

## Activity route map

Here is a basic route-map plan for running a simple EFL activity. In some bigger activities, there may be a number of clearly separate 'sections' within the task, in which case you would go through Steps 3, 4 and 5 a few times.

- 1 Before the lesson: familiarise yourself with the material and activity; prepare any materials or texts you need.
- 2 In class: lead-in/prepare for the activity.
- 3 Set up the activity (or section of activity), i.e. give instructions, make groupings, etc.
- 4 Run the activity (or section): students do the activity, maybe in pairs or small groups while you monitor and help.
- 5 Close the activity (or section) and invite feedback from the students.
- 6 Post activity: do any appropriate follow-on work.

Looking at each step in more detail:

### 1 Before the lesson

- Familiarise yourself with the material and the activity.
- Read through the material and any teacher's notes.
- Try the activity yourself.
- Imagine how it will look in class.
- Decide how many organisational steps are involved.
- What seating arrangements/rearrangements are needed?
- How long will it probably take?
- Do the learners know enough language to be able to make a useful attempt at the activity?
- What help might they need?
- What questions might they have?
- What errors (using the language) are they likely to make?
- What errors (misunderstanding the task) are they likely to make?
- What will your role be at each stage?
- What instructions are needed?
- How will they be given? (Explained? Read? Demonstrated?)
- Prepare any aids or additional material.
- Arrange seating, visual aids, etc.
- Most importantly, you need to think through any potential problems or hiccups in the procedures. For example, what will happen if you plan student work in pairs, but there is an uneven number of students? Will this student work alone, or will you join in, or will you make one of the pairs into a group of three?

### 2 Lead-in/Preparation

This may be to help raise motivation or interest (e.g. discussion of a picture related to the topic), or perhaps to focus on language items (e.g. items of vocabulary) that might be useful in the activity. Typical lead-ins are:

- Show/draw a picture connected to the topic. Ask questions.
- Write up/read out a sentence stating a viewpoint. Elicit reactions.
- Tell a short personal anecdote related to the subject.
- Ask students if they have ever been/seen/done/etc.

- Hand out a short text related to the topic. Students read the text and comment.
- Play ‘devil’s advocate’ and make a strong/controversial statement (e.g. ‘I think smoking is very good for people’) that students will be motivated to challenge/argue about.
- Write a key word (maybe the topic name) in the centre of a word-cloud on the board and elicit vocabulary from students which is added to board.

### **3 Setting up the activity**

- Organise the students so that they can do the activity or section. (This may involve making pairs or groups, moving the seating, etc.).
- Give clear instructions for the activity. A demonstration or example is usually much more effective than a long explanation.
- You may wish to check back that the instructions have been understood (e.g. ‘So, Georgi, what are you going to do first?’).
- In some activities, it may be useful to allow some individual work (e.g. thinking through a problem, listing answers, etc.) before the students get together with others.

### **4 Running the activity**

- Monitor at the start of the activity or section to check that the task has been understood and that students are doing what you intended them to do.
- If the material was well prepared and the instructions clear, then the activity can now largely run itself. Allow the students to work on the task without too much further interference. Your role now is often much more low-key, taking a back seat and monitoring what is happening without getting in the way.
- Beware of encumbering the students with unnecessary help. This is their chance to work. If the task is difficult, give them the chance to rise to that challenge, without leaning on you. Don’t rush in to ‘save’ them too quickly or too eagerly. (Though, having said that, remain alert to any task that genuinely proves too hard – and be prepared to help or stop it early if necessary!)

### **5 Closing the activity**

- Allow the activity or section to close properly. Rather than suddenly stopping the activity at a random point, try to sense when the students are ready to move on.
- If different groups are finishing at different times, make a judgement about when coming together as a whole class would be useful to most people.
- If you want to close the activity while many students are still working, give a time warning (e.g. ‘Finish the item you are working on’ or ‘Two minutes’).

### **6 Post-activity**

It is usually important to have some kind of feedback session on the activity. This stage is vital and is typically under-planned by teachers! The students have worked hard on the task, and it has probably raised a number of ideas, comments and questions about the topic and about language. Many teachers rely on an ‘ask the class if there were any problems and field the answers on the spot’ approach. While this will often get you through, it can also lead you down dark alleys of confusing explanations and long-winded spontaneous teaching. It can also be rather dull simply to go over things that have already been done

thoroughly in small groups. So, for a number of reasons, it is worth careful planning of this stage in advance – especially to think up alternatives to putting yourself in the spotlight answering a long list of questions.

- Groups meet up with other groups and compare answers/opinions.
- Students check answers with the printed answers in the Teacher's Book (which you pass around/leave at the front of the room/photocopy and hand out, etc.).
- Before class, you anticipate what the main language problems will be and prepare a mini-presentation on these areas.
- During the last few minutes of a long task, go round the groups and warn them that each group will be asked to 'report back' to the whole class. Ask them to appoint a spokesperson and to agree on the main message they want to say. You could ask them to choose just one point from their discussion that they think is worth sharing.
- When checking answers, ask for groups to exchange and compare their answers across the room themselves ...
- ... or get a student to come up front and manage the answer-checking, rather than doing it all yourself (you could give this student the answer sheet!).
- Collect in all answer sheets then redistribute them for 'correcting' by other students. When everything has been checked, students pair up with those who marked their paper and listen/explain/justify/argue, etc.
- Correct one student's answers; that student then goes on to correct other answers, etc.
- Divide the board up into spaces for answers and throw pens to different students who fill the board up with their answers (each answer written by different student). The whole group looks at the finished board and comments/corrects.