

Total Physical Response

When learning your native language, first watch your parents for clues on the meaning, then you start acting out your needs before learning the words.

That is also how TPR (or Total Physical Response works). The teacher creates an action for the words they use, and students mimic while saying the word or phrase. This helps them learn English faster as it links their physical actions to the language, making it a teaching method that every ESL Teacher should use in class.

What are some other benefits to TPR? It can help students learn new words, it can be used in big or small classes, it doesn't need much preparation, it gets students excited about learning and is effective for all age groups.

10 TPR Activities

1. Demonstrate vocabulary

Students should be encouraged by their teacher to mimic new words. By acting out a language, they will interpret meaning through different parts of the brain, pairing physical movement with the language.

When using verbs you should roleplay the activity and ask the students to copy you. Like every time you say eat, do the action and the students follow.

They will also understand it better by watching it being performed, and doing it themselves. Nouns can be taught the same way by pairing it with obvious actions connected to it. For example: Toothbrush, you can brush your teeth. Students look towards you for guidance and will learn a language faster from a teacher that is more expressive when teaching.

A bonus of this is that students will become more submissive to your authority and be more engaged. Because they follow your movements, subconsciously they will see you as their leader, making it easier for you to control the class in the future.

Here are the steps for demonstrating vocabulary:

Model and repeat. Say the new vocabulary word to your students. While you do that, use exaggerated gestures, facial expressions, props or body movements to illustrate the meaning of the word.

Have students copy the same gestures, facial expressions or body movements while you say the word.

Then ask them to say the word while making the movement.

Finally, you do the action without speaking, then the students do the action while saying the word. You can also mix things up by saying the word and they act out the meaning.

Make sure to write the vocabulary or phrases on the board so that students can make the connection between oral and written words.

2. Simon Says

The most famous TPR game is definitely Simon Says. It is simple to do and students enjoy being challenged. How it works is that the teacher calls out an action which the students have to complete. But, students must only do the action if it's preceded by "Simon Says", which adds a fun challenge to the game. By doing this the students learn new vocabulary and instructions by physically acting them out.

For example – Simon says touch your nose. Touch your ear, you're out!

But, instead of randomly calling out actions, teachers should be more methodical in their approach to using Total Physical Response.

First start out with basic actions:

Touch your nose, bend your knees, walk in place, close your eyes. – These are good for practicing commands, learning body parts and motor skills.

Then, take it up a notch by using everyday tasks:

Wash your hands, pet the cat, write in your book. There are countless possibilities – Try to incorporate whatever topic you're doing in class that day.

Pretend to: Things don't need to be real, students can have great fun by acting out.

Paint in the sky. Blow bubbles. You are Superman picking up a truck.

Emotions: You are sad. You are happy. Simon says it's your birthday!

Add adjectives, objects and people

Slowly, quickly... Move your friend's book

Add possessives. Pick up your, use my...

Add this, that, here, there. Simon says look there... Look up.. Gotcha

Use Colors, numbers, sizes. Show 4 fingers. Show me a blue pen.

Animals and sounds: Moo like a cow. Simon says Wag your tail like a dog.

It can be tough thinking up actions on the spot, so I added a FREE word file with 100 Actions for Simon Says in the description below. All you have to do is join the Etacude email list.

After practicing a couple of rounds, eliminate the students who get it wrong.

Another fun way to do it is the circle method. Students stand around the teacher in a circle, make sure there is enough space. The teacher then calls out the word which the whole class does, the LAST student to do the action is out. This can also be done while the students are standing behind their desks.



100 Simon Says Activities

Write a letter	Stand on your chair	Turn around in a circle	Snap your fingers	Make thumbs up
Pick up your pen	Stand under your chair	Jump up	Swim	Spin around twice
Look sad	Go to the window	Hop on your right/left foot	Make a snowball	salute
Look at the sky	Put on your shoes	Clap your hands	Sweep the floor	Roar like a lion
Take out your key, unlock the door	Walk to the door	Touch your knees	Ski down the mountain	Move in slow motion
Open the door	Take off your shoes	Wiggle your fingers	Drink hot chocolate	Use magic
Rub your eyes	Cough	Put your arm in the air	Play guitar	Touch your nose
Think	Cry	Flap your arms like a bird	Be a penguin	Scratch your arm
Look happy	Tap the table with your foot	Run in place	Be scissors	Put your hands on your head
Wake up	Point to the door	Put your hands on your hips	Hug yourself	Do jumping jacks
Yawn	Pick up your pen	Moo like a cow	Wiggle your nose	Drive a car
Stretch	Close the window	Wink	Close your eyes	Slide to the right
Wash your face	Smell a flower	Wave hello	Blow a kiss	Play a computer game
Brush your teeth	Take your pen and give it to Angela	Sleep	Climb a ladder	Answer the phone
Get dressed	Fetch your book and give it to me	Stick out your tongue	Crouch into a ball	You failed your test! Act worried
Have breakfast	Put the pen between the books	Act Like a robot	Look left	Hide from your mom
Put on your back pack	Put the eraser in the box	Touch your ears	Reach for the ski	Work out at the gym
Say good bye to your parents	Put the ruler on top of the box	Meow like a cat	Shoot a gun	Walk like a zombie
Walk to school	Put 2 pencils in the box	Freeze	Shake like jelly	yawn
laugh	Put the green book on the table	Bow	Act like a ballerina	Sit down

3. Fun Card Game

We can use this game in many ways, but I will explain it with daily activities.

Because daily activities are a good way for students to learn everyday actions.

First, you need a normal deck of cards.

Use as many cards as actions, for example, if you write 10 actions on the board, only use A – 10 and remove J, Q and K.

For example:

A – Cook dinner

2 – Brush your teeth

3 – Get dressed

4 – Hang up laundry

Ect.

Once you have all 10 written on the board, go through them with the students. Remember, with all learning, repetition is key.

Now, there are 4 corners in your classroom. Assign each corner to a different suit. For example: diamond is that corner, that is the kitchen. Spade is in that corner, it is the bathroom.

Heart is that corner, it is outside. Club is the last corner, that is your bedroom.

Place the cards in the middle, students have to pick one card, then go do their action in one of the corners. It's a lot of fun!

Once they are done, ask them what they are doing: I am brushing my teeth outside!

Outside?? Really??

You can make it competitive by eliminating players who do the wrong action. But as with all movement activities, warn the students not to run and bump into one another, otherwise they will be penalized.

Even if students don't understand all the words, they will eventually learn what it means. Students don't only mimic the words, they have fun doing it. The way that TPR works is similar to how we learn our native language... By interacting with it.

4. Mime Role Plays

These are also a lot of fun for adult students! Give each student a role to act out but tell one of them that they've lost their voice. Explain to the voiceless student what situation he or she has to act out, but don't tell the other student what it is. For example:

Student A – You need to find a pharmacy and you ask someone for directions. You have lost your voice, and you can't say a word.

Student B – You will be stopped in the street by someone who needs directions, but this person can't speak, so you must interpret their gestures to find out where they need to go.

5. Storytelling sessions

Stories are a great way to put vocabulary into context and get your students to have a better understanding of what goes on in class. Adding TPR to your story makes it more engaging and easier to understand.

Choose a story or create your own that involves the same vocabulary, preferably more than once so that the repetition helps them remember. If the topic for class is animals, create a story about going to the Zoo and seeing different animals. Add a specific TPR action for each animal or action. Sometimes I like to make a particular student the subject of the story. It makes them feel included and special. It's good if the story goes full circle, it may not seem like much but students like having a good ending.

Use a typical story plot. Going to the Zoo. Continue : Meet all the animals, hi elephant, hi giraffe. Problem: The monkey has escape. Where is monkey? I have a banana, let's open the banana. Finally, monkey comes back. Hi monkey. Eat the banana.

When you are done telling the story, ask a few students redo the story for class. By summarizing what they have learned, they are more likely to remember it. Using TPR in a story format helps them practice telling the story in full sentences.

6. Drive Time

When developing your TPR activity, think about what your students may experience in the outside world. Experiences like giving and receiving directions are essential elements for ESL and the TPR driving activity will allow your students to master these.

You will need to get to class a bit early for this lesson to set up your classroom into a series of streets and common places from your neighborhood.

You can label each street in the room, leading to a hospital, post office, home, hotel, park and so on. You could tape the locations to the students' desks, and make the pathways between the desks for the streets.

1. After you built your little classroom town with streets, have your students stand in various starting places. This will be the first stage of this TPR activity. For example, "Tom, go stand by the post office." Student Tom will follow the command and walk to the post office.

2. Next, you will instruct a few students to get into their imaginary cars and command them to move about the room as you instruct. For example, "Jane, go pick Tom up at the post office." Jane will then go and pick up Tom.

3. Another layer to this activity is to give and receive directions. Have Jane give Tom directions to a certain place and see if he can complete the task without knowing the final destination. This promotes discussion and communication between students, a great ESL skill for them to work on.

This activity can be done in many various ways and the students always have fun with it. Remember to get them to review the activity by writing down the directions afterwards.

7. Step-By-Step Recipes and Instructions

After your students have mastered basic vocabulary, doing a step-by-step activity is a great way to test and encourage them to listen well. Simply give your students a set of directions verbally to follow. Don't check in after each step, just let them figure it out as they go.

After the directions are finished, check in on their final product and see if the outcome is correct. Review the activity to fix the steps where they might have made a mistake.

This is a great way to teach your students a new skill (origami, drawing a picture, making a specific type of sandwich) and practice their listening comprehension and language development at the same time. Your students don't need to respond verbally or form any words at all. They simply have to listen and follow the directions step-by-step.

Once they have mastered it, they can write down or practice giving the instructions to a partner.

8. Props for English

The idea is to collect a bunch of random small items that could fit inside a shoe box. The items could include toys, miniature furniture, plastic flowers, buttons, keys, play money, toy cars, crayons, etc. With this shoe box filled with small items you can teach a variety of phrases, commands, questions, and vocabulary terms easily. These items can be a great tool if you're looking to introduce some TPR into your classroom routines, even with older students.

One of the ways you can use this shoe box technique is to have your students go through the items.

For example: Sort the items by color, first letter, category, size, etc. Say things like, "find a red item," or "pick up an animal," or "choose an item that you would find in the kitchen." You could also play a game like, "which one of these items doesn't belong?"

Once your students are ready, you can move beyond TPR and ask them to create their own stories or dialogues using the items.

9. Chants

Chants are one of the core elements of teaching English to young learners.

Kids love the rhythm, movements and repetition while doing chants.

There are many reasons for the success of chants with young learners, but most like learning new movements to go with the words.

10. Charades

Divide the class into two groups. Then, let the members of each group find 2 random words from their text book and write it on scraps of paper. Then hand the papers to the other group. You can also provide the words yourself or make it phrases for older students.

Then, one person from each group goes to the front and takes a random paper from the pile. What I like to do is let the student take 2 papers and pick their favorite, that gives them a sense of ownership over their actions.

When you give the signal, both students have to act out the word and the other students call out answers until the correct one is found. This could also be a race where each member of the group gets a turn to go to the front. First team through all the words is the winner.

Conclusion

TPR is great for keeping the attention of your students, and helping them learn faster by pairing the physical, with the language. Use it to make your English classes more enjoyable and engage your students with the lesson.