

Ten practical activities for business English classes

Helen Strong

Business Communication Skills Trainer

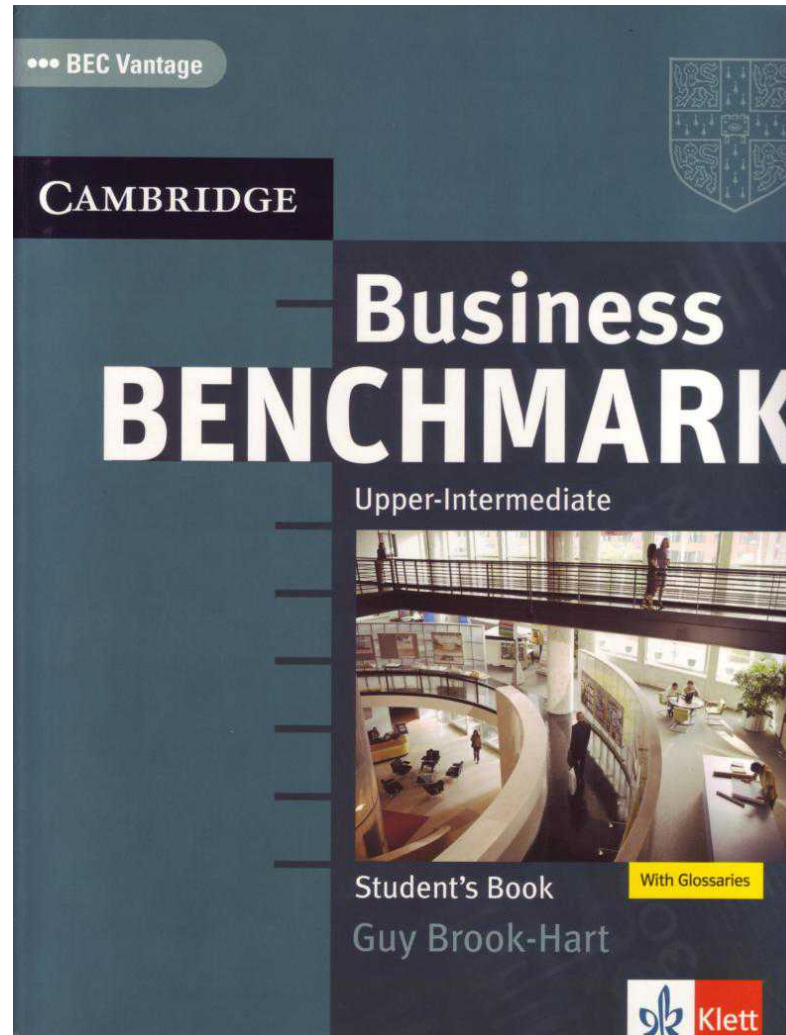
Teacher Trainer, Materials writer, MELTA Chair

Outcome

At the end of this workshop participants will:

- have been introduced to 10 activities for business English classes
- have had the opportunity to discuss the effectiveness of the activities and their application to their own teaching situations

Activity 1: Course book quiz



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Course book and exam quiz: Business Benchmark (book) & Business Vantage (exam)

To get an overview of the book and the exam, answer the following questions:

The course book

1. How many units are in the book?
2. How many main topic areas are in the book and what are they?
.....
3. How many pages is each unit?
4. Do you think you could do one unit per week? If so, how many weeks will we need to complete the book?
5. There is new vocabulary in every unit but what are the four skills that are also practised?
.....
6. Is there any grammar in the book? If so, where is it?
7. Pages 118-206 are known as "the back of the book." What is contained in these pages and how will they be useful to you?
.....

The exam

To answer these questions you will need to go to: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-qualifications/business-certificates/business-vantage/>

8. What are the components of the exam? Complete the table:

9. Can you do the exam online?
10. How do you register for the exam and how much does it cost?
.....
11. Where is your nearest exam centre?
12. Why do you want to take the exam?
.....
.....
.....

Activity 1: Course book quiz

- ✓ good for course orientation
- ✓ lets you know that students have understood the course structure
- ✓ highlights any queries that students may have with the course at the beginning

Activity 2: Stem sentence cards

Talk about...

...your last holiday.

...your current project(s).

...your plans for the future.

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My summer holiday

The best part of the holiday was...	The worst part of the holiday was...	I would (wouldn't) go there again because...
Something that really surprised me about the holiday was...	The journey there was...	When we were there we met...
One of our best day excursions was...	I would say the thing I enjoyed most about the holiday was...	If we hadn't...
What I really like about this holiday destination is...	When I go on holiday I like to...	If I had to sum up the holiday in one word I would say...
Something different that we did this time was...	The best part of going on holiday with the whole family is...	The worst part of going on holiday with the whole family is...

Activity 2: Stem sentence cards

- ✓ good for fluency practice and can lead to LOTS of discussion
- ✓ provide students with useful structures to begin sentences
- ✓ coloured cards appeal to learners with visual / spatial tendencies

Over to you...

1. Which activity do you like best?
2. Which modifications would you need to make for these activities to work with your students?

Activity 1:
Course book
quiz

Activity 2:
Stem sentence
cards

Activity 3: Business Spotlight Head to Head



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Have marketers become spies?

Listen to what people on the streets of Norwich, England said in response to the question "Are you worried that companies are collecting too much information about customers?" and complete the table.

	Yes	No	because...
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			

Source: Business Spotlight 3/2014

Activity 3: Business Spotlight Head to Head

- ✓ good for listening, speaking and reading practice (and writing if you wish)
- ✓ topical subjects that students usually have their own (sometimes strong!) opinions on
- ✓ generates focused discussion and debate as students take sides for and against

Activity 4: The Times 100 Business Case Studies

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Operations: Creating a competitive advantage through R&D

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Competitive advantage through diversity



Curriculum Topics

- HR strategy
- Diversity
- Inclusion
- Benefits of diversity

Introduction

In 1901 county surveyor Thomas Hooley noticed a fallen barrel of tar that had split open in the road. The mess had been covered by waste slag from a nearby ironworks. At once Hooley observed that an excellent patch of road surface had been formed. A year later he had taken out a patent for mixing slag with tar and in 1903 formed the company that became Tarmac.

Today Tarmac is still the UK market leader in road surfacing. It is also the country's largest quarrying company and key producer of aggregates (gravel), ready-mixed cement and mortar. Tarmac UK is sub-divided into two separate businesses:

- Tarmac Ltd extracts key building aggregates and materials.
- Tarmac Building Products Ltd focuses on turning raw materials into products useable by the building sector.

This case study focuses solely on Tarmac Ltd but will refer to it as Tarmac. Tarmac the company and Tarmac the brand are to be found on major construction projects all over the country. The new Wembley stadium, the M1 widening and London 2012 are high profile examples. It also has operations in the Middle East producing crushed rock, sand and gravel, asphalt and contracting activities.

With sales approaching £2 billion in 2010 Tarmac has just over 5,000 UK employees. As a firm in the heavy building materials

industry, the company traditionally had a strong male bias in its workforce, but this is changing. Many posts are now open to men and women across a huge range of job roles.



For Tarmac to succeed in a competitive marketplace, people are a critical resource. This is because the diverse talents of staff make Tarmac distinctive in the marketplace. Technical knowledge, corporate experience and the understanding of customer needs all make a critical difference. Drawing staff from the widest possible pool of talent is key to building and sustaining competitive advantage. This case study demonstrates how Tarmac is benefiting from developing a diverse workforce.

All employees receive core training to do their job effectively and safely. A full annual appraisal identifies personal goals and training needs. Tarmac offers a wide range of internal courses for all levels of staff. There are many opportunities to gain external qualifications including NVQs, BTECs and degrees.

Benefits of a diversity strategy

Diversity and Inclusion is a key dimension to HR management. It is also embedded in Tarmac's overall business strategy. This is driven by a compelling goal: 'Achieve the Exceptional'. This is achieved through diverse talent and leadership within Tarmac.



Engage employees

Tarmac recruits in a highly diverse labour market to achieve corresponding diversity in its workforce. By motivating this diverse talent through appropriate training and development, then the exceptional becomes possible.

Develop markets

Tarmac needs the confidence and trust of its customers. A diverse workforce can build the necessary relationships with increasingly diverse customers in both existing and new markets. This can be a source of advantage that is difficult for competitors to copy.

Reduce Costs

Valuing all employees for who they are and what they offer increases motivation and improves retention. These are two powerful ways to reduce costs and raise quality. Differences in experience, attitude and values open new perspectives and breed a creative culture. This is vital since Tarmac is often in the business of finding solutions to client problems.

Manage assets

Diversity builds new networks of communications. Tarmac's quarries, processing plants and highway contracts typically have a high profile within local communities. A diverse workforce is best able to represent the company in gaining contracts and local approval for investment decisions.

Cement kiln at Tunstead

Tarmac has a large cement kiln at Tunstead near Buxton in Derbyshire. In 2009 the company planned a major expansion that would bring new jobs both in the construction phase and in subsequent operation. Before applying for the necessary planning permission, Tarmac ran an extensive consultation with the local community. A village exhibition explained the plans to local people and gave them the chance to discuss the proposal.

Act Responsibly

Tarmac is committed to accepting social responsibility in all its business activities. This means a high level of concern for all of its stakeholders, including the local environment. The diversity and inclusion strategy helps support the development of a workforce that is able to engage with stakeholders more effectively. This often leads to winning an informal 'licence to operate' through local acceptance or even approval of the company.

Quarry at Bayston Hill

Tarmac operates an important gritstone quarry near Shrewsbury in the West Midlands. In 2008 the company wanted to more than double its size. Local people, many of whom worked at the quarry, were consulted at every stage of the planning process. Tarmac used presentations and a video to keep stakeholders informed. Approval for the project was gained with no objections.

Competitive advantage: An ability to earn superior profits through lower costs or distinctive product quality that competitors cannot readily copy.

GLOSSARY

Appraisal: A process to assess the performance of an employee, often based on comparing outcomes with targets.

Social responsibility: Recognition of obligations towards all stakeholders including the community and wider society.

Stakeholders: Persons or groups with a direct interest in the decisions or behaviour of an organisation (e.g. shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, creditors, local community).

GLOSSARY

Competitive advantage through diversity in the workplace

Before you read

1. What is the proportion of males to females in your company? What about at different managerial levels throughout the company?
2. How far does your company try to recruit people from diverse backgrounds? Do you have a policy on discrimination against people's ages, genders, ethnic origins, religion, sexual orientation, political belief, disabilities, etc?
3. What are the benefits of having a diverse workforce? Are there any disadvantages?

Vocabulary

You are going to read a text about diversity in the workplace at a British company called Tarmac Ltd, a company famous in the UK for laying asphalt on roads. First, check the meaning of these technical and business words in your dictionary:

Technical vocabulary

cement
gravel
mortar
a quarry
tar
waste slag

Business vocabulary

an appraisal
bullying / harassment
competitive advantage
equal opportunity
procurement
sustainability



While you read

Read the text and do the following:

1. Underline the points that mention how Tarmac Ltd promotes diversity in the workplace.
2. Prepare to explain why it is important for Tarmac to have a diverse workforce.
3. Find Tarmac's HR Mission Statement and prepare to explain how Tarmac achieves this goal.

After you read

1. How effective do you think such an inclusion policy would be in your company?
2. How does your company keep its staff motivated? How does it ensure that it retains the best people?
3. "Diversity is dynamic" (p104). How can a company ensure that a diverse workforce doesn't become "stale"?
4. Apply Tarmac's Diversity Strategy "wheel" (p103) to your company, giving concrete examples of how this works in practice.

Role cards

You think it's better for your company to recruit well-educated Germans, aged 25-50, who "fit in" to the culture of the organisation.

You think it's better for your company to recruit people from diverse backgrounds. You also think that older people (aged 50+) will bring much more experience to the organisation.

You think there should be more females in your company's workforce, especially at top management level.

Activity 4: The Times 100 Business Case Studies

- ✓ students learn something 'real' by analysing business practice in other companies
- ✓ free business theory and lesson materials aimed at business students
- ✓ case studies of real companies (for £2.29)

Source: <http://businesscasestudies.co.uk>

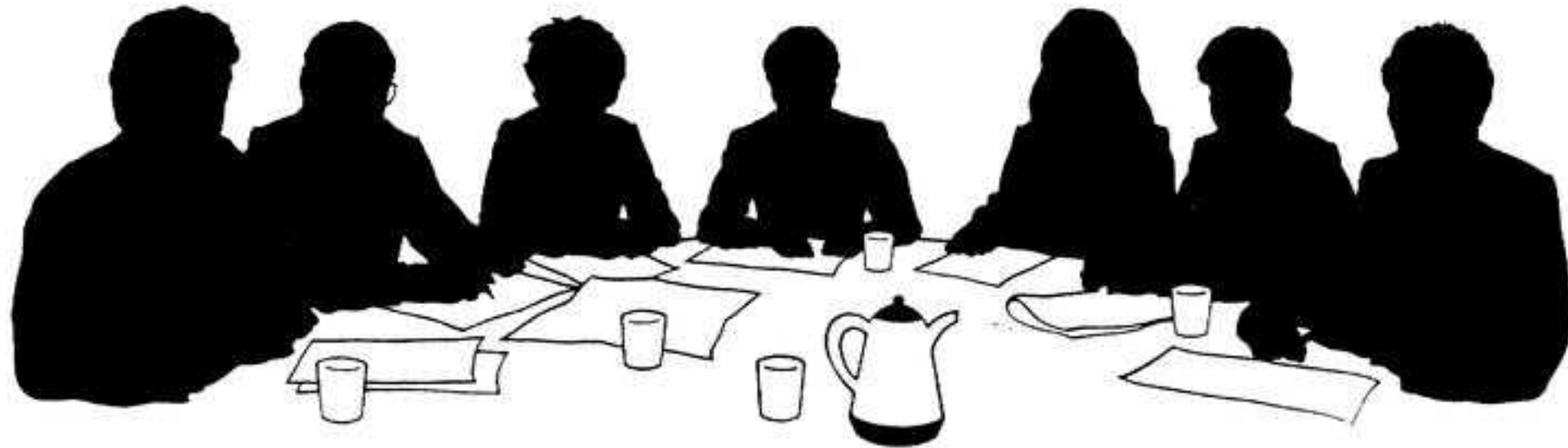
Over to you...

1. Which activity do you like best?
2. Which modifications would you need to make for these activities to work with your students?

Activity 3:
Head to
Head

Activity 4:
Business Case
Studies

Activity 5: How effective was our meeting?



Reflection: how effective was your meeting?



Think about the meeting you have just had. How effective do you think it was?

	The meeting was effective because...	Yes	No
1.	the purpose and goals of the meeting were clear.		
2.	<i>everyone</i> gave their opinions.		
3.	all participants respected each other and gave each other a chance to speak.		
4.	it was not dominated by one or two people.		
5.	it was exactly the right length – not too long and not too short.		
6.	we kept to the topic all the time.		
7.	the leader of the meeting had good control of the participants, topic and timing.		
8.	we all behaved professionally and didn't make personal remarks.		
9.	our knowledge of English was sufficient to understand most of it.		
10.	other:		

Activity 5: How effective was our meeting?

- ✓ gets students to reflect on what makes a successful meeting using a concrete example
- ✓ develops skills that can be translated into their real work environment
- ✓ provides 'closure' on a meeting role play and allows for peer feedback

Activity 6: Write a summary of what was discussed

After discussions, debates and meeting role plays (such as those we looked at in Activities 3–5), ask students to write a summary of what was discussed.

Ask them to send you their summaries before the next lesson so that you can give feedback on them. For example...

Task 3: Head to Head

Summarise the arguments for and against companies collecting personal data. Then state your own opinion.

Task 4: Business Case Studies

Summarise how Tarmac deals with diversity in the workplace. Then state how your company could do the same.

Task 5: Meeting role play

Write the minutes of the meeting.

Activity 6: Write a summary of what was discussed

- ✓ practises writing and summarising skills
- ✓ allows the teacher to give feedback on students' written work and identify areas to work on in future lessons
- ✓ students enjoy doing this focused task and receiving feedback on it (you MUST give fb!)

Over to you...

1. Which activity do you like best?
2. Which modifications would you need to make for these activities to work with your students?

Activity 5:
Reflection on
our meeting

Activity 6:
Write a
summary

Activity 7: Speed networking



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<http://www.business-spotlight.de/blogs/helen-strong/speed-networking>

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Speed networking

07.05.2010

When I first started attending business English conferences (notably the annual BESIG conferences held each year in November), I always felt uncomfortable approaching people and trying to strike up a conversation. In training sessions I try to develop my participants' socializing skills in English, yet at events I attend myself, I'm often too shy to put these same skills into practice.

This has become much easier for me since I got into online social networking sites such as [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Ning](#), but my social and professional circle at conferences is still relatively small. For example, at the [Sprachen & Beruf](#) conference held in Düsseldorf earlier this week, I knew very few of the participants who were attending, and felt a touch apprehensive at approaching "strangers" and thinking of something remotely interesting to say.

Well, this may be about to change. It seems I'm not the only one suffering from social reticence — many participants from previous *Sprachen & Beruf* conferences voiced similar opinions, saying they would have preferred the conference to offer more opportunities for networking and meeting people. So this year the conference organizers tried out a new socializing tool: [speed networking](#).

Similar to speed dating, speed networking allows a large number of professionals to make contact with each other in a very short space of time. The craze has gained popularity in both the UK and the US, where it is used not only at business conferences, but also by universities in an attempt to match graduates with potential employers.

The system is simple: you talk to someone for three minutes (i.e. each



Helen Strong

With teaching tips and trends
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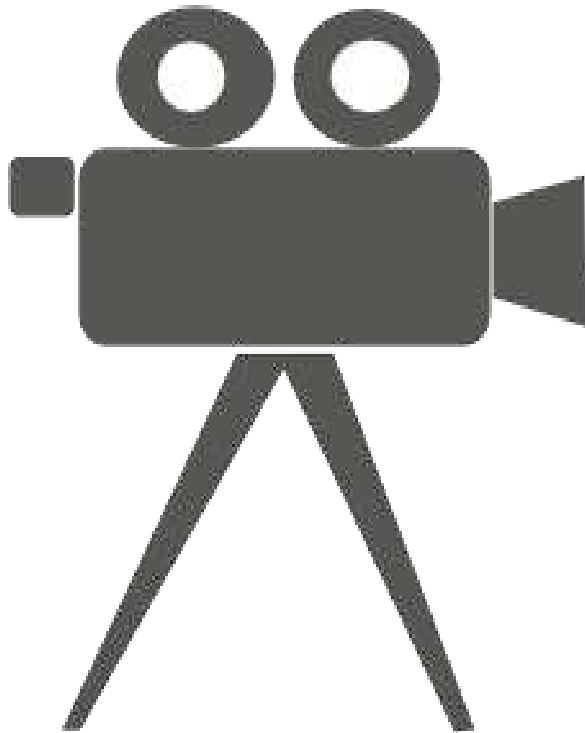
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Activity 7: Speed networking

- ✓ develops fluency and confidence, even in learners with low levels of English
- ✓ real world skill that students often need to develop for talking about themselves and their work in English
- ✓ it's fun (but hard work!)

Activity 8: Filming students' presentations and giving audio feedback



FLK2 feedback: presentation on an entrepreneur

Overall grade

2.7

Name of student: Nicole

Name of entrepreneur: Richard Branson

Content	
Are the reasons for the student choosing this entrepreneur clear?	<i>no, not mentioned</i>
Is there evidence of good research and preparation?	<i>yes, but focused on the company more than the entrepreneur.</i>
Is there a clear structure?	<i>yes - you gave the structure at the beginning. Perhaps a little too long - keep the focus of your presentation in mind.</i>
Is the talk about the entrepreneur rather than the company?	<i>both - I think you could have given more focus to <u>Branson</u> himself rather than his company</i>
Presentation skills	
Use of voice: projection, pace, clarity	<i>clearly spoken with good tempo and volume. Your voice shakes a bit which indicates you may be nervous. One way that you can work on this is to practise breathing exercises.</i>
Body language: gestures, eye contact, movement	<i><u>good</u> body language and gestures but lost eye contact when reading from the screen. Also, watch the video again and ask yourself what it means when you make gestures such as scratching your nose or rubbing your neck.</i>
Awareness of the audience	<i>see above - maintaining eye contact will keep your audience with you</i>
Giving direction: overview and linking sections	<i>good</i>
Use of Visual Aids & equipment	<i>don't give out materials at the beginning because people read them and don't listen to you</i>
Use of language: variety of vocabulary and structures, fluency, appropriately academic style, pronunciation	<i><u>relatively</u> fluent and good use of English, although you stumbled on a few words. Rehearse your presentation to avoid this. Appropriately academic.</i>

Activity 8: Filming students' presentations and giving audio feedback

- ✓ develops students' presentations skills
- ✓ allows the teacher to give feedback on students' presentations and identify areas for improvement
- ✓ students really enjoy receiving audio feedback on their presentations!

Over to you...

1. Which activity do you like best?
2. Which modifications would you need to make for these activities to work with your students?

Activity 7:
Speed
networking

Activity 8: Audio
feedback on
presentations

Activity 9: Restaurant role play



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Zwei Stück original Münchner Weißwürste ⁽⁸⁾
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4,90 €

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Wiener Würstl ^(2,3,8) und Pfälzer ^(2,3,8) auf Sauerkraut

11,50 €

Hofbräuhaus Bratwurst ⁽⁸⁾ - große gegrillte Schweinsbratwurst auf Sauerkraut

7,90 €

Leberkäs ^(2,3,8) **aus der Hofbräuhaus Metzgerei** - ofenfrisch, mit hausgemachtem Kartoffelsalat

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Zu den Wurstspezialitäten empfehlen wir unseren **Brotkorb**
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9,90 €

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mit hausgemachter Natursoße und Kartoffelknödel ⁽²⁾

12,90 €

Schweinshaxe - eine ganze gebratene Schweinshaxe mit hausgemachter Natursoße und Kartoffelknödel ⁽²⁾

13,90 €

Surhaxe - eine ganze gepökelte Schweinshaxe ^(2,3,8), im Gewürzsud gekocht, auf Sauerkraut mit frischem Meerrettich ⁽³⁾

11,50 €

Bierbratl - resch gebratenes Schweinewammerl mit hausgemachter Natursoße, Bayerisch Kraut und Semmelknödel

9,90 €

Original Hofbräuhaus Braumeistersteak vom Schwein mit Schmelzzwiebeln und Millirahmkartoffeln

9,90 €



Activity 9: Restaurant role play

- ✓ good for practising a real life situation of entertaining foreign guests
- ✓ students learn how to describe local food specialities in English
- ✓ motivational and fun!

Activity 10: PowerPoint® karaoke



INSTRUCTIONS

Before the lesson

Create a PowerPoint presentation using slides containing text and images that are interesting for your students. Set the slides to automatically change after 20 seconds.

In the lesson

1. Review the expressions for talking about slides in a PowerPoint presentation.
2. Demonstrate the activity yourself with the first three slides.
3. Hand over to your students. Listen and make notes for later language feedback.

Activity 10: PowerPoint[©] karaoke

- ✓ practises the language of referring to slides in a presentation
- ✓ helps students become more confident in giving presentations
- ✓ motivational and fun!

Over to you...

1. Which activity do you like best?
2. Which modifications would you need to make for these activities to work with your students?

Activity 9:
Restaurant
role play

Activity 10:
PowerPoint[©]
karaoke

Summary: 10 practical activities

1. Course book quiz
2. Stem sentence cards
3. Head to Head
4. Business Case studies
5. Reflection on our meeting
6. Write a summary
7. Speed networking
8. Audio feedback on presentations
9. Restaurant role play
10. PowerPoint karaoke

Thank you for your participation!

Contact

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