

Language skills

The four skills of language learning are Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. They are four capabilities that allow an individual to comprehend, produce and use the language in effective interpersonal communication. They are most often acquired in the order of listening first, then speaking, then possibly reading and writing.

Listening and reading are called receptive skills because learners do not need to produce language to do these, they receive and understand it. Speaking and writing are called productive skills because learners doing these need to produce language.

Having a good English level means to understand and to produce the language, so we should teach and develop all the four language skills in our students.



Teaching Listening

Listening is a very important skill. It is the queen of the four skills as it helps students to speak, communicate with others and learn vocabulary and grammar. It is the first receptive language skill.

Listening difficulties

The speed

It is related to how many people are there in the conversation and how quickly they speak.

Vocabulary

It is related to the inability of students to understand the listening text if they cannot understand the vocabulary included.

Structures

It is related to the inability of students to understand the listening text if they cannot understand the key structures included.

The length and the topic

A long conversation about football, food, clothes, films or TV programs may be easier for students to understand than a short one about politics or science.

Intonation

The intonation and stress of English native speakers are different from speakers of other languages.

Stages of teaching a listening activity

Before listening:

Prepare students for the listening activity by:

- Making them interested with an interesting introduction to the topic.
- Giving them a reason for listening asking them a question to answer.
- Explaining the new words.
- Explaining the new structures.

During listening:

- Students listen to the text for the first time.
- Helping them guess what will happen next after listening to a part of the text.
- They compare their predictions after their first listening.
- Ask some questions to answer before they listen a second time.
- Students listen a second time.
- They do some activities e.g. filling in a table while listening the second time.

Post listening

- Check students' understanding of the whole listening text by asking more questions on details.
- The teacher reads aloud the text (the story) from the audio script with five or six mistakes (not the grammar of course). Students correct these mistakes either immediately or by making a list of these mistakes and tell the teacher of them after listening.



Teaching Reading

Reading is the second receptive language skill which includes the following three levels in sequence.

1. Getting the primary, directed meaning of a word, idea or sentence.
2. Getting what the writer is trying to say to us “between the lines” without actually stating it.
3. Analyzing what the writer says or means.

Techniques to teach reading:

1. KWL Technique (What I know – What I want to know – What I learned)

In this technique:

- The teacher uses a picture or the title to ask the students to say everything they know about the subject they’re talking about and lists their pieces of information (What I know)
- Students ask questions to get information about the topic they are reading about. The teacher accepts any questions that the students ask (What I want to know)
- The teacher gives answers to the questions the students asked. The teacher lists these pieces of information (What I learned)

2. DRTA Technique (Directed Reading Thinking Activity)

In this technique:

- The teacher asks students what they think a story or text with a title like this might be about. Students then read part of the story or text.
- The teacher asks the students what they think now. Are their guesses right or wrong?
- The teacher asks students what it is in the story or text that makes them think this.
- The teacher asks the students what they think will happen next.



Teaching Speaking

Speaking problems and their solution

Problem	Solution
Some students are afraid of making mistakes.	Be patient and encourage group work. Correct only serious mistakes.
Some students don't get a chance to take part in speaking.	Speak to them after the lesson.
Passive students don't participate in speaking.	They need help and attention from the teacher.
The topic is not interesting to students.	Move on to a different topic.
Some of our students speak very quietly.	Encourage them to speak loudly.

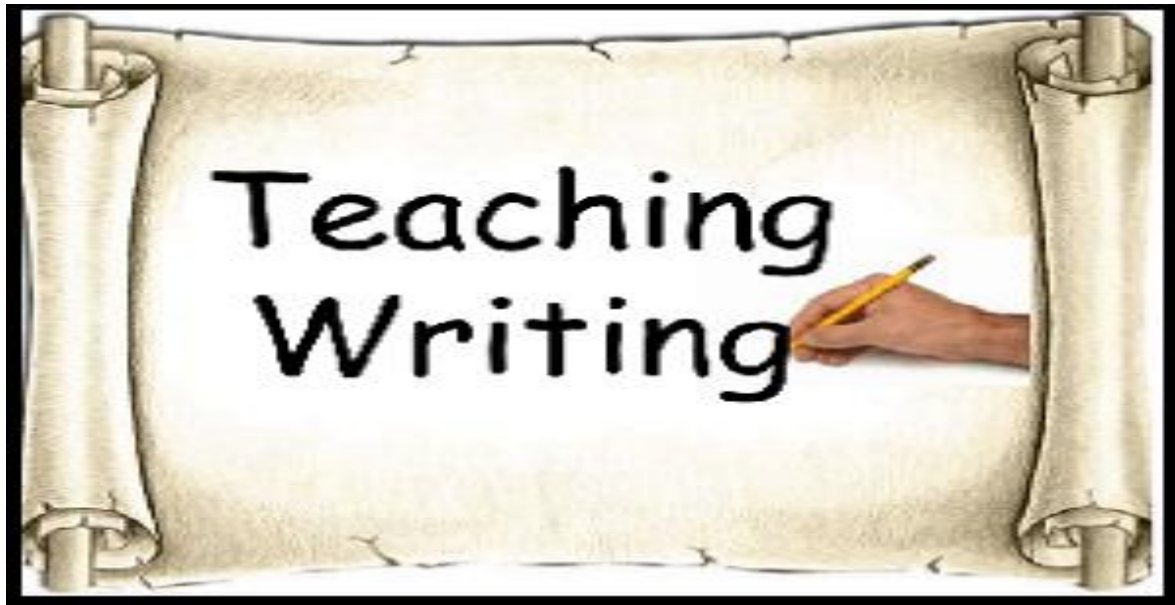
Speaking activities

There are six activities a teacher should use in speaking:

1. Students make sentences about themselves.
2. The teacher asks a question to one student who, in turn, asks another friend to answer.
3. The teacher tells a learner to ask another one a question.
4. The teacher asks a question and encourages students to give short, realistic answers.
5. The teacher asks the students to give a response of more than one sentence.
6. The teacher gives a real answer and asks the students to make a question for it.

Techniques for correcting speaking mistakes based on the type of mistake

Accuracy	Fluency
Expressions of face	Don't correct everything
Gesture with hands	Correct some at the end.
Something like "Try again".	List mistakes and deal with only common ones.



Teaching Writing

There are three stages to deal with writing: before writing, during writing, and after writing.

Before writing (4 steps):

Students get enough ideas and information necessary for writing. It helps learners focus on the purpose and possible readers of their written work before starting writing.

1. Grouping discussion.

Encourage your students to discuss a certain topic in groups. The advantages of this are:

- It helps students get different viewpoints.
- Stronger students can help weaker students.
- It helps the teacher find out whether his students have enough vocabulary and are good at language structures.

2. Sunshine outline.

- Students draw rays coming from the sun and write a question word on each ray: who, what...etc.
- Help students think of possible questions that begin with these question words. Then, they write a phrase or two to answer these questions.

3. Oral brainstorming.

This is done orally. It involves the use of questions. The teacher can write these questions on the board and ask each student to think out answers to them. The teacher should bear in mind the following points:

- Accept all students' answers.
- There are no wrong or right answers.
- Never force the students to follow your viewpoints.
- Never interrupt the students during answering.

The teacher discusses the answers with his students. Then, he asks them to go to the next step.

4. Interviewing.

Students interview each other. They share viewpoints and ideas. They usually share their personal experiences and think about them during the interview. This makes students relaxed and reduces the fear of writing.

During writing (3 steps): 1. Drafting, 2. Revising and 3. Editing.

- The teacher tells his students to write on every other line of their paper to allow room for revising and editing.
- Students write the first form of their writing.
- Students revise whether the content of their writing is clear or not, either in pairs or alone.
- Students edit their writing, either in pairs or alone, as they focus on grammatical, spelling and punctuation mistakes they might have in their writing.
- Students write the final form of their writing.

After writing (3 steps):

1. Publishing students' writing:

The teacher encourages his students to publish their writing in different ways, e.g. in classroom, school, newspaper or magazine. They can collect their written work in a classroom book. They can put it in the classroom, school library. Students can borrow it and read it.

2. Classroom discussion:

Students can read their writing to the whole class, in groups or in pairs. This helps students practice listening to and speaking about their writing.

3. Drawing pictures based on the writing:

Students start drawing pictures based on their writing. This helps students realize that learning English can be fun, enjoyable and interesting.