how to Teach for Exams

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Introduction

Who is this book for?

*How to Teach for Exams* is for all teachers of English who are currently teaching exam classes or expect to become involved in exam teaching in the future. The approaches discussed in this book should be of interest, both to teachers who are very experienced and to those who have been working for a relatively short time. Teacher trainers and trainees will also find useful and accessible ideas for skills teaching in *How to Teach for Exams*.

What is this book about?

It is difficult to imagine a career in foreign or second language teaching that does not, at some point, involve working with students who are preparing for an exam. Although an exam class may have a lot in common with other classes, the fact that students are preparing for an exam makes special demands on the teacher. *How to Teach for Exams* suggests how we might go about satisfying these demands.

The first two chapters establish the context of exam teaching and raise many of the most important issues. Chapter 1 highlights some of the main differences between teaching an exam class and teaching a general language class, and considers what sort of teacher is best suited to exam teaching. It also looks at the first lesson of an exam course, and suggests ways of balancing teaching and testing as the course progresses. Chapter 2 looks at exam course planning and choosing materials.

Chapters 3 to 7 deal with the skills and competencies tested in exams at intermediate level and above. Reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary, listening, and speaking are each focused on separately. These chapters offer a more detailed account of how each of these areas is typically tested in exams and suggest some teaching approaches. In each of these chapters there are activities (signalled by this icon \( \text{**} \)) or sample lessons that can be adapted or used as points of departure to develop the teacher's own ideas. Finally, Chapter 8 deals with the growing body of low-level exams aimed at less proficient learners.

The Task File at the back of the book is divided into sections corresponding to each of the chapters. This can be used in a number of ways. Teachers might like to look at the tasks before reading the chapter, while reading, or indeed after reading. The tasks can be done individually or used as a basis for discussion with colleagues or fellow trainees.

The Exams overview appendix summarizes the range of English language exams available internationally, explains how the Common European Framework (CEF) and the ALTE system provide a basis for comparing the levels of different exams, and includes information to help teachers find out more about these exams. Inside the back cover is a table comparing the main exams offered by the different boards, and their levels. The overview and table act as useful reference documents explaining the context of the exams discussed in the book.
How to be a successful exams teacher

- What is special about teaching an exam class?
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What is special about teaching an exam class?

Preparing students for an examination is a special responsibility. This is because exam results can have a significant effect on people's lives and careers; exams provide access to higher levels of education and open doors to certain professions. An offer of a place at a British or American university, for instance, may be conditional on achieving a specified IELTS or TOEFL grade; a pass in the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) is the passport to an English teaching job in some European countries. Even if a student is taking an exam for purely personal interest, or because their school requires them to, it is still an important event in their life and an opportunity to demonstrate success.

Yet, in many ways, teaching an exam class is not so different from teaching a general language class. The classroom activities and teaching techniques that work in general teaching will help to make a successful exams teacher. It is as important to build variety and fun into an exam course as it is to drive the students towards the goal of passing their exam. As in any course of study, it is also important to nurture the individual abilities of learners and attend to their needs and concerns. As shown in the examples in this book, the sorts of tasks that are set in formal examinations are often quite similar to the language practice tasks found in any good coursebook; indeed, in recent years, exam boards have made great efforts to develop assessment tasks and methods which reflect real-life uses of language.

Many teachers find that teaching an exam class is immensely satisfying. There are many reasons for this. The learners have a shared goal and strong motivation to succeed in their studies. The syllabus is clearly defined and there are lots of published materials (including, nowadays, some excellent