• B2 Exam Classes: Finding the Balance

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• Abstract
  Teaching a B2 exam course? Find yourself falling into the same old exam practice routine? Consistent practice and routine are key to successful exam prep, but variety is important too. So let’s look at some engaging tasks that will spice up your lessons while helping your students learn strategies and practice skills to meet the demands of the exam.

• Bio data
  Brian Engquist has spent over 20 years as an English teacher and teacher trainer. He often speaks about Blended Learning, advances in technology applied to education, assessment, and the evolving roles of teachers and students in this landscape. He works as Teacher Training Department Manager for Spain and Portugal.

• Spot the idiom:

  ![Idiom Image]

  We need to…put ourselves in our students’ shoes!

  NB. Teaching idioms with pictures can be effective and memorable for students.
**Pressure!**

External exams put students under pressure: that pressure can come from themselves, their teachers or their parents. A lot depends on external exams: perhaps they need certification to get into a university or to get a job.

Keys to success in external exams include understanding the requirements of the exam and having appropriate strategies. Lots of practice helps.

However, we shouldn’t forget that learning and emotions are linked: students need to be engaged to learn, therefore we need to keep things interesting.

**Skills and strategies**

Look at A) and B). Which is a skill and which is a strategy?

- Read the questions and mark the key words before reading the text.
- Scan each section quickly to find the information related to the questions. The information in the text will not be written in the same way as it is in the options, although it will have the same meaning.
- Highlight possible answers.

A)

Can scan a long text or a set of related texts in order to find specific information. (C4)

B)

Exams are becoming more skills-based, showing what you CAN DO with the language. However, for now there is still a certain degree of exam strategy involved.

B) is a skill and A) is a strategy
Activity 1: Use of English, Sentence transformations

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. You must use between two and five words, including the word given.

1. People expect tourists to carry sticks to protect themselves from curious monkeys. ARE
   Tourists __________ sticks to protect themselves from curious monkeys.

2. That people know that the monkeys are a huge tourist attraction.
   BE
   Monkeys __________ a huge tourist attraction.

3. Reports claim that twenty top chefs have been invited to prepare the meal.
   THAT
   It __________ twenty top chefs have been invited to prepare the meal.

4. Locals believe that 2,000 kgs of food were consumed at the last feast.
   HAVE
   2,000 kgs of food __________ consumed at the last feast.

5. The tourist office has estimated that over 10,000 visitors watch the feast.
   BEEN
   It __________ that over 10,000 visitors watch the feast.

6. Some people think monkeys get very aggressive around food.
   TO
   Monkeys __________ very aggressive around food.

What's the skill in this exercise?

Sentence transformation = paraphrasing / rephrasing

When might we rephrase something?

When we sense our listener hasn't understood.

It is a skill, though we use it more in spoken English than in written English.

We can predict the types of constructions that we'll need to manipulate.
For example, transforming active to passive.

• Adding a spoken element

There are two decks of cards which are numbered. Each card has a corresponding one in the other deck. Pupils are put into pairs and get a deck each. One gets the student cards (on the left), the other the teacher cards. The student reads out their sentence. The teacher gives the student the word or words they have to use when they rephrase the sentence. How many can they get?

Ronaldo didn’t score as many goals as he had expected.

Ronaldo didn’t score as many goals as he had expected.

a. Ronaldo scored fewer goals than he had expected.

b. Fewer goals were scored by Ronaldo than he expected.

c. Ronaldo had expected to score more goals.

For more examples, see the worksheet at the end of this document.

• Reading: multiple matching
What is the skill involved?

What’s the strategy? Can you put the letters in the right order? (Answers on next page.)
Multiple matching reading strategy order: E,A,B,D,C

• Idea 1: Jigsaw reading for gist

When you read ‘normally’ you often read for gist to get the main idea before searching for details.

We’re going to read to gist first here, but we are going to make the task a cooperative activity and we are going to include a speaking and listening element (if we wanted to exactly recreate exam conditions every time we did a reading exercise, classes around this skill would be silent).
Students are put into groups of four. Each one comes up to the board (where the text is projected / alternative — read from text book and hide the others) to read their text and has to retell it to their fellow group members. The aim is to get a general idea of the four texts — each student must fulfill their role for the group to succeed.

Idea 2: motivating students with an interactive quiz

We are adding a bit of competition and fun to the equation. Technology too — this is motivating for students.

Try the kahoot here

• Writing: the essay

Here are some of the key considerations for students who are writing an essay.

The aim of our activity is to build up variety in the students’ use of linking words — we won’t have to read ‘however’ or ‘on the other hand’ three times per essay.
The Question:

Pollution and environmental damage are serious problems affecting us all. Although / Even though / Despite the fact that they are a real challenge, are these problems impossible to solve?

Passenger cars release gases such as / like / for instance carbon dioxide, which can create global warming. Furthermore / What's more / In addition, many cities suffer from clouds of smog because / as / given that too many people take their cars. However / Nevertheless / Nonetheless, electric cars are becoming more popular and public transport is improving. In some cities (like London) you have to pay to go into the centre in your car, which reduces pollution.

Rivers can be polluted by companies who pump toxic waste into them. Additionally / Furthermore / What's more; oil spills can cause damage to our seas. Despite that / In
**spite of that** / **Be that as it may** governments are getting stricter on companies who break the rules **regarding** / **concerning** / **relating to** water pollution, which should improve the situation.

Power stations which burn fossil fuels to create energy damage our environment, causing the greenhouse effect. Nevertheless, we are developing new types of renewable energies, such as wind or solar power, so we won’t need to use coal.

**In conclusion** / **To conclude** / **To sum up** we are polluting our planet in many ways, but there are environmentally-friendly alternatives, so **in my view** / **in my opinion** / **I believe** we can solve the problems if we want to.

**• Functional language**

Students categorize each group of three words in this table

- Making an additional point
- Introducing an example
- Giving a reason
- Giving an opinion
- Making a contrast
- Meaning ‘about’
- Concluding

**• Memory race**

To help our students remember the linking words, we’re going to do a ‘memory race’ activity. Procedure:
Students underline one word from each set of three. They don’t show their partner what they have underlined.

Student A starts reading the essay. When they get to the first set of three words, they guess which one student B has chosen. If they get it right, student B says so and student A can keep reading. If they get it wrong, it is Student B’s turn.

Student B starts reading the essay. Again, when they get to the first set of three words, they guess which one student A has chosen. If they get it right, student A says so and student B can keep reading. If they get it wrong, it is Student A’s turn again.

Student A starts from the beginning again and will need to remember what they got wrong last time and try a different option. Ultimately, the aim is to get to the end of the essay, remembering all of your partner’s options.

It is a tough challenge, but my experience is that students enjoy it and are motivating to win!

NEXT STEP.

Drilling is useful, but of course the students need to USE the words themselves. You would set an essay for homework on a similar topic (the unit has been on the environment), and tell the pupils to use the linking phrases which have been drilled, but that they are not permitted to use any of the linking phrases more than once.

• Speaking: coming to a conclusion
This question underwent a change in 2015. Apart from the picture stimulus changing to a word spider, the discussion and coming to a conclusion was separated.

If we want our students to come to a conclusion we'll need to provide the language for them to do so and provide practice with that language.

•Activity: disappearing dialogue

Students role play the following dialogue. Support is gradually taken away. Can they remember the full dialogue? This exercise could be done with PowerPoint and a projector or even with a chalk board and a rubber!

Screen 1:
Screen 2:

Screen 3:
• Materials used in the session:
1. They had never been to France before.

a It was the first time they had been to France.

a This was the first time they had been to France.

2. She reads much better now than she did in the past.

a She didn’t use to read so/as well.

b She never used to play so/as well.

c She didn’t read as well before/in the past.

d She’s a much better reader now than she used to be.

e She’s a much better reader than she was before.
fShe wasn’t such a good reader before.

3. Ronaldo didn’t score as many goals as he had expected.

aRonaldo scored fewer goals than he had expected.

aFewer goals were scored by Ronaldo than he expected.

aRonaldo had expected to score more goals.

4. It is unlikely that England will win the World Cup.

aEngland are unlikely to win the World Cup.

bEngland will probably not win the World Cup.

cEngland probably won’t win the World Cup.

dThere is little/not much chance that England will win the World Cup.
5. If your work in class doesn’t suddenly improve, your grades will stay the same.

a Unless your work in class suddenly improves, your grades will stay the same.

b If your work in class suddenly improves, your grades will improve.

c Unless there is a sudden improvement in your work in class, your grades will stay the same.

d If your work in class doesn’t improve, neither will your grades.

6. He couldn’t finish the marathon because of the heat.

a He wasn’t able to finish the marathon because of the heat.

b He was unable to finish the marathon because of the heat.

c The heat prevented him from finishing the marathon.

d He was prevented from finishing the marathon by the heat.
7. “Do you know the cost of the tickets?” Jane asked me.

aJane asked me if I knew the cost of the tickets.

aJane asked me if I knew how much the tickets cost.

8. Almost all my money is gone.

aI don’t have much money left.

aI hardly have any money left.

aI’ve spent almost all my money.
9. His behaviour is usually very bad.

aHis **behaviour** tends to be very bad.

aHe **tends** to behave badly.

aHe has a **tendency** to behave badly.

10. This is the most excited I’ve ever been.
aI have never been more excited.

aI have never been as excited as I am now.

11. Despite winning the prize, she didn’t feel happy.

aAlthough she won the prize, she didn’t feel happy.

aEven though she won the prize, she didn’t feel happy.

aIn spite of winning the prize, she didn’t feel happy.

12. Cold weather affects her health badly.
Cold weather has a bad effect on her health.

Her health is badly affected by cold weather.

13. Mark is much taller than Jenny.

Jenny is not nearly as tall as Mark.

Jenny is much shorter than Mark.