.

### **Why:**

1. If you don't elicit you run the risk of telling the students everything they want to know and ending up spoon-feeding them (see TT9 - the "Why to avoid doing it" part for further explanation).
2. Eliciting means getting information from people as opposed to giving it to them - asking, throwing questions back at the students, in a nutshell.

### **Extra Info:**

When I take the register, I always elicit today's date from the students ("What's the date today?") because I find that even at high levels students are shockingly bad on dates.

Sometimes students don't understand the value of eliciting. They think that you're not doing your job if you don't answer their questions. If I have a student like that I tend to explain like this: "I know I know the answer but I'm not the one learning English here. What is important is, do any of you know the answer?" or "Why should I explain again? We did this last week!"

If you try to elicit something and obviously no one knows what you are getting at or they've all forgotten it or they haven't done their homework then don't keep on trying to get it out of them. Flogging a dead horse will get you nowhere and it just embarrasses/irritates the students and wastes valuable lesson time.

## **Teaching Tip 13: Checking Together**

**How:**

1. When the students have finished doing an activity on their own, put them in pairs or small groups and tell them to check their answers together.
2. Tell the students that if the answers are the same, they are probably correct but if they are different they need to explain/justify their choice of answer to their partner - in English! They can change their answers if they like.

**Why:**

1. It's a good idea to let the students check their answers together before feeding back to the teacher because it gives them the chance to rub out/cross out any glaring errors before the teacher sees and thus avoid looking stupid in front of the class.
2. If a student hasn't a clue about some of the answers it's reassuring to find out that their partner hasn't the foggiest either. The students realise they are not alone. They can also copy their partners' answers (if their partner has some that they don't) but their partner might not be right!
3. Peer teaching is considered a good thing in the world of EFL. Peers are equals. So in this case a student's peers are a student's fellow classmates. Working together and checking work together is a form of peer teaching. This means that instead of the know-it-all (and/or) mother-tongue teacher always teaching them, the students can teach each other (by explaining grammar points, correcting pronunciation, explaining new words and phrases etc). The beauty of it is that the students are all equal to each other and are in the same boat, linguistically speaking.

**Teaching Tip 14: Reading before Writing****How:**

1. Tell the students to read the whole exercise first before writing anything. (This will be unbelievably hard for some students to do).
2. Once they've read it all, let them begin doing the exercise.

**Why:**

1. It's a good idea to read the whole exercise before starting to write anything because sometimes more than one answer is possible but, in the exercise the students are doing, only one answer is the right one.

For example: (a gap fill with these possible answers: take photos buy souvenirs):

I always \_\_\_\_\_ when I am on holiday because they help me to remember it.

(Could be either answer! But not if you've read the whole exercise first because you know that one of the later sentences is:

I \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ on my last holiday because I had a new camera.

This is true not only for my worksheets but also as a useful strategy in exams in general.

2. Another reason is that the students can answer the questions they know the answer to and guess the rest (from a smaller selection because they've used some of the answers already and so have a higher percentage chance of guessing the right answer). A process of elimination.

**Extra Info:**

Exam students are strongly advised to read everything before putting pen to paper for the reasons stated above. Apart from anything else it gives them more context to help them.

**Teaching Tip 15: Brainstorming****How:**

1. Ask the students to think of all the words they know connected with the topic.
2. Tell the students to write them on a piece of paper.
3. Give them a couple of minutes to do so.
4. Put them in pairs or small groups to compare their vocabulary and transfer words they hadn't thought of from their partner's list to their own.
5. Feedback on to the board.
6. Or you could do it all on the board in the first place - just ask the class to give you words to write on the board. (Or give board pens to one or more students and get them to do the writing!)

**Why:**



1. If students have already activated their vocabulary related to the topic they will not be searching for words so much when they start the speaking activities. This should enable them to be more fluent.

**Extra Info:**

Brainstorming can be used as a warmer (a five minute activity at the start of the lesson) just to get them in the mood and to start them thinking about the topic or as a filler (a five minute activity at the end of the lesson) to see how many words they remember from the lesson. It can also be used as revision - "Write down all the words you can remember about X (which we studied last month)!" (The students will love you for that - not!)

**Teaching Tip 16: Personalising****How:**

1. It's been done for you on the worksheets. All the gap-fill exercises, question-forming exercises and even the majority of the grammar analysis exercises have been made to include that ever-important word "I". The discussion questions are mostly aimed at encouraging the students to give their personal opinion on aspects of the topic.

**Why:**

1. In my experience, students like talking about themselves. And why not? Who doesn't?
2. They will remember new words etc. better if they have had the opportunity to use them in exercises, both written and spoken, that are relevant to their own experience in some way.
3. Apparently, when mother-tongue speakers talk, some of the most frequently used words are I, me, and you.

**Extra Info:**

A lot of coursebooks seem to try to make things look "realistic" for the students in this way. They show a photo of a man and a woman and say something like "This is Bob and Pam". Then they provide some sort of exercise which features "Bob" and "Pam" which may go something like this:

Write the following verbs in the sentences below: get up go

1. Bob and Pam \_\_\_\_\_ very early every morning.
2. Bob and Pam \_\_\_\_\_ to work by bus.

In my view, the chances of the students being really interested in "Bob" and "Pam" are slim and so are the chances of them remembering the target language (target language is the words and/or grammar structure you are trying to teach them).

There may well be nice colour photos of people supposedly called "Bob" and "Pam" but, correct me if I'm wrong, it's hardly realistic. The students know full well that the people in the photos are called just about anything except "Bob" and "Pam" because they are models or actors or whatever. They certainly don't care what time they get up and how they get to work.

That's where personalising comes in. Sentences like: "My partner \_\_\_\_\_ very early every morning" can be turned into questions (Do you get up very early every morning?) which will begin a real, personally relevant conversation between two students in which they can talk to each other about themselves. (Yes, I do, I have to be at work by 8.15 every day including Saturday...Really? What do you do? Etc.)

**Teaching Tip 17: Translating****How to avoid doing it:**

1. Refuse to give translations for new vocabulary yourself. Pretend/admit you don't speak the student's language.
2. Encourage the students to guess the meaning of words they don't know or to ask each other for help or to look it up in a monolingual dictionary instead.
3. Explain that you are a teacher, not an interpreter.
4. Remind students that you are a teacher, not a dictionary.

**Why to avoid doing it:**

1. If students translate words and you don't speak their language you won't know if they've really understood or if they've translated it correctly.
2. There often isn't a direct translation for a word or phrase, there is only an "equivalent", sometimes not even that. Try translating a couple of modal verbs (like "must" or "would" and you'll see what I mean) and I doubt very much that there is a translation for "Yorkshire Pudding" in any language (because it's something solely British so other countries will presumably never have needed a word for it). "Get" is hard to translate, as are phrasal verbs.
3. Translating some things word for word doesn't help. For example: My mother -in-law once told me that my husband is a "pezzo di pane" which translates as "a piece of bread". I was none the wiser for having

translated this. Did it mean he was soft, I asked myself? Or stale? (It actually means he's a good sort, apparently.)

4. Translating slows students down which means you run the risk of getting bogged down in the fruitless pursuit of a word which isn't English anyway.
5. Thinking in two languages simultaneously (which is necessary for translating) is very hard. People pay simultaneous interpreters quite a lot of money to do this and you need to be very good at both languages to do it successfully. ("If you are a professional interpreter you may translate in my lessons, no problem" - funnily enough I haven't come across any such students yet!)
6. False friends can cause problems. In Italian the word "sensibile" means sensitive. Not sensible. The word "conveniente" means cheap. Not convenient. I could go on...
7. Often there is only one word in the students' language to translate two English words. For example: the Italian for make is "fare" and so is the Italian for "do". The Italian for "job" is "lavoro" and so the Italian for "work". In such cases translating is actually the origin of the students' confusion over the words, not the solution to it.

#### **Extra Info:**

If I encounter students who are convinced that translating English into their own language is an essential part of learning English I try to discourage them by explaining like this: Let's imagine that I am a piano-teacher and a student wants to learn to play the piano so s/he has piano lessons with me. S/he may not be able to play the piano but s/he is an expert guitarist and brings his/her guitar to the lesson. I play a tune on the piano and s/he tries to copy it on the guitar. But it doesn't sound the same. In fact it doesn't sound like a piano at all. Well, it wouldn't, would it? I suggest that s/he tries playing it on the piano but s/he tells me that s/he will only be able to play it on the piano if s/he can play it on the guitar first. The lesson continues with me playing the piano and the student "translating" the tunes onto the guitar. At the end of this course of piano lessons, do you think the student will be able to play the piano? I think not.

#### **Teaching Tip 18: Pacing**

##### **How:**

1. Change the pace of the lesson by breaking things up a bit. Instead of simply doing one activity straight after another, allow a little time for something different.
2. You can also change the pace during a lesson by allowing time for a brainstorming session.
3. Another way to liven up the pace is to put a time limit on some activities - "You have 2 minutes for this, so get going!" Or introducing an element of competition - put the class into small groups and tell them that these are teams and the first team to finish this activity is the winner. (Prize = no homework, or something like that.) Maybe the activities which involve matching words with pictures would be a good one for this).
4. Use other material during the lesson - your coursebook etc.
5. Wake people up by giving them a 2 minute test on last week's vocabulary.
6. Allow silence at appropriate times during the lesson - while students are reading the questions or during speaking activities when students are formulating a response (thinking of something to say). Silence in the classroom can be a bit unnerving at first but it doesn't mean you're not doing your job - students need time to absorb information and time to think. We all do.

##### **Why:**

1. The lesson will become rather monotonous if it's just a case of "Do Activity 1, then do Activity 2, then [lo and behold] do Activity 3." (!)
2. The lesson will become even more monotonous if the students spend all lesson with the same partner - change the partners over, make small groups instead, or (especially in a brainstorming session) have the group brainstorming directly to you.

#### **Extra Info:**

Exercises may be numbered 1, 2, 3 etc but that doesn't mean you have to do them in that order or feedback in that order. In the discussion activities I often tell students to read all the questions, select the 3 that interest them most and talk about them. When feeding back from another exercise I may ask for the answer to number 5 then number 2 then number 4 - keeps the students on their toes!

#### **Teaching Tip 19: Concept Checking**

##### **How:**

1. Ask the students a question closely related to the target concept. For example, if you are working on a third conditional sentence like this: "I would have done my homework if I had had enough time", your concept checking questions could be these: Did you do your homework? Did you have enough time? If you're checking the understanding of instructions which say: "Guess your partner's answers to the true or false questions below", you could ask: Do you need to speak to your partner at this stage?

**Why:**

1. It's another way of checking understanding.

**Extra Info:**

I suggest thinking up concept check questions before the lesson and jotting them down somewhere. I don't know about you but they never come to me spontaneously when I need them in a lesson.

**Teaching Tip 20: Using Dictionaries**

**How:**

1. If possible, give the students each an English-English dictionary.
2. Make sure they know how to use it. If not, teach them how. (If you don't know how to teach them how, see Extra Info below for some ideas).
3. Encourage the students to refer to their dictionary whenever appropriate during the lesson, though they should try to guess the meaning from the context first where possible

**Why:**

1. A dictionary is an extra teacher for the student.
2. It helps the students to realise that you are not a dictionary and therefore shouldn't be treated like one for further comment).
3. It makes the student more independent - not relying on the teacher the whole time - and more able to study outside the classroom, at home, or whatever, and to continue studying after the course has finished.

**Extra Info:**

I help students get to grips with dictionary work and start to appreciate just how useful one can be by giving them some words to look up and then discuss in pairs. I often give the students different dictionaries too, different levels, different publishers, the lot, so they get the chance to develop a preference. If they do decide to go and invest money in a dictionary as a result of the lesson they have a better chance of buying one that is right for them and therefore a better chance of making friends with it.

The words I give students to look up are false friends - what do they mean? Confusing words - what's the difference between them? (I use "job" and "work" in the sentences "I enjoy my job/ I enjoy my work" - the nouns "job" and "work" mean pretty much the same here but there is a difference because between them, what is it? Words which are impossible to know how to pronounce - "thorough" is a good one, - how do we say it? Sentences to complete - "I'm good \_\_\_ using a dictionary" - what's the missing preposition? Phrasal verbs like "put up with" - do they know which word to look up? Words with more than one meaning - I use "get" - what does it mean? And does their dictionary give too much information about it or too little or just right?

The aim of the game is to get students to realise that using a bilingual dictionary to translate a word is no way to go about dictionary work, especially if it is more than 5 years old - for a start, if they look up the word "mouse" it'll probably just say "small furry animal" and not mention computers at all. Using a monolingual English dictionary could really help them with their studying.