

Activity 5: Grammar Learning Strategies

Format:

Interactive

Target Audience:

This activity is designed to be used with students in a second/foreign language classroom with facilitation by the teacher and/or second/foreign language teachers, researchers, and administrators in an SSBI workshop/course.

Purpose:

To use the strategies of visualization and relaxation to practice an English grammar form: *used to*. The participants are asked to visualize while listening to a short passage and then to use the mental images to practice the grammar form in a speaking activity.

Time:

20 minutes

Materials:

“Used to: Visualization Script”

Directions:

1. Tell the participants to pretend that they are learning English (if it is their L1). In this activity, they will relax and listen to a short passage with their eyes closed, and visualize the images in their minds as they listen. Then, they will use these mental images for a speaking activity. The purpose of the activity is to experience relaxation and visualizing as a strategy for learning grammar. The task involves strategies for listening, preparing to speak, and speaking. The grammar form they will practice is *used to*.
2. Have the participants put down their pens and notebooks and ask them to relax by getting comfortable in their chairs, closing their eyes, and breathing slowly and deeply.
3. Read the “Used to: Visualization Script” out loud in a pleasant, soft (relaxing!) tone of voice. The instructions indicate how the participants are to listen, to prepare for speaking, and to engage in conversation with a partner.

Discussion:

After the participants have finished speaking, ask them for their reactions to the strategies. Did the visualization help them with the speaking task? Were they relaxed? What other ways could visualization (or mental images) be used? What other ways do they try to relax when learning a language? Also discuss the benefits of activating background knowledge to prepare for a task, as well as the repetition of the grammar form in a meaningful context.

Wrap-Up:

Ask for reactions to this activity and how they could use it (or an adapted version of it) with their own students. Emphasize that strategies can be used in many different ways. They can and should be transferred to new tasks. Such relaxation and visualization strategies can hopefully be employed by learners on their own – whether in the learning of challenging grammatical structures, vocabulary words, pragmatic routines, or other daunting language material. It is important to keep the emphasis on learner-generated strategies, not those applied by a teacher, since the learning of grammar ultimately falls on the students' shoulders.

Used to: Visualization Script

I'd like to tell you about some wonderful memories that came back to me in a dream I had last night. Try to picture my dream in your minds as I describe it to you. Keep your eyes closed and breathe slowly and deeply. Relax. Here it is:

It was summertime and it was a really beautiful day. The sky was blue and there were no clouds at all. It was one of those days where the sun is warm but the wind is cool.

I'm ten years old, and I'm at my grandfather's farm in the country. There's a big white house with a garden full of flowers in front of the house. My grandmother used to grow beautiful roses every year. The barn is nearby, where my grandfather used to keep the hay for the horses. You can see where there used to be another barn, but now it's just a pile of old, gray wood. If you look carefully, you can still see that some of the boards used to be painted red, but the strong sun has faded the color away.

My grandfather is telling me one of his stories. He used to tell me stories all the time about when his family lived in Russia. My grandfather used to walk to school every day, and his mother used to give him warm pastries to eat for breakfast along the way. He used to carry them in his pocket to keep his hands warm on the long walk to school.

Now, keeping your eyes closed, try to visualize yourself when you were young. Picture yourself as a child. Think of some things that you used to do when you were young. Bring back those memories, those past habits. Try to see them in your mind. [Pause]

Picture your memory, and silently say to yourself what you used to do. If you used to go to the beach in the summertime with your family, you could say: "I used to go to Florida every summer. I used to sit on the hot sand. I used to love the taste of the saltwater."

When you are ready, open your eyes and tell the person next to you what you used to do when you were young.