



# Freeform Tips

Mark Grundy

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The following was written by Mark Grundy in response to a query from me regarding the use of Freeforms in language classes. The content is copyright 1996, [Mark Grundy](#).

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## Freeform Tips From Mark Grundy

To: Brian Phillips [brian@briandavidphillips.com](mailto:brian@briandavidphillips.com)  
Subject: Re: Freeforms in the EFL Classroom  
Date: Wed, 29 May 1996 15:48:05 +1000  
From: Mark Grundy [Mark.Grundy@cisr.anu.edu.au](mailto:Mark.Grundy@cisr.anu.edu.au)

Dear Brian,

I am delighted to hear from you!

I'm interested that you're using roleplays to teach EFL, and would be interested to see any sample setups you have.

We're fortunate enough in Australia to have an excellent repository of roleplaying games that have been tested and run at roleplaying conventions.

Something you may find useful: a couple of small-group freeform/theatre games that my wife and I did are two simulated "radio plays", called "Flick Barlow, Chicago Shamus" and "Charity St Claire". The idea for these is that the players play 1930's actors in a radio play. For various reasons, the scriptwriter has only



come up with a couple of pages of script, plus a few commercials. It's up to the players to invent storyline when the script runs out.

Add to this a GM/teacher/director, simple costumes and props, a little ``On the Air" light, some mock microphones and some background music, and it makes for a hilarious, high-energy game that's as entertaining to watch as it is to play. I think that it might well lend itself very well to studying written and spoken English.

For larger groups, freeforms that work well generally have the same formula: easy, accessible characters, lots of things to do, and lots of things to find out. The trick is to make sure that everyone can do things up until the very end, but that they don't get frustrated by not being able to find the right information or acquire the right dohickies.

Other tips from memory are:

- never tell the players to avoid a particular outcome. Always set them up to seek a particular outcome.
- make sure that the play doesn't hang on any key character, object or piece of information, unless you're *\*absolutely positively\** sure that this character, object or info will do exactly what you need it to.
- give the players plenty of pointers to other key characters.
- give the players plenty of information about each other, and *\*make sure that they know all their own information\**
- don't give the players more than a page of character/objective information.
- give each character something obvious to make it different from every other.
- keep the rules for resolving unplayed events clear and simple, to avoid too much ruling from GMs/coordinators.

Good freeform genres are: pirates, wild west, gangster, ancient Egypt, mediaeval, any romantic historical period, toys, nursery rhyme characters, anything glamorous, and just about anything involving a ball, masquerade or a cocktail party.

My wife and I talked once about designing a freeform based around the Chinese fantasy series Empress Wu. Part of the attraction of this freeform would be combats done on jogging trampolines, where players try and cut red paper ribbons off each other with plastic swords. The other attractions would be lots of melodramatic acting, operatic villains and purple romance plots :)

To my mind, what makes a good freeform genre is:



- lots of different kinds of characters
- characters and personalities that anyone can understand
- lots of different things to do
- easy to make up more things if you need them

Something else you might find useful is a URL to a recent article I recently wrote, introducing roleplaying for beginners:

[http://cs.anu.edu.au/~Mark.Grundy/RP\\_Intro.htm](http://cs.anu.edu.au/~Mark.Grundy/RP_Intro.htm)

Best wishes,  
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