

Breaking the Ice – Every Day: Quick and Easy Warm-Up Activities in the World Language Classroom

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You are ready for German class. You have planned your class; you have balanced new material and review of old, planned interesting activities: You have put together a well-rounded German class. You are prepared and ready to go...

What about your students? All have something on their mind, but it's not necessarily German.

How can we try to get all these students on the same page? How can we get them interested in German, and how can we get them to think about German, speak German and connect with fellow students, regardless of differing levels and abilities?

This package gives you some ideas of how you can engage your students in short games and other activities at the beginning of class that are designed to create a positive attitude towards German in your classroom.

My guiding rules when I think about creating and using a warm-up activity in class are:

- It has to be quick (+- 5 minutes) as class time is valuable.
- It has to be easy to prepare and to explain to the students, with no or almost no preparation.
- Once an activity and a recognized name for it is established it needs no preparation or explanation
- It has to engage all students on some level.
- It has to create a low-anxiety atmosphere (besides playing with students' competitive nature).
- Set-up of groups (partner activity, or three to four to a group) must be quick.
- The activity needs to be structured in a way that, if running over 5 minutes, it can be modified or ended relatively easily without frustrating or disappointing the students.
- If you have a smart classroom and a permanent display set-up, you can use presentation slides for many of the activities instead of chalk board or class sets of sheets. This saves time and paper, is visually engaging and can be re-used and expanded as necessary.

The activities in this package have worked well in my classroom. If you try them and they don't seem to work well in your classes, change them so they fit your teaching style and your students.

Many of these activities also can be modified and used as regular classroom activities, tied to your curriculum. It can be designed to reinforce a particular skill and can be amended easily with prepared materials. Be creative!

The initial idea for activity 5 came from my colleague Shirley Santora.

The initial idea for activity 13 came from my colleague Deborah Mifflin.

1. "ABC" Activities

An activity with virtually no prep time and seemingly endless possibilities.

Level: Any, particularly beginning and lower intermediate

Preparation: none

Material: Chalkboard, watch

Groups of 3 or 4

Procedure:

Write letters of the alphabet on the board (between 10 and 15 is a good number). Omit letters like Q or X.

Ask groups to find one word for each letter of the alphabet and have them write down the words they found.

Give them one minute or two. Have your watch ready and call out as time ticks away ('1 minute, 30 seconds, 5 seconds', etc.); tell them to stop writing when time is up.

Ask each group to count their words. Ask each group how many words they found. Have the group with the most words start with reading out some words, as you write their answers on the board, behind the letters. Ask the other students to knock on their desk if they have the same word. This encourages active listening. You may want to have the class check whether the words are correctly spelled (that is: beginning letter) and whether they fit the category (or do it yourself, if too time consuming). Fill in gaps behind letters with words from other groups.

Possibilities for this warm-up activity are endless. You can ask the groups to find:

- a word
- a verb
- a noun
- an adjective
- words that describe something big/small/red/blue
- something found around the house
- something found outside
- something found at a farm/ airport/school/kitchen/on vacation/in winter/summer...
- something you can touch/cannot touch
- something that has handles or legs/is bigger than a person/makes a sound...

Variations:

- focus on one letter or two, groups must come up with as many words as possible for them
- have students find words that contain two of those letters
- write a word on the board and ask students to create as many new words as possible with the letters of that word. Focus the search onto the topic that the word comes from or use examples from above

H halten

A anfangen

N neu

D Donnerstag

S Schal

C Chemie

H Hund

U Uhr

H heute

E Ecke

2. "Countdown"

This is another quick activity that gets everybody involved, takes no prep time or materials and can effectively be used to recycle recently introduced vocabulary. It can be very dynamic if you keep the ideas coming.

Level: Any, but particularly beginning and lower intermediate

Material: None

Preparation: Think of or jot down a list of 'countdown' topics

Whole class

Procedure:

Hold up your hands as fists and say "Countdown", and then announce the topic. The students must come up with 10 different things to say. Each time you hear a correct response you repeat it and extend a finger until the class has come up with 10 'things'. For example, you announce: "Give me 10 things you can do in the summer." As students call out 'swimming,' 'biking,' 'eating ice cream', etc. you do the 'countdown' with your fingers until the students have named 10 different things.

Make it a class challenge by setting a time limit ("30 seconds – Name 10 things you can find in a classroom – Go")

Again, possibilities are endless and topics can be tied nicely to current topics.

Variations:

- This can be done as a group activity, much like the ABC activities. You write on the board "10 things/activities one can do/find at _____" Once everyone is ready to go, fill in the missing part, e.g. 'while on vacation'. Each team tries to be the first to have a list of 10 things. Leaving the blank initially gives everyone a clear starting point for the 'competition.'

3. "Charades"

This activity is a lot of fun for the students, especially if they are used to seeing new vocabulary introduced by that method.

Be careful which words or expressions you choose. Think about whether they can really be acted out. Generally, this activity is good for verbs or objects (sports, hobbies, daily routines, animals, professions, fairy tales, etc.)

Level: Any, but particularly beginning and intermediate learners

Preparation: None. But have a list of expressions ready.

Material: Prepared cards with words/pictures

Whole class

Procedure:

Variation 1: Walk around the room and distribute flashcards with vocabulary words to some of your students. They now have to pantomime what is written on the card.

If you feel this puts too much pressure on single students, start with one or two charades yourself and then ask for volunteers to do the next. Generally, outgoing students love to perform in front of the class.

Intermediate and advanced students can describe the words verbally without naming them (like in the board game "taboo". This broadens the choice of expressions again.

If your class is large, divide into three or four groups, distribute cards among groups and have them do the activity in their groups.

Variation 2: Using an object to 'act out' the expression adds an absurd element and might make students feel more comfortable acting out the expression (e.g. pencil charades, rubber chicken or teddy bear charades).

Variation 3: Pictionary. Instead of having students act out words, have them draw the expression on the board and have the other students guess. You can also divide the group in two and award points to the group who guessed correctly. Students who are struggling in German but are talented artists LOVE this activity.

4. "Packing My Suitcase"

This is a popular German memory game that can easily be modified into a warm-up activity and can effectively be used to review recently introduced vocabulary.

Level: Any, but particularly beginning and intermediate

Material: None

Preparation: None

Groups of 3 or 4

Procedure:

The first student says, "I pack in my suitcase: a pencil" Then the next student repeats those words and adds something, "I pack in my suitcase: a pencil and a shoe." The next student repeats and adds another item, and so forth. If a student can't recall an item or mixes up the order s/he is out. Encourage students to be creative, "I pack into my suitcase: an elephant..."

The groups play until there is a winner or you might want to set a time limit and, once you stop the activity ask each group how many items they had at the end. Ask the group with the longest list to recall it as a group. Students like that follow-up.

Variation: You can modify this activity and make it very focused on recent topics. In that case, you might want to use a different introductory sentence.

"Things I can do:" with verbs

"What I did yesterday:" with present perfect

"Yesterday, I saw on a farm: ..."

"In this classroom I see: ..."

You can use some of the topics mentioned under 'ABC Activities'.

5. "Hot Chair"

Another vocabulary activity, a variation of charades

Level: Any, but particularly beginning and intermediate.

Preparation: None, but have lists of expressions in mind or jotted down

Material: chalkboard

Whole class

Procedure:

Ask three students to come to the front and stand in front of the class so that their backs are facing the blackboard. Write three words/expressions on the board. The class has to give the three students clues so they will say the words you have written on the board. With beginners it can be like charades, with more advanced levels ask the class to describe the words without naming them. Once all three words have been named the three students can sit down while you ask three new ones to come up. Do this three or four times.

Thanks to Shirley Santora for the initial idea and name of activity.

6. "That's Who I Am!"

This in a way resembles a TPRS activity. It is easily prepared, but beware, it is a lot of fun and can quickly go over the 5-minute limit. My students love this activity.

A nice effect when using the same picture several times, especially with beginners is that students realize how much more they can say the second or third time around.

Level: Any

Preparation: None

Material: Picture of a person ('Google images' is a great resource!)

Whole class

Procedure:

Hold up the picture and start asking "Who is this?" Students have to come up with an answer: "(That is) Claudia." Then start asking questions like, "How old is Claudia?" or "Does she have pets?" and have students make up answers. Students love to invent the 'facts' of this person's life story, especially the second or third time around you use the same picture. Be sure to repeat information constantly as 'facts' get added.

At the end, ask all students to stand up. Each has to state a 'fact' about the person before he/she can sit down. This ensures

that students are listening and everybody says something.

Variation: For advanced learners. Bring a picture with several people or an interesting situation on it so you can invent a story along with the 'facts', e.g. 'This is Claudia. Claudia loves Sebastian', 'But Sebastian does not like her, and he rather hangs out with his friends.' 'Then, one day...' At the end students can repeat life 'facts' or recall parts of the 'story'.

7. Anything 'Realia'

For the seasoned teacher who has amassed real (miniature) objects over the years. It really is just a vocabulary drill, and the topics are limited by what can be attained in miniature, but using real objects gives it a spin that students enjoy.

Level: Beginning

Preparation: None

Material: Various collected objects, canvas bag

Whole class

Procedure:

You recently introduced a certain topic (e.g. food). Bring a canvas bag full of the items to class. Walk around the room with the 'mystery bag' and have students pull one piece which they then have to name. Be sure to open up the answer to everyone if the student does not know the word. Once everyone has an object, ask them to put it back into the bag while naming it again.

Variation 1: This is less of a vocabulary drill and works best with motivated advanced learners. The success and length of the activity depends upon your students' creativity and quick thinking. Bring a bag with 'Realia' to class. (Good choices are everyday items: book, DVD, sock, hairbrush, etc) Have every student pull an object out of the bag and name it. Start telling a 'story', "Kerstin went to her friend's house yesterday..." While you talk, pull an object (e.g. a toothbrush) out of the bag and incorporate it into the story,. "Kerstin's friend Maria was brushing her teeth with a toothbrush when she arrived..." then have students add to the story while incorporating their object. Don't call on students or go in order.

The point here is not to tell a coherent story but rather to stretch the 'story' in absurd ways to include the items. You might want to finish with a phrase such as "Und wenn sie nicht gestorben sind, dann leben sie noch heute," [And they lived happily ever after.] to give the 'story' an official ending.

8. Matching/Odd Word Out

These are well-known activity forms that my students love to do competitively as a speed drill warm-up game.

Level: Any

Preparation: prepared activity sheet, on paper, to be distributed to students.

Material: See pp.17/18 of this handout

Partners (groups of two)

Procedure:

In advance, prepare an activity (see pp.17/18 of this handout). Tell students to get with a partner, then pass out one sheet to

each group, face down. Give the start signal and have students complete the paper. Note which group is finished first and let that group call out the matches or odd ones out at the end.

Especially the 'odd one out' activity can be used to specifically reinforce recently introduced vocabulary.

This is the most time consuming activity to prepare, but once you have a certain stock of activities you just need to pull it out and make copies. Or tell students to write down the answers on a separate sheet and collect the originals after the activity. You also could laminate them and pass out erasable pens, then use them forever!

Was passt? (Aktivität #8)

____ Stuhl – Tisch – Bett	1. Farben
____ der – die – das	2. Klassenzimmer
____ liegen – hören - lesen	3. Kleidung
____ rot – grün – gelb	4. Verben ('passiv')
____ Anzug – Krawatte- Hemd	5. Pronomen
____ drei – fünf – acht	6. im Zimmer/Möbel
____ ich – er - ihr	7. Kleidung (Mann)
____ Kreide Tafel Schwamm	8. Zahlen
____ Rock- Bluse – Kleid	9. Verben ('aktiv')
____ wandern – gehen – laufen	10. Artikel

Was passt nicht?

rot grün alt gelb

Haus Wohnung Apartment Wohnzimmer

Mütze Badehose Schal Mantel

Abend Sommer Winter Herbst

Apfel Kirsche Birne Kartoffel

gehen springen laufen liegen

Tisch Dach Stuhl Schrank

Berlin Hamburg Wien Köln

Match (Activity #8)

_____ chair table bed

1. colors

_____ the a an

2. classroom

_____ to lie to hear to read

3. clothes (woman)

_____ red green yellow

4. verbs ('passive')

_____ suit tie dress shirt

5. pronouns

_____ three five eight

6. in my room /furniture

_____ he you they

7. clothing (man)

_____ chalk board projector

8. numbers

_____ skirt blouse dress

9. verbs ('active')

_____ to hike to go to run

10. articles

Odd One Out

1. red green old yellow

2. house apartment condo living

3. gloves bathing suit scarf coat

4. my his she our

5. apple cherry pear potato

6. walk jump run lie

7. table roof chair dresser

8. New York Chicago Toronto Los Angeles

9. "20 Questions: Who Am I?"

This classic game can be modified easily into a warm-up activity. Be sure that ALL your students know the person you are thinking of. If your students are slow in asking or can't narrow things down with their questions, be sure to start giving hints.

Level: Intermediate to advanced

Preparation: None

Material: None

Whole class

Procedure:

If you play this for the first time with your students, tell them that you have thought of a famous person and that they need to ask you 'Yes/No' questions to find out who it is you are thinking about. Alert them that they don't want to 'waste' questions by asking whether it is a specific person until they have narrowed it down quite a bit.

Variation 1: This can be modified to be a review activity and can be appropriate for beginning level as well, depending on how you define and structure the activity.

Have a cardboard 'mystery box' ready. Before class, put an object or a picture of an object into this box and have the students use the 20 question technique to figure out what is in the box.

For example, you could say that the mystery object is something found in a student's room if you recently introduced that vocabulary. Students then ask simply, "Is it a bed?" "Is it a computer?" "Is it a book?", etc. Be sure to have a few extra objects/pictures in case the students guess correctly on their first try.

The student who guessed correctly gets the 'honor' of opening the box and reveals the object to the class.

10. "Questions"

The first time I tried out this activity, I wasn't sure how the students would like it. They loved it and everyone was engaged!

Level: Intermediate to advanced

Preparation: None

Material: None

Whole class, divided into groups

Procedure:

Divide the class in two or, if your class is large, divide into several groups

Ask a student from each group to be the recorder. Tell the groups that they have 5 seconds to come up with a question, which you will answer (Obviously, discourage rude, indiscrete etc. questions. Should one be asked anyway, move on and chart it as 0 for the group). Count down with your hands or use a buzzer. If the group manages to ask a question, they get a point, and the countdown starts with the other/next group. You will get the strangest questions, "Do you have bread?" or 'Is the sky blue?" because 5 seconds is not very much time to come up with a question. [I did not have to set additional rules, but I can see how you might have to in larger groups or with younger students.]

11. "No-Questions"

This activity is less dynamic but my advanced students like it because it makes them think hard and creatively about what to say.

Level: Advanced

Preparation: None

Material: None

Whole class

Procedure:

Tell your students to ask you questions to which they think your answer will be 'No'. Give an example if they can't come up with a question: 'Do you speak Italian? – No'. Discourage double negative questions: Do you NOT speak German? (I can never figure it out and it slows down the activity.) This way of asking for a 'no' answer forces the students to think beyond the usual catalog of questions.

You can put a competitive element into this activity if you state that students are 'out' when your answer to a question is 'yes'.

You can do a quick follow-up by asking the students to recall what your answers to their questions were, by asking whether they remember what you cannot do/own/like/know...

12. "Rembrandt – Egypt?"

The title of this activity comes from a skit by German comedian Otto Waalkes, who poked fun at TV Quiz shows by giving random, absurd answers to quiz questions. It became a stock phrase with my friends whenever we would 'aneinander vorbeireden' and had no clue what the other was talking about.

Level: Any, but best with intermediate and advanced

Preparation: None

Material: Chalkboard

Whole class

Procedure:

Ask a student to come to the front and face the class so s/he does not see the board. Write an expression (or up to three) on the board, e.g. 'Yesterday'. The class has to think of questions that would elicit the answer 'yesterday' in the student up front. Rotate students after a few expressions.

Beware: Some students will want to use explanations, much like in #5 "Hot Chair". Discourage immediately.

A few examples (the students laugh hard when they just can't get the one up front to say exactly those words you wrote.):

- "with my mother"
- "it broke"
- "I was thirsty"

13. "Cocktail Party"

When I say the words "Cocktail Party" my students know what to do.

Level: Any, except perhaps absolute beginners

Preparation: None

Material: None

Whole class

Procedure:

Ask students to form two lines with students facing each other so that each student has a partner. Give them a prompt and have them talk to each other about the topic, e.g. 'What did you do yesterday?' or 'What's your hobby?'. After 30 seconds or a minute, give a signal (I clap and repeat the prompt). Now one line should step sideways so each person has a new partner. The last person of that line moves to the other end of their line for a new partner.

With intermediate classes I found it best to give the same prompt throughout the exercise. The students will become more fluent and add details as they repeat themselves. I can catch blatant errors (though I usually refrain from correcting too much). It also makes for an easy follow-up.

At the end of the activity, I walk between the two lines and ask, 'What did X do yesterday?' Because of the repetition, at least three partners can give some information. Since students know they will have to report to the class they are more likely to pay attention to what is being said.

Thanks to Deborah Mifflin for the original idea and name of activity.