



Effective Activities to Teach English Simple Present Tense

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Abstract: Teaching and learning grammar effectively are not easy for both teachers and learners. Especially, when learning English tenses, learners may encounter different troubles from understanding theory to using them in certain contexts. Moreover, it can be so tedious to do a lot of grammar exercises. Hence, teachers should employ effective activities to teach English tense more lively.

Key words: effective activities, English, simple present

I. Introduction

In learning English, grammar is one of the three language components. It is essential for English language learners to master it although it is not easy to understand and practice. Learning tenses may become an extreme difficulty for some learners whose native languages do not have as many tenses as English language. Furthermore, learning grammar does not sound interesting for learners. They can easily get bored or exhausted with grammar theory and exercises. Therefore, it is necessary to have more thrilling and effective ways to teach English tenses. Through activities or games, learners can enjoy learning grammar and applying them in specific contexts.

There are 12 tenses in English language. One of popular ones is simple present tense. It is often used to express facts, permanent states, repeated actions, future events and also describe something's or someone's age, feelings, heights, weights, size and more. To use this tense exactly, learners need a tremendous practice. However, it is easy for learners to get bored when they have to do too many exercises or drills. They need something more interesting and authentic so teachers must generate or adapt effective activities and games to teach grammar vividly.

II. Literature reviewed

Definition of grammar

There have been plenty of ways to define the word 'grammar' over the past years. Ur (1988, p.4) defines that grammar is a manipulation of a language. While, Swan (1980, p.xvi) claims that grammar is the rules that tell how the change of words shows different meaning. However, both of them share a common notion which is that grammar is the way of word or bids of word combination into a sentence. Additionally, Brown (2001, p.362) defines grammar as a system of rules which regulates the conventional arrangement and relationship of words within a sentence.

Definition of tense

The meaning of tense is related to time, so many definitions are based on time to define the word tense. According to Cambridge dictionary, "tense is a form of verb which shows the time at which an action happened". By another way, Susan (2014, p.124) defines that tense is the use of verb forms that indicates time information. Lingga (2006, p.188) states that tense is used to show the time and the perfection level of an event.

Uses of simple present tense

Simple present tense has a variety of functions. MacFarlane (2013) divided uses of simple tense into two groups, “to be” verb and other verbs.

With the verb “be”, it can be used for states.

State	Example
Age	I am 34.
Description	James is short.
Height	They are over 1 metre 80.
Weight	This package is 50 kilos.
Feelings	We are happy.
Distance	The school is seven kilometers away from my house.
Size	The bedroom is four meters by three
Price	This watch is one thousand dollars.
Time	It is five past ten now.

With other verbs, they can be used to express:

+permanent states and situation

I live in Phan Thiet city.

+things which always happen.

The sun falls in the west.

+repeated actions and events.

I have a cup of coffee after breakfast every day.

+facts about future events.

SPT1 train leaves at 13.30.

Forms of simple present tense

Forms of simple present tense are also separated into two groups, one with to be and one with remaining verbs.

+To be

Statements		
I	am (not)	a student.
He/she/it	Is (not)	From the US.
We/you/they	Are (not)	At home.
Yes/No questions		
Am	I	a student?
Is	He/she/it	From the US?
are	We/you/they	At home?
Wh questions		
Who	is	He/she/it?
Where	are	We/you/they?

+Other verbs

Statements		
I/ We/you/they		go.
	do not	go.
He/she/it		goes.
	Does not	go.
Yes/No questions		

Do	I/ We/you/they	go?
Does	He/she/it	go?
Wh questions		
Where	do	We/you/they go?
Where	does	He/she/it go?

III. Effective activities to teach simple present tense.

1. Guess the celebrity

This activity is useful for students to practice simple present tense with verb be. They can use the tense to describe age, description, height, or weight of a person. Here are the steps:

- Divide the class into groups, each group takes turn to play
- Ask one member of the playing group to come forward
- Show the rest members a photo of a celebrity
- Ask them to describe the celebrity physical appearance by making five sentences with verb be. For example:

- She is tall.
- Her hair is blonde.
- She is a singer.
- She is 35 years old.
- She is slim.

- The player listens and guesses who the celebrity is

- The player can make three yes/no questions to collect more information of the celebrity. For example:

- Is she from UK?
- Is she single?
- Is she Grammy winner?

- One way to alter this game is to change the subject such as animals, objects in classroom, places and more.

2. A day in life of an idol

This activity aims to practice simple present tense to express repeated actions and events. It is also a good authentic listening material for students to expose daily English in real life. Students watch a video clip of a day in life of an idol and then write down the idol's activities in the video clip. This video type can be easily found on Youtube or other social media networks. One of the channels having this video type is Vogue with Day in the life series. Here are the steps:

- Divide the class into groups
- Play the video once only
- Students watch the video and try to memorize its content
- In a given time, write down idol's actives as many as possible. For example:

He gets up at 6 o'clock.

After having a shower, he has a shave.

He has a healthy breakfast before getting to work.

He practices dancing three hours every morning.

He usually has lunch at a cafeteria near the company.

In the afternoon, he always practices vocals with other members in his band.

He often gets home after haft past seven.

- The winner group is the one that have the most correct sentences.

3. Physical phenomena

This activity is ideal to practice simple present tense to express things which always happen. Students look at photos that illustrate physical phenomena and then quickly write down the phenomena. Here are the steps:

- Divide the class into groups
- Each group has a board or a sheet of paper to write and show the answer
- Teacher shows a photo of a physical phenomenon
- In a given time, students write down their answer on the board or paper.
- When the time ends, students show their answer
- Each correct answer is a plus point.
- The winner is the one collect the most points.

Here are some common physical phenomena:

- The water boils at 100 degrees Celsius.
- The sun rises in the east.
- The sun sets in the west.
- The Earth orbits/goes around the Sun.
- Apples grow on trees.
- An adult has 206 bones.
- Light travels at almost 300,000 kilometres per second.
- Five times five equals/makes twenty-five.
- Water freezes at zero degrees.
- There are twelve months in a year.

4. On a first date

This activity is efficient to practice simple present tense to express permanent states and situation. During this activity, students have a chance to practice question forms of simple presents as well as their answers. In the final step, students can practice their communication skills through interviewing classmates. Here are the steps:

- Divide the class into groups
- In a given time, students make as many questions as possible to ask a partner on a first date
- Each good question is a plus point.
- The winner is the one collect the most points.
- Following this, students can have ten minutes to mingle around the class and ask questions that they have made.

Here are simple questions to ask on a first day:

- What do you do?
- Where are you originally from?
- Where exactly do you live in?
- What do you like to do when you're not working?
- Are you more of a TV person, or do you prefer movies?
- What type of music are you into?
- Are you a cat person or a dog person?
- Do you have any nicknames?
- Do you have any siblings?
- Do you like your job?
- Do you have a big group of friends?
- What are you most passionate about?
- When's your birthday?

IV. Conclusion

In general, activities or games are very useful tools for teachers to teaching English grammar. They can motivate learners to practice grammar more and efficiently during activity time. Learning grammar time will be more enjoyable and meaningful if teachers can make use of good activities and games. The suggested activities are easy to conduct without much preparation and vary or adapt for further purposes.

V. References

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