

BOOK REVIEW



Title:	100 GREAT ACTIVITIES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
Editors:	Penny Ur & Scott Thornbury
Publisher:	Cambridge University Press
Year:	2024
No. of pages:	169
ISBN:	978-1-009-34873-7
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In today's globally connected classrooms, language teachers across contexts are constantly searching for practical, engaging, and adaptable classroom activities. *100 Great Activities in Language Teaching* by Penny Ur and Scott Thornbury, published by Cambridge University Press, serves as a fulfilment to this need. The title itself *100 Great Activities in Language Teaching* is both ambitious and inviting. It promises not only a collection of engaging activities but also represents activities that could be successfully implemented in real classrooms. This compilation also draws from the highly revered *Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers* series, a fine curation of activities that have appeared in the nearly 45 years lifespan of the series. The book is organized into six categories, each focused on a different skill or knowledge area: *Speaking*, *Listening*, *Reading*, *Writing*, *Vocabulary*, and *Grammar*. The most extensive coverage is dedicated to *Speaking*, with 36 activities, while the remaining areas contained 6–23 activities each. The reason why the authors offer such an intentional emphasis on speaking is due to an inherent desire to assist teachers in completing their goals of helping students “achieve a degree of spoken fluency”.

The first and most dominant chapter, *Speaking*, offers a variety of activities that promote real communication, spontaneity, and student engagement. The tasks range from pair work and group discussions to more imaginative formats that push learners beyond rehearsed dialogues often practiced in traditional classrooms. One particularly engaging task is “Becoming a Picture”, in which a student poses as if they are a person in a picture while the rest of the group asks questions to find out more about themselves. Such a task not only develops fluency, but also maximizes the speaking opportunities and boosts the confidence of learners. Most activities covered in this section are easily adaptable for different proficiency levels and classroom contexts, and each includes clear instructions, rationale, and, in some cases, optional variations.

The next chapter, *Listening*, proposes a refreshing shift from traditional listening tasks that often rely heavily on long stretches of audio followed by comprehension questions. Instead,

the authors in this chapter suggest activities that “*invite students to listen*”, involving learners actively in the process. Most activities in this section are interactive, and designed to help students become more conscious and strategic listeners. One interesting example is the “Interrupting Story” task, where students are asked to listen to their friends telling a story and encouraged to interrupt them at any point with questions. This not only helps students develop listening actively but also provides more opportunities to use the language with their peers.

Similar to the previous chapter where students respond to a spoken text, in Chapter 3: *Reading*, activities are introduced to allow learners to engage with a written one. Rather than treating texts as objects to decode for correct answers as we often see in coursebooks, the activities here aim to generate reader response. This means students are not only reading but also interpreting, reacting and even challenging the text. One memorable instance is an activity in which students use symbols or icons to respond to a text instead of traditional comprehension questions. Specifically, while reading, students may place question marks or exclamation points in the margins of a passage to indicate their cognitive reactions. This approach could engage students and also stimulate critical thinking, and acknowledges that reading is not merely about reading facts but also about negotiating meaning.

The chapter on *Writing* is also notable for its balance of lower-level skills (e.g., sentence building, punctuation) and comprehensive and creative tasks. In the book, Ur and Thornbury reject the outdated notion of writing where students merely produce formal genres such as letters or essays. Taking on a new paradigm instead, the chapter offers interactive and collaborative tasks that help learners engage with writing as a process and as a tool for expression. For instance, one activity tasks students with combining short texts, writing in groups, and responding to visual stimuli. These tasks integrate not only writing and speaking, but also critical thinking and creativity, fostering a more holistic development of the multi-faceted skills behind writing. This approach also mirrors the current best practices in writing instruction, emphasizing brainstorming, drafting, feedback, and revision over the final product alone.

Vocabulary learning, often neglected or overly complex in many classrooms, receives a thoughtful treatment in Chapter 5. The activities here focus not just on memorization, but on reviewing, retrieving, and processing words at a deep level. One standout task is a variation on the classic “Odd One Out” activity. However, rather than asking students to find the one incorrect or unrelated word, they are asked to justify how each word could be different or similar—in other words, find multiple possible answers and defend their reasoning. This encourages flexible thinking, deeper word knowledge, and the ability to articulate semantic relationships. The emphasis here is on how learners think about vocabulary, not just what they remember. Such tasks invite playful engagement while also still reinforcing serious learning goals.

The final chapter, *Grammar*, completes the book’s overarching theme: language is for communication, not just correctness. Rather than offering worksheets full of gap fills, the authors present activities where students must use grammar to convey meaning. For example, students create sentences in the present perfect to express what has happened and choose one of the exclamations given. The other students listen to the sentences and guess what

exclamations could be used as a response to the sentences. This, according to the authors' comments, generated a lot of meaningful practice in the target structure. Grammar, thus, shies away from a totem of rules and guidelines, and is reinvented as a tool for interaction and building communicative competence.

Overall, this book serves as a useful handbook for busy teachers. Teachers would be able to quickly find tasks suitable for different levels or classroom goals. As a language teacher myself, what I love about this book is that not only does it offer practical ideas to make lessons more learner-centered, but it also motivates teachers into thinking how their activities could be adapted and reshaped to suit their own teaching contexts. However, one area where the book could be improved is the clarity of level-specific guidances. While some activities are labeled as suitable for a broad range of levels (e.g., A2–C1), it is not always clear how the activity can be effectively modified (scaled up or down) to suit learners at each level, especially for less experienced teachers. If the publishers were considering a reprint of this book, one suggested change would be to provide a clearer explanation or a set of suggestions for differentiation especially for early career teachers who may struggle to adapt activities appropriately across such a wide proficiency band. With regards to tertiary-level teaching though, some activities may appear initially simplistic. Thus, proper inclusion of academic content, critical-thinking/creative components or more cognitively demanding tasks would be required to elevate these tasks. When upscaled in these ways, then they may fulfil the cognitive and interactional expectations of university classrooms. A modest suggestion would be to include more explicit guidance on how to adapt these tasks for higher education, thereby further enhancing the diverse reach and usefulness of an already invaluable teacher's handbook.

THE REVIEWER

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