

Let's get physical-

Warm-up activities involving movement and language

Marc Helgesen

Miyagi Gakuin Women's University
Sendai, Japan
march@mgu.ac.jp
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As language teachers, many of us start class with a warm-up activity. Why? Many reasons. It introduces the lesson topic. It gets everyone's attention. It can get the class working together as a group.

There may be more. Learning English is a skill. As such, it is more like music, physical education and other "learning by doing" classes at school than it is like history where you just need to master and apply facts. How do you start a music class? With a warm-up. What do you do before sports? Warm-up.

I use those two examples (as opposed to other "learning by doing" classes like math or science) because of the kind of warm-up involved. They are often physical. In music, people do scales. In physical education, some kind of stretches. In English class? There are lots of options but the purpose of this handout is to share some ideas for physical warm-ups.

I am not suggesting that warm-up activities that involve movement are the only good ones. They aren't. But there are several reasons to make use of physical activities.

We all learn through our senses and we all have a "preferred modality" (the sense we learn through best). Of the five senses (sight [visual], hearing [auditory], feeling-touch [kinesthetic], taste [gustatory], smell/[olfactory]), visual, auditory and haptic (also called tactile-kinesthetic) are the ones most useful for school subjects like English. Most of what goes in the classroom is visual (Look at the board/ your book / watch the teacher) and auditory (Listen!). Physical activity makes use of the haptic modality. It is a way many of us learn.

Haptic learning? We often think of this with young children but consider this: How often do you go to a conference or lecture, write lots of notes in your notebook – and never look at those notes again? Most of us do so a lot. And we feel guilty when someone mentions it like I am doing now. We shouldn't feel guilty. We were not writing those notes to read them later. We were writing them to write them: the physical act is a

into our heads. Indeed, *bodily/kinesthetic intelligence* is one of the eight multiple intelligences that Harvard's Howard Gardner (1993) and others have identified as ways people solve problems and learn things.

It is likely there is even more to it. Haptic actions seem to originate the holistic right side of the brain. Verbal language is left-hemisphere based. (Promislow, 1999). Physical warm-ups involved both hemispheres. They may be a way to help learners use both sides of their brains in a more integrated way. Brain-friendly learning specialists such as Jensen (2008) specifically recommend teaching in ways that encourage cross-lateral brain use.

Physical movements encourage our bodies to manufacture endorphin (the chemical that contributes to "runner's high") and dopamine, which helps us see patterns and learn faster. (Snell, 1980, cited in Promislow, 1999.). Those can't hurt.

Other brain research supports physical activity. Medina (2008) points out that physical activity in the form of exercise increases oxygen flow to the brain and is related to improvement in memory and executive brain function. Also, learners in multi-sensory situations have greater recall than those in unisensory situations.

On a more general level, doing physical activities together may just get people working together. I live and work in Japan where *rajio taiso* (radio exercises) are common for school children and even used in some factories and other companies. People do exercises in unison. Next door in Korea, there has been a similar practice called *goong-meen cheh-joe* (people's calisthenics) Are the exercises helpful physically? Sure. But they also get people working together as a group. Bolstad (2001) suggests that people doing physical activities together can help them establish rapport, useful in any group.

Finally, in response to the question "Why do physical warm-ups?" I would ask, "Why not?" Our students spend hours sitting in their desks every day. A few minutes up and moving seems to get them more attentive, more involved. The brain needs physical as well as mental activity. And these activities are fun. That alone has merit.

There are lots of warm-up activities available. For this handout, I have concentrated on some that have learners physically moving around the room (as opposed to, say, activities where they write something. That's physical too but not what I am dealing with here.). Also, I am focussing on those that have a specific, spoken language aspect. There are interesting and useful non-verbal activities. They just aren't what I'm dealing with here.

I hope you find the activities useful. If you have comments or other activities you would like me to consider adding to the list, please email me at the address above.

Good luck. Have fun. *Marc Helgesen*

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The activities



Intro's, ice breakers and learning names

In most courses, we spent time during the first several classes helping students learn each other's names and get to know a bit about each other. Try these.

This is for you.

Preparation: get a few soft objects that are easy to throw and catch. I prefer medium-sized stuffed animals. They don't bounce away like balls do. You'll want 3-4 per groups of 10-15 students).

What to do:

1. On the board, write, *"This is for you, (name)." "Thank you, (name)."*
 2. Students stand in circles of 10-15. Start by going around the circle. Everyone introduces themselves.
 3. Give one stuffed animal a student. She reintroduces herself (*"I'm Mai."*). Then she says, *"This is for you, (name)"* and throws it to that student.
 4. That student says, *"Thank you, Mai. I'm Emi. This is for you, (name)."* and throws it to another student.
- * It is a good idea to have them make sure everyone has gotten the animal once before there are repetitions. There will be times they don't know someone's name. They just look at that student and gesture that they need help with the name. That person says her name.
5. Once everyone has received and thrown the stuff animal once, the fun begins. Ask them to follow the trail – they throw it to the same person. Introduce the second and third stuffed animal. Leave a few seconds delay between each one. They continue to say, *"This is for you, (name)." "Thank you, (name)."* each time they throw it.
 6. Then suggest a bit of silence. They continue to throw the animals but the only think about the names. They don't say them. This silent period really helps them concentrate on the names.



Variation. At this point, make it a free for all. They see how many names they remember. They call out the names and try to get that person's attention (*"Mai! This is for you!"*). When they do, they toss the animal to that person. The animals no longer follow a trail. Creative chaos!

* At the end, give everyone a minute or two to look around the circle and see how many people's names they know.

All tangled up (AKA Gordian Knot)

Preparation: You'll need the same 3-4 stuff animals you used in *This is for you*.

What to do:

1. Repeat *This is for you* (but don't do the variation) with only one animal. Ask everyone to remember who they got it from and who they threw it to.
2. After a few minutes, stop the activity. The circles put away the animals and just mingle with group members for a minutes or so. They can say hello, check on names, etc. It is important that they move to different positions.
3. Then, ask everyone to freeze. They look around to spot the person they got the animal from and the person they threw it to. Moving as little as possible, they take the right hand of the person who threw it to them with their left hand. They take the left hand of the person they threw it to with their right hand. You should have a mess of bodies intertwined with their hands.
4. Let the fun begin. They have to sort out their circle and get back to a normal circle where they are standing holding hands. And they have to get there without letting go of hands. Some people (and pairs) will have to step over other or under other people's hands and arms. People will be moving in and out. At times it will be frustrating (try substituting the work "challenging.") but it will work.
5. At the end, give them time to look around the group to see whose name they remember. If there are people whose names they don't know, they ask. (RB)

Circle action game



This is a variation on something you've probably been doing for years. Check out the pantomime gesture aspect. It makes it a lot stronger.

Preparation: (Optional) One soft object (like the stuffed animals above) for each group of 8-12.

What to do:

1. On the board, write "I'm (name). I like _____."
"You're (name). You like _____."
2. Students work in groups of 8-12. Give the animal to one person. He introduces himself and says something he likes. ("I'm Young Jae. I like skiing.") As he says what he likes, he makes a gesture demonstrating it. For example, he moves his body as if he was skiing or uses two fingers flying down a mountain to represent a skier. Then he throws the object to the next speaker. (If there is no object, he just points to the next speaker.)
3. The next speaker must repeat the first speaker's information and do the gesture before adding her own information and gesture. ("You're Young Jae. You like skiing. I'm Hee Soon. I like listening to hip-hop.") She adds a gesture such as a hip-hop dance movement or something to show listening to music. She throws the object to the next person who has to remember and repeat both Young Jae's information and Hee Soon's.

4. The game continues. Everyone has to remember each person's information and do each gesture: #2 remembers #1. #3 remembers #1 and #2. #4 knows #1, #2 and #3. #4 knows 1-2-3-4, etc. If someone forgets (no problem. It will happen.), the person gives a hint by showing the gesture. That is often enough to help the speaker remember the name as well as the thing he likes. If not, the person can give the information, either by speaking aloud or by mouthing the information silently (like lip-reading).

* **Variation:** Unlike the activities mentioned above, you may want to have some people get a second turn before everyone has had a first. This way everyone keeps paying attention. They might get called on again!

* **Hint:** In this warm-up, everyone is responsible for learning the names of all the other people in their group. Be sure to give them time (2-3 times in a 60 or 90 class seems to work well) to look around the room and see whose names they remember.

Balloons off your body.

Preparation: one balloon for each group of about 8 students.

What to do:

1. On the board write, "From (name's) head."
2. Elicit from the students common body parts likely to be used for this activity (arm, knee, shoulder, foot). Write those on the board as well.

3. Also write things they could say when a partner successfully hits the balloon ("Nice shot, (name)." "Nice shot, (name)." "Good one, (name)."). Give them some things to say when someone isn't successful. ("Nice try, (name)." "Too bad, (name).").

4. Students work in groups of about 8. They stand in circles. Everyone holds hands. If they don't already know each other's names, they introduce themselves. Each group gets one inflated balloon. The task is to keep it in the air as long as possible, hitting it with any part of their bodies except their hands. When they do, they call out how they did it ("From Mari's knee!"). Other students try to acknowledge it ("Nice shot, Mari!"), while continuing to keep it in the air. When it does hit the ground, they start again. (GJ)



Up close and personal

Adding personal information can increase the interest in any class. Learners like to learn about each other and talk about themselves.

Mirrors

Preparation: None

What to do:

1. Tell the students what the topic they will talk about is. Personalized topics like "Plans for the weekend" or "things you did last weekend" work best.
2. (Optional). Give them a minute or two to think about what they want to say (a bit of silent think time really helps increase how much they will say.).
3. Students work in pairs. They stand, facing each other. One is the speaker and the other is the mirror. The speakers talk about the topic, using a lot of gestures as they speak. Mirrors listen. They also imitate all the gestures, reversing them as a mirror would (i.e., if the speaker moves her left leg, the mirror moves his right). The mirror can ask questions.

* Beginners might find it difficult to mirror actions, listen and ask questions at the same time. In that case, you might ask them just do the mirror actions and listening. They wait until after the activity to ask two or three questions.

Variation: Crazy mirrors. Instead of mirroring the action, the mirror does an opposite action. For example, the speaker raises her right arm, the mirror could lower his left arm. The speaker touches her head, the mirror touches his leg, etc (RB)

That's true/ that's a lie

Preparation: None

What to do:

1. Each student thinks of two sentences about himself. One is true and one is false. Both sentences should be believable but not information that other people know. Of course, interesting information (*I rode an elephant once.*) is more fun than everyday stuff (*I don't like spinach.*)
2. On the board write, "*I don't believe...*" "*You're right.*" "*Sorry, you're wrong.*"
3. Introduce two gestures for the game. Crossing one's arms in front of your chest to make a big X means "wrong" or "not true." Joining your arms above your head to make a big circle that goes around your head means "That's right."
4. Everyone stands and walks around at random. Everyone finds a partner. In each pair, one person says both of his sentences. The partner decides which she thinks is a lie, and says, "*I don't believe...*" (e.g., "*I don't believe you rode an elephant.*" making the "X" gesture. If she was correct, the speaker makes the "O" gesture and says, "*You're right. I didn't...(ride an elephant).*" If she was incorrect, the speaker makes the "X" gesture and says, "*Sorry, your wrong.*"
5. Then the other person says her sentences and the partner guesses.
6. When they have finished, they find new partners and continue.

Variation: When someone guesses incorrectly, it often means the information was usual or surprising. You can ask the speakers to add two or three extra pieces of information ("*I rode an elephant two years ago. I was in Thailand. I went there with my friend.*")



Musical chairs

Preparation: Get a CD of some up-tempo music.

What to do:

1. Start by identifying 4-5 personal topics that the students might share information about themselves. For example, if you are working on preferences, you might ask students what they would say about their taste in fashion, food, music, etc. They should think of 2 or 3 sentences they would say for each topic.

* *Note that this “mental rehearsal time” for thinking of sentences is very important. It not only give them time to prepare, it gives them a lot of practice, mentally. More language goes on in this step than in the game itself.*

2. Students work in groups of 5-7. They arrange chairs in circles, face out. There is one less chair than person in each group. They walk in a circle around the chairs as you play the music. When you stop it, they scramble for the chairs. The person who doesn't get a chair must say at least 3 sentences about their preferences on any subject.

3. Then start the music again. Continue.

* **Note:** the person who loses isn't out. You don't need to remove any more chairs. The game just goes on.

DIY FSW (Do-It-Yourself Find Someone Who)

Preparation: none (but you might want to supply the paper so no one's sentences can be identified by the color of the paper, etc.)

What to do:

1. Each student takes out a blank piece of paper and folds it into four squares. One each square, they write a true sentence about themselves.

* *Note that you can make this activity focus on a particular language function or form simply by specifying the topic of the sentences (e.g., past tenses: place you visited; present perfect: things you have done; future: your plans and dreams; etc.*

2. They cut or tear all the sentences apart and give them to you. Mix the squares up and give one to each person. They should not get their own sentence.

3. Students stand and circulate. They find a partner. They ask a question based on the sentence (Did you...? Have you...? etc.). If the person says, “No,” they find a new partner. When they find someone who can answer yes, they write that person's name on the paper. They put it away. They get one more sentence from you and continue.

* *Note that they don't have to find the person who wrote the sentence, just someone who can say “yes” to the item.*

* *You might want to require follow-up questions when someone says, “Yes.”*

Positive voices in your mind

Preparation: None

What to do:

1. (Optional). Have a short group brainstorm about "Who we are." (i.e., everyone has multiple roles: student, son, daughter, friend, employee, pet's master, citizens of x country, etc.
2. Each student writes five or six positive sentences about themselves. The sentences should cover a variety of roles & topics. You might want to give them some examples or phrases to use:

- *I'm good at (cooking).*
- *My friends know that I am (kind).*
- *I am very (hardworking.)*
- *I can read English very well.*
- *I feel good about my (fashion sense).*
- *I (have a good sense of humor).*

* Actually, they will only need four sentences if you have them working in groups of five.

However, asking them to write about six sentences helps with classroom management:

it keeps the faster students on task which give the slower ones time to write the four they need.

3. (Optional). You might have them go back and see if they can make the sentences stronger (i.e., change "good" to "great", add words like "very" and "really", etc.)

4. Students work in groups of five. One person sits in a chair. The other four stand in a circle around the chair. The person in the chair teaches one sentence to each partner. Each partner has a different sentence. They repeat the sentence until they get the intonation the way the person in the chair wants it.
5. The person in the chair closes her eyes. The other partners walk around the chair, repeating the sentence. Everyone is speaking at the same time. It is best if the move in and out and up and down so the person in hears a strange mix of the positive sentences.

* The partner's leave the sentences in the first person, "*I'm good at...*", not "*You're good at...*". They are acting as the person in the chair's innervoice (and saying something positive themselves.).

6. This continues for about a minute. Then a new person sits in the chair and the activity continues.

* The first time you do this with a class, demonstrate with one group while the others watch so they understand what to do. (TM)



FonFs (Focus on forms)

These activities are among the easiest to plug into your lesson because they connect to specific grammar points, functions or vocabulary sets.

ABC race

Preparation: none

Language focus: Various. Examples:

1st conditional (ABC picnic):

If you bring the (apples), I'll bring the (bananas).

"Going to" future (Trip around the world.)

We're going to go to (Australia). Then we're going to visit Bangkok.

Nouns:

I have an album. You have a baseball.

What to do:

1. Write the target structure on the board.
2. Explain the situation and the task. For example, for the first conditional, tell the students that they are going on a picnic. This is an "ABC picnic" which means they have to take one thing that starts with every letter of the alphabet – one thing that starts with A, one that starts with B, etc. all the way to Z).
- * Actually, you might want to leave out the letter "X" – no one takes a xylophone to a picnic.
3. Students work in pairs. They stand and face each other. One partner holds his hands in front of him, palms up.
4. The other partner says the target sentence (*If you bring the apples, I'll bring the bananas.*) and slaps the first partner's hands.
5. The first partner says the next sentence. That sentence includes the second item from the previous sentence (bananas) and a new item that starts with "c" (*If you bring the bananas, I'll bring the chocolate.*) and slaps the partner's hands.
6. They continue until they get to Z.
- * As they play, circulate and give hints to pairs who are stuck on difficult letters (Q [quiche, or they could bring the queen – no one said they could only bring food], U [umbrellas] Z [zucchini, zebra meat])

Line-up #1: comparatives

Language focus: comparative adjectives

What to do:

1. Explain that, in groups, they will think of different ways they could line up.
2. Demonstrate with 4-5 students. Start with something easy (hair length: shortest to longest). Have them stand in the correct order. Get the other students to guess what meaning behind the order is.
3. Demonstrate with something less obvious (number of letters in the students' names). Again, the others guess.
4. Students work in groups of 4-5. They think of at least three different groupings.
5. When they have their ideas, sets of two groups join together. Each group demonstrates their line-ups for the other group. The other members guess. Then they change.
6. When they have finished, the groups join with different groups and continue.
- * If some groups are having difficulty, give them suggestions to get started. Ideas: who lives nearest to farthest from school, birthdays (January – December), how long since they did something (e.g., got their driver's

license), for Japanese/ Chinese students, number of strokes in the characters in their names.



Line-up #2: non-verbal communication

Language focus: various

What to do:

1. Students work in groups of 8-10. Tell them they will line up in order. They must not speak while they are deciding the order. Once they have formed their line, they say their answers out loud to check.
2. As an example, have them do something very simple like: Line up by height.

Possible orders:

- Birthdays (January 1 – December 31).
- The time you got up today (earliest to latest)
- How long it took you to get to school. (longest to shortest time)
- Number of letters in your first and last name (fewest to most)
- Smallest to biggest shoe size
- How long it took you to get to school (shortest to longest time).

Tour guide

Language focus: directions (prepositions, imperatives)

Preparation: (Optional) Get blindfolds for half the students (if this is not practical, you can just have people close their eyes.)

What to do:

1. Students work in pairs. One is a tour guide. The other is a tourist. The tourist is blindfolded.
2. The tour guide directs the tourist around the classroom, giving directions and pointing out things that are interesting. The tour guide may not touch the tourist. Only spoken instructions are allowed. The tour guide encourages the tour guide to touch and pick-up objects.

* Naturally, the tour guides need to be careful so the tourists don't hurt themselves, bump into things or other people, etc.

3. You might want to follow this up with a discussion of what makes for good directions, things that were easy or difficult to explain, etc.

Variation: Scatter a lot of small objects (poker chips work well) around the room. The tourists try to collect as many as possible.

Body clocks

Language focus: telling time

Preparation: Make copies of the body clocks worksheet.

What to do:

1. Demonstrate by telling the students that you are a clock. Ask what time it is. Gesture 9:00 by putting your left hand straight up above your head and your right hand straight out to your side, your right elbow touching your side.
2. Students guess the time. Do one or two more to give them the idea (7:30, 4:15).
3. Students work in pairs. Each person gets the A sheet or the B sheet. They stand and face each other. They take turns pantomiming the times. The partner guesses.

* Students need make it clear which arm is the long hand and which is short. They also need to remember that they have to reverse the time because their partner is in front of them (i.e., 9:00 might look like 3:00). However, it is usually easier to let them figure this out rather than trying to explain it. (RS)



Pantomime these times.

B will guess.

- 12:00
- 3:30
- 8:45
- 7:15
- 11:30
- 2:45
- 8:15
- 6:00
- 10:15
- 1:45

It's ____ (o'clock).

It's ____-- forty-five.
It's a quarter to ____



It's ____-- fifteen.
It's a quarter past ____

It's ____ thirty.
It's half past ____



Pantomime these times.

A will guess.

- 3:00
- 5:45
- 7:30
- 6:00
- 3:15
- 4:45
- 12:15
- 8:30
- 9:15
- 11:45

It's ____ (o'clock).

It's ____-- forty-five.
It's a quarter to ____



It's ____-- fifteen.
It's a quarter past ____

It's ____ thirty.
It's half past ____

Accent/stand up

Language focus: vocabulary review, accented syllables

Preparation: Prepare a list of about 10 multi-syllable words the students are learning. The stressed syllables need to be clearly marked.

What to do:

1. Everyone is sitting down but not at a desk (they need to be able to stand up quickly). Say the first word. Pause a second or two. Say it again. This time stand up and sit down on the stressed syllable.

2. Once they understand what to do, have everyone stand up with the stressed syllables together.

* You might want to give everyone a copy of the word list. They go back and mark the syllables. Then they work in pairs or small groups, practicing together.

* This can be useful for word groups where the stress changes (**Japan**, **Japanese**; **Canada**, **Canadian**; **photograph**, **photographer**).

Variation: Make two lists of 10 words each. Have students work it together, taking turns being the person who knows where the stress is. In that case, you might want all the A's to work together and all B's to work together, practicing before they teach their partners where the accent is. (YN)

Simon says

This is common kids' game. However, it works very well for adults and for language learning if you play it in small groups rather than the full class – more language practice that way – and if the person who makes a mistake becomes the next “Simon” instead of being out of the game.

Language focus: imperatives (command forms)

Preparation: none

What to do:

1. Explain the game. Point out that “Simon” is a man’s name. You will say a series of commands. If Simon says them (e.g., “Simon says, ‘Stand up.’”) they should do them. In you don’t say “Simon says” before the command, they should not do it.

2. (Optional). Brainstorm the kind of verbs useful for the game and write them on the board. (e.g., *point, touch, stand up, sit down, open, close, put, etc.*) Elicit by showing the motions.

3. Demonstrate with the full class. Use commands like the following, preceding each with “Simon says”: *Stand up. Point to the door. Touch your desk. Put your book under your chair.* etc.. When someone makes a mistake (does an action that Simon didn’t say, that person becomes “it” and gives the next group of instructions.

4. Once they understand the game, divide the class into groups of 4-5. One person in each group is “it.” When someone makes a mistake, that person becomes “it.” They continue.

Variation: Instead of “Simon” students can use their own names, “Mari says...” This is especially useful early in the course when they are still learning each other’s names.

Lots of talk

These activities are more open ended. You aren't sure where they will lead.

Well-balanced students

Language focus: various. Prepositions of locations and descriptive adjectives are common uses.

Preparation: none

What to do:

❶ Students work in pairs. They stand facing each other.

They firmly clasp the wrists of their partners. Then they stand toe-to-toe.

They lean all the way back so they are balancing the weight of their partner.

(They look like a giant "V" with each person being one leg of the letter.)

❷ In this position, they have a conversation about the assigned topic. As they do, they have to (try to) maintain the position.

Notes: It is important that they really lean back all the way so they are actually balancing with their partners.

- Once they understand, try variations such as balancing shoulder-to-shoulder, back-to-back, etc.

- An interesting way to use this while practicing prepositions of place and/or descriptive adjectives is to have them stand facing opposite walls (or, if there are windows with a good view, that is even better). They look at their view for about a minute. Then they change positions. Partner's ask questions about the view (Where is the chalkboard eraser? There is a poster. What does it look like? Where is it?). The other person tries to answer.

All tied up and lots of places to go

Preparation: Get a ball of string for each group of 8-12 students.

What to do:

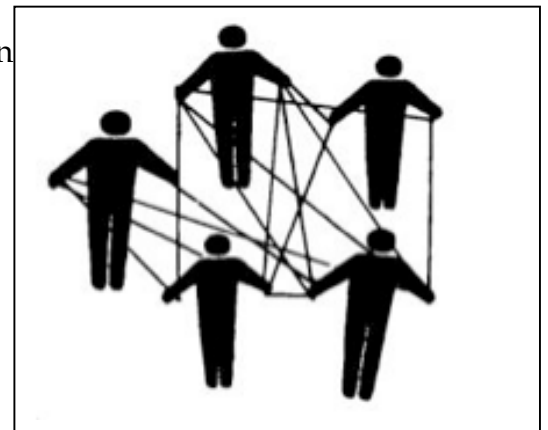
1. Students work in small groups. Give one person in each the ball of string. Either assign a topic (Plans for the next vacation) or make it something general like a story.

2. The person with the string starts. She says something (I am going to work a part time job during vacation.). She holds on to the end of the string and throws the string to someone else. That person says something else (e.g., Where are you going to work?). If it is a question, he keeps holding on to the string as he throws it back to the first speaker to answer. If it wasn't a question, (e.g., Not me. I'm going to

hang out on the beach all summer.), he can throw it to someone else.

3. The string keeps moving around. Each person who speaks has to keep holding on to it. It ends up being all tangled up, as if everyone was part of a spider's web.

* In the case of a story, one person starts it (Once upon a time there was an English class...) and throws it to someone else who adds the next line. (DK)



Slap, clap, snap/snap

Preparation: none.

What to do:

1. Students sit in circles of 4-6 people. Teach them to *slap, clap, snap, snap* in rhythm. "Slap" is slapping both thighs, "Clap" is a single clapping of hands, "snap" is snapping the right and left fingers alternately. Do this with an even beat, about one second for each item.

2. Tell the student this is a vocabulary game. They must listen to the person next to them and say any word connected to what that person says. They say the word on the second snap. Example:

Snap, clap, snap (Teacher: **red**)

Snap, clap, snap (A: hot)

Snap, clap, snap (B: dog)

Here is an example of a chain of words: *red* → *hot* → *dog* → *cat* → *mouse* → *Mickey* → *Disneyland* → *Space Mountain* → *coaster* → *love it!* → *chocolate*

* Note that a word only needs to connect with the word right before it, not with the whole list (*dog* connects to *hot* but not to *red*)

3. Once they understand the game, have them play in small groups.

Sometimes groups will stumble when someone can't think of a good word.

They can either restart on the same word they stumbled on, or they can go on to a new starting word.

* Colors and emotions are good words to start with.

* You might want to write a series (5-8) of starting words on the board so as groups finish with one, they can go on to another.

- Groups sometimes stumble when a student says a word for which the other students don't see the connection. If that happens, they should ask that person to explain (in one class, a chain went like this: *sky* → *blue* → *water* → *marathon*. The others said, "Huh? Marathon?" The student explained, "When you run in a marathon, people give you water to stay cool." Then everyone understood and they continued with the game. (BM)

Balloons & vocabulary sets

Preparation: one balloon for each group of about 8 students.

What to do:

1. Students stand in a circle. Call out the topic (example: *animals*) and toss the balloon in the air. The person it falls near must call out the name of one member of that vocabulary set (*elephant*) and hit the balloon back into the air. The person it falls near must add the next example. They continue as long as they can. They must not repeat a word already used.

For an extra challenge, have them hold hands as in "balloons off your body."

When the balloon hits the ground or someone can't think of a word in time, they either keep going or go on to the next word.

This seems very elementary. However, you can adjust the level to match the learners' ability. For example, at an elementary level, the topic might be "jobs." At an intermediate level, you can specify the types of jobs (jobs where you work outdoors, dangerous jobs, high-status jobs, etc.)

Positive Self-talk. Massaging the mind

Preparation: none

What to do:

❶ Write 2-4 positive sentences on the board. For example, if you use this activity on test day, write sentences like these:

I'm good at English.

I'm getting better all the time.

I'm going to do well on the test.

I'm a good student.

❷ Students work in groups of 6-10. Each group stands in a circle. Each person puts their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. They slowly start to walk in a circle and to massage the neck and shoulders of the person in front of them. They are, at the same time, being massaged by the person behind them.

❸ As they walk, they whisper the positive sentences to the person in front of them.

Notes – They leave the sentences in the first person “I’m good...” instead of “You’re good...”. That way, they are saying positive things to themselves as well as a partner.

Sadly, some people are uncomfortable hearing positive things about themselves. Tell them not to worry. They are still hearing the good things and that is useful. (TM)

Just physical Four up

The following activity doesn't include any language. It is, however, a good, fun way to get students working together.

1. The whole class is seated. The goal is to have exactly four people standing at all times.
2. Anyone can stand up anytime. They can only remain standing for five seconds.
3. Students need to pay attention to what others are doing. They also need to participate.

* The first time you do this, you might want to do a bit of rehearsal. If some students stand a lot and others don't, ask those to stand often to give others a chance. (GM)

Getting by with a little help from my friends.

Alan Maley once commented that language learning activities are a bit like jokes. You are never sure where they originated or how they evolved. In many cases, I have no idea where I learned these activities. In some cases, they are personal variations on activities from other people. When I know where I learned or was reminded of an activity, I have listed the person's initials after the activity. Some of the activities here are learned from or was reminded of by some of the following people (alphabetically): Charles Adamson, Richard Bolstad, Brad Deacon, George Jacobs, Duane Kindt, Bruce Marsland, Yoko Narahashi, Tim Murphey, Rick Siddle, Tim Murphey