

Teaching an Effective English Bible Class

I. Philosophy

A. English & Bible

People who come to English Bible classes often have mixed motivation and interests.

The class is both an *English* class and a *Bible* class.

1. The “felt need” and first interest of students may initially be to practice and improve their skills in English communication.
2. A secondary interest (or at least an openness to learn) may be in the Bible and Christianity. Their “real need” is to hear the Good News and come to know God personally as Savior, Creator and Provider.

The teacher should make every effort to faithfully satisfy both of these needs.

B. Developing Faith

Exposure to the Word of God is the foundation for developing faith. Note key verses:

1. Romans 10:17 “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”
2. Deuteronomy 8:3 “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”
3. Psalm 34:8 “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

C. Bridging Worlds

1. Begin with the world of your students—their life, their felt needs and interests, their experiences and background.
2. Introduce them to God and his Word—his plan, his person, his purpose and interest in their lives.

D. Discovery Approach

Through direct exposure to God’s Word, students discover God’s message by firsthand experience. The process recommended is primarily inductive, though some deductive elements may be included as needed. Students are led step by step through these levels of interaction with the Bible selection:

1. **Observation**—What does it say?
Cover the facts through “who, what, when, where, why, how” questions that can be answered objectively from the scripture text.
2. **Interpretation**—What does it mean?
This stage requires some thought and reflection on the significance of the scripture text. This is moving toward a more subjective personal level.
3. **Application**—What does it mean to me?
How does it apply to my life? This requires a personal response and a sense of practical significance.

E. Teamwork

The ideal is to work together with Japanese Christians or in some connection with the Japanese church. Prayer for your group is vital. If you have one or two Christians in the class, it is helpful to have this added salt and light. Most importantly, remember that the Holy Spirit is the true teacher who convicts of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. Life-changing responses come through the work of the Holy Spirit and should not be forced by an overly eager aggressive English teacher.

II. Practical Considerations

A. Classroom Dynamics

1. An *introductory activity*—get-acquainted, warm-up, sharing time.
 - a. Self-introduction exercises
 - b. Weekly updates that help people get to know each other
 - c. Introductory conversation question(s) that offer natural transitions in the Bible lesson theme or topic for the day.
2. *Seating arrangement*—informal, flexible, moveable
3. *Clear beginning and ending* for class.
 - a. Class terms (spring, summer, etc.) starting and ending dates to facilitate advertising and adding new members naturally.
 - b. Set and keep a clear beginning and ending time for class.
4. Create a *warm friendly atmosphere*. Help everyone feel respected and accepted—secure in their relationship to the teacher and to the other members of the group. Listen to students, accept and appreciate their thoughts and contributions, encourage and affirm the quieter members as well as the talkative ones.
5. *Member care* as a priority—do things together with students, remember birthdays, celebrate holidays, send post cards or notes occasionally, invite to church or special programs.
6. *Use of Japanese language* in class—using a bilingual English-Japanese Bible as well as some other Japanese language support may be helpful or necessary depending on the English level of the members. Be sensitive to the needs and interests of members and the classroom dynamics. If the group has a wide range of English levels, build a sense of community and support with more advanced people helping those at more beginning levels.

B. The English Connection

Provide multiple experiences for the students as they develop their English competency and also discover the one true and living god who loves them. Help students to be active and to use as many of their five sense as possible. Adapt to the level of your students.

1. Read the Bible selections together both in English and in Japanese.
2. Highlight key vocabulary and expressions.
3. Give background information to provide a context for understanding.
4. Drama—Have members take part in dramatizing the reading/acting out the story.
5. Model natural pronunciation and intonation and have them practice.
6. Content Questions—who, what, when, where, why, how?
7. Thought Questions—questions designed to get to the level of meaning/significance and application.
8. English Practice
 - synonyms, antonyms, irregular verbs, sentence patterns, comparatives, special expressions, idioms, etc.
9. Re-telling the story—review and gain confidence in English usage
10. Call for a response.

III. Materials & Resources

A. Selecting a suitable scripture passage

1. Consider the level of the students both in terms of English competency and also Bible/Christian background exposure and experience.
2. Think of and develop themes that would be relevant to your students.
3. Choose manageable units and don't jump around in the scripture.
4. Start with stories and narratives rather than theological epistles.

B. Write your own lessons following the principles for teaching introduced above.