

Strategies/Ideas for Introducing and Practicing Vocabulary

Typically we use a combination of the following:

- Vocabulary list – on gold paper!
- Pictures to be identified
- Student-generated matching activity
- Flashcards
- Crossword puzzle: puzzlemaker.com
- What doesn't fit?
- Riddles/tips/definitions
- Translations
- Bingo (students make computer-generated game "boards")

Row Games

Predicting Pronunciation

Preparation: Prepare an overhead with 25 vocabulary words that students have not seen before. I use a dictionary to choose random words; these contain the difficulties that students often have in pronunciation.

The game: Divide the class evenly into vertical rows of 4 or 5. Place the transparency on the projector so that it is visible to everyone in the class. Cover up the words with a piece of paper, unveiling each word only when the row is ready to compete.

Once you have unveiled the new word, students take a few seconds to ponder pronunciation. When they think they can say it absolutely correctly, they raise their hands. If the first person pronounces the word correctly, his/her team gets the point. If the pronunciation is incorrect, one of the competitors can attempt to pronounce it. If no one in the competing teams can say it correctly, it is opened up to the next set of competitors (the persons sitting directly behind the students who have just competed). Once the correct pronunciation has been given, the next word is unveiled for the next round of competition.

Recycling Vocabulary with Picture Flashcards

Preparation: Select pictures you have used in other levels, random pictures from magazines, flashcards from educational companies, etc.

The game: Divide the class evenly into vertical rows of 4 or 5. If the class is very large, I have students turn their desks sideways so that the rows are very long. I then stand at the end of the group, facing the students. Using the same model as above, I show a picture and the contestants say the word as quickly as possible. The first person to say the word correctly gets the point. I pass the picture to the person sitting at the head of the row; at the end of the game, the number of pictures received is the number of points won by the team.

At different levels I vary the complexity of the task. I might ask for the s/he verb conjugation of irregular verbs, I might ask what is sitting on the roof of the house, or where is the mouse sitting.

2 + 1

Preparation: Prepare an overhead with 2 words in the target language that can be followed by a third word in the same category. Example: Horse, cow, _____. Words can be abstract or concrete, nouns or verbs, adjectives or adverbs.

The game: Using the same technique as in the predicting pronunciation game, students compete to say a word that follows the pattern and is of the same category. If no one in the first set of competitors can think of a word, the students sitting directly behind those students who have just attempted to fill the blank have the opportunity to try to do the same. The team that can complete the most blanks, wins.

Add-A-Sentence Game

This game can be used to practice verbs in various tenses, to retell a story, to recall information from a non-fiction text, etc.

Preparation: Select a picture that has a lot of detail. Have students work with a partner. Students may want to have a list of verbs, adjectives, etc. to work from. Give students a time in which to complete the task (10-15 minutes). Using their lists, students write as many short sentences as they can, identifying detail and varying the verbs (vocabulary) used. Time is called and students are organized into rows. The sentences that students have written are then used during the game.

The game: The first person in row A has five seconds to begin the sentence. The past tense verb must be correct or no points are awarded. Next the first person in row B selects a sentence to read. If the verb is correct, a point is awarded and the game moves on to the first person in row C. Once the first person in each row has had a chance to say a sentence, the game moves to the second person in each row, etc. until everyone has had the opportunity to say a sentence. I often do a second round. The team with the most sentences containing correct verbs in past tense wins.

Add-a-word

Preparation: Choose categories or themes that you can use to illicit old vocabulary for example: colors, animals, countries, cities of Spain, objects in the classroom, in the hospital, question words, etc. This is a review game. The students ideally should be in rows and will compete as teams against the other rows. If you have uneven amounts of students in the rows you can always have them take on roles to facilitate the fluidity of the game. The Score-keeper and Time-keeper take the burden off of the Teacher.

The Game: The Teacher reveals the board and the first student in the first row has five seconds to think of a word that fits the category otherwise their team does not earn a point. Then it goes to the first student in row two - horizontally moving across the classroom. Teacher may change the theme at any time by putting a new transparency up on the screen. Game time is when the Time-keeper comes in handy because they hold the burden for calling time on the students. The row (from the front to the back of the class) with the most points earns the reward -Extra credit is nice, but candy always is a great motivator.

The Hot Seat

Preparation: Teacher creates definitions or hints to signal the current vocabulary. Students need to be familiar with the vocabulary in order to guess.

The Game: Students again compete in rows. Teacher reserves the right to change the seating. The front desk of each row needs to be pulled forward to make it “the hot seat.” The students in the first seats listen as the Teacher provides the hint or definition. The first student to have her/his hand up must give the answer in less than 5 seconds. If s/he cannot the team loses a point for having the hand up, but not knowing the answer. In order to make it less rotational moving for the students and more of a chance to use their knowledge, the people in “the hot seat” will have three opportunities to see if they can earn a point as opposed to one-and-done and then rotate. A Score-keeper is very helpful in this game.

\$25,000 pyramid

Preparation: Teacher creates several cards with a list of words from the current vocabulary list for each group. Students need to be familiar with the vocabulary in order to guess.

The Game: This game is better suited for smaller classes. Students pair up: one will be giving the definitions or hints and the other will guess the words. The object is to see how many they can get (and who has the best definitions). All variations are welcome. One way is that the student with the card of words comes up to the front of the class and states aloud their own created definitions or hints while the rest of the students try to figure out the word. This could be set up as a row game in which the students with the cards come to the front and state aloud their own definitions or hints while the students compete as teams in their rows for example: The students sitting in the first seats of each row compete against each other, then the students in the second seats, and so on.

The Longest Sentence

In this game, students work in teams to create the longest possible sentence that includes as much new vocabulary as possible. Students should be grouped into teams of about four or five; this game works well if each team is seated in a horizontal row.

The teacher begins with team one and asks the first student to give a word in the target language. The teacher then writes this word on the overhead projector so that it is visible to all. The next member of that team must add a new word, then the next member, and so on. The same team continues to add words to their sentence until the teacher identifies a grammatical error, an illogical word choice, or any other violation of the rules. At that point the game moves on to the second team. They begin their own sentence, adding on one word at a time until someone makes an error. This game can continue for as long as the teacher would like. At the end, the teacher adds up each team's points. The team with the most points wins.

Scoring:

- Each word is worth 1 point. But...
- Any word that comes off the vocabulary list is worth 2 points.

Rules:

- Sentences must be logical and coherent.

- Sentences must be grammatically accurate.
- Students may not create lists in their sentences (for example, She bought bread, butter, chicken, fish, cereal...)
- The word “and” may only be used once (you may wish to limit other conjunctions as well.)
- Students may not copy the sentences of other teams.
- Students may not give each other word suggestions.

Group games

Pictionary

Preparation: White boards, dry erase markers, erasers, (or pen and paper), and a vocabulary list. This game is great for review or whether the students are just beginning to learn the words. Teacher may make the lists for the people drawing. It is more fun when the kids think up their own order of words to draw from the list.

The Game: Ask for 6 volunteers to draw. Teacher puts the rest of the students in groups. The idea is for the person drawing to show by pictorial representation to each group as many words from the current vocabulary list. The students drawing have two minutes. Time is called and a score of how many words were correctly guessed is recorded by the person drawing. Only the students drawing then rotate clockwise and have another two minutes to show the new group as many words as possible via drawings without words. A second score is recorded and finally it is the third and last chance before someone else has the chance to draw. This game, like golf, needs to be played honestly. The student with the most points earns the reward. The team that guessed the most correct answers also earns the reward.

Four Corners

Preparation: Choose approximately 15 vocabulary terms to use for this game. For each term, it is necessary to create a clue or definition in the target language. The teacher can do this, or he/she can ask the students to write the clues.

Next, prepare an overhead transparency with all of the definitions. The actual words should not be included on the transparency. However, the students should have a vocabulary list to refer to as needed.

The game: Project the transparency onto a screen so that all of the definitions are easily visible. Go over the definitions once to make sure that all students are able to match the terms to the definitions.

Four students compete at a time. They come up to the front of the room and stand in the four corners of an imaginary box. The teacher calls on a member of the audience to read one clue or definition of his/her choosing. The four competitors must listen, and then race to give the correct vocabulary term. The first competitor to say the correct word moves one space clockwise. The student in that corner gets “bumped” and must sit down. The teacher then calls on another audience member to provide a different clue, and the process continues. The last of the four competitors to be left standing is the winner. The teacher can then choose 4 new students to play.

Circumlocution Games

These games work along the lines of old favorites like Password and Taboo. They are all games that require students to use circumlocution techniques to get other students to identify a specific vocabulary term.

Variation 1

The teacher prepares either an overhead transparency or a PowerPoint presentation with about 18 vocabulary terms. The terms should be in groups of three. Students sit with a partner. You might ask them to arrange their desks so that only one student is facing the screen where the vocabulary will be visible. Alternatively, you can instruct one student in each group to simply look away so that he/she can't see the terms.

The teacher reveals three vocabulary terms to the first partner. The students must use the target language to talk about each term, with the goal of getting their partners to guess each one in the allotted time (typically 30 seconds or so.) The partners then switch roles, and the teacher reveals three new words. This process repeats: three words at a time, until all of the vocabulary terms have been used.

Variation 2

Like the first variation, students work with a partner. The teacher must prepare two different lists (A and B) with 10 to 15 words each. The teacher then gives the A list to one partner and the B list to the other. The students' goal is to use circumlocution to get their partners to identify as many words as possible off of their lists. The teacher chooses a time limit for each partner (usually 2 to 3 minutes.) He/She then instructs partner A to begin. At the end of 2 minutes, the teacher then instructs partner B to do the same thing.

Variation 3

To prepare for this variation, the teacher will need about 8 index cards. He/she should write 5 different vocabulary terms on each card. To play the game, the teacher divides the class into two groups. The first group sends up a volunteer who stands in front of the class. This student is given one of the index cards. Working with a time limit (1-1½ minutes,) he or she must get the members of his/her team to guess as many words as possible. Each word wins the team a point. After time is up, the second team sends up a volunteer who does the same thing. The team with the most points wins.

Row Game Variation **Predict the Meaning**

This is a fun and effective way to present new vocabulary. It also works well as a pre-reading activity. It requires students to draw on previous knowledge (cognates, related vocabulary terms, prefixes, suffixes, etc.) to predict the meaning of new target language words.

Preparation: Create a list of new vocabulary terms that you believe that students will be able to identify. Print this list on an overhead transparency, or prepare a PowerPoint presentation with a different word on each slide. Because the game typically moves fast, it works best with a list that is somewhat long—at least 20 words, if not more.

The game: Teams should be seated in vertical rows. Ideally, each row should have the same number of students. However, the game will still work with uneven rows; students just have to pay more attention to know when their turn is coming up.

The teacher reveals the first word. All of the students in the first seat then try to figure out the word's meaning. Once a student thinks that he/she's got it, the student stands up. The teacher calls on the first student to stand. If he/she gives the correct translation, that student wins a point for his/her team. If not, the teacher can continue to call on students from the first group until someone gets it. Then the teacher reveals the second word. Now the game moves on to students in the second seat. The first student to stand up and give the correct meaning wins the next point. The game then moves to the third seat, the fourth, the fifth, back to the first seat, and so on, until all of the words have been used. The team with the most points wins.

