

Motivating ESI/EFL Students to Write a Complaint Letter

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Introduction

The objective of this task-based lesson is to have students write a complaint letter based on their own research, which will lead to a face-to-face meeting to discuss the problems in more detail. It was essentially designed for classes where students didn't particularly enjoy formal letter writing activities. It aims to show that the writing procedure is intertwined with the other skills of speaking, reading and listening in the problem-solving process. Students are asked to use their mobile phones in this class (which in some schools may challenge the rules). The involvement of mobile phones not only provides stimulus for students to draft their letters, but also aids talking time when it comes to the discussion. There is a lot to cover in a 90 minute-class, so keep on top of your pacing.

Method

Ask students to write down three physical problems with their school, for example, no lockers or a lack of vending machines, on a sheet of paper. Tell the students they have 10 minutes to go out and collect photographic evidence of the problems.

In previous lessons, students have been taught how to write business letters. Quickly revise the main components of a complaint letter then have students write a letter to the school's president. In closing, the letter requests a meeting to discuss the problems in person. This requires the students to include their real mobile phone number in the letter, so to avoid privacy problems with divulging phone numbers, get each student's approval to pass their number onto another student.

Sample a telephone conversation between you, as the president's assistant, and a student in regard to arranging a meeting time.

Have students pick up their phones, exchange letters with another student on the other side of the room then return to stand against the wall on their side of the room. Allocate roles to each side: students and president's assistants.

Have students call each other on their phones to arrange an appointment time for their meeting. Swap roles then make them call again. It gets a little noisy so it might be an idea to forewarn the instructor in the next classroom.

Bring the pairs together in roles as either student or president. Allow five to seven minutes for the discussion of the problems and viewing of photos then swap roles for the same amount of time. It is best if the instructor just plays the role of timekeeper and doesn't monitor the content of the discussions. Let the students have fun with the activity.

For homework, students correct the letter they have received from their partner and return it during the next lesson.

Conclusion

By making students actually call each other in their roles rather than pretend to be calling seems to encourage them to take the speaking activity more seriously. All four skills are covered and hopefully a lot of fun will be derived from the lesson by the students and instructor.
