

Warm-Up Activities

A proper warm-up activity can accomplish several purposes. First of all, warm-up activities can bridge old to new information, thus leading students to make a connection between previous lessons and a new theme or concept. Thus, in its most basic form, a warm-up activity helps students remember what they know (stimulate the recall of prior knowledge) and then build upon it. A warm-up activity also introduces new information in a way that serves as an attention-getting device, thus, warm-ups are sometimes called attention getters.

That stated, a warm up should not just gain students' attention but direct that attention to an appropriate target, thus it can and should also serve to bring students a broad view of a topic that will be introduced at a later time in the lesson plan more specifically. Good warm ups are ideally intriguing to learners, at least in the sense that they can give information in a way that invites curiosity and elicits prediction activities. Thus, the use of visuals, question prompts on the board, or small videos are common.

Another way to think about warm ups is through the use of the idiomatic expression, "prime the pump." This expression, which means, "to stimulate growth by providing a small catalyst," comes from the old fashioned approach of pumping water from a dry well pump. Water will often not come out of a well pump that is dry, so often a small amount of water is placed in the pump so that it stimulates the pump and provides enough lubrication for that pump to begin drawing water. In a similar way, a warm up is a small activity that "primes the pump." In other words, a little activity, (like a little water), activates background knowledge, intrigues students, and gives students access to all that they know (the well).

Warm ups often naturally lead into objective discussions, which can further inspire students to consider what skills they will gain through the completion of the lesson.

1. Written Prompt on the Whiteboard: Question or Statement

The use of a question or statement can be a powerful way to introduce a class, especially if the English class is theme-based (generally a reading, writing, listening, or speaking class). While the concept is simple, finding the right question or statement to evoke participation is not so simple. When you use this technique, make sure that you are inviting students to respond to something that directly targets the information you will be trying to teach later on. Often, a quote that invites a difference of opinion or multiple angles can stimulate conversation. Using a quote from a famous individual can also invite a discussion about what people know about that individual (What do you know about Martin Luther King, Jr.?), how they feel about the quote (Do you agree or disagree with this statement?), and can lead into a prediction exercise about future content (What do you think this quote has

to do with what we will talk about today?) It can also be tied to past content (What does this have to do with what we discussed yesterday?) In other words, when you write a question on the board, what often follows are a series of follow-up questions to help students start talking and thinking about the theme. Write down words and answers, when appropriate, as students respond, and give positive feedback for those who are willing to speak. While this warm up may only be a few minutes long, it can serve to engage students into thinking about the theme and give you information about what students already know. Consider the following example themes, and sample prompts that might accompany those themes:

Level	Theme	Prompt (Question or Statement)
Basic	Family	What makes a family?
Intermediate	Family	What do you love (AND HATE) about your family?
Advanced	Family	A family isn't always about blood. Agree or disagree
Basic	Food	What are your favorite foods?
Intermediate	Food	"All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt." Charles M. Schulz
Advanced	Food	"There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread." Mahatma Gandhi

As a variation, you might provide a written prompt on a sheet of paper and have students respond to it privately as a writing activity, or in pairs and small groups.

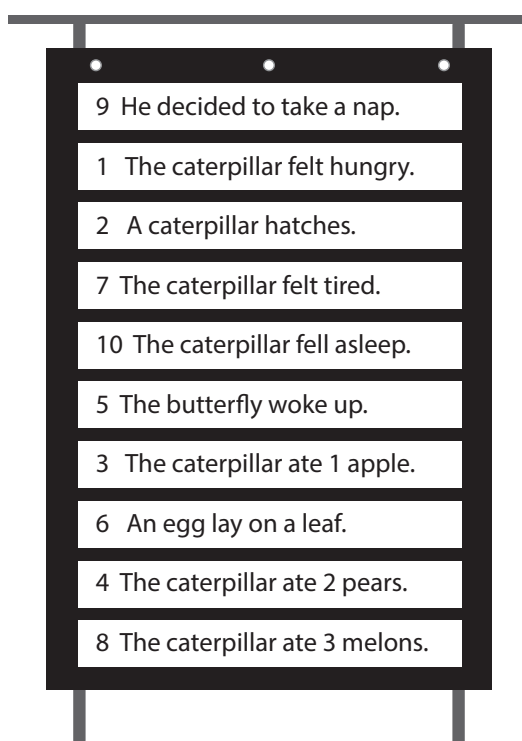
2. Pictorial Prompt

While it is commonly stated that "pictures are worth a thousand words," in the TESOL world, pictures *elicit* a thousand words. A good picture can help to begin a class conversation and have students immediately engage in thoughtful discussion. Just as in a written prompt, a pictorial prompt involves a teacher asking a lot of questions about the picture to lead students into a discussion about the current lesson. A good pictorial prompt should be large enough for all students to see, and often has something unusual or interesting to talk about. You may begin by stating, "What do you see," or ask a more specific question, such as "What problems do you see in this picture?" or "Why is this boy sad?" A good picture often has multiple answers, and a teacher can ask for a wide variety of opinions. When students are answering, a teacher may have to provide key vocabulary to explain certain visual items

(Does anyone know what this is? It is called a rainbow. Let me write that on the board). Remember that you may wish to have students write down their answers, or discuss in pairs or in groups before they speak to the entire class or to you as a teacher.

3. Scrambled Sentence Strips

For this activity, you must have a reading in your future instruction. Several sentences from this future reading are cut into equal-sized strips of paper (4-5 for beginners, and as many as 10 sentences for advanced learners). Invite students individually, in pairs, or in groups, to put the sentences in correct order. For convenience you may wish to number each sentence (in a random order), so you can discuss the correct order after students are done. After students assemble the scrambled sentences in order and there is a class consensus on the correct order, ask students what they think the reading will be about, pre-teach vocabulary by using the words in the strips, or get students to share their thoughts about what they have read so far. If possible, you may wish to put a larger version on a whiteboard and show the correct order, as in the example here below.



4. Back-to-Back Information Gap: Recycling Vocabulary

This is a vocabulary activity. Eliciting key vocabulary can be a good way to introduce students to a new theme, especially if the vocabulary has been used previously (using vocabulary from a previous lesson is called recycling). In this activity, divide students into pairs. One student will be looking toward the whiteboard, while the other student will have his/her back turned away from the whiteboard. If possible, have student chairs facing opposite direction so that students face back to back.