

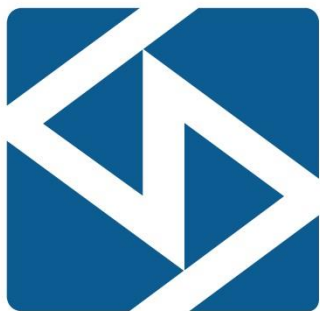
MARCH - APRIL 2018

# ELTANNEWSLETTER

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# ELTA Newsletter

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## Editorial March – April 2018

It is that time of the season, things are slowly wrapping up, the sun is getting stronger and stronger and our pupils and students are getting more and more impatient for the summer break to begin. And if we are to be honest as teachers, we are also looking forward to the end of the school year. Before you fully start to enjoy your well-deserved rest, we hope you will take a look at this issue of the Newsletter and that you will find many useful articles.

As our **Feature** we decided to go with an article on a burning topic for this time of year, if you are a high school teacher, or if you teach in a private language school, and some of your students wish to study a language at a philological faculty. For this purpose, **Milica Vitaz** interviewed several teachers and language instructors from the Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University. They provided a plethora of tips and tricks on how to handle and survive this most important test in your students' lives so far: the entrance exam.

The 16th ELTA Serbia Conference also wrapped up, and it was a memorable one. We are proud to present to you **A Day in the Life of** one of the plenary speakers, **Daniel Xerri**. The interview was done by one of our dedicated editors, **Vicky Papageorgiou**. We are sure you will be inspired by the versatile interests of Mr. Xerri and enlightened by his advice.

In this issue's **ELT Flash** read how the amazing students of the Uižce Grammar School and their teacher **Svetlana Gravrilović** decided to celebrate Frankenstein's birthday!

In our **First Aid Kit** you will encounter a fun and engaging activity written by a young teacher, **Krsto Grujić**. This is a perfect way to enjoy those last classes with your students, when the grades have been sorted out, but as teachers you feel there is still room for some studying.

The **Bookreview** of a wonderfully useful book written by Shelly Sanchez, entitled *Hacking Digital Learning Strategies*, was written by **Vicky Papageorgiou**. Read about the 10 missions the author goes on with her students, and then decide whether you are ready to, by reading the book, follow in her footsteps, and then apply what you have discovered. We hope you do!

In our **Students' Corner** you will see the continuation of the issue's topic, the faculty entrance exam, but this time from the perspective of the students who have taken and passed the exam. Compared to the advice of the professionals in the **Feature Article**, students tend to be more concerned with how one should relax and go through this experience with the least amount of stress. Their opinions and experiences were collected by **Milica Vitaz**.

**The Borrowed from** section of this issue deals with the topic of writing the materials for ELT, and what the principles for doing this are. This data comes from **Katherine Bilsborough**.

We wish to use this opportunity to present to you the new members of our team. We are pleased to say that a number of people were willing to join in and share the workload with the rest of us, which is much appreciated. Joining us from the next issue are: **Olivera Ilić, Nevena Stoilkov, Aleksandra Jevtović, Jana Živanović** and **Stevan Mijomanović**. Welcome!

As always, we are grateful to the contributors and readers of our Newsletter. One of the most ardent contributors, **Svetlana Gavrilović**, never ceases to impress us with the work that she does with her students, and with the time and effort she gives to sharing her experiences with us. Thank you Svetlana!

We would very much appreciate it if you could send us your articles and texts at [newsletter.elta@gmail.com](mailto:newsletter.elta@gmail.com)

From the **Editorial Team**

# **Tackling the Entrance Exam – Advice Given by Teachers**

**Milica Vitaz, PhD, Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University**

**Keywords:** entrance exam, advice, teachers, Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University, English language

This article is aimed at the students who are taking the entrance exam at a philological faculty. It is written by teachers, language instructors and lecturers at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade, but we believe it will be useful for candidates who wish to enroll at other faculties as well. Although the entrance exams may slightly differ at different faculties and universities, there are a lot of aspects which are similar.

## **Here is what the teachers have to say about the entrance exam:**

The period of entrance exam preparation is usually a stressful time for high school graduates. Taking into consideration the amount of obligations they are facing towards the end of their fourth year, the time high school graduates have left to prepare for the desired faculty and, by extension, the desired profession is relatively short. Therefore, the students need to plan their preparation carefully and strive to cover all important points of the academic field they aim to pursue; by the time they take their entrance exam, they are expected to have gained a good command of the academic field they will be tested in. Bearing in mind the importance of the test to the students taking it and the requirements that the test needs to fulfill, test developers are similarly faced with a challenging task. When it comes to the entrance exam at the Faculty of Philology, students who decide to enroll in departments other than the department for English Language and Literature, and who wish to take an English language test, need to take a test containing two parts: a cloze test and a grammar and vocabulary test. The test is designed to classify examinees according to their level of knowledge of English and to prepare them for the educational context of the Faculty of Philology.

Choosing the text for the cloze test, creating test items and balancing their difficulty have proved to be the most challenging tasks. Test developers need to make sure all relevant English language grammar and vocabulary units are tested in 40 standard multiple-choice items.

Selecting the text for the cloze test:

The text is usually an excerpt from a literary text written by a native English-speaking author; the text is further adapted to suit the purpose of the test. The text needs to be of standard length and able to provide 20 relevant grammar and vocabulary items that can be tested, together with clear clues to correct answers within the text. Given that the correct grammar and vocabulary items need to be inferred from the context, the entire excerpt must be clear to examinees, and free from all elements that might hinder comprehension. To that end, test developers usually tend to select a text with an easy-to-follow storyline that usually provides an account of a single event or several related events - which typically yields multiple grammar units relevant for the entrance exam test, such as: various tenses, reported speech, the passive voice, conditionals, subject-verb agreement and modal verbs, just to name a few. The process of text adaptation means adjusting the difficulty of the items to be tested, so that both less demanding and more difficult grammar and vocabulary items are represented.

A. A.

#### PREPARING FOR THE TEST

While preparing for the entrance exam, it is best to use various grammar books and handbooks because different approaches to different grammar and vocabulary issues lead to overcoming obstacles in learning. When you are making use of the internet, i.e. online sources, be very careful about the websites you visit - not all of them are legitimate English-learning websites. When visiting forums, have a careful look at who those forums are for. When you find a piece of information on such a website, double-check it in an online dictionary or similar source.

To prepare for the reading comprehension test, it is best to read books or short stories in English. If you prefer different reading materials, online newspaper articles are also good to practice with. Other online sources - websites, forums, social media and the like are of no use because you need longer texts which form a coherent whole. This type of exercise will also be useful for essay writing, because you will get a sense of the flow of a text.

To prepare for the listening comprehension test, it is best to listen to news in English or various podcasts. If you are able to obtain them, audio books in English will be useful too.

## DOING THE TEST

### GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY

When completing multiple-choice grammar and vocabulary items, it is of crucial importance to read each one very carefully. The clues to the correct answer could be located before or after each gap, so it is important to read the entire sentence/question through first. If it appears to you that two answers might be correct, read the item a few more times until you are able to eliminate any remaining doubts and choose just one. If the answers offered have more than one component, try to eliminate as many as you can on both "sides" of the task.

### LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Taking into consideration that this type of exercise is not frequently done in class, it is of utmost importance not to panic. Wherever you are sitting in the classroom, you will be able to hear the recording clearly. For this part of the entrance exam, it is of crucial importance not to let your thoughts wander, because you will not be listening carefully. It is very important to concentrate only on the text you are hearing and to listen to the instructions very carefully.

### READING COMPREHENSION

The best way to start completing a reading comprehension test is by reading it through at least twice. The first time should be quick, just to get the gist of the story. The second reading should be more careful, so that you are more or less aware which information is contained in which paragraph. Once you start reading the questions, make sure to look for your answers in the text and in the text only. In this type of exercise, you are not supposed to make free associations or draw conclusions which are not evident in plain writing. Sometimes, it may seem that a couple of the answers offered may be logical and correct, but the key is to look at the text and see what it says about the possible answer.

### ESSAY WRITING

When writing an essay, it is more important how you will say something than what you will say. It is not important whether you like or dislike the topic given; your task is to show your entire knowledge of English by writing a single text. First of all, read the instructions carefully, so that

you include every aspect of the task in your work. Then, try to think of the best ways to say things that are connected to the topic. If you would like to say something, but cannot, because you are missing the necessary words or constructions, it is sometimes better to think of something else, something that you know how to say. The important thing is to come up with an essay of good quality, and it does not absolutely have to be as interesting or funny as you want it to be. It needs to be correct and it needs to fulfill the task. It also needs to be simple, but not too simple - try to show people all that you know and come up with a good way to say it.

## CLOZE TEST

When completing a cloze test, it is of crucial importance to read the entire test a couple of times before you start choosing your answers. Always bear in mind that this exercise is not the same as separate multiple-choice items; you cannot complete each sentence on its own. The clue for the correct answer in a certain sentence may be located in the text before or after that sentence. For this reason, it is very important to take a careful look at the text as a whole.

*B. G.*

As one of the markers and core readers for the entrance exam essay at Belgrade University's English Department, I see a whole range of compositions, some of which are naturally much more successful than others. While there's no magic recipe for success, there are certainly steps anyone wanting to enrol at our Department can take so as to improve their chances.

1. Read the task carefully – this might seem obvious, but it's crucial candidates answer the question precisely without too much irrelevance. They won't be able to use a pre-written composition as there are always some specific bullet points to guide them and these must all be covered. The bullet points are actually designed to help our potential students cover a range of grammar in their essays, which brings us onto the next tip.
2. Use a good range of grammar (different tenses, clauses, conditionals, reported speech, subjunctives, etc.) – it's important the composition still sounds natural though. Candidates should show off their vocabulary, too. In fact, we much prefer seeing work that goes beyond the basics. Remember we're looking for candidates who are at B2 level or above according to the CEFR. Our potential students should feel free to take risks with the language – they'll be given some credit for trying even if they make mistakes.

3. While we're on the subject of mistakes, it's vital candidates leave time to check their work at the end. They'll be amazed at how many basic mistakes they can find (spelling, present simple, past simple, articles, prepositions, etc.) just by reading their composition through one more time. Basic mistakes should certainly be avoided so check, check and check again!
4. And finally, some more brief tips. Firstly, candidates should use their own words – don't copy phrases from the task on the question paper. After all, this would tell us nothing about whether they actually know English or not! Secondly, think about the number of words. It's important to write at least the minimum stated in the task – this is to make sure we have enough English to mark and it's also almost impossible to cover all the bullet points properly in fewer words. However, don't write too much either. Quality is certainly better than quantity in this case! And lastly, plan, plan, plan! Candidates should take some time to plan their work – this will help them organise their composition properly with good paragraphs and linking words.

This is as close to a recipe for success as I can give, but it's the candidates who need to add the ingredients, so they should choose them well and wisely! Good luck!

*J. B.*

The experience from last year shows that the candidates were better prepared for the writing part and for doing grammar and vocabulary. Their scores in reading and listening were really poor. Remember to practice for each part of the test.

Before starting the test make sure you listen to the teacher's instructions carefully and read the instructions on the papers. Make sure you understand how you need to fill out the answer sheet. Every year someone makes a mistake filling out the answer sheet. Changing your answers once you've written them on the answer sheet is not possible., so my advice is that you write your answers on the test itself first. And remember to leave enough time to transfer your answers before the end of the exam. You should not hurry to solve everything, but plan your time wisely.

While preparing for the exam you should do all the tests from the practice books which can be bought at the faculty. And it is best that you do those tests so that you simulate exam conditions, i.e. do each part during the time you'd get in the real exam. That is how you'll learn to plan your time, how much to dedicate to reading the question items, how much time you need to answer the question, and then finally, the time you need to transfer the answers. And, since there are no negative points, you should give answers to all the questions. If you don't know something, try and guess.

*M. M. V.*

I'd say that it is not good to put all of your eggs in one basket, i.e. it might be wise to do the entrance exam at a couple of different universities, maybe two, no more. The first time you do the exam will be some sort of practice experience. It will help with anxiety and it may be indicative of how much you know, and what could be bettered before the next exam. In my experience, these exams at different faculties are usually on different days, and although you have to pay each time you take an exam, I believe the cost is worth it.

*M. V.*

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**Milica Vitaz, PhD** is a language instructor at the Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University. Her fields of research are using games in ELT, error analysis, teaching writing and speaking, testing, etc. Her other interests include reading utopian and dystopian literature, watching cartoons and cooking.

## An Interview with Daniel Xerri

Vicky Papageorgiou, ESL/EAP instructor, Metropolitan College,  
Thessaloniki, Greece



**Daniel Xerri** is a Lecturer in TESOL at the University of Malta. He is a member of IATEFL's Conference Committee and of TESOL International Association's Research Professional Council. Between 2015 and 2017, he was the Joint Coordinator of the IATEFL Research SIG. He holds postgraduate degrees in English and Applied Linguistics, as well as a PhD in Education from the University of York. He is the author of many publications on different areas of education and

TESOL. His most recent books are *The Image in English Language Teaching* (2017, ELT Council), and *Teacher Involvement in High-stakes Language Testing* (2018, Springer). Further details about his talks and publications can be found at: [www.danielxerri.com](http://www.danielxerri.com)

**Vicky :** Daniel, first of all, I would like to thank you for agreeing to give this interview.

**Daniel :** Thanks so much for inviting me to be interviewed. I'm very happy to share my thoughts and work with your readers.

**Vicky :** You are a very active and creative person. How do you manage such multiple interests?

**Daniel :** I don't sleep much and work most of the time. Joking aside, I think it's all about doing things that I'm passionate about. I'm lucky enough to be able to find the time to work on the things I'm interested in. Writing is perhaps what I enjoy doing the most in my professional and personal life. So, I consider it natural to spend a lot of time every week working on new articles and books.

**Vicky :** I know that your interest fields are creativity, research, CPD, etc. The fact that one of your research fields is poetry I think is fascinating. Can you tell us about using poetry as interview stimulus material?

**Daniel :** In my research on creativity education, I've used poetry as a means of exploring the attitudes, beliefs and practices of teachers and students. This involved

providing them with a reflexive poem that depicted a lesson scenario and asking them to comment on it. By discussing the poem, they revealed what they thought about creativity and the use of creative texts in the classroom. The poem acted as a stimulus for their thoughts and perspectives.

**Vicky : I was reading another article of yours on ‘teacher versatility’ and creativity and how much you value the openness that teachers should cultivate so that they allow their practices in the classroom to be influenced by disciplines that could be even totally unrelated to language teaching. How do you think that teachers can accomplish this?**

**Daniel :** Teachers are thinking beings and they have views on a myriad of things that might not be directly related to English language teaching. By tapping their different interests and by being open to external influences, they can enrich their teaching and enhance their students’ learning experience. The important thing is to be willing to make connections between elements and disciplines that might not seem to be explicitly connected. Language teaching is not a compartmentalized activity. It is something that can draw energy from other fields of activity. Being willing to enrich language lessons by means of one’s different interests is the first step to being more versatile as a teacher.

**Vicky : Knowledge of the language or knowledge about the language? Which of these two is more important for a language teacher?**

**Daniel :** I think they’re equally important and it would be mistaken to ignore either one. A fairly good level of language proficiency is necessary in order for a teacher to teach the target language but so is well-developed teacher language awareness. In fact, some argue that language awareness contributes to more effective teaching. Teachers – and by extension learners – benefit immensely from initiatives aimed at developing language proficiency, language awareness, together with knowledge of teaching methodology and other competences.

**Vicky : There has been an increasing interest of English language teachers in research. What are the challenges of training teachers to do classroom research?**

**Daniel :** One of the biggest challenges consists of the way research is conceptualized. Even though research can be a powerful form of professional development, the way some teachers think about research can act as an obstacle to them engaging *with* and *in* research. If teachers limit themselves to the conceptions of research foisted upon them by academia, then they are unlikely to see research as something that they could do in their own context.

**Vicky : Can you talk to us about your plenary speech at our ELTA Serbia Conference?**

**Daniel :** In my plenary, I plan to challenge traditional conceptions of research and demonstrate how teacher research is a democratic activity that belongs to all

classroom practitioners. My talk is based on a project that investigates the views of academics, teacher trainers and teacher association leaders from around the world. The people who have contributed to this project share the view that research can be an empowering activity for teachers if they are enabled to see it as an integral part of their professional identity.

**Vicky : Daniel, with already over 100 publications, a very active professional life, what are your plans for the future?**

**Daniel :** My immediate plans are to complete two books that are being published later this year, and strive to meet the deadlines for different articles and chapters that I'm currently working on. All that is on top of refurbishing the 300-year-old house that I've just moved into!

**Vicky : Thank you!**

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**Vicky Papageorgiou** is an ESL/EAP instructor with approximately 20 years of experience, mainly with adult learners. She holds an MA in Education (Open University of Cyprus) and an MA in Art (Goldsmiths College, UK) and she has also been awarded a PGCE in Technology Enhanced Learning with distinction from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David . She studied in Greece, Italy and the UK but also participated in an international project for the McLuhan program in Culture and Technology for the University of Toronto, Canada. Her fields of interest are Technology enhanced learning, Art in ESL, critical thinking, Inquiry Based learning and teaching adults. She is also the website editor of the Visual Arts Circle. She currently divides her time between Thessaloniki (Greece) working as an Adjunct Lecturer at Metropolitan College and Oxford (Oxford St Clare's).

# Happy Birthday, Frankie!

Svetlana Gavrilović, Užice Grammar School, Serbia

**Keywords:** Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, quiz

On a dark and stormy night in 1816, near Lake Geneva in Switzerland, Mary Shelley began writing a story which posed profound questions on ethics and challenged the traditional understanding of what it means to be human. A friendly challenge gave birth to a terrifying tale which, since that time, has become one of the most enduring myths and iconic pieces of literature. Published anonymously at first in 1818, Mary Shelley titled it *Frankenstein* or *The Modern Prometheus*, and her name appeared on its second edition in 1823.

To mark Frankenstein Bicentennial and join in the world's celebrations of this intriguing and



thought-provoking novel, students and English teachers of Užice Grammar School organized a quiz entitled *Happy Birthday, Frankie!* on the 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2018. There were thirty participants – ten three-member teams, who had to read the novel beforehand in order to be eligible for the competition. Having done that, they competed in nine games,

which ranged from simple guessing and gap-filling to demanding observation tasks (several video clips from Frankenstein movies were also shown). At the end of this dramatic two-hour competition, the winners were the three fourth-graders of *Čumić & Co.* – Danica Čumić, Andrej Kovačević and Nikola Filipović, who showed remarkable understanding of the complex ideas underlying this gothic masterpiece.



The sponsors of our competition were The English Book, Belgrade, Pearson, the University of St. Louis, Washington and Art Cinema, Užice.

The quiz was accompanied by an exhibition put on display in the School's halls. Here are some fascinating facts about Frankenstein

we discovered while researching the topic.

- *Frankenstein* was written by a teenager – Mary Shelley was only 18 when she wrote it.
- It came out of a ghost story competition between Mary, her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and the physician John Polidori.
- Mary Shelley wrote it in the shadow of a tragedy – she lost a baby daughter that same year.
- The novel shares a name with a castle in Germany (in German, Frankenstein means 'Stone of the Franks').
- The book was originally slammed by the critics.
- Thomas Edison made a one-reel 15-minute film of Frankenstein in 1910.
- Rammstein's song *Mutter* is about Frankenstein.
- Shelley's monster has been brought to the screen in over 60 films.

Don't forget that

- Frankenstein **is** the scientist and **not** the monster.
- And that **'It's alive! It's alive!'**





References:

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/69171/10-monstrous-facts-about-frankenstein>

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**Svetlana Gavrilović** has been teaching English for nearly thirty years now. She is currently working in Užice Grammar School.

\*I certify that I have the right to publish these photos.

# Mad Libs Game for ELT

**Krsto Grujić, teacher at a private language school**

**Keywords:** Mad Libs, games, ELT, laughter

I vaguely remember using something similar to the Mad Libs game when in high school, but not for any educational purpose. It was something that made us laugh during the school breaks or those sometimes long and boring lessons. But not until I saw it in a popular TV show recently, did I think of how fun and useful it might be in my classroom.

Here are the basic rules of the game. One person first (in our case the teacher) asks the others (students) to come up with random words, like adjectives, numbers, verbs, animals, etc. It all goes into a dialog or story that is later acted out or read, and the outcome is hilarious.

For this particular class, I had to find a way to revise nationality words, numbers, prices and practice a dialog in which students simulate a shopping experience. This particular activity was used with young adults who are at the A2 level. Please note that some may find the content of the game I created a bit offensive, because of the way I use and mention different nationalities, but believe me, the students found this sidesplitting.

You need to hide the purpose of your game at first. Do not tell your students anything. Just say that you will need them to contribute by shouting out words that you ask of them. This part might be a tiny bit boring, but assure your students something great lies ahead. I asked for the words from the entire class, but if you end up with only one or two people contributing, then you might want to ask each and every student to participate by saying one word. Here are the words I needed for my particular mad libs scene, which I was writing on the board as the students were saying them:

1. an amount of time any amount, e.g. three hours, a century...
2. a color
3. an animal
4. the name of a cartoon character

5. a nationality, e.g. Serbs, Germans, etc.
6. a number, any number
7. another number
8. and another number
9. a different nationality
10. number
11. number
12. transitive verb, -ing form
13. transitive verb, -ing form
14. kind of a relative, niece, uncle, etc.
15. any verb, bare infinitive
16. an adjective
17. another nationality
18. a number
19. a number
20. a number
21. an adjective
22. an adjective
23. profession, like teacher, doctor, etc.

Below is the dialog I had written myself, which no one is supposed to see in advance. Once you are done with listing the words, you chose a couple of volunteers, and they come to the board and act out the dialog. They read from the paper below (it's good if each of them has their own copy) and they fill in the blanks with the words from the board.

**At a department store**

Customer: Does anyone work here? I've been waiting for (1) \_\_\_\_\_.

Shop assistant: Hello there! My name is (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_. How can I help you?

Customer: Hi Mrs. (3) \_\_\_\_\_. What a lovely name. I'm (4) \_\_\_\_\_. I'm looking for  
(5) \_\_\_\_\_ actually. Do you have any?

Shop assistant: Well yes, of course we do. How many do you need?

Customer: Oh, only (6) \_\_\_\_\_. How much are they?

Shop assistant: It depends on the size. The small ones are (7) \_\_\_\_\_ \$, and the big ones (8) \_\_\_\_\_ \$.

Customer: Hm... That's a lot.

Shop assistant: (9) \_\_\_\_\_ are a lot cheaper, for example. If you get more than (10) \_\_\_\_\_, they are only (11) \_\_\_\_\_ ¢ each. What do you need them for?

Customer: I really enjoy (12) \_\_\_\_\_ and (13) \_\_\_\_\_ them.

Shop assistant: Really? What do you do for a living?

Customer: I am a very successful (14) \_\_\_\_\_, but in my free time I like to (15) \_\_\_\_\_.

Shop assistant: If you like to (15) \_\_\_\_\_, then we have some (16) \_\_\_\_\_ (17) \_\_\_\_\_. Special discount today, (18) \_\_\_\_\_ \$ for a pair. If you buy (19) \_\_\_\_\_, you get (20) \_\_\_\_\_ for free.

Customer: That's great! That's what I'll buy. Thank you so much, Mrs. (3) \_\_\_\_\_. You are very (21) \_\_\_\_\_. I'll go home to my (22) \_\_\_\_\_ (23) \_\_\_\_\_ right away, and share the good news.

Shop assistant: You are welcome (4) \_\_\_\_\_.

A variation of this would be to put students in pairs, and read out to them the words they need to write down and agree on as pairs. Then give each pair the dialog and let them read on their own. Then maybe you could get one or two pairs to perform in front of the class. It all depends on how much time and resources you have.

Not only is this game fun and funny, it is also easily adjusted to different levels of knowledge, different teaching or revising needs and can easily be made longer or shorter.

I've decided to include links to a couple of mad libs games played by Jimmy Fallon and his famous guests at *The Tonight Show*. These are the ones which inspired me to adapt the game for ELT needs in the first place, and they also gave me ideas on how to think of really interesting gaps in my dialog. Also included are some useful ELT sights that contain examples of the same or similar game.

[Jimmy Fallon and Sarah Jessica Parker play Mad Libs](#)

[Jimmy Fallon and Dakota Johnson play Mad Libs](#)

<https://eltcation.wordpress.com/lesson-plans-2/mad-libs/>

<https://www.lessonplandsdigger.com/2016/02/28/first-certificate-mad-libs/#>

<http://eltresource.com/using-mad-libs-for-friendly-debates/>

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**Krsto Grujić, BA**, is an English teacher at a private school. His main interests include Academic Speaking, teaching English to children and TPR. He usually spends his free time practicing his swordsmanship skills, reading poetry, playing video games and making pancakes.

## Hacking digital learning strategies

Reviewed by Vicky Papageorgiou, Metropolitan College (Greece)

**Keywords** : technology, learning strategies, digital learning, mobile apps, mission-based learning



**Shelly Sanchez's** books are always highly anticipated because they are useful, practical, well written and fun to read! This new one, under the title '**Hacking digital learning strategies**', is no exception to the rule, therefore. A completely student centered book which focusses on learning strategies.

The book is divided in 10 missions. Each chapter comprises a set of steps, which the teacher can follow to complete the mission with their students, as well as, a section about the anticipated problems and a mission prep section. An additional section is the Mission Toolkit in the last pages of the book which offers storyboards, question sets, templates, maps, tables, handouts, mission task cards, badges, etc. and anything useful for the teacher when planning these missions in their class.

In the first mission, entitled **DESIGN A GAME WALKTHROUGH : Create a Tutorial and Teach Others How to Play**, Sanchez describes how an experience she had in a classroom taught her a valuable lesson : she didn't have to do all the teaching or know all the answers, which led her to realize that students could design instructional content and, thus, gain, as well as, share knowledge, a process which motivates them immensely in the end. Therefore, in this first chapter she explains how students teach others how to play a game with a video walkthrough that they create.

In the second mission, called **GO ON A SELFIE ADVENTURE : Define Yourself Through Images**, Sanchez makes use of the so popular selfies among students

which also offer the opportunity for reflection. It is a fact that young learners are not necessarily fully aware of this process, however, posting these selfies after manipulating them is because they are opting for the best shot as they know their peers will rate them! This specific mission's purpose is to teach learners how to make responsible decisions about their own digital identities.

The third chapter is about **CREATING A FICTIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILE : Manage your digital footprint more purposefully**. Believing that to teach the learners how to navigate the digital world with all the necessary skills, confidence and support is of pivotal importance, the next mission has exactly this as its sole purpose : to deepen the students' reflective means and understand what building confident digital identity entails. All this, through historical figures!

Mission 4 is **REMIX LEARNING INTO A DIGITAL TEXTBOOK : Produce and publish an engaging online book**. It's aim is to encourage students to be responsible and choose the learning materials they need and not just accept them as given by teachers. The right expression would be 'expect them to personalize their own learning even though they are young'! Following this pathway, they have to create their own digital textbook '*helping others learn the topic in an engaging way*', as Sanchez claims.

Next come the debates and the 5<sup>th</sup> Mission's title is **DEBATE ISSUES, DON'T DISS PEOPLE :Argue differences of opinion respectfully**. Disagreements on social media are a frequent occurrence and while they result in all parties feeling offended, most of them miss the opportunity for a constructive discussion. While these public arguments are part of our daily social media life, the author believes (quite correctly!) that our curriculums still teach our learners long written argumentative essays, considering, therefore, the need for teaching them shorter arguments in combination with teaching them how to respond intelligently to people with different opinions. Adapting to the new conditions of our life, thus, is a necessity and also has a practical side which teachers are called upon to equip their students with. Our students learn to be respectful and intelligent digital citizens.

In chapter 6, '**Seek and preserve the truth**', Shelly focusses on the quest for truth when everyone is exposed to 'fake news', she tries to show how we can motivate our students to care and preserve the truth.

In chapter 7, **ASSEMBLE A GLOBAL CLASS MEETUP : Join the World Community and Discuss a Pressing Issue**, she tackles on the problem of helping students to understand the role as global citizens and find interest in global issues. For this reason, she suggests that teachers and students organise video conferences with classes from different countries whew students participate in a cultural exchange activity.

In the next chapter, students are required to **conduct Real-World Field Research** and suggests we should see students as problem solvers and innovators. So, this new mission is all about publishing field research to enlighten the public.

In chapter 9, **APPRECIATE OTHERS WITH A DIGITAL BADGE**, Shelly points out that , more than grades, we need to recognise values. **Digital badges** are used to recognise achievements, claiming that '*When students issue their badges, they send a message to their peers that they recognize their achievements and skills*'. In this mission, students design digital badges to issue to their peers.

In the final chapter, **CROWDFUND INNOVATION TO FIND SOLUTIONS**, suggest ways we, educators, can help students innovate solutions to make a difference by , for example, crowdfunding to help improve their communities.

Mission-based learning is , in fact, a powerful and meaningful way of empowering our students , not by just teaching them a language but by teaching them at the same time of being global citizens , responsible contributors and and caring human beings.

Overall, this is an excellent read and a very resourceful book which can be an invaluable tool for teachers of young learners as well as teachers of teenagers, if only with a few modifications in the mission procedures. It belongs in every school's and every teacher's library!

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## **Tackling the Entrance Exam – Advice Given by Former Students Milica Vitaz, PhD, Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University**

**Keywords:** entrance exam, advice, former students, Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University, English language

We believe that a very honest way of finding out what awaits you at the entrance exam is to ask the people who took it and passed it, so we talked to former students of the Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University. All of them have graduated. Most have obtained their Master degrees, and some are even PhD candidates. They all work, either as teachers or translators.

### **Here is what former students have to say about the entrance exam:**

Taking the entrance exam can be really nerve-racking. However, personally, I wasn't too nervous given that I believed in myself and my knowledge of both English and Serbian languages. Taking the exam was the easy part – what was far more difficult to bear was waiting for the results of the exam, when we were forced to live a couple of excruciating days waiting to find out whether we got in or not. Even though I thought I had done fairly well, it was still not pleasant having to check the website for results at least 50 times a day.

If given a chance to take the exam again, I honestly don't think I would have done anything differently. I was thoroughly prepared for the exam and wasn't too afraid to take it given that if I didn't enroll in the English department, I had many other options to choose from as I was interested in other languages as well.

*Marija Ć.*

Since I was about to enroll in the Department of Italian Language and Literature, and due to the fact that I hadn't learned Italian in grammar school, I had to take the entrance exam in English. I've been studying for the exam for a couple of months with my classmates, which came easy because I am a fan of language studies. The entrance exam in English is usually much more difficult than those in other languages, but it is possible to pass. My score was 35 out of 40, even though I'm originally from a small town with a single grammar school. Taking a look back, I wouldn't change my mind and enroll anywhere else rather than the Faculty of Philology,

because I have been a fan of language studies since primary school. If you are determined to enroll in the Faculty of Philology, start learning the language of your preference immediately and don't be intimidated by the hardness of the entrance exam, because it's just a step forward on your journey towards becoming a philologist.

*Ana P.*

What's it like taking the entrance exam?

First of all, I would have to disagree with people that the entrance exam is the most stressful, and the most nerve wrecking thing that you can experience in your education. The experience was not so stressful, because I psychologically prepared for it in advance, knowing that it won't be the end of the world if I failed it. The test itself required a great deal of knowledge but since everything was clearly explained before each part of the exam, it was easy to understand what was expected from us to do. The only thing that I could object to was the sound quality of the tape, or the bad equipment for the listening part, because not everyone could hear the tape, which struck me as something negative given the importance of the exam itself.

Given the chance, would you do something differently?

Hmm, actually, I would. Since I now know how strict the rules are for writing an essay, I surely would not have neglected the part on the exam where it said, Write between 150-200 words, whereas I wrote almost 300. The advice I would give to people taking the exam for years to come is to first, learn what is to be learnt, so that nothing could surprise them and second, not to think of it as the most important exam of their life, because you can always re-sit for it, if you don't do it well.

*Matija Ž.*

Honestly, taking the entrance exam was a nerve-racking experience. But when I think about it, when the time comes and you see your exam paper in front of you, you focus mainly on doing the exam. So there isn't that much room for thinking about the dreadful outcome. My main advice would be to practice a lot, do the entrance exams from the previous years and believe in yourself because hard work pays off, as cheesy as it may sound!

*Jovana D.*

I took the train, two-and-a-half hours early from Pančevo. The train stopped at station Ovca where we were met by the fire department and the police. Due to an oil spillage, high temperatures and the possibility of explosions the train was not allowed to proceed, and I continued down an old road, surrounded by corn, into the unknown. After fighting for my place in a small local bus, leaving behind angry people who were not able to get in, I continued to make my way towards the entrance exam. To make a long story short, I barely made it to the exam.

I think some teachers are unaware (or do not care about) of the pressure the prospective students are under in that situation. And often, because of that, they do not show sympathy in cases when these future students make some mistakes. After having lived through the entire thing I've described, I got grilled for making a mistake when filling out the test.

The exam itself is not too hard. Do not over or underestimate it. I think candidates should read the questions carefully and to avoid changing their minds after answering a question. Overthinking creates panic and you start doubting everything. Of course, first answer the questions you are sure about, and then use the system of elimination for the ones you do not know. Take care when you write your answer onto the answer sheet. Make sure you follow the correct numbering of the questions, so as not to lose points.

It is all very exciting. A new part of your life starts. My advice is not to give up, and not to study something you do not initially wish to study, if you do not get in the first time around. I waited for a year, and tried again, and the group of people I got a chance to meet and study with was the best thing that ever happened to me.

Do not panic, be brave and the knowledge you possess will show.

*Krsto G.*

In a nutshell, the entrance exam is highly nerve-racking. You've been overwhelmed by the pressure and tortured by the thought your future is at stake. You are fed up with a plethora of tests and exercises you've been doing for ages, you have learnt all the rules there are by-heart and nonetheless you are afraid of the questions and writing, reading and listening papers that are just around the corner. It does look a bit like a doomsday scenario. However, things are not as pitch black as they seem to be. Every cloud has a silver lining. Do not forget that the effort comes first, together with your zeal to make it happen. Try to organize your thoughts. Let the disturbing ones go. Keep breathing. Read both the questions and the instructions carefully. Relieve stress by focusing on what you know for sure. Do the questions you find the easiest ones first. It will boost your self-esteem, which is a cornerstone of every success. Check and

double check everything. Triple check if necessary. Do not assume anything! Hunt your spelling mistakes. Also, stick to the topic. Remember that writing must be done in an adequate form, vocabulary and register. Think it through prior to writing. Don't panic! Just... don't! When it comes to listening, remember that some of the answers are perplexing so listen carefully and look for the clues hidden in the correct ones. As for the reading, bear in mind the text must be meaningful. If I were you, I would read the entire text first without paying attention to the blanks to get the gist. One step at the time. Baby steps, if I may add. Then start making links between parts of the text and the paragraphs you need to fill in. Stick to the context. Cross the distracting ones out. That's how you narrow down possible answers. And then, after making sure you've chosen the right one(s), just go for it! Needless to say, bring a bottle of water and extra pens. May the Force be with you!

*Marija T.*

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**Milica Vitaz, PhD** is a language instructor at the Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University. Her fields of research are using games in ELT, error analysis, teaching writing and speaking, testing, etc. Her other interests include reading utopian and dystopian literature, watching cartoons and cooking.

## BORROWED FROM...

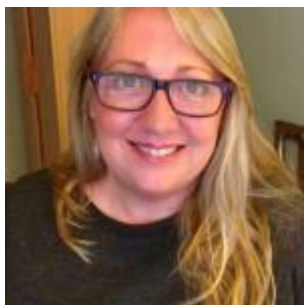
### ELT materials writing: More on emerging principles

This was originally posted in

<https://mawsig.iatefl.org/elt-materials-writing-more-on-emerging-principles/>

**Keywords:** ELT publishing, Materials writing, MaWSIG

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Here, **Katherine Bilborough** offers new insights on a theme she first discussed on the MaWSIG blog last autumn – the topic of principles for materials writers. The MaWSIG blog features guest posts by members – please get in touch if you would like to write for us.

Since writing a blog post called '[Emerging principles for ELT writers](#)' on this website in October 2016, I have given the topic more thought, carried out some research, engaged with other ELT professionals about the topic and given a workshop with the same focus at the 2017 IATEFL conference at Glasgow as part of the MaWSIG Day. This new post summarises my workshop and offers a simple framework for anyone writing ELT materials, whether professionally or for their own classrooms.

#### **Where did my interest in principles start?**

I first considered the concept of principles for ELT materials writers when I attended a presentation by Jill Hadfield at IATEFL 2014 called 'Do writers have principles?' Before Jill's talk I knew plenty about principles of language learning and teaching, but I'd never really thought about materials writers having principles. In retrospect that's a daft supposition; after all, principles from language learning theory find their way into our materials in all kinds of ways. It's just that most materials writers don't stop to think about them, perhaps because we are far too busy writing!

#### **Where do principles come from?**

Traditionally, principles for ELT materials writers have come from two sources. First, a (surprisingly low) number of theorists such as Paul Nation, Brian Tomlinson and Rod Ellis have drawn on research findings from ELT teaching and learning. Examples of specific principles are:

- The course should help the learners make the most effective use of previous knowledge (Nation, 1993).
- L2 language learners can benefit from those mental resources which they typically utilize when acquiring and using their L1 (Tomlinson, 1998).
- Instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners (Ellis, 2005).  
Second, publishers use the findings of extensive market research involving surveys, teacher focus groups, curriculum designers, ministers of education, and so on, to shape the briefs they send to their authors. Examples of principles that I've come across in briefs are things like:
- All vocabulary items must come from the Cambridge Young Learner Exams word lists.
- Wherever possible, use real-world examples.
- Activities should practise HOTS (higher-order thinking skills).  
For me, the difference between these two sets of examples is that in the first set, the principles could be classed as 'common sense', whereas the second set are far more context specific and will not apply to all materials. Brian Tomlinson calls the first set universal principles and the second set local principles. Jill Hadfield has recognised a third type, which she calls tacit principles. These are principles that reflect the philosophy of the writer; they can change from activity to activity within a set of materials. They might include things like:
- Make sure the activity includes an element of humour.
- Give learners an opportunity to be creative.
- Include an activity that gets learners moving their whole bodies.

### **Isn't it time we moved on?**

Between 12 and 24 years have passed since the theorists came up with their principles. Is it time to reconsider some of the established principles? Or to start writing our own? Especially when we are writing materials for our own classes or are self-publishing, the traditional principles might not address our situations. I decided to ask Rod Ellis, Paul Nation and Brian Tomlinson whether the time has come to make some changes to their original principles.

Rod Ellis pointed out that the principles he had drawn up were intended to frame classroom instruction more than materials writing. He based his principles on research into classroom teaching and second language acquisition. He recognised that personal experience can be valuable when framing principles and said that his own personal experience as a teacher came into play when he wrote his principles.

Paul Nation believes his original principles continue to be backed up by current research. He told me about recent research on *deliberate learning*, which creates both explicit and implicit knowledge – something that is present in his original principles. For example:

- As much as possible, the learners should be interested in and excited about learning the language, and they should come to value this learning.
- A course should be presented so that the learners have the most favourable attitude to the language, to users of the language, to the teacher's skill in teaching the language and to their chances of success in learning the language.

Brian Tomlinson believes his principles from 2005 are still valid today but that the following are most relevant for today:

- Provide a rich, meaningful and recycled exposure to the target language in use.
- Stimulate affective engagement.
- Stimulate cognitive engagement.
- Provide opportunities for noticing and discovering how language features and strategies are used to achieve intended effects.
- Provide opportunities to use the target language in order to achieve communicative effects.

### **Can we make it up as we go along?**

Last July I trained around 35 materials writers on a four-week online course; this allowed me to do some informal research. I asked course participants to think about materials they were currently creating and to suggest principles that would be appropriate and helpful for their writing. I asked them to think of their particular context, and I suggested that they justify each principle so that I (and other participants) would have a better understanding of their reasoning.

I had no idea what to expect, but something obvious (in hindsight) happened. For almost every principle that was shared, a contrasting principle was suggested. For example, one participant said there should be no background noise on recorded dialogues, while another stated that authentic audio must have background noise.

Other principles were initially puzzling or surprising, but in the justification phase, their logic became clear. For example, one participant said it was important for materials to contain blank spaces of differing sizes where his students could write. This teacher had noticed that by providing boxes to write in, students understood how much they were expected to write. Another participant said that when she created a cloze activity, instead of adding lines for the missing words within the text, she added them in a column at the side of the page. That way, she could tear off the whole column at the end of the activity and use the same materials again with a different group.

For these particular teachers, these principles were important and justifiable in their contexts.

### **Where do principles fit in to the writing process?**

To conclude, I'd like to suggest this simple framework for ELT materials writers.

1. Think about the *aims* and *objectives*, the *context* and *users* (teachers and learners).
  2. Draw up a list of principles (universal and local).
  3. Justify each item on the list (to yourself or to a colleague).
  4. Write your materials, keeping your principles in mind.
  5. Use your list as a *checklist* when your materials are finished.
- Different materials require different principles. Sometimes, when we are writing materials for a third party, we might have to throw our principles out of the window – or at least shelve them for a while. I don't think this should cause us too many

headaches. After all, as Groucho Marx once wisely said, 'Those are my principles, and if you don't like them ... well, I have others.'

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**Katherine Bilsborough** is a freelance ELT author living in northern Spain. She writes coursebooks for OUP, Macmillan and others as well as monthly lesson plans and blog posts for the British Council's website *TeachingEnglish*. Katherine hasn't got her own blog but enjoys hijacking other people's blogs and has been called 'the interloping blogger', a title that makes her smile. Her current interests include the process of ELT writing and quality in ELT materials. When Katherine isn't writing she's either gardening, reading or lying on the sofa watching telly.

## About MaWSIG

With over 4,000 members internationally, IATEFL is one of the most thriving communities of ELT teachers in the world. The Materials Writing SIG (MaWSIG) is one of sixteen Special Interest Groups within IATEFL. Other SIGs focus on areas such as Teacher Development, Learning Technologies, ESP, Young Learners and Teenagers, Business English, Pronunciation, and so on.

MaWSIG is for teachers who create their own classroom materials; aspiring writers who would like to get their work published; published authors and ELT editors, publishers and designers. It aims to share and promote best practice in ELT materials writing; offer professional development to writers and editors, and connect our members with other writers and publishers. We have regular blogs on our website at <http://mawsig.iatefl.org/> where authors discuss the issues that we face today as writers. We also organise regional meetups where members can network, collaborate with teaching organisations like TESOL-Spain on joint-conferences, and we put on our own face-to-face conference once a year. MaWSIG is run by a committee of volunteers comprised of ELT writers and editors. You can contact us at [mawsig@iatefl.org](mailto:mawsig@iatefl.org).



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