

6 Getting to know each other: humanistic exercises and personalized grammar

A group is more likely to be cohesive and work productively if its members know something about each other, and are willing to disclose information about themselves. Many materials are now available which invite students to draw on their own personal experience, talk about themselves, and share feelings. The 'humanistic' approach in particular takes, in the words of Moskowitz (1978), a 'concern for personal development, self-acceptance, and acceptance by others' as its central focus, and materials in the humanistic tradition, or those influenced by it, can promote friendship, good feeling, and co-operation, while providing good language practice.

There seem to be two ways to use humanistic activities: either in their pure form, as an end in themselves, to develop a positive attitude to self and others, in which case they are often used as warm-up activities or ice-breakers; or in a derived form, as a means to an end, where they are used either to provide general speaking practice, or to practise some specific language point.

Teachers constrained by a crowded syllabus or standard textbook may feel they have little time to incorporate humanistic or group dynamics exercises into their teaching for their own sake, but may nevertheless wish to use activities with a more personal and motivating focus, particularly if their textbook is rather dry, or concerned with the exploits of a fictional character who is not particularly interesting or relevant to the students. One good way of getting the best of both worlds, humanistic and linguistic, is to use 'personalized' grammar practice exercises, which often provide very concentrated practice of a grammatical point, but which have a personal focus.

It is impossible to give a large range of such exercises here, but I have included exercises on major tenses, and there are suggestions in the bibliography for further sources of similar activities. The exercises make use of traditional forms of grammar practice: drills, substitution tables, and completion exercises, as well as newer activities such as pair practice and games, but all have in common the use of a grammatical form to communicate personal information.

CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

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DANMARKS
PÆDAGOGISKE
BIBLIOTEK

Oxford University Press

6.1 What are they up to now?

Elementary

10 minutes

Present continuous

- 1 Ask the class to close their eyes and think about the members of their family. What are they all doing now? Ask them questions: 'What is your mother doing? Your father? Your sisters? Your brothers? Your aunt? and so on. They should not answer, but keep their eyes closed and try to picture what they are doing.
- 2 Ask them to open their eyes and tell their partner what the different members of their family are probably doing at that moment.

LEVEL
TIME
LANGUAGE
PROCEDURE

6.2 How often?

Elementary

10 minutes

Simple present

Copies of chart below for each student (or put it on the board for students to copy down)

Make copies of the chart if necessary.

- 1 Give out copies of the chart or get students to copy it down from the board.
- 2 Ask them to ask each other the questions and fill in the chart for their partner.
- 3 When they have finished, ask them to write five sentences about their partner.
- 4 Collect these in and use the information to make a wall-poster, for example:

- Did you know ...
- Ana never forgets things! (Do you believe her?)
 - Danny never cries! (Do you believe him?)
 - Felix quarrels with his sister almost every day.

LEVEL
TIME
LANGUAGE
MATERIALS
PREPARATION
PROCEDURE

CHART

How often do you:	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
cry	—	—	—	—	—
laugh	—	—	—	—	—
quarrel with your sister/brother	—	—	—	—	—
feel happy for no reason	—	—	—	—	—
feel sad for no reason	—	—	—	—	—
daydream	—	—	—	—	—
forget things	—	—	—	—	—
wish you were someone else	—	—	—	—	—
get angry	—	—	—	—	—
do silly things	—	—	—	—	—
make mistakes	—	—	—	—	—
really enjoy yourself	—	—	—	—	—
change your mind	—	—	—	—	—

6.3 Past confessions

Elementary

10 minutes

Simple past

Copy of the substitution table for each student (see below; or put it on the board or OHP)

Make copies of the table as necessary.

- 1 Give out the copies of the table or put it on the board.
- 2 Ask a few questions from the table to individual students, then get students to work in pairs asking and answering the questions.
- 3 When they have finished, ask a few students to tell the class some interesting facts about their partner.
- 4 Then get each student to write five sentences about their partner.

LEVEL
TIME
LANGUAGE
MATERIALS
PREPARATION
PROCEDURE

5 Collect them in and use the information to write a wall-poster (see example below).

SUBSTITUTION
TABLE

Question: When did you	first last	smoke a cigarette? ride a bicycle? fall in love? drink coffee? go to the dentist? go abroad?
Answer: I first ... I last ...	X	months weeks days years hours minutes ago.

SAMPLE
WALL-POSTER

SECRET CONFESSIONS
OF CLASS 1
ANDREAS FIRST FELL IN LOVE WHEN
HE WAS SIX!
JULIETTE LAST WENT TO THE DENTIST
FIVE YEARS AGO!
ANTONIO FIRST SMOKED A CIGARETTE
IN THE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND WHEN
HE WAS TEN!

6.4 Class records

Intermediate

20 minutes

Present perfect

Copy of the question sheet (see below),
poster size piece of paper

Copy the question sheet, adding or deleting questions as
necessary, and cut it up so there is one question for each
student. Prepare the poster.

1 Give each student one question.

2 Ask them to go around the class and find out how many times
everyone in the class had done these things. They should keep a
running total.

3 When they have all finished, collate the information and fill it
in on the poster. Pin the poster up on the wall.

QUESTION SHEET

Find out how many times people in the group have flown in a plane.	Find out how many times people in the group have broken their legs.
Find out how many times people in the group have drunk champagne.	Find out how many times people in the group have been to a pop concert.
Find out how many times people in the group have been in hospital.	Find out how many countries people in the group have visited.
Find out how many times people in the group have travelled on board a ship.	Find out how many times people in the group have won something in a competition.
Find out how many times people in the group have passed an exam.	Find out how many pets people in the group have owned. What kind of pets?
Find out how many times people in the group have fallen in love.	Find out how many times people in the group have changed jobs.

SAMPLE POSTER

AS A GROUP WE HAVE:

FLOWN IN A PLANE 25 TIMES
 BROKEN OUR LEGS 3 TIMES
 DRUNK 18 GLASSES OF CHAMPAGNE
 BEEN TO 32 POP CONCERTS
 BEEN IN HOSPITAL 10 TIMES
 VISITED 27 COUNTRIES
 TRAVELLED BY SEA 21 TIMES
 WON A COMPETITION 7 TIMES
 PASSED 49 EXAMS
 OWNED 16 CATS 8 DOGS 2 HAMSTERS 9 GOLDFISH
 FALLEN IN LOVE 21 TIMES
 AND CHANGED JOBS 11 TIMES

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

MAGIC MOMENTS

Can you remember what you were doing when:

- your first tooth fell out?
- you first realized you could read?
- your parents told you you had a baby brother or sister?
- someone invited you out on your first date?
- you were offered your first job?
- you first understood what people were saying in English?

6.6 Group predictions

Intermediate

20 minutes

Will, future continuous, future perfect

LEVEL

TIME

LANGUAGE

PROCEDURE

- 1 Ask everyone in the class to imagine what the other people in the class will all be doing in ten years' time.
- 2 Ask them to write a prediction for everyone else in the group, plus one for themselves.
- 3 When they have finished, you can either ask them to read out their predictions, or pin them on the wall and let everyone go round and read them.

6.5 Magic moments

Intermediate

15 minutes

Past continuous

Copy of the questionnaire for each student
 (or put it on the OHP or board)

Make copies of the questionnaire as necessary.

LEVEL

TIME

LANGUAGE

MATERIALS

PREPARATION

PROCEDURE

- 1 Begin by asking the class if they have younger brothers or sisters. Ask those who have if they can remember where they were and what they were doing when someone told them they had a new little baby brother or sister.
- 2 Then give out the questionnaire or write it up on the board or OHP for students to copy. See if students can think of more questions.
- 3 Ask them to ask each other the questions in pairs.
- 4 When students have finished, ask them each to tell the class one interesting fact about their partner.