MARS-EARS on one page

The eight phases and go-to activities

MARS · 1

Modelling

Introduce the unit's chunks through the sentence builder: say sentences from it, and have students show the meaning (e.g. English on mini-whiteboards). Stories and songs work here too.

Go-to: Sentence builder read-aloud · Mini-whiteboard translation · Bingo

MARS · 2

Awareness-raising

Briefly draw attention to the sound, spelling or grammar features you want students to notice — a short "pop-up" explanation, not a lecture.

Go-to: Right or wrong? · Echo and fade

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Receptive processing

Lots of listening and reading that students can almost fully understand (95–98%), with the same chunks coming back again and again. Stay here until recognition is secure.

Go-to: Narrow reading · Narrow listening · Dictogloss · Find someone who

MARS · 4

Structured production

Turn recognition into production with tightly structured speaking and writing tasks that make students produce every target chunk many times, with support gradually removed.

Go-to: Paired translation drill · Quick-fire translation · Delayed dictation · Faulty translation

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Expansion

Now explain the grammar inside the chunks students already use, and combine them with older language so both keep coming back.

Go-to: Unjumble the sentence · Translation grid

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Autonomy

Students use the language without the builder, in familiar situations. This continues across the year as older units are recycled.

Go-to: Describe a photo · Information-gap task · Guided then free writing

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Routinisation

Build speed: repeat tasks with less time or more pressure so retrieval becomes fast and automatic.

Go-to: 4-3-2 fluency talks · Timed retell · Disappearing text

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Spontaneity

Unfamiliar situations with little or no preparation, spread across the year.

Go-to: Role-play with a surprise question · Class debate

Principles: less is more · 95–98% comprehensible input · teach chunks, not single words · recycle constantly · engineer success.

E.P.I. and the MARS-EARS cycle are the work of Dr Gianfranco Conti — The Language Gym (gianfrancoconti.com). Unofficial, independent guide; not affiliated with or endorsed by Dr Conti. Examples and activity write-ups are original.