

Do your students sometimes look bored and unmotivated? This lesson gives ideas about how this can happen.

Task 1 – Sally’s problem.

Sally started her teaching career as a primary school teacher. She liked young children, but after a couple of years she found it tiring to teach them. She decided to make a change to teaching English language to young adults. She did a training course and got a job. To her surprise, she found teaching adults wasn't all that different from teaching children. Many of her students needed the kind of encouragement and support young children do. She liked the first groups of students she taught and thought she got on well with them. She was shocked when her boss told her some of the students had complained. They said they didn't like her teaching style.



What is causing Sally’s problem? Below are some ideas.

Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 

- a. Sally has an unpleasant personality and the students don't like her.
- b. Sally really wants to give up teaching all together and generally has a negative attitude.
- c. Sally speaks slowly and gives strong stress to certain syllables. Her voice sounds a bit patronising.
- d. The students that complained feel that Sally is giving more support to other learners in the class and not them.
- e. The students that complained found out that Sally has only just finished her training and they want a more qualified teacher.
- f. Sally tends to treat her students as though they were younger learners and hasn't adjusted her manner to teaching adults.



Task 1 Feedback

All of the answers are possible, but, in this situation, answers **c** and **f** are the most likely. Teachers often adopt a manner and a way of speaking according to who they are teaching. It is possible that the students who are complaining feel

Key skill

It is important for teachers of any subject to really connect with their students. If you do this successfully, you will really help students become motivated to learn.

Task 2 – Teacher behaviours



Letters a to e below describe teacher behaviours that could cause students to react in a negative way. Make notes about possible student reactions to these teacher behaviours.

Teacher behaviours

a. The teacher enters the classroom and looks at the learners over the top of her glasses without saying anything. She looks a bit angry and waits until all students are quiet. She then questions them in a loud voice.

Student reactions: _____

b. The teacher enters the classroom, looks quickly at the students and immediately opens the course book. She asks students to do the same thing. The teacher doesn't look at her learners and questions them about the material in the course book.

Student reactions: _____

c. The teacher tells a joke in class. The students don't really understand it, but the teacher laughs loudly anyway.

Student reactions: _____

d. The teacher talks for a long time and never varies the pitch and tone of her voice.

Student reactions: _____

e. The teacher creates a lot of fun activities to help motivate her learners. She even makes a cake once a week so they can have morning tea together in class.

Student reactions: _____

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key skill

Apart from creating problems in the classroom, inappropriate teacher behaviour can create a generally negative atmosphere for learners. It becomes harder for teachers to teach and for students to learn when the learning environment has an uncomfortable atmosphere.

Task 3 – Identifying the problem



Statements i to v say clearly what the problem is with the teacher's behaviour in each situation. Match the problems to the behaviours below.

Problems

- i. The teacher forgets that most students want to learn rather than just have fun.
- ii. The teacher's voice is monotonous.
- iii. The teacher misjudges the interests of the students.
- iv. The teacher is too strict with the students.
- v. The teacher has poor eye contact with students.

ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook

Motivating students to learn: Unit 1 d)

Behaviours	Problems
a. The teacher enters the classroom and looks at the learners over the top of her glasses without saying anything. She looks a bit angry and waits until all students are quiet. She then questions them in a loud voice.	
b. The teacher enters the classroom, looks quickly at the students and immediately opens the course book. She asks students to do the same thing. The teacher doesn't look at her learners and questions them about the material in the course book.	
c. The teacher tells a joke in class. The students don't really understand it, but the teacher laughs loudly anyway.	
d. The teacher talks for a long time and never varies the pitch and tone of her voice	
e. The teacher creates a lot of fun activities to help motivate her learners. She even makes a cake once a week so they can have morning tea together in class.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.



Key skill

If the learning environment is negative, the responsibility is on the teacher to do something about it. Students often do not have the skills to deal with the situation and it is, in the end, the teacher's job to manage the learning environment as constructively as possible. The first, key step is working out what the problem is so that you can do something about it. The next task looks at strategies for solving these motivation problems.

Task 4 – Getting help



In the column on the right, there are some solutions to the problems we identified in task 3. Match the problems to the solutions. It may be possible to match more than one problem to a solution.

Problems

- i. The teacher forgets that most students want to learn rather than just have fun.
- ii. The teacher's voice is monotonous.
- iii. The teacher misjudges the interests of the students.
- iv. The teacher is too strict with the students.
- v. The teacher has poor eye contact with students.

Problems	Solutions
	a) Ask a colleague to observe you and give you feedback.
	b) Ask a colleague to video record your lesson and watch yourself.
	c) Use a cassette player and record your lesson – listen to your voice on the tape.
	d) Think about using gesture and facial expression more to make information clear to learners.
	e) Find out from your students what interests and motivates them.
	f) Begin each lesson with an informal chat with your students.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Think about the following question:

“When I am teaching students how much am I in the role of ‘performer’?”

Think about things like your voice, your physical energy, eye contact, body language.

Note your thoughts in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

If you are interested in exploring how you motivate your students, you could try any of the ‘solution’ ideas in task 4. Or you could also keep a diary of the mood of your students and your mood and see if there is any connection.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 98 to 104 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th edition) by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further discussion on what motivation is and where it comes from. On pages 112 and 113 of the same book there is also an interesting discussion of the teacher’s role as a performer and the effect this can have on students.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

There is an infinite variety of possible student reactions. The reactions described below are based on real situations.

a. Student reaction: *The students do not answer any of the teacher's questions, even though they know the answer. The students remain silent.*

b. Student reaction: *The students become restless and begin to whisper to teach other.*

c. Student reaction: *The students are polite, but very distant to the teacher. They do what she asks them, but they are very quiet in class.*

d. Student reaction: *The students complain to the Director of Studies that their teacher is boring. Many of them want to change class.*

e. Student reaction: *The students complain to the Director of Studies. They tell her that they feel they are not learning anything by only playing games and eating cake.*

Task 3 – Feedback

- a. iv
- b. v
- c. iii
- d. ii
- e. i

Task 4 – Feedback

- a) ii, iv, v
- b) ii, iv, v
- c) ii
- d) v
- e) i, iii
- f) iii, iv