

# Using Analogies in the Classroom

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**Analogy:** A similarity or likeness between things in some circumstances or effects when the things are otherwise entirely different.

(*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, 1983.)

Most teachers like to begin English language classes by using some sort of brief "warm up" activity to set the mood and get the students in an English language "mindset." This article, originally inspired by the section on analogies in the United States Information Agency publication *Odds & Ends* (pp. 12-13) suggests a warm-up activity which students not only participate in, but which they also create (resulting in less work for the teacher!).

*Odds & Ends* offers a series of fifteen analogies which can be used to introduce analogies to the class. This introduction can be done with the whole class orally, with students working in pairs or groups, or as a worksheet which the class corrects and discusses together.

Once the students have grasped the idea of analogies, they can begin to write their own. This can be done with as much or as little guidance as the teacher wishes. For example, the teacher can simply say, "Write five analogies," or the teacher can choose to review or exploit a specific content area and say, "Write five analogies that use synonyms," or "Write five analogies that are grammar-based."

The teacher can collect these analogies and use them, a few every day, as material for warm up activities or as 'filler' for the last few minutes of class.

## Some Specific Suggestions

Listed below are suggestions for specific content areas, followed by example analogies:

### I. LEXICAL ANALOGIES

a. synonyms

big:huge

small:(tiny)

(Another format is "Big is to huge as small is to \_\_\_\_\_" (tiny).)

b. antonyms

big:small

love:(hate)

c. American/British lexical differences

NYC:elevator

London:(lift)

d. sex-based differences

female:beautiful

male:(handsome)

e. geography

Paris:Seine

Khartoum:(Nile)

f. nationalities

France:French

Switzerland:(Swiss)

- g. languages  
USA:English  
Mexico:(Spanish)
- h. currency  
Great Britain:pounds  
Italy:(lire)
- i. agents and activities  
pen:letter  
hoe:(field)  
or  
letter:write  
field:(plow)
- j. clothing  
men:pants  
women:(skirt)  
or  
hand:glove  
foot:(shoe)
- k. degree  
like:love  
dislike:(hate)
- l. attributes  
sly:fox  
wise:(owl)
- m. offspring  
dog:puppy  
cat:(kitten)
- n. animal sounds  
dog:bark  
cow:(moo)
- o. cultural differences  
(here, typical foods)  
USA:hamburger  
Burundi:(beans)

## II. GRAMMATICAL ANALOGIES

- a. negative contractions  
is:isn't  
will:(won't)
- b. verb tenses/parts  
is:was  
hit:(hit)  
or  
is:been  
go:(gone)
- c. pluralization  
boy:boys  
child:(children)
- d. subject-verb contractions  
he is:he's  
we would:(we'd)
- e. possessives  
my:mine  
your:(yours)

## III. PHONOLOGICAL ANALOGIES

- a. sound changes  
bit:beet  
hit:(heat)
- b. homophones  
pail:pale  
bare:(bear)
- c. vocalization  
pit:bit  
tame:(dame)

This is only a partial list, of course. Other teachers may come up with equally valid, equally interesting categories. Perhaps you haven't agreed with some of these analogies. That's fine. Think of the language that would be generated in the

classroom as students explain, justify, and defend their word choice to complete the analogy.

For classes with students from different countries and/or language backgrounds, a slight variation in the analogy composing technique can lead to greater mutual understanding among the students. Instead of requiring that an analogy be made between two countries selected by the teacher/analogy writer (cf. analogy I.o), an incomplete, variable cue can be given, as:

USA:hamburger  
your country:(\_\_\_\_\_)

Students then write in their own country's name and fill in the appropriate word to complete the analogy. In classes where there is more than one person from a given country, discussion about the best response may arise. Also, students from different countries may need to explain or describe their answer to the rest of the class. A Senegalese student, for example, who completed the above analogy with "Senegal:ceebujenn" would no doubt need to explain that "ceebujenn" is rice and fish, and then enumerate the ingredients and describe how it is prepared.

It goes without saying that in order to make this exercise successful, the teacher should not give the relationship category of the analogy. That would defeat the purpose of the exercise. It is the students' job to determine the relationship between the first pair of words and then come up with the word that creates the same relationship in the second pair of words. They should then be able to explain and justify their choice.

Analogies can be used at all levels from beginners to advanced students. For low-level students, synonyms, antonyms or

grammar-based analogies can be used. Also, categories that the students already know in their own language (e.g. *geography, currency, etc.*, [cf. analogies I.e, I.f, I.g, I.h above]) are easy to begin with. Language items can be reinforced, reviewed, or even presented and taught for the first time through the use of analogies.

Also, as students seek to convince others of the validity of their selection or discredit the choice of another, a lot of other language comes into play.

An interesting and beneficial variation is to ask students of one class to write analogies for another class of more or less the same level. This creates a sense of group solidarity within each class, and a healthy spirit of competition between classes.

By requiring the students' participation not only in the execution of these analogy activities, but also in their very creation, learner involvement is greater than in many other activities which are either taken from books or developed by the teacher. Thus, students' motivation is high.

A final benefit of this activity is that teachers will probably learn more about their students and their countries and cultures.

#### About the Author

*Susan Rosenfeld received her M.A. degree (TESOL) from Teachers College, Columbia University. She has worked in Africa since 1977, first as a Peace Corps volunteer doing teacher training in Senegal, then as a Fulbright lecturer in Burundi, and now in Niger, directing the English Language Program at the American Cultural Center.*