

MY PROFESSIONAL FAVOURITES (I)

Piret Kärtner
Department of English
University of Tartu

At the beginning of the new school year I would like to share with you some activities that I often use with new groups and classes to get to know them, learn their names, make them feel comfortable with me and each other, get some information about their language level and motivation – in one word, to establish good rapport and a fertile foundation for further collaboration in lessons. These activities can work well with students at different levels as they could be adapted to suit a particular age or level.

I'm pulling your leg

Materials: None

Level: any

Procedure:

The teacher writes or says 10 statements about him- or herself, e.g. *I was born in Tartu. I can't drive a car. I get claustrophobic on a plane*, etc. The statements are said or revealed one by one. The students' task is to decide whether the statement is true or false, and more advanced students have to explain why they think so. The teacher gives the correct answer as well. Then the students have to write 10 statements about themselves (more advanced students are told to avoid obvious things, e.g. *I've got glasses*, and write statements of at least 7-10 words each). Then the students are paired up and they read out their statements to each other and correct the false statements, i.e. they follow the same structure as modelled earlier by the teacher. As a follow-up the students can report to the class the information they got about their partner. The follow-up could be done in writing as well and the papers could be stuck to the wall for others to read.

Getting to know each other

Materials: an A4 sheet of paper for each student, pens, (a tape-recorder and a tape with music)

Level: any

Procedure:

Every student gets a sheet of paper and writes his/her name at the top of it.

The sheets are spread on one or two desks so that all the names are visible. The students stand up, get into pairs and talk to each other for 2-3 minutes (The teacher can keep time by playing the tape for 2-3 minutes). Then the students have to find the sheet with his/her partner's name and write down the information obtained. Then every student has to find a new partner and the procedure is repeated. The same procedure could be repeated for 3-5 times. Every time before starting writing the students have to read through the previously written information. At the end of the activity the sheets are stuck to the wall or the teacher can distribute the sheets randomly and the texts are read out (without using names) and the other students have to guess who the text is about.

Rounds

Materials: none

Level: any
Procedure:

Students sit or stand in a circle. The teacher starts with, e.g. *my name is Piret and I like pancakes* (the first letter of the name and of the ‘like-part’ should coincide). The next student will repeat the beginning, e.g. *her name is Piret and she likes pancakes, my name is ... and I like...* Each following student has to repeat all the previous information and add his/her name and ‘likes-part’. Use can use the same activity with many other structures as well, e.g. *My name is... and I have got...*, *My name is ... and I can ... well*, *My name is... and I would like to...*, *My name is ... and I have never...*, etc. By the end of the activity both you and your students know the names. I have often used this activity at the end of the first lesson with new students. This has given me the chance to say a “personal good-bye” to all my students, e.g. *good-bye Kersti, it was nice to meet you; bye Andres, see you tomorrow*, etc.

If I were a.... I would be... (because)

Materials: 1 grid for every student

Level: any

Procedure:

Every student is provided with a grid and they have to associate themselves with certain concepts and words, e.g. *If I were a colour I would be orange (because it's such a happy and healthy colour)*. They write the words (or sentences) in the grid. Less advanced students make sentences without the explanation; more advanced students have to explain their choice. It could be done as an oral activity or as a written activity, as a pair work activity or a whole-class activity. You can add words to this grid, delete words or use your own words and ideas.

colour	
number	
season	
day of the week	
food	
drink	
musical instrument	
weather	
building	
part of the body	
book	
school subject	
vehicle	
somebody famous	
piece of furniture	

Find somebody who

Materials: 1 grid for every student

Level: any

Procedure:

It is a very widely used ‘stir’-activity to make the students more lively and active. Different grids could be used. The students’ task is to move around the classroom and talk to people. The follow-up could include reporting back as well as making a class report. The tasks can

focus on a particular topic (family, learning languages, hobbies, phobias, etc) as well as on particular structures (the past simple, modals, etc). Changing the structure and the organisation of the activity a little every time that you use the activity will add novelty and variety to it.

1)

	You	Find somebody with the same answer
The number of brothers and sisters		
Favourite day of the week		
The drink that you don't like		
Favourite food		
Dream travel destination		
The best film ever seen		
The best book read		
Favourite composer		

2)

Find somebody who has studied English longer than you	Find somebody who is going in for sports	Find somebody who has lived in the same place for more than 5 years	Find somebody without a watch	Find somebody who has never been to Finland
Find somebody who has lived abroad	Find somebody who sings in a choir	Find somebody who is afraid of spiders	Find somebody who doesn't like rap	Find somebody who has a pet
Find somebody who went hiking in summer	Find somebody who would like to learn a new language	Find somebody who can play a musical instrument	Find somebody who has a unique hobby	Find somebody who doesn't drink milk

3)

Find somebody who knows what the Estonian is for (and write down the translations)

- a) Club sandwich or double-decker
- b) Loaf of bread
- c) Slice of bread
- d) Roll
- e) Croissant
- f) French stick
- g) Submarine (sandwich)
- h) Bagel
- i) Doughnut
- j) Sponge cake
- k) Scone

- l) Danish pastry
- m) Swiss roll
- n) Muffin
- o) Fairy (cup) cake

Activities like that have helped me to create positive classroom atmosphere, ease the tension that might be there if the students do not know each other very well and, in many cases, they have been learning and having fun at the same time.

If you have used other good activities to begin a new school year with, you might send them to me: piretkartner@ut.ee and I will find the way to share these with everybody else in the Estonian language teaching community.