

75 ESL Teaching Ideas

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Introduction

These are the ideas included in [Hall Houston's Random ESL Idea Generator](#). If you have a JavaScript-enabled browser, you can use the generator to get a randomly-selected idea from this list. Perhaps you will find it useful to print out this list and refer to it from time to time.

The Ideas

1. Alter the pacing of your class. If you rush through your class at full speed, slow things down and take time to ask your students personal questions based on the materials you are using. If you tend to proceed at a snail's pace, prepare some additional activities and push yourself to accomplish more than you usually do.
2. Ask a student to demonstrate a dance, and assist the student in explaining the movements in English.
3. Ask students to name as many objects in the classroom as they can while you write them on the board.
4. Ask students to present to the class a gesture that is unique to their own culture.
5. Ask students to write one question they would feel comfortable answering (without writing their name) on an index card. Collect all of the index cards, put them in a bag, have students draw cards, and then ask another student the question on that card.
6. Ask your students if there are any songs running through their heads today. If anyone says yes, encourage the student to sing or hum a little bit, and ask the others if they can identify it.
7. Assign students to take a conversation from their coursebook that they are familiar with and reduce each line to only one word.
8. At the end of class, erase the board and challenge students to recall everything you wrote on the board during the class period. Write the expressions on the board once again as your students call them out.
9. Begin by telling your students about an internal struggle between two sides of your personality (bold side vs. timid side OR hardworking side vs. lazy side), providing a brief example of what each side says to you. After a few minutes of preparation in pairs, have students present their struggles to the class.
10. Bring a cellular phone (real or toy) to class, and pretend to receive calls throughout the class. As the students can only hear one side of the conversation, they must guess who is calling you and why. Make the initial conversation very brief, and gradually add clues with each conversation. The student who guesses correctly wins a prize.
11. Bring a fork, knife, spoon, bowl, plate and chopsticks (if you have them) to class, and mime eating some different dishes, letting students guess what they are. Then let your students take a turn.
12. Bring an artifact from the student's culture to class, and ask them questions about it.
13. Bring in some snacks that you think your students haven't tried before, and invite the students to sample them and give their comments.
14. Call on a student to draw his or her country's flag on the board, then teach him or her how to describe the flag to the class (It has three stripes...).
15. Choose one topic (food, sports) and elicit a list of examples (food - chicken, pudding, rice). Then have your student come up with the most unusual combinations of items from that list(chocolate-beef or wrestling-golf).
16. Collaborate with your students on a list of famous people, including movie stars, politicians, athletes, and artists. Have every student choose a famous person, and put them in pairs to interview each other.
17. Come to class dressed differently than usual and have students comment on what's different.
18. Copy a page from a comic book, white out the dialogue, make copies for your class, and have them supply utterances for the characters.
19. Copy pages from various ESL textbooks (at an appropriate level for your students), put them on the walls, and have students wander around the classroom and learn a new phrase. Then have them teach each other what they learned.

20. Copy some interesting pictures of people from magazine ads. Give a picture to each student, have the student fold up the bottom of the picture about half an inch, and write something the person might be thinking or saying. Put all the pictures up on the board, and let everyone come up and take a look.
21. Describe something observable in the classroom (while looking down), and tell students to look in the direction of what you described.
22. Draw a map of your country or another country that your students know well. By drawing lines, show students where you went on a trip, and tell them about it. Then call on several students to do the same. The trips can be truthful or fictional.
23. Draw a pancake-shape on the board, and announce that the school will soon be moving to a desert island. Invite students one by one to go to the board and draw one thing they would like to have on the island.
24. Draw a party scene on the board, and invite students to come up and draw someone they would like to have at the party.
25. Empty a bag of coupons onto a table, and have students find a coupon for a product that they have no need for.
26. Experiment with how you write on the board, altering your writing style, the size of the letters, the direction you write, and the color of the chalk/pens.
27. Explain to your students what it means to call someone a certain animal (dog, pig, fox) in English, and then ask them what these mean in their languages.
28. Fill the board with vocabulary your students have encountered in previous classes (make sure to include all parts of speech), and get them to make some sentences out of the words.
29. Find out what famous people your students admire, and work together with the class to write a letter to one of them.
30. Find out what your students are interested in early on in the semester. Go to the Internet from time to time to collect articles on these subjects for students to read during the class period.
31. First, instruct your students to write on a slip of paper the name of one book, CD, or movie that changed them in some way. Collect the papers, call out the titles, and ask the class if they can guess who wrote it. Finally, let the writer identify him or herself, explaining his or her choice.
32. Give each student a piece of chalk/pen and tell them to fill the board with pop song lyrics. Then put them in pairs, and get them to use the words on the board to create a new dialogue.
33. Give students a reward (such as a candy or a sticker) each time they take the artificial language in your textbook and turn it into an authentic question or comment about someone in the class.
34. Hand a student a ball of yellow yarn. Have him toss it to another student, while saying something positive about that student and holding onto the end of the yarn. Continue in this manner until there is a web between all the students.
35. Hand each student an index card, and tell them to write down a sentence that includes an error they have made this week, along with the correct version of the sentence. Next, tape all of the index cards on the board for students to look over.
36. Hang up four different posters (example - one of a world map, one of a famous singer, one of a flower, and one of Einstein) in the four corners of your room. Tell students to choose one corner to stand in, and talk about why they chose that poster.
37. Have each student make a list of the five most useful phrases for tourists visiting an English speaking country.
38. Have students come to the board one by one, draw a poster for an English language movie (without the title) they think the other students have seen, and let the other students guess which movie it is.
39. Hire a musician (flute? harmonica? banjo?) to play for a few minutes of your class period.
40. In small groups, have your students design a billboard for something other than a product (wisdom, humility, friendship, etc.).
41. Inquire to see if your students have any unusual talents (can wiggle their ears, can bark like a dog), and encourage them to demonstrate.
42. Instead of saying "Very good!" all the time, vary the ways you praise (and correct) students as much as possible.
43. Instruct your students to find something in their wallets/purses/pencil boxes, and tell the story behind it.
44. Invite your students to stand up and explore the classroom from new angles (look in drawers, under desks, behind posters, on top of cabinets). Then have students report their findings.
45. Just a few minutes before the bell rings, call on your students to choose the ten most useful words they came in contact with during this class period, then have them narrow it down to the three most useful words.
46. Pass around some magazines, and have each student choose an ad that he or she likes. Give students an opportunity to explain their choices.
47. Play a listening activity from your book an additional time with the lights turned off.
48. Play a recording of instrumental music and have some students draw on the board what the music makes them think of.
49. Play five very different sounds from a sound effects tape or CD, and assign students in pairs to create a story based on three of the sounds.
50. Play music that enhances certain activities (quiet music for a reading activity, dance music for an energetic TPR activity). Ask your students for their reactions.
51. Prepare colored letters of the alphabet on cardboard squares and put them in a bag. Students must draw a letter from the bag,

and work together to create a sentence on the board. Each student must raise his or her hand to make a contribution, but the word the student calls out must begin with the letter he or she chose. Put the expanding sentence on the board, adding words only when they the grammar is correct.

52. Prepare several paper bags, each with a different scent inside (perfume, cinnamon, cheese), pass the bags around the class, and let students describe what they smell.
53. Print phrases such as "in the library" "at an elegant dinner with the Royal Family" "in a noisy bar" "in a dangerous neighborhood" on separate strips of paper, put them in envelopes, and tape them to the underside of a few students' desks/tables before they arrive. Write on the board a useful expression like "Excuse me. Could I borrow a dollar?" When students arrive, tell them to look for an envelope under the desks/tables. The ones who find envelopes must say the sentence on the board as if in the context written on the page. Other students must guess the context from the student's tone of voice and body language.
54. Produce a list of commonly used sentence-modifying adverbs on the board, such as suddenly, actually, unfortunately, and happily. Then launch into a story, which each student must contribute to, with the rule that everyone must begin the first sentence of his or her contribution with a sentence-modifying adverb.
55. Provide each student with a list of the current top ten popular songs. Play excerpts from some or all of the songs, and choose some questions to ask your students, such as: Did you like the song? Have you heard this song before? How did the song make you feel? What instruments did you hear?
56. Purchase a postcard for each member of your class, writing his or her name in the name and address space. Turn them picture side up on a table, have each student choose one (without looking at the name), then he or she will write a message to the person whose name is on the other side. If a student chooses the postcard that has his or her own name on it, the student must choose again.
57. Put students in pairs and ask them to guess three items in their partner's wallet/purse/pencil box.
58. Put students in pairs. Tell them to converse, but to deliberately make one grammatical error over and over, stopping only when one student can spot the other's intentional error.
59. Put students into small groups to create an application form for new students to the school.
60. Put the students in small groups, and ask each group to plan a vacation for you. They must plan where you will go, what you will do, who you will go with, and what you will buy. When they are finished, have each group present their plans.
61. Review a phrase or sentence that you want students to remember, by holding a competition to see "Who can say it the loudest/the quietest/the quickest/the slowest/in the deepest voice/in the highest pitched voice?".
62. Set up a board in your classroom where students can buy and sell used items from each other by writing notes in English.
63. Supply each student with a copy of the entertainment section of the local newspaper, and tell them to choose somewhere to go next weekend.
64. Take a particularly uninteresting page from your coursebook, and put students in groups to redesign it.
65. Teach on a different side of the room than you usually do.
66. Tell each student to report the latest news in their country or city to the class.
67. Tell your students to practice a conversation from their coursebook that they are familiar with, but this time they can only use gestures, no words.
68. When they are practicing a dialogue, have students play around with the volume, intonation, pitch, or speed of their voices.
69. Write "Tell me something I don't know." on the board, then ask students questions about things they know about and you don't, such as their lives, cultural background, interests, and work.
70. Write a common adjacency pair (Thank you./You're welcome OR I'm sorry./That's alright) on the board. Ask students if they know of any expressions that could replace one of the ones you just wrote. Write any acceptable answers on the board.
71. Write a number of adjectives, such as mysterious, happy, peaceful, sad, angry, and frustrated on the board. Call out a color, and ask your students to tell you which adjective they associate with that color.
72. Write a word on a slip of paper and show it to a student. This student must whisper it to the second student. Then the second student must draw a picture of what he or she heard, and show it to the third student. The third student, then, writes the word that represents the picture and shows it to the fourth student. Then the fourth student whispers it to the fifth student.... and so on. This continues until you get to the last student, who must say the word to the class.
73. Write an idiomatic expression (such as "It beats me." or "I'm fed up.") in big letters on the board. Call on a few students to guess what it means before you tell them.
74. Write down the names of about five very different people on the board (a small baby, a rude waiter in a restaurant, a fashion model, a stranger in a crowd, and a grandfather). Give students a common expression, such as "Good morning!" or "Sorry!", and ask students how they might say it differently when talking to a different person.
75. Write your name on the board vertically, and add a suitable adjective that begins with each letter of your name. The next step is to invite students to do the same.

<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Houston-TeachingIdeas.html>