

Biography Scanning

Tags: [intermediate](#), [passive](#), [past simple](#), [present perfect simple](#), [present simple](#)

In the Biography Scanning ESL activity students have to quickly note down key facts about a person, then rewrite a biography using those notes.

 2+  15-30 mins  Prepared Biographies

Setup

You will need some prepared biographies. You could print copies on paper, direct students to the relevant Wikipedia page, or use student work (from the [Biography](#) activity).

Unless using student work, prepare two, three or four different biographies. Students will be divided into groups of that size, and you will need one copy of each biography for each group. In class, divide the students into these groups.

You could introduce this activity by showing a video biography of a person to the class (e.g. [Mark Zuckerberg](#)). Ask the students to note down important information while the video is playing, then review it as a class.

Activity

1. The students write down the following prompts (with space to add information after each one): age, date of birth, place of birth, education, jobs, accomplishments, family, current residence.
2. Give the students a biography, face down so they cannot read it yet. If using student-written biographies, the students swap their work. Otherwise, assign each group member a different person.
3. The students then have two minutes to scan the biography and note down whatever they can under each of the headings. It is essential that they write in note form, not full sentences – make sure they understand this and check as they do it.

4. At the end of the time, collect/put away the biographies so they cannot be read anymore. If working in groups, the students then go and sit with the people who read the same biography as them.
5. The students/groups now have to rewrite the biography from the notes they have taken. They must use full sentences and the appropriate target language.
6. Finally, the students go back to their original group, or sit with the person who wrote their biography originally. They read the new biography they have written, and their partner(s) checks their work against the original.

Target Language

The Biography Scanning ESL activity is a good way to practise the language commonly used in biographies – i.e. the [present simple](#), [past simple](#), [present perfect simple](#) and [passive voice](#). You may wish to specify the type of language required for each of the prompts beforehand.