AS and A level Languages other than English: Introduction to the Teaching Syllabus

This Teaching Syllabus is applicable, in a general sense, to all Languages other than English. For this reason there are no specific examples or resources for particular languages.

Patterns of entry

There are a number of possible patterns of entry to this syllabus. Some students may complete the AS components in a one-year course, and not proceed any further. Other students will take all four components in the A level exam after a two-year course.

Structure of this Teaching Syllabus

Because of varied patterns of entry, the five Units of this teaching syllabus may be covered as follows:
▪ For AS after one year, each Unit represents approximately half a term of study.
▪ For A level after 2 years, each Unit represents one term of study. In this case, an extension to each Unit is provided to show how the fourth component (Texts) might be incorporated into the teaching sequence.

Recommended Prior Knowledge GCSE/IGCSE/O level at minimum Grade C in the appropriate language.

General Resources As this syllabus is not language specific, the resources recommended are concerned with aspects of language learning in general.

▪ CILT (Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research) www.cilt.org.uk
▪ QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) www.qca.org.uk
▪ BBC (offers news broadcasts in many languages) www.bbc.co.uk/education
▪ Channel 4 Learning www.4learning .co.uk
▪ CBIET (Central Bureau for International Education and Training) www.centralbureau.org.uk
▪ Lingu@net gives access to many language teaching sites, either on www.linguanet.org.uk or www.linguanet-europa.org
▪ ALL (Association for Language Learning) www.ALL-languages.org.uk
▪ Association for Language Awareness www.ndirect.co.uk/~lexical/
▪ European Schoolbooks Ltd (UK agents for many foreign publishers) www.eurobooks.co.uk
▪ Grant & Cutler (UK's largest foreign language bookseller) www.grant-c.demon.co.uk/home.htm

UNITS

1	▪ Introduction to the AS course. Bridging Unit to move on from GCSE/IGCSE/O level. Establishing starting points and setting targets. Focus on a limited range of topics to establish links with GCSE/IGCSE/O Level. ▪ Topic focus **1** <u>Human relationships</u> (Family; generation gap; young people) but going beyond GCSE/IGCSE/O level in terms of lexis and grammar. Inclusion of 'fun' activities to establish the right atmosphere. ▪ Text focus: sequential and descriptive texts. ▪ Skills focus: work to extend all skills, reading, listening, speaking and writing.
2	▪ Topic focus **2** <u>Daily life</u> (Patterns of daily life; urban and rural life; food and drink; health and fitness; the media; religion and belief; contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken). ▪ Text focus: sequential and descriptive texts; start on informative/explanatory texts. ▪ Integrated Skills development. ▪ For A level Component 4: approaches to more extensive reading.
3	▪ Topic focus **3** <u>Work and leisure</u> (Equality of opportunity; employment and unemployment; sport; free-time activities; travel and tourism; education, contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken). ▪ Text focus: informative/explanatory texts. ▪ Integrated Skills development. ▪ For A level Component 4: reading the first set text; forms of writing about literature.
4	▪ Topic focus **4** <u>International issues</u> (War and peace; problems of the developing world; ethnic, religious, ideological conflicts; contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken). ▪ Text focus: informative/explanatory texts; start on argumentative/persuasive texts. ▪ Integrated skills development. ▪ For A level Component 4: reading set texts 2 and 3; writing context questions and literary essays.
5	▪ Topic focus **5** <u>Environmental and scientific</u> issues (Conservation; pollution; scientific and medical advances; technological innovation; contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken). ▪ Text focus: past examination texts. ▪ Integrated Skills development. ▪ For A level Component 4: further work on literary essays.

TEACHING ORDER

Unit 1 must be covered first. It is essential to establish a bridge to skills developed at GCSE/IGCSE/O level and to provide a platform for subsequent progression. In subsequent Units, the progression of skills and text difficulty must be maintained, but the suggestions for sequencing the Topics may be varied. There is no hard and fast order in which topics should be covered. The Rationale below explains the thinking behind the approach to Skills, Texts and Topics.

Rationale of this Teaching Syllabus

The examination syllabus and the teaching syllabus are both derived from a view of language teaching at the advanced level which is based upon the use of authentic texts organised according to topics and allowing a progression in skills and knowledge. So that the assumptions about method and approach in the Teaching Units may be appreciated and applied, the rationale of the teaching syllabus has been set out at some length in this Introduction. Subsequently, in the presentation of the Units, reference is made back to the relevant section of the Introduction.

1   Weighting of skills at AS and A Levels

In the syllabus, Components 1, 2 and 3 are common to both AS and A levels. But it is important to note the different standard of performance required for gaining particular grades. The syllabus states: "Where common components are used for two qualifications (for example A level and AS) the grading of candidates will be carried out separately". Note that in some languages, the speaking test is optional.

Also significant in planning the course is the different weighting of AS and A level Components in fulfilling the Assessment Objectives. This weighting affects the time allocated to the different components, because of the importance of Component 4 (Texts) in the A level weighting.

There are three Assessment Objectives which may be summarized as follows:

- Understand and respond to written texts in the target language (= Reading Comprehension)
- Manipulate the target language in spoken and written forms (= Quality of Language)
- Select and present information in the target language, organise arguments and ideas logically (= Knowledge and Presentation)

The weighting of the Assessment Objectives as a proportion of each examination is therefore as follows:

AS

	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Totals
Knowledge & organisation	6%		8%	14%
Quality of Language	24%	14%	12%	50%
Reading Comprehension		36%		36%
Totals	30%	50%	20%	100%

A Level

	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4	Totals
Knowledge & organisation	4%		6%	30%	40%
Quality of Language	16%	10%	9%		35%
Reading Comprehension		25%			25%
Totals	20%	35%	15%	30%	100%

NB In some languages**,** the Speaking test is optional and the weightings are therefore different.

2   Skills development

Skills development is progressive and sequential. The incline from GCSE/IGCSE/O level to AS/A level requires steady progression in the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the summary of Unit content above, the references to skills development have been left very general. More specific suggestions for progression are given in the detailed content for teaching units and in the remainder of this Introduction.

The examination syllabus is based on the assumption that skills are integrated, i.e. Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing. Although there is not an examination component devoted to listening only, the skill of listening is necessarily part of the Speaking component (optional in some languages). Not only are marks awarded in the Speaking test for Comprehension, but it is clear that conversations can only take place if both listening and speaking skills are involved. It is also important to bear in mind that an examination syllabus is not the same as a teaching syllabus. Therefore, listening will be a significant skill in the teaching programme even if not extensively tested in the examination. Component 2 of the examination closely associates reading and writing, where writing is seen as a product of reading comprehension. Any teaching syllabus must plan for the skills also to be integrated within the units of the teaching programme.

3   Text difficulty

Skills represent one significant element of progression. The other is text difficulty and the acquisition of vocabulary and structures. Current approaches to teaching and examining languages take authentic texts as a basis. These texts are then exploited in a variety of ways. Authentic texts are written for native speakers of the language and do not select vocabulary and structures to fit the student. This means that grammatical content may be quite random. It is clear, however, that not all text-types use the same grammatical points. Weather forecasts use the future tense; recipes use the imperative. The grammar of a text is, in part, a function of the text. To arrive at a position where students can tackle the texts set in the examination, we can suggest a progression of text-types so that a sequence of increasing difficulty is established.

The suggested sequence below is not language-specific, and a more precise list could be drawn up with language-specific examples. It is also true that this suggested classification is an over-simplification. Many texts will combine elements of two or more types. However, this framework is useful as a guide, and it will be clear that examination texts generally fall into categories (c) and (d).

(a)   Sequential texts. Here events follow in chronological order and indications of time may be frequent ("Later..next…afterwards…soon…then.." etc.). Texts are factual, with little description. Sentences are largely simple, with a limited range of subordinate clauses. Tense is consistent, e.g. present or narrative past.

(b)   Descriptive texts may often be in the present tense or a descriptive past tense. Connectors are predominantly "and…but…" etc. Vocabulary is mainly concrete but with some abstract items. Adjectives are an important feature. There are subordinate clauses, especially relative clauses (or equivalent descriptive features).

(c)   Informative and explanatory texts may explain, guide, offer advice or expound. The predominant tenses are present and future, though past tenses may be used to explain the background to the situation. Vocabulary is more abstract, there is more subordination and the connectors are logical in nature (therefore….and so…nevertheless…despite…etc).

(d)   Argumentative and persuasive texts seek to present pros and cons, to argue a case, to convince the reader about a given state of affairs. Abstract vocabulary is predominant as is subordination. Connectors are logical and there may be rhetorical features, such as metaphor.

In addition to these characteristics of texts, an important consideration is length of text. The total of the two texts to be read in Component 2 of the examination is 750 words. An element of progression suggested in the Teaching Units is the build-up in length so that Unit 5 is dealing with texts of examination length.

4   Topic focus

(a)   Suggestions for the content of Units are based on a general idea of the increasing difficulty of topics, using criteria such as range and abstraction of vocabulary, the conceptual difficulty of more abstract subject matter, the likely range of grammatical structures etc. However, it is not always the case that topic material is closely linked to text difficulty. A teacher might well find, for example, that an accessible text on an environmental subject is appropriate at an earlier stage of the course.

(b)   Texts related to the topic area called "Contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken" might occur at any stage in the course, depending on the level of linguistic difficulty. The teacher needs the chance to bring in material which is specific to a particular culture or which may be an unpredictable subject of immediate and topical interest. The possibility of touching on this topic area is therefore included in each Unit.

(c)   The sequence of topics after Unit 1 is, therefore, just a suggestion. Other factors will govern the choice of topics to be covered, for example, available materials, coursebook progression etc.

All textual material used in the examination is drawn from the topic areas listed in the syllabus. The long list of 27 topic areas might well appear daunting to teachers aiming to present students for the AS examination after one year of study, so we need to be clear about the place of topics in the course and their relationship to the examination. Topics provide a useful basis for an integrated approach to important themes as they affect the individual and society. They offer a way of organising information and a principle for selecting materials. It is of course valuable for students to have some acquaintance with specialist vocabulary in areas such as environment or technological innovation. But from the wide range of texts under any given topic heading, it is impossible to predict the specific theme that might be chosen as an examination text.

The most important aim of any teaching syllabus is to ensure that linguistic skills are developed which allow students to deal confidently with texts, whatever the topic, and to write cogently and accurately when responding to texts.

Choice of topics within the course will usually be dictated by the coursebook chosen. This teaching syllabus does not recommend any one coursebook, and suggests the following general approach.

5   Grouping of topics by broad theme

The list of topics in the syllabus can be grouped within related broad themes. During the period of the AS or A level course, these groups can be explored, even if briefly, and then revisited to cover a new sub-topic, to provide a different angle or explore a related area of vocabulary in more depth.

(a)   Human relationships
         Family; generation gap; young people; contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken.

(b) Daily life
Patterns of daily life; urban and rural life; food and drink; health and fitness; the media; religion and belief; law and order; contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken.

(c) Work and leisure
Equality of opportunity; employment and unemployment; sport; free-time activities; travel and tourism; cultural life/heritage; contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken.

(d) International issues
War and peace; problems of the developing world; ethnic, religious and ideological conflicts; contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken.

(e) Environmental and scientific issues
Conservation; pollution; scientific and medical advances; technological innovation; contemporary aspects of the country/countries where the language is spoken.

6   Teaching methods

The advice set out in the following summary of Units will best be understood within the context of the particular view of advanced level language teaching which underlies the suggestions. That approach may be set out in five stages of teaching, as follows:

Stage 1 Encounter with the text

When embarking on a new topic, the students first encounter a text focused on an aspect of the topic being studied.

The teacher's role is to introduce the theme, raising interest and curiosity to know more. It is important to make links to students' own knowledge and experience so that they are engaged with the subject matter. The teacher introduces new lexis and structures in this first phase to give some signposts to the language needed. This initial stimulus may be a reading or a listening text.

Possible varieties of text include: Article
                                            Cartoon
                                            Literary extract
                                            Radio item
                                            Video

Website
Internet news item

At this point, and before discussing the sequence of teaching any further, it may be helpful to explore briefly the nature of reading and listening comprehension.

<u>What exactly is reading comprehension?</u>

This seems a rather obvious question to ask, but in fact, reading comprehension can operate at several levels. It might mean understanding individual words or it might extend to larger units such as short phrases, sentences and, finally, a grasp of the whole text. Current exam papers set out to test reading comprehension at each of these levels, so there are tasks which focus on words and other exercises which test comprehension of longer sequences.

To test comprehension of the more advanced reading skills, questions can be set which ask for comparison and evaluation of differing approaches to the theme. So the answer to the question, "What is reading comprehension?" is linked to another question "How is reading comprehension tested?", and we might list quite a number of different activities which are involved in the process of testing reading comprehension in a language. Some of those activities are listed below. Not all these activities are represented in every examination paper, but this is the sort of thinking that lies behind the tasks that examiners may set, whether in non-verbal forms or requiring more extended written answers.

Locate   information already present in the text (e.g. by answering specific questions).
             Further advice about answering this type of question is given later in Stage 5 Assessment.

Reorganise   information already present in the text (e.g. by making a summary).

Compare   information drawn from different parts of a text or from two texts.

Infer   information not stated explicitly in the text but implicit in the way the information in the text is presented.

Appreciate   or give an opinion on views presented in the text.

<u>What exactly is listening comprehension?</u>

Listening comprehension does not form part of the CIE AS/A Level examination, but is an important element in teaching a language course and in presenting new material. Listening comprehension requires us to decode information using phonological, lexical and grammatical clues. It is this complexity of response, allied to the fleeting nature of the spoken word, which makes listening comprehension so difficult.

Learning to listen is a continuous process of the listener attempting to increase his/her capacity to interpret and respond to language events. In classroom approaches, controlling the level of difficulty is important to prevent students from being demoralised. Students should be encouraged to develop their capacity for interpreting a text by carrying out some of the following processes:

- Deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words

- Infer information not explicitly stated

- Recognise indicators for introducing an idea, changing topic, emphasis, clarification, expressing a contrary view

- Construct the main idea or theme in a stretch of discourse and distinguish the main point from supporting details

- Predict subsequent parts of the text

- Identify elements in the text that can help to recognise a pattern of organisation

Stage 2 Collecting information and language

This stage involves coming to terms with the text through a graded sequence of tasks, e.g.

> Comprehension questions (oral and written)
> Expand plans and outlines
> Fill in details of summary
> Incomplete sentences
> Gapped texts
> Ordering, tabulating and classifying information
> True/false and multiple choice tasks
> Find equivalents in English or some other language
> Find words equivalent to definitions
> Find synonyms

In a general syllabus of this kind it is, of course, not possible to give examples of these tasks for every language in which CIE sets examinations. However, as illustrative material, an English text with a variety of tasks is given.

Some of these tasks are best conducted by the teacher (e.g. oral questions and answers on the text). But the process of "discovering" the text may be carried out largely by the student working alone or with a partner. This is a stage of student autonomy, where students may set their own pace of learning, make use

of dictionaries and other reference materials on an individual basis and draw their own conclusions. The tasks are set and guided by the teacher or coursebook, but there is no need at this stage for systematic direction of the discovery process by the teacher. Students need to discover the text in their own time, and the teaching process works best at an individual level.

Stage 3 Practising the language

This stage may use more formal drills and exercises to form a bridge between comprehension and production. New material is practised in targeted tasks aiming to clarify the grammar and use new structures and vocabulary. This is where methods which some might consider 'old-fashioned' have a place in fixing new knowledge: short passages for translation and re-translation, dictation, learning by heart and formal grammatical practice, such as inserting correct endings or practising word order.

The type of task may be summarized in the list below. For exemplar material, see the English text and tasks.

Sentence and phrase building
Partial or total reconstruction of text
Grammatical practice
Pattern drills
Sentence translation and re-translation
Manipulating sentence structures

Stage 4 Integrating the language

Now the knowledge gained is used for productive work. Students are encouraged to apply the information "discovered" and the formal elements practised. They may become more independent and adventurous, and the productive skills of Speaking and Writing take precedence (see notes below).

Summary (oral and written)
Note-taking
Paragraph writing
Expansion from notes to text or from notes to oral presentation
Change form, e.g. dialogue to narrative
Personal reaction – more extended writing, discussion of oral topic

Productive Skills – Speaking and Writing

The tests in the oral examination are topic presentation and general conversation. The pattern of progression which has been presented here would generate more structured speaking practice in Stage 3 (Practising the Language), practising new grammatical structures or new topic vocabulary. All current coursebooks suggest pairs activities and other tasks for developing fluency and accuracy. Students are then guided towards Stage 4 (Integrating the Language) where they can bring together their knowledge of the topic and the language 'discovered' earlier to develop presentations and expressions of a point of view.

The process for writing is similar. Stage 3 gives the chance to practise new material in targeted tasks aiming to clarify the grammar and use new structures and vocabulary. In Stage 4, working away from the text, students will develop skills of continuous extended writing, as in a summary or an essay. For extended writing it is important to develop an approach to the writing process. In any piece of writing outside an examination, an author knows his/her audience, the purpose of the task and the level of formality to adopt. It will also be normal to plan and draft a document before editing and redrafting a final version. This same process can be followed in the preparation for writing tasks in the language, Skills can be developed in sequence, starting by making notes on a set topic, then planning sections and paragraphs, writing a first draft for discussion, and finally editing, checking and rewriting as necessary.

Stage 5 Assessment

It is important to note that assessment is actually taking place throughout the sequence outlined above. Teachers will note that certain examination tasks feature in Stage 2 (e.g. finding synonyms) or Stage 3 (e.g. manipulating sentence structures). The aim at the end of each Unit will be to give practice at examination-style tasks, but at the students' current level of progress.

A particular issue to be addressed in assessment was mentioned earlier in the section on Reading Comprehension. Questions requiring candidates to locate a piece of information are a common style of testing comprehension. Such questions are often answered with a direct quote lifted from the text. Does such an answer indicate merely the capacity to locate the answer or does it offer genuine comprehension? The problem for the examiner is simply stated: how much quoting from the text is allowed if the marks are to be awarded? It is not sufficient to tell candidates to use their own words. There are words in the text which are the only words possible for certain answers, unless one was to require an impossible exercise in finding synonyms. So one must expect a certain necessary and unavoidable lifting of items from the text. If, therefore, key words must be allowed, but not whole sentences quoted, this suggests that the examiner is looking for two fundamental elements in a correct answer: (i) locating the correct bit of the text; (ii) manipulating that bit of text so that it is not a direct quotation. The examiner must work on the assumption that an ability to manipulate the text in some way is sufficient to indicate comprehension.

Therefore, to gain marks in the assessment stage and in the examination, the candidate must show:
either: some ability to manipulate the linguistic material of the text (even quite small changes will usually show that the candidate can handle the ideas as well as the language)
or: some explanation, by adding to or extending the quoted material.

7 Types of grammar practice – from accuracy to fluency

Parallel to the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, students need to develop their knowledge of grammar and their ability to manipulate the grammar of the language.

In the teaching Units, the following sequence will be referred to. It begins with raising awareness of grammatical features and develops through formal practice to free use of new structures in written work (adapted from Ur, P. (1996), *A Course in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press).

Type 1: Awareness

Learners are introduced to the structure and are then given opportunities to encounter it in a text, and complete a task that focuses their attention on its form and/or meaning.

Example: Learners are given extracts from newspaper articles and asked to find and underline all the examples of the past tense that they can find.

Type 2: Controlled drills

Learners produce examples of the structure: these examples are predetermined by the teacher or textbook, and have to conform to very clear, closed-ended cues.

Example: Write or say statements about John, modelled on the following example:
John drinks tea but he doesn't drink coffee.
(a) like: ice cream/cake   (b) speak: English/Italian   (c) enjoy: playing football/playing chess

Type 3: Meaningful drills

Again the responses are very controlled, but learners can make a limited choice of vocabulary.

Example: To practise forms of the present simple tense:
Choose someone you know very well, and write down their name. Now compose true statements about them according to the following model:
He/She likes ice cream OR He/She doesn't like ice cream.
(a) enjoy: playing tennis   (b) drink: wine   (c) speak: Polish

Type 4: Guided, meaningful practice

Learners form sentences of their own according to a set pattern, but exactly what vocabulary they use is up to them.

Example: Practising conditional clauses, learners are given the cue: 'If I had a million dollars', and are asked to suggest, in speech or writing, what they would do.

Type 5: (Structure-based) free sentence composition

Learners are provided with a visual or situational cue, and invited to compose their own responses; they are directed to use the structure.

Example: A picture showing a number of people doing different things is shown to the class; they describe it using the appropriate tense.

Type 6: (Structure-based) discourse composition

Learners hold a discussion or write a passage according to a given task; they are directed to use at least some examples of the structure within the discourse.

Example: The class is given a dilemma ('You have seen a good friend cheating in an important test') and asked to recommend a solution. They are directed to include modals (might, should, must, can, could, etc.) in their speech/writing.

Type 7: Free discourse

As in Type 6, but the learners are given no specific direction to use the structure; however, the task is such that instances of it are likely to appear.

Example: As in Type 6, but without the final direction.

8   Teaching Texts in the Target Language (to support the teaching of texts in Component 4 of A level)

Aims in teaching literary texts

- Literature as a language resource (develop extensive reading skills; possibilities for oral and creative work)
- Literature as a cultural resource

- Develop personal responses to literary texts

Literature in the context of communicative language teaching

- Possibilities for co-operative learning (pair work; group work)
- Learner-centred activities (learners express own understanding, choose own topics)
- Real communication (express opinions; authenticity of task)
- Emphasis on fluency (spoken and written) rather than formal accuracy

Choice of text – factors affecting teacher's choice

- Length of book
- Difficulty of language
- Teacher's own enthusiasm for the text

- Accessibility of ideas to students
- Possible examination questions which might be set

Approaches to texts – Methodology Stage 1

(a)   Preparatory phase

Initial chat intended to introduce information about the book, themes, author, period, but drawing on student observations

(b)   Study skills – distinguishing between extensive and intensive reading:

Extensive reading

grasp general sense, neglect details
concentrate on essential language
can summarize main elements of text
anticipate text meaning

Intensive reading

complete understanding of detail
all language details studied
focus on detail of text
analyse text meaning

(c)   Study skills – brainstorming of key vocabulary; use of dictionary and reference works.

(d) Reading as an individual activity

Reading should be seen as an individual activity, not as reading out aloud or translating round the class. But, given the difficulty of the text, the student needs support in the early stages. This support can take the form of advice on study skills (see above) or support with language and comprehension problems during reading.

Approaches to texts – Methodology Stage 2

(a) Start debate. Aim at reader response and identification with characters and themes

(b) Activities to develop and encourage personal responses to literary texts; to explore themes and recreate a text through interactive working approaches, as in the following suggested oral and written tasks:

- A report retells an episode from a different point of view
- A diary or journal is written from a different point of view
- A letter from one character to another expresses surprise, doubt etc.
- The inner thoughts of a central character – how does she feel? What is going through her mind?
- Role-play a key scene
- Prepare questions for an interview with the author