

English for Business / TOEIC Classes

Andy M, Greg, Rob and Mike (notes by Andy with additions from Rob and Mike)

Use of TOEIC Textbooks

From April, this year, both Greg and Robert are using the 'Oxford Tactics for the TOEIC Test.' Greg is using it for the first 30-40 minutes of the class time and Robert has been working through the first unit, but from June, plans to concentrate on the main goals of the course. Both mentioned the usefulness of the pair work practice activities featured in the book that seem to engage the student's interest.

I have also been using the activities in the first unit, but apart from a couple of full practice tests, I shall be spending the rest of the year on activities as set out in the course description, namely research / presentation cycles, but I shall continue to push self-study. Also, because of the tendency for students to run out of time in the reading section through not having done enough timed reading practice work, I'm going to set TOEIC reading practice work for homework and give them the answers with explanations the following week.

The results of a survey of my students indicates that the those who use textbooks have a marked preference for self-study textbooks designed for the Japanese market because they include a lot of information and explanations in Japanese. It may be that time spent in class with the 'Oxford Tactics' book could encourage the students to continue using this book for self-study, though the lack of the audio materials and answers / explanations could be a problem.

The course description

We all agreed that the majority of the students don't read it and don't know what the course entails until they are told by the teachers.

Mike said he thought that students may be taking the class just because it has a 'native speaker' teacher and will be taught in English, without any thought about the content. Or they may have only noticed the TOEIC part of the title and not expect the business issues content and the research/discussion/presentation processes.

Self study and other issues

Robert mentioned the usefulness of having the students realize that the only way for them to improve by 100 points or so is to put in around 250 hours of solid self-study. Greg also mentioned how the students tend to not do well in the test because they don't practice taking enough timed tests in the reading section. I would add that it is also likely they also probably haven't developed their ability to process texts fast enough.

However, the fact that the book has been designed to be taught in class and does not lend itself to self-study, especially if the students don't have the tapes / CDs, is a problem.

It was agreed that getting the students to do sufficient study to significantly raise their scores is no easy task. From the results of surveys I've carried out, it would appear that TOEIC self-study is often not at the top of their list of priorities.

The Resource Center

It would appear that few students are making use of this, especially my Saturday students. Mention was made of the lack of 'user friendliness, the fact that a group of very active students who use the facilities regularly in some way inhibit other students from using the facilities. Nevertheless the fact that it isn't open on Saturdays is really exasperating for both myself and the students who (claim to) want to use it.

Use of another computer room

Another computer room (the Joho Shuri Shitsu) on the 2nd floor of Building 6 is open Saturdays, and might be more user friendly and offer better access for the students. If sufficient numbers of TOEIC CDs could be available, or loaded onto the computers, in the computer room, then this might be a solution. It might also be necessary to provide some kind of training session to acquaint students with how to use the facilities.

ALC TOEIC computer software

Rob adds: I mentioned that another university I teach at subscribes to ALC Net Academy which is an online TOEIC-related self study facility. Students find it useful and it could solve our TOEIC self study problems in one go, although it is expensive and if the university doesn't have it already, this option may be impossible. Mike is looking into this.

Mike adds:

Where to put TOEIC in the curriculum

We discussed some alternative locations in the curriculum for TOEIC teaching and self-study. Moving to some kind of test-prep or learning skills class, with a TOEIC component seemed a backward step, which would return us to the kind of situation there was when TOEIC and TOEFL were combined in the same class. A more likely option would be to have a self-study TOEIC component in Business Skills type classes (functional English for meetings, negotiations, giving and taking bribes, etc) in the A.B section of the curriculum. If this happened, the current Business/TOEIC 2.4 classes would become just English for Business classes with the same objectives as the Listening and Speaking classes. It was felt that, if this happened, it would be useful to keep the distinct business issues focus of these classes rather than just make them into more Listening & Speaking classes.

However, the combination of business issues (through research, discussions and presentations) with TOEIC self-study and some in-class time is now working pretty well, so there's no pressing need to change this.

Postscript from Mike

After the Retreat, I checked and found that Chuo doesn't subscribe to the ALC Net Academy that Robert mentioned, so that's not an option for self-study, unfortunately.

On a more positive note, some TOEIC self study materials (2 sets of the Oxford Tactics pack, and one set of the Thomson Complete Guide, 3rd Edition)) have been moved to the Computer Room (Joho Shuri Shitsu) in Building 2 to try and improve student access to the self-study materials, especially on Saturdays.