

Dictogloss

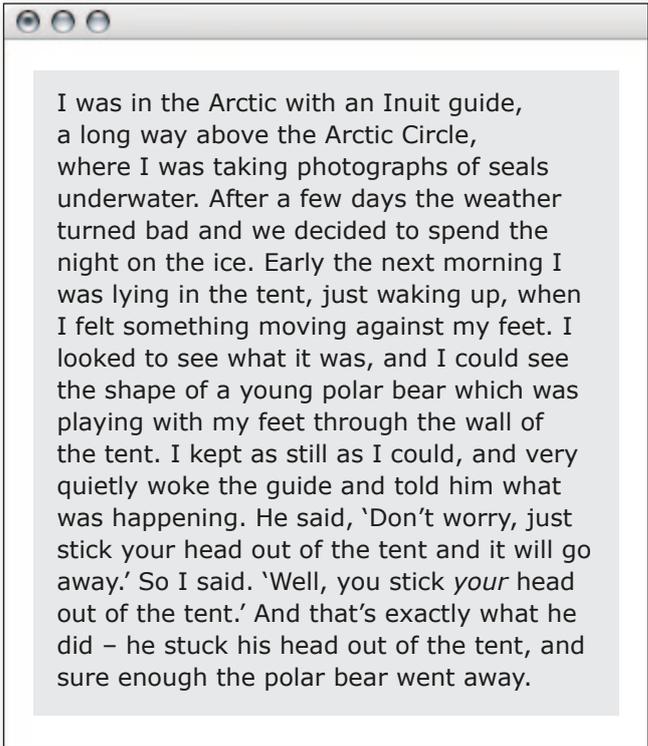
Dictogloss is a technique in which the teacher reads a short text and the learners make brief notes and then try to reconstruct the text in groups. Unlike traditional dictation, there is a gap between the listening and writing phases, giving learners time to think and discuss how best to express the ideas. The aim is not to reproduce the text word for word, but to convey the meaning and style of the text as closely as possible.

Dictogloss is a powerful way of focusing attention on precise meaning, as well as on correct use of grammar. Because it is a co-operative activity, it is challenging without being threatening and it gives learners a chance to discuss language and to learn from each other.

At higher levels it can be used with authentic texts (e.g. from newspapers) and can focus on whatever vocabulary and grammar happens to occur in the text. At lower levels, it works well as a review activity, using a text (or part of a text) from an earlier lesson. As this is a very intensive activity, it's best to use short texts so the class doesn't lose interest.

The example below shows a typical procedure at B1/B2 level, using a story about a wildlife photographer.

- 1 Show a photo of a polar bear in the Arctic, to set the scene and establish key vocabulary.
- 2 Read the text once through at normal speed. Learners listen but don't write anything.
- 3 Read the text again at normal speed, but this time pause after each sentence to give time for learners to make *brief* notes (they shouldn't try to write out the whole sentence).
- 4 Learners sit in small groups and compare their notes. Working together, they try to reconstruct the story, with one person in the group acting as 'secretary'. If possible, they should write it on a computer or an OHP transparency. It doesn't need to be precisely the same as the original, but it should convey the meaning as closely as possible and also keep the same style.
- 5 One person from each group shows their version (or reads it out). The others comment on it and correct any grammatical errors.
- 6 Show the class the original story to compare, and focus on any features of vocabulary (e.g. *a long way, kept ... still, stick ... out of, sure enough*) or grammar (e.g. past progressive tense).



I was in the Arctic with an Inuit guide, a long way above the Arctic Circle, where I was taking photographs of seals underwater. After a few days the weather turned bad and we decided to spend the night on the ice. Early the next morning I was lying in the tent, just waking up, when I felt something moving against my feet. I looked to see what it was, and I could see the shape of a young polar bear which was playing with my feet through the wall of the tent. I kept as still as I could, and very quietly woke the guide and told him what was happening. He said, 'Don't worry, just stick your head out of the tent and it will go away.' So I said, 'Well, you stick *your* head out of the tent.' And that's exactly what he did – he stuck his head out of the tent, and sure enough the polar bear went away.

Some possible variations:

- Before the first reading, ask learners to write numbers in their books, as a heading for each sentence (so in this case 1–8). This makes it easier for them to organise their notes.
- Before learners work in groups, they could try writing a rough version of the text on their own. Then they come together for stage 4 and compare what they have written.
- For stages 5 and 6, go through the text sentence by sentence. For each sentence get each group to read out their version, then show the original sentence and focus on grammar or vocabulary. Then go on to the next sentence, and so on. This is a good way to keep learners' attention, and works well if learners can't easily show their texts to the class.