

An Approach to Dictation

by Jannie van Hees

Dictation, if used regularly, is of great use to all students, but particularly to those from non-English speaking backgrounds. It is used successfully in some schools as the basis for handwriting practice - it is done neatly and carefully in the back of a handwriting exercise book. Jannie recommends that it is a daily process in all classrooms, from New Entrants to Year 6.

What does it provide for language development?

- input for vocabulary, punctuation and structure
- much repetition, as the student listens, processes and edits
- practice and development in all the language modes, especially listening, reading and writing
- an opportunity to develop a real sense of achievement and progress in becoming writers

It is:

- interactive and a self-learning technique
- a most supportive yet challenging task to the student
- a means to work across various levels, abilities and stages of English development in any one group
- especially beneficial if done regularly and within relevant and current contexts and topics

Who marks the dictation?

- It is preferable for students to mark their own work, giving them a copy of the text so they can look for what is right, fill in gaps, and correct errors. It is the most effective way to ensure they process and learn.
- At times you could use peer editing, either before or after self editing. However the peer should underline errors, rather than make the corrections.
- Teachers should check the standard of work as the children are working, and collect in the books regularly once a week.

Recommended procedures

- Alert students that they need to listen carefully.
- Read sentences in full before children start writing.
- Read precisely and slowly in chunks, repeating each chunk.
- Then read the whole sentence through again so students can check and correct.
- Provide a model of the dictated text for students to check their work against.

After work is marked

- Sometimes it should be rewritten, so that students learn to work up a "perfect" copy from their first version.
- Sometimes it can be read out to a partner.
- Sometimes spelling words can be taken from dictation and learned.