Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)

ALT handbook

British Council

July 2013

Preface

The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET Programme) was established in 1987, since when much research has been conducted into team teaching techniques for foreign language education.

This is the latest edition of the "Team Teaching Handbook" which was first published in 1994. The handbook is utilised nationally by Japanese Teachers of Language (JTLs) and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). It is the first team-teaching handbook that a newly appointed ALT will encounter.

The revisions to the government curriculum guidance, the basis for curriculum formation in primary, junior and senior high schools, and its complete implementation across the primary and secondary stages of education have meant that the way in which lessons are taught is changing. The ALT plays an important role, enabling students to come in contact with, and use "real" English, which will become increasingly significant as we aim to equip the younger generations with "global" skills. ALTs are not appointed for the singular reason that they are a native speaker of a foreign language. They are appointed as educators, who possess a high level of expertise and sound set of teaching skills. So for the first time in 10 years, we have taken this opportunity to produce a fully revised edition of the handbook, with considerable support from the British Council.

The handbook contains the basic principles of team teaching, as well as a large variety of activities that can be used in schools straight away. It can be accessed from the English education portal site "EIGO-NET" and the British Council homepage.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the British Council for their extensive assistance in the production of this fully-revised edition of the handbook.

I hope that this handbook will aid the success of English team teaching in schools.

MAEKAWA Kihei,

Director-General,

Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

Preface

The British Council is delighted and honoured to have been able to work together with MEXT to update our ALT Handbook, and make it more relevant for use in schools across the whole of Japan. We are all aware of the need for foreign language competence – especially English – for students around this globalised world, and Japan is no exception in this respect. As the Ministry of Education has recognised in focusing on the effective use of ALTs in Japanese schools as part of its 5 main proposals for improving language learning, a language is acquired through practical use. I myself remember how useful it was to practise French at school with a native-speaker language assistant, working alongside my British teacher. And globally the British Council is very active in this area: In 2012-2013 we sent over 2,500 English Language Assistants overseas and hosted 2,000 Foreign Language Assistants in the UK. Here in Japan, we are committed to working with the Ministry of Education to continue to work for further improvements in English language learning, including teacher training and evaluation. We hope that this handbook will prove to be a valuable asset to ALTs and will lead to tangible benefits to millions of students of English in Japanese schools.

Jeff Streeter
Director Japan
British Council

Acknowledgements

Contents

Foreword

Module 2

Unit 4 Oral practice

Unit 5 Pronunciation work

Module 3

Unit 6 Visual aids

Unit 7 Listening and speaking

Unit 8 Reading and writing

Unit 9 Games

Module 4

Unit 10 Cultural content

Unit 12 Building a resource bank

Module 1

Unit 1 Introduction

Team teaching

Team teaching involves having two teachers in the classroom rather than the usual one. In the case of Japanese English education, these will be the JTL (Japanese Teacher of Language) and the ALT (Assistant Language Teacher).

The dynamics of having two teachers in the classroom, and the opportunity this gives the students to hear English being spoken "live" by a native speaker, makes team-taught lessons different to the kind of English classes students usually experience. The presence of a native speaker also gives students a real reason to use English as a communication tool, and can therefore help bring the subject to life, in the students' eyes.

What is the role of an assistant?

As the job title implies, your main role is to assist the JTL in the preparation and delivery of lessons. As we will see, this assistance may take different forms. However, there are some basic points to bear in mind:

1. In general, you will be working in the classroom with the JTL, team-teaching classes of up to 40 students
2. You should not be expected to teach classes on your own
3. You can anticipate being asked to help plan lessons jointly with the JTL, or to come up with activity ideas to support the language aims of the lesson
4. You can expect your knowledge of English and your home culture to be used as a resource by the teacher and students

It is also important to remember that the JTL is a qualified teacher of language, and knows the schools, students and local culture far better than you do, as a newcomer. Whatever you may personally feel about the way they approach teaching their subject, it is important to establish a relationship of mutual respect. This means being open to different ways of doing things, and open-minded about the effectiveness of approaches which may not be commonly used in your home country.

Different Roles

Your classroom role will likely differ depending on your team-teacher and your relationship with him or her. Obviously, your role is likely to evolve in line with this relationship. However, some possible scenarios are outlined below:

Team teacher

Ideally, you will build up a relationship of trust with your JTL, and you will find yourself involved in planning lessons together jointly, and assessing them at the end of the class. It is worth looking at lesson planning in some detail.

Lesson planning

If you are producing an official lesson plan, it will need to contain the following information:

- Names of the teachers, date and time of the class, name and section of the textbook being used, details of the class being taught (name and year)
- Aims of the lesson, and objectives of each stage
- Timings for different stages
- Roles of the lesson participants (teacher(s) and students)
- Any additional materials and equipment used

In reality, you are unlikely to be producing official plans for each lesson you teach, but it is useful to think about the points raised above every time you prepare a lesson. In particular, one key factor in a good lesson is to think of the learning outcome (your aim) first, and then plan backwards.

It is helpful to think of language in a specific real-life situation, rather than in an abstract way. For example, imagine that your team-teacher wants to practice the structure "Can I + request". For this language, an appropriate learning aim is "Students will be able to order food in a café". The obvious way to measure whether students can do this or not, is to organise a role-play. This role-play makes for a useful main activity to plan your lesson around.

The next thing to think about is what other language you will need to teach as new, and the language you can expect students to know already. This will depend on what year they are in, and what they have covered in their text-book. The JTL will obviously have the best idea about this. Once you know what language you need to teach, you are ready to plan your lesson. It might look something like this:

Lesson: 50 minutes

1) Warm-up: Teachers explain the aim of the lesson. Students brainstorm different foods in a café, by writing them on the board in teams. Then they ask each other about foods they like and dislike. Teachers monitor and give suggestions and feedback on pronunciation / spelling. (10 minutes)

Objective(s): To review useful vocabulary, give students a clear sense of purpose and raise students' interest in the topic by personalising it.

2) Listening activity: Teachers perform a short café skit. Students listen and identify the food that was ordered. (5 minutes)

Objective(s): To introduce students to the target language in a clear context. To help students practice recognising familiar language in natural connected speech.

3) Language focus: the JTL presents the target phrase(s) on the board, in scrambled word order: "have / I / can / sandwich / ham / a / please". Students try to re-arrange the words, then listen to their teachers for the correct answer: "Can I have a ham sandwich, please?" (5 minutes)

Objective: For students to engage with (by actively thinking about) the target language

4) Controlled practice: Students play a card game where they need to ask partners for food cards, using the target phrase from stage 3. Teachers monitor and help out students who are struggling. (10 minutes)

Objective: For students to have the chance to use the target language in a controlled but meaningful way.

5) Freer practice: Students make groups of 3, with one student being the café staff and the other two being customers. Customers enter the imaginary shop and greet the staff, before ordering food from an imaginary menu, and the staff mime taking their order and providing the food. Teachers monitor for any interesting language and unusual requests. (15 minutes)

Objective: Students have the chance to use all of the language at their disposal, and the new language from today's lesson, in a motivating and real-life situation.

6) Feedback: Teachers comment on any amusing requests, highlight useful language points and refer students back to the language aim of the lesson. (5 minutes)

Objective: To consolidate students' learning. To give students an idea of their progress.

Assessing lessons

The most important thing to bear in mind when assessing how a lesson went, after the event, is to de-personalise your observations. If things go badly, it is human nature to start blaming people; for example the students or the team teacher. However, it is far more productive to take a deep breath and analyse things with a sense of detachment. Think about each stage of the lesson, and what you, your team teacher and the students did. What were your expectations for the stage, what actually happened, and why? How could you do things differently next time?

To use an example from the hypothetical lesson above, imagine that students seem confused by the card game activity, and end up not producing the language you had planned for them to use. It seems to your team-teacher that they didn't understand the

rules of the game clearly. In this case you might decide to shorten the warm-up activity by getting students to shout out words instead of writing them down. This would then give you more time to set up your controlled practice activity clearly, perhaps by demonstrating it with both your team-teacher, and then a volunteer group first.

You will often be teaching the same lesson to different classes in the same year group, so it pays to do this kind of reflection as soon after the lesson as you can. Make sure that both you and your team-teacher are clear about any planned changes before you start the next lesson.

It is also useful to analyse lessons that went well. This will allow you to mentally store the positive elements from the lesson and try to incorporate them into future classes you plan. Most importantly, it is crucial to have a clear idea of what constitutes "going well" and "going badly". From the students' point of view, a good lesson is one where they learn something new, in a positive and supportive environment. Some lessons may seem to go very smoothly, but if no learning has taken place, then they cannot really be considered a success. Likewise, other lessons may seem to be full of unanticipated problems, but if the students emerge having been able to meet the lesson aims, and armed with new expressions they can use in English, you can consider the lesson a good one.

Finally, whilst it is important to develop a reflective attitude to your team-teaching, you also need to allow yourself some slack sometimes – there will be days when, for reasons completely outside you or your team-teacher's control, the students are just not in a receptive mood (this may be particularly true of the Junior High School age group). It could be that they have just finished a week of tests, or they have a sports day coming up, and they simply find it impossible to focus. Everyone will have experienced lessons like this, and, as long as they aren't too frequent, it won't be helpful to beat yourself up over them too severely.

In some schools, and with some teachers, you may find that your role more resembles the following two scenarios:

Classroom assistant

In this role, you hand out worksheets, help the teacher monitor learning activities, and model pronunciation, on request. You do not have many classroom responsibilities, other than to be friendly and approachable, and to keep track of what is going on in the lesson so that you can assist when called upon.

Motivator

Here, your role is mainly to add interest and spice to the lesson. The JTL may ask you to recount anecdotes about life in your home country, amusing stories about cultural misunderstandings in Japan, or to provide ideas for games and activities to increase students' energy levels and enthusiasm. This role can be a little intimidating if you are not naturally outgoing, or do not have a large number of game-like activities ready in the back of your mind. You can help yourself by asking the JTL to give you reasonable advance notice of such requests (at least a day), and by asking questions about how your activity will fit into the flow of the lesson. It is much easier to plan an anecdote or activity if you have a clear learning focus in mind!

The JTL, or other members of school staff, may also ask you to socialise with students outside class time, by, for example, helping them with cleaning activities, or getting involved with club activities.

English education in Japan

When you arrive in your school, you may be surprised to find that there are some English lessons where more Japanese than English appears to be being used. It is useful to have some context for this.

English first started to be taught in Japan in the 1870s. At that time, Japan was in a period of rapid industrialisation, and foreign languages were a key medium for obtaining important new ideas from the West, both societal and technological. Since most information at this time came from books and documents, the primary skill necessary was accurate translation of written texts, and this lead to a system of language learning that focussed heavily on grammar and reading. Consequently, writing, listening and speaking skills in English were given a lesser focus.

However, in the current climate of globalisation, Japanese society has recognised the need to be able to transmit its own ideas, culture and knowledge to people from different nationalities, as well as receiving ideas from abroad. Indeed, the ability to exchange information and ideas internationally, in the digital age, is crucial in order to remain competitive. With the needs of important multi-national companies in mind, the idea of developing an internationalised work-force has also taken root. To this end, the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) is now asking schools to focus on fostering communicative skills in the classroom. Rather than the traditional academic approach, with a heavy focus on theoretical grammatical knowledge, MEXT wants teachers to encourage students to use English as a communicative tool, by designing lessons which focus on using all four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, in order to transmit and receive ideas, information and opinions.

The changes to classroom routines and methodology that this implies are quite profound, and some teachers will find them easier to adopt than others. Your ideas, input and enthusiasm are therefore quite significant in helping push English education in Japan in this new direction.

Two recent measures are worth noting. The first is a stipulation that all English lessons at Senior High School should now be conducted primarily in English, whenever practicable. The second is the introduction of English activities into Elementary Schools as an obligatory requirement.

Foreign Language Courses of Study

The Ministry of Education (MEXT) determines the Courses of Study as broad standards for all schools to organize their programs around, in order to ensure a fixed standard of education throughout the country. The basic objectives, as taken from the official MEXT foreign languages courses of study, are outlined below:

Elementary School

I. OVERALL OBJECTIVE
To form the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages while developing the understanding of languages and cultures through various experiences, fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing pupils with the sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages.

Junior High School

I. OVERALL OBJECTIVE
To develop students' basic communication abilities such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, deepening their understanding of language and culture and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages.

II. OBJECTIVES AND CONTENTS FOR EACH LANGUAGE
English
 1. Objectives
   (1) To enable students to understand the speaker's intentions when listening to English.
   (2) To enable students to talk about their own thoughts using English.
   (3) To accustom and familiarize students with reading English and to enable them to understand the writer's intentions when reading English.
   (4) To accustom and familiarize students with writing in English and to enable them to write about their own thoughts using English.

Senior High School

Article 1 OVERALL OBJECTIVE
To develop students' communication abilities such as accurately understanding and appropriately conveying information, ideas, etc., deepening their understanding of language and culture, and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages.

I. Basic English Communication
  1. Objective

To develop students' basic abilities such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language.

II. English Communication I
   1. Objective

To develop students' basic abilities such as accurately understanding and appropriately conveying information, ideas, etc., while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language.

III. English Communication II
   1. Objective

To further develop students' abilities such as accurately understanding and appropriately conveying information, ideas, etc., while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language.

IV. English Communication III
   1. Objective

To enhance students' abilities such as accurately understanding and appropriately conveying information, ideas, etc., and enable them to use such abilities in their social lives, while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language.

V. English Expression I
   1. Objective

To develop students' abilities to evaluate facts, opinions, etc. from multiple perspectives and communicate through reasoning and a range of expression, while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language.

VI. English Expression II
   1. Objective

To further develop students' abilities to evaluate facts, opinions, etc. from multiple perspectives and communicate through reasoning and a range of expression, while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language.

VII. English Conversation
   1. Objective

To develop students' abilities to hold conversations on everyday topics, while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language.

General points to note:

- In Elementary School, students are not expected to learn how to read or write in English, the aim of the activities students participate in is to familiarise them with the sounds of, and some basic expressions in, English.
- Reading and writing are introduced in Junior High School
- The Senior High School curriculum may contain the following subjects: *Basic English Communication, English Communication Ⅰ～Ⅲ*, *English Expression Ⅰ, Ⅱ* and *English Conversation*. All students are required to take English Communication Ⅰ

The use of textbooks

All Junior and Senior High Schools in Japan are obliged by law to use MEXT-approved English textbooks. However, the schools have the freedom to choose which of the official textbooks they will adopt. MEXT have recently stressed that teachers should also seek to introduce supplementary materials into lessons in order to respond to, or stimulate, student interest.

It is also worth noting that MEXT encourages teachers to use the textbook as a tool to teach English, rather than an end in itself. Traditionally, teachers may have considered it their job to get students to memorise the contents of the textbook. Now it is being recognised that lessons need to become more student-centred and communicative.

When you arrive at your new school, it is a very good idea to ask to have a copy of the textbooks being used to teach English. Have a good look at the topics and language points covered, and you will have a better idea of the kind of areas you will be dealing with in lessons. It is also helpful to bear in mind that, for most language learners, receptive skills (reading and listening) outstrip productive ones (speaking, writing). In other words, students may be able to understand complex structures such as relative clauses, when they see them written down, but are unlikely to be able to form them accurately themselves, especially under pressure in speaking activities. One of your primary roles will therefore be to find ways of helping students turn receptive knowledge into productive skills.

English activities at elementary school

The aim of English at elementary school is to familiarise students with the sounds of English, and improve their communication skills. As a result, there is no overt focus on language systems, and little to no focus on reading or writing skills. In practice, this means that most lessons will need to revolve around songs, stories, vocabulary games and mini-dialogues.

MEXT have produced a textbook, called *Hi Friends!*, which teachers are free to use. It is useful to refer to this textbook for ideas about topics and language areas to cover in lessons.

English in elementary schools is taught by the homeroom teacher, rather than a specialist English teacher as it is in junior and senior high schools. Some homeroom teachers may be highly proficient in English, and enthusiastic about teaching it, whereas others may be very hopeful of, and grateful for, your help in planning and presenting lessons.

Characteristics of learners

Children at elementary school are often very new to English, and are enthusiastic about learning a new subject. Unlike older students, they are generally less worried about making mistakes, and are often very keen to volunteer to speak in front of their peers. Their energy levels, when channelled effectively, can make for very satisfying, productive and enjoyable lessons for all concerned.

However, younger students tend also to have shorter attention spans, and can quickly become bored and de-motivated if activities drag on too long. It is therefore important to plan a number of different activities and a sufficient amount of new material for each lesson.

Suitable language

At this level, students gain a lot from simply being able to name physical objects around them in a new language. Naming commonly used items in the classroom (pens, paper, desks, the bin, the blackboard) is an important start, which can be followed up with other vocabulary sets (for example, animals, colours, school subjects, toys), introduced using flashcards and realia.

It is important to introduce the students to classroom instructions in English right from the start, so that this seems a natural part of the English lesson. Gestures and mime will be invaluable tools in helping students understand your instructions. Below are some useful classroom instructions in English. As a preparation exercise, imagine how you might demonstrate the meaning of these instructions using mime and / or pictures:

Make pairs.   Talk to your partner.   Make groups of four.   Deal out the cards.

Listen, please. Look at the board.   Look at me.   Stand up.   Sit down.

Push your desks to the back of the class.   Listen and draw.   Any volunteers?

Learning activities

Students will enjoy simple conversation practice, such as introductions, asking a partner about food likes and dislikes and talking about future dreams. The key to these activities is to offer a model first, perhaps with a stronger student, or the home-room teacher, invite confident volunteers to perform the conversation in front of the class, give the whole class a chance to practise any tricky words or phrases chorally, and then get students to ask each other in pairs.

The same procedure can be followed to introduce role-plays. You can use puppets for the initial presentation of the role-play, before inviting volunteers to participate.

Since you will be introducing new language visually, using pictures and mime, there are a number of games which will be useful to help students learn the new vocabulary.

Card slap.

A very simple game. Students make groups of four, and spread picture cards face up on the floor, or on their desks. Students put their hands on their heads. The teacher calls out a language item (eg, "car"), and students race to be the first to slap the card. Once students are more confident with the vocabulary, members of the group take it in turns to call out the words.

Kim's game

As with the previous activity, cards are spread out face up. Students close their eyes, and one card is removed and hidden. Students open their eyes and try to remember the missing card. This game can be played as a whole class, before being played in groups of four. Extra language practice can be introduced by encouraging the students to give instructions in English ("Close your eyes", "Open your eyes", "Your turn", "My turn").

Car Crash

The cards are spread out in a figure of 8. Students put counters on the start card, roll a dice and then move around the "race track". As they land on a card, they need to say the word in English. If two students land on the same card, they "crash", and both return to the start.

Picture dictation

This can be used to review objects, colours, size adjectives or body parts. The teacher dictates (for example: "It's a big animal. It has a big, grey body. It has big ears. It has four legs. It has a short tail. It has a long nose"), and students draw what they hear, going on to compare their pictures with a partner.

Songs

Songs are a particularly useful way of remembering lists of words, especially those that follow a particular order, such as days of the week, months of the year or numbers. Songs are also a useful "cooler" activity which can be used at any point in a lesson to calm students down and get them to re-focus. They can also be used as part of a classroom routine to start or close lessons, or both. Ideally, songs should be practised repeatedly in short bursts, over a series of lessons, rather than taking up a large part of any one lesson.

Other useful songs are those which include actions, fun sounds, or repetition. Examples include, "One finger, one thumb", "Old Macdonald" and "If you're happy and you know it".

Modelling the song by singing it yourself has a number of advantages. Firstly, you won't need to carry a CD player into the classroom with you. Secondly, you can control the speed of the song, slowing and speeding up the rhythm to help students learn, and liven up the pace. Thirdly, you will have a ready activity at any point you need over the course of a lesson.

<u>Picture Books</u>

Simple story books are an ideal resource for this age group, and introduce the idea of listening to English for pleasure, rather than as a testing activity. Focus students' attention on you, and make sure that they can see the pictures in the book. One way of doing this is to get students to gather around you in a circle, on the floor.

If you don't have access to big books, you can retell well-known fairy tales, such as Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, or The Enormous Turnip using flash-cards and mime. Students often know these stories in their own language, which is a useful scaffold in helping them to understand the new words in English. You can invite volunteers to act out roles from the story, while retelling it.

Learner needs

Most of your students will be encountering English for the first time. Many will embrace it enthusiastically, and want to start using the strange new words immediately. Others will be more reticent, maybe through shyness, or possibly because they find it difficult to form unfamiliar new sounds. You need to be sensitive to the needs of the latter group, otherwise they will very quickly start to dislike this new subject.

Ways of respecting the needs of more reticent students include:

- Inviting volunteers, rather than nominating individual students

- Offering choral practice before pair-work

- Allowing students to respond in non-verbal ways, such as through mime, or drawing pictures

Finally, encourage students to see you as someone who will help them, rather than just a task-master. A key way of doing this is to teach them to put their hands up and shout "help" when they can't remember the word they need in a game such as car-crash, or they don't understand the instructions you have given them for an activity or role-play.

Unit 2 Learning styles and classroom management

Teaching approaches

Approaches to language teaching vary greatly from school to school, not just from country to country.

The assistant should bear the following in mind:

• **All teachers have their own style.** Respect their way of working even if you are convinced through reading, training courses or personal experience that other techniques work better for you.

• **It is unwise to rush in and try to change things overnight.** Your role is to facilitate language use but you need to start with the familiar and gradually introduce new ways of working which suit your purpose.

• **Learners from teacher-centred classrooms need to be taught how to collaborate** and work in pairs, etc. and this has to be done gradually to avoid confusion and chaos.

• **The techniques used very much depend on the age range.** Adult learners in a small group in a private language school respond differently from a large group of excited adolescents in a secondary school. Ball-throwing communication games are great fun in a primary school (although difficult to handle with twenty-five children), but will not appeal to most adolescents. You have to weigh up the age range factor carefully. Assess any games and activities you are planning to use in this light.

• **Teaching approaches are reflected in the room arrangement.** Different activities call for different seating arrangements. Shifting furniture for group work may be the answer but be wary of noise and the time it takes. Plan ahead and leave the room as you found it.

'I am in two schools and they are so different as to be untrue! In each school I work in a completely different way. Even within the schools the styles I adopt depend on the member of staff I am working with.' **Martin Skitt, Linz, Austria. Assistant in two Gymnasien**.

Learning approaches

All learners in institutions are under pressure to achieve similar levels of competence, yet in a large class you will find a varied range of achievement and will have to cater for all (see below). In addition, a naturally chatty teenager will be more likely to be talkative

in the language class than his shy friend. Personality is a deciding factor in attitude and competence.

Some people learn better from seeing things, and enjoy diagrams, writing things down and reading. Other people have an instinctive ear and like learning from hearing and listening, while others prefer action such as making things with their hands, and walking about.

Most of us are a mixture. Clearly lessons which focus solely on the written word with little visual support disadvantage some learners. We need to give a variety of tasks that help students learn in different ways. Accept that during an hour-long lesson the learners' interest will wane at some point if the activity in hand doesn't appeal to their way of working. It is impossible to please everybody all the time but we can try and stimulate as many as possible in the hour we have. This means it is unwise to spend a whole hour on one activity. Some learners will instinctively take to role play even if their command of English makes it challenging. Others may dislike role play, putting on a show, exposing themselves publicly or pretending. Be aware and plan for these learning preferences.

Think about your own preferred learning style:

• What sort of language activities did you enjoy most at school?

• How do you learn new words?

• Are you better at writing or speaking your languages? Have you got an ear for accents?

• Do you like to work alone, in a pair or in a large group?

• Do you need to take notes? Do you like making tables and diagrams to help you study?

Establishing a rapport with your students

The first time standing in front of a class can be nerve-wracking. They may well know that you are not a qualified teacher and, particularly with adolescents, you will have to earn their trust and respect. Your main wish might be to be friendly and liked by these students but this will come with time. Once you have shown that you are organised and have a clear plan in mind for the lesson, and they are working well together with you and each other, then there will be time for jokes and friendly banter. This is particularly important with large groups of teenagers who are excited to have a new face but also ready to trip you up if you seem unsure.

• **Appear confident**. If you are very nervous it will bother them and some will take advantage. Remember the trainee teachers you had at secondary school?

• **Establish a professional and not a personal relationship**. Be welcoming and make a real effort to learn their names and use them. Make a seating plan and get them to make name cards for their desks if this helps you.

• **Be well prepared**. Set the agenda and have a plan which you all follow. Don't ask them what they would like to do or what they want to talk about. They need to see you as responsible and reliable. Later in the year with older learners there may be times when you can choose discussion topics together, but not in the initial stages.

• **Impose your presence**. This does not mean that you take centre stage and do all the talking. Your speaking style (clear and loud enough for all) and your physical presence in a large class help to manage the room. Avoid sitting behind a desk or standing in a corner. Move around, interact with all pupils at the questioning stages, scan the room and make eye contact as if in the theatre. Looking as if you are the teacher reassures learners, and being lively will show that you are enthusiastic about teaching and learning.

• **Listen to the students**. Show interest and listen to their replies to your questions. Be patient if they take time to reply. Wait a bit longer for students to reply as they need to get used to your voice and think about your questions.

• **Pay attention to your own voice and speech**. Modify your speed without distorting sounds or putting in artificial pauses mid-sentence. Pause after each sentence a bit longer than you would for a native speaker.

One disadvantage of working with adolescents is that they are not always enthusiastic when you suggest an activity, but once they get involved in it any objections disappear.

'At first I was very put off by my pupils whinging when I told them what we were going to do. You have to expect this! Basically, don't take anything personally. Get them on your side and you'll all have fun'. **Susan Young, Loire region, France. Assistant in a secondary and a primary school.**

Getting students used to an English-only classroom

After observation, you may note that a good deal of the mother tongue is used during the lesson or that some is used for instructions. Talk this over with teachers if it becomes an issue, but it is advisable for you to start in English and continue. For classes unused to an English-only environment you will need to teach classroom language through gesture, mime, flashcards or a chart. This will take time, especially with beginners. Simple instructions like 'listen', 'open your books', 'ask your partner', etc. can be gradually built up over the first few days. Make your own comments as simple and as natural as possible: 'Really?', 'That's a good idea, Hiro', 'What do you think Tomoko?', 'I enjoyed your dialogues. Now let's look at ...', 'Who's next?' Try to establish a limited but realistic range for all groups to cope with. They will soon start imitating you.

Classroom management (groups and large classes)

Changes of pace

All of the best laid plans can go wrong. Perhaps the students find the text you chose unexpectedly difficult. You planned a listening task but the cassette recorder won't work. Students are losing interest and the amount of chattering is increasing. Students have enjoyed the game so much that they have become over-excited and need calming down. This calls for a change of pace, a slower more reflective activity or a livelier task.

You will also need to add variety to your weekly lesson routine or you and the pupils will lose interest.

'I found it really good to vary the lessons – one week text, one week a game, one week a song and text work, etc.' **Vanessa Garfield, Valence, France. Assistant in a collège and a lycée.**

Dealing with the unexpected

• Abandon something that isn't really working rather than flog a dead horse, but have a filler activity to use as back-up.

• Always have a contingency plan if you are relying on equipment that might go wrong.

• Keep some fillers in your bag which correspond to the month's work. These can be ten-minute activities which liven up a dull, uninterested room (usually speaking /listening game or contest) or calm down an unruly lot (usually reading or writing based).

• Collect a battery of multi-purpose texts for use in emergencies.

• Keep a small collection of large detailed pictures and/or photos on a theme or topic related to the term's work. You can cut a collection of photos from newspapers (even local foreign ones) and magazine supplements to use with higher levels. Update and check photos regularly. For example:

– give out two or three photos to small groups or pairs or whole class

– students write words associated with the person or event

– students invent a headline or match a headline you give on the board to the photo

– students prepare short oral description of photo – what it shows, which event it represents, etc.

'Something which has helped me and saved my skin several times has been to have three or four varied lessons prepared in my bag at all times ... you never know when a teacher will suddenly say "Oh, can you do next lesson instead of the eight o'clock on Monday" – and you really want to be able to say "Yes" to that!' **Richard Hewitt, Eisenstadt, Austria. Assistant in a secondary school and Further Education college**.

'Be flexible. If the teacher gives you some material with one class, exploit it and use it with others.' **Alexis Hughes, Chambéry, France. Assistant in a lycée**.

Dealing with large classes of mixed ability

Mixed classes usually comprise students who have arrived at varying levels of achievement. This does not mean that the weakest at speaking are not as capable at language learning. Some may have had no English at primary school while others may have had three years. In a secondary school some may be very good at reading a poem and understanding it, but not accustomed to discussing the meaning in English and lack the vocabulary to do so.

Difficulties	Solutions
Producing tasks which all students can complete	Use mainly open-ended tasks where learners brainstorm and contribute what they know.
Some able students finish first and get bored and disruptive.	Give tasks which have a core part that everyone has to finish and optional extra questions too.
There is a wide range of levels and you risk teaching three different lessons.	Try mainly collaborative tasks with small groups of mixed ability so they help each other and pool ideas/skills.
Some need revision and the others don't.	Make revision into a team/pair game.
Some texts and listenings are too easy for some.	Choose content/topics very interesting for the age range so the ideas hold their interest.

Setting up a pair work system

Always follow a similar procedure so that once it is familiar, students will respond automatically and know what is expected.

• **Assign roles clearly around the class**, pointing to each student in turn. 'You are A ... you are B ..., etc.' or use colours, animals, etc. with younger learners.

• **Double-check they know their role** with a show of hands. 'Hands up As ... hands up Bs' or 'Who's red?' 'Who's a tiger?'

• **Don't explain what they have to do, demonstrate**. Take one student, he is A and you are B. Practise the dialogue/exchange. Double-check with one pair of students who play A and B and act out with you prompting the pair work. Put prompts on the board if this helps lower levels or classes unsure about pair work. Prompts on board student A '... from?' student B 'I'm ...'

• **Use choral repetition to reinforce roles if necessary**. All As say their lines in chorus. Pick on a student B to respond. Repeat with Bs.

• **Only let students start when you are sure they are all clear as to what they are supposed to be doing**. Use this technique for all communication games and it will get faster and more efficient as they get used to working without you. Never try to set up pair work without checking that the instructions are clear. Think how you will set it up before the lesson.

• **Quickly circulate when they start** in order to see if each of the pairs is clear and working together. Help individual pairs with prompting. Keep an eye out for waning interest and don't let it go on too long. Are they near to exchanging all the information they needed to exchange? Be ready to call a halt.

• **Change pairs with the minimum of fuss and noise** as this can be a big time-waster in large classes and annoy colleagues in nearby classrooms. Try not to say 'Find a new partner ...' as the whole room could be set in motion. All students turn round quietly and form a pair with someone behind or in front or on the other side. Make all As stand up (no scraping chairs) and on the count of three move two desks down, up or across to find a new partner.

Finishing off

Many assistants find it difficult to judge how long activities will take and find themselves either running out of time or with fifteen more minutes to go and nothing to do. This is true for all teachers, but it improves as you get to know your classes. However, plan ahead and start winding down well before the bell rings so you can give a summary of the lesson. After a discussion or simple oral task you may need to go over main problems on the board and must allow time for this essential feedback. In some schools pupils just pack up and rush off when the bell rings. Try to avoid this. Insist on

a formal conclusion and goodbye. If you are required to give homework or to ask students to prepare a task such as something for the role play in the next lesson, do not do it at the very end. Attention usually wanes by the end, so give forewarning and instructions earlier and then just a final reminder at the end.

Discipline problems and solutions

Factors leading to discipline problems

• a gap in the lesson (bad planning, an activity loses momentum, a piece of equipment fails to work)

• unclear instructions (they don't know what to do, they don't start and attention wanders)

• overexcited students arrive from another class in a rowdy mood

• lack of teacher attention (you need constantly to scan the room and keep your eyes and ears open to what is happening, especially in large groups)

• the assistant concentrates on lengthy explanations to one individual (the others get bored)

• work is too easy or too challenging (students give up or attention wanders).

Always discuss discipline procedures with members of staff in your host school before you start teaching. Each country has different rules and expectations and this can vary from school to school. One assistant commented wryly that the discipline methods used on him at school would get you the sack in his host country. In some teaching cultures a quiet classroom is considered a disciplined classroom where learning is taking place. This is evidently at odds with your role which is to maximise student talking opportunities, with reasonable noise levels! Clearly a class that is in control is not always quiet and a quiet class with a teacher doing all the talking is not necessarily a good learning environment. You will create healthy chatter in oral classes but this must not descend into anarchy!
However, bear in mind that teachers on either side of your classroom might take a different view if your class noise disturbs their lessons. Try not to assume that the teacher you are working with is traditional or boring because they do not use the riotous communication games their students adore doing with you. It could be that these teachers have met with criticism or opposition from colleagues in the past due to noise generated from their language classrooms!

Typical problems and some suggested approaches

• **One student starts talking to another and keeps on doing it**. Ask one of the students a question as soon as you realise they are becoming disruptive. Move nearer

to them as you move around the room and try to make eye contact. If eye contact and interruption are not sufficient then move the students to different seats.

• **Students are all talking and no one is listening**. Try to establish silence without raising your voice. Clap loudly, tap a ruler on the board, count down from ten (some students will join in chorus). When silence is reached ... hold the silence for a minute or so before resuming. If disruption is due to lack of interest in the task, go on to something else (a filler) to change pace.

• **A student deliberately refuses to do an activity you have prepared**. Try to find out the reason. What seems like blank refusal may in fact be down to a lack of understanding of the task by the student. If communication is impossible, talk about the case with the JLT, or home-room teacher.

None of the punishments below, which you may have experienced in your home country, are appropriate or acceptable in Japanese schools:

• giving lines

• public humiliation by putting students in the corner (or indeed any kind of public humiliation)

• sending students out of the classroom

• corporal punishment

Unit 3 Motivation and progress

Factors influencing learner motivation

• **The status of English**. Its perceived usefulness in school and after school.

• **Past learning experience**. Students moving to one institution from another where there may have been a negative approach to English need to regain interest and faith in their ability to learn it.

• **Success and reward**. If students have successfully completed previous tasks and lessons and been praised for their achievement then they are more inclined to make an effort.

• **The content of the lesson**. This must be inherently of interest to the age range. They need to be able to identify with the topics chosen.

• **Self-confidence**. Some learners are very disheartened by little failures and some are very nervous about making mistakes, so hindering their progress.

• **Length of time studying English**. At the early stages of language learning everything is new and progress can seem rapid. This sense of achievement is lost or gets slower as the years pass. This is one of the reasons why children at primary school or in their first years of English at lower secondary seem so much more motivated than adolescents in upper secondary school.

• **Lack of challenge**. To get a sense of progress and to create the feelings of effort that students associate with learning, we need to stretch them, e.g. don't tell learners something they can tell you, given a little guidance and encouragement. Help them to guess new words instead of jumping in with translations, or encourage them to try to correct their own mistakes on the basis of their knowledge.

• **A sense of difficulty**. We can create a feeling that English is a difficult language without realising it, with chance remarks like 'there are lots of irregulars in English' or 'this isn't as simple as your language'. More often than not these negative feelings have been induced by learning approaches which overemphasised difficulties and over-highlighted learners' errors. Such comparisons are fruitless and undermine confidence. We cannot take for granted that learners studying English in a compulsory school system will be motivated in the way that a young adult, paying lots of money, in a private language school of his choice will be. You too have chosen to study languages and perceive it as useful. English may be perceived as the most important language to learn in school systems abroad and by parents, but this perception is not necessarily taken on board by students. English is just another school subject. Misunderstandings and disappointment occur when the assistant uses an applauded technique or task from a seminar on teaching motivated young adults, or from an ELT book developed mainly through experimentation in private language schools.
 Too often the comments on quite normal adolescents become negative: 'they don't care' or 'they are lazy' or 'they don't make an effort'. However, it could be that the approach wasn't suitable for teenagers or was just too far removed from their usual

learning experience. You certainly need a great deal of classroom management skills to cope with the demands of a large class of fourteen-year-olds compared to a small group of co-operative twenty-five-year-olds on holiday in Oxford. It pays not to be too harsh on yourself or on the learners. Try not to be too quick to blame yourself or them. Accepting your limitations, and theirs, will help you plan for a more appropriate lesson next time.

Using English in the classroom

Some of your students will not be used to an English-only classroom. It is advisable for them to make the most of your mother-tongue status but it can sometimes be difficult to insist on English-only. In some school systems translation is used, particularly in a contrastive way, to highlight differences between the native language tense system or use of prepositions, etc. and the relative usage in English. These uses can be constructive but assistants are generally not called upon to present language, just to reinforce and practise it. Therefore your lessons should be in English, except in exceptional circumstances, like a student falling ill or major misunderstanding that can only be cleared up in the native language.

Tips for encouraging the use of English in the classroom

• **Always reply in English**, even if students are speaking in their own language.

• **Try not to be too dogmatic**, but comments like 'It's easier for me to speak English – and it helps you' can explain your approach.

• **Artificial motivators** like the swear box for use of the students' mother tongue can be introduced in a light-hearted way, or a list of forfeits which anyone not speaking in English must carry out. Use dice and a list of six forfeits (which you can vary throughout the year), e.g. 'Count from twenty backwards very quickly', 'Sing a song you know in English', etc.

• **Points can be deducted** from the team score during games or contests if the mother tongue is used.

• **Simplify the English you use** to suit the comprehension level of the class and stick to a clear body of classroom instructions which are concise and supported by gesture if appropriate. This does not mean speaking in monosyllables or broken English. Use tone of voice, stress, intonation and any visual methods to aid understanding.

• **Help students to make an effort to understand** without depending on a quick translation. This can take time in groups not used to making intelligent guesses or deducing meaning from context.

Types of learner error

It is useful for you and the learners to accept that mistakes are an inevitable and natural part of the learning process. It is through learners' mistakes that we can see what they are struggling to master, what concepts they have misunderstood and what extra work they might need.

Interference from the mother tongue

All languages are different and it is natural to assume that other languages might perform in the same way as our own. Our system of reality, which defines how we view the world, often collapses when we try to apply it to another.

Translation

Sometimes when speaking or writing, students may find they do not know a suitable expression, so they fall back on using a direct translation of their own language. This is a conscious decision, rather than unconscious interference. It is useful to develop communication strategies to get the message across, and this is more successful in the long term than staying silent. Experimentation is a vital part of the process towards fluency.

False friends

Some words in Japanese have been borrowed from other languages, and may be mistaken for English by students. Some of these words have come from languages other than English, and others have been especially coined in Japan. Mostly, they are written in a special script, called katakana, which marks them out as words of foreign origin. The 'false' assumption that they are English words can lead to confusion and communication breakdowns: e.g. "mansion" = 'apartment' in Japanese, and not the English idea of a large house occupied by millionaires. Below are some other common examples of words which Japanese students often assume are English:

- "Pan" = 'bread' in Japanese, and not the English cooking utensil.
- "Choux (pronounced 'shoe') cream" = a kind of cake in Japanese, and not, as some Americans may assume, 'shoe polish'.
- "Anketo" = 'questionnaire'
- "Arubaito" = 'part-time work / worker'
- "hotchikisu" = 'stapler'
- "baby-car" = 'push-chair' (UK) / 'stroller' (US)
- "homu" = 'platform'

"Chou cream", "pan" and "arubaito" are examples of Japanese words originating from other European languages: respectively French, Portuguese and German.

"Baby-car" and "office lady" are examples of expressions coined in Japan ("Virgin road", for the aisle in a church that married couples walk down, is another), which are guessable by native speakers, but would not usually be used by them. "Salary man" is another such expression, but one which has managed to enter the vocabulary of English-speakers outside Japan.

Finally, abbreviations of words of English origin may make the originals unrecognisable to native speakers, and students need to be made aware of this. Below are a few common examples:

- "depato" = 'department store'
- "pasokon" = '(personal) computer) / PC'
- "ice" = 'ice cream'
- "sebiro" (from "Saville Row) = 'suit' – an abbreviation of the famous street in London where many tailors are located

Sound system

Each language has its own sounds, which are produced by using the throat, mouth, tongue, etc. This involves basic motor skills, which differ from one language to another and need time and effort to master. (See Unit 6 Speech work).

When and how to correct errors

Fluency versus accuracy

When giving tasks to learners we need to make it clear if we are focusing on accuracy or fluency. It is important to learn to use language correctly as too many mistakes will impede understanding. However, we also need to get our message across with reasonable speed and choice of appropriate content that suits our message. When this fluency is missing, you have a very correct, laboured and robot-like delivery. All this does not mean giving them a lecture on language learning. Simply indicate with a comment: 'I will not correct you during these dialogues because I want you to try to speak as naturally as possible', or 'Be careful to use the words "do" or "does" when asking your questions'.

When to correct?

It is generally best not to interrupt students in mid-speech during fluency work. However, intervene with help if communication breaks down. If the learner has got most of his work right but has made a trivial mistake, it is sometimes wise to let the mistake pass. We can sometimes be over-keen for them to get everything right, but this can mean that they then feel over-corrected without getting encouragement for the little that they have managed to achieve.
Conversely some assistants don't want to be too harsh, and regularly fail to pick up on mistakes which need attention, for fear of discouraging the learners. In a school setting learners are accustomed on a daily basis to getting things 'right' or 'wrong' and may be less sensitive than you think. Observe their teachers. How do they correct? When? Have they a policy regarding accuracy or fluency work?
Weigh all this up before deciding what is best for you and the learners.

Correction techniques

Some students do not want you to correct every single error as this is demotivating. A study of fourteen- to fifteen-year-olds in Italian secondary schools showed that they cannot absorb more than a certain amount of corrective feedback. Written work covered in red pen can be disheartening too. However, if learners are not aware that they have made an error then they cannot remedy it. We therefore need to use a variety of techniques to help them spot areas of difficulty.

Feedback on errors

Learners expect and need feedback, and so do teachers, and this can take a number of forms:

Verbal praise or encouragement in class

Be aware that during your lessons students need encouraging words when they have answered well or completed a task. The danger is to over-praise and devalue the effect by constantly gushing 'very good'. Encourage with nods, smiles and 'right, fine', but keep extra special praise for specific moments.

Discussing progress with teachers

The assistant should not be expected to assess students, although some teachers expect this and the matter should be discussed tactfully. It is only natural for the teacher to want to know how learners are doing with you, especially if you are left alone with them. Try to keep this feedback to a monthly or termly session to discuss general details, but keep your own records of how students are doing, what has improved and what the common problems are.

Written praise of their written work

Learners may demand a mark and be very dependent on the marking systems in their schools. Try to avoid this, but use comments like: 'Very good. I like your ideas'. With younger learners use symbols, such as a smiley face with details added for extra good work, like a smiley face with a top hat and bow tie. If the work is fair but there are quite a few errors, do a face which is half happy, half sad. If something is good or poor, try to give a sentence which explains why.

Recording students

Record students' conversations or role plays and use this for your own analysis and even for students' self-assessment. It can be good for motivation if students have a recording of themselves at the beginning of a year, so they can hear how much their performance has improved at the end of the year. Select only very short extracts for students to hear.

Visual correction techniques

Use hand gestures for clarification and for encouraging self-correction:

• **Use your index finger and thumb to indicate contractions**. When a student speaks in the full form, raise your arm and bring your index finger and thumb together which signals that a contraction was necessary. Students quickly get used to this and self- correct.

Example: 'I would like to go to ...' (teacher signals) ... 'Oh, ... I'd like to go to the cinema this weekend.' See figure one.

• **Use all the fingers on one hand to represent the words in a sentence or question**. If there is a missing auxiliary, wiggle the finger where it is missing, leaving a silent gap as you say the sentence.

Example: 'Where you going tomorrow?' (Teacher repeats the learner's question indicating each finger to represent the words, including a finger for the missing item, 'are'.) Student then self-corrects: 'Where ... are ... you going tomorrow?' (Teacher praises correction.)

Your fingers can also indicate visually where a problem lies.

Example: Student: 'I haven't finished my homework already.' (Teacher repeats phrase with a questioning tone, wiggling finger to represent already.) Student: 'Already?' (Teacher nods.) 'Oh, yes ... I haven't finished my homework yet.' (Teacher praises.) See figure two.

• **Use your arm or hand to gesture for inversion in question forms**.

  Example: Student: 'Where you have been?' (Teacher crosses over hands in a sweeping movement.) Student: "Where ... been ... no ... Where have you been?' (Teacher nods, praises self-correction.) See figure three.

Fig. 1
Contractions

Fig. 2
Indicating where error lies

Fig. 3
Inversion

Correction during fluency activities

We tend to intervene more during accuracy work. In this case it would be appropriate to use any of the methods above. However, if you do not want to interrupt the general flow in conversation during a fluency task, it is best to keep a mental note to follow up later. However, you can correct more unobtrusively in a similar way to that used by a

mother correcting her own child learning to speak: Child: 'We goed to the park with Gran.' Mother: 'Yes, we went to the park with her and it was lovely, wasn't it?' You don't highlight the source of the error but you give confirmation of the correct model. It feels less severe to students who need to be corrected during fluency activities.

Encouraging peer or self-correction

• When correcting written work put a line to indicate where the error is, but don't correct it. It helps if you indicate in the margin what type of error it is with symbols, e.g. w/o for word order, sp for spelling, etc. 'My father like__ football but I don't!' (Third person?) The learners then have to puzzle over their errors, discuss with classmates and, if necessary, the teacher, to come up with a solution.

• You can use the same approach as above during oral feedback on the board. Select the main error types. Write four or five on the board with an indication of where the problem lies. Put students in pairs for a few minutes to correct the problems. This might be pronunciation, but with higher level groups you can also focus on appropriate context, e.g. 'Was the expression polite enough?' 'Was it too formal?'

• Activities involving group writing will naturally involve a certain amount of peer correction as students contribute their knowledge to the group effort. To take this a step further, students can be encouraged to pass round their group work to be marked by another group before handing it in. This can be very motivating for teenagers who value the opinion of their peers.

• To reinforce feelings of progress get students to collect their most frequent errors weekly. Students copy the uncorrected phrase, question or word on a piece of card or paper and keep in an envelope or small box. Put a corrected version in another envelope or box. Encourage them to look at the uncorrected version frequently for five minutes every day. When they are sure that they are not making the mistake any more, they remove the uncorrected version from their envelope and transfer it to the envelope with the corrected version to form a pair. Students may also like swapping error envelopes in class once a month and then try to correct them orally or in writing. This gives teenagers a sense of control over their own progress.

Clarification techniques to use during feedback

Diagrams

Diagrams are particularly useful in representing abstract concepts of time, quantity and degree. You can use them:

• to clarify confusion

• to give a board summary which students can refer to

• as prompts on the board for learners to use during controlled oral work or discussions.

Some diagrams can be used to illustrate a variety of concepts (see below), but don't overuse them if you want them to associate the pictures with a main concept. If they are popular you can make small versions in packs to give to pairs or small groups who use them as a card game.

Diagrams for degree. Draw on board or take five sheets of A4 paper and black marker. Stick each on to card and laminate or cover with self-adhesive plastic film so they can be re-used. Write the various uses on the back as they come up in your teaching.

'Do you ever see films in English on television?'
'Yes, sometimes.' / 'No, never.'

Fig. 4 **Diagrams showing degree**

|always|frequently|sometimes|rarely|never|
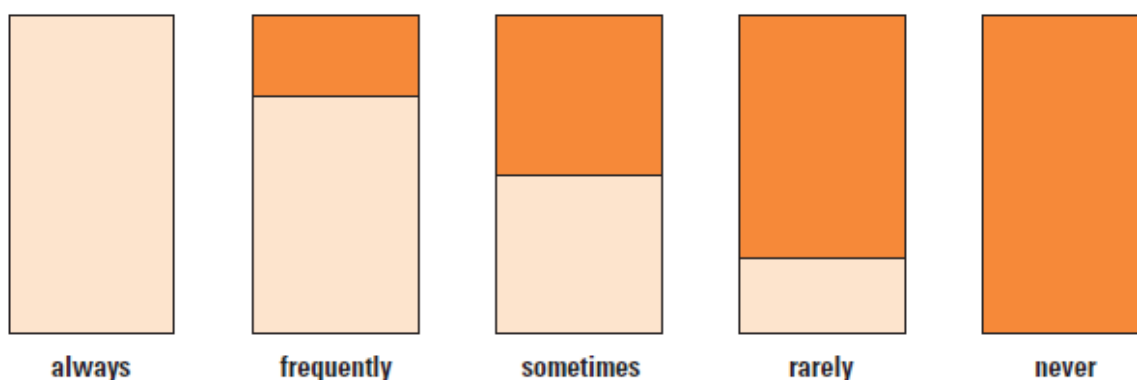
You can use the same sequence of diagrams in many ways:

Example: 'What do you think of Rap?'

Love / Like a lot / Quite like / Don't like ... much / Don't like ... at all

Use only two or three of the visuals as prompts then use the others to complete students' understanding of shades of meaning.

Example: 'I think that all schools should ban make-up.' 'Well, I agree in part but don't you think that ...?'

Completely agree / Agree in part / Completely disagree

Then you can explore: 'I hardly agree ...'

Time-lines

These are very useful for:

• contrasting tenses (past/present)
He was an English teacher but now he's an international pop star.

• contrasting a period with a fixed point in time (future and past)
 It was raining when we arrived at Kate's flat.

• contrasting continuous with interrupted actions
He left the village that night and has lived in London ever since.

Fig. 5 **Example of a time-line**

past   now   future

6.00 pm   He's been reading since six o'clock
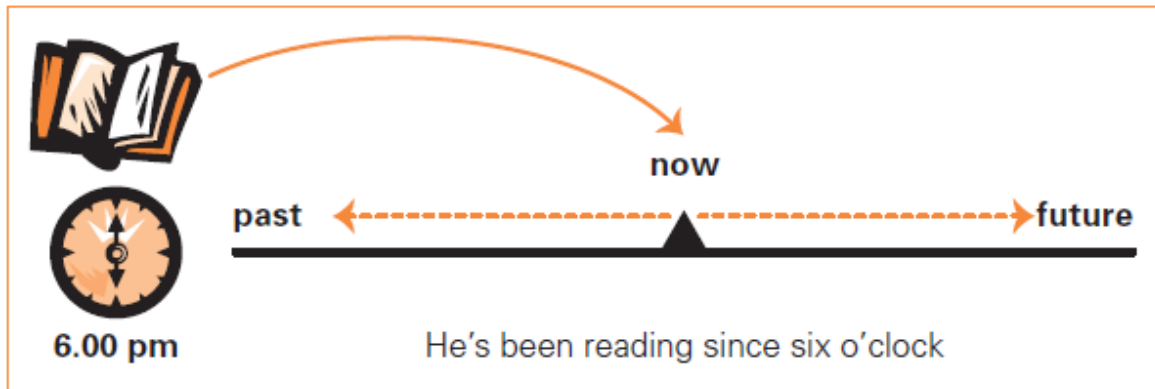
These diagrammatic forms genuinely help students. Students starting with time-lines need to understand the first concept that the point on the line marked **now** refers to the moment that the speaker is speaking.

You can use the time-lines to elicit questions or answers in preparation for a task, as a way to clear up problems during feedback after oral work and as a concept check to see if they understand the use of tenses. Ask a student or students to complete a board time-line in their notebooks to illustrate the sentence.

Example: I have been living in Osaka since July 2009 and I lived in Tokyo from 2007 until July 2009.

Module 2

Unit 4 Oral practice

What do speaking skills involve?

Speaking a language involves using the components correctly – making the right sounds, choosing the right words and getting constructions grammatically correct. Pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary tasks will focus on the need for practice in language accuracy. At the same time, we also need to get a clear message across and this involves choosing appropriate content or ideas to suit a situation, e.g. deciding what is polite or what might appear rude, how to interrupt or how to participate in a conversation. All this involves practice in language fluency. Both types of practice are equally important, although some traditional approaches can concentrate rather too much on accuracy tasks which result in students speaking like a grammar book.

How to prepare students for real communication in English

• **Personal response**. Give students tasks which ask them to contribute information about themselves.

• **Variety of responses**. Give them dialogues which require more than one set response so they have to decide and create their own dialogues.

• **Work in pairs or groups**. Give students tasks in which they have to communicate with others to exchange information, as this gives a greater number of students a chance to talk.

• **Varied language**. Give tasks which require the use of more than one type of sentence structure so students get practice in combining different language forms, e.g. tenses.

• **Balance accuracy tasks with fluency work**. Make it clear that you are interested in what students are saying, not just how grammatically correct they are being! Encourage them to show verbal signs of interest: 'Really? That's interesting, I didn't know that!', 'I think that's a good idea!', 'Are you?', 'Did you?'.

• **Less teacher talking time**. Be careful not to do all the talking, and aim for student participation from the very start of lessons. When preparing pair work, bring in student responses, use students to rehearse roles, get all the class to repeat key items and try to avoid lengthy explanations. Demonstrate. Keep your own talking to a minimum during the activities.

Controlled speaking activities

To understand the degree of control in a speaking task we can contrast these two diary activities:

Diary activity task A

Fig. 1

Student A	
M	visit grandma 3pm painting class 7pm
T	swimming lesson 2–4pm
W	Spanish class 7pm
T	football practice 7pm
F	piano lesson 5pm

Student B	
M	tennis lesson 3pm mum's birthday party pm
T	pub party 6pm
W	Dentist 3pm
T	English club 3pm
F	play rehearsal 6.30pm

Telephone your partner to organise a night out at the cinema or a game of tennis. Find a time which suits both of you. Ask and answer like this:

'What are you doing on Monday evening/afternoon?'
'Are you doing anything on Tuesday/Wednesday afternoon?'

'I'm not free. I'm going to my painting class.'
'Yes, I am. I'm going to school/to the dentist.'

Diary activity task B

Fig. 2

M	
T	
W	
T	
F	

Complete this diary with six appointments or activities over the whole week. Phone your friend to organise an evening out (you suggest the activity) or an afternoon together. Try and fix one fun activity together.

Task A is far more controlled:

• the language structures to use are indicated

• the diary pages contain all the necessary vocabulary for making appointments

• the content is determined by the teacher.

Task B is far less controlled and linguistically more demanding:

• students choose the language to use

• students put in the content and make decisions about their intentions.

It would be possible to modify each task depending on the levels of your classes and their need for fluency or accuracy work. The amount of linguistic support and ideas you give will determine the level of difficulty of the task.

Board or picture prompts for dialogue practice

Dialogue-building gives students with little English a chance to practise beyond sentence level. Making these dialogues meaningful is essential for interest and motivation. Our approach to building the dialogues might involve giving students prompts on cards or on the board. Contrast the two different types of prompting below:

1. **A mechanical drill from a traditional textbook**

Students find these very boring.

'You are a stranger in your town and you need directions. Make up your questions:'

Music shop. ('Is there a music shop near here?')

a) swimming pool   b) disco   c) café   d) tourist office   e) cinema

---

You can make these questions without even thinking about it. The nonsensical prompt thingy would still produce the accurate question: 'Is there a thingy near here?'.

2. **A meaningful dialogue**

Students must understand the situation in order to respond and must think about what to say. This is naturally more demanding but ultimately more beneficial for learning.

'You are a stranger in your town and you need some things.
Ask directions to the places.'

You need a map. ('Is there a tourist office near here?')

a) some toothpaste   b) to change some traveller's cheques
c) something to drink   d) some stamps

Information gap

Traditional approaches often require students to reproduce a written dialogue verbally. This does not prepare them for the unpredictable nature of real communication where the person you are speaking to has information you do not know. Information gap is less artificial, providing a purpose to speak since the other person possesses some information that you need to know.

For example, one student has an incomplete set of instructions on how to get to a friend's party and is not sure what time it starts. The other student has been to the

house before and has a map of how to get there. He also has an invitation which states the time. They phone each other to get details.

In the above example, if both students had the same handout the conversation would be artificial and pointless. Why tell each other details that they both know anyway? However, the information gap forces them to arrive at a complete set of facts after exchanging the missing parts. Through tables of facts that are incomplete, maps which have places missing, drawings with missing parts, timetables, brochures and many more visual props, you can simulate real communication gaps for controlled practice work.

Information gap task

Student A – you live in Brighton
Your friend from London has invited you to a concert at Wembley. He wants to meet you at Waterloo station at around 5 or 6 o'clock so you can travel together to the concert. Ring the station to find a suitable train from Brighton to Waterloo. Find out how much it will cost.

Student B – you work in Brighton station
Use your timetable to answer Student A's questions. Find a suitable train for him/her. Use the price guide to calculate the cost of the ticket.

Activities for controlled practice at all levels

• **Find someone who ...** (activities which focus on specific structures and involve the whole class)

Example: 'Find someone in this class who can: play a musical instrument; speak another language; dance; cook an Italian meal; play chess; say the alphabet backwards in English; drive a car.'

• **Questionnaires** (like those in teen magazines)

Example: 'Are you adventurous or over-cautious?'
What would you do if: a) ...?   b) ...?   c) ...?'

You can focus on a structure and vocabulary area. Students have a plan to follow. They complete the questionnaire for their partner then do the scoring. This is a very controlled way of giving speaking practice and it appeals to teenagers.

Types of fluency practice

If students are more used to teacher-controlled activities and tasks which focus on accuracy, they will need time to get used to fluency activities. Fluency activities are essential at all levels but the balance between fluency and accuracy tasks will differ. You will be able to do far more free activities with intermediate students and upwards,

whereas there will be more need for supported and controlled work with absolute beginners and false beginners.

<div style="background-color:#fce0d0; padding:10px;">

Tips for fluency practice

· **Base the tasks on language that is lower** than the language used in intensive study (e.g. reading texts) with the class. Learners should be able to find the words they need easily rather than struggle, as this will hinder their chances of speaking fluently. Focus on language areas that they can recall and use well. If they have just been presented
with the second conditional you cannot expect them to be using it fluently, although you can have a controlled activity for extra practice in using it.

· **For higher levels, give practice in speaking at length,** not just short exchanges as part of a debate. This means tasks like telling a story or anecdote, telling jokes, making speeches, telling the plot of a book or film or describing a person or place in detail.

· **Keep your intervention to a minimum** while students are performing the task.

· **Prepare vocabulary and ideas** well with students before starting. Students accustomed to more teacher control and to tasks which focus on little more than the repetition of sentences may panic and feel abandoned at first. The first signs of this are a (seemingly) uninterested or downright hostile group of students! They may be in a school culture where the teacher should be seen to be teaching in order for them to feel they are learning! This can happen even after they have enjoyed and successfully completed a task. The key words are **patience** and **preparation**.

</div>

Examples of fluency tasks:

• **Talking about yourself.** E.g. 'I hate maths, do you?'

<div style="border:1px solid #e08040; padding:10px;">

Look at this list of subjects we study at school: English; history; maths; art; information technology; geography; physics; chemistry; literature; biology; physical education; design; music.

Choose one subject you like and think of three reasons why you like it. Choose one subject you don't like and think of three reasons why you dislike it.

Ask your partner/group/class about their subjects. Does anyone like the same one as you? Have they got similar reasons? Find out their reasons and make notes under the following headings:

</div>

• **Reasons for liking a subject. Reasons for disliking a subject**
(Adapted from an exercise by Rob Nolasco)

Prepare the task by using your school timetable, and encourage students to ask you why you liked a subject. This helps vocabulary brainstorming, and you can tailor this to

suit the needs of your group. With higher level groups this can lead into a discussion on the ways of studying they prefer, what they might study or do after school, how to make a subject interesting, etc.

• **Giving your opinion**. The easiest way to elicit opinions is to give a list of opinions on a subject or issue and ask students to modify the statements in pairs or groups to reflect their general feelings about the issue. Five or six statements are enough for students to work with. For example, suitable topics could be pocket/ spending money and young people working; single-sex or mixed schooling; homework or no homework after school; free use of the Internet at home or restricted parental control of its use.

• **Group planning tasks**. Give a group of students a problem to solve or a list of activities to plan. Coming to an agreement can generate a lot of language. Example: 'A group of English students are coming to your town/school next Easter. Prepare a mini booklet to help them. Give a short list of essentials that you think they might need for a three-week stay and give them some useful background information on school life and social life so they are prepared for their arrival.'

• **Retelling a story or piecing together a dialogue** (all levels). Take a simple narrative, cut into equal sentences or parts and give each member of a group one part. Students must read their part for a few minutes, without showing the others, and then return the slip of paper to the teacher. Now students use their memory and own language and collaborate with the aim of fitting together the story. They then either retell it orally or write it up as a group. This works well with higher level groups if you choose a text on an issue that can be divided into three or four parts. Students then collaborate to summarise the ideas found in their part and decide who had the introduction, conclusion, etc.

Here is a very simple one suggested by Michael Swan called The Penguin. Can you find the order?

The policeman was very surprised and said: 'Didn't I tell you to take him to the zoo.'
He found a penguin.
The policeman told John to take it to the zoo.
John was walking down the street one day when ....
He didn't know what to do so he stopped a policeman.
John said: 'Yes, we went to the zoo yesterday and now we are going to the cinema'.
The next day the policeman met John in the street with the penguin.

Role play: fluency tasks

Role play requires students to:

• take on a role (imagine they are someone else)

• imagine a situation (pretend they are in another time and place)

• improvise in their choice of language.

Some people find their new persona liberating, others find pretending to be embarrassing. It is a good way for learners to try out their knowledge and improve fluency in a classroom situation. This type of activity maximises students' talking time and also appeals to shy students who do not like performing in front of a whole class, but can express themselves in the relative privacy of a small group. However, reading a set dialogue is not role play. Many role plays are based on cards or situations described by the teacher.

> Example: Student A – 'You have just arrived home an hour later than your parents allow. Your father is waiting for you at the door. Act out the conversation you have with your father. Student B is your father/mother.'

The best types of role play

• Draw on students' own experience of the world. It is difficult for teenagers to imagine themselves in many work situations (although they probably would be able to play a shop assistant).

• Draw on situations they are likely to find themselves in when they are travelling and/or meeting English speakers.

• Draw on familiar characters from school, home, their textbook or maybe television.

'... some classes quite like doing role plays to illustrate a certain point, e.g. smoking. A parent has found a packet of cigarettes in their child's room, and one takes the part of the parent, one the child.' **Caroline O'Shaughnessy, e-mailed to the Germany assistants discussion group**.

Tips on the management of role play

• **Keep a low profile**. There is nothing worse than a teacher breathing down your neck. Keep a distance to give them freedom to experiment.

• **Listen carefully**. Note down relevant aspects of the students' use of language and creativity, which you can highlight to them afterwards. Note errors but only major ones. If you take notes don't do it so obviously that you look like a detective. It puts students off.

• **Try not to intervene**. Respond to requests from students for help, or intervene if there has been a breakdown in communication and the role play needs to be put back on course.

• **Keep instructions clear and concise**. If it takes an age to explain it is too complicated.

• **Demonstrate (rehearse)** the role play before students start by themselves.

• **Don't force shy students to perform** in front of the whole class.

Free role plays

These can be more challenging without the support of an example dialogue or text. The language is decided by the students but needs careful preparation. Brainstorm with the whole class and give pairs or groups plenty of time to plan and practise.
'
The teacher of my year 9 class approached me and said he wanted to practise their use of everyday English, i.e. going to a chemist [...] so I made a few scenarios which can be cut up and laminated on to cards, etc. First of all the students got all four sheets and had the chance to read them through and explain any words they didn't know. Then they had to choose one scenario and [...] go through them with me which only takes two to three minutes each. Afterwards I wrote a few pointers on how they did for a feedback session later. Next week [...] the teacher wants to videotape it.

The thing that is important about these lessons is that these scenarios are things that could really come up – they are REAL so if students can do these it can work wonders for their self confidence'. **Suzannah McDonnell, Hessen, mailed to the Germany assistants discussion group**.

Classroom management and feedback

Discussions in pairs or small groups give students far more talking practice than teacher-led discussions. However, it is sometimes very tempting for teachers to intervene if a discussion seems to be flagging only to end up dominating the process and doing all the talking. We need to see our role as guides who support the students' practice.

• Provide language prompts on the board or on small cards for students to refer to, e.g. expressions for agreement, disagreement, asking for clarification, etc.

• If students need further suggestions for ideas or they are having trouble finding the right words to express a point, intervene in their pair or small group briefly to help them continue talking.

• While you go around listening to students, encourage them with praise for both their language use and their ideas. Make a mental note of any recurring difficulties which are common to the whole class.

• Make time at the end of the lesson to follow up the discussions and conclude. Firstly give praise and encouragement for students' efforts and ideas, ask group leaders to summarise their group or pair conclusions. If time is short you can summarise what you have heard.

• If you find, during a discussion session, that a lot of students are unsure of a grammatical point covered in their main syllabus, this may be because they are so new

to it that they are still in need of a lot of practice to gain more accuracy. It may be helpful to alert their class teacher, who can then integrate revision of the language point in the scheme of work.

Unit 5 Pronunciation work

What does speech work involve?

• **The physical ability to articulate sounds**. Motor skills, such as where to put the tongue and lips to produce the English consonant cluster / θ / as in thank you, three, thirteen.

• **The ability to get your message across**. Accurate and fluent control of the language.

• **The ability to convey attitude**. Stress and intonation carry meaning,

e.g. Yes? (rising pitch for a question) and Yes (downward pitch for affirmative).

• **The ability to be a good listener**. Not sounding as if you are interrogating a person, using listener tactics to show interest, such as mmmm; yes; really?; you're joking!

Getting the mechanics right – pronunciation practice

Bad pronunciation can be a serious problem if it negatively affects understanding, but we do not need to aim for native-speaker perfection. There is nothing wrong with sounding foreign, but it is important to be intelligible. Pronunciation is closely linked to the ear, and listening is a vital part of developing this area. Listening to a model on tape, CD or video, or using your own voice as a model will be the most effective way of doing this. Teachers will call upon you as a model, in some cases very frequently. You need to recognise the value of being a native speaker of English and exploit it well to assist non-native teachers and their students. Where possible use picture prompts and other visual materials (rather than the written word) in your pronunciation teaching, unless you are looking at the sentence stress system. This is because the spaces between words in English are different in written form from spoken form. Reading individual words we wish students to hear is a distraction and this may break the flow of sounds.

Example: News item = new‿zitem

'Listen and repeat' is the best model to follow.

Tips for achieving a good model of spoken English
· Speed. Don't change, keep to a fairly normal speed but pause a little longer between sense groups. The learners' ears have to tune in to your voice and this will take time. Slowing down too much will only distort the sound you are modelling.

· Consistency. Don't change your intonation. This is easier said than done if you are not used to modelling intonation. One tip is to break your model by giving a brief command to the class which then helps you to repeat the item, e.g. 'What's your name?' 'Listen again / all together / What's your name?'

 Use a good balance of whole class or choral responses and individual repetition.

· Listening. Move around and listen to individuals. Try to be silent when students are speaking so that you can listen to them. When students repeat, don't repeat with them.

· Frequency. It is better to do five minutes of speech work every lesson than one long session every now and then. Pronunciation practice can be boring and repetitive if you do it for a long time.

· Clarity. Make every possible use of visual clues to help students. Speak clearly, facing them so they can all see your mouth and facial expression. When using video, exploit the video with sound off, asking questions about the speaker's mood (e.g. 'Is he angry?' 'Friendly?') and body language, before showing the video with sound on.

Ear training

One important part of pronunciation practice is helping students make sense of the fuzz they may perceive when listening to spoken English. This can be done by sensitising the ear. Our ears will pick up sounds similar to those in our own language but might not hear sounds from another. We need plenty of repetition, pronunciation practice and ear training. For example, Japanese speakers have difficulty hearing the difference between /b/ and /v/ in English. The 'th' sounds (i.e. / ð / as in they and / θ / as in think) do not exist in Japanese, so learners don't know where to put their lips, teeth or tongues to form the sound!

Minimal pairs

It will not be sufficient to just hear the sound that is new, it needs to be compared and contrasted with the sound from the students' own language which is mistaken for it. This involves creating minimal pairs of sounds to highlight the differences in, e.g. ship/sheep; fit/feet, since the sound /I / in the English ship and fit does not feature in Spanish, French or Italian and is substituted with /i/ as in sheep and feet.

Minimal pair tasks – when and how

It is best to deal with minimal pair work when it arises out of a real need. It can be a mistake to identify sounds which cause bother for the learners in your host country and then introduce activities out of the blue that bear no relation to the rest of the lesson. If a problem arises during a class with a teacher and you are asked to model a

consonant or vowel, then it is an appropriate moment to give a set of minimal pairs to illustrate the sound, so have a list prepared wherever possible.

Games for ear training

• **The same or different?**

– Prepare a list of minimal pairs, e.g. hit /heat bit/beat sit/seat grin/green tin/teen.

– Read out one pair and get students to say which word is each, writing them on board.

– Read one of the words twice. 'Are they the same or different?' (The same.)

– Read the contrasting words. 'Are they the same or different?' (Different.)

– Continue with all the pairs, mixing same and different. Students write S or D in their notebooks.

– Pairs can confer and then read the list of pairs again for checking.

Alternatively, make it into a team challenge game. Doing this with numbers from the beginning is great fun, e.g. '13 or 30? 14 or 40?' and numbers which cause confusion, such as 6 and 7 in combinations 66 or 67.

• **Minimal pair pictures**. With younger learners the minimal pair listening can become a drawing exercise. Either circle the drawing if you hear the word, e.g. house or mouse or ask a class to draw the word they hear and compare drawings to check.

• **Odd man out**. Read a list of four words, all except one containing the same consonant cluster or vowel. 'Was it 1, 2, 3, or 4?' For example, church; shoe; chess; cheese.

• **How many times?** Choose a sound to focus on and after initial repetition read sentences or a short text containing the sound once, twice or even three times. Teams must say if they have heard it more than once or just once. Pick some sentences where the sound is not there at all!

Making repetition fun

Repetition of phrases and words is a necessary part of language learning. Teenagers are the most reticent group of learners, since they are more concerned with making fools of themselves in front of their peers. Making repetition into a fun activity, and not a chore, can be done in a variety of ways.

• **Play with volume**. Ask learners to say something in a louder voice, increasing the volume (be wary of the classes next door) or ask students to speak in a whisper, very quietly.

• **Experiment with tone**. Say something in a curious, surprised, angry, bored or frightened tone. This is great for raising awareness of intonation and its importance. Even beginners' classes enjoy experimenting with different ways of asking Yes? or saying Thank you. This is also useful for higher level students preparing for reading aloud in exams.

• **Experiment with speed**. 'How fast can you say it?', building up speed like a train.

• **Adding to a list** (see list games for practising unstressed syllables below) and making it into a game-like activity: 'We went to the park and we played tennis, played football, played cards on the grass, played ...'

• **Playing with numbers**. Counting in evens, odds, tens, backwards or saying times tables. (If you have younger learners and beginners use maths chants and times tables to music.) Look at alphabet games used in primary schools for more inspiration.

• **Playing with rhyme**. Play rhyme games, where one student says a word and the next adds one that rhymes, e.g. day ... play ... say ... pay ... grey

• **Categorise words**. Mix up groups of words with contrasting vowels or consonants which cause difficulty with different stress patterns. Students in pairs divide the words into two or three categories and then listen to check. Repeat the words with the class. Students think of more words to fit each category.

Raps, chants and songs for repetition

Jazz chants can be very successfully used. Songs based on repetition of items or a distinctive refrain can work well from beginners upwards, such as traditional songs like 'Ten green bottles', 'There was an old woman who swallowed a fly' or pop songs which appeal to the age range.

The stress system: weak forms and the schwa /ə/

The most important sound in the English language is the schwa /ə/. Note its presence in the following basic exchanges: 'Həve you got thə time?' 'Yes, it's nine ə'clock.' This neutral vowel is used in unstressed syllables of words and weak forms in a sentence. It should be a priority to help students become aware of this throughout their course, from beginners up to advanced level. This weak vowel-sound /ə/ can replace every vowel sound and so has its own symbol. If you wish to teach any symbols this one should be the main one. Word stress in English is variable: any syllable can carry the main stress whereas in other languages stress may fall on the last syllable, so learners are surprised. Getting the stress on the wrong syllable can make the word incomprehensible to native English speakers. This has more impact on intelligibility than mispronounced sounds. In sentences the stress of words shifts according to

meaning. (Note the stress shifts. On the unstressed word   the vowel sound becomes a schwa.)

Who are you waiting **for**?   Where are you **from**?
I'm waiting fə my sister.   I'm frəm Spain.

Awareness activities for the stress system

Work on recognising weak forms helps students to hear unstressed elements in speech and greatly improves listening comprehension. From beginner level upwards, five-minute activities to integrate with all lessons:

• **Counting syllables** (on fingers) through listening, not looking at words.

• **Dividing a sentence into groups** of syllables through listening.

• **Practising with visuals of two-syllable words** with stress on the first syllable, e.g. Germən, and sets like: mother, father, sister, brother; doctor, teacher, driver, baker; better, faster, cheaper.

• **Listening and practice with sentences** (long and short) with articles 'a' and 'an', as well as 'and'. Lists, shopping, ordering in a café, telling the time.

Example: The weak vowel in ten-ə-clock, ten-tə-ten. Isolate sentence groups for quick controlled practice before speaking tasks like role plays.

Example: Note the unstressed article and linking in this group. ə cupəv coffee; ə glassəv milk; ə pieceəv cake; ə sliceəv tart

Example: Play a list game chorally round the class. The first student starts: 'I'd like a cup of coffee please.' The next student adds: 'I'd like a cup of coffee and a sandwich please.' The next student adds: 'I'd like a cup of coffee, a sandwich and a glass of water please.' Play the game in the same way with other situations: 'What did John take on holiday to the Sahara?' or 'What did Peter give his ten girlfriends on Valentine's Day?'

• **Look at syllables and stress** in a wide variety of words and sentences as well as short paragraphs.

• **Use familiar textbook dialogues**. Ask students to highlight the words which they think are the most important parts of communication. Listen and check how much these words are stressed. This sentence focus is beneficial for listening skills as students identify the main message.

• **Encourage students to anticipate the pronunciation** of new words encountered in reading and mark the stress of new words when you write them on the board. If dictionaries are used, draw attention to stress markings in students' dictionaries.

• **Use songs**. Sentence stress and the schwa /ə/ are usually very clear in songs. Singers greatly exaggerate stressed syllables and the contrast is more marked. Use individual singers with strong, clear voices. Integrate this aspect with your other exploitation tasks for songs.

• **Use newspaper headlines**. Headlines are created by reducing the message of a sentence to the key words, which are those which are stressed. Contrasting a headline with its complete message highlights the stress patterns of English.

Linkage of sounds

When listening to English at normal speed you will note that we move smoothly from one word to the next, so that there aren't pauses between words. This can be seen in the most basic expressions: Thanks a lot. (Thanksə sounds like a single, two-syllable word), and the most elementary of sentences: I'm a student (I'mə ...). Pausing after every word sounds artificial. Indicate linkage in board summaries for all classes.

Treat groups of words and phrases as they come up in a course:

• could have = couldəv; must have = mustəv; might have = mightəv; two weeks ago = two weeksəgo; three years ago = three yearsəgo

• the linking /r/ in: here and there; better and better; closer and closer; mother and father.

Tasks for awareness of linking (all levels)

• **Focus on a sentence or question type** and give six to eight examples. Students in pairs decide which words the speaker might link and then listen to check. E.g. 'Will you be coming tomorrow? I'll see if I can get there by six. What will you do if she doesn't ring? I'll go by myself.'

• **Take a very short passage**, one paragraph, which is easy for students to understand. Ask students to listen and mark any points where words are linked. Go through with the class, listen again, ask for repetition. Pairs then practise reading aloud to each other. Do the same with short dialogues.

Intonation

Intonation is very important for intelligibility since it tells the listener something about the speaker's intentions. Misunderstanding can occur when you might think a speaker sounds bored when there isn't the same use of pitch or variation in melody in the voice in their own language. Link your intonation practice to the functional use of language in the students' course. Take short dialogues from their textbook or a video clip of one brief exchange in order to focus on one feature.

Example: Asking for repetition: listen and read. Notice where the voice rises or falls. Then listen and repeat.

A: What time's the Amsterdam train? A: How far is it to Amsterdam?
B: Eleven B: About 200 km

A: Sorry? What time? A: How far?

B: Eleven, eleven in the morning. B: About 200 km

Follow up choral repetition with controlled pair practice. Students use two different maps of Europe with distances and timetables.

Tips for dealing with intonation

• **The pitch movement** at the end of a sentence or question is essential for meaning and understanding the speaker's attitude. Focus on this clearly.

• **Try not to use very long examples** for practice, as students find it difficult.

• **Use your hands as a conductor** to show sweep and flow of pitch as you ask a question for speech practice. Keep these hand movements consistent.

• **Use arrows on the board** to highlight pitch rising or falling.

• **Use backchaining**: read long sentences down from the end to help students repeat them, e.g. 'Do you mind if I sit here?' Do this in a lively, brisk manner.

Assistant: sit here?   Students: sit here?
Assistant: if I sit here?   Students: if I sit here?
Assistant: mind if I sit here?   Students: mind if I sit here?
Assistant: Do you mind if I sit here?   Students: Do you mind if I sit here?

Integrating speech work with class work

• **Liaise with the main teacher** so that you can anticipate useful work, even at beginner level.

• **Check the pronunciation work in course books**. What is it like? Does the class teacher use it? Could it be of use for you to cover it? In a very busy school year with little contact time for English, pronunciation work might be viewed by some teachers as a luxury they haven't time for.

• **Make time for a little speech work in all your lessons**. E.g. if students will be working on the simple past in coursebook lessons, involve them in a discrimination game with regular past tense '-ed' endings.

Listen to the verbs from the dialogue/in these sentences. Do they end with the sounds / t/ or / id/ or /d/ ?' Incorporate the verbs into a past tense bingo game. (Wash/t/, watch/t/, visit/ id/, wait/ id/, arriv/d/)

• **Focus on intonation** depending on the functional language of their main textbook. Re-use short known dialogues from their books. This means you can completely focus on intonation, without worrying about them not understanding the dialogue.

• **If you are team-teaching, ask to have forewarning** of any dialogues that might be used. Show the teacher why you might be of help by highlighting the intonation features.

Working well with teachers

• "I am just a human tape recorder."

It may be that, initially, you are unable to put into practice any of the ideas mentioned in this unit. The JLT may seem to consider your role as purely to offer pronunciation input, on demand. While this can easily become demotivating, leading to complaints such as the above, you shouldn't underestimate the importance of your input as a model of pronunciation:

- Your accent and pronunciation are authentic, and will improve students' ability to understand native speakers when they are speaking.
- You are a "real person", unlike the disembodied voice coming from the CD player, and are therefore more intrinsically interesting for students.
- You can adjust the speed of your speech to the level of the learners, helping them to improve their ability to distinguish the sounds of English. The CD cannot do this either.

If you feel that you are being under-used in other parts of the lesson, treat this as a good opportunity to observe what the students are doing in lessons, and the areas they are having difficulties with. You may then be able to suggest positive ideas for your further involvement in future lessons.

Overall, bear in mind that maintaining your enthusiasm and a positive attitude, whatever your private feelings may be, is one key to developing your working relationship with the JLT.

Module 3

Unit 6 Visual aids

The assistant as visual aid

Your facial expression, gestures and mimes can greatly enhance students' understanding of your meaning. Without turning into an absolute clown you can take steps to help students understand by:

• miming the action you are describing, e.g. when students are first getting used to classroom instructions in English: 'Listen carefully' (teacher points to ear), 'You've got five minutes' (teacher points to watch and shows five fingers)

• exaggerating your facial expressions slightly to get across a sense of mood – surprise, disapproval

This can be compared to listening to the radio or watching a video of the same conversation. The facial expressions and gestures in video help learners arrive at meaning while with radio it is harder with no visual clues.

The blackboard/whiteboard

This is your main piece of equipment in most schools and it is vital that you use it well. Not every school provides unlimited access to photocopiers! However, the amount of English acquired by students is not linked to the amount of equipment at the teacher's disposal. So don't despair if you have little more than a blackboard to work with.

Board uses

The board is for drawing students' attention to new language, checking understanding and summarising your lesson. Consider that what you write on it and how you write it will be copied into notebooks and imprinted on students' minds. It therefore needs to be uncluttered, well organised and useful for study purposes. Random jottings which end up covering the whole board are not effective. We also need to practise writing clearly and simply on the board, in a straight line, large enough to be seen at the back. Disruption is caused during classes when pupils can't read or understand your notes and when you spend too much time at the board without involving them. The two key factors are presentation/layout and organised and selective content.

Do	Don't
maintain eye contact with the class while writing, standing sideways without hiding what you are writing.	write with your back to the class in silence (as students can take this as a chance to chatter).
write as quickly and clearly as you can. Limit the length of texts or instructions. If possible, prepare a text beforehand if you have access to an empty room.	spend a long time at the board (as it can cause boredom and disruption).
while writing, keep their attention by reading key words and phrases and getting choral repetition at each pause.	hide what you are writing with your body. fail to involve students.
tell students at which point you want them to copy, such as at the end. 'Don't copy this yet. You can when I have finished' or 'This is on your handout. copy it'. remember to stand back and give them time to copy.	start writing with no instructions to the class(otherwise they will try to copy, not listen and struggle to see what you are doing).
divide the board into distinct sections with the centre for main structures or language points, one side margin for key vocabulary and a space for temporary items (to rub out as you go along). select only the important points	write everything that crops up in the lesson so the board becomes overcrowded and messy (this leads to disorganised note-taking – no matter how much you tell students not to copy everything, they will think it is all vital).

Good and bad use of the board

*Fig. 1 **Untidy and badly organised board***

Figure text (as written on board):
~~not busy enough~~ too quiet   overcrowded
Where did you go for your holidays last year?
Spain   the coast   ~~bas~~   what was the
weather like?
what were the beaches like?
disappointing   the climate?   the weather?
better than expected
tropical
rainy
unsettled
vb: ✗
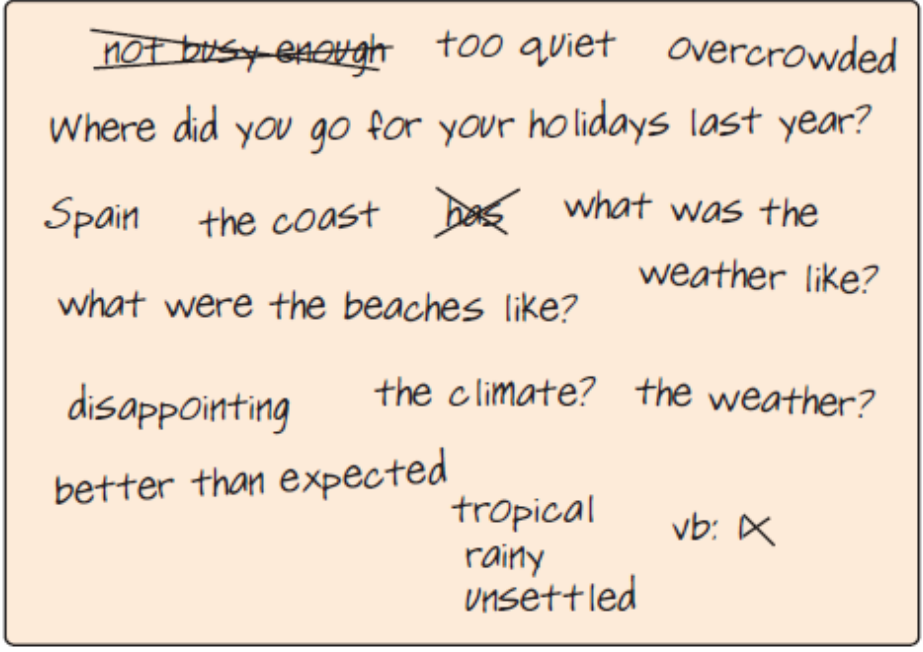
*Fig. 2 **Well presented and organised board***

Figure text (as written on board):

Monday 10th February   Holiday impressions

What			
	was	the food the climate	
	were	the people the facilities	like?

Practice
Ask about last year's holiday
the place/the accommodation ...

new words

unspoilt
overcrowded

tropical
disappointing
unsettled
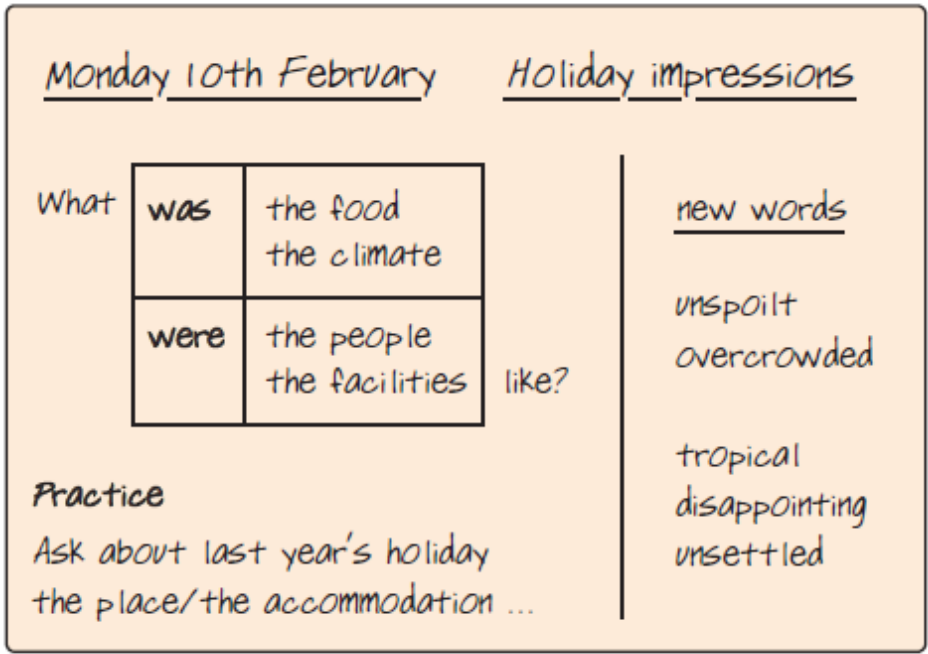
<u>Tips for making best use of your board</u>

• **Underline important features** or use different coloured chalk/pens. You can highlight points which might be difficult for your students, such as, auxiliaries, irregular endings, use of pronouns or contracted forms.

• **Use tables for prompting**. You can build these up with students and can use them for controlled practice

• **Use diagrams, mind maps and time-lines** to clarify abstract concepts such as time, space, quantity.

Blackboard drawings

You don't need to be a great artist to draw on the board since the drawings are best kept simple, showing only important details. Stick people, simple objects and faces with different expressions can become part of your repertoire.

The overhead projector or personal computer projector

These excellent tools have all the features and uses of a board and more! They can be used without the need to turn your back on the class, and the sheets can be prepared in advance, which saves time and helps you to be better organised. You can control how much you reveal to students and when. You can re-use overhead transparencies with other classes, or copies of your slide can be given as handouts. Presentation programs such as Microsoft PowerPoint allow you to modify your slides to suit each class.

Projector uses:

• **Layering or building**: reveal information slowly by preparing one picture or table. Add further details to the picture on a separate slide which you lie on top of the first.

Example: Students draw a picture of an empty beach as in your first slide. Students listen/read a description of the beach and add details or teacher dictates details:

'There's a man fishing in the rock pool. There are two boys playing football near the kiosk.'

Students check their effort with your second slide which reveals all the details.

• **Text work with the whole class**.

Example: Show students a whole page of blanks. Each blank represents a word in the story. Students start with nothing except a title, e.g. 'Angry girlfriend calls the speaking clock'. Students must then predict words as quickly as possible and build up the story piece by piece. As more items are added, missing parts are guessed from context. Give students place names and names of people. First suggestions might be: girlfriend, he, she, a, the, telephone, etc.

Text example:

A man had an argument with his girlfriend. The next day he went away for work and didn't come back for a week. When he returned he found that his telephone was off the hook. His girlfriend had left a note for him next to the telephone. The note read: 'I'm leaving you, goodbye.' He picked up the telephone and listened. It was the speaking clock in New York!

Flashcards

After making very colourful flashcards for key topics and lexical sets, it is easy to under-use them. The advantages of flashcards are:

1 You can use them as an introduction/warm-up to reactivate students' language.

• Get students in pairs to guess the words or phrases that the pictures represent.

• Make a team game. Partially cover each picture (with black card with a shaped cut-out which gives a keyhole effect) and challenge teams to guess the word. Further points can be added or gained by making a sentence about the picture or asking a question about it.

• You can use sets of pictures and ask what they have in common, e.g. all modes of transport; all objects you might find in a bedroom; all uncountable foodstuffs; all countries in the Southern Hemisphere; all spare time activities, etc.

2 You can use the flashcards as cues for substitution in dialogues, e.g. a lexical set of pictures of drinks on the board.

Teacher offers the drinks: 'Would you like a cup of tea? sugar? some milk?' Students respond and continue practising: 'Yes, please.' The teacher then elicits questions from students using the cards and invites others to respond. The dialogue can be further refined until the flashcards serve as prompts for students working alone.

Small cards

Nearly all the activities possible with a whole class using a flashcard or set of flashcards can also be done as a card game with students working in pairs or small groups. See above and Unit 9 for card games with pictures and words.

Posters and flipcharts

You can prepare posters or flipcharts for the classroom. Keep them large, simple and clear, with not too much information. The following posters can be useful: classroom instructions; classroom requests; language tables.

Pictures, photos and postcards

Using one large picture

Two types of picture:
1 a scene with lots happening in it
2 one simple picture of a street; room; house.

Fig. 2 **taken from Elementary communication games – Jill Hadfield, Longman ELT**

• 'Describe what you can see.'

• 'Find someone who is ...'

• Dictation: 'Listen and colour,' or 'Add things to your picture'.

• Vocabulary searches: 'Find five things beginning with 's'. Write all the verbs to describe what is happening.'

• Memory: 'Look at the picture for five minutes and answer your partner's questions, e.g. Is there a man sitting in a deckchair? How many people are playing with the beach ball?'

Using two very similar pictures

These could illustrate: rooms; people; machines; busy scenes (e.g. airport, classroom).

This works very well with the whole class or pairs working back to back so that they cannot see each others' picture, and have to ask questions to find differences or exchange details.

Fig. 3 **taken from Play games with English 1 – Colin Granger, Macmillan Heinemann**
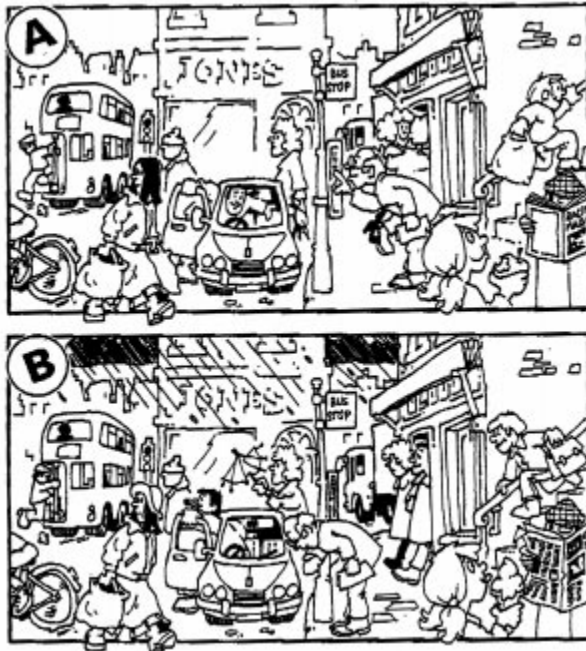
Different task types

1 Spot the difference
Find four differences between your suitcase and your partner's by asking questions: 'Have you got a hair brush in your case?' 'Have you got any shoes?' 'Is the mirror in your room round?' 'No, it's square.'

2 Find the missing things to complete a picture
It is best if both the pictures provided have missing objects. This means that both students have to ask questions to arrive at a complete picture.
Students ask each other directions to complete a map. Students have a list of objects and ask questions to draw them into their picture: 'Have you seen my pen?' 'Yes, it's over there on top of the television.' You can do these activities with a whole class too. The teacher has the main picture and the students have to complete theirs.

Using a sequence of pictures which represent a story

These are useful for practice in describing events, past, present or future.

Different task types (small groups/pairs/individuals or whole class)

1 Students re-order the pictures into a coherent story and then tell it orally.

Fig. 4 **Sequence of pictures**

2 Students each have a different picture in a four-part story.
All four students must describe their picture without looking at the others' to decide on the correct order (more challenging). This generates a lot of speaking practice and questioning.

3 Students have a picture missing and predict how the tale will end or what happened in the middle (missing picture).

4 Students listen to or read and re-order the pictures to follow the story. They then try to retell it.

5 Students complete the missing words in the speech bubbles of a cartoon story (some bits missing or last exchange). They act out the cartoon story. They could then act out a similar situation.

6 Students match words to the pictures and make sentences.

Using two contrasting photos, pictures or postcards

Suitable types are two children (one developing world/one Western European), two places (rural/urban/hot/cold), two photos of a town taken many years apart (this century/last century), two offices (hi-tech/last century), two styles of teenage room, two works of art on the same theme, two postcards of the same place, two Christmas cards, two advertisements for the same type of product, two photos of famous people with something in common.

Exploiting the contrast can give students practice in switching and contrasting tenses and using the language of comparison and speculation.

Different task types (to be used in varying combinations

1 'Think of adjectives to describe each photo.'

Fig. 5 **Contrasting photos**

2 'Describe four differences between each photo.'

3 'Say which photo you prefer and why'
   'Which is the most effective advertisement?'
   'Which place would you rather visit?'

4 'When do you think the photos were taken?'
   'When do you think the paintings were painted?'
   'What makes you think that?'

5 'Give each photo a title, or write a newspaper headline for an article which uses both photos.'

6 Use the photos to widen the discussion.
   'What improvements can you see in the town?'
   'What do these pictures show of changes in office work?'
   'How different is life in the developing world compared to your life?'
   'What aspects of Christmas do these cards emphasise?'
   'Is it too commercialised?'

Magazines and brochures

Apart from providing you with plenty of images to make into flashcards and small cards, magazines are full of advertisements which can be used in contrast with each other.

Examples could be: four or five advertisements for perfume, jeans, teenage accessories or holidays; two photos to exploit (can be fashion make-overs); two teenage rooms and two lifestyles.

Mind maps

These can be built up with students:

• to brainstorm a lexical field before reading a text for discussion or listening to a song, watching a video, etc.

Example: Before reading a text on the increasing risks and dangers of sunworshipping, students are asked to work in pairs to find any words they associate with sunbathing. When these ideas are pooled on the board a mind map develops which explores ideas and provides necessary vocabulary to prepare students for the activity.

Fig. 6 **Mind map – sunbathing**
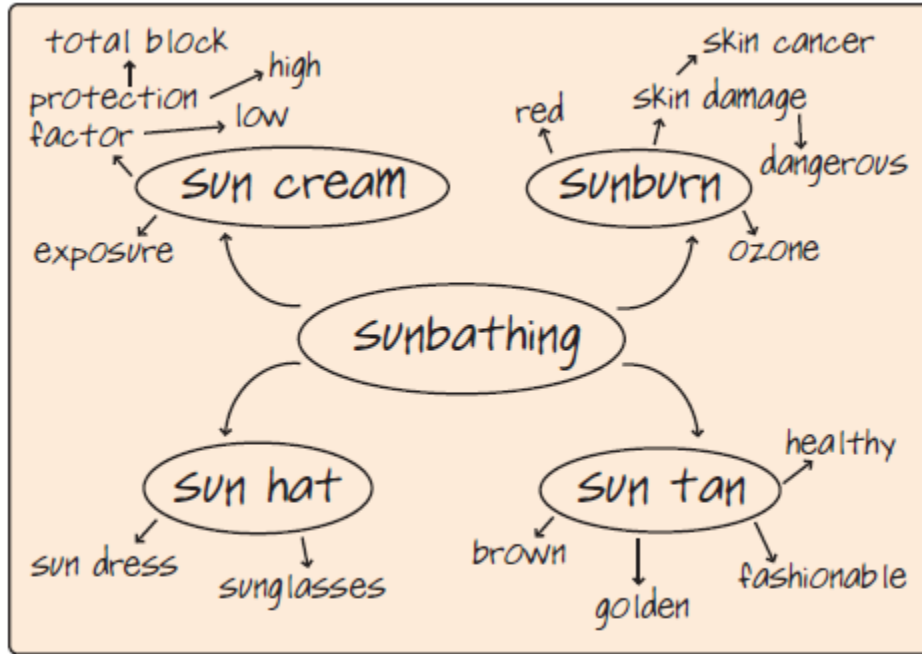
• to be used to elicit connections between ideas and events

Example: Before reading a text on life in the Civil Rights era for young black Americans, the teacher and class develop a map relating to the era. 'Which events and people do you associate with Dr Martin Luther King?'

• to be used in a subsequent pair or group task as lexical support to help the students find the words they need.

Unit 7 Listening and speaking

Listening Skills

We learn a language through listening. Hearing your voice will be important for students. Don't feel tempted to slip into the students' language when they are struggling to understand you. This struggle is part of learning and they need time and help to tune in to you. Your main advantage is your role as a listening and speech model for students. We need to make them want to listen. But how?

From listening to speaking

Listening and speaking are usually practised together. The two levels of listening we need to focus on are:

Listening for gist (to get the general idea or meaning)

This means ignoring the detail and just following the overall topic even if you do not understand every word.

Listening for detail (to get the specific facts)

This means selectively extracting information to suit our purpose.

Example: A recorded message at an airline will give information for all customers and situations, but we may only need opening times of the sales office so we listen for that.

There are specific tasks which train students in these types of listening skills and you need to decide what your aim is for each listening you use. Some tapes, songs and videos will be listened to numerous times until students are satisfied they have extracted what they need. The first listening is usually to get the gist and then we can listen for specific detail. A good sequence for listening could be:

Fig. 1 **Listening procedure for CDs, songs and video**

```
┌──────────────┐
│ introduction │ ──→ introduction topic with visual aids, key words
└──────────────┘
        │
        ↓
┌──────────────┐
│    ╱listening│ ──→ vocabulary preparation
│ pre          │
│    ╲viewing  │ ──→ prediction exercises
└──────────────┘
        │
        ↓
┌──────────────┐
│   set task   │ ──→ go through questions
│              │ ──→ go through table/worksheet
└──────────────┘
        │
        ↓
┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│  listen/view │ ──→  │ listen/view again │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
         ╲                    ╱
          ↓                  ↓
       ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
       │  check task  │ ──→  │ lead into follow- │
       │              │      │   up activities   │
       └──────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
```
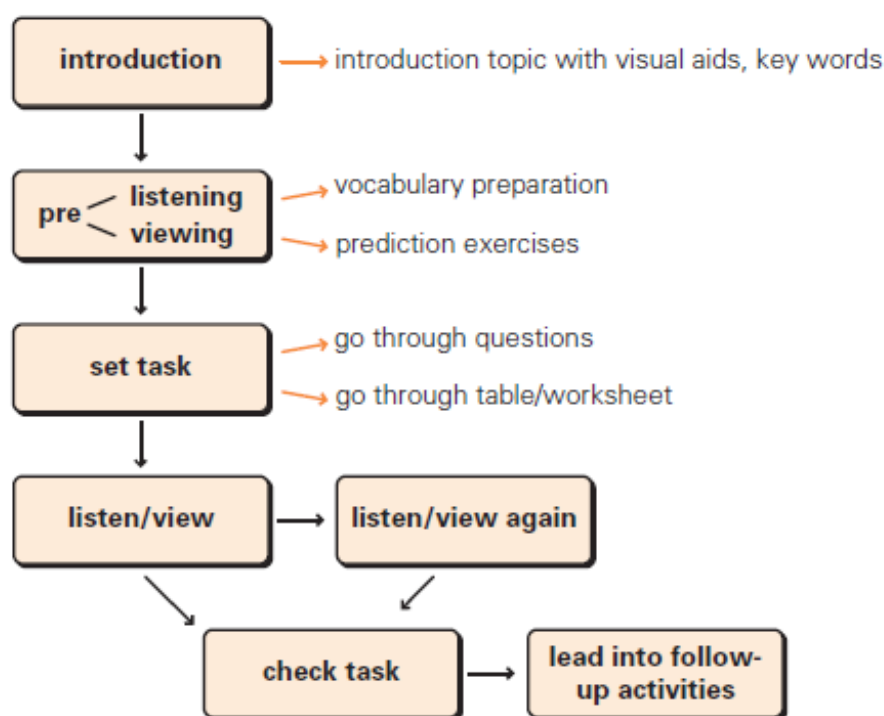
Getting the listening level right

• It is too easy if students can get all the answers straight away on first listening. Part of training the ear is the effort and concentration required to make sense of the stream of speech.

• Give the questions before they listen so they have a reason to listen for something. Otherwise they will listen without focus, thinking they have to understand everything and feeling demotivated.

• Don't accept the right answer from the strongest student and then go on to the next question. You will be in danger of leading the level with the strongest and losing the rest. Ask for suggested answers from everyone without indicating which ones are correct at this stage. Let them listen and check.

• Encourage pair-checking and try to pair weaker students with stronger so they help each other. This is especially useful in mixed groups where you could create strong divisions between those who have finished and those who are lost.

• Make it clear that they do not have to understand everything to get the information they need. Telling teenagers this will have no effect. Showing them, by providing a task they can complete, makes the point.

Authentic listening versus graded listening

In real-life listening there is a great deal of background noise. You really have to concentrate. Be aware of the acoustics in your classroom and of the quality of your machine. Test it before the lesson and queue the CD if you're using one. In real-life listening there is a great deal of redundancy – false starts, hesitations, repeating what you have said and verbal signals to the person speaking, e.g. 'mm ... yes ... er ... um ... yes ... that's right ... went ... went out.' At first this can be distracting for some students.

If we use only graded listening students do not become accustomed to the features of normal speech. Some of your classes may not have had a great deal of listening training so you need to proceed gently and prepare tasks they can achieve. Once you show (not tell) students that they do not need to understand every word then they grow in confidence and accept more authentic material.

Preparing for listening

The points made for preparing a reading text for discussion and for preparing an article for class use apply to listening, and similar tasks can be used. Anticipate the subject matter, without giving all the answers away and without revealing what the listening is about. Give a reason to listen, with a short task to use during the first listening. This task should be extensive, only getting the gist and general shape of the text, e.g. 'Who is speaking?'' Where are they?' 'What is the main topic?'

Adapting listening up or down a level

• Grade the task, not the listening material.

• Split the listening into shorter sections and listen a section at a time. Cut down length if necessary.

• Allow students to listen to it as many times as they need.

• Give students a say in how much to listen to or when to pause.

• Encourage plenty of checking with each other between listening.

• Anticipate the ideas or vocabulary in a pre-listening task which suits the level.

• If it becomes clear they cannot deal with the comprehension details focus on just recognising key words and the main topics. Be flexible and don't plough on if your plan has proved to be too ambitious.

Example: two tasks from the same authentic listening material

Use a recording of teenagers making arrangements with friends on their mobiles. It can be used with a wide range of levels. A lower level class will not be able to answer detailed comprehension questions but you can motivate them with a task to get the gist and pick out key details.

Task 1 – lower-intermediate (students unable to answer detailed comprehension questions)

a What do you use your mobile for? Any other uses? Discussing homework? Telling your parents when you'll be home/arriving? Talking to your girlfriend/boyfriend? Organising your social life?

b Listen to these teenagers from a London secondary school. Who is talking about ...? Number each topic: weekend activities ... homework ... after-school activities ...

Task 2 – upper-intermediate/advanced (students able to provide more vocabulary and analyse conversations)

a Make a list in pairs of all the possible uses for a mobile phone for teenagers, e.g. for calling parents when you miss the bus ...

b Listen to these teenagers from a London secondary school.
Make notes for each conversation. Decide who is speaking: boyfriend/ girlfriend? friends? student/parent?
The reason for the call: to organise something? to talk about something?

C Listen again and answer 'True' or 'False' to these statements:
Douglas hasn't done his maths homework yet.   True/False
Carly will probably not go out with Keith again.   True/False

---

Dictation

Not all assistants have got a CD player, and recordings might be in short supply too. Capitalise on your voice and use it with creativity. Some schools still make use of dictation for English teaching but you can develop this tradition by using dictogloss at all levels. (This is a technique where a text is read twice at normal speed and the students write down key words or phrases, after which they reconstruct the text together in small groups.) It is particularly useful for large classes, for groups of mixed ability and it can be a calming activity with boisterous groups. Finally, it is a great filler activity for when the tape recorder or video breaks down or your photocopies are not delivered in time.

Selective listening for text reconstruction (all levels)

Dialogues and stories work well. Choose a short biography of a film star, pop star or international figure. Ask one half of the class to write down any key details like names, dates or major events in the person's life. Ask the other half to write only the main verbs they hear. After listening, pair students in order to pool their information. Students can ask the rest of the class questions to complete any missing detail 'Did he train in New York or LA?' 'We're not sure'. Let the whole class pool ideas; try not to intervene. Read aloud or listen again (or watch if it is a video) to confirm that everything is understood. They can ask you to stop, repeat a bit or go on. Students will not all end up with the same text. (Note that this technique can be used with short articles from newspapers or magazines with students reading once then pooling ideas to re-create the article, not word for word.)

Revision dictation (all levels)

Choose between five and ten questions or sentences containing language recently studied by your classes. Dictate these. Pairs check or small groups work together. Allow them to ask you to repeat specific sentences as part of their group checking. Read through once more for everyone. Students get points for each correct spelling and/or complete sentence. Vary it with one student being the writer and the other student just listening and helping the writer at each checking phase. When students control the pace of the dictation and are allowed to clear up problems they get a lot of practice in using useful language like: 'Can you say that again?' 'Sorry ... I didn't hear the verb.' 'Can you say that name again?' 'Can you speak more slowly/loudly/clearly?'

Using songs

All former assistants agree that among their most successful teaching tools are songs. Students who are usually quiet become talkative. It disguises work for the work-shy class and is a great motivator. The main pitfall is under-exploitation of the song. You can go in, play the song, give out the words and sing it. That will not fill up your fifty minutes and does not make the song a dynamic learning tool! It is also a mistake to relegate songs to the Friday afternoon or end of term treat slot. Used well, songs can be a staple part of your teaching repertoire. Songs can be used at any stage in a lesson. Just think of the song as a text or poem set to music and apply the teaching techniques for poetry and listening or reading texts for your song.

Some course books have songs especially written for EFL and there are resource materials with tailor-made songs to fit a structure. Some are good, but some are painful to listen to and don't fool teenagers. Choose wisely. Repetition is a good ingredient found in songs and this is useful for learners at all levels.

Preparing the song

Use the song title, key words, pictures and photos in the same way as when preparing reading texts or listening.

Example: John Lennon's Imagine dreamer; heaven; country; world; people; live; religion; die 'Is this a happy or sad song?' 'Is it funny or serious?'

A sequence of drawings to illustrate the song can be used for speculation. On listening to the song they can then be put in order. If you have the music without lyrics or can play a guitar, let them hear the tune beforehand. What type of song might it be? romantic? sad? funny? What type of music is it? fast? slow? funky? jazzy? etc.

Focus on vocabulary items

• Listen and order the words as you hear them.

• Fill in the missing words and check with the song.

• Listen. How many times did you hear this word?

• Spot the difference. Change some words for similar-sounding ones or ones which make sense grammatically but do not make sense in the song. Students read the lyrics and try to spot the strange words. Then listen to the song and correct the different words.

Focus on structure or meaning

• Split sentences from the song into two halves and students have to match them before and during listening, e.g. linking cause and effect. You can give one half and ask them to finish 'You went away and ...'

• Ask students to order parts of the song as they hear them. Put lines on slips of paper to re-order before and during listening.

• Give students a list of verbs to order as they listen to the song or as they read. Listen and check the verbs are in the right place.

• Blank out auxiliaries and students choose the right one from a list on the board.

• Put in a few key items that are wrong. Students can listen and spot them or read the lyrics, predict the wrong items and the check their predictions/corrections on listening.

Note: Using blanks. Try to leave three or four lines clear at the beginning to get students used to the song. Put your blanks in the middle or at the end of lines. Reduce blanks to reduce the challenge if it is too difficult. Listen and do it yourself. Is there enough time between blanks to listen and write? Take the task down a level by

providing a choice of two words to choose from to fill the blank space. One word might be right or both might make sense but only one is heard.

Ear training with blanks

• Give a choice of two words where one is right but the other sounds similar, e.g. night/right, now/how.

• Give a choice of two words for each space but there is a slight vowel change, e.g. sin/seen.

• Give a choice of two words for each space but there is a consonant change, e.g. moon/soon/noon, fake/take/make.

Focus on stress and rhythm

Songs can sensitise students to stress and mouth movements. Clap or tap along with the song. This helps students get into the rhythm. Students mark the words they think will be stressed and clap on them or tap the desks or stamp their feet. (Be careful of classes above and below.) Say the song in rhythm without music, whisper it, increase the volume. Mouth the song along with the music but don't say the words out loud, just exaggerate your mouth movements and students can do the same. Always speak the song before attempting to sing it. Students who don't want to sing can mime.

Focus on pronunciation

• Take out one half of a rhyme and ask students to put them back and then listen to check.

• Take out all words with the same consonant cluster or confusing vowel sounds and ask students to match them.

• Take a song with distinct rhymes and give it to students as a written text with no punctuation. It must look like a paragraph. Don't tell students that it is a song. Students punctuate the paragraph and find the rhymes. Then play the song (the surprise makes it more interesting) and get them to check and write out the lyrics. This also generates a good deal of speaking practice and thought about sentence structure and meaning.

Focus on discussing lyrics

Song lyrics can be open to a large number of possible interpretations and this ambiguity can lead to fruitful discussions. These types of song lend themselves well to speculation when people or places are not clear. Songs might refer to 'you' or 'I' or 'us' or 'them' without the listener being clear of the identity.

Focus on identity

• Listen/read and say who the singers are talking about. Younger people/older people/people the same age

• Who do 'they' and 'we' refer to?

• Is the singer talking about a man or a woman? How did you decide?

Focus on feelings of the singer/narrator/subject matter

• Do you think the singers have a positive or a negative attitude? Why?

• Do young people in your country share this positive attitude?

• How does the singer feel? Happy / confused / angry / worried?

Speculate beyond the song if it is a tale or story

• What did the singer talk about when he last saw his girlfriend?

• What do you think will happen next? What would you do in this situation?

Use the song as stimulus for writing or speaking

• Write the conversation between the singer and her friend as a telephone conversation.

• Write a letter based on the song or send an e-mail with the same subject heading as the song.

• Write about the issues raised in the song. Write a letter to the editor of a national newspaper, drawing attention to these problems for young people/old people/families/communities/immigrants/schools.

Role play and songs

After listening to the song She's leaving home by Lennon and McCartney, ask the students to play the roles.

Example: Student A is the girl who has left home. She has to ring home after a week to reassure her parents. Student B is an angry and worried parent who wants to persuade her to come home.

Using video

Pop videos have all the advantages of songs with the added asset of visual clues. Exploit the video with the sound off to encourage guessing about the song's meaning. Give out the lyrics (with blanks or other tasks) and continue with the sound off, using the pictures for prediction if suitable. Then listen with no picture to the music. Finally combine picture, sound and written lyrics. Experiment with different combinations of these tasks depending on the song and the usefulness of the video.

Example: Half the students see the video with no sound and take notes on what they think the song is about while the other half are given the lyrics to re-order in another place so they don't see the video. Combine students from each group to pool their resources.

The potential and the pitfalls

The principles of listening skills apply to video. However, you also have the help of visual clues (place, facial expression and gesture) to aid your understanding. We need to train students to make use of these clues to arrive at meaning. This means that pre-viewing tasks and initial viewing tasks need to focus on questions about the people and their attitude or relationship to each other. Doing this first viewing with the sound off focuses students on this vital aspect.

Tips and solutions

• **Active viewing**. Watching the television is a passive activity at home but in the language classroom it needs to be an active experience for students to learn. Don't just switch on and sit back for forty-five minutes. You need the help of tasks and a clear plan to get students involved and really listening.

• **Short sequences**. Use no more than one- to three-minute sequences, since you will be pausing, re-viewing and doing two or three tasks with the material. That's sufficient for fifty minutes of class time.

• **Don't have the television on all the time**. Switch off completely when students are working on their tasks. It's a big distraction to have a fuzzy screen in the corner. If students don't have a break between each viewing they will suffer overload and switch off. Take it slowly, in clear steps.

Using off-air video

Break down your sequences into sections of a minute or so, but use maximum three to four minutes for a fifty-minute lesson. Use a recognition task with lower levels but more detailed comprehension and vocabulary tasks with more advanced students. Adapt approaches to suit your students' level and needs.

Example: Using advertisements. This always works well with students but select carefully as sense of humour changes from culture to culture and references to topical things might confuse.

• Students hear advertisement but don't watch it. Using the main words, try to predict the product, then view.

• Some students watch with no sound and describe what is happening to others not watching.

• Students imagine what is being said and write a script, then compare to the real version.

Role play from cartoons, dialogues and video clips

A good introduction to role play is to see a similar situation in action. A funny situation in a strip cartoon, a short clip from a video or even a clip from a comedy programme can inspire parallel situations. After reading or seeing the model, encourage suggestions of parallel situations from students and alternative vocabulary.

Recording or filming role plays

Some students really enjoy recording themselves, playing it back and then trying again. This encourages a great deal of self-correction and you can exploit these moments to focus on improving intonation and pronunciation. This can take time, even over two lessons with good groups, but it is highly motivating.

Unit 8 Reading and writing

Techniques for preparing the text and topic

All of the techniques listed below aim to make the text as accessible as possible so that students can get to the meaning and main ideas quickly. Texts intended as a stimulus for discussion should not turn into lengthy reading comprehension tasks. They should serve as a vehicle for giving students time to think of a topic, preview the relevant vocabulary, talk about it and share their ideas with their classmates.

• **Use any visuals for vocabulary brainstorming**.

Example: Think of five words related to the photo or anticipate the main message of the text through careful questioning: 'Where is the girl in the picture? How old do you think she is? Why do you think she is working there?' All this elicits useful vocabulary and prepares students for the content of the text.

• **Use any headlines or sub-headings**. Write these on the board before showing the text. Ask students to guess what the article is about.

Example: What type of work do you think will be described in the text? Think of another way of saying 'turn to'.

• **Use key words**. Take five or six key words from the text and put them on the board before students read the text.

Example: Saturday job save up part-time university fees pocket money low-paid

After reading, ask students to look at the words again and verbally summarise the message of the text using the words as prompts. This gives students time to think and to practise making sentences about the topic.

• **Use questionnaires**. Give students a mini-questionnaire related to the theme of the text before they read it.

Example: Do you get any pocket money or monthly allowance? Have you ever worked to earn money? What type of things do you use your spending money for?

• **Use prediction exercises**. Involve students in a prediction exercise to anticipate the vocabulary and ideas of the text. This helps them to read the text with real interest.

Example: Which of these statements about American and British teenagers is likely to be true? Read the text and check your predictions.

 'Most British teenagers have no time for extra paid work during term-time because the school day is long.'

'British and American teenagers like to have Saturday jobs.'

'Jobs for students in the US are generally well paid.'

'Some American teenagers work as many as thirty hours a week when they are at school.'

'University students in the UK do not work during their studies.'

'Many university students in the United States have term-time jobs to pay for college fees and living expenses.'

Another prediction technique based on the text:
Here are some of the possible reasons why American teenagers work during term-time. Tick those reasons which seem most likely – decide in pairs.

'They only go to school in the mornings.'

'They don't get any homework so have lots of free time.'

'They need to save up for college which can be very expensive.'

'They don't always like asking their parents for money.'

'It is easy to catch up if you miss school because courses are flexible.'

Types of discussion task based on a text

The degree of control needed in your discussion task very much depends on the language level of students. A class may not be able to cope with a fullscale debate but they might be able to discuss their opinions with the help of a questionnaire which guides them. One of the main reasons that discussions dry up or become too teacher-led is because students lack control of the language needed to discuss the topic. The tasks outlined below provide students with a linguistic framework and some of the words they need are embedded in the task. They also provide a framework for the content, acting as a plan to give the discussion structure. While open, general chats with large groups can bring up interesting points and provide moments of real debate, more structured tasks ensure that all students are involved in talking.
In addition, decision-making approaches involve an element of negotiation with your partner or group and this in turn generates more opportunities for the conversational management skills needed by learners.

In short, it is not simply enough to read a text and then ask students: What do you think?

• **Personalise the topic**.

Example: Here are some of the types of Saturday jobs that UK teenagers do: working in a record shop; working in a clothes shop;
serving in a fast food restaurant; delivering papers or other literature to homes; filling supermarket shelves with stock; helping in a public library; helping in a local community centre.
a) Which job would you prefer? Tell your group why.
b) Put the jobs in order of the best paid and worst paid. Do you all agree?

• **Extend the topic to involve students' experience and knowledge of the world**.

Example: Work experience, work placements and careers visits to industry are part of the school curriculum in the US and the UK. Look at this list of school subjects. Decide what types of work experience or visits could be done in your region. Present your findings to the class. Biology; information technology; history; foreign languages

• **Provide students with a ranking task where they have to agree on an order**.

Example: Which of these factors do you think employers rate the most highly in choosing a student to employ?
Enthusiasm; willingness to work for low wages; academic ability; previous work experience; availability

Another variation on ranking is to give the class three short CVs for three secondary school students. In groups they decide which student should get a holiday job you have specified.

• **Provide a task for controlled debating**. Give students a list of opinions for and against, e.g. in the case of Teens turn to work, arguments for and against school students working during term-time. Students then work in pairs saying which opinions they agree or disagree with and why.

'A job teaches young people the value of work.'

'No child should be allowed to work – it's cruel.'

'All teenagers should have some experience of the real world before leaving school.'

'If young people have to work it's because their parents are too mean to give them spending money.'

Alternatively ask one pair of students to prepare arguments in favour of young people earning during term-time and another pair prepare arguments against. Then bring the pairs together. Each side has to support its position.

• **Devise a role play situation linked to the topic**. Divide the class into two groups – employers and candidates for a part-time job. Employers prepare questions and candidates anticipate the questions and prepare their answers. Put each employer with one candidate to simulate a job interview. Put prompts on the board to help them formulate their questions and answers. Pay? Experience? Hours?   Availability? Job responsibilities?

Dealing with vocabulary

Always anticipate vocabulary problems and provide tasks to do before and during reading. However, if the percentage of new words means that students struggle through each paragraph, there will be little room for discussion or enjoyment, and students will feel disheartened, no matter how interesting the topic.

Vocabulary tasks

Matching
After eliciting vocabulary related to the topic by giving headlines or key words, give definitions for key items in the article. Students read through and match the definition to the word

Finding synonyms and offering antonyms
Provide a short list of synonyms for an article and students find those words in the article with a similar meaning. Offer an antonym, e.g. not polite = rude, when a synonym is not possible.

Contextual guess work
Give two possible explanations for an item in the text and students use the situation to guess the most likely meaning of the word from the ones offered. A native teacher might provide two possible translations but beware of getting into deep water if you try the same!

Using dictionaries
If your students are more advanced but still using bilingual dictionaries, using a monolingual dictionary could be a new skill they acquire with you. Helping themselves to deal with real newspapers should be your aim.

Resources for texts

The best texts for generating conversation

• texts outlining the main points of an issue or topic

• a dilemma or problem for which students can suggest advice, a solution or a possible outcome.

• a narrative which encourages prediction of what might happen next.

• a situation which encourages hypothesis, e.g. What would you do if ...?

• a description of life or people in the past which can be compared to the present.

Reading aloud and oral exam practice

Many assistants are asked to take small groups of students to prepare for oral exams, such as Eiken. Some exams include reading a text aloud and talking about it. Reading aloud is something we rarely have to do in real life, especially in a foreign language, and it is a skilled activity. The danger is that students can concentrate so much on pronunciation and expression that this leaves less room for paying attention to meaning. When we read with understanding we do not read word-by-word or sentence-by sentence, but in sense groups.

> Note the sense groups marked in this exam text:
>
> Susan got up late that morning./ Nothing could have prepared her for the events of the day to come./ It was snowing lightly /and she could see that the path was already completely covered./ 'How will we get to London in this?' she thought.
>
> Read this text aloud for your partner. Listen to the example on the tape and read again.

However, in order to read sense groups we must understand what we are reading, and students need to be able to prepare and interpret texts before having to read them aloud.

Tips and techniques for reading aloud practice

• **Discuss the meaning of a text** before you ask students to read it aloud.

• **Sensitise students** to the idea of sense groups and design tasks to train them to mark up a text with a pencil when they first read through silently. This can be done individually, compared in pairs and then practised together before they try with you. Start doing this first with texts of a lower reading level which are easy for students to understand, so they can concentrate on the idea of sense groups.

• **Use recorded texts** from their books, graded readers on tape or recordings you have made (or read aloud). Assistants can make recordings together if you do not have commercial produced graded readers.

– Ask students to mark where the reader's voice pauses naturally. Students compare, listen and check and then try themselves. The discussion is a learning experience.

– Students mark up a text into sense groups, listen to it read aloud and check their version.

• **Encourage learners to look up** and make eye contact with the listeners after each sense group is completed. This trains them to not read word-for-word but to read with meaning.

• **Isolate specific problems** to learners and focus on them in chunks rather than just reading text after text. For example, if students stumble in texts where there is some speech mixed with narrative, prepare lessons with extracts from texts with this type of speech: 'Are you really sure that's a good idea?' asked Susan, looking puzzled. John continued to press every button on the machine in the hope that something might fix it.

Make a selection of five or six examples where the intonation patterns of the speaker are similar, expressing anger, surprise, curiosity or interest. Concentrate on questions, on short replies or on exclamations, etc. Combine it with examples on tape or video to focus on the intonation of a specific type.

• **Remove the unstressed items** from a short exam text. Ask students to predict what might be missing (pairs/groups). Listen to text read aloud and check predictions. Now practise reading aloud, trying to stress the important words.

Teaching writing

Elementary School
The MEXT guidelines for teaching English in Elementary schools are that teachers focus on speaking and listening activities, rather than reading or writing.

Junior High School – 1st Grade

In the first year of Junior High School, students are mainly focussing on how to form letters and spell new words. As Japanese script is so different from the alphabet, this is of course no small task. Apart from letter formation, one problem many students have at this stage is leaving spaces between words. Your input into writing lessons at this stage is likely to be fairly minimal, and teachers may actually prefer that you don't help students with penmanship, since the way you write letters may be different to the way they are being taught. However, one simple but useful service you can provide is as a mobile dictionary. Actively encourage students to ask, "How do you spell _____?", and you will soon become an interactive and useful learning resource in every lesson, as well as giving students valuable one-to-one speaking time with a native speaker, however brief.

Junior High School 2nd grade upwards, and Senior High School

From the second year of Junior High School, students have built up a small stock of vocabulary, and have also been introduced to the past tense and ways of talking about the future. They are now in a position to go beyond simple gap-fill exercises, and attempt more complex writing tasks. This is where you can be a huge help to both your team teacher and the students in the class. Here is how:

Activities:

Board-rush.

If you want a quick vocabulary review activity, or a warmer to a lesson topic, this activity can inject a little fun and energy. Decide on a topic, divide the board into six rows, and the rows of students into six teams, and get each team to race to put related words in their space on the board. For example, if the topic is food, students would add words like "banana", "spaghetti" or "sushi". To make it more interesting, give points for each word attempted, extra points for correct spelling and bonus points for any words which are unusual or difficult to spell ("spaghetti" would get more points than "sushi", for example). This point system rewards students with a sense of risk – always a positive trait for language learners.

Chinese whispers

As a way of linking pronunciation and writing, for example if you are teaching phonically regular words such as "cat", "car" or "Antartic". Again, divide the board into six rows, whisper the target word to the students at the back, and get them to whisper it to the student in front of them. The student in the front row then writes the word on the board. Then change roles and go again.

As a preparation for a speaking activity, get students to construct their dialogue in writing. This is best done by giving each pair just one sheet of paper. One student starts the conversation, for example by asking a question, and then passes the sheet to their partner, who writes a response and then passes it back.

This activity has a number of teaching and learning benefits. It gives students time to think about what they want to say, and how to express it. It also gives the teacher something tangible to look at and monitor for areas where students are having difficulty and will need help or extra teaching. In this activity, teachers should not be too fussy about spelling or punctuation.

A more high-tech version of this activity could be done in the computer room with a messaging service.

Process writing

"Process writing" refers to an approach which considers the actual process of writing to be equally or more important than the finished product. This way of teaching writing may well be new to your students, and even your team teacher, but is likely to be very beneficial to both.

The theory of process writing is that even professional writers don't simply put pen to paper and produce polished writing. We all need to go through different stages of brainstorming, planning, drafting, re-drafting and proof-reading in order to produce high quality work.

Here's how it might work in practice, in a Junior or Senior High School. Imagine that your students have returned from a school trip. You and your team teacher decide on the task of getting them to write a report of the trip for the parents' open day.

Lesson 1 – Students try to remember exactly what they did, and put key words onto a mind-map. You and the team-teacher move around the groups feeding in any English words that they need. Then, as a whole class, you turn some of the key words into sentences. Students write as much as they can in the time remaining, receiving support from you and the team teacher as they do so (writing as a homework task can be very lonely and dispiriting, whereas writing in class gives students access to immediate assistance from friends and teachers). This is the students' first draft.

Lesson 2 – Show students a model of the kind of finished product you are aiming for. Depending on the level of your students you may well highlight some of the following points: paragraphing, linking ideas with conjunctions such as "so", "and" and "because", or use of pronouns or evaluative language (for example, "It was really fun", "it tasted great / awful"). You don't need to use technical terms to highlight these areas. For example, when focussing on paragraphing, you could simply point out that paragraph 1

deals with events in the morning, paragraph 2 is for the afternoon and paragraph 3 the trip home. This simply and concisely conveys the idea that, in English, each paragraph tends to focus on a single main idea, or theme.

Once the students are clear on the format expected, set them off writing their second version. It is a good idea to pair students up for this; although writing is a solitary activity, it is always helpful to have someone to bounce ideas off. If some students are simply copying each other, you might want to consider how much work they would accomplish on their own before stepping in. If you, or your team-teacher, think that the learners would generally struggle on their own, then it may be a good idea to turn a blind eye. You can always get them to personalise things at a later stage. Whilst students are writing, you and your team-teacher can circulate and offer advice, encouragement and assistance. At this point, the most useful assistance you can offer is in generating ideas and focussing on the content the students are producing. If you start correcting spelling and punctuation mistakes, you will probably find that students become easily discouraged and simply give up writing. On the other hand, if you ask questions about, and seem genuinely interested in, what the students are writing, you may well be pleasantly surprised at how much they produce.

Japanese students have a tendency to describe things in quite a vague way; for example, a trip to Kyoto might be described as, "I went to Kyoto with my friends. We saw some temples." To make the writing more interesting for the reader, and more memorable for the writer, push them to specify details – the names of the friends they spent most time with, what temples they saw, what they did on the bus there, who they had lunch with and what they particularly enjoyed, or didn't like. This way, everyone should have a different account to tell, and students and their parents will be genuinely interested in reading what other class-mates have written.

At the end of this lesson, take in everybody's work. Look through their writing later, and note down common errors. Underline these errors in their writing, but don't correct them (you will need to correct less common errors). This job is much easier for a native-speaking ALT than the Japanese Teacher of English, since you will have an automatic feel for how to re-phrase errors or unnatural phrases into natural English. It may be a lot of work, but it will be very productive.

Lesson 3. This lesson will ideally take place in the computer room. There are several reasons for this:

1) It provides a change of atmosphere, after two lessons with pen and paper.

2) It is much easier to re-draft writing using word processing software.

3) It allows student to produce attractive-looking results, and personalise their writing with illustrations or even pictures.

The first stage should be to do some whole class work on the common errors. Then give students back their work, and get them to try and correct the underlined mistakes, in pairs. You and your team-teacher will probably be very busy at this stage answering queries from the students. They will hopefully see you now as an ally in their quest to produce good quality work, rather than a taskmaster with a red pen, handing out grades, and you may find that this perception helps your relationship with the students in other lessons too.

Once the students are satisfied, get them to type up their work on the computer. This is where feedback on accuracy will be most useful. It will be easy for you to see what students are writing, as it will be up on a screen, rather than on a piece of paper the student is huddled over. It will also be much easier and neater for the student to correct any errors you point out for them. Get them to call for you or your team-teacher's approval, once their work is finished, and you can then allow the earlier finishers to start "jazzing up" their work with exotic fonts, colours and pictures. The excitement that this causes will probably motivate the stragglers to hurry up and finish their work too.

Word processing software will often underline spelling errors in red squiggly lines, and it is a good idea to draw students' attention to this, and show them how to use the drop-down menu of spelling suggestions. This encourages them to become independent learners, and is a real-world skill they may need to use if they encounter English at work in their future careers.

Follow up. You can simply put the work on the wall, as promised, for parents to see. However, it would probably be motivating to give students a chance to read each other's work in a follow-up lesson. You can do this by taping students' reports around the classroom, and posting a comments sheet under each report. Get students to record their reactions in the comments sheet (encourage positive comments!). In Junior High School, you might even want to allow them to do this in Japanese. This will be a short activity (perhaps 15 minutes), but should be motivating for both the writer and reader, and provides a satisfying sense of closure to the writing project.

Points to note.

If attempting the above activity, there are some key points to note.

1) This lesson is a mini project, so you need to agree a schedule with your team teacher. Ideally the lessons won't be spaced too far apart.

2) The computer room is an ideal place for the final draft of the writing lesson. Try to arrange with your team teacher to book this room in advance, and make sure that you are both comfortable with using the equipment before the lesson starts. Trying to trouble-shoot technical problems in the lesson will be add an unnecessary extra level of stress!

3) Writing is the most difficult productive skill – even for native speakers. You and your team teacher will need to devote a lot of energy to prompting, encouraging

and questioning, in the early stages of the writing project. Some learners, particularly so-called "slow learners" may simply be unable to commit anything to paper. In this case, you can offer assistance by getting them to dictate ideas to you. Once you have some of their ideas down on paper, get them to copy what you have written. These students may simply be finding the physical process of writing words too difficult, so copying will be very useful practice for them. If they are copying something personally important, it should also be relatively motivating.

Other writing tasks

Other smaller-scale writing tasks you could work on include sending emails to you, or other members of the class, writing a class blog, posting information on the school web-site, producing posters, or writing stories. When setting up these writing tasks, try to give students a model of the kind of thing you are expecting. For example, in the case of an email, try writing one to the class yourself first. You will then be able to point out useful features of that genre of writing (for example, the use of an informal greeting, or ways of signing off), which may not be focussed on in the school textbooks. Also, try to ensure that students are aware of who they are writing for, as this will change the writing style they use, and the kind of information they will want to include.

Unit 9 Games

Games in the language classroom

• **Help to involve learners actively** in the learning process.

• **Provide a challenge** which encourages learners to stretch themselves (in order to win). Most games involve learners in reactivating the language they have studied and in trying to use it meaningfully.

• **Help learners to forget they are studying**: they lose themselves in the fun of the game and the activity motivates them.

• **Encourage collaborative learning**. Team games require pooling of knowledge, pair games require co-operation and turn-taking. Students can learn from one another. A good reader with a more proficient speaker can combine skills to make a winning team.

• **Give extra practice without inducing boredom**. Many games involve repetition of the same language over and over again. In normal circumstances this would feel artificial and be demotivating.

Management of games

• **The rules have to be as clear as possible**. Complicated scoring and long lists of rules can draw the focus of the lesson away from using language. Stick to basic card games, keep to one topic for a game or try and adapt local games to which everyone knows the rules.

• **Don't explain the game – demonstrate it**. Always have a trial run before starting the game proper and you play a team member in the rehearsal.

• **Don't let games drag on too long**. Set time limits for answering questions (e.g. a buzzer, a bell, a whistle or a slow count down from five when time is up – these theatrical bits also make the game fun for all learners).

• **Try to use games where there is more than one winner**. Everyone then feels they stand a chance of winning and is more willing to try. Games must seem achievable in order to appeal to learners.

• **Assess the learning value of a game**. Some games might be fun to play but are all the students involved? Are they all using language or hearing language again?

• **Consider very carefully the language needed** to play the game. What will the students have to say to each other to guess a person's card? Try the game with a friend or play it through in your head. Does it activate the language you want to practise? Have students got the necessary vocabulary to play it successfully?

• **Balance the types of games you use**. Vary whole class games with card games in pairs, noisy team games, and quiet concentration games for calming down an over-excited class.

• **Don't overuse games**. Games are a motivator but lose their challenge and interest if they become an everyday routine. They need to be seen as a special moment.

Tips for creating games to suit your classes

• **Personalise or localise games**. A game or quiz about famous people can include not only internationally known stars but local people too. Use television, teenage and local celebrity magazines. Mix pictures of local television, sports and music personalities or political and controversial figures with more widely known faces. Students find these quizzes more challenging as not all of them, for example, would recognise the country's football captain or an important politician. The information gap is genuine and meaningful. Stick mixed groups of personalities on A4-sized sheets and photocopy them if you can. Students in small groups or pairs can then have a number of sheets to work from when challenging each other.

• **Adapt games to suit all levels if possible** (to make the most of the material you have prepared). The Famous Person game can work with beginners asking: 'Is he Italian?' 'Is he French?' 'Where's he/she from?' and can work equally well with advanced students who can invent complex clues or questions to guess the personality, e.g. 'He's well known in this country for his music but he comes from America and sings in a boy band. Who is he?'

• **Invent games which recycle language from the main textbook**.
If you note that learners have covered time-telling this week in their main lessons with their teacher, you can prepare a short time bingo game with blank clock faces on cards. Each pupil fills in the clock faces and then the teacher calls out a random time, picks clock faces from a hat or says sentences including the times.

Types of games

Card games

Start with a set of flashcards. Elicit the words for each card then choose a card and ask students to find out which card you have by questioning you. Direct the questioning with examples of the types of question you would like to be asked, if specific structures are to be used. If the activity is to focus less on accuracy and more on fluency, allow students more freedom to experiment with question types. Obviously the less-guided approach suits intermediate learners upwards. A lower-level group will need question prompts on the board to help them.

Example: Holiday destinations game

Using a set of large glossy pictures of different holiday locations from brochures and small packs of six to eight cards of similar pictures cut from holiday brochures. The locations could be in English-speaking countries, e.g. the Australian Outback, Cape Town, Alaska.

• Show the large pictures at great speed and students guess what they can see. 'Is it a ...?'

• Show four or five pictures and then cover them. Choose one of them, and have the students ask questions to guess which one you have chosen, e.g. 'I went on holiday to this place.' (The teacher has chosen a picture of African safari from a collection of photos of holiday places from travel brochures.) Students ask: 'Was it a hot country?' 'Were there any beaches?' 'Did you see any animals?'

Dialogue games with card prompts
After practising a dialogue with flashcards of say, drinks, with the whole class, put students in pairs with a pack of cards (drinks, food, snacks) to challenge each other. Student A picks up a card and offers a drink. Student B responds refusing the drink, and Student A offers an alternative by picking up another card. One point is gained if each student is able to use the appropriate word correctly. Students keep the card if they manage to say something about it which is appropriate. You can use mixed cards of this type for revision as long as the person who picks up a card can ask an appropriate question with it. This is a motivating game for younger and lower-level students as the cards give reassurance as well as reminding them of the vocabulary.

Memory games
Even commercially produced games which you have at home can be used for language practice. Memory games are essentially sets of pairs of pictures but you can also add matching cards with words for each picture. Look out for local card games which can be used: the staff at school might be able to help.

Bingo
Prepare blank cards containing eight boxes and keep a good number of them for moments when you need a filler activity. Write twenty words on the board. (You control the language of the game.) Ask students to choose eight of the words and write them in the boxes on their cards or draw pictures of the words with younger learners. The most basic method is then to call out words, but this can be more challenging and varied if you call out sentences or clues for the word. For example, instead of calling out the word 'car' you can say 'Far too many people use these to travel short distances instead of using public transport. They are making pollution in cities worse.'

Picture pairs/snap/happy families
Many assistants find these games are useful as they can be good for reactivating language and giving practice in questioning.

Games for asking questions

A lot of the games outlined in this unit involve students in asking questions. To be an active participant in a two-way conversation it is important to be able to show interest and find out information by responding to people and asking questions. Too often in

large classes the students get little practice in asking questions. This can be a real weakness. They might answer plenty of the teacher's questions but not find themselves in meaningful situations where questions are needed for true communication to occur. Start with: 'Find someone who ...'

Questions are also needed when you meet other people speaking English (native or non-native) to clarify meaning or misunderstanding. Students really need to practise asking about unknown words. Start with: 'What do you mean ...?'

Games which focus on defining objects or words can be a useful way of practising questions, e.g. 'Guess my object: is it animal, vegetable or mineral?'

Call my bluff is a good example of a definitions game which can be used, in a less sophisticated way, in language classes. Prepare one word and give the students three possible definitions for it. Ask them to guess the correct definition. This game also encourages students to make logical, intelligent guesses at the meaning of unknown words. With more advanced learners you can give them words and a dictionary and they invent three definitions, one true and the other two false.

Games for fluency

These games do not just focus on using the right vocabulary or structures but encourage learners to use all the language at their disposal to communicate freely.

Just a minute
Based on the BBC Radio 4 programme, this game can be used with any topic. It works best with advanced students. A student in each team must talk for one minute without: a) repeating words, b) straying from the topic, c) hesitating. Award points for each person who manages to speak for a minute. Use it for revision by choosing topic areas recently covered in the main syllabus or issues discussed recently.

Dilemmas/Scruples/Taboo-type games
This type of game has proved popular with sixteen-year-olds upwards. Students have packs of cards on which a series of hypothetical questions are written, e.g. 'If you could go back in time, when would you go back to?' 'Why?' 'What would you do if ... ?' (Embarrassing situations/getting yourself out of a fix.) Other contestants can ask difficult questions if you want to make these games more challenging.

The scoring in these games depends on how well the challenged student defends his or her choice of action. A panel of students awards points from one to five (holding up score cards like in a television quiz game).

Describing photographs
Students are given unusual, striking photographs and have to say as much as they can about them without repeating themselves. It can be done in a large class with photographs circulating around the room. This is a useful activity in education systems where photo descriptions and discussion based on a photo form an integral part of the oral exams in schools.

Vocabulary games

These can be played with the whole class or in pairs or teams/groups. They make excellent fillers for the end of lessons, warm-ups to prepare a topic area and life-savers when you stand in for a colleague at short notice. The best games need only a piece of chalk and a board.

Shark attack

Draw a sea and an enormous shark with wide open mouth at the bottom of the board. Draw a stick man at the top of the board. With each wrong guess the stick man moves closer to the shark's mouth until he is eaten. Expand this game to use names of people, song titles, book or film titles.

Limit the topic area, e.g. animals or verbs of sense or emotion. It is a good game for getting students in large traditional classes used to participating. First run the game yourself, then involve students in coming to the board and running the game, then play it in teams and then in small groups or pairs.

Writing slowly on the board

Put up the first consonant of a word. Can students guess what word it is? Gradually add consonants. For team playing, get the teams to draw up their words before the contest begins. Use the OHP (overhead projector) or computer projector to show distorted words for guessing (upside down, out of focus, the top or bottom half of the word).

Charades

Use pictures or words on pieces of paper in a hat or box. Divide class into teams (three teams in large class). Each team takes turns to pull out a challenge from the hat and mime the word for his team-members to guess. This can be done with all action adverbs, such as angrily, happily, quickly.

Categorisation

Give students a list of words (no more than twenty-five or thirty). These can be from recent reading texts, from recent work covered with their teacher or simply vocabulary areas you would like to focus on. Students can work individually, in pairs or small groups. Divide the words into categories and give each category a name.

Revision games (or recycling textbook work in a fun way!)

Many assistants are asked to revise language, especially as the school year progresses. They have commented that they also start running out of ideas or get fed up with playing the same games. Fortunately some of the most successful revision

games are those generated by students themselves. In these games the students suggest the language, not the teacher.

Board games

Make a standard route, like a long snake with start to finish, or a snakes and ladders type board. An A4 sheet size is sufficient. Leave squares blank and have a blank photocopy to complete with challenges. Choose the language you wish to revise and put instructions in each square. Even beginners can play this!

Example:
'Have you ever been on a plane?' (Yes ... move two spaces)
'Describe what you do on Saturday afternoons.' (move three spaces)
'Spell your address.' (move three spaces)

With more advanced learners the challenges can be more open-ended, encouraging fluency. Example: 'Describe your plans for when you leave school next year.'

Student-generated board games work well too. Students in pairs make challenges on a blank photocopied board. Then the board is passed around so a different pair plays with it. This is best if they have played before and you direct them to topic/conversation areas based on recent work in the textbook.

Revision bubbles

Revision bubbles are a good way of doing student-generated revision of structures and vocabulary. This game can be played with students after only a few lessons of English – or many years. Draw a bubble on the board and ask for suggestions from the class to fill the bubble, e.g. any words from the previous month's work. You can specify the types of words that you want the students to give (e.g. verbs, pronouns, adjectives).

• Students in pairs or small groups make as many sentences or questions possible using their words. Set a time limit of ten minutes. Give one point for each correct sentence.

• Students have ten to fifteen minutes to write a short dialogue incorporating as many of their words as possible, and they then act out the dialogues.

• Students categorise their words, inventing any categories they wish (including grammatical categories).
Students develop technique as they play these games. They soon realise that if a dialogue is required they are wise to include useful verbs and they start to suggest high value items for their bubbles.

Question challenge based on the textbook

Each student prepares two or three questions based on the last five units or so in their textbook. Put students in pairs or small groups next lesson to pool their questions. Then they challenge another team to answer the question. One point for correct answer, half a point for comprehensible but inaccurate answer. This game works with eleven-year-olds after just one term of English and eighteen-year-olds of upper-intermediate level because it is the students themselves who control the language of the game. You can direct the quizzes by giving categories, such as food, geography, school, etc.

'Is Turkey in the EU?'
'Where is the singer Dido from?'
'What is the population of France?'
'What colours are in the Italian flag?'

Students become very inventive when planning these quizzes and get great satisfaction if they can bring in knowledge from other areas of their school curriculum, such as maths or science. Students who say English is not their favourite of subjects become motivated enough to talk about a subject they enjoy in school.

Spot the nonsense

Prepare ten or so sentences based on recent language areas covered then mix up words from these sentences. Each sentence contains a word which has jumped from another. The first pair to sort out the nonsense and make each sentence make sense are the winners. This can be done with letters, postcards or short texts too, or a postcard written from holiday using all the opposites which have to be changed. Example: 'It's lovely and rainy and we're having an awful time'. 'When we got up last night the sky was a beautiful shade of blue.'

Instead of wrong words put jumbled letters so they have to guess the word from context and unscramble it.

Nonsense dialogues are enjoyed too. Mix up two or three short conversations (even from textbooks). Small groups unscramble them, then act them out.

Module 4

Unit 10 Cultural content

The assistant as cultural resource

Most assistants find that students are very interested in their lives and in their country. In some cases you may be the first and only person from your country that they have ever met. The countries described in their books and on television will suddenly come to life with you. It is only natural for them to try out all their misconceptions, making assumptions about you. Your patience will be tested to the limit with generalisations about your country and questions about your values and attitudes. It is only natural for students to glean what they can from family, friends and media. You may find a student whose knowledge is based on an uncle's two-month stay back in 1955 or a teacher who had a year abroad in the 1970s. Your own experience of your home country is your main asset for teachers and students to tap in to. You can use this knowledge to the benefit of learners by following some simple guidelines:

• Distinguish between personal experience and national experience. Your own region and family life are just one example of many different lifestyles in your country. Talk about your experience with enthusiasm but make it clear that this is not representative of everyone who shares your nationality.

• Avoid generalisations beginning with: 'American people think that ...' It is wiser to qualify statements with 'Some British people think ...' or 'Many people in Australia believe ...' Try to avoid creating stereotypes about your own culture.

• Students may happily listen to your account of yourself and country for hours but you need to structure this learning to suit the language classroom. This means less teacher talking time and more student involvement in the process. (See below.) There is a danger of giving lectures.

• Use this work in cultural studies to find out more about the host culture. Show students that you also value their world and experience and encourage contributions to your cultural topics.

What is culture?

It is too simplistic to view culture as a list of facts that we associate with a society, for example, that Britain is an island and that Australians like barbecues. Apart from creating stereotypes we risk a 'trivial pursuit' approach to culture. It is true that members of a given society share a body of knowledge which could be termed

common culture or shared culture. This could be anything from knowing the name of a television programme from the 1970s or the symbol of a political party. In essence, it is the Who wants to be a millionaire? knowledge which comes from living there and going through the education system. It would be difficult to transmit a fraction of this knowledge to a foreign learner. It is possible however to identify commonly shared values and trends in the English-speaking world. These factors determine the social and economic fabric of everyday life and can be used as the basis for cultural studies in a language classroom. Instead of simply looking at a who's who? of the Royal Family, the approach can, by comparison, be far less superficial by looking at how the Royal Family are viewed in the UK today and what their role was in the past. It is important to transmit the concept that societies, like your and the students' own, are not static. Behaviour, habits and attitudes have evolved and are constantly changing. Stereotypes of yesteryear are no longer valid. One major theme, for upper secondary in particular, is the impact that the Information Revolution is having on working patterns, life styles and ways of learning, free time and communicating.

What types of material can be used to introduce a cultural topic?

Realia

Money, stamps, menus, maps, greetings cards, packets from products, leaflets, etc.

Example: A real Christmas pudding (even if uncooked in its box – hygiene laws might prevent you taking real cooked recipes into schools). Ask students to guess the ingredients and feel the weight.

Example: A selection of greetings cards (including cyber cards you can send free to yourself as examples), which you can display on walls or a large desk. Using your cards, students make a list of celebrations and occasions for card-giving. Do they send cards for these occasions? This can be good lead-in to the topic of local or national customs. These cards can also reflect the racial and cultural diversity of the country you come from.

Photos, posters, postcards and drawings

Combinations can reflect the rural-versus-urban environment or lifestyles, ethnic communities, diversity of housing and interiors of homes, different types of classrooms, types of jobs or roles of men and women.

Example: A selection of food and drink pictures from magazines can lead in to the topic of multiculturalism and changing eating patterns. Students divide their food pictures into categories: snacks, possible breakfast foods, foods most likely to be on a canteen menu, etc. They get some real surprises by doing this and it challenges their assumptions.

Questionnaires and surveys

An alternative way of giving information at a lower level to avoid dense texts. The results of national surveys can be looked at to introduce issues.

Example: A national survey published people's attitudes to their own country with questions like 'What makes you most proud when you think of your country?' or 'What makes you most embarrassed when you think of your country?'

Graphs, tables, diagrams, maps and statistics

These can be interpreted without too much language. Students tick the sentences which best match the information in the graphs.

Quizzes based on a map can help students learn about your country, or can review the language of geography.

Voxpops from magazines or papers

Voxpops are where several people are surveyed in the street for their opinion on an issue. Similar collections of opinions can be used from discussion groups on the Internet (especially on issues in the news).

Example: Do you think gun control laws are strict enough? from US teen web site after high school shootings. Two or three readers' letters from the national press or teen magazines can be used in a similar way, balancing for and against or reflecting the diversity of debate within the nation.

Songs, music, rhymes, poetry and literature

These can all introduce social contexts, geographical areas and periods in history. Combinations of these can build up a rich tapestry on a theme.

Video and off-air television

These reflect lifestyles and habits, not just tourist information programmes.

What is cultural competence?

Many people living and working abroad have commented that they feel closer to understanding their own culture through living abroad. This is mainly because the experience of adapting to a new country forces us into considering our own lifestyle and values. Everyone thinks that their way is the norm, but this is clearly not the case. Cultural competence involves accepting that there are many different ways of living, thinking, worshipping and behaving. The reading and discussion tasks given to students should require them to make comparisons with their own country and cultural values. This mimics the process of cross-cultural development. A lesson where the assistant just talks about his or her country and students ask questions about it is clearly not the solution. Tasks given to students must require them to bring their own experience to bear on the topic. This can be done with very low-level learners without the need for lengthy discussions beyond students' linguistic competence.

Example: Compare the ways in which the following simple school timetable from an assistant's local secondary school in the UK has been exploited.

Fig. 1 **Sample UK school timetable**

Day	Time	Subject	Teacher	Room
Monday	9.00–9.45	Geography	Mr Stewart	L11
	9.45–10.30	Geography	Mr Stewart	L11
	break			
	10.45–11.30	Science	Mr Evans	S10
	11.30–12.15	Science	Mr Evans	S10
	lunch			
	1.30–2.15	English	Mrs Bainbridge	W6
	2.15-3.00	History	Miss McArthur	W22
	3.00–3.45	History	Miss McArthur	W22
Tuesday	9.00–9.45	Maths	Mr Finnemore	W11
	9.45–10.30	Maths	Mr Finnemore	W11
	break			
	10.45–11.30	Music	Mr Russell	B2
	11.30–12.15	Music	Mr Russell	B2
	lunch			
	1.30–2.15	French	Mrs Mallows	W6
	2.15–3.00	French	Mrs Mallows	W6
	3.00-3.45	Business Studies	Mrs Mayze	L3
Wednesday	9.00–9.45	Science	Mr Evans	S10
	9.45–10.30	Science	Mr Evans	S10
	break			
	10.45–11.30	Maths set Y4	Mr Finnemore	W11
	11.30–12.15	Maths set Y4	Mr Finnemore	W11
	lunch			
	1.30–2.15	English	Mrs Bainbridge	W6
	2.15–3.00	Physical Education	Mrs Fallon	PE
	3.00-3.45	Physical Education	Mrs Fallon	PE
Thursday	9.00–9.45	Design Technology	Mr Rhodes	Tech
	9.45–10.30	Design Technology	Mr Rhodes	Tech
	break			
	10.45–11.30	German	Miss Reynolds	W24
	11.30–12.15	German	Miss Reynolds	W24
	lunch			
	1.30–2.15	Computing Studies	Mr Bird	L2
	2.15–3.00	French	Mrs Mallows	W6
	3.00–3.45	Science	Mr Evans	S10
Friday	9.00–9.45	History	Miss McArthur	W22
	9.45–10.30	History	Miss McArthur	W22
	break			
	10.45–11.30	English	Mrs Bainbridge	W6
	11.30–12.15	English	Mrs Bainbridge	W6
	lunch			
	1.30–2.15	Modern Studies	Mr Johnson	L14
	2.15–3.00	Religious Studies	Miss Reynolds	W23
	3.00–3.45	Religious Studies	Miss Reynolds	W23

Task one

Look at this timetable and answer in pairs:

· What time do students start school?

· Do they have a long school day?

· Which languages do they study?

· Do they have any breaks?

· Divide the subjects into arts or sciences. What other subjects are studied?

· Describe this timetable to your partner. Start: 'In the UK students go to school five days a week ...'

Task two

Look at this timetable and answer in pairs:

· Is the school day in the UK shorter or longer than yours? Is the timetable lighter or heavier?

· Find two other differences, e.g. starting time; breaks; number of hours of sport or languages.

· Tick any subjects that you enjoy on this timetable. Is there anything new? ... or missing?

· Think of another question to ask about education in the UK.

· In pairs or groups choose two more courses that you think your school might offer to students, e.g. fashion and design or technology and music. Does anything surprise you? Say why they are useful. Plan your ideal school week and timetable.

Task one clearly exploits the timetable but restricts itself to the UK. The questions can be answered with one word and very quickly. Students do little more than repeat information without much reflection. The final task is simply to regurgitate the information in an unrealistic mini-lecture. In Task two students need to think about the information and apply it to their own experience and situation. They are asked to interact and to reflect beyond the data. The timetable in Task two also becomes a springboard for a more controlled discussion on the types of subjects that interest young people and some initiative is given to students to formulate further questions

about the topic. Obviously you can do a great deal more with higher-level learners in upper secondary schools but Task two has been used very successfully with whole classes in lower secondary schools. The open-ended questioning in Task two also makes it more suitable for mixed-ability groups as students contribute what they can, using the language at their disposal.

Techniques for developing competence

Bring misconceptions into the open

What is the received knowledge? How far is it true? Find out what students believe to be true and compare it to reality. What do they already know?

Example: Use questionnaires as a lead-in to a topic or ask students to predict what they will be told. It doesn't matter if students cannot complete the whole questionnaire.

The UK and devolution
Look at the map of the UK in pairs.

· Can you fill in the names of the countries: Northern Ireland/England/Scotland/Wales?

· Put the capitals on the map: Belfast/London/Cardiff/Edinburgh.

· In which of these capital cities will you find Westminster?

· What do you call the people who come from ... England?(the English/ English people) Scotland? Wales? Northern Ireland?

Man and the elements (the Australian Outback)

Here are some words which people associate with Australia. Do these words refer to people, places or things? Are they in your dictionary?
Outback Aborigine Sydney continent suburbs Where do most Australians originally come from?
Which language do they speak?

Challenge stereotypes

Compare stereotyped images with realistic images. Explore notions of stereotype. What is expected of men, women, older or younger people? Focus on roles in society.

Example: Ask the following before reading an article from The Guardian (which interviews parents and young people about at what age they should leave home and how much young people participate in the household in the UK):

Before you read discuss in pairs: Who does the following chores in your family? Washing clothes; cleaning; shopping for food; cooking; emptying rubbish; making beds; ironing.

Do any of these statements reflect attitudes of people in your country?
Parents should look after their kids until they're ready to leave home.
Young adults who stay at home should pay for food and bills.
Young people should get their own place once they reach eighteen.
When both parents work they should both cook, clean and shop for food.

Focus on research skills

Looking at societies as a researcher develops skills for cultural understanding. Rather than giving students the information, design lessons where they have to look for it, e.g. developing the ability to link cause and effect, to balance disadvantages and advantages or to find historic, economic or geographic reasons for habits and ways of life.

The birth of Youth Culture

Complete the sentences (or match two parts) using the data you have:

· There were a lot of young people in the UK in 1959 because ...

· Teenage culture was able to develop in the UK because ...

Data-response techniques are used extensively across the curriculum and can be seen in subject disciplines like sociology, history, geography, business studies or media studies. Cultural Studies brings in aspects from all curriculum areas, so the techniques suited to each subject can be used in the language classroom. It is also easier to answer questions on a map showing climatic difference in the UK than to answer questions based on a lengthy text which artificially gives the same information.

The needs of language students

Our main priority is for students to understand easily so they can think about the topic. Sometimes a short case study of two paragraphs is preferable to a long detailed news report.

Example: The Stephen Lawrence case can be used to introduce the subject of racism in the UK and the broader discussion of racial integration.
The procedures and tasks from other units in this manual need to be applied to this cultural material too. We are aiming for topics that are immediately transferable to the students' culture and language level. It is quality of reflection and not quantity of information which counts.

The role of the students' culture

Fig. 2 **The learner's world**
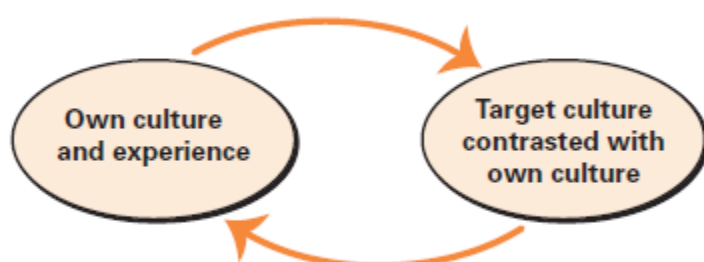
Teaching a lesson with cultural content

Learning about your home country in English could be likened to learning to drive, studying geography or learning how to fit a plug in another language. All of this involves learning something new while using a language which is not your own. Sometimes your linguistic competence will interfere with your understanding of the subject matter. The subject matter might also have its own specialised vocabulary. Think of studying the topic of the UK parliamentary system with a class of fifteen-year-olds in France. How much do they know about their own system of government? Do they possess the necessary vocabulary in their mother tongue (never mind in English)? They might need a lot of lexical support or they might not even find the topic something they can relate to. You need to assess the **content** of your lessons on cultural content with these difficulties in mind. A topic which greatly interests students, such as the fashion industry, might fall flat because the reading you have chosen is far too difficult for their level or the video documentary you are using is too long and too advanced. It is true

that students will be motivated to understand if they are really interested, but they have to get to grips with the content or the interest fades and they become discouraged.

Fig. 3 **An example lesson sequence**
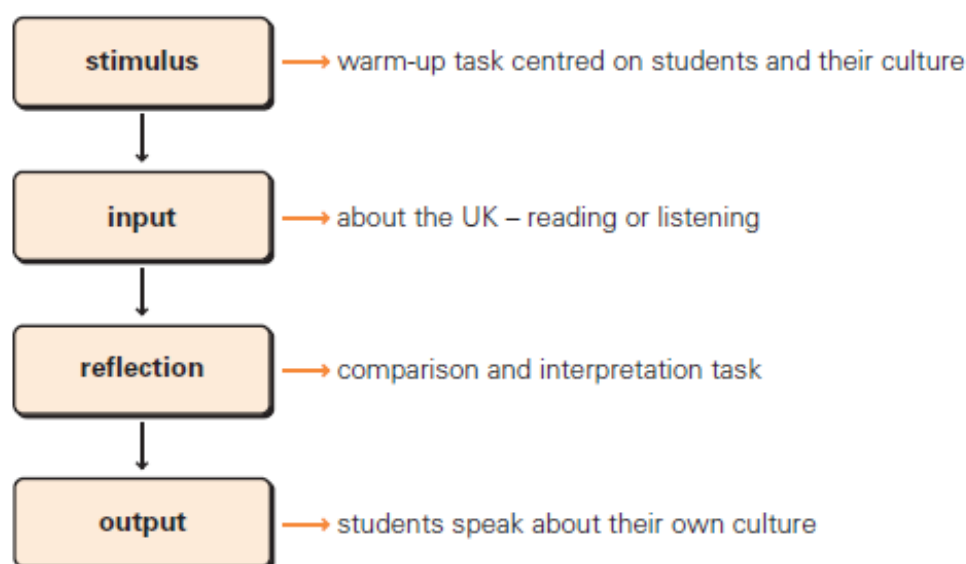
Suitable topics for different learners

Bearing in mind the experience and intellectual maturity of the learners, the following topics have been used in Continental European schools with success.

Younger learners

Topics should focus more on the concrete relating to lifestyle and habits. Include some making and doing activities like making an Easter or Christmas card, making posters of topics, drawing maps or pictures to illustrate topics. Try to keep to visual stimulus with the addition of story-telling, songs and rhymes.

• **Topics related to the seasonal calendar**. Christmas traditions, card-giving habits, Halloween stories and customs, Easter, half-term holidays from school, autumn traditions, etc.

• **Topics related to students' lives**. School and the school day, extracurricular activities at school, towns, villages and cities, basic climate and geography, spare-time activities, television and media, pets, home life, eating patterns, etc.

Older teenagers/young adults

More mature teenagers are ready for more reflection. Keep to topics which they have experience of through their own lives or those of their parents, grandparents and local area. Consider topics such as: the changes in their own society; the different roles and expectations; the freedom of young people; or anything related to generations to be potentially stimulating for the students.

Projects and student research

Projects provide creative opportunities for meaningful language use at all language levels from primary upwards. You can introduce short, controlled projects to start.

Example: Making a list of products from the English-speaking world in their supermarket or using their local press to see how many English words are used. On a larger scale, the project may be an ongoing activity involving students collecting data on American television programmes, following references in the press to events in the UK, surfing the Internet to find out about a person or an era, or making posters for their classroom. The best types of projects are those which draw on the students' own experience and world in comparison to another English-speaking country.

Unit 12 Building a resource bank

Before leaving your country

It is difficult to predict exactly what you will need in your host school but there are certain basic materials that are helpful in most language teaching situations. Try to get as much idea of the standard of English in your school before leaving as you can consult relevant textbooks and teaching material at ELT bookshops and university libraries. It is unwise to buy piles of books only to find that they don't suit the age range and language levels of the students. Invest in one or two basic reference works, like a good grammar of English for language teachers, but hold back on any purchases if you are not clear about your future teaching situation. However, a basic store of visuals and authentic materials should be collected before you leave your country.

• **Start with yourself**. Collect photos and videos of your family, pets, home, living environment, friends, holidays and town. Focus on photos of people doing everyday things, families at festival times, spare-time activities, etc.

• **Look for material in English about your host country**, such as tourist brochures advertising holidays to Japan. If you are aware of the school type and know you will use newspaper articles, start collecting articles about your host country too. Obviously avoid anything too topical that might date. Short articles rather than detailed analysis will be best. Find advertisements for products from the host country. How are these products sold in your country? What image is created of their country? Is it a stereotyped view?
These types of material are useful for cultural studies.

• **Make your own personal video**. Record a range of people speaking clearly and in an interesting way about their likes/dislikes, everyday routines, jobs, family, holidays, etc. Interview friends and family. These interviews and recordings should be easily divided into short sections of one to three minutes. You may even find someone who has visited or lived in your host country to talk about their experience.

• **Make a songs (or poetry) recording**. Record suitable songs from your collection, including two or three recent hits, but try to avoid things that will date. Remember to focus mainly on clear singing without too much background noise and clearly enunciated lyrics. Check on web sites and in song books at your library. Some modern EFL courses have songs as part of the course, so if you can consult books check what those songs are and how they are exploited. Use friends and family to record a selection of poetry from an anthology aimed at the age range you will be teaching.

Using local resources in your host country

It will be easy to supplement your picture collection by using the same procedures as below, getting magazines locally if necessary. Make use of maps of the town where you are staying and leaflets in English (if the English is correct) since students can always play themselves helping a tourist in their own country. This is also the most likely scenario as many may meet foreigners on their own territory and have to give directions, give help at the station or explain dishes on a menu. Some students in

upper secondary, especially tourism and commercial schools, need to practise more specific situations linked to industry and contacts in their area. Discuss this with teachers in these types of school. Use leaflets and situations from local bureaux de change, hotels, industries or tourist attractions.

Visual aids

Realia/props

Collect as much authentic material as you can before leaving your home country. There's nothing more immediate than holding the real thing. Pick up a few copies if you can as it will save on photocopying.

• Collect pub menus, menus from cafés, restaurants and fast food places.

• Bus or train timetables, information leaflets, instructions for using the phone to call abroad or leaflets from post offices, banks and libraries can all be useful.

• Greetings cards, postcards and invitations can be a good source of language and stimulus for discussion. Build up a theme, e.g. postcards of places, people, funny postcards, works of art, greetings cards for festivals, for family events or for everyday celebrations like passing an exam, moving house, etc. Ask family and friends for cards they don't want.

• Leaflets from local theatres, cinemas, concert halls or advertisements from events and listings magazines may form the basis of speaking and reading activities.

Collecting and storing pictures for flashcards

• Collect pictures from magazines in categories, e.g. food, hobbies, clothes, everyday activities, or broader discussion themes like the environment, cultural activities, teenage life, crime, education or immigration.

• Stick pictures on card, cover with plastic if possible, and store them in groups with notes on what type of language they might 'generate'. For example, divide your food and drink pictures into countable/ uncountable nouns.

• Pictures can be collected to practise structures, language functions or vocabulary areas. Make a note of this as you collect. For example, for the function of making/accepting invitations, collect a series of pictures of places to invite someone to, like a cinema, a party, a swimming pool, a game of tennis, etc.

Sources of pictures

Before buying lots of magazines explore ways of getting free magazines for building up your collection.

• Ask all friends and family for magazines, Sunday supplements, television magazines, holiday brochures, supermarket publicity and mail order catalogues. Just three or four of those small mail order catalogues free with Sunday supplements and women's magazines will give you a good collection of household objects to cut up and make into card games for a whole class. You should be looking for variety and quantity and a good range of unusual and large photographs for stimulating discussion.

• Collect a variety of holiday brochures from travel agents to have a wealth of flashcard images and small card images for locations, climate, activities, monuments and much more.

• Find pictures of key figures (not just fleetingly famous), big enough for flashcards, such as members of the Royal Family, the prime minister, personalities in international sport or music, etc. Add local figures once you arrive in your host country.

• Collect advertisements which can be grouped by product type or advertisements aimed at young people. Look for issues that would appeal to young people, such as anti-drugs advertisements, advertisements for slimming products, alcohol, fashion, etc.

Useful maps and wall-charts

• A map of your country, your region or your town. Small maps of local areas of interest or the town centre (maybe maps of the local transport network) can be useful for information gap activities and role plays.

• Maps in geography or history books often show specific features, such as the spread of industry, the different climatic conditions or the concentrations of population. Maps of this sort are useful for your Cultural Studies lessons as you can write questions based on the maps and discuss the country using this visual stimulus.

• Make your own posters about your country based on these small maps if and when you need them. The advantage of posters is that they are easy to roll up and transport and can be adapted to all your classes.

• Free wall-charts from national organisations are good for vocabulary and Cultural Studies (see below).

Pictures and cartoons for describing and story telling

You have to be careful with cartoons as it could be assumed that they are easy when in fact they often contain a great deal of culture-specific reference. Cartoons in newspapers can refer to a topic in the news at the moment or a trend unknown to students, and may use colloquial language unfamiliar to students. Choose carefully to find short strip cartoons for storytelling, reordering, dialogue building and discussion.

Games and communication activities

Use board games (e.g. Scrabble), memory games and game props (e.g. dice). Puzzle books, holiday books and quiz books for young people. These are an excellent source of word mazes, spot the difference pictures, join the dots, and pictures for describing as well as teasers which activate language. For example, a puzzle book for Christmas might have anagrams for Christmas words hidden in a picture, or a holiday book may have a crossword which can be adapted or used with classes. Even if written for native speakers, they can be a good source of games and five-minute filler activities for language learners. Check out children's and teen sites on the Internet, especially sites relating to celebrations like Easter or Halloween in your country.

Finding texts for speaking and writing practice

Use the age range as your starting point. What type of reading material and content appeals to the age range in your country? Look at teenage publications, at reading material in libraries, short story collections, poetry anthologies and popular music which appeals to this group of learners. Look at teenage publications on arrival in your host country too for topic ideas.

• Collect magazines for the age range you are going to teach. Apart from articles and stories, students also like to see and handle a whole magazine. Practise finding your way around a complete publication. These magazines can also be a good source of questionnaires to use for speaking or for short articles which can be used to stimulate discussion or used for dictation.

Example: 'It happened to me ... '. 'My worst ever holiday ...' 'I'll never forget when ...' are common themes.

Problem pages, questionnaires and small advertisements all provide springboards for controlled and free speaking practice. Articles where three or four teenagers give their point of view on an issue can be useful, or articles where three or four products or people are being compared can generate a whole series of discussion tasks and language practice.

• Look out in the national press for articles that would appeal to the age range and could introduce an issue or topic. Special sections relevant to young people and the secondary curriculum can provide a good source, e.g. the section in the Education Guardian for schools with readings and Web links. Also look for short human interest articles of five to ten lines for text dictations, reconstruction and discussion starters.

• Very short stories which are amusing, mysterious or thought-provoking. Find these in cheap collections like "Amazing but true" types of books and the non-fiction sections for young people in local libraries.

Cultural Studies resources

• **The press**. Start by looking at your daily paper from a foreigner's viewpoint. What can you learn about the latest social trends, what is the attitude towards issues and what can you find out about ordinary people, ethnic minorities or national institutions? Collect articles which will help introduce topics about your country and its people.

• **Films, video, television and radio** reflect lifestyle, trends and attitudes and can be exploited for this.

• **Your own souvenirs and realia**. Recipes, local traditions and souvenirs from your area.

• **The media in your host country**. Capitalise on news stories as they occur, to give background, e.g. during elections, cover the system of government, during a crisis look at the issues. Refer to local media coverage of your country. It may be biased but you can redress that.

The Internet

There are vast banks of educational material in all English-speaking countries to suit the age ranges you teach, and worksheets, visuals, texts and lesson plans can be downloaded.

Web sites for teachers and learners of EFL

There are a number of British Council web-sites with lesson plans, video, audio and reading resources, and articles about teaching practice and ideas.

JET-related:

http://www.jetprogramme.org

For all things JET. An invaluable source of resources, information and links to other useful web-sites.

British Council resources:

For Elementary School age children:

http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en

For teenagers:

http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org

For learners of all ages:

http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en

Practical teaching ideas and theory:

http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk

Reading materials which may be suitable for High School students, such as short stories:

http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/britlit

There are also many other teaching web-sites, some with free teaching resources. Here are a few examples:

National institutions

All have their own sites which have educational sections with worksheets and resources aimed at schoolchildren. Examples include:

http://www.csu.edu.au/australia comprehensive Australian government site for history, travel, geography

http://www.parliament.uk/education a schools guide to the system of government in the UK

http://www.royal.gov.uk the official site of the British monarchy

http://www.whitehouse.gov the official site of the US President's house.

International institutions

Official bodies like the United Nations and the Worldwide Fund for Nature have activities in English geared to children and schools: www.wwf.org