

Lucy Pollard's Guide to

# Teaching English

A book to help you through your first two years in teaching



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## **INTRODUCTION**

This book is intended as a guide for those of you who are new to teaching English. It will be a great resource to you as you begin your teaching career. It will help you in most of the situations you will encounter in your first two years of teaching.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I will present the key aspects of teaching and explain some terms that will be used throughout the book. Subsequent chapters will cover some of these points in greater detail. You can read this book in any order that suits you; you can read it from cover to cover; you can dip into it as and when necessary; you can decide to just read the chapters that are of interest or relevance to you. However, I advise all readers to start with a complete reading of Chapters 1 and 2.

All books mentioned throughout this e-book are listed at the end, under References, along with details of author and publisher.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Lucy Pollard has worked as a teacher, teacher trainer, writer, TEFL consultant and Director of Studies for over 18 years. Her experience is varied: she has taught general English, English for specific purposes and English for academic purposes to adults. She has also taught teenagers and young children. She has the UCLES Diploma in TEFL, the Certificate in TEFL from the University of London, a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and the Diploma in Life Coaching.

She is passionate about teaching and learning and has shared her knowledge with students, teachers and colleagues for many years.

## **THANKS**

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## CHAPTER 1: THE BASICS OF TEACHING ENGLISH

### 1.1 Use of English and use of mother tongue

We should try to use English as much as possible with our students. When teaching students at intermediate level and above, all teaching can be done in English. There should really be no need to use the students' mother tongue at these levels. Grammar explanations and definitions of words can be given in English. Explanations for activities and instructions can also be given in English.

At lower levels, you might find yourself using the students' mother tongue more often. Nevertheless, try to use English as much as possible. As your students progress, you will find that you'll use English for instructions more and more frequently. When you are presenting new language, try to illustrate the language through the use of pictures and/or mime. This is preferable to translating. Techniques for presenting language can be found in Chapter 3.

You might want to dedicate one of your first lessons with a class to the study of classroom language. By classroom language I mean phrases such as: open your books, turn to page 10, work with a partner, etc, etc. You can write the language on the board, demonstrate it through mime or show pictures of people opening their books, working with a partner etc. It's important to practise the pronunciation of these phrases and to revise them regularly. In a subsequent lesson, you can give the phrases to students with the words jumbled up (for example: 10 to page turn); and ask them to re-order the words and match them to pictures. Finally, you can write the phrases on large pieces of card and display them in your classroom so that they are constantly visible.

You might occasionally decide to use the students' mother tongue (if you speak it, of course). A time when this is advisable is when your students just haven't grasped what you are saying in English. If you need to deal with something quickly, it is generally quicker in the students' mother tongue (if you speak their language). For example, it could take a very long time to explain the word "soul" using only English and the students might misunderstand if their culture doesn't have a similar concept. You might also need to give some information about an open day or a special event at school and you think it will be done more quickly in their language.

### 1.2 Using the blackboard, whiteboard

You will need to learn how to write on a board. This is not as easy as it appears. Getting a line straight and writing at a size that can be seen takes practice. Practise in an empty classroom one day. While you're there practise writing on the board side on (i.e. positioned in such a way that your back is not to the class). This will be very useful especially if you intend to teach children. You'll be able to keep an eye on what's happening whilst writing.

You will also need to think about what you write on the board. Remember that whatever goes on the board generally finds its way into students' notes. If you want them to retain something, be it homework exercises or a new grammar explanation, write it on the board. You will need to get the balance right: you need to write just enough for it to make sense to students when they come back to look at it and not write so much that your students spend all their time in class copying. When you first start teaching, you could note on your lesson plan which elements you intend to write on the board.

Some teachers divide their board into sections: one section for grammar, one for vocabulary, one for pronunciation, one for homework, etc. Decide whether this sort of organisation would work for you and whether you would like to use it.

You can also think about whether you will write things on the board during class or write them up before class and mask them in some way: this is easy enough when using a flipchart (an easel with pages that you can turn over). With a traditional board, you can cover your writing with paper and reveal it at the appropriate moment.

### **1.3 Who talks in class?**

Obviously the teacher talks in class. Our roles include explaining language points, giving instructions for what to do, asking questions, etc, etc. The students also need to speak; learning a language involves speaking the language. My question here really is: who speaks most in class? When setting up an activity, explaining what to do for homework, the teacher will do a lot of the speaking. However, in other activities, the goal is to get students speaking and using English as much as possible. This involves the teacher being silent, listening to what the students say and setting up tasks that give students opportunities to express themselves.

The issue about who speaks is also known as: student-talking time (STT) and teacher talking-time (TTT). We should aim for our students to be talking more than we do and if possible 80% STT to 20% TTT. I know this is not easy when you're a new teacher; our tendency at the beginning is to speak a lot. This could be due to nerves or a desire to do something to help things go well. However, with time, we speak less because we get more confident and because we learn techniques for getting the students to do all the speaking. At the end of a lesson (or in the middle of it) think about who is doing most of the speaking. If the answer is the teacher, think about ways to redress the balance in future lessons. Some techniques you can use to get students speaking more are: pair work, group work and eliciting. These are all explained below. You'll find activities throughout this book that are focused on getting students to speak.

If students are speaking, they are actively involved in what is going on in the classroom. They are using and re-using language that they have studied. Of course, when the teacher is speaking, the students are getting valuable listening practice with a native speaker. You might occasionally decide to tell your students a story of what you did at the weekend, something that happened to you, etc. This type of activity will give students exposure to natural pronunciation but it shouldn't be overused.



## 1.4 Eliciting

This is another handy tool for a teacher's toolkit. When you are presenting language you should try to get the explanations from your students (elicit) rather than giving all the explanations yourself. Practise asking questions that will draw responses out of students rather than always giving the explanations yourself. An advantage of using this method is that you find out how much students know before you start teaching. If you are aware of students' knowledge, you'll know how much time needs to be spent on the language point.

You can show students a picture of a sitting room and ask them what the various objects are to elicit vocabulary around the topic of furniture.

You can give two or three adjectives and their comparative and superlative forms and ask students to provide the comparative and superlative forms of other adjectives:

Cold	colder	coldest
Beautiful	more beautiful	most beautiful

Students provide the comparative and superlative of: comfortable, small, etc.

## 1.5 Pair work and group work

These will be essential tools as a teacher.

Pair work involves students working together in pairs; so, in a group of 18 students, you'd have 9 pairs working independently. Group work involves students working together in groups of 3, 4, 5 etc.

You can ask students to work in pairs or groups to complete a course book exercise, to produce a piece of writing, to prepare what they will present to the class, to carry out a speaking activity or to check their answers to homework. In fact the possibilities are endless.

There are many advantages to having your students working in groups or in pairs:

First of all, it provides variety. It gives a different focus by taking the attention away from the teacher;

When working in pairs or groups, students go at the speed that suits them. When working as a whole class, the pace is set by the teacher or by other students. Working at their own pace, students can spend more time on points that cause them difficulties and less time on points that they find easy. Thus using time more efficiently;

Students are more actively involved in their work: no snoozing at the back of the classroom!;

Students can share their knowledge, explain things to each other; this is an advantage over having students work individually;

It increases STT whilst reducing TTT;

Students learn to work autonomously; they learn to do things without the teacher. This will help them in their learning outside the classroom. Of course, the teacher is on hand if required;

Every student has the opportunity to contribute; this is almost impossible when conducting teacher-led activities. Consider a 20-minute speaking activity. If you choose to perform it as a whole-class activity with a group of 20 students, each student will speak for an average of 1 minute. If your students do the same activity in pairs for 20 minutes, each student gets the chance to speak for 10 minutes. Much more efficient use of time!

## **1.6 How to organise group and pair work**

At the beginning, it's probably easiest if you just ask the students to work with whoever is sitting next to them. You can go around the class saying, "you two work together", "you two work together" etc. Have students work with their neighbours for a few lessons. This allows students to get used to pair work and group work; it might be completely new to them. Always working with the same person will provide a comforting routine until they are used to this way of working. If they work with a familiar person, it will be easier for them.

You can start grouping students differently when they are used to that way of working. In fact, it's advisable to change the make-up of groups to help avoid over-familiarity. By working with others, students can discover other ways of working and speaking. Dividing students in different ways helps you to separate the noisy students and also to see which students work well together. It also contributes to a sense of cooperation in the classroom.

If you have a group of students of mixed-level, you might ask all the strong students to work together which allows them to do a more challenging task whilst the students who are not so strong do a less challenging task. Alternatively, you could put stronger students to work with weaker students, which allows strong students to explain difficult points to the weaker ones.

If the class are discussing a gender-related topic, it might be interesting to ask all females to work together and all males to work together. Alternatively, you could mix males and females. The same might be applied to age-related topics, city and suburb dwellers, etc. Think about how you would like groups to be formed before going into class.

Always remember that if you are asking students to move to form a group (rather than just asking them to work with their closest neighbours), it will take a few minutes to organise. You will need to factor this into your lesson plan.

## **1.7 What does the teacher do during pair and group work?**

You can quite simply let students get on with the task. However, this doesn't mean ignoring them and letting the task disintegrate.

You allow them to work at their pace and in a way that suits them.

You offer help when necessary.

You answer students' questions.

You can let them know that time is closing in; e.g. "just five minutes to complete what you're doing".

You monitor what is going on. Whilst monitoring, the teacher notes down mistakes and examples of good work.

There are two ways of monitoring: walk around the class, hover over every pair or group for a minute or so to listen to what they are doing. This allows you to focus intensively on each group or pair. There is a disadvantage here, however: students sometimes freeze up and look to the teacher for assistance, which defeats the purpose of group and pair work. Personally, I prefer a different approach in a classroom where the size permits. I arrange the groups or pairs in a horseshoe around the room and I sit in the middle of that horseshoe. I then concentrate my attention on each pair or group in turn without moving. You'd be amazed at how much you can hear. This approach also means that you don't have your back to some of the students.

After pair work or group work, ask students what they discussed, check answers, ask them what decisions they came to, and so on (depending on the task you set). During this stage you can also clear up any questions the students may have and review errors and examples of good work.

### **1.8 Some disadvantages of group and pair work and what to do about it**

Students might go off task; if they haven't understood what is required of them they might do something completely different. Explain carefully and check that they have understood before forming groups.

Students might get noisy. Monitor carefully and say something immediately if it gets too loud.

Students might use their own language. Make it clear from the start that you expect students to use English, monitor carefully. Say something as soon as you hear students using their own language. You might want to introduce a points system and competition; students lose points for using their mother tongue, gain points for using English. At the end of the day or week, add up points and display them for the class to see.

### **1.9 What to do in your first lesson?**

You should think about whether the students know each other or not. If they don't know each other, spend some time allowing them to get to know their classmates. There are many ways to go about this and I suggest you put "getting to know you activities" or "first day activities" into a search engine and choose one that suits you.

Check with a colleague whether the activity you find will go down well in the culture you're working in.

If they already know each other, you could spend a short time allowing the students to get to know you. They could interview you. For this, they prepare questions together in pairs and then ask you their questions. An activity where students get to know their teacher isn't suitable to all cultures; find out about this from more experienced colleagues.

Try to avoid reading and writing in the first lesson. Listening to a recording is not a good choice either; listening can be stressful and you need to be sure it will be pitched at the right level. I suggest some language work (either grammar or vocabulary) which should be kept quite light and a speaking activity to give you a chance to evaluate your students' abilities. If they have been together recently as a group, find out what the students have been studying recently and work on something related to that or something that builds on it.

For the first lesson with an unknown group, choose a neutral topic that will interest most people or at least a topic that everybody can contribute to, e.g. holidays, work, school, families.

### **1.10 Giving instructions**

The success of various stages of your lesson will depend upon your ability to give clear instructions. If the students understand your instructions, they will carry out the task as you had planned. If instructions are misunderstood, students will not do the right thing. If you realise in time, you can give your instructions again; but if you only notice this at the end of the activity, some students will have done the wrong thing. In any case, in order to use time efficiently, it is essential to give clear instructions and to check that students have understood what is required of them before they start work.

When planning your lesson, think about what you will ask the students to do. Then think about how you will say that to them in a way they understand. When you first start teaching, you might want to write your instructions on your lesson plan, or on a separate piece of paper, to help you when you are in class. Giving instructions will soon become second nature to you and students will get used to your way of working and your explanations and things will go more smoothly.

Before giving your instructions, make sure everybody is listening. Explain carefully and precisely. Once you've done this, check that the students have understood. Don't assume anything. It's not enough to say have you understood? Am I clear? The majority of students will just say 'yes'. A far better way is to ask students to explain back to you what they will be doing. You can then move onto a demonstration of what is required. You could do an example together as a whole class or ask a stronger student to carry out the task with you.

Don't give your instructions too far in advance of the task itself. Explain what is needed immediately before students start the activity. If there's a gap between the instructions

and the activity, students might forget what to do. For example, if your students will be moving to work in groups, first ask them to move, and then give the instructions.

Finally, if you realise that the students are not on track, don't hesitate; stop them and go over your instructions again.

### **1.11 How to seat students**

There are various ways of seating students and each serves a different purpose:

In a horseshoe or circle: this is good for whole class discussions and for creating a cooperative environment. If the chairs have small moveable tables attached, this configuration works well as students can move around easily to form pairs or groups.

Groups of 4 or 6 around a table, a number of such groups around the room: also good for discussion but lends itself more to group work than whole class discussion. If the classroom is small, it's not easy for the teacher to go around and monitor. This organisation works well for small children.

In rows with desks separated: good for tests and exams.

Before going into class, think about what you'll be doing and which seating arrangement will suit you best.

### **1.12 Levels**

Levels can be broken up into:

beginner,

false beginner (a false beginner has probably studied some English previously but will need revision of the basics, including the alphabet and numbers),

elementary,

pre-intermediate,

intermediate,

upper-intermediate,

advanced.

Course books are generally published with one book at each of the levels. Some course book writers choose to focus on some of the levels and to omit others (e.g. elementary and false beginner are often omitted). Different schools give different names to the levels; a school might use numbers or letters rather than names.

You can generally expect an absolute beginner class to have students all at the same level. However, as you move up the levels, differences become apparent. In an advanced class, you might have a student who has lived in the UK and who has a very good level of colloquial, spoken English alongside a university student who masters grammar but not spoken English. In such cases, it will be necessary to provide work

that caters to all needs; for example, sometimes focusing on language work and at other times on spoken English. It will be more important to create balance and do activities that cater to different needs at higher levels. Generally speaking, at the lower levels, students have very similar needs.

For a new teacher, the intermediate levels are the easiest to teach. If you have a choice, request those levels when you first start teaching.

### **1.13 Essential elements for students to learn**

These are the aspects of language that students need to learn and as such are the things you'll be concentrating on in class. They can be broken down into aspects of language and language skills.

Aspects of language include grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functions and levels of formality. Let's take a look at each of these:

Grammar includes tenses, formation of questions and negatives, prepositions, pronouns. This is how many of us have studied languages at school. Before starting to teach you should consult a good grammar book. Books by Michael Swan are excellent; they're very detailed and technical and you might find them difficult at the beginning. If you prefer an easier option, you can look at *Advanced Grammar in Use* by Martin Hewings; this book is intended for high level students but teachers can also learn a lot from it.

Vocabulary: this is a basic building block of language learning. Students need to know words, their meanings, how they are spelt and how they are pronounced. When teaching vocabulary, make sure you explain the meaning as well as the spelling and pronunciation.

Pronunciation: students need to know how to pronounce individual sounds as well as combinations of sounds. As a teacher, you'll focus on the sounds students find difficult. This basically means the sounds that do not exist in the students' mother tongue. For example, the "th" sound is difficult for many learners because their language doesn't have that sound.

Functions are set phrases that we use in specific situations. Examples of functions are the use of "how do you do" when you first meet somebody. "I'll have the fish" when ordering in a restaurant. Functions cannot be translated word for word into another language and they usually only carry meaning in specific situations.

Levels of formality: students need to develop an awareness of and an ability to produce language of varying degrees of formality. Certain situations and contexts call for the use of formal language; e.g. a business letter, a discussion with one's university professor. In other situations, more informal language can be used; e.g. an event for students; an e-mail exchange with a friend. As teachers, we need to raise students' awareness of the varying degrees of formality and help them distinguish between them as well as use them.

Apart from language itself, there are four language skills that students need to learn: listening, reading, writing and speaking.

It may be that it is more important for your students to learn one particular skill. For example, an intellectual property attorney might want to focus on reading documents and speaking. Personal assistants might say that speaking and listening are important skills for them to learn. The amount of time you spend on each skill can vary but they should all be covered to some extent.

Skills can be broken down into written (reading and writing) and oral (speaking and listening). Another, more common, way of classifying the skills is as productive skills and receptive skills. The receptive skills are reading and listening: the students receive and understand the input; the productive skills are speaking and writing because they involve the students in producing language.

However, skills are not entirely separate. We rarely use one skill in isolation. When we speak, we also listen to what others say to us; we read an e-mail and write a reply, we might at the same time ask the person sitting next to us how to spell a certain word – this action will involve listening and speaking. Exceptions might be a day at home reading a favourite novel or watching a film. However, we often talk about what we have read or watched, at a later date. A teacher will attempt to integrate the skills in order to mimic the real world.

You will find that students do not have a uniform level across all the skills and all the elements of language. Students are inevitably stronger in some areas than in others. Some students have a musical ear and can pronounce words and phrases well. Others have a good grasp of grammar or vocabulary. Students are usually stronger in receptive skills than in productive skills meaning that they can understand more than they can produce. This is entirely understandable if you compare it to our competence in our own language; for example we could watch a play by Shakespeare and understand what is going on without being able to produce that type of language. We can also read and understand (most of!) a legal document but we would have difficulty writing one ourselves. It is our role to cater to the varying needs of students, wherever possible.

#### **1.14 Free and controlled language practice**

Language can generally be practised in two ways: controlled or free practice.

In controlled practice, the teacher will choose a language structure that they want their students to focus on. For example, you might want your students to use the present perfect (have + past participle) to talk about experiences. You might organise an activity whereby students ask and answer questions such as:

Student A: Have you ever been to Mexico?

Student B: Yes, I have.

Student A: Have you ever eaten snails?

Student B: Yes, I have.

Student A: Have you ever climbed a mountain?

Student B: No, I haven't.

This type of activity involves students in a discussion but the language is very controlled and is pre-determined by the teacher. Such activities are useful at lower levels or where the objective is to get students producing language automatically without having to think about it too much.

Whilst controlled language practice will help with automatic reactions, it does not replicate real-world conversations. The example above is very false, it appears to be an interrogation and there is no sharing of information. In real-life, student A might reply: "so what did you think of Mexico? I might be going there on holiday myself". Teachers should try to incorporate activities that imitate real-life conversations in the classroom as much as possible in order to prepare students for conversations in the real world.

In free language practice, students use all and any language they know to express themselves. An example of free language practice is a classroom debate on smoking in public. Students give their opinions, others agree or disagree, and counter arguments are put forward. There are no limits on the language that can be used, except for staying polite! There is a greater emphasis on this type of activity at higher levels. For more examples of free language practice, see Chapter 4, Speaking.

Alternatively, the teacher might create situations where certain language is likely to be used. For example, when talking about holiday plans, future tenses will probably be used; in an interview simulation, the present perfect (I've never worked in a shop before) and simple past (I worked for the council from 2000 to 2004) will probably be used. We can predict what might be used but the actual language output is very unpredictable and can contain almost any language the students know. This is sometimes known as freer practice. This type of task is useful to practise a language structure that has been presented recently where it is unnecessary to engage the students in controlled practice.

### **1.15 Activities that provide controlled and freer language practice**

The Communication Games series by Jill Hadfield provides controlled and freer language practice in fun situations.

Find somebody who... is a popular activity to provide controlled and freer practice of language. Students are given a sheet with the following:



Find somebody who takes the bus to work

Find somebody who always eats a big breakfast

Find somebody who likes snakes

Find somebody who plays tennis

Find somebody who lives in the suburbs

Find somebody who reads an English newspaper

Students take their sheets, stand up and move around the classroom asking classmates “do you take the bus to work?” “Do you always eat a big breakfast?” etc. When they find a classmate who replies “yes”, they note the name of that person next to the question. They continue until they have the name of a student for each question. The teacher stops the activity at an appropriate point and asks students what they have found out about their classmates. By repeating the questions, students are engaging in controlled practice of the question form in a communicative setting. Depending on how students treat the answers, they can also get freer language practice; i.e. if they choose to ask further questions of their classmates and whether the teacher encourages this approach.

### **1.16 Accuracy and fluency**

Accuracy and fluency usually refer to oral language work but can refer to written work too. I will describe the differences here in the context of activities to practise speaking.

Accuracy refers to correct use of language; this is often used just after presentation of new language. The objective is to produce correct language rather than to communicate ideas. When the focus is accuracy, the teacher usually deals with error correction immediately; we will look at this in further detail in Chapter 9. Typical tasks include: repetition, drills, controlled conversations, (these terms are explained in this chapter and in Chapter 2). These tasks are useful when introducing and practising new language.

If the focus is fluency, the teacher allows students to express themselves freely without interruption. The aim is to help students speak fluently and with ease. The teacher does not correct immediately, the idea being that too much correction interferes with the flow of conversation. In such situations, the teacher notes down errors and comments on them after the activity. The role of the teacher in this type of activity is to ease difficulties in communication and prompt where necessary.

Students need practice in both accuracy and fluency if they are to speak proficiently. At low levels, there will be more focus on accuracy, simply because students don't know enough language for lengthy fluency work. At higher levels, the focus will be mainly, but not entirely, on fluency.

## 1.17 Using a course book

You should look at any course book you are about to use with a critical eye. Check over each unit to see whether it suits your students' goals. If so, you can go ahead with it. If not, you might want to choose a different book or stick with it and find other material that covers the areas that are lacking. This can apply to whole units or parts of them. There might be parts of the book that are too difficult or too easy for your students; you might consider leaving those bits out or supplementing them. You might also want to do things in a different order to how it appears in the course book. The key is to think about your students. Remember you're teaching students not teaching a course book. It's important to look at these aspects before you start using the book. It's more difficult to change a book when you've started using it.

## 1.18 Choosing a course book

If you are asked to choose a course book, here are some guidelines to help you through. It is a list of questions; I suggest you go through the course book, answering each of the questions.

**Topics:** do you think the topics will interest your students? Will students have something to say about the subjects?

**Aims of students:** will the book cater to your students' needs? First think about your students' reasons for learning; their aims might be to learn general English. On the other hand, you might have a class who are studying because they have a specific purpose in mind, e.g. participating in meetings in English. If so, check whether the book will provide enough practice in such work.

**Completeness:** does the book provide enough explanation and practice of language and skills? Is there enough practice of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation? Is there enough skills work? Or will you need to supplement? Remember, supplementing will take time.

**Skills:** how does the book deal with the four skills? Are they all dealt with adequately? Does this correspond to the needs of your learners?

**Approach:** think about the approach to the activities and language – will it suit your students and your own teaching style?

**Syllabus:** is the book pitched at the right level (e.g. not all intermediate books are at the same level); check this carefully by looking at how language work is presented. Does the book follow on from the students' previous course book?

**Additional materials:** what extras accompany the course book? Is there a teacher's book, a workbook, a cassette or CD? What are these like? Can you get hold of them easily? If not, can the book be used without them?

**Availability:** how easily can you get hold of multiple copies of a book? Even if it's the best course book on earth, it won't help you if it can't be delivered on time.

Flickability: this refers to the attractiveness of the book; flick through the book and note whether it looks appealing or dry and boring. Obviously, not the most important of the criteria!

Finally, you have to like the book.

### **1.19 Roles of the teacher**

You will find yourself in various roles in the classroom. The most common are:

**Giving instructions:** obviously in the classroom, the teacher will tell students what activities they are going to do and how they are going to do them.

**Facilitating:** this involves creating situations where students can use English. You will do this through your choice of activities.

**Setting up activities:** similar to giving instructions. Giving instructions entails telling students what they are going to do; setting up the activity involves organising students into work groups, handing out worksheets, preparing a cassette or CD for a listening activity.

**Correcting:** this is vital if your students are going to learn. If your students don't know they've made a mistake, they'll continue making the same mistake.

**Eliciting:** this involves getting explanations from your students rather than always providing them yourself.

**Motivating:** a teacher needs to keep his/her students motivated and engaged in the work being done. You will do this through your own positive approach to activities and students and careful choice of material, bearing in mind what interests your students.

**Explaining language:** look at where this comes, not top of the list. Whilst language explanations are important, it is not your only job in the classroom; use your students for language explanations and elicit rules from them, where possible.

The roles described above differ from traditional teaching styles where the teacher explained everything and led all activities. Students who are used to traditional teaching might feel uncomfortable when faced with a teacher taking on different roles. You should be aware of this and be sensitive to their opinions. However, you should continue teaching in a way that has been proved effective and maybe explain to students why you are teaching in that way. A little knowledge will help reduce students' resistance.

## **CHAPTER 2: APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH**

In language teaching theory, a distinction is often made between teaching approaches and teaching methodologies. For ease of understanding, I will refer to all the following as methods. I have described the methods in chronological order, starting with traditional methods and moving towards more contemporary methods. Please don't assume that the first ones I describe are the most prominent or ones I recommend.

### **2.1 Grammar translation method**

This method was prevalent in schools throughout the beginning of the 20th century; its use continued long afterwards and many cultures still expect language to be taught using this method.

The method consists of studying written texts, translating them into the students' own language and carrying out a study of grammar. There is little attention given to the use of the spoken language. I learnt French through this method and whilst I was able to read and translate complicated texts, I was unable to buy a loaf of bread when I went on holiday to France.

It has been replaced by methods that focus on spoken language and I advise you to familiarise yourself with these newer methods and to use them. However, if you're going to teach in a traditional culture that values the grammar-translation method, you could do the occasional activity of that type just out of respect for students' preferences.

### **2.2 Audio-lingual method**

This method grew out of behaviourist psychology. It involves providing a stimulus to which students respond; if the response is correct, the students are praised in order to reinforce the correct use of language and ultimately to reinforce learning. Language is presented in a very controlled way; i.e. one language point at a time is studied and worked on. Grammar explanations are kept to a minimum and progress is made through repetition.

In a typical lesson, the teacher might show pictures of people in various situations: for example 3 people with their possessions; one woman has got a big house, a beautiful car, etc; one man has a small house and an old car and one man has nothing.

The assumption is that the students know the words: house, car, some and any. The teacher shows a picture and says "she's got a big house", the teacher repeats the phrase and invites students to repeat. Students are praised if they get it correct. If they get it wrong, the teacher repeats and asks students to say it again. The teacher then moves onto the next picture and says, "he's got an old car" this is repeated by the teacher and then students are asked to repeat. The teacher continues with the third person and the phrase "he hasn't got any money". The teacher continues until all forms have been presented and practised. The teacher might then show pictures randomly

(known as a prompt) and invite students to say what possessions the characters have got.

Oral prompts can also be given and students are invited to make sentences with the prompts. For example:

Teacher (T) says: she / big house

Students (Ss) say: she's got a big house

T: he / old car

Ss: he's got an old car

T: she / old car

Ss: she hasn't got an old car

Such exercises are known as drills and are used to encourage automatic use of language; i.e. students respond automatically without stopping to think about what they're saying.

When students have mastered the structure (in the same lesson or in the following lesson) the teacher might present the question form by showing the picture of the woman and saying "big house; has she got a big house?". The lesson will continue in the same way as above. This description of a lesson has been adapted from the course book "Streamlines".

Lessons in this approach are very predictable but at lower levels they provide a familiar environment where students at least get the chance to produce the phrase orally and correctly. This method has been criticised for not being communicative; i.e. there is no real communication; there is no need to say 'she's got a big house; everybody can see she has!

### **2.3 Communicative approach**

This approach developed out of a need to have students communicating for real. It is based on the theory that children acquire language rules by using language rather than through the study of grammar. It involves creating situations where the students have a genuine need to say something, just as children do. I'll illustrate this by describing two approaches to the same activity.

Let's say you've set up an activity where your students are planning a dinner party. They've decided what food to cook and serve and have the recipes as well as ingredients and quantities required. They're about to go shopping and are writing up their shopping lists. You could give each student the list of ingredients and quantities and tell them to perform the following dialogue:

Ingredients and quantities:

1kg lamb

1 kg potatoes

500g tin of tomatoes

50g butter

500g apricots

1 pot of yoghurt

Conversation:

How much lamb do we need to buy?

1 kilo will be enough.

Do we need any butter?

Yes, 50g will be enough.

This will provide speaking practice but will not create a real need for communication; students already know what they need to buy from the shops because they all have the list.

If you prepare 2 lists – each contains all the ingredients needed but on one list the quantities for some items are noted and the other list contains the quantities needed for the remaining items. Thus:

List A	List B
1kg lamb	lamb
1 kg potatoes	potatoes
500g tin of tomatoes	tomatoes
Butter	50g butter
Apricots	500g apricots
Yoghurt	1 pot of yoghurt

You can now give list A to one student and list B to another student and instruct them to carry out the dialogue below in pairs:

How much lamb do we need to buy?

1 kilo will be enough.

Do we need any butter?

Yes, 50g will be enough.

There will be a real need for communication because the student with list A doesn't know how much butter is required. Similarly, the student with list B doesn't know how much lamb is needed. Such activities are called information gaps because there is a gap between the various bits of information the students have.

The communicative approach often refers to speaking activities, however the other skills can also be practised in a communicative way. The essential element is to ensure that there is a reason for carrying out the task other than just practising language.

## **2.4 PPP**

PPP stands for presentation, practice, and production. It is a fairly traditional way to structure a lesson that was popular throughout the 1980's. It proved to be beneficial at lower levels and is still widely used today.

Presentation involves, as the name suggests, presenting a language point. This is usually done by the teacher. Presentation might be similar to the audio-lingual approach through the use of pictures and focused learning. It can also be achieved through explanation and demonstration (for definitions, see Chapter 3). Practice refers to controlled practice (see Chapter 1); it involves students using the target language in a controlled way. This might involve drills, controlled written and speaking activities, and repetition. Production refers to freer practice; students use the target language in sentences of their own. They might also combine it with other language they know. It is not the same as free speaking practice. For example, after studying "have you ever" question forms to talk about experiences (e.g. have you ever been to Mexico? have you ever eaten snails?) students work in pairs to ask each other about their own experiences. The structure "have you ever" will be the same throughout, but the vocabulary will vary. This is known as freer practice.

## **2.5 Task-based learning**

In a task-based lesson, the teacher sets a task for students to do that involves the use of language not yet studied in class or language studied previously that the teacher wishes to revise. The language point chosen is known as target language. The task might be an activity from the course book that was intended as practice of a language point or an activity from a supplementary source. The teacher sets up the task and observes students as they get on with it. The teacher pays particular attention to the students' performance with the target language. The teacher should note down errors but not correct them during the activity. For example in an exercise to check students' knowledge of prepositions of time, the teacher might set up an activity which involves

students deciding when and where to meet. While students are speaking, the teacher might note the use of prepositions (both good and poor use): on Monday, in the afternoon, at 5pm, etc.

Depending on how well (or how badly) students performed, the teacher will decide whether to conduct thorough presentation and practice of the language or whether to revise and practise it briefly. The decision is made according to performance on the task. This can then be followed up with a repetition of the original activity or one that is similar. You and your students can compare performance on the original and final task.

I am outlining the structure of a task-based lesson but I do not advise its use if you are very new to teaching. It requires thorough knowledge of the language point and an ability to handle unexpected questions about the language. You will need to know about it because some course books (e.g. Cutting Edge) follow this format. You can experiment with this approach when you are more experienced and with a language item you know well.

## **2.6 ESA**

ESA stands for engage – study – activate. Let's take a look at each individual component.

Engage involves getting the students' attention or interest, getting them involved. You could achieve this through the use of a personal story told by the teacher, a picture that stimulates discussion or anything else that awakens students' interest. The idea is that if students are involved or engaged, they are more open to the learning process.

Study as the name suggests involves focus on a language point. This could be grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation or how a written text is organised. The possibilities are endless. It can involve the teacher explaining or students working out the rules for themselves using examples as a basis.

Activating involves having students use the language, preferably in a realistic context that is as close to real life as possible. Try to incorporate activities that have students using any language they know and not just focused on one structure (controlled language use).

You can use all three ESA stages in one lesson but not necessarily in that order. You could engage the students, then activate language through a speaking activity and then study language difficulties arising from the activity. You might also have a lesson devoted wholly to the skill of speaking; in which case students would be engaged and language activated. Language study could take place in the previous lesson.

I particularly like this method because it highlights the necessity of engaging students in what they are doing.



## **2.7 Humanistic**

The involvement of the whole person in the learning experience is central to the humanistic approach. A supportive atmosphere is encouraged in the classroom where students are listened to, their comments accepted without judgement and they are encouraged to share their feelings and experiences. Activities are used that involve students talking about their feelings and experiences. Students may be involved in fixing the aims for the course or for one lesson. A teacher may enter the classroom with no plan and just ask students what they want to do that day and the teacher goes with the flow (maybe not an approach to be adopted by a very new teacher).

Speaking as a Psychology graduate, I think care is needed in this type of approach; some people or some cultures might be uncomfortable unveiling their feelings in front of people they might not know well. However, I fully agree with the advantages of creating a supportive, non-judgemental learning environment.

## **2.8 Lexical approach**

The underlying principle of this method is that grammar and vocabulary cannot be strictly divided as is often the case in traditional teaching methods. A further notion is that language is made up of lexical items using grammar to support them rather than being made up of grammatical structures incorporating lexis. Lexical items are words or chunks of words, which have their own meaning. For example, the following combinations of words have different meanings to the individual elements that make them up: by the way, look into, video recorder. Longer structures are also considered to be lexical items, e.g. I just wanted to say that....

The theory is that we learn a language by learning lexical items and not by learning grammar. Accordingly, the main focus of the work is lexical items rather than syntax or grammatical rules. Critics have said that it difficult to know in which order lexical items should be taught. Proponents of this method counter this by saying that the syllabus is organised according to collocation. Collocation refers to words that are frequently used together, e.g. make a phone call, make an appointment, heavy rain, by accident.

A further principle of this method is to teach through: observation, hypothesis and experimentation. The observe phase involves being exposed to language, for example a text to be read. Students are encouraged to deduce the meaning of unknown language (this will be covered in Chapter 3), this phase is known as hypothesis. The experiment phase involves using the language.

## **2.9 A final word on teaching methods**

Of course there are other approaches to teaching, however, the above are the main ones you should be aware of. I suggest you look at any course book you're about to use and see whether it favours one of the approaches above. You will find that after some time teaching, you will have a preference for one (or more) approach over the others. You might also find that different approaches work well with different students and with different levels. Don't worry too much about methodology at the beginning; just do what feels right to you and what you see produces results in your classes.

## CHAPTER 3: PRESENTING AND PRACTISING LANGUAGE

As stated in Chapter 1, students need to learn various aspects of language: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and functions. In order to learn this language, teachers need to present the new language to students and create situations where the language can be practised. Revision and further practice are also essential in subsequent lessons. The amount of revision carried out in later lessons will depend on the students' level and on their mastery of the language point.

Here we will look at how to present grammar, vocabulary and functions, how to revise language and how to create situations to practise both new and known language. Pronunciation will be the topic of a separate chapter.

From a language learner's point of view, presentation of language is probably the most important aspect of studying English. Students expect lessons to contain some degree of language study, either long and intensive or short and sharp, depending on whichever is appropriate – it's most often what they note in their books and take away with them.

The stages are:

1. find out how much students already know about the language point;
2. presentation;
3. check students have understood the presentation;
4. practice (controlled and/or free).

In following lessons:

1. If it was the first time the students encountered the language item, you can do another brief presentation and then do some more activities to practise the language.
2. If students are familiar with the language item, you can go immediately to more practice activities.

### 3.1 Stage 1: Pre-checking knowledge

Before presenting any language, it is useful to find out how much your students know about the language point in question. You can get an idea of what they have studied by looking through their course book and previous work. However, the fact that the students have studied a particular language point does not mean they know it. In class, you can check to what extent they know the language by eliciting phrases that include the language point. This can be done relatively quickly; e.g. you can show pictures of people in action to your students and ask them what the characters are doing to check

knowledge of present continuous and / or verbs of action (he's running, she's dancing, they're playing tennis).

You can also check the extent of their knowledge by asking them to carry out a speaking activity that requires use of the language point e.g. speaking about last year's holidays to ascertain students' knowledge of the simple past and other past tenses. This will take longer but you will have more of an idea of what students know.

You can take an exercise from your course book or workbook for this pre-checking stage. Course books contain many exercises that are intended to be used as practice after the presentation stage. You can take one of these exercises and use it before presentation to find out students' level.

You can also design your own exercises. For example, if you want to find out whether beginner or elementary level students are familiar with "wh" question words (who, what, when, where, why) you could prepare a list of questions with "wh" words and the corresponding answers. Mix up the questions and answers and ask students to re-organise them. Below is an example:

What did she do?	At 3pm.
What time did she do it?	Because she thinks Meryl Streep is a brilliant actress.
Who did she do it with?	She went to see "The Devil Wears Prada".
When did she do it?	At the cinema.
Where did she do it?	Her best friend.
Why did she do it?	On Saturday.

Comment: each question is similar to avoid giving away too many clues and to keep the focus on the "wh" word.

You can prepare similar exercises where students match items to practise other language points: e.g. words and their definitions to check knowledge of vocabulary. You can also use matching exercises to teach first and second conditionals. The first conditional involves the use of simple present and will, e.g. if it rains tomorrow, I'll stay at home. The second conditional involves the use of simple past and would, e.g. if I won a million dollars, I'd buy a big house.

A further example is: if you are about to teach your students how to form questions through word order inversion; you can first of all check to what extent they can form questions already.

A quick and simple way to check students' knowledge of word order is to write out some simple sentences and then to jumble up the words. I suggest you use approximately ten sentences varying in difficulty. Give students the jumbled sentences and ask them to put words in the right order.

Where did you buy your dress?	Buy / dress / where / your / you / did /
What time do you usually go to bed?	Usually / time / go / you / what / do / bed / to
What is your mother's name?	Mother's / what / name / your / is

Organising activities such as the above can be used to pre-check any language point that involves knowledge of word order.

Of course, students can do exercises such as those above in pairs. This can help create an environment of cooperation, and works well when you want a general idea of how well the class copes with the language item. However, if you want to know the level of knowledge of individual students, pay very close attention while they're working.

The beauty of exercises such as those above is that they are easy to prepare and they can be used to check extent of knowledge or be used as revision in a subsequent lesson. And why not, occasionally, use the same activity to pre-check knowledge and to revise? This will allow you and your students to compare initial performance with performance post-presentation of language. It can be very motivating for students to see how well they have progressed.

### **3.2 Stage 2: Presentation**

There are a variety of ways to present language; they vary in the amount of student and teacher involvement. I will outline and comment on some options below.

#### **3.2.1 Explanation**

You can give an explanation in English or in the students' mother tongue. For example, you can explain that the simple past is used for an action at a specific time in the past and that the past perfect tense is used for an action that happened previous to that action.

When I got home last night my husband had already cooked dinner.

Got = simple past      had cooked = past perfect (action happened before I got home)

(Change to husband to wife if you think it's more appropriate for your students!)

Students used to a traditional way of teaching tend to like and expect this type of presentation. The downside is that students might not understand the explanation; very often the language used in the explanation is more complex than the structure itself. It also requires an understanding of syntax and the words used to describe language (verb, object, etc). You can get around this by giving examples (as I did above) or by using the students' mother tongue briefly. If you choose explanation as a method of presenting, I suggest you make a note on your lesson plan of what you intend to say in class as well as example sentences.

### **3.2.2 Demonstration**

You can demonstrate the language you wish to teach. For example, if you get students' attention and drop your pen on the floor, you can say, "I've just dropped my pen". You can also use demonstration to teach the present continuous for actions happening at the moment; e.g. I'm writing on the board; Susan is listening to me. You can use mime to demonstrate action verbs: climbing, running, walking, etc. You can also use objects or the students themselves to teach comparatives and superlatives: John is taller than Susan. Stephen is the tallest person in the class.

Demonstration works well for some language points but not all; it's best for things happening around the present moment and action verbs. One disadvantage is that students may not understand the demonstration; it is advisable to follow up a demonstration with an explanation.

### **3.2.3 Illustration**

This method is excellent for teaching vocabulary, especially at lower levels. You can show pictures of objects you want to teach; you can draw items on the board or cut pictures out of magazines. You can even use the real item (known as realia); it is very memorable for students to see spoons, forks, plates, bracelets, watches, buttons, etc in class. The use of pictures is also memorable, especially for visual learners. It is also easy and time efficient to go back to the language item: you just hold up the item and invite students to tell you what it is, no need for an explanation or complicated elicitation.

You can also use this method to teach structures. For example, if you want to teach the present perfect continuous, e.g. He's been doing his homework since 7pm. You can show, or draw, a picture of John at 7pm settling down to his homework. You can then show a picture of him at 9pm, still doing his homework. You can use the situation to teach or elicit "he's been doing his homework since 7pm".

One drawback of illustration is that it is time-consuming for the teacher to gather together items before the lesson and they can be heavy to carry in to class. Pictures can help you get around this; I suggest you start building up a picture bank as soon as possible.

### **3.2.4 Discovery / deducing meanings**

This approach guides students to learn for themselves rather than the teacher teaching the language point directly. The discovery method involves students studying language items in a text or in isolated sentences. If isolated sentences are used, it's preferable to provide a context. Students deduce grammatical rules, use of tenses, use of the infinitive contrasted with use of verb with -ing. or meanings of words from what they read. (The possibilities are endless). Students then check with the teacher whether their deductions are correct.

For example, you can give your students the following sentences and ask them to tell you the names of the tenses used (present perfect and simple past) and to tell you why

they are used: (simple past to talk about a specific time in the past and present perfect to talk about experiences).

I've never been to Brazil: present perfect to talk about experiences.

She's never eaten snails: present perfect to talk about experiences.

We went to Corsica on holiday last year: simple past to talk about a specific time in the past.

I had beef for dinner last night: simple past to talk about a specific time in the past.

To give a personal example, many years ago I studied elementary German. One day our teacher asked us to read a text relating what the writer had done the previous day and to answer questions on this text. The text contained elements such as the following:

*Yesterday I got up late, ate breakfast quickly and had a shower. I left the house at 8.30.*

We all knew the German for yesterday, get up, eat, have and leave; this meant that we were able to understand the text even though we had never studied the German equivalent of got, ate, had and left. Our teacher then proceeded to a study of language; she put 2 columns on the board with the headings every day and yesterday. In the every day column, she wrote: get up, eat breakfast, have a shower, leave the house. She asked us to provide the verb forms for the yesterday column and then asked us why the verb form was spelt differently: they're in the past tense of course. She elicited from us the name of the tense and the verb forms even though we were new to this structure.

This is a highly effective method of teaching; it involves students 100% in the lesson; the source of knowledge becomes the class rather than the teacher; the teacher has the chance to see who knows the language item and to what extent. This helps plan subsequent lessons; it might be that your students know the structure and just require brief revision and practice. Alternatively, they might need a complete presentation, explanation and extensive practice. It is also very memorable. I studied German almost 20 years ago and can still remember this lesson and the feeling of joy at understanding and discovering this language for myself.

This approach works well for revising language that students should already know and it can be used for new language if the meaning is obvious (as in the example above). This approach engages students in the learning process and as such it is more memorable, especially if they get it right! Using this method in class will encourage students to do the same thing outside the classroom whenever they see the written word; this will be an excellent learning tool for them.

Disadvantages are that students might be resistant to this method if they're not used to it. If you use this method once and you explain the language point after the discovery

phase, they will accept it more easily on subsequent occasions. Another drawback is that it requires a teacher to have thorough knowledge of the language point. Students sometimes come up with something they've heard somewhere else and have misunderstood and you will need to confirm or correct, what they say. I suggest you experiment with this method on a language point you know well and not the first time you teach a complicated structure!

### **3.3 Stage 3: Check students' understanding**

When you have completed your presentation of language, you will need to check whether students have understood. It is not enough to ask students whether they understand or whether everything is clear. The result will simply be their assurances that they understand. It is far better to devise a method that checks they have understood.

For example, after presenting question formation involving present simple you could write on the board: "she likes animals" and invite students to make the question. Students should be able to say "does she like animals?". You can invite a student to the board to write the question or invite the class to produce it orally. You could accidentally add an "s" to like: "does she likes animals?" or make a similar error to see whether students notice and correct it. If so, make sure you remove the extra "s" so students don't copy it into their books.

You can also use a technique called concept check questions (CCQs). You need to ask questions that will lead students to the precise meaning of the language item. First of all check the precise meaning of the language item and then create questions accordingly.

For example, comparative adjectives are used to describe two things that differ and to compare the elements that differ. In the sentence: Sally is taller than Jane, you could ask the students:

Are Sally and Jane are the same size? (No).

Is Jane is taller than Sally? (No).

Is Jane shorter than Sally? (Yes).

If students answer the questions correctly, you can assume that they've understood the language point.

### **3.4 Stage 4: Practising language points**

After presenting language, set a practice activity that allows students to use the language they have just studied. This should be done as soon as possible after the presentation of the language point in order to consolidate learning. Controlled practice and freer practice (for definitions see Chapter 1) are useful at lower levels. At higher levels, you might be able to skip controlled practice and move directly to free practice.

The following activity is an example of controlled practice of questions and short answers: e.g. did she leave work late? Yes, she did or no, she didn't. The example is in the simple past but you can change the tense. The objective of the activity is to answer questions without using the words yes or no.

Start by demonstrating the activity to the class. Students ask you questions about what you did yesterday; you reply without hesitating and without using the words "yes" or "no". For the first round, you could write some questions on the board as prompts, so students don't spend too long formulating their questions. Example:

Did you go to work yesterday?

Did you finish work at 6pm?

Did you have lunch with friends?

Students read out the questions and the person in the hot seat (this is the teacher during the presentation phase) responds with I did or I didn't.

You continue with this for one minute. To help with timing, you can take in a stopwatch, an egg timer or ask a student to time you. If anybody uses the words yes or no, they are eliminated. If somebody speaks for one minute without using those words, he/she gets 10 points. You could then ask a student to come to the front of the class to provide further demonstration of the activity.

When students are clear about what is expected of them, separate them into groups of at least three. One person is in the hot seat and the others ask questions; one person is responsible for keeping an eye on the time.

You can find more games that provide controlled practice of language in the Communication Games series.

### **3.5 Stage 5: Revision**

You will need to go back in later lessons and review the new language briefly. Try to vary presentations by using a different presentation method the second time. Use presentation methods in a logical order. For example, use explanation before discovery and not vice versa. Doing a brief second presentation will remind students and give them a chance to clear up any outstanding questions and will help any students who were absent in the previous lesson. You should also give further practice of the language item. Try to introduce variety into the exercises; if your course book contains a number of exercises, decide which are suitable for use in the first lesson and which you will save for revision on another day.

### **3.6 A final word on presenting and practising language**

I suggest you go through your course book and see how language is presented and practised. You can decide whether the book's approach is the best method for your students and for the language point. Also decide whether the practice exercises are



sufficient. You can follow the procedure in the book, adapt it, supplement it or omit exercises as you think necessary.

## CHAPTER 4: SPEAKING

Speaking is one of the most difficult aspects for students to master. This is hardly surprising when one considers everything that is involved when speaking: ideas, what to say, language, how to use grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation as well as listening to and reacting to the person you are communicating with. Any learner of a foreign language can confirm how difficult speaking is.

It is important to give students as many opportunities as possible to speak in a supportive environment. Gaining confidence will help students speak more easily. You can achieve this by:

- setting controlled speaking tasks and moving gradually towards freer speaking tasks;
- setting tasks that are at the right level for the students or at a level lower than their receptive skills;
- setting tasks that are easily achievable and gradually moving towards more challenging tasks;
- praising students' efforts;
- using error correction sensitively (more about this in Chapter 9);
- creating an atmosphere where students don't laugh at other people's efforts.

The focus of this chapter will be free speaking activities and fluency, not controlled activities and accuracy. For comments on controlled and freer practice, see Chapter 1.

There are three key elements to remember when planning and setting up speaking activities:

1. Language used
2. Preparation
3. Why are the students speaking?

### 4.1 Language

When planning any speaking activity with students, analyse carefully the language they will be using to carry out the activity. If you use an activity from an EFL book, you will probably find comments on the language. If not, think about what you would say yourself when doing the activity and consider whether your students have learnt the language items yet.

Don't make any assumptions about students' knowledge. Spend some time in class reviewing the language that will be used. If students don't have the language required to carry out the task, the results will be demotivation and frustration. Students might even resort to doing the task in their own language. Of course, you can work on the language in one lesson and review it very quickly in the following lesson before doing the speaking work.

## **4.2 Preparation**

Preparation is vital as it will help students to speak more easily.

One aspect of preparation is warming students up to the subject matter. If they are to communicate well, it's important to engage them in the topic. This can be done by checking their prior knowledge and experience of the topic; e.g. if the speaking task is based on driving in big cities, ask them about their experiences of driving in big cities, what they think about it, do they have any anecdotes or unpleasant experiences they could share with the class? and so on. This phase can also be used to introduce vocabulary.

It's also important to give students time to prepare what they are going to say and how they're going to say it. This preparation can be done in pairs or groups. Give them time to consider their ideas and think about the language they will use. They can also do mini-rehearsals, which will build up their confidence and improve the end result.

## **4.3 Reason for speaking**

Students need to feel that there is a real reason for speaking. This is often referred to as the communicative element. Make sure there is a reason for speaking; i.e. that the students are communicating something the others don't know or that the others would like to hear about. Examples of tasks involving real communication include: information gap, tasks involving an element of persuasion, problem solving and role play (see examples below).

Finally, as with all aspects of teaching, it is important to introduce variety and to choose topics that you think will interest your students.

## **4.4 TYPES OF SPEAKING ACTIVITIES**

### **4.4.1 Information gap**

Each student in the group has some information required to complete the task or activity; the aim is to share the information and to complete the task. Students don't know what the others are going to say; and as such it imitates real life conversation. An example being: Students work in pairs; student A has a simple picture which (s)he doesn't show to B; student B has a blank piece of paper. Student A describes the picture; student B listens and draws it. Finally, students compare what B drew with the original.

You can also use spot the difference pictures; this is where you have two pictures identical apart from a number of small differences. Students work in pairs, they have one picture each; they each describe their picture without showing it to their partner. Through detailed description, they try to find the differences between the two pictures.

In the examples above, your choice of picture will determine the type of language used. For example, a street scene will generate different language to a picture of a

dinner party. Bear this in mind when planning and during the language preparation stage.

#### **4.4.2 Discussions: reaching a consensus**

Choose one of the following subjects: 10 things to take into space, 10 things to take to a desert island, 10 things to take into a desert....

Ask students to work alone and to brainstorm 10 things they would take with them. Alternatively, prepare a list of 20 objects and each person chooses ten from the list. Ask students to discuss their lists in pairs and to come to a consensus; they will need to convince each other that their chosen objects are the most useful. When the pairs have agreed on their lists i.e. they have a new list of 10 items, pair up pairs so that students are working in groups of four. The groups of 4 now have to come to a consensus. Continue pairing up groups to form larger groups until you think the students have lost interest. Conduct feedback on the outcome and the language used.

This is commonly known as the NASA game; I first read about it in The New Cambridge English Course by Swan and Walter.

#### **4.4.3 Discussions: moral dilemma**

A variation on the theme of consensus. Explain to students that a single mother who doesn't have much money has been caught stealing milk. She explains why she did it: to feed her young children. Give students roles, e.g. store detective, social worker, and shoplifter's friend. Allow time for preparation in groups: all the social workers together, all the store detectives work together, and all the friends work together. When everybody is ready, regroup the students so that there is 1 store detective, 1 social worker and 1 friend in each group; students say how they would deal with the situation. They have to convince each other that their opinion is the valid one.

#### **4.4.4 Discussions involving opinions**

Try to use topics that will generate varying opinions rather than having everybody agree. Typical examples include life in the city and life in the country, environmental issues, and traditional and alternative medicine. You can also use controversial subjects and topics that are currently in the news.

Discussions involving opinions work well in a group that has something to say. If the class is short on ideas or afraid of voicing a controversial opinion, these activities don't work so well. You can overcome this by giving students time to prepare what they'll say. You can also outline the various general attitudes to the subject e.g. opinions for and against the new underground transport system in the town where you work. Students decide what their opinions are. They prepare in groups first; put students with the same opinion together and tell them to prepare their arguments as well as counter-arguments to what the others will say. You can then regroup students so that students with different opinions are together.

#### **4.4.5 Debates**

This involves choosing a controversial topic; one speaker presents one point of view on the topic and a second speaker presents a differing opinion. Debates are good at advanced levels. It's a good idea to give some input on the topic matter first. For example, you could do a listening or reading activity on the same subject. Give students time to prepare what they will say; you might even prompt them by giving them ideas on the topic and outlining common opinions. Students can prepare in groups and practise the debates in groups before they present to the whole class. Students can ask each other questions after the presentation and vote on which opinion is the most convincing.

#### **4.4.6 Spontaneous conversations**

Sometimes real uncontrolled conversation breaks out in class. This can be where students communicate something about themselves that others are interested in (something the student did at the weekend, a film they saw, a place they visited). If time allows, it is good to allow this type of conversation to continue because it has a real communicative purpose. The teacher's role throughout is to prompt, help with language or communication difficulties. Correction should be kept to a minimum and carried out at the end of the discussion. This type of conversation can be excellent when it is spontaneous but it works less well if the teacher contrives to make it happen.

#### **4.4.7 Role play**

This involves students taking on a role and carrying out a discussion with each person playing their role. For example, the local council wishes to introduce a new system and location for dumping waste. Some students play local councillors, others are local residents, others are members of an environmental organisation and others are managers and employees of the company being asked to carry out the work. The teacher describes and sets up the situation. The students prepare in groups, those playing the same roles prepare together. They then form new groups to carry out the discussion.

#### **Tips and advice for role plays:**

choose the topic carefully because if students don't have anything to say, the role play won't work;

this type of activity can take a long time to set up; the preparation phase is essential if the activity is to work well. Don't be tempted to skip preparation to save time;

the time needed for input of the topic and language as well as preparation, the actual role play and feedback means that you need to allow a lot of time. Don't expect to be able to do a role play quickly;

during feedback after a role play it is important to comment on the content of what was said as well as on language used.

If you want to introduce an element of role play without making it into a long and extended exercise, incorporate the work into a reading or listening skills lesson. After

reading a text or listening to a recording, students role play a television interviewer and one of the characters from the text or recording. Interviewers prepare questions together in groups; interviewees flesh out the character in groups. Students then pair up as one interviewer and one interviewee.

#### **4.4.8 Problem solving: reorganising the zoo**

Explain to the students that the local zoo is undergoing re-organisation and/or that new animals are being welcomed into the zoo. The students are given a plan of the zoo; the names of types of animals and certain criteria e.g. some animals cannot be close to each other e.g. the deer and tiger: the deer would be afraid. Some animals don't smell too good so they should not be close to the café. Avoid frightening or dangerous animals at the entrance: children would be put off. They need to decide where each animal will be housed; it's important to come to a consensus within the group so students will need to persuade each other that their opinion is the best. I first read about this activity in Penny Ur's *Discussions That Work*.

#### **4.4.9 Discussion about jobs (based on an activity in Discussions A-Z Intermediate)**

Give students a list of occupations; dictate the list or show pictures to elicit the job title. Examples include: teacher, stockbroker, waiter, secretary, dentist, nurse, taxi driver, dinner lady, window cleaner, architect, hairdresser, cleaner, air traffic controller.

Ask students to discuss the jobs freely using the following questions as prompts:

What are the daily tasks carried out in each of the jobs?

In your opinion, which job is the most interesting, boring, unpleasant, stressful, rewarding, important to society?

Which job is best-paid, most badly-paid?

Do you know someone who does any of these jobs?

Which job would you most like to do and why?

Which job would you least like to do and why?

#### **4.4.10 Discussions based on pictures**

It is a good idea to make a collection of pictures from magazines, newspapers, the Internet, etc. You can use them for a variety of purposes including using them as prompts in your speaking classes. Here are three simple ideas that can be used with any picture:

You can ask students to simply describe the pictures: what is happening? How many people are there? and so on.

What are the people in the picture thinking? How do you think they are feeling? Why are they sitting there? (or whatever it is they're doing). What happened previously? What is going to happen next? What are they talking about?

Prepare and act out a conversation between the characters.

The last two activities involve students interpreting and imagining about the content of the picture.

#### **4.4.11 Topic prompts**

Prepare a list of topics that you have been working on recently in class and/or topics you know your students are interested in. Write each topic on a slip of paper and put all the slips in a box, bag, hat or envelope. In class, invite students to take out a slip of paper and to speak to the class about the topic. Other students can ask questions and make comments.

#### **4.5 A final word on speaking activities**

I have described the role of speaking separately from other skills but it is quite rare for a lesson to be devoted wholly to speaking. As a lead up to a speaking activity, students might listen to a cassette or read a text on the subject. If students are speaking, obviously some of them are also listening. So we can see that skills are rarely practised in isolation. It is also not desirable for the lesson to be structured in that way since it would not imitate real life situations.

## CHAPTER 5: LISTENING

Listening is one of the receptive skills and as such it involves students in capturing and understanding the input of English. Reading, the other receptive skill, involves students in understanding and interpreting the written word. Listening is probably more difficult than reading because students often recognise the written word more easily than they recognise the spoken word. Furthermore when reading, students can go back and re-read a phrase whereas with listening they only get one chance. With reading, it's the reader who sets the pace whereas with listening it's the speaker or recording that sets the pace.

Because of these issues, many students find listening difficult. Listening tasks can be very disheartening and demotivating, especially if students have had a previous negative experience. It is therefore important to give our students plenty of opportunities to practise the skill of listening in a supportive environment that helps them to learn. We need to design tasks that help them learn rather than merely testing their abilities. This means that we guide them through the recording, pre-teach language and highlight the essential points of the recording. This is in contrast to testing, where the teacher simply plays the recording and the students listen and answer questions.

We can help learning through a variety of methods including preparing students carefully for the listening activities they are about to do, pre-teaching difficult language, by choosing a recording that is suitable for their level. Techniques for teaching listening can be found in this chapter.

Before describing how to approach a listening activity, let's look at the skills and sub-skills associated with listening:

### 5.1 Listening for gist

This is where somebody listens in order to get the main idea of what is being said without focusing on specific details and without hesitating over unknown words. For example, a native English speaker says to a non-native English speaker: "would you like to join us for dinner one evening?". In this instance, it is important that the listener understands (s)he is being invited to dinner. It is not essential for the listener to understand every word. If the words "join us" are new to the listener, we would hope that (s)he can still recognise the statement as an invitation, i.e. (s)he is listening for gist.

Students are often reluctant to practise listening for gist; many of them think it is essential to understand every word that is said. Many would argue that this is so, but it is essential for students to master the skill of listening for gist; if not, they will find it very difficult to converse with native speakers of English. Gist listening prepares students for real life situations. Remember that with gist listening, the aim is to practise listening, not to study language. Of course, you can follow up the gist listening phase with other activities that help develop language skills.



Gist listening activities include: asking students to listen to a recording and to tell you whether the speakers are generally in agreement or not or to tell you whether the speaker's opinion is negative or positive. Students can merely listen to a recording and tell the teacher what the main topic is.

## **5.2 Extensive listening**

This involves students listening for long periods and usually for pleasure. If a student chooses to watch a film in English or to listen to a recording of a novel being read, this would be extensive listening. This type of listening is rarely practised in the classroom. We tend to assign tasks rather than allowing students to simply listen.

## **5.3 Listening for specific information**

This is where we listen to specific information and disregard the rest. For example, recently I was very interested in Paul McCartney's divorce. When the news was on the television, it was generally running as background noise. As soon as McCartney's name was mentioned, I stopped whatever I was doing and listened to the news. I was listening to specific information.

## **5.4 Listening for detailed information**

This is the type of listening you engage in when listening to announcements in a railway station or when listening to directions in a street. You are listening intensively in order to understand all information given.

## **5.5 Predicting**

When we are listening in our mother tongue, we are constantly predicting what is going to come next. This action of predicting helps us understand the thread of the discourse. Start encouraging your students to predict; you can even do this at low levels.

For example, if you're about to listen to a recording of Richard Branson talking about his life, before listening you can ask students what things they think he'll mention. Possibilities include: sports, ballooning, Virgin, etc. Students can listen to check whether their predictions are correct.

You can also do a prediction exercise during the listening task. You can stop a recording at appropriate points and ask your students what they think will come next, e.g. when listening to a song with a simple rhyme, stop and ask students to guess the final word in the sentence that completes the rhyme. When listening to instructions for a recipe, the final phrase might be "serve up and enjoy!" Stop the recording before the phrase and ask students what they think will be said.

Your students will need practice in all of the above sub-skills if they are to become truly proficient. Extensive listening is more difficult to organise in class and is not the best use of time. You can however, encourage your students to do this outside the classroom.

## 5.6 A template for a listening activity lesson

The following is a useful template for lessons where the aim is to practise listening skills (it can be adapted and used for reading skills). It can be used to practise the skills of listening for gist and listening for specific information or listening for detailed information.

(1) Introduce the topic of the recording and arouse students' interest in it. You can achieve this in a variety of ways:

show a picture linked to the topic and discuss the picture;

choose some words or phrases from the recording and ask students to predict what it is about (take care that the subject can be inferred from the language you select);

outline the subject of the recording and ask students to describe their experiences of such a situation, e.g. if they are going to listen to a recording of a job interview, ask them to describe what they know about job interviews. Describe an interview they had. If they have never had an interview, ask them what they think happens.

(2) Pre-teach any difficult language. Do this quickly and efficiently so as not to distract from the topic of the recording. Five or six items is the maximum; you should also consider words that students know in their written form but that they might not recognise when spoken. It is important that they hear the pronunciation of the words during this stage. If there is a lot of unfamiliar language, you might consider using a different recording; you don't want to put students off listening skills work through the use of material that is too difficult. There might be some language that can be guessed from context; in which case you might decide to work on those language items after listening.

(3) Set a task to be completed during the first listening. Explain what the task is and make sure everybody understands what is expected of him or her. The initial task should involve listening for gist; for example you could ask students what the speaker's opinion is, is it generally critical or approving of the topic? Are the speakers agreeing or disagreeing? What is being described in the recording? Alternatively, you might decide not to set a task. Students can just listen and tell you anything they heard. Allow students a few minutes to check their answers in pairs then conduct feedback with all the class. There are many advantages to asking your students to compare their answers in pairs before conducting whole class feedback: students might have heard the answer but not had time to write down the answer, this will give them time; they can also check their answers in a non-threatening environment; you can go around the class listening to what the students say, this will give you a good indication of who dealt well with the task and who didn't do so well.

(4) Give students a task to complete while they are listening again. You should focus on listening for specific information or listening for detailed information during this stage.

Examples of questions to use are:

A list of statements about the recording that students note as being true or false, or don't know from the recording.

Questions starting with how many...? When...? What did...? Who did...? What time did...? Why did they...?

If you design the questions yourself, focus on sections that are essential to understanding the whole text and not on subjects of secondary importance.

Give students time to read over the questions so they know beforehand what is expected of them. Answer any questions they might have. Play the recording again, students note down their answers. Students compare answers in pairs and then teacher conducts feedback as a whole class.

(5) If necessary, play the recording again. You need to get the balance right here between how often you play the recording and the level of interest of the students. I would say play it once for general understanding and a maximum of twice for listening for specific or detailed information. You might exceptionally play it one more time, but this doesn't necessarily increase students' understanding and they can just get more frustrated and demotivated. A wiser approach is to help them more with each successive listening; give more hints and clues each time based on the answers the students provide. If you set questions on difficult sections of the recording, keep these questions short and simple and make sure they focus on the points that are essential to understanding the recording. This approach will help guide your students through the recording. If students have all answers to the question in (4) correct, it is not necessary to listen again. If they have all answers correct except one, you might choose to play only that section of the recording.

(6) After listening, do some oral work and/or language work linked to the recording. For example: if students have been listening to a recording portraying a scene in a shop, have them role-play a shop scene. If the recording was a debate about health and lifestyle, they can discuss their opinions of the topic.

(7) You can also choose some language items as a focus; for example during a job interview the present perfect and simple past questions are frequently used (have you ever worked in a restaurant? When did you leave your last job?). Ask your students to listen again to a particular sentence or question and to write it down. Alternatively, you can give them part of the phrase and ask them to complete it. Note their answers on the board and focus on the structure(s). You can then do some controlled and/or freer language practice around the tenses (see Chapter 1). Language work can be done on grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation (for ideas, see Chapter 10, Pronunciation).

Guessing words from context is also a useful language exercise after a listening activity. Choose 2 or 3 words that are unfamiliar to your students and that you didn't pre-teach at the beginning of the lesson. Write the sentence or phrase that contains the word on the board and help students to guess the meaning from the context.

For example: *in the desert, the temperature can drop very low at night.*

Let's assume that your students know the word desert and temperature, you can ask students to guess the meaning of the word "drop". They should be able to guess it from their knowledge of the world and from the other words they see in the sentence. If not, you can guide them with questions such as: is the word a verb, noun or adjective? Does it describe movement, thought, etc?

### **5.7 A final word on listening activities**

The framework above can be used for listening skills activities. If you're using a course book, there will be activities and exercises to accompany the recordings. I suggest you analyse these activities and if one of the stages above is missing, design a task to make sure it is covered.

## CHAPTER 6: READING

Reading is considered by many to be the neglected aspect of language teaching. It is a shame that it is considered so. How has this come about? Many teachers focus on presenting and practising language; they practise the skills of speaking and listening in class; they might set writing tasks for homework but where does reading come into the programme? It is easy to see how it can be neglected.

However, it is essential for students to practise the skills of reading; they need to be introduced to and given opportunities to practise various sub-skills. If we give students the right sort of support to tackle a text in the classroom, we can hope that they will continue to do the same out of the classroom. Reading is a great source of language learning: language can be acquired from reading as opposed to studied directly (for a definition of acquisition, see Chapter 1). If overt study is preferred, structures and vocabulary can be seen in context and paragraph construction can be analysed.

There is a great choice of texts for use in class: apart from textbooks and other EFL resource books, we can take texts from magazines, newspapers, the Internet, brochures, menus. The opportunities are endless. If we encourage reading in the classroom, we can expect students to continue doing the same long after they have stopped studying with us.

Reading is similar to listening in that it is a receptive skill. It involves students interacting with visual input of language, which they need to process and understand. I say interacting because reading is most definitely an active process; the efficient reader interacts with a text, predicting what will come next, and bringing his or her knowledge of the subject and language to the text. For example, a British person reading about the Victorians will bring to the text his or her knowledge of the period: industrialisation, puritanical ideas, empire, strict upbringing for children, etc. It is essential to train our students in these skills and to encourage their use.

I will start by describing the various sub-skills that are involved in reading and then provide a template, which you can use when designing your own reading skills lessons. You can also use the template to analyse reading exercises in your course book; if you see that any of the stages of the plan below are not covered in your coursebook you might decide to add some activities. The approach is similar to a lesson to practise listening skills; I am repeating it for those readers who do not intend to read the entire book and are just dipping into chapters. However, if you are looking to have a thorough view of the skills of teaching, don't skip this chapter.

### 6.1 Reading skills and sub-skills

#### 6.1.1 Reading for gist

This involves reading to get the main message of the text; it doesn't involve studying every word. For example, you might ask students to read quickly or glance over a magazine article on stress in the workplace and to say what the author's opinion is.

To practise reading for gist, you can give 3 summaries of a text, only one of which is correct. Students read the text and say which summary is the most accurate. If you choose this option, make sure the summary focuses on generalities and not on specifics.

You can quite simply set a time limit – two minutes will be enough – ask students to read the text and to tell you what it is about.

### **6.1.2 Reading to extract detailed information**

Here students read to understand certain aspects of the text thoroughly. For example, when reading the manual that accompanies your new mobile phone you might focus on the use of the answering machine and endeavour to understand it in detail and not read about Internet connection.

### **6.1.3 Reading to extract specific information**

This involves passing over a text to gather specific information. We look over a text to get the information that interests us, for example the departure time of a train. In such cases we usually ignore the remaining information.

Questions that practise reading for specific and detailed information include:

A list of statements about the text that students note as being true or false (or don't know from the text).

Questions starting with how many...? When...? What did...? Who did what? What time did...? Why did they...?

### **6.1.4 Predicting**

As competent readers we are constantly predicting what will come next. If we read a short story where a man and woman meet, we might predict that they will fall in love. We bring our knowledge of the world to the text; the skill of predicting helps us understand what will come next.

To practise prediction, you can:

tell students the topic of the text and ask them to write questions they would like to know about the text. They then read to see whether their questions are answered. When the answers are contained in the text it is very motivating. The danger however, is that students will write questions that are not answered in the text;

give students some vocabulary items from the reading and ask them to predict what they think it will be about. They read to check their prediction;

ask students to read the first paragraph (or first two paragraphs) of a text and to predict what will come next.

### **6.1.5 Extensive reading**

This involves lengthy reading, often for pleasure. If we curl up on the sofa with a favourite novel, we are engaging in extensive reading. We are not trying to understand every word. The objective is to follow the story. Although, if you're anything like me, your mind might wander while you're reading! It is not easy to organise the practice of this skill in class and it's probably not the best use of time. However, you can encourage your students to read extensively outside the classroom: they can read novels, simplified readers, *Cosmopolitan*, *Homes and Gardens* or anything else they enjoy.

### **6.2 Template for a reading skills lesson**

- (1) Start by awakening students' interest in the topic. You can do this by telling them the subject matter of the text and asking them what they know about the topic, what experiences they have, etc. You can show students a picture related to the topic and discuss it. You can tell the students some words or phrases from the text and ask them to predict what it will be about. Keep the discussion general at this stage and don't give away too much information about the text. This stage serves to activate their knowledge and arouse their interest.
- (2) Pre-teach any unfamiliar vocabulary that will affect the students' understanding of the text. If there are unfamiliar words that won't hinder comprehension, you can study those at a later stage.
- (3) Set a task that will practise reading for gist; you can set a time limit on this task to make sure students aren't reading word for word. If so, keep the time limit short: 2 or 3 minutes is usually enough. If you think your students are not used to reading for gist, you can explain to them that they can achieve this by reading the first and last sentences in paragraphs or by running their eyes down the centre of the page without paying too much attention to what is to the left and right. Make sure all the students understand the question before they start reading. Ask students to check their answers in pairs and then conduct whole class feedback. The checking of answers in pairs allows students to work in a non-threatening environment. Pairs are responsible for answers and not individuals.
- (4) Set some questions that will practise reading for specific or detailed information. For ideas, see above. Check that all students understand the questions and give them a time limit to answer them. You can allow about 10 minutes for this. At this point, you should just allow your students to read. Try to avoid the trap of the new teacher, which is to help while they are reading, this only serves to interrupt and break their concentration. Allow students time to check their answers together in pairs and then conduct feedback as a whole class. When checking answers, also ask students to explain where they found the answers to their questions; this will help you to see to what extent they have understood the text and to what extent they are guessing.
- (5) After feedback on the second of the reading tasks, there are 4 related activities you can do; these are outlined below. You can choose to do one, two, three or all of them and you can do them in the order that seems to suit the text and your class on

that particular day. I would advise including a speaking exercise to give a change of focus and tempo after the reading tasks; I also wouldn't do the speaking last of all the 4 post-reading activities. I think it is also respectful to the class to spend some time explaining the words that they didn't know or that caused them difficulty during the reading; by this, of course, I'm referring to language that hasn't been studied elsewhere in the lesson.

(i) You can spend some time satisfying the students' natural desire to want to understand everything in the text. Tell them to pick 3 or 4 words from the text that they would like to know the meaning of. Answer their questions within reason or allow them to use dictionaries.

(ii) You can study language work arising from the text. This could be vocabulary around the theme of the text; for example holiday activities if students have been reading about holidays. There might be a tense that is prevalent in the text, e.g. simple past or a variety of past tenses if the text is a narrative. You will need to focus students' attention on the structure or language; you can do this by simply writing it on the board. Alternatively, you can ask students to find a phrase (or phrases) that expresses past actions. You can elicit the meaning of the phrase and/or do a brief presentation. This can be followed by practice of the language point.

The structure you choose to focus on might not be in the text. For example, a text about somebody who was late for an interview because he overslept could give rise to a study of the third conditional (if he hadn't overslept he would have arrived on time) or *I wish* to express past regrets (he wishes he hadn't overslept). You can ask students why the character was late for his interview (because he overslept) then present one, or both, of the following: he wishes he hadn't overslept; if he hadn't overslept, he would have arrived on time. For ideas on presenting and practising language, see Chapter 3.

Language work could also involve studying the specific organisation of the genre; for example in a film review the first paragraph might describe the film, the second paragraph might compare it to others of its type, the third paragraph might recommend, or not, the reader to go and see it. For further information on the study of genre, see Chapter 7. After this language focus, you can do some oral or written practice of the structure or text type.

(iii) You can do a related speaking activity. Examples include:

students give their opinion on the subject of the text;

students can talk about their experiences of the subject; e.g. "have you ever done this?" "If so, describe what you did and how you felt". "If not, what would you find difficult / enjoyable", "Do you know anybody who has done this?" and so on;

students can talk about how the text makes them feel;

students can say how they would react in such a situation;

students can compare the text to their own lives: focusing on what is different and what is similar;



students can role-play an interview with one of the characters from the text for the local newspaper;

students can invent a dialogue between 2 or more of the characters from the text.

(iv) You can encourage the students to deduce meanings from the text. Take a word that is unfamiliar and that you think students can deduce from the context. You can give clues to help them out, e.g.

Is it a verb, noun, adjective or other?

If verb: is it connected to movement, to thinking, etc?

If noun: is it found in the house? The street? Etc...

Help your students to get at least an approximation of the meaning.

For example, if you want your students to deduce the meaning of the word “sideboard”, you could use the following sentence and questions:

Mr Jones came home, walked into the sitting room, took off his shoes and put his keys on the sideboard.

Is sideboard a noun, verb or adjective? Noun.

Where would you find a sideboard? In a home, in a sitting room.

What category does a sideboard belong to: food, clothes or furniture? Furniture.

Using the above, students can guess that a sideboard is a piece of furniture found in a sitting room.

At lower levels, or where students are not used to guessing meaning from context, you can choose 5 or 6 unfamiliar words and write their definitions in disorder. Ask students to match the words with their definitions; they can use the text as a guide, but not their dictionaries.

### **6.3 A final word on reading activities**

The framework above can be used for reading or listening skills activities. If you're using a course book, there will be activities and exercises to accompany the texts. I suggest you analyse these activities and if one of the stages above is missing, design a task to make sure it is covered.

## CHAPTER 7: WRITING

Writing is a productive skill and, as such, the way we treat it in class has some similarities with the teaching and learning of speaking. The focus of this chapter will be longer written assignments and creative writing; we will not cover written exercises that are designed to practise a language point. Let's first of all review what was mentioned in Chapter 4 and apply the principles to the teaching of writing.

The key elements to consider in the teaching of writing are:

### 7.1 Language

It is essential to make sure that your students have the level of English required to do the task. Analyse any tasks for language required before deciding whether to use it in class. If you are using an activity from an EFL resource, then there should be comments on the language required. If you don't have any guidelines on the language required, think about how you would do the task yourself and what sort of language you'd use. Check whether the level is suitable, and then decide how you will revise and practise language items with your students. This language work can be done in the same lesson as the writing activity or in a previous lesson. At higher levels (upper-intermediate and above), this language review can be very brief. Depending on the type of written task, the language work might include analysis and practice of genre. Genre refers to a type of writing, e.g. recipes, lonely hearts ads, newspaper articles that have similar organisation and language. Language study might also involve work on linkers, for example: although, furthermore, alternatively. Students also need to be aware of the level of formality that is required; for example a business letter will be more formal than a postcard or e-mail to a friend.

### 7.2 Time for preparation

Allow students time to prepare their ideas; they can do this individually, in pairs or in groups. You can also work on the topic as a whole class and integrate other skills work before students start planning their writing. For example before planning a piece of writing about environmental issues, you could do some or all of the following: read a text on the topic, listen to a recording and discuss the subject in class. If you don't have time for lengthy preparation, you should at least brainstorm ideas with the class. Once students have their ideas, they will find the actual writing easier.

### 7.3 Reason for writing

Students need to have a reason or purpose for writing, even if this reason is fictitious. If you identify the audience, i.e. who the intended reader is, you will add a sense of purpose. For example, if you want students to write a description of their town, tell them it is for inclusion in a brochure or on a website for tourists to the area. You might even decide to send their work to the tourist information centre!

## 7.4 Creating interest in the topic and activating students' knowledge

Try to choose topics that will interest your students and introduce variety into the type of writing activities you do with your classes to keep their interest. In business English classes it is also important to practise styles of writing that your students are likely to do in real life; e.g. a sales letter or an e-mail confirming a meeting. You can arouse your students' interest in and activate their knowledge of the topic, possibly through a debate (especially recommended if they will be writing about their opinions), by watching a video or listening to a recording on a related subject. Other ways of activating their knowledge of the topic are by asking them what they know about the topic and what experience they have of it.

## 7.5 Coherence and cohesion

These are two terms that apply to the skill of writing. Coherence applies to the way a piece of writing is organised; a logical progression of ideas and careful organisation within and between paragraphs. Cohesion refers to how ideas are linked; this is commonly achieved by the use of reference words (e.g. the latter) and linkers (e.g. on the other hand, alternatively). These language items are mostly, but not only, used in writing and help guide a reader through the piece of work, showing relationships between ideas.

At a lower level, you can work on linkers such as: but, both, and. You can show two pictures of different people and ask students to write sentences comparing and contrasting the two characters and using the three linkers mentioned. She's tall but he isn't. She's fair and he is too. They're both fair. They've both got fair hair.

At a higher level you can cover more complex ways of linking. You can give phrases that serve as both the beginnings and ends of sentences; ask students to combine them using the linkers. The following is inspired by a Jane Austen novel I'm currently reading, not by my own opinions!

He loved her / she had no money

Although she had no money, he loved her.

He loved her despite the fact she had no money.

## 7.6 Publication

You should also think about ways of publishing the students' work. Ideas include:

inclusion in a class or school magazine;

produce a collection of work written by the class that you could bind or staple and give to all members of the class;

produce an e-book of students' work;

display students' work on a school or class notice board. You can also ask students to go around and read the work on the notice boards. You could set a simple task,

e.g. what is the main theme of each piece of writing? Is the author's opinion negative or positive?

## **7.7 Approaches to teaching writing: process writing**

Process writing, as the name suggests, focuses on the process of writing rather than on the final product. This involves teaching students about the stages involved in writing; i.e. the process. The aim is to help students see each stage as being important and to dedicate time to each of them. The teacher's role is to guide students through the stages one uses when writing. The stages are:

Brainstorming and noting down any ideas connected to the topic.

Deciding from the brainstormed list which ideas are the most relevant to the topic, task or title.

Deciding which order to put those ideas in. This can be done in the form of a plan or a mind map.

Preparation of the first draft; the focus at this stage is organisation of the piece of writing. This doesn't mean that grammar and accuracy are not important; it just means that they are not the focus at this stage.

Revision and editing of drafts, focusing initially on content, relevance and organisation. Then moving onto correcting grammar, punctuation, vocabulary and linkers.

The final stage is the production of a finished piece of work.

To raise awareness in students of the stages of writing, you can brainstorm the steps with your students. Alternatively, you can present them with the list above and ask for their comments on it. Finally, you could give them the list above, jumbled up and ask them to put the stages in order.

You can guide your students through the stages by:

(1) Brainstorming: write the topic/title on the board and invite students to say anything at all connected to the topic. Anything and everything is acceptable at this stage; accept all ideas and comments.

(2) Go through the brainstormed items and decide which are the most relevant to the topic and the most interesting. This can be done as a whole class, in groups or in pairs. If you do this as a whole class, all the students' essays will have the same content. If you choose to do it in groups or pairs, essays will have different content. Both approaches are suitable, you can decide which is best suited to your class.

(3) From the list of chosen items, students decide how the comments will be organised. Different students or groups of students might choose different ways of organising the ideas. For example in an essay that asks students to compare and contrast living in a town and in the country, some students might want to group all comments about the city together and all comments about the country together and conclude with a paragraph comparing and contrasting the two. Other students might

prefer to group together ideas about traffic and then compare traffic in the city and in the country in the same paragraph.

At the end of this stage, students will have a plan or mind map that they can use for writing.

(4) Students write the first draft of their piece of work. Tell your students that they should think about the content and how it relates to the title, organising their ideas into paragraphs and about how the paragraphs hang together.

(5) In the same lesson, in later lessons, or for homework, students can revise their first drafts, improving on the content and organisation.

(6) When they have a good second draft, i.e. the content, relevance and organisation satisfies them, they can move onto improving the language. I suggest that they approach language improvement in stages. For example, they could start by focusing on vocabulary, the correct choice of word. Then they could look at aspects of grammar: tenses, verb agreement, use of pronouns etc. Then move onto spelling and punctuation. You can, of course, organise this language work differently. During this stage, students can review their own work or the work of their classmates.

(7) Finally, students can copy out their essays, in a clean, final version.

There are various ways to organise the work; initially it is best if you do the stages together as a whole class. Later and when the students are used to process writing, you can start work as a whole class and then the students can work together in pairs or groups. Some stages can also be done for homework. The teacher's role throughout is to provide ideas, guidance and feedback. You will also need to encourage students to edit their own work and to incorporate your feedback.

One advantage of the process approach to writing is that it helps students see that a piece of writing goes through a number of stages including revision and editing. By breaking down these stages and working on each one individually, you can help students see the importance of them. They can see that writing does not have to be perfect from the outset and this will make it easier for them to tackle any writing task. It will also help alleviate writer's block that sometimes occurs when students are faced with a blank piece of paper! If students are writing in pairs or groups, there will also be a lot of interaction when they're discussing their revisions.

However, there are drawbacks. Initially, students will find this a novel way to approach a piece of writing and they might not see the importance of the initial stages and try to skip to writing the final product immediately. However, the effort and time invested will pay off as this approach often generates lengthier pieces of writing. Process writing takes longer than other approaches to writing. If you have access to computers, do use them. Computers lend themselves very well to this sort of activity.

To help students see the benefits, you could give them a writing task at the beginning of the course. When they've completed it, ask them to note how they approached the task. Take in their work and keep it without marking it. At the end of the course and

after various process-writing activities, ask students to do the same writing task as at the beginning. Return the students' initial work to them and ask them to compare the two final products as well as their approaches to the task. You can also conduct a class discussion on the results, the benefits and the drawbacks.

## **7.8 Approaches to teaching writing: the genre approach to writing**

Genre refers to the way that texts of the same nature are organised and the way that language frequently re-occurs in texts of the same type. For example, recipes are all organised in the same way. Ingredients are listed and then the steps are described. All recipes contain similar language. If we want our students to write a recipe, it is useful for them to start by studying how recipes are organised and the type of language that is commonly used, before starting on the work themselves.

If you want your students to write a film review (or any other genre of writing), start out by studying various film reviews in class. Firstly, do some comprehension work on the reviews (for ideas see Chapter 6, Reading). Then study the film reviews with a view to analysing how they are organised. Ask students whether they can see any characteristics regarding both language and organisation that are similar between the reviews. For example, do all the reviews finish with the author's opinion? Does the writer make a recommendation? Where is it placed, at the beginning or the end? Which tenses are used to describe the film? When you think that students have enough information, summarise the characteristics for all to see. You can elicit this from your students. They can then use the summary to start planning and organising their own film reviews. They can also incorporate examples of language items that they encountered, without copying directly.

When using the genre approach to writing, try to set tasks that students are likely to be involved in outside of class or that have some sort of relevance. For example, don't ask students studying English for their university course to write lonely hearts ads, unless of course it's for fun in class!

I have outlined two approaches to the teaching of writing; of course others exist. EFL writers have debated the issues surrounding the genre and process approach to writing. I think that both have their advantages and both can help students produce good pieces of writing. I also think that the two approaches can be combined in one writing activity through study of texts and then movement through the stages of writing. This, of course, will take time and can be developed into a writing project spanning over a few weeks.

## **7.9 Shorter writing activities**

The two approaches above can take time to complete. If you want to include short writing tasks into your lessons, here are two ideas:

(i) After a reading or listening activity, choose a character from the text or recording. Ask students to imagine they are that character and to write a postcard, e-mail or letter in character. Remember to define the audience by indicating who the correspondence will be sent to, e.g. friend or family member.

(ii) If you want to revise the organisation of a certain style of essay or the format of a letter, you can prepare an essay or letter, cut it up and ask students to reorganise it.

### **7.10 Using computers**

If you have access to computers for use with your classes, it is good to have your students do their written work on the computer. Organise the students in pairs or groups and have them create their piece of writing on the screen. They will be able to edit their work more easily on the screen than work handwritten in a book. The benefit of working in pairs or groups is that there will be real collaboration and discussion surrounding the piece of writing. Before starting out, you should choose whether you want students to use the spell check or not and set up the programmes or give instructions accordingly.

### **7.11 Penpals**

This is something that motivated me to write when I was at school and it still works today. Students can get very involved with penpals. The advantage today is that students can correspond by e-mail; a quick response to their e-mails is far more motivating than waiting 2 weeks for the post to come around!

Try to set up a penpal project for your students. You can match them with people in another country or city; you can find such possibilities on TEFL websites and in TEFL chat forums. If you don't come across any, try to match your students up with students in another school in the same city or even with a different class in the same school.

You can allow time in class for conversing with penpals and encourage students to continue outside the class. If you don't do penpal work in class, let students know that you're interested in them and their penpals. Ask them how they are getting on, what they are learning about the other person and what language they are learning. Do this without criticising those who are not participating.

## CHAPTER 8: PLANNING A LESSON

In this unit we will look at how to set about planning a lesson. It is important for you to engage in some form of planning for each lesson. At the beginning, planning will take a lot of time; it might even take longer than the actual lesson itself! However, all is not bleak; with time you will get more experienced and you will be able to plan much more quickly, pulling out lesson plans and activities you have already used. Many experienced teachers plan their lessons in no time at all.

First of all, let's take a look at the benefits of having a good lesson plan. The plan will give you aims for your lessons; it will remind you what to take with you when you go in to class; it will give you guidelines whilst you are in the classroom and it will prevent you from drying up while you are there. Having a plan will also provide your lesson with structure; whilst the students might not notice this, they will certainly notice if your lessons lack structure.

The format that your lesson plan takes will depend on many factors: the situation you are in, how much time you have and even how long you have been teaching. Speaking for myself, my lesson plans are more a series of notes; I note which pages and exercises of the course book I'll do with my class; I also note supplementary activities and language to pre-teach or focus on. I think about how much time each activity will take but probably don't write everything down on the plan. But then I have been teaching for over 14 years; when I started out, my lesson plans were very different! Some teachers might go into class with no plan at all; others might go in with just the course book and work through it page by page. Lesson plans are very much a case of what works for you and the situation you find yourself in. They are possibly the most personal and individual part of teaching

The comments below will help you consider the aspects that should be included in lesson plans or at least considered during the planning stages. In some settings it is necessary to produce a very detailed plan; for example, if you are being observed as part of a course or as part of a school evaluation. If your plan is to be used in a situation where you will be tested or observed, I suggest you check with your tutor or assessor exactly what they would like to see in your plan. I can give guidelines but different people and different situations require different aspects to be covered.

The things to consider when planning a lesson are:

### 8.1 Recent work

Think about what students have been working on recently. If they have done a lot of skills work recently, it might be time now to do some language work. If there has been a theme through the last 2 or 3 lessons, it might be time to consolidate that work and/or move on. Aim to get balance over the lessons so that students don't lose interest.



## 8.2 Language work

What language would you like your students to learn or practise during the lesson? How much time will you spend on the language work? Think about the time you spend presenting it and practising it. You will need to get the balance right; if the lesson lasts 2 hours, it is not a good idea to spend all the time on one language point. You should also aim to spend more time on language practice than on language presentation.

## 8.3 Skills work

Which skills or sub-skills do you want your students to practise during the course of the lesson? Try to get a balance here between work on the various skills. Try not to spend a two-hour lesson working on just one skill.

## 8.4 Level of the students

This is obvious but I'll say it anyway. Make sure the activities you choose are suited to the level of your students.

## 8.5 Overall aims of students

Think about your students' reasons for learning English. Your main aim is to help them achieve what it is they are hoping to do with English. They will need to get a balance between what is important to them and what knowledge they are lacking; e.g. hotel workers who mostly need spoken English in order to greet guests and communicate with them. These students will need a lot of practice in spoken English and work on particular functions. They might also need to brush up on their listening skills, grammar and vocabulary. In such a situation, you will need to strike a balance between speaking, listening, language presentation and practice.

## 8.6 Aims of the lesson

Note: I have used the term aims for ease of reference. A distinction is often made between aims, objectives and learning outcomes. Preferences for use of the three terms can vary. I have chosen to keep it simple and to use only the term aims.

There is often more than one aim in a lesson. You should think of aims in terms of what the students will do and not what the teacher will do. Thus, to teach the simple past is not a suitable aim, it doesn't describe what the students will be doing. It is better to say that the students will use the question and affirmative forms of the simple past to discuss what they did at the weekend. You should also try to get your aims specific, measurable, realistic and achievable. Achievable means making sure the students can do the task; it's at the right level for them. By realistic, I mean it can be done in the time available. Specific means being detailed about your aims; instead of saying students will practise *going to*, say the students will use question and answer forms of *going to* to discuss future plans. Measurable: if an aim is worded in specific terms, it is easy to measure. So, for the aim above, you can easily measure whether or not the students have used *going to* questions and answers to talk about plans.

## **8.7 Stages**

You need to think about progression through the stages of a lesson. You could consider your lesson as a play or film unfolding. Many teachers like to use a warmer at the beginning of the lesson. Students come into the classroom “cold”, i.e. from a non-English environment (unless of course they are studying in an English-speaking country). A short activity that engages the students in something fun will warm them up and get them using English. A warmer should ideally last around 5 to 10 minutes; any longer and it’s moving towards a main activity, not a warmer.

For the main activities try to get a natural progression through them, where each one builds on what came before. Move from presentation towards practice, receptive skills towards productive. If there is a lot of speaking or language work, try to break it up with the inclusion of other activities. You should also think about how you end your lessons; it is more pleasant if you wind up the lesson and have time to take your leave from your students. A pleasant way to end a lesson is to ask students what they have learnt during the lesson; asking students what they learnt reinforces the learning process and has them thinking about the activities, what the teacher did, as well as their own contribution. You could also ask them which activities they enjoyed and didn’t enjoy; you need to feel confident to do this but it will give you very valuable clues for planning future lessons. You could word it as what would you like to do more of? Less of? Just because they don’t like an activity, it doesn’t mean you failed as a teacher or that you should leave it out of future lessons. There are many reasons for disliking something. You can introduce it with a smile next time: “your favourite activity coming up!”

## **8.8 Timing**

How long will each activity last? This will also help you to see whether you have achieved balance in the lesson. For example if your presentation of language takes 10 minutes and the practice takes 5 minutes, you’ll need to add some practice activities to balance it out. Aim to spend more time on practice than on presentation.

## **8.9 Variety**

Aim to get variety in and between your classes. Of course there are some things that students will need to study at length even if they don’t enjoy it e.g. phrasal verbs (put up with, do without, etc.). In such cases, aim for variety in the way you deal with the language point; e.g. listen to a recording that contains examples of phrasal verbs, do a presentation of the language, use activities to practise the language, revise it, work on the pronunciation of the language. You can approach the same topic from a variety of angles.

## **8.10 Interest**

When you know your students well, you will know what interests them and will be able to choose accordingly. If a topic is uninteresting and it has to be covered as part of a syllabus, think of ways to make it more interesting, maybe by introducing an element of fantasy, imagination or role-play.

### **8.11 Interaction**

Aim to get a balance within the lessons between different forms of interaction. Try to avoid a lesson which is entirely teacher-led or based entirely on pair work. Involve the students in pair work, group work, individual work as well as whole class work. Of course, you don't need to have all of these types of interaction in one lesson.

### **8.12 Level of motivation**

This might sound obvious but if you have a class that meets at the end of the day on Wednesdays and Fridays, you might see a pattern to their levels of energy. It could be that they are very tired on Friday evenings; in which case, it would be wiser to do in-depth language work or difficult skills work on a Wednesday.

### **8.13 Problems and solutions**

You should also think about any problems that your students might encounter during the lesson and think about what you could do to solve them. For example, the pronunciation of the words photograph and photographer might cause problems for your students; your solution might be to write the words on the board with the stressed syllables indicated and to ask your students to repeat the words after you. For an explanation of stress, see Chapter 10, Pronunciation. Consider any problems the students might have (language use, pronunciation, difficulty in understanding) and think of ways to overcome these problems.

### **8.14 Materials and equipment required**

Make a note of the materials and equipment needed. This will help you be prepared for your class and avoid a situation where you have to run out of class to look for a recording or a bunch of exercises.

### **8.15 Homework**

You can also make a note of which exercises your students will do for homework. If the class will be meeting again within a couple of days, set an exercise that can be completed quickly. If the class are not meeting again for a week, you can set a lengthier task such as essay writing. It is important for students to do homework that will consolidate what they have studied in class; this work will reinforce the learning process. Be careful to choose exercises that are at the right level.

Of course, you can also make a decision about homework assignments at the end of the lesson. The advantage of this approach is that you will have seen how the students perform with the target language and how much follow-up is required.

### **8.16 Extra activities**

You should also have extra activities ready in case the students get through the work quickly or if you decide to do things differently when you are in class. The time spent thinking about extra activities won't be wasted: if you don't use the extras, you can use

them in another lesson. If you find you do need them, you'll be very pleased you took the time to consider them!

### **8.17 A final word about lesson plans**

The above might seem like a lot to think about, but once you have your plan, you can analyse it to see whether the above guidelines have been met. Of course, you might be using a course book. In such cases the book will provide the outline for your lesson plan. I advise you to look ahead through the unit of the book you are about to start. Look at it with a critical eye: you might find that the beginning of the unit focuses on language presentation and practice and that the end of the unit is more skills focused. You might decide to cover all aspects of the unit but to approach them in a different order. You might also decide to omit parts of the unit because your students don't need practice in that point; you might also think that your students need more practice in one aspect of the unit and decide to supplement it. In any case, when planning it is essential to bear in mind your students; many textbooks are excellent but only you know your students.

Finally, whilst I think it is wise to use a plan, I also think there are times when you can move away from it and even discard it totally. If something is too difficult or too easy for your students, you might decide to abandon the task at an appropriate moment. If your students arrive and talk excitedly about a topic of importance to them, I suggest you go with the flow. Just take advantage of their chattiness and use it as a learning point.

## CHAPTER 9: ERROR CORRECTION

Errors are a natural part of the learning process. Students make mistakes when they are learning a new language item; even when language has been presented, revised and practised repeatedly, students can still make mistakes. Errors and mistakes will always occur, it's how we deal with them that determines whether or not our students learn from their mistakes. Correcting errors is essential for students to learn and improve and to avoid a situation where they continue making the same mistake and eventually believe that what they are saying is correct. Errors and their correction can be used to help students consolidate their knowledge of a language point and to foster good learning habits. This approach to students' errors will be the focus of this chapter.

Firstly, we'll take a look at the different types of errors that students make. According to Julian Edge, there are 3 categories of error: slips, errors and attempts. Slip refers to a situation where a mistake has been made, the student knows the language point, (s)he is capable of correcting the mistake. An example of a slip is an intermediate student saying, "I've ate my dinner". In this case the learner knows the correct answer "I've eaten my dinner" but forgot it momentarily or it just came out the wrong way. When prompted the student can correct a slip. Native speakers also make this type of error.

The second category, Julian Edge calls errors. These are mistakes that the student cannot correct himself. There are 2 main categories of this type of error: false-friends and over-generalisations. False friends refer to words that exist in the student's own language and that have a similar word in English with a different meaning; the learner might assume the word is the same. An example of this is the Spanish word "embarazada" which means pregnant. A Spanish student might use the word "embarrassed" incorrectly, believing it is a translation of "embarazada". An over-generalisation occurs at a point where the student is assimilating language but hasn't fully mastered it yet. For example, an elementary student who says "I taked the bus yesterday" demonstrates that they have learnt that an "ed" ending denotes a past tense. They have just over-generalised the rule and applied it to a verb that is irregular in the past tense. Young children also make this type of error in their mother tongue; for example, you might hear a child talking about sheeps as the plural of sheep.

The final type of error is where the student quite simply doesn't know or hasn't encountered the language item yet. This type of error frequently occurs during free speaking practice and free writing practice. The student has an idea that (s)he wishes to express but doesn't know the corresponding language item. They try to put their idea into words; J Edge refers to this as an attempt. For example, a low-intermediate student might say, "If I knew, I would done it". Obviously, the student has made incorrect choices of tense but the student hasn't yet encountered or studied the third conditional: "If I had known, I would have done it".

The above is a summary of Julian Edge's definition of errors. Our role as teachers is to distinguish between the different types of error and decide which need to be corrected immediately, which we will focus on later and which we will not correct. Our decisions will be based on the level that our students are at; what we have been working on recently in class and what we think the students should have mastered by now. We

also need to consider what the focus of the activity is: during accuracy work, the teacher will correct more often and sooner than during fluency work (for definitions of accuracy and fluency see Chapter 1).

## **9.1 Correcting mistakes in oral work**

### **9.1.1 What to correct**

As a general rule, correct the errors and slips described above. If students try to express something and make the third type of error above (attempt), it is not essential to correct it. However, depending on the context and depending on whether other students start to use the incorrect form, you might want to briefly explain the correct usage. You can also correct attempts if they cause a breakdown in communication.

During activities designed for accuracy, you will correct all mistakes in the language point being practised. For example, during a speaking exercise designed to practise the simple past, correct all errors in the use of the simple past. If the students make mistakes in other areas of language, use your discretion as to whether it is necessary to correct or not. During fluency activities, you'll correct less and probably at the end of the activity.

### **9.1.2 How much to correct**

Think about the activity your students are doing. If you are doing a speaking activity to practise fluency, avoid correcting too much as this will interrupt the flow. If a teacher over-corrects during a fluency activity, the students might get frustrated because they don't have the opportunity to express themselves without the teacher interrupting. Our role in this type of activity is to focus on correcting errors that might hinder comprehension or cause a breakdown in communication. As for errors that don't interfere with communication, make a note of them and go over them when the activity is finished. However, if you hear the same mistake being made repeatedly, it's better to correct it sooner rather than later. If the aim of the activity is accuracy, you should deal with all mistakes in the target language immediately. As for errors in other language points, correct them if: very few errors are made in the target language, if the mistake hinders communication or if other students notice it.

Some students feel uncomfortable if the teacher isn't seen to be correcting mistakes. If so, you might like to share this methodology with your students; explain to them that some speaking activities focus on fluency and others on accuracy. Explain that in the latter, you will correct more often and almost immediately; during the former, you will save comments for when the activity is finished. Students will soon get used to this way of dealing with errors. A further advantage of dealing with errors after a fluency activity is that you can spend time presenting or explaining language items, writing some examples on the board and giving students time to copy them down. Students will soon understand the benefits of this approach. During feedback at the end of a fluency activity, it's also important to highlight examples of good work.

### 9.1.3 When to correct

In accuracy activities, correct immediately. In fluency activities, correct at the end of the task unless a) the error affects communication, b) the mistake is made repeatedly or c) students notice and comment on it. If in doubt, make a note and correct it later. You will need to adapt an attitude of silence, and avoid a common error of new teachers which is to do too much and speak too much (even if this is born out of good intentions).

### 9.1.4 Who corrects

When you've decided which errors to correct, think about who corrects it. Try to give the student who made the mistake first chance. This allows them to show whether they know the language point or not and is also a very good way of reinforcing their knowledge and the learning process. If the student doesn't find the right answer, you can correct yourself or ask someone else in the class to try. If you invite another student to correct, try to do this in a sensitive way so as not to negatively highlight the errors of the student in question. You'll also need to consider how much time you want to spend on this. Having the teacher correct is usually the quickest method.

### 9.1.5 How to correct

You can correct directly yourself. This can be done in the interests of speed but this approach doesn't give students the opportunity to self-correct and learn. If you prefer to have students correct their own mistakes, you will need to indicate to them that a mistake has been made. Below are some useful techniques for highlighting a mistake and for inviting students to correct them.

repeat the sentence back to the student, stressing or changing the intonation on the incorrect word(s);

point out which word(s) is wrong and invite the student to correct. If so, do this sensitively and not in a mocking way. E.g. "I taked the bus yesterday"; "taked is not the correct verb form, can you correct it?";

give a gentle hint; e.g. verb form? with a rising intonation when the student says "he go" instead of "he goes";

when a student makes a mistake, respond genuinely to what they are saying, using the correct language; "I go to the cinema yesterday"; "Oh, so you went to the cinema yesterday. What did you see?".

For indicating that a mistake has been made, without saying what it is and for inviting the student to find it for him or herself, use the following techniques:

say: "I'm not sure that's right";

give a hesitant movement of the head, saying mmmmm;

an outstretched hand that moves from side-to-side;

say: "do you think that's correct?";

ask the student to repeat the sentence “could you say that again?”; this serves as a hint that something is wrong. However, if you use this technique regularly and then when you genuinely don’t hear and ask a student to repeat, they can misinterpret your question as an indication that something is wrong.

Things to consider when using the above are: the amount of time available and how successful you think your students will be at finding the mistake.

A final point to remember is that you should ask the student(s) to repeat the correct form any time you correct something. This will reinforce the learning process.

## **9.2 Correcting mistakes in written work**

As a teacher, you will also need to think about your approach to correcting errors in written work. The above categories used to describe oral work also apply to correcting written work.

### **9.2.1 How much to correct**

As with oral work, you need to consider the aim of the activity. So if you are doing controlled writing practice, e.g. a gap-fill exercise to practise a recently-studied language point, you will need to correct all errors and especially errors in the target language.

For a piece of creative writing or extensive writing, you should correct some (but not all) of the errors. You should also think about responding to the content of the piece of prose as well as focusing on language.

When marking written work, you can comment on and give a grade on a variety of categories, e.g.:

content – is the argument good or not?;

organisation of the work;

grammar;

vocabulary;

spelling;

punctuation.

You can choose to comment on all these areas and add some of your own if you like. This is especially important if the students are preparing for an exam. Alternatively, you could tell students before they start writing that you will only focus on one area when correcting. This could be use of linkers, punctuation, organisation of paragraphs, tenses, vocabulary, spelling; whatever you think they need to work on. You could even give a different focus to each student depending on his or her needs. This approach helps students to focus on their weak points while they are writing; it also makes marking easier for the teacher!!



In all feedback on written work, you should include a positive comment. For example, “your use of linkers was excellent”; “you used the tenses well”. Positive feedback is arguably more important on written work than in others areas because the student will retain a record of what was written as well as your comments. However, we also need to give students pointers on how to improve, one or two will be enough. For example, “think about linking paragraphs and work on punctuation for your next piece of writing”.

### **9.2.2 How to correct**

Consider very carefully how you will correct errors in a piece of creative or communicative writing (letter, essay, etc.) It can be very disheartening for students to have their work returned to them covered in corrections. One way to avoid covering students’ work in red ink is to use symbols to indicate to the students that something is wrong. For example:

sp = spelling;

p = punctuation;

wo = word order;

t = tense.

When marking, indicate the spot at which there is a mistake and put the corresponding symbol in the margin. The students can attempt to correct the errors themselves. For higher-level students, or for errors which lower level students should be able to correct easily, you could put the symbol in the margin without indicating exactly where the error is. This shows the students that something is wrong without telling them where. Students go through that particular sentence to identify the error and correct it themselves. These approaches are more encouraging as students are usually able to correct themselves. It also supports the learning process by getting students to think for themselves and by getting them into the habit of reviewing their work.

An important comment about the use of symbols is that students must know what they mean. Keep your list of symbols on view in the classroom and spend some time explaining to students what the symbols mean and by doing some work to practise them. Invent some incorrect phrases, write them on the board with the corresponding symbol and ask students to make suggestions as to the correct form.

### **9.3 A final word on error correction**

After correcting work, you should allow time in class for students to review what they have done and to consider your feedback. Feedback works best when students spend time reflecting on it. This will also give students the opportunity to ask you questions if they are unable to find the correction themselves.

In all, it is essential to get the balance right as to how much we correct. We also need to deal with errors sensitively and in a supportive way.

## CHAPTER 10: PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation is an essential aspect of learning to speak a foreign language. If a student does not pronounce a word correctly, it can be very difficult to understand him/her. On the other hand, if students make grammatical mistakes e.g. in a verb tense, the listener still has an idea of what is being said. So, it can be seen that good pronunciation is vital if a student is to be understood.

It is essential to work on pronunciation regularly. I always suggest that new teachers work on pronunciation through short tasks on a regular basis. It is easy enough to incorporate some sort of pronunciation work into every lesson. Whenever you present new language, you should also work on its pronunciation.

You will need to decide whether to introduce your students to the phonemic alphabet. The phonemic alphabet is a series of symbols that represent the sounds of English. You can find a copy of the phonemic alphabet in any good book on pronunciation, e.g. *Sound Foundations* by Adrian Underhill. One drawback of teaching the phonemic alphabet is that it can be daunting for students to learn all these symbols especially if they use a non-Latin writing system. That makes just too many new symbols to learn. However, if a student knows the phonemic alphabet, they can use that knowledge to check the pronunciation of words in a dictionary. If you don't want to present the phonemic alphabet to your students, I suggest that you at least introduce the phonetic symbols for the letters that your students find difficult to pronounce.

This brings me neatly to another point: which sounds do students find difficult and which should we focus on? Unfortunately, there is not one answer to this; it will depend very much on your students' mother tongue. Many students have difficulty pronouncing "th" but this is not a problem for most Arabic speakers who have the sound in their own language. Speakers of some Asian languages find it difficult to differentiate between "l" and "r". Some languages don't have the "h" sound at the beginning of words and will need to work on its production. I suggest you consult a copy of *Learner English* by Michael Swan. He gives very comprehensive coverage of problems encountered by speakers of various languages. If you cannot get hold of a copy, I suggest you speak to some people who have been teaching in your particular setting for some time and ask them which sounds the students find difficult. You'll also notice it yourself in the first few lessons with your students.

Apart from the difficult sounds specific to certain language groups, students will need to know about the aspects of pronunciation that are described below.

## 10.1 Individual sounds

Individual sounds are letters “s” “k” etc. and combinations of letters “sh” “tch” etc.

To teach individual sounds, you can:

- 1) demonstrate. For example, exaggerate the production of the sound “th” or show that there is an expulsion of air when producing the initial “h”;
- 2) explain to students how to make the sound. For example say, “you put your tongue between your teeth to produce the sound “th””. You can instruct students to put their hands in front of their mouths and to say “house” if they pronounce it correctly, they should feel the breath on their hands;
- 3) show a picture of the inside of the mouth (diagrams are available in many books on pronunciation) and point to where the sound is made. For example, some vowels are produced towards the front of the mouth e.g. the sound ‘e’ in met and ‘ee’ in meet; whereas others are produced at the back of the mouth e.g. ‘ore’ in bore.

Below are some exercises to practise the pronunciation of individual sounds.

- 1) Use tongue twisters e.g. “Red leather, yellow leather” to practise the pronunciation of “l” and “r”. You can find many tongue twisters on the internet. Ask students to repeat them and insist on correct pronunciation of the target sound(s).
- 2) You can also play the game odd one out; show students 4 words and ask them to say which is pronounced differently:

Example: thought, bought, caught, through.

- 3) A useful exercise for working on individual sounds is minimal pairs. For this, you choose a sound that your students have difficulty with. I’ll take “h” as an example because many learners find this sound difficult.

Choose some words (five to ten will be enough) that begin with the sound “h” and some words that sound similar but without the initial “h” sound. For example:

Column 1	Column 2
Ham	am
Hat	at
Hash	ash

Try to choose words that your students are familiar with. If this isn’t possible, don’t worry, the important thing here is pronunciation.

An essential first step in working on any aspect of pronunciation is to have your students listen to the sound. So, read out column 1 whilst students listen, then do the

same with column 2. This is to focus on the different individual sounds. Then read one word from column one and the corresponding word from column 2. This is so that students hear the 2 different sounds side by side.

Then read out one of the words randomly and ask students to say whether it is in column 1 or column 2. Continue with this until most of the students get it correct. By this stage students will be able to recognise the sound. You can then move onto a production phase. Point to a word, say it and ask students to repeat after you, as a group first, then individually. When most students get it right, you can make this more difficult by pointing to a word, not giving the model and asking students to say the word.

You can adapt this exercise to practise any sound. I first saw this activity in “Tree or Three” by Ann Baker.

## 10.2 Word stress

Word stress refers to which syllable(s) in a word carries more emphasis, e.g. the first syllable in the word ‘teacher’ is stressed. Sometimes more than one syllable in a word is stressed, in which case one is usually stressed more than the other. This is known as primary and secondary stress. For example, in the word pronunciation, the primary stress falls on the “a” sound and the secondary stress falls on the “nun” sound. The English language has a particular sound that is called a “schwa”; this is the unstressed sound that often (but not always) occurs at the end of words. Think about the pronunciation of “er” in words such as teacher and painter; this is the schwa. It also occurs in the middle of words e.g. the first “o” in photographer, as well as the –er ending; so the word photographer actually contains 2 schwas. The phonetic symbol for the schwa resembles a reverted letter “e” (i.e. upside down). You might consider introducing this symbol to your students. When teaching vocabulary, you should mark stress and schwas on the new words. To find out where stress and schwas occur, you can consult your dictionary.

Ways of marking word stress include:

'picture

picture

•

picture

PICTure

• •

pronunciation

To practise word stress you can:

- 1) ask students to repeat words after you, exaggerating their pronunciation whilst punching the air in time with the stressed syllables. Such activities can be fun if you get some rhythm going.
- 2) show students words whilst saying them and ask students which syllable the stress falls on. A further activity is to group words that have stress on the same syllable. For example, show students the words below and ask them to group the words according to whether the stress falls on the first, second or third syllable.

Omission, understand, arrangement, normally, overflow, argument

Answers:

First syllable: normally, argument

Second syllable: arrangement, omission

Third syllable: overflow, understand

### 10.3 Sentence stress

Sentence stress refers to words in a sentence that carry more emphasis. If each word in a sentence is pronounced with the same stress, the sentence will sound stilted and unnatural. For example, try reading the following sentence giving each word and syllable the same emphasis: what are you going to do after class? Then re-read it in a natural way. Do you hear the difference? The schwa also occurs in sentences and phrases; think about the pronunciation of “are” and “to” in the sentence above, this is the schwa.

When teaching grammar or functions, remember to give one or two examples of phrases with sentence stress marked on them. You can use the same symbols you use for word stress for consistency.

For example: Have you ever been to Brazil?

To practise sentence stress you can:

- 1) ask students to repeat words after you, exaggerating their pronunciation whilst punching the air in time with the stressed words or syllables.
- 2) practise reading a sentence repeatedly but stressing a different word each time and see how the meaning changes. E.g. I don't know why he phoned her. If you stress the word “I” you're actually saying: “I don't know, but somebody else might know why he phoned her”. Practise this yourself on the different words of the sentence above and I'm sure you'll come up with lots of creative ideas.

## 10.4 Intonation

Intonation refers to the music of the language; how it rises and falls over a chunk of speech, a phrase or a sentence. Languages vary in how much intonation is used. For example German is not very “sing songy” whereas spoken English carries a lot of intonation. If a student, doesn’t master intonation, they can sound monotonous or bored when speaking English, which might not be the impression he or she wants to give. Intonation can indicate meaning. For example, a rising intonation on a question can indicate we didn’t understand. A falling intonation is often used when giving orders, e.g. do it now. Intonation can also show how we’re feeling; for example, a falling intonation can indicate that the speaker is bored.

To teach intonation, you can:

- 1) mark phrases on the board with rising or falling arrows.

For example:



That’s lovely



What time is it?

- 2) say the sentence and exaggerate the intonation; you can say the sentence and at the points where intonation rises and falls, use a rising or falling motion with your hand. Remember to ask students to repeat after you.

To practise intonation, you can ask students to listen to phrases on a recording while looking at the written form of the phrases. Students mark on the phrases whether the intonation goes up or down. They can then practise saying the sentences.

To practise intonation that carries feeling, you can read out various phrases and ask students what message you are conveying through your tone of voice. For example, say, “I’d simply love to go out tonight” in a bored voice, an excited voice, a resigned voice. Ask students what they think the meaning is. Then students can practise it in groups or pairs.

## 10.5 Connected speech

Connected speech involves sentence stress, intonation, as well as sounds that are silent in connected speech, for example: we usually say “goo boy” and not “good boy”. It also refers to sounds that are introduced e.g. “w” in “shall we go (w) out”.

To practise pronunciation in connected speech, you can take a sentence that you think the students will understand and read it out at a natural speed used between native speakers. Ask students to write it down as you speak. Repeat the sentence until they

have most of it; then invite students to tell you what the sentence is and to mark up all the pronunciation features (stress, intonation, silent letters and letters that are introduced). Students can then practise reading the sentences.

You can also work on connected speech after a listening activity. After listening to a recording, you can ask students to focus their attention on certain phrases. You can either write the phrases on the board or dictate them slowly. Ask students to mark stress (both word stress and sentence stress) and intonation on the phrases. They can also mark connected speech. Students can then practise saying the phrases and possibly compare what they say with the recording. Take short sections of the transcript for this, 2 or 3 lines will be enough.

### **10.6 A final word on pronunciation**

There are 2 basic rules to remember when teaching pronunciation:

After working on features of pronunciation, remember to correct students as you would with any other errors both during the pronunciation lesson and in subsequent lessons;

Students should listen to sounds before being asked to produce them themselves.

A lot of the work we do on pronunciation will be awareness-raising. We shouldn't expect our students to produce perfectly pronounced words all the time. Some students don't have a musical ear and/or just don't hear the differences between sounds. Even if they can hear the difference, they can't always produce the different sounds. If your students can't produce the sounds correctly at least they will be aware that a difference exists and be aware of what they are aiming for. A knowledge of sounds will also help them understand spoken English.

I suggest that you work on pronunciation regularly. You can incorporate this in two simple ways: by doing pronunciation work as a warmer or to fill a gap at the end of a lesson, though not in every lesson in order to maintain variety. Secondly, this can be achieved by incorporating pronunciation work into language presentations and speaking and listening lessons.

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