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## Session 1: units one to twelve

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### Why these topics?

The topic areas covered in these units are the subject areas covered in the Trinity College London ESOL exams.

### Why are there no reading texts and comprehension questions?

The units have a 'magazine' format, in that they contain small chunks of language and the kind of 'real' activities such as quizzes and puzzles that engage native speakers when they read magazines. The units do not contain long articles followed by unnatural comprehension questions. The idea here is that students should be motivated to read what's in the book because it's interesting, not purely because they have been told to read it. In the Level 4 (advanced) book there are some short reading texts, but without comprehension questions – they are designed to prompt discussion.

### Why aren't there more traditional exercises?

This is best answered by Michael Lewis in *The Lexical Approach* (1993) when he says: 'Exercises should form a small part of any coursebook. The emphasis, however, should be on activities or tasks. Ideally, many of the tasks should have as their primary focus a non-linguistic outcome – the solution of a problem, winning of a game; completion of a table, creation of a poster etc. In the real world language is always instrumental; this intrinsic nature of language should be reflected by classroom activities.'

### How should I approach discussions?

The best approach to any classroom discussion is to play the devil's advocate and try to put across the opposite points of view to those argued by your students. These arguments should be introduced as 'Yes, but other people might say ...' rather than 'You're wrong; I think ...' This approach should stop any discussion becoming confrontational, and encourages the students to think more and expand their arguments. Always remember that the aim of classroom discussion is to provide real language practice for the students. It is not a platform for the teacher to express his/her own views to a captive audience.

### Why can't I teach grammar?

You can. By using English to complete tasks and discuss topics students will inevitably make a whole range of lexical, phonological and grammatical mistakes. As a teacher you will be constantly making decisions about which mistakes you choose to highlight, and which you choose to ignore. So for example, if one or more students are constantly omitting the third person 's' or using the past simple instead of the present perfect you would be quite correct to point this out and 'teach' the problem grammar. What makes far less sense is to pick out random grammar items such as 'reported speech' or 'conditionals' and teach them – this grammatical sequencing approach is most unsuitable for short vacation courses.

### Why is there some repetition of material across the three books?

A few activities/exercises appear in more than one of the books. This is because many exercises can be interesting and useful for students with very different levels of English. For example, at pre-intermediate level a gap filling exercise might provide the missing words mixed up in a box below the text. At advanced level the same text might be used, but this time the students have to supply the missing words themselves.

### Why are the exercises and activities in the units quite short?

The exercises and activities in the unit are generally quite short to give the teacher the maximum amount of flexibility possible. This means that if a discussion begins as a result of doing an exercise in the book the teacher can allow this to develop for a few minutes or much longer, rather than forcing the students away from genuine discussion and back to an 'artificial' planned lesson which must fit into the allotted class time.

### How long should each exercise last?

There is little point in trying to predict how long particular exercises and activities will take, because every class is different and every teacher is different. Ten different teachers can pick up the same unit in a book and teach ten fairly different lessons. This is where the skill of the teacher comes into play. It is the teacher's job to use the material in front of him/her to engage the class for approximately one hour. Only the teacher can gauge how interested his/her students are on a particular day. Sometimes you will find that you want to extend a topic and come back to it on the following day, and at other times you may want to skim through a unit quite quickly. The most important aspect of timing is that you make the coursebook last for the whole course – don't use more than one unit in an hour – if you are doing this, there's something wrong!

### How can I go through the material more slowly?

You should not just consider what is in front of you in the coursebook, but what is not there as well. The coursebook units are designed to get students talking – once this begins to happen you will have plenty of other language to focus on, e.g. going through the answers to a quiz about healthy eating could develop into a comparison of eating habits in Scandinavia and Scotland. During the course of this discussion there may be some correction work on comparative adjectives, e.g. healthier/better for you. There may be explanations of dishes which some of the class have never tasted, or you might make a list of the worst things that the students have ever eaten – When? Where? What happened? – When I was about six/at my grandmother's/I spat it out, etc. A skilful teacher can guide the lesson like this, going off at tangents in discussions, eliciting language, focusing on useful language items, involving all the students, personalising the discussion, moving from speaking to writing, feeding in vocabulary, before returning to the coursebook again.

### What will the students have learnt?

If the teacher can achieve this kind of atmosphere there is a fair chance the students will leave the class knowing more English than when they went in. What English they will have learnt and how they will have learnt it is very difficult to say – it is often the case that students learn a lot of 'peripheral' English from general interaction with the teacher and other students, while not learning what the teacher is specifically trying to teach them.

