

## USING PICTURE SEQUENCES FOR CONTROLLED WRITING

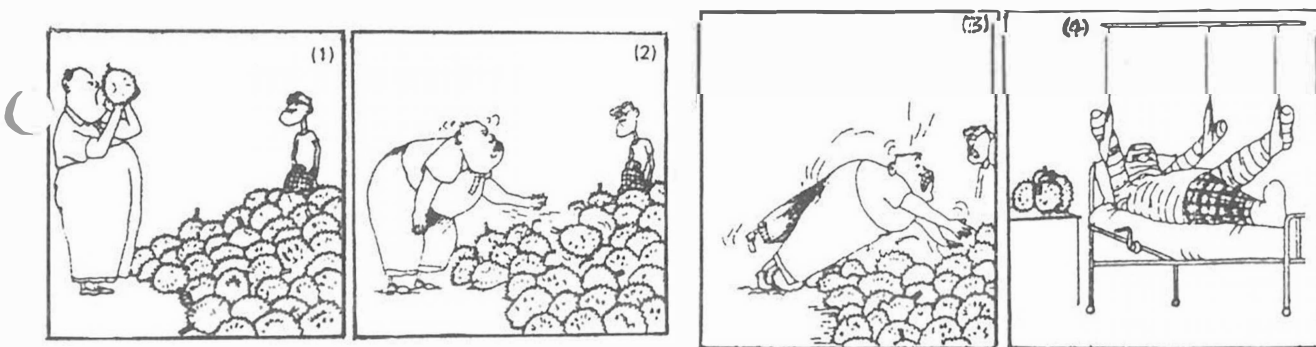
Gerry Abbott

The other day I came across a catalogue reference to some wall pictures, sets of cartoon sequences done by Fougasse, which must have been used by a million or more teachers. I remembered the first occasions on which I had used them, (and they were not new then) twenty-two years ago in a Bangkok secondary school. Various incidents came to mind. There was a time when a student, having identified the first picture of one sequence as a couple of dogs standing on either side of a bone, said that the second picture showed two crocodiles. When I looked again at the two dogs in picture two, now snarling and bristling, I could see the unsophisticated student's point of view. Then there was the time when not one student in a class of fifty-odd could see why a certain monkey, which had snatched an old man's glasses and tried them on, was returning the specs to the outraged owner. My students often did not see what I saw.

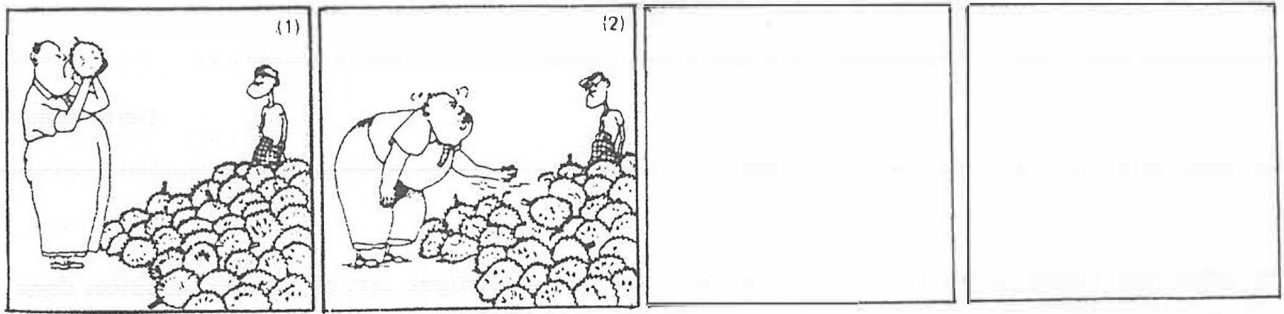
But what chiefly prompted me to put pen to paper was my realising how differently I now use such material. Of course, newer techniques are not necessarily better than older ones; they are sometimes worse and sometimes just different. But, naturally, it does seem to me that my three main innovations are improvements. They represent changes in the display of the pictures, in the oral preparation and in the writing stage of the lesson. Using these three headings, I shall illustrate the older and the newer technique each time, in the manner of the 'before' and 'after' of advertisements for headache pills. Then I shall illustrate one story in more detail, using up-to-date aids.

### 1 Display

I used to pin up a complete cartoon-sequence and wait (sometimes in vain) for the grins that would signal comprehension. Interest began to wane from this early stage, because my students now knew the story and didn't want to bother with how the story could be expressed in English. Let's try Lat (albeit shortened) instead of Fougasse:



Nowadays, I cut up such sequences so that each picture is separate, and mount each one on scrap cardboard so that I can stand them along the ledge at the bottom of the blackboard. I do not begin by displaying the whole sequence, but keep some hidden. In this way I give the students less to concentrate on or be distracted by; and their interest in how the story ends is maintained, however banal and unfunny the ending might be:



## 2 Oral Preparation

Concentrating on one picture at a time although all were in view, I used to ensure that the necessary vocabulary was known:

T: What is he doing in picture one?

P: He's sniffing a durian.

T: Sniffing. Yes, good, he's *sniffing* a durian . . . .

I suppose I always used the present continuous tense (and occasionally the present perfect tense) because I was for the time being concerned with isolated detail rather than with the business of telling a story. Anyway, when the vocabulary had been 'covered', I went back to the beginning and began to give the narrative form orally, e.g:

T: Encik Ali picked up a durian and sniffed it.

I got groups of students to say it, too, and wrote new words on the blackboard; but I didn't let anyone write.

These days, I go straight into the story, demonstrating meanings as I go along and without recourse to a change of tense:

T: Encik Ali picked up a durian and (sniff, sniff) sniffed it.

I still use the blackboard to record new words, but its main use is as a framework for guiding the students:

	picked up	
	sniffed	

The verbs are added as we go along and left there as cues; the new words other than verbs are added on the left or right according to whether they occur in the subject or the complement; and students are picked at random to speak. One repeats the new sentence and another retells the story so far, including the new sentence. This is a challenge which many Malaysian students may shy away from, but it is worth a try. I wish I had concentrated on the verbs in this way all those years ago, when I received work containing gems like:

'Last night I was gone at a party. I was very exciting and was enjoyed very much.'

### 3 The Writing Stage

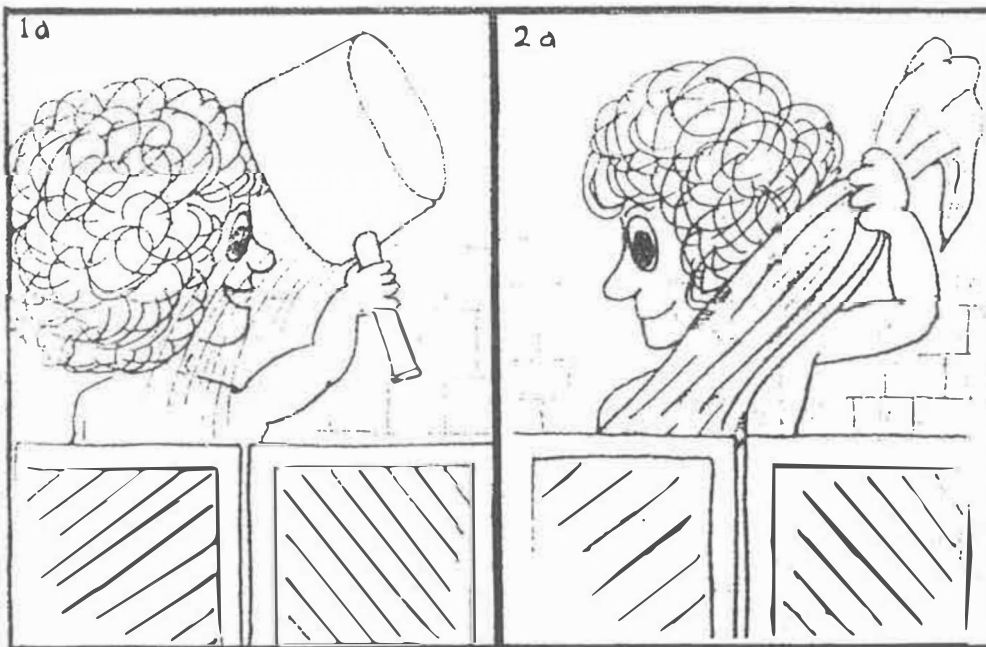
Other than providing oral preparation, I didn't give my students a lot of guidance. They used to take out their pens and exercise books and wrote, while I cooled off and answered occasional queries. The result was that I had fifty-odd bits of marking to do, many of which began something like this:

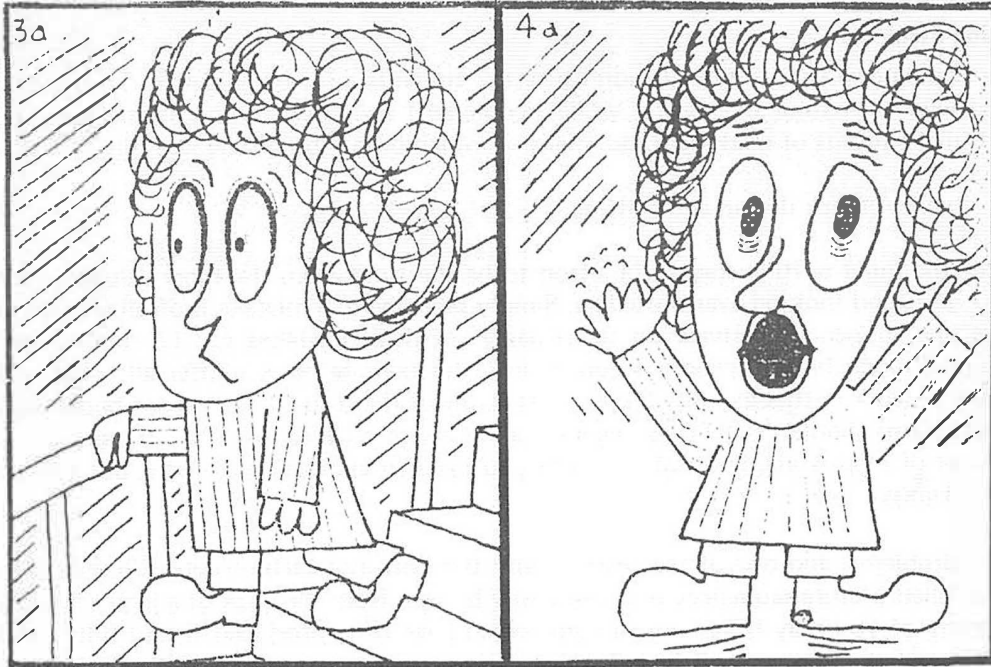
'One day, Encik Ali pick durian and sniffing.'

I now consider the quiet writing stage of a lesson to be the time when the most valuable individual help can be given. I go round looking over shoulders. Simply pointing to a mistake is often enough to get it self-corrected. Drafting in pencil, perhaps on scrap paper, is ideal: mistakes can be rubbed out easily and corrected before a much better version is copied into the exercise book. (After all, what is the sense of having a *bad* set of work in that exercise book? That is one of the student's reference-books during revision and exam-preparation; shouldn't it be as accurate and easy-to-read as possible? If you are *testing* your students, this sort of help is inappropriate because you need to allocate fair marks; but I'm talking about *teaching*. And I digress.)

One of the problems, and one of the reasons why the Fougasse cartoons are still selling, has been the shortage of published picture-sequences that can easily be seen from the back of a large classroom. Recently, however, many of you may have seen the sets which have been produced (beautifully produced, too) under the auspices of the Centre for British Teachers. There are accompanying teacher's notes, but you can of course modify the sequences and use different techniques. In what follows, I have omitted one picture from the chosen sequence and rearranged the rest; there is therefore no change to be made to any of the pictures, though for the sake of clarity I have re-numbered them here. My technique shows one way of dealing with any story in which simultaneous actions play an important part.

The basis of the technique is simply to separate the two parallel sets of actions and deal with them as two narratives at first. Ladies first; and since this one looks like an orang putih to me, and since her jewels look HUGE, I'll call her Elizabeth Taylor. Remember that only one or two of these pictures would be seen at first:

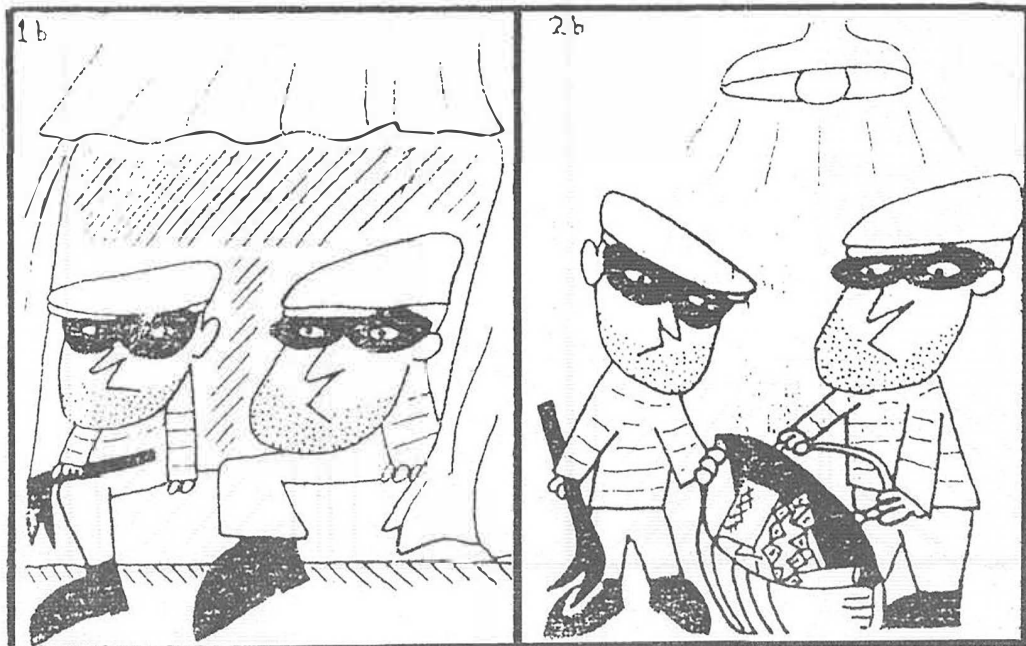


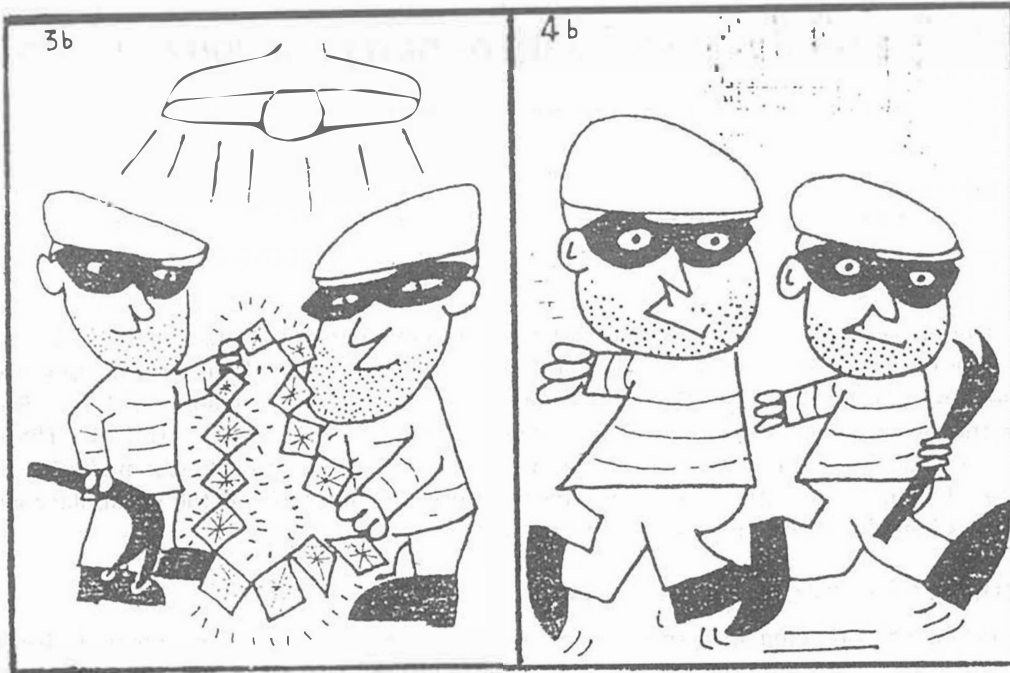


The essentials of the narrative built up would be, eg:

Elizabeth Taylor	had	a bath.
She	dried	herself.
She	went	downstairs.
She	screamed.	

The obvious question is 'Why?' and students may be willing to offer guesses. All sensible ones, whether accurately expressed or not, should be accepted with 'Yes, perhaps you're right,' or some such phrase; and when no further suggestions seem to be forthcoming, the second narrative can be started:





Picture Series drawn by Derek Strange, CFBT.

The skeleton story might be:

Two thieves	climbed	through her window.
They	opened	her bag.
They	found	her diamond necklace.
They	escaped	without it.

Again, the obvious question is 'Why?' but there is a pretty obvious answer. From now on, the paired pictures showing simultaneous actions can be displayed side by side, the two narratives combining into one, eg:

1	a. While b.	Elizabeth Taylor two thieves	was having climbed	a bath, through her window.
2	a. While b.	she they	was drying opened	herself, her bag.
3	a. As b.	she they	was going found	downstairs, her necklace.
4	a. When b.	she they	screamed, escaped	without it.

The contrast between *as/while* (with *ING + ED*) and *when* (with *ED + ED*) is quite clearly signalling the difference between contemporary actions and sequential actions, and this kind of guide is useful even though English does not exclude other permutations of *ING* and *ED* forms with these conjunctions.