

The Human Body - A Vocabulary Awareness Activity in Four Steps

Rolf Palmberg

[rpalmber \[at\] abo.fi](mailto:rpalmber[at]abo.fi)

Department of Teacher Education, Abo Akademi University, Finland

This is a vocabulary activity aimed at practising words relating to the human body. At the same time it will increase learners' awareness of word relationships and translational equivalence.

Step One

Give each learner (or pair of learners) a picture of the human body and ask them to identify the meaning of the main parts of the body, either productively (by filling in the words they already know and using dictionaries to find the remaining ones) or receptively (by combining words with the appropriate parts of the body and, again, using dictionaries if necessary):

Relevant vocabulary items include arm, back, chest, ear, eye, face, foot, hand, head, knee, leg, mouth, neck, nose, shoulder etc.

Step Two

Ask the learners (in pairs, and using dictionaries) to answer the following questions:

1. What similarities are there between a chair and a human being?
(Answer: Both have legs and a back, and sometimes arms.)
2. What is the similarity between a clock, a coin, a house and a mountain?
(Answer: They all have faces.)
3. What is the similarity between a needle and a potato?
(Answer: Both have eyes and yet cannot see.)
4. Who has hands but cannot touch?
(Answer: the clock.)
5. Who has a mouth but cannot drink?
(Answer: the bottle or the river.)

When the learners have finished, challenge them to come up with similar riddles involving body words.

Step Three

Ask the learners to consult their dictionaries and compose their own TOP TEN lists of useful phrases and expressions which include different body words (e.g. 'second-hand shop', 'keep an eye on things', 'head of department', 'give someone a hand'). When they have finished, ask them to share/compare their lists with their classmates.

Step Four

Ask the learners to choose five of the body words and look them up in a dictionary. What other meanings do they have? Are the additional/extended meanings the same as in the learners' mother tongue? If not, what differences are there? Next, ask the learners to share/compare their findings with their classmates.

