

# 17 ways to use PERMA in ELT

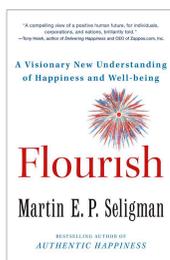


Flourish

Positive Emotion  
Engagement  
Relationships  
Meaning  
Accomplishment

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I strongly suggest you read **Flourish** by Martin E.P.Seligman. Seligman (U. of Penn) is one of the founders of the Positive Psychology movement and is former president of the American Psychological Association.

Seligman, M. 2011. *Flourish*. New York: Free Press.

Youtube video: **Martin Seligman** talking about PERMA (24:49).  
<http://tinyurl.com/PERMAintroduction>

## Positive Emotion

This is one of the easiest areas to incorporate into teaching other areas since it lends itself to activities which can easily be focused on topics, vocabulary sets, grammar or language functions.

- Any of the ideas and tasksheets from the [www.ELTandHappiness.com](http://www.ELTandHappiness.com) website or the book *English Teaching and the Science of Happiness* (2019, Tokyo: ABAX.co.jp)
- Help students **savor** (notice and intensify positive emotion). This can be done by remembering positive experiences, anticipating them or noticing them as they happen (mindfulness). It can be as simple as asking, “What did you do last weekend *that was really good.*” “What’s something good in your life *today*?” “OR “What are you *looking forward to* next weekend (vacation, etc.)?”
- Use **positive psychology/ELT activities regularly**, not just as a one-off. Short of time? See *10 minutes for happiness* for quick ideas: [www.ELTandHappiness.com](http://www.ELTandHappiness.com)

## Engagement

Engagement means the students “buy in” to the tasks emotionally. It shouldn’t be confused with entertainment. For engagement to happen, the learners are often sharing their own ideas/stories. Note that, for engagement to happen, there may be a certain amount of challenge and stress. Stress isn’t bad in and of itself. Positive stress can be a motivator. It is only when stress becomes overpowering and debilitating that it leads to people giving up or being defeated. Avoid that. Daniel Goleman (*Emotional Intelligence*) refers to it as “amygdala hijack”.

- Use tasks that encourage **flow** (a psychological state where you are fully energized and involved in what you are doing. Athletes call it “being in the zone.”). Flow tasks need to be challenging and success oriented. 4-3-2 is one useful task (see the “The Science of Happiness” handout, bottom of page 2.) Another is “Mouth Marathon” where students speak to a partner as long as they can on the chosen topic. Their turn is over when they use Japanese or pause for 5 seconds. As with 4-3-2, it is good to change partners 2-3 times and do task recycling. For more, see the handout “One more time with feeling” on the “Flow” page of [www.ELTandHappiness.com](http://www.ELTandHappiness.com).
- Make sure every class includes **multi-sensory** (Visual, Auditory and Haptic [Tactile/kinesthetic] activity. Every student will be using their main learning channel and are more likely to get involved. For an article listing ways to add multi-sensory teaching to ELT activities, click on “Making sense of it all” at <http://tinyurl.com/SensesELT>

• Haptic (physical/kinesthetic) activity also seems good for building rapport (see relationships, below) and getting everyone involved. For a handout of language warm-up involving physical activity, click on “Let’s get physical” at <https://tinyurl.com/physical-ELT> See “Energy Breaks” on the same website.

## Relationships

• Work on building **rapport** with the students. Learning names is one good step.  
• Do **ice breakers** and other activities that help the students get to know each other. Regularly reassign groups so the develops a sense of itself as a group instead of being a collection of cliques. Here are some easy ways to randomize groups:

- number off by  $x$  - find someone whose name has the same number of letters
- use playing cards. For pairs, colors match (e.g., 4 of spades partners with 4 of clubs.)
- “Stand up. Find a partner you haven’t talked with today”
- Find someone born in the same month as you.
- Find someone with the same color cell phone as you.

By the way, having students stand up and move to find new partners is a good idea for another reason: When students sit for more than 20 minutes, blood builds up in the legs and buttocks. By standing and moving for even one minute, they get a 15% increase in blood (and therefore oxygen) to the brain. (Sousa, D. 2006. *How the Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Corwin.)

• **Go deeper** with conversations. “A” talks about a positive experience. “B” asks WH-questions to get more, deeper information. This builds “active-constructive” interactions.

• **Smile**. We reflect facial expressions. When we as teachers smile, students are likely to smile back and that’s the start of rapport.

## Meaning

• **Personalize**. Connect the language the students are studying/practicing to their own lives. Better yet, have them connect it.

• Helping people understand that they are **part of something bigger than themselves**. That can be a group, faith or any other system. Do language tasks where they read/write/talk about issues like helping people, kindness, etc.

• **Inspirational stories** can be a great source of meaningful tasks. You can find many on the internet. One simple task is to find a few, copy them. Each student gets a story which they read/tell to another partner.

• **Mindfulness**. Search for: *mindfulness ELT* for ideas.

- Also see the “random acts of kindness idea, below.

## Accomplishment

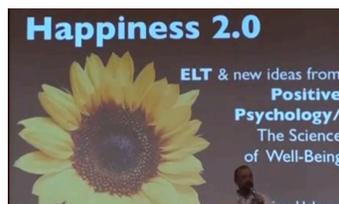
• **Set goals**. Have the students think about why they are learning English. It is useful to break down those goals into small, actionable tasks. E.g., “I will improve my vocabulary” is too vague. “I will study vocabulary cards 10 minutes, 5 times a week” is actionable.

You may not want to have them talk about their goals:

Check out <http://tinyurl.com/TEDgoalsetting>

• Encourage “**random acts of kindness**.” Brainstorm nice things they can do. Then encourage them to do them. You might talk about the results during the next class. This not only gives everyone something to talk about. It also encourages them to recycle (and re-experience) the positive emotion.

• **Help learners notice success**. Progress in English comes a bit at a time. Help learners see their progress. For example, go back to a listening task they found difficult at the beginning of the year. Do it again. They can see how much easier it is. **Celebrate success**.



For a video introduction to these ideas, visit <http://www.eltandhappiness.com/talks.html>