Readings for English 2

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Grammar vs lexis or grammar through lexis?

Submitted by leosel on 2 November, 2011 - 09:01

In this article, informed by the Lexical Approach, I reflect on grammar instruction in the classroom, including my own teaching, and make suggestions on how it can be 'lexicalised'. I consider the problems with 'traditional' grammar teaching before arguing that what we actually need is more grammar input as well as showing how lexis can provide necessary 'crutches' for the learner.

For more on the Lexical Approach see other articles on the TE website:


Lexis = vocabulary + grammar

The shift in ELT from grammar to lexis mirrors a similar change in the attitude of linguists. In the past linguists were preoccupied with the grammar of language; however the advances in corpus linguistics have pushed lexis to the forefront. The term 'lexis', which was traditionally used by linguists, is a common word these days and frequently used even in textbooks.

Why use a technical term borrowed from the realm of linguistics instead of the word 'vocabulary'? Quite simply because vocabulary is typically seen as individual words (often presented in lists) whereas lexis is a somewhat wider concept and consists of collocations, chunks and formulaic expressions. It also includes certain patterns that were traditionally associated with the grammar of a language, e.g. *If I were you*, *I haven’t seen you for ages* etc.

Recognising certain grammar structures as lexical items means that they can be introduced much earlier, without structural analysis or elaboration. Indeed, since the concept of notions and functions made its way into language teaching, particularly as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) gained prominence, some structures associated with grammar started to be taught lexically (or functionally). *I’d like to* is not taught as 'the conditional' but as a chunk expressing desire. Similarly many other 'traditional' grammar items can be introduced lexically relatively early on.

Less grammar or more grammar?

You are, no doubt, all familiar with students who on one hand seem to know the 'rules' of grammar but still fail to produce grammatically correct sentences when speaking or, on the other, sound unnatural and foreign-like even when their sentences are grammatically correct. Michael Lewis, who might be considered the founder of the Lexical Approach, once claimed that there was no direct relationship between the knowledge of grammar and speaking. In contrast, the knowledge of formulaic language has been shown by research to have a significant bearing on the natural language production.

Furthermore, certain grammar rules are practically impossible to learn. Dave Willis cites the grammar of orientation (which includes the notoriously difficult present perfect and the uses of certain modal verbs) as particularly resistant to teaching. The only way to grasp their meaning is through continuous exposure and use.
Finally, even the most authoritative English grammars never claim to provide a comprehensive description of all the grammar, hence the word 'introduction' often used in their titles (for instance, Huddleston & Pullum’s *A Student's Introduction to English Grammar* or Halliday’s *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*).

If grammarians do not even attempt to address all areas of grammar, how can we, practitioners, cover all the aspects of grammar in our teaching, especially if all we seem to focus on is a limited selection of discrete items, comprised mostly of tenses and a handful of modal verbs? It would seem that we need to expose our students to a lot of naturally occurring language and frequently draw their attention to various grammar points as they arise.

For example, while teaching the expression *fall asleep / be asleep* you can ask your students:

- *Don’t make any noise – she’s fallen asleep.*
- *Don’t make any noise – she’s asleep.*
- What does `s stand for in each of these cases (*is* or *has*)?

One of the fathers of the Communicative Language Teaching, Henry Widdowson, advocated using lexical items as a starting point and then 'showing how they need to be grammatically modified to be communicatively effective' (1990:95). For example, when exploring a text with your students, you may come across a sentence like this:

- *They’ve been married for seven years.*
  
  You can ask your students: When did they get married? How should you change the sentence if the couple you are talking about is no longer married?

The above demonstrates how the teacher should be constantly on the ball and take every opportunity to draw students’ attention to grammar. Such short but frequent 'grammar spots' will help to slowly raise students’ awareness and build their understanding of the English grammar system.

**Grammar after lexis**

English lessons in a Primary school involve teaching a lot of chunks, such as *Good morning. How are you? Where do you live?* However, as learners get older they tend to memorise less. They 'switch on' their analytical thinking and tend to break up the language they encounter into constituent bits. Teaching materials that separate grammar and vocabulary do not help either.

How can we assist learners in building a grammar system and, at the same time, help them crack some 'unlearnable' rules? Once again the key is to start with examples of language in use presented as whole chunks without spending too much time on structural analysis in the early stages of learning.

For example, the modal verb *might* with its daunting variety of uses such as deduction, permission as well as being the past form of *may* is often followed by the verb *take* to talk about time. It can therefore be presented as a chunk *It might take a while* without attending formally to all possible uses of *might*.

Such memorised chunks will later promote grammar acquisition. Also, it is often easier to generate similar sentences from ready-made examples rather than from formal rules. Having memorized *It might take a while*, learners can later produce
It might take a long time
It might take a couple of weeks
It might take even longer

Consider another example. The memorized pattern *isn’t easy to live with* can be extended to:

*isn’t easy to work with*
*isn’t easy to get on with*
*isn’t easy to deal with*

or later

*isn’t easy to talk to*

Grammar through lexis

Once I was invited to be a guest speaker in a Primary school. The fifth-graders, who must have just been taught question formation in the Past Simple, were firing questions at me: ‘Did you go to Buckingham Palace?’ ‘Did you see the Queen?’ ‘Did you visit the Tower of London’? While quite impressed with their knowledge of London sights and architectural icons I could not help but think that one day they would have to re-learn what they had been taught. In all of the above examples it would be more natural to use the Present Perfect: *Have you been to…? Have you seen…?* etc. Surely there must be a more natural way of practicing the Past Simple, for instance: *Did you have a nice weekend? What did you do? Did you stay at home all day?*

Delaying the introduction of certain structures is an enduring legacy of structural syllabi where learning a language, particularly its grammar system, was seen as itemistic. In other words, gradually moving from an easier item to a more complex one, following a linear sequence.

I remember teaching an Intermediate course using New Headway Intermediate, which was still an unassailable authority in those days, and where the Present Perfect does not appear until the second half of the coursebook. I too stand guilty of telling my students that “they are not ready for it” because they have not fully mastered other tenses or structures.

Unfortunately, many coursebooks still carefully grade the texts to avoid any encounters with the structures that have not been formally taught. The practice of methodically expunging what may be perceived as a difficult grammar point from textbooks for fear that it might confuse the learner, is regrettable because it deprives our students of natural examples they will later need to build their understanding of this point.

Learning a language is a cyclical process and full mastery takes a long time to achieve. If we go back to our “would” example, this modal verb has a variety of uses. Apart from expressing desire mentioned above, it can be used to talk about Future in the Past, hypothetical or imaginary situations and past habits to name but a few.

Thus our elementary level students using “would like” to express desire do not have the full mastery of this complex modal verb. Yet, it does not prevent them from using it appropriately in certain situations, i.e. expressing desire. Likewise, many seemingly difficult grammar structures can be introduced to talk about specific functions or situations. Here are some more examples.

**Present perfect**

Rather than delaying it until the Intermediate Level, it can be introduced at the Elementary level to talk about travel:
Have you been to London / Turkey / South America?

Later on, it can be expanded to the topic of films.

Have you seen Matrix 2?

Past perfect
It can be introduced as a chunk worse than I’d expected and later extended to than I’d imagined / than I’d thought / than I’d anticipated.

These instances in no way account for all the complexities of the Present or Past Perfect but they will contribute to the understanding of the concept in the later stages of learning. Consequently, by the time learners have come to formally deal with these structures they will have collected enough examples of them in use. Lengthy formal explanations may thus become partially redundant because students will have already internalised certain structures taught lexically.

Conclusion
So is there room for grammar instruction in the classroom? Certainly yes. But the grammar practice should always start with the exploitation of lexical items. Exposing students to a lot of natural and contextualised examples will offer a lexical way into the grammar of the language.

To sum up, grammar should play some role in language teaching but should not occupy a big part of class time. Instead grammar should be delivered in small but frequent portions. Students should be encouraged to collect a lot of examples of a particular structure before being invited to analyse it. Hence, analysis should be preceded by synthesis.

Lastly, language practitioners should bear in mind that grammar acquisition is an incremental process which requires frequent focus and refocus on the items already studied.

References

Also, although not referred to in the article, Hugh Dellar, one of the co-authors of the Innovations series (published by Heinle-Cengage) has often expressed similar views on the role of grammar and influenced my way of thinking.


By Leo Selivan This article was first published in September 2011
Vocabulary and autonomy

Submitted by TE Editor on 15 December, 2011 - 09:25

This article looks at ways to improve your students' abilities to both explore, store and use vocabulary. The general aim is to involve the students in a more autonomous fashion in their learning, rather than simply having them presented with word lists selected by the teacher or syllabus.

- The role of vocabulary teaching
- How can teachers help their learners?
- Self-initiated independent learning
- Formal practice
- Functional practice
- Memorizing
- Best approach
- Practical activities
- References

The role of vocabulary teaching
In the context of learning English as a foreign language, a learner is forced to be autonomous and independent and make conscious effort to learn vocabulary outside the classroom simply because the exposure to the target language is limited in class. So teachers cannot rely on their Ss 'picking up' lexical items. This makes explicit vocabulary teaching necessary. However, vocabulary is notoriously difficult if not impossible to teach because of the complexity of its linguistic, semantic and psycho-cognitive aspects.

How can teachers help their learners?
First of all, ways of presenting new vocabulary should be varied. In order to improve the efficiency of vocabulary learning (memorizing and retrieving lexical items) students should be encouraged to make use of learning strategies that are at their disposal, and be taught, either implicitly or explicitly, new strategies for vocabulary learning. According to one research (Pavicic, 1999) strategies can be divided into four groups

Self-initiated independent learning
These strategies involve planned, active and motivated learning and exposure to language outside the classroom (media).

Examples of strategies
- Word grouping
• Making notes of vocabulary while reading for pleasure/watching TV
• Word cards / Leafing through a dictionary
• Planning
• Recording and listening
• Regular revision

In this group cognitive strategies which include direct manipulation of lexical items are connected to meta-cognitive strategies that make the use of cognitive ones more effective. The aim is communicative use of vocabulary.

Formal practice
These strategies promote systematic learning and vocabulary practice. The aim is accurate reproduction and is often connected to the tasks of formal instruction.

Examples of strategies
• Loud repetition
• Bilingual dictionary
• Testing oneself
• Noting new items in class.

Functional practice
These strategies are based on context as a vocabulary source. They also include exposure to language, but without making a conscious effort (incidental learning). They also have a social aspect, i.e. interaction.

Examples of strategies
• Remembering words while watching TV/reading
• Using known words in different contexts
• Looking for definitions
• Listening to songs and trying to understand
• Using words in conversations
• Practice with friends.
Memorizing
This group includes a number of memory strategies based on inter-, intra-lingual and visual associations.

Examples of strategies
- Using pictures, illustrations
- Associations with L1 (cognates or key word method)
- Looking for similarities between words
- Visualisation

Best approach
There are no universally useful strategies and they contribute to vocabulary learning in different ways. Students use a number of strategies, often simultaneously. The efficiency of vocabulary learning depends on how students combine individual strategies. If students combine and employ individual strategies from different groups they will be more successful in developing the target language lexicon. Thus, the ideal combination would be that of strategies from all four groups.

The teacher should create activities and tasks (to be done both in and outside class) to help students to build their vocabulary and develop strategies to learn the vocabulary on their own. Students experiment and evaluate and then decide which to adopt or reject since strategies are not intended to be prescriptive.

Practical activities
Here is a selection of practical activities that direct learners towards using strategies of vocabulary learning.

The useful alphabet (self-initiated independent learning)
Each student gets a letter and has to find 5, 10 or 15 words s/he thinks would be useful for them. They then report to the class, perhaps as a mingle activity, using word cards (on one side they write the letter, on the other the information on the word - spelling, pronunciation, definition).

Word bag (formal practice)
This is to get your students to write down new words they hear in class.

At the beginning of the term/course divide students into groups of about 5 and give each group a number (e.g. 1-6). At the beginning of each class give each group about 10 cards on which they write the number of their group and the new words they hear in class. At the end of each class they put their cards into the "word bag" and every 2 weeks you check whether they still know those words and which group has the most cards. In the end there are two winners: the group that has the most cards, and the one that knows more words.

Especially for you (functional practice)
The teacher prepares a list of words. Each student gets one word which is prepared especially for
him or her. The trick is that each student gets a word whose initial letter is the same as the initial of the student's first name, e.g. Linda gets listless. Each student must look it up in the dictionary during the class and after a few minutes report to the class. E.g. "My name is Linda and I'm listless. That means that I am ... (definition)...". For homework students can do the same using their surname.

Word tour (memorizing)
Instructions for your students: Think of a town or city you know well. Imagine that you are organising a sightseeing tour. Think of 5 places you would include on your tour and write down the order in which the tourists would visit them. Learn your tour off by heart so that you can picture it in your mind. Whenever you have 5 new English words to learn, imagine these words are the tourists on your tour and picture the words in the places on your tour like this. Tour: Trafalgar Square; Buckingham Palace; Houses of Parliament; Westminster Abbey; Downing Street. Words to learn: apron; dustpan; vacuum cleaner; feather duster; broom. Imagine Nelson on his column in Trafalgar Square wearing an apron, the queen brushing the floor in Buckingham Palace and using a dustpan...

Literature reference

Visnja Pavicic, MA, Pedagoski fakultet [Faculty of Education], University of Osijek, Croatia
Revising lexis: quality or quantity?
Submitted by leosel on 22 November, 2011 - 15:52

This article discusses how much attention language teachers should pay to vocabulary acquisition research, particularly with regard to repeated encounters with lexical items.

Introduction
Sometime in the middle of the last century, Benjamin Whorf, famous for his contention that language shapes thought, made a controversial statement about the Eskimo language having seven words for snow. Frequently quoted or, rather misquoted overtime, Whorf's number of snow words was inflated to nine, twenty, fifty, and even one hundred. A similar snowball effect seems to be taking place with the contentious issue of how many exposures a vocabulary item needs for its retention.

About 20 years ago, researchers originally proposed that a second language (L2) learner needs six exposures to a word in order to retain it. However, with the emergence of more and more research into vocabulary acquisition, the number swelled to 10, then 15 and has now reached 20. Do we really need 20 exposures to the word? How realistic is it? What constitutes an exposure?

How many or how well?
First, my personal experience as a language learner as well as a language teacher shows that you can well do with fewer than six encounters if you have an acute communicative need. For example, if you are desperately groping for a word in L2, and a teacher (or a competent language speaker) supplies it on the spot you are quite likely to remember it. I have learnt many words in French and Spanish exactly this way, by "echoing" what my conversation partner or teacher has said.

Evidently, it is not only "how many times" but also "how well" that should matter. If you come across a lexical item many times but do not do much with it (known as incidental learning), you probably need countless repetitions before it is committed to memory. Conversely, if you are more actively involved in processing the language you meet (known as intentional learning) you are more likely to remember it. It is therefore up to teachers, to create situations and provide meaningful contexts in which learners can have the opportunity to recycle and reuse the language they have learnt.

In or out of context?
Decontextualised language practice was frowned upon during the heyday of Communicative Language Teaching. However, more and more evidence suggests that decontextualised vocabulary learning is perfectly justified (see for example Laufer, 2006). Students on EAP courses require many academic words such as fundamental, evolution, and welfare to understand dense scientific texts. In order to comprehend them you need to reach a certain level (according to Nation, usually 6000–8000 words), and decontextualised rote learning can often be the only way. However, how can you grasp, let alone use, such expressions as come to think of it or the next thing I know... without meeting them over and over again in meaningful contexts?

Testing the optimal number of encounters is also extremely difficult because there are an infinite number of external factors. One such factor is learnability. Some words are inherently difficult to learn. For example, buy more or less corresponds to the Spanish comprar and should not pose much difficulty for a Spanish-speaking learner of English while many other verbs cannot be mapped onto the same concepts in your first language (L1). For example, pursue does not have a direct word-for-word correspondence with Hebrew. Join can be rendered into French as rejoindre, s'engager,
adhérer or devenir membre. It depends on what you want to join in order to choose the right French word, i.e. on the collocations of the verb.

Teaching or researching?
To combat this and other intervening factors researchers often resort to using made-up words (known as “non-words”) in their studies, which I personally have ethical reservations about. Another problem with the studies attempting to count the number of encounters is that they mainly focus on the passive knowledge of vocabulary. For a practitioner teaching Communicative courses where the main aim is to get students to speak and use new language such research is neither valid nor of much use.

When I teach a new lexical chunk in class, I attempt to push the learners’ output as soon as possible by encouraging them to experiment with the new language in different situations. If I were to put my students under experimental conditions, I would have to deliberately stall them while busy counting the number of times a particular chunk was encountered before the learners could produce it.

Individual words versus multi-word items
Most researchers investigating the number of encounters needed to remember new vocabulary unfortunately overlook collocations. It is ironic that the same linguists who strongly propound the importance of learning vocabulary in chunks are preoccupied with counting exposures with individual words.

Establishing how many encounters a learner needs with a new collocation is even trickier. What constitutes a new collocation? An intermediate level learner may be:

a) familiar with the words meet and requirement but not know that they can collocate (meet the requirements);
b) familiar with one of the words (reach) in a collocation (reach a compromise)
c) unfamiliar with any of the words (e.g. bear resemblance)

Somewhat paradoxically, evidence suggests that type A collocations may present more difficulty for learners than entirely new collocations (type C). It could be the novelty effect that makes learners pay more attention to new collocations and overlook partially familiar ones, hence frequent errors such as *did a mistake or *made homework.

Furthermore, some research suggests that lexical chunks, which alliterate (e.g. slippery slope, prim and proper), tend to be learnt faster than the ones which do not display such a pattern (see Boers & Lindstromberg 2005).

Coursebooks & schools
Unfortunately, course books do not provide enough encounters with lexical items. Nowadays most course books are organised thematically. While learners may be exposed to the same lexis within a particular unit, few course books ensure the same lexis is recycled across the textbook, i.e. over a series of units. It is therefore the teachers’ responsibility to ensure that the language our students come across is revised in subsequent lessons and regularly recycled.

I once came across an article, which suggested optimum revision intervals as follows:

10 minutes after the initial encounter
1 day after the initial encounter
1 week after the initial encounter
1 month after the initial encounter
6 months after the initial encounter

Is it feasible in a school setting? Most EFL classes take place once a week, while in secondary schools there are a lot of timetabling constraints to ensure that the above intervals are adhered to. I would therefore recommend revising new lexis as often as possible whenever an opportunity arises. Teachers can make a good habit of finishing every lesson with a review of the language they have collected on the board during the lesson and starting every new lesson with a quick revision of the language covered earlier on the course.

As regards productive knowledge, the teacher should be able to spot when learners are trying to retrieve a partially learnt item and help them by eliciting it. The teacher may aid the students with prompts and questions or, in other words, provide the necessary scaffolding.

Conclusion
While researchers continue to argue how many encounters with a word are necessary in order for the learner to retain it and what the optimal conditions for retention are, most agree that frequent recycling is essential for effective vocabulary learning. It is our responsibility as teachers to make sure that regular revisiting of the lexis is part of a language course.

References


By Leo Selivan

- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/revising-lexis-quality-or-quantity#sthash.DkXOWLWh.dpuf
Context developing activities
Submitted by TE Editor on 19 August, 2005 - 12:00

It is widely recognized that second language (L2) mental lexicon must be independent of its first language (L1) counterpart, if learners are to use the target language effectively and fluently. The purpose for the L2 vocabulary is to be stored in much the same way as L1, which has two significant implications:

- learners do not access their L2 lexicon by means of translating and so can save processing time while improving their fluency and
- L1 does not interfere and so the target language produced is more native-like.

It is easy to observe that there is a whole area of functional language, usually in the form of fixed expressions or sentence frames, which is impossible to acquire on productive level unless learners have developed their own independent mental lexicons in L2. The reason is clear-cut. These items cannot be efficiently accessed through the process of translating from L1 to L2.

This is also true of other areas of vocabulary, such as some collocations or discourse markers. Take the word 'actually' for example which is very frequent in spoken English. Most learners' dictionaries give definitions which begin with 'used in/as/to ...' followed by a description of context in which the word usually occurs. This single fact suggests that learners may have to link certain items of vocabulary to context rather than anything else.

Clearly, if we are to help the learners acquire independent L2 lexicons, we need to highlight the importance of the context in which the language naturally occurs. Once the idea of context playing a decisive role in the choice of language is firmly established, we can begin to introduce varieties of the language used in different contexts, such as cultural and regional, social or situational. However, the reality of L2 instruction heavily exploiting EFL materials rife with all too notorious fill-in exercises, where sentences are artificially constructed and/or lacking any context whatsoever is rather saddening.

On the other hand, this feature of many coursebooks provides learners with plenty of opportunities to develop their own context for the language presented. Here are a few activities that can be used with this purpose.

1. Odd one out
Write up an expression (eg. That's none of your business!) on the board and supply four different situations. The students have to identify in which situation the phrase would be inappropriate. You may follow it up with questions penetrating the context deeper and also expand the line into a short dialogue.

2. Brainstorming
Write up an expression (eg. Hold on.) and have the students brainstorm situations in which the expression would be likely to occur. Then follow it up in the same way as with the previous activity.

3. Fill-in exercise
Infamous fill-in exercises too can be adapted for use in context developing activities. First use the
activity as usual and then pick one or two sentences and go on to ask: "Who was most likely to say it?" Supply a few options for the students to choose from or invite them to suggest their own examples.

4. Dialogue
Present a short dialogue, or part thereof, with a consciousness-raising activity helping the students notice a particular language feature (eg. weak forms). Drill the dialogue chorally and then have the students in pairs answer questions such as:

- Who are the two people? Make up their names.
- How old are they?
- What is their relationship?
- Where are they?
- What time is it?
- Why...? (2-3 questions)

Once they finish, put two pairs together and have them discuss their answers. The purpose of this stage is to find any logical inconsistencies and fix them by supplying additional explanations. The students can form new groups and continue in the same way until they are satisfied with the outcome which they can then present. Finally, drill it again chorally and individually in pairs. Also, consider whether any of the situations presented may be suitable to act out!

Soap operas or romantic films are a particularly rich source of colloquial language suitable for this type of activity. For the more famous Hollywood films it is also easy to find complete subtitles on the internet which makes the preparation easier. On the other hand, the danger is that the students may know the particular scene which would effectively stop them from using their imagination.

Here, for example, is a short exchange from Notting Hill. Note the high occurrence of words from the semantic field of 'Food' and functional language 'Offering'.

A: Uh, would you like a cup of tea before you go?
B: No.
A: Coffee?
B: No.
A: Orange juice? Probably not. Um, something else cold. Uh... Coke? Water? Some disgusting sugary drink pretending to have something to do with fruits of the forest?
B: No.
A: Would you like something to eat? Uh, something to nibble? Um, apricots soaked in honey? Quite why, no one knows, because it stops them tasting of apricots... and makes them taste like honey, and if you wanted honey, you'd just buy a honey instead of... apricots. Um, but nevertheless, there we go there. They're yours if you want them.
B: No.
A: Do you always say "no" to everything?
B: No... I'd better be going.
Unlike the first three activities which, depending on the expression, may be easily adapted for any levels, the last activity in particular should be attempted only with intermediate+ students as it requires a high degree of understanding the language input and ability to respond quickly when challenged by other students. In return, however, it provides ample opportunity for engaging discussion in which the students slowly expand and fine-tune their story so that it's coherent with the language presented.

Jiri Brazda, teacher, Czech Republic

- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/context-developing-activities#sthash.t7xHLNMP.dpuf
Seven steps to vocabulary learning

Submitted by TE Editor on 26 July, 2005 - 12:00

Have you ever considered why a learner (even an advanced one) can hear a difficult English word or phrase literally thousands of times and still not use that word in the way that a native speaker does? You might expect that, after having been exposed to a word in ten, twenty, or maybe at the very most thirty, contexts, a learner will gradually piece together the word’s meaning and start to use it correctly, appropriately and fluently.

- Classroom context
- Seven steps to vocabulary learning
- Conclusion

Classroom context
Of course we cannot expect a learner to acquire difficult words in the same way as a young child acquires their first language, but, perhaps as teacher we can somehow help learners to arouse their 'learning monitor' by, for example, providing rich contexts containing the target language and by giving our learners time to reflect on what the language item means. In this way teachers can use the EFL classroom to replicate the real world and nurture strategies to help students understand and produce difficult language items which often seem beyond their grasp.

Seven steps to vocabulary learning
Here are some practical steps that I have used to help my students. As an example I want to focus on one very tricky word ('actually') and suggest ways that a student can understand what it means, and, thereafter, be able to use it more fluently. This model (which consists of seven steps) can be used for any difficult word/phrase.

Step 1
I get my students to listen to the word or phrase in authentic-sounding dialogues
Here are the dialogues I use for 'actually':

- Do you want a chocolate?
  No, thanks. I'm on a diet actually.

- Do you want a coffee?
  Actually, I'm a bit pushed for time.

- Could I just borrow your book for a moment?
  Actually, I'm just about to use it in class. Sorry.

- How's John doing?
  Actually, he's doing all right!

- Ready to go?
  Yeah...erm...actually I'm going to take my umbrella. It looks like it might rain.
I see you're still following your diet! (meant sarcastically) Actually, I've lost a couple of pounds since we last met.

I think the students need at least six contexts to start to understand all the different nuances of meaning of a difficult target item.

Step 2
I give my students plenty of time to study the word in these contexts, so that they can work out what the meaning / function is. I either get them to study the contexts individually and then get them to compare their thoughts in pairs or groups or I get them to discuss in pairs / groups straight away. I prefer the first option, because, this way, each student gets more time to think for him / herself.

Step 3
I discuss the meaning in plenary. I do this in two stages. First, I simply say "So what do you think?" Then, after having heard their thoughts, I ask concept questions that uncover the heart of the meaning.

Examples of concept questions for actually might be:

- Is the speaker saying something quite important?
- Does the speaker give the other person the answer they want / expect?
- Is the speaker asserting him/herself?
  **Answers: a) important; b) not; c) standing up for him/herself**

After doing such concept question work, I use a summing up concept statement, like this one: "So we use 'actually' after someone asks us a question (often a request or offer), and we don't give them the answer they want or expect."

Step 4
I provide a phonological model (including pronunciation, stress, and intonation) in a surrounding sentence.

Most native speakers devote three syllables to 'actually', the stress is on the first syllable, and there is a rise/fall/rise intonation pattern (which signals the conflict in the situation).

Step 5
I provide a prompt - to elicit use of the word in a natural way.

Here are some prompts I use for actually:

- "So what do you think of __________ ?" (London) I use a facial expression to show that I expect a positive response.
- "Would you like a cigarette?"
• "Shall we go out for a meal tonight?"

• "How's your friend Bill?"

If I don't get the response I want, I repeat and try to get another student to help. Then, if necessary, I get individual students to repeat the response until they feel completely comfortable with it.

Step 6
I set up a simulation, providing students with the chance to say the word in a natural situation. I distribute the following scenario and get two of my stronger students to act it in front of the class and then I get all the students to act it in closed pairs (rotating roles). This is an example scenario I have used for 'actually'.

John and Mary are in a pub.
1. John asks Mary if she'd like an alcoholic drink.
2. Mary declines this (as she doesn't drink alcohol).
3. John buys her some mineral water.
4. Mary suggests sitting down.
5. John agrees.
6. John asks if it's OK to light a cigarette.
7. Mary says she's got a bronchial problem. (etc.)

Step 7
I set up a review schedule, in which words are elicited and practised. It's always important to review such lessons in the future, but each time I do this, I spend less time on it, and insert bigger gaps between the inclusion of this language item in the review sessions. Ultimately, I reach the point where I just need to say to someone "Fancy a chocolate?" and I automatically get the response "Actually I'm on a diet."

Conclusion
Students who are living in an English-speaking country are often happy learning what difficult words and phrases mean through their everyday study or work lives, but for the majority of students, learning a language is a slow and painful process, and we must try to do something to accelerate the pace of learning. My students should, I believe, benefit from the teaching procedures I've described in this article. If they learn words and phrases in this systematic way in class, they are not only likely to achieve more communicative success in class but also to become more aware of how they learn and the knowledge they need to acquire to learn words more successfully.

Further reading
Giorgi and Longobardi *The Syntax of Noun Phrases*, Cambridge University Press
Miller and Weinert *Spontaneous Spoken Discourse*, Oxford University Press

Paul Bress
Multi-word verbs: Methods and approaches

Submitted by TE Editor on 6 July, 2005 - 12:00

In the first of these two articles, Multi-word verbs: Learner problems, I looked at some of the problems that multi-word verbs cause students. In this second article I'll look at a range of approaches and methods that I have used to try to help my students with them.

- Categorising
- Focus on lexical verb
- Lexical sets
- Teaching through texts
- One way of using texts in the classroom
- Conclusion

Categorising
Traditional approaches to the teaching of multi-word verbs focus on the explicit study of the item. Many ELT coursebooks and grammars classify them into four distinct types, depending on whether they are intransitive or transitive, i.e. verbs that don't take an object and verbs that do, or if the verb and particle can be separated or not. Students study the rules, and then attempt to match a number of phrasal verbs (generally not linked thematically) to their appropriate type.

- I have used this method in the past, and have occasionally found students, usually analytical learners, who have benefited from such an approach. The terminology can also aid students resourceful enough to study in their own time, through the use of grammars and dictionaries.

- Generally however, I find such an approach cumbersome. The learner is often overburdened with terminology, and the sheer wealth and complexity of the rules can put the students off using them.

- Too much classroom time becomes taken up with grammar terminology, with little left to engage in real language use, such as reading and speaking. The students spend time "learning to use English", rather than "using English to learn it." (Howatt)

Focus on lexical verb
Another approach is to group them according to the lexical verb:

- run into
- run over
- run off
- run away
- run through

Exercises such as these are usually designed to test knowledge of the difference in meaning between verbs in a group, through gap fill.

- Example: "I ________ Simon in the cinema last night." (ran into)

These exercises are a test of meaning rather than form, but there is usually no situational coherence. I have found that the lack of co-text in exercises such as these makes it difficult for students to remember the phrasal verbs. They lack communicative purpose, and the students have no hooks with which to connect the meaning to their own life.

- One way of making exercises such as these a little more communicative is to set students the task of constructing sentences about themselves, using these verbs, in an attempt to make the meaning real for them.

- A further point regarding this type of grouping is that it can be very confusing for students. It is only the particle which changes the meaning, but being confronted with so many different particles, students easily confuse them, producing sentences such as, "I need to run into my speech tonight", for 'run through', and "I ran over Carmen in the supermarket yesterday."

Lexical sets
More recently, approaches have tended to group phrasal verbs into lexical sets. Thus, a text about plane travel may include:

- take off
- do up
- speed up
- touch down etc.

Certain phrasal verb books group the verbs in this way and have a number of advantages. The verbs are presented through text, which makes their meanings clearer, and students can also use the co-text to work out the meanings. Such cognitive engagement may also make the exercise more memorable.

- Learners generally move sensibly from recognition to production and there is usually a final exercise in which students get to personalise the verbs, by asking each other questions.
However, again, the potential for confusion is high, when the lexical set contains words of very similar meaning. For instance, students of mine had problems with a text about relationships, which contained the verbs; go out with, get on with, fall out, split up. I found that words of similar meaning interfered with each other, especially those which had a similar form, here, go out with and get on with.

Teaching through texts
A more natural approach perhaps, is to teach phrasal verbs as they occur in a text. Language is used in context and is usually better learnt in context.

- In authentic texts the relationship between the verbs is often looser, thereby reducing the chances of confusion.
- Furthermore, texts are not weighed down by complex explanation or categorisation, and thus more classroom time is devoted to authentic language use.

One way of using texts in the classroom
A possible approach is to underline in a text all the phrasal verbs which you wish students to notice. Then, in groups, ask them to try to divine their meanings. The students will thus be able to use the co-text to help them.

- Guessing a new word’s meaning from context is a key vocabulary learning skill and Nation (1990) identifies it as one of the three principal strategies for handling unknown vocabulary. Inferring from context is a difficult task, yet, "The deeper the decisions a task forces upon a learner, the superior the retention and recall." (Nattinger).
- The next step is to move from recognition to production. I often do this by setting up a situation, and then asking students to make the phrasal verbs their own by producing a text along similar lines to the original. Thus, if the original text they read was an advertisement for a gym for example, then I ask them to write another advertisement for a gym, but this time aimed especially at their colleagues, or their classmates.
- Carter and McCarthy emphasise the importance of learners finding meaningfulness for themselves in words and in relationships between words they encounter in texts. This personalisation task will thus be more conducive to successful vocabulary learning.

Conclusion
There are therefore various ways in which multi-word verbs can be approached in the classroom. An approach which combines frequent and contextualised exposure with work on awareness raising may work best. Ultimately though, words are learned by the individual, but through memorable presentation, personalisation tasks, and importantly, recycling, we can work to create in learners a "sense of need for a word" (Allen), which thus may lead to vocabulary acquisition.

Further reading
*Vocabulary* by Michael McCarthy
*How to teach Vocabulary* by Scott Thornbury
Vocabulary in Language Teaching by Norbert Schmitt
Techniques in Teaching Vocabulary by French Allen
The study of lexis in interlanguage by A. Davies, C. Criper, and A. R. P. Howatt.
Lexical phrases and language teaching by J Nattinger and J Decarrico
Words, words, words by Janet Allen

Vanessa Steele, British Council, Barcelona
Multi-word verbs: Learner problems
Submitted by TE Editor on 28 June, 2005 - 12:00

Multi-word verbs are complex and present problems for learners both in terms of their grammatical form and their lexical meaning. I find that learners around the world tend to panic at the mere mention of their name, and to avoid using them for fear of making mistakes. In this article I shall be looking at why this is and how as teachers we can try to encourage students to use them.

- Various meanings
- Collocation
- Helping students with collocation
- Particles
- Pronunciation
- Grammatical form
- Conclusion

Various meanings
Many multi-word verbs carry more than one meaning. Thus, learners who are familiar with the meaning of "turn down" as in, "He turned down the radio", have problems interpreting the meaning of "He turned her down" (rejected her).

- I have found that it is best to deal with the meaning of the verb that is salient in the text. If the meaning of the verb in focus is to 'reject', then I teach this meaning, without going into the other possible meanings. I find this approach to be clearer and less confusing for students.
- Richards states that "Knowing a word means knowing its different meanings (polysemy)." This is certainly our aim in teaching, but we must realise that such competence requires time.
- It is only through reading, exposing learners to texts rich in multi-word verbs, that learners will become lexically competent. "The learner must be allowed to be vague about meaning at first; precision will come later". (Judd, quoted in Carter and McCarthy)

Many multi-word verbs carry a literal meaning, e.g. "sit down", "stand up", though many have a non-literal meaning, e.g. "I picked up quite a bit of Spanish on holiday last year."

- If presented through texts, learners can sometimes interpret their meanings quite accurately, picking up clues from the theme of the text and the co-text, but isolated or even heard or read at sentence level, they can be very confusing for the learner.
Collocation
Multi-word verbs present problems in terms of the words with which they collocate. McCarthy says that collocation is "a marriage contract between words, and some words are more firmly married to each other than others." Thus, "to call off", for example, collocates strongly with "match", i.e."The match was called off due to the rain", and it also collocates strongly with 'engagement', 'wedding', 'meeting'.

- Students often misunderstand the meaning, i.e. cancel, and then attempt to apply it to other nouns with which it in fact has no relationship. For example, "I called off my English class" sounds strange to L1 speakers, as generally we can only call off events which have been specifically arranged, or that are of a unique, one-off nature.

Helping students with collocation
I try to raise students' awareness of collocation by asking them to underline the nouns which follow certain verbs and then later filling in a collocational grid, matching multi-word verbs to their common collocations, e.g.'Call off', 'set up', 'put off' = 'a meeting'.

- Alternatively, I have found that collocation bingo works well, as learners have a set of nouns on a card, which they cross off according to whether they think they collocate with the phrasal verb which I read out.

- Odd one out tasks are also very useful as students are involved in a deeper level of processing, discussing why certain words don't combine.

- Most of all though, it is through the language which occurs in the classroom that students can really see how the relationships between words matter, provided the teacher draws attention to this.

Particles
The meaning of the particles, i.e. 'up', 'on', 'in', can also cause problems as sometimes the particles can share meaning across a large number, but not all, multi-word verbs. For instance, the particle 'up', is often said to express the idea of 'increase', as in 'grow up', 'heat up', 'hurry up', 'cheer up', but this idea can not be applied to the verb 'split up' for example.

- Many exercises exist which focus on particles and sensitise learners to the shared meaning of a group. I find these to be of value in increasing students' confidence in dealing with phrasal verbs, as they feel as though they have a tool with which to help them unlock the meaning of previously incomprehensible items.

- As long as the teacher highlights the fact that the generalised meaning of the particle in question is not the same with all multi-word verbs, then these exercises can be useful in facilitating understanding of multi-word verbs, thus aiding memory and ultimately production.
Pronunciation
Research shows that words which are difficult to pronounce are more difficult to learn. Phrasal verbs are not too problematic for learners in terms of pronunciation, though misplaced word stress is a common error.

Students are frequently reluctant to give stress to particles. In the sentence, "We did the kitchen up" for example, "kitchen" is stressed, though when we substitute the noun for a pronoun, "We did it up", the stress falls on the adverbial particle.
One way of helping learners is by using graphics, such as stress boxes (a small black square) on the board, and getting them to mark the stress above words or syllables in the whole sentence and to practise reading it aloud.

Grammatical form
In terms of grammatical form, multi-word verbs present problems for learners as to whether,

a) they are separable or inseparable
b) they are transitive or intransitive
c) they are formal or informal

In responding to these problems of form, teachers can either focus on the rules, i.e., whether they are Type 1 or 2 etc., or adopt a more incidental learning approach.

- The latter consists of exposing learners to lots of examples, preferably in short contexts which demonstrate their syntactic behaviour.
- Reading is considered a key means to vocabulary improvement, and research suggests that just using a language can be a potent way to learn it, even without explicit focus on linguistic forms.

Conclusion
Multi-word verbs are therefore quite problematic for learners. However, simply by anticipating and being prepared for problems students may have can do much to erase part of the fear and confusion that surrounds multi-word verbs.

Further reading
Vocabulary by Michael McCarthy
How to teach Vocabulary by Scott Thornbury
Vocabulary in Language Teaching by Norbert Schmitt
Techniques in Teaching Vocabulary by French Allen

Vanessa Steele, British Council, Barcelona
I don't think there is ever a class where a student has not queried a new word. Words pop up all of the time and it seems that the more words students notice inside or outside the classroom, the more likely they are to see their own level of English progress.

So teaching vocabulary is one of the most important areas for teachers to deal with. The problem with vocabulary is that there seem to be so many words and sometimes it is difficult to know which ones to teach. They are all over the place and don't come in nice little rules like so many grammar items. So, what can we do to help both our students and ourselves learn such a diverse area of language?

- Ways to help our students
- How I start
- Using it on the course I'm teaching
- What I have to do
- Autonomy
- Conclusion

Ways to help our students
The first way is not to "teach" vocabulary, but help learners to "see" words as Lexis. This means seeing words that come in phrases, groups or words that combine together, which then means looking at areas of Lexis such as fixed and semi-phrases, idioms, and collocations. The second is by organising these phrases in order to help our learners actually produce new language through speaking and writing.

One efficient way of doing this is having your learners keep their own lexical notebooks. It aids autonomous learning and, when designed correctly, can give them a long-term strategy for dealing with vocabulary. By keeping a record of their work in this way students can see that their learning does not just stop and start as each semester starts and finishes but continues and improves as they maintain their notebook.

How I start
So, how do we make lexical notebooks? I have found small A5 notebooks (148x210mm) that you find in any supermarket or shop which sells school material. They do not cost very much, are small enough to be carried around, have 200 pages and strong enough to last years.

- When you introduce the lexical notebook to your students, ask your students at the start of the semester to buy one of these notebooks. This allows them to have a sense of ownership; the books are theirs, not the school's, the teacher's or anyone else's. I have found this means they will take more care of them and use them far more often.
• If you take a look at the photocopiable pages which accompany this article you can see 3 different sections that I have successfully used (with my Brazilian students), that you should be able to cut out and fit into the first 3 pages of your student’s notebooks. Of course you may have to adapt them for your own particular students' needs. So when your students have bought their book, collect them and stick these (or your adapted versions) into each one. Let's have a look at the reasons why we have each one and how they can help the learners.

Download example pages 57k

• The first page is a statement, which will help your learners see how important it is to study Lexis. It is very explicit and clearly explains how they can make a shift in their learning by focusing far more on words rather than grammar.

• The second page has a simple explanation as to how learners should look at vocabulary. Not in single words but in phrases, groups or chunks. I have used the word "collocations" as I have found it much easier for Latin languages, such as Portuguese, to understand this word concept rather than that of the commonly used word "chunk".

• The third page organises the notebooks in themes. The list shows some of the most frequently used lexical combinations, which can be allocated to different pages or each theme. This helps you and your learners see the main typical word combinations to be concentrated on. Choosing to separate language in themes helps not only contextualisation of these word combinations but gives students an organisational tool that they can use to produce language. If the class theme was for example "the environment", the learner can note down the combinations studied and then use them when they come to speak and write about the subject.

Using it on the course I'm teaching

In a period of study, many courses and course books are designed by themes and so the notebook can follow a course quite easily. Throughout a long-term course of study these themes will reappear and if your students have already studied a theme, they can go back to their notebook and add new word combinations as well as review the old ones.

This means learners see both old and new language and when they go back to a new theme they will naturally notice the progress in their own learning. Their notebooks then become a tool to use outside of class.

What I have to do

Upon receiving my students' notebook, I first stick in these first few pages from the photocopiable sheet, then I write on the first 20 pages (the first two Themes) the word combinations the students must note down in each page. Then as a new theme in class comes up my learners have an example of how they should organise the rest of their book. If you do this students see a model of how each theme is set out, some personal input by the teacher and lots of space for them to continue expanding their learning.

Autonomy

The lexical notebook can be initially compared to teaching someone to ride a bike. You need to guide and secure the students before they are balanced and can pedal by themselves. When they start noticing language and writing down words they are becoming self-sufficient and autonomous. The more autonomous our learners become the much more likely it is that they will become better language learners.
Learning strategies such as lexical notebooks will set them on the road to becoming much more successful in their studies and reach levels they might not have thought possible. By organising their learning I can give students a chance to achieve this. Hopefully a few years later, students will still remember the teacher who wanted to give them a way to really improve their whole English studying. You never know they may even come back one day and say "Thank you".

Conclusion
I hope this article will help you make your own lexical notebooks with your students and bring you success when teaching vocabulary. I am sure by doing this it will help benefit your own personal development and go some way to becoming more understanding towards your students needs.

This article first appeared on the British Council ELT Online Community website at: http://www.britishcouncil.org.br/elt/

Further reading
'Lexical Notebooks' By Shaun Dowling, English Teaching Professional, Issue 28, July 2003
'Teaching Collocations' By Michael Lewis, LTP 2000
'Vocabulary' By Schmitt, MacMarthy, CUP 1997

Shaun Dowling, Teacher trainer, Cultura Inglesa, Brasilia
This article gives an extensive list of classroom activities that focus attention on collocation. This is the second of two articles on the topic. The first article - Collocation with advanced levels 1 - gives an overview of the topic of collocation in English language teaching and shows how this is a key area of study for advanced level students.

"The ability to deploy a wide range of lexical chunks both accurately and appropriately is probably what most distinguishes advanced learners from intermediate ones." (Thornbury 2002:116)

- Textual analysis activities
- Preparation activities
- Speaking activities
- Dictionary and matching activities
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

Textual analysis activities

- Students can analyse texts to heighten their awareness of collocations. Depending on the text, you might ask the students to find, for example, five useful collocations that occur around a certain topic. Or you could give students a list of words or phrases and ask them to find what collocates with them in the text. You could also go further than the text and ask them to find further possible collocations with certain items in the text using a collocation dictionary.

- Make up gap-fills based on authentic texts, particularly deleting verbs from verb + noun collocations.

- Get the students to carry out prediction exercises, using a kind of word association technique. You could reveal a text gradually (using an overhead projector) and get the students to predict the next word or phrase.

- Asking the students to reconstruct the content of a text from a few words only serves to highlight the central importance of collocations as against individual words. (There are software programmes which are good for this but you can also do the activity using an overhead projector: put a dash for each word you want to blank out and a number against each dash. Get the students to suggest words and phrases that are missing and write in the correct answers as they come up.)
Ask the students to brainstorm nouns on a particular subject, perhaps for a writing task. Then get them to suggest verbs and adjectives that collocate with those nouns, then adverbs with the verbs, thus building up a number of lexically dense collocational fields.

Speaking activities

- Get the students to do creative drills. For example, devise a 'Find somebody who...' activity for them to practise collocations. For example,

  Find someone who
  ......has been on a strict diet
  ......has found themselves in an embarrassing position
  ...has made an inspired choice etc.

  The students themselves could make up similar activities.

- Get the students to repeat the same activity, for example giving a short talk or telling a story, perhaps three or four times. This has been shown to boost fluency by activating collocations.

Dictionary and matching activities

- Get the students using collocation dictionaries to find better ways of expressing ideas, including replacing words like 'new' and 'interesting' with better, stronger words to create typical collocations, or finding the 'odd verb out'. For example,
  o Which verb does not go with 'answer'? come up with, do, get, require
  o Spot the odd verb Can you find the verb which does not collocate with the noun in bold?

  1. acknowledge, feel, express, make, hide, overcome, admit shame
  2. apply for, catch, create, get, hold, hunt for, lose, take up job
  3. acquire, brush up, enrich, learn, pick up, tell, use language
  4. assess, cause, mend, repair, suffer, sustain, take damage
  5. beg, answer, kneel in, offer, say, utter prayer
  6. brush, cap, drill, fill, gnash, grit, wash teeth
  7. derive, enhance, find, give, pursue, reach, savour, pleasure
  8. disturb, interrupt, maintain, observe, pierce, reduce to, suffer silence

  Answers
  1. make 2. catch 3. tell 4. take 5. beg 6. wash 7. reach 8. suffer (only with suffer in silence)

- Devise some matching games, such as dominoes or pelmanism which require the students to match up split collocations. For example, focus on adjectives that go with nouns, like 'bitter' and 'disappointment,' or 'inspired' and 'choice'
• Give the students a number of words which collocate with the same core word; the students have to guess this word. For example saying 'year, loss, haven, evasion' to produce 'tax'. This could be made into a game by awarding points. The teacher reads out the words one by one and the students in teams gain, for example, 10 points for the answer after one word, 8 after two, 6 after three and so on.

Which word collocates with all the words given?
1. fried, poached, fresh, raw, frozen, grilled, smoked _______________
2. summer, warm, winter, tatty, shabby, trendy, second-hand ____________
3. dangerous, desperate, common, born, hardened, master _______________
4. massive, huge, crowded, packed, outdoor, indoor, sports _______________

Answers. 1 = fish, 2 = coat, 3 = criminal, 4 = stadium

• Get the students used to recording collocations in a variety of ways - in boxes, grids, scales, matrices and word maps. Learners can add new words in the appropriate sections as they come across them in texts, during lessons etc.

• Raise students' awareness of collocation by using translation where possible and appropriate to highlight differences and similarities between their L1 and English.

• Use songs to give examples of typical collocations, and in a memorable fashion, perhaps through prediction, filling gaps and so on. This would help with intonation and pronunciation too, as could recorded radio news items, or TV advertising.

Conclusion
In all these activities, any chance should be taken to enhance deep processing of the language. Strong personal recollections and identifications tend to lead to greater semantic networks and associative links. The focus should be on the integration of new material into old. Language learning is, after all, not linear but cyclical.

Rosamund Moon calls just looking at words "dangerously isolationist" (1997:40), and goes on to say that "words are again and again shown not to operate as independent and interchangeable parts of the lexicon, but as parts of a lexical system" (ibid:42). An understanding of collocation is vital for all learners, and for those on advanced level courses, it is essential that they are not only aware of the variety and sheer density of this feature of the language but that they actively acquire more and more collocations both within and outside the formal teaching situation. It is only by doing this through increased exposure that they can be assured of leaving the intermediate plateau behind.

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This article originally appeared in ‘In English’ - The British Council magazine for teachers of English in Portugal - in the Autumn 2002 issue.

Bruce Williams, teacher, British Council, Lisbon, Portugal
Collocation with advanced levels 1 - not entirely...proper/appropriate/good?

Submitted by TE Editor on 28 November, 2003 - 12:00

This article gives an overview of the topic of collocation in English language teaching and shows how this is a key area of study for advanced level students. This is the first of two articles on the topic. The second article - Collocation with advanced learners 2 - provides classroom activities for the study and practice of collocations.

"The ability to deploy a wide range of lexical chunks both accurately and appropriately is probably what most distinguishes advanced learners from intermediate ones.” (Thornbury 2002:116)

- Problems with advanced levels
- Types of collocation
- Why is collocation important for advanced learners?
- The teacher's role
- Implications
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

Problems with advanced levels
Many advanced students tend to have a number of distinguishing (negative) characteristics. First, they often lack motivation, especially if not working towards an external examination. This is compounded by the fact that they know, or feel they know, English grammar, having recycled the major structures countless times in previous years. In addition, they usually possess a good enough active vocabulary to get by in most everyday speaking situations, and so do not see the necessity for acquiring a lot of new items. Similarly, as many have managed to pass the Cambridge First Certificate exam, they see little need to improve their writing skills. Unless specific lexis related to an individual's work or leisure interests surfaces, novel vocabulary or ways of expressing oneself seem of only passing interest. If teachers content themselves with recycling hackneyed grammar points, or introducing increasingly irrelevant and tortuous new ones, along with rarely used or over-specific lexis, there is a real possibility that learners will simply switch off. Most, according to Lewis, will in fact remain stuck on the 'intermediate plateau' (2000) and tend to continue producing both spoken and written language containing unnatural-sounding elements which grate on listener or reader, as words that do not usually co-occur together are thrown up unexpectedly. For example 'in the shell of a nut' (instead of in a nutshell) and 'I have overtaken the fear of driving' (instead of 'I have overcome the fear of driving') are recent examples from my students. If the reader (or listener) is confused, then the writer or speaker is likely to be at best frustrated or at worst completely misunderstood.

Types of collocation
Learners need to be aware of the fact that words, in Thornbury's phrase, "hunt in packs." (1998:8) That is to say, all words have their own, unique collocational fields. Collocations can be defined in numerous ways (see Moon 1997:43), but for pedagogical purposes it is more practical to restrict the
term to the following: two or three word clusters which occur with a more than chance regularity throughout spoken and written English. Below are the most easily distinguishable types:

**Verb + noun**  
throw a party / accept responsibility

**Adjective + noun**  
square meal / grim determination

**Verb + adjective + noun**  
take vigorous exercise / make steady progress

**Adverb + verb**  
strongly suggest / barely see

**Adverb + adjective**  
utterly amazed / completely useless

**Adverb + adjective + noun**  
totally unacceptable behaviour

**Adjective + preposition**  
*guilty of / blamed for / happy about*  
*also known as compound nouns*

**Noun + noun**  
pay packet / window frame

Why is collocation important for advanced learners?

"Students with good ideas often lose marks because they don't know the four or five most important collocations of a key word that is central to what they are writing about." (Hill 1999:5) As a result, they create longer, wordier ways of defining or discussing the issue, increasing the chance of further errors. He cites the example: "His disability will continue until he dies" rather than "He has a permanent disability." (2000:49-50)

There is no magic formula for correcting these mistakes. Collocations have to be acquired both through direct study and large amounts of quality input. The very concept of collocations is often not easy for learners. The essentially simple idea that word choice is seriously limited by what comes before and after "is perhaps the single most elusive aspect of the lexical system and the hardest, therefore, for learners to acquire" (Thornbury 2002:7)

Once grasped, however, this new focus can re-awaken their interest and enthusiasm in the language. Teachers can highlight progress by periodically recording oral contributions and comparing written texts with earlier output and authentic material. Learning collocations, apart from increasing the mental lexicon, leads to an increase in written and spoken fluency (the brain has more time to focus on its message if many of the nuts and bolts are already in place in the form of collocations of varying length). As Lewis says, "fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed or semi-fixed prefabricated items, which are available as the foundation for any linguistic novelty or creativity." (1997:15) Moreover, stress and intonation also improve if language is met, learnt and acquired in chunks. Quality input should lead to quality output.

In seeing real advances in their spoken and written fluency highlighted, and understanding the importance of collocation in aiding these advances, students will, hopefully, be stimulated to increase their own, informed exposure to English. As a result, they will begin to lift clear of the intermediate plateau.

The teacher's role

Hill argues that the problem for advanced learners is not so much with encountering vast numbers of new words (although extensive reading and listening which will contain new lexis is no doubt necessary) as with working with already half-known words and exploring their collocational fields.
Ellis claims acquisition can be hastened "as a result of explicit instruction or consciousness-raising." (1997:133) The most useful role of the teacher, therefore, is in consciousness-raising, in encouraging noticing on the part of the learners. In other words, the teacher becomes more of a learning manager, giving students strategies to use outside the classroom while at the same time providing exposure to as much appropriate, quality language as possible.

Implications
"No noticing, no acquisition." (Thornbury 1997)
Teachers must raise learners’ awareness of collocation as early as possible. Students who meet words initially with their common collocates use them far more naturally, pronounce them better and have a greater amount of ready-made language at their disposal to aid fluency, allowing more time to focus on the message. Learning lexical strings first seems to enable students to extract the grammar themselves as they begin analysing acquired language.
For advanced learners, especially if new to the concept, teachers need to use activities highlighting collocation. They should also stress the importance of learners actively seeking an increasingly large amount of exposure to primarily written but also spoken language outside the classroom, and noticing collocations within that material.

Conclusion
Rosamund Moon calls just looking at words "dangerously isolationist" (1997:40), and goes on to say that "words are again and again shown not to operate as independent and interchangeable parts of the lexicon, but as parts of a lexical system” (ibid:42). An understanding of collocation is vital for all learners, and for those on advanced level courses, it is essential that they are not only aware of the variety and sheer density of this feature of the language but that they actively acquire more and more collocations both within and outside the formal teaching situation. It is only by doing this through increased exposure that they can be assured of leaving the intermediate plateau behind.

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This article originally appeared in 'In English' - The British Council magazine for teachers of English in Portugal - in the Autumn 2002 issue.

Bruce Williams, teacher, British Council, Lisbon, Portugal
Integrating pronunciation into classroom activities
Submitted by TE Editor on 23 August, 2011 - 14:35

Pronunciation work has traditionally taken a secondary role in language teaching to work on grammar and more recently lexis. In my work as a teacher trainer I have been surprised at how often experienced teachers are reluctant to tackle pronunciation issues in class. I can think of at least two reasons why pronunciation tends to be neglected: firstly, the lack of clear guidelines and rules available in course books, and secondly the fact that isolated exercises once a month do not seem to have much of an effect. This is not surprising, however: like all other areas of language teaching, pronunciation needs constant attention for it to have a lasting effect on students, which means integrating it into daily classroom procedures. I find that addressing issues regularly during the language feedback or group correction stage of a lesson helps to focus learners’ attention on its importance and leads to more positive experiences.

- Using student talk to teach pronunciation
- Word stress
- Vowel sounds
- Diphthongs
- Weak forms
- Sentence stress
- Conclusion

Using student talk to teach pronunciation
Pronunciation work can be kept simple and employ exercises which are both accessible and enjoyable for students, whatever their level. Whenever students do a freer speaking activity, the main aim is usually for them to develop their spoken fluency in the language. However, the activity also serves to work on students' accuracy through the feedback we give them on their use of language.

- When my students do such a group or pair work activity at any level I listen in and take notes which are divided into three areas of language: pronunciation, grammar and lexis. Within the latter, as well as unknown lexis I will also include areas such as register, function, set phrases...and within the former I will include notes on any area of pronunciation that leads to miscommunication. This includes diphthongs, vowel sounds (including weak forms), consonant sounds, word stress and sentence stress. All of these areas can be dealt with quickly and efficiently by having some simple exercises ready which require nothing more than the board and a basic knowledge of the phonemic chart.

- If learners are introduced to the phonemic chart one phoneme at a time, it can be introduced from beginner level and students are quick to appreciate its value. A rule for when 'ea' is pronounced /e/ (head) and when it is pronounced /i:/ (bead) will not necessarily aid production, whereas the activities I propose here will. Once your students get used to the exercises, pronunciation work becomes even more efficient and, dare I say it, effective.
Word stress
Here is a simple exercise I repeat regularly for work on word stress and individual sounds.

- I hear a pre-intermediate learner say: 'I suppose (pronounced with stress on first syllable) I will see her tonight'. The listener doesn't understand because of the mispronunciation and asks the other student to repeat until finally they write it down and we see what the word was.

- After the activity, on the board I put a column with two bubbles to represent word stress, the first small, the second much larger. I write 'suppose' under the bubbles and drill it before asking students to think of other two-syllable words with second-syllable stress.

- I get 'outside', 'today', 'below' and 'behind', which I accept as correct before asking for verbs only. I then get 'accept', 'believe', 'forget' and these go in the same column.

- If a student asks for rules during this exercise, in this case 'Do all 2-syllable verbs have this stress pattern?', for example, I either ask them to think of examples that contradict their rule to give myself time to consider it or I tell them we will look at rules for this the following lesson. As a general rule I find that this procedure encourages learner autonomy by having learners form their own hypotheses which are then confirmed or disproved by the teacher in the following lesson.

Vowel sounds
I hear a pre-intermediate learner say: 'Not now because he is did (dead)'.

- After the activity, on the board I draw a column with the heading /el/. In this column I write the word 'dead' and have students repeat it. I then ask for examples of words which rhyme with this, which students find easy ('red', 'bed', etc.).

- I do not write these, however. I then ask for words which rhyme and have the same vowel spelling, i.e. 'ea'. I put students in pairs or groups to think of words, giving myself some thinking time, too. In this case, depending on the level I will get 'head', 'bread', 'read', 'lead', and we end up with an extendable list of words with the same spelling and sound.

- It is the cognitive work of trying to think of similar words, writing them down and their organisation into columns that helps learners retain sounds and spellings, rather than simply revising the lists. This is why all students should be encouraged to copy the list into their notebooks.

- If the classroom allows it, it's also a great idea to have students pin posters with sound columns up on the wall and add to them whenever a new item comes up for that sound, particularly if it is a strange or different spelling.

- The idea is to get a basic poster with a phoneme at the top and various columns with different spellings.

```
/el/
'ε'  'ea'  'ai'
bed  dead  said
```
Diphthongs
I hear an intermediate learner say: 'I didn't find (pronounced / f iː ә n d/) it anywhere'.

- I make a column with /ai/, drill 'find' and my students give me 'fight', 'bike', 'buy', 'eye', 'my', etc. for the sound.

- I accept these without writing them and then encourage students to think of other words spelt like 'find'. I get 'mind' and 'kind'.

- There may be only one or two for any given pattern. If I have thought of any other words myself I add them to the column, ensuring that they are not obscure words or too high for this particular level (in this case I might choose to introduce 'bind' and 'grind', but probably not 'rind' or 'hind').

Weak forms
I hear an elementary learner say: 'I will buy vegetables (pronouncing 'table' at the end)'. I note that this is also an opportunity to work on word stress.

- I make a column with a schwa, and drill 'vegetable', marking the word stress.

- With an elementary class there is a case for simply teaching this point rather than eliciting known words, so I point out the number of syllables and the stress on the beginning of the word, explaining that this makes the final syllable weak and not pronounced as the word 'table'.

- I add to the list 'comfortable' and 'presentable' as further examples, but avoid adding more so as not to overwhelm students at this level.

- For the second example I point out that the stress is on the second syllable. I can think of objections teachers have made to my suggesting this, such as students' confusion at the lack of a steadfast rule or the non-uniformity of the examples, for example, but to cater to this merely serves to reinforce students' belief that a language always obeys a strict set of rules. In my experience this approach is not a useful one. The only way to learn these fundamental pronunciation points is to notice them, note them down and practise them regularly.

Sentence stress
I use fluency drills to work on sentence stress. I hear an intermediate learner say: 'He told me I couldn't have a holiday' (bold words are stressed). This causes confusion due to the stress being placed on the wrong words in the sentence, i.e. the pronouns, or grammar words, as opposed to the content words.

- The activity is simply a choral drill, but of the whole sentence and maintaining an English rhythm. 'He told me I couldn't have a holiday'.
The trick here is not to over-exaggerate on the stressed words, but keep the stress and rhythm natural. Think in terms of modelling a rhythm, rather than a stress pattern. Using gesture like the conductor of an orchestra or tapping on the board to show the rhythm is especially helpful for students who cannot hear it easily.

Admittedly, this latter exercise on sentence stress does seem to take longer to have an effect, but if highlighted early on and practised relatively often, students do seem to internalise how English stress differs from their own language and helps overcome what in later stages of learning becomes a fossilised way of speaking. Sentence stress causes more communication problems for a fluent speaker than any number of grammatical errors.

Conclusion
One of the beauties of using student speech for pronunciation work is that it directly addresses students' problems. I have attempted to provide a couple of very simple exercises here to help teachers integrate pronunciation into their classes on a regular basis. Regular work in this area helps learners to develop their own hypotheses and gut-feeling for English pronunciation, something experts and researchers have long emphasised as an essential skill of a good language learner.

Barney Griffiths, Teacher trainer, Teacher, Materials writer, Spain

This article was first published in 2004

- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/integrating-pronunciation-classroom-activities#sthash.XiX2msvg.dpuf
Teaching the schwa

Submitted by TE Editor on 2 March, 2009 - 12:00

If you only learn or teach one phoneme, make sure it’s the most common English sound - the schwa.

The schwa

- Why the schwa is the most common sound
- Why I teach the schwa
- How I teach the schwa
- Conclusion

Why the schwa is the most common sound

In stress-timed languages such as English, stresses occur at regular intervals. The words which are most important for communication of the message, that is, nouns, main verbs, adjectives and adverbs, are normally stressed in connected speech. Grammar words such as auxiliary verbs, pronouns, articles, linkers and prepositions are not usually stressed, and are reduced to keep the stress pattern regular.

- This means that they are said faster and at a lower volume than stressed syllables, and the vowel sounds lose their purity, often becoming a schwa. Listen to these two examples of the same question. The first is with every word stressed and the second is faster and more natural with vowels being reduced.

'What kind of music do you like?'

The same thing happens with individual words. While stressed syllables maintain the full vowel sound, unstressed syllables are weakened. For example, the letters in bold in the following words can all be pronounced with a schwa (depending on the speaker’s accent): support, banana, button, excellent, experiment, colour, sister, picture.

Why I teach the schwa

To understand the concept of word or sentence stress, learners also need to be aware of the characteristics of ‘unstress’, which include the occurrence of the schwa. In addition, if learners expect to hear the full pronunciation of all vowel sounds, they may fail to recognise known language, especially when listening to native speakers. Even if they understand, students often do not notice unstressed auxiliaries, leading to mistakes such as, ‘What you do?’ and ‘They coming now’.

Helping your students to notice the schwa won’t necessarily lead to an immediate improvement in listening skills or natural-sounding pronunciation, but it will raise their awareness of an important feature of spoken English.

How I teach the schwa
Fast dictation
I find this activity useful for introducing the schwa in context. However, it can be repeated several times with the same group of students, as it also recycles grammar and vocabulary.

Warn students that you are going to dictate at normal speaking speed, and that you will not repeat anything. Tell them to write what they hear, even if it’s only one word. Then read out some sentences or questions including language recently studied in class.

For example, I used these questions with Pre-Intermediate level students, following revision of present simple questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How many brothers and sisters have you got?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How often do you play tennis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What kind of music do you like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) What time do you usually get up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) How much does it cost?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After reading the sentences, allow students to compare in pairs or groups. Then read again, while students make changes and additions, before a final comparison with their partner(s). Next, invite individual learners to write the sentences on the board, while others offer corrections. The teacher can correct any final mistakes that other learners do not notice.

Say the first sentence again naturally, and ask learners which words are stressed. Repeat the sentence, trying to keep stress and intonation consistent, until learners are able to correctly identify the stressed syllables. Then point to the schwa on the phonemic chart and make a schwa sound. Get students to repeat. Read the first sentence again and ask learners to identify the schwa sounds. Repeat the sentence naturally until students are able to do this. Ask them to identify the stress and schwas in the other sentences, working in pairs or groups. My students found the following, although again there is some variation between accents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How many brothers and sisters have you got?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How often do you play tennis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What kind of music do you like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) What time do you usually get up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) How much does it cost?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. I normally get learners to write the schwa symbol underneath the alphabetic script.

Once this is done, you can drill the sentences, perhaps by 'backchaining'. This is where the sentence is drilled starting from the end, gradually adding more words.

Try to maintain natural sentence stress when drilling. A danger of focusing on the schwa is that it can be given too much emphasis, so correct this tendency if it occurs in individual and choral repetitions.

After doing this activity for the first time, I ask learners some awareness-raising questions:
What kinds of words are stressed? (Content words, i.e. nouns, main verbs, adjectives, adverbs)

What kinds of words are generally not stressed? ('Grammar words', i.e. auxiliary verbs, pronouns, articles, linkers, prepositions)

Do stressed syllables ever contain schwa? (No)

Do you think this is more important for listening or speaking? (Students will often say 'speaking' but in fact this is more important for what Underhill calls 'receptive pronunciation'. Learners will still be understood if they give all vowel sounds their full value, but it's worth practising these features orally to help learners 'develop an ear' for them.)

- Stress and schwa prediction
  Take a short section of tape or video script (a short dialogue or a few short paragraphs of spoken text). Before listening or watching, ask learners to identify the stressed syllables and schwas, and to rehearse speaking the text. They then listen or watch and compare their version with the recording. There will probably be differences, but this can lead to a useful discussion, raising issues such as variations in the use of schwa between accents, and emphatic stress to correct what someone else has said.

- Word stress and schwa
  I often ask learners to identify word stress and schwa in multiple-syllable words recently studied in class. This recycles vocabulary, and illustrates the point that schwa does not occur in stressed syllables. It also helps with aural comprehension as well as correct pronunciation of these words.

- A gentle reminder
  You may still find, even when drilling, that learners are tempted to pronounce the full vowel sound in unstressed syllables. I give my students a gentle reminder that schwa is the 'Friday afternoon' sound. Slumping in the chair and looking exhausted while saying schwa normally gets a laugh!

Conclusion
Many of my students have seemed fascinated by the insight that English is not spoken as they thought, with every vowel being given its full sound, and after an initial introduction to the schwa they start to look for it themselves in other words and sentences. More ambitious students take every opportunity to practise this 'native-speaker' feature, while others revert to the full vowel sound after drilling, but in either case their expectations of how English sounds will have changed.

Further reading
Sound Foundations by Adrian Underhill
Pronunciation by Dalton and Seidlholfer
How to Teach Pronunciation by Gerald Kelly
Teaching English Pronunciation by Joanne Kenworthy

Catherine Morley, British Council, Mexico

- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/teaching-schwa#sthash.eTQ0YRdR.dpuf
Rhythm
Submitted by TE Editor on 4 April, 2007 - 12:00

Rhythm is both a feature of and product of the phonological structure of English. The phonology of any language is a system, so that a change in one part of the system will affect some or all of the other parts.

- Sentence stress
- Connected speech
- Teaching rhythm
- Recognition
- Production
- Conclusion

English is a very rhythmical language, so that a learner who can maintain the rhythm of the language is more likely to sound both natural and fluent. The two components of the system which have the greatest influence on rhythm are sentence stress and the various features of connected speech, i.e. what happens to words when we put them in an utterance.

Sentence stress
In any sentence, some words carry a stress. These are the ‘strong’ or ‘lexical’ words (usually nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs). The remaining words are ‘grammatical’ words and are unstressed or ‘weak’ (conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliaries, articles).

‘It’s the worst thing that you could do’

The rhythm produced by this combination of stressed and unstressed syllables is a major characteristic of spoken English and makes English a stress-timed language. In stress-timed languages, there is a roughly equal amount of time between each stress in a sentence, compared with a syllable-timed language (such as French, Turkish and West Indian English) in which syllables are produced at a steady rate which is unaffected by stress differences. Sentence stress is an important factor in fluency, as English spoken with only strong forms has the wrong rhythm, sounds unnatural and does not help the listener to distinguish emphasis or meaning.

Connected speech
Speed is also a factor in fluency. When we speak quickly, we speak in groups of words which are continuous and may not have pauses between them. This causes changes to the ‘shape’ of words. Unstressed words always sound different when used in a sentence as opposed to being said in isolation.

The most common features of connected speech are the weak forms of grammatical and some lexical words (and, to, of, have, was, were) and contractions, some of which are acceptable in written English (can't, won't, didn't, I'll, he'd, they've, should've). However, we often ignore other features which preserve rhythm and make the language sound natural. The most common of these are:
• **Elision** (losing sounds)

• **Linking** (adding or joining sounds between words)

• **Assimilation** (changing sounds)

Added to these is the use of the **schwa**, the most common vowel sound in English. Many unstressed vowel sounds tend to become schwa, and because it is an important feature of weak forms, learners should be able to recognise and produce it.

There is a temptation to try to teach the rules associated with these features, using phonemic script to write examples. An awareness-raising approach is often more profitable, starting by asking students what happens to certain words when we put them in a sentence:

| listen, it’s upstairs, one or two right kind | why did you? unpopular first girl Christmas | ask them four o’clock, blue apple, last Monday |

This might be followed by a categorisation task, from which rules or guidelines could be elicited.

**Teaching rhythm**

Rhythm, then, is a product of sentence stress and what happens to the words and sounds between the stresses. Unfortunately, learners are often introduced first to written forms and the complexities of spelling. Learners whose mother tongue is phonemic or syllable-timed have particular problems. Teachers should remember to:

• Provide natural models of new target language before introducing the written form.

• Use natural language themselves in the classroom.

• Encourage learners to listen carefully to authentic speech.

• Teach recognition before production.

• Integrate rhythm and other aspects of phonology into grammar, vocabulary and functional language lessons as well as listening and speaking activities.

A number of useful teaching techniques are listed here, focusing either on rhythm as a whole or on contributing aspects, and divided into recognition and production activities.

**Recognition**

• Speed dictations (the boys are good / the boy is good / the boy was good).
• Dictogloss and other variations on dictation.

• Ask students how many words they hear in a sentence (to practise recognising word boundaries).

• Ask: "What’s the third / fifth / seventh word?" in the sentence.

• Teaching weak forms and contractions at the presentation stage, and highlighting these on the board.

• Matching phrases to stress patterns.

• Using tapescripts. Marking stresses and weak forms.

• Using recordings of deliberately ‘unnatural’ English.

• Authentic listening.

Production

• Drills (especially backchaining).

• Physical movement (finger-clicking, clapping, tapping, jumping) in time to the rhythm of the sentence.

• Focus on stress in short dialogues (kn you? Yes I can).

• Making short dialogues, paying attention to stress and rhythm (How often do you speak English? Once in a while).

• Headlines, notes and memos (build the rhythm with content words, then add the rest).

• Reading out short sentences with only the stressed words (How...come...school?), then add the other words without slowing down.

• Reading aloud (with plenty of rehearsal time).

• Focus on short utterances with distinctive stress and intonation patterns and a specific rhythm (long numbers, ‘phone numbers, football results).

• Jazz chants.

• Poems, rhymes and tongue-twisters (limericks are good at higher levels).

• Songs (the rhythm of English lends itself to rock and pop music, while rap involves fitting words into distinct beat).

Conclusion
Because phonology is a system, learners cannot achieve a natural rhythm in speech without
understanding the stress-timed nature of the language and the interrelated components of stress, connected speech and intonation. Attention to phonology begins at lower levels and builds up as learners progress towards fluency. There are specific phonology courses available, while most integrated syllabuses include pronunciation activities which run in parallel to structural, functional and skills development. Above all it is important to remember that there is a place for phonology in nearly every lesson.

Further reading
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Steve Darn, Izmir University of Economics

- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/rhythm#sthash.5U7FZxxA.dpuf
Intonation

Submitted by TE Editor on 16 March, 2006 - 12:00

Intonation is crucial for communication. It's also a largely unconscious mechanism, and as such, a complex aspect of pronunciation. It's no surprise that many teachers don't feel confident about tackling it in the classroom. When teaching grammar or lexis, we find ways of making the language accessible to our learners. How then to do this with intonation?

- What is intonation?
- Why teach intonation?
- Can I improve my own awareness of intonation?
- How I help my students:
  - Awareness-raising
  - Intonation and grammar
  - Intonation and attitudes
  - Intonation and discourse
- Conclusion

What is intonation?
Intonation is about how we say things, rather than what we say. Without intonation, it's impossible to understand the expressions and thoughts that go with words.
Listen to somebody speaking without paying attention to the words: the 'melody' you hear is the intonation. It has the following features:

- It's divided into phrases, also known as 'tone-units'.
- The pitch moves up and down, within a 'pitch range'. Everybody has their own pitch range. Languages, too, differ in pitch range. English has particularly wide pitch range.
- In each tone unit, the pitch movement (a rise or fall in tone, or a combination of the two) takes place on the most important syllable known as the 'tonic-syllable'. The tonic-syllable is usually a high-content word, near the end of the unit.
- These patterns of pitch variation are essential to a phrase's meaning. Changing the intonation can completely change the meaning.

Example:
- Say: 'It's raining'.
- Now say it again using the same words, but giving it different meaning. You could say it to mean 'What a surprise!', or 'How annoying!', or 'That's great!'. There are many possibilities.
Why teach intonation?
Intonation exists in every language, so the concept we're introducing isn't new. However, learners are often so busy finding their words that intonation suffers. Yet intonation can be as important as word choice - we don't always realise how much difference intonation makes:

- Awareness of intonation aids communication.
- Incorrect intonation can result in misunderstandings, speakers losing interest or even taking offence!

Though it's unlikely our learners will need native-speaker-level pronunciation, what they do need is greater awareness of intonation to facilitate their speaking and listening.

Can I improve my own awareness of intonation?
It's difficult to hear our own intonation. Choose somebody to listen to closely: as you listen, visualise the melody in your head, 'seeing' how it's divided into tone-units. Next time you do a class speaking activity, focus on your students' intonation. Are there students whose language is 'correct', but something doesn't sound right? Do they come across as boring or insincere? It may well be their pitch range isn't varied enough.

How I help my students
Awareness-raisinng
Some techniques I find useful for raising learners' awareness of intonation:

- Provide learners with models - don't be afraid to exaggerate your intonation.
- Let students compare two examples of the same phrase, eg: varied/flat intonation, English / L1.
- Ask students to have a 2-minute conversation in pairs as 'robots' (elicit the word using a picture if necessary), i.e. with no intonation. When they then go back to speaking 'normally', point out that the difference is made by intonation - this is what gives movement to our voices.
- Get students to imitate my intonation, but without words, just humming.

Intonation doesn't exist in isolation. So it makes sense to approach it together with other factors.

Intonation and grammar
Where patterns associating intonation and grammar are predictable, I highlight these to my students. I see these as starting-points, rather than rules.

Some examples are:

- Wh-word questions: falling intonation
- Yes/No questions: rising
• Statements: falling
• Question-Tags: 'chat' - falling; 'check' - rising
• Lists: rising, rising, rising, falling

When practising these constructions, I include activities focusing specifically on intonation.

For example, Question-Tags: Students in groups are assigned jobs to mime to each other. Students make notes about what they think each person's job is. They then have to check they've understood the jobs: Students use rising/falling intonation question-tags depending how sure they are: 'You're a pilot, aren't you?'. At the end, students confirm their jobs.

Intonation and attitude
It's important that students are aware of the strong link between intonation and attitude, even if it's difficult to provide rules here.

• The first thing is for learners to recognise the effect of intonation changes. I say the word 'bananas' - firstly with an 'interested' intonation (varied tone); then 'uninterested' (flat). Students identify the two and describe the difference. We then brainstorm attitudes, such as 'enthusiastic', 'bored', 'surprised', 'relieved'. I say 'bananas' for these. Students then do the same in pairs, guessing each other's attitude.

• This can be developed by asking students to 'greet' everybody with a particular attitude. At the end, the class identify each person's attitude. For younger learners, I use 'Mr Men' characters (Miss Happy, Mr Grumpy, Miss Frightened, etc.) Each student is allocated a character and, as above, they greet the class with that character's voice.

Intonation and discourse
Learners also need awareness of intonation in longer stretches of language. Here, we can give our learners clearer guidelines: 'new' information = fall tone; 'shared' knowledge = 'fall-rise'.

A simple shopping dialogue demonstrates this:

SK: Can I help you?
C: I'd like a chocolate (fall) ice-cream.
SK: One chocolate (fall-rise) ice-cream. Anything else?
C: One strawberry (fall) ice-cream.
SK: One chocolate (fall), one strawberry (fall). Anything else?
C: Yes. One chocolate (fall), one strawberry (fall), and one vanilla (fall-rise).

Higher level students can identify the 'new' / 'shared' information, and then practise reading accordingly.

With lower level students, we memorise the dialogue together. Although I don't refer to intonation directly, I use my hands to indicate it (fall = hand pointing down; fall-rise = down then up). Students then prepare their own dialogues. I've found my learners pick up these patterns very
quickly.

Conclusion

When working on intonation in the classroom I:

- Remember that intonation is relevant to any speaking activity, and makes interesting remedial/revision work.

- Remember that students don't always have to 'know' we're focusing on intonation: every time I drill phrases they're hearing intonation models.

- Provide realistic and clear contexts.

- Avoid going into theory.

- Help students find patterns / rules-of-thumb, wherever possible.

- Use a consistent system for marking intonation on the board for example: arrow for tone; tonic-syllable in CAPITALS; double lines (//) for tone-unit boundaries.

- Keep it positive and don't expect perfection. The last thing I'd want is to make my students so anxious about their intonation that they stop speaking!

Further reading

*Sound Foundations* by Adrian Underhill
*Pronunciation* by Dalton and Seidlholfer
*How to Teach Pronunciation* by Gerald Kelly
*Teaching English Pronunciation* by Joanne Kenworthy

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Teaching the tale: language and memory

Submitted by David Heathfield on 5 July, 2011 - 08:01

A feature that is common both to language teaching and to traditional folk and fairy tales is the repetition of phrases or ‘language chunks’. In the most popular English versions of some traditional tales the exact same phrase is repeated unmodified, e.g. ‘I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house down,’ Wolf threatens each of the Three Little Pigs. In other tales a phrase is repeated but amended each time, e.g. ‘Who’s been sitting in my chair?’ ‘Who’s been eating my porridge?’ and ‘Who’s been sleeping in my bed?’ Goldilocks causes the Three Bears to wonder. Another example of this is Little Red Riding Hood’s exclamations ‘What big eyes/ears/teeth you have, Grandma!’ The telling of these stories can usefully support English language students’ learning of the ‘will’ future form, the Present Perfect Continuous and ‘what+adjective+noun exclamations’ respectively.

Joining in
In many cultures listeners are invited to join in with these kinds of language chunks when being told a story in their mother tongue, so it makes sense for us to invite learners of a second target language to join in. Where the story being told in English is already known to learners in their mother tongue (this may well be the case in many parts of the world regarding the three stories mentioned above) this knowledge will provide additional support when joining in with the teacher and retelling the story partly or wholly in English. When orally reproducing the language chunks after the teacher and saying them along with the teacher in the context of the story, learners are also being given the chance to express character and mood meaningfully through voice, rhythm, intonation, posture, expression and gesture. This happens naturally in storytelling.

Storytelling for all ages
The three tales referred to above are often thought of as children’s fairy stories and some teachers may hesitate before asking older children, teenagers and adults to join in with these tales. Wide-ranging experience tells me that playfulness in language learning can be effective at any age and the familiarity and positive associations people usually have with oral storytelling experiences in their lives leads to enthusiastic participation. It is worth remembering that repetition is not only a feature of tales associated with childhood. Many stories from religious texts involve repetition and it is also a feature of many longer jokes and humorous tales.

Teaching the tale
Of course a tale does not have to be already familiar to language learners in order for this kind of participation and repetition to work in the language classroom. Huge numbers of suitable folk tales involving repetition are to be found on the internet – see links below. Here is one way of teaching students to retell the West African tale of Akakro. This story was contributed by Gerry Abbott to Storytelling in ELT (IATEFL). I learnt it from this source and focused in my telling on the high frequency language chunk ‘Have you got something to ... (eat/drink/wear)?’ I have followed the steps below with young learners, teenagers and older students - you can view this process in practice by going to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5Rr54snUdE You can view me telling the whole story at www.youtube.com/watch?v=0t6htD1KCWM

1. First I tell the tale, using pauses and gesture to indicate to learners that they can join in with the ‘Have you got something to...’ phrases.
2. After telling the tale, I invite a confident volunteer student to play the role of the boy and I play the role of the old woman. I ask the other students to focus on our postures and voices while the two of us act out the scene at the old woman’s house. By getting into the role of the old woman
through posture, mime, voice and concern for the boy I model that these features are as important to the dialogue as the text itself.

3. All the students then stand in pairs and act out the scene at the same time (but not chorally). As long as the target language chunk ‘Have you got something to...’ is reproduced adequately, the rest of the dialogue can vary to a small extent and certainly the performances are naturally very different from each other in style, mood and physicality.

4. I might invite one pair to show us their scene. One suitable task for students watching is to notice something that impresses them about the way the pair plays the scene and afterwards give feedback directly to them. This often leads to interesting or unexpected comments such as ‘You looked really hungry’ or ‘The old woman you played is just like my grandmother’ or ‘I felt the gold shining from you both’.

5. Stepping the Story: This is a whole-body approach to story-learning where pairs of students walk through and remember the story as they go. First I make as much space as possible in the classroom. I model this with a confident volunteer student. We stand next to each other, link arms, and together we remember and retell the story. When we have told the first part of the story (what would be the first paragraph if it were written down) we pause and take a step forward together. Then we tell the next part before taking a second step. Observing the two of us stepping the tale reinforces the first half of the story in the minds of the rest of the students. We continue until we have got to the point where the boy comes to the door of the old woman’s house.

6. Now all the students are ready to step the story all the way through from the start. They remember the scene between the boy and the old woman when they get to it because they re-enacted it earlier. I remind students to take their time. Each pair finds their way through the story at their own pace. I make myself available to prompt pairs if they get stuck. Each pair of students tends to step through a story differently. Some narrate it in unison. Others take in turns. Some elicit from their partner. Some tell events in the story as if they are checking off items on a list. Some act the story out physically and mime as they go. After finishing, many students have commented that they imagined the landscape of the story setting as they stepped through. Some felt they were journeying through the story as invisible onlookers. Others said they were active protagonists in the story. Some even felt the heat of the African forest or tasted the fruit the old woman offered the boy.

7. Students often need support with the final part of the story, so we gather and retell it together.

8. Now students are ready to retell the story individually to a partner. A show of hands tells me which students feel most ready and these find a less-ready partner and they sit face to face. The listener’s role is vital as it will have a direct bearing on the confidence of the storyteller and therefore the success of the storytelling. The listener can also support the teller if prompting is required. The listener often has the confidence to have a turn at telling the story afterwards.

9. A suitable follow-up task is to encourage students to retell the story orally to someone they know outside the class. This can be done in a very controlled way, for example students visit another group of students in another classroom and each finds a new partner, this time someone who doesn’t already know the story, to tell it to. Alternatively, or additionally, this can be an oral homework task: students tell family members or friends from outside (and perhaps teach them some English at the same time!). By this stage students are starting to innovate and ‘make the story their own’.

Many activities can supplement or replace stages in this process and more stages can follow, including discussion of ideas in the story, visually representing the story, researching and/or retelling folk tales on related themes, creative writing.

Scaffolding
Memorising language chunks through repetition is an effective way of scaffolding learners’ language use and is also at the heart of how people have always told stories. Storytelling is a co-creative experience connecting teller and listeners and is a fundamental aspect of who we are as
human beings. Giving language students the opportunity to be storytellers themselves gets to the heart of good teaching practice.

For a shorter procedure see activity Teaching students the shortest tale.

Many of the ideas behind this article come from a session led by fellow storyteller Chris Smith from The Story Museum for teachers in UK state schools. Go to www.storymuseum.org.uk click on stories at school and then click on ideas that work then click on mapping and stepping.

There are huge resources of folk and fairy tales from all over the world published in English on the internet – here are just a few of the ones that I recommend:

For everyone:


Especially for children:


By David Heathfield

David Heathfield is a storyteller and English teacher. Find related ideas in his teacher resource book Spontaneous Speaking: Drama Activities for Confidence and Fluency (DELTA Publishing).

[www.davidheathfield.co.uk](http://www.davidheathfield.co.uk)

- See more at: [http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/teaching-tale-language-memory#sthash.Xhx8yz03.dpuf](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/teaching-tale-language-memory#sthash.Xhx8yz03.dpuf)
How useful are comprehension questions?

Submitted by Mario Rinvolucri on 2 November, 2008 - 21:03

You may well ask me “How useful is the question in this title?” After all to check what a student has understood after listening to or reading an L2 text seems plain common sense. If it were not felt to be a sensible procedure why would course book writers supply comprehension questions in large quantities?

Teachers’ comprehension questions

Comprehension questions are a part of an EFL teacher’s arsenal that few people would regard as controversial. In ordinary conversation, in L1, it is quite normal to ask a comprehension question if you are unsure about what the other person has said. You might break into what they are saying and hypothesise: “Oh, so, do you mean that……?”

So, clearly, comprehension questions are a normal part of discourse. The difference is that, in normal conversation, it is the listener who decides to ask the speaker for clarification when he fails to follow what the other is saying. In the EFL class it is an external authority (course book/teacher) that initiates the comprehension checking.

When you come to think of it this is a very bizarre procedure: How on earth does a course book writer in North Oxford know where the linguistic difficulties in a reading passage will lie for a 16 year old in Cairo? Or a university student in Bangkok or a senior citizen in Hamburg?

One might reasonably expect that the undertow of Egyptian Arabic, Thai and German might affect the three learners differently in terms of their ability to comprehend the same passage.

Student comprehension

My first suggestion is that comprehension questions are the business of the students and no one else. One good way of dealing with a reading passage in class is to ask the students to read the text twice and then write 7 questions, each one aimed at a different, named classmate. The students themselves know, better than the teacher does, which classmate is likely to be able to give them an adequate answer. Once each student has written at least four questions, ask them to move around the room asking their questions and listening to the answers.

- This procedure is respectful of the students’ right to find out what they feel they have not yet grasped.
- This procedure links the course book passage to real people in the room.
- This procedure reduces the teachers’ preparation time (if she is in the habit of creating her own comprehension questions.)

Deletion, elaboration and transformation

Yet there are other deeper reasons for doubting the usefulness of the comprehension question in second language reading and listening. The comprehension question is based on the notion that a listener or reader is a sort of CD-ROM that accurately holds the entire in-coming message. This can never be the case. The normal act of listening or reading is always one of deletion, elaboration and transformation.
The listener/reader will defocus from details that strike them as insignificant. These details will be deleted from the listener/reader’s memory.

The listener/reader will elaborate the text as it hits the auditory circuits of her brain - if she is listening to a story the elaboration will often be visual and the listener will create her own ‘inner film’.

In some cases the listener/reader will transform the text by framing it within previous experiences.

For example, I once told a group a tale about a wall girdling a town and the theme of the story was ‘fear’. One listener perceived the whole story in the political framework of the Berlin Wall and its breaching. This person ‘heard’ a much bigger story than I think I told.

Such deletion, elaboration and transformation are a part of the normal, everyday creativity of listening and reading. When I tell a story to 25 students my auditory text is replaced by 25 new texts in the students’ minds. It seems to me very bizarre to go back in time and ask my students language questions about the now ‘dead’ Mario text. Actually I would suggest that such questions are an insult to the students’ inevitable creative elaboration of the original text.

Alternatives to comprehension checking
So what can I do after telling the class a story? I can offer the students questions that help them explore each others’ elaboration. I ask the students to go through the questions below and cross out the ones they do not relate to. Once this deletion is effected I pair them and ask them to use the questions they have retained to get an idea of their partner’s elaboration. Here is a set of such questions:

• In which sort of country did you imagine the story?
• What kind of pictures did you get as you listened.
• Did you create a sort of film from the story?
• Were you ever actually in the same space as the character in the story?
• What feelings did you have during the telling?
• Did you become any of the characters?
• What, for you, is the moral of the story?
• Did this story remind you of other stories you know?
• Did any of the characters seem like people you know?
• Can you think of someone in this group who may have disliked the story?
• Would your brother/mother/daughter/father like this story? Why would they like it?
• At which point in the story did you really start listening?
• Which was the most vivid bit for you?
• At which points in the story did you drift off and think of other things?

The list of questions could be much longer and more detailed, but you will notice they all focus on the students’ elaborated text and on their reactions to the text. None are about details of the original text.

“Very nice” I can hear some readers saying” but what if the students did not understand the language during the telling?”

My answer to this is that the teacher/teller needs to make sure she gets her meaning across by using mime, drawing and L1 glosses on words or phrases that may be hard for students. It is the teller’s
job to ensure language comprehension as she tells, and I believe minimal, disciplined recourse to L1 is natural in this situation.

Conclusion
By the time you get to this point in your reading, the lines you have read will have undergone deletion, elaboration and transformation in your mind. As you get up to get yourself a coffee and think back over these lines, you carry in your head your own unique reading of this text. Thank God you are a normally creative reader and not a tape-recorder with the ‘Record’ button down. Do I really need to write comprehension questions on your behalf?

This article was originally published in IATEFL Voices Newsletter, Issue 204, Sept-Oct 2008.

- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/how-useful-are-comprehension-questions#sthash.lPErLcDi.dpuf
This article is in two parts. The first part will look at some of the shifts and trends in theories relating to reading. The second part will examine tips and guidelines for implementing a theory of reading which will help to develop our learners' abilities.

- The traditional view
- The cognitive view
- The metacognitive view
- Conclusion

Just like teaching methodology, reading theories have had their shifts and transitions. Starting from the traditional view which focused on the printed form of a text and moving to the cognitive view that enhanced the role of background knowledge in addition to what appeared on the printed page, they ultimately culminated in the metacognitive view which is now in vogue. It is based on the control and manipulation that a reader can have on the act of comprehending a text.

The traditional view
According to Dole et al. (1991), in the traditional view of reading, novice readers acquire a set of hierarchically ordered sub-skills that sequentially build toward comprehension ability. Having mastered these skills, readers are viewed as experts who comprehend what they read.

- Readers are passive recipients of information in the text. Meaning resides in the text and the reader has to reproduce meaning.
- According to Nunan (1991), reading in this view is basically a matter of decoding a series of written symbols into their aural equivalents in the quest for making sense of the text. He referred to this process as the ‘bottom-up’ view of reading.
- McCarthy (1999) has called this view ‘outside-in’ processing, referring to the idea that meaning exists in the printed page and is interpreted by the reader then taken in.
- This model of reading has almost always been under attack as being insufficient and defective for the main reason that it relies on the formal features of the language, mainly words and structure.

Although it is possible to accept this rejection for the fact that there is over-reliance on structure in this view, it must be confessed that knowledge of linguistic features is also necessary for comprehension to take place. To counteract over-reliance on form in the traditional view of reading, the cognitive view was introduced.

The cognitive view
The ‘top-down’ model is in direct opposition to the ‘bottom-up’ model. According to Nunan (1991)
and Dubin and Bycina (1991), the psycholinguistic model of reading and the top-down model are in exact concordance.

- Goodman (1967; cited in Paran, 1996) presented reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game, a process in which readers sample the text, make hypotheses, confirm or reject them, make new hypotheses, and so forth. Here, the reader rather than the text is at the heart of the reading process.

- The schema theory of reading also fits within the cognitively based view of reading. Rumelhart (1977) has described schemata as "building blocks of cognition" which are used in the process of interpreting sensory data, in retrieving information from memory, in organising goals and subgoals, in allocating resources, and in guiding the flow of the processing system.

- Rumelhart (1977) has also stated that if our schemata are incomplete and do not provide an understanding of the incoming data from the text we will have problems processing and understanding the text.

Cognitively based views of reading comprehension emphasize the interactive nature of reading and the constructive nature of comprehension. Dole et al. (1991) have stated that, besides knowledge brought to bear on the reading process, a set of flexible, adaptable strategies are used to make sense of a text and to monitor ongoing understanding.

The metacognitive view
According to Block (1992), there is now no more debate on "whether reading is a bottom-up, language-based process or a top-down, knowledge-based process." It is also no more problematic to accept the influence of background knowledge on both L1 and L2 readers. Research has gone even further to define the control readers execute on their ability to understand a text. This control, Block (1992) has referred to as metacognition.

Metacognition involves thinking about what one is doing while reading. Klein et al. (1991) stated that strategic readers attempt the following while reading:

- Identifying the purpose of the reading before reading
- Identifying the form or type of the text before reading
- Thinking about the general character and features of the form or type of the text. For instance, they try to locate a topic sentence and follow supporting details toward a conclusion
- Projecting the author's purpose for writing the text (while reading it),
- Choosing, scanning, or reading in detail
- Making continuous predictions about what will occur next, based on information obtained earlier, prior knowledge, and conclusions obtained within the previous stages.

Moreover, they attempt to form a summary of what was read. Carrying out the previous steps requires the reader to be able to classify, sequence, establish whole-part relationships, compare and
contrast, determine cause-effect, summarise, hypothesise and predict, infer, and conclude.

Conclusion
In the second part of this article I will look at the guidelines which can also be used as general ideas to aid students in reading and comprehending materials. These tips can be viewed in three consecutive stages: before reading, during reading, and after reading. For instance, before starting to read a text it is natural to think of the purpose of reading the text. As an example of the during-reading techniques, re-reading for better comprehension can be mentioned. And filling out forms and charts can be referred to as an after-reading activity. These tasks and ideas can be used to enhance reading comprehension.

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- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/theories-reading#sthash.tijuC0Od.dpuf

Theories of reading 2
Submitted by TE Editor on 29 March, 2006 - 12:00

This article is the second of two parts. The first part looked at some of the shifts and trends in theories relating to reading. This second part will examine tips and guidelines for implementing a theory of reading which will help to develop our learner’s abilities.

- Text characteristics
- Pre-reading tips
- During-reading tips
- After-reading tips

These tips can be viewed in three consecutive stages: before reading, during reading, and after reading. For instance, before starting to read a text it is natural to think of the purpose of reading the text. As an example of the during-reading techniques, re-reading for better comprehension can be mentioned. And filling out forms and charts can be referred to as an after-reading activity. These tasks and ideas can be used to enhance reading comprehension.

Text characteristics
Good readers expect to understand what they are reading. Therefore, texts should contain words and grammatical structures familiar to the learners (Van Duzer, 1999). In texts where vocabulary is not familiar, teachers can introduce key vocabulary in pre-reading activities that focus on language awareness, such as finding synonyms, antonyms, derivatives, or associated words (Hood et al., 1996; cited in Van Duzer, 1999). The topics of texts chosen should be in accordance with the age range, interests, sex, and background culture of the students for whom they are intended. Pre-reading activities that introduce the text should encourage learners to use their background knowledge (Eskey, 1997; cited in Van Duzer, 1999). Class members can brainstorm ideas about the meaning of a title or an illustration and discuss what they know.

Pre-reading tips
Before the actual act of reading a text begins, some points should be regarded in order to make the process of reading more comprehensible. It is necessary to provide the necessary background information to the reader to facilitate comprehension. In addition, as stated by Lebauer (1998), pre-reading activities can lighten students' cognitive burden while reading because prior discussions will have been incorporated.

- **Teacher-directed pre-reading (Estes, 1999)**
  Some key vocabulary and ideas in the text are explained. In this approach the teacher directly explains the information the students will need, including key concepts, important vocabulary, and appropriate conceptual framework.

- **Interactive approach (Estes, 1999)**
  In this method, the teacher leads a discussion in which he/she draws out the information students already have and interjects additional information deemed necessary to an understanding of the text to be read. Moreover, the teacher can make explicit links between prior knowledge and important information in the text.

- **Purpose of reading**
  It is also necessary for students to become aware of the purpose and goal for reading a certain piece of written material. At the beginning stages this can be done by the teacher, but as the reader becomes more mature this purpose, i.e. awareness-raising strategy, can be left to the readers. For instance, the students may be guided to ask themselves, "Why am I reading this text? What do I want to know or do after reading?"

  One of the most obvious, but unnoticed, points related to reading purpose is the consideration of the different types of reading skills.

  - **Skimming**: Reading rapidly for the main points
  - **Scanning**: Reading rapidly to find a specific piece of information
  - **Extensive reading**: Reading a longer text, often for pleasure with emphasis on overall meaning
  - **Intensive reading**: Reading a short text for detailed information

- **The type of text**
  The reader must become familiar with the fact that texts may take on different forms and hold certain pieces of information in different places. Thus, it is necessary to understand the layout of the material being read in order to focus more deeply on the parts that are more densely compacted with information. Even paying attention to the year of publication of a text, if applicable, may aid the reader in presuppositions about the text as can glancing at the name of the author.

  Steinhofer (1996) stated that the tips mentioned in pre-reading will not take a very long time to carry out. The purpose is to overcome the common urge to start reading a text closely right away from the beginning.

**During-reading tips**
What follows are tips that encourage active reading. They consist of summarizing, reacting, questioning, arguing, evaluating, and placing a text within one's own experience. These processes may be the most complex to develop in a classroom setting, the reason being that in English reading classes most attention is often paid to dictionaries, the text, and the teacher. Interrupting this routine and encouraging students to dialogue with what they are reading without coming between them and the text presents a challenge to the EFL teacher. Duke and Pearson (2001) have stated that good readers are active readers. According to Ur (1996), Vaezi (2001), and Fitzgerald (1995), they use the following strategies.

- **Making predictions**: The readers should be taught to be on the watch to predict what is going to happen next in the text to be able to integrate and combine what has come with what is to come.

- **Making selections**: Readers who are more proficient read selectively, continually making decisions about their reading.

- **Integrating prior knowledge**: The schemata that have been activated in the pre-reading section should be called upon to facilitate comprehension.

- **Skipping insignificant parts**: A good reader will concentrate on significant pieces of information while skipping insignificant pieces.

- **Re-reading**: Readers should be encouraged to become sensitive to the effect of reading on their comprehension.

- **Making use of context or guessing**: Readers should not be encouraged to define and understand every single unknown word in a text. Instead they should learn to make use of context to guess the meaning of unknown words.

- **Breaking words into their component parts**: To keep the process of comprehension ongoing, efficient readers break words into their affixes or bases. These parts can help readers guess the meaning of a word.

- **Reading in chunks**: To ensure reading speed, readers should get used to reading groups of words together. This act will also enhance comprehension by focusing on groups of meaning-conveying symbols simultaneously.

- **Pausing**: Good readers will pause at certain places while reading a text to absorb and internalize the material being read and sort out information.

- **Paraphrasing**: While reading texts it may be necessary to paraphrase and interpret texts subvocally in order to verify what was comprehended.

- **Monitoring**: Good readers monitor their understanding to evaluate whether the text, or the reading of it, is meeting their goals.

### After-reading tips

It is necessary to state that post-reading activities almost always depend on the purpose of reading and the type of information extracted from the text. Barnett (1988) has stated that post-reading exercises first check students' comprehension and then lead students to a deeper analysis of the text. In the real world the purpose of reading is not to memorize an author's point of view or to
summarize text content, but rather to see into another mind, or to mesh new information into what one already knows. Group discussion will help students focus on information they did not comprehend, or did comprehend correctly. Accordingly, attention will be focused on processes that lead to comprehension or miscomprehension. Generally speaking, post-reading can take the form of various activities as presented below:

- Discussing the text: Written/Oral
- Summarizing: Written/Oral
- Making questions: Written/Oral
- Answering questions: Written/Oral
- Filling in forms and charts
- Writing reading logs
- Completing a text
- Listening to or reading other related materials
- Role-playing

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- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/theories-reading-2#sthash.tN1k47ta.dpuf
Increasing student interaction

Submitted by TE Editor on 27 September, 2006 - 12:00

I have noticed in many of the classes I have taught that there can be a tendency for the learners to want to interact with me but less enthusiasm when it comes to interacting with each other. I should emphasize that this reticence only applies to interaction in English but it does seem to apply to groups of all nationalities, ages and levels.

- Why student to student interaction is desirable
- Problems we face when trying to increase interaction
- How we can promote an increase in student interaction
- Conclusion

Why student to student interaction is desirable

Participation
Most people agree that learning anything involves participation. You can't learn to play a musical instrument without actually picking up the instrument and similarly it is difficult to learn a language without engaging with that language. Given that language primarily exists to facilitate communication, interaction in that language must have an important role to play in developing a learner's ability in that language. In other words, teachers need to promote learner interaction in order to help the learners succeed.

Maximising practice time
Learners need to practise as much as possible if they are to be successful. Interaction through pair and group work maximises the opportunities to practise as more learners speak for more of the time.

Collaboration
Collaborative learning, particularly through the use of collaborative tasks, has been shown to foster language development since learners can see a reason to use language in order to interact.

Socialisation
Related to the concept of collaboration is that of socialisation. Interaction does not only promote language development but it also fosters the development of social skills (e.g. politeness, respect for others) that people need to operate successfully in any culture.

Motivation
Motivation is a fundamental aspect of successful learning. Interaction gives learners the opportunity to use language successfully and to measure their progress which in turn should lead to an increase in motivation.

Problems we face when trying to increase interaction
Interaction seems so desirable and sensible in theory but we all know that actually promoting and increasing it can be an uphill struggle. Let's consider some of the reasons for this.

Student resistance
It is unfortunately true that some learners are not enthusiastic about pair and group work, particularly in mono-lingual classes in which it is a little unnatural to communicate to someone who speaks your language in a language you are both less proficient in! I have taught many students who have told me that they don't like pair work because they might learn mistakes from their partners. There is actually no evidence to support this worry but it is still common.

Self-consciousness
I have met many learners who become very nervous and embarrassed when asked to speak English. As a language learner myself, I sympathise.

Large classes
While theoretically the more students there are in a class the more possibilities for interaction there should be, this is not the case in practice. The more learners there are, the more difficult developing interaction can be since there are more people to monitor and, therefore, more chances of problems. In addition there is, of course, a greater likelihood of excessive noise which can mask bad behaviour and use of L1.

Mixed abilities
Pairing and grouping students appropriately in classes that have a wide variety of levels (e.g. secondary schools) is much more difficult than in small classes of a homogenous level.

Lack of motivation
If learners have no need to interact or don't want to, they probably won't.

Insufficient language
Perhaps the most common reason for interaction in English breaking down, or indeed not starting in the first place, is that the students don't have the language they need to interact and, therefore, complete the task successfully.

How we can promote an increase in student interaction
This section will suggest some solutions to the problems outlined above.

Teaching process language
This is similar to classroom language but refers to the language that students need to interact. Examples could include: "What do you have for number 2?", "Do you want to start?", and "Sorry, can you say that again, please?". I introduce and/or revise before starting tasks and leave them on the board so that the learners can refer to them while speaking. My learners copy them into the vocab record books too, of course.

Pre-teaching task language
I try to analyse tasks before using them in order to predict what language is critical to task achievement. If I think some of this language may be unfamiliar I pre-teach it before the students do the task. If there is too much language for pre-teaching, I find a more suitable task.

Providing support
As well as providing language for tasks, where appropriate I try to provide ideas too. These can be brainstormed before the task and put on the board so that the learners have plenty of things to talk about.

Giving preparation time
I have often found that interaction breaks down because the learners haven't had time to think about
what they want to say and how to say it. I plan to give some thinking time before starting a task during which the students can ask me or each other for support.

Providing a supportive atmosphere
I try to raise confidence by giving lots of praise and giving feedback on task achievement as well as language use. When monitoring I try to do so as unobtrusively as possible so the students don't feel that I'm necessarily listening to them personally. On the other hand, in feedback I try to make it clear to the class that I have been listening to them and through feedback show them that there is a point to interaction and thereby overcome student resistance.

Varying the interaction and repeating tasks
When teaching large classes I plan to move students around so that they are not always talking to the same partner. A good way to do this I have found is by asking the learners to perform the same task a number of times but each time with a different partner. As well as providing variety of interaction, this approach also maximises practice of the language being worked on.

Having different levels of task
With mixed ability classes I prepare an easy, medium, and difficult version of the same task so students of different levels can interact together at a level appropriate to the language level. For example, after some listening practice students with different tasks can tell each other what they have found out.

Providing a reason to interact
I use tasks that actively provide the learners with a reason to speak and listen. Information gap activities are a good example of these (and these can be used repetitively if designed carefully) and students generally enjoy doing them. Using project work is another good example of a motivating and collaborative approach that promotes both realistic language use and interaction.

Conclusion
Interaction helps learners develop language learning and social skills and so maximising interaction in the classroom is an important part of the teacher's role. Interaction will not necessarily happen spontaneously, however, and in my view it has to be considered before teaching. The approaches suggested above all have this in common - they require forethought and are, therefore, a part of the lesson planning process.

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- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/increasing-student-interaction#sthash.belCTxwx.dpuf
Teaching speaking skills 1

Submitted by TE Editor on 13 March, 2003 - 12:00

'I can understand my teacher's English, but when I speak to 'real people' I can't understand them'. This is a comment I'm sure many teachers have heard. While it is a bit of an exaggeration, students clearly feel that classroom-based speaking practice does not prepare them for the real world. Why do students so often highlight listening and speaking as their biggest problems? Partly because of the demands of listening and speaking and partly because of the way speaking is often taught. It usually consists of language practice activities (discussions, information-gap activities etc.) or is used to practise a specific grammar point. Neither teaches patterns of real interaction. So what can we do in the classroom to prepare students for real interaction?

- What do students need?
- Practical suggestions
- What language should I teach?
- How do I get students to use new language
- Further reading

What do students need?

- Practice at using L1 (mother tongue) strategies, which they don't automatically transfer.
- An awareness of formal / informal language and practice at choosing appropriate language for different situations.
- The awareness that informal spoken language is less complex than written language. It uses shorter sentences, is less organised and uses more 'vague' or non-specific language.
- Exposure to a variety of spoken text types.
- The ability to cope with different listening situations. Many listening exercises involve students as 'overhearers' even though most communication is face-to-face.
- To be competent at both 'message-oriented' or transactional language and interactional language, language for maintaining social relationships.
- To be taught patterns of real interaction.
- To have intelligible pronunciation and be able to cope with streams of speech.
- Rehearsal time. By giving students guided preparation / rehearsal time they are more likely to use a wider range of language in a spoken task.
Practical suggestions

- Transferring L1 strategies
  When preparing for a spoken task, make students aware of any relevant L1 strategies that might help them to perform the task successfully. For example, ‘rephrasing’ if someone does not understand what they mean.

- Formal / informal language
  Give students one or more short dialogues where one speaker is either too formal or informal. Students first identify the inappropriate language, then try to change it. Also show students how disorganised informal speech is.

- Vague language
  Using tapescripts of informal speech, focus on examples of vague language.

- Different spoken text types
  Draw up a list of spoken text types relevant to the level of your class. Teach the language appropriate for each text type.

- Interactive listening
  Develop interactive listening exercises. Face-to-face listening is the most common and the least practised by course books. Any form of 'Live listening' (the teacher speaking to the students) is suitable. (See Try article for a more detailed outline of this)

- Transactional and interactional language
  Raise students' awareness by using a dialogue that contains both. It could be two friends chatting to each other (interactional) and ordering a meal (transactional).

- Real interaction patterns
  Teach real interaction patterns. Introduce the following basic interactional pattern: Initiate, Respond, Follow-up. This is a simplification of Amy Tsui’s work. See Tsui (1994)
  The following interaction could be analysed as follows:

  A: What did you do last night? (Initiate)
  B: Went to the cinema (Respond)
  A: Oh really? (Follow-up)
  What did you see? (Initiate)
  B: Lord of the Rings (Respond)
  Have you been yet? (Initiate)
  A: No it's difficult with the kids (Respond)
  B: Yeah of course (follow-up)

- Understanding spoken English
  After a listening exercise give students the tapescript. Using part of it, students mark the stressed words, and put them into groups (tone units). You can use phone numbers to introduce the concept of tone units. The length of a tone unit depends on the type of spoken text. Compare a speech with an informal conversation. In the same lesson or subsequent listening lessons you can focus on reductions in spoken speech, for example, linking, elision and assimilation.

- Preparation and rehearsal
  Before a spoken task, give students some preparation and rehearsal time. Students will need guidance on how to use it. A sheet with simple guidelines is effective.
What language should I teach?

Spoken language is both interactional and transactional, but what should teachers focus on in class?

Brown and Yule (1983) suggest the following:

- When teaching spoken language, focus on teaching longer transactional turns. This is because native speakers have difficulty with them and because students need to be able to communicate information efficiently whether in their country or in a native-speaker country.

- Teach interactional language by using an awareness-raising approach. For example, with monolingual classes by listening to a recorded L1 conversation before a similar L2 recording. For recordings of native-speaker interactional and transactional conversations, have a look at 'Exploring Spoken English' by McCarthy and Carter (1997). It not only contains a variety of text types, but each recording comes with analysis.

How do I get students to use new language?

Research by Peter Skehan on Task-based Learning shows that giving students preparation time significantly increases the range of language used in the performance of the task, whereas the accuracy of the language is not as influenced. If this is so, then it seems sensible to give students preparation time when encouraging them to use new language.

- Imagine you have been working on the language that would be useful for the following task: 'Having a conversation with a stranger on public transport'. You have now reached the stage where you wish students to perform the task. Rather than just give students 10 minutes to prepare and rehearse the task, give students guided preparation time.

  A simple preparation guide for the task could be a few key questions like:
  How will you start the conversation?
  What topics are you going to talk about?
  How are you going to move from one topic to another?
  How are you going to end the conversation?

  After the preparation stage, students give a 'live performance'. This can be in front of the class or group to group in a large class. This increases motivation and adds an element of real-life stress.

- Another way of encouraging students to use new language in a communication activity is to make a game out of it. Give students a situation and several key phrases to include. They get points for using the language.

  Similarly, when working on the language of discussion, you can produce a set of cards with the key phrases/exponents on. The cards are laid out in front of each group of 2/3/4 students. If a student uses the language on a particular card appropriately during the discussion, he/she keeps the card. The student with the most cards wins. If he/she uses the language inappropriately, then he/she can be challenged and has to leave the card on the table.
Planning a writing lesson

Submitted by TE Editor on 27 April, 2011 - 12:13

Writing, unlike speaking, is not an ability we acquire naturally, even in our first language - it has to be taught. Unless L2 learners are explicitly taught how to write in the new language, their writing skills are likely to get left behind as their speaking progresses. But teaching writing is not just about grammar, spelling, or the mechanics of the Roman alphabet. Learners also need to be aware of and use the conventions of the genre in the new language.

- What is genre?

- Stages of a writing lesson
  - Generating ideas
  - Focusing ideas
  - Focus on a model text
  - Organising ideas
  - Writing
  - Peer evaluation
  - Reviewing

- Conclusion

What is genre?
A genre can be anything from a menu to a wedding invitation, from a newspaper article to an estate agent’s description of a house. Pieces of writing of the same genre share some features, in terms of layout, level of formality, and language. These features are more fixed in formal genre, for example letters of complaint and essays, than in more ‘creative’ writing, such as poems or descriptions. The more formal genre often feature in exams, and may also be relevant to learners’ present or future ‘real-world’ needs, such as university study or business. However, genre vary considerably between cultures, and even adult learners familiar with a range of genre in their L1 need to learn to use the conventions of those genre in English.

Stages of a writing lesson
I don’t necessarily include all these stages in every writing lesson, and the emphasis given to each stage may differ according to the genre of the writing and / or the time available. Learners work in pairs or groups as much as possible, to share ideas and knowledge, and because this provides a good opportunity for practising the speaking, listening and reading skills.

Generating ideas
This is often the first stage of a process approach to writing. Even when producing a piece of writing of a highly conventional genre, such as a letter of complaint, using learners’ own ideas can make the writing more memorable and meaningful.

- Before writing a letter of complaint, learners think about a situation when they have complained about faulty goods or bad service (or have felt like complaining), and tell a partner.

- As the first stage of preparing to write an essay, I give learners the essay title and pieces of scrap paper. They have 3 minutes to work alone, writing one idea on each piece of paper, before comparing in groups. Each group can then present their 3 best ideas to the class. It doesn't matter
if the ideas aren't used in the final piece of writing, the important thing is to break through the barrier of 'I can't think of anything to write.'

Focusing ideas
This is another stage taken from a process approach, and it involves thinking about which of the many ideas generated are the most important or relevant, and perhaps taking a particular point of view.

- As part of the essay-writing process, students in groups put the ideas generated in the previous stage onto a 'mind map'. The teacher then draws a mind-map on the board, using ideas from the different groups. At this stage he/she can also feed in some useful collocations - this gives the learners the tools to better express their own ideas.

- I tell my students to write individually for about 10 minutes, without stopping and without worrying about grammar or punctuation. If they don't know a particular word, they write it in their L1. This often helps learners to further develop some of the ideas used during the 'Generating ideas' stage. Learners then compare together what they have written, and use a dictionary, the teacher or each other to find in English any words or phrases they wrote in their L1.

Focus on a model text
Once the students have generated their own ideas, and thought about which are the most important or relevant, I try to give them the tools to express those ideas in the most appropriate way. The examination of model texts is often prominent in product or genre approaches to writing, and will help raise learners' awareness of the conventions of typical texts of different genres in English.

- I give learners in groups several examples of a genre, and they use a genre analysis form to identify the features and language they have in common. This raises their awareness of the features of the genre and gives them some language 'chunks' they can use in their own writing.

Genre analysis form 54k

- Learners identify the function of different paragraphs in a piece of writing. For example, in a job application letter, the functions of the paragraphs might be something like;
  - reason for writing
  - how I found out about the job
  - relevant experience, skills and abilities
  - closing paragraph asking for an interview

- Learners are given an essay with the topic sentences taken out, and put them back in the right place. This raises their awareness of the organisation of the essay and the importance of topic sentences.

Organising ideas
Once learners have seen how the ideas are organised in typical examples of the genre, they can go about organising their own ideas in a similar way.

- Students in groups draft a plan of their work, including how many paragraphs and the main points of each paragraph. These can then be pinned up around the room for comment and comparison.

- When preparing to write an essay, students group some of the ideas produced earlier into main and supporting statements.
Writing
In a pure process approach, the writer goes through several drafts before producing a final version. In practical terms, and as part of a general English course, this is not always possible. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to let students know beforehand if you are going to ask them to write a second draft. Those with access to a word processor can then use it, to facilitate the redrafting process. The writing itself can be done alone, at home or in class, or collaboratively in pairs or groups.

Peer evaluation
Peer evaluation of writing helps learners to become aware of an audience other than the teacher. If students are to write a second draft, I ask other learners to comment on what they liked / didn't like about the piece of work, or what they found unclear, so that these comments can be incorporated into the second draft. The teacher can also respond at this stage by commenting on the content and the organisation of ideas, without yet giving a grade or correcting details of grammar and spelling.

Reviewing
When writing a final draft, students should be encouraged to check the details of grammar and spelling, which may have taken a back seat to ideas and organisation in the previous stages. Instead of correcting writing myself, I use codes to help students correct their own writing and learn from their mistakes.

Error correction code 43k

Conclusion
By going through some or all of these stages, learners use their own ideas to produce a piece of writing that uses the conventions of a genre appropriately and in so doing, they are asked to think about the audience's expectations of a piece of writing of a particular genre, and the impact of their writing on the reader.

If you have any ideas that you feel have successfully helped your students to develop their writing why not add them as a comment below and share them.

Further reading
A process genre approach to teaching writing by Badger, Richards and White. ELT Journal
Volume 54(2), pp. 153-160
Writing by T Hedge. Oxford University Press.
Writing by C Tribble. Oxford University Press
Process writing by R White and V Arndt. Longman

Catherine Morley, British Council, Mexico

This article was first published in 2005

- See more at: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/planning-a-writing-lesson#sthash.MaUbyPed.dpuf
Class journals

Submitted by Paul Braddock on 4 December, 2012 - 09:52

Students often write in their English classes, following a specific genre in order to do so: the informal email; a job application letter, etc. Of course, it is important that they learn this kind of writing (which is usually essential for exam success), but it doesn’t always encourage them to write for the sake of writing, and to get used to writing in a more relaxed and creative way.

The aim of this lesson plan is to introduce the writing journal into the class, as a different kind of class writing activity, which can become an additional tool in order to help students develop their writing skills.

What is a journal?

Let me first start by defining what I mean by a journal in this lesson plan. This is a similar idea to a ‘learner diary’, where students regularly reflect on what they have learnt in classes, and the way that activities in class have helped them to learn. Nick Peachey has written in Teaching English about using learner diaries in this way. It is also a similar idea to teacher-student journals, where students will write their ideas, and the teacher will make some sort of comment. Over time, this becomes a bit like a dialogue that takes place between student and teacher, and can help both student and teacher to learn more about each other (which usually has a good effect on motivation and learning).

Essentially, the journal I describe here includes both of the above ideas, as well as others. These include ideas such as: ‘fast writing’ – the teacher plays some music and students write down how it makes them feel; ‘character writing’ – students read a story, then imagine that they are a character in the story and then they write the story from their own point of view; ‘discussion sentence stems’ – the teacher dictates some sentence stems, students complete them and then discuss the propositions.

The journal, therefore, is not used for any one, specific purpose. It serves as the students’ ‘writing space’, and the type of writing will change depending on the activity.

What is the goal of journal writing?

What, then, is the point of the journal? I would argue that it encourages the teacher to include a greater number of writing tasks in the class than he/she might normally do. The purpose of the writing tasks may be to produce something that can be read by other students (by swapping over journals), but it doesn’t have to be. Writing for its own sake is a goal to pursue.

Why is this so? Basically writing, like reading, is a skill that we get better at; the more that we practise it, the more fluent we will become. Encouraging students to write freely, about a range of topics, often concerning how they feel about a topic or what their thoughts are regarding their learning, will help them to become more fluent writers. It forms part of ‘building the writing habit’. As Jeremy Harmer says ‘Journal writing contributes to a student’s general writing improvement in the same way as training enhances an athlete’s performance: it makes them fit.’ It can also be an enjoyable activity for many people.

What kind of journal?
Ideally a student’s journal will be a fairly thin, lightweight notebook. In this way, if the teacher wants to collect in a set to look at, he/she won’t find that they are too heavy to carry. Journals for younger students, who will typically write less, may just be some folded sheets of A4 with a colourful card cover which the teacher makes (or gets the students to make in the first lesson). The advantage of providing students with journals yourself is that you may want students to start writing in them from the start of the course. Otherwise, it can take a while for every student to bring some kind of journal notebook to class of their own accord! However, that is also an option.

How do you respond to the journal writing?

We are often encouraging personal reflection and response when we set a journal writing activity, and consequently the most valid response to this kind of writing might be to focus on its content and to respond primarily to this aspect of the writing. A teacher can express interest in the writing and refer to the ideas which are particularly well expressed.

Some learners may be happy with this kind of response and may prefer not to receive much or any ‘explicit correction’. However, there may be learners who would definitely like more detailed feedback on errors. Perhaps the best approach is to ask learners to decide the level of correction that they would like, and ask them to write this in their journal (as suggested in the lesson plan). If correction on a regular basis is going to prove difficult, the teacher could always set up an ‘appointments’ schedule, and arrange to take in and correct different diaries every week.

Using a correction code

If students specifically request that their writing is corrected, one way to correct writing is to use a correction code and to encourage students to correct their own mistakes. The teacher highlights the error, using the code, and later the student reads back over his/her journal entry and tries to make the corrections.

Here is an example of a typical correction code:

WW – wrong word
WT – wrong verb tense
WF – wrong word form (e.g. infinitive instead of gerund)
Ag – the determiner/article + noun don’t agree in number (e.g. singular article but plural noun)
G – there is a grammar problem
^ – there is a word missing
Sp – spelling is wrong
P – punctuation problem

Students can be introduced to this code right from the beginning of the course, and can write it in the front or back of the journal to refer to.
One disadvantage with using a correction code is that students may not actually know how to correct the mistake and may simply leave the error as it is, without feeling any the wiser about the error. For this reason, it is a good idea to use time in class for students to go back through their writing and to try to identify the errors. In that way, the teacher is on hand to help confirm the students’ hypotheses about the correct form and also to give the correct form if the student has no idea what the error is. This could be an extra activity in the lesson every two or three weeks: students look back over all their writing from that period and try to correct their mistakes.

Another disadvantage with using a correction code is that it might generate a lot of work for the teacher, particularly if the class is a large one! Each teacher needs to decide, therefore, what the best approach is going to be to respond to the class journals.

Creating the mood for writing

It can be a good idea to put on some background music while students are writing. This might be related to the activity. For example, one day when I wanted students to imagine that they were a regretful character, writing from a prison cell, I put Adagio for Strings on in the background. It’s one of the saddest pieces I know! It helped the students to focus on the mood. Other classical music is lively and happy – Schubert’s piano music, for example, can be nice! Obviously there is no end to the kind of music that you could play in the background while students are writing. Personally I would avoid music with lyrics, because I think it would be distracting, but the music could be contemporary music rather than classical music. YouTube is a great resource for instrumental or classical music, as much as it is for songs. You might want to take it in turns: in the first class, you choose the music; in the next class, a nominated student can choose it.

Activities for journal writing

You’ll find these ideas explained in more detail if you look at the lesson plan associated with this article. Here are some suggested activities:

- **Personalised journal entry**: Students write a letter of introduction about themselves at the beginning of the course. During the course, they can write about key things in their lives: the media they read/watch/listen to; their hobbies; the things they own; the people who mean the most to them.

- **Reflecting on your learning**: Dictate sentence stems about learning, e.g.: ‘The thing I enjoy most about learning English is …’ etc. Then they compare with their partners.

- **Character writing**: Students read/listen to a story. They adopt different viewpoints within the story and write about it.

- **Happiness diary**: Students chart their happiness (or lack of it) over the previous week; they write about why they felt like that

- **Vocabulary stories**: Students pull words out of the class ‘word bag’; in groups they have to construct a story and write it in their journals, before reading it out to other students.