

TEACHING TIPS

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Teaching Tip 12: Eliciting

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How:

1. Instead of giving information, ask if anyone in the class can provide it. When a student asks 'What does this mean?' or 'What's the past of this verb?' etc. say something like 'That's a good question - what do you think?' Can you guess? Can anyone help Maria here?'
2. If you want to teach some vocabulary, for instance, then rather than giving it to the students, try to get them to give it to you. For example: I want to teach the word 'cow'. I could draw a little picture on the board. I could explain what a cow is. Or I could elicit the word from the students along these lines: 'What do we call/What's the word for an animal which makes milk and goes 'moo'?! With any luck the students will say 'cow'. There you go - I've elicited the word 'cow' from the students. I didn't say it to them - they said it to me; that's eliciting.

Why:

1. If you don't elicit you run the risk of telling the students everything they want to know and ending up spoon-feeding them (see TT9 - 'the Why to avoid doing it' part for further explanation).
2. Eliciting means getting information from people as opposed to giving it to them - asking, throwing questions back at the students, in a nutshell.

Extra info:

When I take the register, I always elicit today's date from the students ('What's the date today?') because I find that even at high levels students are shockingly bad on dates. Sometimes students don't understand the value of eliciting. They think that you're not doing your job if you don't answer their questions. If I have a student like that I tend to explain like this: 'I know I know the answer but I'm not the one learning English here. What is important is, do any of you know the answer?' or 'Why should I explain again? We did this last week!' If you try to elicit something and obviously no one knows what you are getting at or they've all forgotten it or they haven't done their homework then don't keep on trying to get it out of them. Flogging a dead horse will get you nowhere and it just embarrasses/irritates the students and wastes valuable lesson time.

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