

# **Practice & Teaching Methods: English Conversation**

*From a Task-Based Approach*

Graduate School of Education

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**HUFS Graduate School of Education**  
**Practice & Teaching Methods: English Conversation**

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### **Overview**

This course is designed to give you practical insights into using Task-based Learning in your conversation classes. Students will experience sample lesson and have opportunities to apply task-based learning in micro-teaching situations.

### **Text**

Course Packet

### **Assessment**

30% Attendance and Participation

20% Homework

25% Micro-Teaching

25% Reflective Essay

### **Attendance [10%] & Participation [20%] (30%)**

Attendance is **mandatory**. Participants who arrive to class **10 minutes or more** after the start of class will be **considered late**. Participants who are **late 3 times** will receive **1 absence**. Any participant who **misses ¼ or more** of all class meetings **WILL receive an F** in the course. **More important than attendance is participation**. I expect participants to be active in class discussions and to complete all oral and written assignments **BY THE DUE DATE**. If assignments are handed in late without prior permission from the instructor, **10% for each late day will be deducted from the grade**. Finally, participants in this course will have several opportunities to apply the skills learned in lectures, discussions and workshops by engaging in various “in-class” activities and projects.

### **Homework on readings (20%)**

It is essential to be prepared for each class by completing the required readings. This will provide you with the background knowledge on the topic and allow you to participate actively in the class discussion. In order to ensure that you have read the required readings for class, you will be expected to do a short homework assignment for the reading. This homework assignment involves answering the guiding reading questions presented at the beginning of each reading. These homework assignments are to be submitted at the beginning of class. **Late submissions will NOT be accepted.**

### **Micro-Teaching (25%)**

Task-based learning is an approach that is often under utilized in EFL situations. To gain a better understanding of the method and the techniques necessary to implement successful task-based learning each participant will have opportunities for micro-teaching.

### **Reflective Essay (25%)**

After micro-teaching it is important that you reflect upon that experience. Participants will submit a reflective essay one week after completing their micro-teaching.

## **Weekly Plan**

This weekly plan is a **tentative** plan. It will act as a guideline but may not be followed exactly due to the participants' needs, their understanding of the contents, and overall progress.

<b>Week/Date</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>In class activities/Assignments</b>
Week 1		Introduction to course
Week 2	Task-Based Learning an Introduction	<b>Sample Lesson 1 &amp; Processing</b>
Week 3	Basis of the Task-based Approach	<b>Discussion/lecture:</b> about reading
Week 4		<b>Discussion/lecture:</b> reflective practice and microteaching <b>Workshop:</b> On Giving Feedback
Week 5		TBA
Week 6		TBA
Week 7		TBA
Week 8		TBA
Week 9		TBA
Week 10		TBA
Week 11		TBA
Week 12		TBA
Week 13		TBA
Week 14		TBA
Week 15		TBA
Week 16		TBA

# Section 2

## Readings

# 11 Task-based Learning: An Introduction

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Task-based learning (TBL), also known as task-based language learning (TBLL), task-based language teaching (TBLT) or task-based instruction (TBI) focuses on the use of authentic language, having students do meaningful tasks using the target language that have a clear connection to real world situations. Such tasks can include scheduling an appointment at a doctor's office, conducting an interview, or making a fractured fairy tale. Assessment is primarily based on task outcome, that is, was the task completed successfully and not on how accurately the target language was used. This makes TBL an appropriate approach for developing target language fluency and student confidence.

TBL was first proposed by N. Prabhu. He noticed that his students learned language just as easily with a non-linguistic problem as when they were analyzing the linguistic features of the target language. He also noticed that students were more engaged and participated in the class more enthusiastically. He concluded that task-based learning had significant benefits for language learning that were typically missing from more standard approaches.

Willis argues that task-based learning does a better job of creating the appropriate conditions for language learning than other methods or approaches. Willis identifies the following conditions:

1. *Exposure*. Learners need to be exposed to a rich but comprehensible input of real spoken and written language in use
2. *Use*. Learners need to be given opportunities to use the language to do things such as exchange ideas, share opinions, complain, disagree, etc.
3. *Motivation*. Learners need to have a clear reason to listen and read the target language as well as reasons for them to speak and write the target language. In other words learners need to process and use the target language that they are exposed to through doing authentic, meaningful and relevant tasks.
4. *Instruction*. Learners need help noticing salient features of the target language after they have had opportunities to use the target language. In other words, the teacher provides students with opportunities to focus on form.

Willis believes that the first three conditions (Exposure, Use and Motivation) are essential for language learning. Instruction, however, is desirable, but not an essential condition for language learning.

There are five important characteristics to a task-based approach to language teaching:

1. Learning to communicate through interaction in the target language (i.e. interaction is seen as a necessary part of learning)
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language, but also on the learning process itself; for example, learners are given tasks with clear outcomes and they are asked to report on the task itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom

### Definition of task in task-based learning

According to Willis (2007), a task is an activity "where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve some outcome." Willis (1996) also asserts that task is NOT "a label for various activities including grammar exercises, practice activities and role plays." This is because many grammar exercises and practice activities are not communicative, and role plays, although they are communicative, they do not have a clear predictable outcome.

Skehan (1996) defined task as an activity in which meaning is the primary focus. In addition the task must have some sort of relationship to the real world. Furthermore, task completion by the learner is a priority, and assessment of learning is determined by task performance in terms of task outcome.

### Types of tasks identified by Willis

#### 1. *Listing*

- ⊙ brainstorming
- ⊙ fact-finding

Outcome: Complete list or draft of a mind map

#### 2. *Ordering and sorting*

- ⊙ sequencing
- ⊙ ranking
- ⊙ categorizing
- ⊙ classifying

Outcome: a set of information which is ordered and sorted according to specified criteria

### 3. *Comparing*

- ⊙ matching
- ⊙ finding similarities
- ⊙ finding differences

Outcome: Could be that items are appropriately matched or assembled or that the similarities and/or differences are identified and listed

### 4. *Problem solving*

- ⊙ analyzing real situations
- ⊙ analyzing hypothetical situation
- ⊙ reasoning
- ⊙ decision making

Outcome: solutions to problems which can be evaluated

### 5. *Sharing personal experiences*

- ⊙ narrating
- ⊙ describing
- ⊙ exploring and explaining attitudes, opinions reactions

Outcome: largely social

### 6. *Creative Tasks*

- ⊙ brainstorming
- ⊙ fact-finding
- ⊙ ordering and sorting
- ⊙ comparing
- ⊙ problem solving
- ⊙ many others

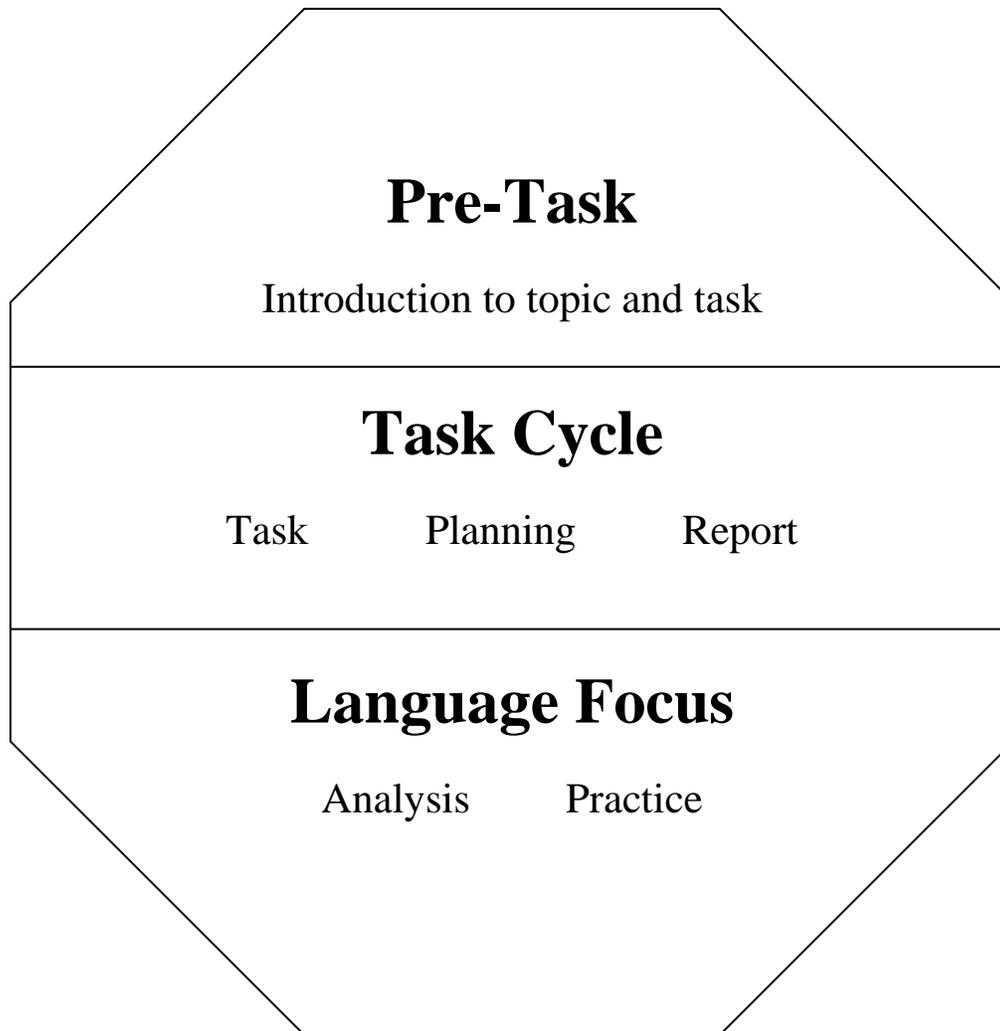
Outcome: End product which can be appreciate by a wider audience

## Task-based learning framework

Willis (2007) uses the following diagram (see below) to illustrate the task-based learning framework. Her diagram has three stages, pre-task, task cycle and language focus.

In the pre-task stage, the teacher introduces the topic, elicits student prior knowledge and sets up the task. The teacher may also choose to model the task. Additionally, the teacher may prepare the students by providing them with key vocabulary or helpful expressions. This step, however, does not follow TBL methodology in the strictest sense, because students should be encouraged to use the language they are comfortable with in order to complete the task, so providing learners with necessary vocabulary or grammatical expressions is usually not recommended.

## Task-based Learning Framework



In the task-cycle stage, students are engaged in a language learning task, students then summarize what happened in the task and share this summary and the results of their task with their class. The teacher monitors and provides feedback to students at each step of the way, but because the tasks have clear outcomes, students are also able to assess their own progress and can often say why the tasks were completed successfully or unsuccessfully. Because the tasks provide students with clear outcome feedback, learners are able to take more responsibility in their own learning; hence TBL is appropriate for building fluency and confidence.

In the language focus stage, the teacher draws students' attention to some aspect of the target language that they used to complete the task. Teacher often chooses language that students struggled with or used incorrectly. It may include language forms that the students were using, problems that students had, and perhaps forms that need to be covered more or were not used enough. After students have had an opportunity to clarify their understanding of the target language, they practice using the clarified form.

In this framework, clarification of the target language comes after students have had an opportunity to use the target language. In other language frameworks such as Present – Practice – Produce (PPP) clarification of the target language comes prior to use. In the Encounter – Internalize - Fluency (EIF) framework, clarification can come either prior or after use, although most examples in the Material Development course packet model clarification of the target language prior to use.

Don't even try to fit task-based learning into the EIF framework. It would be a very messy process, and there are several reasons for this. First, the TBL framework is an integrated skills framework, so assessment isn't determined by the skill but by the task. Second the task cycle stage is a mixture of encounter, internalize and fluency. Therefore, it best to think of task-based learning as a completely different way of organizing and teaching a lesson.

### Sample lesson: Is it task-based learning?

This is a lesson designed for adult learners. It is a multi-level class, but all the learners have had multiple years of previous language learning. The teacher enters the classroom and greets her students, and the students greet her back. She then looks at the class and says: "I have a problem." The students respond to the prompt by saying things like: "What's wrong?" "What's the matter?" "What's your problem?" The teachers says, "I need to take attendance, but I don't have a pen?" Students respond by saying various things like: "Why don't you use mine?" "Here. Use mine." "You should use Jae-Seung's" etc.

The teacher uses a student's pen and takes roll. Then the teacher asks the students: "Why did I borrow Jae-Seung's pen?" Students respond: "Because you forgot your own." Teacher says, "That's right. I forgot my own pen, so not having a pen was my ...." Teacher waits for students to finish her sentence. Several students say: "Problem." The teacher writes the word on the whiteboard and then the teacher says: "When someone has a problem what can we do?" Students say things like. "We can help them." "We can give them advice." Teacher says: "Yes, we can help them and we can give them advice. How do we give people advice? What do we say?"

Students then give suggestions and teacher writes the target language on the white board such as:

- ⊙ You'd better...
- ⊙ Why don't you....
- ⊙ You should...
- ⊙ I think you should...
- ⊙ You might want to consider...

Teacher then explains what the students will do next. Show them that you have two sets of cards; blue cards and red cards. On the blue cards are the situations on the red cards are the problems. Some students will get blue cards and some students will get red cards. People with the blue cards need to find someone with a red card. The person with the blue card will explain the situation. For example: 'I am your professor and you have come to me because you have a problem.' After the person with the blue card has introduced each person's role the person with the red card begins the role play. A: *Professor, I have a problem...* After the pair has completed their role play, they should exchange cards and find a different person to interact with. Teacher should CCQ the directions and then she should pass out the materials.

Students do the activity taking turns asking for and giving advice across a variety of situations and circumstances. The teacher monitors and takes notes regarding the language that students are using across the situations and circumstances. After about eight minutes, the teacher claps her hands and puts the students into groups of about six students. Each group has three blue cards and three red cards. The teacher asks the students to talk about the activity they have just finished so that they can report what they have learned and what questions they may have.

Students work together and discuss the role play and make a list that describes the language that they used and a list of questions they have about the language and situations that they encountered. The students report and the teacher writes the students' observations on the whiteboard such as "Is it OK for a students to say 'you'd better' to their professor when giving advice?" The teacher then makes her own observations.

Next teacher reviews aspects of pragmatics and usage for the various way of giving advice. Teacher provides examples of the TL and tries to elicit the rules from students, but if the teacher is unable to get the students to notice the rules, she provides them with the correct answers. After students have had a chance to clarify the target language, the teacher gives a similar activity to the students. This time the students use green situation cards and pink problem cards to set up the role play. As students do the second activity, teacher monitors and takes notes. After about six minutes, teacher claps her hands and asks students about the target language they used in certain situations and why they chose that target language. Students answer the teacher's consolidation questions and then the teacher dismisses the class.

Although this lesson is staged in a similar way to task-based learning, it is NOT a task-based learning lesson. First of all, role-plays do not have clear outcomes, second this role-play over-emphasized a specific function of language. For a lesson to be considered task-based learning, the task that students are given need to have clear and identifiable outcomes and the language that students use to achieve that task should be open. Even though this wasn't task-based learning (it actually followed the Test-Teach-Test framework), it was still an effective lesson. It was effective because role-plays allow a teacher to assess students understanding of pragmatics better than more outcome driven tasks.

## **BASIC PRINCIPLES**

1. Tasks-based learning should have functional objectives that are tied to the outcome of the task, and these objectives should match the communicative needs of the learners.
2. Task-based learning should have predicted outcomes and limited processes.

3. Task-based learning should require input from all learners.
4. Task-based learning should accommodate learners differing learning styles.
5. Task-based learning should allow for different modes of participation and solutions.
6. Task-based learning should be challenging but not threatening.
7. Task-based learning should develop implicit, procedural knowledge. Learners can best develop implicit, procedural knowledge of a second language through the effort to communicate while doing a purposeful task.

## TECHNIQUES

1. Give tasks with clear individual roles.
2. Allow learners to decide what role each member of the group will take, but make sure that everyone has a role so that everyone can participate.
3. Use authentic materials whenever possible so learners have real target language input to use as a model for their task completion.
4. Use authentic task (see types of task above).
5. Provide guiding questions to organize and structure the language analysis.

## CRITICISM

Task-based learning has many advantages. First, it is more student-centered than traditional approaches, and second it allows for meaningful communication. It allows students to build their language skills around the language they need rather than following a prescribed language syllabus. Although the teacher may present language in the pre-task, the students are ultimately free to use whatever vocabulary or grammar they want. This allows the learners to use all the language they know and all the language they are in the process of learning and not only the target language of the lesson. Furthermore, as the tasks are likely to be familiar to the students such as scheduling an appointment, students are more likely to be engaged. When students find an activity engaging this will motivate them in their language learning.

A major disadvantage for task-based learning is that it is not appropriate for real beginner students. For example it's the first day of Turkish class, and I am the teacher. None of my students have ever studied Turkish before, could they successfully use task-based learning in this situation? No, because they have no knowledge of the target language. Others researchers, for example Carless (2003), has argued that the tasks themselves limit the language to which students are exposed. For example, because tasks need to have identifiable outcomes, certain kinds of language functions do not lend themselves to these kinds of task-types such as discussion or debate. Swan (2005) argued that the assumptions underlying TBL are problematic. For example, TBL assumes acquisition occurs during communication, but there is no evidence that this is the ONLY way that acquisitions take place. Furthermore, task-based learning may also limit teachers ability to assess and teach pragmatic aspects of language. Pragmatics require learners to use language in specific situations, outcome driven tasks tend to focus on task completion and not situational factors. Teachers, therefore, need to keep these things in mind when designing task-based learning lessons.

## PROCESS QUESTIONS

1. What is the Task-based Language Learning?
2. What is your general opinion of this method?
3. What aspect of TBL might you use in your classes?
4. What is the definition of task in TBL?
5. When using the TBL approach, what is the teacher's goal?
6. Describe the teacher's role in TBL approach?
7. Describe the Students' role in the TBL approach?
8. What are the benefits of this approach?
9. What are the challenges/disadvantages of this approach?
10. What are some common activities or techniques used in this approach?
11. As a teacher, have you ever used any of these activities?
12. As a learner, have you ever been taught using any of these activities?
13. What type of learners do you think would best respond to the TBL method?
14. What aspects of TBL do you think would work for your students? Why?
15. Look at the materials that your trainer has provided. Use the definition of task to decide if these materials are appropriate TBL task or not.
16. Make a list of three for language topics that you might want to teach your students. Next look at the list of task types described above a select one or two possible tasks that your students could do for the topics you have brainstormed.

## MICROTEACHING

1. Look at a popular language learning textbook, and adapt a lesson or unit to TBL. How is the lesson similar to the one in the textbook? How is it different?
2. Choose one of task types listed in the first section and develop it into a full lesson plan.

## ACTIVITIES

### “22<sup>nd</sup> Century Star Search”

**Level** Intermediate

**Time** 15-20 minutes

**Aims** To have students make a list of famous people today who will be remembered in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century and to be able to explain why they believe they will continue to be famous

**Organization** Small groups

**Preparation** Pictures of famous people from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century who are still famous today such as Elvis, Marilyn Monroe, etc...

**Procedure** 1 Lead-in: Show pictures of Elvis and Marilyn. Have the learners discuss these questions in groups: Do you know these people? What are they famous for? Why do we still remember them today?

- 2 Set-up: Write the task sequence on WB or put it on the PPT. Explain and CCQ the task cycle.
  - a) List five famous people today who will be remembered in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century.
  - b) Compare your lists. Did you have any people in common?
  - c) Tell each other why you chose the people on your list.
  - d) Finally, combine your two lists, but keep it to only five people.
- 3 Report: Let groups share their lists and the reason why they believe these people will be famous in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century with other groups.

### “Night Out”

**Level** High Intermediate Adults

**Time** 30 minutes

**Aims** To build vocabulary related to the topic and to recycle TL for making plans (be going to) and describing intentions (will)

**Organization** Small groups

**Preparation** Pictures of some common places such as restaurant, bar, etc... and a short listening text of two people planning a night out.

- Procedure**
- 1 Lead-in: Show pictures: restaurant, bar, movie theater and ask them what they see. Try to elicit the topic “going out” “having fun” etc...
  - 2 Vocabulary Building: In groups ask Ss to brainstorm words/phrases and then elicit words/phrases from the groups and write them onto the board (Consider organizing your board into different columns places / verbs / feelings etc).
  - 3 Model Task: Tell Ss they are going to listen to two people talking. Give the listening task: What are they talking about? Play the conversation and let groups discuss their answers. Elicit and write on board: Two people are planning a night out. Tell Ss they are going to listen again. Give Task: Where are they going to go? What are they going to do? Ss listen and then discuss their answers in their groups. Elicit and write answers on the board. Tell Ss they are going to listen for a third and final time. Give task: What do they say to each other to make their plans? Ss listen and then discuss their answers in their groups. Elicit and write answers on the board.
  - 4 The Task: Tell them that they are going to plan a night out for the whole class with their partner. Give them a few minutes to think over place they would like to go. Elicit suggestions and have students rank the best place to least. When the best place has been determined, have students do the task. Then have the students switch groups so they can discuss their ideas with another pair. Students should take note of any similarities and differences.
  - 5 Planning: Put Ss back in original pairings and have them rehearse their presentation for the class night out. Teacher monitors, answers questions that Ss have and keeps note on language points to be clarified later.
  - 6 Report: Let groups share their ideas about the class night out. Each group presents and Ss vote on the best plan.

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# Doing Task-based Teaching

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# CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	xiii
<b>1 The basis of a task-based approach</b>	<b>I</b>
1.1 What do you think about task-based teaching?	I
1.2 Starting with form and starting with meaning: alternative approaches.	4
1.3 Language as meaning	6
1.4 Meaning and tasks in the classroom	8
1.5 Characterizing tasks	12
1.6 Why not start with grammar?	16
<b>2 Task-based sequences in the classroom</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1 Task sequences	21
2.2 Planning a task sequence	23
2.3 Building in focus on form	25
2.3.1 Focus on form at the end of the sequence	25
2.3.2 Exploiting written language	27
2.4 Second language acquisition research and TBT	30
<b>3 Tasks based on written and spoken texts</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1 Introduction: reading for a purpose	33
3.2 Discussion tasks	34
3.3 Prediction tasks	34
3.4 Jigsaw task sequences	41
3.5 Student as question master	43
3.6 General knowledge tasks	45
3.7 Corrupted text	48
3.7.1 Factual gap filling	48
3.7.2 Linguistic gap filling	49
3.8 Ways to recycle texts	53
3.8.1 Corrupted text	53
3.8.2 Quizzes	54
3.8.3 Group dictation	54
3.8.4 Communal memory	55
3.8.5 Summaries	56



5.4.2	Problem-solving task sequences and scenarios	94
5.4.3	Problem-solving games and puzzles	98
5.5	Projects and creative tasks	99
5.6	Sharing personal experiences: storytelling, anecdotes, reminiscences	105
5.7	A summary of task types using the 'task generator'	107
5.8	Review	III
<b>6</b>	<b>Language focus and form focus</b>	<b>113</b>
6.1	Some basic principles	113
6.2	A sample task : 'How strict were your parents?'	114
6.3	Priming	115
6.4	Language focus	116
6.5	Focus on form	117
6.5.1	Identifying items for a focus on form	117
6.5.2	Correction as focus on form	121
6.5.3	Finding texts	122
6.5.4	Some form-focused activities	124
6.5.5	Putting texts together	128
6.6	Organizing language-focused and form-focused activities	129
6.6.1	The pedagogic corpus	130
6.7	Preparing for examinations	131
6.8	Review	132
<b>7</b>	<b>The task-based classroom and the real world</b>	<b>135</b>
7.1	Classroom language and the outside world	135
7.2	Real-world tasks	136
7.2.1	English for specific purposes	136
7.2.2	Everyday English	139
7.2.3	Electronic communication: writing and reading	140
7.3	Artificial tasks	142
7.4	Spontaneous spoken discourse	142
7.5	The social dimension	147
7.6	Teacher roles	148
7.7	Review	151
7.8	Follow-up activities	151
<b>8</b>	<b>Adapting and refining tasks: seven parameters</b>	<b>153</b>
8.1	Introduction	153
8.2	Outcome, and interim goals: the need for precision	156
8.3	Starting points for tasks: input and timing at priming stage	159
8.4	Pre-task preparation and planning	160
8.5	Control of 'agenda' and task structure	161
8.6	Interaction patterns and participant roles	163

8.7	Pressure on language production: 'pushing' output to achieve accuracy	165
8.8	Post-task activities	168
8.8.1	Follow-up tasks for recycling texts	168
8.8.2	Report stage	169
8.8.3	Task repetition	170
8.8.4	Post-task language work	171
8.8.5	Evaluation and reflection	173
8.9	Review	174
8.10	Further exploration: investigating your teaching	174
8.11	Follow-up activity	174
<b>9</b>	<b>Designing a task-based syllabus</b>	<b>177</b>
9.1	The language-based syllabus	177
9.2	A meaning-based approach	179
9.2.1	What do learners want to mean	179
9.2.2	ESP courses	179
9.2.3	English for general purposes	180
9.2.4	English for examination purposes	181
9.2.5	Starting from the course book	182
9.3	From 'can do' statements to tasks and texts	183
9.3.1	The concept of 'can do'	183
9.3.2	Grading tasks	185
9.4	Language coverage and the pedagogic corpus	187
9.4.1	The pedagogic corpus	187
9.4.2	The role of the course designer and teacher	189
9.4.3	Integrating lexis, tasks, and grammar into the syllabus	191
9.5	Covering important lexis	192
9.5.1	The most common words	192
9.5.2	How to teach lexically	194
9.6	The process of syllabus design	196
9.7	Follow-up activities	198
<b>10</b>	<b>How to integrate TBT with coursebooks, and other frequently asked questions</b>	<b>199</b>
10.1	Introduction and problems perceived with TBT	199
10.2	How can I integrate tasks into my textbooks?	201
10.2.1	Identifying tasks and activities that just need 'tweaking'	201
10.2.2	Re-ordering activities	209
10.2.3	Adding and integrating focused tasks	210
10.3	How can we find time to design tasks and plan TBT lessons?	212

10.4	How can I make time to do tasks in-class?	213
10.5	How can you change attitudes of students who aren't used to TBT?	217
10.6	How can I motivate my students to do more than just the minimum?	217
10.7	How can we prevent overuse of L1 and encourage learners with the same L1 to use English during pair-work and project work?	220
10.8	How do we keep learners' interest during a post-task report stage?	221
10.9	How can we give learners a sense of their own progress?	222
10.10	How can we control and keep discipline in large or difficult classes?	223
10.11	One-to-one classes	224
10.12	How can you do tasks with mixed ability learners/on different levels, and ensure all students can do the task?	225
10.13	If we take up TBT, what exams are there that are truly task-based?	226
10.14	Teacher's tips for implementing TBT	227
Appendix 1 Sample task-based lessons		235
Appendix 2 Sample projects and scenarios		246
Appendix 3 Transcripts of task recordings		251
Appendix 4 Designing and using communicative tasks		253
Appendix 5 Sample task-based course plan		255
Appendix 6 Word frequency lists		259
List of teachers who contributed tasks and advice		263
References		267
Index (with page numbers in bold where a word is explained in the text)		273



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When we began planning this book, we sent out a request to language teachers worldwide who were involved in TBT. We asked them to send us tasks which had worked well with their learners together with outline lesson plans to go with them. We also asked them what advice they would give to other teachers hoping to implement TBT, and to report difficulties and problems they had encountered themselves and had heard of from colleagues in connection with TBT. The response was magnificent. So first, and most importantly, we would like to thank the contributors listed at the end of this book, not only for sending us their tasks and ideas, but also for responding so willingly to our follow-up requests for more details. Sadly we were unable to find space for all the tasks sent in—we received well over 100—but everyone's advice has been collated and incorporated at relevant stages in the book, and especially in the final chapter. It is their co-operation that makes this book truly worthy of its title: *Doing Task-based Teaching*.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Doing Task-based Teaching* has been written for language teachers who want to gain a better understanding of how task-based teaching (TBT) works in practice. It aims to give beginner teachers the confidence to start using tasks in their lessons, and help experienced teachers to widen their repertoire of tasks and task sequences. It draws on the classroom experiences not only of the writers themselves, but of over 30 teachers in twelve different countries. These committed teachers have sent in examples of tasks they have designed and used successfully in their lessons. In the book we take further account of the realities of the classroom by looking at ways of combining a task-based approach with current coursebooks.

Chapter 1 begins by exploring some commonly held views on TBT and addressing some common misconceptions. It distinguishes between approaches that begin with a focus on grammatical form and those that begin with a focus on meaning, and looks at the principles that underpin them. It explores the meaning of the term 'task' and argues that a teacher-controlled focus on grammar should come at the end of a task cycle.

From Chapter 2 onwards, the emphasis is very much on *doing* task-based teaching.

Chapter 2 describes four practical sequences of meaning-focused activities leading to a focus on form. These sequences are used to illustrate a coherent and accessible explanation of some basic theories and principles behind TBT.

The next three chapters (3, 4, and 5) focus on designing tasks. They illustrate a variety of different task types, and look at ways of grading, appraising, and evaluating tasks. For each task type, there are examples of specific tasks used in classrooms round the world, as described by the teachers who used them. There is detailed advice on generating effective tasks for different levels of learner and on integrating reading and writing activities.

Chapter 6 distinguishes between a focus on language in use and a focus on form in isolation. It explores stages in a task cycle where learners are naturally concerned with improving their language and becoming more accurate (language focus). Turning to a focus on form, the chapter illustrates how different items can be identified and taken from the language of the spoken

or written texts associated with a task sequence and used as the basis for form-focused exercises. Many examples are given and there is advice on finding and creating texts and preparing for examinations.

Chapter 7 looks at typical classroom discourse and explores how far it can be extended to reflect the language used in the discourse arenas of the world outside. The use of tasks opens up a far wider potential for real-world language use, especially when teaching students with specific needs. This chapter describes 'real-world' tasks that incorporate everyday English and electronic communication. It lists typical features of spontaneous spoken English, examples of which can be brought into the classroom. It acknowledges the difficulties in dealing with variable social dimensions and illustrates task sequences leading to role-plays designed to highlight the social dimension. Finally, it explores the roles of a TBT teacher—as a manager of discourse as well as a purveyor of knowledge.

Chapter 8 illustrates ways of adapting and refining tasks to tailor them more precisely to the needs of specific classes, to make them more engaging and to guard against minimal participation by less motivated learners. Planning a task-based lesson involves making decisions about pre- and post-task activities, the outcome, interim goals of and structure of the task, interaction patterns and the degree of accuracy, and/or spontaneity. The chapter also illustrates the need to devise very clear instructions. Each of the seven broad parameters in task design is further broken down into specific aspects that can be adjusted or 'tweaked' in different ways. Readers are encouraged to experiment by changing one such aspect to see what difference it makes in their lessons and to plan a small-scale action research project.

Chapter 9, on task-based syllabus design, outlines the problems with starting from an itemized language-based syllabus and looks at different meaning-based approaches to syllabus design. It discusses task-based syllabuses for the design of ESP, general, examination, and coursebook based courses, as well as courses based on learner outcomes or 'can do' statements. Starting with topic lexis is essential to facilitate task-based interactions, and the problem of integrating systematic language coverage in TBT can be solved through use of a pedagogic corpus. Finally, there is an explanation and summary of a set of procedures for syllabus design.

Chapter 10 takes up the most frequently asked questions about TBT that have not already been answered in the first nine chapters. It begins with a summary of the most commonly reported problems with TBT, and then responds to questions that arise out of these problems, such as integrating TBT into the prescribed coursebook. It looks at ways of turning textbook activities into tasks, making time to do tasks in class, dealing with large classes, stimulating unmotivated and unwilling learners, combating overuse of L1, and handling mixed ability classes. The chapter includes much advice

from the teachers who contributed tasks and it ends with their most useful tips for teachers who hope to implement TBT in the future.

Reader activities are included at intervals throughout the book and follow-up activities and further reading appear at the end of most chapters. These activities aim to help readers to reflect constructively on what has gone before or to prepare for what is coming in the next section. There are also activities of a more practical nature, applying the ideas in the preceding section to the reader's own teaching context, for example, designing a specific task and writing task instructions for a class of their own, planning a task-based sequence, identifying useful language features in a text, and designing form-focused exercises for those features. Many activities could be used to promote constructive discussion or provide the basis for written assignments on teacher training programmes.

The Appendices include lesson plans and commentaries for tasks, projects and scenarios, tape-scripts, a sample course outline, and a sample handout that can be used in a workshop on task design. The aim is to supply teachers with enough data so they can adapt and try these tasks out with their own classes and plan their own form-focused materials.

### *Note on terminology*

The book is entitled *Doing Task-based Teaching* and we have on the whole used TBT as the short form to refer to task-based teaching. Of course, where teaching goes on, learning does, too—or so we hope! The reader will, therefore, find TBL used from time to time, particularly when we are quoting from the work of others.

Dave Willis and Jane Willis, Kendal, Cumbria, February 2006



# 1

## THE BASIS OF A TASK-BASED APPROACH

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### *1.1 What do you think about task-based teaching?*

Proponents of task-based teaching (TBT) argue that the most effective way to teach a language is by engaging learners in real language use in the classroom. This is done by designing tasks—discussions, problems, games, and so on—which require learners to use the language for themselves. But TBT is not the same the world over. Teachers who begin with the notion that tasks should be central to teaching then go on to refine an approach which fits their own classrooms and their own students. (See Edwards and J. Willis 2005.) Before going on to discuss TBT in greater detail it is necessary to look carefully at some of the things which are important in a task-based approach.

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#### READER ACTIVITY 1A

#### The essentials of a task-based approach

Think about what you have heard about TBT and say how far you agree with the following statements:

- 1 Many people can operate effectively in a foreign language even though their grammar is limited and they make a lot of mistakes.
- 2 Learners will not be able to do a task unless they have the right grammar.
- 3 TBT accepts the importance of grammar.
- 4 TBT is not suitable for learners who are preparing for an examination.
- 5 You do not have to be a highly experienced teacher to use TBT effectively.
- 6 You cannot do TBT unless your own English is completely fluent and accurate.
- 7 TBT can be used to teach both the spoken and the written language.
- 8 Tasks are always done in pairs or groups.

#### **Commentary**

Here is a commentary on these eight statements:

- 1 Most of us know someone who fits this description. Some years ago we were shown round the city of Prague by a Czech friend whose English was very limited. He was rarely able produce a full sentence without at least one or two

mistakes. He rarely used a past tense form, yet he managed to tell us all about the Prague Spring of 1970 using present tense forms with appropriate past adverbials. Even with his severely limited English he was fluent and entertaining. The important thing was that he was willing to make the most of the English he had. This is one of the most valuable things we can give a learner: the confidence and willingness to have a go, even if their language resources are limited. Many of us fall into this category ourselves with respect to at least one foreign language which we use occasionally but have never mastered.

- 2 This depends what you mean by 'the right grammar'. Learners talk about the past long before they have control of the past tense: they say things like 'Yesterday I play tennis'. Long before they have proper control of question forms they can make questions using intonation and interrogative words:

Where you live?

What you want?

In commenting on the previous question we pointed out that learners can be highly resourceful language users, creating complex meanings even with a limited grammar. One of the most important things about TBT is that it promotes learners' confidence by providing them with plenty of opportunities to use language in the classroom without being constantly afraid of making mistakes. Once they have a stock of words they can begin to communicate. And, once they begin to communicate, we can help them shape their language so that it becomes more complex and more grammatical.

- 3 Most current approaches to TBT certainly recognize the importance of grammar. Today task-based activities are almost always followed by one or more form-focused activity. Many traditional methodologies begin by teaching grammatical forms and then go on to set communicative activities in which they believe learners will be able to use those forms. The initial aim of TBT is to encourage learners to engage in meaning with the language resources they already have. This makes learners acutely aware of what they need to learn. They are then given form-focused activities to help them develop that language. They may later do a repeat task which gives them the opportunity to incorporate some of the language they have focused on at an earlier stage.
- 4 TBT is certainly not designed with examinations in mind. It is designed to produce learners who can use their English in the real world outside the classroom, even if that language is grammatically inaccurate. If an examination genuinely tests learners' ability to use the language, then TBT will prepare them for this very effectively. Unfortunately some examinations set a much higher premium on grammatical accuracy than on the ability to use the language. But TBT can be adapted to prepare learners for examinations of this kind. In Chapter 6 we will look at form-focused activities within the context of a TBT programme. The form-focused activities which follow a task can be designed or

supplemented to reflect the sort of question that learners will face in the examination.

- 5 Any teacher will need basic classroom skills—the ability to motivate learners and organize activities in the classroom. They will also need to be able to demonstrate and explain important language features. So an experienced teacher who already has these skills will start with an advantage. But the most important thing in TBT is the willingness to engage with learners in communication, and to allow learners the freedom to use the language. Some experienced teachers find this very difficult because they are used to controlling learner language in order to avoid mistakes. TBT requires a willingness to surrender some of that control. Teachers who come to the classroom with an open mind, whether they are experienced or inexperienced, will learn to use TBT effectively if they have the confidence to trust the learners and give them every opportunity to use the language for themselves.
  - 6 Sometimes teachers who don't have confidence in their own English respond by controlling learners very strictly, so that they can predict almost everything that will happen in the classroom. But if learners are always controlled, they will never learn to use language freely. They need an English-speaking model, and the best model they can get is a teacher whom they respect. So try to use English freely in the classroom even if you do make some mistakes. Mistakes are a natural part of spontaneous use. Once learners are involved in a task which engages their interest, they won't even notice them. So use your English to talk freely to learners: don't deprive them of the best learning aid they could possibly have. You are much more valuable as a model than the cassette recorder, or CD, or video screen.
  - 7 Many people believe that TBT focuses almost entirely on the spoken language. There is certainly a lot of talking in the TBT classroom, from both teachers and learners, but TBT can also be used to teach reading (see Chapter 3) and to provide valuable writing practice as illustrated in later chapters.
  - 8 It is true that many task-based teachers like learners to work in pairs or groups. This is generally because this gives learners more opportunities to use the language for themselves. But TBT can certainly be accommodated within a teacher-led classroom (see Chapter 7), and one of the most successful practitioners of TBT, N. S. Prabhu, used a teacher-fronted methodology (Prabhu 1987), working always with the class as a whole.
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## ***1.2 Starting with form and starting with meaning: alternative approaches to teaching***

Some approaches to language teaching, which we will call form-based approaches, are based on the belief that we need to take great care, at each stage of learning, that learners produce the language accurately. Usually this involves a focus on form at the very beginning of a teaching sequence. By a focus on form we mean that teachers isolate one or two specific forms, specific grammatical structures or functional realizations, and identify these as the targets forms. Learners know that by the end of the teaching sequence, often contained in a single lesson, they will be expected to produce these forms with an acceptable level of accuracy.

A well known form-focused approach is often known as PPP (Presentation → Practice → Production). This begins by highlighting one or two new forms and illustrating their meaning. It then goes on to practise that form under careful teacher control. This control is gradually relaxed until finally learners are offered the opportunity to produce the target form(s) in a communicative activity. This approach has four main characteristics:

- 1 A focus on one or two forms, specified by the teacher, which are later to be incorporated in the performance of a communicative activity.
- 2 This focus on form comes *before* learners engage in communicative activity.
- 3 Teacher control of learner language. This is imposed strictly in the early stages of the cycle and gradually relaxed.
- 4 The success of the procedure is judged in terms of whether or not learners do produce the target forms with an acceptable level of accuracy.

Other approaches, which we will call meaning-based approaches, are based on the belief that it is more effective to encourage learners to use the language as much as possible, even if this means that some of the language they produce is inaccurate. Teachers provide learners with opportunities in the classroom to use the language for genuine communication. This involves a focus on *meaning*. Inevitably, in the course of a meaning-focused activity, learners will sometimes naturally focus on language for themselves. They will, for example, stop for a moment to think 'How do I best express this next idea?', 'What's the word for X?', or 'Should I be using the past tense here?' When this happens learners are not simply thinking about forms specified by the teacher and how best to incorporate these forms in their output. They are thinking about language in general and searching their own language repertoire to decide how best to express themselves in a given communicative situation. We will call this a focus on *language*. Sometimes this focus on language involves teacher participation too. Teachers repeat learner utterances, reshaping them to make them clearer, or supply words or

phrases to help learners shape their message. When teachers do this they are acting as participants in the interaction. As long as teachers are doing this in order to help learners with communication we regard it as a focus on language.

Finally, teachers direct learners' attention to specific forms which occur in the course of a task or an associated text. They may exemplify, explain and practice these forms. This we will call a focus on *form*. Teachers should take care that this focus on form does not detract from a focus on meaning. The simplest way to do this is to withhold this focus on form until after a task has been completed. Sometimes this focus on form is incidental. The teacher stops a learner and offers correction. This correction is aimed primarily at ensuring that the learner is aware of the correct form. It is not offered to help with meaning. When teachers do this they are standing outside the interaction and commenting on learners' performance with regard to accuracy.

We are, then, looking at a three-way distinction:

- A focus on *meaning*, in which participants are concerned with communication.
- A focus on *language*, in which learners pause in the course of a meaning-focused activity to think for themselves how best to express what they want to say, or a teacher takes part in the interaction and acts as a facilitator by rephrasing or clarifying learner language.
- A focus on *form* in which one or more lexical or grammatical forms are isolated and specified for study, or in which the teacher comments on student language by drawing attention to problems.

Long (1988) makes a similar distinction, but uses different terminology, contrasting a focus on *form* (singular) with a focus on *forms* (plural). Roughly speaking, what he refers to as a focus on *form*, we have referred to as a focus on *language*; and what he refers to as a focus on *forms* (plural), we have referred to as a focus on *form* (singular).

A meaning-focused approach normally involves a focus on meaning and a focus on language *before* a focus on form. Meaning-based approaches have the following characteristics:

- 1 The teacher does not attempt to control learner language.
- 2 The success of the procedure is judged on whether or not learners communicate successfully.
- 3 At some stages during a meaning-focused cycle of activities learners and teachers will focus on language. Learners will pause to think how best to express themselves and may discuss different options with fellow students or look for help in a dictionary or grammar book. Teachers will participate in the interaction by helping learners to shape and clarify what they want to say.

- 4 Focus on form comes after focus on meaning. Advocates of a meaning-based approach will spend most of the time in the classroom on activities which promote communicative language use, but will supplement these with activities designed to promote accuracy. Course books which take a form-based approach encourage teachers to devote a lot of time in the classroom to form-focused activities, presenting specific forms of the language to their students and practising those forms. They will, however, almost certainly reinforce these activities with opportunities for communicative language use.

### *1.3 Language as meaning*

When children begin to use their first language they communicate without using sentences. Early utterances may simply consist of pairs of nouns like 'book table'. Depending on the context and intonation and the accompanying gestures this may be interpreted as 'The book is on the table', or 'Please put the book on the table', or 'Shall I put the book on the table?' Relying on a shared context, children manage to convey meanings quite effectively without using grammatical sentences. Much the same is true of learners at the elementary level.

Taking this observation as a starting point, one might argue that early communication is primarily lexical and that grammar plays a subsidiary function. Let us put this to the test by looking at a text which has minimal grammar:

Mother little girl. Mother say little girl go see grandmother. Mother give little girl big basket food. Mother say 'You take food grandmother ...'.<sup>1</sup>

We feel reasonably confident that many of you will have identified the opening of the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*. It is not true to say, however, that we have simply a string of words to tell this story. If we had offered you the sequence:

Mother girl little. Say mother grandmother go see girl little. Basket big food girl little mother give. Say 'Grandmother food take you ...' mother.

You would certainly have found this much more difficult, perhaps impossible, to interpret. What, then, is the important difference between the first and the second versions of the story?

You might answer this by saying that the word order in the first version makes sense. More precisely, you might say the first version follows the conventions of English clause and phrase structure. Each clause has the

<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to Andrew Wright for this striking example.

structure 'subject + verb + ...'. In the phrases 'little girl' and 'big basket' the adjective comes in front of the noun. So the first version does conform to some of the rules of English grammar. It follows the rules of English word order, the rules of English clause and phrase structure.

So, it is possible to tell a story quite adequately with a string of words and a very limited grammar of structure. There are no definite articles or indefinite articles in the first version of the story, and no other determiners such as 'this/that' or 'his/her'. There are no verb tenses. This raises an interesting question. If things like articles and tenses are unnecessary why do we bother with them at all? The answer, of course, is that articles and tenses are far from unnecessary. Even in the telling of a simple story we can make things much easier for our listener by using the full resources of the grammar:

Once upon a time there was a mother who had a little girl. The little girl was going to see her grandmother. Her mother gave her a big basket of food and said 'Take this food to your grandmother'.

So grammar is vital if we want to make things reasonably easy for listeners or readers.

It is also difficult to express complex abstract meanings without grammar. One day our daughter, Jenny, was playing in the garden with her two-year-old son. He was filling a bottle with water from an outside tap, pouring the water in a hole he had dug and watching it disappear. Jenny was thirsty and asked him for the bottle. When he gave it to her she drank some of the water. He was horrified. 'No,' he said, 'that water not for drinking. It for putting in hole.' He used the form 'for + -ing' to express purpose, and it is difficult to see how he could have got his message across efficiently without that complex little bit of grammar.

It is, then, possible to make meanings with a very limited grammar. Many of us go through life as foreign language users with a very limited grammar, and most of us know people who can manage quite effectively in English even though they do not have command of basic grammar like the past tense and question forms. But if we want to express meanings in an efficient, listener/reader friendly manner we need more than vocabulary and word order. We also need a grammar that identifies things clearly and relates them to one another: articles and determiners. We need a grammar that places things in a temporal setting: a tense system. And we need a grammar that is capable of expressing abstract relations, phrases like 'for + -ing' to express purpose.

This suggests two possible starting points for language teaching. One possibility would be to see meaning as the starting point for language development, and to see form as developing from meaning. If we take this line we would encourage learners to use the language as much as possible to communicate. As we have seen, vocabulary is central to communication, so

it would be necessary to introduce learners to the basic vocabulary for a given topic, but it would not be necessary in the same way to provide complex grammatical input for the task. This does not mean that we would ignore grammar in a task-based approach. But it would not be the initial aim of instruction. We would still provide learners with guidance to help them develop an acceptable grammar of the language. And we would still provide sample sentences to illustrate the target grammar. But this would be subordinated to encouraging learners to use the language freely, without worrying too much about formal accuracy. The success of a teaching programme would be judged in terms of the learners' growing ability to use the language for communication.

The second possibility is to see form as primary. If we take this view, we seek first to introduce acceptable forms in the target language and then to provide learners with opportunities to associate these forms with appropriate meanings. Teaching procedures are designed to teach learners to produce a range of grammatical sentences. This does not mean that vocabulary is ignored and that there is no focus on meaning. Vocabulary is taught, but it is secondary to grammar. The aim of teaching is to introduce acceptable sentences. We can think of these sentences as grammatical frames. Vocabulary simply provides items to fill out these frames.

This approach does not ignore meaning and communication. Once the grammar has been taught learners are provided with opportunities to use it in meaningful situations. The primary focus, however, is on grammatical accuracy. The success of a lesson is judged in terms of the learners' growing ability to produce formally accurate sentences in the target language.

Of course most approaches to language teaching seek to provide a balance between form and meaning. Teachers will provide a variety of lessons, with some of them offering a primary focus on form, and others, often called *skills lessons*, providing a primary focus on meaning. TBT has a good deal in common with skills lessons.

### *1.4 Meaning and tasks in the classroom*

Some of the most successful activities in the classroom involve a *spontaneous* exchange of meanings. Perhaps the teacher starts by telling a personal story which immediately engages the learners' interest. They respond with stories of their own. Learners who are not telling stories are listening with interest, working hard to understand what is going on. The teacher helps by providing the odd vocabulary item and by occasionally stepping in and rephrasing a learner's contribution. The same kind of thing might happen with a discussion. The teacher begins by stating an opinion. Learners respond with their own opinions and a useful discussion ensues.

These are golden moments in a language classroom. There is real personal involvement, with an accompanying increase in confidence and fluency. Almost certainly learners will experience some language development. They will pick up the odd useful phrase or vocabulary item from the language they are exposed to. They may find the answer to some grammatical problem which has been worrying them for some time. They may suddenly find, for example, that the question forms which have been so elusive begin to come spontaneously and fluently. A gifted teacher may be quick enough to analyse some of the language used in this sort of classroom exchange and use it for form-focused work in this or a subsequent lesson.

But it is impossible to guarantee this kind of spontaneous activity in the classroom. Spontaneity cannot, by definition, be produced to order. There are also questions to be raised about such spontaneous activities. Can we be sure that a given topic will engage learners' interest? How do we know that all of the class will be genuinely involved in discussion or story telling? Can we be sure what language will occur to provide opportunities for form-focused work? It is very difficult to provide language support on the spur of the moment. Will the teacher be able to take immediate advantage of form-focused opportunities which do occur? Let us look at a brief sequence of activities which might help us meet some of these possible shortcomings of a reliance on spontaneous engagement.

There are a number of burning social issues in the modern world which concern almost all societies. One of these is the use of addictive drugs. Many people have firm opinions on the subject. It is quite possible that a teacher with an adult class at a reasonably advanced level could introduce a successful and spontaneous activity simply by referring to a recent newspaper article and expressing an opinion. The class might well respond to this by expressing their own opinions and engaging in argument and discussion.

Let us imagine however that the teacher decides to take a rather more structured approach. For example, if you want to promote discussion of any controversial topic you can prepare students by offering a series of statements and asking learners as individuals to say how far they agree with each statement and to give reasons for their opinions. The following sample activity demonstrates how this may be done.

---

#### SAMPLE ACTIVITY SEQUENCE

##### Drug abuse

Here are some statements about the problem of addictive drugs. Look at these statements and give each one a mark from 1 to 4, according to the following scale:

- |                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 = strongly agree | 3 = disagree          |
| 2 = agree          | 4 = strongly disagree |

- 1 All drugs should be legalized.
- 2 So-called soft drugs, like cannabis, should be legalized, but hard drugs should never be legalized.
- 3 All convicted drug dealers should be given long prison sentences.
- 4 The property of convicted drug dealers should be confiscated.
- 5 Profits made from drug dealing should be confiscated.
- 6 It is pointless to send drug addicts to prison. In most cases this will simply reinforce the habit.

This opinion survey could be central to a sequence of activities:

- 1 The teacher introduces the topic and highlights one or two issues.
- 2 The teacher introduces the survey, asking for a brief statement of opinions on one or two issues, drawing attention to some of the lexis related to the topic.
- 3 Learners work as individuals to set down their opinions on the 1–4 scale, and to think of supporting arguments.
- 4 Learners work in groups to compare opinions and decide on a group rating on the 1–4 scale.
- 5 Teacher chairs a general class discussion.
- 6 Learners read a text on the issues and compare the author's views with their own.
- 7 Teacher chairs a discussion in which learners compare the author's views with their own.

---

These procedures are designed to provide a focus for discussion and reading by providing a clear outcome. The survey provides a very clear outcome. Individual learners express their opinions in the form of a 1–4 rating. They are then required to justify their opinions in a group discussion. The teacher then elicits the outcome of the group discussion with questions like 'Ramon, in your group, how many people agreed that soft drugs should be legalized?', and follow up questions like 'What about your group, Maria? Did you all agree or were there disagreements?'

When learners go on to read the text, they have a clear purpose. They want to find the writer's opinion on a number of specific issues. They are probably interested by now to find out how far the writer supports their own particular views.

What we have done here is provide a formal framework to promote discussion and to provide a reason for reading.

---

#### READER ACTIVITY 1B

Why should we structure a discussion?

What do you think is to be gained from formalizing a discussion in this way?

## Commentary

There are at least six possible advantages to be gained from formalizing the discussion:

- 1 It gives the teacher the opportunity to introduce in a meaningful context some of the vocabulary—words and phrases—which will be useful in the discussion. The vocabulary will be introduced as the teacher goes through the opinion survey, explaining what is involved in the statements.
- 2 Learners are given the opportunity to gather their thoughts as they work with the opinion survey, before they go into the group discussion.
- 3 It is much easier to express an opinion on a very specific issue than on a general topic. If you say to someone ‘Do you agree that all drug dealers should get long prison sentences?’, you are more likely to get a response than if you simply say ‘What do you think about dangerous drugs?’
- 4 All learners are required to form an opinion and to engage with the topic. Some will do so with lively interest. Others may find this particular topic less interesting. But they will all be engaged at some level.
- 5 If learners have no real opinion on the issue, they may stand apart from the discussion. But once they have committed themselves to an opinion by entering it as a 1–4, they are more likely to defend that opinion.
- 6 The questionnaire and the text will provide material for form-focused activities at a later stage in the teaching sequence. It is possible to identify before the lesson those language items which are worth focusing on. This means that the teacher will have time to prepare form-focused activities before the lesson.

---

When we offer the learners formalized activities of the kind described above to facilitate their participation in meaningful activities we are engaging in task-based learning. Instead of relying on the learners’ spontaneous interest and reaction, we are designing activities which will help promote interest and interaction. It is activities of this kind which we call *tasks*. Task-based learning and teaching is a development on CLT (communicative language teaching) in that it lays emphasis on the design of tasks and the development of task-based teaching.

So we create tasks to facilitate meaningful activities in the classroom. Tasks are not a substitute for interesting topics which engage learners’ interest, but they can enhance that engagement and interest.

## 1.5 Characterizing tasks

If you ask the question ‘What is a task?’ in the context of language teaching, you will get different answers from different researchers and practitioners. Some would call almost any classroom activity a task:

Task is therefore assumed to refer to a range of work-plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning—from the brief and simple exercise type to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making. (Breen 1987)

Unfortunately this definition includes anything that might happen in a language classroom, so it is not very useful if we are trying to characterise task-based teaching in order to distinguish it from other kinds of teaching. Let us look at some more sharply focused definitions:

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### READER ACTIVITY 1C:

#### Characterizing tasks

Here are four definitions of task taken from the literature on task-based teaching. Make a list of the features of a task these writers refer to. Which do you think is the most complete definition?

- 1 ‘A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.’ (Nunan 1989)
- 2 ‘[Tasks are] activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.’ (J. Willis 1996)
- 3 ‘A task is an activity in which
  - meaning is primary
  - learners are not given other people’s meanings to regurgitate
  - there is some sort of relationship to comparable real world activities
  - task completion has some sort of priority
  - the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.’ (Skehan 1998)
- 4 ‘... we define a *language use task* as an activity that involves individuals in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or outcome in a particular situation.’ (Bachman and Palmer 1996)

#### Commentary

In the light of our earlier discussion it is not surprising that meaning plays a large part in these attempts to characterise a task. The first definition (Nunan) highlights *meaning*. Definitions 2 (Willis) and 4 (Bachman and Palmer) highlight *outcome* or *goal*. We have shown how a task can provide a formal framework for meaningful discussion by providing an explicit outcome or goal. The most complete definition is 3 (Skehan). Skehan includes meaning, and suggests that learners should be

producing their own meanings, not simply regurgitating or repeating something that they have been told by someone else; it includes outcome by suggesting that task *completion* has priority, in other words that it is important to achieve an outcome; and it says that the assessment of the activity should be seen in terms of outcome. Finally, Skehan suggests that a classroom task should relate in some way to an activity in the *real world*.

We can, then, determine how task-like a given activity is by asking the following questions. The more confidently we can answer yes to each of these questions the more task-like the activity.

- 1 Does the activity engage learners' interest?
- 2 Is there a primary focus on meaning?
- 3 Is there an outcome?
- 4 Is success judged in terms of outcome?
- 5 Is completion a priority?
- 6 Does the activity relate to real world activities?

The first of these introduces as an additional feature: the notion of engagement. This is because without engagement, without genuine interest, there can be no focus on meaning or outcome. Learners have to want to achieve an outcome, they have to want to engage in meaning.



Figure 1.1 Does the activity engage the learners?

These criteria will not provide us with a watertight *definition* of what constitutes a task, but they will provide us with guidelines for the design of activities which are task-like in that they involve real language use. This is very much in line with Skehan's conclusion:

... some of the time it may be difficult to decide whether an activity merits the label 'task' since the two underlying characteristics of tasks, avoidance of specific structures and engagement in worthwhile meanings, are matters of degree, rather than being categorical. (1998: 96)

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#### READER ACTIVITY 1D

#### Evaluating a task

Look back to the opinion survey about drugs above. How does it meet the criteria set out above?

#### Commentary

- 1 The topic is probably intrinsically engaging for many learners. The task seeks to secure engagement from *all* learners.
- 2 If the activity is introduced without any preceding language study then it is almost certain that there will be a focus on meaning, on the exchange of opinions and supporting arguments. On the other hand, it would detract from the activity as a task if there was an introductory activity practising passive modal verbs with sentences like:

I think soft drugs should be legalized.

Drug traffickers should be sent to gaol.

After an introduction like this, there would be a stronger tendency for learners to focus on specific forms. This tendency would probably be even stronger if students were given explicit instructions such as:

Try to use the following forms in your discussion:

'should be punished', 'should be confiscated'

So the more we try to control the language that learners produce, the more learners are likely to be concerned with form rather than meaning, and the less task-like the activity becomes.

Since communication depends crucially on vocabulary, it may well be necessary to introduce a number of vocabulary items to enable students to complete the activity. This is the purpose of the teacher explaining the opinion survey and initiating a brief preliminary discussion. But there is no need to focus on grammar before beginning the task.

- 3 The purpose of the opinion survey is precisely this: to provide an outcome. Instead of just having a general discussion without any definite conclusion, learners are asked to commit themselves to a rating for each statement.
- 4 This will depend on how the teacher handles the activity. If, for example, a teacher moves round the groups correcting their language this moves the criteria for success towards accuracy, and the focus of the activity towards form rather than outcome and meaning. If, on the other hand, the teacher

leaves the groups to get on with the discussion or, while moving round the groups, facilitates the discussion, clarifying learner language, expressing opinions and agreement or disagreement, then this reinforces the importance of outcome.

If the teacher provides a follow-up activity which values the student discussion, this enhances the importance of outcome. So if groups are given a chance to express their opinions to the class as a whole and if this leads on to a serious class discussion, then this again enhances the importance of outcome. If, on the other hand, the teacher gives little value to the conclusions that students have reached and moves on rapidly to another activity, this will detract from the importance of outcome.

As with meaning, the focus on outcome depends on the way a teacher handles the activity. The more a teacher values students' opinions and encourages them to express their opinions, the more task-like the activity becomes.

5 Students should be given reasonable time to complete the activity and should be encouraged to do so.

6 This activity relates to real-world activities on three levels:

Level 1: On a very general level it gives learners the opportunity to engage in producing meanings which will be useful in the real world. They will be using vocabulary to do with a topic of general interest. They will also be expressing opinions on how the world ought to be rather than simply on how it is. In some cases they will be using language that is already familiar to them. In other cases they will be stretching their language resources to enable them to express new meanings. We might call level 1 the level of *meaning*.

Level 2: At another level they will be practising a kind of discourse which is very common in everyday life. They will be expressing opinions and constructing arguments to support those opinions. They will be agreeing and disagreeing; explaining, elaborating, and organising their arguments; relating to arguments produced by others; and so on. We might call this the level of *discourse*.

Level 3: At yet another level they will be engaging in an activity which could quite easily occur in the real world. It is quite conceivable that they might, on some future occasion, be engaged in a discussion on this very topic. We might call this the level of *activity*.

So the relationship with real-world activity is a complex one. Some activities engage with the real world on all three of the levels we have listed. Other activities may engage only on the first two levels.

Not all tasks meet the real-world criterion so satisfactorily. There are, for example, a lot of games-playing activities which do not relate precisely to the

use of language outside the classroom. Our learners are not learning English so that they can play games outside the classroom. But in playing the game they are using lots of language and language skills which will be useful outside. But an activity should relate to the real world at least on levels 1 and 2 if it is to be a useful and motivating task.

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### *1.6 Why not start with grammar?*

Many lessons begin by isolating one or two forms for study. These forms are then presented and practised in various ways so that they become foremost in the learners' minds. The teacher then move on to a communicative activity—a task, if you like. But learners have already been primed to focus on particular forms. Let us imagine that the teacher wants to teach verbs of liking and disliking followed by the –ing form. Learners are exposed to sentences like: 'I like playing tennis', 'I don't like skiing', 'I love listening to music', 'I hate cooking'. These forms are practised intensively. The teacher then asks learners to work in groups and find out what group members like and dislike. They are told to use the forms they have practised.

It may seem that this group activity focuses on both form and meaning. But this is very difficult for learners to think about both form and meaning at the same time, particularly at the elementary level. This is difficult even for accomplished language users. Some years ago there was a radio quiz programme in which contestants were asked to face the YES/NO challenge. All they had to do to win a handsome prize was answer questions for one minute without saying 'yes' or 'no'. This may sound easy, but the contestants always found it extremely difficult. Indeed it was very unusual for anyone to win the YES/NO challenge. And the audience took great delight in the fact that something which seemed so easy turned out to be so difficult. They roared with laughter when a contestant said 'yes' or 'no' and the quizmaster banged his gong. The quizmaster would start off with a few opening questions like 'What's your name?' and 'Where do you live?' Very often he would repeat the answer so you would get a sequence like:

- A What's your name?
- B John.
- A John?
- B Yes.
- GONG!

The better contestants would be looking out for this trick, so they would answer 'That's right', or 'Correct', or something like that. Then the questioning might go on for some time until a sequence like this occurred:

A You live in Manchester?

B That is correct.

A And your name is Joe?

B No, John.

GONG!

Some contestants would concentrate so hard on what they were saying that their words became very hesitant and unnatural. But they were nearly always caught out in the end:

A Time's nearly up. You're doing really well, aren't you?

B Yes.

GONG!

This simple game seems to us to show that it is extremely difficult to concentrate on what we are going to say and at the same time on *how* we are going to say it, in the sense of what words or forms we are going to use. The contestants found it almost impossible to take part in a question and answer session and, at the same time, to think about the form of their answers, *how* they were answering questions, so as to avoid saying 'yes' or 'no'.

How much more will this apply to learners? If they have been asked to concentrate on producing forms of the language which they have only just been presented and practised—for example, the -ing form of the verb—will they be able at the same time to think about what it is they want to say? It seems to us that learners will be obliged to follow one of two possible strategies:

- They might try conscientiously to produce the target form. As a result their language will be halting and stilted. They will be unable to concern themselves with real-time communication because their attention is taken up with thinking about form. If this happens they are only getting practice in making sentences. There is not a primary focus on meaning.
- They will engage with meaning and will ignore the fact that they are supposed to be producing a particular form. They will engage in a meaning-focused activity, in spite of the teacher's intentions and wishes. If this happens then learners have transformed the activity into a task with a focus on meaning, but from the teacher's point of view the lesson has failed in its declared aim of helping learners incorporate the target form in their spontaneous language use.

They may of course switch between these two strategies, first focusing on meaning, then, possibly in response to teacher correction, focusing on the target form.

So if we begin with a pronounced focus on form it is almost impossible for learners to switch immediately to a focus on meaning. The benefits of a focus

on meaning will be lost. Learners will not make the most of all the other language they have if their efforts are directed to reproducing the target forms. They will be less likely to grow in fluency and confidence. They will be less equipped to use the language outside the classroom.

But there is an even more important reason for rejecting an initial and continuing focus on form: the procedure is likely to end in failure. We will look at language acquisition research in the next chapter (Chapter 2 (2.4)). This research shows that it is very rare for learners to be exposed to a new form and, within the space of a single lesson incorporate it into their spontaneous language production. We all know from our experience as teachers that it takes a long time before learners have spontaneous command of 'do-questions'. For a long time after forms like 'What do you want?' or 'What does X mean?' have been presented and intensively practised, learners go on producing questions like 'What you want?' and 'What mean X?' The same is true of past tense forms, question tags, the distinction between present continuous and present simple and almost any learning item you care to mention. This apparent failure comes about not because learners are careless or teachers are incompetent. It comes about because learning is a developmental process which is not subject to the learner's conscious control.

It takes time for language to develop. The first treatment of a new form or forms will not lead to mastery. It may aid development in that the learner will be more likely to *notice* the new form (see Schmidt 1990) in future once it has been highlighted. But the form will not become a part of the learners' spontaneous repertoire until they have had time to assimilate it. This has been a part of the consensus on language learning since the interlanguage studies of the late 1960s and early 1970s. (See Corder 1967; Selinker 1972.) These studies described the learner as operating a set of strategies for second language development which are influenced, but not driven by a concern with language form. There is a certainly a place for a focus on specified forms in a task-based approach. But form should be subordinate to meaning and, for this reason, should come after rather than before a task. We will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter and again in Chapter 6.

### **Further reading**

**Ellis, R.** 2003. *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of tasks used in SLA research and in the language classroom.

**Skehan, P.** 1998. *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 5 evaluates the second language acquisition research relating to task-based instruction.

**Willis, D. and J. Willis.** 2001. 'Task-based language learning' in **R. Carter** and **D. Nunan** (eds.). *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This paper offers a brief summary of the rationale behind task-based learning and teaching.

**Willis, D.** 2003. *Rules Patterns and Words: Grammar and Lexis in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chapters 1 and 2 look in more detail at the relationship between grammar and lexis.

**Willis, J.** 2004. 'Perspectives on task-based instruction' in **B. Leaver** and **J. R. Willis** (eds.). *Task-based Instruction in Foreign Language Education: Practices and Programs*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Chapter 1 (pp. 3-44) gives an overview of the origins of TBT, explores its relationship with CLT and other perspectives on task-based practices.



# 2 TASK-BASED SEQUENCES IN THE CLASSROOM

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## 2.1 *Task sequences*

In Chapter 1 (1.4) we gave an example of a task-based sequence which began with a teacher-led introduction to an opinion survey about drugs. This was followed by the class working on the opinion survey as individuals. The next stage was a group discussion, which led into a teacher-led class discussion. Next there was a reading activity, which would again be followed by a discussion and evaluation of the writer's arguments. What we have here is a sequence of tasks; each of the stages above could be described as a task. This task sequence prepares the way for a number of form-focused activities which could then follow. Learners have been concerned with meanings which involve, for example, the passive form of the modal 'should', as in 'should be punished', 'should be confiscated'. They are, therefore, ready to go on to look in detail at the structure and use of the passive with 'should' and, by extension, with other modals.

So a task-based lesson would probably involve not a single task, but a sequence of tasks. These tasks relate to one another. The teacher-led introduction is a task in itself. It involves a genuine exchange of meaning, in which learners are required to process language for meaning. It also serves a *priming* function. It prepares or *primes* learners for the coming reading in two useful ways:

- It helps learners focus on the topic and engage their own knowledge and opinions on the subject.
- It affords an opportunity to introduce the vocabulary associated with the topic, in this case words like 'legalize' and 'addicts' and phrases like 'hard drugs'. This is done both in the written statements which provide the basis for discussion, and also in the subsequent teacher-led discussion.

Responding to the statements on the opinion survey as individuals is again a task in itself. Learners will be working on their own to make decisions and construct arguments, even though they do not voice those arguments at this stage. But this task is also *preparation* for the next stage. Learners are

preparing to take part in a discussion. This involves a focus on meaning as they get their ideas together and decide how to express those ideas in English. At this stage learners will inevitably focus on language to some extent. They might, for example, take note of the passive modals 'should be legalized' and 'should be punished', and wonder how these might be used in the coming discussion. This process, whereby learners scan input for language which might be useful as output at a later stage, is often known as 'mining'. But this is quite different from a teacher-imposed focus on form. First there is no isolation of a particular form which learners will then feel obliged to use in the discussion which follows. If they believe the form is useful and they can indeed use it, then they may choose to do so. By the time learners have reached a stage at which they are capable of handling a discussion at this level they may be able to produce modal passives fluently and accurately. If, on the other hand, learners do not have this confidence, they may choose to avoid the form. Secondly, their success in the discussion will not be judged by whether or not they incorporate any particular form in their arguments. So preparation may involve a concern with language, but it does not involve a teacher-controlled focus on form and assessment on the basis of form.

The next task is the class discussion. This is the task that the other activities have been preparing for, but it also leads in to the next task, the reading. This again is a task, a meaning-focused activity, because learners will be reading with purpose. They will be checking their own opinions against those expressed by the author. These two tasks are probably the most important in the sequence. They are the tasks which reflect the real world most closely. They were also probably the starting point in planning the sequence. The whole aim was to enable learners to participate in a discussion and to follow this up with a reading task.

We have, then, a series of tasks. One of them, the introduction, is teacher led. (We will look in more detail at teacher-led tasks in Chapter 7.) One task, responding to the opinion survey, is done by learners as individuals. Another task, the group discussion, involves participation by students as both speakers and interested listeners. The next one, the reading, is a purely receptive task. The sequence is punctuated by teacher-led discussion briefly summarizing some of the results of the individual survey, then later of the class discussion and of the reading.

The introduction to the sequence serves the purpose of priming learners for what follows by introducing vocabulary and helping them focus on the topic. The individual response to the opinion survey is preparatory. It allows learners time to prepare for the next class discussion by thinking about the content of the task, in this case their opinions on drugs. In doing so they will inevitably rehearse and prepare some of the language they will use at the next stage.

So we have a sequence of tasks which have different characteristics and purposes. The important thing, however, is there is a focus on meaning at all stages. As learners progress through the sequence they will be attending to meaning at each stage. The sequence also provides a way of repeating those meanings and the language that is used to express them. By the time they come to the focus on form, learners will have heard the vocabulary and grammar associated with the task several times over.

## 2.2 *Planning a task sequence*

Obviously it is important to plan a task sequence. The planning starts with identifying a topic, in this case drug abuse. The next stage is to decide on a target task or tasks. In most cases, though not always, these will be tasks which closely reflect activities which learners may engage in the real world. The group discussion and the reading are target tasks. They both reflect language use in the real world. The teacher then has to decide how to prime learners—how to introduce relevant vocabulary, how to focus learners' minds on the content of the task sequence and how to explain or demonstrate what will be expected of them in the target task. In this case there is also the need for a preparatory stage at which learners can think about both topic and language. So the planning process for the teacher begins with the *target* tasks, and then involves building in priming and preparation, which we will call *facilitating* tasks.

So far we have talked as though the sequence is covered in a single lesson. But it may be useful to plan ahead. In the example we have been discussing, for example, it would be possible to go through priming in an earlier lesson and ask learners to do the preparation as part of their homework. So in one lesson the teacher would introduce the topic and the opinion survey (priming) and ask learners to respond to the opinion survey (preparation) for homework. The next lesson would then begin with a brief summary from the teacher followed by the class discussion and the reading.

This approach has the advantage that it affords plenty of time for preparation. Learners will have time to prepare what they want to say. Conscientious learners may well consult a dictionary and a grammar book as part of the preparation. They may even make written notes to help them with the coming discussion. What we have here is a focus on language in the context of meaning. It is not a focus on form as defined in Chapter 1 (1.2). Here we have a focus on language in a search for ways to express the right meaning. The learner begins by asking 'What ideas do I want to express?' and then goes on to say 'How can I best express those meanings?', before going on to consult the dictionary or grammar. Forms will be identified by the learner, and will be as many or as few as the learner feels necessary. There is no teacher

control, and the success of the procedure will be judged in terms of how well the learner participates in the coming discussion. So instead of a teacher-initiated focus on form we have learners exploring the language in response to a need to express required meanings.

The reading text may come immediately after the class discussion, or if the discussion goes really well and takes up lot of time, it may be postponed to the next lesson. So instead of being compressed into a single class session the task sequence may begin with the setting of homework one day. This is followed by a class discussion the next day, with a reading task in the following lesson.

#### READER ACTIVITY 2A

##### A conversational task

Imagine you want learners to give an account of a very busy day they had recently. This is the kind of thing we often talk about in everyday conversation. Can you plan a sequence of tasks around this target task?

##### **Commentary**

Here is one way of building a task sequence:

- 1 *Priming* You might begin by telling learners about a very busy day of your own or by asking them to listen to a recording of someone talking about a busy day, and encouraging them to ask you questions about it.
- 2 *Preparation* Ask learners to make a written list of all the things they did on their busy day. They may use dictionaries to help them with this task.  
  
(If you plan ahead, the priming can be done at the end of one class, and the preparation can be done for homework. The target tasks can then be done in the next lesson.)
- 3 *Target task* Put learners in groups of three or four. They should tell each other about their busy days, and decide which person in the group had the most difficult day.
- 4 *Planning* Groups are asked to help the person with the most interesting story to prepare to tell the whole class what they have done.
- 5 *Target task* Two or three learners are asked to give their accounts to the class, who listen and then vote on who had the busiest/hardest day.

You may have thought of other sequences. The important thing is that at each stage there should be a primary focus on meaning, and that by the time learners come to the target tasks they are able to perform effectively.

## 2.3 Building in focus on form

### 2.3.1 Focus on form at the end of the sequence

Although we have argued the case against focusing on specific forms before learners engage with a task, there are good arguments for studying specified forms at the end of a task sequence. There are at least three good reasons for a focus on form at the end of the sequence:

- It helps learners to make sense of the language they have experienced. First learners have listened to their teacher using particular forms and seen those forms in a reading passage or heard them as part of a listening activity. After this a form-focused stage offers them the opportunity to look in detail at some of the forms that have been used. Since this focus on form comes after learners have experienced the language in use, they have a context which will help them to make sense of the new language.
- It highlights language they are likely to experience in the future. Once language forms have been studied they become salient. That is to say, they are more likely to be noticed in the future. And if they are noticed, they are more likely to be learned.
- It provides motivation. Learners want to know why they have been studying, and this usually means they want to know what they have learned. We have argued above that it is unlikely that they can learn to use a new form with any consistency over the course of a single lesson. This applies no matter what methodology we use. But we still need to show learners what learning opportunities they have been offered in a given lesson. By putting grammar at the end of the cycle there is every chance that we can increase motivation. While learners have been grappling with tasks, they have been working with meanings and struggling to find the language to express those meanings. When they come to the form-focused phase of the lesson they are likely to be receptive to ways of expressing those meanings. The focus on form provides answers to questions about the language that they have already begun to ask themselves.

Let's look at a task sequence based on an idea from Aurelia Garcia teaching in Santa Rosa, La Pampa, Argentina. The sequence is designed for 11–12 year-olds at the elementary level. It begins with a teacher led discussion about the subjects on the timetable. 'How many subjects are there?' 'How long do you spend on each subject?' 'Which subjects are the most useful?' 'Which subjects do you think need more time?' 'How many maths lessons would you like?' 'Are there any more subjects you would like on the timetable?' And so on. Learners are then asked to work in groups to draw up their ideal timetable. They can work in Spanish if they wish, but when they have finished this stage some of them will be asked to present their timetable in English. After this, there is further teacher-led discussion in English until a final timetable is agreed.

The teacher-led discussion will feature vocabulary covering the subjects on the timetable, the days of the week, and times of the day. There will also be expressions like ‘twice a week’, ‘four times a week’, and so on. The teacher will also invite learners to state their opinions as to which subjects are more useful than others, and which are the most useful. They will also be asked if there are any other subjects they would like to see on the timetable. Since the names for subjects are central to the coming work it will be useful to list them in English and in Spanish.

This use of Spanish might worry some teachers. But Aurelia comments:

Let’s not be afraid of L1. One of the barriers that has been hard to break is the idea that using the L1 in the English class is a sin. We start many of the tasks at the elementary level in L1, Spanish, with the intention of activating previous knowledge in our students about the subject matter we are proposing and, little by little, while getting into the task cycle, they gradually turn to English. In all cases the presentation is in English. ... Needless to say, intermediate or advanced students can perfectly well work through the whole process in English.

We made the point at the beginning of Chapter 1 that ‘... TBT is not the same the world over. Teachers who begin with the notion that tasks should be central to teaching then go on to refine an approach which fits their own classrooms and their own students’. Aurelia is working with the realities of her classroom situation. She believes that learners at the elementary level will use the L1 among themselves and will use it for support when things are difficult. It is better to take this and work with it, building it into the task sequence, than to pretend it doesn’t happen.

Before the group discussion, the teacher gives them a table to complete with the following headings:

Subject	Lessons per week	Hours per week	Comments

and enough rows for them to enter all their subjects. At first the group discussion may be largely in Spanish, but the teacher reminds them that they

must make their presentations in English and gives them time to prepare for this. During the presentations, the teacher asks questions to check the groups intentions: 'So you would like to have maths five times a week?' 'Why is there only one history lesson?' and so on. After the presentations the teacher leads a round-up discussion and produces a table on the blackboard summarizing the views of the class as a whole.

Aurelia was able to round off a sequence like this with a real life encounter. She persuaded the school co-ordinator to come in to class to hear the learners' ideas for their ideal timetable and to comment on them and ask a few questions. This gave the 11–12 year-olds a real sense of achievement.

One of the features of this task sequence, like many others, is that there is a lot of built-in repetition. At each stage there will be talk about subjects and timing. Once the emphasis moves on from the real to the ideal timetable there is a need for expressions like 'we want' and 'we'd like'. At each stage learners may wish to mine the language they have been exposed to in order to find language to help them express their own meanings. But again this is not a focus on form. The primary focus is on meaning and learners are free of teacher control. They can make their own choices as to how they express themselves.

After the ideal timetable task comes a form-focused activity. Learners are asked to fill out sentence frames like this:

We have four . . . . . lessons a week, but I think we should only have . . . . .  
I'd like to have more . . . and less . . .

They could then be asked to memorize five sentences like this for homework and be ready to repeat them to the class in the next lesson. This has all the characteristics of a focus on form. It identifies specific forms which are to be produced in a controlled fashion, and learners' success will be judged to a large extent on how accurately they produce these sentences. But, when it comes at the end of the sequence, this focus on form serves the three functions outlined above: it helps learners to make sense of the language they have experienced; it highlights useful forms for future acquisition; and it provides motivation. But, because it comes at the end of the task sequence, it does not detract from a focus on meaning.

### **2.3.2 Exploiting written language**

Here is another sequence of tasks which could be used at the elementary level:

- 1 The learners are asked to look at this picture:



*Figure 2.1 Objects on a tray*

The teacher checks that learners have the necessary vocabulary.

- 2 The picture is removed and learners are asked to work as individuals to make a list in English of as many things as they can remember.
- 3 Learners move into pairs to see how many items they can remember between them.
- 4 The teacher works with the class as a whole to build up a list to see if, between them, they can remember all the things in the picture.
- 5 The teacher writes up a few sentences on the board:
  - There is an exercise book is on the left of the coins.
  - The keys are between the coins and the banana.
  - There are some bananas at the top on the left.
  - The ten pound note is in the middle of the tray.
  - There is a glass on the left of the ruler.
  - There are some keys between the coins and the address book.
- 6 Learners are asked to say whether these sentences are true or false.
- 7 The sentences are rubbed off the board and learners are asked to work in pairs to write sentences of their own about the picture—three true sentences and three false.
- 8 The picture is removed. Learners read out their sentences and the other students are asked to say from memory if each sentence is true or false. The teacher gives feedback after each sentence and corrects the sentences which are false.

- 9 Learners are asked to work from memory to call out true sentences about the picture. The teacher makes a list of their sentences.
- 10 For homework they are given four sentences to complete, to make two true and two false sentences:
- There are ... keys between the ... and the ...  
 The ... is next to the ...  
 There is a ... on the right of the ...  
 The ... are on the left of the ...
- They are also asked to produce two sentences of their own, one true and one false. This written work is taken in during the next lesson and marked by the teacher.
- 11 In this next lesson learners produce sentences orally without looking at their written work. Their classmates, without looking at the picture, try to remember if the sentences are true or false. If they are false they must be corrected.

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#### READER ACTIVITY 2B

##### Tasks and real-world activities

- 1 Do any of the tasks in this 'Objects on a tray' sequence relate to real-world activities?
- 2 What are the target tasks in this sequence?
- 3 What is the purpose of stages 1–4?
- 4 In stages 5 and 6 learners are working with written language. How do you think this will affect their attitude towards accuracy?
- 5 What is the purpose of stages 10 and 11?
- 6 How might you follow up this activity?

##### **Commentary**

- 1 None of these tasks are real-world activities in the sense that they represent things we normally do in the real world. But all the way through learners are concerned with real-world meanings. In this case they are expressing the location of objects relative to one another. In the pair work at stage 7 they will also be involved in real discourse as they evaluate one another's responses. This contrasts with the 'Ideal timetable' activity, which is very much a real-world task involving learners in using English to express feelings and opinions of real concern to them.
- 2 As we have seen, there are no target tasks in the sense of tasks relating to the real world. But the sequence is working towards the memory game at stages 7 and 8.

- 3 Stages 1–4 are facilitating tasks, priming, focusing on the topic, and introducing and checking vocabulary.
- 4 The fact that the sentences in stage 5 are written gives the learners an opportunity for mining, trying to find language which will be useful at later stages. Since stage 6 involves writing, learners have time to recall language forms which they might want to use in their written output. This does not mean that they will necessarily be able to recall these sentences when it comes to the target tasks at stages 7 and 8. Nor will they be judged at any stage on their ability to produce specific forms rather than on their ability to perform the tasks successfully.
- 5 Stages 10 and 11 provide a focus on form. They fulfil the purposes of a focus on form outlined above.
- 6 Once learners have been through a sequence like this they can use the experience to play similar games in the future. The teacher could take a tray into the class with familiar objects on it and simply ask learners to remember the objects and where they are. Or she could take in an empty tray and get learners to place objects on it. This could lead into a discussion task in which learners try to produce a drawing of the tray and all the objects on it. This would be a challenging and useful way of reviewing a range of vocabulary items, and also the grammar involved in this task.

## *2.4 Second language acquisition research and TBT*

Research into second language acquisition, into how we learn a language other than our mother tongue, particularly how we learn languages in a classroom setting, is a relatively new branch of enquiry, less than 50 years old. There is still no consensus on how we learn languages, but there is a growing consensus on how we do *not* learn.

Lightbown and Spada (2005) contrast what they call the ‘get it right from the beginning’ approach and the ‘get it right in the end’ approach. The ‘get it right from the beginning’ approach is based on the belief that it is possible to accumulate one grammatical form after another, ensuring mastery of one before moving on to the next. So each stage of instruction specifies one or two forms and seeks to help learners to master these before they move on. Most grammar translation and audiolingual programmes are based on this belief. But it is clear from our experience in classrooms that this simply does not happen. Learners do not achieve mastery of one form before moving on to the next. As a result of this most teaching programmes based on the ‘get it right from the beginning’ approach build in recycling to ensure that the same items are treated again and again in the syllabus. But at each stage there is a sharp focus on one or two isolated forms.

A few highly motivated and highly gifted learners may learn languages successfully in this way, but Lightbown and Spada comment that '... it was the frequent failure of traditional grammar translation and audiolingual methods to produce fluency and accuracy in second language learners which led to the development of more communicative approaches to teaching in the first place'. Most teaching programmes have advanced beyond grammar translation and audiolingualism, but very many programmes are still based on the belief that we should isolate structures and teach each one intensively before offering learners the opportunity to use it.

The 'get it right in the end' approach is based on the belief that what learners need most of all are exposure to language and opportunities to use language meaningfully. Given this exposure, learners are highly creative problem-solvers. They will develop a language system which works, even though they will make mistakes on the way. Lightbown and Spada say:

In the 'get it right in the end' position the emphasis is primarily on meaning, but those who hold this position argue that there is a role for form-focused instruction and correction. The research ... has shown that second language learners benefit from form-focused instruction which is provided within communicative contexts. The challenge is to find the right balance between meaning-based and form-focused activities.

We are arguing the case for a task-based programme of this kind, one which also allows for a focus on accuracy and a focus on form. But there is another important reason why meaning must come first.

Corder (1973) argues the case for language teaching programmes with 'high surrender value'. This term is taken from the world of life insurance. If you have a life insurance policy with a *low* surrender value you must pay into it for a very long time before it is worth very much. If you cash in your policy early you get very little return on your investment. But if you have a policy with a *high* surrender value, you can cash it in after a relatively short time and still get a good return on your investment.

Until they reach a very advanced stage, learners' language will display deficiencies at every stage of their development. If they do not have the confidence and fluency to make the most of their limited language they will have gained very little from their course of study: their course has a low surrender value. But if they are confident enough to make the most of their language with all its shortcomings and inaccuracies then they have acquired a valuable skill for life, they have high surrender value. They will have gained a lot from their course of study, even if it finishes before they have achieved anything like a complete command of the grammar of the language. Nor do they simply have a skill they can apply. They also have the basis for language development. Once they can use the language outside the classroom they

will go on learning. So they have a skill which will grow in value. If this is the case then one of the most valuable things we can give learners is the ability to make the most of their language in spite of its deficiencies. And the best way to do this is to give them plenty of opportunities to use their language in the classroom in an atmosphere which rewards successful use and does not penalize inevitable failings in accuracy.

### **Further reading**

**Lightbown, P. and N. Spada.** 2006. *How Languages are Learned* (Third Edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 6 contrasts the 'get it right from the beginning' approach and the 'get it right in the end' approach, which are briefly reviewed above.

**Nunan D.** 2004. *Task-based Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chapters 3 and 8 look at the components of tasks and at the notion of a task sequence.

# 3 TASKS BASED ON WRITTEN AND SPOKEN TEXTS

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## *3.1 Introduction: reading for a purpose*

When we read a text we read for a purpose. We may read a newspaper or magazine article because the topic interests us and we want to learn more about it. Perhaps we have strong opinions on a subject and want to find out what others think about it. Sometimes a headline catches our eye, and we read an article to satisfy our curiosity. When we read a story for enjoyment we begin to speculate on what happens next, and to predict how the story will develop. In all of these activities we engage with a text for a purpose, and purposeful reading means reading for meaning.

Much the same applies to listening. Just as we read newspapers and magazines, so we listen to news programmes and discussions on radio and television. In an academic setting we attend lectures or tutorials. In everyday life we listen to people recounting their experiences and telling anecdotes. So most of the reasons we have for reading also have their counterparts in listening activities.

In the classroom there is a danger that reading or listening takes place in a void, without purpose or challenge. But it is possible to design tasks which will provide a context for written or spoken texts in order to provide the purpose or challenge which is basic to reading or listening in the real world. These tasks are valuable learning activities in themselves and by providing a context they also make the reading or listening into a meaning-focused activity.

In this chapter we will look at a number of ways of designing tasks based on written texts, and go on to see how these texts can be recycled so that they become familiar to learners. Many of these techniques will be familiar to teachers who have already used them as the basis for skills lessons. Indeed almost all of the techniques involved in task-based teaching are already familiar to most experienced teachers. It is the way these techniques are ordered and deployed that makes the difference. Here we will look at how to build activities, many of them already familiar, into a task-based framework. Finally we will go on to apply the same techniques to spoken texts.

### **3.2 Discussion tasks**

In Chapter 1 (1.3) we gave an example of a discussion task based on an opinion survey on the subject of dangerous drugs. This was part of a task sequence leading to a reading text. We made the point there that:

... we create tasks to facilitate meaningful activities in the classroom. Tasks are not a substitute for interesting topics which engage learners' interest, but they can enhance that engagement and interest. And ... group work gives all learners a chance to give their views.

So a discussion based on an opinion survey or questionnaire helps to involve learners, to engage their interest and to provide a reason for reading. When introducing any text on a controversial topic, it is worth going through some procedure to get learners to commit themselves to an opinion on the issue. An opinion survey is the obvious way to do this. Alternatively you could take the same set of statements, give two statements to each group and ask the group to produce one argument for and one argument against each of their statements. They could then read out their arguments and compare their ideas with other groups who had considered the same statements. This would promote discussion in the same way as a survey and would also involve the groups in a short writing activity.

So discussion is a good way of leading into a text dealing with a controversial topic. Other tasks can be designed to lead into texts of other kinds.

### **3.3 Prediction tasks**

All reading involves prediction, but prediction tasks work particularly well with narrative texts. As soon as we see a headline or the title of a story we begin to anticipate what follows; we begin to ask ourselves questions. As we read we find answers to our questions, and these answers prompt other questions, and so on. By setting prediction tasks we help learners by providing a context for reading and by guiding the reading process. Teachers routinely involve learners in some kind of prediction exercise as part of the preparation for reading comprehension. This can be formalized and built into a task which is just as important as the reading itself.

#### **Stage 1: Priming for prediction**

Here is a prediction task sequence we have often used. It mirrors the reading process because, as soon as you see the story headline, you begin to speculate on what could have happened and how it could have happened.

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Here is the headline from a short newspaper article about a man who jumped off the Empire State Building, one of the highest buildings in New York:

Hello, I've just jumped off  
the Empire State Building

How could someone who has just jumped off the Empire State Building possibly be alive to tell the tale? Work in groups to think of as many explanations as you can. You can use simple drawings to help with your explanations.



*Figure 3.1 The Empire State Building*

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Students work together for a couple of minutes to come up with possible explanations. After working in groups learners are invited to share their ideas with the class. Explanations we have heard include: 'He was wearing a parachute'; 'He was abseiling'; 'He only jumped from the ground floor'; 'He was bungee-jumping'; 'He had a safety net.' All of these explanations can be expressed very simply by a competent speaker of English, but learners do not have the appropriate vocabulary and have to be quite resourceful, saying things like: 'He have thing on his back, like rubber, like elastic. He jump like this'. This is accompanied by gestures to indicate the effects of a bungee-jump. They will almost certainly accompany their explanations with drawings. This is a valuable exercise in stretching their language resources to meet a communicative need, and if the teacher is encouraging and helpful it can be a lively and enjoyable activity. Obviously at this point you need to be careful not to tell the class which explanations is right or which one is nearest to what happens in the text. This would spoil the prediction task which follows.

**Stage 2: Prediction task**


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Here are some words and phrases taken from the article. They appear in the same order here as in the article:

All alone in New York—decided to kill himself—the 86th floor—held on to the safety fence—over 1,000 feet below—a narrow ledge—the offices of a television station—the strong wind—poured myself a stiff drink—a great Christmas

Work in groups to decide what happened. Try to include information from as many of the clues as possible.

---

This kind of prediction task involves speculative discussion and can be regarded as a target task since it involves the kind of speculation and discussion which takes place in the real world outside the classroom. Here, to prompt the discussion, we have taken a number of phrases from the text which is to be studied later. With another text it might work better to take the two opening sentences, or perhaps the opening sentence and the final sentence. Another possibility is simply to take a number of key words from the text. There are no hard and fast rules about what is going to work best. There are, however, a few things worth bearing in mind:

- Make sure the task is 'doable'. Give plenty of clues, so that learners have a lot to talk about and also have a good chance of coming up with an acceptable solution to the problem.
- Be prepared to adjust the task for a subsequent class. If you have given too much help the first time so that the task is not very challenging you may choose to withhold some of that help the next time round. If you have given too little help, you may choose to be more helpful the next time. The first time you work with a particular text, however, it is always wise to give too much help rather than too little. This goes back to making the task doable. Students can get very frustrated if they do not have enough to work with.
- You may also vary the clues you give learners. In this case we have suggested giving the headline and a few words and phrases. An alternative would be to give the first and last sentences and a few phrases, or you might simply give a few key phrases.

You might also vary what is required of learners. Here we have asked them to predict the story. Instead you might ask them to list a number of questions, say five questions that will be answered in the text. If you change the demands of the task you will probably have to vary the clues as well. For example, if you ask them to list five questions you might simply give them the headline and the phrases: 'decided to kill himself', 'safety fence', 'narrow

ledge', 'television station'. If you do this, they will then list questions like 'Why did he want to kill himself?', 'Which storey did he jump from?', and so on.

The most important feature of the prediction stage is that it involves meaning-focused language use. Learners will be drawing on all their language resources to enable them to work together to put together a satisfactory story or to prepare their questions. But in presenting the task to the learners the teacher will also make use of opportunities for priming and teaching. Learners are going to encounter these phrases in the final text; by going through the phrases, the teacher will be priming learners, introducing the topic and preparing them to tackle lexical difficulties which they will encounter in the text. Priming inevitably involves opportunities for language learning. Some learners, for example, may take note of the reflexive pronoun in 'kill himself', or they may notice the collocation 'strong wind', or the noun modifier in 'safety fence'. They will be seeing these items again, and the items will be salient because the learners' attention has already been caught.

### **Stage 3: Preparing for report**

At this stage you should ask learners to prepare one member of their group to tell the story they have decided on, so that he or she can tell that story to the whole class.

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#### **READER ACTIVITY 3A**

##### **Language use preparing for a reporting task**

What useful language work is taking place at this stage? How does it build on what has gone before?

#### **Commentary**

The purpose at this stage is preparation. Learners pool their ideas to produce a polished version of their story. It will build on what has gone before in that they will try to recall and incorporate the phrases which have been used to define the task in Stage 1.

Because learners are about to tell their story to the whole class, they will be concerned with both fluency and accuracy. They will want to tell it with some fluency, but they will also want to present it in the best language they can. Their focus on accuracy means that they will propose phrasings which they believe to be acceptable and effective. They will also correct one another and, on occasions, argue about the best version. The teacher should be ready to respond to requests for help at this stage—to comment on acceptability and to resolve disputes.

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### **Stage 4: Report**

Members from two or three groups tell their story to the whole class who listen in order to compare stories. This report is itself a target task of the kind identified in Chapter 2 (2.2), because it represents the kind of thing we do with language in the real world, in this case storytelling. But it serves a special function here in that it encourages learners to focus on language as well as meaning.

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#### **READER ACTIVITY 3B**

##### **Language use in a target task**

- 1 What is happening at this stage in terms of language use?
- 2 What might the teacher ask the class to do as they are listening to the stories?
- 3 What might the teacher usefully do to reinforce learning?

#### **Commentary**

- 1 The individuals who have been chosen as storytellers will have valuable speaking practice. They will be trying hard to remember the ideas that were provided at the preparation stage. This is a target task involving storytelling, a common everyday activity.
- 2 It is important that learners have some reason to listen to the different stories. For the first story the teacher should say 'Listen carefully to X's story? Is it the same as yours? Does X miss anything important out?' For subsequent stories the teacher might say something like 'Now listen carefully to Y as he tells the story. Is it different from X's story in any way? Does it have any more details? Does Y miss anything out?' In this way learners are set a listening task to encourage them to process carefully what they hear. Listening to stories is also a target task.
- 3 The teacher might retell the story very quickly, reformulating language where the storyteller made mistakes. Occasionally she might comment on these reformulations and draw the class's attention to them. More positively she might draw attention to the storyteller's achievements. She might take notes during the telling so she can comment positively on useful words or phrases which were used appropriately.
- 4 At this stage, if the task sequence is to be spread over two lessons, you could ask the learners to write up their story for homework and compare it next lesson with the real story.

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### **Stage 5: Reading**

Students read the story. Again we have a target task. After the previous stages learners should be curious to read the story to find out if their guesses are

accurate. They will approach the story with the same kind of curiosity as a reader who picks up a magazine or newspaper and reads the headline. This means that there is a focus on outcome: the checking of their guesses, or the satisfaction of their curiosity. In order to check their guesses and satisfy their curiosity they will be reading primarily for meaning, so the reading becomes a task within a task.

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Jim Burney, aged 24, was out of work and out of money and all alone in New York over Christmas. He decided to kill himself by jumping off the Empire State Building.

He took the lift to the top floor, the 86th, where he held on to the safety fence for a moment. He said a quick prayer, then threw himself off and fell towards the hundreds of cars moving along Fifth Avenue, over 1,000 feet below.

When he woke up half an hour later he found himself on a narrow ledge on the 85th floor, outside the offices of a television station, where the strong wind had blown him. The young man was so relieved that he decided to give up the idea of committing suicide.

He knocked on a window of the offices and crawled in to safety. Mike Wilson was on duty there at the time. 'I couldn't believe my eyes', he said. 'It's not often you see someone coming in through the window of the 85th floor. I poured myself a stiff drink, and one for Jim too.'

Jim Burney himself not only survived. He had a great Christmas—he got a lot of invitations to Christmas dinner!

---

Although the reading is important in itself it may take relatively little time. As well as providing reading practice and exposure to the target language it fulfils the important function of providing a rationale for all the language work which has gone before. You may, after this reading, ask for learners' reactions to the story. Did they guess everything correctly? Or just some things? Later they will go on to recycle the task so that the lexis and grammar become familiar (see Section 3.8 below) and meanings will become even clearer. Finally they will look in detail at certain lexical and grammatical features of the text. (See Chapter 6.)

### **Stage 6: Focus on form**

The focus on form comes at the end of the task sequence. This text contains a number of expressions of place:

in New York—off the Empire State Building—to the top floor—where he held on to the safety fence—threw himself off—towards the hundreds of cars—moving along Fifth Avenue— over 1,000 feet below—on a narrow

ledge on the 85th floor—outside the offices of a television station—where the strong wind had blown him—knocked on a window of the offices—crawled in to safety—on duty there—coming in through the window of the 85th floor

It is worth asking learners to go through and underline all the phrases to do with place. The phrase ‘took the lift to’ is an important one. You could point out that ‘took the/a ... to ...’ is a phrase that can be used with any form of public transport, but normally only for shortish journeys. Ask learners how many words or phrases they can fit into the frame:

I took the ... from ... to ....

The most interesting grammatical feature in this text is the use of reflexives. There is one example of the reflexive used for emphasis or identity: ‘Jim Burney himself’. There are three examples of the reflexive used as direct object: ‘to kill himself’; ‘threw himself off’; ‘found himself on a narrow ledge’. The last of these is one of the most frequent of all reflexive phrases. Finally there is a reflexive used as indirect object: ‘I poured myself a stiff drink’. You could ask learners to pick out the phrases with ‘...self’ and use these to introduce some work in their grammar books on reflexives. They could then go on to look for reflexives in other texts that they have studied.

### **Stage 7: Evaluation**

Of course you will be monitoring learners’ reactions at each stage of the process outlined above. How long does the prediction task take? Do they engage in real discussion? Is there too much use of their mother tongue? Is the storytelling generally successful? You will be looking for answers to these and other questions. They will help you to decide if the task is worth doing again and, if so, how it might be adapted to meet the needs of a similar class more precisely in the future.

It’s also a good idea to check learners’ reactions at the end of the process. You could ask them to talk about the experience in groups and jot down their feelings. Did they find the prediction task too difficult or too easy? Would they have liked more help? Did they like the story? Did they need more help with vocabulary before the reading stage? Did they feel the language was useful? You could give them a few of these questions to help with their group discussion and evaluation. This kind of class evaluation and discussion serves at least three functions:

- It involves meaning-focused language use. Engaging learners in genuine discussion which has a real outcome is the best kind of language practice they can possibly get.
- Like your critical observation, it will help to adjust the task for future use.

- It helps to motivate learners if you involve them in decision making and really take notice of their reactions.

### **3.4 Jigsaw task sequences**

A jigsaw task, sometimes called a split-information task, is one in which one individual or group has some information and another individual or group has quite different information. In order to achieve an outcome they have to put the information together. In the prediction task we have just looked at all the learners were given the same information in the form of a set of clues to the story. It would be possible to give some of the information to some groups of learners and quite different information to other groups. They would then need to pool their information to predict the story. This technique will be familiar to many teachers as a way of providing learners with a purpose for communicating. Let us go on to look at some other ways of providing a jigsaw.

#### **Stage 1: Pre-task**

Here are four possible ways of setting up a jigsaw task:

- 1 Split information, as described above.
- 2 Jigsaw the text. This would work very well, for example, with a discussion text. Different groups could be given different paragraphs and asked to reconstruct the arguments for and against, before being given the whole text.
- 3 Crumpled paper. Andrew Wright has demonstrated an intriguing way of jigsawing a text. Type it on one side of a sheet of paper, then screw up the paper into a ball and give one ball to each pair or group. They are not allowed to unfold the paper, but can roll it around. They can read some words, some phrases and some whole sentences, but not the whole text. They then exchange ambassadors, who tell other groups what they have discovered, and bit by bit the class tries to reconstruct the whole text.
- 4 Jigsaw note-taking. Joann Chernen working in Vancouver Community College offers another kind of jigsaw. On an EAP course with trainee bakers she labels learners as As, Bs, Cs, and Ds. She then asks them all to read the same text but to take notes on different aspects of the text. For example, in a text on making chou paste, the As are responsible for reporting on the main points of chou paste products and ingredients; the Bs are responsible for reporting on the main points of the mixing procedures; the Cs are responsible for reporting on the main points of the piping procedures; and the Ds are responsible for reporting on the main points of the baking and handling procedures. They then come together

as groups, each one with an A, a B, a C and a D, and between them construct a summary of the text. So all the learners read all of the text, but they concentrate on different aspects of the text, and then bring their different perspectives together.

### **Stage 2: Putting the story together**

In this stage the groups prepare their stories. The group work here will involve the role of ‘ambassador’: a member of the group whose role is to talk to other groups. At Stage 3 each A group is going to send one of their number, as ambassador, to one of the B groups to compare stories with them.

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Group A: Here are a few clues to help you predict the story:

Jim Burney, aged 24—all alone in New York over Christmas—jumping off the Empire State Building—the 85th floor—a television station—decided to give up the idea—poured myself a stiff drink

When you have prepared your story help your ambassador to prepare what he is going to tell Group B. Ambassadors may write down ten words to help them work with Group B.

Group B: Here are a few clues to help you predict the story:

decided to kill himself—the top floor, the 86th—over 1,000 feet below—a narrow ledge—Mike Wilson was on duty at the time—had a great Christmas.

When you have prepared your story help your ambassador to prepare what he is going to tell Group A. Ambassadors may write down ten words to help them work with Group A.

---

In this example it is suggested that ambassadors should be allowed to write down up to ten words. You should choose an appropriate number of words which will enable the ambassadors to do their job, but will not allow them to write down the whole story.

### **Stage 3: Preparation**

This is similar to the Preparation in stage 3 of the prediction task above. An ambassador from each A group goes to work with a B group, and vice versa. They exchange stories without referring to any written instructions. Ambassadors then return to their own groups and the groups put together their final version of the story. This can be done orally or in writing.

The stages then follow the same sequence as in the prediction task above: report—reading—focus on form—evaluation.

### 3.5 Student as question master

The normal procedure in the classroom is for teachers to ask questions and for students to answer them. In many cases the reading lesson consists of a text and a set of questions. The students read the texts and the coursebook or the teacher then asks the questions to assess their comprehension.

A very productive alternative is to ask students to prepare questions for themselves. This can be done by identifying or handing out the text in advance of the lesson and asking one group of about four students to act as questioners. They will work as individuals to prepare a set of questions on the text for homework. When they come together in class they can decide as a group on their final list of questions. Meanwhile the other groups of four are working hard on the text to try to predict the questions that will be asked and to prepare answers. During the reading lesson the groups who answer questions will be expected to do so *without referring to the text*.

#### Stage I: Select a text

It would be quite possible to use a story, like the one used above, but it is probably better to use a text which is rich in information, such as the following:

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#### Helping people click

With the stigma of online dating fading, the internet is fast becoming the choice for young professionals writes Emily Dubberley.

In March last year, Ed Miles married Maryam Hussein. They had known each other for three years and spent more than 1,000 hours talking but they'd only spent 12 days together, face to face.

Ed and Maryam met online, via IRC (internet relay chat) dating. Within a few days of meeting they were chatting for four hours each day, but seeing each other posed a problem: Maryam lived in the United Arab Emirates and Ed lived in London.

Over the next three years, the couple spent most evenings in front of their webcams, chatting over Instant Messenger. Ed visited Maryam and, in February 2002, he proposed. After filling in countless visa applications and forms, they married in Maryam's home

town and are now living 'happily ever after' in London.

Ed and Maryam's story may be extreme, but the way they met is becoming increasingly common. While dating agencies used to have a stigma attached, the internet has changed people's perceptions. According to Matchcom, the world's biggest dating site, 81% of users are now more comfortable admitting they use a dating service than they were a year ago. And Datingdirect.com found that 68% of people think online dating is better than its offline equivalent.

People like 30-year-old Simon Newman, who has been using dating sites for six months support this. 'I'd never join an agency or place a personal ad, but using a website seems less desperate. It's just a bit of fun.'

*Guardian online 22.1.04*

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Introduce the topic of dating agencies in class. You will almost certainly want to explore the two relevant meanings of 'click': one is what you do with a computer mouse, the other is a slightly old-fashioned term for when two

people realize they are going to get on very well together, as in 'We met at the dance and just clicked straight away'. Then ask all students to prepare the text for homework. Ask one group to act as 'question master'. Members of that group should, as homework, prepare a number of questions they can ask about the text. Explain to the other groups that they will be expected to answer detailed questions on the text but without the text in front of them.

### Stage 2

In class allow the question-master group time to decide on ten final questions. Meanwhile ask the other groups to anticipate questions and be prepared to answer them.

### Stage 3

The question-master group then take turns to read out their questions and the other learners, working as individuals, write down the answers. They then compare answers and decide on a final list. If you adopt some procedure like this, it ensures that all members of the group answer the questions individually. They cannot simply rely on the best members of the group to do all the work. You can take in the individual answer papers to check. Alternatively, the question-master group can come out in front and hear the answers from each small group in turn, with the teacher acting as referee. Points can be allotted to each group for a correct answer and entered in a grid like this one.

Question	Group				
	A	B	C	D	E
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

*Figure 3.2 Answer grid*

### Stage 4

In terms of focus on form, this text provides insights into a range of tense uses. It starts with the marriage of Ed and Maryam in March last year. Then the second sentence shifts back to a time before their marriage. The second paragraph takes us to the time they first met. The third paragraph is about the time between their meeting and their marriage. Paragraphs four and five are about the present time—about how dating services are used now. Given this shifting of the time perspective it is not surprising that there are a lot of time expressions in the text: ‘in March last year’, ‘for three years’, ‘spent more than 1,000 hours talking’, ‘spent 12 days together’, and so on. Nor is it surprising that an almost bewildering range of tense forms is used. Three form-focused activities suggest themselves:

- Pick out all the expressions of time.
- Pick out all the instances of the –ing form and classify their uses.
- Treat the text as a cloze passage, removing all the tense markers and asking learners to recall the tenses used and fill in the blanks.

This could lead into a review of a number of tense uses.

### 3.6 General knowledge tasks

Teachers are used to engaging learners’ knowledge of the world as a way of promoting discussion. You can use this as the basis for a task cycle if you can find appropriate texts, like the one below on whales. One way is to begin with a short quiz. Students answer the quiz, and discuss their answers. This can generate a good deal of class discussion before students turn to the text to confirm whether they were right or wrong. Another way is to ask groups to write seven facts about whales they are sure of. Both these tasks can generate a good deal of class discussion before students actually read the text to confirm whether they were right or wrong. They could then classify the points into categories like physical characteristics, food, habits, life cycle, other.

Here are some questions for a quiz which might be set for high school class based on a text about whales, downloaded from the web ([www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/whales/](http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/whales/)).

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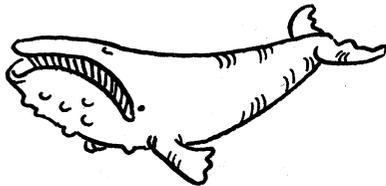
Read these sentences about whales and say if they are TRUE or FALSE.

- 1 The blue whale is the largest animal in the world.
- 2 Fish breathe by filtering water, but whales breathe air through their blowholes.
- 3 Apart from dinosaurs the blue whale is the biggest creature that has ever existed on Earth.
- 4 Whales are the only mammals that spend their whole life in water.
- 5 Whales have hair.

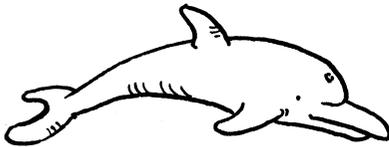
- 6 A blue whale can grow to a length of almost 60 metres.
- 7 It eats about 4 tons of fish every day.
- 8 Like fish whales are silent creatures.
- 9 The smallest whales are less than ten feet long.
- 10 Whales produce milk to feed their young.

Here is the text which gives you the answers to the questions:

Whales are large, magnificent, intelligent, aquatic mammals. They breathe air through blowhole(s) into lungs (unlike fish who breathe using gills). Whales have sleek, streamlined bodies that move easily through the water. They are the only mammals, other than *manatees* (seacows), that live their entire lives in the water, and the only mammals that have adapted to life in the open oceans.



Whales breathe air. They are not fish. They are mammals that spend their entire lives in the water.



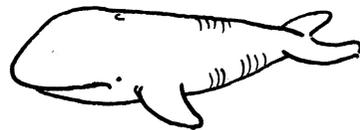
Cetaceans are the group of mammals that includes the whales, dolphins, and porpoises.

Like all mammals:

- whales breathe air into lungs,
- whales have hair (although they have a lot less than land mammals, and have almost none as adults),
- whales are warm-blooded (they maintain a high body temperature),
- whales have mammary glands with which they nourish their young,
- whales have a four-chambered heart.

### Size

The biggest whale is the blue whale, which grows to be about 94 feet (29 m) long – the height of a 9-storey building. These enormous animals eat about 4 tons of tiny krill each day, obtained by filter feeding through baleen. Adult blue whales have no predators except man.



The smallest whale is the dwarf sperm whale which as an adult is only 8.5 feet (2.6 m) long.

The blue whale is the largest animal that has ever existed on Earth. It is larger than any of the dinosaurs were. They are also the loudest animals on Earth.

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**READER ACTIVITY 3C****Using questions to generate discussion**

- 1 How might you use the true/false questions to generate class discussion?
- 2 What other types of question might you use apart from true/false?
- 3 How do you think these would affect language use?

**Commentary**

- 1 The true/false questions can generate a good deal of discussion before the class go on to read the text. You can begin by asking learners to compare their answers with one or two others. You can then ask groups or individuals to read out their answers and ask the rest of the class to say how many they have got right or wrong on the basis of their general knowledge. As teacher you should be careful not to give away the correct answers. The class can then go on to suggest which answers are wrong and to explain why. Finally you can get the consensus view of the class as a whole and write this on the board. Only then do learners go on to check their answers against the text.
- 2 True/false questions are probably the easiest to prepare, but multiple choice questions are better for promoting discussion. On the subject of whales you might ask questions like:
  - Whales are:
    - A fish.
    - B reptiles.
    - C mammals.
  - Whales have:
    - A a lot of hair.
    - B a little hair.
    - C no hair.
  - A large blue whale will be:
    - A about a hundred feet long.
    - B about fifty feet long.
    - C more than a hundred and fifty feet long.etc.

Alternatively you might use open-ended questions like:

How do whales breathe?  
How do they feed their young?  
What do they eat?  
etc.

Open-ended questions clearly require more extended answers than true/false or multiple choice questions. Learners can work in groups to produce written answers to these questions.

---

You need to select your texts carefully, depending on your students. The text on whales, for example, may not be suitable for a class of adults, but would be ideal for a class of high school students. The same site—‘Enchanted Learning’ ([www.enchantedlearning.com/Home](http://www.enchantedlearning.com/Home))—has a number of other activities on each topic, with worksheets and quizzes already prepared.

### **3.7 Corrupted text**

‘Corrupted text’ is simply a label for a text which has been changed in some way and needs to be restored. For example, some elements may be omitted and learners asked to fill the gaps. Alternatively the order of sentences or paragraphs may be changed.

#### **3.7.1 Factual gap filling**

You can provide learners with a challenging problem-solving activity based on a written text by omitting factual information from the text and asking the learners to complete the text. This works particularly well with a text which is rich in numerical information. The examples below have been used successfully with low-level elementary learners.

#### **Stage 1: Pre-task**

Tell learners they are going to read about the biggest and the most expensive houses in the world, and also about the smallest house in Great Britain. Explain to them a bit about the houses and ask them to guess:

The most expensive house in the world was built in 1890. How much do you think it cost to build?

The biggest house in the world is in North Carolina, USA. How many rooms do you think it has?

The smallest house in Great Britain is a cottage in North Wales. How many rooms do you think it has? How big do you think they are?

Write down their guesses to see later who is closest to the correct figure.

#### **Stage 2: Reading task**

Give learners the gapped text and ask them to work first as individuals:

---

#### Three houses

Read about the biggest house in the world, the most expensive house in the world and the smallest house in Great Britain. All the numbers have been left out, but they are given below. Can you put them back to complete the text?

The biggest house in the world is Biltmore House in Ashville, North Carolina, USA, belonging to the Vanderbilt family. It was built in 1890 at a cost of US\$(a). It has (b) rooms and stands in an estate of (c) hectares.

The most expensive house in the world is the Hearst Ranch at San Simeon, California. It was built for the newspaper owner in (d)—(e) at a cost of US\$(f). It has over (g) rooms and a garage for (h) cars.

The smallest house in Great Britain is a cottage in North Wales built in the nineteenth century. It is ten feet ((i) cms) high and measures only six feet ((j) cms) across the front. It has a tiny staircase and two tiny rooms.

Here are the numbers you need:

30 million; 4.1 million; 48,100; 1922; 309; 250; 182; 100; 39; 25;

---

(Texts adapted from *The Guinness Book of Records* for 1986 for use in J. Willis and D. Willis 1988)

### Stage 3: Planning and report

Ask learners to share their solution with a group. Finally ask members from one or two groups to read out their answers to the class. See how far they agree. As teacher, it may be a good tactic to hold back from telling them which answers are correct at this point, as holding back engenders discussion and creates a further learning opportunity for the next stage.

### Stage 4: Checking the solution

There are a number of ways of giving the solution. You could simply announce the answers as they are shown below. This would give learners practice in listening to numerical expressions. As an alternative you could read out the full texts including the numbers. This would be a useful way of recycling the text for listening as well as giving practice in numbers. Finally you could use an OHT to give the answer, requiring learners to read the text again to check their answers.

The answers are: (a) 4.1 million; (b) 250; (c) 48,100; (d) 1922; (e) 39; (f) 30 million; (g) 100; (h) 25; (i) 309; (j) 182.

### 3.7.2 Linguistic gap filling

Texts often contain information which is supplementary to the main story, argument or description. This is certainly the case with the Empire State Building text in Section 5.2 and 5.3 above. You can cut out the supplementary information and ask the learners to replace it, as we show below.

**Stage 1: Priming**

Set up the task by giving the headline and the instructions, and leading a class discussion on their predictions. (See Section 3.3 above.)

**Stage 2: Reading task**


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Here is the story. Nine phrases and sentences have been left out. There are brackets, e.g. (1), in the text to show where they have been removed. The nine phrases and sentences are listed below the text. Can you put them back in the right place?

**Hello, I've just jumped off the Empire State Building**

Jim Burney (1) was out of work and out of money and all alone (2). He decided to kill himself by jumping off the Empire State Building.

He took the lift to the top floor, (3), where he held on to the safety fence (4). He said a quick prayer, then threw himself off and fell towards the hundreds of cars moving along Fifth Avenue (5).

When he woke up (6) he found himself on a narrow ledge (7), outside the offices of a television station (8). The young man was so relieved that he decided to give up the idea of committing suicide.

He knocked on a window (9) and crawled in to safety. Mike Wilson was on duty there at the time. 'I couldn't believe my eyes,' he said. 'It's not often you see someone coming in through the window of the 85th floor. I poured myself a stiff drink (10).'

Jim Burney himself not only survived. He had a great Christmas. (11)

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| a half an hour later                             | g for a moment,          |
| b in New York over Christmas                     | h aged 24                |
| c the 86th                                       | i on the 85th floor      |
| d of the offices                                 | j and one for Jim too    |
| e where the strong had blown him                 | k over 1,000 feet below. |
| f lots of people invited him to Christmas dinner |                          |

---

This is certainly a task; the outcome, which can be shared, is the completed text and the task requires learners to concentrate on meaning. It should also generate discussion in groups. However, it is much more a language-focused task than the previous prediction task. Where as the prediction task led into a reading activity which mirrored the way we read in real life, the reading activity here is much more artificial. It is simply a preparation for the gap-filling activity.

### Stage 3: Report: checking solutions

A member of one group reads out their version of the story, while the other groups listen and compare. Alternatively the teacher may read out the story or play a recording of it, while the groups listen and check their versions.

### Stage 4: Follow-up: memory challenge

Pairs are asked to work together without the text to see how much of the story they can recall and re-tell or write from memory. They can then exchange stories with another pair to compare versions and check the facts. This is a useful consolidation task.

### 3.7.3 Re-ordering

Here is a different corrupted text exercise, in which sentences and phrases that make up the text have been re-ordered. The learners' task is to restore the original text. This is a very common textbook activity, but it is also one that learners could be asked to prepare for other groups to do. In Appendix 1.2 you will find a sample 'text puzzle' lesson by Craig Johnston based on a text called 'Profit motive and the media' which is suitable for a mixed ability class of adults. Our sample task here is more suitable for children. The text is the first part of a story called 'Franky helps Monty'. The story was written in 1999 by a boy in the United States called Eric Ross Weinberg. We found it on the web at <http://home.earthlink.net/~jjweinb/eric/frankyf.html>.

#### Stage 1

Introduce the story. Explain that the story is about a monster called Monty, who is afraid of the dark. You can encourage them to say if they know anyone who is afraid of the dark or if they have ever been afraid of the dark themselves. What did they do about it? The title of the story is 'Franky helps Monty'. How do they think Franky might help Monty? What sort of creature do they think Franky might be?

#### Stage 2

Give the learners the jumbled story. Ask them first to work as individuals, and later ask them to compare their solution with others in a group. You may need to give them some help with some of the words, or allow them to use dictionaries.

---

We are going to look at a story called 'Franky helps Monty' by Eric Ross Weinberg. The first sentence of the story is:

Monty was a big monster.

Here are the next seven sentences. Can you put them together to make the first part of the story?

- a Monty was big for his age, and should have been able to scare anyone.
- b He was afraid of the dark.
- c He was yellow with big spots, and he had big orange ears and a very big green nose.
- d Each night, when he closed his cave with the giant boulder, it got very dark.
- e But Monty had a problem.
- f One evening when he just couldn't sleep, he decided to go for a walk and get some berries.
- g He used to lie awake, afraid of the dark, listening to a lot of the strange sounds of the night.

### Stage 3

Ask the learners to read out what they have written. If there are any discrepancies draw attention to them and ask the class to decide on the best version. Read out the paragraph or put it up on an OHT:

Monty was a big monster. He was yellow with blue spots, and he had big orange ears and a very, big, green nose. Monty was big for his age, and should have been able to scare anyone. But, Monty had a problem. He was afraid of the dark. Each night, when he closed his cave with the giant boulder, it got very dark. He used to lie awake, afraid of the dark, listening to a lot of the strange sounds of the night. One evening, when he just couldn't sleep, he decided to go for a walk and get some berries.

You might simply ask learners to check their answers as they listen or read. Or you could ask them to put their answers away as they listen to or read the correct version. They then go back to their answers and make any changes they want to make.

### Stage 4

If the rest of the story is on the web, there are a number of things you might decide to do. You might look up the rest of the story and tell it to the class. Or you might work through the story with a series of tasks using different techniques. You might start by asking the class how they might help Monty solve his problem. For the second part, for example, you can simply tell learners what happens and suggest that those who can read should find and read the story on the web. Alternatively you could use a variety of techniques to work through the other paragraphs. For example, you might give them a number of words and phrases and ask them to predict the second paragraph. Again you might have to give some help with words.

something shining in the blackberry patch—hid down low—flashlight—  
person—very small—on and off—caught the shining creature—I am a  
monster—a firefly—Franky—live with me—your friend

Here is the second paragraph with the last six words omitted; can you guess what they were?

One evening, when he just couldn't sleep, he decided to go for a walk and get some berries. While picking his favorite berry, the blackberry, he noticed something shining in the blackberry patch. He hid down low thinking that it might be a flashlight with a person behind it. But the light was very small, and it blinked on and off. This was interesting. What was it? He reached out with his claw and caught the shining creature.

'Well hello there. Who are you? My name is Monty, and I am a monster.'

The little light answered in a small, soft voice, 'I am just a firefly. I didn't mean to disturb you. My name is Franky.'

'Oh, you are not disturbing me,' replied Monty. 'In fact, I would like to invite you to ...'

Once learners in pairs have thought of a possible group of six words, you could ask them to continue the story and write a suitable ending, thus leading into a new task cycle, where they end up writing or telling their ending to the class and discussing or voting on the best endings. By the way, the original version of the second paragraph ended with 'live with me in my home', but your learners may have had even better ideas.

### **3.8 Ways to recycle texts**

Once a text has been studied in detail it is a valuable learning resource. It contains language items which will be useful to the learners in a number of ways. There are valuable words and phrases which they will be able to use in a range of contexts. There are good examples of the use of tenses, modal verbs, prepositions, and other grammatical items. These examples can be recalled in grammar lessons so that you can draw on a familiar context to illustrate the grammar, as we will show in Chapter 6. It is, therefore, useful to recycle texts to help learners become familiar with the wordings of the texts studied for comprehension. This makes it more likely that learners will acquire for productive use the useful language they have met in the text. There are a number of possible ways of recycling texts in addition to the 'Memory challenge' that we suggested in 3.7.1.

#### **3.8.1 Corrupted text**

After a text has been processed for meaning, corrupted text exercises can be used to recycle it. You might choose to do this immediately after the text has been studied or you may choose to do it some time later. If you do it some time later, you might ask learners to read through the relevant text for homework before coming to class.

The text on online dating (3.5), for example, would also make a good gap-filling task for consolidation purposes after a form-focused stage. No prior preparation is needed. There are ten phrases with numbers in the text: '1000 hours', '12 days', 'four hours each *day*' and so on. You simply write all ten number phrases from the text on the board from the lowest number to the highest—the class can help you order them by calling them out in sequence. Then they turn their texts over. Read the text out loud minus the number phrases—saying 'beep' instead of the phrase. Pause while learners write down the missing phrase. Learners can see whether their answers are the same as their partners. Finally, they check by re-reading the original text, to see if they now have the phrases where they occur in the original text.

### 3.8.2 Quizzes

You can use quiz questions to check learners' recall. Questions may be true/false, multiple choice, or open-ended. Instead of going through the questions from 1–10 or whatever, you can allow learners to take them in any order they like. The idea then is to get as many questions as possible right, before getting one wrong. After learners have processed a number of texts you can have a Grand Quiz and ask them to re-read a number of texts for homework. You can then set a quiz based on these texts, or ask the learners to set a quiz for each other.

### 3.8.3 Group dictation

This is also a well-established activity used, for example, by Davis and Rinvoluceri (1988) and sometimes referred to as 'running dictation'.

#### Stage 1

Type the text in large, clear, well-spaced type and prepare five or six copies. Put these copies on the walls of the classroom distributed round as evenly as possible. Or they could be on pasted on to card and placed face-down round the edges or down the centre of the room.

#### Stage 2

Divide the class into groups. Provide each group with a blank sheet of paper.

#### Stage 3

Explain that each group is going to write down the text. The members of the group will take it in turns to go to one of the copies of the text pinned on the wall and try to remember as much as they can. They will then come back to the group and dictate what they have read and remembered. As soon as this is finished the next member of the group goes to read the text. The aim is to reproduce the original text word for word.

#### **Stage 4**

As soon as a group believes they have completed the text they must take it to the teacher. The teacher takes a note of the time they have taken and writes it on their paper. When all the papers are in the teacher marks them and adds thirty seconds for each mistake. She then announces the results.

#### **Variation 1**

With a short text like the Empire State Building text it is possible to use the full text. With a longer text there is a danger that the activity becomes tedious. It might be better to take only a section, perhaps a couple of paragraphs.

#### **Variation 2**

Instead of giving learners a blank paper at stage 2 you can make the task easier by providing them with a heavily gapped version of the text. With a gapped text you might give the groups some time to work on the reconstruction from memory before letting them read the full version posted on the wall.

### **3.8.4 Communal memory**

This works on the same principles as dictogloss reconstruction tasks. All learners will have had access to the same text but not all learners will remember the same things about it. With dictogloss, after a pre-task stage where the text topic is introduced, the teacher reads out the text once only at normal speed, without pausing, and students write as much as they can to jog their memories. They then work together to reconstruct it as near to the original as they can.

With communal memory tasks, you can use a text they have already read for an earlier task. Begin by asking learners to work as individuals to put down in note form as much as they can remember about the text, but without looking at the actual text or their notes on it. Then ask them to work in pairs to pool their ideas. Move from pairs to fours. Finally work with the class as a whole to see how much they can recall between them. You might still be able to identify gaps in their recall. You can ask questions based on these gaps. Finally you can read out the text or ask learners to check their own copies.

If you try these tasks out in class, you will probably find, as we did, that during the reconstruction stages, in pair and group interaction, the learners move from discussing facts and content vocabulary, to discussion of lexical and grammatical patternings and helping each other resolve language problems. (For more discussion on this, see Storch 2002.)

### 3.8.5 Summaries

Ask learners working in pairs to re-read a text and take up to ten words of notes, then put the text away and summarize it from memory using a set number of words. You might, for example, ask them to summarise the text 'Helping people click' in exactly 44 words to produce something like:

Ed Miles and Mariam Hussein got to know each other through the internet. After three years of internet chat they finally met. Ed and Mariam are now happily married. Internet dating like this is becoming more and more common and more and more acceptable.

Learners can then read out their summaries to compare with what others have written.

Setting an exact number of words presents learners with a linguistic challenge. To reach the precise number of words, they need to 'juggle' with grammar and wordings. How would you, for example, reduce the words here to 37, without changing any meanings?

A tip to help you here: when deciding how many words to set, write the summary yourself first, then count the words you used. And what did we change to reduce the word count? We used 'became friends' to replace five words in the first line, and left out 'and more' twice in line 4.

### 3.8.6 Personalizing tasks

Much of the lexis and some of the grammar in a text can be recycled by asking learners to relate the task to their own life in some way. After the Empire State Building text, for example, learners could be asked to talk about their fear of heights or about experiences with high buildings. After the Monty story they could be asked to recall their own childhood and whether they were afraid of the dark, or to recall experiences involving fear of the dark. Tasks like this could be set as homework at the end of a task sequence. This would encourage learners to review the texts and mine them for useful language.

## 3.9 Spoken texts

### 3.9.1 The nature of spoken text

Linguists often distinguish between spoken and written language by pointing out that spoken language is generally *interactional*, whereas written language is generally *transactional*. What this means is that spoken language is generally, though not always, used for social purposes—to make friends, to pass the time happily with family and friends and so on. Written language, on the other hand is generally, though not always, used to convey information. Another important difference is that spoken language usually

involves two or more active participants in the production of language, whereas writing is normally produced by one participant and received by another.

These are useful distinctions and account for many of the differences between spoken and written language, but it is a mistake to think that the distinction between spoken and written language is entirely clear cut. For example email chat has a lot in common with the spoken language used in everyday conversation, whereas a university lecture has a lot in common with the language of a textbook. Both email chat and everyday conversation involve participants in taking turns in producing language, and they are both used to make friends and to pass the time with friends. On the other hand both university lectures and textbooks involve one participant as the producer of language, and the other participants simply as receivers; and they are both primarily concerned with imparting information.

It is important to take account of this in preparing teaching materials. Some spoken texts, particularly monologues which have information transfer as their primary purpose, are most usefully treated in the same way as written texts. Learners need practice in listening to spoken monologue of this kind and should learn to process them aurally, and the sort of activities used to exploit monologue in the classroom will have a lot in common with the techniques used to exploit written texts.

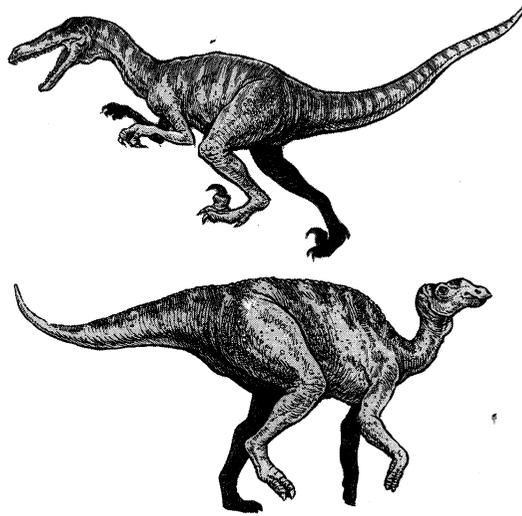
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### READING ACTIVITY 3.3

Here is the transcript of the first part of a mini-lecture on a dinosaur, the velociraptor, together with two pictures which go with the lecture. Can you think of one or more tasks you might use to exploit this text?

#### **The Velociraptor**

OK, so let's take a look at the flesh-eating dinosaurs, the meat eaters. And let's start with the velociraptor. This will be very familiar to a lot of you if you've seen the film *Jurassic Park*. In the film you see the velociraptors hunting humans. It's really scary. The film shows that the velociraptor was one of the most intelligent dinosaurs and it was also one of the most dangerous. We often think of dinosaurs as being huge animals, like *tyrannosaurus rex*, but the velociraptor was only about the size of a large dog—about one metre high and two metres long—and it normally weighed between 10 and 15 kilos. They lived about 80 to 85 million years ago. As you can see from the picture they stood on two legs and had a long tail. They could move very fast—up to 60 kilometres per hour—and they used their long tails to help them to turn very quickly. They used them to balance so they could turn really quickly. They used to hunt in packs, in groups of four or more animals together, just like wolves or lions do today. It had a small head—only about 20 centimetres long—but it had incredibly



*Figure 3.3 Velociraptor and hadrosaur*

powerful jaws with teeth up to 3 centimetres long. They used these teeth to cut up their prey, the animals they killed. They did their killing with their claws. Its main weapon was a claw on its foot, about 10 centimetres long. This claw was retractable—the velociraptor could draw it in, just like cats do, so it was always very sharp. It used this claw to kill the animals it preyed on—mainly defenceless plant-eaters like the hadrosaur.

### **Commentary**

- 1 This text is rich in information, including numerical information. So you could give the transcript to learners with all the numbers removed and give them a list of the numbers and ask them to put them back in the appropriate places. They could then listen to the text to check their answers. This would certainly be a viable task, but it would have the disadvantage that learners would be exposed to the text first in written rather than spoken form. It is important, remember, to give learners practice in processing this kind of material aurally. So the task suggested above might be better as a memory challenge task for recycling purposes at a later stage in the lesson.
- 2 An alternative would be to set a prediction exercise. You could give learners the title of the lecture together with the picture of the velociraptor and the opening three sentences of the text. They could then be asked to work in groups to predict five questions which would be answered in the lecture. You could then lead a class discussion leading to a pooling of the questions to make a long list. Finally the class could vote on the most likely ten questions before listening to the lecture to find out if their predictions were correct. This would have three advantages:

- It would mean that their first exposure to the text was in its original spoken form.
  - It would reproduce the study context. When we listen to a lecture we do not listen in total ignorance. We have strong expectations as to what information will be contained—what questions will be answered.
  - It would provide an opportunity to prime the learners with much of the vocabulary they would need in order to understand the lecture.
- 3 If you know that learners have some previous knowledge of velociraptors you could give them a quiz before they listened to the lecture. You might then listen to their answers and lead a class discussion to decide how sure they were of the answers before listening to the lecture. If they have no previous knowledge of the subject, but they have access to the internet, you could ask them to prepare the topic for homework before giving them the quiz in class. This would have the same advantages as 2 above.
  - 4 You could summarize the main points of the text very briefly in note form, change their order, and ask learners to predict the sequence they will come in. They then listen and number the main points.
  - 5 You could give the script of the lecture to one group of learners and ask them to prepare a quiz for homework. They could then give their questions to the other groups who would listen to the lecture and try to answer the questions.
- 

### 3.9.2 Sources of spoken text

The easiest spoken texts to find and adapt for task-based use are recordings from your coursebook; most coursebooks have transcripts of their listening comprehension materials. Radio interviews often contain sustained responses to the interviewer's questions that bear a strong resemblance to transactional monologue and these can easily be found on the web. There are CDs and cassettes of stories, or short TV or film documentaries, and it is always possible to audio record topical BBC World News items (or get several students to do so). Often transcripts for these are available on the BBC website (<http://www.bbc.co.uk>).

### 3.10 Review

It is important to give learners a reason for working with texts. There are a number of familiar techniques designed to do this. Ideally the learners should be reading or listening to material which provides its own motivation—topics which they find engaging, stories at an appropriate level and so on—but this is not always possible. Apart from anything else, it is not always possible to select material which will engage everyone in a given class. And it is not always possible to predict with certainty just what topics and texts will

engage learners' interest. However, a good task is likely to stimulate motivation, whatever the topic.

Even if a text is intrinsically interesting, it is still worthwhile providing a task-based framework for text processing. There are three possible advantages to be gained:

- The framework will provide a context in which you can prime learners by introducing, in a meaningful context, the vocabulary they will need to process the text.
- The framework will ensure that learners approach the text in the same way as we approach text processing in real life. We rarely approach a text without some expectations as to its nature. By using a task to contextualize a written or spoken text we help create these expectations for learners, providing a real purpose and context for reading or listening.
- A well designed task will help to provide or enhance the motivational challenge involved in processing a text.

Most of the techniques outlined in this chapter involve some sort of prediction. In some cases the prediction is explicit—as when learners were asked to predict the outcome of the Empire State Building story. When asking learners to predict in this way it is important to provide the right level of challenge. They need to be given enough clues to ensure that they have a reasonable chance of making worthwhile predictions. But you need to keep enough hidden to ensure that they still have a reason for reading or listening. This means you will sometimes need to practise restraint and hold back what you know to be the 'right' answers, and not give away too many clues too soon.

In other cases, as when learners begin with a general knowledge quiz, the prediction is less overt, but this activity still has the effect of encouraging learners to speculate on the contents of the text. Here again, you should make sure that there are questions still unanswered as learners move on to the reading or listening. The job of the teacher in setting up and orchestrating a task is to sharpen learners' curiosity and ensure that they will read or listen with interest.

One of the problems of encouraging learners to process text for meaning is that they will not be concerned with the wordings of the text. Good reading and listening strategies depend very much on high level processing, with learners predicting as they read or listen, and checking out and adjusting their predictions as the text unfolds. This means that they will pay attention to the key words in a text, but the minutiae of syntax and phrasing will pass by unnoticed. Given this, it is important to recycle texts in such a way that learners *will* take careful note of the actual wording of the text. This can be done partly by precisely focused language activities which target particular

elements of the text. But it is important that by the end of a task cycle, learners have become as familiar as possible with the wording of a text. Once a text has been processed for meaning it represents a valuable learning resource, one which learners can recall for themselves, and one which the teacher can recall for them to provide well contextualized examples of grammatical and lexical features of the language.

Texts can be used for follow-up tasks, either immediately after the initial study of a given text, or some time later. But it is certainly worthwhile to ensure at some stage that learners pay close attention to the precise wording of the texts they have processed. Chapter 6 gives more suggestions for form-focused exercises and for ways of working with spontaneous interactive spoken language. Meanwhile here are some ideas for exploring some of the tasks and ideas contained in this chapter.

### *3.11 Follow-up tasks*

- 1 Try out one or two of the tasks illustrated in this chapter. After the class, while it is fresh in your mind, write down what you did and what you noticed happening. If you can, try the same task again with a different set of students and notice the similarities and differences between the two classes.
- 2 Try out a set of tasks and ask students for their feed-back after each one (written anonymously by individuals, in the last three or four minutes of class time.)
- 3 Try asking students to find and bring to class one text each on a topic that they are interested in reading. (Sources: internet, library books, library cassettes/CDs, radio, TV recordings, recordings of interviews conducted in English, letters written in English, print-outs of people's biographies from individual websites, comic books (e.g. Asterix), or even textbooks.) Give learners a deadline to produce these, make sure they write the source reference and date on the text, and take note of its copyright status. The first task can be for them each to present a very short summary of their text, persuading the class to choose it for a shortlist of texts to be used in their lessons. You can then select the most popular ones and design a set of tasks for each one.

The next two chapters will provide more ideas for generating different types of task taking topics or themes as starting points.



# 4 FROM TOPIC TO TASKS: LISTING, SORTING, AND CLASSIFYING

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## *4.1 Introduction*

In Chapter 3 we looked at different ways of designing and using text-based tasks, using texts as our starting point. In this chapter, our starting point will be a specific topic or theme, such as 'Families', 'Holidays', or 'Pets', that draws largely on learners' own experiences or world knowledge. For each topic, we can design a sequence of tasks, each one leading into another. Some of these will be target tasks, in the sense that they reproduce discourse activities which we might carry out in the real world. Others will be facilitating tasks in that their function is to help learners to carry out the target tasks. (See Chapter 2 (2.2).)

So, for example, 'Volcanoes' might constitute the topic for one or two lessons. After an initial priming stage, where, for example, the teacher might show some pictures of volcanoes and talk about her experience of them, the subsequent task sequence could include facilitating tasks of listing facts learners know about volcanoes followed by labelling a diagram of a cross-section of a volcano, having first listened to a teacher's explanation; these could then be followed by one or more target tasks: comparing two different kinds of volcanoes; making a quiz about a specific volcano; or recounting their own experience (from TV or other sources) of a volcano erupting.

### **Note on taxonomies of tasks**

In the taxonomy of tasks used in this book, the task types are classified according to cognitive processes such as 'listing' and 'ranking'. This differs from most earlier taxonomies or typologies which often list 'opinion exchange', 'jigsaw', 'information gap', 'decision-making', and 'problem-solving' as separate task types (Pica *et al.* 1993: 18–27). We feel that a cognitive classification, though not watertight, is more specific and more generative as a tool for teachers to use. Tasks generated with particular cognitive processes in mind will often involve the above task types; for example, opinion exchanges and information gaps would naturally occur when listing and discussing, for example, qualities needed by a world leader. Later, agreeing on a particular order of ranking will necessarily involve opinion gaps, evaluation and decision-making.

Another distinction often made is between ‘real-world’ tasks and pedagogic tasks. Many tasks in this chapter involve activities and topics that one might well do or talk about outside the classroom—choosing holidays, earthquake safety procedures (commonly called ‘real-world’ tasks), while others, like the picture dictogloss story activity, would certainly rank as ‘pedagogic’ by nature. Chapter 7 goes into this in more detail.

## **4.2** *Selecting topics*

So how can we select suitable topics for tasks? We can choose topics that

- feature in our learners’ English textbooks
- typically appear on examination papers or in oral tests
- appear elsewhere on the school curriculum (for example, in geography, history, or current affairs)
- are of topical or seasonal interest
- often figure in casual conversations in social settings (for example, in coffee breaks, with host family, in bars or clubs)
- learners want to be able to talk about outside class with foreigners they might meet, or write about to email pen friends, or ‘chat’ about in web-based chat sites.

One way to raise motivation is to ask learners to suggest their own topics, or to get them to choose topics they like best from a list of topics that have proved popular with previous learners. In fact getting learners to select and rank topics they like could form an excellent decision-making task at the start of a new term. Many teachers have reported that giving learners a chance to choose their own topics has significantly enhanced learner engagement.

Not all learners will be equally keen on all topics but, if an engaging task is set, any reasonable topic can engender enthusiasm, especially if it is explored from a new or unusual angle.

The choice of potential topics is boundless. For interest, take a look at this map of the world and skim through topics chosen by English teachers in different parts of the world for their task-based lessons.

At this point, we suggest you stop for a moment and note down three or four topics that you feel would be suitable for your classes. In the following sections we will look at ways of designing different types of task and you can design some tasks based on your topics. This is best done together with a fellow language teacher (or two) as ideas often flow more freely. You can then evaluate the tasks you thought of, refine the best of them, and select a set of tasks that you can grade, write instructions for, and use in class.

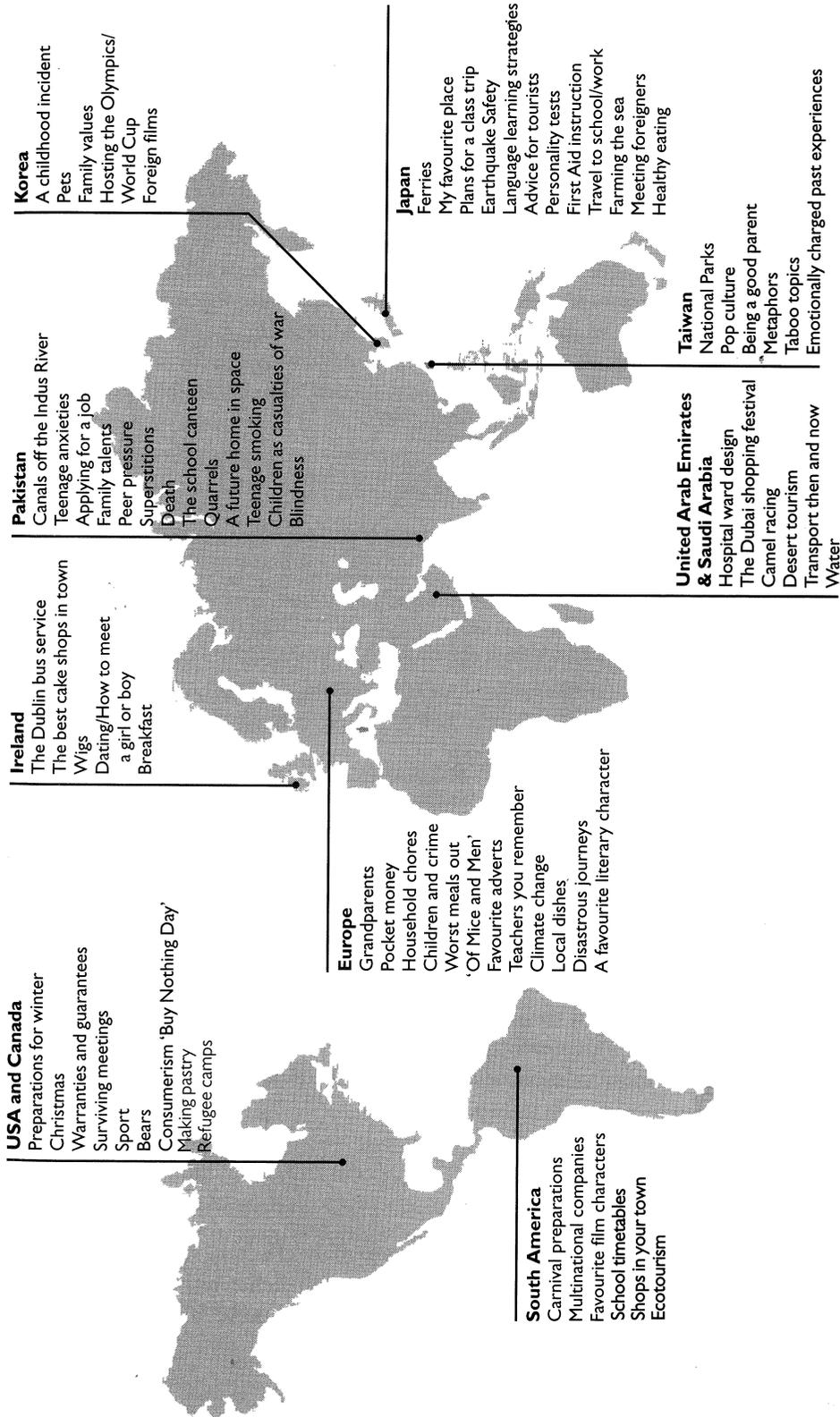
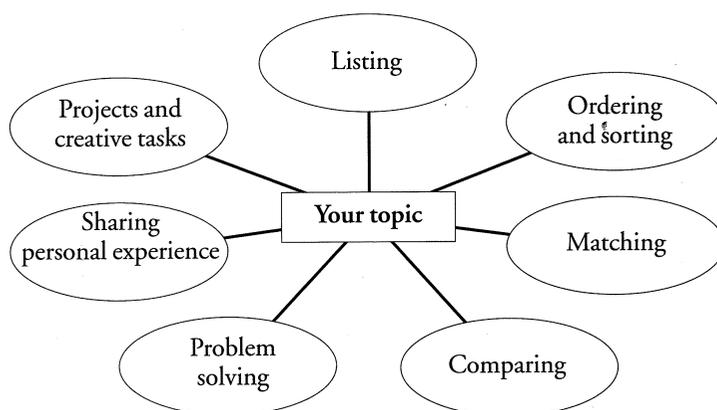


Figure 4.1 Sample topics from around the world

As noted in the previous section, the task types described in this and the next chapter (see Figure 4.2) are derived from a broad classification of cognitive processes. This has proved to be an effective way of generating a set of different types of task based around one topic area. And once learners are familiar with the basic topic vocabulary, they can explore that topic from a variety of angles, exercising a range of cognitive skills which present different linguistic challenges.



*Figure 4.2 Generating tasks from a topic*

### **4.3 Tasks involving listing**

The simplest type of task is listing. It may seem at first sight far too simple, but the linguistic challenge can vary according to what you ask learners to list; it could result in a list of words or short phrases or even quite complex sentences. With the topic 'transport' at the elementary level, learners might simply list the kinds of transport available locally—a list of nouns. At a later stage they could be asked to produce a list of the features of an ideal transport system—probably a mixture of phrases and sentences. At a more advanced level they could be asked to list reasons for using (or not using) particular forms of transport. This would probably result in a list of quite complex sentences. Even more complex would be a list of recommendations for improving your local public transport system.

Listing can usefully be split into two kinds: brainstorming and fact-finding.

#### **4.3.1 Brainstorming**

Brainstorming has been found to be an extremely effective way of getting even shy learners involved in topics and promotes richer task interaction. (See Cullen 1998 for background, principles, and useful techniques for brainstorming.)

Brainstorming can either be teacher-led involving the whole class, or with learners in pairs or small groups brainstorming among themselves. Or as a combination of both – starting with a teacher-led class brainstorm which learners then continue in pairs.

Here are some ideas for listing tasks that teachers in Japan, New Zealand and Brazil have tried out successfully, often starting with a class brainstorm then going on to complete their list in pairs or groups:

- qualities of a world leader
- criteria for choosing a place to stay for a vacation or weekend
- landmarks typically used when giving directions in your area
- things to mention when describing a specific animal
- items to include in an earthquake kit, with a reason for each one,
- things that cats tend to do/like doing
- household chores (and who does them in your home)
- strategies for learning English outside class.

Most teachers advised giving learners a specific number of items to aim for, for example, five qualities for the ‘world leader’ task. Then learners know when they have completed their task. To judge what number to set, do the task yourself, then deduct one or two—so that learners can achieve the task without frustration. If you time yourself while you are doing the task, you can estimate a suitable time limit to set for your learners. Better still, do this with a colleague.

### **4.3.2 Fact-finding**

Fact-finding involves asking learners to search for specific facts in books or leaflets or on a website, or to ask other people outside class. If you introduce the topic the lesson before and do a ‘priming’ stage for the task then, you could set a fact-finding task for homework. Then they work out how to express these facts in English and come to class ready prepared with a draft list. Some examples follow:

- Find out five facts about the volcano Mount Etna to share with other students next lesson. Write them down. Also note down three or four useful words or phrases about volcanoes you could teach your partner.
- Find out what three people outside this class think about cats as pets. Do they like cats or not? List the reasons they give. Prepare to report their views in English in your next lesson.
- Find out the birthdays of seven people you or your family know. Write the name of the person, who they are, and the date of their birthday. Bring your list to class.

Listing often forms a starting point for more complex tasks:

- Lorie Wood gave three websites for ecotourism and asked her advanced learners to design a trip that upheld ecotourism principles. They began by identifying those principles and listing them.
- At the beginning of a project on refugee camps, Yvonne Beaudry gave her intermediate students some websites to look at to find out and list the facilities a refugee camp should have. Groups were then asked to design their own camp.

### 4.3.3 Games based on listing: quizzes, memory challenge, and guessing games

The listing process can form the basis for many simple activities like quizzes, memory games, and guessing games. For example, the volcano lesson could begin with each pair collating and finalizing their list of facts, and then writing a true/false quiz, by changing some of the statements in their list so that they are not true. Or they could write five quiz questions about Mount Etna to give another pair to do, or to ask the class. This could even become a competition, with the class divided in two halves taking turns to respond orally to the true/false statements, or to ask and answer each other's questions, with points being scored by each team for right answers.

Guessing games can also incorporate listing. For example, they can involve

- the class asking the teacher questions (or vice versa) such as 'Guess what I had for breakfast today', or
- students writing five short sentences about their chosen animal and then reading them or saying them for the class, then asking 'Guess what animal this is' (see Appendix 1.4), or
- the well-known game 'Guess what I've got in my bag'.

Here is a brief account of how Sandee Thompson does a version of this last task with her low intermediate learners.

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#### Junk we carry round with us

Sandee gets learners to guess what she has in her book-bag that day. After accepting guesses from the class, Sandee then reveals the objects one at a time and talks about them—a good example of teacher talk forming comprehensible input. This can lead on to a classification task (described in the next section). After this, learners do the same guessing task with each other, in pairs. They then hear a recording of Sandee doing the same task with a colleague and note down differences they hear in the style of interaction. They repeat the same task with another partner and report back on what they have noticed.

(See Appendix 1.6 for a fuller account and to see what Sandee did next.)

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#### 4.3.4 Tasks for real beginners

Taken more slowly, this last task ('Junk we carry round with us') would also be suitable for beginner learners. If learners need consolidation of the new vocabulary, a task like this could subsequently be turned into a memory challenge game by covering up the objects once they have been taken out. Then learners in pairs can draw or write a list of the objects they remember. The challenge is then to see which pair can remember the most objects. You can give them clues if they get really stuck early on. And finally, after seeing all the objects again, learners (or teams of learners) can take turns to tell the teacher what to put back in her bag. To make it more fun, this could also be done as a memory challenge (with the objects concealed), each learner naming one thing that has not been mentioned before until all the objects are back. This sequence of small tasks offers plenty of opportunities for learners to recycle the names of common objects as well as exposure to natural interaction as their teacher talks about them and the activities themselves.

'International words' is an example of a teacher-led listing task that can be done by most classes of complete beginners. It does not put pressure on learners to speak, only to listen and understand as much as possible and to try pronouncing some words. It helps beginners to get used to the flow of English and to recognize words they know in that context. It works because quite a few English words have become international; but of course the number of familiar words also depends on the learners' own mother tongue and their life experience.

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Topic: International words of English

The teacher starts with a class brainstorm, drawing or writing on the board some words the learners probably already recognize in English, e.g. 'taxi', 'football', 'television', 'supermarket'. The teacher talks a little about each word as it comes up ('Who likes football?' 'Who plays football? You?') using gestures and facial expression to help them understand. The teacher might then ask learners to supply other words of English they already know, and to practise pronouncing them the English way.

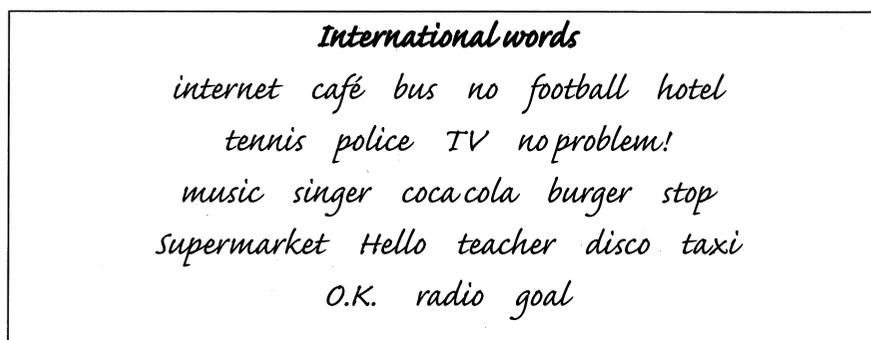


Figure 4.3 International words (1)

At the end of the lesson, learners count how many words of English they already recognize. That they know so many is usually a surprise to them. This illustrates one basic principle of TBT: it is far more positive to build on what your learners already know, than to start with what they don't know. As one teacher put it, think of your learner's cup as being half full, rather than half empty.

### 4.3.5 Evaluating a task

What makes a good task? A good task not only generates interest and creates an acceptable degree of challenge, but also generates opportunities for learners to experience and activate as much language as possible. This applies to all tasks, but the examples below are for listing tasks.

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#### READER ACTIVITY 4A

#### Evaluating tasks in terms of language use

Which two of the following tasks would be likely to generate the most useful language for intermediate learners? And which two the least useful? Which might be usable as an initial but brief teacher-led brainstorm to lead into a topic?

#### **Topic: Cats**

- a Make a list of six typical things that cats tend to do.
- b What different breeds of cats can you think of? Make a list.
- c List the different colours that cats can be. How many can you get?

#### **Topic: Planning a party**

- d What events in your country might people celebrate by having a party? Make a list.
- e Make a list of things you have to do when planning a party.
- f Who might you invite to your next party? Make a list of people you would ask.

Pick one task from the examples above that would generate useful language and think what you would do at a priming stage. What steps you would take to set it up for your learners to do?

#### **Commentary**

One obvious question would be 'Do learners really need to know the words for different breeds of cat?' Such words are very rarely used, and the time spent teaching these would be far better spent on more common words and phrases. Colours of cats might generate a few common colour words and phrases, 'black and white', 'sort of orangey-brown', but others like 'tabby' or 'marmalade' are far less useful. These two, b) and c), then seem to be the least worthwhile tasks. Equally, a list of names of people to invite to a party (f) would have little value in

itself, but could be made marginally more useful by adding 'Give reasons for your choice', which might well generate a little more language use, especially if they were asked to agree on a list of five famous people.

Task d) is a simple task requiring learners to name or explain in English any national holidays or events when parties are held or rites of passage like special birthdays or school-leaving parties; language use would be quite limited but could prove useful if learners needed to talk to foreigners about customs in their country and explain them. However, if done quickly as a teacher-led brainstorm in a priming stage, it could help learners decide what kind of party to discuss plans for, and thus prepare the way for a task such as e), which is more likely to generate a variety of longer utterances like, 'Well, you'd have to choose a day and time when most people are free ....'.

Task a), too, usually generates a wide range of language use: 'Cats often damage the furniture', 'They miaow when they are hungry', 'They sleep in the sun', 'They like to lie in warm places', 'They wake you up at night', 'They catch mice', 'They kill birds and bring them inside', and so on. Most of the words and phrases here are quite common, and if they don't know words like 'damage' they can always paraphrase or use gestures.

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#### **4.3.6 Pre-task priming and post-task activities**

Just as for text-based tasks, learners would need some priming before the task, so that they can understand the topic, activate relevant schemata, recall or ask for useful words and phrases and get ideas flowing. Depending on the topic, you could use pictures, or brainstorm words associated with the topic, find out if anyone has personal experience of it, and so on. For example, on the topic of cats, at a priming stage before task a) above, we usually start by asking learners who really likes cats and who doesn't like cats. We have a good friend who hates cats so we tell them why. Some learners will join in at this point. We then tell the class about a cat we used to have and that our children named 'Garfield' like the cartoon cat. We show a picture of him and talk about the things he did—some funny and some infuriating. Learners like hearing about teachers' personal lives, so this usually works well, but you may have other ideas that would get learners listening and interested in the topic.

Once learners have done the task they can compare their lists in a report stage and possibly collate their ideas making one longer list. They might hear a recording of other people doing a similar task, for example talking about what cats do, and see if their ideas are on the list they made. Finally, move into a focus-on-form stage, with the teacher highlighting useful language forms and letting learners practise useful patterns, and record useful words and phrases in their own 'phrase books'.

### 4.3.7 Summary

To summarize, the outcome of a listing task will of course be some form of list, which can be drawn, written, remembered, compared with other people's, or turned into a guessing game or quiz.

The advantage of starting a sequence of tasks with one or two simple listing tasks is that they can serve as a useful introduction to the topic, and provide a chance for setting the scene and introducing relevant vocabulary. In fact they act as facilitating tasks, helping to lighten the processing load when learners are tackling more complex tasks, as by then, many of the topic words and phrases used for listing will already be familiar.

Another benefit of starting with a listing task is that items on lists can be ordered or sorted or classified in some way or other, for example by making a mind-map, allotting items to categories.

## 4.4 *Tasks involving ordering and sorting*

This broad category includes a variety of cognitive processes, including sequencing, ranking, and classifying, which all require a little more thought and cognitive effort than simply listing. Some involve ordering items according to purely factual criteria, like dates or prices; others involve a certain amount of decision making, based on personal choice or opinion.

### 4.4.1 Sequencing

This may be chronological sequencing, for example, arranging a series of jumbled pictures to make a story, or a jumbled list of events to recreate the order in which they happened. It could entail describing in sequence the steps of a particular process. It could call upon learner's prior knowledge, their imagination, or knowledge gleaned from a written or spoken or visual source.

Tasks that teachers in Canada, the UAE, and UK have used include:

- Order the steps in a baking recipe (where information may be given in a jumbled form, using words, pictures, or line drawings).
- Describe in detail how to make your favourite food.
- Describe exactly what you have to do to make a phone-call overseas from a phone box in your country.

Sequencing can also be done as a memory challenge using a short clip of a film extract on video (not more than 2 minutes) or a film trailer, or a longish TV advert. Play learners the video once or twice with the sound off. Then ask them to try to list from memory exactly what scenes and events were shown, arranging them in sequence. When you are planning this, watch the extract carefully, listing, and counting the different scenes/actions; you can

then give learners a fairly precise number to aim for. The interesting thing is, different students remember different bits, so their lists are nearly always different and can be discussed and compared before showing the video again. This would be a good task to set before asking students to do a comparison of two similar film extracts. (See Chapter 5 and Glen Poupore's movie scene comparison task in Appendix 1.5.)

#### 4.4.2 Rank ordering

Learners could list and then rank their school subjects with their favourite ones at the top; they could list seven kinds of pet and then rank them according to how much trouble they are to keep at home. In both cases, to stimulate more language use, learners can be asked to justify their order of ranking.

Lists can be ranked according to many different criteria like cost, popularity, practicality, or fun value—different topics will obviously need different criteria. With the topic of professions/jobs, criteria for ranking these could include ranking according to rates of pay or likelihood of job satisfaction, working conditions, likely levels of stress, suitability for a working parent with children of school age, and so on.

Here are some ideas used by teachers for tasks involving ranking, some preceded by listing tasks.

*Potential holiday destinations* could be listed and then ranked in order of popularity with the class, based on criteria such as price, weather, accommodation, facilities, or activities on offer. These are in fact the actual criteria that Rosane Correia's class in Brazil arrived at through an earlier teacher-led brainstorming session, after talking about places they had been to on their vacations.

*Qualities of a world leader:* Mikey Kelly in Japan (inspired by an idea from his former colleagues) gets his learners to brainstorm, first silently on their own, up to eight qualities of a world leader and then in pairs or groups, to come to a consensus, agreeing on five of them. (Both these steps work better with time limits.)

Then, learners as individuals arrange these five in a ranked list, according to criteria they have chosen, and next discuss together, debating and justifying their decisions and referring to current world leaders. This prepares the way for a second task, where real world leaders are introduced on the board, and groups rate each of those leaders out of 5 stars according to their agreed criteria.

*Talking about families—how strict are/were your parents?* Tim Marchand in Japan explains how he set this task up after an initial explanatory priming phase:

This task sequence has three stages: a listening stage, a language focus stage and a speaking stage; I sometimes adapt the order according to circumstances. The listening stage comprises a recording of four people talking about how they were treated by their parents, and the students have to listen and decide which parents sounded the softest, and which ones sounded the strictest. They discuss that in pairs, giving evidence/reasons for their ranking.

The speaking stage is simply to talk with a partner and discuss their feelings towards their parents, and report back to the class whose parents were stricter.

At this point, to promote more class discussion, you could attempt to get the class to rank their parents—from softest to strictest!

Tim reports: ‘I’ve used this task several times, and it always goes pretty well. The students have no problem finding things to say about their parents, although there is sometimes a debate over whether “easy-going” is a positive attribute for parents!’

Here the listening stage introduces the topic that the learners will take up later and provides valuable exposure to the kind of language that can be used in this context. This provides excellent priming for learners who are about to do the task themselves. The focus-on-form stage offers a chance to highlight or consolidate features of that language. (See Chapter 6 for ideas for form-focused activities and the recording transcripts for Tim’s task.)

We have seen above that selecting criteria for ranking may be done by the students themselves, in a class brainstorm, or they can be decided by the teacher. For more insights into selecting criteria, try the activity below.

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#### READER ACTIVITY 4B

##### Appraising criteria for ranking

The first activity below is a listing task which serves as a lead-in to the ranking task in the second activity. Which two of the four criteria for ranking in task 2—a), b), c), or d)—below might stimulate the richest interaction for this particular task? Which of them might be best in your context?

##### **Ways to improve your English outside class**

On your own, make a list of four ways in which people in your situation could learn more English outside class. Then exchange ideas with a partner and agree on a list of five possible ways.

Then, with your partner, rank order your list according to two of these criteria: a) expense, b) popularity, c) practicality, d) likelihood of success. Give your reasons.

## **Commentary**

Learners come up with all kinds of ways to improve their English, depending on their age, where they live and where they are studying. Ideas include: surfing the net, emailing pen-friends, reading comic strip books in English (including Asterix or Tin-Tin), reading bilingual books, exchanging conversation lessons with a person wanting to learn to speak their mother tongue, finding foreign residents to talk to in English, offering their services as a tourist guide to foreign visitors, listening to English CDs/tapes while driving or travelling to work or school, taking extra English lessons, keeping an English note-book and writing down expressions they hear or read, finding a foreign or English speaking girl-friend/boy-friend, attending or starting an English speaking club or social circle, buying and reading English newspapers or magazines, getting a voluntary job in a charity shop, company or place where English is spoken . . . .

Given this list of suggestions, ranking according to expense is not likely to stimulate much interaction, as many of these ideas involve very little expense (except extra lessons, buying books, magazines, etc.). Ranking according to popularity would depend on how this was done—if it was a class survey using a ‘hands up if you would like to try this’ approach, very little interaction would happen, but individuals interviewing class-mates and then reporting back might stimulate more. It is likely that c) and d) would be most likely to stimulate discussion, especially if learners ranked them silently first, and then formed pairs and then fours, and were obliged to come to a consensus within a time limit.

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Beginning with silent ranking helps learners to commit themselves to a solution and engage personally with the task, as they can get their ideas together and plan how to express them, before talking to others about it. It is a way of reducing the mental demands and pressure of the task itself.

A surer way to find out which criterion for ranking is best is to experiment and try out all four kinds, with four different groups in the same class. Observe the groups carefully while they are doing the tasks, and then let them report their results to the whole class. Notice which ranking system seemed to work best. Ask each group for their feed-back, too, once they have heard all the results.

### **4.4.3 Classifying**

Learners can either be asked to work out their own categories for classifying, or to allot items in a list to categories already given.

For her ‘Junk we carry round with us’ task, Sandee Thompson asked her learners to think of ways of classifying the things from her bag. They thought of categories like shape (rectangular or round), things with perfume, things that make a noise, objects to do with money. Different learners came up with

different ways of classifying. It is this variety of response that can stimulate rich discussion. It also makes for interesting teaching—you can do the same task with different classes and it is different each time—learners can be very inventive.

When priming learners to choose their own categories, it is helpful to give them one or two ideas first or to do a parallel task with the whole class, like classifying the contents of a classroom cupboard or a desk drawer.

However, if the task instructions give the categories, learners sometimes feel more secure. It makes it a more straightforward task, having only one stage. But this may also reduce the amount of language use it will generate. Which alternative you choose will depend on the degree of challenge your learners are happy with. Here are some ideas for categories you can give. We start with two-way categories.

Giving positive/negative categories works well with many themes:

- After the task about cats, have learners make a list of things cats tend to do, and then ask them to sort their list into ‘nice things’ and ‘not such nice things’.
- *Food*: Learners can classify food items (list provided) twice: first into ‘foods they like’ and ‘foods they don’t like’, and later into food that is ‘reasonably healthy’ (that you can eat a lot of) and food that is generally considered ‘unhealthy’ if you eat a lot of it.
- *Family values: agree or disagree?* For this task, Shaun Manning gave his South Korean learners a set of slightly controversial statements and asked each learner to decide whether they agreed (put a tick) or disagreed (put a cross) with each statement. Then, in small groups, they had to reach a consensus and change the wording of the statements the group disagreed with to make them acceptable. They presented these to the class, compared their adapted statements and discussed the changed wordings.

This last task is a good example of one that starts out with a simple two-way classification and builds up to a serious decision-making task involving a negotiated outcome: the list of adapted statements. (For the full task, with statements and evaluation, see Appendix 1.3.)

The above examples of classification tasks were all based on two categories, but of course there can be more. Animals can be classified in many ways, so can clothes.

‘International words’ (see the Beginner’s task in 4.3.4) can be classified into: things to eat, things to drink, sport, transport, electronic media, school words, etc. The teacher draws columns on the board for these categories and gives an example for each (Figure 4.4). Even beginner learners can say which category the listed words best fit and possibly add one or two more words to each one.

# Section 3

## Resources

# Sample Extended Reflections

**Name:**

**Date:** 10/25/06

**Moment/Issue One: Getting Ss Active and Giving Clear Instructions**

## ► Description

In my last PT, Lesson 9 - "Are you sure?", I noticed many students were so confused. They really struggled when I asked them to practice a dialogue with two different people. They were supposed to exchange their cards, but that didn't happen. Before Ss practiced the dialogue, I gave two candy cards to some students and two rose cards to the other students. I also gave Ss explanations about those two different cards. I said, "You will practice a dialogue on the board with two different people and your partner should have different cards as yours. When you finish your dialogue with a new partner, exchange your cards with each other as a gift. So after you finish practicing the dialogue with two different people, you will have absolutely two different cards as you had first." Ss didn't seem to understand what I said. Then I called up one student who had two candy cards - at that time I had two rose cards. I explained the activity by modeling with that student. The student and I practiced the dialogue and after we finished it, we exchanged our cards. Then I added, "If you start with two roses, you will finish with two candies. Do you understand?" One student said, "Yes" and some student started practicing the dialogue. However Some Ss seemed to be still confused not knowing what to do. I noticed boys at Table C didn't practice the dialogue at all. So I practiced with a boy at Table C. Four girls at Table A and two boys at Table B finished their practice, but I noticed the cards of the two boys at Table B had not been changed. Each boy had two cards. - one candy card and one rose card. Nevertheless they said: "We finished".

**Comment:** Excellent detail. Good job picking a significant 3-5 minute moment to reflect on.

## ► Analysis

There are several factors in this moment that hindered Ss learning. First of all, I did not clarify the task and purpose of the activity I wanted them to do. Although I modeled the activity with one of my better Ss, some of my lower level Ss still did not understand the task. I didn't know that the task was still unclear, because I asked the CCQ: Do you understand? Although it produced answers, such as "Yes," it did not really measure Ss understanding of the task. **As Graves wrote, in order for Ss to do a task successfully they need two things: They need to know what to do and Ss have to have the ability to do it.** I believe that my Ss had the ability to do the task I had planned, but not making the task and purpose of the activity clear to them through my instructions and my lack of CCQs to adequately check their understanding lead me to realize that I had run the activity before my Ss were ready. Since my Ss were not ready to do the task, some Ss didn't do the task successfully and that can undermine their confidence.

**Comment:** This is generalization not analysis

## ► Generalization

According to what I know about Ss learning, Ss need to be active in a lesson. In order to get Ss involved in an activity, they need to have a reason to participate in the activity. **When I planned this activity with cards, I intended to have Ss participate in their activity by giving them a specific task. That was to exchange cards. Actually this idea came from my thought**

that Ss would not be so active to practice a dialogue with a new or unfamiliar person. So I would like to give Ss a reason to practice over their hesitation. But unlike my intention, many students were so confused and didn't even know what to do with the cards. It is important to have materials with high impact, and the trading cards would get the Ss interested. But I realized it was more difficult for low level Ss to understand without this being a regular activity for them. So, although Ss were given a reason to work together, they couldn't understand what to do. If I had asked CCQs, Ss could have understood much better. Also it would have been a good chance to have Ss explain the directions to each other at the tables, in pairs or groups. I felt sorry for not modeling enough. Overall, poor instructions caused Ss to struggle and hindered their learning, **and instructions are crucial to having a successful lesson.**

**Comment:** This is analysis.

### ► Action Plan

When I plan my lesson, I will continue to get Ss active in the lesson by giving them a reason to work together; however, I will include at least two ways of giving instructions such as verbal and written instructions. I will also use: modeling and CCQs. If necessary, due to observed Ss behavior, I'll try to have higher level Ss explain directions to lower level Ss in pairs or groups.

### As a general rule:

- **Description and analysis is written in the past tense.**
- **Generalization is written in the present tense.**
- **Action plan is written in the future tense.**

**Generalization represents what you believe is generally true about the learning teaching situation. It is in this section where you make reference to theory and past readings such as Kathleen Grave's "Adapting Coursebooks."**

**For example you may want to consider writing something like:**

**"I believe that my students have the ability to do the task that I have planned, but if I do not make the task and purpose of these activities clear, they will not be successful. Materials and textbooks don't teach themselves. My role as a teacher is to facilitate Ss learning. To do this I should....because as Graves said....."**

# Sample Observation Notes

## Practice Teaching Observation Sheet

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Trainer: James</b>	<b># of Students: 8</b>
<b>Time: 10:20-10:25</b>	<b>lesson type/topic/skill: listening/reading</b>	
<b>Date: Monday, 28 December 2009</b>		
<b>Lesson Plan:</b>		<b>General comments:</b>
turned in before lesson to be reviewed by trainer		YES
detailed, clear steps and sections		YES
clear SWBAT with observable behavior outlined		YES
challenges and solutions listed		YES
<b>Trainer Summary</b>		
<b>Worked well:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapport building with personal Qs such as what did you do this weekend</li> <li>• Schema building by asking Qs about shopping and buying, but no visuals to help Ss</li> <li>• Prior knowledge assessed, but T didn't write words on the WB</li> <li>• Ongoing assessment used to assess Ss understanding of keywords with Kinesthetic component</li> <li>• Peer checking used 3 out of 4 times, but can we make that 4 out of 4??</li> </ul>		
<b>Things to consider:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When asking guiding Qs to Ss give them time to respond. Use think—pair—share as a technique to give Ss the time they need.</li> <li>• Use specific CCQs to check the vocab you elicit</li> <li>• Missed opportunity for KT activity with T/F check</li> <li>• Mind maps should be used with schema activation</li> </ul>		

<b>Teacher:</b>	<b>Trainer: James</b>	<b>Date: Monday, 28 December 2009</b>	<b>page number: 1</b>
Time	I notice... (teacher or student / actions or words)	I am thinking.... (questions, analysis, application of theory, wonderings, thoughts)	
1020	Class is arranged into two groups of 4. T has prepared PPT and it is projected on the TV. T asks Ss to pay attn and then T greets Ss and Ss greet T. T asks Q: what do you do last weekend? Ss say various things then T asks about shopping and T shows what she bought cheap	☺ Good classroom arrangement. This will promote pair work and promote kinesthetic activities. ☺ Rapport Building ☺ Realia ☺ Schema building and intro of topic	
1021	T asks Ss what do you do when you have things you don't need anymore? Ss hesitate one Ss says donate, but T has to give Ss ideas	?? Could you have had Ss do this as a b'storming activity?? Think—Pair—Share is a way to increase s ability to answer the guiding Qs you are asking.	
1023	T shows pictures and asks Ss about what they see. Ss are saying various things, but T is not writing on the WB	☺ Prior knowledge but could you have written the words on the WB and could you have asked specific CCQs for the words. For example which is popular X or Y? Could the keywords for this reading have been introduced through a collaborative learning activity? Such as a picture dictionary activity??	

1028	T passes out a matching activity to assess vocab. T models on the WB and monitors.	☺ Ongoing assessment. ☺ Models activity on the WB ☺ Simple clear directions ☺Monitoring, but no CCQs of the task
1031	Peer checking	☺ Good for safety and comfort
1033	T has the cards and Ss are doing to come to WB and amch words and meaning. T asks Is it clear as CCQ. Ss stand and do	☺ Kinesthetic ?? But were direction clear? One Ss said T we don't get it.
1036	T shows picture and asks Ss what do you see? Ss say various things such as garage, back yard, etc. T then writes garage sales on the Wb and does a mind map	☺ Mind maps are good for schema building but this needs to come prior to the pre-teaching of the keywords to prepare the Ss for the new words they are to learn
1038	T gives Qs before Ss read and T has Ss read then from the PPT	☺ Ss have reason to read ☺ Let Ss read Qs aloud to lower TTT ☺ T is monitoring
1040	T goes over the Qs altogether, but was their peer checking??	?? Safety and comfort??
1040	T has Ss read the T/F Qs on the PPT. T models by doing the first one again.	☺ Ss have reason to read ☺ Let Ss read Qs aloud to lower TTT ☺ T is monitoring ☺ Ss have the Q set in front of them good for tactile and concrete learners. ☺ Modeling
1043	T has Ss check Qs with each other, but doesn't go over	Peer Checking, but could you have had Ss do this kinestheticy with X/O cards??
1045	T intros the Bingo game. In her direction she uses the words horizontal and vertical	?? Appropriate language for MS Ss??