

Exemplar material – sample text and exercises in English

In Section 6 of the Introduction, a sequence was suggested for teaching reading and listening texts. After an initial phase of encountering the text, three teaching phases followed, each with a different style of exercises. Not every text lends itself to every style of exercise, so what is proposed below is a rather artificial task.

Working from an English text as an example, a short sample of every style of task is suggested for Stage 2 Collecting information and language and Stage 3 Practising the language. Stage 4 of the proposed teaching sequence deals with ways of developing productive skills, in particular, forms of extended writing. These tasks are dealt with at greater length in Units 3, 4 and 5 of this Teaching Syllabus. Therefore, examples of extended writing are not given here, apart from a question which shows how a useful start can be made in setting a Summary question.

The sole aim of giving this text and associated tasks is to give a concrete idea of the exercises listed. These are only suggestions for stages in the teaching process and not examples of polished examination questions.

As English has been used to provide a sample text, not all the proposed tasks can be used (e.g. translation and re-translation). An example is given for each style of exercise, but this should be seen as a suggestion and the exercise is not fully developed here. The amount of support or information given for each style of task can vary, so that tasks can be differentiated between levels of ability. For gap-filling, for example, some students might be required to do the task from memory. Less advanced students would be given, as a learning aid, a list of words to choose from.

Stage 2 Collecting information and language

This stage involves coming to terms with the text, either with guidance from the teacher or individually through a graded sequence of tasks, e.g.

Comprehension questions (oral and written)	Incomplete sentences	Ordering, tabulating and classifying information
Expand plans and outlines	Find synonyms	True/false and multiple choice tasks
Fill in details of summary	Gapped texts	
Find words equivalent to definitions	Find equivalents in another language	

Stage 3 Practising the language

This stage may use more formal drills and exercises to form a bridge between comprehension and production, e.g.

Sentence and phrase building	Partial or total reconstruction of text	Grammatical practice
Pattern drills	Sentence translation and re-translation	Manipulating sentence structures

Text

In this story, called The Enemy, V. S. Naipaul describes his early life with his mother in the West Indies.

This text is not to be taken as exemplifying the type of text used in the language examinations, which tend to be journalistic rather than literary. Nor would dialect be used. But this is a suitable text for teaching as it is lively and thought-provoking. It also expresses lots of attitudes and emotions which would lead to useful class discussion and written work, Its main function here is to provide a source for exemplification of the task-types.

My mother made a great thing at first about keeping me in my place and knocking out all the nonsense my father had taught me. I don't know why she didn't try harder, but the fact is that she soon lost interest in me, and she let me run about the street, only rushing down to beat me from time to time.

Occasionally, though, she would take the old firm line.

One day she kept me home. She said, 'No school for you today. I just sick of tying your shoe-laces for you. Today you go have to learn that!'

I didn't think she was being fair. After all, in the country none of us wore shoes and I wasn't used to them.

That day she beat me and beat me and made me tie knot after knot and in the end I still couldn't tie my shoe-laces. For years afterwards it was a great shame to me that I couldn't do a simple thing like that, just as how I couldn't peel an orange. But about the shoes I made up a little trick. I never made my mother buy shoes the correct size. I pretended that those shoes hurt, and I made her get me shoes a size or two bigger. Once the attendant had tied the laces up for me, I never undid them, and merely slipped my feet in and out of the shoes. To keep them on my feet, I stuck paper in the toes.

To hear my mother talk, you would think I was peculiar. Nearly every little boy she knew was better and more intelligent. There was one boy she knew who helped his mother paint her house. There was another boy who could mend his own shoes. There was still another boy who at the age of thirteen was earning a good twenty dollars a month, while I was just idling and living off her blood.

Still, there were surprising glimpses of kindness.

There was the time, for instance, when I was cleaning some tumblers for her one Saturday morning. I dropped a tumbler and it broke. Before I could do anything about it my mother saw what had happened.

She said, 'How you break it?'

I said, 'It just slip off. It smooth smooth.'

She said, 'Is a lot of nonsense drinking from glass. They break up so easy.'

And that was all. I got worried about my mother's health.

She was never worried about mine.

She thought that there was no illness in the world a stiff dose of hot Epsom Salts couldn't cure. That was a penance I had to endure once a month. It completely ruined my weekend. And if there was something she couldn't understand, she sent me to the Health Officer in Tragarete Road. That was an awful place. You waited and waited and waited before you went in to see the nurse.

But you mustn't get the impression that I was a saint all the time. I wasn't. I used to have odd fits where I just couldn't take an order from anybody, particularly my mother. I used to feel that I would dishonour myself for life if I took anybody's orders. And life is a funny thing, really. I sometimes got these fits just when my mother was anxious to be nice to me.

The day after Hat rescued me from drowning at Docksider I wrote an essay for my schoolmaster on the subject, 'A Day at the Seaside'. I don't think any schoolmaster ever got an essay like that. I talked about how I was nearly drowned and how calmly I was facing death, with my mind absolutely calm, thinking, 'Well, boy, this is the end.' The teacher was so pleased he gave me ten marks out of twelve. He said, 'I think you are a genius.'

When I went home I told my mother, 'That essay I write today, I get ten out of twelve for it.'

My mother said, 'How you so bold-face to lie brave so in front of my face? You want me give you a slap to turn your face?'

In the end I convinced her.

She melted at once. She sat down in the hammock and said, 'Come and sit down by me, son.'

Just then the crazy fit came on me.

I got very angry for no reason at all and I said, 'No. I not going to sit by you.'

She laughed and coaxed.

And the angrier she made me.

Slowly the friendliness died away. It had become a struggle between two wills. I was prepared to drown rather than dishonour myself by obeying. 'I ask you to come and sit down here.'

'I not sitting down.'

'Take off your belt.'

I took it off and gave it to her. She belted me soundly, and my nose bled, but still I didn't sit in the hammock.

At times like these I used to cry, without meaning it, 'If my father was alive you wouldn't be behaving like this'.

Exemplar tasks

Stage 2 Collecting information and language

Comprehension questions (oral and written)

There is a variety of question styles, e.g.

(Locating information in the text)

Why did Naipaul's mother keep him at home one day? (She was tired of tying his shoe-laces for him. He had to learn for himself.)

(Rephrasing information in the text)

(Explain IN YOUR OWN WORDS how Naipaul avoided having to tie his shoelaces.

(Interpreting items in the text)

The school teacher said, 'I think you are a genius'. What did he mean?

(Focusing on the use of language)

The speech patterns used by the author are different from standard English. Give two examples of this from the boy AND two from his mother.

Expand plans and outlines

An abbreviated outline of the text is given in a series of short statements or questions. Each statement acts as a cue for the student to reconstruct the text, giving any further information or filling in details understood from the text.

How does Naipaul's mother treat her son?
Naipaul and his shoes
Her cure for any illness
Mother's reaction

One day she kept him at home, why?
Example of mother's kindness
Naipaul's essay at school and the schoolmaster's reaction.
Naipaul's response to his mother's friendliness.

Fill in details of summary

An extension of the previous exercise, leading to more developed and extended answers, e.g.

"One day she kept me at home" - why? What had he done? what was he to learn at home?

"I didn't think she was being fair". Why did he think that?

"But about the shoes I made up a little trick". Explain his trick.

Incomplete sentences

This is a further extension from the previous task. Students hide the text and complete sentences from memory. They are not required to give exact words but convey the meaning:

“I dropped a tumbler and it broke. Before I could do anything about it.....” (my mother saw what had happened).

“When I went home I told my mother.....” (The essay I write today, I get ten out of twelve for it).

Gapped texts

This exercise aims to focus on specific words used in the text. The student fills in gaps from memory:

“But you mustn’t get the impression that I was a --- all the time.” (saint)

“Slowly the --- died away.” (friendliness)

“...my nose bled, but still I didn’t sit in the ---“ (hammock)

Ordering, tabulating and classifying information

Some texts lend themselves more readily to tabulation than others. In this text one might try to tabulate events according to the time phrases, e.g.

Fill in the blank boxes with an expression of time chosen from the list below the table:

Time expression	Activity in the text
	She would take the old firm line
	When I was cleaning some tumblers for her
	She made a great thing about keeping me in my place
	She kept me at home

At first

Occasionally

One day

That day

There was the time

True/false and multiple choice tasks

True/false is a variety of multiple choice with a single yes or no option, e.g.

Naipaul's mother kept him off school one day because he did not have any shoes. (False)

Multiple choice, e.g.

What was surprising about the episode of the tumbler? (Answer = B)

- A** He dropped the tumbler and it broke.
- B** His mother did not beat him for dropping it.
- C** His mother told him to drink out of the tumbler.
- D** The tumbler was extremely smooth.

Finding synonyms, words equivalent to definitions etc

Find the words in the text which are described by the following dictionary definitions:

Flat bottomed drinking glass with no handle or stem (tumbler)

A length of canvas, suspended at the ends and used as a bed (hammock)

Stage 3 Practising the language

This stage may use more formal drills and exercises to form a bridge between comprehension and production:

Sentence and phrase building

Look at the model sentence taken from the text and then form new sentences with the ideas given:

Model "The day after Hat rescued me from drowning at Dockside I wrote an essay."

Mother kept him at home. Next day – back to school (The day after mother kept him at home he went back to school.)

He dropped a tumbler. Next day – forgiven by mother (The day after he dropped a tumbler, mother forgave him.)

Pattern drills

Drills which repeat a pattern to give practice of a particular structure have gone out of favour because they can be tedious. But it is possible to devise meaningful drills which allow such repetition, e.g.

Model Mother...peculiar. (to hear my mother talk you would think that I was peculiar.)

Teacher...genius. (to hear my teacher talk you would think that I was a genius.)

Naipaul...saint. (to hear Naipaul talk you would think that he was a saint.)

Manipulating sentence structures

Rephrase the following sentences using the phrase in brackets:

I got worried about my mother's health. (It was...)

(It was my mother's health that worried me.)

If my father was alive you wouldn't behave like this. (It is only because...)

(It is only because my father isn't alive that you behave like this.)

Stage 4 Integrating the language leads towards more extended writing and productive work. Unit 4 of this Teaching syllabus suggests approaches to developing the skills for writing Summaries. A start to writing summaries can be made with a question such as the following:

What have you learned from the passage about Naipaul when he was a small boy? Give evidence from the passage concerning his parents, his intelligence, his behaviour and anything that happened to him.

As is explained in the notes on Summary skills in Unit 4, the student should be guided by the detailed wording of the question and structure the summary around the specific information requested.