

## What do teachers need to consider?

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

Teachers should make sure that students who are not taking the exam are still engaged with the work done in class and feel they can benefit from the specific practice that exam students need. This means explaining clearly exactly what is being tested in exam tasks and how these skills also benefit students outside the classroom. Cambridge English Qualifications 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 extended vocabulary practice so that non-exam students feel the benefit.

### 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 exam practice and so on. They also need to know the balance of exam and non-exam students.

Teachers should find out about student's 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?
- 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 Gold Experience 2<sup>nd</sup> edition help with exam teaching?

Gold Experience 2nd edition 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 give students the opportunity to read about and discuss interesting and relevant topics.

## Development of language

Exam tasks require students to demonstrate a range of language at the appropriate level. Gold Experience 2nd edition 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.

## 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 students to reach the overall goal.

## Graded exam tasks

Exam tasks are introduced to students early in the course, but in a graded way. This may mean that a task 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.

## 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 2nd edition 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.

## 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. These tips build throughout the Students' 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 Students' 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 Students' 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. 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.

## 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 unit tests, students complete the course by doing a full 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 Extended 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 section at the back of the Student's Book
- A full practice test in the Workbook
- An Exam Practice booklet
- Audioscripts for the listening tasks
- The Workbook
- Online practice activities

## Extra activities

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

### 1 Developing confidence with the Speaking test

When students feel comfortable with the practicalities of taking the Speaking test, they feel more relaxed and can focus on their performance. This activity will help them to understand the practicalities.

- 1 Put students into pairs (A and B). Give out the appropriate worksheets.
- 2 They read through their own sentences and predict the missing information.
- 3 They dictate the sentences to each other and complete the gaps.

### Student A

- 1 Arrive ..... – don't be late or you will be stressed.
- 2 Say ..... and make yourself comfortable.
- 3 Listen carefully to the instructions. Ask the examiner ..... if you aren't sure.
- 4 If you're taking the exam with a partner, .....
- 5 Give ..... answers. Don't just say yes or no.
- 6 Try to use a ..... structures and .....
- 7 Smile! ....., you'll do better.

### Student B

- 1 Arrive in good time – don't be late .....
- 2 Say hello to the examiner and .....
- 3 Listen carefully ..... Ask the examiner to repeat if you aren't sure.
- 4 If you're taking the exam ....., interact with them.
- 5 Give interesting answers. Don't .....
- 6 Try to use a range of ..... and vocabulary.
- 7 Smile! If you enjoy it, you'll .....

### 2 Remind students of the exam tips

Ask students to work in pairs and write down as many exam tips as they can remember. Discuss which tips they have found most useful, and why. You could do this regularly through the course so that students become very familiar with them.

### 3 Use the marking criteria

The writing tasks are marked under criteria which include organisation, style, language and content. Share these criteria with students early in the course and explain what they mean. Give examples from the models in the Writing file. Ask students to check their own work against these criteria before they hand anything in. This will develop good habits as well as foster understanding of what the tasks require. Use them yourself when you mark students' written work.

### 4 Share students' experiences

Ask students to share things that they find easy, and anything they have found helpful when they do exam tasks. This will also boost their confidence as they realise how much they do actually know, and will give both exam students and non-exam students a lift!

### 5 Help students understand what is best for them

Write the incomplete sentences about doing exam tasks on the board. Students should complete them for themselves. Then discuss their answers with the whole class. This activity will help non-exam students to see the value of exam practice for them. It will also give you valuable information about how your students feel about their English lessons.

- 1 I prefer it when the teacher ..... with exam tasks.
- 2 I understand language most when .....
- 3 I like/don't like doing speaking activities in class because .....
- 4 When we do practice tests in class I feel ..... because .....
- 5 I feel confident about the exam because .....