

Publication :	Straits Times Online Forum
Date :	28 July 2006
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Headline:	Cultivate pupils' confidence with exercises

**July 28, 2006**

## **Cultivate pupils' confidence with exercises**

THE Ministry of Education's proposed plan to encourage primary school pupils to read, write and talk more is most welcome.

More can be done at the implementation level of the scheme and I have some observations as a lay person.

When I was in school some 60 years ago, I was told to pronounce the word 'often' as 'of-fen' and not as 'of-ten', which I did.

For repeating the same mistake in pronouncing this word and other such difficult ones wrongly, I was hit on my knuckles with a ruler by my teacher or told to stand on the table or outside the class, to my utter embarrassment.

During my secondary school days, I was intrigued by the words 'Danger, Highly Inflammable' on petrol tankers.

I asked myself why it should be inflammable and not the simpler flammable.

When I sought clarification from my teacher, he told me in no uncertain terms that the first was right and the second was wrong.

Well, 'of-ten' has become the more accepted form today, although 'of-fen' is still allowed and inflammable has been replaced with flammable.

A dictionary is a vital tool for language development. Introduce to pupils a simple dictionary that gives pronunciation in Romanised English like 'fashad' for the word 'facade', instead of the undecipherable Greek/Latin format which the more celebrated dictionaries use.

Give students exercises in the usage of a dictionary as class or home work.

Ask them to write the definition of a simple chosen word as given in the dictionary and write one sentence each using the word as a noun, verb, adverb and adjective as may be appropriate.

Start with one word and increase the number progressively. The schools can decide at which level to introduce the exercises.

Over a period of time, pupils will begin to appreciate the value of a dictionary and using it will become a cultivated habit.

As for reading, get the students to come before the class and do the reading as though they are facing an audience.

They can also be asked to tell stories that they know or talk about things like how they spent the week-end or school vacation.

More importantly, encourage them to ask many questions.

A similar approach can also be considered for the study of a second language. At the end of every school year, prizes can be given to the best student in every subject for every class, and include one for the most articulate student.

Doing all these will help a child develop confidence, an enquiring mind and the ability to speak with ease, and ask probing and challenging questions in academic, work and social environments later in life.

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