

**Gaining and  
Maintaining Learner  
Focus in English  
Language  
Classrooms:  
Rules of Engagement**

*Mary Lou McCloskey*

*Lydia Stack*

*TESOL 2011*

# Goals of the session:

- To help you promote active language learning in your classroom
- to increase engagement, motivation
  - to focus learning time
  - to increase enjoyment and satisfaction in learning and teaching
  - to enhance English language learning



# *Rules of Engagement*

# Brains and Learning - Theory

- **Positive emotions** open the RAS (Reticular Activating System) to enable input to reach the PFC (prefrontal cortex) (Sousa 2010)
- **The state of “Flow”** for optimal learning can be encouraged by appropriate challenges. (Csikszentmihalyi 1990)
- **Dopamine**, known as a learning-friendly neurotransmitter because it **promotes focus, motivation and memory**, but only during pleasant feelings. (Zull 2002)

# How do we increase Engagement?

By making learning part of everything, all the time, by incorporating routines, strategies, and activities that keep everyone alert and interested and thinking and doing, by making the content relevant and interesting to learners and – sometimes – by helping everyone laugh.



*It's not how we cover the curriculum,  
but how we uncover the curriculum.*

# Meet and Greet

- Learners walk around the room and mingle.
- They must find innovative ways to greet one another in English, e.g., nod, fist bump, “yo,” “hey dude” “how do you do?” etc.
- Teacher observes and notes creative responses to discuss after the activity.

# Use strategies to keep everyone thinking and prepared

## Fairness Can

- Put everyone's name on a stick.
- Put the sticks in a can
- Pull the sticks at random when you ask questions.

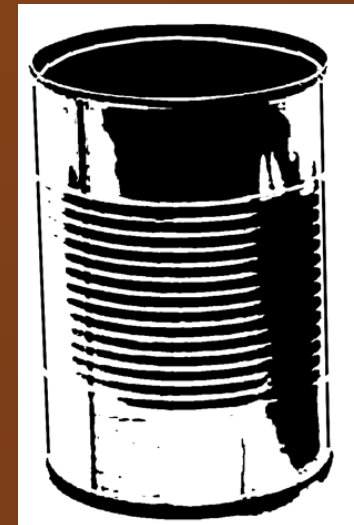
Marie

Mohammed

Javier

Kim

Tron





# Zero Noise Level Signal

1. Move to Zero Noise
2. If others around you haven't seen the signal, silently show it to them.



# Teach “Zero Noise and Full Attention” for instructions

Expect

- (a) zero noise,
- (b) complete attention, and
- (c) five eyeballs on you
  - the two on each learner’s face
  - two on the knees, and
  - one from the heart



Teach a signal for Instruction Time [Video](#)

# Teach “Zero Noise and Full Attention” for instructions

Teach SSLANT expectations:

- Smile,
- Sit up
- Listen
- Ask
- Nod when you understand
- Track the speaker.



# Entrance/Exit Ticket

- Learners answer a question or complete a short task related to the lesson in order to be able to enter/leave the room at the beginning/end of class

## *Examples*

- *Which direction is Baton Rouge?*
- *Name two birds of Louisiana.*
- *What is the plural of etouffee?*
- *Give me an example of a polite form for asking a question in class?*



# Use “warm-ups” Engage learners at the beginning of class

- **Handshake interview** ([video](#)): Teacher shakes hands with each student as they enter the room. Then he/she asks them a question about what they’re studying. If the student answers the question correctly, they enter the room. If not, they get back in line.
- **Find the Errors** Learners work in teams to find the errors, then report on what they found.

# Find the Errors

Have you ever plunked yourself down on a staff meeting where some of your colleagues were, for lack of a better phrase, not paying attention? Grading homework? Having private conversations? Texting?

As we know all too well, kids aren't a whole lot different than adults: If they aren't absorbed by what's going on, they'll find something else that interests them

Getting all your students focused, eager, and on task at the beginning of class is challenging enough. Equally problematic, once you have them lock in to the lesson, is watching them zone out. There's nothing unusual about that. After all, anyone who has to sit through a long routine -- including a teacher's presentation -- are bound to drift off at some point.

Still, unless you manage to capture and keep student's focus, whether at the beginning of or midway through class the engine of student learning that you are trying to drive simply is even in gear.

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# Incorporate movement into learning

## Hand Clapping

Develop hand clapping routines to teach sound patterns

- Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!
- Buzzards, and Pole cats and mules, oh my!
- Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, oh my!

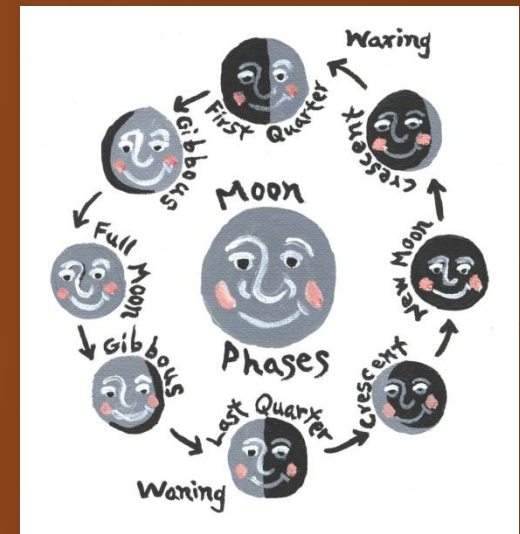


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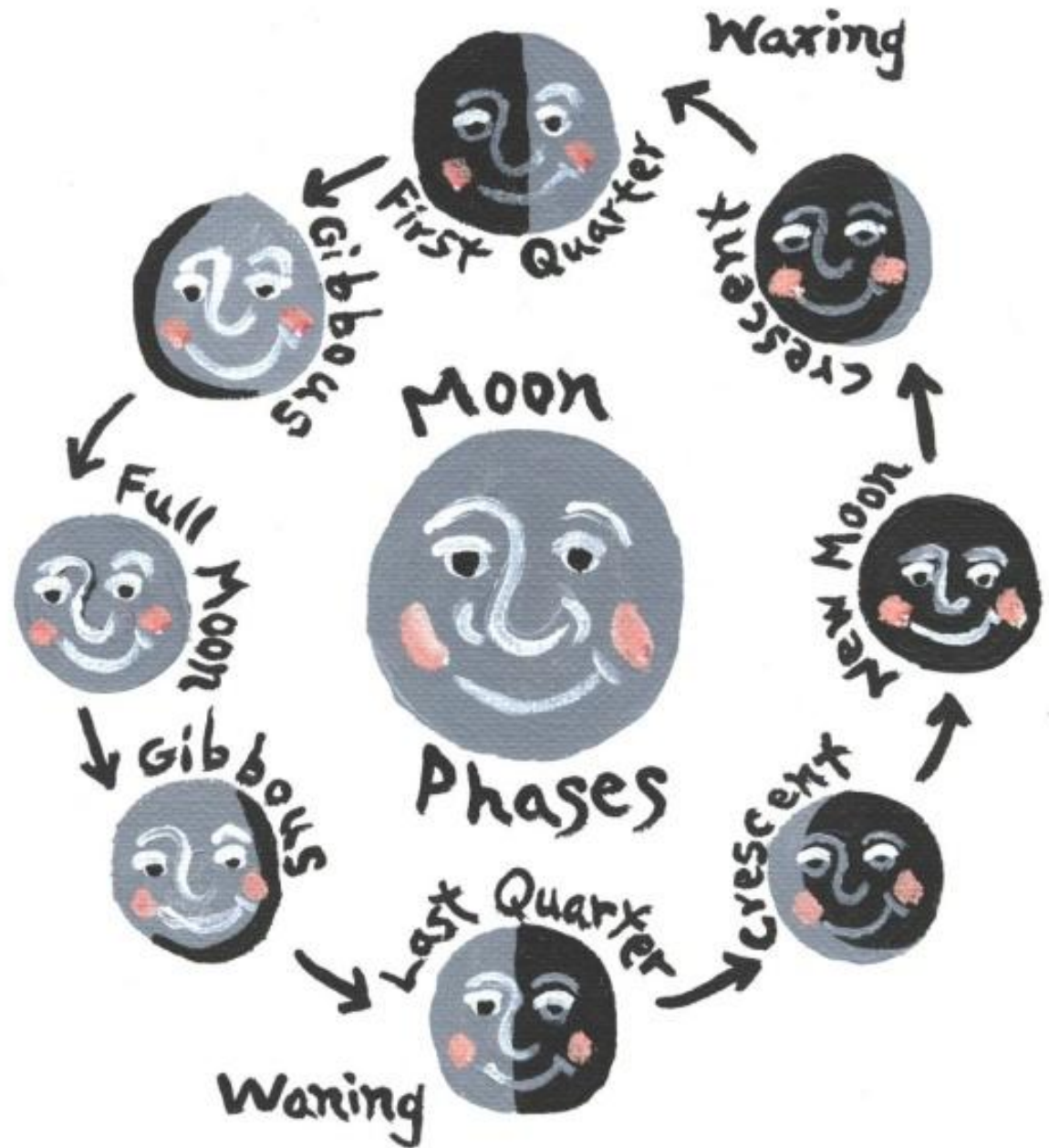
**Lineups:** Have learners line themselves up according to some criteria.

## **Example: Phases of the Moon**

- Pass out cards with labels, phases of the moon, and sentences.
- Instruct participants to line up showing the phases of the moon in order, including in each phase, picture and term.
- Show an answer key and check answers.



# Answer Key



Use **cooperative learning activities** that provide both group and individual accountability.

**Example: “Ask Three Before Me”**

If you have a question, ask three of your peers for the answer before you raise your hand to interrupt the teacher.

# Teach learners how to collaborate

Create a **Cooperative groups rubric**.

How should we behave during a discussion?



# Teach learners how to collaborate

Create a **Cooperative groups rubric**.

How should we behave during a discussion?

- Listen to one another
- Check our understanding
- Speak one at a time
- Connect what we say to the persons before
- Try to come to consensus, or explain our disagreements and understand the other side.

# Teach learners how to collaborate



## Fishbowl

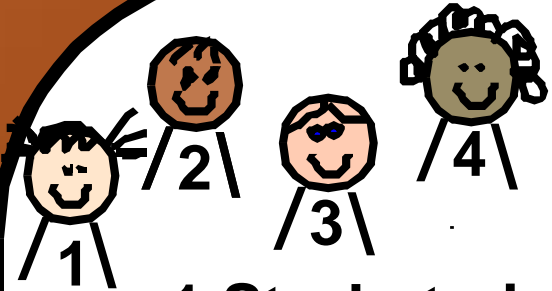
- While a group discusses, have other learners stand around the outside and take notes on their participation, using the rubric.
- Then debrief, talking about what was done well and how the group members could do even better. [Video](#)

# Fishbowl

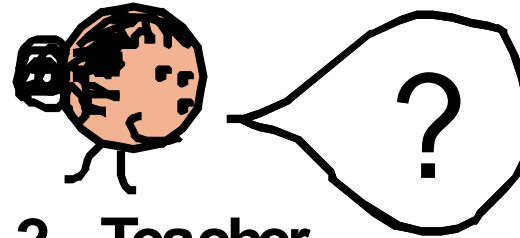
## Discussion topic

What are the biggest challenges for teaching learners of English in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

# Collaborative Learning: Heads Together



1. Students in groups number off



2. Teacher poses problem or question

3. Group members confirm.



4. Teacher chooses a number to give group's answer.





# Questions

- Why is it a good idea to laugh sometimes in class?
- What was the purpose of “meet & greet”?
- What is one way to incorporate movement in the language classroom?
- What are your favorite rules for discussions?

# Promote thought and reflection

## Quickwrites

- Learners write short pieces in their journals in response to your questions.
- They can choose to share entries with the class.
- Have learners mark one piece each week that they want you to read.

# Use strategies to keep everyone thinking and prepared

**Signaling** allows everyone to answer your question, helping you know how they are learning

Ways to use signals

- thumbs up
- sign language *video*
- clap for a ...
- math operation sign
- punctuation mark sign
- colored cups
- colored cards



# Signal when I say, “Thumbs”

- Is the purpose of “Thumbs” signals to exercise one’s fingers?
- How important do you think it is that students enjoy learning?
- Do you think we know enough from studies of the brain to apply this knowledge in our teaching?
- Do you think that the teacher is important in motivating learners?

**Use “minimal supervision” activities to provide learning every minute, even when you’re occupied**

**Sample activities:**

- Study word cards with a partner
- Memorize a poem
- Quickwrite
- Summarize a reading passage
- Read the assignment
- Listen to a recording

# Today's Exit Ticket

- Tell your elbow buddy something that you gained from this session that you want to use the next time you're in the classroom.



# Resources:

Classroom Management Video Tips for Teachers from Edutopia

<http://www.edutopia.org/classroom-management-teacher-tips-video>

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper and Row.

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Levine, L. N. and M. L. McCloskey (2009). *Teaching Learners of English in Mainstream Classrooms, K-8*. Boston, Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.

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Sousa, D. (Ed.). (2010). *Mind, brain and education: Neuroscience implications for the classroom*. Solution Tree.

Zull, J. (2002). *The art of changing the brain*. Stylus.



*It's not about how well we teach, but about how well our students learn.*





*Thank you!*

*Mary Lou McCloskey*

*www.mlmcc.com [mlmcc@mindspring.com](mailto:mlmcc@mindspring.com)*

*Lydia Stack*

*lstack@mac.com*