

Disappearing drill

Drilling is a useful way of helping learners memorise new language and improve their pronunciation. But the traditional choral drill – simply getting learners to repeat words or expressions as a class – can quickly become boring and is difficult to keep going for more than a minute or so. A disappearing drill is an alternative drilling technique which is fun, challenging and easy to use. It can be especially useful after a focus on stress – see the Teaching Tips on **Word stress** and **Sentence stress**.

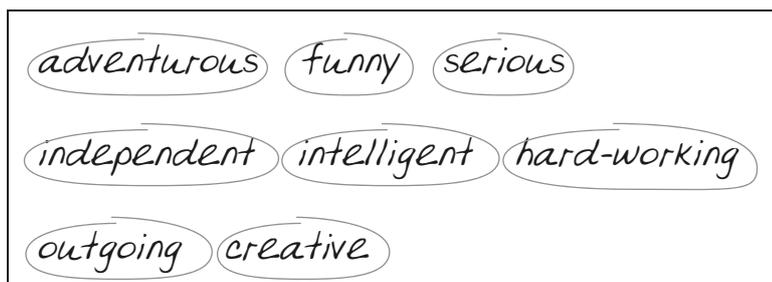
With individual words

- 1 Learners have just learnt the meaning of a new group of words, for example:

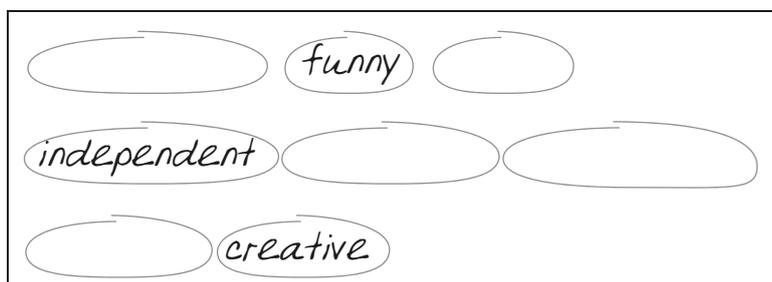
adventurous creative funny hard-working
independent intelligent outgoing serious

English Unlimited Elementary, Unit 8

Write the words on the board, scattered about, and draw a rough circle round each word:



- 2 Start drilling in the normal way, pointing to words at random, asking learners to say the words together, listening carefully to what they say and correcting their pronunciation as necessary.
- 3 After a while, rub out one of the words so that just the empty circle is left. Now, whenever you point to the circle as part of your drill, learners have to remember which word was there.
- 4 As the drill continues, rub out more and more of the words, one by one:



- 5 Challenge your learners to keep going until you've rubbed out all the words. If they can manage it, you'll find yourself leading the drill by pointing at nothing but empty circles on the board!

English Unlimited Teaching Tips

With dialogues

- 1 Learners have just been introduced to a short dialogue which you'd like them to practise. For example, here's a dialogue for practising the language of introductions:

JAMES Hello, I'm James.
MAITE Hi, I'm Maria Teresa.
JAMES ¹*Nice to meet you* . And ²*this is* Isobel, my wife.
ISOBEL Sorry, ³*what's your name again* ?
MAITE It's Maria Teresa. But ⁴*please call me* Maite.
ISOBEL Hello, Maite. ⁵*Are you* one of Rob's colleagues?
MAITE No, I'm not. ⁶*I'm* his Spanish teacher. And you?
JAMES Oh, we're Rob's parents.

English Unlimited Elementary, Unit 1

Write the dialogue on the board.

- 2 Start drilling in the normal way, asking learners to repeat after you as you go through the dialogue and then continue by pointing at the lines on the board. Go through the whole dialogue once or twice.
- 3 Rub out the first line of the dialogue so that an empty space is left after the name of the speaker. Drill the dialogue again. Now learners have to say the first line from memory.
- 4 Continue drilling the dialogue, each time rubbing out one more line:

James
Maite
James
Isobel
Maite It's Maria Theresa. But please call me Maite.
Isobel Hello, Maite. Are you one of Rob's colleagues?
Maite No, I'm not. I'm his Spanish teacher. And you?
James Oh, we're Rob's parents.

- 5 Challenge the learners to keep going until there are no lines and they can say the entire dialogue from memory.

Variations

- You can make disappearing drills easier by only partially deleting words or sentences. With words, you can leave in place first letters, prefixes or suffixes. With sentences, you can leave in place first words, people's names, key words, question marks and so on. With dialogues, you can delete only alternate lines.
- A disappearing drill can be done with by sticking pictures on the board instead of writing words, e.g. when teaching words for food and drink or items of furniture.
- As a follow-up to a disappearing drill with a dialogue, give pens to one or two learners and have them come up to the board and reconstruct the dialogue with the help of their classmates.