


Have you ever tried using a song with your students? Would you like to use songs more often, but are unsure about the different activities you can do with them? This lesson looks at how songs can be a welcome addition to your teaching programme. It outlines what language and skills practice they can provide and suggests some activities that work well for most songs.

### Task 1 – A questionnaire



**Which description best describes the frequency with which you use songs with your students? Choose the one(s) that are closest to what you do, then look at the answer key below. **

1. Never.
2. Once every three or four months.
3. Once a month.
4. Once a week.
5. Only at the end of the week.
6. Two or three times a week.
7. Every day.



### Task 1 Feedback

There is no right or wrong answer to the frequency with which you should use songs in the classroom. It depends on how often you see students and it depends on their interests and their needs. Overuse can make students feel jaded about them, while never using songs can mean that you are not offering variety in your teaching programme and not appealing to students who are very motivated by popular music and popular culture.

### Key Skill

Judicious use of songs with a group of learners can greatly enhance motivation and offer learning opportunities not always found in course books. However, it is interesting to note that some course books now include songs as part of their syllabus. This is perhaps a sign that students expect lessons based around songs at some stage in their course.

Task 2 – What are the issues?



Numbers 1 to 5 outline some supporting ideas for using songs. Letters a to e outline contrary ideas that balance the supporting ideas. Match the contrary ideas to the supporting ideas.

Supporting ideas	Contrary ideas
1. Most students find popular songs very motivating, but...	
2. Songs generally lighten the mood of a class, but...	
3. Music appeals to the senses and is always perceived as enjoyable, but...	
4. Songs are a great source of popular culture, but...	
5. Songs provide many examples of colloquial language that many students are keen to learn, but...	

**Contrary Ideas**

- a. ... some students might think it will lead to singing and for them, this is less enjoyable.
- b. ... in some contexts this might be seen as invasive or inappropriate.
- c. ... this can depend very much on musical taste and more mature learners might not be so keen to learn from songs.
- d. ... this idiomatic language is often difficult to understand.
- e. ... some students may perceive them as being superficial and not concerned with real learning.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

**Key Skill**

On balance, the advantages probably outweigh the disadvantages. However, it is a good idea to be aware of different issues that surround the use of songs and not assume that all students will love working on a song. Also don't assume that students will have your taste in music. What you perceive as "boring folk music" they might find not only melodious, but also easy to understand, and vice versa!

Task 3 – What are the aims?



Numbers 1 to 9 outline very broad language and skill aims for using songs. Letters a to i provide more detail for these aims. Match the detail to the aims.

Aims	Detail
1. To practise listening ...	
2. To practise listening ...	
3. To practise reading ...	
4. To practise reading ...	
5. To practise speaking ...	
6. To practise writing ...	
7. To clarify or highlight vocabulary ...	
8. To clarify or highlight grammar ...	
9. To clarify or highlight pronunciation ...	

Detail

- a. ... by scanning for specific words in the lyrics of the song.
- b. ... by focusing on idiomatic language in the song.
- c. ... by focusing on example structures in the song.
- d. ... for a gist understanding of the song.
- e. ... by creating new lyrics for the melody of the song.
- f. ... for a more detailed understanding of the song.
- g. ... by discussing the content of the song.
- h. ... by matching together words from the song that rhyme.
- i. ... for an implied message in the lyrics of the song.


Check your ideas in the answer key. 

### Key Skill

In effect, a song is just another text and can be used in exactly the same way as you would any other text. However, there are some specific activities that go well with songs. Task 4 looks at some examples.

### Task 4 – Example activities



**Numbers 1 to 16 are example activities that can be used with most songs. Sort them into the following categories that match the stages of a lesson: first listening, subsequent listening(s) and post listening.** 

First listening	Subsequent listening(s)	Post listening

### Activities

1. Students listen and order the lines of the song that have been mixed up.
2. Students listen and decide what kind of song it is – romantic? song with a message?
3. Students listen and select the best of 3 possible titles for the song.
4. Students listen and complete a copy of the lyrics with gaps.
5. Students find and underline examples of a particular grammar point in a song.
6. Students study two or three unfamiliar idioms from a song and try to work out what they mean.
7. Students listen and decide which one of three pictures best represents the song.
8. Students listen and answer True/ False or multi-choice questions.
9. Students rewrite the lyrics of a song, trying to fit their words to the melody.
10. Students listen and select the best of 3 one-sentence summaries of the song.
11. Students listen to confirm their predictions about the content of a song based on having looked at 5 key vocabulary items from the lyrics.
12. Students listen and answer comprehension questions about the song.
13. Students do a role play based on characters or a situation from the song.
14. Students sing the song together as the CD plays.
15. Students listen in order to identify and correct a wrong word in each line of the song.
16. Students are given a list of words from the song. They match together the words that rhyme, then listen and complete a gap-fill of the lyrics using those words.

### **Thinking about your teaching ...**

A line from a song will often get stuck in your memory. It is possible to compare it with a set lexical phrase. How much do you think learning these sets phrases (sung or spoken) help with language learning?

Note your thoughts in your *Teaching Log*.

### **Taking it to the classroom ...**

Try out one of the activities in task 4 that is new to you.

### **Want to find out more ... ?**

The following book is an excellent source of ideas for using songs: *Music & Song* by Tim Murphey (Oxford University Press 1992).

### **Related TaskBook lessons...**

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to the use of songs:

- **Unit 3 a) Listening 1: Listening sub-skills and a typical lesson** (*looks at the different listening sub-skills that students need to practise*).
- **Unit 3 b) Listening 2: Learner-friendly listening lessons** (*looks at strategies for making listening lessons more manageable for your students*).
- **Unit 5 a) Using authentic materials:** *Looks at the pros and cons of using authentic materials and outlines a procedure of how to exploit them in the classroom.*

**Answer Key**



**Task 2 – Feedback**

- 1) c
- 2) e
- 3) a
- 4) b
- 5) d

**Task 3 – Feedback**

- 1) d
- 2) f
- 3) a
- 4) i
- 5) g
- 6) e
- 7) b
- 8) c
- 9) h

**Task 4 – Feedback**

**First listening: 2, 3, 7, 10, 11**

**Subsequent  
listening: 1, 4, 8, 12, 15, 16**

**Post listening: 5, 6, 9, 13, 14**