

1 Funny starts

Everyone would probably agree that laughter improves the quality of life. We've got to laugh, haven't we? This section suggests ideas about how to introduce the topic of laughter with lots of light-hearted activities, including warmers, name games, number games and action games.

1.1 Wink first

<i>Summary:</i>	Students learn each other's names by attention-catching winks.
<i>Level:</i>	beginner – pre-intermediate
<i>Time:</i>	5–10 minutes
<i>Preparation:</i>	none

Procedure

- 1 Students stand in a big circle. Everybody lets their eyes wander over their classmates. When eyes meet, students wink at each other. They then go up to each other, shake hands and say:
Student A (*Chandra*): Hello, my name's Chandra.
Student B (*Marek*): Hi, I'm Marek.
Students all listen to the introductions and try to remember as many names as they can.
- 2 When everybody has introduced themselves to several partners, the game continues but, instead of introducing themselves, students greet each other:
Student A (*Chandra*): Hello, Marek.
Student B (*Marek*): Hi, Chandra.

1.2 Funny names

Summary: Students adopt a funny word as their name.
Level: beginner – pre-intermediate
Time: 5–10 minutes
Preparation: none

Procedure

- 1 Each student writes down a couple of English words they find funny because of their sound or meaning, or both.
- 2 Everyone adopts as their name one of the funny words they have written down, and mills round, introducing themselves. For example:
 Student A: Hi! My name's Slurp.
 Student B: Hello! My name's Good-for-nothing.
 Students try to remember as many 'names' as they can.
- 3 Follow the same procedure as in *Step 1*, but this time everybody should greet their partners by their adopted names. For example, if Student C's choice is *cupboard* and Student D's is *tomato juice*, they greet each other like this:
 Student C: Hello, Tomato Juice.
 Student D: Hi, Cupboard.

Follow-ups

- 1 Students spend a little time thinking about why they find their 'name' funny. You may begin by demonstrating your own choice, like this:
 I love the word *pitta*. Do you know what it is? Well, pitta is a kind of bread. It's flat, and you can open it like a bag and put juicy stuff in it. Yum, yum. I also like this word because it sounds just like my first name: *pitta* – *Peter*.
 Now give students the chance to explain their preferences.
- 2 For homework, students could turn their description into a silly poem. In class, volunteers read out their poem for the whole class to enjoy. Here is a four-liner for my favourite word:
 'What is it you like to eat?
 Tell us, tell us, Peter!
 Soup or rice or cake or meat?
 'Nothing more than pitta!'

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1.3 Hi, Harry!

Summary:	This chain activity requires a great deal of concentration.
Level:	beginner – pre-intermediate
Time:	10–15 minutes
Preparation:	Bring to class small coloured sticky circles.

Procedure

- Explain that this is a unique class, because everybody has the same first name: *Harry*. Students should get used to their new name by playing a silly game, which goes like this:

Student A:	Hi, Harry.
Student B:	Yes, Harry?
Student A (<i>pointing to Student C</i>):	Tell Harry.
Student B (<i>greeting Student C</i>):	Hi, Harry.
Student C:	Yes, Harry?
Student B (<i>pointing to Student D</i>):	Tell Harry.
Student C (<i>greeting Student D</i>):	Hi, Harry.
Student D:	Yes, Harry? etc.
- If someone makes a mistake, their name will change to *One Spot* – thus called because the teacher will stick some kind of stigma on their forehead. So if, for example, Student D above says *Hi, Harry* (instead of *Yes, Harry?*), she/he gets a spot on her/his forehead, and the game will continue like this:

Student C:	Hi, One Spot.
Student D:	Yes, Harry?
Student C (<i>pointing to Student E</i>):	Tell Harry.
Student D (<i>greeting Student E</i>):	Hi, Harry.
Student E:	Yes, One Spot? etc.
- Should someone make a second mistake, they get another spot, and so their name will become *Two Spot* (subsequently *Three Spot*, *Four Spot*), and so on until the whole class goes mad ...

1.4 Buzz

Summary:	This counting game is not as simple as it looks.
Level:	beginner – pre-intermediate
Time:	5–10 minutes
Preparation:	none

Procedure

- 1 Ask the class what makes a buzz-buzz sound. And a zubb-zubb sound (*buzz buzz* backwards)? Anyhow, the name of this game is 'Buzz'.
Answers: a bee and a bee flying backwards.
- 2 Choose a taboo number, *five*, for example. Everybody stands up. The first student begins by saying *one*, the second *two*, the third *three*, the fourth *four*, but the fifth student, instead of *five*, says *buzz*. All multiples of five (10, 15, 20, 25 ...) say *buzz* as well. The counting proceeds as rapidly as possible. If someone should forget about buzzing when required, they sit down and drop out of the game. The last remaining student is the winner.

Variations

- 1 A more complicated variation of 'Buzz' is 'Buzz-Bizz'. The rules are the same as those for 'Buzz', except that there are two taboo numbers here. For example, *buzz* is substituted for *five* (and its multiples) and *bizz* for *three* (and its multiples plus all other numbers which contain a 3, such as 13). In addition, when it is the turn for someone to say, for example, *fifteen*, they should say *buzz-bizz*, as both *five* and *three* are involved.
- 2 Instead of saying *buzz*, students may do an agreed-upon action, such as clap their hands, tap on the desk, twiddle their thumbs, stamp their feet, etc.

1.5 Mr Roy's watch

<i>Summary:</i>	Apart from the fun, this game practises intonation.
<i>Level:</i>	beginner – pre-intermediate
<i>Time:</i>	10–15 minutes
<i>Preparation:</i>	none

Procedure

- 1 Read out this series of exchanges:

Teacher:	Mr Roy has lost his watch and number 8 has found it.
Number 8:	Who? Me, number 1?
Teacher:	Yes, you, number 8.
Number 8:	Not me, number 1.
Teacher:	Then who, number 8?

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*Laughing Matters*

Number 8:	Number 11, number 1.
Number 11:	Who? Me, number 8?
Number 8:	Yes, you, number 11.
Number 11:	Not me, number 8.
Number 8:	Then who, number 11?
Number 11:	Number 5, number 8 ...

Check whether students have understood the rules of the game.

- 2 Read out the conversation again and get everyone to repeat it sentence by sentence. Pay special attention to correct intonation!
- 3 The class stand or sit in a circle. While keeping Number 1 for yourself, give each student a number from Number 2 upwards. Do a few dummy runs, so that everyone gets the hang of it. Then play the game 'in earnest'. It is sure to cause lots of slips – and laughter.

Variation

If you find that numbers are too impersonal, you may use the students' actual names or symbolic ones like names of colours, or fruits, or whatever else they would like to adopt for the period of the game.

1.6 O'Grady says

<i>Summary:</i>	Students perform actions – or refuse to do so.
<i>Level:</i>	beginner – pre-intermediate
<i>Time:</i>	10–15 minutes
<i>Preparation:</i>	none

Procedure

- 1 Explain that you will need a volunteer to come forward and issue a series of simple commands. The class will only obey if the commands are preceded by the clause *O'Grady says*, but will stay put if *O'Grady says* is not forthcoming. For example, if the command is *O'Grady says, 'Rub your nose'*, everybody rubs their nose, but if it is merely *Rub your nose*, nobody should lift a finger.
- 2 Before the game starts, everybody should jot down in their notebook ten simple commands which are easy to perform in the classroom. You may help those who get stuck with these commands. Depending on the language level of the class, here are two lists:

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<i>beginner</i>		
cover your face	cross your arms	cross your legs
fall asleep	lift your left hand	lift your right hand
make a face	open your mouth	pull your ear
pull your hair	put your head on the desk	say 'bow-wow'
sing a song	sit down	stand up
turn around	turn left	turn right
<i>pre-intermediate</i>		
clap your hands	clear your throat	click your tongue
clutch your fist	doodle in your notebook	give out a shout
make a bow	roll your eyes	rub your nose
scratch your chin	stamp your feet	stick out your tongue
tap on the desk	touch your right elbow	twiddle your thumbs
wink twice	yawn	

- 3 A volunteer comes to the front of the class and reads out their list of commands, indiscriminately using and leaving out *O'Grady says*. When the first person has run out of commands, someone else takes over – and so on, until all the students have had their turn.

Variation

The volunteer performs the action even when omitting *O'Grady says*, in order to confuse classmates. In another version, she/he performs something other than what she/he is actually saying.

1.7 Five laughs

<i>Summary:</i>	Students describe different laughs.
<i>Level:</i>	beginner – pre-intermediate
<i>Time:</i>	10–15 minutes
<i>Preparation:</i>	Ask friends and colleagues to produce five or six laughs and record them on tape.

Procedure

- 1 Students listen to the five people laughing on the recording. Which of them make the class laugh? Which is the funniest?
- 2 Put these adjectives in a list on the board. Help students understand their meaning.

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bitter	cruel	hearty	hysterical	ironical	loud
nervous	polite	scary	silly	soft	unnatural

Students get into pairs and listen to the recording again. Stop after each laugh to give students enough time to choose and write down in their notebook the adjective which suits each laugh best.

- Individual students offer their choice of adjectives laugh by laugh. Record votes for each objective on the board. In the end, summarise the results.

Variation

In more advanced classes, the list above may be supplemented with verbs such as:

cackle	chortle	chuckle	giggle	guffaw	snigger	titter
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Can students describe any of the recorded laughs with the verbs of laughter on the board? Can they name situations where giggling, tittering, etc. would be appropriate?

Follow-up

Should you have a bold class, volunteers may be willing to produce a laugh for their classmates to examine. Before they act it out, they should make up their minds about the kind of laughter they want to produce. Having listened to the laugh, the others describe it with suitable adjectives. Does the 'laugher' agree with the judgments?

1.8 The laugh epidemic

<i>Summary:</i>	Students attempt to make each other laugh.
<i>Level:</i>	pre-intermediate – intermediate
<i>Time:</i>	10–15 minutes
<i>Preparation:</i>	none

Procedure

- Students get into pairs. Explain that Partner A in each pair is very serious, determined not to laugh; Partner B is the 'funny guy'. Pairs stand up and face each other. Partner B has one minute to make Partner A laugh by grinning, gesturing, singing a silly song, telling

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- a joke, reciting a nonsense rhyme, imitating someone they both know – everything is permitted! Partner A tries to keep a straight face throughout, but if she/he breaks into laughter, Partner B gets a point. At this point they exchange roles.
- 2 After a few minutes, stop the activity and ask how many times Partner B managed to get Partner A to laugh. What tricks triggered the heartiest laughter?
 - 3 After students have exchanged roles, they analyse the situation as in *Step 2*.
 - 4 Volunteers entertain the whole class with the trick that worked best on their partner.

Variation

Everyone chooses to be either a ‘serious guy’ or a ‘funny guy’, and then behaves accordingly. Students stand up and begin to circulate. Any funny guy may stop any serious guy and do their best to make them laugh. When the serious guy eventually breaks into laughter, she/he has caught the laugh epidemic, as it were, and has also turned into a funny guy. Thus as the number of funny guys increases, so the number of serious guys diminishes. When there are only a few serious guys left in the class, they will be surrounded by several funny guys, all collaborating to pass on the disease. The activity ends when everybody has caught the laugh epidemic (or when you have run out of patience).

Acknowledgment

The main activity is based on an idea by Griffiths and Keohane in *Personalizing Language Learning* (Cambridge University Press).

1.9 Catch them laughing!

<i>Summary:</i>	Each student observes a classmate and then describes her/his laughing habits.
<i>Level:</i>	intermediate – post-intermediate
<i>Time:</i>	20–25 minutes (in class)
<i>Preparation:</i>	none

Procedure

- 1 Ask students these questions:
 - Do you laugh every day?
 - What kind of things in particular make you laugh?

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- Who in the class is best at making others laugh?
 - Who has the nicest/heartiest laugh?
- 2 Launch a ‘laughing project’. Everyone observes a classmate of their choice for one month. What are her/his laughing habits? In what situations, how often and how does she/he usually laugh? When the month is up, each observer writes a short essay on their experience without supplying the name of the person under surveillance. Students then take it in turns to read out their essay, with the others trying to guess the person observed.

1.10 Laugh till you drop

Summary: Students read a text on a bizarre laughing contest.
Level: intermediate – post-intermediate
Time: 10–15 minutes
Preparation: Make a copy of Box 1 and Box 2 for each student.
 (You could make a transparency of Box 1.)

Procedure

- 1 Students look at the woman in the picture and guess why she is laughing.



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- 2 The answer is provided in this extract. While students read the text, help with any unknown vocabulary.

BOX 2

Linda Lutz is laughing because she has just discovered she is the winner of the 'Laughing Contest', an annual competition in San Diego, California. Linda won two prizes simultaneously. One for the longest continuous laugh (she has been laughing for four hours and one minute) and the other for the most hilarious laugh. For her stunt, she received prizes and a free pass to the San Diego Zoo.

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- 3 Ask these questions:
- Did you guess right?
 - How do you think Linda was able to laugh for more than four hours?
 - Would you be able to beat her record?
 - Could such a contest take place in your country too, or is it typically American? Why?

Acknowledgment

This is based on an activity from *When in Britain* by Nolasco and Medgyes (Oxford University Press).

1.11 Laughing quotes

Summary: Students discuss witty sayings on laughter.
Level: intermediate – post-intermediate
Time: 15–20 minutes
Preparation: Make a copy of Box 3 for each student. Make a transparency or copy of Box 4.

Procedure

- 1 Distribute copies of Box 3. As students read the quotations, provide help with any unfamiliar words.