

TEACHING TIPS

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Teaching Tip 20: Using Dictionaries

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How:

1. If possible, give the students each an English-English dictionary.
2. Make sure they know how to use it. If not, teach them how. (If you don't know how to teach them how, see Extra Info below for some ideas).
3. Encourage the students to refer to their dictionary whenever appropriate during the lesson, though they should try to guess the meaning from the context first where possible (See TT 6 for further info).

Why:

1. A dictionary is an extra teacher for the student.
2. It helps the students to realise that you are not a dictionary and therefore shouldn't be treated like one (see TT9 for further comment).
3. It makes the student more independent - not relying on the teacher the whole time - and more able to study outside the classroom, at home, or whatever, and to continue studying after the course has finished.

Extra info:

I help students get to grips with dictionary work and start to appreciate just how useful one can be by giving them some words to look up and then discuss in pairs. I often give the students different dictionaries too, different levels, different publishers, the lot, so they get the chance to develop a preference. If they do decide to go and invest money in a dictionary as a result of the lesson they have a better chance of buying one that is right for them and therefore a better chance of making friends with it.

The words I give students to look up are false friends - what do they mean?, confusing words - what's the difference between them? (I use 'job' and 'work' in the sentences 'I enjoy my job/ I enjoy my work' - the nouns 'job' and 'work' mean pretty much the same here but there is a difference because between them, what is it? Words which are impossible to know how to pronounce - 'thorough' is a good one, - how do we say it? Sentences to complete - 'I'm good ___ using a dictionary' - what's the missing preposition? Phrasal verbs like 'put up with' - do they know which word to look up? Words with more than one meaning - I use 'get' - what does it mean? And does their dictionary give too much information about it or too little or just right? The aim of the game is to get students to realise that using a bi-lingual dictionary to translate a word is no way to go about dictionary work, especially if it is more than 5 years old - for a start, if they look up the word 'mouse' it'll probably just say 'small furry animal' and not mention computers at all. Using a mono-lingual English dictionary could really help them with their studying.

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