

# Teaching English using video materials: design and delivery of a practical course

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**Abstract:** In this paper, a practical course for listening, speaking, reading and writing was designed using authentic video material. The aim of this paper is to offer tools to the TEFL teacher in order to design new course materials using video material. The development procedure is explained in detail, and the underpinning main theories are also mentioned, in order to facilitate the future development of new materials to the TEFL teachers.

**Keywords:** TEFL, video course, authentic material, course design

## Introduction

Listening is a receptive skill that is usually acquired before the productive skill of speaking. A silent period, in which the learner is getting new input, but not producing an output could be present (Johnson, 2008). Active listening involves making sense of the meaningful sounds of language. This can be a daunting task since the sounds of language are usually presented in connected speech, and it may be difficult to recognize individual words. Thankfully, people have the ability to make sense from spoken language by making use of context, language, and their own knowledge of the world (Spratt et al., 2011). Speaking and writing are productive skills that are usually acquired after the receptive skills. The following classes were designed using selected video material. The aim of this paper is to provide tools for the TEFL teachers to design new and innovative course materials using videos.

## Class description, size, age, level and purpose

This lesson has been designed for a group of monolingual learners of a class size of approximately 16 students aged 17-19, who are studying the last year at high school or first year at University, and who take additional English classes at an evening language school. The current level of English of the

students is a mix of B1 and B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Ludbrook, 2010) i.e. independent users with intermediate or upper intermediate level. The aim of this class is not to prepare them to pass an exam, but to improve their English level and aim for excellence in both accuracy and fluency.

## Choice of material

The video that we will use in this class is ‘Spike in tourist driver crashes in New Zealand’. This video was carefully selected after viewing other possibilities, considering the level of the audience and the possibilities that this video gives for listening to a variety of accents and the mix of narration and dialogue. Listening to different accents from various peoples from different countries (New Zealand, UK, USA) is a great way to “train the ear” to the different varieties of English. Making the students aware of these differences would be difficult if they were just exposed to their teacher’s speech (Rost & Wilson, 2013). The listening text in this video is authentic material (Scrivener, 1998), since it contains all the features of real spoken language, and the text was not purposely simplified. There are a number of advantages of using video for teaching, among them seeing

language in use, cultural awareness, and motivation (Harmer, 2001). We will be using the whole video for our class, since this video has an appropriate length (under 3 minutes) and amount of material (under 500 words), and it is suitable for the level of the target class. We will be using the original text (video) without any modification. The transcript of the video and the source are reproduced in Appendix 1.

### *New and important vocabulary*

Before starting the listening task, new and important vocabulary will be introduced to the students. Some of the main words/word pairs to be introduced for this text are listed in Appendix 2. This vocabulary will be taught by introducing examples, detailed descriptions, definitions, synonyms, images etc, and only if necessary by translation (since all students share a common L1). The idea is that new vocabulary must be introduced in context in order to be assimilated and remembered by the learners (Nunan, 1991). New words will be introduced first orally and within the context of an example phrase. It is important not to introduce the new vocabulary in writing until it has been first heard and understood, since this will help students to learn the pronunciation of new words without any original mistake that may later become fossilized (Ellis, 1994).

### **Introduction of the video, pre-listening activity**

One of the disadvantages of a listening text is that when we listen to a recording, we cannot see the body language or the context. But in the case of a video, we will have the visual aid to add context and meaning, making it a little easier to make sense. After introducing new vocabulary, we will prepare the students for the listening activity. I will not just say "listen to the video". We want the learners to activate their mindset and be able to anticipate what will be coming, so I will explain that "you are about to watch a video on the topic of road accidents involving tourists in New Zealand. The audio is composed of some narrator's voice-over lines, and interviews with tourists, with a Town Mayor and with a rent-a-car manager". These instructions will activate the learner's schemata, and it will help them to anticipate what they will hear later (Nunan, 1991; Ur, 1996). This will work as "scaffolding" that will help them to understand better the text.

### **Listening for gist and listening for specific details**

**a. Listening for gist** is a top down listening sub-skill in which the learner is trying to get a general meaning of the text (Harmer, 2001). Some of the problems the students may face when listening to an authentic video are: people speak too fast, learners do not know some new words, learners cannot tell where words start and finish, they try to understand every single word, and as a consequence they get stressed because of the failure to make sense (Scrivener, 1994). As a consequence, the affective filter rises, making it even more difficult for the learner to understand the text (Ellis, 1994). In order to facilitate the introduction of the text, some pre-tasks will be planned. Before listening to the text for the first time, we can give the students some tasks that will help them to understand the text. Rather than asking them to listen and try and understand everything, I will ask the learners some gist questions such as what are the main issues in the video, and to try and identify the roles of the people featured in the video (reporter, tourist, Town Mayor, rent-a-car executive). This will keep learners interested and listening for the whole text. The learners will now watch the whole video. After this first viewing, the learners will be prompted to give their answers, in order to check if most learners have understood the general meaning of the text. If there is a large number of learners who cannot give appropriate answers, then it is most probable that the level of the text is too difficult for the group, and then it may be a good idea to play the video for gist listening for a second time.

**b. Listening for specific details** is a bottom up listening sub-skill where the learner aims at selectively listening for specific points from the text (Harmer, 2001). For the listening for specific details I will divide the text in two parts. Part 1 will be from (minute:second) 0:1 to 1:22. This part will be dealing with the tourists and the Town Mayor. Part 2 will be from (minute:second) 1:23 to 2:44, dealing with the nationwide scheme and the car rental company. The reason for dividing the text in two parts is to allow learners to concentrate on detailed meaning for a shorter time. Some questions will be advanced to the learners, so they can listen selectively for this specific information (pre-task). By listening to an interesting story that involves a meaning-focused activity, we will be helping our learners to develop listening fluency (Nation and Newton, 2008). The questions given in advance to the students are listed on Appendix 3. Students should write notes as they listen and hear the answers (while task). After viewing each part, the teacher will ask students for their answers in order to check that they have understood the text (post-task). This immediate

feedback is needed in order to make sure that students understand the text. Once the students have received feedback, depending on the level of understanding, the video will be viewed again in whole (if the group is progressing well) or pausing after each section if there is a need to check the answers. This final viewing is a good way to check for thorough understanding and to build confidence of their listening progress in a more relaxed way. Only after this final viewing, the students will be given the script. As an option, the teacher may play the video for a final time allowing the students to read silently the script as they listen to the video. This will help students to fix in their minds the pronunciation and spelling of new words in a meaningful context, thus facilitating the uptake of these new words.

An integrative post-task will follow the final viewing (Skehan, 1996). I will ask the students for their reactions to what they have heard. Do they agree, disagree, or even believe in what they have heard? The aim of this post task is for students to be able to use the new ideas and new vocabulary learnt in the lesson, and reinforce these new items in their memory, facilitating the uptake of language.

### *Speaking Class*

**Speaking tasks.** This class is the continuation of a previous listening and reading class, so these previous activities are omitted here (students have already watched the video and listened, first for gist and later for detailed understanding). The new vocabulary (e.g. dirt road), has already been taught, the transcript of the video has been read and some awareness-raising has already taken place in a previous class. For a speaking activity to be successful, ideally the tasks should have the following characteristics: the learners should talk a lot, the participation of all learners should be even, learners should be motivated to speak, and the language used should be of an acceptable level (Ur, 1996). In order to fulfill all these requirements, the following speaking tasks were devised:

**Controlled speaking task.** The students will be given a modified version of the script, dissecting this in the smaller units that have some meaning, which are approximately one line long (Appendix 4). The students have previously taken the listening and reading class, so they already know the correct pronunciation of all words and utterances and its meanings. The teacher will read aloud one line at a slow speed, making emphasis on pronunciation. For example:

*“New Zealand’s rugged beauty brings with it challenging driving conditions”.*

The students will repeat this sentence chorally, trying to pronounce as clearly as possible. The teacher will read the same sentence again, and ask the students to repeat. The aim of this lead-in task is to refresh the topic learnt in the previous listening lesson, and for learners to monitor themselves as they speak and pronounce sentences in a connected way. This is a very controlled task, targeting at increasing accuracy in pronunciation, but the teacher needs to point out that this script is authentic material, and that some of the expressions do not follow all grammar rules. It is also interesting to notice the different accents and the way New Zealanders pronounce some vowels, since an English learners needs to be able to understand English from different countries. Being a choral task, it will help students with a lower speaking level to join in without much hesitation, making participation more even. This task will continue with the second line:

*“and many tourists struggle with the terrain and local road rules”*

and it will proceed in the same way for a selection of some of the 35 “chunks” listed on Appendix 4. The number of “chunks” practiced will depend on time available and on how the class is developing (e.g. boredom). This activity should eventually lead to improved fluency and confidence (Scrivener, 1998).

**Role play.** This will be the core task in this class. The students will be given another version of the script (Appendix 5). In this version, the speaker is identified (reporter, mayor, tourist, employee), and the text is in connected speech. This task will be divided in two parts: in the first part the reporter asks questions to tourists and to the mayor, and in the second part the reporter asks questions to Wai rentals employee. Students will be divided into closed pairs, and they will play the role of the reporter (student 1) and the role of the tourist or the mayor (student 2) in part 1, and the roles of the reporter (student 1) and Wai rentals employee (student 2) in part 2. Student will take turns to play the role using her/his own words, but getting help by using the scripts if needed, this time focusing on fluency. Later students will swap roles. It is also interesting to notice the differences in speaking styles of the same person in the video (e.g. the reporter) when reporting (RP speech) and when speaking less formally to the mayor (a more mundane or casual speech). This change in speech is not a change in register, but rather a change in speech that was defined by Labov as style shifting (cited by

Ellis, 1994). The aim of this second task is to improve fluency and automation. The teacher will go round the class observing, taking notes, and if necessary helping with the pronunciation and intonation.

**Freer Practice.** This can be considered a post-task activity. By now students must have quite a good command of the language studied. Now students will do pair work again, but this time with a different partner, and unscripted. Student 1 will talk freely about the facts he/she can remember from the video, or talk about the pros and cons of some of the arguments featured in the video, and student 2 will ask questions pretending he/she has not seen the video, asking for clarification, more details, negotiating understanding and opinions. They must negotiate turns in an informal way similar to a conversation between two friends. Later, students will change roles again, and repeat the task, but this time with a different partner, in order to avoid repetition of questions. The aim of this task is to work on fluency. Students should use the vocabulary learnt previously, but they are encouraged to use alternative words and paraphrasing if needed to keep the conversation flowing. Motivation at this stage should be high, since learners could be free to introduce new ideas of his/her interest. The teacher will walk around the class, observing and listening, and intervening only to help if some pair is struggling, giving feedback or hints for further talk.

### *Writing Class*

**Writing tasks.** Based on the video, the following writing tasks were devised:

1) The learner can choose between: a) write an article for a students' magazine, reporting the facts mentioned in the video; or b) write a short adventure story for the same magazine, inspired in the video. The audience in both cases is students from a University. Text length should be between 500 and 600 words. Narrative is to be used in both cases, but the register should be different, reporting facts in the former case, and telling a story in the latter case. The language function will be to report in the first case and to develop creative writing in the second case. We can consider these as task-based learning activities, where the first task will develop abilities like listing, ordering and comparing, while the second task will also develop creative abilities that combine the previous abilities, personal experience, and personal knowledge (Johnson, 2008). It is important to instruct the students on how to plan their writing, following some stages such as developing ideas, planning/organizing ideas, drafting (writing a first draft of the article), editing

(correcting and improving the text, proof-reading and re-drafting (Spratt et al. 2011). These steps can be iterative and its order can change.

The teacher will pre-teach these genres by showing one example of a magazine article and a short story (Appendices 6 and 7).

2) The learner can choose between writing a letter or an email to a friend, telling him/her his experience when travelling in New Zealand. The learner will pretend she/he was one of the tourists featured in the video. The language function of this task is to tell a friend all about our trip, and incidentally talk about the driving conditions in New Zealand. This type of writing is intended as a way to communicate, so it is important to emphasize that the message has to produce an interaction. The type of language to choose is also important since these messages are not directed to some unknown person, but to a friend. Therefore, language should be informal, friendly and chatty. Text length should be between 200 and 300 words for the letter, slightly shorter for the email, and special attention should be made to the register, style and format. It is important to follow accepted rules for writing a letter and an email (e.g. netiquette, Teeler, 2000, cited by Harmer, 2001). The teacher will pre-teach these genres by showing one example of a letter and an email (Appendices 8 and 9) and calling on the importance of context for these writings (Hyland 2015). Feedback from the writing assignments should be given within a relatively short time (a few days) in order for this task to be meaningful. Feedback should be given if possible in a "responding" mode (Harmer, 2001) engaging with the student on how (s)he can improve his/her writing.

### **Conclusion:**

This course lessons were designed to provide comprehensible input to the learners at a level that will stretch their abilities (Krashen, 1981, cited by Nation and Newton, 2008). To give the necessary learning conditions, the class was designed to comply with MINUS principles (Meaningful, Interesting, New items, Understanding, stress free, Nation and Newton, 2008). I personally support the view that teaching languages is an integrative process in which several skills are introduced simultaneously, and practice in one skill can reinforce other skills (Anderson and Lynch, 1988). The aim of this listening class was not just to passively understand the words or the meaning of the text. There is an integration of skills that will eventually lead to a progress not only in the

listening comprehension skills but also in the lexical, speaking and grammar proficiency of the learners. These activities can be very motivating since they are based on real life situations that can prepare learners to effectively function outside the classroom.

The final aim of this paper was to offer the TEFL teacher a tool to design new course materials. We hope this paper will be useful for further development of teaching materials by the modern TEFL teacher. This guide, together with other online tools such as the ones described by Morales Palma (2016) will provide a good starting point for the design and development of new course materials.

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**Appendix 1. Video transcript: “Spike in tourist driver crashes in New Zealand”**

(Part 1):

New Zealand’s rugged beauty brings with it challenging driving conditions, and many tourists struggle with the terrain and local road rules.

It’s a bit different, yeah. Like, all the mountain roads here are dirt roads rather than paved, which is really different to back home. It’s easy to forget that you just have almost no grip on ice.

The morning and when I wake up a little bit tired, so some times I go on the right side and see ‘Oh! I’m in New Zealand. I have to go on the left side.’

In the South Island, the country’s most popular tourist area, visiting drivers have been responsible for one in every twelve fatal crashes in the past decade. One of the worst spots is here in Queenstown. I took a drive with the mayor to see what’s causing the problems.

It’s not sub-standard or anything, but it’s just, as we’re driving along, there’s one lane either way. We’re in winter now so we get a lot of frost and grit on the roads. It’s a narrow road with lots of corners and stuff like that. So you need to take the time to drive to the conditions. Well look at that – beautiful shot.

And I guess that’s one of the problems especially in a scenic area like this – people don’t always focus on the road, they’re always looking to the left and to the right at amazing scenery.

And stop, quite often in the middle of the road. So it’s a double thing, and we need to look at ways to understand that that’s what people want to do when they want to visit.

(Part 2):

Queenstown’s being used as a pilot for a nationwide scheme launched by the government this year.

A website called Drive Safe provides information in German, Mandarin and English to help tourists planning to drive here. Air New Zealand’s also getting involved with its in-flight magazine and videos. Around the region extra signs are being placed on trouble-spot roads, and rental vehicles now include signs with driving reminders. But one Queenstown hire company is taking extra precautions. Wai Rentals developed a compulsory app test. It must be passed before keys are handed over.

I think it’s much better than if they just have a pamphlet that they’re made to read before they sign. By actually doing the quiz, it sort of engages them a little bit more. And it also, by its nature of being a quiz on a tablet, it sort of engages the rest of the group as well. So it just heightens the awareness with everyone on the trip. But if someone obviously did just fail everything and wasn’t responding, (That’s one of our customers!) then we wouldn’t hire a vehicle and we’d share that information with the other companies locally as well.

It’s a simple innovation gaining traction, and will hopefully make tourists do their homework before driving on the country’s roads.

Mauricio Olmedo-Perez, BBC News, Queenstown, New Zealand.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34450798>

**Appendix 2. New words and word pairs to be pre-taught.**

*Spike*

*rugged beauty*

*dirt road*

*paved*

*grip*

*sub-standard*

*grit*

*beautiful shot*

*scenic*

*scheme*

**Appendix 3. Questions for listening for specific details.**

Questions in part 1:

- What did tourists find quite different to back home about the mountain roads?
- In the South Island, visitors have been responsible for one in every ... fatal crashes in the past decade
- One of the problems causing accidents is ...
- And another problem causing accidents could be ...

Questions in part 2:

- The website Drive Safe provides information in which languages?
- How is Air New Zealand helping the scheme?
- What extra action has taken Wai rentals?
- What happens if the customer fails the quiz?

**Appendix 4, controlled practice**

**1** New Zealand's rugged beauty brings with it challenging driving conditions,

**2** and many tourists struggle with the terrain and local road rules.

**3** It's a bit different, yeah.

**4** Like, all the mountain roads here are dirt roads rather than paved,

**5** which is really different to back home.

**6** It's easy to forget that you just have almost no grip on ice.

**7** The morning and when I wake up a little bit tired, so sometimes I go on the right side and see 'Oh! I'm in New Zealand. I have to go on the left side.'

**8** In the South Island, the country's most popular tourist area, visiting drivers have been responsible for one in every twelve fatal crashes in the past decade.

**9** One of the worst spots is here in Queenstown.

**10** I took a drive with the mayor to see what's causing the problems.

**11** It's not sub-standard or anything, but it's just, as we're driving along, there's one lane either way.

**12** We're in winter now so we get a lot of frost and grit on the roads.

**13** It's a narrow road with lots of corners and stuff like that.

**14** So you need to take the time to drive to the conditions.

**15** Well look at that – beautiful shot.

**16** And I guess that's one of the problems especially in such a scenic area like this,

**17** people don't always focus on the road,

**18** they're always looking to the left and to the right at amazing scenery.

**19** And stop, quite often in the middle of the road.

**20** So it's a double thing, and you know, we need to look at ways to understand that that's what people want to do when they want to visit.

**21** Queenstown's being used as a pilot for a nationwide scheme launched by the government this year.

**22** A website called Drive Safe provides information in German, Mandarin and English to help tourists planning to drive here.

**23** Air New Zealand's also getting involved with its in-flight magazine and videos.

**24** Around the region extra signs are being placed on trouble-spot roads,

**25** and rental vehicles now include signs with driving reminders.

**26** But one Queenstown hire company is taking extra precautions.

**27** Wai Rentals developed a compulsory app test.

**28** It must be passed before keys are handed over.

**29** I think it's much better than if they just have a pamphlet that they're made to read before they sign.

**30** By actually doing the quiz, it sort of engages them a little bit more.

**31** And it also, by its nature of being a quiz on a tablet, it sort of engages the rest of the group as well.

**32** So it just heightens the awareness with everyone on the trip.

**33** But if someone obviously did just fail everything and wasn't responding, (that's one of our customers!) **34** then we wouldn't hire a vehicle and we'd share that information with the other companies locally as well.

**35** It's a simple innovation gaining traction, and will hopefully make tourists do their homework before driving on the country's roads.

**Appendix 5, role play****Part 1**

**Reporter:** New Zealand's rugged beauty brings with it challenging driving conditions, and many tourists struggle with the terrain and local road rules.

**Tourist 1:** It's a bit different, yeah. Like, all the mountain roads here are dirt roads rather than paved, which is really different to back home. It's easy to forget that you just have almost no grip on ice.

**Tourist 2:** The morning and when I wake up a little bit tired, so sometimes I go on the right side and see 'Oh! I'm in New Zealand. I have to go on the left side.'

**Reporter:** In the South Island, the country's most popular tourist area, visiting drivers have been responsible for one in every twelve fatal crashes in the past decade. One of the worst spots is here in Queenstown. I took a drive with the mayor to see what's causing the problems.

**Mayor:** It's not sub-standard or anything, but it's just, as we're driving along, there's one lane either way.

We're in winter now so we get a lot of frost and grit on the roads. It's a narrow road with lots of corners and stuff like that. So you need to take the time to drive to the conditions. Well look at that – beautiful shot.

**Reporter:** And I guess that's one of the problems especially in such a scenic area like this, people don't always focus on the road, they're always looking to the left and to the right at amazing scenery.

**Mayor:** And stop, quite often in the middle of the road. So it's a double thing, and you know, we need to look at ways to understand that that's what people want to do when they want to visit.

**Part 2**

1:25 (video time)

**Reporter:** Queenstown's being used as a pilot for a nationwide scheme launched by the government this year. A website called Drive Safe provides information in German, Mandarin and English to help tourists planning to drive here. Air New Zealand's also getting involved with its in-flight magazine and videos.

**Reporter:** Around the region extra signs are being placed on trouble-spot roads, and rental vehicles now include signs with driving reminders. But one Queenstown hire company is taking extra precautions. Wai Rentals developed a compulsory app test. It must be passed before keys are handed over.

**Wai Rentals:** I think it's much better than if they just have a pamphlet that they're made to read before they sign. By actually doing the quiz, it sort of engages them a little bit more. And it also, by its nature of being a quiz on a tablet, it sort of engages the rest of the group as well. So it just heightens the awareness with everyone on the trip. But if someone obviously did just fail everything and wasn't responding, (that's one of our customers!) then we wouldn't hire a vehicle and we'd share that information with the other companies locally as well.

**Reporter:** It's a simple innovation gaining traction, and will hopefully make tourists do their homework before driving on the country's roads.

Mauricio Olmedo-Perez, BBC News, Queenstown, New Zealand.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34450798>

**Appendix 6. How to write a magazine article.**

## I. PLANNING



The **beginning** should introduce the subject. The writer wants to catch the reader's attention and hint at what is to come. If the beginning is poor, the reader could lose interest quickly and stop reading.

The **middle** section presents the main ideas, thoughts, actions and so on. These will often be presented in stages or with several twists and turns of argument.

The **ending** generally sums up the piece of text, or makes a final point, or brings a conclusion to a story.

It can add to your marks in a test if you show a plan of how you are going to answer a long question.

A writer will usually plan not only what they are going to write, but also how they are going to write it. For example, how would a writer plan a magazine article about the benefits of health and fitness?

*A. Sample plan for magazine article*

Imagine you are writing a plan for a magazine article about fitness and health.

1. Beginning: do people need to be fit?
2. Arguments for and against
3. How diet relates to this
4. Health angle – unfit people can need more health care
5. Warning against over exercising
6. Ending: get fit and eat healthy food and you will benefit

This is an example of quite a straightforward plan. Each box contains a summary of a paragraph and they are organised in

a way that steers the reader through a journey. Obviously, the more complex the issue, argument, story, and so on, the more complex the plan will be.

Source:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/english/reading/structure/revision/2/>

**Appendix 7. How to write a short story.**

1 **Collect ideas for your story.** Inspiration can strike at any time, so carry a notepad with you wherever you go so that you can write down story ideas as they come to you.

- Most of the time, you'll just think of small snippets of information (a catastrophic event around which you can build a plot, a character's name or appearance, etc.), but you will sometimes get lucky and a whole story will reveal itself to you in a couple of minutes.
- If you have trouble finding inspiration or if you need to write a story in a hurry (for, as an example, a class), [learn how to brainstorm](#). If you can't come up with any ideas, you might have to look to family and friends for inspiration.
- Experience usually helps to build good plots. Many of Isaac Asimov's mysteries came from experience of certain incidents.

2 **Begin with the basics of a short story.** After you've chosen an idea, you need to remember the basics of a short story before writing one. The steps to a good short story are:

- Introduction: introduce characters, setting, time, weather, etc.
- Initiating action: the point of a story that starts the rising action.
- Rising action: events leading up to the climax or turning point.
- Climax: the most intense point or turning point of the story.
- Falling action: your story begins to conclude.
- Resolution: a satisfying ending to the story in which the central conflict is resolved—or not! You don't have to write your short story in order. If you have an idea for a great conclusion, write it down. Move backward or forward from your starting idea (it may or may not be the beginning of the story) and ask yourself questions. "What happened before this?" "What happens next?"

3 **Find inspiration from real people.** If you have trouble understanding or finding attributes of a character, turn to your life. You can easily borrow attributes of people you know or even strangers you notice.

- For example, you might notice that someone is always drinking a cup of coffee, talks in a loud, booming voice, is always typing away at the computer, etc. All of these observations would together make a very interesting character. Your character can even blend attributes of a number of people.

4 **Know your characters.** For a story to be believable, the characters have to feel genuine and realistic. It can be a difficult task to create interesting and realistic characters. But here are a few strategies to create "real people" to populate your story:

- Write a list, titled with the character's name, and write all the attributes you can think of, from their position in the orchestra to their favorite color, from their central motivations to their favorite foods. Do they talk with an accent? Do they have any quirky mannerisms? You won't include all this information in your story, but the more you know, the more your characters will come to life, both for you and for the reader.
- Make sure your characters' personalities are not perfect. Every character needs to have some flaws, some problems, some imperfections and some insecurities. You might assume that people wouldn't like to read about a character with a lot of flaws, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. Batman wouldn't be The Dark Knight if he weren't a borderline sociopath!
- People can relate to characters with problems, as that's realistic. When trying to come up with flaws, you don't need to give your character some huge, bizarre issue (although you definitely can). For most characters, try to stick with things you know about. For example, the character could have anger issues, be afraid of water, be lonely, dislike being around other people, smoke too much, etc. Any or all of these could be developed further.

5 **Limit the breadth of your story.** A novel can occur over millions of years and include a multitude of subplots, a variety of locations, and an army of supporting characters. The main events of a short story should occur in a relatively short period of time (days or even minutes), and you typically won't be able to develop effectively more than one plot, two or three main characters, and one setting. If your story has much more breadth, it probably needs to be a [novella](#) or [novel](#).

6 **Decide who will tell the story.** There are three main points of view from which to tell a story: first-person ("I"), second-

person (“you”), and third-person (“he” or “she”). In a first-person story, a character in the story tells the story; in the second-person the reader is made a character in the story; and in the third-person, an outside narrator tells the story. (Second-person narration is rarely used.)

- Keep in mind that first-person narrators can only tell what they know (which will be limited to what they see firsthand or are told by others), while third-person narrators can either know everything and explore every character’s thoughts (third-person omniscient) or be limited to only that which can be observed by one character (third-person limited).
- You can also mix and match. For example, you could switch between a first-person narrative in one chapter, and third-person in another, or even have more than one first-person point of view. An excellent example of this is the short story “Rashōmon”, by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke<sup>[1]</sup>. This was later turned into a movie of the same name by Akira Kurosawa.

**7 Organize your thoughts.** After you’ve prepared the basic elements of your story, it can be helpful to make some sort of time-line to help you decide what should happen when.

- Your story should consist at least of an introduction, initiating incident, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. You can draw or write a visual with very simple descriptions of what should happen in each of these stages. Having this done will help you keep focused when writing the story, and you can easily make changes to it, so that you are able to keep a steady flow as you write the full story.

**8 Start writing.** Depending on how thoroughly you’ve sketched out your plot and characters, the actual writing process may simply be one of choosing the right words.

- Generally, however, writing is arduous. You probably won’t know your characters and plot as well as you thought, but it doesn’t matter—in a sense, they will tell you what they need, even if you paint them into a corner. Plus, there’s always the second draft!

**9 Come out swinging.** The first page—some would say the first sentence—of any writing should grab the reader’s attention and leave him/her wanting more.

- A quick start is especially important in short stories because you don’t have much room to tell your story. Don’t dillydally with long introductions of the characters or uninteresting descriptions of the

setting: get right into the plot, and reveal details about the characters and setting piece-by-piece as you go along.

**10 Keep writing.** You’re almost certain to hit some bumps in the road to finishing your story. You’ve got to work through them, though. Set aside a time to write each and every day, and make it a goal to finish, say, a page each day. Even if you end up throwing away what you wrote on that day, you’ve been writing and thinking about the story, and that will keep you going in the long run.

- Consider participating in writing groups or activities. One very good activity for writers of all kinds is “National Novel Writing Month,” or NaNoWriMo.<sup>[2]</sup> Every year, from November 1 through November 30th, you are tasked with writing a novel of at least 50,000 words. Brilliance and quality are off the table—the goal is the act of writing. Check out the reference link for more information.

**11 Let the story write itself.** As you develop your story, you may want to turn your plot in a different direction than you had planned, or you may want to substantially change or remove a character. Listen to your characters if they tell you to do something different, and don’t worry about scrapping your plans altogether if you can make a better story as you go.

Source: <http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Short-Story>

**Appendix 8. How to write a letter.**

## II. AN INFORMAL LETTER TO A FRIEND

In this lesson I show you how to write an informal letter for IELTS. I quickly talk you through the problems of informal letters then I show you a model letter with notes on how to make your letters informal. You need to think about:

**1) Understanding the dangers of informal letters**

It is easy to get an informal letter wrong by forgetting the rules of good writing. Here are some dangers:

you forget about a clear structure to your letter – it's easy to write to casually

you forget about range of vocabulary – informal doesn't mean oversimple

you also forget range of grammar too

If you take a look at my letter below you will see a well-structured model with a good range of language. See my letter

*Dear Rashid,*

*It was great to hear from you and I'm really glad that things are working out for you down under. It sounds as if you have landed on your feet!*

*Many thanks for your kind invitation to come and stay with you and Maybeline in Perth, but I'm going to have to turn you down this time. The problem is that I'm just too busy studying for my IELTS exam and I don't have enough time in the day as it is. Perhaps I can take you up on your offer sometime next year, when I hope that I'll have got that magic band score 8.0.*

*My other news is that Acme have offered me a promotion and soon I should be the senior accounts manager. Obviously that means more money but the downside is that I'm almost certainly going to have to work much longer hours too. There's a cloud to every silver lining!*

*Anyway, I must get down to work again. So thanks once more for your kind invitation and I do hope that we can get together sometime in the not too distant future.*

*All the best*

*Dominic (188 words)*

**2) Read and understand the question – get task response right**

As you read this question, you should note two key points:

you are writing to a friend and so you can expect to use more informal language

you have 3 items to include in your letter

*A friend who lives in another country has invited to you come and stay with him/her on your next holiday. You are too busy to accept the invitation. Write a letter to your friend. In your letter*

*Thank him/her for the invitation*

*Explain why you cannot come*

*Give him/her your other news*

**3) Structure the letter and use paragraphs**

You still need to use paragraphs even though the letter is less formal.

One possibility is to use one paragraph for each point. Here I have done something slightly different as I have put the thank you in with the explanation. I follow a 4 paragraph structure:

**chatty opening**

**main para 1** – say thank you and explain why I can't come

**main para 2** – give other news

**chatty close**

*4) Informal letters are chatty – think beginnings and endings*

You are supposed to be writing to a friend, so it is a good idea to do what friends normally do – chat. In letters, this typically means that the letter opens with news and closes with the hope that you will see each other soon. This helps structure your letter.

**Opening paragraph – say why you're writing**

This is where you show what the letter is about. Here I follow the question by showing that this letter is to a friend who has just written to me and I add some detail in to show that we're friends. I chat.

*It was great to hear from you and I'm really glad that things are working out for you down under. It sounds as if you have landed on your feet!*

Note the phrase "It was great to hear from you" this works much better here than "Thank you for your letter".

**Closing paragraph– remind about the most important point**

This is where you normally say what happens next and perhaps summarise the main purpose of the letter. Here I apologise again:

*Anyway, I must get down to work again. So thanks once more for your kind invitation and I do hope that we can get together sometime in the not too distant future.*

**5) For better vocabulary – think synonyms and collocations**

You should remember that vocabulary is 25% of your score in all parts of the writing test. One problem with letters is that they may look too simple and that you forget to use a range of vocabulary. One suggestion is that you think of synonyms and collocations for the words in the question. See these variations from the word "invitation":

invitation – accept/refuse, generous/kind, take up/turn down

The most stylish ones to use are "to take up an invitation" meaning to accept it and "to turn down an invitation" meaning to refuse it.

6) *For better vocabulary – think about topic vocabulary*

Another way you can improve your vocabulary score is to see how you can use specific topic vocabulary. Here, you should see that both in the explanation why you cannot come and giving your news, you have the chance to show off a little. The question is really just asking you to write about what you know. In my answer, I write a little about IELTS but more about work. This gives me the chance to use:

*offer a promotion/senior accounts manager/more money/work longer hours*

None of the vocabulary is very complex. It doesn't need to be – this is an informal letter to a friend. It is, though, very specific. That's good.

7) *Phrasal verbs are great for informal letters*

Phrasal verbs may look simple, but in fact they are extremely tricky to use well. But you should also see that some phrasal verbs are quite simple (“stay with”) and all you need to do is to remember to use them.

*work out for* = things are going well  
*land on your feet* = a set phrase meaning that you have survived a possibly difficult situation (cats always land on their feet)

*stay with* = a simple phrasal verb to replace “visit”

*turn someone down* = note how the object comes between the verb and the preposition

*take someone up on an offer* = note that here too the object comes immediately after the verb

*get down to work* = start work

*get together* = meet each other

8) *Idioms and set phrases*

When you are writing informally to a friend, remember you can use idioms. Idioms can be tricky too, but some are more straightforward.

*things* – this is poor in academia writing, but stylish when writing more informally

*down under* – what the English call Australia – it's on the other side of the globe.

*not have enough time in the day* – a set phrase for being too busy

*the downside* – an idiom for “disadvantage”

*there's a cloud to every silver lining* – the normal phrase is every cloud has a silver lining – meaning that even when things look bad, there is normally a positive aspect too. Here, I have just changed the phrase around.

*the not too distant future* – a set phrase for “quite soon”

9) *Other language to make your informal letters work*

*I'm really glad that* – “really” may look like a little word, but here it is much more stylish than “very”

*I'm just too busy* – “just” is another little word that makes a difference. Her wis simply adds emphasis

*I'll have got* – I vary my tenses nicely in this letter. Spot the

future

perfect

here.

*Obviously* – don't forget to link sentences together in letters.

*almost certainly* – another phrase you may not have noticed.

A top tip is to remember to use qualifying phrases like this.

*Anyway* – another linking word. This one is useful to come back to main point of the letter.

Source: <http://www.dcielts.com/ielts-letters/informal-letter-to-a-friend/>

Appendix 9. How to write an email.

Source:

<http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/skills/writing-skills-practice/informal-email>

Answer this question.

You are going to spend a weekend with your friend from London called Jamie Collins. Read the email you have just received from Jamie and the notes you've made. Write a reply to Jamie using **all** the notes (in red). You should write approximately **150 words**.

New message from Jamie

Subject: Coming to London

Hi,

I'm really looking forward to your visit next weekend. I've checked the forecast and the weather's going to be sunny and warm! So, I thought we could have a picnic in Regent's Park on Saturday afternoon. Would you like to do that?

I've been thinking about the Sunday too. One thing we could do is go shopping in the centre of town. Or, Chelsea are playing Arsenal if you fancy going to a football match. Let me know what you'd prefer to do.

I wanted to ask your advice about something. I've been spending quite a lot of money recently. Have you got any tips on how I can spend less and save a bit of money? I'd be really glad to hear your advice.

Just one last thing. You mentioned that you've got a new tablet computer. Could you bring it with you? I'm thinking of getting one and I'd love to try it out.

See you soon,  
Jamie

Great idea!

Give some advice.

Tell Jamie.

Not possible. Say why.

To:

Subject: