

“THE BASIC LESSON”

This version of the basic lesson is designed for a group of about 15 sitting at tables next to each other, with one or two non literate students, one or two intermediate speakers, and the rest mostly beginner to advanced beginner.

These activities seem simple, but their subtlety and flexibility will only be appreciated after dozens of attempts, and observing expert practitioners. It would take pages to describe all the nuances, so try to get the intent of the activity and work with it, see how it feels for you.

0. READY (<5 min)

It's hard to overestimate how important this 5 minute activity is. It sets the tone for the classroom, indicates that you are a facilitator, not an explainer, that you won't fight against them, and that a ready class is one that is paying attention and acting in a coordinated way. It's also fun, and you can use it throughout your lesson to bring the group back groupness.

- i.** PI: “Ready?” see how Learners respond
- ii.** PI: “Ready?” most people should be watching you now
- iii.** PI: “When I say 'Ready?', you say, 'Ready!' - Ready?” At this point, you should get a better group response
- iv.** Continue once or twice more until the group is smiling and shouting it in unison

And now, you're ready to move to the next activity!

1. ALPHABET LISTEN AND POINT (15 min)

We don't go directly to names because we want to wait until any late Learners come in. This activity practices listening and identifying letters on the alphabet sheet, to prepare Learners to say the letters of their own names.

- i.** CA ensures that everyone has an alphabet sheet. PI: “Show me your pencil”
- ii.** PI: “I'm going to say a letter, you point to the letter. Ready?” Wait for the ready. PI: “A” Encourage the group to help each other find the letter.
- iii.** Depending on how together the group is, continue to other letters of the alphabet, speed it up for interest, do multiple letters at one time. Most importantly, first get the group on the same page, then speed it up to challenge them and keep it interesting.
- iv.** Every once in a while, stop on a letter and go around and practice the pronunciation; or pick two letters that are very confusable and go back and forth between them.

You don't need 100% success, just try to get them all to hear the difference. You don't need to do all the letters either. Try to sense when it's time to move on... probably when it looks like the entire group is there.

2. YELL AND SPELL (10 to 15 min)

Now we address the social context in the class, introducing us all to each other, and validating everyone in the space

- i.** PI: “I'm going to spell my name, you say each letter after I say it” PI says each individual letter, and urges the group (especially the assistants) to yell out the letters. Do not say your name! Some will want to write the letters down, but focus on the choral repetition.
- ii.** After PI finishes spelling her name: “What's my name?” The group should yell it. PI might need to encourage the group two or three times. Strong choral unison is key!
- iii.** PI indicates one of the CA's, who spells their name letter by letter, and the class repeats after each. PI: “What's his name?” Again, strong choral unison is key.
- iv.** Continue with all the Classroom assistants, then move on to the highest level Learners, then finally, the lowest level Learners. Absolutely critical to get everyone's name shouted out.

I discourage name cards in favor of memorizing Learners' names, to remind us just how hard it is to learn something in an unfamiliar language... if you haven't learned their names, they probably won't have learned the words you're bringing them.

3. DOCUMENT SEARCH (10 to 15 min)

Now we start to work with the content you brought. In order for this activity to work you will need copies for each learner, and sometimes, we won't know how many people there are, so keep that in mind. It's possible to do this with pairs if they are sitting side by side, or a very large document like a wall size map. This is essentially the same as the ALPHABET LISTEN AND POINT, but with more complex content. Don't worry too much about the difficulty of “understanding” all the content – it's about listening and identifying words and phrases. Can also be substituted

with picture vocabulary

- i.** PI: "I'm going to say words from this page, you point to them. Do you have your pencil? Show me your pencil, please"
- ii.** PI says something on the page.. if it's very dense text, or the levels are very low, start with the top of the page or the left side of the page. If it's less dense, or the learners are a bit higher, you can jump around. Allow the learners time to identify the word or phrase; CA should assist by repeating the phrase a number of times, identifying folks who are not tracking and keeping them coming along.
- iii.** Allow Learners time to talk with each other about the meaning in their language, or ask PI questions about the word or phrase if that wants to happen.
- iv.** Move through as much of the text as possible in about 15 minutes. Occasionally, ask the group for choral response of the word or phrase.

What we're doing is exploring the real world of language, exploring the text. These are the things Learners come into contact with, and they can be scary. We allow them a safe space to really look at it, and you can direct them to what's important. And it's listening and reading practice too. Higher level Learners get to show their skills, help the class, and ask higher level questions. You can have little discussions with them while lower level Learners are just identifying the word or phrase.

4. DIALOGUE SEQUENCE (30 to 45 min total)

Based on the class we have described, the best dialogue sequence is going to be two speakers, with two lines each, performing some social function. If you have more than 4 lines each, the activity sequence will take a long time... which is not always bad, because the sequence uses a lot of different learning styles. But don't underestimate how much time this can take!

- a. perform it:** PI and CA, or two CA's perform the dialogue in front of the class. Switch roles, encourage the Class to just listen. Articulate it well, but don't slow it down too much. Clearly articulated normal speech repeated several times is better than artificially slowed speech. Project the meaning with movement.
- b. dictate it:** This will be the longest part of the sequence. PI: "Get out a clean piece of paper" PI or CA, or higher level learner reads the first line at normal speed, and Learners try to write it down. Don't write it on the board yet.. give the group a chance to work together to figure it out. CA's should circulate and encourage Learners, make corrections, repeat the phrase multiple times. PI should say the phrase again, a little slower, and perhaps a third time before another CA or Learner writes the phrase on the board. Give Learners time to correct. PI then moves on to the next phrase, possibly having the group repeat chorally.
- c. choral response:** PI says the first phrase slowly, and encourages group to repeat the whole thing (or in chunks if it's longer and more challenging). Listen for it to resolve into a pretty coherent unison. Go through the entire dialogue
- d. pairwork\milling around:** PI puts people into pairs or asks the group to stand up, and practice the dialogue. CA's move through the group, mixing them up, urging them to move around, and practice the dialogue. This will be difficult for lower level learners, but great practice for intermediates. Most importantly, give them time to move to two or three different people. PI may participate herself, or move around and encourage Learners to mix.

5. DICTATION (20 min)

This is a way to practice some of what we looked at on the document in Activity 4.. There, we were exposing Learners to content and exploring it. Now, we're going to review it, and practice writing it and saying it, using guided production. Lower level Learners can look at the page; higher level Learners should try to do it without looking.

- i.** PI: "I'm going to say some phrases from this sheet, you write them down. Work together!"
- ii.** CA's assist groups and individuals with spelling and writing and noticing. When possible, indicate other learners who are getting it.
- iii.** After the phrase is correctly written on most Learners' pages, PI should model the phrase for choral response 1 to 3 times.

If you feel like you're running long on time, just continue picking words and phrases off the sheet – the group will generally not get bored or frustrated even if you do this for quite a long time. Give a lot of space to allow folks to discuss with each other, ask you questions, and for CA's to interact with the students.

6. LISTEN AND DO (5 to 15 min)

This activity will leave the group feeling energized and happy when done well. The activity always works better if you write down the verbs or actions you want to practice beforehand. 10 to 15 items is a solid amount to work with. The classic version is command forms of action verbs. Speeding up the pace keeps it interesting for higher level folks.

- i.** PI: "I'm going to say some verbs, you do the action. Don't write it down or repeat after me, just do it"
- ii.** PI says one verb, and waits for Learners to do the action. CA's will model the action that PI says to get people going and show what we're doing. PI says another, and goes back and forth a few times between them. Then PI introduces a third, going among the three a few times. Then a fourth and fifth, trying to trick the students and mess them up. They will laugh, and it's funny! Continue introducing new items until you are moving back and forth quickly between them
- iii.** If you have time, people find it too easy, or you've gone on too long.. PI asks learners to write the terms down.