

THE STATE SCHOOL ELT SURVIVAL BOOKLET

A Practical Guide to Applying Communicative CELTA Techniques in Traditional & Multi-Level Classrooms

(compiled by Andriy Ruzhynskiy, CELTA tutor)

1. INTRODUCTION: CELTA IN THE REAL WORLD

Transitioning from CELTA training to a state school or high educational institution (HEI) can feel overwhelming. Large classes (25–35+ students), rigid syllabi, exam-driven parents, limited prep time, and diverse learning needs mean you cannot always run "textbook" CELTA lessons.



Remember: You do not need to fight the entire system at once. "Sprinkle" communicative techniques gradually, build your personal bank of adapted materials, and create a positive environment in your own classroom!

2. "SPRINKLING" CELTA TECHNIQUES



Instead of planning full CELTA framework lessons every day, integrate these micro-techniques into standard textbook lessons:

- * **Elicit Before Telling:** Ask students what they know about a visual or topic before explaining it.
- * **Think-Pair-Share (TPS):** Give 30 seconds of individual thinking time, 1 minute to compare with a partner, then elicit in open class.
- * **Instruction Check Questions (ICQs):** Confirm understanding before tasks:
 - "Are you writing full sentences or just numbers?"
 - "How many minutes do you have?"
- * **Concept Check Questions (CCQs):** Replace "Do you understand?" with targeted questions checking meaning, tense, or form.
- * **Formulate Student-Centred Learning Objectives:** Frame goals as "By the end of today, we will be better able to talk about ..." rather than "We will do Unit 3B" or "We will learn Past Simple today".
- * **Use real communicative tasks ('missions'):** Avoid "Discuss this." Try: "Choose your group's best answer" or "Find three differences" or "Agree on one answer" or "Choose one person to report." Remember: a clear outcome makes groupwork easier to manage
- * Before your next lesson, choose **one item** from this checklist:
 - Learners interact before whole-class feedback.
 - Learners have thinking time.
 - Learners discover something before I explain it.
 - Learners have a genuine communicative purpose ('mission').
 - Learners make a choice.
 - Learners personalise language.
 - I monitor strategically.
 - I use delayed feedback.
 - I differentiate the challenge.
 - I reduce unnecessary teacher talk.
 - I add a little more learner involvement.

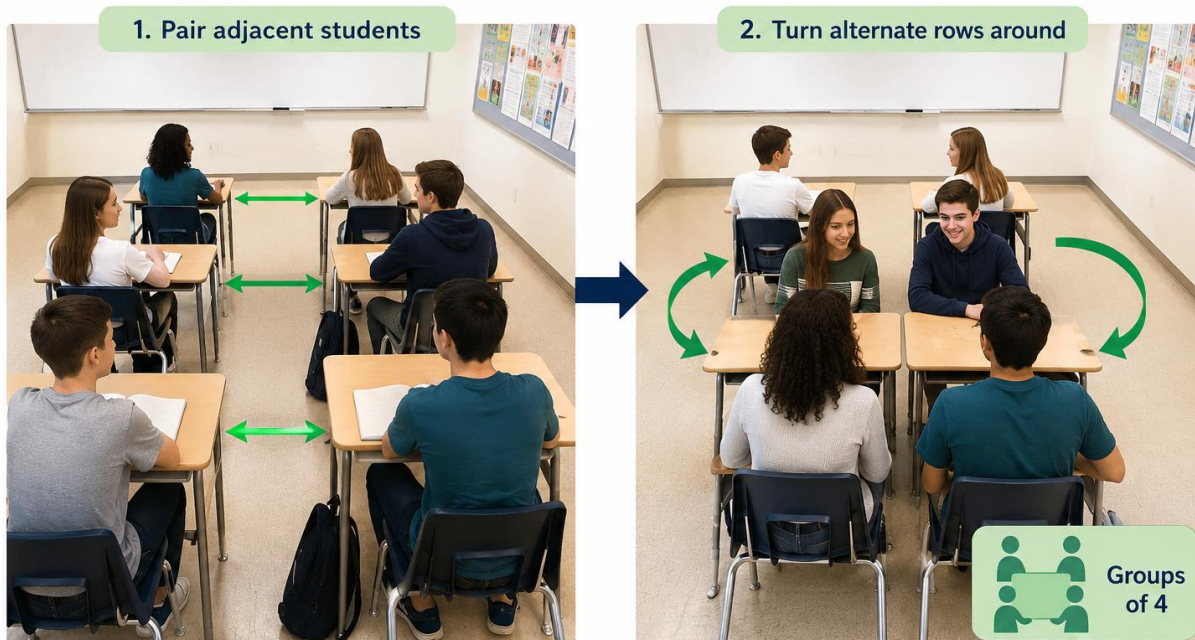
3. MANAGING LARGE & NOISY CLASSROOMS

***Address the "Noise" Myth:** Language classrooms must be noisy because students must speak. Explain to school management that active pair work is learning, not chaos. Your students not only just speak: they speak in English! In that case, whispering does not build pronunciation confidence.



***Physical Space & Grouping:**

In fixed-desk classrooms,
pair adjacent students or turn alternate rows around
to form groups of 4



→ If students can **move their desks/chairs**,
experiment with different number of learners in each group
(2x15, 3x10, 5x6, 8x4, 15x2, etc.)



💡 Different group sizes = different dynamics, more interaction, more learning!

*** Quiet Signals:**

Use **non-verbal signals** (a raised hand, a chime, light on/off or a gesture) instead of shouting over the class.



Raised hand



Chime



Light
on/off



Gesture



Non-verbal signals get attention, keep calm, and show respect.

4. STRATEGIES FOR MULTI-LEVEL & LARGE CLASSES

State school classes often contain students ranging from false beginners to advanced speakers. Apply these core strategies:

*** Differentiating Tasks**

Give everyone the same base reading/listening text, but vary the task difficulty:

- Level 1 (Support): Basic comprehension / True or False questions.
- Level 2 (Standard): Wh- questions / Detail extraction.
- Level 3 (Extension): Inference / Opinion / Role-play tasks based on text.

*Tip: Allow students to select their level of challenge to build autonomy!

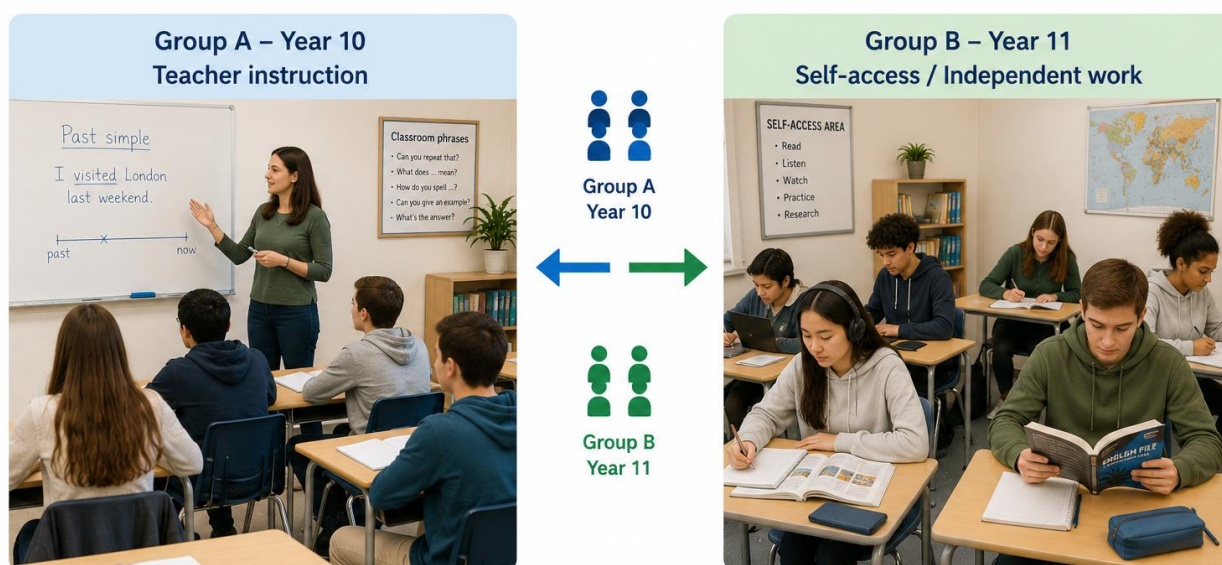
*** The "Minimum-Plus" Technique**

Specify a clear minimum requirement, but allow stronger students to do more:

- "Everyone complete at least items 1-5. Do 6-10 if you have time!"
- "Write between 3 and 6 sentences".

*** Splitting the Class**

- **Splitting the Class: Split by year/level; one group works on self-access while teacher instructs the other.**



Different activities, same lesson objective, maximum learning time.

*** Flexible Grouping & Peer Tutoring**

- Cross-Ability Pairs: Pair stronger and weaker students for collaborative tasks. Remind advanced students that explaining language to others is the best way to master it!
- Like-Ability Groups: Group similar levels together when you want to give targeted direct teacher input to one group while others do self-access work.

*** Fast-Finishers**

- Keep a box or folder of photocopied extra tasks, Scrabble/board games, or logic puzzles so early finishers remain engaged without disrupting others.
- Ask fast finishers to help their peers with the task (but not do it for them!)

* *Low-Pressure Participation*

- Allow silent observation for lower-level learners when processing new input.
- Use multi-level dictations (blank sheet, medium cloze, or light cloze) so students choose their comfort level.

* *Classroom Management & Physical Space Hacks*

The CELTA Standard	The State School Reality	The Micro-Adaptation
Standing Mingles	35 students in narrow aisles; risk of behavioral chaos	Turn-and-Talk / Diagonal Pairs: Students work with the person directly behind them or across the aisle.
Chest & Point Instructions	Back-row students cannot see paper held up at the front	Board-Projected Model: Project or write the task frame on the board; use 1 student pair to demo in front of class.
Monitoring Every Pair	Physically blocked by rows of desks	Zone Monitoring: Pick 2 "sentinel" pairs per row. Monitor them to gauge class progress.
No L1 Allowed	5 minutes wasted clarifying complex instructions in English	The 30-Second L1 Sandwich: Give instructions in English → Ask 1 student to translate the task rule in L1 → Resume in English.

5. SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)



In inclusive state school classrooms, apply these proactive strategies:

- Post daily schedules, classroom rules, and expectations clearly.
- Use light-colored paper for worksheets with wider spacing and uncluttered layouts.
- Keep activities short and concise to prevent frustration.
- Provide both oral and written instructions to engage multiple learning preferences.
- Provide concrete objects/visuals when introducing abstract concepts.
- Provide oral formats for reading/writing tests when assessing language skills.
- Give immediate, specific praise (e.g., "Great job using three new adjectives in your paragraph!") rather than generic compliments.
- Check in privately with SEN students during individual work. Remember: SEN is not one learner profile. Find out what individual learners need.

6. MOTIVATING UNMOTIVATED LEARNERS

When students view English as a burden or grammar-heavy requirement



* **Gamify Tasks:** Turn routine textbook exercises into competitions, team quizzes, or board games (see Sample Hacks below)

* **Personalization:** Adapt textbook topics to connect directly with students' real lives, interests, music, and pop culture.

* **Information Gap & Drama:** Use role-plays, guessing games, and information gap tasks to create an authentic reason to speak.

* **Strong Rapport:** Building personal connections and a safe environment is often the single biggest motivator for state school teenagers!

* **Instead of asking: "Why aren't they motivated?"** ask: Is the task...

- meaningful?
- achievable?
- appropriately challenging?
- visually supported?
- varied?
- personalised?
- interactive?

Sample Hack A: The Grammar Gap-Fill → Information Gap

- **Standard Task:** Students individually fill in 10 gaps in a text on page 42.
- **CELTA Tweak:**
 1. Divide class into Student A (odd numbers) and Student B (even numbers).
 2. Student A writes their answers; Student B writes theirs.
 3. Instead of whole-class answer checking, Student A reads their completed sentence aloud to Student B. Student B listens and verifies using the key provided by teacher.

Sample Hack B: Reading Text → Pair Dictation

- **Standard Task:** Students silently read a 3-paragraph text and answer comprehension questions.
- **CELTA Tweak:**
 1. Assign Row 1 Paragraph 1, Row 2 Paragraph 2, Row 3 Paragraph 3.
 2. In pairs across rows, students summarize their paragraph in 2 sentences to their partner before answering questions together.

Sample Hack C: Zero-Photocopy Board Game:

Write 6 numbered vocabulary/topic prompts on the board. In pairs, students roll a dice (or use a virtual phone dice) and speak for 30 seconds on the corresponding topic/number.

Sample Hack D: Delayed Error Correction for Large Classes:

While monitoring from the front/sides, write 4 sentence mistakes on a sticky note. In the last 5 minutes, write them on the board for a quick "Spot the Mistake" team contest.



7. BUILDING YOUR OWN SYSTEM

You may not be able to change:

the syllabus,

the coursebook,

the timetable,

the examination system,

the whole school.

But you can create your own system. Build your: -

materials bank; -

language bank; -

grouping routines; -

differentiation options; -

coursebook notes; -

successful activities.



8. CONCLUSION: START FROM YOURSELF!

You don't need to convince
the whole staffroom tomorrow.



★ Small steps. Real impact.

Professional change can start with one teacher!

Good luck! 😊

Acknowledgement

Apart from my own ideas, I also used the following sources while I was creating this booklet:

Penny Ur. A Course in Language Teaching, OUP

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/>

<https://www.teachervision.com/special-needs/teaching-students-special-needs>

<https://ww2.kqed.org/education/2016/01/04/5-effective-strategies-for-the-inclusive-classroom/>