

## Tech Beat

*Technology with a heartbeat*

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## ESL Activities for Beginning Learners

What do beginning ELL's (new "in" reference for English Language Learner) need? It depends. A lot depends on their literacy in their own language. Most need to listen and speak before they are ready for much else, but, again, it depends. Following are some possible activities for learners who are starting to gain confidence communicating, especially with the public!



If you like handouts that have dialogues followed by exercises, pay \$15 a year and start downloading from <http://www.handoutsonline.com/>. Click on the Telephone English Role Playing segments or the beginning dialogues. Here are some tips I've used with my adult ESL students who are learning speaking and listening skills:

1. Listen, repeat, take a role, and exchange roles (good ol' Laubach and direct instruction). If the dialogues aren't taped or streamlined, tape them. Takes no time at all. Next, students have five minutes to learn one role with another person playing the opposite role. ("Oh, no, Teacher/Miz.. We can't do it.") You'll be surprised at what students can learn to say in five minutes if the dialogue segments are short; and they'll have a ball doing it once they find out they can. When the time is up, start the dialogue performances, disregarding the pleas and groans for more time. Start with the more confident students so the others can listen and practice. Follow dialogue parts with writing and structure exercises that modify the dialogue in some way (time, location, people, whatever). ("What means 'whatever' Miz?")
2. For telephone skills, student calls a business or agency (nice to prepare both sides for it, if possible.) They have to find out the information they are given to fill out (cost of an item, times they are open, availability of an item, whatever). Send them to the phone and let 'em rip. Some cities have recorded messages on all sort of topics. My students were assigned one or two topics to listen to and report. They loved it and found out all kinds of unexpected information.
3. Negotiation is something ESL students are totally scared of entering. So set it up and have them state their case for being overcharged or neglected or ignored, or *whatever!*

Of course, there are several places where ESL beginners can go to online to hear segments IF they have access to fast connections. Otherwise, the wait is booooring. Try some of the following or let your students try them and tell you what they think. (Go figure—a multi-level activity!)

1. Love what the *site* calls minimal pairs (Is it 14 or 40?). Students click on the exercise, hear an example and then choose the sound they hear. Immediate feedback. <http://www.manythings.org/pp/>. The same page has a couple of songs and tongue twisters. Their home page is full of other activities for all levels, including games.
2. Well, here's a list of great dialogues and listening segments. Students go over some important words and pre-listening activities, listen to the segment, and then answer questions about the information they heard. I thought their beginning segments were a bit advanced, but you be the judge. With good preparation, students could listen to the voices over and over until they get the message. Click on "Spending Money," a dialogue between father and daughter about allowance issues. Cute. <http://www.esl-lab.com/>

Finally, if you want to take the time to be selective, start giving students simple riddles to discuss and solve in class or out. For example, How many letters are in the alphabet? There are 11 letters in THE ALPHABET. Go to <http://www.riddlenut.com/show.php> and scroll through the possibilities. Native speakers and ESL students love these! Riddles make people think out of the box. Some like, "What numbers come next in this series," prepare you for testing dilemmas.

Next time, let's talk about how to get math into ESL, ABE and GED using Web resources!

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