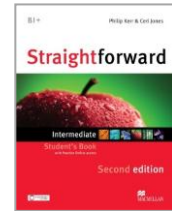




Recycling Vocabulary Making Associations

Activity scenarios by Philip Kerr



Introduction

Learners of a language need **opportunities to practise** using the new language they have encountered. Ideally, the practice will be a little more than the occasional gap-fill or multiple choice exercise. Ideally, it will involve **meaningful communication**, will provide **multi re-exposures** to the new language, and will be **memorable**. And, ideally, from the **teacher's** point of view, it will involve **minimal preparation** or marking.

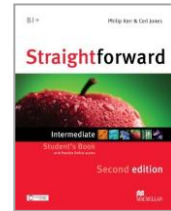
With specific sets of vocabulary, your coursebook will provide at least one practice activity, and the teacher's book will probably suggest more. But learners will also benefit from communicative activities that **mix up the discrete lexical sets** that have been presented and practised on previous occasions. They'll benefit from encountering the words that they are in the process of learning in different contexts. Fortunately, there is a range of classroom activities that offer precisely that.

These activities all encourage learners to make associations between the words they are learning and words they already know. Besides offering good communicative practice, the activities may also promote memorisation and extension of word knowledge. The mental lexicon – the way we store words in our brains – is frequently described by psychologists and linguists as an enormous **network of associations**. Items of knowledge, such as words, are not stored in closed cubby-holes, but as particular patterns of associations, and these patterns are closely connected to other patterns, other items of knowledge, other words. Some of the activities play on the **brain's creative, pattern-finding potential**. For this to be possible, you need a **relaxed** class and a **non-threatening atmosphere**.

There is evidence that word meanings are stored in an organized way, cross-linked to other word-meanings. For instance, when we hear a story about a single farm animal, such as a sheep, psychologists have discovered that several other words for farm animals – horse, cow, pig – are simultaneously activated in our minds, depending on our cultural conceptions of farms and the animals normally found on them. We can refer to this part of our long-term memory as our mental dictionary or lexicon. And no one should be surprised to learn that our lexicon is partially constructed by our culture, because words come from cultures.

Daniel Everett (*Language: The Cultural Tool*, London, 2012, p.193)

There is a short, **fun video clip** on Youtube of the British magician, Derren Brown, playing a word association game: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztHMT9IGVDw> You might like to show this to your class as an introduction to the idea of word associations.

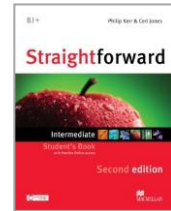


Some straightforward and highly effective activities with coursebook word lists

- Focus on the **words in red**. These are the most frequent words in the language. These are the ones your learners need most.
- If possible, use the **editable, digital wordlists** that are available with "Straightforward Practice Online".

Alternatively, you can use the lists that can be downloaded free at <http://www.macmillanstraightforward.com/resources/companions/>
- Bilingual lists** are available for 13 languages, **including Polish**. This will allow you to add extra words that crop up in your lessons, and delete others that you do not want to focus on.
- As a regular part of **homework**, get your students to study the words on these lists.
- Encourage your students to **say the words aloud** when they are studying them. This **aids memorisation**.
- As an alternative to simply studying the words at home, you could ask the students to organise the words (you have asked them to study) into a **mindmap**. At the beginning of the next lesson, the students should compare their mindmaps.
- Use **quick spelling tests** as fillers in your lessons. More challenging and more useful than simple spelling checks is to **dictate the words** in the students' own language, and they must write down the English equivalents. Very old-fashioned, **still very useful!**

WORD LIST		
Newspapers		
article <i>n C</i> ***	/ˈɑː(r)tɪk(ə)l/	thief <i>n C</i> **
circulation <i>n U</i> **	/ˌsɜː(r)kjʊˈleɪʃ(ə)n/	trial <i>n C</i> ***
daily <i>adj/n C</i> ***	/ˈdeɪli/	victim <i>n C</i> ***
feature <i>n C/v</i> ***	/ˈfi:tʃə(r)/	violent <i>adj</i> **
headline <i>n C</i> **	/ˈhedˌlaɪn/	witness <i>n C</i> **
journalist <i>n C</i> **	/ˈdʒɜː(r)nəlɪst/	
left-wing <i>adj</i>	/ˈleftˌwɪŋ/	Other words
news coverage <i>n U</i>	/ˈnjuːzˌkʌv(ə)rɪdʒ/	abandon <i>v</i> **
press <i>n U</i> ***	/pres/	access <i>n U</i> ***
quality	/ˈkwɒləti	annual <i>adj</i> ***
newspaper <i>n C</i> ***	ˈnjuːzpeɪpə(r)/	attitude <i>n C</i> ***
right-wing <i>adj</i>	/ˈraɪtˌwɪŋ/	best-selling <i>adj</i>
		biscuit <i>n C</i> **
		cable <i>n C</i> **
		cool off <i>v</i>
		cream <i>n U</i> **
		crossword <i>n C</i> *
		cyclist <i>n C</i> *
		demand <i>v</i> ***
		demonstration <i>n C</i> *
		developing world <i>n</i>
Compound nouns (driving)		
credit card <i>n C</i> **	/ˈkredɪtˌkɑː(r)d/	divorced <i>adj</i> **
driving licence <i>n C</i>	/ˈdraɪvɪŋˌlaɪs(ə)ns/	employer <i>n C</i> ***
ID card <i>n C</i>	/aɪˈdiːˌkɑː(r)d/	endanger <i>v</i>
mobile phone <i>n C</i> **	/ˌməʊbaɪlˈfəʊn/	engineering <i>n U</i> ***
motorway <i>n C</i> **	/ˈməʊtə(r)weɪ/	exaggerated <i>adj</i>
no-parking zone <i>n C</i>	/nəʊˈpɑː(r)kɪŋˌzəʊn/	facilities <i>n pl</i>
		flash <i>v</i> **
one-way street <i>n C</i>	/ˌwʌnweɪˈstri:t/	fountain <i>n C</i> *
police station <i>n C</i> *	/pəˈliːsˌsteɪʃ(ə)n/	globalization <i>n U</i>
seat belt <i>n C</i>	/ˈsiːtbelt/	hypothetical <i>adj</i> *
speed limit <i>n C</i>	/ˈspiːdˌlɪmɪt/	investigative <i>adj</i>
traffic lights <i>n C</i>	/ˈtræfɪkˌlaɪts/	launderette <i>n C</i>
		living conditions <i>n pl</i>
		look-alike <i>n C</i>
		media <i>n</i>
		movie <i>n C</i> *
		naked <i>adj</i> **
		negotiation <i>n C</i> **
		network <i>n C</i> ***
		nude <i>adj</i>
		overcrowding <i>n U</i>
		pathetic <i>adj</i> *
		patience <i>n U</i> *
		pie <i>n C/U</i> *
		pompous <i>adj</i>
		protest <i>n C/v</i> **
Law and order		
arrest <i>v</i> **	/əˈrest/	
clue <i>n C</i> **	/kluː/	
court <i>n C</i> ***	/kɔː(r)t/	
crime <i>n C/U</i> ***	/kraɪm/	
criminal <i>n C</i> *	/ˈkrɪmɪn(ə)l/	
evidence <i>n U</i> ***	/ˈeɪvɪd(ə)ns/	
gangster <i>n C</i>	/ˈgæŋstə(r)/	
guilty <i>adj</i> ***	/ˈɡɪlti/	
hold-up <i>n C</i>	/ˈhəʊldʌp/	
innocent <i>adj</i> *	/ˈɪnəs(ə)nt/	
jail <i>n C</i> *	/dʒeɪl/	
judge <i>n C</i> ***	/dʒʌdʒ/	
jury <i>n C</i> **	/ˈdʒʊəri/	
mask <i>n C</i> **	/mɑːsk/	



Some straightforward, fun and useful word association activities

Activity 1: Associate this!

Ask the class to look at a selection of words from a word list. Ask them to look at the first word on the list and then to find another word on the list which they can associate with it. Ask one student to say her / his associated word and to explain the association.

Now ask the class to focus on the word that has just been mentioned (by the student). Ask them to find another word from the list that they can associate with the new word. Ask a volunteer to give the new word and explain the association. Once the students have grasped the activity, they can carry on in small groups.

Activity 2: Forced associations

Once the students have got used to the idea of making associations between words (and to the fact that there is no right or wrong answer (so long as they have understood the word), we can push them to use their imaginations a little more.

Go back to the first word that was chosen (in Activity 1) and ask students to find another word on the list they can associate with the first word. Then, and still with the first word in mind, ask them to find *another* word from the list that can be associated with the first word. Each time, the student should explain their association.

Once the class has got the hang of the idea, you can ask them to work in pairs or small groups and try to find connections between one word and *all* the other words on the list. This can require a bit of imagination!

Activity 3: Picture associations

Collect a set of large, varied images (for example, torn out of a magazine or downloaded and printed): 7 or 8 of about A4 size should be enough. If you have posters on the walls of your classroom, you may be able to use these instead.

Write a list of words that you want to recycle on one side of the blackboard. You could include up to about 20 words. Attach the pictures to the other side of the board (or make them visible to the class).

Ask the class if anyone can find a connection between any of the words and any of the pictures. Encourage them to use their imagination. Elicit two or three responses, asking the students to explain the connections. If students are slow to offer a response, you may give an example yourself.

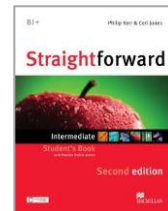
Divide the class into groups (of 4 – 5) and tell them they must find a connection between all of the words and at least one of the pictures. When you / they have had enough, do feedback on the exercise with the whole class.

Variations

- Tell the students in groups to choose just one picture, and then to look for connections between that picture and at least six of the words on the list.



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- Tell the students to choose one picture (but not to tell anyone else which picture they have chosen). They must then choose three words that they can associate with the picture. They tell their words to a partner, who must guess which picture was being thought about.
- Tell the students in groups to prepare (orally) a narrative which includes seven or eight of the words on the list. They will find this easier if they relate their narrative to one of the pictures. Once the groups have prepared their narratives, they can pass it on to other groups (à la Chinese whispers).

Activity 4: Words in sentences

Write a list of words that you want to recycle on the blackboard. You should include over 25 words. Divide the class into groups and explain the rules of the 'game'. With lower levels, the rules can be explained in the students' mother tongue.

Rules

The object of the game is to make sentences that contain words from the list on the board. If you

use just one of these words in a sentence, you get 1 point. If you use two of the words, you get 2 points. If you can make a correct sentence with three of these words, you get 3 points. The more risks you take, the more points you can score. But if your sentence is incorrect, you'll get no points and you'll miss your turn.

Give the groups four or five minutes to begin working. Then ask one group to send one of their members to the board. This person will write a sentence that their group has prepared.

Tell the group if the sentence is correct (and give points) or incorrect (but do not explain why it is incorrect!). Give everyone a little more time before asking someone from the next group to come to the board to write a new sentence or to correct a sentence that is already there.

When a word has been used correctly in a sentence, cross it off the list. It cannot be used again.

Continue in this way until you or the students have had enough. With the whole class, look through any uncorrected sentences on the board and look at any words from the list on the board that students seem to have been avoiding.

Activities such as these, when a class is familiar with the procedure, can be a useful way of starting or finishing a class. They also work well towards the end of a term. They require quite a lot of talking, and hopefully some of it will be in English!

Straightforward
Second edition

Go to www.macmillanstraightforward.com and find
more class activity ideas, tests, e-lessons, and videos!