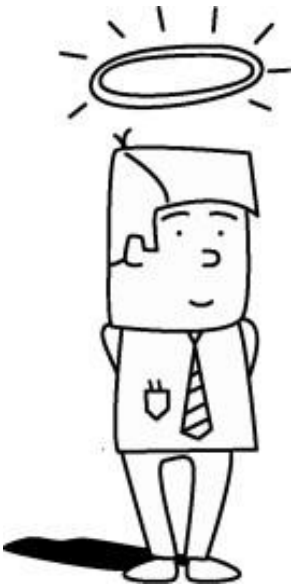
Engaging Lesson Activities

Making lessons Active, Engaging & FUN



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The Needs-Focused Approach™

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Starters and Openers

It doesn't take much to ensure a lesson fails. In fact, you can do it before the pupils get through the door. A frown, some harsh words and over-the-top warnings are usually sufficient to send the mood of your typical pupil plummeting and have them conclude that the next 50 minutes are going to be a thoroughly miserable experience for all concerned.

But let's assume you've worked hard to establish a warm and welcoming tone at the door and the students trudge through to their seats with a reasonably positive outlook. They sit down full of hope and expectation – eager to discover what you've got planned for them.

"What are we doing today Sir?"

The success of the lesson now depends largely on your starter or opening activity and it could go one of two ways. If you manage to hook them and arouse their natural curiosity about some new concept you have a good chance of leading them into a successful learning experience, cementing your already-positive relationship with them and chalking up another 'win'. On the other hand, if your choice of opener fails to grab them, it is likely you'll spend the next hour doing nothing but sort out problems.

You *need* a strong opening or starter activity

Remember the saying 'You never get a second chance to make a first impression'? Whoever wrote it was obviously aware of the sheer carnage often created as a result of a poor lesson opener.

If you lose your pupils in the first 2 minutes you'll spend the next 58 minutes trying to get them back. Lose them half way through the lesson and it's a bit easier to re-focus them but unless you get their attention from the outset, the rest of the lesson is going to be, at best, very difficult. In **Lesson-ology™** we include an ever-growing collection of engaging generic starter activities which can be applied to any lesson topic. Just like the following samples…

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Generic Starter 1:

'What's in the Bag?'

Number of people: Unlimited

Age group: Any

Materials: Prop related to the lesson content together with a suitable bag or container.

Time: 10 minutes

Overview: A lesson-related prop is hidden in a bag or container. Pupils have to guess what's inside. Younger pupils may enjoy this as a regular routine ("What's in the bag ***today?***") but older pupils also enjoy it as an occasional warm up. It relies on intrigue and may fall flat if the prop doesn't live up to the hype which the game naturally generates – so take care to choose a suitable prop.

Directions:

1. Write on the board *'You have 20 chances to guess what's in the bag'.*

2. Explain to pupils that they can volunteer to ask a question to try and determine what's in the bag. Questions can only be those which have a 'yes' or 'no' answer, ie they can ask "is it blue?" but not "what colour is it?"

3. Write their questions down on the board one at a time to keep track of the total number asked and to avoid repeated questions. Answer them "Yes" or "no" and put a tick or a cross next to the question. (I always like to have two noise effects for right and wrong answers to add to the humorous atmosphere… a kazoo or duck call for wrong answers and a bugle horn or quiz master's bell for right answers. Be sure to carry an even-tempered duck if you choose this route.)

4. Tension mounts once their questions are into double figures as they realise they might not succeed – particularly when you tell them they will get extra homework if they don't get the right answer!

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Generic Starter 37:

Box BINGO

Overview: A great way to keep students focused during the lesson.

Number of people: Groups of two to four.

Materials: One empty cardboard box per group, paper, tape and pens.

Time: Around 5 minutes to start – carrying on through the lesson.

Directions:



1. Teacher writes the lesson title on the board and presents students with a list of twenty to thirty simple questions about the topic which are likely to be answered during the lesson. The questions are pre-written – either on a slide or sheet of paper, and given to each group to look at.

2. Each student in each group must pick ONE question (to which they don't know the answer) from the list and write it on his/her sheet of paper. They then stick their question to one of the box sides. As there are six sides to a box, some students get to write more than one question.

3. The teacher should try to keep the question sheet in front of them during the lesson to monitor which questions are asked as the lesson progresses, but the idea is that as soon as a question is answered, any student who has written this down on their team's box should write the answer on the box, under their question.

When a team's questions have all been answered they can stand and shout "Box!" (or any other suitably-entertaining word).

4. A joke trophy could be awarded to the winning team (eg, a gold, spray-painted box mounted on a plinth) to create a ceremony and this could be used as a regular way of keeping students focused on the lesson topic.

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Generic Starter 38:

Question Bags

Overview: Continuing with our packaging theme, here's a nice little activity to stimulate group discussion in an active format.

Number of people: Groups of up to 5 students.

Materials: Paper bags, pens and 'answer slips' (strips of card or paper).

Time: Around 5-10 minutes.

Directions:

1. Write a question on the outside of a paper bag and have enough bags for groups of four to five students – a different question on each bag. The bags should be sealed – with tape or staples – leaving a small slit wide enough to 'post' an answer slip into the bag.



2. One bag is issued to each group and students discuss their answer to the question. A designated member of the group writes the group's answer on a piece of card or paper with the group's name at the top so as to identify their answer later.

3. Bags are rotated between groups through three or four 'rounds'; ie, bags are passed from table to table so that each group gets a new bag with a new question to answer. They repeat the process of 'posting' their answer into the bag so that there are three to five different answers in each bag.

4. In the final round, each group rips open the bag they are given and they decide, as a group on the best answer before reading it out to the rest of the class. (If you have time to spare, you can leave a few days between steps 3 and 4 to simulate Royal Mail first-class post.)

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Generic Starter 11:

Anagrams

Number of people: Unlit dime.

Materials: None essentially required although mini-whiteboards add an element of interaction to the game.

Time: 5-10 minutes.

Overview: A very quick and easy-to-set-up 'settling starter'. Students can work individually or in pairs to unravel keywords and phrases relevant to the lesson topic.

Directions:
1. Decide on a number of keywords and phrases and write them on the board in a scrambled format.

2. Given students a set time in which to decipher the letters and write down the answers.

3. When the time is up go through each puzzle in turn and ask students to write down their answer on their mini whiteboards and hold them up.

Early finishers could make up their own anagrams.

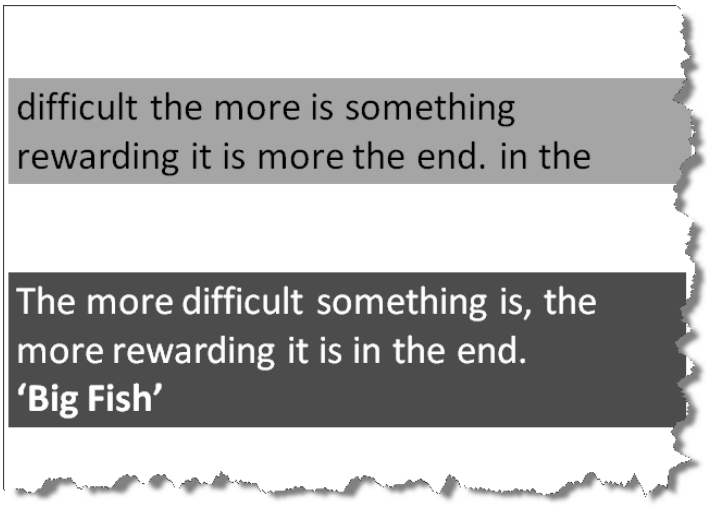
Here are a few to inspire creativity:

The meaning of life = ***The fine game of nil***
Eleven plus two = ***Twelve plus one***
Dame Agatha Christie = ***I am a right death case***
Desperation = ***A Rope Ends It***
The Morse Code = ***Here Come Dots***
Dormitory = ***Dirty Room***
The Earthquakes = ***That queer shake***
Slot Machines = ***Cash lost in 'em***
Snooze Alarms = ***Alas, No More Z's***
The Public Art Galleries = ***Large Picture Halls, I Bet***
That's One Small Step for a Man, One Giant Leap for Mankind =
Thin man ran; makes a large stride, left planet, pins flag on moon. On to Mars!

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Generic Starter 29:

Jumbled Quotes and Phrases



Number of people: Any number.

Materials: 'Jumbled Quotes and Phrases' game in your **'Interactive Whiteboard Downloads'** (full version of **Lesson-ology™** only)

Time: 10 - 15 minutes.

Overview: A very quick and easy to set up starter or fill-in which can easily be adapted to lesson content by changing the phrases in the game template slides. Students have to unscramble the words to find the hidden motivational phrase. The sample phrases/quotes in the download are suitable for use as discussion starters.

Directions:

1. The game is best played in teams of three-five.

2. Load the Power Point presentation – teams race to unscramble the phrase on each slide and write them down.

3. Phrases are discussed in turn.

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Fill-ins and Fun Stuff

Fill-ins and games are an *incredibly* important part the Needs-focused™ Approach. During live training sessions on Classroom Management I always make the point that the best way to ensure engagement and minimize disruption during lessons is to have your students turning up for class in a *positive* frame of mind – actually looking forward to your lesson.

It's a lot easier *keeping* them in a positive state than it is to *make* them enjoy a lesson if they have already made their minds up that they are going to hate it. The **only** way to do this is to consistently give them a satisfying & rewarding lesson experience – by making appropriate/achievable tasks, cooperative/active learning and FUN an integral part of every lesson.

In the full version of **Lesson-ology™** we include a highly exciting and novel collection of quirky 'puzzles', 'on-the-spot' games, 'fill-ins' and 'fun tips' which you can use with any group to fill five minutes, enhance learning, teach social skills or simply bring some hilarity to the lesson.

A resource bank of 'fill-in' activities can be a life-saver during those daunting times when a lesson starts to go wrong. At times like this, to avoid classroom chaos, you need to quickly change the tone of the lesson, grab every pupil's attention and collect your thoughts. Fill-ins are also a great way to infuse a lesson with positive emotions and cement teacher/pupil relationships.

Here is a small sample of the materials from this, my favourite, section...

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Fun Tip 1

'Puppets & Ventriloquists' Dolls'

Puppets are not only a great way to add humour to lessons - they can also help teach social skills, solve disagreements and enhance learning with any age group. Here are some ways to use puppets and ventriloquist dolls in your lessons...

1. Use specific puppets or dolls to teach the topic that they relate to.
The puppet can deliver an introduction, perform a demonstration, act as 'host' for a class quiz, take part in a Q & A or 'Ask the Expert' session etc.

- A doctor or nurse puppet can teach about human biology, diet, vitamins etc
- A 'mad scientist' puppet can teach science
- A farmer puppet can teach about the environment
- An alien puppet can teach about planets and the solar system
- Puppets from different countries or religious groups can talk about their life and beliefs

2. Use puppets as a classroom management aid
Young children often respond much more easily and positively to requests from a puppet. A puppet can also provide much-needed humour in highly charged, emotional situations. Think 'Mr Punch'. ☺

3. Use puppets to solve disagreements between pupils
A puppet can be a very effective mediator in restorative practices asking questions such as:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking?
- How were you feeling?
- Who else has been affected by this?
- What do you need now so that the problem can be resolved?

4. Use puppets to develop pupils' presentation and social skills
It can be far less daunting for a pupil to make a presentation by speaking 'through' or 'to' a puppet. Similarly, social skills can be practiced by 'acting out' or role-playing and using a puppet as one of the characters.

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Fill-in 7:

Crazy Lists

Overview:
Creating lists is a great way to develop thinking skills, and when you make the lists a little crazy you add a little humour to the classroom too. As a quick fill-in, settling starter or relationship-building activity, this is a winner.

Number of People: Any group size – pupils work in pairs.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Materials: Paper/pens and a copy of the list headings for each learning pair.

Directions:

1. Divide the group into learning pairs and issue the materials.

2. Each pair is to pick two headings from the list and produce a 'Top Ten' under each heading.

Variation:
Stick three copies of each list heading on the board on separate pieces of card. Have one person from each learning pair come up to the board and select ONE heading to work on. When the learning pair have completed their first list they can then go back to the board to get a second heading.

List headings:

Crimes committed by Santa Claus
Things Homer Simpson would never do
Meals you would never find in a posh restaurant
Causes of broken biscuits
Things you can't buy
Flavours of crisp you can't buy
Interesting words beginning with 'J'.
What you shouldn't wear at the beach
Things you would miss if you were stuck on a desert island
Alternative words for 'money'
Ways to say 'Thank you'
Ways to show you're sorry

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Fun Fill-in 16:

Caption Competition

Number of people: Any.

Materials: A variety of funny pictures, easily obtainable from the billions on the web.

Time: 10 minutes.

Overview:
Some pictures are simply crying out to be adorned with speech bubbles, thought bubbles or silly titles. Students love to take part in this and the finished results can be a good way to decorate a tired area of wall space.



Directions:

1. Source suitable images from the net, newspapers or magazines. Doing a search for 'funny captions' using Google's 'image search' facility threw up the one above together with 660,000 others. The caption can easily be covered up or digitally removed if you prefer 'Hybrid dog/hovercraft launched' and have suitable software.

2. Put the image up on the board/wall and give students five minutes to work in pairs or groups to come up with the best caption and then share as a group.

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Fun Tip 5:

A Touch of Magic (Mind Magic Part 1)

I first started using magic in lessons as a result of a unit of work I was doing with my class on Shakespeare. We had been studying Macbeth and their interest in the witches led to discussions on the paranormal, which naturally led to a lesson on magic and illusions which they enjoyed tremendously.

As a treat I decided to show them a few simple tricks I'd learned from a friend who ran a corporate entertainment business, and the response was just amazing. I couldn't believe how much interest there was in the group in tricks and illusions so I tried to show them at least one new trick each week. In time students were bringing their own tricks in to show the rest of the class and it became something of a ritual to have a (excuse the pun) 'magic moment' each week.

Invoking demons and making schools disappear are for advanced magic class only, but here is a suitable selection for the amateur practitioner.

Mind Trick 1: OTHER PEOPLE IN SCHOOL

Students of all ages love this first form of magic in which someone apparently reads the mind of another, or foretells events yet to come. You don't need to be psychic to do these tricks - you just need to know a few sneaky tricks. ☺

The illusion:
Hand out three slips of paper, and ask for three volunteers to help you. Two are to write the names of two students in the class on their slip. The third person is asked to write the name of a student from another class/year group in school.

The three slips are folded and placed in a hat, (without you touching them). You are then blindfolded, or the hat is held high over your head so that you cannot see into it. You are able to reach in and bring out the slip with name of the person in another class written on it.

How it's done:
This is a very easy trick. Take a sheet of note paper, and tear it into three pieces. The top and bottom pieces will have one smooth edge and one rough edge, but the centre piece will have two rough edges.

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Make sure the person who is writing the name of the missing person writes on the centre slip while the other two students write the names of a student in their class on each of the other two slips. Have the slips folded and dropped into the hat.

When you reach into the hat, all you need to do is feel for the slip with two rough edges. When you have found it, don't bring it out right away. Have the students concentrate on the names they have written. Bring out the slip, still folded, and hold it against your head. Build up the suspense until you have created a mystery. Then reveal the slip in your hand as the one with the missing student's name. For added showbiz flair, leave the room while the names are being written (so that all the spectator students are aware of the names chosen), and then be led in blindfolded for a dramatic presentation.

Mind Trick 2: FAMOUS NAMES

The illusion:
Have members of the audience call out the names of about ten famous people, past or present. You can adapt this trick to curriculum by having students choose key words.

Each name/word is written on a separate card. The cards are then well mixed and you make a prediction on a pad of paper as to which card you think will be picked. A student selects one of the cards. He reads his selection aloud and the name you wrote on the pad is the same as the name read.

How it's done:
You will need ten small cards or a small pad of paper to write the names on and a hat. With everything at hand, ask someone to call out the name of a famous person/a key word associated with the lesson topic. Write this down on one of the cards and drop it into the hat. Ask for another name/word. This time do not write the name/word that is called, but write the *first* name/word that was called. Now both cards in the hat have the same name written on them. As different names/words are called you continue writing the original word on each card until you have about ten cards in the hat, all with the same word on them. Now write this word on the pad so that the audience does not see it.

Place the pad where it can be seen, but with the writing away from the audience. Invite a student to come up and assist you. Shake the hat to mix the cards. Ask the student to reach into the hat and select one of the cards, and read the word written on it, aloud. After he does this, turn the pad around to show that the name selected was the same as the one that you predicted on the slate. Be sure to destroy the slips after the trick, so that no one may see them.

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Fun Fill-in 16:

The Golden Ticket



Number of people: Any.

Materials: A shiny, glittering, well-designed Golden Ticket and a book of raffle tickets.

Time: 5 minutes.

Overview:
The Golden Ticket creates the very moment of buzz, intrigue, excitement and expectation which gets students talking, puts a smile on their faces and has them returning to lessons in a great mood - thus doing no harm at all to your status as their favourite teacher.

I'm not a great fan of rewards because there is a danger of them being relied on as a behaviour management cure-all. When they are promised in advance of desired behaviour outcomes – 'do this and I'll give you this' - they are nothing more than bribes, and as such are worse than ineffective. But as a spontaneous, unexpected treats, they can be tremendous mood changers and motivators.

The Golden Ticket can be used to represent a huge variety of pleasurable experiences for your students, with the proud winner being even luckier than young Master Charlie Bucket himself. The lucky ticket holder could be entitled to:

- early lunch
- five minutes of a preferred activity such as: PC time, drawing, playing a game, eating a snack, having a cup of tea, watching a film etc. Texting is a surefire winner.
- a no-homework night!

Directions:

1. Issue a raffle ticket to every student then draw one from a hat. The winner gets the ticket.

2. If you prefer, give tickets out in return for good behaviour/participation. Try to make sure every student gets at least one raffle ticket before you make the draw. Obviously, the more raffle tickets an individual has earned, the more chance they have of winning.

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Energisers

Energisers are generally quick activities designed to stimulate thinking, raise flagging energy levels or to spark motivation in an activity. They can be used at the beginning of a group session or class, as well as in the middle or at the end. They are also a wonderful way to build group cohesion and stimulate interaction because they depend on the group's cooperation, participation, and interest to complete the activity.

Please don't make the mistake of discounting energisers as a waste of time. You will waste far more time by having to deal with students who are bored, listless, lacking in energy and in need of an activity change. Energisers, when used appropriately, can maintain the attention of an otherwise troublesome class.

They also have the added bonus of helping boost memory. Physical activity – even in very short bursts - increases production of the memory fixatives norepinephrine and epinephrine, and triggers the release of glucose (which also supports memory functions) from glycogen stores in the liver.

Where possible, we try to include activities which will suit both a 'normal' class size (25-40 pupils) as well as smaller nurture/special groups (2-8 pupils). For a guideline as to the suitability for different group sizes refer to the 'Number of people' heading in the activity intro.

Please note:
It can be useful to outline the **purpose** of each activity to your pupils (as stated in the activity introduction) and to ask them **processing questions** at the end.

Questions such as 'How did you feel about that?', 'Did the activity help you feel more comfortable with the group/relax/warm up/have fun?', 'What did you get out of that exercise?' or did you feel uncomfortable in any way?' help participants see the activities as a **learning experience** as opposed to just 'game playing' although too much emphasis on these questions can frustrate pupils and make them feel very negative about what they previously felt to be an enjoyable experience. Use with caution and be sensitive to their reactions.

Finally, it may be helpful to bear in mind the following points when selecting an activity:

- Time of day and weather (younger children in particular are affected by extreme weather and may become over-excited with some of the activities).
- Room restrictions. 'Health and Safety'
- The way participants are dressed.
- 'Mood' of the group or individuals within the group.
- Special Educational Needs of pupils

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Fun Energiser 1

'Write Your Name'

Number of people: Unlimited

Materials: None

Time: 5 minutes

Purpose: To create fun and stimulate humour. To re-focus a group who have lost interest with an activity.

Directions:

The group stands in front of the leader. The leader instructs the group to take their right hands and write their first names in the air with an imaginary pen/pencil.

Next, they are asked to write their last names in the air with their left hands. (Usually that's more difficult.)

Next they have to write their first and last names; *but*… they have to put their hands behind their backs and pretend they have a pen/pencil in their mouths to write their names.* Remember to dot every "i" and cross every "t".

* Explain that they must write 's-l-o-w-l-y' and make them aware of the danger of sharp head movements. (Health and Safety, remember ☺)

Alternatives to 'pen in the mouth':
Place pen in ear, in elbow, in belly button, on end of shoe, in the middle of back etc.

NB// pen in the belly button always gets a laugh but be prepared for vulgar gestures from older students.

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