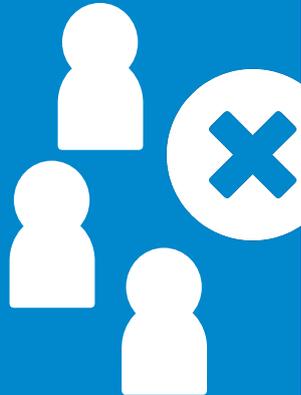


# Talk English



**Warmers, starters  
and simple activities  
for ESOL classes**



# Vote with your feet

Label each side of the classroom with one of two options, such as “I like....” and “I don’t like...”

Ask learners to stand in the middle of the room and show them what to do - they should walk to the side of the room to show which the statement is true for them.

Call out options - e.g. “fish”. Learners should move to the “I like.. Side if they like fish, and vice versa.

Ask learners to move back to the centre and call out another option. Repeat several times.

There are lots of options you could try this with, another example is ‘I can...’ and ‘I can’t...’

# Circle ball games

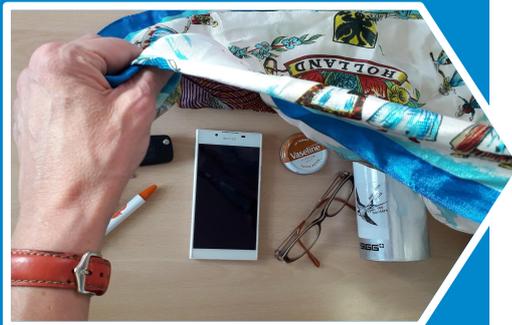
Stand (or sit) in a circle. This could be the whole class, or groups of any number.

Use a ball to nominate someone to answer a question.

For example, say: “My name’s ..., What’s your name?” and throw the ball to someone. They should answer the question and then throw the ball to someone else.

This can be used for any question and answer in any topic. You can also do this activity anywhere- the learners in the picture are visiting a local park.





# Kim's game

Collect about 7-10 objects from learners (with permission!) or related to a topic (e.g. food items, classroom objects).

Place your objects around a tray or on a separate table, making sure that everyone has a clear view of them.

Tell people to look at the items but not write anything down. Set a time limit - say, a minute. Then put a cloth over the tray so the items are not visible.

Give each pair a mini whiteboard or piece of paper and a pen/pencil. Tell them to write down everything from the tray that they can remember. The pair who remembers the most wins.

Variation for non-writers: while covered, remove one object. Uncover and learners say what is missing. Repeat several times.

# Things we have in common

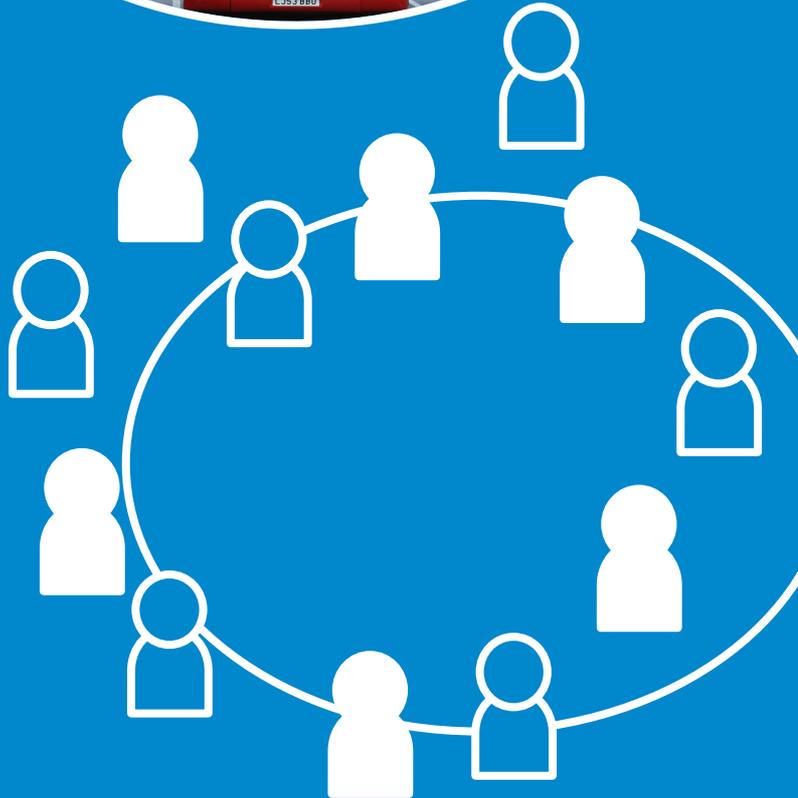
Make a circle on the ground using a string or chalk.

Everyone stands outside the circle.

Make a statement that is true for you and might apply to some of the learners- e.g. “I come to class by bus”, “I have a sister”. Show the learners they should step in the circle if a statement applies to them.

Repeat for many different statements.

Invite learners to have a try at making a statement themselves.



How  
many...?



## Line up in order

Ask learners to stand and line up in order of some fact about them.

Examples could be: month of birth, house number, alphabet position of first name or surname, length of time in the UK, number of siblings.

Learners will need to collaborate and ask and answer lots of questions to each other in order to do this.

You could demonstrate this task first with the learners holding their answer on a post-it or mini-whiteboard and then repeat it without the written prompt.

# Show and tell

Show learners a photo on your phone you have taken recently. Tell them who/what is in it, where and when you took it and why. Invite them to ask you questions

Ask learners who have smartphones to choose a photo to show their partner and talk about. Partners ask questions about the photo.

If anyone doesn't have a smartphone - ask them to talk about another personal item - e.g. an item of clothing or jewellery, or something they have in their bag.

Follow-up: ask learners to bring in from home a photograph or object they would like to show the class and talk about in the next lesson.





## 3 things....

Tell the learners the last 3 things you bought.

Invite them to ask you some questions about your purchases.

For example: "I bought a new phone, some bin bags and a bunch of flowers".  
"Why did you buy flowers?" / "What type of phone did you buy?" / "Where did you go shopping?"

Now ask them to do the same task in pairs: tell your partner the last 3 things you bought and let them ask you questions.

Swap roles.

# Mystery bag

Bring a bag of real items related to the topic to class.

Examples could be food, clothes, medication containers, travel accessories, cooking utensils or classroom objects.

Invite learners to put their hand in the bag without looking and choose an object.

They should guess what the object is before removing it from the bag to check.

Encourage the other learners to ask an appropriate question about the object. For example, a tin of beans: “How do you cook it?”





# Two truths and a lie...

Show learners pictures to illustrate three things you can do (e.g. “I can map-read, I can play the piano and I can sew”)... but one of them is a lie.

Invite them to ask you questions to try and guess the truth. After they have asked all the questions they can think of allow them to guess and reveal which is the lie.

Ask them to do the same task with each other in pairs or small groups. They can write or draw pictures to represent the 3 skills on a mini-whiteboard or scrap paper.

Alternative version- 2 things you like and one you don't.

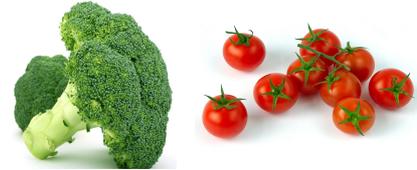
# Memory game

Invite learners to sit or stand in a circle or around a table so they can see and hear each other.

Demonstrate the game: start off with a sentence that can be added to, e.g. “On Saturdays, I go shopping and I buy broccoli”. The person next to you should repeat what you have said and add an extra item, e.g. “On Saturdays, I go shopping and I buy broccoli and tomatoes.”

The next person should repeat and add a third item, and so on until you have gone around the whole group. The last person needs to remember everything.

This can be very challenging, so encourage learners to help each other!





# Best and worst....

Tell your learners the best thing that happened to you this week.

And the worst...

Use pictures, gestures or mime if it helps understanding.

Ask learners if they would like to share the best and worst thing that happened to them this week in pairs, and then maybe to the whole class.





## 3 (more) things...

Tell the learners 3 things you saw on your way to class.

Invite them to ask you as many questions as they can to find out more.

Next, ask them to tell their partner 3 things they saw on their way to class, ask questions and remember what their partner has told them.

Ask learners to report back to the whole class what their partner saw.

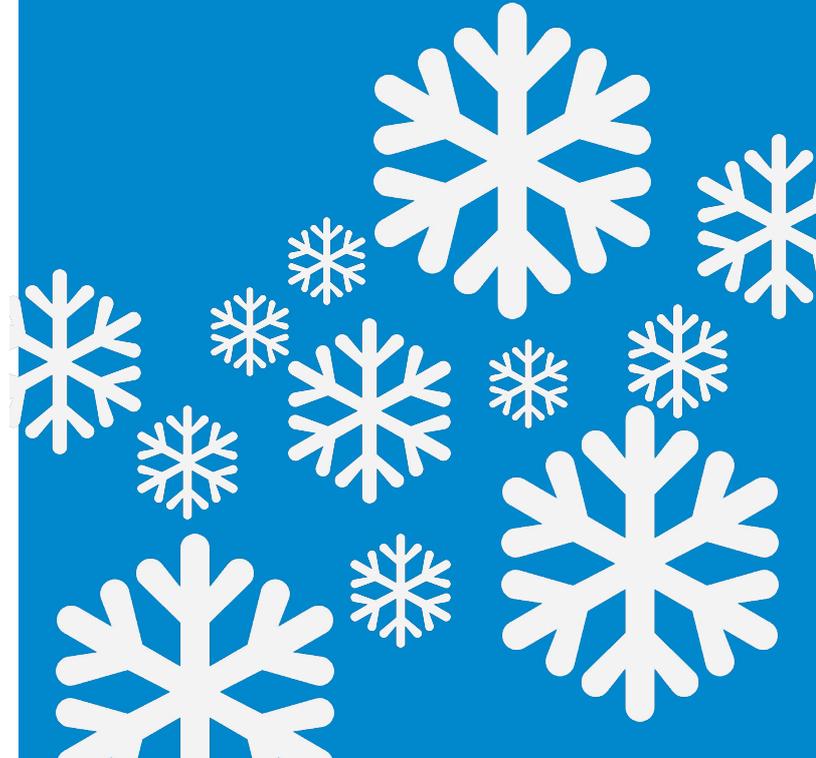
# Snowball fight

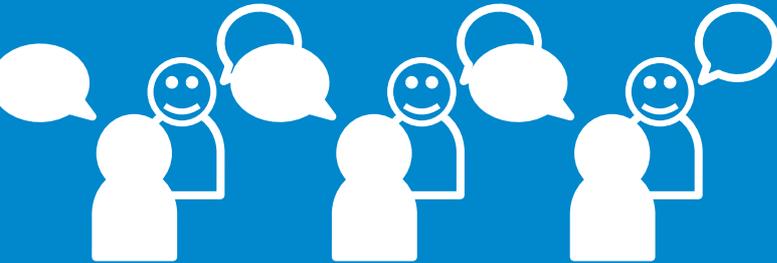
Write 3 questions on the board. For example, *What's your favourite food / place to go at the weekend / book?*

Tell learners to answer the 3 questions on 3 pieces of scrap paper. Don't write anything else!

Each learner should then scrunch up their pieces of paper into 'snowballs' and have a fight.

Then tell learners to pick up 3 'snowballs' and ask other people the questions ("What's your favourite...") until you find the person who wrote it.





# Speed dating

Set up the room so that every learner can face a partner: you can use 2 rows of chairs, pairs at tables café-style, or stand in two rows.

Prepare the learners to ask and answer some questions. This could be a simple drill (e.g. personal information questions) or a role play (e.g. making an appointment at the doctor).

Give a time limit for each pair to ask and answer the questions or do the role play, then rotate one row so learners speak to someone new.

Repeat until learners have spoken to everyone in the opposite row. If you're doing a role play you could repeat the activity with the roles swapped.

# Music mingle

Adapted from: *ESOL Activities: Pre-entry* by Elisabeth Babenko, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Elicit from learners any greetings they know.

Draw a sun and a moon to elicit day and night, and write am, pm and eve on the board.

Ask the learners what greeting we use in the morning, afternoon and evening and write up good morning, good afternoon and good evening.

Tell them that you are going to play some music and they should walk around.

When the music stops playing, shout out a time, e.g. “10 am” / “10 o’clock in the morning”.

The learners should greet as many people as they can with the time-appropriate greeting until the music starts again, and so on.





# Guess the picture

Choose a large picture related to the topic you are teaching or want to introduce.

Cover the picture up with post-it notes (or create a digital equivalent if you can use a smartboard).

Reveal a small part of the picture and invite learners to guess what it is. Encourage them to say as much as they can about what they can see and make guesses.

Gradually reveal parts of the picture until they can guess correctly.



# Backs to the board

Put learners in pairs, and ask one member of each pair to sit with their back to the board and the other facing it.

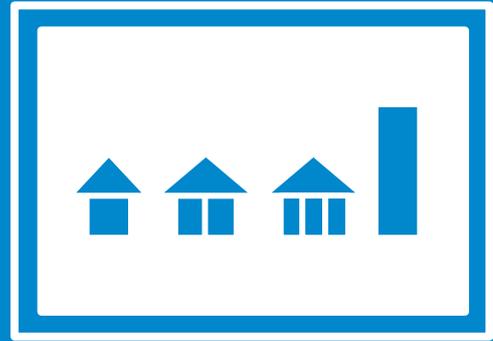
Give mini whiteboards or paper and pens to the learners with their backs to the board.

Put a picture, photograph or poster on the board, or draw your own.

Ask the learners facing the board to describe the picture so that their partner can draw it without looking.

Compare drawings before looking to check.

Ask learners to swap positions and repeat with a different picture.



# Total Physical Response (TPR)

There are a few examples of TPR methods in this booklet: here is one to use for teaching directions.

Ask learners to stand in a line. Introduce “turn left”, “turn right” and “go straight on” and get them to move to follow your directions. Repeat many times, changing the order.

Add a drilling stage where they repeat back your direction while doing the movement.

Draw or mark out a simple map/plan on the floor with chalk or masking tape and have learners give each other directions from one place to another.

Practise giving directions to places in your venue or nearby.



# Musical TPR

A well known example of this type of activity is the children's action song "Heads, shoulders, knees and toes" but there are many possible variations.

Choose a song with clear lyrics related to the topic, or that you think your learners might like.

Choose a few words in the song that are repeated and show learners an action to do when they hear each word. Examples could be: stand up, point to something, put hand on head, make a shape with arms/hands.

Play the song and do the actions together. Play it again so they have another chance to get it right. Play it again while you sit down so they can't copy you.



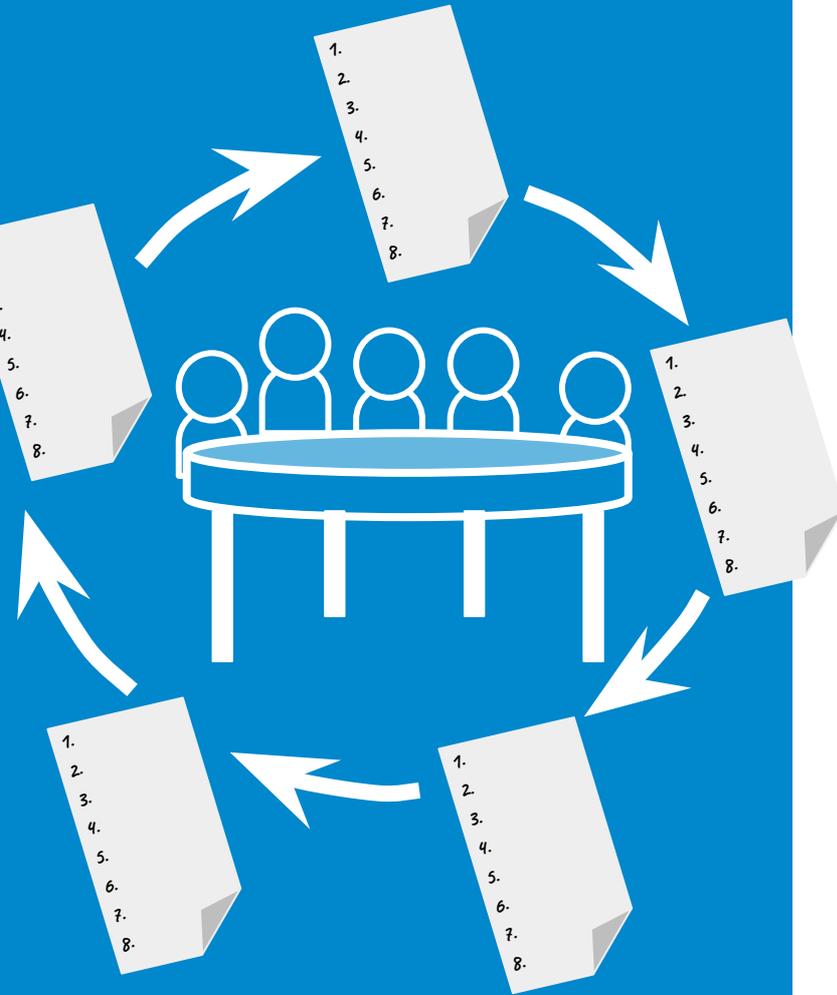
# Circle dictation

Choose 8 words or phrases that your class have been learning to spell. Give learners a piece of scrap paper each and tell learners to write numbers 1-8 down the side.

Dictate the first word and tell the learners to write what they hear with correct spelling. Then ask them to pass their paper to the person on their right in a circle, so that everyone now has a different piece of paper.

Tell learners to look at the previous person's spelling. Did they write it the same? Is it correct? Don't mark it yet - just look.

Dictate the second word and tell learners to write this on the new paper. Pass this to the right and repeat. Finally, check and mark the spellings together.



# 10 things...

Have learners tell you 10 sentences about themselves beginning, “I am”, “I can”, “I have” or “I like”.

(You can adjust the number to suit the level of your learners.)

You could model this first yourself. Give learners plenty of time to think and let them draw or write some prompts.

Or use this to review vocabulary in pairs or teams: name 10 things that are big / small / green / you can eat / you can wear / you have in your kitchen / in the classroom.

