

Collaborative activities

Collaborative activities are great for EAL learners because they encourage speaking and listening, and particularly exploratory talk which is really important for language development. They are also very useful in supporting access to the curriculum. Working with a partner or in a small group allows learners to feel more confident, and the language is being used for a specific purpose rather than out of context.

It is important to consider the grouping of learners carefully, for example placing early stage bilingual learners with peers who can provide good models of English, and / or share the same first language. Group work can be organised to ensure that all members of each group have a role to play and are expected to participate. Collaborative activities help learners to understand the importance of active listening.

Types of collaborative activities

- ◆ Pair or group discussions
- ◆ Work together on shared tasks, e.g. matching, sorting, ranking
- ◆ Activities with a competitive element/games, e.g. bingo
- ◆ Drama and role play
- ◆ Information exchange activities, including barrier games and jigsaw activities

- ✓ **Top tip:** Establish the type of behaviour that will be expected from learners for them to benefit most from these types of activities
- ? **To consider:** Are the tasks sufficiently challenging and will they provide a genuine need for discussion, problem-solving and working together?

Practical ideas for collaborative activities

Pair or group discussions: general points

- ◆ learners can discuss in English or in their home language. Think about what you want them to get from the discussion and decide which language you want them to use.
- ◆ make sure the EAL learner has a role in the discussion. [Speaking frames](#) can be useful.
- ◆ encourage other members of the group to include EAL learners who may need support to take part

Types of pair or group discussions

- ◆ **Listening Triangles:** learners work together in groups of three, a speaker, a questioner and a note-taker:
 - the speaker explains the topic (or expresses their opinion on an issue) as directed by the teacher
 - the questioner listens carefully and asks for clarification or further detail
 - the note-taker observes this process and provides feedback to both speaker and questioner
- ◆ **Talk Partners:** Learners are paired for short discussion activities. Pairs can be selected, chosen randomly or regularly switched. It may be useful to establish ground rules and model some appropriate question types and responses.
- ◆ **Think-Pair-Share:** Learners prepare a response to a text or prepare a piece of work and then explain their ideas to a partner. After the pairs have discussed the issue, they join with another pair, share views and emerge with a group conclusion or perspective.
- ◆ **Snowballing:** Learners discuss something or investigate an issue in pairs. The pairs then join another pair to form a group and share their findings. The small group then join together to make a larger group 2 □ 4 □ 8 □ 16 □ whole-class.

Working on shared tasks, e.g. matching, sorting, ranking

Working collaboratively on a task encourages use of the vocabulary of the curriculum area, and at the same time encourages use of the language of making suggestions, justifying opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, etc. It also practises listening. Many of the resources on the site have images that can be made into [flashcards](#) which can be used for matching, sorting or ranking.

Games and activities with a competitive element

Games can be very effective in motivating learners, and in revising or consolidating curriculum content. They also practise the language of turn-taking and negotiating. Bingo is a popular game included in several of our resources, e.g. [food bingo](#), but a quick noughts and crosses game can be produced for any topic on a whiteboard, e.g. a 3x3 grid with answers in each square. Split the class into 2 teams, and teams discuss possible questions to match the answers, e.g. (examples given from different subjects here)

36	chloroplasts	China
Newton's	Van Gogh	Carbon dioxide
protein	personification	adjectives

There may be several possible correct alternatives, e.g. for 36, correct suggestions could be: What's 6 squared? What's 9 times 4? Name a square number, How many 2s are there in 72? What's 72 divided by 2?

Drama and role play

[Drama and role play](#) can be fun and used successfully in any area of the curriculum. Drama is a very valuable tool for exploring issues, making

learning memorable, encouraging co-operation and empathy. The use of drama and role play can create an opportunity for the learner to hear and use language in a meaningful context, so as to be able to use it.

Information exchange activities, including barrier games and jigsaw activities

[Information exchange](#) (or information gap) activities are communicative activities for two or more learners. They involve learners having different bits of information that they then have to convey orally to each other.

Here are some examples:

- ◆ [Barrier games](#) are a specific form of information gap activity. Information gap activities are communicative activities for two or more learners, where, for example, Learner A has information that Learner B needs, and vice versa. In a barrier game Learner A and Learner B sit with a barrier between them and are required to convey information to each other, for example while looking at different text or images. A book or file propped on its side can be used as a barrier.
- ◆ [Jigsaw activities](#) involve learners working in groups to become experts in different areas, then sharing information between the groups. This is a useful way of disseminating and sharing ideas. It helps learners to clarify their own understanding and provides an opportunity for them to question others. Activities can be organised in several ways:
 - o **Rainbowing:** This is a form of jigsaw activity where each member of a working group is given a different colour. When the group task is complete the learners form new groups according to their colours. Within the colour groups, they compare findings, discuss what they have achieved, or carry out another task that they all need to contribute to, e.g. completing a grid.
 - o **Envoys:** Once each group has completed its initial discussion, it sends out one member as an envoy to the next group. Envoys move round all the other groups in

turn explaining and sharing ideas gathered from the groups they have visited.

Good for EAL, Good for All: Can I use collaborative activities with the whole class?

Yes: They support everyone. They encourage collaborative learning, and help develop speaking and listening skills for all learners.

For a range of free teaching resources that promote collaborative learning see the [Collaborative Learning Project website](#)