

Motivating writing activities for teenagers

Edmund Dudley
English Teachers' Day
Vienna, 5th December 2018

In this talk

- My teenage students and writing
- 10 activities to try
- For more on the topic of *Teenagers...*

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My students

- Hungarian teenagers
- 14-18 yo
- state school
- 3 x 45 min / week
- target: B2 exam



My teenage students and writing

Features of writing tasks that teenagers *don't* hate:

- traditional tasks with a creative twist
- an element of the unexpected
- options and alternatives to choose from
- an added challenge

Sample of students' writing

Dear John.

~~I write~~ I'm happy to write you again. ~~Sorry for not~~
I'm sorry for not writing sooner, but I was
interested in Sudan, so

~~My qualities~~ are I have got lots of
qualities; I'm hard-working, reliable,
and I'm also a liar, and that's a
good thing ⁽ⁱ⁾ because John has to trust me.

I'm avible for an interview
anytime. If you say Monday 30³⁰ AM
(i) will be there. ~~also~~ ^{avible} on Feb. 30.

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1. Time limits for writing

Set a time limit instead of a word limit

- Works well with flexible, open-ended writing tasks
- Effective in mixed-ability groups
- Students agree on a time and set the timer

2. Unusual constraints

Standard task, eg:

Write a 120–140 word email to a friend to ask for their advice about finding a summer job...

Add additional constraints and arbitrary requirements, eg:

- Avoid words containing the letter J
- Use six different ‘colour’ words in the email

3. Random phrases

- Add an optional extra challenge to writing tasks
- Come up with an unusual phrase
- Challenge students to use it - as naturally as possible

3. Random phrases

Writing a letter to a hotel

- Making a booking
- Asking for information about facilities
- Asking for directions

Include the phrases:

“a whisker from the beard of Charles Darwin”

and

“a warm glass of Sri Lankan mango juice ”



3. Random phrases

We are a group of well-known stem-cell researchers from Cuba. Our goal is world domination and to produce ear-wax from the DNA we had collected from a whisker of the beard of Charles Darwin.



our group.
What kind of facilities does the hotel offer? For example:
Do you have a warm glass of deep frozen Sri Lankan mango juice?



3. Random phrases

An other important thing. My best friend will die on our visit because he has a rare tropical illness. His last wish is a fresh, warm glass of Sri Lankan mango juice. I think it's not a big ~~thing~~ thing to ask.



Unusual constraints / Random phrases

What makes them effective?

There is something about a seemingly pointless challenge that many teenagers cannot resist.

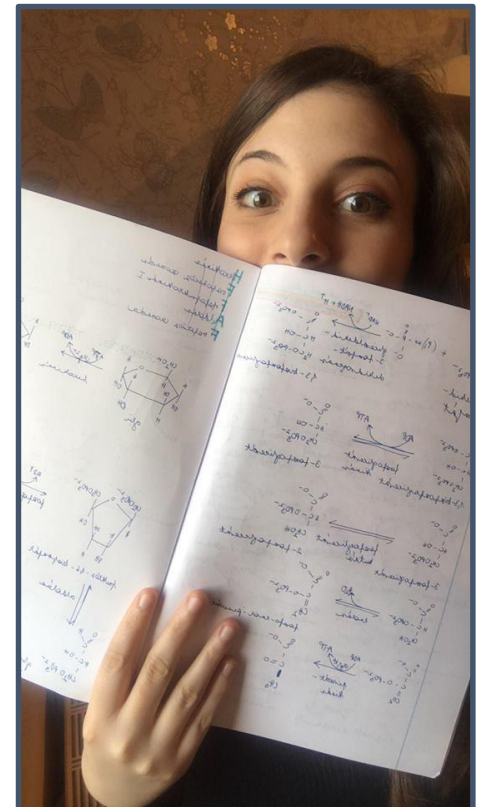


‘Challenge accepted’ meme

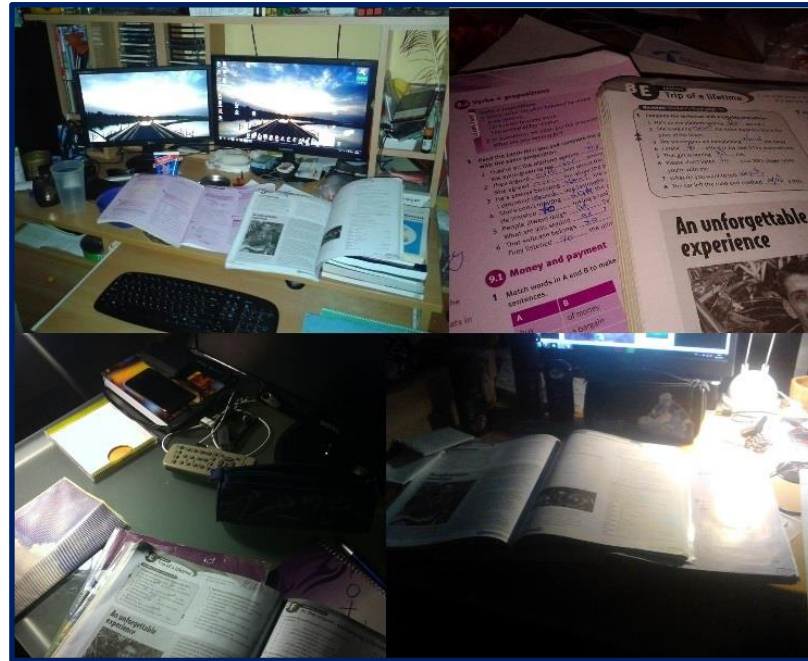
4. Homework selfie

To deter students from doing 'corridor-work'...

- ask students to send/upload a homework selfie
- vote for the most creative photo
- winner gets a classroom privilege



4. Homework selfie



Me to Polar Bear Resistance League

Post photographic evidence that you did 'homework' and not 'corridor-work'.

Upload a photo of your finished homework. In the background your home surroundings should be clearly visible.

5. Convert to QR code

If students are interested in technology...

- occasionally invite them to convert writing into QR code
- Use your phone's QR-code reader to access the text
- Optional extra: convert your feedback into QR code, too



5. Convert to QR code



6. Creative problem solving

- Set a creative-thinking challenge
- Give students a problem to solve
- They write their solutions using the target vocabulary
- Works well as vocabulary-revision task

6. Creative problem solving

You are alone in a house

You are locked inside the bathroom.

You have no mobile device.

Send a message or get someone's attention using the things in the bathroom:

- ***nail clippers***
- ***toothpaste***
- ***loofah***
- ***comb***

6. Creative problem solving

Send a message: 1) Write a message on the loofah with the paste
2) Wait for it to dry
3) Throw out at window

Send a message with toothpaste to your neighbour?
You should write your message on your window.
That's all.

7. Setting-problem-resolution stories

Collaborative writing activity in groups of 3

- each student has a blank piece of paper
- each student writes paragraph 1: setting the scene
- rotate, read, add the next paragraph
- paragraph 2 introduces a problem
- rotate, read, add the final paragraph
- paragraph 3 resolves the problem

8. Left hand, right hand

Hi, my name is left

Hi, my name is Right

8. Left hand, right hand

- Write two sentences: one left-handed, one right-handed
- compare the sentences
- choose human qualities to describe each set of handwriting
- imagine a conversation between your left hand and right hand
- write the dialogue down
- switch the pen from hand to hand for each new turn

Hi, my name is left

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Hi, my name is Right

8. Left hand, right hand

Hello, How are you?

Hi, I'm tired... Are you OK?

Actually, I feel a bit sick.

Can I help you? Do you ^{need} a doctor?

8. Left hand, right hand

I think no... I'm strong, just I
don't feel my legs. I need
sleep and rest.

OK... but you look very bad...
YOUR ~~eye~~ eyes tell me everything...
YOUR soul is sad... (aw?) Right?

8. Left hand, right hand

Hmm... Maybe... The school is very
lot of... I don't have time for
myself. ~~at~~
any

One day isn't enough everything..

That's so true... But first healthy!

Yeah, thank you!

You're welcome, I'm here for u!

8. Left hand, right hand

Hey! What's up?

Hey! How u doing?

I'm fine.

Are u?

No I'm not.

What's the problem buddy?

I don't want to write a file test
Zamanga.

8. Left hand, right hand

I thought that u have a reviews problem.

It is serious, I'm going to get a 1 and my dad'll beat me up with a belt.

Well, u'll deserve it bro.

9. Write the first sentence

- show students a book they haven't read
- their task is to write the first sentence
- show them the blurb
- invite them to ask questions
- students write their sentence on slips of paper
- read out all the sentences (students' + actual first sentence)
- vote for favourite



9. Write the first sentence

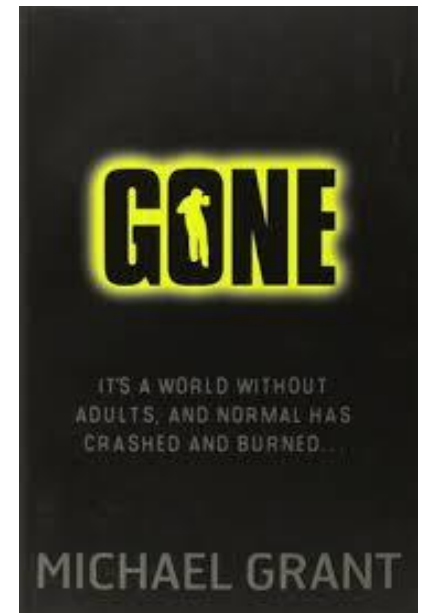
One minute the teacher was talking about the Civil War.

It all started at 12:00 o'clock on Monday.

GONE. THEY'RE ALL GONE.

It's only us now.

Do you want a bar of chocolate?



10. Hidden song lyrics

Standard writing task with a creative 'song lyrics challenge'

- students plan their writing
- they also choose a well-known song and find the lyrics
- select four lines from the song
- 'smuggle' those lyrics into their text
- share, read, try to identify the lyrics and song

10. Hidden song lyrics

Vienna: a visitor writes...

There's so much to discover in this city. I love walking around, every day discovering something brand new. You'll probably see me in one of the cafés. Come over and start up a conversation with just me. I'd be happy to show you around. Come on now, follow my lead. I'll drag you into all the bookshops, though. I can browse in bookshops for hours. I may be crazy, don't mind me.

10. Hidden song lyrics

Ed Sheeran –
Shape of You

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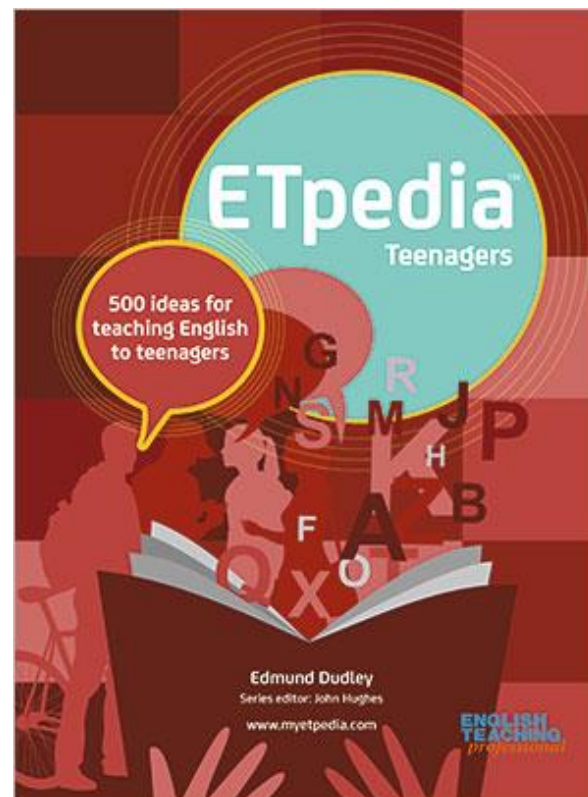
10 activities

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2. Unusual constraints
3. Random phrases
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7. Setting-problem-resolution stories
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10. Hidden song lyrics

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Edmund Dudley

Slides here:

legyened.edublogs.org

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