

**A HANDBOOK OF
ENGLISH
DICTATION**

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A Handbook of English Dictation by Anonymous

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**A HANDBOOK OF
ENGLISH
DICTATION**

A
HANDBOOK
OF
ENGLISH DICTATION.

COMPILED
FOR THE USE OF CANDIDATES IN ALL CIVIL
AND MILITARY EXAMINATIONS.



LONDON:
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1881.

260. g. 469

PREFACE.

THIS collection of passages is intended for the use of candidates for all preliminary, test, or qualifying examinations, and is especially designed with a view to final preparation and practice during the month or six weeks immediately preceding the examination. It is well known that defective spelling is the most prolific source of failure, whether a candidate's object be to enter the Military or Civil Services, or to be permitted to begin special professional studies in Law or Medicine, or merely to obtain the Oxford and Cambridge "Local" certificate. Spelling-book knowledge will not guarantee its possessor against disaster, unless it has been tested by practice in dictation under precisely the same conditions as those observed in the examination-room.

This little book contains many of the passages that have already been given in the examinations conducted by the Civil Service Commissioners, together with others of various degrees of difficulty, so as to meet the requirements of most candidates. The teacher is recommended in using it to adhere to the plan which is followed by the Civil Service Examiners. The passage should first be read over at an ordinary pace, so that the pupils may gather its general purport. It is well to ask a question or two after having so read it, in order to ensure that attention has been paid to the reading. Then the teacher should dictate the passage, not too slowly, breaking it up into groups of three or four words, and repeating each group three times. Lastly, the whole should be once more read over, with special attention

to the punctuation. After this, the exercises should be *at once* collected, no time for alteration being allowed. The whole process should be limited to half an hour, even for the longest passages contained in this book. It is highly important that this last condition should be strictly observed, for a pupil who has been allowed to dawdle over dictation will, even if a fair speller, be certain to fail when hurried along at a pace to which he is unaccustomed.

In preparing candidates for the military examinations, in order to reproduce the exact circumstances under which the pupil will be tested, a considerable amount of noise, disorder, clapping of hands, and cheering may be encouraged in the class-room.

As soon as the exercises are done, the mistakes should be underlined in red, and the corrections should be written out by the pupil at least a dozen times. It is useful to cause the old exercises to be preserved, so as to note the besetting errors of each individual, and correct them by special practice.

A few specimens have been inserted of those grotesque productions called "Orthographical Exercises." They will suffice as patterns, should any teacher be desirous of constructing such monstrosities for private use.

It only remains for the compiler to tender his thanks to Messrs. Longmans and Co., for kindly permitting him to make use of extracts from the works of Macaulay and Froude; to Messrs. A. and C. Black, for a similar favour with regard to passages from Macaulay's Biographies in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica'; and to Dr. Bucknill, who has allowed him to reprint certain portions of the 'Mad Folk of Shakespeare.'

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I.

IN the early periods of history a broad line of distinction was drawn between the nobility and common freemen. Those of the higher order were distinguished by their noble birth, which they traced to a divine origin, and by their superior wealth, which enabled them to undertake numerous adventures, and increase their fame and riches by the booty which rewarded a successful expedition. They were distinguished also by a robust frame, a majestic bearing, skill in warlike exercise, and superior personal powers.

II.

I never wake without finding life a more insignificant thing than it was the day before, which is one great advantage I get by living in this country, where there is nothing I shall be sorry to lose. But my greatest misery is recollecting the scene of twenty years past, and then all on a sudden dropping into the present. I remember, when I was a little boy, I felt a great fish at the end of my line, which I drew up almost on the ground, but it dropt in, and the disappointment vexes me to this very day; and I believe it was the type of all my future disappointments. I should be ashamed to say this to you if you had not a spirit fitter to bear your own misfortunes than I have to think of them. Is there patience left to reflect by what qualities wealth and greatness are got and by what qualities they are lost?

III.

The obstacles which William might expect to encounter on English ground, though the least formidable of the obstacles which stood in the way of his design, were yet serious. He felt that it would be madness in him to cross the sea with a few British adventurers, and to trust to a general rising of the population. It was necessary, and it was pronounced necessary by all those who invited him over, that he should carry an army with him. Yet who could answer for the effect which the appearance of such an army might produce? The government was indeed justly odious. But would the English people be inclined to look with favour on a deliverer who was surrounded by foreign soldiers?

IV.

Within doors the travellers were warm, the houses being close, the walls thick, the lights small, and the glass all double. The food was chiefly the flesh of deer, cured in the season, bread good enough, but baked as biscuit, dried fish of several sorts, and occasionally pieces of mutton and buffalo, which is pretty good meat. All the stores of winter provisions are laid up in summer. Their drink was water mixed with a little spirit, and, for a treat, wine instead of beer, which, however, the people possess of good quality. The hunters, who venture abroad in all weather, frequently brought in fine venison, and sometimes bear's flesh, which, however, was not much esteemed. The visitors had a good stock of tea, with which they treated their friends, and they lived cheerfully and well, all things considered. It was now March, the days had grown considerably longer, and the weather at least tolerable, so the travellers began to prepare sledges to carry them over the snow, and to get things in order for the journey.

V.

While I sat thus, I found the air overcast and grow cloudy, as if it would rain ; soon after that the wind rose, by little and little, so that in less than half an hour it blew a most dreadful hurricane : the sea was all on a sudden covered with foam and froth, the shore was covered with the breach of the water, the trees were torn up by the roots, and a terrible storm it was ; and this held about three hours, and then began to abate, and in two hours more it was stark calm, and began to rain very hard. All this while I sat upon the ground very much terrified and dejected, when on a sudden it came into my thoughts that these winds and rains being the consequences of the earthquake, the earthquake itself was spent and over, and I might venture into my cave again. With this thought my spirits began to revive, and the rain also helping to persuade me, I went in and sat down in my tent, but the rain was so violent that my tent was ready to be beaten down with it, and I was forced to go into my cave, though very much afraid and uneasy for fear it should fall on my head.

VI.

The only stars that rise and set at the Pole are the planets of the solar system, and their risings and settings, like those of the sun and moon, are not for a few hours but for months or years at a time. The fixed stars, on the other hand, never rise or set. Once in twenty-four hours they describe circles in the heavens, of which the Pole-star is the centre. Those near the horizon move in large circles ; those higher up in smaller ones. The Pole-star itself describes so small a circle, that our eyes cannot detect its motion. The explanation of these curious sights is simple enough. Every point on the earth's surface is describing a circle round the Pole. If, therefore, one were to stand at that centre, he would see everything on the earth moving round him. But the Pole is

a point so small, that if a traveller covered it with his foot, he would, in the course of a day, make a complete revolution round himself.

VII.

The climate of Canada presents great extremes of heat and cold, especially in the lower or eastern part of the province. The seasons of spring, summer, and autumn are included between the months of May and September; in October the frosts begin, and during November and the first three weeks of December snowstorms are incessant. After this period the atmosphere clears, an intense and dry frost succeeds, and continues until April or May, during the whole of which time the sky is serene and of a bright azure hue. Throughout this long winter the ground is buried under a hard covering of ice and frozen snow. The snow begins to melt in April, and has all disappeared by the first week in May. Summer is then fully established, and the vegetation breaks forth in profuse luxuriance. In the upper or western portion of Canada, particularly in the country which borders on the great lakes, the climate is much less extreme, and the winter of shorter duration. In all parts of the country the air is dry and healthy, fogs are almost unknown, and the cold of winter is rendered less severe in its effects by the general absence of wind during the greatest intensity of the frost.

VIII.

My mental ruminations, notwithstanding my assumed confidence, were not always of an unchequered nature. The Muse—the very coquette who had led me into this wilderness—like others of her sex, deserted me in my utmost need; and I should have been reduced to rather an uncomfortable state of dulness, had it not been for the occasional conversation of strangers who chanced to pass the same way. But the characters whom I met with were of a uniform and uninteresting description. Country parsons, jogging home-