

Reverse Brainstorming

What is Reverse Brainstorming:

The purpose of Reverse Brainstorming is quite literally brainstorming ideas related to the opposite of a thing. For example, if the problem you are trying to address is how to grow better food, the thinker might reverse the problem. What do we do with food once it is grown? How can we use grown food better? This line of thinking can result in new innovations to the original problem by brainstorming on a parallel stream.

How to Plan with Reverse Brainstorming for ESL/EFL learners:

To use Reverse Brainstorming in the EFL classroom, as the teacher you must assume that learners will be able to brainstorm about a general topic. The way that I think this is best utilized is by going in an opposite direction. For example, we may often have Ss brainstorm foods they like. To put a reverse spin on it, what can change a food you like into one you don't like (i.e. I love apples, but if you put salt on them, I won't like them. Or, I love apples, unless they are too old, etc). The purpose is to go in the opposite of the usual direction for brainstorming. This can result in some very interesting conversations and allow teachers to really expound on some lexical areas that have been taught to death.

What level is this appropriate for:

Reverse brainstorming is challenging brainstorming and assumes that Ss will be able to go in an opposite direction with language. This will work best with learners who are past a beginner level. It could be used with young learners, assuming they have enough exposure to language. In general I would recommend this with A2+ or greater for the maximum use.

When to use Reverse Brainstorming in the lesson plan:

If using either Present-Practice-Produce, Encounter-Clarify-Remember-Internalize-Fluency, Present-Practice-Use, or Encounter-Internalize-Fluency frameworks for planning for lesson, or if using a Task based learning (TBL) approach, use Reverse Brainstorming after the presentation stage and before the practice stage. This is an activity that builds language for practice.

In Engage, Study, Activate, I would recommend this during the Engage phase as a way to engage Ss in language they have previously learned and capture attention and excitement. Then during the study phase the structure/new language can be introduced. All of this should be able to move easily towards Activate and use of language.

Following Idea Box

As with other Creative Ideas, once Reverse Brainstorming is used move to your pair/group practice and from there you should be well staged to head to fluency.

A basic step by step for using Reverse Brainstorming. This can be modified to match your lesson plan.

1. Ask Ss what they know about the topic. Make a list of those things on the board. For Example: What foods do you like
2. Pass out the Reverse Brainstorming worksheet.
Ask Ss to consider the reverse of the topic. For example: What would change a food you like into a food you don't like?
3. Review the worksheet. Allow Ss to make lists of reasons that would reverse their thinking, idea from the original idea.
4. Direct Ss attention the board. Continue with additional columns from the worksheet as presented.
5. Once finished, elicit examples from Ss. Write script or structure Ss will use on the board to help structure the conversation for Ss. Model using the conversation with Ss.
6. From here, move to practice activity where language will be used.