

*These are just a few activities with Cuisenaire Rods I use which you might find useful.*

*Remember, practice with rods is important. You need to be confident and slick about your moves before you go into the classroom.*

*Sandra*

## ACTIVITIES

- **Pairing up sts:**  
Sts pick a colour. Then they go to sit next to someone who has the same colour.
- **Error Correction:**  
Sts put out Red, Yellow, Green rod depending on whether they want to be corrected all the time (R), at the T's discretion (Y) or never (G)
- **Group error correction:**  
T selects a few sentences.  
Sts decide which are right (Green Rod)  
And which are wrong (Red Rod)
- **Literal Representations:**
  - Colours** Red/Yellow/Green etc
  - Prepositions** On/Between/Under/Near/To, etc
  - Imperatives & one(s)** Put the green rod down. Pick up the yellow one. Put the red ones to one side .....
  - Rods being sold in a shop** (customer/shopkeeper language)
  - Rods being ordered** Business Correspondence

These exercises make meaning tangible.
- **Non-literal Representations:**  
Trees, houses, people, syllables, phonemes, words, intonation patterns, abstract ideas, etc.

## GRAMMAR & SYNTAX

- **Comparatives & Superlatives:**  
Which is taller? Longer? Shorter?  
Which is the tallest? Shortest? Brightest? Dullest? More interesting? Most boring?  
Also practises opposites (long-short) and **less/least**

## Using Cuisenaire Rods

- **Focusing on Grammar by restricting vocabulary:**

By using only the single noun ROD, we can focus on the grammar without distractions from other words.

Eg **Have you got** a red rod? No, I haven't. (short answers)

Do you want the red rod? Yes, I do.

Did you take the red rod? No, I didn't.

If I hadn't already given Mary the red rod, I could have given it to you.

- **Word Order:**

Practise structures like Adverbs of Frequency, Pres Perfect with already/yet/never

Correction:

Touch the wrongly placed word(s) - (rod).

Get sts to think about where the wrong word(s) should go.

- **Eliciting Grammar:**

Pick rods to show main words:

John, bed, day, bacon & eggs, bus. Get up, eat, catch.

Elicit John GETS UP, EATS bacon & eggs, etc etc

- **Words within syntactic structures:**

Eg He said he would do it vs He told US he would do it

The rod for US is quite visible, and additional to the structure

Substitute US with: him, her, me, them, you and DRILL

**Could also be used for similar structures such as suggests, recommended, would rather, would prefer**

**Could also be used for Gerund vs Infinitive vs Bare Infinitive**

Eg Promise, refuse & forget followed by infinitive

Deny, enjoy followed by V+ing

Name rod: **threatens**

Sts decide which structure it goes into (similar to Promise or to Deny?)

**During vs since**

## Using Cuisenaire Rods

Since vs for  
Despite vs although

- **Passive structures, continuous tenses, WH Questions and most of the simpler transformations can all be demonstrated using rods.**
- **Colour-coding Parts of Speech:**  
Give each colour a different part of Speech.  
Form sentences  
Correct sentences  
Word Order
- **Pre-fixes and suffixes:**  
Use a particular colour for each particular prefix or suffix to practise/use.  
Use Rods to denote words. Which prefixes/suffixes go with which words?
- **Teaching Phrasal Verbs**  
Use the long brown 10 cm rod for the verb, and different colours for each particular particle.

**Make off with**

- **Teaching Language Chunks:**

Presenting language chunks

Again rods are used to represent different words. This works particularly well with lower levels as rods provide a visual image where they can hang new language.

Typical language chunks you can work with are:

- I have (haven't) got a/an . . .
- I like (don't like) . . .
- Have you ever + past participle ( to talk about experiences) ..

As with phrasal verbs, select appropriate rod lengths to represent short or long words in the phrase while at the same time consistently using the same rods for pronouns or verbs.

Use short rods for pronouns.

- **Question Forms:**  
Build on these chunks or as individual structures  
Show inversion, place of auxiliary, etc

## Using Cuisenaire Rods

- **Modality:**  
 Present and past deduction  
 It must/can't/could/might be .....
- **Timelines:**  
 Tell a story, using the rods to mark out the events. Afterwards, ask sts to re-tell the story.

OR

Tell a story and ask for the sts to listen out for the tenses.  
 Mark N (NOW) on the timeline.  
 Use long rods for continuous tenses, small blocks for pres simple, and red rods for past simple.  
 Check understanding with sts.  
 Ask them to tell their own story.

### PHONOLOGY

- **Rod as phoneme:**  
 Used to treat each phoneme in a word differently/separately.  
 Practise individual sounds, then move them together to create the whole sound.  
 For correction:  
 The teacher does not (except as a last resort) give the correct pronunciation, but simply shows where in the word the mistake has been made, allowing the student or a classmate to correct.
- **Intonation & Stress:**  
 Rods are very helpful in dividing up words into syllables.  
 For stresses in words, use longer rods.  
 Alternatively, put a small rod on top of the stressed syllable.

When sts mispronounce words (word stress), use the rods to highlight the wrong stress.  
 Say the word properly, and ask the sts to change the stress to where they hear you say it.

Try refund, increase, record, take off, take up as VERBS  
 Then as NOUNS.  
 Show word stress change

## Using Cuisenaire Rods

13 vs 30 Pronunciation - Stressed syllable change

Photo/photograph/photography/photographer **change in stressed syllable**

**Alternatively, use longer upright rods for the stressed syllable.**

**OR place rods horizontally, ask Sts to put the stressed one upright**

- **Sentence stress :**

Use for comparative stress. John asked ME (not you) to go to London with him.

Use:

He gave me a bunch of red roses.

Use LONG rod to show stressed words (for emphasis):

The boss COULD have decided to let them go.

As opposed to:

The boss could've decided to let them go.

- **Sentence stress:**

Use to highlight important words in sentence.

Use small white blocks to show weak forms.

Angle rods to show rise, fall + rise-fall.

- **Contractions:**

Use rods for separate words.

Move them together where the contractions come.

- **Headlines:**

Ask sts to listen to the news headlines.

They then make up the sentence with the rods.

Afterwards, they work on Stressed Words & Weak Forms, and Contractions

### BUILDING BLOCKS

- Pre-teach or revise prepositions of position.

Then build a small model with rods. Model should be not too simple, not too complicated.

A square made of long rods of different colours, with three or four other rods placed on it, horizontally or vertically, and a few little rods scattered in the centre, is ok.



## Using Cuisenaire Rods

Sts give you instructions to help you build another model, identical to the first. Follow their instructions (being of course, quite difficult, and taking everything literally), they will have to produce language such as:  
Put an orange rod parallel to...", "No, not that corner, the top right hand corner" and so on, until the model is built.

Students using the rods lead to more variations and extensions. When they have succeeded in getting you to build an identical model, you can go over some of the mistakes in English they made. Then they can divide into groups or pairs, make models which they hide behind books and give instructions in English to their partner(s). They should do this "blind" so they cannot see the work in progress.

- There are many variations and extensions on this.  
The instructions could be written down and the "original" model destroyed. When the imitators have followed the instructions and built a supposedly identical model, the first group can write a *"letter of complaint"* to the *"building company"* to point out its imperfections. *"We were most surprised to find that the blue rod was not placed parallel to the yellow one, despite our specific instructions"*.
- Depending on the level of the students other extensions can be used. For technical students, you can explain that whenever, say, blue rods touch yellow rods there is a danger of rapid corrosion, and they could write a safety report recommending changes in the design of the *"building"*, in the style that safety reports are written.
- If the students' English is not yet up to inventing instructions, give them the rods in small groups, and get them to follow your instructions for building a model (given live or on cassette). When the groups have finished they can compare models and if there is a difference, listen to the instructions again to see who was right.

Variations on the listening exercise would include listening to a description, on tape, of a model and noticing the mistakes made in the description. The students then have to report back *"The cassette said the rods were parallel but they're not, they're perpendicular, and the red rod is lying down, it's not standing up."*

### SCENE-SETTING & GRAPHICS (Rod as Paintbrush)

- **Telling the time:**  
Use 2 long rods as hands of the clock.
- **Graphics such as a cheque, a calendar, etc**  
Draw outlines of pictures with the rods
- **Graphs:**  
Use rods as the axes and show movement on the graph

## Using Cuisenaire Rods

Can also be used for Preps in graph descriptions

- **Directions:**

Map out a street(s) and use to teach directions OR prepositions

- **Contextualising:**

Eliciting vocab from sts or teaching vocab through giving context.

Eg, plane crash with rods .... elicit SURVIVORS.

OR, build ORGANOGRAM of company & describe.

Sts then draw organogram of their companies or departments.

Other sts ask Qs about who's who.

Could also be a presentation about the Co structure

- **Negotiation Game:**

Two groups (A & B) or in pairwork.

A & B given a selection of rods and a sheet of point values for each colour of rod.

Sts can write down values themselves BEFORE being given their rods.

Then each group or pair negotiates to gain valuable rods held by the "other side".

Can be done over the telephone or in emails.

- **Describing a room (in your house or elsewhere, OR the workplace, OR the Classroom**

Use rods to build up picture as you speak.

Instruct sts to move around furniture, etc.

Sts draw their own house/room & give each other instructions about moving furniture.

- **Scene-setting or narratives:**

Eg, marking out a street with shops

- **Story-telling:**

Use rods to build up a story. Check that sts can remember what the rods are. Ask What's this again?

Then go back and get sts to tell the story.

Eg Factory & strikes, getting up in the morning – a typical day

LLs have a huge resource of knowledge regarding stories which we can readily tap into in the language classroom. What's more, the use of bottom-up knowledge, i.e. knowledge gained through life's experiences, gives context and meaning to the

## Using Cuisenaire Rods

target language, and so provides a more memorable experience for learners. The rods can be used to visually represent people and places within stories. The events can also be represented by moving the rods around as you or your students tell stories. This supports and reinforces student's understanding of the story.

Here are some types of stories you can use:

- Well-known tales such as 'The Little Red Riding Hood' or 'The Three Bears'. See [example lesson plan](#).
- Parts of the plot from films all the learners have seen.
- Stories which have already been met in course books or other classroom activities.
- Learners' own stories which recount personal experiences.
- Teachers' stories which learners have heard in previous classes.
- **Dictation:**  
T creates a scene with the rods, which the sts cannot see, & then describes the scene.  
The sts re-create the scene with their rods.  
At the end they compare with your scene to see if it is similar.  
The sts do the same with each other.

### **Some classroom management considerations:**

Let all LLs have a good clear view of the table, or divide into smaller groups 8-10 sts.  
Work with one group while others are working on preparation or follow-up activities.  
OR Use horseshoe shape round table.

- **Planning:**  
**Think about what kind of Qs to ask beforehand. Working with rods must look spontaneous and snappy, but Ts should plan and practise before.**

The nature of the activity means that learners spontaneously call out answers.  
Typical questions are:

- Who's this?
- What's this?
- What's s/he doing?



## Using Cuisenaire Rods

- Where's s/he going?

By accepting and refusing learners' answers the teacher can guide the activity and create a positive group dynamic where learners are focused, challenged to speak in English and often have the chance to personalise the activity.

Sources used:

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/cuisenaire-rods-language-classroom>  
[http://www.developingteachers.com/newsletterplans/cuisenaire\\_rods.htm](http://www.developingteachers.com/newsletterplans/cuisenaire_rods.htm)  
<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/john.mullen/cuisenaire.htm>

Learning Teaching by Jim Scrivener, Macmillan




## Using the Present Progressive


### • Activity 1

You are taking part in a Game Show on TV and have to mime the action on your slip of paper. However, no words are allowed! The other team has to guess what **you are doing**. They can ask you questions to try and find out whether they have guessed correctly:

E.g. **Are you ( Verb + *ing*) ..... ?**

NOTE: Make sure the question has the correct **grammatical form** as shown above.

If the correct format is used, give the team a thumbs up sign  and then mime your agreement or disagreement.

If the correct format is not used, give them a thumbs-down sign  for them to try the question again.

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## Grammar Practice Activities

gapfill	crossing out extra words	match to pictures	reformulation	
sentence order	multiple choice	surveys	roleplay	error correction
word order	match half sentences	questionnaires	translation	
transformation	problem-solving	info-gap	quizzes	discussion
gist translation	drills	jazz chants	stories	

Which activities in the box are

**FLUENCY/ MEANING-BASED**

**ACCURACY/FORM-BASED**



**Teacher's Note:**

- **Activity 1**

Divide the class into 2 teams, then cut up the following and give out one card to each member of the team. Members of Team A then take turns to mime their activity while Team B tries to guess. A correct answer requires the exact **grammatical** structure of the activity described, 'Are you (verb + ing?)' On the other hand, paraphrasing or prompting of vocabulary is allowed.

Before starting the activity, allow each team some time to discuss (and ensure comprehension of) the key words before actually taking it in turns to mime the actions. This enables students to be more confident when it is their turn to mime.

- **Activity 2**

When all members have mimed their activity students can work on Activity 2 in order to consolidate the new vocabulary learnt during the activity.

**TEAM A**

You are watching a very scary film.	You are waiting for your friend who is very late.	You are making a cup of coffee.
You are eating some hot soup.	You are trying to catch a fly	You are chewing a very sticky toffee.
You are cheering because your team scored the winning goal.	You are running after a pickpocket	

## TEAM B

You are waving to a friend across the road.	You are reading a very funny text message from your friend.	You are acting in a Shakespeare play.
You are opening a soft drink can.	You are cleaning your sunglasses.	You are whispering to your friend during the lesson.
You are unwrapping a beautiful birthday gift.	You are yelling at your son because he lost your mobile phone.	

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## Fun Memory Game

Here is a fun memory game that students can play to practice the present continuous for actions happening now.

Before class, make one copy of the worksheet for each pair of students and cut as indicated.

### Procedure

Divide the students into pairs and give each pair a set of cards.

Tell the students to shuffle the cards and spread them out face down on the desk.

Explain that the students are going to play a memory game where they have to turn over picture cards and make sentences in the present continuous tense about what's happening in the pictures.

The aim of the game is to turn over two matching activity cards, so the students need to remember the position of the cards to help them win the game.

The first student turns over a card and makes a sentence about the picture in the present continuous tense, e.g. He's riding a bike.

The student then turns over another card. If the activity on the second card matches with the first card, the student makes a sentence about the second picture, e.g. She's riding a bike.

If both sentences are grammatically correct, the student keeps the pair of cards as a trick.

Then, it's the other students turn to play.

If the activity on the second card doesn't match the first card, the student turns the cards back over so they face down and play passes to the other student.

The student with the most cards at the end of the game is the winner.

Afterwards, have the students show you matching cards and make present continuous sentences about the cards.

As an extension, have the pairs place all the cards face down and write sentences about the pictures. The pair who writes the most correct sentences is the winner.

### Possible Answers

1. He's riding a bike. She's riding a bike.
2. He's cooking. They're cooking.
3. They're drinking coffee. He's drinking coffee.
4. He's playing video games. They're playing video games.
5. She's watching TV. They're watching TV.
6. He's listening to music. She's listening to music.
7. They're reading a book. He's reading a book.
8. They're swimming. He's swimming.
9. He's sleeping. She's sleeping.
10. She's using a computer. They're using a computer.
11. They're fishing. He's fishing.
12. They're working out. He's working out.

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## Fun Memory Game

