

Hear-Say Activities to Support Student Production

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ABSTRACT

Hear-Say activities have proven to be an enjoyable and effective way to review vocabulary and get students talking. “Hear-Say” is my name for a basic activity where students hear a word, find it on a list and then say another word from their list. They are described in many methodology textbooks but not used much in the classroom. I have found them fun and game-like, but promoting a team spirit and win-win mentality. They are quick to make and easily tailored to fit any level class and all but the youngest of students. This workshop will demonstrate the use of Hear-Say activities and how to make them for your classes.

Keywords: Student production, Classroom activity

I. Rationale and Background

It is generally accepted that one must practice productive skills – written or oral – in order to develop productive skills. That means students must have a time to produce and work with meaningful English, both inside and, hopefully, outside the class room. This, however, can prove daunting in some classroom settings as students and many teachers are not really sure how to start using English.

This presentation focuses on a classroom activity which requires both engaged listening and speaking on the part of the student. Such activities are often discussed or described in methods books, but are rarely used in classrooms. The goal of this presentation is to demonstrate an activity and show how teachers can make and use it in their classrooms. As they are teacher-created, they can be tailored to fit any classroom setting except perhaps with very young learners.

Hear-Say activities provide an engaging environment in which students can participate actively in groups of three to five students. Each student must listen to the other students and respond orally when it is their turn. The pace and random nature of the interchanges require students to be engaged and attentive throughout the activity.

I have used this activity with university students at various levels, usually with numbers, as a ten- to twelve-minute warm-up at the beginning of class. Students develop a lightly competitive approach, but must rely on each student in the group to complete his or her part in order of the group to complete the task. Moving slowly from easy numbers to harder ones, students learn to listen, speak clearly and understand more and more difficult numbers. This activity could easily be done to review vocabulary or other listening-speaking tasks.

II. Demonstration of the Hear-Say Activity

If set up for three students, a Hear-Say activity might look something like this:

Student A		Student B		Student C	
Hear	Say	Hear	Say	Hear	Say
STAR T	1	1	2	2	3
3	4	4	5	5	6
6	7	7	8	8	9
9	10	10	11	11	FINIS H

where Student A starts by saying “1.” Student B hears “1” and says “2.” Student C hears “2” and says “3.” This continues cycling through to “Finish.”

Of course, in a real situation, you do not want to just go around the circle, down the card, and count from one to eleven; that would be too easy. So, first the cards will be set up to randomize the numbers.

Student A		Student B		Student C	
Hear	Say	Hear	Say	Hear	Say
STAR T	1	1	4	4	7
7	10	10	2	2	3
3	11	11	9	9	8
8	5	5	6	6	FINIS H

Then they will be set up to switch randomly between students:

Student A		Student B		Student C	
Hear	Say	Hear	Say	Hear	Say
STAR T	1	7	10	1	4
4	7	2	3	10	2
3	11	11	9	8	5
9	8	5	6	6	FINIS H

The next step is to change the order on each card so that the student must look for the next number:

Student A		Student B		Student C	
Hear	Say	Hear	Say	Hear	Say
STAR T	1	7	10	10	2
9	8	2	3	6	FINIS H
4	7	11	9	1	4
3	11	5	6	8	5

Numbers work well with this kind of activity, but so do basic vocabulary words, questions and answers, and pronunciation minimal pairs (copy / coffee, pine / fine, ship / sheep). With cards for three to five students per group and seven to twelve lines per card, this makes a challenging yet doable classroom activity for almost any number of small groups of students.

III. Creating a Hear-Say Activity for Your Class

I create Hear-Say activities quite easily using the Tables function in MSWord. Start by deciding how many Hear-Say responses you will need: (number of students in the group) x (number of words each student will say) - one, e.g., four students in each group; each student will have ten lines on the card = $(4 \times 10) - 1 = 39$ words needed.

Start with a new document. Narrow margins and two columns. Insert a table four columns wide and 40 lines long. Start on of the columns with the word "START" than list the words you want to use in that column. Use another column to randomize the order they will be spoken (just list the numbers) and sort the table by that column. The words you want to use are now in the correct order. This column becomes your "Hear" column.

Copy the words you want students to say (not "START") and paste them into the column to the right – starting on the first row (next to "START"). This will leave a blank spot at the bottom of that column. Put "FINISH" in the blank cell. This column will become your "Say" column. Next, assign each line to one of the students: A, B, C, or D. This is the trickiest part; you need to have the same number of lines for each student; you can move in any order between students (e.g., $A \rightarrow B$, $A \rightarrow C$, or $A \rightarrow D$) but you may not have the same student on consecutive lines ($A \rightarrow A$). Sort by this column. You now have all of your lines sorted by which student will see and say them. It's best to divide the table into student sections at this point.

With the table divided by student, assign random numbers to each line of each student's card, using an open column. Then sort each card by this new line number. This will mix up the order in which students see the Hear-Say words. With this, you are basically done. Remove unneeded columns; resize the two remaining columns; add lines headers for "Hear" and "Say" and make it look as fancy or as plain as you want.

IV. Conclusion

With "Hear-Say" activities student can actively produce, review, and practice many aspects of English. They can have fun while working together and even help each other. Feedback is built in. If the students have problems with vocabulary or pronunciation, they cannot finish the task. A student can see his/her problems and work on them further as necessary. With a little experience, this kind of activity is easy to create for almost any class and even more creative ways to use these versatile activities.

About the Presenter

Philip Owen, MEd, MDiv, got his start in teaching English in graduate school at UCLA. After that, he taught in several programs in the US. Phil moved to Korea in 1999 to work at the Language Education Center of Kunsan National University. A year later, he joined the English Department as a visiting professor and has been there since. Phil likes to see his students actively producing English in his classes. He enjoys travel, movies and Korean green tea.