

INSTANT INVOLVEMENT- THOSE VALUABLE FIRST MINUTES IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

by Alice C. Pack

Frequently instructors have problems during the first five minutes in the ESL Classroom, particularly in large classes. Time is often wasted calling the roll, late students straggle in, friends sometimes exchange greetings (often in their native tongues), and, in general, student-teacher rapport develops slowly.

These problems can be almost completely eliminated by utilizing several methods of 'instant involvement.' Various materials, requiring simple preparation, which are described and illustrated in this article, are prepared in advance and distributed immediately when the class is supposed to start. If the material involves student listening, the teacher begins to read immediately; if the materials involve reading or writing, student materials are distributed immediately. Regardless of the number of students present and/or the disorder of the students in the classroom, begin immediately! The teacher should not repeat anything, either materials or instructions, and all student materials are distributed immediately and responses collected promptly at the end of the involvement exercise (usually two or three minutes after the class has started). After the responses are collected, another two or three minutes may be used for giving the answers and/or answering student questions about the selections.

As a student always puts his name at the top of all papers, the roll for the day is taken without using precious classroom minutes. Latecomers hand in a blank sheet of paper with just the student name on top, so teachers also have a record of late attendance. (I have found that there are no latecomers and very few absentees after a few days of using 'instant involvement' exercises in my classes.)

Specific materials used in class should depend on current classroom learning goals.

If the class is primarily aural recognition or oral production, listening exercises are used; if it is primarily a reading class, reading exercises are used; if it is primarily a writing class, writing exercises are used.

An added advantage to that of keeping track of attendance and immediate involvement in an ESL class is the knowledge a teacher can accumulate on the listening, reading, or writing ability of a particular student on a day-to-day basis. If rolls are marked with a correct score over the number of answers (4/9, 7/10, 8/9, etc.) daily improvement can be noted for each student. Then, if teacher-student consultations are held, the teacher can show the progress or non-progress of a student in a particular area and give individual help, out-of-class assignments, or assign students to other classes.

The ten to twenty minutes necessary to prepare these exercises is a small price to pay for the increased classroom help of instant attention and increased activity they provide.

LISTENING EXERCISES

Aural recognition or listening materials may be prepared by selecting short articles from news journals or the daily newspaper. (Students are particularly interested in items about their native countries.)

Make up several true-false or multiple choice questions about the material, using synonyms and/or rephrasing content material. Avoid direct quotes and statistical figures.

At the start of the class small slips of paper with numbers and choice indications (one is reproduced below) are distributed and the teacher begins to read the article. As soon as the article is completed, the questions are read (again without any

repetition). Students mark their papers during this reading. The papers are collected immediately and the teacher reads the correct answers for student information. Students may also ask for word definitions or clarification of some part of the article at this time.

Articles should be read at normal speed--pauses between phrases and clauses may be necessary for beginning classes--but remember there are no repeats, either for the article or the questions.

Some newspaper or journal articles may be used only once as the news becomes 'stale,' but some are of general information and can be used for a year or two.

If the class has a very low level of English comprehension, or if the teacher is too busy to prepare materials, the short one-page 'rate-builder' materials in SRA kits may be used. These are available on levels from grade one through grade eight, and would be suitable for students in beginning and intermediate to advanced classes. (Often listening comprehension is much lower than reading comprehension of the material, as content cannot be reviewed.)

Student Answer Sheet

Name _____

- | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | a | b | c | d | e |
| 2. | a | b | c | d | e |
| 3. | a | b | c | d | e |
| 4. | a | b | c | d | e |
| 5. | a | b | c | d | e |
| 6. | a | b | c | d | e |

Following is an article that is still interesting to students although it is nearly five years old.

(It has been used for several classes.)

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The director of the Detroit zoo hired four new security guards last week, not to contain the wildness within the cages, but to protect the animals from the inhumanity of man. In the past two years, the zoo population has been victimized by deliberate acts of brutality. A baby Australian wallaby left the protection of its mother's pouch and was stoned to death; a duck died with a steel-tipped arrow in its breast. A pregnant reindeer miscarried after firecracker-hurling youths bombed the frantic animal into convulsions. Visitors have been observed dropping lighted cigar butts on the backs of alligators, watching the ashes burn through the reptiles' skin, then breaking into laughter when the alligators reacted to the severe burn. Finally, the zoo's male hippopotamus choked to death last week after someone responded to the hippo's openmouthed begging for peanuts by rolling a tennis ball down its throat. The zookeepers were left to wonder whether it was their charges or their visitors that really should be caged.

1. The director of the Detroit zoo hired
 - a) watchdogs.
 - b) zookeepers.
 - c) guards.
 - d) some animals.
2. The security guards were hired to
 - a) protect the animals from the visitors.
 - b) protect the visitors from the animals.
 - c) protect the baby animals.
 - d) guard against accidents.
3. The injury to the animals by human beings during the last two years has been
 - a) unforeseen.
 - b) accidental.
 - c) unknown.
 - d) deliberate.
4. The zoo mentioned was in
 - a) Chicago.
 - b) New York.
 - c) Detroit.
 - d) Los Angeles.
5. The hippopotamus died because

- a) it was shot by a steel-tipped arrow.
 - b) some youths threw firecrackers at it.
 - c) lighted cigar butts were dumped on its back.
 - d) a tennis ball was thrown down its throat.
6. That people should probably be caged was suggested by
- a) the animals.
 - b) the zoo keepers.
 - c) the visitors.
 - d) the newsmen.

A short listening exercise for a beginning class is for students to indicate whether words read by the teacher are the same or different. The words should be either minimal pairs or the same word.

Example:

lug	rug	D
pick	pick	S
pick	pig	D
sick	thick	D
thick	thick	S

Excellent examples of minimal pairs for all English speech sounds in initial, medial, and final position may be found in Gordon, *Speech Improvement* (Prentice-Hall, 1974), Nilsen and Nilsen, *Pronunciation Contrasts in English* (Simon and Schuster, 1971), and Plaister, *English Monosyllables* (East-West Center Press, Honolulu, 1965).

READING

Cloze tests are easily constructed from short articles or news items. Simply delete every *n*th word from the body of the text and replace it with a blank, leaving both the first and the last sentences of the article intact. In the article below every 6th word was deleted.

(Remember that 50% exact word or 65% acceptable substitute is an excellent score for a Cloze test.)

The same paragraph used as a listening exercise is repeated here as a Cloze test.

The director of the Detroit zoo hired four new security guards last week, not to contain the wildness within the cages, but to protect the animals from the inhumanity of man. In the past two years — zoo population has been victimized — deliberate acts of brutality. A — Australian wallaby left the protection — its mother's pouch and was — to death; a duck died — a steel-tipped arrow in its —. A pregnant reindeer miscarried after — hurling youths bombed the frantic — into convulsions. Visitors have been — dropping lighted cigar butts on — backs of alligators, watching the — burn through the reptiles' skin, — breaking into laughter when the — reacted to the severe burn. —, the zoo's male hippopotamus choked — death last week after someone — to the hippo's open-mouthed begging — peanuts by rolling a tennis — down its throat. The zookeepers were left to wonder whether it was their charges or their visitors that really should be caged.

The multiple-choice or true-false questions with articles described in the listening section may also be used with the paragraph and the questions duplicated for reading.

WRITING

A good involvement exercise for writing is the scrambled sentence. Students are given lists of words which they arrange into the proper English syntax.

Example:

1.	2.	3.
needs	comes	always
improve	class	to
his	she	they
he	everyday	try
to	English	English
English	to	use

1. He needs to improve his English.
2. She always comes to English class.
3. They always try to use English.

Dr. Pack will demonstrate these and other instant involvement exercises at the TESOL Convention in New York City, March 1976.