

Teaching English Through English

by Jane Willis

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Synopsis: This article contains excerpts from Jane Willis's *Teaching English Through English: A Course in Classroom Language and Techniques* (Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers Series, Longman ELT, 1982). The excerpts from units 14 to 21 discuss ideas, methods, strategies, and various activities for teaching the four core components of English: *listening, speaking, reading, writing*. Footnotes and parenthetical words are included here for further elucidation of the key points.

Unit 14: Focus on Dialogues (pp. 94-102)

- Focus on *form, meaning, and use* of expressions.
- Remember context: put grammatical structures in real-life context.
- Provide model sentences with demonstration, pictures, diagrams, realia.
- Provide contrastive examples with pictures and practical situations.
- Ask yourself: does a change in form lead to a change in meaning?
- Write some possible answers: think of possible questions that suit them.
- Write sets of graded questions: (1) a 'sign-post' question¹ to make them listen with a purpose. (2) some questions to check general understanding of the situation. (3) some questions to check particular items that may cause problems.

Possible mode of presentation

Draw a picture of people talking. Act it out for students. Make them listen to understand. Get them to learn each line and say them in pairs. Then write some cue words on the board and get them to do it all in pairs.

Method

(1) Before introducing the dialogue, introduce the characters and set the scene. Give a sign-post question, then do the first reading of the dialogue.

(2) Provide general comprehension questions and do second reading. Then do a third reading with pauses for repetition, class in halves².

¹ A sign-post question is a question that asks for the *gist*, the most important idea of the listening passage.

² If a sentence or phrase is confusing for the students, simplify it by breaking it up into chunks. Then have the students to repeat the chunks; first as single chunks, then all together. A similar process could also be done with complex words but working with syllables instead. Adjust the speed of repetition, and pay attention to syllable stress. While doing listening and repeating, focus on their *pronunciation, intonation, and fluency*, trying to avoid a 'robotic' voice whenever possible.

(3) Provide more detailed questions to promote short oral practice. Listen and repeat, faster (but no faster than a normal speaking pace), class in halves, then individuals³, then in pairs. Check pair work.

(4) Assess the performance of several pairs⁴ (strong ones going first), class listening. Suggest variation on the dialogue, and ask students for some ideas of what they could say in the new situation. Do less controlled pair work, teacher wandering round to listen. (This is in preparation for oral production and ‘live talk’).

Unit 15: Focus on Oral Practice (pp. 104-112)

Substitution tables

Fred		big	ball.
He	has/'s got a	small	balloon.
Jane		nice	toy car.

Discrimination exercise

Listen to the question carefully and give an appropriate answer. For example, give an answer like “Yes, I do” or “Yes, please,” depending on the nature of the question.

Substitution drill

“Ali goes to school every day.” Substitute the following words into the sentence:

- yesterday
- shopping
- to town
- every day

Conversation drill

You are B; tell A what he/she needs.

e.g.) A: “Oh dear, it’s raining.” B: “You need ...” (a raincoat, an umbrella, find shelter, etc.)

A: “I feel so cold.” B: “You need....” (a coat, gloves, the heater, etc.)

³ The reason you should listen to individuals repeat is to check for errors in pronunciation, intonation, fluency, etc. In addition, other students can listen for the same mistakes that they would probably make. As a rule, a student who is strong in speaking should be called upon first; a weaker student should go next. That way the weaker student can try to mimic the first student and have an opportunity to correct any errors that the first student made. This also develops confidence among shy and lower-level students. After checking 2 or 3 students individually, have all of the students practice the dialogue in pairs. Monitor the pair work but do not interrupt them often since this is mostly a fluency exercise. If students make any mistakes, make a mental note and go over the mistakes after the students have completed the exercise.

⁴ Have them perform in front of class as this will help the class to redirect their attention on the pair; in addition, the pairs can practice speaking under pressure. Provide corrections if necessary, but use *constructive feedback*. While coaching their speaking, try to imitate their voice so they can listen for any errors; then use your model speaking voice so they can hear how it is naturally done. Allow the students to compare the two versions and decide which one is better. Then, have the students to repeat the correct version. Alternatively, you can record their performances, so you can provide a more accurate feedback. This also allows the students to get in the habit of listening more carefully and doing self-corrections in speaking.

Using picture cues

- a.) Make true statement about the things in the pictures. This is a discrimination exercise involving compare and contrast.
- b.) Say which you would rather have as a present; tell your neighbor why.
- c.) Describe one of the objects to your neighbor (without naming it), until he/she can guess which it is.

Guessing games (with cue cards)

A teacher or student picks a card and the others must guess which it is by asking questions based on a model given (e.g., to practice using questions in the *simple past*).

Transformation drills

- e.g.) Change the sentence of the form “will” to “going to.”

Using wall charts

- a.) Make sentences about the picture using the pattern “I saw *x* (verb + ing)...” (*x* = someone). For example, “I saw John *swimming* in the lake.”
- b.) In the situation given by the picture, think and ask what questions the characters might ask one another.
- c.) Make up a dialogue, in pairs, based on the characters in the picture.

Imaginary situation

e.g.) Your friend’s parents have gone away for a few days, leaving your friend in charge of the house and family. You check that your friend has remembered to do everything (house chores). You ask questions like, “Have you swept the yard?,” “Have you ...?,” etc. In an office situation, a boss might check on the secretary in the same way.

Expanding

Expand a given set of words to make sentences and provide alternative examples.

- e.g.) Fred/holidays/July → ‘Fred has gone on a holiday in July.’
Or, ‘For July, Fred will be on holiday.’

Teaching skills for oral practice*Conversation drill*

—Use a two-line dialogue to practice English spoken *naturally*. Use picture cues to elicit a certain kind of sentence (e.g., to practice the form “should have done”). Then, change these sentences into naturally uttered responses.

For example,

Question: “What should he have done?”

Answer: “He should have gone to bed earlier,” or

→ “gone to bed earlier” (the shortened, naturally spoken response).

Provide more examples of utterances and change them into the most natural oral responses. Do the same for other sentence patterns that need practice.

Substitution tables

- a.) Together as a class (or in pairs) create a simple substitution table with a maximum of six items in the longest column. Make sure the possible sentences resemble naturally spoken English.
- b.) Make up 6-8 questions or statements that will naturally elicit a sentence from the table as a response. You could also tell a very short story (possibly humorous) which could be summarized by a sentence from the table.
- c.) Practice in pairs, eliciting and reading out sentences from the table you have written.
- d.) Make up a short four line dialogue containing one of the sentences from the table, or a similar one, that will illustrate how this structure can be used in an everyday situation.
- e.) Make a copy of all the tables and dialogues produced by students for future practice materials.

True/false statements

- a.) Look at the following sentences and say whether each refers to past, present or future time:
 - (i) If Cyril had won the lottery he would have bought a Mercedes.
 - (ii) If Fred was rich enough he would buy a Mercedes.
 - (iii) If Charlie gets a raise in salary he'll buy a Mercedes.
- b.) True or false statements about sentences like the above can help you diagnose whether the students have understood the meaning and implications of the structure. The students listen to your statements, which should either be true or false, and then tell you which they think it is, giving the corrected version if it was false. For example, sentence (i) above can be written on the board and the following statements made orally by the teacher. Which of the following are true or false about sentence (i)? Correct the false ones.

– Cyril won the lottery.	– He has bought a Mercedes.
– Cyril tried to win the lottery.	– He can't afford a Mercedes.
– He didn't buy a Mercedes.	– He didn't win the lottery.
– He wanted to buy a Mercedes.	
- c.) Write some true/false statements about sentences (ii) and (iii) above and try them out on your neighbors.

A game to play: Give Me Another One (with any number of players up to 8, in a circle).

—Player A chooses a pattern sentence, e.g. “Jim likes playing football.” He then gives another sentence on the same pattern in order to show which words can be changed, e.g. “Jim likes watching television.” He then says, “Give me another 6!” (or perhaps up to 10). Each player in turn says one different sentence on the same pattern until the six are done. Then someone else chooses and the game continues.

You are out

- if you hesitate for longer than the agreed time (5 or 10 seconds).
- if you make a mistake and do not correct it yourself before the next player's turn.
- if you give a sentence which is meaningless or unacceptable, e.g. “Jim likes making,” or “Jim likes crying.”

The game finishes when only one person is left in, and he or she is declared the winner.

Unit 16: Focus on Vocabulary (p. 114)*How can we teach it?*

- | | |
|--|--|
| *draw pictures, diagrams, maps | *use a model |
| *bring maps, charts, graphs | *take students out of the classroom |
| *explain simply, mime, act | *bring the real thing into the classroom |
| *write in figures, use symbols | *demonstrate |
| *give a context and let students guess | *provide synonyms, antonyms, lexical sets |
| *translate into language 1 and then exemplify in English | *pre-teach key vocabulary before introducing a text and allow students to infer or guess the meaning |

Unit 17: Focus on Activities for Oral Production (pp. 124-132)*Explanation and Description*

- interpretations of graphs, maps, diagrams; e.g. from geography or social science textbooks.
- mini-speeches on topics of interest; e.g. hometown, hobbies, school rules, pop stars.
- describing a process; e.g. rice-growing, bottling factories, cocoa production.
- street directions or directions for a journey.
- instructions for operating a machine, or how to drive a car, etc.

Discussion/Conversation

- interpretations of pictures; e.g. the story behind a picture or speculations about the people in the picture.
- social issues; e.g. traffic, pollution, education, role of women, planning a new town or school (or ideas from a textbook or newspaper).
- personal experience; e.g. discussion of horoscopes, disasters, plans for future, holidays.
- pictures for opinions; e.g. fashion, pop stars, consumer goods.

Role-play and Dramatizations

- extending or continuing a set dialogue
- inventing a conversation for characters in a picture; e.g. two people leaving a cinema, or a tourist arriving at a hotel reception, or someone shopping, etc.
- social events; e.g. shopping, travel, party, interview
- dramatizing a sequence; e.g. a family discussion about choice of job for teenage son, or discussion between witnesses of a car accident (using cue cards).

Games and Problem Solving*Guessing games* (teams or whole class)

—Class has to guess by asking questions about what *object*, *action*, *person* or *place* one student is thinking of or has a picture of. The questions can only be answered with “Yes” or “No.” Examples of guessing games: “Twenty Questions,” “Personalities,” “Glug,” “Hide and Seek” (see directions below).

Elimination games (teams, groups or whole class)

Examples: “Just a minute,” “Conversation Gambits,” “My grandmother went to market,” “Simon Says,” “Don’t answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’”

Problems (pairs)

Each person in the pair has a picture or some information that the other needs, but cannot see. They must find out, by asking questions and explaining, enough information to solve the problem or complete the task set. For example, “Find the difference,” with two nearly identical pictures or maps; “Arrange a meeting,” with two diaries with various engagements for the week.

Game directions

“Just a minute”

—Teacher writes 4 to 8 topics that the class has already talked about, e.g. ‘tea’ or ‘football’ or ‘holidays’ or ‘my village,’ etc., on small pieces of paper which are then folded up. One person or team is chosen to pick one topic, and must talk about it for a set time, e.g., 15 or 30 seconds, without hesitating or repeating anything. Points can be awarded for each 5 seconds of speech. Students or teams are out if they hesitate for over 3 seconds, or repeat the same thing. Mistakes in English need not matter, since the object of the game is to encourage fluency.

“Don’t answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’”

—One team asks members of the other team questions to try to make them answer “Yes” or “No.” The answering team can use other responses, e.g., “Of course not,” or “I think so,” or “I did” or “It is,” etc. The teacher times how long it is before a “Yes” or “No” is said. The team with the longest time wins.

“Twenty Questions”

—One person or team thinks of an object or animal, etc. The others can ask up to 20 questions with “Yes” or “No” answers, in order to guess what the object is. If they guess in less than 20, they have won. Questions like, “Is it alive?,” “Is it made of wood?,” “Does it have 4 legs?,” etc., are possible.

“My grandmother went to market and she bought...”

—This game practices weights, measures, the use of articles *a* and *an*, and ‘some,’ etc. Student 1 begins “My grandmother went to market and she bought a kilo of tomatoes.” The next student repeats that, and adds something new, i.e., “My grandmother went to market and bought a kilo of tomatoes and a blue dress.” Student 3 repeats it and adds one item. If any student forgets something or gets it in the wrong order, he is out. This can be played individually or in teams; the members of the team can help each other out.

“Conversation Gambits”

—The teacher sets a situation, e.g. “in a restaurant,” or “meeting a friend in the street,” or “visiting a friend in hospital,” or gives the first line of conversation like, “I went to a party last night.” The aim of each team is to keep the conversation going by thinking of appropriate questions to ask every time there is a silence. If there is a silence of more than a set time, e.g. 5 or 10 seconds, the team is out. Again, the teacher needs to time each team’s performance.

“Glug”

—This is similar to Twenty Questions, except that “glug” stands for an action, e.g. dance. Questions like “Do you like glugging?,” “Have you glugged today?,” “Do you glug in the kitchen?,” etc. can be asked.

Unit 18: Focus on Listening (p. 134)*Kinds of listening*

*discussions	*dialogues	*folk songs
*stories	*interviews	*news broadcasts
*descriptions	*lectures	*instructions
*talks	*pop songs	*telephone conversations
*advertisements	*directions	

Listening purposes

- general information: main points
- specific information: particular items
- cultural interest: general
- people’s attitudes and opinions
- organization of ideas
- sequence of events
- lexical items: words expressing noise, movement, etc.
- structural items: their use and meaning
- functional items: their form and use

Listening enabling skills

- predicting what people are going to talk about
- guessing at unknown words or phrases
- using one’s own knowledge of the subject to help one understand
- identifying relevant points; rejecting irrelevant information
- retaining relevant points (by note taking, summarizing)
- recognizing discourse markers, e.g. “Well,” “Oh, another thing is,” “Now, finally...” etc.
- recognizing cohesive devices, e.g. “such as,” “which,” including link words, pronouns, references, etc.
- understanding different intonation patterns, and uses of stress, etc. which give clues to meaning and social setting
- understanding inferred information, e.g. speakers’ attitude or intentions

Listening activities

*true or false?	*identify <i>who said what, who did what</i> , etc.
*discuss for or against (debate)	*complete flow charts
*continue the dialogue	*discriminate between two things (is it A or B?)
*fill in a table	*compare and contrast (with optional reading texts)
*write short answers to questions	*take notes (not just copying)

- *think (problem solving)
 - *multiple choice (select *a*, *b*, or *c*)
 - *put events in chronological order
 - *draw a picture (for visualization)
 - *follow directions (with a map)
-

Unit 19: Focus on Reading (pp. 142-152)

Reading purposes

- *pleasure*: magazines, holiday brochures, letters from friends, etc.
- *survival*: forms, official notices, bills and receipts, labels, directions, bus and train timetables, place names, street signs
- *work*: reports, articles, catalogues, workshop manuals, notice boards, minutes of meetings, professional journals, advertisements, business letters
- *study*: dictionaries, textbooks, indexes, glossaries, bibliographies, library catalogues, abstracts
- *other* (that may fit into one or more of the above categories): newspapers, photograph captions, posters, job advertisements, instructions for use, contracts, phone directories, charts, diagrams, reference works, graphs, literature, novels, plays, poetry

Reading skills

1. Recognizing words and phrases in English script.
2. Using one's own knowledge of the outside world to make predictions about and interpret a text.
3. Retrieving information stated in the passage.
4. Distinguishing the main ideas from subsidiary information.
5. Deducing the meaning and use of unknown words; ignoring unknown words/phrases that are redundant
6. Understanding the meaning and implications of grammatical structures; for example, involving cause, result, purpose, reference in time (e.g. verb tenses; compare: "He could swim well" – past, with "He could come at 10 a.m." –future).
7. Recognizing discourse markers: e.g., "therefore" → conclusion, "however" → contrast, "that is" → paraphrase, "e.g." → example.
8. Recognizing the function of sentences, even when not introduced by discourse markers: e.g., the function of an example, definition, paraphrase, conclusion, warning, etc.
9. Understanding relations within the sentence and the text (words that refer back to a thing or a person mentioned earlier in the sentence or the text, e.g., information about *which*, *who*, *it*).
10. Extracting specific information for summary or note taking.
11. Skimming to obtain the gist, and recognize the organization of ideas within the text.
12. Understanding implied information and attitudes.
13. Knowing how to use an index, a table of contents, etc.
14. Understanding layout, use of headings, etc.

How do you teach a difficult text? Help students by

- providing more background information
- pre-teaching key words the day before
- dividing text into short chunks

- providing sign-post questions for main points
- adding discourse markers where helpful, e.g., *in addition, therefore, so, first, second*, etc.
- asking easy questions
- paraphrasing difficult ideas (simplifying)
- setting easy tasks like matching questions and answers

Reading activities

Early stages (word/sentence recognition)

- match words to pictures
- sort words into lexical sets
- match sentences to pictures

After the early stages (reading for meaning)

- arrange jumbled sentences into a paragraph
- answer the questions, complete the sentences
- is this information TRUE, FALSE, or NOT STATED?
- choose the correct answer from *a, b, c*, or *d*
- note taking for summary, jumbled key points
- complete a table or chart of information
- label a diagram, fill in missing information
- find a sentence/word which tells you that _____
- cloze passages, words given below
- fill the blanks
- match questions to answers, jumbled sentence halves

Activities and word games (for elementary reading level)

(a) Matching word to picture

—Students match the word to the correct picture as quickly as possible.

To make: Prepare 6 pairs of small cards, a word on one card, a picture illustrating it on the other, using words your students will need to be able to read in their textbooks. Mix each set up and store in a labeled envelope. Write the words the envelope contains on the outside of the envelope, with the instructions to the students: “Find a picture to match each word, then write the words down.”

(b) Word families (or lexical sets)

—Each envelope can contain any number of words on separate cards belonging to one word or family lexical set, e.g. names of animals, kinds of food, colors, etc. The teacher mixes words from two or three envelopes (i.e. different lexical sets) together; the students read them and sort them out back into sets as quickly as possible. This can be done competitively.

To make: Complete lexical sets (such as for places, food, people, clothes, color, etc.) with familiar words or phrases then copy them on to cards. Store each set in a separate envelope, clearly labeled. Pictures can also be added, to make a combination of both games (a) and (b).

For example, complete the following lexical sets:

<u>Places</u>	<u>Food</u>	<u>People</u>	<u>Clothes</u>	<u>Color</u>
(to) the shop	rice	the doctor	shirt	blue
(at) school	sugar	Mr. Jones	sandals	green
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Reading activities (for elementary to intermediate level)

(a) Matching sentences to pictures or wall charts

—Two or more pictures or wall charts are displayed, and students read and sort sentences into two columns, according to which picture they are about. This can be done with small pictures, e.g. magazine pictures, or wall pictures or maps, etc.

To make: Find suitable pictures to suit the vocabulary your students know orally and need to read. Write 6 sentences about each picture on cards. Store them in labeled envelopes, containing or referring to the correct picture.

To use: Mix the sentence cards from two or more envelopes; students sort them as quickly as possible according to the picture they refer to.

(b) Matching questions and answers (based on a picture or short text)

—Students look at the picture, or read the text, then find all the question cards. Then they find a card with a suitable answer for each question. This gives students practice in recognizing referential words like ‘he,’ ‘she’ etc., and discourse markers like ‘because,’ ‘in order to,’ etc.

To make: Choose a suitable magazine picture or short text. Mount it on card the right size to fit in the envelope. Write, on separate cards, 6 questions and 6 or more answers. The answers should be natural sounding answers, not too long; because to have long answers that repeat or look like the question would make the matching too easy. It is a good idea to provide two extra ‘answers’ that do not match any questions, then students cannot get the last ones right unless they really understand all of them.

(c) Matching sentence halves (based on a picture or short text)

—This is the same as matching question and answer except that you split sentences in half and write half on each card.

(d) Jumbled paragraphs or texts

—Students read the sentences on the cards, then re-arrange the cards in the best way to form a coherent paragraph which they can check by looking up the original paragraph in their textbooks. This gives them practice in reading for meaning, seeing how a text is organized, and reorganizing link words and words which refer back or forwards. Rearranging paragraphs of a text is also useful.

Unit 20: Focus on Writing Practice-early stages (p. 156)

—Before students write, make sure that they can say it, read it, and understand it.

Why write in class?

- to learn the motor skills of handwriting; to develop neatness, clarity and speed
- to learn spelling and punctuation, etc.

- to keep a written record of what has been learned and achieved
- to reinforce vocabulary and structures already mastered orally
- to practice for end-of-term achievement tests

Writing activities

1. Match then copy (e.g., match picture to word, vice versa).
2. Write true sentences about the pictures. For example,

	tree		happy.
The	ball	is	green.
	boy		red.

3. Match, then write: For example,

David has a new football	<i>who</i> likes playing football.
Mr. Jones has a new car	<i>which</i> he plays with a lot.
Sam has a new friend	<i>which</i> he drives to school in.

4. Write 20 sentences that are true. For example,

There	are	a lot of	trees	in the	kitchen.
		a few	plants		dormitory.
		10, 20, ..	birds		classroom.

5. Write a short paragraph about someone you know, using suitable words from the tables.

➤ Tom/Akosha | goes to the | market | every | evening.
 | | shops | | morning.
 | | store | | day.

➤ He/She | buys | vegetables | for | his |
 | | rice | | the | family.
 | | meat | | her |

➤ He/She | never | goes | by bus | because it is | not far.
 | usually | | on foot | | expensive.
 | often | | by bicycle | | faster.

6. Match question and answer, then write. For example,

Where does Anna live?	He's twelve.
Where do you live?	I live in Keta.
How old is Peter?	She lives near me.

7. Write more sentences on a pattern, e.g., ‘She goes to bed at 9 o’clock.’

He / go / school / 7.

They / come / home / 2.

Peter / eat / lunch / 12.

Unit 21: Focus on Written Production (pp. 164-175)

Kinds of writing

—Study: description, narrative, information

—Work: business letters, minutes of meetings, references, application forms

—Daily life: form filling, letters, notices

Writing skills

1. Handwriting: forming and joining letters.

2. Mastering spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, referential words (e.g., *he*, *who*).

3. Linking sentences using connecting words, relatives, etc. Connecting paragraphs.

4. Being aware of different demands of written English (contrast with spoken).

5. Organizing information logically and clearly with a specific type of reader in mind.

6. Using discourse markers appropriately to indicate main points, developments in a theme, change of topic, examples, conclusions, etc.

7. Using variation in normal sentence patterns and word order to develop a theme clearly and emphasize the main points at each stage.

8. Selecting vocabulary to convey attitude and implied meaning.

Writing tasks

1. *Paragraph writing*

(a) ‘Hossein’s new house is off Kings Street. He moved there because it was quieter. It’s next door to a hospital and has a large garden at the back. His wife likes it because it has a modern kitchen.’

Sadegh / flat / Park Road.

moved /cheaper.

cinema / small garden / front.

Friends / near / town center.

Use the above words to write about your friend’s house, using the similar sentences.

(b) You think you have seen a man who is wanted by the police. Write, for the police, a short description of the man, saying when and where you saw him.

Begin with: ‘The man I saw was coming out of ...’ (Provide information about place, time, and date. Give a description of clothes, briefcase, etc., appearance, manner, and possible intentions).

2. Essay writing

(c) ‘The school leaving age should be 15 minimum.’

Discuss, then write.

Skeleton plan

Advantages: ‘It’s a good thing to do *x* because’

Disadvantages: ‘It’s not a good thing to do *x* because’

‘Most people prefer *x* (or *y*) because ...’

‘I think *y* as well as/instead of *x* because (+ example).’

(d) Write a letter applying for the job advertised here. Give all necessary details and ask for more information re hours, pay, etc.

Wanted

Jul/Aug Exp. Sales

Assistant, large store.

Must speak English.

Apply to D. Lee, Waltrex

Stores, City Rd, Sidville.

Are your students poor at writing? Try the following:

- Stage preparation carefully: students should speak – read – then write.
- Grade each step; give shorter, simpler tasks until they improve.
- Give practice in planning, organizing and expressing information.
- Give model or target essays.
- Practice relevant structures before they write their own.
- Keep a record of common mistakes. Focus on one per lesson.
- Insist on corrections. Test them later.
- Make them write in class. Vary the topics set.
- Do writing as group work. (The strong help the weak).

Teaching skills

1. Preparing for a written examination

(a) List the kinds of written tasks that your students have to perform for the final school leaving examination.

(b) Plan a pre-examination program of essay writing revision as follows:

- ✓ List the typical forms of writing required by the essay topics on past examination papers.
- ✓ What specific grammatical structures and other language items can be used for each form of writing?
- ✓ What types of essay could be planned or organized in similar ways? (e.g., describing a process, giving directions, giving opinions, compare and contrast, using markers like “first,” “second,” “third,” “however,” “on the other hand,” etc.).

- ✓ What have different forms of writing got in common? Show your students how one form of writing might be useful in three or four different essay topics; this is useful when they select exam questions.
- ✓ List areas of lexis (vocabulary) which may be needed for the examination. Vocabulary depends on the *topic*, not so much the *form* of writing; e.g., a description of a place may include some of the same vocabulary as giving street directions but not the same grammatical structures.

2. Early intermediate writing. Model paragraphs, guided production

(a) *Read/expand/write*

Look at writing task (a) about Hossein's house at the beginning of this unit. This is in three stages; (i) reading, (ii) writing practice, on to (iii) written production. Do this exercise quickly, orally in pairs. Write another short model paragraph, giving biographical details about a (famous) person you all know. Then think of someone else, similar, and write prompts as in stage (ii). Finally, think of someone else for students to write about by themselves, keeping to the same patterns. Perhaps they could do an autobiography, with some extra help.

(b) *Cloze paragraphs*

Write another short model paragraph at a level simple enough for your students to imitate, using a different form of writing. To use this in class you would write it on the board leaving out every 6th word or some of the verbs or subjects, etc. Write below it more than enough words to fill the blanks. When your students can say and write it correctly, you could delete more words, or perhaps every 5th word instead, and not give them words below to choose from. They then write this on a new page (so they cannot see what they have just written). By this method, students practice one form of writing intensively, and you only have to write the model once on the blackboard. (Alternatively, you can write the models on overhead projector transparencies since you can re-use them over and over again.)

(c) *Expanding from key points*

This is more difficult than expanding sentences, since students have to not only expand each point into a sentence but also provide something to go before and after. Adequate oral planning is essential. Structural and lexical items need revising too; so do suitable discourse markers and connecting words.

Look at writing task (b) about giving a description to the police at the beginning of this unit. Practice this activity in pairs, getting each other to expand the points to the length and form it should be written in. Then practice with a different topic taken from your textbook, making sure the expanded version sounds like written English. Finally, write down the difficulties your students may find with this type of exercise (e.g., linking ideas, punctuation, short jerky sentences, etc.). If you do one version for them on the board as a target text, then rub it out bit by bit; they will get the idea better.

(d) *Jumbled key points* (based on key points from a reading text)

When students have arranged the key points in the correct order, they can be asked to join sentences, using link words, relatives etc., and make any other changes necessary to make it sound like good written English. Then, after preparing it orally first, they can write it down. In pairs, discuss possible alternative ways of linking the sentences.

(e) Answering questions on a reading text (to form a summary)

Answering, in full, questions designated to elicit the main points of a reading passage is another way to get students to write a guided paragraph. Suggested link words can be shown, in brackets, beside the questions. (*Warning*: writing a summary without thorough guidance should never be set except to advanced students).

3. Correcting written assignments*(a) Avoiding 'pitfalls'*

If the writing task has been prepared thoroughly, there should not be too much correcting to do. If there are a lot of mistakes in many students' work you should ask yourself what went wrong at the preparation stage. (NB: It helps you to diagnose the problems if you write the essay you want your students to write, before you prepare the preparation lesson).

(b) Training students to spot and correct their own mistakes

In the early stages students find this difficult, and so they need guidance in correcting their own work. Gradually, this guidance should be withdrawn, until by examination time, students are better at checking their own work and correcting their own mistakes.

(c) A method of marking

Here are some symbols that have been found to be useful:

- s – spelling
- c – concord (agreement: subject and verb)
- s/p – singular, plural
- w/o – word order
- T – tense
- V – vocabulary, wrong word or usage
- app – appropriacy (inappropriate style or register)
- p – punctuation (including capital letters)
- Ir – irrelevant information
- ?M – meaning not clear
- ^ – word missing

If you let your student know what kind of mistake he has made, he has more chance of correcting it. You can withdraw your help in *stages* throughout the course, thus:

- Stage 1 – (elementary) underline the mistake and write the symbol in the margin.
- Stage 2 – underline the whole word/phrase and write the symbol in the margin.
- Stage 3 – *do not* underline the word or the mistake; only write the symbol in the margin.
- Stage 4 – (exam classes) put a dot or *x* in the margin for each mistake.

(e) Awarding marks or grades for compositions

There are two main ways of grading a piece of writing: 'impression' marking and 'split' (or analytic) marking.

- *Impression marking*: you read the written work through quickly and give it an 'impression' mark. In an exam, at least two, preferably three, people independently should give an impression mark for each essay, keeping a record on a separate mark sheet, not writing the grade on the essay itself.

- *Split marking*: you ‘split’ total marks, and give a proportion for each of the following:
 - organization (plan, paragraphing, etc.)
 - accuracy (grammar and spelling)
 - appropriacy (style, register)
 - content (relevance).

Depending on what form of writing it is, you adjust the proportion of total marks given for each category. (For example, a business letter would need a low proportion of marks for content, and higher than usual for appropriacy and accuracy). You could also add or subtract a few marks for neatness, layout, etc.

For example,

org. 3/4 acc. 3/6 apr.2/7 content 3/3 total: 11/20

4. Basing composition work on reading texts: creating skeleton plans for writing

—Find a reading passage in your textbook that would be suitable for essay writing. Then, write a skeletal outline for writing the essay. Here’s an example of a skeletal writing plan for a discussion/argument type essay (x = something/action that the subject does, ¶ = paragraph):

*Skeleton plan*⁵

¶1: Many people do x (+ advantages of doing x). Doing x , however, has disadvantages.

¶2: Reasons for doing y (alternative to doing x).

¶3: Many people prefer doing x (+ reasons). Anecdote/example of such a person.

Conclusion: Doing x as well as y is perhaps the answer.

(Keep in mind that alternative skeletal outlines to the one given here could also be created for non-argument type essays).

⁵ Let us imagine that the topic of the essay is on ‘ways people get to work.’ Let us assume that x = ‘driving to work.’ After writing a skeleton plan, paragraph 1 of the essay might look like the following (suitable discourse markers in brackets):

‘Many people drive to work *because it is more convenient*. They do not have to wait for the bus, especially out in the cold, nor do they have to wait for a taxi or a train. With a car, they can leave whenever they want and drive at their own pace. [However], driving to work has certain *disadvantages*. [First], it creates much air pollution which can be bad for our health. [Second], there can be high oil and gas expenses after much driving. [Third], ...’

The second paragraph could discuss an alternative to driving to work (x), such as walking to work (y). The third paragraph could explain why many people prefer driving to work. It should also provide several anecdotes or examples of people that prefer driving. Finally, the conclusion of the essay should give the author’s opinion about getting to work, and perhaps give a complementary answer like, ‘I believe that driving and walking are both convenient ways of getting to work, depending on the individuals’ needs and the situation that they are in...’

5. Training in exam techniques

—In the year or term of the examination, practice in examination techniques is essential. Give students exam practice in class. This has two advantages:

- (a) They get used to being timed and working under pressure.
- (b) You can see where they are likely to go wrong and devote more time to that area in another lesson.

Techniques specific to exams:

- read and carry out instructions on the exam paper
- work to time, on their own and silently
- select (the right number of) questions
- interpret the essay title – meaning, purpose, aim
- select relevant information and appropriate style or register for task
- plan, organize clearly and logically
- leave time to correct own mistakes

6. Essay/paragraph writing (preparing students for ‘free’ writing)

—When teaching ‘free’ writing, follow the same steps as your students should take when writing for an examination. Then they will get into good habits and are less likely to go wrong in the exam. (In addition, they will have less surprises and develop higher confidence in writing).

Steps (after reading the instructions, planning out the time and selecting a title):

- (1) Read the title, underline the key words, identify what form of writing is required.
- (2) What is the purpose of the piece of writing? Who is it for? What style is appropriate, formal or informal?
- (3) List possible main points – note form.
- (4) List necessary subsidiary points – to back up the main points; examples, anecdote, opinion, etc.
- (5) Express (to yourself or in written form) each main point in full, as simply and clearly as you can.
- (6) Jot down any useful words, phrases, structures, idioms you think you might forget when actually writing.
- (7) Select and organize relevant main points into a plan, with relevant subsidiary points – note form. Do not include any information that is not asked for.
- (8) Add link words, phrases, discourse markers to plan (trying to say the whole thing through to yourself in your head).
- (9) Write it, clearly and simply.
- (10) Check it through, once for relevance, again for accuracy (subject/verb agreement, tenses, spelling, punctuation, etc.).

When first preparing students for ‘free’ writing, you will need to show them how to tackle each step. Encourage student participation. While going through the steps, have them work in groups or by themselves, then discuss it together as a class. Nearer the exam, you can get them to do Steps 1-5 on their own before you discuss anything, and so on, gradually withdrawing guidance. (*NB:* Never ask a student to write an essay that you haven’t written or at least fully planned yourself).

