

Pre-teaching essential vocabulary

We sometimes need to make sure that our learners understand key vocabulary before they do reading or listening tasks in the coursebook. This is known as **pre-teaching**. In this teaching tip, we consider the following questions: When is it a good idea to pre-teach? Which vocabulary items should we pre-teach, and how many? How can we pre-teach vocabulary in a way which engages our learners?

When to pre-teach and how many items to cover.

In order to decide whether to include pre-teaching, you need to 'plan backwards' and look at the tasks which learners will have to do while reading or listening. There may well be vocabulary in the text which is unfamiliar to your learners, but you need to decide whether they need to know this vocabulary in order to do the tasks. In other words, is it **essential vocabulary**? If not, you may be able to simply let your learners do the tasks without pre-teaching. This will help build their confidence and foster the idea that they can get information from a text without understanding every word. However, you may feel that your learners don't know key vocabulary items to do the tasks. In this case, a brief pre-teaching stage is a good idea. This will prevent your learners from getting 'blocked' during reading or listening.

Keep focused on the question: Which items will my learners need to know in order to do the tasks? Remember that by doing reading or listening tasks successfully without understanding every word, learners are trained to cope better with texts in the real world. One or two items will often be enough. If the text and tasks are appropriate to your learners' level, it shouldn't be necessary to teach more than six or seven words or expressions at the most. For example, in order prepare a pre-intermediate group to do task 2 below, you might want to pre-teach the circled words:

7.2

7.2 goals

- make recommendations
- give directions

If you're interested in art ...

READING

1 Look at the photos in the website for tourists. What do you know about Amsterdam?

2 Now read the entries. Which place would you most like to visit? Why?

English Unlimited Pre-intermediate,
Unit 7

English Unlimited Teaching Tips

How can I pre-teach?

1 Convey meaning.

For the first word, give a simple definition or example but without the word itself. For some words, showing a picture might be the best way of conveying the meaning.

'Last weekend I went to the train station. I wanted to buy a train ticket. I had to wait a long time because there was a long line of people ...'

2 Elicit.

See if your learners can give you the word. If they can't, simply tell them.

'What do we call a long line of people? There was a ... ? There was a queue.'

3 Check understanding.

Ask one or two questions to check that learners understand the word and reinforce the meaning.

'Sometimes you see a queue in the train station. Where else can you see a queue?'

4 If you're pre-teaching before a reading, learners need to know the *written form* of the word, so write it on the board.

If you're pre-teaching before a listening, learners need to know *what the word sounds like*, so have them repeat it several times (and then write it on the board).

5 Repeat these steps with the remaining words.

Variation

If you want to pre-teach more than one or two items, prepare a worksheet with definitions of the words you want to pre-teach in one column and in another column some example sentences with the words underlined. Make sure that the definitions and sentences are in a different order. The learners' task is to match the sentences / words with the definitions. You can save a lot of time by simply taking or adapting the sentences and definitions from a good learner dictionary.

Match the definitions 1-5 with the underlined words a-e.

1. to arrange to use or do something at a time in the future

a. Excuse me, are you in the queue?

2. a book in which you write about what you have done and your thoughts and feelings

b. The train was very crowded.

3. to go to a place where no one can see you

c. I've booked a hotel room.

4. a line of people waiting for something, one behind the other

d. The girl hid behind a tree.

5. full of people

e. I kept a diary of my trip to Egypt.

Adapted from the Cambridge Essential Dictionary, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/essential-british-english/>