

## Teaching real beginners – Additional guidelines for working with English Elements – Basic Course

So far we have tended to divide beginners of EFL into two groups: ‘real’ beginners learning English for the first time and ‘false’ beginners who want and need the opportunity to learn English again systematically from the beginning.

However, within the group of ‘real’ beginners there are, in fact, two sub-groups:

- First of all, that traditional group of learners, mainly nationals of the country they are learning in, who are not only learning English for the first time but are also making their very first attempt at learning any foreign language at all.  
For these learners a gentle, step-by-step approach which makes no presumptions about learning skills is of paramount importance. Indeed, it is advisable that sufficient time will have to be allowed for guiding such learners towards acquiring the appropriate language-learning skills which are essential to a successful learning process.
- Secondly, a group of learners becoming more and more prominent in our learning centres who, mainly due to increased international mobility, are learning English not necessarily in the country of their origin.  
For them learning English will be a new experience, but not the process of learning a foreign language. Depending on their personal circumstances, they will have already acquired foreign language skills in German, French, Russian, etc. And although the system of the other foreign language they will have learned will differ in parts from that of English, an awareness for foreign language learning will have been created. Not only that, but due to their language-learning background they will also be more open to the principle of learner autonomy, that is, becoming more involved in the language-learning process, bringing in and sharing their previous learning experiences and also taking on some of the responsibility for learning English.  
(The goal of learner autonomy is one also to be set for real ‘real’ beginners. However, generally speaking, more time has to be invested in the process.)

The frequency of these two sub-groups of real beginners will vary regionally, and this will have an influence on the types of beginners’ courses on offer.

The great advantage of working with *English Elements – Basic Course* is that it is geared towards both of these learning-groups, providing them with a solid basis on which to continue building up and consolidating their knowledge of English. It offers a range of structures and lexical material geared towards natural communication at beginners’ level with emphasis being placed on extensive listening, pronunciation and speaking practice. If insufficient time is devoted to these areas, then a solid learning foundation will not be laid.

Now let’s have a look at how to approach teaching both these groups of learners using the same material while at the same time taking into account their different learning profiles.

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First of all, the group of ‘real’ real beginners: for them the step-by-step approach as outlined in the main body of the *Teacher's Notes* is of paramount importance. In addition, extra time has to be allowed for incorporating some of the Homestudy exercises and more of the Extra Activities suggested in the *Teacher's Notes* into the teaching lessons. In general, this group of learners will require more regular guidance on how to manage their learning process: how to store their vocabulary in an accessible way; how to listen effectively; how to accept grammar as a function of communication; how to organise their learning outside the classroom, etc. However, the additional time invested in guiding your learners to gradually taking on more responsibility for their own learning process will be well worth while.

Let us now focus on the group of learners for whom English is **not** the first foreign language. Experience has shown that they are keen to learn English as quickly as possible. This generally means not longer than one term, which within the context of *English Elements – Basic Course* would mean covering the material of the course in 26-28 double lessons. In practical terms, this means teaching two 90-minute lessons per week over a period of 13-14 weeks.

However, local factors may not always allow for holding twice-weekly lessons. In this case, a compromise can be achieved by running the course once a week for two 45-minute lessons per session, plus a Saturday session at the beginning, one in the middle and one at the end of the course with eight 45-minute lessons each.

This time-model has the advantage of providing the learning group with a real ‘push’ on the first day of course, something which this group of learners is ready for, and also enabling the teacher to draw all the threads together without undue hectic on the final day. The middle Saturday, coming halfway through the book, is geared towards consolidating the initial learning process and also giving it a further thrust.

With this time-model, learners have the feeling they have attended a ‘mini’ intensive course. (Real intensive courses running for four weeks with fourteen 45-minute lessons a week can also cover the material, but not all learners can devote themselves to such an intensive learning form.)

The following time model provides a breakdown of how the learning material of *English Elements – Basic Course* can be covered in the form of the ‘mini’ intensive course as described above:

<u>1<sup>st</sup> Saturday</u> (before Week 1)	four double lessons	Unit 1 – Unit 2/B2
<u>Weeks 1-3</u>	three double lessons	Unit 2/B3 – Unit 3 Revision Unit 1 to be done as homework, with only ex. 1 being compared in class.
<u>Weeks 4-7</u>	four double lessons	Units 4 + 5
<u>2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday</u> (at the end of Week 7)	four double lessons	Units 6 + 7, plus exs. 1 + 6 of Revision Unit 2 Revision Unit 2, exs. 2-5 to be done as homework.
<u>Weeks 8-13</u>	six double lessons	Units 8-10, , plus ex. 3 of Revision Unit 3 Revision Unit 3, exs. 1-3 to be done as homework, with ex. 4 then being followed up as a pair-work exercise in class.
<u>3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday</u>	four double lessons	Units 11 + 12 Revision Unit 4, the ‘Basic Pursuits’ board game, provides an ideal close to the course on a Saturday afternoon.

In total, there are 25 double lessons (50 forty-five-minute teaching units).

The next question to be considered is how to cover the material of *English Elements – Basic Course* within the time suggested. Here are some guidelines:

- Spend sufficient time on working through Unit 1 with your students: three double lessons are suggested. It will have exemplary character and provide your learners with a model of the learning process they should adopt. It will also allow for the pace of learning to increase once students have got off to a good start, knowing what to expect.
- Include the two opening listening exercises of the Homestudy section of Unit 1 into your classroom work and stress the value of these exercises, which form a regular feature of each Homestudy unit, to your learners in giving them not only the opportunity to train their hearing to the sound of English but also to try out natural ‘chunks’ of communicative English again and again at their leisure. This would be a first step towards learner autonomy.
- Point out the function of Memory Box – Part D – by going over it with the students in class when completing Unit 1 and then hand over this responsibility to your learners for the remaining units in the book. At the same time, assure your learners that you are willing to clear up any uncertainties within the framework of what has been covered in each unit. Allow the opportunity for this particularly at the beginning of a lesson following the completion of a unit.

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- Take time on the first day to point out the function of the Homestudy section beginning on page 118. Encourage your learners to read the Pinboards, which contain useful learning tips and interesting background information. Generally speaking, there is no need to go over the Homestudy exercises in class as the key is contained at the back of the book (pages 182-191). This also promotes learner autonomy since the main aim is for learners to consolidate their learning process for their own benefit. After all, they are learning for themselves and not for the teacher!

***Your English Elements Team***