



## Education - Teachers

By: [swoosh](#) - at May 12, 2013

# The Most Common Problems in ESL Classrooms

## The Reality

Teaching English as a second language (ESL) is a rewarding career, yet a challenging one. As facilitators of learning in ESL classrooms, there is a great demand for teachers to constantly adapt to students' attitudes and needs. This might be basic, but imagine being in front of 30 students having very different personalities, attitudes, learning styles and language levels. Constantly, teachers face problems common enough in ESL classrooms. For neophytes, these occurrences mean failure to control the class but for experienced ones, it is an opportunity to grow and be flexible.

Excellent ESL teachers are able to recognize the most common problems in ESL classrooms, and devise ways to reach solutions. Modifications in teaching methods and strategies to tailor fit the kind of students in a class would mean a more productive and interesting [language classroom](#) environment for both the teachers and their students.



## The Problems and their Remedies

Here is an outline of the most common problems in ESL classrooms and how to deal with them.

### 1. The Use of First Language

This is probably the most common problem every ESL teacher faces. Speaking the first language is an instinct for almost everyone. For ESL students, this might mean not being able to totally adapt to using second language or the difficulty achieving it. Lack of confidence in using the language in front of the class adds to this problem as well. See why [boosting students' confidence in speaking](#) is extremely important for ESL educators. To solve this, an ESL teacher must be encouraging enough to persuade students to speak English, and only English in class. When students start to whisper to each other in their native tongue, do not hesitate to ask if there are questions. Another common solution is setting a rule of imposing penalty to whoever was caught using their first language in class. This penalty can be in the form of an English recitation or song in front of the class.

### 2. Inability to Follow Instructions

Often times, students in ESL classrooms would nod in agreement when the teacher asks if instructions are clear. In most cases, especially with beginners, students are shy to ask as they may be laughed at by their peers. As a result, they pretend to understand and do assigned tasks the way they perceive they should be done. To deal with this, ESL teachers must make sure instructions to a homework or activity are clear enough for everyone. When students start to talk to each other with looks of confusion, consider restating the instructions. As much as possible, write them on the board. Teachers can even use pictures or gestures to get ideas across. Make use of model sheets or videos to let students understand fully what you expect them to do. Speak clearly and make sure you have every student's full attention.

### 3. The More Advanced Students Dominate the Class



Students in an ESL classroom tend to avoid being asked not because they don't know the answer. Frequently, this might be because they find it hard to grasp for the right words or it takes some time to construct ideas in another language. As a result, many of the more advanced students are likely to raise their hands first and get to answer or speak in class often. When the teacher wants the class to progress faster, many of those who shy away will be left behind as advanced students are more competitive. To settle this, teachers should give equal opportunity to all class members. This can be done by randomly choosing students' names for a recitation. Give enough time for students to think. When



the class' "eager beavers" are too persistent, let them play the role of helpers. Assign them to assist their peers. Assigning them to give [peer feedback](#) takes some of the weight off of the educator and keeps advanced students busy.

#### 4. Students Lack Interest in the Lessons

In many cases, teachers would always wonder why students just can't stop staring at the book and scribble answers on the worksheets with bored, uninterested faces. What was actually misunderstood is the fact that teachers might be the one who bore the students. Following too much structure in class will absolutely make the student feel forced to study and thus feel less motivated. In answer to this, ESL teachers can use the subject of the lessons as bridges to real-life situations. Engage the students by integrating technicalities of the language with things they can relate to. For example, don't just explain tenses of the verbs and give generic examples but use them in making sentences with situations real to the students. Talk about college plans, vacation, funniest experiences, unforgettable events or love. Make your topic fun. This will not only model use of the language but also makes learning memorable.

#### 5. Students Are Too Dependent and Unprepared

Students might automatically wait for the teacher to utter the correct answer instead of having to figure it out by themselves. When students do not want to think, their ability to learn independently and be [self-directed in learning](#) is hindered. They might not be able to learn and benefit from self-study. To remedy this, ESL teachers should make sure students value individual participation in class. Instead of giving out the answer right away, solicit answers from class members continuously. When no one seems to get it right after several tries, give hints but do not tell answers directly. Additionally, when dealing with adult ESL students, the inability to do homework outside the classroom is common. This is especially true when students are working. To cater to this, give options. Instead of homework, agree on having a regular five-minute practice session for every student per meeting. Confirm how much time they are willing to commit to and be clear that despite the demands of jobs, it is essential not to stray away from their purpose of reaching goals in language learning.

### The Teaching Goals

There will always be problems in ESL classrooms. It takes an innovative and flexible ESL teacher to keep students engaged and interested in class. More than just teaching the content, teachers are to inspire, empower and motivate the students to improve language skills. The ultimate goal of ESL classes is to develop students' ability to communicate in the English through their mastery and understanding of messages and their meanings by [reading](#), listening, [speaking](#), [writing](#), and [grammar](#). Depending on students' level and age, demands vary. The technique is to make sure everyone knows and understands the goal for studying English. As an ESL teacher, one should not mainly attend class to follow the structured coursework, but create an environment where students learn with fun. When students are kept engaged in the lessons, they learn more than they realized as their teachers move closer to achieving the goal of teaching English and producing students equipped in the language.



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