

SUCCESSFUL EXAM STRATEGIES FOR B1 AND B2 LEARNERS

This practical workshop will focus on activities which help build skills for Cambridge PET and First Certificate, while also looking at what characterises learners at these levels of the CEFR. The ideas and approaches here aim to make students be ambitious, accurate, curious, confident and more self sufficient.

1. Introductions, restricted practice and spelling

PET candidates have to spell their surnames. It can be quite demoralising for them if they get this wrong and creates a bad first impression. Here we'll look at how to work spelling into our introductions and also play 5 minute games with it, which is especially good with younger learners. We'll also look at helping students make associations with the sounds of the alphabet.

2. The improvised gap-fill

Students have to fill in gaps at PET and FCE. Here we'll look at ways to expose them to the right kinds and get them noticing things for themselves, which will help us practice for Use of English part 2 (FCE) and Reading part 5 (PET).

3. Memory building exercises

We want our students, especially those studying for FIRST, to start thinking beyond word level and deeper into phrase level. Here we'll look at some exercises which encourage students to use their memories and learn essential grammar by rote.

4. Rephrasing and self correction

We should try to make our students more independent when it comes to checking. Here we'll look at the types of 'clues' that can help them find the answer themselves and also at an exercise which encourages revision and consolidation of grammatical structures, again based on memory. Here we'll look at practice for Use of English part 4 (FCE) and Writing part 1 (PET).

5. Using L1

Translating is something that all language students do, some more successfully than others. We can help by ensuring they are making the right connections with structures in their own language and by getting them to notice those differences. Here we'll look at how translation exercises can be used to help students get to grips with some of the essential grammar at PET and FCE.

6. Collaborative writing

Writing is an area often neglected in class. It feels wrong to have all the students writing in silence and, too often, too few students fail to produce writing when asked to work independently outside of the classroom. Here we'll look at how collaborative writing tasks can be useful and communicative, and at how we can design activities which combine multiple skills – writing, reading, speaking and listening.

7. Prediction

Listening can play a key role in the classroom and a successful lesson can easily be planned around one. We'll look at types of prediction exercises and how they help set the context; encourage critical thinking about the task; and most importantly, how they can help form part of a communicative classroom in which language is learned, heard in context and then practised. We'll also look at how freer, less restricted speaking practice can help students prepare for PET speaking part 4 and how it can also help build skills in interaction which are useful at FCE.

8. Reading rephrased

Here we'll look at how we can get students to practice rephrasing as a way of predicting the language they will later read.

9. Sound association for pronunciation

Improve pronunciation by getting students to make associations with the words they know how to pronounce well and those which they have doubts with. We'll look at how, as this becomes a regular classroom exercise, they start making their own associations and asking association-related questions themselves about pronunciation.

10. Consolidation

One of the key differences between a B1 candidate and a B2 candidate is the range of language that they attempt to use. For PET, it's just beginning; for first it should already be fairly wide. Much of their preparation for FCE will involve increasing their vocabulary. Here we'll look at the role of repetition and how to recycle language to help consolidate it. If we are focusing on the right language then there's no such thing as too much practice, especially if it is varied, fun and set in context. We'll also look at a final way to begin or end a stage/class which again focuses on the repetition of whatever we consider to be important.