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***Effective exam practice
for
teenagers***

Language
Learning



macmillan
education

Exam practice material can be soulless and dry at times, and the tasks we get our students to do can be divorced from their lives and personal experience.

In this session, we're going to look at the essentials of exam preparation (both in terms of language skills development and exam skills confidence).

We'll then look at how to bring in a simple but effective element of student-centred personalisation to exam practice. This can help create a cohesive and coherent thread through disparate tasks and topics.

It can also aid motivation, encourage the use of skills such as critical thinking, cultural awareness and research, and consolidate exam skills too.

Exam practice materials

- Past papers
- Practice exams
- Exam tasks in coursebooks

If students are preparing for an exam, we have to do a certain amount of exam practice.

Why?

What is it good for?

What is it not so good for?

All exams require 'exam skills'.

Format and structure

- What actually happens in the Speaking paper? What are the stages? What do you have to do in each stage? What might they ask you?
- What kind of writing tasks (review, article, essay, etc) might be in the Writing paper?

All exams require 'exam skills'.

Rules

- Whether you use a pen or pencil for the answer sheet
- How long you have to write a composition
- Whether you listen to a recording once or twice
- Whether in sentence transformations words like 'don't' and 'wouldn't' count as two words or one

All exams require 'exam skills'.

Strategies

- With a reading multiple matching task, should you read the whole text slowly and carefully from start to finish to find the answer to each question, or should you scan the text?

All exams require 'exam skills'.

When a student goes into an exam, it's essential they know the format, rules and strategies. **BUT...**

All exams require 'exam skills'.

BUT...

Exams aren't designed to test exam skills.

They're designed to test language skills.

Language skills are NOT properly developed just by doing exam practice tasks.

It's far more difficult and time-consuming to develop all the language skills needed, so that should always be our main focus.

Don't feel restricted by the exam format.

At times, we can use exam practice material as a resource, and adapt it to suit our purposes.

Exam practice material

Step 1: our own creative adaptation

Step 2: straight exam practice

Reading and Use of English • Part 6

You are going to read an article about a special kind of skateboard. Six sentences have been removed from the article. Choose from the sentences **A – G** the one which fits each gap (37 – 42). There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

An amazing skateboard

The skateboard controlled by brainwaves that moves wherever you think it should.



Thinking of getting somewhere in a hurry? A new gadget from a company called *Chaotic Moon Labs* proves that the future of travel is only limited by the imagination. A skateboard they have developed, aptly named the *Board Of Imagination*, takes commands directly from the rider's brainwaves and transfers them to a motor that propels the board forward. You just think of a destination, and how fast you would like to get there, and the *Board Of Imagination* will set off – hitting a top speed of around 50km per hour. If you think that's too fast, it will slow down.

A film on the internet of the board being put through its paces by the general manager of *Chaotic Moon Labs*, who refers to himself simply as 'Whurley', shows that he has mastered the art of thinking his way from Point A to Point B. The secret of his success is special software in an onboard computer – and a clever headset that monitors and interprets brainwaves. So far, he's the world's leading pilot of the board. **37**

On the video, Whurley demonstrates how the board is handled. He gets on, looking relaxed and confident. **38** As he puts it through its paces, he manages to hit fairly high speeds. The computer can be seen attached to the front of the board, and the motor is underneath. Whurley compares the process to imagining pulling yourself along with a rope. If you 'see' the destination in your mind, and how fast you want to get there, the *Board Of Imagination's* gadgetry will do the rest.

The whole concept started with another motorised board, called the *Board of Awesomeness*. That gadget used a tablet computer and an adapted computer games console to analyse hand movements. **39** The new version is more sophisticated and uses a special wireless headset which can detect signals from the brain and process them.

Whurley explains that the headset sends signals from the rider's brain to the computer via a connector built into the headset. Then, software installed on the computer controls the electric motor. Of course, riders who want to use the board need to be able to balance. **40**

Whurley says this was a simple and painless process. He practised with just the headset and a computer so that a profile of how he 'thinks' could be made. That profile was then loaded onto the computer on the board. **41** Thinking about lunch, or boring work could bring the board to an abrupt halt.

Sounding like a man speaking from painful experience, Whurley says: 'We quickly realised that we would have to find a way to handle distraction. We've done the best we can to compensate. **42** The only thing they can do is practise. Hopefully over time they can learn to focus.'

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>A The only problem is that users really do have to keep their minds focussed.</p> | <p>E Apart from that basic requirement, they just have to get their brainwaves and the computer software to work together.</p> |
| <p>B As a result, they became easier to ride.</p> | <p>F It's clear, however, that there could be other skaters thinking themselves to various destinations in no time at all.</p> |
| <p>C Then, the board seems to take off of its own accord.</p> | <p>G These were then converted into commands for the motor.</p> |
| <p>D However, it will always be an issue for most riders.</p> | |

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Step 1:

- Students cover sentences A-G
- Read text for gist
- In pairs or small groups, they come up with their own sentences to fill the gaps
- Skills focus: text logic, coherence, cohesion

Step 2:

- Straight exam task

Listening • Part 3

Questions 19 – 23

You will hear five short extracts in which people are talking about photography. For questions 19 – 23, choose from the list (A – H) what each speaker says about it. Use the letters only once. There are three extra letters which you do not need to use.

A Learning to use new photographic software is fun.

B I have found some useful advice online.

C Photography helps me to remember events.

D It's my goal to become an expert in photography.

E Doing photography means I go to new places.

F I can express original artistic ideas through photography.

G My friends have helped me to develop my skills.

H Taking photos gives me more confidence.

Speaker 1 19

Speaker 2 20

Speaker 3 21

Speaker 4 22

Speaker 5 23

Step 1:

- before they listen, students say or write sentences that contain the meaning of A/B/C etc, but they're not allowed to use any of the key words in the sentence given.
- For example, for B, they might say/write:
I got some great information from a website.
- Skills focus: recognising synonymous information

OR

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Speaker 1 19

Speaker 2 20

Speaker 3 21

Speaker 4 22

Speaker 5 23

Step 1:

- before they listen, each student chooses a letter A/B/C etc, and writes a sentence that means the same thing without using any of the key words in the sentence given. They keep it secret which one they've chosen.
- They say their sentence. The others have to say which letter it is.
- Skills focus: recognising synonymous information

how to bring in a simple but
effective element of
student-centred **personalisation**
to exam practice

Have your say!

At what age do you think teenagers should be allowed to go on holiday with their friends? Why?

- Quick / simple
- No planning / provided
- Students can express their own opinions...
- ...and relate what they've read/heard to their own experience
- Students practise 'speaking' when doing reading/listening

Have your say!

At what age do you think teenagers should be allowed to go on holiday with their friends? Why?

drawbacks

- Only speaking
- Limited range of tasks
- Limited focus (mainly opinion/preference)
- Only in Reading and Listening sections

Have your say!

At what age do you think teenagers should be allowed to go on holiday with their friends? Why?

- Expand: not just Reading and Listening
- Not just 'speaking practice'
- Increased range of tasks
- Increased focus (not just opinion/preference)
- More systematic / varied / integrated

Personalisation: focus

- Expressing opinion
Expressing preference
- Critical thinking
- Reflecting on learning
- Writing
- Research
- Presentation
- Discussion

Personalisation: focus

- Ideas
- Personal/daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

Which is it?

- Ideas
- Personal/daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

Are there any myths or interesting stories about how cities in your country were founded?

Which is it?

- Ideas
- Personal/
daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

What is the best way of doing this kind of task? Choose from the two approaches below and discuss with a partner.

* Keep thinking about gap (1) until you get the answer. Then do gap (2) and spend time thinking about that one. Keep going until the end.

* Read through the text to get the general meaning. Then fill in any gaps you think you know. Then think carefully about the gaps that are left.

Which is it?

- Ideas
- Personal/daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

Write a tongue twister in English that has at least one verb in the past simple.
As a class, say everyone's tongue twisters as quickly as you can.

Which is it?

- Ideas
- Personal/daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

Some fish are not good for us because they contain mercury, a poisonous substance. Go online and find out:

- * the names of some fish which have it
- * which groups of people are particularly at risk

Which is it?

- Ideas
- Personal/daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

Can you think of a time when friends of yours argued? Work in pairs. Describe what happened. Say:

- * what had caused the argument
- * what happened as a result
- * how the argument ended

Which is it?

- Ideas
- Personal/daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

Which of the people from The X Factor or shows like it in your country have become most successful?
Write a short paragraph about one of them, similar to the paragraph above.

What kind of task came before this?

Ideas

Write three sentences giving crime prevention advice for a teenage bike owner using *so as (not) to* and *in order (not) to*. Work in pairs and compare your advice.

What kind of task came before this?

Research

Find 2 more facts online about each of the mountains in the article and turn them into 8 questions.

In pairs or small groups, give each other a quiz.

What kind of task came before this?

Learning

Why is it a good idea to predict the missing information before you listen?

Why should you never leave any gaps empty in a listening exercise?

What personalisation task could follow this?

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Reading and Use of English • Part 3

For questions 17 – 24, read the text below. Use the word given in capitals at the end of some of the lines to form a word that fits in the gap **in the same line**. There is an example at the beginning (0).

Write your answers **IN CAPITAL LETTERS** on the separate answer sheet.

Example: 0

S	K	I	L	F	U	L													
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Playing chess

Have you ever played chess? Some say you need to be very (0) to play it well but it is quite easy to learn. I started learning when I was only six years old and it helped me develop my powers of (17) If you want to achieve (18) as a chess player, the main requirement is an ability to analyse a situation (19) Chess even helped me find various (20) to the mathematical problems I was given for homework.

SKILL

CONCENTRATE

SUCCEED

EFFECTIVE

SOLVE

At first, one of my big problems was not having enough (21) Learning chess at school taught me the importance of waiting to make the right move! My teacher was critical of my tendency not to think (22) before making a move. I discovered that every single error in chess gets instant (23) , enabling your opponent to take control and putting you at a great (24) in the game.

PATIENT

CARE

PUNISH

ADVANTAGE

- Ideas
- Personal/
daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

- Ideas
- Personal/daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

Hunting for dinosaurs

Marge Baisch was riding on her parents' farm in Montana in the USA when she noticed what at first (0) seemed to be the bone of a cow. In fact, it (1) out to belong to a dinosaur called a triceratops. About 65 million years ago, dinosaurs regularly (2) near huge rivers in this part of Montana. Luckily for modern day dinosaur enthusiasts, the (3) here were perfect for preserving those that died there. However, once prehistoric bones are (4) to the air, they can become fragile, so it is important to find and preserve them before they disappear into the dust.

Since Marge's discovery, her family have found the (5) of hundreds of dinosaurs, some of which they have (6) to museums. Many tourists visit the farm in the hope of coming across something unusual. The tourists may not stand much (7) of discovering an entire skeleton, but they are still very enthusiastic! The Baische family often allow them to keep whatever they find, although some scientists (8) of this policy.

Young Inventor

Schoolboy Tim Freeman has come up with a clever idea to improve the efficiency of school buses.

- Ideas
- Personal/
daily life
- Culture
- Learning
- Research

Tim Freeman was just twelve years old when he came up with a revolutionary idea that would make school buses more energy efficient. This would not only save money, but also help the environment. Five years later, the schoolboy finally saw his dream come true.

It all began when Tim did a short summer course on aerodynamics, the study of the movement of air around objects. **37** He realised that the perfect candidate was his school bus. It had a very square front which meant it did not use petrol efficiently, only travelling 3km per litre, compared to a private car that can average about 8.5km per litre. He decided it was high time the vehicle was improved.

After thinking about it for a while, Tim came up with the idea of attaching a large piece of strong transparent plastic to the front of the vehicle, covering the windscreen. It would help redirect the flow of air around the bus and thus make it move forwards more easily. **38** At least, that was the theory.

While his science teachers loved the idea, Tim needed to find enough money to build a model and test it. **39** Helped by his older sister Alice, he managed to obtain a grant from an organisation that helps young people develop new ideas.

Over the next year, Tim used the money to build a

small-scale model of his invention. He did tests on it by attaching it to a mini toy school bus and seeing how it performed in a little wind tunnel he built in his garage. **40** Because of this he knew he now needed to step it up and create a life-sized version that could be put to the test on a real bus.

By the time Tim was fifteen, he had set up a team of young engineers like himself, and been helped by his sister and his local community to obtain another grant to develop his idea further. While Tim and his team were able to build the initial versions, they soon realised that they needed some expert help to really get going. **41** The person who volunteered was the one who had inspired Tim to start thinking about the project in the first place. She had taught him on the summer course when he was twelve. Along with two of her engineering students she worked with Tim through the summer to finally help him realise his dream.

The final version of Tim's invention looks rather different from his original idea. Instead of a transparent piece of plastic that covers the windscreen of the bus, it is a smooth ramp-shaped 'hat' that gets fixed to the roof of the bus. **42** In tests done on virtual and real roads it has helped increase the efficiency of school bus fuel use by 10-20%. Maybe this ingenious device will eventually help other buses and even cars become more fuel-efficient!

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