

Alternative Ways of Starting Classes, Ending Classes, and Deciding on a Syllabus in Language Education

Nazokat Sayfullayeva Abdusalim qizi- Shakhrisabz State Pedagogical Institute "Teacher of the Department of Foreign Language Practice and Theory"
sayfullayevanazokat19@gmail.com

Abstract

Effective language teaching goes beyond the delivery of content—it includes how lessons begin, conclude, and are structured overall. This article explores alternative and student-centered approaches to starting and ending lessons, and innovative methods of designing syllabi that involve learners in meaningful ways. Drawing on practical classroom strategies, teacher reflections, and academic research, it presents flexible, engaging, and inclusive techniques that can be applied in various contexts. These approaches enhance student motivation, autonomy, and retention by focusing on the learning process, not just the outcomes.

Introduction

In language education, classroom routines play a powerful role in shaping the learning environment. The way a teacher opens and closes a lesson can influence how students perceive the class, how much they engage, and how much they retain. Likewise, a syllabus is not just a list of topics—it represents a roadmap of the learning journey. Traditionally, syllabi are top-down documents designed by institutions or teachers. However, involving students in these decisions fosters a sense of ownership and personalization. This article explores these three areas—starting lessons, ending lessons, and designing syllabi—through practical, research-informed methods that promote active learning and student participation.

1. Starting Classes Creatively and Purposefully

The opening moments of a lesson set expectations and mood. Moving beyond basic greetings or taking attendance, creative openings can stimulate curiosity, prepare the mind, and help learners transition into the English-speaking environment.

Innovative Strategies:

Scenario-based Warm-ups: Give students a “mini situation” like “You lost your passport at the airport” and ask them how they would react.



Quick Debates: Present a provocative statement like “Homework should be banned” and let students express quick opinions.

Picture Prediction: Show a strange or humorous picture and ask learners to guess what happened before or after it was taken.

Mystery Bags: Bring a small object hidden in a bag and give clues related to the lesson’s theme.

"Whisper Chain": Whisper a short sentence to a student and let it go around the room to see how it changes. Then connect it to the day’s language focus.

Real-life Application:

One teacher started each class with a “three-word challenge,” where students had to make a funny or logical sentence using three random words from the previous lesson. This built vocabulary recall and sparked creativity.

2. Ending Classes Meaningfully and Reflectively

Rather than simply stopping when time is up, teachers can use the end of class to consolidate learning, encourage reflection, and preview upcoming content. Memorable endings help learning “stick.”

Alternative Ending Techniques:

Prediction for Tomorrow: Ask students what they think the next lesson will be about based on a clue or teaser.

Peer Teaching: Let students explain a key idea from the lesson to a partner in their own words.

"One-Minute Paper": Learners write down the most important thing they learned and one thing they didn’t understand.

Emotional Check-ins: Ask how students felt about the lesson using emojis or a traffic light (red = confused, green = confident).

Silent Summary Wall: Students write a summary or word from the day and stick it on a poster at the back of the class.

Real-life Application: In a high-school class, the teacher asked students to choose a GIF or meme that described how they felt about the lesson. This humorous but honest method helped track student mood and engagement.

3. Collaborative and Flexible Syllabus Design

A syllabus should be a living document, not a static one. Involving learners in the planning and development of the syllabus increases motivation and relevance, especially in adult or project-based learning contexts.

Student-Centered Syllabus Planning Methods:

Needs Analysis Worksheets: At the beginning of the term, students complete surveys about what skills or topics they need for their personal or professional goals.

“Learning Menu” Format: Create a syllabus with core topics and optional “side dishes” learners can vote on weekly.

Quarterly Adjustments: Review syllabus coverage every 4–5 weeks and let students suggest additions or changes.

"Question Box" Syllabus: Place a box in class where students can anonymously suggest topics or real-world problems they want to explore.

Integration of L1/L2 Interests: Let students bring texts or video clips in their own language to be translated or discussed using English vocabulary and grammar.

Real-life Application:

In an adult ESP course, the teacher created a basic grammar roadmap but allowed students to insert workplace-based scenarios they encountered each week. The syllabus became dynamic and highly relevant to their daily tasks.

4. Challenges and Considerations

While these alternative methods are rewarding, they require planning, adaptability, and sometimes institutional support.

Time Constraints: Balancing flexibility with curriculum coverage can be difficult, especially in test-preparation contexts.

Student Readiness: Some learners may feel uncomfortable with too much autonomy; scaffolding is essential.

Assessment Alignment: Creative activities should still support the overall assessment goals and course outcomes.

Teacher Confidence: New teachers may need support or peer training to confidently implement non-traditional approaches.

Conclusion

Incorporating alternative ways of starting and ending classes and redesigning the syllabus with learners in mind results in more engaged, motivated, and responsible students. These methods shift the focus from teacher control to learner empowerment. Instead of following rigid formats, educators are encouraged to



experiment with flexible structures, foster student voice, and create a positive classroom culture. By applying small changes consistently, classrooms can become spaces of curiosity, connection, and meaningful progress in language learning.

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