

TEACHING TIPS

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Teaching Tip 16: Personalising

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How:

1. It's been done for you on the worksheets. All the gap-fill exercises, question-forming exercises and even the majority of the grammar analysis exercises have been made to include that ever-important word 'I'. The discussion questions are mostly aimed at encouraging the students to give their personal opinion on aspects of the topic.

Why:

1. In my experience, students like talking about themselves. And why not? Who doesn't?
2. They will remember new words etc. better if they have had the opportunity to use them in exercises, both written and spoken, that are relevant to their own experience in some way.
3. Apparently, when mother-tongue speakers talk, some of the most frequently used words are I, me, you.

Extra info:

A lot of coursebooks seem to try to make things look 'realistic' for the students in this way. They show a photo of a man and a woman and say something like 'This is Bob and Pam'. Then they provide some sort of exercise which features 'Bob' and 'Pam' which may go something like this:

Write the following verbs in the sentences below: get up go

1. Bob and Pam _____ very early every morning.
2. Bob and Pam _____ to work by bus.

In my view, the chances of the students being really interested in 'Bob' and 'Pam' are slim and so are the chances of them remembering the target language (target language is the words and/or grammar structure you are trying to teach them).

There may well be nice colour photos of people supposedly called 'Bob' and 'Pam' but, correct me if I'm wrong, it's hardly realistic. The students know full well that the people in the photos are called just about anything *except* 'Bob' and 'Pam' because they are models or actors or whatever. They certainly don't care what time they get up and how they get to work. That's where personalising comes in. Sentences like: 'My partner _____ very early every morning' can be turned into questions (Do you get up very early every morning?) which will begin a real, personally relevant conversation between two students in which they can talk to each other about themselves. (Yes, I do, I have to be at work by 8.15 every day including Saturday; really? What do you do? etc.)

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