

REVIEWS

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RESOURCES: From teacher to teacher

***Twisting the Tale* podcast**

www.eoisantander.org

The *Twisting the Tale* history podcast from the E.O.I. Santander is now in its second season with improved sound quality! Martin and Kevin, both teachers at the school, embark on some lively, light-hearted historical banter for each episode while mulling over some of the linguistic issues that surface during their discussion.



The podcast deliberately avoids dwelling on conflicts and politics, and seeks to explore other aspects of history including literature, the arts, science, women's rights, human rights, animals, food and drink, tourism, and sport among other topics. The pod draws on newspaper articles, plays, poems, songs, extracts from novels, diaries and other texts to investigate each theme. There is also always a moment to comment on what was happening in Spain.

Last year, for the first season, "1900ish," the 18 episodes looked at what was going on in and around the year 1900, while the new second season, "The 1920s in 20", focuses on the wild and wonderful decade known as The Roaring Twenties.

The podcast is aimed at B2+ level adult students of English. Each episode includes English language considerations, mainly vocabulary and pronunciation issues, and is accompanied by a comprehension exercise and transcripts of the texts used. The comprehension exercises are light-hearted in nature. For example, these two items are from Season 2 *Modernist Literature*:

3. According to *The Wasteland*, the world will end:
 - a) in 2025, as per some ancient pre-Columbian calendar.
 - b) when "The Orange-Haired Man" returns to power.
 - c) with another Big Bang.
 - d) with a whimper.
 - e) when uncontrolled podcasting causes society to degenerate into drunkenness.

4. What is the connection with the movie Barbie?
 - a) Barbie and Ken discuss the blurring of the distinction between poetry and prose.
 - b) Barbie is seen holding a copy of *The Wasteland*.
 - c) There isn't one.
 - d) *The Wasteland* was first published on pink paper.

The Transcripts comprise any texts we have used in the episode: poems, excerpts from novels, plays, newspaper and magazine articles. We mention a lot of books from the corresponding historical period relevant to our topics, and one of the advantages of our first two seasons is the fact that copyright has expired for these works, and nearly all of them (from Sherlock Holmes to Ernest Hemingway) can be found for free somewhere on the Internet.

We received some feedback from students at our school at the end of last season, and we have modified a few things. In particular, we try to keep each episode to around 20 minutes max: hence "The 1920s in 20." Some students said the delivery was a bit too quick, but on the Spotify and iVoox platforms you have the option to slow down the speed of the audio. A couple of B2 students have commented on this feature as helping them to follow the episodes, so we are keeping our "natural speed" of conversation the same. Click here to listen to Season 2 [Tutankhamun and Tutmania](#).

Last year's first season served to introduce the podcast format to the *Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Santander*, and for us to learn how to create a series of episodes. Our colleague Miguel, who is responsible for the IT at the school, also helped us to come to terms with various aspects of podcasting. Unfortunately for him, we ended up converting his "IT office" into our recording studio as, after experimenting with various school rooms, it offered the best acoustic environment for our makeshift analogue set up.





This year the school has successfully applied for an educational innovation project financed and overseen by the *Consejería de Educación de Cantabria*. With the project funds we now have a digital interface, and we should be able to create a proper mini-studio, hopefully for the not-too-distant future. The aim of the project is to explore the many possibilities that podcasting offers both in form and timing and, fundamentally, encourage teachers to extend the different podcast formats to more levels, and other languages taught at the school.

The recent U.S. presidential election has been described as the first “podcast” election, and undoubtedly the complete freedom to determine the nature of each recording means podcasts can be adapted to any sphere of life, and English language teaching and learning is no exception. The aim of the project is to explore the many possibilities that podcasting offers both in form and timing. It encourages teachers to extend the different podcast formats to more levels, and other languages taught at the school. Our experiment was motivated by the idea that with a few modifications, with English language students in Spain in mind, we could create a fun and informative series of episodes that would offer our students (and anyone else who wants to listen!) a way of practicing their English outside the classroom. Similarly, we hoped to raise the profile of the *Escuela Oficial de Idiomas* “brand” by offering a free resource to students that transcends the boundaries of the traditional English language classroom.

Any teacher or student can create a podcast. To start with, all you need is an idea, a mobile phone and a free account on one of the digital platforms such as Spotify. It might be a five-minute monologue or a thirty-minute interview complete with sound effects. Little by little you can explore exactly where your particular podcasting path lies.

From the *Twisting the Tale* podcast our message is loud and clear ... hit the record button, and have fun! Oh, and click on the link in the article, and have a listen to us when you have a moment.

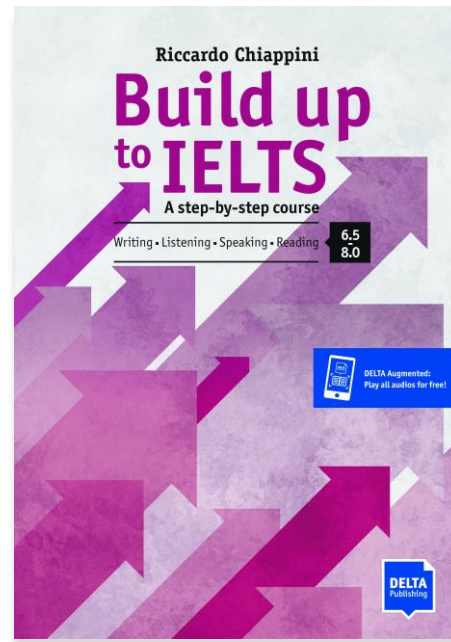
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QUICK TIPS

Build up to IELTS: A step-by-step course

Riccardo Chiappini
 DELTA Publishing, 2022
 184 pp
 ISBN 978-3-12-501581-4

The first thing I noticed about Chiappini's book was that it was designed for students themselves. Indeed, the introduction addresses the student in second person while explaining how the book is organised, and how a student can 'focus on the skills and/or task types' (p.6) they find most problematic.



As Chiappini explains, although the book covers all aspects of the exam, a 'special focus has been given to the Writing section, as this is the area IELTS candidates generally find most challenging' (p. 6). So, each of the ten thematic sections (Education, The natural world, The arts, and so on) begins with Writing, and this is more or less half of each unit. Clear models are given for the tasks, and the book is clear about genre differences, and how to write different parts of different types of text. Chiappini also provides helpful checklists that students can use to train themselves to meet the higher band criteria. I particularly liked the not-so-subtle suggestion that students 'use a thesaurus' (p. 9), reminding them implicitly of the need to think carefully about vocabulary choices. This is something I find difficult, especially with students attempting higher exams or aiming for higher scores: training them not to rely on their more basic lexical resource.

After writing, the other exam parts are addressed in the rest of each unit. What stood out for me in the Speaking section was the repeated recommendation that students record themselves, and listen back to analyse their own answers against the success criteria. This is something I find myself suggesting a lot, so it is very welcome to see it in print. Each chapter ends with a section called 'Pulling it all together,' itself concluding with a writing task, making good on the promise to focus on this area.



At the end of the book, before the Answer Key that allows independent students to check their answers, there is an exam guide which clearly and succinctly walks students through the task types with clear guidance on how to perform well on each. The book is nicely designed with some images, but relying more on colour, and clear sans serif fonts for visual appeal, giving it a focused, no-nonsense feel.

Overall, I have no doubt that the book is helping my students 'achieve the objectives' they have set themselves on their 'linguistic journey[s]' (p. 6), which is Chiappini's hope at the outset of the book. I would recommend it to IELTS candidates who are largely preparing on their own to enter an exam and aiming for the higher scores. Equally, this is a useful book for teachers/Directors of Studies who need a course book that covers language issues, but which is organised around the exam sections, and exam tasks.

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Explorify for Inclusion Hub

[Explorify](#)

If you are teaching science, the *Explorify for Inclusion Hub* can help you engage all your learners, especially those with special needs. By approaching the goal of inclusion from several perspectives, the *Hub* takes into account that teachers have personal preferences, and limited time regarding how to approach the topic of inclusion.



For this reason, the range of materials on offer is very useful: print summaries, videos, teaching materials, tips, downloads. Teachers will appreciate tips on how to navigate these multiple access routes.

An introductory video explains that the *Inclusion Hub* resources were developed over time, and tested by teachers at several types of schools in the UK: reception, mainstream primary, and lower secondary. The guidance that grew out of this research is summarized in four main sections: deciding which *Explorify* activities to use; calming learners and focusing their attention; improving thinking and learning skills; and making a record of learners' responses. Tips are offered for carrying out each strategy, and illustrated by a collection of nine two-minute videos in which an expert teacher describes the inclusion strategies, and shows the resources used in each one.

The videos are easy to follow thanks to rich visual input, and the presentation of key aspects of the strategy as on-screen text. If desired, subtitles in English can be activated. Alternatively, the case study is also available as hypertext which clearly identifies the setting, perceived need, approach, outcomes and teacher reflections, all enhanced with illustrations and links to worksheets and video extracts. The variety of access options makes the case studies very user-friendly.

Among the strategies described in the case studies are observation (zooming in and out on an image to capture the learners' attention) and making comparisons (Odd-One-Out activities: concept, the use of verbal frames, and sharing ideas). Speaking, listening, reading and writing skills are an integral part of the strategies. For



example, the print materials offer key words as colourful, labelled images which learners use to complete sentence frames: *I think ___ is the odd one out because ___*. As a result, learners are supported as they develop communication skills.

Guiding language use in this way makes the *Explorify* strategies especially useful in classrooms where science is being taught through English as occurs in Spain: language and content are effectively integrated, and the challenges faced by UK science teachers are similar to those in Spain. The value of the strategies, however, is not limited to science classes: they can be integral parts of English classes for speakers of other languages. For example, Case Study 7 shows how assigning roles to learners (describer, thinker, listener, recorder) provides structure for group work. Case Study 9 describes how recording student work in big book format can support formative assessment.

The *Explorify for Inclusion Hub* offers the resources described in five of the strategies as downloads for use “as is” in the classroom or as models so teachers can make their own. Material can be downloaded for free.

The *Explorify for Inclusion Hub* is one of the many resources that *Explorify* offers for teaching science. Other resources include articles, videos and a toolkit all designed to help you teach science. Sign up for free to receive the *Explorify* newsletter: theme-based activities, a blog, information on conferences and courses.

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