

## Language skills

by Russell Whitehead

# EXAMS

**Overview:** These practice materials are designed to help you with Module 1: Part 1: Language skills. In these materials you will think about the four skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing in terms of subskills.

**Time:** 30–60 mins



### Think about

If your students aren't conscious of doing something in L1, then they will find it hard to think about doing it in L2. If you want to focus on reading for detail, for example, then start by discussing when they do this in L1 and why.



### Notes for teacher trainers

- Depending on the time available, you can expand and develop the considerations in a) and the idea of the first *Think about*. Give trainees a few questions related to this to discuss in groups and then whole class.
- You can also develop the idea of the *Think about* point about cooking, and extend this parallelism to other activities.
- Trainees should be encouraged to discuss their own English learning needs detail, so that they apply the subskills to their own abilities and needs.



### Think about

Most of the time we combine various subskills together. For example, in a typical phone call, we might speak with appropriate politeness, listen to specific information, make written notes, etc.



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**Stage 1: Considering**

a) Think about the following tasks. What language skills might you need to achieve them? Make some notes next to each task.

Task	Language skills
Writing a lesson plan	<i>brainstorming, note-taking</i>
Planning a holiday	
Marking students' homework	
Finding a phone number in a directory	
Phoning a parent	
Preparing the school newsletter	
Arranging to go to a restaurant with friends	
Attending a seminar	
Watching the news	
Reading a story aloud	
Reading the newspaper	

Now check the suggested answers.

**Stage 2: Experimenting**
**c) Reading subskills**

Use these words to complete the sentences.

scan      skimming      topic sentence

1. If we read a text quickly to get the general idea of what it is about, we call this \_\_\_\_\_ .
2. In order to read a text effectively, you need to be able to identify the \_\_\_\_\_ of each section or paragraph, as that contains the important information.
3. When you want to find out specific information from a text, you \_\_\_\_\_ it.

Now check your answers. When do you use these skills in your everyday life?

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**d) Listening subskills**

Match the two parts of each sentence together.

1. To deduce meaning from context is to guess what an unknown word...
2. To listen for gist or global understanding is to understand...
3. To infer mood is to decide what speakers feel about something from...

- A. ... how they speak rather than the exact words they use.
- B. ... means by using the situation and other words to help you understand.
- C. ... what the general meaning is.

Now check your answers.

**e) Writing subskills**

Use these words to complete the sentences.

coherence	edit	cohesive
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1. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to correct mistakes and make improvements to a piece of writing.
2. It's important to use \_\_\_\_\_ devices, for example conjunctions or lexical fields, to join a text together.
3. The ideas or arguments of a text should fit clearly and smoothly together, and this is called \_\_\_\_\_.

Now check your answers.

**f) Speaking subskills**

Can you fill in the missing letters to make words and complete these sentences?

1. If learners don't know the exact word or expression they need, they can p\_\_\_\_\_ to explain their meaning with other words.
2. If learners are making mistakes while focusing on fluency in a speaking activity, they will often not self-c\_\_\_\_\_.
3. In conversation, the process of speaking and then allowing another person to speak is called t\_\_\_\_ - t\_\_\_\_\_.

Now check your answers.

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g) Now try this part of a sample TKT exam task.

For questions 1-3, choose the correct word(s) to complete each statement.

1 Working out the overall meaning when reading is called \_\_\_\_\_.

- A inferring attitude
B note-taking
C reading for gist

2 Producing a new version of a text is called \_\_\_\_\_.

- A re-drafting
B evaluating
C proofreading

3 Reading and listening are called \_\_\_\_\_ skills.

- A receptive
B interactive
C productive

Now check your answers.

Think about

'I want to be better at cooking.' This is a general statement, and perhaps it's not very helpful.

However, statements like these can be more practical: 'I want to be better at using a knife for slicing,' or, 'I want to be able to mix flavours together better.'

So, what about the learner who says, 'I want to speak better English'?



Stage 3: Reflecting

Go through these materials again, and highlight the information that you found most useful or surprising. Write a short summary of what you have learnt about skills and subskills.

Dotted lines for writing a summary.

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**Set yourself this target**

Think about your English. Choose one of the subskills mentioned in these materials that you want to improve. Decide what you can do to improve it. Make doing this your target for the next month or so.

**Don't forget**

Practising each part improves the whole.



**Suggestion for independent learning**

To deepen your understanding of subskills, monitor your use of subskills in your L1 for the next week. Try to notice what subskills you are using in everything you do.

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## Answer key

### Stage 1 a) suggested answers

Task	Language skills
Writing a lesson plan	brainstorming, note-taking, editing
Planning a holiday	scanning, reading for specific information, note-taking
Marking students' homework	reading for gist, e.g. if looking at a story for a composition, or detail, e.g. if checking for correct answers to exercises
Finding a phone number in a directory	scanning, reading for specific information
Phoning a parent	turn-taking, paraphrasing, inferring attitude/feeling/mood, listening for detail
Preparing the school newsletter	planning, drafting, editing, proofreading
Arranging to go to a restaurant with friends	turn-taking, listening for specific information
Attending a seminar	note-taking, listening for gist, listening for detail
Watching the news	fluency, understanding intonation
Reading a story aloud	using appropriate intonation, fluency
Reading the newspaper	skimming for general interest, and also for specific information in certain stories that are particularly relevant to you

### Stage 2 c) answers

1. skimming
2. topic sentence
3. scan

### Stage 2 e) answers

1. edit
2. cohesive
3. coherence

### Stage 2 d) answers

1. B
2. C
3. A

### Stage 2 f) answers

1. paraphrase
2. correct
3. turn-taking

### Stage 2 g) answers

1. C

This is the correct answer. Attitude is not the overall meaning, and note-taking is not the same as working out.

2. A

This is the correct answer. A draft is a version. You might evaluate first, in order to decide what changes you will make in the re-drafting process. Proofreading is making small checks and changes to spelling etc.

3. A

This is the correct answer. B and C are true of many types of speaking and writing.