

Substitution tables

A substitution table is when a teacher provides a table giving model sentences with a range of choices for learners to select from, using a set pattern. It is a very useful scaffolding resource which extends the speaking or writing skills of EAL learners and can be used as a reinforcement of newly-acquired language. Substitution tables provide models for learners to practise target language and support the development of specific grammatical features within the context of the curriculum. They are motivating and generate a sense of achievement.

Substitution tables can be used to support talk and provide a scaffold which enables learners to speak or write in grammatically correct sentences. They often used to provide an opportunity for independent work for learners who are new to English. However they can also be used by pairs or groups where they can encourage learners to develop and extend speaking and listening skills within the context of a curriculum topic and provide an opportunity for meaningful communication.

Types of activities using substitution tables

Substitution tables can be used:

- ◆ to scaffold talk
- ◆ to scaffold writing
- ◆ to support development of a particular grammatical feature

They can be made up of:

- ◆ single words
- ◆ a mixture of words and phrases
- ◆ images
- ◆ a mixture of words and images

Practical ideas for using substitution tables

- ✓ **Top tip:** Choose a language structure that is short, not too complex, and commonly used in English
- ? **To consider:** Would it be enhanced by including visuals?

- ◆ **Activity:** Substitution tables are laid out in a grid and the learner moves from left to right, making a selection in each column in order to construct a sentence. Cells could include words or phrases. These could also be accompanied by supporting visuals in order to support understanding.
- ◆ **Identify the language function:** This means thinking carefully about what the language you want the learners to practise is for, e.g. describing, explaining, recounting, reporting, comparing.
- ◆ **Choose a simple language form that is commonly used in English:** e.g. If the language function is comparing: (Singular or plural noun) is / are (comparative adjective) than (singular or plural noun).
- ◆ **Provide visuals** to support understanding particularly for younger learners.
- ◆ **Vocabulary:** Make sure the list of possible words they are choosing from is made up of useful curriculum-related vocabulary that you want the learners to practice.
- ◆ **Age range:** Substitution tables can be used with any age group. Older learners can also develop their own substitution tables.

Good for EAL, Good for All: Can I use substitution tables with the whole class?

Yes, they support everyone. They help all learners to generate grammatically accurate sentences while still having an element of choice over the content so learners will be writing their own sentences not just copying a model.