**Language drills**

Drilling is a way of memorising a chunk of language by repeating it. It can be a very effective approach for learning new vocabulary or language structures. Teachers often give learners lists or word banks of key words, and these are difficult to use or retain because they are out of context. Similarly grammar structures in the form of writing frames are often forgotten and learners don’t always use them in later, unsupported work. Through drilling, learners internalise the target language and are more likely to be able to use it independently.

**Types of drills**

* Chain drill
* Ball drill
* Hunt the object
* I went to market
* Songs and chants
* One-to-one

**Practical ideas for using drills**

* **Top tip:** Each drill only needs to take 2 to 5 minutes

**? To consider:** The best time in the lesson to do them - as a

starter? Half way through to raise energy levels? At the end?

Choose one or two language structures and/or 6-8 items of vocabulary for each lesson. Flashcards can be useful in these drills and then used in follow-up matching activities. [Read more about flashcards].

Chain drill

Use flashcards. Show the first picture card to learner A and say ‘What is it?’ Learner A says, ‘It’s a (dog)...’. Then give them the card.

Learner A then asks learner B the same question ‘What is it?’. When learner B gives the answer, they get the picture card. This can go around the table with each learner asking and answering the same question. You can feed in more than one picture at a time so that a few cards are travelling around the group at the same time.

Ball drill

Stand in a circle. Point to a picture and throw a ball to any learner and ask the question ‘What is it?’ They answer ‘It’s a …’ and then throw the ball to another learner and ask the same question and so on. Any structure can be practised like this, e.g. ‘What have you got? I’ve got a …’ ‘What do you like?’ ‘I like…’

I went to market

Lay down the cards one at a time face up, adding a new item of vocabulary for each learner’s turn e.g. ‘I went to market and I bought an orange.’ 2. ‘I went to market and I bought an orange and an apple’ and so on. Learners need to recite the whole list each turn. When all the vocabulary items are down, turn them over, one at a time, so they are face down and then the learners recite the list from memory. You don’t have to use ‘I went to market’ as your language structure, you might use ‘First, then, after that, finally’ for instructions or recounts or ‘He is wearing’ for describing characters.

Hunt the object

This is played like ‘hotter and colder’. Pre-teach the language structure you want the class to use and then send a searcher out of the class. Hide an object in the classroom. The searcher needs to come back to the classroom and find the object. The rest of the class repeat the language structure, getting louder as the searcher gets closer to the object and quieter as they move away. Orchestrate the volume with your hands. This can be used with any language structure or vocabulary item in any curriculum context.

One-to-one

For an adult working one-to-one with a beginner, lay the flashcards face up on the table and simply point to the picture and say ‘What is it?’ Give them a few seconds to think about it. If they don’t know, tell them the answer and get them to repeat the word with a hand gesture\*. After you have given them the name choose a different card. Go back and forth pointing at different cards until the learner can name all the pictures in a random sequence.

\*Using hand signs or gestures to elicit speech from a beginner helps cut down teacher talk which can be overwhelming and confusing. First, say the words you want the beginner to say. Then use your whole hand to point to them. Next, use a ‘give it to me’ gesture with palm up and four fingers repeatedly lifted towards yourself. Complete beginners usually understand the signal and it becomes a natural part of future lessons.

Songs and chants

For 0 to 4 and 5 to 7 age ranges: Sing nursery rhymes using the target language instead of the original words. E.g. ‘First we dig the soil’ to the tune of ‘Twinkle Twinkle little star’.

Older learners: use chants, raps, claps and stamps.

**Good for EAL, Good for All: Can I use language drills with the whole class?**

Yes, drills can be used to practise and memorise formal language structures in preparation for writing. They offer a language hook to hang written work on.