

OXFORD FORWARD

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Preparing for the HKDSE

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Forward Foreword



“

Examinations are formidable even to the best prepared, says the English clergyman and writer Charles Caleb Colton, for the greatest fool may ask more than the wisest man can answer. Our working assumption is quite the opposite—if students still find the HKDSE formidable, it means that they are not adequately prepared.

Preparing students for exams is, of course, a multimillion-dollar business in Hong Kong. We at OUP, however, see this less as a profit-making opportunity than a chance to bridge the gap that many students have between knowledge and practice, learning and performance.

To this end, we've come up with titles that break new ground by focusing at once on knowledge acquisition and skill development. It is human nature to fear the unknown and students tend to underperform under pressure. We therefore go to great lengths to familiarize students with both the contents and format of the HKDSE, so that students will feel right at home when they finally sit the exam.

It is often said that exams are a necessary evil. We don't see it that way. For us, an exam is just one of the many situations in life that calls for the practical application of knowledge.

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Perry Lam
Assistant Editorial Director, English Language Teaching Department

Oxford Mock Exams and Sharing Sessions

The Oxford HKDSE English Mock Exams and Sharing Sessions 2013 were held at Lee Kau Yan Memorial School on Saturday, 14 December 2013. As the number of applications was overwhelming, this year, two sessions of mock exams were held. Students had the option of participating in the Paper 1 or Paper 3 mock exam. Around 1,000 students and teachers from over 90 local secondary schools participated in the event.

Student response and feedback was extremely positive, especially during the post-exam sharing session, hosted by Ms Debbie Shek and Mr Richard Choi, both experienced secondary English Panel Chairpersons. The two speakers gave informative and engaging presentations on useful exam strategies for the HKDSE, as well as addressing difficult questions in the mock exams. The day ended with a lively question and answer session in which our speakers addressed queries from students in the audience.



Ode to English

To help students appreciate English from a new perspective, Oxford launched the first of two students' workshops on 18 November with Perry So as our guest speaker. Mr So was Associate Conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra from 2010 to 2012. He now regularly conducts on four continents. Over 400 students and teachers attended the event. Mr So's scintillating talk touched on English and music and was illustrated by such great men as T. S. Eliot, Schumann, Samuel Beckett and Keats. His lively presentation and charming personality made these towering figures at once approachable. A teacher and two students of Diocesan Boys' School also came on stage to share their views on English.



English and I 英語全

English has always been a vital part of our everyday lives here in Hong Kong, so what could be more meaningful than publishing a book that explores the relationship of 12 luminaries with this incredible language? This book allows readers to embark on an amazing journey with illustrious personalities such as renowned poet Yu Kwang-chung (余光中), celebrated writer Pai Hsien-yung (白先勇), political heavyweight Chan Fang On-sang (陳方安生) and multitalented star Karen Mok (莫文蔚). Written in Chinese, this book will provide readers with a personal glimpse into the world of 12 different personalities coming from all walks of life. Get your copy in bookshops this July!



No short cuts to exam success— motivation is the key

Oxford Forward recently met with Kathy Cheung Siu Mui, Alan Cheng Tze Cham and Winnie Chow Wing Yi, English teachers at Law Ting Pong Secondary School in Tai Po. They discussed the importance of motivation and a love for English as a part of their HKDSE preparation strategies.



When Kathy Cheung Siu Mui, Head of Department at Law Ting Pong Secondary School, first invigilated an HKDSE Paper 3 examination last year, she witnessed something that she says she will remember for ever. 'From what I observed, some students gave up and fell asleep very soon in the exam, at only Task 2.' She wonders what happened to these students that they didn't have enough confidence in their language abilities to continue. 'Who has actually killed these students' interest?' she asks. 'No one wants to lose. No one wants to fail. So, who are the people who have taken away their interest and motivation?' Cheung is keen to keep students feeling optimistic. 'If people keep saying to them, "there's no hope for you," they'll end up feeling hopeless. Teachers matter and methodology matters. It's not just what you give to students, but how you teach them.' According to Cheung and her colleagues Winnie Chow Wing Yi, Head of Junior Secondary, and Alan Cheng Tze Cham, Head of Senior Secondary, in order to have students achieve their best possible score in the HKDSE exam, fostering motivation is key.

The English teachers at Law Ting Pong are dedicated to the inclusiveness of their programme. Students are not simply drilled with HKDSE details, but are rather given an educational model that leads to a love of the language. Thanks to an unofficial English class policy that states that teachers should only be speaking for about 10% of the lesson time, students become vocal participants in their education. Cheung says, 'We always bear in mind the question, "Am I talking too much?" It's a question I ask myself every

lesson. We teachers are very aware of the necessity of giving students more time to use the language.'

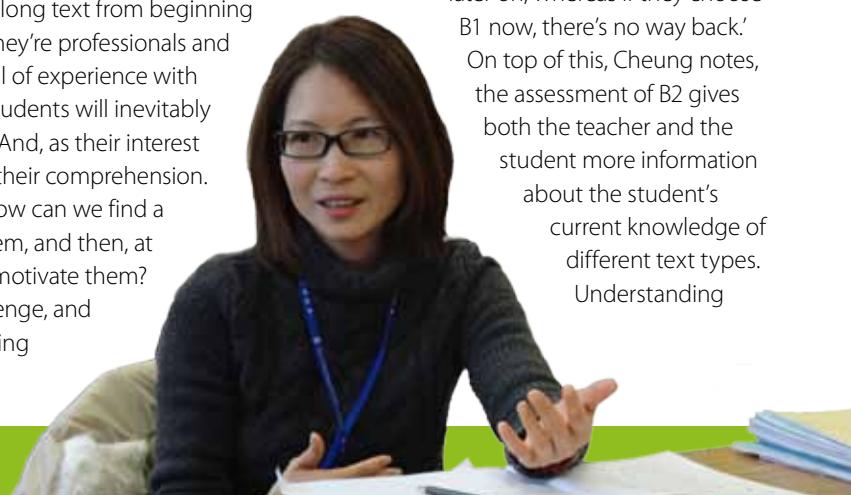
Alan Cheng points out that the SBA can be used to prepare students for the speaking exam. 'I think it helps get them into the mode of having a discussion.' He strives to ensure that students are focusing on the quality of their speech rather than the quantity. 'There's a difference between the English and Chinese speaking exam,' Cheng says. 'In the Chinese exam, they start with a mini-presentation each, then they talk for a bit, and then they have to come to a conclusion. For the English exam, we encourage the students to ask questions, to probe and talk to each other in a more natural way.' This speaks to the importance of having students be comfortable expressing their ideas and interacting with fellow students.

The benefits of an interactive classroom are clear for the speaking component of the HKDSE. However, an active and verbal class can also work together to make the written component more manageable. According to Cheung, while it may be easy for teachers to go through a long text from beginning to end—since they're professionals and have a great deal of experience with text analysis—students will inevitably become bored. And, as their interest wanes, so does their comprehension. Cheung asks, 'How can we find a way to teach them, and then, at the same time, motivate them? That is our challenge, and we are still working

very hard on this.' One technique that the teachers at Law Ting Pong are employing is to integrate multiple skills into a lesson. During a writing lesson, for example, students are also practising elements of listening and speaking. 'When it comes to writing,' Cheung says, 'we do not just give the students the topic and tell them to go write it and give them a grade; they do a lot of pre-task practical preparation, a lot of sharing, a lot of presentations, and in the end they put everything together to complete the writing task.' These sorts of supplementary tasks keep the students engaged, and simultaneously prepare them for other parts of the exam.

One of the greatest stresses for students preparing for the HKDSE is whether they will choose Part B1 or B2 for the reading and listening components of the exam. While the final decision is always left up to the students, Cheung and Cheng both encourage their senior form students to complete B2 during practice. Cheng says, 'I think there's a lot more to learn from doing Part B2. And also, if they do B2 now, they still have the choice of doing B1

later on, whereas if they choose B1 now, there's no way back.' On top of this, Cheung notes, the assessment of B2 gives both the teacher and the student more information about the student's current knowledge of different text types. Understanding



text type conventions, after all, is one of the most important preparation points for the examination. In Part B of Paper 2, in particular, a knowledge of all possible text types allows students to choose the topic and/or Elective they feel most comfortable with.

Preventing students' frustration is equally important to maintaining motivation levels. Following OUP's mock exam in December, several students asked how they can complete the reading portion of the exam if they do not understand all of the vocabulary. They wanted to know how they can succeed in the exam without understanding the more challenging vocabulary items. However, if students are asking this question, Cheung believes, the problem has started earlier. 'You build up vocabulary starting in Form 1, not in Form 6.'

During lessons, she thinks it's important that students are given texts that match their abilities, in order to gradually increase their comprehension and confidence. 'I think it's wrong to give a student a text if their standard is not up to that level. Teachers must be very careful what kind of a text they give a student. Our purpose is to help them, to encourage them, not to discourage them. Some teachers love giving very challenging articles, saying, "This is the DSE standard." But what's the point if the student is not up to that level? It's wrong to give a student a text they do not understand. Being a teacher, you must be able to judge where your students are, in order to provide them with an article where they can at least understand 70% of the vocabulary, instead of 30%. If your students can't be perfect for the DSE, at least make them Level 2. Set different targets for different students.' With this strategy in mind, students will not be left to flounder during the actual exam.

Teaching junior secondary, Winnie Chow has found that a focus on the language arts starting from a young age fosters an early and strong connection with the English language. This connection will lead not only to HKDSE success, but also to lifelong language skills that will benefit the students after they leave school. Poetry is a text type that many students find intimidating in the exam, but Chow's approach in junior secondary allows her students to not only understand poetry, but also to love it. 'We have different poems that we ask students

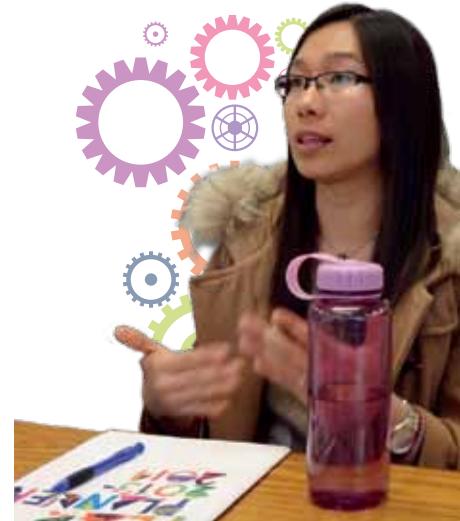


to write, such as haiku, acrostic and shape poems. There are lots of poetic devices we cover in our scheme of work. We might ask students, for example, to write a poem about their neighbour using an acrostic poem so they can develop their creativity through observation of people. When writing haikus, I've also taken my students downstairs to the playground to observe nature and write something. They really enjoy the process because it's not inside the classroom, but outside. They share with each other and get feedback from their peers and the teacher, so they really enjoy poetry. Alan Cheng adds, 'I think it's important to actually get them to do it themselves. Some teachers might want to teach a lot of devices and then identify them within a poem, but until students do it themselves, they're not going to remember it. It won't be something they can do by themselves.' Once again, enjoyment is seen as key to future language success.

It doesn't stop with the students; the English teachers at Law Ting Pong also have a passion for the language. Cheung says, 'When it comes to a poetry unit, if you're aiming just at the DSE, you're not going to enjoy it. We love poems, we love exploring things with students, and when our students challenge us and we don't know how to answer, we say, "Let me find out." We learn together. That's how we are able to create a relaxing learning environment for students to enjoy poems, short stories, legends and fables. We teachers enjoy and have interest in these sorts of things, and eventually we will be able to influence students.'

When going from junior to senior forms, a change of focus happens in the language arts. Cheung says, 'In junior forms, we focus on creativity, imagination and passion for language arts. But in senior forms, we don't have so much time. We focus more on vocabulary that would appear in the DSE examination, and on metaphor use and poetic devices.' However, students don't notice much of a change in difficulty because of the careful preparation in junior secondary. Chow notes that senior secondary students have approached her to say the difficulty gap between junior and senior forms is much smaller in English than in other subjects. 'This is good news,' she tells them, 'because we're preparing you from the junior forms for the senior forms.'

Because of their focus on motivation and student inclusion, the English teachers at Law Ting Pong don't have a great deal of respect for exam short cuts. Many Secondary 6 students begin looking for tips and tricks once the HKDSE arrives in their foreseeable future. Cheng wonders why students would be in such a position in the first place. He goes on to say, 'There aren't any short cuts, honestly, because if you don't understand the texts, you just don't understand them.' Cheung adds, 'We tell students, "We help you to develop lifelong learning skills plus an interest in English and communication skills. If you need to have so many short cuts for the DSE, what about after the DSE? How are you going to have short cuts when you manage people?"' With such passionate teachers, the students at Law Ting Pong Secondary School are bound not only to succeed in the HKDSE exam, but also in the workplace.



WORD PLAY!

What's in an anagram?

Anagrams are words or phrases formed by rearranging the letters of a different word. For example, 'the classroom' is an anagram of 'schoolmaster'. Can you create anagrams of the words below to complete the text?



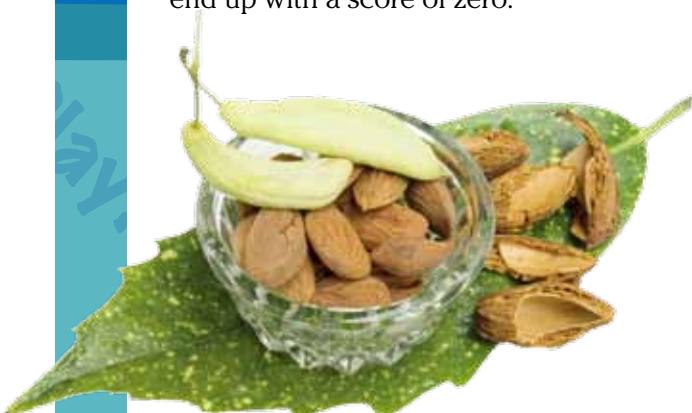
Piece-of-cake anagrams!

If you want to get a score on Paper 3 of the HKDSE that you can **grab** (1) _____ **brag** _____ about, make sure you don't **care** (2) _____ through the exam. Stay **clam** (3) _____ and be sure to **tied** (4) _____ your answers. Make sure you are careful when you read the Data File **times** (5) _____ and **silent** (6) _____ to the recording.

Harder nuts to crack!

When sitting down to write Paper 1, the first thing you should do is **ticks** (7) _____ your barcode label at the top of the page. If you're too **agree** (8) _____ to get started, you might forget! Something else you'll have to do is decide which **notices** (9) _____ you will complete: B1 or B2. While B2 is certainly more **ought** (10) _____, you can achieve a better overall **cores** (11) _____.

For questions that require longer answers, you may want to include an **braved** (12) _____ or two to make your sentences more descriptive. In Paper 2, where you are assessed on your use of grammar, it's important that you use the correct tense: **serpent** (13) _____, past or future. Make sure you **dusty** (14) _____ hard before the day of the exam. And, of course, make sure you **sister** (15) _____ **teaching** (16) _____, otherwise, you might get caught and end up with a score of zero.



Vikings or Shakespeare?

In the course of its history, the English language has been shaped by many outside forces. For example, in the year 793, a group of Vikings landed in northern England and decided that they'd stay for a few hundred years. When they weren't pillaging and burning villages, they were helpfully contributing to the English language. Before the Vikings, there was no 'fog' in London, social situations were never 'awkward', and people certainly never had to 'die' (though the Vikings certainly changed that). Another major English-language contributor was William Shakespeare. It's said that Shakespeare added nearly 2,000 words to English. Can you guess which of the following have a Viking origin and which came from Shakespeare?



(Hint: Viking words often contain 'hard' sounds. Shakespeare often combined existing words, added prefixes or suffixes, or made verbs into nouns in order to create new words.)



Viking

- 1** anger (n.)
- 2** shooting star (n.)
- 3** outbreak (n.)
- 4** ugly (adj.)
- 5** mimic (v.)
- 6** addiction (n.)
- 7** bag (n.)
- 8** knife (n.)
- 9** rotten (adj.)
- 10** unreal (adj.)

Shakespeare

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Watch this space

Things to look out for in the coming months



Events

Oxford ELT Student's Workshop

Our guest speaker will be Dr Lo Yuen Yi, Assistant Professor of the Faculty of Education at the University of Hong Kong. She will talk to us about how she learnt English and how she became a professor at HKU.

Date 12 May 2014 (Monday)

Time 4.30–6.00 p.m.

Venue HKTA Tang Hin Memorial Secondary School



Downloads

New HKDSE Mock Test

Unseen Mock Test 2 (2013–14) has been uploaded to our website. Teachers can download the new mock test from
<http://elt.oupchina.com.hk/dna/downloads>



In the next issue of Oxford Forward

- Different kinds of English: making sense of English around the world
- Reflections on the 2014 HKDSE English Language Exam
- More news, interviews and students' activities

Look out for the next issue of *Oxford Forward* in June 2014

Word Play (Answers)

Anagrams

- 1 brag 2 race 3 calm 4 edit 5 items
6 listen 7 stick 8 eager 9 section
10 tough 11 score 12 adverb
13 present 14 study 15 resist
16 cheating

Vikings or Shakespeare?

- 3 Shakespeare 4 Viking
5 Shakespeare 6 Shakespeare
7 Viking 8 Viking 9 Viking
10 Shakespeare