Adaptable Teaching Tools
Activity Ideas to Get Students Talking

Add interest, energy, and fun to your lessons by using a variety of activities and games that help your students practice what they learn in class. Brain research shows that having fun is necessary for authentic learning and long-term memory because it increases dopamine, endorphins, and oxygen in the brain. Review the following activities and adapt them to a variety of themes and lesson plans to reinforce learning.

Line-up

Goal: Students line up in sequential order.

Suggested topics: Alphabetical order of first or last names, birthdate order (using month and day only), date of arrival in the United States

1. Explain the topic to be practiced.

2. Model the questions that students will need to ask and make sure students can ask and answer the questions. (Examples: What's your last name?, My last name is …)

3. Show the students the beginning and end of the line formation.

4. Tell the students to form a line. Allow time for the students to talk together so they can line up in the correct order.

5. When the line is formed, have the students take turns reporting their information to the whole class. (Example: My last name is Alvarez.)

Memory Game or Concentration

Goal: Students find the most matching cards.

Suggested topics: Civics test questions and answers, commands and action pictures, famous people's faces and names or titles, main verbs and irregular past tense forms, object pictures and written words

1. Make sets of index cards of matching items.

2. Have the students play in small groups with one set of cards per table. Cards should be mixed up and placed upside down.

3. Have the students take turns flipping over two cards to try to find a matching pair.

4. If a student finds a pair, the student can keep it and take another turn.

5. If the student does not find a pair, the next person takes a turn.

6. Play until all the cards have been matched.

Mixers

Goal: Students find the classmate with a matching card.

Suggested topics: Civics test questions and answers, commands and action pictures, small talk questions and answers

1. Make a set of index cards of matching items.

2. Distribute one card per student.

3. Explain that each student needs to circulate to find the person with the matching card.

4. Explain that the students must talk to one another to find the person with the matching card. Explain that they may NOT show their cards to one another.

5. Have the students get up, circulate around the room, and find the person with the corresponding card.

6. When they find their partner, they should practice (or discuss) that item together.

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Category Folder Activity

Goal: Students sort information by category.

Suggested topics: U.S. geography (states that border Canada, states that border Mexico, etc.), branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial), federal and state powers

1. Prepare file folders with divided sections labeled with the categories from the lesson. Create several folders so that your class can work in small groups.

2. Prepare sticky notes with key phrases for each category.

3. Have the students form groups of 4-5 and work together to place the sticky notes in the correct column.

Below is a sample category folder for the civics test items on U.S. geography. Prepare sticky notes with the following place names (one per sticky note):

Alaska, Arizona, Atlantic Ocean, California, Canada, Idaho, Maine, Mexico, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi River, Missouri River, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pacific Ocean, Pennsylvania, Texas, United States, Vermont, and Washington.

Countries	States that border Mexico	States that border Canada
Oceans		
Rivers		

Corners

Goal: Students stand in different corners of the room based on category.

Suggested topics: U.S. geography (states that border Canada, states that border Mexico, etc.), branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial), periods in U.S. history (1700s, 1800s, 1900s, and 2000s), famous Americans

1. Similar to the Category Folder Activity, prepare sticky notes with key phrases for each category of the chosen topic.

2. Make large signs for each category title and tape them in various corners of the classroom.

3. Hand out one sticky note per student.

4. Have the students stand up, read their note, and go to the correct corner of the room.

5. Have the students in each corner read their note out loud for the class.

6. Discuss and practice the civics test questions that correspond with that category.

7. Collect the notes and redistribute. Have the students go to new corners.

Role-playing

Goal: Students practice dialogues with questions and answers.

**Suggested topics:** Civics test items, small talk topics, commands and actions

1. Write a short dialogue on the board, leaving blanks where appropriate to fill in information.

2. Practice the dialogue with the class, modeling each line for them to repeat after you.

3. Have the students form pairs and decide the roles of the applicant and USCIS officer.

4. Have the students practice in pairs. Once they have practiced, they can switch roles.

5. Circulate and provide guidance.

6. Have each pair perform the dialogue for the class.

Inside-Outside Circles

Goal: Students practice a short exchange with different partners.

Suggested topics: Greetings, small talk topics, questions and answers about personal identification information

1. Model a target question and possible answers that students will ask each other. (Examples: Where are you from?, I'm from …)

2. Ask the students to stand up and form two circles (see diagram). One circle is inside the other.
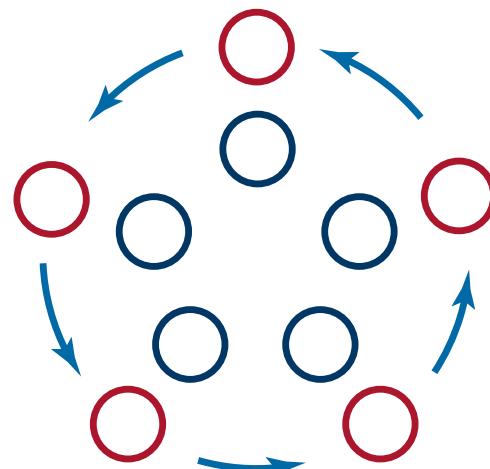
3. Have the students standing in the inside circle face those in the outside circle. The students in the outside circle should face inward.

4. Explain that the outside circle students will ask the target question and the inside circle students will answer. Explain that after they talk together, the students on the outside circle will move one person to the right and begin the exchange again.

5. Have the students start with the question and answer exchange. When you call time, the outside circle moves one person to the right. Then the students repeat the process, asking the same question with the new partner.

6. Have the circle rotate until the students have talked with several different classmates.

Speed Spelling

Goal: Students practice spelling new vocabulary using alphabet letter tiles.*

Suggested topics: Vocabulary from Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, vocabulary lists from the reading and writing tests, civics test vocabulary

1. Have the students form groups of 4-6 players around a table with one set of alphabet letter tiles.

2. Explain that you will call out a word, and that they should, <u>as a group</u>, find the letters and form that word on the table.

3. When the word is spelled correctly, the students should raise their hands to have their word checked.

4. The first group to spell the word correctly is the winner of that round.

5. Some groups may need several tries to spell the word correctly. Tell them to try again and check back later.

6. When every group has the correct spelling, ask the winning group, or one student, to spell the word out loud.

7. Ask a follow-up question using the word they just spelled to help reinforce the meaning in context.

* You can use sets of alphabet letter tiles from board games for this activity or make your own sets. Print out the reproducible template of "letter tiles" (see Appendix A), preferably on hard-stock paper. Cut out the tiles and store each set in a separate plastic bag. Distribute one bag of tiles to each group of students.

Conversation Grid

Goal: Students ask and answer questions about themselves and practice requests for clarification.

Suggested topics: Birthdates and birthplaces, marital status and children, address information

Preparation tip: Review clarification phrases, such as "Please repeat that" and "Please spell that," before beginning this activity. It is helpful to display these phrases on the board where students can easily refer to them during the activity.

1. Write the target questions on the board and practice them with the whole class. (Examples: What is your birthdate?, What is your birthplace? or When were you born?, Where were you born?) To protect your students' personal information, have your students report their birth month and day only for their birthdate.

2. Have the students form pairs so they can practice asking and answering the questions with each other.

3. Distribute the handout Conversation Grid (see Appendix B), one per student.

4. Explain the labels of the three columns: Name, Birthdate, and Birthplace. Explain that the students will each interview five classmates and write the answers in the appropriate column. Explain that, for this activity, they should report their month and day only for their birthdate.

5. Direct the students to get up and interview five other students.

6. Encourage the students to use clarification phrases with each other.

7. Circulate and provide guidance as needed.

Adaptation: Using the blank Conversation Grid master (see Appendix C), create your own version to adapt to a current lesson in your curriculum. Choose two related questions from your lesson to review and write them on the board, such as, "What is your marital status?" and "How many children do you have?" Distribute copies of the blank grid and have the students label each column respectively with "Marital Status" and "Children." Then follow the steps described above.

A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	B
B	B	B	C	C	C	C	D	D	D
D	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
E	E	F	F	F	G	G	G	G	G
H	H	H	H	I	I	I	I	I	I
I	J	J	J	K	K	K	L	L	L
L	L	M	M	M	M	M	N	N	N
N	N	N	N	O	O	O	O	O	O
O	O	O	P	P	P	P	Q	Q	R
R	R	R	R	R	R	S	S	S	S
S	S	S	S	T	T	T	T	T	T
T	U	U	U	U	V	V	V	V	W
W	W	W	W	X	X	Y	Y	Y	Z	Z

Appendix B Conversation Grid (Birthdate and Birthplace)

Name	Birthdate (month and day)	Birthplace
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Appendix C Conversation Grid (Blank Master)

Name		
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		