

# Teaching mixed ability IELTS classes: strategies, approaches & activities

Jo Tomlinson and Fiona Aish

# Today we will...

- ... discuss the challenges of mixed ability IELTS classes
- ... explore some potential solutions
- ... apply our ideas to materials evaluation & planning

## *Discussion 1: What is your context like?*

- Describe a typical IELTS class in your institution.
- Do you have mixed ability IELTS classes? Why? Why not?
- What challenges do mixed ability IELTS classes present?

*1. Different levels of language, skills & test knowledge bring challenges.*

## *Challenges of mixed ability IELTS classes*

Maintaining motivation

Managing students' expectations

Planning lessons and courses

Responding to students' individual needs

Choosing and writing materials

Ensuring students all make progress

---

## *Discussion 2: How do you manage?*

- What do you find most difficult with mixed ability IELTS classes?
- What strategies/ approaches do you have for specific difficulties?
- What activities do you use that improve your teaching?
- Which course books/ materials work best for this type of class?

*2. Planning, classroom management & activities can address these challenges.*

## *Planning – The flipped classroom*

**Definition:** Students are introduced to some of the material before class then practice, discuss and activate the material during class time.

**Aim:** to give students time to assimilate the material at their own pace and provide a more active learning experience in the class.



# *Benefits of flipped learning*

Low level students	High level students	Teachers
Allows sts to spend lots of time on language.	Can focus on gaining a deeper understanding.	Can give specific preparation tasks to different students.
Can improve confidence and motivation.	Can help students push themselves.	Enables a more productive use of class time.
Can raise awareness of level and work required to improve.	Can reduce dissatisfaction with being in a mixed ability class.	Helps tailor specific support to students.
Can encourage class participation.	Gives sts more control.	Promotes independent learning.

# *Classroom management*

Student buddies/ teams of the same level

Strong + strong students together - focus on accuracy

Strong + weak students together – if you know it, teach others

Pair sts with complementary skills for specific tasks

Nominate sts/ pairs to explain specific answers

Writing feedback – ‘Teacher please check the following 3 areas...’

Sts peer assess each other’s work using the public criteria for Sp and Wr

# Reflection & goal setting

## Reflection questions:

- What did I learn about my ability to do ....?
- Who helped me today?
- Who did I help?
- What test technique did I use today which was useful?
- What did I do today which was not helpful?
- What tips would I give other students?

## Setting goals for different levels:

- What language do I want to learn from today?
- Make a plan to improve skills e.g. scanning, reading speed.
- Analyse wrong answers.
- Do the task again at home and notice the difference.
- Record speaking tasks every day.
- Rewrite writing tasks with corrections/ improvements.

# *Activities for mixed ability IELTS classes*

Strong sts: explain correct/ incorrect answers for receptive skills  
collaborate on writing tasks  
create useful vocab list from text & audioscript  
use more error correction

Weak sts: use templates for writing & speaking tasks  
check audioscript before feedback on listening tasks  
reduce word limit on writing tasks & time on speaking tasks

General: in pairs, sts write tasks for each other  
in pairs/ groups sts create a 'test quiz' & test each other

*3. Evaluating and tweaking materials can help us teach mixed ability IELTS classes.*

# *Suggestions for adapting materials*

## **Activities:**

- Brainstorm zoo based vocabulary (done as preparation)
- Teach/ peer teach pronunciation of key words – encouraging, prey, exhibition, penguin, building
- Predict type of answer for each space and possibilities
- Do Ex 4 as a whole class directing specific Qs to specific sts
- Ask sts to explain exam advice to each other and add more tips
- Different pairs write audioscript for each question type then explain how they wrote it and why

*Material: Complete IELTS, Brook-Hart & Jakeman, p.50 Listening*

## *Discussion 4: How could you use this material?*

Think about:

- The flipped classroom approach
- Classroom management strategies – pairings & groupings, reflection questions & goal setting
- Tweaking, adapting & supplementing the material

Any questions?

Thanks for listening

[www.facebook.com/TargetEnglishUK](http://www.facebook.com/TargetEnglishUK)

[twitter.com/TargetEnglishUK](https://twitter.com/TargetEnglishUK)

[jo@target-english.co.uk](mailto:jo@target-english.co.uk)

[fiona@target-english.co.uk](mailto:fiona@target-english.co.uk)