

CLASS ACTS



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THE NEWSLETTER FOR TEACHERS WHO CHOOSE TEXTS
AS CAREFULLY AS THEY CHOOSE FRIENDS.

The **FAQ**

In order to get the most out of students in large class settings, there are a number of issues which need to be addressed. Not least is 'Why you are there?' This FAQ doesn't answer that one, but it may help many teachers new to student-centered, cooperative-learning.

What is an information gap?

An information gap activity is basically a situation where each student in a pair (A & B) are on different pages of their text. A typical information gap would be where student A has some information and questions on her page and student B has different information and questions on his page. The answers to student A's questions are found on student B's page and *vice versa*. Hence the term 'information gap'.

Why are information gaps useful?

Information gap activities are useful in a number of ways.

First, they focus the student's attention on the information they are studying on their page. After you have directed your students to the proper page, they must study the information in order to be able to work with their partner in the pair. This information could be, illustrations with captions, text, text which first needs to be matched to graphics, etc. Whatever it is, it will focus the student on her page. While

the student is head down figuring out what goes where or what words and sentences mean, the teacher will be walking around the class helping those who ask for help, and trying to help those who are afraid to ask for help, yet nevertheless need it. When helping students in this way it's a good idea to get down to the student's level. i.e. don't tower over the students, but actually get your head lower than theirs. If you do this your students will come to see that you are there to help and many of them will use you more effectively. It also helps you to build a good teacher/student relationship.

Second, they give students a reason for asking each other questions.

Because students are on different pages and have different information they have to ask their partner in order to get the answers to their questions. Each student wants to be able to answer his partner's questions and thus has a 'real' reason for speaking.

Third, they give students a 'real' listening and speaking activity.

continued on back page

Great hospitality! Thanks.

I was in Nagoya on 22nd May for a small presentation. Thanks for your hospitality Gaye. Sorry I missed the Salsa dance session. Next time I'll get me hips moving. I just wanted to say that, as usual I got as much, if not more, out of the presentation/workshop than I gave. One point I particularly remember you making is, having all the A students go to one corner of the room, B's to another corner and the Cs and Ds to the other two corners. This then allows you to go in and teach all the As at the same time. Then move on to the Bs, Cs, and Ds.

Paul Shimizu

Information

Gap

Activity

THIS ISSUE'S CENTREFOLD IS a four-person information gap designed to demonstrate the value of having students using different but related language at the same time.

Have students sit in groups of four with A facing B and C facing D. Give each A and each C student, the page with the A&C sections, and the B&D sections to each B and D student. In this way, you can go over the two stages of the activity with all your students at once. Activity 1 is a labeling activity. Direct your students to the **word bank** and have them label their object. Write some help language up on the blackboard. 'How do you pronounce this?'; 'What does ... mean?'; 'How do you say ... in Japanese?'; etc.

When students have finished, move on to activity 2. Tell the students they are going to fill in the missing information by using the mini-dialogue at the bottom of the page. Start all your students at the same time. When the A&B students have finished they become C&D, and vice versa. While students are involved in the info-gap activity, it is important to go around the class helping, encouraging and generally monitoring them.

You may want to have students extend this activity into a more challenging format by having the A&C students NOT looking at their text while answering B&D's questions. Then reverse roles. Finally have all students see what questions and answers they can remember by having all students NOT use their text at all. Good Luck

...comes around!

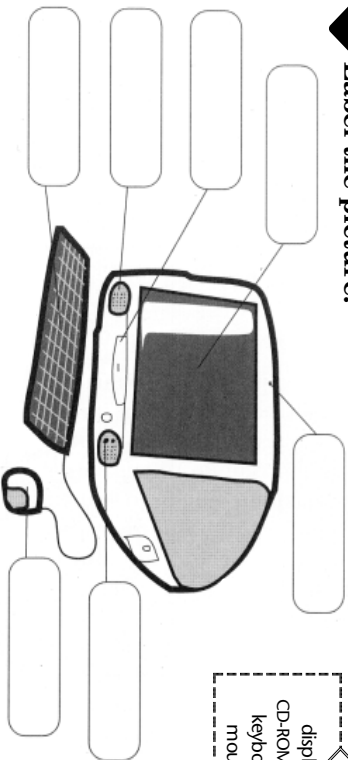
Wow! What a revelation this year has been. Have the students actually got better? Have we got better? Maybe it's a combination of both!

I think, in all honesty, it must be a combination of both. However I do feel that many students have begun to realise that they cannot simply be fed knowledge, information, language or whatever, without putting some effort in themselves. I'm increasingly amazed and impressed by students who willingly raise their hands to ask a question and make a total "fool" of themselves, then do the same thing the following week. I applaud them, encourage them and am warmed by their courage. There are, of course, a now sizable and increasing number of students who are raising their hands and asking perfectly correct questions.

Another aspect is that I, as a teacher, have become much more positive towards my students and the learning process which I'm trying to put them through. Our students are human beings and have all the senses and feelings that go with being a human being. If you become angry, patronizing, ridiculing, *lasse faire*, lazy and generally unhelpful towards your students, they will respond accordingly. That really goes without saying.

What we often forget however is just how powerful being earnest, positive and cheerful can be. It seems to me that students quickly realise when you show that you are in the same boat as they, and that you are there to help them. For my part, that behaviour has only been met with equally positive, well motivated students, who get pleasure from the learning process. It also has given me greater control in my classes. I seem to be able to get my students to do anything I want (within reason, of course). The point is that such a level of trust has been established that I am now really able to do my job effectively, and enjoy doing it, as well.

Label the picture.



- Word Bank**
- display
 - CD-ROM drive
 - keyboard
 - mouse
 - speakers
 - microphone
 - headphone jack

You and your friend saw the same computer at different shops. You both took notes, but each missed some information.



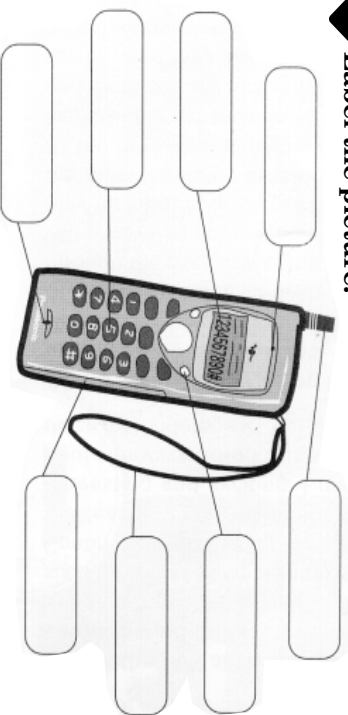
Ask your partner.

My Computer

CPU
Speed *MHz (Megahertz)*
RAM *96 MB (Megabytes)*
Hard disk *GB (Gigabytes)*
CD-ROM
Colors *strawberry, blackberry, tangerine, banana, grape*
Display
Sound *microphone; built-in / speakers*
Accessories
*Price (HWD)** *158,000 yen / 380 / 440 (mm)*
 * H = height (How high...?), W = width (How wide...?), D = depth (How deep...?)

How large is the hard disk?
 What accessories does it have?
 How high is it?
 How fast is the CPU?
 How fast is the CPU?
 How large is the display?
 How fast is the CD-ROM?
 What kind of speakers does it have?

Label the picture.



- Word Bank**
- antenna
 - battery
 - number display
 - speaker
 - key pad
 - carry strap
 - microphone
 - power button

You and your friend saw the same cell phone at different shops. You both took notes, but each missed some information.



Ask your partner.

My Satellite Telephone

Weight *76 grams*
*Size (LWT)** *138 / (mm)*
Colors
Battery life *standby mode: hours, talk mode: 6 hours*
Memory *500 names*
Redial
Features *custom rings, vibration alert, calculator*
Cost
Monthly fee *5,600 yen*
Calling charge ... *peak: 30yen/minute, offpeak: yen/minute*
 * L = length (How long...?), W = width (How wide...?), T = thickness (How thick...?)

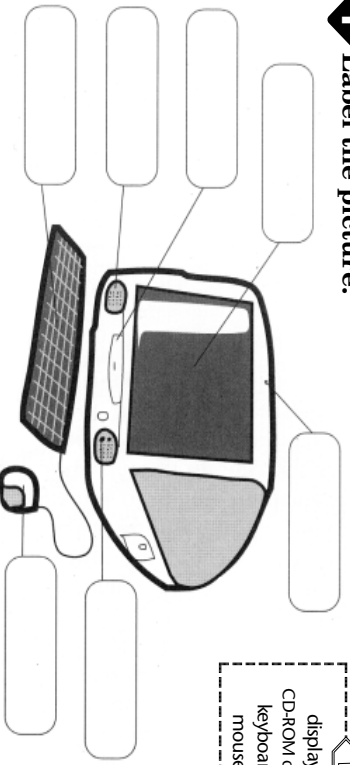
How much does it cost?
 How long is it?
 How many numbers does it redial?
 How many numbers does it redial?
 How much is the offpeak calling charge?
 How long does the battery last in standby mode?

PERSON 4

Information Gap

Activity A

1 Label the picture.



- Word Bank**
- display
 - speakers
 - CD-ROM drive
 - microphone
 - keyboard
 - headphone jack
 - mouse

You and your friend saw the same computer at different shops. You both took notes, but each missed some information.

2 Ask your partner.



zMic Computer

CPU *Power G4*

Speed *477 MHz (Megahertz)*

RAM *MB (Megabytes)*

Hard disk *6 GB (Gigabytes)*

CD-ROM *24 speed*

Cobans -----

Display *15 inch*

Sound *microphone: / speakers: built-in (stereo)*

Accessories *Keyboard, mouse, modem*

Price *year*

*Size (HWD)** *(mm) 395 /*

* H = height (How high...?), W = width (How wide...?), D = depth (How deep...?)

How deep is it?

How much does it cost?

How much RAM does it have?

What kind of microphone does it have?

megabytes

How wide is it?

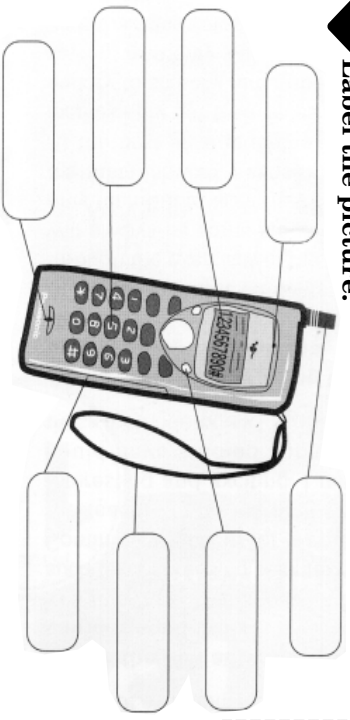
What colors does it come in?

PERSON 4

Information Gap

Activity C

1 Label the picture.



- Word Bank**
- antenna
 - battery
 - number display
 - speaker
 - key pad
 - carry strap
 - microphone
 - power button

You and your friend saw the same cell phone at different shops. You both took notes, but each missed some information.

2 Ask your partner.



X1T Satellite Telephone

Weight -----

*Size (LWT)** *122 / 179 (mm)*

Cobans *pearl white, silver blue, midnight black*

Battery life *standby mode: 800 hours, talk mode: hours*

Memory -----

Redial *20 numbers*

Features -----

Cost *33,000*

Monthly fee -----

Calling charge *peak: / year/minute, offpeak: 20 /year/minute*

* L = length (How long...?), W = width (How wide...?), T = thickness (How thick...?)

How long does the battery last in talk mode?

How heavy is it?

grams

How long is its memory?

minutes

How much is the peak calling charge?

How much is the monthly fee?

Since the questions being asked by student A are not on student B's page then student B must actually hear the question and be able to assimilate that question in order to respond. Student B must have also studied her page in order to be able to answer. When B answers the question A must listen to the answer. And like B, must assimilate the information aurally in order to be able to write down the answer. This may well also lead to students using 'empowerment language' such as 'Pardon?' or 'How do you spell ?' or 'Please speak more slowly.' etc.

Finally, they involve students in an activity with their peers as opposed to a teacher-centred activity. When a class of students are involved in activities with each other, then students are more willing to participate. They are less likely to be nervous because they are all in the same boat. They will also be a lot less nervous because they are neither confronted by a foreign person nor an older person. When the whole class are engaged in activities with each other there tends to be quite a lot of noise, thus creating an atmosphere in which students can talk freely. Information gap activities also mean that students don't have the limelight on them in the same way as teacher centred activities. There is however a definite place for throwing the limelight on individual students. So this does not mean don't have teacher-centred activities. They are essential in the right place and at the right time.

What does cooperative learning mean?

To us, this means that students and teacher are in the learning/teaching situation together. It also means, that each student has to participate in order for the other students to complete the assignment. Therefore, the students will be working with each other either in pairs or in small groups or even in whole class activities such as a 'Find someone who ...' type of activity. With student-centred activities, students have to understand, that if they do not study properly then their partner and other members of their group will also, not be able to study properly. Thus students have greater control over their own education. Furthermore, students are more likely to participate fully in cooperative learning situations once they realise that they are responsible for each other's education.

Why four-person information gap activities?

Four-person activities, where students are working in pairs within the group, are particularly useful as each pair, ie. students A & B and students C & D, are engaged in similar information gap activities, but adjacent students are not using the same language. This enables them to fully focus on what they are doing. Thus the 'echo effect' is eliminated. Also when students A & B have finished their activity they switch pages with C & D and vice versa. This gives students a second crack at a similar/related dialogue, giving them further reinforcement of the target language.

Why are interviews/surveys/find someone who, activities useful?

These kind of activities are usually fun, lively, challenging and interesting (provided the material is appropriate and at the right level). They get students moving around the class talking to other students with whom they rarely talk. A kind of party atmosphere - giving a greater sense of real English- can easily be created. They give students the opportunity to develop their English speaking skills beyond the text.

Why do we tend not to teach much new vocabulary and grammar?

We feel that by and large the vast majority of students in this country do not have a handle on the most basic conversation structures of the English language. Time and time again students trip up on the English they were supposed to have learned in Junior High School. And time and time again we witness grammar structures and vocabulary that would be appropriate, had students actually learned/retained what was taught them, but is actually beyond the capabilities of most students.

Isn't the material too easy for my students?

No definitely not. We, all too often, rush students through texts and language at a rate that is way beyond their capabilities. See the previous answer.

Isn't the material too short for a years course?

Absolutely not. The text, in fact any text, never contains all the language you would like to teach your students. The teacher is there to supply the additional material appropriate for students and teacher alike. The teacher should also be challenging students through a variety of methodologies to get their faces right out of the text.

Isn't the material too long for a one semester course?

Yes, in fact it quite often is. As a teacher, you must use the parts of each unit that fit your time and needs, or select those units which you are most interested in, and which you think would interest your students the most and going into them in depth. Or a combination of both.

Aren't the MM activities just camouflaged drills?

Yes they are. That's what makes making such texts and using such texts interesting. Continually looking for ways which make the teaching and learning process more interesting and exciting. I really wished I could have studied Japanese through these methodologies.

Are students really using the language or just going through the exercises in the text?

At the lowest level, students are just going through the exercises in the text. And there will always be some students who can do only that. But at least they can get through the material with a sense of achievement. At the best level students will attempt to increasingly get their faces out of the text and try to actually remember what they are saying. And they will challenge each other with their texts closed to see how much of the material has been assimilated. Furthermore they will develop their language beyond the text. The teacher is vital in that students often need to be reminded to challenge themselves. i.e. the bottom line is that their language development is in their own hands.

Why do you waste time having students labeling pictures?

We feel that spoon feeding students is a kind of insult. The first step in teaching students is to get them to understand that their language development is as much their responsibility, if not more, as the teacher's. When a student is confronted with some words, phrases or sentences which have to be matched to some illustration, she is immediately challenged. A thought process is now under way, rather than simply remembering the names of things. Students who invest a little time in finding out something for themselves are much more likely to retain what they have learned and to feel rewarded through that process.



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