

## A GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUP TECHNIQUES\*

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## SOME PRINCIPLES OF SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

In the traditional English classroom goals and activities have been largely teacher oriented. That is, the teacher alone had an overall view of the objectives of the course, and he was the sole authority in determining the methods to be employed in achieving these objectives. Each class was reduced to a statistical average and was then taught as though every student coincided with this average.

While it is true that some people learned English in this fashion, it is also true that this approach failed to recognize and take advantage of each student's unique potential. Those closest to the average (or to the teacher's concept of the average) were able to learn English, but an equally large number became discouraged and discontinued when they discovered that the pace and methodology designed for the average were not suitable for them. They were either left behind, or (in the case of the fast learners) bored as their minds raced ahead.

Completely individualized instruction would require that each student study and practice alone. This situation, however, is far from ideal. This type of private tutoring, except for very advanced students whose primary aim is conversation, can be taxing on both teacher and student, as well as expensive. A student learns not only from his teacher, but also from his fellow students, and their problems give him additional insights in the language. Since most teachers have to deal with groups of students, it should be made clear that considerable individualization can be achieved within a group of students and in the context of a specific program. The purpose of this article is to guide teachers in the practical aspects of individualization, through small-group instruction.

Some teachers have a tendency to regard their groups as clearly divided into three levels: the gifted students; the underachievers; and the "average" students. The basic idea of individualized teaching is to reach all students by using a variety of techniques and materials. The teacher must spend more time and effort working with the underachievers and be prepared to provide the fast learners with more challenging tasks that will further their learning.

\* Condensed from: Handbook for Small Group Techniques. México, D.F.: Instituto Mexicano Norteamericano de Relaciones, A.C., 1973. 41 pp.

The need for individualized instruction should be evident to every teacher, not only for the obvious advantages it offers teacher and student, but also because students are now demanding to be treated as individuals.

The students of today are also quite articulate in pointing out the shortcomings of a learning situation, if they are permitted to do so. It is sometimes painful, but always fruitful for a teacher to ask his students to voice their candid opinions of the various activities conducted in the classroom. Students reject mindless repetition and manipulation exercises that have little if any relationship to their thought and communication processes. The primary goal of language acquisition is communication, and thus the wealth of ideas each student brings into the classroom must be utilized to the fullest extent possible.

Individualized teaching takes advantage of an individual's unique potentials. Every student walks into the classroom with a vast accumulation of experiences, feelings and idiosyncrasies. It should be understood that individualized teaching does not attempt to pamper the student or accommodate his whims of the moment. It is intended to motivate him and teach him how to use his potentials by allowing him to share his experiences, feelings, ideas and aptitudes.

This new, student-oriented approach attempts to create a learning environment by making all possible resources available to the student and making him share the responsibility for his achievement. This is accomplished by stating clearly the objectives of the course and the behavior expected from the student after the completion of any given level. He should be encouraged to analyze his own progress (with the help of the teacher), and to indicate his own weaknesses and uncertainties to the teacher. After determining quickly that the student's analysis is correct, the teacher is then able to place that student with two others with similar problems, and to assign the activity to this group of three that will best overcome their weaknesses.

The teacher also acts as a resource person, available to guide and answer questions, to motivate students by making classroom activities relevant and interesting, and to organize and encourage learning as unobtrusively as possible. The teacher should be ready to answer questions, even though they may not be directly connected with the lesson. A student's question is a clear indication of a desire to learn, and these "learning moments" should always be encouraged. It is not necessary for the teacher to go into long and complicated grammatical analyses -- a short explanation is all that is usually required. The student must not feel that he is being held back by a rigid schedule, but rather that he can advance as rapidly as his effort and ability permit. He must also understand and accept his own responsibility for analyzing and directing his progress.

Small-group work and individualized teaching in general make it necessary for teachers to redefine "discipline" in their own minds. Individualization results in a markedly informal atmosphere, in which students feel free to leave their seats to consult with the teacher, or with fellow students. More student-student interaction results in a noisier classroom, but there is a difference between the noise students produce when they are simply trying to escape boredom by random chit-chat, and the noise of students actively engaged in practicing the target language. True discipline does not exist in isolation, but it is the result of students' concentration on the activity they are engaged in. It would truly be sad to observe silence in a classroom where language is being learned. Mischief makers do exist, but they can usually be converted into effective group leaders if their energies are channeled productively.

For teachers who have to work with large classes, small-group work is probably the only way in which the language can be taught effectively. In no other way is there enough time for individual reaction. (In a class of thirty, for example, divided into ten groups of three students each, ten students will be reciting at the same time, and each student will recite ten times as much as in the traditional class.) The lack of practice in the traditional large class makes it impossible for the student to acquire proficiency in the target language.

A few general points deserve special mention:

**Supervision:** Small group and individual activities create better rapport between teacher and students when the teacher monitors their performance, offers corrections and suggestions when necessary. The reverse is true if the teacher instructs the students to form groups and then leaves them to work on their own. In this case students feel abandoned and have a definite tendency to dislike small-group work.

**Participation.** A student should be permitted and encouraged to speak when he wants to speak -- to learn when he wants to learn. The traditional audio-lingual techniques force the student to speak only when his turn comes, or when the teacher sees fit to call on him. There are moments when something catches his interest but the system requires that he remain silent. These potential moments of learning are lost forever. Students should be encouraged to grasp such opportunities by speaking up immediately.

**Speaking the target language only.** Care must be taken that small-group activities do not degenerate into a polite exchange in the native language. Emphasis must be placed on the cardinal rule that the language being learned should be spoken at all times. This, however, does not preclude the occasional use of a few words in the native language, to save time and clarify a concept.

## TEACHER'S ATTITUDE

The success of any attempt at individualizing instruction depends largely on the teacher's attitude. There are certain basic principles that a teacher has to accept fully before he can succeed:

- 1) He should have clearly defined objectives not only for the entire course, but also for each class period. These objectives should be formulated for the class as a whole and, insofar as it is possible, for each student according to his needs and capabilities. The students should be informed of the goals the teacher has established for them, and they should be told how they are expected to perform at any given point during the course and at its completion.
- 2) Students should be made to feel that they are to judge their performance not in relationship to that of other students, but rather in relationship to the materials presented. They should be encouraged and helped in setting up their own objectives.
- 3) Teachers should avoid pre-judging students by categorizing them as "fast" or "slow" learners. A perfectly capable individual may appear to be a "slow" student due to a number of discoverable and resolvable factors initially unknown to the teacher.
- 4) The teacher must not classify students by the way they dress, look or behave, or by whether or not they share the same or the teacher's values, opinions, likes and dislikes.
- 5) The teacher must endeavor to develop tolerance for students who have difficulties arriving on time, or who sometimes miss class. A student who manages to attend class, however late he may be, is obviously interested and rather than wasting valuable class time berating him for his tardiness, he should be put to work immediately. Tolerance results in a more relaxed relationship between teacher and students.
- 6) It should be kept in mind that teaching is not merely a matter of presenting material and then assuming that the teacher's and the students' goals have been achieved. A structure has not been taught until the students have learned it. Individualized instruction means teaching the student who was absent when the structure was presented, re-teaching the student who failed to understand the first presentation, and reviewing material from time to time. A review lesson represents reteaching a given structure, using a different technique or approach, if necessary.
- 7) In order to allow for different learning abilities, a variety of activities is necessary to make it possible for students to learn

to speak, read and write the target language. This makes it possible for a student to succeed in some area, boosting his confidence and encouraging him to try to master other aspects of the language that may be more difficult for him. Some students can learn orally; others need to see the written word. Sometimes a student has to reinforce his learning through writing. Each student should be allowed and encouraged to choose the activity most useful to him. A program that neglects any one of these aspects in favor of another is not well-balanced.

- 8) A teacher must learn to depart from a schedule if the group becomes vitally interested in some aspect of the language that he had not planned to cover in any given class period. He must learn to recognize these learning moments, take advantage of them -- and readjust activities to keep up with his schedule.
- 9) A teacher must avoid becoming a slave to his materials -- he should use them judiciously. Going over every single exercise in a lesson does not assure success. He must select the drills to be used according to the students' needs.

In order to individualize classroom procedure, the following students' variables should be taken into account:

- 1) Willingness to learn. This can be greatly increased, or even created by a sympathetic teacher. A teacher can completely alienate a student by reacting in a superior, scornful or impatient manner. If a teacher answers a student's question with "Didn't you learn that last term?" he has probably lost the student right then and there, if not physically, at least emotionally.
- 2) Auditory discrimination. Some people hear better than others. Students are not being uncooperative when they do not produce a simple word satisfactorily. They may not have an ear for language and need special help.
- 3) Speed of learning. People learn things -- even different aspects of the same thing -- at varying speeds. Montessori<sup>1</sup> talks about "learning plateaus" in children. A child reaches a certain level and seems to be unable to go further. After a period of indefinite duration -- while he is probably internalizing recent acquisitions -- he is ready to resume learning.
- 4) Variations of experience with the language (previous English studies, travel, etc.).

<sup>1</sup>Montessori, Maria, El Niño, Secretaría de Educación Pública, México, 1957

5) Age. Increased age is often accompanied by:

- a) A reduced plasticity for language learning.
- b) Reduced auditory discrimination.
- c) Inferior ability to evaluate his own oral performance.
- d) Reduced talent for mimicry. Children play games of mimicry quite well and without any trace of self-consciousness. This ability diminishes as a person grows older.
- e) In some cases, shyness.
- f) Unwillingness to participate, which is really a fear of making mistakes. (This can be decreased by the teacher's tactful corrections in class. You do not correct people, you correct mistakes.)
- g) Greater reliance on writing.

Increased age, on the other hand, offers some advantages:

- a) An older student knows how to learn. This does not imply academic learning exclusively. Even if his academic background is negligible, an adult, by the simple act of living and interacting with people in complex everyday tasks, has had to master a number of skills. His learning capacity has been in use all his life.
- b) He has greater powers of concentration.
- c) He has a longer attention span.
- d) He has more perseverance.
- e) He can follow instructions.
- f) He can intellectualize learning. He can make analogies, comparisons, contrasts, etc. He can detect patterns and apply abstract rules.
- g) He has, in some cases, had experience in learning other languages.

#### TEACHER AND STUDENT'S ROLLS

THE TEACHER'S ROLE. The teacher should function effectively in all of the following capacities:

- a. Generator and supervisor of a learning environment. A teacher is, basically, a person who makes learning possible. He motivates students and makes sure that they are aware of all available resources (in and out of the classroom), and that they can use them to the best advantage.
- b. Resource person. He makes his training, experience and ability as a native speaker, available to his students to clarify doubts, explain new concepts and suggest additional sources of information.
- c. Counselor. He guides and suggests, offering individual help when needed without limiting himself to the role of an "information machine" or a model to emulate.

- d. Researcher. He not only keeps up with the latest developments in his field, but through continued observation of his students, relates these developments to actual classroom situations. His concern is not limited to the academic aspects of teaching, but extends to the knowledge of his students as individuals; he endeavors to discover what method of learning is best for each one of them.
- e. The most expensive piece of equipment in any classroom. He does what no book, teacher's aide, student or machine can do. The teacher should:
1. Present and drill material.
  2. Supervise students' performance.
  3. Offer corrections and praise when called for.
  4. Create special materials or adapt those available when necessary.

THE STUDENT'S ROLE. The student should be:

- a. Co-planner and director of his learning program. A student can become actively involved in his learning process if:
1. He is made aware of what is expected of him. This can be accomplished by giving him clearly stated behavioral objectives that indicate what his performance should be at any point of the course and at its completion.
  2. He is given diagnostic tests that will enable him to recognize his problems and learn to solve them with the teacher's guidance.
- b. Monitor and evaluator of his own progress. A student must be trained to use the various exercises in the "Student Study Booklets" as testing devices so that he doesn't need a formal examination to evaluate his progress. Continual self-assessment is the best means to motivate a student.
- c. Active participant in different group activities. He should be made aware that participation in small group activities is a privilege only a classroom offers. This is something he cannot find any place else and he should take full advantage of it.
- d. Tutor. Learning and teaching is much more effective than just learning. Re-structuring of subject matter in order to communicate it to others helps a person internalize it.

## STUDENT'S OBJECTIVES

The student's role was discussed in the preceding chapter. In addition it is important for the student to know what is expected of him throughout the course as well as at its completion. A general outline explaining what is expected of him can be the same for all levels with the different goals for a specific course detailed at the end. Outlines will be most effective in the student's native language for beginning courses and in English thereafter.

To the student:

The techniques that will be used in this course are intended to create a learning atmosphere in which you can utilize your capacity to the maximum and advance as fast as your effort and ability permit. In order for these techniques to be effective, your complete participation in all classroom activities is essential. You can have a decisive influence on your learning process if you make an effort to identify problem areas and ask the teacher's help to overcome them.

While it is true that passive learning systems are now being abandoned in almost every field, they have always been ineffective in language acquisition. If you do not use the target language as often as possible, especially during class, you will never master it. Understanding a grammatical explanation is only the starting point: intensive practice is needed before a structure can be properly internalized. A passive student who is satisfied when he has understood and memorized grammatical explanations will no doubt learn something about the language. An active student will learn to understand, speak, read and write the language.

It is necessary that during periods of drill in small groups you and your classmates speak only English; otherwise, the purpose of the activity is lost. If you or any of the classmates you are working with have problems with a grammar point or with a vocabulary item, you should call on your teacher to answer your questions. If you feel that you have mastered the structure being drilled, you should not continue working with it so as not to hurt your classmates' feelings; instead you should leave the group and ask the teacher for a different assignment.

It is your responsibility to:

- 1) Plan and direct your learning process. This can only be accomplished by your recognizing your needs and finding ways to fulfill them. You can call on the teacher, ask help from a fellow student, or try to find an answer to your questions in your textbook.
- 2) Evaluate your progress. Drills and exercises often can be used as testing exercises so that you will not need the results of a formal examination to assess your progress.



- 3) Participate in class actively. If you hesitate to do so because you are afraid of making mistakes, you make it impossible for the teacher to help you. You should feel that teachers do not correct students, they correct mistakes.
- 4) Take advantage of small group activities. You probably do not have someone to read questions to you and correct your mistakes except in the classroom.
- 5) Tutor. Nothing helps reinforce a subject matter as much as trying to communicate it to others.
- 6) Participate in all extra-curricular activities. A number of activities through which you may reinforce your language learning are offered, such as: Conversation Club (it is advisable that you attend both the English and the Spanish Conversation Clubs, since friendships can be made at both, and you can avail yourself of friends to practice with), Sing-Along Club, Square Dancing, Excursion Club, Lectures, Art Shows, etc.

The manner in which intelligence influences a person's language learning is basically the way in which he uses all the resources at his disposal: the teacher, the textbook, his classmates, extra-curricular activities, etc. Make your own English acquisition an exciting adventure by following the suggestions above.

The preceding explanations to the student can be used for all levels, to be followed by precise student performance objectives for each level determined by the teacher and/or school administration.

#### THE TEXTBOOK

The textbook should be considered a lesson plan, and the teacher should endeavor to use it creatively to make the material relevant to his students. The teacher should never become a slave to the textbook, nor allow the class period to be spent in the reading of the book by teacher. The following are some hints that will help the teacher use the textbook more effectively:

- 1) Personalize the content of the lesson. Out of necessity, textbooks in general present language in a more or less artificial context. No textbook can present vocabulary items that will fit the specific needs of a housewife, doctor or secretary or of a given, limited geographical location. The teacher can overcome this problem by teaching the vocabulary items his students need, as they voice their needs. Rather than asking something like "Does Mary study at the university?", when there is no such person in the group, he should ask the question using the name

of one of his students and that of a local university. Many teachers believe that using the language meaningfully entails setting up situations for skills or role playing. While this is an effective process, real use of the language can simply be utilizing the students and props available in any classroom.

- 2) Explain to the students the mechanics of substitution drills and encourage them to create their own when they are studying at home. Point out to them that each sentence in a choral repetition presents a structure and that they should master it before going on.
- 3) When necessary or solicited, give students grammatical explanations about each lesson. This is particularly useful to students who miss class.
- 4) Give suitable written homework assignments. Some suggestions:
  - a) Have students rewrite a dialog, personalizing it.
  - b) Have students choose one or two questions found at the end of most units in most textbooks, and answer them with as many logical, connected sentences as possible.

#### TECHNIQUES FOR PRESENTING NEW MATERIAL TO THE ENTIRE GROUP

1. A CHORAL REPETITION. This is one means of introducing the new structures and vocabulary in a lesson. The usual procedure is for the teacher to read sentence by sentence aloud, asking the students to repeat in unison. You may prefer to do it with books open or closed, according to course level, difficulty of structure, length of sentences, or students' ability. The number of repetitions should be determined by the needs of the class.
2. A BUILD-UP PRESENTATION. Basically, this means to present new material situationally, basing presentation on your knowledge of your students: "

Example: for the presentation of DO for the first time

Teacher: (pointing at himself) I work. (then, to one of the better students who also works) Pedro, do you work?

Pedro: Yes, I work.

The presentation can be continued along these lines by using intransitive verbs to keep the questions simple but logical: sing, dance, swim, drive, study, etc.

The second step would be for you to get the students to ask the questions:

Teacher: Pedro, ask Juan if he studies.

Pedro: Juan, do you study?

Juan: Yes, I study, etc.

The gradual build-up may continue by the addition of the time expression: on Monday, every day, once a week, etc.

The third step would include the frequency adverb. At this point the questions would be something like:

Marfa, do you usually study in the morning?

As the final step you may wish to introduce transitive verbs that require a direct object and introduce objective pronouns.

3. SONGS. The song should be chosen carefully taking into account both the structural content and the appeal it might have for the students. When a popular song can be used to present new material, the student has the added reinforcement not only of hearing it often, but also of singing it outside of class.

Play the song once, then, play it again, stopping now and then to explain and/or discuss it. After it has been understood by the class you can dictate the words with one of your best students writing them on the blackboard and the rest of the group writing them in their notebooks. When the student writing on the blackboard makes a mistake, try to elicit a correction from the class. If none is forthcoming, you should make it. When all the students have the words, these can be used as a choral repetition, or read aloud by individual students, then the group can sing the song once or twice.

4. READINGS. These will always prove more appealing to the class if written by a classmate. You may choose one of the better students -- or perhaps one that is repeating the course, and have him write about what he plans to do on his next vacation (for introducing the "going to" future), what he did the preceding weekend (to introduce the past), what he would have done if he had lived in some remote period (to introduce "if" clauses, etc.). The student's reading must be checked before he is asked to read it to his classmates. After he has read his paragraph you point out the grammatical point involved, then have the student read it again and be ready to answer whatever questions his classmates

ask. A greater degree of interaction among students can be achieved at this point if you encourage the student who is answering questions to also ask questions of his own.

5. DIALOGS. These can be written by you and given to the students to memorize, or they can be prepared by two or three students with your help and then acted out for the whole group. You may suggest a simple situation, i.e., Mother, Father, teen-age son or daughter. Situation: Mother asks Father to do a number of things (this may be used to present causatives want, ask, tell, advise, etc.), and he, in turn delegates these things to be done by the son.

Mother: I want you to get up early tomorrow because there are a lot of things you have to do.

Father: What do you want me to do?

Mother: The carpenter is coming to fix the dining-room table. I want you to tell him not to take too long doing it. Ask him to use the same shade of varnish when he finishes fixing it.

Father: I don't see why I have to get up to do it. Why don't you tell him yourself?

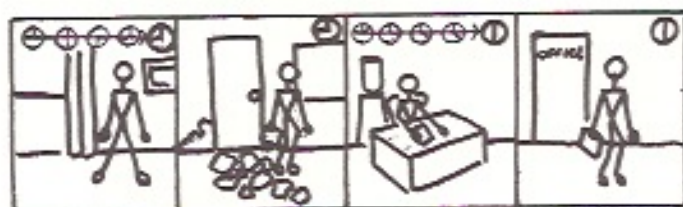
Mother: It's easier for a man. Remember that I invited the Nelsons to have dinner with us tomorrow. The table has to be fixed.

Father (to son): Your mother asked me to tell you to get up early tomorrow. She wants you to talk to the carpenter who's coming to fix the dining-room table.

Son: The carpenter doesn't have to come to fix it. Tell mother to look in the dining room. I fixed the table this morning.

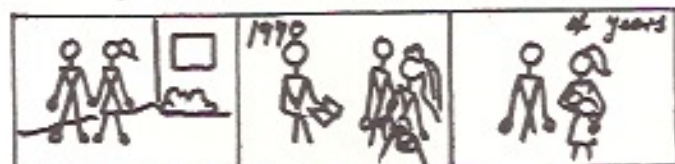
etc.

6. VISUAL AIDS. If you can draw a circle and a straight line you can draw stick figures. It is suggested that you prepare your own drawings to present a given structure. Using magazine cut-outs may make it difficult to control the responses you wish to elicit from the students. A set of drawings to present "until" might look like this:



1. Mr. Jackson is home until nine o'clock.
2. He doesn't leave home until nine o'clock.
3. He's in his office until six o'clock.
4. He doesn't leave his office until six o'clock.

A set of drawings to present the present perfect (in relationship with the past and present) might look like this:



1. Dick and Maggie are married.
2. They got married in 1970.
3. They've been married for four years.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR A FIRST CLASS DAY

The importance of the first class day cannot be overemphasized. It is perhaps the single most important day in any course. The first contact between teacher and students can influence their interaction throughout the term. This is the opportunity for the teacher to establish rapport with his group by being warm and friendly. Surprisingly, even very experienced teachers are nervous and jumpy on the first day of class. They must make an effort not to show it. A calm and assured teacher creates confidence in the students, who are usually more nervous than he is.

Since the ultimate goal of any language class is communication, it is imperative that the teacher establish this from the moment he walks into the classroom and faces a new group. The following are some suggestions for a first class day in any beginning course.

As he walks into the classroom the teacher will greet the group and elicit the proper response. He will point at himself and tell the group "My name is \_\_\_\_\_." Then proceed to ask a student his or her name. If the student the teacher has called on fails to respond, there will always be another one who will volunteer the answer: "My name is \_\_\_\_\_." The teacher then goes back to the original student for his answer.

After asking four or five students their names, the teacher calls on another student and asks (pointing to one of the students who has already answered) "What's his (her) name?" The student will no doubt have forgotten the name in question so the teacher prompts: "Ask him (her)." The student asks "What's your name?" and then reports to the teacher "His (her) name is \_\_\_\_\_."

As a follow-up game, the teacher asks a student "What's your name?" and tosses a small ball to him. He must answer and then ask someone else the same question tossing the ball.

These activities not only break the ice, but make it possible for both teacher and students to know everyone's name from the very beginning and permit a more natural and relaxed classroom atmosphere.

The simple task of asking and answering these questions permits every student in the group to leave the classroom with a distinct feeling of accomplishment: he has actually used the foreign language to elicit and give real information.

Variations of this pattern may be used for all courses with questions and answers growing more complex according to the level. In higher levels, after the question and answer period, the teacher may ask the group to write as many details about his classmates as he can, i.e. he can describe them physically, write about their occupations, describe the way they are dressed, etc. Then, these descriptions can be read to the entire class by the students.

#### USE OF PROPS AND VISUAL AIDS TO DEVELOP ORAL SKILLS (FOR SMALL GROUPS OR ENTIRE CLASS)

##### A. PROPS

The objects the students usually have with them, the classroom furniture, pictures, maps, etc. are the most readily available props.

Ask the students to put whatever they have in their pockets and purses on their desks. Besides building up vocabulary, these objects can be used for:

1. Drilling IT. Hold up a pencil and say: "The pencil is new." Have one of the students repeat your statement and then give him a cue: "long." The student will say: "It's long." Give cues only as long as necessary for the group to grasp the idea, then omit the cue, with the student furnishing the adjective. Then stop giving the sentence and hold up the object with the students producing both statements.

2. Drilling possessive adjectives. Pick up an object and ask: "Is this my book?" Have student answer with a complete negative sentence: "No, it isn't your book." Point to a girl: "Is it her book?" Student will answer: "No, it isn't her book," etc. When all the possessive adjectives have been elicited from the student, ask him: "Is it your book?" and he will answer: "Yes, it's my book."
3. Drilling occupations. Have students state their occupations. Then ask questions that will require an affirmative or negative answer. This technique can also be used to drill short answers followed by a complete sentence giving additional information: "Is Pedro a doctor?--Yes, he is. He's a good doctor."
4. Drilling demonstratives. Start by asking the question, but lead students into asking the questions themselves simply by holding up objects. The student will ask: "Is that a dictionary?" or "Are those new shoes?" etc.
5. Drilling IN, ON and AT for place. Props: a box for objects; the teacher's desk; pictures of a hospital, a movie theater, a university, a school, etc. Affirmative, interrogative and negative sentences can be elicited by manipulating the different props. After the teacher has gotten the ideas across, the students should make up their own sentences, with the teacher prompting them by using the props.
6. Drilling adjectives. Bring a bag with a number of easy-to-describe objects: a book, an apple, a toy, etc. The student who gets the bag chooses an object -- without letting the others see it. Then he describes it: "It's new. It's interesting. It's difficult." etc. with the group asking questions: "Is it a(n) \_\_\_\_\_?" until somebody guesses what it is. This can be used with students of any level. The descriptions may go from a simple adjective to a comparative, then to an elaborate sentence such as: "It's smooth and hard and it reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_."

STUDENTS MAY BE ASKED TO BRING PROPS FOR A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES SUCH AS:

- a. Role playing. Instruct each student to bring three objects. Have groups of three students pool the things they brought and write a short skit about them.
- b. Identifying scents. Each student is to bring one or more bottles with different liquids: after shave lotion, vinegar, beer, vanilla extract, etc. Have one student try to describe the smell without naming it. The others will ask questions until they guess what it is.

- c. Show and tell. This activity continues to be effective, particularly in a language class. Students bring an object and then tell their classmates about it.

## B. VISUAL AIDS

Besides the visual aids the teacher himself can prepare (see page 15), he may also build up his portfolio of visual aids from magazine cut-outs, posters, photographs, etc. A visit to an embassy, or to a travel agency will furnish a teacher with an inexhaustible supply of materials. Catalogs and menus will permit the students to plan meals, make shopping lists, etc. When a specific structure is to be practiced (i.e. interrogative word questions), the teacher may ask the students to bring pictures or photographs particularly meaningful to them, so that they can answer the questions put to them by their classmates truthfully and in detail.

Whenever visual aids are to be used, the teacher should make sure that all vocabulary and structure items are understood.

- 1) Have students describe what they see. For the present of custom present a series of pictures of a man, a woman, children, doing different things. The resulting description might be something like:

Every Monday Mr. Allen gets up at six o'clock. He has breakfast. He goes to work in his car. He works in a bank. He's a cashier. He has lunch at a restaurant near his office because he doesn't have time to go home. He gets off work at five o'clock. He reads the paper when he gets home. He usually watches television for a while before he goes to bed.

Students should be encouraged to ask meaningful questions after each statement, i.e. "Does he get up at six o'clock on Sunday too?", etc. The teacher should encourage as much interaction among students as possible.

- 2) Have students describe what they see using the ING present. Instruct students to ask questions about the statements made as described above. A variation in this case would be for them to ask the questions in the present of custom, to establish a contrast between the two tenses, e.g.

Student A: Alice is studying in her room.

Student B: Does she study every day?, etc.

- 3) Instruct students in each group to make up a story about a picture. Let it be understood that this is to be a group effort. After



they have decided on the story, they choose one of their members to go to another group and tell the story. This may be done when the various forms of the verb to be have been presented:

Mr. and Mrs. Kelly are Americans. Their house is very nice. Ann and Greg are their children. Mr. Kelly is a doctor. Mrs. Kelly is a chemist. Ann and Greg are students at the American School. Their dog is big and white. It's a nice dog. The family is in the living room. It's a large room. The sofa is tan and the chairs are brown. The pictures on the wall are beautiful.

Then have the members of the other group ask questions about the story. In higher courses several pictures can be used.

- 4) Instead of realistic photographs or illustrations, use reproductions of abstract paintings and have students describe what they see. Use ink blots and have students describe what they find in them.
- 5) Have students bring their favorite pictures, (snapshots, reproductions of works of art, illustrations from magazines or newspapers, etc.) and be ready to tell the class why they are their favorites.
- 6) "Now you see it, now you don't." Flash a picture and elicit individual versions of what was on the picture.

### C. OTHER ACTIVITIES TO ELICIT ORAL PARTICIPATION

1. Cocktail party. Have students push the chairs against the wall and mill around, just as they would do if they were attending a typical cocktail party. This technique can be used successfully to practice dialogs, which include structures that students find difficult to learn and which is almost impossible to practice in class enough without resulting in boredom on the part of the students. For instance, there is a limit on how many times the teacher can ask, "What time does your father go to work?", before the students grow tired of the repetition without having internalized it.

A dialog such as: "What time do you go to bed and what time do you get up? I go to bed at \_\_\_\_\_, and I get up at \_\_\_\_\_." and/or "What time does your father go to work, and what time does he get off work? He goes to work at \_\_\_\_\_, and he gets off work at \_\_\_\_\_." can be repeated by the students as many times as they find different partners to talk to without getting bored. Not only do students practice the structure, but the better ones will teach it to the weaker students. The cocktail party idea

works because it affords the students the necessary mobility, which they would lack in any other physical set-up. This technique can be used to practice almost any structure in the form of a dialog. Students should be encouraged to go on to other questions once they have mastered the basic structure.

ACTIVITIES FOR ORAL PRACTICE  
(FOR SMALL GROUPS OR ENTIRE CLASS)

- 1) FLEETING DIALOGS. When a structure has been drilled, it should be incorporated immediately into a short dialog. These dialogs should then become a brief exchange between student and teacher or student and student before proceeding to the next structure. To a teacher it may seem obvious to suggest that all drills are eventually intended for natural communication, but for the student this must be demonstrated and practiced, so that he may internalize the habit.
- 2) EXPRESSING ONE'S REACTIONS. Expressing one's personal feelings is what oral communication is all about. Encourage students to talk about things that are familiar and important to them. A student will be candid only if he feels that the teacher and the students listening are interested in what he has to say, and that his opinions are valuable. Have the rest of the group participate by asking the speaker questions, adding comments of their own, etc.
- 3) DESCRIBE A SIMPLE PROCESS. Students should be told to prepare for this activity at home and describe to their classmates: how to play the guitar; how to make chantilly cream; how to play chess; etc.
- 4) PANEL DISCUSSION. Have two students defend a topical subject, with two students against it, and one to act as moderator. Encourage students to choose controversial subjects. Help them with vocabulary items and structures when necessary.
- 5) TALES. A student tells a fairy tale but does not give the ending. The other students supply an original ending.
- 6) QUESTION AND ANSWER DRILLS FOR ORAL PRACTICE. After a student speaks, the others ask him questions.

A student:

1. Is asked to make an outlandish statement and be prepared to elaborate on it, e.g. "I'm going to get a divorce." "I was in jail for six months in 1968." "My brother is a Marxist."
2. Tells about an accident that he was involved in.

3. Tells fantastic tales about himself or someone he knows.
  4. Explains what happiness (poverty, unhappiness, love, friendship, etc.) means to him.
  5. States his opinion about a controversial subject.
- 7) CONVERSATION STARTERS. Write each of the following statements on a card. Distribute among students instructing them to complete the statement truthfully and be ready to answer questions about it.
1. People will think highly of me if ...
  2. When I get mad, ...
  3. I find it strange ...
  4. I really hate ...
  5. What I admire the most in people is ...
  6. If I were very rich ...
  7. People who value material things above all else ...
  8. Nothing is more annoying than ...
  9. Marriage should be ...
  10. When I was little I ...
  11. My happiest moment was when ...
  12. To love a person is ...
  13. In ten years, I'd like to ...
  14. One of the most enjoyable things is ...
  15. I don't think parents ...
  16. One of my good qualities is ...
  17. Single people who live alone ...
  18. Sometimes I feel my friends ...
  19. I'd like to be ...
  20. I'd work harder if ...
- 8) ROLE PLAYING. Exercises should be devised that bear directly on the students' needs, their lives, etc. For example a student may:
1. Introduce an English-speaking foreign visitor to his classmates.
  2. Help a tourist find a post office, hotel, restaurant, etc.
  3. Talk to an English-speaking person visiting the office where he works, explaining that he is an English student and asking him why he is here.
  4. Answer the phone. It is a wrong number but the person is speaking English so he helps him out.
  5. Be applying for a job at a company where English is necessary.
  6. Be traveling in California. He asks about travel arrangements, hotels, entertainment, etc.
  7. Be attending a professional football game and asks about the rules.
  8. Introduce himself to a new neighbor who is a retired American and help him become acquainted with the city.

9. Be arriving at an American university for one year of study. He talks to a counselor about housing, registration requirements, etc.
  10. Pretend he is an ambassador to the U.N. speaking in English, about his country's viewpoint on some issue.
- 9) A MORE COMPLEX TYPE OF ROLL PLAYING MAY INVOLVE THREE STUDENTS IN A GIVEN SITUATION, e.g.:
1. waitress/restaurant manager/dissatisfied customer
  2. salesman/eager-to-buy wife/unconvinced husband
  3. dentist/young patient/mother
  4. grocer/young housewife/meddling mother-in-law
  5. teen-age daughter/liberal mother/old-fashioned father
  6. tailor/easy to please customer/picky wife
  7. taxi driver/man and wife giving him conflicting directions
  8. house painter/mother and daughter choosing colors
  9. father/mother/newspaper story
  10. newly-weds trying to decorate their home.
- 10) GENERAL TOPICS OF CONVERSATION. A great variety of economic, social, educational and financial backgrounds is found in most classrooms. These differences can sometimes inhibit communication, but when the teacher skillfully draws students out, underlining the fact that those very differences make for mutual interest, they can be the bases of meaningful and lively interchange. It is advisable that, until the ice is broken and all members of a class feel comfortable and relaxed enough to express their ideas candidly, the topics for conversation be kept as simple as possible. There are certain experiences that are common to all of us, i.e.
1. Tell about the place where you live.
  2. Tell about a time when you needed money and what you did to get it.
  3. Tell about how you lost something and how you happened to find it.
  4. Tell about something you helped organize: a party, a picnic, etc.
  5. Tell about how your family celebrates Christmas, New Year's, etc.
  6. Tell about a disagreement you have had with one of your best friends and how you patched it up.

After students grow confident, they can attempt other topics which will require exposing more of themselves.

## ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP WRITING SKILLS

## 1) FOR SMALL GROUPS OR ENTIRE CLASS - GRAMMAR DRILLS

- a) INTERROGATIVE WORD QUESTIONS. The teacher dictates the interrogative word, then reads a sentence. The students write the question, asking for additional information. After each question has been written, it can be checked either orally or by having a student write it on the chalkboard. When using this technique with small groups, all the members of the group cooperate in formulating the question, but only one of them writes it. In this case, a different student is to write each question.
- b) SHORT ANSWER PLUS COMPLETE SENTENCE. The teacher dictates the YES or NO for the short answer, then the information for the follow-up sentence. When doing this type of exercise for the first time, write an example on the chalkboard.

i.e. The teacher reads: Yes --- for one hour yesterday

The students are instructed to write: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ (for one hour yesterday)

Then, the teacher reads the question (not to be written by the students): Does it rain very often here in the summer?

The students answer: Yes, it does. It rained for an hour yesterday.

When using this technique in small groups, all students cooperate in formulating the answer, with a different student writing each time.

## 2) FOR SMALL GROUPS

- a) PICTURES FOR WRITING. Students write a story suggested by a picture. In more advanced groups, students may be given several pictures to combine into a story. The teacher goes from group to group making corrections, then, a student from one group reads the story to the students in another and they discuss it. A story may be assigned for homework. Tell students to cut out an illustration and write a story about it. Post the best compositions in the classroom.
- b) PARAGRAPH WRITING. Give each group an opening sentence and ask them to write at least five sentences to continue the narrative. "Every Monday, my father ...," "Before Mr. and Mrs. Thompson came to this city ...," "When I have my vacation next month ...,"

etc. Have one student write while the others contribute ideas. Have somebody read the finished paragraph.

- c) **DIALOG WRITING.** Suggest a simple situation involving three people e.g. planning a party, friends meeting after being away on a vacation, talking about a movie they have seen, etc.

Stress the fact that a natural conversational situation should include:

- a. greetings
  - b. asking for specific information
  - c. giving information requested in detail
  - d. volunteering additional information (narration)
  - e. discussion
- d) **DEAR ABBY.** Give each group two cut-outs of the "Dear Abby" or "Ann Landers" column. After they have checked new vocabulary items in their dictionaries, have them discuss the problems and Abby's answers. Switch cut-outs among the groups two or three times. Homework assignment: think of an imaginary problem to be presented the next day. Then, have each student ask the others in his group to help him solve his problem. Have the most interesting problem in each group described to the entire class for discussion and advice.

#### CREATIVE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

- 1) **AUTOBIOGRAPHY.** Have students write a short autobiography at the beginning of the term, including why they are studying English. This gives the teacher some information about their interests as well as their ability to express themselves in English. (This should be done after the midterm exam in Course One.)
- 2) **PROPHECY.** Have students predict what the year 2000 will be like; foretell what one of their classmates will be doing in ten years, or cast a celebrity's horoscope.
- 3) **NEWSPAPER.** This should be a class project. Begin on a small scale. Assign individual students, or teams when possible, to write a section of a class newspaper on subjects of general interest, e.g. have them report on institute, center or school activities, such as the conversation club, the excursion club, square dancing, guitar classes, art shows, etc. Items can be posted and changed from time to time.
- 4) **SIGHT-SEEING.** Have students report on a visit to an interesting place.

- 5) **BOOK REPORTS.** Check in the library on the supply of books available. You may assign the same book to the entire class, or a different title to each small group. Have them write a collective book report to be read in class.
  
- 6) **CRITICISM.** Assign all the students in the class to visit an art gallery (before or after class). Have them write a short article criticizing what they have seen. This should be done as if they were writing for a magazine or newspaper. The same can be done with movies or plays.