

Teaching some basic structures

This chapter aims to give you some ideas as to how, over a period of time, you can teach young children some basic structures in English. Young children have no notion of grammar (nor do they need it), but learn through imitation, intuition and lots of practice. Therefore it is **not** suggested that in one lesson you focus **exclusively** on one structure, but rather that you use activities suggested for different structures. Each activity should be repeated and augmented in following lessons until the children have learnt the structure to your satisfaction. Then, as children learn as quickly as they forget, you will need to repeat the activities now and again in subsequent lessons.

Most of the activities here are very short and should only last a few minutes each. Exceptions are the games, follow-up and 'final focus' activities.

The three structures selected are: *can* for asking permission, the present tense of the verb *to be* and the verb *have/has got*. Children are basically egocentric and their main interest is themselves and their possessions, thus the importance of the verbs *be* and *have*, which are also of course basic concepts in any language. Children need to learn to ask permission as an essential part of their socialisation. Getting them to do this also helps to create an atmosphere where English is spoken, right from the beginning.

Can for asking permission

Aim

∴ To teach pupils to use *Can I ... ?* to ask for permission in a variety of contexts.

1 Back-chaining

∴ A technique called BACK-CHAINING can be used to introduce *can* for asking permission.

Basic procedure

- Offer the children something they like such as a sweet, a sticker, etc. and explain in L1 what you are going to do. e.g. *We are going to learn how to ask for a sweet.*
- Start with the last word in the question, and build the question up backwards.

T: *please?*

Get children to repeat *please?*

Repeat the word using different voices (e.g. a whisper, a shout, a high/low voice, a squeaky one).

When the children can say *please?*, say the preceding word (*sweet*). After repeating *sweet* a few times, add *please* (*sweet, please?*) and continue like this with the rest of the question.

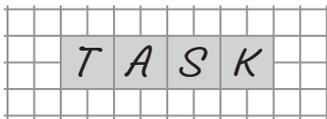
'please?

'sweet, 'please?

a 'sweet, 'please?

'have a 'sweet, 'please?
 'I have a 'sweet, 'please?
 'Can I have a 'sweet, 'please?

- Remember to keep a steady rhythm and consistent intonation. The whole process should only take three or four minutes at the most.
- Later in the lesson, repeat it. In the following lesson, most children will only have remembered *sweet, please?* but in no time, they will be using the whole question.
- If you are not used to using BACK-CHAINING, practise in front of a mirror, reading the sentence from a piece of paper. It is worth learning to BACK-CHAIN as it is such an easy way to teach children a long sentence or difficult structure.



Think of a question that your pupils need in class and teach it to them next lesson by BACK-CHAINING.

2 Asking in class

Now, start using *can* for permission in class. When children need pencils, for example, before you give one to a child say *Can I have a pencil, please?* Get each child to ask this before you give him the pencil. Use the same rhythm as when you taught the class to ask for a sweet. Little by little, your children will get the idea and start substituting *pencil, crayon*, etc. for *sweet*.

Variations

Later, start adding adjectives, e.g. *Can I have a red pencil, please?*
 Then change the verb: *Can I go to the toilet, please?*

3 Follow-up: drawing in a group

When the children know the words for the colours, this is a good activity to practise *Can I ...?*

Basic procedure

- Put the children in groups of about four or five and give each child a crayon of a different colour.
- Ask them to draw a picture. In order to complete their picture, they have to ask the others in their group: *Can I have the yellow, please?* Teach them to answer *Yes, here* and give their crayon to their friend.

Variation

To make the activity more interesting, give out different colours of Plasticine and get the children to make a picture with it on a piece of black card.

Reinforcement

Go out and play 'Crocodile'. ◆ SEE PAGE 31

4 Follow-up: shopping

Later on, you can get the children to pretend they are shopping so that they learn to use *can* in a different, yet realistic situation. If they are learning words for food, set up a grocer's or greengrocer's. Alternatively, you could set up a stationer's that sells things for school, or a clothes shop.

- Use basic structures. At first, play the role of the shopkeeper. Here is a sample conversation.

Shopkeeper: *Good morning. (Can I help you?)*

Customer: *Good morning. Have you got apples?*

S: *Yes. I've got green apples and red apples.*

C: *Can I have green apples, please?*

S: *How many apples (do you want)?*

C: *I want/Can I have three apples?*

S: *Here.*

C: *How much is it?*

S: *Five (francs).*

C: *One, two, three, four, five.* (Customer taps shopkeeper's open palm five times.)

S: (gives apples to B): *Here.*

C: *Thank you.*

S: *Goodbye!*

C: *Goodbye!*

- Later, you can have more than one shop with various pupils playing shopkeeper.

Variation

If you are feeling adventurous, you can even organise a sort of flea market in the class where the children bring in some old toys to sell among themselves. Set a maximum price for each item which is low. Each child has a stall (a chair) which he can open or close depending on whether he is buying or selling. You might like to ask a few parents in to help.

General practice

- Insist right from the beginning that your pupils use *please* and *thank you*, which are very important when speaking English and may be used more regularly than in other cultures.
- Once your pupils can more or less ask permission with *can*, be firm. Don't let them get away with asking in L1 because this will soon become a habit and some children will test you constantly by doing so.

The verb *to be* in the present tense

Aim

- To teach the positive and negative forms of the verb *to be* in the present tense.

1 *I am*

Basic procedure

- Pat your chest twice and say *I (pat) am (pat) ... intelligent!* (Make a sign for this, e.g. put your finger to your temple and take it out to the side.) *I (pat) am (pat) ... strong!* (Use a deep voice and flex your arm muscles.)
- It is essential to use actions to communicate your meaning. ➤ SEE ACTIONS AND MIME PAGE 23
- Always exaggerate your actions. Choose adjectives that make children feel good about themselves, so that they will assimilate them naturally – they all want to feel intelligent, strong, pretty, etc.
- In subsequent lessons, add useful adjectives. e.g. *hungry, clean, small, big, dirty, tired, angry, hot, cold, ill, nice.*

- Because English uses *to be* + an adjective to express concepts that in many languages are expressed with the equivalent of *to have* + a noun (e.g. *I am hungry: Ich habe hunger, J'ai faim, tinc fam, tengo hambre*), teach those adjectives straight away so that the children associate them naturally with *to be*. This is especially important as older children, when they begin to learn to write, start translating what they are not absolutely sure of. ◆ SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHILDREN BEGIN TO WRITE? PAGE 74

Contracted forms

Immediately after using the full form of the verb (e.g. *I am strong*) repeat the phrase using the contracted form (*I'm strong*). If you also use the contracted form when speaking, children will gradually start using it themselves. This is true for any contraction.

2 You are – 'hypnotising' your class



You have probably used *you are* in games and in your instructions to the pupils, so they have heard it before and it will ring a bell with them, at least. Now you can teach it by 'hypnotising' them!

Basic procedure

- Say in a theatrical voice *I'm going to hypnotise you! Ready? ... Sleep! ... Sleep!* The children put their heads on their desks and mime being asleep. (They keep their eyes open though!)
- Say *You are big, big, BIG!* Mime the adjective and use voice inflection to emphasise the meaning. The children mime with you. (Gradually over the following lessons, drop the actions and use only voice inflection and finally, only say the words. e.g. *You are fat, fat, FAT!* The children continue to mime.)
- When you have finished, say *You are going to wake up. Ready? Wake up!* Everybody 'wakes up' and you put a look of surprise on your face: *Oh! What happened?*
- Later, start mixing words that sound alike (*hungry/angry*) to teach them to listen and discriminate.
- This activity can be used when your class is overexcited and you need to calm them down. ◆ SEE PAGE 16

3 It is

It is simply taught through showing pictures of singular objects that are important in children's lives (e.g. *ball, house, cat*) and should be taught within a sentence. e.g. *It is a ball*. For an explanation of why you should use full sentences ◆ SEE PAGE 21. There is absolutely no need to explain that *it* is used for objects – just let the children use it automatically.

4 They are/We are

- Later, you can start showing pictures of plural objects. Start with objects that the children already know in the singular. This will familiarise them with *they are* used with objects (they will already be quite familiar with the words as you will have certainly used them in class). For children aged five and older, you can mention that *they are* is for 'more than one'.
- *We are* comes naturally through use: help your pupils to acquire the notion by drawing a circle in front of you with your hand every time you use it. The circle will give the idea of *we are* as encompassing you and the class.

5 *He/she is*

When teaching *he* and *she*, you can tell the class that girls are silent because you say *shhhh* (put your finger to your lips) ... *shhhhhee!* for girls. It's an easy way to help pupils distinguish between *he* and *she* and at the same time, helps work on the /sh/ sound, which is difficult for certain non-English speakers to pronounce.

Basic procedure

- Point to a boy and say *He is intelligent!*
- Point to another boy and say *He is strong!*
- Point to a girl, with your finger on your lips and say *Shhhhe is pretty!*
- Point to another girl and say *She is strong!*

Do the actions while speaking.

- Then revert to a drawing or picture and say *He is fat!* etc.
- Show another picture of a person and elicit the sentence.
- Finally, ask each child to say something about the classmate beside him (help by doing an action, if the child needs it).

By first using a classmate and then a picture, you are making *he/she* a general concept: *he* is not used just for your friend, but any male person, child or adult.

6 The negative

Basic procedure

- Choose a slim (not a skinny!) child and say *He is fat!*
- Then act as though you have made a big mistake (remember to exaggerate to make more impact and get more attention) and add with a smile *No! He is NOT fat.* When you say *not*, slap one hand on the other loudly.
- Then say normally *He isn't fat.*

The slap you use on *not*:

... makes an action game out of the negative, which is fun

... adds sound and rhythm that stay with the child, telling him internally when to place the *not*

... can be used to remind children to add the *not* when they are trying to use the negative, or to correct them if they have forgotten to use it.

7 Final focus

Basic procedure

- When you feel your children have assimilated these forms of the verb *to be* (remember that in the meantime they will have learnt other structures), give them a picture to colour which shows a number of people who are different shapes and who have different expressions that they can describe (*small, big, fat, thin, cold, angry*, etc.). It should also include some of the objects you have taught so that they can talk about them using *it* and *they*. ◆ SEE

PHOTOCOPIABLE PAGE 12

- If you do not have suitable pictures for them to colour, ask them to find pictures in a magazine, cut them out and glue them on a sheet of paper.
- While the children are colouring or sticking pictures onto paper, go around and ask them to talk about their picture(s). Point to the different people or things and get the children to make sentences about them.
- Assess what each child has assimilated and make a note of this in his notebook. Get each child, when he has finished, to stick the picture(s) in his notebook.
- Reward each child by drawing a smiley face on his sheet. ◆ SEE GIVING REWARDS PAGE 15

“Why do I need a final focus activity?”



Cover the next section. Think of at least three benefits of a final focus activity as described above. Then compare your list with the one below.

This kind of activity is helpful in the following ways.

- It gives you and the children a summary of what you have done.
- It provides you with assessments of each individual's progress.
- It shows parents what their children are learning.
- The children have the satisfaction of seeing something concrete that shows that they have 'passed a level'.
- If you put the picture(s) in a book, you:
 - ... will give the children a lot of pleasure as they love books of their own work
 - ... will create a sort of picture dictionary that you and the children can refer back to.

“What happens when children begin to write?”

When children begin to write, you may be surprised to find that many children start to translate from L1 instead of writing down what they would normally say, making a lot of typical grammar mistakes. This is because writing is a slower process than speaking, so children begin to think about what they are writing and refer back to L1, forgetting the language they have already acquired in a more automatic way. Typically, if you ask them their age, they will answer *I am eight*, and then write *I have eight*. Teachers have to work on teaching their pupils to listen to their intuition and not their intellect. Likewise, it is important that teachers teach their pupils to be mentally 'agile', in other words, to find ways of expressing themselves when they do not know the right word or structure. e.g. saying *the door isn't open* if they do not know the word *closed*.

Have/has got

Aim

To teach the forms *he/she has got*, *have you got ...?*, *Yes, I have*, *No, I haven't*.

1 Song: 'Ten Little Indians'

- It is always a good idea to use a verb or structure before you actually teach it so that the children are already familiar with it. So with *has got*, you can start by teaching the action song 'Ten little Indians'. ◆ SEE PAGE 59
- The action of crossing their arms when they sing *has got* can then become your prompt for using this form of the verb, or correcting them when they use something else instead (*have got* or *is are* most common mistakes).

2 Song: 'Sally has got a red dress'

- Now add the well-known children's song 'Sally has got a red dress' to teach the meaning of *has got* and to start working on personal description. ◆ SEE PAGE 60 If you don't know the tune, use the words as a chant, with the rhythm shown.

Basic procedure

- Ask a child to come to the front of the class. Say *Rebeka, come here, please. Oh, look! Rebeka has got blue jeans!* Hold her hands and swing them back and forth, saying or chanting:
Re'beka has got 'blue 'jeans,
'Blue 'jeans, 'blue 'jeans!
Re'beka has got 'blue 'jeans,
To'day, to'day, to'day!
Sit down, Rebeka. Angie, come here! Oh! What has Angie got? Angie has got a green sweater! (sing song)
- Get the children to sit in a circle and put their arms around each other's necks or waists and sway with the music from side to side. This just adds that element of fun to a song that maybe the children don't feel like singing that day.

3 Rhyme: 'Have you got a crocodile?'

This rhyme teaches them the question form *have you got* and the short answers *No, I haven't* and *Yes, I have*. ♦ SEE PAGE 56 for the words and actions.

Basic procedure

- Give a big clap on *have*, so the children are aware of the shortness of *have* as compared to *haven't* since they tend to confuse these.
- Now, all you have to do is to ask a child a new question but using the rhythm and intonation of the rhyme. Use vocabulary that they already know, preferably something that they are wearing or have got in front of them so you can point at it while asking e.g. *Have you 'got a 'sweater?*
- Finally, get the children to start making their own questions.

4 Game: 'Memory'

When the children have assimilated the forms above, reinforce them by playing 'Memory'. ♦ SEE PAGE 49

5 Follow-up: *has* and *is*

While you have been teaching *have/has got*, you will probably have also been working on *he/she is*. Your pupils will need a lot of practice before they begin using *is* and *has* without confusing them. Here is a good activity to help them start seeing the difference in meaning between them.

- Ask a child to come to the front of the class and stand on a chair so everyone can see him. Say *Martin is strong! He is intelligent! He has got a red sweater. He has got blue jeans.* At the beginning, only use vocabulary that the children know. Later you can add other useful vocabulary for very simple descriptions.
- A good game to continue this work of distinguishing *is* and *has* and of learning to describe people is 'Thumbs up!'. ♦ SEE PAGE 35

6 Final focus

A picture dictation ♦ SEE PAGE 45 is one way to complete work on this structure, or one form of it.

- The children simply listen carefully and draw what you tell them.
- This activity should get more and more complicated throughout the school year so as to develop children's listening and comprehension abilities.



Which other activities in Chapters 5–7 can help you reinforce *can* for asking permission, the verbs *to be* and *have/has got*? Look back at these chapters to find out.