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Author(s)	Heath, Robert
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A COMPOSITION USING NEW ADVERBS OF FREQUENCY

ROBERT HEATH

Teachers who give the topic “My Day” or “My Daily Habits” are often disappointed with the dreary and error-laden results. Here is a typical sample from a Secondary I pupil:

I usually get up at 7 o'clock. I always wash my face and hands. I quite usually for my breakfast have two eggs. Always I go to school by bus. At school I . . .

The next excerpt is taken from a sample composition that is interesting and well-done:

At home we take the Chinese newspaper and “The Straits Times”. I invariably read the stories in the Chinese paper before anyone else in the family. I generally look over the international news. Quite frankly, I very seldom look at the reports of speeches. In “The Straits Times” I normally turn to the TV page first, because . . .

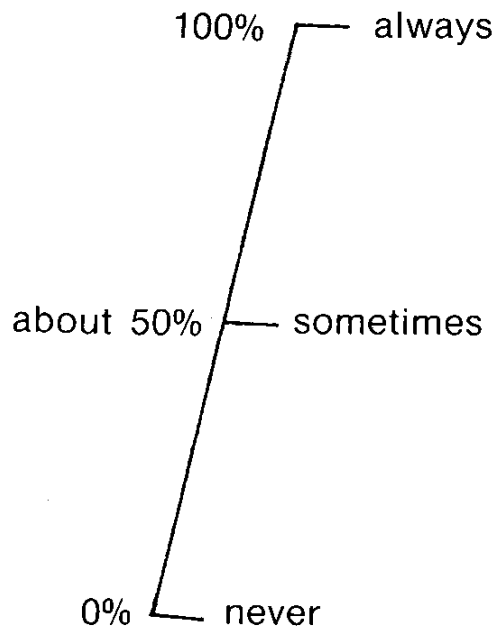
Here is an “integrated” lesson that, if taught well, will

- extend their vocabulary,
- consolidate their grammar (present simple tense), and
- result in a more interesting and accurate composition.

It is “integrated” in the sense that everything done in the class leads up to the composition. Modern thinking about English textbooks is rather critical of the book that has, for instance, a comprehension passage on an adventure story (past simple, past continuous), a vocabulary section (add — *ion* to addict, predict), a grammar section (turn these active sentences into the passive) and a composition (My favourite uncle) all in one chapter. In this lesson the teacher, building up to the topic “My Daily Habits”, gives a lesson in the following stages:

Vocabulary Extension

Start with adverbs of frequency that they already know. Put this “cline” on the chalkboard.



and ask them to suggest other words and to say where to put them on the cline. The exchange should go something like this:

Pupil: Occasionally.

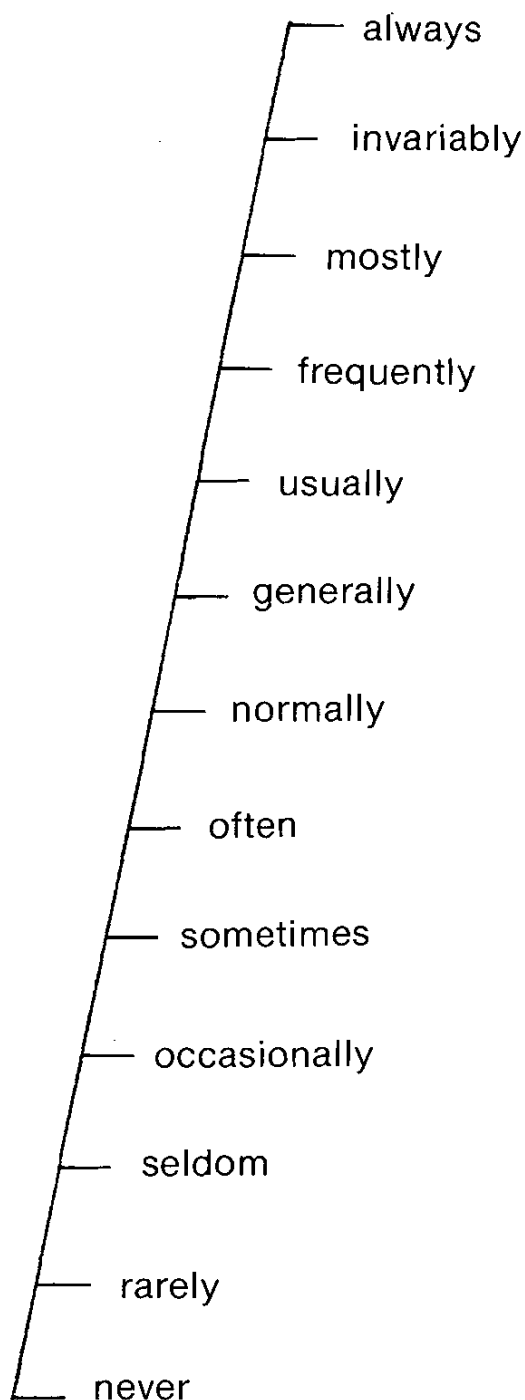
Teacher: Good. Now, where should I put it?

Pupil: Between sometimes and always.

Teacher: Is that right, Mui Choo?

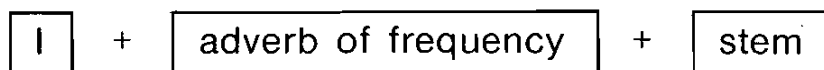
Mui Choo: No. It should go between . . . etc.

Keep going in this fashion until you have placed all the words that you think your class can handle. Introduce new ones (e.g. invariably) yourself if no pupil does. The final list could look like this:



Grammar

Take the sentence “I *usually* get up at seven o’clock”. If the pupil can handle that sentence, then she can handle any of the above adverbs of frequency, even new ones. The situation is more complicated for sentences with a different word order (for instance, “I get up at seven o’clock sometimes” is acceptable but *“I get up at seven o’clock never” is not) so for the purposes of this composition instruct the pupils to stick to the pattern



that is, the present simple tense. It might be helpful for some pupils to contrast the word order of the English sentence with the same sentence in their first language, e.g. Chinese: I — every day — 7 o'clock — eat — breakfast.

Try a few sentences orally round the class.

Teacher : Beng Gek, give me a sentence with “rarely” about a television programme.

Beng Gek : I rarely watch “The Incredible Hulk”.

Teacher : Very good! Neither do I. In fact, I seldom watch TV at all. Now, Mano, tell me about a part of the newspaper. Use “generally”.

The emphasis is on producing sentences, not on filling in the blanks. Do not bother with textbook exercises that require them to insert adverbs of frequency into sentences like “I — go to bed before midnight” because every word on the cline fits.

Writing Activity

The idea is to use some or all of the new adverbs of frequency in a composition. You can make up your own rules, e.g.

- Use every word on the cline once.
- Use 10 of the words on the cline.
- Use all of the words once and three of them more than once.
- You can only use “usually” twice . . . etc.

Leave the cline on the chalkboard during writing. For teachers who are tired of “My Day”, here are some topics that have proved interesting taught the above way:

- My Reading Habits
- My Television-viewing Habits
- My Afternoons/Mornings (depending on the session)

- Shopping with My Parents
- Sundays
- Meals at Home
- Long Weekends in Malaysia
- Sections of the Newspaper I Read.

Marking

If you teach this well, even the poorest pupils will get something right. Put a tick every time they use a new adverb correctly. Be positive — do not penalise pupils unduly for things like spelling and punctuation. The main focus of this composition is adverbs of frequency and it should be marked accordingly. Put two ticks for adverbs used with flair and imagination and three for literary genius. The pupils may well be delighted to see that they got something right instead of the usual “chilli-sauce” disaster.