

Trying a Total Physical Response activity!

Most teachers are familiar with a technique of teaching a language through the use of commands — often called Total Physical Response. The basic technique usually involves giving a series of oral commands, which individual students carry out. Research findings show that the students watching learn as much if not more as the students performing the actions.

“Oops! I forgot to put back the chalk!”

1. Stand up.
2. Walk to the board.
3. Pick up the chalk.
4. Write your name.
5. Put the chalk in your pocket.
6. Pick up the eraser.
7. Erase your name.
8. Put the eraser down.
9. Go back to your desk.
10. Sit down.
11. Stand up again.
12. Go back to the board.
13. Take the chalk out of your pocket.
14. Put the chalk down.
15. Go back to your desk.

Gesture or mime if necessary to help the students out. Often, however, the teacher doesn't need to provide much correction, as this is usually done quite spontaneously by the rest of the class.

As soon as the students begin to understand the basic commands, vary the order. This prevents students from simply memorizing the order without listening carefully to the commands themselves.

Play with the commands. For instance, order a student to sit down when the nearest chair is four meters away. Or, tell a student to pick up a book and write his name. Or, tell a student to pick up a chair and put it in his pocket. Use your imagination!

Write the commands on large strips of paper and you have a reading variant. If the strips are held up so that everyone can see them, this becomes a simple reading lesson for the whole class.

Have one of the students give the commands and you have a speaking variant. A variant of this, sometimes termed “robot”, the student being given the instructions playing the part of a “robot” and obeying the commands. Younger school children seem particularly fascinated with “robot”, when the teacher plays the role of the robot and they get to give the orders.

Commands can also be used to teach tenses. Write a series of commands on a cue card or on a piece of paper. Hand the cue card to a student. Tell the student to read the card silently and carry out the commands. These explicit instructions to the student are necessary — otherwise, the student will probably read the card out loud and then just sit there.

Once the first student has completed performing the series of commands, conspicuously take the cue card from the first student and give it to a second student. Have the second student carry out the same set of commands.

Again, take the card from the second student and give it to a third. Have the third student carry out the commands.

The class has watched you give three students in a row exactly the same cue card and have watched

them carry out perform exactly the same series of commands. The stage is now set for teaching either the future or the past.

To teach the future, first prepare another student by quietly whispering, “Don't do anything!” Now, give the cue card to the student that you just ordered not to do anything. The class, of course, expects the student to do just what the previous three students did.

Having set up some definite expectations, ask the following questions, writing the answers on the board as the students provide them:

Teacher questions:	Student answers:
1. What do you think she will do?	1. (She will) stand up.
2. What do you think she will do next?	2. (She will) walk to the board.
3. Then, what do you think she will do? ...	

Even if the students give the short answers, write the fuller answer on the board, since the future tense is the point of the exercise.

To teach the past, use the same preparation. Again, have three students in a row carry out identical commands, and again hand the cue card to a fourth student (who has been instructed to do nothing). This time, however, instead of asking what the fourth student will do, point back to the very first student to carry out the commands and ask:

Teacher questions:	Student answers:
1. What did she do?	1. (She) stood up.
2. What did she do next?	2. (She) walked to the board.
3. Then, what	

This time, however, it makes no difference whether you write the short answer or the longer answer on the board, since both contain the past tense.

The less advanced classes use simpler commands. The more advanced classes use more complicated commands. We have offered two, but we encourage you to write your own.

Student Cue Cards

<p>Instructions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stand up. 2. Walk to the board. 3. Write your name. 4. Go back to your seat. 5. Sit down. 	<p>Instructions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stand up. 2. Walk to the board. 3. Pick up the chalk. 4. Write your name. 5. Put down the chalk. 6. Go back to your seat. 7. Sit down.
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