

PREWRITING AND FREEWRITING

It's All in a Name

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Levels	<i>Any</i>
Aims	<i>Ice breaker to get to know each other</i> <i>Practice pronunciation, spelling, writing, and face-to-face communication</i> <i>Participation in a nonthreatening, student-centered writing class</i>
Class Time	<i>30–40 minutes</i>
Resources	<i>Chalkboard or computer overhead screen</i>

Students often go through a whole course without knowing most of their classmates' names. The first class meeting is the time to create synergy and set a personal and communicative agenda by getting students to focus on language that belongs to them—their names. You can help set the tone for the class by having the students lead you toward the correct pronunciation of their names. This activity, as a first exercise in a writing class, lends itself to face-to-face communication and has a high probability of communicative success. The accomplishment, though seemingly simple and pedestrian, is real and useful, not least because it recognizes the importance of a person's name and the value of honoring students as individuals. Furthermore, it empowers students to learn to ask for repetition and to correctly pronounce the spelling of letters.

PROCEDURE

1. Review pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet. If the language is American English, be sure to pronounce the *y* at the ends of *A, B, C, D, E, G, I, J, K, P, T, V,* and *Z*, and the *w* at the ends of *O* and *U*. Also, *H, Q, R, L,* and *X* are hard to pronounce and may require extra practice. A possibility is to have each student say a letter of the alphabet and when a student mispronounces one, have the entire class repeat the correct pronunciation after you and make them start again with *A*. Remind them that they need to spell words with equal stress.

2. Ask all of the students to come to the board and write their first and last names.
3. Pronounce each name and ask that person to give you feedback on your pronunciation. Keep going until each person gives some sort of positive feedback on your pronunciation.
4. Ask students to try to pronounce any names of their classmates that they find to be different for them. Practically, this means names of students from dissimilar cultures, such as a Mexican student trying to pronounce a Vietnamese name. Again, have the student whose name it is give feedback.
5. Have a few students practice spelling their names using equal stress on the letters. Be sure to write “How do you spell it?” on the board. Then discuss questions used in small talk that people ask in order to get to know someone. Have students dictate these and write questions on the board, which may include: Where are you from? What do you like to do? Do you have any brothers and sisters? What is your major/job? What is your favorite food?
6. Tell students that they must move around the classroom and ask 10 other students for their first and last names. They need to ask “How do you spell it?” and then ask a small-talk question but not the same one more than twice during the activity. If time permits and the class size is less than 20, have every student learn everyone’s name and something about the person.
7. If the class has mixed nationalities, instruct students that half of the students they talk to must be from cultures and countries different from their own. For example, a Japanese student would need to have at least 5 non-Japanese students in their list of 10 names.
8. Students write notes on information they learn about each classmate.
9. After students have written down their names and information, stand in a circle. One student at a time stands forward. The others say his or her name and information that they learned.



CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. Especially at lower levels, you might want to write the alphabet on the board to refer to during the exercise.
2. Again, especially at lower levels, you might want to provide a list of pertinent questions and requests for students to use in the exercise. For example:
 - a. What's your name? (Explain that final intonation goes down the first time, and when asked the second time or for clarification, it goes up.)
 - b. How do you spell your first name?
 - c. How do you spell your last (family) name?
 - d. Please repeat that.
 - e. Say that again, please.
 - f. Did you say *A* /ey/ or *E* /iy/?