

1. Grammar and functions with the most frequent 500 words

Purpose of this frequency-based course

The purpose of this course is to help students learn and practice the rules of grammar without having to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary. The course uses only the most common 500 words (apart from basic words needed to describe and explain English grammar), most of which even weak students may be expected to know by the end of P6.

For weak classes who don't know many of the words, the course provides ample repetition to ensure that the 500 words are reinforced through constant use in context. A large portion of the language examples are communicative functions that students in lower secondary will find very useful.

The most efficient way to study a language

There is considerable research showing the importance and usefulness of focusing on the most frequent words in second language learning. The respected researcher Paul Nation found that the first 200 words account for 55% of written text and the top 500 words account for 66%. Other studies show the first 100 words make up half of all written material, the first 300 make up 65% and the first 500 make up over 70% of text. This is even higher for spoken English.

To give an indication of the importance of high-frequency words, the 12 most frequent lexical verbs (i.e. verbs that are not used as auxiliary verbs) account for almost 45% of all lexical verbs in conversation, according to the world's largest corpora of oral English.

Clearly then, the most efficient way for students who are behind in English to catch up and gain confidence is to focus on the most frequent words. This not only increases their comprehension of all spoken and written English they encounter, but gives them confidence when they see what a wide range of functions they can use and topics they can write and speak about with just 500 words.

Please go to page 2

Our word-frequency lists

This course uses only the most frequent 500 words in English, apart from specific vocabulary needed to explain and understand grammar (e.g. noun, verb, infinitive, gerund).

This list was drawn from our own vast corpora of fiction, children's books, academic books and papers, newspapers and magazines, and then compared word by word with all of the world's most respected frequency lists and dictionaries that provide frequency information.

It was then adjusted to replace words we don't consider core words for P6-S2 students, but which are on three or more of these lists, such as *British, company, council, French, government, industry, labour, policy, political, president, public, service, social, society, state, system, thus, trade* and *united*. We replaced these words with ones students are likely to encounter regularly in P6-S2, but which are not normally in the top 500, such as *air-conditioner, belongings, calculator, camera, chapter, club, computer, dictation, dictionary, email, internet, locker, microphone, monitor, playground, quiz, screen, staffroom, test, type, and washroom*.

The world's first frequency-based grammar course

There are plenty of graded readers on the market, but they do not use the most frequent words overall. Their frequency lists tend to be skewed towards fiction, so they often have words like *king* and *horse*, which are unlikely to be encountered by Hong Kong students apart from in simplified versions of Victorian novels. This is what makes this course world unique. The 500 words used in the course were selected specifically for Hong Kong students from P6 to S2, based on the words they are most likely to hear in the classroom, and read and use in their schoolwork.

Components

1. Learning materials — Functions. Presentation slides at the start of many quizzes, covering interpersonal expressions, conversations, classroom language, and pair and group work. Every slide has an audio clip of each sentence in a North American accent to help students develop natural stress and intonation.

2. Learning materials — Grammar. This is a series of presentations slides at the start of many quizzes explaining many of the grammatical rules tested in the quizzes: questions, tense, irregular verbs, prepositions, adverbs, determiners, verbals and conjunctions.

3. Quizzes. This is the main focus of the course. It includes **54 quizzes** with **1175 questions** to provide practice and reinforcement of the grammar rules and communicative use of the most frequent 500 words.