

## Reading Homework due Week 4

### **Task:**

**Read the attached text to get ideas about what you need to think about in the planning stage of an activity.**

Start planning a short speaking activity that you would like to teach. Make a planned write a short description for about 6~8 steps of your activity.

Here is an example showing some of the steps for the star game:

1. Tell students that we are going to play a star game with the whole class. Explain that at each point of the star, I will give an answer about me and students must guess the correct question.
2. Draw a star on the board and let students guess the correct questions.
3. When students have guessed the correct questions, tell them that one of the answers is a lie. Let them guess which answer is a lie and what is the correct answer.
4. Now, put students into pairs and ask them to create their own star to play the game.
5. ...
6. ...
7. ...
8. ....

**Bring your 6~8 step activity plan to next class.**

## Chapter 3 Classroom activities

### Section 1

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).

<b>What arrangements can you use?</b>	<b>A few variations on the arrangements</b>
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
marital status	personality	qualifications	intelligence
sickness record	blood group	references	