

English Compass A1 Teaching tips

The following pages are to be used as a help for all teachers: a reminder for those who have completed some formal teacher training, and a helping hand for those who haven't. Although many of the tips can be applied to any English-teaching situation, the examples given are all based on exercises found in *Compass A1*.


Section one: Classroom management

Coping with mixed ability classes

a Why is it important?

Although most students have taken some kind of grading test before being put into a class at the A1 level, there will still probably be a mixture of real and false beginners in your class. And you will find that some learners show more linguistic aptitude than others. It's up to you, the teacher, to provide a balanced learning environment so that the more able students are not bored and the less able students are not demotivated by being over-challenged.

b How can we do it best?

- It's of prime importance to create a supportive, learner-friendly environment in the classroom, where no one is shamed by making a mistake or asking for explanations. Friendliness, praise and patience are the key words!
- It's advisable to begin the course with the Starter Unit on page 15 of *Teaching Compass*. Not only because many of your students won't have the coursebook in the first lesson, but also it gives a gradual lead-in to Unit 1 and pre-teaches some of the structures in Unit 1. And it gives you the opportunity to assess your learners' abilities in a relatively non-demanding situation.
- As early as you can in the course – during the Starter Unit or Unit 1, monitor activities and note which students seem to be unsure of themselves or who need longer to complete the task given. And also note the false beginners in the class.
- When you ask a question to the class, or ask for feedback, try to choose a more able, confident student to give the first answer. This allows the less able students to digest the structure and to use the first answer as a pattern.
- Students are more secure when talking in pairs or groups. There is ample opportunity for pair and group work in each lesson – or opportunity to demand more of stronger students. Some tips for supporting weaker students and for making more demands on stronger students are given in the lesson notes in *Teaching Compass*.
- Make sure that students have a change of partner(s) so that they can benefit from speaking to students of different levels of ability. Not only the weaker students benefit from this, but also the stronger students as they will be required to give help, explain and support the weaker student. (See *Student interaction* below.)
- When students are required to listen or read for detail and you think it might be rather challenging, give pairs of students just two items to focus on. Ideas for this are given in the teaching notes.
- In the teaching notes in *Teaching Compass*, you will often see the 'helping hand' symbol:  and here you will find tips on how to simplify specific activities and give support to weaker members of the class.
- In the teaching notes in *Teaching Compass*, you will also find tips on how to extend activities for stronger students in the class.

Arranging student interaction

a Why is it important?

Group and pairwork change the pace of the lesson. They give students more opportunity to speak, and allow them to use English to communicate. It's important that students work with different partners to let them experience a wider range of competences, opinions, personalities and information. *Compass A1* gives instructions about which activities should be done as pair or group work, so you will find that your lessons have a good mixture of activity styles.

b How can we do it best?

Some possibilities for making pairs and groups are:

- Cut or tear pictures into two / three / four, depending on the group size you want, and give each student one piece. Students find the person / people to complete their picture.
- To practise various structures, make card pairs, e.g. (after Unit 7, Part B, exercise 3a) make pairs of cards with the infinitive and the irregular past form of the verb.
- Give students parts of words or sentences. They find the person / people to complete their word or sentence.

- Ask all students wearing black shoes / jeans / a watch to find someone not wearing black shoes / jeans / a watch.
- Ask all students who have a pet / grandchild / laptop / rucksack to stand up and find someone without.
- Ask students to make a line, with those whose birthdays are in January at one end and birthdays in December at the other. Split the line into the group sizes you want.

Giving instructions

a Why is it important?

Giving clear instructions not only helps the lesson to run smoothly because students understand what you want them to do, but it also gives students confidence because they can understand real English.

b How can we do it best?

- Read the instructions out from the coursebook. You will find that they are short and worded in suitable language for beginners.
- Speak slowly enough for everyone to understand you, and use simple gestures.
- Give instructions in stages, allowing students to complete one stage before giving them the next set of instructions.
- Don't say *This is tricky* before playing a listening exercise, as you will make students panic and think that they won't be able to understand the CD.
- Don't say *Do you understand?* as students will usually say *Yes*, whether they have understood or not.
- Rather than ask *Have you all (got a copy)?* Ask *Who hasn't (got a copy)?* So you can easily see who needs attention.
- Make sure your language is at their level, use grammatical structures and vocabulary which they know and will understand.
- Look at the students when you are talking to them. Don't give instructions while writing on the board.
- Use concept questions to check students have understood. (see below)

Concept questions

a Why are they important?

Asking questions allows you to see whether your students have understood either your instructions, a grammatical point or the meaning of vocabulary, and to revise them if they haven't. Asking concept questions can avoid long explanations.

b How do we do it best?

- Ask questions to check whether a student has understood a grammatical concept, e.g. Unit 2, Part A, has the minor grammar point *a/an*. To check whether students have understood when to use which word, you could ask: *What does 'office' begin with?* (O), *Can I say 'a office'?* (No), *Why not?* (Because before *a, e, i, o, u* we use *an*).
- Ask questions to check whether a student has understood the meaning of a word, e.g. in Unit 3, Part A, we have the word *nephew*. To check the meaning, you could ask: *Is a nephew a boy or a girl?* (A boy), *Is it my son?* (No), *Is it my brother's son?* (Yes).
- Ask questions to check whether students have understood instructions, e.g. when you have given your instructions for the game on page 131, you could ask: *Do you write about all categories of hotel?* (No, only one), *Do you write about a hotel that you know?* (No, you design a hotel), *Do you write ideas for all of the points?* (Yes).
- Ask questions to correct a student. If a student makes a mistake that can easily be corrected, you could ask a concept question, e.g. Unit 6, Part B, has the grammar point *much* and *many*. Student: **I eat much biscuits every day.* Teacher: *So you like biscuits. Can you count biscuits? Can you say one biscuit, two biscuits?* Student: *Yes. I mean many biscuits.*

Correction

a Why is it important?

Correction helps students to develop their language skills. It is important to decide when – and how – to correct. If students are doing a fluency exercise, it is not as important to correct as when they are doing an accuracy exercise (see speaking skill below). It is good to develop an atmosphere in which students help each other when they make mistakes.

b How do we do it best?

- Use your facial expressions or a gesture to show a mistake has been made.
- Use your fingers to count the words in the sentence and point to the word where there was a mistake, e.g. **His name are Jim.* Count the words on four fingers and point to the third finger.

- Repeat the sentence up until the mistake, e.g. Student: **Last summer I go on holiday.* Teacher: *Last summer I ...?* Student: *Last summer I went on holiday.*
- Don't correct mistakes which are above the students' level.
- Don't put students 'on the spot', especially shy or less confident ones.
- If students don't know how to correct their sentences themselves, ask if anyone else in the group can help them.
- When monitoring pair/group activities, make a note of common mistakes and deal with them after the activity has finished.
- Remember to praise your students whenever possible.

Timing

a Why is it important?

Keeping to the time in your lesson plan ensures that you get through the material you would like to. *Teaching Compass* has several features to help you plan your time well.

b How do we do it best?

- To help end an activity and bring groups or pairs back together, give a one minute warning and then ask everyone to stop.
- In *Teaching Compass*, approximate timing is given at the start of each exercise.
- In *Teaching Compass*, several exercises include the feature **If short of time**. If you see that one or two exercises have taken longer than you planned, you are given a tip on how to shorten one of the exercises later on, e.g. Unit 10, Part A, exercise 5a.
- In *Teaching Compass*, there are also **If time permits** added to some exercises. These are extensions to exercises if you have extra time before the end of the lesson, e.g. Unit 7, Part B, exercise 5.

And in the coursebook:

- The *Starter* exercises are designed so that you can begin the lesson even if not everyone has arrived. This means that you don't waste time waiting for students to come into class.

Flexizones:

- There's a *Flexizone* at the end of each unit Part. As the name suggests, these are flexible in that they are optional and can be used either in the lesson itself or at a later date as revision.
- The *Flexizone* activities in Part A take between five and ten minutes each. You can do one, both – or neither – depending on the time you have available and Part B has one longer *Flexizone* activity of approximately 15–20 mins.

Section two: Vocabulary and grammar

Dealing with vocabulary

• Pre-teaching

If you have a weak group, you may want to pre-teach – or remind them of – some vocabulary before they read or listen to a text. There are several ways of doing this: using synonyms, opposites, mime, explanations or drawings. If we look at the reading text on page 102, some examples of the above-mentioned methods are:

watch – draw a TV on the board and sit in front of it. Laugh from time to time.

average – give the synonyms, *normal*, *typical*

comfortable – give the explanation, a sofa is comfortable – but this classroom chair is *not* comfortable.

• Reacting spontaneously

If students ask you for the meaning of a word, resist the temptation to simply give the German translation. Instead, use the methods listed above to help the students to understand the meaning of the word.

• Learning vocabulary

If students ask how to learn vocabulary, direct them to the *Words and phrases* section on pages 194–212. Some students find it useful to put the words they want/need to learn on post-its around their home or workplace.

You can also emphasise the advantages of personalisation when they are choosing the vocabulary items they want to learn – they should learn the ones which are relevant to their person and situation.

Teaching grammar communicatively

In *Compass A1*, the grammar is always communicative and, where possible, personalised. It is taught and practised in the context of the unit. Grammar is presented in the *Grammar focus* box and controlled practice is given in the exercises which follow the presentation. Grammatical structures are interwoven with functional language and games; tasks and activities are provided to allow students to practise the structures they have learnt. An example of this is Unit 7, Part B, exercises 4, 5 and 6. Positive sentences in the past simple are presented in the context of past holidays. Both regular and irregular verbs are included and students are encouraged to use them in the exercises 4a, 4b, 5 and 6. In this way, they are interested in how to use a grammatical structure to communicate a message.

If your students ask you how to learn and practise certain grammatical items, refer them to the grammar section on pages 169–179. For each of the grammar items, there are many extra interactive exercises on the Internet, which can be accessed using this entry code: www.langenscheidt.de/englishcompass.

The way in which students can learn their grammar items can also be personalised. Encourage your students to use words and sentences which are relevant to them when practising a particular structure, rather than sentences which are decontextualised.

Section three: The four skills: The golden rules of ...

Reading

- In *Compass A1*, students are always given a task when they are asked to read something.
- The first task is usually to read for gist. Students are given a question which requires them to understand what the text is about. An example of this is in Unit 8, Part B, exercise 1a.
- Following tasks require reading for specific information. This involves students looking at the text more carefully. An example of this is in Unit 11, Part B, exercise 1b.
- Students don't have to understand each word when reading a text. Give them confidence by reassuring them that they need to understand the *sense* of the text rather than every individual word.

Writing

- Writing can be completely controlled (e.g. Unit 4, Part A, exercise 4a), partly controlled (e.g. Unit 4, Part B, exercise 4d) or freer (Unit 12, Part B, Compass characters).
- Writing can be done at all levels, from beginner to advanced. For example, in Unit 1, Part B, exercise 8 students complete a form; in the *Flexizone task* of Unit 2, Part B, students are asked to write their ideas for a new image of their town and also a slogan.
- If you decide to mark students' written work, don't correct mistakes which are above their level. For example, the students do not study the present perfect in *Compass A1*. When students are completing exercise 5b in Unit 8, Part B, you would not correct the following sentence *I already saw the film 'ET' three times* to *I have already seen the film 'ET' three times*.

Listening

- Listening is the skill which students often find the most difficult. You can take away some of their fear by reassuring them that they don't have to understand each word when listening to the CD.
- Never say *This is a difficult listening* to students as this might make them panic.
- In *Compass A1*, students are always given a task when they are asked to listen to something. The first task is usually to listen for what the listening text is about. An example of this is in Unit 12, Part B, exercise 1b. Following tasks require listening for specific information. An example of this is Unit 12, Part B, exercise 1c.
- If you have a weak class, divide them into groups and ask them to listen for different details.

Speaking

- Students can do a lot with little language. In *Compass A1*, we encourage students to speak from the very beginning of the course. Unit 1, Part A starts with easy exercises, such as introducing a partner.
- Some activities are to develop accuracy. Correct any mistakes which are at the students' level, or those which are the focus of the lesson. For example, in Unit 3, Part B, exercise 4b, you should correct students' mistakes involving *is/are*.
- Some activities are to develop communication, and the focus is on fluency, rather than accuracy. It can be counter-productive to correct students during such activities. Examples of this are the *Flexizone* exercises in Part B of Units 4 and 5.
- Don't correct mistakes above the students' level.