

**Unit of Work for**

**Alex Jackson:**

# **Closing Out**

By Pat Flynn

## Introduction

Welcome back to the world of Alex Jackson. A world created for young readers to laugh and learn as they enter via their imagination, a place where both boys and girls are welcome. And, of course, their teachers! This unit of work has been written to help teachers provide students with positive reading and learning experiences.

The unit is divided into 5 sections. Chapters 1-6, 7-12, 13-18, 19-24 and 25-30. Each section has a listening comprehension quiz, two-level chapter questions, a 10-word spelling list, fill-in-the-blanks vocabulary and a language lesson. At the end of the unit are suggested major activities and an answer section.

The language sections cover: colons and semi-colons; affect, effect, then, than; active and passive sentences; past participle and past tense of verbs; efficient writing. The major activities include a book review, persuasive speech, and diary entry.

This unit of work is published both in hard copy and on the internet at <http://www.patflynnwriter.com/>. The hard copy can be ordered by phoning University of Queensland Press Sales at 07 33652440, or fax—07 33651988. This version includes an answer section at the back. The teacher section on the website includes reviews of the Alex Jackson titles, and a link off the home page provides information about the author.

Parts of this unit are interactive, including writing a book review to the author. To obtain a reply make sure students write “review” in the subject of the email. The email address is <mailto:author@patflynnwriter.com>. If students don't have access to the net and would like to send letters, please include stamped addressed envelopes to Pat Flynn C/O UQP, PO Box 6042, St Lucia, QLD, 4067.

Thank you for entering Alex's world. I hope you enjoy reading and teaching about his journey and that this unit of work makes learning enjoyable for both students and teachers.

## Themes

Alex Jackson: Closing Out continues the journey of **self-discovery** Alex takes on the road from boyhood to manhood. Alex is no longer a boy, but not quite a man — like being trapped in the ocean where the waves are at their most explosive, where they are closing out.

The major theme of the novel is the **attitude of men towards women**. Alex sees his skater hero, Possum, and some peers treat girls as **sexual objects**, and he has to decide on what course of action to take in his own life. Should he be **faithful** to his girlfriend, Becky, while he's away on a skate tour? Or should he listen to the advice of his fellow skaters, "What happens on tour stays on tour."

**Sex** is an important part of the **relationship between men and women**. Some boys the same age as Alex are having sex, or at least say they are having it, but things don't go smoothly when it comes to his **physical relationships** with girls, and Alex learns that there are consequences to his actions.

Another theme is the ways and effects of **female bullying**. Alex's sister, Sam, finds fitting into high school difficult when she becomes the target of a gossip campaign from another girl.

Whether it is possible for **people to change, the nature of God and love, and parenting styles**— particularly the contrast between Alex and Becky's fathers— are also themes of Closing Out.

Author, Pat Flynn, says he was inspired to write the novel after noticing how girls seem to understand boys better than boys understand girls. "And there is still pressure on boys from other boys to treat girls as sexual objects, as something less than human," says Flynn.

But, as in other Alex Jackson books, Flynn says he wanted to examine the issue with little moralising. "First and foremost I want boys and girls to enjoy the story. Hopefully, each reader can also take something away from the experience."

## CHAPTERS 1-6

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 1

1. Which skater talked Alex's parents into letting Alex go on the tour without Casey? (p.9)
  - a. Meat
  - b. Jonesy
  - c. Possum
  - d. Davo
  
2. Possum met a girl in Rockhampton whose name was? (p.13)
  - a. Zoe
  - b. Mandy
  - c. Zelda
  - d. Madonna
  
3. Alex met a girl named Jade and they did the following activity together: (p.25)
  - a. Skating
  - b. Watching a movie
  - c. Kissing
  - d. Surfing
  
4. Mrs Beagan spoke about the first big event in the school year. It was the: (p.30)
  - a. Retreat
  - b. Camp
  - c. Swimming carnival
  - d. School Social
  
5. Jimmy's partner for the presentation on boy/girl relationships was: (p.34)
  - a. Emma Barney
  - b. Sarah Sceney
  - c. Claire Carney
  - d. Becky Tonella

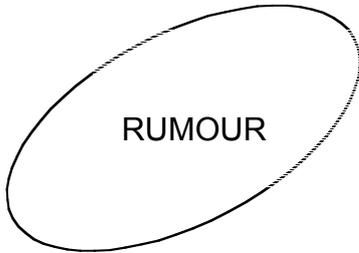


## Chapters 1-6

### Spelling

When we first learned how to spell it was often helpful to sound out words. MAT. M—A—T. However, as words get more difficult, sounding out doesn't always help. For example, school could be spelt skool, liquid could be lickwud, etc. Fortunately, our brains are incredible computers, and after seeing a word a few times it can usually remember how to spell it. Successful spellers are very good at having a picture of the whole word in their head, rather than simply trying to sound the word out. They will then write it down and see if it looks right on paper. One way to practise this is to imagine the word in your head written across your favourite skateboard, bicycle, T-shirt, etc. This helps you to remember it better.

**Exercise:** There are 5 lists of 10 words from the book in this unit. For words you aren't sure of, imagine them written across something you know well, perhaps as a sticker. Make sure you can see the word clearly in your head. One way to test this is to close your eyes and spell the word backwards, as well as forwards.



## Chapters 1-6

### Spelling

#### List 1

nuisance  
squeal  
sympathetically  
mischief  
suited  
flurry  
suspicious  
weird  
paddle  
disappear

### Vocabulary

Place the correct words from List 1 into the following sentences.

1. Chief delivered a \_\_\_\_\_ of punches into the air. (Chapter 1)
2. Becky gave a little \_\_\_\_\_ as she fell back onto the bed. (Chapter 1)
3. This \_\_\_\_\_ the skaters as they cleaned out the esky hours ago and they went downstairs to refuel. (Chapter 2)
4. "Whenever she gets \_\_\_\_\_ Possum accuses *her* of cheating, to throw her off track." (Chapter 3)
5. The skaters went to Timezone and were getting into it, yelling and screaming and making a general \_\_\_\_\_ of themselves. (Chapter 5)

## Chapters 1-6

### Language — This affects/effects you more than/then me. Affect/Effect, Then/Than

**Affect** and **effect** have similar meanings, but **affect** is a verb (a doing word) and **effect** is a noun (something we can see or experience). **Effect** is used more often, and note that something '**has an effect on me**' but 'it **affects me**'. It is always **special effects**.

- Alex's words **affected** Becky greatly.
- Alex's words **had a terrible effect on** Becky.

**Then** has to do with time. **Than** is used when you want to make a comparison.

- Alex stopped skating for a bit, **then** started again.
- Alex is a better skater **than** Jimmy, but Jimmy is better **than** Alex at computer games.

### Exercise: Place the correct word—effect, affect, then, than—in the sentence

Becky is ( ) by her Dad being out of prison. She spends less time with Alex.

One of the ( ) of Becky's dad being out of prison is that she spends less time with Alex.

An ( ) of growing up is that girls wear make-up to school.  
It ( ) them as they need to earn money to buy it.

The pressure of the first demo had a negative ( ) on Alex.  
Alex was ( ) by the pressure of the first demo.

The ( ) of seeing Jade in her bikini caused Alex to consider cheating on Becky.

When Becky rang it really ( ) Alex. He washed off Jade's number.

The ( ) of having skateboarders in the van was that hotel managers were suspicious.

It ( ) the guys as they couldn't find a place to stay.

Casey is a better vert skater ( ) street skater.  
Casey went to Ballina ( ) broke his ankle.

Possum bought a drink ( ) sauntered up to a group of girls.  
Possum is more popular ( ) Meat when it comes to girls.

Alex took their picture ( ) went to bed.  
Alex was more excited ( ) tired.

## Chapters 7-12

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 2

1. Sam found out that Brent Brown liked: (p.40)
  - a. Louisa
  - b. Georgia
  - c. Kim Lim
  - d. Sam
  
2. How did Alex get rid of the nasty message about Sam in the toilet? (p.45)
  - a. Wrote over it
  - b. Whited it out
  - c. Used sandpaper
  - d. Painted over it
  
3. Why did Constable Massingham come to the skatepark? (p.49)
  - a. To bust Alex for pretending to be Billy Johnstone
  - b. To stop a drug deal
  - c. To skate
  - d. To ask if Casey would take Steve under his wing
  
4. What did Alf Tonella do every time Alex and Becky walked to the station? (p.58)
  - a. Walked the dog near them
  - b. Drove beside them
  - c. Walked with them
  - d. Went to bed
  
5. Why did Ben Wilson give up boxing? (p.61)
  - a. He lost a fight
  - b. Chief wouldn't train him anymore
  - c. His girlfriend was pregnant
  - d. He got sick of it



## Chapters 7-12

### Spelling

#### List 2

adjusting  
immediately  
occasionally  
travelling  
obsessed  
liaison  
obscenities  
committed  
reverberated  
grovelling

#### Vocabulary

Place the correct words from List 2 into the following sentences.

1. When Alex was in Year 8 a bit of pressure from a Year 10-er would leave you \_\_\_\_\_ then running for cover. (Chapter 8)
2. "It's not just you, there's a social worker involved and I'm the police \_\_\_\_\_." (Chapter 9)
3. After each miss he screamed \_\_\_\_\_, and after the third went to chuck his board, then realised it wasn't his. (Chapter 9)
4. The noise \_\_\_\_\_ around the garage like a thrash band.  
(Chapter 11)
5. "Just because you're \_\_\_\_\_ with it Jimmy, doesn't mean that girls are," said Sarah. (Chapter 12)

## Chapters 7-12

### Language — Is that your colon or semicolon? Colon and semicolon

The most common use for the **colon** : is to introduce a list of things. Capitalise the first letter after a colon only if it is a complete sentence.

- ☞ Jake promised this: He would repay all the money that he owed. He would no longer spend all his money at the TAB. He would only go to the Casino if he felt lucky.
- ☞ There are only three things to consider when choosing a boyfriend: body, brains and their wallet.

The colon can also be used in giving emphasis — similar to the dash.

- ☞ He has only one hobby: eating.
- ☞ He lived by a single rule: skate hard.

It is also used in writing times and quotes from the bible.

- ☞ The train arrived at Central at 7:21 p.m.
- ☞ “Please take your bibles out and turn to Matthew 12: 34-38,” said Miss Phillips.

**Semicolons** have two main uses. One is to clarify a list of things when you need to use a lot of commas.

- ☞ The deceased, Dave Karkit, leaves a son, John Karkit of Beeton; a daughter, Jane, wife of Mike Killer of Eden's Landing; and a sister, Joanne, wife of George Blood of Kingston.

The semicolon also can be used to link two independent clauses together — rather than use a conjunction or a full-stop.

- ☞ They started going out on Monday; they broke up on Tuesday.
- ☞ The letter was due last week; it arrived today.

**Exercise: Place a colon or semicolon where needed. You may need to replace other punctuation symbols.**

1. The contents of Alex's bag included four skate magazines two bags of lollies three pairs of pants eight T-shirts and a scrunched up letter from Becky.
2. There was a loud yell Steve had slammed.
3. The boy had one thing on his mind skateboarding.
4. Being lazy is indicated by the following not doing any work at school not doing any work at home not doing any work at work.
5. It was 2.30 in the morning I couldn't sleep.
6. You must remember to bring the following to retreat a hat sunscreen and a bible.

## Chapters 13-18

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 3

1. What did Becky make Alex for their special dinner? (p.68)
  - a. Lasagne
  - b. Spaghetti Bolognese
  - c. Ravioli
  - d. Chicken Carbonara
  
2. Adrian Dorry told Alex that a girl liked him. The girl's name is: (p.77)
  - a. Claire Connolly
  - b. Claire Christiansen
  - c. Claire Carney
  - d. Sarah Sceney
  
3. Steve and Alex watched a video of Alex boardsliding down the courthouse stairs. How many stairs were there? (p.80)
  - a. 10
  - b. 12
  - c. 15
  - d. 21
  
4. Claire wrote Alex a note at the retreat. The note said that: (p.90)
  - a. She wanted to go out with him
  - b. She wanted to break up with him
  - c. She hated Billy Johnstone
  - d. She wanted to meet him at the beach at 1am
  
5. Linda took a bottle of alcohol out of Billy's backpack. What type of alcohol was it? (p.94)
  - a. Vodka
  - b. Bourbon
  - c. Wine
  - d. Beer



## Chapters 13-18

### Spelling

#### List 3

lasagne  
signalled  
rumours  
vacuum  
smuggled  
anoint  
encouragement  
breathe  
knuckle  
shuddered

#### Vocabulary

Place the correct words from List 3 into the following sentences.

1. “Just because a stupid boy likes me instead of her, she’s started \_\_\_\_\_ that I’ve been with heaps of guys and that I’m a backstabber,” said Sam. (Chapter 14)
2. Casey was never far away, giving Steve advice and words of \_\_\_\_\_. (Chapter 16)
3. Claire had \_\_\_\_\_ to Alex to follow her. She went into the dunes. (Chapter 17)
4. There were jars of oil and burning incense, and the idea was to approach someone who had been hurt by you or others and \_\_\_\_\_ them with the oil. (Chapter 16)
5. Alex closed his eyes, \_\_\_\_\_ and shivered and it was over. (Chapter 18)

## Chapters 13-18

### Language—Know your Voice Active and Passive sentences

The active voice is when the subject of the sentence is doing something, rather than having something done to it.

- Alex attempted a 360 flip. (Active)
- Becky reached over and kissed Alex. (Active)

A passive sentence often has **was** and **by** in it.

- The 360 flip **was attempted by** Alex. (Passive)
- Alex **was kissed by** Becky.

While the passive voice can be effective at times, the active voice is usually better because it is clearer and less wordy.

**Exercise:** Change these sentences from the passive voice into the active voice.

On the port rack reading a book was Sam.

Claire's leg was pinched by Alex when he dived under the water.

The three boys were called back into the hall by Miss Phillips.

He was led back to the dunes by Claire.

Some cigarettes and a bottle was taken out of Billy's backpack by Linda.

Write 3 sentences in both the active and passive voice. Example:

- Alex gave Sam a dirty look. (active)
- Sam was given a dirty look by Alex. (passive)

## Chapters 19-24

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 4

1. What did Claire throw in Alex's face? (p.101)
  - a. Apple Juice
  - b. Orange juice
  - c. Water
  - d. Coke
  
2. Vanessa belonged to a group known as RLW. What do the letters stand for? (p.107)
  - a. Real Love Works
  - b. Real Love Wishes
  - c. Real Love Waits
  - d. Real Love Walks
  
3. Why did Constable Massingham arrest Steve? (p.112)
  - a. For stealing gear from the skate shop
  - b. For assault
  - c. For vandalising his police car
  - d. For stealing Casey's videos and CDs.
  
4. Which place did Alex finish in the skate comp? (p.124)
  - a. 1st
  - b. 2nd
  - c. 3rd
  - d. Last
  
5. Alex was angry at Sam for telling their mum about what he did at retreat, so he gave Sam: (p.120)
  - a. A mugby tackle
  - b. The typewriter
  - c. The milkshake
  - d. A dead leg



## Chapters 19-24

### Spelling

#### List 4

quivered  
poured  
interrogations  
forgiveness  
careering  
rebellious  
barrier  
glistening  
hilarious  
screeched

#### Vocabulary

Place the correct words from List 4 into the following sentences:

1. There were \_\_\_\_\_ from Miss Phillips and Mrs Beagan but Alex didn't get into trouble. (Chapter 20)
2. She stopped talking as the tears welled up in her eyes and her mouth \_\_\_\_\_. (Chapter 20)
3. A police car \_\_\_\_\_ around the corner and Constable Massingham jumped out. (Chapter 21)
4. Casey grabbed Steve's shirt and his board went \_\_\_\_\_ over a gutter. (Chapter 21)
5. The tattoo of crossed boxing gloves on his upper arm was already \_\_\_\_\_ from the sweat. (Chapter 24)

## Chapters 19-24

### Language — What's past is past.

#### Past participle v/s past tense

The past tense of a verb shows the action has already happened.

- Alex **skated** across the concrete. Something caught his eye.
- She **took** a deep breath.

The past participle needs an auxiliary or 'helping' verb such as **has**, **had** or **have**.

- Alex **had skated** across the concrete when something caught his eye.
- She **had taken** a deep breath.

Mostly, the past tense and past participle take the same form, such as **skated**.

However, some **irregular verbs**, such as **took/taken**, take different forms. Do not use the past participle instead of the past tense of the verb, or vice versa.

- Alex and Claire swum in the ocean. (wrong)
- Alex and Claire swam in the ocean. (right)
- Alex and Claire have swum in the ocean. (right)

#### Past Tense

swam  
ate  
spoke  
rang  
wrote  
became  
chose

#### Past Participle

swum  
eaten  
spoken  
rung  
written  
become  
chosen

#### Exercise: Choose the correct form of the verb

1. Alex had **become/became** someone he wasn't proud of.
2. Peter Callaghan **sang/sung** out of tune. He **did/done** it all the time.
3. Claire had **chose/chosen** to give her life to God.
4. He **flew/flied/flown** down the ramp.
5. The phone **rang/rung**. Becky picked it up.

Write sentences using the following verbs:

- spoke, spoken
- wrote/written
- ate/eaten

## Chapters 25-30

### Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension—Quiz 5

1. The girls at St Joseph's liked Alex again after he: (p.136)
  - a. Landed a cool skate trick
  - b. Got back with Becky
  - c. Sang a song
  - d. Apologised to Claire
  
2. The fight between Sam and Louisa DeBono was stopped by: (p.139)
  - a. Mr Letcher
  - b. Claire Carney
  - c. Alex
  - d. Peter Callaghan
  
3. Becky came to Alex's place to see him. How did she get to Beeton? (p.143)
  - a. Bus
  - b. Her dad dropped her off
  - c. Train
  - d. She walked
  
4. Alex finally landed the skate trick he'd been trying. It was a: (p.148)
  - a. 360 flip
  - b. Kickflip indy
  - c. Backside 180
  - d. Ollie
  
5. What did Billy Johnstone call himself during his oral presentation? (p.153)
  - a. A rock star
  - b. A footy star
  - c. A stud
  - d. A porn star



## Chapters 25-30

### Spelling

#### List 5

idiot  
millennium  
catalogue  
chuckled  
disappointed  
sober  
consequences  
apologising  
wrestling  
parasite

#### Vocabulary

Place the correct words from List 5 into the following sentences.

1. "Guys think it's fine to have sex but they don't think about the \_\_\_\_\_," said Emma Barney. (Chapter 25)
2. "When you make up lies about someone you're the lowest type of \_\_\_\_\_ there is," said Claire. (Chapter 26)
3. Emma and the others thanked Alex for \_\_\_\_\_ to Claire, and Sarah said she never really doubted him. (Chapter 26)
4. The contract offered free decks and clothes for a year, and the \_\_\_\_\_ had pictures of all the gear he could choose from. (Chapter 28)
5. Alex caught up with a \_\_\_\_\_ Possum and a moderately drunk rest of the team. (Chapter 30)

## Chapters 25-30

### Language — Writing like a writer Efficient Writing

Good writing is often called “efficient” or “tight” writing. It involves expressing ideas as clearly as possible without using unnecessary words.

- Walking down the street Alex saw an unlucky looking woman who tripped over an old, abandoned, rusty, shopping trolley. He didn't want to laugh but the giggles rose up inside him like a gas bottle full of helium and he laughed heaps and heaps.

Words can be cut from this passage without affecting its meaning. Also, the over description means it lacks clarity in some places. What is an “unlucky looking” woman? Does the reader really need to know so much detail about the shopping trolley? Here is an edited version.

- Walking down the street Alex saw a woman trip over an old shopping trolley. He didn't want to laugh, but it rose up inside of him like helium.

**Exercise: Rewrite the following passage making the writing more efficient. Cut out words where possible and rework sentences to make them clearer.**

### Lunch at School

Me mate and me ran down to the oval as soon as it became a possibility, which was when the bell went. I brought a pigskin football with me so we could practise our big kicks and high marks. When I crossed the creek I was pretty pumped and all that, so I forgot to envision where I was going. I sort of, accidentally tripped on a rock like object, and slipped into the creek.

"Hep B for me!" I yelled with horror.

Me mate laughed like a hyena.

Swimming out of the creek I went, using the Australian crawl technique. I ran up to my mate and punched him fairly hard in the face.

His yelling at me was loud. We then realised that the footy was still in the creek. Because I was still wet, me mate sort of pushed me back into the creek to get it.

I got the ball, got out of the creek and kicked it dead straight into my companion's guts. He then chased me round and round the oval until he got really, really stuffed, then I called him a wuss and he chased me again and caught me and rubbed my head into the smelly, dirty mud.

## Major Activities

The following are suggested major activities to accompany the book.

### Book Review

The main task of a book review is to tell the reader whether the book is worth reading.

In a Review you should:

- Give your opinion clearly.
- Support your opinion by referring to specific good and bad things about the book. For example, you might cover the effectiveness of the characters, plot (what happens in the story), style (humorous, fast-paced, etc) and major issues or themes covered.
- Draw your ideas together in a clear and concise conclusion.
- Mention at least some positive points.

In a Review you should not:

- Simply describe the item without saying why you liked or disliked different parts.
- Tell the reader the ending of the book.
- Make negative comments without giving a good reason.

**Activity:** Check the author's website

<http://www.patflynnwriter.com/> and read reviews of the Alex Jackson series.

**Activity:** Write your own review of Alex Jackson: Closing Out, and if you wish, send it to the author, Pat Flynn (<mailto:author@patflynnwriter.com>).

He'll be interested to hear your comments and will send you a reply. Make sure in the subject of the email you write 'Review'.

### Diary Entry

Write a diary entry as one of the characters explaining how you feel at a particular point in the story. You could be Becky after she asked Alex to leave, or Sam when Louisa started spreading rumours about her.

### Persuasive Speech

Prepare a persuasive speech on the topic:

*Boys don't treat girls with enough respect.*

Use quotes from Closing Out to help your argument.

# Answers

## Chapters 1-6

### Listening Comprehension

1. D
2. B
3. A
4. C
5. C

### Vocabulary

1. flurry
2. squeal
3. suited
4. suspicious
5. nuisance

## Chapters 7-12

### Listening Comprehension

1. D
2. B
3. D
4. A
5. C

### Vocabulary

1. grovelling
2. liaison
3. obscenities
4. reverberated
5. obsessed

## Chapters 13-18

### Listening Comprehension

1. A
2. C
3. C
4. D
5. B

## Answers

### Vocabulary

1. rumours
2. encouragement
3. signalled
4. anointed
5. shuddered

### Chapters 19-24

#### Listening Comprehension

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. B
5. B

### Vocabulary

1. interrogations
2. quivered
3. screeched
4. careering
5. glistening

### Chapters 25-30

#### Listening Comprehension

1. D
2. B
3. C
4. A
5. D

### Vocabulary

1. consequences
2. parasite
3. apologising
4. catalogue
5. sober