



# Ten terrific ideas for teaching English with songs

## Do the children in your English classes like singing?

Songs are a great way for children to learn English. Try these top tips for teaching English through songs from Devon Thagard, co-creator of Super Simple Songs and contributor to **Everybody Up**.

### 1 Use songs to create a welcoming atmosphere

As teachers we often make a great effort to decorate our classrooms. Don't forget to decorate your classroom with sound, too! Play songs as students enter the classroom. It's relaxing, creates a great atmosphere, and signals to students that it is time for English.

### 2 Use songs to warm up

Students come to class with different energy levels each day. Some students are feeling energetic and some are not. When we start the lesson with one or two simple and fun songs, we can help students warm up both their bodies and their minds. It also lets students know that this is a class where they are going to be listening, speaking, and interacting.

### 3 Use songs to signal transitions

Young learners can quickly grow discouraged and lose concentration when they don't understand what the teacher wants them to do. Songs are a fantastic way to signal to students when it is time to move from one activity to another. Use songs to welcome students to class, to say hello, to lead into circle-time activities, to signal when it's time to clean up, to indicate ABC time or storytime, and to say goodbye. When used consistently, students will know exactly what to do as soon as they hear a song playing.

### 4 Introduce songs as background music

The easiest way to introduce a new song is to play it as background music while students are doing another activity. Set your music player to 'repeat' mode, and play the song in the background while students are coloring, doing a craft, or completing a worksheet.

The goal is not to have the students memorize the song, but just to get them familiar and comfortable with it. As the students continue with their activity, the song will begin to sink in. Some students may begin humming the song. Some students may begin singing parts of the song. The following lesson, play the song as students enter the class. By the time you 'teach' the song, the students will already be quite familiar with it.

### 5 Create a song rotation

One of the great things about songs is that they provide input that children don't mind listening to over and over. Schedule your songs so that the amount of repetition is appropriate for the age of the students. Children under four years old absolutely love singing familiar songs each week. Feel free to use the same song in class for weeks and weeks.

As students move into elementary school, they crave more variety. They still like to re-visit their favorite songs from time to time, but not every class. With elementary school students, try singing a song two classes in a row, then take the song away for a couple of weeks. Re-introduce the song a couple of weeks later as review, and then sing the song from time to time throughout the rest of the school year.

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## 6 Have extra songs ready

Sometimes; things don't go as planned in class and you need to make a change. Maybe an activity didn't work as you expected it to, or some materials are missing, or the students are feeling tired. Songs offer a way to quickly change the atmosphere. Always have some of your students' favorite songs ready to go on your music player. If something goes wrong and an activity doesn't work out, you can quickly regain the interest of the students with a fun sing-along.

## 7 Let students choose

Another great feature of songs as language teaching tools is that they take so little class time. Singing a song might only take 2–3 minutes but allows for significant review of vocabulary and structures learned in earlier lessons. Try to leave a small block of time at the end of each class for the students to choose a song they would like to sing. This can be done randomly (students pick a song name out of a hat), as a prize for winning a classroom game (the winning team gets to choose the song), or as a class vote. Singing the song at the end of class ensures students will go home with an English song in their heads.

## 8 Listening first

Always remember that input comes before output. That is, students need to hear new language before they can produce it. With songs, listening comes before singing. Don't expect students to sing the songs right away. When you introduce a song, have the students listen and do the actions to the song along with you. They'll be watching you and doing the actions, while learning the song at the same time. After one or two times, they'll likely be singing along with you without any prompt. If you like, you can introduce all of the actions to the songs before listening, then listen and act, then act and sing.

## 9 Listening exercises

As students grow older they may be a little more reluctant to sing and do the actions. That's OK and doesn't mean that they don't like learning with songs. Use songs as listening exercises. Play songs and have students raise their hands when they hear certain words. Or have students complete fill-in-the-blank worksheets as they listen to the lyrics. After listening to the song a couple of times as part of a listening exercise, you'll often notice students beginning to sing along. And even if you don't sing the song in class, the song will stay with the students long after class is over.

## 10 Encourage listening at home

Ideally you will use materials that include songs students can listen to outside of the classroom. Ask the parents to play some English songs at home or while driving in the car. It's fun and easy and helps your students receive English input throughout the week.

## Have fun singing!

**Devon Thagard is the co-creator of Super Simple Songs ([www.supersimplesongs.com](http://www.supersimplesongs.com)) and a contributor to **Everybody Up** from Oxford University Press.**