

Lip Syncs: Speaking ... with a Twist

LEVEL: Upper beginner and above, including older primary students, teens, and uninhibited adults

TIME REQUIRED: 90 minutes for the entire activity, which, if necessary, can be divided over two or more class periods

GOALS: To develop speaking confidence and fluency; to build vocabulary knowledge and pronunciation awareness; to appropriately use nonverbal communication (e.g., facial expressions and gestures); to enjoy and assess lip-sync performances

MATERIALS: Chalkboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers; pencils or pens; paper; a device to play songs (and possibly videos) in the classroom

OPTIONAL MATERIALS: A digital projector or other video playback device; a mobile phone with a video camera or other device for recording student performances; an Internet-connected computer or device that can access and play songs and videos in the classroom (Note: Teachers can download content in advance and play it offline in the classroom if an Internet connection is not available.)

OVERVIEW: Music-based instruction is common in many English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, and the benefits language learners gain from working with songs are well documented (Mobbs and Cuyul 2018). However, some teachers don't stray far from compulsory textbook suggestions for song-based activities, and

learners often just sing instructor-selected songs or analyze grammar or vocabulary items in their lyrics. This article describes an alternative way of working with music in the EFL classroom.

I stumbled upon this activity concept while watching a televised lip-syncing show with my own children. While viewing the program, I thought, "Why not do a lip-sync project in my English language class?" Now, after years of conducting these projects, I have found that they motivate learners to understand a listening text, support pronunciation practice, and—perhaps most importantly—allow learners to have fun while developing their speaking confidence and fluency. In sum, lip-syncing activities, such as the one described here, can build class spirit, develop collaboration skills, and encourage language development.

PREPARATION:

1. Select a song that is appropriate for your teaching context. You might consider your students' ages, the song's messages and themes, the relationship between the lyrics and your specific language-teaching goals, and any local copyright or academic fair-use guidelines. Ideally, the song you select will have an accompanying performance video (i.e., a music video, a musical movie performance, or a recorded theater performance) as well as an online video example of an individual or group lip-syncing the song.

- Try to find an accompanying performance video that communicates the song’s story or themes. Ideally, the video will clearly show the performer’s mouth singing for at least part of the song.
 - Search online for the song title and “lip sync” or “lip dub” to locate one or two videos of the song being lip-synced. Lip-sync performances by student groups or performers who are about the same age as your students can be motivating for your class to watch.
- An example of a lip-sync video can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IrfGVGAyc4
2. If you plan to use the Lip Sync Planning Worksheet (Figure 3), prepare paper copies of it and of the sections of song lyrics you will to assign to student groups. Alternatives to preparing printed materials are offered below; see Step 8 of the Procedure for details.

PROCEDURE:

1. Show the music video or other performance clip to the class without any sound. Tell learners that as they watch the silent video, they should describe out loud everything they see. Everyone can contribute at any time while the video plays (e.g., “I see lots of children and a lady.” ... “There’s lightning.” ... “They’re laughing!”). This description process can get silly and a bit noisy, but it creates interest in the target content and encourages learners to notice things like body language and facial expressions.
2. Scramble the words in a sentence that summarizes the main idea or actions

For example, the song “My Favorite Things” (Rodgers and Hammerstein 1965) from the movie *The Sound of Music* (1965) could be an effective choice because its lyrics are simple, the song’s message is clear, and several online lip-sync videos of it are available:

- An original movie performance clip can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IagRZBvLtw>

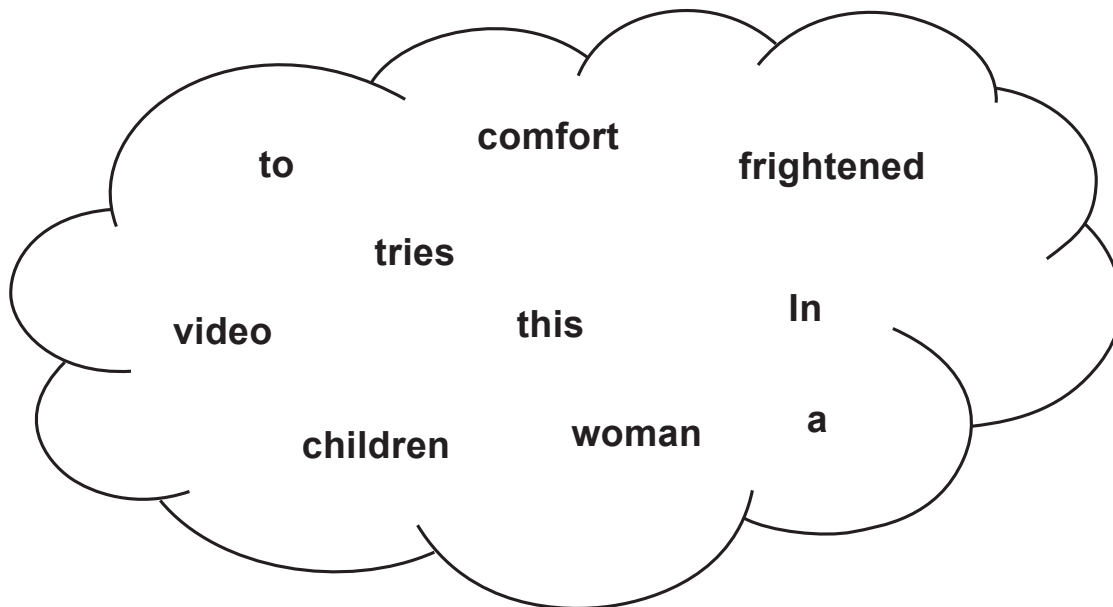
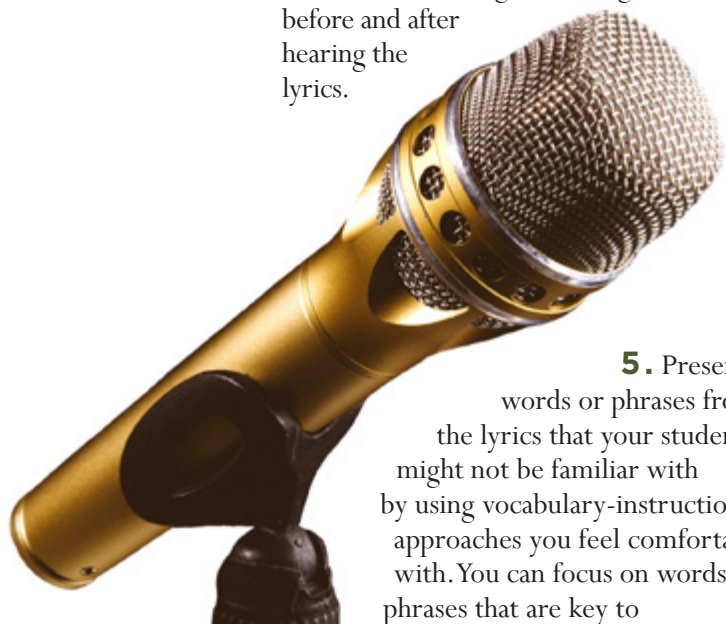


Figure 1. Example sentence scramble for “My Favorite Things”

shown in the video and write them on a board. Figure 1 gives an example of a sentence scramble related to “My Favorite Things.” Tell students to unscramble the words and write the sentence down on a piece of paper. (A possible summary sentence is *In this video, a woman tries to comfort frightened children.*) Ask learners to check their answer with a classmate and to briefly discuss whether they think any other information should be added to the sentence.

3. Ask the class if anyone can name the song in the video; write the title on the board.
4. Play the video again, this time with the volume turned on. Ask learners to listen to the lyrics as they watch in order to determine whether their guesses about the song’s content and themes were correct. Sometimes it is helpful to give learners a moment to listen and watch with no task so they can put the pieces together for themselves and just think. But you can also ask learners to take notes about the main content or new language that they notice, to sequence the events, or to make a list of characters or objects in the video. Afterwards, the class can have a discussion, possibly comparing what students thought the song was about before and after hearing the lyrics.



5. Present words or phrases from the lyrics that your students might not be familiar with by using vocabulary-instruction approaches you feel comfortable with. You can focus on words or phrases that are key to

understanding the song’s main message, or you might highlight vocabulary items that overlap with content from your textbook and curriculum. For “My Favorite Things,” the vocabulary list might include *whiskers, copper kettles, brown-paper packages, crisp apple strudels*, etc. As a class, review other words or phrases that the students identified as unfamiliar when they watched the video in Step 4. The goal is to make learners comfortable with the song’s meaning and related vocabulary.

6. Prepare the class to watch one or two lip-sync videos featuring the song. Write the term *lip sync* on the board and ask for definitions or examples from the class. Explain that the class is going to watch a lip-synced performance of the song in the video they watched earlier. Tell students to pay attention to what they like about the lip-synced performance; intermediate and advanced students might want to make written notes as they watch.
7. After students have watched the video, guide the class in compiling criteria that define an effective lip-syncing performance. Write students’ ideas on the board (see Figure 2). If required, replay the lip-sync video and add items to the list.
8. Break the class into groups of two to six students. (In smaller classes, pairs might work best.) Based on your students’ proficiency level, assign each group a portion of the lyrics to lip-sync. For example, you might assign upper beginners just a few lines, while advanced groups might be assigned much longer parts. You might also assign the groups different verses but have the entire class lip-sync the chorus (the part of the song that is repeated several times). If you have a large class, you can assign the same section of the song to multiple groups. Give written copies of the assigned lyrics

Good lip-sync performers ...

- know the lyrics
- aren't shy
- use gestures (body movements) and their face to show feelings that match the words
- move their mouths clearly
- sing as fast or slow as the song

Figure 2. Sample learner-brainstormed criteria for effective lip syncs

to each group—or display the lyrics on the board or with a projector and let students copy down their assigned sections.

a bit silly and have fun with the lip-sync performances—everyone will perform, and there is nothing to be nervous about!

9. Pass out a copy of the Lip Sync Planning Worksheet (Figure 3) to each group or write the information on the board for students to copy.
10. Tell students they will have about 30 minutes to complete the worksheet and practice before performing their lip-synced section.
 - Remind students to review the list of criteria for effective lip syncs as they prepare.
 - Suggest that students within a group can watch one another practice and share advice about lip-syncing and performing.
 - Tell the students that it is okay to be
11. Play the song or video repeatedly while students prepare. If you have enough audio devices for each group to listen independently, have groups work in different areas of the classroom and play the song back at a low volume in their groups.
12. Monitor groups as they work and answer questions they might have.
13. When preparation time is up, arrange the groups at the front of the classroom in the order that their assigned sections will play in the song. (If you have groups with the same assigned section, they should be next to each other.) Tell students this will be their practice performance; they may refer to their planning worksheets if they need to.

Names:

1. What is the main message of this song?
2. What emotions are in this song? How does this song make you feel?
3. What gestures (body movements) or facial expressions go with your part of the song?
4. Write new words or phrases and their meanings from your part of the song:
5. Write words or phrases from your part that you need to practice lip-syncing:

Figure 3. Lip Sync Planning Worksheet

14. Play the music and let the groups lip-sync (or sing) along.
15. After one round of lip-syncing to the song for practice, review the criteria related to effective lip-syncing. Ask students to watch the other groups with these criteria in mind during the next performance; tell learners to remember individuals and groups that give a particularly effective performance, based on the list. Prepare to record the performance if you plan to do that.
16. Play the song again and let the students perform a second time (or a third time, as will likely be requested!). If you are able to record each performance, make sure to capture performances from the entire class.



17. Conduct a performance debrief with the class. Using the criteria for effective lip-syncing as a guide, ask students to share their opinions about groups and individuals who gave strong performances. Remind the class to use kind language and offer supportive suggestions for improvement; for scaffolding, give examples of level-appropriate phrases to use, such as “I like how Marta lip-synced as fast as the song” or “I think Group A did a good job of moving their mouths clearly.” If you recorded the performances, you can play that video for the class and ask the students to supply feedback as they watch.

18. If time allows, close the activity by asking students to share what they liked best about the activity and what new or interesting vocabulary items or phrases they learned.

VARIATIONS:

1. **Audio-only:** Showing a performance video and associated lip-sync video(s) might not be possible in every classroom. However, if you have an audio-output device and a sound recording of the song, you can still conduct a modified audio-only version of this activity. (*The American Rhythms* and *Sing Out Loud* resources on the American English website, at americanenglish.state.gov, might be appropriate for your class.)
 - In place of Step 1 above, have the students listen to the song once or twice to get the gist of the main themes.
 - Continue with the sentence scramble in Step 2.
 - Skip Step 3.
 - Have students listen to the song again in Step 4.
 - Complete the vocabulary presentation and explanation in Step 5.
 - Present the “lip sync” concept in Step 6. If your students are familiar with lip-synced videos and can generate a list of positive lip-syncing qualities, go to Step 7. If not, and if you are feeling brave, do a short demonstration lip sync to your chosen song (try to reflect the qualities of a “good” lip sync—don’t be afraid to be dramatic!), and then complete Step 7 to create the list of effective lip-sync criteria.
 - Continue with Steps 8–18.

- 2. Small-group evaluations:** After the rehearsal in Steps 11 and 12, assign each group a partner group. The partner groups will observe each other closely during lip-sync performances and provide feedback (after the teacher prepares the class to give supportive comments). This paired-group feedback approach can be helpful in large classes where conducting a whole-class performance observation and feedback session might not be practical. Teachers may also use this approach if they think students will be more receptive to giving and receiving feedback in a small group rather than with the whole class.

EXTENSIONS:

- 1. Student-selected songs:** If your students respond well to this activity, allow them to have input in selecting the song or songs for future lip syncs. I have observed that when learners choose a song that they want to understand and have a voice in how they show their understanding, then they will engage with the song lyrics deeply and negotiate the meaning of the text.

- Option A (controlled choice):* Ask students to suggest several songs they would like to lip-sync. Explain that the songs they suggest should be appropriate for the classroom in terms of language and themes. Outside class, or while students are engaged in an independent activity, review the student suggestions for content appropriateness and to make sure video material of the songs is available. Narrow down the list of suggestions to two or three appropriate options; if possible, you can select songs that suit other teaching aims. If you want the whole class to work on the same song, let students vote on the narrowed list you selected. If you plan to allow students to work on different songs, let groups choose any song from the list.

- Option B (free choice):* If your students are mature enough to follow guidelines on selecting classroom-appropriate content, allow individual students or groups to select their own songs to analyze and perform.

- 2. Performance with props, costumes, or visual supports:**


If you conduct this activity over more than one class, you can add a question to the Lip Sync Planning Worksheet that asks students, “What props, costume pieces, or other visual aids (signs, pictures, etc.) could you use to communicate the ideas in your part of the song?” If practical, encourage students to bring items from home or create visual aids in class to use during the performance. Even if students can’t actually collect or make these items, the process of thinking about what they would use during a performance encourages them to engage more deeply with the song’s themes, emotional tone, and vocabulary.

- 3. Performance for an external group:**

To give your students a wider audience, consider incorporating a student lip-syncing performance into a school assembly, events for language learners, English Club meetings, or a parents’ event.

SCAFFOLDING

If your students do not know what lip syncing is, try introducing them to the concept like this: Silently mouth a word they know (you may need to do this several times to make sure



Use body movements and facial expressions.

that all students can see you). Ask the learners to shout out that word when they figure out what is being mouthed. Do this for another word or two, and then have a few students mouth words to the class, or have students form pairs and take turns mouthing words and guessing each other's words. After a few minutes, you can ask, "What are we doing?" This leads to the term *lip sync*. You can return to this activity at any time for a warm-up or review.

REFERENCES

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