

When we arrive in the classroom, we need to start the lesson off in such a way that the students' interest is aroused so that they become engaged. Where possible and appropriate, we will tell the students what they will be doing or, in a different kind of lesson, discuss with them what they can achieve as a result of what they are going to do.

We do not always need to explain exactly what we are going to do, however, particularly if we want to maintain an element of surprise. But even in such cases, a clear start to the lesson is necessary, just as a good play starts with the rise of a curtain, or a visit to the doctor starts when he or she asks you, 'Now then, what seems to be the problem?' or 'How can I help you?'

When an activity has finished and/or another one is about to start, it helps if teachers make this clear through the way they behave and the things they say. It helps students if they are made clearly aware of the end of something and the beginning of what is coming next. Frequently, teachers need to re-focus the students' attention, or point it in some new direction.

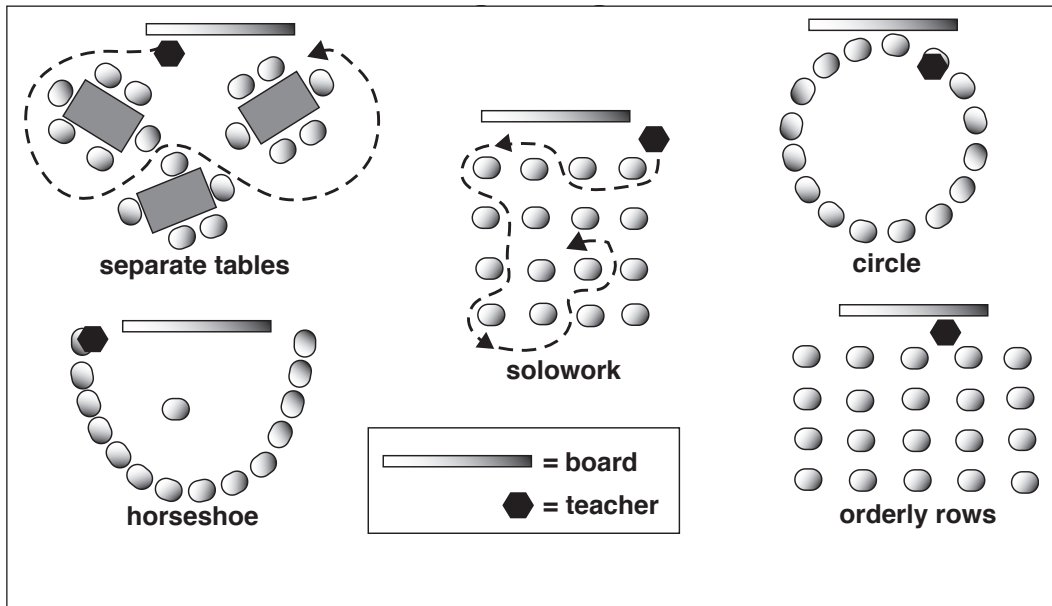
In order for such changes of direction to be effective, the teacher first needs to get the students' attention. This can sometimes be difficult, especially when teachers try to draw a speaking activity to a conclusion, or when students are working in groups. Some teachers clap their hands to get the students' attention. Some speak loudly, saying things like, 'Thank you ... now can I have your attention, please?' or 'OK ... thanks ... let's all face the front, shall we?'. Sometimes when teachers speak loudly, the students just speak louder in order not to be bothered by the interruption. To counter this, some teachers speak quietly in order to force the students to listen to them. Another method is for the teacher to raise his or her hand. When individual students see this, they raise their hands briefly in reply to indicate that they are now going to be quiet and wait for the next stage.

When we have brought an activity or a lesson to a finish, it helps if we provide some kind of closure: a summary of what has happened, perhaps, or a prediction of what will take place in the next lesson. Sometimes, teachers find themselves in the middle of something when the bell goes. This is unfortunate because it leaves unfinished business behind and a sense of incompleteness. It is much better to round the lesson off successfully. Ideally, too, we will be able to give the students some idea of what they will be doing next, and create enthusiasm for it so that they come to their next lesson with a positive attitude.

The stages of a lesson will be a particular concern when planning lessons (see Chapter 12).

Different seating arrangements

In many classrooms around the world students sit in orderly rows. Sometimes, their chairs have little wooden palettes on one of the arms to provide a surface to write on. Sometimes, the students will have desks in front of them. At the front of such classrooms, often on a raised platform (so that all the students can see them), stands the teacher. In contrast, there are other institutions where you can find students sitting in a large circle around the walls of the classroom. Or you may see small groups of them working in different parts of the room. Sometimes, they are arranged in a horseshoe shape around the teacher. Sometimes, in a class of adults, it is not immediately obvious who the teacher is.



Different seating arrangements in class

Clearly, the different arrangements of chairs and tables indicate a number of different approaches and this raises a number of questions. Are schools which use a variety of seating plans progressive or merely modish, for example? Is there something intrinsically superior about rigid seating arrangements – or are such classrooms the product of a particular methodological orthodoxy? Is one kind of seating arrangement better than another? What are the advantages of each? We will look at the advantages and disadvantages of various seating arrangements.

Orderly rows

Having the students sit in rows can appear somewhat restrictive, but there are advantages to this arrangement. The teacher has a clear view of all the students and the students can all see the teacher – in whose direction they are facing. It makes lecturing easier, enabling the teacher to maintain eye contact with the people he or she is talking to. If there are aisles in the classroom, the teacher can easily walk up and down making more personal contact with individual students and watching what they are doing.

Orderly rows imply teachers working with the whole class. Some activities are especially suited to this kind of organisation such as explaining a grammar point, watching a video/ DVD or a PowerPoint (or other computer-based) presentation, using the **board** (whether or not it is **interactive**) or showing student work on an **overhead transparency** (see Appendix A on page 252 for descriptions of these and other classroom technologies). It is also useful when students are involved in certain kinds of language practice (as we shall see in Chapter 6). If all the students are focused on a task at the same time, the whole class gets the same messages.

When we are teaching a whole class of students who are sitting in orderly rows, it is vitally important to make sure that we keep everyone involved in what we are doing. So, if we are asking the class questions, we must remember to ask the students at the back – the