

Introduction

Dictations for Discussion is an intermediate-to-advanced-level text that is intended to improve the listening and speaking skills of ESL students. Reading and writing are also reinforced, along with progress in vocabulary and grammar. This text provides a wide variety of dictations from authentic materials that include provocative news items, problems to solve, and decisions to make.

The 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 central focus of the unit is a dictation activity followed by a discussion section. The discussions can take place in pairs or small groups. The unit ends with a follow-up activity which is intended to explore the topic further through writing, research, and speaking activities. This text includes several cooperative learning activities.

Most units are two or three pages long. Some units will take less time than others, so a shorter unit or part of a unit can be done as a fill-in. The dictations can take between 15 and 20 minutes, and the discussions can take from 20 to 30 minutes. Some follow-up activities can be done in class and others can be done out of class.

The complete texts of the dictations begin on page 137. These full texts can be read to the students or a student can read them to the class. They are also available on two CDs.

✿ **Types of Dictation** ✿

Dictation has been presented in many forms through the years 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 and open springboard to discussion in which students are encouraged to use the language they have just learned.

This text includes five types of dictation: partial, pair, dictogloss, note-taking, and prediction. While all units include pair and group work in the discussion segments, several units will include more extensive cooperative activities. See the unit on “Birthdays Around the World” as an example.

Partial Dictation (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.

Pair Dictation (sometimes known as mutual) ❁

This dictation requires students to work in pairs to combine two-part texts into one continuous piece. One student has a copy of dictation Part A, and the other has dictation Part B. Each student has half of the text. They should not look at each other's sheets. They take turns. Student A dictates and B writes; then B dictates and A writes, and so on until the story is complete.

Dictogloss ❁

In this kind of dictation, the focus is on getting the main idea of a sentence or short paragraph. There are many variations of the dictogloss technique. In the directions for the sentence-level dictogloss, 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. As the students work at rebuilding the sentence, they can work in pairs and then fours.

Note Taking ❁

Note-taking activities require students to write down information they think is important for the discussion that follows. This may only amount to a few words; however, when students work in pairs after the listening section is over, they should compare their notes to be sure they caught the pertinent information. When this is accomplished, they are able to discuss the issues that follow.

Prediction Dictation ❁

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

❁ 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 at 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 the students, repeat two, possibly three times. When field-testing our material, several teachers said they thought the material looked quite difficult for their students, but they were surprised at how well the students did. It's up to you to decide what works best. If you have to repeat more than three times, the text is too difficult for the 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 numbers, have the students write numerals, rather than the word (15, instead of fifteen), except for single-digit numbers (1-9). 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 check with each other in pairs on what they've heard as 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 dictations from the appendix, you may find it helpful to copy the page you're dictating and fill in the blanks yourself ahead of time. This is helpful when giving feedback. It's easier when you're working from the same page as your students. Here is an example:

Cheating in the classroom isn't just about copying someone's paper or writing answers on a crib sheet. With the Internet, cheating has gone high tech.

6. There was no 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. *Dictations for Discussion* 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. With more advanced students, you may want to ask a student to give a dictation by reading from the full dictations. The reader may prepare for this by listening to the CD.
10. The photographs used throughout the book have been chosen to be used as prompts for more discussion.
11. **Cooperative activities** have been included in three of the units. These are extensions of pair and group work and they are one of the best ways to have everyone in the class very involved:

Day 1.

There are four groups, A, B, C, and D. Everyone in each group is responsible for researching part of the material assigned to that group.

Day 2.

All groups reassemble, and the group members go over all the information they have gathered, being sure that each member is fully familiar with all the material.

Day 2 or 3.

New groups are formed. Each group includes one person from each of the original groups. In other words, each new group will consist of one A, one B, one C, and one D. The Group A person is responsible for sharing all of the Group A material. By the end of this activity every member of the class should have the complete information. This can be a lengthy activity, but it is very valuable, especially for shy students.

✿ Using the CDs ✿

Although it is not necessary to have and use the accompanying CDs, many teachers find that having the CDs provides greater flexibility in using the material. They can be used in several ways:

1. 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.
2. 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 the students prepare for standardized listening tests. You can use the pause button; that will allow the students time to fill in the blanks.
3. Play the CD after the students have taken the dictation and checked their answers. This can help the students improve and become more confident in listening comprehension.

On the CDs, each dictation text is on a separate track. The CD track numbers are given in the table of contents of this book (iii-iv), and also next to the titles of the gapped texts (1-135) and the titles of full dictations texts (137-209).

✿ Using a Media/Listening Laboratory ✿

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

1. Read a short partial dictation in the lab. Then have the students record what they have written. You can collect both, and then on the student CD, give some feedback on their pronunciation.
2. Have the students create their own partial dictation and make four or five copies of it. They record it carefully and leave the results at their stations. They then move from station to station doing four or five of each other's dictations. The students' dictations can follow a general theme – food, for example, or a specific form – a joke or poem.

3. Dictate a chunk of language. Have the students listen and record it. Add another chunk. Let the students record again. At the end of the short, fairly simple dictation, the students transcribe it. Collect their transcriptions and make appropriate comments and corrections.
4. Dictate a problem. An example might be a “Dear Abby” letter that you have turned into a dictation. 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 listening to their fellow students and making comments of agreement or disagreement. By preparing short, easy-to-understand dictations first, you can also use this technique to introduce current political or social 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 137. They are recorded on two CDs, or you can read these full texts to give the dictations.