

Teaching EFL can be challenging when student engagement is lacking due to high teacher talk, scripted curriculum, or lack of interest. Fortunately, cooperative learning structures give students the engagement they desire while making the classroom student-centered and exciting. Below, you'll find a list of my favorite structures adapted for the EFL classroom from Dr. Spencer Kagan's seminal book, "Kagan Cooperative Learning." All the structures presented below can be adapted for teaching primary, secondary, or adult learners.

Rally Robin Flashcards

1. Give two sets of cards to each team or if you don't have enough, have person 1 split the cards in half and give to person 3.
 2. Person A holds up the picture side of a card and can either say "What's this?" or can just use the sentence pattern if you have already practiced it.
 3. Person B answers. If they get it wrong, they have to say it three times.
 4. This continues until B has all the cards.
 5. Repeat steps 2-4 with B asking.
 6. Have student A turn the cards to the word side then repeat steps 2-5.
- * If you want them to practice spelling, you can have them show the picture side and say "How do you spell..." instead of just saying the word.
- This is the most used structure for EFL instruction because it works wonders. You can use it to have students go back and forth asking answering picture/vocabulary cards, or you can use it for paired reading where they go back and forth with the text, or you can use it with phonics cards in the same way.

Round Robin

1. Teacher asks a question then gives think time.
 2. Teacher chooses who answers the question first.
 3. Students go around in a circle until everyone has answered the question.
 4. The person who started re-reads the next question and answers it or the teacher states a new question and students start again.
 5. Repeat step 3.
- this is probably the second-most-used structure because students can work with their whole team to do lots of things. It can be used to practice the vocabulary words, phonics words or sentence patterns, not to mention the best use - reading dialogues!

Fan N Pick

1. Person 1 fans out the cards
2. Person 2 picks a card from the deck and reads it to person 3
3. Person 3 gives the answer to the question
4. Person 4 takes the card from person 2 and checks to see if Person 3 answered correctly.
5. If Person 3 is right, they praise them!
6. If not, they give them three hints. If they don't have it after three hints, person 4 reads the correct answer and person 3 says it back to them.
7. Team praises Person 3.
8. Everyone stands up and rotates seats.
 - a terrific structure for reinforcing students' knowledge of both the vocabulary and sentence patterns, and can be modified to fit pretty much anything.

Whiteboard Write

1. Teacher shows a picture, students write the word
2. Students hold up their whiteboard when they are finished
3. Co-teachers walk around the room and call on students to say what they wrote down
4. Students erase after they say it out loud correctly - if they got it wrong, they have to rewrite it.
5. Repeat all steps
 - probably the least cooperative of the structures but one of the most effective for checking students' oral and written progress. I do this each lesson with three things: the vocabulary words, the phonics words and sounds and the sentence patterns. After using this, you and your coteacher can see which students know it and which don't and you can differentiate from there.
 - You can differentiate this by asking your number 1s and maybe number 2s (high level students) to write a full sentence while everyone else just writes the word. Or if they are older you can have everyone write the sentence except for student 3 (the lowest student) who can just write the words.

Numbered Heads Together

1. Teacher asks a question
2. Teacher provides think time
3. Students independently answer the question on their whiteboards
4. Students stand up when they are finished writing
5. 1-2 and 3-4 share their answers with each other and remain standing until they come to a consensus.
6. Whole team remains standing and comes to a consensus and writes the same answer on all whiteboards.
7. Teams sit down when they all have the same answer.
8. Teacher calls on one student from each group to share their answer with the group.

- This is great for reading comprehension practice and testing students' knowledge of the material. You can use it to activate prior knowledge aka have students remember what was in the last story (as long as they are connected!!) then you can use it to have students tell details from the story after reading. Spinning the spinner to see who which student will stand and share with the class can be a little daunting for some kids, so if they are shy at first, you can let them speak in their native language, then tell them in English and have them repeat you or your coteacher.
- Another way to use this is a quick check of their knowledge of the vocabulary/phonics by having them chorally or individually say a word based on a picture/flashcard you hold up. This is not a structure to be used very often because it has a lot less participation at the same time - at most 6 or 7 kids are speaking at once and at worse if you do it individually you are only calling on one student, which isn't cooperative.

Sage N Scribe

1. Student A is the Scribe and Student B is the Sage.
2. The Sage will read the first sentence or question out loud, then will answer it.
3. The Scribe records the Sage's responses in their workbook, step-by-step, coaching and clarifying if necessary.
4. The Sage then writes down his/her answer in their own workbook.
5. They switch roles and repeat steps 2-4 for the rest of the worksheet.
 - I love love love this because it's a structure that allows students to practice speaking, listening, writing and reading all at once. You use basically any of the pages in the book and you take turns reading a question out loud and answering it then letting your partner listen and see if you're right, then you write it and your partner checks, then your partner writes and you check. I use this one every single class period.

Text Annotation

This is also not necessarily a cooperative learning structure but is vital for students to raise their comprehension levels. Text annotation works best like this:

1. Have students turn to the questions first (as a whole group to model for them) and choral read the question.
2. Ask students to shout out the key words (you will have to spend a few minutes the first time explaining that key words are who the sentence is about, and what the question is asking - usually the vocabulary words they have been practicing).
3. Circle the key words
4. Turn to the text and look for key words that go with the question.
5. Read the text that has the key words in it
6. Circle any key words
7. Now that students have circled the key words from the question and the answer, they should be able to answer the question accurately.

Quiz Quiz Trade

This structure has two parts, the first five steps being another structure called Stand Up, Hand Up, Pair Up

1. Stand up
2. Put your hand completely up
3. Walk around until music stops/teachers says stop
4. Introduce yourself/compliment partner and say thank you
5. Track the teacher and wait for instructions

Actual Quiz Quiz Trade instructions:

1. Students each receive one card.
2. Students Stand Up Hand Up Pair Up (see above) when the music stops.
3. Students greet and compliment each other.
4. A quizzes B.
5. B answers. If correct, A praises. If incorrect, A gives B three hints. After 3 hints, A reads B the correct answer and B says it back.
6. A praises B.
7. Switch roles and repeat steps 4-7.
8. Partners switch cards.
9. Partners say goodbye with a compliment.
10. Students raise their hands and stand silently until the teacher turns the music back on.
 - I use this structure all the time when reinforcing vocabulary comprehension, practicing oral fluency, and reviewing for exams.

Simultaneous RoundTable

1. Teacher assigns each person a topic
2. Everyone writes
3. Everyone holds up their board and says what they wrote when the teacher calls on them
4. Everyone passes in a circle
5. Everyone continues writing until they get the original board back
6. The team reads what's on each whiteboard one at a time

Find The Fiction

1. Teammates each write three statements; two true, one false.
2. One student stands and reads their statements to the team.
3. Each team member says which one they think is the lie and why.
4. The standing student will say what the lie is - the other students praise the standing students if no one guessed the right answer, or the standing student praises the students who did get it right.
5. Repeat for remaining students.
 - This is a great teambuilding activity because it requires the cooperation of the whole group and they get to know things about each other at the same time.

Caveats and Tips

- It won't always go well - if it is failing, evaluate what's wrong then stop and give better directions - 9 times out of 10 the reason it's not going well is because the students don't understand, not because they don't want to do what you asked.
- Give directions as concisely as possible, using a mix of English and their native language. DO NOT just have your co-teacher translate everything you say; instead work with them ahead of time to decide what they can understand in English and what needs to be said in their native language.
- Let student 1 (the strongest student) re-explain the directions to their teammates after you give them. Helpful hint: hover nearby to make sure they explain it correctly - but it is also ok if they give the instructions in their native language.
- Always use a timer to keep students accountable and motivated.
- The more frequently you use a structure, the faster students will memorize it. This will use more time up front but save time in the long run because students will be familiar with how the structure works regardless of the content.