

Balls to the wall

Time: about 30 minutes

Material: 3 coloured sheets of paper crumpled into balls. List of “similar sounding words” (see the back of this sheet).

Objectives: Have the students practice their listening and speaking skills. Especially, words with similar or difficult pronunciation.

Description: Since there are usually 6 rows of desks in the classes, I make each row into a team. The first student from team 1,2 and 3 will come to the front and stand about 4 meters (13'1.48" for British and American imperialists) from the board.

They will each be holding a ball of paper of a different colour.

On the board, you will write 2, 3 or maybe even 4 words that sound “similar”.

For example “Love” and “Rub”. (Pronounced in “katakana English” they both sound like “ラブ”). You can then show them how to correctly pronounce the English “R”, “L”, “V” and “B” sounds by explaining where the tongue and the lips should be and what they should do.

Have all the students repeat the correct pronunciations a few times.

You will then move away from the board and say one of the words. The 3 students standing in front have to throw their ball on the correct word. The first student to hit it gets 2 points for his team and the second one gets 1 point. Of course, if a student throws the ball on the wrong word, he doesn't get any points.

Sometimes, the balls hit the board almost at the same time so I give 2 points to everyone.

You then repeat with the first students from team 4,5 and 6 and with new words. Then, you do the same with the second students from team 1,2 and 3. Etc.

TL;DR You put similar sounding words on the board. You have the students practice saying them. 3 students stand in front with a ball of paper. You say one of the words and the students try to throw their ball on it as quickly as possible.

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Grade level: Any (JHS, SHS).

Tips: Make sure to keep the whole class engaged by having all students repeat the words after you explain them since it is likely that each student will be in front for only about 30 seconds during the whole activity. Also, ask the students help you spot which ball hits the board first. Things tend to happen really quickly.

You can use your hands to simulate the tongue and teeth placement in the mouth during your explanations.

Acknowledgement: I saw this activity in previous ALTs repertoire under the name “Word Swat”. They would use big fly swats to go hit the correct words on the board.

See the other side for examples of words to use

Balls to the wall vocabulary:

Cheap/sheep/ship/chip

Rub/Love/Tub

Work/Walk

Boot/But/Bat/Bath/Boat/Bait/Bet

These/Tease/Seize

Bug/Bag/Big

Cave/Cove/Cab/Care/Core

Rice/Lice

Sea/She/Shy

Lunch/Launch

Fleas/Fleece

Cream/Clean/Dream

Butch/Botch/Batch

Low/Row/Raw/Law

Run/Ran/LAN

Which/Wish

Cat/Cut/Coat/Cot

Land/Lend

Loose/Lose

Sharp/Shark

Read/Lead/Led/Red

Fun/Fan/Phone

Pine/Pain(Pane)/Pan

She/See(sea)/Shy/Say

Sick/Sheep/Six

Weather/Wetter

Are/Our

Vote/Boat

Call/Care

Grow/Glow

Flow/Blow

Keep/Kip/Cap

High-Fi/High-five

Bread/Bled/Blade

Cram/Clam

Let/Red/Led

Trip/Tulip

Speed/Speedo

Much/Munch

Slip/Sleep

Rat/Rot

Lap/Rap/Leap/Reap/Rip

Team/Theme

Biking/Viking

sit/seat