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The Live Lab: Guidelines and Exercises for the Teacher-Produced Language Laboratory

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School for International Training

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THE LIVE LAB

Guidelines and Exercises for the Teacher-Produced Language Laboratory

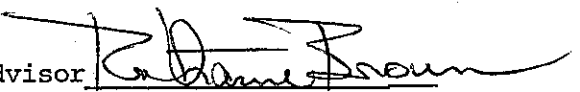
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

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ABSTRACT

A live lab is one that is not pretaped. A teacher tailors the lab period to a particular class and the individuals in it on a particular day. It responds to the students' needs rather than asking them to adapt to it. Included in "The Live Lab" are 1) a description of the laboratory at the School for International Training, 2) twelve general guidelines for producing a live lab, 3) an indexed collection of suggested laboratory exercises grouped by the skill areas of sound discrimination, pronunciation, intonation, listening comprehension, vocabulary building/activation, writing, and culture/values, 4) sample lesson outlines for five consecutive lab periods for each of three levels: beginning, intermediate and intermediate/advanced, 5) a bibliography of some materials designed for or adaptable to use in ESL language laboratories.

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INTRODUCTION

Recorded sound holds so much potential for language students. It can seem to capture time itself and put it in their grasp. The pace and content of classroom material may be largely out of their control, but laboratory material can be replayed, examined, pondered and digested entirely at the individual student's discretion.

For some students, lab can be a lifeline, the beginning of the realization that a finite amount of the language can be understood at their own pace, and so the language is accessible. They can relax and learn. For others the lab offers opportunities for refinement of skills and access to individually controllable resources -- newscasts, songs and readings that can be stopped and replayed at will. For the teacher, lab can mean freedom: freedom from the excuse for repetition, freedom to set tasks and let the students pace themselves, freedom to challenge the faster members of the class and yet know that the other class members have the means to assimilate the same material at a slower pace.

All this can be said in praise of language laboratories in general. But this paper has been written to extol the virtues of the live lab. What is it and why is it preferable?

A live lab is one that is not pretaped. It is the creation of teacher and students at a particular moment in time. It is not, however, spontaneous. A good deal of planning goes into it. Just as much planning as the classroom requires.

Why would a teacher want to lengthen an already long day with laboratory as well as classroom preparation? Perhaps at this point a brief description of my approach to teaching is in order because the live lab is an extension of my work in the classroom.

There are three values I hold in my teaching that particularly apply to my concept of a language laboratory. The first is flexibility. I value being able to change lesson content, order or format based on my perception of student response or need. The second is individualization. I value being able to match the student with the task, to either offer a variety of tasks or to divide the class into groups, each with an appropriate task. The third value is immediacy. I would like class content and format to be relevant to students' daily needs and interests.

The live lab incorporates these values: 1) flexibility -- the lab can respond to the class, to their interests and problems; it can be sequenced and segmented to fit student and teacher needs and time requirements. 2) individualization -- the lab is tailored to a particular class and the individuals in it, on a particular day; it responds to the students' needs rather than asking them to adapt to it. 3) immediacy -- material drawn from a day's class work can be on tape the same day.

The lab becomes a wonderful tool. It is no longer a set curriculum, appended to or tortuously integrated into the classroom in hopes that some students will find it useful. A teacher may stretch the electronic system in any way her¹ students and her own creativity take her. Its use becomes a challenge, both rewarding and fun.

The Laboratory

The reel to reel laboratory at the School for International Training (SIT) may or may not be similar to those other teachers work with. It must

¹I have arbitrarily chosen the female pronoun to represent both male and female teachers in order to avoid the cumbersome repetition of his/her throughout the paper. Students are generally referred to in the plural for the same reason.

certainly be like many in that it is neither new nor perfect. There is a console from which the teacher may speak to the students, play a tape or a record. There are twenty-four booths. Each booth has a corresponding tape deck along one of the laboratory walls where students put on their tapes at the beginning of the lab period. They can manipulate them by remote control from their booths. Students are issued blank tapes for the duration of the English program. At the end of the lab period, they take their tapes away with them. They can return to the lab at any time (it is open twenty-four hours) to replay that day's lesson or a preceding one. The user of a tape can record only on one side and for a total of about forty-five minutes. When the tape is finished, the students start in again, erasing what has come before. The students have control over when they record what the teacher is saying or playing, but the teacher can direct the recording process. The booths are equipped with microphones, but the students have the option of recording or not recording their own voices. If they record, they can compare their voices to the teacher's when they replay their tapes. They can also rerecord their portion of an exercise without erasing the teacher's. The School also has a cassette laboratory that works in much the same way.

The lab is generally used daily. It is part of a 27 hours/week, ten week English program. One teacher has a class of no more than twelve students for an entire five or six hour day. The suggestions for exercises given in this paper were designed with the SIT intensive teaching situation in mind, but they are applicable or adaptable to other situations as well.

As a teacher reads through the guidelines and suggestions that follow, measuring them against the capabilities of her lab, the needs of her students and her teaching style, she can decide if a live lab is something she would like to try. The sample lesson outlines which follow the suggestions are intended to clarify the relationship between the exercises and an actual lab period.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PRODUCING A LIVE LAB

1. Know the capabilities of the lab.
2. Plan a clear orientation to the lab for the students, introducing them to the technician if there is one and giving them a task which requires recording. Allow enough time to evaluate each student's understanding of the recording mechanism.
3. Check on the condition of the equipment and the quality of the recordings the students make. No matter how good the teacher's material is, if the students' tapes are not clear, they won't be able to use them outside of class.
4. Establish a routine that has the students seated with their tapes cued and their written material at hand by a certain time. The routine might also include a simple, non-disruptive way for a student to indicate a technical difficulty or failure. Remember that if for some reason a student has problems one lab period and does not make a usable recording, all is not lost. He or she can use a classmate's tape for that particular assignment.
5. Use actual recording time selectively. Tell students when to record and when to stop in order to eliminate dead time and to allow their tapes to last longer.
6. Allow time for an unrecorded trial run-through of an example from a new exercise to discover if the explanation was indeed clear.
7. Don't repeat. The technology does that for both the teacher and the student.
8. Organize material so that there is variety within a period, but consistency between periods. It may be more productive to have four five-minute versions of a task done in consecutive lab periods than one twenty-minute one. Variety aids in concentration and makes it more likely that each student will find something particularly enjoyable and useful for him/her in that day's lab.

9. Don't pad. If the teacher has a solid half hour of material and an hour lab to fill, she can return to the classroom or have the students begin their overnight lab assignments then, while she's there available for questions.

10. Be sensitive to students' reactions. If a sizable portion of the class is frowning or is visably lost or bored, re-examine the task.

11. When planning, think in terms of the possibilities for recycling: classroom material for lab, lab material for the classroom and one exercise doing double or triple duty.

12. Periodically reconsider the appropriateness of what you are doing in the lab. If it could be done just as well in the classroom, perhaps it belongs there.

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SUGGESTED LABORATORY EXERCISES, GROUPED BY SKILL AREAS

The following exercises have been grouped by skill areas but not by language level. Most could be used at any level, although some modifications might be required. A description of each exercise, the procedure to follow for its use in the laboratory and its possible follow up, in or out of lab, are included under each heading.

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

To be able to understand a language and to speak it, a person must discriminate between sounds. The language lab offers a near ideal setting for working on this skill. Sounds are here represented according to the Trager-Smith system.

1. identifying sounds in a sentence

The teacher selects five or so sentences from class work -- from a reading, from a Community Language Learning transcript, from a student's oral comments or composition, etc. -- and types them on a ditto master. All or most of them contain words with a sound the class is working on, perhaps /e/. In lab, the teacher distributes the ditto with the sentences and asks the students to listen for /e/, giving a word familiar to the class as an example or pointing to the sound on Dr. Caleb Gattegno's Sound-Color Fidel² if the students are accustomed to this tool. The teacher, or another English speaker, says the sentences once while the students record them and circle the words containing the sound on the sheets in front of them. Depending on the class's or individual students' needs, the dittoed sheets can be collected after lab, collected the next day when students have had a

²The Sound-Color Fidel is a single 16½" x 22½" chart of colored rectangles on a black background. The rectangles represent all the vowel and consonant sounds in English. The chart was developed by Dr. Gattegno and is distributed through Educational Solutions in New York City.

chance to listen overnight, or left with the students and a correctly marked copy posted in the classroom. The same sentences can be used for more than one sound.

2. arranging words in categories according to vowel or consonant sounds

The teacher selects ten to twenty words used recently in class. The words contain sounds the class is presently working on. The teacher types the words on a ditto master and draws columns below them with either phonetic symbols or sample words as headings. For example:

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| <u>g</u> reat | <u>b</u> usy | <u>s</u> traight | <u>a</u> ny | <u>e</u> ight | <u>t</u> ake | <u>t</u> rip |
| <u>m</u> iss | <u>s</u> ki | <u>f</u> riend | <u>d</u> ead | <u>s</u> aid | <u>p</u> lease | <u>l</u> azy |
| <u>m</u> ess | <u>w</u> omen | <u>s</u> neeze | <u>f</u> ifty | <u>p</u> eople | <u>b</u> uild | |

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| /i/ <u>s</u> it | /e/ <u>s</u> et | /iy/ <u>s</u> eat | /ey/ <u>s</u> ay |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|

While the students record, the teacher says each word. Overnight, the students replay their tapes and assign the words to sound categories. Next day the results are put on the blackboard in class. If the task has proved a difficult one, the teacher may want to ask the class for additional examples or words containing the target sounds.

The number of categories depends on the auditory sophistication of the class and the proximity of the sounds to be distinguished. I have used from two to nine, depending on the students' level of English.

3. minimal pairs and triplets

This technique overlaps with the next skill area, pronunciation. A list of ten or so numbered minimal pairs or triplets is typed on a ditto master. Although it is well nigh impossible to choose minimal pairs and triplets entirely from class material, perhaps at least one of the words in a set can be a familiar word, matching it by using a

resource such as Nilsen and Nilsen's Pronunciation Contrasts in English.

examples:

| minimal pair | | minimal triplet | | |
|--------------|-------|-----------------|-------|--------|
| /i/ | /iy/ | /u/ | /aw/ | /ow/ |
| 1. fill | feel | 1. fund | found | phoned |
| 2. it | eat | 2. but | bout | boat |
| 3. will | we'll | 3. ton | town | tone |
| etc. | | etc. | | |

The sounds are not new ones. If the words have not been taken directly from class work, the teacher reminds the students of the connection to the classroom either by writing a cue word from class on the blackboard or by pointing to the sounds on the Sound-Color Fidel. It is emphasized that all the words in each column have the same vowel or consonant sound so if they can say the first word they can say all of them, no matter what the spelling.

The students record. They say the first word and then the teacher says it, the second, etc. until the column is finished. A familiar cue word or colored rectangle on the Fidel is indicated for the second column and the same procedure followed. Then the teacher says that she will say one word from each pair or one from each triplet and they are to circle the word she says.

| (teacher's voice) | (student's paper) |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1. fill | 1. <u>fill</u> feel |
| 2. it | 2. <u>it</u> eat |
| 3. we'll | 3. will <u>we'll</u> |
| etc. | etc. |

When she finishes, the students stop recording. To correct the exercise the teacher asks them to hold up one or two (or three) fingers to indicate if they have circled a word in the first or second (or third) column. Pausing after each number, she shows the correct answer with

her own hand. Once the exercise is corrected the class says the circled words, guided in their pronunciation if need be by the teacher pointing to the sound on the Sound-Color Fidel or in the cue word. Once the students understand the exercise, it need not be corrected in lab, but can be followed up the next day in class.

PRONUNCIATION

1. vocabulary from class

This is a simple but highly effective technique. The teacher keeps track of new words and expressions as they come up in class. After school she types that day's vocabulary on a ditto master for the next day's lab, perhaps adding the date at the top of the page. If the lab period is in the afternoon and there is sufficient time during the midday break, the morning's new words can be added to the sheet. At some point during their class work the students have been exposed to the concept of primary stress, learning to divide words into syllables and to listen for the emphasized syllable. In lab, with their vocabulary sheets in front of them and while recording, the students say the first word. At this point they have only their auditory memories of class to guide their pronunciation. The teacher then says the word and the students repeat it, putting a circle around the syllable they believe carries the primary stress.

(teacher's voice)

1. Vermont
2. realize

etc.

(student's paper)

1. Vermont
2. realize

When the list has been completed they stop recording.

The first few times this exercise is used in lab it might be helpful to write some of the words on the board in the classroom,

either immediately following lab or the next day. Different students can then circle the syllable they believe carries the primary stress and the class can come to an agreement as to correctness, with the teacher's guidance if necessary. Once a routine has been established a correctly marked copy can be posted in class from which students can check their work independently.

In addition to aiding pronunciation, this exercise reviews vocabulary in a new, albeit isolated, context and provides students with an ongoing, correctly-spelled record of class vocabulary. The lists are useful for the teacher too, reminding her of words the class has been exposed to and serving as a resource for examples of sounds appropriate to this particular class.

2. unpronounced letters

This exercise is similar to the previous one, but rather than listening for and circling stressed syllables, the students circle the syllable or letter or cluster not pronounced. The teacher can extract words containing unpronounced letters from perhaps a week's worth of vocabulary sheets (see 1 above) and type them on a ditto master, works like camera, listen, catch, comb, talk, interesting.

(teacher's voice)

1. walking
2. Catholic

etc.

(student's paper)

1. walking
2. Catholic

The lab and follow-up procedure would be the same as for the vocabulary sheets.

3. minimal pairs and triplets

Students distinguish between and pronounce words identical except for one sound (live, leave). See item 3, page 9.

INTONATION

An intonation exercise asks students to be aware of larger segments of the language than individual sounds or words and to try to approximate the flow and fluency of a native speaker.

1. sentences

The students have worked in class on dividing sentences into phrases, eliding syllables and plotting the "shape" of the sentence.

Would you like to have a piece of pie for dessert?

The teacher selects sentences from class work, from a Community Language Learning transcript, from a student's oral comments or composition, or from other student-generated material. Each student has a sentence. If the class, and thus the number of sentences, is small enough, and if it seems appropriate, the sentences can be dictated in lab (see dictation, page 21). If a dictation is not appropriate, the sentences can be typed on a ditto master and distributed. The teacher reads the sentences in lab, speaking normally but not excessively fast, and the students record them. After class, each student replays his/her sentence in lab, divides it into phrases and works on saying it as smoothly as possible.

The follow-up can be handled in at least two ways. 1) Students can say their sentences in class one at a time and get peer and teacher feedback. 2) The class can be divided into groups with the students listening, speaking and evaluating each other while the teacher circulates. As a variation, the students, when satisfied with their sentences after the group evaluation, can tape them on a cassette recorder to play for the class as a whole.

2. brief stories, dialogues, short plays, poems

This is an expansion of the preceding exercise. A lot of classroom material can be recycled for intonation practice -- stories or descriptions students have written individually or in groups, situational dialogues they have developed, short plays and poems they have read or written. The students may not be at a stage where listening to a native speaker say their material in lab and working on the resulting tape is useful to them. They may prefer not to have that model. If so, lab work would be extraneous and they can do their intonation work in class, perhaps taping their own voices. For more hesitant students, the teacher's or another speaker's rendition of their material, or the voices of professional actors on a commercially produced version of a published play or poem, may be just the influence needed to interest them in improving the flow and expressiveness of their speech.

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

This is a time-honored use of the lab. Possibilities abound. There is a good deal of published material available for use and adaptation,³ but it need not be too time consuming for a teacher to make up her own tailor-made exercises.

1. scrambled words

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. It is an enjoyable way to reinforce spelling and the alphabet. The teacher reads five scrambled words of a certain category letter by letter while the students write and record. She reads at a reasonable speed and she does not repeat.

³Joan Morley, Improving Aural Comprehension (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1972).

If the category is states in the United States she might say,

1. E-M-I-N-A
 2. A-A-S-E-K-R-B-N
- etc.

Overnight the students check their transcription and decode the words. The next day they can put their answers on the board in class or compare their answers with a posted copy. Other categories for scrambling might include cities, countries, names of class members, recent vocabulary.

2. numbers

Exercises to help make the recognition of numbers second nature can often be created on the spot in lab. Students can listen to the lab material overnight if they need more than one hearing and their results can either go on the classroom blackboard the next day, can be collected, can be compared in pairs, or a correct sheet can be posted in class for them to check on their own.

a. general numbers

The teacher says five to ten numbers, once, while the students write and record. Depending on the class, the numbers can be one digit, two digit or as many as eight digits.

b. telephone numbers

The teacher says five to ten telephone numbers, once, while the students write and record. The numbers are probably most useful in a sentence context, something that an operator or a person leaving a message might say. The students write only the number.

Please have him call me at area code 617, 352-7774.

That number is area code 212, 902-3688.

c. addresses

The teacher says five to ten addresses, once, while the students write and record. If she wants the students to concentrate only

on numbers she will use very common street and city names, but the exercise could combine letter and number practice:

She lives at 2157 Randolph (R-A-N-D-O-L-P-H) Street in Putney (P-U-T-N-E-Y), Vermont, and her zip code is 05346.

d. mathematics problems

The teacher gives five or so oral mathematics problems while the students write and record.

495 minus 72 is

He divided his 96 books into two equal piles and distributed one pile equally on three shelves. How many books were on each shelf?

e. grocery list

The teacher reads a brief grocery list while the students write and record. This exercise requires some advance preparation. The names of the items could be on a ditto sheet and the students could fill in the quantify and price and add up the total.

five cans of soup at 35¢ each

three pounds of bananas at 29¢ a pound

one quart of milk at 60¢

This context for number work is particularly appropriate if the class is dealing with count and noncount nouns and the vocabulary we use in English to quantify noncount items, e.g. cans, bags, loaves, tubes, etc. The students can then fill in both the numbers and the quantifiers.

five cans of soup at 35¢ each

3. focused listening

This is a broad category. The teacher reads a sentence or a paragraph while the students listen for one element in or function of the text.

a. general sentence function discrimination

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. The teacher establishes symbols for an affirmative statement, a question and a negative statement, perhaps ., ?, -. She then reads ten or so sentences one time each while the students record and write down the symbol indicating what they think, on first hearing, the types of sentences are. They can replay their tapes after school and revise their work if they need to.

It is not really necessary for the sentences the teacher chooses to be drawn from class material. As long as the structures and vocabulary aren't discouragingly advanced and therefore distracting, sentences can be taken from any source because the emphasis is on listening for the function of the sentence, not for content.

The exercise can be corrected in many ways -- at the blackboard, in pairs, in small groups, etc. -- but the teacher will probably want to devote some time to having the students think about and share the criteria they were using when they made their decisions, i.e. what they were listening for. The exercise should then be repeated, using new sentences, in the following lab.

b. question word discrimination

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. The teacher reads ten or so questions once each while the students record and write down the word in the sentence that signals the kind of information asked for, e.g. when, what, how much, do, etc.:

When did he eat?
What did he eat?
Why did he eat?
How much did he eat?
Did he eat?

(These sample sentences are intended to show how important question words are when there are no other clues in the sentence to signal the kind of information asked for. Normally the remainder of the sentences as well as the question words would vary.)

After the students have had an opportunity to revise their work overnight, the teacher might want to collect it so that she can monitor what individual students are actually hearing, pinpoint difficulties, and reassign the task or similar ones to those having problems. The exercise is very quickly corrected.

As was the case in the preceding exercise, the teacher can select sentences from a variety of sources because the emphasis is on listening for the specific question word, not for content.

c. tense identification

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. The teacher establishes some simple written symbols to denote specific tenses, perhaps p, pc, pa, f (present, present continuous, past, future) if students are used to formal terminology or every day, now, yesterday, tomorrow, if tense has been presented in terms of time cue words. The teacher then reads approximately ten sentences which are written in a variety of tenses while the students record and write down a symbol or cue word for each. As in the preceding two exercises, the sentences need not be drawn from class material.

This exercise may require class follow-up the first time or two it is used in order to allow students to think about and share the criteria they were using when they made their decisions.

Later, students can turn in their work or a correctly marked sheet can be posted in class for students to check independently.

d. fill-in

linear

When typing a paragraph, Community Language Learning transcript, dialogue, song, newscast transcript, etc. on a ditto master, the teacher systematically leaves a blank for every fifth (or sixth, or seventh) word. While recording in lab with their papers in front of them, the students listen to their teacher's or someone else's voice or a tape of the song, dialogue or newscast and fill in the missing words. They can listen again if necessary after class. A correctly filled in copy can be posted in class the next day for students to check on their own, or students can put their answers on the blackboard.

Preparation for this exercise is potentially time consuming. It is reduced considerably if recycled class material is the source of the text.

function word

This exercise is similar to the previous one, but function rather than linear position is the criterion for deciding which words are left out. If the teacher places the focus on articles or prepositions, for example, then those words are omitted and blanks put in their places and the students' attention is directed to listening for them. As with cloze exercises, fill-ins are easier to prepare if recycled class material is used.

e. grammar point or part of speech

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. The teacher reads several sentences or a paragraph that she has written herself or selected from class material. The students listen for examples of a particular structure or part of speech and write them down as they record.

example: (grammar point, causative)

(teacher's voice)

(student's paper)

The spoon was dirty so I had the waitress bring me another one.

had. . . bring

example: (part of speech, two word verb)

(teacher's voice)

(student's paper)

They turned the project down because of what they termed unwarranted expense.

turn down

After class the students replay their tapes to verify and complete their lab notes. Students can then compare their results in small groups or pairs the next day in class.

In choosing a structure or part of speech to focus on, the teacher needs to remember that it must be short enough for the students to write down quickly. Some suggestions:

grammar point

negative
interrogative
comparative
superlative
verb + gerund
verb + infinitive
passive voice
causative

part of speech

two word verbs
words with certain
prefixes or suffixes
adjectives
adverbs
noncount nouns
possessive pronouns
modals

4. question answering

This kind of exercise requires advance thought but no typing. While the students record, the teacher reads five to ten questions once each, pausing only briefly between questions. After class the students replay their tapes and write answers to the questions.

Follow-up may vary according to the type of question asked. If the questions ask for personal information or opinion, e.g. What's your name? What did you do last night? How are you feeling? Do you think tests are useful in learning a language?, the answers can be collected and assessed individually. If the information asked for is factual, e.g. information about the class, about the school, about a classmate's presentation, about a movie shown in class, about a reading passage or story, students can evaluate their findings in small groups the next day.

variation 1

Students identify and write down the question word, e.g. what, how, do, etc. before writing the answer.

variation 2

Students write the entire question before answering it. The questions serve as a dictation (see below).

5. dictation

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. The teacher chooses sentences it would be useful for the students to examine closely, sentences

containing recently acquired vocabulary, idioms or structures

containing words the class is having difficulty recognizing in context, e.g. taught/talk, weren't/went

containing reduced forms, e.g. /Di'jaduwit/ (Did you do it?)

resulting in a narrative using a variety of tenses or a comparison of the use of two tenses, e.g. While I was driving to school I had a flat tire.

If the exercise is to be done entirely out of class, each sentence can be read once while the students listen and record, but do not write. If the teacher would like to challenge some of the quicker students she can read each sentence once and allow time for writing in lab, pausing between sentences until she sees that the faster students have finished. Only in the case of very long sentences will she divide them into two or at most three parts. When all of the sentences have been read, she can ask the students to record and then can read the sentences again, at normal or near normal speed and with only very brief pauses between. The students thus have only the material they need to work with after class, without long pauses.

Saying a sentence only once allows students to train themselves to listen for primary information, filling in if a further opportunity presents itself. Saying a sentence two or more times or dividing it into short segments doesn't prepare students for any listening situation they are likely to encounter in real life. Students who are at first frustrated with the single reading can always return to the lab and repeat the sentences as many times as seems necessary to them.

The teacher will probably want to collect dictations from time to time to monitor exactly what the individual students think they are hearing and how they are going about developing criteria for judging the correctness of their work. At other times sentences can be assigned to different students to put on the classroom blackboard and their classmates can direct them to make changes if needed. The teacher's guidance may also be required. Occasionally it may be useful to have students compare their transcriptions in pairs or small groups, particularly if it is possible for them to meet outside of class and listen to the lab tape together.

Once the sentences are corrected, it might be useful to ask the students to look at the exercise as a whole, to share any observations that strike them and to say why they think the teacher chose those particular sentences.

6. tapes recorded from radio broadcasts

The teacher tapes a short (one to three minute) segment of a newscast, commercial, etc. She plays it in lab while the students record.

She can

ask several questions about the segment while the students record (see question answering p. 21),

have the students do some form of focused listening, for example listening for two-word verbs, the superlative or passive voice (see focused listening item "e", grammar point or part of speech, p. 20),

have interested students make a transcript,

prepare a transcript herself and use it for a fill-in or cloze exercise (see p. 19),

use the transcript for identifying sounds (see identifying sounds in a sentence, p. 8).

She can even conceivably do all of the above with the same tape.

7. plays

This technique requires a good deal of advance preparation and access to commercial materials. The teacher finds a play she would like the class to work with. The choice of play is critical. A sufficiently interesting play with vivid characters and a creative plot which uses vocabulary that is both common and appropriate to the students' level can yield a wealth of lab (and class) work for several days. After selecting the play, the teacher either orders a commercially produced version and enough scripts for the class or she and some friends tape their own version to accompany the scripts.

In class, some brief introductory work is done, perhaps making

comments about the author, the period in which the play was written and its setting. In lab, the play or a portion of it is played. The students record, follow along in their scripts, and jot down new vocabulary on a separate piece of paper. The teacher can

ask several content or opinion questions about the play while the students record (see question answering, p. 21),

have the students decide during a second hearing after class which of the new vocabulary words they jotted down are necessary for a general understanding of the play. They then look those words up,

have the students watch for certain types of vocabulary or examples of a structure during their second hearing. This is similar to focused listening item "e", grammar point or part of speech, p. 20, but the student has the aid of a script.

have the students write brief descriptions of the various characters or of one character of their choosing,

have the students write a narrative summary of the play or a portion of it.

Class time may be needed to follow up on these tasks. Classroom discussions and perhaps the impulse for the students to write their own play may also develop.

VOCABULARY BUILDING/ACTIVATION

1. vocabulary from class

This technique provides students with an ongoing, correctly-spelled record of class vocabulary. See vocabulary from class, p. 11.

2. focused listening - part of speech

While the teacher reads, students listen for a particular type of word. See focused listening item "e", grammar point or part of speech, p. 20 .

3. word description game

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. The teacher chooses five to ten recent vocabulary words and prepares brief descriptions:

This is the way I feel when I don't eat. (hungry)

This is what I wear between my foot and my shoe. (sock)

This is what I do when I go from the bottom of a mountain to the top. (climb)

The teacher would probably not want to be intentionally ambiguous, but students could be told that two or more words could fit the description equally well.

The students record while the teacher reads the descriptions. They supply the described words immediately or after replaying the tape after class. Next day, students can compare their solutions in pairs or small groups, can put the words on the blackboard, or can check their solutions against the teacher's version posted in class.

4. dictation

An exercise which reviews and activates selected vocabulary, possibly in a new or contrastive context. See p. 21.

5. scrambled words

A review technique which reinforces spelling and the English alphabet. See p. 14.

6. incomplete sentences - supply a word

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. The teacher thinks of sentences from which the last word can be dropped. The reader (or listener in this case) can guess from the rest of the sentence what the last word might be.

The policeman said he was sorry but he had to give me a

There was no bridge over the stream so I had to

It is quite possible that more than one word will make sense.

While the teacher reads the sentences, once, in lab, the students record and either supply a word immediately or wait until they have

a chance to listen to the tape again after class. Follow-up can be handled as suggested in the word description game, p. 24.

7. songs

Words associated with music are often remembered seemingly effortlessly and, when conscious effort is required, the task is a pleasant one. Some students will work hours transcribing or memorizing a song they particularly like and a word or phrase that has tickled their fancy will crop up in their conversation.

The teacher chooses a song and tapes it. The song may be chosen because a student has suggested it, because it contains a certain idiom or structure, because it is about rain and the weather is rainy, because it is representative of a type or period of American music, because it espouses a certain value, etc. If the teacher doesn't already have the lyrics, she transcribes the song and types the words on a ditto master. In lab she can

simply play the tape while the students record and follow along with their papers,

make the ditto master into a cloze or fill-in exercise, (see p. 19),

select one or two words from the song that are very likely new and/or idiomatic and ask students to suggest their probable meanings from the context. The suggestions would be followed up in class the next day.

ask students to summarize the song in a sentence or two, using their own words, and compare their summaries in small groups the next day.

Taping and transcribing songs requires time. A teacher on her own may not be able to do them often. A department of teachers, however, could pool tapes and transcriptions individuals had made. Be sure to check on your institution's coverage regarding copyright laws. You may be limited to traditional material which is non-copyrighted.

8. plays

See p. 23.

WRITING

1. dictation

See p. 21. At the same time as it challenges listening skills, a dictation also works on writing. Being able to understand an English sentence does not necessarily mean one can write it. Follow-up is important, guiding students to both see their writing mistakes and to consider it necessary and helpful to correct them. A combination of blackboard correction and collecting individual lab work might be used.

2. summary of oral material

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. The teacher chooses a paragraph or perhaps even a one or two page story or article and reads it in lab while the students record. The students listen again overnight and write summaries of a specified length -- a sentence, twenty-five words, a paragraph.

If the chosen text contains no new vocabulary, the task is one of summarizing oral material in a written form -- a very useful skill. The teacher may even want to take some class time prior to the lab to introduce probable new vocabulary in order to keep the focus squarely on summarizing. But some classes may welcome the opportunity to infer the meaning of vocabulary from the context and to transcribe and look up words whose meaning cannot be inferred and is essential to an understanding of the text.

If the summaries are long and/or the class is large, considerable correction time could be required of the teacher. If this possibility is appalling, try one sentence summaries of paragraphs. Two or three

summaries of the same paragraph could then be put up on the blackboard the next day and the class could compare and refine them. Their criteria established, they could then break into pairs and go over the remaining summaries in the assignment and the teacher could circulate, concentrating on those students having the most difficulty.

3. question writing

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. The teacher chooses a paragraph or brief story or article and reads it in lab while the students record. There should be little or no new vocabulary. The students listen again overnight and write questions that can be answered with an understanding of the text. With some classes it might be a good idea to prescribe the question words to be used, e.g. "Write five questions, using a different one of the following question words in each sentence: 1) who, 2) what, 3) which, 4) how often, 5) when."

Follow-up is two fold, focusing on form and content, question formation and question answering. Form could be handled

individually, with the teacher collecting papers and indicating errors,

in pairs or small groups, with the students correcting each other while the teacher circulates

as a class, with students writing their questions in columns on the blackboard or on large sheets of paper headed Who, What, etc. and making changes until they (and the teacher) are satisfied.

By this time an extensive treatment of content, question answering, might grow tedious. A brief period working in pairs might simulate the most natural situation, with one student asking his/her questions and the other answering and vice versa. Or, pairs of students could exchange

papers and answer each others' questions in writing overnight. They would then be able to listen to the tape again if they needed. The student who wrote the questions could then correct the answers.

4. incomplete sentences - supply a clause

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. It combines dictation and composing skills. The teacher thinks of five or so incomplete sentences. In order to complete them, students will have to draw on their knowledge of English structure. They have the opportunity to be as creative as they like.

I'll tell him when he

If we'd known, we

It's urgent that he

He was taking a shower when I

The teacher reads the incomplete sentences in lab, once, while the students record and write (see dictation, p. 21). Overnight they can verify their transcriptions and complete the sentences. Follow-up can be handled as in question writing, p. 28.

5. incomplete paragraph or story

This exercise requires advance thought but no typing. It is a variation of dictation, p. 21. The teacher sequences and connects the sentences chosen for a dictation so that they form an open-ended paragraph or brief story. The students record and write while the teacher reads the sentences. After class the students replay their tapes and perfect their dictations, joining the sentences into a paragraph. They then compose an ending to the text, keeping tense and content consistent with the dictated material.

Follow-up could be handled in a variety of ways. One that keeps

classroom time to a minimum is for the teacher to post a correct version of the dictation for students to check on their own. She then collects the papers and focuses her comments on their original material. After correcting their paragraphs, students might then read them to their classmates, affording an opportunity to hear different approaches to the same task.

6. cultural material

See below.

CULTURE/VALUES

A language reflects and is influenced by the culture of the people who speak it. It is possible to introduce an awareness of culture into the language classroom in many ways. Using the laboratory has at least one advantage: it allows the students their own individual tapes of the material and thus the opportunity to reflect on it in private. Their reactions can be perhaps more truthful and considered and everyone, the confident, fluent student and the hesitant, less comfortable one, can express his/her reactions in writing without having to command floor time in a classroom discussion. For some students, the time to get in touch with their feelings and opinions and to wrestle unpressured with the task of expressing them in the target language gives them the confidence they need to participate freely in a discussion.

Not all cultural material lends itself to presentation in lab. Non-visual, primary material (i.e. not readings about the culture but examples drawn from it) may be the most useful. Some, but not all, resources require a good deal of fluency in the language.

It is unlikely that cultural material will be presented in lab without classroom follow-up. The aim of such material is to provoke thought and

awareness and some follow-up is needed to urge students to shape their impressions into a communicable form. Most initial follow-up will probably be in writing, writing the students do after they have replayed the material.

Students can be asked

whether they liked or disliked the material and why,

where they think the material came from and when it was produced
(if no background information was given),

how the material made them feel,

how the material represents the culture of which it is a part,

what values are expressed in the material,

how the values differ from or echo those in their own culture

whether they personally agree or disagree with the values expressed
and why

etc.

Once students have identified their reactions and have grappled with trying to express them they are much better prepared to discuss the material in class. The teacher might want to collect the papers, indicate grammatical errors, return the work and be available for questions before any discussion takes place. Yet, as little time as possible should elapse between writing about the material and discussing it. Ideally the written work could be collected in the morning, corrected midday, and the discussion could take place in the afternoon. Division of the class into small groups might encourage more even participation.

1. music

a. popular songs

A careful search can yield songs that are both recent enough to be considered contemporary by the students and literate enough to be deemed structurally useful and thought provoking by the teacher. Be sure to check on your institution's coverage regarding copyright laws.

examples:

| | |
|--|---|
| "Big Yellow Taxi" Joni Mitchell | "Something So Right" "Slip Slidin' Away" "Paranoia Blues" Paul Simon |
| "Sounds of Silence" "America" "My Little Town" Simon and Garfunkel | "Whenever I See Your Smiling Face" "How Sweet It Is" James Taylor |
| "Time in a Bottle" "Working at the Car Wash Blues" "Operator" Jim Croce | "Sir Duke" "I Wish" "Living for the City" Stevie Wonder |
| "Imagine" "Ghetto" "Hello in There" Joan Baez | "Lucille" Kenny Rogers |
| "So Far Away" "You've Got a Friend" Carole King | "At Seventeen" Janis Ian |
| "Sunshine On My Shoulders" John Denver | "Father and Son" Cat Stevens |

b. traditional or historically interesting songs

Songs from the past can breathe life into history. Many folk songs Americans associate with primary school and dismiss as trite are fascinating to learners of English. Their enthusiasm may help the teacher rediscover the meanings behind the all-too-familiar melodies and words.

examples:

| | |
|---|---|
| "America the Beautiful" "Home on the Range" "Oh Susannah" "Yellow Rose of Texas" "Dixie" "Go Tell It On the Mountain" "We Shall Overcome" "Follow the Drinking Gourd" "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" "Blowin' in the Wind" Bob Dylan | "This Land is Your Land: "500 Miles" "If I Had a Hammer" "Bicycle Built for Two" "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" Pete Seeger "Eve of Destruction" Barry McGuire |
|---|---|

c. instrumental music

Music typical of different geographical regions of contemporary America, of different ethnic groups and of different periods in

history can be played in lab along with simple background information about the composer, the instruments used and the social milieu.

2. poetry, plays, short stories

The lab gives students the opportunity to hear and to record representative works read by the authors themselves or by gifted actors. It gives their works a dimension classroom presentation cannot give -- a personal one-to-one reading. The students are more likely to be touched and to respond.

3. lectures, articles

More factual in tone, lectures and readings of articles can present cultural material in a less affective manner than literature or music, inviting analysis and debate.

4. interviews

Interviews with statesmen, authors, spokespersons for important issues, representative Americans, etc. can make ideas live. When possible, it is preferable to have an interviewee present in class, available for questions and capable of responding to the students. For all the times when this is not possible, playing an interview in lab is a useful substitute.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SAMPLE LAB LESSON OUTLINES

It may seem that there is a chasm between guidelines for producing a live lab and a list of suggested exercises and the next step, producing one's own live language labs. The sample lab outlines which follow are designed to bridge the void.

Three hypothetical classes are represented, a beginning level one, a low intermediate and a high intermediate or advanced. Five consecutive lab periods are outlined -- a week's worth if students have lab every day, longer if they meet less frequently. They are not introductory lessons; it is imagined that the students are already familiar with the lab set up. The lab periods are of differing lengths, a half hour for the beginning students, longer for the intermediate and intermediate/advanced.

It may be something of a contradiction in terms to say that one can outline a live lab, especially five of them!, in advance. It is, after all, the live lab's special advantage that it allows the teacher to respond to a particular class with "flexibility", "individualization", and "immediacy". Thus the outlines are samples and are not intended for strict use. They are designed to show how "exercises" become a laboratory "class" and exemplify variety within a lab period, continuity between lab periods and a link with class material. Detail (e.g. specific minimal pairs, a specific grammar point, a specific type of song) is given only when it clarifies continuity. All of the exercises referred to can be found in the Index to Suggested Laboratory Exercises on page 6. Time is also reserved for "appropriate commercial material", i.e. exercises and tapes produced commercially. Some sources are listed in the Bibliography.

same as day 1, simple fill-in

VOCABULARY OF DAY

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal pair /i/ /e/

5 SCRAMBLED WORDS

5 NUMBERS - general

10 SENTENCE FUNCTION DISCRIMINATION SENTENCES

10 DICTATION SENTENCES

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Write question words only from questions.
3. Circle the sounds /i/ and /e/ in red in the dictation, scrambled words and vocabulary.

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal pair /i/ /y/ (new words)

5 SCRAMBLED WORDS

5 NUMBERS - general

10 SENTENCE FUNCTION DISCRIMINATION SENTENCES

FILL-IN

based on class grammar point

5 DICTATION SENTENCES

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Circle the sounds /i/ and /iy/ in red in the dictation, scrambled words and vocabulary.

VOCABULARY OF DAY

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal pair /i/ /iy/

5 SCRAMBLED WORDS

5 NUMBERS - general

10 SENTENCE FUNCTION DISCRIMINATION SENTENCES

10 DICTATION SENTENCES

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Circle the sounds /i/ and /iy/ in red in the dictation, scrambled words and vocabulary.

5 VOCABULARY OF DAY

VOCABULARY OF WEEK

mark unpronounced letters

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal triplets /i/ /e/ /iy/

WORDS IN VOWEL CATEGORIES

20 words, /i/ /e/ /iy/

WORD DESCRIPTION GAME

based on week's vocabulary

5 DICTATION SENTENCES

SONG - general listening

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Put words in vowel categories.

4 VOCABULARY OF DAY

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal pair /i/ /e/ (new words)

5 SENTENCES FROM CLASS ON DITTO

- a. listen for /i/ and mark
- b. listen for /e/ and mark

5 SCRAMBLED WORDS

5 NUMBERS - general

5 GENERAL INFORMATION QUESTIONS

i.e. How old are you?

5 DICTATION SENTENCES

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Write question word and answer gen. info. questions.
3. Circle words /i/ and /e/ in the dictation, scrambled words and vocabulary.

BEGINNING LEVEL

Half Hour Lab

Five Consecutive Labs

VOCABULARY OF DAY

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal pair /e/ /ey/

10 TENSE DISCRIMINATION SENTENCES

5 NUMBERS (several digits)

SHORT PASSAGE IN PAST TENSE

listen for and write verbs
(focused listening)

APPROPRIATE COMMERCIAL MATERIAL

SENTENCE COMPLETION - supply word

5 DICTATION SENTENCES

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work
2. Circle the sounds /e/ and /ey/ in red in the dictation and vocabulary.

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal pair /e/ /e/

5 SCRAMBLED WORDS

10 TENSE DISCRIMINATION SENTENCES

5 NUMBERS (several digits)

PAST TENSE PASSAGE SHEET

(same as previous lab but this time students have sheet)

listen for and mark /d/ /t/ /id/

APPROPRIATE COMMERCIAL MATERIAL

10 DICTATION SENTENCES (in past tense)

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Students assigned sentences in past tense passage for intonation work.
3. Circle sounds /e/ and /ae/ in vocabulary, dictation and passage.

4 VOCABULARY OF DAY

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal triplets /e/ /ey/ /ae/

VOCABULARY OF WEEK

mark unpronounced letters

5 SCRAMBLED WORDS

1 MATH PROBLEM

SHORT PASSAGE - read by teacher

APPROPRIATE COMMERCIAL MATERIAL

10 DICTATION SENTENCES

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work
2. Write 5 questions about passage using 1)who 2) what 3) when 4)why 5) where.

5

SONG - in past tense; verb fill-in

VOCABULARY OF DAY

5 TELEPHONE NUMBERS

10 TENSE DISCRIMINATION SENTENCES

1 MATH PROBLEM

WORDS IN VOWEL CATEGORIES

20 words, /e/ /ae/ /ey/

APPROPRIATE COMMERCIAL MATERIAL

10 DICTATION SENTENCES

SONG - repeat

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Put vowels in categories.
3. Circle /e/ /ae/ /ey/ in dictation.

VOCABULARY OF DAY

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal pairs /ey/ /ae/

5 TELEPHONE NUMBERS

1 MATH PROBLEM

SENTENCE COMPLETION - supply word

APPROPRIATE COMMERCIAL MATERIAL

VERBS IN PAST TENSE PRONUNCIATION

CATEGORIES

20 regular past tense verbs

/d/ /t/ /id/

DICTATION

5 general questions in past tense
i.e. What did you wear yesterday?

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Answer questions.
3. Put verbs in categories.

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

45 Minute Lab

Five Consecutive Labs

VOCABULARY OF DAY

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal pair /ur/ /or/

5 ADDRESSES - numbers and place names

10 TENSE IDENTIFICATION SENTENCES

LISTENING PASSAGE

listen for and write down examples of the passive voice

10 DICTATION SENTENCES

(some in passive voice)

SONG - repeat

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Summarize general idea of song in one sentence. Did you like it or not? Why?
3. Circle examples of /ur/ and /or/ in red in vocabulary and dictation.

4 VOCABULARY OF DAY

SOUND DISCRIMINATION

minimal pair /ur/ /er/

10 INCOMPLETE SENTENCES - supply clause

NEWSCAST FILL-IN

same material as 2

5 DICTATION SENTENCES - passive voice

PLAY - Act II

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Complete sentences.
3. Circle examples of /ur/ and /er/ in vocabulary and newscast.
4. Write a one paragraph summary of Act II.

VOCABULARY OF DAY

5 ADDRESSES

10 TENSE IDENTIFICATION SENTENCES

TAPED NEWSCAST

listen for and write examples of passive voice

5 QUESTIONS ABOUT NEWSCAST

APPROPRIATE COMMERCIAL MATERIAL

DICTATION

in passive voice; open-ended; students complete

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Answer questions about newscast
3. Complete dictation story.

5 SONG + background

musical comedy

VOCABULARY OF DAY

1 MATH PROBLEM

WORDS IN VOWEL CATEGORIES

30 words, /ur/ /er/ /or/ /ar/

APPROPRIATE COMMERCIAL MATERIAL

10 DICTATION SENTENCES

PLAY - Act III

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Put words in vowel categories.
3. Which of 3 songs of week did you prefer? Why?
4. Choose one character from play; write a one paragraph description.

VOCABULARY OF DAY

5 INCOMPLETE SENTENCES

supply clause

1 MATH PROBLEM

WORDS IN VOWEL CATEGORIES

20 words, /ur/ /ar/ /or/

APPROPRIATE COMMERCIAL MATERIAL

PLAY - Act I

5 QUESTIONS ABOUT PLAY

Homework:

1. Verify all lab work.
2. Complete sentences.
3. Put words in categories
4. Summarize general idea of song in one sentence. Did you like it or not? Why?
5. Answer questions.

INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED LEVEL

50 Minute Lab

Five Consecutive Labs

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