

A–Z of teaching young learners: Starting a lesson

What and why?

Many things happen at the beginning of a lesson which, as teachers, we may be unaware of. The first moments of a lesson can establish for a child how far they feel 'included' and whether they will understand what is happening. Many things are happening in a child's life, and to expect them to suddenly 'switch into' an English lesson without being 'eased in' will often mean that some children don't make the transition until too late – sometimes not until the lesson is ending! It may be some days since their last English lesson, or they may have just been involved in some very different activity (another subject, a game, playtime, etc.). It is important, then, to 'build a bridge' into the English lesson.

Practical ideas

- You can play some music as they come into the class or as you get things ready – one of the songs that they know, for example.
- You can start with 'a round' – that is, going around the class. Everyone can say something that they remember from the last lesson: a word, a song, something that happened spelling – anything. If they don't know what to say, they can just say I learned some English!
- Instead of a round, you can ask the children to 'brainstorm' in groups, noting down things that happened or that they remember. You can ask each group for one or two of the things that they remember.
- You can achieve the same thing with a quiz. Ask the children to look back at the pages they have covered in the book and find certain things, for example, particular words, what a person was wearing, how many people were in a picture, and so on.
- 'Show and tell' is a good way to start a lesson, making the children feel personally involved. You could ask them to bring in something that has something to do with English – for example, some English that they have found on a packet, a postcard they have received, a book in English they have at home, etc.