

TECHNIQUES FOR TRAINING UPPER SECONDARY STUDENTS TO UNDERSTAND REFERENCE AND CONJUNCTIONS

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Conjunctions and reference items are such common words that you may often be tempted to ignore them and concentrate on more obvious lexical difficulties. However, this is dangerous as your students probably do not fully understand them, especially in their cohesive function.

Many students can write work that is grammatically correct without using any reference or conjunctions, and many teachers must have been tempted to leave it at that. Yet inspection of the writing usually reveals it to be cumbersome and repetitive if there is no reference; or disjointed with a staccato-type rhythm if there are no conjunctions. You need to show your students how their style of writing is improved when cohesive elements are used. Explain the meaning of these words carefully and guide your students to use them correctly.

Proper training in understanding reference and conjunctions is even more important in teaching reading than in teaching writing because the writer can control what he produces but the reader has less control over what he reads. Reference and conjunctions occur frequently in all kinds of writing and, what is more, they often give vital clues to the meaning of the passage. If you do not train your students carefully and systematically to recognise these signposts they may fail to fully understand much of what they read. And you cannot teach grammar effectively if you do not know it yourself; so look it up in a good reference grammar such as Quirk and Greenbaum; *A University Grammar of English*.

I have designed a series of lessons which can be used to teach reference and cohesion to upper secondary students of above average ability, with over forty in the class. They are samples of possible activities which you can extend and develop to suit your own students. I would generally try

to use materials which are authentic examples of language use.

In conducting the lessons, the introduction should be brief and interesting, involving some revision and much elicitation from the students. Prepare your students psychologically using discussion and stimulating visual aids, before handing out the exercises. Give the instructions clearly and make sure your students understand what they have to do by working through a few of the examples with them and before asking them to complete the work. Include a well-balanced variety of activities in your lesson, which use a number of different skills. Your materials, whether printed, taped or 'realia', can be used to contextualise the exercises; to motivate your students; to give them information to refer to; and to give them prompts or clues for their written and oral work. During the lesson you need to check the students' progress frequently, in a number of different ways. Encourage your students to check their own work and to offer constructive criticism of the work of other students. Make all your language tasks realistic, meaningful and interesting by remembering your students' communicative needs and using situations to which your students can relate.

In teaching upper secondary students it is as well to be aware of the persistent errors that are likely to occur. I have noticed the following in my students:

1. Reference

- (a) Mixed reference occurs, e.g. *I, you, he, they*, and *one* might all be used in the same paragraph to refer to the same thing.
- (b) There may be no agreement in person or number between the subject and its nominal forms.

2. Conjunctions

- (a) A wrong word is used because a student does not understand the meaning.
- (b) A redundant second conjunction occurs, e.g. *Although ... but ...* (See R.K. Tongue *The English of Singapore and Malaysia* (pp 62–64) for further examples.)

Lesson One (for an average or weak class)

Aims

1. To elicit conjunctions which can be used to sequence information in chronological order; e.g. *When I was a baby; when I was two years old; then; eventually.*
2. To show the students why these conjunctions are needed.
3. To revise personal reference.

Aids

Sets of pictures of children of different races showing the different clothes each race would wear at different ages. These could be photographs, posters, or simple drawings by the teacher. They should be attached to a magnetboard, flannelboard, or blackboard (e.g. using Blu-tac).

Assumptions

1. The students have not done much work on conjunctions before.
2. The students are familiar with the cultural items shown.
3. The students have been taught how to use reference.

Plan

1. Take the pictures of one race. Introduce them in a jumbled order, one at a time, attaching them to the board. Ask the students to describe the pictures as they appear and put any difficult vocabulary on the board as it occurs. (3 minutes)

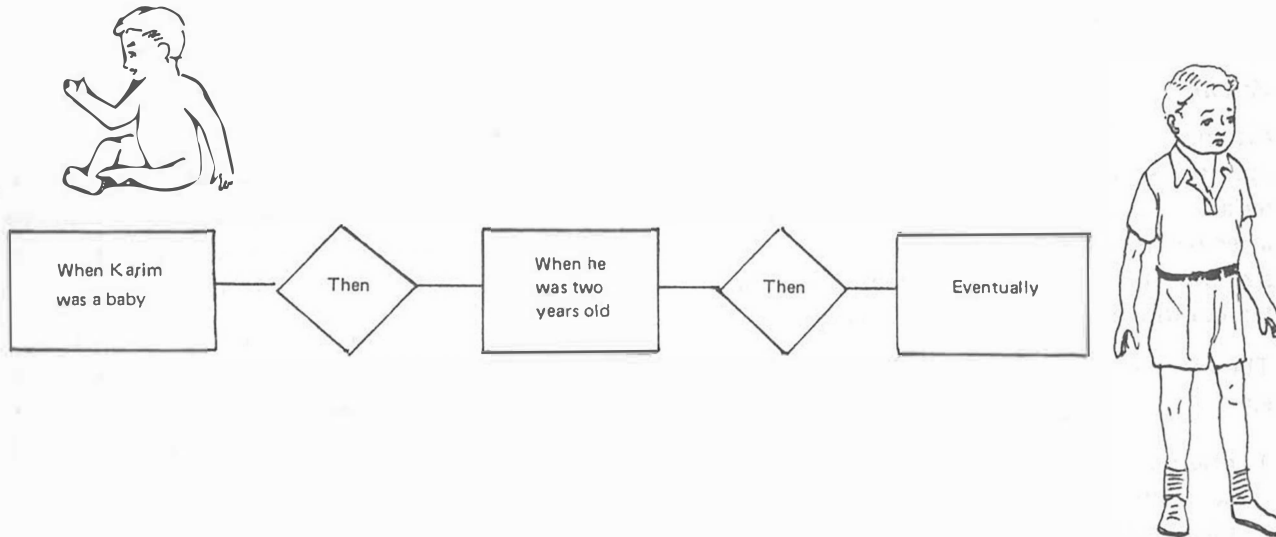
2. Ask the students to suggest an order for the pictures, which should be numbered. This can be done individually, or in groups of three or four, depending on the complexity of the problem. Arrange the pictures in the order suggested. (2 minutes)
3. Ask the class to think of a simple sentence to describe each picture. This can be done in pairs or in groups of four to make sure this stage does not take too much time. (4 minutes)
4. Elicit a sentence from each group and write these on the blackboard, or, better, get the students to write them on the blackboard so that any errors can be pointed out by the rest of the class and corrected as they occur. Look at the use of reference in particular. (4 minutes)
5. Have the class read through what has been written on the blackboard silently, and then comment on its effectiveness as a piece of writing. Have the students point out (after guidance through questioning or comparison with other texts if necessary) any sentences that are badly connected: then elicit suitable conjunctions to connect the passage. (3 minutes)
6. Elicit from the class why it is important to use conjunctions:
 - (a) to make the text easier to understand;
 - (b) to make the text better stylistically;
 - (c) to make reading the text easier;
 - but (d) that is not essential to the understanding of the text. (3 minutes)
7. Show a different set of pictures and ask the class, in groups of four, to write a connected passage about these pictures. Different sets of pictures can be handed to different groups, so that the groups have the communicative task of describing their pictures to the rest of the class after finishing this assignment. An O.H.P. would be very useful at this stage if one is available, as the students are then able to check each other's written work, having done the writing on transparencies. (16 minutes)

Variations

1. A similar activity can be done using a cartoon (unaltered or put into a jumbled order), or any

other series of pictures, e.g. slides taken during a holiday, a list of instructions, e.g. for a recipe or for using a computerised automatic banking card. These activities can be used to elicit different kinds of sequencing conjunctions, though I would avoid using the same type of activity too often on the same class.

2. A graphical exposition can be used after stage five, especially if the students are mathematically inclined.
e.g. A flow chart.



Lesson Two (for an average or above average class)

Aims

1. To practise the use of personal, demonstrative and comparative reference.
2. To revise agreement between subject and pronominal forms.
3. To develop the ability to recognise to what a reference item refers.

Aids

A newspaper article, magazine article or some other extract from a text that might interest the students. I chose a newspaper article about football for my class of boys. The reference items (e.g. *he, they, this, these, such*) should be erased and marked by numbers for easy identification. The text should be pasted onto a piece of paper with room for the instructions down the side.

Plan

1. Briefly revise the kinds of agreement needed in the passage, through elicitation from the students. (2 minutes)
2. Briefly discuss football (i.e. the subject matter) to prepare the students psychologically. (2 minutes)
3. Hand out the worksheet and ask the students to read it quietly on their own, to find the answer to the pre-question: 'Who scored?' Using pre-questions in this way helps direct the students' attention in reading, and may be used in a competitive way to increase reading speeds and encourage skimming and scanning. (3 minutes)
4. Elicit the answer to the pre-question and then check on overall comprehension using rapid oral questioning. (4 minutes)
5. Have students answer the worksheet on their own, then check through their answers in pairs, or in groups if the class is weak in English. (10 minutes)

- Elicit the correct answers from the class. If there is any disagreement, guide the students to recognise and correct their own mistakes without actually telling them the answers. (4 minutes)
- As a possible extension, arrange the students in groups and ask them to rewrite the story as if they were the characters described. This extension also involves the use of conjunctions, which should be revised before starting the assignment. (10 minutes)

Variations

Alternative materials include extracts from newspapers, magazines, books and letters. Taped material can also be used, with words erased from it after recording. Pictures (on an O.H.P. or poster size for a large class) can be used for oral or written questioning, e.g. *Whose car is that?*

The activity described in this lesson can be varied, e.g.

- Erase the reference items and then draw the connections onto the text instead of listing them down the side.
- For more advanced classes, do not give reference clues. Just ask the class to fill in the missing words.
- Ask the class to locate reference items and draw in lines linking them to the words to which they refer.

Lesson Three (for an average or above average class)

Aim

Practice in the selection and use of a variety of conjunctions.

Aids

A crossword and accompanying passage (see example below).

Assumption

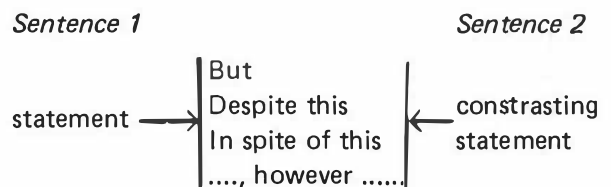
Students have an extensive knowledge of a number of different types of conjunctions.

Plan

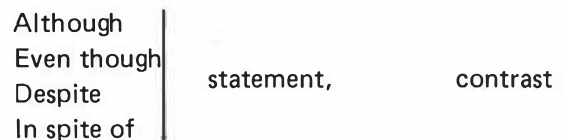
- Revise the different types of conjunctions through elicitation, grouping them in a visual arrangement, such as that suggested at the end. (3 minutes)
- Give a brief contextual introduction by describing the story so far. (5 minutes)
- Show the class the worksheet and explain that the numbers in the passage (in brackets) refer to the numbers in the crossword. Some letters have been inserted to make the problem easier to solve. (2 minutes)
- Hand out the crossword and ask the class to solve it in pairs or in groups of four, depending on your estimation of their ability. The teacher should guide those who have difficulties without solving the problem for them. (20 minutes)
- Elicit answers from the class, if necessary. A large chart or O.H.P. transparency would be very useful for this. To end the lesson the class can suggest possible endings to the story. (5 minutes)

Variations

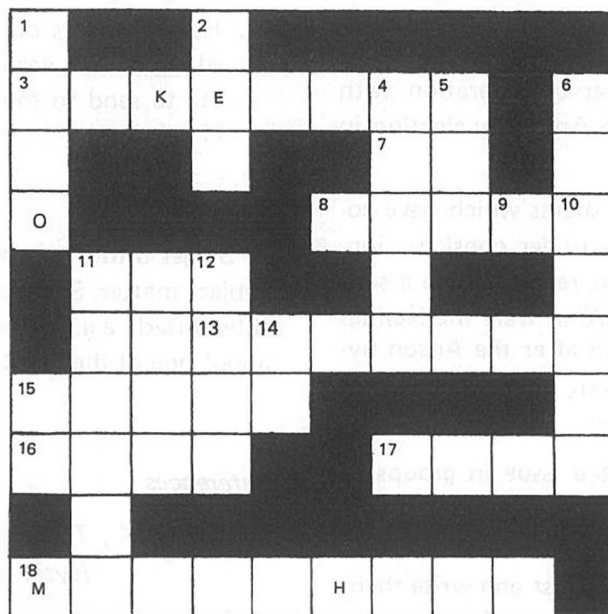
A crossword technique can also be used to revise reference items, as well as other games, e.g. noughts and crosses. A visual presentation of conjunctions is given below:



OR



Special attention should be paid to the fact that *although* and *but* should not be used in the same sentence, as this is a common error.



Fill in the blanks in the passage below. Each dash represents one missing letter. Check your answers by filling in the crossword above.

The boys were worried. They had been searching for Karim _____ (4) noon E (2) they still did not know where to find him. They were _____ O (1) beginning to feel hungry. They had left their house _____ (15) _____ (16) as they had received the ransom note. _____ (13) when they reached the bridge it was deserted. They had searched for an hour _____ (11) moving on. M _____ H _____ (8) Karim had been in trouble. _____ (6) _____ (10) his captors had dragged him to the bridge, _____ (11) he had resisted fiercely. _____ (15) a brief struggle he had managed to free his hands. _____ (12) he untied his feet. He stood, shrieked the few native words he knew _____ (8) pretended to be in a trance. The native carriers started to behave KE _____ (3), frightening the kidnappers. They asked each other _____ (8) they should run _____ (14) fight. Karim tried to scare them with his act, as he was easily outnumbered, and in the _____ (5) he succeeded. Free at _____ (17) he ran into the jungle

Lesson Four (for an above average class)

Aims

1. To revise the use of contrastive conjunctions.
2. To revise the use of conjunctions to sequence information.
3. To revise letter-writing in a style appropriate for writing to the local paper.

Aids

Two contrasting accounts of the same thing, e.g. two film reviews; letters to the editor of a daily paper; reports before and after an event which took a peculiar turn. Material can be extracted from the newspaper.

Assumptions

1. The event described is of contemporary interest and is familiar to the students.

2. The students have already been taught the conjunctions needed.

Plan

1. Discuss the event under consideration with the students. I used the Anson by-election in Singapore. (3 minutes)
2. Hand out the prepared sheets which have copies of the two articles under consideration. Ask for individual silent reading. Give a suitable pre-question, e.g. 'What were the feelings of the P.A.P. before and after the Anson by-election?' to the students to guide them in their reading. (5 minutes)
3. Have students discuss the issue in groups of four to identify all the possible points of contrast. (5 minutes)
4. Elicit these points of contrast and write them on the blackboard in note form. (3 minutes)
5. Ask the class, in pairs, to think of suitable conjunctions of contrast to put between the opposing statements. Write these on the board. Check for correctness and appropriacy. (3 minutes)
6. After a brief oral explanation to prepare the students psychologically, hand out, or ask the students to produce their own, letters which have been written to one of the English-medium daily newspapers. Ask the students to read these silently, having previously been given questions about the style, e.g.
How are the important points ordered?
How are these points linked together?
How does the writer direct the reader's attention to the points he wants to discuss? (6 minutes)
7. Get the class to discuss the answers to these questions in groups of four. (8 minutes)
8. Collate the answers in a class discussion. (3 minutes)
9. Ask the students to write their own letters to the same newspaper about the issue discussed in the first part of the lesson. Guide them in terms of what to write (content); how to contrast and sequence the ideas, and the style of language to be used. (25 minutes)

10. Have students check each other's work in pairs. (2 minutes)
11. Have students consider their work in groups of eight. Ask each group to select the best letter to send to the newspaper for publication. (7 minutes)

Variations

Stages 6 to 11 are only appropriate with certain subject matter. Some other writing activity may be substituted, e.g. writing to a friend to tell him about one of the latest films.

References

- Tongue, R.K., *The English of Singapore and Malaysia* pp 62 – 64
- Watson, C., A First lesson in discourse Writing, in *Modern English Teacher*, Vol. 8 No. 4
- Byrne, D., *Teaching Writing Skills Teaching Oral English*
- Khoo, R., Variations of a Crossword in *Guidelines* No. 5
- Quirk, R. and Greenbaum, S., *A University Grammar of English*