

4 VOCABULARY EXERCISES *That Work*

Edited by Rob Waring

“Twenty words as fast as you can!” and “Words I want to learn”

(from a colleague in China)

1. Write the following 5 sentences on the board:

- i) It's a _____ day today, isn't it?
- ii) What a _____ coat that is!
- iii) I think our teacher is a really _____ person.
- iv) Mexican food is _____.
- v) London (or a more relevant city) is such an _____ city.

2. In pairs, Ss come up with two possibilities for each space. NB: They can't repeat words so ten words altogether. When they finish, get some of the Ss to tell you their words.

3. Divide the class into teams of 4-6 players and give each team a

piece of board.

4. Each team has to come up with 20 adjectives (words like the ones in the warmer, you could tell them). Members call out words, the player at the board acts as secretary for the whole team. Ss cannot repeat a word in another team's list. So if Team A has already got “*interesting*” for example, Team B may not use it. The team that can finish first is the winner.

5. Get the class to look at all the words on the board and check spelling and meanings

6. Ss (individually) choose (from any of the words on the board) three words for each of the following categories: new words; words I like;

particularly useful words

7. In pairs, Ss then compare the nine words they have chose. How many are the same/different?

8. Ss then pool their words (= up to 18 words). Using dictionaries, Ss find a word which has the opposite meaning.

9. Monitor and assist as required. NB: Try to get Ss to find completely new words where possible rather than just using a prefix (So, for example: happy / sad NOT happy / unhappy).

Modifications: Stronger Ss can work on ‘word families (*beautify*, *beauty*, *beautiful* etc).

Vocabulary development files

by John Dutton

Intermediate students of English in Japan often ask “How can I increase my vocabulary?”. Here is one procedure I have recommended to my students and which seems to have been successful.

1. The student needs a “Vocabulary Development” file. Next, in their classes, they should try to notice areas where their vocabulary needs work. *What did they want to say last lesson but couldn't?, did the teacher correct something?, did they see something or hear something they didn't understand?* This self-awareness of language level is important in all areas of learning, and vocabulary is no exception.

2. At home, with a good E-J / J-E dictionary, they should investigate the target word(s) and make notes in their file. They need a chart to show noun, adjective, verb and adverb forms, with International Phonetic Alphabet transcriptions and intonation patterns marked as appropriate. Against each word should be a marker to show whether

the word is very common, rather common, or rather uncommon - many Japanese dictionaries show this with a rating system using asterisks.

3. Under the chart, they should attempt a short sentence for each common form, aiming at a clear sentence structure and correct grammar.

4. They should have their teacher look over their work in the next class.

Example: In class, the student says “I am interesting in this topic”,

to which the teacher responds “Oh, you're interestED in this topic.” The student notices the error, and at home makes the following entry in their file (see chart A).

This dictionary-work discovery activity combines phonology and grammar with vocabulary study, and has the student actively involved in the learning process, encouraging learner independence. It also underlines the importance of choosing a dictionary carefully, bearing in mind the level and needs of the learner.

Chart A.

Noun = *interest, Adj=**interesting / **interested

Verb = *to interest (someone) in (something), Adv = interestingly

This vacation plan is interesting.

I am interested in this vacation plan.

My friend interested me (vb. pp.) me in this vacation plan.

Note: The interest (n.) on this loan is 6%.

Similes

by Hugh Graham-Marr

“Similes” is a short activity which can be used for the recall of adjectives and nouns and to look at what adjectives can be used appropriately with what nouns. It can also be used to have students source new words from the dictionary, classmates or the teacher. It can be done singly, in pairs or in groups. As a lead-in to the main activity, the teacher can either put on the board or hand out a matching activity which gives pairs of half similes. The difficulty or frequency of occurrence of the examples and the extent of the activity can vary according to student level. A sample matching activity is given below:

When you compare something to something, or when you say something is like something else, this is a

‘simile’. Below are halves of some common similes. Match the numbers to the letters to complete the similes.

- | |
|----------------------------------|
| 1. as smooth as ???? a. a loon |
| 2. as vain as ???? b. life |
| 3. as big as ???? c. ice |
| 4. as hungry as ???? d. a wolf |
| 5. as crazy as ???? e. a peacock |

(Answers: 1.c 2.e 3.b 4.d 5.a)

The teacher might then add that similes are not only set expressions but that sometimes people will create their own. This leads in to the main activity which is to give students half similes and ask them to complete the similes. Students can base the completions either on

their own or on popular perceptions.

From adjectives into nouns:

or

From nouns into adjectives:

as colorful as ????
 ???? as old shoes
 as silly as ????
 ???? as TV
 as odd as ????
 ???? as a missile

Modifications: The half examples can be chosen from a topic area/ theme you’ve covered recently, or localized as in:

As ???? as the waterfront at Odaiba on a Saturday in the summer.

Vocabulary recycling with “Betty’s game”

by Rob Waring

Language learning theory states that if students have to work to recall or explain a partially known word, then there is a greater chance it will be remembered. The aim of this game is to do both these things as well as finding out how much they recall and have some fun along the way. This is probably my favourite vocabulary game and it has never failed (yet)!

Students are broken into groups of 4 to 6. A leader in each group is elected who stands in front of the group, facing away from the board while the other students can see it. The teacher writes a word (or simple phrase) on the board that the students have recently studied. The sitting students have to use only English to help the leader to define the word (without dictionaries). The first leader to get the correct answer gets a point for her team (you can give different points for ‘more difficult’ words). Thus, this is a race between teams to recall the correct word. When the word is guessed all the students are told the word and reminded of its meaning and when and where it was met. The

teacher then writes another word. Don’t wait for all the teams to guess the word as you’ll soon have a bored mob on your hands. It is important that the pace of the game is fast. After a few words other students can become the leader so everyone has a chance to guess. The winning team is, the one with the most points. The race factor to this game brings a desperation to make oneself understood in English.

If you have a weak class (or children) you can allow students to use Japanese and you should use easy words or pictures. Remember, the aim is to get them to practice defining words and explaining words in English, not to show them how much they have forgotten! If it is a higher level class you may wish to penalize the use of Japanese (thus requiring them to push their language production) by deducting points. If ‘only English’ is a problem for your group you can put useful vocabulary definition sentence heads on the board to help them define the words.

For example, you can write on the side of the board

It is a noun / adjective /
It means
We use it when
It has 5 letters
We learned it / yesterday / ...
It sounds like
A similar word / the opposite is.....
It is a phrase

In my experience it is always good to put words up that will make the students smile during the game. So if you put up ‘smile’ you can expect 90% of the class to smile (you can then add rules to deduct points for gesture or pointing if you wish). Similarly, if you put up ‘intelligent’ or ‘beautiful’ you will have a class of people saying ‘Me, me, me!’