

Chapter 3 **Classroom activities**

A key teaching skill is to successfully prepare, set up and run a single classroom activity or task. This chapter looks at some typical classroom activities, and there is also guidance on planning similar activities.

1 Running an activity

The basic building block of a lesson is the **activity** or **task**. We'll define this fairly broadly as 'something that learners do that involves them using or working with language to achieve some specific outcome'. The outcome may reflect a 'real-world' outcome (e.g. learners role-play buying train tickets at the station) or it may be a purely 'for-the-purposes-of-learning' outcome (e.g. learners fill in the gaps in twelve sentences with present perfect verbs). By this definition, the following are all activities or tasks:

- Learners do a grammar exercise individually then compare answers with each other in order to better understand how a particular item of language is formed.
- Learners listen to a recorded conversation in order to answer some questions (in order to become better listeners).
- Learners write a formal letter requesting information about a product.
- Learners discuss and write some questions in order to make a questionnaire about people's eating habits.
- Learners read a newspaper article to prepare for a discussion.
- Learners play a vocabulary game in order to help learn words connected with cars and transport.
- Learners repeat sentences you say in order to improve their pronunciation of them.
- Learners role-play a shop scene where a customer has a complaint.


Some things that happen in the classroom are **not** tasks. For example, picture a room where the teacher has started spontaneously discussing in a lengthy or convoluted manner the formation of passive sentences. What are students doing that has an outcome? Arguably, there is an implied task, namely that students should 'listen and understand', but, by not being explicit, there is a real danger that learners are not genuinely engaged in anything much at all.

This is a basic, important and often overlooked consideration when planning a lesson. As far as possible, make sure that your learners have some specific thing to do, whatever the stage of the lesson. Traditional lesson planning has tended to see the lesson as a series of things that the teacher does. By turning it round and focusing much more on what the students do, we are likely to think more about the actual learning that might arise and create a lesson that is more genuinely useful. (And if you plan everything in terms of what the students will do, you might find you worry less about what the teacher has to do!) Even for stages when you are 'presenting' language, be clear to yourself what it is that students are supposed to be doing and what outcome it is leading to. Think of a complete lesson as being a coherent sequence of such learner-targeted tasks.

Task 15: Using coursebook material

Here is some material from a student coursebook. In using it as the basis for a class activity, which of the following working arrangements would be possible?

- 1 Students think and then write answers on their own.
- 2 Students prepare a short monologue statement of their own views which they then present to the whole class.
- 3 A whole-class discussion of ideas and answers.
- 4 Pairwork discussion.
- 5 Small-group work.
- 6 Students walk around and mingle with other students.
- 7 Written homework.

2 a)  If you were the prime minister or president of your country, what would you do? Look at the ideas below.

build better hospitals/schools
 pay teachers/politicians more
 open more universities/cinemas
 make the weekend four days long/the working day shorter
 make the army bigger/smaller
 build more roads/shopping malls
 clean up cities/rivers
 give more money to old people/the unemployed

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Even a simple task like this can be used in a variety of ways – and all the suggested uses are possible. Combinations of ideas are also possible; for example, students could first think on their own for a few minutes and then compare in pairs. Whatever you choose, there are then further options as to how you do the task; for example, you could ask students to compare, discuss and question each other's views or, alternatively, to reach a consensus compromise solution. These variations lead to two very different types of speaking activity. More variations are possible when considering the stages that immediately precede or follow the activity. Your choices as to how the task will be done depend partly on the aim of the activity, i.e. what you want students to get out of it. ■

Teacher options

Bear in mind that, even where coursebook tasks include explicit instructions such as 'Compare answers with a partner' or 'Work in pairs', you always have the option as a teacher to give a different organisational instruction. For example, you may feel that a 'work with a partner' exercise might be more interesting done in small groups. And even if you follow the book's instruction, you still have the possibility of manipulating the organisation a little, for example:

- you could tell each student who he or she must work with (e.g. 'Petra, work with Christina');
- the students can choose partners for themselves;
- the pairings can be the result of some random game or humorous instruction (e.g. 'Find someone whose shoes are a different colour from your own').

The coursebook provides the raw material which only comes alive in class. You have important choices as to how to do this. Figure 3.1 summarises some basic options you could consider for many basic short coursebook activities (e.g. for short discussion tasks such as the 'Prime Minister' task above).

What arrangements can you use?	A few variations on the arrangements
Individual work	Students talk together and write nothing; they are permitted to write.
Pairwork	You choose pairs; students choose pairs; pairs are randomly selected (e.g. from a game); face to face; back to back; across the room (shouting); communicating in writing only
Small groups (three to six people)	Groups have a secretary (note-taking duty); groups have an appointed leader; membership of groups is occasionally rearranged; groups are allowed to send 'ambassadors'/'pirates' to other groups (to compare/gain/steal ideas)
Large groups	(as above)
Whole class: mingle (all stand up, walk around, meet and talk)	Students may only talk to one other person at a time; groups may meet up to maximum of three/four/five people, etc.; time limits on meetings; you ring bell/stop background music, etc. to force rearrangements
Whole class: plenary	The conversation/activity is managed by you/by a student/by a number of students; whole-class work with brief 'buzz' intervals of pairwork/small-group discussion.

A few more variations for running an activity

- Do it at speed, with a very tight time limit.
- When a group finishes, they disperse and join other groups.
- Each person makes a quick answer which is noted but not discussed; then, when all have spoken, the discussion begins, using the notes as a starting point.
- Require compromise/consensus single answers.
- Introduce task by dictating instructions/problem, etc.; individuals dictate answers back to the whole class.
- Students prepare a report-back presentation summarising their solutions.
- Students prepare a role-play dialogue incorporating their answers.
- Students do the exercise as homework.

Figure 3.1 Activity options

Activity route map

Here is a basic route-map plan for running a simple EFL activity. In some bigger activities, there may be a number of clearly separate 'sections' within the task, in which case you would go through Steps 3, 4 and 5 a few times.

- 1 Before the lesson: familiarise yourself with the material and activity; prepare any materials or texts you need.
- 2 In class: lead-in/prepare for the activity.
- 3 Set up the activity (or section of activity), i.e. give instructions, make groupings, etc.
- 4 Run the activity (or section): students do the activity, maybe in pairs or small groups while you monitor and help.
- 5 Close the activity (or section) and invite feedback from the students.
- 6 Post activity: do any appropriate follow-on work.

Looking at each step in more detail:

1 Before the lesson

- Familiarise yourself with the material and the activity.
- Read through the material and any teacher's notes.
- Try the activity yourself.
- Imagine how it will look in class.
- Decide how many organisational steps are involved.
- What seating arrangements/rearrangements are needed?
- How long will it probably take?
- Do the learners know enough language to be able to make a useful attempt at the activity?
- What help might they need?
- What questions might they have?
- What errors (using the language) are they likely to make?
- What errors (misunderstanding the task) are they likely to make?
- What will your role be at each stage?
- What instructions are needed?
- How will they be given? (Explained? Read? Demonstrated?)
- Prepare any aids or additional material.
- Arrange seating, visual aids, etc.
- Most importantly, you need to think through any potential problems or hiccups in the procedures. For example, what will happen if you plan student work in pairs, but there is an uneven number of students? Will this student work alone, or will you join in, or will you make one of the pairs into a group of three?

2 Lead-in/Preparation

This may be to help raise motivation or interest (e.g. discussion of a picture related to the topic), or perhaps to focus on language items (e.g. items of vocabulary) that might be useful in the activity. Typical lead-ins are:

- Show/draw a picture connected to the topic. Ask questions.
- Write up/read out a sentence stating a viewpoint. Elicit reactions.
- Tell a short personal anecdote related to the subject.
- Ask students if they have ever been/seen/done/etc.

- Hand out a short text related to the topic. Students read the text and comment.
- Play ‘devil’s advocate’ and make a strong/controversial statement (e.g. ‘I think smoking is very good for people’) that students will be motivated to challenge/argue about.
- Write a key word (maybe the topic name) in the centre of a word-cloud on the board and elicit vocabulary from students which is added to board.

3 Setting up the activity

- Organise the students so that they can do the activity or section. (This may involve making pairs or groups, moving the seating, etc.).
- Give clear instructions for the activity. A demonstration or example is usually much more effective than a long explanation.
- You may wish to check back that the instructions have been understood (e.g. ‘So, Georgi, what are you going to do first?’).
- In some activities, it may be useful to allow some individual work (e.g. thinking through a problem, listing answers, etc.) before the students get together with others.

4 Running the activity

- Monitor at the start of the activity or section to check that the task has been understood and that students are doing what you intended them to do.
- If the material was well prepared and the instructions clear, then the activity can now largely run itself. Allow the students to work on the task without too much further interference. Your role now is often much more low-key, taking a back seat and monitoring what is happening without getting in the way.
- Beware of encumbering the students with unnecessary help. This is their chance to work. If the task is difficult, give them the chance to rise to that challenge, without leaning on you. Don’t rush in to ‘save’ them too quickly or too eagerly. (Though, having said that, remain alert to any task that genuinely proves too hard – and be prepared to help or stop it early if necessary!)

5 Closing the activity

- Allow the activity or section to close properly. Rather than suddenly stopping the activity at a random point, try to sense when the students are ready to move on.
- If different groups are finishing at different times, make a judgement about when coming together as a whole class would be useful to most people.
- If you want to close the activity while many students are still working, give a time warning (e.g. ‘Finish the item you are working on’ or ‘Two minutes’).

6 Post-activity

It is usually important to have some kind of feedback session on the activity. This stage is vital and is typically under-planned by teachers! The students have worked hard on the task, and it has probably raised a number of ideas, comments and questions about the topic and about language. Many teachers rely on an ‘ask the class if there were any problems and field the answers on the spot’ approach. While this will often get you through, it can also lead you down dark alleys of confusing explanations and long-winded spontaneous teaching. It can also be rather dull simply to go over things that have already been done

thoroughly in small groups. So, for a number of reasons, it is worth careful planning of this stage in advance – especially to think up alternatives to putting yourself in the spotlight answering a long list of questions.

- Groups meet up with other groups and compare answers/opinions.
- Students check answers with the printed answers in the Teacher's Book (which you pass around/leave at the front of the room/photocopy and hand out, etc.).
- Before class, you anticipate what the main language problems will be and prepare a mini-presentation on these areas.
- During the last few minutes of a long task, go round the groups and warn them that each group will be asked to 'report back' to the whole class. Ask them to appoint a spokesperson and to agree on the main message they want to say. You could ask them to choose just one point from their discussion that they think is worth sharing.
- When checking answers, ask for groups to exchange and compare their answers across the room themselves ...
- ... or get a student to come up front and manage the answer-checking, rather than doing it all yourself (you could give this student the answer sheet!).
- Collect in all answer sheets then redistribute them for 'correcting' by other students. When everything has been checked, students pair up with those who marked their paper and listen/explain/justify/argue, etc.
- Correct one student's answers; that student then goes on to correct other answers, etc.
- Divide the board up into spaces for answers and throw pens to different students who fill the board up with their answers (each answer written by different student). The whole group looks at the finished board and comments/corrects.

Task 16: Planning a procedure for a coursebook activity

Plan a basic procedure for using the following material in class, using the steps described above.

Starting up

- A** In your opinion, which factors below are important for getting a job? Choose the seven most important. Is there anything missing from the list?

age/sex appearance astrological sign contacts and connections
 experience family background handwriting hobbies intelligence
 marital status personality qualifications references
 sickness record blood group

2 Exploiting an activity

In this section, we look at one simple activity in detail. This may help you to similarly analyse your own teaching material in future.

Task 17: Analysing a coursebook activity

Read this activity from a student coursebook and answer the following questions on content and classroom procedures.

Anecdote

4 Think about your life at the age of eight. You are going to tell your partner about it. Choose from the list the things you want to talk about. Think about what you will say and the language you will need.



'My son, Eric, won't be coming to school today; he's in dreadful pain.'

- Did your life use to be very different to how it is now?
- Where did you use to go to school? How did you get there?
- Do you remember any of your teachers?
- Were there any you particularly liked or disliked? Why?
- Who were your friends?
- What did you use to do before/after school or during the breaks?
- Did you ever do anything naughty? Were you caught and punished?
- What was your favourite game?
- What were your favourite sweets?
- Was there one of the older children you particularly admired?
- What was your greatest wish?

Analysis of	Questions
1 Language content	What language systems and skills will the students probably be practising when they do this activity?
2 Other content	What other purposes (apart from getting students to practise language) might this activity serve?
3 Preparation	What preparation needs to be made? Are any special materials or visual aids needed?
4 Steps	As with many activities, it's important to note that there are actually quite a number of separate steps bundled within the single printed instruction. What are the steps in this task?
5 Instructions	You could simply tell the class to read the coursebook instructions and do the activity, without further guidance. But if you wanted to give instructions orally, what are some important considerations?
6 Organisation	What organisational arrangements could you use in class?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

- 1 The main language areas are:
 - preparing and giving a 'long turn' monologue describing their memories of school life;
 - using *would* and *used to* to talk about things that were regular habits in the past but are not true now;
 - using other past tense forms (past simple and past progressive), especially asking and answering questions about the past.
- 2 As well as working on language, the activity involves students in:
 - talking and listening to one another on a personal level. This may help to build good relationships within the class and help create a good working atmosphere;
 - recalling and reconsidering some quite specific personal memories; students may find that they are thinking about things forgotten till now. This degree of personal investment and self-discovery tends to be a frequent element in many contemporary coursebook units and may lead students to find that they are also learning about themselves, others and the world as much as about the language. (Some teachers feel uncomfortable with this kind of work and try to keep the focus on language work rather than what they see as more intrusive general and personal education. But of course language is intertwined with our lives and our understanding of the world, and any teaching approach which seeks to disentangle the two may be hard to implement and may miss out on some essential elements.)
- 3 No special preparation is necessary and no special materials or visual aids are needed.
- 4 This is one possible analysis:
 - 1 Students think about their life at the age of eight.
 - 2 Students read list in book and select some or all topics to deal with in detail.
 - 3 Students consider their own answers for questions and maybe make notes.
 - 4 Students plan language to express these ideas.
 - 5 Students tell partner about their thoughts.
 - 6 Students listen to their partner's ideas.Other interpretations of stages and sequence are possible. The fact that there are possibly six sub-steps within a single task reminds us that a teacher does need to take care in (a) checking activities before offering them to students, and (b) preparing clear uncomplicated instructions.
- 5
 - Instructions need to be simple, short and clear.
 - If a task has a number of separate steps or stages within it, it is sometimes a good idea to give instructions for these stages one at a time, and wait till that stage is completed before giving the next instruction. With this task, you could first ask the class to 'Think about your life when you were eight years old', then allow thinking time or maybe even elicit a response or two from students before going on to the second part of the task and the second instruction. Separating activities and instructions into different steps is an important technique. At each point, the learners know what they need to know without possible confusion from instructions for later parts of the activity.

- Demonstrations are often a better way of introducing a task than a wordy explanation. In this example, there may not seem to be very much to demonstrate, but you could still work through an example sentence or two (maybe saying your own answers aloud), rather than simply explaining the instructions. By doing this, the learners may become clearer about what the activity involves.
- 6 This task would work in many arrangements. It is likely to start with individual thinking and note-taking, which may then be followed by comparing in pairs, small groups or whole class. ■

Task 18: Interpreting a lesson description

Below is a brief description of a teacher, Ricardo, using the above activity in his class of seventeen young adults. Before you read it, visualise for yourself what might happen. What are the learners doing? What is the atmosphere in the classroom like? As you read the text, notice points where he adds to – or alters in some way – the printed task.

Lesson description

Ricardo says, 'I've been thinking about when I was young – about eight years old. I wonder if you can remember back so far?'

Some of the students say 'Yes', some 'No'.

'Ask me some questions,' continues Ricardo. 'Can you find out some information about me when I was eight years old?'

Students are often curious to find out about their teacher, and the tactic works here. They now begin to ask questions such as 'Did you live in this town?' 'Which school did you go to?' etc. When it gets too noisy, Ricardo uses gestures to indicate which student should speak next. He also encourages students to rephrase or correct each other when their questions contain errors related to the language aim of the activity. Sometimes he corrects an error himself. At one point, two students get interested in some of the pop groups Ricardo mentioned from his childhood and they tell the class about some CDs they bought recently. Ricardo visibly enjoys the chat, but after a minute or so brings the focus back to the main task.

When a number of useful questions have been asked, Ricardo asks the students to think back to the questions they had asked him. As they recall questions (e.g. 'Did you like school?'), Ricardo writes them up on the board.

When a number of questions are up, Ricardo says, 'OK – now it's your turn to think about when you were eight years old. I'm going to give you one minute to remember that time.'

The class falls silent. Ricardo deliberately refuses to take questions at this point and he says 'Ssssh' to a group in the corner who are giggling and not being serious about being quiet.

'OK,' says Ricardo, 'open your books at page 49 and read the list of questions in Exercise 4. Decide which are the three most interesting questions for you.' Again, he allows a silent period while students do the reading.

When he feels students are ready, he asks a few students, 'Do you have three questions?' When he is confident that the students have done this successfully, he says, 'Now, you have five minutes to make notes about your answers to the three questions you chose. Don't write whole sentences, just ideas.'

He waits while the students do this, keeping an eye out for the moment when the majority of them have finished (rather than strictly keeping the arbitrary time limit he set). Then he says, 'In two minutes, you're going to work in pairs and tell your partner about your life when you were eight. Look back at your notes and think about the language you'll need to describe this.'

When the preparation time is over Ricardo says, 'Find someone to work with.' Chaos follows for a minute or so while students reorganise themselves. Some walk across the room to find a partner, some just turn to the person next to them.

When they are sitting down again, he says, 'Turn your notes over so you can't see them. Tell your partner about your life when you were eight. You can quickly check your notes if you want to, but don't just read them aloud. Your partner can ask questions to find out more information.' The students start talking in pairs. There is a lot of noise from the conversations. Ricardo wanders around the room at the start of the activity to check that the students have understood the instructions and are doing what was asked. He then sits quietly in a corner of the room apparently taking little notice of what the students are doing. At one point, a student asks Ricardo for help (the right way to say something); Ricardo says a short phrase quietly, but offers no further help. The conversations continue for about seven minutes.

When most have finished talking, Ricardo calls attention back to himself by standing up and saying 'OK' and waiting (patiently) for silence. Then he asks, 'Did you find out about any stories?' A short feedback discussion starts. One student says, 'When Julio was eight, he naughty...'

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Two key additions/alterations: Ricardo asks students to make written notes; he asks them to choose only three questions to answer. ■

Task 19: Analysing a lesson description

Look back at the description of the lesson in Task 18. Which of the following sentences are true?

- 1 The teacher had a lead-in to the activity rather than simply giving the instructions straight away.
- 2 The teacher demonstrated how to do the activity rather than simply giving instructions.
- 3 Instructions were clear and simple.
- 4 The teacher clearly separated the various steps of the planned activity.
- 5 The teacher corrected the students in some parts of the activity but not in others.
- 6 The teacher spent some time presenting and practising the main target language for the activity.

- 7 The teacher had thought of at least one possible problem with the activity and tried to prevent this by giving an additional instruction.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

- 1 True. Ricardo started by getting students to ask questions about his own childhood.
- 2 Not really, though you might consider the lead-in as a sort of demo of the later task. Beyond this, all instructions are given as normal spoken instructions.
- 3 True. Instructions were concise and to the point. This may look simple enough, but it's a really hard-earned skill. If you are just starting out teaching, you're quite likely to find that your instructions last for ages and twine around themselves!
- 4 True. The steps were separated into quite distinct stages. Note that even the getting into pairs is treated as a stand-alone instruction with its own time to be completed. This kind of careful step-by-step thinking is the mark of a really competent organised teacher.
- 5 True. He corrected (and encouraged student correction) at the beginning when the class was working with him, but when the pairwork started, he did no correction at all.
- 6 False. You may find this a bit odd, but Ricardo didn't even mention that the activity gave them the chance to use *used to*. There was certainly no explicit presentation of the target language. (Don't take this as a 'rule'; you might well decide to do some language work before a task!) Ricardo's decision here may have been because he was using the activity as a 'test' to see how much they knew and used naturally; having found this out, he could decide what he needed to focus on when he taught *used to* later in this lesson or in a future lesson. Another reason might be that his aim was to focus on the speaking and communication in the task rather than the grammar.
- 7 True. Ricardo had thought that the activity would probably work less well if students simply read their notes aloud, so he specifically asked them to put their notes away. He also predicted a possible problem if students hadn't selected three questions from the list and so took care to check that this had been done successfully before moving on to give the next instruction. ■

Task 20: Opinions about a lesson description

What is your opinion about the following things that happened during the activity? Do you think they were appropriate or useful? Would you do the same or not?

- 1 There were a number of very noisy stages in the activity, e.g. when the students were changing places, and when they were all talking to each other.
- 2 Ricardo allowed a brief diversion from his plan while the students talked about music.
- 3 The teacher told off some students (saying 'Ssssh!') at one point.
- 4 Ricardo only offered minimal help to a student who asked.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

My own opinions:

- 1 Learning is often quite a noisy business. If people speak or move or do things, then there is very likely to be noise, especially if lots of people are doing things

at the same time. Obviously sometimes noise serves no useful purpose, but it is often evidence that a lot of important work is going on.

- 2 This diversion allowed students to talk about something of interest to them without deviating from the original lesson plan for too long. I usually feel that such moments are not wasted time but are actually important (as long as they don't take over the whole lesson). For once, the students are using English to do something they want to do, rather than something I have asked them to do!
- 3 Most teachers nowadays don't feel very comfortable with telling off of this kind (especially in an adult class!). However, it surely is a teacher's responsibility to make sure that as many students as possible get as much as possible out of an activity. At times, it may be necessary to use one's authority appropriately – not unkindly or disrespectfully, but clearly and unambiguously – to keep the class on track and make sure that the activity stands a chance of working.
- 4 At first glance, this seems rather cruel. Is it possible that it is sometimes more useful for a teacher not to help than to help? ■

3 **Pairwork information gaps**

Introduction to common activity types

This section and the next two introduce three very common activity types:

- pairwork information gaps;
- small-group discussions;
- pairwork grammar activities.

In the Resources section at the back of the book (Appendix 2), you'll find materials for all three types of activity. All are potentially suitable for early lessons in your teaching; all should be relatively straightforward to set up in class, yet they all stand a reasonable chance of not flopping! From the students' perspective, the activities should be engaging and useful. Even if you don't use the specific material, you may feel that you can draw something from the general ideas and devise similar activities yourself.

The tasks are all based around getting the students to speak and exchange information and ideas, i.e. using language to communicate. There is some possibility for you to input some language, but speaking rather than learning new items is the primary aim.

This section offers detailed instructions for using Resource 1 from Appendix 2 at the back of the book – a pairwork information exchange (beach scene pictures) suitable for a range of learners from Elementary to Intermediate levels.

Task 21: Defining 'information gap'

What is an 'information gap'? If you don't already know, work it out by studying Resources 1–3 in Appendix 2.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

When one person knows something that another person doesn't, we can say that there is a 'gap' of information between them. Most real-life communication comes about because of such gaps of information (or of opinions or ideas, etc.).

When someone knows something we don't, there is a reason for talking (or writing/reading). By creating classroom activities that include such information gaps, we can provide activities that mimic this reason for communication, and this may be more motivating and useful to language learners than speaking without any real reason for doing so. ■

If you're interested in the reasons for doing speaking work in pairs (as opposed to, say, with the whole class), read Chapter 5.

Task 22: Predicting uses for material: pairwork information gap

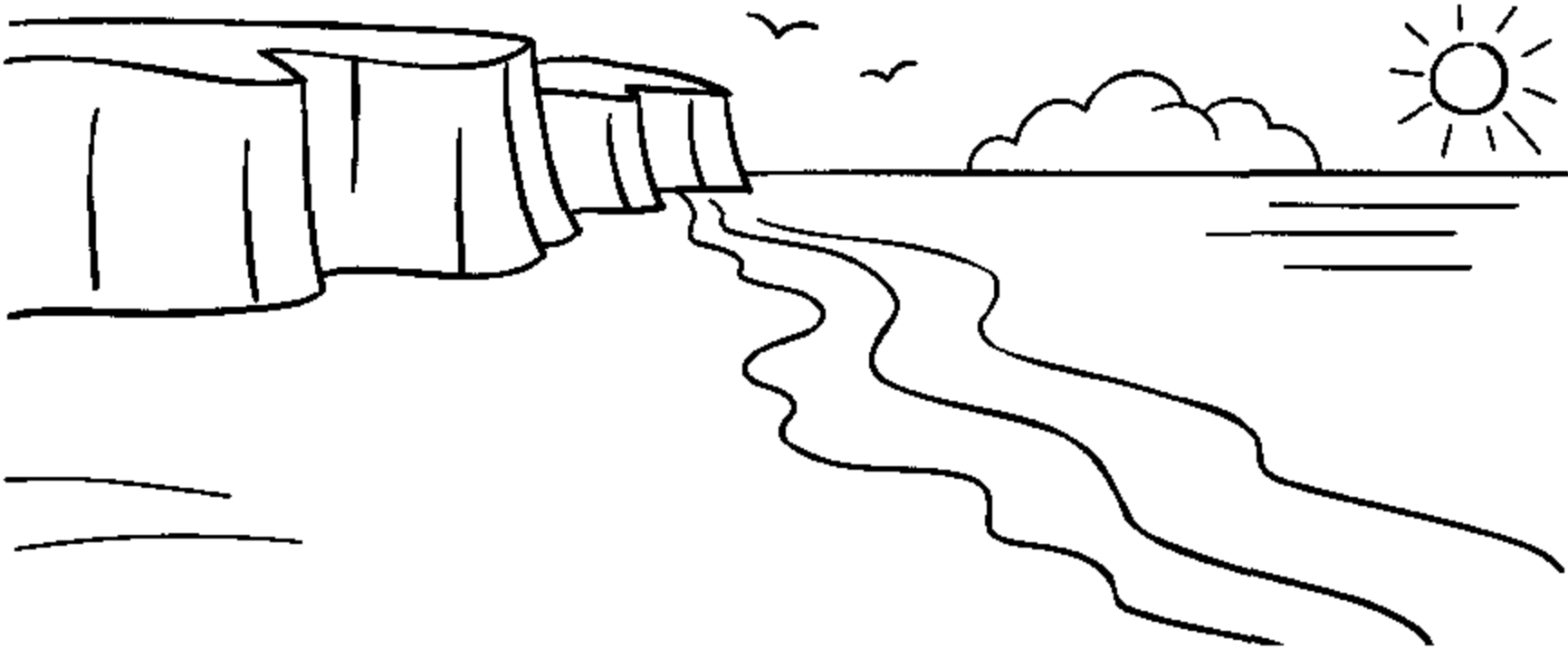
Have a look at the pictures for Resource 1 in Appendix 2. Before you read the commentary below, work out your own way to use the activity route-map (see page 44 and summarised below) with this material.

Activity route map

- 1 Pre-class: familiarise yourself with the material and activity; prepare any materials or texts you need.
- 2 In class: Lead-in/prepare for the activity.
- 3 Set up the activity.
- 4 Run the activity: students do the activity (maybe in pairs or small groups while you monitor and help).
- 5 Close the activity and invite feedback from the students.
- 6 Post-activity: do any appropriate follow-on work.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Here are my own instructions and guidelines, using the activities route map.

Route map	Instructions
<p>1 Pre-class: Familiarise yourself with the material and activity. Prepare any materials or texts you need.</p>	<p>The material consists of two similar but not identical pictures; there are fifteen differences between the pictures.</p> <p>The task is 'Spot the difference', but each student will only see one of the pictures. Students will work in pairs.</p> <p>Without looking at each other's pictures, they should describe their pictures and compare details, trying to discover as many differences as they can.</p> <p>Photocopy enough pictures so that you have one 'A' and one 'B' for every pair of students.</p>
<p>2 In class: Lead-in / prepare for the activity</p>	<p>Draw a simple picture of a beach on the board.</p> 

	<p>Ask students where it is. Ask what people do there. If students are in a country where people take beach holidays, you could ask for their own opinions. e.g. whether they like beaches.</p> <p>Ask students to tell you some things you find at the beach. Write the words on the board as they come up. If necessary, add new things to the picture (e.g. ice cream). Make sure that a number of useful words from the task picture are mentioned. (NB You don't have to exhaustively 'pre-teach' everything.)</p> <p>You could ask students to copy the picture and labels.</p>
3 Set up the activity	<p>Rearrange students into pairs, facing each other. Hand out the pictures, making sure that in each pair there is one 'A' and one 'B' picture. Students must understand that they cannot look at each other's pictures. (Saying the word <i>secret</i> with a 'hiding-the-picture' mime may help make this clear.)</p> <p>Explain the task simply and clearly, i.e. the students must find what is different between the two pictures by talking and describing, not by looking.</p>
4 Run the activity: students do the activity (maybe in pairs or small groups while you monitor and help.)	<p>As students start doing the activity, walk around unobtrusively, just to check that they are following the instructions correctly (i.e. they understand the task and are doing it in English). After that, you could continue with discreet monitoring or maybe sit down and wait for students to finish the task.</p> <p>If you monitor, you could collect overheard examples of good or problematic sentences. Don't feel the need to join in or take an active part in the work; this stage is for students to work together.</p>
5 Close the activity and invite feedback from the students.	<p>Keep an eye on students as they finish (the task will take different pairs different lengths of time). When about half of the pairs have finished, announce that everyone has one minute to finish. After you stop the activity, ask students what was easy or difficult; help them with expressions or vocabulary they ask for – or use other feedback ideas.</p>

<p>6 Post activity: do any appropriate follow-on work</p>	<p>If you collected any sentences while you were monitoring, write them up on the board. Ask students to work in pairs again and decide which sentences from your list are good English and which not. They should also work out corrections for any errors.</p> <p>Alternatively, use any other follow-on activity, e.g. 'You are one of the people in the picture. Work in pairs and write a paragraph describing your day at the beach.'</p>
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Task 23: Deciding on the aims of an activity

When the activity has finished, what might the students have learned or be better able to do, i.e. what was the aim of the activity?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Amongst other things, students may be better able to:

- speak more fluently;
- describe objects, their location, decoration, shape, etc. in precise detail;
- listen carefully and decide which information is important;
- ask for further clarification of information;
- name some typical objects and activities associated with the sea, holidays, beaches, etc.;
- interact effectively and use time efficiently to solve a specific, challenging puzzle.

It's worth noting that the students are practising fluent speaking under some degree of pressure. They have limited time to prepare what they are going to say and cannot worry about getting their grammar 100 per cent accurate. Students will become more focused on the message they wish to communicate and on getting that across successfully. This shift of values from 'getting the grammar' right to 'achieving successful communication' is an important one for many students to come to terms with. While a fair degree of good grammar is necessary to succeed in the task, successful communication is a more important real-world goal than simply being perfect. For more on fluency and accuracy, see Chapter 7, Section 4. ■

Task 24: Planning further lessons using the route map

Resources 2 and 3 in Appendix 2 are similar to Resource 1 and are designed around the same idea of pairs exchanging information. In Resource 4, the learners are two people who witnessed the same incident. They must share information and decide exactly what happened. In Resource 5, the learners have information about some events on in town. They should discuss the various possibilities and agree their favourite event to recommend to other people in class as a good day out.

Refer to the detailed instructions for Resource 1 and use the route map to plan your own exploitation of the material in the other resources.

4 Small-group discussions

This section offers detailed instructions for using Resource 6 in Appendix 2 at the back of the book – a small-group discussion task (board game) suitable for a range of learners from Intermediate to Upper Intermediate levels.

Task 25: Predicting uses for material: board game

Look at the board game handout. Before you read the full instructions, think how you might use such material in class.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

The activity uses a board game to get students discussing in small groups. The game element helps focus attention, and students may find that it adds something exciting and humorous to a more serious discussion topic. The activity is adaptable for a wide range of topics. One example set of cards on general discussion topics for Intermediate level and above is given in Appendix 2 (Resource 7).

Route map	Instructions
1 Pre-class: Familiarise yourself with the material and activity. Prepare any materials or texts you need.	Photocopy one game board for every four students in your class. You will need a die for all groups and a counter for each player (these could be coins). Cut some paper into a lot of small blank 'cards'. Decide what topic you want the students to discuss and prepare a list of interesting discussion questions (or use the set of sample discussion cards from the Resources section). Photocopy and cut up one set for each group.
2 In class: Lead-in / prepare for the activity	Obviously, your lead-in will depend on which topic you have chosen. If you have chosen a single topic (e.g. 'globalisation'), it might be an idea to first clarify exactly what the term means. You could do this by writing the word on the blackboard and eliciting definitions and examples of one or two arguments for and against. Or you could choose one of the more extreme viewpoints from the cards and say it to the class, hoping to get a reaction. This initial mini discussion may prepare them for the conversation in the game itself.
3 Set up the activity	Form small groups of four to five students and hand out a pack of cards to each group. Students keep the cards face down. Explain that students should take it in turns to throw the die and move their counter around the board.

	<p>If they land on a square with a '?', they should take a card, read it out and ask the group to discuss it for at least 30 seconds.</p> <p>If they land on a 'Talk' square, they should express their own opinion about it for at least 30 seconds. Everyone else in the group can then join in a short discussion about the question.</p> <p>Every time a learner passes 'Bonus' (i.e. having circled the board once), they get a point. The winner at the end is the one with most points.</p>
<p>4 Run the activity: students do the activity(maybe in pairs or small groups while you monitor and help.)</p>	<p>Monitor as usual.</p>
<p>5 Close the activity and invite feedback from the students.</p>	<p>It may be tricky to decide when it's appropriate to stop the activity. Some teams might really get into the discussion; others may race through it faster. The best thing to do is watch and judge when most groups have had the most value from it. If any groups finish very quickly, go over and tell them to play another round.</p> <p>It seems natural to extend the group work into a whole-class comparison of views (if students aren't sick of the subject already).</p>
<p>6 Post activity: do any appropriate follow-on work</p>	<p>Writing follow-ups might include writing a summary of each individual's own opinions, preparing a poster or newspaper article, writing a letter to a politician, etc.</p> <p>You could link the discussion into reading a relevant magazine article.</p> <p>The topic may provide a useful context for working on some grammar points, e.g. globalisation could help introduce <i>We should ... The government ought to ... If we don't ...</i>, etc.</p>

5 Pairwork grammar activities

This section offers detailed instructions for using Resource 8 in Appendix 2 at the back of the book – a grammar lesson that involves quite a lot of pairwork suitable for learners around Elementary or Pre-Intermediate levels.

Task 26: How students learn to use grammar

If you don't 'explain' grammar points to students, what other ways are there that they could become better at using grammar?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

One answer is that learners can try using language that they already know – or half-know – and experimenting with it, as in a chemistry laboratory, mixing components together and seeing what kinds of outcomes arise. As we will see in the later chapter on grammar (page 252), studying grammar only partially involves a need for teacher explanation; the essential heart of learning grammar seems to be that students have lots of opportunities to try things out themselves. This is a 'trying things out themselves' kind of lesson. ■

Task 27: Predicting uses for material: grammar

Have a look at the pictures in Resource 8 and think of a way to use them for working on grammar.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

The heart of this task is based around learners making sentences and questions in a range of tenses (which you can specify in the task instructions). To some extent, the activity's level is self-grading. If the students don't know some language items, they simply won't use them.

The basic activity involves pairs looking at a picture and making sentences, passing on the sentences to another pair and receiving another pair's sentences (about a different picture) themselves. Each pair must now try to recreate the other pair's original picture from the information they have received.

Instructions

Here are my own instructions and guidelines, using the activities route map. By the way, this activity has two sections and therefore goes through Steps 3, 4 and 5 twice.

Route map	Instructions
<p>1 Pre-class: Familiarise yourself with the material and activity. Prepare any materials or texts you need. (happened yesterday).</p>	<p>The material consists of various pictures showing events happening. Decide whether you want students to mainly work on present progressive (to describe what is happening now) or past simple. Students will be able to use more than these tenses, but it's important that you establish whether the events are now or in the past.</p>

	<p>Prepare a large copy of Picture A and copies of the other pictures – one for each pair. If you have more pairs than pictures, reuse them, but be careful not to hand out the same picture to two pairs sitting next to each other.</p>
<p>2 In class: Lead-in / prepare for the activity</p>	<p>Put Picture A on the board. Tell them that it shows what is happening now (or yesterday afternoon if you want learners to work using past tenses). Invite learners to think up good sentences about the picture. When a student suggests one, write it up without acknowledging whether it is good or bad English. Invite students to check and suggest amendments or improvements. Collect ten sentences. If students produce over-simple ones, upgrade the challenge by asking, for example, for 'sentences at least seven words long' or 'exactly thirteen words long' or 'you must include the word <i>although</i>,' etc. This has effectively been a demonstration of the task students will now do in pairs.</p>
<p>3A Set up the section 1 of the activity</p>	<p>Put students in pairs. Hand out the other pictures, one to each pair. Emphasise that pictures are secret. Pairs should take care that other pairs do not see their picture. Give task instructions.</p>
<p>4A Run section 1 of the activity: students do the activity (maybe in pairs or small groups while you monitor and help.)</p>	<p>Students work in their pairs and make ten sentences (as in the demo). You may set minimum sentence lengths or other requirements. Go round and point out any obvious errors or problems. Try not to 'over-help'. Make sure students are writing clearly on a separate piece of paper.</p>
<p>5A Close section 1 of the activity</p>	<p>When students have all finished ask them to turn over their pictures.</p>
<p>3B Set up section 2 of the activity</p>	<p>Ask pairs to pass on their sentences (but not pictures) to another pair. Each pair receives sentences from the pair they gave theirs to. Give instructions for the next section. (This has not been demonstrated!)</p>

<p>4B Run section 2 of the activity: students do the activity(maybe in pairs or small groups while you monitor and help.)</p>	<p>Pairs read the sentences they have received. They have a new blank piece of paper. Students interpret the ten sentences and work out what the original picture must have been, drawing it as best they can on the paper.</p>
<p>5B Close section 2 of the activity</p>	<p>Stop the activity when most pairs seem to have a reasonable picture. Get pairs to meet up. They compare pictures and sentences. There may be some amusement at misunderstandings and alternative interpretations.</p>
<p>6 Post activity: do any appropriate follow-on work</p>	<p>You could now extend the activity by collecting a range of sentences (from different pairs) down the left-hand side of the board and inviting different students to draw on the right-hand side, slowly building up a composite picture with features from different originals. Alternatively, redistribute the pictures and repeat the original activity 'live', i.e. basically the same, but have pairs work with other pairs from the start and say the sentences to them as they think of them (rather than write them down).</p>



Task 28: Exploiting material differently

Can you think of any completely different way to exploit these pictures?