

CHAPTER 1: THE BASICS OF TEACHING ENGLISH

1.1 Use of English and use of mother tongue

We should try to use English as much as possible with our students. When teaching students at intermediate level and above, all teaching can be done in English. There should really be no need to use the students' mother tongue at these levels. Grammar explanations and definitions of words can be given in English. Explanations for activities and instructions can also be given in English.

At lower levels, you might find yourself using the students' mother tongue more often. Nevertheless, try to use English as much as possible. As your students progress, you will find that you'll use English for instructions more and more frequently. When you are presenting new language, try to illustrate the language through the use of pictures and/or mime. This is preferable to translating. Techniques for presenting language can be found in Chapter 3.

You might want to dedicate one of your first lessons with a class to the study of classroom language. By classroom language I mean phrases such as: open your books, turn to page 10, work with a partner, etc, etc. You can write the language on the board, demonstrate it through mime or show pictures of people opening their books, working with a partner etc. It's important to practise the pronunciation of these phrases and to revise them regularly. In a subsequent lesson, you can give the phrases to students with the words jumbled up (for example: 10 to page turn); and ask them to re-order the words and match them to pictures. Finally, you can write the phrases on large pieces of card and display them in your classroom so that they are constantly visible.

You might occasionally decide to use the students' mother tongue (if you speak it, of course). A time when this is advisable is when your students just haven't grasped what you are saying in English. If you need to deal with something quickly, it is generally quicker in the students' mother tongue (if you speak their language). For example, it could take a very long time to explain the word "soul" using only English and the students might misunderstand if their culture doesn't have a similar concept. You might also need to give some information about an open day or a special event at school and you think it will be done more quickly in their language.

1.2 Using the blackboard, whiteboard

You will need to learn how to write on a board. This is not as easy as it appears. Getting a line straight and writing at a size that can be seen takes practice. Practise in an empty classroom one day. While you're there practise writing on the board side on (i.e. positioned in such a way that your back is not to the class). This will be very useful especially if you intend to teach children. You'll be able to keep an eye on what's happening whilst writing.