

# Preparing Young Learners for Exam Success

Elaine Boyd





**Elaine Boyd** has been involved in assessment design and quality assurance for over 30 years, working for a range of international exam boards. She has been especially concerned with the impact of assessments in the classroom and worked closely with teachers and teacher educators delivering courses in assessment literacy in Europe, India and SE Asia and has published articles in this field. She has been Visiting Professor at the Universitat Politècnica in Valencia with responsibility for developing a framework for EMI. Her research includes intercultural communication and pragmatics and her PhD investigated spoken language using corpus data. She is currently a post graduate tutor at The Institute of Education at University College London. Elaine has authored several exam coursebooks for a range of age groups for leading international publishers and is a Course Consultant for Look, a seven-level primary series from National Geographic Learning.



# What we will talk about today

- Young learners and assessment
- Our aims as teachers in supporting students
- Strategies to help students feel relaxed and confident in formal exams
- How to assess speaking and writing
- Monitoring ongoing progression: formative assessment
- Giving feedback



Children running

Look at the photo. What can you see?

# Young learners and assessment

- Why do we test young learners?
- How do your young learners feel about assessment?
- Why?
- How does testing affect self-esteem?





# Our aims as teachers

## Ensure students:

- know they are being tested
- know what they are being tested on
- know how to do the test
- are well-prepared for the content
- are given manageable results
- are given a second opportunity



Let's play! <sup>UNIT</sup> 10

Look at the photo.  
What can you see?

# Strategies to help students

- Personalize
- Collaborate
- Reflect
- Help my friend
- Second chance
- Own it!





# Personalize - example

## Example classroom activity to help practice Writing skills for Flyers

### LESSON 6

### Writing

#### In this lesson, students will:

- read a fictional story and answer questions about it
- practise using the past simple and past continuous to tell a story about the past
- check the spelling, grammar and punctuation in a piece of text
- write a fictional story using picture prompts.

**Materials:** A soft rubber ball, or a ball made out of a large sheet of crumpled up paper.

#### Warm up

- Write the following words on the board: animal, colour, food, sport, book, TV programme, place.
- Throw a ball up into the air and catch it. As you catch it, say: *My name is xxx and my favourite animal is a tiger.* Throw the ball across the class to a student and say: *Colour!* The student says his/her name and favourite colour and then throws the ball to another student, calling out a category from the board. Continue until every student has spoken.

#### 1

- Have students open their books to p. 35. Tell them to read the title of the story and look at the picture and predict why the lunch was unusual. They then read the story quickly to check their ideas.

#### 2

- Go through the information in the box. Explain that we usually use a mix of past continuous and past simple tenses when we tell a story in the past. Remind students that we can also use past simple and past continuous together in a sentence to describe an interrupted action and refer them back to Grammar 2 on page 34, if necessary.
- Give students a minute to find three examples of the past continuous in the story in Exercise 1. Check answers by reading the story out loud and telling students to stand up or put their hands up when they hear a past continuous sentence. This is a good way to keep students engaged and to get an idea of how many students have correctly identified the past continuous sentences.

#### 3

- Remind students of the importance of checking their writing. You may already use a code when marking students' work. It's useful for students to see their errors categorized in this way as it will help them to know what to look out for in their own work.
- Students can work in pairs to find and correct the mistakes in the text. With a weaker class, help the whole class first identify the mistakes and then have students make the corrections.

#### 4

#### Task guidance notes

Flyers Reading & Writing Part 7: In this part of the test, students have to write a story based on three pictures in between 20-40 words. Students are assessed on:

- how closely they describe the pictures
- how well they connect the ideas/events in the story
- how understandable their story is (vocabulary and grammar).

**Challenges:** Students can find this stressful because they have to 'create' the story and often worry about how correct their language is. It's important they focus on the content of the pictures. As the students have to tackle this task on their own, it's a good idea to do an activity to help them take ownership of / be independent with their work.

#### Performance descriptors:

- Can link phrases or sentences with connectors.
- Can write simple descriptions.
- Can write a short, simple story using pictures or own ideas.

- **Personalize:** Tell students they are going to write a story about some friends in the park. Ask the class: *Do you go to the park? Who with? How often? What do you do there?*
- Ask students to look at the pictures in Exercise 4. Ask: *Who won the prize? (The boy in the red shirt.)* Check their understanding of the words in the box.
- **Collaborate:** Students work in pairs to describe orally what is happening in each picture. Monitor and help. Discuss ideas with the whole class.
- Next, have students in their pairs write one sentence for each picture. Ask them to check their ideas with another pair. Ask: *Can you make any improvements?* Check their final versions with the class.
- Again in pairs, ask students to connect the ideas in their sentences using *and* and *but*.
- Students write their stories individually. It is best to do this in class so that you can monitor at the time.
- **Reflect:** Ask students to check their work. Give them a checklist.

	Yes or No? / Notes
Is the story the same as the pictures?	
Have you connected the ideas?	
Have you used a variety of vocabulary?	
Is your grammar and spelling correct?	

#### Sample answer (5)

Three boys were playing football in the park. They saw a sign for a sports competition and entered it. Two boys were very fast and climbed over the wall. The other boy tried but he was slower. He won the race and got first prize. (53)

#### Sample answer (3)

Three boys were in the park. They entered a competition. Two of the boys climbed the wall. The other boy jumped on the trampoline and flew over the wall. He won the first prize. (33)

**Additional practice:** Workbook p.29; worksheet on website.

### Writing A story

### LESSON 6

#### 1 Read the story. Why was the lunch unusual?

#### An unusual lunch

Last Saturday, Theo and Cora visited their cousins, Alexa and Xander. Uncle Damon was making pasta in the kitchen. Aunt Agatha was working on the computer. The children were bored. They decided to go outside and play tennis.

Theo loved tennis and he loved winning. He really wanted to win the game. He hit the ball hard and it flew up into the air and through the open kitchen window.

Uncle Damon came out of the kitchen. He had tomato sauce on his face and his clothes. The children went into the kitchen. The tennis ball was in the pot with the tomato sauce.

"I'm very sorry, Uncle Damon!" said Theo. Uncle Damon was laughing.

"It's OK, Theo," he said. But I hope you like pasta with tennis ball sauce!"



#### 2 Read the information in the box. Then look at the story in Exercise 1 and find three examples of the past continuous.

When we write stories about the past, we usually use the past simple and the past continuous.

We use the past simple to describe a series of events. *He picked up the ball and threw it.*

We use the past continuous to describe a scene or to talk about an action in progress. *Katie was watching TV and the cat was sleeping on the sofa.*

#### 3 Writing skill Check your work

##### a Read the information in the box.

When we check our work, we need to think about:

- spelling, for example double letters (win/winning), plurals
- grammar, for example correct tense and form
- punctuation, for example capital letters and full stops.

##### b Find and correct five mistakes in the text.

It was monday. Umar and his friend Khalish were walked to school when they saw their teacher, Mr Halim. Mr Halim was ridding his bike, but he stopped when he saw the boys. He was very surprised to see them. 'It's a holiday today!' he said Umar and Khalish were very happy.

#### 4 Look at the pictures and write a story. Use the words in the box.

football enter a competition  
climb jump high prize trampoline



# Personalize - example

4

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4

Look at the pictures and write a story.  
Use the words in the box.

football   enter a competition  
climb   jump   high   prize   trampoline





# Personalize - rationale

## **Strategy:**

With pictures or with books closed, ask questions that relate the task topic to students' own lives so they can 'imagine' the scenario and setting and think of the usual things that happen in that context.

## **Why?**

- Helps students to understand that English can be connected to their own lives
- Gives students a framework for making language decisions in e.g. vocabulary and grammar or functions.

# Collaborate - example

Example classroom activity to help practice Speaking skills for Movers

## LESSON 3

### Look and remember

#### 1 Write the odd one out.

- |         |          |           |             |       |
|---------|----------|-----------|-------------|-------|
| 1 lake  | river    | waterfall | village     | _____ |
| 2 pasta | bottle   | plate     | cup         | _____ |
| 3 ant   | dolphin  | kangaroo  | parrot      | _____ |
| 4 curly | straight | moustache | long        | _____ |
| 5 neck  | cough    | shoulder  | stomach     | _____ |
| 6 son   | daughter | sister    | grandmother | _____ |

#### 2 Write two odd-one-out puzzles for your friend.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3 Write questions. Then ask and answer the questions in pairs.

- 1 are / you / old / how  
\_\_\_\_\_?
- 2 your / is / when / birthday  
\_\_\_\_\_?
- 3 and sisters / got / brothers / any / you / have  
\_\_\_\_\_?
- 4 Saturdays / you / do / on / what / usually / do  
\_\_\_\_\_?
- 5 like / books / you / do / comic / reading  
\_\_\_\_\_?
- 6 on Sunday / going to / you / what / do / are  
\_\_\_\_\_?

#### 4 Think about your favourite things. Then ask and answer in small groups.

animal sport food place to visit country activity fruit

What's your favourite animal?

A cat. What's yours?



# Collaborate - example

## Collaborate:

Ask students in pairs to decide orally two things they know about each noun.

### LESSON 3

## Look and remember

### 1 Write the odd one out.

1	lake	river	waterfall	village	_____
2	pasta	bottle	plate	cup	_____
3	ant	dolphin	kangaroo	parrot	_____
4	curly	straight	moustache	long	_____
5	neck	cough	shoulder	stomach	_____
6	son	daughter	sister	grandmother	_____

# Collaborate - rationale

## **Strategy:**

Allow students to plan and prepare in groups, even if each group ends up producing the same result.

## **Why?**

- Gives student some calm preparation time
- Allows them to make mistakes in planning
- You can monitor and pick up mistakes before students need to perform
- Students can revise several times before production
- Students can learn from each other



# Reflect - example

Example classroom activity to help practice Listening skills for Starters

## Review 5: Units 9-10

1 Look and write.



1

n s a e j

j e a n s



2

h r i t s



3

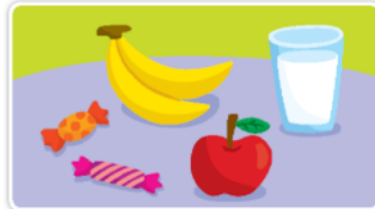
k c s o s



4

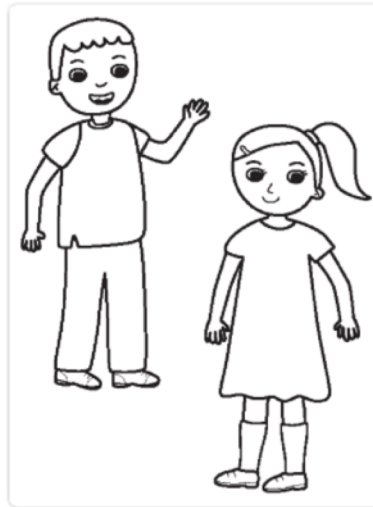
s r e d s

2 Look and read. Tick (✓) or cross (X).



- 1 There's milk on the table. ☒
- 2 There are two bananas too. ☐
- 3 There's an orange. ☐
- 4 There are three sweets. ☐

3 Listen and colour. TR: 164



4 Write *like* or *don't like*.



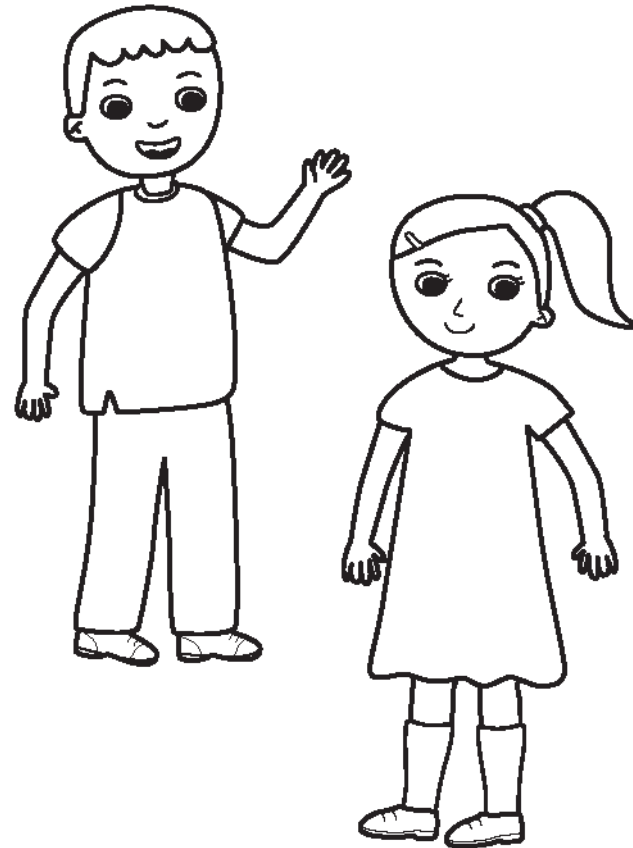
- 1 I like oranges.
- 2 I \_\_\_\_\_ milk.
- 3 I \_\_\_\_\_ water.
- 4 I \_\_\_\_\_ kiwis.

# Reflect - example

## **Reflect:**

Ask students to think about how they could do the task better, e.g. by coloring more quickly, by listening for important words/nouns, etc.

**3** Listen and colour.  TR: 164



# Reflect - rationale

## **Strategy:**

After completing a task, ask students to think about how they could do better, i.e. what went wrong. They can do as a class or in groups or pairs depending on their level.

## **Why?**

- It is vital students understand what they find challenging in order to progress
- Allows discussion of how to get better
- Gives a deeper understanding of task so less scary



# Help my friend - example

Example classroom activity to help practice Reading skills for Movers

## Review 5: Units 9–10

### 1 Write the word. There are two you don't need.

café car park cinema hospital market sports centre supermarket

- 1 You can swim and play basketball here. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Doctors work here to make sick people well. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 There are films here. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 You can sit and drink hot chocolate here. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 This is a big shop. You can buy food here. \_\_\_\_\_

### 2 Put the letters in the correct order.

- 1 Can you \_\_\_\_\_ (b l i m c) that tree? It's very high!
- 2 Do you want to go out or \_\_\_\_\_ (y a s t) at home?
- 3 I don't live very far away so I \_\_\_\_\_ (l e c c y) to school every day.
- 4 I love watching funny videos. I \_\_\_\_\_ (l u g h a) a lot.
- 5 She's thirsty. She \_\_\_\_\_ (d e s n e) some water.

### 3 Circle the correct answer.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 Was there a market here ten years ago?<br>A Yes, there was. B It's a car park.                             | 4 Was Sam at the party?<br>A Yes, he was.<br>B Yes, he doesn't like parties.                               |
| 2 Were there a lot of people here then?<br>A Yes, there are lots of people.<br>B No, there weren't many.     | 5 The children weren't in the playground.<br>A What are they playing?<br>B Really? Were they all in class? |
| 3 In those days, there was a big swimming pool in the park.<br>A Was there? Wow!<br>B I love swimming there. | 6 There was a pencil case here on the table five minutes ago.<br>A Yes, there were. B Where is it now?     |

### 4 Complete.

- 1 A I \_\_\_\_\_ (play) a new game with my friend last night. It was 'Mouse Race'.  
B I tried that game, but I \_\_\_\_\_ (like) it.
- 2 A \_\_\_\_\_ (he paint) anything in art class yesterday?  
B Yes, he \_\_\_\_\_. He \_\_\_\_\_ (paint) a picture of some giraffes.
- 3 A I \_\_\_\_\_ (watch) the film. I was asleep.  
B It was a good film. I \_\_\_\_\_ (enjoy) it a lot.

# Help my friend - example

## Help my friend:

Check the answers with the class then ask students in pairs to check each other's spelling.

**1** Write the word. There are two you don't need.

café car park cinema hospital market sports centre supermarket

- 1 You can swim and play basketball here. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Doctors work here to make sick people well. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 There are films here. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 You can sit and drink hot chocolate here. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 This is a big shop. You can buy food here. \_\_\_\_\_

# Help my friend - rationale

## **Strategy:**

After completing a task, students work in pairs to each help each other improve their answer or to explain something to each other.

## **Why?**

- Allows students to absorb cognitive processes of reflection
- Improves self-esteem as each student can be good at something
- Students can learn from each other



# Second chance - example

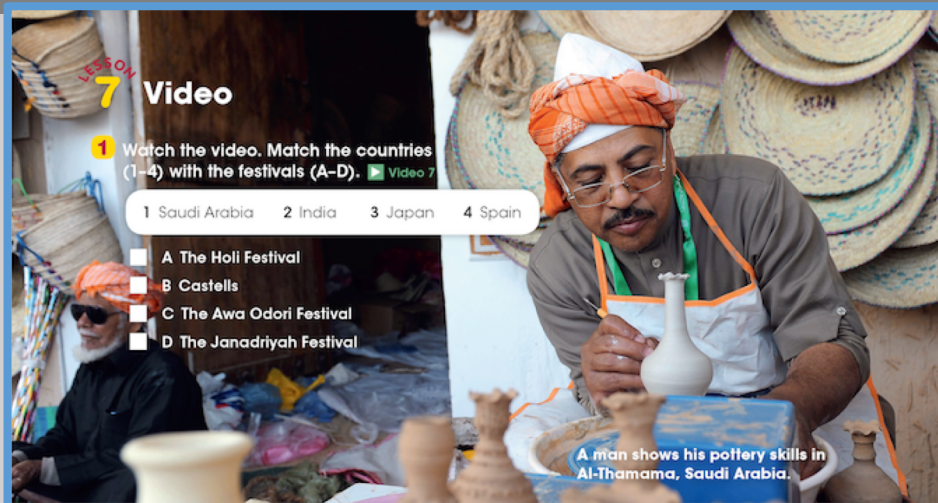
Example classroom activity to help practice Speaking skills for Flyers

**7 Video**

**1** Watch the video. Match the countries (1-4) with the festivals (A-D). [Video 7](#)

1 Saudi Arabia   2 India   3 Japan   4 Spain

☐ A The Holi Festival  
☐ B Castells  
☐ C The Awa Odori Festival  
☐ D The Janadriyah Festival



A man shows his pottery skills in Al-Thamama, Saudi Arabia.

**2** Watch the video again. Then read the sentences and tick (✓) the correct festival. [Video 7](#)

	Holi	Castells	Awa Odori	Janadriyah
1 It takes place at the end of winter.				
2 It takes place in summer.				
3 It takes place from June to November.				
4 It celebrates spring.				
5 It's called the 'Festival of Colours'.				
6 It's a dance festival.				
7 The festival is two weeks long.				
8 You can see lots of colourful costumes.				
9 There's art, food and camel racing.				
10 People make human towers.				

**3** Work in groups. Discuss the questions.

- 1 What's a popular festival in your country?
- 2 When does it take place?
- 3 What do people do at the festival?
- 4 What can you see at the festival?

# Second chance - example

## **Second chance:**

Ask students to create three new questions on another topic they have studied already. Then put them into new pairs to ask and answer. Remind them to focus on interaction. Monitor.

### **3 Work in groups. Discuss the questions.**

- 1 What's a popular festival in your country?
- 2 When does it take place?
- 3 What do people do at the festival?
- 4 What can you see at the festival?

# Second chance - rationale

## **Strategy:**

After a speaking or writing task and a discussion of answers or errors, allow students to repeat or make a 'clean' copy so they have the best version. Preferably do this fairly soon after their first attempt.

## **Why?**

- Young learners need repetition = fluency
- Gives them a chance to be successful; creates memory
- Young learners especially do not learn in a linear way so need opportunities to go back and repeat things



# Own it! - example

## Example classroom activity to help practice Reading skills for Starters

### Review 5: Units 9-10

#### 1 Look. Unscramble and write.



nunys

\_\_\_\_\_



dwniy

\_\_\_\_\_



ninarig

\_\_\_\_\_



yducol

\_\_\_\_\_

#### 2 Listen and circle. TR: 169

- 1 It's **raining** / sunny. Put on / Don't wear your boots.
- 2 It's **hot** / cloudy. Don't bring / Don't forget your sunhat.
- 3 It's windy / **raining**. Wear / Don't wear your scarf.
- 4 It's sunny / cloudy. Bring / Don't bring your coat.

#### 3 Look and read. Write Yes or No.

- 1 The zebra is drinking water.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 It's raining. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 The hippo is bigger than the rhino. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 The baby elephant is having a bath. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 The snake is longer than the crocodile. \_\_\_\_\_



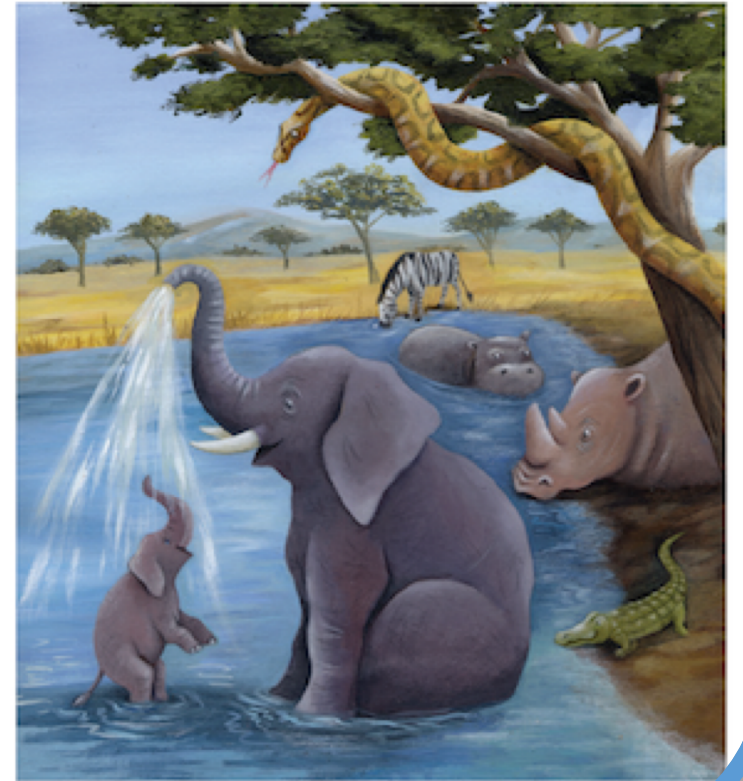
# Own it! - example

## Own it!:

Ask students in pairs to write three new sentences, one must be incorrect. They then move into new pairs and swap questions to answer *yes* or *no*.

### 3 Look and read. Write *Yes* or *No*.

- 1 The zebra is drinking water. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 It's raining. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 The hippo is bigger than the rhino. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 The baby elephant is having a bath. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 The snake is longer than the crocodile. \_\_\_\_\_



# Own it! - rationale

## **Strategy:**

After completing a task, allow students to create their own similar task preferably connected with their own lives. This might only be a small part of the task. Swap with others to do their task then allow the 'designer(s)' to check.

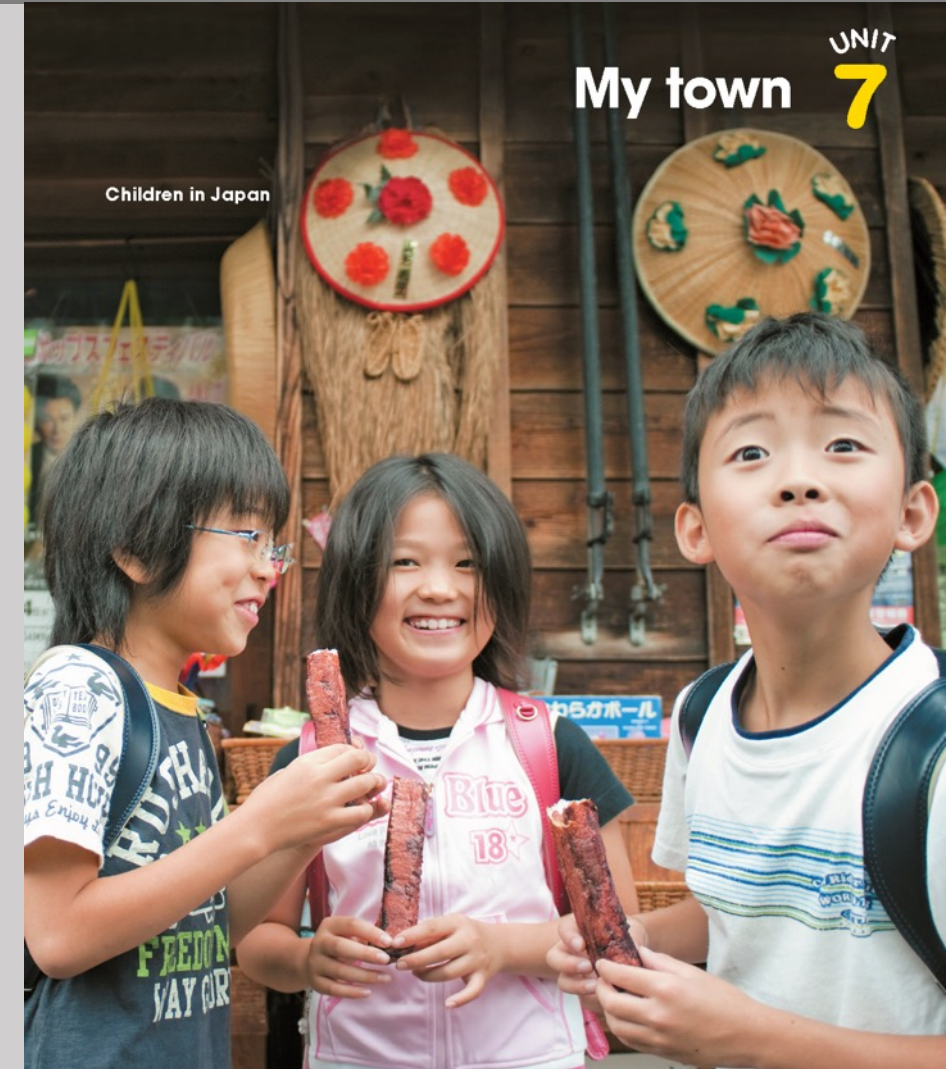
## **Why?**

- Allows students to see how tests work so gives them a better understanding of what's required
- Makes students feel not so daunted because they too can create a task
- Students feel empowered; not scared
- Students have fun by making tasks for their classmates



# Strategies: Summary

- Personalize
- Collaborate
- Reflect
- Help my friend
- Second chance
- Own it!



Look at the photo. What can you see?

# Approaches to assessing writing & speaking

- Challenges
- Example speaking criteria for Cambridge Young Learners exams

*Vocab and grammar | Pronunciation | Interaction*

- Example writing criteria for Cambridge Young Learners exams

*cohesion | sticking to task | understandable*

- Issues for young learners

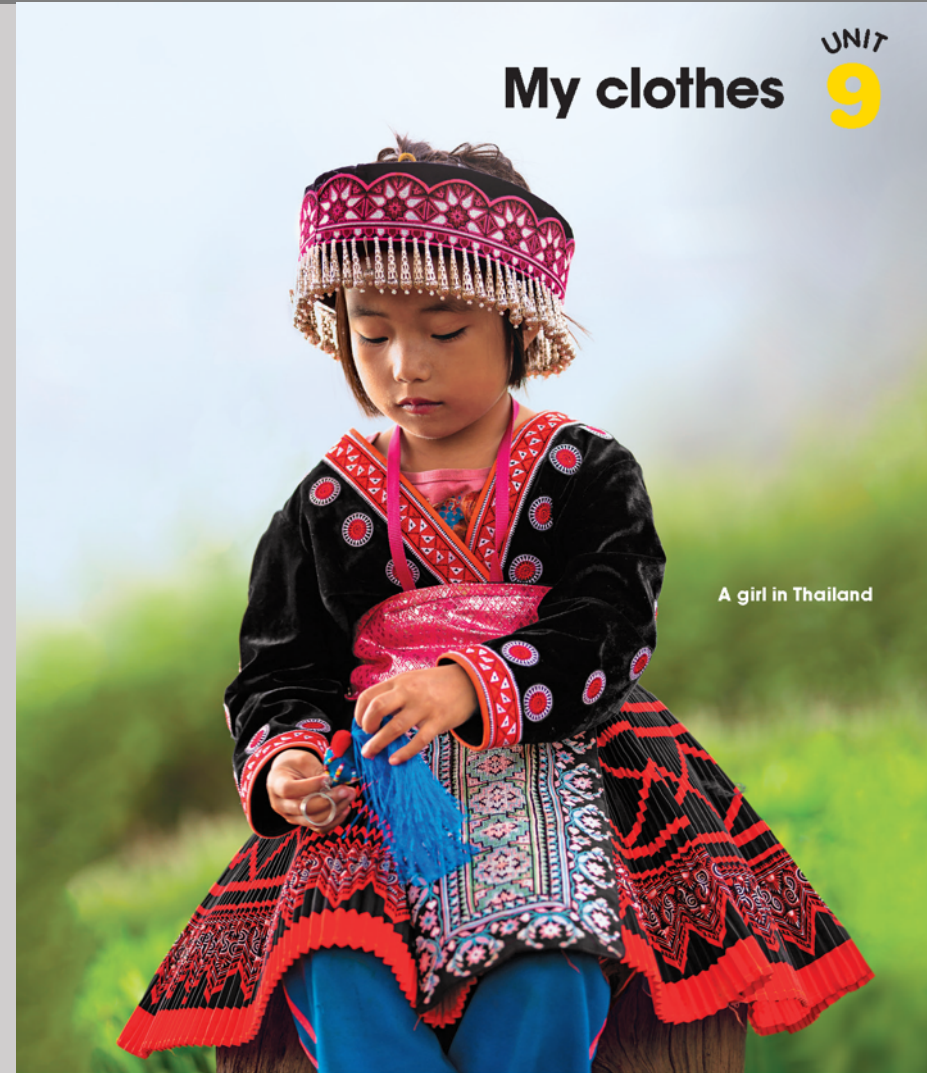
# Assessing writing & speaking

## Method

- Allow students to do a task then use a single aspect of assessment.
- Give students feedback; allow them to practice task again.
- For the next task, use a different single criterion.
- Towards the end of the course, start using all the criteria together to assess their performance.

My clothes

UNIT  
9



A girl in Thailand

Look at the photo. What can you see?



# Assessing speaking: example

**LESSON 1 Words**

**1 Listen and point.** TR: 101

  
beans

  
cheese

  
chicken

  
chips

  
egg

  
grapes

  
juice

  
mango

  
pear

  
sausage

**2 Listen and repeat.** TR: 102

**3 Say.**

Do you like chips? Yes, I do.



Focus on one aspect of the assessment. Listen and make notes of any problems and then go back over this with the class after the activity. Don't interrupt the flow of the activity.

Assess: vocabulary	
Excellent performance	uses all the required vocabulary; simple phrases; may make a few mistakes
Satisfactory performance	uses most of the required vocabulary; uses words and some phrases; makes some basic mistakes



# Monitoring ongoing progression

## How do you do this?

### Suggestions:

- Use observation for all skills
- Make sure assessment tasks are the same as usual class activities
- Monitoring must be regular
- Give oral feedback and/or progress notes, not scores



# Monitoring progression

Exercise references	Performance descriptors	Assessment activity 1	Remedial activity	Assessment Activity 2
READING				
Units 1 – 5, Ls 2 & 4	CAN understand simple sentences	Choose eight sentences from the units and write on the board or a worksheet. In pairs, students read and draw to illustrate understanding.	<b>True/False:</b> Write sentences on the board using the same structures with the topic of the class or students. Students in pairs, answer True or False.	After Unit 7, repeat Act 1 with different sentences from same units.

# Giving feedback

Student: (name)			
Student can	Progress 1 assessment	Feedback	Progress 2 assessment
understand simple sentences	Date: 13 Sep A B (C)	<i>problems understanding sentences with pronouns</i>	Date: 9 Dec A (B) C

# Summary

- Young learners and assessment
- Our aims as teachers in supporting students
- Strategies to help students feel relaxed and confident in formal exams
- How to assess speaking and writing
- Monitoring ongoing progression: formative assessment
- Giving feedback









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