

EXPERIENCE E-N-G-L-I-S-H

I've come up with the following acrostic using the letters in the word "ENGLISH" to summarize some of the "teaching tips" that I've found helpful in my own English classroom. Hopefully, many should be applicable in other language teaching situations as well.



when learning about shopping, students pair up and one plays the role of customer and the other the role of salesclerk; or when teaching Nursing English, I'll ask one student to play the role of patient, and

another to play the role of nurse. It's important to use realia whenever possible as well. I try to use real menus when teaching about eating out in restaurants, real money when learning about currency, and bring in real newspapers when talking about current events. Field trips can also be a valuable learning tool. Take your students to the Macau Museum and have them act as tour guides as they talk about the displays using English. Go for lunch at a local teahouse and discuss the various kinds of food available and ask them to explain local eating customs. Every language is tied closely to its culture(s). Therefore cultural awareness is important in order to avoid communication problems or misunderstandings. As an American teacher, I try to help my students understand my culture as a way of helping them to use English more effectively. We often discuss the differences between Chinese and Western culture. I usually invite each class of students to my home, both as a way of getting to know them better, and to let them see for themselves how a person from a different culture lives.

– EXPERIENCE English

For any language to be learned effectively, it must be experienced. Most primary and secondary schools in Macau have very large classes...which means that English classes are usually little more than silent students listening quietly to the teacher lecture. The more *interactive* you make your lessons, the better your students will be at absorbing and remembering what they're learning. I have found the use of games, songs, role-plays, discussions, and debates to be especially useful. There are numerous resources available with ideas for English games and other activities for varying levels. I like to play CD's of English songs and have the students sing along...or play a song and have the students fill in the blanks on a worksheet with the lyrics. Role-plays are not only fun, but provide an opportunity for students to **experience** the situation. For example,

I think it's also important for students to be exposed to natural English speech. Of course, the ideal in any language situation is for the teacher to be a native speaker. But this is not always possible. Let's face it, there aren't a lot of native English speakers in Macau! But that doesn't mean you can't still model correct pronunciation and stress. Look words up in the dictionary if you have to! Natural intonation, rhythm, and speed are also very important. Of course, when teaching beginners, you should speak more slowly...but gradually increase the speed as your students progress. Always speaking too unnaturally slowly distorts the sound, and it limits the ability of your students to understand native speakers. I have also found it very useful to include at least some phonics as part of many of my classes. Most students in Macau learn English the same way they learned Chinese...by memorizing vocabulary word by word (character by character). It's important to teach at least the basics of English phonics so that students can begin sounding out unfamiliar words for themselves instead of looking each and every word up in the dictionary. One last word of caution: don't use English "baby talk". You can speak simply but still use complete sentences with correct grammar. Students will mimic what they hear, so it's important that they hear GOOD spoken English.

AI – Grammar is Secondary

I have been surprised (and humbled) to learn



that most Macau students know much more English grammar than I do! That is, they know much more about grammar RULES. However good intentioned, focusing on grammar when teaching English is like memorizing the instruction manual for your car without ever actually getting behind the wheel to DRIVE it! Obviously, I'm not advocating that you stop teaching grammar altogether, just that you limit the amount of time spent drilling your students on grammar rules. Encouraging your students to both LISTEN to and SPEAK more English is a much more effective way for them to learn grammar. They will pick it up naturally as they USE the language. I have had countless students in my classes who knew the English grammar rules inside and out, but who, once they opened their mouths were unable to string words together to make even one grammatically correct sentence! As they hear you speak good English, they will naturally "incorporate" the rules without even being aware that they are doing so. One other important tip – don't overcorrect their mistakes! Unless you're covering a particular point of grammar that lesson, it's better to let them talk than to constantly interrupt to correct their grammar mistakes. One good method is simply to REPEAT back to them the sentence with the error, using correct grammar.

AI – Listen to English

Language learning usually progresses from listening to speaking. That is, we can understand what's being said long before we can produce

meaningful speech. Just think of how many people you know who can understand, but not speak Mandarin...or how much better most students are at listening than speaking. Two of the best ways to learn English are to READ and LISTEN to it! So in addition to the speaking you do in class, use as many auditory aids as you can in your teaching. Encourage your students to watch English TV, videos, and movies, and to listen to English tapes. It's also helpful to have them READ ALOUD when they are reading English books, newspapers, or magazines. Even hearing their own voices will help them improve their English. Try it yourself!

J – INVOLVEMENT Leads to Improvement

Language learning isn't a spectator sport. You must be personally involved in playing the game! That's why it's important for everyone in your classes to PARTICIPATE in the classroom activities. Encourage student to ask questions when they don't understand. Make sure you give each student a chance to speak. Make use of small groups to facilitate this, and limit the size of the groups to 6-8 students. Students need to know that they have a unique contribution to make to the success of the class. Encourage participation from each and every one of them.

S – Speak Out!

As mentioned above, it is my sincere belief that

to learn a language one must USE that language. As a teacher, it's important for you to create a learning environment where students feel relaxed and safe. Encourage them to TRY. Let them know that mistakes should not only be accepted, but expected. Mistakes provide an opportunity to LEARN. If students know that they won't be ridiculed or embarrassed by the teacher when they make mistakes, they will be more likely to take a risk the next time. Give lots of praise and encouragement to your students. Do whatever you can to create a positive environment where students feel comfortable. If you do, you'll see them begin to open themselves up AND open their mouths!

H – Have fun!

Finally, have fun! If you enjoy teaching as much as I do, that shouldn't be hard. Just remember, learning should be fun for your students. Be creative, try new things, use variety when it comes to your teaching methods and teaching tools. Smile! Use your students' names as often as possible. I've had people in the office of the Centre where I work tell me that they heard so much laughter



coming from the classroom that they wondered if I was really TEACHING anything! You CAN have both! If you open yourself up to your students and let them see you as a person as well as a teacher, then your STUDENTS can

also become your FRIENDS. Enjoy your students! Enjoy your work! Be the best teacher you can be, and HAVE FUN!

Joy Turner