

## LEARNER PROFILES

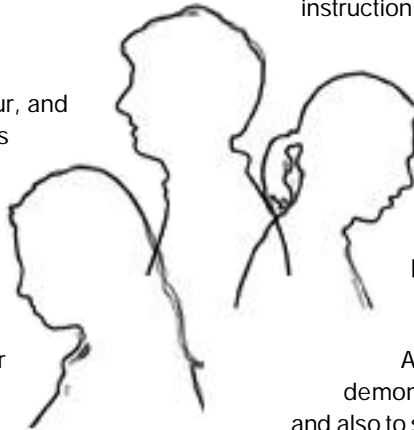
By Paul Sanderson

This is a getting-to-know you activity and, perhaps, a less intimidating alternative to the 'stand up and introduce yourself' type of activity which I believe to be a rather nerve-racking and sometimes embarrassing experience for many learners. This is especially true on one's first encounter with a new group of people, and even more so in another language.

Learner Profiles can be used during the very first lesson of a new course but, ideally, the activity should follow a name-learning exercise, as quick identification of each other is important to the success of the activity.

### Stage 1

Put your learners into groups of three or four, and give each group felt-tipped pens and sheets of A3-sized paper. Tell each learner to pin a sheet up on the classroom wall at head height - as a rough guide, the centre of the sheet of paper should be at eye level. In turn, each member of the group should stand against the wall with their back against their own sheet of paper, but with their head turned to the left or the right. When they are in position, the other members of their group should carefully draw around this side-on view to produce a profile of their head and the tips of their shoulders. To help clarify this, I show my learners a profile of myself that a colleague has helped me produce before the lesson. I pin this up on the wall as it will also be used in the activity.



Drawing the profiles is a very co-operative and amusing stage of the activity, usually producing peals of laughter while the profiles are being drawn and also when learners see the results of their work. Shrieks of disbelief echo around the room when learners see the shape of their noses or the size of their chins.

When all the profiles are ready, tell everyone to write their first name clearly somewhere on their own profile sheet.

### Stage 2

During the next stage of the activity, your learners should work individually. Explain that they should move from sheet to sheet and, using keywords only, write something they

know or think they can guess about the person. Tell them that they should write on every learner's profile sheet, either inside or outside the profile, but they should not write on their own.

If they would like to know something about the person, they should simply write their idea followed by a question mark.

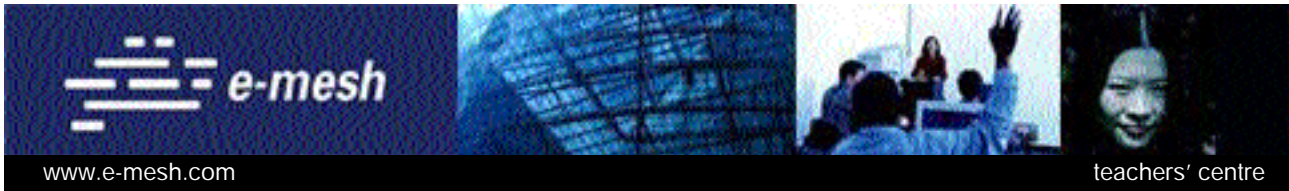
Explain that once they have written something on every profile, they can return to other profiles to add further information, guesses or questions. One final, important instruction to give is that on each profile, nothing should be repeated! This means that they will have to read what others have written before they add anything new.

I usually play background music during the activity to provide a pleasant working atmosphere for what is, at this stage, a relatively silent, thinking, reading and writing activity. Again, I join in the activity to help demonstrate what I want my learners to do and also to show that I do already know something about them (either from colleagues or from their enrolment forms) and I am interested in finding out more.

When the profile sheets are becoming relatively full of ideas, and before the buzz has died down, bring this stage of the activity to a close, and ask each learner to reclaim their own profile sheet.

### Stage 3

For the next stage of the activity, pair your learners, or ask them to choose someone they would like to work with, and tell them that they should exchange their profile sheet with their partner. Explain that they should go through the information on the sheet carefully with their partner - to check information, to confirm guesses and to get the answers to questions. It is important that they cover everything that has been included on their partner's sheet - perhaps finding out a little extra background information as well. For example, if someone has written 'married' on one learner's profile, their partner would check this and might learn that the person is, indeed, married, her



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husband's name is Pietro, they have been married for three years, and they have a young daughter called Vittoria. All the information they learn from this interviewing stage will be too great a load for their memory, so I ask them to make brief notes on the profile sheet itself.

### Stage 4

When all the pairs have finished their interviews, begin the next stage of the activity, which involves each learner introducing their partner to the other class members. Here, two pairs should work together, each person presenting their partner using the original information on their partner's profile sheet (which has now been checked) as well as their own notes of background information. When the four presentations have been completed, each pair should find new pairs to present their partners to.

I find it helpful if I begin the presentations myself, covering the points learners have written on my own profile sheet. This shows everyone how I deal with each point (e.g. "One person wrote 'American'. In fact, I'm not American but English, and I was actually born in Oxford in a part of the city called Iffley." "Someone else wrote 'Pet?' Well, I do have a pet as a matter of fact - a canary called Edith, and I named her after the famous French singer, Edith Piaf, because ..." and so on).



### Stage 5

Finally, tell learners to remain in their pairs and ask them now to produce a new version of their partner's profile sheet - this time including only the information which is correct and any other background information they discovered about their partner. This is a comparatively free stage of the activity, so I tell my learners that they can use lots of different colours if they wish and perhaps present some information using drawings and symbols - some learners may also wish to redraw their partner's profile. The aim here is to produce a colourful, illustrated profile of their partner, so I do my best not to limit, or put constraints on, my learners' ingenuity and creativity. Lots of coloured pens and extra paper are called for here!

A variation of this (if time is running short) is to play a round of "What did you find out about ...?", where everyone calls out anything they can remember about each of the individual class members in turn.

Although this last stage is optional, I like to include it as a way of rounding off the whole activity and for the class to

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have a tangible result for their efforts. Once finished and up on the classroom walls, this makes a wonderfully attractive and personalised display of the class members - and of course, new information can be added as we learn more about each other in our future lessons together.

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Paul Sanderson has been an EFL teacher, trainer and writer since 1978 and has worked in several European countries. His publications include *Using Newspapers in the Classroom 1999* (CUP). He is Content Editor for e-mesh Ltd.