

# Introduction

*Basic Dictations* is a mid- to high-beginning level text that is intended to improve the listening and speaking skills of ESL students. Reading and writing skills are also reinforced, along with attention to vocabulary and grammar. This text provides a variety of dictation topics that are useful for newcomers living in the United States.

The text is photocopyable, and units are designed to stand alone so that teachers can pick and choose which dictations meet the needs, interests, and levels of their students. Each unit begins with a short introduction that provides a background and context for the dictation. The introduction is followed by a short list of vocabulary items whose meanings are central to the dictation. The list also provides a chance to hear the teacher pronounce these important vocabulary items and to have the students repeat them. The central focus of the unit is a dictation activity. In some chapters there is an additional listening activity. Each dictation/listening is followed by a discussion section. The discussions can take place in pairs or small groups. With some units, the teacher may want to discuss the issues with the whole class.

The units in this text are one, two, or three pages long. Therefore, some units will take less time than others. A shorter unit or part of a unit can be done as a fill-in. The dictation and discussion times will vary depending on the level of the class.

The complete texts of the dictations begin on page 117. These full texts can be read to the students, or a student can read them to the class. The complete texts are also available on a CD. On the first page of each unit, there is a *Teacher's note* in the margin giving the CD track and the location of the complete dictation text and of the explanation of how to give the dictation.

## ❁ Different Types of Dictations ❁

Through the years, dictation has been presented in many forms in reading, listening, grammar, and writing classes. It is also used as an assessment procedure. This text, however, does not deal with scoring or analyzing student work. The dictations are meant to be a challenging springboard to discussion in which the students are encouraged to use the language they have just encountered in the dictation. This text includes four forms of dictation: partial, pair, dictogloss, and prediction.

In this text, the direction lines are minimal. It may be necessary to supplement them with your own directions in the first few units you do. The rest of this introduction fully explains what you need to know.

### 1. **Partial** (sometimes known as *cloze*)

Most of the dictations in this text are partial dictations where words, phrases, or chunks of language have been deleted, and students are required to listen and write down the missing words. All the dictations should be discussed upon completion. Pair work is encouraged, and spelling can be corrected at the time of completion.

## 2. **Pair** (sometimes known as *mutual*)

This dictation requires students to work in pairs to combine two partial texts into one continuous piece. One student (Student A) has a gapped copy of the dictation, and the other student (Student B) has a different gapped copy. Each student has half of the text. They should not look at each other's texts. Student A dictates and Student B writes, then B dictates and A writes, back and forth, and so on until the story is complete. The first one the students do should be modeled first.

## 3. **Dictogloss**

In this kind of dictation, the focus is on getting the gist or main idea of a sentence.

Students are told that they will hear a sentence only once, after which they are to jot down the words they can recall and try to reconstruct the sentence in writing as accurately as they can. The first time this is done, the teacher will probably have to allow the students a second reading until they discover that they need to pay attention the first time around. This is especially true for beginning-level students. As the students work at rebuilding the sentences, they can work in pairs or groups of three or four. Some teachers like to have students write their sentences on the board for all to see, correct, and discuss.

## 4. **Prediction**

Prediction lessons come in two parts. The first part focuses more on reading skills and grammar. The students can work individually or in pairs, reading the passage and predicting (or guessing) what should be in each blank space. Any logical or grammatically correct word or phrase can be accepted. The second part requires the students to listen to the same passage and see if their guesses were correct, or similar.

## **Additional Listening Activities**

Seventeen of the units in this text have listening sections. After the dictation, there are short conversations that recycle the vocabulary in the dictations. There are exercises and activities that follow these conversations in each unit.

Students should listen first and try to do the activity. They can listen as many times as they need to. For a follow-up activity, the teacher might give the students the complete text of the conversation and have them read it aloud.

Also, in several chapters there are charts to fill in. These are not dictations but practice in listening and writing down the information requested. See page 21 as an example.

## ❁ Tips for Teachers ❁

1. When reading the full dictations, try to speak naturally, at normal speed, keeping the features of the spoken language. If you are reading the full text at normal speed and you know the exercise will be fairly easy for your students, give the word, phrase, or chunk of language only once. Try to start with a pace that is comfortable for your students, and then make them work a bit at understanding. If you think the text will be difficult for your students, repeat it once or possibly twice. When we were field testing our material, several teachers said they thought the material looked quite difficult for their students, but they were surprised at how well their students did. It's up to you to decide what works best. If you have to repeat it more than three times, the text is too difficult for your students.
2. The students may want to check the spelling of a word or words as you are giving the dictation. It's best to tell them to wait until the end of the activity.
3. For single-digit numbers (1-9), have the students write the words (two rather than 2). For larger numbers, have the students write numerals, rather than the word (15 instead of fifteen). They should also use dollar (\$) and percentage (%) symbols rather than writing out the words.
4. One key to making the dictation a positive experience is to have students correct their own work. When the dictation is completed, the students in pairs check with each other on what they've heard, while you walk around helping and clarifying. This in itself allows for a great deal of discussion. After they have self-corrected, they can turn to the full dictation texts for confirmation. You can then go over the dictation with the class and discuss whatever vocabulary or concepts they don't understand.
5. Rather than read the full dictations, you may find it helpful to copy the page you're dictating and fill in the blanks ahead of time. This is helpful when giving your students feedback. It's easier when you're working from the same page as your students. Here is an example from the Trivia Contest chapter:

On what date do Americans celebrate Valentine's Day?

What does 9/11 stand for?

6. There is no single pattern that was followed when choosing words or phrases to be deleted. Sometimes the deletions focus on idioms, sometimes on numbers, sometimes grammar, sometimes vocabulary.
7. *Basic Dictations* also works well for substitute teachers, since a minimum amount of preparation is needed.

8. You and your students can also create dictations from local newspapers, the Internet, or any other source. This way you can choose a timely topic and easily adapt it to the level of your students.
9. Discussions. The discussion can be in pairs, small groups, or the entire class. In some units there are two discussions. They can be done in any order. To save time, one can be eliminated.

## ❁ Pronunciation ❁

When introducing the vocabulary, you may want to ask students to repeat some of the words or phrases after you introduce them. Students often know the meaning of a word but are afraid to use it because they don't know what it sounds like. They'll probably need to use some of the words in the discussion that follows the dictation and will feel freer to use them if they have already said them aloud.

## ❁ Using the CD ❁

On the CD, each dictation text or listening conversation is on a separate track. The CD track numbers are given in the table of contents, beneath the titles of the gapped texts, and next to the page numbers of the full dictation texts.

Although it is not necessary to have and use the accompanying CD, many teachers find that having the CD provides greater flexibility in using the material. For example, when students are listening to conversations between two or more people, the CD can be much more effective than the teacher reading both parts. Below are suggestions for using the CD:

- ❁ Play the track once through without stopping, before reading the dictation to the students. This will introduce the topic and give the students a head start toward comprehending the dictation when it is read to them.
- ❁ To give the students a chance to hear a different voice, have the students take the dictation from the CD. Although more challenging, this can help students prepare for standardized listening tests. You can use the pause button; that will allow the students time to fill in the blanks.
- ❁ Play the CD after the students have taken the dictation and checked their answers. This can help students improve and become more confident in listening comprehension.

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### ❁ Using a Listening Laboratory ❁

Almost any dictation that is done in class can also be done in the listening lab. However, there are additional things that can be done in the lab that cannot be done in a classroom.

1. Read a short and easy partial dictation in the lab. The dictation can be from this text or something you have devised on your own. Then have the students record what they have written. You can collect both, and then on the student CD, give them some feedback on their pronunciation. If they can do this successfully, next time make the dictation a little longer.
2. Dictate a problem. An example might be a “Dear Abby” letter that you have turned into a dictation (or try one of the Abby-type letters in this text). After each student has done the dictation, they record the solution to the problem. You should listen and respond to the solution, or the students can move from station to station to listen to their fellow students and make comments of agreement or disagreement. By preparing short, easy-to-understand dictations first, you can also use this technique to introduce other survival or cultural topics that you think will be of particular interest to your students.

### ❁ About the Full Dictation Texts ❁

The complete texts for the dictations begin on page 117. You can read these full texts to give the dictations.