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Listening

A Extensive and intensive listening

Students can improve their listening skills – and gain valuable language input – through a combination of extensive and intensive listening material and procedures. Listening of both kinds is especially important since it provides the perfect opportunity to hear voices other than the teacher's, enables students to acquire good speaking habits as a result of the spoken English they absorb, and helps to improve their own pronunciation.

A1 Extensive listening

Just as we can claim that extensive reading helps students to acquire vocabulary and grammar and that, furthermore, it makes students better readers (see Chapter 15, A1), so extensive listening (where a teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they listen to and to do so for pleasure and general language improvement) can also have a dramatic effect on a student's language learning.

Extensive listening will usually take place outside the classroom, in the students' home, car, or on personal stereos as they travel from one place to another. The motivational power of such an activity increases dramatically when students make their own choices about what they are going to listen to.

Material for extensive listening can be found from a number of sources. A lot of simplified readers are now published with an audio version on tape. These provide ideal listening material. Many students will enjoy reading and listening at the same time using both the reader and tape. Students can also have their own copies of coursebook tapes, or tapes which accompany other books written especially at their level. They can also listen to tapes of authentic material (see Chapter 14, B1), provided that it is comprehensible (see Chapter 5B).

In order for extensive listening to work effectively with a group of students – or with groups of students – we will need to make a collection of appropriate tapes clearly marked for level, topic, and genre. These can be kept – like simplified readers – in a permanent collection (such as in a self-access centre, or in some other location), or be kept in a box or some other container which can be taken into classrooms. We will then want to keep a record of which students have borrowed which tapes; where possible we should involve students in the tasks of record-keeping.

The keenest students will want to listen to English tapes outside the classroom anyway, and will need little encouragement to do so. Many others, however, will

profit from having the teacher give them reasons to make use of the resources available. We need to explain the benefits of listening extensively, and come to some kind of agreement (see Chapter 9, B1) about how much and what kind of listening they should do. We can recommend certain tapes, and get other students to talk about the ones which they have enjoyed the most.

In order to encourage extensive listening we can have students perform a number of tasks. They can record their responses to what they have heard in a personal journal (see Chapter 24, A1), or fill in report forms which we have prepared asking them to list the topic, assess the level of difficulty, and summarise the contents of a tape. We can have them write comments on cards which are kept in a separate 'comments' box, add their responses to a large class 'listening' poster, or write comments on a student web site. The purpose of these or any other tasks is to give students more and more reasons to listen. If they can then share their information with colleagues they will feel they have contributed to the progress of the whole group. The motivational power of such feelings should not be underestimated.

A2 Intensive listening: using taped material

Many teachers use taped materials, and increasingly material on disk, when they want their students to practise listening skills. This has a number of advantages and disadvantages:

- **Advantages:** taped material allows students to hear a variety of different voices apart from just their own teacher's. It gives them an opportunity to 'meet' a range of different characters, especially where real people are talking. But even when tapes contain written dialogues or extracts from plays, they offer a wide variety of situations and voices.

Taped material is extremely portable and readily available. Tapes are extremely cheap, and machines to play them are relatively inexpensive.

For all these reasons most coursebooks include tapes, and many teachers rely on tapes to provide a significant source of language input.

- **Disadvantages:** in big classrooms with poor acoustics, the audibility of taped and disk material often gives cause for concern. It is often difficult to ensure that all students in a room can hear equally well.

Another problem with classroom tapes is that everyone has to listen at the same speed, a speed dictated by the tape, not by the listeners. Although this replicates the situation of radio, it is less satisfactory when students have to take information from the tape. This is because they cannot, themselves, interact with the taped speakers in any way. Nor can they see the speaking taking place.

Finally, having a group of people sit around listening to a tape recorder or disk player is not an entirely natural occupation.

Despite the disadvantages, however, we still want to use taped material at various stages in a sequence of lessons for the advantages mentioned above. In order to counteract some of the potential problems described above, we need to check tape

and machine quality before we take them into class. Where possible we need to change the position of the playback machine or the students to offset poor acoustics or, if this is feasible, take other measures such as using materials to deaden echoes which interfere with good sound quality.

If it is possible we can have a number of machines for students to listen to tapes or disks at their own speed, or we can take the group into the language laboratory (see Chapter 10E). In order to show students what speaking looks like we can use videotapes (see Chapter 20). As an alternative to tapes we can also encourage interaction by providing 'live' listening (see below).

An issue that also needs to be addressed is how often we are going to play the tapes or disks we ask students to listen to. The methodologist Penny Ur points out that in real-life discourse is rarely 'replayed' and suggests, therefore, that one of our tasks is to encourage students to get as much information as is necessary/appropriate from a single hearing (Ur 1996: 108).

It is certainly true that extracting general or specific information from one listening is an important skill, so that the kind of task we give students for the first time they hear a tape is absolutely critical in gradually training them to listen effectively. However, we may also want to consider the fact that in face-to-face conversation we do frequently have a chance to ask for clarification and repetition. More importantly perhaps, as Penny Ur herself acknowledges, this 'one listening' scenario conflicts with our wish to satisfy our students' desire to hear things over and over again (see Chapter 6, B1).

If students are to get the maximum benefit from a listening then we should replay the tape two or more times, since with each listening they may feel more secure, and with each listening (where we are helping appropriately) they will understand more than they did previously. As the researcher John Field suggests, students get far more benefit from a lot of listening than they do from a long pre-listening phase followed by only one or two exposures to the listening text (Field 1998a). So even when we set prediction and gist tasks for first listenings, we can return to the tape again for detailed comprehension, text interpretation, or language analysis. Or we might play the tape again simply because our students want us to. Whatever the reason, however, we do not want to bore our students by playing them the same extract again and again, nor do we want to waste time on useless repetition.

A3 Intensive listening: 'live' listening

A popular way of ensuring genuine communication is live listening where the teacher and/or visitors to the class talk to the students. This has obvious advantages since students can interrupt speakers and ask for clarification (see Chapter 19, A1). They can, by their expressions and demeanour, indicate if the speaker is going too slowly or too fast. Above all they can see who they are listening to.

Live listening can take the following forms:

- **Reading aloud:** an enjoyable activity, when done with conviction and style, is the teacher reading aloud to a class (see Chapter 4, D2 and Example 1 in Chapter

15, B1). This allows them to hear a clear spoken version of written text, and can be extremely enjoyable if the teacher is prepared to make a big thing of it.

The teacher can also read/act out dialogues either by playing two parts or by inviting a colleague into the classroom.

- **Story-telling:** teachers are ideally placed to tell stories which, in turn, provide excellent listening material. At any stage of the story, the students can be asked to predict what is coming next, or be asked to describe people in the story or pass comment on it in some other way.
- **Interviews:** one of the most motivating listening activities is the live interview, especially where students themselves dream up the questions (see Example 1 in B1 below). In such situations, students really listen for answers they themselves have asked for, rather than adopting other people's questions. Where possible we should have strangers visit our class to be interviewed, but we can also be the subject of interviews ourselves. In such circumstances we might want, though, to set the subject and/or take on a different persona for the activity.
- **Conversations:** if we can persuade a colleague to come to our class we can hold conversations with them – about English or any other subject. Students then have the chance to watch the interaction as well as listen to it. We can also extend story-telling possibilities by role-playing.

Live listening is not a substitute for audiotapes or disks – either in the classroom, language laboratory, or self-access centre – but it does offer an extra dimension to the listening experience over a series of lessons.

A4 Intensive listening: the roles of the teacher

As with all activities, for listening we need to be active in creating student engagement through the way we set up tasks. We need to build up students' confidence by helping them listen better rather than by testing their listening abilities (see Chapter 14, B3). In particular we need to focus on the following roles:

- **Organiser:** we need to tell students exactly what their listening purpose is (see Chapter 14, B4), and give them clear instructions about how to achieve it. One of our chief responsibilities will be to build their confidence through offering tasks that are achievable and texts that are comprehensible.
- **Machine operator:** when we use tape or disk material we need to be as efficient as possible in the way we use the tape player. This means knowing where the segment we wish to use is on the tape or disk, and knowing, through the use of the playback machine counter, how to get back there. Above all it means trying the material out before taking it into class so that we do not waste time making things work when we get there. We should take decisions about where we can stop the extract for particular questions and exercises, but, once in class, we should be prepared to respond to the students' needs in the way we stop and start the machine.

If we involve our students in live listening we need to observe them with great care to see how easily they can understand us. We can then adjust the way we use the 'machine' (in this case ourselves or a visitor) accordingly.

- **Feedback organiser:** when our students have completed the task, we should lead a feedback session to check that they have completed the task successfully. We may start by having them compare their answers in pairs (see Chapter 8, A3) and then ask for answers from the class in general or from pairs in particular. Students often appreciate giving paired answers like this since, by sharing their knowledge, they are also sharing their responsibility for the answers. Because listening can be a tense experience, encouraging this kind of cooperation is highly desirable.

It is important to be supportive when organising feedback after listening if we are to counter any negative expectations students might have (see Chapter 14, B4) and if we wish to sustain their motivation (see Chapter 3, C3).

- **Prompter:** when students have listened to a tape or disk for comprehension purposes we can have them listen to it again for them to notice a variety of language and spoken features. Sometimes we can offer them script dictations (where some words in a transcript are blanked out) to provoke their awareness of certain language items.

B Listening lesson sequences

Listening can occur at a number of points in a teaching sequence. Sometimes it forms the jumping-off point for the activities which follow. Sometimes it may be the first stage of a 'listening and acting out' sequence where students role-play the situation they have heard on the tape. Sometimes live listening may be a prelude to a piece of writing which is the main focus of a lesson. Other lessons, however, have listening training as their central focus.

However much we have planned a lesson, we need to be flexible in what we do (see Chapter 22, C1). Nowhere is this more acute than in the provision of live listening, where we may, on the spur of the moment, feel the need to tell a story, or act out some role. Sometimes this will be for content reasons – because a topic comes up – and sometimes it may be a way of refocusing our students' attention.

Most listening sequences involve a mixture of language skills – though one, in particular, is often the main focus of the sequence. Frequently students listen for gist on first hearing before moving on to different task skills; at other times they may listen for specific information straight away.

In general we should aim to use listening material for as many purposes as possible – both for practising a variety of skills and as source material for other activities – before students finally become tired with it.

B1 Examples of listening sequences

In the following examples the listening activity is specified. The skills which are involved are detailed, and the way that the listening text can be used within a lesson is explained.

<p>Example 1: Interviewing a stranger</p>	<p>Activity: live listening</p> <p>Skills: predicting, listening for specific information, listening for detailed information</p> <p>Age: any</p> <p>Level: beginner and above</p>
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Where possible, teachers can bring strangers into the class to talk to the students or be interviewed by them (see A3 above). Although students will be especially interested in them if they are native speakers of the language, there is no reason why they should not include any competent English speakers.

The teacher briefs the visitor about the students' language level, pointing out that they should be sensitive about the level of language they use, but not speak to the students in a very unnatural way. They should probably not go off into lengthy explanations, and they may want to consider speaking especially clearly.

The teacher takes the visitor into the classroom without telling the students who or what the visitor is. In pairs and groups they try to guess as much as they can about the visitor. Based on their guesses about who has come into the room, they write questions that they wish to ask.

The visitor is now interviewed with the questions the students have written. As the interview proceeds, the teacher encourages them to seek clarification where things are said that they do not understand (see Chapter 19, A1). The teacher will also prompt the students to ask 'follow-up' questions, so that if a student asks *Where are you from?* and the visitor says *Scotland* he or she is then asked *Where in Scotland?* or *What's Scotland like?*

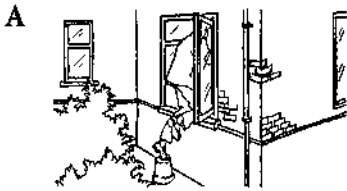
During the interview the students make notes. When the interviewee has gone these notes form the basis of a written follow-up. The students can write a short biographical piece about the person, or write the encounter up as a profile page from a magazine. They can discuss the interview with their teacher, asking for help with any points they are still unclear about. They can role-play similar interviews amongst themselves.

Pre-recorded interviews in coursebooks and other materials are also extremely useful for giving students the chance to hear different voices talking about a variety of subjects. It is often useful to give students the interviewer's questions first so that they can predict what the interviewee will say.

<p>Example 2: Sorry I'm late</p>	<p>Activity: getting events in the right order</p> <p>Skills: predicting, listening for gist</p> <p>Age: young adult and above</p> <p>Level: lower intermediate</p>
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A popular technique for having students understand the gist of a story – but which also incorporates prediction and the creation of expectations – involves the students in listening so that they can put pictures in the order in which they hear them.

In this example, students look at the following four pictures:



They are given a chance, in pairs or groups, to say what they think is happening in each picture. The teacher will not confirm or deny their predictions.

Students are then told that they are going to listen to a tape and that they should put the pictures in the correct chronological order (which is not the same as the order of what they hear). This is what is on the tape:

Anna: Good morning Stuart. What time do you call this?

Stuart: Oh dear. Yes, sorry I'm late.

Anna: Well? What happened to you?

Stuart: I woke up late, I'm afraid. I didn't hear the alarm.

Anna: Were you out late last night?

Stuart: Yes. I'm afraid I was.

Anna: So what happened?

Stuart: Well, when I saw the time I jumped out of bed, had a quick shower, and ran out of the house. But then, when I got to the car I realised I'd forgotten my keys.

Anna: Oh really!

Stuart: But the door to my house was shut.

Anna: What did you do?

Stuart: I ran round to the garden at the back and climbed in through the window.

Anna: And?

Stuart: Well someone saw me and called the police.

Anna: What happened then?

Stuart: Well, I told them it was my house and at first they wouldn't believe me. It took a long time!

Anna: I can imagine.

Stuart: And you see that's why I'm late!

The students check their answers with each other and then, if necessary, listen again to ensure that they have the sequence correct (B, A, D, C).

The teacher can now get students to listen/look at the tapescript again, noting phrases of interest – such as those that Stuart uses to express regret and apology (*sorry I'm late; I woke up late, I'm afraid; I'm afraid I was*), Anna's insistent questioning (*What time do you call this? Well? What happened to you? And?*), and her reactions (*Oh really!; I can imagine*). The class can then go on to role-play similar scenes in which they have to come up with stories and excuses for being late at school or work.

Example 3: Telephone messages

Activity: taking messages

Skills: predicting, listening for specific information

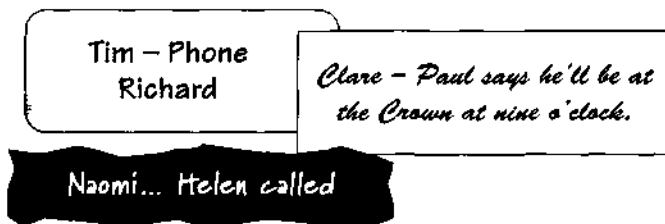
Age: teenager

Level: elementary

Although most textbooks have taped material to accompany their various lessons, there is no reason why teachers should not record their own tapes with the help of colleagues and other competent speakers of the language provided that they take care to use a decent microphone and to record the voices as naturally as possible. This will allow them freedom to create material which is relevant to their own students' special needs.

This sequence shows the kind of thing that teachers might have their colleagues help them with – they can get them to play the parts of the occupant of the house and the three callers.

The sequence starts when the teacher asks students the kind of short messages people might leave for members of their family if and when they take phone calls while they are out. The messages are often quite simple, for example:



Students are told that they are going to hear three phone conversations in which the callers leave messages for people who are not in. They are told that Mrs Galloway has three daughters, Lyn (19), Eryn (17), and Kate (13). They are all out at the cinema, but three of their friends ring up and leave messages. All the students have to do is to write the messages which Mrs Galloway leaves for her daughters.

This is what the students hear:

Mrs Galloway: Hello.

Adam: Hello. Is Lyn there?

- Mrs Galloway:* No, she's out at the moment. Who's that?
Adam: This is Adam. Do you know when she'll be back?
Mrs Galloway: About ten, I think. Can I give her a message?
Adam: No ... er yes. Can you tell her Adam rang?
Mrs Galloway: Sure, Adam.
Adam: Thanks. Bye.
- Mrs Galloway:* Hello.
Ruth: Can I speak to Eryn?
Mrs Galloway: Is that Ruth?
Ruth: Yes. Hello Mrs Galloway. Is Eryn there?
Mrs Galloway: No, Ruth, sorry. She's at the cinema with her sisters.
Ruth: Oh. Well could you ask her to bring my copy of *Romeo and Juliet* to college tomorrow?
Mrs Galloway: Your copy?
Ruth: Yes. She borrowed it.
Mrs Galloway: So you want her to take it in tomorrow? To college?
Ruth: Yes. That's it. Thanks. Bye.
Mrs Galloway: Oh ... bye.
- Mrs Galloway:* Hello.
Jane Metcalfe: Can I speak to Kate?
Mrs Galloway: I'm afraid she's not here. Can I take a message?
Jane Metcalfe: Yes please. This is Jane Metcalfe, the drama teacher.
 Can you tell Kate that the next rehearsal is at three-thirty on Friday?
Mrs Galloway: The next rehearsal?
Jane Metcalfe: Yes, for the school play.
Mrs Galloway: Kate's in a play?
Jane Metcalfe: Yes. Didn't she tell you?
Mrs Galloway: No ... I mean yes, of course she did.
Jane Metcalfe: OK, then. We'll see her on Friday afternoon.
Mrs Galloway: Er ... yes.

When they have written messages for the three girls they compare their versions with each other to see if they have written the same thing. They listen to the tape again to clear up any problems they might have had.

This sequence naturally lends itself to a progression where students 'ring' each other to leave messages. Perhaps they do this after they look at the language of the three phone calls so that they can use phrases like *I'm afraid she's not here/Can I take a message?*

Message taking from phone calls is a genuinely communicative act. Where possible students will be involved in the phone calls themselves, if possible taking messages from someone speaking from another room, or from another booth

in a language laboratory (see Chapter 10E), or at least working in pairs to role-play calls.

Example 4: UFO

Activity: jigsaw listening
 Skills: listening for detailed information
 Age: adult
 Level: upper intermediate

This listening sequence also involves filling in a form, but it has a jigsaw element built into it, so that to complete the task, students who have listened to one tape have to share their information with students who have listened to another.

The effect of having to gather and share detailed information to complete the forms is that the students in different groups end up with a good general understanding of the whole text.

The students have been working on a unit in their textbook called 'Anyone out there?' about space. In this class they are given the following 'UFO report form':

UFO REPORT FORM

1 Name and address:		
2 Place:	Date:	Time:
3 Other witnesses (names and addresses):		
4 Weather conditions:		
5 Description of sighting (where seen and for how long):		
6 Appearance (indicate size, shape, colour, distinguishing features – draw a sketch):		
7 Sound and movement:		
8 Description of any aliens (appearance, manner, behaviour, speech, purpose for being here):		
9 Conclusions:		

From *Upper Intermediate Matters* by J Bell and R Gower (Pearson Education Ltd)

One group (group A) listen to the following taped extract and fill in all the information they can on the form:

Extract A: Whitley Strieber and the aliens

And then there was the story of the home-loving dad who claims he was experimented on by space alien scientists. Human guinea pig Whitley Strieber suffered a terrifying brain examination as he lay naked inside the hi-tech surgery of the cruel creatures' spacecraft. The writer of the best-selling book *Communion* wants the world to know extraterrestrials are out there – and they're not friendly. Whitley trembled as he recalled his operation millions of light years from Earth.

'I had been captured like a wild animal and it was like they were trying to tame me,' said the 41-year-old.

'They performed bizarre medical procedures on me and inserted a thin metal instrument into my brain.'

Whitley claims his outer space tormentors were like giant-sized insects.

They were bald, with massive liquid-like narrow eyes, yellowish-brown skin that felt like leather, two holes for nostrils and big, floppy lips.

And to prove his chilling time with the beings actually took place, he agreed to take a lie detector test – and passed!

The *New Yorker* says his nightmare began when an army of aliens invaded his home while he slept.

He was unable to move as they ripped off his pyjamas, poked him with their wrinkled hands, then took him off to waiting craft.

'They told me they were going to do an operation...'

The other group (group B) fill in as much of the form as they can based on the particular tape extract that they listen to:

Extract B: Mrs Coe and the aliens

Yes, the aliens have landed. Only yesterday they stepped out of their spaceship and went for a walk in the park. Three giant creatures twelve feet tall with tiny heads and wearing bluish metallic clothing chose Russia for a very close encounter with the human race.

Their arrival was heralded by a shining ball seen hovering over the local park by residents of Voronezh, 300 miles east of Moscow.

The UFO landed and out came the giants, similar to humans and accompanied by a small robot. 'They went for a walk near their spaceship,' said the official news agency Tass. 'Then they disappeared back inside. Onlookers were overwhelmed with fear that lasted several days.'

The landing was authenticated by staff from the Voronezh Geophysical Laboratory, whose head, Genrikh Silanov, is a respected scientist.

Tass said: 'Scientists confirmed that a UFO landed in the park. They also identified the landing site and found traces of aliens.'

Silanov's men discovered a twenty-yard depression in the park with four deep dents and two pieces of rock. 'They looked like deep red sandstone. But analysis showed that the substance cannot be found on Earth.'

There was speculation among UFO experts in Britain that the aliens could have been those that Mrs Coe said landed in her garden last month in a spacecraft which was surrounded by bubbles of light. According to her amazing story the aliens grabbed her by the arms and lifted her up a beam of light into a kind of room. Mrs Coe was reported as saying she felt they meant her no harm and that when she came round she was in her garden and not hurt in any way.

Now students from group A interview students from group B (and vice versa) using the form as a basis for making notes about their partner's story.

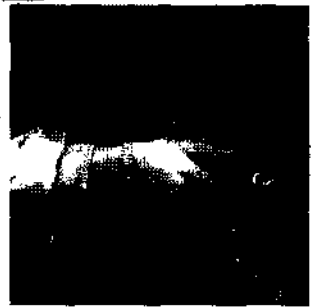
All students now have both UFO stories. They discuss which one they found the most believable, and say why they think this. The sequence ends when the students either write a diary entry by Whitley Strieber for the day he saw the aliens, or as Mrs Coe, write a letter to the newspaper about her experiences.

Using jigsaw techniques in listening presents greater logistical difficulties than it does in reading. It requires different tape machines in different places. However, if these difficulties can be overcome such tasks are well worth doing since they involve both listening and speaking in a thoroughly attractive way.

Example 5: We had a nice time, but .	Activity: analysing conversations Skills: predicting, listening for detailed information, listening for text construction Age: young adult and above Level: intermediate
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In the following sequence, students are working on a unit called 'Regrets'. The lesson starts with the teacher leading a discussion about the kinds of things that can go wrong on holiday, and helps the students to come up with sentences like *You might be ill* or *Perhaps you'll miss your flight*, etc. If any of the students have a holiday 'horror story' they can tell it to their partner, their group, or to the class.

The students are told that they are going to listen to three people talking about things going wrong on holiday. They look at the photographs on the next page and try to predict what the problem is likely to be in each case. They can discuss this in pairs and groups to think of all the possibilities they can.



From *Lifelines Intermediate* by T Hutchinson (Oxford University Press)

They now listen to the tape to see if they were right. This is what they hear:

- 1 A Hello. Did you have a good holiday?
 B Well, yes and no.
 A Why? What was the problem?
 B My wallet was stolen.
 A No! That's a bit rough. How did that happen?
 B Oh, we stopped at this market and I was just sitting in the car when some people – a man and a woman, it was – came up. I thought they were selling things. Well, like a fool, I'd put my wallet on the dashboard. Anyway, these people came up to the car, and while I was talking to the man, the woman put her hand in and grabbed the wallet.
 A Goodness me! What did you do?
 B There wasn't much I could do. I was stunned. They just ran off into the crowd. Well, I reported it to the police, but they weren't much help.
 A Was there much money in it?
 B Yes, quite a bit, and my credit cards. But it was my own fault. I shouldn't have put it on the dashboard where people could see it. If I'd left it in my pocket, as I usually do, it wouldn't have happened.
 A Well, I hope it didn't spoil your holiday too much. Actually it reminds me of when we were on holiday a couple of years ago and ...
- 2 A Hello, I haven't seen you around for a while. Have you been away?
 B Yes, we've been skiing in the States.
 A Oh yes, I remember you telling me you were going. Was it good?
 B Well, it was until the last few days.
 A Why? What happened?
 B Well, Tina decided that she wanted to have a go at snowboarding. You know this thing where you stand on, like a board.
 A Yes, I know.
 B Well, I thought it was a bit dodgy, but she wanted to do it. You know what kids are like. So she did. Well, anyway, she fell off and broke her arm.
 A Oh no. Poor Tina. Was she all right?
 B Yes, she was OK. The ambulance took her to the hospital and they dealt with it. But then when I came to pay, I found that our insurance didn't cover us for snowboarding – only for skiing.
 A Blimey! So what did you do?
 B Well, what could I do? I had to pay for everything myself. It cost me an arm and a leg! You know what medical costs are like in the States.
 A I hear they're rather expensive.
 B You're telling me! Well, I suppose I should have checked the insurance policy before she went snowboarding, but I blame the insurance company. I mean lots of people go snowboarding these days.
 A Well, funny enough, something similar happened to a friend of mine. His son wanted to go snowboarding and ...
- 3 A Hi. Welcome back. Have you had a good time?
 B Well, we did when we finally got there.
 A What do you mean?
 B Well, we only missed the flight, didn't we?
 A No! How did you manage that?
 B We got stuck in a traffic jam on the way to the airport and by the time we got there the flight had already left.
 A Oh dear.
 B It was all John's fault. We should have set off earlier. But you know what he's like – everything at the last minute. I mean, it would have been all right if the road had been clear, but it wasn't, so ...
 A So what happened?
 B Well, the tour company got us on another flight later in the day. So we had to wait for 12 hours at the airport and then when we arrived it was too late to get to our hotel, so we had to book into another hotel at the airport for the night.
 A But you got there in the end?
 B Yes, but I was not in too good a mood by then. I can tell you.
 A I'm not surprised. We missed a flight once, but it wasn't because of the traffic. We ...

and then in a subsequent listening (or listenings), they fill in the following chart:

	1	2	3
Problem			
Cause			
Result(s)			
Whose fault?			
Why?			

Students now listen to the extracts again, but this time they are listening out for exactly how the speakers construct their discourse, as the following exercise shows:

Talking about a holiday

a Listen to the conversations again. How do people

- ask about holidays?
- indicate that there was a problem?
- ask what happened?
- show sympathy?
- relate the story back to their own experience?

b Look at tapescript 13.3 and check your answers.

When they have done this exercise in pairs or groups they check through the language with the teacher before moving on to use the results of their enquiries in a 'making conversations' activity which encourages them to try out the language for themselves.

Make more conversations about holiday disasters.

a Work with a partner and make conversations about the situations below, following the diagram.

A

Greet and ask about the holiday

Ask what happened

Sympathize

Ask about results

Compare the problem to your own experience

B

Indicate a problem

Describe what happened

Express blame or regrets

Describe results

- 1 lose passports/leave bag on beach/have to get new ones at the embassy/wife's fault/didn't leave passports at hotel
- 2 injured/walk into glass door/go to hospital/hotel's fault/couldn't see door
- 3 get lost/car runs out of petrol/spend night in car/own fault/didn't check the petrol gauge
- 4 holiday cancelled/tour company goes bust/have to go home/husband's fault/choose cheap holiday
- 5 house burgled while away/door not locked/TV and video stolen/neighbour's fault/came in to feed pets and forgot to lock door
- 6 arrested/smuggling money out of the country/taken to police station/own fault/didn't declare it on immigration form

b Think of a similar experience that might have happened to you. Make more conversations with your partner.

From *Lifelines Intermediate* by T Hutchinson (Oxford University Press)

This sequence shows how listening extracts can be used for a variety of different purposes – from training in (and practice of) language skills, to language analysis and as a stimulus for language production (see Chapter 17).

Example 6: At the post office	Activity: analysing language exchanges
	Age: adult
	Level: upper intermediate/advanced

Any spoken language can be studied for information about how the text is constructed and in what order certain functions can occur within an exchange. This can be useful at any level – with both simplified and authentic text. To collect the latter type speakers can wear voice-activated microphones as they go about their normal lives so that the recordings which are obtained are a record of everyday spoken reality.

The following extract was collected in just such a way. A male customer <S 01> has gone to the post office and is talking to a female post office clerk <S 02>:

<S 01> Right, send that first class please.	1
<S 02> That one wants to go first class, right we'll see if it is,	2
it's not it's not 41, it's a 60, I thought it would be, I'd	3
be in the ... 60 pence [6 secs] there we are	4
<S 01> Lovely thank you	5
<S 02> Okay 70 80 whoops 90 100	6
<S 01> Thanks very much	7
<S 02> Thank you	8

From *Exploring Spoken English* by R Carter and M McCarthy (Cambridge University Press)

Students looking at this transcript will notice how apparently messy and arbitrary real language is. However, closer inspection – taking into account the false starts, thinking aloud, etc. – shows that the extract above contains the bare essentials of what the customer needs to complete his business. The pattern, according to the authors of the book, seems to be: 1 a request for service (line 1), 2 an acknowledgement of the request and a statement of the price (lines 2–3), 3 the handing over of the goods (line 4), 4 the giving of money and receiving the change (lines 5–6), and 5 a closure of the encounter (lines 7–8) (Carter and McCarthy 1997: 93).

There is much more to notice here, too. For example, *Right* is a common way of opening transactions. *Send that first class* may be an imperative, but because it is almost certainly an ellipsis of a sentence like *I'd like to send that first class* or *Can I send that first class?* it is not considered rude; the clerk almost certainly understands it to be a request, not an order.

In their commentary on the extract Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy note how *That one wants to go first class* only makes sense when we realise that *wants* is here used to mean *needs* or *should* – a common use of the verb in spoken English. And so on.

Examination of real informal spoken exchanges like the one above yields a fantastic amount about the way we speak to each other, yet it is problematic too. It is

extremely culture-bound, for one thing, and while it may make us aware of exactly how conversations are constructed it is difficult to see how we might translate that into active use. Do we teach students to hesitate and change their minds for example? Should we promote ellipsis and the use of informal conversation markers which might sound strange coming from a foreign language student's lips when used to a native language speaker? What level is this kind of study suitable for? These questions have formed the focus for a lively debate so that it is still unclear what teachers and students might do with such extracts beyond having students 'notice' certain features of speech.

However, for anyone interested in how native speakers really communicate, such close attention to the construction of informal encounters of this kind gives invaluable insights into the way the language works.

C The sound of music

Music is a powerful stimulus for student engagement precisely because it speaks directly to our emotions while still allowing us to use our brains to analyse it and its effects if we so wish. A piece of music can change the atmosphere in a classroom or prepare students for a new activity. It can amuse and entertain, and it can make a satisfactory connection between the world of leisure and the world of learning. Because the appreciation of music is not a complex skill, and because many different patterns of music from a variety of cultures have become popular all over the globe through satellite television and the Internet, most students have little trouble perceiving clear changes of mood and style. In class, therefore, we can play film music and get students to say what kind of film they think it comes from. We can get them to listen to music which describes people and say what kind of people they are. They can write stories based on the mood of the music they hear, or listen to more than one piece of music and discuss with each other what mood the music describes, what 'colour' it is, where they would like to hear it, and who with.

Even those who are sceptical about their ability to respond to music often end up being convinced despite themselves; as one of David Cranmer and Clement Laroy's students wrote after hearing Honegger's 'Pacific 231':

I am really puzzled by people's ability to see things in music. I can't. Take this music for example ... if you ask me, I would visualise a train steaming through the prairie and Indians attacking it ... while some people are desperately trying to defend it.

From D Cranmer and C Laroy (1992: 57)

Example 7: Ironic

Activity: understanding song lyrics

Skills: listening, reading for general and detailed comprehension

Age: young adult and above

Level: intermediate

One of the most useful kinds of text for students to work with is song lyrics, especially where the song in question is one which the students are very keen on. However, songs can present a problem, particularly with teenage students, precisely because it is often difficult to know exactly which songs the students like at a particular time and which songs, very popular last week, have suddenly gone out of favour!

There are two ways of dealing with this problem: the first is to have students bring their own favourite songs to class. If they do this, however, the teacher may want to have time (a day or two) to listen to the song and try and understand the lyrics. Some of the songs may deal with issues and language which the teacher is not keen to work with. Another solution is to use older songs, and to ask students whether they think they still have merit – whether they like them, despite their antiquity. Teachers can then choose songs which they like, or which are appropriate in terms of topic and subject matter, and which they themselves think pass the test of time.

The following example takes a song released in the mid-1990s. Students are told that they are going to hear the singer Alanis Morrissette perform her track 'Ironie'. Do any of them know it? What do they think it is going to be about?

They are then given the following worksheet and told that when they listen to the song, all they have to do is put the verses in the correct order – even if they do not understand all of the words.

Listen to 'Ironie'. Match the numbers on the left with the verses on the right.

1 -----

CHORUS

It's like rain on your wedding day
It's a free ride when you've already
paid.
It's the good advice that you just
didn't take
And who would have thought it? ...
it figures.

2 -----

CHORUS

3 -----

4 -----

a A traffic jam when you're already late
A no-smoking sign on your cigarette
break
It's like 10,000 spoons when all you
need is a knife
It's meeting the man of my dreams
and then meeting his beautiful wife
And isn't it ironic, don't you think?
A little too ironic, yeah, I really do
think.

b Mr Play-It-Safe, was afraid to fly
He packed a suitcase and kissed his
kids goodbye
He waited his whole damn life to
take that flight
And as the plane crashed down he
thought 'well, isn't this nice!'
And isn't it ironic, don't you think?

CHORUS

Life has a funny way of sneaking up
on you
Life has a funny way of helping
you out.

- c An old man turned ninety-eight
He won the lottery and died the next
day
It's a black fly on your Chardonnay
It's a death row pardon two minutes
too late
And isn't it ironic, don't you think?
- d Life has a funny way of sneaking up
on you
When you think everything is OK and
everything's going right.
And life has a funny way of helping
you out
When you think you've gone wrong
and everything blows up in your
face.

Students compare their answers and the teacher checks that they have the verses in the right place. They can now listen to the song again, and this time they should read each verse as it is sung. At the end of this procedure the teacher asks them what the song is about, and what the tone of it is, to elicit the information that it is about things always turning out the opposite to what you want. It is half bitter, half jokey.

The teacher can then take the students through the lyrics, explaining phrases they did not understand, asking questions to check their comprehension of various words and expressions (e.g. *It figures, sneaking up on you, everything blows up in your face*). Although this kind of text study is somewhat cumbersome, a detailed look at song lyrics, if the students are interested in them, will really help some of them to remember some of the expressions, especially when they are combined with catchy music.

There are many other ways of using songs lyrics, of course. Teachers can give students lyrics with various words blanked out; the teacher can give students a list of words and ask them to listen to the song to see which of the words are used. The teacher can ask students to put lines in order, or complete half-finished lines. Or the teacher can simply have students listen to a song and say what they think the title might be – or say where they would most like to hear it.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Listening**

On listening in general, see M Underwood (1989), A Anderson and T Lynch (1988), M Rost (1990), and J Field (1998a). T Ridgeway (2000) and J Field (2000) argue about the relative merits of listening strategy training.

- **Authentic text**

On the advantages of using authentic listening texts in class, see J Field (1998b: 13).

- **Using authentic transcripts**

On using transcripts of conversations in teaching, see R Carter (1998a), and G Cook (1998) who questions the use of such samples of 'authentic' speech, and a reply to his criticisms in R Carter (1998b). L Prodromou (1997a) strongly questioned the work of Carter and McCarthy, and their reply is most instructive – see M McCarthy and R Carter (1997) to which Prodromou himself replied (Prodromou 1997b).

- **Using music and songs in the classroom**

On using music generally, see D Cranmer and C Laroy (1992). On songs see, T Murphey (1992), L Domoney and S Harris (1993), and S Coffrey (2000).

17

Teaching productive skills

A Productive skills

The productive skills of writing and speaking are different in many ways. However, there are a number of language production processes which have to be gone through whichever medium we are working in.

A1 Structuring discourse

In order for communication to be successful we have to structure our discourse in such a way that it will be understood by our listeners or readers. In speech this often involves following conversational patterns and the use of lexical phrases, the pre-fixed or semi-fixed word strings that have led methodologists to look carefully at lexical approaches (see Chapters 2, B4 and 6, A8). In general, fewer formulaic phrases are found in writing than in speech (Wray 1999: 227–228), and this is why writing in particular has to be both coherent and cohesive. Coherent writing makes sense because you can follow the sequence of ideas and points. Cohesion is a more technical matter since it is here that we concentrate on the various linguistic ways of connecting ideas across phrases and sentences. These may be ‘chains of reference’ (Biber et al. 1999: 42) where we use language features such as pronouns, lexical repetition, and synonymy to refer to ideas that have already been expressed. We can use various linkers as well, such as for addition (*also, moreover*), contrast (*although, however, still*), cause and effect (*therefore, so*), and time (*then, afterwards*).

Although spontaneous speech may appear considerably more chaotic and disorganised than a lot of writing, speakers nevertheless employ a number of structuring devices, from language designed to ‘buy time’, to turn-taking language (see A2 below), and quite specific organising markers such as *firstly, secondly, or even and as if that wasn’t enough*, as in *and as if that wasn’t enough he lost my money on a horse!*

A2 Following the rules

When people with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds get together they speak to each other easily because they know the rules of conversation in their language and their shared culture. When they write to each other they obey certain conventions. Such rules and conventions are not written down anywhere, nor are

they easy to define. But at some cultural level our shared schemata (see Chapter 14, A1) help us to communicate with each other successfully.

There are three areas of rules which we should consider:

- **Sociocultural rules:** speakers from similar cultural backgrounds know how to speak to each other in terms of how formal to be, what kind of language they can use, how loud to speak, or how close to stand to each other. Such sociocultural rules – or shared cultural habits – determine how women and men speak to each other in different societies, how conversations are framed when the participants are of different social or professional status, and guide our behaviour in a number of well recognised speech events such as invitation conversations, socialising moves, and typical negotiations.

Sociocultural rules and habits change over time, but at any given moment they exist in the public consciousness so that obeying them or purposefully flouting them become acts of belonging or rejection.

- **Turn-taking:** in any conversation decisions have to be taken about when each person should speak. This is 'turn-taking', a term which refers to the way in which participants in conversations get their chance to speak. They do this by knowing how to signal verbally or visually that they want a turn or, conversely, by recognising when other speakers are signalling that they want to finish and are therefore giving them space to take a speaking turn.
- **Rules for writing:** writing has rules too, which we need to recognise and either follow or purposefully flout. These range from the 'netiquette' (Teeler 2000: 9–10) of computer users, who chat to each other on the Internet, to the accepted and successful patterns of a letter supporting an application or the conventions followed in journalism or fiction. When we produce language in these genres (see A3 below), part of our skill lies in negotiating these rules successfully.

A3 Different styles, different genres

One of the reasons that people can operate within sociocultural rules is because they know about different styles, and recognise different written and spoken genres.

In Chapter 2c we saw how our language use is determined by a number of factors. First among these is the purpose of our communication, what we want to achieve. But the form in which we try to achieve that purpose is determined by other parameters such as the setting, the channel we are using to communicate by, and the type of communication (genre) which we are involved with. If we want to give people facts (our purpose) in a lecture theatre (setting) through a microphone (channel) we will probably use a lecture genre with its typical patterns of rhetoric and organisation, and this genre will determine the style of the language we use. The whole event will be different from how we might transmit the same information to a friend in an informal conversation. This in turn would be different from the kind of language we might use when writing the same information in a particular magazine genre: when exchanging e-mails on the subject with a close colleague our use of language will almost certainly be very different again.

In each of the above cases, the writer or speaker will operate at a different level of formality. We can characterise this as a level of intimacy, where the more distant a speaker or writer feels themselves to be from their audience, or the more tentative they feel about their message, the greater will be their use of formal grammar and lexis. When people talk about spoken and written grammar, therefore (see Chapter 2, A1), one of the differences they are sometimes describing is between 'distance' and 'closeness'.

A feeling of distance will make the use of well-formed sentences in writing a priority. It will suggest the use of full forms and written equivalencies in spoken communication. Closeness, on the other hand, leads to spontaneity so that in conversation the occurrence of ellipsis, non-clausal sentences, tags, hesitators etc. is more common.

Distance and closeness are not the same as writing and speaking, however. People sometimes write 'closely' in media such as postcards, e-mails, and notes left around the house. They can speak more 'distantly' in speeches, formal interviews, and prescribed ceremonies. It may, therefore, be useful to think of language production as being more 'writing-like' or more 'speaking-like' (Tribble 1997: 21). Thus essays, formal articles, reports, and some novels are very distant and 'writing-like' whereas some writing such as particular magazine articles, fiction, advertising and, especially, e-mail writing is much closer and more 'speaking-like'.

In order to speak and write at different levels of intimacy students need practice in different genres (see Chapter 18, B2) and different styles so that as their level increases they can vary the grammar, functions, and lexis that they use. It is vital, therefore, that if the coursebook does not offer a satisfactory range of such genre-based activities, we should supply it ourselves (see Chapter 21, C2).

A4 Interacting with an audience

Part of our speaking proficiency depends upon our ability to speak differentially, depending upon our audience, and upon the way we absorb their reaction and respond to it in some way or other. Part of our writing ability depends upon our ability to change our style and structure to suit the person or people we are writing for.

Where people are giving formal 'writing-like' lectures, they are likely to adapt the way they are speaking and the words they are using on the basis of audience reaction; just as good actors, for example, are expert at riding a laugh, or changing their pace to suit public conditions, so good presenters, salespeople, and politicians keep their ears and eyes open to see how their words are going down and speak accordingly. Writers engaged in an e-mail correspondence modify subsequent communications on the basis of the reaction of the people they are communicating with. Novelists and playwrights at a conscious or subconscious level identify a prototypical audience to write for. In informal spontaneous conversations we are constantly alert for the reactions of the people we are interacting with so that we make our communication as informative as required, amending it depending on how the other participants in the interaction behave.

A5 Dealing with difficulty

When speakers or writers of their own or of a foreign language do not know a word or just cannot remember it, they may employ some or all of the following strategies to resolve the difficulty they are encountering:

- **Improvising:** speakers sometimes try any word or phrase that they can come up with in the hope that it is about right. Such improvisations sometimes work, but they can also obscure meaning.
- **Discarding:** when speakers simply cannot find words for what they want to say, they may discard the thought that they cannot put into words.
- **Foreignising:** when operating in a foreign language, speakers (and writers) sometimes choose a word in a language they know well (such as their first language) and 'foreignise' it in the hope that it will be equivalent to the meaning they wish to express in the foreign language.
- **Paraphrasing:** speakers sometimes paraphrase, talking about something *for cleaning the teeth* if they do not know the word *toothbrush*, or saying that they are *not happy with somebody* when they want to say that they are really fed up. Such lexical substitution or circumlocution gets many speakers out of trouble, though it can make communication longer and more convoluted.

Clearly some of these 'difficulty strategies' are more appropriate than others.

As teachers we should encourage paraphrasing and improvising as more useful techniques than discarding thoughts or foreignising words blindly.

B Productive skills in the classroom

When students write or speak in lessons they have a chance to rehearse language production in safety, experimenting with different language in different genres that they will use on some future occasion away from the classroom.

When students are working on their language production, they should be operating towards the communicative end of the communication continuum (see Chapter 6, A4). Activities at the non-communicative end of the continuum – such as language drills – are excluded from the category of productive skills even though they may be done orally. Similarly, the writing of sentences to practise a grammar point may be very useful for a number of reasons, but such exercises are not writing skill activities. This is because language production means that students should use all and any language at their disposal to achieve a communicative purpose rather than be restricted to specific practice points.

However, skill training is not always communicative in itself, since teaching people to take turns or use correct punctuation, for example, is often fairly controlled – and may involve quite a lot of teacher intervention.

One of the chief advantages of production activities is that they provide evidence for students and their teachers to assess how well things are going (see Chapter 7B).

The freer the task the greater the chance of seeing how successful a language learning programme has been.

B1 Reception and production

The teaching of productive skills is closely bound up with receptive skill work. The two feed off each other in a number of ways.

- **Output and input:** when a student produces a piece of language and sees how it turns out, that information is fed back into the acquisition process. Output becomes input.

Such input or feedback can take various forms. Some of it comes from ourselves, whether or not we are language learners. We modify what we write or say as we go along based on how effective we think we are being. Feedback also comes from the people we are communicating with. In face-to-face spoken interaction our listeners tell us in a number of ways whether we are managing to get our message across. On the telephone listeners can question us and/or show through their intonation, tone of voice, or lack of response that they have not understood us.

Teachers can of course provide feedback too, not just when a student finishes a piece of work but also during the writing process for example (see Chapter 18, B1), or when as prompters or as a resource teachers offer ongoing support (see Chapter 4B).

Figure 22 shows the relationship between input and output:

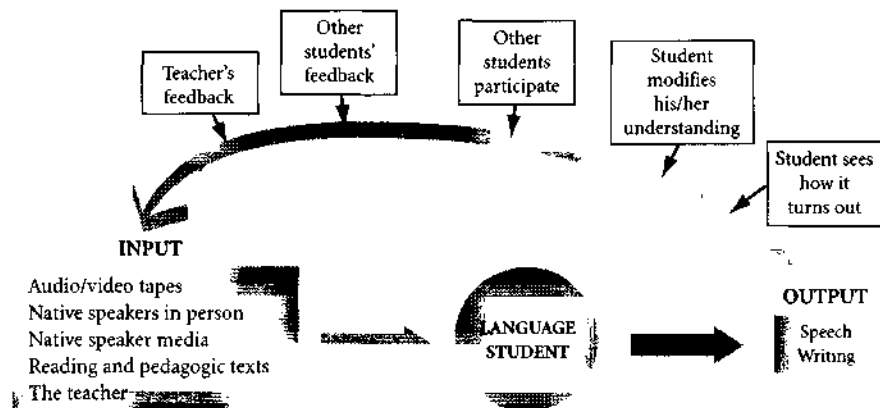


FIGURE 22: The circle of input and output

- **Texts as models:** especially where students are working with genre-focused tasks, written and spoken texts are a vital way of providing models for them to follow. One of the best ways of having students write certain kinds of report, for example, is to show them some actual reports and help them to analyse their structure and style; to get students to give spoken directions they will benefit from hearing other people doing it first.

Productive work need not always be imitative. But students are greatly helped by being exposed to examples of writing and speaking which show certain conventions for them to draw upon.

- **Texts as stimuli:** a lot of language production work grows out of texts that students see or hear. A controversial reading passage may be the springboard for discussion, or for a written riposte in letter form. Listening to a tape or disk in which a speaker tells a dramatic story may provide the necessary stimulus for students to tell their own stories, or it may be the basis for a written account of the narrative.
- **Reception as part of production:** in many situations production can only continue in combination with the practice of receptive skills. Thus conversation between two or more people is a blend of listening and speaking; comprehension of what has been said is necessary for what the participant says next. In writing too what we write often depends upon what we read. Letters are often written in reply to other letters, and e-mail conversation proceeds much like spoken dialogues. Indeed, in the case of chat rooms and MOOs (permanent spaces on the Internet where a number of users can meet in real time in virtual rooms), the computer discourse takes place, like spoken conversation, in real time (see Teeler 2000: 31–35).

The fact that reception and production are so bound up together suggests strongly that we should not have students practise skills in isolation even if such a thing were possible. That is why many of the examples in this book show integrated skill sequences, where the practice of one skill leads naturally on to other linked activities.

- **Production enables reception:** productive skill work is a way of helping students with their receptive skills. Students can apply the insights they gain from their writing work to their reading. When they have tried to speak within certain genres, they are better attuned to understanding other people speaking in the same context.

C Problems and solutions

There are a number of reasons why students find language production difficult, especially with tasks at the communicative end of the communication continuum. However there are a number of ways in which teachers can help students get as much out of such activities as possible. In the first place, we need to match the tasks we ask students to perform with their language level. This means ensuring that they have the minimum language they would need to perform such a task. Secondly, we need to ensure that there is a purpose to the task (that it has some outcome) and that students are aware of this. We should also remember that students who are not used to speaking or writing spontaneously need to be helped to cultivate such habits. Teachers should not expect instant fluency and creativity; instead they should build up students' confidence 'bit by bit' (see Chapter 6, B1), giving them restricted

tasks first before prompting them to be more and more spontaneous later. Finally, teachers need to assess the problems caused by the language they need, and the difficulties which the topic or the genre might create.

C1 Language

Learners engaged in a productive task can become very frustrated when they just do not have the words or the grammar they need to express themselves. Sometimes, of course, they can research language they would like to use (see Chapter 12), but this can make writing a very cumbersome process, and in speaking such an option is anyway not available, at least not in spontaneous speech.

There are a number of steps we can take which will help students achieve success:

- **Supply key language:** before we ask students to take part in a spoken or written activity we may check their knowledge of key vocabulary, and help them with phrases or questions that will be helpful for the task – e.g. an interview situation or the writing of a particular kind of letter. However, where speaking is concerned, we should remember that language which students have only just met for the first time (whether grammatical, lexical, or phrasal) is often not available for instant use in spontaneous conversation; more exposure and practice is usually necessary before people can use new language fluently. We should not expect, therefore, that we can introduce new language and have students use it instantly in communicative activities.
- **Plan activities in advance:** because of the time-lag between our students meeting new language and their ability to use it fluently, we need to plan production activities that will provoke the use of language which they have had a chance to absorb at an earlier stage.

Language production activities which fall at the communicative end of the communication continuum are not just practice activities, however. One of the strategies which speakers need to develop is the art of getting round language problems in communication; writers, too, will have to find ways of saying things even though a lack of language makes this difficult.

C2 Topic and genre

If students are not interested in the topics we are asking them to write or speak about, they are unlikely to invest their language production with the same amount of effort as they would if they were excited by the subject matter. If they are completely unfamiliar with the genre we are asking them to write in, for example, they may find it difficult to engage with the task we have given them.

In order to write or speak successfully it helps if we 'know what we are talking about'. Yet the variety in a general English classroom sometimes means that students are at times expected to write or speak about topics they have little knowledge of.

When students with language limitations are asked to work with topics that do not interest them, perhaps in unfamiliar genres, and without the necessary

information, then language production activities suffer. We need to have ways of avoiding such a scenario:

- **Choose interesting topics:** although there is no magical way of ensuring that our students will be engaged with the topics we offer them, it is nevertheless important to try and find the type of tasks (and the topic material) which will involve the members of our classes.

One way of doing this is to use our instinct, but this is unreliable. It may be better to find out from students what their favourite topics are through interviews and questionnaires – or, by observing them (see Chapter 4, B8) – and then come to conclusions about what kinds of topics seem to produce the best results.

However, it is worth reminding ourselves that even unpromising tasks and topics can be invested with success if teachers can think of ways of engaging their students with them.

- **Create interest in the topic:** because we want students to be engaged in the task we are asking them to become involved in, we will want to create interest in the topic which the activity explores.

We can create interest by talking about the topic and communicating enthusiasm. We can have students discuss the topic in 'buzz groups' (see Chapter 19, B3) to get them involved in it, or we can ask the group if anyone knows anything about the topic and can therefore tell the others about it. We can ask students to think about what they might say or write and give them opportunities to come up with opinions about the topic before the activity starts.

- **Activate schemata:** even though students are now interested in a topic, they may find it difficult to take part with any enthusiasm if they are unfamiliar with the genre the task asks them to work in. For this reason, we should give them time to do things such as discuss what happens in interviews if they are going to role-play an interview, or show them examples of typical letters written to newspapers before we ask them to write one themselves.
- **Vary topics and genre:** variety, as a cornerstone of good planning (see Chapter 22, A and B) does not just apply to the activities we ask students to be involved in. It is also important to vary the topics we offer them so that we cater for the variety of interests within the class. Our chances of organising successful language production activities over a period of time will be greatly enhanced if we provide a varied diet of topic and activity.

It is also vitally important to vary the genres we ask our students to work with if we want them to gain confidence in writing and speaking in different situations.

- **Provide necessary information:** when we plan a writing or speaking task we need to ask ourselves which bits of information are absolutely essential for the task to be a success and then give that information to our students before they start. We cannot expect them to role-play if they do not know who they are

supposed to be and what they are supposed to achieve. We cannot ask them to write a report if they do not have the necessary facts at their disposal.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Interacting with an audience**

Making communication as informative as required and amending it on the basis of participant reaction were major features of the 'cooperative principle' (H Grice 1975).

- **Dealing with difficulties when speaking**

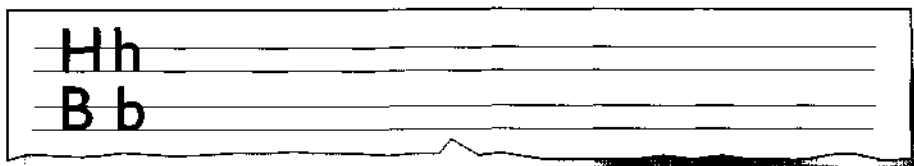
See M Bygate (1987: Chapter 5).

A Writing conventions

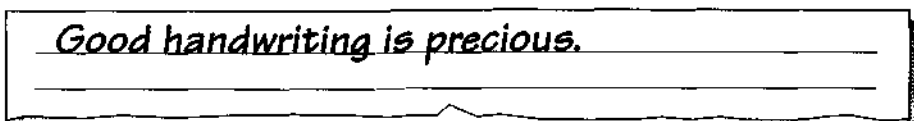
Written text has a number of conventions which separate it out from speaking. Apart from differences in grammar (see Chapter 2, A1) and vocabulary, there are issues of letter, word, and text formation, manifested by handwriting, spelling, and layout and punctuation.

A1 Handwriting

Many students whose native-language orthography is very different from English have difficulty forming English letters. Such students should get special training. This might involve practice in the formation of individual letters as the following example demonstrates:



Sometimes the teacher can write sentences out neatly with spaces underneath for the student to imitate that writing:



Handwriting is a personal issue. Students should not all be expected to use exactly the same style, despite copying exercises like the one above. Nevertheless badly-formed letters may influence the reader against the writer, something which is undesirable whether the work is the product of some creative task or, more seriously, work that is going to be assessed in a test or exam. We should encourage students with problematic handwriting to improve it.

Though more and more written communication takes place from a computer keyboard, handwriting is still important for personal letters, written assignments, and most (but not all) exams (see the Chapter notes on pages 333–334).

A2 Spelling

Although incorrect spelling does not often prevent the understanding of a written message, it can adversely affect the reader's judgement. All too often bad spelling is perceived as a lack of education or care.

One of the reasons that spelling is difficult for students of English is that the correspondence between the sound of a word and the way it is spelt is not always obvious (see Chapter 2, D4). A single sound (or more correctly, a single phoneme) may have many different spellings (*paw, poor, pore, pour, daughter, Sean*), and the same spelling may have many different sounds (*or, word, information, worry, correspond*). When students work on different phonemes, we need to draw their attention to the common spellings of those phonemes. We should also get them to look at different ways of pronouncing the same letters (or combinations of letters) or have them do exercises to discover spelling rules (see Chapter 13, B4). When students come across new words we can ask them what other words they know with the same kinds of spelling or sounds. When they listen to tapes they can study transcripts and/or copy down sections of the tape.

An issue that makes spelling difficult for some students is the fact that not all varieties of English spell the same words in the same way. Which is correct: *color* or *colour*, and *theater* or *theatre*? How do we decide between the use of *s* and *z* in words like *apologise* and *customize*. What position can we take about those Internet users who seem to enjoy breaking spelling rules?

To help make things clear, we should get our students to focus on a particular variety of English (British or American English, for example) as a spelling model for them to aspire to. But we should also make them aware of other spelling varieties, drawing their attention to dictionary entries which show such differences.

One of the best ways to help students improve their spelling is through reading, especially extensively (see Chapter 15, A1). We can also draw their attention to spelling problems and explain why they occur. Copying from written models is one way to do this; when students see and reflect on their copying mistakes, their spelling 'consciousness' is raised (Porte 1995).

A3 Layout and punctuation

Different writing communities (both between and within cultures) obey different punctuation and layout conventions in communications such as letters, reports, and publicity. These are frequently non-transferable from one community or language to another. Such differences are easily seen in the different punctuation conventions for the quotation of direct speech which different languages use, or the way in which commas are used instead of/as much as full stops in certain languages, while comma 'overuse' is frowned on by many writers and editors of English. Some punctuation conventions, such as the capitalisation of names, months, and the pronoun *I*, are specific to only one or a few languages. Though punctuation is frequently a matter of personal style, violation of well-established customs makes a piece of writing look awkward to many readers.

Different genres of writing are laid out differently; business and personal letters are different from each other, and e-mails have conventions all of their own. Newspaper articles are laid out in quite specific ways, and certain kinds of 'small ads' in magazines follow conventional formats (see Chapter 2, c4). To be successful as writers in our own or another language, we need to be aware of these layouts and use/modify them when appropriate to get our message across as clearly as we can.

B Approaches to student writing

There are a number of different approaches to the practice of writing skills both in and outside the classroom. We need to choose between them, deciding whether we want students to focus more on the process of writing than its product, whether we want them to study different written genres, whether we want to encourage creative writing – either individually or cooperatively – and how the computer can be a useful writing tool. We need to be aware of the different roles we can and should assume for writing activities.

31 Process and product

In the teaching of writing we can focus on the product of that writing or on the writing process itself. When concentrating on the product we are only interested in the aim of a task and in the end product. Those who advocate a process approach to writing, however, pay attention to the various stages that any piece of writing goes through. By spending time with learners on pre-writing phases, editing, redrafting, and finally 'publishing' their work, a process approach aims to get to the heart of the various skills that should be employed when writing.

In its simplest form a process approach asks students to consider the procedure of putting together a good piece of work. We might, for example, discuss the concept of first and final drafts with our students and then ask them to say whether the following activities take place at first or final stages, and to put them in the best order:

- a Check language use (grammar, vocabulary, linkers).
- b Check punctuation (and layout).
- c Check your spelling.
- d Check your writing for unnecessary repetition of words and/or information.
- e Decide on the information for each paragraph, and the order the paragraphs should go in.
- f Note down various ideas.
- g Select the best ideas for inclusion.
- h Write a clean copy of the corrected version.
- i Write out a rough version.

First draft	Final draft
f,	

In reality, the writing process is more complex than this of course, and the various stages of drafting, reviewing, redrafting and writing, etc. are done in a recursive way: we loop backwards and move forwards between these various stages (Tribble 1997: 37–39). Thus at the editing stage we may feel the need to go back to a pre-writing phase and think again; we may edit bits of our writing as we draft it.

Ron White and Valerie Arndt are keen to stress that ‘writing is *re*-writing; that *re*-vision – seeing with new eyes – has a central role to play in the act of creating text’ (White and Arndt 1991: 5). In their model, process writing is an interrelated set of recursive stages which include:

- drafting
- structuring (ordering information, experimenting with arrangements, etc.)
- reviewing (checking context, connections, assessing impact, editing)
- focusing (that is making sure you are getting the message across you want to get across)
- generating ideas and evaluation (assessing the draft and/or subsequent drafts)

White and Arndt’s model can be represented diagrammatically, as in Figure 23:

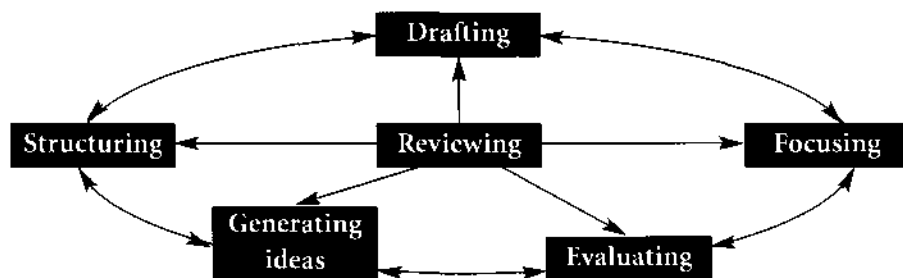


FIGURE 23: White and Arndt’s process writing model

One of the disadvantages of getting students to concentrate on the process of writing is that it takes time: time to brainstorm ideas or collect them in some other way; time to draft a piece of writing and then, with the teacher’s help perhaps, review it and edit it in various ways before, perhaps, changing the focus, generating more ideas, redrafting, re-editing and so on. This cannot be done in fifteen minutes. However, the various stages may well involve discussion, research, language study, and a considerable amount of interaction between teacher and students and between the students themselves so that when process writing is handled appropriately it stretches across the whole curriculum.

There are times when process writing is simply not appropriate, either because classroom time is limited, or because we want students to write quickly as part of a communication game, or when working alone, we want them to compose a letter or brief story on the spot.

B2 Writing and genre

In a genre approach to writing students study texts in the genre they are going to be writing before they embark on their own writing. Thus, if we want them to write

business letters of various kinds we let them look at typical models of such letters before starting to compose their own. If we want them to write newspaper articles we have them study real examples to discover facts about construction and specific language use which is common in that genre. This forms part of the pre-writing phase.

Chris Tribble (1997: 148–150) suggests the following ‘data collection’ procedure as a prelude to the writing of letters to newspapers. Students are asked to spend some time every day, for a week, looking at letters to the newspapers. They are asked to make notes of particular vocabulary and/or grammar constructions in the letters. For example we might tell them to find any language which expresses approval or disapproval, or to note down any *if*-sentences they come across. They can use dictionaries or any other resources they need to check understanding. At the end of a week they bring the results of their research to the class and make a list of commonly occurring lexis or grammar patterns.

The teacher now gets the students to read controversial articles in today’s paper and plan letters (using language they have come across in the data collection phase) in response to those articles. Where possible they should actually send their letters in the hope that they will be published.

A genre approach is especially appropriate for students of English for Specific Purposes (see Chapter 1, B3). But it is also highly useful for general English students if we want them, even at low levels, to produce written work they can be proud of.

Students who are writing within a certain genre need to consider a number of different factors. They need to have knowledge of the topic, the conventions and style of the genre, and the context in which their writing will be read, and by whom. Many of our students’ writing tasks do not have an audience other than the teacher, of course, but that does not stop us and them working as if they did.

Asking students to imitate a given style could be seen as extremely prescriptive, encouraging them to see writing as a form of ‘reproduction’ rather than as a creative act. Imitation is only a first stage, however, designed as much to inform as to enforce adherence to strict genre rules. In the end it is up to them to decide what to do with the data they have collected (however this has been done).

B3 Creative writing

The term ‘creative writing’ suggests imaginative tasks such as writing poetry, stories, and plays. Such activities have a number of features to recommend them. Chief amongst these is that the end result is often felt to be some kind of achievement, and that ‘most people feel pride in their work and want it to be read’ (Ur 1996: 169). This is significantly more marked for creative writing than for other more standard written products.

Creative writing is ‘a journey of self-discovery, and self-discovery promotes effective learning’ (Gaffield-Vile 1998: 31). When teachers set up imaginative writing tasks so that their students are thoroughly engaged, those students frequently strive harder than usual to produce a greater variety of correct and appropriate language than they might for more routine assignments. While students are writing a simple

poem about someone they care about, or while they are trying to construct a narrative or tell stories of their childhood, for example, they are tapping into their own experiences. This provides powerful motivation to find the right words to express such experience. Creative writing also provokes the kind of input–output relationship we described in Chapter 17, B1.

In order to bolster the ‘product pride’ that students may feel when they have written creatively, we need to provide an appropriate reader audience. Apart from ourselves as teachers, the whole class can also be such an audience. We can put students’ writing up on a class noticeboard, or copy it and include it in class magazines. We can make anthologies and distribute them to friends, parents, and other teachers; we can, if we want, set up web sites for our classes on the Internet (see Chapter 10F).

There is always a danger that students may find writing imaginatively difficult. Having ‘nothing to say’ they may find creative writing a painful and de-motivating experience, associated in their minds with a sense of frustration and failure. A lot will depend upon how we encourage them (see B6 below). It is also important not to expect whole compositions from the very first. We need to build up creative writing bit by bit (see Chapter 6, B1), starting with phrases and sentences before expecting whole compositions.

B4 Writing as a cooperative activity

Although many people in their personal lives write on their own, whether at home or at work, in language classes teachers and students can take advantage of the presence of others to make writing a cooperative activity, with great benefit to all those involved. In one example of such an approach, group writing allowed the lecturer to give more detailed and constructive feedback since she was dealing with a small number of groups rather than many individual students (Boughey 1997). Individual students also found themselves saying and writing things they might not have come up with on their own, and the group’s research was broader than an individual’s normally was.

Cooperative writing works well with both process and genre-based approaches. In the first case, reviewing and evaluation are greatly enhanced by having more than one person working on it, and the generation of ideas is frequently more lively with two or more people involved than it is when writers work on their own. In genre-based writing, two heads analyse genre-specific texts as well as, if not better than, one head would do, and often create genre-specific texts more successfully as a result.

Writing in groups, whether as part of a long process or as part of a short game-like communicative activity, can be greatly motivating for students, including as it does, not only writing, but research, discussion, peer evaluation and group pride in a group accomplishment.

B5 Using the computer

Where schools have computers which students have access to, there are many good reasons for using them for writing, as the following list shows:

- A word-processing package removes the problem of poor handwriting that some students suffer from.
- A word-processing package allows the competent user to edit his or her material at great speed and with great facility.
- Spellcheckers can ease the task of achieving correct spelling.
- If students are working in groups, a computer screen can sometimes be far more visible to the whole group than a piece of paper might be.

A computer screen frequently allows students to see their writing more objectively. It also has the advantage of greatly enhancing the participation of individuals when they are working with their colleagues in pairs or groups.

An important use of the computer is as the means of creating 'mouse-pals', the e-mail equivalent of pen-pals. Getting students to write e-mails in English to others around the world can be extremely motivating. The communication is immediate and exciting, and may well stimulate and motivate students where other letter writing does not.

Teachers can have students e-mail each other within a school provided that they can set up the requisite number of individual addresses. If teachers can make contact with another school, they can then get lists of those students' addresses and have their own students write to individuals at the other school.

E-mails represent a genre all of their own where linguistic accuracy is not so formally important. But despite this, we can still encourage students to 'sit back' and consider the results of their efforts before clicking on the 'send' icon.

86 The roles of the teacher

Although the teacher needs to deploy some or all of the usual roles (see Chapter 4B) when students are asked to write, the ones that are especially important are as follows:

- **Motivator:** one of our principal roles in writing tasks will be to motivate the students, creating the right conditions for the generation of ideas, persuading them of the usefulness of the activity, and encouraging them to make as much effort as possible for maximum benefit. This may require special and prolonged effort on our part for longer process-writing sequences.

Where students are involved in a creative writing activity it is usually the case that some find it easier to generate ideas than others. During poem-writing activities, for example, we may need to suggest lines to those who cannot think of anything, or at least prompt them with our own ideas.

- **Resource:** especially during more extended writing tasks, we should be ready to supply information and language where necessary. We need to tell students that we are available and be prepared to look at their work as it progresses, offering advice and suggestions in a constructive and tactful way. Because writing takes longer than conversation, for example, there is usually time for discussion with individual students, or students working in pairs or groups.

- **Feedback provider:** giving feedback on writing tasks demands special care (see Chapter 7D). Teachers should respond positively and encouragingly to the content of what the students have written. When offering correction teachers should choose what and how much to focus on based on what students need at this particular stage of their studies, and on the tasks they have undertaken.

C Writing lesson sequences

In the following examples the writing activity is specified, together with its particular focus. The way that the text can be used within a lesson is explained.

Example 1: Paul's business trip

Activity: punctuating a text

Focus: writing conventions

Age: young adult and above

Level: elementary

In this task students practise basic punctuation such as capital letters, commas, apostrophes and full stops. To complete the task, they need to be aware of where a speaker would pause to breathe when reading the text out loud, as this will help them punctuate the task correctly.

Students are told to look at the pictures and listen to the story. While and after they listen, they have to change the unpunctuated text by using capital letters, commas, apostrophes and full stops (the ends of the first two sentences are given):



it was friday and it was pauls big
business trip to new york in america / he
got up at 5 am got dressed had a cup of
coffee and read the newspaper / at 6 am
a taxi arrived to take him to london
airport paul locked the door and put his
bags in the taxi but he left his briefcase
in the house his business papers his
money his credit cards his plane ticket
and his passport were all in his briefcase
luckily the taxi driver asked paul if he
had his ticket paul ran back into the
house and got his briefcase but this time
he ran out of the house and left his keys
inside

From *Elementary Matters Workbook* by G Cunningham (Pearson Education Ltd)

If the unpunctuated text can be displayed on computer screens, students can discuss as a whole group how to punctuate it, helping each other to understand how punctuation works.

Example 2: The genre analyser

Activity: writing a review

Focus: identifying genre features

Age: young adult and above

Level: upper intermediate and above

In this sequence we want our students to write reviews of plays, concerts, or films they have seen, and to do this in a way which is appropriate for the kind of audience (either real or imaginary) they are writing for.

First we ask our students to look at a collection of reviews of plays and films, from newspapers, magazines, and/or on the Internet. For each one they have to use the following reviewers' 'genre-analysing' kit:

REVIEWERS' GENRE-ANALYSING KIT

Answer the following questions about the review you are reading:

MEANING

What is being reviewed?

Does the reviewer like it?

What, if anything, was especially good about the thing/event being reviewed?

What, if anything, was especially bad about the thing/event being reviewed?

Who, if anybody, deserves credit for their part in it?

Who, if anybody, should be criticised for their part in it?

What, if anything, does the thing/event remind the reviewer of?

CONSTRUCTION

How is the headline/caption constructed?

What does each paragraph contain, and how are the paragraphs sequenced?

What grammar and lexis is used to show approval?

What grammar and lexis is used to show disapproval?

By studying the reviews and answering the questions above about them, students build up a picture of how they are usually written.

We can now show them a video or get them to go to a play or a film. While watching it they make notes about such items as the plot, the characters, the performances, the music, the cinematography and the special effects.

Afterwards students draft their reviews, using language – if appropriate – from the reviews they read previously. The teacher can go round, encouraging and helping. If there is time he or she can read the full drafts and give constructive feedback on each one. Students then write their final version, and later, when all the reviews have been read, the class can vote on the best one.

Writing reviews can be greatly enhanced by having students write in pairs or groups, keying their opinions directly into a word processor. The discussion and focus which the computer screen provides will add to the creative nature of the activity in many ways.

Studying different writing genres – whether through a ‘genre-analysing kit’, data collection, or even putting a variety of texts into a corpus to run with concordancing packages (see Chapter 12 c) – is a vital first stage in having students do their own writing in specific genres.

Example 3: A poem

Activity: ‘running dictation’

Focus: writing for fun, concentrating on writing correctly

Age: any

Level: pre-intermediate and above

In the following example (adapted from Davis and Rinvoluceri 1988) the basic idea of a dictation has been subverted somewhat so that students dictate to each other, making the writing that happens as a result of this enjoyable and perplexing in turns.

Students are put into groups. The teacher puts an A4 copy of the following poem on a table at the front of the classroom:

A man bought a piano for his wife
which she constantly tunes
and polishes. He says her hands and fingers
are less flexible than once they were
which is depressing.

She came home and she found it there,
a big surprise. Its brown respectability
dominates the room. He watches her straight back
and fumbling fingers in the evening city, lit
by brakes and klaxons.

Each group sends a representative to the front of the class to read only the first line of the poem, memorise it, and then run back to their group and dictate the line. When this has happened, groups send a second (and then a third) representative to read the second (and third) line(s) and take that back to their groups and dictate it.

The activity goes on in this way until one group has the whole poem. The teacher can then give that group a further task while the others finish, or stop the class and show everyone a complete version of the poem for them to check their own version against. They are then asked to decide on their own title for the poem (originally called ‘Piano Piece’).

An alternative procedure at this point is to ask all the students to write down, in complete silence, what the poem means for them – however flippant or profound their response is. They can, for example, write ‘nothing’ if they feel like it. When they have done this they stand up, still in silence, and go round reading what other people have written. The effect of writing and silence in this way can be dramatic and enjoyable.

Example 4: Julia's story

Activity: story circle

Focus: cooperative narrative writing

Age: any

Level: elementary and above

In this activity students join together to write a story. But there is an element of fun built into the activity and the results are not intended to be taken too seriously.

Students are put into groups of about five, sitting in circles. The teacher then dictates a sentence such as:

That day, when Julia came back from work, she knew something was different.

Each student writes the sentence at the top of their piece of paper. They are then asked to write the next sentence in Julia's story; all they have to do is write one sentence which follows on from this introduction.

When all the students have done this the teacher tells them to pass their pieces of paper to the person on their left. They all now have to write the next sentence of the story which has just been passed to them. When they have finished, the teacher asks everyone to pass their papers to the person on their left. They all now have to write the next sentence of the story on the piece of paper in front of them.

The procedure continues until the pieces of paper return to their original owners. At this point the teacher tells everyone to write a sentence to finish the story off – however ridiculous!

The students are then encouraged to read out the stories they have just finished. The results are often highly amusing, and because many hands have collaborated in the process, nobody has to suffer individual responsibility for the final versions. The teacher should make sure that quite a few of the stories are heard by the class, and that the rest are available for everyone else to read.

This kind of group writing is enjoyable and useful for developing writing fluency. However, it should be used sparingly, otherwise it will lose its main attraction of spontaneity.

Example 5: Lady Margaret Beaufort

Activity: looking at notes

Focus: abbreviations and other note-taking conventions

Age: adult

Level: advanced

If students are to write complex compositions they will need to make notes when they plan their work. In this example at the advanced level students are first asked to think of at least three situations when they might need or want to take notes. They are then asked to say when abbreviations, punctuation, initials, numbered points and drawings might help them. They are then asked if they have any special methods that they personally find useful.

Students are then asked to say what the following signs and symbols mean and to write examples of each in an appropriate context:

a	e.g.	e	c. 500 people	i	=
b	etc.	f	Shakespeare et al.	j	<
c	N.B.	g	→	k	>
d	15th c.	h	∴	l	&

From *English Panorama 1* by F O'Dell (Cambridge University Press)

They are now given the following text and task:

<u>Lady Margaret Beaufort. b. 1443</u>
= d. of Sir John Beaufort, 1st Duke of Somerset
= m. of Henry VII (b. 1457)
1455 (!) married Edmund Tudor
During part of Wars of Roses (1455–85, betw.
Houses of Lancaster & York) MB imprisoned at
Pembroke by Yorkists.
Lancastrian claim to Eng. throne passed to MB
as grand-d. of John of Gaunt (after extinction
of male line)
Henry ascended throne after defeat Richard III
1485 (Battle of Bosworth Field)
1464 m. 2 Henry Stafford (s of Duke of
Buckingham)
1475 m. 3 Thomas Stanley (1st Earl of Derby)
Founded Christ's and St John's Colls., Camb.
Endowed 2 divinity professorships at Oxford
& Cambridge
Patron of Will Caxton (1st Eng. printer)
d. 1509

Subsequently students read and listen to additional information related to the topic which they have to make notes on.

The whole sequence has allowed students to consider the business of note-taking and the symbols we use. We could also show students three or four different note-taking methods (numbered points, a spidergram, or points recorded in no particular style or order) and ask which they would find most useful (see page 338).

Example 6: Women in the US

Activity: report writing

Focus: coherence

Age: adult

Level: advanced

In this sequence students write a report based on the following statistics about women in the USA:

Women in the U.S. – A New Look

NUMBER:

More than half of the population

The nation's 119.1 million females comprise 51.3 percent of the total population. Ten years from now they will number 130.3 million, but their proportion of the total population will be about the same as today. Now there are 88.4 million women age 18 and up.

RACE:

6 of 7 are white



Of all females – 101.6 million or 85 percent are whites, 14.6 million or 12 percent are blacks, 2.9 million are of other races.

AGE:

Older than men on the average

The median age of females is 31.9 years compared with 29.3 years for males. And females are getting older: in 10 years their median age will be 34.5 years, and by the year 2000, 36.8 years.



LIFE SPAN:

Women live longer than men

The average female lives to a little more than 78 years, or nearly eight years longer than the average male. The gap in life expectancy is widening – it was little more than seven years two decades ago.



EDUCATION:

More likely to attend college



Among persons age 18 to 24, 35 percent of women are enrolled in college compared with 34 percent of men. At last count, 23.4 percent of graduating medical doctors were women, as were 30.2 percent of lawyers.

MARRIAGE:

More women are putting it off

Just over half of the women age 20–34 have never been married, compared with 35.8 percent in 1970 and 28.4 percent in 1960. But 83 percent of women ultimately do marry.



FAMILIES:

Those headed by women rise sharply

More than 1 in 7 families, 9.1 million – are headed by women. The number has risen by 85 percent since 1970, largely because of the climbing divorce rate.



CHILDREN:

Women want fewer offspring



Of childless married women age 18–34, 23 percent expect to have one child or none, while 72 percent expect to bear two or three children. Only 5 percent expect four or more. If fulfilled, these plans mean little population growth.

POLITICAL POWER:

Edge in numbers at the top



Women of voting age are 52.2 percent of all Americans age 18 and up. With women living longer than men, the proportion is growing.

From *Language Issues* by G. Porter-Ladousse (Pearson Education Ltd)

They start, in groups of three, by deciding which topics go together to make a coherent paragraph (as an example they are told that the topic of children probably goes well with the topic of families).

Each person in the group chooses one of the paragraphs they have planned and writes it up. They are told to link the information together with cohesive devices they have studied, especially contrasting two pieces of information with words such as *whereas*, *but*, *in spite of*, etc.

In their groups students now study their three paragraphs and work out what order they should go in and how to join them together. If they have access to computer screens, each group has a chance to make immediate changes of sequence and language.

When the complete reports have been finished, they can be put up on the board or included in a web site so that they can be compared with other groups' versions. A discussion can now develop about which versions are more coherent or easy to read.

This sequence shows how planning the order of ideas in a text, coupled with the use of previously studied cohesive language, can produce well thought out reports which can then provide good material for comparison and discussion.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Spelling and pronunciation correspondence**

See J O'Connor and C Fletcher (1989), G Kelly (2000: Appendix C), and R Shemesh and S Waller (2000).

- **Genre writing**

C Tribble (1997: Chapters 5 and 6) makes a strong case for a genre-based approach. R Badger and G White (2000) advocate a 'process genre' approach!

- **Computers**

An early but still extremely useful article on word processing for students is A Piper (1987).

- **Pen-pals/mouse-pals**

See H Hennigan (1999) on how pen-pals became, in his words, 'keypals'. See also D Teeler (2000: 175–176).

There are many pen-pal sites on the Internet as any search will show. Typical of what is on offer at the time of writing are:

<http://www.penpalgarden.com/> – a large free pen-pal site where you fill in details about yourself and indicate whether you want pen-pals of the same or opposite gender.

<http://www.penpal.net> – one of the largest free pen-pal sites on the Internet, you can select contacts by age and country.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/ngo/penpal/index.html> – where children are matched to similar pen-pals around the world. There is a small charge per person.

- **Dictation**

The renaissance of various forms of dictation (such as the poetry dictation in this chapter) can be chiefly ascribed to P Davis and M Rinvoluceri (1988).

19

Speaking

A Elements of speaking

The ability to speak fluently presupposes not only a knowledge of language features, but also the ability to process information and language 'on the spot'.

A1 Language features

Among the elements necessary for spoken production (as opposed to the production of practice examples in language drills, for example), are the following:

- **Connected speech:** effective speakers of English need to be able not only to produce the individual phonemes of English (as in saying *I would have gone*) but also to use fluent 'connected speech' (as in *I'd've gone*). In connected speech sounds are modified (assimilation), omitted (elision), added (linking *r*), or weakened (through contractions and stress patterning) (see Chapter 2, D4 and D5). It is for this reason that we should involve students in activities designed specifically to improve their connected speech (see Chapter 13, B5).
- **Expressive devices:** native speakers of English change the pitch and stress of particular parts of utterances, vary volume and speed, and show by other physical and non-verbal (paralinguistic) means how they are feeling (especially in face-to-face interaction). The use of these devices contributes to the ability to convey meanings. They allow the extra expression of emotion and intensity. Students should be able to deploy at least some of such suprasegmental features and devices in the same way if they are to be fully effective communicators.
- **Lexis and grammar:** spontaneous speech is marked by the use of a number of common lexical phrases, especially in the performance of certain language functions (see Chapter 2, C1). Teachers should therefore supply a variety of phrases for different functions such as agreeing or disagreeing, expressing surprise, shock, or approval. Where students are involved in specific speaking contexts such as a job interview, we can prime them, in the same way, with certain useful phrases which they can produce at various stages of an interaction.
- **Negotiation language:** effective speaking benefits from the negotiatory language we use to seek clarification and to show the structure of what we are saying.

We often need to 'ask for clarification' when we are listening to someone else talk. For students this is especially crucial. A useful thing teachers can do, therefore, is to offer them phrases such as the following:

- (I'm sorry) I didn't quite catch that.
- (I'm sorry) I don't understand.
- What exactly does X mean?
- Could you explain that again, please?

A way of getting students to practise this language is to give individuals cards which each have one of these phrases written on them. We can then start to explain something but insert words or explanations that are purposefully incomprehensible or obscure. Students then have to use the language forms written on their cards to interrupt and ask what we mean.

Speakers also need to 'structure their discourse' if they want to be understood, especially in more 'writing-like' speech such as giving presentations. They need to use certain phrases to highlight the content structure of their discourse. They use negotiation language to show the structure of their thoughts, or reformulate what they are saying in order to be clearer, especially when they can see that they are not being understood.

We can help our students to structure discourse by giving them language such as the following:

- The important thing to grasp is that ...
- To begin with/And finally ...
- What I am trying to say is that ...
- What I mean is ...
- The point I am trying to make is that ...
- ... or, to put it another way ...,
- etc.

If students are going to give a presentation they can be told to include this kind of structuring/reformulating language. We can provoke its use, too, by giving those who are listening role cards like the following:

Without speaking, show that you do not understand what the speaker is saying, by looking confused, scratching your head in confusion, etc. However, only do this once.

Without speaking, show that you do not agree with something the speaker is saying, by looking angry, shaking your head, etc. However, only do this once.

A2 Mental/social processing

If part of a speaker's productive ability involves the knowledge of language skills such as those discussed above, success is also dependent upon the rapid processing skills that talking necessitates.

- **Language processing:** effective speakers need to be able to process language in their own heads and put it into coherent order so that it comes out in forms that are not only comprehensible, but also convey the meanings that are intended. Language processing involves the retrieval of words and phrases from memory and their assembly into syntactically and propositionally appropriate sequences. One of the main reasons for including speaking activities in language lessons is to help students develop habits of rapid language processing in English.
- **Interacting with others:** most speaking involves interaction with one or more participants. This means that effective speaking also involves a good deal of listening, an understanding of how the other participants are feeling, and a knowledge of how linguistically to take turns or allow others to do so (see Chapter 17, A2).
- **(On-the-spot) information processing:** quite apart from our response to others' feelings, we also need to be able to process the information they tell us the moment we get it. The longer it takes for 'the penny to drop' the less effective we are as instant communicators. However, it should be remembered that this instant response is very culture-specific, and is not prized by speakers in many other language communities.

B Classroom speaking activities

Many of the classroom speaking activities which are currently in use fall at or near the communicative end of the communication continuum (see Chapter 6, A4). In this section we will look at some of the most widely-used.

B1 Acting from a script

We can ask our students to act out scenes from plays and/or their coursebooks, sometimes filming the results (see Example 5 in Chapter 20, D2). Students will often act out dialogues they have written themselves. This frequently involves them in coming out to the front of the class.

When choosing who should come out to the front of the class we need to be careful not to choose the shyest students first, and we need to work to create the right kind of supportive atmosphere in the class. We need to give students time to rehearse their dialogues before they are asked to perform them. Where the whole class is working on the same dialogue or play extract, we can go through the script as if we were theatre directors, drawing attention to appropriate stress, intonation, and speed. By giving students practice in these things before they give their final performances, we ensure that acting out is both a learning and a language producing activity.

B2 Communication games

Games which are designed to provoke communication between students frequently depend on an information gap (see Chapter 6, A4) so that one student has to talk to a partner in order to solve a puzzle, draw a picture (describe and draw), put things in the right order (describe and arrange), or find similarities and differences between pictures.

Television and radio games, imported into the classroom, often provide good fluency activities, as the following examples demonstrate. In 'Twenty Questions' the chairperson thinks of an object and tells a team that the object is either *animal*, *vegetable*, or *mineral* – or a combination of two or three of these. The team has to find out what the object is asking only 'yes/no' questions such as *Can you use it in the kitchen?* or *Is it bigger than a person?* They get points if they guess the answer in twenty questions or less.

'Just a Minute' is a long running comedy contest where each participant has to speak for sixty seconds on a subject they are given by the chairperson/teacher without hesitation, repetition, or deviation – or, in the case of language students, language mistakes. If another contestant hears any of these he or she interrupts, gets a point and carries on with the subject. The person who is speaking at the end of sixty seconds gets two points.

'Call My Bluff' involves two teams. Team A is given a word that members of the other team are unlikely to know. Team A finds a correct dictionary definition of the word and then makes up two false ones of their own. They read out their definitions and team B has to guess which is the correct one. Now team B reads out three definitions of their word (one correct and two false) and team A has to guess.

In other games, different tricks or devices are used to make fluent speaking amusing. In 'Fishbowl', for example, two students speak but at a prearranged signal one of the participants has to reach into the fishbowl and take out one of the many pieces of paper on which students have previously written phrases, questions, and sentences. They have to incorporate these into the conversation straight away.



Discussion

One of the reasons that discussions fail (when they do) is that students are reluctant to give an opinion in front of the whole class, particularly if they cannot think of anything to say and are not, anyway, confident of the language they might use to say it. Many students feel extremely exposed in discussion situations.

The 'buzz group' is one way in which a teacher can avoid such difficulties. All it means is that students have a chance for quick discussions in small groups before any of them are asked to speak in public. Because they have a chance to think of ideas and the language to express them with before being asked to talk in front of the whole class, the stress level of that eventual whole-class performance is reduced.

Buzz groups can be used for a whole range of discussions. For example, we might want students to predict the content of a reading text, or we may want them to talk about their reactions to it after they have read it. We might want them to discuss

what should be included in a news broadcast or have a quick conversation about the right kind of music for a wedding or party.

Another way in which we can train students to respond fluently and immediately is to insert 'instant comment' mini-activities into lessons. This involves showing them photographs or introducing topics at any stage of a lesson and nominating students to say the first thing that comes into their head.

The opposite extreme to informal buzz groups is the formal debate, where students prepare arguments in favour or against various propositions, so that, when the debate starts, the panel speakers produce well-rehearsed 'writing-like arguments', whereas others in the 'audience' pitch in with their own (less scripted) thoughts on the subject as the debate progresses.

A popular debating game which has survived many decades of use is the 'balloon debate', so called because it is based on a scenario in which a group of people are travelling in the basket of a balloon. Unfortunately, however, the balloon cannot take their weight. There is a leak, and unless someone leaves the balloon, they will all die. Students take on the role of a real-life person, either living or historical – from Confucius to Shakespeare, from Cleopatra to Marie Curie. They think up arguments about why they should be the survivors either individually, or in pairs or groups. After a first round of argument, everyone votes on who should be the first to jump. As more air escapes a second round means that one more person has to go, until, some rounds later, the eventual sole survivor is chosen.

Participants in a balloon debate can represent occupations rather than specific characters; they can take on the roles of different age groups, hobby enthusiasts, or societies.

Some discussions just happen in the middle of lessons; they are unprepared for by the teacher, but, if encouraged, can provide some of the most enjoyable and productive speaking in language classes. Their success will depend upon our ability to prompt and encourage and, perhaps, to change our attitude to errors and mistakes (see Chapter 7c) from one minute to the next. Pre-planned discussions, on the other hand, depend for their success upon the way we ask students to approach the task in hand.

One of the best ways of encouraging discussion is to provide activities which force students to reach a decision or a consensus, often as a result of choosing between specific alternatives. An example of this kind of activity (with particular relevance to schools) is where students consider a scenario in which an invigilator during a public exam catches a student copying from hidden notes. The class has to decide between a range of options, such as:

The invigilator should ignore it.
 She should give the student a sign to show that she's seen (so that the student will stop).
 She should call the family and tell them the student was cheating.
 She should inform the examining board so that the student will not be able to take that exam again.

The fact of having to make such an awkward choice gives the discussion a clear purpose, and an obvious outcome to aim for.

B4 Prepared talks

A popular kind of activity is the prepared talk where a student (or students) makes a presentation on a topic of their own choice. Such talks are not designed for informal spontaneous conversation; because they are prepared, they are more 'writing-like' than this (see Chapter 17, A3). However, if possible, students should speak from notes rather than from a script.

Prepared talks represent a defined and useful speaking genre, and if properly organised, can be extremely interesting for both speaker and listeners. Just as in process writing (see Chapter 18, B1) the development of the talk, from original ideas to finished work, will be of vital importance.

B5 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are useful because, by being pre-planned, they ensure that both questioner and respondent have something to say to each other. Depending upon how tightly designed they are, they may well encourage the natural use of certain repetitive language patterns – and thus be situated in the middle of our communication continuum (see Chapter 6, A4).

Students can design questionnaires on any topic that is appropriate. As they do so the teacher can act as a resource, helping them in the design process. The results obtained from questionnaires can then form the basis for written work, discussions, or prepared talks.

B6 Simulation and role-play

Many students derive great benefit from simulation and role-play. Students 'simulate' a real-life encounter (such as a business meeting, an encounter in an aeroplane cabin, or an interview) as if they were doing so in the real world, either as themselves in that meeting or aeroplane, or taking on the role of a character different from themselves or with thoughts and feelings they do not necessarily share. Simulation and role-play can be used to encourage general oral fluency, or to train students for specific situations especially where they are studying ESP (see Chapter 1, B3).

For a simulation to work it must, according to Ken Jones, have the following characteristics:

- **reality of function:** the students must not think of themselves as students, but as real participants in the situation.
- **a simulated environment:** the teacher says that the classroom is an airport check-in area, for example.
- **structure:** students must see how the activity is constructed and they must be given the necessary information to carry out the simulation effectively.

From K Jones (1982: 4–7)

In a role-play we add the element of giving the participants information about who they are, and what they think and feel. Thus we might tell a student that they are *a motorist who thinks that parking restrictions are unnecessary* or *You are Michelle and you want Robin to notice you, but you don't want him to know about your brother*, etc.

Role-plays are effective when they are open-ended, so that different people have different views of what the outcome should be, and a consensus has to be reached. That way there is a dynamic movement as the role-play progresses, with people clearly motivated to say as much or as little as they need to achieve their aims. In one such intermediate level activity ('Knife in the school') a boy has brought a large hunting knife into a school and the boy, his parents, the head teacher, and class teacher have a meeting to decide what must be done about it. The students take the role of one of these characters based on a role card which tells them how they feel (e.g. *Jo Glassman, teacher: Two of your pupils, Sean and Cathy, told you that they had seen the knife, but are afraid to confront Brian about it. You believe them absolutely even though you didn't actually see the knife yourself. However, you don't want Brian to know that Sean and Cathy are responsible for this meeting. You want to see Brian suspended from the school.*). In groups of five the students role-play the meeting, and at the end different groups discuss the decisions they have come to.

Clearly 'Knife in the school' might be inappropriate in some situations, but other role-plays such as planning meetings, television 'issue' shows, and public protest meetings are fairly easy to replicate in the classroom.

In a different kind of role-playing activity, students write the kind of questions they might ask anybody when they meet them first. Students are then given paintings by Goya, for example, and are asked to answer those questions as if they were characters from the painting (Cranmer 1996: 68–72). The same kind of imaginative interview role-play could be based around people in dramatic photographs.

Simulation and role-play went through a period of relative unpopularity, yet this is a pity since they have three distinct advantages. In the first place they can be good fun and thus motivating. Second, they allow hesitant students to be more forthright in their opinions and behaviour than they might be when speaking for themselves, since they do not have to take the same responsibility for what they are saying. Third, by broadening the world of the classroom to include the world outside, they allow students to use a much wider range of language than some more task-centred activities may do (see Chapter 6, A5).

7 The roles of the teacher

As with any other type of classroom procedure, teachers need to play a number of different roles (see Chapter 4B) during the speaking activities described above. However, three have particular relevance if we are trying to get students to speak fluently:

- **Prompter:** students sometimes get lost, cannot think of what to say next, or in some other way lose the fluency we expect of them. We can leave them to struggle out of such situations on their own, and indeed sometimes this may be the best option (see Chapter 7, c1). However, we may be able to help them and

the activity to progress by offering discrete suggestions. If this can be done supportively – without disrupting the discussion, or forcing students out of role – it will stop the sense of frustration that some students feel when they come to a ‘dead end’ of language or ideas.

- **Participant:** teachers should be good animators when asking students to produce language. Sometimes this can be achieved by setting up an activity clearly and with enthusiasm. At other times, however, teachers may want to participate in discussions or role-plays themselves. That way they can prompt covertly, introduce new information to help the activity along, ensure continuing student engagement, and generally maintain a creative atmosphere. However, in such circumstances they have to be careful that they do not participate too much, thus dominating the speaking and drawing all the attention to themselves.
- **Feedback provider:** the vexed question of when and how to give feedback in speaking activities is answered by considering carefully the effect of possible different approaches.

When students are in the middle of a speaking activity, over-correction may inhibit them and take the communicativeness out of the activity. On the other hand, helpful and gentle correction may get students out of difficult misunderstandings and hesitations. Everything depends upon our tact and the appropriacy of the feedback we give in particular situations.

When students have completed an activity it is vital that we allow them to assess what they have done and that we tell them what, in our opinion, went well. We will respond to the content of the activity as well as the language used. Feedback for oral fluency work is described in detail in Chapter 7, C3.

C Speaking lesson sequences

In the following examples the speaking activity is specified, together with its particular focus.

Example 1: Experts

Activity: communication game

Focus: controlled language processing

Age: any

Level: elementary and above

The following game-like activity based on a London ‘Comedy Store’ routine is used by the writer Ken Wilson (Wilson 1997) for getting students to think and speak quickly.

The class chooses four or five students to be a panel of ‘experts’. They come and sit in a row facing the class. The class then chooses a subject that these students are going to have to be experts on. This can be anything, from transport policy to film music, from fish to football. In pairs or groups, the class write down the questions they want to ask the experts about this particular subject. The teacher can go round the class checking the questions as they do this. Finally, once the questions have been written, they are put to the experts.

The element of this activity that makes it amusing is that each expert only says one word at a time, so the sentence is only gradually built up. Because the experts often cannot think of how to continue it, it can ramble on in ever more extreme contortions until someone is lucky enough or clever enough to be in a position to finish it (with just one word). The following example shows how it might begin:

Question: How do fish breathe?

Expert 1: The

Expert 2: answer

Expert 3: to

Expert 4: this

Expert 1: question

Expert 2: is

Expert 3: an

Expert 4: answer

Expert 1: that ...

etc.

'Experts' encourages even reluctant speakers on the panel to speak, even if (or perhaps because) they only have to produce one word at a time. It keeps both experts and questioners engaged in the construction of utterances in a controlled but often surreal environment.

Example 2: Films

Activity: questionnaire

Focus: lexis and grammar, interacting with others

Age: young adult and above

Level: lower intermediate and above

In this sequence the class have recently been working on the contrasting uses of the present perfect and the past simple.

The activity starts when the teacher talks to the students about the five or six most popular films that are currently on show or which have been extremely popular in the last six months or a year. They are then told that they are going to find out which of these films is the most popular one in the class.

The teacher hands out the following questionnaire form – or writes it on the board and has the students copy it. They put the names of the films they have discussed in the left-hand column.

Name of film	Tick if seen	Good (✓✓), satisfactory (✓), bad (X) or very bad (XX)

The class now discuss the kinds of questions they can use, e.g. *Have you seen X? What did you think of it?* In pairs students now interview each other and ask if they have seen any of the films and what they thought of them. They complete the charts about their partner.

The teacher now gets a student up to the board and asks them to fill in the chart based on what students have found out, e.g. *How many people have seen X? and How many people thought that X was very good?* This can then lead on to a discussion of the films in question. Students can be encouraged to say which was the best bit of one of the films, who their favourite actors are, etc. The results of the questionnaires can be put on the board.

Questionnaires are often the first stage in much longer sequences, leading on to written reports and discussions. In this case, for example, students can use the questionnaire results for discussion or to write their own 'film page' for a real or imagined magazine.

Example 3: Whose line is it anyway?

Activity: improvisation game

Focus: language processing, interacting with others

Age: upper intermediate and above

Level: young adult and above

'Whose Line is it Anyway?'; taken from a British Channel 4 television game, is a challenging exercise for students. Two students come to the front of the class. The teacher asks the rest of the class to say who each of the students is (e.g. *policeman, nurse, teacher, president*) and chooses the most interesting and communicatively generative suggestions. The pair of students might now represent a policeman and a midwife – or any other combination of occupations.

The teacher then asks the students where a conversation between these two is taking place; they might suggest a café, the street, a cinema, or a beach. Finally, the teacher asks the students what they are talking about. It could be speeding, nuclear physics, childcare, a film they have both seen, or football. The pair at the front might now be a policeman and a midwife on a beach talking about speeding.

The two students playing the game have to improvise a conversation straight away. They win points based on how well they manage. As an added twist the teacher can give one of the participants a card with a word describing how they speak, e.g. *politely, angrily, ingratiatingly*, and when the conversation is over the rest of the class has to guess what word that participant was given.

The game does not have to be quite so brutal, however. Students can practise the conversations in pairs before coming up to the front. Everything depends upon the teacher–student relationship.

Example 4: Rooms in a house

Activity: discussion

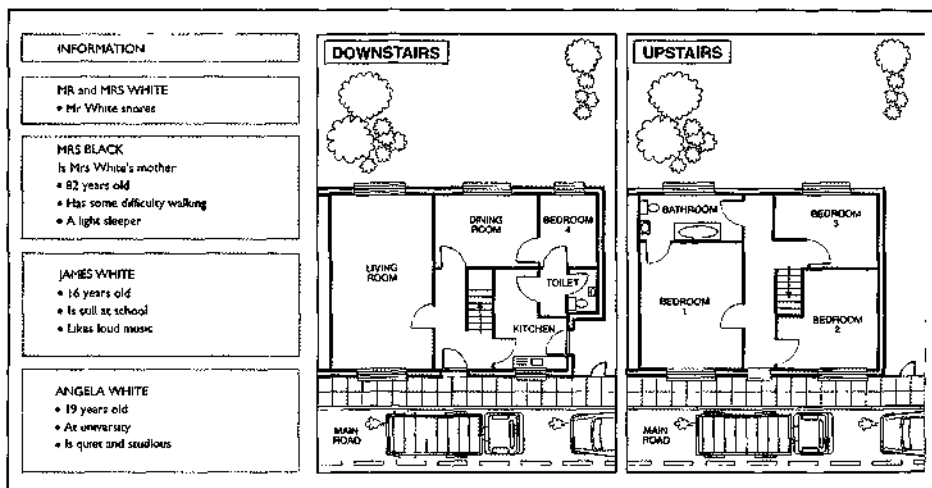
Focus: interacting with others

Age: adult

Level: upper intermediate

The following sequence is designed to train students for the speaking component of the Cambridge First Certificate exam (FCE – see page 333 for details).

Students are shown the following information about a family who are going to move into a house:



From *New First Certificate Masterclass* by S Haines and B Stewart (Oxford University Press)

They then have to decide which bedroom would be the most suitable for each member of the family. Subsequently, they have to choose any two members of the family and say how they might decorate and furnish their rooms.

Though the task is, in itself, fairly easy, the ability to discuss issues like this in a foreign language is not, especially when (as in an FCE exam situation) they have to talk to each other with an examiner listening and assessing their performance. A lot will depend on how we have approached discussion, in general, in the class (see B3 above).

Example 5: Travel agent

Activity: role-play

Focus: interacting with others, information processing

Age: any

Level: intermediate and above

In this example, an information gap is created which means that the role-play has a genuinely communicative dimension built into it. The students have been working in the area of tourism. They are told that in pairs they are going to act out a scene in a travel agency, where one student is a customer and the other is a travel agent. Student A is given the following information:

A Customer

You want:

- a double room
- to go to a hotel in Miami for 7 nights (You can spend up to \$1400 on a hotel.)
- to be as near as possible to the city centre
- to go to a hotel with a good discotheque
- a children's swimming pool for your small son
- someone to be available to look after your son at the hotel
- the hotel to serve good food
- a comfortable room (with a good view)

Student B gets the following hotel information which he or she can show to the customer if necessary, but which he or she will probably have more success explaining by telling student A the information:

B Travel agent

Study the following information carefully so that you can answer A (the customer).

	Sun Inn	Regency Park	Paradiso	Oasis
Cost (double) per night	\$180	\$175	\$210	\$130
View				
Distance from centre	10 miles	12 miles	20 miles	3 miles
Disco				—
Restaurant				—
Adults' swimming pool				
Children's swimming pool				—
Childcare facilities	—			—

Note: Various features (e.g. view, discos, restaurants, etc.) have been given different 'smile' ratings to indicate quality.

= excellent, = very good, and = good

As an example we can say that you get a better view if you're staying at the Paradiso than you do if you are staying at the Regency Park.

Students are given time to study their information. The teacher points out that the customer needs to select the hotel based, as far as possible, on the six qualities they want.

While students act out the scene in pairs we can go round listening, prompting if necessary, recording examples of especially good or not very successful language use.

When the pairs have completed their role-plays we can have them compare what happened. Did all the customers choose the Regency Park (the hotel with the nearest set of qualities to the customer's needs)? What did they find difficult/easy? We can then discuss things we heard which went well – and not so well.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Discussion**

P Ur (1981) is still a classic account of different discussion activities. On developing discussion skills, see C Green et al. (1997).

- **Debate**

On 'democratic debates' (with the students choosing the topic) see P Capone and K Hayward (1996).

- **Prepared talks**

On student lectures see M Geldicke (1997).

- **Teacher roles**

On intervention during communication activities see T Lynch (1997).

- **Role-play and simulation**

The best account of role-play and simulation is still K Jones (1982) (see B6 above) which includes a wonderful simulation about simulations for teachers. However, A Al-Arishi (1994) sees reasons why role-play should not be widely used.