

Yeah! I got an Eikaiwa! oh, erm, eto, Arrggh.... What do I do next...?



Eikaiwa... It's an English Conversation Lesson.

But.. Why are people coming? Who are the students? What do they want from me?

Ask them! Use a simple survey and conversation with new attendees to find out what they want from the class. You can also use this as a tool to get a feel for their English ability levels, as well as their confidence levels.

Few will be 'English Hungry Monsters', most likely they want to practice for school, work, travel, to understand media, (been sent parents) or just come for social reasons.

Don't expect too much, students will rarely have a chance to practice between classes, and your classes may be their only opportunity to use English. That doesn't mean don't challenge the students, just encourage them to speak.

And people will come when they want, numbers will change, don't take it personally, stick to the goals and just focus on the people in front of you...

What do you want to teach? Vs What do they want to learn?

This is the hard part, plan it in advance, ask them, then work with their responses while expanding the material. Make a long term lesson plan, then share it with students. Linked lessons or lessons of interest will help sustain interest and students can see their progress.

What to teach? Build on their experience. Many will have studied at school, particularly grammar, so it may be a case of helping them remember, rather than teaching new things. Use conversational grammar patterns, these are what will be used.

Practice using existing language, introduce more over time, and introduce culture and context, themed topics, like Halloween, as well as everyday activities that may involve useful language for them. Choose things of interest for your students, to help them retain information.



Don't talk too much!

Students are coming to learn from you, but also to practice their use of English. Teach a point with examples or context then get students to work on it. Use a range of activities, and keep notes on what works well, and not so well. Use group activities and peer teaching/ support so you can focus on moving around and helping students. (Don't over correct students, just help steer them in the right direction while building confidence.) Groups of mixed abilities or with different interests can help each other, especially in creative activities. Why not try using interviews, information grids, information gaps, role-plays, storyboards, problem solving activities, videos, discussions or debates, creative writing, script writing, mini-projects, games... Games are fun, they can be really useful to practice material, but the main thing is the students are practicing English, whilst having fun.

What to watch out for...

Excessive note takers, some students will try write down everything you say. Keep the pace high and focus on activities which limit time to write too much.

Dictionary overkill... Some students will look up every word or search for the 'perfect' word, mid-sentence, often it may be a safety guard. Encourage them to feel comfortable with making mistakes, (it's part of learning back home, but it may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable for students here), and to focus on using the skills and vocabulary they have to communicate.

Students are 'shy' to speak out, this is maybe the most common issue. Not just when you are giving instructions, but when they have to demonstrate their English abilities.

Activities involving character creation or projection may help, until confidence builds. Check people have understood by asking questions to the group.



Mix it up! It's (usually) your party!

In most eikaiwa's you will be the leader, you have the freedom to teach what and how you want. Even if you get an eikaiwa where you are not the 'leader', people will want your input, maybe even ask for a window within the lesson time to try different things...

Many activities that you experience in school may be transferable by adapting the language.

Develop a format you are comfortable with, then switch the activities within them. An ice breaker or warm-up activity will get people 'thinking English' and relaxing, then move on to what ever you want.

Hand-outs or worksheets will keep people thinking about English after the class, and can speed things up when teaching. Work within your time, if the class is too short, and students want more, it's up to you...

But too long and your students will struggle to go the distance.



Where to get ideas and resources...

The internet! Search by topic rather than general searching, eg. "Family Traditions lesson plan". The Kumamoto JET collection books have many adaptable activities. Your predecessor may have left some copies. There is also the Kumamoto Lesson Plan Wiki! Don't be shy about borrowing ideas, ...

Games; Pictionary, Charades, Scrabble, Taboo, jeopardy, bus stop game, 20 questions. Anything is ok, just make it right for your class.

Reading storyboards, jigsaw reading, problem solving activities, reading aloud. Skits and story telling with characters, expression and gesture helps develop communication skills and confidence. Magazines and newspaper reading can introduce current events and cultural activities. Video clips of popular tv. Shows can introduce humour, slang, accents into the class.

Cooking Eikaiwa, make dishes from home with English explanations, then have a tasting party after...

The possibilities are endless...