16 | Teaching language skills

Teachers tend to talk about the way we use language in terms of four skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening. These are often divided into two types. *Receptive skills* is a term used for reading and listening, skills where meaning is extracted from the discourse. *Productive skills* is the term for speaking and writing, skills where students actually have to produce language themselves.

As we shall see in Section A below, there is some concern about separating skills in this way, especially since they are seldom separated in real life. We might also want to question a once commonly-held view that receptive skills are somehow passive, whereas production skills are in some way more active.

It is certainly the case that when we speak or write we are producing language, and no one would argue with the idea that language activation (see page 67) takes place when we are doing this. But reading and listening also demand considerable language activation on the part of the reader or listener. We cannot access meaning unless our brains are fully engaged with the texts we are interacting with. In other words, we have to think to understand, using any or all of our language knowledge to get meaning from what we are seeing or hearing.

But in any case, whether we are reading or speaking we often mix what we are doing with other skills, as we shall see below.

A Skills together

It makes little sense to talk about skills in isolation since, as Eli Hinkel points out, 'in meaningful communication, people employ incremental language skills not in isolation, but in tandem' (Hinkel 2006: 113). When we are engaged in conversation, we are bound to listen as well as speak because otherwise we could not interact with the person we are speaking to (although some people, of course, are better listeners than others!). Lecturers frequently rely on notes they have written previously, and people listening to lectures often write notes of their own. Even reading, generally thought of as a private activity, often provokes conversation and comment.

Writing, too, is rarely done in isolation. Much of today's communication is electronic (via emails and text messages, for example). We read what people send to us and then reply fairly instantly. And even when we are writing on our own, we generally read through what we have written before we send it off. Sometimes, of course, this is not the case when dealing with emails and text messages, but writers and texters often regret sending their messages in haste!

Clearly, therefore, if skill use is multi-layered in this way, it would make no sense to teach each skill in isolation. We will, therefore, look at how input and output are connected in the classroom, how skills can be integrated, and how skill and language work are connected.

A1 Input and output

Receptive skills and productive skills feed off each other in a number of ways. What we say or write is heavily influenced by what we hear and see. Our most important information about language comes from this input. Thus the more we see and listen to comprehensible input, the more English we acquire, notice or learn. This input takes many forms: teachers provide massive language input, as does audio material in the classroom and the variety of reading texts that students are exposed to. Students may read extensively (see below) or listen to podcasts (see page 188). They may interact with other English speakers both inside and outside the classroom.

But students get other input, too, especially in relation to their own output. When a student produces a piece of language and sees how it turns out, that information is fed back into the acquisition process. Output – and the students' response to their own 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 effectively we think we are communicating. 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, or when, acting as prompters or as a resource, they offer ongoing support (see Chapter 6B).

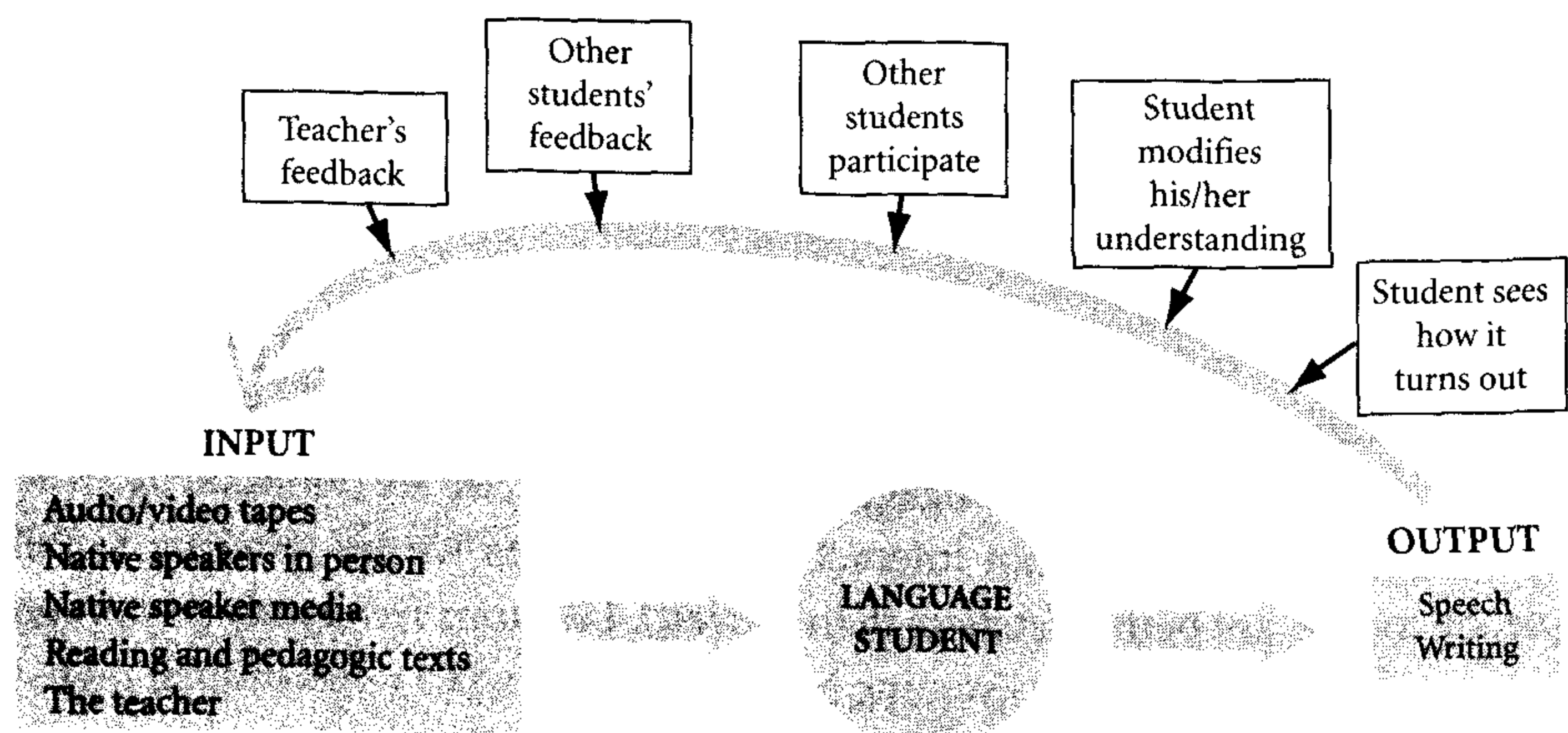Figure 1 shows the dynamic relationship between input and output:

FIGURE 1: The circle of input and output

A2 Integrating skills

In order to replicate the natural processes of skill-mixing which we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and also because we want to provide maximum learning opportunities for the different students in our classes, it makes sense to integrate different skills. That is why so many learning sequences are more like the Patchwork model we discussed on page 67, rather than following the Straight arrows or Boomerang lesson types.

- **Speaking as preparation and stimulus:** we often ask students to discuss a topic as a way of activating their schemata (see below) or engaging them in a topic that they are going to read or hear about. Speaking sessions allow students to investigate their thoughts and feelings about a topic. Frequently, too, speaking is part of a longer planning sequence.

- **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; when getting students to give spoken directions, they will benefit from hearing other people doing it first.

  Productive work should not always be imitative, of course. But students are greatly helped by being exposed to examples of writing and speaking which show certain conventions for them to draw upon. We will look at genre in detail in Chapter 19.

- **Texts as preparation and stimulus:** much 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 recording 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. In this way, we often use written and spoken texts to stimulate our students into some other kind of work.

- **Integrated tasks:** frequently we ask students to listen to something (a recorded telephone conversation, for example) and take a message or notes. We might ask them to prepare a spoken summary of something they have read, or read information on the Internet as preparation for a role-play or some other longer piece of work.

  Almost any speaking activity is bound to involve listening, of course, but sometimes when students are involved in some kind of cooperative writing (see page 328) they will be speaking, listening, writing and reading almost simultaneously. Indeed Task-based learning (see page 71), or even just working on some single task, is almost predicated on the idea of skill integration, since it is usually impossible to complete a task successfully in one skill area without involving some other skill, too.

  Skill integration is a major factor in lesson planning, as we shall see in Chapter 21. Weaving threads of different skills and topics is a major art of teachers who plan for a sequence of lessons. Skill integration also happens when students are involved in project work, which may well involve researching (through reading or listening), speaking (e.g. in discussions or when giving a presentation) and writing (e.g. submitting a report) – as we shall see in Section D below.

A3 Language skills, language construction

Work on language skills is often a precursor to work on various aspects of language construction. As we saw in Chapter 12C, we often ask students to look at texts and discover facts about language for themselves. But whether they are trying to work out construction, or whether we are explaining things that occur in written and spoken texts, it makes considerable sense to use anything which students read as data for them to work on. For example, if we take the following text, we can see how it can be used to look at a range of different language points.

Forget satnav – it's quicker using a map, *Which?* tells motorists

Esther Addley
Friday November 10, 2006
The Guardian

Need to get from A to B? Don't bother switching on that fancy piece of kit on your dashboard. The consumer magazine *Computing Which?* has confirmed what thousands of frustrated motorists already know from bitter experience; that the best source of directions is not an expensive satellite navigation system, but a map.

In a trial that will delight Luddites and the long-suffering partners of gadget enthusiasts, the magazine tested four route-finding aids to determine the best way to reach a panicular destination. Three hi-tech systems, including a £220 satnav box, a Microsoft software package and the government's own direction-finding website, were tested alongside the more old-fashioned method. The most effective? A copy of the AA's *Great Britain Road Atlas*, priced £8 from most petrol stations.

We could ask students to find all the adjectives in the two paragraphs, and then divide them into one-word adjectives and then compound adjectives (adjectives made from two or more words). Students could discuss how journalistic writing allows for shortened questions like *Need to get from A to B?* and *The most effective?* – forms that would be unacceptable in more formal writing. We might see if students can find descriptions of types of people (*Luddites, long-suffering partners, gadget enthusiasts*). We can discuss the reason for the use of the present perfect as against the past simple to describe the study. There is also a good example of colon usage, and a particularly revealing clause-rich sentence showing how commas can operate rather like brackets (*Three high-tech systems, including a ..., a ... and a ..., were tested ...*).

Any text or audio track can be 'mined' in this way. There is always some aspect of language that can be drawn from it. If we let the students read the whole article (from which the above is just an excerpt), it could first be the springboard for a discussion about old and new technology, and only later be used as the focus for the kind of language focus we have suggested.

A4 Integrating skill and language work

The ideal learning sequence, then, will offer both skill integration and also language study based around a topic or other thematic thread. The following example shows how it might work at the intermediate level.

Stage 1: the students complete the following questionnaire about how they respond to physical appearance. This involves them in reading and speaking.

> **1** When you first meet someone, what do you look at first?
>   **a** their hair
>   **b** their face
>   **c** their eyes
>   **d** their mouth
>   **e** the front of their body
>   **f** the back of their body
>   **g** the clothes they are wearing
>   **h** something else (please specify)
>
> **2** Which of the following will make you think most positively about someone (choose one only)?
>   **a** they are well-groomed
>   **b** they are well-dressed
>   **c** they have a good physique
>   **d** they look interesting
>
> **3** Think of two people that you find very attractive. What is the most physically attractive thing about them?
>
> **4** Think of two people whose appearance you find unusual or striking. What is the unusual/striking thing about them?

The class discuss their responses to the questionnaire.

Stage 2: the students read the following text from a novel about a Cantonese couple living in London, where Chen works in a Chinese restaurant.

> Working in the fields Chen had once had a physique which had been lean, tanned, and sinewy; now it was almost impossible to see the outlines of his ribs for the plump flesh which clothed them. Not that he was chubby, just prosperous, as he was careful to explain to Lily.
>
> On Lily there were two opposing views. Chen did not think she was pretty. She had a long, thin, rather horsey face, and a mouth that was too big for the rest of her features, and she smiled too frequently for a woman. She had a largish bust, and her hands and feet were a fraction too big to be wholly pleasing to her husband. It was her face, though, which really let her down (Chen had decided), being over-full of expression, particularly her bright black eyes which she had a habit of widening and narrowing when listening to something she found interesting. Probably there was too much character in her face, which perhaps explained the lack of Cantonese male interest better than any particular wrongness of an individual feature or their relationship to each other. Westerners found her attractive, though. Lily was unaware of this but Chen had noticed it with great surprise. That was if second glances and turned heads on the street were anything to go by.

From *Sour Sweet* by Timothy Mo (Abacus)

Stage 3: the students answer comprehension questions about the text before discussing Chen's views of Lily's appearance. They talk about whether or not beauty is a cultural concept.

Stage 4: students look for any language in the text which describes physical appearance. This leads on to a study section where they first discuss whether words like *thin, slim, skinny, fat, stout* or *chubby* have positive or negative connotations, and then go on to say whether words like *lean, sinewy, handsome, pretty, nubile, well-built* and *plain* can be applied to men, women or both.

Stage 5: students re-write the text from *Sour Sweet* as if Chen really approves of his wife's appearance.

Stage 6: students write physical descriptions of well-known figures. The class has to guess who they are writing about.

Stage 7: students listen to a dialogue about a police line-up before role-playing police officers taking witness statements based on descriptions of people they have supposedly seen committing a crime.

The sequence, which would, of course, be inappropriate in certain cultural contexts, provides both study and activation (see page 67). More importantly, from the point of view of this discussion, it involves the students in reading, writing, speaking and listening. As a result, students have been able to practise a wide range of language abilities.

A5 Top-down and bottom-up

A frequent distinction is made between top-down and bottom-up processing. In metaphorical terms, this is the difference between looking at a forest, or, instead, studying the individual trees within it.

It has been said that in top-down processing, the reader (or listener) gets a general view of the reading or listening passage by, in some way, absorbing the overall picture. This is greatly helped if their schemata allow them to have appropriate expectations of what they are going to come across. In bottom-up processing, on the other hand, the reader or listener focuses on such things as individual words, phrases or cohesive devices and achieves understanding by stringing these detailed elements together to build up a whole.

It is probably most useful to see acts of reading and listening (as well as speaking and writing) as interactions between top-down and bottom-up processing. Sometimes it is the individual details that help us understand (or put together) the whole; sometimes it is our overview that allows us to process the details. Without a good understanding of a reasonable proportion of the details gained or proposed through some bottom-up processing, we may find it difficult to come to a clear general picture of what a text is about, or about how to put together a coherent stretch of discourse. But without some global understanding of the topic that is written or spoken about, even an understanding of the details may not be enough.

B Receptive skills

Although there are significant differences between reading and listening, as we shall see in Chapters 17 and 18, nevertheless the basic classroom procedure we often use is the same for both.

B1 A basic methodological model for teaching receptive skills

A typical procedure for getting students to read a written text or listen to a recording involves both Type 1 and Type 2 tasks. Type 1 tasks are those where we get students to read or listen for some general understanding, rather than asking them to pick out details or get involved in a refined search of the text. Type 2 tasks, on the other hand, are those where we get students to look at the text in considerably more detail, maybe for specific information or for language points. Moving from the general to the specific by starting with Type 1 tasks and going on to Type 2 tasks works because it allows students to get a feel for what they are seeing or hearing before they have to attack the text in detail, which is the more difficult thing to do.

The procedure for teaching receptive skills generally starts with a lead in. This is where we engage students with the topic of the reading and we try to activate their *schema* (plural *schemata*), a term which was best described by Guy Cook as 'our pre-existent knowledge of the world' (Cook 1989: 69). This is the knowledge that allows many British, Australian, West Indian, Pakistani and Indian people (for example) to make sense of headlines like *England in six-wicket collapse* (a reference to the game of cricket), whereas many Canadians would instantly understand what it means to be sent to the *penalty box* and why being sent there might give another team a *power play* (both terms come from ice hockey, Canada's national sport).

All of us, at whatever age, but especially from late childhood onwards, have this pre-existent knowledge which we bring with us to all encounters with topics and events. The job of the receptive skills teacher, therefore, is to provoke students to get in touch with that knowledge or schema. They can then predict what a text is likely to be about, and what they are going to see or hear. We can provoke this kind of prediction by giving them various clues, such as pictures, headlines or book jacket descriptions. We can give them a few words or phrases from the text and ask them to predict what these might indicate about its content. We can encourage a general discussion of the topic or ask students to make their own questions for what they are going to read about. Whatever alternative we choose, the point is that prediction is vitally important if we want students to engage fully with the text.

Once students are ready to read, we set some kind of a comprehension task so that they will read or listen in a general way – trying to extract a mostly general understanding of what, superficially, the audio or written text is all about.

The students read or listen to the text and then the teacher directs feedback. Here we may suggest that students go through the answers in pairs or small groups. This is partly so that they get more opportunities to work together, and partly so that when we go through the answers with the class, individual students do not get exposed as having failed in a task.

Sometimes the teacher directs a text-related task immediately this Type 1 task has been completed. A text-related task is any kind of follow-up activity and might be either a response to the content of the text or a focus on aspects of language in the text. However, we will usually get the students to look at the text again for a Type 2 task in which they are required to examine it in more detail. The comprehension cycle is repeated and then the teacher involves the students in text-related tasks (of course, it is possible that students might be involved in more than one Type 2 task cycle).
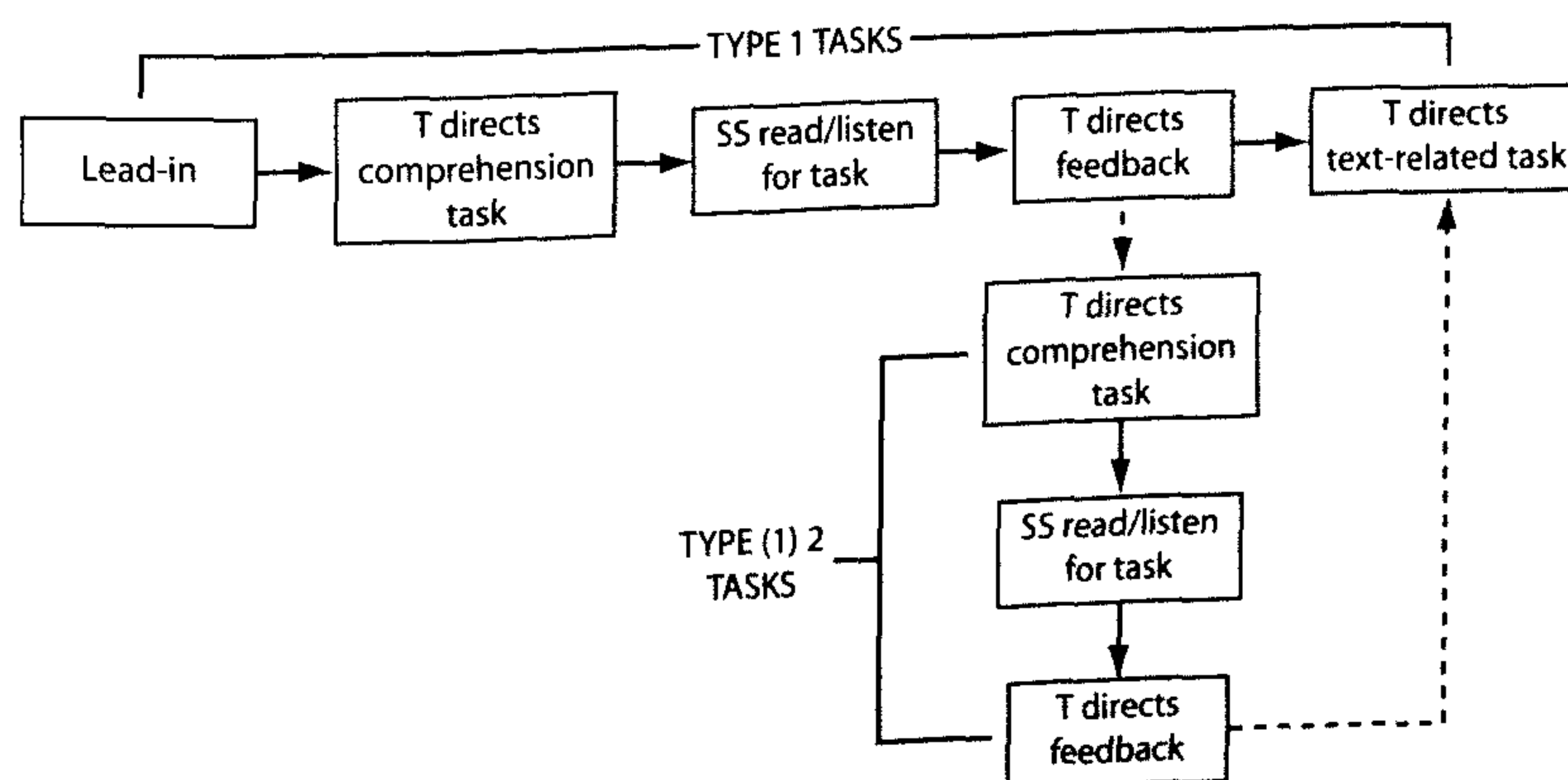
We can summarise this procedure in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: A basic methodological model for teaching receptive skills

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B2 The language issue

What is it that makes a text difficult? In the case of written text, some researchers look at word and sentence length (Wallace 1992: 77) on the premise that texts with longer sentences and longer words will be more difficult to understand than those with shorter ones. Others, however, claim that the critical issue is quite simply the number of unfamiliar words which a text contains. If readers and listeners do not know half the words in a text, they will have great difficulty in understanding the text as a whole. To be successful, they have to recognise a high proportion of the vocabulary without consciously thinking about it (Paran 1996). Both sentence length and the percentage of unknown words play their part in a text's comprehensibility.

When students who are engaged in listening encounter unknown lexis, it can be '... like a dropped barrier causing them to stop and think about the meaning of a word and thus making them miss the next part of the speech' (Underwood 1989: 17). Unlike reading, there may be no opportunity to go back and listen to the lexis again. Comprehension is gradually degraded, therefore, and unless the listeners are able to latch onto a new element to help them back into the flow of what is being said, the danger is that they will lose heart and gradually disengage from the receptive task since it is just too difficult.

If, as Stephen Krashen suggested, comprehensible input aids language acquisition (see Chapter 3, A1), then it follows that 'incomprehensible' input will not. We can try to get students to read or listen to texts that are way beyond their comprehension level, but the only effect this will probably have is to demotivate them.

It is obvious, however, that the more language we expose students to, the more they will learn, so we need specific ways of addressing the problem of language difficulty. These could include pre-teaching vocabulary, using extensive reading/listening, and considering alternatives to authentic language.

- **Pre-teaching vocabulary:** one way of helping students is to pre-teach vocabulary that occurs in the reading or listening text. This removes at least some of the barriers to understanding which they are likely to encounter.

    However, if we want to give students practice in what it is like to tackle authentic reading and listening texts for general understanding, then getting past words they don't understand is one of the skills they need to develop. By giving them some or all of those words, we deny them that chance.

    We need a common sense solution to this dilemma: where students are likely to be held back unnecessarily because of three or four words, it makes sense to teach them first. Where they should be able to comprehend the text despite some unknown words, we will explain to them that they should try to understand the general meaning of the text, and that we will look at the meaning of individual words once they have done their best to read in this general way.

    One useful technique is to use some (possibly unknown) words from a reading or listening text as part of our procedure to create interest and activate the students' schemata; the words may suggest topic, genre or construction – or all three. The students can first research the meanings of words and phrases and then predict what a text with such words is likely to be about.

- **Extensive reading and listening:** most researchers like to make a difference between *extensive* and *intensive* reading and listening. Whereas the former suggests reading or

listening at length, often for pleasure and in a leisurely way, intensive reading or listening tends to be more concentrated, less relaxed, and often dedicated not so much to pleasure as to the achievement of a study goal.

Extensive reading and listening frequently take place when students are on their own, whereas intensive reading or listening is often done with the help and/or intervention of the teacher.

Extensive reading – especially where students are reading material written specially at their level – has a number of benefits for the development of a student's language (see Chapter 17A). Colin Davis suggests that any classroom will be the poorer for the lack of an extensive reading programme and will be '... unable to promote its pupils' language development in all aspects as effectively as if such a programme were present' (1995: 335). He also claims that such a programme will make students more positive about reading, will improve their overall comprehension skills, and will give them a wider passive and active vocabulary. Richard Day and Julian Bamford agree, citing as two of the many goals for extensive reading 'enabling students to read without constantly stopping' and 'providing an increased word recognition' (Day and Bamford 1998).

What these commentators and others are claiming is that extensive reading is the best possible way for students to develop automaticity – that is the automatic recognition of words when they see them. It is by far the best way to improve their English reading (and writing) overall.

The benefits of extensive reading are echoed by the benefits for extensive listening: the more students listen, the more language they acquire and the better they get at listening activities in general. Whether they choose recordings of passages from textbooks, recordings of simplified readers, other listening material designed for their level or podcasts of radio programmes which they are capable of following, the effect will be the same. Provided the input is comprehensible, they will gradually acquire more words and greater schematic knowledge which will, in turn, resolve many of the language difficulties they started out with.

- **Authenticity:** because it is vital for students to get practice in dealing with written text and speech where they miss quite a few words but are still able to extract the general meaning, an argument can be made for using mainly authentic reading and listening texts in class. After all, it is when students come into contact with 'real' language that they have to work hardest to understand.

  Authentic material is language where no concessions are made to foreign speakers. It is normal, natural language used by native or competent speakers of a language. This is what our students encounter (or will encounter) in real life if they come into contact with target-language speakers, and, precisely because it is authentic, it is unlikely to be simplified or spoken slowly.

  Authentic material which has been carelessly chosen can be extremely demotivating for students since they will not understand it. Instead of encouraging failure, we should let students read and listen to things they can understand. For beginners this may mean roughly-tuned language from the teacher (see page 117), and specially designed reading and listening texts from materials writers. However, it is essential that such listening texts approximate to authentic language use. The language may be simplified, but it must not be unnatural. As Ronald Carter and his colleagues suggest, 'concocted, made-up language can be perfectly viable but it should be modelled on naturalistic samples' (Carter et al 1998: 86).

Authentic material can be used by students at fairly low levels, however, if the tasks that go with it are well-designed and help students understand it better, rather than showing them how little they know. A gently paced sequence of activities with small tasks leading to bigger ones, for example, can enable students to watch television soap operas in English and help them understand far more than they might have thought possible (Farrell 1998).

It is worth pointing out that deciding what is or is not authentic is not easy. A stage play written for native speakers is a playwright's representation of spontaneous speech rather than the real thing, so it is, in a sense, both authentic and inauthentic. A father talking to his baby daughter may be employing 'baby talk' – rough-tuning the language so that it is comprehensible – but there is nothing inauthentic about it. The language which students are exposed to has just as strong a claim to authenticity as the play or the parent, provided that it is not altered in such a way as to make it unrecognisable in style and construction from the language which competent speakers encounter in many walks of life.

B3 Comprehension tasks

A key feature in the successful teaching of receptive skills concerns the choice of comprehension tasks. Sometimes such tasks appear to be testing the students rather than helping them to understand. But although reading and listening are perfectly proper mediums for language and skill testing, nevertheless if we are trying to encourage students to improve their receptive skills, testing them will not be an appropriate way of accomplishing this. Sometimes texts and/or the tasks which accompany them are either far too easy or far too difficult.

In order to resolve these problems we need to use comprehension tasks which promote understanding and we need to match text and task appropriately.

- **Testing and teaching:** the best kind of tasks are those which raise students' expectations, help them tease out meanings and provoke an examination of the reading or listening passage. Unlike reading and listening tests, these tasks bring them to a greater understanding of language and text construction. By having students perform activities such as looking up information on the Internet, filling in forms on the basis of a recording or solving reading puzzles, we are helping them become better readers and listeners.

  Some tasks seem to fall halfway between testing and teaching, however, since, by appearing to demand a right answer (e.g. *Are these statements about the text true or false?* or questions abut the text with *what, when, how many* and *how often*), they could, in theory, be used to assess student performance. Indeed, when they are done under test conditions, their purpose is obviously to explore student strengths and weaknesses. Yet such comprehension items can also be an indispensable part of a teacher's receptive skills armoury. By the simple expedient of having students work in pairs to agree on whether a statement about part of a text is true or false, the comprehension items help each individual (through conversation and comparison) to understand something, rather than challenging them to give right answers under test-like conditions. If students are encouraged to try to predict the answers to such questions before they read or listen, expectations are created in their minds which help them focus their reading or listening (although we must be careful not to ask them to try to predict things they have no chance of being able to guess). In both cases we have turned a potential test task into a creative tool for receptive skill training.

  Whatever the reading task, a lot will depend on the conditions in which students are

asked to perform that task. Even the most formal test-like items can be used to help students rather than frighten them!

- **Appropriate challenge:** when asking students to read and listen, we want to avoid texts and tasks that are either far too easy or far too difficult. As with many other language tasks, we want to get the level of challenge right, to make the tasks difficult but, nevertheless, achievable.

  Getting the level right depends on the right match between text and task. Thus, where a text is difficult, we may still be able to use it, but only if the task is appropriate. We could theoretically, for example, have beginners listen to the famous conversation between Ophelia and the prince in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* ('Get thee to a nunnery ...') and ask them how many people are speaking. We could ask students to read a few pages of *Ulysses* by James Joyce and ask them how many full stops they can find. Despite the difficulty of the texts, both of these tasks are achievable. Yet we might feel that neither is appropriate or useful. On the other hand, having students listen to a news broadcast where the language level is very challenging may be entirely appropriate if the task only asks them – at first – to try to identify the five main topics in the broadcast.

C Productive skills

Although the productive skills of writing and speaking are different in many ways, we can still provide a basic model for teaching and organising them.

C1 A basic methodological model for teaching productive skills

A key factor in the success of productive-skill tasks is the way teachers organise them and how they respond to the students' work. We will consider these in more detail in Chapters 19 and 20, but we can, here, set down a basic methodological model for the teaching of productive skills.

In the *lead-in* stage, we engage students with the topic. Perhaps we ask them what they know about a certain subject (e.g. we ask them what experience they have of tourism if we are going to have a tourism debate – see Example 7 on page 358), or we might, if we are going to role-play checking in at an airport, get them to think about the kind of conversation that usually takes place when people check in.

When we *set the task*, we explain exactly what students are going to do. At this stage we may need to demonstrate the activity in some way. For example, if we want students to work in pairs, we can show the class how the activity works by being one of a public pair ourselves so that everyone sees the procedure in action. We may get students to repeat the task instructions back to us (either in English or in their L1, depending on which is appropriate). We will also make sure that students are given all the information they need to complete the tasks (e.g. role cards, etc. for a role-play).

Once the students have started, we will *monitor the task*. This may mean going round the class, listening to students working and helping them where they are having difficulties. With writing tasks, we may become actively involved in the writing process as we respond to the students' work and point them in new directions (see Chapter 19, B7).

When the activity has finished, we give *task feedback*. This is where we may help students to see how well they have done. As we said in Chapter 8, C3 and D, we will respond to the content of the task and not just to the language the students used. We will show positive aspects of what they have achieved and not concentrate solely on their failings. Finally, we may move on from the task with a *task-related follow-up*.

In Chapter 3B we discussed the value of repetition. Frequently, then, we may re-set the task (or something very similar to it) and go through the sequence again.

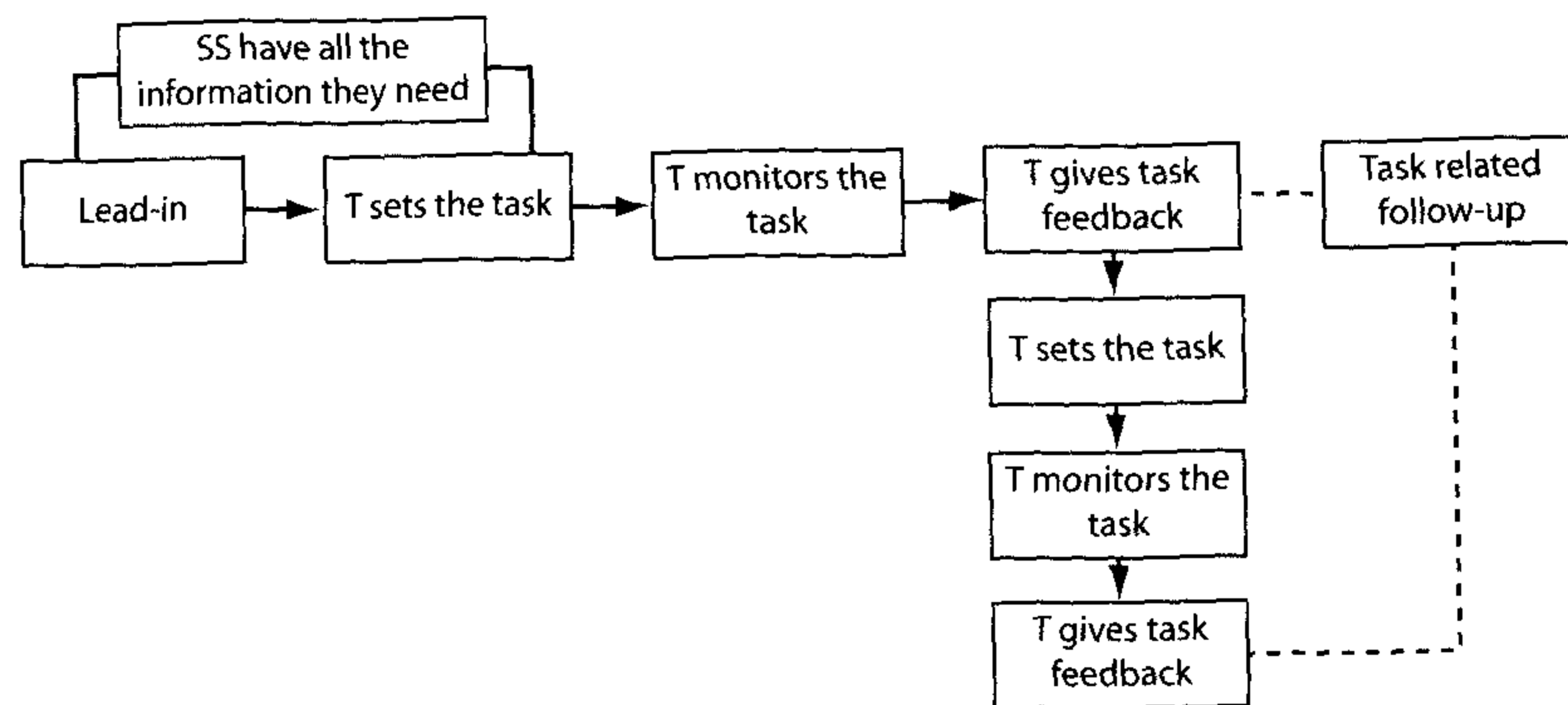We can summarise this procedure in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3: A basic model for teaching productive skills

C2 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 writing – as we shall see in Chapter 19 – certain genres will push us to supply information in certain prescribed ways. But in order for writing to be successful, it 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*).

Conversational discourse, on the other hand, often appears considerably more chaotic. This is partly because it is 'jointly constructed' (Thornbury 2005a: 14) by however many people are taking part. In order for this 'construction' to be successful, participants need to know how to take turns, and what discourse markers, for example, they can use to facilitate the smooth progression from one speaker to the next. Such structuring devices include language designed to 'buy time', and quite specific organising markers, such as *firstly, secondly* or even *and as if that wasn't enough*.

It is worth pointing out that spoken English tends to have a higher proportion of formulaic lexical phrases than written English (Wray 1999: 227–8).

Successful communication, both in writing and in speech, depends, to some extent, on knowing the rules. Thus, as we saw in Chapter 2, C1, speakers know how and when to take turns, just as successful writers in a particular discourse community know the differences between accepted norms for writing emails and writing business letters. And there are more general sociocultural rules, too, such as how men and women address each other, whether there is any difference between talking to people of the same age or people who are considerably older, and finally, how to perform certain common speech events such as agreeing, inviting, suggesting, etc.

We are not suggesting that students need to speak or write language exactly like a British or Canadian person (for example), especially given our comments about the globalisation of

English in Chapter 1. Nevertheless, sociocultural rules of various discourse communities exist in the public consciousness (even though they change over time) so that obeying them or purposefully flouting them become acts of belonging or rejection.

C3 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 reactions and respond to them. Part of our writing skill depends upon our ability to change our style and structure to suit the person or people we are writing for.

Where people are giving 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 are expert at riding a laugh or changing their pace to suit the mood of their audience, so good presenters, salespeople and politicians keep their ears and eyes open to see how their words are going down and speak accordingly. Even when lecturers read their speeches, they will change their pace, repeat words or lines, and perhaps add in or take out some phrases on the basis of how their listeners are responding. Writers engaged in an email 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.

C4 Dealing with difficulty

When speakers or writers of their own or of a foreign language don't know a word or just can't remember it, they may employ some or all of the following strategies to resolve the difficulty:

- **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 can't find words for what they want to say, they may abandon the thought that they can't 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 other words, pronounce it as if it was an L2 word) in the hope that it will be equivalent to the meaning they wish to express in the foreign language. This will work reasonably well if an English speaker says *content-o* because they hope that what they are saying sounds Spanish and so will be understood. Luckily for them, there is a Spanish word *contento* which means *happy*. However, if they say that they want to go to the *librario* to try to find a book, their foreignisation is less successful because there is no such word, and the closest equivalent in Spanish (*librería*) means *bookshop*, not *library* as they had hoped.

- **Paraphrasing:** speakers sometimes paraphrase, talking about *something for cleaning the teeth* if they don't know the word *toothbrush*, or saying that they *have very bad feelings about somebody* when all they want to say is that they are *cross with* that person. 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. However, a major reason for having students perform oral communicative tasks in class is to give them practice in just these kinds of strategy.

C5 The language issue

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 12D), 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 useful for the task. 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. Instead, we need to plan in advance.

- **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 when a lack of language makes this difficult.

D Projects

Frequently, teachers ask their students to work on assignments that last for longer than say, 45 minutes or one or two lessons. Some TBL sequences (see page 71) are like this, but whatever methodology we are following, such longer-term projects have always been part of educational sequences. In schools in many education systems around the world, children may produce their own booklets or computer-based materials which combine a number of subjects they have been studying over a period of time – maths, geography, history, etc. They may produce 'books' on the life of indigenous people in their country before the arrival of settlers or conquerors from overseas, or they could write their own Aztec or ancient Egyptian cookbooks; they might do projects on animals or aspects of the natural world. Typically, their booklets will include pictures as well as writing.

In order to complete their projects, the children will look at books, consult websites, watch videos and, perhaps, conduct their own mini-experiments. The project thus becomes a perfect vehicle for skill integration and information gathering.

Project work is popular in EFL/ESOL teaching and learning, too, though its use is naturally constrained by the amount of time available for its implementation. It is far more popular, for example, on courses where students are full-time students and have access to a wide range of resources and people.

There are many possible areas for project work in an EFL/ESL setting. Many teachers, for example, encourage their students to produce a class newspaper. Other classes produce guides to their town or books on history or culture. Some projects look at people's attitudes to current issues or ask students to produce brochures for a public service or a new company.

What these examples demonstrate is that the difference between a full-blown project and some writing or speaking tasks is chiefly one of scale. When we get students to prepare for a debate (see page 358) or have them analyse reviews so that they can write their own (see page 334), we are involving them in a project of sorts. Projects are longer than the traditional essay or other written task. They demand significantly more research than a buzz group (see page 350) preparing for a quick communicative activity.

D1 Managing projects

Projects can be organised in a number of different ways, but they generally share the same sequence:

- **The briefing/the choice:** projects start when the teacher or the students (or the two in combination) decide on a topic. Sometimes students may bring their own ideas, sometimes the teacher may offer a list of possible topics, and sometimes the teacher may ask all the students to do the same project.

  Once the choice has been made, a briefing takes place in which teacher and students define the aims of the project and discuss how they can gather data, what the timescale of the project is, what stages it will go through and what support the students will get as the work progresses.

- **Idea/language generation:** once a briefing has taken place, what happens next will depend on how directed the project is. If students have come up with their own ideas and topics, this is where they will start on the process of idea generation. They have to decide what is going into their project. They need to make a plan about what they have to find out, and think about where they can find that information.

  If, however, teachers are directing the project very carefully, students may be told what they are looking for and where they are going to find it.

- **Data gathering:** students can gather data from a number of sources. They can consult encyclopedias or go to the Internet to find what they are looking for. They can design questionnaires so that they can interview people. They can look at texts for genre analysis or watch television programmes and listen to the radio.

- **Planning:** when students have got their ideas, generated some topic-specific language and gathered the data they require, they can start to make a plan of how the final project will be

set out. In the case of a written final product, this will involve the kind of process approach we discuss in Chapter 19, B1. If students are planning to end the project with a big debate or presentation, for example, this is where they plan what they are going to say.

- **Drafting and editing:** if the project has a final written product, a first draft will be produced, consisting either of sections or the whole thing, which fellow students and/or the teacher can look at and comment on. This draft will also be self-edited by the project writers (see Chapter 8, D4).

- **The result:** finally, the goal at which the whole project has been aiming has been reached. This may take the form of a written report or a blog accompanied by photographs, for example. It may be a big role-play where people who have been gathering data about different sides of an argument get together to discuss the issue. It might be a short piece of film, a drama production or a recording. But whatever it is, this is what the whole thing has been for.

- **Consultation/tutorial:** throughout the lifetime of a project, teachers will need to be available as tutors, advising, helping and prompting students to help them progress. Such consultations and tutorials will, of course, focus on how the project is progressing. For example, we will want to be sure that students have been able to gather the data they have been looking for. We will want to be confident that they have understood the data and that they can use it effectively. A frequent problem occurs when students try to do too much in a project, so teachers may need to help them narrow down the focus of their work.

Victoria Chan, a lecturer at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, had her class do a newspaper project (Chan 2001). It is a typical example of such work. After the task briefing, students discussed newspapers and what goes into them. They analysed different aspects of newspapers (articles, reviews, comment, etc.) for both content and language, and then drafted their own stories, film reviews, etc. These were then subjected to peer review and editing before being used in the finished class newspaper. Throughout, the students were clear about the stages of the project and what they were doing and would do next. Victoria Chen reports that they were interested and motivated by what, for them, had been a highly innovative approach.

Although projects may not be appropriate in all circumstances (principally, perhaps, because of the time which teachers and students have at their disposal), still they usually involve a satisfying integration of skills. They require detailed planning and idea generation and encourage students to gather data. At the end of the whole process, students have work they can show proudly to their colleagues and friends, or they have the chance to be involved in really significant presentations both oral and/or with presentation equipment, such as overhead projectors and computer-supplied data projectors.

D2 A webquest project

As we saw on page 191, webquests allow teachers to get their students to do research from the comfort of a computer terminal. As in that example (of a webquest about city housing in New York), teachers can design the various stages of a webquest and select the sites that students can go to to gather data so that they don't waste their energies on fruitless searching.

In Chapter 5, we described a webquest which generates individual student profiles in terms of Multiple Intelligences (see page 90–91), and we can use this same webquest as an example of how such Internet-based projects are structured.

Like most webquest projects 'Teacher, have you thought about me?' (http://www.eslgo. com/classes/mi/index2.htm) starts with an *Introduction* in which the students are told that everyone learns differently and that during the webquest they are going to investigate seven or eight types of intelligence.

When students have absorbed this (the teacher can discuss the introduction with the students), they click on *Tasks* and reach the task screen. This tells them what they are going to do and, crucially, gives them clear task outcomes (e.g. 'After completing this webquest you will know about different kinds of intelligence'). It is worth pointing out that the authors of the webquest tell the students that this is more than just an assignment – it will help them learn.

Students now start to collect data using the links built into the *Process* page. In Task 1, they are offered links to short and long Multiple Intelligence questionnaires which they have to complete to find their own MI profile as in the following example:

> **Short**
> www.mitest.com/o7inte~1.htm
> http://ivc.uidaho.edu/flbrain/MIassess.html

All they have to do is to click on one of the links to go to a questionnaire. This, of course, is where the advantage of doing projects via the Internet become apparent. Task 2 gets students to click on links where they will find articles which explain the whole concept of Multiple Intelligences. Task 3 (on the same page) asks students to 'discover more about your strongest intelligence' and 'consider what medium you will use to report to your lecturer'; Task 4 asks them to 'choose another Multiple Intelligence to learn more about ... to deepen further your understanding of Multiple Intelligences'; and Task 5 tells them to 'Plan and produce your report'. There is a further page of extra resources which students can reach by clicking on the appropriate links.

When students have completed and delivered their report, they do a *Self evaluation*. Here, they rate themselves on a scale of 1–4 in different categories, such as 'General knowledge' and 'Readiness for the future'. For example, in the first of these categories, if they choose 'You learned a great deal about many types of intelligence' they would get a score of 4; in the second category, choosing 'You haven't decided how to use your knowledge yet but you're thinking about a few things that may help' would give a score of 2.

There is an evaluation grid for teachers too, and then, finally the webquest is over, and the designers end it with an upbeat message of encouragement:

Congratulations! You now have the knowledge needed to take control of your own learning. You don't have to worry about your teacher's style because you are aware of your style and can learn in a variety of ways. This means you can help yourself understand difficult concepts using various kinds of intelligence at your disposal.

Walk into your next class (and all future classes) with confidence, because you control what you learn. But remember you never stop learning and ideas on how we learn are always changing. You are now on an exciting road to self discovery, a road that may lead you into new areas of multiple intelligences.

This webquest is a good example of a multi-skill project. There is reading and writing, and speaking and listening (in the discussion sessions with the teacher and other students which can occur at various stages of the process). The quest promotes and supports IT literacy (see page 323), too.

Other webquests and projects may be considerably more multi-faceted than this (and take more time). Nevertheless, this example shows how technology can be harnessed to enhance successful project work.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Authentic English**

  See S Murray (2001). A Gilmore (2004) compares textbook and authentic interactions, whereas W Guariento and J Morley (2001) compare text and task authenticity.

- **Language skills**

  See the references at the end of Chapters 17–20.

- **Projects**

  D Fried-Booth (2002) is the second edition of her ground-breaking book on the subject. See also a short article on cross-curricular projects by S Andrewes (2004) and G Beckett and T Slater (2005) who demonstrate how projects are blends of content, language and skills integration.

17 | Reading

A Extensive and intensive reading

To get maximum benefit from their reading, students need to be involved in both extensive and intensive reading. Whereas with the former, a teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they read and to do so for pleasure and general language improvement, the latter is often (but not exclusively) teacher-chosen and directed. It is designed to enable students to develop specific receptive skills such as reading for *gist* (or general understanding – often called *skimming*), reading for *specific information* (often called *scanning*), reading for detailed comprehension or reading for inference (what is 'behind' the words) and attitude.

A1 Extensive reading

We have discussed the importance of extensive reading for the development of our students' word recognition – and for their improvement as readers overall. But it is not enough to tell students to 'read a lot'; we need to offer them a programme which includes appropriate materials, guidance, tasks and facilities, such as permanent or portable libraries of books.

- **Extensive reading materials:** one of the fundamental conditions of a successful extensive reading programme is that students should be reading material which they can understand. If they are struggling to understand every word, they can hardly be reading for pleasure – the main goal of this activity. This means that we need to provide books which either by chance, or because they have been specially written, are readily accessible to our students.

    Specially written materials for extensive reading – what Richard Day and Julian Bamford call 'language learner literature' (1998: 61) – are often referred to as *graded readers* or *simplified readers*. They can take the form of original fiction and non-fiction books as well as simplifications of established works of literature. Such books succeed because the writers or adaptors work within specific lists of allowed words and grammar. This means that students at the appropriate level can read them with ease and confidence. At their best, despite the limitations on language, such books can speak to the reader through the creation of atmosphere and/or compelling plot lines. Consider, for example, the following short extract from the second chapter of a level 1 (elementary) murder mystery for adults. In the first chapter, a man in a hospital bed appears to be suffering from amnesia. In the second chapter, that same man speaks to us directly:

> There is a man near my bed. His clothes are white. No. Some of his clothes are white. He has a white coat, but his trousers are brown. He also has brown hair. The man in the white coat says he's a doctor. He says his name is Doctor Cox. He tells me to call him Philip. He says he is going to help me.
>
> But he's not going to help me. They think I don't remember. They think I don't know anything. They know nothing, the doctors. Or the police. Nobody knows who I am. I sit in the bed and answer questions. They ask lots of questions.
>
> 'Do you know what amnesia is, John?' Doctor Cox asks me.
>
> Doctor Cox. Doctor Philip Cox. He thinks he's somebody. He's nobody. I know what amnesia is.

From *John Doe* by A Moses (Cambridge University Press)

The language is simple and controlled, but the atmosphere – in true murder-mystery style – is satisfyingly creepy. A student who enjoys this kind of story, but whose level of English is fairly low, will enjoy it enormously.

To encourage students to read this kind of learner literature – or any other texts which may be comprehensible in the same way – we need to act in the following ways:

- **Setting up a library:** in order to set up an extensive reading programme, we need to build up a library of suitable books. Although this may appear costly, it will be money well spent. If necessary, we should persuade our schools and institutions to provide such funds or raise money through other sources.

  If possible, we should organise static libraries in the classroom or in some other part of the school. If this is not possible, we need to work out some way of carrying the books around with us – in boxes or on trolleys.

  Once books have been purchased, we should code them for level and genre so that students can easily identify what kind of books they are. We should make the students aware of what the library contains and explain our classification system to them.

  We need to devise some way of keeping track of the books in the library. A simple signing-out system should ensure that our collection does not disappear over time.

  All of these setting-up procedures take time. But we can use students to help us administer the scheme. We can, if we are lucky, persuade the school administration to help us.

  If our students take part in extensive reading programmes, all the time we have spent on setting up a library will not have been wasted.

- **The role of the teacher in extensive reading programmes:** most students will not do a lot of extensive reading by themselves unless they are encouraged to do so by their teachers. Clearly, then, our role is crucial. We need to promote reading and by our own espousal of reading as a valid occupation, persuade students of its benefits. Perhaps, for example, we can occasionally read aloud from books we like and show, by our manner of reading, how exciting books can be.

  Having persuaded our students of the benefits of extensive reading, we can organise reading programmes where we indicate to them how many books we expect them to read over a given period. We can explain how they can make their choice of what to read, making it clear that the choice is theirs, but that they can consult other students' reviews and comments to help them make that choice. We can suggest that they look for books in

a genre (be it crime fiction, romantic novels, science fiction, etc.) that they enjoy, and that they make appropriate level choices. We will act throughout as part organiser, part tutor (see Chapter 6, B1).

- **Extensive reading tasks:** because students should be allowed to choose their own reading texts, following their own likes and interests, they will not all be reading the same texts at once. For this reason – and because we want to prompt students to keep reading – we should encourage them to report back on their reading in a number of ways.

One approach is to set aside a time at various points in a course – say every two weeks – at which students can ask questions and/or tell their classmates about books they have found particularly enjoyable or noticeably awful. However, if this is inappropriate because not all students read at the same speed (or because they often do not have much to say about the book in front of their colleagues), we can ask them each to keep a weekly reading diary, either on its own or as part of any learning journal they may be writing (see Chapter 23, B3). Students can also write short book reviews for the class noticeboard. At the end of a month, a semester or a year, they can vote on the most popular book in the library. Other teachers have students fill in reading record charts (where they record title, publisher, level, start and end dates, comments about level and a good/fair/poor overall rating), they ask students to keep a reading notebook (where they record facts and opinions about the books they have gone through) or they engage students in oral interviews about what they are reading (Bamford and Day 2004: 77–85).

We can also put comment sheets into the books for students to write in, as the following example for a book called *The Earthquake* shows:

Rating	Your comment and your name
5	I'm afraid earthquake happens to us. Shoko
5	Great! Gabriel is nice. He is cool. TOMOKO
4	"Who is really taking care of me," I think after reading this book. YOKO
4	I had a chance to think what's the most important thing by reading this book. Hisako

From *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom*
by R Day and J Bamford (Cambridge University Press)

It does not really matter which of these tasks students are asked to perform, provided that what they are asked to do helps to keep them reading as much and as often as possible.

A2 Intensive reading: the roles of the teacher

In order to get students to read enthusiastically in class, we need to work to create interest in the topic and tasks. However, there are further roles we need to adopt when asking students to read intensively:

- **Organiser:** we need to tell students exactly what their reading purpose is, give them clear instructions about how to achieve it and explain how long they have to do this. Once we have said *You have four minutes for this*, we should not change that time unless observation (see below) suggests that it is necessary.

- **Observer:** when we ask students to read on their own, we need to give them space to do so. This means restraining ourselves from interrupting that reading, even though the temptation may be to add more information or instructions.

  While students are reading we can observe their progress since this will give us valuable information about how well they are doing individually and collectively. It will also tell us whether to give them some extra time or, instead, move to organising feedback more quickly than we had anticipated.

- **Feedback organiser:** when our students have completed the task, we can lead a feedback session to check that they have completed it successfully. We may start by having them compare their answers in pairs 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.

  When we ask students to give answers, we should always ask them to say where in the text they found the relevant information. This provokes a detailed study of the text which will help them the next time they come to a similar reading passage. It also tells us exactly what comprehension problems they have if and when they get answers wrong.

  It is important to be supportive when organising feedback after reading if we are to counter any negative feelings students might have about the process, and if we wish to sustain their motivation.

- **Prompter:** when students have read a text, we can prompt them to notice language features within it. We may also, as controllers, direct them to certain features of text construction, clarifying ambiguities and making them aware of issues of text structure which they had not come across previously.

A3 Intensive reading: the vocabulary question

A common paradox in reading lessons is that while teachers are encouraging students to read for general understanding, without worrying about the meaning of every single word, the students, on the other hand, are desperate to know what each individual word means! Given half a chance, many of them would rather tackle a reading passage with a dictionary (electronic or otherwise) in one hand and a pen in the other to write translations all over the page!

It is easy to be dismissive of such student preferences, yet as Carol Walker points out, 'It seems contradictory to insist that students "read for meaning" while simultaneously discouraging them from trying to understand the text at a deeper level than merely gist' (1998: 172). Clearly, we need to find some accommodation between our desire to have students develop particular

reading skills (such as the ability to understand the general message without understanding every detail) and their natural urge to understand the meaning of every single word.

One way of reaching a compromise is to strike some kind of a bargain with a class (see Chapter 4, B2) whereby they will do more or less what we ask of them provided that we do more or less what they ask of us. Thus we may encourage students to read for general understanding without understanding every word on a first or second read-through. But then, depending on what else is going to be done, we can give them a chance to ask questions about individual words and/or give them a chance to look them up. That way both parties in the teaching–learning transaction have their needs met.

A word of caution needs to be added here. If students ask for the meaning of all the words they do not know – and given some of the problems inherent in the explaining of different word meanings – the majority of a lesson may be taken up in this way. We need, therefore, to limit the amount of time spent on vocabulary checking in the following ways:

- **Time limit:** we can give a time limit of, say, five minutes for vocabulary enquiry, whether this involves dictionary use, language corpus searches or questions to the teacher.

- **Word/phrase limit:** we can say that we will only answer questions about five or eight words or phrases.

- **Meaning consensus:** we can get students to work together to search for and find word meanings. To start the procedure, individual students write down three to five words from the text they most want to know the meaning of. When they have each done this, they share their list with another student and come up with a new joint list of only five words. This means they will probably have to discuss which words to leave out. Two pairs join to make new groups of four and once again they have to pool their lists and end up with only five words. Finally (perhaps after new groups of eight have been formed – it depends on the atmosphere in the class), students can look for meanings of their words in dictionaries and/or we can answer questions about the words which the groups have decided on.

This process works for two reasons. In the first place, students may well be able to tell each other about some of the words which individual students did not know. More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that by the time we are asked for meanings, the students really do want to know them because the intervening process has encouraged them to invest some time in the meaning search. 'Understanding every word' has been changed into a cooperative learning task in its own right.

In responding to a natural hunger for vocabulary meaning, both teachers and students will have to compromise. It's unrealistic to expect only one-sided change, but there are ways of dealing with the problem which make a virtue out of what seems – to many teachers – a frustrating necessity.

A4 Intensive reading: letting the students in

It is often the case that the comprehension tasks we ask students to do are based on tasks in a coursebook. In other words, the students are responding to what someone else has asked them to find out. But students are far more likely to be engaged in a text if they bring their own feelings and knowledge to the task, rather than only responding to someone else's ideas

of what they should find out.

One of the most important questions we can ever get students to answer is *Do you like the text?* (Kennedy 2000a and b). This question is included in the initial task in Example 2 (below). The question is important because if we only ever ask students technical questions about language, we are denying them any affective response to the content of the text. By letting them give voice (if they wish) to their feelings about what they have read, we are far more likely to provoke the 'cuddle factor' (see page 58) than if we just work through a series of exercises.

Another way of letting the students in is to allow them to create their own comprehension task. A popular way of doing this – when the text is about people, events or topics which everyone knows something about – is to discuss the subject of the text with the class before they read. We can encourage them to complete a chart (on the board) with things they know or don't know (or would like to know) about the text, e.g.

Things I/we know	Things I/we are not sure of	Things I/we would like to know

This activity provides a perfect lead-in since students will be engaged, will activate their schemata, and will, finally, end up with a good reason to read which they themselves have brought into being. Now they read the text to check off all the items they have put into the three columns. The text may not give them all the answers, of course, nor may it confirm (or even refute) what they have put in the left-hand column. Nevertheless, the chances are that they will read with considerably more interest than for some more routine task.

Another involving way of reading is to have students read different texts and then share the information they have gathered in order to piece together the whole story. This is called jigsaw reading, and we will look at an extended version of the technique in Example 7.

B Reading lesson sequences

We use intensive reading sequences in class for a number of reasons. We may want to have students practise specific skills such as *skimming*/reading for general understanding or 'gist' (usually a Type 1 task – see page 270) or *scanning*/reading to extract specific information (also often a Type 1 task). We may, on the other hand, get students to read texts for communicative purposes (which mixes both Type 1 and Type 2 tasks), as part of other activities, as sources of information, or in order to identify specific uses of language.

Most reading sequences involve more than one reading skill. We may start by having students read for gist and then get them to read the text again for detailed comprehension; they may start by identifying the topic of a text before scanning the text quickly to recover specific information; they may read for specific information before going back to the text to identify features of text construction.

B1 Examples of reading sequences

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

Example 1: AKA Diaz

Focus: reading to confirm expectations
Skills: predicting; reading for gist; reading for detailed comprehension
Age: adult
Level: intermediate

In this example, students predict the content of a text not from a picture, but from a few tantalising clues they are given (in the form of phrases from the passage they will read).

The teacher gives each student in the class a letter from A to E. She tells all the students to close their eyes. She then asks all the students with the letter A to open their eyes and shows them the word *lion*, written large so that they can see it. Then she makes them close their eyes again and this time shows the B students the phrase *racial groups*. She shows the C students the phrase *paper aeroplanes*, the D students the word *tattoos* and the E students the word *guard*.

She now puts the students in groups of five, each composed of students A–E. By discussing their words and phrases, each group has to try to predict what the text is all about. The teacher can go round the groups encouraging them and, perhaps, feeding them with new words like *cage, the tensest man* or *moral authority*, etc.

Finally, when the groups have made some predictions, the teacher asks them whether they would like to hear the text that all the words came from, as a prelude to reading the following text aloud, investing it with humour and drama, making the reading dramatic and enjoyable.

'This is it,' Rick said, in a cheerful voice. Through the windows of the classroom I could see the men. They were not in their seats; instead they were circling the room restlessly, like lions in a cage.

'Is there going to be a guard in the room while I teach?' I asked. I realized that this was something that should have been straightened out earlier.

Rick looked at me with deep concern. 'I'll come by a bit later, see that you're OK,' he said.

I walked through the door into the classroom. My students barely looked human. The desks were arranged in no special order, except that some of the men had got into racial groups. Many of them were smoking, and under the glare of the lights I could see their tattoos. One man with a pointed beard and a long mane of black hair circled behind me and around the other side of the desk. He was easily the tensest man I had ever seen. I thought of telling him to sit down but wondered what I would do if he refused so I kept the suggestion to myself. I placed my leather bag on the desk and faced the class. Nobody paid any attention to me. The conversation grew louder. I wanted to cut out and run. I had volunteered for this?

Every teacher has these moments of panic. We worry about rebellion: our moral authority lost, the students taking over. I had a teacher in high school, a Miss Hutchinson, who after taking roll would turn towards the board and be followed by an avalanche of paper aeroplanes and spitballs, sometimes even the bodies of students flying forward, an impromptu riot.

I unpacked my bag and began the roll. A few names down, I called out 'Diaz.'

No answer. 'Diaz,' I said again.

'Ain't my name,' a man in the front row volunteered.

'Why did you answer?' I asked.

'I'm here under another name,' he said. 'An alias. I could tell you my real name, but then I'd have to kill you.'

'We'll count that as "present",' I said. Several members of the class laughed: at least that slowed down the conversation. I finished the roll and handed out the syllabus for the class. I read it aloud and when I got to the end I looked up. 'So any questions?' I asked. The paper trembled in my hand.

'Yeah, I got a question.' AKA Diaz raised his hand. 'I want to know what the *&!* it means.'

From *Maximum Security* by R O'Connor in the literary magazine *Granta* (no. 54, 1996)

The students now read the text for themselves to answer the following detailed comprehension questions:

1 ***True, false, or probably (not)?***
   a The class is in a prison.
   b There's a guard in the classroom.
   c Robert O'Connor had offered to teach the class.
   d There are white, black, Hispanic and Asian students in the class.
   e The class has both sexes.
   f Robert O'Connor was frightened.
   g The men threw paper aeroplanes at the teacher.
   h The men wanted to take the class.
   i Diaz is the man's real name.
   j AKA means 'also known as'.
   k The class was going to be a great success.

Before moving on to work with the content of the text, the teacher may well take advantage of the language in it to study some aspects that are of interest. For example, how is the meaning of *would* different in the sentences *I ... wondered what I would do if he refused* and *a teacher ... who ... would turn towards the board ...*? Can students make sentences using the same construction as *He was easily the tensest man I had ever seen* (e.g. *He/She was easily the* (superlative adjective + noun) *I had ever* (past participle)) or *I could tell you my real name, but then I'd have to kill you* (e.g. *I could ..., but then I'd have to ...*).

The discussion possibilities for this text are endless. How many differences are there between Robert O'Connor's class and the students' own class? How many similarities are there? How would they (the students) handle working in a prison? Should prisoners be given classes anyway, and if so, of what kind? What would the students themselves do if they were giving their first English class in a prison or in a more ordinary school environment?

Part of this sequence has involved the teacher reading aloud. This can be very powerful if it is not overdone. By mixing the skills of speaking, listening and reading, the students have had a rich language experience, and because they have had a chance to predict content, listen, read and then discuss the text, they are likely to be very involved with the procedure.

Example 2: Going home Activity: general reading
                Skills: reading for gist; reading for detailed comprehension
                Age: any
                Level: upper intermediate

Over 20 years ago Michael Scott and his colleagues, working at university level with ESP students in Brazil, designed a 'standard exercise' which could be used by their students with any reading text (Scott *et al* 1984). In their version, the questions were detailed and were in Portuguese. The usefulness of the questions was assured because any students, even if they were having trouble with their spoken English, could read a text with the help of this broad-based reading 'kit'.

For general English we can use the same principle and design questions which can be given to students in English or in their own language, and which can be used for any reading text they meet. Consider the following general questions:

> 1 What is the text about?
> 2 Who was it written by?
> 3 Who was it written for?
> 4 What is the writer's intention?
> 5 Do you like the text?

In the following example, these five questions are applied to this text:

19-year-old Penny Elvey and her friend Anna are going home after six months as volunteers in a school in Nepal. But then the rain starts and the roads are flooded. This is part of their story.

At the village of Meestal there is a huge river blocking our path. We came here a few weeks ago with some students for a picnic but the innocent little stream that we sat by has now become a raging torrent.

Across the water we can see a truck. On our side a man approaches us.

'That is my friend,' he says gesturing to a man standing by the vehicle. 'You go with truck.'

Anna and I smile enthusiastically. But our guide steps forward.

'It is too dangerous. We must wait. The river will become smaller.'

Anna and I glance at each other. It is a curious philosophy since the rain is still falling steadily.

The truck driver's friend grins at me.

'We help. You give me 600 rupees.'

600 rupees is far too much but we are desperate. He knows. He knows I know he knows. Our eyes lock.

People are watching us curiously to see how we are going to react. I fold my arms and force a laugh.

'Then we will stay the night here.'

For a terrible moment I think he is going to walk away, but then he smiles nervously.

'I mean 300 for you; 300 for your friend.'

He calls two of his friends and they hold our luggage above their heads as they step into the water. Slowly and steadily they cross the river and reach the other side safely.

Suddenly a man taps my shoulder.

'For you too dangerous. You must stay here.'

My rucksack and walking boots are now sitting on a rock across the water. In the pocket of my rucksack are all my papers and money. Where my passport goes I follow. Maybe the current is not that strong.

'You can swim?'

A small crowd of people gathers on the other side. Anna goes first. Four men take hold of her and lead her safely across. Now it is my turn. I step forward gingerly but catch my ankle on a rock. The water pulls my legs away from under me. But the men drag me to the safety of the far side.

Anna and I pick up our things and climb into the old truck. The people there stare at us in amusement. We are wet through, covered in mud, our clothes in tatters. But as the truck shudders to life, we look at each other and smile. We are going to make it to Kathmandu in time for breakfast!

Adapted from *Network*, the *Gap Activity Projects* annual newsletter

When the students have discussed their answers to the general questions in the reading kit, they can go back to the text to answer more detailed questions (e.g. *Who went for a picnic? Who has to pay* 600 *rupees?* etc.). The teacher may want to draw their attention to certain items of vocabulary with a task such as:

Match the words from the text with their definitions.

a gesturing   **i** move eyes in order to see something
b glance   **ii** give a short quick look
c grins   **iii** *looking at something for a period of time, often*
d look   *when it is moving/doing something*
e smile   **iv** look for a long time with eyes wide open because of
f stare   interest, surprise, etc. Can be rude.
g watching   **v** moving hands, arms, head, etc. to express an idea or
    feeling
    vi smile widely
    vii use the position of the mouth to show pleasure

The students can now make sentences with these words using the pronouns *I* or *we*, e.g. *I like it when people smile at me.* They could discuss why Paula has written her story in the present tense, and they could then go on to talk about journeys they have made, or discuss how they feel if they spend a long time away from home. Or perhaps they could work on an exercise like the following:

You are going home after six months in the jungle or on a desert island. Copy and complete the chart with things you are looking forward to most when you get home.

food	
drink	
object(s)	
activity	

In whatever ways the text is exploited, the use of the general questions ensures that students will approach it – for the first read anyway – in a general way. Of course, many texts can be used in this way, whether for beginners or advanced students.

Example 3: Village of   Activity: modified cloze text
    snakes   Skills: reading for gist; reading for detailed comprehension
        Age: teenage
        Level: elementary

A popular test of comprehension is the 'modified' cloze procedure (see Chapter 22, B2) where every *n*th word is replaced by a blank. Although there may be some doubts about this as a testing technique, when used with students for fun, it can be a good way to help them arrive at a general understanding of a piece of text and a detailed understanding of the sentences in it. It may be necessary, however, for the teacher to choose some of the words that will be replaced by blanks – because some of them which happen, say, every seventh word, may cause

too much trouble and should therefore be avoided.

In this example, teenage students are going to read about snakes and snake charmers in an Indian village. The teacher starts by asking students if they know any words about snakes and the people who play music to snakes. Words like *poison, poisonous* and *snake charmer* will then be elicited.

Students are now given the following text and asked to work with a colleague to see if they can fill in the blanks as they read.

VILLAGE OF SNAKES

by Sohan Devu

Saperagaon isn't an ordinary Indian village – (1) _____ a village of snake charmers. In (2) _____ house in the village there are (3) _____ lot of poisonous snakes: vipers, kraits (4) _____ cobras. Each one of these snakes (5) _____ poisonous enough to kill you, but (6) _____ children love playing with them.

It (7) _____ the beginning of a new day (8) _____ Saperagaon. The sun is coming up. Twelve-(9) _____ -old Ravi is happy because it (10) _____ warm enough to wake the cobras. (11) _____ opens the basket and a king cobra (12) _____ its head. It hisses and then (13) _____ to bite. 'It doesn't like waking (14) _____ !' says Ravi, laughing.

The villagers use (15) _____ snakes to earn money for food.'(16) _____ day we walk 15 or 20 (17) _____ to the nearest town,' says Ravi.'(18) _____ play music on the pipes and (19) _____ snakes dance. People enjoy the show,(20) _____ they don't like paying. Each day (21) _____ earn only 25 or 30 rupees.' ((22) _____ not enough for an ice cream (23) _____ the UK).

'There aren't many snake charmers (24) _____ India now,' says Sanjay Nath, (25) _____ father.

'Do many snake charmers die (26) _____ snake bites?' I ask.

'No, not (27) _____ ,' says Sanjay, 'but that isn't the (28) _____ . We haven't got much money or (29) _____ . It's too difficult to earn money. (30) _____ is not a good enough life (31) _____ children. They go to school now. (32) _____ learning a different way to live.

From *Go Student's Book 2* by S Elsworth and J Rose (Pearson Education Ltd)

When the teacher and students have checked the answers to the blanks, they can read the complete text again for answers to more detailed questions such as *How many types of poisonous snakes are there?* and *Why does Ravi like the sun?* Students can then be directed to look at the text again for any language points which are interesting and/or to make sure they have understood the text as fully as is necessary. They may then say if they would like to be a snake charmer or talk about animals they like or don't like. They might listen to an interview with Ravi about his daily life and then talk about their own.

This kind of cloze procedure can be used with poems in a more interactive way, as in the following example for intermediate students.

First the students are shown, line by line, the following poem. They are told that they have to try to guess what words go in the blanks, however crazy their guesses are. We can do this by gradually revealing the lines on an overhead transparency or on a computer screen projected onto the board. Thus in the following poem ('The Confession' by Brian Patten), the students see the following lines:

The Confession (version 1)

When he showed her the (1) _____ again, she said,

'Yes, I remember (2) _____ it.

I was incredibly (3) _____ then.

You handed me the (4) _____

And telling me over and over how to use it

You posed, (5) _____ (6) _____ .

You were so (7) _____ , so (8) _____ to everything.

'It was a July afternoon.

The day was (9) _____ and my (10) _____ hummed.

I was (11) _____ and in search of (12) _____ (13) _____

That seemed beyond you.

'Yet how can I forget that (14) _____ ?

Look closer at the (15) _____ .

See there (16) _____ (17) _____ (18) _____ ,

In the (19) _____ (20) _____ you

The other (21) _____ , (22) _____ so (23) _____ .'

The students almost certainly won't be able to come up with the original words, but they can compare their guesses to see if anyone has come up with the same idea. Throughout, they should know that this is a kind of game.

We now tell them that we will show them the lines again, but this time we will add the first letter of each word, i.e. (1) p____ , (2) t____ , (3) y____ , etc.).

The next time the students see the poem, they get the first two letters of each word (i.e. (1) ph ___, (2) ta ___, (3) yo ____, etc.). By now several students will have guessed a proportion of the words.

Finally, they see the completed poem:

The Confession (final version)

When he showed her the photograph again, she said,

'Yes, I remember taking it.

I was incredibly young then.

You handed me the camera

And telling me over and over how to use it

You posed, smiling stiffly.

You were so pompous, so blind to everything.

'It was a July afternoon.

The day was hot and my body hummed.

I was bored and in search of an adventure

That seemed beyond you.

'Yet how can I forget that day?

Look closer at the photograph.

See there in the background,

In the corner behind you

The other boy, grinning so openly.'

This activity works extremely well because students are constantly trying to make sense of what they are seeing. They are searching for all and any of the language they know to

try to complete the blanks. And because we give them a bit more information each time, they gradually get to guess almost all the words. Somewhere between reading and vocabulary practice, this activity is enjoyable and dynamic.

Example 4: The right film

Activity: researching a topic
Skills: scanning; reading for gist
Age: any
Level: intermediate

The following example shows how computers and the Internet can be used in class (or in a self-access or computer centre) to get students searching for information in an entirely realistic and enjoyable way.

Students are told that they are going to the cinema in Cambridge, England. They have to find a film that is suitable for themselves and a 13 year old, and which is on in the evening. They will have to check reviews to make sure the film is a good one. Before they do this, they have the British rating system explained to them (U = anyone can go, PG = parental guidance: children can go with their parents or alone if their parents say they can, 12A = suitable for 12 year olds upwards, 15 = suitable for 15 year olds upwards, and 18 = anyone older than 17).

Students are directed to 'Guardian Unlimited', the website for one of Britain's most widely read quality newspapers at www.guardian.co.uk and then to the 'Films' pages within the website. The teacher tells them to enter a Cambridge postcode in the space provided. When they click on the 'Go' button, they will find something like the following on the screen.

They now have to click on the 'U', 'PG' and '12A' films to read summaries and short film reviews (which are also available at this site). When they have done this for all the films which suit their target audience, they have to make a choice based on the summaries and the review information. But they have to do this as quickly as possible.

> **Vue**
>
> **Grafton Centre, East Road**
>
> Barnyard (PG) **Sat/Sun mat** 11.10
> Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit
> Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan (15) 10.50 (Sat/Sun)
> 12.10 1.20 (not Sun) 2.30 3.30 5.00 6.00 (not Tue)
> 7.00 8.30 9.30 10.40 (Fri/Sat) 11.40 (Fri/Sat)
> Breaking and Entering (15) 11.30 (Sat/Sun) 2.20 5.30
> 9.00 (Sun-Thu)
> Casino Royale (12A) 9.30 (Sat/Sun) 10.00 (Sat/Sun)
> 11.00 (Sat/Sun) 12.30 1.00 2.00 4.00 4.30 5.30 7.30
> 8.00 9.00 10.30 (Fri/Sat) 11.10 (Fri/Sat) 12.07
> (Fri/Sat)
> The Devil Wears Prada (PG) 1.50 4.20 (not Sat/Sun)
> Eight Below (PG) **Sat/Sun mat** 9.50
> Jackass Number Two (18) Thu 5.10 7.20 9.40
> Open Season (PG) **Sat/Sun mat** 10.10
> The Prestige (12A) 12.20 3.00 5.50 8.40 11.30
> (Fri/Sat)
> Saw III (18) 6.50 9.20 11.50 (Fri/Sat)
> Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny (15) **Sat/Sun** 4.20

When choices have been made, the students have to explain which film they are going to see and why. They can also tell their classmates which films they would have preferred to go and see if they didn't have to worry about the 13 year old and/or they could go at different times of the day.

At this level, students will not understand all the words in the descriptions and reviews, etc. Nevertheless, they should understand enough for them to talk about what they have found.

Getting students to search for information on the web is, as we saw in Chapter 11G, immensely useful. Perhaps the best way of doing this is through webquests (see www.webquest.org). The Internet is the ideal resource tool for this kind of reading. Provided that the teacher has researched the topic (and the appropriate websites) beforehand, the reading for specific detail

will be purposeful and enjoyable whether students are looking at films, weather patterns or holiday destinations. However, it is important for the teacher to have done some of the work in locating sites so that a lot of time is not spent searching uselessly.
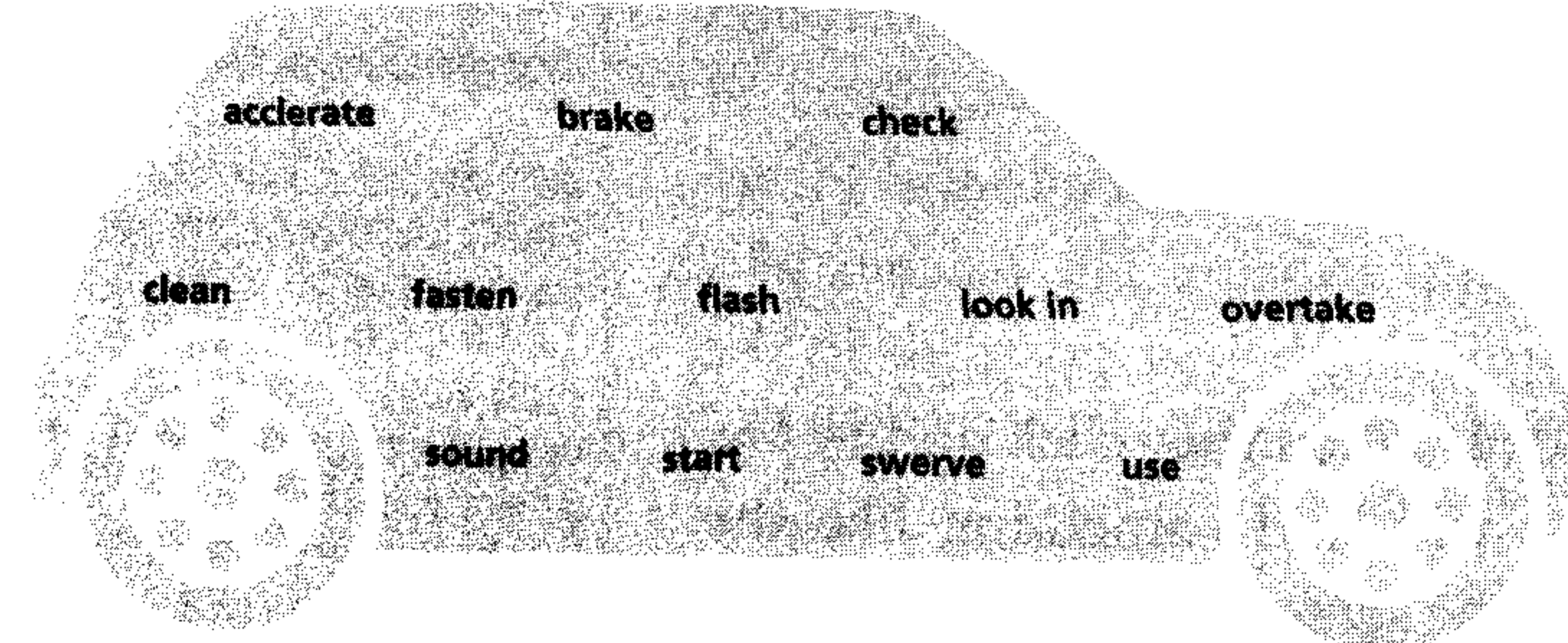
Example 5: Look behind you	Activity:	ordering sentences
	Skill:	reading for gist; reading for detailed information
	Age:	any
	Level:	elementary

In this example, students first have to do a reading puzzle, which leads them on to complete a story. The reading is part of an integrated skills sequence which includes discussion and language work.

Students are told they are going to discuss a car journey. The teacher asks them to name the parts of a car (she can bring along a photograph or draw a car). The students end up with words like *mirror*, *tyre*, *indicator*, etc.

Students now look at the following exercise where they have to write the correct verb in the blanks to make up typical car phrases. They can do this individually or in pairs.

From *Reading Extra* by L Driscoll (Cambridge University Press)

The teacher goes through the answers with the class, and then gives pairs of students the set of sentences on page 297, which they have to put in order to make a story. (They are in the correct order on page 297, but the teacher will have mixed them up so that she doesn't give them out in a perfect sequence.) While they do this, the teacher goes round the class monitoring what is going on and giving help where students are stuck.

A woman was driving home along a country road late one night.

The road was completely empty except for one car behind her.

The woman thought nothing of it until the other car began to overtake.

Then it suddenly braked, swerved back behind her and flashed its lights.

The woman felt a bit nervous, particulary when the car flashed its lights again.

She accelerated, but the other car stayed right behind her.

The woman was absolutelt terrified by the time she got home.

And, what made things worse, the other car stopped behnd her.

Her only hope of escaping was to get into the house and phone the police.

She got out of her car and began to run, but so did the driver of the other car.

She screamed in terror, but he shouted, 'Quick! get inside and call the police!'

When the police arrived, the woman discovered that the man wasn't trying to kill – he had actually saved her life.

The teacher goes through the sentences with the class to make sure that everyone has the correct order. She explains that the end of the story is missing, and asks the students, once again in pairs or groups, to try to work out what the end might be. They should write a final sentence or two.

The class listen to the different endings and decide which one they like best. The teacher then shows them the following:

As the man was driving along behind her, he had seen someone with a knife rising from the back seat. But when he flashed his lights, the person sat back down again.

Finally, the class discuss the fact that this story is unlikely to be true. It is one of those urban myths that everyone tells.

Re-ordering lines or paragraphs like this is a bottom-up activity (see page 270) where general meaning is only achieved by looking at how the whole thing coheres on the basis not only of the facts, but also by the use of cohesive devices (see page 29) which make the whole thing stick together.

A variation is to get students to stand up and give them each a card with a different line from a poem. They can read their lines out to each other but not show them. They have to put the poem in order (the following cards, describing an advertising photograph, are examples of this).

Had driven her to do it

A girl kissed lips of stone

And her safety was the thing

More attractive than a king

Of living life alone

On the back of Cosmopolitan

To advertise a perfume. Fear

That made a dull cold statue

The following example runs the risk of causing some students disquiet since it discusses an issue they may not be too comfortable with. It is an example of the kind of text which some teachers find extremely appropriate for their classes (because it engages the students' interest), whereas others would be unhappy to bring such a topic into the class.

The sequence starts when the teacher asks the students what they would say if they met someone who had just had plastic surgery (and had previously announced that they were going to do this). Would the students comment on their friend's new appearance in any way, and if so, how? Students can discuss this as a whole class or in pairs or small groups.

Students then look at the headline to the article below and speculate on its meaning. They are then asked to read the article just to say whether there is a similar trend in their country (or countries). They can discuss this in pairs before the teacher makes sure that they have got the main point of the article.

As a Type 2 task (see page 270), students answer the following questions:

1   Why are younger people turning to plastic surgery?
2   Why did the doctor refuse plastic surgery to one patient?
3   Why is plastic surgery now more popular with men?
4   Why did the man have liposuction?

YOUNGER PLASTIC SURGERY PATIENTS

Surgeons at clinics specialising in plastic surgery are reporting increasingly younger patients, according to a report released recently by the National Association of Plastic Surgery in the United States.

"They want to look like the people they see in films or the models they see in magazines. It's becoming an obsession." said one doctor in a beauty clinic in California. "Last week we had a woman in here who, at 30, said she was looking too old and wanted a facelift. I told her to come back and see me in 15 years."

The average age for patients undergoing plastic surgery over the last year was 32, down from 34 just the year before. In England recently, a 15-year-old girl was in the news for announcing that her parents were going to pay for breast enlargements as her 16th birthday present.

Her mother said, "If it makes her happy and gives her more chance of success in life, then what is the problem?" Though women still dominate the plastic surgery scene, men are growing increasingly concerned with their physical appearance and are doing something about it. According to the report, men now make up 39% of all surgeries performed — that's an increase of nearly 20% from last year.

One man, who wished to remain anonymous, said he got his liposuction – removal of excess fat – after pressure from his wife. "She's a very athletic woman and, well, I enjoy a good steak." Liposuction tops the list of plastic surgery performed on men, followed by hair implants and breast reduction. For women the top order is still breast enlargement, followed by liposuction and facelifts.

From *Taboos and Issues* by R MacAndrew and R Martinez (Thompson Publishing)

The possibilities after a text like this are many and varied. Students could discuss different kinds of plastic surgery and what they think of them. They can take a position about whether or not plastic surgery is something they approve of or not. They could play a kind of game

where they have to decide – if they had to choose – what they would have done to themselves. They might debate whether or not plastic surgery should be paid for by the state for anyone who wanted it, or they could look at a portrait from an earlier period and discuss what they could do to make the person look more like someone from the twenty-first century.

Example 7: The cellist	Activity: jigsaw reading
	Skills: reading for detailed comprehension
	Age: young adult and above
	Level: intermediate

In the following example, students are set a mystery. In order to solve it, they are put into groups of three and each student in the group is given something different to read. Without showing their texts to their colleagues, students have to share the information they have so that they can put the three pieces together, like a jigsaw, to assemble the complete story and resolve the mystery

As a lead-in, we can start the sequence by playing students an extract of music (preferably a recording of part of 'The Cellist of Sarajevo' by David Wilde). Students are asked not to say much but just to conjure up a picture in their minds based on what images this difficult and troubled music provokes. Students now read the following text:

THE CONCERT

There was only one chair on the stage of the concert hall in northern England. There was no piano, no music stand and no conductor. Just that solitary chair.

The atmosphere in the hall was tense. People were nervous and excited. Everyone in the audience of 600 people knew that they were going to hear a very special kind of music.

Finally it was time to start. Yo-Yo Ma, one of the world's most famous cellists, came on to the stage, bowed to the audience and sat down quietly on the chair. He made himself comfortable, thought for some minutes until there was complete silence, and then he started to play music that was at first empty and dangerous, but that soon became loud and painful, like the worst thing you've ever heard. It was almost unbearable but then, finally, it faded away to nothing. Yo-Yo Ma did not move. He stayed with his head bowed over his instrument.

Everyone in the hall held their breath. For what seemed like hours, nobody moved. It was as if they had all experienced something terrible and dark.

But then Yo-Yo Ma stood up. He put down his cello. He stretched out his hand to someone in the audience, asking them to come and join him. An electric shock ran through the audience when they realised what was going to happen.

A man got up from his seat and walked towards the stage. He was dressed in dirty motorcycle leathers, but Ma did not seem to mind. He rushed down from the stage, and when the two men met they flung their arms around each other in an emotional embrace.

The audience went crazy; suddenly everyone was cheering and shouting, like people do when they've just heard great music. But this was more than music.

From *Just Right Intermediate* by J Harmer (Marshall Cavendish Ltd)

We can check the students' comprehension by asking them to fill in the following chart:

Name of the concert cellist	
Number of people in the audience	
Description of the music	
Audience reaction to the music	
Description of the event after the music finished	
Audience reaction to the event	

They can check their charts in pairs and groups to see if they have understood everything.

We now tell the students that they are going to try to find out why the text says 'but this was more than music'. What, they must find out, is the connection between the music itself, the man in the audience and Yo-Yo Ma. What is the story of the music and how did it come about?

In each group of three students, one student is A, one B and the third C. Student A is directed to the following material:

STUDENT A

Read the text and make sure you understand the answers to the following questions.

a Why was there a queue of people in the street?
b What happened at four o'clock?
c How many people died?
d When exactly did they die?
e Who were they?
f Who is or was Vedran Smailovic?

In the early 1990s, there was a terrible war in Yugoslavia. Many people died, both soldiers and civilians. The city of Sarajevo was for many months one of the most dangerous places in the world. It was constantly under attack and its civilian inhabitants had to live with no electricity and little water. Only a few shops stayed open to sell food.

On May 27, 1992, one of the shops, a bakery, opened in the afternoon and a long line of men, women and children queued to buy fresh bread. But it was not to be. At four o'clock a mortar shell exploded in the street and twenty-two innocent people were killed.

A man called Vedran Smailovic lived near the scene of this terrible tragedy. He was 35 at the time, and when he heard the news he decided to do something about it.

All the A students have to be sure that they can answer the questions at the top satisfactorily so that when B and C ask them these questions, they will be able to answer them.

Student B gets a different text and question. Like the A students, all the Bs have to check their answers to the questions above the text, before asking the A and C students to answer the questions underneath the text.

STUDENT B

Read the text and make sure you understand the answers to the following questions.

a What was Vedran Smailovic's job before the war?
b What did Vedran Smailovic do when he heard the news?
c What piece of music did he play?
d Why did he play his cello?
e Was he ever hurt?

Before the war, Vedran Smailovic had been a cellist with the Sarajevo Opera. When he heard about an explosion that had killed men, women and children in a bread queue in Sarajevo, he decided to do something about it. And so he did what he did best. He played his cello.

For the next twenty-two days at exactly four o'clock in the afternoon he put on his concert clothes, took his cello and a plastic chair into the empty streets and played a piece of music by the composer Albinoni – his Adagio in G minor, one of the saddest pieces of music ever. Around him there was fighting and death. Shells fell and bullets flew while he played, but he was never hurt. With the world collapsing around him he played for compassion and peace, to ease the pain of loss and to preserve the dignity of the human race.

Find the answers to the following questions by asking Students A and C. Don't show your text to them.

a Why did Vedran Smailovic play for twenty-two days?
b Why did he play at four o'clock in the afternoon?
c Who is David Wilde and what did he do?
d What is David Wilde's connection to a concert in Manchester?

The third piece of the jigsaw is given to the C students.

STUDENT C

Read the text and make sure you understand the answers to the following questions.

a Who is David Wilde?
b What did he read about?
c What did he do then?
d Where was the first UK performance of his new music?
e Who played it?
f Who was in the audience?

David Wilde, an English composer, read a story in his newspaper which moved him deeply. It was about a man called Vedran Smailovic, who played his cello in the street in the middle of a war to honour the dead. His courage was extraordinary because he sat in the street and played while shells and bullets flew around him.

David Wilde was so inspired by the story that he wrote a special piece for solo cello which he called *The Cellist of Sarajevo*. It was performed by the cellist Yo-Yo Ma at the Manchester Cello Festival in April 1994. Incredibly, Vedran Smailovic had survived the war and was in the audience that night to hear it. When Yo-Yo Ma finished playing, the two men embraced in front of a cheering audience.

Find the answers to the following questions by asking Students A and B. Don't show your text to them.

a Exactly what happened in Sarajevo on May 27, 1992?
b What was Vedran Smailovic's job before the war?
c Why did Vedran Smailovic play his cello? What piece of music did he play?

Finally, we bring the class back together to make sure that the students have understood the whole story (that the piece 'The Cellist of Sarajevo' was written by the British composer David Wilde after he had read how cellist Vedran Smailovic played his cello in the street in Sarajevo to honour civilians killed in a bomb attack – and how Smailovic had been in the audience when Yo-Yo Ma played the piece at a concert). Once they have done that, we can ask them to decide (once again in groups) on adjectives to describe Vedran Smailovic; they can talk about how people respond to tragic events, and later they can look at some of the language chunks that occur in the texts (e.g. *He made himself comfortable, everyone held their breath*). We can then move on to ask students to study vocabulary for music and musicians.

The point of reading activities like this (quite apart from the hope that students will be engaged by the stories themselves) is that everyone is reading for a purpose and that unless they all read and do their best to pass on what they understood, the jigsaw is impossible to complete. Their participation is almost mandatory.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Reading**

  On reading in general, see C Nuttall (1996), C Wallace (1992) and F Grellet (1981). See also articles by R Buckmaster (2005), I Cavallera and A Leiguarda (2006), P Harvey (2005, 2006) and S Pani (2004). D Dlugosz (2000) discusses the role of reading for young learners. S Urquhart and C Weir (1998) have written a substantial work on reading in the *Longman Applied Linguistics and Language Study* series.

  On encouraging students to analyse the language of texts in detail, see R Gower (1999). As a learner he found 'explicacion de texte', (i.e. describing features of a text in detail after reading/listening to it) extremely useful, however 'old-fashioned' it was; see also C Walker (1998: 172).

- **Reading and technology**

  M-L McCloskey and E Thrush (2005) talk about building a reading scaffold with web texts. M Vallance (2006) puts interactive stories on an iPod.

- **Extensive reading**

  C Nuttall (1996: 127) talks about 'vicious' and 'virtuous' reading circles. The former occur when weak readers read less and less and so read slower and less effectively, whereas a virtuous circle occurs when students read faster and therefore more effectively. R Day and J Bamford use the term 'book strapping' to describe how the effects of an action (extensive reading) are fed back into the process to achieve greater results with less effort (1998: 30).

  J Bamford and R Day (2004) have a wealth of activities for students who are reading extensively. See also P Prowse (2000), P Watkins (2001), V Brines (2001), who discusses organising a reading programme, and C Green (2005), who wants to integrate extensive reading into task-based learning.

18 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 pronunciation.

A1 Extensive listening

Just as we can claim that extensive reading helps students to acquire vocabulary and grammar and that, furthermore, it make students better readers (see Chapter 17, 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 MP3 players 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 obtained from a number of sources. Many simplified readers are now published with an audio version on cassette or CD. These provide ideal sources of listening material. Many students will enjoy reading and listening at the same time, using the reader both in book form and on an audio track. Students can also have their own copies of coursebook CDs or tapes, or recordings which accompany other books written especially at their level. They can download podcasts from a range of sources or they can listen to English language broadcasts online, either as they happen or as 'listen again' events on websites such as www.bbc.co.uk/radio.

Of course, radio broadcasts are authentic in the sense that we defined the term on page 273, and as such they may cause some learning problems for students at lower levels. However, in a short article about listening to the radio, Joseph Quinn advised students not to worry if they don't understand everything. They don't actually need to, and they're bound to take in a lot of language even if they are not aware of it. To make the most of this kind of input, students should set themselves a simple listening task, adopt a relaxed posture and 'lie down and doodle' while they listen (Quinn 2000: 14).

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, CDs and podcasts, clearly marked for level, topic and genre – though John Field thinks that it is very difficult to judge

the difficulty of a text and, therefore, difficult to grade listening (Field 2000a: 195). These can be kept, like simplified readers, in a permanent collection (such as in a self-access centre or on a hard disk so that students can either listen to them on the spot or download them onto their MP3 players). Alternatively, they can 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 items; where possible, we should involve students in the task of record-keeping.

The keenest students will want to listen to English audio material 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 about how much and what kind of listening they should do. We can recommend certain CDs or podcasts 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 23, B3), 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 recording. 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 website. 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 audio material

Many teachers use audio material on tape, CD or hard disk when they want their students to practise listening skills. This has a number of advantages and disadvantages.

- **Advantages:** recorded 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 recordings contain written dialogues or extracts from plays, they offer a wide variety of situations and voices.

  Audio material is portable and readily available. Tapes and CDs are extremely cheap, and machines to play them are relatively inexpensive. Now that so much audio material is offered in digital form, teachers can play recorded tracks in class directly from computers (either stand-alone or on a school network).

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

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

  Another problem with recorded material in the classroom is that everyone has to listen at the same speed, a speed dictated by the recording, not by the listeners. Although this replicates the situation of radio, it is less satisfactory when students have to take information from the recording (though see A3 below). Nor can they, themselves, interact with the speakers on the audio track in any way and they can't see the speaking taking place. For many

of these reasons, students may wonder why they should get involved with such material.

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

Despite the disadvantages, however, we will still want to use recorded material at various stages in a sequence of lessons for the advantages we have already mentioned. In order to counteract some of the potential problems described above, we need to check audio and machine quality before we take them into class. Where possible, we need to change the position of the tape recorder or CD player (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.

An issue that also needs to be addressed is how often we are going to play the audio tracks 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 or 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 the kind of task we give students for the first time they hear an audio track 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.

If students are to get the maximum benefit from a listening, then we should replay it 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, 2000b). So even when we set prediction and gist activities for Type 1 tasks, we can return to the recording again for Type 2 tasks, such as detailed comprehension, text interpretation or language analysis. Or we might play the recording again simply because our students want us to. However, we do not want to bore the students by playing them the same recorded material again and again, nor do we want to waste time on useless repetition.

As with reading, a crucial part of listening practice is the lead-in we involve students in before they listen to recorded material, for, despite John Field's comments about long pre-listening phases, what students do before they listen will have a significant effect on how successfully they listen, especially when they listen for the first time. In a recent study Anna Ching-Shyang Chang and John Read wanted to find out what kind of listening support was most helpful for students who were doing listening tests. Overwhelmingly, whether students were 'high-' or 'low-proficiency' listeners, they found that giving students background knowledge before they listened was more successful than either letting them preview questions or teaching them some key vocabulary before they listened (Ching-Shyang Chang and Read 2006: 375–397). Of course, listening practice is not the same as testing listening; on the contrary, our job is to help students become better listeners by blending Type 1 and Type 2 tasks so that they become more and more confident and capable when they listen to English. But what this study shows is that activating students' schemata and giving them some topic help to assist them in making sense of the listening is a vital part of our role.

A3 Who controls the recorded material?

We said that a disadvantage of recorded material was that students all had to listen at the same speed – that is the speed of the recording, rather than at their own listening speed. Nevertheless, there are things we can do about this.

- **Students control stop and start:** some teachers get students to control the speed of recorded listening. They tell the teacher when they want the recording to be paused and when they are happy for it to resume. Alternatively, a student can be at the controls and ask his or her classmates to say when they want to stop or go on.

    It is possible that students may feel exposed or embarrassed when they have to ask the teacher to pause the recording. One possible way of avoiding this is to have all students listen with their eyes closed and then raise their hands if they want the recording to stop. No one can see who is asking for the pause and, as a result, no one loses face.

- **Students have access to different machines:** if we have the space or resources, it is a very good idea to have students listen to different machines in small groups. This means that they can listen at the speed of a small group rather than at the speed of the whole class.

    Having more than one machine is especially useful for any kind of jigsaw listening (see page 299 for an example of jigsaw reading).

- **Students work in a language laboratory or listening centre:** in a language laboratory all the students can listen to material (or do exercises or watch film clips) at the same time if they are in lockstep (that is all working with the same audio clip at the same time). However, a more satisfactory solution is to have students working on their own (see the pronunciation activity in Example 6 on page 261). All students can work with the same recorded material, but because they have control of their own individual machines, they can pause, rewind and fast forward in order to listen at their own speed.

The three solutions above are all designed to help students have more control even when they are members of a large group. Of course, students can go to learning/listening centres on their own and they can, as we saw above, listen on CD, tape or MP3 players (or computers) to any amount of authentic or specially recorded material in their own time.

A4 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 it allows students to practise listening in face-to-face interactions and, especially, allows them to practise listening 'repair' strategies, such as using formulaic expressions (*Sorry? What was that? I didn't quite catch that*), repeating up to the point where communication breakdown occurred, using a rising intonation (*She didn't like the ...?*), or rephrasing and seeing if the speaker confirms the rephrasing (*You mean she said she didn't know anything?* if the speaker says something like *She denied all knowledge of the affair*) (Field 2000a: 34).

Students can also, 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 and respond not just to the sound of someone's voice, but also to all sorts of prosodic and paralinguistic clues (see Chapter 2G).

LISTENING

Live listening can take the following forms:

- **Reading aloud:** an enjoyable activity, when done with conviction and style, is for the teacher to read aloud to a class. This allows the students to hear a clear spoken version of a written text and can be extremely enjoyable if the teacher is prepared to read with expression and conviction.

    The teacher can also read or act out dialogues, either by playing two parts or by inviting a colleague into the classroom. This gives students a chance to hear how a speaker they know well (the teacher) would act in different conversational settings.

- **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, to describe people in the story or pass comment on it in some other way. And as we have suggested (see page 56), re-telling stories is a powerful way of increasing language competence.

- **Interviews:** one of the most motivating listening activities is the live interview, especially where students themselves think up the questions (see Example 1 in C1 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 can take on a different persona to make the interview more interesting or choose a subject we know about for the students to interview us on.

- **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 storytelling possibilities by role-playing with a colleague.

A5 Intensive listening: the roles of the teacher

As with all activities, we need to create student engagement through the way we set up listening tasks. We need to build up students' confidence by helping them listen better, rather than by testing their listening abilities (see Chapter 16, B3). We also need to acknowledge the students' difficulties and suggest ways out of them.

- **Organiser:** we need to tell students exactly what their listening purpose is 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 audio material, we need to be as efficient as possible in the way we use the audio player. With a tape player this means knowing where the segment we wish to use is on the tape, and knowing, through the use of the tape counter, how to get back there. On a CD or DVD player, it means finding the segment we want to use. Above all, it means testing the recording out before taking it into class so that we do not waste time trying to make the right decisions or trying to make things work when we get there. We should take decisions about where we can stop the recording 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 speak accordingly.

- **Feedback organiser:** when our students have completed the task, we should lead a feedback session to check that they have completed it successfully. We may start by having them compare their answers in pairs (see Chapter 10, A4) 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 a listening if we are to counter any negative expectations students might have, and if we wish to sustain their motivation (see Chapter 5D).

- **Prompter:** when students have listened to a recording for comprehension purposes, we can prompt them listen to it again in order 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 Film and video

So far we have talked about recorded material as audio material only. But of course, we can also have students listen while they watch film clips on video, DVD or online.

There are many good reasons for encouraging students to watch while they listen. In the first place, they get to see 'language in use'. This allows them to see a whole lot of paralinguistic behaviour. For example, they can see how intonation matches facial expression and what gestures accompany certain phrases (e.g. shrugged shoulders when someone says *I don't know*), and they can pick up a range of cross-cultural clues. Film allows students entry into a whole range of other communication worlds: they see how different people stand when they talk to each other (how close they are, for example) or what sort of food people eat. Unspoken rules of behaviour in social and business situations are easier to see on film than to describe in a book or hear on an audio track.

Just like audio material, filmed extracts can be used as a main focus of a lesson sequence or as parts of other longer sequences. Sometimes we might get students to watch a whole programme, but at other times they will only watch a short two- or three-minute sequence.

Because students are used to watching film at home – and may therefore associate it with relaxation – we need to be sure that we provide them with good viewing and listening tasks so that they give their full attention to what they are hearing and seeing.

Finally, it is worth remembering that students can watch a huge range of film clips on the Internet at sites such as You Tube (www. youtube.com), where people of all ages and interests can post film clips in which they talk or show something. Everything students might want is out there in cyberspace, so they can do extensive or intensive watching and then come and tell the class about what they have seen. Just as with extensive listening, the more they do this, the better.

B1 Viewing techniques

All of the following viewing techniques are designed to awaken the students' curiosity through prediction so that when they finally watch the film sequence in its entirety, they will have some expectations about it.

- **Fast forward:** the teacher presses the play button and then fast forwards the DVD or video so that the sequence shoots past silently and at great speed, taking only a few seconds. When it is over, the teacher can ask students what the extract was all about and whether they can guess what the characters were saying.

- **Silent viewing (for language):** the teacher plays the film extract at normal speed but without the sound. Students have to guess what the characters are saying. When they have done this, the teacher plays it with sound so that they can check to see if they guessed correctly.

- **Silent viewing (for music):** the same technique can be used with music. Teachers show a sequence without sound and ask students to say what kind of music they would put behind it and why (see Section D below). When the sequence is then shown again, with sound, students can judge whether they chose music conveying the same mood as that chosen by the film director.

- **Freeze frame:** at any stage during a video sequence we can 'freeze' the picture, stopping the participants dead in their tracks. This is extremely useful for asking the students what they think will happen next or what a character will say next.

- **Partial viewing:** one way of provoking the students' curiosity is to allow them only a partial view of the pictures on the screen. We can use pieces of card to cover most of the screen, only leaving the edges on view. Alternatively, we can put little squares of paper all over the screen and remove them one by one so that what is happening is only gradually revealed.

  A variation of partial viewing occurs when the teacher uses a large 'divider', placed at right angles to the screen so that half the class can only see one half of the screen, while the rest of the class can only see the other half. They then have to say what they think the people on the other side saw.

B2 Listening (and mixed) techniques

Listening routines, based on the same principles as those for viewing, are similarly designed to provoke engagement and expectations.

- **Pictureless listening (language):** the teacher covers the screen, turns the monitor away from the students or turns the brightness control right down. The students then listen to a dialogue and have to guess such things as where it is taking place and who the speakers are. Can they guess their age, for example? What do they think the speakers actually look like?

- **Pictureless listening (music):** where an excerpt has a prominent music track, students can listen to it and then say – based on the mood it appears to convey – what kind of scene they think it accompanies and where it is taking place.

- **Pictureless listening (sound effects):** in a scene without dialogue students can listen to the sound effects to guess what is happening. For example, they might hear the lighting of a gas stove, eggs being broken and fried, coffee being poured and the milk and sugar stirred in. They then tell the story they think they have just heard.

- **Picture or speech:** we can divide the class in two so that half of the class faces the screen and

half faces away. The students who can see the screen have to describe what is happening to the students who cannot. This forces them into immediate fluency while the non-watching students struggle to understand what is going on, and is an effective way of mixing reception and production in spoken English (see Chapter 16, A1). Halfway through an excerpt, the students can change round.

- **Subtitles:** there are many ways we can use subtitled films. John Field (2000a: 194) suggests that one way to enable students to listen to authentic material is to allow them to have subtitles to help them. Alternatively, students can watch a film extract with subtitles but with the sound turned down. Every time a subtitle appears, we can stop the film and the students have to say what they think the characters are saying in English. With DVDs which have the option to turn off the subtitles, we can ask students to say what they would write for subtitles and then they can compare theirs with what actually appears.

  Subtitles are only really useful, of course, when students all share the same L1. But if they do, the connections they make between English and their language can be extremely useful (see Chapter 7, D2).

C Listening (and film) lesson sequences

As we saw in Chapter 16A, no skill exists in isolation (which is why skills are integrated in most learning sequences). Listening can thus 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 recording. 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. 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 re-focusing our students' attention.

Most listening sequences start with a Type 1 task (see page 270) before moving on to more specific Type 2 explorations of the text.

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 of it.

C1 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.

Example 1: Interviewing a stranger	Activity: live listening
	Skills: predicting; listening for specific information; listening for detail
	Age: any
	Level: beginner and above

Where possible, teachers can bring strangers into the class to talk to the students or be interviewed by them (see A4 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 or groups, they try to guess as much as they can about the visitor. Based on their guesses, 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. The teacher will also prompt the students to ask follow-up questions; if a student asks *Where are you from?* and the visitor says that he comes from Scotland, he can then be 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 – for example, 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 also role-play similar interviews among themselves.

We can make pre-recorded interviews in coursebooks more interactive by giving students the interviewer's questions first so that they can predict what the interviewee will say.

| **Example 2:** Sorry I'm late | Activity: getting events in the right order |
	Skills: predicting; listening for gist
	Age: young adult and above
	Level: lower intermediate

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 in order to put pictures in the sequence in which they hear them.
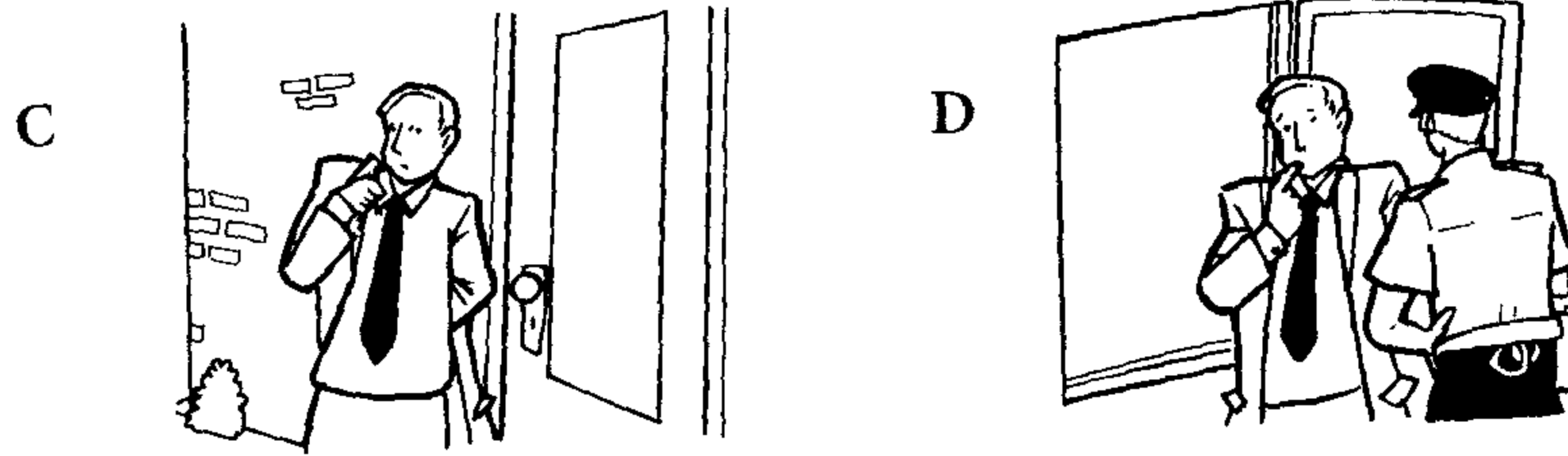
In this example, students look at the following four pictures:

A

B

311

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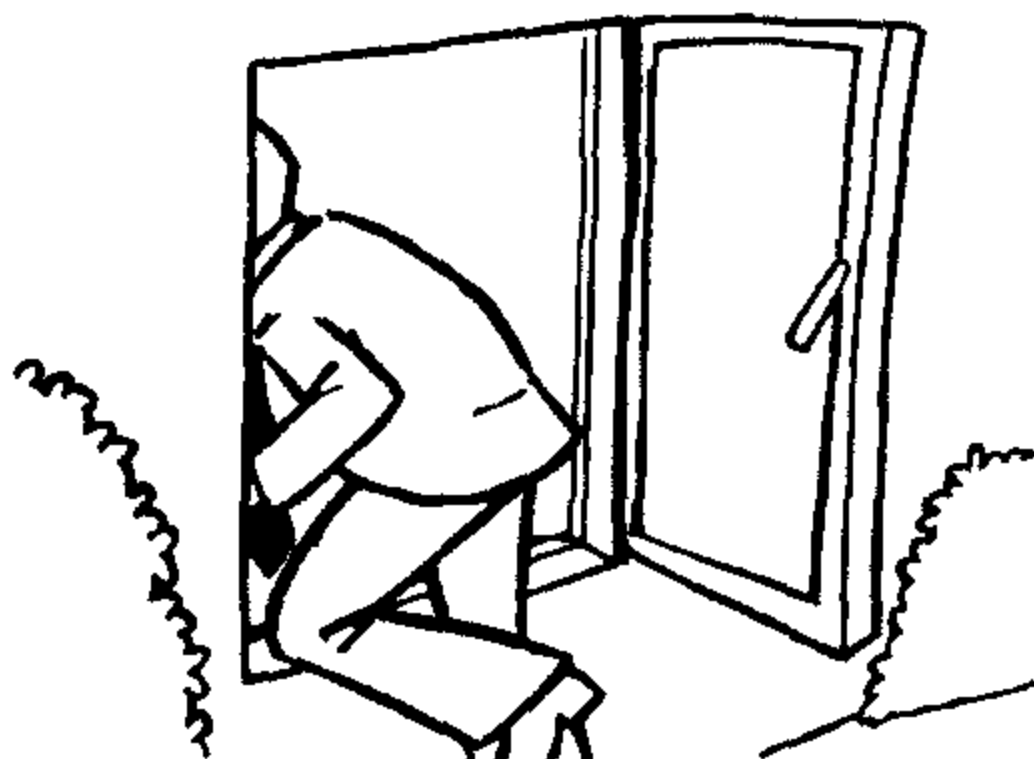
They are given a chance, in pairs or groups, to say what they think is happening in each picture. The teacher will not confirm or deny their predictions.

Students are then told that they are going to listen to a recording 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: *Morning Stuart. What time do you call this?*

STUART: *Er, well, yes, I know, umm. Sorry. Sorry I'm late.*

ANNA: *Me, too. Well?*

STUART: *I woke up late.*

ANNA: *You woke up late.*

STUART: *'Fraid so. I didn't hear the alarm.*

ANNA: *Oh, so you were out last night?*

STUART: *Yes. Yes. 'Fraid so. No, I mean, yes, I went out last night, so what?*

ANNA: *So what happened?*

STUART: *Well, when I saw the time I jumped out of bed, had a quick shower, obviously, and ran out of the house. But when I got to the car ...*

ANNA: *Yes? When you got to the car?*

STUART: *Well, this is really stupid, but I realised I'd forgotten my keys.*

ANNA: *Yes, that is really stupid.*

STUART: *And the door to my house was shut.*

ANNA: *Of course it was! So what did you do? How did you get out of that one?*

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

ANNA: *Quite a morning!*

STUART: *Yeah, and someone saw me and called the police.*

ANNA: *This just gets worse and worse! So what happened?*

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 (C, A, D, B).
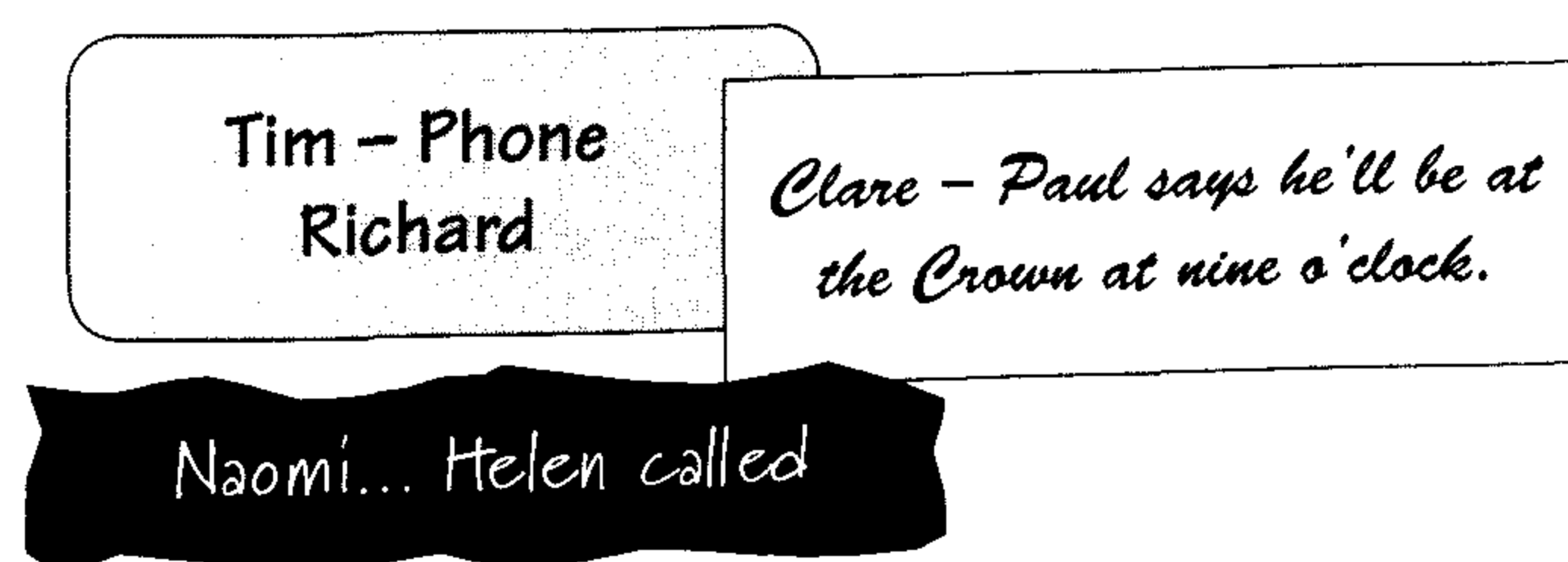
The teacher can now get the students to listen again or look at the tapescript, noting phrases of interest, such as those that Stuart uses to express regret and apology (*Sorry I'm late, I woke up late, 'Fraid so*), Anna's insistent questioning (*What time do you call this? Well? So what happened? So what did you do? How did you get out of that one?*) and her use of repetition both to be judgmental and to get Stuart to keep going with an explanation she obviously finds ridiculous (*You woke up late, Yes, that is really stupid, Quite a morning! 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 for school or work.

Example 3: Telephone messages	Activity:	taking messages
	Skills:	predicting; listening for specific information
	Age:	teenage
	Level:	elementary

Although most textbooks have audio 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' particular 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 they take phone calls while they are out. The messages are often quite simple, e.g.

> Tim – Phone
> Richard

> *Clare – Paul says he'll be at the Crown at nine o'clock.*

> Naomi... Helen called

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. Any idea 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 in?*

MRS GALLOWAY: *No, Ruth, sorry. She's at the cinema with her sisters.*

RUTH: *Oh. Oh that's a pity, ummm ... could you ask her to bring my copy of Romeo and Juliet to college tomorrow?*

MRS GALLOWAY: *Your copy?*

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RUTH:	*Yes. She borrowed it.*
MRS GALLOWAY:	*Typical! 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. Er, my name's Jane Metcalfe. I'm 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 then 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* and *Can I take a message?*

Message taking from phone calls is a genuinely communicative act. Where feasible, 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 page 306), or at least working in pairs to role-play calls.

Example 4: Breakfast	Activity:	listening to customs around the world
	Skills:	listening for general understanding; listening for detail; (re-)telling information
	Age:	young adult/adult
	Level:	elementary

In the following sequence, adapted from *New Cutting Edge Elementary* by Peter Moor and Sarah Cunningham (Pearson Education Ltd), the students have been studying words for different foods and working on the grammar of countable and uncountable nouns.

The teacher starts the sequence by getting the students to say what they had for breakfast today. They should tell other people in their pairs or groups. They then look at the pictures and information about the six people in them (see the next page). They should try to predict what these people have for breakfast.

Students now hear the audiotrack (see below) in which the six characters talk about their breakfast. They have to write down what each person says they have for breakfast – just the foods, without worrying about any extra material.

Recording 2

Kemal Well, I usually have breakfast at home before I go to work. I always have tea, black tea, maybe two or three glasses. And I have cheese and eggs and tomatoes, and in Turkey we have fantastic bread so I usually have bread with butter and jam, and sometimes I have yoghurt, too.

Mi-Kyung I always have breakfast with my family. We usually have white rice, and we have Kim-chi. We cannot live without Kim-chi! Kim-chi is a traditional dish of mixed Korean vegetables. It's very hot and spicy.

Dimitry Well, for breakfast, when I have time, I have tea, usually, black tea with lemon and lots of sugar. Never with milk. Then I have bread and cold meat and some cucumber as well. And then I sometimes have a small cake or some biscuits to finish.

Sonia In Brazil, we have very good tropical fruit, guava, mango and things like that, and we always have fruit for our breakfast – also we have coffee, of course, everybody knows in Brazil we have very good coffee, and maybe bread and jam.

José I don't usually have breakfast. I don't have time because I go to work very early about seven o'clock in the morning, so I just have a cup of coffee for breakfast, in a café with my wife Anita. But I usually stop work for a snack at about eleven, half past eleven and go to a café near my office. I have another cup of coffee and a nice big piece of tortilla – Spanish omelette made with potatoes and eggs – it's really delicious.

1 **T6.2** Listen to five people talking about their breakfast. Write down what they have.

Kemal is a student from Ankara in Turkey.

Mi-Kyung lives in Seoul, the capital of South Korea.
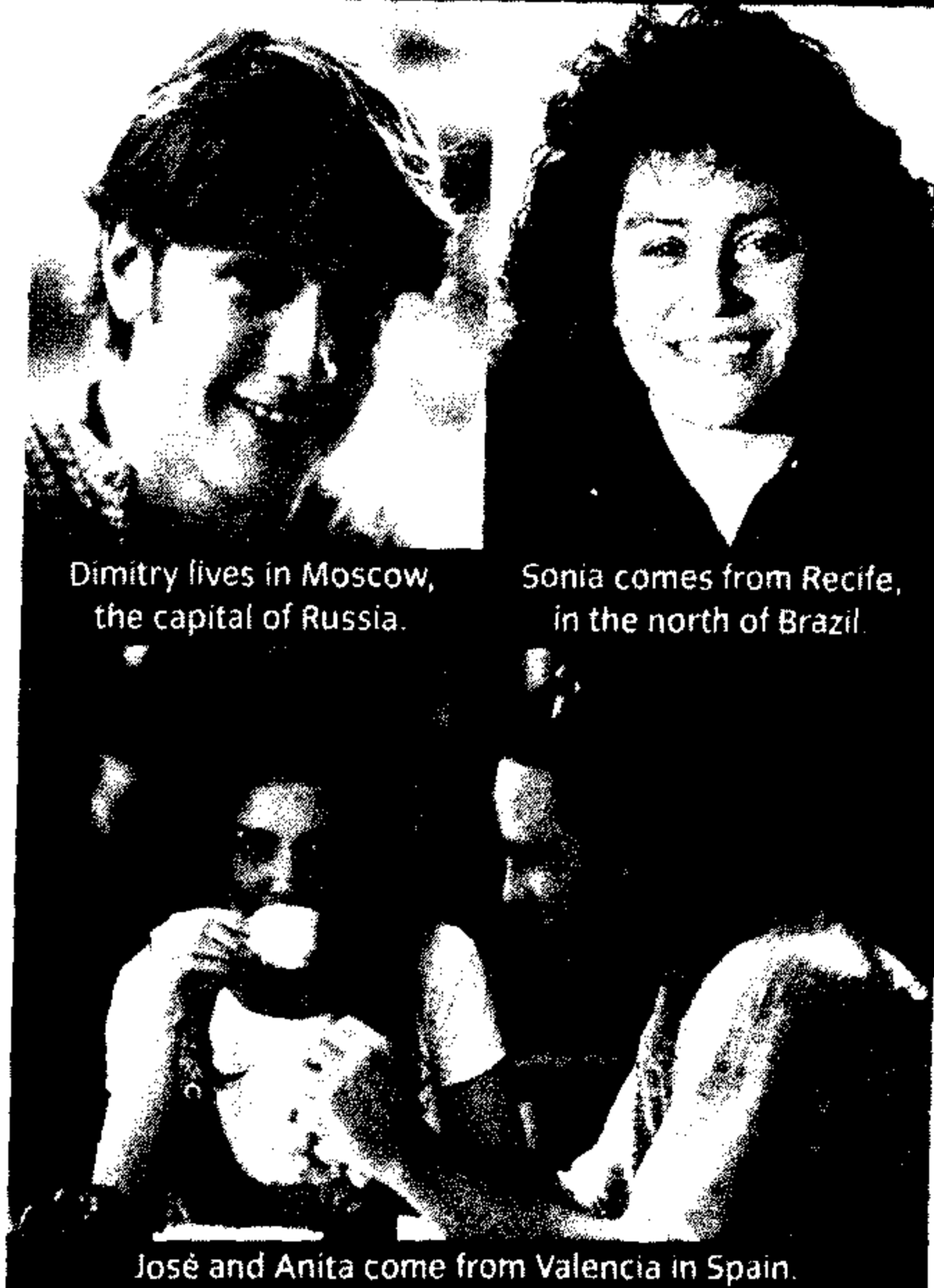
Dimitry lives in Moscow, the capital of Russia.

Sonia comes from Recife, in the north of Brazil

José and Anita come from Valencia in Spain.

Students now compare their answers in pairs before the teacher checks that they all agree. The teacher then asks the students to listen again to see what extra details they can find out (such as the fact that Kemal says they have fantastic bread in Turkey, that kim-chi is hot and spicy, and that José goes to work very early and then has a snack about eleven, etc.).
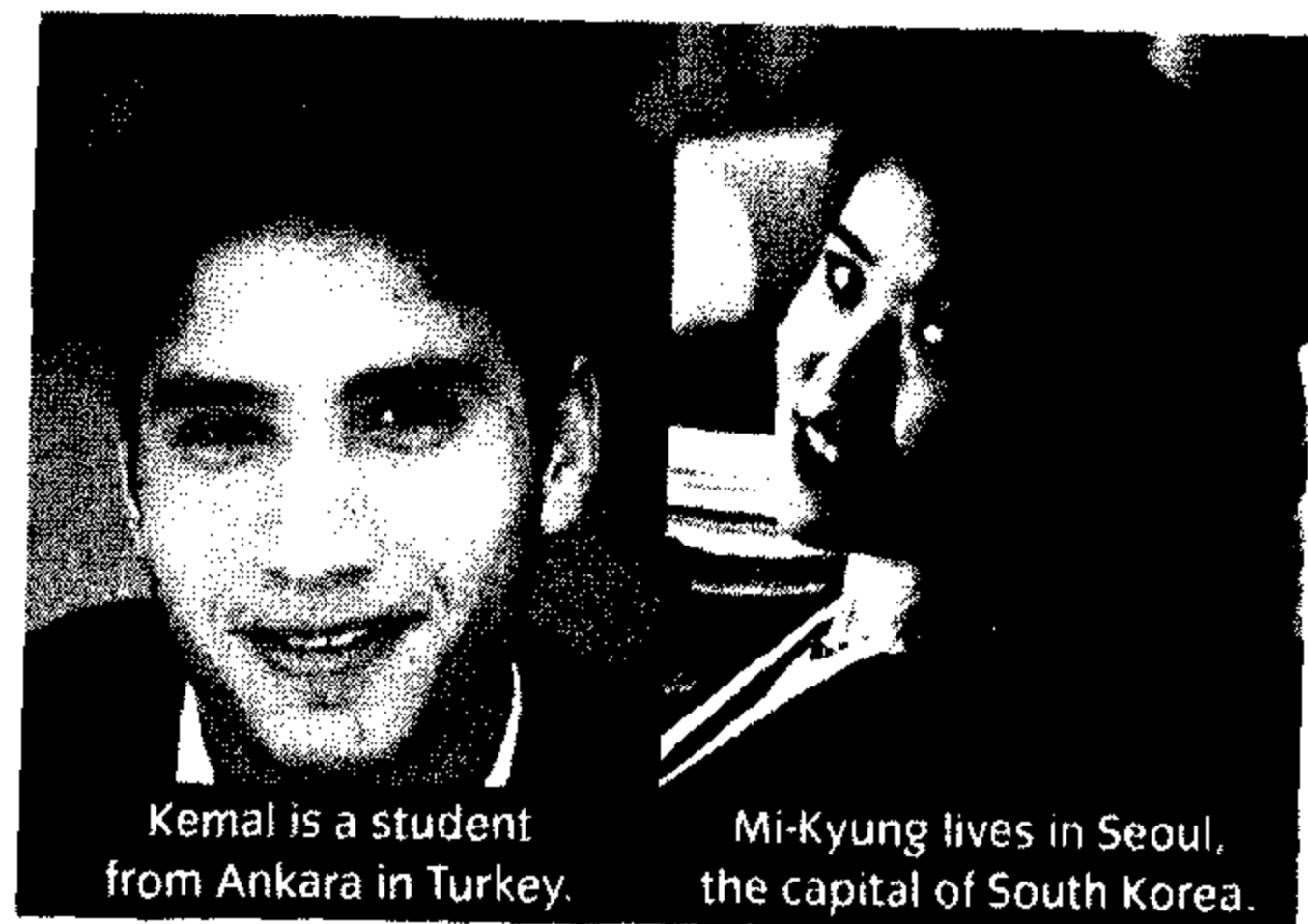
When students have gone through the answers with each other and with the teacher, they can choose which breakfast sounds the best. They can then think what they would say if someone interviewed them about their normal breakfast.

The class is now divided into interviewers and interviewees. The interviewers stand in a circle and the interviewees stand, facing them, in an inner circle. The interviewers now have a minute to interview the person in front of them before the inner circle moves one person to the left so that the interviewers are now facing different interviewees.

The interviewers note down what people have for breakfast.

When the activity is over, one interviewer describes what one interviewee has for breakfast and the other interviewers have to say who the interviewee is.

Example 5: Storytelling	Activity:	listening to a monologue
	Skills:	listening for gist; listening for language study; analysing language
	Age:	adult
	Level:	upper intermediate plus

In this extract, adapted from *Just Right Upper Intermediate* (Harmer and Lethaby, published by Marshall Cavendish), students are introduced to Jan Blake, and told that she is a professional story teller.

The students are given the following list of words and phrases and told to make sure they know what they mean:

a)	a mirror is held up	☐
b)	asides	☐
c)	audition	☐
d)	being human	☐
e)	decent money	☐
f)	fantastic experience	☐
g)	fascinating	☐
h)	fundamental	☐
i)	aren't we great?	☐
j)	harmony	☐
k)	hunter	☐
l)	looked back	☐
m)	judgement	☐
n)	the place was packed	☐
o)	percussionist	☐
p)	*regardless of the circumstances*	☐
q)	something universal	☐
r)	stupid	☐
s)	the whole gamut	☐
t)	visualising	☐
u)	word for word	☐
v)	subconscious	☐
w)	tradition	☐

Jan Blake

They can use a dictionary or the Internet (or each other) to see if they can make sense of these words and phrases.

They now listen to the following audiotrack in which Jan is speaking about the craft of story-telling. All they have to do is tick words and phrases from the first exercise which they hear.

Audioscript

What are stories for? I think, I think stories – this is my personal opinion. This isn't, er, a kind of tried and tested theory – but my personal opinion is that when someone tells a story in that arena, at the moment that the story is being told, everything about being human is accepted, yeah? The good, the bad. Every single experience of being human is in that room with everybody and it's almost, there's no judgement of what it means to be a human being at that moment. Does that make sense? So what the audience gets from it, I think, is a mirror is held up and I say to the audience this is us, aren't we great? Or aren't we stupid, or aren't we fascinating or aren't we vengeful or aren't we wonderful lovers or aren't we – this is the whole gamut of human experience can be found in a story, I think, and I think that there's something very fundamental that I can't put my finger on and say what it is. But it happens when stories are told, the visualising of the story, the sound of the story teller's voice, the contact with the audience, the, er, asides if you like, the recognition of the human condition – all of those things are in the room with you when you tell a story, when you hear a story, and I think that's what the audience gets out of it, umm, the opportunity to delve deep into your own consciousness, your own subconscious, your own imagination and experience something universal. I think that's what happens when you *hear* a story, that's what happens when I tell a story.

After checking through the answers, students listen to Jan again in order to see if they can summarise what she said. In pairs and groups, they see if they can come up with a one-sentence summary of Jan's main points.

We can now ask students to have a close look at what Jan says. One way is to ask them to do a cloze exercise (see page 382) on the audioscript, like the example below.

> What are stories for? I 1 _____, I think stories – this is my 2 _____ opinion. This isn't, er, a 3 _____ of tried and tested theory – 4 _____ my personal opinion is 5 _____ when someone tells a 6 _____ in that arena, at the 7 _____ that the story is being told, 8 _____ about being human is 9 _____, yeah? The good, the bad. Every 10 _____ experience of being 11 _____ is in that room with everybody and it's 12 _____, there's no judgement of 13 _____ it means to be a human 14 _____ at that moment. Does that make sense?

They try to fill in the missing words first and then listen to the track again to check their answers. This exercise makes them look at the audioscript with great care.

Another alternative is to have students look at the audioscript to see where Jan changes topic in mid-sentence (*I think stories – this is my personal opinion. This isn't, er, a kind of tried and tested theory –*), where she repeats herself (*in a story, I think, and I think*), what hesitation fillers she uses (*umm*), where she inserts new clauses into a sentence (*So what the audience gets from it, I think, is a mirror is held up*), etc. This is the kind of analysis of text we suggested on page 268 (though Jan, being a professional story teller, speaks in a far more organised way than many monologue speakers).

Example 6: Prizegiving	Activity: word-game listening
	Skills: listening for specific information; listening for detail; listening for acting out
	Age: any
	Level: intermediate plus

The technique of having students listen to see whether words (or phrases) occur in a text can be made extremely lively if we play games with it. In the following example, the teacher is going to read an extract which occurs towards the end of the book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J K Rowling. The teacher wants to try to engage the students with the text in an interactive way.

The students are divided into two teams. Each team can give itself a name. The students are now shown the following words. They are told that they should choose one of the words (but make sure that no one sitting next to them has chosen the same word). They must make sure that they know exactly what their word means.

applause	curse	hugging	silent	waffle
babble	decoration	loudly	stamping	
bravery	dish	point	stars	
cheering	explosion	purple	summer	
courage	face	seat	sunburn	
cup	game	shock	tears	

Now all the students stand up. They may not sit down until they have heard their word. The teacher starts to read an extract from the story which describes Harry Potter's school's end-of-year feast, at which the headmaster, Professor Dumbledore, gives a speech and awards the 'Hogwarts Cup' to the house which has gained the most points for good behaviour, brave deeds, etc.

Any student who has chosen the word *loudly* will be able to sit down almost immediately as *loudly* occurs towards the beginning of the passage.

The teacher goes on reading until she gets to the end of the extract, which finishes with the word *decoration*.

With any luck, at least one student from each team will have chosen the word *decoration*, but even if they don't, they will listen with considerable interest for their words, and the competition between the two teams will add greatly to their engagement with the text.

The teacher can now read the text again for students to hear exactly who won what, why, and how many points the individuals were given, etc.

As a follow-up, the students can extract Professor Dumbledore's speech and study it to see exactly how it should be spoken. They can practise using the right stress and intonation as if they were going to perform the part in the film of the book.

Students can now give parts of Dumbledore's speech, one after the other. If time, space and enthusiasm permit, the whole class can act out the scene.

Of course, this particular extract will only work if students know something about Harry Potter (and how his boarding school is divided into four houses, etc.). Nevertheless, the example shows how students can have fun as they practise the skill of listening.

Example 7: Witness statement	Activity:	being observant
	Skills:	watching/listening for detail
	Age:	any
	Level:	elementary and above

In this activity, which uses a film extract, the students have to try to give as much information as they can about what they have seen – as if they were witnesses being questioned by the police. The best kind of video extract for this is a short one- or two-minute conversation in an interesting location.

After being told to remember as much as they can, they watch the sequence. In pairs, they now have to agree on everything they heard and saw: *Who said what to whom? Where did the action take place? Who was wearing what? How many people were there in the scene? What was the name of the shop? How many windows were there in the house? Was there anything in the distance? What exactly did the characters say (if anything)?*

When the pairs have finished their discussion, the teacher reads out questions and the students have to write their answers. The questions might be something like the following:

1 How many people did you see in total in the excerpt?

2 How many of them were women? How many were men?

3 What did the man say first?

4 Were there any vehicles in the excerpt? If so, what were they?

5 How many different buildings were there?

6 What colour was the old man's jacket?

etc.

When students have written the answers, they compare them with other pairs to see whether they all agree. Now they watch the excerpt again to see how good they are as witnesses.

Example 8: Different season, different sex	Activity:	making changes
	Skills:	watching for gist; interpreting text
	Age:	young adult and above
	Level:	lower intermediate and above

In this activity, students first watch a film clip and the teacher makes sure that they understand it. They do any language work which may be appropriate.

The teacher then asks the students to watch the excerpt again. But this time they have to imagine how the scene would be different if, for example, instead of the summer which is clearly shown, the episode were taking place in an icy winter. Or, if the excerpt takes place in rain, how would it be different in bright sunshine? They can discuss the differences in pairs or groups, talking about everything from what the characters might wear to how they might speak and how they might behave.

An interesting variation on this is to ask students how the scene would be different if the participants were the opposite sex. Would the conversation between two women be different if the women were changed into men? How might the invitation dialogue they have just watched change if the sex of the participants were reversed? The responses to these questions are often revealing (and amusing). What students say will depend a lot upon their age and culture, of course, and there is always the danger of unnecessary sexism. But where teachers handle the activity with finesse and skill, the exercise can be very successful.

Having students think about filmed excerpts in this way not only helps them understand more about the language being used (and how it might change), but also directs them to insights about language and behaviour in general.

D 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 in the classroom. Some teachers, for example, like to put music on in the background when their students are working on a reading or

language task or when they are involved in pairwork or groupwork. This may help to make the classroom atmosphere much warmer, and one of the methods we looked at from the 1970s (Suggestopaedia – see page 68) had background music as a central part of its design. However, it is worth remembering that not everyone is keen to have music in the background at all times, and even if they are, they may not necessarily like the teacher's choice of music. It makes sense, therefore, to let students decide if they would like music in the background rather than just imposing it on them (however well-intentioned this imposition might be). We should allow them to say what they think of the music we then play since the whole point of playing music in the first place is make students feel happy and relaxed.

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 a wide range of world music types. 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 each piece 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 Leroy's students wrote after hearing Honegger's 'Pacific 231' (which most people see as the composer's depiction of a steam locomotive):

> 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.
>
> (Cranmer and Leroy 1992: 57).

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, because it is often difficult to know exactly which songs the students like at any 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 to 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.

According to Sylvan Payne, 'the ideal song ... repeats key phrases; attracts students' attention; and teaches some natural, interesting language without offending anyone' (2006: 42). He finds that typing in grammar points like *should have* along with the word *lyrics* into his Internet search engine often finds him exactly the kinds of songs he wants.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Listening**
  On listening in general, see J Flowerdew and L Miller (2006), M Underwood (1989), G White (1998), A Anderson and T Lynch (1988), M Rost (1990), J Field (1998a) and P Bress (2006). In a short article B Holden (2002) offers 36 ways to integrate listening skills with learning strategies.

- **Children reflect on listening**
  C Goh and Y Taib (2006) found that young learners became better listeners after they were encouraged to think about how they listened, what made it easy and difficult, etc.

- **Live listening**
  See J Marks (2000). J McEwan (2003) discusses the benefits of bringing family and friends into the classroom for her students to listen to and interact with. See also H Keller (2003).

  There is an interesting example of conversational live listening in Lesson 13 of the Teacher Training DVD pack from International House London (for information see http://www.ihlondon.com/dvdseries/).

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

- **Note-taking**
  On training students to take lecture notes, see H Evans Nachi and C Kinoshita (2006).

- **Podcasts**
  On using interactive stories on an iPod, see M Vallance (2006) – and for more on podcasts in general see page 188 and the reference to learning on the Internet on page 409.

  For a list of good podcast sites for students of English, see www.englishcaster.com.

- **Film and video**
  Older books on the use of video still have a lot to say about using digital film. See, for example, Stempleski and Tomalin (1990) and R Cooper *et al* (1991).

  D Coniam (2003b) writes about 'jigsaw video'. T Karpinski (2003) uses film to stimulate students' vocabulary learning. See also T Murugavel (2003) and S Ryan (2002).

- **Subtitles**
  For the use of teletext subtitles, see R Vanderplank (1988, 1996).

- **Listening sequences**
  For more listening sequences, see J Harmer (2007: Chapter 10). S Burgess and K Head look at teaching listening for exams (2005: Chapter 6). H Evans Nachi and C Kinoshita (2006) have suggestions for listeners taking notes in lectures.

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

  For more on using music in the classroom, see L Demoney and S Harris (1993) and D Cranmer and C Leroy (1992) – now sadly out of print, but a classic, nevertheless.

  On songs, see S Coffrey (2000) and C Goodger (2005). R Walker (2006) sees songs as good ways of practising pronunciation, and M Rosenberg (2006) lists some of the songs she takes into her business lessons. G P Smith (2003) writes about 'mondegreens' (where we mis-hear song lyrics) as a way of extracting meaning from song.

19 | Writing

A Literacy

In the past, people tended to view someone as literate if they could manipulate '... a set of discrete, value-free technical skills which included decoding and encoding meanings, manipulating writing tools, perceiving shape–sound correspondences, etc. which are acquired through formal education' (Hyland 2002: 53). However, as Ken Hyland points out, this view has changed radically in the last few years so that now literacy is seen as significantly more complex, located as it is in social contexts. We judge people as literate, in other words, if they can read and write in certain situations and for certain purposes, some of which are more prestigious than others. It is certainly true that to be deprived of the opportunity to write is 'to be excluded from a wide range of social roles, which the majority of people in industrialised societies associate with power and prestige' (Tribble 1996: 12). However, in different domains of life there are different literacies, and it is the exact nature of these which seems to matter. Filling in a form certainly suggests literacy at one level, but if the same person is incapable of putting together an appropriate letter of application, then they are demonstrating a lesser standard of literacy than someone who can not only write a letter of application, but also construct a short story or write a complex report. In the Christian world of the middle ages, sacred texts were only written in Latin and were only available to people with prestige and, therefore, a prestigious kind of literacy. Not that much has changed, perhaps, since in world terms we might well say that, for example, being able to use information technology successfully is a mark of a kind of literacy still denied to the majority of the world's population.

As we shall see below, the concept of genre is highly bound up with literacy of this kind, in that different written genres perform purposes for specific discourse communities. In foreign-language teaching, therefore, we need to decide what kind of writing we expect from students, and, therefore, what kind of literacies we are asking from them. This is especially important when students are studying English for academic purposes (EAP); the actual discipline and the level they are studying for will determine how 'literate' they should be.

In this chapter we will concentrate first on the 'nuts and bolts' aspects of literacy, before discussing issues to do with the writing process and genre.

A1 Handwriting

It may seem strange to worry about handwriting when so much communication takes place electronically, in emails or by using word processing software. Yet there are still many occasions, even for the most computer-literate, when we have to write by hand. Many language exams are still taken by candidates using pens and pencils, and we generally write notes, postcards, memos, journals, etc. in handwriting.

Many students whose native-language orthography is very different from English have difficulty forming English letters and may have to be taught exactly how it is done. This may involve showing them which direction the writing strokes go in. For example, the following worksheet (designed for children learning to write the letter *b*) shows writers where to start (at the star) and how the strokes go. Gradually the written *b* becomes fainter and fainter until the students are, in effect, writing it on their own.

The 'b' will disappear. Try to trace it. Start at the ★.
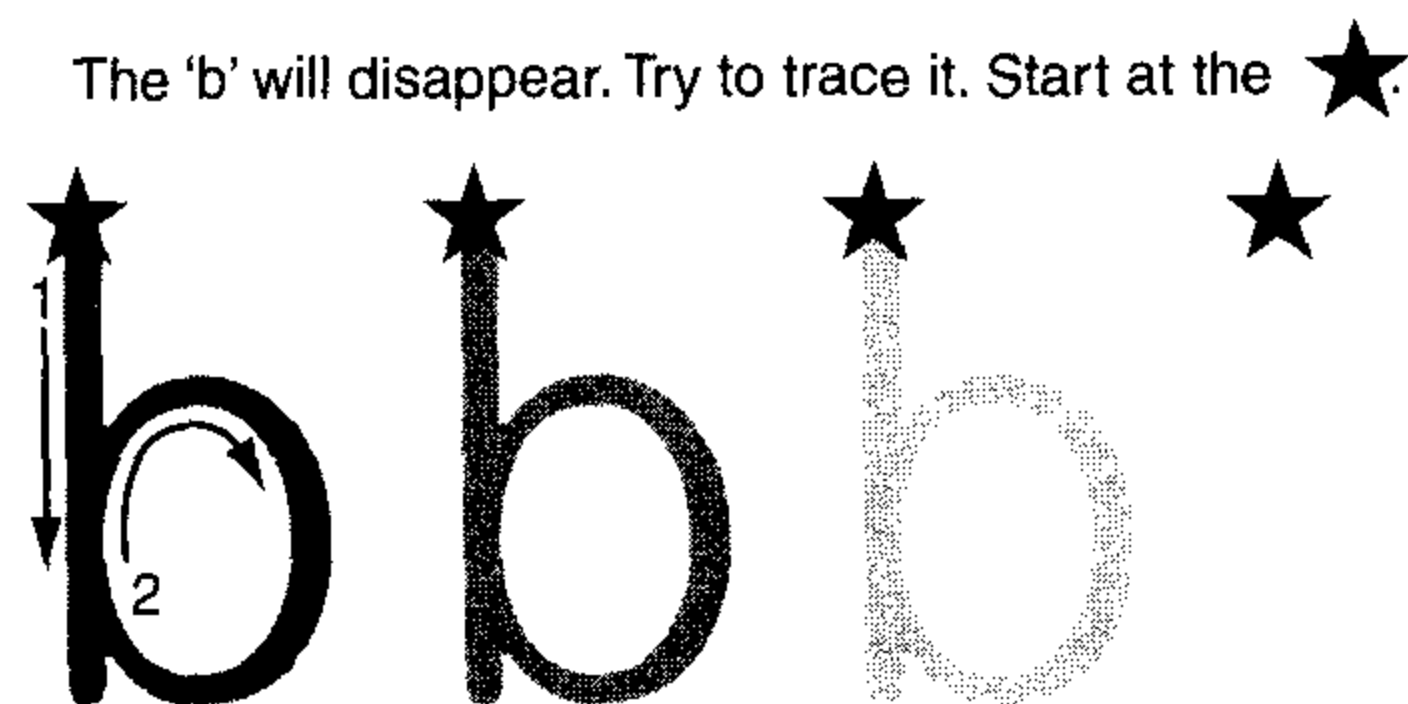
Later on, we can get students to write words and sentences, showing them, with the help of solid and dotted lines (and little diamonds) how tall letters should be and where the round part of the *b* finishes, etc.
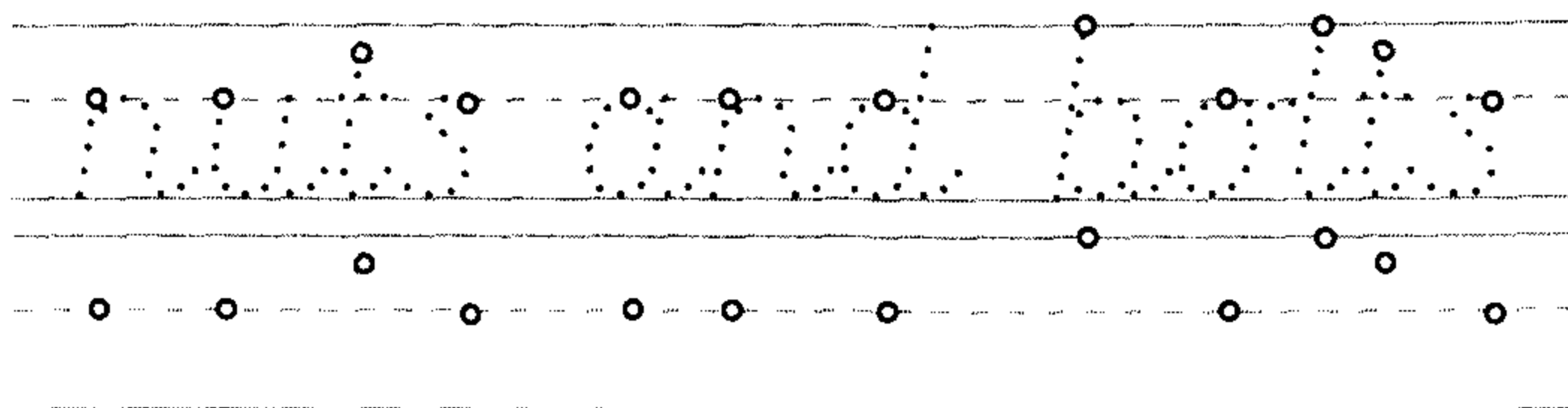
Handwriting is a personal issue. Students should not all be expected to use exactly the same style, despite copying exercises like the one above. Nevertheless, badly-formed letters may influence the reader against the writer, something which is undesirable whether the work is the product of some creative 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.

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. This is not necessarily the case in emails, and SMS text messages have spellings and 'words' all of their own. Nevertheless, as we saw on page 24, whereas it is perfectly acceptable in some emails to have spelling which is inexact, in other situations it is not.

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, F4). 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. 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 recordings, they can study transcripts and/or copy down sections of the recording.

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, theater* or *theatre?* How do we decide between the use of *s* and *z* in words like *apologise* and *customize?* The former, in each case, are British spellings, and the latter are North American (though in Canada both spellings of *colour* and *theatre*, for example, are used).

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 17, 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 materials. 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 many writers use commas instead of or as much as full stops, although comma overuse is frowned on by many English-language writers and editors. 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 emails 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. To be successful as writers in our own or another language, we need to be aware of these layouts and use or 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, and whether we want to encourage creative writing – either individually or cooperatively. We will want to build the 'writing habit'.

B1 Process and product

In the teaching of writing we can either 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. As we shall see below, a consideration of written genre has a lot in common with a product approach to writing, i.e. an approach which values the construction of the end-product as the main thing to be focused on (rather than the process of writing itself).

Many educators, however, advocate a process approach to writing. This pays attention to the various stages that any piece of writing goes through. By spending time with learners on pre-writing phases, editing, re-drafting and finally producing a finished version of their work, a process approach aims to get to the heart of the various skills that most writers employ – and which are, therefore, worth replicating when writing in a foreign language. Indeed, it might be possible to argue that editing and re-drafting are even more important when we are writing in a foreign language than when we are writing in our first language.

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 activities listed here take place at first or final stages, and to put them in the best order.

In reality, the writing process is more complex than this, of course, and the various stages of drafting, reviewing, re-drafting and writing, etc. are done in a *recursive*, way: we loop backwards and move forwards between these various stages (Tribble 1996: 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.

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

Ron White and Valerie Arndt stress that '... writing is *re*-writing ... *re*-vision – seeing with new eyes – has a central role to play in the act of creating text' (White and Arndt 1991: 5). Perhaps, then, it is better to see writing as a kind of process 'wheel', where writers move both around the circumference of the wheel and across the spokes. And even when they have written what they think is the final version of their work, they may still, at the last moment, go back and re-plan or re-visit stages they had thought they had completed.

FIGURE 1: The process wheel

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, re-drafting, re-editing, and so on. This cannot be done in 15 minutes. 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. Not all students see this as a good thing, however. Many will find it difficult
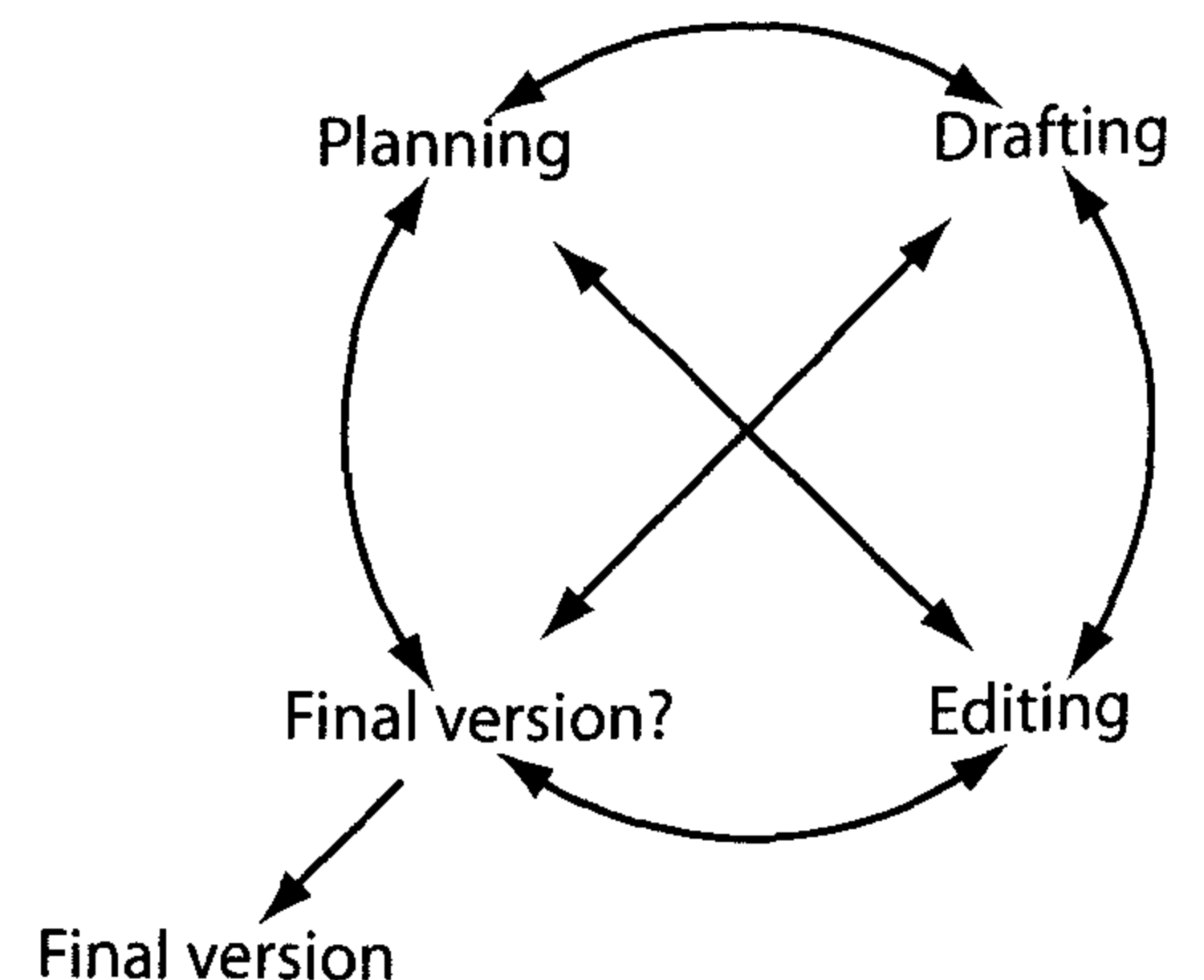
to give enough time to the process and would rather finish a piece of writing straight away. And there are times when process writing is simply not appropriate, either because classroom time is limited or because we want students to write quickly as part of a communication game.

However, none of these circumstances should prevent us from explaining the process to our students and encouraging them to plan, draft, re-draft, re-plan, etc. In longer pieces of writing (or writing for portfolios – see below), the writing process is at least as important as the product, and even in exam writing tasks, the students' ability to plan (quickly) and later read back through what they have written in order to make any necessary corrections is extremely important.

B2 Genre

As we saw in Chapter 2, C2, a lot of writing within a discourse community is very genre-bound. In other words, writers frequently construct their writing so that people within that discourse community will instantly understand what kind of writing it is. We know what an advertisement is when we see it, we recognise poetry formats and we know what a formal letter should look like. Genre represents the norms of different kinds of writing.

When teachers concentrate on genre, students study texts in the genre in which they are going to be writing before they embark on their own work. 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 are common to that genre. This forms part of the pre-writing phase.

Chris Tribble (1996: 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 used in them. 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, students 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. However, it is also highly useful for general English students, even at low levels, if we want them 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, as well as 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. One way round this – and something that is absolutely necessary if students are to have real knowledge of a

genre – is for them to see many different examples from the same genre. This means that they will be able to choose from a variety of features. However, at lower levels this may well be impractical, and so imitation may, after all, be a useful first stage, designed as much to inform as to enforce adherence to strict genre rules. Later, with exposure to different examples within a genre, it will be up to them to decide what to do with the data they have collected.

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 among 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 sense of achievement 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, for some, provides powerful motivation to find the right words to express such experience. Creative writing also provokes the kind of input–output circle we described in Chapter 16, A1.

In order to bolster the 'product pride' that students may feel when they have written creatively, we need to provide an appropriate reader audience. In addition to ourselves as teachers, the audience can be the whole class. 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 websites for our classes on the Internet, or have students write blogs (see the example on page 338) which can be read by others.

There is always a danger that students may find writing imaginatively difficult. Having 'nothing to say', they may find creative writing a painful and demotivating experience, associated in their minds with a sense of frustration and failure. A lot will depend upon how we encourage them (see B5 below). It is also important not to expect whole compositions from the very first. We need, instead, to 'build the writing habit', providing students with motivating, straightforward tasks to persuade them that writing is not only possible but can also be great fun.

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 whether the focus is on the writing process or, alternatively, on genre study. In the first case, reviewing and evaluation are greatly enhanced by having more

than one person working on a text, 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, it is probably the case that 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.

Cooperative writing is immensely successful if students are writing on a computer. If the screen is big enough, everyone can clearly see what is being created, and everyone can make small changes both during the initial writing process and also later on. Students and teachers can also email each other, of course; and just as with Wikipedia, anyone can modify entries, so with student writing on the Internet (or on an Intranet – that is on a hard disk that everyone in the school, or from a group can access), other students can alter things that are there, and gradually co-construct a final finished product.

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 Building the writing habit

Some students are extremely unconfident and unenthusiastic writers. There may be many reasons for this: perhaps they have never written much in their first language(s). Perhaps they think that they don't have anything to say and can't come up with ideas.

Whatever the reason, we need to help such students build the writing habit so that they recognise writing as being a normal part of classroom practice and they come to writing tasks with as much enthusiasm as they do other activities. One way of doing this, of course, is to give them interesting and enjoyable tasks to do. We must make sure, however, that we give them enough information to do what we have asked. We will want to make sure that they have enough of the right kind of language to do the task. We need to be able to give students ideas to complete the task, too. Sometimes we may dictate half-sentences for them to finish so that they do not have to come up with too much information of their own. Sometimes we will feed in ideas to a student or students as they do the task. Of course, we don't want to crowd the students with too many ideas if this is going to stifle creativity, but we need to be ready with enough suggestions to make sure they can never say *I can't think of anything to write*. Finally, patterns and schemes help students to write with confidence. This is the first stage of looking at different genres that we mentioned above. If students are given a model for postcard-writing, it is easy to come up with their own slightly different version. Simple poems often provide a framework in which students can say something meaningful while still being supported by a helpful structure. Giving students some kind of simple structure to write in provides the same kind of support that every writer gets when, instead of finding themselves in front of a blank screen, they are given parameters and constraints to write with. However, we are not suggesting that all writing needs to be constrained or supported in this way. The blank screen is the place where a great deal of creativity first starts.

Building the writing habit can be done with a range of activities. We can promote *instant writing* by dictating half a sentence which the students have to complete (e.g. *Before I am thirty I would like to ...*). We can get them to write three *Don't* sentences for a new school (e.g. *Don't run in the corridors*). We can get students to respond to music by writing what words or scenes a piece of music suggests, or by describing the film scene a piece of music might accompany. They can write about how a piece of music makes them feel or write stories that the music 'tells them to write' (Harmer 2004: 66).

Pictures can provide stimulation for writing-habit activities. Students can describe pictures or write descriptions of a wanted man or woman so that their colleagues have to identify that person from a group photograph. They can write postcards from a picture we give them, or create an interview with a portrait, say, from 200 years ago.

There are many writing games, too, such as story reconstruction activities where students have to build up a story from a set of pictures, each of which only one of them has seen (see below). We can get students into story circles where, in groups, they create a story together.

The whole point of all these activities is just to get students to write for the fun and practice of it, rather than have them write as a skill. Building the writing habit falls halfway between writing-for-learning and writing-for-writing (see B6 below).

B6 Writing-for-learning and writing-for-writing

We need to make a distinction between writing-for-learning and writing-for-writing if we are to promote writing as a skill.

Writing-for-learning is the kind of writing we do to help students learn language or to test them on that language. Thus, if we say *Write three sentences using the 'going to' future*, our aim is not to train students to write, but rather to help them remember the *going to* future. The same is true when we get them to write (say for a test) four sentences about what they wish about the present and the past.

When we ask students to design a good magazine advertisement, however, we are doing this so that they may become good at writing advertisements. When we get them to write a narrative, it is their ability to write a story that counts, not just their use of the past tense.

If we are to build the students' writing skills (as opposed to building their writing habits or getting them to write for language practice), we will have to use such writing-for-writing tasks as often as is appropriate.

B7 The roles of the teacher

Although the teacher needs to deploy some or all of the usual roles (see Chapter 6, B1) 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 a poetry activity (see Example 6 below), 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 to complete a writing task.

- **Feedback provider:** giving feedback on writing tasks demands special care (see Chapter 8D). Teachers should respond positively and encouragingly to the content of what the students have written. When offering correction, teachers will 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. Some of the activities are about the nuts and bolts of writing (Examples 1, 2 and 5), some are designed to build the writing habit (Examples 5 and 6) and others are designed to give students practice in the skill of writing (Examples 3 and 4).

Example 1: Dino at the hotel	Activity: punctuating a text
	Focus: writing conventions
	Age: young adult and above
	Level: elementary

If we want students to learn about punctuation, they need to make the connection between the way we speak and the way punctuation reflects this. Commas, for example, are often placed at the points where a speaker would take a breath if they were reading the text. Full stops represent the end of a tone group, etc.

The following task – at elementary level – asks students to punctuate a prose passage using capital letters, commas, inverted commas (quotation marks) and full stops.

Students read the unpunctuated text from an elementary graded reader (see page 283) and then listen to the story on CD. This is so they can get a good idea of what it is about. In pairs, they then try to add punctuation. They can listen to the recording as many times as they like.

> 20 april was dino bracco's twenty-first birthday he worked giovanni his boss at the hotel grand brought him a cake from the hotel kitchen just twenty-one said giovanni and then he put his hand on dino's back ah dino dino ... when I was twenty-one ...
>
> dino ate some cake and smiled he was only twenty-one years old but he was a young man who knew what he wanted he had a plan
>
> you must know what you want dino his mother said to him when he was a child and he did he had a plan dino came from a very small town called rocella in the south of italy his mother and father were farmers rocella was beautiful but no one had any money dino was born there but now he lived and worked in venice he worked at the reception of the hotel grand

From *Hotel Casanova* by S Leather (Cambridge University Press)

We can put the unpunctuated text on the board, OHT or a projected computer screen. Students from the different pairs can punctuate it, line by line and the rest of the class can say whether or not they agree. Punctuating poems in this way is also very effective.

Example 2: The bear

Activities: story reconstruction, story continuation
Focus: coherence and cohesion
Age: young adult and above
Level: upper intermediate and above

This sequence aims to make students aware of coherence – and especially cohesive devices – in writing. It is similar to Example 5 in Chapter 17 (page 296), but the objective of this whole sequence is to get students writing more coherently, using cohesive devices appropriately.

The students are told that they are going to reconstruct a text about Kitty Redcape, whose grandmother lives in the woods. Kitty frequently goes there to have tea. They are given a series of cards and told to re-order them to make a story (the first one is done for them). They need to look out for clues, such as the use of pronouns, repetition of lexical items and a coherent order of events. These are the cards they are given:

A (1) One day, on her way to visit her grandmother, Kitty Redcape saw a handsome prince.

G So he rode away, sadder, but alas no wiser.

H The bear, who by this time was fed up with being ignored, followed the prince into the forest and ate him.

B 'Oh shut up, you silly old woman,' he retorted.

C At that moment the prince rode by and charged into the garden.

I 'I'm sure you were,' said the prince. 'Come on, let's get away from that silly old lady and go to my castle for lunch.'

D 'I have come to save you, young maiden,' he cried, knocking the grandmother down in his haste to be by her side.

J Her heart skipped a beat or two, but the prince hardly noticed her as he rode by.

K 'Thank you for coming to our rescue,' Kitty Redcape said to the prince, 'though I have a gun and was quite capable of looking after myself.'

E 'Hey! Watch what you're doing!' said Kitty Redcape's grandmother.

F 'That silly old lady's my grandmother, actually,' said Kitty, 'and I didn't like the way you spoke to her. And now that I can see you close to, I can't imagine why I thought you were good-looking. Why don't you rejoin your hunt?'

L By the time she got to her grandmother's house, Kitty had forgotten about the prince, but she was horrified to see the old lady being attacked by a bear.

If students are having trouble with the sequence, we can point out, for example, that the first three cards all have *the prince* in them, and that this lexical repetition helps to tie the story together with a 'chain of reference'. We can show them how *he* is used in the same way in this two-sentence sequence:

> At that moment the prince rode by and charged into the garden. 'I have come to save you, young maiden,' he cried, knocking the grandmother down in his haste to be by her side.

After the pairs and groups have completed the task, they check to see if they have all got the same order (A, J, L, C, D, E, B, K, I, F, G, H) and discuss why and how it is arrived at.

We can now get them to develop more sentences about Kitty and her grandmother, perhaps going as far as making their own stories. For example, we might give them the following exercise:

> **Read the opening sentence and then complete the sentences which follow.**
>
> When Kitty was on her way to her grandmother's house, she stopped to talk to two woodcutters in the forest.
>
> 1. She _____.
> 2. They _____.
> 3. It _____.
> 4. The old lady _____.

Alternatively, they can be asked to re-write the following paragraphs, replacing *Kitty Redcape*, *the prince* and *the bear* by *she, her, he, him* or *it* where necessary.

> Kitty Redcape often goes to visit Kitty Redcape's grandmother in the woods. One day, on Kitty Redcape's way to Kitty Redcape's grandmother's house, Kitty Redcape sees the prince and Kitty Redcape thinks the prince is very attractive. The prince does not notice Kitty Redcape.
>
> When Kitty Redcape arrives at the cottage, Kitty Redcape sees Kitty Redcape's grandmother being attacked by a bear. Just then the prince rides into the garden to save Kitty Redcape and the prince is rude to Kitty Redcape's grandmother.
>
> The prince asks Kitty Redcape back to his castle for lunch but Kitty Redcape says no because Kitty Redcape doesn't like the prince's treatment of Kitty Redcape's grandmother and Kitty Redcape doesn't fancy the prince after all. Kitty Redcape suggests that the prince should go back to the prince's hunt and leave them alone. And that's what the prince does. The bear follows the prince into the forest and the bear eats the prince.

If students are enjoying the fairy story aspect of this sequence, we can then use a variation of 'Julia's story' (see Example 7 below) and have them write their own texts starting with a sentence we give them such as:

Once upon a time there was a handsome prince who lived in a castle by the river.

They can then put their knowledge of coherence and cohesion into action.

Example 3: 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) that they are writing for.

Firstly, we ask our students to look at a collection of reviews of plays and films from newspapers, magazines and/or on the Internet (see Example 4 on page 295). 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 DVD 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. We can go round, encouraging and helping. If there is time, we 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 onto a computer screen. The discussion and focus which this provides will add to the creative nature of the activity in many ways.

Studying different writing genres – whether through a genre-analysing kit, through data collection, or even by putting a variety of texts into a corpus to run with concordancing packages (see Chapter 11, G2) – is a vital first stage in having students do their own writing in specific genres.

Example 4: Unsent letters	Activity: letter writing
	Focus: communicative writing
	Age: any
	Level: intermediate and above

In this activity, students are told that they are going to write a letter to someone that they would never normally write to. For example, they could write:

- to someone who bugs you
- to someone you have hurt or offended
- to an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, or an ex-friend
- to an unborn child
- to an examiner
- to a burglar who has 'done' your house
- to a person who has helped you without knowing it
- to the present owner of the house you used to live in
- to a famous historical figure

From *Letters* by N Burbidge *et al* (Oxford University Press)

When students have chosen the recipient of their letter, they write it. While they are doing this, the teacher can offer help and suggestions if they want it.

When students have finished their letters, they can show them to their colleagues. Their colleagues have to be able to say who the letter is to and what points it is trying to make.

Although these letters are only pseudo-communicative – because they will not actually be sent – they nevertheless fulfil all the characteristics of a communicative activity (see Chapter 4, A5); students choose who to write to so that they compose their letters with both purpose and enthusiasm. They emphasise content rather than language for its own sake.

Example 5: 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 Rinvolucri 1990) the basic idea of a dictation has been altered so that it is the students who dictate to each other (rather than the teacher). It has a competitive element, is very active and is often extremely enjoyable.

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.
Peter Hedley

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 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.

There are many different ways of doing dictations, and when students have some element of control (or agency – see page 103), they are especially convincing. For example, it is possible for the teacher to read out a dictation, but have students pretend that they have a control button of the kind that you get with tape recorders, DVD players, etc. This means that they can say *pause, stop, rewind, fast forward*, etc. to control the teacher's speed and get repetition if they need it. Of course, this activity works just as well if a student is the one reading out the passage they have to write.

Example 6: Ancient monuments	Activity:	writing a poem
	Focus:	creative writing
	Age:	any
	Level:	lower intermediate plus

Simple poetry-writing activities are often extremely effective ways of getting students to write creatively, but within clearly delineated frameworks (so that they do not feel oppressed by the need to be too imaginative).

In the following example from Jane Spiro (2004: 88–90), students are going to write poems from the point of view of ancient monuments and buildings (this makes much more sense than it appears!).

The teacher brings in pictures of famous buildings, statues, landscapes and monuments, etc. which the students are likely to know. Alternatively, she can direct students to websites where they can see these things.

Students now choose one of these places. They are going to think about what the place or thing *has seen, has heard, has known*, etc. The teacher may write up the following on the board (and ask students to think of completions):

> *You have seen ...*
> *You have heard ...*
> *You have known ...*

The teacher now divides the class into small groups. She gives them a picture or name of a place. She may have a list for the students to choose from, and can move round the groups suggesting possibilities both about the monuments in question and about the kind of things the students might want to include in their poems (e.g. *the sadness of a king, camels in the desert, the sound or war, the shouts of revolution,* etc.).

The students now write their poems, but they can either write to the monument/place (*You have seen ...*) or take on its personality (and write *I have seen ...*). When they have finished

their poems, they can show them (without a title) to different groups to see if they can guess what the monument or place is.

Jane Spiro quotes the following student poem, produced with the procedure we have described.

> The Pyramids
>
> I have seen camels
> And then cats
> I have seen slaves
> And then princes
> I have seen stone
> And then marble
> I have seen life
> And then death

Of course this is not a great poem, but it has the air of poetry about it, and, above all, it has given students a chance to write creatively, however restricted the poetry frame may be.

Example 7: Julia's story	Activity:	story circle
	Focus:	building the writing habit; cooperative narrative writing
	Age:	any
	Level:	elementary and above

In this activity, students join together to write a story. However, 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 again 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 – that of spontaneity.

Example 8: Such is life	Activity: student blogging
	Focus: writing for communication
	Age: adult
	Level: any

On page 193 we discussed the value of keypals and blogging for student writing. Students can now post their own contributions onto the web so that others can comment and react in writing to what they have to say.

The following example shows a student blog in action. However, it starts with a blog by Rosa for the adult migrant English programme at St George's College of TAFE (technical, further educational and vocational classes), in Sydney, Australia.

The blog she runs (http://ourclass2006.blogspot.com at the time of writing) offers students' views on a number of topics and posts photos of student activities. It has games, descriptions and grammar activities as well as sections for teachers. But it also encourages students to write blogs and make podcasts.

In order for students to learn how to become bloggers, Rosa sends them to a tutorial site (see Figure 2). Once they have done this, they are ready to go.

One of the students, called Jessie, set up her own blog entitled 'Such is life'. One of her postings (see Figure 3) muses on how her life might change; it is accompanied by a picture Jessie has found to make her posting more interesting.
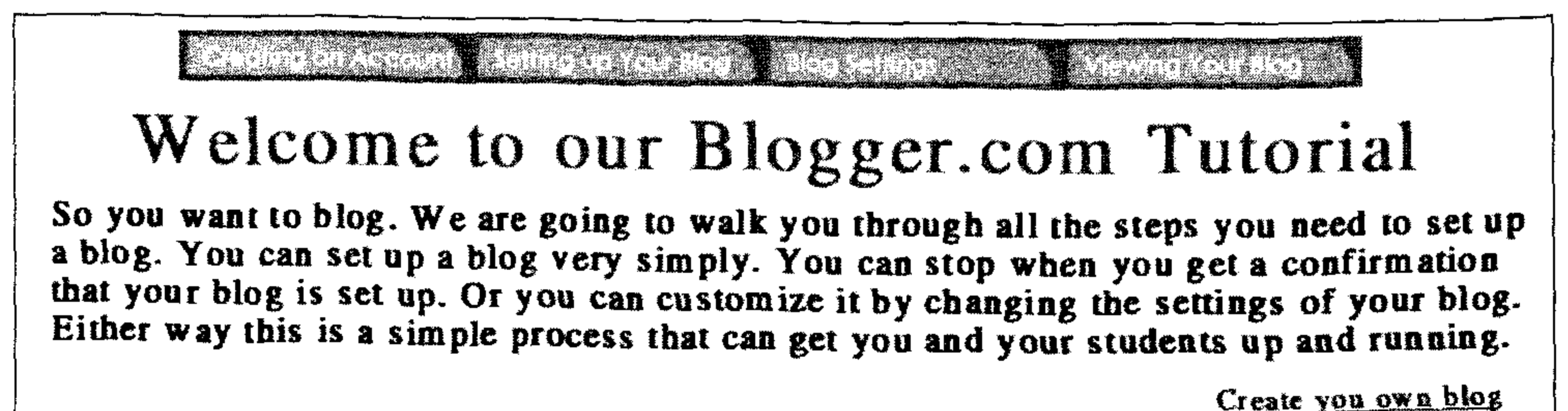

Welcome to our Blogger.com Tutorial

So you want to blog. We are going to walk you through all the steps you need to set up a blog. You can set up a blog very simply. You can stop when you get a confirmation that your blog is set up. Or you can customize it by changing the settings of your blog. Either way this is a simple process that can get you and your students up and running.

Create you own blog

FIGURE 2: Rosa's blog tutorial (opening page)

friday, february 17, 2006

My new life in TAFE

From now on beginning my new life in TAFE... should be study hard for my future... stop smoking and stop drinking... start student life as start New Life... ...... will be beautiful on my way ...Such is life...

Expert Eyes

FIGURE 3: Jessie's blog

3 Comments   Collapse comments   Close this window

bitola said...
Hello Jessie !

Your fotos is very beautiful
and your new stil of live is good.

rosa said...
Hi Jessie. You are the first professional blogger I meet in one of my classes. You must share your knowledge with your clasmates. It will help your English a lot and they'll learn so much form you.

vuthy said...
Hi Jessie. Your photos is so beautiful and i am so glad of your language. Smoking is not a good idea for your health, also drinking, so it's very good that you stop it now.
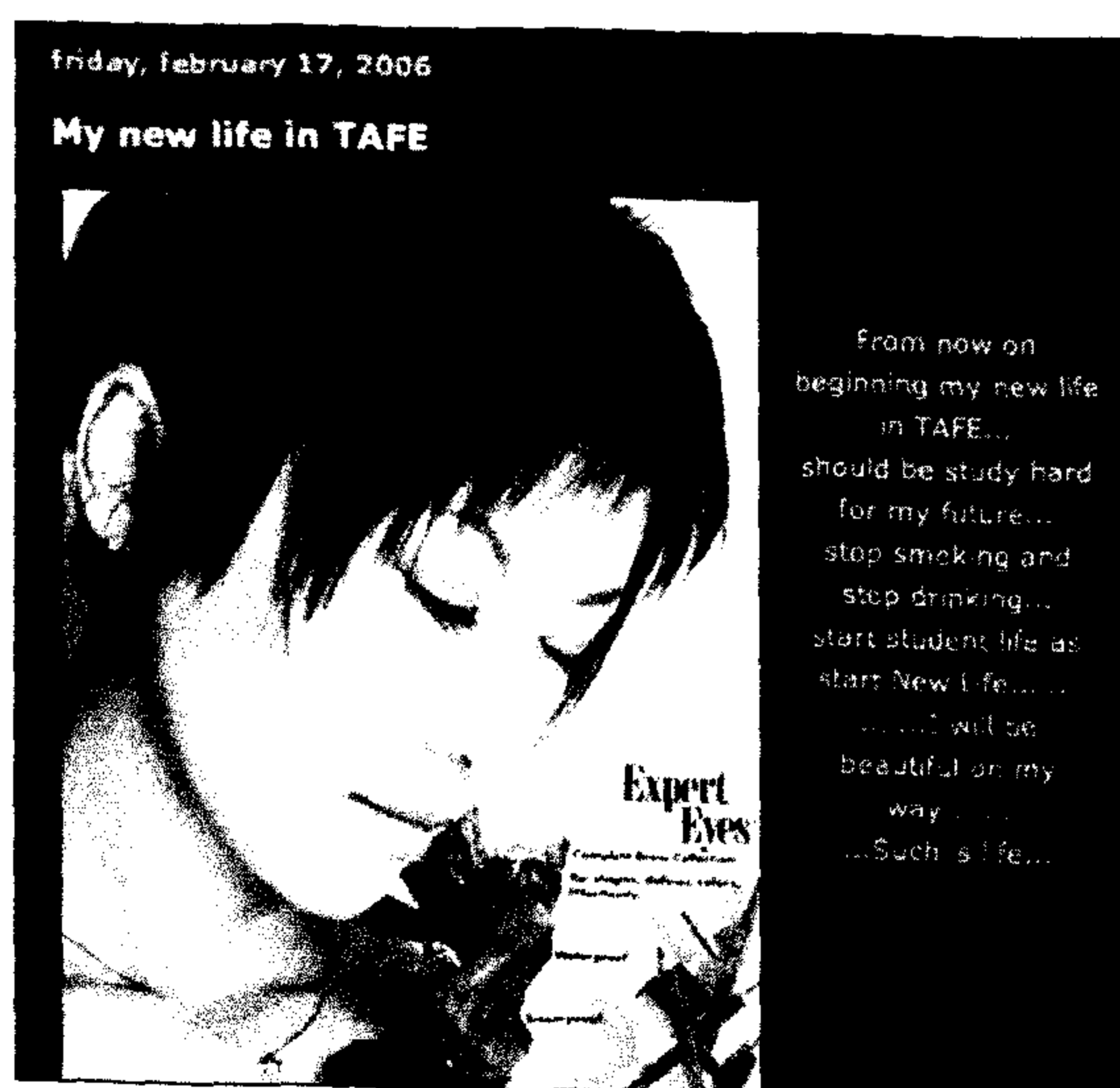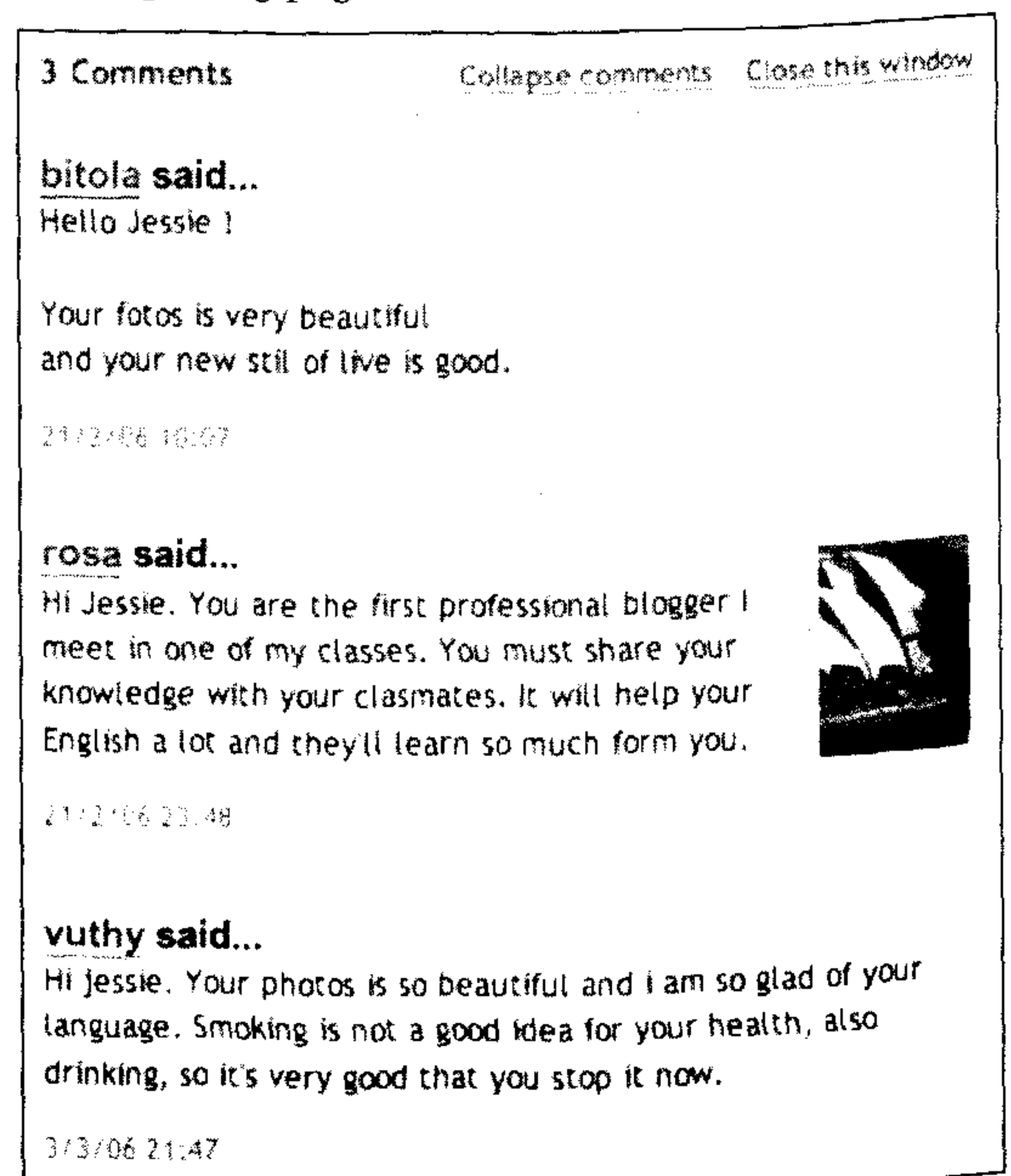
3/3/06 21:47

FIGURE 4: Replying to Jessie

As with all successful student blogs, she gets some replies (see Figure 4), and writing has now become real communication.

Of course the task for the teacher and the students is to keep blogs like this going. Furthermore, teachers will have to decide how much (if at all) they intervene to help students with their English. In the examples above, there are points where a writing teacher would want to intervene. In a blog (or with keypals and chatting) we have to decide how much to leave students to communicate on their own, and how much to use this as raw data for successful feedback on student work.

Example 9: College transport	Activity:	report writing
	Focus:	how reports are constructed; making notes
	Age:	young adult +
	Level:	upper intermediate

In the following sequence, students are lead through an exam-type task (for the Cambridge ESOL First Certificate exam). The clear objective is to teach report-writing skills.

The sequence (from *First Certificate Expert* by Jan Bell and Roger Gower, published by Pearson Education Ltd) starts when the teacher asks students to discuss the following questions:

1 *Which form of public transport do you prefer?*
2 *What is good and bad about public transport where you live?*

The students can discuss this in pairs or groups before the teacher talks about the questions with the class. They then look at the following task:

> It is difficult for students to get to your college. Public transport is not very good and the college car park is very small. A committee has been set up by the principal to analyse the problem and to recommend what the college should do. You are on the committee, and you have just had your last meeting.
>
> You have been asked to write a **report** for the principal.
>
> Write your **report** in **120–180** words in an appropriate style.

Students have to look at the task and decide how many parts there are to it, how informal or formal the style should be (bearing in mind who 'you' are and who you are writing to), and what will make the reader think it is a good report.

Once the teacher has discussed these questions with the class, they then start planning for the report by making notes under three headings:

Public transport	**Car park**	**Possible solutions**
buses every hour	*more students have cars*	*write to bus company*

They then match a typical four-paragraph sequence with what might be written in each of the four paragraphs.

Paragraph 1: Introducing the report
Paragraph 2: Describing the first problem
Paragraph 3: Describing the second problem
Paragraph 4: Summarising and recommending

a Focus on a minimum of two points.
b State the purpose of the report.
c Give a clear summary of the situation.
d Describe how you got the information.
e Only give relevant information.
f Give just one or two recommendations.
g Give the facts briefly and clearly without strong personal opinions.

They can then match their notes about public transport, car parking and possible solutions to the paragraphs.

Finally, in this phase, students are offered three titles for their report: (a) Cars, buses and trains, (b) To and from college, (c) Student transport. They are then given some language they might want to use before being asked to complete the task.

When students have written their reports, they are asked to look at them again and edit them, considering the following questions:

- Is the information relevant?

- Is the style clear and natural?

- Does the report feel balanced? (Are different viewpoints presented fairly?)

One of the reasons for this detailed writing sequence is that students are learning how to write successful exam answers (see the 'backwash effect' in Chapter 22D). But the habits being encouraged here – an analysis of the task followed by detailed planning, drafting and review – are the same habits which we have suggested for both genre and process-writing sequences.

D Portfolios, journals, letters

Many educational institutions and teachers get students to keep portfolios of examples of their written work over a period of time. These can be used for assessment, since judging different pieces of student work written over a period of time is seen by many people to be fairer than 'sudden death' final tests. However, using portfolios is a somewhat controversial alternative and not without its problems (see page 380).

Portfolios are also used as a way of encouraging students to take pride in their work; by encouraging them to keep examples of what they have written, we are encouraging them to write it well and with care.

For the Common European Framework (see page 95) portfolios are considerably more than just getting students to keep examples of their writing. *The European Language Portfolio* has three parts:

- **Language biography:** here students reflect on their language abilities using 'can do' statements (see page 96) to say things like *I can understand numbers, prices and times in English*. They can record if and why such abilities are important for them.

  The language biography asks them to say what language experiences they have had, and reveals the fact that a huge number of school students in various countries have rich and varied language backgrounds.

- **Language passport:** this is the 'public' version of the biography, and it tells, in simple tabular form, what languages the holder can speak and how well. The learners fill in this profile and can obviously amend it as their linguistic ability improves in one language or another.

  The language passport is the clearest possible statement of the advantages and benefits that accrue to people who speak more than one language, and it reinforces students' pride in their language(s) profile.

- **Dossier:** this is where students keep examples of their work – projects, reports, diplomas, PowerPoint presentations, etc. The students indicate whether this work was done individually or with other students.

The ELP is not an easy option in terms of the time needed to complete and read it by both students and teachers, and it comes with many add-ons (such as a list of 'can do' statements, see page 96) which make it somewhat cumbersome. However, it makes a powerful statement about an individual student's language identity and helps them to reflect on their learning. Indeed, portfolios may be successful mechanisms by which teachers 'can not only diagnose the learners' skills and competencies, but also become aware of their preferences, styles, dispositions and learning strategies ...' (Nunes 2004: 327). As with student journals and letter/email exchanges between teachers and students, portfolios can have a powerful effect on the development of learner autonomy, something we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 23A.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Writing in general**
  On writing in general, see C Tribble (1996), T Hedge (2000: Chapter 9) and J Harmer (2004). T Hedge (2005) has a wealth of good writing ideas. K Hyland's important book (2002) discusses research in writing and W Grabe and R Kaplan (1996) write about the theory and practice of writing in the *Longman Applied Linguistics* series.

- **Mixed composition classes**
  N Ibrahim and S Penfield (2005) describe the benefits of mixing ESL students with first language English speakers in a freshman composition class in the USA.

- **Literacy**
  E Helmer (2005) discusses twenty-first-century literacy. P Stapleton (2005) discusses Internet literacy and its relationship to academic writing.

- **Spelling**
  R Shemesh and S Waller (2000) offer a complete book on teaching spelling. See also S Waller (2002), P Brabbs (2004), J Desmond (2006) and R Hamilton (2003), who has an 'NLP spelling strategy'.

- **Process**
  C Kelly (2003) stresses the need to focus of pre-writing rather than revision for students to understand structure. M Vince (2004) sees the educational value of a process approach. See also J Harmer (2004: Chapter 1).
  J Chau (2003) comes up with a three-step approach (ideational, sentential, relational) to help less proficient student writers. K Hill (2005) wants to link essay types and cognitive domains.

- **Genre**
  C Tribble (1996: Chapters 5 and 6) makes a strong case for a genre-based approach. H Kay and T Dudley-Evans (1998) discuss teachers' attitudes to genre. See also J Harmer (2004: Chapter 2).

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- **Process and genre**
  R Badger and G White (2000) advocate a process-genre approach. J Muncie (2002) wants to find a place for grammar in composition classes. C Vickers and E Ene (2006) show how students can improve their grammatical accuracy by autonomously noticing their own writing errors.

- **Creative writing**
  C Rühlemann (2005) gives a number of ideas for students to recreate dialogue, etc. on the basis of material given to them by the teacher. S Mercer (2004) describes getting students to create different characters who can then be incorporated into play scenes. A G Elgar (2002) has students writing playscripts.

- **Penpals/keypals**
  See H Hennigan (1999) on how penpals became, in his words, 'keypals'. K Fedderholdt (2001) describes a successful keypal exchange between Japanese and Danish students.

  To set up penpal or keypal arrangements, teachers can contact the embassy of the country they are interested in, post notices at teachers' conferences or access penpal sites on the Internet such as the following three:

  www.penpalgarden.com/ – a large free penpal site where you fill in details about yourself and indicate whether you want penpals of the same or opposite gender.

  www.penpal.net – one of the largest free penpal sites on the Internet, you can select contacts by age and country.

  penpal@nationalgeographic.com – a site where children are matched to similar penpals around the world. There is a small charge per person.

- **Writing examples**
  For more writing activities, see T Hedge (2005), J Harmer (2004: Chapters 4–6, 2007: Chapter 8). On teaching writing for exams, see S Burgess and K Head (2005: Chapter 4).

- **Weblogs**
  M Vallance (2004) set up a blog project for his students with mixed results. The students were enthusiastic but Vallance himself had to intervene to (a) provide interesting topics, and (b) stop students disagreeing with each other too violently. J Askari Arani (2005) discusses teaching reading and writing in this way. S Peters (2006) gives clear tutorial information about weblogs and A P Campbell (2003) explains weblogs clearly.

- **Portfolios**
  The European Language Portfolio is clearly explained in F Heyworth and R Blakely (2005). A McDonald (2004, 2005a and b) discusses each of the three elements of the portfolio in turn.

20 Speaking

A Elements of speaking

If students want to be able to speak fluently in English, they need to be able pronounce phonemes correctly, use appropriate stress and intonation patterns and speak in connected speech (see Chapter 15). But there is more to it than that. Speakers of English – especially where it is a second language – will have to be able to speak in a range of different genres and situations, and they will have to be able to use a range of conversational and conversational repair strategies. They will need to be able to survive in typical functional exchanges, too.

A1 Different speaking events

In his book on speaking, Scott Thornbury suggests various dimensions of different speaking events in order to describe different speaking genres (Thornbury 2005a: 13–14). For example, we can make a distinction between *transactional* and *interpersonal* functions. Transactional function has as its main purpose conveying information and facilitating the exchange of goods and services, whereas the interpersonal function is all about maintaining and sustaining good relations between people.

Whatever the purpose of the speaking event, we can characterise it as *interactive* or *non-interactive*. The conversation that takes place when we buy a newspaper at a news kiosk is interactive, whereas leaving a message on an answer phone is non-interactive.

Finally, we might make a difference between speaking that is *planned* (such as a lecture or wedding speech) and speaking that is *unplanned*, such as a conversation that takes place spontaneously when we bump into someone on the street.

These distinctions allow us to describe an event such as a job interview in terms of purpose (largely transactional), participation (interactive) and planning (partly planned).

These distinctions are not absolute, of course. Some speaking in a job interview may be for the exact purpose of maintaining and sustaining good interpersonal relations, and most interviewees do their best to plan what they are going to say (just as interviewers plan what some of their questions will be). Nevertheless, thinking of speaking in terms of purpose, participation and planning helps us to provide speaking activities in all six categories – and in different combinations of these categories.

A2 Conversational strategies

When we discussed structuring discourse in Chapter 16, C2, we said that successful face-to-face interaction depended on a knowledge (and successful execution) of turn-taking. Furthermore, speakers use various discourse markers to buy time (*ummm ... well ... you know ...*), to start a turn (*well ... I'd just like to say ...*) or to mark the beginning or the end of a segment (*right ... now ... anyway ...*).

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- **Conversational rules and structure:** Zoltan Dörnyei and Sarah Thurrell add further categories of discourse, such as conversational openings (*How are you? That's a nice dog! At last some sunshine!*), interrupting (*Sorry to interrupt, but ...*), topic shift (*Oh, by the way, that reminds me ...*) and closings (*It's been nice talking to you ... Well, I don't want to keep you from your work ... we must get together sometime*) (Dörnyei and Thurrell 1994: 42–43).

- **Survival and repair strategies:** as we saw on page 306, students need to be able to use repair strategies when listening in interactive situations. In other words, if face-to-face conversation is to be successful, students need to be able to ask for repetition by using formulaic expressions, repeating up to the point of conversation breakdown, etc. To these repair strategies we might add such abilities as being able to paraphrase (*It's a kind of ...*), being able to use an all-purpose phrase to get round the problem of not knowing a word (*You know, it's a what-d'you-call-it*) and being able to appeal for help (*What's the word for something you play a guitar with?*).

- **Real talk:** if students are to be involved in spontaneous face-to-face conversation outside the classroom with competent English language speakers, they probably need to be exposed to more than just the kind of questions that are commonly found in coursebooks. These are sometimes well formed and take no account of ellipsis, for example. Helen Basturkmen looked at transcripts of masters-level students in conversation and found them using – among other things – questioning reformulation (i.e. repeating what someone had just said), multifunctional question forms (e.g. *Did you consider the possibility of an alliance with other organisations?* which functions as both suggestion and criticism) and the piling-up of questions one after the other (*How much technology? Who does it? Is it the suppliers?*) (Basturkmen 2001: 10).

We would not expect students to be able to use these various discourse markers or repair strategies at all levels. On the contrary, we would expect them to develop their conversational skills as their English improves. However, students need to be aware of what real conversation looks like and we should give them help in using some of the more important phrases.

To raise their awareness, we can get students to analyse transcripts of real speech, directing their attention to how speakers ask questions, respond to the questions of others, etc. We can get them to transcribe small sections of authentic speech, too, and then ask them to produce a 'clean' version, i.e. as if the original piece of conversation had been written down without all the hesitations, false starts, etc. that characterise the actual transcription.

If we want to try to get students to use typical discourse markers and phrases, we can write them on strips of paper. Each student has to pick up one of the strips and they then have to use the phrase on it in conversation. We can see who manages to use the most phrases.

We can help our students to structure planned transactional (partly interactive) discourse, such as a lecture, by giving them language like this:

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 these:

> 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.

A3 Functional language, adjacency pairs and fixed phrases

A lot of speaking is made of up of *fixed phrases* (or *lexical chunks* – see page 38) such as *Catch you later, Back in a sec, Can I call you back in a couple of minutes?* etc.

Fixed and semi-fixed phrases crop up a lot in functional exchanges (Chapter 2, B2). Thus, for example, we can offer people things, such as a drink, a coffee, etc., by saying *D'you fancy a ...? Would you like a ...? Shall I get you a ...?*

Many functional exchanges work well because they follow a set pattern. One such pattern is the *adjacency pair* (Cook 1989: 53–57). If someone approaches you and says *Nice day isn't it?* they expect a paired response, such as *Yes, isn't it.* If we say *D'you fancy a coffee?* the adjacency pair is either *Yes, please* or *No, thank you.*

When teaching speaking, we need to make students aware of fixed phrases, functional sequences and adjacency pairs. We can do this by teaching functional exchanges. We can have students look at transcripts of typical exchanges and we can let them watch film clips (see page 308) of this kind of language use.

B Students and speaking

Getting students to speak in class can sometimes be extremely easy. In a good class atmosphere, students who get on with each other, and whose English is at an appropriate level, will often participate freely and enthusiastically if we give them a suitable topic and task. However, at other times it is not so easy to get students going. Maybe the class mix is not quite right. Perhaps we have not chosen the right kind of topic Sometimes it is the organisation of the task which is at fault. But a problem that occurs more often than any of these is the natural reluctance of some students to speak and to take part. In such situations the role(s) that teachers play will be crucial.

B1 Reluctant students

Students are often reluctant to speak because they are shy and are not predisposed to expressing themselves in front of other people, especially when they are being asked to give personal information or opinions. Frequently, too, there is a worry about speaking badly and therefore losing face in front of their classmates. In such situations there are a number of things we can do to help.

- **Preparation:** when David Wilson was trying to use German while living in Austria, he found out something that most speakers of foreign languages know. If he was to go into a restaurant and order something, it was much better if he spent some time outside the restaurant, reading

the menu and then rehearsing (in his head) what he was going to say. Then, when he went in and placed his order, he did it fluently and without panic (Wilson 2005).

Wilson is describing the value of planning and rehearsal for speaking success, and students, too, will perform much better if they have the chance to think about what they are going to say and how to say it. This may involve just giving them quiet time to think in their heads about how they will speak, or it may mean letting them practise dialogues in pairs before having to do anything more public.

Marc Helgesen suggests making a feature of this thinking-in-our-heads (that is trying out a conversation in our minds). He suggests a series of ten tasks that students can do on their own (Helgesen 2003). For example, when they are on a bus, they can imagine they are in a taxi and give the imaginary taxi driver directions. They can practise telling themselves about the best thing that happened to them today or tell the person in their head about their plans for the future.

Paul Mennim describes how students record presentations they are going to make, transcribe what they have said, correct it and then hand it over to the teacher for further comment before finally making the presentation (Mennim 2003).

At other times, where students are going to take part in a discussion, we can put them in buzz groups to brainstorm ideas so that they have something to say when the real discussion happens.

Of course, there will be times when we want and expect spontaneous production from students, but at other times we will allow them to prepare themselves for the speaking they are going to do.

- **The value of repetition:** as we saw in Chapter 3B, repetition has many beneficial effects. Each new encounter with a word or phrase helps to fix it in the student's memory. Repetition has other benefits, too: it allows students to improve on what they did before. They can think about how to re-word things or just get a feel for how it sounds.

  When students repeat speaking tasks they have already done once (or twice), their first attempt is like a rehearsal for the final effort. Each rehearsal gives them more confidence as they are not attempting to get the words out for the first time when they try to speak in subsequent 'performances'.

  Repetition works even better if students get a chance to analyse what they have already done. This analysis may come from fellow students or from the teacher, but if they get a chance to evaluate what they have done – or at least get feedback about it – their performance second or third time round can only get better. Paul Howarth (2001a and b) describes this as process speaking, characterised by the pattern:

  $$\text{plan} \rightarrow \text{perform} \rightarrow \text{analyse} \longleftrightarrow \text{repeat}$$

  If we ask students to make presentations (see page 351) or tell stories, repetition obviously makes sense in the same way as getting students to draft and re-draft their writing. But letting students rehearse conversational exchanges works, too. If students have had a chance to try out the exchange, they will do it much more confidently and fluently when they do it a second time.

- **Big groups, small groups:** a major reason for the reluctance of some students to take part in speaking activities is that they find themselves having to talk in front of a big group. A way

of counteracting this is by making sure that they get chances to speak and interact in smaller groups, too. As we have seen, this can be preparation for dialogue-making or discussion.

- **Mandatory participation:** in a presentation at the 2004 IATEFL conference in Liverpool, UK, William Littlewood bemoaned the presence of 'social loafers' when groups do a task – that is students who sit back and let everyone else do the work (Littlewood 2004b). How, he wondered, could he ensure that all students were equally engaged in a task. He called one of his ideas 'numbered heads': in each group of four, for example, the students are asked to assign a number from 1 to 4 to each member, without telling the teacher who has which number. At the end of an activity, the teacher indicates a group and a number (1–4) and asks that student to report on what happened. Neither the teacher nor the students knows who will be called and, as a result, all the students have to stay on-task.

Simon Mumford (2004: 35) suggests a 'speaking grid' (see Figure 1). We start by drawing a grid and writing the names of half of the students on the vertical axis, and half on the horizontal access. We now write the numbers 1–4 in the first column of the vertical axis and then write the numbers diagonally downwards (to the right). We put the number 4 at the top of the second column and then enter it diagonally, too. We write 3 at the top of the third column and 2 at the top of the fourth column.

Students are told that each box in the grid represents two minutes' conversation: 60 seconds of A talking to B, 60 seconds of B talking to A, so according to the example grid, for the first minute Ahmet will talk to Suzanne and then for the next minute Suzanne will talk to Ahmet. Next, Ahmet will talk to Ali and Ali will talk to Ahmet, and then he will talk (and listen) to Maria (and so on). We now give students a topic (e.g. holidays, my family, what I hope for in the future or my favourite place). Students change places after we give a signal.

	Ahmet	Lucy	Pierre	Jane
Suzanne	1	4	3	2
Ali	2	1	4	3
Maria	3	2	1	4
John	4	3	2	1

FIGURE 1: The speaking grid

Mandatory participation also lies at the heart of jigsaw reading activities (see page 299) and story-circle writing (see page 337) since both these – and other similar activities – only work when all the students take part.

82 The roles of the teacher

As with any other type of classroom procedure, teachers need to play a number of different roles (see Chapter 6, B1) during different speaking activities. However, three have particular relevance if we are trying to get students to speak fluently:

- **Prompter:** students sometimes get lost, can't 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. 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.

  There is one special sense in which teachers act as participants, and that is when they are in a dialogue with the class (see Chapter 4, A8). Just as one-to-one teachers may engage in direct conversation with their students (and co-construct dialogue, thereby scaffolding their learning), so in dialogic events in larger groups, the teacher and students may talk together communicatively as near-equal participants. These are often very special moments in the lesson, although we have to be careful not to take over the classroom so that students lose opportunities for speaking (see page 118).

- **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 task, 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 8, C3.

A crucial part of the teacher's job when organising speaking activities is to make sure that the students understand exactly what they are supposed to do. This involves giving clear instructions and, where appropriate, demonstrating the activity with a student or students so that no one is in any doubt about what they should be doing.

C 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 page 70). There are a number of widely-used categories of speaking activity, and we will start by looking at them before going on to specific speaking examples.

C1 Acting from a script

We can ask our students to act out scenes from plays and/or their coursebooks, sometimes filming the results. Students will often act out dialogues they have written themselves.

- **Playscripts:** it is important that when students are working on plays or playscripts, they should treat it as 'real' acting. In other words, we need to help them to go through the scripts as if we were theatre directors, drawing attention to appropriate stress, intonation and speed. This means that the lines they speak will have real meaning. 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.

  Laura Miccoli made drama a main feature of her work with her adult students. They started with preliminary stages which included relaxing, breathing exercises and learning how to laugh with each other. During an intermediate stage they worked on such things as emotion, action, physicalisation, gesture and how to show crying and laughing. Finally, in the presentation stage they worked on the script itself. She found that using drama (and having students write about it in their portfolios) was motivating and provided 'transformative and emancipatory learning experiences' (Miccoli 2003: 128).

  Quite apart from the benefits for pronunciation and general language use, drama also helps, according to Mark Almond (2005: 10–12), to build student confidence, contextualise language, develop students' empathy for other characters, involve students in appropriate problem-solving and engage them as 'whole' people (that is marrying emotional and intellectual characteristics of their personalities). He points out that drama practises gesture, facial expression, eye contact and movement, proxemics and prosody.

- **Acting out dialogues:** when choosing who should come out to the front of the class, we should be careful not to choose the shyest students first. 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. If we can give students time to work on their dialogues, they will gain much more from the whole experience.

C2 Communication games

There are many communication games, all of which aim to get students talking as quickly and fluently as possible. Two particular categories are worth mentioning here:

- **Information-gap games:** many games depend on an information gap: 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. There is an example of this type of communication game on page 357.

- **Television and radio games:** when imported into the classroom, games from radio and TV 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 20 questions or fewer.

  'Just a minute' is a long-running comedy contest on UK radio. Each participant has to speak for 60 seconds on a subject they are given by the chairperson without hesitation, repetition or deviation. In the radio show, as in the classroom, 'deviation' consists of language mistakes as well as wandering off the topic. 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 60 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. They read out their definitions and Team B has to guess which is the correct one. Now Team B is given a word and reads out three definitions of their word (one correct and two false) and Team A has to guess.

There are two more TV-inspired games in the examples below.

In other games, different tricks or devices are used to make fluent speaking amusing. In 'Fishbowl', for example, two students speak on any topic they like, but at a pre-arranged signal one of them has to reach into a 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 whatever is on the paper into the conversation straight away.

C3 Discussion

Discussions range from highly formal, whole-group staged events to informal small-group interactions.

- **Buzz groups:** these 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.

- **Instant comment:** 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.

- **Formal debates:** in a formal debate, students prepare arguments in favour or against various propositions. When the debate starts, those who are appointed as 'panel speakers' produce well-rehearsed 'writing-like' arguments, whereas others, the audience, pitch in as the debate progresses with their own (less scripted) thoughts on the subject.

  In order for debates to be successful, students need to be given time to plan their arguments, often in groups. They can be directed to a series of points of view either for or against a proposition – or sent to websites where they will get 'ammunition' for their point of view. Webquests (see page 191) are often good ways of preparing students for debates. The teacher can divide the class into groups and then give links to different websites to the different groups.

  It is a good idea to allow students to practise their speeches in their groups first. This will allow them to get a feel for what they are going to say. There is an example of a formal debate on page 358.

  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 number of people are travelling in the basket of a hot-air balloon. Unfortunately, however, there is a leak and the balloon cannot

take their weight: 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 also take on the roles of different age-groups, hobby-enthusiasts or societies.

- **Unplanned discussion:** 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 (see Chapter 21, A2). Their success will depend upon our ability to prompt and encourage and, perhaps, to change our attitude to errors and mistakes (see Chapter 8C) 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.

- **Reaching a consensus:** 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.

C4 Prepared talks

One 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. However, if possible, students should speak from notes rather than from a script.

For students to benefit from doing oral presentations, we need to invest some time in the procedures and processes they are involved in. In the first place, we need to give them time to prepare their talks (and help in preparing them, if necessary). Then students need a chance to rehearse their presentations. This can often be done by getting them to present to each other in pairs or small groups first. The teacher and the class can decide together on criteria for what makes a good presentation and the listener in each pair can then give feedback on what the

speaker has said. The presenter will then be in a good position to make a better presentation. However, this only works if students have had a chance to discuss feedback criteria first.

When a student makes a presentation, it is important that we give other students tasks to carry out as they listen. Maybe they will be the kind of feedback tasks we have just described. Perhaps they will involve the students in asking follow-up questions. The point is that presentations have to involve active listening as well as active speaking.

Whether or not feedback comes from the teacher, the students or a combination of both, it is important that students who have made an oral presentation get a chance to analyse what they have done, and then, if possible, repeat it again in another setting so that they do it better.

C5 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 can be situated in the middle of our communication continuum.

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. There is an example of a questionnaire on page 354.

C6 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 interview or a conversation in an aeroplane cabin, a hotel foyer, a shop or a cafeteria) as if they were doing so in the real world. They can act out the simulation as themselves or take on the role of a completely different character and express thoughts and feelings they do not necessarily share. When we give students these roles, we call the simulation a role-play. Thus we might tell a student *You 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.

Simulation and role-play can be used to encourage general oral fluency or to train students for specific situations, especially where they are studying English for specific purposes (ESP).

When students are doing simulations and role-plays, they need to know exactly what the situation is, and they need to be given enough information about the background for them to function properly. Of course, we will allow them to be as creative as possible, but if they have almost no information, they may find this very difficult to do.

With more elaborate simulations, such as business meetings, mock enquiries or TV programmes, for example, we will want to spend some time creating the environment or the procedures for the simulation. Of course, the environment may be in the teacher's and the students' heads, but we want to create it, nevertheless.

Simulations and role-plays often work well when participants have to come to some kind of a decision. 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 but 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 someone when they meet them for the first time. They are then given postcards or copies of paintings by famous artists, such as Goya, 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 have recently gone 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 are thus motivating. Secondly, they allow hesitant students to be more forthright in their opinions and behaviour without having to take responsibility for what they say in the way that they do when they are speaking for themselves. Thirdly, 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 4, A6). There is an example of a role-play on page 359.

D 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 can't 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 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 (✗) or very bad (✗✗)

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 the other 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 part 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: My home town	Activity:	communication game
	Focus:	lexis and grammar; language processing; information processing
	Age:	any
	Level:	elementary

In this activity, from Hadfield (1997), the whole class is involved in a matching game which involves reading and talking to others in order to solve a puzzle.

The words which students need to know in order to play this game include *north*, *south*, *east*, *west* and various places such as *university*, *cathedral*, *shopping centre*, *port* and *seaside*. The teacher makes sure that the students know them before the activity starts.

The teacher makes copies of a map of Britain in which eight towns are marked with a dot but not named. Students are also given eight town maps of which the following are the first two:
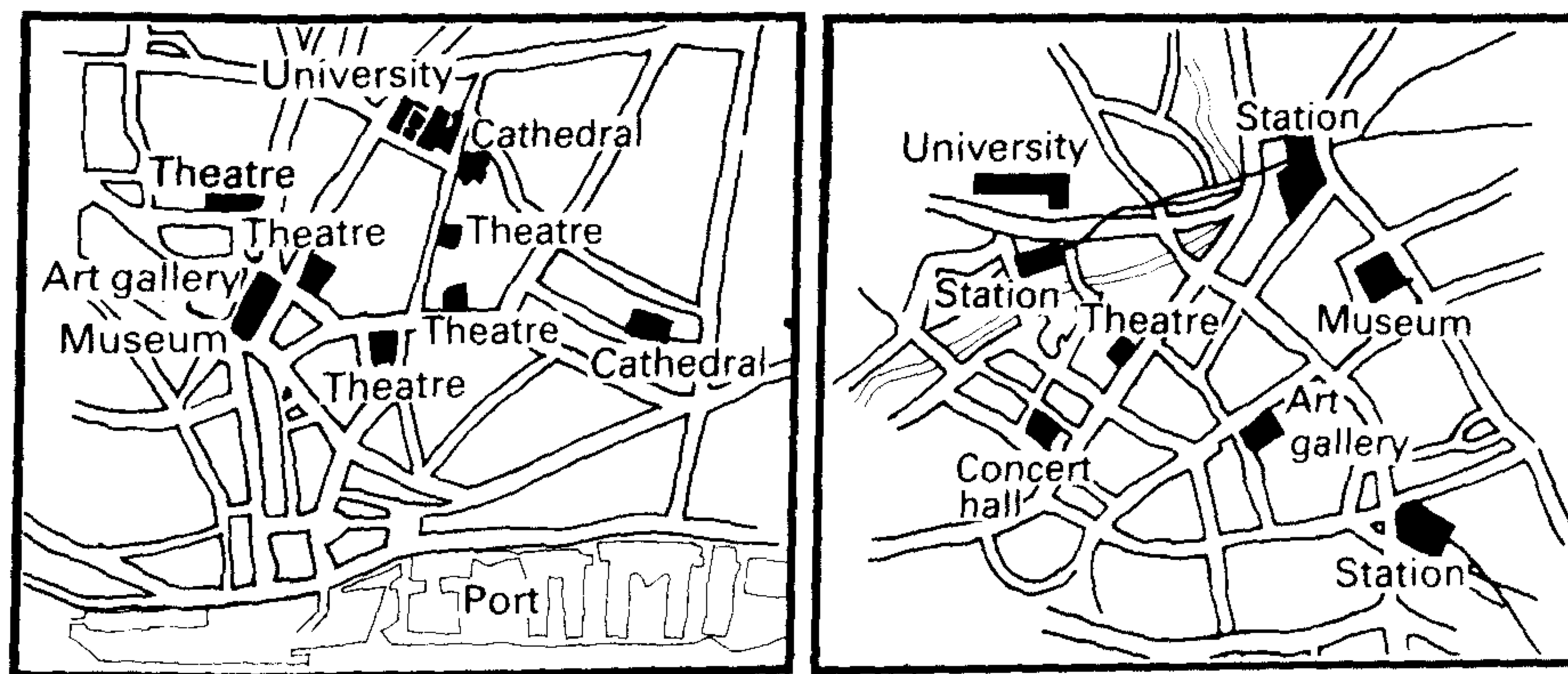
Individual students are then each given one of eight written town descriptions, such as the following:

You come from Liverpool. Liverpool is a large port in the north-west of England. It has a university, two cathedrals, an art gallery, a museum and five theatres.

You come from Manchester. Manchester is an industrial town in the north of England. It has a university, a concert hall, a theatre, a museum, an art gallery and three stations.

Based on the information on their card, each student now writes the name of their town in the correct place on the map, and draws a line between that place and the appropriate town plan.

The teacher then collects all the place description cards back from the students. They now have to go round the class asking each other about their towns without looking at anyone else's map. The game finishes when each student has a complete set of place names with lines linking them to the correct plans.

This game will obviously work best with students who do not have extensive knowledge of Britain and are interested in learning more. However, it can easily be adapted to make it relevant to other groups, as the author suggests, by making it about other countries. Students can even create their own imaginary countries.

'My home town' uses an information gap to create the necessary conditions for communication but shares the information around many more than two people.

Example 4: Whose line is it anyway?	Activity:	improvisation game
	Focus:	language processing; interacting with others
	Age:	young adult and above
	Level:	upper intermediate 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. police officer, nurse, teacher, president) and chooses the most interesting and communicatively generative suggestions. The pair of students might now represent a police officer 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've both seen or football or anything else. The pair at the front might now be a police officer 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 have 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 and the relationship which the students have with each other.

A similar (but less taxing) game is called 'Royal banquet' (Mumford 2004). Here students sit along the sides of a table. The top couple are the king and queen, the others their courtiers. When the king and queen choose a topic, everyone (in their pairs across the table) must talk about the same topic. If the king and queen change the topic, all the courtiers have to change the topic, too. This can be extremely amusing (and, of course, the teacher can feed topics to the king and queen). All the couples not only have to engage in conversation, but also keep their ears open to make sure they know what the couple nearest the king and queen are talking about.

Example 5: London map	Activity:	information gap
	Focus:	finding the differences between two pieces of information
	Age:	adult
	Level:	upper intermediate

The following sequence is designed to get students talking in detail about the differences between two maps. It demands quite a lot of language from the students and significant attention to detail. It uses maps of London, but we could equally well use maps of any other city or place that the students have some familiarity with or are living in.

The activity starts when students are given two minutes to write down as many sights of London as they can. If they have access to the Internet, they can have a quick search, or they can look at a tourist guide or any other reference work. The point is for them to have to scan very quickly.

Students are put in pairs. In each pair one student is A and the other student is B. They are told that they are going to look at maps of London. But we make sure that they realise that they may not show their maps to each other. Student A is given map A and Student B is given map B. We tell them that some of the differences may be in the pictures, but others are in the writing.

Map A

Here is a tourist map of the main sights of Central London. Your partner has a map that is similar but not the same. Ask each other questions, describe your map and work together to see how many differences you can find.

Map B

Here is a tourist map of the main sights of Central London. Your partner has a map that is similar but not the same. Ask each other questions, describe your map and work together to see how many differences you can find.

From *Pair Work Book* 3 by P Watkin Jones and D Howard-Williams (Penguin Books)

Example 6: Time capsule		
	Activity:	decision-making
	Focus:	information processing; interacting with others
	Age:	teenage and above
	Level:	elementary and above

A practice that is not uncommon is that of burying time capsules containing artefacts of contemporary life which, if they are found a thousand years from now, will give the finder

some idea of what life was like today. In this sequence, students are told that they have a box about the size of a small suitcase. They must fill this with the largest number of things which best exemplify life today. They do not have to worry about the cost or the weight of an object, but they do have to choose things which, together, fit into the box.

The class starts with a general discussion in which the teacher and the class discuss the kinds of material which exemplify a society. Perhaps they will talk about music, books, plants, architecture, modern inventions, photography, art, teenage culture, cars, foods, etc.

When they have done this, the teacher gets students into pairs or small groups. In a short space of time (which the teacher should set and keep to) they have to make a list of everything they would like to include, however crazy. No one's suggestion is rejected at this stage.

The teacher now gets two pairs (or two small groups) to work together. They have to share their ideas, only this time they have to pare down their lists so that the items will all fit into the box. Once again, they have a short time limit for their decision-making. While they are discussing the issues that this task raises, the teacher goes round the groups, listening to what is being said and noting any points that may be worth bringing to the attention of the whole class. Where necessary, the teacher should encourage students to speak in English rather than reverting to their own language (see Chapter 7, D4).

When the groups have made their choices, the whole class listens to the suggestions and comes to a decision about the class time capsule. The teacher may want to feed in ideas or suggestions which he or she heard while going round the class. Later the teacher and class can discuss any language problems that came up during this activity.

Example 7: The debate	Activity: discussion; making speeches
	Focus: making a compelling argument
	Age: young adult plus
	Level: intermediate

In the following activity, students are going to debate a serious topic, arguing as well as they can for and against a certain point of view. The activity occurs during work on the topic of holidays.

Students are told that they are going to debate the statement 'Tourism is bad for the world'. We can start the sequence by inviting them to give any opinions on the subject so that the topic gets an airing. Perhaps we can put them into small buzz groups first just to give them time to think around the topic.

The class is now divided into two teams. In Team A students are told they should agree with the motion and in Team B they are told they should disagree with it. Point out that they will be given an opportunity to air their real views later but that debating is all about how well we argue a case.

The teams try to come up with as many arguments as they can. Perhaps they can look up facts on the Internet. If not, we can feed in arguments, e.g.

Tourism is a bad thing
- According to scientists, 15% of all greenhouse gasses will come from aeroplanes by 2050.
- Water is diverted from agricultural/poor areas to feed tourist centres.
- Tourism generates rubbish.
- Tourism destroys the countryside and pushes wildlife away.
- Tourism destroys traditional ways of life, etc.

Tourism is a good thing
- Tourism is fun.
- It's the world's largest industry.
- Tourism provides employment to many who otherwise would have no jobs.
- When tourism is restricted, only the rich can travel.
- Everyone needs a chance to relax, etc.

Students get a chance to rehearse their arguments in their teams. While they are doing this, we can go round monitoring what they are doing, offering suggestions and helping out with any language difficulties they may be having.

We can now select a proposer and a seconder, and an opposer and his or her seconder. The proposer must speak for two or three minutes, and the opposer then has the chance to state their case for the same amount of time. Now the seconders speak in their turn, probably for slightly less time (it helps if we are quite strict with the timing).

Now the subject is opened up for anyone to make their points. Once again, we may impose a time limit on their offerings.

Finally, the proposer and opposer make a short closing speech and then everyone votes on whether they agree with the motion or not. Perhaps the best way to ensure that this all works well is to have the teacher as the debate organiser and controller. But perhaps not! If a student controls the debate, it will give him or her a good role and allow the teacher to prompt students who are having trouble from the sidelines. Alternatively, we can make this into a TV-style debate, and give different students from both Team A and Team B different roles, such as an airline executive, a travel writer, an environmentalist, a holidaymaker, a hotel employee, a local fisherman, a politician and a travel agent. Each one can now use the arguments they have come up with, but from the point of view of the role they are playing.

Example 8: 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 gives the role-play a genuinely communicative dimension. The students have been working on 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 $1,400 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. He or she can show it to the customer if necessary, but will probably have more success by explaining it.

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	☺☺	☺☺☺	☺☺☺	
Swimming pool				
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 and 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 which most closely matches the customer's needs)? What did they find difficult/easy? We can then discuss things we heard which went well – and not so well.

Example 9: The interview	Activity:	simulation
	Focus:	interacting with others; lexis and grammar; process language
	Age:	adult
	Level:	intermediate and above

In this sequence, students simulate an interview for a middle management post in a big company. We start by discussing with the class general interview issues such as the relationship between silence (on the part of interviewer and interviewee) and rising tension, and the importance of the first minutes of an interview when lasting impressions are created. We can get the students to predict some of the standard questions that usually come up, such as *Why do you want this job? Why do you want to leave the job you are in?* and *What special qualities do you have that would make you a suitable candidate for this post?* There are also the *What would you do if ...?* questions where the interviewer gives the candidate a hypothetical situation to respond to. Sometimes interviewers also ask 'best' and 'worst' questions such as *What is the best decision you have ever made and why?* We can agree with our students that

good interviewees are able to tell stories of their past experience which exemplify the answers they are trying to give.

We can help our 'interviewees' by working on a variety of language phrases and chunks which will be useful to structure the discourse for this particular kind of activity (see A2 above). For example, they may want to buy time when they can't think of an immediate answer to a question. We can introduce language such as the following and, if necessary, have students try it out in a quick controlled practice activity (see Chapter 12, B2):

> That's quite a difficult question. Could you repeat it, please.
> I'm not sure if I understand your question.
> I think I'd need time to think about that.

Or we can have students look at and practise other good interview phrases such as:

> I think the best example of what I am talking about is/was ...
> Well, it's difficult to be specific, but ...
> I'm really pleased that you asked me that because ...
> One of things that attracted me to this post was ...

We now put students in two groups. In the first, the 'interviewers' group, the students write as many questions as they can think of for the particular interview in question. The 'interviewees' group try to predict what questions they will be asked.

The interviews now take place, either in groups or with the whole class watching one interview, after which we can give feedback on how well the questions were asked, how well the interviewee managed to deal with them and whether the right kind of language was used. Our simulation has provided not only an opportunity for rehearsal, but also the opportunity for the teaching of specific process language.

E Making recordings

The activities in this section suggest ways in which the camera (and/or the microphone) can become a central learning aid, as a result of which students work cooperatively together using a wide variety of language both in the process and the product of making a video or audio recording. Where sophisticated editing facilities are available and there are trained sound or film personnel on the premises, high production values can be achieved. But that is not the main point of these activities: a lot can be achieved with just a hand-held camera and a playback monitor.

Example 10: News bulletin	Activity: presenting information clearly
	Age: young adult and above
	Level: elementary and above

News bulletins are especially interesting for students of English, not only because they will want to be able to understand the news in English, but also because news broadcasts have special formats and use recognisable language patterns. Recognition of such formats allows teachers to ask students to put their own bulletins together, based on the news from today's

papers or on stories which they have been studying. How would television news present the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, the Spanish conquest of Mexico or the demise of Captain Ahab in his pursuit of the great whale?

Students can first watch news bulletins and analyse the language that is particular to this genre (for example, passive usage, the use of the present simple to tell stories, and the way in which speech is reported). In small groups, they then choose the stories they wish to tell and the order in which they wish to tell them. After writing the script – and editing it with the help of the teacher – they film their broadcasts; these are then watched by their classmates and by the teacher, who can lead the feedback session which ensues.

We can also have students record their own political broadcasts, advertisements or role-plays (especially where we ask them to simulate a typical TV format such as a topical debate show).

Example 11: Put it on screen

Activity:	filming a scene
Focus:	acting from a script; interpreting text
Age:	any
Level:	any

When students read a story, study an extract from a novel or work with a coursebook dialogue, they form some kind of mental picture of what they are understanding. This ranges from a perception of the setting to an idea of what the characters look and sound like.

A way of really getting inside the text is to have students film the scene they have just read. If they are studying a textbook dialogue, for example, we might tell them that they should disregard the textbook illustration and focus on the words and situation only. With these in mind, they should plan and film their own versions of the text. On the other hand, we might encourage them to change aspects of the dialogue – the ending perhaps – so that even a textbook dialogue becomes their own.

Any text which involves human interaction can be exploited in this way. For example, would it be possible to film Robert O'Connor's first nerve-wracking class in the prison (Example 1, page 289)?

Filming a scene involves discussion about acting and direction and a close focus on the text in question. However, despite possible problems of logistics and time, the results can be extremely satisfying, and the activity itself highly motivating.

E1   Getting everyone involved

Because filming usually involves one camera operator and may be confined to one narrator and one overall director, there is a danger that some students may get left out of the video-making process. However, there are ways of avoiding this danger.

- **The group:** if more than one video camera is available, we can divide a class into groups. That way each member of each group has a function.

- **Process:** we can ensure participation in the decision-making process by insisting that no roles (such as actor, camera operator, director) are chosen until the last moment.

- **Assigning roles:** we can assign a number of different roles as in a real film crew. This includes such jobs as clapperboard operator, script consultant, lighting and costumes.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Students analyse audioscripts**
  P Sayer (2005) noticed significant improvement in student speaking skills after the students had looked at transcripts and identified conversation strategies.

- **Shy students**
  See R Simunkova (2004). D Shinji Kondon and Y Ying-Ling (2004) examine strategies that students in Japan use to cope with language anxiety.

- **Teacher roles**
  On intervention during communication activities, see T Lynch (1997).

- **Discussion**
  P Ur (1981) is still a classic account of different discussion and speaking task activities. On developing discussion skills, see C Green *et al* (1997). See also B Deacon (2000) and K Harris (2002), who in a very short article writes 'in praise of whole class discussion'.

- **Drama**
  Apart from M Almond (2005), already mentioned, one of the most popular books on using drama, A Maley and A Duff (2005), is now in its third edition. See also B Bowler (2002) and A G Elgar (2002).

- **Games**
  See A Wright *et al* (2006).

- **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). See also P Brown (2005), and T Edwards (2005) on poster presentations. C Mei Lin Ho (2004) argues for the viva (the oral defence of a written project).

- **Role-play and simulation**
  For an exceptional (historical) account of role-play and simulation, see K Jones (1982) (see A3 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.

- **Speaking sequences**
  For more speaking activity ideas, see J Harmer (2007: Chapter 9) and S Thornbury (2005a: Chapters 5 and 6). S Burgess and K Head (2005: Chapter 7) discuss teaching speaking for exams.