

eslactive

Picture Dictation

Tags: [beginner](#), [comparatives](#), [intermediate](#), [kids](#), [prepositions of place](#),
[there is/are](#), [warmer](#)

In the Picture Dictation ESL activity, students have to draw a picture from their classmate's description.

 2+  15-30 mins  Computer **or** Prepared Picture; Projector (Optional)

Setup

You will need at least one or two suitable pictures for students to describe (either on the computer or on a piece of paper). These pictures should have many different elements – e.g. multiple people doing different things, features/objects in the foreground and background etc – but still be achievable in terms of drawing! You should also be aware of matching the vocabulary in the picture to the level of your class. These online images are good options:

[At The Park](#) [Classroom Scene](#)

If you have a projector, you can group the students into pairs, with one student describing the picture projected on the board to their partner (better because more students get the opportunity to speak). Ask the partners to sit opposite each other, with one student facing the board, and the other facing away from it.

If not, one student will come to the front and describe the picture to the rest of the class. You could also model this by describing one yourself the first time.

The students who can't see the picture will need a piece of paper/notebook and a pencil.

Activity

1. Project an image on the board (remind the students not to turn around first!), or show the student at the front a picture.
2. The student who can see the picture describes the picture in detail to their partner/the class, using the target language. No pointing or gestures allowed!

3. The students who can't see the picture draw what is described as accurately as they can.
4. When the students have finished drawing (normally around five minutes), tell them to now look at the original picture. Comparing the drawings is a fun moment for everyone!
5. An optional extension if you want to practise comparatives is to ask the students to come up with five sentences comparing the original and their drawing (e.g. *The tree is bigger in my picture, The ball is closer to the tree* etc.).
6. Swap the student roles and repeat with a new picture.

Tip: To stop students from gesturing and pointing to different parts of the picture when describing, ask them to sit on their hands!

Target Language

The Picture Dictation ESL activity is often just done as a fun warmer. However, there are also a number of different language elements you can focus on. For example, beginner students can practise [there is/are](#) when listing the objects in the picture. As described above, they can also practise basic [comparatives](#) by comparing their drawing to the original.

Another very important element is something many students struggle with, [prepositions of place](#). Students can describe both positions within the picture (at the top/bottom, in the middle, on the left/right etc.) and relative positions (in front of, behind etc.). Make sure you circle the room during the activity and correct mistakes if necessary.

If you wish to practise writing and reading instead of speaking and listening, you can combine the Picture Dictation ESL activity with the [Describing Pictures](#) activity. In the Describing Pictures activity students write descriptions about a picture cut out from a magazine beforehand (perhaps for homework). The students then swap their descriptions (not the pictures) in class, and try and draw what is written in the text. Finally, they compare their pictures with the original, and try and work out the reasons for any differences.

If you're looking for a similar activity without the drawing element, try [Box Of Lies](#). This game is great as warmer for higher level students, or to continue practising the same target language once you've done the Picture Dictation ESL activity.

For an activity in which students have to try and draw a picture from memory, see [Memory Picture](#).