

# TeFTOET: Techniques for Teachers of English Tests

by Kevin Sawatzky

**D**on't let that ominous sounding acronym fool you into thinking this article will be as difficult as the tests our students, and perhaps some of us, have taken. One of the main difficulties students have with TOEIC, TOEFL, or Eiken is vocabulary. Here are some ways to improve your teaching and their learning in this area.

1. Have students keep a vocabulary notebook with the following headings: New Word, Part of Speech, Japanese Equivalent, Synonyms (2), Antonym (1), and Original Sentence using the word. Typing these as column headings at the top of a landscape A4 page allows easy entry and review. Students can also add another column for personalization notes; how often the word has been encountered, when (not) to use it, words they easily confused it with, or a good way to remember it. Assign 10 new words per week, and encourage the use of a good English-only dictionary, preferably one with sample sentences, to supplement the usual bilingual glossaries and dictionaries. The best way to show students how to keep a notebook is to show them complete examples that you or other students have done.

2. Jeopardy is an easy and fun vocabulary review/preview game. You say a word the student had, or may have, difficulty with, 'receipt', for example, and the student gives a definition in the form of a question. "What do you call a piece of paper that proves you've bought something?" If you teach a group of students, keep points to make it more challenging. You can give two or three fewer words for homework to the winner as a reward, but tell them because they've been so keen in the game you think they'll do more on their own.

3. Memory is another easy to play game. Write prefixes or suffixes on blue cards and their meanings on white cards. Use however many/few pairs you think your student(s) can handle. I usually use 12 pairs. Play like the usual memory game, except that one blue and one white card is picked up per turn. If the student gets a match, they can take another turn. The winner has the most pairs when all the cards are gone.

4. Prefixes and Suffixes can also be practiced in a race-style game if you have two or more students in a class. Give one student or pair a list of prefixes, the other a list of suffixes. Set a time limit, 3-5 minutes usually works well, and have students write words containing items from their lists. Use the lists below, or

make your own depending on student needs. Use as many or as few prefixes or suffixes as you like, but set time limits accordingly.

### Suffixes:

A: -al, -ancy, -ate, -fy, -ic, -ity, -ment, -ous, -ity, -ship

B: -ance, -ary, -ation, -ency, -ize, -ly, -ness, -hood, -tion, -en

### Prefixes:

A: after-, anti-, auto-, bene-, bi-, counter-, dis-, omni-, multi-, re-, un-

B: post-, over-, under-, poly-, pre-, in-, inter-, circum-, bi-, mis-, mal-, non-

5. Spot the Antonym is a simple review/preview exercise that only takes a few minutes to do. You should explain that antonyms are not always direct opposites, but express opposing ideas or opposing relationship. Before class write a 'one of these is not like the others' type list and have students pick out the different one.

### Examples:

extraneous      superfluous      needed  
unnecessary

or

cautiously      recklessly      carelessly  
negligently

This can be done individually or in pairs, with one point awarded for each correct answer. A follow up is to give another point for creating a sentence in which the synonyms can be used interchangeably. "Because he was driving \_\_\_\_\_ Mr. Muramatsu caused an accident," for example. This will help students realize that, even though ideas are similar, not all synony-

mous words can be substituted singly for one another.

6. Knowing word inflection and derivation relationships is essential for these types of tests. This activity, integrally connected with vocabulary building, is designed to get students' neural connectors connecting along the connective pathways. Make an A4 or A3 size chart with the following headings: noun, adjective, verb, and adverb. Write in one word form per line, and have students race to fill in the others. If you have a group class, use A3 paper and prepare cards with the various word forms on them beforehand. Split the group into teams and deal out the shuffled deck of word family cards to individual members and tell them not to show their hands. Tape the chart to a wall, or a whiteboard, making sure everyone can see it. Decide which team starts, and the first player puts a card under the appropriate column. If any player on her team has other forms of the word they can put them up. Give one point for each correctly placed word, and a bonus point if a team has all four forms.

7. Newspaper clippings are an often overlooked, yet invaluable resource that add realism to the classroom. Start a collection of pictures, short announcements and news briefs from the business section, or get students to do it. To manage these alternative resources glue one item to a piece of B5 paper, and write notes on the source, which section of which test it relates to, how you intend to use it and page references to your usual textbook. Put these pages in a plastic pocket file from your local 100-yen shop and keep it next to your regular texts. Once you get into this habit you'll think of more ways to use them, but here are a few to get you started.

a. Keep an eye open for errors and highlight them. An entry in my own collection, "Exhaust standards tightened: Report recommends cutting particulate emissions by up to 85%," contains the following sentence. "Automakers are expected have difficulty meeting the high reduction targets since no technical measures have been established to achieve such goal." My notes indicate this is a prime example of two mistakes found on 'Part VI, Error Recognition' on the TOEIC. The first, "Automakers are expected have," is an incorrect infinitive, missing "to." The second, "established to achieve such goal," is missing the article "a" or the plural "-s" to make "goal" match the plural "targets." Advanced students should be able to name the error type, and be able to fix it without any choices, but lower-level students may need answer choices, such as those provided on the TOEIC's 'Part V, Incomplete Sentences.'

b Pictures with lots of nouns and action

depicted are useful for building speculation and anticipation skills useful for Part I of the TOEIC (choosing a correct description of a photo). Ask students to list as many nouns, verbs, and adjectives as they can about each picture. Then have them write four short sentences describing the picture, only one of which is true. You can prepare similar sentences beforehand, and use them to practice listening. If you assign homework, having students find their own pictures, write statements, and quiz each other in the next class is an ideal, motivating, way to foster thinking in English.

c. Show students headlines and ask them what type of information they anticipate will be found in the article. Remind them to focus on the five *Wh-* and *how* questions. This skill is useful for cutting down response time in the reading sections of all tests because it activates students' background knowledge, which is often a key to eliminating obviously wrong answer choices. Ask students to skim the articles, focusing on the most important words (nouns and verbs) and compare their speculations with what they read.

d. Deciphering new words from context is an often difficult and time-consuming skill to teach. A large part of this skill is recognizing synonymous ideas, not only words. In the headline "Exhaust standards tightened: Report recommends cutting particulate emissions by up to 85%," point out to students that they should equate 'cutting' with 'tightened', and 'exhaust' with 'emission'. Using a few examples like this in each class will increase awareness that new vocabulary need not be threatening nor does it have to be fully understood to grasp the basic meaning of a passage.

## Conclusion

Let's face it: no one likes teaching for tests (or likes to admit that they do), since this kind of teaching seems destined to join grammar-translation in the musty methodology museum. Yet I hope that these ideas have given you a few ways to liven up test-preparation classes, and will lead you to develop your own in teaching for the three major English examinations in Japan. In addition to familiarizing your students with the types of test questions they will face, they will help you to help your students build, revise and recycle their English--and that is what is most important.

*Kevin Sawatzky teaches at a conversation school in Yokohama. His latest TOEIC score was 970, and his next challenge will be Eiken first grade. He can be reached at <sawatzky@hpo.net>.*