

I have found that one of the best ways to teach functions is to get the students to role play. Not only are students aware of the functions, they also get to use them in a realistic and interesting way.

In this article, I would like to share with you some role playing activities which I have adapted from various sources.

**May I Introduce Myself** (adapted from a communication game of the same title, published in 'Communication Games' – ELTI Guide No. 1)

This activity enables students to practise social greetings, introductions and leave-taking, in order to discover the name, occupation (and any other information) about another person in the class. Everyone in the class is involved.

### *Materials Required*

1. A set of cards, known as 'occupation cards'. On each card, the name of an occupation is written.
2. Another set of cards with the names of countries written on them.
3. An equal number of cards with a name of a person written on each card. Use the names of film stars, popular singers or even your own staff.
4. A cyclostyled list of all the names, which will be given to each student. There should be blank spaces beside each name, so that the students can write down the information they obtain from questioning their classmates.

### *Procedure*

1. Each student takes a name card, an occupation card and a card with the name of a country on it. These cards are his identity, occupation and country of origin, for the duration of the game.

2. Each student is given a name list and he has to go round the class, meet 10–15 people, and find out their names, occupations and the countries they come from. The information obtained must be written in the blanks on the list.

### *Points to Note*

1. With a low English proficiency class, the teacher should give the students an idea of how the conversation should be structured, and also teach the phrases that will be used.
2. Some students will tend to cheat by just copying out the information on the cards that other students hold. So the teacher should circulate round the class, keeping an eye on the students. It might help if you explain to the class that the point of the game is not to win but to practise their English.

### *Role Play Cards*

In the teaching of area four, I have found that I can teach a whole range of functions using cued role play cards.

### *Materials Required*

1. 40 pieces of manila cardboard, each about 12 by 20 cm. 40 pieces gives you 20 sets, which is enough for an average sized Malaysian class.
2. Artline pens, No. 700.

### *Procedure*

1. Label each set – 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, etc, so that it will be easy to match them.
2. Devise dialogues as shown in the example below, using functions as far as possible. You can add other information, varying it to suit the ability of your students.

A

A: Dial the number.

B: ....

A: Request to speak to Azizan.

B: ....

A: Invite B to go for a party – a day and place.

B: ....

A: Accept reason and take leave.

B: ....

B

A: ....

B: Answer the telephone.

A: ....

B: Acknowledge.

A: ....

B: Thank A and decline the invitation.

A: ....

B: Give reason.

A: ....

B: To take leave.

3. Divide the students into pairs and give each pair a set of cued role play cards. Let them practise in pairs and call out a few pairs to act out the roles.

If the students have a fairly high English proficiency, then the teacher could distribute the cards at random, and call out the numbers. Each student would then be unaware of what the other is going to say. This element of uncertainty creates more authentic communication.

### Using Visuals – Pictures or Stick Figures

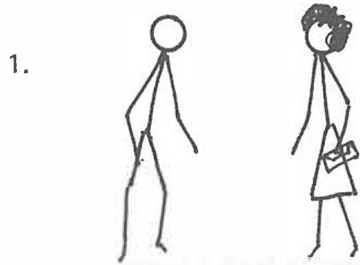
Sometimes a picture or a set of stick figures, can be used to teach some of the 'emotionally bound' functions like anger, complain, threaten, warn and so on.

The picture below, was adapted from an idea in M.E.T. Vol. 9:4, for use in the classroom. If it is enlarged on to a piece of manila cardboard, it can be seen by the whole class.

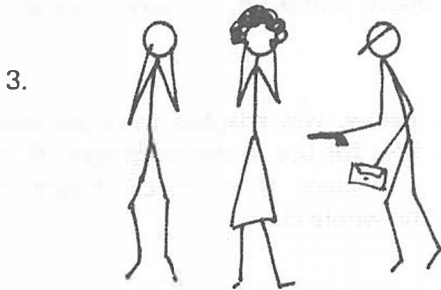


*Procedure*

1. Introduce the picture by asking some leading questions to guide the students, e.g. (1) Who are the people in the picture? (2) Why is the man angry? (3) How is the girl going to react? etc.
2. Divide the class into groups, and assign them the task of creating the dialogue, which they think took place.



to suggest  
to agree



to warn/threaten

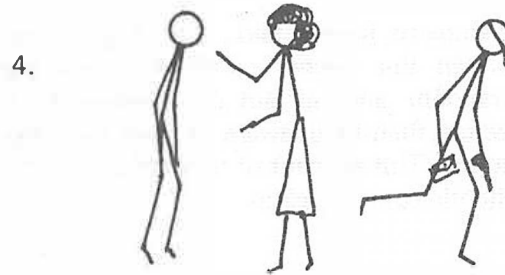
3. Get several pairs to act out the roles.
4. As the students act out the roles, note the phrases they use, and at the end of the lesson, relate these phrases to the functions.

**Stick figures**

The following set of stick figures have been used with hilarious results.



to order/demand  
to beg/plead with



to blame

*Procedure*

Relate the following story to the students:

*Picture 1:* Ahmad meets Yati, a former classmate while shopping. He suggests that they go to a coffeehouse for a drink and talk over old times. Yati agrees.

*Picture 2:* As they are walking towards the coffeehouse, a robber confronts them and demands their valuables. They plead with/beg him not to take away their valuables as they are only students.

*Picture 3:* The robber warns them to keep quiet and threatens to injure them, if they don't hand over their valuables to him.

*Picture 4:* As the robber leaves, Yati blames Ahmad for the loss of her valuables.

Get the students to act out the story and you will be in for a surprise. The boys in my classes, had a fabulous time being the villains, and even carried make-shift weapons. Also, don't be surprised if you hear cliches from American 'cops and robbers' TV shows.