

# Challenges and solutions: Effective communication in the classroom

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*Making  
language  
matter.*

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# Thanks for coming... who are you?

1. Do you teach primary (P), secondary (S), tertiary (T) or adults (A)?
2. How many learners do you have in your classes? (type approx. number: e.g., 30)
3. What's their level of English? Beginner (A0), elementary (A1), low intermediate (A2), intermediate (B1), high intermediate (B2), advanced (C1)?
4. Are you currently teaching online? (Y/N)
5. When do you hope to get back in the classroom?

# Aims

- To explore some of the challenges that Russian teachers face when trying to get learners to speak English in the classroom.
- To discuss possible solutions to these challenges (mainly face-to-face, but also online).
- To share resources for simple classroom research to help us to understand more about our challenges and the efficacy of certain solutions.

# Challenges – face-to-face teaching

What challenges do you experience when you try to get your students to speak English in the classroom?

1. they lack confidence
2. they find it too difficult
3. they don't like pair or groupwork
4. they do it wrongly
5. too many use Russian
6. there's too much noise
7. they begin to misbehave
8. I lose control of the class during pair or groupwork

Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and use the code 85 43 28 6

# 1. Students lack confidence 2. find it too difficult

Take baby steps:

- a) reading out a dialogue (then memory games)
- b) reading out a dialogue with gaps for their name and details
- c) reading out and completing an open-ended dialogue
- d) writing a dialogue in pairs, then performing for the class

# Example scaffolded dialogue

A: Good morning! Can I help you?

B: Yes, I'd like to buy some \_\_\_\_\_.  
How much are they?

A: They cost \$\_\_\_\_\_ each.

B: That's very expensive!

A: OK. How about \$\_\_\_\_\_ each?

B: That's a better price. Thank you!

A: How many would you like?

B: I would like \_\_\_\_\_ please.

A: Here you are. Anything else?

B: Yes, I'd like...





# Example scaffolded dialogue

## Checking into a hotel

Role Plays for Today

Read the dialogue and complete the questions with *do*, *does*, *is* or *are*.

### Guest

Hello. 1 \_\_\_\_\_ you speak English? →  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ you have a double room for tonight?  
Good. How much 3 \_\_\_\_\_ it?  
€40 per person or per room?  
4 \_\_\_\_\_ that include breakfast?  
OK. 5 \_\_\_\_\_ the bathroom en suite?  
It means that it has a private bathroom.  
Right. 7 \_\_\_\_\_ it possible to see the room?  
From England.  
Yes. With my husband. He's in the car.  
OK. This is fine. Shall I pay now?  
Er... Isn't it €120?  
Right. 10 \_\_\_\_\_ you accept credit cards?  
OK. Here you are. What time's breakfast?  
Oh! 11 \_\_\_\_\_ it possible to have it at 10?  
Another €5! Per person?  
Oh, all right! Here you are.

### Hotel owner

A little, yes.  
Let me see... Yes, we do.  
€40.  
Per person.  
No. Breakfast is €10 extra, per person.  
Sorry. What 6 \_\_\_\_\_ 'en suite' mean?  
Ah, yes! That's another €10, per person.  
Yes. Come with me. Where 8 \_\_\_\_\_ you from?  
Really? 9 \_\_\_\_\_ you on holiday?  
Ah, I see. Here is the room.  
Yes, please. That's €130, please.  
Yes, and €10 for the car park.  
No. Only cash.  
From 8 to 9. My wife gets up early!  
Yes. For an extra €5.  
Per person.  
And here is your key. Goodnight.



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### 3. Students don't like to work in pairs or groups

What about outside the classroom? What difference does it make?

- Put learners into 'friendship groups' (on agreement that they do it seriously). Revise this regularly.
- Give them the choice – the alternative is to 'write a conversation' alone (some SLDs may prefer this).
- Explain in L1 the importance of speaking practice for language development to increase understanding.
- Make it more project-based, or encourage inter-team competition – increases intrinsic motivation.



## 4. Students do it wrongly

### Possible causes:

#### **Behaviour management**

- Students having fun / being 'naughty'.
- Difference in perception – what is 'right'?

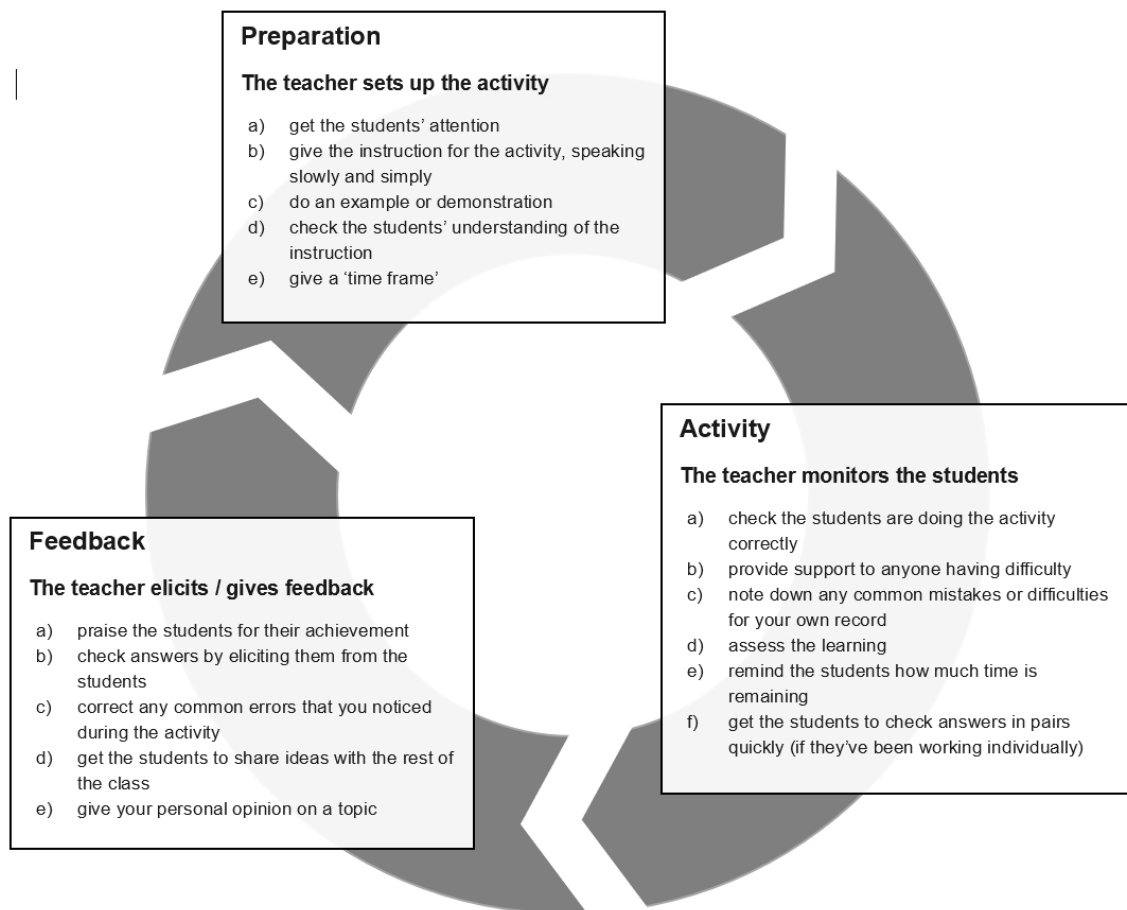
#### **Classroom management**

- Students don't understand the activity – setting it up wrongly.

#### **Curricular choice**

- Activity is too challenging (see earlier slide).

# Setting up an activity – The activity cycle



<https://speakinggames.wordpress.com/2017/07/29/the-activity-cycle/>

[http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/activity\\_cycle\\_by\\_jason\\_anderson.pdf](http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/activity_cycle_by_jason_anderson.pdf)

# Setting up an activity – The activity cycle

## Preparation

### The teacher sets up the activity

- a) get the students' attention
- b) give the instruction for the activity, speaking slowly and simply
- c) do an example or demonstration
- d) check the students' understanding of the instruction
- e) give a 'time frame'

## Activity

The teacher n

## 5. Use of L1.

### Causes:

English is too difficult / lack of confidence / identity issues

### Solutions:

#### English only approach:

- e.g., Yellow card -> Red card / 'English police'

#### Softly, softly approach:

- Allow L1 first -> Then try (writing) it in English.
- Encourage 'translanguaging' -> Try to use mainly English, but L1 is OK when you don't know. It's OK to blend!
- Praising pairs / groups who use more English.



## 6. Too much noise.

### Solutions:

- Pairwork is quieter than groupwork (sitting closer together, less 'group excitement').
- Practise speaking in hushed voices (e.g., with reading aloud activities).
- Notice who speaks loudest first. Provide that individual with feedback quickly, and if necessary after class.
- Noisy column on board: Any students who raise their voices are added. They have to sing together at the end of class (e.g., a nursery rhyme).

# 7. Students begin to misbehave.

## Solutions:

- Notice who does this first. Provide that individual with feedback quickly, and if necessary after class.
- Use cooperative learning strategies: Groups score points for doing activities correctly. Prize at end of the week / term for improvement (not for best).

### 4b Student teams achievement divisions (STAD)

Main skills	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading
Functions	agreeing and disagreeing; explaining ideas and concepts; peer teaching			

#### Summary of the activity

Developed by Robert Slavin (1995), student teams achievement divisions (STAD) is a versatile, cooperative learning procedure. It provides a complete lesson structure and can be used to teach grammar, vocabulary and reading skills. There are four or five stages depending on the version. Here is the four-stage version:

1. Working as a whole class, the students learn something new (e.g., through a teacher grammar presentation or an activity in which the whole class match pictures to words together, etc.).
2. Students then sit in **home group** 🧠 teams and have time to revise what they've learnt, check each team member can remember it and provide peer tuition to each other if necessary. This could involve

STAD, from Anderson (2009) 'Activities for Cooperative Learning', Delta Publishing.

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## 8. I lose control of the class during pair/groupwork

### Solutions:

- Have a clear signal. E.g., use of bell, horn,
- ‘Hands up’ approach. When I raise mine, stop talking and do likewise.
- Game: ‘5, 4, 3, 2, 1...’ Any team still speaking lose points.



# Challenges online

- Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and use the code 85 43 28 6

# Teaching online – 3 possible ideas

- What's App can sometimes be used (if allowed) – students can record voices, giving answers to questions (e.g., for homework task).
- Breakout rooms (in Zoom): Create and agree rules in advance (esp. regarding interaction). Don't expect much English, but give them a task that requires them to prepare smth in English (e.g., a dialogue or role play to perform for classmates, or 1 minute stories).
- Substitute 'speaking' for 'fast writing' using the chat function in Zoom or similar.

# Two tools for informal classroom research

Before you try to implement solutions, try to understand the challenge more. Go to [jasonanderson.org.uk](http://jasonanderson.org.uk) and visit the Resources page:

1. For understanding your students:

[http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/Focus\\_group\\_interviews\\_with\\_students.docx](http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/Focus_group_interviews_with_students.docx)

2. For getting support from a 'buddy':

[http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/Buddy\\_observation\\_form.docx](http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/Buddy_observation_form.docx)

Further ideas: See Smith & Rebolledo , A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research. British Council.

[https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/30510\\_bc\\_explore\\_actions\\_handbook\\_online\\_aw.pdf](https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/30510_bc_explore_actions_handbook_online_aw.pdf)

# Teaching online

Recent report:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-publishes-new-review-of-evidence-on-remote-learning/>

Creative ideas:

<https://escaperoomelt.wordpress.com/author/grahamstanley/>

# Delta Publishing – Ideas in Action

Titles in the series aim to bring together the theory and the practice of specific approaches, methods or principles:

- Activities for cooperative learning
- Activities for task-based learning
- Activities for inclusive language teaching
- Activities for alternative assessment (coming soon!)



<https://www.deltapublishing.co.uk/series/ideas-in-action-676>

# References and further reading

- Anderson, J. (2006). Role Plays for Today. Delta / Klett.
- Anderson, J. (2019). Activities for Cooperative Learning. Delta / Klett.
- Smith, R. & Rebolledo, P. (2018). A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research. British Council.
- [https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/30510\\_bc\\_explore\\_actions\\_handbook\\_online\\_aw.pdf](https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/30510_bc_explore_actions_handbook_online_aw.pdf)