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Eliciting Techniques

Eliciting is a technique that ESL teachers can use to get information about what the students know and don't know. This means that the teacher becomes more capable and doesn't waste time rehashing the students' existing knowledge. Eliciting creates a learner-centred environment and is very thought-provoking for the students. Eliciting can be used for a great deal of things such as eliciting vocabulary, grammar, synonyms, antonyms, background information, language forms and rules, general knowledge, opinions, feelings, contexts, meanings, memories, associations, ideas, situations, questions and answers.

Eliciting gets students involved in the lesson, because they are actively producing speech and giving information. The students become active learners, rather than just listening to the teacher give information. The teacher can assess the students' knowledge and in-turn adapt the lesson to the students' needs. There is a great deal of collective knowledge in a group of students and utilizing this knowledge makes the teaching of new knowledge more memorable.

There are many techniques ESL teachers can use to elicit from students, depending on what the teacher wants to elicit. However, there needs to be input or stimulus from the teacher in order to start the process of accessing the students' knowledge. Beware of [cultural differences](#) when eliciting and try to nominate students to answer. Give students time to think about what they are going to say and ask questions with no right or wrong answer. If you find there is little response from the class, try giving them more input to help direct them. Below are some techniques for eliciting.

Eliciting Vocabulary

Eliciting vocabulary is used when we want the student to come up with a word on their own. This may be because you have taught the word already and you want to review it. There are many ways this can be achieved. An easy way to elicit vocabulary is by giving definitions. Provide the students with a definition and see if the students can supply the correct word. You can use a dictionary as they normally contain clear definitions that are easy for students to understand.

You can also use synonyms to elicit vocabulary. When you use this technique, make a statement and ask the students to paraphrase it by using a synonym. Using opposites (antonyms) is also useful when we want to elicit a word from a student. Furthermore, you could pretend you have forgotten the word you are trying to elicit. This happens regularly in natural conversation and is a great way to elicit vocabulary. You can ask the students questions to try to elicit the vocabulary you pretend you can't remember.

For young or visual learners, use flashcards or pictures to elicit vocabulary from the students. Mind maps or word clusters work better with older students and can also help to elicit vocabulary. Simply start by writing a general topic in the centre of the board and have the students add words that relate to the topic.

Students often pick up new words quickly. The problem comes when the students are not given the opportunity to use the words they have learned. This leads them to forgetting vocabulary, so try to find ways to regularly practice the words you teach in class and use them in contexts the students will remember.

Eliciting Grammar

For eliciting grammar, you could use a situational dialogue, a drawing or modelling. Create some kind of context for the students to understand the grammar point and then follow up with [concept check questions](#). If you are doing a reading exercise, ask the students to give you examples of the grammar point from the text. You may also wish to ask the students questions that require the students to answer using a particular grammatical form. You may want to try telling the students the grammar point first and then asking them to give you some example sentences.

Reading

Predicting is used a lot when teaching reading. Normally, a headline or photos are used to elicit from the students. In this way, you can get the students to predict the story, ideas, forms and language that are likely to be used.

Background Knowledge and Ideas

When a lesson is topic based, it's always a good idea to get the students to give you their background knowledge of the topic and their ideas. Write up any vocabulary or information they give you that other students in the class might find useful. This collective knowledge will come in handy during the lesson. You can elicit this information by using a text, mind map or pictures. You could even tell a story or anecdote and ask for the student's reaction.

In addition, brainstorming helps the students come up with ideas and information relating to the topic you are going to teach. The students can work in groups or together as a class to think of words and associations relating to the topic.

Free-writing is also a useful activity to help draw on the students' background knowledge. Ask the students to free-write for a few minutes in response to a topic or question. Students will likely draw on past experiences or knowledge to help them complete the activity.