Connecting 5 principles with 39 activities, Firsthand
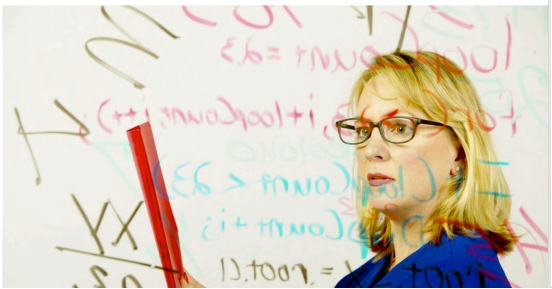
Meaning-based interaction

Time-efficient language generation

Student Buy-in

Repetition with change

Connecting English To student interests/ lives

Photo courtesy: abroad-studyguide

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Sample request   *Firsthand* information

The URL for the online version of this handout is: **tinyurl.com/EFprinc-act**
"Click" in this handout refers to the online version which has many hyperlinks.
The URL for a presentation we did a few years ago is: https://tinyurl.com/EFSpeakingTasks
     (note: the activities are not limited to *English Firsthand*. The URL without "EF" was already taken.)

Ss = students
T/Ts = teacher/ teachers

All of the ideas here are **meaning-based interactions** (it is language, after all).

Connecting to students' interests:

OK. We might be cheating by using 2 different pictures (this one and the one on the previous page) for this topic's logo. But many students' current interests really are different than their future goals. See what makes sense for your Ss.

• **Warm-ups and tasks for non-English majors:** Short URL: tinyurl.com/4non-majors.
Many schools require students to take required English conversation classes that students have no particular interest in. Our solution is to connect the book to the students' lives. One of the easiest ways is to connect the course to their major. We've created a webpage – *Warm-ups and Tasks for non-English majors.* It contains over 70 links to short videos and activities for over ten different majors, plus many general videos for university students. Consider starting class with a short (in our case, about 10-minute) activity related to the learners' major. Then go on to the regular lesson from the book. The warm-up creates interest and lets the students know that you do care about them engaging with the class. The frequent personal information and ideas in the About you (Listening), Pair Work, Group Work and My Story (Real stories) contribute to this.

• **Personalization –** guarantees relevance and builds future buy-in. If using English Firsthand this is done for you as each page includes a personalization task, but if not try to add a personalization step where possible.

• **Give a little, Get a little –** as a teacher giving a little personal information (not all the time!) shows a willingness to be transparent and a confidence to show students who you are as a person. *Transparency* was shown to be one of the 3 most important factors in research into what makes a good teacher, along with prizing students and being able to empathize with them. Such transparency by the teacher also sends out the message the classroom is a safe place for students to share their personal information or stories (Aspy, D. & Roebuck, F. (1977) *Kids don't learn from people they don't like* Ameherst, Mass: Human Resource Development Press)**.**

Time-efficient Language generation.

We really don't have as many class hours as we need to make most students proficient. So we have to use the time to ensure **every student** is using English **a lot.**

• **Assigning leaders –** in group work assign one student as the group leader. The leader's role includes keeping the discussion or task moving forward, summarizing each member's opinions or ideas, keeping the group in English and taking notes ready to present (note-taker could be another role you or the leader assign). Each week a different student is the leader of the group.
Use physical objects as markers for the group leader –I use a cut out 'Hand' that I physically give to the students when assigning leadership. This hand stands on the leader's desk. This physical object on the desk helps me and the other members see clearly who the leader is in each group. On the website, click **HERE** to get a copy of the hand logo, (above right). Print at about 250%.

- **Frame your Aim –** imagine the aim of your class as a 'frame'. Then chose activities to fit in the frame. Only activities matching your lesson aim can go in the frame. Then rearrange them within the frame to form a coherent lesson plan. Framing ensures all activities share a common aim.

• **Think Time** – always allow your students time to think –maybe just 2 minutes – but giving Think Time will make conversations more interesting and increases the complexity of the language students use.

• **Say your ideas, then sit down.** Students often don't want to say example answers in front of the whole class. But sometimes you need examples. Have everyone stand up. They can sit down once they've given an answer. (note: we've been doing this for years, but were reminded of it when Jim Ronald used it in a podcast recently. Thanks for the reminder, Jim).

• **Time on Task principle –** maximize class time spent engaged with English. Minimize instructions given in L1. Most instruction language is similar. Use English consistently. Ss learn it.

• **No big test in July/ January.** "Test week" has to be one of the stupidest ideas academia has ever come up with. That is NOT how the brain works. The hippocampus (the part of the brain where working [short-term] memories become long-term) is active during sleep. When students aren't getting enough sleep, they aren't remembering things. Instead, give two or three quizzes throughout the semester. See the *Assessment for Learning* section of each *Firsthand* book. Use those "practice tests" as the real test. (And, yes, this is letting them know what will be on the test. If they prepare for it, great. That is studying!). More test ideas in the "Student buy-in" section.

 • **The book quizzes end** by asking students for their questions and comments. If you are using a different test, add that. Read the comments. See how you can use the ideas. If the comments are in Japanese and you can't read them, you can use *Google Translate* on your phone. Just turn on your camera. It translates them. BTW, you'll probably get some positive feedback from the students. That will motivate you!

• **Seating arrangements matter** – make sure your classroom matches the purpose of your class. Moving, grouping desks or chairs for pair works or group works encourages interaction. If something stops you from rearranging, consider sometimes using clipboards in class to free up students and change the dynamics of your class. More open, no desks acting as barriers between students brings students closer together - literally!

• **Tech: use wisely** – we live in increasing tech worlds – phones, tablets, computers are a great resource for teaching effectively IF used appropriately. Tech can add clutter to classrooms. So using tech to be 'cool' should be resisted while at the same time not using a learner management system (LMS) or some other form of tech that could enhance the learning experience in class simply because of tech-phobia needs to be addressed.

• **No opt out –** asking individual students questions should be done with thought – considering the students level and personality (hence it is so important to know your students). Once you have asked a question though expect an answer. The habit of a student replying simply; "I don't know ", can be discouraged by telling that student you will return to them in a minute. Then ask another student the same question - which provides a model of how to answer the question - then return to the initial student. In such a way the first student has been provided with support on how to answer but has not been allowed to 'opt out' of answering.

• **Time confetti** is the idea that most of our "free time" is broken into tiny segments. Most of us don't make good use of them. SEE tinyurl.com/MHTimeConfetti for a list of Ss and Ts generated ways to make use of "time confetti." Introduce the concept. Have your Ss make their own list.

• **DIY About You** LISTENING If you are using *Firsthand,* the books do this for you. If you are using something else. Write 3-4 personal questions related to each listening activity. Dictate the questions. Students write them (then check for accuracy). Then they compare their own answers with partners (fluency work).

• *I/ We/ You* **model-** rather than explain activities demonstrate or model them. Start by demonstrating on your own as the teacher –This is the 'I' stage. Then, model it with an individual student or group, or you work with the whole class. This is the 'We' stage. Then, pass the activity over to the class to do – This is the 'You' stage. Using I/we/you before each activity allows students to see what to do multiple times before they are asked to be active, avoids the need for lengthy L1

explanations, and allows the teacher to check comprehension, reducing the risk of confusion when an activity starts. I = T   WE = T->S or T -> Ss   YOU = Ss -> Ss

• **Reduce TTT – Teacher Talk Time –** this does depend on the aims of the class of course. We're not referring to well thought out lessons where the teacher's role is to provide comprehensible English input to students, we are referring to teachers who are too fond of their own voices in L1 or L2 – we have all been guilty of this at certain times –just need to be aware of it**.**

• **TTT purpose**
> 1. specific points – perhaps giving feedback or providing information
> 2. instructional –setting up an activity, running the class
> 3. showing sentiment – empathy towards students –building rapport**-**

• **TTT** t**iming** –

Short and interspersed between student activity: SsSsSsSs $_{TTT}$ SsSsSsSs $_{TTT}$ SsSsSsSs

Getting **Student Buy-in**

This isn't optional. If they aren't buying-in, nobody is learning much.

• N**ames are important** – using names builds rapport between teacher and students and importantly students and students. In addition, it emphasizes the importance of the subject in when speaking English, teaching students to use the names of their classmates rather than the cold-sounding; 'she' or 'he'. Recently, with online classes or ones where everyone is wearing a mask the use of a simple name badge is not only useful for the teacher, but also for students.

• **Feedback–** is one way to show students the teacher is buying into the class. Then expecting buy-in from students is completely rational. We believe feedback should be mainly on the content – the message that students are trying to convey. By so doing students will want to express themselves more. Through more use of the language the students will improve.   Only focusing on the form of the language – especially in a negative way – risks reducing the students' willingness to try to use the language and hence opportunities to notice their own mistakes become limited.

• **Making Quiz days more interesting.** Each level of *Firsthand* has six quizzes. Here are six simple plans to make those days more interesting: https://helgesenhandouts.weebly.com/making-quiz-days-more-interesting.html

• **Cookies on test days.** A long time ago, *The Washington Post* had a story about research showing how high calorie meals helped students raise test scores. On test/quiz days (often the first quiz of the year), I ask students how many skipped breakfast that day. (I teach in a women's university. Unfortunately many students say yes.). I tell them about the research. Then I pull out a big bag of cookies and pass them out. They eat the cookie before the quiz. I don't think the cookie itself makes a difference. But maybe the teacher caring enough to bring cookies on a test (i.e., "high stress") day makes a difference. At least it lowers the "fear factor." Article at: https://helgesenhandouts.weebly.com/uploads/1/1/2/5/11251138/sugar_surge__washingtonpost.com_.jpg

• Related to the cookie idea. I ask the student, in pairs or groups, to figure out what they know about the health benefits of chocolate. Then I give them **THIS HANDOUT** (not the one you are holding, on one online: click on the picture of chocolate), along with a piece of dark chocolate.

• **Energy Breaks**. Humans are not designed to sit still for 90 minutes. Introduce short (5-minutes or less) activities that include physical activities. Here are 17 tasks (so more than one per week) you can use in your classes. https://helgesenhandouts.weebly.com/energy-breaks.html

• **Power of FUN** Catherine Price's best-seller, the power of fun, says we should try to include "playfulness," "connectedness" and "flow" into activities. In English class, this especially connects

to fluency tasks. Makes sure you include all three. See https://www.eltandhappiness.com/new---the-power-of-fun.html for ideas.

Repetition with change

Repetition is important. But change helps Ss pay attention.
What can be changed?

> -Time – shorter encourages fluency, longer gets students producing more English.
> - People – shuffle the groups – same content but it is fresh to the new members.
> - Group size – 4 students / 3 students / pair work / whole class
> - Spaced repetition. In the same class (Repeat after me), next class, after class, later (on bus/train)
> - Support level - 1st time use prepared notes, 2nd time occasionally look at notes, 3rd time see how much you can talk on the topic without any notes
> - Physical dynamic – sitting down in groups – standing up as a whole class or short pair work

• **Conversation models**. Many teachers use the same way to introduce a conversation (dialog) each class. Here are 9 ways you can vary modeling it. (Note: most of us have 15 or 16 weeks in a semester so you can vary the practice.

> - book recording audio
> - book video
> - book video with "drama prompts"(see the first part of each video
> - substitutions of key words. If the book doesn't have them, have Ss write them in.
> - you perform the dialog
> - 2 students perform
> - Students shadow the video(full shadowing, key or last word shadowing)
> - Human recorder: Groups of 3. One person has their book open. S/he reads it, the others repeat.
> - Nonsense syllables. Repeat nonsense syllables (Lalala, etc.) to match the intonation of the recording (video or audio). Then say the words in the same rhythm.

• **Hand gestures for accents, syllables.** (pronunciation) Students gesture with their hands – high for stressed syllables, low for unstressed). This helps them get beyond "katakana pronunciation". Use the bold in the language map on the Pair Work for hints. (We learned this from Harumi Kimura, in a JALT Mind/Brain/Education *ThinkTank* article.)
Multi-sensory pronunciation practice. 15 multi-sensory ways to work on pronunciation. Remember, if students are bored, they aren't paying full attention.
• **Drum machine pronunciation.** Search online for "free drum machine." (this is what hip-hop and other musicians use for rhythm patterns). Find one and find a rhythm that works (sort of) with the sentences in the language map on the pair work or group page. Have the students use the rhythm to practice. It is kind of like a *jazz chant*.
• **Multi-sensory (haptic) teaching.** Each class should have visual, auditory and haptic (AKA tactile/kinesthetic) input. Visual and auditory come naturally to most teachers. Be sure to add touch and movement. There are 20 ways in the linked handout.
• **Lots of questions**. Get lots of "point counters" (e.g., poker chips, buttons, *ohajiki* pieces (check the toy department). Each group gets a set. Students earn one point every time they ask a question.
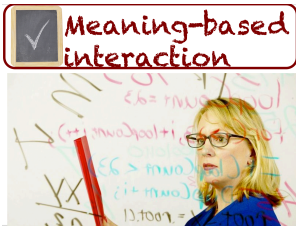
Meaning-based instruction.

We said at the beginning that all our activities should be meaning-based. And we believe that. But these didn't fit neatly into any specific category but we still wanted to share them.

• **Build a teacher 'tool box'** – stay hungry to learn and add news ways to do things –great ideas you see from others into your tool box. With more tools we can better do the job of teaching our students in the most effective way possible.

• **Engagement through Q&A -** keep the tempo high when doing Q&A. Try to speak to all students equally in class. Don't overuse IRF (initiation, reaction, feedback) with any one student. Use a name list and check each time you asked a student a question. You want all students engaged in your class.

• **Sentence level dictation** – important to keep the language short (not long paragraphs) The language should be challenging but doable. If using Firsthand pick a line or two from the listening scripts included in the Teachers Manual. Another option is use *'My Mobile World'* – Firsthand's online complement - Listening Activity 8 where questions are dictated to students to write before answering. Initially, students should try individually, then they can compare their answers with a friend's. This is meaning-based input, but with an emphasis on accuracy - Focus on Form.

• **Background music.** This grew out of something I started during online teaching. I try to get to the classroom a few minutes early. I search on Youtube.com for instrumental BGM (background music). There are many types: *jazz, classical, j-pop, k-pop, Ghibli, Disney, etc.* It is playing when students enter the classroom. I turn down the sound during most of class put it back on during pair and group work. I often let students decide which genre they want.

 • **[Pictures from my life](#)**. After a long vacation (or even a long weekend), have students decide on 3-4 pictures on their phone of interesting things they did. They practice, then give a "mini-presentation" to partners about the pictures. Partners ask as many questions as possible. If they don't have photos (or don't want to show them), they can use blank paper and describe their "invisible photos."). Variation: have them take photos of 3 or 4 important people/things in their life. They talk about those.

• **[Talking about Japan](#)** Don't assume the students are studying English to visit an English speaking country. They are more likely to use English in Japan while talking to a foreigner. Add activities where they practice talking about their own culture. Ideas:
https://helgesenhandouts.weebly.com/talking-about-japan.html

• **Use a Bag Table** – very simple idea to de-clutter your crowded classroom before starting. A bag table (near the door is best) upon which all bags stay during the class, removes distractions for students and makes sure moving around the classroom is hazard free - no-one is going to trip over someone's bag if they are all safely on the bag table. (Note: at our school, someone figured out that classrooms could hold an extra two rows of desks – if you love a classroom that feels like the morning subway – we don't. That's what is behind this idea. It makes interacting easier).

• **Positive psychology in ELT**. Marc does work to connect positive psychology ("the science of happiness" to ELT. See https://www.eltandhappiness.com/ There is a handout with activities to connect positive psychology to the *Firsthand* syllabus.

We hope you are your students
enjoy communicating, firsthand