

ENGLISH IN PRACTICE

English in Practice

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

English in Practice is a Programme, not another textbook. Most students using the Programme have worked through textbooks either in school or college and will probably not welcome yet another progress through the traditional chapters, however cheerful and fresh their contents. It enables them to follow a connected, coherent course suited to their immediate social needs, consisting of elements chosen from a very wide selection of reading material, notes for guidance and exercises.

Sections are designed to cover various areas of practice in the essential elements, conventions and skills of communication which concern students in courses related to technical, professional and business studies, both preliminary and more advanced. These include:

GETTING AND GIVING INFORMATION

GETTING INFORMATION FROM READING AND OTHER
SOURCES

REPORT-WRITING AND TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION

LETTERS AND OFFICE COMMUNICATIONS

NOTICES, ANNOUNCEMENTS, INSTRUCTIONS

EXPRESSIVE WRITING

The Programme is concerned not only with strictly vocational applications of communication skills. Many of the exercises in all sections have also a general, social or non-vocational reference, and may perhaps be attempted as much for pleasure as for practice. The section on Expressive Writing contains suggestions and exercises less specifically related to definable vocational needs than the rest, though the work here has a close bearing on some of the conventional kinds of writing called for in English examinations.

In fact, the entire Programme of work contained in *English in Practice* can be regarded as providing suitable and adequate practice for most of the examinations in English and Communications normally taken by students in 16-plus courses, ranging from the Certificate of Office Studies, through the many 'external' examinations set by the Regional Examining Unions,* the Royal Society

* The East Midland Educational Union, the Union of Educational Institutions, the Union of Lancashire and Cheshire Institutes, the Northern

of Arts and other bodies, Ordinary National Certificates and Diplomas in Business Studies and Public Administration and, on the technical side, the Ordinary National Diploma in Technology. It should also be of direct value to students on Certificate of Extended Education courses when these develop. As new assessment programmes in technical and business studies courses containing a communication element are likely to emerge in the near future and this Programme should be applicable to these also. Students on some of the more advanced courses, especially those leading to Higher National and comparable diplomas and certificates, may also find useful material from which to quarry.

The work contained in the Programme is not graded in any conventional way. Most of the reading material can be appreciated at different levels and exercises can be dealt with in different ways according to the grades, personal, course and vocational need of students. Further, the material, suggestions and exercises provided are not intended to be exhaustive; once embarked on the Programme it should be possible for teachers and students in discussion to introduce other topics, reading passages, material for examination and analysis, and to devise exercises going outside and beyond anything contained in the Programme.

It is hoped that the Programme will be used progressively and selectively. The sections are written in a sequence and as may be seen from the detail of lay-out in the Introduction it is assumed that students will normally give attention to work in the early sections before going on to later sections, but this is not essential. There are appropriate sectional cross-references thus enabling students to relate their work in one area of communication studies to others, starting from the area which seems most suitable according to their needs.

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INTRODUCTION

In the world of business, industry, administration, social and political affairs written and spoken communication are the main means of ensuring that work is properly organised and carried out. Poor writing and speech are a recipe for irritation, confusion and high costs; good written and spoken communication certainly make business easier, pleasanter and more efficient.

The Programme is concerned with some of the main problems of communication, especially written communication – though frequently we shall be using words such as ‘telling’, ‘speaking’, ‘listening’ and ‘audience’. In a sense all these words are necessary in any discussion about communication, since all communication consists of development from, alternatives to, or substitutes for, clear speech and hearing. But often in such discussions the words are not to be taken quite literally.

Attention is drawn to some of the main difficulties of saying (writing) whatever has to be said to the person or persons who must be spoken to for whatever purpose; and the Programme suggests some of the ways of avoiding the failures in communication that so often clog business and administration. It reminds students of some basic principles (if not ‘rules’) to be observed in learning how to communicate efficiently, especially in writing; and it draws to their attention some of the conventions, styles and routines of communication with which they may be expected to be familiar when they seek employment in business, administration and the like.

Several important assumptions are made about those students who are likely to use this Programme. These are that:

- they want to learn to communicate;
- however uncertain and vague they may feel about their ultimate occupations or careers, they wish to do reasonably well in whatever field they eventually choose;
- they have enjoyed a reasonably effective education so far (even if they were, at the last, anxious to leave school) and that they have learned most of the ‘basics’ about expressing themselves in speech and writing, at least to the point where they feel the need to do better;
- they are willing to make an effort; that they do not expect to become efficient just by waiting and hoping; that they do not subscribe to Dogberry’s dictum: ‘to write and read comes by nature’;

- they are not content with just getting by or of being no better than anyone else. As Phyllis complacently put it:

‘I can spell all the words that I use,
And my grammar’s as good as my neighbour’s.’

All the work suggested in the Programme has been conceived in terms of a set of four basic principles of effective communication, applicable indeed to all kinds of communication whether or not in speech or writing. These principles may be expressed in the form of questions to be asked on every occasion that communication is considered or attempted:

FROM WHOM, TO WHOM? – every act of communication is from someone to someone, and exactly who makes a difference to the nature, form, tone and timing of the communication itself;

WHAT? – the message itself may be simple, complex, direct, indirect. It must be clear (this does not always mean it must be instantly obvious to any dim-wit) both to sender and receiver what the message is intended to be;

HOW? – by what means, in what form of words, in what tone, what manner, what ‘code’ or convention is the message transmitted? Is it the right or most appropriate method? Is it sent at the right time?

WITH WHAT EFFECT? – this is the most difficult of all the questions to answer. The sender of a message cannot know what the effect is going to be until it has been received; but he can, and should, anticipate. Experience should tell him what kinds of things he can do to achieve the effect he intended. He should never be in the unfortunate predicament of having to say, after some disastrous misunderstanding following his inept piece of communication: ‘That isn’t what I meant.’

These questions can and should be asked in every exercise suggested by the Programme. Work is arranged in such a way that the student is encouraged to ask these questions all the time.

It is not intended that students using the Programme should work their way systematically from one end to the other – unless, of course, they actually wish to. Discussion moves from the ways of obtaining, comprehending, interpreting and applying information through to methods of handling digested information, presentation and transmission. It concludes with a return to some of the more general and familiar issues of ‘self-expression’, essay-writing and the like (to whom?). This is not to suggest that self-expression is something different from the earlier, hard practical matters. The

whole Programme is about self-expression, which, for the purposes of the underlying argument, is making personal, original, distinctive use of whatever ideas and information come the writer's way. Originality has nothing 'airy-fairy' about it; it is the confident process of taking possession.

Work is arranged into eight main areas of interest and activity:

- 1 GETTING AND GIVING INFORMATION
- 2 GETTING INFORMATION FROM READING
- 3 OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION
- 4 REPORTS: VERBATIM AND SUMMARY
- 5 REPORTS: DESCRIPTIVE, ANALYTICAL, EXPLANATORY
- 6 COMMUNICATION DIRECT: LETTERS, MEMORANDA AND TELEGRAMS
- 7 COMMUNICATION DIRECT: NOTICES, ANNOUNCEMENTS, INSTRUCTIONS, ADVERTISEMENTS
- 8 EXPRESSIVE WRITING

Each main study area has a number of sections, directing attention to particular problems and forms. Each section is introduced with a short exposition, hopefully drawing attention to matters that have been learned earlier in the Programme or earlier in the student's school career.

The sections are divided into subsections, each with its short expository introductions, followed by suggestions for work under the headings:

ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION - suggestions for individual and group activity and discussion around the topic just introduced.

CRITICISM IN PRACTICE - mainly examples and passages for study, analysis and discussion, often followed by detailed 'comprehension' or short critical exercises.

EXERCISES - usually at the end of the main section, suggesting a variety of assignments related to the work done in all the subsections. Some of these will be typical examination questions.

Not all of the subsections have both *Activity and Discussion* and *Criticism in Practice*, and there is inevitable overlap between the kinds of work contained in these subsections.

The Programme is not intended as an 'examination course' and should be of interest to a wide range of students who include English and Communication in their courses, particularly those who are expecting to work in offices, public administration, and industrial

management at almost any level, but do not necessarily have to face an examination in English.

It is hoped that students will find the reading passages interesting, even entertaining, and that the exercises and suggestions for activity will appeal to them as having demonstrable relevance to real life. More important still, the Programme will only have succeeded in its purpose if students find themselves taking more and more critical interest in communication as it is actually practised in business, industry, and social and public affairs. There is in the outside world much more of the right kind of material, problems and ideas for the keen student of communication to grapple with than can ever be contained, or even successfully illustrated, in a textbook or teaching and study Programme.

ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION

1. Examine the Introduction you have just read in terms of the four principles suggested in the text:

- Who is 'speaking' to whom?
- What is the main argument?
- How is it done? Is the approach right? Are the right words used?
- What is the effect of the passage on you?

2. Consider the questions:

Would the Introduction you have just read be more use as a Conclusion? Does it help to have things explained in this general way before starting on the main part of the work?

3. Discuss the assumptions made about the kinds of students the author thinks will benefit from this course.

Is he justified in making such assumptions?

Suppose some or all of the assumptions are not correct so far as you are concerned. What do you think ought to be done about it? How would you tackle the job?

4. Discuss the proposition that all good composition, even on the most routine subjects, is original and 'self-expressive' in some degree.

If you have reservations about this, you might consider whether or not a computer could make a better job of some of the communication tasks that clerks and other office workers are often called on to do. What kinds of tasks?

5. Who are Dogberry and Phyllis, and where, when and to whom did they make the remarks referred to?