

Vocabulary Teaching Using Student-Written Dialogues

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One way to motivate students to learn new vocabulary words is to have them write their own short dialogues. You can model this by first reviewing ten vocabulary words the way you and the class likes best. Then, using the entire class as your partner, compose and write a dialogue on the board. Humorous dialogues are more effective than others. Here's a step-by-step approach:

1. Model the exercise, you and the class writing a dialogue together. In lower-ability groups, the teacher may write the dialogue; in advanced classes, volunteer students may do this.
2. Pair students, let them do the same. (4 or 5 minutes)
3. Have the pairs of students exchange dialogues. (1 min.)
4. Have the new pair practice the dialogue, making any changes to correct grammar or improve the dialogue. (3 minutes)
5. Have the second pair present the edited version to the original writers. (2 minutes)
6. Have the four discuss the dialogues, process, feedback, etc. in English (2-4 minutes)
7. A few options may then be discussed and one chosen:
 - a. pass the dialogues around the room for students to read (5 min.)
 - b. collect the dialogues to use in another creative way, (basis for quizzes, a Dialogue Book for the semester, suggestions from students, etc.), or
 - c. rip them up and have the students basket-ball toss them into the garbage.
8. The teacher does not grade, review, or correct.

This exercise gives students the opportunity to read, write, and practice and/or perform without much anxiety. The exercise can be introduced in one class period. Once established, however, you can use it once a week. When it becomes a habit, the whole process can be completed within 15-20 minutes.

When doing such exercises, it is often wise to time each step. Short time allotments discourage timidity. Vary the suggested times, according to the students' levels of comfort and production.

I owe the basic idea of this exercise to Ms. Ibtisam Ali who gently suggested it when she was my student at the United Arab Emirates University. She is now an English teacher herself in the UAE.