

2.1.3 Learning strategies

Pastimes

comparing favourite pastimes to learning preferences

Level	elementary/intermediate/advanced
Main goal	discovering learning styles
Language focus	comparing, expressing preferences using <i>prefer/like doing something</i> , comparative adjectives

Ask students to think about how they like to spend their free time, and to make a list of favourite activities. Have pairs or groups share notes, and arrange the activities into groups under the following headings: picture, sound, movement, and touch. (Groups may overlap.) Ask them to check which group(s) their favourite pastimes tend to belong to. Explain that the categories they used correspond to the four main types of perception (see note for *Questionnaire on learning styles* on page 18). To clarify what this means in practice, you may put the four types on the board and ask students how they could do a learning task (e.g. memorising irregular verb forms, or presenting a story for the class) in different ways corresponding to the four types. Then, ask them to think of their preferred type of perception when they learn things, e.g. do they read aloud or silently, or do they learn words by writing them down, and see if it is in the same group as their favourite pastimes. For example, Anita did pantomime for a few years and she is a devoted theatregoer: she remembers words best if she writes them down several times. So, it seems that for her *picture* and *movement* are more important than *sound*.

Forgetful me

analysing memories

Level	intermediate/advanced
Main goals	memory techniques, sharing personal experiences
Language focus	<i>remember</i> + gerund, <i>can/can't</i>

This activity reveals differences in the way individuals remember things and helps students identify their strengths for themselves.

Ask students to recall events, names, places, smells, feelings, and sounds from their lives about five to ten years ago. They should list things they can remember and try and explain why they can remember these and not other things. Give them a few examples of your own memories. When they have five or six items on the list, they share it with their partner or in

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a small group and discuss the types of things they remember better, and how they could use this in learning new vocabulary.

Here is one example: we tried to recall the first time we talked about the idea of this book in 1994, four years later. Anita remembered that we were sitting in the cosy armchairs of Ágota's living room, and she felt comfortable and interested in our conversation. Ágota remembered that there was a freshness in the air as the door to the balcony was open, and the room was lit by the early afternoon sun. As it seems, Anita tends to remember feelings while Ágota often remembers smells and places. So Anita tries to associate new words with human characteristics, or to her own feelings about them (funny words always stick in her mind!), and Ágota links words to the situations in which she learnt them or where she could use them.

Grouping words

learning new words

Main goal	memory techniques
Language focus	vocabulary building
Preparation	(copies of word lists)

This activity introduces a technique for learning new words. On the board, write a list of words you think are new to the class. It should be a random collection, with no grammatical or topical cohesion. Ask learners to look at the list and try to memorise as many of the words as they can in, say, five minutes. Then, erase the words and ask them to write down as many as they can remember. Do a quick survey to check results. Then, give them another list where the same number of new words are grouped in some logical way, and give them the same task. Check results and compare them with the first one. Explain that, in theory, learners should do better on the second task, as the meaningful grouping of words helps retention. If this was not the case, discuss what other factors may have helped them in doing the first task. Ask students what other techniques they know of and use for learning new words.

For more practice, you may give them the first list on a handout and ask them to try and group the words and learn them for the next lesson. You can check results next time.

Words for feelings*learning new words*

Level	elementary/intermediate
Main goal	memory techniques
Language focus	vocabulary building, describing
Note	may use as a warm-up + round-off

This activity introduces a learning style and shows how it works in learning new words.

Start the lesson by writing two words on the board expressing extremes of physical or mental state, such as: *tired/fresh*, *exhausted/energetic*, or *indifferent/excited*. Elicit words that describe states between the extremes and add one or two new words as well. Ask the students to write down and/or say a few sentences describing how they feel at the moment (e.g. *I am not very tired. I feel fit*, etc.), and encourage them to use the new words (e.g. ask if there is anyone who feels . . .). Then move on to some other activity. Before the end of the lesson, ask students to recall the new words they learnt at the beginning of the lesson. Ask if their mood has changed since then, and whether the new words were easy to remember. Explain that some people learn best if they link new input to movement or sensations, and associating new words with their own physical/mental state can help them remember words. Discuss how students could use this in practice, and then make a quick survey of who thought the technique could be useful.

Tuning in*identifying difficulties in listening*

Level	intermediate/advanced
Main goals	focused listening, identifying difficulties
Language focus	stress, intonation, pronunciation
Preparation	tape recorded speech or dialogue (from textbook)

This activity helps students distinguish their problems with listening. Also, setting a double task may help some students to focus their attention better.

Before asking your students to do a listening exercise from the main textbook, write the following points (or those appropriate to the selection) on the board:

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- distractions
- speech too fast
- strange dialect
- too many new words
- background noise
- too much information

Check if they understand all the words, and have students copy the list of problems. Then ask them to do the listening task. Play the recording a second time and tell the learners that, whenever they find it difficult to follow the material, they should mark one of the reasons in the above list. At the end of the recording check how much they have understood, and ask which problems were marked most often. You may follow with a discussion on which of the problems are easier to deal with, and what can be done about them.

You may use *Why don't you listen?* (page 39) as lead-in for this activity.

Variation:

Rather than writing the problems on the board yourself, invite the learners to cite problems they have had and build up the list together.

Singing story

catching key words in a song

Level	elementary/intermediate/advanced
Main goals	focused listening, guessing, self-confidence
Language focus	written fluency practice, vocabulary review
Preparation	tape recorded song + lyrics on handout or OHP
Note	may spread over two lessons or take up most of one lesson

This activity gives the learners some orientation and interest for listening without the tension of having to understand everything. It also helps them realise how much they can guess from understanding just a few words.

Select a pop song that has some story in it and for which you have the lyrics as well. Pick some key words from the song and write them on the board.

Ask students how much they usually understand of the words of pop songs, and what clues they use (such as the title and the refrain). Then invite them to read the key words from the song and make up a story from them. (This could be done in writing, as a homework assignment.) Then play them the song and ask them to focus on two things: if the tunes matched their story at all, and whether they could recognise any of the

key words. You may play the recording twice and then check how much they understood the story. Ask students whether having the key words helped them understand the whole story.

Finally, give them the lyrics, or read the story for them (simplify if necessary) so that they can compare it with their own. Discuss how much they could guess, and whether they can recognise and use key words in other tasks.

See *Weather forecast* (below) for a similar activity designed to introduce focused reading.

Weather forecast *reading for key words*

Level	beginner/elementary/intermediate/(advanced)
Main goals	scanning, self-confidence
Language focus	vocabulary review, future forms
Preparation	handouts with weather forecast page from a daily/weekly paper or recorded from radio news in the foreign language

This activity introduces the idea of focused reading and helps students realise how much they can gather from just a few words.

You may use this activity to review vocabulary on weather conditions. Give students or pairs a copy of the weather forecast page of a foreign language paper: select a text which is well above the level of the group. Ask them to underline the words that they think describe the weather. When they have finished, ask them what they can say about the weather in the foreign country. Put a stroke on the board for each idea or characteristic, and congratulate students on the amount they understood just by focusing on a few words! To prepare students for the idea of focusing, you may use *Singing story* (page 32), the listening version of this activity.

Variation 1:

With intermediate students, you may either set a tight time limit to make the task more difficult, or instead of reading, have them listen to the forecast (read it for them, or play recorded material).

Variation 2:

With intermediate and advanced students you may use any article suitable in content and length for the class. Distribute handouts and tell students to read through the text quickly and underline the words they know (other than articles and prepositions). Tell them that they have

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only five minutes to do this. Next, they should reread the words they picked and then read the first paragraph more carefully. Ask them to try and guess what the article was about and exchange their interpretations with a partner. Then pool all guesses and see how close they are to each other and to the correct answer: point out to students that they were able to make good guesses without reading the whole article. For further practice, see *Reading assignment* on page 74.

Attentive reading

experimenting with reading strategies

Level	elementary/intermediate/advanced
Main goals	comprehension strategies, focusing on the learning process
Language focus	reading practice
Preparation	handouts
Note	may be used as a homework assignment

The aim of this activity is to get students to realise that different types of text require different modes of reading.

Select two written passages appropriate to the level of the students. They should be of about equal length and difficulty, but one of them should be a description of a person, a building or a landscape, elaborated with a lot of detailed information, and the other should be an interesting story, with a clear line of events. Give both to students and ask them to read each text only once as homework. They should write down the exact times when they started and finished reading and answer the questions below. Write these on the board and ask students to copy them, so that they know what information to focus on when they are reading the text.

- 1 What is the main topic of the text?
- 2 Who is/are the main character(s)? (or, what is described in the text?)
- 3 Write down as many names and words as you can remember from the text.

In the next lesson check the answers to the first two questions. Have students compare reading times, level of comprehension and retention for the two texts, and discuss possible reasons for differences. You may start the discussion by asking students to estimate the time it would take to read *War and Peace* (or any other novel that they are likely to have heard of) and the time it would take to find out from a timetable when the next train leaves for London (or any other city relevant to the students). This is of course an exaggerated contrast between two different reading strategies, but it may help students realise that they do use different

strategies in their reading, and that these very much depend on the nature of the particular task. For further practice in reading strategies, see *Reading assignment* on page 74.

Variation:

With advanced students you may use more difficult texts, and instead of the reading times, ask students to record the number of times they had to read the texts in order to be able to answer the comprehension questions.

How to read
experimenting with reading strategies

Level	intermediate/advanced
Main goals	scanning, skimming
Language focus	reading practice
Preparation	handouts with task sheet and written passage

The activity helps students realise that different reading tasks require different strategies in reading.

Select a written passage appropriate to the level of the class. Give each student the same passage but different task sheets to one half than to the other. The first task sheet should instruct students to look for specific pieces of information in the text, e.g. the name and occupation of characters or if there are any animals mentioned, etc. The second sheet should ask general comprehension questions that require careful reading of the whole text. The number of questions should be about the same. Give students the task sheet first and ask them to read it carefully before they set about the task. Then give them the text: they should read it only once, and *time* their reading.

Students in the first group are likely to finish earlier, so you may give some extra follow-up task at the bottom of the sheet that does not require further reading (e.g. make a list of animal names you know in the foreign language). When both groups have finished, have them compare reading times, and reveal the difference in their tasks. Discuss implications for reading strategy. For further practice in reading strategies, see *Reading assignment* on page 74.

How to guess
making and adjusting guesses

Main goals	guessing from clues, creativity
Language focus	vocabulary building
Preparation	handouts

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This activity invites students to stretch their minds and introduces a technique to get round unfamiliar words.

Select a passage appropriate to the level of the class, and make a list of the new words separate from the original text. Give students the list and ask them to make guesses on the meaning and grammatical type (noun, verb, etc.) of each word. Then give them the passage and have them adjust their guesses. Follow with a discussion on how and why they made adjustments and how they could use guessing in other tasks. For further practice in guessing from clues, see *Reading assignment* on page 74.

Facetalking

guessing words from facial expression and gestures

Main goals	communication strategies: using mimes and gestures, guessing from clues
Language focus	adjectives, vocabulary review
Preparation	cards
Note	this activity may not work out well with very shy or too lively groups

This activity helps students to realise how much they can express without words.

You will need stacks of cards with one adjective on each describing a person's physical or emotional state (e.g. *bored, tired, happy, sad, hurt, surprised, dreamy, sleepy, hot, cold*: see cards in the Appendix). Each pair or group gets a stack of cards, and one student picks up the first card (without showing it to anyone else!) and tries to mime the given emotional state by facial expression and gestures. The student who comes close enough (e.g. saying *tired* for *exhausted*) in guessing, takes up the next card. You may stop them after five minutes and see who acted or guessed best, and how many cards were used. As a follow up, discuss the difficulty of the task. Once students get to know the activity, you can invite them to add to the card collection. For further practice, see *Cartoon story* on page 61.

Variation:

Give each group a mask that covers the eyes and/or the face. Ask one learner from each group to put on the mask and try to express a feeling with body movements (you may let them choose for themselves) that others in the group will try to guess.

The other side*listening to an L2 speaker of the students' mother tongue*

Main goals	communication strategies, self-confidence
Preparation	tape recording or printed text on handouts or OHP
Note	only works with monolingual groups

The activity focuses on the relationship between correct speech and communication, and gives confidence to the students by showing that they too can express a lot of ideas at their current level of accuracy.

Ask a native speaker of the foreign language to speak or write something (preferably matching some topic in the textbook) in the students' mother tongue, and record the performance, which should not be too proficient. Present the material to the students and ask them how much they understand, if they notice any mistakes, which mistakes hinder understanding most, etc. Discuss how much of the speaker's message got through despite the mistakes and whether this usually applies to their use of the foreign language as well. It may also be useful to discuss how students feel about making mistakes. With beginners, the follow-up discussion may be conducted in their mother tongue.

Variation:

With advanced students you may do a similar activity with some authentic material: unedited, natural native speech or transcript of speech in the foreign language. You can then focus on slips of grammar, halts and hesitation, search for words, etc. In another application, you may use the activity to focus on compensation strategies (using synonyms, circumlocution, etc.).

Just a smile*solving a simple situation in a one-sided conversation*

Main goals	communication strategies: using mimes and gestures
Language focus	oral fluency practice, reported speech
Preparation	role cards

The point of the activity is to give students confidence in their communicative abilities, and show them a technique that helps them to communicate.

You need to prepare this activity with some discussion on mimes and gestures, or introduce the idea with another activity, such as *Facetalking* (page 36). Then students form pairs to act out a simple situation (see in the Appendix) with one of them speaking and the other one responding only with gestures and mimes. Partners switch roles after two to three

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minutes, and do another situation. After the activity, ask some students what their silent partner ‘said’ in their ‘conversation’.

2.1.4 Community building

Who said what

learning students’ names

Level	intermediate
Main goal	group cohesion
Language focus	reported speech
Note	may be especially useful in adult education

This activity encourages students to recognise others in the group (and not focus solely on the teacher).

In the first few weeks, after a group activity or pair work, ask a few students to report what the other(s) have said, mentioning the names as well, so that you can learn their names. It is of course also for the students to learn each other’s names, which can be a first step towards cooperation and forming a community.

Close your ears

speaking without interruption and listening in pairs

Level	elementary/intermediate/advanced
Main goals	sharing personal experiences, empathy
Language focus	oral fluency practice
Preparation	role cards A and B (see in the Appendix)
Note	may take a long time if students get interested in the discussion part

This activity helps students realise the significance of being attentive and giving feedback in communication.

Students work in pairs. In each pair, give one student role card A or ask them to think of a serious problem they would like to tell somebody about, and give card B to the other student. The role of A is to share a problem with a friend and the role of B is to be an uninterested, unsympathetic listener. Partners take turns in the two roles, and when they finish they discuss the experience. Most students will note that it was not nice to speak to an inattentive audience. Get them to describe the behaviour of bad listeners and the reasons why this may disturb the speaker.