# Create a Communicative Language Classroom

# CONTENTS

# The Importance of a Communicative Classroom

The communicative classroom, as you may have guessed, is all about communication. Teachers use the communicative approach to simulate real-life situations to motivate and prepare students to communicate meaningfully. For foreign language teachers, this means communicating in the target language.

Since understanding and communication are two major goals for language learners, it's no surprise that many language teachers prefer this method. But it takes time and creativity to create a successful communicative classroom. A key tenet of this method is  spontaneity and a variety of engaging activities and exercises.

In this eBook, we'll walk you through some of our favorite communicative activities for reading, writing, listening, and speaking, tested and perfected by a 20-year language teaching veteran!

# Reading Activities

**Activity #1: Read Aloud**

Don't let the name fool you, this activity is communicative and interactive! Split students into pairs of two and provide each with a copy of the text. Have them take turns reading each paragraph out loud to each other.

Here's the kicker—make two copies of the text that slightly differ from one another. As students read out loud, their partner must listen and highlight the differences between what they're reading on the paper and what their partner is saying out loud.

**Example:**

Partner A's First Paragraph: The Olympic Games were started by the Greeks more than 3,500 years ago when Greece was an **important** world power. In those days, women were not allowed **to watch** or to compete in the Olympics. Men competed without wearing **clothes**. Some of the early Olympic Games included running, **skiing**, and boxing. The Olympic Games stopped when Greece lost its great **power**.

> **Can reading be communicative?**
> "Reading is, of course, just as communicative as any other form of language use and as teachers our aim is to bring out that communicative element. For example by establishing direct communication between reader and writer by exploiting students' written work for reading practice."
> – Patrick Howarth, BBC

Partner B's First Paragraph: The Olympic Games were started by the Greeks less than 3,500 years ago when Greece was an **unimportant** world power. In those days, women were not allowed **to listen** or to compete in the Olympics. Men competed without wearing **tennis shoes.** Some of the early Olympic Games included running, **wrestling**, and boxing. The Olympic Games stopped when Greece lost its great **language.**

# Reading Activities

**Activity #2: Read and Run**
You'll want to push the chairs aside for this activity.

Tape the text on the wall at the other end of the room.

Divide the class into pairs of two and have each time line up at the opposite end of the room from the text. Student A gets a list of questions and reads them one at a time to their partner, Student B.

Student B runs (carefully!) to the text at the other side of the classroom to find the answer in the text, and then runs back to dictate the answer to student A.

Then, they swap roles and move on to the next question. The first pair to answer all of the questions wins!

## Where to find reading materials online:

**The Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning (COERLL)—**This center at University of Texas provides free learning materials in 16 languages. Materials vary by language, but it's a safe bet that reading materials are widely available.

**The Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT)—**This site provides educational materials in a variety of subjects, but if you filter by "Humanities" and "World Languages," you'll find materials in 14 languages (and a smaller selection if materials in "less commonly taught languages.")

# Reading Activities

**Activity #3: Slashed Text**
Make four copies of the text and cut it diagonally into four. Break up students into groups of four, giving each one a separate piece of the text.

Each group must work together to answer a set of questions about the text *without* showing the others their piece.  Let groups compare answers  when they have all finished.

**Activity #4: Class Text Bank**
Students bring in interesting target language texts—articles, poems, blog posts, etc.—and submit them to the class text bank.

For weekend homework, each student selects a text from the bank and reads it. They must come to class prepared to discuss the text with the student who originally submitted it.

Image by AFS-USA

# Writing Activities

**Activity #1: Story Starter**

This activity can go on in the background of a class period and it's a very fun way to end class!

Start class by writing down one sentence of a story (in the target language, of course) on a piece of lined paper. Make sure that the last 3–4 words of the sentence end on the second line. Then, fold the top of the paper down to cover the first line, so only those 3–4  words are showing.

Pass the paper to one student, who will try to continue writing your story based on those few words they can see.  After they write one sentence and fold the page down, they'll pass it to the next student, until everyone in class has had a chance to add to the story.

At the end of class, read the story out loud to the students (or have one of them read it) and enjoy the hilarious twists and turns.

Alternative 1—If you don't want to distract students during class—break them into groups of 4 to complete the exercise much quicker. Each group can then share their story with the class.

Alternative 2—If your students' comprehension level isn't very high yet, don't cover the previous sentences, so they're not flying blind.

# Writing Activities

**Activity #2: Whole Class Editing**
Writing is traditionally a solo act—but not with this activity! Collect writing samples from the class and select a few for whole class editing. (Pro tip: obscure the author's name!)

Display the text on a projector, smart board, PowerPoint, etc. so every student can see it from their seat. Then, take a step back and let the students correct one another's work.

Feedback from peers is significantly more powerful and memorable than a bunch of red pen marks bleeding all over the page.

Image by Quinn Drombowski
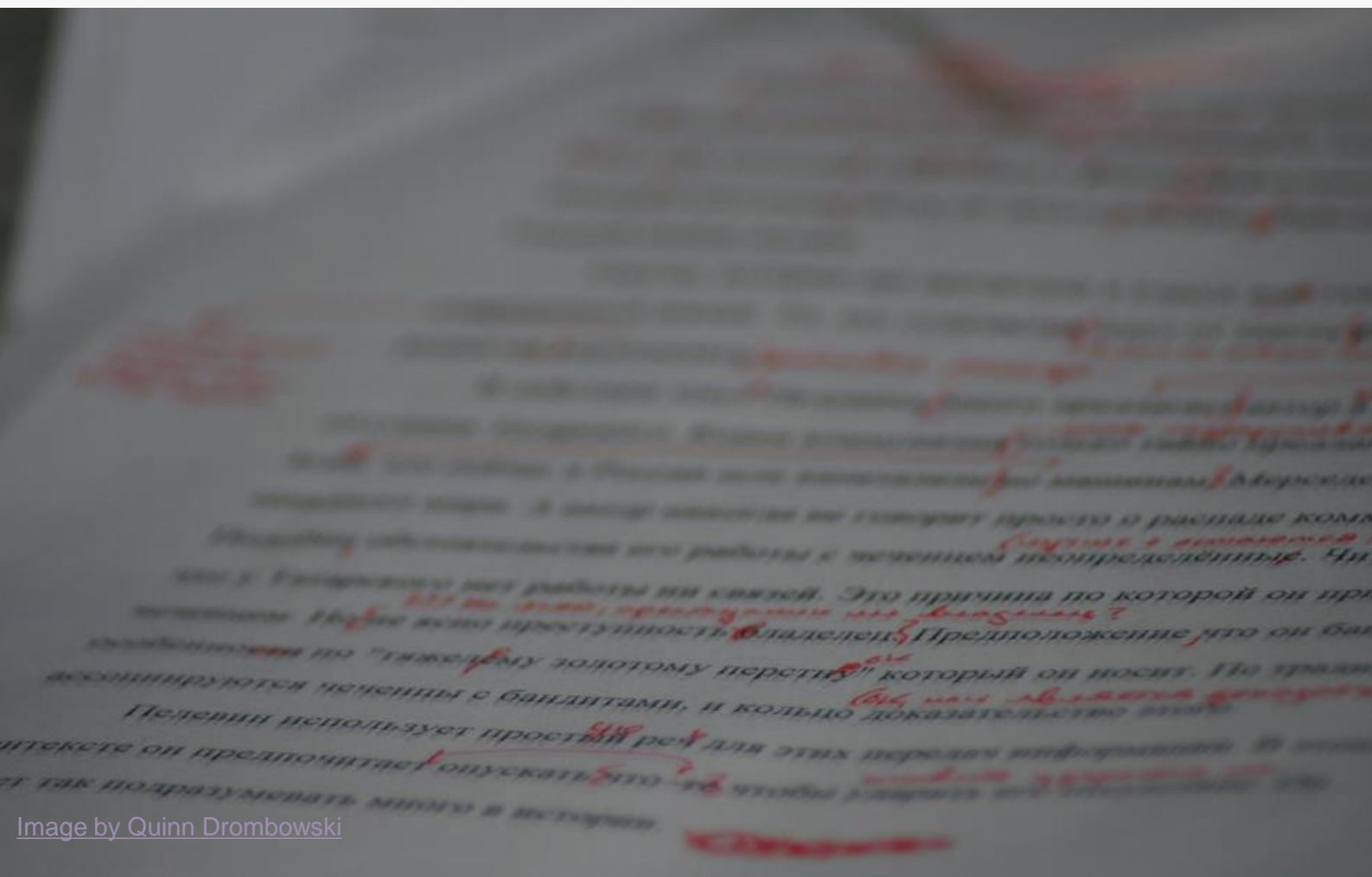
# Writing Activities

**Activity #3: Whole Class Blog**

This a long-term, project-based communicative writing task. Given that you'll be releasing students to the web for this assignment, we recommend this for high school aged students and above.

First, you'll need to set up a blog for your class (see our recommendation for a free, easy blog set-up below.)

Divide students into pairs and assign each pair a different topic relating to the culture of your target language. The groups must work together to research and write about that topic using the language.

As blog posts are published throughout the semester, assign them as reading for the rest of the class and require each student to leave a comment on the post (using the target language, as always.)

At the end of the semester, share the blog with students' parents as a wonderful portfolio piece!

## Hosting a free blog on WordPress

It's as easy as:
- Choosing a theme/design (you can change it later)
- Coming up with a *name* (which will display as *name*.wordpress.com)
- Select your plan (we recommend the "Free" plan)
- Provide an email and password (you'll use these to log in)

Et voila, you have a blog! Your students, being the digital natives that they are, will likely be able to take it from here when it comes to editing and publishing posts.

# Listening Activities



Image by Thomas Galvez

**Activity #1: Total Physical Response**
To oversimplify, Total Physical Response (TPR) is a very popular language teaching method that connects language comprehension and physical movement.

Plan activities that get students to physically act out what they hear, kind of like Simon Says. TPS works well with vocabulary—students can act like animals, point to body parts, etc.

This approach is particularly useful for younger learners, or those with lower proficiency levels, because there are no expectations for language production (yet!) Students can refer to the group for confirmation by looking around at their peers.

# Listening Activities

## Activity #2: Follow Me

This is another great beginner level task.

Provide students with a map or chart. Dictate directions and have them follow along with a highlighter (or their finger if you want to save paper!)

We suggest using a highlighter so you can observe their comprehension.



## Activity #3: Chart or Graph Completion

This is one step up from Follow Me. Have students listen to audio—a news report, a short story, a song, etc.—and have them respond to some kind of challenge.

Students can mark statements true or false, re-order the events of a story, fill in a graph with key details (the who, what, where, etc.) all while listening. We recommend playing the selected audio twice—once for an initial listen and again so they can answer the questions and showcase their comprehension.

# Speaking Activities

**Activity #1: Information Gap**

There is a variety of "information gap" activities, all of which require students to converse in order to accomplish a task and fill in some kind of blank.

You could also provide pairs of students with a schedule, a menu, a map or any other kind of visual. The key is to alter the copies slightly, so each partner is missing certain pieces of information that only the other partner has. Students must talk to one another and ask questions to fill in the information gaps.

This task can be tailored a thousand different ways. Another one of our favorite activities involves providing two nearly identical images and asking students to discuss the subtle differences as they find them.



Image via CC BY-SA 3.0 on Wikimedia Commons

# Speaking Activities

**Activity #2: Jigsaw**

There are also a lot of "jigsaw" style activities—we'll call this one "Experts".

Divide students into even groups and give each group a separate but connected task. Let's use food as an example and give each group the name of a meal, such as chicken parmesan.

- Group A must come up with a description of the meal.
- Group B prepares a shopping list for the required ingredients.
- Group C prepares the recipe.

Now, mix things up! Take one member from each group and join them into new groups so that each has one member from A, B, and C. Then have each member present their group's findings.

That way each student hears about the meal, the shopping list, and the recipe.
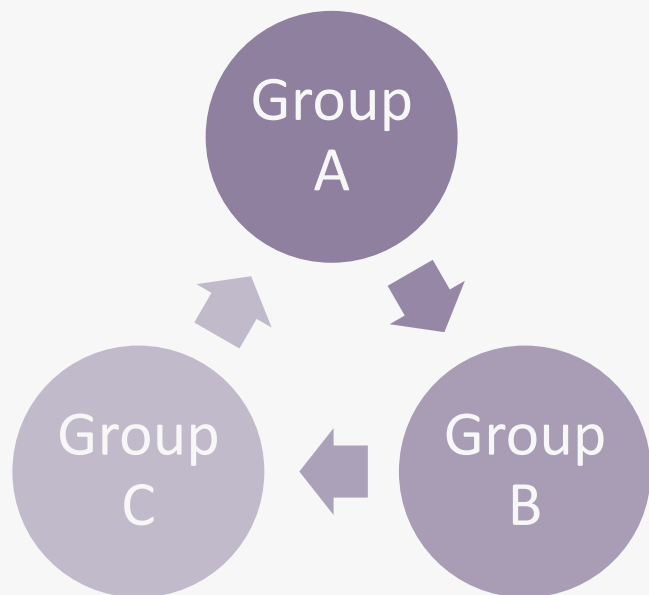
# Speaking Activities

**Activity #3: Find Someone Who…**

This is a great activity for larger classes, with at least 10 people. Print out a bingo–board style grid with a number of descriptions.

Ask students to get up and ask their peers questions (in the target language only!) to find someone who meets each of those descriptions. Remind students that "yes/no" answers don't count— they must answer in complete sentences.

When they find someone who "has a sister" or "was born outside the U.S.", they write their name in the box. The first student to fill in their board (or the four corners, or diagonals, or whatever you choose— remember, Bingo style!) wins.

| Has an older sister. | Went to a foreign country. | Plays a sport and an instrument. |
|---|---|---|
| Has more than one pet. | Can describe what they're wearing. | Has a hidden talent. |
| Can name 5 foods they like. | Is an only child. | Can name 5 things in their locker. |

# Speaking Activities

**Activity #4: Line Dance**
This activity is great to get students speaking to new people, rather than their best friend in class or the person sitting next to them.

Ask your students to form two concentric circles. Pose a question on any relevant topic and have students discuss the answer with the student facing them. After one minute, the outside circle moves to the right by one person and the game starts again with a new question.
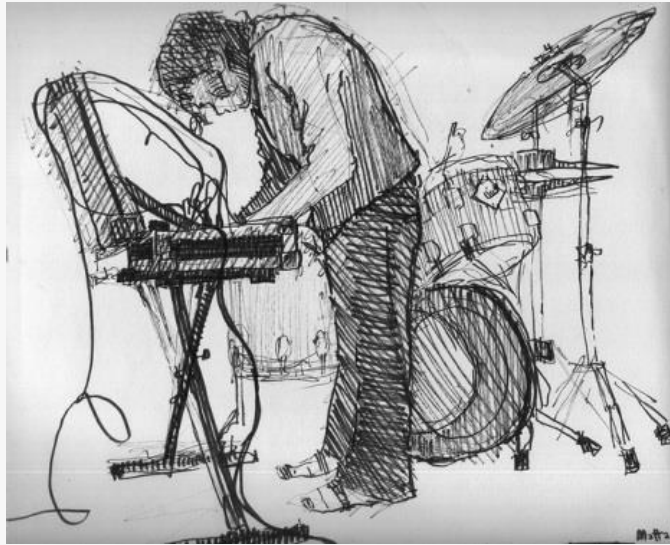


Image by Whitney Waller

**Activity #5: Speak and sketch**
This activity is a twofer—one student will be speaking and another listening.

Provide students with an image or scene filled with a lot going on, such as a kitchen or public park (somewhere relevant to your current lesson). Have student A describe the image using the target language while student B listens and sketches what they hear.

Then, swap roles with a new image! Students have a lot of fun seeing what the other has come up with at the end.

# Recommended Tools

**LiveBinders**—This site lets you or your students build digital resource binders to organize and shair their work (as individuals or as a class.)

**Audacity**—This is our favorite free, easy recording tool. You or your students can record yourselves for listening or speaking activities. With Audacity, you can also record anything coming out of your computer's speakers—great for separating audio from a video, saving a news broadcast for later, etc.

**iPadio**—Don't want to deal with audio files? This site allows students to call a free 800 number and essentially leave you a message. All of their recorded messages will be organized onto a webpage for you, making it the ideal way to save and store speaking-related homework.

**VoiceThread**—This is another free website that is great for speaking activities. It's all based around an image you upload. Students can log in and contribute, perhaps in a round robin discussion about the image, a communal storytelling session inspired by the image, etc.
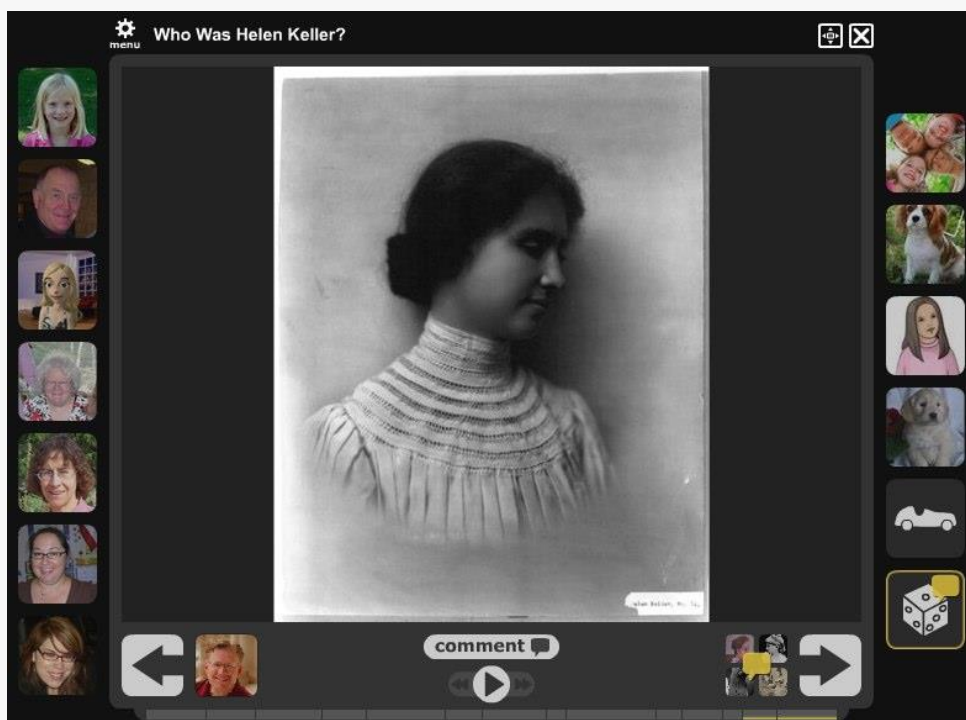
# Putting It All Together

The success of a communicative classroom hinges on students' pre-class preparation. **Many of these activities—from beginner tactics like TPS to high level tasks like Jigsaw—require students to come to class already familiar with relevant vocabulary.**

Transparent Language Online is designed to prepare students to participate in communicative activities. Create your own class materials, or use ours, and assign it to your students as homework. Listening, speaking, reading, and typing activities will help them master the new words and phrases—and you can check on their progress both online and in class!

**Don't take our word for it, see for yourself in the free trial of Transparent Language Online.***

TRY IT FREE

*Note: Trials only include student features, not educator features. To see all educator features, please contact us for a demo!

# Want to learn more about how we incorporate technology into our communicative classrooms in Transparent Connect?

## Download our free implementation guide!

" **In the flipped teaching model, students "front load" their language abilities by learning vocabulary and phrases independently before each class.** Teachers can then build on what their students have already learned, practicing and applying that knowledge in class through communicative activities and task-based strategies. The result is a more rewarding classroom experience, with more time spent actively engaging with the instructor, rather than passively listening. It also allows for more individualized guidance; students that need more instruction can get it, while those that have a good handle on the material already can practice its application through group activities.

**It's important to note that this process is different from, for example, simply giving students a video of grammar rules to watch at home, then going over the concepts from that video in class.** Though that's often how the flipped classroom is applied, that approach doesn't yield the desired results because it doesn't give students a chance to apply the concepts after learning them (and most students won't really internalize a grammar video outside class; it's boring and generally can't be tracked).

**It also fails to take advantage of the different things that technology and teachers do really well.** Technology excels at rapid learning exercises – a computer can present dozens of learning encounters per minute, observe and record learning outcomes, and continually adjust until the learner commits the material to memory. A teacher would be hard-pressed to efficiently replicate this fast-paced, flexible, and individualized learning experience. On the other hand, teachers are far better than software when it comes to facilitating interactive tasks such as role play or dialogues, encouraging discussions, and generally helping students apply their language knowledge in context. In an ideal DABL-based flipped language classroom, both technology and teachers get to do the things that they do best.