

# Paired Command Cards (PCCs)

These cards are used to help teach and reinforce basic English verbs in their imperative/present simple, present continuous and past tense forms, using the Total Physical Response teaching method. The names of body parts, common nouns, and other parts of speech are also practiced. There are two sets of 5 cards, and each card in a set has the same pictured actions in a different sequence, so a pattern won't be memorized.



## *Total Physical Response (TPR)*

TPR is a powerful linguistic tool to teach new vocabulary. Students perform actions in response to commands, stimulating comprehension areas of the brain, leading to greater long-term retention of new words than translation exercises alone.<sup>1</sup>

## *PCC progression plan*

Please carefully read and follow the steps below. Jumping ahead will result in frustration for both teachers and students. The amount of time (over consecutive class periods) to remain at each step will vary greatly with the ages and level of the students, but do not proceed to any higher step until the previous one has been mastered by all.

### *PCC progression summary*

1	Teacher commands
2	'Read' card as group
3	Prep game (1 at a time)
4	Prep game (as far as can go)
5	Pair commands
6	Simple -ing responses
7	-ing responses to all
8	Pair commands (reading)
9	Past tense responses
10	-ing and past tense

**STEP #1.** The teacher gives commands indicated on card (picture side) at least once in every class, while students act or pantomime as a group. At this stage don't show the card to the kids at all. Don't try to do a whole card the first few times unless their level is already high enough that it's easy. After they have once progressed to the bottom of a card, however, always do all the commands each class.

**STEP #2.** (a) Huddle and show one of the cards while pointing to the pictures, saying each verb or command clearly while the students listen silently.

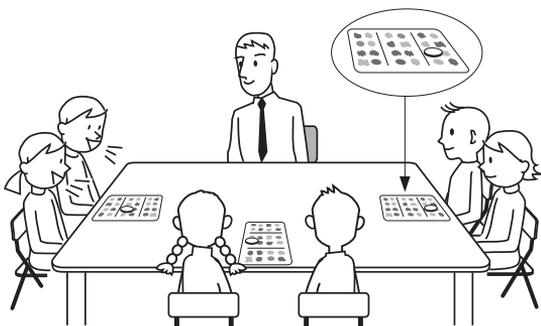
(b) Showing a different card of the same level, point and have the students chorally say each one. For reinforcement and pronunciation emphasis the teacher may repeat after the students, but, unless they get stuck, not the

reverse.



(c) Using a card as teacher's cue only, command as in step #1.

STEP #3. The kids sit in pairs or threes and are given one card per group. Using a chip as a marker, teams race to be first to finish saying the pictured actions on all (or part) of their card. Every member of a team must pronounce each command clearly, correctly, and in unison in order to move forward. If a mistake is made, the teacher may offer a correct model, but the team must wait until their next turn to try the same pictured word again. At this step,



each team attempts only one command per turn, and the commands are not acted upon, only spoken. The team that reaches the end first is applauded. Ideally, continue until all have finished, with those who have finished earlier judging and coaching their classmates. If the game is taking too long the first time or two, you can declare the end of any row to be the goal. (Any horseplay or rule infraction results in the loss of a turn.)

It is important that all team members speak in unison, both so that disorderly answers do not cloak pronunciation errors and so that less proficient students do not simply parrot a teammate. Also, the strictest of pronunciation standards must be maintained, as pronunciation will be harder to correct during the pair work to which this game is preparatory.

STEP #4. The same as step #3, except that, on a single turn, teams may say as many pictured words as they can without mistakes, again in unison and in a paced rhythm without pauses.

STEP #5. This is our primary goal, for which previous steps, though important, lay the foundation. Pair kids up and have them command each other in accordance

with the rules on the separate rule sheet. Commands are given in the imperative (present simple tense). There is no verbal response, just pantomime or physical action. For



the first few weeks, you might continue doing step #4 as preparatory review. This activity not a speed contest. Encourage them to get with it, but don't reward for finishing paired commanding first. 

Before trying this the first time, your class should see one live demonstration performed by you and a sharp student as your demo-partner. (In the next, or a later class, a sharp student duo may perform the same service.) After observing the demo and before teaming and standing, the class should collectively read over the Japanese text of the accompanying rule sheet. (Rule numbers can be read in English, of course.)

STEP #6. (Present cont. tense) 'I'm eating,' etc., is said by the commandee while pantomiming the same. No vocal response is given for touch commands. (Make sure the kids know what they're saying and don't confuse present continuous with present simple.)

STEP #7. Step #6 plus oral responses to 'Touch...' and other commands; e.g. 'I'm touching my nose,' and, 'I'm pointing to the door.'

STEP #8. The students use the reading sides of cards of which the colored picture sides have already been mastered. 'ING' responses are expected for all commands. Paired reading-study (without responses) should be done as preparation. If the kids are cannot yet read well enough, this step may be postponed, or in a mixed level class, those who can read may do the reading side and those who can't, the picture.

STEP #9. (Past tense) After the command has been executed or pantomimed the commandee says, 'I ate,' etc. (Optionally, the commandee may here say both '-ing', as in step #8, and then the past tense.) The teacher should command them as a group, getting past tense responses, for several weeks before letting students try this in pairs.

STEP #10. (Optional) E.g. A: 'Eat! — What are you doing?'

B: 'I'm eating.'

A: 'What did you do?'

B: 'I ate.'

Et cetera...

### *PCC follow-through test*

Teams that finish first will then report to the teacher for their 'test.' The teacher quickly spot-checks commanding and responding abilities, using their just finished card. If either messes up, they both must go back and re-

practice (twice, taking turns) with the one-third section in which the mistake occurred. This follow-through needn't be done every time, but its anticipated possibility should cause the students to pay more attention while working in pairs. 

*Notes:*

- Don't expect the students to remember and follow all the pair work rules the first try. They should be referred to the rule sheet before each of their earliest efforts and periodically thereafter. Infractions should be dealt with not by haranguing, but by pointing out the problem of 'Official Rule' number(s) 'such and such' having been compromised. Children not totally out of control respond to this when recognition of their accomplishments (rules satisfactorily followed) is also given. Have all read the 'PCC Department Rules' the first two consecutive weeks of pair work, and the 'PCC Department Rule Reminders' the two weeks after that.
- For obvious reasons it would be better if the kids did not always pair with the same partners. Systematically pairing every student with every other student over the weeks is a good idea in most classes.
- When an odd number of students makes one group of three necessary, that group, also, should run through the card just twice, in order to finish at roughly the same time as other pairs. One student in the threesome will command for a given third of the card, and the other two will simultaneously pantomime. Threes are good for a child who is behind, he will learn from the others and can be weaned later. After your kids are good enough not to need much monitoring you'll alternatively be able to pair with a weaker child yourself. Beforehand, guide the threesome in the order in which to go, to ensure that the same student does not command for the same section twice. One possible plan for doing so is illustrated at right. Not every student will command every section on the card, so it's advisable not to have the same group of three each week.

<i>Section</i>	<i>Commander</i>
Top third	Student A
Middle third	Student B
Bottom third	Student C
Top third	Student B
Middle third	Student C
Bottom third	Student A

*(So that whoever goes first is also last.)*

- The pair-work steps may be classified as 'student-centered TPR (total physical response),' but they have at least two advantages over TPR. First, as the students are in control, they'll gain satisfaction and confidence

seeing immediate results from their own speaking efforts. Second, standard TPR (which is teacher commanded) postpones student vocal production indefinitely, based on theories (with which we agree, to a point) that concentrated listening is most important to future speaking skill, and that immediate production – “Repeat after me...” – may be counterproductive, as it interferes with long-term memory.



Our PCC method, however, allows us to ‘have our intake and speak it, too’ by sufficiently separating the two activities, eliminating aural-oral interference. With the verb sections at the ‘present continuous’ level (Step #6) there is a required vocal response simultaneous with the performed action. This, though, is conversion-production, not repetition. And the plain verb forms will have been well learned previously.

Comparing again with orthodox TPR, there is, however, a potential problem with this activity. Lacking the silver-tongued elocution of their teacher, our kids will, to some degree, be voicing imperfect models to their partners. Though we can’t eliminate this problem entirely, by following our careful ‘prep game’ strategy we can significantly reduce it and at the same time improve our students’ speech. On balance we’ve found this single disadvantage to be far outweighed by the multiple benefits and overall success we have using these cards in this manner.

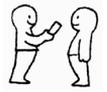
### *Additional Prep Game Suggestions*

STEP #3-B. The same as step #3 except that team members alternate in being first to speak, their partners quickly repeating. Pronunciation requirements for each team member are strict. When an error is made, the same person who made it must try again on the next turn. A team partner may quietly help in the interim.

STEP #4-B. Similar to step #3-B, but with teams going as far on the card as they can without error.

SELF-STUDY TEAMS. Teams sit with their own cards and a few bingo chips. They simultaneously go through their cards by themselves, identifying each picture audibly but quietly. They place a chip on any picture they can’t name or are unsure of, or that the teacher catches either of them mispronouncing. When they’ve finished an entire card, they raise their hands and either report perfect success or show where they’ve placed chips. In either case they are praised. Any missed ones are clearly told them (by the

teacher or, if any other teams have finished, by them), and they try for chip removal again once other teams have been checked.



**SELF-STUDY TEAMS, WITH TUTORING.** As in the above, teams still work independently but individuals take turns being speaker, and being teacher/monitor of their partners. If, as is usually the case, students are of uneven ability, the weakest should be paired with the strongest and those of roughly equal average ability should be paired. At this step, the stronger students will go first and the weaker will be given chips under the pretext of being ‘teacher.’ If the weaker one does happen to know one the other has missed, he or she will identify it before placing the chip over it, but more likely will simply be able to place chips when the partner is stuck. In the meantime, of course, the weaker learns from the stronger. When the first student is done, you correct any errors and decide if a repeat is needed. When next the roles are reversed, we may expect a strong one to really function as a teacher of a slower partner. Responsibility may be given to let you know when they think their partner is up to par.

1. Asher, J. (2007, February 5). TPR: After forty years, still a very good idea. Retrieved February 2, 2015, from <http://www.tpr-world.com/japan-article.html>