

## **HANDOUT PREPARATION AND CLASS PRESENTATIONS**

(adopted from David Adger and George Tsoulas, University of York)  
– *SEE ONLINE PRESENTATION-PAGE FOR FURTHER DETAILS* –

The handouts — an integral part of this course — have at least **3 separate functions**:

- ❶ they (may) serve as a **starting point** for your term paper;
- ❷ they (may) provide you with a **summary** of the content of particular classes so that you can clarify any points you haven't understood and refer back to them;
- ❸ they are a way of **developing skills** that are not specific to the subject (i.e. linguistics or English Studies), although you learn them through the subject.

(They also serve as a means for me to **monitor** the level of your understanding!)

You have been split into a number of groups, and **each group has responsibility** for one particular handout. The members of the group need to **work as a team** and negotiate amongst themselves the various **responsibilities** of the group members as well as the **content** of the handout and the choice of **examples**.

I suggest the following **basic process**:

- (i) the group meets outside class time to **agree on what should go** on the handout;
- (ii) members of the group are **delegated with the relevant tasks**, for example:
  - (a) *design and structure of the handout,*
  - (b) *additional research/references,*
  - (c) *write-up,*
  - (d) *presentation,*
  - (e) *revision after feedback;*
- (iii) the **handout is drawn up** and **presented in class** (note that you should have a **small number of people** presenting, probably no more than two or three) and **the other members of the class are expected to ask questions and suggest revisions** — it is important that **criticisms are constructive** and are taken that way;
- (iv) someone takes **notes of any feedback** from the presentation and **restructures/amends the handout** to take account of this;
- (v) the **finished handout is submitted** to me (within one week at most) and I distribute it to all the members of the class — the group is also required to provide me with a **breakdown of responsibilities** (i.e. who did what).

It is important that the handout contains enough information to be **useful for revision purposes**, but does not attempt to recapitulate everything said in class. One of the skills you will learn is to be **selective** and an overly long handout is difficult to present and doesn't provide a distillation of the course material. The names of the members of the group should be included, as they will be the class experts on the section of the course that the handout was about.

*It is crucial that the example sentences in the handout are different from those in your readings or lectures.* You need to make up your own examples which make the relevant point. This is actually quite difficult at first, so be prepared. *The handout should be word-processed to make it legible and to make it easy for you to revise.*

When/If you put your handout on an **overhead for presentation**, make sure the point size is at least 18, and if you're using a small font like Times, even 24.

#### CRITERIA FOR A GOOD HANDOUT

1. Your **names** should be on it.
2. It should be **structured** into main and sub-headings (including a **title**).
3. There should be an **introductory** section, possibly with the **aims** of the class.
4. It should be **word-processed** (and in **big enough font size** to read, both as a handout and on an overhead).
5. The **structure of the argument** should be made clear (if there is one), with crucial examples (perhaps from other languages or different stages of English).
6. **Examples** should be numbered.
7. The **main hypothesis** should be flagged up, if there is one.
8. There should be **tree-diagrams/pictures/tables** if they clarify the point made.
9. Definitions of technical terms could, of **key principles** should be included.
10. A **summary** might be needed.
11. **References** should be included (with page numbers where appropriate).

*NB: Feel free to replace "handout" by "PowerPoint presentation" if you so wish!*  
*(in other words: your presentation may be accompanied by technology-aided means instead)*

## SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR PRESENTATIONS / PAPERS

Below are some suggestions for presentation and / or paper topics I came up with. *Notice straight up: This list of suggested topics is by no means exhaustive!* You're more than welcome to modify all of these suggestions in virtually any way you wish—including the wording of the task. (Don't take the directions too strictly!)

### A. Some (sociolinguistic) topics that are more historical or related to literature:

- ❶ What are the Old English and Middle English origins of regional variation in Modern (British) English?
- ❷ Examine the influence of the Viking invasion(s) on the English language.
- ❸ Examine the influence of the Norman Conquest on the English language.
- ❹ Examine the chief sociolinguistic, historical, and political / cultural factors at play in a given period of the English language.
- ❺ Apply a (socio- or formal) linguistic approach/analysis to the literature (prose or poetry) of a particular period of the English language.
- ❻ What were the main factors in the emergence of Standard (British) English?
- ❼ Discuss the rise and development of American English.
- ❽ Critically discuss the dialect/language distinction as it applies to the English language (synchronically and diachronically); feel free to take pidgins and creoles or so-called "Modern Englishes" into your consideration.
- ❾ What is the relevance of an historical examination of the English language to its present-day orthography?
- ❿ Discuss the emergence of a particular "Modern English" (or a group), such as Indian English, Nigerian English, Cypriot English (or West African English).
  - *Beowulf* / *Peterborough Chronicles* / *Ormulum* / J.R.R. Tolkien's *Middle Earth* / ...
  - historical, political, and cultural reasons for Latin influence throughout
  - Scandinavian / French influence on place names / personal names
  - printing press / writing systems / orthography / dialects
  - legal / religious language and standardization
  - Global English / *lingua franca*

B. Some more **theoretically demanding** or interesting topics:

- ① Proto-Germanic is defined as a “cluster of innovations” as compared to Indo-European. Discuss some of these innovations. What are the possible causes?
- ② What are “language types”? Critically discuss the view that Old English belonged to a different language type from Modern English.
- ③ What are the difficulties and drawbacks of the surviving Old English corpus? How might these difficulties affect the conclusions we draw about the nature of the language?
- ④ When and how did word order change in the development of English? What could have been (some of) the main reason(s) or compounding factor(s)?
- ⑤ Discuss and evaluate three different theories of sound change.
- ⑥ Pick any aspect or particular phenomenon of Old English grammar (syntax, morphology, phonology, vocabulary) and discuss its properties.
- ⑦ Pick any aspect or particular phenomenon of Middle English grammar (syntax, morphology, phonology, vocabulary) and discuss its properties.
- ⑧ Pick any aspect or particular phenomenon of Early Modern English grammar (syntax, morphology, phonology, vocabulary) and discuss its properties.
- ⑨ Pick any aspect or particular phenomenon of the grammar of an English-based creole (syntax, morphology, phonology, vocabulary) and discuss its properties.
- ⑩ Develop an inventory of the grammatical properties of Cypriot English (sound system, words and meaning, syntactic properties).
  - social factors affecting phonological change
  - the second person singular pronoun after 1800
  - grammatical properties of English dialects or varieties
  - influence of invading language(s) on grammatical change
  - word order / verb placement / question formation / verb particles
  - *easy to please*-construction / emergence of infinitival *to* or complementizer *for*

*Alternatively (under either option A or B), you may simply write a book review of a work that you particularly (dis)liked, or engage in a critical discussion of selected scholarly articles dealing with any aspect of the history of the English language.*