ESL Meme Activity Pack

Memes are short, funny and built on a few fixed sentence patterns. This pack turns those patterns into grammar practice: students write captions, compare a plan with reality, run a caption battle and talk about humour. Built for adults and older teens.

LEVEL	STUDENTS	GROUPING	TIME
A2 to C1	Adults and older teens	Pairs and teams	10 to 20 minutes

What's inside, in the order of the blog post

1	**When you … captions**	Pattern sheet + caption cards 1 to 3	**Pages 2-3**
2	**Nobody: / Me:**	Pattern sheet + caption cards 4 and 5	**Pages 2-3**
3	**Me / Also me**	Pattern sheet + caption cards 6 and 7	**Pages 2-3**
4	**Expectation vs reality**	Three topics, two boxes each, to draw or describe	**Page 4**
6	**Caption battle**	Six photos, one caption per team, then a class vote	**Page 5**
7	**Meme talk**	Eight discussion cards about humour and memes	**Page 6**

Activities 5 and 8 in the post need nothing printed. Print pages 3 and 5 once per pair or team, page 4 for every student.

Language for the task

EXPLAINING A JOKE

It's funny because …
It's relatable because …
The joke is that …

REACTING

That's so me.
I can relate to that.
I don't get it. Can you explain?

VOTING

Ours is funnier because …
That one made me laugh.
It's clever, but …

Which errors to fix

FIX THESE, THEY ARE THE POINT

~~When you are realising it's Monday.~~ → **When you realise it's Monday.**

~~It makes me to laugh.~~ → **It makes me laugh.**

~~It's funny for me.~~ → **I find it funny.**

LET THESE GO

Missing subjects and lower case inside a caption.

Meme captions break rules on purpose: *me at 2 a.m.* is the genre, not a mistake. Correct the sentence students say about the meme, not the caption itself.

Most memes use one of a few fixed patterns. Each one practises a piece of grammar, so a caption is a sentence your students build on purpose.

PATTERN	HOW IT WORKS	EXAMPLE CAPTION
When you … Present simple after when	Describe a situation everyone knows. The photo is the reaction.	**When you realise the meeting was yesterday.**
Nobody: / Me: -ing for a strange habit	Nobody asked for it, and you do it anyway.	**Nobody: / Me at 2 a.m.: checking what's in the fridge again.**
Me: … / Also me: … Contrast: a plan, then what really happens	Two lines that disagree with each other.	**Me: I'm starting a diet on Monday. / Also me on Monday:**
Expectation / Reality Going to or would for the plan, past or present for what happened	Two pictures side by side.	**Expectation: I'm going to study for three hours. / Reality: I watched one video.**
Tell me you're … without telling me Imperative, then a sentence that gives you away	A habit that shows who you are.	**Tell me you're a teacher without telling me: I say "any questions?" at dinner.**

What makes a caption work

Short. Ten words or fewer. If it needs explaining, cut it.

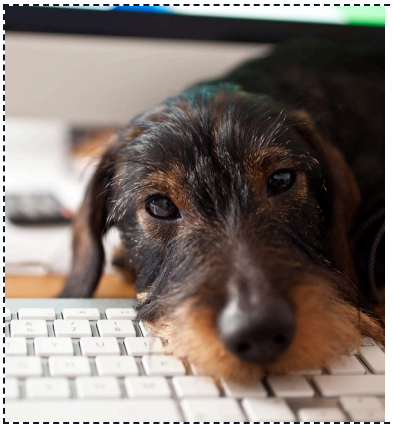
True. The best captions describe something everyone has done but nobody says.

The photo does half the work. Write the situation; let the face be the reaction.

A grammar joke to explain (activity 5)

The past, the present and the future walked into a bar. It was tense.

Ask: why is it funny? (*Tense* means nervous, and it is also the grammar word for past, present and future.)



1 · WHEN YOU ...



2 · WHEN YOU ...



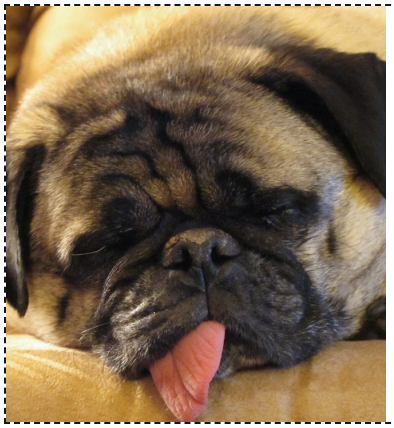
3 · WHEN YOU ...



4 · NOBODY: / ME:



5 · NOBODY: / ME:



6 · ME / ALSO ME



7 · ME / ALSO ME



8 · ANY PATTERN

Photos, CC BY 2.0 via Flickr: 1 Håkan Dahlström; 2 Ivan Radic; 3 dougwoods; 4 Jo Naylor; 5 Lisa Zins; 6 waitscm; 7 slava; 8 theowl84.

Free for classroom use. Share the link, not the file: **esllaboratory.com**

For each topic, draw or describe what you expected and what really happened. Then write one caption for each box: *going to* or *would* for the plan, past or present for the reality.

Your first English lesson

EXPECTATION	REALITY

Working from home

EXPECTATION	REALITY

Your last holiday

EXPECTATION	REALITY

Each team writes one caption per photo in five minutes. Read them out without saying which team wrote which; everyone votes for the funniest, but not for their own.

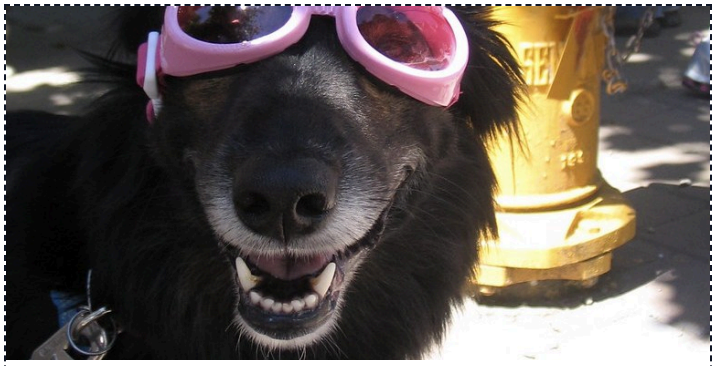


PHOTO 1 · OUR CAPTION

VOTES ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

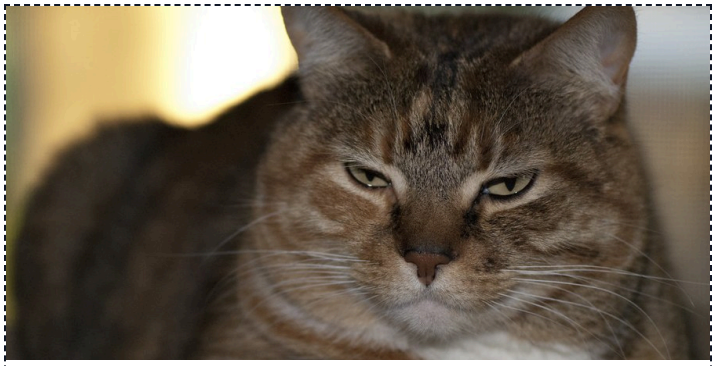


PHOTO 2 · OUR CAPTION

VOTES ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

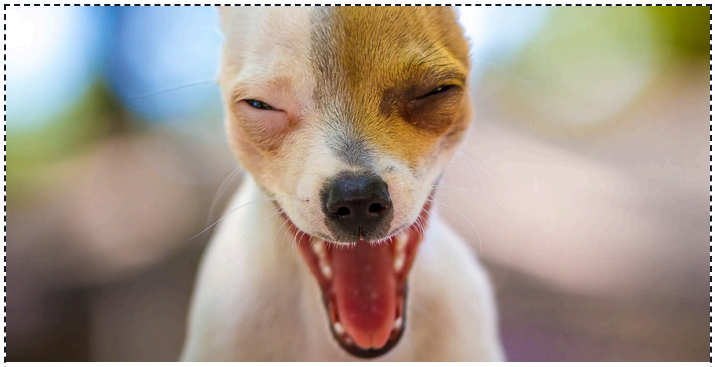


PHOTO 3 · OUR CAPTION

VOTES ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

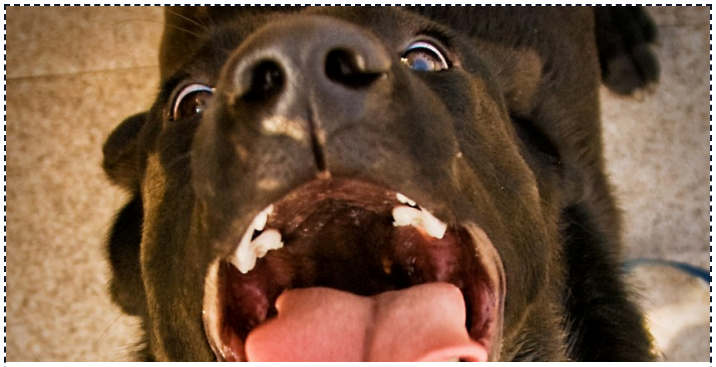


PHOTO 4 · OUR CAPTION

VOTES ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

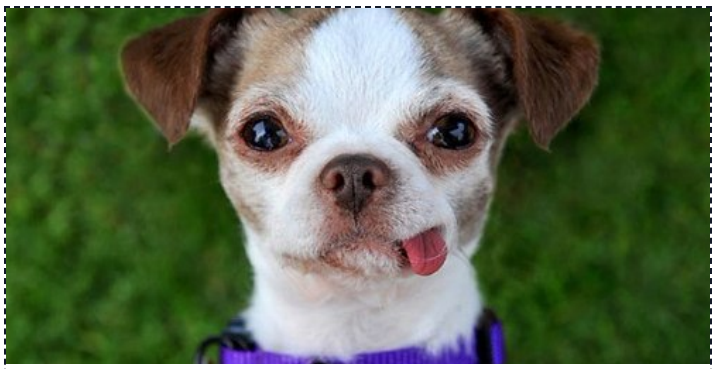


PHOTO 5 · OUR CAPTION

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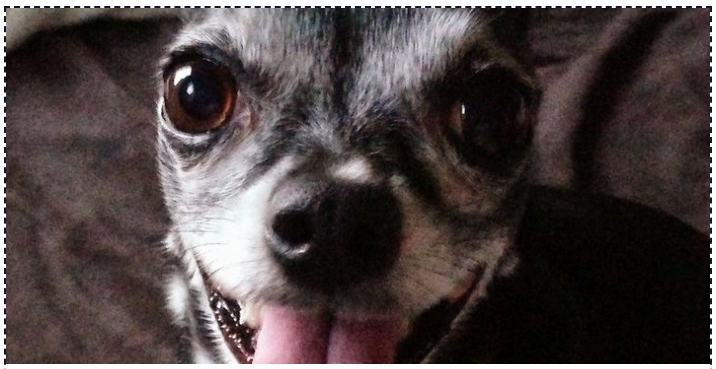


PHOTO 6 · OUR CAPTION

VOTES ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Photos, CC BY 2.0 via Flickr: 1 416style; 2 RyanAlldread; 3 Charlie Stinchcomb; 4 joshDubya; 5 MatherAMC; 6 david_shankbone.

1

What kind of memes do you send most, and to whom?

2

Is there a meme that only works in your language? Explain it in English.

3

Can a meme be funny and true at the same time? Give an example.

4

Have you ever sent a meme to the wrong person? What happened?

5

Should brands and politicians use memes? Why or why not?

6

What gets lost when you translate a joke?

7

Which meme would you show a visitor to explain your country?

8

Are memes a kind of language? Who are the native speakers?