



Introduction Activities for Online Language Learning

Introduction activities can play a pivotal role at the start of an online activity or course. They can set foundations for community to grow and they can help learners better orient themselves to the online space. Language learners will benefit from the ability to engage with target language through initial activities prior to engaging with course content and materials. Language learners will also benefit from initial activities that help learners engage with the online space, preparing them for smooth engagement with the course content and activities.

There are many websites that list language

learning ice breakers – search and use what suits you and your context. On the next pages are four initial activity ideas that you can use or adapt as needed.

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Learn about classmates

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

This is an activity designed to help learners get to know each other and start building social connections. It will also help your learners become familiar with the discussion forum technology. It is a good activity if you have several learners with low online learning experience.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Read through your classmates' responses to the introduction activity in the introduction module and answer the following questions:

- Who has been in Canada the longest?
- Who has been in Canada for the shortest time?
- Who first arrived to a city other than Calgary?
- Who came from a country different from yours? (name 1 person)
- Who is currently working? (name 1 person)
- What is the most common expectation for this course?
- Who has a name that you did not know the meaning of before today? (name 1 person)

(note – in the introductions, learners were asked to explain any meaning associated with their name)
By Wednesday, February 18th, post your answers in your group's thread.



Navigate the space

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

A course “treasure hunt” will help your learners become familiar with the online space in depth. This type of activity can ensure that technology problems are confronted at the start of a course. It will also give you a better sense of your learners’ digital literacy proficiency, and a sense of how the language of the course interface suits the language skill levels of your learners.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTION

Complete the following tasks. If you do not know how to complete any of the tasks, post in this discussion thread to ask for help. Answering a classmate’s post for help will earn you bonus points in this activity.

- Locate the _____ support document and download it.
- After you have downloaded the _____ document, upload it to the “introduction Dropbox” and submit.
- Take a screenshot of the “edit your profile” screen.
- Post the screenshot in this discussion forum in a new discussion thread.
- Direct Message a classmate and ask them a question about their introduction.
- Respond to any questions you receive.
- In this thread, post a link to a news story that is relevant to this class.
- Create an audio file using _____ to explain your opinion about a news story that a classmate posted.
- Post your audio file in the discussion thread titled “Audio Opinions”.
- Send your facilitator an email when you have completed all of these tasks.



Digital literacy quiz

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Having learners answer questions about their digital literacy will help you to better understand their online habits and experience. If answers are posted in an open forum for the whole class to see, it can also spark conversation about online resources and useful strategies for learning online. This type of survey may also help learners network in the class if they start to talk about different social media that they use. However, be careful not to include sensitive questions in the quiz if you are going to ask learner to post their answers in an open forum.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Complete the following questions and post your answers in this discussion thread. Respond to any of your classmates' posts as you like. Please do not answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering – your post will be viewable by everyone in the class.

- What are your favorite websites and apps?
- Which websites and apps do you visit or use daily?
- Do you use any online resources specifically for language learning? If so, which ones?
- How often are you online per week?
- What do you think have been the most important developments in digital technology over the past 5 years?
- What do you find frustrating about digital communication?
- What's one way that digital communication benefits your life?



Synchronous conference call

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

If time and scheduling permit, a class conference call is an excellent way for learners to meet each other and begin to build community in the class. Many learners may not be used to the extreme asynchronous nature of online learning, and a synchronous event such as a video-conference call can help ease them into studying online. In addition, learners will have the ability to ask questions and receive answers in real time. A synchronous event will also give learners practice for speaking and listening, which is often in high demand during online learning activities.

TOPICS YOU MIGHT WANT TO COVER IN YOUR CONFERENCE CALL ARE:

Introductions

Be sensitive not to put learners on the spot – some will be self-conscious about their speaking skills and accents, and they might be less talkative than other learners. Introductions are best run as optional, or even at the end of the session.

Expectations

Learners can discuss their own expectations of the class. Discussing expectations acts as a type of introduction to each other, as they learn about their classmates' motivations and learning context.

Small talk

Small talk can be relaxing and stress free, and it gives learners a chance to bring up any topics that they feel are important. Small talk will also provide opportunities for speaking and listening practice.

Overview of the Learning Management System

Reviewing the Learning Management System provides an opportunity for immediate answers to any questions that your learners may have about the online space. Reviewing it together may help learners orient themselves in a smoother way and with a greater sense of certainty.

Preview of the course material

Previewing the course material can help learners understand the workload they face, and this can help them to plan their time for the activity or course. You can also introduce any vocabulary and language concepts that may be new to them.

Vocabulary review

Explicitly going over key vocabulary is a way to introduce concepts and material of the course or activity. Provide learners with a glossary or list of words they can keep handy throughout the course.



Reflection question

Choose one key reflection question and distribute it to the class prior to the meeting. Learners can prepare an answer or some initial thoughts about the question. Providing them with the question beforehand ensures that learners have enough time to think about the language specific to this topic.

Questions and concerns

Time for questions, concerns, and comments is an important part of any online conference. Just as in physical classrooms, be patient in allowing time for language learners to think and formulate their questions. You may even want to leave the screen (“I have to check on something, I’ll be back in 60 seconds”) to give learners time to reflect or chat among themselves.

