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## Teaching in Non-Native English

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March 2018

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**Teaching in a foreign language** can be **challenging**. While lecturers are well versed in the specialised terminology of their fields, they may need some teaching experience to grow more confident in classroom management. However, it is possible for teachers to prepare for a number of **standard situations** that typically occur in classrooms and to practise the appropriate language. By addressing such typical situations and suggesting possible formulations, the content of this article seeks to assist you in developing strategies for proficient and successful teaching endeavours in non-native English. Please choose the expressions that **correspond to your personality** and teaching style or that make you feel most comfortable and **adjust them to the different class dynamics** as you see fit. Some lecturers find it helpful to think in English for half an hour before a class meeting. This facilitates **switching language** if they mainly think and speak in a different language.

**Note: English Style Guide and terminology database**

At the University of Vienna, the English Style Guide (<https://intra.univie.ac.at/themen-a-z/initiale/e/thema/englischer-style-guide/aktion/show/ctrl/tp/?cHash=7c362c8ca8c6e344ac9b08b0774b998&logintype=login&auth=shibboleth&pid=2>) and the terminology database UniVie Term (<https://term.univie.ac.at:8880/auto-login/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit>) can inform you about the institutional linguistic conventions.

## 1. First Day of Class

Teachers have individual approaches to teaching the first meeting of a class (see entry “First Class Meeting” (</startseite/universitaeres-lehren-lernen/erste-einheit/#c461094>)). However, there are many frequent or recurring aspects, too: **you introduce yourself**, invite **students** to **introduce themselves**, talk through the **course logistics** (e.g. assessment, attendance policy), and introduce the course content including the **learning objectives**.

### 1.1 Classroom expressions exercise

If you want to find out whether you can benefit from working through this section, please check your teaching-related vocabulary in the following exercise. It is a sample dialogue, taking place in a first class meeting. The professor presents the course outline and assessment criteria to the students.

|           |                |             |          |              |                    |           |
|-----------|----------------|-------------|----------|--------------|--------------------|-----------|
| be out of | come to        | count       | credit   | fill in      | get back           | go around |
| go over   | grade down     | lose points | make up  | make-up quiz | miss               | move on   |
| open-book | partial credit | pass back   | penalize | quiz         | review session     |           |
| share     | skip           | speak up    | turn in  | turn to      | on the right track |           |

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Professor: | Hello everyone, and welcome to the course! Here is the syllabus that explains how everything is organised this semester. Take one and _____ the rest _____, please. If there aren't enough copies to _____ you'll have to _____ today. I'll bring additional copies next week. Also, I will post it on the Moodle course page after today's meeting. Now, at the bottom of the first page, you can find the attendance policy. |
| Student:   | Will we be _____ if we _____ class?  |
| Professor: | I'm sorry, I didn't hear you from the back. Could you please _____?  |
| Student:   | I asked if we would be _____ if we _____ a class.  |
| Professor: | No, you won't; not up to three times. More frequent absences will have consequences for your participation grade, unless you provide me with a doctor's note confirming that you had to miss class due to medical reasons. But there's going to be a short _____ at the beginning of each class, and if you're not here to take it, you'll _____.  |
| Student:   | What if we're ill and can't _____ class?   |
| Professor: | You can request a _____ by email in advance, which I will send to you at the beginning of class, but you won't get _____ if you don't _____ it _____ within 30 minutes.<br>Ok, let's _____ to the section on the quizzes.  |

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Student:   | Will the weekly quizzes be _____?  |
| Professor: | Yes, you can use any materials you want for the quizzes, and also for the midterm and the final. Are there any other questions about the tests?  |
| Student:   | Will you have a _____ to _____ the material that will be on the final? And how much will each exam _____?  |
| Professor: | We will do one _____ only, in the last class before the final. The final will be 50% of your grade, and the midterm will be 30%, and the quizzes plus participation will be worth 20%. |
| Student:   | What kinds of answers do you want to get from us on the quizzes and tests?   |
| Professor: | Good question. What I'm mostly interested in is how well you can analyse a given problem. So you'll be getting _____ if you're _____.  |
| Student:   | _____ to the quizzes, if we get a bad grade on one of them, can we _____ it _____?   |
| Professor: | No, there won't be any second chances for the quizzes, I'm afraid. Now let me see how we're doing with the textbook. Do you all have a copy?   |
| Student:   | The bookstore _____ them this morning. What should we do?  |
| Professor: | I'll ask them to order some more copies right after class. Hands up, who still needs one? Ok. Now, if there are no more questions, let's _____ our first topic.                        |

**Here are some standard examples you may use when interacting with your students for the first time:**

## 1.2 Welcome and introductions

- Hello everyone! Welcome to our class on... I hope you had a good start into the new semester / your study programme (*if you are teaching study beginners*).
- I want to welcome you to our course. The title is "...".
- Before I say a bit more about the content of the course, I will briefly introduce myself. My name is ... My first degree was in...
- Can each of you say a few words about yourself, so that we get an idea who you are and what you are interested in? Let's start at the left. Would you like to introduce yourself (*looking at student*)?
- (*Alternatively:*) Unfortunately, we cannot do a round of introductions, as this is a really big class. In smaller seminars, I normally like to get to know the students - to know what they are doing, and to know about their interests. I'm sorry we cannot do this now, but I hope I'll get to know you as the term progresses.

As an option, you can address language issues:

- I suspect that most of you do not speak English as your first language. Whenever you do not understand something, please let me know.

You can comment on the history of the course:

- This course is still rather new. I have only taught it once before. I got some useful feedback and have made modifications to a few sessions. I hope that you will find it an inspiring perspective on...

## 1.3 Preview of content and learning objectives

- To get a first idea of the topics covered, please have a look at the syllabus.
- We have 14 classes in total. In the first three units, we will deal with... Then we will turn to...
- At the end of this course, you should be able to analyse... / demonstrate... / understand... / apply... / assess... You will be aware of...
- How does the seminar link up with the lecture? In this course, we mainly expand on things that the lecture does not cover in detail. In addition, we will apply concepts introduced in the lecture.

## 1.4 Digital media in your course

- Has everyone signed up for the Moodle course? The enrolment key is...
- On Moodle, you can find the course description with all the information we are discussing right now: the course outline including information on assessment criteria.
- Please browse through the material on Moodle by next week.
- Please post your essay in the forum (on Moodle).

## 1.5 Readings and reading assignments

- I have set up a reading list for you that contains mandatory and optional texts.
- The skill I would like you to build up is to read carefully and to develop an analytical / a deep / a selective approach to reading.
- If you have any difficulties understanding a paper, don't panic. This is normal. Academic literature is often hard to read, but I selected papers that I think are appropriate for you.
- The papers are the foundation for our discussions in class. So please do prepare the mandatory readings before each unit.
- If you have not read this text, please make sure you will have done so by next week.

## 1.6 Assessment and grading

- Now we will have a look at the criteria for assessment. What is expected from you?
- Exams will be based on the lectures and the readings.
- The presentation makes up 10% of the overall mark.
- If you had difficulties with our quiz, I recommend you brush up on / review...

## 2. Questions, Answers & Discussions

### 2.1 Reacting to student questions

#### **If you did not catch the question:**

- Are you asking if...? / Are you asking me to explain...?
- I didn't catch the (last part of your) question. Could you repeat that, please?
- If I've understood you correctly, you mean... Is that right?
- Sorry, I'm not sure I've understood (what you mean). Would you mind repeating your question?
- Excuse me, but I did not quite follow that. Would you / Could you please say that again in a different way?

#### **Rephrasing the question:**

- Your question is... / What you're asking is...
- That's a good question. (to class) XY would like to know...
- I want to make sure everyone hears this. Would you repeat your question, please?

#### **Checking that your answer is sufficient:**

- Does that answer your question? / Is that what you were asking for? / Is that what you wanted to know?
- Does that help? / Is that clear (now)?
- Let me know if the points are still unclear.

**Responding concisely:**

- That's a complex question to answer in a few words. For our purposes, we can assume...
- That's a complicated issue, but in simple terms...
- What you need to know about this for this class is...
- I don't want to go into..., so let's just say the answer is...

**If you do not know the answer:**

- I'm not really sure. I'll have to check...
- I can't answer that one right now.
- I'm sorry, I really don't know.
- I don't have much experience in that field. It might be more helpful to ask...
- It could be... / I would say... / In my experience...

**If you need to delay your response:**

- I wonder if you'd hold that question for later?
- Let me get back to you (on that one).
- Oh, let me think for a moment...
- What do the others think about your colleague's question?

**If you think the question is not relevant or on topic:**

- How is this relevant for/to us (for/to this course)?
- That's something I'd rather not talk about just now. Let's go back to...
- I'm afraid that's outside the scope of this class. To get back to our initial question, ...
- This does not seem relevant for this class/course. Maybe we can talk about that during the break.

**Changing the question into a more appropriate one for the class:**

- Let me put that question another way.
- I think what you would like to know is.... Is that right?
- We don't have to worry about that in this class. But what we do want to know is...

## 2.2 Responding to student answers

### Responses to incorrect answers:

- Good guess, but that's not it.
- I see what you're getting at, but I'm afraid that's not it.
- Do the rest of you agree? Is that correct?
- What do the rest of you think?

### Responses to partially correct answers:

- You're on the right track. What else is there to be said about...
- Not quite.
- So far so good. But there's more.
- That's a good start!

### Responses to correct answers:

- Good job! Right! Correct! You've got it! Well done!

### Responses to vague or incomplete answers:

- Could you elaborate on this? / Could you develop this a bit?
- What do you want to get at?
- Let's try to make that more constructive: ...

### Responses to unintended or unexpected answers:

- Where do you see the link between this and the question we are talking about?
- Could you elaborate on this? / Could you develop this a bit?
- Would you mind telling me more about...?
- Sorry, that's not really what I mean. What I'd like to know is...

### Paraphrasing student responses:

- His/Her suggestion is that...
- Did everyone hear what your colleague (just) said? He/She makes the point that...

### Giving hints:

- Why did you... and not...?
- Wait a minute. If you do that, what will happen?

**Following up:**

- Does everyone see how we got this?
- Do we need to go over this again?
- Any more problems? / Anything else?
- If it is still not clear, feel free to see me after class.

**2.3 Leading discussions****Helping enable an environment for discussion:**

In order to create a respectful atmosphere, you may want to explain the rules and expectations for the discussion beforehand. You could say:

- It is okay to express different points of view. We do not need to agree – that's what discussions are here for!
- If you feel you do not have a well thought-through response, it is still interesting for the others to learn about your thoughts. So do think out loud and share your ideas with the others.

Many lecturers seek to increase student participation by explaining the importance of discussion for the students' overall success in the course.

**Commenting on contributions to the discussion:**

- That's a valid point.
- This is debatable. / That's controversial!

**If a small number of talkative students dominate the discussion:**

If you want to get quiet students to vocalize their ideas, you can call on individuals. Many lecturers see this as a form of singling students out and prefer alternative approaches. In this case, you can say:

- I see that students at the back (at the right, in the second row, etc.) have not contributed much yet. Would anyone of you (*pointing in the direction of the "quiet" corner of the lecture hall*) like to share your thoughts?

In addition, you could say to a very talkative student in the discussion:

- You know so much, but let's wait a bit, so that the others have the chance to develop their thoughts and contribute their ideas too.
- Can you try to be very concise and express your idea in one single sentence? That's a good exercise in precision.

**Helping develop balanced arguments:**

- Could we argue this the other way around?
- Being devil's advocate is a crucial part of academic thinking. Does anyone see this differently?
- Let's try to present our arguments soundly. How did you arrive at your conclusion? / What makes you think ...?

**If a discussion is vague**, you can consider phrases in the section "Responses to vague or incomplete answers" (see above)

**If a discussion strays off topic**, you can redirect students back to the ideas at hand (see above: "If you think the question is not relevant or on topic").

**If you want to end the discussion:**

- Let's identify the most important ideas generated together / in the discussion.
- On the board, we see the most important points: ... (*Remember to record and write down the key ideas and questions throughout the discussion – or have a student do this for you.*)

### 3. Classroom Management

#### 3.1 Giving instructions

**At the beginning of class:**

- Please sit down. We want to get started (*again – if it is after a break*).
- I'm afraid the set-up of the room is not ideal, but I hope this does not keep us from interaction and discussion (*if the seating arrangement is not flexible*).

**If students do not speak loud enough:**

- Could you speak up please?
- Can you see your colleagues in the last row (*if that is on the other side of the lecture hall*)? Please speak up so that also they can hear you.
- Can you please address your remarks to your colleagues? They need to be able to hear you.
- Can you (*i.e. other students*) please pass the microphone to your colleague?

**Group work:**

- You have... minutes to discuss this question in your groups. Then there will be plenary reports to the whole group, where a spokesperson of each group comes to the front and summarises the key findings.

Checking on individual groups:

- How does it go? Is everything alright?
- How far have you come?

### Student presentations:

- Can you please come forward? Stand in the middle /center so that everyone can see you. (*if you call up someone to give a presentation*)
- For your presentations, please use an outline that you can freely speak from rather than read from.

### Classroom management - other phrases:

- You have ... minutes for this task. / The allocated time for this task is...
- Please raise your hands. / Hands up! (*if you ask a yes/no question*)
- We've gone over the time. I'm afraid we need to hurry up and leave the seminar room. The next class is about to start.

### 3.2 Referring back and forth / sign-posting

- To preview today's class a bit: First, we start off by speaking about ...
- We haven't covered point 5 yet.
- We'll touch on it later. (*if a student brings up an issue that you want to deal with later*)
- In two months we will come back to this issue when we look at... more closely.
- Let's move on to...
- This brings/leads us (back) to...
- ... refers back to what we discussed earlier.
- Now I would like to illustrate these propositions with reference to...

### 3.3 Dealing with disruption and resistance

If students are disinterested or disturb class, you might need to address the issue in class. You could say:

- Please focus!
- Please mute your mobiles.
- Your colleague just made an important point. I recommend you take notes. You might need these things when it comes to the exam (your own presentation, etc.).

**Expressing complaints to students:**

- I don't appreciate...
- I'm frustrated with/because...
- I have an issue with (possessive + gerund)... (e.g. I have an issue with your using your mobile phone in class.)
- It bothers me that... / ... bothers me.
- Would you mind not (+ gerund)... (e.g. Would you mind not slamming the door next time you leave the classroom?)

## 4. Sample Emails to Students

**Homework reminder**

**Dear All,**

Since several of you missed class earlier this week, here is a reminder about the homework assignment for next week:

Please take a look at the case study on pp. 45-46 in the textbook and prepare at least two possible solutions to discuss in class.

See you next week,

XY

**Late homework submissions**

Dear Students,

It has come to my attention (alternatively: I have noticed) that several of you have not handed in the last homework assignment.

Please do so by Friday this week. I will not accept later submissions. / After the due date, 10 % of the points will be deducted for each day the assignment is late.

Best regards,

XY

**Class cancelled**

Dear All,

This is to inform you (alternatively: I just wanted to let you know) that due to a short-notice trip abroad there will be no class this coming Tuesday, 7 October. I will get in touch about the make-up date shortly.

Kind regards,

XY

**Student missed classes**

Dear XY,

I just realized that you have already missed three classes. (more formally: ... that you have not attended three course sessions already.)

Please contact me as soon as possible (more formally: at your earliest convenience).

Sincerely,

XY

### **Assignment to be uploaded on Moodle**

Dear Students,

As announced in the course description, your first online task will be a brief reflection paper discussing two aspects: first, your motivation to take this class and second, on your choice of topic. Please have a look at the topics covered in this course and start your literature research in libraries and online. Once you get an initial overview, please decide which topic you would like to focus on. Explain the reasons for your choice in a text of around 250 words. Please upload the word document to the dedicated folder on Moodle.

Best regards,

XY

### **Mock test on Moodle**

Dear All,

You can now find the example questions / mock test for the final exam on the Moodle course page. If you have any questions, please send me a message or ask me in class.

I am looking forward to seeing you next week,

XY

### **Information on grades**

Dear Students,

I thought you might like to know that all midterm tests are positive. Your course marks should be online by the end of the week.

Congratulations!

Best regards,

XY

### **Recommended citation**

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