

Introduction

This is an index of inspirations, ideas, and activities to spark thought, conversation, and, ultimately, written work. It is published in book form for teachers who wish to use it as a reference and resource book. However, the material has been designed so that it can be easily photocopied and the copies used to create a set of index cards that can be kept in a file box arranged by activities – what I like to call a "fundex."

How is the book organized?

I have set up the book sorting the topic cards by activity type. Within each activity section there are several cards on different topics, and on each topic card there are generally several tasks for the language learner to choose from. For example, as shown in the table of contents, in the section "Write a Story about This Photo," there are 16 topic cards to choose from, and on the first card showing a photo of a door, there is a list of eight different tasks.

These are all student-centered tasks to be used by individuals, pairs, or small groups. The tasks are optional; the learners are free to write what they want on the general topic. In fact, I imagine that many teachers will also feel free, and inspired, to use the fundex in many different ways. I do. I am always digging in my fundex for a class writing assignment or conversation topic, for a way to inspire one of my classes. I hope that in this same way each teacher will make this fundex a mine of their own.

The nineteen activity types in this collection are arranged very generally from easier to more difficult, the first ten being somewhat easier. However, the topic cards for each activity are flexible. Most of them can be used successfully by students with English proficiency ranging from the high-beginner to the advanced. For example, choosing to write about a memory, one student might write a 50-word paragraph in short sentences while another, more proficient student might write a longer, more complex composition.

Who can use these cards and how do they work?

This material is appropriate for adult, college, and high school learners working in a classroom setting, in a library study center, or in a tutorial. The subject matter reflects the kinds of experiences teens and adults deal with in the United States and Canada. When the fundex is used with younger students or in other countries, the teacher will want to be selective in choosing from the topics I have given and will also want to add original topics for each type of activity that are appropriate to their students' interests and culture.

A topic and several tasks are outlined briefly and clearly on each card. As very little specific language is supplied, the students need to use the English they know in writing. Students working with partners will find that sharing their activities is both enjoyable and effective.

The teacher takes the role of facilitator, giving ground rules for activities, such as setting time limits, clarifying specific requirements, and suggesting follow-up. Then as the students are working, it is a good idea for the teacher to walk around to be available as a resource and, of course, to determine that the students are engaged and understand the directions.

Why use the card format?

The basic idea behind putting the topics on cards and making them available in an index card box or fundex is to empower and thus motivate the learners, to give them a real opportunity to choose freely from among the activities, topics, and tasks. At other times, however, the teacher may choose a single card in order to work with the whole class on a topic that complements some other class work the students are doing.

The real beauty of these writing inspirations is their simplicity and accessibility as a set of cards. It may take a little time to copy, paste, and, if possible, laminate them, but once done, they are easy and fun for the students – and their teacher. And since these activities can be recycled and added to year after year, these cards are only the beginning. I offer them as an inspiration for both teacher and student creativity.

How to Prepare these Fundex Cards

You, the tutor or teacher, can use this book simply as a source for teacher inspiration. If you wish, you can photocopy any topic card that you think will interest your class and use it as a handout. On another day, you might want to make a transparency and project your chosen topic with an overhead projector. You have the publishers' permission and encouragement to do so. In another situation, of course, you can also just give the book to an individual student or pair of students, saying, "Here. Choose something fun to write about."

However, both I and Pro Lingua are great believers in the effectiveness of giving a learner a sample of language to work with on a separate piece of paper. We find it to be a simple but powerful technique. If you are willing to invest a little extra time and effort, we suggest that you set up an inexpensive 8x5 index card file. Using a pack of multicolored index cards, you mount each topic on a card with a glue stick. You may want to put each type of activity on a different colored card, both because this is attractive and because it eases the task of keeping your file sorted. Just trim your photocopy around the frame and paste the topic on the index card. Then if you want your cards to last for years, laminate them.

The book is designed so that you don't even need index cards to get started. If you cut your photocopy along the dotted lines and then trim the borders off, leaving an even quarter of an inch of white around each frame, your paper will be just 8x5. If you laminate this paper, it will be as stiff as an index card. However, you will still want some index cards so that you can add inspirations to your personal collection, your own fundex.