

Total Physical Response (TPR)

A Curriculum for Adults ©

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Total Physical Response (or TPR)

Introduction

The method described here: Total Physical Response (TPR), is, like all tools, most effective when used correctly in the correct setting. Discard the notion of heading straight into the activities section. Instead, **PLEASE** take the time to read the directions first. The success of TPR instruction lies more in applying the method correctly than in the script of materials.

The “Why” and “How” of TPR

Dr. James J. Asher first described the TPR method in his book “Learning Another Language Through Actions”. He and other linguists observed the following characteristics about successful language learners:

1. Good language learners achieve fluency faster when they are immersed in activities that involve them in situational language use;
2. Good language learners often start their language learning with a period of silence as they watch the effect of language on others;
3. Good language learners show comprehension by successfully accomplishing language-generated tasks;
4. Good language learners focus on overall sentence meaning rather than a sentence’s grammatical parts;
5. Good language learners make faster progress when the language of instruction is consistent (though limited) on a daily basis, and
6. Good language learners make faster progress when the content involves language that is clearly usable or valuable outside the classroom.

In commenting on the impact of a period of silence at the beginning of the learning cycle, Dr. Asher and others speculated that the improved fluency – or the ability to communicate so that native English speakers can easily understand - results from students having the chance to absorb the prosody or “music” of the target language without having to reproduce it orally at that time. In other words, listening and comprehension are the first steps in language learning.

These, then, are the strategies for good language learning: 1) students need to be involved in a situation where oral language meaning is immediately perceived and understood; 2) student silence (as opposed to oral production) is permitted and encouraged as a learning tool while they can watch the effect of language on the actions of others; 3) student comprehension is demonstrated by successfully completing tasks cued by oral language; and 4) students can focus on overall meaning rather than grammar. These key teaching/learning strategies are built into this method and into this script.

The current script provides the structure and organization to include the other valuable instructional strategies that Dr. Asher observed: 5) consistent language on a daily basis, and 6) content involving English that is clearly usable or valuable outside the classroom. And finally, this script's primary focus is on **adults**: their **interests**, their **needs** and their **environment**.

Students are much more focused in their learning when instruction involves the use of physical items – “realia” – to create meaning. “Manipulables” eliminate the possibility of ambiguity in meaning. However, depending on the availability of resources, the teacher may have to resort to Picture Dictionaries or similar resources. On the whole, this script uses topics for which a supply of realia is often readily available. However, if pictures must be used, we recommend they be as large as possible and mounted on some sturdy material so that they are the same pictures each lesson for consistency and can be stored without likelihood of damage.

HOW TO TEACH USING TPR:

TPR's LIMITATION: The TPR method described here is for use with adults who are complete ESL beginners only. If the student is able to spontaneously volunteer any English, he is going to find this script very limiting and is probably better in a class where he can continue to work on his oral production skills.

1. TPR and the syllabus. TPR is recommended as just one component in the syllabus for beginning adult students. Other syllabus components may include, for instance, numeracy, date and time recognition, writing, listening discrimination, picture stories etc.

Every TPR lesson needs to include three steps: 1) teaching/learning; 2) practice or rehearsal and 3) testing or evaluation.

2. Class size: TPR works best with about 8 students. More than 10 students, and there will be too much unfocused time as each student waits for his turn during the individual demonstrations. Fewer than six and it becomes difficult to limit the number of new vocabulary items to a “learnable” number making the lesson top-heavy with vocabulary.

If you do have more than 10 students, maybe you can use a volunteer. If so, be sure to provide training and a lesson plan record sheet to monitor progress.

3. How many new vocabulary items in one lesson? Nine new vocabulary items in one lesson is an average achievable goal. Some students can learn more, some less. The fourth step in the teaching/ review/ testing /evaluation procedures will soon tell you how many new vocabulary items your students can really master in one lesson. You may find that you can increase the number of vocabulary items for an ambitious class by moving into a different topic area. You may need fewer vocabulary items for a slower class.
4. Ask for/expect **no** oral participation: If you do have a student with some very limited oral production skills in your class, he is probably going to want to recite along with you. You will need to persuade him to do it with his mouth only and not voice his sounds so that other class members listen only to native speaker modeling. Don't encourage verbal responses from the students – only actions. After about 10 hours of instruction, some students may spontaneously start parroting the teacher. These students are telling you they are ready to move into a regular communication skills class. It is not considered appropriate to have students learn to speak the TPR script because imperatives are of limited use in most general communication environments.
5. Using consistent imperatives: The teacher uses the imperative form of the verb throughout (Point to ... Walk to ...Touch the etc.). Some teachers find this bare language uncouth and feel they must preface it with “please” or offer elaborate instructions or explanations, such as, “You see?” or “No, watch me again” or “Please do x not y”. We recommend the alternative of an international signal of friendliness to offset feelings of uncouthness, such as a smile. So, practice purging your language of commentary, names, injunctions and any language

other than that in the script. That's easier than having to remember to say "Please" in front of every single imperative.

6. lesson steps/1, 2 and 3:

- Step 1: Teaching/learning: The teacher needs to act out the action that demonstrates her imperatives clearly and consistently, that is, when the teacher says, "Point to the door" she needs to accompany her words by pointing to the door herself. She needs to point to the same door each time. The correct response from the student or students is the act of **immediately** pointing to the door. (This is the "Physical" response of "Total Physical Response").
- Step 2: Practice or rehearse. The teacher needs to use the words and the actions of the imperative consistently to establish understanding and student confidence in their mastery of this word-action communication system. As student competence becomes clear, however, the teacher needs to transition to using words **WITHOUT** actions. Be ready to put the action back in (thus returning to Stage 1 instruction) if any student shows uncertainty or confusion.
- Step 3: Evaluate. Evaluation is the end-stage of the teaching/learning and practice-to-competence sequence. Here, the student functions in English without any support from the teacher's gestures or the predictability of repetitive, known sequencing. The teacher will be able to see if the students can unhesitatingly demonstrate what has been taught and practiced.

7. Getting ready: Teachers need to prepare for a TPR lesson by doing the following:

- A. Set learning goals for teacher and students. What will your students know at the end of the lesson that they do not know at the beginning? To ensure student progress, write out (use the blank Lesson Plan form at the back of this handbook) or write down in a notebook your **exact** lesson language [so that you have a record of the vocabulary items your students have covered and/or need to review]. Are you going to use "point to" or "touch the" or "pick up" or ...? Are you going to work on parts of the body, room items, tools or ...? Will you use realia or pictures? If using pictures, how are you going to display the pictures so that ALL students can see the same pictures? All of these details need to be thought through and realia gathered, the script written and the support material (thumb tacks, scotch tape etc.) included.
- B. Memorize your script. Pacing is all-important in TPR and to maintain that pacing, you will not have time to look at your notes. You need to have the entire nine to twelve word script in memory so you can speak at your normal speaking speed and sustain your students' attention and concentration. So, memorize your script.
- C. Use your normal intonation, rhythm and stress pattern. Using your normal speech pattern will help to establish the

- D. prosody or “music” of our language in the students’ heads. It is this unique “music” that creates much of our communication. Consider how important intonation is when we change meaning with a change in our intonation pattern while saying: “The POLICE are here?” The police are HERE?” “The police are here.” Stress and intonation are key factors in our communication. Help the students learn this by using your normal speaking speed and tone of voice. You can slow your delivery the first time through so that the students can clearly hear individual syllables, but after that you need to return to your normal speaking speed. The emphasis on normal speaking speed is critical in ensuring that students develop native speaker reflex response to your oral directions.

What happens when you slow your speech down? When you slow down your delivery, you lose your natural intonation pattern, strain your voice, promote word-by-word translation and defeat the whole purpose of TPR, that is, near native speaker understanding. So, speak normally.

8. Practice your first lesson in front of a mirror! Remember that, during the lesson, you will not be able to explain what you want your students to do. After all, the reason they’re in a TPR class is because they have zero English. So, practice pantomiming the following. Make your actions explain what you want the students to do: **“Watch. Listen. Do not speak.”**

Deliver your first three imperatives three times pointing as you do it each time. Maintain a consistent tone and speed.

- A. You say (For example):
“Point to the table. Point to the chair. Point to the floor.”
“Point to the table. Point to the chair. Point to the floor.”
“Point to the table. Point to the chair. Point to the floor.”
- B. You pantomime: Next, pantomime that you want the students to copy you by pointing as you speak. You may have to run around the first time to show students how to point, but after that they are usually very happy to find that they just have to listen, copy your actions and not to speak.
- 9 Lesson procedures for each new language unit (One verb or verb phrase constitutes a complete new unit of information, whereas nouns may be introduced in groups of up to three at a time).
- A. Model: Say the three imperatives while modeling the action three times
- B. Say the three imperatives and have the group practice the actions as many times as are necessary for success reinforcing the actions by pointing when any student displays uncertainty.
- C. Randomize the imperatives. Still working with the whole group, instead of saying:
- “Touch your head.” “Touch your nose.” “Touch your chin.”
- say:**

- “Touch your nose.” “Touch your nose.” (yes, this is a deliberate repeat.) “Touch your head.” “Touch your nose.” “Touch your chin.”

When you break the pattern of predictability, you are asking the students to differentiate among the sounds they are hearing in order to respond. This is a test and the student responses give the teacher information about any student uncertainties. As the group focuses on this new challenge, some will be quick to respond and some will start looking around for help and support. This is a valuable “teachable” moment. Still working with the whole group, review and re-teach where uncertainty is apparent. Pay particular attention to any student who is clearly depending on other students for his responses. Everyone needs to be sure before moving to individualized demonstrations.

- D. Individual response at random/evaluation: Now’s the time to check for individual competence (and confidence). Start with your strongest student and work your way round the class (but **DO NOT say** student names). Give each student 4 or 5 imperatives in random order as in C above. Leave each student on a “success”. **Do not allow an individual student to fail at any stage.** Help immediately if necessary when you see a student hesitate by guiding him through the required action. Start the next student with the last “success” the class heard. Student hesitation tells you that you have not fully established the sound-object connection in the student’s memory. Repeat and model the imperative several times to embed the one item that the student hesitated over. Encourage the student to act out the demonstration too, and as soon as he seems competent, go to an item in that sequence that he knows and then back to the “problem” imperative. The goal is to leave the student on a success so that he can see he is making progress. You need to do this correction speedily enough that you do not lose the attention of the other students.

Some teachers with beginning level students feel that they are being kind to their students when they break the grouping and teach one item at a time. Our observation of students and our own personal learning experience suggest it is easier to memorize three groups of three related items especially when supported by actions and realia (or visuals) than 9 individual items.

In addition, teaching groups of items helps students to memorize by categories, an important aid to recall. At the same time, the predictability of grouping reduces the anxiety that accompanies learning.

10. Predictability as a teaching tool. Teach each new action or response in the same sequence each lesson. A predictable pattern of instruction is itself a form of communication and helps to allay student anxiety so that they learn more easily.
11. Consistent modeling each day is important. That is, if you used “Stand up” on one day, you should not use, “Get up” on the next day. If the teacher mixes the oral cues, the student becomes uncertain of the wanted responses.

12. One-step additions to the syllabus: Introduce new language one unit at a time. One verb or verb phrase constitutes a complete new unit of information, whereas nouns may be introduced in groups of up to three at a time. Introduce new verbs with familiar nouns, and new nouns with familiar verbs. Avoid introducing a new verb **and** a unit of new nouns at the same time. This can send the students into overload and confusion.
13. Maintain all steps in the teaching sequence: Whatever adjustments you make, the success of the method is tied to maintaining every step of the teaching sequence outlined here. If your students are really “hungry” for new material, they may be telling you that they are ready to move into an oral production script.
14. Vocabulary choice: The vocabulary was chosen for its usefulness to most newly arrived work-bound immigrants, and for the easy availability of the objects. A few items that seemed useful but not essential are included in parentheses in some units and may be used for groups that are particularly hungry for material. Teachers can add vocabulary items particular to areas of the country. However, list them in the glossary and be sure to support their meaning with realia or pictures.
15. Evaluate! Evaluate! Evaluate! Many new teachers assume that reviewing (or recycling) material covered earlier insults adult students. However, reviewing at a challenging pace can avoid “insult” to most students. For other students, review is like a memory “booster” and can make learning more certain. Thus, review – and the evaluation opportunity it provides - will show the teacher whether the teaching has created ‘lasting learning’ or was superficial and left learning gaps for the teacher to fill. Review and evaluation can thus work hand-in-hand to ensure student progress telling the teacher when the students are ready to move on to language production.
16. Problems and cures:
 - A. *The lack of an immediate student response gives the teacher important feedback. Is the hesitation confined to one student or more? Is the problem with the student or the teacher? One common student problem centers on student learning style. Some students are independent learners. They enjoy the scary challenge of learning. Some are dependent learners. They are uncomfortable and uncertain about the challenge of doing their own learning. They are more used to having someone else telling them what to do or say. If you have a student who never acts without checking the actions of another student first (a dependent learner), this may be the time to seek native speaker assistance. Seek someone (preferably not a student or family member) who can translate reliably. Then, as soon as possible and outside class, explain to the dependent student that you want to help him (or her) learn English, that you are very experienced at teaching ESL, and that you know how to adjust the lesson to make it learnable, but only he (or she) can do the learning. Try to get a commitment from the dependent student to try.*

- B. *Are you modeling and demonstrating sufficiently before you begin asking the students to demonstrate to you?*
- C. *Are you maintaining your “pacing” or are you going so slowly that the students are ‘tuning you out’?*
- D. *Some students are parroting teacher aloud. Signal them to be silent - don’t try to explain. Student vocalizing will slow your delivery and the other learners will be listening to learner-English rather than native speaker English.*
- E. *Is your language “clean” of all commentary and consistent on a daily basis?*
- F. *Are all the students focused? If some were still chatting in their native language when the lesson started, then they didn’t have time to transition from language or thought to English. Remember, too, that a key element in TPR’s success is that the language be of interest to the students. This means that teaching household items in an all-male class, for instance, may have only very limited interest. If so, you might want to move on to tools or transportation.*
- G. *Is the lesson too long so that the students have too many words to hold on to? 30-40 minutes is usually as much intense concentration as class AND teacher can handle in one day.*
- H. *Is the lesson too short so that the students do not have time to fully absorb the learning tasks?*
- I. *Is the lesson too easy so that the students are not sufficiently challenged? Can you pick up the pace of your delivery and the number of new vocabulary items you are teaching in each lesson? Or are the students telling you that they are ready for an oral production class?*
- J. *Is the lesson too difficult? A successful lesson should end with **every** student achieving success. Not even one student should be allowed to fail. You may have to increase the number of your repetitions, because part of the success of TPR is that students keep up their enthusiasm for learning because they CAN succeed.*
- K. *“They’re bored!” Who’s bored? The students or the teacher? TPR lessons call for a very high level of concentration from the teacher and involve a lot of script repetition at a predictable rate of delivery. Some teachers give up after a few days claiming the students are “bored”. More often, the teacher becomes bored and reflects it in her delivery. The teacher needs to focus on the students’ needs and accomplishments,*

checking off their achievements and moving them towards near native-speaker listen-and-respond speed. In writing student goals, specify the listen-and-respond speed. Keep a careful record of what the students HAVE successfully learned. Their successes help to keep boredom at bay.

- L. *Beginning students feel very insecure. After all, returning to the classroom as an adult can be stressful. In addition, when adults find themselves without the language skills to manage their own daily lives many feel profoundly inadequate. Keep in mind, therefore, that what is boring to you is still very new to them. Maintaining the predictability of the teaching sequence and building up a categorically organized and usable vocabulary can be reassuring besides being an effective teaching tool.*

SCRIPT 1: The Room and Numbers 1-10

VERBS	NOUNS		
Stand up Sit down			
Point to the Touch the Look at the Walk to the	door wall window chair	ceiling blackboard light switch wall plug	telephone clock table (floor)
Jump Clap	one four seven times	two five eight	three six nine
Open the Close the Shut the	door	cabinet	book

SCRIPT 2: Parts Of The Body

VERBS	NOUNS		
Touch your	head face nose chest	hair eye mouth back	neck chin teeth stomach
Hold your left right	arm shoulder leg wrist	hand elbow foot knee	thumb hip ear ankle
Open your	mouth	hand	eyes

SCRIPT 3: The Kitchen

VERBS	NOUNS		
Point to the	burner sink can opener refrigerator cutting board cup knife	stove cabinet drawer freezer pan glass fork	oven counter toaster teakettle pot plate spoon
Turn on Turn off	light	front burner	back burner

SCRIPT 4: food

VERBS	NOUNS		
<p>Point to the</p> <p>Touch the</p>	<p>potatoes</p> <p>beets</p> <p>peppers</p> <p>celery</p> <p>cucumbers</p> <p>cauliflower</p>	<p>cabbage</p> <p>squash</p> <p>eggplants</p> <p>peas</p> <p>yams</p> <p>tomatoes</p>	<p>carrots</p> <p>string beans</p> <p>mushrooms</p> <p>corn</p> <p>onions</p> <p>garlic</p>
<p>Point to the</p> <p>Put the (___) on the (___)</p> <p>Give the (grapes) and the (lemons) to (Mary).</p> <p>(Mary), put the (grapes) on the table and the (lemons) on the (chair)</p>	<p>grapes</p> <p>peaches</p> <p>pears</p> <p>pineapples</p>	<p>bananas</p> <p>plums</p> <p>oranges</p> <p>lemons</p>	<p>cantaloupes</p> <p>cherries</p> <p>strawberries</p> <p>coconuts</p>
<p>Point to the</p> <p>Give the (____) to (___)</p>	<p>meat</p> <p>frozen fish</p> <p>cheese</p>	<p>chicken</p> <p>lobster</p> <p>milk</p>	<p>fresh fish</p> <p>eggs</p> <p>bread</p>

SCRIPT 5: Tools

VERBS	NOUNS		
Pick up the	hammer	nail	wrench
Put the (____) on the (____)	pliers	bolt	nut
Put down the	screwdriver	screw	hook
	paintbrush	paint	sandpaper
Point to the	flash light	battery	bulb

SCRIPT 6: OUTDOORS/INTERSECTIONS

VERBS	NOUNS		
Point to the	house	apartment building	street
	mail box	stairs	front door
	fireplug	sidewalk	curb
	bus stop	stop sign	corner
	grass	tree	bush
	driveway	path	alley
	bus	car	van
	motor-cycle	truck	train

SCRIPT 7: CLOTHING

VERBS	NOUNS		
Point to the	hat	jacket	gloves
	undershirt	bra	slip
	panties	briefs	pantyhose
	shoes	boots	sandals
	socks	sweater	shirt
	jeans	pants	skirt
	blouse	dress	suit

SCRIPT 8: U. S. MAIL

VERBS	NOUNS		
Point to the	envelope	letter	package
	letter carrier	return address	mailing address
	stamp/postage	postmark	postcard

SCRIPT 9: Public Transportation

VERBS	NOUNS		
Point to the	taxi	bus	train

SCRIPT 10: PREPOSITIONS OF MOTION

VERBS	NOUNS		
Go	under the bridge	up the stairs	over the bridge
		down the stairs	
Get	out of the taxi	into the taxi	

**Toy cars and bridges and stairs made of cardboard work quite well as "props".*

SCRIPT 11: PARTS OF A CAR

VERBS	NOUNS		
Point to the	rearview mirror	windshield	hood
Touch the	bumper	side view mirror	tire
	dashboard	steering wheel	ignition
	front seat	back seat	child safety seat

SCRIPT 12: JOBS AND OCCUPATIONS

VERBS	NOUNS		
Point to the	housekeeper	auto mechanic	baker
	bricklayer	butcher	carpenter
	cashier	cook	dentist
	gardener	hairdresser	housekeeper
	nurse	painter	police officer
	secretary	truck driver	welder

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times	10
tire	16
toaster	12
tomatoes	13
Touch	10, 11
Touch the.....	16
train	14, 16
tree.....	14
truck	14
truck driver	17
Turn off	12
Turn on	12
two.....	10

U

under the bridge	16
undershirt.....	15
up the stairs.....	16

V

van.....	14
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W

Walk	10
wall.....	10

wall plug..... 10
welder..... 17
window..... 10
windshield 16
wrench..... 14
wrist 11

Y

yams 13
your 11

Sample lesson plans

Teacher: _____

M O N D A Y	<p>Goal: Students will be able to: <i>Identify 6 parts of the body: head, nose, chin, face, teeth, mouth + Touch your</i></p> <p>Materials: (Books, pages etc.) <i>No mats needed</i></p> <p>New Vocabulary: <i>As above</i></p> <p>Activities: <i>Listen and point.</i></p> <p>Outcome: Teacher will evaluate students' proficiency by having them: <i>Individually demonstrate competence by correctly identifying a minimum of 4 of the six words.</i></p>
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T U E S D A Y	<p>Goal: Students will be able to: <i>Identify 6 parts of the room: Point to the – (door, wall, ceiling, floor, table, chair)</i> <i>Correctly respond to: Stand up, sit down,</i></p> <p>Materials: (Books, pages etc.) <i>Use materials available in room. Substitute (but change item in the glossary) if necessary.</i></p> <p>New Vocabulary: <i>As above</i></p> <p>Activities: <i>Review head, nose, chin, face, teeth, mouth 10 minutes.</i> <i>Listen and respond to: Stand up, sit down</i> <i>: Listen and point to door, wall, ceiling, floor, table, chair</i></p> <p>Outcome: Teacher will evaluate students' proficiency by having them: 1. <i>Individually demonstrate competence by correctly responding to a minimum of 4 of the eight new phrases; and</i> 2. <i>correctly identifying a minimum of 4 of the six body part words</i></p>
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Sample Lesson Plan Form

M O N	<p>Goal: Students will be able to:</p> <p>Materials: (Books, pages, pictures, realia etc.)</p> <p>New Vocabulary:</p> <p>Activities:</p> <p>Outcome: Teacher will evaluate students' proficiency by:</p>
T U E S	<p>Goal: Students will be able to:</p> <p>Materials: (Books, pages, pictures, realia etc.)</p> <p>New Vocabulary:</p> <p>Activities:</p> <p>Outcome: Teacher will evaluate students' proficiency by:</p>
W E D	<p>Goal: Students will be able to:</p> <p>Materials: (Books, pages, pictures, realia etc.)</p> <p>New Vocabulary:</p> <p>Activities:</p> <p>Outcome: Teacher will evaluate students' proficiency by:</p>
T H U R S	<p>Goal: Students will be able to:</p> <p>Materials: (Books, pages, pictures, realia etc.)</p> <p>New Vocabulary:</p> <p>Activities:</p> <p>Outcome: Teacher will evaluate students' proficiency by:</p>
F R I D A Y	<p>Goal: Students will be able to:</p> <p>Materials: (Books, pages, pictures, realia etc.)</p> <p>New Vocabulary:</p> <p>Activities:</p> <p>Outcome: Teacher will evaluate students' proficiency by:</p>

