



5-minute physical tasks for the language classroom

Marc Helgesen

www.HelgesenHandouts.weebly.com

When we sit for 20 minutes, blood flows downward. There is a blood build-up in the feet, lower leg and buttocks. One minute of standing and moving around leads to a 15% increase of blood – and therefore oxygen – to the brain. (Sousa, 2011, *How the Brain Learns*. Corwin Press. p. 30.).

These are short activities you can do in the middle of your classes to insert physical activity. In most cases, they ask the students to review what they have been doing in the class so far. In a few cases, they are talking about or doing something else.

Note: many classrooms have too many desks for much physical movement. You can fix this by having students push the desks together to make rows of two desks each. The aisles between them provide space for movement.

1. Well-balanced students. Students in pairs. They stand toe-to-toe. They hold each others' wrists and lean backwards so their bodies form a giant "V". They try to balance as they discuss the class so far. Note they really are balancing each other, not just leaning backwards.



Note: have them grip wrists for strength.



2. Three-student stars.

Like *well-balanced students*, above, but in 3's. They lean out, like they are forming a 3-pointed star. Again, they discuss today's class so far.

3. Power Poses Explain that body position influences your body's chemicals. These poses increase testosterone (a power hormone) and decrease cortisol (a stress/fear chemical). Students hold each pose for 1-2 minutes. They should notice their head, shoulders, chest, breathing and feelings. Poses:

- #1 Wonder Woman / Superman. Feet apart, hands on hips, chest out, head up.
- #2 King/Queen of the world. Like above but arms up and out to the side. Like you are holding the whole world, or maybe giving it a hug.
- #3 Victory. Arms above head, forming a big "V" – like when you win a race.



4. Walk & talk. Work with a partner. Stand up. Walk around the room. Talk about the lesson so far today. If there is a dialog in their textbook, they can also practice that.

5. Walking yoga. They slowly walk around the room, breathing in rhythm to their walking. *Breath out 2-3-4, hold 2-3-4. Breath in 2-3-4, hold 2-3-4.* They are silent and focus on their breath. Note: Breathe out through the mouth, in through the nose for the best oxygen exchange.

6. Playing catch review. Work in groups of 4-6. Each group makes a ball out of an old newspaper (or use stuffed animals). One person says one thing they have studied, learned or talked about today. She throws the ball to any other student. She repeats that sentence. Then says her own. Then throws the ball. The next student repeats the second student's

sentence, then adds her own. Note: at the beginning of a course/semester, have them add their names so they learn each others: “I’m (name #1). (sentence)” “Thank you (name #1). (#1’s sentence). I’m (name #2) (#2’s sentence).”

7. Balloons. Students work in groups of 5-6. Each needs a balloon. They toss the balloon to the partner. Two review suggestions: vocabulary – students say vocabulary connected to topics the teacher announces (tied to the lesson theme). They try to say the word before the balloon gets to them. OR They say a sentence related to the lesson theme.

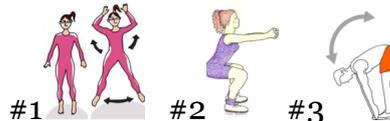
8. Musical chairs. Groups of 5-6. One less chair per group than members. Like the game musical chairs except (a) when a player is “out” (doesn’t get a chair), she doesn’t leave the game. She says at least 3 sentences related to the target topic and (b) before each round, the teacher announces the topic – related to the lesson (example: if they are talking about preferences, topic might include things they like: food, sports, entertainers. Students think of their sentences. For stronger students have them add more information, such as *I like (entertainer) because (reason)*. Give them **thinking time** so everyone thinks of an answer.

9. Line up, non-verbally. Students work in groups of 7-10. The teacher calls out the task. Students have to mime their answers or somehow get the meaning across nonverbally. Then they check in English. If you happen to be teaching comparatives, there are many options related to the grammar • Height. (this is a good one to teach the activity with since it is easy to check) /Time you get up/go to bed – earliest to latest. • How long does it take you to get to school? • How many letters in your name? • Hair length • Size of your hand (good because it encourages appropriate touching – good for oxytocin (positive brain chemical) release). (Even if you are not teaching comparatives, it is a good physical break).

10. Slap-clap-snap-snap. For vocabulary review. Also fluency work (they need to speak quickly). Students in groups of 5-6. They do these actions in rhythm: slap thighs, clap hands, snap fingers, snap fingers. The teacher says the category. One student says the category and a related word. The next student repeats the word and add one more. They continue. Example: *color → red → hot → dog → cat → mouse → Mickey → Disneyland*

11. Line up (2 x 5). Students stand in lines facing each other. They have a one-minute conversation about (a) the class so far today or (b) the grammar or function point of the lesson as it relates to their own lives. They see how much they can say in one minutes. Then each person in one line moves to the right and has a similar conversation with a new partner. They continue about 5 times. Variations: for stronger classes, have them speaker for 2-3 minutes. OR have them speak for 1 minute each. Partners ask questions.

12. Boot camp. For review of items with short answers (e.g., vocabulary). The teacher calls out a few questions (“*What word mean (x)?*”). Say each one two times so everyone understands. Delay student answers (you want everyone to have time to think. Signal for an answer: *1-2-Go!* Students with the correct answer do 5 jumping jacks(#1). Students with the wrong answer do 5 exercises that are less fun such as squats (#2) or toe touches (#3). This shouldn’t be a punishment. It is more like a game (imitating a military boot camp physical training. *Give me 5 squats!*).



(Art courtesy www.perfectingtheimperfections.com)

13. 6 dots. Each pair needs one die (as in “1 die, 2 dice”). Label 6 places around the room with numbers 1 to 6. Pairs roll the die. They go to that number. They say that number of sentences about today lesson. Then they roll again. They go to the next number and say that number of new sentences about the lesson. When they get a number they already did, they still go to that place. This time they just roll the die again. The goal is to visit all six locations as quickly as possible. (No dice? They do a “rock/scissors/paper”-like game but use 0, 1, 2 or 3 fingers).

14. We’re doing sports. The teacher calls out a series of sports. Students pantomime each one as quickly as possible. They might try to do more than one action (e.g. “Baseball” could be swinging a bat, throwing a ball, catching a ball, etc.) If you want, have them say what they are doing (using the present continuous: *I’m swinging a bat*). Possible sports: baseball, tennis, soccer, swimming, skating, skiing, golfing, archery, rock climbing, canoeing, badminton, frisbee, ballet, kick-boxing.

15. Peer neck massage Students form two lines, they put their hand on the neck/shoulders of the person in front of them. They massage the person. After a minute or so, turn around and massage the other person. Great before tests! (Thanks to Tim Murphey for this one).