

Thursday Options

Connie Hartshorn and Mayo L. Hart
ESL Teachers
Adult Options in Education

The practice of *Thursday Options* is used in multi-level ESL classes. The concept is to allow students to use Thursdays as a day to review, supplement, extend and enrich classroom instruction in a way that is student-directed. We combine our three classes-- from beginning to high intermediate levels--and benefit from the energies & inspirations of three classroom teachers, a paraprofessional & two volunteer tutors.

Monday through Wednesday, the teachers lead classes in English instruction. On Thursday students are given the opportunity to choose which individual areas they will work on alone, or with other students of similar or differing language ability. Activity options to date are:

- Vocabulary work of many varieties
- Grammar exercises
- Reading – newspapers/stories
- Sentence and story scrambles
- Pronunciation practice
- Work in our 'listening area' with a variety of listening activities
- Computer work
- Conversation Café – group conversation on weekly topics

Regular classroom materials are used. Teachers and tutors help to monitor the activities and guide students to appropriate exercises, if needed. Students often vary their groupings during the morning, starting out with individual practice, then on to small group exercises, finishing with Conversation Café and the chance to enjoy the current topic of discussion with brewed coffee and cookies!

Giving students the opportunity to group and regroup themselves according to individual learning needs and desires is one of the most important benefits of *Thursday Options*. The concept of independent study becomes more familiar to students who are otherwise used to the learning environment that places the teacher at the head of the class. Higher-level students become mentors and provide models for lower-level students. Teachers and tutors are freed from the regular classroom schedule to work one-on-one or with small groups and to get to know students from other classes. The opportunity to work by themselves or in configurations of their own choosing generates much student enthusiasm for Thursdays!

The most time-consuming part of this practice is in its organization and the gathering of materials. Once the structure is in place and students become familiar with it, it runs smoothly. There is about a half-hour of set-up and tear-down-time before and after class and three different rooms & the hallway are used.

For the listening area it is ideal to have several tape recorders & sets of headphones. Extra expenses are limited to the coffee and cookies provided in the Conversation Cafe.