

Developing Grammar II: Simple Past Tense

This set of activities is targeted for students in a lower-intermediate level ESL grammar course. The goal is to raise the students' awareness about the simple past tense, and then carry out some activities in which this tense is recycled, and finally, to produce language output in the form of an information gap activity.

Input Processing Activities

Trang Hung Son

Activity 1

Read the following dialog between Nam and Win, then answer the questions below the dialog.

Win: Hi, Nam. Nice to see you again.
Nam: Hi, Win, good to see you, too.
Win: How are you doing?
Nam: Pretty good. And you?
Win: I am O.K. But I am still worried about my car.
Nam: What's the matter?
Win: I **have** a car accident **last night**. My car is at the police station now.
Nam: What! You **had** a car accident **last night**!
Win: Yeah. I **had** the accident **last night** at about 8.
Nam: Sorry to hear that..
Win: I myself made a mistake because I **drink** a lot of wine.
Nam: You **drank** a lot of wine and you drove!
Win: Yeah, I **drank** so much. I went to the party at Bob's. You know him, right?
Nam: Yeah.

Question: Why does Win use "have" and "drink" while Nam uses "had" and "drank"?

Activity 2

a. Matching activity

Match the pictures with the sentences.



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.

- a. Mickey **milked** the cow.
- b. Mickey **grew** some wheat.
- c. Mickey **talked** to a very tall girl friend.
- d. Mickey **walked** upstairs.
- e. Mickey **listened** to music.
- f. Mickey **went** to bed.

b. Survey

Go around the class and ask your classmates the following questions. Write their names in the right column if they say “yes.” The student who finishes this survey first will win a small prize.

Questions	Names of students who say YES
a. Did you chat on line with your family last week?	
b. Did you daydream when you were in class last week?	
c. Did you buy any new clothes last month?	
d. Did you have a computer crash within the last week?	
e. Did you go on vacation with your family or friends last summer?	
f. Did you have any party last month?	
g. Did you play any computer game last week?	
h. Did you cook any food for your family last month?	
i. Did you eat out yesterday?	
j. Did you listen to any song last night?	

Notes for Teachers and Answer Keys

Activity 1

This activity aims to raise the students’ awareness about simple past tense. Put students in groups of four, and hand each group a set of cards with the dialogue. Expected answers: 1. Win used the time adverb ‘last night’ but he used the present tense form of the verbs ‘have’ and ‘drink.’ 2. Win used the verbs ‘had’ and ‘drank’ because he noticed that the action happened last night. Teacher should emphasize the contrast between the simple present tense form and the simple past tense form of the verbs.

Activity 2

These activities aim to have students work with the target form without producing it.

2a. Put students in groups of four. Hand each group a set of pictures about what Mickey did last week. Ask them to match the pictures with the appropriate sentences. Afterward, ask them to give the answers and give feedback. Answers: 1. f; 2. e; 3. a; 4. b; 5. c; 6. d

2b. Give each student the list of questions on a handout. Answers will vary. Prepare a prize for the winner.

Source of images

Room 108 kid stories (1999). Retrieved August 2, 2007, from <http://www.netrover.com/~kingskid/rattic/ratpage23.html>

Recycling Activities

Dung thi Nguyen

Activity 1

Read the following story and answer the questions below.

Stuck in the Desert

by Saeed Al-Qamzi

Three years ago on the last day of January, I had a big problem. I can't forget this day forever. The story began when my uncle, my cousin, and I went to the desert. My uncle was the oldest at 72 years old, but he was still strong. My cousin at that time was 10 years old, and I was 25 years old. All of us liked hunting. Usually we went hunting on the weekend, especially in winter, because winter is the hunting season.

On the 25th of January, we decided to go hunting. All things were ready in the car, a Range Rover with four-wheel drive. We began on Thursday afternoon, and it took us three hours by car. We reached the place we were looking for at 5:15 P.M. First, we fixed the tent, then we made coffee and had a few minutes of rest. After that, we left to go on the hunt. We hunted using a falcon. Often, we hunt birds and rabbits. We spent two hours without finding anything. We decided to go back to the camp. On our way back, my cousin saw a rabbit. He cried, "Rabbit!! Rabbit! Quick!" I took the falcon's head cover and flung it off aggressively. When the rabbit saw the falcon, it ran fast, but my falcon was a professional hunter. He flew up and came down to trick the rabbit. After two minutes, the rabbit was caught. We took it and went back to the camp where we started to cook our dinner. We ate the delicious food, drank Arabic coffee, and sat around the fire talking until 10:30 P.M. Then we went to bed.

We left camp the next day at 7 o'clock in the morning. We went north and found two kinds of birds and caught them. However, we faced trouble at 10:00A.M. because the car got stuck in the sand! We spent about three hours trying to pull out the car without any progress. Finally, we decided to walk. I talked with my uncle about how hard it is for an old man or a young boy to walk more than 40 km. in the desert. He agreed with me. So I took a bottle of water with me and started to walk south alone. I knew the way well, but it was a long way in the sand. I walked more than four hours without stopping. I felt tired and thirsty. I drank all the water which was in the bottle. I stopped to rest, sleeping around two hours.

When I got up, darkness had covered the area. "What should I do?" I asked myself. I continued to walk south. I was worried about my uncle and cousin, and they were worried about me also. Suddenly, I met a Bedouin man who was riding his camel. He took me to his house. When I had had enough rest, I asked him to take me to the road and he did. After that, I found a car which took me to the city to get help. I had one day to get back to my uncle and cousin. When I got back to them, they were so happy because I had gotten help and they were able to see me again.

Eventually, I learned a lesson from this story, which was that the desert is very dangerous. Next time, when we go hunting, we must go in groups with two or more cars. If we go together, we can keep each other safe. We know the desert is dangerous, but we will never quit hunting.

Questions

1 Which of the following is NOT true?

a. Saeed's uncle was over 70 years old.

b. Saeed was younger than his uncle and his cousin.

c. Three males went hunting.

d. Winter is the hunting season, so they went hunting in January.

e. Saeed's uncle was an old, but strong man.

2 Choose the correct answer.

a. The Range Rover had front-wheel drive.

b. The group left for the hunting trip at 2:15 P.M.

c. After resting, they fixed their tent.

d. During the first two hours, the group found animals to hunt.

e. The rabbit tricked the falcon.

3 Which happened last among the following events?

a. On their way back to camp, Saeed's cousin saw a rabbit.

b. The group sat around the fire talking.

c. They ate delicious food and drank Arabic coffee.

d. The falcon flew up and down and caught the rabbit.

e. Saeed took off the falcon's head cover.

4 Which is NOT a reason that Saeed had to walk forty km.?

a. The car got stuck in the sand.

b. It was hard for an old man or a very young boy to walk 40 km.

c. Saeed did not know the way and he became lost.

d. The group spent 3 hours trying to pull the car out of the sand, but could not.

e. There was nobody around who could help the hunters get out of the sand.

5 Which is NOT true about the Bedouin man?

a. He was riding a camel.

b. He took Saeed to get help.

c. He took Saeed to his house.

d. He allowed Saeed to rest.

e. He took Saeed to the road.

6 What lesson did Saeed learn from his experience?

a. Hunting is dangerous and he will not hunt again.

b. When hunting, Saeed will use a different type of car.

c. When hunting in the desert, people should go in groups with two or more cars.

d. Bedouins are not helpful to strangers in the desert.

7 What is the main idea of the story?

a. You must train a falcon well to hunt in the desert.

b. Saeed loved his family and loved to go hunting with them.

c. Because their car got stuck in the sand, the hunters learned that the desert can be dangerous.

d. Saeed was strong enough to walk 40 km. in the desert.

Activities 2

Use the cues given below to answer some questions about "The life of Diana."

1956: born in Chicago

1974: graduate from high school

1974-1978: attend University of Illinois at Chicago

1978-1980: serve in the US Peace Corps. (Thailand)

1980-1982: Do an MA in TESL at University of Columbia

1983: get married

1984: have a son

1985: return to University of Columbia for a Ph.D.

1989: get a Ph.D. in education.

2001: become a professor at Harvard

Note. From Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1983, p. 75).

Activity 3

Read the following excerpt and answer the questions.

My first victim was a woman – white, well dressed, probably in her early 20s. I came upon her late one evening on a deserted street in Hyde Park, a relatively affluent neighborhood in an otherwise mean, poor section of Chicago. As I swung onto the avenue behind her, there seemed to be a safe distance between us. Not so. She glanced back. To her the young black man- about six feet two inches with a beard and wavy hair, both hands shoved into the pockets of a big and heavy military jacket- seemed threateningly close. She picked up her pace and was soon running in earnest. Within seconds she disappeared into a cross street.

Note. Text taken from Staples (1984, pp. 20-22).

Questions

1. Who was the writer's first victim?
2. How old was she?
3. What did the woman do at first when the writer was behind her?
4. How tall was he?
5. Was he old?
6. Did his hands swing as he walked?
7. Did the woman talk to him?
8. What did she do?
9. Why did the woman run away?

Teacher's Notes and Answer Keys

Activity 1

Teacher divides class into 5 groups. Each group reads one paragraph and underlines the simple past tense used in the paragraph. The last group reads two last paragraphs (because the last paragraph is short). The teacher then mixes the groups in a jig-saw manner and make sure the members in the new group have read different paragraphs. Each member in the new groups will tell the other group members about their paragraph and show the group the verbs in simple past tense that they have underlined in the reading.

After that, the groups compare the answers by writing their own answers on the board. Teacher gives feedback.

Answers: 1. b; 2. b; 3. d; 4. e; 5. b; 6. c; 7. c.

Activity 2

There are 10 periods in Diana lifetime, so the teacher writes two periods on each of five small pieces of paper, then puts those pieces into an envelope. The teacher then divides the class into 5 groups. Each group picks one piece of paper from that envelope. Each group uses the given cues to write their own sentences about Diana's life, so each group writes two sentences. Each group reads their sentences aloud in front of the class and writes them on the board. Each group then rearranges those sentences into chronological order. Each group reads aloud their answer in front of class. Teacher gives feedback and corrects any pronunciation and intonation mistakes. Focus on the "ed" pronunciation, and irregular verbs in past tense.

Answers:

Diana was born in Chicago in 1956.
She graduated from high school in 1974.
She attended University of Illinois at Chicago from 1974 to 1978.
She served in the U.S. Peace Corp in Thailand from 1978 to 1990.
She did an MA in TESL at University of Columbia from 1980 to 1982.
She got married in 1983.
She had a son in 1984.
She returned to University of Columbia for a Ph.D. in 1985.
She got a Ph.D. in education in 1989.
She became a professor at Harvard in 2001.

Activity 3

Teacher divides class into three groups. Each group answers three questions. Teacher writes down three questions on each piece of paper and puts them into an envelope. Each group chooses their questions from the envelope and answers them. Each group makes one question about the reading. Group leaders read their answers aloud in front of class and their own questions. The other members write down the answers and the questions they made on the board. Each group answers the two other groups' questions. Teacher gives feedback.

Answers:

1. His first victim was a well-dressed white woman.
2. She was in her early 20s.
3. She glanced back.
4. He was 6 feet 2 inches tall.
5. No, he wasn't.
6. No, they didn't.
7. No, she didn't.
8. She walked faster and then ran.
9. Because she stereotyped him. Even though the author did not do any harm (he kept a safe distance between him and the woman), but because he was black, she thought that he was going to smuggle her. This story is an example of racial discrimination in America. (The wording of this answer may vary.)

References

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Information Gap Activity

Edwin Davis, Jr.

Instructions

All students: Get into groups of three and sit in a triangle. You will help each other make complete sentences using simple past tense with the given places and times. One student will have the places, the second will have the times, and the third will have the verbs to make the complete sentences for the whole group. All sentences will be about a person named John.

STEP 1

Student A: You will have a set of cards with pictures of places on them. You will also get a list of these places. (Use this list only if you get stuck on what the picture on the card is about.)

Using these materials, make a sentence out of each card using the simple past tense of *go*. The subject of all of your sentences will be *John*.

Example: If you see a picture of a restaurant, then say “John **went** to the **restaurant**.”

STEP 2

Student B: You will have a set of cards with pictures of different times or dates on them. You will also get a list of these times. (Use this list only if you get stuck on what the picture on the card is about.)

Using these materials, make a sentence out of each card using the simple past tense of *go*. The subject of all of your sentences will be *John*.

Example: If you see a picture of a clock that says 10:00, then say “John **went** at **10 o'clock**.”

FINAL STEP

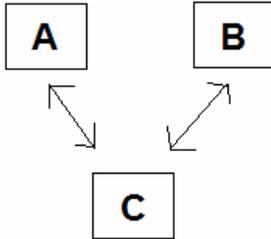
Student C: You will have a list of verbs to use. Instead of using the simple past tense of *go*, you will use one of the verbs on the list that best fits the sentence. Your sentence will be a combination of your group’s sentences.

Example, if Student A says “John **went** to the **restaurant**.” and Student B says “John **went** at **10 o'clock**.”, then you can select the verb “eat” and say, “John **ate** at the **restaurant** at **10 o'clock**.”

All students: Make sure your voice is loud and clear enough so Student C can make a sentence. All of you will have a chance to be Student A, B, and C this week so help each other out.

Notes for Teachers

Make sure Students A and B face Student C. If you need to, draw the following figure on the board.



Give a copy of the instructions to each student.

Go over the instructions with them.

Answer any questions and concerns they have.

Facilitate and make sure the students are doing it correctly.

DOs

Students A and B are facing C.

Students A and B are orally producing their sentences.

All students' voices are loud and clear.

All students' use the correct grammatical forms.

Students are orally producing the lexicon and grammatical forms assigned to them.

DONTs

Students A and B write down their sentences and show it to Student C.

Student A's Materials

List of Places

library

club

beach

new house

the woods

Index Cards



library



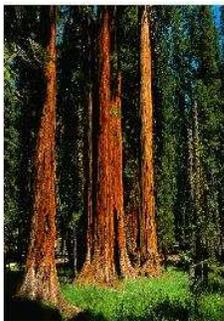
club



beach



new house



woods



restaurant
(Sample Card)

Student C's Materials

List of Verbs

swim

move

study

dance

camp

eat (sample)

Sources of images

“Club”

Illusions Dance Club and Restaurant. (2007). Dance_floor_1.jpg. Retrieved August 1, 2007 from http://www.illusionsdanceclub.com/files/Dance_floor_1.jpg.

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