Strategies for Getting the Little Tykes Off Your Back **134**

I originally got my TEFL certificate in Guadalajara, Mexico at the International Teacher Training Organization. This was in 2014. The program at the time was pretty standard for most EFL programs. You went through at least 120 hours of teaching training. What was different about this program was that it offered actual experience in the classroom where you could teach to students with real needs to learn English. ITTO had an agreement with the neighboring private academy, IMAC, whereby teacher-trainers were assigned different classes to teach during the course of the day. Students at IMAC were very diverse and from a wide range of backgrounds. Many students of IMAC needed English for their jobs or for their university, where it was required to pass an English proficiency examination. Others were just intrigued by it and the culture, having aspirations to move to Canada or the United Kingdom or the United States.

Getting practice at ITTO was invaluable because it allowed me to test ideas out and to work out the quirks in some of the pedagogical strategies that we, the teacher trainers, were learning about. We had been assigned a textbook and the textbook was definitely comprehensive in that it had numerous templates on teaching, and pedagogical approaches designed for maximum learning. Things like classroom management, warm-ups/cool-downs, and phonetics were covered in this folio and I remember thinking at the time how overwhelming all of this was, and yet how so crucial it was that we could be assimilating all of this content and then working it out in a classroom for students. Yet, when I started teaching at a real school, I soon discovered that the textbook had only taken teacher-trainers so far in preparing us for what reality was like on the ground as an English as a Foreign Language teacher, and that the needs of a real school were quite different from the needs of the model student that ITTO and the rest of the teaching curriculum had been preparing us for. In short, I soon discovered that the needs of an English teacher required something a little more than just dispelling information and having students repeat ad infinitum until they got it, or understood. At many of the schools, EFL teachers had to play something of a dynamic role in the classroom and in the community at large.

One interesting thing that my training had not prepared me for was the life outside of the classroom that also had to be a chore. As an English teacher, for example, not only are you supposed to be teaching English to students but you are also apparently supposed to act as a model citizen for the host country and for your own country. For me, this wasn’t quite a scary proposition, although I certainly wasn’t the upstanding citizen that people had known me to be. I had a tattoo and I laughed at dirty jokes. I thought it was funny when my students cursed and I had no problem talking about alternative lifestyles to people, were they to ask about it. In korean schools, before you are hired, the hiring staff check to make sure you have no visible tattoos or any psychological issues, like depression. There are a few of these hurdles that one has to pass to be considered for an English teaching post in Korea that signal to you as a potential hire that you’re no just teaching English but also serving some kind of ambassador role and public figure.

Fast forward to my teaching post in Korea, I quickly learned that the role of English teacher, at least at my school in Korea, was something of a hybrid mixture of entertainer and educator, sometimes distributed evenly 50%-50% but sometimes largely skewed toward entertainer. What many English teachers on Facebook boards have called “Edutainer.” This is exactly what has been my experience from the get-go.

Sure, you’re probably thinking this is a rather harsh conclusion to make. But allow me to explain myself a little more thoroughly here. As a “guest English teacher,” in Korea, my success was almost entirely contingent on whether my students enjoyed the class or not. This in turn, was usually determined by whether they attended or not. Therefore, if students did not attend my class, they probably did not enjoy it enough and therefore I was performing poorly. Sometimes, these absences were entirely excused, such as as when students had to perform in a debate or attend some annual conference that was hosted by the school. Sometimes students were absent for school trips and other times, they missed because they had to attend an important class on job preparation and life after high school. And then of course, there were the numerous trips to the nurses office and the hospital. Between all of these various excuses, I might have only seen my students for about 7 classroom sessions where I was charged with the duty of making them enjoy the book, pedagogy be damned.

When your entire job is designed to please the student, you’re not going to resort to the strategies that other more conventional teachers use in their daily lives. When you’re sole duty is to get students interested in a subject, you’re going to become a regular Patch Adams: you’ll smile all the time, wave to students, crack jokes with them, and ask them personal questions about their lives. You’ll meet them in the hallway and after class and gauge them in conversation. But perhaps most importantly, you’re going to be on all the time and use your high energy and smiling to ensure that students read nothing but the best from your personality and don’t register anything that remotely resembles exhaustion. You’re going to do this to be on the good graces of nearly everyone in the school environment so that the students are happy and the teachers think you’re particularly effective. Never have I been at a job where my success and effectiveness was entirely determined on the basis of my consistent smiling and pleasing of the students. To be fair, this was my first post overseas, but if there is anything I have learned, it is how exhausting it can be on the teacher, how taxing it can be to be “On” all the time. I can liken this experience to being a Renaissance Fair performer. Although I never worked for the Ren Faire, I did audition for the Renaissance Fair once upon a time and remembering the auditors speaking vaguely about the need to be able to perform and not be “off character.” For those of you who aren’t aware of theater terminology, the phrase “off character,” and other such phrases refer to the idea that when you’re watching a show, there are certain areas designated for the life of the show and certain areas that are the realm of reality. So for example, the area just beyond the stage, to the sides of it, and behind, is called “back stage.” When you are backstage, you can be yourself again. You can talk to your fellow cast members or prepare for your next scene by rehearsing your lines, or you can do some stretches. If you’re not in a show and you’re just hanging out a theater (e.g. because you’re in high school), you can use the backstage for other things as well (I will leave you to use your imagination!). The area just beyond the stage, in the wings, is either the orchestra pit or just the area beyond the stage where the audience resides to enjoy the show. It is beyond what many actors refer to as the “fourth wall,” it’s the dividing line between the performers and the audience. So clearly, in the tradition of the theater, there is a fine line between what is pretend and what is real. This is very similar to Erving Goffman’s ideas about there being actual physical areas in life where people take on different identities. According to Goffman, people create backstages and frontstages of their lives. The frontstage can be thought of something like a performance whereby people put on a front for people and do impression management. They smile, they look happy, and they say things that will hopefully endear themselves to other people and create satisfactory relationships. The backstage, on the other hand, is where all of the prep work is involved--it’s the reserve of all of your worries, anxieties, complaints, and frustrations. This is where all of the fighting happens and the real core of the person comes out in all of its raw form. Sometimes the distinction between front and back is quite stark that it’s like you’re living a double-life, completely separate or that you have some kind of a split personality. Other times, your front and back are more extensive. I bring this up because for the most part, EFL/ESL literature has really done an inadequate job at conveying this rather interesting facet of the teaching profession. After interviewing many EFL/ESL teachers, many do seem to agree that there is an element of having to be “on” all the time for the school community. For Korae especially, oftentimes what you do outside of the class--but in the school environment--is just as important as what you do within the class, perhaps even more important since the students are more likely to approach you in the hallways and be “real” with you. The truth is that your job doesn’t end after the class is over. Your job continues until the end of the day is over and you can retreat to your house and chill out and do whatever you’d like, and even this is sort of false because oftentimes, you’ll see other students outside of school, in cafes and restaurants and stores and you’ll have to find a way to interact with them in a casual way but nevertheless putting on a front. It’s not that you’re being fake, but that your job as a cultura-diversity-ambassador and entertainer (a sort of pseudo-representative) mandates that you put on this front.

It’s not that I did not enjoy the company of my students. On the contrary, I quite enjoyed their company, sometimes more so than my own colleagues because they were just always more “real” with me and honest than most other staff members that I had to spend my other, non-classroom hours with. However, you reach a certain point in your teaching career where the mandate of constantly being “on,” and in entertainer mode begins to grate on you so much that teaching--at least EFL teaching in the way it has been designed in schools across the world--that it starts to feel like slave-work or indentured servitude. And I say this with a lot of love and fondness for my students. I had many great moments with my students. The reality, however, is that you are being paid to be a performer for more hours than the human body can tolerate. And this is the main point that I wish to drive home in this book. There is no human being on this Earth that can take so much high energy performing for hours on end. The body will tear down and you will burn out rather quickly.

I’m sure there will be some detractors reading these words and arguing a few valid points. For example, some might say that teaching is designed for people who do not have that frontend/backend dichotomy. In other words, that who they are on the outside is exactly who they are on the inside. To this argument, I would say that I am not actually directly addressing the “fronts,” per se but the necessity at your job to be attentive all the time to the people around you and the people that you need to serve. Like it or not, the need to be attentive all the time and to be that teacher that everyone turns to, either for praise or complaints, is not great for one’s health. It’s taxing to be attentive all the time, to be smiling widely and fraternizing in the jovial way that EFL teachers are known to do. People need a break They need to be able to keep a quiet face sometimes, to allow their bodies to rest. This is more the concern that I have, and less about maintaining a consistent identity.

Other people are likely to argue that your job is to be attentive and if you don’t like it, you can leave. Well, yes, that is the job of the profession, and frankly, I’m concerned with it. Some schools around the world,for example, have high turnover rates. These schools can be likened to teaching factories where teachers are required to keep draconian hours and then work schedules that are inconsistent and often go against the circadian rhythm. These schools also require that type of attentiveness that I have been describing, attentiveness to the students and to your colleagues. “So scale back your energy,” you might be thinking to youself, “use some strategies that you learned from your teacher training program.” Well, actually, many EFL programs actually don’t address this issue that I speak of. On teaching message boards and similar platforms, I often hear about first-year teachers not having anticipated the level of entertainment and silliness that they woudl have to put on for their students. Soon enough, they get tired of putting on a show, so to speak, rather than doing what they were trained to do in school, and either quit after the first year, or, in the worst case scenario, will do a midnight run and just disappear from the neighborhood without a trace, likely “going home,” to wherever that is. Alas, there are no statistics on the number of would-be teachers doing midnight runs or giving up after a year, but if anyone has any information on this, I would love to have it.

So in short: teaching requires you to be on and attentive, in entertainer mode and it requires a hightened level of energy that most would-be teachers aren’t prepared for. It isn’t always apparent the level of energy that you’re required to expend because oftentimes that job won’t feel that way, especially during those desk warming sessions as many an English teacher will tell you. However, there is no doubt that teaching does require that attentive front.

So who is this book for? This book is for any teacher who recognizes this reality of teaching and who is feeling tired and frustrated by it. It’s for the teacher who wants to get some of their time and energy back. Many books have been produced to help the EFL teacher cope with the demands of teaching to many students. Many of these books I have used to cull material together, especially those that I have used in my own experience to get the students doing maximum work with little effort on your part. If you go to the back of the book, you’re going to see an appendix of some of the resources I have used to help me save my energy and teach to students. This book will take you through a series of exercises and activities that have been designed to get the students more engaged in th activity than in you. Many of these games are great for middle school and high school students. Some might even be good for elementary students too. This is not your normal pedagogy book. I am not going to review theories of teaching or over-explain why a particular game or strategy counts as effective taeching. There are many books out there right now that can do this for you, and more than probably they have done this in a more comprehensive and englightening way than what I could do for you. This book is more practical. My goal for this book was for you, the reader, to have an outlet for teaching, a resource that you could draw from when the going got tough. I’ve included several in-class strategies as well as several out-of-class strategies. Many of these suggestions will seem obvious when you’re reading them. Others I hope will provide you with some clarity of thought and what it is that you need to do. And still others I do hope you’ll be learning about for the first time. I have written this book because I deeply care about the profession and want it to improve.

This is not to say that I have all of the answers here in this book. In all likelihood, if you’re teaching multiple classes and dealing with hundreds of people per week, your energy is likely going to be taxed in some way. However, I have learned that there are several ways for you to get around the abuse of your time and energy that frequently takes place in the EFL classroom and in communities that hire English native speakers. And you can use these strategies on a near daily basis to pace yourself, preserve your strength, and ultimately learn how to expend energy where it counts in your life: starting businesses, meeting new people that elevate you and make you excited about what you’re doing and where you are going. This has been a long road and a difficult one, but I have learned that if you don’t care for yourself first, then you won’t be able to help make your life grow and evolve where you want it to go. And you’ll just remain stagnant and ultimately do yourself a disservice. This is the price you pay for allowing your mental energy to be wasted. It’s like Isaiah Hankel said in the *Habitual Hustler:* “I find mental energy is more important than time and money. If youv’e ever bought something to save time, you know money is not yoru most valuable possession. If you’ve ever sat down to watch television, then you know it’s not time. It’s mental energy. If you don’t protect your mental energy as the #1 importance, other people will drain it from you.”

In this day and age, where it is becoming increasingly easier and easier to design your own lifestyle and start businesses with almost little initial investment--in other words, to invest in yourself--you owe it to yourself to arm yourself with the strategies that will allow you to perform at your very best. Maybe owning a business is not for you, but at the very least, you should be taking care of your mind and body on a daily basis so that you can maximally serve the people you have been hired to serve. So how do you do this? It starts with your decision today to not allow students, faculty, or anyone in your immediate surroundigns that you have to work with on a daily basis to drain your energy. it starts with you making the decision that you will not try so hard at your job that by the end of the day, you’re completely spent.

In his book, *Awaken the Giant*, Tony Robbins argues for the effectiveness of Neuro-Associative Conditioning, saying basically that people can change in an instant if they decide to do so. How can you do this, he asks? You can decide that the pain of working too hard is so unbearable that you’re not willing to endure it anymore. You can decide that expending your energy for other people until you havqe nothing left to give is just not worth it. And decide to reallocate your associations. Tony Robbins basically says that people make decisions based on one of two things: pain and pleasure. If you allocate more pain toward the energy debt that you accrue toward the end of the day, then you can decide to change and improve your circumstances on the job. It’s really that easy. The strategies that I have used over the course of my own career will certainly help you deal with this, but they won’t be nearly as impactful if you don’t put your foot down today and say “I am not going to take this anymore.” Believe me, I was there.

I started my career overly-eager, shall we say. Eager to please other employers, eager to please the students, eager to please everyone. In my efforts to please the employers, I would always check and double check that what I was doing was just fine and that I was employing proper pedagogical strategies. In terms of the students, I would always change course of the lesson if they were bored or not interested. And if there was just no way for me to change the lesson, I would give them candy for paying attention. But just think about how damaging that is to people in the long run, especially yourself. If you were charged with the responsibility of educating students, then you are actually not living up to your repsonsibilities because you are giving in to the whims of the students.You are allowing them to waste their own time and yours. You are becoming nothing but an entertainer. If this is what you were really hired to do, than fine. Yo ucan still use these strategies to help you lessen the need to over-perform. Many schools, of course, have different settings in which you will be teaching. Some private academies will have you teach all age levels at different hours of the day, sometimes during what many would consider the night shift. Other schools will have you work during the day and teach only select classes. The demands of each level of student is also considerably difficult. If you’re teaching little children, then you’ll most likely be expending a lot of energy trying to enact fun and games and songs into your classes. If it’s for high school, then you can be more conversational and reason with students. Alas, my only experience is with high school and middle school so I probably won’t be able to provide much assistance for those of you who are teaching very young children. So who is this book for? This book is for anyone who is teaching English as a Foreign Language to middle school and high school students. The strategies that are provided in this book will help you manage yoru classroom behavior more effectively and also help you to reduce the amount of energy you expend in the classroom when you’re teaching. Although these strategies won’t provide you with a 100% alleviation of the taxing needs of your respective school, it will nevertheless provide you with ways that you can begin to reduce the ware and tear of the academy so that you have enough energy leftover to initiate the actions that will be necessary for you to move forward in your life and either improve your work environment or take the steps needed to transition out of your career and into something that is more manageable or of more interest to you. In his book *End of Jobs*, Taylor Pearson declared the age of working for other people was over; that, despite what other people would have you believe, the years of spending your time in a cubicle, or in the case of English teaching, at a desk with other teachers, is over. He further states that those who will profit the most from this age are those who are going to pursue their own interests and start their own businesses out of those interests. Doing this isn’t often always easy because it requires a lot of stamina and deliberate focus. It requires that yo have enough energy left over to execute on your job escape plan. In order to do this, you need to take concerted steps to lessen the ware and tear, the energy sapping experiences of your school, both in the class and outside of the class. This book will hopefully provide you with some answers for doing that.

It was a cold day in late January and I found myself nearly sweating as I scrambled to try and think about what I was going to do for my winter camp in the middle school where I taught English. “You know, do something fun,” my co-teacher said. I had had little feedback and was nearly exhausted from trying to please everyone. When you are in Korea teaching English, you’ll frequently get the advice to “Play games.” Play any kind of games. Some of the games that are usually cited: Jeopardy, Hot Seat, Hit or Miss, Apples to Apples, and HangMan. These games certainly have their value and will be described more thoroughly later on in the book. However, I think people overestimate the helpfulness of these games because it is actually a lot of work to prep the students into playing them, especially during those periods when teh students have just gone through an exam or are in preparation for one. You’ll frequently get mixed reactions to the games when you try to initiate them in your class. Some students will love the idea, while others will only love it if there is candy involved (more to come on this idea as well). Still, others will be more “serious” students and absolutely hate the idea that you are wasting their time. Sometimes games go over well, but they can also bomb really badly. When you’re trying to implement a game, you usually have to fill the game in with some information or facts that the students are going over. It could be vocabulary or concepts and definitions or something like this to test students’ recall and recollection of the material. Doing this can be super time-consuming and energy draining in itself. I remember creating massive amounts of jeopardy games, for example, and spending what felt like countless of hours fill out these jeopardy boards with questions from the student textbooks that were at different levels of difficulty. Sometimes I would even forget the answer and would have to look back and check myself. When I really wanted to save time and use someone else’s work, it would be fraught with error. There would be grammar errors or misinformation or really bad pictures, sometimes even terrible pictures that had nudity or some form of profanity that was inappropriate for my age group (oh my goodness, it was disastrous).

So in short, powerpoint-games aren’t always the best solution to a teacher’s energy debt, although they can be! I cannot tell you how many times Scrabble has saved me and helped me preserve my mental energy (not to mention sanity) when I was feeling the most drained. As I’ve said, there are many strategies in this book that will help you preserve your energy. Most of this book was designed for EFL teachers who are teaching English since this is where the most gross violations of mental taxation come into play. English teachers the world over are treated like indentured servants or even economic slaves as they are forced to toil day in and day out with massive amounts of classes for little pay. Some teachers would argue with me and say that they have the best jobs in the world. And I don’t doubt this for a second. I do believe there are many teachers in the industry who have excellent jobs. But I also believe there are probably many more teachers who feel differently and feel that they are being taken for granted or taken advantage of or both. And I’m sure there are many English teachers who feel downright exploited for their services. You don’t have to look far to find the horror stories that abound over the internet of people who were not reimbursed for certain expenses that were promised them, certain procedures that were downright authoritarian, and requirements that almost impossible to meet. Many schools expect teachers to be perfect and read the minds of authorities in the school and do exactly what they want perfectly without getting any objective feedback. There are many schools that have been run chaotically and the English teacher is often the one to bear the brunt of this management and financial mess. And then to add further sand to the wound, the English teacher gets lambasted for being bitter and angry when the entire system is apparently rigged against them, not in their favor. Being an English teacher is by no means easy. Being any kind of an educator is difficult. But there are ways around this. I hesitate to use the word “hack” here because it has been so overused in other media outlets. Instead, I prefer to use strategies because while these won’t solve your problems completely, they will mitigate some of the frustrations of being any kind of teacher.That is my hope for this book and for you, as the reader.

So let me explain exactly what I intend to cover in this book. I will make this section brief so that we can get right to the strategies that have worked for me. **The book covers strategies for in the class, strategies for the school community, strategies for outside of school, and even strategies for your home and for life in general.** I also include among these strategies career planning tips because when you find yourself depleting so much mental energy on a daily basis and you’re brought to the point of desperation whereby you have to pick up a book like this, then you know that something needs to change and change fast. I hope that this book will give you some ideas on what you can do to take steps to change your life for the better.

As I stated there are many strategies covered here. The first part of the book covers strategies for the classroom. Probably the most important question you’re going to have is how to reduce the level of energy that you’re expending in class. When you’re a new teacher, your initial inclination probably to please your students. After all, who doesn’t want to make the students happy while learning? Isn’t that the best way to get information to stick? To make it memorable? Interestingly enough, studies have revealed that this is not necessarily the case. In fact, several studies have come to the surface that reveal that having an ebullient happy teacher is in fact detrimental to the learning process (**FIND A CITATION)** and that making the students laugh, in and of itself, is no guarantee that the students are going to like you in the long run or even be able to retain any of the valuable information that you’re trying to convey to them, either for a test or otherwise. (CITE). We all want to be liked, it’s true. But when it comes to teaching, being liked by the students may not be all that it’s cracked up to be. Sure, if your entire job relies on you being able to attract the students to your class, then you definitely have to be liked and perhaps act like a performer rather than a teacher. I will cite strategies that you can use if you’re in circumstances like this. For those of you who are in the enviable position of not needing to be liked by the students,then there will also be strategies for you as well.

Many beginning teachers, in the midst of trying to get a foothold, will naturally cling to the “please them, make them happy,” solution. They’ll do a song and dance, do massive amounts of lesson planning and work, and attempt to really consider each and every student that they have, especially the most troubling students who don’t even want to be in the class. I can honestly say that after having tried this experience, if you go down this fateful path you will get burnt out faster than you can say “olly olly oxen free.” You cannot allow the students or the administration to impose this kind of work on you, even if they threaten to fire you. That’s right. I will repeat that because it bears repeating. Even if you are on your last dollar and you don’t think you’re going to be able to work anywhere else, if the administration insists on this type of super-work on you, if they impose, then you need to not only walk but run. There are many companies who have these kinds of draconian impositions on their teachers, running down a slave shop, and many teachers who quickly become the walking-dead. You cannot allow yourself to become one of these teachers, even if you’re insisting that you need to do it. Your body and health are far more important than pleasing other people.And frankly, you won’t be able to do your best work unless you’re doing less of it. In fact, I would even argue that the less work that you do, the more productive you become because you’ll have the energy and the willpower to be able to exact results. When you’re down for the count and you cannot possibly give anymore because you’ve already expended so much energy trying to give your all for your students, this is when you’ll give the least amount of work and be the least productive. You must avoid this at all costs because this can quickly lead to depression and other more serious circumstances that you need to avoid. Your survival depends on it.

And so I open this book with strategies you can use for the classroom. Because it is one of the first energy sappers you will likely encounter in your journey as a teacher. You’ll realize your putting in more work and you’ll soon look for ways to find the smart ways of doing things that will reduce the work ten fold. Look no further. I have provided some of these strategies for you here.

The second part of this book covers strategies that you can use for the school community. One responsibility of an English teacher is to interact with the community. Most professions that are done offline require interaction with the working culture. The teaching profession is no different. In my experience as an English teacher, overseas in Korea, I had to be an integral part of the community and serve as a sort of cultural ambassador for my country. Sometimes this entailed dispelling popular myths about the culture, for example, that not everyone was in love with Justin Beiber or Miley Cyrus. Sometimes this required that I hold conversations with students outside of class about how they were doing, perhaps asking them about their plans for the weekend. And sometimes I had to play soothing psychologist to all of the students whose embattled hormones raged during test-time. In a way, I was part psychologist, part teacher, part counselor, and part entertainer and court jester and trickster. Sometimes I got to play talent show announcer and sometimes I was able to play coach. I had to play all of these roles at any given time. I have to admit that sometimes these roles were fun. A good part of the time, they were tiring. These are the sorts of aspects of teaching in a brick and mortar school that get little publicity. But even more interesting,the story of how these sorts of activities extract life energy from teachers daily is seldom told. This is because for the longest time, people have taken for granted the fact that teachers do this sort of thing. For some reason, it is expected that teachers are going to give their all for each student. I know this because I was a student once upon a time and never one second did i ever consider what the teacher had to go through to plan lessons. And of course, I railed and complained from high school and college whenever I saw a teacher seemingly taking the easy street. I used to call them frauds and privately hate them because they weren’t doing anything. I have since changed my thinking on this. Maybe it doesn’t look like it from a distance but teachers are quickly becoming some of the hardest workers in any profession. The more and more we progress into the 21st century and either give jobs to robots or outsource most work to the internet, brick and mortar teachers are quickly becoming the hardest workers because of the multiple roles they play and the unrealistic expectations that people exact on them. I’ve already listed some of the roles that I had to play when I was teaching in Korea. However, I have also heard of some other roles that people have played as teachers, some of these more precarious than my own: Mind-reader, fortune teller, pillar of perfection. Some teachers have had to glean perfect lessons based on what their superiors were thinking. Still, other teachers somehow found themselves having to anticipate the week’s events and make lesson plans. The roles abound for the teacher mostly because there isn’t really a common consensus as to what a teacher should be. According to **Name,** a teacher **could have been anything from a priest and shaman to a counselor. Even a member of the family!** Teachers serve different roles to different people in different communities throughout the world. And because of the vast diversity of roles that a teacher can fill, oftentimes they are caught in the crossfire of competing interests that make up the school community. So what is a teacher to do in all of this? The answer may surprise you.

Equally as important are the strategies you incorporate outside of the school. In the third section of this book, I cover strategies for conserving your energy within the non-school community. One interesting phenomenon is the fact that many teachers are supposed to be considered upstanding pillars of their communities. They are supposed to have absolutely no flaws and they are supposed to be these well-rounded know-it-alls, incapable of mistakes. For those of us teachers who split our personas between our teaching personas and our everyday life personas, this can be a very formidable operation to endure. Many teachers sometimes move out of their communities just so that they can avoid being seen by students and protect their real-world persona so that they can live comfortable lives.

Living in the community where you teach is not easy. You run into parents, students, and colleagues. If you’re like me and lived in a foreign country, you occasionally also get approached by strangers. Sometimes it’s the reverse and you just get stared at. Whatever the case may be, these daily interactions can also cost a lot of mental energy. When a student approaches you to say “hello,” and “How are you?” you have to think about the culturally appropriate thing to say and then further anticipate what what you’re going to say in return that will be polite and reaffirm the image that the student has of you. It can be a very exhausting impression management game where you are constantly trying to endear yourself to other people. It’s not that these activities aren’t enjoyable but one can easily underestimate just how much of a second- and third- shift teachers actually have without getting paid. Depending on what community you’re teaching in, the wages may not justify all of the energy that you’re putting into it. Actually, I argue that it is never justified, even if teaching is something that you do for the sheer pleasure of it. Because taking care of yourself--your mind and your body--must always come first. Charity must begin at home. And so the third part of this book focuses on managing the stressors that come with interacting with people just outside of the school community.

Finally, the fourth part of this book focuses on strategies for your home life and personal life. This is another area that is seldom broached in the teaching profession but is all too critical if teachers are to perform to their maximum potential. There’s this saying that “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” Well, a teacher is very similar to this. No one ever examines the personal life of a teacher, perhaps because no one cares or no one wants to think of their teacher in this sort of way. But teachers are humans and have the same needs as others do. Yes, they have sex lives, and they make mistakes in relationships. Sometimes they drink excess wine and sometimes they smoke cigarettes. Teachers aren’t perfect. And because people don’t ever need to consider the totality of a teacher’s life (now why would they?), it can be very difficult for the teacher to manage these assumptions from others and may often make the teacher feel like some kind of a celebrity trying to maintain a certain public image. The difference between the public and the private lives of teachers is an interesting one. In the media historically, the types of stories that appear about teachers and their private lives is a less than flattering one. News of teachers molesting children or pornography surfacing that features the teacher are all too common in the media, to the extent that a backlash of sorts gets created where the teacher is supposed to be as saintly as the Virgin Mary. The question becomes how to live your life--mistakes and all--and not lose energy over it, particularly the parts that involve masking parts of who you are in front of other people. Discussions about what you can do to become a more integrated person in your personal and professional life will be discussed. Finally, some closing remarks will be made that will tie up all of the loose ends. Please note the appendix of resources in the back for you to take advantage of right now. These resources were collected from my research as well as my own personal experience with what works and what doesn’t and they are there for you to use! Use them well!

Chapter One: In-Class Strategies

I include this chapter as the very first because there is no bigger culprit of zapping energy from the teazcher than than classroom itself. By far, this is the place where most of the enery is going to get exacted. For most beginning instructors, this is probably the most precarious situation of them all since in all likelihood, the beginning teacher will be eager to do a good job and try to please the students. They will do a song and dance, play the banjo, act like a clown, and reward students with lots and lots of candy and smiles just to be on their good graces. Mark my words that there is nothing more deadly to a teacher’s career and endurance/sustenance than becoming one of those teachers who is constantly battling to please the students and colleagues. This strategy is by no means an endurable one because most obviously, the strategy will create burnout and lead one to distress. In a community where the teacher is front and center, especially in a foreign country, the possibilities for over-exerting yourself in daily conversation is high, whether it be talking to your students or colleagues or parents. Frequently, these interactions exact a toll on the teacher because they just require so much forethought and planning and pretending to be relaxed. Social interaction doesn’t always have to be strenuous of course, but when it comes to putting on airs--which all humans do--there’s bound to be an element of energy utilization to ensure that it happens, that you’re on the good graces of the people around you. It’s natural. Like any profession, it behooves you maintain your ease and sense of calm in class. It is vital for you to protect your body and your mind and be as calm as you possibly can be. Becaues the moment you start putting on a show for students, they will expect the same from you over and over again utnil eventually you’ll wake up one day and find yourself dreading the experience of behaving like a side show performer. It is not your responsibility to entertain the students but to convey information. Even if the students are having a bad day and need motivation, this should never phase you. You should maintain your ground and sense of authority and work with the sometimes unpredictable and unregulated emotions of your students, all the while realizing that it is not your fault that the students are having a bad day. This is especially true for the EFL/ESL classroom, especially in Korea, where usually the teacher is not repsonsible for any grades that make a difference in the lives of their students. Because of your expendable nature anyway, you should just relax and go with the flow. It’s not going to make a difference in the long run anyway if your song-and-dance routine pleases anyone. Because at the end of the day, if a school doesn’t have the funds to keep you on board, you’re gone, and you’re just that much more tired after doing all of that work that you should have never done in the first place. So please take the time now to promise yourself that from this moment on, you are going to take care of yourself and expend only enough energy necessary to communicate with your students. Because teaching, like most professions, will never reward you for your love. If you get inner rewards for being over the top and performing, that’s another story, but if you find yourself overacting for the sake of the students, then you should realize that it is a fruitless battle and that nothing positive will come of it. That said, I have included many activities here that were designed with a number of purposes in mind. Firstly, many of these activities are designed to get the attention off of you, the teacher. I include any activity that I have performed with success that has permitted me some downtime in the class, whereby I can just lazily walk around or even better, sit at my desk and daydream for a while during the activity. I also included activities that were designed to require little help from the instructor. In other words, if the activity required help from the teacher and clarification, it wasn’t included. Therefore, many of these activities are going to serve you well for when you need to review material. A little pro tip that you should be aware of when you’re teaching English overseas is that a lot of the time, students are already familiar with a lot of English related material. Want to teach cooking terminology? The students have probably been exposed to it. Want to teach students how to find the store? They have probably gone over it with their teachers in previous classes. Therefore, you don’t need to reinvent the wheel if the students have already gone over the material in their classes. Many of the activities can stand on their own as a result and serve as a review, even if you have never gone over the material in prior classes. Just a quick test of the subject to ensure that the students comprehend is sometimes all that you need to determine if the activity is appropriate for your class. As a beginning teacher, you’re likely not going to know what words students are unfamiliar with and you’ll likely get little help from your colleagues working in the school since most of them will be busy working on their own jobs. Therefore, many of your classes can be used to explore what students know and what they don’t know. You can provide, for example, worksheets that are designed for a range of proficiency levels and see what students find the easiest. This might involve a bit of photocopying on your part, but it is an effort well-spent when you’re just trying to figure out what your students want or need. If you don’t have a photocopier, than you can write the activities on the board and have the students copy the work into their notebooks or on a small piece of paper. Students should always be prepared for class anyway and if they are not, it is not your problem. Tell them to be prepared. And on this note, a little side commentary is in order. Alway always alway on the first day of class, set the standards for moving forward: the rules by which students follow in order to maintain a healthy pattern of productive behavior. In the book *Teaching English in Korean Public Schools*, the author SP Lee recommends that you find your own rules to suit your needs and he recommends some rules of his own that have worked for him, one of them being “no talking when the teacher is talking.” For middle school students especially, this rule can be an absolute life-saver when you’re trying to handle multiple students at once. If students aren’t aware of this need, you must make them aware of it and repeatedly until they learn how to behave properly. A classroom where students are cross-talking constantly can be just as bad as a teacher who is overly active in class and trying to entertain the kids constantly.

Worksheets have been an absolute life-saver for me. Worksheets are by far the best way of getting the students quiet and busy while I can just stare out the window and meditate on what I should do with my life. Sometimes I’ll go around and check what the students are doing and offer assistance but of course, sometimes I will use this downtime to conserve my energy. I love worksheets. There are many different types of worksheets that you can give to your students to get them quiet and focused. You can make word searches for the students, based on vocabulary that you are going over. You can also make a crossword puzzle for the students. You can do fill-in-the-blank worksheets, with or without word banks. You can even make clue worksheets and have students read clues and attempt to solve the puzzle. Many of this will require some prep time, but there are still many websites that will generate these generic worksheets for you with just the minimum of input. The following is a list of helpful worksheet-generators that are active as of 2015:

**Scramble Words** - <http://textmechanic.com/Word-Scrambler.html>

<http://textmechanic.com/Word-Scrambler.html>

**Scramble Sentences** - <http://www.toolsforenglish.com/tools/scramble-sentence/>

<http://www.toolsforenglish.com/tools/scramble-sentence/>

**Make a Crossword Puzzle** - <http://www.puzzle-maker.com/CW/>

<http://www.puzzle-maker.com/CW/>

**Make a Wordsearch** - <http://www.puzzle-maker.com/WS/>

<http://www.puzzle-maker.com/WS/>

**Make a gapfill activity** -<http://sunnyscchoi.tripod.com/papergapfillgenerator.htm#Step> Seven

**Make Your Own Comic** - <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/>

<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/>

**Make a Match-Up Worksheet** -<http://www.superteacherworksheets.com/generator-matching.html>

The following links should help you, although sometimes they are a bit drab and require some sprucing up, especially for middle schoolers whose attention tends to wander around the room when they feel like they are being tied down to a boring worksheet. For this, I sometimes tell the students that they can work with a partner, if I feel that they won’t chat in class. However, if the students are chit-chatting away, that I will usually opt for the second option of designing the worksheet. You can find some great designs if you do a Google search on the Images search engine of Google and type in words like “worksheet borders,” and “border designs.” You can also, if you’re feeling really ambitious, look for images that are related to the topic that you are going over. When I was a first year English teacher, I did this a lot and saved many of my worksheets to Google Drive. But even doing this proved to be a lot of work, more work than i was willing to put in for the time and the amount of money that I was making. And I’m someone with little patience (I have to work on this). During those times when I wanted to divert my focus to more important matters, like reading a book or developing my web skills, I just hired someone on Fiverr.com to make me worksheets. I never hired anyone from Europe or the United States because these freelancers were just too expensive. Very often, I would hire someone from the Philippines or Pakistan or India to make worksheets for me. Sometimes, there were freelancers who I actually paid to find me talented artists who would work for literally 2 dollars an hour. These artists would produce the worksheets for me within a matter of days and I would just pay them a quarter of my hourly paycheck to save me the time that i needed to do other more important tasks, as mentioned reading, writing, and web development skills.

We have reached an era where it is literally no trouble at all to find someone who will work for pennies on the dollar to make you whatever you want, and Fiverr has become that go-to service for it. It might change in the future, and when it does, I’ll no doubt have to update this book and let everyone know about it, but for now Fiverr takes prominence in the market. You can find any freelancer in any part of the world to do work for you--you can find freelancers to make PPTs, freelancers to design worksheets, or make the exercises for you. You can find freelancers to do modeling work for you and freelancers to make instructional videos. Whatever you’re looking for, you’ll likely find it on Fiverr with just a little bit of search and the right keywords. Typically what I have done is scan in the worksheets and send them to the freelancer. The introductory message is usually quite casual. I’ll say something like “Hey, I’m interested in your services. I have this list of vocabulary (see attached). Would you be able to make a crossword puzzle out of this. It’s for middle schoolers. I have attached a scanned copy of the worksheet as well, to give you a better sense of the level I’m working with here. Let me know, thanks.” If the freelancer is in a developing country, they will usually return my messages within a matter of hours, sometimes in a few minutes. If the freelancer is in the United States, the wait time tends to be a bit longer. Ditto for European freelancers.

Sometimes they will ask for clarity about the assignment, but if they don’t, then they’ll usually send me a custom offer and I’ll either agree with it or I won’t. For example, one time a freelancer sent me a custom offer for 50 USD to make a PPT that was going to be about 15 slides. I flat out refused to pay the freelancer this amount and pressed the cancel button expediently. The freelancer returned and said that he wanted to work with me and that he was willing to adjust the price on my behalf. I told him that I was going to pay 15 USD and that was it. The freelancer agreed to the price and then sent me the custom offer. If the freelancer hasn’t had many customers, then they’ll likely be willing to negotiate with you so that they can receive their first favorable rating and get their business off the ground. You can use this to your advantage. Since freelancers are being born every day on Fiverr.com, you can keep hiring new freelancers to do excellent work for a small fee and maintain your expenses this way. I did this constantly throughout my tenure as a teacher and it worked wonders. So worksheets are actually an excellent way of getting the students busy on something different, something non-teaching related. If you can make the activities on the worksheets tricky enough, you can use a worksheet for the entire class period and do a last minute check up at the very end of class to see if students understood the material. If they clearly didn’t understand the material, you can then review the material again for the following week. It is great when students don’t understand the material because that means you can reuse the same material again in subsequent weeks without moving on to a new lesson or unit. This also saves you a lot of energy.

Any of the links I have provided you should set you on the right track to getting your worksheet-needs met, but if they don’t, you can also visit UpWork.com or freelancer.com and look for potential VAs this way as well, possibly someone for long term work. You could even hire some VAs from taskbullet and see how well they do for long term projects. Outside of worksheets, I also play movies. Not all the time because it often looks unprofessional to people if you show movies (although I know at least two professors in my university who literally all they did was show movies in the class). Although I don’t aspire to become a “movie-teacher,” i nevertheless recognize what life-savers movies can be when you want to do as little work as possible. Movies, apart from keeping the little kids silent for a period of time, perhaps over the duration of several classes, also provide stimulus that you can work off of to generate assignments and test whether the students have understand what transpired in the film, and then test to see how well they can articulate the movie back to you. This doesn’t always work with Middle school students because their proficiency is naturally rather low, but for high school students, this can be an absolute charmer. What kind of movies should you give to the students? This depends on what school you’re teaching in and the level of maturity of your students. I try to strike a balance between what would interest the students and thus engage them in conversation and what I could reasonably show in a high school setting that would have some educational merit. Of course, what does and does not have educational merit is somewhat subjective but you can actively court feedback from your fellow English teacher colleagues on websites like Waygook.org and Facebook groups that focus on the country that you’re teaching in. For me personally, action and fantasy usually work well for my classes but they might not work for you. Wherever you are, you’ll want to consider showing something that the students find at least a little bit interesting because then they will be more inclined to talk about what they have just seen, rathern than to snooze through the video and ignore everything that happened.

Usually after a video, I give another worksheet and have students answer questions about what happened. Sometimes I go more in depth and have the students make an art project based on what they have seen--it can be anything from a video to a collage. I don’t really care, as long as the students are processing information and then articulating it to me and thus demonstrating that they have been active and present during the screening of the film. Like I said, movie activities have been a real godsend when it comes to conserving energy and not breaking my back over lessons and lesson planning. They allow the kids to sit back and vegetate while I can also sit back and either watch the movie with them or do some of my own work. Sometimes it’s hard to concentrate on my own work when the movie is blasting in the background. My concentration is frequently broken when this happens and it’s hard for me to get back into the groove that i need to perform what it is that I would like to focus on during that class.

Some people would argue that this is theft. That what I am doing is wasting the school’s money by providing these activities to the students with artificial educational value. People might say that I am not a go-getter or someone who takes responsibility. Some would argue that I have no soul because I don’t apparently care about the development of my students. And these people would be wrong. This has absolutely nothing to do with “getting over” on the system and robbing schools blind of the money that they spend on me. Rather, it’s about self-preservation and being able to manage your workload, your personal life, and your self-development without burning out, without tiring yourself out. It’s also about having enough energy so that you can give effectively to students when they really do want your help. This is about deciding to take care of yourself first and then decide what matters to you most next. Many people come to the teaching profession with different goals and needs in mind. Sometimes they come to the teacher profession because they want to travel; sometimes they come to the teaching profession because they can’t find jobs in their home country; some peope come to teaching because they want to take a gap-year before going back to school and deciding on what they are going to do; and some people do it for the sheer love of teaching. Whatever the case may be, these are strategies that you can absolutely incorporate into your lessons, not because you’re a bad person but because you need to be able to take care of yourself so that you can take care of others. Also, there appears to be this untold assumption that good teachers are always active despite the fact that many a great teacher has been made by taking a rather passive posture, a la the Socratic method, and allowing students to divine their own conclusions about life and the material that they are responsible for learning. Many of the lessons prescribed in this chapter are passive for you the teacher. It doesn’t make you a bad teacher just because you’re inactive. There are still some other activities that you can incorporate into your classroom to be less active. Aside from worksheets, music, movies, and hiring from freelancing websites, games are also a great way of providing student-centered activities that will allow you to take a back seat. Some of the more popular games that I have allowed students to play on their own is Scrabble, Jenga, Wild Card (Uno), Battleship, and Go-Fish. Many of these games allow students to practice grammar patterns and vocabulary that they have recently learned. For card games especially, students can have a great chance of working out their words like at a gym while you take a backseat and just watch their progress. Some games like Uno wouldn’t appear to lend themselves to English practice, but if you incorporate a special rule that the students have to follow while they are playing--for example, give five English sentences that you learned if someone makes you Draw 4--then you could easily turn this and many other card games into a wonderful fruitful and productive class while storing your energy. I have done this many times with no just Uno but with Go-Fish and War. In the game, War, every time a student puts down a card, they have to provide me with one fact about themselves. When students play these games, I usually pair them up or group them together so that they can enjoy interacting with each other. This allows for the students to stay engaged in the class by staying engaged with each other and allows me to sort of withdraw and watch the progress. Sometimes you have to watch out for students devolving conversations back into their native language but if they are playing appropriately, then this game can be really effective and involve very little of you. In terms of Board games, Scrabble has been by far the most impactful and effective game that I have played with my students. In this game, students are provided with seven tiles that each contains a letter--sometimes no letter at all--and the students are then required to form English words with the random assortment of letters that they get for themselves by grabbing the tiles from the bag. Students then form words on the board and get points according to how many points the letters are worth. In subsequent rounds, students then attach their own words to whatever words have already been placed on the board and the game proceeds in this fashion with each student taking turns providing words on teh board and accruing points over the subsequent rounds. I frequently give this game after an exam period when the students are really not in the mood to be doing any more extraneous work. Sometimes the board game can be a bit slow if students don’t know enough words with the letters that they given, but very often the students are engaged with the game and looking for ways to get the most points. Sometimes I’ll model the activity by playing the game with the students and showing them what’s possible with the amount of points that they could get (for instance, getting a triple word score or a double word score depending on where you put the letters). But very often, I’ll take a back seat and allow the board game to do the lesson for the day. Outside of the board games, there are several powerpoints that have been floating around the internet that if you used in your class, they would practically totally relieve you of repsonsibility for the entire lesson. Teachers all over Korea have made fabulous powerpoints that serve as real life surrogates for the professional game shows. Some of them I have used for my classes: Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy, Who Wants to be a Millionaire, and Family Feud are all real-live game shows that have been converted into PPT format that can be used for your young students and stimulate a real life game show scenario. Some PPTs require actual adjustments but others can be used right out of the box so to speak and are quite successful. For my own part, I have also made Snakes and Ladders and Foiled into PPTs which you can search for on Waygook. These games are absolutely invaluable for giving you the vacation-without-a-vacation that you need, from teaching. The kids love it and they practice what they have learned.

Sometimes, the PPTs are hard to adjust because they were made in such an advanced way that unpacking all of the different features would take literally days. For this, I hire a VA to do the unpacking for me and make the adjustments according to bullets that I have in a menu. I show the PPT-VA my sentences that i want to use, the words that need to be replaced and then I have them do the replacing for about 15-20 USD. Some people would find this expensive but the time that I save in doing this and the extended value that I get from using this PPT over and over again is actually worth far more to me in the long run. These artifacts endure for months and years and can be reused over and over again so I find it’s nothing for me to cough up a one time expense of 15 USD for an advanced PPT project like this. These games are great when you have to do some form of interaction but you don’t want to do a whole lot of it. Jeopardy especially has been super successful in the class and only requires you to click on certain squares where the students do the choosing. You literally just have to do a click and point and you’ve done your interaction for the day. “But wait,” some people might say, “isn’t your job interacting with the students?” My answer to this is “yes,” and this interaction doesn’t necessarily have to take place in the classroom. Also, the students are practicing their English through these games. I’ve come to realize that if the students really want to practice their interaction, they’ll engage you in conversation. Some students will be shy, and for these students, I approach them and engage them in conversation. Actually, it’s with the shy students that I feel most at ease since I don’t have to expend so much energy helping them understand my “greetings.” On this note, another way to conserve your energy and willpower is to keep conversation to a minimum and only give as much as the students are willing to take. This was a lesson that has taken me a very long time to learn. I used to think that the more conversation I could muster and diarrhea out of my mouth, the better English classes would be. Well, nothing is further from the truth. As with many things in life, the more you speak the worse it becomes until eventually the students just stop trying to understand you completely and zone out.

The reality is that the students don’t understand a lot of English. Oh, they might try and put on a front that makes them look really confident, but at the end of the day, they can’t capture the complex nuances that one can only get from years of fluency. There’s a reason why instructors TEFL programs stress the importance of reducing teacher-talk-time (TTT). Because TTT just plain doesn’t work and at the very worst, it makes you defuse more energy faster than you can say “olly olly oxen free.” Speaking is just a big time filler that just makes you exhausted. Why say anything when all you have to do is smile to capture all of the words that you had been meaning to say. Smiling. although it involves few words, will probably take you further in the English environment than speaking if only because smiling is a universal language whereas English is not (although maybe in a few decades it will be). So do yourself a favor and reduce your talking. Period. Try to give yourself the goal of talking a maximum of 50 sentences per day or at least shoot for the goal of feeling that you have spoken significantly less than you usually do. Trust me that this will do more for you in the long run than you realize. So when you play PPTs, don’t speak that much. Conserve your energy. When you have to speak, use the Socratic method and pitch the ball back to the other players, where the players are the students. It’s like a game of tennis, you see, and every time you speak the ball is technically in your court. Try to keep the ball in the students’ court as much as human possible. When they cannot generate words, wait until they can find some sort of words to express themselves. Even an “I don’t get it,” is preferable to nothing, particularly if the students are non verbal as opposed to pre-verbal.

There are days when the students won’t feel like talking. Why get angry at this? They are clearly doing you a huge favor. Rather than fight their stubbornness, just embrace it and reduce the talking. As an English teacher, you have very little influence over the direction of their academic career. In Korea especially, you’re likely to have no power to direct any sort of behavior outside of giving the students candy incentives to comply with your wishes. Therefore, it is in your best interest to be on their good side and make sure they are pleased at all times even if what they are doing is harming themselves. You probably know this by now but if you don’t, allow me to remind you that all of your actions led you to where you are today. We all went through it. That period of our lives when we had to comply with some authority’s wishes despite our real wish to just lazily sit on the couch and play video games. For many of us, this desire continued into college when we would negotiate with professors and ask them to curb grades or give us extra credit even though we hadn’t studied. Sometimes would seek out the easy professors on RateMyProfessor.com to ensure the minimalist of efforts in our educational career, all the while not even realizing that we were harming ourselves. If we are where we are today, it’s because of the choices we made that have put us where we are. Sure, it would be nice for the students to realize that what they were doing was unwise but they are already overstressed and tired and don’t have time to consider this. There will be a few students who do think about this but the vast majority of students will not care that they are not getting the most out of your classes. In life, everyone has to be ready to learn and discover some rather painful realizations about themselves. Sometimes this happens soon, and sometimes it takes many months of years. What I’m trying to articulate here is that it is not your responsibility to impose learning on students who aren’t willing to learn the material, especially when your class is voluntary and has no influence on their lives. As a taecher, one of the most important lessons you will ever learn through experience is that you have to meet the students wherever they are in their development and then stop pushing after that. It’s a sort of delicate process when you’re initially assessing what it is that the students know and don’t know, but beyond this, once you figure it out, you can’t go overboard or else you’ll lose the students and ditto for if you go underboard with them. I have had many lulls in my class, usually because the students were either too challenged, not challenged enough, or didn’t want to learn any of the material. When all was said and done, the classes went well depending on how the students felt and what they were willing to give me for that day. I just worked with the energy. It’s important for you to do the same, all the while making sure that your body language is open and your words are kind. We often forget that students have lives outside of our own classrooms. Show the students that you appreciate this fact about them--that is, their whole totality-- and that you’re willing to meet them wherever they are in their development. In a weird ironical way, this will do more for making your class productive than being Mrs. Stringer all the time and enforcing your standards on people that you know nothing about. And what’s more, this will also help you conserve bucketloads more of your energy. In fact, I would even argue that the more placid you become, the better because it means that you know your place in the school and how to handle yourself when students throw you all sorts of curve balls wherever they may fly. And believe me when I say that they will definitely throw you some curve balls. I’ve walked into entire classes of students chanting over and over again “candy, candy, candy” despite the fact that I had never even met these students and they knew nothing about me. Did I give them candy? You bet your darn butt I gave them candy. I gave them a lot of candy. Candy has this rather unusual influence that is hard to describe, especially when you’re teaching in Korea. It’s like this magical elixir that turns students into these obedient little lemmings that serve your every beck and call. It’s the difference between a Ford and Roll’s Royce. How does this relate to conserving your energy? Well, it turns out a lot actually. A decades’ worth of classical conditioning experiments, starting with Pavlov, bears this out. In case you’re not familiar with Pavlov, he was a psychology researcher who studied the salivary glands of dogs. In one famous experiment, he would ring a bell in front of a dog and note no major changes. Following the ringing of the bell, he would provide the dog with some food. Every time he rang the bell, he would then follow the action with the provisioning of food for the dog until eventually the dog learned to expect food from Pavlov after ever ring of the bell. How did Pavlov know this? He observed the salivation of the animal after every bell ring, a part of the dog that had not been there before in the initial phases of the study. It was through this research that Pavlov learned about how to teach animals. And can you guess what happened next? Well, fast forward several decades later, you can just imagine how this research could have been applied to humans. These days, it’s almost a taken for granted that humans respond much in the same way as the dogs in the original Pavlovian experiment. I’m not psychology research, but I can certainly tell you that the provisioning of candy is definitely something that coerces students into compliance. I’m not saying that I give candy liberally to the point where students forget my name and only refer to me as “Candy,” but I am saying that I will often use candy to make my classes easier to handle.

When it comes to conserving energy in your classes, give candy. Give candy right before exams when students aren’t willing to do anymore work. Give candy post exam when students are tired of working. Give candy right before a holiday when students definitely don’t want to work, and make sure to also give candy right before summer break. Holidays, big tests, and extended vacations are all opportunities for you to feed your students and trick them into compliance. How does giving candy make the class easier? It makes the class easier because you can make a command to the students, and with the little promise of candy, get them to do exactly what you want without asking twice. I’ve been an English teacher over two years now and I have seen with my very eyes how entire groups of students have turned their entire lives around with the promise of candy. I have also seen students who had very little English proficiency turn into budding literati when I told them about the promise of candy at the end of the game. Students will do all sorts of things for candy--including obediently follow a worksheet, obediently play a game that you force upon them, and even do some verbal activities that help them practice the sounds and meaning of the words that they are responsible for knowing. Candy is the great equalizer for almost all of your activities in the sense that all students are willing to fight for it on some level, unless you’re dealing with students who have several cognitive disabilities (which alas, is beyond the scope of this book). It’s hard to argue, haggle, and dispute with unmotivated students. Incidents like these are usually the main culprits behind exhausting many teachers’ will power and mental energy. It’s like the classroom becomes this forum for less-than-inquisitive whining and complaining. So do you remove this frustration? Candy. Lots of it. “You do this and you get candy,” is what you should say. I guarantee that once you do this, all arguing stops and it all becomes a game as to how they can secure that candy into their mouths. Make sure the candy is good, of course. Unfortunately, I can’t make any recommendations as to what type of candy you should get. It will be contingent on your individual class’ tastebuds. You may want to ask the students what kind of candy they like so that you can provide them with the amenities when the time is most convenient for you. Many teachers swear by the steadfast rule that they will not give candy if the students haven’t earned it. I totally understand this position, and I don’t blame the teachers for saying this. You obviously don’t want to be digging yourself a grave by making the students feel like they are somehow entitled to the candy. On the other hand, you need to first be responsible for ensuring your health--it goes back to you and the whole “Charity begins at home,” thing. If you’re not taking care of yourself, then you’re definitely not going to take care of others. And sometimes, you need every waking moment to keep yourself together during those long hours that seem like they will last forever, hours of teaching that just drag on because they feel like you’re more of a prison warden than anything else. Candy has saved me many times and I’m definitely a proponent of it, at least for EFL/ESL teachers. Maybe not for science teachers, but definitely for language teachers. There are some other strategies that are also worth considering. Sometimes I have gotten a lot of cross talking in my classes where students will like they can just yell or scream over my voice. This usually gives me a headache, particularly when the students are hurling all sorts of senseless invectives that have nothing to do with the class. Apart of this has to do with the fact that I didn’t set enough clear boundaries from the start. However, another part has to do with the fact that I didn’t order the Conair Mike Machine soon enough. These little machines strap around your body and have a detachable head piece that you can wear and speak into at the same time. They have little voice boxes that you can adjust and have served wonders for my classes where students feel like they are liberty to speak whatever they want at any time in the lesson. When I’ve had a co-teacher teach with me in the classroom, I have volunteered to allow them to use it since they are more likely in a better position to stop the students dead in their tracks (they speak the target language, after all, while I do not). I cannot emphasize enough just how critical it is for your voice to carry over all of the students and be heard from anywhere by anyone (unless they are deaf, which alas, is also beyond the scope of this book). Nowadays, I never leave home without a mike that helps me direct the classes and guide the lessons. When students act up, I talk sternly in the mike while cranking up the volume. It’s total, cold, raw power that I display before the students’ very eyes and they automatically just quiet down.

In middle school, using a mike is especially handy when the students have less filters and just say whatever comes to their minds in screeching pitches. For this, I maintain my placidity and just talk into the microphone and call the student out by name. And that reminds me…

Memorize the names of your students as fast as you can. If there are too many and you can’t, there are other compensatory strategies you can use which I will discuss in a little bit. But allow me to stress that if you memorize your students’ names, you’ll be able to call them out on the spot in front of the entire class and publicly disapprove of their behavior. If there’s something that students really don’t like, it’s being called out on the spot in front of their peers where they are judged. You can maintain your energy and calm quite considerably if you learn to call out the names of the students who are particularly pernicious in your class and causing all sorts of behavior problems. Behavior problems will arise in your class, without doubt, and they will surely tax you of all that you’re worth. To mitigate the effects of troublesome students, learn their names and use your mike to call out the name and tell the perpetrating student to stop. It’s amazing how even the most ebullient and active troublemakers will be stopped in their tracks just at the sound of their names being called from halfway across the room, by the teacher. Doing this regularly will surely help to alleviate you of the stress of trying to flag down the troublesome student and getting them to stop. Now, for students whose names you can never remember, you have a few options. Please be aware that this is a highly contentious issue and many teachers are divided on what they should do when they don’t remember names. One option is to have the students make name tags that they can wear regularly. Although this takes up a lot of time, it nevertheless can be beneficial for you as the teacher to be able to call students out. I have tried this activity a few times and sometimes this works, although the perils of doing this are legion: students don’t have markers, they write in little small letters that you can’t read, the color of their pens are too bright to see, they write their names in their mother languages as opposed to the English spelling, their handwriting is illegible, and there is too much doodling on the paper that it clouds out the student’s name. Explaining the rules for this sort of activity can take up a HUGE chunk of time and when you’re dealing with students who are learning English, they most likely will not understand you without the help of a teacher’s aid or a co-teacher, if you’re fortunate enough to have one of these. When you don’t have one, or if you have a particularly inactive one, then another option is to make up names for your students. Many people debate whether this is just transferred colonization of one kind or another. Personally, I don’t care what it is. If it gets the job done and leaves me less exhausted, that’s what I’m going to do--symbolism be damned. I am going to be repeating this over and over for you as you continue reading this book because it does bear repeating. Your self-preservation must take precedence! Absolutely, it must! And if it means you have to make up names for your students, then so be it. Call one student Spiderman and another student “Ralph.” Do whatever it takes for you to gain control of your classes and your students for preserving the maximum amount of energy possible. These compensatory strategies are better than nothing at all.

Another option is to just memorize some names and then have the students whose names you’ve memorized instruct the bad students to quiet down or behave. You can even play favorites on purpose and have the good students really become the vocalpiece for the class, the moral compass, and the surrogate teacher assistant if things aren’t working out. In fact, sometimes, the more you are nice to the star-student, the more commanding this student can be when it comes time to quiet down the rest of the class. I’ve recruited many of these little academic athletes to whip the class into shape and have made sure these students realize how grateful and thankful I am for their help (extra attention, social time, more one-to-one conversation, etc.). You can usually reward students wtih overt displays of casual conversation that make the other studetns feel jealous, like they are being deprived of their moments for casual fun conversation. Of course, you shouldn’t always play favorites because it could easily backfire. Alas, you’ll have to use your judgment to determine whether this strategy will work in your favor or not. Some books just can’t fully prepare you for every scenario, but it’s worth a try. If you fail, you can always backtrack and try something else. That’s the beauty of teaching young kids. As long as you keep your moods relatively middleground, they’ll have no recollection of strategies that you’ve tried in the name of improving your class.

So we’ve discussed using a microphone to keep the level of noise at bay. We’ve spoken about using students names to call them out and quiet them down when they are either misbehaving or out of control. We have spoken about giving worksheets to students to perform quiet work and movies to get them to vegetate for hours and then to process what they’ve seen through yet… more worksheets. We’ve also discussed fun PPT games that you can play that involve very little talking or interaction from you. Card games and board games were also mentioned. We’ve even discussed minimizing teacher talk time and just allowing the students to do most of the talking whenever possible. All of these strategies are assumed to work without a co-teacher or teacher’s aid in the room. However, when you do have a teacher’s aid in the room, you can make your job exponentially easier. I don’t want to say that you’re exactly freeloadnig on the hardwork for your co-teacher, but I will say that you should be using your co-teacher as much as is humanly possible if she or he is in the room with you. Whenever possible. I’ve had some co-teachers who have just sat in the back and text messaged. At first, I left these teachers get away with it at the beginning of the year. Eventually, I grew to incorporate them so much that I became virtually helpless without their assistance. Trust me, it should be like this. “But Todd, you’ll get fired.” No I won’t. Because you have to ask yourself. If the level of dispassionate disconnectedness is already tolerated in the school environment, then what you’re doing by relying on the inacive co-teachers is actually harmless compared to what they are probably doing in their own classes (assuming their level of dispassion pervades their entire life in untold ways). This is why when I am faced with an offensively inactive co-teacher, I make sure to direct the students’ attention toward the co-teacher and tell the that I need their translation help. Or give them worksheets to distribute while smiling and thanking them for their assistance. If the co-teacher is super persnickety and really doesn’t care about you--perhaps even trying to actively harm you--then give yourself a year and look for other jobs. Life is too short to be putting up with a problematic co-teacher who makes you life a living hell. If however, you do have a co-teacher who actually listens to you and who is willing to be engaged in the class and with the students, you can use their ability to translate to your advantage and have them do a lot of the explanations for you. Sure, you did get trained, technically, to purvey information to students in English, to teach English with English as it were. But if the school is going to provide you with an aid, assistant, or co-teacher, then use it! Make sure that the teachers are being as active as you are, if not more active. Here are some ideas for how you can utilize your co-teacher to your advantage: (1) You could have your co-teacher provide translations for your PPTs; (2) You could have you co-teacher provide you with worksheets that the students are using and use that to create activities for them like Bingo or Jeopardy (all the while keeping in mind that you can hire out a really inexpensive VA to make these games for you!); (3) You can have your co-teacher do a lot of the translation work for you in class, as was already mentioned; (4) you can have your co-teacher prepare accompanying materials to match the ones that you are going to provide; (5) you can pass the speaking-baton to the co-teacher and have them do a little lecture on the classroom material for the day; (5) You can ask your co-teacher about upcoming events in the school to be cognizant enough so that you know when you have to have a lesson prepared for the students; (6) you can ask your co-teacher about local events in town or local services to be apart of. Your co-teacher is most certainly not your virtual assistant or receptionist and they are by no means obligated to do you any favors at all. However, make sure to match the level of work that they provide for you so that you’re not over stressing about what you need to do. Therefore, if they are particularly inactive in your class or they take a back role, then you can use to your advantage by just selecting whatever lesson you think will be most helpful for students at the time of your lesson, without having to concern yourself with your co-teacher. If for whatever reason the co-teacher is bossy without actually doing anything, then gently remind them that you are in a relationship with them and that they need to do their part to ensure that the relationship executes the desired responsibilities of both teachers.

An entire book could be written about co-teachers (something I may do in a subsequent project). If you’re looking for more information about this format of teaching, I highly recommend you check out the book *Teaching English in Korean Public Schools* by SP Lee who does a more than adequate treatment of this subject, discussing ways to work with your co-teacher and ensure a healthy working relationship. Lately, I’ve discovered a new way for checking out and preserving your energy. Group projects. I’ve already mentioned that worksheets can be helpful in keeping the students busy but you could extend this to include some multi-class projects that involve a lot of group work and heady thinking. Many EFL books have provided great ideas for projects to give to your classes, and the Cambridge series is one of the best. There are many different types of projects you can do with your students over extended classes. For example, you can have them make a video, replete with script, actors, and a director. These types of classes are typically very fun for the students and keep you at bay while they perform the necessary responsiblities of the assignment. Another fun group activity is to do a publicity campaign whereby students organize themselves into groups and form a cause that they can support with propaganda. Making fliers is usually a great project to do over many days. Still, another activity that you can give to your students is game-making. Why purchase your own games when you can just have the students make their own authentic games that help them study material they are required to care about? I don’t know about you but I can’t think of a better way to keep the students occupied while I just stare out into space. When I have assigned this activity, students have typically taken 1-2 class periods to finish and then to play the game. I have the students make their own rules, make their own pictures on the game board, decide which information they want the game board to test students on, and decide on their own game board pieces. In short, I have the students basically do everything and I keep to high standards so that the students push themselves and I have maximal time to be able to sit back and watch the students take initiative on their own projects. My former students have made some rather elaborate games for me and they are frequently so fun to play that I have the students in each group take turns playing different games that have been developed over the course of the lesson.

Generally speaking, there’s a lot you can do with big poster paper. I’ve already mentioned that you can play games. Other things you can do is make movie posters, Humphrey Boghart style. You can have the students make their own modern art pieces, in the style of Picasso or Monet or Salvador Dali. You could have students diagram their own inventions and reward prizes for the most inventive piece. Or you could have the students make a diagram of the body or a diagram of their house or a diagram of your plans for life. In one Cambridge book I remember reading, *Personalizing Language Learning,* there was an activity where you would give students different traffic signs, from stop to go and to be careful and to even the most underused “Deer ahead,” sign. You would show the students all of these pictures and then you would have them draw a map that literally represents their entire life from birth to present with the different road signs to represent different milestones in their development. You could have the students do this, and extend the time that it takes to complete this task by providing markers and colored pencils and regular pens and pencils. You could enforce perfection and make sure that the students really fill in that detail to extend the time it takes to give this project. Finally, as frosting on the cake, you could have the students individually present their pieces to the class or have them present other students’ pieces to the class, or both. You could vote on the best life so far, and reward the student with the best life some candy. If you want to extend this activity even further, you could have students take turns and instruct their partners or groups of students how to draw their own particular life story on a map and then see if the students heard the instructions correctly.

You could put all of the life stories in a storybook album and then compare them across different classes and have the students vote for their favorite ones amongst the entire population of students in their grade or across the entire student body who did the activity. You could use the same signs that you taught the students for other activities as well. You can have students draw maps of places they like to visit or places they would like to go or imaginary islands. Afterwards, you could have the students talk about their activities while you sit back and listen. As you will find, there are many activities amongst the English teaching canon that could be extended almost indefinitely and when it comes to an activity using posters, there is an infinite supply of follow-up and add-on activities to accompany said poster activities. Other potential projects that you could with your students include making YouTube videos. In this era of overnight sensations being made, you could spark your students’ interest in the potential of them getting famous all over the world and then instruct them to make videos with the express goal to become famous overnight. The subject could be anything (within reason) and they would have *x-*number of classes to put the entire piece together, along with script. You could then assign a movie day where you and the rest of the class all watch the videos and then vote on the best one. You could even have an academy award day where you reward some students for best performance, or most dramatic. There are seemingly an unlimited supply of activities having to do with voting.

I have made many PowerPoints based on the games featured in the Cambridge Series, particularly the book entitled *Discussions that Work.* In this book, Penny Ur provides an entire section dedicated to just games where students can vote and I have found that voting games to be quite successful in my classes, particularly for me, when I need the students to focus on themselves and deliberate and haggle amongst each other while I relax. Many of my PowerPoints are featured online if you just search for my name “Toddsqui.” You can apply voting to most activities or structure them into most of your lessons. One game that I learned from the *Discussions that Work* book is the *Who Gets Eaten by the Minotaur* game. In this game, students are provided with the scenario that there are five women, all of whom have back-stories, each of which in turn has its own tad bit of scandal involved. All of the women are being sentenced and you, the judge, have to determine which of the four is the least deserving of a light sentence and thus get eaten by the minotaur. I made a powerpoint activity based on this game and submitted it to the Waygook website. Most of my fellow teachers in Korea found this scenario to be violent and offered some alternatives: Granting asylum to certain refugees, Who goes to prison. I like these alternatives as well. Regardless of which theme you go with, these activities can be real stress relievers if you perform them the right way. Mostly all you have to do is read the material, point and click on the powerpoint slides as you explain the scenario. Then, you can leave the students to do the discussion and then get back to you with their final vote. After the students have to determined the fate of the subjects, you can then ask them why they did what they did. There’s nothing more passive for a teacher than this activity because it places the responsibilty of talking and thinking directly on the student and allows you to take a break. There are other games like this as well. Another one is the *Choose Your Candidate* game, which is again taken from the Penny Ur book. In this game, students get to choose Mr. America or Woman of the Year or President of the Country or Ambassador of the Country or winner of an all-expenses paid trip to Hawaii based on information that they receive from contestants. In this game, you can divide students up into groups and choose their representative. The representative is going to be the candidate that is eligible to become Mr. America or whatever the reward is. Each group takes about 10-15 minutes to come up with a speech for the contestant, and to think of answers to possible questions that the other student body might ask. A panel of judges may also be selected to determine the winner of this game. After the 10-15 minute period is up, student representatives may be called to the front of the class and provide their speech, followed by a Q&A session with the rest of the students. After each representative has gone and given their best speech, judges can then determine the winner and the representative who wins the game can be given a prize, like candy or a big hug. This voting activity like the Minotaur activity is great for getting the students to take sole controle of the class and work amongst each other. It’s amazing how fast time flies when you’re doing an activity like this! Students will get right to work and really have fiery debates--sometimes even in English--over who deserves the reward or prize (in the case of the minotaur, it’s punishment).

There are so many voting-based activities that you can incorporate into your classes and weave throughout the semester. They’re not just confined to individual activities. You can virtually have students vote on everything, from worksheets to PPTs. If the students feel like what they are doing is a direct result of their own choosing, they’ll be more likely to do those activities and you’ll be able to take an increasingly passive stance in your class as they get to work on the activities that they chose. This is why I always try to bake voting into my classes because I know that voting will encourage students to be more in control of the direction of their education. I think one of the things that people don’t realize about teaching is that it’s a two-way relationship. Teachers very often don’t fail because they are bad teachers; rather, they fail because they didn’t establish a healthy working relationship with their students. At the end of the day, teachers will only be able to meet students wherever they are in their growth and development and eagerness to learn. You can only do so much to force students into doing the work that you want. Sometimes they won’t even want to do any of the work that you supply. In this case, you just have to meet them where they are and work with that (or not work with that). These days, I don’t work with students who refuse to do any work for me. It’s a futile effort. If the students are actively resisting the work for the class, I just allow them to do it and I move on with whatever it is that I have to do in my own life to make it better. I don’t push the students to do what I want them to do if I have seen them actively despising the English language. I let them hate it and be who they are going to be while I move on to more positive things in my life. Yes, there have been many classes where I just sat at my desk and did my own reading while the students rebelliously slept the whole time. It took me a long time to reach that point because I always wanted to help other people. But when I told my supervisors about their behavior and they just shrugged, I decided that it was a battle not worth fighting and i just decided to do my own work during that class. Will these sleeping students that I had come around at some point? I don’t know, but life is too short for me to be worrying about them. Like I said, you have to take care of yourself. Do what Tony Robbins suggests and seek pleasure and avoid pain wherever possible.

Giving your students choices whenever possible, even in a country where students are expected to follow the teacher, is not a bad idea. Actually, my experience in Korea, despite it being known for a country that respects elders, has been somewhat the reverse of what people normally say about it. Most of my students have never had a problem arguing with me and telling me that i’m wrong. They have ranted and raved and objected to many of the activiites that i have given them. They have openly requested to self-study during my class and some days they have even asked me if they could go use the bathroom, to which I have conceded, only to see them toward the tail-end of the class to which they explained that they had a really bad case of the runs. Some students have even had the audacity to request that they leave class to go play video games in the computer room. My Korean students have hardly ever shied away from telling me what to do. Maybe it’s because of my status within the school, my own teaching style, the changing times in Korea, or a mixture of these characteristics and others that I am not aware of, but whatever the case may be, it seems that the idea that korean students are somehow obedient to every word that a teacher says seems more myth than reality. Even during those times when I have put my foot down and told the students how I felt about their behavior, these times have been the absolute worst for me because it means that I have lost the trust in the students and they have come to resent me for making them do things that they don’t want. It ususually takes me more than a few weeks to win them back to my side and show them that I do care about how they feel, but that a compromise is needed in order for the both of us to move forward with our respective roles. When this happens, I usually end up expending more energy than I need to in order to win them back. Therefore, I am usually not willing to fight my students on classroom policy, wherever possible. It’s more trouble than it’s worth. If you’re fortunate enough to be in a country and community where students really do obey whatever the teacher says, then this conversation is moot and you consider doing virtually anything you want. Obviously, you should consider doing what’s in the best interests of the students while conserving your energy, but the task in doing this should be expontentially easier for you to achieve. If you are like me and have my experience, then you’ll obviously need to resort to strategies that will influence students into compliance. Like almost anything in life, you’re never going to be able to convince anyone to follow you unless you sway people by explaining things in terms of their worldview, their perspective. You have to meet your studetns where they are and reason with them from their angle or else the battle is completely lost. “Because I said so,” just never flew with me and my students, so I had to give them choices. Once students perceived themselves as having some choice in the matter of their education, then I could reason with them, first by saying that they had chosen their lesson and then reasoning with them further with yet more compromise: “Okay, so you wanted to do this activity and now you’re not interested in doing this. Let’s finish it anyway and then I will give you another selection.” When students were particularly rebellious, I truly had to reason at their level and be direct and like them. “Look, there are plenty of things that I do not want to do,” I told one student in my class one time. “I didn’t wnat to go to school either but I went. I did not want to do many of the activities. I would have much rather played video games, just like you, and not have gone to school.” I continued. “But in life, you can’t always do what you want to do. Sometimes, you have to do what other people want you to do. Don’t forget this,” I nearly warned. “You have to be able to please other people first and foremost before you can please yourself.” Please bear in mind that this was an English conversation class. I never thought in a million years that I would be having this conversation with a student who was at medium range of English proficiency. But here I was, acting like a little student and trying to show him what remaining young-kid-style humanity I had remaining in my body. I had to show this student that I still remembered being a student too and that I had similar emotions that he had, even it was a lie and I had always been a fantatsic student who graduated top 10 of my class and graduated summa cum laude from undergraduate school and magna cum laude from graduate school. What did this kid know anyway. I had to just continue to play along. By the time I had finished this spiel, the student was wholly convinced that i was right and we continued with this activity. It was stressful and energy-draining to have to go through this type of conversaiton and in hindsight, I could have saved myself a lot of effort by just giving the student the type and style of teaching that he wanted. And this is the lesson that I really want to drive home in this chapter for you. If your country and school community are anything like mine, then you’re going to want to maximize on your students’ ability to choose. Go to your class with a series of choices for the kids and have them vote on the activity that they want to do. Give them ultimatums and compromise. As long as the students perceive themselves as choosing their fate, they’ll be less likely to openly rebel and you’ll be in a better position to go through lessons without exacting any more mental strain to do so. That said, there are a few more activities that you can give to your students that will make them more active in your class. We already brought up voting activities. Other great activities that get your students busy is Clue activities. There are plenty of PowerPoint presentations floating around the internet today that are like the game Clue whereby students have to solve the whodunit question. These activities are very popular with students in Korea and they will likely be popular in other countries throughout Asia as well. These games are great because students can spend almost the entire class period working them out, expending all of the mental energy that they have to do them and then checking with you at the very end of the class for the answer. Another great activity to give to your students is the “Murder” game whereby you select one student as the detective and one student as the murderer. In this game, the student-as-detective leaves the room while you select a murderer who will wink at students to kill them. The detective will return to the class and ask students different questions of each student, trying to detect any sort of lying in their countenance. These questions can be super broad and irrelevant to the game, such as “what is your favorite color?” or they can be related to the game at hand, such as “where were you on the night of February 1st?” The questions will largely depend on the level of proficiency that you have. In any case, after or during questions, the killer can kill people and then the student can attempt to search and take three guesses at who the killer is. The beauty with this game, as with many of the other games that i have mentioned, is that this game is largely between the students and not the teacher After you’ve explained the rules--or gotten your co-teacher to do it if you have one--then the game can literally move forward on its own without your assistance. And if the students really get into this game, they can continue until the bell rings. This game can be done during the semester or in the winter camps that I have already mentioned and they are great time killers (no pun intended). Another great activity that you can give to your students, and which also happens to be mentioned in Penny Ur’s *Discussions that Work,* is “Arranging” games where you have students categorize words or concepts in a sequence, almost like a puzzle game.

When considering choices you can give to your students, there’s nothing more fun than arranging games. I have a series of powerpoint presentations that I made where all students have to do is arrange, arrange, arrange! One of the games, which is taken from the Ur book, is arranging the guests. In this scenario, students are at a dinner party and they are given profiles of several of the guests. Students are told what their personalities are like and what they do for a living. In this game, there’s usually a cross-section of characters, from a judge to a school teacher to a little brat who complains to her mommy all of the time. The students job is to arrange these guests at a dinner a party to ensure that everyone gets along and there is not a lot of in-fighting. This usually gets the students very busy, particularly if they’re above-average level of proficiency. Students will very frequently work through potential combinations like the activity is some kind of a rubics cube and then devise sentences that explain why they chose the way they did. This game is absolutely perfect for giving students an outlet to express themselves and to do most of the work for you. Another game that practically lends itself to self-teaching is arranged-marriage game. Again, this is taken from the Penny Ur book. In this game, students act as a marriage committee in a futuristic society where everyone needs to be married off and any couple that is getting a divorce needs to be re-coupled right away. Students are given a list of couples and the different problems that each couple if experiencing. The students then have to re-arrange the couples so that everyone is happy again. I’ve had much success with this game for the same reasons as the other game mentioned above. First of all, students love talking about relationships and couples so this game easily lends itself to all sorts of chit-chatter. Secondly, students love entertaining different arrangement of couples and figuring out the best match. I have very frequently delivered this game to classses as small as two and classes as large as 10 and it works the same. Sometimes it’s helpful to tell students to write down the information that you give to them via powerpoint or distribute worksheets that will remind the students of the different couples. This allows them to cross check their facts wiht their own memories to determine the best fit. I usually give the students about 15 minutes to deliberate before they render a decision and then I have them tell me why they chose the way they did. Sometimes the students will finish a lot sooner than I expected and then I will tell them to explain their reasoning. Usually, if their finishing of the activity is premature, they won’t be able to produce sentneces that explain their logic, and so back to the drawing board they will go until they can produce something for me. If they can produce sentences that explain why they chose what they did, I will have each student of a group contribute their thoughts. If I don’t understand what they are saying, I will tell the students as such and tell them that they have to go back to the drawing board and figure out logical sentences to give to me. After all, this is why I have been hired, isn’t it? To provide students with this kind of feedback (the invaluable feedback of knowing if a native English speaker can understand you or not). Sometimes students will give me clipped responses that just barely skim the surface and tell me the answer to their reasoning. In some cases, I will let this slide if the timing of the class is around exam time or their are some other unforeseen special circumstances (for example, I haven’t seen the students in two weeks due to a festival or some kind of a class trip). However, if I have seen the students rather consistently for weeks on end, I seldom tolerate clipped replies, such as “He is a firefighter,” to explain why they coupled, Bill, the Fireman, with Grace, the Nurse. I usually make the students come up with something more comprehensive and well thought out. Again, your needs may differ depending on what school you’re teaching in or what country you’re generally located in. For students in South Korea, in a high school setting, this is totally a normal expectation.

Another possible option, again taken from the Penny Ur book, is to have the students arrange animals in a zoo which functions similarly to the other games that I have already mentioned. With this particular game, it is important to give students a diaghram of the zoo so they can figure out where everything is and then determine visually from this point where everything should go (the flamingos with the iguanas, etc. etc.). These arrangement activities are absolutley perfect stress relievers for the teacher because they place sole responsibility on the student for making the class interesting and fun. If the students decide that they don’t want to partake in the activity, then it is entirely their fault for feeling that way. Personally, I have never had this problem. Most of my students have enjoyed these activities and engaged in them similarly to other lessons I’ve given in the past. There are still other arrangement activities that you can provide, most of which come right out of the Cambridge canon and can be applied to numerous classes where you don’t want to exert too much energy. For instance, you can have the students group words based on severity (e.g. tiny, small, big, large, collosal) or group them based on importance. You can have students use a randomly generated list of words and then have them determine their own categories. You can have the students generate sentences based on these random words that you’ve generated and make it into a game whereby the student who can’t think of a sentence is out of the game. Working with vocabulary is an absolutely wonderful way to get the energy off of you, particulalry if you’re working with vocabulary that the students have to learn. As a general rule, it will serve to your benefit if you can go over words that the students have already been reviewing because this provide some added incentive for students to be engaged with the class (since reviewing the vocabulary that they have to know for a test is never a bad idea).

Category games are extraordinary and I have used them extensively in my class. I’ve learned a lot about them from many books, but most of my activities derive from the Cambridge series. *Discussions that Work*, *Vocabulary Activities for Language Learners, Personalizing Language Learning,* and *Teaching One-to-One* all contain really great activities that you can use in your classes to keep the little tykes busy. Many of the activities I have mentiond here already. I will still mention a few more so that you can feel fully prepared. One activity that has worked really well for me is having the students draw out venn diagrams. I’ll have them write at the top of the venn diagram “Likes” and “dislikes” and then have them go interview other students and collect information. You don’t necessary have to perform this activity in a venn diagram. You can use a grid instead. Either way, getting the students up and out of their chairs and working with other students usually keeps the students busy for awhile. Once they finish interviewing at least two people, I will have them sit down and we’ll do a global feedback session whereby I have each student go around and tell me what they learned about their friends in this activity. Sometimes I’ll correct what they have to say if there is anything glaring, but usually I jut give the students an opportunity to exercise their mouth muscles and feel moe confident with the language they are trying to learn. This usually works really well for me. Another category game that I give to my students is writing random words on the board and then having students create their own categories based on the words that they see. To add further relevance, I will use words from the textbook that they are giving. Which reminds me, if you ever really want to conserve energy, use the textbooks that the students are using! Not only can you find great material from them, but students will usually feel more inclined to pay attention and follow your lead if you’re using material that they deem relevant to their lives. The textbook usually covers this base really well. Once the words have been written on the board,I will then have the students make their own categories. Sometimes I will model this but very often--particularly if you’re working with high school--you don’t need to model this at all and the students will work on this. Once they have created categories, I then charge the students with the responsibility of justifying why they chose the categories that they did. This usually compels them to speak further about their choices and I just sit placidly and listen to what they have to say. This can be a great warmup activity for students. Another great categorizing activity is to have the students create stories from the words that they are either using for their other classes or ones that you randomly picked from a textbook or some other source and then having the students generate a story a comic strip based on the words and then creating the stipulation that the students absolutely muse use all of the words in some way or context. It will help if you anticipate the difficulty that some of the students might have with using a select few words but this shouldn’t take you more than a few seconds to determine. For all intends and purposes, category games are what I call “set-it-and-forget-it” games, meaning that you basically give the instructions once and then get the students to work diligently on the activities for the remainder of the class while you take it easy. For activities like this, it might be helpful if you made use of classroom dictionaries, but it’s not always necessary. Personally, I love using dictionaries in my class for most of my activities. First of all, it prolongs the activities considerably while giving the students the extra discipline that they usually need to stay focused and learn new vocabulary. Dictionaries also giving students access to a range of words that might not otherwise be used in the classroom, which adds a little spice t the teaching. And finally, dictionaries allow the students to stay focused as they get more and more involved in the classroom activities with the more words they are able to use at their disposal. Sometimes, I will give students a worksheet and have them take some time to look up the words on the worksheet, again for the same reasons that i have listed above. It makes the activity longer while also giving the students that ol’ discipline again. If you don’t have dictionaries in your class, I highly recommend you ask someone to get them for you because they’ll give you that much more access to free time in your own class.

You can find a load of games like this in the Cambridge series, but if you don’t have the time to peruse the way I have, you can get easily accessible activities from various websites throughout the net, some of which I have listed in the appendix to save some space in this writing. As of publication, there are so many activities availalbe to you that you practically don’t even have to do any teaching anymore. You can just use the worksheets and literature that other kind people have created and published for you on open-source forums. I have had many weeks where i just didn’t have the desire in me to lesson plan based on the students needs. When this happened, I used websites to generate a list of activities to give to the students. Some aspiring English teachers will cry “blasphemy,” upon reading this. They’ll call me a fraud and a cheat and tell me that I am doing this teaching all for the wrong reasons. But I must insist that I am not writing this book for a singleminded English teacher with no other aspirations outside of teaching. I am writing this book for the renaissance people of the world who enjoy teaching but also recognize that there are other facets of their life that need to be met and that teaching just isn’t going to be the Eden for them to reach their larger goals in life. Like it or not, teaching English overseas isn’t the most sustainable of careers and wiht the way the market is going, the income is only going to stay the same or perhaps even get worse as the need for English teachers who teach English in English dries up in the markets. When this happens, it will be helpful for those English teachers--out of survival--to develop strategies to get their time back, to retrieve the willpower that they will surely need at the end of the day and to harness it toward their side hustle projects or other business ventures. It’s almost like a race that you’re losing, or being on some kind of a sinking ship. When I was in South Korea, it would always surprise just how much money English teachers would spend on some of the most inane products. Not that I am anyone to pass judgment, but I want to be clear that I am not trying to cater to English teachers who use their time outside of teaching to take lavish trips to Indonesia. I’m speaking primarily to the side hustlers of the English teaching world, of which there are many (I’m sure). But I digress. We’ve reached a point in time where you can almost always avoid reinventing the wheel when planning lessons. Even in the seminal work on lesson planning, in the Cambridge series, entitled *Lesson Planning,* the authors do make it clear that there is really no one right way of lesson planning. Some people will just write a list of words on a sheet and call that a “strategy,” while others will go more elaborate and create extensive bullet points that branch out into other bullet points ad infinitum. You can probably guess what my personal philosophy is with this lesson planning: take the path of least resistance. Lesson planning takes time and in my experience, even with rehearsal, will never be perfect. Things will bomb for many reasons, some of which are entirely out of your control. For example, the students feeling bad about a test that they took could lead them to hate your activity and then cause it to bomb. The truth is: you won’t always know why a lesson bombs, so the truth is that it’s in your best interest to just generate a list of activities and review with students (particularly during those weeks when you just don’t want to be bothered). Some might even argue that today what I am recommending is still too much work. And maybe they’re right. In the past, for example, I have hired VAs to handle a lot of my worklaod, from finding worksheets to making them themselves. I will explore this idea of outsourcing a little bit later, describing the whys and the whats and the wherefore.

There are many grammar-based games that you can give to students. Again, much of which is already supplied in the Cambridge series. Penny Ur has written extensively about grammar practice activities which I highly recommend you check out because they have literally saved me lots of time (after reading them of course). In my training program for teaching English, we learned the mantra of teaching form-meaning-use of any particular grammar structure. In South Korea, the students were already familiar with many words and grammar strctures and were just at the point where all they really needed was to be gently reminded of how they were formed (not necessarily what they meant). Therefore, I would structure many of my classes as review classes, even without having pre-taught any of the material. The students almost always knew how to form the grammar structures anyway!

Some grammar games however lend themselves to getting the students off your back while others are more work than they are worth planning them. Point blank, any grammar activity that involves you explaining the form and the meaning of the words does not belong in this book and I have excluded them. They are excluded because then this book becomes a teaching book with different activities that you can use for your classes. This is not the type of book that I am providing to you here. I am only looking to provide you with activities that will get the students off your back, that will allow you some rest time. Thus, any activity, grammar or otherwise, where you have to explain anything is completely against what I am trying to do here in the work of this book.

When looking for particular grammar activities that get the students’ attention off of you, ask your colleagues about what grammar structures they should know already. Run some sentences by them and ask them if the students will understand. If you get a confirmation that they do know the structures, then that is the greenlight for you to move forward and start considering the various activities that will get the students off your back. Use only grammar that the students are already familiar with and structure your lessons as a “Review with the Native English teacher” class. The students, and even the colleagues, will appreciate this especially since it may be argued quite forcefully that your job isn’t to teach new material but rather to help the students exercise material that they should have learned with the real translators. Once you’ve found a grammar structure to review, there are different types of activities that you can give to get the students busy: fill-in-the-blank, cloze activities, and word bank activities are probably the best types of worksheets that you can give to yoru students to get them to practie the form and meaning and use without you. It will literally take you 15 minutes to write a paragraph with blanks and then give it to the students. You don’t even need to decorate worksheets because most students will doodle on the worksheets no matter what you do and the pictures that you might wish to add to them don’t really add to the experience. It’s just extra work for you that you don’t need. Simply write a paragraph and take out some words. You can use a word bank if you wish or you can make it even harder for the students by not giving them any hints aside from telling them that the material is a review. For younger groups, you can make word searches with the missing words in the grammar structure or crossword puzzles with the structure in them. The more you provide material that is familiar to the students, be it because of a tes tthat they recently had to take or some activity that they recently did with another teacher, the more relevant the students will feel the grammar exercise is. You could literally use the book that the students are using and just make your own activities based on the book. And if doing this work takes up too much time, you could just farm out the work to someone in the Philippines who will do it for five dollars an hour. Using these sorts of activities with grammar is usually the best way to get the tykes off your back. Still, another type of activity that you can use is to have the students generate their own stories using the grammar structure, or have them read a passage and point out the structure for you. Some countries don’t encourage creativity so having students make their own anything is usually quite difficult if you don’t pre-teach what it is that they are supposed to do. If this is the case for you, I would strongly urge you to consider just giving a worksheet and having students derive the correct answer. Memory games are also spectacular for getting the students off your back, particularly in countries where raw human-derived memorization is considered the path to success. Getting the students to stretch their memories is an easy task to give to the students. Some students won’t be motivated unless you give them candy to do this. I would recommend giving them candy when this happens. It will take you less time in the long run and create less mental taxation too. There are several memorization games you can give to your students to keep them busy without you. One of them is a very popular game which I have lifted from the book *Recipes for Tired Teachers.* In this activity, you give each individual student a sentence strip with a sentnece on it. Each student needs to have at least one sentence strip and all of the sentence strips will tell a story of some kind. First, instruct the students to memorize the sentence. This usually takes about 5 minutes. You can go around and test different students to see if the sentence has crystalized in their minds. My students always loved when I did this. After the students have demonstrated their ability to memorize the words on their respective strip, you can then insturct the students to give you back the sentences. After that, you can tell the students that all of these sentence strips--the ones you’ll be holding--make a story and that it is the student’s responsibility to put the sentences in order so that they make a cogent and coherent story. Whenever I do this activity, it usually takes a whole chunk of time for the students to figure out what words mean and what each member of the group is saying. It forces the student to come to terms with their accents and how their communication might be perceived as either effective or ineffective. If you want to make this activity even longer, you can mandate that the students only speak in English and not their mother tongue. To make the activity much longer, you can mandate that students are not allowed to write the words down on paper. And of course, the larger the class you have, the easier it will be for you to break students up into groups and create a competition for which group can produce the story whole again in the least amount of time. I have had much success, so much success in fact that I have a whole stockpile of sentence stories ready to go in the event that I just don’t feel like teaching that day and will usually dispatch to the students to continually practice their memorization skills.

Still another game is the random word list game which is so beautifully simple and elegant in its execution. In this game, you choose random words to put on the board. They can be based on words that the students have already been going over or they can be of your own choosing, ideally based on words that the students will be familiar with (you can double check with your colleagues just to make sure that the students are familiar with these words). Put the words all over the board and then have the students look at the words around the board (Break them into groups if you have a large enough class). Give them about fifteen seconds to do so, and then immediately erase the words from the board. Afterwards, have the students try to recall the words from the board, either by writing them down on paper or saying them. You can make a game out of this activity by having each group take turns providing one word that they remember until they can’t continue anymore. You can continue playing this game in multiple rounds to see how far the students can go. This activity doesn’t usually take that long. If you want to extend it, you could distribute a worksheet with a story on it and have the students speed read the words before collecting the papers again. Then, you could have the students in groups attempt to recreate the story in their own words and possibly embellish on the words to make the story more fun. There are also websites which you can use for story prompts. Storytimed.com is a great website where people can go to upload their own stories and have others contribute. One option for an activity is to read the stories to the students (which usually takes only about five minutes) and then have the students recall the story and then continue it. You can even have the students tell you the story from what they can recollect and then have them continue it. Although this would technically make the activity more hands-on (for you), it still places most of the responsibility on the student to produce as opposed to the teacher. You could literally flash anything in front of the students and then take it away from them to see how much they can remember. You can flash picture stimuli, from magazines or newspapers or websites. You can flash words or drawings, and you can even have the students stare at a student and then close their eyes while that student changes his appearance and then have the students look again and see which part of the student was changed. One of the most popular flash-type games is called “Kim’s Game,” whereby you take a bag of different goodies, from pencil cases to erasers and gum and thumb tack and whatever other random objects you can muster. You show the students this random assortment of objects for a few seconds and then cover them up afterwards. The students are then charged with the responsibility of writing down as much of the medly as they can remember. This usually takes about half the class if it’s a 45 minute period. Sometimes even more and you don’t have to do much of anything at all!

One of the most popular games for memory if you’re working younger children is the “Going on a Picnic” game whereby students going around in a circle and provide one word that starts with a certain letter in the alphabet. The task is to remember all of the words that each student says in alphabetical order and those who forget are out. When I have done this game, sometimes students will help each other and thus make it a non-competitive game. If you have to monitor the game to make sure there are no cheaters, than technically you’re not getting the students off of your back and so the game is ill-advised. I would only give this game to students who can compete properly. Of course, with every game it’s important to provide the rules, but if the students can help themselves, then initiating a quieter game is probably better. And speaking of quieter games, playing memory with the students is a great quiet game that will get the students activating their short term memories. Sure, there’s a little prep involved with making the cards but once you have them made, you can reuse them over and over again. If I don’t have the time to make the cards myself, I’ll usually run the idea by one of my colleagues and recruit their help in making the cards. Of course, if they don’t have the time to help and I don’t have the time to do them, I just don’t initiate the game and I move to another one. One really great game that I have played with students is the memorize-this-text game. Although this partiuclar activity isn’t a favorite among students, it’s a favorite for me because it’s fast, requires little or no prep, and it can take the whole period. It’s a bit active because you have to interact with the students in the game, but it doesn’t require extraneous talking or shouting. It’s ideal for smaller groups. Basically, all you have to do is take a sample text, be it a poem or some famous stanza, and write it on the board for the students to read. Ideally, it should be about 12-15 lines of text. Show the students and have them read the text. Once finished, erase 3-5 words from the board and then have one student read the text again, this time replacing each missing word with the correct word. Once the student is finished, erase another 3-5 words and continue like so until the entire piece is completely gone and the students have to recite the entire piece from memory. As I have already mentioned, this isn’t exactly a set-it-and-forget-it piece because you’re still engaging with the students, but I do consider this a helpful game for conserving yoru energy and willpower because like so many of the other games I have already mentioned, this one requires very little talking. In fact, I have done this game many times without speaking so much as an entire sentence because this game is just so easy to explain. All you have to do is literally erase the words and have the students repeat the poem, and the students will automatically know what it is that they have to do. No prep activities are the absolute best for conserving your energy in the off hours when you would otherwise be lesson planning. One of my favorite poems to give for this particular activity is the Cross Poem by Langston Hughes which is just 12 lines long. I originally found this poem in the *Grammar Games* book by Mario Rinvolucri, a prolific author who has long been contributing super helpful EFL books for teachers the world over. This activity typically takes the whole class period. Some teachers might question the educational relevance of this activity, but you can easily justify it if the sample writing in question includes some kind of target word or phrase that the students have had to be responsible for on a test or a lesson in their other classes. Another game I like to play with large groups, particularly of young students, is a variation on the memorize-random-words game I described earlier in the chapter. I break students up into groups of 3-4 if the class is large enough and I have each student write ten random words on a sheet of paper. The words cannot be related to each other (e.g. such as a series of numbers or different body parts). They have to be ten random words. Sometimes I’ll give the students dictionaries for this activity. Having the students generate their own list of random words will usually take about 5 minutes +/- 2 depending on their level of proficiency. Once the students are finished with writing their own words down on paper, I then instruct the students to memorize the words on their paper. I give them about five minutes and very often will go around the room and test different students to see if they have memorized the words or not. Once I feel like a sufficient number of students have memorized the words, then I instruct a member of whichever group is going first to select a member from another group. The student selects one of the students. I then ask to borrow the list of words from the student who has been selected and I give that list to the other student who did the selecting. I then tell the selected student to recite from memory all of the words that he wrote down on his paper. If the student recites the words perfectly, then that student achieves points for his team and if he doesn’t, then the group that selected him gets the points. Subtraction may or may not occur for whichever team is on the losing end. I really love this activity because it can be a really powerful motivator for students who would otherwise find their language classes super boring. Although this activity is very similar from the poem activity that I described just one paragraph ago in that you have to remain a participant in the exchange, it nevertheless requires very little talking from you and all you have to do is go around the room and volunteer students to do the selecting. Eventually, if you get a good rhythm going for the activity, the lesson will take care of itself and the student will just start taking care of the activity on their own and doing without you telling them to. This is exactly what you want to have happen in your class, for this activity and virtually all of the others that are described for you in these pages.

I have had nothing but success with this game. Sometimes I’ll give candy as prizes and sometimes we’ll just play for fun, and the game almost always goes over well. One variation of this activity is to have the selected student close her or his eyes and then attempt to recite objects that she or he remembers seeing in the room, or from the picture. I’ve seldom done this activity because it can be a bit awkward making the students close their eyes, but if you have a group of students who eagerly follow your instruction, then you can probably make this variation work for you. For smaller groups of students, sometimes I give each student a magazine clipping that features a very detailed picture. If I don’t have magazines, I just make a print out or use the textbook that the students are responsible for. I have each student study their picture and then write questions about that picture. Once they are finished, each student takes turns showing their picture to the group of students for about 15 seconds. They then remove the picture from sight and proceed to ask the rest of the students questions about that picture. Students who answer correctly get one point and the student with the most points gets a reward. I have done this activity for students at a special technical high school which worked out great. This activity easily lasted the whole class and the only instruction I had to give was at the beginning when the students weren’t familiar with the game and needed to learn the rules. After giving these instructions, of course, it was smoothing sailing. One activity for even smaller groups is the “What are you wearing?” activity whereby you get two students to face each other and study their appearance for about fifteen seconds. Then, you have them turn around and stand back to back while they take turns adjusting their appearances. Give the students about fifteen minutes to do this and then have them face each other again. In the final step, have the students attempt to point out the change in appearance. Some caveats are worth noting about this game: (1) If the students are wearing uniforms, it can be difficult to make the activity tricky; (2) There is a tendency for students to be super-tricky, to the point that it is virtually impossible to figure out the change (for example, when a student slightly adjusts his or her suit button or makes a little tweak to their tie.) Instead of waiting for this to happen, make sure to explain during the rule-giving portion of this activity that subtleties are not allowed and then provide an example for why this is the case. This activity doesn’t usually last very long at all--15 minutes at the most if you have a very small class, since the activity tends to get boring very quickly. I would recommend doing this as a warm-up and prelude to other activities for the class. At least for Korea, some of the most successful memory games involve trivia or some variation thereof. Any simulation of a game show where students are contestants who are responsible for learning random inane facts about the world will usually go over well, but only if you’re using facts and information that the students will definitely know about. this can be tricky since news is super cultural bound, but you can mitigate this possible issue by first asking your colleagues about where they get their news from, or even better, taking a PPT from one of the EFL websites and just checking with another teacher if the questions are fair to ask of the students.

Many of the games that I have already mentioned pages ago will work well in trivia format. Sometimes with trivia based activities, I’ll either introduce the passages of information that students have to be familiar with in order to play the game or sometimes I’ll just review past information and get straight to the game. Of course, students prefer being able to play the game straight away rather than consume information before playing the game. Of course, I prefer the students familiarizing themselves first with the information and then playing the game afterwards and normally I’ll do this by either giving the students a worksheet to read over or I will show them a powerpoint slide with the infromation on it and time their reading. There will be some stragglers invariably in this activity, but I accept this and normally mitigate the risk of students feeling bad about themselves by giving special attention to those students who are behind, all while rewarding those students who are good at reading with extra smiles and congratulatory remarks. Once the students are finished reading, then we proceed with the trivia based game and there are a range of them of course. The games with the least amount of work on your part is invariably going to be Jeopardy which basically only requires that you flip whatever cards the students choose to answer. If you do decide to play Jeopardy, make sure that you are giving special attention to the level of difficulty. You will really only be able to truly assess this once you get to know the students a little bit better. Once you have figured them out, then you can determine a level of difficulty that is within their range and provide some really challenging questions on the Jeopardy game. The trick is to hit that sweet spot with the questions where the students feel the challengingness of the question without being completely disconcerted by the level of difficulty. In some Jeopardy games, I have often provided what I thought were really challenging questions only to discover that they were quite easy for the students. What ended happening was that the students would go directly to the super-challenging questions and then answer them correctly right away and thus totally defeat the excitingness of the game. In other instances, I’ve played Jeopardy games where the questions was so hard that the students not only gave up on the game, but they also started to feel bad about themselves and very nearly required counseling afterwards in order to feel better about their improvements in the language. This is very sensitive work, mind you, and you have to be extra aware of whether you’re hurting students or causing them to feel at the other end of the spectrum, which is over-confident and feeling like they don’t need your services anymore. Either case is totally bad for you, so hitting the medium sweet spot is going to be part of the challenging work of making these activities work for you.

Another trivia-based activity that I have played is Wheel of Fortune which is basically a glorified hangman game with a special wheel that students can turn for points (or lose them, depending on their fortune). Still another activity is a bomb game whereby students choose letters on a slide. These letters contain a question about the material and if they get the question right, then they are eligible to select one of three options of prizes, one of which contains a bomb that could evaporate all of the team’s points. I learned how to play this game from a Korean co-teacher that I had who apparently had had years’ worth of experience in working with English teachers, for she had some rather ingenious ways to cut corners in the lessons that even I thought were rather thrifty. This particular activity has always been exciting for the middle school students, with or without candy, and has involved very little of me in the lessons.

There are also digitized versions of Connect Four floating around the internet which you can use, with the stipulation that students answer trivia questions correctly first before being able to select the spot that they want their chip to go in. Ditto with most board games that are out on the market. There are digitized versions of Clue, Monopoly, Checkers, Chess, Snakes and Ladders, Foiled, and Candy Land. All of these games can be trivia-ized and made into a trivia game. You can use your own cards for these types of games or you can embed the questions directly into the PPT and have the students work at it. The board games almost always take the whole period to do and I will frequently forego introducing any material for these such games because I realize how long it takes to just explain the rules of these games. When it comes to playing trivia-based board games, I would only advise doing them if you have a highly active co-teacher who is willing to translate on your behalf, or, short of having a communicative co-teacher like this, I would recommend getting your instructions translated into the mother tongue language so that you don’t get stuck trying to do a song and dance about the rules of the game and you can just get straight to the game.

Perhaps you’re thinking that setting these games up is a lot of work. And you would be right in thinking this if you assume that you’re doing this all on your own. But who says you have to? I have used Fiverr.com and UpWork to hire many of the best PPT-makers on the planet, for just a small modicum of money to make some rather dazzling PPT presentations that have lasted me literally months. Some PPTs only cost me $10 USD, at the time of this writing, and the most expensive (for 200 slides, let’s say) cost me $100 USD. Most people would consider this expensive, but I would rather spend money to save myself time in the long run then to be stuck making all sorts of games for students that I won’t see ever again. And given that English teaching is a particularly unpredictable profession (i.e. you need to be the type of person to keep your whits about you and leave at a moment’s notice if ever you’re not wanted anymore), I do not invest all of my time in lesson planning. And as I have already mentioned a few pages ago, there’s no one right way to lesson plan. At least according to the authorities over at Cambridge (see *Lesson Planning* in the Cambridge series). Thus, it’s a small investment in my opinion to be spending money on these PPTs that will save you time and energy to do other things.

Aside from the trivia powerpoints, again, you can always refer back to the card games and other physical brick and mortar games to get you through. Card games can almost always be turned into trivia games if you play your cards right (pun unintended), although in my experience making the card games into trivia games requires a lot of unnecessary enforcement of the rules since students will likely try to cut corners by speaking in their mother tongue or completely skipping the trivia part. Use your judgment. If you think the students can handle the level of independence that card games call for, then by all means try card games out. You could, for example, make separate trivia cards to with the Uno Cards and have students draw from them after every round, or pick one up after one student has to draw four. Korean students also taught me a variation of Uno called “One Card,” which also proved equally as fun and which I have since incorporated into other classes (Google “One Card game”). All of these games are great for testing memory, be it long term or short term. I encourage you to experiment to see which types of trivia games will be the most successful to your students while at the same time giving you the most vacation time in your head.

Another favorite activity that I like to do for fun is music-making. My background is in musical theater, after all, and I spent a good part of my education either singing other people’s songs or when I wasn’t doing that, making up my own songs just for fun. There are many students who love music, although not necessarily to make it themselves. You’ll have to gauge whether you have the type of personalities in your class who can hold up such an activity and make it successful. The premise for this activity is rather simple. Show the students some rhyming words that they should be familiar with at their level of proficiency. Have them offer their own examples of rhyming words. Then, play a song that has some rhyming words in it and then instruct the students that you want them to make their own song. It can be a rap song, or a country song, or some other type of song, but they have to make it at least two minutes and it has to be creative. You can have the students vie for a creativity reward or candy and see which group of students come up with the most creative rendition. I enjoy this activity a lot because I literally get paid to enjoy fresh entertainment that I will not be able to see in the movies or on YouTube. I don’t have to do anything for this activity except enjoy the company of the students.

If you’re feeling really ambitious, you can film the performances and upload them to social media (with permission from the parents and the school community, of course) and see how many views you get from around the word, plus comments. Many teachers have already started doing this, to surprisingly wonderful results. You’d be surprised just how much the students can come up with on their own and in the best moments, can be really inspiring for you, the teacher, to watch as students, uninhibited, do an amazing Maroon 5 rendition or something from their local band.

But in returning to the subject that is this book, hopefully you have come away with some actiivites that can really serve you in conserving your energy. And if you get only one lesson from this book, please let it be the the following: **reviewing material** is the easiest way to get the little tykes off your back. It’s true. Hear me out on this.

You can review material that you have gone over ad infinitum if you think the students haven’t understood it the first time, or you can even go over material that they might have learned from other teachers. It amazes me how many teachers walk into a an EFL classroom and expect the students to be tabula rasa and have very low levels of proficiency. I mean, unless you’re teaching Elementary students, I think it’s a fair assumption that students as high as middle school will come in with a whole inventory of words that they have learned from prior years of learning. You can use Getting to Know You activities to gauge just how much your students know and then use the information that they know to review that material. You can ask your co-teachers as well and maybe peruse the textbooks that the students are going over to see what kinds of English they are supposed to know for class. Of course, the textbook isn’t always a great barometer for how much your students are going to know (there are afterall many false-starters and some students might have some learning disabilities to take into consideration) but you can use the textbook as a rough sketch of what it is that the students might be working on and then use that material in easy and unique ways. Of course, it is always always always a great idea to gamify your lessons whenever you can. This will always go over well with young people who are in cultures where competition is thoroughly encouraged. Other countries may not be as susceptible to this, but if not, that works to your benefit because then you can jut provide worksheets and other more academic tasks for the students to do and then your class just becomes an exercise in work-management. Now I would be remiss if I didn’t tell you that sometimes you’re going to get a lot of busy work in lesson planning, but you don’t have to leave that work to yourself to do. You can ask other English teachers for material that they’ve used and which have been a success in their own class. If you don’t have anyone around to do that, you can ask on popular Facebook message boards, and in the worst case scenario, you can log onto Fiverr.com and literally pay someone 10 USD to make worksheets for you. There are plenty of freelancers online as of 2015 who are looking to help teachers with their work generating and if your salary as an English teacher is in the 2000 USD range—as of 2015—then you are definitely capable of outsourcing a lot of your lesson planning to other people to save yourself some time. If you’re in the middle east teaching English, there should be very little work that you *aren’t* outsourcing since you’ll be making well over 2000 USD as take-home pay. Obviousy, as the teaching profession develops and requires a vastly different skillset from previous years, you’re going to want to hunker down on doing as much information-gathering as you can on your prospective school to figure out what exactly the students have been reviewing and most importantly, whether there are any hacks or cutting corners available to you that you might not have considered. Always remember that opportunities multiply as they are ceased so you are encouraged to be like a sponge and absorb as much as you can from those who have taken your path in previous years—as there will undoubtedly be some. As of 2015, there is really nothing that cannot be found if you don’t look hard enough and rest assured, there will always be hacks. I don’t have statistics on the origins of hacks in the teaching profession, but I’m willing to bet that hacks have been around since time imemoriam. While we are on the subject of outsourcing, getting yourself a general VA to look up information is never a bad idea as a strategy for getting the little tykes off your back. You can have your VA do so much for you then the people in your own office can barely do for themselves. For instance, you can hire a VA on upwork to do some of the research that I’ve already described in the previous paragraphs. You can have them look up reviews of the schools that you are going to be entering for your next job. You can have them look up other VAs who will make worksheets or powerpoints. You can hire a VA to find other former employees of the school that you presently teach at. You can use a VA to look up valuable resources for teaching material or to look for teaching material that is similar to the one that you’re going over. It’s almost reminiscent of the A.J Jacobs book where the author outsources his entire life, but it’s such a truism these days. You can literally outsource your entire life and almost no one would ever notice as you sit back at your desk and chill out over a cup of coffee. If you aren’t making enough money to hire a VA as an English teacher, then you might want to address why this is and consider maybe another school. I remember teaching in Mexico and earning pesos that were barely enough for me to buy a hot chocolate every morning. I left this situation because it just wasn’t sustainable. If the working situation isn’t sustainable enough for you to outsource, then it’s probably not sustainable enough to live on and unless you’re living on some kind of a trust fund, I wouldn’t consider you taking this route unless you’re planning on multiple careers in different professions and can take a few jobs working remotely. This isn’t a bad idea, but just know that you’ll necessarily have to do that if you’re working in a country that cannot afford to pay you the lavish salaries of the East.

I remember sitting with a fellow English teacher for coffee. I was in South Korea at the time and this particular English teacher whipped out his laptop and proceeded to show me a collection of lessons that he had prepared for his students. One after the other, he showed me one lavish PPT production after another. One PPT was on types of crimes and different procedures that takes place when a person is apprehended. In this particular PPT he had a list of different activities that accompanied a worksheet. Students had to match crimes with the punishments, they had to do a word search, they had to point out the crimes in embedded videos that this particular teacher had forked from the internet. Students had to arrange the lists of crimes and then label the different categories. In short, this particular PPT was astonishingly detailed and far better than anything I ever could come up with. At that moment, I hired this English teacher on the spot to handle all of my PPT woes. I had no regrets about this because I knew that he would save me time. Because I was good friends with this particular English teacher, he volunteered to give me his PPTs for free so that I could use them. And use them indeed. The entire PPTs lasted at least a month and allowed me to sit back and relax as the students diligently went through the lessons to understand procedural law, using the English language as a guidepost. It was wonderful!

The point I am trying to make here is that if you’re going to make lavish PPTs and other worksheet materials, the least you can do to ease some of the strain of getting paid a set amount from your job is to offer to do this type of service for other clients, vis-à-vis the numerous freelancing sites that are on the market today. You could offer to make PPTs on Fiverr.com for five dollars, for example, and include numerous add-on services to go with your initial five dollar offering. You could offer to make tailor-made English videos and sell them through fiverr or Etsy-type sites, or perhaps even make your own service and start marketing it through popular English websites or popular English-teaching blogs. One trap that English teachers often get themselves into is the thought that “it is my work, so I should keep it to myself and not share it with those other greedy teachers who get something for nothing.” At least this has been the mentality of many hard-working English teachers. I personally think this mentality is wrong because while it’s true that you’re giving teachers a way out of the hard work that you’ve clearly given up for yourself, there are nevertheless untold dividends to be offered if you do put your work on display for others and get that exposure that could lead to other opportunities down the road. This is not to say that I want to appeal to your greedy side and promise you that there will be other opportunities for being overly generous with your work, but I will say that you are doing far more for the benefit of the community if you do offer your services and promote the idea of sharing so that other teachers can follow your lead and do the same for you somewhere down the road. I suppose it all comes down to karma and spreading the good karma in this rather small industry. Many teachers don’t believe in it, but I do. I definitely think there is a karma that spreads and that if you’re generous, people will be generous to you in return. I’ve seen it happen.

We’ve covered a lot of ground in terms of getting the little tykes off your back. But there is still one more area to be covered. And that’s the area of actual, real-life lessons. Sure, there are many activities that you can do to get the students busy and offer your back. We’ve already discussed games as being really useful tools for keeping the little tykes busy: board games and PPT games being prime among them. We’ve also discussed using various types of activities that involve playing with words, creating categories, and doing some improvisation work with your students. There is only one last thing that we need to cover and that’s that fateful day when you actually have to give a lesson. Yes, it’s true, at some point you’re going to have to give an actual lesson, with a whole body that includes a beginning, middle, and an end. You’ll have to introduce vocabulary maybe or some grammar structure, maybe do some gesticulations to articulate the type of English that you’re trying to capture (the scenarios, contexts, and so forth) and then provide activities for the students that get them to practice, be it conversations that they perform in front of you or worksheets where they just ingrain the patterns of English in their mind through writing. Thankfully, there are still some ways for you to cut corners when you do actually have to give a lesson and I will certainly outline some of these strategies for you here before ending this chapter. Firstly, we live in an era where everything has already been done for you. So if you think you have to develop a lesson plan from scratch, think again. Linguahouse.com for example has many wonderful lesson plans and worksheets and videos that you can use for your classes. You don’t need to do anything except use these lessons or assess whether you think the ideas for the lessons will be interesting. You just fork the lessons and then use them at will, allowing the material to be conveyed through you while the students eagerly respond to the different stimuli that are part of the lesson. Busyteacher.org, as of this writing, is another invaluable resource, as is ESLPrintables.com and teacherswhopayteachers. All of these websites provide you with lesson plans and worksheets and PPTs and all sorts of little trinkets that you can use for your classes. I’ve used all of them and it has been years since I even developed a lesson plan from scratch since virtually everything I need is online. The other thing to keep in mind is that social media groups have also burgeoned all over the net. By 2020, 5 billion people will be using the internet. The scary thing to think about is that there may be a group of English teachers somewhere in the world who are making and generating content for each other on a regular basis, and you wouldn’t ever know about them. You could live your whole life without ever knowing about this group of diligent little English teachers because the internet, and by extension the world, is just so vast and truly beyond the comprehension of anyone in particular. It’s like when you try to count stars and you give up after counting to ten. The internet is just so vast, and social media groups are ever expanding the way the universe is, that you are likely to find something that will be more than useful to you in terms of delivering content to your students. You don’t need to reinvent the wheel when the material is ready for the taking. You just have to reach out and look for it. Or hire a VA to do it for you. Just remember, you have to introduce the material, maybe with some demonstration of how it is used, along with media stimuli. Provide students with a way to practice that language, and then apply some of the activities above to get the little tykes off your back. And then maybe review at the end, if there’s time. It’s really that simple. Now if you happen to have stumbled upon a really unique topic and you are just strapped for finding some PPT or video or worksheet on that topic—super rare but entirely possible—then I would advise that you make a rough sketch of what it is that you’d like to have happen and then either outsource it to some staff in the Philippines to spruce up your topic or if you have the time, when all else fails and you’re strapped for cash, do it yourself. But if you’re going to do it yourself, start small, don’t be ambitious, and test out a minimal version of your potential topic on the students first to see if they are taken with the topic. If they are, then you can build up further and if the students don’t like the topic, then you’ve learned something valuable about your lesson idea. Don’t spend over an hour on a lesson that you haven’t tested yet. Test first and then fill out the lesson plan later.

Unfortunately, discussing how to plan a lesson is beyond the scope of this book, but *Lesson Planning* is a great book that describes what you can do to prepare for your classes and serve the most successful delivery of material possible. When I was teaching in South Korea, I would have open classes whereby I would have to prepare an entire lesson to be reviewed by fellow native English teaching colleagues and native Korean staff alike. During this particular class, people would review my work and then offer me some feedback as to how I could improve on the lesson and my teaching overall. It was a great time to get outside support and assistance because teaching English can often be a solitary endeavor if you’re not surrounded by other teachers who are doing similar things as you are. Before every open class, my teachers used to make me write out the script to the class. I remember at the time thinking that it was a waste of time and energy, really taxing on my resources. But I did it anyway out of obedience and what started as a begrudging task turned into a learning opportunity, an opportunity for me to realize just how much energy I could save in advance if I just planned accordingly. I’m not saying that you should write a script for every class that you teach, but I am suggesting that some lesson planning may go a long way in helping you conserve more of your energy for the long haul. Whether you make the material yourself or outsource, having a well-prepared lesson can often be the difference between a stressful class and one that is executed with ease and grace. However, at the end of the day, you’re going to have to figure out what works best for you. Some teachers will create a laundry list of things to do for their students while other teachers were be more elaborate and created bulleted lists that are nested within other lists which in turn are nested with other lists as well. Whatever you decide to do, give yourself at least enough time to consider your classes before you enter them. Consider what would be best and ask around for assistance where you can. So to conclude this chapter, there are many ways for you to conserve your energy and willpower while teaching. You can provide students with games that you fetched from popular EFL websites or you can play board games and card games and just monitor the activities every so often. Finding material should never be a problem for you since there are just so many groups and support networks for this sort of thing. You can take advantage of sites like Waygook.org (being ever mindful for some trolls and not taking their criticisms to heart) or you can go on to popular Facebook groups and other social media outlets. Knowing fellow native English teachers in real life can obviously be super helpful as they will likely have a similar reference point for teaching and will guide you toward activities and assignments that have worked for them. Knowing other English teachers can pose a perfect opportunity for exchange which in turn will cut the work by almost half if you’re paired with the right English teachers. If you find that a particular English teacher just doesn’t deliver and is more of a moocher than a giver, than do not hesitate to find other English teachers who take their job more seriously. Trust me when I say that they are out there in the world. Find them, befriend them, and help each other out to mitigate the experience of being tired all the time. To combat it. Several activities which have long been a hallmark and staple of the English teaching profession is the worksheet. More specifically, the crossword puzzle, word search, and fill-in-the blanks have been used by English teachers for decades to get other students to practice the four domains of language fluency: reading, speaking, listening, and writing. As of 2015, there are several websites that will generate these sorts of worksheets for you for free. You just have to plug in the words and phrases that you’d like to use the and the website generator will do all of the rest. The worksheets that were listed in this chapter are also in the back of the book! If for whatever reason you find yourself strapped for time, you can always recruit Vas on Fiverr and UpWork to do the work for you. Just show them the words and then the type of worksheet that you want and then get the worksheet made. I usually don’t go this route, personally, unless I know that whatever material this particular VA is going to generate will lead to literally weeks upon weeks of excess free time for me to do other things. Believe it or not, this has happened repeatedly, as I hire and farm out many of my job responsibilities to other VAs. I’ve had several PPT designers make me PPTs that have been able to use over and over again in my own classes to the point where I often forgot what I was being paid for!

You should not be afraid to farm out your various responsibilities or somehow feel ashamed about it. As you should know by now, learning to delegate is a very important responsibility that English teachers are rarely told that they need to do. And yet, at any level of teaching, there are always going to be ways to cut corners and get the work done in half the time with little stress or energy. In order to appreciate the full experience of what English teaching is all about, ironically, you often have to give up some important tasks to be able to have time to yourself and observe what’s going on around you. Some websites where you can hire extra help for a really affordable price: Fiverr.com, Freelancer.com, and UpWork (formerly Elance and oDesk). My primary experience in hiring is with fiverr and upwork and I can tell you that I’ve had mostly positive experiences. In working with anyone, it’s important to make sure you have all of your expectations up front. Some people recommend that you interview all of your potential hires. Personally, I think this is a good idea if you’re working with UpWork because it saves time in the long run in that it keeps you from having to clarify issues and repeating yourself. On the other hand, if I’m looking for a one-off job, I will usually resort to Fiverr.com and bypass all formalities for an interview (Fiverr.com just isn’t designed in the same way that UpWork is). For repeat employees, interviews are necessary. When you interview, make sure that the freelancer can be seen on camera. Assess whether they have command of the English language and whether these are people who seem personable and confident. If this is someone you think you’d want to work with, then put them in the “follow up” pile.

People make a big deal about hiring staff, but it really doesn’t have to be a big deal, especially when you’re just hiring people to put together a decent powerpoint presentation or some worksheet. In most cases, you can just go directly to hiring someone and see what they produce. If you like it, you hire the person again and if you don’t like it, then you move on. Sure there is some level of risk involved in doing this sort of thing but I would rather incur the risk of hiring a potentially awesome PPT-designer then to incur the risk of waiting around and hoping for divine inspiration to hit me when I least expect it. The former plan is full-proof while the latter plan is not. Just start hiring people. You’ll contribute to the economy while also saving yourself a lot of time and energy.

Aside from worksheets and PPTs and outsourcing and board games, keeping organized is also critical to your success in getting the little tykes off your back. You have to constantly be on top of what’s going on in your school community and pressing people for details. Make following-up your mantra, along with good documentation. It will save you from stressing in the long run when people get on your back about not realizing that you had a winter camp coming in the following week or that you were supposed to plan a lesson for the day when no one had said anything about being required to attend school on a holiday. Actually, very often it's the students who will be the most genuine and honest bunch of the entire school community, and the teachers are the ones that you'll have to look out for. Don't be afraid to reach out to the students themselves and ask them what's going on in the community. Sure, some teachers might think this is incredibly unprofessional and that it demeans your authoritative presence within the school, but no one really has any reservations about what you're doing in the school, except maybe you. At least usually. Sometimes it's clear. Sometimes you're in the school to do some major pedagogical stuff, but sometimes you're just there to babysit and look foreign. You'll have to assess what your status is within each school before determining how you're going to act. Many first time teachers often feel like they are going to change the school community wth their teaching. However, years of literature on the Peace Corps has shown that this is not only impractical, but it's unrealistic. No one is going to welcome you with open arms until they determine that you're non-threatening. And even then, you're still going to end up doing a lot of the fun activities that you did even after you start feeling comfortable with your students. Further, if you come into the school with some grand mission to get the students fluent in less than three months, you're bound to be disappointed. Be open and receptive and ask a lot of questions, while keeping documentation about who said what.

When you follow up with teachers and they give you set dates, make sure to put those dates in your Evernote planner or whichever planner you use so that you won't be surprised. Remember that the more you know in advance, the easier it will be to get the little tykes off your back. And finally, there are many resources you can use to do the work for you. You can create your own worksheets or take them from other people on message boards and websites. If you don't have the exact authentic thing that you are looking for, and you don't want to spend the energy making it yourself, then you can farm out the task to someone on Fiverr.com who will likely do the task for you at only a fraction of what you're being paid. Earn a lot of money and then spend a modicum of it on outsourcing your work to other people to significantly reduce the burn rate of your energy and willpower. You won't regret it.

If you're stuck, please visit the resources in the back of this book to get you to a place of solutions. There are so many resources on the net that it can be overwhelming just pouring through them all to find what you're looking for. You can use up all of your energy and willpower for days just looking for the appropriate material. When this happens, I either court people's recommendations or I just go ahead and make my own, outsourcing the grunt work for other people to do. I've done this so many times that it has become second nature, and I still end up saving money over time. It's the 21st century folks, and geoarbitrage is in! Don't be afraid to use it when you need it! I hope you've gotten a lot out of this. Of course, if you still have some questions about anything I have just said, do not hesitate to contact me and I will get back to you within a timely manner.

**Key Points to Take Away from the lesson**

**References at the end for books that they can use**

Strategies for the School Community

We've already covered teaching in the classroom. It actually never ceases to amaze me how so many TEFL and TESOL programs renege on teaching teachers proper modes of behavior when in the host country. Sure, teaching within the classroom is a skill that must be addressed, but most programs tend to falsely assume that the teaching ONLY happens inside of the classroom, much in the same way people had used to assume that women's jobs were only at work and never outside of work, never a second shift. So allow me to set you straight here.

Part of the life of an English teacher is doing multiple shifts, and not getting paid for it. In Asia in particular, you'll be working multiple hours of unpaid work. The classroom environment will continue outside of the classroom, as a rule. It will take place in the hallways, in the school corridors, on the field of the school playground, in the parking lot, and restaurants and cafes and just about anywhere else where you could conceivably run into a student or teacher from your school. I've had more incidences like these then I care to recount, and the questiion always becomes one of what to say and/or how to behave. Because many people will not speak English well, conversations have this tendency to devolve into translation work or at worst, another class. Even if the person isn't from your school, but manages to strike up a conversation with you, there's a tendency for you to start running your own English classes right then and there.

When I was running Meetup groups in Busan, for example, there would sometimes be the occasional few who would come to my group to practice their English, nevermind the fact that my group was about creating businesses that prosper without your help. People still wanted to converse and practice listening to English. This was cute at first but it soon became rather exhausting as the fine line between teaching and socializing became increasingly blured.It wasn't these people's faults or anyone else for that matter. It's just the nature of the beast. If you're going to live in a country that's not where you were born, then you're going to have get used to the fact that you're not going to have immediate access to fluent speakers who fully grok what it is that you're taking about or saying. This can be frustrating when you want to separate your work and life, but most countries don't have a concept of this kind of separation, which makes it all the more difficult to manage. In order to fully realize the strategies in this book, you are going to need to create some kind of separation between yourself and your profession. Ideally you'll have to divorce yourself completely because otherwise, you will burn out. Working 9-to-5 is difficult enough. You're observed a lot. You have to put on a front for people sometimes. You have to manage kids and their varying and sometimes unpredictable needs. And then there's the lesson planning that can be stressful. I'm not saying don't completely divorce yourself from the people in your school life, but at least create some distance so that you can regroup when you need to.

There are several strategies that I have learned to use over the years to maintain the distance and allow myself the time and space to re-energize when I need to. One of the most important words that I have learned in the English language since starting my teaching career is “no.” There's nothing quite as powerful as this word. Let me explain.

In school life and within the community, you’re going to be constantly called upon to do some activities that you don’t necessarily want to do or have the time to do. In my first year of teaching in South Korea, I was courted to teach additional night classes for a local public high school. The pay was great for an English teacher and since I was hard up for cash at the time, I figured why not. It would add to my resume and provide me with more money than I would have had. However, I quickly learned that teaching beyond 20 hours per week was well beyond what I could afford to do. Actually, it was over 40 if you count the hours that I spent in school. Every week, I found myself preparing multiple lessons for two high schools, one middle school, and one adult class. I also had separate lessons for lunchtime activities. I was quickly burning myself out and my lessons started to show this burn out. Thankfully, the experience of teaching in these multiple schools didn’t last very long and I was able to successfully finish my responsibilities without burning bridges and getting totally destroyed by all of the responsibilities that I had. This is exactly the kind of responsibilities that you might be courted to do. If you are asked to work beyond 20 hours of work, just say “no.” If you’re asked to do any work outside of the classes that you are contracted to teach, just say “no.” You can say “no.” People often say that you can’t because you’re in another country. Some people will feel more comfortable than others doing this. But you know what? You don’t have to. You don’t have to compromise anything if you don’t feel comfortable. Just say “no.” If taking on added responsibility means that you’re compromising your main responsibility, then you absolutely must put your foot down because you will not be able to function properly. People often worry about money so they take on added responsibilities to get more of it or to prove to some people that they are capable of doing many things and thus can take on added tasks and get more money. These are silly rules that English teachers impose upon themselves to measure where they are achieving the goals that they value most. I’m saying this is all well and good but you need to modify your rules so that you can be the healthiest while in the foreign country, and one rule that is certainly not worth holding onto is the rule that says you’re not a competent and worthy instructor unless you’re doing multiple things at once and affecting many people’s lives. Not letting go just leads to indentured servitude.

There are other things that teachers might ask you to do. My contract in Korea stated that I had to agree to added tasks that the co-teacher or other administrators might ask me to do. This was WITHIN the contract and the previous incident that I just recounted was outside of my contract. There are other things that you’ll probably be asked to do that are outside of your contract. You may be asked, for example, to make a powerpoint for a festival or to put on a theatrical production for your students to do during a festival. You’re going to have to use your judgment but if you find that these such activities prevent you from having a life outside of the school, you absolutely must drop the responsibility immediately. There’s no use being a martyr for the cause and sacrificing your life force just to please a co-teacher who wants to put on an extra show and endear himself or herself to the administrators. It’s just not worth it. In one incident of teaching in Korea, I was told to put on a theatrical rendition of Iron Man and Good Will Hunting. It was the most exhausting (not to mention embarrassing) experience of my life because it was just done poorly and without the needed supervision that was required to put on a show of such caliber. I made sure to explicitly voice my complaints to the teacher and told them what the type of project would require. Yet, they went ahead and had me do this show despite all of my protestations and warnings. These are just the sorts of things you have to look out for, and reading your contract over and over and over again is never a bad practice to get into. Heck, getting into the hobby of reading your contract at least once a week is probably not a bad idea as you’ll be able to cite verbatim the text that has hopefully been crafted in such a way as to favor the employee and protect you from unnecessary exploitation. And exploitation is such a huge part of EFL that you absolutely have to be wary at all times of what you’re getting into. Thankfully, there are many reputable review sites and Facebook groups in the world to help steer you in the right direction. One of my favorite resources is ESLWatch.info where English teachers anonymously post reviews of their experiences with teaching in different programs and schools, both good and bad. You’ll get all of the good, bad, and ugly from this site so you are strongly encouraged to do your due diligence and read/watch this website regularly, not to mention ask around. The best way of avoiding the issues I have just brought up above is asking around and trying to strike up a one-on-one conversation with an English teacher who is presently in the field and thus in a position to offer valuable recommendations.

Before coming to Korea, I was dialoging constantly with people who had been where I was going. I read about Waygook.org from a book on teaching English in Korea and then reached out to some teachers about their experience and then courting feedback about what to look out for and who to get in touch with for a possible job opening. It was through this experience that I eventually applied for EPIK and made the decision to accept a job offer with to my mind was probably one of the better companies offering English services to Koreans at the time. I have no regrets about having done this and this type of research is advice that I would offer to anyone seeking to teach overseas. When I was in Mexico, I worked at this company for a very short period. This was my first teaching experience and I had done absolutely no research whatsoever on this company. I spent hours teaching students from a mandatory book that they were required to read. And then, after spending those hours, I wasn’t paid. This was a nightmare. Research your companies wisely, country customs, and make sure, at the very least, that your school is going to be in a position to pay you responsibly (i.e. on time and in full). I know this sounds sort of obvious to you, probably, but you’d be surprised how different countries are with respect to customs on paying people. In many countries, the employer has the right of way and it doesn’t matter what kind of complaints you lodge against the company or the employer—you just ain’t getting paid until the employer says so.

I recall Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as I am writing these words. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs says that in order to achieve full satisfaction, you need to be able to have the most basic of needs met first—food, shelter, clothing, love. And then afterwards, you move on to more pressing interests, like satisfaction, feelings of accomplishment and achievement, and the sense that you have made a difference in the world. Let me say that you will not be able to reach those high stratospheric levels of Maslow’s chart if you don’t have your basic needs covered. It never ceases to amazing me how many English teachers I know say “I love teaching and it’s the profession I truly want to be in.” Well, I’ve got news for you: Virtually any profession—even one that you quote unquote love—can become a living nightmare if it’s a profession that entraps you and keeps you from living a more free and flexible and ultimately comfortable life. Any profession. Being able to *not* worry about expenses coming in and *not* worrying about food, shelter, and clothing will go a very long way in ensuring that your love for teaching holds up. Because as much as I have loved teaching as well, there were definitely moments when I absolutely hated the shackles it made for me.

Another strategy I can’t recommend enough is going out and meeting local citizens. You MUST do this. Absolutely must in this day and age. The more people you invest in meeting, the more you’ll be able to frontload the work off of yourself and onto others. Let me explain the logic behind this.

I have been fortunate enough to have joined many meetup groups while as a teacher. I have also been fortunate to get exposure to various kinds of English teachers. By far some of the most valuable experiences I have had have been with local citizens in the country where I was teaching. Sure, there were some people that I met in my groups who were only interested in getting free English lessons and just mooching off of the experience they could get with learning the language. On the other hand, there were some meetup group participants that I have met who had been virtually fluent in English and who were able to point me in interesting directions in my life while I was in the country. For example, while I was teaching, I met a woman who owned a hostel and was able to house me at her place in a particularly nice area of Busan, at a discount no less in exchange for my helping her with her website and growing her business. Another local citizen was able to help provide me with resources for finding taxi stands (Uber wasn’t allowed at the time) or finding the best restaurants or going to the best museums. All of these resources I would have never been able to find on my own had I not reached out to the most social people that I could find in the country. It sort of goes without saying that local citizens sort of know the area of the country better than most, and finding ways to reach out to people—through meetups, social media, social apps—is just a great way of making countries your own and becoming more familiar with your surroundings.

So what does this have to do with getting the little tykes off your back? For one thing, as I already mentioned, having a social life is important wherever you decide to teach. Maximizing on the pleasure and decreasing the pain of being overworked and underpaid is a strategy to incorporate for most of your life, especially in the EFL industry. But also, gaining additional perspective on your place of residence will endear you to the people in your school community and reduce the risk of you looking like someone who doesn’t work hard. In a weird way, being acclimated translates to working hard in the EFL industry because your job, essentially, is to absorb the atmosphere, process it, and then register the differences for people and then relay this information to them. How are you going to do that if you’re not meeting people who have already trodden the path that you wish to trot? So becoming more acclimated goes a long way in looking busy and thus reducing the stress it takes on you to prepare lessons for kids. Once you start figuring out where you are and what people do in your country, you’re then able to generate ideas for your classes that explore these cultural nuances, without even necessarily trying to prepare a lesson. You’ll just generate good ideas on your own, from your own experiences, and this is the best kind of preparatory practice to get into while you’re teaching outside of your own country.

I have also met many foreign teachers and as I have already stated, they can prove invaluable in helping you with material. However, one caveat is most definitely in order for you to be cognizant enough as you proceed to socialize with other native English teachers. Let me first start off with saying that no English teacher is created equal and you’re going to run into a lot of different characters to try out for size. My first advice for you is to come to grips with the type of people you wish to socialize with and keep company. Determine ultimately what you wish to get out of the experience of teaching in a foreign country. If you decide that you wish to have a lot of fun and go clubbing and fraternize and do all of the thigns that you wish you had done in college, then you’ll gravitate toward the types of teachers who are doing this sort of thing and have developed strategies for cutting corners just so they can do this sort of partying. Or maybe you want to be with the outdoorsy type of people who like to go hiking on the weekends and do as little lesson planning as possible. Find out how you want to live your life and then look for those people who are living the way you approve. We all have these sorts of rules and outlooks on life that determine how we’re going to live and the sooner you come to terms with who you are and who you wish to associate with, the easier it will be to find those people and reduce the time it takes for you to get the little tykes off your back. For me personally, I was interested in socializing with people who were business savvy. I didn’t want to stay in the English teaching profession forever so I chose to associate with people who had similar ideas and were doing fun and exciting projects that allowed their lives to move forward, beyond teaching. I found this to be the most helpful because people understood what I was doing and they elevated me by helping me do more of what I wanted to do. And for my own part, I did the same for them and we developed a sort of mastermind group. Some of the funniest—and interestingly, most productive—sessions that I had with these people was when we were trying to cut corners to reduce the amount of time we were taking to prepare for lessons, just so that we could get back to our real joys and passions.

Teaching should be a passion of yours and you should enjoy it. If you don’t enjoy it anymore, then it’s time to get out. For many people, there’s a life cycle or a season for the joy of teaching and when the love starts to wane, then it’s time to move on. Luckily for me, I had already developed the sorts of business contacts in Korea that allowed me to move my life forward quickly and get the little tykes off my back sooner. Maybe you will do the same.

There are many native English teachers that I encountered along the way who just weren’t good for me. Not only because they didn’t share the same values or rules for life, but just because they weren’t genuinely interested in holding a friendship with me. Every time I met with these people, it seemed like a chore, something that they felt like they had to do or something. And whenever I spoke to these people, they would always somehow criticize me. There was just no love. Many people have already pointed this out in message boards, but if you can’t be loved by a particular friend of yours, moving on is the most appropriate step to take in order for you to find the people who will love you. And unless you live in the sticks, there are plenty of people in the world who will love you and consider you as a complete person that they are willing to help. I recall a funny quote from the book *Travel While You Work* in which an author who took up a pen-name to write romance novels spoke of how befuddled she was when she often heard people who were lone travelers wishing more than anything else to socialize with another person, despite the fact that the person might be a complete “twat” and completely unsatisfying as company to keep. I think the message of this particular passage of the book reads loud and cloud: Don’t socialize with other people just because you feel lonely. Socialize with the right people who elevate you and make you feel good and who also get where you’re coming from. Just because you share a native language doesn’t mean you two will get along, despite what the locals think about that. You have to find the people that are good for you. It’s that simple. Because if you don’t, you’ll end up wasting more time in the long run chasing people who are uninterested in your development or saving your ass when you need it the most. And that’s a real test of friendship: whether the person is willing to save your ass when the going gets tough. If the person says “You should have known this,” or resorts to blaming you or somehow taking a holier-than-thou response to a bind that you’re in, in terms of lesson planning, then it’s time to drop that person immediately and go find some other people in your area. The point is you’re getting the little tykes off your back and every teacher should understand the need and desire to do this at some point in their teaching career and at some level. Therefore, if they don’t honor this reality of teaching with you, then find someone who will.

Now there is some socializing that you’re going to do as a teacher that I just going to remind you of working a second shift. As I have already mentioned, several times I made quote unquote friends with people who were basically just using me for my Englsih speaking ability. At first I didn’t’ mind this because I was getting extra attention and conversation. However, this soon wore off because I realized that I was getting a false impression and that the interaction I was getting from these people was all for the wrong reasons and not the reasons that I wanted to be hanging out with a friend. A friend is someone who loves you and supports you and helps you through tough times. As I was beginning to build my relationships with other people, I had to ask myself if the people who I was interacting with were the kind of people who were willing to step up to the plate and help me out whenever I needed them or if they were the kind of people who were just fair-weather friends, being nice to be because it was just an opportunity for them to improve on themselves and get something out of my own speaking abilities. My conversations were starting to feel jarring and verbose, completely ungratifying and sucking the energy directly out of me. I was smiling and laughing but not actually feeling anything that I was experiencing, just putting on an air for people who just wanted to use me for my language abilities. IN the end, I realized that I needed to take steps to mitigate the level of energy that I was expounding upon these “friends,” to allocate to other activities and I swiftly reduced my time that I spent with them. You might find yourself in a similar situation.

In an episode by Nick Loper and his Side Hustle Nation show, Nick spoke about a productivity hack that he had recently learned about whereby you document all of the favors that you do for people throughout the day to get a better sense of what people are asking you to do. You figure out what are the most popular requests and then you charge people for these services, potentially. Well, my service was English, and I realized that I was providing more exposure to English then I cared to do while I was in Asia. I was being paid to be exposed and also giving free exposure to anyone who would listen. Now, I’m not saying that you snouldn’t go out and make friends with people who are interested in learning English. But what I am saying is that you should guard yourself against any possibility that you might be feeling extra drained if you find yourself doing double-duty. You have to find those people who are genuinely interested in you, in getting to know you. There aren’t really any signs for doing this. How you tell if a person is really interested in you will depend upon varying factors. The best that I can say is that you’ll know it when you know it and then act accordingly.

I don’t limit my interactions to fellow foreigners. It doesn’t matter if the person is a fellow foreigner or not. There will always be people who take up an unnecessary amount of energy, whether they speak English or not. I had a fellow foreigner friend like this. Every time I met her I was on edge, bottled up with anxiety because she was so unpredictable in her anger and aggravation. It was literally sucking the energy right out of my very soul. I had to act fast, so what I did was I blocked her on social media and stopped answering messages. It only took me two days to get rid of her and she never called again. If you’re luck, the necessary endings that you make with people will be swift, immediate, and easy. I’ve heard stories of people trying to make necessary endings and having this fail when the person on the receiving end of the rejection took the rejection badly and then started to pursue the rejector, to the point where the rejecter had to call the police and apprehend the stalker. Thankfully, this hasn’t happened to me yet. Most of my endings have been swift, quick, relatively painless. All I had to do was block people on social media and that was it. You can do the same when you want to reduce the level of energy that you’re using on people, particularly noxious people who aggravate you and take all of your energy away. You can choose who to associate with and associate with only those who bring you up. The rest can go to hell.

With respect to socializing, this is a very tricky subject because often times socializing and work blend into each other. These days, there really is no distinction, but if you’re doing something that you don’t want to do, then it serves to your benefit to make sure the two worlds are distinguished. With my middle school, this was the case. The students I had in my middle school grades were just so energetic yet rebellious, always questioning my authority. Had I been in middle school myself, I’m sure I would have loved this behavior but when you’re actually the person who is doing the teaching and charged with the task of getting some information into the brains of the students—while being graded according to how effective you are in the classroom—you can become pretty anxious about the whole experience. As such, I wanted to contain the whole experience in the day and not have it bleed over into the evenings when I was done with work. This included the daily drives that I would generously get from one of the teachers. It was just so exhausting during the day that often times the rest of my energy was depleted throughout the day and possibly for the rest of the week if the class was particularly rambunctious. When a select few students tried to reach out to me on Facebook, I denied their access to my account because having to deal with the bleeding over from middle school to my real life was just way too much for me to handle, The other issue here is that the kids are… well… kids and I’m not comfortable sharing some of the personal information that I share on my FB page getting with kids.

So let me be clear here. The issue over whether to share social media networks with your students is up in the air and is largely contingent on what kind of teacher you are and whether you have something in your life that you think is worth hiding (e.g. you’re gay or you have a weird hobby or some kind of destructive thoughts). If you have a very involved private life, then sharing social media is probably not a good idea. However, if you are completely transparent and sometimes even use social media for your own activities in the school, then connecting with your students over social media might not be a bad idea. My general feeling is that connecting and staying involved with people outside of the classroom, through social media, leads to a lot of second guessing of what you’re doing and whether your behavior is appropriate or not. It forces you to be on guard a little more, even if you don’t have anything to hide. And it also causes you to absorb the time and energy it takes to maintain connections with your students outside of class. You end up using your social media time on thinking about school when you could be using social media as just a means to relax and not have to think about the school environment. So when it comes to getting the little tykes off of your back, I generally side with not bothering with them at all through social media. And when I do, I make sure to make a new FB account and a new email address which I tell the students I will swiftly throw away upon completion of the assignment. Sometimes however you’ll have to deal with random chance encounters in the streets or through social media. The question of how to handle this is rather tricky. When I was in South Korea, I would only usually run into students if I was hanging around town, sometimes at the supermarket and sometimes at cafes. Many of my students loved seeing me in person and would always tell me that they missed me and wished that I was still teaching them again. When this happened, I felt really good and I always told them so and expressed gratitude for their kindness. I know it’s hard to believe, given all that I have written here so far, but I actually did enjoy teaching (when I was teaching) and I did love most of my students, as problematic as many of them were as students. Just because students are overly energetic in your classes and cause you migraines occasionally does not mean that they are inherently bad people. Many of my students were just kids and didn’t have that developed sensitive to a person’s needs that come with time (and a lot of reading). I understand this of course and always had empathy to all of my students, even the ones that sometimes were rebellious in my class. The students were never bad on a personal level. Whenever I saw them in person, it was like meeting an old friend and I exchanged pleasantries with them. The dynamic was just different. Students sometimes will be different people depending on the social situation. In class, they might be little brats, but alone, on the street, walking to someplace—either alone or with a friend—they might be different, more sensitive people. If you’re going to be approached for just a casual “hello,” do not avoid it. Just enjoy it and exchange the pleasantries. Pretend that you’re meeting your best friend in the whole world and that you’re about to exchange a few jokes together. I always did this and it was a lot of fun. Sometimes I amped up my English a little bit and just assumed that they knew some of the advanced words that I was talking about when I spoke to them and it was hilarious. “Oh, I love gorillas today!” I might say to them and any reaction was priceless. Sometimes the students pretended that they knew what I was talking about and they just agreed with me, by saying “yes yes” over and over again and other students would surprise me and say “Uhm, what the fuck?” And we would just laugh together. These sorts of pleasantries go a long way in endearing you to your students and also provide you with new fodder to use to get the students off your back. If your students feel that you’re a hospital person outside of the school, then you can easily control them better in the class. If the student sees you as a real person who is genuinely caring and who enjoys socializing with the student, then you’re likely to get what you want in the class because people generally will return kind for kind. It’s kind of like a law of the universe. Or something.

Still, there are moments when I just couldn’t be bothered talking to students in the street because either I had some place urgent to go to (usually another café) or I had to meet someone for something (dinner or extra class). There were a few strategies I would take to avoid interaction. I would either take back alleys on my way to wherever it was that I was going, with the expectation that I wouldn’t see anyone in these back allies. To further decrease the likelihood of being discovered, I would wear a hoodie or wearing something to make me more nondescript, like sunglasses. I would also wear headphones so that it looked like I was busy (which I probably was because I usually listened to my favorite podcasts while traveling from one place to another). If on this occasion I was still discovered by another student, I would then strike up a quick conversation, amp up my English and make it quick and clipped. I would say “hello” and carry on with the conversation, making it brisk and to the point. If I really had to go somewhere, I would abruptly apologize to the student and tell them that I had to go somewhere urgent. This usually ended the conversation and allowed me to move forward with my day. If you’re teaching in a small town, you’re likely to run into students wherever you go, unless you take transport out of town and go to a city nearby. I find that if you’re teaching elementary to high school students, you probably won’t have to travel far to get away from them if you really need to. I learned this quite quickly actually when I spoke to one of the veteran English teachers in my town who said that there were many cities that one could go to “get away from the town and just be on your own.” I never forgot this because at the time that I was told this, I could sense that I would need to do this. Your town and the people in it can be great but sometimes you need a little space to recharge and just be on your own in a new environment. So much repetition cannot be great for a person, or so I feel from my experience these past few years as a teacher. I quickly learned this. When I was teaching in South Korea, the cities that I would frequently retreat to would be Busan and Jinju and very rarely Ulsan. I needed these hours by myself so that I could process what had gone on the entire week. Sometimes this created some friction between me and the staff because the staff were very close-knit, like a family and sometimes it seemed like I was deliberately trying to separate myself and be a loner (which can be a very scary thing for people in Asian countries who are very family oriented and about clanship). When this happened, I would always reassure the staff that I wasn’t going crazy, that I just needed time on my own to do the things that I enjoyed. Sometimes, if I didn’t think I would get negative feedback, I would tell my colleagues about some of the great experiences that I was having while doing things on my own—the meetup groups that I had joined and the fun projects that I was working on by myself or with other people. This usually settled any of their concerns that they had with me and my proclivity for being alone and separate from the group.

It’s funny as I recall these experiences because there were also a handful of people in the office who also felt the need to be alone, despite coming from a culture that doesn’t generally support striking out on your own and doing your own thing. Many of the staff would renege on going to local community events or local faculty hangouts or hiking trips. Many of the faculty had to study for exams that they needed to pass in order to become eligible for teaching licenses and would very often go out on their own and study somewhere, be it a local café or a library. They did this despite all of the invitations to go out and do fun things with the school and the staff. So I was, by no stretch of the imagination, doing something that only a foreigner does. I was actually in very good company.

This is not to be negative by the way. There’s nothing negative in my support of doing lone-work. As I’ve already mentioned, you need this lone-work in order to be with other people, It’s kind of like a yin-yang sort of thing. In order to have love, for example, you must have the opposite. In order to belong, you sometimes need that separation. It’s like the saying goes, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” At least for me, I’ve always needed absence in order to make the heart and the teaching grow fonder.

So there are many ways for you to handle interactions with your students outside of school. But I would also like to mention that for the most part, students will not go out of their way to bother you if you look busy or in a hurry to go somewhere. I think most people around the world can read body language pretty well, particularly the kind of body language that screams “I’m busy and have places to go!” Even when I was in a café working on programming, students would often just pretend that I wasn’t around and I truly did appreciate this. For my own part, I would play along and pretend that I didn’t see them and on then on Monday, we would have a long conversation about “Oh my god, I saw you but you didn’t see me!” And then I would say “Oh my god! I can’t believe that happened!” It actually provided good practice for the students to practice their “oh my god I saw you” conversation skills. And when this happened in the school, I usually didn’t mind in the least because I was fully recharged and ready for the interaction ahead.

Now, on to the topic of disclosing personal information about yourself. There is really no straightforward policy or strategy for addressing the topic of disclosing personal information. There are some schools that will be more formal and conventional than others. You’ll usually get a good sense of where the school is when you read your contract and research the school before applying. Find out what people have said about the school in the past, and short of this information, you’ll get a pretty good sense of what the school expects from you when you’re actually in the school environment. When I was teaching in South Korea, I basically made my own rules about what was appropriate to disclose to students, based on my own culture. Sometimes what I chose not to disclose was not a big deal for South Korea, but for me it was a big deal. Other times, I disclosed stuff that was actually more serious than I thought it was (oops!). And sometimes what I did was absolutely perfect. When it comes to getting the little tykes off your back, I recommend disclosing not so much that you are required to talk for some unforeseen period of time. That’s not to say that you shouldn’t disclose anything and leave the conversations completely clipped (although you might end up doing this anyway if you’re teaching young children who can’t hold conversations with foreign instructors). I usually kept things casual and fairly superficial and unthreatening: “How are you?” “How was your weekend?” “What are you doing?” “Where are you going?” “What do you want to do this weekend?” “I saw you cheating on the exam, punk.” Okay, the last one was for a very special relationship but on the whole I kept conversations at a very simple level for the students to grok and this kept the conversations at a minimum. For the really loquacious students, I of course indulged them in discourse but if I didn’t have to, I usually didn’t. This probably comes across as more abrasive than it actually was. I kept great relationships with my students but I was also keenly aware of the energy that I would expend on a near daily basis and how much energy debt I was wracking up while doing this. I think beginning teachers really have no idea how much energy debt they are dispelling for the world when they teach for the first time. Many first time teachers will do all sorts of high flying acrobatics just to be liked by their students—they’ll sing, dance, play jams on their guitar, prepare jokes for the following week, do some kind of outrageous juggling act, all in the name of being liked by the students and keeping up appearances of effective learning. The truth is that you really don’t need to do any of this stuff in order to be an effective teacher, and in fact, sometimes there are more gains to be made with the minimalist approach to teaching. I’ve actually found less to be more in my teaching because the students don’t feel overwhelmed with having to catch every word that flies out of my mouth. It gives them confidence that they can handle this English thing and use it in empowering ways to communicate with foreign teachers who know nothing about their language. This to me was the experience that I was shooting for at all times, rather than to be an edutainer, a coined phrase that I am almost positive came out of South Korea in reference to teachers who give students the impression that they are learning when all they are really doing is playing fun an games and entertaining. There are other variations of the definition of this word, I’m sure, but the one I have given is the one that I am familiar with. Teachers in South Korea will frequently refer to themselves as edutainers because of their incessant gamification of lessons and their near constant performing of lesson material, through the song-and-dance stuff that I mentioned above. If you want to get the tykes off your back, doing this edutainer stuff is the least likely approach to get you there, and at the worst, will lead you to burn out. I tried doing this and quickly realized how impossible it was within a 9-to-5 schedule. If you’re working 22 teaching hours and then sitting the rest of your time in the office or interacting with the school community, then doing this edutainer stuff is not going to be feasible because that approach will invariably lead students to expect it whenever they see you, in the hallway, in the office, outside in the school community, in major cities where you might run into them. Basically, you’re setting yourself as the go-to person for entertainment and humor, not to mention the fact that you’re not being taken seriously. By extension, the language that you are charged with teaching will also not be taken seriously by the students. “But that’s what I’m supposed to do in my school,” you might protest, and that’s fine, as long as you take the strategies I’ve provided in these pages to mitigate or lessen it considerably. You absolutely must because the human body and mind was just not designed to take on that constant expenditure of energy and mental power. This is really not a debatable point. As a rule, you *will* burn out if you don’t take heed with this. And if your job is just way too much pressure for that, then you need to leave it. We will talk about when it is time to leave your job a few chapters from now.

In shifting back to the original topic of disclosing important information, keeping dialogue short and sweet, and maybe even funny will allow you to conserve your energy. If you’re teaching in a face-culture like South Korea where keeping up appearance is a must, you can smile more often. Actually, studies show that if you smile a lot, you’ll start to feel better. Maybe deliver your short and sweet dialogue with a smile will help considerably. Also, giving presents to teachers in South Korea also will go a long way toward shutting them up because they will feel a sense of having owed you something and will pay that back in dividends since you can’t measure “hospitality,” directly. Which brings me to the next topic: maintaining relationships with your staff and colleagues.

In my working experience, I have found that giving uncountable amounts of something to the teachers and staff has gone a long way in helping me maintain cordial and placid relations with them. Some of the gifts I provided to the staff and colleagues included plants, chocolate, and even coffee. I also provided porcelain plates at my house and fruit on some days. I allowed some faculty to share my stapler without even asking, and I also shared my candy which I usually gave to students. I also sometimes told staff where they could find great worksheets, great powerpoints, great lesson plans. Sometimes I just offered this on my own. These were all little favors that sometimes I was asked to deliver and sometimes favors that I just offered throughout the day. These are the sorts of uncountable gifts that you can give to the staff in your office to keep them quiet about you. I don’t want to say it’s hush money, but in a way it is. They just don’t see it as that, which is a great thing. If you give untold amounts of this sort of “hush money,” you can keep the faculty from exacting all sorts of untold damage on your experience in the office. And believe me, sometimes the staff and faculty are far worse than the students in terms of exacting energy and willpower and mental energy.

In my experience, I have been with teachers who monitored my lessons every week and then publicly criticized me in front of the students. I have also had teachers who talk about me and the way I keep my house in front of other teachers. I’ve also worked with teachers who asked me to submit unnecessary documentation which I later found was not expected in the least bit, but nevertheless used as a diversion to make it look like I was a busy little beaver. When this kind of damage occurs to you, there are ways of getting back the time that you lose in the office and I will also discuss this a few pages from now. But rest assured, you can mitigate the attacks considerably if you just continue to give gifts on a regular basis. Find the items in your store that look like a lot but cost the least amount of money. Candy is a great option, but I have also found plants work just fine, and short of that, getting pens and pencils for everyone also works pretty well. The sky’s the limit when it comes to what you can get teachers. You don’t necessarily have to buy them a car but you can just as easily by them other hand-crafted tchotchkes. Etsy.com is actually a great place for you to buy gifts for your colleagues and fellow faculty. I have found many little arts and crafts, from little mural paintings, to sewn things that people have appreciated. Sometimes it gets too expensive to send things overseas so I’ll just go to the local supermarket and buy things from there. You can get your colleagues all sorts of things: hand-made soap or ornaments for the holidays; bed, bath, and beyond types of trinkets; you can buy candles or incense. Really, anything that teachers can hold in the palm of their hand is usually a good barometer for accessing whether something would be a good gift or not. Food is always great, but even better when it is considered. For instance, some teachers might be on a diet, so rather than get them some kind of chocolate fudge brownie, you can get them some carrots or grapes or something where the most nutrition can be had. This shows thought and consideration and being listened and the teachers were really appreciate it.

Of course, none of this ever calculated into your paycheck. I wish it was. But be that as it may, I estimate that I don’t spend nearly as much as people would think when I’m spending money on gifts for people. Usually it takes out a little under 25% of my weekly budget for food and groceries. I don’t buy the teachers lavish things, like expensive place mats or porcelain plates with amazing interior design. That’s way too much money and the eye isn’t discerning enough to determine which gifts are more expensive than others when it comes to some expensive items. Like I said, a good rule of thumb is that anything that can be held in the hand is usually good, but you have to consider price too. Do some research to consider if some gifts are more socially appropriate than others (for example, giving someone earrings might send the wrong message). Don’t over-think this. Just be generous enough to think about getting a gift, then get the cheapest-but-most-valued gift you can find and give it, wrapped or unwrapped it. Gift giving pays for itself in dividends when you don’t have faculty constantly breathing down your back. Objectively speaking, this gift giving serves as your objective shield, anchoring you with the school community as you endear yourself to others.

Sometimes when you talk to faculty, the topic of what you did for the weekend comes up. In some school environments, you don’t really need to worry about this. You can just do your own thing and move on your merry way. However, in many countries, especially in Asia, you are going to be talking to faculty quite regularly and having quote unquote casual conversation where all sorts of things might come up. “What did you do?” might be the most common question you get asked. Other questions that might come up are “are you married?” “Who did you go with to the movies?” and “Are you really traveling by yourself?” Sorts of chiding questions were always asked of me as I was coming and going from the office, and although I sometimes felt a little irritates by these not-so-subtle questions about my life, I smiled and told the teacher that I had a fabulous time over the weekend and this usually made me feel better about the mannerisms by which people addressed me.

If you’re not supposed to share your personal life with your students, I would equally advise you not divulging as much as information to fellow teachers who are more than likely to use it against you if you’re not too careful. For example, I had many colleagues who caused me great stress through months at a time because they would frequently take my personal life to other faculty members who I didn’t know and hadn’t spoken to. Soon enough, my business, which I had considered personal, would be everyone’s business and soon enough, I would be the talk of the town. Some of this was non-threatening while other information was sensitive enough that if it ever escaped the confines of my relationship with another teacher, then it could have surely caused havoc. As such, I almost never divulged any information about the relationships I kept in the country and the things that I did for fun, which probably weren’t exciting anyway. One of the ways to quickly get people on your back is to talk about sensitive information with your fellow colleagues. These people are one of the last few people that you want on your trail as you continue working at your school.

There of course will always be exceptions to the rule. I knew many English teachers in Korea, for example, who were great chums with their co teachers and the other faculty of the foreign languages department. They would take frequent camping trips, go horseback riding, and do karaoke. For my own part, I also had some super affectionate supervisors and colleagues working with me. I’ll never forget the time that my supervisor decided to come to my house and actually plumb my toilet which had been stopped and seemed beyond repair (this is a story for another book!). There is no dobut that many of my colleagues have alleviated great stress from what would otherwise be a terribly overwhelming experience in a new country. Use your judgment to determine whether a person has good intentions. You’ll know pretty quickly what their intentions are when they start talking to you. If you notice that they have a proclivity to talk behind people’s backs out of spite, than you’ll know that that is a warning sign to be sure. Generally, those who talk about other people behind their backs are just one short step away from talking behind *your* back! You’ll also notice the smile and whether it is half-faked or whether it is the general thing. You’ll notice their expressions and see if they’re genuinely excited to see you or if they are just faking it. Thankfully, facial expressions don’t change much across the world. Most people will smile when they are happy and frown when they are sad and there is a ton of variation in and between this, all of which doesn’t terribly deviate from one country to the next. Always be wary of others and never give your full trust to people who haven’t earned it.

As I mentioned earlier, there will be times when teachers take time away from you, sometimes out of spite and sometimes because they just want to give you busy work. As I already mentioned, one teacher had me write an entire script for a class that I was doing in front of panel judges. The entire script despite the fact that she wasn’t even going to read it. This was just busy work, the kind of work that you give to little children to keep them occupied. I had lost a lot of time from doing this work, time that I could have spent working on my side hustle projects. When someone gives you a task that you can’t work around, there are some ways that you can cut corners to make your life easier. I’ve already mentioned outsourcing as a viable strategy and I would mention it again. UpWork , Freelancer, Task Bullet, Guru**,** Fiverr, all of these resources will allow you to hire a freelancer for a real cheap price and allow you to get your busy work done. If you need transcript services, you can get them through script pad and then hire someone on fiverr to handle the writing. If you need a PPT made, you can go to these websites and have a freelancer make it, at little time or cost to you.

One of the best ways to endear yourself with fellow English teachers is to provide them with the fruits of your labor. To the victor enjoy the spoils, as they say, and if you share teaching materials, you're likely to be rewarded with additional resources from the other teachers to get the kids off our back. The English teaching profession is rife with teachers who have learned to cut all sorts of corners. **In fact, the English teaching profession can probably best be described as a cutting-corner profession where teachers have learned a host of strategies to get kids off their back. They take ready-made worksheets with them to their classes, hire Vas to make worksheets for them, use already-made games to give to the students, or find the most masterful multimedia presentations (*Avatar*, anyone?) to present to their students to get them away from the pressure of having to have a direct and meaningful conversation with students. Okay, maybe not necessarily meaningful but you know what I mean. Teachers are professional corner cutterers and it is in this profession that I really honed my corner-cutting craft to get back my time and to ultimately get the kids off my back. And at the height of my corner-cutting, I was basically doing no work at the school and just using my time to create startup businesses and other ventures that would help me increase capital. Fortunate enough for others, I am not a sociopath who just latches on to a cozy situation and acts like a parasite on company time. When I don't see the need for myself in the school because all I do is cut corners, I extricate myself from the situation and move on to something more meaningful and more rewarding, since life is way too short to be working at a job where all you do all day is cut corners.**

That said, sharing and exchanging materials wit teachers is the single most powerful gesture you can make with your colleagues not only to endear yourself with them but to also cut more corners when you're really pressed for time and trying to find a way to cut corners. There were some days when I felt like a junkie, looking for other people's materials rather than to suffer the agony of making my own ppts or worksheets from scratch. Because I had made friends with many of my colleagues and fellow English teachers in the profession, I never suffered for very long because someone somewhere always had my back if I needed it. Also the websites that are provided online are so helpful that the whole jargon about teaching pedagogy and styles of teaching and lesson planning are all hogwash in this day and age. You literally just need to be a purveyor of the material on these websites in order to do an effective job as a teacher (being a kind teacher is also never a bad thing either). I've already said this but I'll say it again: If you have to make a powerpoint or a lesson plan, then you're reinventing the wheel. It sounds kind of depressing but it is true—anything that needs to be made in this industry has already been made and just really requires tailoring here and there. You could make your own tailor-made games, I suppose, and sell them but if you're looking to conserve your willpower and mental energy, then you do not need to do create something out of thin air. Besides, no one will ever know the difference between a lesson plan that you made and poured your heart into versus a lesson plan that was made from the hearts and minds of other dedicated teachers. And at some point, there really is no difference between taking the lessons of dedicated others and using the lessons that you've made on your own from scratch. Unless you somehow find this therapeutic, then I would not advise doing that. And doing so is liable to make you do 20th century work in a 21st century. The problem with today's schools is that they just haven't caught up to the way the world works today, in this era of globalization and near rapid change in technology. It used to be a cliché to say that we now live in a global world but now it's sort of true—you could literally work from anywhere and with anyone. You don't need boundaries to determine what you're going to do with your life. Everything you need is at your fingertips. Making PowerPoints and worksheets will therefore set you back and keep you behind on the times if you insist that only true worker bees make their own material. Doing this is foolish, especially if you are only relying on one source of income to sustain you. If you're fired at the drop of a hat, and all you did with your time was make powerpoins and worksheets, then you're going to be in deep deep trouble. Think of corner cutting as self-preservation, as opposed to just corner cutting.

So the English teaching profession is necessarily a profession of corner cutting and many of your colleagues have already learned the quote-unquote hacks for their profession. Talking to these teachers and asking them what it is that they do for lessons will be super helpful in allowing you to bond with your fellow teachers and also help you get pressure off of you faster. Your willpower won't be taxed all the time because you'll have other people's work to present to the kids. This is the idea way you want your relationships with fellow teachers to be. There will be times when your colleagues aren't helpful. Some may even have problems, like with alcoholism or lack of motivation or any of a host of problems that you aren't aware of. The key is to be proactive and make sure that you are addressing the shortcomings of these people early so that you don't have to worry about it later. So for example, if there is a co-teacher who doesn't inform you of the events of the school, it is important for you to say up front what your expectations are for being informed about holiday events, vacations, and things of that nature. Insist on it, fight for this information. Don't be coy because if you are, people will just walk all over you and not care. Fight to be informed. And if the co-teacher still persists on not informing you of anything, then it is your prerogative to work around this person and find other outlets for information, possibly another teacher or some other source, like a fellow native English teacher. Try to get to know as many people as you can so that you have a number of resources to draw from when someone falls short of your expectations of them. This goes for most areas of life.

Sometimes you'll get a particularly vindictive colleague and co-teacher who likes to play hardball. I used to be meek and avoidant of the issue and do whatever the co-teacher told me to do. These days, my advice is to fight back. Fight back and fight hard. Get your time back so that the vicious co-teacher doesn't take it away from you. If you find that she blames you for various things when something goes wrong, have documentation that proves her wrong. Documentation probably won't help you when you're the guest English teacher, but at least putting up your guns and fighting back will show her that if she wants to take advantage of you, she's not going to be able to do without giving herself a hard time. And if she wants more pain, she will continue her vindictiveness. Save money the moment you enter the job and don't stop saving until you have enough to leave the job and say good bye to the teachers forever. When life gives you lemons, make lemonade (where possible) and just love yourself.

Let's say you've lost time from doing an unnecessary task that your co-teacher imposed upon you (like writing an unnecessary script that no one is going to look at, not even her). When you get one of these Camus-like tasks that are pointless, outsource it to someone else for five dollars. Then, work on your own. If the co-teacher insists on monitoring you throughout the day, keep a dummy document that shows some kind of work that you're doing. And show the co-teacher this work as you're farming out the task to some person in the Philippines for $4 USD per hour. People think that they would be losing money by doing this, but you're actually not if you pay 4 USD per hour for a VA. You're actually gaining time and still collecting money (assuming you earn at least 10 USD profit).

If you’re asked to write a script, for example, rather than actually type the script out, you can use one of those MAC OS recording devices that will write text to the screen as you speak into it. There are many other devices for Android as well. Guaranteed, many of your colleagues will probably not look at the document once you submit it and even if they do, they probably won’t be able to tell the difference between the good English and the bad English, but use your judgment anyway since you don’t want to get in trouble, obviously. Another way of cutting time is to anticipate these problems beforehand by asking other teachers what they’ve had to do and then modeling their example. You’ll often find that there are some teachers who were given the same sort of useless assignments that wasted time and the way they reacted to this imposition of work was far different from yours, but perhaps more effective. I was a real push over when I came to Korea, but the more exposure I got to other foreigners who had different rules and values by which they lived, the more I realized that I could stand up for myself and decide how my life was going to be for the time that I was living in Korea. Tony Robbins often brings up the idea of *references*, different thoughts or memories that we use as a reference or guidepost by which we behave and act. In other words, they are ideas that give us help in determining how to behave with other people in different contexts. With respect to your host country and its customs, sometimes it’s just a matter of collecting different references for a particular context that will help you make the most time-saving decisions and ultimately the best decision for your life in the country. So collect those references by speaking to other English teachers, and watch as your life slowly but surely expands into something more fruitful and eventually something more time-saving!

Sometimes you’ll have no choice but to do the grunt work. When this happens, don’t make a scene and try not to fight as much as possible (at least in the moment). Do the work, finish it, and then make up for it later with more time that you give to yourself. Keep tally of the time that you’re spending doing the useless work and then make up for it later with the work that you really want to do. Again, saving money so that you have income to leave your job is also going to be an effective strategy if at some point you find that your side businesses or projects are doing better than your normal projects. However, since there really is no job security in the English teaching profession, I recommend that you leave a job at max, every two years, either to try another teaching environment or to try another industry and to keep your life exciting. Job security is one of those urban myths that keeps people in fear and keeps them at a job. If most people I knew how little job security there actually was, perhaps most people would handle their jobs in a way that maximized side projects and side hustles, perhaps people would gravitate towards the things that they really loved to do rather than to suffer the sometimes inexplicable torture of having to serve other people, like indentured servitude. Save your money and keep score of where you are within your development.

Now to move on to a different topic. When it comes to teaching overseas and reserving your energy in social situations, one of the best things that you can do is keep in touch with family and loved ones from back home. Countless studies out of the Peace Corps have revealed that sometimes whne you’re overseas, you’ll suffer some sort of confusion with your identity as you slowly start to assimilate and assume more and more of the culture and mannerisms of the people in your host country. Although this isn’t likely the case if you’re working in more developed countries, speaking to families can provide you with a sense of certainty about who you are, what you’re doing in the host country, and serve as a reminder that you’re not alone and that you do have some options moving forward. Although talking to many people throughout the day can be a drain, talking to family is one of those moments in your day that you should make time for because, as busy as your day will get and as tired as you may become, talking to people from your home country—especially your family—will be refreshing and rejuvenating because you won’t have to even try. You’ll just be able to do the conversation with little or no effort because the mannerisms and mentality and memories will just come rolling back. It never ceased to amaze me how easily my old mannerisms and mentality came back whenever I got on a call with my relatives on Skype. We would talk about the same things and the same people and the same events and talk about the future. It served as a useful reminder of what I was doing, it kept me in perspective and was there quite refreshing.

So my advice is to basically structure family time into your schedule. Even if you had sometimes turbulent relations with your relatives, I would recommend doing it because it provided you with that breath of fresh air that you might not be getting in your immediate surroundings. There are of course many resources for keeping in touch with your relatives. You can use devices like Skype and Appear.in and Google Hangouts. Zoom is also becoming popular. One interesting development is the growing popularity of Facetime (Apple’s product) which you can use to access anyone with a similar Apple product, anywhere in the world, for free. Right now, Skype has the prominence over most of these other messengers because of services as varied as Skype To Go and other calling card services that Skype provides. This may change in the future as more and more companies get into the market of digital communication. When I was in South Korea, I used Skype the most when talking to my relatives. When Skyped failed, either because of a storm or because of a lousy connection, I would revert to either Facetime or a pre-paid calling card. I would reserve time after work to make phone calls, usually at night when my parents were usually up (in the East coast of the United States).

Talking to friends and family in my host country was one way that I could get through some of the toughest times that I faced as a teacher. This was one way that I could re-energize., Another interesting strategy for me to re-energize was looking for other jobs. There are plenty of English teaching jobs for a variety of settings and sometimes I would just get lost in the menagerie of options available for looking for work. It was like being like a kid in a candy store. I even had a friend in Busan who had programmed a website to curate all of the teaching jobs in Korea which made me spend less time looking for work. It was like a buffet: I could teach at a university or a college or another middle school in the middle of the desert. I could teach at nighttime or on weekends or during the day or part-time or full-time. The more options I looked into, the more options I realized that I had to design my own life, to the point where I realized that I didn’t even want teaching anymore. It was kind of like that jam experiment where people are offered numerous jars of jam and then decide not to buy any of the jams because there is just too many to choose from.

There are many resources for finding work. One of my favorite websites was Waygook, but at various times I used Dave’s ESL Café and various Facebook groups that have spurred over the months and years since I have been teaching. Some countries are changing their policies, with some becoming more stringer while others still remain a bit lax, depending on where exactly you’re teaching. In many of the South Asian countries, you’re likely to need a degree and some teaching experience. In other countries, you might need an actual degree in English or teaching. You learn all of this stuff while you’re teaching, but there are some signs you can look for in determining whether a job is more amenable or susceptible to allowing you the ability to get the kids off your back. Review websites that review places of employment are legion. One of the first things that I look for when I am looking for a place that will allow me some space is how the area is structured. Believe it or not, how the office is set up will usually help you determine just how much space you’re going to get, if any. There are some private schools in the ESL market that are entirely transparent, literally and figuratively. The walls themselves are made of glass and afford you absolutely no ability to be private, not even to your own students who might come knocking on your door at all hours—which could be stressful in and of itself. There are other jobs that allow you some private space in select quarters and some where you’ll get your own cubicle or perhaps even what amounts to your own closet. You can find the sorts of lurid details about office work by reading reviews online and seeing what people are saying. The next thing I look for is quality of life. Is the boss nice or a quote-unquote bastard? Are the people there ruthlessly competitive? Are they parasitic and feed off of your hard work? What’s the morale like?

It’s true that if you do this kind of investigative work, you’re likely to not want any job that comes your way. A good rainy-day fund approach however is to constantly look for people that you would love to work with and networking with people who are doing the things that you really want to work on and spend your time and energy on. Obviously, if you really loved teaching (or didn’t become disenchanted with it), you wouldn’t be reading this book and looking for ways to cut corners. This is the first reality that you need to come to grips with—that maybe teaching is not for you and that your time is best spent elsewhere. But before you can make any moves, you need to figure out what it is that keeps you ticking, that keeps you waking up the morning and that provides you with the motivation to keep you going. Is it writing a book? Is writing speeches for people? Graphic design? Programming? Why do you like these other things? Does it provide you with a sense of security? More money? More time that you can use to do volunteer work? Is it the volunteer work itself. You can use your time as a teacher, getting people off your back, to find out what it is that you truly want to do with your life, taking stock and doing some serious soul searching. You won’t be able to create an exit strategy for yourself if you don’t’ know where it is that you want to go: As the saying goes, “If you don’t know where it is that you want to go, any road will take you there.” Getting clear on what it is that you want to do and that gives you pleasure while providing value to other people will be a fabulous use of your time as you begin to transition out of English.

If you still find that you need to teach English but you’re sick of your environment, you can consider teaching in another country or teaching a different demographic of student. Instead of doing private, you can do public or vice versa (although public is usually better in terms of quality of life). Maybe you just need to shake things up a bit, just for a short period of time. There are two things you can do to cushion your department from a job: save a shitload of money, at least six months worth of it, and also prepare and do your research… preferably months in advance. Find out what people are saying about jobs, what exciting things people are doing around the world, and try to get involved. Let’s say you’re doing other projects that are not related to school. You have many projects and you’re just not sure which route to take. I would recommend that you try them and whichever one gives you the most success, to do more of that and enjoy it. Ultimately, life is too short to be looking for ways to cut corners at a job that you do not enjoy. When I was teaching in my second year, the position started to feel redundant. All of my lessons were successful or as successful as they could be and there was just no more opportunity, so the job became boring and redundant. Sure, I suppose I could have changed my feelings about the experience and really striven to deliver new and innovative content, but I didn’t have the heart for it and I felt that my energies were best spent elsewhere, perhaps in another profession entirely. If you feel this way too, you’re going to have to plan your escape from your job, perhaps against your baser instincts and needs for security and a cushy job. Never forget that job security is a fallacy. If you’re in need of some motivation to leave your job, I would also highly recommend that you read the *4 Hour Work Week* for some ideas about how you can live your life to the fullest and not be tied down to the sort of indentured servitude that having a job requires. Sure there are some people who enjoy the jobs that they do but many other people are going to want to live more fully than to be shackled to a 9-to-5. Especially English teachers. Maybe one day English teaching won’t be a profession where people without any experience or with questionable credentials come flocking for survival money, but that day has not arrived yet (thankfully, for many of us I suppose).

When I am looking for jobs, I also look for accommodations and package. Will the employer be willing to pay for my air fare? My apartment? Will the money that I make allow me to save, preferably rapidly? Will I be working 20 hour weeks or 100? I came across one agency that was hiring English teachers to work 35 teaching hours, with a whopping total of 100 hours required to be in the facility itself, at the beck and call of students whenever they so desired. That’s over 74 hours of unpaid work in the school where your energy is constantly depleted! I don’t know about you but I’d rather prostitute my body part-time than to take a job like this. It would be more enjoyable and perhaps even more lucrative. Life is waay too short to be working such draconian hours. Watch out for jobs like these and if you manage to accidentally snag one of these, plan your quick exit strategy. Reach out to people on social media and continually ask around for references to great schools. You should be doing this anyway, even when you’re at a cushy job, but especially do it when you’re at a job that you strongly dislike. You can get more ideas about what to do when you’re at a shitty job by reading *The Job Escape Plan* by Joytsna Ramachandran which talks about many internet businesses you can run that will provide you with some additional source of income, sometimes passive income which is the best kind of income to have! Other sources that you can tap into to make money include podcasts, particularly Pat Flynn’s *Smart Passive Income* and Nick Loper’s *Side Hustle Nation.* Tropical MBA is another great podcast, as well as *Entrepreneur on Fire.* Just be aware that sometimes these podcasters will try to sell you something. They’ll be so captivating that they might actually get you to press the “buy” button. Don’t do it. They are trained to get you to pull out your wallets. You are going to be just fine without the services that they try to offer you. Just take the advice that they give you for starting your own business and then discard the rest. You don’t need any productized service to get the ball rolling on creating a passive income stream from the sources online. Listen to these podcasts whenever you can. Listen on the bus, in the taxi, waiting for the light, while in the bathroom. Listen to them at night before you go to sleep and listen to them while you’re eating lunch. Whenever you can, get the wisdom of these folks ingrained in your head, for your very life might depend on it if you find yourself out of the job and wondering what to do next. Never panic. There are always solutions, as you’ll find from listening to these podcasts.

One of the last final notes that I can impart upon you as you begin a career in managing burdens is to always keep yourself abreast of the market forces that are impacting your industry. If you’re working in a rural area, for example, one of the downsides is that you’re likely to have less evidence of the changes that are taking place in a country or in the world with respect to teaching English. Time moves very quickly and it’s sometimes hard to see how things are evolving and developing over time. In one particular area where I taught, I often felt myself likening the experience to a prison without walls, in the sense that you would not know what was really going on in the world. Actually, though, the sole responsibility for learning about the world lies with you and keep abreast of the news, both in the world of English teaching and also the world over all, is likely to put you at a sense of ease. There are many ways of getting this news, but if you’re teaching in another country, you’ll likely get most of your news from the internet (assuming most of it is not firewalled, in which case you’ll probably want to buy a VPN to manage that). Another interesting avenue is to look at opportunities in cities where most of the progress is being made in the world. As of 2015, for example, most teachers in Korea are not able to teach high school and adults at universities. Only in the extremely rural areas and even this is changing. This is basically the evolution that is taking place right now in the country and it is likely to be more evolved by the time that you read these words. I have found this out from asking other people and looking around.

When you feel like your job is under threat or you see changes taking place that my adversely affect you, keep calm and use your time wisely to accrue more skills, more experience, and meet new people. The more avenues you expand for yourself in your life, the more you’re going to be able to inundate yourself from whatever befalls you while you’re teaching English. I’ve already mentioned several ways that you can look for English teaching positions. Now all that is left is non-teaching positions which you may in fact need to take. I suppose the ultimate way of getting the little tykes off your back is to you actually get a new job where you don’t have to deal with the little tykes *at all.* There are several websites and job boards available. One of the most popular, as of 2015, is [www.escapethecity.org](http://www.escapethecity.org/) which even has an entrepreneur program that teaches you how to start your own business from scratch. Still others are jobbatical.com and flexjobs.com. Traditional freelancing websites are also pretty popular right now in 2015—websites such as upwork.com, freelancer.com, Guru.com, and even Craigslist. Yes, it’s true that some of these websites tend to be a race to the bottom, you want to work on developing your relationships online with people and using that as a platform to advertise whatever new skills that you’re learning (as you’re getting the little tykes off your back). All of this stuff I was able to do while I was transitioning out of teaching. Thankfully, I was teaching at a company that had a lot of downtime and a lot of desk warming, so I used that experience to start a blog, learn coding, develop a following, and network with people around the globe who were of similar mindsets. I used my desk warming to hire an entire global staff of freelancers to help me build the projects that I could only dream about if I were tasked with the responsibility of building things on my own. Please allow me to dispel for you the myth that I am not a doer. People who get the little tykes off their back are people who aren’t non-doers. Sometimes they are just people with a dream. People who see more for themselves than what they’re presently doing. And actually, a lot of what I was doing was creating more value for my company because I was learning new and valuable skills that I could teach to my students in the target language. Maybe the company didn’t see it that way, but it didn’t matter anyway because my contract was fixed and there was really no way for me to progress in the company any further than I already had. Some teachers decide that this is the level they wish to maintain for themselves, teaching 40 hour weeks with no promise of promotion or advancement, and just keeping a relaxed life despite changes that are going on around them. Although I have learned many strategies to get the tykes off my back, I am not someone who just sits back and allows the world to go by. I get the tykes off my back so that I can achieve more in the long run. None of these strategies I ever used with the purpose being able to spend more of my time doing leisurely activities that don’t create value. This is the best way of getting them off your back in my opinion. Doing it in the service of some higher cause, for a better future.

Most of the time I was able to do my own thing while desk warming. Whenever someone asked me to do something—which was seldom—I jumped and did it, of course. Most tasks never really took that much time for me to do. If they did, I would find ways of getting back that time over the weekend to do my chores that I had been meaning to do while I was desk warming. Eventually, I started to feel burdened by people asking me to do these little tasks that required no skill whatsoever. I had larger visions for my life that couldn’t be as contained. When this happened, I knew it was time for me to leave. Sure, the job I had was cushy and there are definitely far worse jobs to be had (I had them all, I’m sure), but if you’re not growing or developing and just sitting still without seeing the world and trying to make changes in it, then you’re also taking a grave risk. With the evolution of the internet and the rapid changes that are taking place in the world today, it behooves you to be in the world to win it. From starting businesses to meeting people doing exciting and interesting things, if you’re sitting at a desk for almost 40 hours per week, then you’re removing yourself from the action and this can have damages too. People always ask me if I have any fear of losing a job and not finding a new one. The answer is that the only fear that I have is the fear of missing out on opportunities that I could have ceased if only I had been in the action. Jobs will always come to you if you’re dedicating yourself to a life of service and helping other people. For the most productive citizens of society, I truly believe that no singular job that requires 40 hours per week could ever contain such an inspired person for very long. Most people who want to contribute more to many more people will find a way to leave their job and do something more important with their lives. They’ll use their job as leverage, as a starting point for something more grand.

So here is a list of things to consider when you’re thinking about whether you should stay or not at your English teaching job: (1) Do you constantly thnk about what other people are doing “on the other side?” (2) Do you constantly feel like you have to get the little tykes off your back so that you can do other things? (3) Do you wake up every morning and feel the pain of having to get out of bed and take a shower and then go to work? (4) Is every day a race to do something more important with your time? (5) Is your growth and development capped? (6) Are your most productive periods of work on the weekends or whenever you’re not working at your job? (7)Do you constantly fantasize about your vacation time and try to sneak in some sick days so that you can have more time to relax? (8) Do you find yourself complaining a lot about yoru colleagues to your friends or complaining about what other people do to you at the job, despite your most earnest attempts to make the situation work for you?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then chances are you need to consider leaving. It’s okay if you feel this way. And it’s okay if you find yourself complaining a lot about things in your school. Everybody has complaints and sometimes it can be very relaxing to fan them out. But recognize also that your complaints are entirely reflecting the fact that you need to make a change and that it is you who needs to take charge of your own life to ensure that your happiness is maintained. Although it can be alluring to outwardly lash at how screwed up things are, at the end of the day you are entirely responsible for ensuring your own happiness no matter where you are and who you are working for. The onus is on you. I am saying all of this because it can be a dangerous thing if you find yourself complaining a lot about how fucked up things are because then that type of complaining can sometimes leak into your actual work life and then spread like a toxin to other people. And then before you know it, you’ve poisoned the pool and everyone is sensing a bit of distress and unease about the working environment. Anyone in business will tell you that all it takes is one person to ruin the whole experience for everyone. So do yourself a favor and keep your complaints to yourself. Nothing will get people ON TOP OF YOU faster than your complaints and outward lashing at other people. If you complain, that complaining will only come back to you and make things ten times worse. It’s kind of like a boomerang effect. When things are uncomfortable, the last thing you want to do is point to what you perceive as the source of your discomfort and place outward blame on it and then hope it will go away. Rather than stew in your anger and resentment, find ways of providing solutions to issues or creating value in your environment. Admittedly, there are some corporate setups that will probably not allow you to do very much of anything within your work environment. However, take charge of what you can control. You know you can control yourself, so figure out ways of lessening the complaints in your mind and thinking of things that make you happy. Don’t feel resentful, but think of other things that get you excited (such as, for example, departure from your job). I can’t emphasize enough that nothing will make things worse than you just complaining about your experience at the job, your colleagues, and the awful students you have to teach. This will get you nowhere, and at the very worst, will sour your reputation. Whenever possible, try to leave your job on a good note. As the old performing arts adage goes, leave them wanting more.

This is the best way of leaving a job. To leave the employers and fellow employees sad to see you leave. It gives you the courage and good karma that you’ll need to move on to your next life challenge.

So we’ve covered a lot of ground in this chapter. We’ve discussed several ways to keep the community at bay and ways to engage your students when you’re seeing them on the outskirts. Local citizens can sometimes engage you in conversation but this hasn’t really been the case for me in most countries that I have visited. Whenever someone in Korea engaged me in conversation, it actually was quite pleasant and effortless and was usually in the process of me doing something important, such as looking for a place to go or finding where the nearest tourist attraction was. Most of the time, in my little town, no one really paid me any mind as I typed feverishly on my laptop in the dead of winter, at one of the many cafes in town. I never really had a negative experience with any of the locals since most of the activities that I did required very little speaking and were mostly solo operations. There are two types of foreigners that you’ll encounter, as Mish Slade notes, in her book *Travel While You Work.* There are the types of foreigners who will walk into an establishment, be it a restaurant or a café or something else, and just start speaking to people in English, assuming that they speak the language and can understand them. And then there are others who will never make that assumption and choose to learn some of the language so that they can get by in the country. Not sure which camp you fall under but I personally fall under the second one because it has greatly eased tension for me and my mental willpower when I have been able to communicate with locals, even on the most basic level. Perhaps you’re not the type of person to get anxious when there are language barriers, but even if you aren’t, memorizing the local language can go a long way in endearing people and showing people that you are genuinely interested in their culture and customs and society. It might even open doors for you (although in Korea, most people who were able to open doors for me often insisted that I speak to them in English). In looking back on my experience, I just remember a sense of relief when someone understood me when I asked them where the bathroom was or where the garbage can was or where the luggage went. These are all the sorts of things you have to anticipate needing when you teach in a country that is not your own, and nothing will get the locals off your back faster then if you just member the damn language already!

As I already indicated in this chapter, most of your energy will be spent dealing with kids and colleagues outside of the school, so when you find yourself approached by one of the students, smile and engage them and don’t forget that they don’t really know enough of the language for you to have any in depth conversation about anything. In many respects, the conversations that you have with students outside of school won’t even be remotely as energy sapping as the conversations that you’re used to at home, so it shouldn’t be much of a worry to you. Also, many students won’t even approach you probably unless you’re in a community and country where it’s a fabulous experience when you run into a teacher on the streets or in an unlikely location. If you find yourself in one of these types of scenarios, then it will behoove you to learn the transportation system fast (again, learning a language can go a long way in ensuring that you learn things rather quickly with your surroundings). Learn how to get out of your neighborhood and to another neighborhood that is two hours away. Get on a bus and go to these places and get familiar with them as your escape havens. You’ll need these escape havens sometimes just for a change of pace or sometimes to even get work done. Big cities can be valuable escape havens because you’re not likely to run into anyone that you know in them since there are just so many people. And if you want to do something social in cities, with English speaking residents of those cities, you can do them and still not be worried that you’ll run into these people in the city again because the cities can be so vast and populated that you’ll never be found by these people again if you don’t want to. So learn where your nearest city is and go to it if it won’t break the bank. If it does break the bank, then find something that is closer and less populated and go to that. Or learn of some corners of your own town where people hardly frequent (like the library) and go those places instead. As an EFL teacher teaching in a local neighborhood, sometimes you have to learn how to escape and disappear to do your best work within the school community. Some people might take exception to it, but you can frame this as your own need just to recharge your batteries and get your bearings again. You can tell your colleagues that you just need a change of pace or that you are doing some sightseeing around the country. All of these are valid excuses for when you need to go to an escape haven. And you are encouraged to learn them.

But as has already been indicated, you don’t really need to worry much about socializing with your students because usually the conversations will be short and clipped or your students will just ignore you anyway. Oftentimes it’s your colleagues that you need to learn how to tactfully socialize with and keep it at a distance. Office politics aside, I stressed the importance of endearing yourself to them when possible. This included things like getting gifts for the faculty and then also asking them about what their thoughts were. I have found in my own experience that transparency and communication will go a long way in lessening what ever possible friction might come your way as a result of the token prize that everyone is shooting for, although one never knows. I have read some pretty horrific stories on job EFL review sites where in-teacher competition was practically baked into the job position and faculty found themselves vying for raises and prizes amongst each other, often only getting ahead if they endeared themselves to the senior teachers. If you are reading this book cover to cover, then you’re probably not one of those people who is going to find himself or herself at a job where there is such in-fighting. If you’re reading this book, you probably have enough curiosity and know how already to figure out what it is that you need to do to be in a comfortable situation. But on the off chance that you didn’t get the memo, IF the company that you’re interested in working for has a reputation for a particularly toxic environment, then you should take heed and consider other options because nothing will burn you out faster then seemingly endless competition day in and day out between you and your colleagues, fighting for the little bread crumbs that they serve you.

I remember listening to a friend talk about his experience with working at a private hagwon in South Korea where all classes were videotaped. One day, my friend recounted, he was sitting at his desk and allowing his students to do quiet work. Soon afterwards, he was later castigated for doing that. He had been sick and had just given the students quiet work to do. They had yelled at him despite the fact that he had spent most of the year working at the private academy without any sick days whatsoever. He had also described evaluations that would take place throughout the year where the senior teachers would review his work and then sometimes just spurn him just to spurn him even though he had done a good job. My friend had described working for this company as working for a “concentration camp.” These were his exact words. Let me be clear here. Aside from the fact that you should never EVER take a job like this—you should be working part-time for less money if it comes to this—if you ever find yourself in such a toxic environment as the one I have just described, you need to plan your escape. My friend said that his former job made him lose faith in humanity a little bit, which is actually an atrocious thing to say. If your job is making you feel like that, then you need to leave it. Always keep money in the back that you have on reserve to escape a job that is HIGHLY HIGHLY unsatisfying. Sure, sometimes you don’t realize that something is unsatisfying until months later when you have the time to reflect, but once you start to feel that something is off, take a step back and assess whether you have a good working environment or not.

It’s no secret that in South Korea, public school teachers, although paid less, have a much better quality of life than do their private school counterparts. Most teachers, when asked, unanimously agree that they would take the quality of life over the pained Monday-Sunday schedule for more pay. My thinking is that I almost never want to be in a situation where the work environment is toxic. Or if desperate times call for desperate measures, I certainly don’t want to stay at a job for very long. Assess your situation and make sure that whatever job you’re going into, that the rewards-incentives are not structured in such a way as to create a blood-thirsty battle within the hierarchy. You’ll find that people’s baser impulses come out considerably when there is such structures in place and your students—although energy sapping as they are—will be the least of your worries.

Not to belabor the point here, but I remember being called for an interview for a company in China. There are certain signs to look for in a company when you’re interviewing with a representative for a possible position. When I was interviewing with this particular representative, I remember him first telling me that there was a high turnover (bad sign #1). He said that he didn’t know why there was such a high turnover but that he was trying to figure it out. He then proceeded to tell me about the working environment and that faculty were required to stay in the school effectively for 100 working hours! (bad sign #2). If you are forced to essentially live in the school, then you shouldn’t be taking the job. Instead, you’ll find more gratification from teaching online to people around the world. There are so many schools in and around Asia that effectively force teachers to practically be shackled to the school so that the communities on the outside don’t see them. It’s almost like the teachers effectively become freak show performers, performing for the kids when they are in school and then staying additional hours at the beck and call of their superiors or the kids again. If traveling is one reason why you decided to teach EFL, then there are better jobs in the world of EFL that will allow you to see the country that you live in. Make sure that when you’re looking for a job or deciding to take a job, that your working hours are max 22 per week with maybe another 20 hours of office time (if you’re working full time). This is what would be considered normal, as of 2015 (although the idea of a 40-hour work week is also changing, but I suppose that’s a subject for another book).

The interviewer for this particular school in China also said that a lot of the teachers moved on to other schools almost a few months after they had taken a job with their company (bad sign #3). I was pretty sure that I wasn’t going to take this job after meeting with this interviewer, but just out of curiosity, I researched the company online and found in the top results of Google a host of bad reviews about the school and about the draconian hours that they impose on their teachers (bad sign #4). These results came before the school’s official website! If the business that you’re looking to work for has nothing but bad results showing up on Google, even before the official site, do NOT take the job.

I am talking about all of this to you because a major part of being able to work with a level of ease is in determining the optimal environment to do that in. If you walk into a war zone, then none of the strategies that I have provided in the pages before this one are going to do you in any good because the odds are just going to be stacked hopelessly against you. Take stock of this now and figure out the right environment for you. Also, always question the authority of a book or a person who recommends a private school that has a bad reputation. Many times, people have recommended that I apply for such-and-such a school, and then sooner rather than later I discover through a simple search that the school is toxic in more ways than one. Sometimes, it’s a mishap or just an example of being woefully misinformed. The point is that you should do your own research and never put all your cards on one person or one source to provide solutions for you. Make your search comprehensive and multi-pronged.

I have digressed a lot but I felt it worth it. You really need to make sure that your work environment is manageable so that you can control your relationships properly with both your students and your colleagues. You need to make sure that no group of people is ever a complete threat to your equilibrium.  
 Managing social interactions doesn’t have to be energy inducing. The only time I have ever felt that I was expending more energy than I needed to outside of the school community, in the township where I was working, was when my middle school students approached me in the bus terminal and attempted to strike up a conversation that turned out to be quite painful. They basically used the opportunity for additional English lessons which led to awkward silences a lot of the time and staring off into space. Students don’t realize that very often a teacher’s words and mannerisms and behaviors are “scripted,” for the class, much in the same way that an actor prepares to assume a role in a play or a movie. The students didn’t realize this and I found myself at a loss for words despite my eagerness to see the students. In hindsight, this wasn’t really a big deal because I loved my students and they loved me, but finding a way to communicate and exchange ideas was a formidable task that I would have rather not been doing (as I was eating dinner, mind you). It probably goes without saying that you can mitigate the likelihood of this happening if you just eat at a restaurant or café where you know people will be less likely to attend. Bus terminals aren’t usually the best places to remain anonymous.

Some of the best places to go for anonymity are dark tavern-like cafes that are off the beaten path, in alleys and corners where people are not likely to frequent (You can usually get a good sense of this just by seeing if there are any passerby as you’re walking toward the entrance). Cafes are the best because you can get a lot of work done while drinking coffee and eating something. You can’t really do that with restaurants. I have also found that libraries are great places to be anonymous because (a) no one likes to read; and (b) you have to be quiet and your own thing. Even if there are some people at the library, they are less likely to notice you when they are so entrenched in whatever affairs they need to take care of. The other good thing about libraries is that they have different types of corridors and cubicles and all sorts of corners that are designed perfectly for hiding. If you really want to remain anonymous, you can go to these little corners and just side with your book to your face and no one will notice you. Some other great places to go for anonymity are parks that are outside of your township (provided the weather is good). Most people will be busy doing their own thing, as with libraries, and not notice you. In South Korea, I would go to parks all the time to film videos for my YouTube channel despite passerby that wouldn’t even bat a second eye to look at what I was doing. In Mexico, because the weather was nice all the time, I would go to little park islands in and around downtown Guadalajara and sit and just read for hours at a time with no one stopping to ask me any questions about what I was doing, despite my glaring foreignness. In Manila, there were no parks but there were malls and these malls had plenty of sitting areas to go to for quiet reading, despite the fact that often people would stop and stare at me and my foreignness (more so than in Mexico).

Finding places to go for anonymity is a lot easier than one would expect. I find that it’s mostly excuses that hold people back from finding the places of refuge that will allow them to get their busy work done or just be still and quiet. In South Korea, I often hiked mountains with the intent purpose of going to the top of the summit because I knew that no one would be there when I arrived. And that was just the way I liked it.

When you’re in the school, there’s less of an opportunity for this kind of retreat but you can still steal some moments of time to yourself when you’re not teaching the kids. For example, sometimes when I just needed to close my eyes and not be around other people, I would go to the bathroom and just sit in the stall for some moments of quiet. Sometimes I would actually go to the bathroom and just sit longer on the toilet seat to gather my thoughts and just have time to myself. Other times, I would go to a room that was unoccupied and just sit quietly or stare out the window. In South Korea, there were often vacant computer rooms that I would also sit and have my lunch. I would spend nearly 45 minutes in these rooms, all by myself, eating a lovely lunch where I wasn’t being judged or assessed or examined or chided. Please bear in mind again that it wasn’t because I didn’t like my environment or my colleagues or the country or the people. I was quite happy, but I also needed that precious time to regroup so that I could fully enjoy the company of others. Many people will probably read these words differently and twist them to make it seem like I’m some kind of misanthrope, but this is not the case. Most people in my school environments loved me and I have loved them. But in order for me to maintain this sense of closeness with people, I needed to be separate at times. Maybe you will feel the same way when you start teaching. And maybe you won’t.

When you feel that you really have no options, there is also one last place you can use as your refuge and that is your home. You can turn your phone off and convert your entire apartment into a study hall. Most people don’t’ advise doing this because the mind translates your apartment as a place for sleeping and doing relaxing things. However, I have made holidays of my apartment where I would change furniture around and make the place look different. I would turn on the tea kettle, place some low calming music or perhaps coffee sounds from coffitivity.com and I would get to work at my little floor table with the window open, simulating a café experience while I wrote my next chapter for my book or worked on my computer programming skills or managed my global work staff and told them what I needed to do. Sometimes I would just read. If I ever became sleepy, I would find a way to make the apartment just a little uncomfortable—I would turn down the heat for instance, and this would make me less tired and more willing to work. Sometimes if I was really that tired, I would just take a power nap for 25 minutes and then wake up and start working again, while also promising to give myself a reward for doing a good job. Many people swear by the Pomodoro technique and this has worked well for me as well. I use the Online Timer which you can google and set it for 25-30 minutes and just work with intense focus on whatever task it is that I needed to accomplish and just do it. Then I would reward myself by either searching social media or play some music that I loved—usually music from the 1980s in the United States because this is one of my favorite genres.

You can bake in some special holidays to have around your apartment when you feel lonely but also realize that the people in your community just aren’t going to do it for you. You can play music and dance around the room or you can search social media or you can peruse your cell phone and talk to random strangers. Blab.im is also great for meeting random strangers although sometimes you have to be careful because a lot of the people on blab use the platform to get extra English lessons and this can prove just as draining as your normal classes, and for no on money! You can also cook. Although cooking is not exactly my forte, I have found it to be one of the most therapeutic experiences of my teaching career and the process of going through making something from start to finish is quite relaxing to me, especially to the background of some music that I like or a highly informative podcast.

These are just some easy ways to transform your apartment into something other-worldly to help you get your work done within your home. There are countless other sources that you can use to make the most of your staycation indoors if you're looking for easy avoidance and to conserve a lot of energy. In subsequent editions of this book, I will provide additional resources for transforming your apartment to make it seem like you're going places without actually going places. It's kind of funny to say this but some of the best memories I've had while traveling have been when I just stayed in my own apartment and did my own thing. It was safe, private, enjoyable, and I could conserve a shit ton of energy without actually sleeping (something that I only recommend in slight doses or else it becomes counterproductive).

Short of staying home, the next best way to conserve energy is to leave the country. But first a warning: vacations can really be expensive and eat a hole in your wallet, thereby eliminating other options for you in the future if you don't have enough capital. I only recommend taking out-of-country vacations as a last resort. And frankly, if you're traveling so frequently anyway, you probably should just go move to the country where you want to take a vacation. Sure, there are some countries that are literally designed with the only express purpose being to take a vacation and that's it, there are still many countries that are quite livable despite their reputation of being a vacation and tourist destination (e.g. Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam). Living in these countries is entirely possible if your tastes sway in that direction. But I digress. Vacations out of country for English teachers can be quite expensive. Some teachers might consider taking the vacation on credit and paying it back later. I disagree with this decision because (a) owing someone money anywhere is an uncomfortable predicament to be in, especially when you're traveling; and (b) I don't believe in spending money that I don't have or any kind of consumer spending that will put me in the red and bury me. I only spend money that I have when I spend money on vacations out of country.

If you're feeling that you really need a break and get away from it all, you can find a host of nice apartments on AirBnb or do some hostel-jumping or hotel searching with agoda.com. I've tried some of these and they're great for short term stays. I generally do not recommend couchsurfing.com because you have to spend a lot of time getting to know the couchsurfing community and you have to practically make friends with virtually everyone you meet or else it becomes a futile exercise. If you're going to make friends, my thinking is you should make friends with people who share similar interests to you and then work backward to couch surfing possibilities from there. Not the other way around. To me making friends with people just because they might have a spare couch is a little phony and just not my style. The other issue is that most people don't trust men—I understand this actually—and so they are less inclined to help you out unless you can produce the proper paperwork—criminal background check, blood tests, and the like. When I was in Mexico, I was able to snag two couches by two women, for just a few days, but I declined. Another person messaged me after it was too late and I had already boarded the plane for Asia. What I learned from this experience is that if you really want to make couchsurfing work *at all*, you had best get started now, from the moment you read these words. Go to couchsurfing.com and start looking at profiles of the people who live in the countries where you want to go. Message them and get to know them. Tell them that you have d always wanted to visit their country. Show them your blog or some other digital accomplishment to prove that you're not some homicidal maniac. I did this before going to Mexico and it worked. I befriended this host from Guadalajara. It was quite an interesting way the way we met. I told him that I was looking to run away from the United States and he was more than happy to accept me into his home. Although I never stayed at his apartment, I'm sure he would have taken me in had I followed up with him.

So the point I'm trying to make is that couchsurfing is entirely possible when you want to get away from it all. You just have to do your planning and make sure you do it at least a month in advance because most people need to be prepped for something like couch surfing, even the best hosts on the planet, because people are going to live their lives and some moments in their lives will be more convenient than others. If you show your awareness of this, and be sensitive to people's needs, you'll likely be able to find a couch for the place you want to escape to. However, if you're like me, you want to just live alone in a foreign country. For this, I recommend searching hostelworld for the right accommmodations. Short of this, Agoda is another viable option, although I've had mixed experiences. You still have to do your research. Agoda isn't going to just hand pick the best-selections for you, although it will give you a good sense of what to expect when you arrive at a given motel or hotel (there are reviews of the establishments on the pages).

When I visited the Philippines, I had mostly nice establishments, albeit in some rather shady areas of the city. The first night I was in the Philippines, I met a guy named JoJo who threatened to beat me up if he ever saw me in the streets again. But Manila was still a fun place. Leaving a host country for another country has its perks to be sure. For one thing, you can see what you're missing in the world and what's taking place outside of the bubble that you're usually cloistered in. This is not only refreshing but it can give you ideas about where to take your career next. It's also nice to be in a country where you know absolutely no one at all and can start afresh with new insight and no preconceived notions. There's something fun about being able to walk the streets and just observe people doing their daily activities, even when no one is talking to you or paying attention. Some countries are better at this than others. When I was in the Philippines, everyone stared at me unless I was in a crowded marketplace, like near Binondo, in the Chinatown district. Sometimes I would feel uncomfortable but I nevertheless always found time to be by myself and absorb the vast amounts of energy that I had lost while teaching at school.

Even if you're being extremely social in a country that you're visiting, this could still help you conserve some of your energy anyway just by virtue of the fact that you're doing something new and exciting and it's something that's a change of pace. Let's face it: teaching can get pretty boring, even at your best when you're trying to develop new and innovative material for your students. Sometimes the pattern that you fall into can make the job tedious and unfulfilling. When this happens, vacations can fill that void that you experience and fortify your relationship with your first host country. It was weird when I was leaving the Philippines to return to South Korea because although I am from the United States originally, I felt a sense of relief in returning to Korea as opposed to the United States or some other country that I have visited. This is the sort of power that taking a vacation can have. It can remind you of the good things that you have and give you just that much more excitement in your life for you to take back with you to teaching. Either way you spend your time on a trip away from your host country—be it to lounge in a chair or to go hiking in the mountains—is bound to reinvigorate you for your classes when you return. Don't underestimate the need for even just a change of pace.

So as you can see now, there are plenty of ways to retreat and escape the confines of a profession that will zap the energy right out of you. In a school where you’re virtually in front of people at all times, it can be quite difficult for you to conserve your energy. Although it’s nice to be wanted by people consistently for your services, often times it can be quite draining and you need to find ways to conserve that energy. This is why I always recommend to people starting some kind of a business on line so that you can affect more people will little or no energy. In a future chapter, I’m going to address this career planning that you need to consider. The world is changing, as you know, and in some respects, it *does* make sense to keep up with the Joneses so that you are maximizing on your happiness and not working from pay check to paycheck for people who are constantly asking you to perform XYZ in a set timeline. These days, you don’t need to do all of that and in the coming chapters, I will explain some strategies you can use to remove the tykes off your back in the 21st century, even when the academic institutions are working from a 20th and sometimes even a 19th century perspective.

So to recap, there are plenty of ways to keep the little tykes off your back outside of the classroom but within the school community. You can keep conversation at a minimum and keep it casual. You can find places in your building to retreat to whenever you need to be alone—bathrooms are some of the best private areas around for this sort of thing, even if the bathroom can be grimy and disgusting. Corridors are another option as is unoccupied rooms. Keep pleasantries and smile at the students when you’re walking through the hallways. If you’re in a busy school where people are constantly approaching you with favors and tasks and conversations, maintain that you’re a very busy person and tell them that they can get in touch with you at a specified period of your choosing (but *not* in that moment). I think it’s okay to even tell your students that you’re tired. It humanizes you more and lets them know that they can just freely approach you with favors because they know what a tired person you are and they can understand that. If this doesn’t work, just say you’re busy and don’t have the time to accommodate until when they schedule something with you.

When it comes to teachers, you have to be far more delicate because these are the people who will make or break you in the school environment. In my first year as a teacher, I had a rather nightmarish co-teacher who would swing back and forth in moods and give me competing recommendations (they were more like orders) on how to improve the class so that the students were interested in the material and continued coming to my class. Everyday became an altercation and she could sense my aggravation and nervousness and only grilled harder. In truth, I probably would not have renewed my contract had I needed to work with this individual but I persisted in trying to solve my problems by reaching out to other colleagues and telling them about the situation. I earnestly wanted to do a good job and I didn’t know how to rectify such a sensitive situation, especially when I questioned the judgment of this particular co-teacher. I gathered up information as I went through this investigative process, learning about how co-teachers had typically done the work in the school and learning about what they did to handle a situation like the kind that I was in.

Some teachers said that I could do what I wanted in the class and were blatantly shocked by what they were hearing me say when I told them about what was transpiring. I told them about how my co-teacher had sat in on my class and openly criticized my teaching pedagogy in front of the students, saying things like “No no, that’s bad teaching. You’re wrong for teaching it to them like that.” Such things would have surely made you cringe as they did me when I recounted the experience ad infinitum for people whose judgment I trusted more than my own co-teacher’s. If you find yourself questioning the judgment of your co-teacher, you need to reach out to other people to bring yourself back to reality. Very often, it’s easy for co-teachers to shield their NETs from the real world and warp them mind into thinking that teaching should be like XYZ when it is really like ABC. Teachers can distort reality and make it seem lik you should be doing more work than you’re supposed to do. In order to get teachers off your back, you need to reality test at all times. Reality test by asking around. And don’t’ do this in the message boards either because the trolls will pounce on you and just as easily blame you for all of your troubles just because they like to do that. Confide in a local or someone whose authority you trust. Try to befriend some kind of local English teacher that is in a similar predicament as you and has been teaching for a little longer. They will surely be able to teach you some of the tricks of the trade and help you manage some of your stress and sometimes even step in to handle the altercations.

Teaching in a foreign country is a difficult because there are potentially many misunderstandings that can take place between you and the students, between you and the co-teachers, between you and society. Sure, there will be many countries and communities that chalk up these misunderstandings to it being a “foreigner thing,” but a lot less people will be so forgiving and will openly wonder why you don’t follow things the way the locals do, especially if you’ve been in the country for a long period of time. Befriending an expat can be vital toward your sanity, even if you wanted to originally live in a country because you wanted to meet more of the locals. It helps to have at least some fellow foreigner friend to give you a sense of ease about what you’re doing and what you’re experiencing.

Anyway, after I had figured out what was going on with my co-teacher, I eventually got her removed from the responsibilities of being my co-teacher. So I’d like to think. She was a very toxic person and bad for the overall morale of the group and had to be removed, like a cancer. Once she was removed, a huge burden had lifted. I am almost positive that this would never have happened if I hadn’t befriended other people and been eager to resolve problems and issues. If you can become the person who wants to do a good job and problem solve, then you’ll become the person that people lay off of as well. Constantly think to yourself “How can I solve a problem today in the school?” Sure, this is a proactive stance but it’s also an investment in your ability to get people off your back. At a certain critical mass, you’re likely to get people to lay off of you for the tenure of your contract, so start solving problems for people.

Many colleagues might befriend you, and that’s a good thing. You want to be friends with colleagues and have them become close allies. But watch out for the language leeches who use you just to maintain their English proficiency. These are the people that sound good to talk to but in reality, are just people who are testing their English proficiency and leaving you feeling sort of empty about the whole experience. It took me a long time to realize what a drain this was becoming on my mental and emotional energy. I would hang out with these colleagues and have a conversation with them and feel totally wiped out, despite feeling like the conversation was about virtually nothing at all. How could this have happened? Well, it’s easy. I was being a sound board for their English proficiency. This is what I was being paid to do, and they were mooching free lessons off of me. Remember, you’re being paid in a country to converse with people in English and give them the practice that they would otherwise not receive if you were not around. Know how much you’re worth and just say “no” to the English-leeches! You’ll save so much more energy in the long run!

Finding places of refuge in the school is great: bathrooms, parks, corridors, your own apartment. All of these places can give you the respite that you need to get the little tykes off your back for a little while when you’re not doing activities in the classroom that will get them off your back. Another important thing to do is to maintain your space. Maintaining office hours and being able to tell people that you are busy will also go a long way in getting the little tykes off your back, as will getting the faculty off your back without necessarily causing offence. Sometimes even putting on headphones is a good sign that lets people know that you’re busy although be careful with this. It is not advised that you do this straight away lest you should be considered offensive to the people around you. Wait a few months until you get some seniority and then go ahead and play something on your computer and wear headphones. Maybe you’ll be at an office that requires you not to be playing anything on your computer while you’re at the office. This is a business that you don’t want to work for. Again, you want to work for a company that gives you liberty to give you some space, even when the walls are paper thin or even glass, literally.

Maintain your space and keep it up of the utmost importance. Does a student want you to help them with their term paper? They’ll have to wait until your schedule frees up. Do the faculty want you to teach a workshop? Tell them that you had plans that you established before they asked you this favor. There were many surprises that were sprung up on me while I was teaching in South Korea. Surprise! We have a festival! Surprise! We have a faculty dinner! Surprise! You are going to have to teach a kid how to perform in this next show, as the Great Incredible Hulk no less. I didn’t usually say “no,” but when I could, I did tell the teachers that I had scheduled something with a friend that couldn’t be broken. I did this because going that extra length would have meant compromising other important tasks that I had to do, such as learning how to program and starting businesses from laptops, things that I was already doing at the office.

It’s true that part of being a foreign teacher is to provide that cultural exchange, that cultural dialogue and to be apart of the host culture that you are in. I am not saying that you shouldn’t partake or do favors for people. All I am saying is that if things get to be too much for you to handle and you need to take a break, you’ll have these useful resources that I am giving you at your disposal to take back some control of your life. At that very worst moments of my teaching career, I had absolutely no control over what anyone was doing to me. I worked over 25 hours per week and stayed in the school for most of the day. My entire life was passing me by in these prisons without walls and I was saying “yes,” to everyone, even for the littlest of things, like going out for coffee on a weekend. It was burning me out, I wasn’t enjoying it at all, and I needed a rest. I needed sleep. I need refuge. I needed space to myself so that I could process everything. There was no way that I was going to be a good Engish teacher to anyone if I was burned out and saying “yes,” to everyone. So little by little, I took control of my time, the people that I hung out with, and managed my daily activities in the school a lot more efficiently.

Other things that I learned to do was outsource a lot of my work to other people around the world who were willing to work for less. When I first started working as an English teacher, I would make my own powerpoint presentations. I would spend hours on them, really, and the PPTs weren’t even that great. They never got so many hits on Waygook.org or anything like that. They would be about the most mundane stuff, like present progressive tense or the past progressive (really boring stuff) and I would spend hours compiling video footage on YouTube for each PPT slide. It took me hours of my time and some times I wouldn’t even be able to use any of them because the students had holiday off or my co-teachers didn’t want me teaching that stuff, or they were too advanced. I would also lesson plan a lot, create lists, write scripts, write dialogues, anticipating how the interactions would go and then execute and then hypothesis test and do split A/B testing about whether students liked the material about the platypus or not. In hindsight, I shouldn’t have done this much work outside of class. It was just too much for one person. None of the students really benefited from these extra lessons that werent’ apart of their main curriculum. Actually, the most useful material I ever gave the students was outside of the class itself, in the hallways when I dialogued with them and had them practice their English language as opposed to pointing and clicking on a PPT presentation. In the less formal corridors, I was able to really perform the work of an EFL teacher, engaging students in casual conversation and asking them about their plans for the future. I was able to joke and tease and laugh with the students and this made more of a difference then any of the games that I bothered to work on.

If you’re teaching at a school where you don’t have to grade, give tests, or virtually do anything except smile pleasantly and provide good pronunciation to the students, you ca probably cut your work in half by outsourcing the PPT material to other staff in the Philippines or Pakistan. This is what I did most of the time and I ended up saving a ton of time in lesson planning. Eventually, I stopped lesson planning altogether because I just had an inventory of activities in my head that I could whip out at a moment’s notice, with or without PPT technology, and just use them to get the students to practice. If I was hard up for lesson ideas—which was rarely the case—I would search sites like Waygook or ESLPrintables. Aside from that, I would outsource like crazy and then put them on Waygook for other teachers to benefit. When my co-teacher told me to teach from a textbook,that was great because then I didn’t have to plan at all. I just had to read from the textbook and provide the sound samples for the students to follow from. All of this is going to sound sacrilege to some people who believe that teaching should be done the hard way. But frankly, the hard way is tiring and no one is going to reward you for it. No one will notice the difference, and life is just too short for you to be doing things the hard way, especially given your precarious status as a native English teacher. Once the schools run out of money, you’re out as well. There’s no stopping the schools from dismissing you, even if you worked several years with your lesson planning and gave the most knock out lessons that no one even remembered. It is your job responsibility, obviously, to provide great content to your students, but you can do that easily without having to hit your head against a brick wall over and over and over again. It’s kind of like going to school and getting a lot of credentials with the assumption that the credentials are going to do something for you. I earned four degrees and the most I ever got was unemployment and exile from my home country, the United States. How’s that for hard work? If there is anyone who knows what hard work can do for you, it should be me. So please take heed with what I have to tell you and cut your lesson planning time in half by outsourcing. I do most of my outsourcing on Fiverr.com, but I have also found some pretty good people through UpWork.com. Really, Fiverr does all that I need it to do. I’ve hired PPT-makers, videographers, designers, and worksheet makers. Really, all of your teaching needs can basically be outsourced to a third world country and if you drive a hard bargain, you can really get away with bloody murder and have a really nice solid PPT for about 10 USD, one that will last you at least a month.

In the next chapter, I bring up some strategies for conserving your mental energy through social media.

**Chapter 3**

As of 2015, social Media has grown exponentially. For all intents and purposes, it is where the real job market can be found, where commerce flows back and forth at such a rapid and dizzying pace that it can be difficult just making sense of it all. As of 2015, the most popular social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and Reddit. Tying it all together are services like HootSuite which can bring all of your social media into one place, one operating hub. More than ever, social media is critical in your every day life. It’s how you keep abreast of the news in your home country as well as in the local country, it’s where you can sustain dialogue with others and bring up interesting headlines, poems, art, job sites, and other resources. On social media, you can connect with all of your students and provide them with additional outlet for trying out their language skills and absorbing them into the fold of your life with other people.

Adding to this is the fact that you can teach from anywhere in the world nowadays, from Verbling.com to italki.com and to other sites that function as a language exchange program for people. This provides a sort of precarious issue because the boundaries between work and personal life often tend to blur across social media. Many people don’t advise using social media at all because of the risk of betraying your professional identity for people. Particularly with a social media site like Facebook, maintaining your authority can be hard when your buddies are holding you upside down as you drink through a beer bong, college style. Although it is strongly advised that you don’t incorporate your social media, I feel a bit differently about it. Let me explain.

Although this book is about getting the little tykes off your back, you can just as easily mitigate the little tykes from getting on your back in social media by creating a more sanitized social media profile on Facebook and using that to blog every once in awhile about what’s going on in your life (minus the rated R material). I know many teachers who have done this to a lot of success, myself included. I think it’s important to teach social media in English to students because it has become such a big part of our lives and not doing so is to rob your students of an authentic English speaking experience that they would otherwise not get. And since the competition is also getting a lot fiercer, you can get the competition off your back by incorporating some form of social media into your classes. Apart from posting my own thoughts on social media, I often use the account to post interesting articles for the students to read. As of 2015, none of the students that I have had have had the time to actually read any of these articles but it is nevertheless there for them if they want to challenge themselves.

In one of my winter camps in South Korea, I used email exchanges to get updates on how people were doing with their debating practice which also worked quite well. Every day I emailed the students and told them what we would be doing for the following day and they would almost never respond. It was actually quite great because it was like they knew that didn’t want to take any emails anyway. Using emails allowed us to get a lot of work done because I was able to keep everyone on task. Since these classes, I have tried to incorporate more social media, albeit with some resistance from the administration. However, I have made the case that social media is needed as it becomes more entrenched in people’s lives—minus high school students in South Korea who are not allowed to use their phones at all for virtually the entire day—a practice which makes these students a bit divorced from the world. Even more shocking, as of 2015, I know more than a handful of high school boys in South Korea who don’t even possess social media accounts, much less a phone. Just think of what social media could do for you in terms of getting the little tykes off your back. Really picture it for a moment.

Right now, Facebook provides chat sessions, image sharing, and recording. You can post links and you can recommend courses. Heck, you can start your own course on Facebook and make video responses to other people’s video responses. You can join groups and like pages and exchange information back and forth with people and networks. It’s a massively surreal, multifaceted multimedia medley that has really brought learning to a whole new level. Granted, some schools don’t really consider writing a form of communication which is where social media truly shines; however, as already mentioned, videos are supported as are podcasts and pages and pictures and all the rest. There’s just about nothing that you’re limited to when it comes to social media. Also, there’s nothing stopping you from putting your own teaching materials on a social media site in image form, word doc form, or any other form you choose that will make the dispelling of information easy for your students.

Now, given all that I have already said here, there are is an unprecedented opportunity here to get the little tykes off your back. For instance, you can easily use social media to keep them busy. Give them assignments to post on your facebook page that you created especially for them. Have them read an article that you post on the social media account. Have them favorite what you’ve written or have them experiment with video. They can add you to their network and send and share information. Social media sites are usually used just for fun and socializing, which makes Facebook a major drawback as a tool for learning, but you don’t necessarily have to use these sites to give boring and annoying homework; rather; you can use them to endear you to the rest of the school community without necessarily needing direct contact with your students. I’m actually surprised that, as of 2015, there are no schools that will actually pay you to engage with your students through social media. Because it is a form of engagement and often takes up some time in your day that you could be spending doing something more important, like building a web application or start your own business.

The point is that you really shouldn’t discount social media for all that it offers. For pinterest, you can have students practice making image collage representations of the concepts that you’re going over. Sometimes, for example, I give lessons on rather abstract scenarios that students are likely to encounter if they are speaking in the second language. For example, one lesson can be on miscommunication and I could ask the students to find images that represent this and then from there make their own script and then film it for Facebook and YouTube. If you’re worried about privacy issues, consult your school about what’s appropriate. If you get the “okay,” then you can create weeks upon weeks of valuable social media-laden lessons that keep the little tykes busy for an entire semester. I’ve done this a lot for my winter camps usually in South Korea since a lot of what I’m talking about here is really wild-talking as far as the South Korea curriculum is concerned. Most of what you do is supposed to be private and not disclosed to anyone outside of the school community, at least according to the contract requirements for teachers working in the Education Program of Korea (EPIK).

There are various lesson ideas and plans you can use to get the little tykes off your back. I remember observing this in a webinar that was sponsored by the Cambridge University Press, if my memory serves. In this seminar, a veteran teacher who was teaching Greece brought up the idea of comic strips and how having students continue the storyline could be really helpful in getting the students to explore the target language in a fun and safe environment. Many valuable resources were brought up in this webinar, one of them being storybird.com which has many really interesting libraries of colorful pictures that you can use as a basis for getting the students to practice English improvisation and riffing off of storylines. Just select some of the pictures from the site, or have your students select them, and then have the students finish the storyline by writing it out or making their own pictures. Apart from this, you could also print out strips of paper and then have the students make their own comic strips based on what you show them from the storybird.com site. Another option, although less favorable, is to use deviantart.com, but you’ll have to do some sifting through this to see what works best for your classes as there are likely to be some pictures that just don’t jive with your classes (they are rated R or they contain some other offensive material that you have to be careful not to expose your students to). Another invaluable resource that was brought up in this seminar was makebeliefscomix.com which allows you to literally make your own comix on the fly. This particular website is great for younger students.

I think it’s probably fair to say that comics, like fill-in-the-blanks and word searches, will always be the tools that English teachers use to reach their students and it is becoming vastly easier to be able to include your students in this process and thus get them off your backs a lot more easily. Another valuable resource that was brought up in this webinar was storytimed.com which is basically like a social media site for people who like to write. The way it works is quite simple: You just write out a fictitious work in a timed format and then allow that story to be continued by other users who will add on to it within a timed sequenced event and the story will continue and continue until a deadline that you have preordained or until you decide that the story is finished. Including stories from this site and using them as stimulus for your classes can be a great way for students to practice their writing and imaginative thinking, although probably not advised for students are below intermediate level.   
 As tempting as it may be to give students challenging material in the classes, you really should avoid doing this for students who are not at intermediate range, and there are plenty of social media-based activities that you can incorporate into your classes for students that are even at a lesser range of ability. Coming from Larry Ferlazzo’s website is a bunch of super helpful multimedia based resources that have worked quite well for me in South Korea, particularly in getting the students off of my back. EFL Club Songs (<http://www.eflclub.com/2songs/songs.html>) is a website that includes a list of songs that you can play on your computer. The lyrics are included along with fill in the blanks for your students to consider the words that are missing. Fill in the blanks are the bread and butter of EFL teaching and most teachers use fill in the blank to get the students to practice their fluency and ability to recall some of the vital words that they should have learned. EFL Club songs functions like as a fill in the blank, but for music. You can use this website and play songs from the Beatles. You have the option of including a word bank or leaving one out and I swear that two songs will take up a 45-minute period. Karaoke Party (http://www.karaokeparty.com/) was another incredibly helpful resource for my classes, particularly for the winter camps in South Korea. I would have the students select the songs that they liked the most and then they would sing along to the lyrics below which would further solidify their understanding and fluency practice. This particular website worked especially well for my middle school classes. And while we’re on the topic of middle school classes, another useful multimedia based website that has worked quite well for me is GamestoLearnEnglish.com which includes a variety of vocabulary based games that you can use in your classes, provided you have a touch screen intercom system that allows the students to move around the different electronic game board pieces. This game website has been invaluable in helping me provide engaging material that lasts the entire period in a 45-minute period class in middle school.

Another resource that is recommended by Larry Ferlazzo but one which I have seldom used beause it requires a bit more lesson planning than I have patience for is zondle.com which allows you to create your own electronic games. This is a great website if you have the computers available for your students to work on and can get permission from the administration to use them. Personally, I haven’t taught at any schools that have had the facilities to allow me to make games that I could then give to the students to practice on, but if you have these facilities, then you’ll be in a great position to get the little tykes off of your back if you can just give them some games to work on. Larry Ferlazzo has a great many resources that can be overwhelming to wade through and I’ve only just skimmed the surface of what has worked for me. Although I have skimmed the surface, you should know that one I have already brought has provided me with more than enough material for at least a half years’ worth of courses material to keep the students engaged and more importantly, off my back. The more you find from Larry Ferlazzo (<http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/>), the better position you’ll be in to get the little tykes off your back. And if you’re like me and you just don’t have the time to sift through all of this, hire a VA on fiverr.com to look through this website and select material that you think would prove engaging for your students (making sure to list the criteria by which your VA should select certain programs of study).

When I was teaching in South Korea and part of the Busan Coders meetup group, out in Busan, one of my good friends was a WordPress developer and had made his own curriculum and tests through the WordPress platform, via a variety of plugins that were designed for the purposes of testing students. He had created communities for his students, platforms by which they could submit their own work, login credentials, and award systems that would allow the students to feel a sense of accomplishment after completing a set of activities. I bring this up because if you have the time and you’re looking to increase your skill set while you’re teaching in South Korea, a good option is to learn WordPress and to learn the many features that it supports for English learning. You can do what my friend did and perhaps even start your own business based from WordPress that allows you to recruit clients for more dynamic English learning. WordPress is a vast reservoir of technological capabilities and although my understanding of all the features is elementary compared to my friends and others, you’d be really enhancing your value as an English teacher by learning this platform and incorporating its many features into your classroom. Also, unlocking many of the features that WordPress has available could also help you to unlock your free time and ultimately your mental energy. It’s amazing what invested time in learning these platforms can do for you.

It’s true that technology is developing at a rapid pace and I’m sure by the time this book is published, wearable technology will be more mainstream, perhaps more of a household name now that experimentation is under fullway with Google glasses and Apple watches.

Already, there are many teachers who are experimenting with virtual reality and game-like programs that teach students how to program and use coding. I don’t see why any of these technologies can’t be incorporated and taught in the English classroom when your job is to teach first and foremost relevant English, and if more and more English is going to be over the internet, and technologized, then teachers should be able to teach this way of interacting with people. With respect to getting the little tykes off your back, you can harness the power of programs like Scratch to get the students busy learning to program and code basic computer programs. Or have them work on some interactive modules that you created or that were created by some other aspiring English teacher. As of 2015, there are many teachers who are able to code basic games that test vocabulary and pronunciation, many of whom are posting their achievements on EFL message boards like Waygook.org as well as Github.com. I would recommend the moment you enter a school and start teaching for the first time—if this is indeed you—that you waste no time in learning about these technologies and what you can do with them to get the little tykes off your back. The answer you’ll find is overwhelming, which of course is good for you because you’ll never be at a loss for figuring out what to do.

There are still some other activities that I would like to recommend. Some of these are based on a rather old Cambridge book by the name of *The Internet and the Language Classroom*. Truthfully, this book is outdated. Super outdated actually because it makes references to things like Netscape and Geocities. The pictures are also quite historical. You might not even recognize Google.com if you first saw it in this book! However, there are a great many activities that are still employable to this day, even with the evolution of the internet. One great way to get the little tykes off your back is to have them use the internet to look up words and concepts and then report back to you on what they have learned. Actually, this activity is also recommended in the book *Vocabulary Activities*. Using the internet, you can have students look up a bunch of words from text that you introduce to them or you can have them use the dictionary as a support as they craft some kind of script or dialogue for you. As of 2015, many students around the world will have their own cell phones that they can use at a moment’s notice to translate. When I was teaching in South Korea, one of my co-teachers used an app called *Voca Repetition* to get the student to practice vocabulary that they were responsible for learning which numbered in the hundreds. It was amazing the kind of folio-sized words that they had to learn. You can take advantage of this actually on a number of fronts. You can use the same app that the students are using and have them practice their words, perhaps putting the app on a screen for everyone to see and then having the students take turns practicing the different activities that come from the app. Or you can promote more engagement with cell phones by having the students look up words, as mentioned already, or have them use the internet dictionaries for just about any activity or conversation that you have with your students.

There are some other interesting ideas that are explored in the book *The Internet and the Language Classroom.* Another interesting idea is to have the students do a research project and searching for different facts that would help support there ideas. I have tried this a number of times with my debating classes in South Korea, where I have emphasized repeatedly to my students the importance of backing up your claims with stated facts. I have taught my students to use things like Google Scholar and other search engines to find what they are looking for. If their proficiency is too low, I have the students search for information in their own language and then perform translation work. And by the way, one of the best ways for getting the little tykes off your back is to have them do translation work. You can have the students use these digital dictionaries to have them find the words that will help them communicate more effectively as they attempt to translate some kind of text from their language to English. One activity that I have done, which is from the *Drama Techniques* Cambridge book, to some success is to have one student act as a representative of their home country while another student is tasked with the responsibility of translating every single word that the student-ambassador is saying into English. This can be quite a painful exercise for many students because it requires extra cognitive effort to go back and forth between languages, but it is a super-helpful exercise for all involved, especially the teacher who has to do practically nothing while the activity is taking place.

Really, what I want to communicate here is that there are many digital activities that you can do to get the little tykes off your back. Many of these activities involve searching or translating or navigating and then reporting back. Many people would shrug and not call this type of work teaching, but I think it’s effective because it disciplines the students into searching for words and promotes the students thinking in the target language more. It also gets the burden off of you and the responsibility of learning back onto the students where it really should be, at all times. In the next chapter, I am going to describe some activities that you can do to get the students self-motivated. You’ll need your students motivated in some respect, but getting them self-motivated requires some different strategies, but when used, can be prove super helpful in getting the students off of your back.

So in sum, there are indeed many ways to get the little tykes off your back with technology. You can use digital games, like Falling Clouds and Zondle to get your students engaged in their own little worlds, practice English vocabulary and grammar on these digital apps. Make sure to also introduce your students to Duolingo.com and Buusu.com, both of which are language communities that are designed to help you get the most practice with romance languages. I have used these sites myself when learning Spanish and can say with certainty that they help a lot if you consistently work with them on a daily basis.

Aside from apps, you can also introduce students to modules that you make through content management systems like WordPress. Many English teachers have already been platforms like this which you can find on EFL message boards and also on github.com. The more you think about it, the more you’ll realize that there is an endless supply of technological strategies to employ in the classroom to get the little tykes off your back, and you are really only limited by your imagination.

Finally, make use of the digital dictionaries so that you can have students look up words and report to you on important ideas that they would like to communicate. You can also use these dictionaries to have the students translate text that it is their mother language into English. Searching-and-sifting activities take a long time and they are very rewarding for the stressed and tired teacher who just needs a break now and then from teaching students day in and day out, teaching draconian hours in one building for an entire day. Many of these digital platforms will prove to be an absolute godsend in your career as an English teacher. Please make sure to go to the appendix in the back of this book to see more ideas for how you can incorporate technology into your class!

**Chapter Four: Self-Motivation**

Beyond a doubt, one of the single most important reasons for why teachers are so desperate to self-motivate their students is so that they can get them off their backs. Think about it: if a student is self-motivated, you don’t need to worry about them at all. You can just let them go and figure out what they’re going to do rather than to babysit or hold their hand as they figure their lives out. You can trust that they are going to pursue their passions and learn new things and grow and be able to take care of themselves, leaving you with the oodles of time and energy that you need to take care of whatever other affairs you deem most important.

In my career, I have had some unhealthy relationships with my classes and with some particularly rambunctious students that didn’t want to be in the room, didn’t want to learn anything (much less English) and they weren’t interested in listening to someone like me even for a second. I’ve also had some really motivated students that I basically didn’t need to teach at all because their drive was enough to get them through my class and perhaps plenty of other classes that they were responsible for attending. And in between these two extremes are where a vast majority of my students have sat, not incredibly motivated but also not complete duds that didn’t want to do anything. There was a reason to hope that the students would get better. And I would say that a good majority of my work—maybe 90% of it—was to try and get the students motivated to do the work themselves and to learn on their own. Now I was teaching in South Korea and there’s this rather big misconception that the students in South Korea are super-students who love to learn and eagerly go to class every day. At least this was the stereotype that I grew up with (and I am originally from a Korea town in the United States!). However, please allow me to put this idea to rest that South Korea students, like students all over the planet, probably don’t want to be in school. Sure, they have moments where they love learning, but they also have moments where they wish they could just go outside and play some soccer or go home and go to sleep. I’ve been fortunate enough to travel extensively for years and have come to realize that most people don’t really like school. Some do, and they love learning, but there’s a difference between loving to learn and being forced to do something out of survival or obligation. Although most of my students in South Korea studied for almost 11 hours per day, that didn’t necessarily mean that they enjoyed it. Quite the contrary, they felt it was a version of the eighth circle of hell. And then in comes in teacher Todd to provide more obligation and more responsibility on top of what they are already learning in their classes. There was really no other choice for me. It was either be eaten alive but these frustrated and resentful students or give them the tools to enjoy the torture. Out of necessity, I chose the latter option and have learned from my experience that self-motivating students is ridiculously difficult and sometimes impossible, but when it is done effectively well, it can really help you get the little tykes you’re your back.

To his credit, Larry Ferlazzo has created an entire book about self-motivating students. I read many of his books religiously as I was desperately trying to figure out a way to get the little boogers off of my back. Day in and day out I would read about teaching pedagogy and strategies to use. Sure, the book *Recipes for Tired Teachers* has many standby activities that you can use when all else fails, but they don’t necessarily fix the problem of motivation in your class. At best, they serve as mere band aids to a more systemic issue. You have to understand that no amount of throwaway activities are going to do anything for you in the long run if your students are not interested in attending class and don’t want to learn anything, much less English. In order to stem the flow of rambunctious, restless, annoyed, and resentful students in your class, you need to address the problem of motivation. I’ve found in my experience that using propaganda videos and multimedia that show people interested in learning and studying or even people who have NOT studied and therefore suffer the consequences just *does not* work for my students at all. Maybe it’s in the way that I deliver the material or maybe I just don’t show enough emotion when I am showing this material for the students, but I just haven’t found motivational videos to be helpful. Pointing-and-clicking just doesn’t really captivate people.

Ironically, the most powerful technique that I have found useful so far is the one that requires the most energy and willpower from you: socializing with your students. That’s right, as much as you may try to avoid your students, you also have to be around them long enough to talk to them on a real level about stuff, to get to know them and figure out what they are thinking. Part of this goes back to the social media that I mentioned in the last chapter. If you use social media to get to know your students and find out what is going on in their lives, then you’ll be that much more attached to them and they’ll be likely to take your activities and your lessons more seriously. The more you get to know your students and the more they feel obligated to attend your class because “gosh, you’re such a nice guy,” the more opportunity you have to really demonstrate the joy of reading and learning new things. People are motivated by different things: money, love, stability, candy, you name it, we all have motivations for different things. People have different rules by which they play the game of life and they have many ways by which they want to achieve their goals. Most students will not have fully processed this thought and will only really understand it at a superficial level. You, as a teacher, can’t possibly glean what motivates all of your students in your class. It’s nearly impossible (although you can try if you have small classes). Rather than trying to figure out what everyone is looking for (which you cannot do anyway because the human mind is limited in that way), you can instead model your behavior and show people how much you enjoy learning and what you can do with it.

Sometimes, I like to socialize with incredibly fluent students in the hallway because I realize that other students will probably feel jealousy about this (which is exactly my intention). There’s no debating the fact that students who can speak multiple languages have a leg up in almost all aspects of life: career wise and relationship wise. Those who can go through different countries and speak multiple languages have an unprecedented freedom that only you or I can ever possibly imagine, having the ability to think in multiple languages and frames of thought can really go a long way in shaping your future to be bright and happy. So when other students see another student demonstrating this capacity to speak multiple languages and just be relaxed with a native speaker, it makes them see just what they’re missing. Granted, this certainly won’t work for everyone, but I think it is one of the more powerful strategies you can use to show people the power of speaking multiple languages.

Short of doing this, I try not to slow down my speaking in class and make it seem like a class. I talk real casually, sometimes even if it’s beyond some of my students and mix and match my engagement with students who are more fluent than others. Of course, there’s always a danger of losing some of your students amidst this speed-talking that can only come with fluency, but sometimes you have to make this sacrifice on occasion, and then circling back to the less fluent students in subsequent classes. Really, most of the English conversation classes I have ever taught have been a game of back-and-forth whereby I have jumped from different proficiency levels and made multiple accommodations to different students, usually in the same class. I actually don’t advise making multiple accommodations to anyone because that will just burn you out and you won’t be able to have more time to yourself because you’ll be so busy accommodating everyone. Instead, you have to make your expectations known up front, even if it means borrowing a co-teacher from the other room to translate on your behalf and letting everyone know what you expect of them. As long as you are upfront about what you need to accomplish for the class and what type of work it’s going to take, then letting down a few students is ethically correct because you would have told everyone your expectations for the class without necessarily knowing who was falling behind. Sure, you’ll make adjustments hither and thither as you go along and as you get to know the students, but you won’t fall victim to students who don’t deserve your help in the first place which is another big mistake that beginning teachers often make when they are teaching classes for the first time. They just fall victim to these demanding, complaining students who ask so much of your time without actually doing any of the work. They’re like those bad customers that you get in a business who just complain but pay you little money for your time and energy. You don’t want to be allocating your time on these particular students in the class, at least not if you’re looking to save yourself time.

Let’s be clear however that when I talk about students who are lost-causes here, I am not talking about the bad-boy students who are rebellious but nevertheless amazing participants in the class, in their own way. I’ve had many quote unquote bad students in my class who have done all sorts of naughty things—dropping the f-word, insisting on being heard every time in class. You know what? I prefer these students then the ones who don’t want to be in the class to begin with. And these bad students are not the type of students I am talking about. I am specifically referring to the types of students who want something for nothing and then complain to you when you demand even a little work from them. This is the problem with not setting expectations. If you don’t set the ground rules in your classes—and by the way, this might be a good life rule as well—then the students will have a free slip to act any way they want in your class. And if you start every class with a 30-minute game just for funsies, then forget about it. The class is lost, you’ll never get them back. In order to self-motivate your students, you’ve got to be motivated yourself, at least for a certain window period, if you ever hope to rest back your time and energy from the students. “Don’t smile until April,” as the saying goes from the book *Language Activities for Teenagers.* This will also save you from the uncomfortable predicament of becoming that one “changed teacher” that the students don’t like anymore. “What happened to Teacher Todd?” some of the students used to say, “he no longer plays tic tac toe with us on the board or give us loads of candy or do Jeopardy with us.” Sure, I was hired to play these fun games, but I’m also supposed to teach the kids something. And I’m supposed to do that with maximum health and all of my mental faculties intact so that I can perform my job responsibilities. In order for me to do that, I have to be a stickler sometimes and get the students to be more responsible.

“But Todd, you’re supposed to make the class fun and interesting for the students,” you might object, perhaps even scream at me as I describe such lurid details to you about the profession. But the more I gave, the less I received. Students don’t really have this third-eye sense of give-and-take. They just take, take, take, to the point where they jus take things for granted, including my time and my hospitality which are two non-replenishable resources with each relationship that I have. The more I gave, the less I got, so I figured if I’m going to care about anything, might as well be me so that I can perform my job responsibilities and do the things that I want to do in my life. This brings me to another point.

English teacher can be a fun profession if you find the right working environment. I have b rought this up time and again and it is really worth repeating because it is so important. The English teaching profession can either make or break you in your life. It can be a tool to give you more freedom and joy in your life or it can become a nightmare. Really, the choice is up to you. I always see these forum threads on Waygook that compare the pros and cons of teaching in a private school versus a public school in South Korea. It usually goes something like this: “The private schools will give you more money but you’ll have less time to yourself, while the public schools are going to be less pay but the quality of life will be better.” So I ask you dear Reader, which option would you choose? If you said the second option, you would be right. I would much rather have the better quality of life than the shittier one any day. And by the way, the better quality of life sometimes isn’t even that much better if you have nasty colleagues and belligerent and irritable students. Toward the end of one of my contracts, I was almost running away screaming because I couldn’t take the incessant teaching that I had to do with such meddlesome students that I had at the time. What could have possessed me to take on such added workload with such rambunctious little nasties I will never know, but it has been a lingering regret. I don’t work more than 20 hours per week if I can possibly help it, and I will work less if it means I have more time to myself to do the things that I really want to do, like hiking, meditating, and being alone with a nice cup of coffee. These are the things that I enjoy and would rather spend my time doing. “But where will you get the money?” you might be asking yourself as you read these words. And to this, I shall respond that “necessity is the mother of invention,” and the human mind has this rather uncanny ability to derive solutions in the most desperate of times when it seems like there are no solutions. Teaching English was actually how I got myself out of another jam that is a fable for another book entirely. But the point is that you’re going to get students self-motivated *who are self-motivated to begin with*! You can’t teach students to want to learn. Many schools will believe this and try to make you do this to the students which is actually an impossible task. Anyone who expects you to teach students to want to learn—while of course also teaching English-- is somebody that you need to plan on leaving. Because you’re on a sinking ship there and you’re just not going to win it.

Some self-motivational literature has you driving circles around the students, showing them this clip and that clip and this poster and that poster and giving them little worksheets with people appearing as if they enjoy reading a really thick textbook. All of this propaganda stuff is ridiculous to me because the students aren’t sponges that just absorb everything. They’re actually a lot smarter than most people give them credit for and they can see right through thinly veiled attempts at indoctrination. At the end of the day, they’re going to be just like any other human—they’re going to determine what is most important for them in their own life and then take actionable steps to pursue that. It’s kind of like a pain-pleasure principle, although I’m not a utilitarian or anything like that. I’ve just seen it from experience. I know this probably sounds a bit hopeless and you were looking for some strategies on how to get the students interested in English enough so that you could save yourself some time and energy in the long run. In the paragraphs to follow, I *will* provide you with some strategies that you can use if you’re absolutely faced with students who are relentlessly unmotivated and determined to make your life a living hell. By the end of this chapter, I will hopefully have taught you that, above all else, you will keep calm and prosper despite all that you face as an English teacher in a non-English-speaking country. Let’s begin.

Most of my dreadfully failed classes have turned that way over time. Yes, I place the blame on myself for this and my inexperience. Without exception, my classes have deteriorated because the motivation was not only dwindled but also because I took too many liberties with the students that they eventually took such hospitality for granted. They figured they could get away hook, line, and sinker with most of what I was doing and I was just a big pushover as a teacher. If you’re a pushover teacher who wants to be friends with your students, then you are going to have a difficult time controlling your class and keeping it from devolving into chaos. When I walked into my tech high school for maybe the 20th session, I could feel the sense of dread swarm over me, permeate my entire body and make me feel absolutely exhausted. It was going to be another session of seemingly constant battle and incessant war with my students, fighting to get them to pay attention, stop using their cell phones, to contribute and try to do the work, and keep busy. At best, I could expect maybe three students to participate out of a class of 15-29 students. The other students would busy themselves with other work, with sleep, with talking to their friends, and with just being generally problematic hecklers, delighting in the fact that I couldn’t manage to get any point across as a teacher. Making matters worse was the fact that this class happened at the end of the day, after a long hard day of teaching at yet another high school full of demanding boys.

When you’re fresh from the United States and have had no work for a long period of time, you think your tolerance level will be strong for this sort of thing. But actually, nature wins out in the end and your body gives out, it totally collapses from the pressure of it all and you burn out. There’s no way that you can stop this from happening, even if you’re the most hard working little worker bee this side of Asia. I was so overcome with dread that I just couldn’t’ imagine another day. Every time we had an unexpected vacation at this school, I thanked the Gods of teaching that they had spared me just one more day to recoup. The pay was good, but it wasn’t *that* good to justify my being enslaved to the classroom, teaching kids day in and day out and not seeing the light of day. This is what teaching can become for you if you’re not careful enough—at most, it can serve as your own prison, shackling you to the confines of the institution and prohibiting you from seeing the light of day. It’s a bit ironic in retrospect given the fact that I had originally gone into teaching with one of the motivations being to travel the world and see it in all of its wonder and amazement. Taking a teaching job, I have discovered, is probably one of the worst ways to travel and enjoy a country. Most countries these days will work hard to keep you in their school for over 60 hours per week of your life and thereby keep you from actually enjoying the country that you’re living in. When this happens, I do advise you to take the job for as long as you can get yourself a six month nest egg and then dump the job immediately. If the colleagues you have are particularly ruthless, all the easier it will be for you to leave your place of employment for greener pastures.

But going back to the worst case scenario that I was describing. It seemed like a nightmare that I had to go through over and over again. The kids were nice when I could talk to them in private, alone, outside of the class where all of the students put on a front for other students like in a performance or something. But the class was just obnoxious, rambunctious, and energy-zapping. I’m convinced it took at least five years out of my life span which probably makes it just as bad as pollution in Beijing. That’s what a bad class will do to you. It will shed years from your life like pollution. Like bad people as well.

Some of the most toxic relationships I’ve had in my life involve toxic students with bad attitudes and anger management issues. They also include students going through puberty and having a hard time being polite and nice to faculty and learning how to communicate properly. I could have had good friends, a supportive family back in the United States, but these toxic students were absolutely ruining my life. And I had to see them for more hours in the week than I care to remember. And the tech students particularly were the most taxing because they were the least motivated of all. And it manifested in all of the behavior problems I have just described. And I had no co-teacher helping me manage this situation. At best, I could go to fellow English teachers with my problem and ask them how to solve it—the problem, that is.

So you’re probably wondering how to motivate students like this. Well, there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that it really can’t be done, as I’ve already mentioned in previous pages. You can reach a few students, and you definitely should reach them, but for the vast majority of students, how you get them is how they’re going to be. Don’t let teachers tell you differently. Some teachers would like to think that they hold the secret to getting students to change their ways and many students have done this, but the numbers are against you. Some people will think I’m being cynical about this. I’m not. Many people can change. I’ve seen change in people’s lives. I’ve seen former drug addicts turn around and bad students in my own years become good students. I’ve seen adults turn a leaf and become better people and I have also seen powerful celebrities and political figures in my lifetime admit that they made a mistake and that they are willing to change their ways. There’s no denying the power of the human spirit to triumph over challenges and obstacles and overcome adversity. I am a living testament of this myself, having gone through multiple surgeries given some of the congenital issues that I’ve had to deal with. But when it comes to your role as an English teacher, a guest English teacher, who comes into a foreign environment without having any foreknowledge of what the life is like of a student in your host country—having no reference of your own to work from—and perhaps not even speaking the local language, expecting that students will listen to you in your own language lecture about how important your class is is just a farce. It’s a joke. Mostly because it’s totally impractical and not based in reality at all.

Reality-testing is an important skill to develop as an English teacher. You need to assess just what it is that you do in the school, what your presence serves, and what it is that you’re *really* being paid to do. Are you paid to just keep English in the school somehow? To just remind students of the English presence around the world? Are you paid to entertain students in your language? Or is your role to keep peace while the *real* teachers do the job that they were paid to do. Every school is going to have a different philosophy and different colleagues that sometimes don’t even reflect the philosophy of the school. Navigating this sort of terrain is super difficult, especially if you don’t speak the local language. In some instances, you may never fully get the real truth about your situation in the school, but glean some kind of close proximity or estimation to what you think the truth really is. And be just fine with that. Whatever the case may be, you should learn to accept now the fact that you’re not going to be this grand savior, this Patch Adams, who comes into the school and changes everybody ‘s lives for the better. If anything, you’re going to be the person who adapts to the things that are around you, to the school culture and to the environment, and yes, even to the overall mentality of the students. You’re going to learn to accept the fact that you’re not the central piece in the lives of most of your students. In fact, if you can impact one life, you might just consider yourself lucky and count your blessings. I mean, just put yourself in the shoes of your students. When was the last time you even thought about your high school teachers, much less the good ones? Hardly ever, I’m guessing. I know I had a few good high school teachers but not nearly enough for me to think a lot about then. They didn’t exactly mold me into the person that I am today. Heck, I don’t even count my language teachers among the teachers who were the most influential on me in high school. Their impact was negligible. The single most influential thing on my life was me, when I decided that I would take control of my studies and be interested in studying stuff. Sure, there was a little encouragement along the way, but I wasn’t going to change before I was ready to change. Most teachers appear to have come into the profession of teaching with the idea that they have to be agents of change. This couldn’t be further from the truth of what it is that you’re going to do as an English teacher. Well, I’m not saying it isn’t always going to be true. I suppose if you take on a post in the Peace Corps where you’re building villages and teaching students with little resources, you may in fact be the single most important person to change the lives of students. Heck, if you go to a developing country where money is not your main motivation because you already have more than enough to live on, then you may very well find yourself among the company of people who admire you and feel like your brilliance is rubbing off on them in some unforetold ways. However, if you’re getting paid a living wage in a developed country, such as the ones that are in Asia, then you’ll likely be wondering at times just what it is that you’re doing.

“The program is clearly not working,” a fellow native English teacher said to me about three months before I was leaving my post. “They’re going to kick all of the foreigners out.” My friend then proceeded to complain about how he almost never sees his students, how he has them on a rotating basis and can barely have time to develop any of their lessons. He not only doesn’t give homework or tests, but he sees students once a month to basically smile, encourage, and then let go. What I think was most amusing for me was that this person was SUPER British, like with the whole seriousness thing. He came into Korea thinking he’d get all pedagogical and shit and what ended up happening was the exact opposite—students begging for games and fun and almost little teaching at all. I imagine that this job has helped this particular person relax a little more and not be such a teacher.

I counted my blessings enough while I was in South Korea because there was little that was expected of me as an “English teacher.” Sure, it would have been nice for them to have seen some of the PPTs that I was making and some of the lesson plans that I had developed but I didn’t really see my students enough or have any grading capacity whatsoever to have any super influence on them. Any of the students who really wanted to learn English from me were going to do so and the others were just going to coast by or not even take my class to begin with. Some students did think that they were getting a lot out of my class simply from attending and feeling the English rub off on them. Who knows? Maybe it worked for them or it gave them some level of confidence that I couldn’t see. But I could probably count the number of people who took my classes seriously, even before I started teaching the classes. Some students I still keep in touch with but a lot of my students don’t even know where I am and I dare say that they care or that I will somehow be remembered. Some teachers will probably chalk this up to the fact that I didn’t try hard enough, that I had to try super-hard. Maybe they’re right. I can only say that your experience is going to vary, so you’ll have to use your own judgment with this. I’m not saying *don’t* try, but if you at least go into the experience without any expectations or preconceived notions about your students are going to get out of your class, you’ll be that much more prepared to tackle the class and be pleasantly surprised in the long run. You’ll also move yourself toward a place where you’re able to conserve a lot more energy. It’s almost like the famous saying goes: “I feel much better now that I have lost all hope.” Except you’re not losing hope, you’re just not trying to be a super hero to everyone. Don’t be everyone’s super hero. Be content with imperfection and let the experience glide over you like a warm wave. This is my best advice when it comes to self-motivating students on the road.

So let’s say you have a class that has absolutely no desire in the world. What do you do in a situation like this? Outside of learning to accept the fact that you cannot change systemic issues like this, the next best thing is to make the class fun for you and fun for the students and hope that some kind of educational information is conveyed to the students in the process. Don’t make the students your enemy because that won’t make the experience enjoyable. And if the faculty blame you for being too friendly, well then that’s the price you have to pay for making the experience enjoyable for yourself. It’s so easy for other people to point their finger and complain about your lousy teaching when they aren’t in the trenches themselves and experiencing the daily systemic shit storms that many English teachers have to face. Be kind to the students. After all, they are in prison as you were. They are basically being forced to attend school for reasons outside of their control. They are in a total institution that socializes them and forces them to compete and fight to be considered valuable and worthy. Frankly, years of studying juvenile delinquency in criminal justice school has taught me that school in general is the biggest farce and the biggest lie perpetuated to young people. It distorts reality and makes you feel like all of life is this survival of the fittest game. You learn to compete and fight for worth and if you receive a poor letter grade, that means you’re unworthy and if you receive a good letter grade, it means that you are an important person. Of course, the reality is that the good feeling of a letter grade only lasts a moment and most of the time if you compete in the real world rather than network with other people and make friends, you’re considered a dick by many. Most of school life warps reality and keeps students out of the real world where they would probably best serve humanity. But be that as it may, the students are compulsed into attending school and to sitting in on your class and absorbing whatever information you think is important for them to understand. Is it any wonder that the students rebel? I mean, really?

So once you have compassion for your students and understand where they’re coming from, you can give lessons to them that you think are fun. You can play games for candy. I have already mentioned many games in the previous chapter which worked really well for me. I will mention them again because I cannot stress enough how important they are when your classes completely collapse and you’re deemed unnecessary in the school community. When this happens, PPT-games will be your best friend as they were mine when I ran out of ideas for trying to coax the students into fervent educational ardor. When the going was tough, I played Jeopardy, Tic Tac Toe, Battleship, Bingo, Pictionary, Charades, and a series of card games that I had the students play on their own with the stipulation that they had to speak some English. Sometimes, if the students were obedient enough, I would introduce the stipulation that if they spoke English even once, they would have to recite 10 ideas off the top of their heads. I got this idea from the James Altucher book, *Choose Yourself*, where he recommends listing 10 ideas per day. I had my students do this sometimes to work on their cerebral cortexes since sometimes the problem in class is not a language proficiency issue but a lazy-thinking issue.

So what does a collapsed class really look like? Most people don’t really like to talk about this but I think it has happened to more than a few teachers where discussing this is of the utmost importance so that you know if you have actually succeeded or totally failed the people you are tasked with helping. A collapsed class is quite simply a class that no longer functions as what it was intended to function as. For example, if you were supposed to teach the kids English, a collapsed class is when all you do is enter the class and are hard-pressed to even play English games with your students. One of my collapsed classes was at a technical school in South Korea where I would enter the class of about 25 students and be happy if only three students engaged in my class which consisted primarily of playing PPT-based games, and some of the more exciting ones at that. At the lowest point of my English teaching career, I played League of Legends-based PPT games and Zelda games, PPTs that had been created by some seriously OCD English teachers who had no other time on their hands but to make these super advanced PPTs that basically simulated the actual RPG games that they were based off of. And yet, even with these super advanced PPTs that I used to test student’s understanding of pop culture, only two or three students managed to really actively stay engaged. This was weeks after I had tried to be more pedagogical with the students and actually teach them some kind of a structured grammar or vocabulary or syntax.

At the very worst, a collapsed class is one that you dread day in and day out and when the only thing you have to look forward to is a surprise day-off. I’ll never forget the day that I realized that there was no class for the technical school on account of the holidays. My surprise was so sudden and so complete that I do often consider it one of the happiest days of my life simply because I felt free and relaxed again. When you are dreading your class so much that all you have to look forward to is freedom, then it’s time to get another job. But if you need the income, then you have to find a way to deal with this and confront your issues the way I did, at least for the duration that you need the money. Now, I have already brought up some PPTs that I used. I used these PPTs in some respects in lieu of a lack of a co-teacher being in the room and having a presence. These PPTs most of the time were helpful in maintaining the interest of some of the students. If your class ever becomes collapsed, you’re going to need to have a toolkit of throwback options, standby activities that you can whip out and just give to the students who are not interested. You can find these many PPTs on sites like Waygook.org and Teachers Pay Teachers. If you’re a brand new teacher, I would start to cultivate these PPTs the moment you enter the school and rather than make your own PPTs (which takes too long unless you genuinely love doing them), I would just use what has already been made and just experiment with whether they work for your classes or not. In retrospect, I wish I could have done this sooner because it would have saved me a lot of stress from having to reinvent the wheel. Many teachers, including my very own at the university level, have this way of hiding behind PPTs so that they can tune out and just not do anything in the classes. It’s true that one of the timely godsends and staples of any sort of teaching is the PPT, hiding behind the PPT and just reading off of it so that you don’t’ have to do anything. Although I never liked these sorts of teachers (I still don’t), I frequently revert to this style of teaching when I can no longer tolerate a class or when the class has given up or it’s some mixture of me giving up and the students giving up. When the class becomes mere babysitting, I just revert to the introverted PPT-showing teacher and I do recommend that you do the same if you find that your class has collapsed. Your mental health is more important than trying to win a losing battle. I’m not trying to be negative here. Again, many people can change, but I also think apart of growing up and becoming a mature teacher is knowing when the battle is lost and then cutting your losses right away so that you can move on to your next gig or experience. Life is just way too short for you to be fighting to save a group of students who probably don’t even view you as a significant part of their lives (how can they when they have so many other things that they have to worry about in their school? It’s practically baked into the system). So one of the quickest ways of surviving an unmotivated class is to play games because gamefying anything, although not the best source of motivation or reason to do something, can sustain the class through to the end.

One strategy that has been recommended by Larry Ferlazzo and one that I like a lot is the “Make Your Own Game Board,” approach. It’s very simple really. You just introduce to your students the dice and cards that they are going to use. You show them big white pieces of paper and then the writing and drawing utensils. You then tell them that they are going to make their own board games and that the stipulation is that the board game HAS to work. It has to have perfect English and it has to be functional. I did this with one of my co-teachers and this activity was SO successful that the co-teacher and I also got involved in the game and by the end of the class, we were all huddled in a circle—the co-teacher and myself—and routing for our favorite players to win the game. If we had had soju and some money to bet on, the class would have been super successful, I’m sure of it. So gamefiying is a great way of surviving but an even better survival strategy is to have the students make their own games. If you only see groups of students on a rotating basis, you probably won’t be able to sustain this game for weeks on end. This is probably to your advantage because you can then give the same activity over and over again. Have the students make their own games and then play them. To extend the activity further, have different groups of students play other students’ games and then have the classes vote on their favorite game. Nothing saves you more stress than having the students just decide and make their own games. Maybe they’re not motivated to learn English but at least they’re motivated to do *something!* And this is a start. It’s always good to start with something rather than nothing.

Apart from gamefying a class that has collapsed, another way of dealing with disaster territory is to provide food incentives, like candy. I know that you’re not supposed to really give candy because it sets up the expectation that the students will want it every time. But when your class has collapsed and it’s making you feel miserable as it did me when I first was teaching, candy saved my life. That’s right, candy saved my life. Because rather than have to fight the students and be angry with them all the time, candy allowed the classes to run smoothly and make the time go by faster. It sucks to say this but most collapsed classes look like glorified babysitting and maybe that’s really what I should have been doing as opposed to “teaching.” Or become an au pair. These jobs are also available all over the world and are probably infinitely less stressful than dealing with a group of unmotivated and angry and disenchanted students who don’t want to learn anything from you. I don’t’ say this with malice either. I totally understand what my students were going through and I’m sure that I would have behaved the same way when I was there age. You can’t expect students to have reached a level of maturity where they’re willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. No one young enough in high school is going to be able to do that for you and you shouldn’t expect them to. You have to be the more mature person to set the boundaries and instruct the students as to what you’re willing to tolerate and what you’re not willing to tolerate. So I’m not at all resentful or angry. It’s funny to think about because even weeks after my collapsed classes had ended, many of my former students would approach me in the streets—some of the *worst students imaginable—*and still say “hello” to me and act as if we had been friends for a very long time and that there were no hard feelings! I swear! And of course, I would always try—to the very best of my abilities—to conceal my look of astonishment with this! I keep forgetting sometimes that holding grudges in other countries doesn’t make any sense whatsoever. Not to mention the fact that holding a grudge is one way to drain yourself really quickly!

I played many games when my classes collapsed. It was better for me and better for the students. We didn’t want to have to deal with each other in this capacity so we just played games that made the students at least excited on a superficial level. We played Jeopardy with random trivia questions. Some of these trivia questions came from websites like Waygook.org and ESLPrintables. Most of the time, I didn’t prepare them myself. I just couldn’t be bothered to prepare for the class that wasn’t going to be invested. I also played Family Feud and Wheel of Fortune. Family Feud is just another trivia-type activity while Wheel of Fortune is basically a glorified hangman game. Again, didn’t really take much prep to have the students look at the screen and play along. Maybe years from now the students will think that they had a terrible education or maybe they won’t even think twice about their English classes. Regardless, as a teacher, I can honestly say that it takes two to tango and if a student doesn’t want to learn, a teacher cannot somehow glean internal inspiration where there is none. It is all on the student to determine just how much they’re going to get from their education. It’s a tough lesson to learn and one that certainly took me many years to figure out, but it’s true and I think more and more people should begin to see this role of a teacher as one of facilitator and not one of diviner, divining somehow mythic brilliance from students who are not ready to learn or don’t want to take any information from anyone. I am saying this having taught at schools that weren’t even mandatory to attend! Sure, to stay with the rest of society in Korea, I suppose that going to high school is in their best interests, but this didn’t really make the students better students. Just imagine how a non-mandatory class would be! Probably ten times worse. But I digress.

When we weren’t playing these PPT games, we were playing board games or matching games. I got my classes in a huge circle, all 25 of them, and I put a jenga set in the middle of the room and I said that the first person to knock the Jenga tower over is going to have to speak English for two minutes. Surprisingly, this was a very successful class and one that I didn’t even need to think twice to prepare. The kids just ate it up and played along and we had a grand old time trying to keep the tower stable despite the antics of students putting the little rectangular pieces in all sorts of upright and bizarre ways. When I didn’t have this lesson to contend with, I gave the students strips of paper with sentences on them and told each individual student to memorize whatever was on their strip of paper (this lesson came from *Recipes for Tired Teachers*, ironically!). I had the students memorize the words and then work in groups to try to assemble the story together. Most of the time they didn’t get the story right, but that didn’t matter. At least they were busy doing this activity while I could just stare out the window and pray to God that the class would be over shortly. It worked wonderfully!

If you’re working in Korea, hot seat games are super popular. The basic principle is simple. You break the students up into groups and then you take turns having one member of each group come to the front of the class and sit in a chair. Afterwards, you flash pictures on the PPT of random objects and things that the students should know the English words for: wrestling, Tai Kwon Do, scissors, tree, bird, cow, explosion. Whatever! And then you have the groups attempt to get their member in the “hot seat” to say the word. Group members are not allowed to say the word, of course, nor are they allowed to gesture. I must have played this game at least 25 times with separate Hot Seat PPTs in this one obnoxious class that I had to contend with. Every week it seemed like we were playing a new Hot Seat game! “Guess what kids?” I would say to the students and they would look at me like I was Satan. “Another Hot Seat game!” I would say with a gleaming smile and then the class would liven up again! It was quite artful actually and they never minded.

I’ve also played Battleship as well, although this game is ridiculous hard to teach at first. Students just aren’t going to get this game and explaining it can be absolutely draining. The only way I have been able to teach this game with students is by playing with them and modeling by example how the game goes. Once they get the hang of it, I break them up into pairs and have them try it on their own. When my class had completely collapsed, I actually couldn’t play a lot of these pair games because it just provided students with opportunity to talk to their friends and just not do any work at all. When I was really drained, I would just pretend like they were working hard on their game. At the beginning stages of our work together, I tried to break them up and do the game. This only made them resent me more, so I eventually stopped doing this.

Card games were also quite valuable for me when the class collapsed. I would have the students play Crazy Eights—which is basically Uno—and War and sometimes memory. I would also have the students play Go Fish, but they usually didn’t like this game all too well. I would have the students play for candy, and this did motivate them to at least try. I became the candy king at one point in my career. It was eating a lot of my salary as I would go purchasing candy nearly every week just to try to appease the kids and get them off my back. I tried to vary the shopping up so that it would be a little exciting for me. One week I would shop for chocolates for the students and go on this scavenger hunt for the most affordable and chocolate-y treats. Another week, I would go for something more fruity and still, another week I would go for something of a mint variety. At the beginning of class, I would show the students the candy that I had brought for them and some would cheer and some would be disappointed and I would appease the disappointed students by reassuring them that the candy would be back next week and probably be something that they liked (provided that I saw said student again, which I usually didn’t).

Because I was teaching with another English teacher, I almost begged every week to have a team teaching scenario whereby the more experienced English teacher could teach the whole class while I looked on. This teacher was quite good and you’ll never know quite how relieved I was to be sitting in my chair and doing nothing while the other English teach took over and had the students play her version of the hot seat game. At the end of this class, I even became the movie teacher and had the students watch MegaMind, this really bad 3D animated cartoon movie about a blue villain who turns into a hero and saves the planet from destruction. I actually had learned about this movie from my fellow English teaching colleague who had apparently shown the movie a few other times with her classes. It worked historically well as the students just sat vegetating at the screen while I just read from my podcast reader. These were some of the strategies that I had to use to survive a collapsed class. Believe me, it wasn’t the most enjoyable experience in the world and I had to get really creative at times when I ran out of ideas. I just feel bad for those English teachers who are in China right now who probably have to work ten times the hours at lower pay! How torturous that must be!

With much smaller classes, the strategies were quite different and admittedly, I have borrowed many of the survival strategies that I use form the books, *Recipes for Tired Teachers, Teaching One-to-One,* and *5-Minute Activities.* You can decide to purchase these books if you’d like but I’m only going to give you the activities that have worked for me to mend a collapsed class. If you’re working with students for fifteen classes in the entire semester, this should be more than enough to hold you over for the entire academic year, never to see these kids again. However, if you’re looking for something a little more considered, you may wish to pick up one of these books and peruse the other exercises in them which may have more of what you’re looking for, albeit written for the teacher who actually wants to teach their classes and not run away screaming from them.

When I had a one-on-one class, it became quickly apparent that one of the downsides to teaching one to one is that you can’t hide from your student and that you actually almost always need to be on for them. Well, almost anyway. I still found a way around this when this particular student didn’t wish to be with me. There were actually somedays when I felt like a prison warden watching over a inmate in prison—how ironic given the fact that my major was criminal justice! In any event, there were several activities that I tried when this particular individualized tutoring session collapsed and my student didn’t wish to attend the class anymore. One of the most tried and true ways to revive the class from time to time—and one which I am taking directly from the book *Teaching One-to-One*—*was to ask the student what he wanted to learn!* So simple, and so direct. It was hard for my student to tell me what he wanted because Korean culture dictates that the teacher knows everything about all there is to know and should never be challenged by the student… well, unless they’re a foreign teacher in which case all of the rules no longer apply. Thankfully for me, the kid was interested in psychology so I led the class as if it was a college level psychology 101 course. We talked about psychopathy, of all things, antisocial personality disorder, and the different other types of disorders. Not sure how well the disorders translated into an English class—perhaps there are some disorders that are just way too super foreign to Koreans for them to even fathom—but it held me over for a number of weeks. I couldn’t give homework because my class wasn’t a priority but at least each week was a different discussion of psychology that we both personally enjoyed. We even took the time to watch some video clips of some psychopaths on YouTube—the most notorious psychopath of them all, Ted Bundy. So I guess my first recommendation for you would be to ask your student what they want to learn. You can’t be responsible for gleaning whatever is in the backs of the minds of your students. Actually, almost unanimously, most authors in the EFL world agree that you should constantly gauge how your students are feeling about the course. Ask them what they want to learn before the course begins, ask them if they are happy with the course so far midway through the course, and then finally assess whether the students have fully gotten the most out of the course as possible. I generally advocate this because it places the responsibility squarely on the student to direct his or her own education and not blame you. Yes, I advocate this even if you’re teaching in a school where the teacher is supposed to know everything because nothing prepares students for life better than keeping the students directly observant of their own role in the education process, not to mention the fact that it takes some pressure off of you from having to deliver something that the students don’t even like. Man, I cannot even tell you how much I tried in vein to get the students to like my ideas. I tried so hard. We played games about the house, we played Simon Says, we tried naming fruits and vegetables, I even had one lesson on the difference between software and hardware for one class, and even played a soccer game for another class that was more athletically inclined than I was. None of this ever really mattered because I never gauged the students and asked them what they wanted. To be fair, some were just too young or too immature to fully formulate what it was that they wanted to receive from the class (and I guess in this respect, I would have probably been better suited for older students). Be that as it may, the most enjoyable classes were the ones where I asked the customers what they wanted and they were able to tell me definitely that they wanted X, Y, and Z, and then I just delivered that to the best of my ability. Some subjects, such as sports, were really not my thing, but I nevertheless tried to get into with the students so that they would be fully present for the class and enjoy it as much as they could.

I’ve had some classes that were forced on the students and they didn’t want anything from the class. They hated the class so much that they absolutely refused to do any of the work that I set in front of them. They didn’t even pay attention to me and just kept their heads down the entire time. I complained to the administration and the results for what I should do were in: suck it up. Fine! When this happens to you—hopefully it never will—you can just throw your hands up in the air and make it a free self-study class. So many people want EFL teachers to move mountains for kids that just don’t have it in them to learn, much less learn a new language. It’s a systemic issue that you should just let go. This is my professional opinion which you can take to the bank with you. If you’re going to be fired for being unable to teach a class that didn’t want to be in the room with you, then this is a job that you don’t belong in anyway! Yes, even if you don’t have the money, you should leave the job. There will be others. Don’t you worry. And actually, if it turns out that all you’re doing is babysitting kids, well you could probably earn a lot more money as a babysitter overseas than an actual English teacher. But I guess this is another story for another book.

Back to teaching one-on-one with a collapsed class. Not all of my classes failed. But when it came to teaching one to one with this particular student, there were some moments when I thought that I would never make it through. Really. This is the truth. So after we treated the English class like it was a psychology course in college—which the student liked a lot—we also simulated a test-taking environment and I made the kid some worksheets that he could practice with to improve his written skills. This worked really well for getting the little tyke off my back because while he did the worksheets, I could just sit quietly and stare off into space (the class was usually at the very end of the day when I was in the least mood to be teaching anything, much less English). Other video clips worked really well, and sometimes just plain old conversation held me through where he and I talked about the major cultural differences between our cultures (always riveting to me, but apparently not to most students who just take the differences for granted, usually). Sometimes we would also play games with cards and make stipulations about what would happen if the opponent lost—such as the aforementioned 10 ideas list that I would make most of my students do. Other things included “come up wit one new fact about yourself that I don’t already know,” which actually proved quite difficult for the students, including my one on one student, since all they could ever produce was “I like video games,” and “I have a lot of work to do.” I did this with my one-on-one student to much success.

Apart from keeping track of what you’re student is looking for, I also advise keeping their work on hand so that you can have a reference to look back on and see where the student is making the most mistakes. Some students don’t want to receive any corrections, so I just use that as an excuse not to give them any if they’re not ready to receive it. Providing feedback is a touchy subject and many people are divided on just how much feedback to give to the student. Entire books have been written on the topic and you are encouraged to look into them as I can’t possibly give them an adequate treatment in this book. However, I will say that in my experience there are students who just want to practice without receiving any criticisms or remarks on what they’re doing in correct with the language. I’ve also had some students who just sort of assume that I have a funky accent and that the way real English is spoken is the way they are saying it. Or sometimes they just wish for a British person to talk to them instead so they can hear what English is *really* like. Whatever the case may be, if I come across a student like this, I try to remind the student that I am there to help them improve and correct their language. Sometimes they’ll take heed but if they don’t, I drop the subject immediately and let the student not improve themselves. This is entirely on them and I’d rather have the student stay continually motivated to attend my classes then to feel disconcerted by my critiques and then no longer feel like there is any hope. Obviously, each case will vary considerably from one student to another but generally speaking I prefer gentle critique over hard-sells. The people I hard-sell to almost never come back through the door for another English class (unless my classes are mandatory which they almost always aren’t).

Aside from keeping track of the student’s work, using a recorder can also cut time in helping you figure out what the students need the most help with. Again, this recommendation is taken from the book *Teaching One-to-One* and a host of other Cambridge series books that recommend a recorder of some kind. When I was applying to the Peace Corps, I also read from their digital libraries which recommended using a recorder to hear the sounds of the local language of the host country that you would get immersed in. So there’s something to be said about recording sounds. I’ve done this a few times and I like doing it because it helps me immediately pinpoint what the students need the most help with and allows me to easily justify to the students why I am giving particular exercises for the class. “Why teacher?” they often ask and I’ll say, “Because I heard it on the recorder and it’s a mistake that keeps coming up, time and again.” Believe it or not, this will get the little tykes off your back if for no other reason than the fact that you have objective evidence showing that they can’t speak the language properly. This works especially well for one-on-one settings where the instruction is more personalized.

Keeping running tabs of your students’ progress is one of the best ways to get the student off your back. Gauging their interest is another great strategy to use as is providing more advanced worksheets and exercises. Another thing that I have often given is surveys and then sometimes I’ve asked students to analyze surveys. Although many of my high school students found this to be boring, they also found it to be necessary which compelled them to continue with the class, trying to measure and analyze the surveys despite their boredom. This has also been interesting for most of my advanced students who like learning about how social scientists measure social things. When I was teaching in South Korea, many of the students were already pretty well-versed in research methods. For the more advanced students that take my class, I provided TED talk videos and really advanced articles out of the Times Magazine and compelled discussion. Many of my students didn’t need to learn the language per se, just the pronunciation of it. It’s funny how some of the smallest quirks in a person’s speaking can sometimes be the most formidable to correct. I found that the more advanced a student was in their language proficiency, the more difficult was for me to make any measurable changes to their fluency, either because they were too pompous to make the needed changes or they just didn’t believe me—they just felt like it was a matter of practice. Again, to get the students off my back, I just let them believe this. My protestations didn’t really move mountains when it came to teaching these advanced students.

I have had experience teaching a handful of adult learners as well. I first started teaching adult learners back in New Jersey, in the United States, where I was tasked as a language volunteer-instructor. The student body was mixed, with representation in various parts of the world, from China to the Dominican Republic and Colombia. It was hard to coordinate this, but I frequently mended this difference by providing worksheets that we could all do together and then reviewing the worksheets. I would use the whiteboard to explain something in English but most of the time I would let the students do the talking and experimenting in a safe environment. This was at the beginning of my EFL career and to be honest, I probably did some of my best work when I was working with the adult students because they had enough drive to continue going with their studies and they wanted the language enough where assigning homework wasn’t such a huge ordeal as it was for many of my younger students. Still, there were times when I also wanted to get the adult students off my back and when I wanted to do this, I would prepare a series of worksheets that I would select based on whether they could be turned into a game or some kind of activity afterwards. Some of the subjects that I found frequently served themselves for this sort of purpose was Food, clothing (fashion), technology, extracurricular activities, weekend activities, grocery shopping, body parts, describing movies, trivia, and health and wellness. These broad topics usually had a worksheet to draw from and then an accompanying game to go with them. There are several books that actually contain worksheets PLUS activities that can be divorced from the worksheets: *Games for Vocabulary Practice* has been an absolute godsend and it is available online for free at the following address: <http://assets.cambridge.org/052100/6511/sample/0521006511WS.pdf>. Another great book that contains a similar setup is the book *Copy & Go: Ready Made Interactive Activities for Busy Teachers*, although I used this book less than the aforementioned vocabulary book. Another book that I used sometimes for my adult learners was *The Recipes for Tired Teachers* book which contained a lot of interactive games to give to the students. Since many of my classes for adults only ran about 45 minutes in length, these games and activities were able to sustain me for the most of the time. Sometimes the adult learners came late to class, but to maintain my composure and energy levels, I would always end the class at exactly the time that the class was supposed to end. This was my rule because it helped me maintain the boundaries for tardiness and maintaining boundaries allowed me to conserve energy and not care so much. If you’re teaching personal lessons to students for a living, this might not be possible as you’re kind of beholden to the students for their paychecks. If you find yourself in this situation, you should firmly establish a cancellation policy that mandates you get paid if the student misses. It’s a very good idea to review the rules of the game that you’re playing with your individual student or students before you begin to play, and if you have any reason or gut instinct is telling you not to engage with this particular student in some kind of economic transaction, then fellow your gut and do not engage. Cut your losses and keep looking for the work that’s going to be reliable, consistent, and lucrative for you.

There are a number of things you can do with your adult students to get them off your back. One of the best ways of doing this is, ironically, keep a record of their work. Apart from being able to track changes, you can use it to justify repeating a lesson over and over again since your records will indicate that the student still hasn’t fully grasped or internalized the idea that you’re trying to convey. I’ve done this a number of times with students. They lazily remove “I am,” for instance when they are responding to a question like “How was your weekend” and so I will continue asking this question until I hear what they say as correct. This is just a minor example of every day communication, but if I’m working with a student, I will give them homework that works on a particular structure and then we will review it together in a one-to-one session. Many adult students just want to have conversations with you without doing any work, and this is all well and good sometimes but very often it can create the illusion of progress where there is none. Besides, nothing will drain you faster than having to converse every week with a student on a new topic of their choosing. It’s exhausting and it makes you go around in circles with this student until they give up and potentially give up the class. The only way you’re going to retain students is if you keep track of their progress, monitor it, and then make exercises and activities that are based on the needs that they present with. This is, at bottom, what an English teacher does in the 21st century. They take what the student gives them—be it online or in person-- and provide activities that will help the student practice the proper form and use. Many adult students will already have a good sense of the meaning for many different words since English is the lingua franca of the world, but many may not know how to use the words properly and in what context. You can model different scenarios and get the students to practice this work with you. If you’re going to give conversations, make sure you let the student know that you’re giving a conversation based task so that they can practice what they should be doing properly. And if the student is still not saying things properly, well, then that is your opportunity to rinse and repeat over and over again until the student finally says things properly. I have done this with almost all of my students since repetition is a very important aspect of learning just about anything. I don’t settle for “good enough,” because I realize that there’s a lot of time to be saved when you’re repeating certain units over again so that the student can practice what they have learned. I go for quality over quantity of information almost every time and you should to if you wish to rest back your time. With younger students, I provide worksheets. And for very young students, you can usually play a game for a long period of time and they won’t even notice. That’s the beauty about young children—they have absolutely warped senses of time and feel like a game for the whole class period is a great way to spend their time.

But in going back to the adult students, I also find the little things to enliven the class make a whole lot of difference. For example, if you’re actually meeting with an adult in real life to help with them with their English, you can bring coffee or water or some kind of gourmet treat to the class that you can then share with the student as you go over certain material. This makes the class far more charming and less of a struggle to have to endure if you’re making the class seem light and easy (irrespective of whether this makes the learning easier or not!). Sometimes learning isn’t comfortable—we all know this—but that doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t make the class or your lessons as comfortable as possible so that the teaching is as easy on you as possible.

Other ways to enliven a one-on-one class without necessarily having to be alert and present most of the time is to have a list of conversation questions for your student to answer per class. This could take up a good 15 minute period of your class each time with the student and actually, allocating your time with the student in different chunks of time is a good way to maximize the reduction of active energy you dispel in your class. In one class that I used to teach back in New Jersey, I would have a chunk of time where I would introduce new words, another chunk of time when I would ask the students questions about their life, and another chunk of time where I would describe the form, meaning, and use of a new concept in English—never an easy thing to do. I would then reserve the last part of the class for general questions and conversations. I amassed a lot of worksheets when I was still working in the United States as an English instructor. I used to scan them in and store them on my Google Drive so that I could always have them on hand when I needed them. The great thing about Google Drive is that you can actually search for documents through a search mechanism. So if you call your files things like “Food Vocabulary,” and “Present Progressive with Mr. Bean,” then you’re likely to be able to find them quickly and use them at a moment’s notice. As an English teacher, you’ll find that getting material is one of the easiest aspects about the job and can save you a lot of time in the long run if done soon enough. When I am at a loss for what to do in my classes, then I just search through my drive and find a worksheet to throw at the students. This is probably an obvious answer and one that you didn’t need to buy a book for, but I will say that there are a host of resources that you might not know about that will help you begin to throw worksheets at students at a much faster pace and thereby help you conserve your energy and save more time. Some of these websites are the following: EnglishforEveryone.org, Eslprintables.com, Waygook.org, eslcafe.com, busyteacher.org, teacherspayteachers.com, and esl-kids.com. All of these websites will give you more than enough of an arsenal to combat those lulls in your one on one classes when you don’t know what to do next. They’ll also help you fill time where there are gaps or help you challenge students when they are feeling unchallenged. It’s helpful to anticipate problems that may arise in your class, but I find that doing this is a terrible way to expend energy and that, rather than having a backup plan for just about everything in the classroom, I just take things as they come and improvise. I find that this creates a more authentic experience for students because when things don’t go according to a plan (i.e. the real world happens), then that is your opportunity to have an authentic moment with your student and then to figure out what to do next while perhaps courting suggestions from your student. This is more valuable in my opinion because it keeps the student involved in the education process and it also keeps you from breaking your neck from lesson planning for long periods of time. I know many teachers—myself included—who literally spend weeks planning for just one lesson that they’re going to give at some random time in the semester! They hole themselves up in their apartments and work for hours on end on the most miraculous PowerPoint presentation you have ever seen. They then unearth from wherever it is that they came from, replete with laminated cards and a twitching wrist, and they have this miraculous lesson plan that then doesn’t even go according to plan! Don’t be like me and countless other English teachers who have come and gone in the profession. Trust me when I say that you don’t need to plan so much for an entire lesson. Your whole life is going to come and go and before you know it, you’re going to find yourself wondering what happened all of this time while you were trying to figure out what to do with your students and helplessly lesson planning your days away. This is *NOT* a great way to live.

There are some strategies you can give for teaching one-to-one. Apart from keeping a portfolio and playing games with your students, you can introduce multimedia videos and sound files and art projects that keep the student busy. If the student is exceptionally fluent, you can even start a project with the student—write a play, write a book, make a video, create a song, make a flyer, write a poster, write a letter to a very important person, join a social media group and post important questions. The more active and lively you make your one on one classes, the more dynamic and interesting they will become and ironically, the less work you’ll have to do in the long run because you will have established the basis for a very exciting journey with your student. Doing these projects are not only fun because they are engaging, but they also can be extended for weeks upon weeks. Making a video, for example, requires making a storyboard, characters, writing a rough draft, editing, and then casting the roles if you need more than one person to play a part in the video. It also requires a time to go do the actual shooting of the film. You might even have to introduce samples of a film clip so that your students have an example of what it is that you’re looking for in the final production. Making a video could take many days if not weeks and can prove to be just the challenge that they need to get their English to the next level of fluency. Also, making something like a video or a play can be either totally hands-off on your part or it can involve you doing something fun. Either way, it’s a win-win situation for you because either scenario is a preferable one to having to write up boring lessons that drill down activities for the students to work on. And of course, when you’re in about as to what the students would enjoy the most in your one-on-one class, just ask them. It’s okay to ask the students “How was this lesson?” and “does this feel good?” I know, it’s a weird question because it makes you feel vulnerable, but in a weird way, the more vulnerable you feel when you’re communicating with your student, the more likely you’ll be to get the students off your back! I swear, it’s one of those weird ironies of teaching.

If projects aren’t really looked favorably upon in your school’s culture, then you could always just provide increasingly more difficult worksheets for the students to complete. You’ll find that there’s really no limit on how much a student can improve over time. There’s always something to correct, something to remind, something to cut. You just need to be more cognizant of this and then tackle it when you hear it happen again. I’ll describe some of the problems that students present with in a later chapter so you’ll understand what it is that I’m talking about.

There are still more strategies that you can give to get the adult learners off your back. Apart from gift giving, providing coffee for the morning classes and sweet gourmet treats for the afternoon classes, and also keeping records of just what it is that you’re doing with your student, you can take inventory of what interests in your adult students. Unlike high school and middle school students, who basically don’t see the purpose of surveys and therefore don’t take them seriously, adults are different in that they usually think it is very thoughtful of you to provide a survey that asks them about their interests. There are many surveys online that you can draw from to ask the students questions. Typically, I ask a select few of the same questions over and over again to understand the students better: (1) Why are you learning English?: (2) What are some of your hobbies?; (3) What is the most difficult part about English?; (4) What would you like to accomplish in learning English?

These sentences are sometimes phrased differently but they are nevertheless variations of the same thoughts that I have when I give students surveys and attempt to gauge what it is that they are doing in my class. When I was in New Jersey, teaching English at a local public library, many students would remark that they wished to talk to their clients better, at their jobs. Other students wanted to pass the citizenship exam while other students wanted to be able to speak with their children in the target language. When I was in Mexico, many students wanted to be able to travel and go to Canada and experience cold weather. When I was in Korea, many students were just interested in American culture without necessarily having any idea as to what they would use the language for. As an English teacher, the more you teach, the more you’ll encounter the varying reasons that people have for speaking English and you’ll be able to tailor your lessons to these different needs. In one of my classes back in the United States, one of my students wanted practice speaking at the post office so I found post office-related worksheets to give to the student and then we practiced saying the words. Although this didn’t exactly get the student off my back, it alleviated any pressure for me to be super alert and aware of what was going on in the class because the material just took care of itself, it lived on its own. Whenever possible, you want to find such materials that live on their own, even when you are the person to initiate them. There are many such worksheets out there that you can find on the internet and it’ll just be a matter of experimenting with them in your particular context. Ultimately though, you can’t really go very far in getting the students off your back if you ask them what it is that they wish to accomplish in the class. If you keep the needs of the adult student in the back of your mind, the lessons will be more likely to live on their own.

Surveys are great for adult students and I give them at least three times per semester. Before the class starts, which assesses where the student is; the middle, which assesses how far they have come and inventories where we need to go, and then a final survey, which assesses again how far the student has come and also explores possibilities for future lessons. If you are going to teach one on one with a student, keeping track of progress like this will give you direction and a sense of how to take the lessons and sustain them over time. Sometimes it can be easy to run out of ideas but as long as you consider the totality of the person you’re working with—their wants, their needs, their ambitions, you’ll come up with a limiteless supply of lesson ideas to give to the student per each class. Just make sure that you are providing the student with clear reasons for why you’re helping them the way you are. Sometimes if you play the recording back, although it may be painful for the student to listen to, it can also be a good wakeup call and a justification for you the teacher to step in and correct whatever it is that they’re doing incorrectly. Don’t do this all the time because the students will get discouraged but do it enough so that the student views you as someone who is professional and taking the students’ errors into consideration. If you do this, you won’t get much challenging remarks from the students or a high bounce rate. As an English teacher, the onus is usually on you to keep the students coming back to the room since technically they almost always never need to come back, not even if you’re teaching at a private school where students are otherwise required to attend classes. As an English teacher, you are the least priority for students of all shapes and sizes, so getting the students to come back to your class is one of those realities you have to grow accustomed to as you begin to travel this industry. Universally, studetns will almost never tell you why it is that they dropped your class. If you’re teaching at a regular school, they might say things like “I had to go do this particular project,” or “I have a big test,” but usually this is just to be nice and what they are really saying is “I didn’t think your class was important to my life at this moment in time.” Hopefully the activities that I have provided above will give you enough power to be able to retain your students while not getting overwhelmed and tired. We are trying to get the little tykes off your back, albeit still have them repeatedly come back to class.

Adults are notoriously difficult to please because they are more business oriented and more cognizant of their time and how it relates to money. Normally, you don’t want to beat around the bush with adults because they’ll see through it right away. Normal activities that you give to students of younger years—in middle school and high school—can also sometimes be viewed as childish by adults and have no value whatsoever. At worst, they can be seen as terribly demeaning and degrading. For example, if you determine that passing a ball to an adult is a good idea, you may be met with resistance by the adult and a deep level of resentment. Maybe it does or maybe it doesn’t go without saying that adults should not be treated like children in the EFL classroom. At all. This means that any of the exercises you normally give students of younger years to get them off your back will not work for adults. With adults, hard data and a clear demonstration of their improvement is really the only way that you’re going to be able to appease them and then get them off your back. **(this paragraph belongs earlier).**

Giving homework to adults may also sound like a good idea but adults are some of the busiest people on the face of the Earth. No joke. They may have kids or families that they have to take care of. They be moving back and forth from one country to another to take care of matters back home. Sometimes they have jobs where they keep draconian hours and get little money for the services that they provide. And sometimes, they are out of town on business. Adults have so many reasons for not being in the class that faulting them for not doing homework is terribly inconsiderate. I remember teaching English in New Jersey and being told by my superior that many of the students weren’t learning the language because they didn’t practice. She said that even five minutes of practice would be enough. Well, I know from my own experience with learning languages that she this boss of mine was probably on to something. When I was learning Mandarin for example and studying at least 10 minutes per day, every day, I began to pick up some nuances of the language and the alphabet. I also started building my vocabulary from scratch and pretty soon I could utter basic phrases that would get me by in Mainland China. Trying to emphasize this to students is one way you can reach them and get them to practice. However, if they don’t do it, it’s also a way to get some of the pressure off of you—after all, they didn’t have the time to do the homework so can the blame be completely on you? You’ll be hardpressed to find students who blame you for *their* inability to complete assignments. So I guess the lesson here is that whenever possible, put some accountability on the students to learn the language. You can do this by assigning homework that they don’t, or you can give them exams for practice. Have them tell you the definitions of words or have them speak in depth about a topic that you have already gone over. Have them produce as much of the language as possible.

My instructors in the International Teacher Training Organization (ITTO) said the students should be talking about 80% of the time and I really like this rule because as I already mentioned, it gets the heat off of you and the accountability on the student to learn the language. I can’t think of a better way to get the students involved and getting them to take ownership of their own learning than through this sort of accountability where they are required to speak at great length about whatever interests them. Surveys and assessments will get you to understand what the students are looking for in their language learning and what their expectations are, but having them actually mold the words in their mouth and then practice it through open activities—perhaps recording these activities and then playing them back for the student—will help you reach the adult students and get them off your back.

Whenever I meet a new student for the first time, I let them know how difficult it is. If they don’t have a lot of the language already, I will find someone to communicate with them or I will use Google translate and translate the phrase “This is going to be super difficult!” for the student, so that they know what they are in store for. I don’t do motivation. I’m not a muse and I can’t will people to want to learn language for themselves (as much as I would like to). I can really only facilitate whatever motivation the student would have had without me. There are some teachers who are living embodiments of inspiration for many people. I don’t know them personally, but I can tell you that I am not usually one of them (alright, *sometimes*  I am, very seldomly) and I do not rely on my ability to inspire to get me through lessons and classes. Rather, I am upfront and direct about what language learning entails and make sure that the student is aware of this. Learning language is not always fun, and sometimes it can be downright boring and repetitive and exhausting and sometimes even heartbreaking. It’s funny how most language learners—once they have achieved an intermediate to advanced proficiency—don’t reach this “THIS is it,” nirvana-like stage where they feel super joy at the fact that they have learned a language. On the contrary, by the time they learn the language, they are usually disillusioned, dismayed, or perhaps indifferent about it all. Maybe they even have a few battle scars to show for their hard learning. Maybe they dated one too many people who speak English! Whatever the case may be, language learning, at a distance, sounds like a great hobby to pick up. It sounds like a hobby that’s on the level of sipping cappuccinos at a café. In reality, language learning can be tough. Sure, it can be enjoyable too, but emphasizing the tough moments that students will have to stick-it-out with is also very important for getting the students off your back, particularly the adult students who will sometimes be inclined to blame you for their lack of improvement. Self-monitoring and constant assessment of improvement is always an important thing.

In addition to making sure the students understand how difficult language learning is, you can also enrich your classes, particularly the one-on-one classes by arranging places to meet up and coffee shops to go to. You don’t need to confine lessons to the apartment, unless your student does not feel comfortable speaking in public. If they do not mind, you can always meet them in an open setting and run your lessons like a conversation and then correct the student either during the lesson if you’re not in a hugely public area or perhaps through email or some other means. I’ve already mentioned personalizing the language learning process, but I advocate doing this because it humanizes you and brings the real world more to the classroom. Also, students tend to think they are getting more from the experience when they can be in the real world, and sometimes applying their English on the spot in public settings (assuming you teach in an English speaking country). Also, meeting in different locations has a way of making your classes seem more dynamic and interesting. This will endear you to the student even more if you do this. Or if you don’t have the budget to do this or the weather isn’t permitting, again revert to the other strategy I mentioned where you bring in some treats for the room so that you two can practice more of the language while also comfortably chewing on something delicious, a delicacy. You could even make some food, like cookies, and then bring those in. A little goes a long way. Believe me!

Before finishing up this chapter, it is important to consider more strategies for when students do not want to be in the room. As I already mentioned, you’re going to encounter many situations where you’re in front of a room of students who don’t want to be there. Actually, most students almost never want to be in a classroom. Not even the most motivated students. The classroom is the absolute proverbial prison without walls, it is the place where you are reminded everyday that you are at the bottom of the totem pole and there’s little chance for you to climb up and out without “doing your time.” Even the most motivated students are motivated because they can see an escape plan in their mind’s eye and they have a way of executing it so that they can get out of the bin as fast as possible. For those others who don’t have an escape plan, it manifests in unruly behavior and outright rebellion. It’s never a pretty sight. Most students around the world are the same way. There’s really no exception except for maybe the uber-rich or uber-mature students, but these types of students grace their presence in your class just once in a blue moon. For the most part, you’re going to have to assume that you don’t have any of these types of students to work with.

So let’s say you’re in a class where the students absolutely hate English and don’t want to be in the room with you. Assuming that they aren’t outwardly rebellious and just sleeping, you can do ten things: **(1) Play games; (2) Offer food-reward incentives; (3) Barter students with work in exchange for a treat; (4) Complain to the administrators; (5) Make the class exciting by introducing material that the students don’t normally see; (6) Introducing guest-speakers into the class which will force the students to be on their best behavior; (7) Invite an observer to the class to watch what it is that you’re doing and offer feedback and suggestions; (8) Courting feedback from your English teacher social network and asking them what to do; (9) Forcing students to leave your room if they do not obey; (10) Quitting your job. I will go over these ten strategies with you one by one so that you can figure out what it is that you need to do to get your class under wraps.** A lot of these pointers are repetitions of precious points, so I won’t delve too deeply into them at this point, but I want you to know that you have these options in the event that you find yourself in a situation like this. There is no doubt that this is a lot of work and not likely to alleviate some of the stress you have with respect to getting the students off your back. But bar none, this is going to be the fastest way for you to get the stress out of your life and move on with your life.

The first strategy mentioned is to play games. I’ve already gone over this ad infinitum in previous chapters so not much needs to be said here. If you look at websites like Duolingo.com and Buusu.com, you’ll see that these websites rely heavily on the gamefication of language learning because it is a test and proven strategy that works for language acquisition. Most of my students, no matter where they have been in the world, love games and love competing with each other. They also love the sense that they have learned something in their English classes and can apply it to something that provides almost immediate gratification—a game. Games also provide little pressure for you to be on all the time. You can just sit back and relax and watch the students struggle with each question that you may or may not have invented yourself. When you give these games, you can smile and pretend to be a real gameshow host. You can clap when a student gets the question right and you can encourage other students to call out a response after a student fails to answer the question correctly and you’re wondering what the answer is. You can introduce bombs in the game that force all of the students to lose points if they have you click on the wrong square. And you can reveal rewards that the students get for answering a question that is particularly difficult. Most of the time this sort of gameification works. As a general rule, the more detailed your PPT is and the more captivating the animation is, the better it will be for the students to consume and the more likely you’ll be able to sit back and relax and watch the students just daze at the screen. For example, there is one zombie attack PPT that has been downloaded extensively on Waygook.org and in this zombie attack PPT, there are a number of video clips that show characters running away from an onslaught of zombies and aliens. The clips have been lifted from scenes in a movie but they fit perfectly for this context, in this PPT. The graphics of this PPT just draw you into the world of the game and this can be really great for an unruly group of students. This is assuming that the students are awake and that they are willing to put in even just a modicum of effort. If they aren’t, then there’s really nothing you can do to save the class and you are encouraged to see the other bulleted strategies below.

Bar none, food-reward/incentives are the best incentives you can provide your students. They’ve already been mentioned earlier but it bears repeating. Students love to be fed the way cows love to eat grass. The two go hand in hand and if you have even a little bit of candy on hand, you’ll be able to win over many students to your class, albeit for superficial reasons. Of course, there is always the danger that you will create students that take candy for granted and just expect it from you, but if you give this type of reward sparingly, you can create an expectation effect in your students that keep them eagerly awaiting your class and wondering if today is going to be the day that they win candy from you. When I’ve had super unmotivated students who didn’t want to do anything, I gave candy. I gave candy for answering questions correctly, for raising their hands when they were supposed to, for quieting other students. Hell, I gave candy if the student just smiled at me. I gave so much candy that I practically needed to create another checking account just for my candy fund. There was just so much candy flying out of my pocket each week (this is a bad thing) that I could barely keep track of where it was all going when I wasn’t eating it myself. The co-teachers never complained because they sometimes would bum some candy off of me as well and I would just give it to them (although in hindsight, I should have made them work for the candy as much as I made the kids do it!). For most of the problematic classes, I was without any co-teacher and therefore no one was holding me accountable for any sort of measurable result. I was just charged with holding the pigs in the pig pen, metaphorically speaking, and entertaining them. And boy, did I do an entertainment for the students. I would smile excessively when I held these candy-based activities. I was almost like a crackhead super high on heroin, grinning to the point of convulsions while handing out candy in jitters and squeals of faked joy. Although candy is a popular option for many teachers dealing with students who are unmotivated, I also happen to think that giving candy can also be pretty hazardous to your energy and mental frame of think. The candy doesn’t exactly get the tykes off your back because although you can play games for an entire period and give candy to the winners of each round, there’s still an element of presence that you need to have in the class in order to make it work for you. You can’t just sit back and relax and watch the students do their own work. You actually have to be there, and be ready. There’s just no checking out. This is why I almost never advocate candy as a first line of defense solution for a class that does not want to be in the room. There are other ways to make the students do all of the work—like a scavenger hunt, to be described a little later—then to reward candy, either by playing games or otherwise, to keep the students going.

Another strategy to use for the moderately-motivated classroom is to barter for some other treat, like playing a hot seat game or watching a sports video or some other kind of movie. A hot seat game is basically just a series of pictures on a ppt show whereby students attempt to get each other to say the words that are on the slides by describing what they see in the picture or describing the word that needs to be said without actually saying the word. “It is something that you put on your body, all over it, to get you clean,” a student might say in order to try and get another student to say “soap.” I love these games because there’s nothing more passive for me while I’m in the class then to have them play this game while I sit and twiddle my thumbs.

I have done this bartering thing to moderate success. To be honest, bartering takes up a whole lot of energy because you’re giving the students a series of choices, but they are fixed choices and the students have to decide, sometimes amongst a host of bad choices that they don’t like at all. “Okay kids, here’s the deal,” you might begin, and then continue “You can do this worksheet and if you do it all and we go over it, then we can play this Mario-themed hot seat game, this Zelda-themed hot seat game, or this sports-themed hot seat game.” The students invariably frown and then you inevitably decide for them. It’s like a shady guy opening his coat and revealing jewelry that all looks counterfeit but nevertheless acting as if it’s the best jewelry to be on the market. If you modify the selection of goodies that you barter your students for, then you’ve basically lost the game because then you’re giving the students complete control over what they get to do in the class (this is definitely something that you want to avoid).

Bartering works well if you get to know what the students are already used to as a reward, which can be tricky to glean if you don’t have contact with the teacher who taught at the school last or if no one is telling you anything about what the students are used to (or worst case scenario, people are telling you what the students are used to, but it’s all a lie as is what happened to me when I first taught in South Korea where the teacher had me believing that the students absolutely loved all things pedagogical. Well, I quickly learned my lesson on this one and changed my lessons accordingly, sometimes despite what my colleague was telling me). If you can get a sense of what the students are used to for a reward and get a good impression of how they view you (as a real teacher or some kind of an English mascot that comes in and smiles every now and then), you’ll be able to determine if bartering works for you. Most times, it actually hasn’t worked for me because the students either become too self-entitled or my status as an English teacher isn’t strong enough in the school for me to make my bartering actually make a difference to the students one way or another. You’re going to have to ask around and maybe visit the message boards and FB groups where people have taught in your specific country to figure out the low down on this one. Still, I put it here as an option because it has clearly worked for some teachers in the English teaching profession. One particularly popular treat to give students, for example, is apparently movie-day and food-day whereby the students can bring in their own snacks or just watch a movie (pre-selected of course). In my experience, movie-day has been a big waste of time (great for getting the little tykes off your back!). It’s amazing to me what the administration and faculty alike are willing to settle for when you hav a movie day! I’ve shown a whole lot of crap to the kids on the reasoning that “hey,that’s what they wanted to see!” I once tried to show the students the movie *English Vinglish* about a woman who becomes empowered to learn English to prove her family wrong (I tried showing this to a group of high school boys). You can imagine how well this did. Most of the students not only started snoring but those who even bothered to pay attention to me found themselves feeling resentful that I could bother showing this movie when I didn’t even speak *their* language! “Here, watch this movie about learning English, so that you can learn my language. By the way, I don’t speak two languages myself, but you should!” You can imagine how ridiculous this was, so I learned my lesson on this and started showing the kids something more educational, like *Mega Mind.* I also showed *Harry Potter* and then *Spider-Man 3.* All of these movies had absolutely nothing to do with English, but hey, the kids loved it and I didn’t have to do anything in the class except read from my kindle reader, so it worked for me (and apparently everyone else as well since no one ever complained about my teaching when the kids were happy with it!). In this respect, a lot of my teaching has felt like glorified babysitting and perhaps in many ways, it was (which kind of makes me feel a modicum of regret since I am told that babysitters earn more money!!). In any event, movies are an entirely useful bartering system to give to your students and perhaps the best kind because you don’t have to do anything once you press the play button and allow the kids to watch. Pro tip: just make sure that the sound volume is just low enough for you to concentrate on your own reading! Sometimes the volume is so loud that you have no choice but to concentrate on the movie.

One way to string out a movie class longer is to have the students do some kind of reflection on it (even though they probably won’t want to do this and it will only sour the experience for them and teach them that movie days aren’t actually treats in exchange for hard work but more work in exchange for work—which actually isn’t entirely different from the real world where sometimes the reward you get for hard work is… more work!). Use the movie day sparingly, but use it as a tool in your arsenal for it will help you considerably. Other useful bartering strategies is to give your students break time where they can speak their own language for a few moments (this works only for those students who really take your class seriously), also known as “language vacations.” I can’t remember where this strategy was recommended (I think it was recommended in *Teaching Large Multilevel Classes*). The premise is that your students are speaking English the whole time and then you give them temporary breaks. Actually, most of the time, my students have never stuck with trying to speak English in the class. Never. I’ve tried to impose this rule countless of times with even the most fluent of English speaking students but invariably they have had to speak their mother language to assist me in purveying information to the less fluent students (by the way, recruiting your fluent students to give information to less fluent students is *always* a great idea!). All of my students have always had to speak their native language because they didn’t have the resources or the discipline to be able to sustain speaking for that long. Since the students are usually unable to do this, I just give the students break time in lieu of a language vacation. Or the ever popular “self-study” time as is found in schools in South Korea since most students seem to forever be racing to study their next subject outside of your class.

I used to think that speaking slowly would be helpful to purvey information to students. But the longer I remained an English teacher, the faster I became irrespective of the level of students and I did find this to be the most helpful because it simulated the real world the most. When you visit an English speaking country, for example, most people aren’t going to slow down for you and help you understand what is coming out of a person’s mouth. I’m from New York and I can tell you it doesn’t work that way. If anything, people usually get frustrated that they have to double as a teacher and whatever other role that they are and doing this double duty without being paid can be very frustrating for the average citizen. Simulating this type of experience (minus the anger and frustration) can sometimes be the closest thing that the students ever get to being in a foreign environment where they have to survive in another language. I tend to think this is a very valuable experience for students to have (not to mention the fact that it’s ten times easier for me to handle then to have to slow-speak for everybody and hope that they get what it is that I’m saying.). That is not my job.

And while we’re on the topic of things not being my job, I should clarify what is and is not my job (or at least what has and has not been my job) since there appears to be a lot of confusion about this. Many English teachers are under the impression that they should be carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders and teaching the students all there is to know about the English language, form vocabulary and grammar to culture and intonation. I know this because I was one of those teachers who felt like he had to do everything because somehow the curriculum was just failing the students and that the country—perhaps even the world—would be a better place with me gracing the classrooms with my presence and slowing down speech so that the students would *finally* get it! Alas, that was all that was needed to cure the students of all of their pain in learning the English language: overly prepared powerpoints and slow speech. Actually, when I got to my first school, I was so surprised by how effective the native English teachers were at teaching the students English. For those of you who aren’t familiar, in some schools, there are actually English teachers who teach the students with their mother tongue language. In South Korea, there are teachers who teach English in Korea to the Korean students and the same applies to Mexico for the students who speak Spanish. Many of the teachers are already doing a great job at this. I know because I was tasked with the laughable responsibility of teaching some of these teachers in my first year in South Korea.

To give you a little back story, in addition to teaching students, sometimes you’ll have to teach the teachers some English (at least if you’re in South Korea). When I was first given this responsibility, I thought it would be easy. I would just teach them the way I taught my kids: smile broadly and give them worksheets. But this was a little different because the teachers I had to teach actually knew a whole lot about the English language. They could form sentences easily, and with a fluidity that would have surely rivaled some people from back home in New York City. Actually, to be honest, there were many students that I came across in my universities that couldn’t form as many sentences as these teachers could in the English language. Not only that, but the cheap parlor tricks that I use for my other students (worksheets, mirrors, smiling) could not be used with the adults because they could just see right through it and normally wanted to cut down to business. Okay, maybe the smiling was important and needed to be kept, but the vast majority of strategies I tried using were no good for these teachers who needed more conversation-oriented classes. Which is basically what I gave them. And they left anyway. I mean, the attrition became so bad for these classes that I basically had achieved what amounted to a part-time job. This was actually probably better for me in the short run because I could use the time to focus my energies on the more important responsibilities I had to myself: writing books, developing websites, and socializing on social media.

The point I am trying to make here is that there are going to be some schools that don’t need you to reinvent the wheel and do epic shit to get students to learn. In many ways, you will have zero accountability when teaching the kids, apart from providing your voice and accent occasionally for the teachers to use in their classes, and even then, you might not even get to do this! Sometimes you can just sit back and smile and approve of what the students are doing. I did this in my middle school classes with an over-bearing English teacher, and I quite enjoyed the relaxation it gave me. I basically didn’t have to do anything. The teacher spoke entirely in Korean and I just smiled and said “Exactly. What she said!” pretending like I knew exactly what she was talking about. I would nod and smile and laugh, not sure what I was doing any of these motions for except for the fact that it added to the overall ambience of the class. Every week the vice principal would point and laugh at me and say “You comedian,” despite the fact that I hadn’t done anything except smile and speak in my normal upper-octave voice, but I pleasantly agreed with him and made what I considered to be a funny face, further endearing myself to him.

Sometimes you’ll just be there for moral support. I’m not even kidding. I didn’t realize this could be a job, but it really is. The job of moral support. Moral English supporter. So much of my experience as an English teacher has been that of supporter and encourager. I’ve had zero accountability for the progress of the students. I’ve just been an overall icing on the cake of what had already been achieved with the students by their native-country English teachers. I just did a little bit more pushing and that was it. In many ways, serving this kind of role was the best way for me to conserve my energy because it required very minimal preparation and only a slight bit more exertion of energy during the actual class periods. Everything was just so laid-back and at times that I felt like something was wrong. After all, how can something that feels so good, be so right? Something was missing here and I couldn’t put my finger on it. It was only by the fourth or fifth month that I realized that too much conservation of energy was actually not a good thing at all and it was in this overt relaxive state that I soon began to realize that I would need to make a move and change things or else I would be left behind in many respects. I will describe more of what was going on in the last few months of my contract as an English teacher in a subsequent chapter, but take my word for it: too much conservation of energy can also quickly zap the energy right out of you.

So in going back to the English teacher—in many cases you’ll be a moral supporter, just someone who is there to add a little diversity to the classroom and reassurance that what is being done by the book is the right way of doing something (hint: it usually isn’t!). In other ways, you’ll just be a conversation teacher who works in a sort of English lab setting and helps the students practice their English conversation skills. These classes tend to be more relaxed, but some teachers are authoritarian enough to make the classes stricter in what gets done and by who and when. I admire these sorts of teachers because I have always been such a pushover and in need of making friends, even with my students. I suppose if I had had my authority to punish the students, I would have been a different teacher. But alas, it wasn’t meant to be!

Ultimately, the point I want to make is this: If the students in your school have an English teacher that is bilingual, then you can conserve a lot of energy and mental power by allowing the English teachers do what they do best: teach English! While they do that, you can facilitate the hard work that they do by giving the students a bang-up conversation, replete with all of the topics that they will have no doubt covered in their other English classes. You may not even know it, but a lot of the work has already been done for you in these classes that you’re NOT teaching, and perhaps the real hack I can impart for you is to figure out what the students are actually getting in their other classes so that you can know where to front load all of the responsibility, not to mention figure out what your job really is! These are all critical insights that took me months to realize! Hopefully I will have saved you some time!

Let’s say you’ve tried everything to enliven your classes. Outside of the co-teacher, you’ve played games, you’ve provided incentives (candy or otherwise), you’ve smiled a lot and attempted to hobnob with students outside of their classes to try to endear yourself to them and get them on your side. All of this was a lot of work and you find yourself still exhausted at the end of the day, unsure if you’ve reached them on any considerable level and still finding that the work of getting the students pleased with your class (always a tough predicament when you’re dealing with a group of people who don’t want to be in the room to begin with!), then you have to take the next recourse and move up the chain in command (assuming that’s the way things are done in your school and community). When things aren’t working out, you need to speak with someone of authority who will mend the situation or see dire consequences. In Korea, I know that speaking with your co-teacher would be your first line of defense, followed by any staff or administrators who are above them. Before you do this, however, it is a good idea to keep a diary and notes about what is going on in your school. Mark down your attempts and the behavior in response.

In my TEFL program, one of the instructors had an unruly child who would always act up in class. This was in Mexico and the instructor was under the impression that the student had some Oppositional Defiance Disorder (the antisocial personality disorder for children!). What this teacher did was insightful. Because the staff did not seem to do much in the way of getting the child out of the teacher’s class, the teacher called up the parents, specifically the father, and told the man what was going on in her class with this particular student. In Mexico, the father is the chief disciplinarian of the household so going straight to the source seemed to have done a good job for this particular instructor because the moment she told the father, the child became almost a different person overnight and managed to control his behavior from that moment on. Apparently the father had disciplined his own child. So as you’re taking notes, make sure you start to build a case for yourself, almost like a lawyer. Talk about the avenues you have taken to try to resolve the issue and the persistence of this child in making things worse. Afterwards, present your case to the co-teacher and administrator and try to let them know as gently as possible what is going on in your class. Don’t cry, don’t put up a big fuss, just present your case as directly as you possibly can. Then, if measures aren’t taken (and sometimes they won’t be because private schools tend not to care about a students’ unruly behavior when they are strictly for profit and stand to accept just about anyone into their program as is humanly possible), then you can try and reach the parents and explain what is going on. On this note, it’s important to discuss the role of parents.

Parents are actually very important players in the education process. It may be hard to see their presence at times in a school, but you should make it a hobby of taking a moment or two to note that they are your clients (if you’re teaching children), not the kids themselves who sometimes don’t know why they do what they do when they behave badly. The Peace Corps literature talks a lot about this: including the parents in the educational process as much as possible. If you’re teaching in a remote area that has little funding and the teaching that you do is more of a community service thing, then getting to know the parents is an excellent way for getting the students off your back, particularly the bad ones who won’t be able to control themselves. You can get some real power in the educational process with the parents backing you every step of the way. Getting to know the parents and what they expect from you is also a great way to learn about your job and your real responsibilities versus what you’re supposed to be doing on paper. When you’re teaching in another country, you want to adjust and be flexible to whatever it is that people do in your community even if what it says that you’re going to do (the stated needs) are different. Sometimes you have to veer off and do what everyone else does so that you can stay on good terms with the people in your community and not call so much attention to yourself in a negative way (unless this is something that you’re interested in doing).

Generally speaking, I don’t advise calling attention to yourself as a teacher. Rather, I recommend keeping a low profile. I advocate this strategy because you are a guest English teacher, even if your job description if regular teacher. You’re not part of the society, although in some cultures you can become way (for instance, in Brazil, where if you marry an individual you become Brazilian by virtue of that bind). In other cultures, you’re always be seen as a sort of foreign entity that is coming into the school community and giving people a taste of diversity. In Korea, for example, I basically functioned as the chief diversity officer for the school, showing people how weird and foreign I was. Sometimes it was overwhelming for the students and they had to skip my class because there was just so much foreignness. I didn’t come into these countries expecting to become some staunch advocate, although doing this would have probably made my life a little more interesting and more noteworthy. But after having seen one too many episodes of locked-up abroad, I decided that I would pick and choose my battles wisely which is something that I feel most English teachers should do. In many societies, English teachers are at the bottom of the pecking order in most respects. Oh, sure, please pay a lot of attention to the fact that some countries like Korea highly respect teachers, but in many respects, the native English teachers aren’t really viewed as real teachers. They fill a more precarious role, one that is super vulnerable. For example, if the country ever needs to cut its budget and improve its GDP, native English teachers will probably one of the first to go—after the day laborers from Indonesia. Being a native English teacher in many respects is not the same as being a teacher in the home country. It’s different. But I digress.

To get the bad kids off your back, parents are usually the best way (if the administrators or co-teachers aren’t helping you.). One English teacher I heard had actually gone all the way up to the Principal about issues that she was having in her school. In Korea, going up the pecking order is the best way of redressing some issues that you’re having with your class (and to completely ignore the kids’ parents). In Mexico, you bypass the school and go directly to the parents (apparently). It’s all going to vary really, and you’ll have to determine the proper channels to take in advance. Read the contract. That’s never a bad idea. Read it a few times. Maybe make a ritual and read it once a month so that you know what your entitled to. Be like a lawyer and try to interpret your role in different ways and then seek clarity on the parts of the contract that you’re confused with. You can learn a lot about a school just by reading its contract. I remember reading my contract for Korean and being surprised when, after the fifth read, I discovered that I am entitled to sick leave. Not once had I taken sick leave… until I discovered it after reading the contract. Sometimes if you repeatedly read your contract, you’ll encounter many pleasant surprises, such as this one. So make sure to read your contract repeatedly, preferably before you even take the job because the contract is basically the holy bible of your working arrangement. It is the thing that grounds your behavior and binds you to the school community. Learn the contract and you learn the protocols. Learn the protocols and you’ll know exactly what you need to do the next time you face an unruly group of students who don’t want to have anything to do with you. Learn how to handle a situation like this and you’ll be greatly unburdened by this type of drama and thus will have ultimately gotten the kids and the parents and the administrators off your back (whoever is the first one to look at your behavior from the chain of command).

One time I had this debating class that I had to teach in my school. The kids did not want to be in this class because they felt that they had better things to do (in South Korea, the high school students will almost always feel like they have something better to do). According to the students, they had so much work to do. They had to study for their math class, their science class, their English class (the REAL one). They had to prepare for their tests and they had to work on their projects and build their portfolio to endear themselves to the colleges and universities that they would be applying to. They worked 11 hour days. Honestly, I didn’t blame them. But they still needed to attend my class and this manifested itself in overtly hostile behavior whereby the kids basically decided that it would be a good idea to blame the messenger (i.e. ME). They would refuse to do the work or they would make wild and crazy gestures at random points in the class for no reason at all. They would blurt out expletives and other crazy nonsensical things and they made my life very difficult. Teaching the class became a nightmare actually and something that I dreaded. But rather than stew in misery, I decided that it would be a good idea to record this class. I told the students that I would be recording the class and that they would be free to act any way that they wanted. I even put the video on YouTube in a private channel so that my superiors could see just what kind of craziness I was dealing with (alone). I brought this behavior to the attention of my co-teacher and told him that it would be in both of our interests if he attended the class since I had absolutely no authority. It’s kind of difficult for me to understate just what kind of LACK of authority I had. I had actually no authority whatsoever in this particular school. I didn’t give grades, I didn’t write portfolios, I didn’t determine the student’s future at all whereas all of the other teachers did determine the future of their students, some teachers more so than others. And this of course was no big secret to the students. They knew just how irrelevant the foreign English teacher was and they behaved like this. So what this recording did was give me some proof that I had been trying to control the class to the best of my abilities, and that the students were overtly denying and rejecting my presence as a teacher. This led to the co-teacher sitting in on the class (which is basically what he was supposed to do anyway because all co-teachers are supposed to accompany the foreign teacher). What I did is something that you can do too, and probably with better technology than I used. You can inform the students that they will be recorded and that the recording will go to your “boss,” which is the simplest word that most ESL students will recognize (as oppose to superior, colleague, or supervisor). It’s funny that even when I did do the recording, the students acted up despite this knowledge which only supported my case even more. I showed the clip to my co-teacher and contrary to how I thought he would react (gasps, jaw-drops), he actually snickered with some kind of expectant mirth—almost as if he had devised a recipe for a stew that he knew expected to taste sour in my mouth. Oh well, I had the objective evidence and there was nothing that he could do expect make my life easier or else I would surely go beyond him to the next person in command. Which is also something that you can do too. Always devise objective information for your case. Be as transparent as you possibly can and make a case for yourself as to why the class isn’t working out. Some teachers I know are going to read this and be so shocked that I had this problem. There are some teachers in China after all who deal with throngs of students who want to eagerly be in the classroom and absorb as much English as they possibly can—which can be its own problem and take a toll on any younger-and-eager English teacher. But if I had to choose between too many eager students and not enough eager students, I’d choose neither. Both are crazy problems to have and ones that you need to take measures to escape if you find yourself in them. We are going to talk more in-depth about making your escape like an escape artist in a following chapter, but let me first say that one of the best ways to make an escape is through saving money—even if it is meager baht that you’re earning in Thailand. Save a shitload of money and use that money to get out. Or, reinvest that money into acquiring skills that will make you a more valuable person. It’s kind of like what Tony Robbins says about being a person who is super helpful or what Seth Godin says about being the linchpin. You want to become a super-valuable person and sometimes the only way to do that is to make shit happen and build your skill set so that you don’t have to be relegated to teaching throngs of students for 10 dollars an hour. Actually, I would almost argue that if you find yourself taking a position that is a lot of work for little pay, that you just bypass this altogether and collect welfare until you have enough saved to work on getting a better skillset. Alas, I can’t go into the nitty gritty of the welfare system in the United States or abroad, but these are all problems that you need to be aware of before accepting a position as an English teacher. Also know that many schools are not going to be great (this is why they are hiring you!), so thinking of ways to try and make the environment better for you and for the people around you will also go a long way—assuming you can live off the wages that you receive from the employment. The math has to add up so that you can do a good job and be as effective as you possibly can be given some of the struggles that you’re bound to face.

Going to the chain of command is an effective strategy, but be forewarned that it may be taboo in some cultures to go directly to the chain of command when something doesn’t work out. Just be cognizant of this. Of course, if you do want the tykes off your back and the administrators to stop breathing down your neck whenever they see poor English performances, you’ll take measures to redress the problems that you’re facing and do it as soon as possible.

Let’s say you have a class that is actually willing to sit in on your class and receive instruction. They are interested in a foreigner and they want to hear what natural English is spoken like so that they can learn how to say things properly. They also want to practice their own English in a conversational setting. But for some reason, you’re sensing the energy of the classroom depleting. Perhaps you’re using too many activities to get the little tykes off your back. One way to prevent your class from absolutely dying and, ironically, from getting the students on your back is to do something non-conventional for the particular students that you’re working with. Go all Patch Adams on the students and introduce some new guest speakers. Or introduce a topic that isn’t normally covered in the class. You may have to run your ideas by one of the administrators before you do this but trying to stretch the boundaries of what the students are used to receiving in their classes is a great way to retain your students’ attention, perhaps even to captivate them and keep them involved in the learning (and to get them off your back). I’ve done this to a lot of success—one class became a video-making class whereby the students developed their own script and performed it in front of the camera (our goal was to make the video go viral on YouTube). You can also introduce a guest speaker from another country. One time, I introduced my mother to the school community and the students were absolutely riveted by her appearance, almost as if they were seeing some exotic animal from the wild for the very first time!

There are other more innovative things that you can do, as of 2016. Trying to introduce tech into your classes is a great idea—even if it’s social media, as I already mentioned. Guest speakers, social media, class trips, props. Do some standup comedy if the students like jokes. Make funny faces or dress up in something unique and different. Multimedia can sometimes be your saving grace when a class isn’t going well. Students even in high school sometimes require incessant teaching parlor tricks to get on with their lessons and to continue feeling a sense of accomplishment from one lesson to the next. Note, these don’t have to be spontaneous activities that you do on the spot (this can get exhausting), but you can strategically plan out these different ideas so that everything that you’re going to do is unique but also planned and strategic. Even with some of the more innovative classes that I did while I was teaching, it was all planned in advance so that I didn’t even need to think about it. Ted Talks and worksheets were used in advance so that I would just walk into the office and know exactly what I would need to do. The activities were interesting enough that they worked for me, worked through me, as opposed to me pushing the ideas and lessons on the students. Believe me when I say that the former scenario is far more preferably to the latter scenario.

Some of my more successful innovative classes were the video making class where our goal was to go viral and at least achieve 100 views on our YouTube channel. I started the class by showing the students a video that was done from another school in the same country (so that the students could immediately identify with the students in the video). I then told the students that I said that I told the teacher who had made the video with the students that I thought we could do a better job than the students who had made the video. I told them that we couldn’t fail at this and that we would need to make something great within the next few days. We got to work on generating ideas, talking about camera filming strategies, developing a storyboard and a script to go with it, and fact-checking and double checking that the English was great. I didn’t need to use any lesson plan for this because the necessity to get something up within a few days drove the entire activities. If there was something that needed to be done but wasn’t, it was usually glaringly obvious because the students knew what they needed to do to make a good product. To add further heat to the students, I told them that we would be presenting the video at a festival, in front of the entire school. I told them that I wouldn’t care, that I would just do it, and I tried to convey to the students that I had impulse control problems so that they would believe me when I said that I would show the video. There was a map on the wall of the classroom and I pointed to the country that we were in. I said “This is Korea,” and then I told them what would happen once we put the video on YouTube: “And this is the United States,” I pointed, “and this is Canada… the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Australia…” I continued. “This is the entire English speaking world that is going to gain access to your video and they are all going to watch it, so you need to make it good. I’m going to be the chief marketer of this class and we need to get this thing up and running. I know you won’t fail me.” So that’s basically what we did. We spent the next few classes really honing in on ideas and making sure that we had a deliverable by the last day of class. It was a wonderful activity that kept the students engaged and interested and also motivated. I find that some scare tactics work wonders for classes that would otherwise not be interested in taking the class. Granted, some of my classes were voluntary, but having the lessons structured loosely in this way gave the students the empowered feelings that they needed to move themselves in the direction that I wanted them to go in—and best of all, it required little effort from me. I could get the tykes off my back and watch them succeed. For another class, we watched Ted talks and then discussed the themes (this was for a more advanced class). Admittedly, I thought this class was boring, but some topics that we covered were quite interesting—such as the idea of going viral and then another video about virtual reality. Had I been able to stay with the same students for a longer period of time, I would have surely tried to have gotten some wearable tech for the students to experiment with.

For another class, I had the students make their own board games with magazines that I used from Juxtapoz, which has some really awkward and bizarre magazine pictures but which work quite well for making collages and games. They are high-quality and interesting to look at. For another class, I wanted to teach coding and how to make basic websites, but that was just beyond the scope of my contract, so I was really unable to do it. Playing sports games was another rather unconventional thing that I did for an EFL class. Instead of staying in the room, I acted as coach and had the students play basketball, soccer, and volleyball while I shouted out calls that didn’t necessarily have anything to do with the game itself. “No, it’s not good, play again!” I would say, or some variation thereof without necessarily knowing the rules of the game myself. I’m actually not great at sports, but if I could get the students to play without me and just call out random statements every now and then to make believe that I was a soccer coach, then it worked for me. I’m really going to hammer this whole gamefication thing home for you because it really saved me from what would have otherwise been intolerably boring classes. When you have no authority to determine the future of your students, you’ve gotta play a shit ton of games and be like a children’s figure that the kids smile and laugh at from a distance.

Other innovative things I tried were showing students how to use Google Keyword Tools to find the most popular English words on a given topic. This was actually a one on one class and the student was fascinated with how it worked, more so than when we spoke about “fun things to do on the weekend.” We brainstormed topics and then did a keyword search for those topics to see if there were any keywords that stood out to us and upon which we could build a viable internet business from scratch. It was a really cool idea and I would have surely wanted to execute this idea with the student—it was one of those classes that actually served me and not just the student, so the work didn’t feel like a burden. There are definitely some lessons that will serve you and not just the student. For instance, any skill that you learn and can relay to your students is time well spent for you because you can reinforce your own learning while also teaching the students some skills that you find interesting. Other lessons that serve you are the ones where you have a fully fleshed out lesson plan that you want to see if it will last the whole period and be interesting enough for the students to stay engaged with. I only did this occasionally because the job would have been super difficult otherwise and I would have had to quit. But when I did this, the efforts reaped dividends because I could then build a portfolio and repertoire of some of the most efficient lessons that required as little amount of work from me as possible. You’ll want to do this sort of thing early on in your career so that you can travel around the world with these preset lesson plans that you can whip out of your hat at a moment’s notice. I have some of these lesson ideas on my Udemy course, but you can find more of them from reading the Cambridge books.

Another creative idea is to take a famous movie and have the students reenact it. Although be forewarned that sometimes this may backfire in the worst possible way. When I first started teaching, for example, I was tasked with the responsibility of having the students put on a play for a spring festival in Korea. I was fresh out of college and so had the mentality that this would be a good idea if we all just tried hard enough to make it work. I told the students in the first class that I wasn’t doing this play for myself, that I wanted the students to own as much of the results as I did, and so I did the unfortunate thing of allowing the students to select their own movies that they wanted to reenact, which in retrospect was a terrible idea for they had chosen the least-actable movies of all time—Hulk and the Amazing Spider Man series, with Toby Maguire. I spoke to my co-teacher and told her this would be a bad idea, but she said “let them do it,” but also offered that we added a few more classier examples to the repertoire of scenes that they would do. So we added *Good Will Hunting* to the mix. The students practiced for weeks and I simply directed. The idea was to first show the original and then have the students reenact the scene. The day of the festival was the most mortifying day of my life, as one of the students had his shirt off and had colored himself entirely green for the scene. The Hulk scene would be the very last scene of the production. The students practiced the fighting sequence and then did it before a live audience (the entire school) and pretended to throw fireballs and give flying sidekicks, without any use of English whatsoever. Needless to say, I wanted to die. I wanted to disappear off the face of the Earth after this demonstration. I should have been more pro-active in this exchange and instead, my passivity bit back and taught me that there are absolutely some situations where you must not find activities that will get the students off your back. In this situation, I needed the students on my back so that I could get the rest of the community off my back in the long run.

Although most people didn’t really mind the performance or think twice about it, it was still not a good display for someone new to the school and I can just imagine what my colleagues were thinking at the moment that the production was put on: “Who did we hire?” In any case, there are many ways you can be creative without necessarily putting your entire reputation on the line. Larry Ferlazzo has devised many ways to use technology to be creative, from using singing websites to convert your class into a live karaoke session to using game-making to gamefy lectures. He has created a blog which he incorporates his students into and allows them to contribute to. Sometimes he has the students make their own blogs and reflect on the classroom experience. Some of these activities are a bit hogey and unrealistic to execute in some classes, but there are some that I have been able to use for Korea. Like the karaoke idea. The ESL Club songs website has also saved me many times as those activities take up the entire class and keep the students engaged and in conversation with each other as to how best to fill in the blanks.

You don’t necessarily need technology to be creative. Changing the location of the class can also break the monotony. Try a different room or go outside to have the class. Hold the class at a café if this is culturally appropriate (probably wouldn’t work for Korea, but it’s worth a try!). Hold Skype conversation meetings to supplement the in-class material. In this era, although there are many ways to earn an income online and perform job responsibilities over the digital space, it’s amazing how there’s still nothing as powerful as face-to-face interaction, in-person communication. No technology, be it Skype or some other instant messenger like Slack, has fully been able to topple the sheer power and effectiveness of in-person communication. If you’re teaching in a brick-and-mortar school, you can use this to your advantage by using your in-class support and mixing it with the digital world. As of 2016, however, you should know that many of the countries in Asia haven’t quite caught on to this development yet and are still working from 20th century assumptions. This might change. Perhaps you’ll be the person to enact the change or perhaps the culture doesn’t forbid you to be anything beyond what you already are.

I know this is a book about getting the little tykes off your back, but I’ve learned that in some strange way, the more you’re interested in what you’re teaching, the less of a burden it becomes to teach the students. If you’re actually doing something innovative and something to move the class forward that will increase everybody’s skills, well, then you really don’t need to get the little tykes off your back because everyone is growing and developing together in a space that is not so chartered. This sounds Pollyanna, I’m sure, and perhaps even a bit idealistic, but if you can’t find ways to make the profession exciting for yourself, then you’ll always be looking for ways to get the little tykes off your back. When this happens, this is a sign that you need to leave the profession. But this is a topic for another chapter!

Other creative strategies you can incorporate into your class is public speaking and PPT creation. Instead of you making your own PPTs, why not have the students develop their own PPTs, or even better, have them make the PPTs that you will use to teach other students. Since students have a lot they can teach the teacher, why not have them do all of the work for you so that you can learn from them what they consider to be the most effective in teaching students of their caliber, in their culture, in their school. A lot can be gained from having the students do more of the work than you do (although as I said before, you have to be careful with this). Another possible area to get innovative is with experimenting with different forms of English, such as comedy writing, business-letter writing, negotiating, debating, bartering, giving a toast, public speaking, lawyer-speak, and having fun with logical fallacies. These are all different forms of English that require a different type of English lexicon that you can teach the students. Although maybe not the most needed set of skills, you can maybe incorporate something different once in awhile for students who are more advanced, giving them a little bit of suspense and anticipation. You could show examples of these different types of English in action, via YouTube, and then have the students attempt to recreate it, and then record it for public view.

Or fine a contest that is being held somewhere in the country and then have the students compete for whatever the prize is. Nothing will galvanize your students quite like a good national contest where they have to compete to be noticed by important people (not to mention the fact that it’s going to help students’ portfolios and build their reputation just in time for those college applications). If you’re stuck for ideas on how to be creative, I do recommend going to Udemy.com and browsing the different courses that are offered and seeing if you can teach the same exact material in an English class. In many cases, you probably won’t be able to, but perhaps for many you will. And the students might even be interested in the subject that you have to teach. In Asia, sometimes it’s not an issue of whether the students know basic English (which many citizens will!) but what types of English they are capable of reproducing. Sometimes making the class about English AND something else will make the class more interesting, more dynamic, and just more creative overall. It will also keep your interest up which will go a long way in easing the constant need all of the time that you need to get the little tykes off your back. When you get into your second and third year of teaching, you find that you need to develop some strategies to keep your interest up, lest you should dissolve away into irrelevant and unhelpful English teaching goo.

There are interesting activities that you can do particularly with younger students. I know some teachers on the Waygook forums have tried paper machiet projects where they make masks with students, or lanterns. One teacher made popsicle stick houses and had the students paint them. Another teacher had a scavenger hunt while still another teacher did collages. You really don’t know what sorts of activities will interest your students (while also being interesting for you). The most you can do sometimes is just experiment and see what is working for your particular class and what isn’t. I know this is such a wishy washy response to readers who are probably looking for some clear and solid responses for how to get the students off your back in creative ways but often times there really is no surefire way to do it without at least a little bit of experimentation and getting to know your students. You can do a whole lot for yourself by accepting the fact that you’re not going to win every class and that, no matter how accountable people hold you for making sure that the students are both learning AND enjoying the learning process, that you’re going to accept the fact that the tradewinds sometimes don’t favor you or your style on a particular day. I was once a kid. I’m assuming you were once a kid too. Oftentimes when kids are angry, it usually has very little to do with the other person and more has to do with the kid’s feelings and their own hang-ups.

This is not to completely absolve you of the responsibility of teaching. However, it is also important to recognize that there are just going to be some days when the kids are not in the mood to be in school, much less to learn from you or even attempt to learn from you. Trying to grasp what another person is saying in another language is a very mature task for anyone. It requires patience, stamina, and diligence. It requires that you pay attention to another person for a long time, even if you don’t catch all of the words or if you don’t understand what the other person is saying. You have to be willing to withstand getting bored and dismissing another person, you have to give laser-like focus to another person to get the most out of what they are saying if they are talking in a language that is not of your own. I speak from experience. When I was in Mexico, taking a class that was entirely in Spanish, the attention that I had to give to the other teacher was so intense, in fact, that I literally had to clasp my head in my hands and keep it steady as I attempted to focus on the instructor and grasp everything that she was saying. And this was in Spanish, a language that has some remarkable similarities to English (both being derived from Latin). Imagine going from Arabic to English or from Korean to English. This is not easy feat and it requires discipline and years upon years of exposure. This is assuming the student is even interested in learning the language. If they are not, it may easily take a lifetime for a person to be fully conversant with another English speaker. So learning to accept that you’re fortunate enough to be teaching a language class entirely in your own language and expecting students to understand you fully is a privilege, and when you accept this as a privilege, you can begin to lessen your sense of dread and angst over whether classes are going to do well or not. In a sense, you can get yourself off your own back when things don’t go according to plan. And trust me, things won’t go according to plan. Actually, over 50% of the time, things won’t go according to plan. And this is just fine because that’s what being human is all about. The best way of tackling this is mere exposure and sustained thinking about teaching English and being around professionals. I’ve given you a lot of strategies so far in this book, and the more you take from them, the more you’ll be able to address those unpredictable moments when things don’t go according to plan. Being creative is very subjective actually because what is creative to you will not be super creative to the other students. Again, it comes down to experimentation and figuring out what works best for each class. Sometimes you can repeat a lesson (I strongly urge you to do this) for multiple classes. And sometimes innovation is just not going to work for cultural reasons. I can tell you that it wasn’t the most accepted practice in my private school in South Korea. Most people didn’t understand why I would do such experimental things. Either that or there just wasn’t enough resources or time to exact all of the fun experimental things that I wanted to do (since my English classes weren’t a top priority for the students). That’s the other thing. There’s a lot of calm that can be achieved when you realize that you’re not the center of the universe in your school’s community. And when it comes to preparing something for your students, sometimes enough really is enough. Things don’t always need to be perfect. They just need to be good.

If you’re interested in finding out more about some fun things you can do with your students that are off the beaten path so to speak, I highly recommend that you peruse the Waygook forums. Michael Stelzner, the host of the Social Media Examiner Podcast, also made a website called My Kid’s Adventure which is exclusively designed to provide adults with fun projects that they can do with children (be it their own or some other children) and I highly recommend using this website if you’re teaching elementary aged students. This is not an affiliate link that I am pushing here, so feel free to click on the link and be taken to the website.

Being an English maturity sometimes means harnessing enough maturity to know that you’re inexperienced in a given environment. This is why when all else fails—the kids repeatedly don’t like any of your lessons and they are outright rebellious to you—learning to accept the fact that something is amiss and you’re mostly responsible for it will go a long way in ameliorating the issue. It is okay if you are inexperienced. We all have to start somewhere when we’re in a new industry or at a new job. There’s quite a bit of learning and sometimes re-learning that is involved when we take on a new job. Accept this. Acknowledge that you’re lacking the experience and court feedback and help from other teachers when your class is going awry. Acknowledging the expertise of other teachers is actually a great way of getting the colleagues off your back if they have a particularly competitive edge to them and it also endears you to the overall community when people see that you want to learn and figure things out. Granted, there are some private academies that have nothing but a hostile stance on teachers who are trying to improve themselves and their skill, but these are not environments that you should be apart of in the first place. We’re assuming that the working environment is a relatively healthy one (not toxic). if the environment is healthy, people will be kind to you for asking for help, perhaps even be flattered that you would consider them an expert.

If your class collapses, court feedback from another teacher. Ask them to sit in on your class. If the teacher isn’t allowed to do this, find out who *is* allowed to do this and have them sit in on your class and provide feedback. In order to save face, make sure that you tell whoever is sitting in on your class that you would prefer it if they would provide the feedback to you after class, and not in front of the other students. In South Korea, many teachers provided feedback directly in front of the other students, as I was teaching, and at first, I found this very damaging to my professional image as an instructor. But eventually, I discovered that iw as just a glorified babysitter anyway, so it didn’t matter. To maintain your self-image as a professional, make sure to take this into consideration because there are many people who will offer you this feedback at the time that the students are receiving your instruction which *will* make it difficult for you to teach the same students in the future because they will view you as some kind of a pushover that they shouldn’t take seriously.

Getting someone in the room is the single most valuable thing that you can do for your career as EFL teacher. It provides you with the sort of outside, critical feedback that you need to move forward in your self-development and life. Some teachers have complained sometimes in the EFL message boards that their feedback didn’t mean anything or that it was completely illogical because “Hey, I so did that already. What are they talking about?!” Assuming you’re not working at a corrupt job where people just give each other feedback depending on how good in bed they are, the type of feedback I’m talking about is an honest sort of feedback where you actively assert yourself and ask someone to provide it to you. When I was an EFL teacher working in a private school in South Korea, I always asked people to come into the room. I took a completely transparent stance on what I was doing and told everyone that I could that they were always welcome to come into the class to see what was going on and offer some feedback. When classes got out of control, I definitely told everyone that they had to come into my class to see what was going on so that they could give me an honest assessment about why the class was devolving. Bear in mind that I had a lot of wiggle room in what I supplied the class. The class was my own and I could do with it what I wanted. Some of you may wince and think that this provides me with an unprecedented amount of freedom that virtually guarantees my success, but I beg to differ. It is definitely a wonderful thing to have been able to have had the experience to craft my own lessons and provide them to the students, it also meant that it was doubly hard to retain the attention and interest of the students because my status as the inventor of lessons was also the same kind of status that debased me and made me appear more like a “friend,” of the students and not a genuine teacher trying to dispel important information for people. It was the same sort of status that made me not a teacher. There were times when my colleagues said that they thought I should introduce a textbook of some sort, and I did this because (a) it made it easier for me to get the students off my back and (b) It was just easier for me to lesson plan and make the other lessons that I really wanted to do that much more enjoyable (because it gave me the chance to improve upon them before the actual day of the execution of the lesson). However, even when I gave these textbooked lessons, they were usually received even more coldly by the students then when I just gave my own lessons. This was unique to my own school’s culture and probably not the same sort of culture that your’e going to be working in. Perhaps you’ll always be in a classroom where there is a huge demand to learn the language. I certainly wasn’t. But I can tell you this. The feedback was always helpful. Every little feedback I ever received where a person was forced to go outside of themselves and talk about me was a lesson that clarified things for me. Whether it was the speed of my voice or the clarity of instruction, all of it helped me. And when the fault was clearly not of my own, that was also helpful to know. If you have reason to trust your colleagues and their assessment of your performance, then getting feedback will be great. Sometimes there is a danger that the students will be on their best behavior if you invite someon into the class to observe. If you’re worried about this—as you should be—then you should just record the class, as I already mentioned and invite a staff of teachers to watch it and see what’s going on. Some academies will even have a CCTV in the classroom and will almost always be able to watch what you’re doing regularly, to the point where it might feel oppressive. Whether you want this or not is your call to make, but what I like about filmed classes is that you can see exactly what is going wrong and try to fix it. Some schools only care about the money and the students that give it to them, and could care less about any education value. This is very helpful for you to know. The best advice I can give for a situation like this is to not beat yourself up over what’s going on in your class. It’s true that many employers will hire innocent and naïve English teachers to assume the blame for many of their own business’s shortcomings. This could very well be the case for your own affairs within the school and if this is the case, the most medicating action you can take in a situation like this is to know exactly where the job postings are at all times and be ready to send out a mass of resumes like wildfire when it’s time to leave. Even better, hire a VA to do it for you to speed up the leaving process. Life is waaay too short for you to be assuming the responsibilities of someone else’s failed business and their faulty practices.

“But Todd!” some people might say. “You are giving up before you’ve even tried. You’re selling out and taking the path of least resistance. You’re not a go-getter!” No hold on just a moment there. I didn’t say give up right away. I am just saying that you should give your situation an honest and critical assessment about what’s going on. I cited an example of what *might* be the case, but didn’t say that you should quickly jump to conclusions about your school. I fully recognize that it sometimes takes teachers *months* to figure out that their job is a shithole and that there’s no hope of it getting better. A really great book to read about with respect to when to *give up* is the book by Dr. Henry Cloud called *Necessary Endings.* In this book, Dr. Cloud teaches just exactly what kinds of thoughts should be in your mind right before you decide to pull the plug on an experience and change the channel. I highly recommend all readers take a look at this book before they decide to leave a job or are even considering leaving their job. There’s something very sobering about knowing the sorts of logical steps you should take before knowing when the time has come to change the channel. At some point, you’re going to lose hope in your job (it happens to the best of us). Things will change. The only certainy in life is change after all. Maybe the school will have a new principal and that principal will hate native teachers and try to get them out; maybe new staff will be hired and they will not like you; maybe you’ll grow tired of teaching and decide it’s time to try other avenues. You can’t ride the wave forever, so learning when to know it’s time to leave, when there’s no hope in your staying, is a great skill to acquire. Definitely check the book out.

Going back to our topic at hand here, we’re assuming that you can get feedback. The more feedback you ask for, the less responsibility you need to take for your own actions because your own actions will be based on the actions of what other people have told you! And when the time comes for that evaluation—assuming it’s an honest one—you’ll have acquired a number of behaviors that are specific to your school and culture that is based entirely on the feedback that other more veteran players of the school have given you. There’s nothing more satisfying than knowing that you have successfully absorbed all of the practices of your school’s culture and have become the embodiment of them. It’s almost like an actor taking on a new role and being able to assume the life history of the character they are performing—it’s the very essence of compelling performances of the likes of Lawrence Olivier and Sir Anthony Hopkins. When you internalize other people’s feedbacks, you can become that feedback, become the type of teacher that people have been looking for to fill the void in their school. And you can take a dying class and bring it back to life. Or at least get the students to behave themselves more appropriately and bear the grunt of having to attend your class.

When I was teaching in Korea, it seemed like all of my classes were an imposition on the students. Just give you an impression of what I had to work with, the students work from 8 AM to 12 PM at night. In the last semester of my tenure in South Korea, I wanted to created a short film called “Nightmare at the Munchunguan,” about this sort of scenario (a munchunguan is Korean for study-hall. It’s like a big self-study room where students go to absorb vast amounts of information). I wanted to really have like this scenario completely encapsulated in my film so that people could see what students go through in their lives and the seemingly endless and dizzying amounts of time they put into their studies just so they can get accepted into a good university and do great things in their lives (I wish all Korean students will read *Choose Yourself* by James Altucher at some point in their lives so that they can free themselves just a little bit from the pressure, but this is another story for another day). It’s really no wonder that they can’t possibly take English classes with the foreigner seriously… like, at all. I wouldn’t take my own class seriously if I were in there position. Especially if the teacher didn’t speak my own language. I would just talk right back to the teacher in my own language. “Alright Todd, repeat after me: ‘how are you doing today?’” “Que? Como se dice?” Yeah, I would just totally respond like this. This is why getting the students to a place where they can respect you and take your class even a little seriously takes *a lot* of work. It requires harnessing as much maturity out of the students as they can possibly bear. It requires you to get the students to search inside of themselves and find it in their heart to have mercy on your soul and do the activities in your class. Sometimes I succeeded and sometimes I failed, because all of the students were different. If you’re in the same predicament as I was in, you’ll most likely experience some failures along the way. Sometimes you’ll even have a student that is super motivated at the beginning but toward the end of his tenure in your class (by year two, for example), he’ll become a completely different student and absolutely hate English. You’ll also have the reverse. And some students will just be invisible and others will just be mediocre and you won’t ever remember them again. The point is that you’re going to have a whole gamut of student types dealing with this same crazy scenario of a foreigner who only speaks English coming into the classroom and demanding to be taken seriously. And you’re going to have to learn to cope with failures. We all have them and the easier you are on yourself, the easier it will be to embrace the nature of this torrential profession with open arms and thus get the little tykes off your back.

I had a blab conversation in 2016 with some random guy from Boston. He asked me what I did for a profession and I told him that I was an English teacher. He was clearly interested and asked me to elaborate on what I did. “You speak Korean, don’t you?” he quipped, to which I responded that I didn’t. And hten of course, the invariable question: “How can a person who doesn’t speak the language teach English?” I explained to him then that what I did was different from what the other English teachers did in the school and that I was providing the students with more of an immersive experience than what they would receive outside of the classroom, in their communities. This helped him understand a little bit better. The idea of an English teacher varies, I guess, according to country and culture. Sure, we English teachers are supposed to cover the grammar and spelling and stuff as the other English teachers do who actually speak the local language, but if we don’t speak the local language, we come up against a justifiability problem whereby we have to either justify our existence within the school or make new roles to fill in the school. In many respects, English teachers who don’t speak the local language are sort of like magicians who have to conjure up new problems and then solve them so that everyone thinks that the English teacher is doing his job. So for example, when I was in the school, there was clearly a smiling problem (meaning, that there was a lack of smiling). So I started smiling a lot in the hallways. A smiled so much that it hurt my face constantly and it wasn’t doing a thing for me to get the students off my ass. However, it made the school environment better… even if my face sweated profusely from all of the smiling that I did. And actually, I can verify with certainty that if you force yourself to smile, you will start to feel happy, but I will also say that it doesn’t last very long once you stop smiling. It only lasts for as long as you’re smiling. Other problems that I addressed were the lack of comedy and I would crack jokes with the other teachers and students, and to whoever else could understand me in English. “Oh is that how you say cock and balls in Korean? Very nice, I’ll keep that in mind,” and other sorts of funny-at-the-time contextual jokes that most people might be horrified by if reading this passage as a dispassionate and objective outside observer. I’d like to think that this sort of added something to the overall environment of the school, even if it was just the smallest thing. It’s like that supporting character in a sci-fi movie that does virtually nothing except stand around and press a few buttons. I was kind of like that for some of the students. Even if they couldn’t understand me most of the time. I would just pat them on the back and smile and make comforting sounds in English that they couldn’t make heads of tails about and it was alright. It worked for them.

If you’re finding that you need to justify your existence the way I did, look around the environment like I did and see if there is even a small thing that can be changed. If the teachers are complaining that they didn’t have their morning coffee, go get them the freakin’ coffee like your life depended on it. Become the coffee-maven. Do whatever you can to make the environment better because in a weird way, the more you try to make the environment better, the easier it is for people to be off your ass even for those fleeting moments when you will be able to sit at your desk and do nothing. Just stare into space and be grateful that you don’t have it as hard as some other people in the world. And further, people will be more inclined to help you if you are more inclined to help them. You’ve got to be a super giving-machine in order to get to a point where you can ask people to sit in on your class and provide you with some feedback that you can use (like, actually valuable feedback). I was very grateful for all of the feedback I ever received in my school. The teachers were my frontline of defense against the students who didn’t take my class seriously. They were the people who taught me what the students liked to do, their aspirations, their thoughts, and the style and brand of teaching that they most respected. My colleagues spoke on my behalf to the students in the local language and told them what I was thinking and what needed to be done in the class to make the best of the situation. They really saved my ass, which is why you should keep the services of your colleagues in the back of your mind when you start teaching for the first time. See if there is anyone in the school community that you can turn into an ally, and quickly. It’s hard to make allies when you’re first starting out because you have to get oriented with your surroundings and see where people’s intentions lie and what sorts of personalities they have, but once you get a good grounding, definitely recruit your colleagues and friends for assistance. They will save you big time.

But let’s say that you really are alone. That you don’t have anyone at the school that you feel comfortable talking or even worse, that you can trust without being a conniving backstabbing you-know-what. The next best thing for you to do is to reach out to your social network of English teachers or join communities of English teachers somewhere, either in the country or in cyberspace.

Firstly, get in touch with an organization somewhere. I’ve heard English Companion Ning recommended a few times (http://englishcompanion.ning.com/) which has a number of active contributors and ongoing discussion about the EFL world. I’ve also seen Teachers Pay Teachers recommended a few times over the months. A good thing about this last resource is that you can make your own resources that people pay for, which couldn’t hurt you from getting more money, particularly if you’re working for a school or in a country that doesn’t pay well. The British Council is another great resource that keeps its blogs updated and even hosts a series of webinars for you to look into. I’ve tried befriending some people through this resource, and although my results have been sort of negligible, I’m not saying that it couldn’t work for you in the right circumstances, and at the right time. Here’s a link: <http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/>. Facebook is of course another great medium you can take advantage of. The number of groups surrounding this topic of course are too numerous to name and I would advise you to just do a quick search for whatever country you’re teaching in and then follow up that long chain with EFL or English teaching to see what you get. If you make friends with one person in at least one of these groups, that could be a great start. Assuming that you really hit it off with one person, you could either continue expanding your network by asking this person if they know anyone else could help you, or you can do a social search on Facebook and looking for people who are friends with the friend that you just made (pro tip from Amy Porterfield). I wouldn’t advise you to stalk people, of course, but as always, there’s a way to be tactful when meeting someone over Facebook for the first time. You can start out by telling the person how you know them and then telling them a little bit about yourself. Afterwards, you can discuss your presentation situation and seeing if you can give you some valuable advice or at least redirect you to a valuable resource in the EFL community. Most of the time, if they aren’t trolls are disgruntled forum moderators, people are going to be more than happy to help you wherever they can (this has been my experience). Most teachers know what it feels like to need resources. Actually, I think any seasoned EFL teacher worth his or her salt probably has also become an expert at reaching out to people for resources and ideas and all sorts of hacks to game the system and get what you want out of it. EFL teachers are certainly some of the most creative people on the planet for doing this sort of thing and you are bound to find some kindred spirit in waiting, as long as you reach out and use social media to your advantage. It’s really endearing to people when a random strange befriends them out of nowhere, asking for advice. People love it because it is just so rare. It’s hard for most people to resist. At the very worst, people will either not respond or just turn you away and say that they don’t have time for such triviliaties. This isn’t so bad of course because you will have learned some valuable information about who this person is (or isn’t) and can move on swiftly to find some other person who is more helpful. Doing this sort of searching can really be just a numbers game. Cyber space is your fastest and most efficient way of eliciting feedback on how you’re doing. Sure, it takes some time to do some searching and find the right people but you can lessen the amount of draining this does on you by either always being on the lookout for people—which you will probably do anyway if you’re new to teaching and have no idea what you’re supposed to be doing—or hiring a VA to do this for you. A very good VA can streamline the process considerably and direct you straight to the person that you really ought to be talking to about your challenges—be it a blogger, forum contributor, or a mixture of things. Podcasts can also be very valuable, although people tend to make themselves scarce if they are more in the public eye than usual. I wouldn’t really recommend reaching out to super duper popular podcasters because there’s a certain level of distance that a podcast-entertainer-reporter tends to keep in order to maintain their image and impression of themselves on others. Also, you don’t need that sort of added pressure. You just need help and getting it from someone that doesn’t have this sort of baggage is probably the easiest route to take.

Many countries have organizations that you can be a part of for a fee. I myself have never been apart of any of them nor can I endorse any. However, I can tell you for certain that if I was super desperate and didn’t know anyone, I would probably join one of these groups and make it a priority to go to at least one of their meetings or conferences. Not just for the networking opportunities but also for ideas. On this note, you should know that I do what James Altucher recommends in his *Choose Yourself* series: that is, to make a list of ten each day. A list of ten can be anything: ten drinks, ten fabulous vacation locales, ten foods to eat before you die, 10 ways to die well, etc. etc. It’s supposed to strengthen your mind and give you more ideas to work from so that you’re never in a jam. Having done this for almost a year now, I can say with certainty that there are definitely some undefinable benefits to doing this. For one thing, I am sharper and more aware of my surroundings. And whenever I have a class that I’m having trouble with, I break out a list and explore my options without panicking. I did this with one of the classes that I had in South Korea. The students were aggressive and arrogant and totally not committed to the class. They were not willing to respect my authority and take the class as they should. So what I did was develop a list of 20 ideas for fixing the class or fixing the situation and I handed it to my co-teacher/supervisor to let him know what my thoughts were. In doing this, we can to an agreement as to what could be done to fix this situation—teach other students—and that’s what we did. Sometimes you can’t switch the students you have, of course, but it’s always helpful to examine ALL of your options, even if they are terrible ideas at the outset, so you can begin to explore the options you have for yourself. You’ll never really know what is possible until you put everything on the table, so to speak, and bring them up with someone who is in a position to make changes. The more ideas you generate, the more options you will have. This works for the employed world as well as the unemployed world. Having ideas can help you reach a solution faster.

Finally, let’s say that you have a completely rebellious class and you know for sure that there is really nothing you can do to amend the situation. You’ve tried all of the options that I’ve stated above. You’re finding yourself completely drained and wasted from all of the work that you’re putting in to try and make the class work and you’re spinning your wheels for hours upon hours and trying to figure out what to do. One of the last options that you have is to kick your students out of the class. I’m not sure how many cultures prescribe to this sort of treatment of their student body, but as the guest English speaker, maintaining your authority is absolutely crucial and kicking a student out of the room is by far the least harmful of the array of punishments that you could possibly exact on your students. I usually don’t do it aggressively. When I tell a student that they have to leave the room, I do it calmly, almost conversationally, and with a straight face. I explain my reasoning if they don’t understand all of the words that are coming out of my mouth (usually I don’t need to say a lot of words—I’ll just point to the behavior that I am trying to retrench, like use of cell phones during the class or the constant head-down behavior that sometimes bothers me). I will explain my reasoning and then just point to the door so that the student knows what I am requesting. This style has worked for me in this given context, although it didn’t always work for me. When I first started out working in South Korea, I was brand new and had no idea about the customs and just how much responsibility I had over the students and just how much control I had. When I got into the classroom, I foolishly exerted my energy and reprimanded students if they were not paying attention to me or the lessons that I was trying to give. I would say things like “Can you please pay attention?” and “Can you please focus?” which made the students resent me, especially since I was a new teacher and hadn’t been fully sussed out yet by the faculty and students alike. This had an adverse impact on my ability to teach because many students were actually deliberately missing my class because they didn’t want to attend because they had been so deeply offended by my inconsiderateness and reckless disregard for their welfare and happiness. I wasn’t a normal teacher afterall, I was just a conversation teacher talking to students. This was my role, but I walked into the classroom—as many new English teachers will do—with an air of authority and a prima donna sense about me that I was going to change these students and make them the best darned English speakers in the world. Who was I kidding? Most of them already spoke English and of those that didn’t, they didn’t take the class seriously at all because they just had so many other commitments, not to mention a lack of interest. It turns out that my job was and always had been simple: Make the class light and fun and entertaining for the students. If I can be funny, even better. As long as the students loved my class, despite any disarray that occurs, then I would have been considered a success. Some teachers willingly or unwillingly accept this type of post. Sometimes they just resign themselves to a live that is not of consequence and just do what they came to do—be English-speaking entertaining specimens for the students to observe and practice passively understanding. I wasn’t going to tolerate such an irresponsible for position for very long because it leads to all sorts of career vulnerabilities down the road that I just couldn’t afford to have. But be that as it may, not being entertaining at times was exhausting in itself because the students grew weary and resentful whenever I tried to convert the class into a real one where we could learn something new together. It was clearly not the mission that the employers had for me while I was there and I had to learn to accept this. This is not to say that the staff weren’t friendly or that the kids were absolutely horrible to “work” with. On the contrary, they were very close allies of mine. We were all like a big family. A dysfunctional one, but a family nonetheless. And as you know, working with your family can be downright exhausting as there are all sorts of compromises and negotiations that need to take place when you’re working with them. A lot gets lost in the bargaining. For example, students had often wanted me to play games with them when I wanted to just give them a worksheet. I would remind them of all of the times that I had let them sleep in my class, all of the times that I had let them be passive and not speak at all, and all of the times that I had allowed them to do other work, to build up the sense of obligation they had to me. This didn’t really work too well and I ended up growing more resentful. You see, I would have these conversations with the students. It wasn’t exactly teaching, it was more like a conversation or discussion to assess what we were going to do together. I would start off by telling the students what my agenda was for the class and then they would introduce a topic that they were interested in. Because I had no curricular responsibilities other than to create my own, I willingly obliged these semi-requests because they were after all my first customers and I wanted to retain their interest in the English language for as long as I could (there’s nothing worse than teaching a group of students who have actually *lost* passion for learning English. This is an even more exhausting scenario, to be sure). This conversation would proceed for 10-15-sometimes even 30 minutes as we attempted to get our bearings, learn from casual conversation, and then proceed with the lesson that I wanted to teach them. In truth, thse casual conversations actually became the lesson. They were student-directed, but they were lessons nevertheless. This was tiring for me because I was a planner and I wanted to plan my lessons out accordingly. Working with the whims of my students interests made me feel vulnerable and anxious and didn’t allow me to grab the reins as it were and take charge of the direction that we were going in. Then again, since there was no accountability and since the impact that I could make on the students was at a minimum in the grand scheme of their lives within the school, it never was entirely clear where we were going except for the fact that I needed the students to feel entertained by my presence. In hindsight, perhaps this was the only place we were ever going. Just putting on a clown show for the students and hoping that it invigorated them to pursue English more.

I guess this wasn’t a bad thing because I had always been interested in comedy and had done some stand-up comedy back in the early 2000s, but working in Korea required me to change my entire thinking about what English teaching was. The definition of “teacher,” was just completely different from anything that I had ever anticipated. In essence, I had to give the illusion of teaching rather than do the real thing. I also had to babysit and keep the kids in the school as much as possible. I look back in retrospect and think of what the alternatives might have been for these students who had to sit in on my class week after week and absorb the nonsense that invariably followed from our whimsical conversations. I guess the students might have been able to spend more time in the study hall. Perhaps they could have taken up a woodworking course or perhaps take another course at another high school nearby. When I was in high school, I took a college-level course at the local community college. Maybe the students could have done this with their time (although community colleges don’t really exist in Korea). Perhaps the students could have played more soccer. Hell, maybe they could have enjoyed their childhood a little more by doing what mother respectable teens would do in America and just going to the arcades for some mindless fun. I’d like to think that I had some impact on the students despite the structural challenges that were in my way. It’s really hard to gauge whether this was the case, but the point that I am trying to make in all of this is that I had to learn to adjust my thinking to the school environment, to the community, and to the definition that this particular culture had given to foreign English teachers. I had to change and adjust or else I was going to be living in a world that was no one else’s and would only alienate myself further. This goes back to punishment as well. In most scenarios, you’ll want to avoid any sort of punishment. Even if the teachers walk up to you and condone corporal punishment, you have to resist the urge and not punish any of your students until you can get a good footholding in the community and establish a reputation amongst everyone that you are an okay person with good morals and values and that you genuinely want to help the people around you to succeed. Once you establish this amongst your new friends and your peers, then you can begin to court people’s feedback about gaining more control over your class. Yes, even if this class is just a clown show and your prime responsibility is to entertain them. Take a stance of learning about your environment and always asking questions about what’s going on, and you will go far.

A good way of asking about punishment is to phrase it in the following way: “What happens if X happens?” and “What should I do if I see this particular circumstance happening?” Very often, your colleagues will tell you to report it. Or if there is CCTV in the room, then there’s really no need to tell anyone because you’ll most likely be monitored. Another good way for inquiring about punishment is to ask about the forums or visit the website Discipline Help to learn about all of the ways to handle students that are of different types: the class-clown, the tired student, and the overly disruptive student. Honestly, there is SO MUCH literature on bad students that it can get overwhelming at times just sifting through all of the literature and learning about the different methods of punishing the shit out of your students. Take it slowly. Consume only a little discipline literature at a time, and eventually you’ll find the shoe that fits right.

Some teachers force students to leave the class, which can actually work quite well if you’re teaching in a place like South Korea where shame is sort of a big deal. If you ask that one student who doesn’t do any of the work to leave the class because you’re just not pleased with their performance, and then you do it in front of the other students, then it’s likely to send a strong message that you will not tolerate misbehavior and will likely publicly humiliate students if they try to be defiant with you. It’s kind of like what a good stand-up comedian will do if there are hecklers. A good stand-up comedian to watch for her masterful ability to manage hecklers and disruptive people is Laurie Kilmartin, whose videos you can watch on YouTube. There is one particular video on YouTube that features Ms. Kilmartin managing a 70 year old heckler, and the barbs that go back and forth between the two are absolutely priceless and totally worth taking notes on. Ms. Kilmartin doesn’t miss a beat while also maintaining overall levity in the environment. I’m not saying that you should do exactly what Ms. Kilmartin does and throw barbs at another student, but keeping your composure the way she does is great for your class. In the video, she even asks the hecklers to leave, while also managing to recruit the entire audience on her side to go against the hecklers in the audience. It takes nerves of steel, but sometimes this is what you need to manage your class and bring it back to a state of equilibrium where you can just chill out, and to do so in a way that you won’t damage your overall relations with all of the students that you teach. There’s nothing worse than an entire class that has conspired to make your life a living hell. I would recommend building your alliances with some of the more obedient students so that you aren’t alone in the battle against the more disruptive kids.

When it comes to cell phones, teachers also have different styles of handling this. I knew one teacher who said at the beginning of class “If I see your phone, I take your phone,” and she never missed a beat in retrieving phones from kids who would use them to search the internet and play games while she was teaching. I have to admit that I think cell phones are incredibly disruptive and when you don’t do something about them, it sends the message that you’re a light and easygoing teacher who overlooks a lot of terrible behaviors that the students would never be able to get away with in their own classes. Controlling cell phones, for me at least, is the ultimate test of a teacher’s ability to maintain control over her class and if you can get a handle on the cell phone issue, other issues will prove easier to take care of.

Of course, some classes will be more mature than others. I have been known to allow students to use their cell phones as dictionaries to look up words. If I ever suspected that the students were using their phones for reasons other than to look up words, I would automatically ban cell phone use for the class and have them use physical brick-and-mortar books instead. I guess in terms of getting the students off your back, you would think that allowing them to use their cell phones would be a great way of doing it. However, allowing them these liberties will come back to haunt you and bite you on the ass, particularly when you want to maintain control over your class and have them actually do some quiet work while you just lazily sit by and look at the clouds. You in all likelihood will not be able to do this if your students think they have full control over what they get to do in the class, and believe me when I say that they will absolutely believe this if you give them the liberty to use their phones for non-academic purposes.

I did say that you should create allies with the students but I want to clarify this point further because it’s definitely important to qualify what I said. You should make allies with the people that you think are going to be mature and good students. I suppose in some circumstances it is okay to make allies with the super-bad student who happens to be the gang leader of the entire school, but generally speaking, I have found that many students will feel betrayed if you have formed a relationship with them and then you force them to do work in your class. It’s almost as if they expect there to be strings attached to your teaching. The only thing missing is payola! There will definitely be times when you have to enforce work on students that are good kids, at least outside of the class. This will probably create a difficult conversation for you to have with your students about your expectations for the class. This has been difficult for me in the past because I tended to be such a pushover and I wanted everyone to be my friend. But eventually, as I grew into the position, I became better at managing my difficult relationships with the students. Whenever I spoke to the students, I would often clarify that I didn’t like being “bad teacher,” and “mean teacher,” to them, and that I really did like them and that what I was about to say was nothing personal. And then I would launch into my tirade. The students would understood and then we would be back on good terms despite my displeasure with them. Sometimes I would even blame the administration for the reason why I was such a bad guy.

In the very famous book *Influence*, by Robert Cialdini, the author recommends that one of the ways to positively influence people to get them on your side so that they will actually *buy* what it is that you’re saying is to pretend that you’re on the side of the buyer. The author brings up the example of a car dealership and speaks of a salesman who tries to get the client the best deal on a new car. Little do the clients know that the dealer has absolutely no intention of getting them the best deal, only faking the best deal so that the clients will buy a car at the original sale price (perhaps even higher). All along the salesman was in cahoots with the owner of the car company and did nothing, all the while telling the clients that “I did the best that I could.” You could use this strategy easily with your students who in all likelihood won’t know what hit them. You can say “Look, the administration wants me to use this textbook, so that’s what we have to do. I didn’t want it to be this way, but this is what we have to work with.” You can then follow this up with a life lesson of one sort or another: “Sometimes there are some things in life that we just don’t want to do but we have to do anyway.” The students will surely understand this because they are in school and presumably don’t want to be there. For the majority of the time, using this strategy worked just fine for me.

Other teachers will ignore some students who chronically don’t’ do any of the work. I have to admit that in many contexts, I will do the same and ignore the non-performing students. I know that in the “no child left behind,” era, you are supposed to be taking care of everyone. You are supposed to coddle and just assume that everyone is a good kid and that they all deep down inside want to learn and to be given a chance to succeed. I am in total agreement that you should work to help children who are trying to learn and to succeed and grow and encountering obstacles along the way. But I think it’s also important to keep in mind that there are also some students who just don’t want to be in your class, they just don’t’ want to learn, and they have some serious behavior problems. You’re going to have students like this, it’s a given. And in fact, sometimes it’s rare if you have students that actually want to be in the room.

I was speaking to one of my friends who used to teach in a juvenile correctional facility (the topic came up because I was a criminology major who studied the penal system… ironically). And what struck me about what my friend was saying was just how obedient many of the inmates were. Like seriously obedient. They had been in the big house for murder and drug abuse and some of the most heinous crimes you can think of, and even exhibited some of those bad behaviors while in the prison, but when it came to my friend’s class, she said that they really wanted to be there. That even though they probably didn’t have much of a future, that the class represented lala-land for the students and allowed them to grow as much as they could within such rigid and unforgiving circumstances. This impressed me because it seemed like the prisoners were giving my own kids a run for their money, in terms of obedience. Many people have this preconceived notion that students in Asia are some of the best in the world. It’s true that there are many great students where I have taught in Asia, but it is wrong to stereotype all students and I will say with confidence that for as many brilliant students that I encountered, there were also an equal proportion of duds and haters who just made my life a living hell. Almost to the point where I had wanted to quit a number of times because I couldn’t imagine having to go back to the school to try and fight and overcome their resistance to learning everything.

I think it’s also interesting that the military also happens to be a place where the most obedient students can be found. The prison system and the military are both places where you’re going to find the most obedient students on the face of the Earth. Perhaps third place are the private students who have mommy and daddy to pay for boarding school. And then maybe comes the foreign students in private school. Followed by students from the United States, generally speaking (public or private). The point is that you’re going to unpleasantly surprised by just how combative you have to be. I cannot drive home this fact enough and when that time comes, you may not be able to do anything about it (either because it’s a private institution that only cares about the money or because attendance for your class needs to be populated, irrespective of the type of caliber of student that you get, and so forth). When that judgment moment comes, you’re going to have to decide if it’s worth having the problem student in the class at all, and sacrifice the maximum amount of learning that can be done. I have had many disruptive students play on their phone and absorb the attention of the other students in the class. I have made a public announcement usually when this happens to “Please put the phones away.” I give three warnings and then after the third warning, if the behavior does not cease to stop, I kick the student out of the class. I target them by name and I tell them that this behavior won’t do, and I tell them to leave the class. In Asia, this is public shaming and is one of the worst things you could do to a child. To be honest, it’s actually one of the worst things you can do to any child so you really want to use this tool in your arsenal sparingly. I know this because I can still remember the days when I was unfairly squared away by my own teachers and it took me years to recover from it. If you emphasize the behavior that you want stopped, rather than targeting the student and attacking who they are, then you can probably get away with kicking the student out for their behavior. And I strongly advocate doing this. As I said, some of the best stand-up comedians have done this and you can learn a lot from them. Just look up “stand up comedians and hecklers,” on YouTube and just get wowed by the results that appear. You will be absolutely shocked by how graceful that stand up comedians are at rolling with the punches so to speak and dishing out a good helping of verbal ass-whoopin’. What is striking is that most stand-up comedians actually do end up kicking the hecklers out of their show. So do the same. Kick your students out of the show and then proceed with the rest of your class, even if it means that the rest of your students live in fear for that moment that they too will get kicked out. It’s important for you to rest control of your own affairs with the students, for your own sanity and peace of mind. This is what getting the tykes off your back is all about. It’s enduring those uncomfortable first few moments so that you can live in peace for the rest of your tenure as a teacher.

If you’re still on the fence with how best to punish students in your own way—and you strongly suspect that maybe the style that I am advocating is not really for you—then I suggest a really helpful website called DisciplineHelp.com which outlines all of the different ways to address a variety of problem students. The site has typed the students into different categories and then includes a list of strategies for how to deal with each one. When you’re finding resistance in your class from certain students, you can refer to this site and figure out if punishment is even warranted in a situation like this. Sometimes if you just take a learning stance and try to figure out why the student is behaving the way he is, you can bypass punishment completely. However, many times you have to take direct action where other people won’t take any action for you on your behalf, either because they don’t have time or because they just aren’t willing to have that type of difficult conversation.

Of course, another option is to go to the British Council’s website or Waygook to ask other teachers what they have done in the past. You’re going to find a number of different helpful responses. Now, I understand that sometimes wading through the materials in the forums can be a daunting task. Sometimes you feel like you are wasting time or that your life is passing you by or that the English of some of the teachers is just so impenetrable that you cannot bear to read another single word more. When this happens, you have a number of options: You can either decide to commit to reading just a little bit each day, making it a habit akin to working out and dealing with your issues with why you don’t want to read about other teacher’s experiences. Or you can bypass this process altogether and hire a VA on fiverr to find answers to the question of discipline in your host country. Or you can just directly message teachers again and ask them what they have done in the past (much like the other strategies I have already advocated). Whatever option you decide, do it. And do it fast before you start your classes so you don’t violate any cultural norms. Ask everyone you know and be a sponge. And whatever you do, don’t hit the students. At all. Never do it. Maybe this goes without saying. Don’t hit the little tykes. This is one form of punishment that doesn’t help at all. And at worst, is a gross violation of nearly every norm on the face of this Earth, including the norm of being human. Never ever resort to corporal punishment. Let the other teachers do it, but not you. You have other things to worry about, like inspiring and making the students laugh.

Don’t tell others not to hit if it’s in your own culture

**Who to speak to when the classes collapse**

**More self-motivating strategies (have the students observe you read, be a model for them, share social media, be cool)**

**Ideas for winter camps/summer camps/ workshops**

**Ideas for getting the adults off your back**

**\*business English \*fellow teacher English \*adult English**

**Ideas for your free time when you do have the tykes off your back**

* **learn about the EFL industry**
  + **\* learn about travel requirements (visa changes, passports)**
  + **Learn a new skill-set that will make you even more valuable**
  + **Start a new project that will make you more money (fiverr, upwork, freelancer)**
  + **Network with people at meetup groups**
  + **Surrounding yourself with people that you like**
  + **Traveling to other cities and other countries to attend conferences**
  + **Searching for more jobs**
  + **Learn a new language**
  + **Learn the local dialect**

**Next chapter: Strategies to get your students self-motivated so that you don’t have to do any work**

**Review what you wrote**

**Provide bullet points at the end**

**SIGNS THAT YOU NEED TO GO**