

Introduction

Great Dictations is a high beginner/low intermediate-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 wide variety of dictation topics, including provocative news items and information from the Internet.

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 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. 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. With some units, the teacher may want to discuss the issues with the whole class. The units end with a **follow-up** activity which is intended to explore the topic further – often by having the students speak with native speakers. The follow-up also provides additional language skill practice, especially writing practice.

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 usually take about 30 minutes. The discussions take from 20 to 30 minutes. Some follow-up activities are done in class and some are done out of class to be continued during the next class meeting. Longer units with in-class follow-up activities will take 30-50 minutes.

The **complete texts** of the dictations begin on page 81. These full texts can be read to the students, or a student can read them to the class. They are also available on a CD.

❁ Different Types of Dictations ❁

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 springboard to discussion and writing by 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**.

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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.

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 differently gapped copy. Each student has half of the text. They should not look at each other's sheets. 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 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. This is especially true for high beginner/low intermediate 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 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.

❁ 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 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 how well their 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 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 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 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 "Trivia Contest."
 1. Where can you buy a Whopper Junior?
 2. Who wrote *Romeo and Juliet*?
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.

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7. *Great 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 words but are afraid to use them because they don't know what they sound 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 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. It 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 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 students improve and become more confident in listening comprehension.

❁ Using a Listening 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 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 81. You can read these full texts to give the dictations.