

THE ADJECTIVE QUIZ*

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INTRODUCTION

This is a flexible activity consisting of a core element (see primary aim) and alternative additional options (see secondary aims), which is presented in an elaborate lesson-plan format. You can choose which options to include, and to what extent you will exploit each one, according to your learners' level and age, and the time available. You may also choose to concentrate more on the exam-prep aspect, particularly when you use the activity for vocabulary revision before the exam.

AIMS

Primary

Vocabulary: To provide learners with opportunities to

- a. clarify the meaning of adjectives they have been taught
- b. learn more adjectives in a memorable way
- c. use those adjectives in a realistic and meaningful way.

Secondary

Speaking: Practice in expressing opinions, (dis)agreeing, compromising in a realistic context.

Vocabulary: Practice in expressions used in giving opinions, (dis)agreeing, compromising.

Exam preparation: To raise awareness of the pitfalls built into multiple choice questions.

Dictionary use: Practice in using a dictionary.

LEARNERS

Level: Pre-intermediate – advanced. The activity is particularly suited to learners preparing for language exams.

Age: Teenagers to adults.

ORGANISATION AND PREPARATION

Learners are in 2-4 competing teams, according to the number in the class and their ability to work in small or large groups. Each time the game is played one team becomes the *quiz-master* and the other teams are the *contestants*. Teams take it in turns to become quizmaster and contestants.

During the activity learners will need a list of adjectives (e.g. adjectives used to describe a film or book: *fast-moving, funny, violent, repetitive*). For more advanced learners elicit/provide ways of modifying the adjectives (e.g. for films: *rather slow, fairly tight, not exactly fast-moving* etc.). You can also provide learners with some expressions for giving opinions, (dis)agreeing etc.

You don't need to give learners a comprehensive list of all the relevant expressions. Too many expressions can confuse or discourage them, as they may feel that they have to learn all of

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them. What is more, learning/using such expressions is only a secondary aim of this activity. It would be better to introduce them gradually, selecting a few expressions each time you do the activity.

The activity can be used either in a lesson dealing with a particular group of adjectives, or during a vocabulary revision lesson. Adjectives can be grouped according to what they can describe (e.g. actor, politician, TV series, music record). For low levels I would suggest you limit adjectives to one category (e.g. appearance).

PROCEDURE

Before giving learners the list of adjectives tell them what the topic is and spend about 5 minutes eliciting relevant adjectives. This is also a good opportunity to teach new vocabulary. If you have prepared a handout with adjectives, give it to learners and ask them to add more. Otherwise, write the adjectives on the board so learners can refer to them during the activity.

Each group is asked to devise a number of quiz questions. The actual number will depend on the size of the class and the time available. Each quiz question has the following format:

- A number of adjectives belonging to the same group (e.g. describing a book, film, TV series, personality). These work as the multiple-choice (MC) 'question'. I think 3-5 items are enough.
- A number of choices, which are the actual personalities, films etc., out of which students have to decide on the one that the adjectives best describe. I'd suggest 3-5 options, according to learner level and the time available. More options will need more time to formulate and will potentially generate more discussion.

For example, in the category of *TV series* one possible quiz question is:

Action-packed, tongue-in-cheek, romantic, modern

- | | |
|----------|-----------------------|
| <i>A</i> | <i>Hercules</i> |
| <i>B</i> | <i>Lois and Clark</i> |
| <i>C</i> | <i>X Files</i> |
| <i>D</i> | <i>Stargate</i> |

Contestants select the option they think is best described by **all the adjectives on the list**. They write their answer on a paper slip and give it to the quizmasters. Contestants are awarded a point for each correct answer. You can manipulate the scoring system to make the quiz more interesting or challenging. For example, the quizmasters may get one point each time a contestant gives a wrong answer.

After a number of rounds the final score is calculated and the winner is announced. In case of a tie, teams can play another round, or you can be quizmaster and present your own quiz item (which means that you need to have prepared one).

It is a good idea to present the winning team with a prize of some sort. Before answering, contestants can ask the quizmasters to clarify what they mean by particular adjectives; this means that quizmasters need to be clear themselves about the meaning of the adjectives they use. In case the quizmasters are unable to clarify the meaning of an adjective, I would suggest you allow quizmasters to use a dictionary rather than provide the explanation yourself. This way the learners learn to operate independently, and at the same time get practice in using dictionaries.

Of course, contestants can also **challenge** the answer which the quizmasters regard as correct, or challenge the design of the quiz item itself. For example, contestants can argue that two MC options are equally well described by the adjectives on the list, or that the MC option regarded as correct by the quizmasters is not described well by the adjectives.

Procedure at a glance

Learners and/or teacher decide on topic → Teacher elicits/teaches vocabulary
 → Learners prepare quiz questions → Quizmasters ask, and contestants answer,
 the quiz question → Learners resolve any challenges → Points are awarded
 → Learners change roles → New round starts ...

A note on multiple-choice questions

As you probably have imagined, it is quite tricky to come up with a really challenging MC question without some adjectives on the list and/or some MC options being open to challenge. But this is an advantage rather than a drawback: vague and/or badly designed MC options or adjective lists are desirable as they will almost certainly generate arguments and involve learners in meaningful communication using the target language.

Remember that the main point of the activity is not for learners to find the correct answers, but to think about the meaning of adjectives and use them in a realistic and meaningful way.

This is also an excellent opportunity for exam training. You can exploit tricky MC options to raise awareness of their nature of distracters and the techniques used to make them 'appealing'. You can work together with learners and help them produce tricky distracters. In this way learners will have 'inside information' on their design, and be better prepared to tackle MC questions.

RATIONALE

Grouping lexis according to their meaning or context of use enables learners to make helpful associations and aids memory (see Gairns & Redman, 1986). Also, having to think about the meaning of adjectives within a clear context learners take an important step towards a thorough understanding of them. McCarthy (1990: 36) claims that "arguably, learners do not get any real grasp of a word anyway until they have performed some sort of mental contextualisation upon it."

Learners will have to **think about the meaning** of the adjectives...

- when (as quizmasters) they are asked to clarify what they mean by a particular adjective.
- when they decide on the correct MC option.
- when (as contestants) they decide whether to challenge the quizmasters' choice of adjectives.

Working with lexical meaning is the one side of the coin; the other is using lexis in a meaningful and purposeful way. Contextualised use "can evoke in the learner the vital feeling of 'need' for a word to fit a meaning that has been activated in the mind" (McCarthy 1990: 109).

Learners will have to **use** adjectives ...

- when they decide on which adjectives to provide as clues for the MC options. This involves the learners' personality as there are no 'correct' adjectives; it all depends on the learners' feelings towards the 'object' to be described.
- when they give reasons to support their challenge (by explaining why they think some adjectives are wrong and what they think are the 'correct' adjectives).

The vocabulary part of this activity may seem to be fairly controlled as learners are asked to use words from a list. Nevertheless, the activity as a whole simulates real life conditions as learners will have to use the adjectives not in a right/wrong exercise framework, but in order to exchange opinions and/or argue about the qualities/attributes of a particular film, book, etc.

POSSIBLE PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Some learners may not be familiar with certain films, personalities, books etc. used as MC options. The solution is for the teacher to have already compiled a list of films, personalities, books etc. which learners are familiar with. Quizmasters will only be allowed to use items from this list.

Learners at pre-intermediate level, or weak intermediate learners may have problems expressing themselves orally. In such a case, you can choose to focus mainly on written language. That is, ask learners to decide on the correct MC alternative, as well as to write the adjective lists and design the MC options. You can exploit the 'speaking' aspect (i.e. challenging and defending choices) with higher levels.

Learners may remain silent, respond with just a few words, or use their mother tongue. Unfortunately, there seem to be no short-cuts here; the solution is long-term. Learners need to be gradually familiarised with interacting naturally in English. Use of group/pair work and speaking skills development with particular focus on communication strategies will help achieve this goal.¹

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¹ For a framework of procedures and materials see Gabrielatos (1993), for more activities see Dornyei & Thurrell (1992) and Nolasco & Arthur (1987).