ETpedia™
Teenagers

500 ideas for teaching English to teenagers

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ENGLISH TEACHING professional

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10 reasons for using this resource

Introduction

1. **You're new to teaching**
   Less experienced teachers will find this a useful and practical introduction to working with teenage students.

2. **You need some ideas**
   More experienced teachers in search of new ideas will find good, practical activities and techniques here.

3. **You're struggling with teens**
   This book does more than provide classroom ideas: it aims to help teachers better understand teenagers, and to empathise with some of the issues that teenagers have in the classroom.

4. **You've never taught teens before**
   Experienced teachers who are about to work with teenagers for the first time will get a sense of the unique challenge posed by teenage classes.

5. **You read on the run**
   Teachers who need something bite-sized that they can dip into between classes will appreciate the format of the book.

6. **You're looking for staffroom discussion-starters**
   Senior teachers and heads of department can select units of the book to kick-start staffroom conversations, peer collaboration and idea-sharing among colleagues.

7. **You want something that works**
   The ideas in the book are designed to be simple, effective and down-to-earth.

8. **You haven't got much time to prepare lessons**
   Most of the practical ideas and activities in this book are straightforward and need little or no preparation.

9. **You enjoy teaching**
   This book is written for teachers who love teaching, and who want their lessons to be memorable and enjoyable – both for their students and themselves.

10. **You're curious about other teachers' experiences with teens**
    The author has spent many years working with teenagers, thinking about the teenage classroom and discussing teaching with colleagues. The book is a culmination of that process.

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10 ways to use this resource

1. **Use it to get ideas when planning lessons**
   This book can be dipped into when planning practical activities for lessons.
2. **Talk about it with your colleagues**
   Read a unit and then discuss it with your colleagues. Share your own ideas and techniques.
3. **See what your teenage students think about it**
   Use one of the units (for example, Unit 4) as reading input in one of your classes. Ask your teenage students if they agree with the views expressed about teenagers.
4. **Read it critically**
   No two teenage classes are the same, and experiences differ. Modify and adapt ideas to suit your own needs.
5. **Add your own ideas in the margins**
   Use this book as a notebook. Jot down your thoughts and new ideas in the margins of each unit.
6. **Read a unit a week**
   Tackle one short unit a week for a manageable and beneficial reading challenge.
7. **Try out one idea every week**
   Choose an idea that you like from each practical unit. Try it out.
8. **Open it at a random page**
   Open the book at random, read one unit, and make a note of one idea to try out, or one view about teenagers to discuss with a colleague.
9. **Compile a 'Top 50'**
   Read the book from cover to cover. At the end of each unit, circle the point that you like the most.
10. **In case of emergency**
    Keep the book in the staffroom for those moments when you need a quick idea for your next lesson.

Sample

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10 facts about the author

Edmund Dudley ...

- is from the UK, but lives in Budapest.
- started teaching in 1992.
- is a freelance trainer, materials writer and teacher.
- has regular classes with teenage students at PTE Babits Secondary School in Pécs, Hungary.
- also speaks Hungarian – his students' mother tongue – although English is his first language.
- has two daughters, one of them still a teenager. They both agreed to read several units of the first draft of this book, and told their dad which parts were a bit rubbish, which parts weren't that bad, and which parts were cool. He thinks they're the ones who are cool.
- is the co-author (with Erika Osváth) of *Mixed-Ability Teaching*, published by OUP.
- occasionally posts ideas and materials for teachers at legyened.edublogs.org.
- travels a lot and posts pictures on Instagram as edtothemund.
- wasn't always much fun to be around while this book was being written. He is therefore extremely grateful to Sinéad Laffan for her good humour, constant support and expert professional insights, especially about teaching pronunciation and listening. The best ideas in those units are hers.

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10 things that teenagers value in their teachers

It can take time to gain the respect of a group of teenage students, no matter how good the teacher's intentions are. One of the reasons for this slow process is that teenagers tend to feel slightly threatened by new teachers, and so can be quite cautious and reactive when they encounter them for the first time. Teenagers are not usually keen to articulate the things that they value in a teacher, partly because – unlike adult learners – they are less confident in their status as 'equal partners' in the classroom and so tend not to make suggestions, instead preferring to wait and see how the teacher wishes to work.

On the other hand, teenagers are very quick to express dissatisfaction with working methods and tasks, even if they cannot always offer an explanation as to why they do not like them or suggest a better alternative. By noticing the things that teenage students resent in a teacher's working methods, it's sometimes possible to figure out what they actually value.

1. Willingness to experiment

Although teenagers certainly prefer a well-prepared and methodical teacher to one who is unprepared and disorganised, a little bit of novelty and creativity will also go down well. When teens complain that a lesson is 'boring', what they actually mean is that it is predictable. Try to find a new twist on revision activities rather than always doing them in the same way. (See, for example, Unit 34.3: Mini-interviews from workbook questions.)

2. Consistency

For all that they value novelty and innovation in language-learning activities, teenagers do want predictability and consistency from their teachers when it comes to managing the classroom and handling evaluation. Don't spring surprise tests on them, for example, or go back on your word about lesson content.

3. Fairness

Teenagers have the capacity to endure uninspiring lessons without getting frustrated or upset, but they will never forgive a teacher for a perceived act of unfairness. Pay special attention to how you treat students, making sure that no one receives preferential or discriminatory treatment. Avoid double standards: if student A gets into trouble for not doing the homework on Monday, but student B is let off with a smile the next day for the same oversight, the rest of the group will rightly be annoyed.

4. Willingness to use technology

Don't feel intimidated by teens' mastery of technology. They are actually more interested in our attitudes towards technology than our ability to master it ourselves. Naturally, teens respect those teachers who already use technology as well as they do, but they are also generally happy to explain and demonstrate apps and programs to less tech-aware teachers – provided we show a genuine interest and willingness to learn.

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5. Not embarrassing students

Avoid comments that put individual students in embarrassing situations. Teenagers are highly concerned with how other people see them, and are particularly aware of the danger of losing face in front of their classmates. Insensitive comments by teachers (about a new hairstyle, clothes, pronunciation, test results, etc.) can make teenagers cringe – even if the comment itself is positive or seemingly innocuous. Remember that teenagers are not really interested in winning the approval of the teacher: it's the other students in the class whose opinions matter to them. Keep personal comments to a minimum. Teenage students notice if we respect them in this way, and tend to respect us back as a result.

6. Curiosity about their interests

When teenage students do talk about their interests in class, it can be demoralising if the teacher does not show much curiosity or interest. Such an attitude comes across as belittling and dismissive. If teenage students are particularly engaged by a topic that is of personal interest to them, encourage them – but do not require them – to bring in some extra information about the topic to the next lesson, or to do a mini-presentation on the topic. It is not necessary to share the student's enthusiasm, merely to show interest and to pay attention.

7. Sensitivity to students' schedules

Teenagers often have tough daily schedules, with a number of different teachers of other subjects all making demands of them at the same time. A common complaint among teens is that a teacher 'only thinks about his/her own subject'. Rather than announcing the date of a test, for example, ask the class in advance which day would suit them best, and try to come up with an arrangement that works for everyone. You might try the class-rep technique for this (see Unit 14.1).

8. Willingness to negotiate

As noted above, teenage students appreciate it when teachers demonstrate flexibility and a willingness to negotiate with them. In addition to giving plenty of advance notice when it comes to announcing tests and out-of-class assignments, bear in mind that teens respond well to being given options and being allowed to take responsibility for their own learning.

9. Setting an example

Teenagers expect their teachers to live up to the standards that they set for their students. For example, if it isn't acceptable for students to say that they didn't have time to do the homework, teenage students will resent it when we say that we didn't have time to correct the assignments that we promised to have ready for the lesson.

10. Ending the class on time

Resist the temptation to take another minute or two at the end of the lesson to finish an activity or explanation. Break times are precious for teenagers, and every second counts. Keep an eye on the clock and make sure you let the students go as soon as the bell goes at the end of class.

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10 grammar activities that teenagers won't hate

Grammar activities are generally not crowd-pleasers with teenage students unless important exams are imminent. To discover the reasons for this, it's worth looking at how we present grammar activities to students in class. Teenagers often find traditional use-of-language activities difficult, boring, and lacking in any real-world spark. It's worth remembering that students respond well to tasks and activities that present them with a puzzle, a challenge or an opportunity to come up with an imaginative solution. In other words, grammar itself does not have to be boring, as long as we can find an interesting angle with which to present it to students.

We can also be transparent about what we are doing. There is no need to smuggle grammar into a lesson by pretending that it's something else. The key consideration when planning grammar activities for teenagers, though, is to think about the tasks from the students' point of view, and to try to include an element of personal challenge in order to make the focus on language more engaging and worthwhile.

1. Definitions challenge

Have a competition to see how many words students can define in 60 seconds. Use words and vocabulary items that the students are already familiar with. Prepare plenty of word cards to use in the game, or use any vocabulary revision cards you might already have made. Pre-teach phrases for defining nouns (*It's something that … / It's someone who … / It's a place where …*), verbs (*It's when you …*), and adjectives (*It's used to describe something that …*). Put students into two teams. Before each round, nominate from one of the teams one student to be the timekeeper, two students to be grammar checkers and two students to be definition checkers. Volunteers from the other team take turns to define words from the set of cards. Their teammates guess what the word is by shouting out their guesses. When 60 seconds are up, allow the checkers to decide if the definitions were correct (lexically and grammatically). Award one point for each correct definition. The teams then swap over so that the team members who have just played take on the roles of timekeepers and checkers. Provide help as needed and keep a running total of correctly defined words. The winning team is the one with the most points. As an alternative, get students to invent definitions of non-existent (made-up) words, for example, ***blashter.***

2. Creative gap-fills

Write a sentence on the board containing one gap; for example, *The afternoon in the airport was the ___________ part of the holiday*. Put students into two teams, A and B, and ask the members of team A to think of imaginative and grammatically correct ways of filling the gap (using a superlative form in this case). Each student in team A writes one answer on a scrap of paper, choosing less frequent, less familiar words if they can. Don't let them confer. When every member of team A has chosen a word, get them to count up how many different answers they came up with altogether as a team. Now give team B five attempts to predict the answers written by team A. If team B correctly guesses a word that a student from team A came up with, then team A have to cross that word off their list. After the fifth guess, review the words left on team A's list. Ask them to read out their remaining answers with a short explanation of each to demonstrate that they understand

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the correct meaning of the word. For example, if their superlative adjective was *most entertaining*, they might give the explanation … *because we met a guy who showed us amazing card tricks*. If the explanation is acceptable, it counts as one point. Make a note of team A's final score.

Then write a new sentence on the board, for example, *There were six kittens altogether, but we chose this one because she was the* ___________. This time the teams swap roles: each member of team B chooses a superlative form to fill the gap; then the members of team A have five attempts to predict words from team B's list. Compare scores at the end. The winning team is the one with the highest score.

3. Mini-interviews from workbook questions

Breathe unexpected life into grammar-practice activities in the workbook by asking students follow-up questions as you check the answers. For example, if the item in the book is *My father drives more slowly* ___________ *my mother*, first ask one student to give the correct answer (in this case *than*). Before moving on to the next question, respond to the content of the answer in a slightly playful way. Say *How interesting. Would you say that your father is a slow driver, or is it just that your mum drives fast?* Teenagers are not expecting to have to 'own' the content of the workbook items in this way, but usually enjoy the (sometimes absurd) challenge of providing creative answers. Encourage other students in the class to ask their own questions, too.

4. Cause-and-effect brainstorming

Present students with an open-ended puzzle and get them to come up with creative solutions. Begin by setting the scene. Present the following scenario to students, or one like it. (You can write it on the board, dictate it, present it as a gap-fill and elicit answers, or do a picture dictation.)

A boy is standing at a bus stop. He's holding a watermelon. The bus comes and the doors open. A girl leans out of the open door and says something to the boy angrily. The boy looks shocked, says sorry to the girl, gives her the watermelon and starts running in the direction the bus came from. The girl sits down in her seat again, holding the watermelon in her lap and shaking her head.

Ask students to work in pairs. Their task is to make sense of this story, using speculative language, such as *might have / may have / could have*. Listen to the students' ideas first, helping them to ensure that the grammar is correct. Then ask follow-up questions about their story. At the end, decide which solution to the puzzle was the most creative.

One possible solution: The girl is the boy's sister. The boy had been asked by his sister to go to the store to buy a watermelon while she was in town. She told him he could take her bicycle and put the watermelon in the basket on the front. On the way out of the store, the boy forgot about the bicycle and – out of habit – walked over to the bus stop. Meanwhile his sister spotted her bicycle outside the store from the bus window. When she saw her brother waiting at the bus stop with the watermelon, she realised what had happened. When the doors opened, she told him to run back to get her bicycle before someone stole it.

Sample

5. Everything's OK – a one-word dialogue

Put students into pairs and provide them with the script for a short dialogue in which each speaker only says *OK* each turn.

A: OK

B: OK

A: OK

B: OK

A: OK

B: OK

A: OK

B: OK

A: OK

B: OK

The challenge is to come up with a communicative dialogue in which the only word spoken is *OK*, so students have to use their imagination.

Give each pair time to decide what they think is going on in the dialogue. They can add any punctuation they want (question marks, exclamation marks, etc.) but they cannot add any words to the script. They will have to think about all the communicative functions that can be expressed with the word *OK*: it might be a question, an agreement, a challenge, an expression of sympathy or an exclamation of delight. The pairs practise performing a meaningful dialogue using only the word *OK*.

When they have planned their dialogue, each pair performs it twice. The first time they can only use the words in the script, but can embellish the meaning with gestures, facial expressions and intonation. The other students guess what is happening. Then the pairs prepare to perform their dialogue a second time. They write down an expanded version, replacing all the OKs with complete questions and sentences. At the end of the activity, students vote for the dialogue they thought was the most creative. You can then focus on any grammar points that emerged from the dialogues. Teenagers are noticeably more willing to focus on language when they have created it themselves.

6. Create flowcharts to support rules of language usage

Get students to interpret grammar rules by turning them into flowcharts. Many coursebooks highlight the rules of language usage in special 'grammar boxes', but teenagers rarely pay them much attention. Making a flowchart is an effective way to help students engage with the rules, and also helps them to check their own understanding of them. A further advantage of a completed flowchart is that it can be tested (and sometimes improved) by other students in the group. See page 150 of the Appendix for an example of how a grammar box in a coursebook can be turned into a flowchart.

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7. Relative-clause roulette

Give each student a small piece of paper or card, numbered on one side. On the other side of the card, ask each student to write a non-defining relative clause beginning with *who*, for example, …, *who speaks three foreign languages*, …. Check the clauses for accuracy. Stick the completed cards on the board in the shape of a circle, with the numbers facing out. Students take turns to choose a number from the 'roulette wheel' on the board. They then have to write a full sentence on the board, using the chosen non-defining relative clause *and* the number on the card. So, if the above clause was on card number 12, the full sentence would also need to contain some reference to the number 12. One possible answer might be: *My sister, who speaks three foreign languages, started learning Spanish when she was 12*. The activity can then be repeated with non-defining relative clauses starting with other pronouns (*where, which, whose*).

8. Images from sentences; sentences from images

Write the following sentences on the board, or similar sentences with the same tense contrast:

A. *When she looked up, he was leaving.*

B. *When she looked up, he had left.*

C. *When she looked up, he left.*

In pairs, get students to discuss the meaning of each sentence, and the difference between the three. Instead of translating the sentences into L1, get students to draw a comic strip of each sentence in such a way that it demonstrates that they understand the order in which the two events happened in each sentence.

The students' drawings could look something like this:

Sentence A

Panel 1: They're both sitting at different tables, reading.

Panel 2: She's still sitting and reading, he's now standing up.

Panel 3: She's looking up at him; he's putting his coat on and moving away.

Sentence B

Panel 1: They're both sitting at different tables, reading.

Panel 2: She's still reading; he's halfway out the door.

Panel 3: She looks up; he's gone.

Sentence C

Panel 1: They're both sitting at different tables, reading.

Panel 2: Still seated, they both look up at the same time and catch each other's eye.

Panel 3: He's putting his coat on and moving away; she's watching him.

Alternatively, provide each pair with a unique set of sentences. When they have finished their drawings and had them checked, students swap them with another pair. Now they have to look at the three images and write the correct sentence to accompany each one.

Sample

9. Exclusive answer cards

When doing a difficult gap-fill exercise, write the answer to each question on a separate card. Provide each pair with one of the cards containing one of the correct answers, but do not indicate which question it is the answer to. Do the activity as a competition: each pair tries to get the most correct answers. If they wish, students can decide to show their answer card to other pairs in return for seeing what's on theirs, but at the same time they need to consider how many times they should do this and with which pairs. If they suspect that a particular pair has a good chance of winning, they might decide not to show them what's on their own card. This adds an element of strategy to the activity.

10. Text correction with music

Find a song that your students are not familiar with. Choose a song with a strong narrative, which is at a suitable language level for your students. Reformat the song lyrics to resemble a paragraph of text, and then make five to 10 deliberate grammar mistakes in the text. Tell the students that they are going to read a story that contains some language mistakes. Give them a chance to read through the text and to find as many mistakes as they can. Then play the song. Finally, check the answers together.

"I have tried many different grammar activities with teenagers, and it happened many times that one activity works perfectly with one group, but it does not work with the other group, or at least it does not work that well. It is great to have many activities up your sleeve, and not be afraid to try them out; teenagers love variety. Someone will always learn something from those activities, either you or your students, if you know what I mean;)"

Branka Dečković, English Language Teacher, Medical school, Kragujevac, Serbia

Sample

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Unit 34.6: Sample flowchart with grammar reference and exercise

Grammar reference: *too* and *enough*

1. We use *too* and *enough* to talk about how too much of something or too little of something prevented something from happening:
   too + adjective + infinitive: *I was* ***too slow to win*** *the race.*
   not + adjective + *enough* + infinitive: *I was****n't fast enough to win*** *the race.*

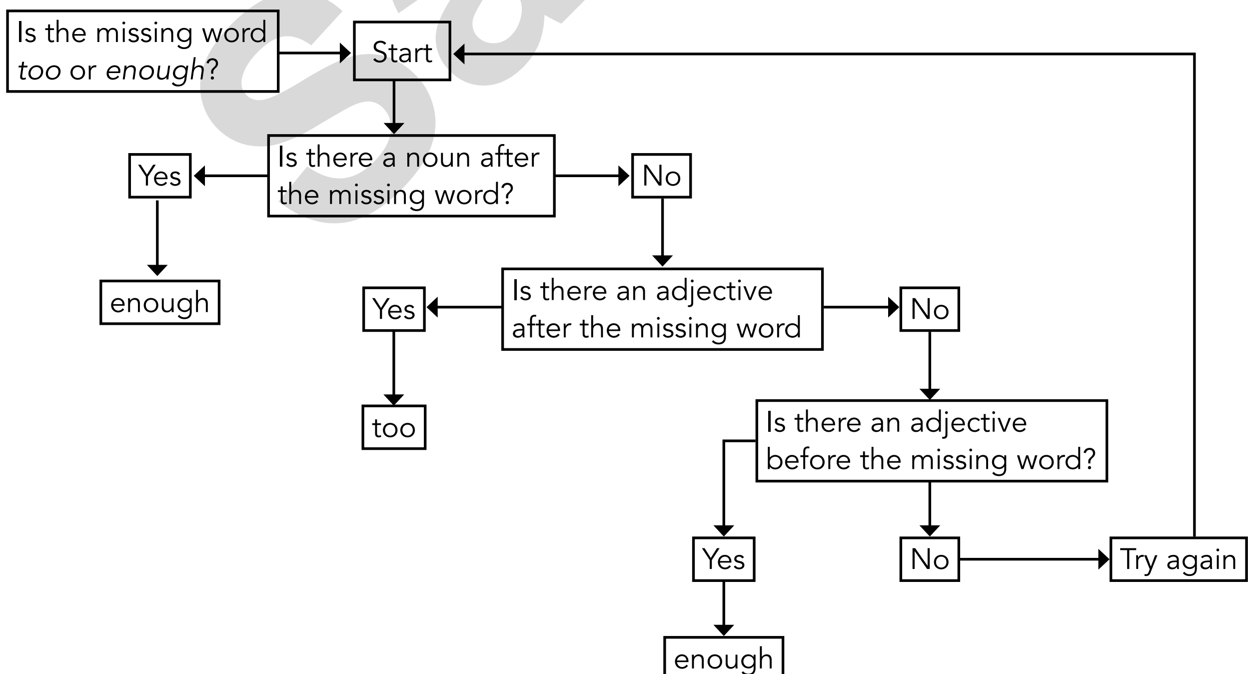
2. Note the word order with *enough*:
   enough + noun: *We didn't have* ***enough money*** *to eat out.*
   adjective + *enough*: *The restaurants weren't* ***cheap enough*** *to eat out.*

Practice exercise:

Complete the sentences with **too** or **enough**.

1. The hat is ______________ expensive to buy.
2. These shoes aren't big ______________ to wear.
3. We haven't got ______________ time to see the movie.
4. It isn't warm ______________ to eat ice cream.
5. The box is ______________ heavy to lift.

Flowchart



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