How to Teach TOEFL®, TOEIC® & IELTS®

and Other Standardized Examinations

A Fast Simple Step-by-Step Guide

How to Teach

TOEFL® TOEIC® IELTS®

and Other Standardized Examinations

Second Edition

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Introduction

Why Take This Course?

This course is designed to help newly-trained and experienced EFL teachers further improve their skills and career options. Teaching specialized skills courses in writing, reading, and listening; and test preparation courses for TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, etc. is natural progression as you move up in your teaching career.

Goals of the Course

The goals of this course are to provide additional skills that will allow you, with confidence, to seek more varied and demanding coursework. It is also intended that increased skills will lead to increased job satisfaction.

Bottom Line

Many EFL teachers have no idea how to teach the more demanding courses such as TOEFL or IELTS Preparation, or even advanced writing. This course will show you how.

Standardized Testing

The more you know about the type of test being given, how it is developed, administered, scored, and interpreted, the more insight you will have in understanding the testing process, its outcomes, and, ultimately, in making decisions regarding a student's education.
(Pearson Educational Measurement)

II. Standardized Testing

A. What is standardized testing?

Tests are "standardized" when they are developed, administered, and scored using established procedures and guidelines. These procedures and guidelines ensure that all students are tested under the same conditions, that they are all given equal opportunity to determine the correct answers, and that all scores are established and interpreted using appropriate criteria. Two types of standardized tests are:

1. **norm-referenced tests, used to compare student performance to that of other students; and**
2. **criterion-referenced tests, used to measure student performance against a defined set of learning requirements or expectations.**

In developing standardized tests, test developers follow established procedures to create questions that reflect the curricula or the learning requirements. They also analyze the test to ensure that it measures student performance accurately and reliably. When standardized tests are given to students, there are prescribed directions for how the test is to be administered and every test given in every setting must be given under the same conditions to ensure that no one has an advantage.

Standardized Testing

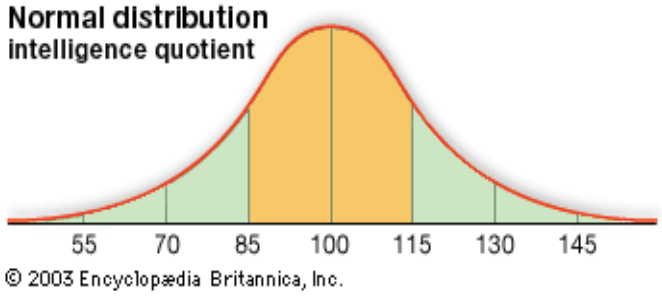
In scoring standardized tests, manual and computer-assisted analyses double check the scoring process to ensure that every student's score is accurate. Interpreting standardized test scores is a critical process because the decisions can have significant impact on students' lives. Many guidelines govern how test results can be applied and what evidence (usually statistical analysis) is needed to support various uses. (adapted from Pearson Educational Measurement)

Why are standardized tests used? What do the tests tell us?

Standardized tests such at TOEFL and IELTS and others are usually administered to determine, or predict, a student's likelihood of success in an English-speaking academic setting. TOEIC is used to measure and predict the subject's skills using English in an English-speaking work environment.

Some interesting correlations

Controversy surrounds standardized tests as they tend to be one-dimensional and measure only certain aspects of a person's ability/ skill. They may not measure other important aspects such as social skills or determination to succeed. IQ tests, for example, can well predict the gross income of the subject's parents, or even the number of books in her parents' house. Thus the test sometimes possibly better measures wealth or resources available to the student than native ability.



Standardized Testing

B. Introduction to Test Development

Validity

How do we know whether a test measures the ability in which we are interested? Even if a test is perfectly reliable and virtually error-free, how do we know if it is measuring the abilities we want it to measure and not something else? This is the idea and central concern of validity, and ultimately involves the kinds of judgments that can be drawn from test scores.

Let's consider a math test consisting only of word problems. The test score could appropriately be used to indicate the student's ability to solve math problems that require reading; that would be a valid use of the test score. However, using the test score as a representation of the student's math ability in general might not be valid, especially if the student was not fluent in the language in which the word problems were written.

People who develop tests analyze them in several ways to determine the appropriate (i.e., valid) use of test scores. Let's review some of the issues considered in determining the valid use of test scores:

Standardized Testing

- Do the questions on the test represent the entire subject matter about which conclusions are to be drawn? For instance, if a test is designed to measure general arithmetic ability, there should be questions about addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. If there are no questions about division, the test does not measure the entire content of arithmetic, so the test score cannot be said to reflect general arithmetic ability.
- Is the student required to demonstrate the skill that the test is intended to measure? Tests should be directly targeted to the skills measured and that skill should affect test performance. For example, a test designed to measure writing proficiency should ask test takers to write something, and better writers should be shown to receive higher scores.
- Are the test scores consistent with other indicators of the same knowledge and skills? Suppose a student takes a test designed to measure writing ability. If the student does well on writing assignments in class, then he or she should also do well on the writing test, so long as the type of writing on the test is consistent with that done in class. On the other hand, students who do not perform well on writing assignments in class should not do as well on the test. The validity of using that test score as an indication of the person's ability is questionable if there is inconsistency between the test score and classroom performance.

Standardized Testing

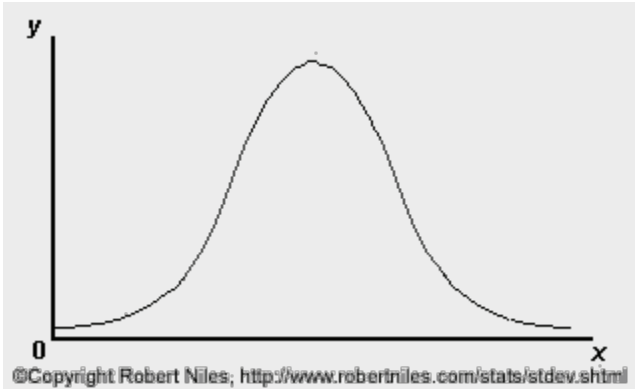
Reliability

The consistency of scores across different administrations or scorers is known as reliability. It is crucial that test scores be adequately reliable in representing a person's knowledge and skills. Some level of error is always a factor in testing (more on this later) and test scores. If a person takes the same test on different days, we can expect the results to be slightly different, but the more error there is in the test's make-up, the more different the two test scores are likely to be. If the two test scores are very different, it is reasonable to conclude that the difference is due to test error and that the scores do not really reflect what the test taker knows and is able to do.

Inconsistencies in scoring tests might also undercut reliability. Some tests are composed of multiple-choice questions, while others require that the test taker construct a response, such as an essay. Scoring a multiple-choice question is straightforward, because there is one right answer; the answer provided is either correct or incorrect. Therefore, regardless of who scores the test, the score on that question will be the same. Essay-type questions, however, require human judgment and are therefore more difficult to score. If two people read the same essay, it's likely that each person will give the essay a slightly different score. However, if the two scores given by the two scorers, or "raters," are very different, then the score on that essay is not very consistent and thus not very reliable.

Standardized Testing

The measure of consistency between scorers is called inter-rater reliability. The closer the scores assigned to an essay by different raters, the higher the inter-rater reliability of that test. While it might seem impossible to get different raters to assign exactly the same score, it is possible to train raters so that they all score in a very similar way. If this goal is accomplished, there can be more confidence that the score assigned to the essay reflects the ability of the student.



Example of a “normal” curve or normal distribution of scores on a test

Basic Statistical Concepts

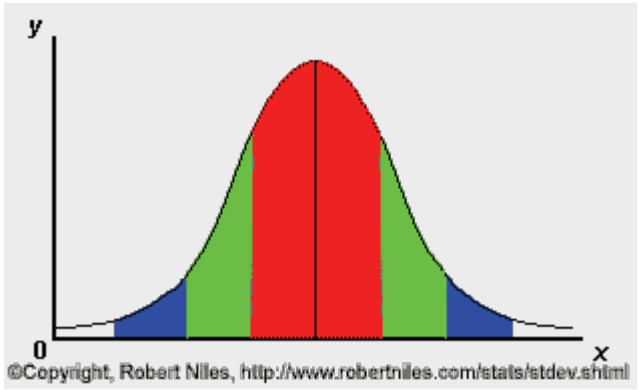
The “Normal” Curve

Standardized tests such as the TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC force scores into a “normal” or bell-shaped curve—such as the one to the left. Intelligence tests also do this.

A normal distribution of data means that most of the examples in a set of data are close to the "average," while relatively fewer examples are at one extreme or the other.

Let's say you are writing a story about nutrition. You need to look at people's typical daily calorie consumption. Like most data, the numbers for people's typical consumption probably will turn out to be normally distributed. That is, for most people, their consumption will be close to the mean, while fewer people eat a lot more or a lot less than the mean.

Standardized Testing



The Standard Deviation

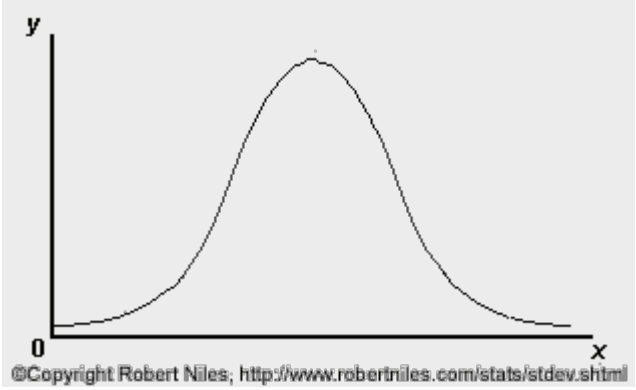
The standard deviation is a statistic that tells you how tightly all the various examples are clustered around the mean in a set of data. When the examples are pretty tightly bunched together and the bell-shaped curve is steep, the standard deviation is small. When the examples are spread apart and the bell curve is relatively flat, that tells you that you have a relatively large standard deviation.

Computing the value of a standard deviation is complicated. But let's see graphically what a standard deviation represents (see chart to the left).

One standard deviation away from the mean in either direction on the horizontal axis (the first area to the right and to the left of the mean on the above graph) accounts for somewhere around 68 percent of the people in this group. Two standard deviations away from the mean (the first four areas) account for roughly 95 percent of the people. And three standard deviations (the six areas) account for about 99 percent of the people.

If this curve were flatter and more spread out, the standard deviation would have to be larger in order to account for those 68 percent or so of the people. So that's why the standard deviation can tell you how spread out the examples in a set are from the mean.

Standardized Testing



When you think about it, that's just common sense. Not that many people are getting by on a single serving of kelp and rice. Or on eight meals of steak and milkshakes. Most people lie somewhere in between, closer to the middle.

If you looked at normally distributed data on a graph, it would look something like the chart on the left of this page.

The x-axis (the horizontal one) is the value in question... calories consumed, dollars earned or crimes committed, for example. And the y-axis (the vertical one) is the number of data points for each value on the x-axis... in other words, the number of people who eat x calories, the number of households that earn x dollars, or the number of cities with x crimes committed.

Now, not all sets of data will have graphs that look this perfect. Some will have relatively flat curves, others will be pretty steep. Sometimes the mean will lean a little bit to one side or the other. But all “normally distributed” data will have something like this same "bell curve" shape.

Standardized Testing

Credit to Robert Niles for his excellent description of these statistical concepts.

Why is this useful? Here's an example: If you are comparing test scores for different schools, the standard deviation will tell you how diverse the test scores are for each school.

Let's say Springfield Elementary has a higher mean test score than Shelbyville Elementary. Your first reaction might be to say that the kids at Springfield are smarter.

But a bigger standard deviation for one school tells you that there are relatively more kids at that school scoring toward one extreme or the other. By asking a few follow-up questions you might find that, say, Springfield's mean was skewed up because the school district sends all of the gifted education kids to Springfield. Or that Shelbyville's scores were dragged down because students who recently have been "mainstreamed" from special education classes have all been sent to Shelbyville.

In this way, looking at the standard deviation can help point you in the right direction when asking why information is the way it is.

The standard deviation can also help you evaluate the worth of all those so-called "studies" that seem to be released to the press everyday. A large standard deviation in a study that claims to show a relationship between eating Twinkies and killing politicians, for example, might tip you off that the study's claims aren't all that trustworthy.

Standardized Testing

"Norming" a test - and statistical curve smoothing

Tests that don't naturally fit into a "normal" curve can be forced or adapted to a normal curve via the use of statistical methods.

Error in test scores

As we explained at the beginning of this section, some error is always a factor in test score interpretation. In fact, tests simply cannot provide information that is 100% accurate. This might sound surprising, but this is true for many reasons; for example:

- **The extent to which a student has learned the breadth and depth of a subject will influence how she or he performs on a test. On a reading test, for example, a student might do well with questions about word meaning and finding the main idea of a passage but have had less practice distinguishing fact from opinion. The experience (or lack thereof) that a test-taker brings to the test represents a source of error in terms of using the test score to generalize about the student's reading ability.**
- **Sometimes a student taking a test is just plain unlucky. If a student is tired, hungry, nervous, or even just too warm, he or she might do worse on the test than if the circumstances were different.**
- **A test might have questions that seem tricky or confusing. If a student is not clear about the meaning of a question, he or she will have trouble finding the correct answer.**

Standardized Testing

Testing specialists can calculate the standard error of measurement, which can be thought of as the range of scores obtained by the same person taking the same test many times.

The standard error of measurement is a "best guess" about how close the test is to measuring a person's knowledge or skill with 100% accuracy.

The standard error of measurement is a statistical estimate of how far off the true score the test score is likely to be.

Standard error of measurement

- **The score a person gets on the test is meant to indicate how well that person knows the information being tested. One way of looking at a test score is to think of it as consisting of two parts. One part represents the real but unknowable true ability of a person. This part is unknowable because it is never possible to get inside someone's head and have a perfect measure of their ability in the area of interest. The other part of a test score represents the error, all the things that make the test a less-than-perfect snapshot of someone's knowledge at one moment in time. Unlike the way we can manufacture a yardstick that is exactly three feet long to measure length, even the best tests can provide scores that are only approximations of the true ability.**
- **Unfortunately, it is impossible to break these two pieces of a test score (the true ability and error) apart. But it is important to understand that any test score contains a certain amount of error, and as we've illustrated the error might be due to things that are going on with the test taker or things that involve how the test is created or scored. Errors in test scores cannot be completely eliminated, but fortunately there are techniques that can be used to provide some idea about how much the score is affected by error.**

TOEFL®

More than 6,000 institutions and agencies in 110 countries rely on TOEFL scores to select students with the English skills needed to succeed in an academic setting.

III. TOEFL

A. Overview of the test

TOEFL® stands for the Test of English as a Foreign Language. This test is designed to measure the English language ability of people who do not speak English as their first language and who plan to study at colleges and universities.

About the TOEFL Test

To succeed in an academic environment in which English is the language of instruction, international students need to not only understand English, but also to communicate effectively. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a test that assesses all four basic language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The TOEFL iBT (Internet-based test) helps individuals demonstrate the English skills needed for academic success, as well as help institutions make better decisions about prospective students' readiness for academic coursework in colleges and universities.

Why Take the TOEFL Test?

Most people take the TOEFL test as a prerequisite for admission into colleges and universities where English is used or required. In addition, many government, licensing, and certification agencies, and exchange and scholarship programs use TOEFL scores to evaluate the English proficiency of people for whom English is not their native language. The test predicts success in an academic setting in an English speaking country.

Who Should Take the TOEFL Test?

ETS, the company that developed the TOEFL test recommends that non-native English speakers at the 11th-grade level or above should take the TOEFL test to provide evidence of their English proficiency before beginning academic work in English. The test content is considered too difficult for students below 11th grade.

Some institutions do not require TOEFL test scores of the following:

- **Non-native speakers who hold degrees or diplomas from postsecondary institutions in English-speaking countries (e.g., the United States, Canada, England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand)**
- **nonnative speakers who have successfully completed at least a two-year course of study in which English was the language of instruction**
- **transfer students from institutions in the United States or Canada whose academic course work was favorably evaluated in relation to its demands and duration.**
- **nonnative speakers who have taken the TOEFL test within the past two years**
- **nonnative speakers who have successfully pursued academic work at schools where English was the language of instruction in an English-speaking country for a specified period, generally two years.**

A good manual should have a clear explanation of the scoring system of the examination to help you know just how far your students are from their goal.

Students should know, or ask you to help them discover, the score they need for admission to the university or institution they wish to attend.

Forms of the Test

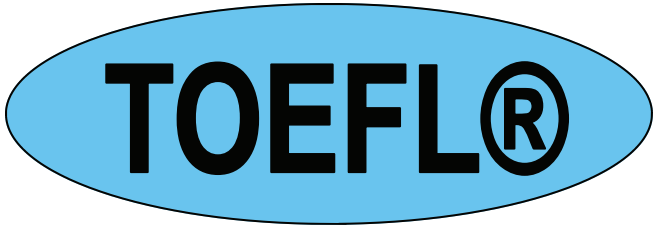
The test comes in the pBT and iBT forms - meaning the paper-based test (being phased out) and the Internet-based test (to become the standard). The cBT or computer-based test has been phased out. We will focus on the test itself here and not the form in which it is administered.

B. How to select a study book for your students

Look for a study manual that has a baseline examination and at least three, preferably as many as six or more, practice tests, as well as good, clear explanations of the test and test items. The study manual should be current and published within the last two years.

A baseline examination will help you and your students to get a good sense of their current strengths and weaknesses on the areas of the test. This will help you know what the students need to work on most to improve their scores.

Progress tests will help you and your students measure their improvement as you guide their studies.



Baseline, practice and progress tests should be taken under conditions as close as possible as those at a testing center.

C. How to use a study book

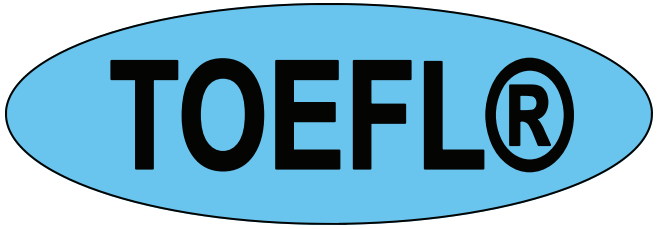
Once you have chosen a study manual, read the directions carefully. Typically, the first 10-40 pages of a manual will give very detailed instructions on how to best study for the test, test-taking tips, and basic information about the test. A smart instructor [you] will take the test at least once so they know exactly what is entailed.

Building a good study plan is an essential first step in helping your students. But, first, you must know the skill level of your students and where their skills are strong and weak. This will require giving your students a baseline test to determine their current skill levels.

Once an estimated baseline score has been established, carefully review your students' skill levels and develop a study plan that will help raise lower scores and strengthen the higher scores.

Irregularity of skill levels (strong verbal skills and very weak writing scores, for example) are not uncommon and working on raising the lower level skills will, most likely, yield the quickest results (ETS research suggests this is true).

Students will often want to study intensively for short periods of time, but they will generally be more successful with distributed practice over longer periods of time.



It is not uncommon for students to want to take a major examination in four weeks or even less and expect that they can significantly raise their scores in that period of time. Such an approach is usually self-defeating and should be discouraged.

Many major tests require a minimum of three months to pass between examinations as they have good research that indicates that student scores typically do not change significantly if less time is involved,

Once the study plan is implemented and the students are working regularly, administer periodic practice tests to measure improvements. The purpose of this is to give the student feedback on their improvement and to give them practice in the actual taking of the test. There is also a practice effect with such tests and students can improve their scores slightly with only practice.

Familiarity with the test will help students better judge how much time is allowed for each question, for reading, for drafting and correcting their writing, for taking notes for conversational components, for double checking that each question has been answered, etc.

TOEFL®

The test is now about four hours long. All sections will be completed in one day.

D. What taking the TOEFL test is like

Photocopy and take the first baseline test in the manual that you purchased [see accompanying notes]. Take the test under standardized conditions , taking only the allotted amount of time for each section. After taking the test, compute your score and think about the overall testing experience and suggest strategies for improving your overall and sectional scores. The exercise will help you know what to do with your students at that point.

E. Skills tested

The TOEFL iBT tests all four language skills that are important for effective communication: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

TOEFL iBT Test Sections

Section	Time Limit	Questions	Tasks
Reading*	60–80 minutes	36–56 questions	Read 3 or 4 passages from academic texts and answer questions.
Listening	60–90 minutes	34–51 questions	Listen to lectures, classroom discussions and conversations, then answer questions.
Break	10 minutes	—	—
Speaking	20 minutes	6 tasks	Express an opinion on a familiar topic; speak based on reading and listening tasks.
Writing	50 minutes	2 tasks	Write essay responses based on reading and listening tasks; support an opinion in writing.

Some questions require test takers to combine more than one skill: To succeed academically in English-speaking colleges and universities, students need to be able to combine their language skills in the classroom.

Integrated questions, or "tasks," in the test help learners build the skills and confidence needed to communicate effectively in the academic environments they plan to enter. The integrated tasks ask test takers to (1) read, listen, and then speak in response to a question (2) listen and then speak in response to a question, and (3) read, listen, and then write in response to a question.

The TOEFL iBT includes a Speaking section. This section includes six tasks, and test takers wear headphones and speak into a microphone when they respond.

The responses are digitally recorded and transmitted to ETS's Online Scoring Network where human scorers rate them. The scorers are carefully monitored for accuracy, so test takers and score recipients can be assured of the reliability of the speaking scores.

The Writing section has been expanded. The test requires test takers to write a response to material they have heard and read, and to compose an essay in support of an opinion.

TOEFL®

F. Practice Testing and recalibrating goals

After a reasonable period of study, have your students take a progress test and re-evaluate their goals based on their performance. No two students will be exactly the same and goals should be individualized.

G. Resources

Download the 76 page PDF file "TOEFL iBT Tips" by ETS at:

http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/TOEFL_Tips.pdf

ETS will update the publication from time to time, so the number of pages may vary.

ETS offers a variety of paid and free preparation materials to help students get ready for the TOEFL test. It is worth seeing which materials my help your specific students.

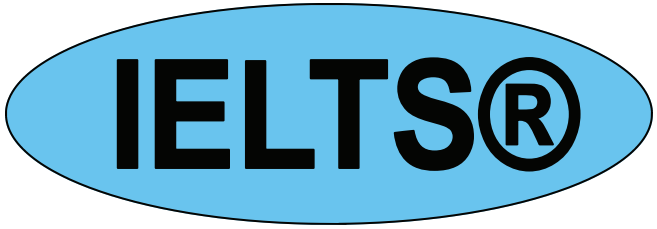
IV. IELTS

A. Overview of the test

The IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test provides an evaluation of English for those who wish to study or train at the tertiary level in English. It is very similar to the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). IELTS is a jointly managed test by the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, British Council and IDP Education Australia. The test is accepted by many professional organizations in The UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

B. What taking the IELTS test is like

Photocopy and take the first baseline test in the manual that you purchased (see *How to Select a Study Book* in the previous section). Take the test under standardized conditions , taking only the allotted amount of time for each section. After taking the test, compute your score and think about the overall testing experience and suggest strategies for improving your overall and sectional scores.



Free Resources from IELTS

Download a variety of PDF files that provide assistance and instruction for all the sections of the IELTS examination as well as the ***IELTS Guide for Teachers*** *at:*
http://www.ielts.org/teachers.aspx

C. Skills testing

Students take either the "Academic" or "General Training" sections in reading and writing—the listening and speaking sections are the same for both forms of the test. The total test time is about 2 hours and 45 minutes and consists of the following:

- **Listening (30 minutes)**
- **Reading (60 minutes),**
- **Writing (60 minutes) and**
- **Speaking (11–14 minutes).**

The Listening, Reading and Writing tests are done in one sitting. The Speaking test may be on the same day or up to seven days before or after the other tests.

D. Practice Testing and recalibrating goals

After a reasonable period of study, have your students take a progress test and re-evaluate their goals based on their performance. No two students will be exactly the same and goals should be individualized.

V. TOEIC

A. Overview of the Test

B. The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is a benchmark of English language skills in listening and reading and measures the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment. The test is widely accepted by corporations, English language programs, and government agencies around the world.

Corporations use it to document progress in English training programs, recruit and promote employees, and put standard measurements in place across locations.

English Programs use it to place students at the correct learning levels, and show student progress and program effectiveness.

Government agencies use it to document progress in English training programs and to recruit, promote, and hire employees.

B. What taking the TOEIC test is like

Take a practice test (see *How to Select a Study Book* in the TOEFL section), compute your scores and consider strategies for improvement, as with the previous examinations.

TOEIC®

C. Skills testing

The TOEIC test comes in two forms, the original listening and reading components and the more recently developed writing and speaking section. Listening and reading is still a paper-and-pencil, multiple-choice assessment with two separately timed sections of 100 questions each. The speaking and writing form of the exam is taken only over the Internet. Be sure to ask your student if she intends to take both forms of the test, or more common, to take only the Listening and Reading form, as the writing and speaking form is not yet available worldwide. Be careful when you search for a study manual, that you find one that has BOTH tests in it (if available in your area, again, check the ETS website).

The Listening and Reading Test

Section I: Listening

Test takers listen to a variety of questions and short conversations recorded in English, then answer questions based on what they have heard (100 items total).

- **Part 1: Photographs**
- **Part 2: Question-Response**
- **Part 3: Conversations**
- **Part 4: Short Talks**

TOEIC®

The Listening and Reading test takes approximately 2½ hours, with:

- *45 minutes for Listening*
- *75 minutes for Reading and*
- *approximately 30 minutes to answer biographical questions*

Section II: Reading

Test takers read a variety of materials and respond at their own pace (100 items total).

- **Part 5: Incomplete Sentences**
- **Part 6: Error Recognition or Text Completion**
- **Part 7: Reading Comprehension**

The Speaking and Writing Tests

The *TOEIC*® tests assess language skills that are used in daily life and the workplace. Test takers speak and write in English their responses to real-world questions and scenarios. The tests use common everyday vocabulary, phrases and key expressions used in business. Test-takers do not need specific business knowledge to do well on the test.

The TOEIC Speaking Test Format

- **Content: 11 questions**
- **Time: approximately 20 minutes**
- **Score scale: 0–200**

On the following page is an overview of the TOEIC Speaking Test, which includes 11 questions that measure various aspects of speaking ability. For each question, specific directions will be given, including the time allowed for preparing and speaking the response. It is to the test-takers' advantage to say as much as they can in the time allowed. It is also important that you speak clearly and answer each question according to directions.

TOEIC®

Free Resources from TOEIC:

TOEIC Listening and Reading Sample Test (PDF)

Questions	Task	Description
1–2	Read a text aloud	• You will read out loud the text on the screen. • You will have 45 seconds to prepare. • Then you will have 45 seconds to read the text out loud.
3	Describe a picture	• You will describe the picture on your screen in as much detail as you can. • You will have 30 seconds to prepare your response. • Then you will have 45 seconds to speak about the picture.
4–6	Respond to questions	• You will answer three questions. No preparation time is provided. • You will have 15 seconds to respond to questions 4 and 5. • You will have 30 seconds to respond to question 6.
7–9	Respond to questions using information provided	• You will answer three questions based on information provided. • You will have 30 seconds to read the information before the questions begin. No additional preparation time is provided. • You will have 15 seconds to respond to questions 7 and 8. • You will have 30 seconds to respond to question 9.

TOEIC®

10	Propose a solution	• You will be presented with a problem and asked to propose a solution. • You will have 30 seconds to prepare your response. • Then you will have 60 seconds to speak. In your response, be sure to: o Show that you recognize the problem o Propose a way of dealing with the problem
11	Express an opinion	• You will give your opinion about a specific topic. • You will have 15 seconds to prepare your response. • Then you will have 60 seconds to speak.

The TOEIC Writing Test Format

- **Content: eight questions**
- **Time: approximately 60 minutes**
- **Score scale: 0–200**

On the next page is an overview of the TOEIC Writing test, which includes eight questions that measure different aspects of writing ability and takes about one hour. For each type of question, the test-taker will be given specific directions, including the time allowed for writing.

TOEIC®

Questions	Task	Description
1–5	Write a sentence based on a picture	• You will write 1 sentence that is based on a picture. • With each picture, you will be given 2 words or phrases that you must use in your sentence. • You can change the forms of the words and you can use the words in any order.
6–7	Respond to a written request	• You will show how well you can write a response to an email. • You will have 10 minutes to read and answer each email.
8	Write an opinion essay	• You will write an essay in response to a question that asks you to state, explain and support your opinion on an issue. • Typically, an effective essay will contain a minimum of 300 words.

FREE Resources:

Review the Sample Tests (PDF) and take a look at the TOEIC Speaking and Writing Examinee Handbook (PDF).

D. Practice Testing and recalibrating goals

After a reasonable period of study, have your students take a progress test and re-evaluate their goals based on their performance. No two students will be exactly the same and goals should be individualized.

Teaching Grammar

Download the grammar ebook for this course at:
www.TEFLeBooks.com/grammar.pdf
and work all the way through it.

VI. Grammar

Goals and Techniques for Teaching Grammar from the Georgetown University Language Resource Center

The goal of grammar instruction is to enable students to carry out their communication purposes. This goal has three implications:

- **Students need overt instruction that connects grammar points with larger communication contexts.**
- **Students do not need to master every aspect of each grammar point, only those that are relevant to the immediate communication task.**
- **Error correction is not always the instructor's first responsibility.**

Overt Grammar Instruction

Adult students appreciate and benefit from direct instruction that allows them to apply critical thinking skills to language learning. Instructors can take advantage of this by providing explanations that give students a descriptive understanding (declarative knowledge) of each point of grammar.

Teaching Grammar

- Teach the grammar point in the target language or the students' first language or both. The goal is to facilitate understanding.
- Limit the time you devote to grammar explanations to 10 minutes, especially for lower level students whose ability to sustain attention can be limited.
- Present grammar points in written and oral ways to address the needs of students with different learning styles.

An important part of grammar instruction is providing examples. Teachers need to plan their examples carefully around two basic principles:

- Be sure the examples are accurate and appropriate. They must present the language appropriately, be culturally appropriate for the setting in which they are used, and be to the point of the lesson.
- Use the examples as teaching tools. Focus examples on a particular theme or topic so that students have more contact with specific information and vocabulary.

Teaching Grammar

Relevance of Grammar Instruction

In the communicative competence model, the purpose of learning grammar is to learn the language of which the grammar is a part. Instructors therefore teach grammar forms and structures in relation to meaning and use for the specific communication tasks that students need to complete [these tasks are sometimes called *functions*].

Compare the traditional model and the communicative competence model for teaching the English past tense:

Traditional: grammar for grammar's sake

- **Teach the regular *-ed* form with its two pronunciation variants (see Fast Track Grammar Review)**
- **Teach the doubling rule for verbs that end in *d* (for example, *wed-wedded*)**
- **Hand out a list of irregular verbs that students must memorize**
- **Do pattern practice drills for *-ed***
- **Do substitution drills for irregular verbs**

Teaching Grammar

Communicative competence: grammar for communication's sake

- **Distribute two short narratives about recent experiences or events, each one to half of the class**
- **Teach the regular *-ed* form, using verbs that occur in the texts as examples. Teach the pronunciation and doubling rules if those forms occur in the texts.**
- **Teach the irregular verbs that occur in the texts.**
- **Students read the narratives, ask questions about points they don't understand.**
- **Students work in pairs in which one member has read Story A and the other Story B. Students interview one another; using the information from the interview, they then write up or orally repeat the story they have not read.**

Error Correction

At all proficiency levels, learners produce language that is not exactly the language used by native speakers. Some of the differences are grammatical, while others involve vocabulary selection and mistakes in the selection of language appropriate for different contexts.

Teaching Grammar

In responding to student communication, teachers need to be careful not to focus on error correction to the detriment of communication and confidence building. Teachers need to let students know when they are making errors so that they can work on improving. Teachers also need to build students' confidence in their ability to use the language by focusing on the content of their communication rather than the grammatical form.

Teachers can use error correction to support language acquisition, and avoid using it in ways that undermine students' desire to communicate in the language, by taking cues from context.

- **When students are doing structured output activities that focus on development of new language skills, use error correction to guide them.**

  Example:
  Student *(in class)*: I buy a new car yesterday.
  Teacher: You *bought* a new car yesterday.
  Remember, the past tense of buy is bought.

- **When students are engaged in communicative activities, correct errors only if they interfere with comprehensibility. Respond using correct forms, but without stressing them.**

  Example:
  Student *(greeting teacher)* : I buy a new car yesterday!
  Teacher: You bought a new car? That's exciting! What kind?

Teaching Grammar

Strategies for Learning Grammar

Language teachers and language learners are often frustrated by the disconnect between knowing the rules of grammar and being able to apply those rules automatically in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This disconnect reflects a separation between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge.

- **Declarative knowledge is knowledge *about* something. Declarative knowledge enables a student to describe a rule of grammar and apply it in pattern practice drills.**
- **Procedural knowledge is knowledge of how to do something. Procedural knowledge enables a student to apply a rule of grammar in communication.**

For example, declarative knowledge is what you have when you read and understand the instructions for programming the DVD player. Procedural knowledge is what you demonstrate when you program the DVD player.

Procedural knowledge does not translate automatically into declarative knowledge; many native speakers can use their language clearly and correctly without being able to state the rules of its grammar. Likewise, declarative knowledge does not translate automatically into procedural knowledge; students may be able to state a grammar rule, but consistently fail to apply the rule when speaking or writing.

Teaching Grammar

To address the declarative knowledge/procedural knowledge dichotomy, teachers and students can apply several strategies.

1. Relate knowledge needs to learning goals.

Identify the relationship of declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge to student goals for learning the language. Students who plan to use the language exclusively for reading journal articles need to focus more on the declarative knowledge of grammar and discourse structures that will help them understand those texts. Students who plan to live in-country need to focus more on the procedural knowledge that will help them manage day to day oral and written interactions.

2. Apply higher order thinking skills.

Recognize that development of declarative knowledge can accelerate development of procedural knowledge. Teaching students how the language works and giving them opportunities to compare it with other languages they know allows them to draw on critical thinking and analytical skills. These processes can support the development of the innate understanding that characterizes procedural knowledge.

3. Provide plentiful and appropriate language input.

Understand that students develop both procedural and declarative knowledge on the basis of the input they receive. This input includes both finely tuned input that requires students to pay attention to the relationships among form, meaning, and use for a specific grammar rule, and roughly tuned input that allows students to encounter the grammar rule in a variety of contexts.

4. Use predicting skills.

Discourse analyst Douglas Biber has demonstrated that different communication types can be characterized by the clusters of linguistic features that are common to those types. Verb tense and aspect, sentence length and structure, and larger discourse patterns all may contribute to the distinctive profile of a given communication type. For example, a history textbook and a newspaper article in English both use past tense verbs almost exclusively. However, the newspaper article will use short sentences and a discourse pattern that alternates between subjects or perspectives. The history textbook will use complex sentences and will follow a timeline in its discourse structure. Awareness of these features allows students to anticipate the forms and structures they will encounter in a given communication task.

5. Limit expectations for drills.

Mechanical drills in which students substitute pronouns for nouns or alternate the person, number, or tense of verbs can help students memorize irregular forms and challenging structures. However, students do not develop the ability to use grammar correctly in oral and written interactions by doing mechanical drills, because these drills separate form from meaning and use. The content of the prompt and the response is set in advance; the student only has to supply the correct grammatical form, and can do that without really needing to understand or communicate anything. The main lesson that students learn from doing these drills is: Grammar is boring.

- **Communicative drills encourage students to connect form, meaning, and use because multiple correct responses are possible. In communicative drills, students respond to a prompt using the grammar point under consideration, but providing their own content. For example, to practice questions and answers in the past tense in English, teacher and students can ask and answer questions about activities the previous evening. The drill is communicative because none of the content is set in advance:**

  Teacher: Did you go to the library last night?
  Student 1: No, I didn't. I went to the movies. (to Student 2): Did you read chapter 3?
  Student 2: Yes, I read chapter 3, but I didn't understand it. (to Student 3): Did you understand chapter 3?
  Student 3: I didn't read chapter 3. I went to the movies with Student 1.

Teaching Grammar

Developing Grammar Activities

Many courses and textbooks, especially those designed for lower proficiency levels, use a specified sequence of grammatical topics as their organizing principle. When this is the case, classroom activities need to reflect the grammar point that is being introduced or reviewed. By contrast, when a course curriculum follows a topic sequence, grammar points can be addressed as they come up.

In both cases, instructors can use the Larsen-Freeman pie chart as a guide for developing activities.

For curricula that introduce grammatical forms in a specified sequence, instructors need to develop activities that relate form to meaning and use.

- **Describe the grammar point, including form, meaning, and use, and give examples (structured input)**
- **Ask students to practice the grammar point in communicative drills (structured output)**
- **Have students do a communicative task that provides opportunities to use the grammar point (communicative output)**

Teaching Grammar

For curricula that follow a sequence of topics, instructors need to develop activities that relate the topical discourse (use) to meaning and form.

- **Provide oral or written input (audiotape, reading selection) that addresses the topic (structured input)**
- **Review the point of grammar, using examples from the material (structured input)**
- **Ask students to practice the grammar point in communicative drills that focus on the topic (structured output)**
- **Have students do a communicative task on the topic (communicative output)**

When instructors have the opportunity to develop part or all of the course curriculum, they can develop a series of contexts based on the real world tasks that students will need to perform using the language, and then teach grammar and vocabulary in relation to those contexts.

For example, students who plan to travel will need to understand public address announcements in airports and train stations. Instructors can use audio-taped simulations to provide input; teach the grammatical forms that typically occur in such announcements; and then have students practice by asking and answering questions about what was announced.

Teaching Grammar

Using Textbook Grammar Activities

Textbooks usually provide one or more of the following three types of grammar exercises.

- **Mechanical drills: Each prompt has only one correct response, and students can complete the exercise without attending to meaning. For example: George waited for the bus this morning. He *will wait* for the bus tomorrow morning, too.**
- **Meaningful drills: Each prompt has only one correct response, and students must attend to meaning to complete the exercise. For example: Where are George's papers? *They* are *in his notebook*. (Students must understand the meaning of the question in order to answer, but only one correct answer is possible because they all know where George's papers are.)**

To use textbook grammar exercises effectively, instructors need to recognize which type they are, devote the appropriate amount of time to them, and supplement them as needed.

Recognizing Types

Before the teaching term begins, inventory the textbook to see which type(s) of drills it provides. Decide which you will use in class, which you will assign as homework, and which you will skip.

Assigning Time

When deciding which textbook drills to use and how much time to allot to them, keep their relative value in mind.

- Mechanical drills are the least useful because they bear little resemblance to real communication. They do not require students to learn anything; they only require parroting of a pattern or rule.
- Meaningful drills can help students develop understanding of the workings of rules of grammar because they require students to make form-meaning correlations. Their resemblance to real communication is limited by the fact that they have only one correct answer.
- Communicative drills require students to be aware of the relationships among form, meaning, and use. In communicative drills, students test and develop their ability to use language to convey ideas and information.

Supplementing

If the textbook provides few or no meaningful and communicative drills, instructors may want to create some to substitute for mechanical drills.

Assessing Grammar Proficiency

Authentic Assessment

Mechanical tests *do serve one purpose: They motivate students to memorize. They can therefore serve as prompts to encourage memorization of irregular forms and vocabulary items. Because they test only memory capacity, not language ability, they are best used as quizzes and given relatively little weight in evaluating student performance and progress.*

Just as mechanical drills do not teach students the language, mechanical test questions do not assess their ability to use it in authentic ways. In order to provide authentic assessment of students' grammar proficiency, an evaluation must reflect real-life uses of grammar in context. This means that the activity must have a purpose other than assessment and require students to demonstrate their level of grammar proficiency by completing some task.

To develop authentic assessment activities, begin with the types of tasks that students will actually need to do using the language. Assessment can then take the form of communicative drills and communicative activities like those used in the teaching process.

For example, the activity based on audiotapes of public address announcements can be converted into an assessment by having students respond orally or in writing to questions about a similar tape. In this type of assessment, the instructor uses a checklist or rubric to evaluate the student's understanding and/or use of grammar in context.

Teaching Study Skills

VII. Teaching Study and Examination Skills

Effective Study Skills — Dr. Bob Kizlik

How to Study and Make the Most of Your Time

No two people study the same way, and there is little doubt that what works for one person may not work for another. However, there are some general techniques that seem to produce good results. No one would argue that every subject that you have to take is going to be so interesting that studying it is not work but pleasure. We can only wish.

Effective Study skills are about more than understanding

Effective study skills must be practiced in order for you to improve. It is not enough to simply "think about" studying; you have to actually do it, and in the process use information from what you do to get better. This is the central idea of this page. All that follows depends on this single concept. There is a saying that goes like this: "Practice doesn't make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect." If you want to be an achiever, take this saying to heart.

Teaching Study Skills

All schedules should be made with the idea that they can be revised. A good schedule keeps you from wandering off course. A good schedule, if properly managed, assigns time where time is needed, but you've got to want to do it!

The value of a schedule

Before you even begin to think about the process of studying, you must develop a schedule. If you don't have a schedule or plan for studying, then you will not have any way of allocating your valuable time when the unexpected comes up. A good, well thought out schedule can be a lifesaver. It's up to you to learn how develop a schedule that meets your needs, revise it if necessary, and most important, follow it.

Making every hour count

A schedule should take into account every class, laboratory, lecture, social event, and other work in which you engage. There are givens such as classes and so on that have to be incorporated. You must focus on the other "free time" available and how you will use it. Make a weekly schedule and block off the 24 hour day in one hour increments. Indicate times for classes, labs, lectures, social, and work time. Also block off a period for sleeping each day. With what is left over, plan time for study. This gives you a rough road map of the time available. Of course, you can revise your schedule as circumstances warrant.

When to study

The problem of when to study is critical. A good rule of thumb is that studying should be carried out only when you are rested, alert, and have planned for it. Last minute studying just before a class is usually a waste of time.

Teaching Study Skills

Don't be afraid to revise your schedule. Schedules are really plans for how you intend to use your time. If your schedule doesn't work, revise it. You must understand that your schedule is to help you develop good study habits. Once you have developed them, schedule building becomes easier.

Studying for lecture courses

If your study period is before the lecture class, be sure you have read all the assignments and made notes on what you don't understand. If the study period is after the lecture class, review the notes you took during class while the information is still fresh.

Studying for recitation courses

For classes that require recitation, such as foreign language, be sure to schedule a study period just before the class. Use the time to practice. Sometimes, practice with others can help sharpen your skills in a before-class study period.

The Process of Study

How to use your time

Time is the most valuable resource a student has. It is also one of the most wasted of resources. The schedule you develop should guide you in how to allocate the available time in the most productive manner. Sticking to your schedule can be tough. Don't dribble away valuable time. Avoiding study is the easiest thing in the world. It's up to you to follow the schedule you prepared. A good deal of your success in high school or college depends on this simple truth.

Teaching Study Skills

Everybody has thinking skills, but few use them effectively. Effective thinking skills cannot be studied, but must be built up over a period of time.

Where to study

You can study anywhere. Obviously, some places are better than others. Libraries, study lounges or private rooms are best. Above all, the place you choose to study should not be distracting. Distractions can build up, and the first thing you know, you're out of time and out of luck. Make choosing a good physical environment a part of your study habits.

Strategies

Thinking skills

Good thinkers see possibilities where others see only dead-ends. If you're not a good thinker, start now by developing habits that make you ask yourself questions as you read. Talk to other students who you feel are good thinkers. Ask them what it is they do when they think critically or creatively. Often times, you can pick up valuable insights to help you become a better thinker.

The SQ3R method

The SQ3R method has been a proven way to sharpen study skills. SQ3R stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review. Take a moment now and write SQ3R down. It is a good slogan to commit to memory to carry out an effective study strategy.

Teaching Study Skills

Survey - get the best overall picture of what you're going to study BEFORE you study it an any detail. It's like looking at a road map before going on a trip. If you don't know the territory, studying a map is the best way to begin.

Question - ask questions for learning. The important things to learn are usually answers to questions. Questions should lead to emphasis on the what, why, how, when, who and where of study content. Ask yourself questions as you read or study. As you answer them, you will help to make sense of the material and remember it more easily because the process will make an impression on you. Those things that make impressions are more meaningful, and therefore more easily remembered. Don't be afraid to write your questions in the margins of textbooks, on lecture notes, or wherever it makes sense.

Read - Reading is NOT running your eyes over a textbook. When you read, read actively. Read to answer questions you have asked yourself or questions the instructor or author has asked. Always be alert to bold or *italicized* print. The authors intend that this material receive special emphasis. Also, when you read, be sure to read everything, including tables, graphs and illustrations. Often times tables, graphs and illustrations can convey an idea more powerfully than written text.

Teaching Study Skills

Recite - When you recite, you stop reading periodically to recall what you have read. Try to recall main headings, important ideas or concepts presented in bold or italicized type, and what graphs charts or illustrations indicate. Try to develop an overall concept of what you have read in your own words and thoughts. Try to connect things you have just read to things you already know. When you do this periodically, the chances are you will remember much more and be able to recall material for papers, essays and objective tests.

Review - A review is a survey of what you have covered. It is a review of what you are supposed to accomplish, not what you are going to do. Rereading is an important part of the review process. Reread with the idea that you are measuring what you have gained from the process. During review, it's a good time to go over notes you have taken to help clarify points you may have missed or don't understand. The best time to review is when you have just finished studying something. Don't wait until just before an examination to begin the review process. Before an examination, do a final review. If you manage your time, the final review can be thought of as a "fine-tuning" of your knowledge of the material. Thousands of high school and college students have followed the SQ3R steps to achieve higher grades with less stress.

Teaching Study Skills

There is usually one important detail associated with every main idea. The more important details you can identify, the easier it will be to review for examinations because you have made a link between an idea and information that supports it. The more links you can make between details and ideas, as well as ideas themselves, the more powerful will be the efforts of your study.

Reading

A primary means by which you acquire information is through reading. In college you're expected to do much more reading than in high school. Don't assume just because you've "read" the assignments that is the end of it. You must learn to read with a purpose. In studying, you may read the same assignment three or four times, each time with a different purpose. You must know before you begin reading what your purpose is, and read accordingly.

Getting the Main Idea

Getting the main idea in reading is central to effective studying. You must learn what the author's central idea is, and understand it in your own way.

Every paragraph contains a main idea. Main ideas are perfect for outlining textbooks. Make it a habit to find the main idea in each paragraph you read.

Extracting Important Details

Extracting important details means that you locate in your reading the basis for main ideas.

Teaching Study Skills

Don't Read Aloud to Yourself

Generally, reading aloud to yourself does not help you study more effectively. If you move your lips while you read, you're not reading efficiently. If you read aloud or move your lips while you're reading, you are reading slowly, so stop moving your lips. Try putting a finger over your lips. Your finger will remind you not to move your lips. Make an effort to read faster and retain more - after a while, you'll be surprised how little effort it will take.

Taking Notes

Like reading, note-taking is a skill which must be learned and refined. Almost invariably, note taking, or the lack of it, is a constant deficiency in the study methods of many high school and college students. Learning the ingredients of good note taking is rather easy; applying them to your own situation depends on how serious you are in becoming a successful student.

Where to Keep Notes

You must learn to keep notes logically and legibly. Remember, if you can't read your own writing a few days after taking notes, they are of little use. By all accounts, the best place to keep notes is in a loose-leaf notebook. Use dividers to separate the different classes you take. Make it a habit of using your notebook to record ALL your notes. If you're caught without your notebook and need to take notes, always have a supply of loose-leaf paper with you. Insert your note papers into the notebook as soon as you can. Be sure to buy a good notebook, as it will get a lot of wear and tear.

Outlining Textbooks

First of all, don't underline. Use a highlighter. Experience has shown that text passages highlighted are more easily remembered than the same passages underlined. In outlining a text, don't just read along and highlight what seem to important words. That technique rarely works. The act of outlining works much better.

Taking Lecture Notes

Surveying, Questioning, Listening

Taking accurate and concise lecture notes is essential. Develop the habit of taking notes using appropriate methods described earlier in the SQ3R technique. For example, when you listen to a lecture, formulate questions as you listen. Your main job in taking lecture notes is to be a good listener. To be a good listener, you must learn to focus and concentrate on the main points of the lecture. Get them down, and then later reorganize them in your own words. Once you have done this, you have set the stage for successful reviewing and revising.

Reviewing and Revising

As you prepare for examinations, tests, or other assessments, you should spend time reviewing and revising your lecture notes. Begin the process by reviewing your notes right after a lecture. If you wait too long, you may discover that the notes just don't make sense. Don't hesitate to revise your notes based on the review process.

Teaching Study Skills

Knowing the Ground Rules

Always read directions! Indicate your answers exactly the way the directions state. Make sure your answers are clear. Determine what the scoring rules for the test are and follow them to your advantage. For example, if wrong answers are penalized, don't guess unless you can reduce the choices to two.

Research Notes

Any form of note-taking that requires compilation of information by categories, rather than in narrative form is best done using index cards. You can sort, edit and arrange index cards to suit your particular study needs. The most important point in using cards is to indicate the correct reference or topic at the top of the card. Use the cards for study, review, to help organize information for papers, reports, or projects. An even better idea, if you have a personal computer, is to organize your categorical information in a database. Once you set it up, finding, updating and adding new information is quite easy. If you have a printer, you can print out your notes in a variety of ways.

Taking Examinations

Objective Examinations

Surveying

Survey any objective examination to find out what types of questions are being asked. Surveying helps you to know what to expect.

Answering Easy Questions First

Answering easy (to you) questions first is the best strategy. If you stumble over difficult questions for too long a time, you may not be able to complete the exam.

Teaching Study Skills

Picking out Key Words

Objective examination questions usually contain one or more key words. A key word or group of words are those on which the truth or falsity of a statement hinges. Learn to spot the key words in the statement that define the meaning. If a statement contains two clauses, one of which is false, the whole statement is false. Usually, two-statement true-false questions are either both true or both false.

Reading Multiple-Choice Questions

Multiple choice questions are essentially true-false questions arranged in groups. Usually, only one alternative is correct. Your job is to pick the alternative that is more nearly true than the others. Read multiple-choice questions the same way as for true-false. Eliminate obvious false choices.

Reading Other Types of Questions

The methods used to answer true-false and multiple choice questions apply to matching questions as well. Always scan the entire list of alternatives before matching any. As in the other types of questions, try to identify key words in each list and test them. Completion questions require you to provide a word or phrase. When you encounter completion questions, choose your words carefully. If you don't know the answer, give it your best guess, as often times such responses get at least partial credit.

Teaching Study Skills

Good handwriting

Good handwriting is an absolute essential for essay questions. If your cursive writing is very hard to read, try printing instead. Most instructors value clear handwriting. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling also count. Well-written grammatically correct answers almost always receive higher grades than poorly written grammatically incorrect answers, even though the answers themselves are the same.

Essay Examinations

Planning your time in answering essay questions is more important than in objective type tests. The general rule is not to get carried away on one or two questions to the extent that you cannot answer that other questions in the time allowed. Read through the entire examination first. Get a feel for the questions you are expected to answer. If the exam allows you to choose from a number of questions, be sure to number your answers exactly to match the questions.

When you follow directions for an essay exam, pay attention to the key words the instructor has included. Such words as "list," "describe," "compare and contrast," and "outline" have special meaning. Don't "write around" the question but answer it directly. If a question asks you to list something, don't write a narrative about it. Answering essay questions directly is always the best policy.

After scanning the list of questions to be answered, choose the ones you know most about. A good idea is to prepare an outline of your answers. The outline will help you remember important ideas and facts to be included in your response. Another technique is to do a "memory-dump." This technique is discussed in the last section of this guide, "Power Study Tips."

Gathering Materials Before You Write

Before you begin writing, assemble the materials you will need. Use index cards, notes, bibliographies, summaries, reports and reviews as part of your preparation process. Using index cards for references is an excellent way to organize your materials. Computer database programs can also help you classify and organize reference materials.

Writing Themes and Reports

Reviewing the Topic

Students usually have some freedom to choose the subject of themes or reports. When you make this choice, be sure that the topic is acceptable to the teacher, and is as interesting to you as possible. Another consideration is that of availability of resource material. Your task is made much easier when there is a good amount of reference and resource material available.

Using Correct Punctuation and Grammar

As in writing essays questions, good grammar and punctuation are a must. Most students use word processors to write papers. Be sure to use the spell checker that almost all word processors have built in. Many word processors also have some sort of grammar checker. Learn to use a grammar checker, as it can point out serious flaws in your writing and help you become a better writer. Most grammar checkers explain the grammar rules that apply to the suggested corrections to your writing.

Teaching Study Skills

Preparing an Outline and Writing the Paper

Once you have your topic, have gathered and organized your materials, it is time to outline your paper. Put your outline on paper! Don't make the mistake of trying to keep everything in your head. Make your outline in the form of main headings or ideas with sub-headings fleshing out the flow of the paper.

Using the outline as a guide, begin writing by asking yourself what the paper is going to say and what conclusions you want to reach. Doing this ahead of time will help keep you focused and prevent you from straying from the purpose of the paper. Making up the outline as you go along almost always results in a less than satisfactory product. Writing is important in high school and is a key to success in college and in many professions.

Become a good writer by writing, revising, and reviewing your work. Don't be afraid to ask other students to critique your work. Try to write in your own natural style, be aware that most good writers go through many revisions, and be prepared to do the same. Writing and test-taking are the end results of developing good study skills. There is no magic formula for success. If you follow the suggestions in this guide, apply them and think about them, you'll have taken a giant step toward becoming a successful student.

Teaching Study Skills

Power Studying Tips for College Students

The following tips have proven to be extremely powerful guides for organizing, thinking, studying, and learning in college. They represent the best advice of successful college students. The can also work for high school students.

Study Space

Tip: Your study space should be as quiet and comfortable as possible. Avoid studying in noisy places such as cafeterias, recreation rooms, or lounges.

Tip: When studying, keep a waste basket handy.

Tip: Have a consistent place for everything, and above all, keep it there!

Tip: Have everything needed for study handy beforehand. Don't waste valuable time looking for books, notes, of other information. After you have assembled the items you need, put them where you can reach them easily.

Study Habits

Tip: Begin study no less than 30-90 minutes after a meal.

Take a break!

Tip: If possible, study no more than 30-40 minutes at a stretch. Many students retain more by studying for short periods with breaks in between.

It all depends on what you're trying to study, but generally, after a period of study, take a break.

Teaching Study Skills

A Clue from the Course Instructor

Tip: Pay attention to the course outline or syllabus. Generally, important points and materials are referenced here and repeated. Don't be afraid to ask the teacher if there is something you don't understand. Most teachers will be glad to clarify for you.

Tip: Never study within 30 minutes of going to sleep.

Tip: Prioritize! Make a list of what you intend to study, prioritize the list, and stick to it!

Tip: Take study breaks away from your desk or wherever you are studying. Let the break be a time to think about other things. Use some break time to reflect, not constantly review what you have just studied.

The Classroom

Tip: Distractions in the classroom are deadly. To help avoid distractions, sit near the front of the class. You're less likely to miss something important, and there are far less distractions at the front than any other location.

Tip: Think! Thinking is one of the most important things you can do in class. If you just sit there passively, and not think, class can be deadly. Think about what the teacher is saying BEFORE writing down anything. Writing down each word is a WASTE OF TIME. Reorganize in your mind what the teacher says, and then write it down. This way you will be connecting the teacher's words with HOW you think. If you do this, your notes will make a lot more sense later on.

Teaching Study Skills

Don't Underline

Tip: Efficient students do not underline! Underlining is not a productive way to emphasize textbook material. It's best to use a highlighter.

Preparing for Class

Tip: Read the table of contents of your texts carefully. If the textbooks have chapter summaries, read them first! If you don't understand the material from the summaries, go back and highlight. Take notes on what you have highlighted and review your notes. Tip: Break study material into short segments of length dependent on its difficulty. Remember, concise notes are more powerful than copious notes. Think about the material! Then take notes on what you don't know or are not sure of.

Test Taking

Tip: For essay examinations, try the "memory dump" technique. If permitted, write down everything you've memorized - facts, names, dates, ideas, events, and so on BEFORE you do anything else. Sometimes reading through the essay questions can distract you from what you've studied. The "memory dump" technique requires that you write down everything possible BEFORE you begin writing essay answers. This way, you are less likely to forget something important.

A Final Word

The study skills presented here depend on one thing, and that is willingness to WANT to improve and do well. Without the effort and sacrifice, no amount of suggestions, ideas, or outlines can help much. The Student is the one who is responsible for their education, and effective study skills can help. Work smart, not hard.

Teaching Reading Skills

Effective language instructors show students how they can adjust their reading behavior to deal with a variety of situations, types of input, and reading purposes. They help students develop a set of reading strategies and match appropriate strategies to each reading situation.

VIII. Teaching Reading Skills

Georgetown University Language Resource Center

Strategies for Developing Reading Skills
Using Reading Strategies

Language instructors are often frustrated by the fact that students do not automatically transfer the strategies they use when reading in their native language to reading in a language they are learning.

Instead, they seem to think reading means starting at the beginning and going word by word, stopping to look up every unknown vocabulary item, until they reach the end. When they do this, students are relying exclusively on their linguistic knowledge, a bottom-up strategy.

One of the most important functions of the language instructor, then, is to help students move past this idea and use top-down strategies as they do in their native language.

Teaching Reading Skills

Strategies that can help students read more quickly and effectively include:

- **Previewing: reviewing titles, section headings, and photo captions to get a sense of the structure and content of a reading selection**
- **Predicting: using knowledge of the subject matter to make predictions about content and vocabulary and check comprehension; using knowledge of the text type and purpose to make predictions about discourse structure; using knowledge about the author to make predictions about writing style, vocabulary, and content**
- **Skimming and scanning: using a quick survey of the text to get the main idea, identify text structure, confirm or question predictions**
- **Guessing from context: using prior knowledge of the subject and the ideas in the text as clues to the meanings of unknown words, instead of stopping to look them up**
- **Paraphrasing: stopping at the end of a section to check comprehension by restating the information and ideas in the text**

Teaching Reading Skills

Instructors can help students learn when and how to use reading strategies in several ways.

- By modeling the strategies aloud, talking through the processes of previewing, predicting, skimming and scanning, and paraphrasing. This shows students how the strategies work and how much they can know about a text before they begin to read word by word.
- By allowing time in class for group and individual previewing and predicting activities as preparation for in-class or out-of-class reading. Allocating class time to these activities indicates their importance and value.
- By using cloze (fill in the blank) exercises to review vocabulary items. This helps students learn to guess meaning from context.
- By encouraging students to talk about what strategies they think will help them approach a reading assignment, and then talking after reading about what strategies they actually used. This helps students develop flexibility in their choice of strategies.

When language learners use reading strategies, they find that they can control the reading experience, and they gain confidence in their ability to read the language.

Teaching Reading Skills

Reading to Learn

Reading is an essential part of language instruction at every level because it supports learning in multiple ways.

- **Reading to learn the language: Reading material is language input. By giving students a variety of materials to read, instructors provide multiple opportunities for students to absorb vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and discourse structure as they occur in authentic contexts. Students thus gain a more complete picture of the ways in which the elements of the language work together to convey meaning.**
- **Reading for content information: Students' purpose for reading in their native language is often to obtain information about a subject they are studying, and this purpose can be useful in the language learning classroom as well. Reading for content information in the language classroom gives students both authentic reading material and an authentic purpose for reading.**
- **Reading for cultural knowledge and awareness: Reading everyday materials that are designed for native speakers can give students insight into the lifestyles and worldviews of the people whose language they are studying. When students have access to newspapers, magazines, and websites, they are exposed to culture in all its variety, and monolithic cultural stereotypes begin to break down.**

Teaching Reading Skills

When reading to learn, students need to follow four basic steps:

1. Figure out the purpose for reading. Activate background knowledge of the topic in order to predict or anticipate content and identify appropriate reading strategies.

2. Attend to the parts of the text that are relevant to the identified purpose and ignore the rest. This selectivity enables students to focus on specific items in the input and reduces the amount of information they have to hold in short-term memory.

3. Select strategies that are appropriate to the reading task and use them flexibly and interactively. Students' comprehension improves and their confidence increases when they use top-down and bottom-up skills simultaneously to construct meaning.

4. Check comprehension while reading and when the reading task is completed. Monitoring comprehension helps students detect inconsistencies and comprehension failures, helping them learn to use alternate strategies.

Teaching Reading Skills

Developing Reading Activities

Developing reading activities involves more than identifying a text that is "at the right level," writing a set of comprehension questions for students to answer after reading, handing out the assignment and sending students away to do it. A fully-developed reading activity supports students as readers through pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities.

As you design reading tasks, keep in mind that complete recall of all the information in a text is an unrealistic expectation even for native speakers. Reading activities that are meant to increase communicative competence should be success oriented and build up students' confidence in their reading ability.

Construct the reading activity around a purpose that has significance for the students

Make sure students understand what the purpose for reading is: to get the main idea, obtain specific information, understand most or all of the message, enjoy a story, or decide whether or not to read more. Recognizing the purpose for reading will help students select appropriate reading strategies.

Teaching Reading Skills

Define the activity's instructional goal and the appropriate type of response

In addition to the main purpose for reading, an activity can also have one or more instructional purposes, such as practicing or reviewing specific grammatical constructions, introducing new vocabulary, or familiarizing students with the typical structure of a certain type of text.

Check the level of difficulty of the text

The factors listed below can help you judge the relative ease or difficulty of a reading text for a particular purpose and a particular group of students.

- **How is the information organized? Does the story line, narrative, or instruction conform to familiar expectations? Texts in which the events are presented in natural chronological order, which have an informative title, and which present the information following an obvious organization (main ideas first, details and examples second) are easier to follow.**
- **How familiar are the students with the topic? Remember that misapplication of background knowledge due to cultural differences can create major comprehension difficulties.**

Teaching Reading Skills

- Does the text contain redundancy? At the lower levels of proficiency, listeners may find short, simple messages easier to process, but students with higher proficiency benefit from the natural redundancy of authentic language.
- Does the text offer visual support to aid in reading comprehension? Visual aids such as photographs, maps, and diagrams help students preview the content of the text, guess the meanings of unknown words, and check comprehension while reading.

Remember that the level of difficulty of a text is not the same as the level of difficulty of a reading task. Students who lack the vocabulary to identify all of the items on a menu can still determine whether the restaurant serves steak and whether they can afford to order one.

Teaching Reading Skills

Use pre-reading activities to prepare students for reading

The activities you use during pre-reading may serve as preparation in several ways.

During pre-reading you may:

- **Assess students' background knowledge of the topic and linguistic content of the text**
- **Give students the background knowledge necessary for comprehension of the text, or activate the existing knowledge that the students possess**
- **Clarify any cultural information which may be necessary to comprehend the passage**
- **Make students aware of the type of text they will be reading and the purpose(s) for reading**
- **Provide opportunities for group or collaborative work and for class discussion activities**

Sample pre-reading activities:

- **Using the title, subtitles, and divisions within the text to predict content and organization or sequence of information**
- **Looking at pictures, maps, diagrams, or graphs and their captions**

Teaching Reading Skills

- Talking about the author's background, writing style, and usual topics
- Skimming to find the theme or main idea and eliciting related prior knowledge
- Reviewing vocabulary or grammatical structures
- Reading over the comprehension questions to focus attention on finding that information while reading
- Constructing semantic webs (a graphic arrangement of concepts or words showing how they are related)

Doing guided practice with guessing meaning from context or checking comprehension while reading pre-reading activities are most important at lower levels of language proficiency and at earlier stages of reading instruction.

As students become more proficient at using reading strategies, you will be able to reduce the amount of guided pre-reading and allow students to do these activities themselves.

Teaching Reading Skills

Match while-reading activities to the purpose for reading

In while-reading activities, students check their comprehension as they read. The purpose for reading determines the appropriate type and level of comprehension.

- **When reading for specific information, students need to ask themselves, have I obtained the information I was looking for?**
- **When reading for pleasure, students need to ask themselves, Do I understand the story line/sequence of ideas well enough to enjoy reading this?**
- **When reading for thorough understanding (intensive reading), students need to ask themselves: Do I understand each main idea and how the author supports it? Does what I'm reading agree with my predictions, and, if not, how does it differ? To check comprehension in this situation, students may:**

Stop at the end of each section to review and check their predictions, restate the main idea and summarize the section.

Use the comprehension questions as guides to the text, stopping to answer them as they read.

Teaching Reading Skills

Assessing Reading Proficiency

Reading ability is very difficult to assess accurately. In the communicative competence model, a student's reading level is the level at which that student is able to use reading to accomplish communication goals. This means that assessment of reading ability needs to be correlated with purposes for reading.

Reading Aloud

About Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is a task that students will rarely, if ever, need to do outside of the classroom. As a method of assessment, therefore, it is not authentic: It does not test a student's ability to use reading to accomplish a purpose or goal.

A student's performance when reading aloud is not a reliable indicator of that student's reading ability. A student who is perfectly capable of understanding a given text when reading it silently may stumble when asked to combine comprehension with word recognition and speaking ability in the way that reading aloud requires.

However, reading aloud can help a teacher assess whether a student is "seeing" word endings and other grammatical features when reading. To use reading aloud for this purpose, adopt the "read and look up" approach: Ask the student to read a sentence silently one or more times, until comfortable with the content, then look up and tell you what it says. This procedure allows the student to process the text, and lets you see the results of that processing and know what elements, if any, the student is missing.

Teaching Reading Skills

Comprehension Questions

Instructors often use comprehension questions to test whether students have understood what they have read. In order to test comprehension appropriately, these questions need to be coordinated with the purpose for reading. If the purpose is to find specific information, comprehension questions should focus on that information. If the purpose is to understand an opinion and the arguments that support it, comprehension questions should ask about those points.

In everyday reading situations, readers have a purpose for reading before they start. That is, they know what comprehension questions they are going to need to answer before they begin reading. To make reading assessment in the language classroom more like reading outside of the classroom, therefore, allow students to review the comprehension questions before they begin to read the test passage.

Finally, when the purpose for reading is enjoyment, comprehension questions are beside the point. As a more authentic form of assessment, have students talk or write about why they found the text enjoyable and interesting (or not).

Teaching Reading Skills

Authentic Assessment

In order to provide authentic assessment of students' reading proficiency, a post-listening activity must reflect the real-life uses to which students might put information they have gained through reading.

- **It must have a purpose other than assessment**
- **It must require students to demonstrate their level of reading comprehension by completing some task**

To develop authentic assessment activities, consider the type of response that reading a particular selection would elicit in a non-classroom situation. For example, after reading a weather report, one might decide what to wear the next day; after reading a set of instructions, one might repeat them to someone else; after reading a short story, one might discuss the story line with friends.

Use this response type as a base for selecting appropriate post-reading tasks. You can then develop a checklist or rubric that will allow you to evaluate each student's comprehension of specific parts of the text.

Teaching Writing Skills

IX. Teaching Writing Skills

Teaching writing is often about teaching grammar. If grammar comes up anywhere in EFL, it is in the writing classroom. Most EFL students will have some writing skills when you get them. But they will often have an idea that their writing is quite good and generally it will be quite poor.

Many EFL students will have had some experience with paragraph and essay writing, but, in fact, will have quite poor writing skills at the sentence level. Therefore, you will need to take them back to sentence level and begin to teach them very basic structure and how to write simply. Run-on and fragmented sentences will be very common until you correct those errors.

The more basic you get with your writing students, the better. Once a good foundation is built, you can move on to basic paragraph writing and on to essays. These skills take time to develop though and you will find that most textbooks will move your students forward too quickly.

Teaching Writing Skills

Learn how . . .

Many EFL Teachers either don't like or don't know how to teach writing skills effectively. With just a bit of thought and planning you can have a profound impact on your student's writing skills and thus their examination scores.

Two manuscripts developed specifically for EFL students can be downloaded for this course at:

http://teflebooks.com/SentenceWriting.pdf and

http://teflebooks.com/AdvancedWriting.pdf

Examine both of these manuscripts and notice the progression from teaching sentence writing skills to building paragraphs, and eventually to writing essays. Use the format of these two books to help you teach writing to any group of students. The two books demonstrate the correct method for improving your students' writing skills.

If you have no previous experience teaching writing, work through both of the books to deepen your understanding of the techniques involved.

Take particular note of what skills come in what order and how the manuscripts use the previously taught skills repeatedly in the following lessons to reinforce the students' memory and skill.

Teaching Listening Skills

Effective language instructors show students how they can adjust their listening behavior to deal with a variety of situations, types of input, and listening purposes. They help students develop a set of listening strategies and match appropriate strategies to each listening situation.

Strategies for Developing Listening Skills

Georgetown University Language Resource Center

Language learning depends on listening. Listening provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication.

Listening Strategies

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Listening strategies can be classified by how the listener processes the input.

Top-down strategies **are listener based; the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Top-down strategies include:**

- **listening for the main idea**
- **predicting**
- **drawing inferences**
- **Summarizing**

Teaching Listening Skills

Bottom-up strategies **are text based; the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. Bottom-up strategies include**

- **listening for specific details**
- **recognizing cognates**
- **recognizing word-order patterns**

Strategic listeners also use *metacognitive strategies* to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening.

- **They plan by deciding which listening strategies will serve best in a particular situation.**
- **They monitor their comprehension and the effectiveness of the selected strategies.**
- **They evaluate by determining whether they have achieved their listening comprehension goals and whether the combination of listening strategies selected was an effective one.**

Teaching Listening Skills

Listening for Meaning

To extract meaning from a listening text, students need to follow four basic steps:

- **Figure out the purpose for listening. Activate background knowledge of the topic in order to predict or anticipate content and identify appropriate listening strategies.**
- **Attend to the parts of the listening input that are relevant to the identified purpose and ignore the rest. This selectivity enables students to focus on specific items in the input and reduces the amount of information they have to hold in short-term memory in order to recognize it.**
- **Select top-down and bottom-up strategies that are appropriate to the listening task and use them flexibly and interactively. Students' comprehension improves and their confidence increases when they use top-down and bottom-up strategies simultaneously to construct meaning.**
- **Check comprehension while listening and when the listening task is over. Monitoring comprehension helps students detect inconsistencies and comprehension failures, directing them to use alternate strategies.**

Teaching Listening Skills

Developing Listening Activities

As you design listening tasks, keep in mind that complete recall of all the information in an aural text is an unrealistic expectation to which even native speakers are not usually held. Listening exercises that are meant to train should be success-oriented and build up students' confidence in their listening ability.

Construct the listening activity around a contextualized task.

Contextualized listening activities approximate real-life tasks and give the listener an idea of the type of information to expect and what to do with it in advance of the actual listening. A beginning level task would be locating places on a map (one way) or exchanging name and address information (two way). At an intermediate level students could follow directions for assembling something (one way) or work in pairs to create a story to tell to the rest of the class (two way).

Define the activity's instructional goal and type of response.

Each activity should have as its goal the improvement of one or more specific listening skills. A listening activity may have more than one goal or outcome, but be careful not to overburden the attention of beginning or intermediate listeners.

Teaching Listening Skills

Recognizing the goal(s) of listening comprehension in each listening situation will help students select appropriate listening strategies.

- **Identification: Recognizing or discriminating specific aspects of the message, such as sounds, categories of words, morphological distinctions**
- **Orientation: Determining the major facts about a message, such as topic, text type, setting**
- **Main idea comprehension: Identifying the higher-order ideas**
- **Detail comprehension: Identifying supporting details**
- **Replication: Reproducing the message orally or in writing**

Check the level of difficulty of the listening text.

The factors listed below can help you judge the relative ease or difficulty of a listening text for a particular purpose and a particular group of students.

How is the information organized? Does the story line, narrative, or instruction conform to familiar expectations?
Texts in which the events are presented in natural chronological order, which have an informative title, and which present the information following an obvious organization (main ideas first, details and examples second) are easier to follow.

Teaching Listening Skills

How familiar are the students with the topic?

Remember that misapplication of background knowledge due to cultural differences can create major comprehension difficulties.

Does the text contain redundancy?

At the lower levels of proficiency, listeners may find short, simple messages easier to process, but students with higher proficiency benefit from the natural redundancy of the language.

Does the text involve multiple individuals and objects? Are they clearly differentiated?

It is easier to understand a text with a doctor and a patient than one with two doctors, and it is even easier if they are of the opposite sex. In other words, the more marked the differences, the easier the comprehension.

Does the text offer visual support to aid in the interpretation of what the listeners hear?

Visual aids such as maps, diagrams, pictures, or the images in a video help contextualize the listening input and provide clues to meaning.

Teaching Listening Skills

Use pre-listening activities to prepare students for what they are going to hear or view.

The activities chosen during pre-listening may serve as preparation for listening in several ways. During pre-listening the teacher may

- **assess students' background knowledge of the topic and linguistic content of the text**
- **provide students with the background knowledge necessary for their comprehension of the listening passage or activate the existing knowledge that the students possess**
- **clarify any cultural information which may be necessary to comprehend the passage**
- **make students aware of the type of text they will be listening to, the role they will play, and the purpose(s) for which they will be listening**
- **provide opportunities for group or collaborative work and for background reading or class discussion activities**

Teaching Listening Skills

Sample pre-listening activities:

- **looking at pictures, maps, diagrams, or graphs**
- **reviewing vocabulary or grammatical structures**
- **reading something relevant**
- **constructing semantic webs (a graphic arrangement of concepts or words showing how they are related)**
- **predicting the content of the listening text**
- **going over the directions or instructions for the activity**
- **doing guided practice**

Match while-listening activities to the instructional goal, the listening purpose, and students' proficiency level.

While-listening activities relate directly to the text, and students do them during or immediately after the time they are listening. Keep these points in mind when planning while-listening activities:

If students are to complete a written task during or immediately after listening, allow them to read through it before listening.
Students need to devote all their attention to the listening task. Be sure they understand the instructions for the written task before listening begins so that they are not distracted by the need to figure out what to do.

Teaching Listening Skills

Keep writing to a minimum during listening.
Remember that the primary goal is comprehension, not production. Having to write while listening may distract students from this primary goal. If a written response is to be given after listening, the task can be more demanding.

***Organize activities so that they guide listeners through the text*.**
Combine global activities such as getting the main idea, topic, and setting with selective listening activities that focus on details of content and form.

Use questions to focus students' attention on the elements of the text crucial to comprehension of the whole.
Before the listening activity begins, have students review questions they will answer orally or in writing after listening. Listening for the answers will help students recognize the crucial parts of the message.

Use predicting to encourage students to monitor their comprehension as they listen.
Do a predicting activity before listening, and remind students to review what they are hearing to see if it makes sense in the context of their prior knowledge and what they already know of the topic or events of the passage.

Give immediate feedback whenever possible. **Encourage students to examine how or why their responses were incorrect.**

Teaching Listening Skills

Sample while-listening activities

- **listening with visuals**
- **filling in graphs and charts**
- **following a route on a map**
- **checking off items in a list**
- **listening for the gist**
- **searching for specific clues to meaning**
- **completing cloze (fill-in) exercises**
- **distinguishing between formal and informal registers**

Using Textbook Listening Activities

The greatest challenges with textbook tape programs are integrating the listening experiences into classroom instruction and keeping up student interest and motivation. These challenges arise from the fact that most textbook listening programs emphasize product (right or wrong answer) over process (how to get meaning from the selection) and from the fact that the listening activities are usually carried out as an add-on, away from the classroom.

Teaching Listening Skills

You can use the guidelines for developing listening activities given here as starting points for evaluating and adapting textbook listening programs. At the beginning of the teaching term, orient students to the tape program by completing the exercises in class and discussing the different strategies they use to answer the questions.

It is a good idea to periodically complete some of the lab exercises in class to maintain the link to the regular instructional program and to check on the effectiveness of the exercises themselves.

Integrating Listening Strategies With Textbook Audio and Video

Students can use this outline for both in-class and out-of-class listening/viewing activities. Model and practice the use of the outline at least once in class before you ask students to use it independently.

1. Plan for listening/viewing

- Review the vocabulary list, if you have one
- Review the worksheet, if you have one
- Review any information you have about the content of the tape/ video

Teaching Listening Skills

2. Preview the tape/video

- **(tape) Use fast forward to play segments of the tape; (video) view the video without sound**
- **Identify the kind of program (news, documentary, interview, drama)**
- **Make a list of predictions about the content**
- **Decide how to divide the tape/video into sections for intensive listening/ viewing**

3. Listen/view intensively section by section. For each section:

- **Jot down key words you understand**
- **Answer the worksheet questions pertaining to the section**
- **If you don't have a worksheet, write a short summary of the section**

4. Monitor your comprehension

- **Does it fit with the predictions you made?**
- **Does your summary for each section make sense in relation to the other sections?**

5. Evaluate your listening comprehension progress

Notes

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Nothing is impossible, the word itself says 'I'm possible'!
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