

# ACTIVATE YOUR ENGLISH

## 'SPEAK - SURE' Workshop Summary

by **John L Norman - Director of AYE**

Following my original paper 'The Missing Element' and the three workshops held in Italy in January, I am here providing, as promised, a brief outline summary of the practical exercises included in the workshop. For most benefit, I suggest reading the summary along with the original article which is also on this website.

The main point of the article, and indeed the workshop, is that more attention needs to be paid to helping students improve their articulation, if they are to be able to communicate effectively in English. However good their grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, the accurate production of vowel and consonant sounds, especially for medial and final consonants, is vital. Students need practice, understanding, energy and accuracy in articulation to express themselves and be fully understood in English.

I suggest that a good way to do this is to create a warm up routine of exercises to use, with variations, at the start of each lesson. Surely every teacher can spare 5 minutes - such a routine also has the effect of energising students, especially when done standing up.

So, your warm up routine might look something like this -

**1 minute - relaxation exercises** - gentle movements to head and neck, **breathing** exercise - counting to 10 on one breath, from soft to loud, and reverse etc, **brain gym** exercise connecting left and right brain hemispheres, and **mouth circuit** loosening tongue, tip and blade, lips, jaw etc.

**1 minute - placing exercise** - trying to bring the sound forward in the mouth. **Humming** - with variations of pitch, volume etc - finger on lips and face to feel increasing vibrations. **H - ommm** sound, as above - make it dramatic. This exercise also increases resonance. ( with all these exercises and those that follow, have all the students speaking together - breathe between each sound, teacher to lead, conduct, orchestrate, control and watch out for any students hyperventilating and getting light headed )

**1 minute -- vowel sign speaking - a e i o u + nv 9 neutral vowel - (the key to fluency)** Speak, repeat, vary - look for accuracy and energy. Use the m sound as in - M A MA M E MA ME M I MI MA ME MI M O MO MA ME MI MO M U MU MA ME MI MO MU and MINIMANOOSH - and repeat.

**1 minute consonant speaking** - single sounds and clusters and combinations -eg  
t t t t t - ta ta ta ta - te te te te ta te ta te ti ti ta ti etc  
b b b b p p p p - ba be be ba ba be bp bp bp etc

kkkkk ggggg - kg kg kg etc

Focus on whatever sounds need most practice - with variations.

**1 minute tongue twisters - eg**

Peggy Babcock and repeat x 3

Fife 4 Forfar 5 x3

She sells sea shells on the seashore x 3 - substitute final s with z

Red Lorry yellow lorry - red lolly yellow lolly x3

Thistlers and thatchers think thorough thoughts x 1000000!

Make a vocal cantata - two groups different TT's - make a round etc

This, of course, is just an example. Create your own routine - make it fun, bring the language to life while working on accuracy and energy.

There are many other activities to pursue linked to the same purpose - for example -

**Write a tongue twister competition** - invite students to prepare/create their own - give them a sound - max 10 words - it must make sense. Have a competition lesson - each group speaks its own new TT. Vote on the winner.

**Try the 'Silent Language' exercise** - partners face each other - they use a simple four line dialogue ( not prepared) and speak the words with no sound but with maximum energy mouthing. One speaker starts - listener responds if he/she has understood. If not, listener holds up hand to make the speaker repeat. Fun, difficult and very good practice.

**Try the 'What makes the Sound' exercise** to increase awareness and understanding of sound production process. Two teams - give them a sound to practice - they then have to describe exactly how the sound is made. No need for technical jargon.

Finally, spend a lesson preparing and speaking a poem or piece of prose - we used The First Voice opening speech from **Under Milk Wood by Dylan Thomas** and **Holy Thursday from Songs of Innocence and Experience by William Blake**. Work on understanding, set the poem for different speakers and voice groups, organise the class, rehearse and perform - possibly record the final performance for students to evaluate the quality of their own speaking. A wonderful way to create a class experience of bringing the language to life. You will need easier material for younger students.

This outline provides some examples of practical ways to improve students speaking. There are many others. Try them, use them, create your own warm up routine, observe the improvement in the students articulation.

Have fun, be bold and let me know how you get on. I hope we shall meet again.

John Norman