

# Introduction

*Dictations for Discussion* is an intermediate to advanced level text that is intended to improve the listening and speaking skills of ESL students. Of course, since skills are not isolated from each other, 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. Each dictation naturally leads to a discussion activity that can take ten, twenty, or thirty minutes.

The dictation/ discussion units may be used in any order, depending on the needs, interests, and levels of the students. The units are classified into six topic areas, but one topic is not necessarily easier or harder than another. Each unit is labeled at the top of every page with proficiency indicators, as follows:

**I = Intermediate**

**H = High Intermediate**

**A = Advanced**

## ✿ 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. It is meant to be a challenging and open springboard to discussion in which students are encouraged to use the language they have just learned. In this text there are four types of dictation, described below.

**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, and pair work is encouraged here.

**Pair** (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. Student A dictates and B writes, then B dictates and A writes, and so on until the story is complete.

## **Dictogloss**

This form of dictation is an excellent way to develop a connection between what the learner hears and the written language. In this listening/speaking text, however, the focus is on getting the gist or main idea of a sentence or short paragraph and preparing students to take notes.

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. For intermediate level students, the length of the sentence dictated should be about 12-15 words, whereas for higher level students the sentence can be up to 25 words.

Also included are very short paragraphs to be dictated. In this kind of dictation, the students should focus more on the meaning of the paragraph than on the individual sentences; they are not expected to get everything word for word. The teacher may read each paragraph once at normal speed while the students just listen; then the teacher can read it again with longer pauses between sentences if necessary. The students write only one sentence which expresses the main idea of the entire paragraph.

## **Prediction**

Prediction lessons come in two parts. The first part focuses more on reading skills and grammar. The students are required to work in pairs, read the passage, and predict (or guess) what is in each blank space. Any logical or 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 dictations, try to speak naturally, at normal speed, keeping the features of the spoken language. If you are reading the text from the appendix 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 the students, repeat two, possibly three times. 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 appendix. The reader may prepare for this by listening to the CD.
10. **Discussions.** The discussions can be done by pairs, small groups, or the entire class. As the students finish discussing each question, they can check it off in the space after the number. Doing this can ensure that the topic is fully and carefully discussed. When dealing with sensitive or controversial topics, it's important to be sure that the class atmosphere is an open one where your students can express themselves and know that their opinions will be respected and welcomed. If you have misgivings about a particular topic, don't do it!

## ✿ Using a Listening Laboratory ✿

A Compact Disc is available for use in class or in a language laboratory. Almost any dictation that is done in class can also be done in the language lab. However, there are some additional things that can be done in the lab that cannot be done in the classroom.

1. You can read a short partial dictation in the lab, and then have the students read what they have written onto their tapes. You can collect both and then on the student tape give some feedback on their pronunciation.
2. The students create their own partial dictation and make four or five copies of it. They read it carefully onto their tape and leave the tapes at their stations. They then move from station to station doing each other's dictations. This assignment can follow a general theme, or it can be a specific item such as a joke or poem.
3. Dictate a chunk of language. The student listens and records it on tape. Add another chunk. The student records again. At the end of the short, fairly simple dictation, the student rewinds the tape and transcribes it. Once again, collect the tape and paper and make appropriate comments and corrections on the tape.
4. Dictate a problem. An example might be a "Dear Abby" that you have turned into a dictation. After each student has done the dictation, they talk on their tape about their solution to the problem. You can collect the tape, and respond on it to their solution, or the students can move from station to station listening to their fellow students and making comments of agreement or disagreement onto their classmates' tapes. 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 the students.

On the Compact Disc, each of the full dictation texts is on a separate track. In this text, the CD track numbers are given in the table of contents (iii-iv). They are also given next to the titles of the gapped texts on which the students take their dictations and next to the titles of the full dictation texts in the appendix.

## ✿ Full Dictation Texts ✿

The appendix at the back of the book starting on page 125 includes the complete texts of the dictations. You or a student can give dictations by reading these. However, it is important for students to hear different voices, so you may want to use the CD from time to time.