

## What do teachers need to consider?

### 1 What do you do when not all students in a class are taking the exam, or are taking different exams?

Students using the A2 level of the course may be working towards the A2 Key for Schools qualification. Teachers should make sure that students who are not taking the exam that a particular exam task relates to are still engaged with the work done in class and feel they can benefit from the specific practice it provides. This means explaining clearly exactly what is being tested in exam tasks and how these skills also benefit students outside the classroom. Cambridge exams test skills that are transferable to the real world, and this should be explained to students. Once an exam task has been completed, it could be followed by general discussion on the topic or extend vocabulary practice to maximise its usefulness for non-exam students as well.

### 2 How is teaching for exams different from teaching general English classes?

- Exam classes often place more emphasis on reading, writing and grammar. General courses often include more speaking activities and general listening tasks that aim to develop communicative skills and fluency.
- An exam course is fixed, with an exam syllabus that must be completed. This means the teacher may feel there's little time to do many extension activities from the Student's Book that are either optional or not in exam format, even though these are clearly useful. When doing these activities, it's important that teachers explain their value clearly to the students so that they understand how they relate to the exam.
- Exam students may not be interested in learning English for its own sake – they may simply want to pass the exam. This means they may be keen to do exam practice but may not see the value of spending time on communicative or fluency activities. Non-exam students, on the other hand, will want to do fluency work that improves their communicative ability.
- Students may feel under pressure to succeed. This could come from parents, teachers or from the students themselves, and leads to a feeling of frustration if they're not doing well.
- There can be problems if students are not at the level of the exam they're studying for. Students can become demotivated, and teachers can feel frustrated.
- There is a very clear end goal which creates a shared bond among exam students. It also means that non-exam students can see a progression through the course, and gain a sense of progress and achievement in their overall ability.

### 3 What do exam teachers need to know at the start of a course?

It's vital that teachers know about the exam before they start the course, so they can make crucial decisions about how much time to spend on the different aspects of the exam, when to start dedicated exam practice and so on.

Teachers should find out about students' priorities and how many students intend to take the exam. They should then find out about individual student's respective strengths and weaknesses in order to focus as much time as possible on those areas students have trouble with. Information they need includes:

#### a) The format and content of the exam.

- How many papers are there, and what skills does each one test?
- How many different parts are there in each paper? Are they all compulsory or is there a choice?
- What is the grammar syllabus for the exam?
- How are the skills tested – multiple choice questions, gap-fill ... ? What techniques are required for dealing with each one?

#### b) The practicalities of taking the exam.

- How much time is allowed for each part of the exam? How should students balance their time?
- Where do students write their answers? Is there transfer time?

#### c) Marking the exam.

- What is the weighting of different papers within the overall qualification?
- How many marks are there for each question?
- What are the assessment criteria for each part where there is no 'right' answer, especially when testing the productive skills of writing and speaking?

#### d) What happens after the exam?

- How are the results presented? Do students receive feedback? Are the grades linked to the CEFR? What level are they linked to?
- What can your students do with the qualification? Is it recognised internationally?
- What is the next exam that your students should progress to?

### 4 What makes a successful exam teacher?

Teaching for an exam is very rewarding, but it is also challenging. A good exam teacher:

- knows and understands the exam well, including the testing focus of each part and what techniques students need to deal with each one
- understands how to achieve a balance between developing skills and doing exam practice in lessons so as to engage all students in the work
- enjoys teaching towards a goal
- manages their own and their students' time effectively and efficiently
- listens to students' concerns and worries
- gives honest and direct feedback on students' performance
- motivates students and fosters confidence and independent learning

**5 How important is balancing teaching and testing?**

Students enrolled on an exam course will expect to go through a lot of practice tests and exam practice. However, if this is all you do you will produce excellent test takers but poor language users! You may also risk losing the interest of non-exam students. When time is restricted you need to make the most of the time you choose to teach, and the time you need to be testing. This balance is different with every class.

- **A class below the level**

The priority is teaching. Students may lack both test taking skills and language knowledge, so you need to identify their needs and try to fill in the gaps. Testing too often might de-motivate them, although you may want to set progress tests for your own assessment of what they need to study more. Make sure that they have realistic aims and that they maintain a sense of progress. You may decide not to mark their work using exam criteria, but to mark constructively which will also benefit non-exam students.

- **A class at the level**

Students have the basic test-taking and language skills, but they need to consolidate and review these as well as extend the range of structures and language they can use productively. Regular testing can give these students a sense of progress. However, you need to consider how you mark their work in order to provide positive feedback and foster improvement, possibly by not marking to the level of the exam too early.

- **A class above the level**

The emphasis is on enabling students to achieve the highest mark they can. Their language and test-taking skills should be good, and the problem may be to keep them motivated. Challenge them by setting them tasks above the level of the exam, and involve them in understanding what they have to do to get a higher than average mark in the exam. They should be aiming high, extending their range of language and not settling for 'good enough'.

**6 Helping exam students help themselves**

Encouraging a collaborative approach to developing exam skills will improve students' confidence, enable them to help each other and make each task seem more familiar and achievable. By involving students in understanding what exam tasks involve, teachers can foster confidence and facilitate success. It is really crucial that students feel comfortable with the tasks, and that there are no surprises when they enter the exam room.

**How does the Gold Experience series help with exam teaching?**

Gold Experience works in a graded and supportive way, and provides a number of resources that help to develop the technical skills students need to deal with exam tasks, while also improving and extending their general language skills. The course is beneficial for both exam and non-exam students, and provides supportive and extended practice in real-life skills. The topics are engaging and age-relevant and give students the opportunity to read about and discuss interesting subjects.

**Development of language**

Exam tasks require students to demonstrate a range of language at the appropriate level. Gold Experience has grammar and vocabulary sections that develop this range in topic related units, which makes it easy for students to apply them to exam tasks and to the real world. For example, in Unit 4, students learn vocabulary relating to the topic of schools as collocations, rather than individual words. This both enables students to use the language more effectively in real world situations, but also to apply it to exam tasks, such as the multiple choice cloze in Part 4 of the A2 Key for Schools Reading and Writing paper.

**Focus on the process as well as the goal**

Learners are helped to understand not just the point of what they are doing but also how to be successful. Understanding the point of each task type, and the process they need to follow in order to complete it, enables student to reach the overall goal. For example, in Unit 1, students learn strategies to help them complete the A2 Key for Schools Listening Part 2 exam task. These strategies include looking at the questions and deciding what the important words are (e.g. price, day) and thinking about what kinds of words students might hear for a price (a number). Students are also alerted to the fact that they may hear more than one price, meaning that they need to listen carefully to make sure they write down the right number, in this case the price per day.

**Graded exam tasks**

Exam tasks are introduced to students early in the course, but in a graded way. This may mean that a task type initially has fewer questions or a simpler text, or that it tests a more limited range of structures. This helps them to understand the exam task, and therefore deal with it more effectively. For example, students are first introduced to Part 2 of the A2 Key for Schools Reading and Writing paper (the matching reading task) in Unit 1. The text used in this task reflects the language covered in the unit and so is limited to the present simple. However, the matching task in U8 covers a range of structures, more reflective of the actual exam task, since it appears towards the end of the course.

**Developing confidence with exam tasks**

The clear learning goals for each skill established at the start of each unit, plus the frequent models throughout the book for the productive skills, show students what they need to do in each task and how to do it. Students are often nervous about certain parts of the exam, such as the speaking and listening papers. There are often specific reasons for this:

- Speaking – students may be embarrassed about speaking in front of an examiner, or may be nervous so that their mind goes blank and they say too little.
- Listening – students often feel that they are not in control as they can't stop the recording to play it again, and this can cause them to panic if they are unsure of an answer.

Gold Experience provides plenty of practice in these two skills, and clear advice on how to deal with the problems students find with them. In this way students develop confidence. For example, in listening lessons such as the one in Unit 4, students are encouraged to predict the information they will hear in order for them to listen more confidently when they complete the A2 Key for Schools exam task. There are also useful 'Skill tips' that give advice, such as the one in the speaking lesson in Unit 1, p17, which reminds students that making mistakes is a part of learning and not to worry too much about making mistakes when speaking.

## Regular exam tips

There are exam tips in every unit which deal with specific exam tasks. The tips focus on aspects of the task that will help students deal with it effectively. These often precede practice in that particular task, so that students can see the tip in action. For example, in Unit 4, p54, there is an exam tip preceding an A2 Key for Schools Part 5 task. The exam tip that reminds students that there is only one word in each gap and gives advice on what kind of missing words to look for. These tips build throughout the Student's Book and help students to understand exactly what is being tested, what to look out for, and develop a bank of appropriate exam techniques that they can refer to. As they work through the Student's Book and become familiar with the tips the tasks will become easier.

## Focus on the process of writing

To help students identify good practice in writing tasks, lessons in the Student's Book provide model answers. There are also tasks that encourage students to analyse the model answers, which gives them greater understanding of how to complete the tasks themselves. These analytical tasks focus on the approach, content and language required by the different writing genres. In Unit 5, for example, students are introduced to story writing, which is Part 7 of the reading and writing paper. Students are guided through the process of responding to picture prompts, selecting appropriate content and structuring their story using time markers, all before they are asked to attempt a Part 7 exam task on their own. There is a task at the end of each writing section which mirrors the model so that students can practise writing an answer themselves. There is also an *Improve it* section which guides students and helps them review and improve their work. In these sections, students are encouraged to work together to review and analyse each other's writing tasks, and to cooperate in understanding where improvement is required. There is a Writing file with further tips on how to approach the tasks, with further models.

## Focus on speaking

Throughout the Student's Book there are discussion questions that encourage students to talk about ideas related to topics they have been reading or writing about. This is particularly beneficial for non-exam students. In sections specifically devoted to exam tasks, there are model answers for students to analyse. These answers give clear models for long turns and give examples of the best ways to interact with a partner. An example of this can be found in the speaking lesson in Unit 6. Students are given a model conversation about holiday plans which they can then adapt to talk about their own personal plans.

## Explanatory answer keys

There are clear keys provided for the exam tasks. In the reading and listening tasks the lines where the answers can be found are quoted.

## Practice test

As well as working through regular exams tasks in the Student's Book and Workbook units, students complete the course by doing further A2 Key for Schools exam practice in unit 10 for each task type they have met in the course. They can then check their answers against the detailed answer key provided. As well as working through regular unit tests, students complete the course by doing a full A2 Key for Schools exam practice test in the Workbook, which they can check against the answer key.

## Resources for self-study

There are a number of resources which provide opportunities for self-study, and also give supplementary information and further practice. These can be used in class or at home. They include:

- A Wordlist at the end of each unit in the Student's Book
- An Extend Vocabulary section at the back of the Student's Book
- A Speaking file section at the back of the Student's Book
- A Writing file section at the back of the Student's Book
- A Grammar file and Practice section at the back of the Student's Book
- A full A2 Key for Schools practice test in the Workbook
- An A2 Key for Schools Exam Practice booklet
- Audioscripts for the listening tasks
- The Workbook
- Online practice activities and the vocabulary practice app

## Extra suggestions

Here are five suggestions that might help your students with their studies for exams.

### 1 Watch videos of the speaking test

Videos are available of the Speaking part of the exam online. Watching another student sit the relevant exam can help students familiarise themselves with what to expect. Make sure students understand that the format will be the same but the content will be different.

### 2 Practice Speaking test

If students feel comfortable with the practicalities of taking the Speaking test they only have to think about the language they need, and an activity like this will help them relax. If you can, near the end of the course, give students opportunities to do a practice Speaking exam, either with yourself or another teacher acting as the examiner.

### 3 Encouragement from previous candidates

If you can, invite older students or alumni from your school who have taken the same exam the previous year to visit your class. Get them to talk briefly about what it was like, give tips, and give students the opportunity to ask questions. (Be aware that exam specifications do change, so make sure any specific task advice is relevant to the most up to date exam specifications.)

### 4 Exam tips

Make a point of discussing each exam tip and ensuring students understand how to apply it to the task.

### 5 Focus on building student confidence

Look for opportunities to build student confidence through actively looking for opportunities to give each student positive encouragement that is sincere and specific.

Emphasise that the Cambridge for Schools exams are an opportunity for students to demonstrate their progress in English.