



## Course Concepts Oral Skills

**All the Course Concepts focus on skills and are based on general principles set out in the introduction to the series. One of these principles is that skills are not acquired by the learner being told about them, but rather by actually doing things themselves, or to put it another way – we learn by actively engaging in a learning process. The teacher's job is to provide suitable and sufficient support.**

**What follows here are some specifics for Oral Skills. This will give an idea of what kind of oral skills are taught here, and why and how they are taught. The course descriptions will provide all the details.**

There are three Concepts for Oral Skills offered here, at two different levels, with one building on the other.

They developed out of experience with teaching courses to meet differing needs, in terms of the actual skills required and the level of accuracy. At first sight the oral skills needed by Department Secretaries, for example, to assist visiting staff from abroad may look rather different from those of students of English preparing for an oral exam in Literature, or students of Economics preparing for an internship abroad. However, the needs of each group can be clearly identified and it is easy to see then how much of the basics they have in common.

Although all students are supposed to have reached level B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)<sup>1</sup> scales of foreign language proficiency before coming to university, I found that some had had very little experience of speaking English at school, while others who had already spent some time abroad were fluent, and some also fairly accurate.

Thus, at the **lower level**, with students in their early semesters, of whatever subject, my primary aim was to help everyone to feel comfortable using English as a means of communication. To reach this aim an atmosphere of trust had to be established in the classroom so that all the students were relaxed enough to talk, and equally important, to listen to each other in English. For this reason there was a strong focus on group activities (to which I could listen in, as unobtrusively as possible, and sometimes took notes). There was a lot of interaction going on at any one time; no one had to do a presentation or give a talk, or sit and listen to one.

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe (2017). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*.

The language focus was on building fluency in the basics of communication in English, starting within the peer group, and on accuracy in a limited area of communication. As far as class size is concerned I would say from experience that although the average class size was twenty-five, this course concept works with up to thirty-five people. Beyond that the noise level is too high.

At the **upper level** the focus of both concepts was more on accuracy, in a wider area including academic language, and activities included more formal discussions and short talks i.e. solo performance.

The three concepts offered here can be used equally effectively with students of any subject and department, not just those majoring in English, and certainly not just those whose mother tongue is German.

In all courses I tried to keep the amount of intrusive correction i.e. interrupting and correcting, to a minimum. This does not mean that the teacher opts out, but rather tries to make sure students are exposed to enough correct and authentic English to cope with each separate situation they are in. If these correct forms are constantly recycled and brought to the students' attention, the students gradually develop an "ear" for certain things, become able to monitor the language used by themselves and their classmates, and are able to help each other out if something goes wrong.

As explained in the introduction to the series of Course Concepts, the courses were designed to fit into the academic term. If you have more time available, you can easily expand them. Some tips are given for doing this.

The question of evaluating and grading students' work is a big one, and complex. The answer is dependent on both the individual course and the situation within the institution. In all the oral skills courses described here everyone is contributing all the time, so they all "do a good job". You can decide yourself how important the accuracy and fluency of their oral contributions are, and how this should be expressed in their grade. What is really important is that the focus for both students and teacher remains during the whole term on interacting and contributing, not on worrying about grades.

One way of dealing with the problem of grading is to turn it into a topic for discussion. With the students you can think back on the various things done in the class and consider which of these should contribute to the grade and in what way. You could produce a draft evaluation sheet with the items you think are legitimate. These can be discussed, and points allocated to each, to indicate how many points a minimal performance would earn and how many points a maximum performance would earn. It is still the teacher's job to decide how many points each individual student should get, but at least the class is aware of how you do this. This way of dealing with the problem is certainly not suitable for every class, but worth keeping in mind.

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

### **Oral Skills 1**

The following is a typical course description of a lower level **Oral skills course**, written in the form generally required by the university: Target group, Course aims and contents, Course requirements. To this more information is added and handed out to the participants at the first meeting of class, and talked through in detail.

**Target group:** This course is primarily aimed at 1st-year students of English.

**Course aims and contents:** The course provides practice in speaking English in a wide variety of situations, with the aim of expanding participants' general communicative competence. Although activities will include one formal chaired discussion, the focus will be firmly on less formal spoken English in small groups. After the first few weeks participants will be in charge of the class: everyone will have the chance to run a session, with a topic and activities of their own choice. This will be done in a team, and help with planning and preparation will be provided for each team separately in tutorials. These tutorials will be run by a student who is a near-native speaker of English, and the times will be fixed in agreement with the teams. Every student will get clear feedback on their English, both fluency and accuracy, and how to improve it.

**Requirements:** To obtain credits for this course students are required to participate regularly, run one session of the class in a team and complete one short written assignment.

Please note that regular participation really means regular and spread over the whole term. There is no way you can make up for missing attendance by handing in a piece of written work, for example. The oral communication in English has to take place regularly. That is the only way to learn.

One final piece of advice to make sure the class goes well: get the details of at least two neighbours here today so that you can contact them if you are off sick. Please make it your own responsibility to find out exactly what you missed and what you have to do to catch up. And those who give the information: please don't be mean and give only a tiny part of the information. You wouldn't like it if someone did that to you.

To the course description the following was added:

Some rules of the game for running a session of the class

In the next few weeks you will discover that there is more to oral skills than discussions or presentations, and that in everyday life

we use language to do a lot of different things apart from expressing our opinions. We express emotions, ask for advice and give it, protest, demand, tell stories, argue fiercely, make compromises, apologise, complain and so on.

You will also quickly realise that this room can become – an employment agency, a TV studio, a theatre, a gym, a travel agent's, an office, another country – anything that you want it to become. And there you can have quizzes, interviews, arguments, sketches, political campaigns, any activities you like.

I want to make this class a place where you will have the opportunity to do many of these things. One of the best opportunities is running a session of the class, usually in teams of between two and four people. You will soon get to know each other in this class, and you can decide yourselves who you would like to work with.

First, you should meet somewhere outside of class and chat and begin to collect ideas for a topic, something you are really interested in, and believe your classmates would also be interested in. Then decide what you would like to do, or rather what you would like the class to do. Your job is not to give a talk or a presentation while the others snooze ..... Your job is to get the class motivated to interact, and of course to do this in English. Discussions are fine, but only as a part of a session. You will get a handout later to help you with the planning and organising of your session.

My job is to stay in the background, keep my ears open, and give you, the whole class, feedback on your English. After every session run by you, I will write up a Language Focus sheet for everyone.

One or two comments on the course description:

First, tutorials. I believe they are absolutely necessary if students are to make real progress during the term. They are an opportunity for the teacher to get to know each individual student better and to give the detailed advice that each one needs. But is it always possible to find the time? When the workload was too heavy for me to do the tutorials myself, the university provided some funding for students to do the tutoring. You need to find the right person (a good command of English, ability to communicate and interact with students etc.), and mentor this person. I discovered that having students hold the tutorials was a very profitable experience for all concerned.

In this case, the tutorials to help the students organise their session of the class were well worth while. The sessions went well and the students running them learnt a lot from the whole process.

Secondly, contact details of classmates. Encouraging students to talk to the people around them from the very start is an integral part of the course. I also asked them to make a name card or badge, with just the first name, for the second week of class onwards. It had to be something they could attach to themselves as we moved around a lot. They were very creative!

## Step by step through the course

At the first meeting of class students are registered and given the information above plus some more details. We talk through the 'Help Expressions' sheet, also available on my website, which they are expected to bring to class, every week, and use.

HELP!

Here are some useful expressions for you in class – when things aren't going so well. They are the basics of (classroom) communication.

(zzzzzzzzzz) Sorry, I haven't quite wakened up yet. (Ask my neighbour.)

Sorry, I didn't quite get that. Could you say it again please/ Could you say it more slowly.

What did you want us to do?

What does 'preponderance' mean?

What's the English for 'Wohngemeinschaft'?

[...]

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF\\_cm\\_helpexpressions.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_helpexpressions.pdf)].

**Starting the course. The course begins with three units: Shipwrecked Survival, Flat Sharing, and Language Learning.** They cover topics that proved to be interesting and relevant for the students and automatically lead to student-student oral communication. Although it might not be obvious from the titles, they basically revolve around life as a student in a new environment. The first two in particular function as effective ice-breakers. All of them promote class cohesion, and allow the students to experience interesting situations where particular language is required. Each topic is introduced in such a way that they can acquire the language they need to engage with it. None of these units are just quick fillers; they are linked, overlap, and all can be further expanded if the time is available.

### Shipwrecked Survival

Topic: Working in a group to survive a difficult situation.

Language focus: The language of sharing information, making suggestions, agreeing and disagreeing, making compromises, expressing hypotheses.

Aim: Through experiencing a difficult situation within a simulation where sharing information is literally vital, students should realize that they need to use certain strategies all the time, both in language class and later when abroad. They should also acquire the English necessary to do this.

Activities: In groups, students are told they are shipwrecked, each given some information and then left to see if they can survive. Later we do a post-

mortem i.e. they have to think about why they survived or failed to do so. Working on a Language Focus sheet in class, then at home.

Materials: Information for the simulation; Language Focus sheet.

This idea and some of the materials were gratefully taken from an excellent source of simulations (Jones 1984), and adapted and extended for the purposes of this language class. The original 'Shipwrecked' has five different profiles, a map to be cut up into squares and a diary to be filled in. Each square of the map has information on vegetation, water and so on in that square. It also indicates what they can expect to find in each direction.

Jones, Ken (1984). *Nine Graded Simulations*. Munich: Hueber.

The students are usually new to the university and certainly new to each other, and in a completely new situation, with a new teacher. In this situation, Shipwrecked is a very effective icebreaker. The minimum number of people is five, as there are five profiles in the original simulation pack, and the maximum is about thirty-five, due to the amount of noise generated by seven groups talking at the same time. The ideal room is free of furnishings except stackable seats and two or three tables, and is carpeted.

They get into groups, of five if possible, sitting on the floor, as this is less formal and more relaxed than sitting on a chair, and it gives them space to lay out the materials coming later. I ask them to take one last look out the window, and then listen, eyes shut if they wish:

Today you are in a critical situation. You were on a ship, your ship was wrecked in a storm, and you and the other four people beside you are the sole survivors. It is your job and in your own interests to stay alive. [...] Your survival depends on you alone. [...] Advice: Decide on how you are going to determine which way to go – will you have a leader who decides, will you vote, will you just hope for the best? This may look like a game of chance but it is not. If you treat it like a game then you are not likely to survive. Take care, and good luck!

Each person is then given a profile, with a little information on who they are, what they know and what they have. For example, one knows how long they can survive without water and without food; one has a compass; one suggests making a map day by day as they travel, since they can see what lies ahead in each direction.

They are given no instructions. Silence falls while they read the profiles. It takes some time till the first brave person realises that they have to talk to the others in the group if they want to survive. It is not until that is well under way that I go to each group, ask some questions, and then provide a little more information in the form of map squares. After that they are completely on their own again – until a voice is heard “We’re dead!!!” The people in that group are allowed to be resurrected, provided that they first discuss their decisions and their decision-making process.

I added language work based on the shipwrecked survival situation, and reflection and discussion on what they think my reasons were for shipwrecking them, and on what they have learned from it. In the end they realise that they have just learned, or at least become aware of, some very useful strategies for survival as students, in a new location, in a new group, and as students abroad in the future: share your information, talk to the people round about you, and listen to them.

I also point out that the language on the 'Language Focus' sheet, which is worked through together, is essential for communication. It is language they will find they have to use in this class again and again: making suggestions, reacting to suggestions positively, reacting negatively, expressing hypotheses, expressing needs, using some common tenses correctly. This is some of the language I want them to get right, which means that I listen for it, and signal to them if they are getting it wrong. After a couple of weeks students become conscious of this language and are able to monitor themselves and/or help others.

### Shipwrecked Survival Language Focus

Making suggestions:

e.g. Let's go north

(Taking as base the words "go north", write down any other ways you know of making suggestions)

.....  
....

Reacting to suggestions positively:

e.g. Good idea

.....  
....

Reacting negatively:

(on a scale of politeness)

e.g. You must be joking

.....  
....

(This is a good opportunity to look at how English says "no" in a very polite manner. "You must be joking" or "No way, not on" are fitting ways of saying "no" to the suggestion "Let's go to where the crocodiles are", but not when saying no to your study supervisor.)

Expressing hypothesis:

e.g. If we went north, we would probably find a river

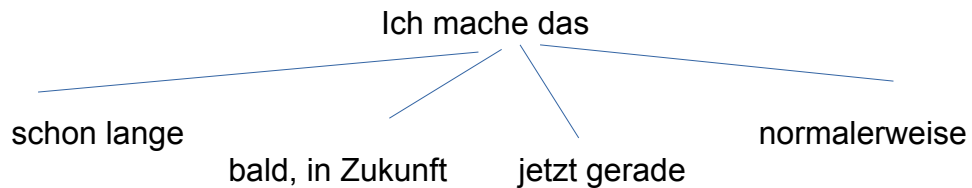
.....  
....

(We later had fun with the Expressing hypothesis, with each group using it to do an honest post-mortem: "If we had listened to each other we wouldn't have gone to the swamp and been eaten by the crocodiles" and so on.)

Expressing needs:  
 (on a scale of urgency)  
 e.g. We desperately need water

.....  
 .....

Finally, German uses the present tense to express a range of times, but how does English do this?



Obviously students make other mistakes too, but the purpose of the Language Focus sheets is to focus on certain things only, so that the learners can actually make progress in terms of accuracy in a limited number of things.

### Flat Sharing Survival

This is a follow-up to the Shipwrecked situation. We check the Language Focus sheet from Shipwrecked and then engage in another survival-type activity: trying to survive in a small flat shared with at least three others they are not yet familiar with. The language focus is the same, with the addition of flat-sharing vocabulary and the expression of likes, dislikes, habits and compromises. Without the latter it is very difficult to survive.

The idea for this topic came originally from Unit 1 'Somewhere to Live' of the intermediate level course book *Challenges*.

Abbs, Brian & Sexton, Malcolm (1981). *Challenges: a multi-media project for learners of English*. Harlow, Essex: Longman.

First the scene needs to be set, by talking about the local accommodation situation for students, always difficult, and about a time when the situation was really dramatically bad (mattresses on the floor of a hostel). We talk about flat sharing, filling the board with possible problems: noise, cleaning the kitchen, shopping, sharing the bathroom etc. Sometimes they need a little time to think about themselves first: Do I like a lot of people round me? How do I react to noise? And what is noise for me? Do I need a routine, regular times? Do I need tidiness and order? Do I mind people borrowing my things? etc. Then in groups, again assigned by me, this time to make sure "friends" are not together as the students have already got to know a little about some of the others through surviving the shipwreck with them, they discover the survival situation they are in that day:



You have a real problem finding accommodation, but you are in luck, you now have a flat to share with the others in your group. Talk to each other, get to know each other, see if you could find a modus vivendi, even for a short time, just until you can find something else.

The snag is that each group is assigned a flat with one room less than the number of students in the group. This may arouse some laughter or consternation at first but motivates everyone to talk about their habits and routine, likes and dislikes, with a part of the new Language Focus sheet to help them. In contrast to Shipwrecked Survival where they have profiles to guide them, in this situation they are communicating as themselves. This helps the class, or at least the groups, to get to know each other.

### Flat Sharing Survival! Language Focus Sheet

#### Likes - Dislikes - Compromises

(1) Likes and dislikes, on a scale from Heaven to Hell

Heaven :-))

I really love	cooking for lots of people/
Techno	

I like  
I quite like

I don't mind / it doesn't bother me	cooking for lots of people people smoking in the kitchen
-------------------------------------	---

I don't like	snakes as pets, thank you
--------------	---------------------------

I really don't like	if people don't clean up the kitchen
---------------------	---

I hate / detest / can't stand

It would drive me crazy	to listen to jazz all day! if someone had a chiming clock (one that goes Ding dong, ding dong ....)
-------------------------	--

Hell :-((

(2) Compromises:

How would it be if	we shared the shopping?
Do you think we could	share the cleaning?
Would you mind if	I have friends to stay?

After about fifteen to twenty minutes each group is invited to tell the others whether they think they could survive together, and how they would organise

this. This can include comments on what they think are shopping essentials, which is fun, as for some people peanuts or ketchup are essentials, for others it is coffee or tofu.

There is another aspect which could be focussed on later, and that is cultural differences regarding the acceptability of sharing a room. A student who already had experience of an American student dorm, pointed out that sharing a room with another student, a complete stranger, is the norm.

The Language Focus sheet continues with a follow-up for home, based on what they struggled to express in their groups. The German is a back-translation of their English:

(3) Some more useful language:

There are seven of us, and only five rooms, so how are we going to divide them up?

Who's going to share with whom?

[...]

One person, two people

Shall we make a rota?

What about visits from family and friends?

There's no problem if everyone keeps to the rules

(4) How would you say these in English? (keeping in mind that they refer to the situation you were in, in class, planning how you could survive together)

In meiner WG sind wir fünf Personen (literally: in my living community are we five persons)

Mein Zimmer teile\* ich nicht!

Zwei Personen müssen\* leider ein Zimmer teilen

Machen\* wir einen Plan?

[...]

Jeder kauft\* die eigene Seife

Ich koche gern - ich koche\* für Euch, einmal die Woche!

Früher habe ich nicht geraucht ...

Checking through the translation task in the following week it becomes clear that many students do not realise that the “useful language” in (3) can be used to do task (4). This is a good opportunity to talk about the purpose of Language Focus sheets, especially since the expression of future time in English, a problem here\* as German tends to use the present tense, was looked at in the Shipwrecked Language Focus sheet.

As a follow up to the topic of sharing a flat, you could give them a short text to read at home. Here is one example. It is about young people living away from home for the first time.

### Basic living

[...]

In the flat-sharing situation, of course, part of the trouble - and the fun - is that maybe for the first time your son or daughter will have to do some basic catering and budgeting. If you've been so protective that they can't even boil an egg or do their own washing they're going to be in trouble. [...] They should also know that jeans, navy woollens, red polo and a white shirt can't emerge happily from the same hot-wash cycle at the launderette.

There are certain basics in common, of course, but looking after oneself as a student and taking a share in the chores of a flat aren't the same as living with the family. No teenager is likely to take kindly to parental lectures on food values and making the best use of vegetables in season! [...]. When they're on their own and have a fixed allowance for food, they'll soon find that lashing out on expensive luxuries and convenience foods leaves them short by the end of the month. [...] If they prefer to spend the last few days of each month on a diet of baked beans for their protein - that is their problem [...].

Q:

Does any of this sound familiar? Is there anything that is different in Germany?

In fact, the text is an extract from an article in a UK magazine from 1978. Clarke, Jean (1978, December). Are they ready to leave home. *Good Housekeeping*.

I chose it deliberately as an example here, to show how useful non-contemporary texts can be. In my experience, if the students don't know when this was published, they read it as contemporary and look only for differences between Britain and Germany. Given the publication date, the students will realise that the problems they have are not new.

I built up a large collection of interesting texts over the years. It is fascinating to look back on them, even now, to see how many of the problems are sadly still with us, and how little has changed in some areas, though of course there may be much change in others. In general, using a non-contemporary text on a familiar topic can encourage communication as comparisons can be made between then and now.

The topic of living away from home for the first time, which was introduced here in a light-hearted way, could easily be continued by looking at related issues such as: What is it like to stay at home and go to university in the same town? Can life be lonely in a student hostel? Is sharing a flat better? How can you finance your accommodation? It is in fact such a big and relevant issue for the students that they sometimes chose it for their session. For more ideas and language:

I left home when I was 18. To say that I had my bags packed and ready by the front door on my birthday eve would be a slight exaggeration, but, having secured the 'A' levels necessary to pursue further education, I was determined to secure my independence too. [...] [...] When I left home to become a student in the mid-70s, I, like thousands more, moved into a bedsit. To say the room - found for me by London University's accommodation office - in a seedy North London suburb, was grim is a massive understatement [...] On a number of occasions I cried myself to sleep [...].

Millar, Barbara (2009, April 23). The gap years. Three views of young adulthood. II. The Stay-at-home Kids. *Scottish Review*. Online Current Affairs Magazine issue no 096.

## **Language Learning**

Topic: Their own experience of language learning; developing strategies of more effective language learning.

Language focus: Relating your own experience, sharing opinions; the vocabulary of language learning.

Aim: Through reflecting on their own experience of language learning, and that of the others in the class, students should become aware of the many ways of learning a language, and of the principles behind our class. They should also acquire the English necessary to do this.

Activities: In groups, students are given some statements of opinion on language learning to discuss. Reading a text on Learner types at home.

Materials: Language Learning statements; Learner types text.

This topic was chosen as it is one which all of us shared a keen interest in. Everyone has experience of learning another language and is actively engaged in it, most of us for the rest of our lives. If there are some in the class who grew up with two or more languages, all the better as it adds a different perspective.

It is a topic where emotions are involved, but by this time the students are not strangers any more and are willing to share their experiences; this sharing encourages further questions and more telling, in others words genuine communication.

In small groups the students are given a list of statements on language learning which I had either heard or read, but were not necessarily my opinions. Their task is to comment on any that they find interesting, and say why. This generates a lot of talk. After about twenty minutes they are usually ready to tell the whole class which statement they as a group find most interesting, regardless of whether they agree with it or not.

Learning another language is quite normal. There are far more bilinguals in the world than there are monolinguals.

You can never learn a language really well if you don't learn it as a child.

You never know two languages equally well.

Understanding a foreign culture is much more difficult than understanding a foreign language.

I feel I have a different personality when I speak another language.

In the language class I don't want to talk about me – I want to talk about important things.

I can't learn anything by talking English to other Germans.

I can't learn anything if my teacher doesn't correct me all the time.

Spending some time abroad is the only way to learn to speak fluently.

If you want to communicate with people the most important thing is to get the grammar right.

You don't have to learn about the foreign country if you just want to be able to talk to people or read books.

I could understand what the people were saying, but I didn't know how to answer.

The people I met didn't talk like the people in our schoolbooks.

It's possible to learn a language without a teacher.

It's my teacher's fault if I don't learn.

It's silly to spend so much time at school learning one or two languages really well. Children should be learning several languages.

I hate performing in language classes!

I wish I'd gone to an Immersion School where English is the language of instruction!

.....

Finally,

Q: What was your most negative/positive experience of language learning?

Q: What do you hope for at university?

The idea and some of the items were gratefully taken from:

Péchou, Ann (1983). *The Poet and the Scientists*. Canterbury: Pilgrims Publications.

This topic covers not only their own experience but also their beliefs about language learning in general, and about teaching languages. This is a good opportunity to help them consider what goes on in our language class, and what principles I follow e.g. with regard to correcting, and the feasibility of our aims.

This can be followed up by some quotes to think about, for example from Pit Corder (Introducing Applied Linguistics, 1973) reproduced in Ronowicz (1999):

No one knows 'the whole' of any language, or how to use it appropriately in all possible situations of language use. He acquires those parts of it which he needs in order to play his part in society. As he grows older, the roles that are ascribed to him or that he acquires change and develop, and as they change he learns more of his language (he may also forget some).

Ronowicz, Eddie & Yallop, Colin (Eds.) (1999). *English: one language, different cultures*. London: Continuum, p.4.

An example home assignment as additional follow-up:

A short article on different learner types with tips for capitalising on strengths was a useful follow-up text. It appeared in a Sunday newspaper's annual supplement for school leavers, focussing on the knowledge and skills required for passing final school-leaving exams and on choosing the right university. The ideas are interesting and sensible, the language friendly. This particular article introduces the idea of Audio learners, Visual learners and Kinesthetic learners and offers tips for each different type on "Ways to increase your learning power". Students are asked if they can identify with any of these learner types, and if there are any tips they would like to use. The tone appeals to students, and makes them more interested in the message, and acting on it. This helps them to relate what we do in class to their own learning process.

[...] Are you a Kinesthetic Learner? You are the kind of person who feels everything. You are the one most likely to faint in the biology class at the sight of blood. If someone takes a fit of the giggles you are the first to join in and the last to be able to stop. You are a thoughtful soul who needs time to process new information because you are always tapping into your emotions, relating events to previous experience [...].

Black, Norma (2000, April 23). Best Days of Your Lives. Your exams can take you closer to your goal. *Scotland on Sunday*. Exam Series Part 4, 2-5.

In this unit on Language Learning, the specific language they need can be found in the Language learning statements. Anything else can be added, as required. If students make mistakes of the kind already covered by the Language Focus sheets, sometimes a neighbour will help, or you can signal to them, so that they have the chance to correct themselves. Examples of this kind of mistake:

\*When I have been in Canada I have learned French; \*If we would learn English in primary school; \*I learn Spanish since two months.

### **More units**

At this stage it is still very unlikely that any group will be ready to run a session of the class. I found the following to be good units to continue with. They work well, involve interesting activities, and add important language.

## **Planning a university – Your dream campus**

Topic: Designing a campus university from scratch.

Language focus: The language of making suggestions, agreeing and disagreeing, making compromises, campus vocabulary from A-Z.

Aim: Learning more about what a campus university normally has and what kinds of things a university can offer students and staff (facilities, equipment, services).

Enjoying the chance to be imaginative and creative, in a small group. As students now know each other a little better they can decide who they want to work with, and then experience the pleasure of cooperating in order to create something really good.

Activities: Collecting ideas about the things a university usually has (perhaps on the board). In small groups students dream up their own campus and then draw it on an overhead or a poster.

Materials: Overheads, pens, paper.

First we gather ideas about what things a (German) university normally has e.g. a canteen, seminar rooms, offices, a library; and then, more fun, things they would like a university to have e.g. sports facilities, pubs, a chemist's, a sauna .....

In small groups the students are free to imagine their dream campus and then draw it. The drawings are eventually put onto overheads or posters and “presented” or rather commented on briefly by each group in turn, queried and critiqued, and voted on or each person chooses their favourite.

The final task in class is for each student to decide what one single thing they would like to change at their university, immediately.

A suggestion for a follow-up task:

Given a list of universities from any English-speaking country, the students are asked to pick one each. At home they go to the website of the one they have chosen and make some notes about what they feel the particular characteristics or special features of this university are, what the selling-points are and so on. They bring this information to class the following week and create a poster of their university and try to “sell” it to the class. The posters are hung up, studied and commented on, primarily in comparison to what they know about universities in Germany, and in other English-speaking countries.

A good film which combines with insight and humour the topics of sharing a flat, learning another language, university life and studying abroad, is 'L'Auberge Espagnole'. Various European languages are spoken in the film, with English subtitles.

Klapisch, Cédric (Dir.) (2002). *L'Auberge Espagnole*.

## The University and You

Topic: Students' own experience of studying (English) at university.

Language Focus: Personal appearance and clothing; formal interview situation; academic vocabulary for their course of studies.

Aim: To encourage students to think critically about their own experience of studying.

Activities: Imagining and acting out the first meeting of an Open University student with her tutor; watching the whole film 'Educating Rita'; writing a short text on the topic of their own experience of studying.

Materials: Lewis, Gilbert (1984), *Educating Rita*; guidelines for their writing task

First I tell the students a little about the Open University, in particular the range of students it caters for. See for example:

[<https://www.open.ac.uk/scotland/about-us>].

Then I introduce briefly the two main characters of the film 'Educating Rita', Rita, a hairdresser, and Frank, a professor and her tutor.

How do they imagine these two people: their appearance and their clothing when Rita goes to the university to meet her tutor for the first time. (It's your choice whether you give the date of the film or not.) This we do in detail, putting several different versions on the board, both as sketches and in words. Next they have to imagine what would happen at the first meeting, and act it out in pairs, with the classroom transformed in part into Frank's office and each Rita of course standing outside the classroom door at the start.

Then we watch the opening scenes of the film, first Frank seemingly asleep in front of his class, then Rita arriving at his office. It is of course very different from what they had expected, and is a wonderful introduction to their written task.

For their written task they are given a handout with some information on the film and what I want them to write about. They are asked to watch the film at the end of term, not before. The reason for this is that they need time to complete the course and then stand back and reflect not only on the film but also on their own experience of studying at a university.

The Rita who takes her degree in English at the Open University in Britain is probably very different from you on several counts: she's twenty-seven, she's married, she has years of work experience, she didn't do her A-levels (Matura) before she left school, she's studying at the Open University which means that she has a personal tutor and a great deal of motivation, but she has to go on working at the same time; she can't take years off to go to classes every day and concentrate exclusively on studying.



I want you to watch the film, not read the play or quote any so-called learning aids, then write me three paragraphs in answer to my questions. I would really like to know what you think.

First, what do you think Rita gets out of studying/studying English literature: What does she learn? What can she do at the end that she couldn't do before? Is it all positive? Is it worth while?

Then a paragraph about your own experience of studying/studying English, telling me what you personally have got out of it so far.

Lastly, I'd like you to write a paragraph about what you hope to get out of studying/studying English at the university.

**STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD**

(1) study in your own time

(2) improve your career prospects

(3) gain new skills and confidence

(4) study for the sheer joy of learning

(Source: the cover of a brochure of The Open University in Scotland 2002/2003)

Despite the age of the film it remained for me one of the best on the topic of university education as it raises many questions which are equally relevant today. Reading the students' work was always very interesting, from the point of view of both content and language. I felt that their answers were honest, so we must have managed to establish the necessary atmosphere of openness and trust during the term.

The reason for the rather strict three questions, three paragraphs is that otherwise students can get completely carried away and write pages and pages, but don't address the points which are of particular relevance for this class. Or they may try to write some kind of academic paper, using what they think is formal academic vocabulary. If they stick to the guidelines, they can all produce a short text which is fairly clear for the reader. This is surely evidence of success for the students.

As the play was required reading for some time in German High schools, some were familiar with the story but only from the point of view of what they were required to think in accordance with the school curriculum. Now they were being asked to watch the film from a new perspective, as students, and relate it to themselves.

One student wrote:

“Not this again” was my first thought when I was asked to write about Educating Rita. But now that I have watched the film I don't think it is so bad. In fact, I had never watched it before from the point of view of finding my own opinion about it. And what I found was an amusing parallel: Frank does not like Rita copying second-hand knowledge from others. He wants her to create her own thoughts. And here I am, supposed to do the same [...].

## Pop Festival

Topic: Planning and organising a pop festival.

Language focus: The language of a formal chaired discussion; planning, organising, compromising.

Aim: To give the students practice in carrying out a formal chaired discussion.

Activities: Preparing for and carrying out a public debate.

Materials: Chaired Discussion Handout; Profiles, map etc. based on the materials from Michael Lynch; Press reports.

Lynch, Michael (1985). *It's Your Choice: 6 role-playing exercises*. London: Arnold.

A formal chaired discussion may sound rather dry and dusty, but the topic and the circumstances are definitely not. The idea here, which I found excellent, is to hold a public meeting involving many different interest groups on the topic of whether a Pop Festival should be allowed to take place in a sleepy English village or not. The students always loved it.

The original materials by Michael Lynch include a map of the fictitious village and surrounding farms, a list of interest groups and for each interest group some ideas of what the pros and cons of a festival could be for them. You could equally well create your own materials from scratch, taking ideas from real events with countryside locations such as Groove Loch Ness, or Electric Fields Festival.

What is really important for this to work is that students can choose who they want to be, whether a member of the Environmental Group, a pop fan, the local Lord or Lady, festival organiser, local farmer or shopkeeper, resident, or the District Council. The original has enough different interest groups to satisfy everyone in the class from the would-be farmer to the would-be nobility, but others could be added. Everyone needs a card with some relevant points to consider regarding possible advantages and disadvantages for them of holding the pop festival in their village. They sit together with other members of their interest group and decide what policy they as a group want to take: should there be a festival, and if yes, under what conditions. The decision is in no way prescribed.

Next there is the public debate, chaired by a student, at which all the interested parties can put forward their ideas. The festival organisers need to be very well prepared as they start off. The press is always present, a role I took as it gives the chance to make some notes on the outcome and, more important, some language notes. To help them with the more formal language the students have a Language Focus sheet 'Chaired Discussion Handout', talked through the previous week.

Chaired Discussion: This is a list of useful expressions for use in a chaired discussion i.e. a more formal discussion with a chairperson who opens and closes this discussion and asks people to contribute – and keeps order if things get a bit heated! [...]

It has useful expressions for: Asking for a contribution; Stating opinions; Agreeing; Disagreeing; Interrupting; Asking for permission to contribute; When you can't follow an argument; Getting people back to the point; Listing; Stating a conclusion.

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF\\_ha\\_chaireddiscussion.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_ha_chaireddiscussion.pdf)].

No one ever knows what is going to happen at the public debate and what the outcome will be. There may be a gracious Lady decked in all the jewellery and scarves available in the classroom who wants nothing to do with a pop festival; an ancient Lord, wobbly on his feet but young at heart, who is full of enthusiasm for the festival; farmers who argue their cows would give more milk if they heard music; shopkeepers who smell money from catering. It was always fun.

As the Press I wrote the opening lines of reports on the public debate and added them to a collection made on previous occasions. These were distributed to be read at home. Examples:

#### SAY 'YES'!

Last night pop festival fans gathered in the local pub in Upper Charnwood to make a last ditch attempt to rouse opinion in favour of the festival. Backed by the pub owner they plan a campaign which will [...].

#### DEAD AND BURIED

Dead and buried, was the comment of one disappointed pop fan after yesterday's public hearing on the proposed pop festival. We might as well have a funeral march, [...].

#### A TREE FOR CHARNWOOD

With their generous proposal to plant a tree for Charnwood at the opening of the pop festival the organizers dispelled all fears of damage to the environment [...].

#### UPPER CHARNWOOD ENTERS THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

With yesterday's decision to run a pop festival, Upper Charnwood has taken a major step forward. Pop fans left the hall jubilant [...].

In the following session the students can move around the class, sharing opinions on the quality and veracity of the reports: "That's rubbish"; "Some of this is right but the rest is absolutely not true"; "I am happy with this article, except ..."

(An anecdote with current relevance: a student once told us about performing with a choir at a major event. One newspaper report was very critical, talking about their poor performance of XYZ. In fact, the choir did not perform this piece at all.)

Short reports from real festivals in similar countryside locations can help the students to keep the vocabulary in mind e.g.

One thing I do promise is that when we are gone we will tidy up, and you will never know we have been here. [...] Northern Constabulary and the DJ had warned before the Loch Ness music festival that the misuse of drugs would not be tolerated. There were overnight swoops on the audience's tented community, with more searches on Saturday as the spectators arrived [...].

Love, David (2006, June 25), Rock Ness is music to the ears of Fatboy Slim. *Scotland on Sunday*.

Apart from the Language Focus sheets prepared in advance specifically for certain units, I also wrote up Language Focus sheets based on the language problems that occur if I feel they deserve the attention of the whole class. I took quick notes of problems and after class wrote them up in a systematic way. The students were expected to work through them while the situation was still fresh in their minds. I checked on this briefly at the start of the following session. From these the students begin to see that if the same problems keep on recurring, they have to make an effort to improve.

The following is an example of a Language Focus sheet based on students' language in class, simply to show what kind of things I focussed on, and the way I structured the sheets. As the sheets were all similar in structure and layout, and as I often took the first few minutes of the following session to check on some of the points, they were soon accepted by the students as an integral part of the course.

Pop Festival      Useful language      30 June 20xx

Pronunciation:

Careful: **village**, **visit**; fence/fans; think/sink; life (noun)/live (adj.) as in "live music"

Word stress: check which syllable is stressed and rewrite the following words like this disCUSS: event, economic [...]

Count/uncount: Which are uncount (Check in the dictionary): catering, sanitation, damage, accommodation, security [...]?

Useful words and whole expressions:

Alcohol and drugs – we will **check on that /monitor that /check everyone at the entrance**

people **who** take drugs ...

not more than 3000 **tickets** will be sold

there's only the village itself on the **map** (so I don't know where the next village is)

that's what you have to **discuss**

on the **camp site**

**6-year-olds** [...]

Draw a line and put the words /village, city, hamlet, town/ on the line, in order of size\*.

Do the same with these: wood, tree, forest, copse

Tense / aspect:

**(Remember the language sheet for Shipwrecked, with the tenses and aspect?)**

that's the best offer we **have had** so far

we **have been** neighbours for years now

my family **has lived** here for thousands of years

It **depends** on the price of the tickets

[...].

\*Why bother with these words? In this case, some students used “city” for the sleepy little village, and “forest” for the woods. This German English can unfortunately convey a completely false impression. For example, our university, which is in fact close to woods and belongs to a town beside a lake, becomes a university beside a forest, in a city by the sea. To help them remember the difference we used local examples which everyone knew. We drew a straight line on an imagined map, from a hamlet called O, through a village called L, via the town of Konstanz to the city of Zurich.

I think this is a good example of how you need to focus on what is relevant for your students. Your Language Focus sheets could look quite different.

### **Student-run sessions**

After the first few weeks, during which the students really get to know each other and realise that there is more to language than expressing opinions, it is then their turn to run almost all of the rest of the sessions themselves.

To help them run a session the students are given the following planning and preparation sheet, which they work on in their group and take with them to the tutorial(s). Usually they need two meetings with the tutor.

Planning and preparation sheet for running a session of class

Your topic: What is the topic, theme of the whole session? Why did you choose this?

What is your aim: What should the class be able to do, talk about, think about in English by the end of the session?

Your activities: What do you want the class to actually do? Why these activities? Why in this order?

Your materials: If you want to use anything in class that you have written yourselves, please bring it along for checking beforehand.

Can you think of any follow-up assignment for the class?

Working on a project with one or two other people can be very difficult and frustrating. However, here it went well. The students were not assigned to a group, nor were they given a topic. They formed their groups on the basis of affinities and chose their topics in agreement with each other. If they used the tutorials wisely as the place where possible difficulties were brought to light and differences of opinion sorted out, they went into class excited but confident. They could also be sure that the language they were using was correct.

Running a session gave them the opportunity to “teach”, in a very different way from what they were used to. They set the scene for their classmates, gave instructions, got the interaction going, and generally held the class together, and sometimes joined in the group work. After each student-run session the students responsible could come and talk to me about their experience.

Topics chosen ranged from Creating a new country to Adopting a child; from Disney films to Emigrating; from Dating to Intelligence; from Fairy tales to Erasing bad memories.

It should be remembered that these were not topics solely for discussion, but topics worked on by means of a wide variety of interesting activities. During these activities the class discovered whole new ranges of language and persuaded, charmed, complained, apologised, insulted, begged, explained, rejected, in English, to their heart's content.

An example of a Language Focus sheet written after a student-run session:

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS Useful language 12 December 20xx

I again made lots of notes – because you were very very productive:-) Well done everybody. You are a great class.

Pronunciation: Careful!

watt surface (n) tear (vb)

price/prize there/dare other/udder [...]

And careful with these voiced/unvoiced consonants:

**chunk**                    **junk**

**cheer**                    **jeer**

Check the syllable stress: collapse [...]

Mixed: Can you correct the following:

- \* OK, I start
- \* you are confused, or?
- \* until today they produce safe energy...
- \* Konstanz – a city by the sea
- \* so many people are eating fish
- \* a high educated person
- \* I want to give the word to the unemployed now
- \* we want that our power plants are ...
- \* it would cause that tourists are coming here
- \* there could happen something else
- \* I feel like being in a difficult situation

Lots of useful language:

All of you will **take part in** the discussion  
After a **brief** introduction ...  
There will be a **vote**  
What can we **do about** it?

It is **easier** if everyone gets a sheet (I get, you get, he/she gets)  
Who wants to be in the Government?  
There are too **many** residents, not enough Greenpeace members  
(much + uncount noun; many + count noun)  
French nuclear power plants are **practically on our doorstep**  
A good way to **earn money**  
**Invest money in** research  
He's **good at** drawing  
[...]

(Tense)

I **am afraid** my children **will get** cancer  
You **will get** compensation - **as long as** the power station **is** in operation  
There **would be** even more problems if we **did not invest** in nuclear power

EVERYBODY: What's your favourite new word or expression from this language sheet? :-)

And this week's big question:

German citizens in Baden-Württemberg recently had the chance to voice their opinion on the Stuttgart 21 project in a referendum. Do you think it would be a good idea to hold more referendums? On what issues?

## Mini-tests

To make sure that the students take the Language Focus sheets and feedback seriously it is a good idea to have one or two mini-tests for them. The first of these can be a wake-up call for those whose general conception of oral skills classes is that they talk, or rather give a talk, get a grade for it, and the job is done. The concept of interaction, feedback, practice (applying the feedback) and making progress is missing.

Below are some examples of the kind of items used in the mini-tests. Although these items will appear very cryptic to the outsider, all were taken from class work and almost all had already appeared on a Language Focus sheet, so the students could be expected to recognise them and remember the context.

Please note that these are only examples of items, and each mini-test only contained some of them.

1) Words and expressions:

When you are sure of yourself are you: self-assured? self-confident? self-conscious?

Who raises a child? Who educates a child? [...]

2) Sort the following words and expressions (a binge, a banquet, an oddball, as cool as a cucumber, drunk, obese, scruffy, skinny, slim, stubborn, tipsy, wrinkles [...]) into two bundles:

(a) words with more positive connotations:

(b) words with more negative connotations:

3) Rewrite this list in order of size, from biggest to smallest:

British Isles; city; England; forest; Great Britain; Scotland; town; United Kingdom; village; wood.

4) Can you match up the words on the left with the correct synonym on the right. (This involved lots of false friends.)

Words on the left: detest, topical, finally [...]

On the right: suitable, actual, don't mind, can't stand, at last [...]

5) Fill in the missing prepositions. If no preposition, then just write -  
I don't agree ..... you on that.

I want to say something ..... the Department of the Environment ..... that.

Statistics ..... crime.

Work should be handed in ..... Friday. [...]

6) What do you say in these situations? How do you ask?

You don't understand the words "Immersion School".

You only know the German word "Wohngemeinschaft", not the English. [...]

7) Can you put these rather rude-sounding commands into more appropriate English:

Repeat!

Continue!

Make groups!

Say something!

8) What's the English for:

Wir müssen die Natur schützen. Wir müssen die Natur um Charnwood schützen.

Ein Kind kriegen

Es muss nicht sein [...]

9) How do you say these things in real English:

(Organiser:) Heute reden wir über Werbung.



(Organiser:) Wir schreiben die schwierigen Wörter an die Tafel.  
(Class member:) Kannst du bitte zur Seite gehen. Ich sehe die Tafel nicht.  
(Class member:) Was bedeutet "with the proviso"?  
(Class member:) Wie heisst "Akte X" auf Englisch? [...]

10) What's the German for:  
Damages  
They've got lots of money  
They got lots of money [...]

11) Underline the stressed syllable e.g. disCUSS

comfortable      cafeteria      advertisement      advertising  
abbreviation      display (noun)      vegetables      mistake (noun)  
pronunciation      desert (noun) [...]

12) Put in the correct article (a/the/-):  
.....alcohol  
.....English language  
.....German culture  
.....German economy [...]

13) Which are count (C), which are uncount (UC)?  
feedback      children      furniture      poverty      homework      progress  
accommodation      brainstorming      advertisement      vocabulary [...]

14) Can you put these into the right tense:  
My friend ..... (live) in Konstanz all her life.  
When I ..... (come) to the university first, I .....  
(find) it a bit confusing.  
I would go to New Zealand if I ..... (get) the chance to  
study abroad.  
If I ..... (not be accepted) in Konstanz, I .....  
(go) to Heidelberg.

15) Collocations. Take the following verbs and match them with a suitable noun. Just write them in front of the noun.  
act out/ do/ express/ have/ make / run/ spend [...]  
a mistake  
a quiz  
a scene  
a session of class  
[...]

16) Put these together into sentences:  
I /have difficulty/find the right word in English  
I/suggest/buy a dictionary

## Getting towards the end of term

### Board games

Students can design and play board games, to be added to the class collection. This is a really enjoyable way for them to recap some of the topics covered during the term. One popular board game, easy to make, is like snakes and ladders with numbered boxes for the players to travel along. These boxes have corresponding cards, with either an obstacle or a bonus. Each group can choose their own topic, create the game and then pass it on to the other groups to play.

The ups and downs of student life suits the purpose well: “You missed the deadline for your term paper. Go back 5 squares”. A handout can help with the language.

#### Language Focus Board Games

Language to help you create the rules of the game:

Each player in turn throws the dice.

To start, you have to .....

If you land on a circled number, you have to take a card.

If you ....., you miss one turn. [...]

Language for playing the game:

Turn taking: Whose turn is it? Is it your turn? No, it's mine.

Cheating: Hey, you're cheating! You didn't .....; you forgot to ..... ; that's not fair! [...].

### Our Agenda

Towards the end of the term it can be worthwhile looking at the “agenda”, simply so that they can focus again on what we have been doing in the course. An example:

Some of the open – and the hidden – agenda

My aims are helping you to do the following:

- talk to strangers
- cooperate with strangers
- share your information and ideas
  
- talk English
  
- think about: learning in general  
                  language learning in general  
                  learning English

language teaching in general  
teaching English

using and teaching spoken English

- run a session of class i.e. set your aims; choose your topic; choose your methods and activities; decide on timing
- learn some basics of oral communication in English
- take responsibility for your own learning  
[...].

Students can talk to each other, neighbours or small groups, about this agenda, how they feel about it and what they feel they have actually learnt. It could be left at that, or you could open it up for a discussion in the whole round.

### **Feedback on the course:**

One informal way to get some feedback from the students to each other on the individual units or sessions of the class (including mine): I put on the board a list of all the topics we covered from the very beginning of the course, distribute lots of small cards and ask everyone to write a little about any of the topics they remembered well, writing the title of the topic on one side of the card, and a few words about what they remembered on the other side. These are later collected and distributed to the people who ran the session, as a kind of private and personal feedback.

For more ways to get feedback: see Oral Skills 2.

A grading problem: If English majors, especially those wishing to become teachers of English, had major problems in pronunciation they were required to attend a pronunciation course and show improvement before they were given recognition for the Oral Skills class. This was accepted as fair by the students and by colleagues, and proved effective.

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

### **Oral Skills 2**

At the upper level there are two slightly different concepts for Oral Skills. One is for the Oral Skills course called '**Discussion and Presentation**', the other is for '**Building on Fluency**'.

Both are aimed at students in more advanced semesters who have already done some kind of lower-level Oral Skills course and have preferably spent some time abroad. Both meet the needs of students of any subject, as within the given framework the topics can be chosen to suit the interests of each particular class, and the level of accuracy aimed at can of course also be adjusted. In contrast to the lower level course, the focus is more on discussion, informal and formal, and on solo presentations.

A range of language handouts are available on my website to be used by the students as learning resources. They cover what I consider to be learnable basics, fundamental to the students' progress. There are tips for preparing a talk and guidelines for structuring it; practice with getting the syllable stress correct in words which commonly occur in this kind of class e.g. CATegory; and practice with prepositions in common phrases e.g. an INTRODUCTION TO linguistics.

Below are typical course descriptions as given to the participants at the first meeting of class, and talked through in detail. The primary target group in both examples is students with English as a major or a minor. My experience has been, though, that students not studying English at all can be excellent participators in such courses, as they want to think about topics outside their own subject areas.

### **Oral Skills: Discussion and Presentation**

Despite the word presentation in the title it is made absolutely clear to the students that they will not be required to give a multi-media presentation; the focus is clearly on giving a short talk. Having the chance to give a short well-organised talk to a small, sympathetic and attentive audience, combined with help with the language and clear feedback, boosts the students' confidence, and shows them a path forward.

Target group: The primary target group is students of English as a major or a minor who have already attended a lower-level Oral Skills course and have spent some time in an English-speaking country.

Course aims and contents: The main object of this class is to give regular practice in talking in English about topics from literature, linguistics and language teaching. There will be a variety of activities but the main input will be from the participants in the form of short talks on a relevant topic.

There will be clear guidelines on how to structure a talk and deal with difficult questions, and all participants will get clear feedback and help with their English. This combination of oral proficiency practice in presentation and discussion skills with literary and linguistic topics is good training for giving longer presentations both in university seminars and in the outside world.

There will also be tutorials, where participants will get extra help with their oral skills, and guidance with preparing their talk.

Materials: All materials will be provided.  
Please see also [www.FindYourFeet.de] and print out: Word stress, Prepositions, Advanced Oral Proficiency talk; Chaired discussion, Giving a talk.

Requirements: Regular active participation, one short well-structured talk, and being chairperson when a talk is given. All participants will be expected to attend the tutorial to prepare their talk, and later to get feedback.

The talks should be:

Short (maximum of 15 minutes); interesting; followed by good questions for the listeners.

A special feature of these short talks is tuning the listeners in to the talk, before starting, and having a student chair the session.

### **Oral Skills: Building on Fluency**

This is the second main type of upper-level course, a further development of the concept, where the focus is more on dramatised narrative than on short talks.

Target group: The primary target group is students of English as a major or a minor who have already attended a lower-level Oral Skills course. Students from other Departments who have a similar level of English will also be welcomed.

Course aims and contents: The aim of this course is to give participants the help they need to progress from fluency towards more accuracy. We will be engaging in a wide variety of activities, including dramatising passages from novels and scenes from plays, and giving very short talks.

All participants will get clear feedback and help with their English, on the path towards accuracy – of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. There will also be tutorials, where participants will get extra help with their oral skills, and guidance with preparing their talk.

Materials: All materials will be provided. Please see also [www.FindYourFeet.de] and print out: Word stress, Prepositions, Advanced Oral Proficiency talk; Chaired discussion, Giving a talk.

Requirements: Regular attendance and regular active participation in all the activities.

As in all the other courses, students are encouraged at the first meeting of class to get contact details of other classmates, and to make good use of the 'Help Expressions' handout. I also handed out small cards, for their first name only, written big enough to be read across the room.

## **Shared contents for both upper-level courses, Discussion and Presentation; Building on Fluency:**

Both course concepts focus on oral input from the students. In the one case, this is in the form of short talks on topics of their own choice, in the other it is more the dramatisation of texts. In both it is necessary first to create the kind of environment where the students feel comfortable enough to contribute and interact. Thus, there is a large amount of overlap in terms of activities, topics and language, especially at the beginning.

Most of the steps described below are common to both courses, as they all further fluency and/or accuracy, as well as fostering class cohesion. Exactly which activities and topics are selected will depend on the interests and needs of each particular group of learners, and on how much time you have to budget for students preparing and then giving a talk. In any case the learners are involved quite naturally in sharing ideas and opinions, so that when it comes to giving a talk or a dramatic reading of a text they are well prepared for it, linguistically and emotionally.

### **Step by step**

#### **Starters:**

In both courses we begin with an ice-breaker. Suitable for the level and the aims is 'You look like someone who ...'. First we gather in the centre of the room, standing, with nothing to hold on to other than a pen. We talk about this situation, and how we automatically make snap judgements on people based on what we see. Then they get the sheet 'You look like someone who ...' and start off.

You look like someone who ....

Take this sheet and move around the room, talking to as many of the others as possible. You should start each interaction with the words: "You look like someone who ...". Your task is to talk briefly to everyone and see if you can find someone in this room who accurately fits each statement on the list.

So:

You look like someone who ....

likes to dance

doesn't like getting up early

is a vegetarian

prefers the writing of past centuries to contemporary writing

can keep calm in an emergency

can live with books and papers scattered all over the place

[...]

The idea and some of the items were gratefully taken from:  
Civikly, Jean & Schuetz, Janice (1994). *Participating in the Communication Process*. Dubuque: Kendal Hunt Pub. Co.

There were usually about eighteen statements on the sheet, mostly not too serious. Despite the instructions above, the students sometimes become so involved in talking to the first person that they may forget to move on; in general, they simply don't want to stop talking. After a while, however, I stop them, and we gather in the middle again and talk about any surprises they got e.g. if someone said to them "You look like (something which was totally off track)" and why that could be (appearances deceptive).

Following this I ask them to think about their two favourite hobbies or things they are passionate about, and then they get the chance to move again, trying to find out if there are any other people in the class who share these keen interests.

This activity is more than just a good ice-breaker. The students find out a lot about each other, sometimes friendships develop from this first meeting. The teacher can also learn a lot from observing or from taking part, about the different personalities and the individual strengths and weaknesses in English.

### **Language Learning:**

This is a good first topic as all the students can relate to it, and it can easily be expanded. As in the lower-level class, we consider language learning and learner types, with reference to themselves. See the unit on Language Learning in Oral Skills 1.

From the list of Language Learning statements they usually pick up on the statement "I feel I have a different personality when I speak another language" and this can lead to interesting thoughts on language and identity. The list can also be adapted to include some particularly appropriate for this level e.g. "I've been abroad as an au-pair, so I don't need to go again as a student." "My French is much better than my English, but I don't know why."

To help them understand the modest aims of our class, and assess their own learning progress we also look at oral skills on the Self-assessment Checklist at Level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in the English Language Portfolio.

"I can" checklists organized by CEFR level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) and communicative activity (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing) are used not only to evaluate learning outcomes, but to identify learning targets and monitor learning progress. In other words, self-assessment based on checklists embraces planning and monitoring as well as evaluation. It is formative in the sense that it helps to give direction to the learning process.

[<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/self-assessment-grid>].

They are encouraged to set themselves an aim, and decide how they are going to reach it. This should be talked about in class. Are their aims realistic? How can they best reach them? The students are always good at giving each other helpful ideas.

Another way to expand the topic is by giving them a brief experience of being a beginner themselves. This can be done by watching a film which teaches a language that most students are unfamiliar with. I sometimes used Unit 1 of 'Speaking our Language' (Gaelic). This is an interesting experience for them. It reminds them how difficult it can be to catch new words when you hear them first, or how the ear listens for similarities of sound to any other language you know. And with Gaelic, what a surprise it is to see how these new words are written!

It can also be a positive experience as they can see, in comparison, how far they have come with English.

Scottish Television (1993). *Speaking our Language*. Isle of Skye: Canan.

Another related direction to go in would be Culture shock. Most students have plenty to tell about their own experiences of this, and reverse culture shock too.

People do not usually realize how much their daily life is influenced by unwritten rules automatically accepted and applied within their social class, their neighbourhood, their country. They not only tend to take them for granted, but also frequently make the wrong assumption that everyone operates within the same system of cultural rules. It is not until they come into contact with another culture [...] that they realize they have problems with interpreting other people's actions and reactions [...].

Ronowicz, Eddie & Yallop, Colin (Eds.) (1999). *English: one language, different cultures*. London: Continuum, p.8.

### **Studying (English):**

Informal group discussions are important early in the term. Nobody needs to perform. Nobody is expected to be an expert. Questions which focus on their own experience of studying are ideal. In the set of questions below, which relate mainly to studying English, there is no right answer to any of the them; they function simply as encouragement for students to express their own opinions. This is a good chance for them to share quite openly their experience of studying: "You like Linguistics?!? You can't be serious!"; "I'm tired of analysing literature. I don't enjoy reading any more."

As students of English also have at least one other subject, they can compare their experience of studying these different subjects: "Sports Education is far more interesting than English. It's much more practical"; "Biology means working long hours in the lab"; "Economics gives me a different view of the world."

Before they start thinking about the questions listed below, you might like to ask them to write down, just for themselves, three things they like about Literature/Linguistics and three things they don't like.

Some questions relating mainly to studying English:



What do you like/dislike about studying Literature/Linguistics?  
Can you keep a balance between studying literature, linguistics, practical language classes?  
The value of studying literature/linguistics?  
Which topics in linguistics have been most difficult?  
Has a knowledge of linguistics made you a better language learner?

What is literature?  
What is for you the value of studying literature at university?  
Are 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century themes in English literature different from those of other centuries?  
Have you come across a book that you really loved, and wanted to buy and keep?  
What is the value of teaching literature at school?  
Which literary works have been most difficult for you so far? How did you cope with this difficulty? How many English books have you read that were written since 1990?

The value of a stay abroad?  
What were the difficulties of your stay abroad? And what were the benefits? Is there anything you wish you had known/learnt before going abroad?

What advice would you give those beginning to study English?  
What would you like to know before becoming a teacher?

Out of all that you have learned so far what do you feel will be a useful foundation for your future career?

What one thing would you change in your course of studies?  
What one thing would you change about the way English is taught in school here?

Many of these questions overlap and there is no necessity to cover them all. What direction the discussion goes in varies from group to group, and class to class. To add some spice to the open questions above some controversial opinions can be thrown in.

The value of a university education for example:

Why is academic study the best way of training the mind? What does the study of history or literature or chemistry equip you for except teaching the same subjects to future generations of students. They teach you nothing about handling people, about working in a team, about keeping within a budget, about drawing on information and techniques from different specialisms [...] In content, university education offers excellence in a limited field, incompetence in most others.

Wilby, Peter (1977, May). University Challenge. *Sunday Times Magazine*.

Some questions could be expanded into complete units, with the addition of background material. On the value of studying literature, for example, there is a scene at the beginning of the film 'Educating Rita', where Frank, the lecturer, appears to be asleep. Then, in response to a question by a student on the poet William Blake, he says: "Blake. Do you know what he is. He is a dead poet. That's all [...]" and goes on to ask an amazed class why they are sitting there, studying Blake, studying literature, instead of being outside in the sunshine, enjoying life.

Gilbert, Lewis (Dir.) (1983). *Educating Rita*.

It is important to take care, though, not to infringe on a topic area that a student has chosen for their talk. This can be quite difficult, as it takes a few weeks before the students decide on the rough topic of their talk. In contrast to a seminar, students are not given a list of topics for their talk at the beginning of semester, nor are they assigned a date for it. Some students know from the outset what topic they want to give their talk on; others need time to decide first the field and then the actual topic.

**Just a minute** moves away from informal group discussions to solo performance and involves talking spontaneously on a given topic for one minute. It is a timed activity, with a timekeeper. I used it initially for students facing an oral exam or interview in English. It is prepared by thinking about anxiety-filled formal situations, difficult questions, awkward silences, and the possible use of a couple of "smoothers" or "fillers" that are not difficult to learn. These they are encouraged to use in the following situation:

They are each given a sheet of paper with photocopies of the title covers of a variety of books from literature and linguistics taken from publishers' catalogues. Some examples: *The body in language*; *Women' Studies*; *American Gothic*; *Travel Writing*; *Analysing Casual Conversation*. They have a few moments to study these, then I choose a title, choose a student and ask a very general question. I usually pad out the question to give the students a little time to think about their answer. The only requirement is that they manage to talk for one minute. Here it is not the accuracy that is focused on, simply the courage to overcome nerves and say something relatively fluently. It sounds a bit stressful, but it was always done calmly and with good humour. The idea for this activity I found in:

Ellis, Gail & Sinclair, Barbara (1989). *Learning to learn English. A course in learner training*. Cambridge: CUP, 77-78.

This could be expanded into a discussion of silence in different cultures.

### **Various other activities:**

What is needed at this stage is a fund of ideas for activities that connect to the topics already introduced or to the students' input. This does not mean separate complete units, but activities that you can use as required, during the weeks when the students are still in the process of choosing their topic or preparing their talk at home. It could also be in conjunction with the students' talks, so that a session of class has a variety of activities. They are not fillers, but connectors.

The following are only suggestions from my own experience; the connections you make between the students' input and your own interests, ideas and experience may look quite different.

**Puzzles and quizzes** are popular. Everybody is involved, and although there may be one right answer, the path requires thinking and intelligent guessing.

**Extracts from literature:** guessing the century, period, author

A set of short extracts from literature (from books usually on the university reading list) for the students to try to guess the period when they were written and perhaps even the author, or the title. They really enjoy doing a close reading, studying the language and sifting through their knowledge of literature to find “echoes”, and make suggestions. I chose passages where the message is clear or the atmosphere dramatic. Even students with only minimal knowledge of English literature can enjoy this, as the message in some is so modern that they are stunned when they find out when the book was written. One set of extracts has passages from 1605 to 1937, taken from Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, Emily Brontë, Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Orwell, Thomas Hardy and Henry James. Examples of the extracts:

Then you are not afraid of death?' I pursued. 'Afraid? No!' he replied. 'I have neither a fear, nor a presentiment, nor a hope of death [...]. (Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*, 1847)

For it was the middle of June. The war was over, except for someone like Mrs Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin [...]. (Woolf: *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925)

To reach this place, the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of waterside people, and devoted to the traffic they may be supposed to occasion [...]. (Dickens: *Oliver Twist*, 1838)

Apart from ourselves, and our unhappy peculiarities, it is foreign to a man's nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and shall be that person's lover. There would be a much likelier chance of his doing it if he were told not to love [...]. (Hardy: *Jude the Obscure*, 1895)

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time [...]. (Shakespeare: *Macbeth*, 1605)

If students contribute their own selections you can soon build up a wide choice.

### **Biographies** of famous writers:

The task is to prepare a biography to relate to the class, revealing little by little only some clues. The listeners have to guess the identity. For example:

I was born on one side of the world, and died on the other. I am best known for my adventure stories, but I started off my adult life in a very different field [...] (Robert Louis Stevenson 1850-1894)

To continue on the topic of literature:

Which character from literature would you like to meet? What one question would you ask them?

### **Linguistics quizzes:**

Students who prefer Linguistics to Literature enjoy making up quizzes for their classmates. They relish the challenge.

### **Questioning the canon:**

The following quote from a lecture given by T. S. Eliot at the University of Glasgow in 1942 always came in useful when students were talking about standard interpretations of poems, novels or films, or even trying to impose one particular expert's interpretation:

A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author meant. [...] The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid – it may even be better [...].

Eliot, Thomas S. (1942). *The Music of Poetry*. Glasgow: Jackson, Son and Company, 15-16. Reprinted 1969, Folcroft: Folcroft Press.

In conjunction with the quote above I chose some unusual poems as they lead the students to question their ideas about poetry in general. Two of them, 'The Quark Sisters' and 'Poised to exist' are about Physics. I first discovered them in a newspaper article:

Scottish physicists who spend their lives grappling with obscure formulae have commissioned a poet and a photographer to help them shed their mad professor image and make their science accessible to the public [...].

Garivelli, Dani (1999, December 26). Poetic Justice for science's mad professors. *Scotland on Sunday*.

The poems are:

The Quark Sisters

Yes, you may date us, but let us say at once  
That we are many, some strange, others  
Displaying bags of charm. Perhaps you know  
We always go around the place in threes  
[...].

Poised to Exist

In a dressing room behind the stage  
A graviton preens itself  
Checks that its symmetry is not slipping  
Waits for the curtain call  
It is in an excited state  
[...].

Written by McDonough, Ian 2000, when he was commissioned by the Engineering and Science Research Council and Strathclyde University to produce a series of poems on particle physics.  
[<http://ppp.phys.strath.ac.uk/poems.html>].

Another unusual poem is 'Summer's Day', simple in content but challenging in language. The students were given the title only and asked about their associations, then their associations with 'your eyes'.

Summer's Day

Yir eyes ur  
eh  
a mean yir  
pirrit this wey  
[...].

Leonard, Tom (1986). Summer's Day. In: King, Charles & Smith, Ian (Eds.). *Twelve More Modern Scottish Poets*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

This could be linked to **Regional Accents** below.

**Another perspective on questioning the canon:**

The idea here is to look at two different versions of a poem, the original a ballad from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the other a re-writing from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The original well-known ballad is the romantic/romanticised story of a brave and fearless, handsome young man who rescues his loved one, on her wedding day, from a forced marriage:

Oh young Lochinvar is come out of the west,  
Through all the wide Border his steed was the best,  
And save his good broadsword he weapons had none,  
He rode all unarmed, and he rode all alone.  
So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war,  
There never was knight like the young Lochinvar  
[...].

Scott, Walter (1808), Lochinvar  
[[http://www.online-literature.com/walter\\_scott/marmion/5/](http://www.online-literature.com/walter_scott/marmion/5/)].

'Lochinvar Revisited' tells a different story:

That was not quite how it was, Scott!  
He was not as young as that, for a start,  
not as the years speed anyway,  
however much like all of us at heart.  
[...]  
Along to the ceremony, then, came Lochinvar,  
to where there milled in churchyard principals and cast;  
not as a guest or as an onlooker came  
but as a stranger ambling past;  
[...]  
In an archaic kilt and plaid he came,  
confusedly nodding on a lean old Highland mare.  
'Out of the west too obviously,' someone said.  
And another, 'or rapidly going there.'  
[...].

Maclean, Alasdair (1976). Lochinvar Revisited, in *Waking the Dead*. London: Gollancz.

It is a very funny, clever rewriting of the story, with the characters and the setting transformed, and the outcome too.

### **Good books for school:**

Students choose and present briefly a book they could imagine actually using in school, explain why, for what age group, and how they would use it.

They generally love books but tend to get bogged down in the process of learning how to analyse them rather than enjoying them. A good antidote is the documentary 'Just Read', which is about the work of Michael Rosen, the Children's Laureate, in a Welsh Primary School, "trying to start a reading revolution" i.e. reading for pleasure. It is a pleasure to watch.

BBC Four (2009, February 8). *Just Read with Michael Rosen*.

### **Some quotes on literature and literary criticism:**

I made a collection of thought-provoking comments on literature and literary criticism for discussion, some of them light-hearted, others more heavyweight:

Literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing. Criticism can never be a science: it is, in the first place, much too personal, and in the second, it is concerned with values that science ignores. The touchstone is emotion, not reason [...]. All the critical twiddle-twaddle about style and form, all this pseudo-scientific classifying and analysing of books in an imitation-botanical fashion, is mere impertinence and mostly dull jargon.

D. H. Lawrence. Quoted by Gomme, Andor (1984). Criticism and the Reading Public. In: *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, 7, From James to Eliot*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, p.422.

Nowadays, no one of sound mind and body is ever likely to read a book of literary theory [...] All this is really too bad, because people who read are constantly making judgments about books [...] Who's better: Stephen King or Thomas Pynchon? Alice Walker or Toni Morrison? A mystery "falls apart at the end." What does this mean? A certain writer's novels aren't "true to life". Should they be? [...].

Dirda, Michael (1990). How Stories Work. *The Washington Post*. (exact date unknown)

**Regional accents** is a very good topic as it is emotionally charged, and links students' personal experience of regional accents, whether in their own country or abroad, with the study of Linguistics. 'Does Accent Matter' has a chapter titled 'Are some accents better than others?' and provides a controversial answer to this question. A short extract from this chapter makes very interesting reading as it is peppered with highly subjective comments and makes ample use of expressions such as: it is often commented, tend to be, might achieve, a French academic once told me, it is rumoured that, claimed that, seemed to be.

Honey, John (1989). *Does Accent Matter*. London: Faber and Faber, 61-63.

Looking at some of the poetry and songs of Robert Burns written in the 1700s was a good way for me to link regional accents (and varieties) to topics of interest. The expression of love, parting and longing in 'A Red, Red Rose' or 'Ae fond kiss' can be compared with contemporary pop songs. What he wrote on the principles of liberty and equality in 'Is there for honest poverty' can be linked to the work of the African-American singer, poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou.

Barke, James (Ed.) (1962). *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*. London and Glasgow: Collins.

### **Chaired discussion:**

If you feel that the class needs some practice, you could add a simulation on the lines of Pop Festival, in Oral Skills 1. Better still, you could give the class the chance to create a new one.

## **Giving a talk:**

The students' own short talks do not begin until we have had time to get to know each other, and they feel comfortable in the class. To help them prepare their talk there are the materials from my website [www.FindYourFeet.de] mentioned in the course descriptions above. These we work through in class together:

Advanced Oral Proficiency – Giving a Talk: Some “rules” of the game for giving a good talk in the Advanced Oral Proficiency class. From experience I suggest the following rules for giving talks to ensure that the class is interesting for both speakers and listeners. Remember that everyone has at least one turn at being a speaker, but many turns at being a listener [...].

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF\\_cm\\_aoptalk.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_aoptalk.pdf)].

Giving a Talk: Here are some tips for giving a talk in English. There are structuring tips for organising your talk and some useful English expressions. You can use these to give a talk anywhere, both inside the university and out [...].

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF\\_ha\\_giving\\_a\\_talk.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_ha_giving_a_talk.pdf)].

Chaired Discussion: This is a list of useful expressions for use in a chaired discussion i.e. a more formal discussion with a chairperson who opens and closes this discussion and asks people to contribute – and keeps order if things get a bit heated! [...].

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF\\_ha\\_chaireddiscussion.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_ha_chaireddiscussion.pdf)].

Students are required to come to a tutorial to talk about their choice of topic, how exactly they are going to present it using the guidelines given, and what questions they would like to ask the listeners.

As one of the special features of giving a talk in this class is tuning the listeners in, the first time that a student gives a talk I chair the session, guiding the speaker, and “demonstrating” what I would like the chairperson to do.

Once the title is on the board, the chairperson asks everyone to take a moment and consider what they expect from the talk, what they would like to hear about and so on. This simply capitalises on the fact that when we see a poster on an upcoming event of any kind and read the title we automatically begin to make associations and imagine what it could be about.

The chairperson then invites everyone, one after another, to say what they expect. It does not matter at all if their expectations are not met by the actual talk. What matters is that the listeners are now tuned in, and the speaker knows they have an awake and interested audience. Any questions that are not answered during the talk can be asked after the talk.



Another special feature is that the speaker should have good questions prepared for the audience. This underlines the fact that the speaker, though knowledgeable, is not an expert on the topic, and is genuinely interested in the thoughts of the listeners.

The subject of their talks could be from the fields of literature, linguistics, language teaching, the main interest areas of students of English, or it could be from their other subject whether joint major or minor (often Sport, Economics, Science). Topics from English included: South African writing and apartheid; The language of Rap; Teaching English to young learners; Pidgins and Creoles; Censorship; Australian English; Language death; Utopias; Mexican-American writing; Politeness and the regulation of human relations. The talks were often very interesting and thought provoking, and in the course of the semester we could make connections between them, so that there was genuine learning involved.

If the course is open to students of any subject and department then it makes sense for them to offer a talk on a subject unfamiliar to the others. Here the handout 'Advanced Oral Proficiency – Giving a Talk' is particularly useful. In any case the speakers have to do some critical thinking about their topic and their listeners before they can actually give their talk.

**Feedback sheet** for individual speakers:

After their short talk each “presenter” gets a personal feedback sheet to give them a quick overview of their command of the language, with some brief notes on:

content; structure of the talk; fluency; vocabulary; grammar; pronunciation.

Here I only write a few words e.g.

content: very interesting;

structure: clear;

fluency: mostly fluent;

vocabulary: some weaknesses in the vocabulary of your topic;

grammar: tense problems;

pronunciation: sounds good except for “th”.

The rest of the sheet can be used for writing correct forms e.g.

vocabulary: It is set in India;

pronunciation: ACCess;

grammar, tense: It was written in 1925.

This sheet is talked through with the speaker outside class.

What you as the teacher put on the feedback sheet will depend on your aims. An alternative feedback sheet for students giving a talk, which I found useful in Study Skills courses:

Topic: ABCD

Structure: (well-structured or not)

Your questions for the audience: (clear and interesting or not)

Fluency: (fluent or hesitant)

Pronunciation weaknesses:

Grammar weaknesses:

Vocabulary weaknesses:

Overall impression of competence:

### **Language Focus sheet** for the whole class:

During class, no matter what the activity, I took notes on the language used, wrote these notes up after class, printed them and expected the students to work their way through them before the next class. Sometimes they did, sometimes they did not. Those who did not make the effort soon discovered that they were still making the same mistakes, and no progress.

For examples of this kind of Language focus sheet see below, though obviously much of it will only make sense to those who attended the class.

As I wanted to let the participants see that the content of their talks had a value and the topic was not finished when the talk ended, I often added thinking, reading, viewing tips.

An example Language Focus Sheet based on students' talks. This one was put together from two separate sheets, from two separate class sessions each with two separate topics, simply to give an idea of the kinds of language I picked up on.

Your Talks: Language Acquisition; Linguistic Categories; 9/11 Literature; E. A . Poe: Detective stories

#### Pronunciation:

margin, **g**estures, **g**ender / motivation, device

Careful with the final voiced consonant: \*rot / **rod**

NOTE: dare is NOT = there / \*sird is NOT = third / \*wif is NOT = with

Also, even if you think you know, check the pronunciation of the following in the dictionary:

marriage, X, neuter, auxiliary, edible, ambiguous, syringe [...]

Contrast the pronunciation of the following: man/men; crash/crush; letter/ladder, bodies/buddies; misery/mystery/mastery; **bench**/binge

Stress: pheNOMenon; ALso; aLTHOUGH; auxILIary;  
caTHOLicism; ESSence; techNIQUE [...]

See: FyF - Course materials - Oral Proficiency - Which syllable is stressed

Prepositions:

children at this age/ children of this age

against this background

an insight into language acquisition

[...]

See: FyF - Course materials - Oral Proficiency - Some prepositions that often cause problems

Useful words and expressions and constructions:

you can **borrow** the book from me

some arguments **in support of** this theory

this is only **intended as** an example (dies soll nur ...)

parents talk in a **different** way from children, I have a **different** opinion (~~another opinion~~)

~~the motivation of rewriting the myths: the reason for rewriting~~

[...]

Lisa, **could we hear from you** first? (See Chaired Discussion Handout)

I **cannot** agree with that **either**

There is not **much 9/11 literature**; there are not **many books**

E. A. Poe's style of writing **makes demands on** the reader's imagination

(Just a reminder: Novels **are** fiction, so you don't need to talk about ~~a fictional novel~~)

[...]

Grammar:

a **person who**, a thing which (parents **who** don't talk to their children)

**this** principle, **these** principles

Tense: If parents **didn't** talk to their children ...

I'll come back to this later

Aspect: It **is starting** to have an impact on Europe

[...]

(OW!!) ~~I do have a question~~ - I have a question

Modals: must (logical necessity)

These things **must be** closely connected = Given the evidence, there can be no other conclusion

Adjective/adverb

children can acquire two languages equally **easily**, equally **quickly**, equally **well**

...I think **it was explained well** [...]

Article:

(countability)

Count nouns: a book, books;

Uncount nouns: literature; information; data

[...]

(reference)

generic reference:

∅ birds, women, fish, parents, children, modern detective stories

∅ Catholicism

∅ American Literature

specific reference:

the mind

the Western World

[...]

Some corrections needed:

Some language which you can easily correct if you consult the Handouts for this course. Learning to use the appropriate ways of expressing your opinions, agreement and disagreement will make it easier for you all to put your message across and get the class involved.

\*\* the book concerns about

\*\* to say it short

\*\* to another thing I said you

\*\* very fine

[...]

Mmm, pretty awful, therefore in small print (They were just bad moments ...) When you have corrected them, put multiple lines through them so that you can't see them anymore. OK?

\*\* What invented E A Poe?

\*\* Who the second talk chairs?

\*\* How does X literature differs from Y literature?

[...]

Can you translate these: (these are back translations from their English)

Als ich Kind war, habe ich viel gelesen (literally: when I child was, have I much read)

Ich weiss nicht, wo es in Deutschland spielt (literally: I know not, where it in Germany plays)

Seiner Meinung nach, waren das keine Helden (literally: in his opinion, were that no heroes)

Ich habe euch ein Buch vorgestellt (literally: I have you a book presented)

[...]

Advice: Make use of all the correct language you have been given, on all the handouts. Get the basics right, the rest will follow on. And remember "zurückrufen" ... \*\*

\*\*[This is a German word I always have difficulty pronouncing because of u-ü-u, and freely admitted it when we were talking about their pronunciation difficulties. We could all laugh together.]

Thinking / Reading / Viewing tips:

Given what we think we know about language acquisition, what consequences does this have for the integration of incomers to our society?

You might like the following, in the library:

Rachel Scott: A Wedding Man is nicer than Cats, Miss. (1971) [...]

What can fiction do that non-fiction can't?

Reading tips on bomb attacks: Maggie O'Farrell: After You'd gone (2000); Hari Kunzra: My Revolutions (2007); Peter Dorward: Nightingale (2007); Ian Rankin: The Naming of the Dead (2006) [...].

Some information on the contents of FyF handouts referred to above:

1) Which syllable is stressed:

Word Stress: This handout is to help you with the pronunciation of some words which crop up frequently when you are talking about Literature and Linguistics. The words here were collected in the Advanced Oral Proficiency Class which focuses on topics from Literature and Linguistics; they are frequently mispronounced. The focus of this handout is not on individual sounds but on where the stress goes within a word. Example: The word "contents" has two syllables "con" and "tents" so which gets the stress? This handout has three parts: (1) Test yourself (2) The right answers (3) Some tips [...].

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF\\_cm\\_wordstress.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_wordstress.pdf)].

2) Some prepositions that often cause problems:

Prepositions: This handout is about prepositions that often go wrong, both in students' speaking and writing. The phrases and sentences here were collected in the Advanced Oral Proficiency Class, which focuses on topics from Literature and Linguistics. There are three parts: (1) Gap-filling task (2) The right preposition (3) One or two tips. You can use Part (1) to test yourself then look at Part (2) for the right answers. [...].

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF\\_cm\\_prepositions.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_prepositions.pdf)].

### **Dramatic activities:**

Here I see two different kinds of activity, or two ways of dramatising. One is to actually act out some scene, the other is what I focussed on in my course, namely a kind of dramatised reading of a text. For many students the latter is an absolute delight. They discover the power of the voice, and take pleasure in developing their own. I had the distinct impression that they were totally involved in this activity and could practise and practise and practise.

What kind of texts are suitable? It depends on the students' interests, so it is important to have a selection of texts on hand to choose from for working together in class. Here are only a few suggestions.

If there are students who really want to do Shakespeare, i.e. stay within the canon of literature, a scene from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet', with its teenage lovers, is a good option. Whatever passage is chosen can be watched in a contemporary film version, e.g. the Baz Luhrmann production (1996) where the setting is contemporary, but the language of Shakespeare remains.

Luhrmann, Baz (Dir.) (1996). *Romeo + Juliet*.

To make the link between Shakespeare and the focus of this class, namely building fluency in contemporary English, a good choice would be reading a scene from the original play 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and watching a part of the very interesting BBC film production (2005). This was one of four television adaptations of Shakespeare plays under the umbrella title ShakespeaRe-told, each adapted by a different writer. The themes of the originals are relocated to the present and the language is contemporary.

In Act I, Scene I of the original, Hermia's father, Egeus, complains to the Duke of Athens, Theseus, about his daughter's refusal to marry his choice, Demetrius, and wants to force her: "I beg the ancient privilege of Athens; As she is mine, I may dispose of her."

In the film, 20<sup>th</sup> century Hermia comes to her father, Theo, to try to communicate to him her uncertainty about marrying James (Demetrius), but with no success. Theo is distracted. "Dad, are you even listening?", Hermia says. The father-daughter relationship here is loving, but as far as the marriage is concerned, Theo remains adamant. This breakdown in communication is very carefully and humorously worked out throughout the whole film, with the father simply unwilling to listen. Together, you could transcribe the one brief dialogue and then practice it (05:03 - 06:41).

BBC, Fraiman, Ed (Dir.) (2005). *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The monologue from the play 'Amadeus', where the composer Salieri addresses God at the end of Act 1, is good dramatic reading, and once again can be viewed in the film adaptation of the play.

*Capisco!* I know my fate. Now for the first time I feel my emptiness as Adam felt his nakedness ...[*Slowly he rises to his feet.*] Tonight at an inn somewhere in this city stands a giggling child who can put

on paper, without actually setting down his billiard cue, casual notes which turn my most considered ones into lifeless scratches. [...] *Grazie tante!* You put into me perception of the Incomparable - which most men never know! - then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre [...].

Shaffer, Peter (1981). *Amadeus: a play*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 55-57.

Forman, Milos (Dir.) (1984). *Amadeus*.

To remain within the classics of literature, the Brontë sisters are a good source of dramatic text, 'Jane Eyre', or 'Wuthering Heights' for example. In the former, Chapter XII, there is an impassioned monologue on restrictions placed in particular on women.

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. [...] It is thoughtless to condemn them (women), or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

Brontë, Charlotte (1979). *Jane Eyre*. London: Heron Books, 129-130. First published 1846.

However, I preferred to steer the students towards contemporary prose fiction. The short story 'Green Man', for example, is the beautifully imagined encounter between a young woman and a very strange stranger. The dialogue is thought provoking and funny.

“Sarah,” he said.  
[...]  
“How did you know I was Sarah?”  
“When I realised you were on your way.”  
[...]  
“Who? How ...? What are you doing here?”  
“I am meeting you. It's a great pleasure,” he said with maddening formality.  
“But you weren't expecting me?”  
“Not in so many words, no.”  
[...]  
“Who are you?” she asked at last, and was annoyed to hear her voice sounded frail and squeaky.  
“Not yet,” he said. “I hope so, by the end of my journey.”  
[...].

Elphinstone, Margaret (1991). *An Apple from a Tree and Other Visions*. London: Women's Press, 3-72.

Students are also asked to choose a short extract from contemporary writing to practice reading aloud at home and then “present” to the rest of the class. Here they are free to follow their own interests. One very impressive choice was an extract from a speech made by a politician, George Galloway, to the US Senate on 17 May 2005. In it he defended himself brilliantly against accusations that he had profited from Iraqi oil.

Senator, I am not now, nor have I ever been, an oil trader, and neither has anyone on my behalf. I have never seen a barrel of oil, owned one, bought one, sold one - and neither has anyone on my behalf. [...] I am here today, but last week you already found me guilty. You traduced my name around the world without ever having asked me a single question, without ever having contacted me, without ever having written to me or telephoned me, without any attempt to contact me whatsoever. And you call that justice. [...].

Torrance, David (Ed.) (2012). *Great Scottish Speeches*. Edinburgh: Luath Press, 193-196.

This book has excellent speeches on a wide range of topics from many different situations and across time. If the students find a speech that interests them, where they can identify with the speaker, they enjoy practising and finally “performing” it.

For work together in class, however, I found, to my surprise at first, that it was stories for young children which really caught their imagination. This was true of male students and female, German and non-German. Perhaps partly because they are written to be read aloud to children who cannot yet read alone, and function thus as motivators for the child to learn to read themselves. So, a short children's story to be read and dramatised, and finally “performed” for another class at the end of term was the real hit! For winter terms I chose from my store of children's books 'The Cobweb Christmas'. It is a beautifully told story, set in Germany, about an old woman preparing for Christmas. It is ideal for the purpose, with narrative and dialogue, full of repetitions, and dramatic vocabulary.

Once upon a Christmas time, long ago in in Germany, there lived a little old woman. She was so little she had to climb upon a step stool to reach her feather bed and so old she couldn't even count all the Christmases she'd seen. The children in her village called her Tante, which means 'Auntie' in German [...]

Climo, Shirley (2001). *The Cobweb Christmas*. HarperCollins.

If possible, the story should be cut up into short passages, one per week. Each week the students are then given a new passage, which I would read aloud once or twice, and then the students gradually joined in, so that we were finally reading together. This listening first is really important for the students, not just to find out how to pronounce new words, but even more in order to get the rhythm of the language, especially with regard to weak forms and intonation patterns. They then sit in pairs and take turns reading the new



passage aloud. They have to practice outside of class too, and in the following week we read aloud together the story so far before starting work on the next passage. From listening carefully to each student reading aloud I was able to give them a clear indication of any weaknesses and help them improve. Students with definite persistent pronunciation weaknesses were invited to a pronunciation workshop. See below.

This kind of dramatic reading is an excellent way of helping students acquire correct English, and tackle deeply ingrained errors. It is also particularly interesting if the class includes students of English on exchange programmes from other countries with a different mother tongue, as it raises awareness of the characteristics of each language. Italians for example will have a problem with “old/hold”; speakers of Spanish will turn “special” into “especial”.

### **Pronunciation workshops:**

I held some relaxed one-hour workshops with small groups of students who had clear pronunciation problems, the kind of problems that can cause communication breakdown in interaction with people who do not share their mother tongue, and the kind of problems that should not be passed on by teachers to future generations of English learners in school. We first looked at their ability to hear phonemic differences (wine/vine; live/leave; back/bag; think/sink; puck/pack; old/hold etc.) then made sure that everyone was able to pronounce them correctly, and practised this with a home-made fairy tale text with lots of challenges. They were given some tips on how they could work on their problems independently, but also encouraged to attend a pronunciation class.

Our own fairy tale :-)

Once upon a time there was a very beautiful princess, Thelma Louise, who lived with her father in a very rich castle.

One day, however, Thelma's father remarried and her step-mother, who was rather jealous, forced Thelma to leave the castle and go and live in a little house in the depth of the forest. Thelma was of course very upset, but as she was allowed to take her three cats with her, she left, just as she was bid. Thelma took one more thing with her, unknown to her step-mother, a beautiful string of beads her mother had given her on her death bed.

When she at long last reached the little house, Thelma discovered that it was very special: it had thick, thick walls that kept out the cold, so that even when Thelma fell sick, she did not have to seek a doctor [...].

**A special feature** of any class in the winter term was reading aloud some verses from the Bible: The Gospel according to St. Luke, Chapter 2, 9-12.

9 And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this *shall* be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

*The Holy Bible. Authorised King James Version (1953). William Collins Sons and Company Limited: Glasgow, 55-56. First published 1611.*

I collected versions in many languages represented in my classes, and found that students were eager to read aloud in another language they were studying, or in their own mother tongue. How wonderful for them to be the experts and absolutely right!

### **Feedback on the course**

To evaluate the class from their point of view the students had two different opportunities. One was writing a poem, and the other was completing an evaluation and feedback sheet.

**The evaluation sheets** were short, uncomplicated, and gave the students the chance to offer their own ideas. Some of the questions are below; scales were provided from 'really interesting' to 'dead boring', or 'a lot' to 'very little', or 'Yes', 'Partially', 'No'. The questions have to be chosen to suit the particular class, and to suit your interests as the teacher: what would be helpful for you to know?

Example questions:

How would you rate this course from really interesting to dead boring?

How much do you feel you learnt?

Be honest! How much effort did you put into this course?

How motivated do you feel to go on learning English?

Given the aims of this course (Please read the course description carefully!): Do you think we/you reached them?

What would you definitely have liked more/less of?

Any other comments on this course?

Would you recommend this course to other students?

If you could give first year students of English some advice, what would it be?

### **Students' poems:**

At the end of term, apart from the evaluation sheet for them to fill in, students were happy to get the chance to write a poem of their own, quickly and spontaneously, to sum up their experience of the class in a light-hearted way.

These were shared in class, and later I wrote them all up for the class to look back on. (Sometimes students also handed in poems later, poems which they had written with a great deal of thought and sincerity. They remained private.) Although these poems will make little sense to anyone not in the class, here are one or two, just to enjoy. The grammar mistakes\* in the second poem were made on purpose, and referred to something happening in the university at that time.

We have travelled for a long time  
through fields of Imagination and Regeneration  
have learned 'bout Coetzee and Female Crime,  
Frankenstein, Pidgin and Creole – How fine!!  
We have visited the Elizabethans in their theatre place  
have stopped and looked in the Victorians' face  
have chatted with Edgar Allan Poe  
until the chairperson stopped the show.  
We discussed literature and linguistics  
argued enthusiastically about New Critics.  
The story of the poor Africans made us cry  
so it's time to say good bye!

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Today I'd like to talk about ...,  
Detectives, language, Harlem crowds.  
We had to collect correction papers  
They lie on my desktop like huge skyscrapers.  
\*We still speakn't English very good  
But then we look at Find Your Foot – s  
Since Collins Cobuild was a necessary need  
We actually know it's "Find Your Feet".

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Being here in Oral Skills has given us a shock  
Which is why right now we're suffering from writer's block.  
Making up a poem is like climbing up a tree  
Weaving lines like webs, if only spiders we could be!

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We developed fluency,  
read our stories - come and see!  
In autumn, winter, end of cold,  
speaking fluently is our gold.  
Proper grammar in simple books  
Have a talk - see how it looks!  
After all, our favourites are:  
Tante, Lion and Dinosaur.  
We don't need to drink a jar!  
We like talking more and more.  
We found out that speaking is art,  
Thank you, ..., for touching our heart.

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