
Book Reviews

101 EFL Activities for Teaching University Students

Hall Houston, iTDi TESOL (2022) (152 pages). ISBN: 979-8419082793. Price: 935 yen

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Hall Houston's *101 EFL Activities for Teaching University Students* provides a comprehensive selection of activities enabling any university EFL teacher to make their lessons more enjoyable. The book's strengths include its useful structure, modeled on the flow of the school year, as well as its clear instructions, and high quantity, quality, and variety of activities.

The activities in the book are divided into three categories: Getting Off to a Good Start, Maintaining Motivation and Interest, and Ending the Semester Gracefully. This chronological arrangement aligns with the typical progression of a school year, making it easy for teachers to implement the activities as needed. I found this structure more intuitive than grouping by activity style or skill, as is common in other similar titles. It makes the book simple to use as a quick resource for filling a spare 20 minutes of a lesson, but it could also work as a companion piece when planning a semester's worth of lessons.

There is a great variety of high-quality activities here. I implemented several of the activities in a second-year speaking class at a women's university, with approximately 20 class students. The students' TOEIC scores ranged between 420 and 465, and while they were motivated, they frequently lapse into Japanese unless they are reminded to use English. My impression was that the students

responded very positively to the activities. From the section *Getting Off to a Good Start*, I used the self-explanatory “Questions for the Teacher,” which gave my students an opportunity to get to know me better. By permitting and answering some unusually personal questions, I was able to establish a greater sense of trust in the classroom. Additionally, when the students continued to use the question types they had practiced with me to interview each other, their motivation to conduct question and answer sessions entirely in English increased.

“Halfalogue,” from the *Maintaining Motivation and Interest* section, involves the teacher modeling one half of a telephone conversation, after which students write and perform the other half, using target vocabulary and grammar structures. This activity was an excellent way to make the textbook more student-centered and fun. The students’ work, related to job interviews, included creative ideas such as their friend starting a business in crime—an imaginative twist not in the original scope of the chapter but effectively using its vocabulary. It was highly entertaining and demonstrated the flexibility of the book’s activities, which can be easily adapted to textbook material.

Finally, at the end of term I chose “A Sketch of My Break” from *Ending the Semester Gracefully* to stimulate discussion of out-of-school activities and end the term on a positive note. In this activity, students think of four things they are planning to do during the break between semesters and draw a basic picture representing each on a piece of paper. They then use each picture as a visual aid to explain their plans to other students. To show them how it works, the teacher first demonstrates with pictures of their own plans. Judging from their eager attention to it, students were interested in my demonstration, which included hot springs and ramen, and I could observe their excitement and amusement in drawing their own pictures and explaining them. Almost all students enjoy basic drawing, and the energy generated from that and my demonstration carried over into the explanations which I observed everyone attempting in English to the best of their ability. This activity and the energetic response I could see from students made for a raucous and memorable conclusion to the term.

An unusual feature for this type of book is the inclusion of tips and advice to

teachers on their professional development and even self-care. Like the teaching activities, these are grouped by time of year and include how to better interact with colleagues and how to keep track of and improve the development of one's teaching ability. This kind of advice is a thoughtful and helpful addition. A few tips such as altering behavior at staff meetings or examining your workspace would be of use mainly to full-time staff, but the majority, such as sharing lesson plans with other teachers and deliberately making new acquaintances around the school, would benefit anyone.

To give further ideas and inspiration, as well as a bibliography of titles on teaching theory and practice, the book also provides a list of recommended books and web resources with notes from Hall Houston on the specific usefulness of each. There is also an appendix of worksheets and some other activity materials, which can be photocopied from the book or downloaded from the publishers' website. I used the downloadable Halfalogue worksheet to help run the activity mentioned above, which saved time and energy. The web resource list also revealed to me David Gooblar's list of teaching tips at Pedagogy Unbound (<https://pedagogyunbound.com>), which is extensive and which I will be making use of in my future lessons. The depth of reference material in Houston's book is impressive and underscores the author's commitment to his craft and to helping other educators.

I have only a few minor criticisms of an otherwise superb book. While the book can be used as a quick last-minute resource to fill spare lesson time, it would be helpful for this purpose if it contained a few more very short (five-minute) and no-prep activities. Most of the activities require at least 15 minutes to run, and many require some preparation time—although this is a deliberate choice by the author rather than a failing, it should be borne in mind when making a purchasing decision. Additionally, a few links in the book are broken, which is inevitable in a printed text with any online references but which could cause some inconvenience. Some educators could find the activity descriptions a bit text-heavy, and a few illustrations could improve the clarity in some cases. Lastly, while the book has a slightly cheap look to it, it is affordably priced at 935 yen, making it significantly cheaper than many other similar titles, which makes this

point less of a drawback.

These are minor criticisms of a book that overall provides a generous, high-quality and intuitively organized selection of activities. It should have a place on the bookshelf of every EFL teacher.

Author bio

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