

# 10 WAYS TO..... Correct

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**In his regular column, Jim Wingate shows that everyone makes errors and that correcting them can be fun!**

**Correction is revision, reminding learners what they know. If they don't know it yet, it's not correction, it's teaching. So, if all your learners are making the same error, don't blame them. You haven't found the way to get them to remember yet. So teach it differently.**

**Constant interruption and correction can make learners afraid to speak and write. Encourage your learners to feel free to make errors.**

**With enough exposure to good models (reading, listening to tapes, etc), most errors are self-correcting.**

**Do *you* need to correct learners more than *they* need to be corrected?**

**Does '*Please correct me*' sometimes really mean '*Please hold my hand*'?**

## **One: Fluency Time, Accuracy Time**

Many teachers say, '*This activity is 10 minutes of Fluency Time. Just talk. I will note your errors. I won't stop you.*' Then they introduce five minutes of Accuracy Time when they correct errors.

## **Two: Correct English Only**

Some teachers privately note common **errors** being made and take a few minutes of each lesson to write on the board a correct version of six of the **errors**. These teachers write the correct version, not the **error**. They believe that seeing and hearing the **error** from the teacher reinforces the **error**. (Doesn't it?)

## **Three: Hot Cards**

Cynthia has slips of paper. As learners make errors, she writes the correct version

and hands it 'hot' to that learner.

#### **Four: Cold Cards**

Henri adds students' names to his correction cards and hands them out 'cold' at the end of the lesson.

#### **Five: Flash Cards**

Jan has cards representing the six common errors he is working on. When he hears (or sees written) one of those errors, he points to, or holds up, the card for the learner to self correct. His current cards include a big 'S' to indicate the third person singular (or plurals), '-ed' for the Past Simple, 'irreg' for an irregular verb, etc. Where possible Jan makes the cards colourful or humorous, eg a picture of a ship or a sheep to correct that pronunciation confusion.

#### **Six: Peer Correction**

Introduce a small signal to show learners that there's an error in what they have just said. If individuals can't correct themselves, silently invite other learners to supply the correction. Encourage learners to help one another. It increases their self-reliance, improves group cohesion, and keeps them alert.

#### **Seven: Finger Correcting**

Introduce your fingers – students repeat the last sentence word by word as you hold up each finger in turn. Your fingers become a most useful correction tool. Identify a wrong word (vocabulary or pronunciation) by indicating the relevant finger and expressing doubt in your face. If words need to be elided, eg 'do not' to 'don't', use your other hand to press the two relevant fingers together. If there are too many words, hold up a finger for each word spoken and then bend down the word(s) to be omitted. If a word is missing, hold up a finger for each word spoken, but keep the missing word/finger bent down. Then restore the finger to upright.

#### **Eight: Persistent Errors**

With persistent errors, use learners instead of fingers to represent words, eg five students represent the words 'I', 'do', 'not', 'like', 'chocolate'. Students move around to express positive and negative statements and questions. Add extra students to represent positive and negative question tags. You then replace the 'I' with 'he' or

'she' and give each group a card with a big letter 'S'. They pass the 'S' from main verb to the auxiliary and back to express 'She *likes* chocolate' and 'she *doesn't* like chocolate'.

This technique can be used for other grammar items. For example, four students represent 'I', 'like', 'to', 'swim'. A fifth learner representing '-ing' drives out the enemy 'to' and recreates the sentence as 'I like swimming'. This little role-play eliminates the error \*'I like to swimming'. 'To' can drive out '-ing' in other constructions.

### **Nine: Grammar Auction**

Write on the board a mix of six incorrect sentences (containing errors students have been making) with ten correct ones. Your learners bid (imaginary) money to 'buy' the sentences they think are correct. When you reveal which sentences are 'real' and which are 'counterfeit', your learners will remember because they either gained or lost 'money'!

### **Ten: Fun with Errors**

Learners who are the most confident when speaking and writing English are those who have fun with errors. Their teacher says, '*Errors are natural*'. '*Errors show you are experimenting and learning*'. '*When you speak your own language you probably make one error in twenty words*'. '*That was a funny error. Let's make it Error of the Month*'. '*I'll tell you about an error I made yesterday*'. '*Here are some errors which English-speaking people make*'. Such teachers take the fear, blame and guilt out of errors. Fun, joy and laughter free the errors to correct themselves.

**Jim Wingate is running his weekend teacher training course, *The Seven Secrets of Teaching*, in Brighton next spring and summer. *The Seven Secrets of Teaching*, which is jointly presented by Language Teachers' Development Training and ETp, provides intensive, enjoyable, practical and effective teacher development.**