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## Five-Minute Activities



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# Five-Minute Activities

*A resource book of  
short activities*

Penny Ur and Andrew Wright  
*with illustrations by Andrew Wright*



Consultant and Editor: Michael Swan



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# Introduction

This book provides a collection of short, easily-prepared activities to supplement the longer teaching procedures that make up the main body of an English course.

## The need for short activities

When preparing your lesson, you start by planning the main items you want to include: the teaching of a new grammar point, for example, or a grammar exercise, or the reading of a text. But once you have prepared the main components of your lesson, and made sure it is (hopefully!) learning-rich, varied and interesting, you may find you still need some extra ingredients to make it into a smooth, integrated unit. You may need, for example:

1. a quick warm-up for the beginning to get your students into the right mood for learning;
2. an idea for a brief vocabulary review before starting a new text;
3. a light filler to provide relief after a period of intense effort and concentration;
4. a brief orientation activity to prepare a change of mood or topic;
5. a game or amusing item to round off the lesson with a smile.

Besides contributing to routine lesson planning, you may find these activities can be of use in non-routine situations as well: when, for example, you have to fill in for another teacher and need some quick, easily-prepared ideas for instant use; or for supplying extra content for an English club evening or English party; for helping a group of new students to get to know one another; or for keeping students profitably busy when you unexpectedly have extra time on your hands.

## The activities

The process of each activity is described briefly, with examples; in many cases sample material for immediate use is provided in the BOXES.

### *Learning value*

We have included only teaching procedures which we consider to have genuine learning value for the students. We have thus left out activities which we feel to be mere timefillers, or that keep students occupied doing something relatively profitless. (For example, we have not

included the game ‘Hangman’ which has the class spending several minutes over the spelling of a single word!) We feel strongly that even in brief, enjoyable ‘transition’ activities the students can and should continue to practise, learn, increase knowledge and improve thinking.

### *Level*

In most cases, activities are suitable for a variety of levels, from elementary to advanced, so you will find indication of a recommended level only in very few cases. You, the teacher, are probably the best judge of the appropriacy of an activity for your students. To give extra flexibility of level, you will find that the sample material in the BOXES is often clearly divided into elementary, intermediate and advanced sections.

### *Timing*

As the title of this book implies, the activities are designed to be completed in about five minutes of lesson time, but some can be even shorter and others can be lengthened. We have in many cases added further ideas (under the subtitle *Variations*), which will enable you, should you wish, to develop the activity into a longer lesson component. Note that the first time a class uses a particular technique it might take a little longer than subsequent times, because of the extra minutes taken up with instructions and clarifications.

### *Preparation*

Another guideline we have tried to observe is that the activities should demand the minimum of preparation before the lesson. Usually all you have to do is leaf through the book and decide which idea you want to use: the book itself provides the texts where necessary. Occasionally the activity demands a little planning before the lesson: where, for example, magazine pictures or small picture cards are needed. For the most part, the only materials are blackboard, chalk (or whiteboard, markers), and – for the students – their current textbook, pencils and notebooks or sheets of rough paper.

### *Integrating the activities into the lesson*

The fact that the activity is short means that it is necessary to devote some thought to its introduction and ending, otherwise the frequent changes can cause a feeling of abruptness and restlessness. Try to link each short activity with what has gone before or what is coming after, in topic, mood or language, by saying, for example: ‘In that exercise, we came across two words that sounded the same but had different meanings. Let’s look at some others . . .’ (see, for example, **Same word, different meanings**, page 68) or: ‘We’re going to be reading a poem about a journey, so let’s start thinking about the idea of travelling . . .’ (see **Brainstorm round a word**, page 4). Even if you are using the

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activity as a total contrast, or as a rest or break with no connection with other parts of the lesson, it is worth making your reasons explicit: ‘You all look as if you need a bit of a rest. Sit back and relax, I’m going to tell you a story and I’m NOT going to set you any questions on it!’ Then, of course, make a link with the same sort of transition comment at the end: ‘I hope you enjoyed that story and are feeling more relaxed. Right, now let’s get back to . . .’

In order to explain the organisation of an activity, you will usually have to give an example of what is to be done. However, once the activity is clear, it is advantageous if the students or a student can take over the teacher’s role. For example, there is no reason why a student should not ask the questions in **General knowledge** on page 30. As this principle applies to most of the activities it has not usually been referred to in the *Procedure* sections.

### *Organisation*

The activities are laid out simply in alphabetical order of title. You may find it helpful to leaf through and note down for yourself names of activities you think you may want to use; you will then easily find them when you need them.

If, however, you are not looking for a particular title, but want an activity which practises *spelling*, or which stresses *listening* comprehension, or which involves the use of *guessing* or *mime* or *dictation*, you may find what you need by using the **Index** at the back of the book.

We hope you enjoy using this book as much as we have enjoyed writing it!