

Selman, Mary. 1979. *An Introduction To Teaching English as a Second Language To Adults*. Vancouver, B.C.: Pampas Press.

About the Author

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Self-Introductions

(continued from page 20)

When everybody is present, introduce yourself, casually, while facing the class. Speak as you would normally to a group of native-speaking strangers, in a friendly tone of voice. Then go to the board and introduce yourself again, drawing attention to each of the sentences as you say them. Do this a third time, pausing after each sentence to give the students time to focus on the different utterances.

The Next Steps

Next you should teach the correct pronunciation and intonation of the various sentences, perhaps having the students repeat them chorally after you. At first you can have them repeat your own self-introduction, and later have them substitute their own names, hometowns, jobs, etc. (after all, not everybody is named Rube).

When you feel that the class has learned these sentences fairly well, go back to the board and try to solicit appropriate questions for each of the sentences you have written. Even in beginning classes there will usually

be at least one student able to come up with the right question, i.e., "What is your name?" Write these student-generated questions on the board, suggesting changes when absolutely necessary. Then, if desired, go over the material showing some of the important differences between written and spoken language. Pedagogically this can be very important, as it points out from the very first day of class one of the major difficulties of learning English as a foreign/second language. You can then go on to have students practice the questions.

The next step is to have volunteers take turns asking you the questions, in any order. You will, of course, answer them truthfully, in a communicative manner.

Pair or Group Work

The next step is very important. You have finished presenting the material, using a whole-class technique. Now you want the class to practice, using a small-group or paired technique, moving from rote work to a more communicative activity.

Divide the class into pairs or small groups and have them practice their own self-introductions. This not only introduces the students to each other, which is extremely important in a humanistic classroom (you have to know something about someone else in order to begin to feel at ease with him and to begin to form some kind of a relationship), but also initiates them to pair practice (or small group work). The students will begin to rely on themselves and each other from the very first day of class. While the students are practicing, you, the teacher, go around the class, working with each group or pair, correcting when asked to, and supplying the necessary vocabulary for each individual self-introduction.

You can end up the period (or activity) with a "mixer," where the students go around the room introducing themselves to the other members of the class. Or, if you want, you can call on volunteers to introduce themselves in front of the class, or have the class ask selected volunteers some of the questions they have been practicing.

It is important to use only volunteers in these activities, as many people are naturally shy about speaking (even in their own language) in front of strangers. Others may not want to show what they know until they feel that they have mastered it. Still others just might not want everybody to know who they are or where they come from. (To get around this I let the students know that they always have the right to "pass" or, better yet, to make something up rather than sticking strictly to the "truth.")

Advantages to Teacher & Students

The self-introductory activities described above can help you on that all-important first day in class in several important ways.

Perhaps most importantly, they can help you create an atmosphere where real language learning can take place. People get to know each other in a friendly, supportive atmosphere, using real language to talk about real and important things—themselves.

Students also begin to learn to count on themselves and to take responsibility for their own learning.

Pedagogically, the students are learning some of the differences between spoken and written language which are so important in English, and to work in pairs and small groups—techniques that they and you will find useful throughout the course.

You, the teacher, will also be learning a lot about the individuals who make up your class right from the beginning, and this is a must if you are going to have an open, humanistic class, where people know, and are interested in, each other.

And finally, it is a "fun" activity, and for better learning to take place, the foreign language class should be fun.

About the Author

Michael "Rube" Redfield (M.A. Stanford) is currently teaching Spanish and English in Nagoya and Osaka, Japan. He has published in the TESL Reporter, English Teaching Forum, Cross Currents, Guidelines, and Hispania, and has given presentations at various conventions: TESOL, RELC, JALT, LAA, and USIS. He is the International Representative-Japan for the TESOL Teaching English Internationally Interest Section.

Self-Introductions for that First Day in a Humanistic Classroom

Michael "Rube" Redfield, Nanzan Women's College

Many beginning (and sometimes veteran) language teachers are understandably nervous before the beginning of their first class meeting in a new term. They are faced with meeting anywhere from six to sixty individuals whom they do not know and who do not know them. They want the year to start off right, but realize the difficulties of getting students who do not know each other to work together using a foreign language.

One successful way to meet this challenge is to start off with self-introductions. I have found the technique described below to be very effective (and affectively valuable also) with beginning to advanced classes in the Orient, the Middle East, and in the Americas.

The Teacher's Self-Introduction

The first thing you should do is to write your own personal self-introduction on the

blackboard before class. This will naturally get the students' attention right away and will show the class that you are prepared, organized, and competent. I prefer an informal classroom, so I use the following self-introduction:

My name is Rube.
I am from Chicago.
I am 34.
I am a teacher.
I live in the barrio Buenos Aires.
I speak English, Spanish, German, French, and Japanese.
I am married, but have no children.
I like sports, books, and beer.

You might prefer a more formal self-introduction or more "difficult" structures, depending on your teaching situation.

(Continued on page 8)

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