

Substitution Tables



When you feel that a pupil learning English as an additional language needs additional support in order to put their ideas into sentences, whether written or orally, substitution tables can be an extremely useful scaffolding tool.

A substitution table is essentially a simple frame which allows the learner to follow the correct syntax in a sentence whilst retaining autonomy over the choice of words.

Substitution tables can be used at a variety of levels but most benefit will be gained from B upwards (Code B, [Early Acquisition on the DfE Proficiency Scale](#)) at a point when the child can read reasonably fluently. They can be used to scaffold talk as well as writing, while at the same time helping an EAL learner to practise a required area of grammar. A substitution table can be used to reinforce or extend language, depending upon the objective.

By using our natural tendency to view and use [language in chunks](#), we can set up frameworks that provide the student with some of the choices they need to make, whether lexically, grammatically or as a combination of both. The structure of the table means that the EAL learner does not have to consider all the possible variants that he or she is usually faced with, such as word order, spelling and punctuation, which means that the task can be less overwhelming, allowing the learner to focus on a specific area or areas.

For example:

Mr and Mrs Birling Sheila Birling Eric Birling Gerald Croft Inspector Goole Eva Smith	is are	(not)	selfish. old-fashioned. clever. cold-hearted. childish. honest. responsible. <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block; margin-top: 10px;"> <i>your own idea</i> </div>
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TABLE 1: TRAITS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN "AN INSPECTOR CALLS"

The content of the table should be linked to the curriculum as in **Table 1** and by adding *your own idea* the student is provided with opportunities to create further examples on the same theme or topic. Brackets can be used to indicate that a word is optional (see 'not' in the table above). Images could be added for clarification, e.g. pictures of the characters.

The table not only enables the student to form grammatically comprehensible sentences required for a particular lesson (in this case the character traits from 'An Inspector Calls') but also focuses their attention on a particular aspect of grammar (the Simple Present), whilst allowing them to practise using it in a supportive way. It also means that once the table is understood by the EAL learner, they will be able to work independently, whether the focus is on writing or collaborative talk.

The beauty of substitution tables is that they can be constructed to fit the needs and ability of the student. Compare the following:






Common Rock Types				
Granite		is	an igneous rock.	It is usually polished and smooth.
Clay			a metamorphic rock.	It is very hard and durable.
Marble			a soft, white rock.	It can be found in the desert and on beaches.
Chalk			a mixture of small pieces of rocks or minerals.	It is used to make pottery and bricks.
Sand			a natural material made of minerals.	It is often used for writing and drawing with.

TABLE 2: PROPERTIES OF COMMON ROCKS

Common Rock Types					
Granite			igneous rock		is usually polished and smooth.
Clay			sedimentary rocks		is very hard and durable.
Marble	is	a	metamorphic rock	which	can be found in the desert and on beaches.
Chalk	are	an	soft, white rock		are often used for building.
Sandstone and limestone		-	mixture of small pieces of rocks or minerals		is used to make pottery and bricks.
Sand			natural material made of minerals		is often used for writing and drawing.

TABLE 3: PROPERTIES OF COMMON ROCKS USING COMPLEX SENTENCES

Table 2 helps the student to use the correct terminology, focusing purely on the vocabulary and its meaning but without any grammatical choices, whereas **Table 3** helps the student practise grammar in addition to lexis. Providing a choice of *a*, *an* or no article gives them

practice in choosing the correct determiner, while the choice of *is* and *are* will check the student’s understanding of singular and plural forms of the verb *to be*. It also encourages the student to make a more complex sentence by combining the two sentences and adding a relative pronoun (which ...). The relevant grammar required will be reinforced through usage, rather than needing to teach complicated grammatical terminology.

Carefully created substitution tables can allow the student increasing control with their use of language across the curriculum: the more control given to the student, the greater the cognitive challenge embodied in the task. **Table 4** below focuses on several areas at the same time: understanding the vocabulary and choosing the correct verb, but also requiring the student to choose the correct inflection of the Simple Present Tense.

What do you and your partner remember about ‘Macbeth’ so far?		
Macbeth Lady Macbeth King Duncan The witches Banquo	write(s) plan(s) read(s) talk(s) to tell(s) believe(s) <i>your own idea</i>	a murder. a letter. the future. Macbeth. the witches. <i>your own idea</i>

TABLE 4: RECALLING KEY EVENTS IN ‘MACBETH’ ACT 1

The addition of *your own idea* once again allows the student to be creative and demonstrate other words and information that they know or experiment with language they are less certain of.

As mentioned before, substitution tables should be linked to the curriculum, enabling the EAL student to participate in the writing and/or discussion that is happening in the classroom. Any grid can be adapted according to the needs of the child. Compare the following examples:







A	square 	has	0 zero 1 one 2 two 3 three 4 four 5 five 6 six	side(s).
	triangle 			
	rectangle 			
	circle 			
	hexagon 			
	pentagon 			

TABLE 5: PROPERTIES OF 2D SHAPES

A	square triangle rectangle circle hexagon pentagon	has	1 2 ?	side(s). vertices.
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TABLE 6: PROPERTIES OF 2D SHAPES - MORE COMPLEX

Table 6 provides less support but is more fitting for children who have already learnt the names of the shapes and are ready for more cognitive challenge.

Any subject, vocabulary or grammatical form can be utilised in the table. Look for a common thread in the sentence structure; one that the student needs practice in. For example, **Table 7** requires the student to use the Simple Past for a history lesson.

	Change to the PAST		
The Second World War	start		
The Battle of Britain	end		1939.
Britain	drop two atomic bombs on Japan		1940.
Japan	invade the Soviet Union	in	1941.
Germany	invade Poland		1942.
The Battle of France	begin bombing German cities		1945.
The US	attack German warships and train facilities		
	bomb Pearl Harbour		
	surrender to the Allies		

TABLE 7: SIGNIFICANT EVENTS OF WW2

The following table (8) provides practice using a future tense for making predictions in a science lesson.

When we heat	wood metal glass plastic water clay <i>your own idea</i>	I'm sure I think I don't think	it will	expand (get bigger). shrink (get smaller). change colour. change shape. stay the same. <i>your own idea</i>
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TABLE 8: PREDICTING CHANGE IN MATERIALS WHEN HEATED

Again, this can be adapted for more advanced EAL learners:

It seems probable (that)	the	will	verb	when heated	because	_____.
It seems unlikely (that)	_____					

TABLE 9: PREDICTING CHANGE IN MATERIALS WHEN HEATED - HIGHER COGNITIVE DEMAND

A more controlled framework can also be used for advanced learners, to practise common writing conventions. **Table 10** is to support students KS3/GCSE students using Point Evidence Explain (PEE):

I completely/partially	agree/disagree	with the statement	because + general idea
First of all,	1 st point	Quote	Explain
Another reason that I agree/disagree is	2 nd point	Quote	Explain
Furthermore,	3 rd point	Quote	Explain
To sum up,	I think that	statement is (mostly) correct/incorrect	because ...

TABLE 10: FRAMEWORK FOR MINI PEE ESSAY

Once a substitution table has been made, it can be saved to a bank of resources and, if kept editable, adapted to individual students' needs. Tables can also be created spontaneously with pen and paper as and when a need arises.

For example:

The writer I My partner	think (s)	in the year 2050	trees plants people clothes cars phones TVs computers houses countries	will might	VERB e.g. live be have	...
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TABLE 11: PREDICTING FUTURE CHANGE

A handwritten table such as **Table 11** above is quick and easy to make and yet contains all the elements we need in a good substitution table. The addition of the ellipsis (...) at the end of the table is a sign that the sentence can be extended using the student's own words. The extent of this response can be varied according to the student's ability, e.g. by adding an adjective, adverb or clause.

For more ideas and examples of substitution tables see:

<https://ealresources.bell-foundation.org.uk/teachers/great-ideas-substitution-tables>

<https://www.sateal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/SATEAL-Bell-Foundation-Substitution-tables.pdf>

<https://ealjournal.org/2018/11/19/the-power-of-substitution-tables/>

For more detailed advice on how to make a substitution table, watch this video (particularly from 6:26 - 17.10) https://youtu.be/Su0gLxMf_4s

If this article prompts you to make any substitution tables yourself, please feel free to share them with us. Just email to emtas@hants.gov.uk with *substitution table* as the subject.

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