

IDEAS FOR ASSISTING IN THE CLASSROOM

*The following classroom ideas are adopted from guidelines prepared by
“REACH for your future” NGO, Vietnam.*

Model activities and do role plays. You can help the teacher demonstrate games or activities so they are clear for the students. You can also assist the teacher with writing on the board, handing out papers, cleaning up, and doing other basic classroom tasks.

Model pronunciation. The teacher may ask you to model and drill pronunciation of important words or phrases. This will include not only individual sounds, but also features like word stress (“toMAto”, “cappuCCIno”).

Be another set of eyes and ears. You can help the teacher monitor students during activities. Walk around the room and listen, helping students as necessary. You can also maintain discipline, making sure students are on task and behaving well.

Divide and conquer. Once you’re comfortable with the students, there may be times in the lesson when you and the teacher can effectively split the class in half, with each of you leading one group of students. This way you can give the students more individual attention. Again, this is particularly useful in large classes.

Challenge stronger students. In every group there may be a few students who have reasonable English skills already. Sometimes during lessons you can take them aside and challenge them by teaching them new words or phrases, or by speaking more complex sentences with them. You might also work with them before or after class, if you have the time.

Encourage weaker students. There will often be a handful of students who struggle to keep up with lessons and start to fall behind. As with stronger students, you may sometimes take them aside to give extra listening/speaking practice. Speak slowly and praise their efforts. This will help them catch up.

Be a language resource. The teacher may check with you on the meaning or pronunciation of a word or phrase, or ask what foreigners would typically say in a situation.

Tips for maximizing your effectiveness in the classroom:

- Always speak slowly and clearly. The majority of students are beginners who have little or no experience using English. Listening is a difficult skill for them, and they will need lots of practice to understand you. But speak naturally, not like a robot!
- Don’t insist on perfect pronunciation. Many features of English pronunciation are difficult for Khmer students. Final consonants (rice, noodles), consonant clusters (strawberry), and some sounds (“th” as in this) bother even advanced English speakers. Help students recognize and produce these sounds, but don’t expect perfection. It can be de-motivating if volunteers drill the students over and over with a difficult word/sound. Ask yourself “Could I understand this person speaking to me in a restaurant/shop/hotel?”
- The teacher may use a CD or audio lesson on computer. Sometimes volunteers and teachers ignore this option and act out dialogue themselves. This can make it more difficult for students! It’s hard to speak slowly and clearly and loudly enough for all students to hear, and watching a volunteer can distract students from the *actual language* they need to focus on.

Also, the teacher can play a recording several times, giving students multiple opportunities to understand. After students have listened to an audio presentation and read the script, *then* you can role play with them or the teacher to give extra listening practice.

- Don't overwhelm students with lots of ways to say things. There are many ways to say the same things in English—for example, “May I take your order?” “Are you ready to order?” “Would you like to order?” etc. Typically students only need to know one or two of these phrases. You'll confuse and overwhelm students if you give them too many options. Start with basic phrases and add new ones only as the students are ready for them.
- Think international English. There are many differences between Australian, British, American, and other types of English. As native speakers, we are partial to our own way of saying things. Some differences may be important for the students to know (“chips” / “French fries”); some may not. Add varieties slowly—don't try to teach everything at once!
- Learn (and use!) the students' names. Knowing students' names will help you get to know them as individuals, and show them that you respect them. Khmer names can be difficult at first. The more you practice saying them, the easier they will become.
- Remember that CLS teachers are permanent employees of CLS. They are familiar with the organisation and the students, and they have overall responsibility for delivering the English curriculum. If you have any issues, please bring these up, but do so respectfully, outside the lesson. Don't undermine the teacher in front of the students.