

Exemplar 2: Motivating Students to Read

Overview

This exemplar focuses on a reading programme that was implemented in S.1 at [Christian Alliance Cheng Wing Gee College](#). By including a writing component (a penbook scheme), the programme has motivated students to borrow more books and to read for pleasure using the school library facilities. The school management showed its support by timetabling reading lessons in the library in the junior-form English curriculum. The exemplar also highlights the importance of the library and its clerical staff in collaborating with the English panel in providing an environment that is conducive to reading.

From our observations, there are several distinctive features that are worth highlighting:



- The reading programme itself, which invites students to read from a wide choice of literary texts and then write penbook letters to their peers and/or teachers describing what they like and don't like about the book. The letters are distributed each week and the students who receive letters from their classmates are invited to reply describing their own book. The letters are then collated by each student in a file that is collected by the teacher at the end of term.



- The importance of utilising the many resources in the library for the benefit of students' learning in English

Several benefits of the scheme have been identified and will be examined in this exemplar. They include:

- More students than before are using the library.
- More books than before are being borrowed voluntarily by students.
- The teachers claim that students' interest in reading has increased.
- The students' writing skills have improved.
- Students write more for their penbook letters than they do for regular English compositions.
- Students themselves report that they have gained considerably from the reading programme.

The exemplar features interviews with Mrs May Tam (the English teacher of 1B), Mr Lai Pik Tim (the school's librarian) as well as the students of class 1B. Examples of the students' work will also be shown.



This exemplar follows Mrs May Tam, one of the Effective Teachers (ETs) identified at Christian Alliance Cheng Wing Gee College, in the conception and implementation of the English Reading Programme conducted in junior forms. The school librarian and his clerical support team in the library were instrumental in the success of this initiative, and the school management showed its support by timetabling reading lessons in the junior-form English curriculum.

Original idea of penbook letters came from a seminar

Mrs Tam reported that the idea for the reading programme came from a seminar conducted by an overseas speaker at an EMB workshop in 2001. The guest speaker at the seminar shared her experience of a reading scheme in New Zealand, where students were invited to share what they had read with their teachers and classmates. After the seminar, Mrs Tam worked alongside the junior-form coordinator to adapt the idea to meet the needs of students at Christian Alliance College.



The video subtitles in this exemplar have been slightly edited for easier comprehension.





Programme adapted to suit the local context

The focus of the initial programme was on writing. Students were required to write formal essays on books they had read. These essays were then checked and marked by teachers. Mrs Tam felt that the focus of the original writing tasks needed to be adapted to the local context:

"The writing requirement was different [to the one shared by the speaker at the seminar]. We don't focus on the students' grammar, the accuracy ... we just focus on the students' ideas of sharing of what they have read and what they have got from the readers."

Orientation

At the beginning of every school year, students are given an orientation. This introduction is important as it allows students to understand the purpose of reading, to know where to find books and to get them thinking about good reading habits.

- Five-page  [questionnaire](#) in September to help students analyse good reading habits
-  [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQ) sheet on ERS
- Rules and  [sample letters](#)
-  [Guidelines](#) on what to write in penbook letters



Programme

- Once a cycle, students have to write a letter to their teachers, parents or schoolmates about the books they are reading.
- Recipients of a letter must respond within one cycle.
- Students must write at least two letters to their teacher per term.
- Teachers mark the penbook letters based on content, not accuracy.

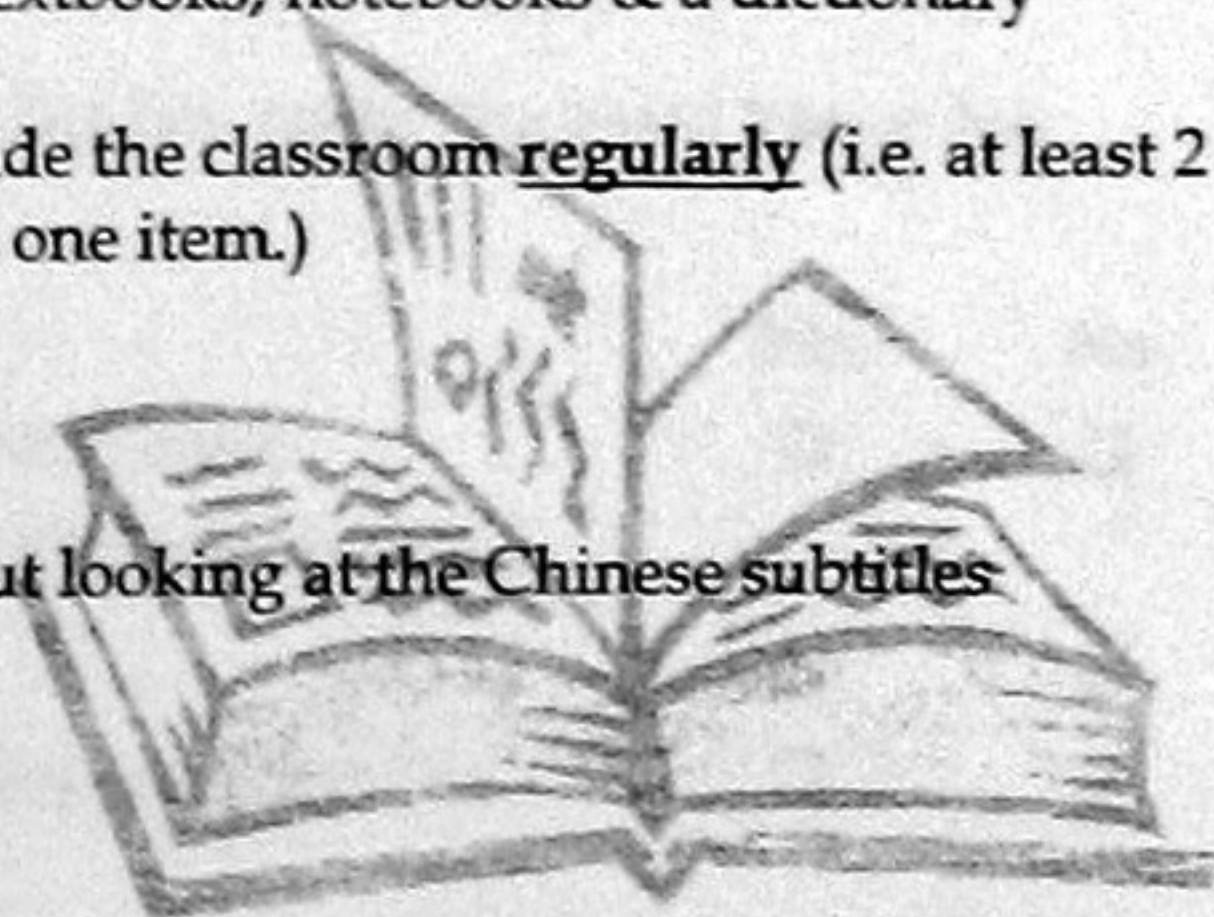
ERS Orientation Programme Sept 2003
A Questionnaire on Study and Reading Habits

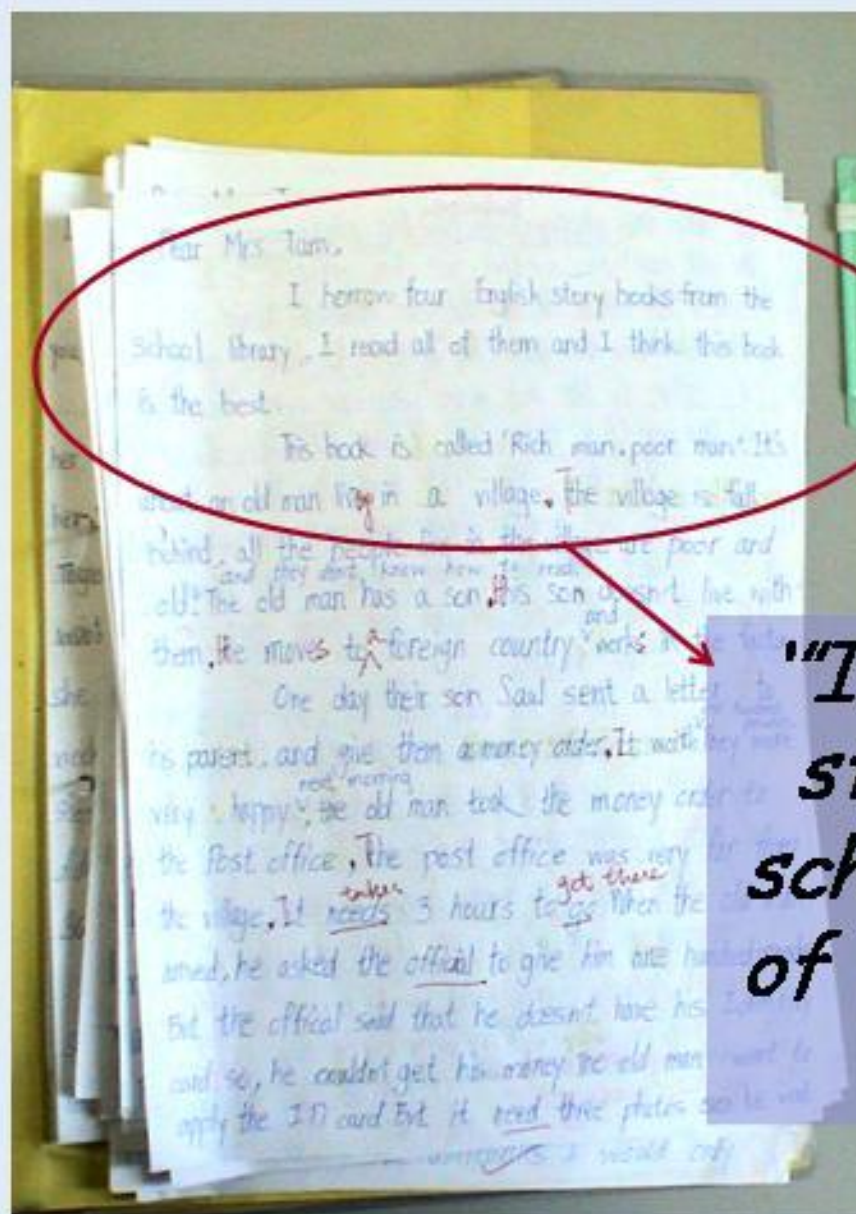
Name: _____ Class: _____ () Date: _____ P. 1

A. *What kind of English learner are you?*

Check your study habits. Circle the answer that tells what you really are at present.
Be honest to yourself!

1. How often do you speak English in class?
a. never b. sometimes c. almost every lesson
2. When the teacher says something that you don't understand what do you do? (You can circle more than one answer.)
a. ask the teacher to repeat in Chinese
b. say nothing, just let it be
c. ask another student what it means
d. ask the teacher to repeat in English and try to guess the meaning
3. When you come to the class, what do you bring along?
a. nothing b. textbooks
c. textbooks & notebooks d. textbooks, notebooks & a dictionary
4. Which of these things do you try to do outside the classroom **regularly** (i.e. at least 2 times a week)? (You can circle more than one item.)
a. listening to songs in English
b. reading stories or other books in English
c. writing to a pen-friend in English
d. watching English TV programmes without looking at the Chinese subtitles
e. reading English newspapers
f. doing extra English grammar exercises
g. reading English magazines
5. How much time do you spend working on English every day outside the classroom?
a. less than half an hour b. 1 hour
c. 1.5 hours d. 2 hours





"I borrow four English story books from the school library. I read all of them and I think this book is the best"

Zoe,
I just finish a book called
"Carole's Camel"...I don't
think I will keep camel to
be my pet.. I don't have
place...

Dear Amy,
Yes. I think I
don't keep camel
to be my pet. I
will keep lovely
cat or rabbit to be
my pet. Ha ha! 😊
Hope you send
more letter to
me!
Zoe.

Amy Amy
Dear Amy,
Yes. I think I don't keep camel
to be my pet. I will keep lovely
cat or rabbit to be my pet. Ha
Hope you send more letter to
Zoe.

Dear Amy,

Thank you for your sharing of the book. I like your sharing very much! I think you're that kind of person who reflects. That's good.

I don't like to play football. Actually I never play football but I like watching the world cup. Honestly, I'm quite crazy for it.

P.T.O. =>

Danny Long-legs loves football...

Can me ask you few questions? Do you like playing football or watching football?

My favorite character is Danny because he practises hard to make perfect. I love him too because he can teach me and other people when you practice hard you will like it.

Can I ask you a few questions? Do you like playing football or watching football? Can you give me an example about after practice had a good rest? Thank you?

Love,
Amy

Dear Amy,
Thank you for your sharing of the book. I like your sharing very much. I think you're that kind of person who reflects. That's good. I don't like playing football. Actually I never play football but I like watching the world cup. I'm quite crazy for it.

P.T.O. =>

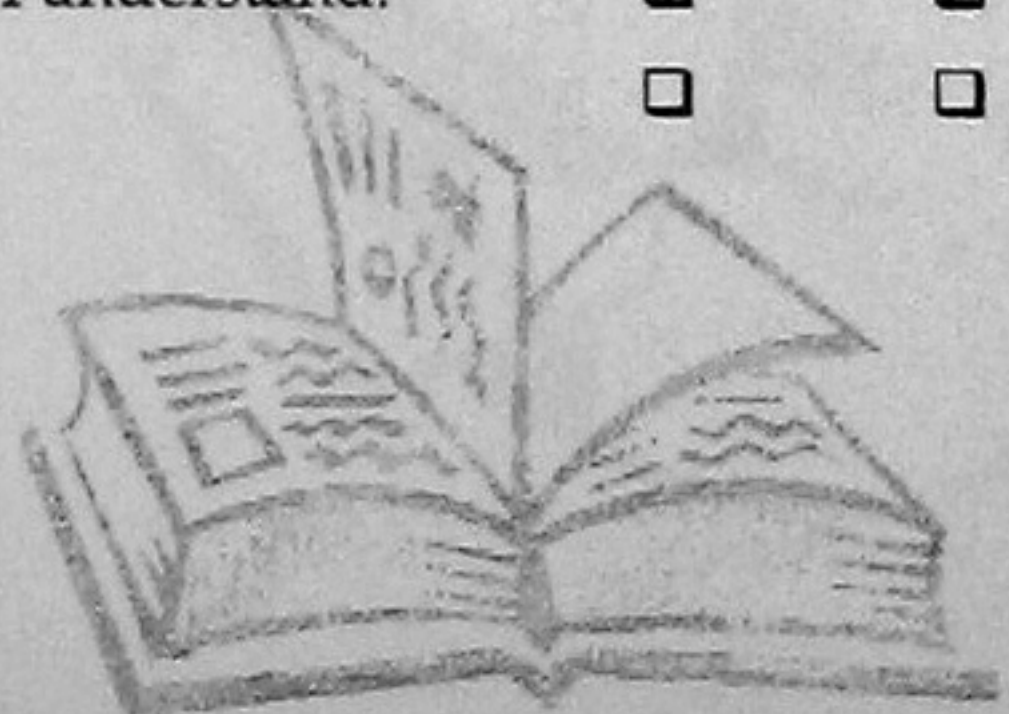
B. Are you an independent English learner?Consider the following statements for yourself, write 'T' if they are **TRUE**.

1. Every day, I spend at least 30 mins revising the things learnt in the English lesson(s) that day. _____
2. I enjoy visiting libraries to look for English reference books or read English magazines. _____
3. I make use of the dictionary to check the meaning of new words. _____
4. I look at the examples in the dictionary to learn how to use a word. _____
5. I write down all the new words in a vocabulary book. _____
6. I study the vocabulary book at least 3 times a week. _____
7. I use the newly learnt English words a lot in writing and speaking. _____
8. I read aloud newly learnt English words 5 or more times because it helps me to remember the pronunciation better. _____
9. I like to cut up English words into parts because it helps me to remember the pronunciation and the spelling better. _____
10. I always think about what I am going to do before I do it. _____
11. I like to make a plan for what I am going to do every day. _____
12. I have a good sleeping habit, so I always feel refreshed in the morning. _____

C. What are your reading habits?

Answer each of these questions by placing a ✓ in the box under the word Yes or No.

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I always sound out the words in the books when I read. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I can use the rest of the sentence to help guess the meaning of a word I don't know. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I use what I already know to help me understanding what I'm reading. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I know what to do when I don't understand what I'm reading. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I can find books that I like to read in my room and in the school library. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I like to read for fun. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I always share the titles of good books with my friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I have some favourite authors and usually read several books by these writers. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. I ask myself questions as I read to make sure that I understand. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. I know how to find the information in a library. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



ERS Orientation Programme Sept 2003
Analysis for the Questionnaire on Study and Reading Habits

p.3

A. What kind of English learner are you?

Check your score for Section A.

Item	Score	Item	Score	Item	Score	Item	Score	Item	Score
1. a.	0	2. a.	1	3. a.	0	4. a.	4	5. a.	1
b.	1	b.	0	b.	1	b.	4	b.	2
c.	2	c.	2	c.	2	c.	3	c.	3
		d.	3	d.	3	d.	3	d.	4
						e.	4		
						f.	3		
						g.	4		

Analysis

Score	Description
30 - 40	You are an active and serious English learner. You try your best to learn English well and are willing to do extra work. Good! You are on the right track. Keep it up.
19 - 29	You are a hard-working student and like to follow instructions. You can do even better if you can make better use of the other resources more! Study the suggested items in Q. 4 and set your study plan.
10 - 18	You are not an effective English learner. You need to form some good habits in English learning and need to spend much more time doing things in English. Study the suggested items in Q. 4 and set your study plan.
Below 10	You are a poor English learner. You need to form good habits in English learning. Maybe you are afraid of learning English. Maybe you don't know how to learn English well. Don't worry. Go to Q. 4 and study items a - g again. Set a goal and start work. You can have lots of improvement.

Analysis for the Questionnaire on Study and Reading Habits

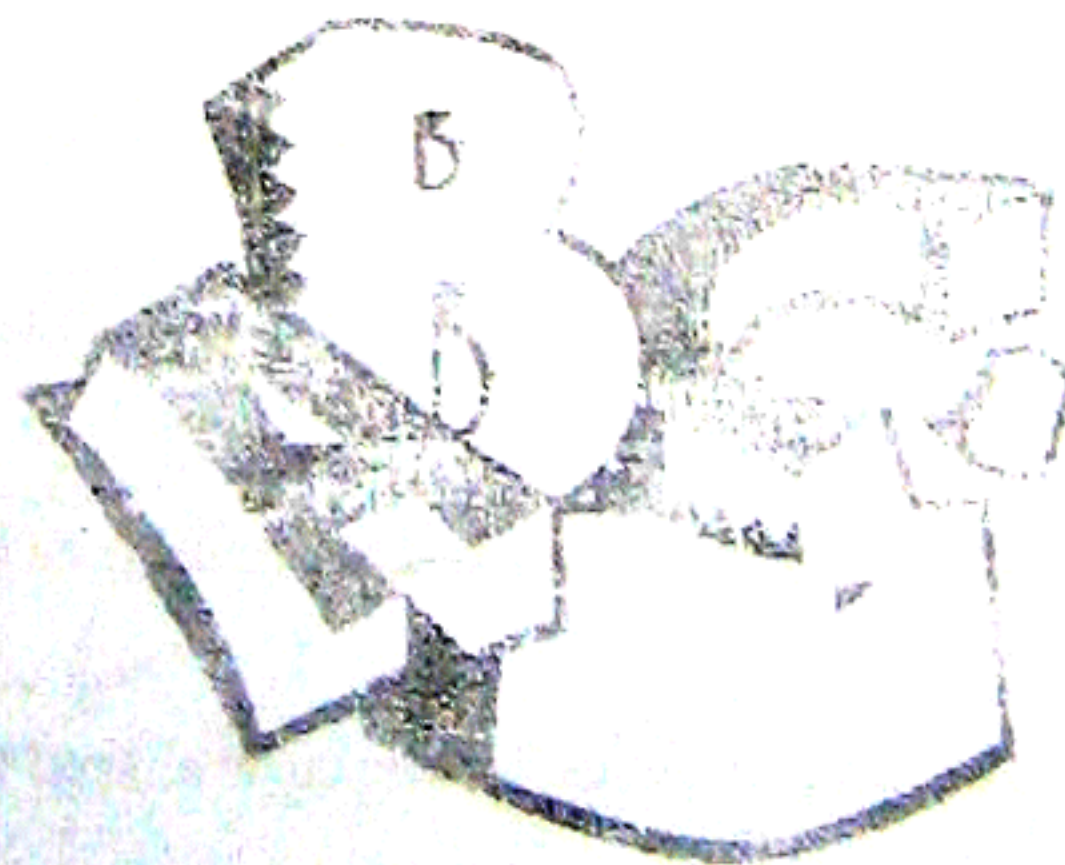
B. Are you an independent English learner?

When you say 'True', you get **2 points** each. When you say 'Not True', you get **0 point** each.



Analysis

Score	Description
18 - 24	You are quite an independent English learner. You learn how to <u>use</u> English. Keep using English you learnt in your schoolwork and daily life. Then you can learn even better.
8 - 16	You can be an independent English learner. You have formed some good habits in learning English. Now you have to use more English references and look at English around you more. Go through items 1 - 12 again and see which ones you have left out. Then work hard on them.
0 - 6	You depend on your English teacher quite a lot and want to be told what to do. If you want to learn English well, you need to use reference books and be much more active in learning English. Prepare well for the English class and spend more time on English learning activities. Go through items 1 - 12 again and see which ones you have left out. Then work hard on them.



ERS Orientation Programme Sept 2003
Developing Good Reading Habits

P. 5

What are good reading Habits?

Decide which of the following habits are good reading habits and which are poor habits.
Put a ✓ in the right box under the word Good or Poor Reading Habit.

	Good Habits	Poor Habits
1. Find books by popular authors to read about.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Go back to the previous chapter and reread again and again.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Look at one word at a time when reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Moving your lips as you read.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. Place a finger beneath the words being read.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6. Read a number of different materials.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Stop reading self-selected books that don't hold their interest.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Take the time to sound difficult new words out.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9. Ask themselves questions and try to guess what may happen next.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Try to read material that is at their ability level or higher.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Use other words in the book to understand the meaning of difficult new words.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Read the book cover and the first few pages when choosing what to read.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Cheng Wing Gee College
Extensive Reading Scheme 2003 - 2004

p. 6

FAQs about ERS

Question	Answer
1. What is 'ERS'?	Extensive Reading Scheme
2. What is ERS lesson?	A lesson to read novels, nonfiction books, short stories, newspaper and magazines and write Penbook letters about books, reading and authors.
3. When?	Every cycle
4. Where?	School library
5. How many books to read every term?	F.1 - 6 books F.2 - 5 books F.3 - 4 books
6. For F.3 students, when to do reading without ERS lessons?	Morning reading time, free time at school or at home
7. What to bring?	Reading materials and Penbook
8. What is a Penbook?	A place to write letters to your English teachers, your parents and schoolmates.
9. How often to write Penbook letters?	At least one letter every cycle.
10. Why writing Penbook letters?	People learn by talking and writing. They form their own ideas through writing and become a better reader.
11. What to do with another person's Penbook letters?	Respond to that person's letter within one teaching cycle.
12. What will teachers do with the Penbook letters?	Give feedback and marks.
13. How many letters to write to English teachers?	At least 2 every term.
14. Any awards?	Yes, by nomination.

Sample Penbook Letter 1

Dear Mrs Chow,

I just finished a book called 'The House on the Hill'.

This book tells the story of Paul and Maria. Paul is in love with Maria, but he is poor. Maria is rich and she loves money a lot, so she chooses to marry an old man who is rich. Sometime later, Paul wins a prize and becomes a famous writer. Maria knows about it. She, then, leaves her husband and wants to live with Paul and his money. Paul is happy to know that Maria is coming back to him because of his money.

The book is easy to read. The best part is it makes me think about what true love is and whether money is really so important. A lot of people love money and think that money is the most important thing. Well, I don't agree with that. I know we need money, but it is not the most important thing. Our life and health are more important and money can't buy us true love. In the book, Paul is facing a difficult decision of whether to accept Maria again even if her love for him is not genuine. How would you choose if you were Paul?

I think you would like this book because it is a good reminder of what true love is.

Best wishes

Amy

Sample Penbook Letter 2

Dear Mrs Lee,

Over the weekend, I re-read the famous fairytale, The Snow White. It is one of my favourite fairytales. So it is fun to read it over again from beginning till the end.

Do you remember what the story is about? *Let me write you an acrostic poem.*

**She was a beautiful, lonely girl.
No one could see how beautiful she was.
Only the seven dwarves knew
Where she lived.
Why were
Her friends taking care of her
In the little house in the forest
The witch was trying to
End her life.**

.....And the rest is history. *What do you think about the acrostic poem? Do write back soon.*

Best wishes,
Joel

Sample Penbook Letter 3

Dear Shuman,

How are you getting on? Still busy with your studies, right? Well, don't forget to do some reading from time to time.

I've read a great book these two weeks. It's a tie-in. Do you know which book it is? Take a close look at the edge of the acrostic poem below and you'll be able to find out.

**Tragic story of love and
Interesting characters
Triangle between two men
And a woman stuck on a ship with
No way to escape
Iceberg
Crashed into the ship and sank the lovers**

Yes, it is about the ship, Titanic. It is really legendary.

I have watched the movie two times. A number of scenes in the movie 'Titanic' are still capturing my heart. The way Jack enlightens Rose's mind really moves me. He lights up her life and gives her hope to live on. It aches my heart when Rose is left to live on without Jack.

But how can one individual gives his life so selflessly for the betterment of another individual? Is this simply fictitious or can it be possible?

It can be possible, I think. I believe that the desires to love and be loved, to sacrifice for our love and be sacrificed for are all inside us. It's God, the creator, who places such desire inside all of us, the creature. It's Jesus Christ who sets Himself as an example to be crucified for our sin. He makes us a better person and gives us hope to live on. The passion between Jack and Rose in the film captures this loving relationship between Jesus Christ and us. That is why it is so appealing to all of us.

In this sense, we are all Rose while Jesus is Jack. Do you think so, Shuman?

Love,
Muriel.

What should I write in the Penbook letters?

- Comments telling what you like, dislike or notice about the author's language, techniques or ideas.
- Questions on whatever you don't understand. Speculate the possible answers.
- Predictions about what will happen next or what might happen if the story had continued.
- Make connections with other books that you have read or films you have seen.
- Plot summaries.
- Character or story event description.
- Ideas about the reading process.
- Reflections on how the story relates to your own life.
- Write an alternative ending for the story.

(another)



The Role of the Teacher in Motivating Students

Mrs Tam:

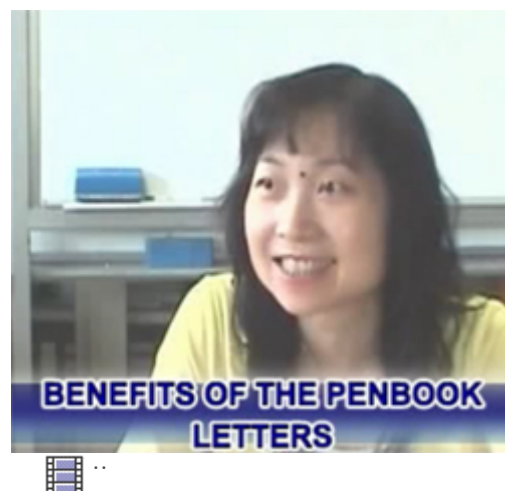
- Proactively monitors students during reading sessions
- Gives feedback and encouragement through penbook letters
- Recommends books
- Creates an atmosphere where students encourage each other through feedback and recommendations



Benefits of the Reading Programme

There are a number of benefits of the reading programme, including:

- More students are using the library than before
- Students are borrowing more books than before
- Students' interest in reading has increased
- Students' writing skills have improved
- Students feel that the reading programme has helped them



More students using the library than before

According to the school librarian, the number of students using the library has increased. For example, two years ago, it was compulsory for students to borrow a certain number of books in order to write their book reports. Most students only borrowed books prior to the deadline for submission of reports. Two years ago, the school decided to allow students to borrow books on a voluntary basis. Now students are under no obligation or pressure to borrow books, yet the number of books on loan at any given time has not decreased. Mrs May Tam, the 1B teacher, feels that the change is due to the fact that students are no longer asked to write book reports. She also believes that students are more inclined to select books based on their own reading preferences, which motivates them to read.

Interviews with six students from 1B revealed that students appreciate the "freedom" to choose books and use the library at different times. One student claimed that she had borrowed more than 50 books since September 2003. Through further discussion, we discovered that some students have even started to use the public libraries in the Shatin district. Clearly students are now taking greater responsibility for their learning, especially in reading English books.

More books being borrowed from the library

The following table shows how many books students in S.1 borrowed in the academic year 2003/04. 1B is the highlighted class as this has been the observed class throughout the year.

Class	Number of books borrowed 2003/04
1A	295
1B*	1206
1C	549
1D	591
1E	653

* 1B was the observed class in this case study

In trying to establish why students in 1B were reading more than their peers, we interviewed a number of students in 1B. The students we interviewed claimed that Mrs Tam encouraged them to read and helped them to find good books.

In interviews with six of Mrs Tam former students (now in S.2), we found that all of them remembered Mrs Tam's lessons with fondness and felt that the reading lessons in the library were "relaxing and enjoyable". They admitted that they did not read as much now as they did before, but this could be attributed to additional workload in other subjects.

Mrs Tam provides students with an excellent role model for reading. She reads widely and shares her love of reading with her students. She is also determined to provide students with an environment that is conducive to reading.

The 1B students interviewed all spoke positively about the feedback they received from Mrs Tam on their penbook letters, and said that this encouraged them to read and write more. The penbook letters have become a meaningful channel for communication where students express their opinions and receive constructive (and personalised) feedback from their teacher.

Mrs Tam is also aware of her students' preferences and tries to accommodate these in her lessons. She acknowledges the difficulties of presenting the "classics" to S.1 students and is therefore willing to cater to students' interests as a means of getting them to read.

The responsibility of the teacher in promoting reading habits is a distinctive feature of Christian Alliance College. When asked to outline the necessary conditions for an effective reading scheme, Mrs Tam cited the following:

1. Students must understand the purpose of reading.
2. There must be a wide range of reading materials and resources available to students.
3. The teacher should create a reading atmosphere by inviting students to share their ideas on what they have read and by providing positive reinforcement.



Linguistic benefits for students

A major benefit of reading can be found at the linguistic level. Mrs Tam believes that the reading programme has improved students' written compositions, particularly in areas such as vocabulary and sentence structure. Most students we interviewed agreed. They mentioned that they are now able to incorporate more vocabulary into their writing and have a better understanding of grammatical structures.

Students also developed new learning strategies over the year. Mrs Tam showed them how to use a dictionary and many students have learned to use vocabulary books when writing compositions. Such learner training seems to be a positive outcome of the programme.

Students also mentioned that they read at home in front of their parents. When asked whether their parents approved of this type of activity, students replied that their parents encourage them to read English books to improve their English-language skills.

Why have Lessons in the Library?

Two years ago, the school decided to timetable reading lessons in the school library, primarily because teachers wanted to exploit the library's resources to promote greater interest in reading among students. Interviews revealed that the librarian and staff-members of the library have played a central role in the success of the reading programme.



Takes students out of the classroom

Students enjoy leaving the classroom and going to the library for the timetabled lessons. It helps them to focus on reading.



Mobilises human resources in promoting reading

Mr Lai Pik Tim, who is the school librarian and a teacher of Chinese history, has been at Christian Alliance Cheng Wing Gee College for 19 years. Mr Lai and his staff support the reading programme by informing teachers of new books, preparing books that teachers may wish to introduce to students, and training student librarians.

Mrs May Tam, an English teacher we interviewed, spoke highly of Mr Lai:

"The librarian helps me ... he is so helpful. First, the librarian helps us to train student librarians to check out books, shows them how to borrow books and trains them how to tidy up the book boxes. This means that students can borrow books in the lesson, which is very helpful to us....Sometimes, I ask the librarians to play some music to help the students to read and he will help me. The librarian is very helpful ..."



Promotes a wide range of reading resources

Despite having to work with a limited budget, Mr Lai provides students with a variety of multimedia resources and makes the library comfortable.

View CAGWC's own website for their [library](#), including an interactive video that allows you to view the library.



Conclusion

The idea for Christian Alliance's reading programme stemmed from an EMB workshop and is now an integral part of the junior form English curriculum at the school. The benefits are enormous, in terms of students' intrinsic motivation for reading in English and improved writing skills through the penbook letters.

The use of the library is also a vital component in the success of the reading programme. The library provides students with a calming and inviting environment that is conducive to reading. The library has a wide choice of reading material, and teachers and the librarian work together to discuss recommendations for new books. The school management also plays a role by providing funding for library facilities.

The librarian, Mr Lai, is a role model to his colleagues and the students. His commitment to providing students with opportunities to improve their reading has had a significant impact on the success of the programme. Another key figure in the success of the reading programme is Mrs Tam, who teaches 1B. She is regarded as someone who leads her class by example in reading lessons. Her influence on the hearts and minds of students is revealed in comments from students and statistics on borrowing rates.

