

## ESL Developmental Continuum P–10

### Teaching strategy – Running dictation

#### Focuses on

Speaking Listening Reading Writing

#### Most useful for students at stages

A1 A2 BL B1 **B2 B3** SL **S1 S2** S3 S4

This is an activity that is fun and motivating for students at upper primary and lower secondary level.

#### Purpose of this activity

This activity is often used to inject some fun into the learning, or to enliven a tired class. It can also be useful for introducing a new theme or topic or to focus on a particular grammatical point.

#### How this helps ESL students in particular

This is a collaborative activity, whose successful completion relies on the use of spoken and written English. The finished products are products of the *group* not of individuals, thus there is less threat to individual members' face if their sentences are not totally accurate. The correction of the completed texts makes students notice aspects of what they have remembered and transcribed which may not be accurate. It encourages the use of metalanguage – a language to talk about language.

Most of all, it is fun!

#### Procedure

In preparation for this activity, the teacher needs to find and copy a text that is of a suitable level for the class. Make sure the text deals with content the students are familiar with. For ESL students, this is not the time to introduce new vocabulary or grammatical structures!

Divide the class up into groups of 4 or 5, with one student being the designated writer. You also need a 'runner', or, alternatively, the other students in the group can take turns at being the 'runner'.

Pin up around the classroom walls (or outside in the hallway) as many copies of the chosen text as you have groups of students.

When you tell the students to start, a runner from each table group goes up to their sheet of paper and tries to memorise as much of the text as he or she can, before running back to their table and dictating the text to the writer. It is important that the runner dictates and does not write, for the activity to work. Then, when the writer has finished writing that sentence, a runner from the group runs to the text, and reads and remembers the next chunk of text to bring back to the table.

Once all the sections of the text have been dictated, the members of the group confer to check the final version of their text for accuracy of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

The winners can be either the first group finished or the most accurate group, depending on the purpose for the activity, time of year, etc.

The final versions can be checked in a number of ways:

- by groups reading their texts aloud
- by getting their version from the wall to check at their table,
- by writing their sentences on the board (one per group, not each group writing their whole text) for discussion with the teacher and other class members as to its accuracy, word choices made, and so on.

### **Acknowledgments/reference**

British Council (2004). 'Running dictation'. Available as a Word document from The British Council  
(<http://www.britishcouncil.org/flasonline-lessons-all-ages-running-dictation.doc>)