

25 ideas for using WhatsApp with English language students

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Philip Haines is the Senior Consultant for Oxford University Press, Mexico. As well as being a teacher and teacher trainer, he is also the co-author of several series, many of which are published by OUP. Today he joins us to provide 25 engaging and useful classroom activities for language learners using WhatsApp.

There are three main obstacles to the use of technology in ELT. First is the availability of technology and internet connection in the classroom. Second is teacher techno-phobia. The final, and perhaps the biggest problem, is knowing how to use it for language learning purposes.

WhatsApp or similar messaging services can help overcome these obstacles. If our classrooms are not well equipped, we can take advantage of the technology that students have on their phones, even if there is no internet available in class. Many activities can be set up by the teacher and extended beyond the classroom when students later link to Wi-Fi. Alternatively, students can show each other their phones at different stages of activities.

Many self-confessed, techno-phobic teachers that I know use WhatsApp on a regular basis in their private lives, so already feel quite comfortable with it. However, the trick is to set up activities that make students do all the work without the teacher needing to share contact details. Each student need to have a WhatsApp buddy in the class who they communicate with via WhatsApp and carry out the activities.

Here are 25 ideas of how to make good use of WhatsApp for language learning. WhatsApp was the starting point for these ideas, but teachers will see that other applications and messaging services will work just as well. For these activities I make use of the following five features: **text**, **photo**, **video**, **audio** and **emoji**.



text



photo



























video





























audio



emoji

 → 	Gap fill One student looks through their textbook and chooses a sentence. The student writes the sentence but leaves out one word and using the underscore (_) in its place. They send this to their WhatsApp buddy. That student needs to send back the missing word.
 → 	Incorrect sentences One student looks through their textbook and chooses a sentence. They write the sentence, but make a mistake of grammar, spelling or vocabulary. They send this to their buddy for correction. That student needs to send back the correction.
 → 	Odd-one-out One student writes four words. One of the words should be different from the other three in some way. They send the four words to their buddy. That student needs to identify the odd-one-out and write the reason for their choice.
 →  or  → 	How do you spell...? One student sends a recorded message asking 'How do you spell _____ ?' (with a word of their choice in the gap). The other student replies with audio or text with the correct spelling.
 → 	Distance interview One student records questions that they want to ask their buddy. They send these one at a time. The other student records and sends back the answers.
	Audio diary Students records what they are doing at different times of the day. They can compare and see how similar or different their days are.
	English in my community Students take photo of examples of English they see written around their community.
	30-second presentations Students prepare and record a 30 second presentation on topic of their choice.
	Tour guide Students make a short video of a place they know well. This could be their house, neighborhood, school, etc. They could either give the commentary as they film or one student could be the presenter, while the other does the filming.
 + 	What's in your bag/pocket? Students take out things they have in their bag or pocket and take a photo of all the items. They then write the names of all the objects as a caption for the photo.
 + 	Create a picture dictionary Students take photos of objects around their house/classroom and write what each object is as a caption to each photo.
 + 	I am eating... Over the course of one day students take photos of everything that they eat and write what the foods are as captions for each photo. Students can then compare who has the best/worst diet.
 + 	Describe a process Students chose a process of an activity they know well (example: make a sandwich, download a video, change a tire, etc.). They take a photo of each stage and write a description for each photo as a caption.

 + 	<p>Photo story Students take a series of five or six photos that tell a short story and they write the narration for each photo as a caption.</p>
 + 	<p>Photo diary Over the course of one day each student takes photos/selfies that work as a diary of that day. They write a description of what they are doing as a caption for each photo. Students can compare to see who had the most interesting day.</p>
 → 	<p>Illustrate a feeling One student writes and sends the name of an emotion (example: happy, angry, in love, etc.) to their buddy. The other student has to illustrate the emotion with a selfie.</p>
 → 	<p>Find the emoji One student chooses an emoji and writes and send the name of it to their buddy. The second student needs to find and send back the correct emoji.</p>
 → 	<p>Do as I say One student records and sends instructions for a set of actions to their buddy The other student needs to show comprehension by miming and videoing the actions described in the instructions.</p>
 →  or  → 	<p>Change 3 words One student chooses a short text from the textbook. The student films the text and reads it at the same time, but instead of reading the text exactly as it is written, the student changes three words. The other student needs to watch and listen to what the first student said in order to identify which three words were changed. The second student replies in audio or text with the three words that were changed.</p>
 + 	<p>Learning verbs When learning verbs, students make a short video of each verb and write the verb as a caption for the video.</p>
 → 	<p>Mime it One student writes a verb and sends it to their buddy. The second student has to show comprehension of the verb by recording a short video of the action.</p>
 → 	<p>Sentence dictation One student chooses a sentence from the textbook. They record the sentence and send it to their buddy. The second student needs to write out the sentence and send it back to be checked by the first student.</p>
 → 	<p>Can you pronounce this? One student chooses a word from the textbook and sends it to their buddy, writing 'Can you pronounce _____?' (with the chosen word in the gap). The second student has to record the pronunciation of that word.</p>
 → 	<p>Emoji race In pairs, both students send the name of an emoji to their buddy. Each student needs to find and send the corresponding emoji. This is done as a race.</p>
 → 	<p>Emoji stories One student chooses four emoji and sends these to their buddy. The second student needs to write a very short story (or sentence) that contains all four of the words/concepts that correspond to the emoji.</p>