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Exam Tips In ESL Textbooks

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DEPARTAMENT D'ESTUDIS ANGLESOS I ALEMANYS

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ABSTRACT

This project reports on a content and statistical study of exam tips present in twelve English as a second language (ESL) textbooks for the B2 and C1 levels from the common European framework of reference (CEFR) in order to determine the exam tips' distribution, purpose and use. All exam tips present in the twelve selected textbooks were collected, classified and interpreted. Findings show that interaction between the learner and the tips and integration between the tips and the content of the textbooks is sought by the different selected publishers when designing and writing their exam tips. Variables such as the textbook title or the type of exam tip also highly shape the distribution and arrangement of the tips.

***Keywords*: exam tips, ESL textbooks, exam strategies**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES iv

LIST OF FIGURES v

1. INTRODUCTION 6

3. OBJECTIVES 14

4. METHODOLOGY 15

5. ANALYSIS 21

6. CONCLUSION 32

7. REFERENCES 34

APPENDIX A 35

APPENDIX B 36

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Selected textbooks' publishers, titles and levels. 15

Table 2. Example of my Excel classification of exam tips. 19

Table 3. Number of exam tips for the speaking paper depending on the publisher. 20

Table 4. Number and type of exam tips depending on the CEFR level. 20

Table 5. Distribution of exam tips in my selected textbooks. 22

Table 6. Distribution of the types of exam tips based on the CEFR level..... 28

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Diagram of Oxford's Strategy System 11

Figure 2. Exam tips compilation example 16

Figure 3. Exam tips box example 16

Figure 4. Diagram of oxford's classification of anguage learning strategies. 17

Figure 5. Diagram of my classification of exam tips. 17

Figure 6. Example 1 of an exam tips box with accompanying activitites 24

Figure 7. Example 2 of an exam tips box with accompanying activitites 24

Figure 8. Number of exam tips per exam paper and average according to the paper length from B2 textbooks. 26

Figure 9. Number of exam tips per exam paper and average according to the paper length from C1 textbooks. 26

Figure 10. An instructional and a metacognitive tip for part 1 of the Listening Paper from the B2 exam 29

Figure 11. Example of memory exam tip 30

Figure 12. Example of affective tip 30

1. INTRODUCTION

English as a Second Language (ESL) textbooks are a commonly used tool by learners that seek to improve their English level. Some decide to use said textbooks together with the guidance of a tutor or teacher, while others follow a more autodidactic approach. Nevertheless, they usually have a common goal: to achieve a certain proficiency level of the language.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) describes different levels of language proficiency ranging from beginners (A1) to proficient speakers (C2). Learners can achieve these different validations by getting a diploma that certifies their level of English. With this in mind, students use or choose textbooks that aim to prepare them for the exams that, upon passing, would grant said recognitions.

A key factor in passing these exams is being familiar with the exams' formats, understanding the different tasks and putting enough time and effort into practicing and reflecting on one's performance. Most ESL textbooks that prepare students for official English exams focus not only on the exams themselves but also on the English level required for said exams. These books provide students with practice on crucial parts of the English language, such as grammar, vocabulary or syntax that would ultimately, both directly and indirectly, influence a learner's performance on the exam. This is the reason why a big number of ESL textbooks are divided in different units that aim to review or learn different parts of the English language while, at the same time, making constant references to the activities and tasks of the goal exam. Mock activities and exam tips are

usually distributed throughout the units of the ESL textbooks, which provide a constant reminder of the end goal and serve as essential practice and instruction.

Exam tips are short pieces of advice that focus on a particular aspect of the exam that they prepare for. These tips are useful items that can often be forgotten or disregarded by teachers or learners. Not all ESL textbooks include explicit exam tips but the ones that do provide learners with important comments and useful insight towards the goal exam. The content of these exam tips usually focuses on a specific part of the goal exam, this being a specific activity or certain strategy for a task. Some textbooks decide to include exam tips as part of activities and others as extra information. Some textbooks distribute the exam tips throughout the contents of the units while others decide to present them together. The approach that ESL textbooks have regarding the presentation of the exam tips ultimately affects how the learners interact with them.

The very nature of exam tips, their variety and their purposes make for interesting study. What seems to be a sometimes-overlooked aspect of ESL textbooks becomes the center of my analysis and the main body of my project.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

English is not only the most spoken language in the world (Ethnologue, 2021) it is also the most studied foreign language. A lot of people from all over the world choose to study English in order to increase their educational and professional opportunities and, as a result, plenty of English as second language (ESL) textbooks are published every year. Publishers like Oxford University Press or Cambridge University Press dominate the market publishing dozens of new titles on an annual basis. This big publishing giants yearly release catalogues with new titles or edited versions of old textbooks. Schools, teachers and students then have a wide variety of titles to choose from classified by age, objectives and level.

A lot of these textbooks aim to help students achieve a specific level of English. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) describes six different levels of language proficiency in a foreign language: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. I chose to work with textbooks focusing on the B2 and C1 levels. The B2 level (FCE) indicates that the student has a level of English which would be high enough for them to reside in an English-speaking country and have a job without language being an impediment. The C1 level (CAE) is the second to last level from the international standard proposed by the CEFR and proves the student's high-level ability in English. In comparison with the B2 level, a C1 student would be capable of using the English language more efficiently in more demanding and spontaneous situations while at the same time being more proficient in adapting their speech in accordance to the professional, social and academic settings. In order to officially validate their English level, students have to take the according test from the Cambridge English Qualification

exams and obtain a passing grade. All the exams from the different English CEFR levels follow similar structures and test the same language skills. Consequently, for the case of the B2 and C1 levels the correspondent exams are exceptionally similar. Both exams consist of four different papers; Firstly, the reading and use of English paper, which is divided in seven parts for the B2 level and in 8 for the C1 level. It tests a student's proficiency on grammar, vocabulary as well as their understanding of different types of texts. The B2 exam includes two multiple choice activities, an open cloze activity, a word transformation activity, a key word transformation activity, a gapped text activity, and a multiple matching activity. The C1 only adds a cross-text multiple matching activity. Secondly, the writing paper, which is divided in two parts for both levels but with C1 requiring the learner to be familiar with more types of texts. Both the B2 and C1 levels include a compulsory question where students have to write an essay and a second question where students write from a choice of text types. Thirdly, the listening paper, which tests a learner's ability to understand spoken English used in different contexts. Both the B2 and C1 levels include the same number of parts but in different orders. Students have to complete two multiple choice activities, a sentence completion activity and a multiple matching activity. Finally, the speaking paper, which exposes the learners to face-to-face situations and tests their performance. Both the B2 and C1 levels have the same number of parts and activities: an interview activity, a long turn activity, a collaborative task and a discussion activity. With such a similar structure for both exams, the not so obvious changes in level from the B2 to the C1 level require students to have a better understanding of the nuances of the languages and possess more instinctive English skills.

There have been a number of studies that focused on the analysis and comparison of ESL textbooks. Ansary (2002) explored what the main characteristics of EFL and ESL textbooks were. Other more specific studies focused on the dialogues present on ESL textbooks (Wong, 2002 & Bernsten, 2002), the input that students were getting from them (Miller, 2011) or the pragmatic competence being taught (Vellenga, 2004). However, there were not studies that I could find analyzing the subject matter that I examined. Information regarding the content and purpose of exam tips in ESL textbooks was rather scarce and the little relevant information about them was found in some support material for the very same ESL textbooks that I analyzed. In these instances, the texts mainly referred to the purpose of the tips and their situation in the books' pages, usually without acknowledging or referring to the very nature of the tips.

The field of research of language learning strategies studies the processes and strategies that exam tips are based on. I realized that most of their descriptions and views on key concepts could be used for my analysis and so I decided to base part of my study on the subject of language learning strategies.

Oxford (1990) originally defined language learning strategies as "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning". She would later (1993, p. 175) build on her own definition and describe language learning strategies as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students employ— often consciously—to improve their progress in internalizing, storing, retrieving, and using the L2". O'malley and Chamot (1990, p. 1) described them as "the special thoughts and behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information". Some years later, Grenfell and Harris (1999, p. 39) defined them as "naturally induced habits and taught behaviors and

techniques that form processes involved in language manipulation and the study skills necessary for organizing learning".

Oxford developed a classification of language learning strategies based on important features such as language skill, problem orientation, action basis, involvement, ability to support learning, degree of observability, level of consciousness, teachability, flexibility, and influences on strategy choice (Oxford, 1990, p. 11). The understanding of these different features and aspects helped her create a new strategy classification system (see figure 1) that separated direct strategies from indirect strategies. Oxford differentiates direct strategies from indirect strategies in order to be able to understand how to properly apply them in classroom settings and because the very nature of both types of strategies calls for different analysis. On the one hand, she defines direct strategies as the ones "that directly involve the target language" (Oxford, 1990, p. 37). On the other hand, Oxford describes indirect strategies as the ones that "support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language" (Oxford, 1990, p. 135). Her final classification includes memory, cognitive and compensation strategies as direct strategies and metacognitive, affective and social strategies as indirect strategies. This last classification is the one that I ultimately adapted as part of my analysis of exam tips.

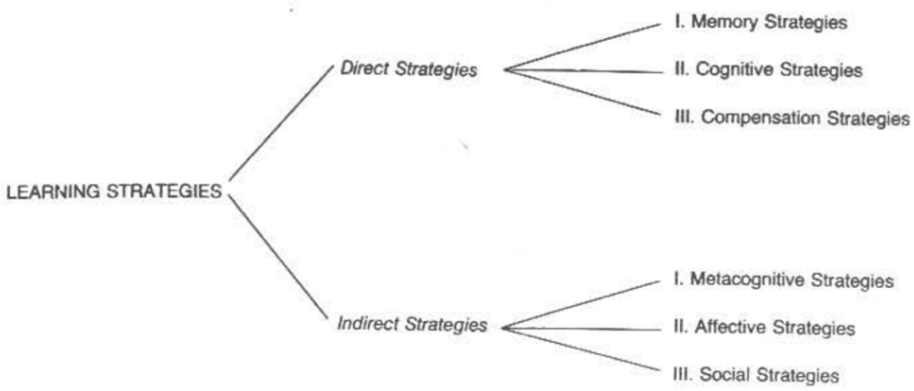


Figure 1. Diagram of Oxford's Strategy System (Oxford, 1990, p. 16).

It is important to understand the purpose of each one of these strategies in order to later understand how I adjusted these concepts to match my project. Oxford (1990) explains that

- Memory strategies help students acquire new information, store it and access it.

- Cognitive strategies help students, mostly by means of practice, create new language.

- Compensation strategies help students work around their weaknesses in a language.

- Metacognitive strategies help students understand and use their own knowledge of the language and strategies to learn more effectively.

- Affective strategies help students control their emotions and feelings in certain learning situations.

- Social strategies help students when using the language while interacting with others.

As stated before, Oxford's original classification of language learning strategies served as the bases part of my analysis of exam tips. Her work and the studies of others in the same field shaped the way that I adapted her original classification to mine. There are also more specific studies that focus on the different language learning strategies for the

different language skills, i.e., speaking, reading, listening and writing. I purposely chose not to make this part of my theoretical framework since I wanted to focus on exam tips in general rather than on their differences depending on the language skill that they aim to help with.

3. OBJECTIVES

My general objective in this project is:

1. To conduct an in-depth analysis of exam tips present in ESL textbooks aimed to B2 and C1 students.

My specific objectives in this analysis are:

1. To Identify and classify the different types of exam tips.
2. To understand the objectives, distribution and language from exam tips.
3. To contrasts the different publishers and titles' approach to exam tips.

4. METHODOLOGY

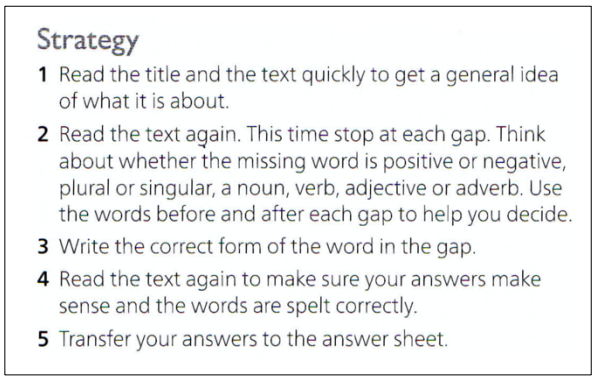
To conduct this analysis, a total of over eighteen hundred ESL exam tips were collected from twelve B2 and C1 ESL textbooks. The textbooks were selected from the wide range of publications of three of the major publishers of English language teaching material: Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press and Pearson English. Two titles were selected from each publisher, together with the 2 target levels versions (i.e., B2 and C1) for each title (see Table 1 for the textbooks' publishers, titles and levels and Appendix A for their full bibliographic information). Different publishers and titles were purposely selected for contrasting purposes.

Table 1. *Selected textbooks' publishers, titles and levels.*

Publisher	Title	CEFR Level
Cambridge University Press	Compact	B2
Cambridge University Press	Compact	C1
Cambridge University Press	Complete	B2
Cambridge University Press	Complete	C1
Oxford University Press	Cambridge English: Result	B2
Oxford University Press	Cambridge English: Result	C1
Oxford University Press	Solutions	B2
Oxford University Press	Solutions	C1
Pearson English	Expert	B2
Pearson English	Expert	C1
Pearson English	Gold	B2
Pearson English	Gold	C1

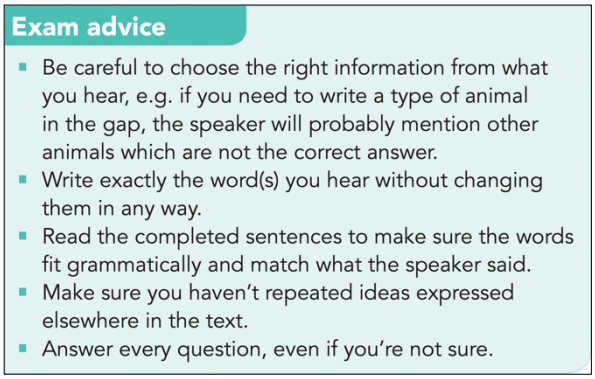
All exam tips present in the selected textbooks were distinctly identified and compiled. The exam tips can be found in two different contexts: in 'exam tips boxes', distributed

throughout the units or in 'exam tips compilations', present at the end of the different units or right before the end of the books. Exam tips boxes (see figure 2) are selections of exam tips organized in some type of box. These boxes are found inside the units of the textbooks and they are positioned before, after or together with the activities they refer to. Exam tips compilations (see figure 3) are also selections of exam tips, but these appear outside of units and without accompanying activities. The labelling of both these boxes and compilations differs depending on the publisher but their titles always refer to tips, strategies or pieces of advice for the according parts of the exams.


Strategy

1 Read the title and the text quickly to get a general idea of what it is about.
2 Read the text again. This time stop at each gap. Think about whether the missing word is positive or negative, plural or singular, a noun, verb, adjective or adverb. Use the words before and after each gap to help you decide.
3 Write the correct form of the word in the gap.
4 Read the text again to make sure your answers make sense and the words are spelt correctly.
5 Transfer your answers to the answer sheet.

Figure 2. *Exam tips compilation example (Burgess & Thomas, 2019, p. 179).*


Exam advice

- Be careful to choose the right information from what you hear, e.g. if you need to write a type of animal in the gap, the speaker will probably mention other animals which are not the correct answer.
- Write exactly the word(s) you hear without changing them in any way.
- Read the completed sentences to make sure the words fit grammatically and match what the speaker said.
- Make sure you haven't repeated ideas expressed elsewhere in the text.
- Answer every question, even if you're not sure.

Figure 3. *Exam tips box example (Davies, Falla, Kelly, Wendholt & Wheeldon, 2017, p. 88).*

Using digital and physical copies of the selected textbooks, all the exam tips boxes and compilations were individually separated, stored and labelled for easier further reach. For digital copies of the textbooks, said boxes and compilations were directly cropped out of the pages using the default image editor of my Macintosh OS laptop computer. For physical copies of the textbooks, I first scanned the pages where boxes and compilations were present and then I followed the same procedure as I did with digital copies. All the exam tips files were labelled as followed: *Textbook Title – CEFR Level – Page – Exam Paper (i.e., Reading and Use of English, Listening, Writing and Speaking) – Part In the*

Corresponding Paper, e.g., Compact B2 - Pg. 20 - Speaking - Part 2. The boxes and compilations were stored together in the same folder amounting to a total of 730 items.

Different exam tips boxes and compilations do not include a fixed number of exam tips, some of them might include an extensive list of strategies, while other present just one tip. Therefore, once I had all the boxes and compilations properly organized, I went through them one at a time and determined how many tips they consisted of. In the end, a total of 1865 individual exam tips were identified.

Having researched the field of language learner strategies, Rebecca Oxford's classification of strategies (1990) was the most similar to the content of my exam tips. Some of my exam tips would not fit in any of her categories, so I had to adapt and expand her categorization to match the content of my study. Consequently, I created a categorization of my own (see figure 4) based on Oxford's classification (see figure 5).

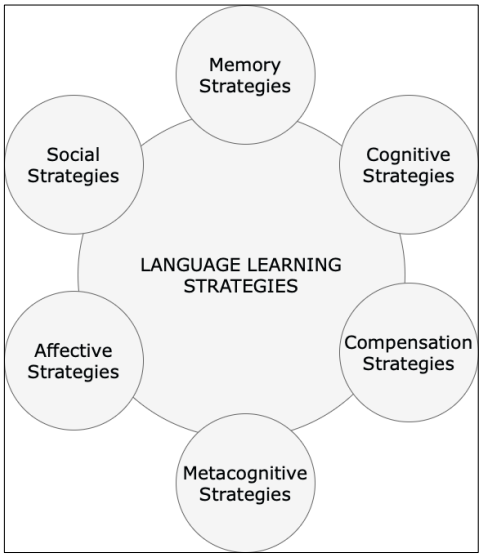


Figure 4. *Diagram of oxford's classification of language learning strategies.*

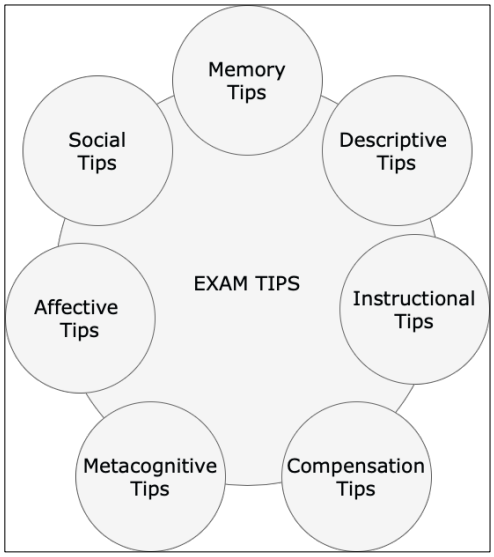


Figure 5. *Diagram of my classification of exam tips.*

All of Oxford's categories were adapted into my own categorization that includes an extra group:

- Memory tips tell students how to successfully organize and record new information that they can later use in the exam.

- Descriptive tips explain the objectives and procedures of the target activity from the exam.

- Instructional tips guide students with steps to follow when working on the target activity from the exam.

- Compensation tips tell students what they can do when in doubt or when facing situations that they are not proficient at in the exam.

- Metacognitive tips tell students how to use their own knowledge of tips and the demands from the target activities from the exam in order to perform effectively.

- Affective tips tell students how to manage their emotions in the context of the exam and its different activities.

- Social tips give students useful advice to use when interacting with their partner or with the examiners in the speaking paper of the exam.

Once I had successfully adapted Oxford's classification, I created a Microsoft Excel document (see table 2) in which I could sort, label and organize the exam tips boxes and

compilations in a way that allowed me to quickly access, rearrange and edit them. The document classified the items based on: the book title, the CEFR level, the exam paper, their context in the textbook (i.e., exam tips box or exam tips compilation), the number of exam tips they included and the types of tips they were.

Table 2. *Example of my Excel classification of exam tips.*

Title	CEFR Level	Paper	Part	Number of Exam Tips	Box / Compilation	Descriptive Tips	Instructional Tips	Compensation Tips	Affective Tips	Memory Tips	Metacognitive Tips	Social Tips
Complete	B2	Speaking	1	3	Box	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Compact	C1	Listening	4	9	Compilation	1	2	0	1	0	5	0
Gold	B2	Reading and Use of English	1	1	Box	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

The full table organized all the 730 boxes and compilations and could be easily rearranged and modified using Microsoft Excel's own sorting and editing features. This allowed me to obtain all sorts of statistical data that I could visualize using the different graphics and charts available in the program. It was at this moment when I had to decide how to interpret all this raw data and determine what statistical results and figures were worth developing. I first obtained figures from each specific title, then I combined them to create more figures for each of the four publishers and finally I joined them together to obtain statistical results from all the books combined. I also isolated results based on the CEFR level, therefore obtaining data that only applied to the B2 and C1 titles respectively. I followed the same procedure for exam tip boxes and exam tip compilations, generating then results that were separated by these two variables. Later, I focused on data derivative from the different papers of the exam and, finally, I interpreted the data with the different types of exam tips as the focal point. This allowed me to see how many tips and of what

types were aimed to the specific parts of the exam, together with the other variables like CEFR level, title… (See tables 3 and 4 for examples)

Publisher	Paper	Number of Exam Tips
Cambridge University Press	Speaking	244
Oxford University Press	Speaking	107
Pearson English	Speaking	149

Table 3. *Number of exam tips for the speaking paper depending on the publisher.*

CEFR Level	Number of Exam Tips	Descriptive Tips	Instructional Tips	Compensation Tips	Affective Tips	Memory Tips	Metacognitive Tips	Social Tips
B2	960	83	480	67	7	6	297	20
C1	905	101	417	54	2	1	324	6

Table 4. *Number and type of exam tips depending on the CEFR level.*

The obtained figures and statistical results were interpreted and used to produce conclusive observations about exam tips. When analyzing the data and figures, the contrasting nature of the different publishers and the different CEFR levels was always taken into consideration. This allowed me to focus on specific aspects of my study while being mindful of their bigger context.

5. ANALYSIS

Statistical results and a contrasting approach were the reference for comparisons between different variables. Different publishers, titles and CEFR levels highly determined the analytic process while providing key results that would ultimately cement my observations and deductions. This contrasting method allowed me to simultaneously focus on different aspects regarding exam tips, which ultimately helped me establish links and make deductions that culminated in a somewhat broad analysis of my subject matter. the main body of my analysis is based not only in the interpretation of the obtained statistical data and also on further thought regarding the nature of tips, textbooks and English as a second language. Thorough reflection of my findings together with later contrast with the field of language learning strategies fully shaped the inference from my focus of study.

5.1 Different Publishers and Titles

There were dissimilarities regarding the distribution of exam tips not only depending on the publishers but also on titles from the same publisher. Cambridge University Press' titles contain almost half of the total exam tips while Oxford University Press and Pearson English's titles represent the remaining 57%. This big difference in numbers in favor of Cambridge University Press is representative of how important these exam tips are for their titles that prepare students for exams. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Oxford English has the lowest number of exam tips (i.e., 436) while at the same time being the combination of titles that amount to the lowest number of pages (i.e., 653) and units (i.e., 42). This is indicative that the length of the textbook, along with the way that the units

are organized, determine, up to an extent, the number of exam tips present throughout the book (see Table 5 for more figures).

Table 5. *Distribution of exam tips in my selected textbooks.*

Title	Publisher	Total Tips	Pages	Units	Boxes	Compilations
Compact B2	Cambridge	270	160	10	93	8
Compact C1	Cambridge	239	159	10	100	4
Complete B2	Cambridge	148	200	14	39	4
Complete C1	Cambridge	130	253	14	33	4
Expert B2	Pearson	179	215	12	24	20
Expert C1	Pearson	167	208	10	23	25
Gold B2	Pearson	143	205	12	54	15
Gold C1	Pearson	153	225	12	56	16
Result B2	Oxford	90	176	12	37	0
Result C1	Oxford	115	183	12	50	0
Solutions B2	Oxford	105	143	9	63	0
Solutions C1	Oxford	126	151	9	62	0

Exam tips Boxes and Compilations

The way that students interact with the exam tips does not just depend on how many of them they have at their reach. The way that the publishers and textbooks select to place the exam tips ultimately influences the interaction tip-student. On the one hand, exam tips boxes distributed throughout the different units of the textbooks represent recurrent advice and extra help that learners internalize every unit and directly use with the activities that they are accompanied with. All of the chosen textbooks include exam tip boxes since this was one of the requirements that I followed when choosing the textbooks. On the other hand, exam tip compilations, which appear in their own section after units or before the end of the book, provide students with a strategy bank that mainly focuses on tips and purposely avoids including supporting activities.

A significant difference was observed between the three publishers with regard to the distribution of exam tips compilations. Pearson English's titles contained the highest number of compilations (i.e., 76), Cambridge University Press' titles had 20 and Oxford University Press' titles did not include any. Titles that include compilations demonstrate an identifiable goal in giving learners an unstained focus on exam tips. The main difference between boxes and compilations lies on how said encasements affect the way that learners perceive the tips. Ideally, a textbook would include both types of contexts for the tips, allowing students to have constant direct tip-activity interaction while having the opportunity to easily access a summary section for easier study and review. All of the chosen textbooks have accompanying 'Teacher's Books' which describe and detail the contents of the book (see Appendix B for the list of teacher's books consulted and their bibliographical information), the objectives, the teacher's approach and the different sections of the textbooks. Naturally, they always mention tips or strategies and their according context and give a short description of their use and objectives.

> Thanks to comprehensive Exam Focus section detailing strategies for every part of the exam, as well as extra tips with exam tasks, Gold C1 Advanced New Edition ensures that both teachers and students know what to expect in the exam and how to deal with each part effectively. (Annabell, Manicolo & Wyatt, 2019a, pg. 3.)

This is a quote from the accompanying teacher's book for the Gold C1 textbook. The rest of the titles that have both exam tip boxes and compilations include similar comments that give teachers and students insight into the nature and objectives of their exam tips. The choice by textbooks like Result and Solutions of purposely not

including exam tips compilations cannot just be explained from a length issue perspective. For instance, both Compact titles would be placed near at the bottom of the list according to length, but they are the two books with the most exam tips. Moreover, exam tips compilations amount to half a dozen pages at most, which would not seem like an extensive addition to textbooks which are between 150 and 250 pages long. A reason why textbooks may disregard exam tips compilations might be because their lack of engagement and interaction. A selection of tips with no supporting material to put them into practice weakens the interaction between the student and the exam tips. Learners and teachers might be more engaged to refer to the exam tips if there is a clear immediate goal to achieve. On the contrary, the more direct practicality and noticeability of exam tips boxes make them more likely to be used in ESL textbooks. Exam tips boxes are designed to stand out from the rest of the items on a page and, in contrast with compilations, their accompanying activities give them a clearer purpose (see figures 6 and 7 for examples).

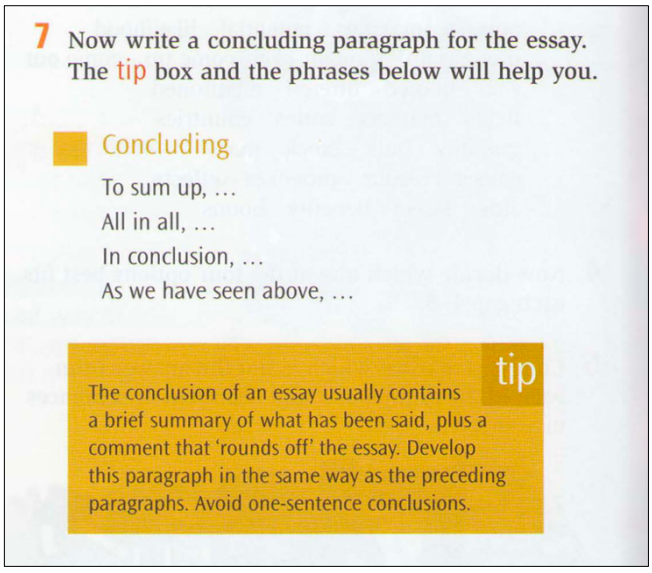


Figure 6. *Example 1 of an exam tips box with accompanying activitites (Gude & Stephens, 2014, p. 150).*

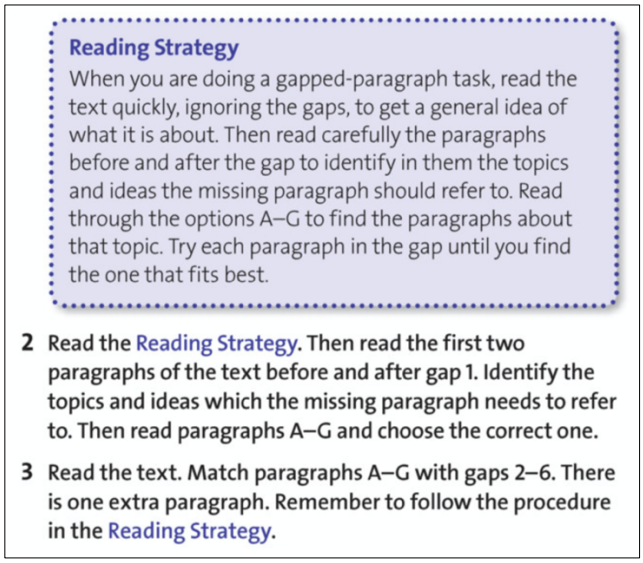


Figure 7. *Example 2 of an exam tips box with accompanying activitites (Davies & Falla, 2018, p. 36).*

In both these examples it can be seen how exercises and activities directly refer to the tips and are placed next to them for easier navigating through the page. Even when activities do not explicitly make reference to the exam tips boxes, the easily understood connection with them based on their position makes it hard for the learner to miss them. This is a common occurrence between all the selected textbooks. The exam tips boxes are always seamlessly integrated with the rest of the items and their usual colorful designs make them an integral part of the layout of the page.

CEFR Levels and Exam Papers

The exam formats for the B2 and C1 level tests are practically identical but there are small differences in some of the different papers of the exam which cannot be disregarded when trying to understand the distribution of exam tips based on the level.

A balanced distribution of exam tips depending on the CEFR level was observed in my selected textbooks. Exam tips from B2 textbooks amount to 48% of the total number of tips and C1 textbooks contain the remaining 52%. This does not come as a surprise taking into account that two versions of the same title usually follow the same structure, style and objectives. For instance, if the B2 version of a title has a specific number of units divided in carefully thought sections with their own tips and activities, its C1 version will follow the same approach and focus on changing the content rather than the structure. This results in textbooks from the same title but aimed to different levels having the same layout for most parts of the book and consequently a similar distribution of exam tips.

The different papers of the Cambridge English qualifications exams challenge a learner's different language skills, vary in length and require different approaches. This highly determines the number and type of exam tips that are going to be designed for each paper. The reading and use of English paper, for instance, is the one with the most parts for both the B2 and C1 levels. With each part calling for a different approach, the reading and use of English paper has unsurprisingly the highest number of focused exam tips from my selected textbooks (see Tables 5 and 6).

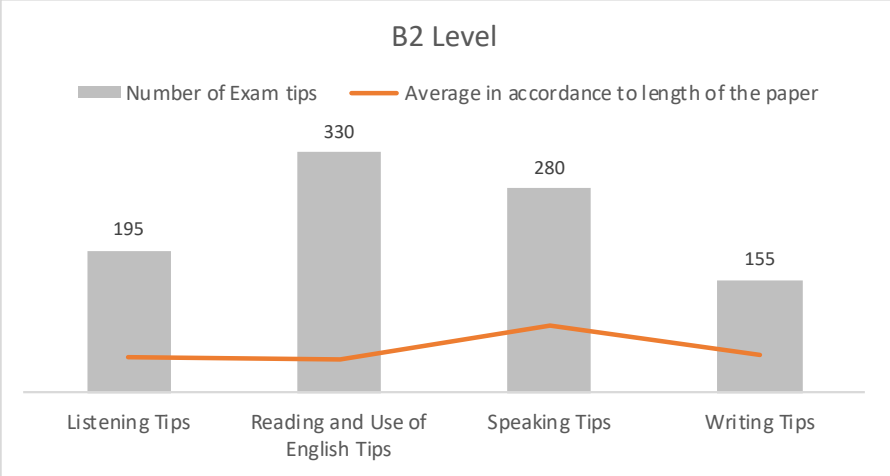


Figure 8. *Number of exam tips per exam paper and average according to the paper length from B2 textbooks.*

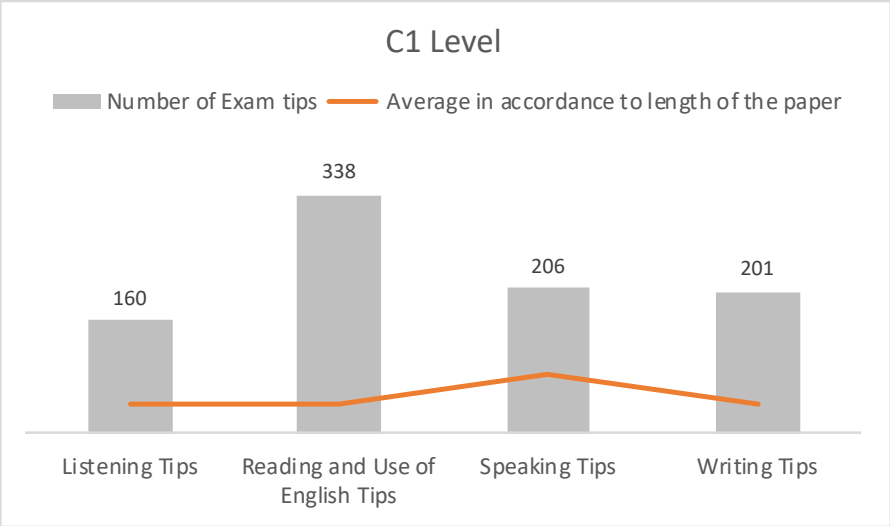


Figure 9. *Number of exam tips per exam paper and average according to the paper length from C1 textbooks.*

The orange line in the chart represents the relationship between the number of parts from an exam paper and the number of exam tips aimed for that paper. There might be a big difference between the 195-160 listening exam tips and the 330-338 reading and use of English exam tips, but this is consistent with the fact that the listening paper consists of four parts and the reading and English paper consists of seven parts for the B2 level and eight parts for the C1 level. On a similar note, the writing paper, while only having two parts, requires the learner to prepare for having to write two out of five different type of texts.

The only exception here is in regard to the speaking paper, which has the highest number of exam tips in relation to its different number of parts. This is not an isolated occurrence because it happens in eight out of my twelve selected textbooks. In order to understand why this happens it is important to think about how a student prepares for the speaking part and the role that textbooks play when helping them do so. Intelligibly, the speaking paper is usually the part of the exam that worries students the most. It is the only one that requires direct interaction with other people and where students cannot go back to change their answers. When students prepare for this part of the exam, they would ideally be practicing with other classmates or with their teacher. An autodidactic approach would prevent the learner from being exposed to so many situations and nuances that come with interaction alone that would be crucial for a good performance in the speaking paper. Textbooks themselves cannot assume the role of a speaking companion for the learner so they make up for it by giving extra advice on such language skill. It is then the role of the teacher or student to find a proper context to put said advice into practice and get the most out of the tips.

Types of Exam Tips

There were important dissimilarities found regarding the distribution of exam tips depending on the type. Instructional and metacognitive tips alone represented up to 82% of the total of exam tips present in my selected ESL textbooks. Another 16% was constituted by descriptive and compensation tips. Social, memory and affective tips represented such marginal numbers that they could even be seen as exceptions to my initial classification of types of exam tips (see Table 6).

Table 6. *Distribution of the types of exam tips based on the CEFR level.*

Type of Tips	Total	B2	C1
Descriptive Tips	184	80	104
Instructional Tips	897	465	432
Compensation Tips	121	63	58
Affective Tips	9	4	5
Memory Tips	7	6	1
Metacognitive Tips	621	297	324
Social Tips	26	20	6

To understand the predominance of instructional and metacognitive tips it is important to refer to their nature as tips and their immediate goals (see figure 10 for an example). On the one hand, instructional tips, when firstly presented to learners, might be perceived as the type of exam tip that represents the most immediate practicality for the target activities. This is because, upon reading the tip, learners obtain information that they can at once use with usually no further reflection or serious thought. This completely contrasts with compensation and affective tips, which students would be able to apply only when they find themselves in a situation that would require them to either work around their weaknesses (for compensation tips) or to manage their emotions (for affective tips). To

further my point, if a student learns an instructional tip for part 1 of the reading and use of English paper, he or she would be able to use the tip every single time, something that would not happen with compensation or affective tips. On the other hand, metacognitive tips do require students to reflect on known tips and strategies for the activities to help them perform better but they can also be used every single time. Metacognitive tips provide students with important knowledge about exercises that would ultimately automatize some mental processes, helping the students think and decide more efficiently. So, even though their practicality might not be as evident as it is with the instructional type, metacognitive tips are fundamental tools that students can rely on to help them achieve greater results in the different exam papers.

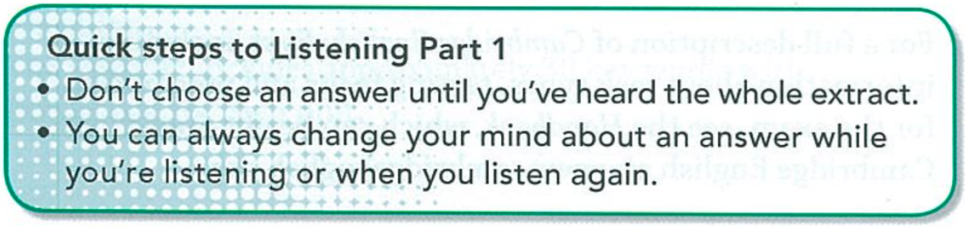


Figure 10. *An instructional and a metacognitive tip for part 1 of the Listening Paper from the B2 exam (May, 2014b, p. 8).*

Taking all this into account, it is easily understood why both instructional and metacognitive tips are so present in ESL textbooks. Students that have a thorough understanding of both types of tips, together with being familiar with the target activities, already have a lot going for them. On the opposite extreme, there seem to be clear reasons why memory, affective and social tips would present such small numbers in comparison with the other types of tips.

Firstly, memory tips are the only type of tips that consistently give students advice that are aimed to be used when preparing and studying for the exam (see Figure 11 for an example). This contrasts with the rest of the tips, which are mainly focused on strategies that can be applied when actually doing the exam. This characteristic prevents memory tips from having an immediate practicality that learners can put into action as soon as they read them. Moreover, this type of tips usually asks students to follow routines that require a more important amount of time, dedication and investment.

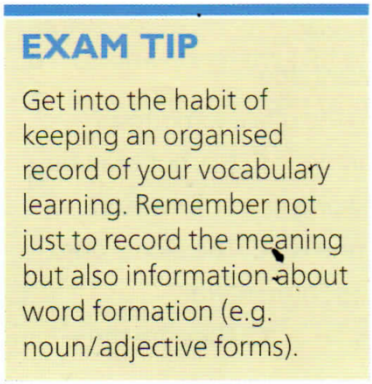


Figure 11. *Example of memory exam tip (Burgess & Thomas, 2019, p. 58).*

Secondly, affective tips' focus, i.e., the management and control of emotions (see figure 12 for an example), completely differs from the focus and objectives from the other types of tips, which directly link the tips with the different contents of the papers of the exam. Most textbooks did not include affective tips, making it clear that giving emotional advice to learners was not of importance for them. Controlling one's emotion might not be as easy as plainly following some written advice, this matter depends on the personality and character of the student and might be more difficult to be taught, specially from an ESL textbook which focuses on language teaching.

- Try to look and sound confident! Taking deep breaths may help you to relax.

Figure 12*. Example of affective tip (May, 2014a, p. 107).*

Finally, social tips are exclusive to the speaking paper of the exam, which is the only part that requires students to interact with other people. But interaction is not present in all the

different parts of the speaking paper and my selected textbooks seemed to focus on giving speaking advice aimed towards one's speaking abilities and skills rather than interaction. One of the reasons why my selected textbooks usually overlook the social nature of the speaking paper might be because they may expect students to already have enough social skills to be able to hold basic conversations. The way that the speaking paper is designed creates a non-threatening environment which aims not to impair in any way a student's social abilities but to make them feel comfortable enough that it should be the least of their worries. With this in mind, it makes sense that ESL textbooks would not focus too much on this aspect of the speaking paper.

6. CONCLUSION

This analysis of 12 ESL textbooks containing exam tips shows that the role that they have inside of the books is bigger than the impression that their size might give. Two different ways of presenting exam tips were observed, but the textbooks were always in favor of including the type that was more visually integrated with the rest of the content. Here is where the interaction student-tip appears to be one of the major aspects that textbooks keep into consideration for their distribution of tips. This is closely related to the perceived practicality that these tips have on the learners. A student would want to read and learn about useful strategies and, therefore, tips that can be consistently used when practicing for the exam would represent the most appealing ones. Consequently, tips like this dominate ESL textbooks and tips focused on more specific aspects have a marginal presence. The classification of exam tips that I adapted from Rebeca Oxford's very own categorization of language learning strategies ultimately proved itself very useful and led me towards much needed insight into the purpose and goals of exam tips. Apart from this, the different CEFR levels did not seem to have a big impact on how the textbooks decided to present exam tips. Instead, there were bigger dissimilarities found when comparing publishers and titles, which pointed towards different approaches followed by different textbooks which ultimately shaped their use of exam tips. Additionally, even though the distribution and use of exam tips might differ between some publishers and titles, it was clear that all textbooks designed their exam tips around the learners' needs and sought interaction with the book. But although these different publishers and titles from my selected textbooks seemed to understand the importance of exam tips, they usually failed to express that said importance to the learners or teachers. To improve this textbook-user miscommunication, exam tips could be described and presented in a similar manner as

the different sections and features from a textbook, but this was never the case. It is then in the hands of the teacher or learner to interpret the tips' relevance and act accordingly, otherwise these very helpful pieces of advice might be completely disregarded.

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APPENDIX A - Full bibliographic information of my selected textbooks

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May, P. (2014a). *Compact advanced*. Cambridge University Press.

May, P. (2014b). *Compact first, 2nd edition*. Cambridge University Press.

APPENDIX B - Full bibliographical information of the consulted 'teacher's books' that accompanied my selected textbooks.

Alexander, K. (2014). *Advanced expert, 3rd edition: Teacher's resource book*. Pearson English.

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