FyF

Course Concepts Study Skills

All the Course Concepts 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 doings things themselves. 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 the specifics for Study Skills.

In Germany, as in many other non-English speaking countries, a number of lectures and seminars, even complete courses of study, are now held in English. Students are expected to understand the input from the lecturers, take part in discussions and present papers in English, read books and journals and write term papers in English too. That is a tall order, especially for those at the start of their university career.

Thirty years ago the challenges were less. But even then I could observe the difficulties students had when faced with English, and catered for these specific needs when teaching ESP courses. First-year Psychologists, for instance, were required to read a complete textbook in English. For them I took a relevant textbook and used an approach to it which they could apply to all further reading. Early-semester Scientists were expected to understand occasional lectures in English and give short talks. Here I put the focus on watching very short documentaries and using them as a basis for giving a talk.

The course concept offered here for Study Skills is a kind of compendium of the English-language skills generally required by students, regardless of their subject of study. Although everyone now has far more opportunities to listen to authentic English for example and to converse with native speakers than when I first taught this kind of course, the classroom remains the place where the students can get guidance and clear feedback, and most important, they can find out how to improve. The overall approach is: help the students tune in to whatever topic, and encourage them to cooperate and to make connections, between words, ideas, people.

Please note that although some of the publications cited below may be old, I wish to acknowledge them as I believe the writers got the essentials right. In the same way, please note that the texts and films used below are intended only as examples of what can be done, and how it can be done.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Study Skills

Below is a typical course description, written in the form generally required by the university: Target group, Course aims and contents, Course requirements. This is handed out to the students at the first meeting of class and discussed.

Please note that the target group given here 'students of English', means major or minor, and that all of them have a second and/or third subject. This course can be taught with any students and can also be slightly adapted to meet the needs of those preparing for a stay abroad.

> Target Group: All students of English who feel that there is a big gap between the competence they acquired at school and the competence expected at university.
>
> Course Aims: The aim of this course is to give students help with the skills required to study in an English language environment. These include dealing with massive amounts of new vocabulary, using reference books, reading and listening effectively, writing a short coherent text, and giving a short talk.
> Although the Study Skills course has clear aims, we are still free to be flexible. Once the course starts I will take into account what I find out about your needs and you will have the chance to say if there is something you think is missing or you would like to spend more time on.
>
> Materials: Participants will be expected to bring with them to class an advanced level English learners dictionary, preferably the Collins Cobuild. Many of the materials required are available on my website [www.FindYourFeet.de]. For example:
> Writer-Reader handout (which gives information on how I mark your work), Giving a talk, CV, Formal letters, Writing a term paper. Further details at the first meeting of class.
>
> Requirements: To gain credits for the course students are required to participate regularly, complete assignments regularly, and hand in written work again at the end of term as a little portfolio.

Some comments on the course description:

1) Dictionary: The reason for recommending a particular dictionary is that it proved to be an excellent tool for learners. In fact, for many years while the degree exams for students majoring in English included an essay and a translation from German into English, this is the dictionary which was specified for use. It made sense overall to encourage students from the very start to learn how to use it effectively. There were copies in the library, but having their own for long-term use was the better option.

2) Encouraging students to talk to the people around them from the very start is an integral part of the course. In this case I ask them to get contact details from some people round about them, so that they can make contact if they are off sick, or want to get together outside of class. I also give them a card to write their first name on, large enough to be read across the room. In every class I had a card with my name on it, first name on one side, second name on the other. They could use whichever they felt comfortable with.

We also talk through the handout with 'Help Expressions', as it is essential for communication in the class.

> Help!
> Some useful expressions for you in class - when things aren't going so well.
> (zzzzzzzz) Sorry, I haven't quite wakened up yet.
> 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?
> I get the meaning of the words, but I still don't get the meaning of the whole sentence/text.
> I understand your question, but I don't see the point of it? What has it got to do with the topic?
> I'm afraid I still don't follow the argument. Could you perhaps go over it again?
> What does "post-modernism" mean? Could you explain it (again) please.
>
> Wait a minute. I can't find the words.
> How do you say "Kehlkopfverschlusslaut" in English?
> What's the English for "Kehlkopfverschlusslaut"?
>
> Could you wait a minute / slow down a bit? I think we're going too fast. Could we take another look at …?
>
> NB: There is one really important, very useful word in here. It occurs 6 times and has 5 letters. What is it?

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_helpexpressions.pdf].

Course contents

The following are things I aimed to at least touch on during the course:
Thinking about being a student and a language learner; oral skills for group communication, holding a chaired discussion and giving a short talk; macro and micro reading skills; dictionary and vocabulary acquisition skills; macro and micro listening skills; CV and term paper writing skills.

How much of each is done depends on the composition of the class and their strengths or weaknesses. None of them can be done in the depth and detail possible in courses such as Writing, Oral or Listening Skills.

Step by step through the course

So that the class is as stress-free as possible for each individual, we start with getting to know each other and exchanging ideas in the relative comfort of small groups, and only later have a formal chaired discussion and short talks. We also move from the so-called "receptive" reading skills i.e. understanding written texts, to the written production of their own CV. It makes sense to progress in roughly the following order:

Oral skills for group communication
Reflecting on studying, and learning English

Reading skills (macro)
Reading skills (micro): Dictionary and vocabulary acquisition skills

Writing skills CV

Listening skills (macro)
Listening skills (micro)

Oral skills chaired discussion
Oral skills short talks

Oral skills for group communication:

There are two units here, 'Shipwrecked' and 'Flat Sharing', both centring on surviving in difficult situations where oral communication plays a vital part. They function as effective ice-breakers, automatically leading to student-student oral communication, and promote class cohesion. The language focus is similar in both.
These units are linked, overlap, and can be further expanded if the time is available. For more ideas, please see Course Concept Oral Skills.

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, and adapted and extended for the purposes of this 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 to be found there. It also indicates what they can expect to find in each direction.
Jones, Ken (1984). *Nine Graded Simulations*. Munich: Hueber.

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.
The students get into groups of five 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 groan is heard "We're dead!!!" The group are allowed to be resurrected, provided that they first discuss their decisions and their decision-making process.

I added language work, 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 need in any class where informal interaction is the norm. 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. 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.)
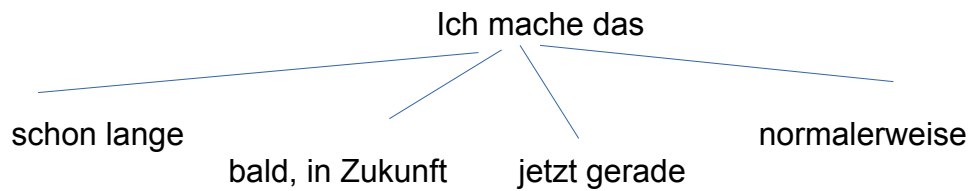
Expressing needs:
(on a scale of urgency)
e.g. We desperately need water
….. ….

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

<div align="center">

Ich mache das

schon lange   bald, in Zukunft   jetzt gerade   normalerweise

</div>

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 who are strangers. The language focus is the same, with the addition of flat-sharing vocabulary and the expression of likes, dislikes, habits and compromises.

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 students 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 it 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 (a clock 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 7 of us, and only 5 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 5 Personen (literally: in my living community are we five persons)
> Mein Zimmer teile* ich nicht! (literally: my room share I not)
> 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*, 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. I chose it deliberately as an example here, to show how useful non-contemporary texts can be.
Clarke, Jean (1978, December). Are they ready to leave home. *Good Housekeeping*.
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.

These two units should not be seen as a childish waste of time before the class gets down to business. In fact, I found them indispensable. They help to create the kind of atmosphere and environment in which students are ready and willing to cooperate and contribute. They also provide a lot of useful language.

Reflecting on studying, and learning English:

This section involves engaging the class first with neighbours or in small groups, then in the round, in reflecting on their own attitudes, beliefs and habits with regard to studying and to learning English. There is a lot to discuss, and no single right answer.

Studying, study habits. Depending on your students you might like to approach the topic by means of a self-assessment questionnaire. The idea for this came originally from Wallace (1980), Unit 1 'Organising your studies'. It is subdivided into: College work, Private study, General way of life. There is also a separate part which considers the special difficulties foreign students may have studying in Britain.

Now, at the beginning of your studies in Britain, is a good time to look at your life-style as a student, and ask yourself if it is helping you to succeed, or not.

Wallace, Michael (1980). *Study Skills in English*. Cambridge: CUP, 3-8.

The questions are concrete and still totally relevant, which means they are a good basis for making your own questionnaire:
Do you have any kind of cataloguing system for keeping track of the books you read? In general, do you find the subjects you are doing interesting and stimulating? Is your private place of study properly heated and lit? Do you know how many hours a week you spend in classes; on private study; on recreation? Do you miss classes sometimes? Do you contribute to tutorial discussions?
The questions can be answered by each student individually, in private, simply as a way of tuning in to the topic.

You could also decide to start with a more general question, without any preliminaries:
What is a good student? "A good student is someone who …."
It is interesting to collect all the ideas and then decide if some are more essential than the others, or if, after thought, some can be relegated or rejected. Someone may also question the word "good", which could lead to the idea of being an effective learner, and thus introduce the idea of acquiring skills which are effective.
You might like to offer the following for thought, if they have not already been suggested:
… can work independently
… can cooperate
… is flexible in their thinking
… can assess their own work
… can use the library
… can work systematically
… is aware of their limitations
But what do these things really mean? And what obstacles have to be surmounted to become an effective learner? How can you personally become one?

Learner types

Reflecting on themselves as learners in general and as learners of English.
What type of learner are you?

The short article below (Black 2000) is from a series addressed to school-leavers, and introduces some interesting ideas on learner types. Most importantly the tone is friendly and appeals to young people, so students are more likely to be interested in the message and acting on it.
It introduces the idea of Audio learners, Visual learners and Kinesthetic learners and offers tips on "Ways to increase your learning power" for each different type. I ask the students if they can identify with any of these learner types, and if there are any tips they would like to use.

> […] 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.

Language learning. To focus more particularly on language learning, there is a set of statements on language learning for the students to share opinions on. This is part of a whole unit on the topic of language learning from Course Concepts Oral Skills.
The statements are ones I had either heard or read, but were not necessarily my opinion.

> You never know two languages equally well.
> In the language class I don't want to talk about me - I want to talk about important things.
> It's my teacher's fault if I don't learn.
> I can't learn anything by talking English to other Germans.
> I hate performing in class!
> I can't learn anything if my teacher doesn't correct me all the time.
> I can learn better on my own, outside of class.

Statements of this kind are really very useful as they raise awareness of oneself as a learner, and awareness of the characteristics of the learning situation one is in. As there may be a mismatch between students' perceived needs and what the class provides, this can be a good opportunity to do some explaining.

Reading skills:

First, some self-awareness questions. Why more self-awareness questions, you might ask. I would just like to say that they are a good way of tuning in to the topic; no one is being tested; there is no right answer; students become completely familiar with the idea of reflecting, and linking this to talking to their neighbours, and listening to them.

What do you read in German/your mother tongue?
What do you read in English?
Here it will become clear that the variety of text type is usually much bigger in their mother tongue. It might be possible by means of the questions: Why do you read these things, and How do you read them, to begin to make the students aware that they perhaps use different strategies for different purposes.

Scanning and skimming I used to introduce by asking the students about reading the extensive menu of the university canteen, displayed on a screen and covering the whole week. Today is Friday, how will you read the menu?

Are you going to start at the top, Monday, and read your way through? Of course not, they laugh. They may not know the word 'scan' but they will usually say look for Friday first, and go from there. Skimming would give them an idea of all the good things offered that week:).

Or what about looking up a word in the dictionary? Here they can take out their dictionaries and look up a particular word. I suggested scanning from bottom up, with a finger in the middle of the page.

Although some students may already be familiar with the ideas of scanning for specific information and skimming for gist, in my experience most do not use them as forerunners to reading for detail when dealing with a long text. They do not seem to have an effective way of tackling a long text in their mother tongue either.

Macro-skills, step-by-step for dealing with a long text, non-fiction.

How do you read long texts or non-fiction books in English?
Do you …
1) Start at the beginning, then read word by word to the end?
2) Find that your mind starts wandering?
3) Start highlighting and find you've pretty much highlighted everything?
[…]

The idea came originally from
Whitney, Norman & Davis, Evelyn (1985). *Study Skills for Reading*.
I added questions from my own teaching experience, number three for example. These usually led to laughter, as the students recognised their own behaviour. And realised that they have to change it if they want to have an effective way of dealing with long texts, in whatever language.

So: Are you a good reader? What is a good reader?
"A good reader is someone who ...".
Depending on what they offer, you might like to add the following suggestions for consideration:
… knows how to survey a text first
… knows why they are reading
… reads for that purpose.

Carman (1972) deals with the question of strategies for reading longer texts, and makes it clear how important it is to understand your own purpose for reading. This text may be dated (who writes letters nowadays, you might ask) but it hits the nail on the head, with humour. My italics.

> For instance, when a guy receives a letter from his girl, he's going to read that letter a lot differently than he would a chapter from a Chemistry book. For one thing, he's more interested in the content of the letter, right? He can relate to that letter much better than to a chapter on molecular theory […]. There is often a need to create a purpose for reading that is meaningful to you. When a teacher says, "Read Chapters Five and Six by Friday and be ready for a

quiz," the assignment itself is no purpose. *Sure, your purpose for reading will be to pass the quiz and the course, but you also need a purpose that is meaningful to you* - just like the guy with the love letter.

Carman, Robert & Royce Adams, W. (1972). *Study Skills: A student's guide for survival*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. p. 56.

So, what happens when your assignment is to read a whole textbook? How will you go about it?
We didn't just talk about this, we actually tried out a strategy.

I chose a large, heavy, slightly intimidating textbook, typical of the kind of book they might be expected to read, and brought one copy to class. In the university library there were multiple copies of many textbooks of this kind. For those beginning a course of studies at university any English textbook, no matter what the field, is a challenge. My choice was from Politics: 'The Logic of International Relations', thinking this field would not be too alien in terms of concepts and language.
Jones, Walter (1985, 5th edition). *The Logic of International Relations*. Boston: Little, Brown.
Your choice could be something quite different, and of course up-to-date.

In this unit the students realise that they can learn to use their knowledge of the world and apply some effective reading strategies to get an overview of a textbook, whatever the subject.

The handout below guided our approach to the book, and was given to the students later.

Reading lengthy texts

Some things to keep in mind before reading:

Ask yourself:

1) Why am I reading this text? What do I want to get out of it? What do I expect from it?

2) What information can I gain about the text from: the layout; illustrations; print type?

3) What questions can I formulate before actually reading the text, on the basis of:
my reasons for reading
information from the layout etc.

4) What strategies can I use to try to answer these questions before I do any thorough reading?

First the students are asked to think about what ideas and words they might find in a book with the title 'The Logic of International Relations'. You can give the publication date and place.

We then look at the table of contents, which is clearly structured and typical of English-language reader-friendly textbooks. This is one of the advantages of a textbook in English, and worth emphasising.

There are four parts:

The Logic of National Perceptions; The Logic of Power; The Logic of International Trade and Exchange; The Logic of World Order.

These four parts are subdivided into seventeen titled chapters, which are themselves also clearly subdivided.

For work in class I made a copy of the table of contents, then blanked out thirteen of the headings in the table, and provided the students with one copy of this each.

An example from the table of contents:

[...]
IV The Logic of World Order
Chapter 17 The Future World Order
1. Ecology
2. Science and Technology
3. Population
4. Food
5. _____
6. Autocratic Government
7. World Economics
[…]

First the students read the table of contents with blanks, trying to get a grasp of the whole text. It is a good idea to talk about using highlighting pens, as sometimes students end up highlighting just about everything, which is not very helpful. Would it make sense here to highlight the titles of the four parts?

Then they are given the missing headings from the whole table of contents in a separate list. Their task is to consider where the missing words would fit.

Canada; Chemical and Biological Warfare; Evaluation of United Nations Performance; Foreign Economic Assistance; Instinctual Aggression; Mineral Resources; Polarity and Stability: A Debate; Strategic Decisions Under Conditions of Risk; The Century of Humiliation: The Meeting with the West; The Sanctions of International Law; The State Withers Away; The World Debt Crisis; Values, Beliefs, and Cognitions

To get an idea of the thought processes involved you might like to try to figure out which of the headings listed above would fit in as point five.

They now have an overview of the contents. Are there any concepts or words which they expected to find?
I then ask them if they had to choose a chapter or section to read, which would it be. One common choice was 'Instinctual Aggression', so I have taken it here as an example to work on. What do they expect to find there? What words, ideas?

Instead of providing the several pages on 'Instinctual Aggression', I give the students a typed list of the opening lines of each paragraph to read, with a clear reminder of the structure of the part in which it is embedded. This corresponds to how they are encouraged to read when they have the complete text.

> The Logic of International Relations
>
> II The Logic of Power
>   11 Principal Causes of War
>   10. Instinctual Aggression pp 421-428

> 10. Instinctual Aggression
>
> One of the most popular theories of war among laymen is the idea of an instinct of aggression […].
>
> It is quite evident that people enjoy violence; otherwise television and the movies would not be so full of it […].
>
> On the other side, several theorists view aggression as a dominant impulse triggered by political disputes that provide the necessary rationalization for violence […].
>
> Systematic studies distinguish between realistic and nonrealistic conflicts […].
>
> No final answer to this question has emerged from conflict research, but it is a reliable maxim that the aggressive urge is important only insofar as it is translated into ideology […].
>
> If an aggressive instinct is the cause of war, what is the cure? […].
>
> There is now a substantial research literature on the nature and function of the aggressive urge and its relation to political violence […].
>
> This question leads him to his key finding: that a second, previously unknown factor exists alongside the aggressive urge […].
>
> Lorenz extends this theory to an explanation of human aggression […].

If aggression, in fact, does underlie violent political ideologies, political controls against the outbreak of wars will be difficult to institute […].

Unfortunately, these colorful suggestions overlook the subtle process by which aggressive drives are translated into depersonalized ideologies […].

Cultural Differences and Aggression

Are some countries and cultures more aggressive than others? […].

Nineteen hundred years ago Tacitus gave this classic account of the German propensity to war [...].

But is there a scientific basis for the opinion that different cultures have varying propensities to political violence? […].

War-Peace Cycles

Another strand of aggression research is the search for cycles of violent behavior […].

Early quantitative research into this matter varied in its conclusions, with some researchers rejecting the cycle theory, some demurring from it by finding certain trends, and others accepting it [...].

With these exceptions, most researchers have not found a uniform pattern in the temporal spacing of wars […].

Task: Using only the opening lines of each paragraph, they are asked to choose which complete paragraph they would like to read.
This they do individually outside class, using the books in the library, and then report back on it.

Finally, as a reminder of the path we have taken, a handout with strategies:

Reading lengthy texts

Some things to keep in mind before reading:

Ask yourself:

1) Why am I reading this text? What do I want to get out of it? What do I expect from it?

2) What information can I gain about the text from: the layout; illustrations; print type?

3) What questions can I formulate before actually reading the text, on the basis of:
my reasons for reading
information from the layout etc.

4) What strategies can I use to try to answer these questions before I do any thorough reading?

TITLE?

Title comprehensible :-)   Title incomprehensible :-(

Look first at illustrations, text in bold type, all visual information from the layout

What do I know about the topic already?
Collect headings

What could be new and interesting in the text?
Formulate your own questions

Scan the text for specific information

Start on the text
e.g. table of contents; chapter headings; abstracts; conclusions

Skim first and last paragraphs of chapters

Skim the first line of each paragraph for answers to your questions

First overview

If more information required, read the whole text

By the end of this unit, the students have a set of strategies and procedures for working their way through a complete textbook in English. What is more, they have tried it out themselves.

Depending on students' interests this can be a good time to discuss the differences between reading long texts in print, or on the screen. Where, for example, is it easier to get an overview?

Micro reading skills

This section begins with a question: What do you do when you are reading English and come up against a new word?

It continues with:
Guessing meaning from co-text and context
Using the Cobuild Dictionary
Strategies for learning vocabulary for the long-term

First we look at words out of context. I put a list of about ten words on the board, such as salvage, pounced, egret, pelt, flush, lure, and ask them simply to say how many they know. Most know between none and three. Are these really English, they sometimes wonder.
We take a look at German, and think about clues as to part of speech as in 'macht' (3rd person singular verb), 'Macht' (noun) and 'machte' (3rd person singular verb past tense). The students are then asked to make guesses about the part of speech of the words on the board. I enter everything they offer with a question mark beside it. 'Egret', for example is usually seen as a verb or a noun, by analogy with 'regret'.

Next we look at these words in context, e.g.

> In spite of the fact that the beautiful egret is in danger of dying out completely, many clothing manufacturers still offer handsome prices for the long, elegant tail feathers, which are used as decorations on ladies' hats.

The idea was gratefully taken and adapted from:
Baudoin, E. Margaret, Silberstein, Sandra et al. (1977). *Reader's Choice. A Reading Skills Textbook for Students of English as a Second Language*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 5.

In this way they can see that using their knowledge of the world, plus their knowledge of English sentence structure, word order, grammar, and basic vocabulary, they can guess what the word means, perhaps not exactly, but more or less, which is enough for our purposes.

The next step is working through the '**Vocabulary Using Cobuild Handout**' with the aim of helping them to see the value of using an excellent tool effectively. All the tasks focus on typical language problems students have, whether German speakers or speakers of other languages. There are different versions of this handout, with one focussing more on using the dictionary to understand texts, the others include tasks which will help them as writers and speakers.

> Part (1) Choose what you think is the right answer – quite spontaneously – without a dictionary
> (1) A friend told me that when she heard she had won a free flight to Sydney she passed out/ fainted/ swooned/ lost consciousness?

[…]
(14) Which is/are correct? When I was in Wales I experienced that …/I made the experience that …/I found that …

Part (2) Which of the above questions would you expect to be able to solve with the help of an English-English dictionary?
[…]

Neither in Part (1) nor in Part (2) are the students being tested. In Part (2) they are asked simply about their expectations or rather confidence in the dictionary. This is an additional stress-free opportunity for them to exchange ideas with neighbours. I have deliberately used the word 'neighbours' here rather than partners to stress the fact that if students are encouraged from the very start to simply talk to the people sitting next to them, preferably about the topics in hand, they soon become familiar with this natural form of interaction.

Now use the Collins Cobuild. See if you can find a clear answer to the questions. If you haven't got a copy of the Cobuild yet, you can use the one in my Semesterapparat (on reserve in the library).

The tasks encourage the students to look carefully at the co-text and context of a word before they look it up in the dictionary. For example, they show that the verb and the noun 'sanction' have opposite meanings, as do the constructions 'stop to do something' and 'stop doing something', or that 'a game' (count noun) and 'game' (uncount noun) are completely different things.

All their work is checked in the following week of class. It was always necessary to go through the tasks item by item together till everyone understood how to find the answers. This takes time, but is well worth it. The next task is a summing up of what they have learned about the dictionary.

Part (3) So what kinds of information does the Cobuild give you? Make a list here:
[…]

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_voc_usingcobuild.pdf].

In this way the students learn a lot of grammar e.g. count/uncount nouns, constructions, verb patterns; and a great deal about levels of formality, register, collocations etc. and realise that they can find the answer to a lot of language questions by themselves. This sets them on the path to being independent learners.

Incidentally, the handout includes a translation task to convince the students that no matter whether they are writing or reading or translating, the Cobuild is an excellent tool. One of the items is:

Ich hatte grosse Schwierigkeiten, eine gute Übersetzung zu finden.
Without a dictionary, this is usually translated as:
*I had big difficulties to find a good translation.

They are encouraged not only to use the dictionary at home but also to bring it with them to every session of class – and use it. At this stage it would be good to touch on the use of online dictionaries, both monolingual and translation, so that students can discover for themselves the strengths or weaknesses.

Once we have established that much can be guessed from the context, and that the dictionary is a necessary tool when reading and learning English, we think about ways of learning vocabulary i.e. ways of getting words off the page and into long-term memory.

Ellis (1989) offers a good approach to this topic with a set of ways of noting down new vocabulary: there are lists, translations, definitions, word fields, illustrations, mind maps and so on. You can add to this or make your own set. The students are asked to talk about them with their neighbours, and then each is asked to say something individually e.g. I like X because ...; I think X is hopeless because ….

Ellis, Gail & Sinclair, Barbara (1989). *Learning to Learn English. A course in Learner Training*. Cambridge: CUP, p.43.

There are many different opinions on each of the ways, and what is most interesting is that usually there is at least one student who says "X is not much good, but it is what I learned at school, so that is the way I do it."

I take time to go through all the different ways on the sheet and comment on them from my point of view as a life-long language learner, and as a teacher, making it clear that everyone has to find their own effective way or rather ways of noting and remembering new vocabulary, depending on the purpose. I remember clearly when a student taught me a lesson by explaining to me how useful for them a certain strategy was for a particular purpose that I would previously have rejected outright.

You can also refer back to 'Learner Types' and talk about the fact that some learn better by seeing something, others better by listening to it etc. For many, some kind of visual image can be very useful; for example sea, puddle, lake, drop, ocean, pond could be arranged vertically with an ever increasing or decreasing circle beside them. Or the consequences of something could be indicated with an arrow.

Having worked through the Using Cobuild Handout, however, they now understand why the co-text and the context are so important, and that listing words with no indication of part of speech or count/uncount noun or collocations for example does not make sense.

To reinforce the message that their work on vocabulary has to be meaningful in order to be effective I gave the students an extract from a very interesting newspaper article 'Total Recall' in Scotland on Sunday. Although it centres on exceptionally gifted people, it "looks at what the human brain is capable of."

> As far back as ancient Greece, it was understood even people with no special powers of recall could develop strategies to help them to learn long lists of information. (…) […]Various studies have shown that the human brain is capable of remembering only a limited number of arbitrary items in working memory; grouping these items

into chunks permits the brain to retain them more easily in our minds […].

Garavelli, Dani (2011, October 10). Total Recall. *Scotland on Sunday,* p.15.

In the following week I ask them how they would fill in the gaps in the short extract below:

> Learning words ….
> "Various studies have shown that the human brain is capable of remembering only a _____ number of arbitrary items in working memory; _____ these items into _____ permits the brain to _____them more easily in our minds."
>
> So: O_____ words in a way that is _____for you.

To introduce the idea of working on vocabulary in texts I usually chose a short text from contemporary fiction which was easy to visualise, example below. I read it aloud for them, then they tried reading it through themselves, trying to get the gist, then working on the vocabulary: finding the meaning of unfamiliar words and then organising them in such a way that they can remember them. The text below lends itself well to this. To give them an idea of how this can be done I would bring in the work of some previous students from a Reading and Vocabulary Skills class.

> It was eight hours since Sarah's plane had landed in Port Elizabeth and three sine she'd driven into town. Now freshly showered and wearing the lightest of her summer dresses, she stepped out of the Smitsrivier Retreat. And stopped abruptly - bowled over by the sight that met her eyes [...]
> The spotless sidewalks of before, once a testimony to a combination of Calvinist order and cheap labour, were chaotic, overgrown with improvised stalls, wooden crates on which were laid wrinkled oranges in groups of four or five, spotted pawpaws, piles of green prickly pears and cobs of roasted corn. She took in all those old familiarities as she kept walking until a combination of curiosity and hunger drove her into an old convenience store.

Slovo, Gillian (2006). *Red Dust.* London: Virago, 7-10.

Writing Skills:

Within the Writing Skills section it makes sense to focus on a CV, and add some information on writing a formal letter, and a term paper.

Writing a CV

Materials required: Dictionary
From FyF: Writer Reader, CV, Logical Links

There are several very good reasons for choosing this text type: their task is a realistic one, they learn about summarising, about structuring a text, and how to choose appropriate language. In a CV the style is (relatively) formal, the structure must be clear, the information must be relevant and basic grammar and vocabulary should be correct. These are building bricks for eventually writing a good term paper. Questions about the specific characteristics of a term paper can be answered with the Handout 'Writing a Term Paper'.

Their task is to decide which English-speaking country they would like to study in, choose a university and write a CV in the traditional text form required for applications via the International Office of their own university.

First, however, before they do any writing, they need some of the information from the '**Writer Reader Handout**', which "aims to help you to be critical of your own writing and show you how to use and learn from the feedback you get from me." In this handout there is

> (1) The concept behind my writing classes
> (2) Questions for you as the writer of your text and as the reader of your text
> (3) The correcting system I use
> (4) Some technicalities

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_writerreader.pdf].

When planning their CV the students have to ask themselves the questions in (2) above: Who am I writing to, What will they know, and Why am I writing. Thinking about the question "What will they know" helps the students to understand that it makes little sense to write "I worked for the Fachschaft/the Sparkasse/the Südkurier".
In essence, then, they are faced with the task of summarising their lives for a very particular readership. That is the first lesson in summary writing: before you can summarise you need to know who you are summarising for, what they will know already, and why you are doing it.

This also leads to very interesting discussions on different societies' opinions on what is relevant for the CV and raises awareness of just how different the German education system is from that of any of the English-speaking countries. At the personal level students can learn a lot through having to look at their own lives from the outside, and often ask for advice on what to leave out, what to put in and how to express it. A good example is a student who asked me:
"My Mum and Dad were divorced, do I have to write that? (…) I lived alone with my Mum. She had to go to work all the time, and I was alone ..." After a while the student realised that this could be expressed in a positive way: "As

my mother and I lived alone she had to go out to work. This meant that I learned how to be independent at a very early age."

The CV is also good experience for organising information in coherent paragraphs.

Later, when correcting their own work, they will need Part (3) of the Writer-Reader Handout: The correcting system I use. This explains my way of marking texts so that students can learn how to correct their own work.

> To help you correct your own work I will underline mistakes I am pretty sure you can correct yourselves and symbol-mark them as follows:
> • W word Example: if you write "When do we write the next test" I will underline "write" and put a "W" above it to show that this word is wrong. If you look up "test" in the Cobuild you will find that we don't use the word "write" with "a test" in English. Look it up and see!

In the **CV Handout** there are:

> (1) Some useful English expressions for typical features of the German education system (e.g. "ein Schulpraktikum", das Gymnasium besuchen", "Leistungskurse", "auf Bachelor studieren").
>
> (2) A guideline CV as a continuous text.
>
> (3) Some tips for writing a CV in the traditional text form required for applications via the university to study abroad (this covers more personal questions, such as what to put in, what to leave out).
>
> (4) Some useful books and websites including the European Curriculum Vitae Format www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu (good for helping you focus on your abilities, not just on qualifications).

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_ha_cv.pdf].

Using the information in the **CV Handout**, students draft their CV at home and bring it with them to class the following week. Draft does not mean a scribbled mess, but a correctly written piece of work that they can look at in class, with a critical eye, and share with their neighbours.
Questions in class about the draft texts:
Regarding the visual image of your/your neighbour's text: Can you see paragraphs? Or is it just one continuous text – or a shopping list? Check your text for paragraphing against the guideline CV.

There can also be quick checks of their own text for other things easily scanned for e.g. short forms such as I'm or don't, which they will not find in the guideline CV.

The next step is to read through the **Logical Links Handout**, which introduces them to more formal style logical links, i.e. the kind they might like to use in their CV.

> This handout is about the words which are used to link ideas. It was written for use in Basic Academic Writing, to help students write a good CV, which is quite a formal kind of text. (1) A list of common logical link words (2) Tips on choosing the logical link words most suited to a formal text, e.g. a CV and a term paper („Hausarbeit").

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_logicallinks.pdf].

Their next task is linking up a set of sentences to make a mini-text. Example:

> I hope to become a teacher of English and Biology
> I was born in Munich
> I passed my A-levels in 6 subjects
> Before going to university I decided to spend a year in Canada
> I am now in my third year at university
> I attended primary and secondary school in Munich
> I grew up speaking English and German
> I was born on 23rd June, 199x
> I am now studying English and Biology
> My parents are Canadian
> In Canada I worked in a playgroup for a year
> I am studying in Konstanz

In pairs they try to reorganise this jumbled list of events into a sensible sequence, then link up the sentences to form a coherent paragraph. This is not easy as they are often not familiar with links such as "however", "as", "although".

Next, they can do a quick scan of their own CV text to see how often "and", "but", "so", occur so that they can think about whether they would like to replace one or two of these with something slightly more formal, as shown in the Logical Links Handout, and in the CV guideline.

Language Correction work

The next step is to look at language collected from previous students' CVs which needs to be corrected. The idea behind correction work of this kind is that students get the chance to realise what is not correct English and correct it, without having the feeling that their own work is being criticised. The mistakes can be simply underlined, but usually I symbol mark them as students still need help at this stage to identify the problem.

Some examples of symbol-marking:

T(Tense)
On the first day I <u>have started</u> at nine.
Ws
In Canada there is <u>a big competition for</u> places to study.
C   W
They want to <u>avoid that refugees are sent back</u> to <u>the</u> own country.
Art.   Asp.
<u>Economy</u> in Australia <u>flourishes</u>.

The problems on this language corrections sheet include:

Individual words or phrases: "I visited High School", "I want to get a journalist later", "Get into contact with foreigners";
Level of formality: "it's great";
Tense: "When I was in Canada I have gained", and aspect: "At the moment I prepare";
Constructions/verb patterns: "My parents insisted on me to do (vocational training first)".

And finally a little translation task:
How would you say the following in English:
Ich bin zweisprachig aufgewachsen
Ich studiere im 5. Semester Englisch und Spanisch

These are both examples of German-English from their CVs (*I grew up bilingual; *I study in the 5th semester English and Spanish) which I have back-translated into German.

What is important is that the students can find all the correct forms themselves with the tools available to them: CV Handout and the dictionary (which they have already learned to use). Working through the correction sheet in pairs and then with me helps them to put into practice what they "learnt" in the Cobuild quiz.

To finish off I draw their attention to a question at the bottom of the corrections sheet: What are you going to do with this sheet now?
Answers are usually: put it in my folder, read it again, look at it ….
I take the sheet from any student and hold it up, and ask them what they can see best: the typed part of the page (which is all wrong) or the handwriting at the side (their corrections)? They realise that what immediately leaps to their attention is the typing …. so that every time they look at that page in future they will automatically focus on wrong English.
I suggest that if they want to learn from all their efforts in correcting the mistakes on this sheet they should do three things (all time consuming, but effective):
1. on a fresh sheet of paper write out all the correct English
2. on another sheet write out all the correct English but ordered meaningfully, rather than grammatically as on the original sheet
3. tear up the corrections sheet so that they will never see it again
Some students actually take my advice :-)

The final task is to rework their draft CV at home, and hand it in for correction. All the revision work they do on their CVs is intended to reinforce the idea that they can be critical of their own work, and help themselves.

They also find it very interesting to read brief biographies of prominent people whose path through the education system was very different from that of the average (German) student. One of my favourites is from a university magazine:

> John X is the MP for West Dunbartonshire […] and Chair of the House of Commons Treasury Committee. After leaving school at 15 without qualifications, he worked as a council weeder in Dumbarton and then in a factory. He started studying at 24 [...] He became a Visiting Professor at Strathclyde's Business School in 1994.

Strathclyde People, the magazine of Strathclyde University, Glasgow, Autumn 2009.

This unit on writing a CV may well strike you as being very long drawn out. This is all intentional, as acquiring skills takes time. And the skills acquired here will serve them well for all academic writing.

Writing a formal letter

Materials required: Dictionary
FyF: Formal Letters
[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_ha_formalletter.pdf].

Writing a formal letter is only touched on briefly.
First we make a list of the things which appear in a German formal letter: writer's name, address, salutation, date, etc. Then they are asked to place all these things on a sheet of paper the way they would do it in German. (Lots of discussion.)
Next we look at a formal letter in the Formal Letters Handout, and students are asked to identify differences between English and German layout. They are always surprised. This is a good occasion to talk about differences in other very 'everyday' things such as multiplication and division, or knitting (!) - where differences are totally unexpected. Usually someone has an anecdote to tell.

However, I relativise the importance of getting the layout correct, (after all, this differs from country to country and will continue to change) and stress instead the importance of being polite i.e. requesting, not demanding, and addressing the recipient respectfully. Even though letters from a British university welcoming new students to induction week for example, will address them by their first name (greatly to the surprise of the class), this informality should not be used by the student.

There is a great deal more information on Writing Skills available on my website. For example:

Writing Summaries

> This handout gives tips on how to write a summary of any kind of text, whether newspaper article or film. There are tips on how to structure a summary, how to keep the summary separate from your own comment, and there are useful English expressions. (1) General comments on writing a summary (2) Writing a summary of an editorial (3) Writing a summary and comment on a documentary film (4) Writing a summary and comment on a book (5) Writing a summary and comment on a feature film […].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_writingsummary.pdf].

Essay Writing

> The Essay Writing Handout contains tips for organising your ideas and actually writing an essay.
> (1) Information on the structure of an essay
> (2) Tips for planning your essay
> (3) More information on paragraphs
> (4) Some useful language
> […].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_cm_essaywriting.pdf].

Writing a Term Paper

> This handout contains tips for organising your ideas and actually writing a term paper (Hausarbeit). Although it was written for students of English writing a term paper on Area Studies, Literature or Linguistics, it is addressed to students of all Departments and subjects who need to write a term paper in English.
>
> (1) Information on the structure of a term paper
> (2) Tips for planning your term paper
> (3) More information on paragraphs
> (4) Using clear English
> (5) Some more useful language
> (6) More tips for your written paper
> (7) Information on how to acknowledge your sources
> (8) How to write your bibliography
> (9) A final word
> […].

[http://www.findyourfeet.de/usr/doc/FyF_ha_termpaper.pdf].

Additional oral skills practice:

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

An interesting follow-up task is the following:
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 great 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.*

For more Oral Skills activities: please see the Course Concept Oral Skills. **Pop Festival**, for example, fits into this class very well. The first part involves various interest groups deciding whether they are in favour of a proposed pop festival being held in their village or not. The second part is a formal chaired discussion in which all interested parties have their say and a decision is made. A formal chaired discussion may sound rather dry and dusty, but the topic and the circumstances are definitely not. It is fun. The students always enjoyed it and learned a lot.

Listening and viewing skills: Macro (listening for gist) and micro (listening for detail)

I chose to use a documentary, rather than a feature film, as it does the kind of thing students are supposed to be able to cope with, i.e. it presents a lot of information. The example below is a documentary on the environment as this is a topic of permanent interest, and one that everyone knows something about, though perhaps only in their own language. Although I used various documentaries I have chosen this one here as an example as it embodies perfectly the message that the old is not necessarily out of date or irrelevant. As I write this in 2019, it is clear that to a large extent the dire warnings in this documentary are still unheeded.
BBC Two Horizon (1971), *Due to lack of interest, tomorrow has been cancelled*. 4.03.1971.
[https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/6254d3d38f674b6288acb485fcffdeda].

Approaching the task: getting tuned in by thinking about expectations.
First, given just the title, what do they expect the topic to be? Then, given that it is a documentary on the environment, what kind of words do they expect to hear, or issues to be raised. Sometimes asking just about words helps the students to be more spontaneous as they don't feel required to formulate whole issues.
Out of this, the class might be able to isolate some topics they expect e.g. water pollution or climate change.

Next they get some information on the documentary, that it was made by the BBC in the 70s, which means it is now very old, but is it out of date? They might already have some ideas about the focus of the film.

We listen to an audiotape of the opening of the film, with background noises, and music. Then they get the text, with gaps to fill, for close listening.

> Lake Erie, the pride of the American lakes, an inland sea stretching for 10,000 square miles. This was the scene for the (first great warning signal). No one really noticed exactly when the (historic) mistake took place. The first, perhaps, were the birds, who finally flew away from the lake, which had been poisoned by man's activity.
> Then 12,000 birds died in a single month. And beneath the acidic waters the fish also died as the poisoned lake (lost its power) to

produce oxygen.Finally the waters became dangerous, even for human beings. This is the (classic example), not of pollution, which is reversible, but the systematic total (irreversible destruction) of the biological processes which make life on earth possible. For ecologists these are the new and serious warning signs.

Professor Paul Erlich:
We're certainly (justified in thinking) of the world as entering its ecological crisis. We've had many warning signals. A good example in this country is the ("death" of) Lake Erie, the dying off in the US, in GB and so on, of eh birds that feed (high on oceanic food chains). We're getting the symptoms now of (breakdown in the crucial life support systems) of the planet."

We now (estimate)that if not another single molecule of DDT is released into the environment it'll be (roughly a decade) before the peak of the (run-off) of DDT into the oceans is reached. Now it has already been distributed over the land and it will be a full decade before the maximum dose (hits the ocean). Furthermore it's likely to be 10 or 20 years before the (worst effects) of that maximum dose are seen in the food chains in the ocean so we may have 20 or 30 years before we find out just how much we have done by adding this one compound, DDT, to the environment. Now unfortunately (we're still adding) DDT to the environment, we're adding many other poisons with similar characteristics. As a result of that we might be very much like the (dinosaur shot in in the hindbrain), you know, we're dead but we don't know it yet."
(Prof. Paul Erlich)

Music

Tomorrow has been cancelled, all the headlines say.
All that's gonna happen, happened yesterday.
Mother Nature's tired, and she wants to say:
Leave me while I'm resting, (I don't want to play).

The task outside class is viewing for a particular purpose. They watch the complete film, take notes on which issues are covered and whether these match with their expectations or not. An alternative is to give some more guidance by providing a sheet divided into boxes with the titles of the topics e.g. The use of pesticides, ready for students to write their notes.

In the following week they can check with their neighbours. As the documentary has some very effective visual images, it is interesting to also ask the students which of these have remained in their mind.

Finally, they are asked to fill in the gaps of a brief summary I wrote.

Here is a very brief summary of the film. Can you fill in the gaps with suitable words?

This documentary is concerned with drawing the public's (…) to the dangers of (…) and changes in the (…).

The main examples given are the death of the (…) of Lake Eyrie caused by the discharge of (…) into the lake, the (…) of the prairies through the replacement of the native (…) and animals by imported crops and cattle/livestock, the problem of (…) in Los Angeles, and finally, the way in which the use of (…) poisons both the crops and the people (…) in the fields.

At the end of the film various measures of (…) are shown, for example the preservation of the life of (…) in a national park.

The scenes are interspersed with interviews with experts who issue (…) warnings as to what will happen if this situation does not improve (…).

From this a really interesting discussion on what has changed, whether for better or for worse, can arise. The students now have a great deal of the vocabulary that they need to do so. The focus here is not, however, on vocabulary acquisition but on approaching a lengthy audio-visual text, by tuning yourself in.

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], in particular **'Advanced Oral Proficiency - Giving a talk'**, which gives advice on planning and presenting a talk for an advanced level Oral Skills class; **'Giving a talk'**, which gives a structure for a talk and some specific language; and **'Chaired Discussion'**. These we work through carefully 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. Speakers: […].

[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].

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].

These handouts were all kept simple. They were written for learners who need basics, not the frills. If students follow the guidelines on Giving a Talk, especially the structure, the audience will be able to follow it no matter how weak the speaker's English. That was my message. It could be backed up by: Maher, John (1990). *International Medical Communication in English.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 9-12.

In an Oral Skills class, each speaker would be 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. They would learn how to be an effective chairperson, which includes giving the listeners time to tune in to the coming talk. This is not possible time-wise in a Study Skills class.

Students are free to choose their own topic. Those in higher semesters are expected to choose one from their own course of studies; those who have only just begun studying can choose a topic of personal interest, sometimes a book, a film, or a hobby.
As stipulated in the handouts it has to be short, a maximum of 10 minutes, and students have to follow the procedural, structural and language guidelines given. To make sure that this is not an ordeal for the students, especially the "beginners", and that some real communication takes place I spread the talks over several sessions, with four people giving a talk each session, in small groups, at the same time. Each speaker has two chances to give their talk, in two different groups.

Before they begin their talk, the title should be made clear and the listeners should have a moment to tune in.
After each talk the groups have a few minutes to ask the speaker questions, then another few minutes to make notes on what they have learnt. At the end of this session, everyone has the chance to say a few words about each topic they have heard. This is all very intensive work, listening and speaking. I move around and make notes for the speakers on a sheet, as personal feedback.

The kind of feedback sheet you use will depend on what you want to focus on. This is just one example:

Name:
Date:
Topic:

Structure: (well-structured or not)
Your questions for the audience: (clear and interesting or not)
Fluent or hesitant:
Pronunciation weaknesses:
Grammar weaknesses:
Vocabulary weaknesses:

Overall impression of competence:

I also pick out any common and typical mistakes, typing them up on a Language Focus sheet so that we can talk about them and correct them together in class e.g.

* People are doing this since thousands of years

* We have to prevent that detergents end up in the sea

* The second field I want to mention are basic research activities

* Many people argue that it were difficult to find an alternative to death penalty

* It is written in 1925

These should be symbol-marked as with the CV, so that the students' attention is focused on what exactly has gone wrong, and are thus enabled to make the corrections.

Additional optional oral skills practice:

Interviewing exchange students from English-speaking countries is a good opportunity to consider the problems of living and studying in a different culture.
Of course students can also have informal contact with native speakers of English outside class, but inviting them to class has several big advantages for all concerned. First, the class has to prepare questions they would like to ask. Second, the guests have the chance to talk freely about their home university and the problems encountered in their new environment, both inside and outside the university. Third, no one has to perform as all interaction takes place in small groups.
Communication is at the forefront in the small groups, but I can later concentrate on accuracy by writing up a Language Focus sheet. Students can also have a little writing practice, not a summary of all they heard, but simply a couple of lines on one or two things that struck them as particularly interesting. This too can be looked at for accuracy.

Another idea that worked well was to follow up the 'interviews' by creating a kind of survival kit for guest students at the university. First they made a list of things the guests had touched on as puzzling or problematic, adding their own ideas. They organised these, then shared out the work, with everyone choosing something they would like to write on.

Playing a board game: Study Trail

Students can design and play board games, to be added to the class collection. 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 of this class very 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! […]

The student productions were really funny!

Course evaluation:

Feedback on the course. In general, where students are always actively involved in class, you can easily see if there are problems or frustrations, and perhaps rectify them on the spot. However, end-of-term evaluation can also be useful.
To evaluate the class from their point of view they had two different opportunities. One 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?

The other way, more fun, was writing a short poem on their experience of the class, quickly and spontaneously, usually with neighbours. These were written on overheads and enjoyed. I wrote them up later and gave everyone in the class a copy.

Mostly the poems can only be understood and appreciated by those taking part in the class, but here are one or two, just to enjoy.

Study Skills   Your poems

Every Wednesday the same procedure
And always the same teacher
I think we learnt a lot
And we got no shock!
……..

Learning how to study

Reading, writing
- Listen carefully!
Wrong pronunciation,
Wrong tense,
But nice things on the plan for today.
We survived.
….....

Every day on Wednesday
I went to a class called Study Skills
I think I was always there
And learned a lot of good skills.
……

We went to the study skills course half a year,
We had a lot of fun in there.
We made many friends,
And hope the friendship never ends!
Mrs R... always tried to help us,
Therefore it was our favourite class!
…..

Learning all the study stuff
Reading, talking, writing
Can be really, really tough
But is quite a useful thing.
…..

What am I doing here?
I asked that a lot
But now it has to stop
Mrs R... made it clear
To learn how to study
Therefore you need a buddy
With a coffee in my hands
It all begins
First if you don't know a word
Pull your dictionary out of the dirt
Look it up
And go back into the pub.
Your (?) is near
Stop drinking beer
Write your CV
While you're watching TV
The world will be dying
But not while you're living
So get up off your ass
And that fast.

And a poem for the students from me:

Hard work it was,
For you – and me,
But trust I do
You have learnt something new.

One day, perhaps in foreign fields afar,
You'll watch a film or hear a talk,
Reach for your Cobuild,
Write essays, papers, without a blot,
And realise: "I know a lot!"

FyF_cc_studyskills.pdf

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