

## Papelitos (Little Papers)

Contact time with foreign language students is frightfully limited when put in the context of wanting them to become fluent in the *target* language. Therefore, we need to provide classroom activities that keep students fully engaged as much as possible. One of the most effective activities for drilling grammar points is one I call *papelitos*. It is a paired activity that requires the full attention and participation of both partners. Additionally, it requires both students to work equally as hard, thereby getting equal benefits from the endeavor.

### Purpose/Advantages of the Activity

1. Provides maximum participation on everyone's part.
2. Provides equal amount of work on the part of each student.
3. Students gain practice using (or minimally, pronouncing) the target language.
4. Pairing can be random, as individuals' levels of competence don't matter a great deal.
5. Camaraderie develops.
6. Struggling students experience a level of "control" and confidence by having the answers half the time.
7. More capable students have to stay awake!

### How to Make Papelitos

To have the "authentic" item, you'll start with a full sheet of paper cut vertically so you have two halves – but of unequal size. Ideal is 4 x 11" and 4½ x 11." The reason for making them different sizes is to facilitate separating them before and after use.

Another reason for this size and shape that they can be stored easily in a shoe box. Take a vertically-folded sheet of typing paper to wrap around each set of papelitos. Clearly label it by lesson, chapter, or topic. The more specific you can be, the better. At a later date, you might want to use them in a different way, at a different time of the year, or with a different group of students.

Note: In reality, any workbook page or practice sheet can be made into a *papelito* by having two sets: one blank (questions or tasks only) and the other with the answers provided. The answers could be filled in on another copy of the worksheet or typed on a separate sheet. Most desirable is to have both the questions/tasks and answers on the second sheet. This provides learning for the "teacher," whereas if only the answers are provided, there is no reinforcement of the material being practiced.

Now that you've visualized papelitos, here's how you prepare them before the cutting. I found it easiest to type the practice sheet first, remembering that it will need to fit on a 4" wide paper. .

Let's say that you want to practice demonstrative adjectives. Title your page – again, as specifically as possible – and add the word "Practica" (Practice). Next write the instructions.

Example:

### 7.2 Adjetivos demostrativos y la ropa

Práctica

Instrucciones: Completa las frases en español.

Begin typing your items in groups of five or so. In other words, type five lines, then skip a space, then five more lines, skip a line, etc. Always number the lines! Make every effort to include all the relevant vocabulary and grammar forms from the lesson you are practicing.

1. (these) sandalias
2. (that) vestido
3. (this) chaqueta
4. (that – over there) falda
5. (those) camisetas

A change of pace is sometimes desirable, so after twenty or so items, so write new directions:

Para cada palabra, di (say) las formas correctas de este, ese, y aquel.

21. vestido
22. chaqueta
23. pantalones
24. camisa
25. zapatos

Cambia de la forma plural a la forma singular.

26. esas sandalias
27. aquellas faldas
28. estos trajes
29. estas camisetas
30. esos impermeables

Cambia de la forma singular a la forma plural.

31. este abrigo
32. ese calcetín
33. esta corbata
34. aquel traje de baño
35. aquella blusa

I like to give as many tasks as possible to fill the page. You want to get as much practice out of each *papelitos* activity as possible.

### **Helpful Hints**

If you type the two columns (practice and answers) separately rather than in columns, then you can cut and paste them onto one sheet and duplicate to make a master copy. This allows you to have the very narrow margins that may be necessary to get a lot of practice on to one page. It also helps you to cut the two different sizes you want.

For the answer sheet, it's useful to start with the practice column and then edit it. Proofread at least twice! Because everything looks so similar, it's really easy to make and overlook small errors.

When you begin creating *papelitos*, you may think they are too hard and time-consuming to make. Truly, it gets easy! Remember, too, that you have them forever, and many can easily be altered to work in different classes. Once you have your template, the work goes pretty quickly.

Perhaps you are studying preterite verbs. There are so many! Have a *papelito* for each kind of verb you teach: regular, stem-changing, irregular, etc. Also have *papelitos* that combine the different kinds. The real test of learning is when students can differentiate one kind from another!

Another organizing tip for *papelitos*, especially those that look quite similar (for example, different preterite verbs) is to make a small mark in the top corner with felt-tipped pens of different colors. It will facilitate separating them.

While I generally use *papelitos* for grammar drill, they certainly are adaptable to cultural material or a review of literature.

### **Procedure**

Now that you've created your *papelitos*, what do you do with them?

Students will work in pairs. One student will have the practice sheet, the other the answer sheet. If you have an odd number of students, provide two practice sheets and one answer sheet for the one group of three. They can rotate the papers and take turns answering. Students should switch sheets (practice and answers) every five or ten items. You decide that, based on the difficulty of the tasks. The reason to keep changing the *papelitos* frequently is so that each student will have an equal opportunity to be "teacher" and "student." If they continually change roles, then no matter when you end the activity, each student will have had an approximately equal amount in each role. Students quickly realize one role is easier than the other!

If a pair of students finishes before you call time (end the activity), that pair will start over again, but with opposite roles. Example: Student A started with the practice sheet. For Round 2, Student B will take the practice sheet. Remember: Equal opportunity!

If the first run-through was perfect – really perfect! – then those two students may converse in the target language.

Time for this activity depends on the difficulty of the tasks and the abilities on your students. Probably an average time would be 8-12 minutes. Consider that you want everyone to complete at least one go-through, but not have more than one or two pairs finish twice. As always, you want everyone on task at all times, so try not to allow any down time.

Once your students become accustomed to this activity, it's extremely fast and easy to use *papelitos*. Cleanup time consists only of separating the practice and answer sheets, and because the sheets are different sizes, it's easy, right?

During a review time for semester exams, or simply when you feel the students are a bit rusty on a few different skills, place a variety of sets of *papelitos* (clearly labeled, remember?) on a table. In pairs, let students choose what they most need to work on. This is a good activity for a substitute teacher to supervise. However, it should not be the only one, as boredom, and then chaos will set in. This is meant to be a brief activity.

### **Conclusion**

Most students like this activity but all recognize its usefulness. We all have at least a few churlish students who complain, but some of them have come back long after our year together and admitted how many things we did in class, particularly *papelitos*, were really helpful. I've also had students ask to take them home before a test or when they've been absent. Now that's a good thing!