

Giving language feedback

In a communicative language lesson, there will be many opportunities for learners to talk in pairs or groups. Whenever learners are talking, it's a good idea to monitor discreetly and make notes of good language, language which could be improved, and language errors. You can then use these notes at the end of the lesson to provide learners with feedback.

How can I use my notes of learners' language?

1 Copy the notes you've made onto the board. Try to include a mix of:

- good language which you'd like to highlight:

We set out at nine o'clock.

- language which is OK but could be made more precise or natural-sounding:

I really don't like buses when they have a lot of people.

- errors:

I am agree with you.

Don't be afraid to edit your notes to make it clear what the learner was trying to say in each case, and to remove small errors which you don't want to focus on.

- 2 In pairs or small groups, learners look at the expressions on the board. Ask them to consider: Which are all right? Which could we make better? How?
- 3 Then elicit and discuss the learners' ideas. Using a different coloured marker if possible, make it clear which sentences are correct and which could be improved or corrected and how.

We set out at nine o'clock. ✓
I really don't like buses when | *(they have a lot of people.)*
| *they're full of people.*
| *they're crowded / overcrowded.*
I am agree with you.

- 4 Give learners a few minutes to copy the notes on the board, so they have a record which they can refer to later on.
- 5 A fun way to round off this language feedback stage and the lesson is to ask learners to hide their notes. Quickly rub out the improvements and corrections you've written on the board (perhaps leaving a few clues, such as the first letters of some key words). In pairs or small groups, tell the learners to look at the notes on the board and try to remember the improvements and corrections.

What are the advantages of this kind of language feedback?

- Most obviously, it makes learners aware of strengths and weaknesses in their language and helps them to develop their accuracy.
- It provides learners with language input which is directly suited to their needs.
- Doing language feedback after speaking – rather than during it – means that we can allow learners to develop their spoken fluency without interruptions which will tend to undermine their confidence.
- It motivates learners to speak at greater length because the more they speak, the more feedback they get.
- It can be used as a way of praising weaker learners and developing their confidence (as well as keeping stronger learners on their toes!).
- It's a useful tool for time management because you can adjust it to fill the number of minutes you have left before the end of a lesson. If you have fifteen minutes, you can put all your notes on the board or even use them in two lots, following the procedure above twice. If you have only five minutes, just select a few notes which you feel to be the most useful. And if you have no time at all, simply save your notes for the next lesson!