

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO PRE-UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MALAYSIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

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In this article it is my intention to restrict my comments to material directly connected with reading only.

For many years it has been axiomatic that any course of instruction should have clearly defined aims. Where skills are involved these aims are usually expressed in terms of the performance required. Any reading material should hence be based on actual future needs and it is therefore necessary, first of all, to establish the type of English involved.

Most of the students will enter scientific courses and will be studying abroad where English will be the medium of instruction. It is felt that the conversational/idiomatic type of English used in 'successful social intercourse' or the type of English found in literature is not a central need for successful English medium study. What is considered important is proficiency in the more neutral, expository type of English that is the medium of education in English speaking countries. The ability to handle a topic such as 'climate' is felt to be more appropriate than an ability to handle a text dealing with social greetings or the language of a novel or short story or even an article taken from a newspaper or magazine. An examination of the following text will serve to illustrate this point.

Text 1

The climate of an area is its characteristic weather considered over a period of not less than 30 years. Climate depends first on latitude which determines whether an area is hot or cold and how strongly marked are its seasons. It depends also on the moving air-masses that prevail in the area.

Text 2 (from a newspaper article)

A freak storm battered the Munich area with hailstones the size of tennis balls, high winds and heavy rains, injuring 300 people and causing damage in tens of millions of dollars.

Text 3 (from an airline magazine)

West Germany temperate. Warmest in July and August, coldest in January and February. Long spells of frost are rare. Snow on the mountains from December to March.

Text 4 (from a novel)

If a man stopped to catch his breath, the sweat froze to his skin beneath his clothes. If he tried to free the clothes, the skin of his body tore off in strips. With his face grotesquely swollen by the biting wind, many a half-blinded man stumbled into a crevasse and was never seen again; and yet the remainder never faltered.

Text 5 (conversation)

A: Hello. I understand you're from Scotland.

B: Yes. I am.

A: I'm going up there next week. Is it really as cold as they say?

B: Not really. But then I'm used to it. Which part are you going to?

A: The north, but I believe the winter has been rather mild.

The type of discussion about climate in text 1 is the type that might occur in a geography text book (or in any other 'technical' text book) and is thought to be more appropriate than the 'journalese' of text 2 or 3 or the figurative language of a novel or short story (text 4) or the social formulae used in a conversation at a party. Any material used therefore should deal with the English illustrated in 1, i.e. expository English.

Two points are raised, however:

1. Students with fluent social English will not necessarily cope successfully with such material. Training is hence essential as it is assumed that part of proficiency at this level is an ability to understand unsimplified source material in competition with native speakers.

2. An important part of the English being developed is an ability to deal with non-verbal devices also used for communicating information. Material should therefore include maps, diagrams, tables, graphs, etc. which require students to transfer information from one medium to another. For example, students might be asked to write an account of different types of climate, using information given in the form of rainfall and temperature graphs.

In most cases of higher study and certainly at the beginning stages, the amount of 'input' information will exceed any output demanded of the student. However, the input operation is not a passive one and the student will have to process the information in several ways. Such a situation involves important cognitive skills, some of which are listed below:

- (a) An ability to understand the whole text despite lack of comprehension of certain parts.
- (b) An ability to skim and reject the irrelevant.
- (c) An ability to select so that significant parts are registered and used for explanation and exemplification.
- (d) An ability to differentiate between fact and opinion.
- (e) An ability to see the relationship of parts to the whole; and to follow an argument or step by step detail.
- (f) An ability to use language cues as an aid to comprehension.
- (g) An ability to transfer information from one form to another.

These skills (by no means exhaustive) are closely related and more than one may be involved at any one time in reading tasks. Any reading exercise should therefore, aim to develop these skills in two broad uses:

1. An ability to understand what the writer is saying and why. It involves comprehension of individual as well as the overall purpose of the writer's intention.
2. An ability to handle and use the information beyond the writer's intention.

Such a situation requires a response to the basic language function and as each function has a characteristic combination of features, the nature of the reading task must depend on the language function of the passage. Such a statement assumes that language fulfils functions of various types and that for efficient language development these functions should be isolated and practised just like any other skill.

Towards this end expository English can be shown to involve three main function areas, regardless of topic or subject matter. These may be termed as instruction, description and narrative. These functions are not brought about at random but by an examination of the grammatical items which focus 'most efficiently' on a correlation of verb form and sentence pattern (the verb phrase being the pivot of the sentence form) which system allows a viable description of the language used in each function area. (for further reading see McEldowney, 'Language Function and the English Verb System', RELC., 1976). The following texts serve to illustrate the above points.

Instruction

Text 6 — Assembling the Pressure cooker

1. Insert the shorter of the two handles into the bracket at the base. Fix into position using one of the handle bolts and screw up tightly.
2. Insert the longer handle into the bracket on the cover.
3. Fit the second bolt into the handle and screw up tightly.
4. To open, slide the cover handle to the right until the two arrows are opposite each other and lift off the cover.
5. To close the cooker, position the arrow on the base handle, keeping the cover level. Slide the cover handle to the left until it completely covers the handle on the base.

Text 7 — To prevent burns and scalds in the home

1. Keep children out of the kitchen, especially when you are busy cooking.
2. Do not let children play with matches.
3. Do not go near a flame if you are wearing or carrying flammable material.

4. Do not use wet gloves when lifting hot things or you may be scalded by the steam.
5. Do not pour kerosene, petrol or turpentine, etc. near an open fire or on a fire.
6. Keep the handles of cooking utensils and kettle spouts turned inwards when left on the stove or table.

Comment

In text 6 the function is to give instructions for assembling a pressure cooker and in text 7 it is to ensure safety in the home. Instructions can tell us how to do things, how to get somewhere, as well as for imparting tips on safety, the care of appliances, etc. They are a common part of the conduct of education in most disciplines.

Description

Text 8

The Q9-9QZR is finished in scratch-resistant gold. It has a 5-band graphic equalizer and a detachable speaker system. In addition to high-speed there is an auto-programme search system as well as an auto-programme pause system.

Text 9

Modern cassette players incorporate many refinements such as this device which automatically turns the cassette over to play the second side. Another feature is

Text 10

Another kind of sensing element consists of a light metal vessel which is filled with a liquid or gas. An increase in temperature causes the contents to expand and the vessel to lengthen.

Such a vessel is connected to a bulb some distance away which senses the relevant temperature. When the temperature changes, the pressure of its contents changes too and these pressure changes are communicated to the main vessel which shortens or lengthens accordingly.

Comment

The language illustrated by texts 8, 9 and 10 can be said to be descriptive. The general function of 8 is to describe the appearance of a particular appliance. The general function of 9 is to describe the nature and action of a device on a cassette machine. The general function of 10 is to describe how a sensing element works. Description can be specific (text 8) or general (text 9, 10). It can refer to a wide range of characteristics, actions, etc. and occurs in some form in almost all academic disciplines.

Narrative

Text 11

The driver of the car got out and fired a pistol at the police car. But this did not stop the police. One of them scrambled over the bonnet of the police car and chased the man with the pistol down Hallyard Road. The man made as if to turn right but tripped and fell. In seconds the police were on him.

Comment

The general function of text 11 is to outline the events leading up to the capture of the man with the pistol. The narrative outlines two or more steps in a sequence carried out on a specific occasion. It is important in the writing of reports of various types and in the developmental aspects of most disciplines.

These points may be summarized by the following table:

Form	stem	stem + -s	stem + -s	stem + -ed	stem + -ed
Examples	place sketch describe	shows described flows	is are	mined added heated	objected revolted passed
Function	Instruction	(straight)	Description	(process)	Narrative

Texts 6 and 7 illustrated the function of instruction and here were found the stem form of the verb in both cases. In addition, the sentences do not have subjects. The verb 'to be' does not occur and 'active' verbs are used. Sequence is an important feature in text 6.

Texts 8, 9 and 10 dealt with the function of description. Text 10 differs from 8 and 9 in that sequence is important in the description of how a sensing element works and that 'active' rather than 'stative' verbs occur. There is also a choice of verbs as part of the description uses 'stem +s' forms (consist of, causes, senses) while in another part of the description there is used what is called the passive verb groups, i.e. finite 'stem +s' followed by non-finite 'stem +ed' is connected). An examination of a wide range of examples shows that the form most often chosen in expository English to describe a process is the finite 'stem +s' form followed by the non-finite form 'stem +ed'.

For teaching purposes it seems important to differentiate between these two functions of 'straight' description and the description of process. Straight description is marked by 'stem +s' forms of the verb, largely stative verbs, a high ratio of parts of 'to be' sentences with subjects and the lack of necessity for sequence. Process, with its series of passive verb groups in sequence is illustrated by the text below:

Text 11

Slurry is introduced through the front of the centrifuge, rotated and thrown outwards. The liquid is filtered off by centrifugal force. The remainder is washed by further centrifugation and peeled off by the blades. They fall in a connecting trough and are discharged by a screw conveyor.

It can hence be shown that the functions of Instruction, Description and Narrative are marked by a particular cluster of language items. These functions occur in most subject disciplines. Materials for exercises can be selected from encyclopedia and other general information books. Within the scope of expository English, it is possible to develop language functions which are appropriate to the widest range of candidates and which will also avoid the danger of getting involved in teaching geography, history, etc. This point is especially valid in terms of vocabulary. It is considered

that the specialized vocabulary of the individual subject is not the concern of proficiency in English but is a matter of subject proficiency. The student will be familiar with the word 'climate' and know its general meaning. In geography his task is to learn the specialized definition of 'climate' for that discipline. The central meaning is the concern of English proficiency; the specialized meaning the concern of subject proficiency. Appended are exercises to illustrate the above. They are all taken from J.M.B. past exam papers except for exercises 4 and 5 which are my own.

Exercise 1 involves instruction. It demands a response to stem from verbs and as following instructions involves carrying them out, it seems valid to ask students to mark the route outlined.

In the second exercise a different set of skills is called into play. It involves understanding description, one aspect of which is the ability to visualize what is being described.

The third deals with narrative and process, the comprehension of which is the ability to follow a sequence.

Exercises 4 and 5 involves not so much interest in the writer's purpose as the need to find particular details. An important aspect of this skill is the ability to skim through material and reject what is not relevant to the task set. Exercises 6 and 7 handle the skill of using information beyond the writer's intention. Here the data is used as a base for the cognitive processes in that the student is required to use the data in the passage to solve the problems set.

Usually vocabulary items are tested by using a format of discrete multiple-choice items. The lack of context is considered a serious hindrance in that a large part of lexical meaning comes from context beyond a single sentence level. Hence, it is thought important to base vocabulary exercises on connected texts.

Bibliography

Joint Matriculation Board Exam papers.

McEldowney — 'Language Function and the English Verb System'. *RELC Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1976.

White R.U. 'The Language, The Learner, The Syllabus,' *RELC Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 1, 1975.

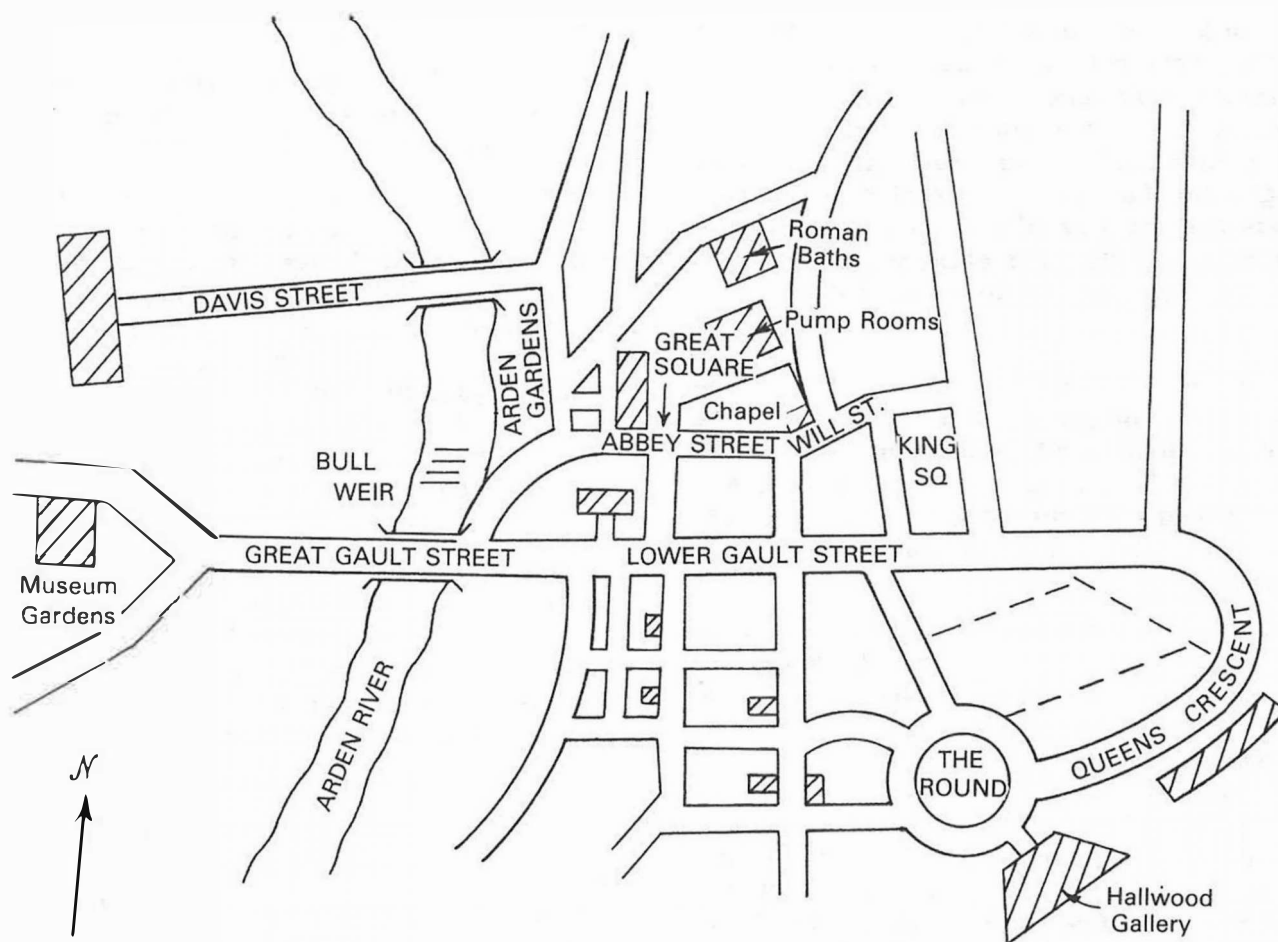
Exercise 1

Read the passage. It gives directions for a walking tour of the city to a group of delegates attending a conference in Mander. Draw a line to mark the route on the map of Mander below.

Start from the Great Square. Turn right along Abbey Street. Take the first turning to the right and walk along the side of the Abbey to view the ancient stonework remaining on the west wall. Take the first turn left and walk towards the Arden Gardens. Stop to admire the view across the gardens towards the river. Turn left and follow the river round to the bridge on Gault Street. The bridge built in 1789 has a fine arch structure. Stand on the bridge to see Bull Weir. Then look left towards the museum in its setting of tall trees. Then walk along Lower Gault Street through the area of modern depart-

ment stores and take the fourth street to the right. Walk right around the outside of the building in the third block on the right. It is a fine Victorian warehouse still in use. Turn right and continue towards The Round and The Hallwood Gallery. It contains a famous train museum open daily from 9.00 am to 6.30 pm. Leave the gallery and go right following The Round to a footpath on the right. Cross the park by the footpath from which can be obtained a fine view of the Georgian buildings or Queens Crescent on the hill to the right.

To return to the Great Square take the footpath to King Square. Go around the west side of the square to Will Street. Turn off Will Street at the chapel on the corner entering the Great Square with the Pump Rooms on the right. This is the best view of this famous eighteenth-century building.

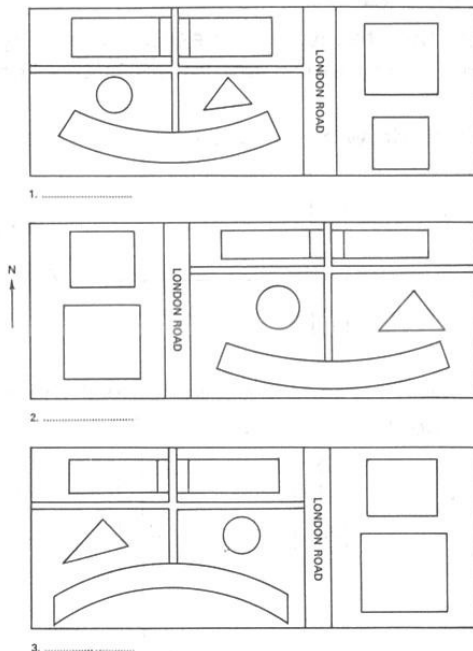


Exercise 2

The university campus is small and compact and covers a relatively small area of ground to the south of the city. The campus is roughly rectangular in shape with one-third of it to the east of London Road. It is hoped that a plan before the Council at the present time will lead to the closing of London Road to traffic. In the last week three students were knocked down by cars moving too fast along London Road. As well as standing side by side on the east side of the road the Union Building and Administration Block are further separated from the rest of the campus in that they are both fairly traditional square-shaped tower blocks. The slightly larger Union building is to the south.

The crescent-shaped Accommodation block covers the bottom third of the campus on the other side of the road. The remaining area is divided into four equal parts by paths. The circular library building in London Road is a contrast to the modernistic triangular-shaped Arts block next to it and the two rectangular wings of the Science Block to the north. The two parts of the Science Block are separated by a small open courtyard.

Look at the following diagrams and label the diagram that fits the description. *University Campus*. On the other plans mark any items X which do not fit the description.



It was not until 1698 that a lighthouse was finally constructed on the Eddystone Rocks. It was the first of several lighthouses to be built in the same area, the last of which stands there today. The first one was dismantled and rebuilt after one year of use and three more were built for various reasons in the following years. Winstanley decided to build the first lighthouse on the highest peak of the rock only three feet above water level. It was made of stones joined together with mortar and bounded together with iron straps. During the building the workers experienced great difficulty, at one stage even being captured by pirates. Winstanley was dissatisfied with his first effort. He pulled it down and built a second very elaborate tower forty feet higher. It has many decorative projections. It stood for four years and was then knocked down by a very violent storm.

Its lightness and ornate appearance were a sharp contrast to the present lighthouse with its characteristic smooth-sided modern shape — a large swelling base tapering upwards to a waist rising in a perpendicular cylinder with the total weight of stone in the structure amounting to 4,668 tons.

This modern lighthouse was pioneered by Smeaton who decided to model his lighthouse on the shape of a tree, which is strong enough and elastic enough to resist gales. He built in stones which were worked in such a way that they could lock together without the use of cement. This tower stood for many years till it was undermined by the crumbling of the Eddystone Rocks themselves. The present tower was erected a short distance away on firmer ground. After this Smeaton's lighthouse was removed and installed as a monument in Plymouth.

Between Winstanley's pioneer lighthouse and Smeaton's achievement Rudyear built a wooden lighthouse which withstood the sea for forty years after its completion but which caught fire in 1755 and was burned to the ground.

Exercise 3

Read the passage and decide which 10 of the following sentences tell you about the development of the Eddystone Lighthouse. Put them in

the correct order to outline the steps in development of the lighthouse.

- A. A lighthouse introducing the technique of interlocking stone was erected.
- B. It was replaced in 1699 by a taller tower.
- C. Pirates destroyed this lighthouse.
- D. The sea washed it away.
- E. Smeaton's lighthouse was moved to a new site.
- F. A wooden lighthouse was built on the same site.
- G. Winstanley built the first of the four Eddystone lighthouses.
- H. The underlying rocks were washed away by the sea.
- I. The wooden lighthouse was burned to the ground after two years.
- J. The first of the five lighthouses was completed in the seventeenth century.
- K. It was destroyed by fire.
- L. It lasted much longer than previous lighthouses on the site.
- M. The modern lighthouse was constructed.

Exercise 4

Read the passage carefully and answer the questions which follow.

Kuma Island

The island of Kuma has some ancient buildings which are quite remarkable. These buildings are known as the 'Caves of the Teller' and are more than two thousand years old. In the caves, there is a long corridor which runs in a straight line from north to south. It starts at the entrance to the caves and continues for 128 m.

The floor of the corridor is 244 cm wide. The flat ceiling is 122 cm wide. The walls are 488 cm high.

In the west of the corridor, there are several smaller side corridors which run west to the sea. Six of these smaller corridors open to the sea but the seventh has no opening to the sea.

As you move south along the main corridor, half-way down on your left, you will find three small rooms with baths. These rooms are side by side.

At the end of the corridor are 3 large rooms. The room into which the main corridor runs is 25m^2 . This is where the Teller stood. To the west of this room is another room. This is where the Customer stood. The third room to the east is larger than the others. It is 30m^2 . It has two small rooms opening from it, one to the north and one to the south.

Exercise 5

Read the following passage and draw a cross section of the main corridor.

The most remarkable antiquities in the area are cut into the mountains high above the town of Puteum. It was an amazing feat to cut a suite of rooms for litigants out of the hard rocks with nothing but the simplest tools. For instance, the main corridor continues for as far as 500 feet before it opens out into several rooms. The floor is as wide as 12 feet. The walls are 20 feet high and completely symmetrical, rising to a perfectly flat ceiling 6 feet wide. Such feats were typical of the time and illustrate the heights to which the civilisation had risen before the decline set in.

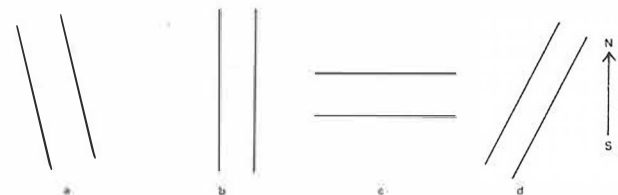
Exercise 4

Read the passage carefully and answer the questions by putting a circle around the letters a, b, c, or d to show the correct answer.

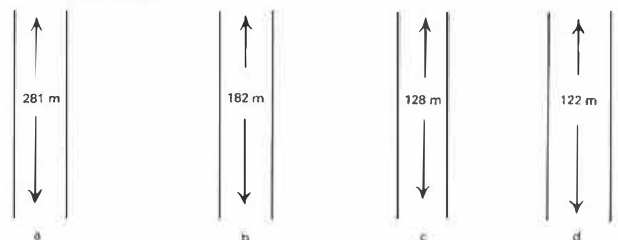
KUMA ISLAND

Answer the following question correctly by putting a circle round the letters a, b, c, or d

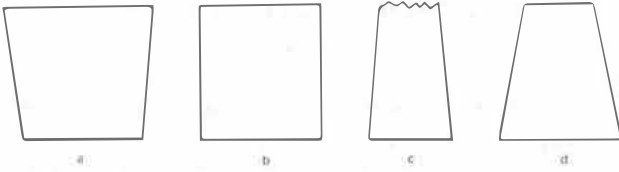
- Which drawing shows the main corridor?



- Which of the drawings shows the main corridor?



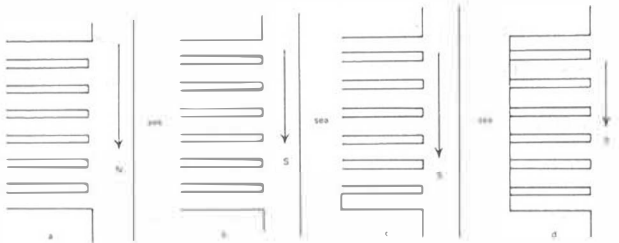
3. Which of the drawings shows the shape of the main corridor?



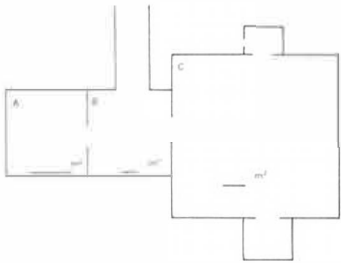
Exercise 4

KUMA ISLAND

4. Which drawing shows the seven side corridors correctly?



5. Study this drawing carefully and answer the questions



- Write the size of the rooms A, B, and C on the diagram.
- Put a capital T in the room where the Teller stood.
- Put a capital C in the room where the Customer stood.

Exercise 6

Body Warmth

Animals that are unable to control their body temperature are said to be cold-blooded and their temperature rises and falls with changes in the external temperature. In freezing conditions the temperature of such animals might be as low as 36°F. Warm-blooded animals, on the

other hand, are not dependent on external temperature. Their body temperature is constant, usually in the region of 100°F. Only birds and mammals are warm-blooded. Food and oxygen are the basis for their body heat.

We can say that size is important in keeping a man warm. All warm-blooded animals give out the same amount of heat from a square centimetre of their skin when they are at rest so that the amount of food needed to keep them warm is related to their skin. Weight is not important. Five hundred mice are equal in weight to a man. If, however, we put all the skins of these five hundred mice together, they will make seventeen times the area of a man's skin. The amount of food and oxygen that these mice take in would also come to seventeen times the amount a man takes in. In fact, a mouse takes about a quarter of its own weight in food every day, and this food is chiefly used in keeping it warm.

(10 000 square centimetres = 1 square metre)
(1 000 grams = 1 kilogram)

Complete the following form information in *Body Warmth*.

- If an ant is cold-blooded and a dog is not, the body temperature of the _____ will fall in winter.
- In freezing conditions a camel's temperature is about _____ °F.
- The body temperature of insects _____ on hot summer days.
- A man at rest gives out 40 calories of heat an hour from each metre of his skin. A tiger at rest gives out _____ calories of heat an hour from each metre of its skin.
- If the weight of one man is 70 kilograms, the weight of a mouse is _____ grams.
- If the area of a man's skin is 30 000 square centimetres, the area of a mouse's skin is _____ square centimetres.
- When compared with a lion, a mouse needs to eat a _____ amount of food in proportion to its weight in order to keep warm.
- With regard to size, _____ mammals can live more easily than others in Arctic regions.

Find words or phrases in the passages below that can be replaced by the following:

- cannot
- fluctuates
- however
- remains the same
- about

Exercise 7

Salt Pans

A salt pan is an artificial or natural hollow near the sea which is used for the extraction of salt from sea water. A flat low-level area is selected and this is divided into various basins, positioned in such a way that the evaporation of the water is speeded up by the combination of the sun's heat and the action of the wind. The basins are not very deep and have encircling low walls or earth banks. They may be at different levels, so that the water flows down from one basin to another by the natural action of the earth's pull. In the upper basins, known

as "evaporation" basins, the solution of salt becomes more and more concentrated, flowing finally into the lower or "salting" basins, where its dissolved salt begins to be laid down. This is later collected for cleaning and packing.

The following words can be substituted without changing the meaning, for words or phrases in the passage *Salt Pans*. Write the appropriate words from the passage in the places provided below.

- depression _____
- so placed _____
- expedited _____
- both _____
- are bounded by _____
- descends _____
- gravity _____
- termed _____
- increasingly _____
- deposited _____