

Part 1: An Introduction to Dictation Activities

- 1) Purposes of Doing Dictation
- 2) Guiding Principles for Conducting Dictation
- 3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Spelling and Note-taking Skills



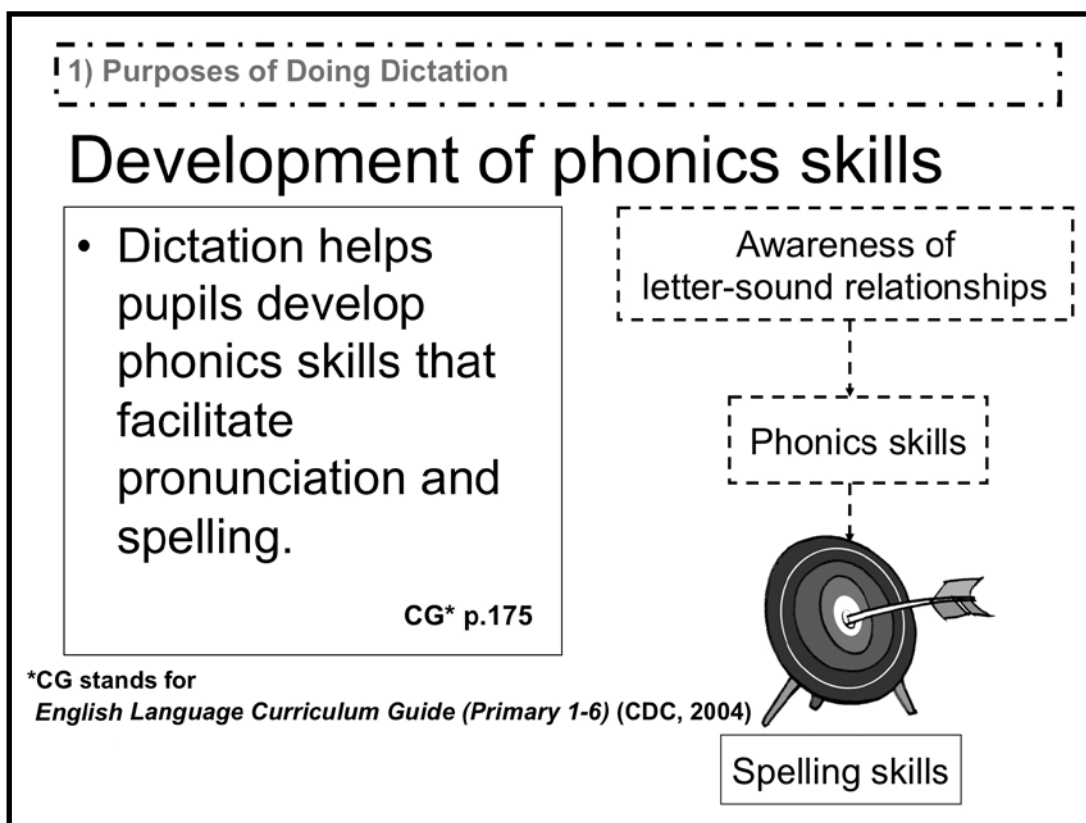
Part 1 is an introduction to dictation activities and it covers three areas: the purposes of doing dictation, the guiding principles for conducting dictation and the strategies to improve pupils' spelling and note-taking skills.

1) Purposes of Doing Dictation

- Development of phonics skills
- Development of listening and note-taking skills
- Development of writing skills
- Promoting autonomy in language learning
- Promoting assessment for learning

According to the *English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-6)* (CDC, 2004) (pp.174-178), dictation is an activity that helps learners develop phonological awareness and phonics skills, listening skills and writing skills.

Dictation can also be conducted to motivate learners and promote autonomy in language learning. After each dictation, teachers can analyse pupils' performance and make use of the assessment data to provide positive and constructive feedback to pupils. In other words, dictation can be used to promote assessment for learning.



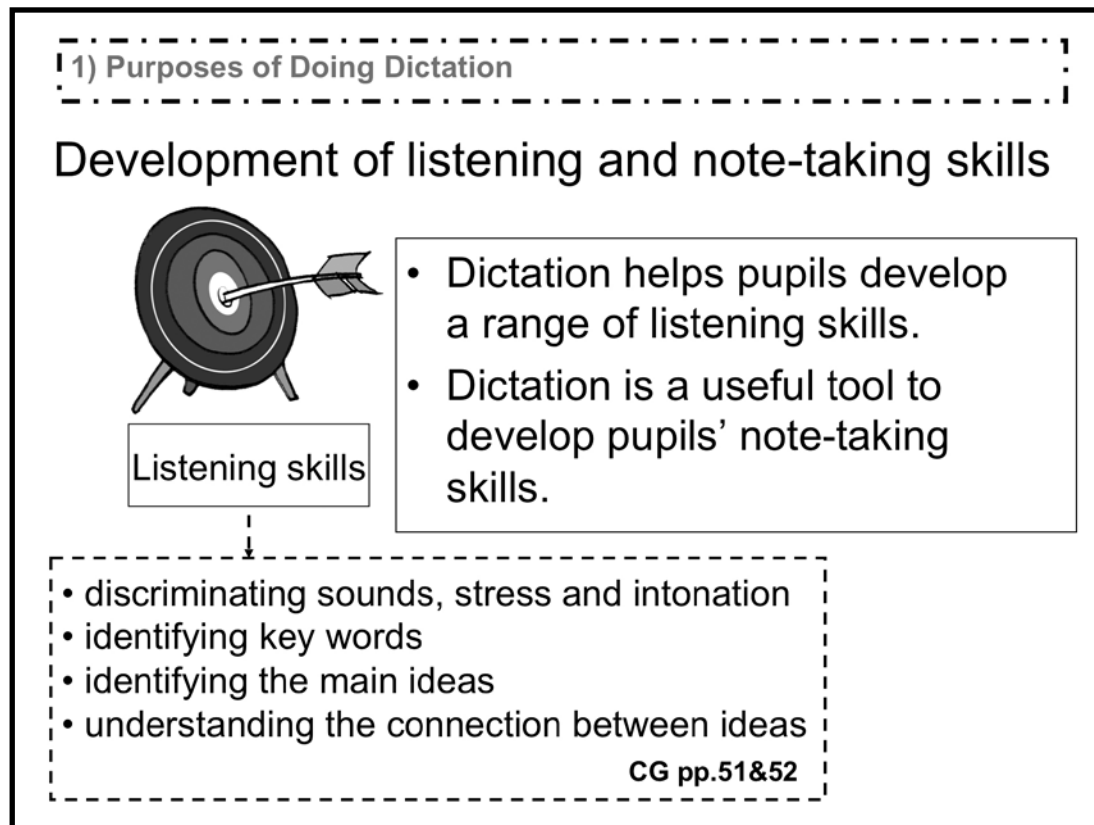
Dictation provides pupils with a good opportunity to apply the phonics skills they have learnt to spell new words. It also facilitates the development of pronunciation and spelling skills.

For pupils at an early stage of learning, more emphasis could be placed on their understanding of letter-sound relationships. They could be asked to fill in some letters representing the target sounds they hear. For example, pupils could be asked to listen to initial consonant blends and ending consonant blends that are not common in Cantonese (e.g. 'br' as in 'break', 'st' as in 'frst').

At a later stage, pupils could even be asked to provide rhyming words in short poems or other literary texts. For example, they can be asked to fill in the rhyming words when they listen to the teacher's reading of a poem called *Shell Secrets***.

**Reference

Education Department. (2000). *Let's Experience and Appreciate Poetry (LEAP)*.



Dictation is a useful activity to develop pupils' listening skills. In order to spell the words correctly, pupils need to discriminate between different consonant sounds (e.g. walk / talk), consonant blends (e.g. mask / mast) and vowel sounds (e.g. sit / sat).

For words with similar pronunciations, pupils have to make use of contextual clues to decide which words to write to suit the context, e.g. My brother does not like to eat meat (not meet).

Dictation is also a useful tool to develop pupils' note-taking skills. Teachers may provide pupils with different graphic organisers to help them take notes while listening. In the listening process, they could also be asked to pay attention to the connection between ideas supported by appropriate cohesive devices, e.g. I like painting, so I joined the Art Club.

1) Purposes of Doing Dictation

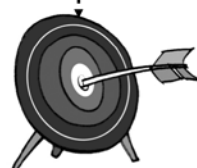
Development of writing skills

- By using dicto-comp / dictogloss, pupils can make use of the notes taken during listening to reconstruct texts and develop their writing skills.

CG p.177

Note-taking of key words

Applying language knowledge
in writing



Writing skills

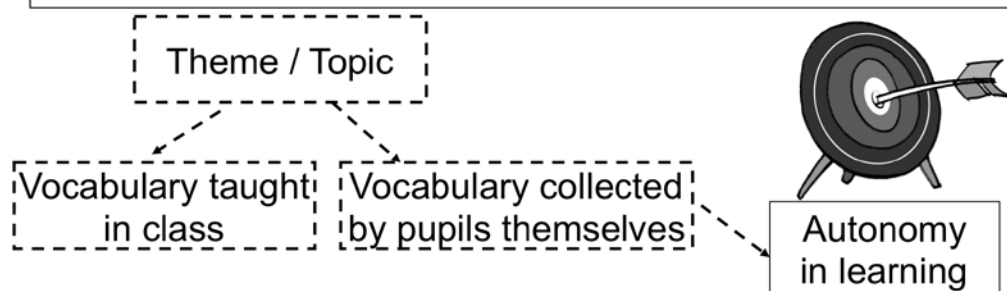
Apart from listening and note-taking skills, pupils' writing skills could also be developed through dicto-comp / dictogloss. In the process of doing dicto-comp / dictogloss, pupils are asked to note down key words while listening to the dictation passage, and then reconstruct the text using their language knowledge. This kind of dictation is particularly useful in helping pupils revisit the target vocabulary and apply their grammar knowledge in writing.

1) Purposes of Doing Dictation

Promoting autonomy in language learning

- Dictation can be used to promote self-learning.
- Pupils should be encouraged to collect more vocabulary related to the theme / topic they are learning.

CG pp.176&177



Apart from testing pupils' ability to spell the words learnt in the textbooks or readers under a certain theme or topic, dictation could also be used to promote autonomy in language learning. Pupils could be asked to collect more vocabulary related to the themes from other learning materials, such as picture dictionaries, readers and word walls. During dictation, opportunities could be provided for them to write as many words as possible. Bonus points could be given to enhance pupils' motivation.

1) Purposes of Doing Dictation

Promoting assessment for learning

- Dictation is a useful tool that helps teachers understand pupils' learning progress.
- Teachers should provide constructive **feedback** to pupils by analysing their problems and giving suggestions for improvement.

Identifying and analysing pupils' mistakes

Giving suggestions for improvement



Assessment for learning

Many pupils and parents merely consider the marks in dictation as an indicator of learners' performance in English language learning. In fact, dictation is more than a testing device. It is a useful tool for teachers to understand pupils' learning progress and facilitate assessment for learning.

After each dictation, appropriate feedback should be given to pupils to help them understand what their problems are and how they can improve next time. For example, teachers can draw pupils' attention to the use of phonics skills as well as knowledge about grammar and the context to spell and write the correct words. It is also useful to teach pupils what to pay attention to when they check their own work in dictation.

1) Purposes of Doing Dictation – Promoting assessment for learning

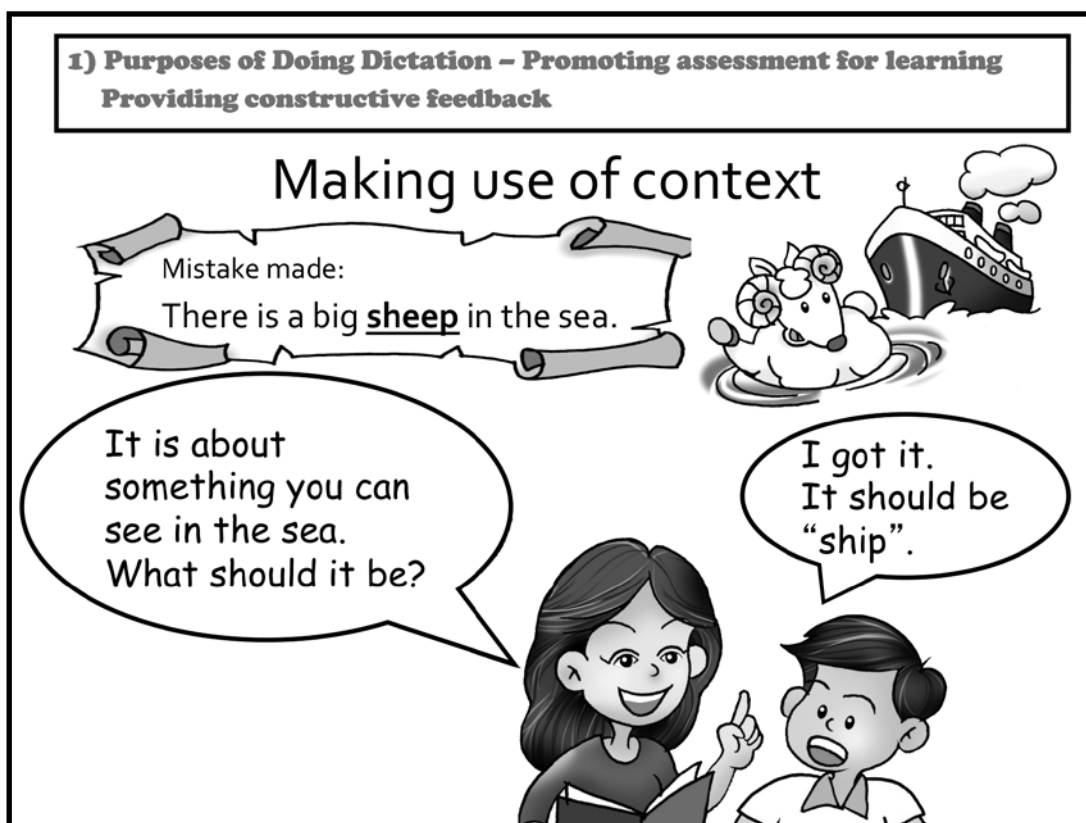
Providing constructive feedback

- Teachers should analyse pupils' mistakes and give suggestions for improvement by guiding pupils to make use of
 - **context**,
 - **grammar knowledge**, and
 - **phonics skills**in writing the words with accurate spelling.
- Teachers should design follow-up learning activities whenever appropriate to consolidate learning.

In providing constructive feedback to pupils, teachers should make use of context, grammar knowledge and phonics skills to guide them to analyse their mistakes.

Follow-up work should be conducted whenever appropriate to consolidate the learning of the target vocabulary and language items. Teachers may revisit the target language items with pupils by showing them the common mistakes and highlighting the correct usage. For instance, after conducting the picture dictation about fruit, it was found that many pupils were not aware of the use of plural nouns. They wrote, 'There are a few eggplant next to the carrot.' Also, some pupils could not spell plural nouns correctly and they wrote, 'There are a few mangos.' Teachers need to remind pupils to add an ending 's' to most nouns to change them into the plural form and explain the spelling rules for other plural nouns, e.g. mangoes, strawberries.

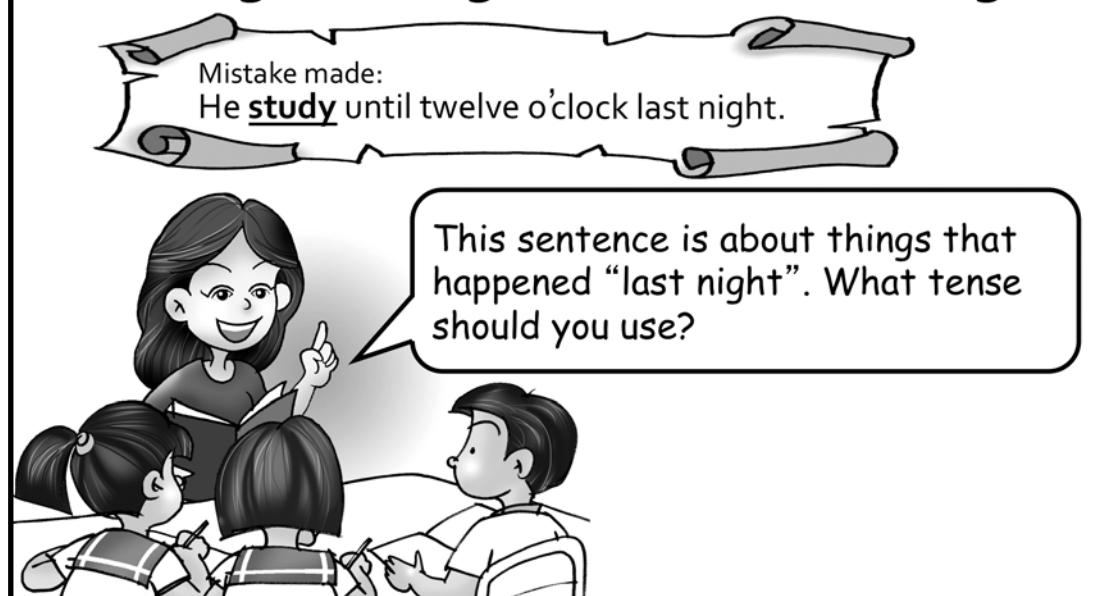
As for the confusing vocabulary items, teachers may highlight their pronunciations, meanings and parts of speech to help pupils use the correct vocabulary in context. For example, some pupils mixed up 'whole' and 'hole' in dictation. They wrote, 'He (Andrew) was tired for the hole day.' Teachers should ask pupils to think about the meanings of the two words and guide them to use contextual clues and their knowledge about the parts of speech to write the correct word, e.g. 'whole' is an adjective while 'hole' is a noun.



Pupils often mix up the words that sound the same or similar. Teachers can help pupils figure out the correct answer by making use of the context. In this sentence, the pupil wrote, 'There is a big sheep in the sea.' Teachers may ask, 'A sheep has thick wool and eats grass. Do you find it in the sea? If no, think about something you can see in the sea. What should it be?' With the help of the clue, pupils are guided to work out the answer.

1) Purposes of Doing Dictation – Promoting assessment for learning
Providing constructive feedback

Making use of grammar knowledge




Pupils may not get the correct verb form when they do not pay close attention to their teacher's reading out the text during dictation. They should be reminded to make use of their grammar knowledge to proofread their work. In this example, the pupil wrote, 'He study until twelve o'clock last night.' Teachers may ask, 'This sentence is about things that happened "last night". What tense should you use?' When the time marker is highlighted to pupils, they are reminded to use the correct tense.

1) Purposes of Doing Dictation – Promoting assessment for learning
Providing constructive feedback

Applying phonics skills in spelling

Mistake made:
He gets up at seven o'cock.



How do you spell the word “class”?...
Now, listen to this word again,
“o’clock”. Do “class” and “clock” begin
with the same sound? Now try to
apply your phonics skills and spell
“o’clock”.

Many pupils spell the words incorrectly because they are not aware of the letter-sound relationships. Teachers should guide pupils to apply phonics skills to improve their spelling and pronunciation. In this example, the pupil wrote, ‘He gets up at seven o’cock.’ Teachers may remind pupils of some other familiar words that begin with the ‘cl’ sound and then ask them to apply their phonics skills to spell the word ‘o’clock’. For example, teachers may say, ‘How do you spell the word “class”? Do “class” and “clock” begin with the same sound? Now try to apply your phonics skills and spell “o’clock”.’