**Gateway to Exam Success (Preparing Students for National and International Exams)**

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Preparing for exams can be a daunting and stressful task, both for the students and the teacher. With exams gaining ever-increasing importance, there is much at stake for our students and often a very fine line between success and failure.

The question for us as teachers is: How can we ensure our students are as well-prepared for their exams as they can possibly be?

**International Exams: An Alphabet Soup**

There is a veritable alphabet soup of international exams out there today. Do you know the full titles of these exams?

* IELTS
* KET
* PET
* FCE
* CAE
* TOEFL

For a bonus point, what is the CEFR?

The good news for us as teachers is that although the level of difficulty of the language will change depending on the exam, many task types are similar in different exams, with the same skills are required.

**What are the universal rules of success for exam preparation?**

These are some general rules that apply to successful preparation for exams. Can you complete these rules?

Students:

* need to know the t\_\_\_\_.
* need to be familiar with skills such as reading for g\_\_\_\_, sc\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, g\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ meaning from context.
* need to know useful exam t\_\_\_\_\_\_ and s\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for different tasks.
* need to build their c\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* need to be familiar with s\_\_\_\_\_\_ answers.
* need to develop i\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ study skills.
* need sufficient p\_\_\_\_ with the test and authentic f\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on results/progress.

**Some practical skills for exam classes**

Teaching exam classes is all about finding a balance between training, testing and teaching. We need to prepare students for the pressures and specifics of exams, while avoiding the negative aspects of the ‘backwash effect’.

1. Familiarity with the test: task types and exam skills

Which exam skills are being trained with these questions?

* *You are going to read a blog. The title is ‘Turn Off TV Week’. What do you think ‘Turn Off TV Week’ is?*
* *You have four minutes to read the blog and decide if each person thinks Turn Off TV Week is a good or bad idea.*
* *Read the texts again and decide if the statements are true or false. Write the numbers of the lines where you found the answers.*
* *Look at the underlined words in the text. Without a dictionary, guess the meaning.*

Giving students ample practice with exam-type tasks and skills will help them greatly. *Gateway* has exam-type tasks throughout the book, as well as a ‘Gateway to Exams’ section after every two units.

2. Build confidence

We shouldn’t throw our students in at the deep-end – initially they will need lots of help with exam tasks. As progress is made, we can gradually remove the stabilisers – just like with riding a bike!

Think how you can help students’ confidence with use of English, reading and listening tasks. Examples include giving students prompts to the answers in use of English tasks or reducing the number of options or distractors for multiple-choice reading and listening tasks.

3. Use the advice boxes in *Gateway*

*Gateway* as useful advice boxes for exams and study skills throughout the book. Make use of these by turning them into quizzes or communicative activities where the advice boxes are cut up and distributed to students; they can then discuss the tips or guess which exam section the advice is from.

**Exam Advice T/F Quiz – Word Formation**

1. Remember to read the task in detail first then go to the questions.
2. You can use suffixes but not prefixes in the word formation section.
3. Looking at the words before and after the gap will give you the answer.
4. Remember you may need to change the spelling of the word – e.g. STRONG – STRENGTH.
5. When you have finished, read through to check for mistakes.
6. Spelling isn’t important for word formation – if you are close you’ll get the mark.

4. Work with sample answers

Working with complete or sample answers can help students gain a better idea of exam tasks and what is being tested. You can use completed use of English tasks and ask the students to identify which words they would choose to test; alternatively, sample written answers with comments from Teacher’s Handbooks are useful to analyse in class with students. YouTube also has clips from a range of speaking sections from exams – watch these with your students!

5. Build independent study skills

Use the study skills boxes in Gateway to help your students become more autonomous learners. Not only will this help them with their exams, it will also build skills for life and further study!

**Guessing meaning from context**

* She *nordled* her final exams because she hadn’t prepared well.
* He was wearing jeans, a t-shirt and a pair of *galvies*.
* Francesca is a very *snorpy* person – terrible things are always happening to her.
* She *toogled* into the classroom and told everyone the news.

With writing tasks, use a correction code to train your students’ proof-reading skills.

6. Give realistic feedback

Exam tasks which are objective (i.e. have a right/wrong answer) are easy to mark. However, tasks which are more subjective (usually speaking and writing tasks) require the teacher to know what the exam requires and what the examiners will be looking for. This means a detailed knowledge of the test criteria is needed on the teacher’s part, as well as knowledge of some of the test ‘jargon’ that international exams employ.

* Target reader
* Linking words and cohesive devices
* Discourse management
* Appropriacy
* To impede communication
* Coherent
* Conventions

7. Find a balance between teaching the test and teaching the right language skills

*“Negative backwash from too much testing makes good language teaching more difficult.”*

Avoid this by using the content-rich material in *Gateway* which focuses on language, cultural and cross-curricular knowledge – all of which enhances the learning experience for students.

* Why is Glastonbury famous?
* What is a ‘chav’?
* Why is 1984 a significant year?

Don’t forget, you can also have some fun by using revision games such as ‘word formation tennis’ or TV game show-style quizzes such as ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire?’.

Useful websites:

[**www.gateway-online.net**](http://www.gateway-online.net/)[**www.facebook.com/macmillangateway**](http://www.facebook.com/macmillangateway)
**www.iptrussia.ru**