



Five Easy Ways to Increase Participation and Improve Motivation

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Nearing the end of the semester? Are you or your students feeling burned out? Do you notice fewer and fewer students consistently coming to class? How can you keep students excited about learning English? How can you maintain a pleasant classroom environment right up until the end of the semester? Here are five simple ideas that will surely help.

One Extra Credit Point

It is amazing to see just how much a student will do for just one point. This strategy can be applied to almost any assignment or activity. For example, sometimes teachers walk into class counting on group participation to carry the lesson. If students refuse to participate, the lesson can fail. In this situation, one extra credit point can be an immediate solution to the problem. If each student who participates is awarded one extra credit point, the teacher will soon have many willing volunteers.

Extra credit points are handy for solving a variety of different problems. If students are consistently late, offer an extra credit point to those who arrive on time. If homework assignments are consistently sloppy, offer an extra credit point for neatly typed work. The beautiful aspect of one extra credit point is that it generally does not have a significant effect on student grades, but if it is labeled "extra credit," students are somehow motivated to jump to great heights for that one single point.

Whiteboard Races

Grammar and editing instruction can sometimes become dull and boring. One way to spice up a mundane verb tense or punctuation lesson is to have a whiteboard race. Before class, visualize how many teams can be comfortably accommodated at your whiteboard. Prepare and print a set of sentences with typical, common, or review grammar mistakes

for each team. Print each sentence in large font on a separate sheet of paper. Then, tape them face down on the board in each team's area. In class, divide the students into teams, and have each team send one member to the board. On your signal, one of the sentences is turned over. The first person to correct the sentence appropriately wins a point for his/her team. Students take turns at the board, but they will all remain engaged if they are allowed to coach their teammate who is at the board.

Pop Quizzes

Near the end of a semester, some students can feel overwhelmed, demotivated, or exhausted and may be tempted to miss class. Others consistently arrive late. Still others may choose not to come all. One way to ensure on-time attendance is with pop quizzes. An unannounced quiz may be given at the very beginning of class. It should be very short—just two or three questions and less than five minutes in duration. This way, by the time stragglers arrive, the quiz is over; and no make-up quizzes are allowed. Students quickly learn that if they want to receive credit for the quiz, they must come to class, and they must arrive on time. Students who are always on-time to class are gratified by the pop quizzes because the questions are very easy. In some respects, grading the quiz is unnecessary or at least of secondary importance. If students are there to take it, they probably earn 100 percent. More important, the main part of your lesson can begin with everyone present.

Mind Reading

Attempting to “read the teacher’s mind” is a simple game-like way to help students understand the main idea of a reading passage. It can also be used as a stepping stone in writing summaries. First, distribute or project a high interest, level-appropriate paragraph. One source for such material is the *News of the Weird* website: www.newsoftheweird.com which features incredible stories. (For this reason, teachers need to carefully consider which topics they feel are appropriate for their students, as some of them are quite “racy” or can be difficult for English language learners). Next, have students skim the paragraph. Then announce, “It’s time to read my mind! What are the three key words I have in my mind from this story?” Students guess which three words the teacher has picked as the most important. When one of the three words is guessed correctly, the teacher underlines or highlights it. After all three words have been identified, the class discusses why they might be the most important words. When this activity is done regularly, students gradually show improvement. If time permits, students can write a short one-sentence summary of the paragraph individually or in pairs using the three key words.

Ring around the Paragraph

This activity allows students to practice constructing a paragraph in an entertaining way. Before class, prepare one index card per student by writing a unique topic on each

card. Topics can be random and unrelated (for example *lion*, *Coca-Cola*, *soccer game*, *this classroom*, and *teacher's name*). Vocabulary review words can also be used. Distribute the cards, one to each student. Students sit at individual computers or desks and write a topic sentence about the topic shown on their card. They do the actual writing on a sheet of paper or the computer. When they have had enough time to write their topic sentence, they rotate. Everyone moves one chair to the right. They read the topic sentence in front of them and write a supporting sentence for that topic. Repeat the process of switching chairs, reading, and writing the next sentence several times. Finally, after enough turns have been taken, tell students to write a concluding sentence for the paragraph in front of them. Then, students can return to their original seats and see how their paragraph has morphed. There is usually a lot of laughter.

This activity lends itself to many possible extensions. Teachers can ask for volunteers to read one or two sample paragraphs. Students can critique the paragraphs by looking for coherence and unity. They can check for a clear topic and controlling idea in the topic sentence or fully-developed details in the supporting sentences. Teachers may also ask students to take their paragraphs home and fix any errors in form or organization.

Conclusion

Getting students out of their seats, moving around, and using the target language can increase student motivation and confidence. These activities require little preparation and can be as high tech or no tech as you like or need. The next time the end of the semester rolls around, and you feel like your classes need a little boost, break out one of these activities and get ready for some lively participation.

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