

Music can be incorporated into English class in many different ways. Using music in ESL class has many benefits for the teacher and students, such as improving memory and concentration, motivating learning, and most importantly, it makes learning fun. It should also be noted that using music can help learners to improve and develop their overall English skills, especially listening. There are many techniques for using music as a tool to supplement regular English classes, so let's look at some of the methods.



Introduce vocabulary and grammar in a meaningful way

Song gap fills are an excellent way to introduce vocabulary and grammar. They make students more interested in the language and help provide the students with a context. It is easy to find songs that use certain vocabulary or grammar by searching online. When you do a song gap fill in class, you can make it into a game by splitting the class into teams and numbering each missing word. After listening to the song a few times, you can award points for each correct word and spelling. Many classes in ESL are also topic-based. When you are introducing a new topic in class, try doing a song gap fill related to the topic such as Christmas or love, etc. This helps to introduce not only the topic but any related vocabulary.

Alternatively, you can use a song gap fill activity to showcase or highlight grammar in context before you go through the rules of a grammar lesson. Song lyrics are authentic teaching materials that can make your lessons more meaningful and interesting. Using music to introduce certain grammar concepts like prepositions, articles, or even parts of speech can help students to start noticing patterns, such as how certain words or verb tenses are used in a sentence. Additionally, song lyrics can provide genuine examples of how grammar is used by English speakers.

The topic of music is, in itself, a goldmine for teaching topic vocabulary. You can create a series of lesson plans ranging from the topic of instruments, music genres, feelings and emotions, and much more. As an example, let's look at the topic of music genres. You can select clips of music on the internet and ask students to identify different genres. This can be expanded further into a lesson on emotions and the introduction of adjectives or can even become a teachable moment to discuss cultural differences regarding the preference of music in different countries. The possibilities are endless.

Use music to teach 'real world' English

In addition to topic vocabulary, music can also be extended to teaching idioms and slang expressions. Not surprisingly, music contains a lot of slang expressions and idioms, so students can learn a lot of new language and expressions just by listening to songs. Song lyrics that contain idioms and expressions can also help to generate class discussion about the meaning of a song.

Perhaps you may have noticed that idioms and slang expressions are not always necessarily included in curriculums, and neither are they considered a priority. That is why using music is a great opportunity to introduce or talk about idioms and slang expressions especially for those students who are in ESL contexts. ESL students are more likely to encounter these idioms and slang expressions in their everyday life. Consider what we are exposed to outside of the classroom on a day-to-day basis: interaction with other native-English speakers, radio broadcasts, advertisements, TV programs, and the list goes on.

Music is diverse and there are English singers from all over the globe. Depending on where you are teaching, you can also point out the word differences between English varieties in English songs produced around the world. At the end of a lesson, check in with your students by encouraging them to use the vocabulary that they learned through music. You can challenge them to use newly learned idioms and slang expressions in conversation for homework. Have fun with it.

Using music to integrate English skills in your lessons

You can implement music into your lesson plans to help students develop listening strategies. Use music to train students to listen for particular items like vocabulary or grammar structures or help students to improve their overall listening comprehension. Integrating listening activities with other skills such as writing, speaking, and reading can help to reinforce what students learn from listening activities. This is why music is a helpful tool for your ESL classroom, you can use music to execute activities that keep your students motivated, actively participating, and engaging in the classroom.

Here is an example of a listening and speaking activity that involves music. Some prompts you can use to facilitate the activity include: "What is the singer singing?" or "What do these lyrics mean?" Start by asking your students to listen to a particular song verse and have them listen carefully for specific lines in the lyrics. After playing the clip once or twice, you can get them to either paraphrase or discuss the meaning of what they heard. This can be done as a pair activity or as a class discussion depending on your classroom dynamics.

You could also try using music in a listening and writing activity as an opportunity to develop note-taking skills. Before playing the song, prepare guiding questions for your students to use while they take notes. The questions you ask will vary depending on what you are teaching and your song choice, but open-ended questions work best. While students listen to the song, encourage them to take notes about the assigned questions. Then, they can compare their notes with a partner once the song is finished.

An alternative to this listening task would be to use the music as a dictation lesson. Play the song and stop at every line, giving students a chance to write down what they hear. After listening, they must work with a partner or in a group to put the song lyrics together. To supplement this activity, encourage students to create their own comprehension questions about the song to ask their peers. Of course, these activities should always be modeled first, to ensure that your students understand how to participate, and ultimately, enjoy the experience.

Teaching pronunciation with song lyrics

Teaching pronunciation can prove difficult at times, especially with sounds that your learners may have problems with. For example, some students may have difficulty distinguishing between the long /i/ and the short /i/ sound or perhaps they may have trouble with the consonants /l/ and /r/. To introduce and get students familiar with difficult sounds, why not listen to songs that contain rhyming words? In this case, songs with a rhyming pattern are a great resource, as your students can listen to a sound multiple times. You can try executing this activity by projecting the lyrics onto a screen and asking the class to circle the words with the target sound that you are teaching. After playing the song a couple of times, you could follow up with a team game to check if they have improved their pronunciation of the difficult sound. Divide the class into teams and pause the song each time they encounter a word with the target sound. Then, give points to the teams who pronounce it correctly.

This can also be adapted to teaching word stress patterns such as word stress on a particular syllable or on specific words in a sentence to teach chunking or connected speech. To teach this feature of pronunciation, use songs to introduce how certain sounds link together when certain words are combined, such as the pronunciation changes in contractions or the linking of words in phrases or expressions. Similar to the activity described for the difficult sounds, you can isolate the lyrics that contain connected speech and ask your students to listen carefully to write down what they hear. After the song is played once or twice, allow students to compare their answers with their peers. Another idea would be to get students to reproduce the connected speech examples by imitating the singer. This can also be converted into a team game to keep your students engaged.

Create a positive learning environment with music

Playing background music positively affects the mood of a class. Music can be played in the background when students are doing bookwork or other related exercises. Teaching with music can make activities more memorable and can help to relax and prepare students for learning. Many teachers use music to teach or facilitate creative or descriptive writing activities. For instance, you can begin your class by doing a journal activity with the following prompts: "Write about how this music makes you feel" or "What images come to mind when you are listening to this music?" Doing an activity like this can help to set the tone for the rest of the class.



You can also use music as a reward for students. The students can choose or make requests for background music that they listen to while they do bookwork. You can also play some upbeat music in the background as students are coming in and getting settled at the beginning of class. This helps to create a positive atmosphere. When the music is turned off, it signals to the students that the class is ready to begin.

Finally, during days when you can feel that the class has low energy, you can use music as an energizer activity. If you know that your class has a favourite song, you can do a sing-along to take a break from the main lesson. There is nothing wrong with taking a step back to revitalise yourself and the students before going back to the main lesson.

Engage younger learners by using music in games

Music can be used in games to liven up the class and signify when a round starts and ends. Please check our [ESL Music Games](#) page for games that can be played with music.

If you have a particularly outgoing class, you may wish to hold a singing or lip-syncing contest. Students could also explain the meaning of their chosen song before they perform. Getting the students to try writing rap songs is another great activity, and it gets the students using different word formations. The students also get to try rhyming for themselves.

If you teach young learners, singing songs together has many benefits. Kids love to sing, and they can learn a lot of language in just a few classes. You can use songs to teach vocabulary, such as 'Old McDonald had a farm' for teaching animals. You can also use songs to teach the alphabet, to indicate transitions between activities. You can even try pairing these songs with actions that make these activities even more enjoyable. Have a look online for kids' songs and match them with the level of your class.

Teaching music for higher-level or mature ESL learners

Although most of the methods described above seem to be geared toward younger or lower-level learners, the same activities can also be adapted for other levels and ages. Depending on your group of students, you can adjust or alter the focus or content of the activities to suit your learners' needs and goals.

Music is universal and it is one of those topics that everyone has an opinion about, so why not use this to your advantage? Most higher-level or mature learners enjoy discussions. Choose songs with lyrics that contain themes that encourage critical thinking. Some interesting themes you can discuss are cultural norms, abstract concepts such as happiness or regret, relationships, pop culture, or even current trends.

Using music is a great way to facilitate speaking-focused activities like presentations or surveys. Activities like these create opportunities for students to express themselves in a variety of ways. Teachers who have a bit more class time or resources like access to computer labs or devices can use these music-themed speaking activities as an opportune time to teach research skills as well. This includes how to use search engines, how to filter for information, creating PowerPoint presentations, and so much more.

As you can see, you can do a lot with music in the ESL classroom. It is an accessible resource, and you can use music as a way to teach both isolated and integrated skills. Most teachers use music as a supplementary activity, but it can also stand alone as an entire unit, a lesson, or become a part of your class routine activities. Plus, there is a variety of music you can choose from which can help you to conduct all kinds of engaging activities in the ESL classroom.