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Module 24: Teaching Beginner-Level Students

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24.1 What is a Beginner Student?

- new to topic
- just started learning
- cannot do it very well yet
- fluent in their own language(sometimes)
- inexperienced
- often a wide range of existing knowledge (from TV, music, hearing foreigners etc.) as beginner is subjective
- beginner is not the same as age, all ages can have different abilities
- False Beginners - maybe previous exposure to language, can sometimes learn faster as they know more than they thought or sometimes have imperfect English already learnt which makes it harder to unlearn and learn proper english.
- Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) - A1 | Beginner
 - At the A1 CEFR level, a language learner can:
 - Understand and use very basic expressions to satisfy concrete needs.
 - Introduce themselves and ask others questions about personal details.
 - Interact simply as long as the other person speaks slowly and clearly.



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24.2 The Beginner Classroom

'Use' of the Target language is key:

Both by the students and the teacher. The teacher should speak almost entirely in the target language but at a level understandable to the students so they get that all important 'comprehensible input'. Students need to get used to the new words and sounds they are hearing so they should speak the language with their peers and teacher in every class. Pair work and group work is a great help here, as are things like 'exit tickets'. As I often say to my students: Do you play an instrument? Do you play a sport? Will you improve your guitar or football playing by just watching someone else do it and studying how their feet or hands move? Maybe a little, yes. But how do you really improve? You need to actually play the guitar or kick the ball. It is the same with learning languages.

The classroom should be Active, Supportive and Cooperative:

- Active: Varied tasks that get students up and moving at least once during class to keep them awake and concentrated
- Supportive: Everyone should feel comfortable making mistakes and asking questions in the target language
- Cooperative: Students should frequently work together on varied tasks using the target language to communicate.

Feel welcome in the Classroom

An important first step in helping English language learners (ELLs) succeed is making them feel welcome in the classroom.

This will:

- increase their confidence
- make them feel more comfortable in the class
- build a foundation for positive relationships with you and their peers

Most in the class will be beginners

-can be online or physical

Physical Classroom:

Atmosphere: friendly, interesting, fun



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Put yourself in their shoes—how would you feel if some stranger starts saying weird stuff at you and expects you to reply in the same alien language? It's nerve-wracking and mortifying, to say the least.

24.3 Strategies for Teaching Beginner-Level Students

Put Yourself in their Place

This is useful if you're living in a foreign country. Remember the time when you first arrived and barely spoke a word of the local language. Think of how little you understood and how when you listened all you heard was a stream of sound.

That's what the beginners in your class think of you now.

So you need to break it down. And by this, I mean really break it down!

This means when you teach beginners:

- forget grammar – don't even think about giving them grammatical explanations
- build on what they already know
- give examples, practice and more practice

Organizational Tips:

1. Structure your class into small sections

When you structure your class, you give your beginning students something to lean on when things get rough. They will know what to expect each time they enter the classroom and will feel comfortable with the challenging learning tasks ahead of them.

When structuring your class, you should do so in increments of time spent on each activity. Not a lot of people would enjoy sitting through an hour-long grammar lecture every time they enter class. By creating a varied structure you keep the students on their toes and anticipating the next section.

A very basic structure for your class might include:

- greetings and getting settled in (5 minutes)
- warm-up activities for voice and body (10 minutes)
- presentation of the day's theme and exercise (10 minutes)
- doing the day's exercise (20 minutes)
- evaluation of the work done in class (10 minutes)
- homework and goodbyes (5 minutes)

Part of any new language will be learning its structure. Even beginners will need to get a handle on a number of structures to be able to move ahead. When you look at the structure of the language you are teaching, you will find additional, practical structure you can put into your class. Doing this reinforces just what you want your beginners to learn without lecturing them on it.



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2. Always follow the basic structure

Once you have established (and explained!) your class structure, follow that structure each and every class period. From time to time you can totally part from your structure; however, there are several reasons why a strictly structured class is advantageous.

- **Planning:** When planning your class, for example, you need only think of material to fill in short segments. It is so much easier to plan for a five-minute warm-up exercise than it is to plan a 25-minute explanation of a grammar point. An active exercise section gets the students doing a lot of the work themselves, leaving you free to observe for later evaluation.
- **Behavior:** Students will probably be better behaved if they know that something they enjoy is coming up. Since you've structured your class in small segments, there is little chance of students acting out because of boredom. Agile movement from segment to segment makes the time fly and does not give "trouble makers" time to make trouble.
- **Class time economy:** Finally, if you and your students know that these minutes are dedicated to this activity which is followed by another related but different activity, time is more economically spent in the classroom. Students will not have much time to dwell on what was difficult in the warm-up because you will be moving right along to explaining the main language activity of the day. You also avoid getting caught up in lengthy explanations, since you will be wanting to get the actual exercise underway and give your students a chance to practice in front of you.

3. Include quizzes and games in the structure

When you are structuring your class, make sure you include both quizzes and games regularly. If you make sure the students know that every two weeks there will be a quiz, there will not be as many groans when you present it.

Games are a very important activity in the language classroom. Although they may be useful as rewards, if you regularly schedule games into your structure, your students will find your classes entertaining and motivating. This helps foster a positive learning attitude among your beginning students.

4. Experiment with alternative classroom setups

Rows of desks, students looking at the back of the head of the one in front of them, a big table with students sitting around, all looking at the teacher, these are common classroom setups. If you have the flexibility where you teach, try regrouping your students into patterns they don't expect. For example:

- **The semi-circle:** Push all the desks and tables against the walls and put the seats in a semi-circle, leaving a big space in the middle for students to stand in when doing warm-ups or pair-work.
- **Face-to-face:** When pairing up your students, get the tables out of the way and have them sit in their chairs facing their partners, randomly scattered around the room. Make sure to leave room between pairs so you can move around and listen in on their practice.



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- Back-to-back: Useful when practicing telephone speech, this setup tends to make students listen more to what is being said by their partner.

Presentation Tips

1. Learn to draw

You're going to have to explain a lot of things to your students.

One of the easiest tools for explaining vocabulary, verbs, even many adjectives, is drawing. You don't know how to draw? Spend a bit of time learning the basics of shape drawing so that when you have to teach words like "cow" or "ugly" you can quickly sketch something for your students to see. This method of presentation is also a great introduction to "pictionary" activities during game time.

2. Use scripted role plays

Don't be afraid to give your beginners scripted role plays.

A lot of language at the beginning stage involves using basic and familiar patterns. By giving your beginners a script to follow, students don't have to think about what they need to say, they just practice the everyday language. Some useful situations would include:

- Ordering in a fast-food restaurant
- Buying a train ticket
- Sending a package by post
- Asking for directions on the street
- Getting a phone number from information

3. Use song, video and games instead of lectures

Students of all ages will enjoy the break a song will bring to class. Songs let you do cloze exercises with the lyrics, sing-alongs and karaoke are fun activities. Just make sure the songs are somehow related to the language point you are practicing.

Any video you show should be short, sweet and full of language. Realistic dialogues in films are best and, the shorter they are, the better they are assimilated and can be used for future practice.

You can find plenty of videos to choose from on FluentU, where authentic videos meet learning tools for an optimized experience for your students. You can hand-pick videos from a variety of options like movie trailers, music videos, vlogs, inspirational talks, news segments and more.

Or, you can pass the ball to the students' side and let their interests guide them to videos they actually want to learn with.

Since FluentU videos are organized by difficulty, students will be able to stay at an appropriate level. They'll also have the support of interactive subtitles, with on-demand definitions and flashcard-creation capabilities from any video.



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FluentU also tests students on their knowledge of vocab words (at their pace) and you, the teacher, can see their progress and areas of difficulty.

Again, if you were to ask your beginners to choose between a lecture on frequency adverbs and a game that lets them play with them, which do you think they will enjoy more? I bet the vote will be on the “game” side. Don’t hesitate to use a game to get a point across, they will often stick in student’s memories (and be more easily understood!) than 20 minutes of you talking and making graphs on the board. You will enjoy them as well.

Evaluation Tips

1. Use student passports to record daily achievements

A student “passport” is simply a small notebook that looks something like a passport. Templates can be found online, or you can custom-make one that best suits your teaching style.

You will record their achievements in class in these little notebooks, with notes, quiz grades, gold stars. They are also great to handle discipline with younger students! Make sure to include a space for parents to initial when they have seen the latest teacher’s note, be it good or bad!

2. Only quiz on practiced material

Quizzes should always cover recent material that you have covered. Avoid pop quizzes and trick questions: You want to know if your students have been paying attention and if they are catching on to what you are teaching. Keep quizzes short (no more than ten questions) and easy to grade.

When you have given a quiz, note the result on the “quiz page” in each student’s passport. Or you can hang a star poster on the wall where students can see their progress and improvement. Tests can be hard, but quizzes should be easy. Getting a good “grade” on a quiz should be no problem for most beginners, and accumulating those grades is a wonderful motivation for drilling forward.

3. Reward students often and equally

Almost everyone likes to be told that they have done a good job. You should get into the habit of motivating your students with praise and rewards. Sometimes simply saying “good work” can make the difference between a beginner being motivated or becoming frustrated. Stars and stickers are visible rewards. Special game sessions can break the habit of your regular structure.

Celebrate a target language holiday by bringing in a tray of goodies that are often shared on that day, for example, candies for Halloween, dried fruit for Ramadan, turrón for Christmas. Make sure that your beginners know that you think that they are moving forward and improving and make sure to spread that good feeling to all of your students frequently and equally.

Teaching a group of beginners can seem like a stressful task, but the truth is, you will find your experience with a beginner language class a more manageable challenge if you are structured, prepared and weave fun throughout the experience with them. Remember that you will present them with their first step on the journey of learning that new language.



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A big responsibility is yours to keep them interested in the task, but it is a responsibility that comes with ample rewards for both your students and yourself.

- Define problems: shy, inexperienced,
- draw from other experience
- use praise
- Pictures
- Highly motivated

24.4 How to Teach Beginners

Break up lessons and categorize vocabulary

Think about how hard it is to learn a foreign language. It can be overwhelming at first. Learning English is no easy task.

ESL students need structure. Try creating lesson plans with small activities broken down into manageable chunks to help them absorb and remember everything.

Teach your students English with vocabulary categories. Categorizing vocabulary makes learning new words sticky!

For example, you can group vocabulary in categories like animals, dining, directions or things you find in a supermarket, to name a few.

Let's say you're doing a listening activity with a dialogue in a supermarket and questions. Introduce key vocabulary first and ensure that the students understand the questions before you hit play.

As activities are shorter and more structured at beginner levels, you might also find you'll need more resources. Thankfully there are plenty of free resources for ESL lessons online.

Repeat everything

Don't be afraid to be a broken record. Getting in the habit of repeating things will help your beginner students understand the lesson and retain key phrases and words better.

If you begin every class with a greeting like, "Hello, how are you?", students will quickly get comfortable with replying to and using this greeting.

Most instructions in the classroom can also boil down to a few surprisingly simple words. Listen, read, write, look, stand up and sit down.

Focusing on repeating the same words in your instructions means students with no experience with the English language will learn those words quickly, and understand better.

You can also extend the concept of repetition to your classroom routine.



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Try starting every lesson with a vocabulary revision game (repeating new words from the last lesson) and finish every lesson with writing homework and tidying the classroom.

Even if students don't understand every word you are saying, over time, they will become familiar with the routine, and understand what they should be doing.

Use plenty of props

Imagine how you might describe what a cat is to someone who doesn't speak English.

The reality is you can say whatever you like, but the simplest thing would be to show them a picture of a cat or draw a cat on the board.

Part of your lesson preparation for teaching English to beginners might be finding pictures or objects that can help you explain concepts quickly and accurately in the classroom.

It's also a great idea to print some common classroom language to put up on the wall.

"Can I please go to the washroom?" is a long question for a beginner to remember in English. But if they can see the question on the wall, they can try to ask. Or in worst-case scenarios, point at it.

Encouraging your students to use classroom language in English is also a great way to help them to speak in full, correct sentences, using language they have seen modeled by you and other students.

If you don't want to make your own, Pinterest is an excellent source for classroom posters.

Embrace your inner mime

There will also be times where you need to explain what a cat is, but you don't have a picture to reference or space on the board to draw one.

So, what's the next most straightforward thing you can do? Let out a couple of meows and act it out.

How into character you get depends on what kind of teacher you are, but making good use of gestures (and not minding looking a little silly in front of your class) will help you get your message across in many situations.

And honestly, you might feel a little ridiculous at first, but once you see how much it helps your students, you'll find yourself miming along to everything you say.

You can also get students involved too!

Asking students to act things out can be a great way to check vocabulary comprehension, get them involved in playing games or even let them communicate how they are feeling.

Check for understanding

Even after you've given great instructions, shown a picture, and done an Oscar-worthy mime, you'll still sometimes end up with a class of clueless faces looking back at you.



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When teaching basic English to beginners, it can be hard to gauge how much students understand. And often, through no fault of their own, they may completely misunderstand what you're asking them.

To help everyone stay on track, you'll need to check students' understanding all the time. To do this, ask concept check questions.

For example, imagine you want students to do a speaking activity where they ask ten questions to different students and write their answers down. You could ask if they understand, but chances are they may just say yes even though they don't.

Instead, try asking specific yes/no questions related to the activity. You could ask:

- How many questions will you ask?
- Will you speak to one student or ten students?
- Will you write the answers or just listen?
- Does everyone have a pen?

Asking these questions to the whole class at once will give you instant feedback on what students understand (or not) and will also reassure students that they have the right idea of what they should be doing.

Get into group activities

Sometimes it can be hard to get students in beginner classes to form a bond, especially if they are all from different countries and don't share a common language.

Singing songs and chants is a great way to build group activities into a beginner class while improving fluency and focusing on repetition.

The British Council Kids website has tons of simple songs that classes can sing together, as well as games and videos.

Or, you could also try watching simple shows as a group. This is easier with younger learners, who watch kids shows. But it's also a great option for adults. Try Peppa Pig!

Watching shows in English gives students something to enjoy together, and you'll probably notice your students using common phrases.

And don't forget to play games together. Simple games like Pictionary, bingo or Scattergories can all help build a friendly, supportive atmosphere in your class.

Give plenty of encouragement

For learners at this level, everything is new and they are bound to make mistakes when they speak and write in English.

They know this as much as you do and might need more praise and encouragement to keep going.

Making mistakes should be embraced because mistakes lead to learning.

Steps that seem small, like being able to say a full sentence, or pronounce a new word, are huge achievements for your learners and should be treated as such.



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So give plenty of praise and encouragement!

A Practical Example

So let's say you want to introduce adjectives to the class.

Start with what they know:

- Show a model of a car to the class, elicit the word car and make sure everyone understands and knows this word.
- Show a hat to the class, elicit the word hat and make sure everyone understands and knows this word.
- Show an apple to the class, elicit the word apple and make sure everyone understands and knows this word.

Then introduce something new:

- Bring out the car and show them the color of the car which in this case is: red.
- Bring out the hat and show them the color of the hat which in this case is: red.
- Bring out the apple and show them the color of the apple which in this case is: red.

Say the word several times, write it up on the board, get the class to say the word.

Then join the new with the old. Spend time practicing red car, red hat and red apple with the class. Get them used to it. Get them comfortable with it.

When the class is comfortable, bring out a variation: a green car, a green hat and a green apple.

And then it's a matter of moving on very slowly. This means giving the students plenty more practice with the material you've introduced.

This means games, activities, practice exercises and so on. It does not mean introducing more new material! No, that only happens when your class is 100% sure of what has already been introduced.

- Games
- kinaesthetic activities
- Concise practical information
- Repetition
- Back and forth
- Use their own language (similar words)

24.5 Difficulties with Teaching Beginners

Different Levels of competence

One class can consist of several students with different characteristics and capabilities. Some of them are fast learners, get motivated easily, disciplined, obedient, and some not. In spite of that,



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teachers are required to be able to control and manage the class to run well as it is planned. This means that it can be difficult to set an appropriate level of teaching for the whole class.

Lack of Motivation

Students may not see the need for learning English and not engage with the learning process which can not only slow their own learning but also hinder the progress of the whole class as individual motivation can spread throughout the class or slow down the pace of learning. Lack of motivation can also be a symptom of poor lesson planning and lack of interesting activities. To maintain a positive motivation, a variety of engaging activities should be planned throughout lessons as well as demonstrating the importance of learning.

Poor Discipline

Poor discipline can be a particular problem in English classes where the teacher does not speak the native language. Controlling the class can be difficult as without being able to use the native language, students may not understand instructions and may even take advantage of the teacher not understanding what students are saying. Teachers learning some native phrases in this area would go a long way in improving the discipline in English classes or perhaps if possible a native speaker be present in the classroom as well.

Speaking

In areas where very few English speakers are present or pass through as tourists, students may not have encountered many native English speakers and therefore will struggle more with the speaking and pronunciation of English words. This will also mean that students likely have a much more limited vocabulary in English.

Writing

Writing has an important role in helping students strengthen their language skills, content, culture and literacy. Many students find it very difficult to learn how to write in English as the Thai script is different to the English script. English uses the Latin alphabet which is very different, and has different rules to the Thai alphabet.

Curriculum/Syllabus

One of the main problems in teaching the English language is an unclear and unsuitable curriculum. Where expectations and objectives are unclear, lessons are not able to be planned as well which can lead to lessons not being at an appropriate level, either too advanced or too easy for students which will slow learning progress. Having a comprehensive and cohesive syllabus with clear learning objectives across each lesson and term/year as a whole is important in being able to teach English to



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beginners at the correct level and at a sustainable pace. It also allows lessons to be planned well to a proper structure that allows for more effective learning.

School Facilities

The availability and quality of school facilities such as technology and learning resources are wide ranging across different schools, districts and countries. Many schools will not have sufficient facilities to properly support ideal teaching methods and may rely on older more traditional methods such as using a blackboard rather than a projector. In many countries, textbooks are either not available or not at an appropriate level for students, often too difficult for students' abilities. Visual support is greatly important for young learners in beginner English lessons. The use of an LCD projector for presentations, videos and other visual aid is extremely useful to aid in teaching and improve the level of English in students. The best aids to use when no projector is available, is the use of pictures as they are easily understood and great visual support.

<http://psychologyandeducation.net/pae/index.php/pae/article/view/3087/2761>

Class Size

A class with more than 38 students is considered to be a large class, which can be a challenge for teachers and slow learning as there can be a lack of resources, classroom management issues and difficulties with teacher-student rapport. Large classes are a common challenge faced by many teachers worldwide, resulting in problems of control and discipline. In some cases, classes may consist of 40-50 students which is an extremely large class size. With so many students, they are difficult to be controlled and pay less attention during the class. A strategy to combat the problems of a large class is to use group work. Using groups of 3-6 students, where students are assigned a task with a variety of activities, to include collaboration and cooperation, improves the learning and helps to deal with the challenges of monitoring learning.

- Pride
- New concepts
- anticipate problems
- If you don't speak their language, learn a few words to help them out

24.6 Activities and Photocopiable/electronic Resources

The International Teachers Association (ITA) is offering a resource platform from Early Childhood to Higher Education.

Here is the link for the printable resources



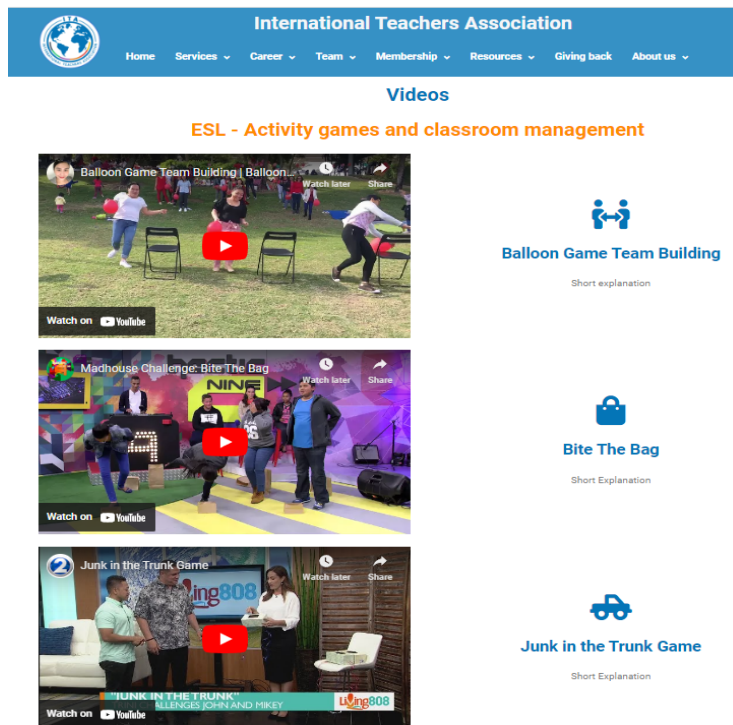
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Here is the link for some videos

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