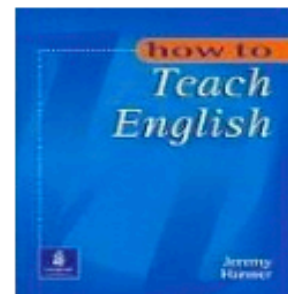


A Book Summary of

# ***"How to teach English"***

By

**Jeremy Harmer**



**FREE  
chapters  
inside**

Written by

**Ian Leahy**

primary commentary and review

This is it!

very useful for us trainee  
teachers

A wonderful teaching guide!

Helped sooth my nerves about  
being a first time ESL teacher

not for fanatics

Good tips



***eslinsider.com***

*"How to Teach English"* is a practical book which covers the aspects of being a good teacher, dealing with problems and the unexpected in the classroom. It describes, simplifies and gives us an introduction to language including grammar and more. It focuses mostly on teaching adults.

In this book summary my aim was to capture the essence of Jeremy Harmer's *"How to teach English"* in my own words and offer a bit of commentary. The few words in quotes were directly taken from his book.

-Ian Leahy, creator of <http://eslinsider.com>



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## Chapter 1. What's a good teacher like?

*Can you define a good teacher?*

English teachers and students in the U.K, Spain and Finland were asked this question. Some of their answers were as follows.

- Their lessons should be interesting, so you don't fall asleep.
- A teacher must love her job.
- I like a teacher who lets her personality show.
- A teacher must be knowledgeable, about other topics as well.
- I like an entertaining teacher.
- They should get the quieter students to speak and keep the talkative ones quiet.
- They should know their students names.

*What's the best way for a teacher to talk to his students?*

He should use "rough tuning". This means that he should use language that will be understood by his students. He has to tune it to fit their level of comprehension. Teachers can also use body language to get their point across.

*What's the best way to give instructions?*

They must be simple and logical. After the instructions are given, the teacher can call on a student to repeat them to test if they understood.

*How much should I talk in class?*

Generally a teacher should minimize his talk time "TTT" and maximize the students talk time "STT". The teacher must speak at appropriate times.

*What is a good lesson like?*

Those are the ones where the students aren't bored. Be unpredictable, spontaneous and use variety in your classes. If you usually stand up then sit down. If you usually wear a suit then dress casual. If you usually talk loud then talk quietly.

*Should I always follow my plan?*

Be flexible and have some extra activities or tasks on hand for those who finish their work early. Be prepared when things go slower or faster than expected.

## **Chapter 2. What's a good learner like?**

*Do we all learn the same?*

No. There are many exceptions to the rule. For example, one student who practiced basketball daily for a year became a good basketball player. Another student who practiced basketball far less frequently became an equally good basketball player.

*Should students be motivated?*

Motivation is key to learning. Teachers can use their behavior, skills and attitude to motivate their students. However, real motivation comes from within the individual.

*Is the teacher responsible for the students learning?*

Students should have access (in the school or center) to materials like English movies, books, or audio. Although every school will not have these. The teacher should essentially guide students and encourage them to be responsible for their own learning. The use of homework does this, however it should not be too much.

*What are the qualities of good learners?*

1. They listen.
2. They can take risks.
3. They ask questions.
4. They ask about the best way to learn.
5. They can accept correction of their mistakes.

*How is teaching adults different from children?*

They have a long history of learning. There are typically less discipline problems teaching adults and they don't need their language to be "camouflaged" like kids. They can also enjoy activities.

*What are the different levels?*

**Beginner:** Their growth is easy to see and their failure too, as some beginning adults will get discouraged and quit.

**Intermediate:** Their growth is not so easy to see as they have already learned a lot. They may have experienced a plateau effect. They need to be challenged and the teacher needs to show them where they can learn.

**Advanced:** They have also experienced the plateau effect and language is learned bit by bit. Here they can take more responsibility for their learning.

### Chapter 3. How do I manage my classroom?

*How should I act and use my body in class?*

**"Proximity":** Teachers should consider the space between them and their students.

**"Appropriacy":** It is important to consider what kind of affect our physical behavior has on our students. As we want to develop a good relationship with them.

**"Movement":** Successful teachers move around the classroom to keep their students attention.

*Does it matter how I use my voice?*

**"Audibility":** Get the volume right. Not too loud or too quiet.

**"Variety":** Change the pitch of your voice for the appropriate action.

**"Conservation":** Take care of your voice and avoid shouting.

*Is it important how I start or finish a class?*

Make it clear when something starts or finishes. You can clap your hands or raise/lower your voice. You can also add a summary of what has happened.

*How can I arrange the desks or tables?*

**Ordered rows:** Their eyes are on the teacher. Move around the class and use guess work. Do not follow an order and be unpredictable when calling on students.

**Circles and U-shapes:** These can create a feeling of equality and intimacy.

**Tables or groups of desks:** These favor pair and group work.

*How can a teacher work with his students?*

**Whole class:** The teacher has students focus on him.

**Groups:** This can get more students active at the same time and gives them more independence. The teacher can give special help to a slower group while others are working. Unfortunately some students might revert to their native language and/or be more disruptive.

**Solo:** Individuals get to work at their own speed.

Generally it's best to use different class groupings for different class activities.

*How can teachers find out whether their classes were successful?*

1. They can get feedback from their students.

2. They can videotape their classes.
3. They can ask a friend or colleague to sit in on their classes.
4. They can assess student progress with a test.

## Chapter 4. How can we explain teaching and learning?

*Do children and adults have the same ability to learn?*

Children exposed to language outside the classroom will usually learn it. Not all adults will as they may not want to.

*What "elements" are necessary for learning a language in the classroom?*

**"Engage"**: A stage where teachers arouse students interest. They may use music, games, pictures or stories.

**"Study"**: The stage where the instruction of language is the main focus.

**"Activate"**: A stage where students can try out the language.

*How do we arrange the "elements" of ESA? An example below.*

**"Engage"**: Students look at pictures of a robot. Teacher asks, "What is the robot doing?" Students say why they like or don't like robots.

**"Study"**: The teacher shows a picture of a robot. Then asks, "What can/can't it do?" It can walk, It can't sing, etc. Teacher focuses on the proper pronunciation of the above sentences.

**"Activate"**: Students get into groups and design a robot. They present it to the class and say what it can or can't do.

The three elements are not always in this order and they may also be repeated like, EASA or even EAASASEA.

*What are the different methods of teaching?*

**Grammar translation**: This was the most common way of learning language for hundreds of years. It teaches people about the language, but it doesn't teach them the language itself.

**Audio-lingualism**: Suggests that a language is learned by repetition and habit through conditioning.

**PPP, Presentation, Practice and Production**: This is similar to the sequence above about the robot. It works well on the lower levels, however it doesn't always on the upper levels when the students already know a lot of language.

**TBL, Task Based Learning**: Focus is on the task. When they have completed the task, the teacher may give them some instruction/reinforcement on the language used during the task.

**CLT, Communicative Language Teaching**: Says that language is more than just bits of grammar. It has functions like "inviting, agreeing, suggesting, etc." If students are exposed to enough language and they are motivated then they will learn.

**Discovery**: Students are asked to discover facts about the language themselves.

**Lexical**: Says that words and phrases are better building blocks than grammatical structures.

## Chapter 5. How do you label language (grammar)?

## Sentence Constructions

**Complements:** These are used with verbs like to be, seem, look, etc. They give information about the subject. For example, *She seems happy.*

**Subject and verb only:** *He talked.*

### Objects

1. Direct: Things or people affected by the verb. *He played the piano.*

2. Indirect: A person or thing that benefits from an action. *He played the piano for me.*

Adverbial phrases: Complement the verb. *He lived in Shanghai.*

## Parts of speech

**Noun:** A name of a person, place, thing, activity, idea, or quality. Can be used as the subject or object of the verb. *Bird, Bill, form, train station*

**Pronoun:** A word that is used in place of a noun or noun phrase. *His, we, they, us*

**Adjective:** It gives more info. about the noun or pronoun. *Stupid, best, happy*

**Verb:** It describes an action, experience or state. *Walk, be, speak*

**Adverb:** It gives more info. about the verb, adjective, or sentence. *At the gym, carelessly, in a day*

**Preposition:** Shows how other words are connected. *For, under, on*

**Determiner:** Articles, possessives, demonstratives, quantifiers. *The, a, an, my, your, etc., this, these, etc., some, many, etc.*

**Conjunction:** It connects sentences, phrases or clauses. *And, but, or*

### Noun types

1. Countable: *1 pear, 2 pears, 3 pears*

2. uncountable: *water, milk, sand*

**Collective nouns:** Nouns that describe groups and organizations. *Team, family, government*

**Compound nouns:** *apple tree, girlfriend*

### Verb types

**Auxiliary verbs:** Be, do, have

**Modal auxiliary verbs:** Shall, should, can, could, would, will, may, ought, might, must, etc.

**Main verbs:** *ride, say, yell*

**Phrasal verbs:** These are formed by adding an adverb or a preposition to a verb to create a new meaning. *Set out, pick up, put up*

### Verb forms

**Present:** *He is on the phone.*

**Past:** *He played basketball.*

**Simple:** *He plays.*

**Continuous:** *He is playing basketball.*

**Present simple:** *She is on the bike.*

**Present continuous:** *What's he doing? He's...*

**Past simple:** *She rode a bike.*

**Past continuous:** *He was waiting.*

**Present perfect simple:** *She has sung a song.*

**Present perfect continuous:** *I have been looking for a job.*

**Past perfect simple:** *She had played soccer as a child.*

**Past perfect continuous:** *He'd been staying at the hostel for 3 months.*

Verb forms can be used to talk about different times, kinds of events or a state.

**Participles:** Present=going, Past=gone

**Regular and irregular:** Regular=talked, walked, Irregular=went, saw, ran

**Active:** Sentences that have a subject, object and a verb. *A lion (S) confronted (V) her (O).*

**Passive:** *She was confronted by a lion.*

## Pronouns

**Subject:** I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they, etc.

**Object:** Me, you, him, her, it, us, you, them

**Reflexives:** Myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves

**Possessives:** Mine, yours, his, hers, it's, ours, yours, theirs

**Relative pronouns:** Who, whose, where, which, that. *I saw a boy who was climbing a tree.*

**Adjectives:** Can be used before or after nouns.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
Good	Better	Best
Big	Bigger	Biggest

The order=size>color>origin>material>purpose>noun

## Adverbs

Time	Manner	Place
early	slowly	Toronto
late	quickly	downstairs

**Prepositions:** They usually come before a noun. On, in, next to, by, etc.

## Articles

**Determiners:** They usually come before a noun. *The, an, a, etc. or this, that, these, some, etc. An apple or some apples.*

**Definite:** We can use (the) when there can be just one or when a the listener or reader knows who we are talking about. *The book or the president of the USA.*

**Indefinite:** (A/An) We use these to refer to a particular group, person or thing. *A good teacher, a man, a car*

**Conjunction:** These join two clauses. *And, but, so, because*

## Chapter 6. How do you teach language?

*How should we expose students to language?*

Examples

**Beginners:** The teacher holds up a ball and says "Ball". Students listen and repeat. Then

the teacher introduces a sentence and says "It's a ball." Students listen and repeat. Then the teacher asks, "What is it?" Students listen and repeat.

**Elementary:** Teacher will play a recording of a dialogue more than once and possibly give a written version of the dialogue to the students.

**Intermediate:** The teacher will get the students to use comparative adjectives. Before she does this she will have them read a piece of text from a newspaper.

**Advanced:** The teacher is teaching students vocabulary. She does this by handing them a paper with a single word, used in many different sentences.

*How can students understand the meaning?*

**Beginners:** "It's a ball." The meaning is clear through the use of objects or pictures. "What is it?" can be expressed using gestures and other body language.

**Elementary:** After the recording is played the teacher will then ask comprehension questions.

**Intermediate:** Comparatives. Teacher shows two pictures of a chair, of which one is comfortable and the other uncomfortable.

**Advanced:** Meaning can be explained by context. By seeing the same word in different sentences they can guess the meaning.

Meaning can also be explained by using types, i.e. kinds of fruit, and miming or by opposites.

*How can you assist students to better understand the language form?*

**Beginners:** Words can be spelled, B-A-L-L. The letters show the pronunciation. The teacher shows which letters are stressed. Intonation can be used to express questions.

**Elementary:** Groups of words can be used to express meaning. For example, "Do you have (a/an).....?"

**Intermediate:** The teacher will ask students to look at their text and answer questions like which is the comparative form of *safe*?

**Advanced:** The teacher may ask students to look at their text and see what words come before and after the selected vocabulary word.

*How can they practice the language?*

**Beginners:** They will use a good deal of repetition that will be done in chorus and then individually.

**Elementary:** Here students will practice Q & A with one student asking the question and another answering. For large classes you can use group work do this.

**Intermediate:** For teaching comparatives, students will repeat sentences and then substitute them to compare other things.

**Advanced:** Here students will find a lot of repetition and chorus too unsophisticated for them. Here students can make their own sentences using the word correctly. A bit of chorus is o.k. especially when many students are mispronouncing a word.

*Why do students make mistakes when learning language?*

Students often make mistakes due to the construction of their own languages. Students should know that making mistakes are a natural part of learning.

*How should I correct my students?*

Teachers should point out when something has gone wrong and have the students correct themselves.



## Chapter 7. How do you teach reading?

*What kinds of materials should students read?*

It's important to find reading material that is suitable to the students ability or level. A teacher may use articles, stories, magazines, books, poems, menus, or even advertisements.

*What kinds of reading skills should students learn?*

They should learn scanning and skimming. Scanning for bits of information and skimming to get a general idea of what it is about.

*What ideas are behind the teaching of reading?*

1. Reading is not a passive skill.
2. Students need to be interested in the content.
3. Students should respond to the content as well as the language.
4. Prediction plays an important part of reading.
5. Match the tasks and activities to the topic.
6. Good teachers use the text to the fullest.

Here are some suggestions. Students:

- arrange instructions that have been mixed up.
- read a recipe and then cook.
- read a play and then act it out.
- are given words from a text and then they predict what it's about.
- match topic sentences with the paragraphs they come from.
- read a story with a missing ending and then they provide it.

## Chapter 8. How do you teach writing?

*Why should I teach writing?*

1. It visually reinforces what we have learned.
2. It helps us learn.
3. It helps those who prefer communication in a slower way.
4. It's a language skill.

Writing should suit their level, be useful, and be based on their interests.

Examples

**Elementary:** Students are shown a postcard or other model/topic and after observing this they are asked to produce their own.

**Intermediate:** Students are given a dictation (a sentence) and then are asked to write it according to their preferences. *On Sunday I like to to eat potato chips and watch football on the couch.* -> becomes -> *On Sunday I love to go to the lake and go swimming with my friends.*

**Upper Intermediate:** The teacher will introduce the students to newspaper headlines. Then they will write their own and then finally an article to go with it.

*How should I correct it?*

The teacher should show sensitivity as too many red marks can demotivate students. Word symbols can be used, like s=spelling or g=grammar. Correction can be time consuming so the teacher can also tell the students in advance that he will be correcting spelling, grammar or punctuation.

*What about hand writing?*

It is a personal matter, but the teacher can encourage it to be readable.

*How can I fit writing into ESA?*

E=The teacher talks about post cards.

S=They study the post cards and their features.

A=They write their own.

## Chapter 9. How do you teach speaking?

*How should I encourage students to speak?*

**"Rehearsal":** This gives the students a feel of what it is like to communicate in that language.

**"Feedback":** Teachers can see how well they are doing during speaking tasks and students can see how they have improved.

**"Engage":** Good speaking activities should be enjoyable and motivating.

*What are some examples of speaking activities?*

**Elementary:** A student is given a picture, he gives directions to another who draws it.

**Intermediate:** Survey. Students are given a questionnaire about sleep patterns. They then get up, circulate around the classroom and ask each other.

**Advanced:** Students are asked their personal take on a topic like movies. Then they get into groups and discuss whether violence has a negative effect or not on people. After, the groups can form a debate.

*What should the teacher do during a speaking activity?*

The teacher does not dominate the discussion, however the teacher can get involved and offer his view point.

Here are some other suggestions. Students:

-get into pairs and each is given a similar picture with only slight differences. Through discussion they have to find out the differences.

-think of five famous people. Then they decide on the perfect gift for each one.

-get into groups and look at five different photos and then determine which one gets a prize.

-have a debate on who gets to stay in the balloon. The balloon only has room for so many people, not everyone can go.

## Chapter 10. How do you teach listening?

*Why should I teach listening?*

It's a good idea for the students to be exposed to different accents. Parts of the language

are also subconsciously impressed on the students.

*What sort of things should they listen to?*

Find appropriate material to their level.

*What's important about listening exercises?*

1. Use a quality CD player.
2. Prepare the students, get them ready before listening.
3. Play it more than once.
4. Have the students respond to the content as well.
5. Use different tasks for different stages. The first time might be more general and the second time more detailed.
6. Use as much of it as you can.

*What are some examples of listening exercises?*

**Beginner:** The students have already been exposed to the topic and words with photos before listening. After listening the teacher will ask some comprehension questions.

**Elementary:** The students are exposed to questions about a dialogue. They can see pictures about it and prior to listening to the dialogue they try to predict the answers to the questions.

**Intermediate:** The students are introduced to different cultural practices (taking your shoes off when entering a home, using only the right hand for handling food, bowing, etc.). Then they are asked which would be the most difficult for them to do. Then students are shown questions about the recording. They try to predict what the recording is about. After they listen they then act out the dialogue.

*What are some ideas for using video?*

1. We can play the video without sound and try to predict what it's about.
2. We can cover the image and listen to the sound.
3. We can pause it and try to predict what happens next.
4. Half of the students watch and then the other half doesn't.

Some other activities for listening.

**Elementary:**

Students listen to a phone message and then write it down.

Students listen to directions and then follow them using a map.

**Intermediate+:**

Students listen to, but can't see people describing their occupations. They then guess what they look like and what their jobs are.

Students listen to three different poems being read by three different people. They decide on the mood or color for each and which one they like best.

## Chapter 11. How do you use textbooks?

*How can we use textbooks?*

If the material is lacking a teacher can either, omit, replace, add to or adapt it.

Here's an example of *addition* used in the ESA format.

**"Engage":** Teacher uses the words that are often listed in the back of the book. Students associate them with a positive or negative meaning. Students can also list their five favorite words.

**"Study":** Students look at the words and identify how many syllables they have. They are asked which ones are compound words (e.g. background, airplane). They can be asked what are the comparative forms of the adjectives or what sound the verbs past tense endings make.

**"Activate":** The teacher asks the students to form a newspaper headline with the words. He or she can also give the students a partial sentence and have the students finish it with words from the list.

The teacher may not find everything in the textbook useful. Teachers can use their creativity to omit, add to, adapt to or replace the material.

*How should I choose a text book?*

1. Look through it.
2. Try it out in the classroom.
3. Talk with other teachers.
4. Get opinions from colleagues, friends or students

## **Chapter 12. How do you plan lessons?**

*Why plan?*

A plan helps remind the teacher what they intend on doing. It is something to fall back on. Sometimes things don't go as planned, so the teacher has to also be flexible and improvise.

*What's the aim of a plan?*

It needs to have a logical order and have variety.

*What should I put in the plan?*

In the beginning it will help teachers to make the plan as detailed as possible. However, experienced teachers may just make an outline or write down a few notes that may include an activity, the page or any other tasks they are intending on doing.

1. Who are the students? In the beginning the teacher should write this down.
2. What's the target (objective)? Listening, writing or other.
3. How will the teacher do it?
4. What could go wrong? How will you deal with it?

*Is there anything I need to ask myself about this plan?*

1. Who are the students?
2. Why do you want to do it?
3. What will they learn?
4. How long will it take?
5. What could go wrong?

6. What's needed?
7. How do you do it?
8. How does it relate to the following or preceding lessons?

*What's the proper format?*

There is no correct format. It should help the teacher and possibly anyone who is watching.

*How should I plan several lessons?*

There should be variety. Sameness and predictability will demotivate the students.

## **Chapter 13. How do I deal with problems?**

*What if my students are of different abilities?*

1. Use different materials and divide your classes into groups based on their level.
2. Use different assignments for different levels. For example have three different questions for the levels.
3. Ignore it, however, some may get bored by the slowness of the other levels.
4. Use the students, pair the strong with the weak.

*What if the class is very large?*

1. Use work sheets. All the students can benefit from them.
2. Use pair and group work.
3. Use a chorus and repetition. Divide the class in half and have one half ask the question and the other answer.
4. Assign group leaders.
5. Make sure you can be seen and heard.
6. Lastly size can be used to your advantage. For example, a little humor becomes even more humorous in a large class.

*What do I do if students are speaking their native language (L1)?*

1. Tell them, if they are using L1 then they will have less of a chance to practice and learn English.
2. Let them use it at appropriate times.
3. Respond only to English, ignore the rest.
4. Create an English environment, for example you can give them English names.
5. Repetition: keep telling them.

*What if my students don't cooperate or do what I say?*

1. Talk to them outside the class.
2. Write to them, explain the problem and what they can do about it.
3. Use activities, poor behavior means less fun.
4. Get help. Ask a work mate to sit in on your class.
5. Make a contract that states the behavior that you would like to see from them. Use language they can understand. And have them sign it at the beginning of the year or from your starting point.

*What if they don't talk?*

Sometimes students won't talk much. This can be because they are intimidated or afraid

of making mistakes. Or it could be because of their personality or culture.

1. Use pair work. They will feel less pressure.
2. Start sentences and have them finish them.
3. Use role play and dialogues. This will give them a new identity.
4. Let them use a recording. This will give them quiet time to think and express what they want to say.

## Chapter 14. Thoughts and recap

-*Boredom* is a sign that you should change something that you're doing. When you see students yawning that is a sure sign for you to change what or how you're doing something.

-Find *appropriate* material for the learners.

-*Motivation* is essential to learning. For children use games and activities. For both adults and children you can use your behavior and attitude.

-Use both *variety* and *movement*. Variety in how and what you teach and movement in the sense that you move and they move.

-Consider incorporating *different teaching methods* into your classes.

-Use *prediction* when teaching reading.

-Writing should be based on students *interests*.

-If the textbook is lacking; consider adding to, skipping, replacing or adapting the material.

### Review (My review on Amazon.com.)

*"Whether you're just starting out or you have already been teaching for some years; there is something in this book that will help you.*

*I came upon this book (w/ out the DVD) seven years after I had started teaching. And I got something out of it. Most of those years were spent teaching English mostly to kids in Taiwan, Korea and now China. This book says it focuses mainly on teaching adults, however I definitely think it's a good read for English teachers of all levels. I found that it gave me some new ideas, confirmed others and reminded me of ones that I had forgotten.*

*I generally liked his "viewpoint" in that it wasn't overly opinionated or narrow. It offered multiple points of view and multiple ways of carrying out "tasks".*

*I also enjoyed the different examples of lessons for the different levels (beginner,*

*intermediate, etc.). The examples of how to teach the four skills and the additional suggestions gave me some fresh ideas to use in the classroom. Basically the best thing about this book is that it has fresh ideas. And in my experience teaching there is nothing more important than fresh ideas.*

*If you have been teaching for several years, this will at least help you brush up on your skills and give you a few new ideas. Or if you're just starting out this will be a great book to read and keep on hand as a reference book."*

-Ian Leahy

