

Vocabulary Building with Flashcards

These activities work well with beginning level ESL learners.

The website: www.mes-english.com has free flashcards and related activities in a wide range of topics for ESL learners. These flashcards can be used in a number of different ways to help learners build their English vocabulary. Each series of activities listed below should be done over a number of lessons, building on complexity and giving the learners time to process information and practice vocabulary.

Building Oral Familiarity with Vocabulary

1. Go to the mes-english website.
2. Click on "flashcards" at the top of the page.
3. Select the topic you are focusing on from the list on the left hand side of the page and double click on it.
4. Print out a set of large flashcards, small game cards and a handout for that topic from the website. Make multiple copies of the small game cards and the handouts for your class.
5. Create a set of full or half page flashcards and a set of small game sized flashcards with the words to go with the picture flashcards you are using (You will need to type these out, as mes-english does not have them). Make multiple copies of the small game word cards for your class.
6. Start by building oral vocabulary. Show the learners the large flashcards one by one in class, and ask if anyone knows the words. Go over them orally, showing them the pictures, acting them out if possible and discussing what they mean. Have the learners repeat the words (and act them out if possible) as you hold up the pictures. The more active the learners are, the better they will remember the words.
7. Once you have gone over them a few times orally, then hold the pictures up randomly and ask the learners to tell you what the pictures are.

8. Give the learners the small game cards (pictures only) – one set for each learner or one set for each group. Say the words randomly, and have the learners hold up the corresponding picture card. Once the learners feel comfortable with the vocabulary, have different learners take turns calling out the words and checking to see if their classmates are holding up the correct picture card.
9. You can also have the learners work in pairs, taking turns holding up the cards and asking their partner: “What is this?” While they are doing this, you should circulate around the room, listening for accurate answers and assisting when necessary.

Connecting Written Words to the Vocabulary

1. Once the learners are comfortable using the vocabulary words orally, begin to use the written word flashcards in combination with the picture flashcards. Begin with the picture flashcards once again, eliciting the vocabulary orally. As the learners tell you the word for each flashcard, put it up on the board and print the word below it.
2. Give each of the learners a copy of the handout from the website. You can either print it out with the words on it, or write them out before you copy it and have the learners copy the words from the board.
3. Review the words, pointing at them randomly and having the learners tell you what they are.
4. Remove the picture flashcards from the board, leaving the written words that you printed below them on the board. Give each learner a flashcard or a couple of flashcards. Ask them to put the flashcards on the board above the correct words.
5. When all the flashcards are in the correct spot, review the words as a class, noting the spelling and patterns in the words.
6. Next, remove the words you have written on the board and give each learner a marker. Ask the learners to go up to the board and write the words for one or two flashcards of their choice. Allow them to take the handout with them to copy if they need to. Copying reinforces what they are learning. Check the words as a class.
7. Give the learners a set of small game cards (pictures) again. Hold up the large written word flashcards that you created and say each word. Have the learners hold up the corresponding picture cards. Once the

learners are comfortable with this, hold up the word cards, but do not say the word. See if they can read the word card themselves and hold up the corresponding picture.

8. Hand out the small game cards that you have created with the written words. Hold up the large picture flashcards one by one and see if the learners can hold up the corresponding word cards.
9. Hand out the small game cards that you have created with the words and the picture game cards. Have the learners match the picture game cards to the word cards individually, in pairs or in small groups. Circulate around the room, assisting when necessary, pointing out cards that students need to reconsider and answering questions.
10. Take one set of picture game cards and one set of word game cards. Select the same number of vocabulary words as half of your learners. Hand out the cards (one written word card and one picture word card for each vocabulary word) randomly, with half of the class getting picture cards and half of the class getting word cards. Have all of the learners walk around the class at the same time, saying the word for their card. Each learner with a word card must find the learner with the corresponding picture card. When everyone has found their partner, go over the words as a class, having the learners say their word and hold up their matching word/picture cards.
11. When you feel the learners are comfortable with the written vocabulary words, separate the class into teams. Divide the board up into the same number of spaces as teams. Give each team a marker. Hold up pictures one at a time and each team should send up one person to write the word on the board. The learners who are not writing are responsible for assisting the writer orally by yelling out how to spell it or suggesting corrections if necessary. The first team to write the word correctly gets a point (or each team that has written it correctly when everyone is finished gets a point, depending on how competitive you want to make it). This works well as a fun warm up over a series of days to help the learners practice.

The mes-english website also has word finds, crosswords, matching sheets, dice, gameboards and BINGOs that you can print off and use in the classroom with the learners. These also help to reinforce vocabulary. Scroll down the page when you are on the page of the topic that you want, until you see "Tools for Educators." Click on the type of activity that you want to print off or click "make it." Select your topic again and

follow the instructions. There are also ideas for games in the classroom on the mes-english website. Have fun with these activities while helping your learners build their vocabulary.