

Presentation techniques

We are now in a position to look at some of the techniques that can be used in presentations. New grammatical items are often the focus of the lesson and, therefore, need to be presented in a meaningful way to the learners. First of all, then, we will look at the presentation of grammatical items.

To begin, look at these two presentations; decide what *you* think each approach says about the teacher and decide which you think is the best, and why.

Teacher A

T: This morning we will look at conditional tenses. In particular, we'll look at the use of *if + past + conditional*. We use these tenses when we are talking about an 'unreal' situation. What I mean by this is that we talk about something that we don't expect to happen. Look at this example:

If the President came to my home, I would give him tea.

The 'condition' is found in the first part of the sentence and the resulting action or event is found in the second half of the sentence. But, the important thing is that we don't know whether or not the first condition will actually take place. In other words, the President may or may not come to my house; we don't know. The first tense is in the past – *came* - while the second uses the modal *would* to form the conditional tense *would give*. Now look at these two examples that I've written on the board.

If a thief came to my house, I would chase him away.

If I won a lot of money, I would buy a new car.

Do you understand? Good. Who would like to try and make up some sentences in the same way?

Teacher B

After explaining any new vocabulary and giving the background to the story, the teacher hands out worksheets with the lyrics to *If I were a rich man* from *Fiddler on the Roof*. However, there are some gaps where the verb phrases should be. The teacher explains that she wants the learners to fill in the gaps while listening to the song. She plays the song twice and later responds to the students' suggestions and gives feedback on the correct answers. She then asks the learners questions to elicit the meaning of the structure (the second conditional – *if I were a rich man, I'd have*), for example:

Is the man rich?
Does he have a nice, big house?
Does he want one?
.... and so on.

Comments on the teachers:

Teacher A: there is no interaction with the students and no attempt to involve them actively in the learning process. Such a presentation is unlikely to be successful with most learners. As language teachers, we need to be able to present the new structures to the students in a way that they can understand and relate to their own experiences of life. The students do not need to learn a mass of factual detail about the entire grammatical system, but they do need to learn to use the language in a meaningful way. Simple language is needed in the explanations. In some cases, teachers use language that is relatively advanced and the reality is that if the students could cope with the complex language of the explanation, they would not need to be taught how to use the conditional in the first place.

Teacher B: decides to begin the presentation with a song – an interesting way of gaining the learners' attention and motivating them to involve themselves in the lesson. The worksheet creates a demanding but entertaining task which focuses their minds on the structure to be learned – there are the added bonuses of a chance to recycle the Present Perfect structure (*have you ever?*) and a listening comprehension exercise. After the gap-filling answers have been checked, the teacher makes no attempt to explain the new structure, but chooses to check the learners' understanding directly by asking them factual questions. This presentation, although longer than the others, will probably be more memorable and be a more effective aid to the comprehension of what is a difficult grammatical structure.

There is more than one way to present a new language structure, but the most important thing is to make the presentation meaningful and memorable. We will be examining three ways which are often used in the TESOL/TEFL classroom: explanation, elicitation and discovery learning.