

Using Student Personal Responses to Teach English

A personal response is an individual's reaction to something that he/she has heard, read or seen. The response can be written or verbal. In this interactive workshop, participants will learn how to use student personal responses to improve student communication and critical thinking.

1. Why Use a Personal Response Activity?

- It allows students to personalize the material and get fully engaged with it.
- It gives students the practice expressing a personal position or experience.
- It allows students to clarify their thoughts and ideas.
- It is an activity focused on expressing meaning (rather than a form-focused activity).
- It focuses on fluency of expression.
- It allows students to develop their critical thinking skills and/or evaluation skills and/or judgment skills.
- It allows students to increase their confidence in expressing their personal position, feelings and opinions.
- It gives the instructor some insight into their students' thoughts, opinions and experiences.

Why it is important for language learners to be able to express personal position, opinion or experience?

- In an individualized society it is important to express personal responses to events and prompts;
- Our personal responses allow us to differentiate ourselves from other people.

2. Possible Prompts for Personal Responses

Prompts for personal responses can be put into five different categories as given below. Within each category there are numerous kinds of prompts that can be used.

Visual Materials	Listening Texts	Audiovisual texts	Reading texts	Real objects or things
unusual photos family photos landscape photos event photos magazine pictures maps book covers signs calendars art postcards colours	audio news clips dialogues monologues songs poems music jokes sound effects stories	TV news clips TV show clips movie clips documentary clips music videos commercials movie trailers talk show clips cooking demos	newspaper articles magazine articles internet articles personal stories inspirational stories journal entries quotes proverbs poems song lyrics personal ads cereal boxes student writing menus advertisements text messages E-mails headlines	unusual objects every day objects cultural objects cooking utensils food articles of clothing jewelry other accessories food glasses toys games bottles or containers tools

You should consider the following criteria when selecting prompts for your personal response activities:

- Interest for students
- Age appropriate
- Level appropriate (content, vocabulary, grammar, length)
- Portability

3. Instructions and Response Structure

Instructions for personal responses may include any of the following:

- The purpose for the activity;
- Target language you want the students to use in their responses;
- The productive skill you want them to use (speaking or writing);
- The format you want their response to be in (paragraph, essay, free-writing, free-speaking, discussion, debate);
- Specific questions you want students to answer;
- An indication that there is no wrong answer.

The structure for a student personal response is quite simple. It has three pieces to it:

- A statement introducing the prompt;
- A statement of the student's response to the prompt, following the teacher's instructions or questions;
- Statements or details supporting the student's response.

4. Sample Personal Response Activities

Prompt	Questions or Instructions
An advertising clip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was your emotional reaction to this advertisement? • Would you buy this product? Why or why not? • Do you think this is a good advertisement? Why or why not?
A clip of a real life event (wedding, birthday party)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you feel when saw this event? • Would you do something like this at your own wedding (birthday party)?
A cartoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think this cartoon is funny or amusing? Why or why not?
An everyday object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell a short story using the prompt as a central component of the story.
A family photograph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the people in this photograph? • What are they doing? • How do you feel when you look at this photograph? Why?
An unusual object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think this object is for? • How do you use it? Please come up with specific instructions for how to use it. • What are ten uses for this object?
A song	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this song make you feel? Why?
A proverb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you agree with this proverb? Why or why not?

Prompt	Questions or Instructions
A clip about a current event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were in the middle of this event, what would you feel? Why? What would you do? Why?
An editorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you agree with the writer? Why or why not?
A picture of a person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you feel if you met this person? Why? • What would you say to them?
A culture specific object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you think this object is from? Why? • What is the object for? Do you think it is useful?
A piece of artwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think this is beautiful? Why or why not? • How does it make you feel?
A piece of clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the piece of clothing for? • Would you wear it? Why or why not?
A movie or TV clip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the characters? • What are they doing? • What is their relationship? • Which character would you like to be? Why? • What do you think of the characters' actions?