

New Teaching Strategies: Using Cell Phones as Teaching Tools

by Lane Morgan, ELL Tutor

Every classroom teacher has had the frustration of a lesson interrupted or ignored because of students' cell phones. Banning them rarely works, so many teachers have learned to work with them as a classroom tool instead. In one-to-one tutoring, cell phones are rarely a problem, and they can be a powerful asset. Not every learner has computer access or computer confidence, but nearly everyone has a multisensory educational tool masquerading as a phone.

Suggestions:



Texting: The more different ways we practice reading and writing, the more likely we are to remember the words. Using a keyboard activates different parts of the brain than writing by hand. Using voice-to-text and then reading the results uses still other parts of the brain. Try having your learner text you the practice vocabulary words, using both the keyboard and the audio function. Audio texting also provides a pronunciation check as words must be spoken clearly to transmit accurately.

For emerging readers, texting can be a real-world way to practice targeted vocabulary. One tutor/learner pair uses texting to practice vocabulary and punctuation by confirming their appointments: The learner is learning *school* as a sight word, so the tutor texts *school?* to confirm their meeting. The learner might not recognize the word without context but knows that is what is coming and can text back *yes* or *no* and confirm the meeting time. If the phone has text-to-speech capability, the learner can receive a text, try reading it, and then convert it to speech to check comprehension.

Texting etiquette: Use texting etiquette as a discussion topic. What communications are appropriate to text, and what messages should be given by voice or in person?

Word recognition: With smart phones, have the students type the same words using different fonts and type sizes. To do this, go to Settings: My Device: Display: Font. Seeing the same vocabulary in different formats forces the brain to process the information multiple times, making it easier to remember and to read in the real world.

Recording: Record part of your conversation practice or your student reading aloud. Play it back to let the student practice noticing and correcting errors. You can play it a second time and point out additional areas for praise or correction.

Camera: Have the student photograph scenes from home or work (if allowed) as discussion topics. This can be a good way to identify objects for vocabulary practice.

Calendar: Use the calendar function to practice days of the week and names of the months, a.m. and p.m., etc.

Math: Use the calculator function to respond to math instructions: You could ask your student to perform a series of operations—add 7896, multiply by 28, divide by 2, and then practice saying the result.



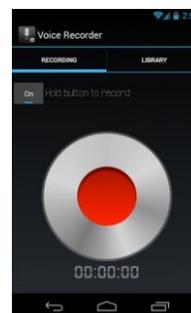
Oral vocabulary practice: Use a phone as a prop to have a one-sided conversation. If you are practicing communicating with a child’s school, you could be the parent responding to a call saying your daughter is sick. For example, you could say: “Yes, this is Olga Tiniakoff.” ... “Oh. She was sick this weekend but she felt ok this morning.” ... “I’m at work now. I can come

in half an hour.” Your learner tries to guess what is being said on the other side. Of course you can do this without a phone, but props help to make practice fun.

Homework: For emerging readers who are not ready for written assignments, use voicemail to record vocabulary words and to provide the audio for read-along stories.

For other suggestions:

<http://busyteacher.org/6955-7-great-esl-cell-phone-activities.html>



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