

15 Short Classroom Exercises

In this article short exercises are considered to be 5-10 minutes long. Short exercises are a great way to get students warmed up for the class, to help break the ice between students, and even to reward students for working hard during the class. These 15 activities have been chosen so teachers could do a new activity every week of the semester, however many of the activities can (and some should) be reused throughout the semester. The activities have been taken from my personal experience and also adapted from the book "Five-Minute Activities: A Resource Book of Short Activities" Ur and Wright (1992).

1) Fact of the Day

Students can use their iPads to find a fact that they find interesting. This can be done individually or in groups. Students must then read the facts to the class, and later the whole class can decide which the most surprising fact was.

Variation:

The teacher gives a fact to the students in the form of a question, and then the fact is used for a discussion. For example, if the fact was "China consumes more seafood than any other country in the world," the teacher could first ask "which country consumes the most seafood in the world". Then the teacher should allow a minute or two for discussion, followed by the answer and asking the students to share if they are surprised and to give their opinions.

2) What Can You See?

Showing the students a picture and asking what they can see can be made more interesting by choosing a picture that can be interpreted in various ways.

Option A

Optical illusions- These pictures include the well-known black candlestick with white facial silhouettes on each side. A wide variety can be found on the following page:

<http://www.optical-illusionist.com/category/double-meanings/>

Option B

Rorschach test- This is most commonly known and used as a psychological test whereby those under analysis say what they can see in an ink blot. There are no right or wrong answers, and it can be used to get students to explain what shape or objects they can see. They can be found on the following page:

<http://theinkblot.com>

Option C

Abstract pictures- Simply draw shapes on the board and ask the student what they represent. A circle may be a ball or the sun, a triangle may be a mountain or a tree.

3) Word Association

In this activity you give the student a word, the next student must then give a related word and so on. The new word must only be associated with the previous word. For example:

Soccer- Field- Farm- Cow- Steak- Restaurant- Kitchen- Knife

4) The Name Game/Shiritori

This game involves students listening to a word, then using the last letter of the word to start a new word. All students will all be familiar with the game but it takes a little work to explain how it works in English. In the Japanese version, the final character of the word must be the first character of the following word. The game is lost if either a word is repeated or if a word ending in “n” (ん) is used. For example:

Uma- Mame- Megane- Negi- Gin
Horse- Bean- Glasses- Leek- Silver

In this example the person that said silver (gin) is the loser.

When playing this game in English, higher level classes usually don't any have problems but lower level classes often have difficulty spelling the words. So for these classes the teacher can tell the students the last letter of the previous word, for example:

Student: Table
Teacher: E
Student: Egg
Teacher: G

As for finishing on the letter “n”, it is possible to pick a new letter every time the game is played.

5) Pick a Side

In this game the teacher will ask an “or” question, then the students will walk to one side of the class to answer. For example:

“Which do you like better, Chinese food or Korean food? People who like Chinese food walk to the left, those who like Korean food walk to the right”.

Variation 1

Ask lots of “or” questions.

Variation 2

Ask follow up questions, eg. “What is your favorite Korean food?”

Variation 3

Make students ask the “or” questions.

6) Scattergories

This game involves students generating words that fit into certain categories. First, the categories are introduced. Examples of common categories are food, drink, country, sport, verbs, etc. Then the students are given a letter, for instance “A”. The students must find a different word for each category starting with the letter “A”. The game can be done individually, but works better with teams of 2-4. The first team to fill each category wins. The example below shows the categories, one line of correct answers and one line of incorrect answers.

Food	Animal	Country	Sport
Apple	Alligator	Australia	American Football
Apple juice (Not food)	<i>Ahiru</i> (Japanese, English only)	Akita (Not a country)	Ice Hockey (Doesn't start with “A”)

7) Yes/No Game

A volunteer student is chosen and must answer as many questions as possible from the other students in one minute. The only rule is that the volunteer must not answer “yes” or “no”. For example:

- A) Do you like apples?
- B) I do like apples.
- A) How about bananas?
- B) I also like bananas.
- A) Grapefruit?
- B) No.

In the example above student B has lost because they used the word “no”.

8) Find Someone Who...

In this exercise students are asked to “Find someone who...”. The student must then walk around the class and find somebody who matches the description. For example:

Teacher: Find someone who was born in the same month as you.

Student A: I was born in January, how about you?

Student B: I was born in May.

Student C: I was born in January, too.

In this case Students A and C can be partners, Student B must find somebody else.

Example questions:

Find someone who:

...was **born** on the same day of the month as you.

...**likes** the same type of **music** as you.

...**likes** the same **sport** as you.

...**ate** the same thing for breakfast as you.

...**got up** at the **same time** as you.

...**lives** near the same train line as you.

9) Quick Write

The students will be given 5 minutes to write about a topic. Explain that the goal is to describe their experiences, and that mistakes in spelling or grammar are not a problem. When the time is up some students will be asked to read their writing to the class. Their experiences can then be discussed through **follow up questions**.

Note: It is useful to ask students to write on google classrooms so you can check their writing and use it for other exercises.

10) Correct the Mistakes

In this exercise, students will be given a short piece of writing that contains mistakes. The students, either as individuals or as pairs, can then correct the mistakes. To prepare this activity, it is a good idea to use a paragraph written for the “Quick Write” exercise.

11) Reflection

During the last 5-10 minutes of the lesson, the students can be asked to reflect upon what they have learned in the class. For this activity it is useful to write the lesson plan on the board. Each section of the class can be reviewed and the teacher can guide the reflection by asking questions such as:

- What did you do?
- What was the purpose of the exercise?
- What did you learn?

- What mistakes did you make?
- Are you still unsure about anything?

12) Diaries

Students spend 5 minutes once a week writing about their studies. It is advisable that diary entries are written on Google Classroom for two reasons. Firstly, no work will get lost, and secondly, teachers can decide whether diaries should be available for the whole class or private. Whether the diaries are available for the whole class to see or private can be decided by the teacher or by class vote.

Some students don't like asking questions in class, but they may be more willing to write about problems they are having. This can help the teacher get a better understanding of how the students experience their classes. For example, if several students had the same problem you can review the relevant section of the book. Or, if a few of the students feel the book is too easy/difficult you can adjust your teaching accordingly.

13) Vocabulary Volleyball

This is a game where students "box" against each other using vocabulary. First, the teacher will pick a category, for example "animals", and put the students into pairs. Student A will "serve" by naming an animal in English, student B will then "block" by saying the same animal name in Japanese, then "returns" by saying a new animal in English. The game is lost when a student fails to "block". For example:

Student A: Dog ("Serve")

Student B: Inu, cat ("Block", "Return")

Student A: Neko, zebra ("Block", "Return")

Student B: What's a zebra?

In this case Student B has lost.

Variation 1

Some teachers don't like to have any Japanese in their classroom. In this case the students don't need to "block", they just keep naming animals until one is repeated and then the game is lost.

Variation 2

Don't use categories, allow students to pick any obscure word they know.

14) Odd One Out

Write 4-6 words on the board and have students pick which one is different from the others. For example:

Soccer player	Doctor	Mother	Teacher	Soldier	Lawyer
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A wide variety of odd one out activities can be found here:

https://en.islcollective.com/resources/search_result?Tags=odd+one+out

15) Word Replacement

In this activity the students are given a sentence. For example:

One day, the student went to the library to study.

Then each student will change 1-3 words to make a new sentence. For example:

One day, the student went to Starbucks to study.

One day, the student went to Starbucks to drink coffee.

One day, the teacher went to Starbucks to drink coffee.

Yesterday, the teacher went to Starbucks to drink coffee.