

Have you taught groups that sometimes don't gel? Do you feel that the way students get on in class is important? This lesson looks at the way classroom dynamics create a good learning environment and enhance opportunities for learning. It looks at what helps create good dynamics and the reasons for that.

Task 1 – Sonya's least favourite class

Sonya: I'm teaching a class at the moment that I really am not very fond of. As a group I find them very cold – almost to the point of being hostile. At the beginning of the course, I went out of my way to be nice to them, but they just didn't react, and it's just gone from bad to worse. I can't wait for this term to end so I can be free of them.



Question: Is this just a personality problem? Why (not)? Jot down your thoughts on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 🗝️

Task 1 Feedback 🗝️

There may be a personality problem here. However, Sonya's comment about being nice to the students suggests that this is all she did. Some student groups do contain difficult personality mixes and simply being nice to students (while very important!) is not enough to ensure a good group dynamic.

Key Skill

Teachers sometimes need to work hard at creating a good classroom dynamic and in doing so they will need to employ a variety of strategies. This work needs to occur not only at the beginning of a course but also during every lesson.

Task 2 – Why are classroom dynamics important?



Below are some statements that give specific reasons as to why classroom dynamics are important. However, in some of the statements the rationale is not so valid. Read the statements and decide if the rationale is *valid* or *questionable*.

Statements about classroom dynamics	
1. Good classroom dynamics mean that the lesson is more fun for the teacher. <i>valid</i>	<i>questionable</i>
2. Good classroom dynamics involve interaction, and practice at interacting is a key element in learning and being able to speak a language. <i>valid</i>	<i>questionable</i>
3. Good classroom dynamics foster a positive and constructive learning environment. <i>valid</i>	<i>questionable</i>
4. Good classroom dynamics mean that there is much more student-centred interaction and the teacher can relax. <i>valid</i>	<i>questionable</i>
5. Good classroom dynamics can more clearly determine what different roles students and teachers can take during a lesson. <i>valid</i>	<i>questionable</i>
6. Good classroom dynamics can result in a more spontaneous learning environment that allows for more creative decision-making by the teacher. <i>valid</i>	<i>questionable</i>
7. Good classroom dynamics mean that you can respond to students more and you don't have to plan in so much detail. <i>valid</i>	<i>questionable</i>
8. Good classroom dynamics will result in more enjoyable lessons for the students and increase their motivation to learn. <i>valid</i>	<i>questionable</i>

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Good classroom dynamics are connected to the maximisation of learning opportunities. Making lessons enjoyable is something that should be of benefit to the learners. While teachers may also enjoy a fun learning environment, their needs as far as this is concerned are secondary to the students.

Task 3 – Key requirements for classroom dynamics



Numbers 1 to 10 below are all key requirements of good classroom dynamics. Letters a to j are explanations of these requirements in terms of classroom practice. Match the key requirements to the explanations.

Key requirements	Explanations
1. Good group dynamics require a shared sense of purpose.	
2. Good group dynamics require clear staging of lessons and clear sign posting of activities.	
3. Good group dynamics require a sense of trust, empathy and confidence within the learner group.	
4. Good group dynamics require a variety of activities.	
5. Good group dynamics require consideration of teacher and student roles in a lesson.	
6. Good group dynamics require consideration of students' expectations.	
7. Good group dynamics require consideration of cross cultural issues.	
8. Good group dynamics require consideration of individual preferences and learning styles.	
9. Good group dynamics require consideration of physical factors in the learning environment.	
10. Good group dynamics require real communication that is meaningful and relevant to students.	

Explanations

- a. While students need to assume some responsibility for their learning, the teacher often has to take the role of leader in the classroom.
- b. Teachers need to think about how they can arrange the classroom furniture to facilitate different interactions that aim to promote good classroom dynamics.
- c. The teacher needs to indicate clearly to students when one activity finishes and another begins as well as letting students know where the lesson is heading.
- d. Individual students need to be aware of the fact that not everyone in the group will want to learn in exactly the same way that they do.
- e. This can only be achieved when students are able to personalise language and share their ideas.
- f. In multi-lingual / multi-national classes teachers need to make sure that students are tolerant of one another's differences.
- g. The teacher needs to provide activities that give students a sense of working together on a problem that can be solved by means of co-operation.
- h. This can only happen when teachers and students begin to see each other as individuals and not just part of a collective whole.
- i. Students need to understand that they are part of a group that has to work together and they are not doing a one-to-one lesson.
- j. Too much routine activity will not create a dynamic and spontaneous environment that facilitates learning.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Task 3 shows that careful consideration of learners as individuals and how they may or may not fit together lies at the heart of establishing good group dynamics. With most groups, good dynamics will not happen spontaneously, but only as a result of careful planning on the teacher's behalf.

Task 4 – Ways of facilitating good dynamics



Numbers 1 to 10 are all ideas that can be used in the classroom to help create good dynamics. Letters a to j describe the purpose of these ideas. Match the ideas with the purposes. Different variations are possible

Classroom ideas

1. Do ice breaker activities at the beginning of a course ...
2. Do regular, daily warmer activities ...
3. Do group problem-solving tasks ...
4. Do tasks that allow students to personalise language and ideas ...
5. Do activities that integrate 'old' students with 'new' students when the composition of the class changes ...
6. Do work on learning styles and learning strategies ...
7. Let learners know about your teaching style, the course content and your reasons for doing some activities ...
8. Monitor students not only for language problems, but also for the 'climate' or mood of the class ...
9. Monitor your own decision-making during the lesson and the effect this has on pace ...
10. Allow for interpersonal exchanges between you and the learners before, during and after the lesson ...

Purposes

- a. ... so that students find out more about themselves as learners and how to learn more effectively.
- b. ... so that you can become aware of any potential threats to the dynamics of a group.
- c. ... so that newly formed classes can get to know each other as people.
- d. ... so that you get to find out about each other and what is happening in your lives.
- e. ... so that a good dynamic is constantly passed on within the group.
- f. ... so that the group's energy levels are raised at the beginning of each lesson.
- g. ... so that lessons don't drag and have a negative effect on the group dynamic.
- h. ... so that students get the chance to work as a team,
- i. ... so that they are more likely to feel confident about you when you assume the role of 'leader' in the classroom.
- j. ... so that students can express genuine opinions and feelings.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Think about some previous learning experiences that you have had. They don't need to be related to language learning. Can you remember classes that had a good dynamic? Try to analyse what it was about the teacher and the other students that helped to create this dynamic.

Note your observations in your *Teaching log*

Taking it to the classroom ...

In task 4 there is a good array of ideas. It is likely that there are some ideas in the list that you haven't tried. Make it your aim over the next term to try out as many of the ideas in task 4 as possible. Having tried each idea, evaluate its effectiveness for creating a positive learning environment with your students.

Want to find out more ... ?

Classroom Dynamics by Jill Hadfield (OUP 1992) has an invaluable resource of ideas and activities that aim to promote a good learning environment.

On pages 161 – 167 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th edition) by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on the advantages and disadvantages of using different grouping options in the classroom and their effect on class dynamics.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to this topic:

- **Unit 1 b) Student interaction and teacher roles:** Includes discussion and analysis on a variety of different seating arrangements and appropriate teacher roles for each.

Answer Key

**Task 2 – Feedback**

1. **questionable** – *The teacher's sense of enjoyment is less important than the students'.*
2. **valid**
3. **valid**
4. **questionable** – *There is likely to be more student-centred interaction. However, the teacher should monitor this interaction attentively and not relax.*
5. **valid**
6. **valid**
7. **questionable** – *While it is good that teachers are responsive to students, teachers also need to ensure they plan their lessons in such a way that students get a sense of coherence from the teaching programme.*
8. **valid**

Task 3 – Feedback

1. g
2. c
3. h
4. j
5. a
6. i
7. f
8. d
9. b
10. e

Task 4 – Feedback

1. b, c, d, k, j
2. d, e, f, k
3. e, h
4. j
5. c, e
6. a
7. i
8. b, g
9. g
10. d, i, j



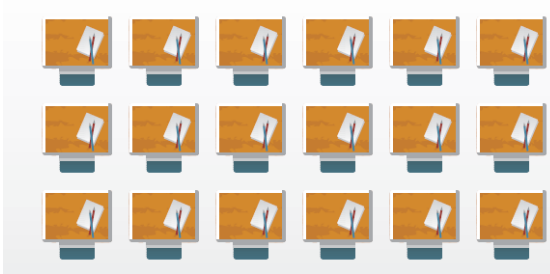
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How should you sit and group students for the best learning results? This lesson will describe different ways of arranging students in your learning space and what roles the teacher plays within these different arrangements.

Task 1 – Seating arrangements



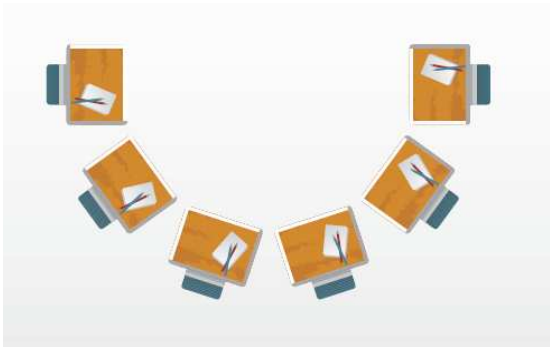
Look at the different seating arrangements a) to d) below. Which ones have you used as a teacher (or perhaps as a second language student)? Rank them in order from 1 = most preferred to 4 = least preferred. Then read the feedback on Task 1 below. 🗝️



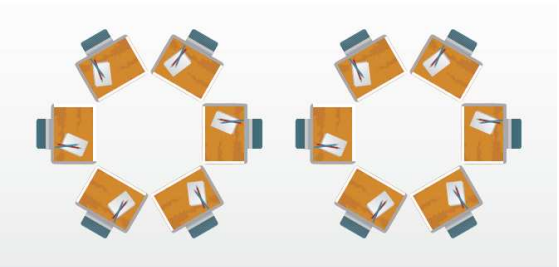
a) Rows



b) Circle



c) Horseshoe



d) Islands

Task 1 Feedback

Your answers to this task will depend on past experience and personal choice. In many private English language learning contexts with smaller classes, 'the horseshoe' is a favourite seating arrangement. However, with larger groups 'islands' might be more manageable. Sometimes the institution you work for dictates the seating because the desks are permanently fixed to the floor. However, the key issue is more to do with how the students are grouped during specific activities, rather than how the furniture is arranged.

Key Skill

It is important for a teacher to think about how a room is arranged and how students will interact for different activities. It is useful if a teacher thinks through these arrangements when they are planning their lessons.

Task 2 – Patterns and activities



Numbers 1 to 7 below show pictures of different interaction patterns. Letters a to g give the names of the patterns. Numbers i to vii describe typical activities associated with one of the patterns. Match the pictures to the names and activities.

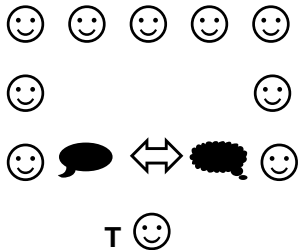
1.



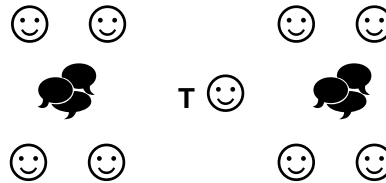
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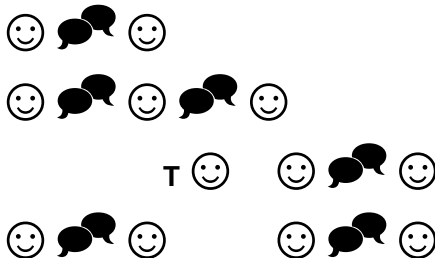
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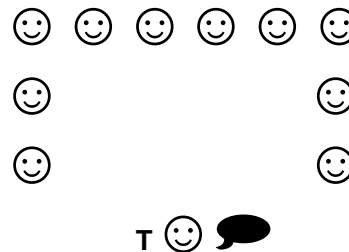
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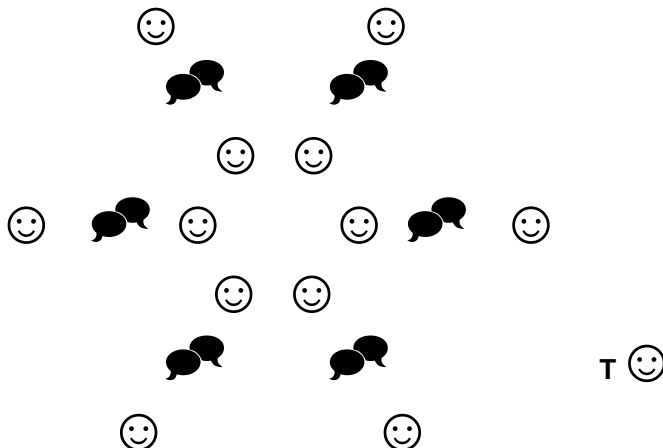
5.



6.



7.



Names of patterns	
a. open pair	b. teacher-fronted plenary
c. group work	d. student working alone
e. closed pair	f. onion ring
g. mingle	

Activities

- i. controlled oral practice of a four-line dialogue.
- ii. discussion on a news topic – different students present their point of view.
- iii. multiple role play – students assume different roles with different students.
- iv. survey on free time activity – students find out information from others.
- v. written grammar practice task.
- vi. students check their answers to a listening task with each other.
- vii. teacher conducts feedback on a reading task.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

In task 2 there are lots of examples of student-centred interaction. These are only examples and some activities could use different interaction patterns. For example, the discussion could be done by closed pairs and the multiple role play could use a mingle interaction.

Task 3 – What’s the teacher doing?



Using the same interaction patterns from task 2, decide on which two roles a teacher has for each activity from the list a to d below. Then match the teacher activity i to vii to the interaction patterns and teacher roles.

Teacher roles

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| a. controller | b. evaluator |
| c. informer | d. facilitator |

Teacher activity

- i. Monitor closely and help students with language.
- ii. Keep students moving around so that everyone has a partner.
- iii. Nominate who should answer a question.
- iv. Time interaction and tell students when to change partner.
- v. Monitor at a distance and make a note of errors.
- vi. Nominate who should speak.
- vii. Monitor closely and point out mistakes.

Interaction patterns	Teacher roles	Teacher activity
open pairs		
teacher-fronted plenary		
group work		
student working alone		
closed pairs		
onion ring		
mingle		
open pairs		

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Key Skill

During student-centred interaction, the teacher plays two key roles: facilitator (making sure the students are able to speak) and evaluator (assessing students' progress with the task and also assessing the language they are producing). How closely you monitor depends on the nature of the activity and the strengths and weaknesses of your students.

Task 4 – What are the issues?



Numbers 1 to 10 below describe criticisms that teachers can have of student-centred interaction (pairs, groups, mingles). Letters a to j are replies to these criticism. Match the criticism to the replies.

Criticisms	Replies
1. Students make too much noise when they are all speaking at once.	
2. The desks in my room are screwed to the floor, so it is difficult for students to form pairs and groups.	
3. Often when students work in pairs, they don't like the person they have to work with.	
4. Students aren't used to working in this way. They will find it strange.	
5. I worry that students don't really learn any grammar or vocabulary when they are just chatting in pairs.	
6. Some pairs finish before others and just sit there.	
7. I feel like I am losing control of the class when students are in pairs or groups.	
8. Weak students often find pair work hard because they are not sure what they are meant to be doing.	
9. I can't hear everything students are saying so that I can correct them.	
10. Students will revert back to using their first language when I put them together.	

Replies

- a.** Sometimes it is a good idea just to let students speak and not worry about mistakes. This will help them develop some degree of fluency.
- b.** Students also need to develop speaking skills and this kind of interaction can help them to learn to speak.
- c.** This means you need to help those students first when you are monitoring.
- d.** Even if you can't move the furniture, you can always move the students.
- e.** This may happen so you will need to reinforce the importance of using English and check that students are doing so when you monitor.
- f.** That's true to some extent, but at least this means they are producing language.
- g.** This doesn't need to happen if you monitor pair and group work actively and attentively.
- h.** If that's the case, you should keep students moving around so they work with different students for each activity.
- i.** If this often happens, you should plan an extra activity that will keep these students occupied until the others have finished.
- j.** In this case, you should introduce new kinds of interaction patterns gradually. Also let your students know why you are doing this and what benefit they can gain from it.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Do you feel your classroom is student-centred enough? Over a period of about five lessons, try keeping a record of how much time is spent on teacher-fronted interaction and how much time is spent on student-centred interaction. If you feel the percentage of teacher-centred interaction is too high, think about which activities could include a greater amount student-centred focus.

Keep a record of your findings in your *Teaching log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Are you familiar with all the interaction patterns in task 2? Try experimenting with some of them. For example, role plays are traditionally done in pairs. However, for variation, it might be interesting to try an onion ring role play exercise. Students could perform their role with three or four other students as they move around the onion ring. You will need to set a time limit for each interaction.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 108 - 111 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on different teacher roles.

On pages 84 - 90 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on classroom interaction and seating options.

See also section 1 of *Language Teaching Classroom Practice DVD & Workbook* by Heather Richards and Karen Wise (AUT University 2007).

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to this topic:

- **Unit 1 a) Classroom dynamics:** Includes discussion and tasks on how the physical classroom environment can have a positive effect on classroom dynamics.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

1. d and v
2. a and vi
3. e and i
4. c and ii
5. g and iv
6. b and vii
7. f and iii

Task 3 – Feedback

Interaction	Teacher roles	Teacher activity
open pairs	controller, evaluator	vi. Nominate who should speak.
teacher-fronted plenary	informer, evaluator	iii. Nominate who should answer a question.
group work	facilitator, evaluator	v. Monitor at a distance and make a note of errors
student working alone	informer, evaluator	vii. Monitor closely and point out mistakes
closed pairs	facilitator, evaluator	i. Monitor closely and help students with language
onion ring	facilitator, evaluator	iv. Time interaction and tell students when to change.
mingle	facilitator, evaluator	ii. Keep students moving around so that everyone has a partner.

Task 4 – Feedback

1. f
2. d
3. h
4. j
5. b
6. i
7. g
8. c
9. a
10. e



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Why is it that all students don't learn in the same way? By doing this lesson, you will find out about different student learning styles and how to deal with them.

Task 1 – What's wrong?

Lisa is talking about her current class to a colleague, Kate.

Kate: Are you going to use this grammar game?

Lisa: I don't think so.

Kate: Why not?

Lisa: Games don't seem to work with the class I have at the moment. They usually do, but not with this class.

Kate: That's strange.

Lisa: I know. I used to love language games when I was learning Spanish. This class gets excited when we do a gap fill exercise. I don't know what's wrong with them.



Is there something wrong with Lisa's class? What should she do? Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 🗝️

Task 1 Feedback 🗝️

There is probably nothing wrong with Lisa's class. It is likely that as a group they have a learning style that prefers more serious language learning activities. Lisa and Kate are making the assumption that because *they* enjoy language learning games *all* their students will. Lisa should talk to her students directly and find out exactly what they do like. She could also do a learning styles quiz with her class to discover what kind language learning activities her students might enjoy more than games.

Key Skill

All students have different learning styles. This affects the way they behave in the classroom and their response to different materials and activities. Here are some common learning styles:

- **Fluency-focused** – *likes communicating and doing freer speaking activities*
- **Accuracy focused** – *likes to be sure that they are getting things right*
- **Visual** – *likes working with visual information when learning English*
- **Auditory** – *likes receiving information by listening and responding*
- **Kinesthetic** – *likes to include physical activities in the learning process*

It is important to realise that each learning style is a continuum and all students will have a mixture learning styles, however some may be more prevalent than others.

Task 2 – Learning styles and classroom activities



Numbers 1 to 11 describe different classroom activities. Letters a to e are the learning styles from task 1. Match each classroom activity with the correct learning style. You will need to use some of the learning styles more than once.

Classroom activities	Learning styles
1. Mingle activities that involve walking around and talking to other students.	
2. A role play done in pairs or small groups.	
3. A grammar lesson taught through a context created by pictures and drawings.	
4. The teacher corrects students a lot during oral pair work.	
5. Listening to the teacher read stories aloud.	
6. Running dictations where students have to run to a text and run back to their group to dictate what they can remember.	
7. Completing a grammar gap-fill task that checks understanding.	
8. Writing tasks based on graphs and tables.	
9. Drilling students in a new grammar structure.	
10. Listening to and responding to the teacher's oral questions.	

Learning styles

- a. fluency-focused
- b. accuracy-focused
- c. visual
- d. auditory
- e. kinesthetic

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Task 3 – Finding out about your students’ learning styles



Match up columns A, B and C so that you create four logical sentences, then write those sentences in the empty table below.

A	B	C
1. Giving students a lecture on learning styles is a good idea is a bad idea because this is a quick and efficient way of having some idea of how your learners like learning.
2. Doing a simple learning style quiz because it will give you a more in-depth idea of their learning style over a longer period of time.
3. Asking students directly about their learning style because they probably won't understand what you are saying
4. Observing how your students react to different activities because they probably don't know what it is.

Logical Sentences	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.



Task 4 – What can teachers do?



Once we begin to understand the different learning styles of our students, what can we do about it? Below are some descriptions of teachers' actions. Decide which actions are 'constructive' (C), and which are 'not constructive' (N). Write C or N in the right-hand column.

Teachers' actions	C or N?
1. The teacher tells the learners they must change their learning style so they become better learners.	
2. The teacher makes sure her/his lessons contain good variety so all learning styles are catered for.	
3. The teacher makes learners aware of their learning style.	
4. The teacher asks students to discuss the usefulness of different activities with their classmates.	
5. The teacher monitors students carefully and tells them when they are using the wrong learning style.	
6. The teacher suggests different ways of doing activities in the classroom and offers students a choice.	
7. The teacher makes students aware of the fact that their classmates' learning styles are different and that sometimes they need to be flexible about their reaction to different activities.	
8. The teacher always puts students with the same learning style together in pairs.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

It can be interesting to think about your own learning style. Do a learning style quiz to discover which kind of learner you are. Describe learning activities or ways of learning that appeal to you when learning something new. Then consider this question: “To what extent do my choices about teaching reflect my own preferred learning style?”

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Whenever you get a new group of students, spend some time trying to work out the learning style of individual members of the group as well as focusing on the group as a whole. You can do this by questionnaires and direct observation of their behaviour and response to activities. Try to strike a balance between catering for their learning style and providing them with variety.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 88 & 89 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further discussion on learning styles and some alternative ways of describing students.

Learning to Learn English by Gail Ellis and Barbara Sinclair (Cambridge University Press 1989) includes many practical ideas for dealing with learning styles.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL TaskBook series, which also relate to this topic:

- Unit 1 e) **Learner autonomy:** Looks at different ways to help individual learners become more autonomous.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1) a, d, e
- 2) a, d
- 3) c
- 4) b
- 5) d
- 6) b, e
- 7) b
- 8) c
- 9) b, d
- 10) d

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) Giving students a lecture on learning styles / is a bad idea / because they probably won't understand what you are saying.
- 2) Doing a simple learning style quiz / is a good idea / because this is a quick and efficient way of having some idea of how your learners like learning.
- 3) Asking students directly about their learning style / is a bad idea / because they probably don't know what it is.
- 4) Observing how your students react to different activities / is a good idea / because it will give you a more in-depth idea of their learning style over a longer period of time.

Task 4 – Feedback

- 1) **not constructive:** *While it is good to encourage students to be flexible, forcing them to change is likely to affect their motivation in a negative way.*
- 2) **constructive:** *The idea to try and please all of the students some of the time.*
- 3) **constructive:** *When students know their learning style, they are likely to be more receptive to trying alternatives.*
- 4) **constructive:** *If one student says she doesn't like listening activities, but another student explains why she likes them and finds them useful, the first student might re-evaluate her ideas.*
- 5) **not constructive:** *Adapting a learning style can only come about gradually over time. This kind of very direct feedback to a student in the middle of the activity could cause resentment.*
- 6) **constructive:** *Particularly if many learners in a group have a similar learning style. Letting students participate in the learning process in this very active way is likely to motivate them.*
- 7) **constructive:** *This means individual students are less likely to expect lessons tailored to their individual learning style all the time.*
- 8) **not constructive:** *It is good for students to experience a range of learning styles when working in groups. It can open their eyes to different ways of learning.*



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Do your students sometimes look bored and unmotivated? This lesson gives ideas about how this can happen.

Task 1 – Sally’s problem.

Sally started her teaching career as a primary school teacher. She liked young children, but after a couple of years she found it tiring to teach them. She decided to make a change to teaching English language to young adults. She did a training course and got a job. To her surprise, she found teaching adults wasn't all that different from teaching children. Many of her students needed the kind of encouragement and support young children do. She liked the first groups of students she taught and thought she got on well with them. She was shocked when her boss told her some of the students had complained. They said they didn't like her teaching style.



What is causing Sally’s problem? Below are some ideas.

Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 

- a. Sally has an unpleasant personality and the students don't like her.
- b. Sally really wants to give up teaching all together and generally has a negative attitude.
- c. Sally speaks slowly and gives strong stress to certain syllables. Her voice sounds a bit patronising.
- d. The students that complained feel that Sally is giving more support to other learners in the class and not them.
- e. The students that complained found out that Sally has only just finished her training and they want a more qualified teacher.
- f. Sally tends to treat her students as though they were younger learners and hasn't adjusted her manner to teaching adults.



Task 1 Feedback

All of the answers are possible, but, in this situation, answers **c** and **f** are the most likely. Teachers often adopt a manner and a way of speaking according to who they are teaching. It is possible that the students who are complaining feel

Key skill

It is important for teachers of any subject to really connect with their students. If you do this successfully, you will really help students become motivated to learn.

Task 2 – Teacher behaviours



Letters a to e below describe teacher behaviours that could cause students to react in a negative way. Make notes about possible student reactions to these teacher behaviours.

Teacher behaviours

a. The teacher enters the classroom and looks at the learners over the top of her glasses without saying anything. She looks a bit angry and waits until all students are quiet. She then questions them in a loud voice.

Student reactions: _____

b. The teacher enters the classroom, looks quickly at the students and immediately opens the course book. She asks students to do the same thing. The teacher doesn't look at her learners and questions them about the material in the course book.

Student reactions: _____

c. The teacher tells a joke in class. The students don't really understand it, but the teacher laughs loudly anyway.

Student reactions: _____

d. The teacher talks for a long time and never varies the pitch and tone of her voice.

Student reactions: _____

e. The teacher creates a lot of fun activities to help motivate her learners. She even makes a cake once a week so they can have morning tea together in class.

Student reactions: _____

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key skill

Apart from creating problems in the classroom, inappropriate teacher behaviour can create a generally negative atmosphere for learners. It becomes harder for teachers to teach and for students to learn when the learning environment has an uncomfortable atmosphere.

Task 3 – Identifying the problem



Statements i to v say clearly what the problem is with the teacher's behaviour in each situation. Match the problems to the behaviours below.

Problems

- i. The teacher forgets that most students want to learn rather than just have fun.
- ii. The teacher's voice is monotonous.
- iii. The teacher misjudges the interests of the students.
- iv. The teacher is too strict with the students.
- v. The teacher has poor eye contact with students.

ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook

Motivating students to learn: Unit 1 d)

Behaviours	Problems
a. The teacher enters the classroom and looks at the learners over the top of her glasses without saying anything. She looks a bit angry and waits until all students are quiet. She then questions them in a loud voice.	
b. The teacher enters the classroom, looks quickly at the students and immediately opens the course book. She asks students to do the same thing. The teacher doesn't look at her learners and questions them about the material in the course book.	
c. The teacher tells a joke in class. The students don't really understand it, but the teacher laughs loudly anyway.	
d. The teacher talks for a long time and never varies the pitch and tone of her voice	
e. The teacher creates a lot of fun activities to help motivate her learners. She even makes a cake once a week so they can have morning tea together in class.	

Check your ideas in the answer key.



Key skill

If the learning environment is negative, the responsibility is on the teacher to do something about it. Students often do not have the skills to deal with the situation and it is, in the end, the teacher's job to manage the learning environment as constructively as possible. The first, key step is working out what the problem is so that you can do something about it. The next task looks at strategies for solving these motivation problems.

Task 4 – Getting help



In the column on the right, there are some solutions to the problems we identified in task 3. Match the problems to the solutions. It may be possible to match more than one problem to a solution.

Problems

- i. The teacher forgets that most students want to learn rather than just have fun.
- ii. The teacher's voice is monotonous.
- iii. The teacher misjudges the interests of the students.
- iv. The teacher is too strict with the students.
- v. The teacher has poor eye contact with students.

Problems	Solutions
	a) Ask a colleague to observe you and give you feedback.
	b) Ask a colleague to video record your lesson and watch yourself.
	c) Use a cassette player and record your lesson – listen to your voice on the tape.
	d) Think about using gesture and facial expression more to make information clear to learners.
	e) Find out from your students what interests and motivates them.
	f) Begin each lesson with an informal chat with your students.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Think about the following question:

“When I am teaching students how much am I in the role of ‘performer’?”

Think about things like your voice, your physical energy, eye contact, body language.

Note your thoughts in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

If you are interested in exploring how you motivate your students, you could try any of the ‘solution’ ideas in task 4. Or you could also keep a diary of the mood of your students and your mood and see if there is any connection.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 98 to 104 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th edition) by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further discussion on what motivation is and where it comes from. On pages 112 and 113 of the same book there is also an interesting discussion of the teacher’s role as a performer and the effect this can have on students.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

There is an infinite variety of possible student reactions. The reactions described below are based on real situations.

a. Student reaction: *The students do not answer any of the teacher's questions, even though they know the answer. The students remain silent.*

b. Student reaction: *The students become restless and begin to whisper to teach other.*

c. Student reaction: *The students are polite, but very distant to the teacher. They do what she asks them, but they are very quiet in class.*

d. Student reaction: *The students complain to the Director of Studies that their teacher is boring. Many of them want to change class.*

e. Student reaction: *The students complain to the Director of Studies. They tell her that they feel they are not learning anything by only playing games and eating cake.*

Task 3 – Feedback

- a. iv
- b. v
- c. iii
- d. ii
- e. i

Task 4 – Feedback

- a) ii, iv, v
- b) ii, iv, v
- c) ii
- d) v
- e) i, iii
- f) iii, iv




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Do you sometimes worry that what you are doing with your students inside the classroom just isn't enough? There is probably good reason for your concern. This lesson looks at why it is a good idea for learners to be autonomous and suggests ways that you can help them achieve this.

Task 1 – Opinion survey



Look at the statements below and decide if you agree or disagree with them. Think about why you agree or disagree. Then read the feedback box below for some comments on these opinions. 

- a) The best thing for students to study outside the classroom is vocabulary.
- b) You can't change a student's learning style.
- c) When it comes to independent learning, students don't know what they need.
- d) It's no good setting homework because students never do it.
- e) You can waste a lot of time making your methodology obvious to learners.

Task 1 Feedback

- a) Vocabulary is only one thing students can study outside the classroom. They can also study grammar and practise language skills. There is a lot of things that they can do outside the classroom.
- b) You probably can't change a student's learning style in any radical way, but you can point out to them ways in which their learning style can limit them and suggest some options.
- c) This is often true. Students know what they like doing, but that is not always what they need the most.
- d) This is true of some students, but many students expect homework and feel disappointed if teachers do not set it.
- e) However, this can also give students an insight into different approaches to learning that they can utilise outside the classroom.

Key skill

Students can make better progress if they spend some time learning autonomously outside the classroom. Teachers need to help their students develop awareness of autonomous learning options and suggest strategies for putting them into practice.

Task 2 – Why should teachers promote autonomous learning?



1 to 5 below are key ideas associated with learner autonomy, while a to e provide an explanation of the key ideas. Match the ideas to the explanations.



Key ideas	
1. Learning time	2. Students' individual needs
3. Students' motivation	4. Students' general study ability
5. Students' individual responsibility for learning	

Explanations

- a.** Some students may have had little or no training on how to study any subject in an effective way, so English language teachers will need to help them with useful strategies.
- b.** If students have a sense of ownership of their English language learning, they are likely to want to study more.
- c.** Teachers cannot hope to teach students absolutely everything they need to know so a good part of the learning is up to the student.
- d.** Students are outside the classroom more than they are inside it and need strategies to help them use their own time productively.
- e.** When students are working in a group they cannot hope to always do the things they like doing or need to do. They have to consider other students needs too.

Key skill

One of the broader aims of learner autonomy is to ensure students accept some responsibility for their own learning outside the classroom. It is easier for students to meet their individual needs during the time they study alone. With the right kind of advice from the teacher on how to go about this, student motivation can be increased.

Task 3 – Advice to students



Numbers 1 to 8 below are areas of advice for students who need to develop autonomy. Letters a to h are statements you might make directly to students in relation to each area of advice. Match the advice to the statements.



Areas of advice for students	
1. goals	2. time frames
3. materials	4. help
5. learning style	6. progress
7. revision	8. learning systems

Statements

- a. You will need this sometimes, so don't be afraid to come and ask for it.
- b. This has got to be done regularly. We'll do some in class, but you also need to do your own.
- c. A good way to start is by finding out what is available in the library and the learning centre – not just books, but also computer programmes and things off the internet.
- d. You need two lots of these – ones that you can reach in a short space of time and others, bigger ones that will take you longer to reach, for example studying at an English-speaking university.
- e. You need to think about setting up ones that work for you, for example, the best way for you to record vocabulary so that you'll remember it.
- f. These need to be realistic in relation to your learning goals.
- g. I'm not asking you to change this, but you sometimes need to be a bit flexible about the way you study language.
- h. It's just as important to know when this has been made as it is to realise what you don't know yet.

Key skill

The ideas in task 3 suggest that teachers have an important advising or counselling role to play with their students. However, this is not all they can do. See task 4 below for more ideas.

Task 4 – Some specific strategies



Some strategies for learner autonomy are best taught in class, while others are best taught in one-on-one counselling sessions. Look at the techniques below and put them into the correct box.

Techniques

1. Set homework regularly.
2. Discuss the rationale for the methodology you use e.g. stages in a reading lesson in relation to practising reading sub skills (scan, gist, intensive reading etc.)
3. Help students articulate specific short and long term goals.
4. Systematically revise language that you teach.
5. Give advice on alternative learning strategies e.g. suggest a fluency-based learner try some accuracy-based activities for a change.
6. Set up group and project work that gets students relying on each other independent of you.
7. Provide learners with an orientation to resources that you have such as a library or a learning centre.
8. Give learners feedback on their progress in relation to the goals they have set.
9. Point out specific resources such as self-access books, computer programmes or internet web sites that could help students.
10. Provide examples of different learning systems that other students have used.

Best taught in class	Best taught in one-on-one sessions

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Thinking about your teaching ...

Put yourself in your students' place. If you are currently learning a language, this will be easy. If you are not, try to imagine that you are. Which of the autonomous learning techniques in task 4 would you find most useful. Rank them from 1 to 10 (from the most to the least useful) and note down why.

Record your observations in your *Teaching log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Choose one of the in-class strategies from task 4 that you do not currently do with your learners. Try it out and get them to give you feedback on this. You can record this experiment in your Teaching log.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 394 – 408 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further reading on learner autonomy.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL TaskBook series, which also relate to this topic:

- Unit 1 c) **Learning styles:** Looks at how students' learning styles may affect their preferences for certain kinds of learning activities both in and outside the classroom.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1. d
- 2. e
- 3. b
- 4. a
- 5. c

Task 3 - Feedback

- 1. d
- 2. f
- 3. c
- 4. a
- 5. g
- 6. h
- 7. b
- 8. e

Task 4 - Feedback

Best taught in class	Best taught in one-on-one sessions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set homework regularly. 2. Discuss the rationale for the methodology you use e.g. stages in a reading lesson in relation to practising reading sub skills (scan, gist, intensive etc.) 4. Systematically revise language that you teach. 6. Set up group and project work that gets students relying on each other independent of you. 7. Provide learners with an orientation to resources that you have such as a library of a learning centre. 10. Provide examples of different learning systems that other students have found useful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Help students articulate specific short and long term goals. 5. Give advice on alternative learning strategies e.g. suggest a fluency-based learner try some accuracy-based activities for a change. 8. Gives learners feedback on their progress in relation to the goals they have set. 9. Point out specific resources such as self access books, computer programmes or internet web sites that could help students.



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When you have to write a lesson plan is it sometimes difficult to write down your aims? This lesson will give you ideas on how to write better aims when you need to.

Task 1 – Milly’s dilemma.

Milly is asking for help from her Director of Studies.

Milly: I’m going to teach this lesson using a reading text. The students will spend quite a bit of time reading and then working on vocabulary-in-context. The only thing is there are some really good examples of the past continuous in the text. I want them to underline these verb forms because we studied them last week and it would be good revision. The problem is I’m not really sure what my main aim is – reading or grammar?



Can you answer Milly’s question and tell her why? Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 🗝️

Task 1 Feedback 🗝️

Milly indicates that her students will “spend quite a bit of time reading”. Her focus on grammar looks like she will only get students to underline and notice the past continuous without doing a detailed focus on this verb phrase. This suggests that the main aim of Milly’s lesson concerns the development of reading skills and the grammar focus is a subsidiary (or secondary) aim.

Key skill

Sometimes it is necessary to write detailed lesson plans, for example, when you are going to be observed by another teacher. Writing main and subsidiary aims for the lesson as a whole as well as writing aims for each step or stage in a lesson can help you to think carefully about what you are trying to achieve with your students.

Task 2 – Writing clear aims



Some of the following aims are well written, while others are not clear or do not contain enough detail. Put the aims into the appropriate column below.

Aims

- a) For learners to distinguish between ‘will’ and ‘going to’ used to make spontaneous decisions in the context of stating intentions after a lottery win.
- b) By the end of the lesson learners will have had practice in using strategies to guess the meaning of new vocabulary in context.
- c) To clarify the present perfect continuous using a taped dialogue.
- d) For learners to practise the present continuous with the attached picture.
- e) To provide practice in scan listening skills in the context of listening to flight departure information at an airport.
- f) By the end of the lesson students will have had speaking practice and clarification of some tenses.
- g) To provide freer writing practice in the context of mini paragraphs.
- h) By the end of the lesson learners will have an understanding of which kinds of words can have both a weak and strong phonological form in authentic spoken language.
- i) For learners to practise detail reading and the inferring of opinion from a newspaper article with political bias.
- j) To focus on linking as per page 27 ex. 3
- k) To clarify the form and meaning of the future perfect in the context of speculating about technology in the future.
- l) By the end of the lesson learners will have done a great variety of reading practice around the topic.

Well written aims	Aims are not clear or lack detail

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Task 3 – Aims in the procedure



Sometimes it can be difficult to write aims in the procedure of the plan. You need to be sure you are stating an aim and not just describing what the students are going to do. For example:

- 1) To get students to read and answer question 1.
- 2) To make sure students have a gist understanding of the text.

Comment: 1) is just describing procedure, but 2) is clearly stating an aim.

Decide whether the following statements are (A) aims or (D) merely a description of activities. Put A or D in the column on the right.

Statements	A or D?
a) To check learners' understanding of the activity.	
b) To identify and highlight irregular simple past forms.	
c) To complete the second task.	
d) To discuss the answers in pairs.	
e) To provide oral fluency practice	
f) To underline examples of the present perfect in the text	
g) To plan the essay before the first draft	
h) To provide controlled oral practice of the target language	
i) To complete the gaps in the sentences	
j) To brainstorm and share ideas for the first draft.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Task 4 – Aims and description



Now describe activities that match the aims. The first example has been done for you.

Example activities

a) To check learners' understanding of the activity.

Description: The teacher asks oral asks oral questions to make sure the students know what they have to do.

b) To identify and highlight irregular simple past forms.

Description: _____

e) To provide oral fluency practice

Description: _____

g) To plan the essay before the first draft

Description: _____

h) To provide controlled oral practice of the target language

Description: _____

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

You probably do not write detailed aims for lessons that you teach on a day-by-day basis. However, it is often a good idea to think about what your aims are in a lesson. Think of some lessons that you have taught in the last two or three weeks. Decide whether your aims were clear for these lessons or whether they were a bit confused and resulted in lessons that you were not happy with. Do you think your students were clear about your aims?

Note your thoughts in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Try telling your students what your aims are at the beginning of each lesson. You can write them up on the board. Alternatively, you could ask your students at the end of the lesson what they thought the aims were. It might be interesting to see what they say. If their ideas are different from yours, it is interesting to explore why.

Want to find out more ... ?

Page 371 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) has an introduction to lesson aims.

On pages 124 to 128 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on lesson aims.

See also section 3 of *Language Teaching Classroom Practice DVD & Workbook* by Heather Richards and Karen Wise (AUT University 2007).

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

Well written aims

a), b), e), h), i) and k)

Aim not clear or lack detail

c) To clarify the present perfect continuous using a taped dialogue.

Comment: *There is no mention of the topic of the dialogue or the context.*

d) For learners to practise the present continuous with the attached picture.

Comment: *There is no mention of what kind of practice – oral or spoken, controlled or free. There is no mention of the context.*

f) By the end of the lesson students will have had speaking practice and clarification of some tenses.

Comment: *There is no mention of whether the speaking is language practice or more general fluency practice. The tenses are not named.*

g) To provide freer writing practice in the context of mini paragraphs.

Comment: *There is no mention of the text type (narrative, report, argument) or the topic of the text.*

j) To focus on linking as per page 27 ex. 3

Comment: *There is no mention of whether the linking is to do with pronunciation or grammar.*

l) By the end of the lesson learners will have done a great variety of reading practice around the topic.

Comment: *There is no specific mention of the kind of reading sub skills (scan, skim, intensive) that will be practised in the lesson.*

Task 3 – Feedback

a. A

b. A

c. D

d. D

e. A

f. D

g. A

h. A

i. D

j. D

Task 4 – Feedback

b) To identify and highlight irregular simple past forms.

Description: The teacher asks learners to underline simple past irregular forms in the text. She gives them a list of irregular verbs to help them identify new forms.

e) To provide oral fluency practice

Description: The students work in pairs to personalise the information in the text by telling each other about a recent holiday they have had.

g) To plan the essay before the first draft

Description: Students share their brainstorming notes and discuss the content of each paragraph of the essay. They write up a paragraph-by-paragraph plan.

h) To provide controlled oral practice of the target language

Description: The teacher uses white board prompts to elicit a four-line dialogue. Students then practise the dialogue in pairs.



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Do you sometimes feel that sentence-level examples of language do not always help learners? Do some authentic examples of spoken language not fit into neat grammar categories? This lesson aims to help you look at some ways of analysing authentic written and spoken language.

Task 1 – What about the little words?

Anna: “I’ve got this student, Milos. He often picks up on some of the little words and sounds that we use like ‘well’ and ‘umm’ and wants to know about them. However, there’s nothing in the course book that we are using at the moment that can really help him. What should I do?”



Can you help Anna? What should she do? Jot down your ideas on a note pad, then check with the answer key below. 🗝️

Task 1 Feedback 🗝️

Anna probably needs to go outside the course book and find some examples of authentic spoken language. She needs to look at how these little words are used in spoken language and prepare a task of some kind that she can not only give to Milos, but the class as a whole. Students are often very keen to learn about this kind of language.

Key Skill

The analysis of authentic examples of written and spoken language is known as discourse analysis. This kind of study of language encompasses not only the “little words” mentioned above, but a whole range of features that look at language as a communicative event. This lesson is a very brief introduction to some aspects of discourse analysis.

Task 2 – Analysis of written language



a) Here is a letter that is mostly authentic (only the names and addresses have been changed). Read the letter and complete the analysis task below.

5 February 2009

Anna Martin
1 College Street
Schooltown

Dear Anna,

Thank you for sending in your application and test for our TESOL Course.

We are sorry to tell you that your work in the test is not at a high enough level for you to follow a TESOL Course. We need to be sure that the level of English of students on these courses is high because part of the course involves teaching your classmates, some of whom will be at an advanced level.

We feel you need to spend some more time studying general English to improve your English language skills and think about applying for a course at a later date.

Thank you again for the interest you have shown in our courses.

Yours sincerely,

Emily Smith
Director of Studies



b) Analysis task: Numbers 1 to 8 are language examples from the letter. Letters a to h are labels for these examples. Match the examples to the labels, then place them in the correct table below: 'key features of a formal letter to a student' or 'features of problem → solution patterning'.

Key features of a formal letter to a student

Labels		Examples from Letter
	↻	
	↻	
	↻	
	↻	

ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook

Analysing written and spoken language: Unit 1 g)

Features of Problem → Solution Patterning

Labels		Examples from Letter
	→	
	→	
	→	
	→	

Labels

- a. Full name and address included at the beginning of the letter.
- b. This outlines the background **situation**.
- c. The salutation uses the first name of the student.
- d. This is used throughout the letter by the writer to indicate that the organisation and not the individual is responding to the student.
- e. This outlines the key **problem** in the letter.
- f. This outlines a **solution** to the problem.
- g. This signals to the reader that the information that follows will be some kind of problem.
- h. This sign off is used because although the letter is official, the writer of the letter knows the name of the person she is writing to.

Examples

1. The second paragraph (beginning "We are sorry ...").
2. Yours sincerely,
3. The pronoun 'we' used in the letter.
4. The third paragraph (beginning "We feel you ...")
5. Anna Martin, 1 College Hill, Schooltown
6. the first paragraph (beginning "Thank you for ...")
7. Dear Anna,
8. the word "sorry" (paragraph 2)

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

This task gives an idea of the kind of analysis that can be done with authentic written texts. The 'key features' are examples of typical language that we associate with particular written genres. The situation → problem → solution pattern in this letter is known as a discourse pattern. Discourse patterns can be found across a wide range of genres. For more information on genre features and discourse patterns, refer to the "Want to find out more...?" section below.

Task 3 – Analysing spoken language

Below is a piece of authentic spoken language:

- Line 1.** A: What's different about Tokyo to Auckland?
Line 2. B: **Well, for a start**, it's ... **um** ... I don't know if it's actually bigger in size, but
Line 3. bigger population-wise. **Of course**, it's a lot more crowded and a lot busier.
Line 4. **Obviously** the transport system is a lot different – there *is* a transport system **as**
Line 5. **opposed to** Auckland where there's ... **well**, there are buses, **but** not
Line 6. as efficient as Tokyo.



Letters 1 to 8 are pieces of language taken from the text (they have also been highlighted in the text). Letters a to h give definitions or explanations of these bits of language. Match the definitions to the pieces of language.

Language from the text	Definitions
1. well (line 2)	a. making a contrast
2. for a start (line 2)	b. showing you think the listener already knows this information
3. um (line 2)	c. starting a new topic
4. of course (line 3)	d. adjusting information in a sentence
5. obviously (line 4)	e. showing that you expect the listener to understand because the idea is clear
6. as opposed to (lines 4 – 5)	f. indicating you are going to make your first point
7. well (line 5)	g. introducing a different idea
8. but (line 5)	h. hesitating

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Task 3 has focused on only one aspect of spoken text: words that are typically described as ‘discourse markers’. It is also possible to look at the way pronouns refer forward and back to nouns, or the way that unnecessary words are often left out of spoken language. A key problem is finding material that can be used to focus on authentic spoken language. The next task suggests a strategy.

Task 4 – Creating your own spoken language samples



Letters a to f describe steps in an approach to creating an authentic or semi-authentic recording that you could use in the classroom for the purposes of analysing spoken language with students. Put these steps in the correct order.

Steps to creating an authentic recording	Order
a. Transcribe the excerpt.	
b. Give students a language task that gets them to notice some useful key features in the excerpt. You don't need to focus on everything that's there.	
c. Listen to the conversation and find an excerpt that exemplifies some interesting features of spoken interaction.	
d. Give students the transcript.	
e. Record some native speakers having a conversation or set up an improvised role play of a particular situation.	
f. In class treat the excerpt as a normal listening lesson and get students to understand the gist and more detailed information in the text.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

In the TaskBook lesson: *Teacher Language*, it was suggested that you record part of your lesson in order to evaluate your language. It could be useful to analyse your own language along the lines suggested above. It would be interesting to see how many discourse markers you use, or you could look for broader patterns in terms of the way you initiate spoken interaction with students and how they respond.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Try to include regular lessons in your teaching programme where you focus on language features that are not concerned with grammar or vocabulary. The suggested book below will help give you ideas.

Want to find out more ... ?

The following book is an excellent introduction to the ideas introduced in this lesson: *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers* by Michael McCarthy (Cambridge University Press 1991).

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

Key Features of a Formal Letter to a Student

- a → 5
- c → 7
- d → 3
- h → 2

Key Features of Problem → Solution Patterning

- b → 6
- e → 1
- f → 4
- g → 8

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) c
- 2) f
- 3) h
- 4) b
- 5) e
- 6) a
- 7) d
- 8) g

Task 4 – Feedback

- 1) e
- 2) c
- 3) a
- 4) f
- 5) d
- 6) b



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ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook

Analysing written and spoken language: Unit 1 g)
