

7 Fun Information Gap Activities for the ESL Classroom

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February 27, 2018



Speaking is a lot like **investigating**, isn't it?

We use language to convey ideas and information. We also use it to **ask questions, gather details and solve problems**. Every time we speak we are acting as amateur detectives, striving to find out what we need to know about different situations on a daily basis.

Teach your ESL students to be expert detectives, and they'll also become expert English speakers!

ESL students need to be comfortable obtaining and giving information in a variety of contexts. **Information gap activities** give them the chance to hone their real-world speaking skills and set them up to be expert investigators—I mean, speakers!

What Is an Information Gap Activity?

An **information gap** refers to when students don't have all the information they need to complete a task or activity.

Information gap activities require students to speak and to practice teamwork, working with their classmates to acquire the missing information. Once they've learned the information from their classmates, they can fill the "gap" and complete the task or activity.

For this type of activity, as with most speaking activities, it's usually best to divide the class into pairs.

Why Are Information Gap Activities Useful?

This clever activity approach is a great way to get your students speaking. Students must work together and communicate clearly in order to successfully complete the given task.

The best part is that they're very flexible and can be adapted for virtually any topic or lesson, just like the majority of ESL activities. For example, you can easily use an information gap activity as a way to review and practice new vocabulary, parts of speech and topic-based dialogues.

1. Complete the Text

Practice: Parts of speech.

Procedure: Create two versions of a story. Remove different information from each story.

For example, one version of the story might be missing character names and locations (proper nouns) while the other version omits adjectives and adverbs.

Divide the students into pairs and distribute a different version to each student.

Students must work together to complete the story they've been given based on the different information each student provides. To do this, students must ask questions to discover the missing information that their teammate has. Ask the students to write in the missing information.

This activity can be adapted for different levels and ages, depending on the story you use and what missing information you choose to focus on.

Example:

Student A: What is the name of the first character?

Student B: Her name is Lisa. What adjective is used to describe the "tree" in the second sentence?

Tip: You can either write your own stories or use some ready-made stories from the internet.

2. Draw This

Practice: Adjectives and descriptions.

Procedure: Divide students into pairs. Give an image or picture to the first student in each pair without showing it to the second student.

The first student describes the picture to the second student. The second student then draws the image based on this description. The second student is allowed to ask questions to help them understand what the picture or image is.

This activity can be adapted for any level. Select pictures that will incorporate language the students have been studying and are familiar with. For instance, in the following example there's a focus on colors.

Example:

Student A: The background is light blue.

Student B: Okay.

Student A: There is a woman in the middle of the picture.

Student B: What color is her hair?

Student A: Her hair is brown.

Tip: You can turn this activity into a “competition” with the winner being the pair that best replicates the image. If you want to expand the activity, have the students switch roles and provide a second image.

3. Let's Use the Map

Practice: Location names and directional words.

Procedure: This is a fun and relevant activity. Anyone who plans to travel or visit someplace new will need to know how to ask for directions. It's also useful to know how to give directions in English. You'll need to pre-teach some key vocabulary terms, such as “turn right” and “turn left.”

Assign students into groups of two. Provide one student with a map of a city or town, either from a real location or one of your own design. Make sure the map is clearly labeled with some of the more common locations.

One student asks for directions to a location: library, theater, hospital, police station, grocery store, etc. Using the map, the other student gives explicit directions. Students should ask clarifying questions and either write down or outline the directions they hear.

Students should take turns in this activity.

Example:

Student A: Can I help you?

Student B: Yes. Where is the library?

Student A: It's on 5th Street.

Student B: What's the best way to get there?

Student A: Take Apple Avenue and turn right.

Student B: Apple Avenue and turn right?

Student A: Yes. Then walk two blocks and turn left at the hospital.

Tip: If you're really ambitious and have the time, ask each student to create their own map to be used in this activity.

4. Job Interview

Practice: Talking about experiences, professions and characteristics.

Procedure: Divide students into groups of two. One student is the interviewer, the other is the interviewee.

The interviewer asks typical interview questions. You can either pre-teach these types of questions to the whole class or provide a list of sample questions to each pair.

Provide the interviewee with a profession and short backstory. The information you provide the interviewee can be as detailed or as minimal as you choose and should correlate with the students' English level.

Example:

Student A: Where did you study?

Student B: I studied at ABC University.

Student A: What did you study?

Student B: I studied medicine.

Student A: What are your strengths?

Student B: I'm hardworking and passionate.

5. Making a Grocery List

Practice: Food vocabulary and amounts.

Procedure: Ask your students to find a partner. One student is the Chef, the other is the Shopper.

For a beginning ESL class, provide the Chef with a recipe using simple food words and measurements. For more advanced students, ask them to think of their favorite recipe.

The Shopper must create a shopping list based on the Chef's dish. The Shopper asks questions about the Chef's recipe to determine what and how much of everything they need to buy. Give students time to reverse roles.

Example:

Shopper: What are you making?

Chef: Caesar Salad.

Shopper: What do I need to buy?

Chef: Lettuce, cucumbers, chicken, and cheese.

Shopper: What kind of cheese?

Chef: Parmesan.

Shopper: How much chicken?

Chef: 1 pound.

Tip: Have some fun with this one! This activity can be adapted for different role play scenarios. Instead of a chef, perhaps the first student is a mother or father who's asked the second student to do the week's shopping. The second student needs to write down the list.

6. Charts

Practice: General speaking.

Procedure: This is a pretty common information gap activity. It can be effective in encouraging students to analyze and clearly present information, and these charts can be based on just about anything.

For example, a nice way to practice family relationships is the family tree chart.

Divide students into groups of two. Provide each student with a family tree. Student A's chart has part of the information and Student B's chart has the rest.

Then the students must work together to make one, complete family tree.

Example:

Student A: Who is married to Grandpa John?

Student B: Grandma Elizabeth.

Student A: How do I spell “Elizabeth?”

Student B: E-L-I-Z-A-B-E-T-H. What year was their first child born?

Student A: Rebecca was born in 1940.

Tip: If your students are professionals working in the business sector, you might use business-related charts, like graphs with missing information or spreadsheets with missing numbers.

7. 20 Questions

Practice: General speaking.

Procedure: This is more of a fun English game, but students love it and it’s a great way to practice asking questions and learning new information.

You can do this activity as a whole class, in small groups, or in groups of two.

One student thinks of an item or object. The other students must ask questions in order to figure out what item the student is thinking of. The questions should be “yes” or “no” questions. If the students can’t guess the item within 20 questions, the student who’s thinking of the item wins the game.

If you do this as a whole class, make sure you keep track of how many questions have been asked. In small groups or pairs, the student thinking of the item should keep a tally of how many questions are asked.

Example:

Student A: Okay. Go!

Student B: Is it alive?

Student A: No.

Student C: Is it bigger than my desk?

Student A: Yes.

Student D: Is it...?

Tip: As the teacher, you may want to make some stipulations or even assign a category. This way the realm of possible answers is smaller and you have more control over the content.

Remember, these are just a few examples of how you can utilize information gap activities. Get creative and feel free to adapt these ideas to suit your own classrooms, cultures and students.

Happy speaking!

