Spelling Better for Teachers

10 Five-Minute English Warm-Up Activities

English teachers of all levels, ESL/EFL teachers and tutors

1. Word chain

Materials: none.

How to run: say a word. The next student says a word that starts with the last letter of your word (cat, top, pen). Keep going around the room. For a harder version, use only nouns, or only words with two or more syllables.

2. Letter swap

Materials: board.

How to run: write a short word such as CAT. Students change one letter at a time to make a new word (CAT, COT, DOT, DOG). Write each new word under the last and see how long the chain gets.

3. Missing letters

Materials: board.

How to run: write three or four recent spelling words with some letters replaced by dashes (B_ _ UTIFUL). Students write the full words. Reveal the answers and ask which letters were hardest.

4. Syllable sort

Materials: none.

How to run: say a word. Students clap the syllables and hold up that many fingers. Try a mix of one-, two- and three-syllable words, then ask a student to give a word for the class.

5. Five in a category

Materials: board.

How to run: write a category (fruits, feelings, things in a kitchen) and a starting letter. In pairs, students list five words that fit. Share answers and check spellings together.

6. Odd one out

Materials: board.

How to run: write four words, one of which does not belong (happy, glad, cheerful, tired). Students choose the odd one out and explain why. Accept any answer with a good reason.

7. Mystery word in three clues

Materials: none.

How to run: think of a word and give one clue at a time (It is an animal. It has stripes. It lives in grasslands.). Students guess after each clue and then spell the answer aloud.

8. Opposites quick-fire

Materials: none.

How to run: say a word; students call out or write its opposite (hot/cold, early/late, ancient/modern). Speed up as the class warms up.

9. How many words?

Materials: board.

How to run: write a long word such as TEMPERATURE. In two minutes, students write as many smaller words as they can using its letters (each letter only as often as it appears). Compare lists.

10. Sentence stretch

Materials: board.

How to run: write a short sentence (The dog ran.). Students take turns adding one word or phrase to make it longer while keeping it correct (The small brown dog ran quickly across the park.). Read the final sentence aloud.

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