JIMALEE SOWELL
Cote d'Ivoire

How to Conduct an ELT Workshop

In my experience as a teacher and teacher trainer, I have come to realize that in some parts of the world there is no clear line between what constitutes a paper presentation or lecture and what constitutes a workshop. Workshops in some countries are often conducted in much the same manner as a lecture—with the presenter speaking to an audience that sits and listens passively.

The word *work* in *workshop* indicates that participants need to do work rather than just receive ideas and information as they scribble in their notebooks. A workshop should be a platform to engage the audience in activities and provide opportunities to share ideas and experiences with one another. As Portner (2006, ix) says, "presenting a workshop is a form of teaching in which you invite those in attendance (participants) to interact with you and each other in the exploration of a professional issue, curriculum content, or instructional methodology." This does not mean, though, that workshops consist exclusively of engaging in activities—they include both presenting information and facilitating activities and may also include the exploration of ideas (Portner 2006).

While many teachers feel comfortable delivering paper presentations and lecturing in front of a class, they are often unfamiliar with workshops and are therefore fearful of conducting them. However, workshops are a great way for English language teaching (ELT) professionals to share their interests and talents with colleagues at their own institutions or at conferences. As English teaching professionals, we all have areas of interest and expertise; therefore, it would be a shame for us to not share our best practices. Additionally, at some educational institutions, conducting workshops is an expected part of continuing professional development, along with paper presentations and publications. This article, then, serves to give readers a framework for planning, preparing, and delivering a successful workshop, including strategies to keep on pace and anticipate and overcome obstacles.

PLANNING AND PREPARING YOUR WORKSHOP

Choose a topic

First, choose a topic that is workshop-friendly. This means you need a hands-on topic that allows your participants to carry out activities and engage in discussion. For instance, a topic that demonstrates how to conduct interactive reading activities would be good for a workshop. In contrast, a topic such as the history of English language teaching, which is more about delivering information than providing hands-on practice, is less amenable to a workshop and would be better suited for a lecture.

You need a hands-on topic that allows your participants to carry out activities and engage in discussion.

If presenting at a local or regional conference, you will often need to choose a topic that follows the conference theme. All conferences will list their theme and sub-themes. Some themes will have a specific focus, such as the "Inspire to Write" conference held at the University of Dhaka in 2014 that called for workshops and papers specifically related to the teaching of writing. Other conferences will have a more expansive focus and be open to topics outside their theme, such as the 2014 University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh conference, "The 21st Century Classroom: Directions, Issues and Changes," which invited pertinent workshops and papers but did not limit submission of proposals to only those themes.

Know your audience

In order to engage workshop participants, you need to choose a topic that is relevant to them. Of course, the easiest audience to select a topic for would be the teachers you work with because you are aware of their teaching contexts and interests. If presenting for your colleagues, you could even take an informal survey about topics of interest to them.

When you choose your topic, keep in mind the fundamental characteristics of the adult learner. Adult learners have experiences they can draw upon, are self-motivated and directed, learn best when they view what they are learning as beneficial, and want learning that is immediately useful (Knowles 1984). Therefore, it is important to design your workshop in a way that allows the participants to tap into and share prior experiences and to provide knowledge, skills, and techniques that they can immediately apply to their teaching.

For a workshop at a conference, it is not so easy to predict exactly who will be your audience or how much your audience will know about your topic; you could have a mixed group of participants ranging from elementary school teachers to school principals unless you specify that your topic is for teachers of a certain level, such as young learners or university students. In cases where you have such a mixed group, choose a topic that is fairly universal for all teachers or one that is adaptable to students of all levels. For example, a workshop on giving effective instructions is beneficial as most teachers, even the very experienced, need practice giving effective instructions. An interactive reading activities workshop could use materials that are at an appropriate level for the workshop participants and be followed by a discussion about how to adapt the activities for students of different ages and levels.

If you are going to work with the same group of teachers again, ask the participants for input about workshops they would like to attend and cater to their desires for your next workshop. Your workshops will be more successful when you address your audience's needs and give participants activities, techniques, and strategies that they can apply in their classrooms.

Attend a workshop

One of the best ways to prepare for your workshop is to attend other workshops. Make notes about what went well and why. What did you like or dislike about how the presenter conducted the workshop? What kinds of problems did you see that you would want to avoid in your own workshop? For example, I have liked workshops with well-prepared and confident speakers who knew how to manage time and offered the audience techniques they could add to their teaching repertoire. Some of the things I liked less were ill-prepared speakers, speakers who talked at their audience but failed to engage them, and speakers who could not successfully manage time.

Practice your workshop

Practice your workshop before you deliver it professionally. An ideal practice audience would be other English teachers since they can respond to your content in an authentic fashion. If unable to secure an audience of English teaching professionals, you might be able to coax friends or family members to act as participants for a rehearsal. Run your rehearsal exactly as you plan to conduct your workshop. Encourage your practice audience to ask questions related to your workshop. Time yourself and get feedback on your rehearsal so that you can make adjustments before the actual workshop.

Check your presentation room

Inspect the room where you will conduct your workshop so you know the layout, the seating arrangements, and the kind of multimedia equipment that is available. It is helpful if you can inspect your presentation room before you start preparing your workshop. In reality, though, you might only be able to view your presentation room a few hours before your workshop begins, and, in some cases, you might not have the chance to see your presentation room before you start your workshop.

Consider the seating arrangements

Ideally, you will present in a room with a seating arrangement that is conducive to workshops—i.e., workshop participants are able to work together in pairs or groups and can easily shift from pair to group work and vice versa. However, the ideal is not necessarily the norm, and you might find yourself in a room with fixed chairs and tables that are impossible to move. Keep all possible seating arrangements in mind as you prepare your workshop activities, and be wary of activities that require absolute numbers. For example, some activities might strictly require working in groups of four. If you do not know that you will be able to easily get your workshop participants into groups of four, either adapt your activity or choose an activity that allows for the number combinations you need to accommodate.

Have a backup plan for technology

There is a saying, "Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst," which is how you should approach using technology in your workshop. Although technology can be a wonderful addition to your workshop, it does not always function, and if you decide to use it, make sure you have a backup plan to allow for various technical failures such as an interrupted Internet connection or a sudden power outage. If, for example, you have written discussion questions on PowerPoint slides, also prepare handouts with the same questions. If your PowerPoint presentation has pictures that are essential to your workshop, print them out and have them ready. Also, have something for your audience to do while you set up your equipment in the event that it takes longer than expected. Do not find yourself in a position where you are unable to deliver a good workshop due to technical failure, and never blame an inability to present well on technical considerations. Your audience will not be on your side if you tell them that you had a wonderful workshop prepared that you cannot present because the technology failed.

Provide handouts for workshop participants

Prepare a handout that outlines the activities or processes you will cover so that participants can reenact the activities at a later date. Simply providing a copy of PowerPoint slides is not always enough since much of what you actually do in your workshop will not be on the slides. Make sure you bring more than enough handouts for everyone.

PARTS OF THE WORKSHOP

A workshop (or presentation) should have a clear beginning (introduction and warm-up), middle (body), and end (conclusion and question-answer session) (Lukey-Coutsocostas and Tanner-Bogia 1998). Following is a description of the three parts of a typical workshop.

BEGINNING STAGE OF THE WORKSHOP

Introduction

When you start your workshop, introduce yourself and state your affiliation. Thank your participants for attending your workshop. Present the title of your workshop, and give

a brief introduction of your topic. Let your workshop participants know the expected outcomes of your workshop so that they will have an idea of what learning or skills development they will take away. However, keep your agenda somewhat open-ended to allow for flexibility in your workshop (Garmston and Wellman 1992).

Warm-up

Warm-up activities are ice-breakers that help participants get acquainted and feel more relaxed with one another before the main part of the workshop begins. Warm-ups also serve as a diagnostic for your workshop, helping you to learn a bit about what the participants know about your topic so you can make necessary adjustments to timing and the tasks you have planned. Additionally, warm-up activities introduce your audience to the topic you are about to present and activate any relevant background knowledge they might possess. Warm-ups during the first few minutes also help you with latecomers—you will not need to start and restart as tardy participants filter in, and those who arrived on time will have something to do as you wait for everyone to arrive.

What kind of warm-ups can you do? You can give your participants a few discussion questions or true/false statements related to your topic and have them talk in pairs or small groups, and then have a few participants share with the whole group what they discussed. You could also have participants do a puzzle, such as a crossword, related to your topic. You can also do any kind of ELT warm-up activity—perhaps one that you have had success with and that they can take into their own classrooms.

One energetic and engaging warm-up is "Stand up if … ." For this activity, prepare a list of facts you want to know about the attendees of your workshop. They will stand up for each "Stand up if … " statement that is true for them. For example, you can say, "Stand up if … ":

- you teach in a primary school.
- you teach at a university.
- you teach writing.
- you like writing.

MIDDLE STAGE OF THE WORKSHOP

Group work

Remember that a workshop needs to involve active learning, not just passive listening, and the challenge is to keep participants engaged. According to Garmston and Wellman (1992, 71), "small-group activities (involving two or more persons) are a basic building block for interactive presentation strategies that help participants attend, focus, and construct meaning from experiences." In the body of your workshop, allow time for pair, small-group, and whole-group discussion as you run your activities. It is not enough to explain activities to participants and then expect that they will later be able to carry them out. Learning how to conduct an activity usually comes from actually doing it. To save time, you might need to do an abbreviated version. If, for example, an activity usually takes about 40 minutes in the classroom, you can run your activity for 10 to 15 minutes, or as long as it takes for participants to fully understand how to carry it out. If you have an extremely large audience, you can demonstrate your activities with a few participants in front of the whole group.

It is essential that workshop participants understand the purpose of the activities you show and how they can be used in the

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participants' contexts. After conducting an activity, have participants work together in groups to discuss how they could use the activity in their own classrooms. Would they be able to use the activity just as it is, or would they adapt it? If so, how? If you have a mixed audience, you can group participants together according to institutional type: primary school teachers together, secondary school teachers together, and so on. If time allows, representatives from each small group can share their ideas with the whole group.

Level of materials

What level of materials will you use when demonstrating activities? There is no perfect choice, and what you decide really depends on your purpose and your audience. If you are working with a mixed audience, you might choose to use materials that would be engaging for the entire audience (reminding participants, of course, that the activities would need to be adapted to fit their students), or you could prepare different levels of materials and group teachers according to institutional type, though this could entail a lot of extra work, and teachers would likely still need to adapt materials to fit their students. If you are working with teachers from a single institutional type, such as elementary school teachers, you might choose to run the activities exactly as you would with students. However, teachers still might need to make adaptations to the materials and activities to fit their context. In short, it is easier to use level-appropriate materials that teachers take directly into their classrooms when working with a homogeneous group, and easier to use materials that might be challenging and engaging for the entire audience when you have a heterogeneous group. Remember, however, to emphasize to participants that activities need to be context-appropriate whether adapted or not.

Managing time

It is said that timing is everything, and it is certainly important to the success or failure of your workshop. Before you plan your workshop, check the time allotment carefully. Time allowed for workshops is typically 40 to 50 minutes, but can be as little as 15 to 20 minutes, and you could be asked to deliver a workshop that is an hour or longer. Plan according to the allotted time, but be ready to expand or reduce your workshop to meet the needs of your participants and the fluid workshop schedule. The best way to do this is to plan more activities or discussion sessions than you think you might need. However, make sure that the extra elements will not damage the integrity of your workshop whether you use them or not.

For my interactive reading activities workshops, for example, I have six activities written on a handout. When I do this workshop, I check the time allotment and then choose how many of the activities will fit into the workshop schedule. I also prepare one or more additional activities I can use in case the teachers I am working with happen to be particularly fast in getting through the regularly scheduled activities. No matter how many activities I actually do, I never skip the opening or the closing. And I always have a handout that includes all the interactive reading activities I do in workshops and usually a few more.

When you start an activity, let participants know how much time they have. This will help you schedule accurately and keep the participants on track and focused. If they know, for example, that they have ten minutes to complete a task that has five questions, they will not spend ten minutes on the first question. When time is up, stop the activity. It is often not essential that everyone complete an activity in its entirety, and if you allow all groups or participants to take as much time as they think they need, you will not be managing time, but time will be managing you. You do not want to have a situation where some groups are finished before others and have nothing to do while waiting for the rest to conclude.

Using visuals in the workshop

While using visuals in your workshop is not essential, they are a nice addition that can

aid in transmitting your message. As Garmston and Wellman (1992) say, "Good graphics greatly support the learning process for many participants. On average, only 20 percent of an audience has auditory-processing strengths. This means that most people will remember the imagery you use more than your words" (67). Visuals can be photographs, drawings, flip charts, videos, overhead transparencies, or some kind of presentation software. Among the presentation software available, PowerPoint is currently the most commonly used (Ledden 2013). While PowerPoint is extremely popular, it is not always used effectively. According to Weissman (2011), in an effort to authenticate their ideas, presenters "bulk up their PowerPoint slides with loads of data and jabber away as they click through them. Instead of impressing their audiences, they lose—or, worse, alienate—them" (62). Common problems associated with PowerPoint are too much text on slides, confusing graphics, and presenters who recite their slides verbatim instead of focusing on the audience. Ways to avoid these problems are to limit text on PowerPoint slides, highlight only essential information, use meaningful visuals, and avoid rushing from one slide to the next (Kosslyn 2007).

Answering questions

As a presenter, you will get questions you do not know the answer to. According to Ledden (2013), it is a good practice to try to predict the questions that might come up and to prepare answers to them; it is also advisable to be honest with your audience about what you do not know. If you feel confident, you might also turn the question to the audience to see if anyone else can answer it. Campbell (2002) gives some responses that can be used when faced with questions you do not know how to answer:

- I don't know the answer, but I can find out for you. If you will leave me your email address, I will get back to you.
- I hadn't considered that one. I need to think about it and get back to the question later.
- I'm not sure I know the answer to that. Maybe we could talk about it after the session is finished.
- There are really no right or wrong answers to that question. However, my experience has been … .

Furthermore, Ledden (2013) advises using the following method when asked a question you can answer confidently:

- Take the name of the audience member.
- Repeat or rephrase the question for the rest of the audience.
- Answer it.
- Check the response to your answer with the audience member.
- Thank the audience member.

ENDING STAGE OF THE WORKSHOP

At the end of your workshop, briefly go over what you covered. Make sure participants know the names of the activities presented and how they can conduct them in the future. Allow time for questions and answers and final comments. Get feedback from your participants on how the workshop went. Find out if your proposed outcomes were achieved. Written feedback is, of course, always preferable if you want honest feedback. You can find a myriad of workshop feedback forms and templates through an Internet search, but when you use or prepare a feedback form, think carefully about the specific areas of your workshop you would like to receive feedback on.

Following the closing, make yourself available to your participants for any further questions, comments, or related discussion. It is also a good idea to have business cards to distribute in the event that some of the participants would like to contact you at a later date. Some participants might also ask to take photos with you.

ADVICE ON HOW TO DEAL WITH NERVES

You will likely feel nervous before your workshop—manifested as anxiety for the entire week prior to your workshop or as jitters when you enter your presentation room. Before any kind of public-speaking event, it is common to suddenly wonder why you ever thought that you would be able to do a workshop and to feel you do not have enough experience or knowledge to help your audience. This feeling is referred to as *imposter syndrome* (Clance 1985). In spite of having a lot that you can share with others, you feel that you do not. You may not be able to completely get rid of this feeling, but among the best ways to deal with it are to focus on what you want to convey to the audience, to be well prepared, and to accept that you are not perfect (Campbell 2002).

ADVICE ON HOW TO HANDLE THE AUDIENCE

Generally, workshop participants want to be in your workshop and as such are on your side; however, you might find some individuals who are difficult to handle. Here are potential difficulties you might encounter and ways to deal with them.

Participants who are reluctant to speak out

It can be quite tense and even embarrassing when you ask your audience a question but get no response. In order to preempt this situation, you should give participants time to think individually and discuss their ideas in pairs or small groups before asking them to share with the entire audience. After participants have had time to discuss their thoughts, they will be more comfortable sharing their ideas with everyone.

A participant who wants to speak all the time

Some people love to be heard and will take every available opportunity to speak and answer all your questions. However, as a facilitator, you need to control this. Your focus on only one or two participants will annoy others and make them feel left out. You want the chance to speak to be distributed among as many workshop participants as possible. Try to call on different people and make sure you do not call on the same person repeatedly. If one person keeps insisting that you call on him or her, acknowledge that person's willingness to contribute but emphasize that you want to give opportunities to speak to other participants.

One way to get everyone involved while ensuring that no one person dominates is to put the participants in groups and give them a list of questions or problems to work through. Tell members of each group that they are responsible for one or two questions or problems—so they should focus specifically on the question(s) or problem(s) assigned—but that they should work through other questions or problems if time remains. Once time is called, have a representative from each group briefly explain to everyone what his or her group discussed. You can also have each group work on a different activity related to your central theme and then have group representatives report on what was discussed in their group.

A participant who insists that you are wrong

A participant may strongly disagree with what you say or insist that you have given wrong information. Do not argue with the participant. Thank the participant for expressing the opinion and restate your position. If, however, the participant continues to insist that you are wrong, suggest that you talk over the issue at the end of the workshop. You do not want a situation where you are giving all your attention to only one participant, and you do not want to become angry or out of control with anyone in your workshop.

A participant who brings up an off-topic issue

If a participant makes a comment or asks a question that is completely irrelevant to your topic, thank the participant, but redirect him or her back to the topic at hand. Let the individual know that the point raised is good for a topic in another workshop or

Treat unexpected occurrences as an opportunity to learn and improve for the next workshop.

suggest that you talk about it at the end of the workshop. If you allow for unrelated digressions, the direction of your workshop could go off on a winding road.

A participant who already knows too much

You might find that you have participants in your audience who know a great deal about your topic—in fact, they decided to attend your workshop because it is a topic of interest for them. In their enthusiasm, such participants might want to speak a lot to demonstrate their knowledge. While you certainly do not want to curb their enthusiasm, let them know that you would like to also give time for ideas and responses from other participants. If possible, get the "experts" to work in groups with participants who know less about the topic.

LEARNING FROM DIFFICULTIES OR FAILURE

Your workshop may not go exactly as you want it to, but that is okay. Treat unexpected occurrences as an opportunity to learn and improve for the next workshop. The more you present, the greater the chance that you will become a skilled and confident presenter. However, you have to start from somewhere, and you cannot learn what leading a workshop is like unless you are first willing to do it.

CONCLUSION

Delivering workshops is an important part of an English instructor's professional development and a great way to share with other teachers—whether for colleagues, for local teachers, or for regional or national conferences. However, it is essential that workshops provide interactive sessions and are not delivered in lecture mode. I hope that this article helps more English teachers gain the confidence and know-how to conduct successful workshops and take the initiative to do so. I believe that many English language teachers will discover that delivering workshops can become an enjoyable part of their professional development.

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Jimalee Sowell holds a master's degree in TESOL from SIT Graduate Institute in Vermont. She completed two consecutive English Language Fellowships in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and is currently an English Language Fellow in the Ivory Coast.

KATHLEEN F. MALU AND BRYCE SMEDLEY
United States

Community-Based English Clubs: English Practice and Social Change Outside the Classroom

Two widely held beliefs are that English is one of the most important global languages and that knowledge of English leads to expanded career opportunities, salary increases, and improvements in living standards. Countries around the world recognize that to remain competitive in the global economy, their citizens must learn English.

To that end, governments make policy changes that support the teaching and learning of English. As examples, consider the introduction of English in Tunisia beginning in grade five (Afia 2006) and the adoption of English as an official language in Rwanda (Malu 2013). In countries where English as a foreign language (EFL) is taught in schools and universities, language learners study oral and written language. Yet language learners from Turkey to the Democratic Republic of the Congo tell us that learning English in classroom settings is not sufficient. They want opportunities beyond the classroom to practice English.

This article addresses that desire by defining and providing a rationale for the creation of community-based English clubs. We offer strategies that individuals can use to create and sustain English clubs, and we suggest meeting activities that will engage members in conversations and potential community action on a range of topics such as democracy, gender equality, and environmental protection.

DEFINITION OF A COMMUNITY-BASED ENGLISH CLUB

The "club" concept is a worldwide phenomenon. Book clubs are a venue for talking about books; school- or university-based clubs such as debate clubs, foreign-language clubs, and sports clubs offer members opportunities to engage in activities of interest to them. Membership in such clubs may be voluntary or based upon qualifications or expertise.

Community-based English clubs are similar to these clubs. They are informal gatherings of individuals who meet regularly and often voluntarily and who come from different parts of a community, town, or village for the express purpose of practicing English. Members may be professionals or students at secondary and university levels. Members commit to speaking in English during meetings as they engage in activities that support and encourage them to use the language.

There are various models of community-based English clubs. In countries that we

are familiar with, some clubs are created by EFL teachers who charge membership fees that supplement their modest teacher salary. But not all clubs charge fees. Local artists create clubs whose goal is to gather like-minded individuals seeking to advance their careers or expand their contacts globally. Local activists create clubs and use English as a vehicle to discuss politics, cultural norms, and important community issues. Some clubs simply provide a safe place where members practice English.

The primary goals of English clubs are communicating and practicing English. English club activities may incorporate reading, writing, listening, speaking, and critical thinking; however, the focus of community-based English clubs is on practicing oral language skills—speaking and listening to English. In general, members engage in activities relevant to the immediate community or region of a country. These activities may address national concerns or global challenges, and they are more meaningful when they are member-focused. Members also interact collaboratively and cooperatively, practicing English by discussing real-life issues and expressing themselves in the safety of the club environment.

RATIONALE FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ENGLISH CLUBS AND EFL TEACHER PARTICIPATION

There are numerous reasons why EFL educators should consider creating and supporting community-based English clubs. In many countries, students have EFL class a few hours per week—enough time for studying vocabulary, grammar, and written English, with little time to concentrate on oral language. Students often leave school with strong knowledge of the written language and a thirst for gaining fluency and confidence in spoken language. EFL teachers who support community-based English clubs can help address this knowledge gap.

EFL teachers—particularly those who are non-native speakers and lack opportunities to sustain their language proficiency—also benefit from the clubs because they can practice English. Members may include individuals who have studied or worked in an English-dominant environment, and clubs may invite international, native English–speaking visitors to share ideas and information.

Besides the practical reasons for creating English clubs, theory and research also suggest that EFL teachers should support and promote English-language clubs. For instance, Au (1998) argues that language acquisition is most effective when individuals use language for meaningful purposes and connect experience, knowledge, and culture through authentic language use. Because members discuss topics that are meaningful to them, they have opportunities to connect their knowledge to language. Having the space to make such connections allows members to socially construct language and thought—two essential ingredients in learning (Vygotsky 1987). Meaningful topics and materials also produce lively and engaging club meetings and ensure that members remain committed to the club over an extended period of time.

Additionally, research suggests that when individuals use a foreign language, they are more likely to make judgments that are different from those they would make in their native, first, or primary language (Costa et al. 2014). Thus, conversations about moral dilemmas can lead club members to develop new and different ways of viewing and judging situations and individuals.

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If we acknowledge that language learning is a lifelong activity, English clubs can play a key role in sustaining this learning, and EFL teachers who actively participate can play an important part.

THE CLUB LEADER

For community-based English clubs to succeed, there needs to be a club leader. This individual need not have extensive knowledge of English, but he or she needs to have leadership qualities, including strong interpersonal, collaborative, and organizational skills. The leader's role is to recruit or invite members to join (and encourage members to do the same); establish and maintain club membership and club rules; and plan, organize, and lead club meetings.

A local EFL teacher or university professor may be ideally positioned to organize an English club or at least play an advisory role. However, this individual must take care not to assume the role of teacher or professor during club meetings. The most effective club leader assumes the role of facilitator, coach, or guide. In this role, the leader must be supportive, flexible, and nurturing because the effectiveness and sustainability of a club will depend, in large part, on how well the leader and members meet in a spirit of cooperation. If an educator is selected as leader, it is essential that this individual remain mindful that members are not students—the club is not a classroom.

The identification and selection of a club leader may take time. For instance, a group of individuals may want to form a club, but initially none may want to lead. Until the club is established and a leader emerges, individual members may assume the role of leader on a rotating basis, or leadership may be shared. Individuals who want to start a club might invite an English language professional to serve as club facilitator for the first few meetings until the club can select a leader.

CLUB MEMBERS

Club membership should be open to everyone. Participation should be encouraged from as wide and diverse a group as possible. Anyone committed to practicing English regularly for a few hours should be welcomed into the club. Members might include young people and professionals, workers and housewives, grandparents and grandchildren—anyone who wants to practice speaking English. Key requirements should be members' availability and commitment to attend club meetings.

CLUB MEETING SITE

American Spaces—established by U.S. embassies in many countries—and community libraries naturally support and complement the goals of English clubs. These sites often have materials and technology that clubs can use. Absent such a space, members can meet in schools, parks, or members' houses. Attendance will be maximized if locations are easily accessible via public transportation.

THE FIRST CLUB MEETING

We suggest a weekend date be chosen for the first meeting so that as many potential members as possible can attend. At the first meeting, members should select a mutually convenient time for subsequent meetings. If most members are in school, a Friday evening meeting may work well. But if members have full-time jobs, Saturday or Sunday afternoons may be best. If most or all members attend religious services, members may meet before or after a service. Schedules and availability may differ between men and women, and these differences should be addressed. The key element is this: clubs that consider the needs and desires of their members have a greater chance of long-term success.

SELECTION OF CLUB LEADERSHIP

At the first meeting, members should select a club leader. As mentioned above,

CLUB ELECTION PROCEDURES

1. Members receive advance notice of the election date.
2. On the date, club members meet. A Timekeeper is chosen to keep time and supervise the election. The Timekeeper may not run for office. Ballots (small pieces of paper, with a distinct mark on each) are created and held by the Timekeeper.
3. Club members either self-nominate or nominate members as candidates for leadership positions: Leader [President], Assistant Leader [Vice President], and Secretary.
4. Candidates accept—or decline—the nomination.
5. Candidates for Leader [President] stand before the members and explain why they want the position. (We suggest these speeches be no more than three minutes.)
6. Candidates answer questions from club members. The Timekeeper sets a reasonable length of time for questions and answers.
7. Steps 5 and 6 are repeated for the positions of Assistant Leader [Vice President] and Secretary.
8. The Timekeeper asks for two volunteers (they may *not* be candidates) to help distribute the ballots—one to each member, including all the candidates—and witness the tally count.
9. Members vote in silence, writing the names of their choices for each of the three positions on the ballot.
10. Members deposit their ballots in a box at the front of the meeting room and return to their seats.
11. When all members have deposited their ballots, the Timekeeper and two volunteers open and read aloud the names on each ballot.
12. The Timekeeper makes a public tally of each vote (preferably on a chalkboard or paper chart) in view of all club members.
13. The Timekeeper counts the votes and announces the winners.

Note: Ballots with any errors (e.g., more than three names, or names of two candidates for the same position) must be eliminated from the tally. These ballots are not counted because of these errors.

Table 1. Club election procedures

temporary options such as shared leadership or a time-fixed rotation can be used until the club becomes established.

Once a club is established, members can officially select their leadership. This is an ideal opportunity to conduct a democratic election. In Table 1, we list simple procedures that can ensure a democratic election process.

CREATION OF CLUB RULES

At the first club meeting or within the first few meetings, it is important to create the club rules. These rules should come from the members and should address roles, responsibilities, and procedures that club members will follow. They do not need to be complicated or sophisticated. The most effective club rules support and promote

the goals and values of the club members. Sample club rules are:

- Members must be on time.
- Members must respect all opinions.
- Members must be conscious that men and women participate equally.
- Members must avoid topics that arouse heated controversy (e.g., partisan politics, religion, or the names of government officials).
- Members who cannot attend a meeting must tell another member.
- When the club leader is absent, the assistant leader leads the meeting.
- Members must respect each other.
- Club meetings are not the place for finding a husband or wife. (This rule was created for a university club by several young women who felt uncomfortable with the behavior of some of the young men in the club.)

CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Despite club rules, members may experience challenges during meetings. Table 2 presents challenges and solutions that club members have identified.

SMALL-GROUP MEMBER ROLES

When clubs have trouble giving everyone equal time to speak and practice English, we encourage members to take on conversation roles or responsibilities, similar to those used in the classroom-management approach called *literature circles* (Daniels 1994). Although we suggest roles below, club members should modify these roles for their particular club needs. Here are possible roles that club members might assume in small-group conversations:

- Group Director—makes sure everyone speaks and listens to one another
- Note-taker—takes notes on the small-group conversation and reports to the entire club
- Timekeeper—makes sure the group stays on task within the time frame assigned and helps the Group Director make sure that everyone has equal time to speak
- Vocabulary Collector—notes vocabulary questions and seeks answers from other members or does research after the meeting and reports findings at a subsequent meeting
- Grammarian—keeps track of grammar questions and seeks answers from other members or does research after the meeting and reports findings at a subsequent meeting

CLUB MEETING ACTIVITIES

Club meeting activities should be selected based on the interests of the members. Initially, the club leader organizes and plans the first few meetings in consultation with the members. As the members get to know each other, responsibility for activity selection shifts from the club leader to the members. Meanwhile, simple activities may evolve into community-action projects. In fact, the kinds of activities a club chooses will be limited only by the creativity of the club members themselves. In our experience, topics that clubs find appealing include democracy,

The kinds of activities a club chooses will be limited only by the creativity of the club members themselves.

Challenge	Possible Solutions
A few members monopolize the meeting.	• Members decide on the length of time each member can speak—generally three minutes. • Members select a timekeeper who is responsible for telling members when time is up.
Men speak more than women.	• Club leader, in private conversations, encourages women to speak more. • Some meetings have separate discussion groups, in separate meeting rooms, for men and women. • Some meetings are for "men only" or "women only." • Club meetings present role plays or skits that focus on this problem and follow up with discussions of strategies that will encourage equal participation. • Club meetings have child-care provisions for members who may have responsibility for young children.
Some members attend occasionally.	• Club leader checks that the meeting time and place are convenient. • Club leader takes care that conversations are respectful and safe. • Members create a "buddy chain" to remind others about upcoming meetings.
Members argue about English language problems such as grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation.	• Club secretary notes the problem and seeks assistance. • Club meetings have time at the end for talking about English language problems. • Club members volunteer to research the issue(s) and report their findings at the next meeting.
A member is disrespectful.	• Club leader speaks to the member in private, referring to the club rules as appropriate. • Club leader reviews club rules at the beginning of the meeting. • Club members talk about this problem openly in a club meeting and add or revise club rules. • As a last resort, member is sanctioned and barred from attending a number of meetings—or dismissed from the club—as appropriate.
Some members want to argue about controversial issues.	• Club leader reminds members that the purpose of the club is to practice English. • If the club is for members of a religious community, then religion may be an acceptable discussion topic—otherwise, the club leader reminds members that religion is not a club discussion topic, particularly in cases where conversations suggest recruitment or proselytization.

Table 2. Challenges and possible solutions

freedom of speech, civil rights and civil society, human and children's rights, current events—at local, national, and international levels—gender issues including domestic violence and sexual abuse, cultural traditions, love, and personal and family relationships.

Below we present four basic activities that, in our experience, club members have found enjoyable. Each of these activities can be designed to focus on the topics listed above.

Activity 1: Skits

A skit is a short performance or sketch. Skits include conversations between two or more people and can be humorous or serious. In some countries these are called "drama." Skits are similar to a theater play but take only a few minutes to perform. Anyone can write a skit. Members benefit when the skit focuses on authentic, locally relevant themes (Thomas 2014). If the issue is controversial, members may have motivation to talk and practice English.

The club meeting begins with the leader asking members to volunteer to play characters in the skit. After volunteers are selected, they plan and practice the skit in private. When ready, the volunteers perform the skit in front of the members. At the end, the leader checks that members understand the skit, and then they talk about the skit. Depending on the club's size, members may break into small groups for discussions focusing on the skit's theme. Members can also share thoughts about what might happen after the time frame of the skit or what might have happened before. Members may share personal experiences that are similar to those of the characters in the skit.

Skits can be written about an event that members may experience in their daily lives. Or kits can be developed using a story, novel, newspaper article, or online news report. Together, a group of members can write a skit using, for example, the following online news report:

> Yesterday, parents, children, and community members from a local apartment building demonstrated in front of the management office. The demonstration was peaceful, and no arrests were made. The parents reported that they had visited the management office several times during the past two months and no action had been taken. Parents expressed concern that the building had chemicals that were causing their children to get sick. Children had headaches and stomach problems, and parents demanded that the management clean the building immediately. When questioned, a management official told this reporter that the management was trying to address the health concerns of the parents. Parents noted that Ms. Smith, their local community organizer, was extremely helpful in directing the parents to take action.

To write the skit, members identify characters and create dialogues based on the story. Table 3 shows an example of a skit script based on this news report. Character roles are listed at the top of the skit. This is one of many skits that can be written using this news report.

At the end of the skit, club members talk about it. Here are generic questions that members can use to talk about any skit:

- Did you identify with any of the characters in the skit? Explain your answer.
- What can you learn from this skit and use in your community? Explain.
- Does the skit remind you of an event or person in your life? Explain.
- What feelings did you have as you watched the skit?
- If you have a similar experience, what actions might you take?
- If someone in your community has a similar problem, what might you do?

Activity 2: Role plays

Role plays are similar to skits; the main differences are that many members can participate in role plays, and role plays do not use a script. Each role play is different

A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER IN ACTION

N = Narrator **P1** = Parent #1 **P2** = Parent #2 **P3** = Parent #3 **MS** = Ms. Smith

N: Ms. Smith was 25 years old when she came to work with a poor community in an apartment building. She was a community organizer. The skit begins at an apartment meeting.

MS: Listen, everybody. We've made some good progress. We organized neighborhood cleanups and street repairs.

P1: Yeah. Remember when you came? You were just a young girl, and now look. You're a different person.

MS: Maybe that's true, but I'm still not satisfied. We have lots more work to do. Last night you told me there was a problem in the building—a health problem. You told me you spoke to the management office and they didn't listen to you.

P2: So what can we do?

MS: You have the right to have the problems in your building fixed, especially if they affect your health and your children's health.

P2: You still didn't answer my question. What do we do now?

P1: Let's go to the manager's office next Monday.

MS: But first we need to organize. We need lots of parents to come because the problem affects all the children's health. Who will get all the parents to come?

P2: I will call the parents.

P3: Me, too. I'll call parents, and I will call the television station and tell them there is a problem in the building and we are going to the manager's office to ask about it.

MS: Good. We will meet on Monday at one o'clock at the manager's office.

N: On Monday, parents go to the manager's office. When they get to the office, no one is there. The parents wait, and more parents come. The television crew arrives, and the police come. The parents stay calm. At the end of the day, the parents talk to each other about the events.

P1: We were successful. The manager will see the news and fix the problem.

P2: We learned a lot.

P3: Yeah, can you believe it? We're great. And Ms. Smith is great too!

MS: Well, you were all great. You were prepared. You were clear about what you wanted. You stayed focused, and you stayed calm. You were organized.

N: Soon, the problems in the building were fixed. The parents, children, and community members now feel their building is safe and their children's health is protected.

Table 3. Sample skit script

because the role play depends on the interpretation of each person who plays the assigned role.

To begin, the club leader or members choose an issue. They describe the scene, the people or characters involved, and the issue. Members volunteer to play the characters in the role play. The volunteers practice the role play in private and then perform it in front of the club or in small groups. Afterward, members talk about the role plays.

We have found that role plays are most effective when issues selected are relevant to the lives of club members. In several clubs, members have talked about friends who were drug users. We watched as club members identified the issue and volunteered to play various roles. Members told us afterward that the role play was important because they seldom had opportunities to discuss this topic freely in a safe environment. The club role plays gave them an opportunity to explore issues and consider ways to solve them.

Table 4 shows a description of a sample role play. The club leader sets the scene by presenting the introduction. Members volunteer for roles and leave the meeting room to practice. If props are needed, the volunteers improvise or create them out of available materials. When the volunteers are ready, each group presents its role play.

Club members can talk about each role play when it is finished, or they can wait to talk about all the role plays at the end. Each role play may be different, so it is important that members discuss the different ways each play examined the issue. Here are generic questions members can use to talk about role plays:

- Did this role play examine a problem in the community? If yes, explain. If no, what community problem is similar to or different from the one in this role play?
- Did the role play offer practical solutions to the problem? If yes, explain. If no, why not?
- Did the role play give members new ideas for understanding this problem? Explain.
- Can members work together to solve this problem or a similar one in the community? How might they be able to work together?

Activity 3: Debates

When used with a structured format, debates enable club members to present two sides of controversial issues. Information and personal experiences can emerge from debates that may challenge club members to reconsider points of view without forcing them to adopt, change, or assume a position or opinion they disagree with. Numerous websites offer information about structured debates (see, for example, http://how-to-teach-english.ontesol.com/teaching-speaking-skills-debates-in-the-esl-classroom). Below we give one format with suggestions for timing that club members may find helpful.

Debate format

The club meeting begins with members choosing the debate topic. The topic needs a "pro" and "con" side and should explore a theme that is relevant to members. Here are possible topics with pro and con positions:

- Violence is needed to bring about peace. / Violence is never an acceptable road to peace.
- Media influence real-life events. / Media have no influence on real-life events.
- Democracy is the best form of government. / Democracy is not the best form of government.
- Fathers should stay home and take care of babies. / Fathers should not stay home and take care of babies.

After club members select a topic, they volunteer for the debate teams. Each volunteer is placed on either the pro team

MOUNTAIN FLOODS

These role plays take place in a town. It has been raining for three days, and the river flowing into town from a nearby mountain is getting deep and dangerous. The raging waters threaten the town.

Role Play 1

Father:	He is worried that the floods may destroy their home. He wants his wife and children (Joseph and Suzanne) to leave.
Mother:	She is worried. Joseph is sick. She wants to keep him at home so he can rest.
Joseph:	He is 3 years old. He is not happy. He wants to go outside to play.
Suzanne:	She is 10 years old and happy because she received good grades in school. She wants to study.

Role Play 2

Radio Announcer:	She reports the weather forecast and predicts more rain. She must announce this forecast on the radio. But the phone rings each time she tries to speak on the radio. She is the only person at the radio station.
Caller 1:	She is worried because she cannot leave her house. It is surrounded by the river, and her house will be destroyed soon. She calls the radio station because the police are not answering their phone.
Caller 2:	He is angry. Last year he told the government that the town needed to protect against the rains. No one listened. Now he wants to warn all the people to leave town. He calls the radio station. He wants to convince the announcer to broadcast this warning.

Role Play 3

Doctor in Hospital:	She knows many people will be hurt in the floods. She wants to prepare the hospital for many patients. She wants to call a meeting, and she wants to meet in 10 minutes.
Nurse:	He wants to go home. His family lives near the river and needs help. He has worked at the hospital for 24 hours. He is tired and worried.
Ambulance Driver:	She checked the ambulance, and it has no gas. She wants to leave the hospital to get gas. The gas station is near the river, so she must leave now.

Table 4. Sample role plays

or the con team. Volunteers are given a few minutes to decide their role and prepare their positions.

- Speaker 1 for each team introduces—and later summarizes—the major points of the debate.
- Speaker 2 for each team presents additional points and argues the points presented by Speaker 1 of the opposing team.
- Speaker 3 for each team argues against the points presented by Speakers 1 and 2 of the opposing team.

When the teams are ready, the club leader chooses a member to serve as Timekeeper.

The role of the Timekeeper is important because each speaker must respect the time frame (see Table 5).

When the debate is over, members in the audience question the debate teams. Members then take a few minutes to decide how they will vote. Votes can be cast on the quality of the arguments, the level of knowledge and expertise of the debate team (pro or con), or which team was more convincing. The goal of this activity is to have a lively discussion in a controlled setting that gives as many members as possible opportunities to express themselves in English, using a structured format.

Debate Time Frame
Pro—Speaker 1 Presentation of debate points *(3 minutes)*
Con—Speaker 1 Presentation of debate points *(3 minutes)*
One-minute time-out for teams to strategize
Pro—Speaker 2 Additional points and arguments *(3 minutes)*
Con—Speaker 2 Additional points and arguments *(3 minutes)*
One-minute time-out for teams to strategize
Pro—Speaker 3 Arguments against points of Con Speakers *(3 minutes)*
Con—Speaker 3 Arguments against points of Pro Speakers *(3 minutes)*
Two-minute time-out for teams to strategize
Pro—Speaker 2 Additional arguments against points of Con Speakers (*2 minutes*)
Con—Speaker 2 Additional arguments against points of Pro Speakers (*2 minutes*)
Two-minute time-out for teams to strategize
Pro—Speaker 1 Summary of most important debate points *(2 minutes)*
Con—Speaker 1 Summary of most important debate points *(2 minutes)*
Club members question Pro Speakers and Con Speakers *(10 minutes each team)*
Two-minute time-out for club members to decide which team to vote for

Table 5. Debate time frame

English clubs offer creative opportunities for communities to experiment and play with language and to practice using English in an atmosphere that is supportive, encouraging, and respectful.

Activity 4: Social change

Social-change activities may be the most important activities that community-based English clubs can perform. Social change begins when club members discuss issues that are critical in their communities. When members take actions to change their society, they are invested in and committed to improving lives, especially those in their communities. While social-change activities can be paired with activities such as debates, skits, or role plays, they should follow a basic three-step format.

The first club meeting should serve to identify the problem or issue that members want to address. One way to do this is to brainstorm. Here are basic rules for brainstorming:

1. Accept all ideas—without commenting, criticizing, or debating them.
2. Remember that all ideas are equal—no idea is good or bad.
3. Build on each other's ideas—use an idea to come up with a new or different idea.
4. Remember that it is better to have lots of ideas rather than a few.
5. Feel free to be creative—crazy or funny—because such ideas can lead to a new, clever, or useful idea.

Members should brainstorm for at least ten minutes and preface the actual brainstorming with an imaginary exercise. For example, members might imagine that on the previous night there was an accident. A truck carrying 1,000 pounds—a half ton—of cotton balls spilled out its load onto the road. Now the town is filled with cotton balls. What can the club members imagine doing with them?

After brainstorming playfully and creatively, members are ready to generate a list of problems they have in their community. Either a member or the leader should record the list where it is visible to everyone. Next, the members divide into groups, and each group selects one problem to talk about. These conversations should focus on the reasons for the problem, possible changes that might solve the problem, identification of an expert to speak with the club about the problem, and other individuals or groups also interested in this problem.

Next, members need to learn as much as possible about the problem. In a follow-up meeting, an expert might address the club, providing information about ways they might go about solving the problem. This invited guest might give a brief background of the problem; discuss the current status of the problem, including attempts made to resolve it; and suggest possible solutions and actions to take.

Once members better understand the problem, they should create an action plan. A variety of action-plan templates is available online, and club members can modify a template to meet their own requirements. Small groups can fill out an action-plan template and present it to the members. By consensus or vote, members should agree on the specific steps they will take and assign tasks to members. These steps should lead to changes that will resolve the problem. UNICEF (2015) designed a template that we modified (see Table 6) and encourage clubs to use.

ADDITIONAL CLUB ACTIVITIES

Besides the four basic club activities presented above, there are many more that clubs can use. Here are four:

Action Plan

The problem we want to solve is …

_____

_____

We will solve the problem by …

_____

_____

Complete the boxes to create the action plan. If more work boxes are needed, add more below. If fewer are needed, leave boxes empty.

What	Who	When	How	Results	Complete
Work	People responsible	Timeline	Materials needed	Solutions	Work completed (Yes/No)
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

Table 6. Action-plan template (adapted from UNICEF 2015)

- Some clubs begin their meetings by learning and singing a song.

- Clubs may like to regularly discuss "In the News" items, where members volunteer to present and lead a discussion about a recent national or international news event.

- Listening to podcasts and discussing them is another enjoyable club activity. A wide variety of podcasts can be found at the Voice of America website (www.voanews.com).

- Watching and discussing short video clips or TV shows at meetings are also fun.

CLUB ATMOSPHERE

Community-based English clubs are designed for groups of people to come together primarily to practice language. They are not classrooms with teachers and students. They are safe, nurturing, supportive environments where those who wish to immerse themselves in English for a few hours can do so. Again, it is important that the club leader assumes the role of guide or facilitator—and not of a teacher who focuses on error correction. English clubs offer creative opportunities for communities to experiment and play with language and to practice using English in an atmosphere that is supportive, encouraging, and respectful. Clubs also offer members the chance to use English and join a group of like-minded individuals interested in pursuing a common goal. Furthermore, English clubs offer possibilities for community action if members take ownership of their club. It is theirs, and meetings are theirs for them to do with as they wish. Taking this approach offers members the opportunity to be as adventurous—or playful and creative—or serious as they wish.

We urge readers to consider creating community-based English clubs, which not only support English language acquisition outside the classroom, but also promote discussion and concern about important issues and thereby strengthen civil society.

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Kathleen F. Malu was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Rwanda she was a Peace Corps volunteer and more recently a Fulbright Scholar. She is a professor of education at William Paterson University of New Jersey, a Research fellow at the University of South Africa, and an English Language Specialist for the U.S. Department of State.

Bryce Smedley, PhD, was a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya. He has served as an English Language Fellow in the Union of the Comoros and as a Senior English Language Fellow in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the Congo American Language Institute. He is currently an Assistant Professor of education at Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho.

LAURA LODER BÜCHEL
Switzerland

English Homework: What Makes Sense?

Controversies over the amount and quality of homework assignments have been in the news for years (Lee and Pruitt 1979; Cooper 1989, 2007) and explosively so more recently due to attention brought about via films such as *Race to Nowhere* (Abeles et al. 2011). Some argue that homework does not provide much benefit for elementary school children and that it is only in the sixth grade that it starts to make sense (Cooper, Robinson, and Patall 2006; Kohn 2006). Others discuss the role of quality verses quantity (Cooper 1989; Thomas 1992; Warton 2001). A few articles address homework in foreign-language education (Wallinger 2000; Chang et al. 2014), and some pertain to adult foreign-language learners.

The purpose of this article is to persuade English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and teacher trainers that homework is indeed beneficial by presenting multiple examples of high-quality homework assignments, as Dettmers et al. (2010) found in mathematics. The argument here is that it is not the time spent on homework that matters in early foreign-language instruction, but rather the types of homework assignments—perhaps different from traditionally assigned practice activities—that make learning more meaningful. There is a need for concrete ideas and discussion among teachers and teacher trainers regarding homework, especially in countries where English is not the local language of instruction and where instruction is limited to two or three lessons a week for varying levels of beginning learners. Altering our mindset about what constitutes effective homework might bring about change in the classroom and learners' relationships to homework.

BENEFITS OF PEDAGOGICALLY SOUND HOMEWORK

Many positive views of homework adhere to the following pedagogical principles, which are based on what learners themselves want from homework (Cushman 2010; Warton 2001) and go in the direction of what teachers know to be important:

- There needs to be a purpose, even if the purpose is for homework to be used in class for practice (as communicative language teaching might attest).
- A focus on learning is paramount, and sharing strategies plays a large role (Cohen 2011; Oxford 2011).
- Homework should transfer to different situations, controlled or through letting learners choose a new context.
- Elements of self-determination are vital

Although some teachers may prefer assigning homework spontaneously, planning homework has the benefit of making it more thought-out, even if the particular assignment has to be left for another day.

to motivation; when learners choose strategies and topics, they have a say in their learning (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011).

Five characteristics of good homework identified by Vatterott (2010) are: (1) purpose, (2) efficiency, (3) ownership, (4) competence, and (5) aesthetic appeal. When teachers assign homework, it is of utmost importance that they think about its purposefulness, consider how well it encourages learners to become self-directed (Blaz 2006), and listen to learners' wishes (Cushman 2010). With this aim, I would like to provide what I consider a healthy approach to homework from three perspectives: those of a teacher trainer, learners, and a mother.

A TEACHER TRAINER'S PERSPECTIVE

In the specific context of the eastern, German-speaking part of Switzerland, EFL instruction begins in the second or third grade (with seven- to nine-year-old children) for two or three 45-minute lessons a week and continues like this until learners are finished with secondary school, at the age of 16. In some cases, the English-language teacher is the main classroom instructor who teaches the majority of subjects. In this case, the teacher is in charge of all the homework the learners receive and can prioritize and adapt as necessary. Frequently, however, children go to a specialist teacher for subjects such as English or Arts and Crafts. This arrangement makes discussions about homework more difficult to coordinate because each teacher finds his or her subject important and may or may not be aware of the learners' workloads. Furthermore, subject-specialist teachers cannot simply finish an English lesson in the subsequent lesson—for example, in the math lesson—because the English lesson is over. Thus, subject-specialist teachers might do well to have a general homework policy or routine like that in Table 1 to let learners know what has to be done on which days. Following this routine also is less time-consuming than always explaining new homework tasks; I have seen teachers take up to 15 minutes to explain homework.

This type of routine does not mean that every assignment has to be the same, but it does allow learners the comfort of knowing that certain days are homework free. Although some teachers may prefer assigning homework

This sample routine can be written on the board at the beginning of the week and stay the same for a few months.

- Monday: No homework today because it conflicts with math homework.
- Wednesday homework: Read assigned passage to prepare for Thursday's lesson.
- Thursday homework: Complete assigned task to prepare for next Monday's lesson. (Teacher can assign an appropriate written gap-fill exercise that can be swapped with peers, a look-say-cover-write-check exercise, or some other task.)

Table 1. Routine for subject-specialist teachers

spontaneously, planning homework has the benefit of making it more thought-out, even if the particular assignment has to be left for another day.

I have overheard three main comments by teachers of in-service courses as to why they assign homework:

1. They want learners to get into the habit of keeping in touch with the content of lessons between class periods, promoting the idea of repetition and rehearsal.

2. They want to encourage learners to become independent learners, to organize their studying and learn how to learn.

3. They need more time than they have in class and are often unable to finish everything they had planned.

It seems that the first two aims could be merged into one, making it possible for teachers to assign homework that enables students to keep in touch with the lesson and learn to learn (see Table 2 for examples).

This approach contains aspects of differentiated instruction, as activities can match individual needs (Blaz 2006), while at the same time helping learners develop a repertoire of language-learning and rehearsal strategies (Oxford 2011). As Chang et al. (2014) mention, adults can better self-direct and focus on what they need for homework, but children and adolescents need more training and guidance.

Common assignments such as completing a gap fill, a word search, or a crossword puzzle have little place as homework assignments unless they have a purpose such as transferring to the lesson or supporting learning-to-learn objectives. In addition, homework assignments should not just be collected—the teacher should ask the learners how they went about the exercise or what they did when they got stuck (see Table 3 for examples).

- Vocabulary: Learn relevant words with a look-say-cover-write-check activity (choose a word from a list; look at it and say it out loud; cover the word and form an image in your mind; write the word down and check the spelling).
- Reading: Underline key points of a text from the lesson and transfer these to another sheet of paper for expansion in class.
- Writing: Write an outline of a pertinent text, to be completed in class; prepare relevant cards that can be used for a class game.
- Speaking: Read a text from the lesson aloud in front of a mirror.

Table 2. Homework activities to connect with lesson and learn to learn

These activities require not just checking answers, but also a class or small-group discussion and follow-up through a similar activity.

- Word search: In class the next day, have learners share *how* they searched for words. Did they look for double letters? For common letter combinations? For infrequently used letters, such as *X* and *Z*?
- Crossword puzzle: Have learners share *how* they solved the puzzle. Were the shorter or longer words easier? Did they start with the words that intersected with other words?

Table 3. Ways to make common homework assignments more strategic

Homework assignments should not just be collected—the teacher should ask the learners how they went about the exercise or what they did when they got stuck.

Considering the third comment above, teachers should think about the fairness of having some learners complete what was started in class at home, while others either get to advance in the language or do not get additional homework. This might help to bridge the gap and give weaker students a chance to catch up, but often it is slower students, not weaker students, who get this take-home task. Thus it may be better to have an "everybody has homework" policy with different tasks for different learners than an "only some students have homework" policy.

LEARNER PERSPECTIVES

Learners themselves, especially older ones, have opinions about homework, and luckily at times their voices have been heard. EFL learners, especially the younger ones, may not have had the chance to formulate what they think is worthwhile. Yet perhaps their voices are represented in Cushman's (2010) and Warton's (2001) articles on student views of homework. The following four suggestions from teenagers in Cushman's (2010) study support self-directed learning (Benson 2007) and purposeful instruction. The student suggestions are followed by possible assignments in the EFL classroom.

Student suggestion 1: Self-created homework task

After presenting new classroom material, teachers often assign students a set of questions to answer for homework. As an alternative, the teacher asks students to create their own "homework task that follows up on this material" and to explain their task choice in class (Cushman 2010, 77).

With older learners, this can be done exactly as explained. When starting a new unit on traveling around the United States, for example, learners can individually decide to make a mind map, go through the textbook unit and list anything they are unfamiliar with, or write a set of questions. Important

Remembering the word *window*

- I said it over and over again in my head.
- I remembered "Oh … wind!"
- I pictured a round windO.
- I picture Father Wind's mouth blowing an "O."
- I wrote it down, covered it, wrote it again, and did this until I did not have to peek.
- I have a box with flashcards; I write the word on the front and a picture on the back of a flashcard. When I know how to say and spell the word from the picture, the card goes in the back section.

Remembering a list of words

- I thought of places in my house and associated the words with those places.
- I made one funny sentence where all the words fit.

Table 4. Student memory tricks to remember words

here is not which exact language features are written down, but rather the discussion in class about the method used to select their own homework and the results.

With younger learners, something more concrete is recommended. For example, when starting a unit on the five senses, the teacher has learners go through the unit and make some sort of matrix for homework. They might decide to have each of the five senses as a category, or they may decide to have parts of speech as categories, but in class learners can look at each other's matrices and even guess the categories. Offering two ideas such as (1) create a mind map or (2) write a list of questions or vocabulary items they want to know also achieves the objective of preparing for a topic.

Student suggestion 2: Memory tricks

Teachers often fall back on having students memorize a list of facts for homework and then testing them on it later. As an alternative, the teacher asks "each student to share with the class a memorization trick (such as a visual cue) that works with one item on this list" (Cushman 2010, 77).

In EFL lessons in Switzerland, learners are often expected to memorize vocabulary lists from glossaries in course books. Asking students how they remember a certain word or set of words and having them share the technique provides learners with different access points to new language and can focus on comprehension, spelling, or simple identification (see Table 4 for examples from students). These learning strategies can also be recorded in a portfolio. After a few lessons of sharing, learners can try a different technique they heard about from someone else, then report back on the technique in class and record their experience with it in the portfolio. This step can soon be part of a weekly routine.

With younger learners, teachers may want to practice a few techniques in class and then share which ones worked for whom and with which adaptations. Granted, some of these discussions may be better off held in the local language, as this is meaningful use of the native tongue (Butzkamm 2003).

Student suggestion 3: Student-initiated questions and explanations

Another common homework assignment is having students read a text and then giving them questions to determine whether they read it. Another option would be to ask students "to write down two or three questions" they have after they have read the text (Cushman 2010, 77). Likewise, when teachers want to determine whether students understand a main concept, instead of having them fill out a worksheet, teachers can have students "demonstrate the concept for the class in small groups, using any medium" (Cushman 2010, 77).

The underlying idea of both these learner suggestions is that this homework can be used in class. In the same way, EFL learners can do any of the following homework assignments:

- Write questions they have after reading a text. They may need support such as teacher-provided sentence starters (e.g., "When did _____?" and "Why did _____?"). These questions can be shared in small groups in the following class or used for a quizzing activity.

- Write Two Truths and a Lie statements on slips of paper to engage each other to listen attentively in the next lesson.

- Write a gap fill or short summary of a text to share with a partner.

These are simple activities that can be assigned from one class to the next and be supported by projects. For instance, for a lexical set based on the topic of animals, learners have the task of working on a poster or placemat about one particular animal. Each night they add something new, using the language practiced in class. After a few weeks, the posters are presented in small groups in class and displayed around the classroom or school.

Student suggestion 4: Transferring learning

Math teachers will often assign several word problems that involve a certain procedure to help students understand how the procedure relates to different situations. Instead, teachers can "ask small groups to choose one word problem that applies this procedure in a real-world situation, solve it, and present it to the class" (Cushman 2010, 77).

As in suggestions 1, 2, and 3, appreciating the fruits of homework labor in class is of utmost importance. Another idea here is transfer—how to help learners transfer what they are using, as this example from math implies. For instance, in a unit where linking words are one of the main language aims (even with simple words such as *and* and *but*), learners can be given the target vocabulary and be asked to write a short text using the words in a situation unrelated to the topic treated in class (for example, if the topic was "food," then assign the topic "animals" for the assignment). In this same way, as with the animal poster described above, if the unit is on animals, then the poster could be about something else—a robot, for example—where certain structures and language are certainly transferrable ("It has _____"; "It lives _____"; "It eats _____"). Finally, if the language structure—for example, "Would you like _____?"—is presented in class in the context of a restaurant, for homework learners can make a list of other situations where the same language structure is likely to be used—for example, "Would you like to dance?"

An additional point mentioned in Cushman (2010)—the value of doing homework in pairs or small groups—will be addressed in the following section.

A MOTHER'S PERSPECTIVE

As a mother, I would argue that some of the homework my children bring home, especially in the case of English, does not provide the concrete means to enable them to become independent learners, although by doing a gap fill or by studying vocabulary they are indeed coming into contact with the language between lessons. My older daughter has German (the local language of instruction) and two foreign languages in the classroom, and she has a different teacher for each of these subjects. Each teacher works with a flashcard box, so in three languages she has cards with the lexical item on one side and a translation or sentence on the other side. Never has she had to make cards herself; they have all been produced by local publishers. She would probably not have many ideas of her own about how to work with these cards if her parents were not teachers. This is an example of how the three teachers do not communicate about their systems, nor have they used the cards in class in ways that would enable the children to study independently at home—some children have ideas about how to do that; others perhaps not. If three different teachers encouraged three different systems, think of how rich the learning might be!

However, my children have enjoyed homework on occasion, and this is where I would like to focus the following three points.

1. My daughters love homework when they do not have to sit at their desks. Taking it somewhere else allows for a bit of self-determination, helps children find out where they work best, and shows them that they can learn everywhere. Following are some activities my children have found enjoyable:

    - Taking a walk (with a friend) and making a list of all the things on their street that begin with the letter *h* (for example).
    - Learning a rhyme while jumping rope—for example, "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, turn around."
    - Rewriting flashcards on scraps of paper and having a parent or friend hide them outside or around the house; the child finds them and rewrites the words in chalk on the

driveway or sidewalk (teachers can practice this technique in class and let the learners use it for homework).

2. My daughters love homework when they can work with a friend or read aloud to a parent. Teachers might understandably avoid assigning homework that has to be done with parents, as this will work with some children but not others. In Switzerland, for example, many parents speak English, but in every class there are instances when the children's knowledge at times surpasses that of their parents. However, completing homework with a friend works just as well. My second-grader loved the fact that once a week she was even expected to do homework with a friend. There are already ideas listed in this article that can be done in pairs, and below are a few more that my own children have enjoyed:

   - Memorize little poems: The homework is to stand in one part of the house and shout the poem to someone in another part of the house (like a shouting dictation). This can also be done outside.
   - Play a flashcard game: If each child has the same set of cards, the two of them can play Snap with the picture side up and be asked to make a sentence with the word if they get a match.
   - Prepare for a play: Memorize lines and practice together with a friend until it sounds just right; this can make homework last hours!

3. My daughters love homework when they are using it for something specific or asked to involve the community. Homework in our house gets done well and efficiently when my daughters know they will have to present something to the class (e.g., a poem or a presentation about a topic) or when someone else's work depends on theirs ("I have to turn in my text because Fritzli needs the information for his work"). Furthermore, activities such as interviews with neighbors (e.g., asking in English about what type of chocolate they like best) or going to a local shop to see if any advertising is in English are much loved, as they put my daughters in contact with the subject outside the house and require them to share findings once they are back in class. Table 5 provides seven additional ideas for involving the community in homework.

QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION ON HOMEWORK

I encourage teachers to think about their practices related to homework by using the questions in Table 6 to reflect on homework-related issues and initiate discussions during

1. Interview someone about his or her English-language learning history.
2. Ask someone to "Count to 10" or whatever the lesson aims are.
3. Find someone else to do homework with you and share that experience in class.
4. Bring in food labels or packaging and write down words from the labels.
5. Cut out words from magazines.
6. Label items in a room, house, or local shop, or on a local street.
7. Start speaking in English in public (on the bus, in a restaurant) for the fun of it and see how people react.

Table 5. Homework ideas that involve the community

General context questions

1. Can I depend on parental help in all the learners' families?
2. Do learners live within walking distance of one another?
3. How long should homework take? Are there local recommendations?
4. How often should homework be given? Once a week? Every night?
5. Does my homework policy need to be discussed with another teacher?
6. Do learners have access to the Internet?

General questions to help shape homework assignments

7. Which skills should be practiced? What sort of speaking practice makes sense?
8. How good are my learners generally? How motivated are they? Are there general class tendencies in terms of interests or strengths?
9. Who should correct the homework? Is the homework done for me to see the progress of the learner (as an assessment), or is it informal practice that can be used and corrected in class? What assignments do I give that are not based on correcting learner work but rather on discussing an approach to an activity?
10. What purpose should homework serve for the learners and me? How can I make this clear to the learners and their families? Do I need to make this clear for each assignment, or can I have a few principles that are communicated and to which I stick?
11. When I assign vocabulary learning for homework, what do I mean and what should learners do?
12. How can I individualize homework to support individual strengths and needs for improvement?
13. What assignments can I have the learners do outdoors or with movement?

Table 6. Questions for self-reflection and to initiate a discussion about homework

teacher in-service days or in teacher training (see Appendix for answers according to the Swiss context).

CONCLUSION

In contrast to some researchers' views, my opinion is that homework does matter, as it engages and motivates students and helps them to become better learners (Vatterott 2010). Until conclusive evidence is found about when to start assigning homework and how much to give, perhaps the best thing teachers can do is to take a healthy look at their own practices and ask themselves if they are serving the needs of their learners and if their homework principles reflect good teaching principles. Furthermore, if we do not want learners to have maladaptive homework practices (Bembenutty 2011) and we want them to become self-regulated learners, then the ideas presented in this article can contribute to good habits, strategy-building, and the idea of learning for a reason—not just at desks and for a teacher.

There are many perspectives that have not been treated in this article, such as those of different learner types and learners who do not have the support of the home environment. In addition, this article assumes that English-language teaching is taking place in countries such as Switzerland or the United States, where learners have access to course books, are provided with additional materials, and are expected to do homework as part of the societal norm. That said, many of the ideas here are on the level of sharing strategies, which can be done with any type of learner and with or without course books or flashcards, and are exemplified in the study of different subjects.

Homework does not have to vary as much as is described in this article; it can be as simple as assigning word lists or flashcards every week. The important thing is integrating various ways of working with students that are tried or explained in class and practiced at home, then reflected upon in class. My gut feeling as a mother, as a teacher, and as a teacher trainer tells me that it is not the routine of homework that is important, but the learner engagement involved in doing it. Ensuring engagement takes careful thought and planning on the part of the teacher. And creating engaging homework assignments can lead to good routines and habits on the part of the learner and teacher.

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Laura Loder Büchel, PhD, is a teacher trainer at the Zurich University of Teacher Education in Switzerland. She received her MEd in Bilingual/Multicultural Education from Northern Arizona University and her PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Her personal website is elteach.weebly.com.

APPENDIX

Answers to questions in Table 6 based on the author's Swiss context

General context questions

1. ***Can I depend on parental help in all the learners' families?***

   No, and thus routines and clear assignments are important. Task repetition is also important. If learners write their own gap fills to swap in class, then this task can be explained once and used regularly.

2. ***Do learners live within walking distance of one another?***

   Yes, and thus they can be asked to work together.

3. ***How long should homework take? Are there local recommendations?***

   The recommendations here are 10 minutes in the first grade, 20 minutes in the second grade, 30 minutes in the third grade, and so on. These recommendations are not followed by all teachers because by the fourth grade, many think the time involved becomes too much.

4. ***How often should homework be given? Once a week? Every night?***

   Many teachers assign homework on Monday for the entire week. This approach has the advantage that learners can decide when they do what, but it has the disadvantage that often homework involves just having learners do a certain exercise in a book.

5. ***Does my homework policy need to be discussed with another teacher?***

   Very often yes. To not overburden learners, teachers will need to reach compromises so that all the teachers are not assigning homework on the same days.

6. ***Do learners have access to the Internet?***

   Not in Switzerland; thus, teachers do not often ask students to bring information to class, although sometimes they ask students to bring pictures (which can be from the Internet or from catalogs or magazines).

General questions to help shape homework assignments

7. ***Which skills should be practiced? What sort of speaking practice makes sense?***

   Often, learners do not get enough practice in a certain skill in class, so teachers have to find meaningful activities to allow learners to practice that skill. Learners generally do not have enough writing contact, so having them write funny poems with target words or a riddle to use in class might be useful.

8. ***How good are my learners generally? How motivated are they? Are there general class tendencies in terms of interests or strengths?***

   One class I taught loved to read, and everyone was happy to come to school having read a chapter of an easy reader. Other classes needed practice in writing, so I tended to assign a writing activity. To answer this question, you can identify what your class needs: more explicit strategy training or more practice.

9. ***Who should correct the homework? Is the homework done for me to see the progress of the learner (as an assessment), or is it informal practice that can be used and corrected in class? What assignments do I give that are not based on correcting learner work but rather on discussing an approach to an activity?***

I believe that learners tend to do their homework if it is to be used. Thus I like them to bring things to class to start the lesson with (like quiz questions), and I see homework as a form of learning and not necessarily a formal assessment (though I certainly gather data about their strengths and needs). I find that anything that goes "public" is taken more seriously. With some classes, I tell learners that they are to practice a technique at home; then we use it in class.

10. ***What purpose should homework serve for the learners and me? How can I make this clear to the learners and their families? Do I need to make this clear for each assignment, or can I have a few principles that are communicated and to which I stick?***

This has to depend on each class's needs!

11. ***When I assign vocabulary learning for homework, what do I mean and what should learners do?***

Teachers need to teach learning, not just vocabulary, and they should be teaching skills, not just words. Thinking of reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities helps to get away from a focus on vocabulary translation. In the case of word cards and lists, have strategy stations where learners try out different approaches, then choose one to use for homework for a week and then another one for another week, followed by a discussion of the effectiveness of each.

12. ***How can I individualize homework to support individual strengths and needs for improvement?***

It can be as simple as differentiated instruction, where (for example) advanced learners have to learn a longer poem and others a shorter one. Or some learners write out a text, and others prepare to read it. A list of possibilities on how to reach an aim from which learners can choose helps them to plan. However, I ask students to make a plan of what they will do each night and for how many minutes (at least at first).

13. ***What assignments can I have the learners do outdoors or with movement?***

Many such assignments are suggested in this article. You can also have learners take turns saying a sentence with a partner, each time taking a step back until they are shouting it at one another, or have learners hop out words or sentences as they spell or say them, or have them write phrases in sand.

READER'S GUIDE

This guide is designed to enrich your reading of the articles in this issue. You may choose to read them on your own, taking notes or jotting down answers to the discussion questions below. Or you may use the guide to explore the articles with colleagues.

For example, many teachers discuss *Forum* at regularly scheduled meetings with department colleagues and members of teachers' groups, or in teacher-training courses and workshops. Often, teachers choose an article for their group to read before the meeting or class, then discuss that article when they meet. Teachers have found it helpful to take notes on articles or write a response to an article and bring that response to share in a discussion group. Another idea is for teachers to try a selected activity or technique described in one of the articles, then report back to the group on their experiences and discuss positives, negatives, and possible adaptations for their teaching context.

How to Conduct an ELT Workshop
(Pages 2–9)

Pre-Reading

1. Conferences frequently offer sessions and workshops. What is the difference between the two? In your experience, do conference organizers always respect this difference? Explain your answer.
2. Think of a workshop you attended that you thought was valuable or informative. What made it so valuable or informative?

Post-Reading

1. According to the author, what are some differences between a lecture and a workshop?
2. What does this article tell you about how adult learners are different from children? What does this knowledge tell you about how to design an effective workshop for teachers?
3. What are some ways to make a workshop interactive? Make a list.
4. Imagine that your school or workplace has asked you to prepare a workshop for other teachers. Choose a topic that your colleagues will find valuable. What activities will you include in your workshop for participants to do? Make a list.

Community-Based English Clubs: English Practice and Social Change Outside the Classroom (Pages 10–23)

Pre-Reading

1. Have you ever participated in a school or community club? What was the name of the club? What kind of activities did the club have? Did you have a leadership role?
2. How could an English club help you? How could it help other people at your school or community?

Post-Reading

1. What are the advantages of an English club, according to the authors?
2. What are the steps in starting an English club? Make a list.
3. Imagine that you are a member of an English club. You notice that a few, younger members of your club attend meetings regularly and participate actively in the activities, but they do not speak very much. Why do you think this is so? How would you encourage them to speak more frequently?

English Homework: What Makes Sense? (Pages 24–34)

Pre-Reading

1. Consider the word *homework*. What thoughts and feelings come to mind?
2. Do you give your students homework? Why or why not? If you give homework, how is the homework valuable to students? Do your students think it is valuable? Do they enjoy doing it? Why do you think so?
3. What kinds of homework did your teachers give you when you were learning your first foreign language? Was the homework helpful? Interesting? Enjoyable? Did it help you learn? Did it motivate you to learn more? Explain your answers.

Post-Reading

1. On page 25, the author says, "When teachers assign homework, it is of utmost importance that they think about its purposefulness, consider how well it encourages learners to become self-directed, and listen to learners' wishes." How do these ideas relate to your views about the homework you assign?
2. Look at Table 2 (page 26). Use the ideas to think of a homework assignment for your students.
3. Look at the questions in Table 6 (page 31). Select two of the questions most important to you in creating valuable homework assignments. How would you answer the questions? How do your answers help you create better homework assignments for your students?

Four Ears Hear More Than Two: A Competitive Team Approach to Listening Practice

by ALEXEY SHIKHANTSOV

My teaching practice involves intensive preparation of second-year university students for their end-of-year exams, based on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). More than once, the group of students was too large for the size of the classroom, which hampered our listening practice enormously: due to the nature of the task, students could not be given different versions of it, and they were sitting so close to each other that focusing on individual work was difficult. The solution, which I share in this article, came as pure improvisation in one of my classes. The students appreciated the approach, and now, after several uses with various groups, the activity seems to have crystallized into a regular and established teaching technique. In what follows, I describe how it works and how it can be applied to many kinds of listening practice in the classroom.

THE PROCEDURE

Prepare the listening passage—either a recording or a script that you will read. Divide students into teams of two (you may appoint the pairs specifically, judging the level of each student and thus ensuring fair starting conditions for each pair; if the number of students in the class is odd, one particularly advanced student may work alone, or you can have one or more teams of three). Then give each team an answer sheet.

Tell students that your class will hold a friendly competition involving the listening passages and that teams have two ways to score points—by answering quickly and by answering correctly.

When the recording starts to play, each team works on the answers together; if one member mishears or does not catch the needed word, the other member might hear it and put down the answer. As soon as the answer sheet for one section (or for the whole test) is completely filled in and agreed upon, the team members raise their hands. The number of points given for early completion depends on the number of teams participating: if there are six teams, then the first team ready gets 5 points, the second finisher gets 4, and so on.

When all the teams have finished the task, collect the answer sheets, check them, and calculate each team's total points. For example, suppose the team that raised hands first answered three questions correctly; that team will get 3 points (for answering three questions correctly) plus 5 bonus points (for finishing first), for a total of 8 points. Meanwhile, the last team to raise hands may edge the fastest team by giving 10 correct answers out of 10; even though that team gets no bonus points for finishing quickly, it gets 10 points overall—1 point for each correct answer.

A scoring chart might look something like the one in Table 1, although with large classes there would be many more teams.

Also with large classes, rather than checking the answers yourself, you can have teams exchange sheets and score each other's answers. Having students check answers can also make it easier to incorporate discussion of the answers into the class.

If there are more sections in the test or exercise, the competition continues with the next part. Update the teams' results after each section. The team with the most points at the end of the activity wins. Thus, the students practice the activity in an entertaining way, working quickly and collaboratively, and with each attempt they feel more confident about it.

ADVANTAGES

- The activity is entertaining and actually lots of fun. It livens up the course or the lesson and generally lightens the atmosphere. In my experience, even the least motivated students put forth effort.

- It is a fine way to practice the needed skills without pressure or stress—while the students actually train their ears on the task, the whole thing still feels like a game.
- I believe that competitiveness is not the least important quality in achieving the desired result in an exam, and the proposed activity develops competitiveness enormously.
- Doing a task together results in team building, which is important for encouraging students to work together for other class activities.

I would also suggest, albeit tentatively, that unexpected fun activity relieves and relaxes the students, and they might listen to the recording in a reinvigorated way. Besides, the pressure for potential mistakes is reduced because it is divided between the members of the team; if the team does not do well, it is not any person's fault. Conversely, a lower-level student on a winning team can taste success and become more confident.

POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

The students were critical only of the importance of raising their hands first. However, in a number of cases, a team that was ready last still went ahead in total points because many of their answers were correct. In other words, success in the activity relies on both time management

Teams	Section 1: Correct Answers + Bonus	Section 2: Correct Answers + Bonus	Section 3: Correct Answers + Bonus	Total
Crazy Fishes	5 + 3	6 + 3	6 + 2	25
Funky Noises	8 + 2	7 + 1	6 + 3	27
Fit and Fiddle	8 + 1	7 + 0	10 + 1	27
Team Spirit	9 + 0	9 + 2	10 + 0	30

Table 1. Scoring chart

and correctness. A team is rewarded for being quick, but the reward is squandered if the answers are wrong. Of course, sometimes the quickest team has only one or two wrong answers out of ten and thus tops the table, but this result only emphasizes the importance of further individual practice for each participant.

The scoring method can be a topic for discussion. After a winner is announced, you can ask students to discuss the advantages of answering quickly compared to answering relatively slowly but with possibly more correct answers. In any case, the structure of rewarding the team's quickness is entirely up to the teacher. This decision may also depend on the purpose of the class; if the students are preparing for a timed test, such as the IELTS, having them try to answer quickly could benefit them later when they take the test.

Having the teacher record the scores takes some of the lesson time, especially with a test that has multiple sections; after completing each section, the teams hand in their answer sheets, and the teacher counts the points accumulated. This is an argument for having the students exchange papers and check the answers.

Splitting the competition into several rounds is a universally accepted sporting practice; it adds the thrill of friendly rivalry to the process and thus boosts students' motivation.

CONCLUSION

The suggested technique can be used for almost any kind of classroom listening practice and with all kinds of classes. It seems to work well both in exam preparation and in regular textbook listening exercises. I would also like to emphasize that the technique is totally adjustable to the nature of the task and to the students' needs, especially in terms of determining the number of bonus points. Overall, participants tend to enjoy the activity and come to perceive the challenges of listening tests in a more positive way.

Alexey Shikhantsov has been teaching English at various levels for nine years. He is a senior English language teacher in the National Research University "Higher School of Economics" in Moscow, where the scope of his teaching includes ESP, phonetics, IELTS preparation, and English public-speech coaching.

MY CLASSROOM KAZAKHSTAN

Yulia Bulatkulova discovered her passion for English language teaching at a young age as a result of the example set by an esteemed childhood English teacher, Elvira Kuyanova. "I liked the way she spoke, always in English, and I thought to myself, I want to be like her," Ms. Bulatkulova recalled. She explained that it was her teacher's command over a language different from the one they shared that captivated her interest.

Photo by Nursultan Aibatyrov

Yulia Bulatkulova (inset) is a lecturer at Eurasian National University, pictured in the background.

Photo by Lauren Whitaker

Ms. Bulatkulova, now a lecturer at Eurasian National University (ENU) in Astana, attributes her aspiration for teaching to that teacher, who brought her love of language to the classroom. "I was impressed with the fact that a person is able to speak another language," she said. Admiration soon shifted to motivation; her desire to make an impression upon her teacher kept her up late at night studying grammar and exploring the language intently. Her happiest day occurred when she won the Olympiad in English in her hometown of Zhezkazgan. The Olympiad, a competition held in each city during which students compete to demonstrate the highest mastery of a given subject, is the pinnacle of achievement for students in Kazakhstan. The English language competition consists of three assignments: a read-and-retell task, a grammar test, and a culture/country study test. By winning, Ms. Bulatkulova earned sought-after congratulatory remarks from her teacher, which continued to motivate her throughout her education.

As time went on, her motivation shifted from the desire to impress to the desire to master the language. Her current students, also preparing to be English language teachers in Kazakhstan, share the same overall goal of mastering the English language. Her students are motivated to master the language in order not only to teach, but to maximize their opportunities in other avenues of life, such as traveling and expanding their worldviews.

Ms. Bulatkulova's personal wish is to improve the English-teaching capacity in Kazakhstan, and her goal is to do this through effective instruction and mentorship of her students in the Department of Theory and Practice of Foreign Languages. She hopes to increase her students' knowledge and passion for teaching, mentoring them so that they find pride in teaching, despite the challenges that accompany the profession. Her approach involves not only focusing on English language skills in the classroom but also harnessing her students' unique talents in order to increase motivation, broaden students' minds, and integrate various learning experiences in meaningful and authentic ways. "You don't know how talented they are until you give them opportunities to express themselves," she explained.

A typical week for Ms. Bulatkulova involves ten to twelve hours of instruction. She teaches courses in Etymology, English Literature, and English Language Teaching Methodologies to intermediate and upper-intermediate students. Her classes are relatively small, with no more than ten students in each class, and that allows her to personalize her teaching style to suit her students' variety of needs.

Because each class meets in a different room—some small, some large; some with moveable tables, others with seminar-style seating that is immobile; some with chairs, others with stools—Ms. Bulatkulova must practice her creativity and innovation. She does not plan the lesson around the classroom but rather makes the classroom fit her lesson, an approach that sometimes requires her to arrive early and rearrange seating and desks, or even search the building for an empty, more compatible classroom.

Her main concern is maintaining student motivation and interest, and one strategy she uses is consistently changing the seating arrangements. "I try to make it different quite frequently," she said. "One thing I am particularly convinced of is that students mustn't always sit in the same place and work with one particular partner." She explained that providing an always-changing

You don't know how talented [students] are until you give them opportunities to express themselves.

Ms. Bulatkulova (seated) studies a textbook with students in her Etymology course.

Photo by Nursultan Aibatyrov

environment increases classroom unity and student autonomy. Depending on her goal, she uses creative seating arrangements and classroom setups to promote skills such as team building, critical thinking, awareness of different patterns of thought, and responsibility for individual and/or group learning. Ms. Bulatkulova values establishing an environment conducive to the goals of each lesson and carefully considers each aspect of her lessons in order to create maximum positive impact.

What makes Ms. Bulatkulova's classes unique is her integration of the world's cultures, history, and art into her curriculum. Such focus encourages creative and critical thinking while broadening students' worldviews. Her students have created plays, for example; groups of students read a piece of classical literature together and went on to create their own play based on their selection. Examples of the literature covered include George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, William Shakespeare's *Othello*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. Students have the freedom to hone in on a specific piece of the text or to create their play using a variety of elements from the text. Ms. Bulatkulova believes in providing the literary and linguistic tools necessary for careful analysis and critical thinking, but she encourages students to be responsible for their own creativity when working together to create their plays. Her role in these projects is that of a linguistic and cultural guide, allowing students the creativity and confidence to create their own

One thing I am particularly convinced of is that students mustn't always sit in the same place and work with one particular partner.

Ms. Bulatkulova believes in a learner-centered approach and encourages her students to explore their creativity and the world through the arts.

meaning and manage their own learning, while at the same time being supported and steered in the right direction.

Ms. Bulatkulova believes in a learner-centered approach and encourages her students to explore their creativity and the world through the arts. Her approach is highly effective, with students motivated by topics that are personally meaningful. Zhansaya Yessetova, a fourth-year student at ENU, explained that Ms. Bulatkulova "is curious, in a good sense, and her incorporation of critical thinking and analysis of interesting texts were really useful" in allowing Yessetova to apply the skills practiced in class to real-world situations. Through Ms. Bulatkulova's approach to motivation by means of creative freedom, her students feel empowered to use their comprehension and critical-thinking skills to explore classical literature and art in a way that is truly meaningful to them.

The student-generated plays enabled Ms. Bulatkulova to discover that her students were interested in another art form: textiles and costume creation. It was clear to her that the students had spent a great deal of time and collaboration in designing their costumes for the plays. She realized that focusing on this interest could offer opportunities for collaboration and engagement in English instruction, in addition to offering student ownership over classroom materials. An advocate for the interconnectivity between language and the

Ms. Bulatkulova leads her students in a game to review for the final exam.

Photo by Lauren Whitaker

Even after a world-class performance, we must practice again the very next day in order to continue to hit those notes.

arts, Ms. Bulatkulova incorporated costume design into the play-project guidelines. She required students to collaborate and plan their costumes using English to discuss materials, work through the design process, and provide and receive opinions. She explained that just as seating is an important component of a conducive learning environment, so is allowing students to express themselves creatively. By creating their own costumes and props, students shape their own learning through careful consideration, planning, brainstorming, and making motivated decisions as a group and independently. These elements are at the heart of Ms. Bulatkulova's teaching philosophy.

This philosophy is present in all aspects of her instruction, from the classroom environment to the strategies she integrates into her lessons. She also believes that the key to being a successful teacher is maintaining the mindset of a lifelong learner. She likens teaching to the ever-changing nature of music, requiring tune-ups and alterations in order to hit the perfect note. "Even after a world-class performance, we must practice again the very next day in order to continue to hit those notes," she explained. This personal philosophy makes professional development an important element to her success, and she prides herself on transferring the value of lifelong learning to her students. She explained that she is "proud of teaching [her] students to *learn* … to be critical and creative in their approach to learning."

Ms. Bulatkulova leads by example and is an active participant in Global Education sessions and the Kazakhstan English Language Teaching Association, and she regularly attends teacher-training programs and workshops with English Language Specialists. She also participates in events arranged by the British Council and Regional English Language Office of the U.S. Embassy in Astana.

Ms. Bulatkulova is a highly motivated and effective teacher, and her classes serve as evidence that this trait has been imprinted upon her students. Perhaps, just as she was once motivated to make an impression upon her teacher, her students are compelled to work hard to make impressions upon her. The culture of high expectations that she maintains in her classrooms, combined with her motivation and passion for teaching, contributes to the popularity of her classes.

Ms. Bulatkulova works hard to ensure not only that she maintains her passion as a lifelong learner, but also that her students find the motivation to expand their knowledge and experience in the field of English language teaching. She prides herself on providing the best possible classroom environment for her students. Ms. Bulatkulova's interactions with her students, both inside and outside the classroom, demonstrate that she has followed in the footsteps of her childhood role model in providing motivation and a love of learning and language.

This article was written by **Lauren Whitaker**, an English language teacher who is currently the English Language Fellow hosted by Eurasian National University in Astana, Kazakhstan. She holds an MA in Linguistic Studies from Syracuse University with a concentration in Language, Culture, and Society.

TRY THIS

Current Events

LEVEL: Low Intermediate to Advanced

TIME REQUIRED: 45 minutes to model the activity; 3 to 5 minutes for each student to present (presentations may take place throughout a course)

GOALS: To read and understand informational text; to gain knowledge of events in local, national, and international communities; to practice summarizing; to improve oral presentation skills

MATERIALS: Sample news article: "E-readers Help Thousands in Africa Learn to Read" or a different news article; 5Ws + H graphic organizer (Appendix); paper and pencils or pens

BACKGROUND: This activity is based on current events and news stories. You can use it as a regular feature in your classroom or English club. By reading articles in newspapers or magazines or online, students or club members become familiar with an informational writing style; they also learn vocabulary and develop reading-comprehension skills.

Using news in the classroom keeps students aware of events happening in local, national, and international communities, and it promotes critical thinking. Being aware of issues and events in the news can motivate students to have further discussions with classmates, family, or members of the community and to become active in their communities. The procedures below describe how to model a way for students to collect information from a current-events article and prepare a presentation. Although this model is set in a classroom, you can use the same steps to establish a current-events project in an English club.

PREPARATION:

1. Consider how often you would like students to present current events. After students understand the assignment, they will select an article and prepare a presentation independently. How often you schedule current-events presentations depends on your class size and how often your class meets. Here are four options:

   - Create a calendar or list of dates and allow students to sign up for a day they would like to present, or assign dates to students.
   - Schedule presentations on a specific day of the week; each week, have one or two different students present.
   - Allow one student to present at the beginning of each class meeting so that a current event is presented every day during the course.
   - Select specific dates during the course that will be dedicated to current-events presentations.

You can also use these options to schedule presentations in English clubs.

2. Prepare the news article you will use to model this activity. You can choose one yourself or use the sample article,

E-readers Help Thousands in Africa Learn to Read

Deborah Block

February 5, 2016

At the Kibera Girls Soccer Academy in Nairobi, 17-year-old Naima Hassan and her fellow high school students sit in class, using an e-reader instead of textbooks. The electronic device, known as the Worldreader, can be loaded with hundreds of books.

"I get to learn everything that I want," Hassan said.

On a continent where millions of people can't read, there's a chronic shortage of textbooks in many schools, including the girls' academy.

"The textbooks that we have cannot be used by everyone in the school, so with the e-readers we now can learn at a comfortable pace," Hassan added.

Over the past five years, tens of thousands of free Worldreaders have been provided to students, teachers and libraries in 12 African countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. The digital collection comprises about 30,000 books in 40 languages.

The idea came from Worldreader Co-founder and President David Risher, a former marketing executive at Microsoft and Amazon.

"Now that the world is going digital," he said, "this is a good time to try to solve the problem of illiteracy on a scale where people haven't been able to solve it before."

He said the Worldreader is increasing reading comprehension in the schools where it's being used.

Access, portability

With so much information on the device, including books from African authors, teacher Claris Akinyi is pleased that the students can do their own research and learn more than they ever could before. Besides English, there are books in Swahili, Kenya's national language.

Akinyi uses it to plan her classes.

"When I need to prepare a lesson using different books, I can easily access the materials," she explained. "I can carry it home so as to prepare a lesson for different classes."

She said the Worldreader is helping give disadvantaged students a better chance of getting into college after high school.

Hassan dreams of becoming a TV camerawoman.

"Using the e-reader, you can download a book about a camera," she said, "and then you can learn everything about a camera."

In areas without electricity, Risher said, the e-readers can be charged using a simple solar setup at a school or library.

Worldreader also has an app that anyone anywhere can access. By using a phone with a Web browser, thousands of books in several languages are available at read.worldreader.org.

www.voanews.com/content/e-readers-africa-students-read-access-technology-books/3179051.html

"E-readers Help Thousands in Africa Learn to Read." The examples in the procedure refer to the sample article, but you can adapt them easily if you choose a different text. You can make copies of the article for students or project the article so that it is visible to your whole class. If students can access the article online, you can provide a link and ask them to read it before class.

3. Each student will use the 5Ws + H graphic organizer (Appendix); prepare copies or draw it on the board so that students can copy it into their notebooks.

PROCEDURES:

1. Ask students if they know what "current events" are. Depending on their knowledge, you can explain that current

events refer to news stories—important things that are happening now in local (in your town or region), national (in your country), or international (worldwide) communities. Ask students if they can give any examples of current events/news stories that they have seen or heard about.

2. Tell students, "We will have regular current-events presentations in our class. For your presentation, you will choose a news story that interests you. You will present information about the news event to the class." At this time you might want to explain how you plan to schedule the activity in your course.

3. Tell students, "Today I will show you how to complete the current-events graphic organizer and presentation from start to finish. We will read a news article, write down important information, and then choose the information we want to share in a short presentation."

4. Have students read the sample news article you have prepared. You can choose to have them read it independently, in pairs, or together as a whole class.

5. Tell students, "After reading the article, I need to write down the important information I will use to plan my presentation. For this, I will use my 5Ws + H graphic organizer. The 5Ws are *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why*, and H stands for *how*." Distribute copies of the graphic organizer to students or, if you have drawn it on the board, ask them to copy it into their notebooks.

6. Tell students, "I am going to begin with the first W, *who*. I will reread or skim my article to find the information I need for this question. Who are the people involved in the news story?" You can model rereading the article aloud to find the information, and students can follow along. Give students a chance to provide the information; if the article is projected on a screen, you can highlight or underline it in the text. If students have copies, they can also underline or highlight the information.

7. Write the information for *who* in the graphic organizer and have students do the same on their copy. If necessary, say, "In this article, I found several people involved with the use of e-readers. One person is Naima Hassan, a student who uses the e-reader. Another person is David Risher, the founder of Worldreader. The last is Naima's teacher, Claris Akinyi. I am going to write down their names and their roles in the story to help me remember when I make my presentation."

8. Follow the same process to look for information that tells *what* the news story is about. Give students time to go back through the article. If necessary, you can say, "I found that this article is about an e-reader, called Worldreader, with 30,000 books in 40 different languages. The article also mentions an app and a website people can use on their mobile phones. I am going to write these things under *what* on my graphic organizer."

9. Have students refer to the article again to find information for the *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* sections of the graphic organizer. Say, "For the next four sections of the graphic organizer, I want you to look back at the article and see what you can find about when, where, why, and how this news is happening. Underline or highlight the information in the article when you find it, and write it in the chart." If necessary, work through each W and H with the class to be sure students understand the procedure.

10. Give students time to locate information from the article independently or in pairs. Circulate around the room to make sure students understand the task. As needed, ask guiding questions to help students find the information. When they have finished, ask student volunteers

to share the information they located. Record information from the article on the graphic organizer on the board.

If students need additional support, you can guide them through the *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* portions of the activity by asking questions and soliciting responses:

Guiding Questions	Information from the Article
When is this news happening? **When** were the e-readers given to schools?	*E-readers have been given to schools in the past five years.*
Where does Hassan go to school? **Where** have the e-readers been used?	• *Kibera Girls Soccer Academy in Nairobi* • *12 African countries including Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zimbabwe*
Why are the e-readers being used in these countries and schools?	• *textbook shortage* • *to solve illiteracy using digital tools*
How are the e-readers helpful to students and teachers? **How** do they use them?	*E-readers are giving students access to new information in many languages and allowing teachers to plan for different classes at home.*

11. Say, "Another part of the activity is presenting the news event you chose to the class. Now we will talk about what you should include in your presentation and how to use the information you have written in the graphic organizer." Ask students what makes a good presentation. Ideas might include "speaking clearly and loudly," "being prepared," "making eye contact with the audience," "not reading off of your paper," and so on. You may want to list these ideas on the board for students to copy or on a poster to display in the classroom, so students can refer to the list as they plan their presentations.

12. Inform students that for your presentation, you will start by providing the title of the article and a short introduction telling what it is about. Then, using the graphic organizer, you can make a list of key points to include in your presentation. Model your thinking by saying, "I want my presentation to be about three minutes long, and I am going to use my graphic organizer to help me plan what I will say. I need to include information about all 5Ws and *How*." You can ask students for ideas about what they would include and, on the board, make a list such as this one:

- Worldreader is an organization co-founded by David Risher.
- Worldreader has given thousands of free e-readers to classrooms in 12 countries in Africa in the past 5 years.
- Countries include Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and more.
- The e-readers give students and teachers access to about 30,000 books in 40 languages.
- A Worldreader app and website can be used for free on mobile devices.
- Teacher Claris Akinyi from Nairobi likes the e-readers because she can take one home to plan lessons and use different texts with her students.
- Student Naima Hassan said the e-readers have helped her learn about things that interest her and given her school access to more books.
- E-readers are helping to solve problems such as a shortage of textbooks and illiteracy in many African countries.

Explain to students that they can conclude the presentation by saying why they found the article interesting or telling about something new they learned from it.

13. Model giving an actual presentation to the class. Tell students, "When you present your current event, you may want to have cards or a small piece of paper with your important points written down. You should also practice your presentation so that you are not just reading the words off of your paper." Then present the key information from the sample article as you expect students to do with their own news stories.

14. Give students about 10 minutes to take turns presenting on the sample article to one or two classmates in small groups, so that every student has a chance to practice. Those watching the presentations can provide feedback. You can move around the classroom to provide comments as well.

15. Brainstorm ideas about where to find articles. Sources can include local or national newspapers, news websites, or mobile apps. Additional sources, especially for students learning English, can be found in the Resources box on page 51.

16. When students understand the requirements of the assignment, you can schedule the presentations (see Preparation, Step 1). Review the schedule with students so they know their presentation date. You might want to confirm upcoming presentations each week as a reminder.

EXTENSIONS

1. Ask students to write a personal reflection about the news story they chose. The student can write about his or her opinion on an issue in the article, a possible solution to a problem, or the effect the news event has on his or her life. The questions in Variation 3 can provide additional ideas for students' reflections. These reflections could lead to a class discussion about how the news affects the class, school, community, or country.

2. Create a news timeline display in the classroom. Depending on how often current events are presented, you can divide the timeline into days, weeks, or months for the length of your course. After each presentation, have the student add information to the timeline about the news event he or she presented. Options include displaying students' graphic organizers along the timeline, posting photos from the news article, or writing a one- or two-sentence description giving the date and what occurred. The timeline can be used for students to reflect on news over time or even to track developments of a single news story.

3. Facilitate discussion as a follow-up to students' presentations. Discussions can be with the whole class or in small groups and can be teacher-led or student-led. (See Variation 3 for sample discussion questions.) After the discussion, small groups of students can create skits based on the news story to reenact it or to show the effects or consequences of the news event. If students are opinionated about the news story, they can hold a debate.

VARIATIONS

1. For students of lower English proficiency, articles with simplified sentence structure and grammar are available online at www.newsinlevels.com. Lower-proficiency students can also complete sentence frames like these to use as a presentation script:

   - The news story I found is called _____ (title of article).
   - The people in the story are _____ (who).

- The story tells about _____ (what).
- This story happened _____ (when).
- The story happened in/at _____ (where).
- This story happened because _____ (why).
- The story changed people's lives by _____ (how).

2. Students can create a visual representation of their news article. Ask students to create a poster that contains a single image and phrase that students feel summarizes the main idea of the article. The students can display their posters when they present their current events. Or you can display several of the posters at the same time in a gallery walk and allow the class to circulate freely, view each poster, and discuss the news event with the student presenting the poster. You can keep the posters on display to create a collection of news events over the duration of the course.

3. For an English club, the facilitator and members can decide how to implement a current-events activity depending on how often the club meets and how many members there are. Club members can use the graphic organizer and present their current events following the procedures in Steps 11 through 13. To increase participation and opportunities to practice English, the presenter can pose discussion questions to the club following the presentation of the news article. This can be done as a whole-group discussion or in smaller groups if many people are at the club meeting. Presenters can develop their own questions based on their news story. Sample questions include the following:

- Why is this news event significant?
- What effect will this news event have on local, national, and international communities?
- Does this news event affect your life directly? If so, how?
- What is your opinion about this issue/news event? Why?
- What is the best way to solve the problem or deal with the issue in this news story?

This activity was written by **Amy Hanna**, who has taught ESL to students in primary school, university, and adult education classrooms, trained teachers in TESL methods, and developed materials for English-language programs in the United States and abroad.

Resources

There are many places where students and English club members can find news articles to read and summarize. Local, national, and international English-language newspapers or magazines are a great resource, and many have websites that can be accessed on mobile devices. Websites with news articles written specifically for students learning English include the following:

- *Time* for Kids: www.timeforkids.com
- Smithsonian Tween Tribune (leveled articles): http://tweentribune.com/
- Voice of America: www.voanews.com
- News in Levels: www.newsinlevels.com
- *The New York Times* The Learning Network blog (articles and lesson ideas for current events): http://bit.ly/LearningNetworkBlog

APPENDIX: 5Ws + H Graphic Organizer

5Ws + H

Title of News Article: _____

Article Date: _____ Source: _____

Who?	
What?	
When?	
Where?	
Why?	
How?	

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WH_TS M_SS_NG?

Below is a list of activities that might be part of an English Club meeting. However, the vowels are missing from the activities. Your job is to fill in the missing letters to complete the list.

For example, you would complete "S K _T S" by filling in the blank with an *I* to spell *skits*.

Now see if you can fill in the letters below.

1. S_NG_NG S_NGS
2. M_V__ N_GHT
3. B__K CL_B
4. D_B_T_
5. R_L_ PL_YS
6. D_SC_SS_NG C_RR_NT _V_NTS
7. PH_T_ C_NT_ST
8. G_M_S
9. C_NV_RS_T__N PR_CT_C_
10. C_FF__ BR__K
11. TR_NSL_T__N
12. W_TCH_NG TV SH_WS
13. L_ST_N_NG T_ P_DC_STS
14. _L_CT_NG CL_B _FF_C_RS

Answers on page 40

Answers to *THE LIGHTER SIDE*

WH_T'S M_SS_NG?

1. singing songs
2. movie night
3. book club
4. debate
5. role plays
6. discussing current events
7. photo contest
8. games
9. conversation practice
10. coffee break
11. translation
12. watching TV shows
13. listening to podcasts
14. electing club officers

English Club Email

Sara attended an English Club meeting and wrote about it the next day to her friend Lisa, who could not attend the meeting. But Sara did not mention the events at the meeting in the order they happened. Can you read her email and figure out the order in which things happened?

Hi, Lisa,

Sorry you weren't able to attend the English Club meeting yesterday.

It was a good meeting. The highlight was making plans for the picnic next month. The discussion took so long that we almost didn't have time for the Language Focus at the end of the meeting. I'll tell you more about the plans when I see you.

Oh, in Small-Group Discussion, we talked about the expression "Don't give up!" and related it to our lives and our communities. But I wonder if we should do those discussions right before the break instead of right after? We went straight from Small-Group Discussion to planning the picnic, and I think people would have enjoyed continuing to talk about "Don't give up!" during the break instead of having to cut off the conversation.

I was late for the meeting, so I missed the first part of the short-story discussion. But it was interesting! I thought about the story later when we were voting on a movie to watch next week. Should we watch movies that are based on the stories we read, or is that not important? Maybe I should have asked this question when we were choosing the movie, but before I could, it was time for the break.

Actually, we didn't have much time to choose the movie because we had a lot of new members at the meeting. Their introductions, right after the story discussion, took a long time. But it's great to have new people in the club!

Many people asked about you after the meeting, and I said you will definitely be at the next one. Talk to you soon!

Sara

Now write numbers in the blanks to show the order in which the following things happened. Write "1" for the thing that happened first, "2" for the thing that happened second, and so on.

___ Small-Group Discussion
___ Language Focus
___ movie selection
___ short-story discussion
___ people asked about Lisa
___ picnic planning
___ break
___ new-member introductions

Answers are below.

Answers to *THE LIGHTER SIDE*

ENGLISH CLUB EMAIL

_5_ Small-Group Discussion
_7_ Language Focus
_3_ movie selection
_1_ short-story discussion
_8_ people asked about Lisa
_6_ picnic planning
_4_ break
_2_ new-member introductions