

10 LOW-PREP VOCABULARY REVIEW ACTIVITIES

FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS



Don't have
a lot of prep-time?
These activities use limited materials
and take minimal time to prep!

THE WHY?

I asked the Instagram world for low-prep activity ideas and received ZERO ideas, but many requested that I share ideas.

Regardless of where you're teaching or what resources you have at your disposal, all teachers need a few low-prep, on-the-spot activities in their back pocket.

All of these activities have been used by myself in various classrooms with language learners. They are a compilation of some of my favorite activities and games.

I highly suggest using Vocabulary Activities by Penny Ur for more ideas. Some of the ideas in this resource have come from her book.

I do not claim to be the creator or author of these activities. They are all variations of common games and activities used by many teachers. This item is not for sale, nor should be sold.

GENERAL VOCABULARY TEACHING TIPS:

1. Vocabulary words are learned best in context rather than in groupings (colors, body parts, animals, food).
2. Vocabulary should be intentionally reviewed and repeated throughout units.
3. Pairing visuals, objects, or movement with vocabulary is useful.
4. For new classes, focus on "survival" vocabulary first. What words or phrases must they know to simply feel comfortable in the class? Teach and practice those first.

ACTIVITY 1: CIRCLE MAPS PRE & POST ACTIVITY

Explanation: This activity is used the very first day of introducing a unit (before vocabulary), and then at the end of a lesson/unit as a review. It also acts as a reflection activity, showing students how much they have learned after a lesson.

1. Draw a large circle with a smaller circle in the center. Write a general topic of the lesson or unit inside the small circle.
2. Ask students to start sharing anything they know about the topic. Write the words that students start to share.
3. This acts as a great pre-assessment for the teacher, allowing you to see what prior knowledge students have.
4. Hang the circle map in the room throughout the unit if possible, or take a picture to refer back to at the end of the unit.

End of unit review:

1. Repeat the steps 1-2 from above.
2. This time, students should be able to recall vocabulary from the unit, filling in the circle much more.
3. After students have shared everything possible, show the first circle map next to the second. Usually this gets a good response from students because it's a visual example of how much they have learned.

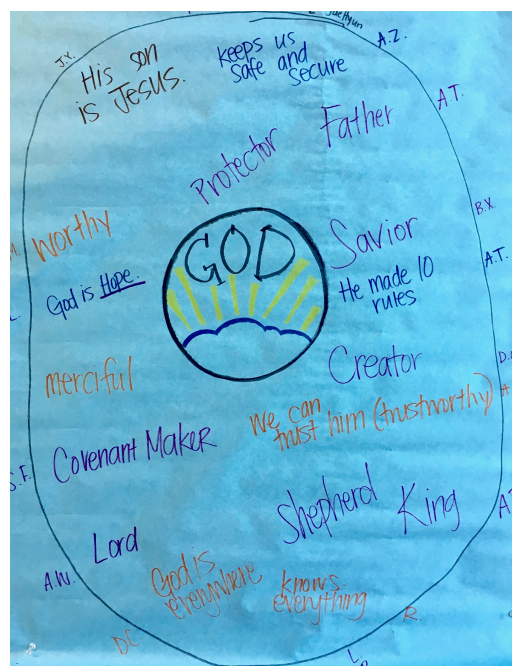
Materials:

- anything to draw a large circle (paper is best, but a chalkboard, whiteboard works).
- writing utensil (for the teacher)

Example:

Here's an example from an ESL Bible class I taught. This is the second circle map that acts a review and as an assessment.

- The main topic, "God", was the same in both maps.
- I used different colors for parts of speech. Orange: adjectives. Purple: Nouns / Names. This is not necessary, but useful. At the end, I ask students if they can figure out what the different colors mean.
- The letters on the side of the circle are student initials. This gives them a sense of pride and accomplishment. It also allows me to assess who is and isn't participating.



ACTIVITY 2: DRAW A WORD

Explanation: Drawing a picture that relates to the vocabulary word can be very helpful. It allows students to be creative, think critically, and put the word in a context. There are two different ways I use drawing with vocabulary words:

1. Draw any picture or symbol to illustrate the word: Students choose a vocabulary word or two and draw a picture that illustrates the word. It can be a scene, one object, a symbol. Students can either share their pictures with partners or small groups, or if drawn on sticky notes, they pictures can be stuck to a vocabulary list on the wall.

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- 2 Use the word in a drawing: this one is a bit more challenging, but fun! Students must make an illustration out of the vocabulary word that depicts the meaning. See below for an example.

Materials:

- paper or sticky notes
- writing / drawing utensils

Example:

- I've had students do this, but I decided to try for my own language learning
- "Webale" means "thank you"
- "Kaawa" means "coffee"
- "Oli Otya?" means "How are you?"
- "amazzi" means "water"
- "Nedda" means "no"
- "Kye Kyo" means "yes"
- "sula bulungi" means "good night"



ACTIVITY 3: CATEGORIES

Explanation: from a list of vocabulary words, students work to organize the words into categories. The possibilities could be endless and students can get creative with the categories. The goal is to get students to think about the words more deeply and critically. They must think about their context, meaning, or form in order to create categories.

Materials:

- paper and writing utensil, or NONE (could be done as a spoken activity if no resources are available).

ACTIVITY 4: DIAMANTE POEMS

Explanation: Students will write a poem using vocabulary they have learned, plus prior vocabulary and supporting language. Students must use relating adjectives, verbs, and nouns to complete the poem. This activity would most likely be for intermediate-advanced students. I recommend doing one as an entire class as an example and model.

1. Choose two antonyms, or have students suggest. They can also be two words from recent vocabulary words that have opposite meanings.
2. Write the first antonym at the top of the board, and the second at the bottom.
3. Next, students offer two adjectives associated with each antonym. Write them below and above the antonyms.
4. Then, have students think of verbs associated with the antonyms. Write them in -ing verb form. I usually ask for three verbs.
5. As for two nouns relating to each antonym. Write them on one line in the middle of the poem.

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6. When you read the entire poem, it moves from one extreme to another, using various parts of speech. It also looks like a diamond.
7. After practicing together, students can work in partners or pairs to do their own.

Examples:

light
bright, happy
shining, glowing, guiding
sun, day, night, room
hiding, sleeping, crying
scary, black
dark

desert
dry, hot
sweating, drinking, walking
snake, dirt, water, fish
swimming, relaxing, laughing
blue, beautiful
ocean

I learned the above activity solely from Vocabulary Activities by Penny Ur. The above poems are my own.

Ur, P., & Thornbury, S. (2012). *Vocabulary activities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ACTIVITY 5: WHICH DID I ERASE?

Explanation: There's two main ways to use this activity, but it's pretty much the same.

1. Scatter words around the board, or write a small passage that uses vocabulary words (3-5 sentences).
2. Allow students to study the board, but no writing or taking pictures!
3. Students close their eyes or turn their bodies away.
4. Erase one word, or one phrase from the passage.
5. Students turn around and try to identify the word or phrase that's missing.
6. Continue until all words are finished.
7. To get students more involved, I'll allow the student who answered correctly to come up and erase the next item.

Materials:

- chalk or white board

ACTIVITY 6: STORIES

Explanation: Students work together to write a story with a selected group of vocabulary words. This activity requires students to use the words in context and in the correct part of speech.

1. Give students a set of words. I generally use 5-8.
2. Give students a sentence requirement and time requirement.
3. Give students some story starters: Once upon a time..., A long, long time ago..., In a far off place...
4. Students work together in pairs or small groups to create a story.
5. Let them have fun!
6. Students can share their stories with the class.

Materials:

- paper and writing utensils for each group.
- could be done with no resources, but I'd make the requirements simpler since they'll have to recite from memory.

ACTIVITY 7: GUESSING GAME

Explanation: Students guess the vocabulary word from a series of hints or yes/no questions.

1. One student stands with their back to the board, looking towards the students.
2. Write a vocabulary word on the board behind the student.
3. The other students (non-standing) give hints to help the student guess the word, OR the standing student can ask yes/no questions to the class (kind of like "20 questions").

Materials:

- chalk or white board
- could be done without a board: Teacher can write the word on a piece of paper and show the class quietly, without showing the student who is guessing.

ACTIVITY 8: ACT IT OUT!

Explanation: Students must act a vocabulary word and try to get their team to guess the correct the word. This is just like "charades".

1. Write one word on individual, small pieces of paper.
2. Put the papers in a small bowl, hat, box, or simply on a table.
3. Create teams.
4. One student comes up, chooses a paper, and acts out the word without using any words or sound.
5. The actor's teammates are guessing the word. They get a point when they guess correctly.
6. Repeat with different students.

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Materials:

- paper
- one writing utensil

ACTIVITY 9: SLAP!

Explanation: Students race to recall and slap the correct vocabulary word.

1. Write vocabulary words around the board.
2. Divide the class into two teams.
3. One student from each team stands in front of the board, with their back to the board.
4. Give a definition or sentence that uses the word in context.
5. Students spin around, and try to slap the correct word first.
6. Repeat through each student.

Materials:

- chalk or white board
- fly-swatters if available
- possible objects to slap with: hands, board erasers, pointers, plush toys

ACTIVITY 10: PARTNER GUESSING — FROM CONTEXT

Explanation: Each student writes a sentence using a vocabulary word in context. Partners guess each other's words from the context of the sentence.

1. Students scan their vocabulary list or a recent text / lesson they've had.
2. Each student chooses one word.
3. Students write one sentence using the word in context. For example, if the word is "behave" the sentence could be: The dog must behave to get a cookie.
4. When students have their sentences, they take turns reading their sentences to their partner. However, they replace the vocabulary word with "Ding!". For example: The dog must DING to get a cookie.
5. Their partner must guess the missing word.
6. This could be done in small groups or as a whole class, it just depends on the time. I prefer to use partners and use this as a quick "bell-ringer" at the beginning of class or "ticket-out-the-door" activity at the end of class.

Materials:

- paper and writing utensils for students.
- NONE: if students are only required to create one sentence, this could be done without resources.

BONUS ACTIVITY!

ACTIVITY II: ROLL & SHARE

Explanation: Students roll dice and follow the prompt according to the number rolled.

Example:

1	define the word
2	use the word in a sentence
3	act it out!
4	draw a picture
5	what is the part of speech?
6	what is a synonym?

1. Give students a list of words to review.
2. In small groups, students take turns rolling dice and reviewing the word according to the number rolled.

Additional possible options for review:

- antonym
- what does it remind you of?
- what's one category the word could belong to?
- dance! (this one is always fun, not necessarily part of review)
- spell the word
- think of adjectives to describe (if a noun)

Materials:

- dice; could be done with one die
- Teacher rolls at the front, calls out the number, and groups continue
- list of activities; could be on paper handed out to students, or written on the board

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the **ESL** girl

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE



Hello!
Hi!
Hey!
Welcome!
What's up?
How's it going?

THANKS FOR SUPPORTING A FELLOW TEACHER! I'M KIM & I LOVE TEACHING ALL THINGS ESL / ELL RELATED. MY GOAL IS TO HELP SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS FEEL COMFORTABLE, SAFE, AND CONFIDENT. IF THEY LEAVE THE CLASSROOM FEELING LIKE SOMEONE BELIEVES IN THEM, THEN I'VE DONE ALL THAT MATTERS.

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO USE THIS RESOURCE FOR ALL OF YOUR CLASSES & EDUCATION NEEDS. HOWEVER, PLEASE DO NOT SHARE WITH OTHER TEACHERS OR POST IN SHARED-FOLDERS. IT'S GREATLY APPRECIATED!

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